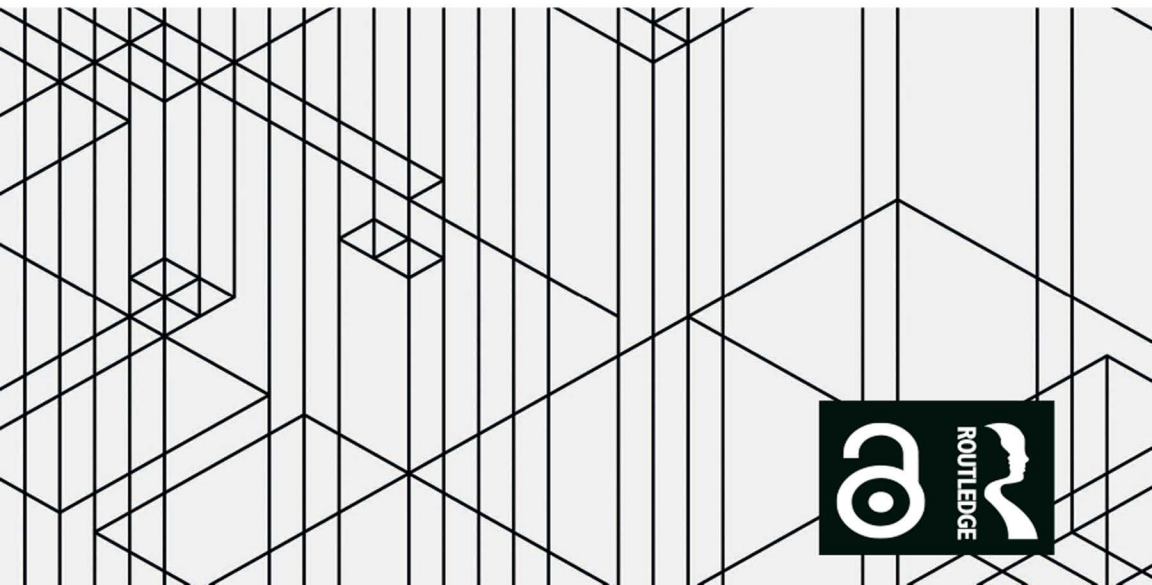


THE DIALECTIC OF RESSENTIMENT

PEDAGOGY OF A CONCEPT

Sjoerd van Tuinen



The Dialectic of Ressentiment

Drawing upon a wide variety of authors, approaches, and ideological contexts, this book offers a comprehensive and detailed critique of the distinct and polemical senses in which the concept of resentment (and its cognate ‘ressentiment’) is used today. It also proposes a new mode of addressing resentment in which critique and polemics no longer set the tone: care.

Contemporary tendencies in political culture such as neoliberalism, nationalism, populism, identity politics, and large-scale conspiracy theories have led to the return of the concept of resentment in armchair political analysis. This book argues that, due to the tension between its enormous descriptive power and its mutually contradicting ideological performances, it is necessary to ‘redramatize’ the concept of resentment. *By what right do we possess and use the concept of resentment, and what makes the phenomenon worth knowing?* Inspired by Marxist political epistemology, affect theory, postcolonialism, and feminism, the book maps, delimits, and assesses four irreducible ways in which resentment can be articulated: the ways of the priest, the physician, the witness, and the diplomat. The first perspective is typically embodied by conservative (Scheler, Girard) and liberal (Smith, Rawls) political theory; the second, by Nietzsche, Deleuze and Foucault; whereas the standpoint of the witness is found in the writings of Améry, Fanon and Adorno; and the diplomat’s is the author’s own, albeit inspired by philosophers such as Ahmed, Stiegler, Stengers, and Sloterdijk. In producing a dialectical sequence between all four typical modes of enunciation, the book demonstrates how the first three reinterpretations of resentment are already implied in the theater set up in Nietzsche’s late polemical books, while the fourth proposes a line of flight out of it.

The Dialectic of Ressentiment will be of interest to scholars and advanced students working in critical theory, social and political philosophy, cultural studies, sociology, history, literature, political science, anthropology, and Nietzsche scholarship. It will also appeal to anyone interested in the politics of anger, discourse ethics, trauma studies, and memory politics.

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Introduction

The Loot of Morality

How is it possible that people vote against their economic self-interest? 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 triumphantly declared in *The Guardian*, a month after Donald Trump’s win in the 2016 presidential election.¹ Two years later, Francis Fukuyama published *Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment*. While Nobel laureates such as Paul Krugman and Joseph Stiglitz wallow in enlightened incomprehension (speaking of ‘gut feelings,’ ‘demagoguery,’ ‘mass deception,’ and ‘hate preachers’), Mishra and Fukuyama are more emphatic: we should finally accept that people are not guided by economic reason alone. Besides calculating beings, we are also in need of recognition and susceptible to envy and pride. Worse, the modern masses are prone to hysteria, scapegoating, and fanaticism. Our aim, as Spinoza warned over three hundred years ago, should be ‘not to deride, bewail, or execrate’ these passions ‘but to understand them.’²

Yet, despite their rhetoric of emotional intelligence, Mishra’s and Fukuyama’s conclusion hardly deviates from all those voices that seek to rationalize and exorcize the growth of reactionary movements with psychopathological formulas. We are supposedly dealing with a pervasive ‘ressentiment’: a toxic brew of hatred, frustration, humiliation, and indignation, conditioned by passivity. As pent-up anger, resentment expresses itself only indirectly, taking a hidden pleasure in perpetual recrimination and demands for compensation based on its own unattainable fantasy of justice. First conceptualized in the nineteenth century, resentment was often said to be the main drive behind the French Revolution and subsequent emancipatory processes. Eventually, these processes were supposed to have led, despite their secret base motivation, to a mature democracy – a post-historical,

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post-ideological, and post-political playing field from which the soil on which resentment grows has been erased. Except that with the rise of nationalism, populism, fundamentalism, anti-intellectualism, identity politics, and large-scale conspiracy theories, the question of resentment has made a comeback in the idiom of armchair political analysis.

For who would deny that reactionary miasmas are not *only in* the air we breathe, but that they *are* in fact the air we breathe? If we understand societies as autohypnotic, self-stressing collectivities, today's crowds increasingly come together and observe themselves as a technologically and commercially mediated 'victimological collective.'³ Private resignation and public spectacle converge upon an indignation industry that constantly converts leftist energies into rightwing energies and vice versa. More and more, people feel excluded, unrecognized, and powerless. Their suppressed longing for revenge expresses itself in hallucinations of a simultaneously weak and omnipotent elite, an aggressive cynicism that is parasitical on the regulative ideals of empowerment and mature citizenship as well as on those of law and order, not to mention the algorithmically amplified culture of naming, blaming, shaming, and claiming.

The only controversial aspect about resentment, then, appears to be its origin: 'Capitalist globalization has brought into being a new, worldwide aspiring class whose demands it cannot meet.' 'Middle-class interests are no longer heard.' 'The winner-take-all culture provides the 99 percent with no other self-image than that of the loser.' 'We have become enfeebled and agitated by the ("social") media.' 'Modern emancipation is collapsing under its own success.' 'Technological accelerations leave us feeling orphaned and obsolete.' None of these explanations is new and they all contain a grain of truth. If they nonetheless remain unsatisfactory, this is because of a problem in the concept of resentment itself.

Ever since the heyday of bourgeois culture in the mid-nineteenth century, it has been banally familiar to speak of the unleashed hatred of the silent majority in a moralizing way. Conservative theorists of resentment from Alexis de Tocqueville to Max Scheler and René Girard have argued that the inherent tension between resentment 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 in constant need of mediation. Today, their 'hatred of democracy' (Jacques Rancière) has become one of the most worn-out clichés of social science. Resentment is presumed to be at the basis of emancipatory movements, but at the same time, is held to threaten the civil institutions in which the success of these movements is embedded. As moralism and economism take over from political antagonism, the temptation to replace the narrative of class opposition with the diagnosis of an increasingly intrusive individual and mass neurosis becomes irresistible. But how rational is this mass psychology, now that equality has ceased to be the *a priori* of

neoliberalized democracy?⁴ And now that the placid reason of the interpreters is overtaken more and more by a pervasive panic over events that it anticipates less and less?

This question should be at the heart of any critical inquiry into the problem of resentment. Although first invoked by Friedrich Nietzsche to critically expose the pathological reversal of values at the very root of Western culture – the ‘slave revolt in morality’ – the notion of resentment would quickly be adopted by the liberal and conservative establishments in their bewilderment over why the masses grumble. For many authors over the course of the twentieth century, resentment is the most important factor in the ideological paralogsms that allegedly corrupt modern emancipatory politics.⁵ Others have used it to retrospectively explain revolts and revolutions of any type and period from antiquity onward.⁶ Resentment thus becomes as unhistorical and slippery a category as it becomes trivial. Is the self-indulgent conformism in the very evidence of its diagnosis not itself a typical case of what Isabelle Stengers has called the temptation of a vindictive schoolmaster’s 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.’⁷

Perhaps this temptation explains why the concept of resentment has a very strong public life but a rather limited academic one. A heavily charged term in Western political discourse, it does more than just describe the profile of a pathological psychology. It is also deeply positional and transactional, as it identifies a moral vice. Resentment is like bad breath; it is always the other who has it. This blame game makes its truth, or rather, its plausibility more obstinate than is generally acknowledged. For who could expect the subjects of this analysis to enthusiastically accept that they have been defeated by their own baser motives? Yet social upheavals, ethnic and religious tensions, imperial projects, and ordinary political skirmishes all provide occasions for invoking resentment to stigmatize incorrigible enemies, whose disproportionate convictions and intractable beliefs would put them beyond the pale of negotiation.⁸ When Hillary Clinton referred to Trump supporters as a ‘basket of deplorables,’ or when social media trolls accuse those in power of holding on to privileges inherited from the past, more than a suspicion arises that this kind of scorn is itself a symptom of a denunciative pathos that is deeply interwoven into our political reason. Morality is the loot of a fight that appears to be hypocritical through and through.⁹

Polemology: Truth and Plausibility

The central claim of this book is that the meaning of the concept of resentment remains unclear as long as we separate it from its polemical use. It is precisely its conflictual politics that remains unacknowledged when,

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for example, leftist intellectuals blame ‘rightwing populists’ for pursuing a vulgar politics of rancor, or when the latter blame the traditional ‘leftist elite’ for defending nostalgic and hypocritical ideals of liberation. As Carl Schmitt reminded us, all political concepts are intrinsically concepts of struggle (*Kampfbegriffe*) because they are a form of combat carried out with words.¹⁰ If politics occurs through the emergence of a clear distinction between friend and enemy, concepts such as democracy, class, republic, equality, freedom, ideology, the state, and especially the concept of the political itself are always used against specific enemies.¹¹ Political concepts are like punches – jabs, haymakers, and feints intended for a particular antagonist. Before they describe specific practices or ideals, they are used to refute, marginalize, discredit, and create an adversary. They do not mean the same in every situation and they are exposed to shifts that can easily reverse one meaning into its opposite. This is not a shortcoming, since the struggle for the meaning of words is immediately a political struggle. The task of philosophy is to recover a concealed polemic from within the thick of the battleground.

Of old, the work of recovery was the endeavor of dialectics: the labor of the concept, or the freeing of determinate thoughts from their fixity. It is less a matter of describing resentment in its various appearances than of mapping the contested grounds where the concept is claimed. Contestation here is not the opposite of rationality but the very process through which thought becomes adequate to its object. Philosophy is its own time comprehended in thought, as Hegel says, because it is both the infinite demand for universality and the actuality of opposition. Reason is the self-aware recognition and systematization of the contradictions that define an evolving epoch. It is never in contradiction with itself, since it is precisely through antagonism, in thinking both itself and its other, that it achieves true comprehension.

However, in rising above all opposites and reducing conflict to the general criteria of absolute knowledge, reason tends to put itself forward as the ultimate form of good sense. As the determining negation of the negation, the positive of the negative, the mediating movement of reason sublates the conditions of division and betrays the antagonism that constitutes it: the confronting parties turn out to be no more than already-past moments of a fully accomplished self-comprehension. Against those who hold polemics for an unnecessary distraction, we must therefore return to the spirit of difference at the heart of the dialectical method. Philosophy itself is not the self-transparency of reason and should not sacrifice the original combativeness of concepts in order to conform to higher intentions. This is why it must descend from the ideal heights of the encyclopedia to a pedagogy that takes into account the historico-material conditions of a concept’s creation – that is, the divisive aspects of its articulation – no less than the systematic

moments of its self-positing.¹² Instead of negating one's enemies, the challenge is to affirm or love them. In a living dialectic, what is at stake is the contrasts that a concept produces rather than the contradictions it mediates. Was it not Nietzsche who, in taking his own corpus as a battlefield of diverging interpretations, demonstrated like no other the unthought tensions in the depth of all true thinking and the humor it takes to rise to the surface of sense?¹³

In the affirmation of a polemical situation, what matters is not universal consciousness but the incommensurability of the positions. This means that the truths that arise from it are not of the order of logos, which would reduce struggle to internal quibbling, but of that of pathos, which situates us immediately within an intractable rivalry. As a rule, however, it is precisely the polemical impetus of a concept that remains hidden behind scholarly solemnity. The concept of resentment is no exception. While, for Nietzsche, it signaled the preference for moral reasoning over overt contest, the naïve use of the concept covers up precisely this crucial point. It is useful to ignore or deny the contentious efficacy of the diagnosis of resentment in the name of its 'truth.' The very latency of the polemical charge makes it all the more hurtful, since the accused stand charged not just with entertaining various ignoble emotions but also with lacking discernment.¹⁴ It suffices to reduce any emancipatory movement – from Jacobinism to intersectional feminism – to its alleged base motivation in jealousy, frustration, or some other passion deemed pathological and/or irrational in order to disqualify it.

In this context, Fredric Jameson has rightfully pointed to the 'unavoidably autoreferential structure' of resentment, the 'resentment of resentment' that makes for double standards in diagnostic discourse. In his estimation, 'this ostensible "theory" is itself little more than an expression of annoyance at seemingly gratuitous lower-class agitation, at the apparently quite unnecessary rocking of the social boat' and hence 'the theory of resentment, wherever it appears, will always itself be the expression and the production of resentment.'¹⁵ Besides expressing exasperation, then, resentment tends to function as an ideologeme consolidating a hostility beyond ideological commitment.¹⁵ Its preemptive role in establishing conditions of putative discursive reality leaves those to whom it is said to apply with nothing but the futile disgruntlement of the utopian dissident: stop whining and be reasonable!

The aim here, by contrast, is to investigate the conditions that could make the concept relevant and important. Whether we like it or not, resentment is here to stay. As an analytical concept, resentment may only have limited explanatory power, but as a symptom, it never fails to exert fascination. As a moral signifier, moreover, it will continue to be invoked to great effect, especially in its negative incarnation of anti-resentment. It is thus

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by exploring and recuperating one of the most obfuscatory terms in our political lexicon that we can find an orientation in our contemporary political condition. Hard to define but easy to identify, its status as the trace of many different meanings and revaluations makes it ideal for a genealogical project in the philosophical sense. As Nietzsche said: ‘all concepts in which an entire process is semiotically concentrated defy definition; only something which has no history can be defined.’¹⁶

Starting from the gnawing intuition that it cannot be taken at face value and that its polemical use in both public and academic debates has been corrupted by a considerable lack of reflexivity and creativity – indeed, of polemical verve – what we need is a critical understanding of resentment as one of those thorny issues that always threaten to compromise those who invoke it. Every theory of resentment as cultural matrix is itself part of this culture and needs to position itself within the culture’s force field. Today, there are confident voices suggesting that even ‘politically correct’ thinking is itself not free from the disease it detects everywhere. Well-meaning social scientists are bullied as pedantic moralists and critical theorists are disparaged as anachronistic curmudgeons. This, too, is nothing new. Since the word resentment belongs to the widely shared vocabulary of intellectuals, maybe it is itself the expression of a certain impotence, similar to what was once called the *trahison des clercs*, as opposed to the ‘men of action.’ The point is that, in matters of resentment, it is impossible to have the last word. As soon as we think that we are above resentment, or that we have uncovered its ultimate meaning, we must ask ourselves whether our own discursive position is not itself infected by the very moralizing stance that we like to think we have acquired the right to detect and detest in others.

The rationality of the diagnosis of resentment cannot take the form of an assessment of empirical truth. In an essay on culture wars, Peter Sloterdijk writes:

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.¹⁷

In the absence of a universal ground, plausibility is disconnected from truth. Perhaps it does not even depend on the production of a collective consenting affirmation in the first place. As Nietzsche demonstrates, as soon as truth becomes a moral – that is, a transcendent – ideal, it is itself already marked by the sign of resentment; it is the truth of the ‘slave’ who denies the irreducible *polemos* between noble and servile standpoints. ‘Difference breeds hatred.’¹⁸ Consequently, the concept of resentment cannot be abstracted from its political situation and takes on a different meaning depending on who uses it and to whom it is addressed. The true value of the concept of resentment, its plausibility, depends on a perspectival sensibility that puts truth back on its feet¹⁹: not because of the relativity of its truth, which is only the reverse image of perspectivism, but because of the truth of the relational, which involves the variability of the affects of both the one who wields the concept and of those to whom it is said to apply.

With the more or less forgotten subtitle of *On the Genealogy of Morality*, ‘a polemic’, Nietzsche emphasizes that each attempt to distinguish between high and low ancestry implies a struggle over the legitimacy and origin of this distinction. This means that the value of a polemic does not only lie in the opposition it sets up. It depends on the relative position one has within this opposition, to the extent that there are two oppositions, one affirmative and one negative. Whereas, in the first case, the opposition is merely a confirmation of one’s freedom to differ, in the latter, one is a prisoner of the opposition. It is one thing to discern the healthy from the sick from the standpoint of health; it is something entirely different to blame the healthy for being healthy or for withholding health from the sick. The latter position already involves a resentimental reversal of values, such that, as tends to be the rule in critiques of Nietzsche, the healthy are accused of being sick enough to distinguish the healthy from the sick.

In the current post-emancipatory condition, however, our understanding of resentment is hardly ever based on more than some everyday psychology. It usually functions as an abstraction that can be enlisted for any cause. But while there are as many genealogies as there are political points of view, what is missing is a set of immanent criteria with which to interpret and evaluate them. When Hannah Arendt was struck by a fact that, willy-nilly, put her in possession of a concept (the banality of evil), she ‘could not help but raising the *questio juris* and asking myself “by what right I possessed and used it.”’²⁰ In the case of resentment, too, we must ask ourselves what entitles us to use it. Nietzsche himself was adamant that, for him, resentment, insofar as it constitutes the ground of the values of ‘good’ and ‘evil,’ relates not only to a psychological (or historical, sociological, or even biological) problem, but first of all, to a philosophical or speculative problem.²¹ As we will see, this entails that the discerning eye

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of the genealogist is not aimed at the origin (*Ursprung*) of a phenomenon but at the milieu (*Herkunft*) in which it becomes. Given a certain state of affairs, what new perspective does it afford? What are the upward and downward tendencies it expresses? Genealogy is not universal history in the sense of a history of necessary developments. Rather, it attempts to unearth hidden forces and redistribute empirical hierarchies. Who are the slaves and who are the nobles? Does the revolt of the former lead to emancipation from their condition or merely to its becoming universal? Does the ubiquity of resentment mean that it is an unavoidable condition of modern life or are there exceptions where it is already mutating into something else? Is resentment the key concept of a sad science that derives its authority from binding us to the status quo or can it also be affirmed as the object of a gay science that experiments with its future becomings?

These questions are the object of a general polemology. The very attempt to contest the self-interpretation of morality by means of the truth of resentment excludes pedantry. It comes with the practical necessity to differentiate active and reactive applications of this truth – an ethical difference at odds with the world as we find it, with its values and distributions between rich and poor, elite and masses, man and woman, white and black, colonizer and colonized, and so on. As Nietzsche put it in one of his last notebooks: ‘Great politics. I bring the war. Not between people and people. . . . Not between classes. . . . I bring the war that goes through all absurd circumstance of people, class, race, occupation, upbringing, education: a war like that between rise and decline, between the will to live and a vengefulness against life.’²²

Two Theses on Nietzsche

This is not a book about Nietzsche, but about the lives of one of his best-known concepts. Yet while almost all authors in the contemporary discourse on resentment touch upon Nietzsche only in a cursory manner, here we start from Nietzsche’s original remarks – not in the sense of a return to the author but in an effort to inherit a certain taste or intuition. In true thought, there are no schoolmasters, only precursors. By taking quotations as events rather than as arguments, the goal is to seek plausibility at least as much as truth. It is precisely by staying as close as possible to Nietzsche that we can also construct a perspective that decenters him in a rigorous fashion.²³

What can still be done with a concept that has traveled around the world? Just as it refuses to explain a single social or cultural phenomenon through resentment, this book refuses a master etiology of resentment. It posits no intrinsic connection between resentment and democracy or populism and resists the temptation to identify certain socio-political groups

or individuals as resentimental. Instead, its project is quite different: to critically map, delimit, and assess the diverse senses in which the term resentment can be used today. All the empirical descriptions, explanations, and characterizations that follow are subordinate to this aim.

I have collected a wide variety of authors, methods, ideological contexts, and the many interpretations of resentment that follow from them. But I have not done so in the form of a comparative study that treats authors who are not equal as equals. Instead, my aim is to demonstrate how all subsequent reinterpretations of resentment are already virtually implied *in senso negativo* in the drama set up in Nietzsche's late polemical books, such as *On the Genealogy of Morality*, *Twilight of the Idols*, and *Anti-Christ*. This dialectical method also enables me to continue the drama of the 'philosopher' and the (secular) 'priest' begun there by elaborating the perspective of two personae that Nietzsche himself did not pay a lot of attention to: first, the 'person of resentment'; and second, the philosophical diplomat whose cunning lies in the simultaneous representation and betrayal of all belligerent positions. It is my contention that only this last persona contains a plausible perspective on resentment's overcoming.

In following this method, the contents of this book can be laid out in two willfully recalcitrant theses on Nietzsche:

There is no positive correlation between resentment and justice. The question of the genealogy of morality returns us to the point where morality and politics meet: the question of justice and its relation to resentment. Any account of how resentment translates politically is itself political. As a provocative opening salvo, the first chapter consists of a critique of mostly liberal attempts to distinguish between the use and abuse of 'the reactive attitudes' for emancipatory politics.

Part of our ideological heritage is a widespread contemporary discourse in social and political theory that seeks to avoid a simplistic conflation between righteous anger and vengefulness. In addition, it acknowledges that the object of resentment may be higher on the pecking order but just as often is lower; that resentment can be conscious and authentic but doesn't have to be; that some, but not all, cases of resentment are manifestations of a vicious envy; that the slight to which it responds may be real or merely perceived; that the impotence it articulates may be real or imagined and so on. All these considerations crystallize in the same dogma, according to which we must distinguish 'resentment' from 'resentiment,' defending the former and dismissing the latter.

Even though the definitions of these terms vary, their use is constant. The emphasis on resentment is coterminous with a generally progressive stance on the passions that react against forms of social injustice, albeit with an ugly face. What is at stake, for example, is the defense of moral

indignation of working- and middle-class voices over the exorbitant bonuses for the managerial elite or the exoneration of Black rage over entrenched racism. In contrast, the emphasis on resentment stems from a more conservative point of view, in which inequality is seen as a fact of nature and passionate resistance in the name of justice is portrayed as mendacious and harmful. The aim is to defend society against inappropriate or unnecessarily polarizing expressions of anger. Democracy supposedly requires ‘good losers’ willing to sacrifice their own interest for the sake of socio-political stability.

At the same time, liberal and conservative voices tend to agree in one respect: both concepts play an essential role in the moral gatekeeping of emotions. Whereas resentment is deemed essential for mutual recognition in democratic practice, resentment is considered its nemesis. The former is the urge to remedy wrongs; the latter is its corruption in botched revenge, backbiting, and spite.

Resentment is an expression of displeasure, in which the recognition of the occasioning injury is contemporary with its appearance. Even where there is a time lag between suffering and retaliation, as with the acute awareness of the futility of improvement when we are confronted with circumstances beyond our control (state bureaucracy, the law, the market, the media), resentment could well serve to prevent resentment from taking hold, as long as basic egalitarian conditions are met. According to Grayson Hunt, resentment is an affect of self-affirmation. It could deliver a ‘burst of particularity’ – a burst of anger or a burst of laughter – that fends off any tendency to descend into resentment. Thus understood, resentment is supposedly ‘a felt experience of creative distancing from resentment’; it is, then, not cathartic but creatively disruptive and resists the process of ‘cruel internalization.’²⁴ To the extent that it has a realistic prospect of action, resentment may thus still be socially useful, despite its ostensibly anti-social nature.

Ressentiment, by contrast, is Pandora-like. Once it escapes into the world, it really is the swamp of moral fraud in which the very possibility of justice and bona fide political action is lost. Whereas resentment can be legitimated as long as it is instrumental in guarding shared norms of justice, what must be prevented at all cost is its ‘sliding’ into a self-authorizing resentment. Michael Ure states that resentment is a necessary but insufficient virtue of democratic practices that are committed to mutual respect, equality, and justice. But for these practices to persist, legitimate grievances must never be allowed to flounder in ‘a radical envy and a deep hatred of existence that identifies virtue with victimhood’: ‘Resentment is the raw material; resentment is a lack of hygiene,’ and hence, we ‘need to understand how socio-political resentment can slide into ontological resentment in order to avoid totalitarian or perfectionist politics.’²⁵

The problem with these distinctions is that they are mostly theoretical and that they presuppose a highly idealized and universally shared conception of the political realm – indeed, a ‘totalitarian or perfectionist’ one. In practice, the slide is impossible to localize and, as soon as it comes into play, has already occurred. Elisabetta Brighi observes a ‘relative hegemony’ of resentment due to recent failures in the politics of recognition; for example, among Muslims who are treated as less than full members of postcolonial societies. She asks, how are we ‘to cope with failure while holding on to emancipatory, counter-hegemonic, and self-affirming political practices’ instead of merely solidifying established identities? Yet, acknowledging this difficulty does not keep her from defending the moral value of resentment in response to failures of justice and dismissing its colonization by resentment. Focusing on the Paris terror attacks of 2015, she raises the apparently unsettling but ultimately still self-referential question: ‘Is the current wave of global terrorism fueled by resentment or resentment?’²⁶

Rather than seeking to give a new answer to this question or providing criteria that would contribute to an ever more delicate distinction between resentment and resentment, what ought to be investigated is the function of such a differentiating exercise. Why is it necessary to constantly protect the socio-political order from the risk of moral corruption in these terms, and for whom? Far from wanting to downplay the social and political significance of collective sensibilities in struggles for social justice, the focus here is on the attempts to interpret and legitimate some at the cost of others. While the outright rejection of resentment, on the one hand, risks sanitizing the body politic from the very types of affect able to challenge the social order, the defense of resentment, on the other hand, ignores that this is always an already blunt weapon; paradoxically, the only tolerable resentments are those that further entrench the social order, rather than challenge it. And so, those rehashing the distinction between resentment and resentment sound like a broken record.²⁷

Invariably, one of the main authorities invoked in these theoretical exercises is Nietzsche. Although he sees resentment as a threat to ‘civilization as such,’²⁸ William E. Connolly insists that ‘you do need to draw upon the powers of resentment and indignation from time to time, as Nietzsche himself emphasizes, but you seek to do so in ways that do not allow those resentments to slide into resentment.’²⁹ This is all the more surprising, as Nietzsche himself never made any distinction between resentment and resentment. Deeply suspicious of any moral calculus imposed on suffering, he would have denied its relevance to his own understanding of justice. Worse, it is precisely these chastened accounts of perceived injustice that bore the brunt of his dialogical polemics. It is therefore by way of a historical reconstruction of Nietzsche’s concept of resentment in

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its cultural and socio-political context that a critique of the mainstream discourse on reactive attitudes becomes possible. What is at issue is the emancipation from reactive interpretations of civil and social justice; that is, the principle and possibility of politics in the age of the domestication and governmentalization of moral sensibilities.³⁰ The many attempts at distinguishing resentment from ressentiment ultimately frame these attitudes in the form of a false problem. This problem not only incorporates some reactive sentiments at the cost of a depoliticization of others but also obscures the wilder and, perhaps, more exceptional conditions of affirmative and more volatile forms of political action and judgment. Do we, perhaps, have an interest in hiding from ourselves that concepts such as justice have unjust beginnings and that they are subject to a becoming that exceeds the social contract?

The argument will proceed by two steps. Drawing on mostly eighteenth- and nineteenth-century authors, from Joseph Butler and Adam Smith to Søren Kierkegaard and Fyodor Dostoevsky, a historical distinction is made between three problems that play a key role in the evaluation of the reactive attitudes; namely, the problems of their rationality, their authenticity, and their justness. The pedagogical task will be to demonstrate that each problem always has the solution it deserves, in terms of the available means and ways it is stated. It is then argued, by way of a critique of the distinction between moderate and excessive resentment and by way of a deconstruction of the distinction between unreflective and self-conscious ressentiment, respectively, that the first two problems are ill-posed. These problems concern differences in degree; they are both equally prone to the relativism of what, retrospectively, can be called 'the resentment-ressentiment complex': the resentment of ressentiment in postwar Anglo-American liberal political theory that warns of the slide of resentment into ressentiment and the compulsive yet unconvincing attempts to set the terms for averting it. This leads to the third problem, which is, in fact, posited by Nietzsche himself in a way that sets him apart from his predecessors no less than from his alleged followers. It implies a critique of the resentment-ressentiment complex as essentially a step backward from his critique of nihilism: Is an account of justice necessarily interwoven with resentment/ressentiment or can we conceive of an outside perspective?

The true problem with the retributive passions concerns a difference in kind, not between resentment and ressentiment, but between active affects and passive or reactive affects. Pierre Klossowski, who emphasizes that this demarcation is located in physiology rather than in moral psychology, goes as far as calling it Nietzsche's 'reality principle.'³¹ The key method and ambition of the *Genealogy* is to differentiate, among all of the historical

reversals, shifts, and transformations, between active and reactive uses of moral values (first essay), of memory and conscience (second essay), and of ascetic ideas and cruelty (third essay). It is in this way that Nietzsche resists the various psychologizations and moralizations of our sentiments; that is, the reversal of their active determination from the perspective of the reactive life. To speak of ‘use and abuse’ is already ironical, as active use precludes the generality of the utilitarian standpoint. The touchstone is not God or nature or humanity or the general interest; it is life, which knows no ultimate court of appeal – just its own multiplicitous will to power, which, moreover, is the opposite of wanting to live or to prevail, as both are again only reactive interpretations of the will that consolidate an already established form of domination.³²

Always looking for vitality, Nietzsche is interested neither in critically delimiting the legitimacy of resentment nor in ‘making it productive,’ like those centrist politicians eager to reframe what they perceive as ‘apolitical’ anger. Those who seek to appropriate the reactive affects are stuck in an interpretative impasse that prevents a genuine act of problematization. Instead, we must bring about a Nietzschean ‘de-moralization’ of the pseudo-problem of the reactive attitudes by means of a historico-systematic reorientation: there are not two different moods; the reactive affects do not of themselves contain any information about justice. While moral sentiments and political actions are always entangled, only the latter constitute the ground of social justice. Put differently: while resentment is not necessarily the ‘enemy’ of politics and is often an ingredient in it, it is not in itself political. This difference between the role of the emotions in politics and the political act has an anarchic inflection that will be further developed in the subsequent chapters.

Nietzsche is not a psychologist and therefore not particularly interested in resentment. Whereas the concept of resentment is among his best-known contributions to moral philosophy, it is often lamented that Nietzsche’s scattered remarks do not constitute a rigorous psychological profile. Legitimate as this reservation may be from the point of view of social science, the attempts to break with Nietzsche’s partiality and offer a more systematic theory of resentment so far have been nothing but ways of licensing one’s own point of view. Not only does it impute to Nietzsche a misplaced concreteness, it also misses the point, as Nietzsche was skeptical of both the psychological and the systematic as general modes of knowing.

The *Genealogy* opens not simply by rejecting the ‘back-to-front and perverse kind of genealogical hypotheses’ of ‘English’ psychologists³³ such as Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill, Jeremy Bentham, and Herbert Spencer as well as their German counterparts such as Eugen Dühring and Nietzsche’s

erstwhile friend Paul Rée. It reorients their evolutionist and utilitarian inquiries into the origins of morality towards the motivations of psychology itself. ‘These English psychologists, who have to be thanked for having made the only attempts so far to write a history of the emergence of morality, – provide us with a small riddle in the form of themselves; in fact, I admit that as living riddles they have a significant advantage over their books – they are actually interesting!’ Nietzsche admires the empiricists for their ‘plain, bitter, ugly, foul, unchristian, immoral’ truth. It was they who discovered the *vis inertiae* of custom and the association of ideas out of which complex intellectual activity, including moral judgment, historically emerges. Yet their historicisms are not historical enough. They lack a ‘real *power* of the intellect, real *profundity* of spiritual vision, in short: philosophy.’³⁴ Nietzsche, in other words, is not interested in the bare fact of what the English call resentment. Rather, he distanced himself precisely from those who look for private vices behind public virtues without questioning the value of those virtues themselves. Moral psychologists are obsessed with the *partie honteuse* of our inner world but incapable of living up to the consequences of their truths. They discern a meanness in the past, but thereby only legitimate the meanness of the present. In short, their pessimism lacks necessity.³⁵ They lack a critique of moral judgment; of morality as such. Out of a mechanistic bias and in the name of science, they highlight a single purpose of a thing and then place this purpose at its origin, whereas the first principle that guides Nietzsche’s genealogy is that the original development of a thing and its ultimate usefulness are altogether distinct. For Rée, punishment is useful as a means of compensation, prevention, improvement, and so on, just as criminal law serves as a deterrence. In this way, he tells us something about his sense of morality, but without raising the problem of future legislation (which, for a gay science, revolves around the speculative thought of a justice without punishment³⁶). Lacking the necessary ‘personality’ or ‘passion,’ the English psychologists are therefore limited by a ‘plebeian ambition’ and represent a ‘devaluation of the concept “philosopher”.’³⁷

What does it mean to write *more philosophico*? Nietzsche said: ‘I distrust all systematizers and avoid them. The will to a system is a lack of integrity.’³⁸ We have already seen that variety and conflict are not shortcomings of thought but the original, primitive form of dramaturgy that belongs to philosophy and distinguishes it from its rivals. To formulate general rules and categories of thought, by contrast, is already to negate the polemical drama beneath the concept. For this reason, Nietzsche holds the idealist understanding of dialectics, from Socrates to Hegel, to be bad taste in philosophy. The difficulty in reading him lies not so much in conceptual analysis, or in the fact that his position shifts so often that he seems

to be contradicting himself. Rather, it is that his work does not allow us to conclude and summarize a ‘take-home message.’ Are we even sure that he wants us, me, or you, to understand him?

Nevertheless, there is an irony in the criticism of the missing systematic account of resentment: after all, Nietzsche all but failed to conceive of this philosophical system. It is just not where and what one expects it to be. As he states about the origin of ideas in *Beyond Good and Evil*, we must conceive of concepts like animals bound to their territories (and planets bound to their orbits):

That individual philosophical concepts are not arbitrary and do not grow up on their own, but rather grow in reference and relation to each other; that however suddenly and randomly they seem to emerge in the history of thought, they still belong to a system just as much as all the members of the fauna of a continent do: this is ultimately revealed by the certainty with which the most diverse philosophers will always fill out a definite basic scheme of *possible* philosophies.³⁹

All true dialecticians and system builders know that philosophical ideas are not arbitrary inventions of an empty mind. For Hegel, the concept is the process by which the subject both becomes and contradicts the predicate, thus becoming something other than itself. For Nietzsche, too, philosophical concepts are not created in isolation, but neither is their interdetermination a matter of logical or ideal entailment, let alone conscious deliberation. Rather, concepts evolve in ways dictated by physiological and geographical circumstances. The system is the perspectival completeness of the concept.⁴⁰ Reading his work therefore involves affective evaluations that evoke a whole atmosphere.

With respect to resentment, the ostentatious fact that Nietzsche never gave a general exposition cannot be separated from his polemics with precisely those psychologists who claim to provide such an exposition. As the perennial distinction between resentment and resentment made by contemporary inheritors of the English ‘free thinkers’ shows, it is not only possible to import concepts into a bad atmosphere, uninspired interpretations and evaluations almost automatically present themselves. Based on established meanings and habits of thought, these generally prove to be hasty and effectively do the opposite of what they are meant to do. Not that the German milieu is any better. It took only one generation for Scheler to defuse the dynamite of Nietzsche’s genealogical critique of modernity into a plain psycho-sociological law, leading him to ridicule the disenfranchised and interpret their plight as petulant and pointless resentment. Everything happens as if Nietzsche’s concept of resentment, from the moment

it was created, has been divided among asymmetrical modes in which it could be thought and applied, and as if his philosophical breakthroughs were immediately compromised and betrayed in the various conformisms of liberal and conservative psychologists.⁴¹

What a critique of the discourse on resentment must systematize, then, is precisely this multiplicity that lies at the heart of the concept, but that is not itself linguistic or psychological. Prior to psychological good sense and its historically preconstituted realm of fact, there is an atavistic network of innate schemata of perspectives in which concepts and empirical data presuppose one another. To ground the various claims to the concept of resentment is to traverse the branches of this network, to interpret its family resemblances, and to evaluate their potential for further growth. The onerous task of a pedagogy of the concept is thus to go further than any stable given, whether it be the phenomenon or an analytical definition, and develop a veritable logic – that is, not an isolated system of abstractions but a scheme in which the concept is elaborated as concrete universal. The phenomenal and the logical never fully correspond. The spirit of resentment is something historical and subject to endless transformations, but the concept is the invariant of its transformations; it involves both the system of variations and the geo-historical variations of the system.

As suggested by Nietzsche's imperative of 'thinking otherwise' – meaning thinking not just against one's own time, its suffering and needs, but also by means of and through the other – a system inevitably includes other, often mutually exclusive positions, most of them also opposed to his own. 'We have no right to stand out *individually*' (*irgendworn einzeln zu sein*).⁴² Deleuze and Guattari have suggested that Nietzsche's main concepts are inseparable from a theatre filled with various 'conceptual personae.' These are not historical characters but the genealogically condensed 'intercessors' of our discourse – the real, thinking subjects of enunciation or 'thought-events' by which the concepts come alive and become oriented.⁴³ Conceptual personae are the powers of imagination that function as a compass in the determination of the undetermined concepts. For, if the will to power together with the eternal return of difference is Nietzsche's plane of immanence (and the critique of the will to truth is his image of thought), this plane is populated not only with repulsive concepts, such as resentment and bad conscience, but also with the self-sufficient pretensions of all those who understand the will to power only from the point of view of nihilism.

In the drama of resentment, 'priests' articulate the fact of resentment but without being in possession of its concept. They appear as the negative image of the philosopher – a minimal power of imagination and

cognitive scope that immediately turns against speculative thought by fixating the thought-movement in an empirical judgment; that is, without first determining what the problem is.⁴⁴ Historically speaking, Nietzsche distinguishes Jewish priests from their Christian counterparts, whose power over the herd is based on a pedagogy of victimhood and guilt. But their social function in shaping and pacifying our reactivity has long since been passed on to the liberal psychologists, modern-day social science, and anonymous AI. Thus, while Nietzsche dedicates little attention to the phenomenon of resentment in itself, it becomes of key importance in his polemic with contemporary instantiations of what, adapting Foucault, we may call the priest-function.

In turn, it is only by integrating the priest in a field of mutual sympathies and antipathies that a more coherent critique of culture through the concept of resentment can be constructed. In this regard, the ad hominem attack is not a logical fallacy but the very basis of perspectivist philosophy, in which supplementary positions mutually reinforce one another. The demand to be systematic stems from the problem we already encountered earlier: Who has the right to wield the diagnosis of resentment? This is Nietzsche's idea of philosophers as 'commanders and lawgivers':⁴⁵ one is never right by accident. To know is to pass from general concepts to particular intuitions, but to think is to move from a singular experience to its universal principle. As we read in the preface of the *Genealogy*, a text conceived as polemical 'appendix' to *Beyond Good and Evil* that is widely read as Nietzsche's most systematically composed treatise, this singular, embodied experience must contain a 'fundamental will to knowledge'⁴⁶ developed enough to sustain the complete determination of divergent intuitions and positions in their reciprocal necessity. Pathos is what inserts our thought into the polemical field through which the various subject positions mimic each other. It is also what sustains a thought's hierarchization or 'composition.' The system underlying a concept such as resentment cannot be reconstructed from just any point of view but demands intricate exercises in shifting perspectives. The concept itself invariably retains a Nietzschean signature, but the problem it answers to obliges us to demonstrate a 'moral typology'⁴⁷ of its uses.

While the second chapter of this book deepens the arguments made in the first by answering the abstract question 'What is resentment?' it initially does so with a certain self-restraint, in the form of an ostensibly neutral definition and phenomenology. It provisionally defines resentment as a clogging of the will that occurs when reactive affects such as anger, envy, vengefulness, and malice become ensconced in feeling instead of being expressed in action; when a secret pleasure is derived from moral indignation and axiological reversals. In addition to Nietzsche, I rely on

Dostoevsky's image of the modern slave – the urbanized, educated, but deeply alienated and self-loathing 'underground man.' Fundamental to this type is not an excessive but straightforward desire for equality; it is the insatiable need for humiliation that is intertwined with a perversion, and ostentatious hatred, of modern, egalitarian ideals. Forced to deny its own humiliation, resentment finds pleasure in it and draws a virtue from it: humility. Abasement then becomes a reason to exist. Every humble soul has others below it that it resents and that can be humiliated in turn: women, children, migrants, animals. Consequently, resentment is not actually a revolt but precisely that which reproduces the unequal state of affairs.

This generally recognizable symptomatology or form allows resentment to be registered and known empirically. But this does not yet make it 'worthy of knowing' (*wissenswert*).⁴⁸ Not only is it far from sufficient for explaining the historical triumph of reactive forces on the real plane of action, too many others already have a stake in the condescension of resentment. To think is to select. Nietzsche repeatedly warns his readers against mistaking him for a priest. The wisdom (*sapientia*, which Nietzsche relates to its etymological root in *sapio*, taste) of the philosopher vis-à-vis resentment lies in his sense for the relevance of its becomings. Without this sense of discernment, one could even think that Rée is the real author of the *Genealogy* (just as Martin Heidegger was to portray Nietzsche as Zarathustra's 'last man'). Nevertheless, for Nietzsche as much as for us, the contemporary notion of resentment is only an alibi for a more intricate operation of thought.

What replaces psychology, the interpretation of the affective waverings of the soul, is physiology – the pathic logic of the will to power. The body, with its nervous system, cells, tissue, organs, and secretions, does not think but is what compels us to think. Pathos precedes the subjective of enunciation and constitutes the place in the world that the subject occupies.⁴⁹ It defines a perspective – the implicit condition for there to be any empirical fact at all. At the same time, what first resounds as a cry is always at risk of becoming idle chatter. Physiology concerns the necessary relation or consistency (ethos) between pathos and logos. It matters *who* says something. Each type of will knows and perceives resentment in the way that it deserves, that is, in the ethical modality that corresponds to its own capacity to be affected.

In order to critically distinguish the various types of will, Chapters 3 to 6 unfold a drama with a cast of four supplementary characters: the priest-psychologist, the physician-philosopher, the person or witness of resentment, and the diplomat. The four types function as markers or references whenever the sense of the concept of resentment is to be determined. The first two types are discussed in depth by Nietzsche; whereas

the vantage point of the third can be found in the writings of Jean Améry; and the fourth is the one constructed here, through complicities and shared sensibilities with philosophers such as Stengers and Sloterdijk as well as Bernard Stiegler. Since, among the first three types, each is averse to the other two, there is no a priori rule and no final court of appeal that can mediate or solve their claims to truth. Following Nietzsche, we can nevertheless discern between higher and lower truths. The question of rank is simultaneously a transcendental one (*quid juris*) and a practical question of verification (*quid facti*). It will be argued that the philosopher and the person of resentment present a more plausible use of the concept of resentment than the first, mainstream version: that of the priest, who suffices with the concept's empirical truth and is therefore insufficiently (self-)critical. It is, however, only from the vantage point of a diplomat, who not only affirms the polemical situation but also seeks to mediate between the various framings of the facts of resentment, that the concept of resentment will acquire its most critical sense and highest value – precisely because it no longer serves to criticize or dismiss resentment as a psycho-psychological fact.

Dramatis Personae

The priest: While Nietzsche does not seem to care much for the persons of resentment, the priest subjects them to endless (self-)scrutiny. For Nietzsche, resentment is too timeless a category, and therefore, overly bound to the moral expectations of the present. The 'untimely' and 'extra-moral' originality of his approach lies in his emphasis on the necessity of millennia of slow, cultural preparation and consolidation before resentment culminates in the egalitarian morality characteristic of modern democracies. Accordingly, the Jewish priest triumphs over external threats and internal struggle by stabilizing the object of revenge: the evil enemy. The Christian priest then universalizes resentment by redirecting this revenge towards the evil within. In both cases, Nietzsche argues, we are dealing with a form of dialectical artistry that turns active forces against themselves. The triumph, in other words, is not based on strength but on cunning. Priests proceed not through the immediate composition of forces but by means of an indirect contagion of souls. Themselves not free of resentment, their weakness leads them to a withdrawal from direct, physical struggle with the strong and to a reliance on psychological concepts (the soul, free will, God, bad conscience) and techniques (pity, confession, interpretative authority, ascetics). These are the signs of an all-the-more ambitious and all-the-more vicious appetite for power, because

they legitimate and conserve an impotent form of life that, were it not for this spiritual revenge, would be destined for physiological ruin. Indeed, for Nietzsche, there is no culture of the spirit worthy of the name except that of the priest. If, for Nietzsche, resentment is the basic affective disease of the West, it has become so due to a whole psychology that favors inwardness, and that has led to nihilism at the scale of a whole civilization.

It is not thanks to the pathos of negativity (resentment) that humanity becomes deeper and more interesting, then, but thanks to the priest's pathos of faith (the negation of negativity), which gives each member of the herd a new psychological depth. Psychologization is the way in which priests give meaning to the suffering from which they simultaneously derive their authority. In overcoding the affective life with the language of moral redemption, they provide the sick with refined but addictive defense mechanisms (in particular, the feeling of guilt) that momentarily anaesthetize suffering, only to stimulate its proliferation and envelop us in reactionary sentiments. Today's narcissistic fixation on our emotional life is only the secularization of an essentially Judeo-Christian culture of internalized self-cruelty. From the bad conscience of the sinner to the Oedipus complex of the envious consumer and the false consciousness of the postmodern nationalist, the task of the modern priesthoods of governance, corporate media outlets, experts of all sorts, and increasingly, tech companies, always remains the same: to interpret, steer, and render reactive life profitable.

It is hardly surprising that virtually all approaches after Nietzsche reverse the causality between resentment and modernity into a more direct and determinate but also more circumstantial relation: if Christianity were still capable of mediating inequality (after all, in Christ we are all equal), resentment would become explosive only in the egalitarian cultivation of the frustration of the disadvantaged over the persistence of inequality. The volatile hierarchy of democratic life, free commerce, and mass media makes the whole world available for comparison, and thus, for a sense of relative deprivation and status anxiety. From Scheler to Girard and from Tocqueville to Fukuyama, this inverted perspective shows resentment to be the consequence of the modern culture of envy and indignation over withheld justice. Accordingly, we 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, all the while imposing a taboo on revenge.

Although often empirically valid, the focus on envy nevertheless naturalizes the baseness of desire and fails to provide an emancipatory response to the contradictions of the bourgeois world. It certainly explains why we come to scorn something worthy of the highest estimation and esteem only what is of little worth, and why the desire for humiliation in egalitarian

societies is the demonic shadow cast by the universal pursuit of happiness. Yet while Scheler, for example, looked to the past for a position outside of resentment (Christian love), the problem is that his description of resentment is itself part of bourgeois, egalitarian morality and the war it has declared on internal enemies. It adopts Nietzsche's notion of the slave revolt, while, at the same time, remaining stuck in nostalgia by rejecting any future possibility of nobility as inhuman or unrealistic.

Perhaps it is the same lack of perspective that also explains the moral shorthand in the persistent demand to distinguish between good resentment and evil resentment. In *The Rebel*, Albert Camus famously describes resentment as degeneration of rebellion. While rebellion is a universal human condition, resentment is a revolt turned infinite in the ideal of universal equality. This bad infinity therefore necessitates a new 'rebellion against rebellion,' which supposedly comes from a 'reasonable culpability' in the face of the two historical projects that, in the eyes of Camus, have in common that they turned rebellion into servitude, fascism, and communism: 'Then, when revolution in the name of power and history becomes a murderous and immoderate mechanism, a new rebellion is consecrated in the name of moderation and of life.'⁵⁰ Rather than rigorously distinguishing the two 'excesses' through their opposed relation to egalitarian politics, Camus puts all the emphasis on their alleged common basis in bad rebellion, while good rebellion becomes a defeatist restraint on the potentially emancipatory demands of a specific time and place. As it turns out, liberal egalitarianism is inseparable from the conservative fear of equality – a fear that translates epistemologically in the indiscriminate observation of resentment and practically in the failure to envision an alternative.

Camus's stance of pride mixed with bad conscience again confirms that the criticism of resentment is not itself without resentment, insofar as it seeks to ground claims to justice in reactivity. Political therapy is certainly needed, but not from the resentment that allegedly holds resentment entrapped. Both resentment and reactivity are products of a reified notion of the existing order and its established values that come at the cost of alternative viewpoints and the suppression of unwelcome demands. This situation is what enables the priest to continue with the spreading of paranoia at the level of desire itself. Was it not Nietzsche's lesson that psychology and moral pacification are precisely the ways through which the priest turns inward the outward recriminations of resentment? Indeed, do they not foster resentment as a strategy of control, a tactical fostering of sad passions such as envy, hope, nostalgia, and anxiety in people who, in the name of an exhaustive self-preservation, will renounce their own power and give in to secrecy and cowardice?

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The philosopher: The very agreement-in-diversity between historical and contemporary pastoral voices seems to prove the ideological performance of the notion of resentment. It is their attempts to exchange polemics for a stable and impartial truth that Nietzsche would undoubtedly have criticized as moralizing. Plausibility for him means: so much the worse for the facts! Whether his historical references are correct or whether his sources were reliable is not the primary concern. The key question is what new perceptions and feelings his naming of cultural phenomena affords, and for whom.

The followers of Scheler, by contrast, seek to correct Nietzsche on positivist grounds: the early Christians were not slaves at all; there is nobility in Christian love; the role of the Church was precisely to inhibit explosions of resentment; Nietzsche's very notion of nobility as pure activity was itself the figment of resentment and so on. But by effectively absolutizing empirical insights, they cover up their lack of a new perspective. If there is an impasse in Nietzsche, this comes to the fore less in Nietzsche himself than in early twentieth-century Nietzsche reception, which borrows Nietzsche's gestures of suspicion but without their incisive relevance and enlightening aggression. In an analysis of this dissolution of the radical critique of metaphysics into a general anti-philosophical stance, Christoph Narholz has aptly introduced the concept of a 'second resentment': the empirical hardening of a critique of resentment in the first, Nietzschean (metaphysical) sense, that typically succumbs to a metaphysical reproach against Nietzsche (and his critique of metaphysics).⁵¹ Every critique of Nietzsche that follows this pattern – and almost all of them inadvertently do – confirms Nietzsche's initial polemical intuition – not as the antithesis that confirms the thesis at a higher level of perspectives made commensurate but in the nihilist form of a reduction of complexity and discernment, indeed, of life itself. *Incipit tragoedia/parodia.*⁵²

How not to be another priest? If both the philosopher and the priest refer to the empirical fact of resentment and yet only the former can lay claim to the full complexity of its problem, this is because they are inspired by a pathos of distance. Deleuze paraphrases this as an 'instinctive, almost animal *sapere* – a *Fiat* or a *Fatum* that gives each philosopher the right of access to certain problems, like an imprint on his name or an affinity from which his works flow.'⁵³ Whereas the priest, lacking any prospect of another life in this life, always appeals to calm and impartial reason (nothing is at stake, society must be defended), the philosopher's taste for exceptions finds its element in something that is anything but reasonable.⁵⁴ It is essential to subtract this concept of taste from its aesthetic dimension and recover its ethical territory. Instead of the priest's taste for moral judgment, the philosopher of the future is committed to trial.⁵⁵ Truth must be considered as the outcome of a process or experiment, not recovered as

something that was lost at the beginning. Instead of resentment being fixed in words and discourse, it undergoes multiple becomings through bodily encounters: on the one hand, the bad becomings of bad conscience that deepen and normalize resentment in the encounter with the various priests; on the other hand, the good becomings through which it gets de- and recomposed in a more affirmative, albeit more exceptional body politic. Or as Stengers puts it: ‘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.’⁵⁶ In other words, the diagnosis of resentment 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, upon the addition of the diagnostic element to their mixture, can set in motion the very resentment that is diagnosed.

The philosopher’s starting point is not just that the discourse of resentment has several faces; it is that resentment itself is not a unitary phenomenon but something that has multiple senses or meanings. Things never are simple in themselves; they express certain forces and their becomings. A phenomenon already includes the potential metamorphosis of that phenomenon. Everything is already an interpretation, and every interpretation is already an interpretation of an interpretation. As Michel Foucault said, ‘interpretation has at last become an infinite task.’⁵⁷ Instead of truth or knowledge, the immanent ethical criterion of philosophy is therefore the affects that a concept implies: does it lead to a heightening of life or to its debasement? The art of philosophy is a matter of different, relative speeds. A concept acquires its validity and apodicticity only through its medial position, through enveloping into but also away from the competing becomings against which it has to be measured. Always beginning ‘from the middle,’ from the affirmation of historical experience, including that of resentment, it takes effect through shocks and proceeds in bursts. It is only in contestation with the prevalent type of the pastoral interpretation of resentment that Nietzsche discovers the necessity to explore the concept of resentment in its full scope. If only philosophy has the right to give resentment its proper name, this is on the condition that we complete Nietzsche’s shift from the judgments of moral psychology to genealogical critique. If Nietzsche’s lesson were to be summarized in a slogan, it would therefore be: Never psychologize resentment – or, with Franz Kafka: *Nie mehr Psychologie!*

Without a doubt, Foucault and Deleuze are the most profound authors to have continued Nietzsche’s genealogical inquiry into the priestly origins of Western subjectivity and its supposed interior core, the psyche. Whether in his early archaeologies of knowledge practices or his later genealogies of

power relations and of technologies and aesthetic practices of the self, Foucault's questioning of subjectivity is not concerned with morality but with ethics and sovereignty. While this leaves out the Nietzschean problematic of ressentiment or moral sickness,⁵⁸ it nonetheless attributes a constant and essential role to the 'pastor' as a function of psychologization in Western dispositifs of power and their confessional regime of truth. Priests are biopoliticians *ante litteram*. Their identification reveals an essential link between politics and biological and psychological life, but it also helps us to situate the forgetting of the pastoral subject-position in virtually all later discourses on ressentiment within the context of contemporary governance.

As early as 1946, in an essay inspired by Jean-Paul Sartre entitled 'From Christ to the Bourgeoisie,' Deleuze, too, argued that, with Christianity, there begins a cult of interiority that capitalism would only deepen by means of private property and money. After his engagement with the Nietzschean revolution of (non-)philosophy in *Nietzsche and Philosophy* and the events of May '68, in the *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* books together with Félix Guattari, he combined and rewrote the *Genealogy of Morals* and *The Anti-Christ* in terms of the 'universal history of capitalism.' *Anti-Oedipus* sets out from a fulminant polemic against 'that last priest,'⁵⁹ the psychoanalyst, and his contemporary offspring, only to eventually, in *A Thousand Plateaus* and *What is Philosophy?*, culminate in a 'geology of morals' that gets rid of the remnants of human subjectivity that still haunt the historical continuity of Nietzsche's original genealogical method. Throughout, philosophy constructs conceptual lines of flight where standardized language and readymade judgment tends to block the immanent process of production or creation of our modes of living.

If, as Nietzsche foresaw, modern politics has become a struggle over the definition of life, what matters first of all is the protection of the body from the mold of psychology as the privileged mode of subjectivation. Drawing on the work of Foucault, Deleuze, and Guattari as well as the occasional reference to the critical theory of the early Frankfurt School – in particular, Theodor W. Adorno – here, the battle between the philosopher and the priest is therefore pushed forward, as two radically opposed physicians of culture for whom what is at stake is both the critical problem of ressentiment and its clinical transmutation into new forms of life.

The person of ressentiment: Among the therapeutic voices on ressentiment, the priest builds their career on the pretense of being able to heal and protect the weak and the sick, both against the strong and against themselves, whereas Nietzsche notoriously assigns the philosopher the task of protecting the strong against the weak and the sick. Nevertheless, the two 'physicians' are in agreement in two respects: they both emphasize the irrational and inauthentic – that is, the surreptitious, self-deluding, and self-defeating

nature of resentment – and they agree that resentment, at least in its raw state, cannot constitute the basis of social life and justice. In practice, though not in theory, they even agree on the unhealable nature of resentment. Are they therefore not still at risk of confusion?

According to an ancient trope in political thought, an overdeveloped sense of victimhood poses a threat both to society and to personal well-being. More recently, feminist and post-colonial theorists point to the ‘tendency to reproach power rather than aspire to it, to disdain freedom rather than practice it.’⁶⁰ Wendy Brown, following Nietzsche and in a partial critique of Foucault, has shown how disciplinary mechanisms and structures of state and market exclusion more and more often premise political struggles for recognition on the ‘wounded attachments’ of marginalized groups, such that rancor and spite toward one’s perceived oppressor go hand in hand with a renunciation of freedom and assumption of one’s own powerlessness and victimhood. She points to overinvestments in ostentatious victimhood that ‘come into conflict with the need to give up these investments,’ leading to culturally dispersed paralysis and injury-based forms of identity politics instead of taking on plutocracy and battling socio-economic inequality. ‘Could we learn to contest domination with the strength for an alternative version of collective life, rather than through moral reproach? In a word, could we develop a feminist politics without resentment?’⁶¹

Brown’s diagnosis resembles the classical observation, made by authors such as Richard Sennett and Christopher Lasch, that an increasingly passive experience of the public realm has condemned isolated and disempowered citizens to a loss of critical judgment. Meanwhile there has emerged a whole cultural industry that, alternating between sentimentality and cruelty and coming with a moral veneer, makes disinhibition converge with authoritarianism. Psychoanalytically inspired theorists like Slavoj Žižek and Robert Pfaller observe how resentment has become the epistemological spirit and political culture of neoliberalism. Moralizing complaints about micro-aggressions replace class struggle, just as political freedom is bartered for legal protection. Understood as the envious articulation of a secondary narcissism held in common by angry white men and feminist killjoys, this resentment is typically articulated in the pseudo-politics of animal rights and anti-pedophilia movements (on the right) or the need for safe spaces and trigger warnings (on the left), all of which are deemed to express a general infantilization of the public sphere. Worse, in demonizing the happiness both of others and themselves, these tendencies reproduce the systematic violence and social decomposition of neoliberal capitalism.⁶²

But aren’t these analyses – each of them a variant of the much older notion of ‘voluntary servitude’ – still too condescending, in that they tell those they concern that they are misidentifying their enemy and should get

over their false consciousness? Do they not betray a lack of empathy for the experience of loss and attach an element of moral condemnation to suffering? They might apply to the confessions of figures such as Anders Behring Breivik or the incel masculinity of Eliot Rodger, but they seem inadequate to describe figures like Frantz Fanon or James Baldwin, who are mercilessly honest about their irrational self-identifications, their shame, and self-contempt, in a way that precludes rational assessment.

In *Black Skin White Masks* (1952) Fanon writes from a self-pathologizing perspective, as a psychiatrist who never ceases to indict himself for the ‘affective erethism’ that shuts him off from the circuit of two-way recognition. He wants the white man to say ‘dirty nigger’ and retaliate, but all he gets is indifference and paternalistic curiosity. ‘The black man did not become a master. When there are no more slaves, there are no masters. The black man is a slave who was allowed to assume a master’s attitude’; that is, bourgeois culture.⁶³ Fanon puts his finger on the sore spot. Those dispossessed and left behind by capitalism are not only entitled to their ugly feelings, insofar as they correspond to objective conditions; these feelings also pose a real obstacle to social recognition. Yet perhaps what is more important than recognition is the fight for it. This means that we must lend our ear to a third type of voice: that of the victim who bears witness to his own pathos of negativity. This becomes possible when we approach resentment not as an objective condition but as a question and a potential site of critique. What if the problem of resentment about extreme atrocities constitutes the ethico-political limit of all medicalizing and psychologizing accounts of settlement, forgiveness, reconciliation, and civil education?

This comes to the fore in the most lucid way in the liminal case of Améry, who fully develops the polemical relation both to the philosopher and to the priest, and is, therefore, the missing link in the complete distinction of each of the positions in their reciprocal negations. Améry’s aim is to undermine precisely that good sense that is still shared by the philosopher and the priest and that crops up in the aversion to resentment. Against the gradual rehabilitation of the executioners, against the guilt of the survivor and the goodwill of his contemporaries and interpreters, Améry wants recognition of his resentment, of what it is in all its ugly reality. A reconstruction of his standpoint within the polemical triangle of the priest, the philosopher, and the person of resentment distinguishes our understanding of Améry in three ways: (1) Whereas Améry’s more tepid defenders justify and exonerate his resentment through the exceptional context of the objectively recognized and morally superior lived experience of victimhood, Améry’s revolt against the irreversible past is more radical in that it zealously refuses all rationalization and fully assumes its illogical, toxic, and absurd nature. (2) Whereas Jameson and Žižek find in Améry a rudimentary articulation of a radical politics of emancipation, and in this

sense, point to the anti-Nietzschean weight of what they call his 'authentic resentment,' Améry's embrace of his own resentment, in fact, supplements Nietzsche's concept, even if he inverts its polemical sense and never ceases to struggle with the infelicitous conditions of its use. (3) Beyond the question of the authenticity of his resentment, this emphatically anti-pastoral stance also implies that we need to move beyond the restrictions of the phenomenology of victimhood and look for the political significance of resentment in its literary and conceptual systematicity no less than as a description of lived experience. What makes Améry plausible, in other words, is not that, as a witness, he is true to the content of his own experience, but the rigor with which his writing resists and rejects the claims made by philosophers and priests to precisely that experience.

The diplomat: If Améry teaches us about the philosopher and the priest, what do we, his readers, learn about the person of resentment that the therapists cannot provide? The errors of both liberal and dialectical interpretations of Améry are due to the fact that his voice remains almost inaudible under the weight of two centuries of polemical discourse. However, they are also a result of the paradoxical nature of Améry's writing itself, which struggles for authenticity while also relinquishing it. Precisely by fully identifying with his victimhood, he objectifies his hatred in endless reflection, thereby immunizing himself from alienation and alterity instead of proving wrong those voices that are quick to dismiss him or try to save him from himself. All three perspectives, it seems, remain stuck in animosity, regardless of whether this is openly acknowledged or not.

While we have determined the consistency of the various subject positions that, together, compose a drama that exceeds them, the question arises whether it is possible to increase the coherence of this drama; that is, of the ways in which these consistencies feed back into one another. It is not so much the truth of the concept of resentment that is in need of revision, but rather, the purpose it serves. In general, the epistemology of resentment is a loop between various actors, including politicians, social scientists, and reporters, each pointing to realities produced by the respective others, confirming and amplifying them. Insofar as each merely mirrors the other, they all remain parasitic on the need for polemical communication that amplifies resentment. But what happens when we no longer allow the critical truth of the concept of resentment to function as an excuse for neglecting the more speculative care for the becoming of resentment itself? Does caring not involve a pragmatist reorientation that concerns not just the concept of good sense but also the construction of what Stengers, following William James and Alfred North Whitehead, calls 'common sense'?

As masters of suspicion, the philosopher and the priest have always used the concept of resentment in a denigrating critique of common sense,

based on a more exclusive good sense. They oppose a higher health or a transcendent morality to what they consider respectively vulgar and underdeveloped. The critical or auto-suspicious stance of the persons of resentment is even more fierce as they resist good sense and common sense alike. Instead of finding relief in communal life, their tactic is to contaminate society with the bitter truth of their own condition and thereby spoil the happiness of their contemporaries – a tactic that is again taken up in contemporary writing on victimhood identity, justice, complaint, and the cultural politics of emotion; for example, the work of Sara Ahmed. What binds all three personae together is a polemical plane of consistency that excludes any potential commonality beyond the scope of each of the respective points of view.

The final aim here, by contrast, is to explore the relevance and irrelevance of the concept of resentment from a more irenic point of view; that is, a point of view that neither privileges nor denies any of the prevailing forms of rationality but is entirely invested in testing the possibility of the kind of coming community that polemics always aim to foreclose. This radically situated care for the common is the opposite of a depoliticizing gesture. Common sense is not a neutral medium, an irrational feeling, a transcendent standpoint, a safe space, or a fusion of horizons. Least of all is it already given. Instead, it obliges us to put our diagnosis of resentment at risk by participating in the fabrication of a multiplicitous collective from which resentment is not excluded but in which it is kept from becoming hegemonic.

If we continue to make use of the concept of resentment, then, this is not out of the will to make generic judgments about the grievances of xenophobic underclasses. We find resentment in all layers of society, not least among the middle-classes who see themselves as tolerant, neutral, and rational, but who are subject to the constant anxiety that they do not live their life fully and who may be envious in this regard of both the luxury and power of the wealthy and the solidarity of the working class.⁶⁴ Regardless of class, however, are we not also dealing with people who suffer from, say, fear, shame, and grief? Then why would we still risk using the stigmatizing label of resentment?

Yet it seems undeniable that all these affects are at least enhanced and deformed by a contemporary culture of proliferating reactivity, albeit one that is organized less by the church or the state than by global media industries. For most authors, resentment was the *mal de siècle* of the nineteenth century. But the pernicious loop between the regulative idea of equality and persisting inequality circulating through the relatively homogenous media sphere of the market and the newspaper has long since been replaced by the recursiveness of algorithmically encoded and diversified feelings and conduct. With the accelerations of technocapitalism, the paranoia of the super-ego has given way to new disinhibiting and socially disintegrating forms of

resentiment that, taken together, make up something like a contemporary structure of feeling. But this only increases the challenge for the philosopher, who, counter to the objective of priest figures such as the academic or the manager, is still seeking a perspective in which the dramatic event of the truth of resentment, in being problematized, plausibly points to its possible transformation. Is it possible to combine the Nietzschean demand for plausibility with the obligation to let oneself be maximally answerable for a world of which resentment is a significant part?

The passions and actions summoned by Nietzsche, the warrior-philosopher, are still of a critical nature and come at the cost of other possible becomings of the common. They bring about collateral damage to all those who are already suffering. We must conclude, therefore, by constructing a perspective that points beyond him. For Nietzsche, knowledge, especially psychological knowledge, is inseparable from a combination of precisely those passions that Spinoza excluded from intelligible knowledge: ridicule, lamentation, execration.⁶⁵ Foucault emphasizes that these passions guarantee a distance from, and domination over, their object of knowledge, as opposed to the classical ideals of congruence, bliss, and unity. 'There is knowledge only insofar as something like a single combat, a tête-à-tête, a duel is set up, contrived, between man and what he knows.'⁶⁶ In seeking to protect the few against the many, Nietzsche's polemic is exclusively directed against the priests. But his iconoclastic writing style does little to prevent old resentiments from deepening or new resentiments from being triggered elsewhere. Isn't there still too much good sense in the will to overcome all that is slavish, moralistic, religious, 'human' – in other words, all that is tainted by resentment? Isn't Nietzsche the modern philosopher par excellence; namely, someone for whom the polemical aspect of truth is more important than its consequences? Doesn't his mode of philosophizing with the hammer reduce common sense to the image of an outdated folklore, in the name of a future of which the philosophers constitute the privileged spokespersons? The least we can say is that his very identification of thought with aggression and hierarchy makes it all too easy for the subsequent hermeneuticists of resentment to turn its concept into a ready-made label – an all too convenient truth to be used at will.

As it makes little sense to criticize negative passions merely for being the negative pole in a system of opposites, Nietzsche never turned directly against the 'persons of resentment.' But is it possible to embrace them in a more plausible way than the various priesthoods have done? In the form of a counterpoint to philosophical good sense, Stengers's ethnographically and feministically informed project of a 'cosmopolitics' leads back to a non-exclusive pluralism and an alternative dialectic stemming from the encyclopedic diplomacy of Leibniz, rather than the universalism of Kant and Hegel. She identifies important parallels between the Leibnizian

version of the problem of the hidden pleasures of voluntary servitude, the problem of damnation, and the cynical realism, active nihilism, and open fascism of capitalism's minions and their neoliberal guardians. But, while diplomats owe their existence to a situation of war, their pathos is one of peace. Leibniz, in his *Philosopher's Confessions* (1672), demonstrates how the speculative demand for the inclusion of the damned in the milieu of common sense, as opposed to their exclusion in the name of good sense, may well be indicative of the only remedy against the further mobilization of resentment, provided that we do not understand inclusivity to mean that those included are forced to leave behind the pathos that has defined them up to now. Rather, it means the full assumption that damnation is a non-innocent event in which the damned play a non-negligible part. In terms of a monadic communication between perspectives, the mediating role of the diplomat here is not to represent the attachments and commitments of the different parties but to add oneself to the mix in such a way that this enables a shared presence to which each party can contribute strictly through their own terms.

Resonance, the communication across differences, instead of levelling contamination – it is in this way that we return to the key question in the drama of resentment: Why speak of resentment here and now? It is a question that not only concerns how resentment exists as a fact but also what it is still capable of becoming in mutual implication with other affects and subject positions. Does our way of speaking ultimately lead to less or more resentment?

Perspectivism and Class Struggle

The necessity of stating our reasons for using the concept of resentment also takes us back to the questions from which we set out. Even though they sound contemporary, they are, in fact, new versions of the old riddle of the complicity of people in their own oppression, which constitutes one of the most fundamental questions in political philosophy. To paraphrase Spinoza on despotic power: Why do they fight for their servitude as stubbornly as though it were their own expression?⁶⁷ How does this book contribute to a contemporary clarification of this riddle?

Given all the caveats of the concept of resentment, it seems more obvious to seek the answers elsewhere; for example, in Marxist ideology critique. Over the twentieth century, Georg Lukács' account of the reification of social relations in modern societies has provided a crucial matrix for analyzing the discrepancy of class interests and psychological consciousness. It explains both the irrational consciousness of the pre-capitalist classes, the petty bourgeoisie, and farmers, and the false consciousness of the capitalist classes, the bourgeoisie, and workers, insofar as they have

not overcome the contradictions that render their emancipatory struggles impotent. Concerning the latter, we have, on the one hand, an increasingly cynical bourgeoisie struggling for survival under conditions of imperialism and monopoly capitalism; on the other, there is an internally divided proletariat that confuses its fight for partial interests within liberal societies with class struggle. Either way, as Lukács argues, a reactionary psychological consciousness prevails over class consciousness, of which only the latter is capable of acting in full awareness of a universal emancipatory mandate.⁶⁸

At the face of it, however, resentment does make for an adequate name for this subjective blockage of praxis and solidarity. It identifies the role of envy in the dialectic of revolutions; it spells out the unconscious convictions among the subaltern of the superiority of hegemonic values; it explains the corruption of the intellectuals who are supposed to increase class consciousness; it even makes us aware of how the division among workers could be instrumentalized by their enemies. If, for liberals, resentment explains why people remain discontented despite objective affluence, for Marxists, it explains why they fail to become revolutionary. It describes both impotence in action and, at the perceptual level, the impoverishment, mutilation, and castration of experience. It is not only a generalization of the various mixtures of sad passions that characterize alienated consciousnesses, no matter to which class they belong. It also explains why these consciousnesses persist even when the objective conditions improve, addicted as they are to their paralogistic interpretations of the world and themselves in it. Except that, as we have already seen in the case of Jameson, Marxists have always remained deeply suspicious of the concept of resentment, abhorring psychological explanations for being guilty of what they are meant to explain. Why can't resentment be recognized as a social pathology?

Again, it was Lukács who set out the main coordinates of critique. He agreed that Nietzsche's romantic rebellion against the decadence of democratic capitalism was not mistaken in its object. In the absence of a liberal revolution but already confronted with the rise of the proletariat as independent political factor, the German bourgeoisie could not but hide from reality and betray its own democratic ambitions. The problem was, rather, that Nietzsche chose the wrong side in the class struggle, deeming it a sign of good taste or 'instinct' not to ask about 'the worker problem'⁶⁹ at all. Instead of resolutely siding with the workers' movements, Lukács argues, he gave in to an aristocratic epistemology that was easy to appropriate by the socially militant bourgeoisie. This made Nietzsche the main 'indirect apologist' of imperialist capitalism, a thinker who objectively belongs to fascism, even if, subjectively, he was too 'honest' not to despise it.⁷⁰ Accordingly, the notions of taste, perspectivism, and vitalism, as well as Nietzsche's practical understanding of polemics, are forms of irrationalism that could not but obscure the real stakes of social conflict

and undermine the emergence of a coherent worldview of the proletariat as world-revolutionizing force.

It is not difficult to see how the concept of resentment, especially in its priestly guise, is at the heart of this indirect preparation for fascism. Precisely to the extent that it is tied up with the ugly fate of the workers, including the colonized and victims of the slave trade, it effectively renders this fate unworthy of philosophical thought. And indeed, while it offers an explanation of the tragedy of modern society, which constantly produces new contradictions that threaten its own survival, the concept remains stupid, insofar as it fails to overcome them. As Domenico Losurdo has recently shown, it is possible to read Nietzsche's oeuvre dialectically as a continuous reaction to every subsequent revolutionary movement, from the French Revolution to those of universal male suffrage, the end of slavery, the worker uprisings of 1848 and 1872, the broadening of education to the entire populace, and the struggle for women's rights. In this context, the notion of resentment, instead of being a tool for laboring through the deadlocks of liberal democracies, can only deepen them in the form of an enlightenment aimed at managing the moral sentiments of the masses. Losurdo stresses its indebtedness to the French historian Hippolyte Taine, who claimed that the mass appeal to moral indignation cannot but stimulate self-conceit. And it cannot be denied that Nietzsche, likewise, condemned, with particular regard to the Jacobin-socialist tradition and the Russian revolutionary movement, what he saw as their 'anarchism of exasperation.'⁷¹ 'Whereas the old critique of envy was a call on the masses to be content with their lot,' Losurdo concludes,

the criticism of resentment was the polemical response to the frequent invocation by the organised revolutionary movement of the idea of justice and noble sentiments. That is to say, in the face of the revolutionary discourse of the critique and condemnation of the social order in the name of morality, Nietzsche's discourse appeared as a metacritique.⁷²

Put differently: Just as pastoral morality gave way to enlightenment ideals, Nietzsche indirectly continued the classical critique of envy in the form of an abstract obsession with hierarchy that continues to set limits to social and political reform, especially those fueled by an assertive resentment or indignation, and that legitimates nationalist, sexist, and racist ideologies to this very day.

Class struggle against Nietzschean perspectivism: For classical Marxism, this is, perhaps, the ultimate polemic in modern theory – one that defines the limits of Nietzsche's political epistemology and renders it redundant. At the very least, it demands the outright dismissal of the notions of

ressentiment and the slave revolt as themselves the class bias of a middle-class morality that cannot but displace class struggle into individual psychopathology.⁷³ At the same time, this dismissal blocks a possible alliance vis-à-vis their common enemy, pastoral power and its ideological avatars.⁷⁴ There is no point in downplaying Nietzsche's unabated and outdated aristocratism, which severely limits the relevance of his work in furthering class consciousness. Yet, while Nietzsche was fully surrounded to the point of suffocation with liberal (and protestant) revisionism and had multiple reactionary affinities ('masks' in a play of distances), what matters in philosophical concept creation – as opposed to historical reductionism – is to what extent it manages to emerge and detach from the psychosocial and lexico-semantic milieu. Instead of being guilty by association, what useful, non-esoteric perspectives does Nietzsche's work open up? What is the 'theoretical surplus'⁷⁵ here that could be still useful for the education of the left?

In this regard, it is significant that, while Nietzsche is hostile to socialism, which he understood primarily as a levelling phenomenon, his enemy was not Marx – who regarded egalitarianism as ideological dust thrown in the eyes of the workers⁷⁶ – but rather, the leading anti-Semite, Dühring, who is mostly remembered only as the target of Friedrich Engels's polemical work *Anti-Dühring* (1876). What will become clear over the next chapters is that, for Nietzsche, the event of the slave revolt belongs to a quite different history than that of a proletarian revolution and that, moreover, it remains meaningless without its 'genius,' the priest who, as the organic intellectual of the slaves, claims to heal their resentment while, in reality, merely managing it in the same way that liberals manage inequality in the name of equality, universalizing the servile condition. Thus, when Nietzsche sneers, for example, at the French Revolution as 'a pathetic and bloody piece of quackery,'⁷⁷ does this limit his point of view to the ultra-reactionary stance that rebellion is never more than a revolt in morality rather than in praxis? Or can it call our attention to the problem of an abiding reactivity, in which slaves remain slaves?

While classical Marxists are as critical of psychology as Nietzsche, they tend to mirror it in their rationalist belief in moral progress, as well as in their redemptive estimation of the passions of resentment and indignation as a necessary evil. In the introduction to *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (1843), the young Marx himself famously describes the affective conversion of class consciousness that only a revolution can bring about. It is a transformation that leads from indignation and denunciation via shock to courage and radical enthusiasm (that is, from tragedy to comedy). At the same time, this critique can only succeed if it takes the form of a polemic with pastoral power as part of the ideological state apparatus. If

the Reformation consisted of the spiritual critique of priesthood, it is now a matter of abolishing its material conditions of power. It is 'no longer a case of the layman's struggle against the *priest outside himself* but of his struggle against his *own priest inside himself*, his priestly nature':

In the struggle against that state of affairs, criticism is no passion of the head, it is the head of passion. . . . Its essential pathos is *indignation*, its essential work is *denunciation*. It is a case of describing the dull reciprocal pressure of all social spheres one on another, a general inactive ill-humor, a limitedness which recognizes itself as much as it mistakes itself, within the frame of government system which, living on the preservation of all wretchedness, is itself nothing but *wretchedness in office*. . . . Theory is capable of gripping the masses as soon as it demonstrates *ad hominem*, and it demonstrates *ad hominem* as soon as it becomes radical. . . . The evident proof of the radicalism of German theory, and hence of its practical energy, is that it proceeds from a resolute *positive* abolition of religion. The criticism of religion ends with the teaching that *the human is the highest essence for a human* – hence, with the *categoric imperative to overthrow all relations* in which the human is a debased, enslaved, abandoned, despicable essence.⁷⁸

Here, we have a vivid description of the primacy of praxis over critique, not unlike Nietzsche's categorical opposition of practice to pastoral hermeneutics in *Anti-Christ*.⁷⁹ Indignation articulates in a relentless critique of the bad conscience of the middle classes, of what Nietzsche calls 'nihilism' and Marx calls the general 'anarchy of the mind.' To embrace the polemical is to combat boredom. Whereas the purification of resentment and indignation from ressentiment remains a purely theoretical exercise, their transformation into something positive can only occur through their passage to the act. Amidst the universal demoralization of the mid-nineteenth-century German post-*histoire*, to denounce means to bury the dead happily.

Since the expectation that we can make the ultimate emancipatory passage and leave our servile condition behind remains unfulfilled, however, this inevitably brings back what we have called the resentment-ressentiment complex: the condescending question of whether a historically given anger is rational and authentic enough or whether it is doomed to remain the unemployed negativity of false consciousness, no matter of whether this is due to under- or overemancipation. Perhaps it is here, confronted with the insistent problem of discerning between active and reactive tendencies at the heart of emancipatory struggles, that Nietzschean dramatization could still be of help. For even if, from the liberal point of view, Nietzsche has little new to offer to the psychology of resentment (or envy), his instinctive

eye for its higher developments and more structural composition is all the more relevant for those interested in de-Oedipalizing society. Nietzsche's plausibility as a philosopher articulates less in a minimal interest in the bare facts of resentment – different from the priest, he harbors no resentment of resentment, only contempt – than in the struggle against those who claim authority over them – in particular, the internalized priest that constitutes modern subjectivity. In this sense, his 'dynamite' remains a key to questions of libidinal economy and social reproduction – questions, that is, pertaining to our practical, intellectual, and affective investment in capitalism as a system.

In an age of stagnation, marked by the full subsumption under capital of anything resembling a universal proletarian class consciousness or sustained revolutionary praxis, a key task of academic philosophy is to take stock of the events that break with one's intellectual comfort zone. What lies beyond the consciousness of the professional-managerial class? What alternative forms of care can we imagine for one of the most persistent symptoms of late capitalism? If the pathos of class struggle remains the historical outside of all hitherto existing discourses on resentment, it is now all the more necessary to rely on it as the implicit drive of an immanent critique that patiently explicates the contradictions between the various anthropological, journalistic, and phenomenological versions, not in the hope of superseding them, but of avoiding their mistakes. My undertaking, which finds in Marxism a consistent reference and counterpoint, is therefore not one of political psychology but of political epistemology. It situates the discourses on resentment among the contradictions of their time and evaluates them according to the extent to which they contribute to their overcoming rather than their reinforcement.

Although it is essential not to lose sight of the phenomenon under all the conceptual contestation, it is not enough to further refine our understanding of resentment or develop a new cultural critique. On the contrary, it is necessary to produce an archive for all the possible positions within the drama of resentment – not an archive of all authors and everything that has been said about it, to be sure, but of everything that could and should be said.⁸⁰ Since we do not freely choose our own role within it, it is only by unearthing this drama in its entirety, tracing the full sequence of radical perspective shifts and adding another layer beneath it – that of a simultaneously non-pastoral and non-Nietzschean, affirmative treatment aimed at the inclusion of the persons of resentment in a common sense to come – that we seek to enable new, more rigorous, and perhaps, more generous uses of the concept. Hopefully, these will critically contribute, for example, to some of the recent attempts to harness the reactive passions for left-wing populist purposes or post-colonial struggles, just as they continue the great

Marx-Freud-Nietzsche axis in ideology critique. For this remains the ultimate conviction that lies at the basis of this book. Despite everything, it must either be possible to address and work through the various guises of resentment or the Left is lost.

Notes

- 1 Pankaj Mishra, 'Welcome to the Age of Anger,' *The Guardian*, 8 December 2016, www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/dec/08/welcome-age-anger-brexite-trump. See also: Pankaj Mishra, *Age of Anger: A History of the Present* (Milton Keynes: Allen Lane, 2017).
- 2 Spinoza, 'Political Treatise, P,' in: Michael L. Morgan (ed.), Samuel Shirley (trans.), *Complete Works* (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett, 2002), 680.
- 3 Peter Sloterdijk, *In the World Interior of Capital: For a Philosophical Theory of Globalization*, trans. Wieland Hoban (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 154.
- 4 'Inequality, not equality, is the medium and relation of competing capitals. When we are figured as human capital in all of what we do and in every venue, equality ceases to be our presumed natural relation with one another. Thus equality ceases to be an a priori or fundament of neoliberalized democracy.' Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (New York: Zone Books, 2016), 38, 28.
- 5 Marc Angenot, *Les ideologies des ressentiment* (Lanzville: XYZ Publishing, 1997).
- 6 Marc Ferro, *Resentment in History* (Cambridge and Boston: Polity Press, 2010).
- 7 Isabelle Stengers, *Cosmopolitics I*, trans. Robert Bononno (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 9.
- 8 Insofar as it defines an ethic of conviction that abhors compromise, the charge of resentment plays a similar accusatory role as that of 'fanaticism.' Cf. Alberto Toscano, *Fanaticism: On the Uses of an Idea* (London: Verso, 2009).
- 9 Stephan Schlak, 'Moral als Beute: Die Karriere der Ressentimentkritik', *Merkur* 665–6 (2004), 906–13, 907.
- 10 On resentment as political concept, see Bernd Stegemann, *Das Gespenst des Populismus: Ein Essay zur politischen Dramaturgie* (Berlin: Theater der Zeit, 2017).
- 11 The charge of resentment also functions analogously to the accusation of ideology: it always concerns the illusions of others, never our own. The more we think we are free of ideology, the more we are caught up in it. Ideology 'has no outside (for itself), but at the same time that it is nothing but outside.' Louis Althusser, *On Ideology*, trans. Ben Brewster (London and New York: Verso, 2008), 49.
- 12 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, trans. Graham Burchell and Hugh Tomlinson (London and New York: Verso, 1994), 12.
- 13 For this reason, I have little patience with the bulk of the Anglo-American Nietzsche reception in moral philosophy, the liberal Nietzsche who is lacking both in dialectics and pathos. Instead, this book has been inspired by the 'French Nietzsche,' especially as he comes to the fore in the studies of Pierre Klossowski, Gilles Deleuze, and Sarah Kofman. Whereas some contemporary scholars may consider these studies 'controversial,' Nietzsche's work is much more controversial than any of its interpretations while controversy, in this case, is a recommendation for philosophy, not an argument against it.

- 14 Karl-Heinz Bohrer and Kurt Scheel (eds.), preface to 'Ressentiment! Zur Kritik der Kultur', special issue, *Merkur, Deutsche Zeitschrift für Europäisches Denken* 665–6 (2004), 743–4.
- 15 Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Oxford: Routledge, 2002), 189, 192–3. Jameson underlines that Nietzsche's genealogical 'myth' of ressentiment served as a psychological critique of Victorian moralism and its hypocrisy. It is only with its 'secondary adaptations' that the notion acquires 'a more fundamentally political function' in the explanation of mass behavior: 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.
- 16 Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality and Other Writings*, ed. K. Ansell-Pearson, trans. Carol Diethe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), II §13.
- 17 Peter Sloterdijk, *Die Verachtung der Massen: Versuch über Kulturkämpfe in der modernen Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2000), 56. Elsewhere, I have provided an overview of Sloterdijk's loosely coherent elaborations of the concept of ressentiment and his various attempts at psychopolitical deneuroticization: Sjoerd van Tuinen, 'A Thymotic Left? Peter Sloterdijk and the Psychopolitics of Ressentiment', *Symploke* 18.1/2 (2011), 217–34; Sjoerd van Tuinen, 'From Psychopolitics to Cosmopolitics: The Problem of Ressentiment', in: Stuart Elden (ed.), *Sloterdijk Now* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), 37–57. It must be observed that Sloterdijk's understanding of psychopolitics has shifted from a critically differentiated intuition of a pervasive ressentiment (kynicism/cynicism) and jovial strategies for interrupting moralistic smog in between *Critique of Cynical Reason* (1983) and the first two volumes of the *Spheres* trilogy (2004), to an increasingly blunt dismissal of critical pathos and militant energy in *Rage and Time* (2006), culminating in a positivistic defense of bourgeois class consciousness in *You Have to Change Your Life* (2009) and onwards.
- 18 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, ed. Rolf-Peter Horstmann, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), §263.
- 19 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, Preface. A pedagogy of the concept interprets concepts through the power they have of affecting our lives and evaluates them according to their relevance or, indeed, their plausibility. 'Philosophy does not consist in knowing and is not inspired by truth. Rather, it is categories like Interesting, Remarkable, or Important that determine success or failure.' Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, 82. Concepts are therefore inseparable from ethical questions of good and bad, as well as from political questions of power and interest. More compelling questions than those concerning truth are: 'who wants the true, when and where, how and how much?' Gilles Deleuze, *Desert Islands and Other Texts 1953–1974*, trans. Mike Taormina (New York: Semiotext(e), 2004), 98.
- 20 Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1978), 5.
- 21 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I §17.
- 22 Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Nachlass 1887–1889', in: Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (eds.), *Kritische Studienausgabe* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1999), vol. 13, 637. See also: Robert J. Antonio, 'Nietzsche's Antisociology: Subjectified Culture and the End of History', *American Journal of Sociology* 101.1 (1995), 1–43, 28.
- 23 I have sought to limit myself to the works Nietzsche published during his lifetime and only minimally rely on the posthumously published *Notebooks*. My

- focus is on Nietzsche's writings from *Daybreak* onwards. I mostly rely on the Nietzsche editions published by Cambridge University Press but have modified the translation wherever necessary based on the original German. Since it is not the authors and the texts but their dramatic typology that concerns my investigations, I have sometimes permitted myself to interpret Nietzsche's work as partaking of a certain zone of indiscernibility with later Nietzschean authors, Deleuze in particular.
- 24 Grace Hunt, 'Redeeming Resentment: Nietzsche's Affirmative Ripostes', *American Dialectic* 3.2/3 (2013), 118–47, 143–4.
 - 25 Michael Ure, 'Resentment/Ressentiment', *Constellations* 22.4 (2015), 599–613, 601, 610.
 - 26 Elisabetta Brighi, 'The Globalisation of Resentment: Failure, Denial, and Violence in World Politics', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 44.3 (2016), 411–32, 427. For an analysis of the 'colonization' of moral resentment by ressentiment, see Reinhard Olschanski, 'Resentment oder Ressentiment? – Nietzsche und die Kolonisierung der Moral', *Psychologie und Gesellschaftskritik* 45.3/4 (2021), 7–43.
 - 27 Following a latent Marxist inspiration, Michel Foucault, in outlining 'four propositions on analyzing ideology,' reminds us that resolving discursive paradoxes and contradictions is never enough for a true ideology critique. Rather, contradictions help locate precisely where ideological discourses are functioning. Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 185–6.
 - 28 William E. Connolly, *Political Theory & Modernity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 171.
 - 29 William E. Connolly, *World of Becoming* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 66, 114.
 - 30 Peter Lyman, 'The Domestication of Anger: The Use and Abuse of Anger in Politics', *European Journal of Social Theory* 7.2 (2004), 133–47.
 - 31 Pierre Klossowski, *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, trans. Daniel W. Smith (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 103.
 - 32 Nietzsche famously distances himself from a 'low' interpretation of Spinoza's *conatus* in modern science. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, ed. Bernard Williams, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff and Adrian del Caro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 349. At the same time, Deleuze has shown how the will to power can be understood in a Spinozist way as immanent causality. Just as we do not desire the good because it is good but because we desire it, power is not what the will wants but that which wants in the will. It is the power of valuing something. Wars waged for money or honor, or even the redistribution of wealth through social struggle, appear to Nietzsche as regressions precisely to the extent that they fail to produce a new image of power. Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 83.
 - 33 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, Preface §4.
 - 34 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §252.
 - 35 Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, §48.
 - 36 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, ed. Maudemarie Clerk and Brian Leiter, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), §78; *Gay Science*, §321; *Genealogy*, II §10.
 - 37 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §§213, 252–3; *Gay Science*, §345.

- 38 Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Twilight of the Idols, or How to Philosophize with a Hammer', in: Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman (eds.), Judith Norman (trans.), *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols: And Other Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 153–230, Arrows and epigrams §26.
- 39 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §20.
- 40 'There is *only* a perspectival seeing, *only* a perspectival "knowing," the *more* affects we are able to put into words about a thing, the *more* eyes, various eyes we are able to use for the same thing, the more complete will be our "concept" of the thing, our "objectivity":' Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §12.
- 41 Deleuze opens his 1962 study of Nietzsche with a warning against conformist readings of Nietzsche, including perhaps Scheler's: 'It is clear that modern philosophy has largely lived off Nietzsche. But not perhaps in the way in which he would have wished. . . . [W]hat has happened in modern philosophy is that the theory of values has given rise to a new conformism and new forms of submission. Even the phenomenological apparatus has contributed to placing the Nietzschean inspiration, which is often present in phenomenology, at the service of modern conformism.' Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 1.
- 42 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, Preface §2. Furthermore: 'We sit within our net, we spiders, and whatever we may catch in it, we can catch nothing at all except that which allows itself to be caught in precisely *our* net.' *Daybreak*, §117.
- 43 Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, 64–5. Following Deleuze's understanding of transcendental empiricism, we can understand the supplementary character of Nietzsche's system as that of a system in heterogenesis. In affirming multiplicity, philosophy makes sure that concepts and the problems they correspond to do not get domesticated. They 'exhibit a certain coherence,' but what is essential is that 'they get it from somewhere else' and that this coherence is 'always on the way, always in disequilibrium with itself.' Instead of discovering their discursive evidence, a pedagogy of the concept proceeds through the 'method of dramatization': 'You have to present concepts in philosophy as though you were writing a good detective novel: they must have a zone of presence, resolve a local situation, be in contact with the "dramas," and bring a certain cruelty with them.' Deleuze, *Desert Islands*, 141–2. To dramatize is not to explicate what a concept means but to demonstrate how it corresponds to an implicit situation that makes us think and in which its personae are implied in turn. Concepts are always personal, not in the sense of being subjective but in the sense of radically decentered expressions of an event structured by divergent becomings. Hence, philosophy's affinity with schizophrenia; it proceeds 'blow by blow,' (Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, 76) in a constant combat with all the other personae that are enfolded within its plane of consistency. Instead of the higher subjectivity of Hegelian dialectics, the coherence of the drama is delirious with the personae appearing as marionettes: 'I am no longer myself but thought's aptitude for finding itself and spreading across a plane that passes through me at several places. The philosopher is the idiosyncrasy of his conceptual personae. The destiny of the philosopher is to become his conceptual persona or personae, at the same time that these personae themselves become something other than what they are historically, mythologically or commonly (the Socrates of Plato, the Dionysus of Nietzsche, the Idiot of Nicholas of Cusa).' *Ibid.*, 64, 70.
- 44 Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, 65, 80, 83.
- 45 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §211.
- 46 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, Preface §2; *Beyond Good and Evil*, §230.

- 47 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §186; Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), Preface §7.
- 48 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, trans. Marianne Cowan (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1962), §3.
- 49 Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, §252.
- 50 Albert Camus, *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*, trans. Anthony Bower (New York: Vintage, 1992), 11, 22, 250, 289, 305. Along these lines, Camus argues that it is meaningful to distinguish rebellion from (Schelerian) resentment only within Western society, 'where a theoretical equality conceals great factual inequalities' (ibid., 20, 17–18): 'Rebellion pleaded for the innocence of mankind, and now it has hardened its heart against its own culpability. Hardly does it start off in search of totality when it receives as its portion the most desperate sensations of solitude. It wanted to enter into communion with mankind and now it has no other hope but to assemble, one by one, throughout the years, the solitary men who fight their way toward unity.' Ibid., 280.
- 51 Christoph Narholz, *Die Politik des Schönen* (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2012), 19–22. A more adequate title of Narholz's book would have been 'Critique of Second Resentment.' His main opponent is Max Weber; more specifically, the problem of a 'theodicy of happiness': the need for legitimacy of the happiness of the modern bourgeoisie, as opposed to the traditional theodicy of unhappiness. According to Weber, this need articulates in the vengeful reversal of the hatred of the happy towards the disenfranchised, who personify the feared unhappiness of the happy. The problem is that Weber follows Nietzsche the psychologist but not Nietzsche the genealogist. 'Whereas Nietzsche morally identifies metaphysics and resentment, Weber empirically distinguishes religion and resentment. In this way he loses Nietzsche's point in moral philosophy, but corrects its history.' Ibid., 22. As a consequence, we lose a sense of the intellectual creativity it took for Nietzsche to set up his critique of first resentment and rely on this critique only in a reversed sense by consuming its apparent result. Thus, the challenge for us is to affirm the existence of resentment without letting the critique of first resentment slide into second resentment.
- 52 Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, Preface §1.
- 53 Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, 79; Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (London and New York: Continuum, 2001), 200. Deleuze paraphrases Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §231. See also *Gay Science*, §277.
- 54 On the unreason of passion and the taste for exceptions, see Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, §3.
- 55 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §42.
- 56 Stengers, *Cosmopolitics I*, 12.
- 57 Michel Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Freud, Marx', in: James D. Faubion and Paul Rabinow (eds.), Robert Hurley and others (trans.), *The Essential Works of Michel Foucault: 1954–1984* (New York: The New Press, 1997), vol. 2 *Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology*, 269–78, 274.
- 58 Foucault asserts that power always produces resistance and that every subject is perversely capable of resistance, and in practicing it, practices freedom. Brown calls this 'a curious optimism, even volunteerism in Foucault,' since it misses the basic question of critical theory: why do we experience ourselves as free as long as we can think of ourselves as recognizable subjects? The problem of resentment, eclipsed in Foucault's Nietzscheanism, is a challenge to Foucault's tacit assumption of the resilience of the desire for freedom, 'a givenness that arises

- consequent to his implicit conflation of the will to power in resistance with a will to freedom.’ Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 63.
- 59 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane (London and New York: Continuum, 2003), 108, 112, 332.
- 60 Brown, *States of Injury*, 55, 73.
- 61 Brown, *States of Injury*, 47.
- 62 ‘According to Nietzsche, the critical labor against resentment, the hatred for happiness, is the decisive effort to be made for happiness to be conquered one day and to guarantee that the weak do not begin to take pleasure in their weakness or failure and twist the relinquishment of their own spoils [*Beuteverzicht*] into a critical attitude.’ Robert Pfaller, *Wofür es sich zu leben lobnt: Elemente materialistischer Philosophie* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag, 2011), 87.
- 63 Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008), 41, 194. Or: ‘There is no open conflict between White and Black. One day the white master recognized *without a struggle* the black slave. But the former slave wants to *have himself recognized*,’ seeing that he is locked up within himself yet deprived of being-for-himself. *Ibid.*, 191.
- 64 On the resentment of the middle-classes and their disposedness to authority, see Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom* (New York: Avon Books, 1965).
- 65 Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, §333.
- 66 Michel Foucault, ‘Truth and Juridical Forms’, in: *Essential Works*, vol. 3 *Power*, 1–89, 11–12.
- 67 Spinoza, ‘The Theological-Political Treatise’, Preface, in: *Collected Works*, 389–90.
- 68 Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Merlin Press, 1971), 46–82.
- 69 Nietzsche, *Twilight*, Skirmishes of an untimely man §40. To focus on it is nothing less than ‘the cause of all stupidities.’
- 70 Georg Lukács, ‘Gehört Nietzsche dem Faschismus?’, in: Rüdiger Dannemann and Axel Honneth (eds.), *Georg Lukács: Ästhetik, Marxismus, Ontologie* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2021), 337–48. See also: Georg Lukács, *The Destruction of Reason*, trans. Peter Palmer (London and New York: Verso, 2021), 309–402.
- 71 Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, §347.
- 72 Domenico Losurdo, *Nietzsche, the Aristocratic Rebel: Intellectual Biography and Critical Balance-Sheet*, trans. Gregor Benton (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 421. In meticulously reconstructing the reactionary background and resources of Nietzsche’s politics, Losurdo’s program is to critically contrast the historicist’s Nietzsche to philosophical readings that are allegedly guilty of a ‘hermeneutics of innocence.’
- 73 On capitalism’s (racist) spectre of the ‘slave revolt,’ see Domenico Losurdo, *Liberalism: A Counter-History*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London and New York: Verso, 2014).
- 74 Rancière identifies a clerical inspiration among all the ‘intellectual manifestations of antidemocratic fury,’ from Tocqueville to post-’68 disillusionment, that hold democracy, insofar as it is understood as the reign of the limitless desire of individuals in modern mass society, responsible for all social problems. Jacques Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*, trans. Steve Corcoran (London and New York: Verso, 2014), 1, 17–20, 71, 80, 85–6. Rancière shows that the topicality of resentment coincides with a reversal of Marxist ideology critique: ‘Formerly, it was a global system of domination that explained individual behaviour. The

- good souls then felt pity for the proletariat which, having let itself be taken in by the enticements offered by the betting office and household appliances, was regarded as the victim of a system that exploited it at the same time as nourishing its dreams. But as soon as the Marxist rupture failed to accomplish what the denunciation required, the denunciation was turned round: . . . It is because democratic man is a being of excesses, an insatiable devourer of commodities, human rights and televisual spectacles, that the capitalist law of profit rules the planet.' *Ibid.*, 87–8. Radical democracy, by contrast, is 'polemical' precisely because it means 'being godless' and involves the 'murder of the shepherd.' *Ibid.*, 33. In a word, it is 'ungovernable': 'Democratic excess does not have anything to do with a supposed consumptive madness. It is simply the dissolving of any standard by which nature could give its law to communitarian artifice via the relations of authority that structure the social body.' *Ibid.*, 41, 61–2.
- 75 Losurdo, *Nietzsche, the Aristocratic Rebel*, 820–1. Contrary to Losurdo, Alain Badiou emphasizes the deterritorializing logic of rivalry and mimicry in Nietzsche's relation to historico-political revolutions, an 'amplified mimetics of the revolutionary event' that seeks to produce a rupture in time rather than a dialectical supercession. Alain Badiou, *Casser en deux l'histoire du monde* (Paris: Le Perroquet, 1992), 10.
- 76 Egalitarianism is primarily a recipe for the 'harmony between capital and labor'; it is a universalization of a particular class interest, and as such, it is inextricable from the 'veritable Eden' where capital buys labor power and where 'liberty, equality, property and Bentham' rule. Cf. the critique of Lasalle's 'vulgar socialism,' which principally turns on the bourgeois concept of distribution abstracted from the mode of production in the 'Critique of the Gotha Program', 1875, www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1875/gotha/
- 77 Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, §534; *Beyond Good and Evil*, §46.
- 78 Karl Marx, 'Introduction', *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (1843), www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/intro.htm
- 79 Friedrich Nietzsche, 'The Anti-Christ: A Curse on Christianity Hammer', in: Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman (eds.), Judith Norman (trans.), *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols: And Other Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 1–68, §§32–4; *Genealogy*, I §6.
- 80 As Foucault only half-jokingly described his research at the Bibliothèque Nationale, 'I'm going to check whether people at that date were saying what they should have been saying!' Alain Brossat, Philippe Chevallier and Daniel Defert, 'Foucault: The Materiality of a Working Life', *Foucault Studies* 21 (2016), 214–30, 230.

1 The Resentment-Ressentiment Complex

The Problem of Rationality: From Rage to Resentment

The mildly sarcastic French word *ressentiment* is often considered untranslatable. According to the Larousse dictionary, *ressentiment* derives from *ressentir*, to feel strongly or ‘doubly’ (*re-*), a verb used for both positive and negative feelings. However, by the time Denis Diderot, in his consideration of the legitimacy of imperial conquest and colonial slavery, referred to the *ressentiment* of the ‘savages,’ the noun had already acquired its more limited denotation as a reactive attitude or after-feeling.¹ It was understood in the double meaning of a passionate remembrance of injury or insult and of the desire to avenge it. Like so many French moralists and *philosophes*, Diderot used the term *ressentiment* in a way that is close to how Edmund Burke and protagonists of the Scottish Enlightenment spoke of resentment or indignation: the accusatory anger over acts, remarks, or persons perceived as hurtful and morally wrong. In fact, when Nietzsche began using the word *ressentiment* and, following Dühring, coined the old French notion as a philosophical concept, it had already been circulating in Europe and among German elites for centuries.

Many would say it is as old as Homer’s *Iliad*, the very first word of which is *menin*, wrath, rage, blind anger:

*Of the rage of Achilles, son of Peleus –, sing Goddess
that murderous anger which condemned Achaeans to countless agonies
and threw many warrior souls deep into Hades*

The ancient Greeks appealed to the Gods in order to make sense of the unleashing power of vengeful rage. To modern taste, their glorification of acts of violence may appear shocking and hopelessly archaic, but for the ancient Greeks it was the subject of euphoria and awe. They took pride in being allowed to witness the theatre of war and its spectacular deaths, whereas a world without such events would be worthless. This is not to say

that the ancients did not also live in fear and awe of the arbitrariness and excesses of rage. Even in later tragedy, however, the Furies (Eumenides) are not banished from Athens but, as happens at the end of Aeschylus's *Oresteia*, hidden and given shelter, since the retributive passion they represent remains a legitimate indicator of self-respect and self-defense as well as of allegiance to the moral and social order. Legal institutions replace and terminate the endless cycle of blood vengeance, but the dark vindictive passions continue to be honored on the condition that their tendency to violent outburst is tempered and subjected to the calm voice of rational persuasion.² That said, Horkheimer and Adorno, following Nietzsche, have shown that this transformation of words and deeds into doubts and second thoughts already happens in the transition from the *Iliad* to the *Odyssey*, that is, in the transition from fame and glory to ruse and trickiness. Odysseus *polytropos*, the man of brilliance, guile, and manipulation, is versatile not with the chariot but with the mind. Less sincere and more hateworthy, he disenchants both the others and himself in order to avoid battle.³ In a sense, he is the first victim of what Marx called *embourgeoisement*: the process by which raw drives are tamed and turned into a conservative force, inevitably resulting in a slackening of character.

As the aestheticism of the Homeric age was gradually replaced by the rationalism of the Hellenic age, rage became criminalized for its vehemence and was superseded by the more controlled passion of indignation. Invoked as the neutral distributor (*némein*) of fortune, Aristotle conceptualizes *nemesis* as the sense of justice that prevents any hubristic upsetting of the political balance from passing unpunished. It is the passion of righteous indignation, 'an impulse, accompanied by pain, to a conspicuous revenge for a conspicuous slight directed without justification towards what concerns oneself or towards what concerns one's friends.'⁴ It features alongside pity, because they are both passions required for the identification with others. Whereas pity, or compassion, is the pain experienced over the unmerited suffering of others, indignation concerns their undue fortune: 'It (*nemesis*) is our duty both to feel sympathy and pity for unmerited distress, and to feel indignation at unmerited prosperity; for whatever is undeserved is unjust, and that is why we ascribe indignation even to the gods.' For Aristotle, in other words, indignation is an aristocratic passion directed against slaves (who, like women, have no business getting angry). Its object is injustice: the lack of hierarchy in fortune, especially when too many riches are bestowed upon those who lack ambition and competence. As such, indignation signifies almost the opposite of envy, which 'is excited not by the prosperity of the undeserving but by that of people who are like us or equal with us.'⁵

Yet, within the Western tradition, the great moral caesura is located between the Ancient Greek civilization, on the one hand, and the

Judeo-Christian-modern civilization, on the other. Aristotle still warned that ‘sulky people are hard to appease, and retain their anger long; for they repress their passion. But it ceases when they retaliate; for revenge relieves them of their anger, producing in them pleasure instead of pain.’⁶ Anticipating what Nietzsche would call the slave revolt in morality, it appears that, while the immediate exercise of indignation had initially been the privilege of masters, what Aristotle dismissed as the delayed and internalized frustration of the serfs was to gradually become the universal norm. The caesura thus concerns two radically opposed ways of managing the economy of anger as the pre-eminent affect capable of constituting moral and political subjectivity. Whereas the Homeric hero expresses anger in immediate release and glorious sacrifice, later Europeans subject it to a process of sublimation, transference, and distortion.

Indignation has been easy to disqualify, for example, because, under the influence of the Christian culture of humility and its taboo on revenge, it is usually reduced to a pathological form of envy. And, as Aristotle observed, envy is very close to spite: ‘The man who is delighted by others’ misfortunes is identical with the man who envies others’ prosperity.’⁷ But, as we have seen, indignation does not have its roots exclusively in envy over material goods but also in the struggle for recognition. If the ‘re’-affects are, in fact, primary emotions and not just derivatives of desire and greed (*eros*), this is because, as Plato points out in the *Republic* and as Francis Fukuyama and Peter Sloterdijk have recently reminded us, they are grounded in a different part of the soul; namely, the seat of pride (*thymos*).

While eroticism points to ways leading to those ‘objects’ that we lack and whose presence or possession makes us feel complete, thymotics discloses ways for human beings to redeem what they possess, to learn what they are able to do, and to see what they want.⁸

The wrath of the Homeric heroes now seems incomprehensible because we generally tend to see everything that stems from a highly developed sense of status recognition – generosity, revenge, or readiness to die in battle – through an erotic lens in which they can only appear as the symptoms of a hidden, neurotic inner life. Yet the Greeks saw the world as a public stage, the *agon*, on which to exteriorize their pride and display their wealth; a public spectacle that, for them, is inherently worth more than the private suffering that may follow from it. The thymotic economy is, thus, not based on lack and reasoned calculation, but rather, on extravagant dissipation. Here, egoism, self-esteem, vanity, *amour-propre*, ambition, but also generosity need not necessarily be reduced to a narcissistic libido. In fact, if life in the Greek *polis* is unthinkable without the proper management and domestication of thymotic energies, it couldn’t do without them. Thymos

concerns the very capacity to create new possibilities of life – a concern that resounded again, for example, in the rallying cries at Tahir Square in January 2011: *aish*, *huriyya*, *karama insaniyya*, or ‘bread, freedom, human dignity.’ There can be no free society if it does not equally serve eros and thymos alike.

Nonetheless, after antiquity, it is only with the rise of civil society and a new public sphere in eighteenth-century Europe that indignation, together with resentment, regains prominence as a key term and problem of moral psychology, albeit under more egalitarian premises. In the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, a book that contains the anthropology that undergirds the *Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith describes indignation as an emotional experience ‘which boils up in the breast of the spectator, whenever he thoroughly brings home to himself the case of the sufferer.’⁹ But, if we feel indignation toward those who have wronged others – a contagious affect that is also essential to the political thought of Machiavelli or Spinoza – the emphasis has now shifted to the more selfish resentment that we feel toward those who have wronged us. Our mutual recognition as equal citizens depends on it. Instead of a private emotion, Smith sees resentment as essentially a ‘noble and generous’ (that is, sociable) passion that demands public acknowledgement. While ‘harsh and turbulent,’ his contemporary Joseph Butler finds resentment to be ‘one of the common bonds, by which society is held together.’¹⁰ As a response of resistance and as a possible corrective to injury and ‘moral evil,’ it is ‘a generous movement of mind’ that compensates for the meekness of sympathy and pity. Because benevolence does not suffice in the pursuit of justice, resentment is necessary for demanding redress and thus providing the necessary checks and balances for social behavior. In the rather optimistic words of Smith, the gratification of resentment ‘tends, of its own accord, to produce all the political ends of punishment; the correction of the criminal, and the example of the public.’¹¹

The problem is that such gratification is always at risk of becoming infinite and malicious. As Smith points out, resentment is a dangerous and unappealing passion, as it is ‘the greatest poison to the happiness of a good mind.’¹² 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.’¹³ While we may forgive those who are not responsible for their actions, there is no honor in doing so with those who willingly hurt us. On the other hand, the object of resentful action 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.’¹⁴ For Butler, similarly, resentment must distinguish itself from ‘hasty and sudden

anger' through a sense of virtue and vice, or good and evil. More explicitly still than Smith, Butler warns that the gratification of resentment has an intrinsic tendency toward 'excess and abuse.' Under the aegis of moral justification, it can quickly become self-defeating and a threat to social life. This happens when resentment against the act is redirected against the person, where it may trigger counter-resentments 'so as almost to lay waste the world.'¹⁵

Here, then, we discover a first moral ground for the contemporary distinction between a resentment and resentment; namely, the still Aristotelian difference between a reasonable resentment and a self-legitimizing resentment. While the passion of resentment is an indispensable mechanism of retributive justice, in order for true justice to exist and for resentment not to deteriorate into rancorous memory, both Smith and Butler emphasize that revenge should never be more than a means to an end. Resentment is a *pharmakon*, both cure and poison, depending on the dose and application. The purpose of resentment is not to single-handedly prevent or remedy disorder and injury. It is a necessary evil that only becomes morally good when balanced with our natural pity and compassion. In other words, resentment must remain a passion and not lead to action of its own accord. If it is to function as a remedy against injury, then resentment implies a deliberative reason or good sense.¹⁶ The challenge of resentment, much closer to Aristotle's *nemesis* than to Homer's rage, therefore lies in its moderation and its proportionate acting out. While it tends toward brutality, resentment is a legitimate passion as long as it is tamed by the social principles that regulate retribution.

The Problem of Authenticity: Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky, Flaubert

Both the moral uprightness and the tendency to action characteristic of resentment are lacking in resentment. As a category in moral and political discourse, resentment has gradually come to absorb the function and significance of resentment, such that resentment's negative and irrational connotations now overshadow its positive and more reasonable aspects. This is due to Nietzsche's conceptualization, but it is also the consequence of a historical shift in public culture.

The rise of liberalism coincides with the emergence of civil society and the expanding capitalist economy in eighteenth-century Europe. In such a context, resentment could be deemed reasonable, provided that we can recognize the reasons grounding it and gauge an adequate response. There was optimism that an equilibrium could be found between our affective lives and economic processes. Older cardinal sins were reinvented as productive and useful passions, assuming that they keep each other in check. Kant wrote of the 'unsocial sociability' (*ungesellige Geselligkeit*) of human

beings, for whom the conflicts resulting from the ‘desire for honor, power, or property’ are necessary moments on the way to the establishment of a republican constitution and perpetual peace. Together with indignation, resentment could be regarded as the reactive but necessary counterpart to the enthusiasm that formed the impassioned drive of the French Revolution, notwithstanding its role in the terror that followed.

In the following, more complacent period, however, the notion of resentment acquired the additional connotation of ‘a senti-mental mixture’ of calculating reason and toxic sensations.¹⁷ Sympathy and resentment were increasingly seen as contaminated by envy and a compulsion to compare oneself. They tended to articulate in judgmental reflexes toward others rather than in healthy self-assertion. Already in 1806, discussing the role of the press, Johann Gottlieb Fichte described his own ‘age of liberation’ as an ‘age of absolute indifference towards all truth, and of entire and unrestrained licentiousness.’¹⁸ By the mid-nineteenth century, Karl Marx diagnosed a post-historical age *avant la lettre*, a grey in grey epoch in which farce and parody paralyzed the 1848 revolution, leading to a counterrevolution based on ‘property, family, religion, order.’¹⁹ It was not only the notion that passion can be subordinate to reason that became questionable; the authenticity of the passions themselves was at risk. There was a general conjecturing as to whether the heyday of bourgeois liberalism, not unlike our own age of neoliberal hegemony and its oligarchic forms of government, hid a more fundamental incapacity to take a real moral or political stance. Did its egalitarian and humanitarian values not conceal a fear of social decline and self-interested vindictiveness, both toward the state and the proletariat, thus making the masses susceptible to new forms of authoritarianism? Did its oscillation between market cruelty and religious sentimentality not find its justification in protracted resentment and indignation, blocking the very possibility of fighting for a just cause and holding the potential to be infinitely more unforgiving and disproportionate? In other words, was authentic resentment not inevitably corrupted by baser passions such as envy and greed, or even replaced by the philistine lack of all passion (an excessive rationalism)?

In *The Present Age* (1846), Kierkegaard complains that the public culture of courageous speech and concrete action had dissolved into lethargy. Comparing his own time with the prior ‘revolutionary age’ characterized by a certain revelatory rawness, he diagnoses a ‘passionless, sedentary, reflective age’ dominated by ‘ressentiment and abstract thought’ that spreads like a ‘desolating forest fire.’²⁰ Quite like today’s neoliberal reaction, the struggles for freedom and equality immediately preceding the time of Kierkegaard could only be experienced vicariously, through the lens of skepticism and cowardice, as if they consisted of nothing but satire. A prudent passivity seemed to prevail over immediate action, such that passions,

including that of resentment, are disconnected from enthusiasm and internalized as resentment: 'just as in a passionate age enthusiasm is the unifying principle,' Kierkegaard writes, 'so resentment becomes the negatively unifying principle in a passionless and very reflective age.'²¹ Whereas the revolutionary age was a time of clashes among, and real choices made by, exemplary individuals, and pre-modern times were known for the fearlessness of religious faith, in the present age, nobody stands out or is capable of taking responsibility for anything beyond their self-interest. Instead of directly embodying and expressing resentment and indignation, people are immobilized in vacillation behind the generic chatter (today, we would say 'discourse') about the revolution. Of course, that people take refuge behind public reflection over what is 'reasonable' is hardly the fault of individuals but is instead, first of all, a cultural problem:

Yet one mustn't straight away take this ethically as an accusation; no, reflection's idea . . . is resentment, and the resentment is therefore twofold: . . . Reflection's resentment in the individual frustrates impassioned decision in him, and if it looks as if he were just about to succeed, the reflected opposition of the surroundings stop him.²²

For Kierkegaard, the abstract notion of the public is thus itself both a figment of resentimental imagination and the main organizational form of resentment. It is the paralogistic mirage of a generalized third party – *das Man* as Martin Heidegger would later call it – that allows us to hide from ourselves behind the quiet calm of a busy life: 'while the individual egoistically thinks he knows what he is doing, of all of them one has to say that they know *not* what they do.'²³ Sometimes, we may still feel as if we are ready for a leap of faith, for decisiveness to live in authenticity or fidelity to universal truth and justice, but when the general absurdity and particular caveats of our desire dawn upon us, rational self-interest rapidly subdues all initiative into resentment: 'Nowadays not even a suicide does away with himself in desperation, but considers this step so long and so sensibly that he is strangled by good sense, casting doubt on whether he may really be called a suicide, seeing that it was mainly consideration that took his life.'²⁴ It is at these moments that all we can do is apologize for our pathetic individuality – 'just kidding, it was nothing but a flirt.' Our passions are levelled into anonymous statistics and spectacular themes for mass consumption. As each of us finds his or her singular presence subsumed by the general public, our 'whole generation becomes a representation.'²⁵

Kierkegaard did not actually use the word resentment. His term is *misundelse*, which literally means not granting something to somebody, and in the latest English edition, the term is given its more usual translation as 'envy.' While envy certainly plays a role, however, what Kierkegaard

describes is a reflexively amplified sensibility that inhibits the will and prevents it from coming to a decision. This is why, in his case, it is better to stick to the older English edition, in which *misundelse* is translated as resentment.²⁶

In Kierkegaard's understanding, we find at least four phenomena that, taken together, are very close to what Nietzsche would eventually conceptualize as resentment and the type of morality it is based on. *Internalization*: Kierkegaard evaluates resentment as a form of baseness or servitude, defined as a prison or paralysis of the will: 'just as a serf belongs to an estate, so the individual realizes that in every respect he belongs to an abstraction under which reflection subsumes him.'²⁷ *Inauthenticity*: we nonetheless conceal our inhibited condition of self-preserving passivity from ourselves by projecting our own grandiose subjective potential beyond any actual decision as well as by seeking shelter in neutral reason and superficial objectivity. 'The life of the passionless person is not a principle that reveals itself and unfolds; on the contrary, his inner life is something quick, continually on the move and chasing after something to do "for the sake of principle".'²⁸ *Contagious levelling*: resentment is less an individual prison than a cultural prison, since by taking individuals en masse as the public, it generates a herd mentality: 'This self-establishing resentment is levelling, and while a passionate age accelerates, raises and topples, extols and oppresses, a reflective, passionless age does the opposite – it stifles and impedes, it levels.'²⁹ *Nihilism*: finally, Kierkegaard demonstrates how this 'dialectic of the present age' is as unyielding as time itself, comparing it to entropy in thermodynamics. Thus, in contrast to the revolutionary age, Biedermeier culture 'gains in extensity what it loses in intensity.'³⁰

We thus discover a second moral ground for the contemporary distinction between resentment and resentment, the former being active and sincere and the latter overly reflective and self-deluding. At best, resentment is a frustrated resentment turned inward; at worst, it is a smoldering envy that was never meant to see the light of day. Either way, once there is resentment, the time for authentic resentment is over. Those who cultivate indignation are increasingly seen as the representatives of a rotten culture, actors in a spectacle without dignity, sustainability, or credibility. The rise of the notion of resentment coincides with the catchall diagnosis of hysteria, triggered by the entrance of minoritarian voices in the political arena as a way of dismissing them as blindly aggressive and morbidly sensitive. In France, authors such as Jules Michelet and Hippolyte Taine warned of a degenerate resentment that was poisoning public life. Anticipating the rise of mass psychology a generation later, they saw it as a problem of hygiene among the new urban masses. The problem of resentment is not so much that it inspires the masses to organize in revolt but that its simmering negativity makes for uncontrollable societies of disaffected individuals.

It is around the same time that Fyodor Dostoevsky, writing among growing revolutionary activity and liberal reforms in Russia, would draw a portrait of the 'underground man' whose hyper-conscious inertia is the source of both his solitary feeling of superiority and all his troubles:

Not just wicked, no, I never even managed to become anything: neither wicked nor good, neither a scoundrel nor an honest man, neither a hero nor an insect. And now I am living out my life in my corner, taunting myself with the spiteful and utterly futile consolation that it is even impossible for an intelligent man seriously to become anything, and only fools become something. Yes, sir, an intelligent man of the nineteenth century must be and is morally obliged to be primarily a characterless being; and a man of character, an active figure – primarily a limited being.³¹

Seeing his ennui as a necessary expression of his society's utilitarian morality of utopian socialism and rational egoism as set out in Chernyshevsky's novel *What Is to Be Done?* (1863), as well as of its enlightened admiration of the laws of nature, the 'retort man' regards with spite every idea of collective utopia, all the while continuing to envy the 'men of action' and hating his own subterranean refuge. The merciless precision of his 'heightened consciousness,'³² his painful lucidity about this antinomy, leaves him only a 'specter of freedom';³³ as he attests to his suffering in the form of repulsive parody, it remains the subject of unceasing doubt and cruel mockery. A constant alternation between self-mistrust and self-delusion leads to spiritual atrophy, depriving him at once of the magnanimity to forgive and forget and of the idea that his protest could ever be effective or even noted by the outside world. Worse still, he refuses the liberal equation of justice with some kind of moderate revenge, lamenting instead the absence of beauty, great deeds, and strong individuals. Unable to find satisfaction in revenge, his pleasure consists exactly in the deterioration of the affective ground for justice and in the sublation of the belief necessary for justice. Like a mouse, he 'folds before its antithesis.'³⁴ Having chosen a theatrical self-laceration over the mandatory happiness of the utilitarian utopia, there simply seems to be no one left to get angry at, leaving only a deep abhorrence over the necessity that $2 + 2 = 4$ and the general good sense that reduces desire to interests and life to work. 'Wickedness could, of course, overcome everything, all my doubts, and thus could serve quite successfully in place of a primary cause, precisely in that it is not a cause. But what's to be done if there is also no wickedness in me?'³⁵

We can also see this reflexive internalization of resentment at work in other writers of the time besides Dostoevsky, such as Gustave Flaubert, or again, in later literary phenomenologists of resentment such as

Louis-Ferdinand Céline³⁶ or Michel Houellebecq. In his massive work of existential psychoanalysis, *The Idiot of the Family: Gustave Flaubert*, Jean-Paul Sartre shows how, in the bloody class struggles of the French Second Empire, the indifference of market competition went together with a general auto-intoxication alternating between hatred, counter-hatred, and self-hatred. Starting from the Oedipal dynamics at work in Flaubert's childhood and youth (his mother avoiding a strong attachment to her son after the death of his two older sisters, his father imposing on him the entrepreneurial ethics of achievement and social ascension), Sartre describes the fate of the self-loathing idiot, now better known as the 'loser,' as the 'objective neurosis' of a whole society. Out of a lack of self-esteem and social recognition, Flaubert, aged around nine or ten, did not rebel but chose the ingenious 'option of resentment': 'a secret and ineffectual malice, engendered and masked by ennui,' a 'passive activity' that seeks covert revenge and legitimates its innate impotence by obeying the world's imperatives to the point of death.

Passive obedience gives rise to resentment and prescribes its limits while preventing it from turning into hatred. Thus the slave, while revolt is impossible – even inconceivable – experiences the master's orders as a rosary of guiding imperatives and as his own life becoming alien to him, yet to be lived as his own. It is submission, a transcendent but immanent duty; yet the secondary results of this zealous accomplishment of obligations – fatigue, illness, pain, humiliation – constrain the toiler to recognize the other's demand within him as an alien evil or, if you will, to grasp his malaise as coming from an Other. A negative character is automatically attached to the order in the course of its execution, and to the person who has given it. . . . In this case resentment, without ever raising itself to the level of hatred, becomes the deep *meaning* and *purpose* of submission. Which can be expressed in these terms: when aggressiveness is lacking, when the Other is already established in the subject and deprives him of his sovereignty, namely the autonomous activity that would allow him to assume or reject a constituted character, in short when consent and revolt are equally impossible, resentment appears in the unloved child. It is a complex tactic by which he attempts to recover an impossible subjectivity by exaggerating the alienation that first makes him conscious of himself as object. In the present case the tactic consists of borrowing the force of the other through passive obedience and turning it against him; by turning himself into the pure means of realizing the alien ends imposed on him, the resentful man lets them reveal their own inconsistency and, by their unavoidable consequences, their malignity.³⁷

In sum, what Sartre describes is very close to what we now call passive aggression: by saying one thing and doing another, Flaubert guaranteed that, no matter how his environment responds, it is always wrong.³⁸ Like Jean Genet after him, Flaubert wrote like the illegitimate child who robs others of their legitimacy and authority. It provides him with the emotional shift from defenseless humility to proud resentment, even with a secret hope or love beyond despair. But it won't save him; instead of making something out of what he's been made into, he, 'the child without a self,' made himself into what he had already been made into, his reified alter ego: 'when the inertia is entirely absorbed by the resulting praxis and is recomposed as the union of endured feeling and passive action, it will still preserve its archaic sense.'³⁹ As a writer alienated from his middle class audience, Flaubert's escape into an imaginary hatred was the demonic correlate of a lifelong suicide. Ceaselessly dissecting human life in its basest motives without ever changing a thing in the process, he became the literary prophet of a whole society's misanthropic truth: no matter whether we are above or below, we are all crooked slaves beyond healing.⁴⁰

What is this literary gesture, however, if not a paradoxical appropriation and embodiment of the resentment that always already binds the author to those they seek to distinguish themselves from? Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky, and Flaubert struggled for an anachronistic spiritual enrichment of life. But when they oppose a desire for the true life to the sober, calculated existence of the bourgeoisie, their contempt can hardly hide their own boredom and passivity – something they know all too well, since their rapturous phrases never succeed in becoming more than relentless irony. Their common predicament appears to be that, in the attempt to provide a criticism of the moral crisis of their time, they find themselves in the position of a second-order reflection of this very crisis.⁴¹ How, if not by fulminating against the mediocrity of others, could they reckon themselves authentic? If resentment wants to be authentic in contradistinction to the insincerity of others, this is because only resentment has such a strong *need* for it. In their obsession with the dull, obtuse life of their contemporaries, these authors take their own image of the true life as comparative standard, all the while failing to live up to it. No longer, or not yet, in possession of what Nietzsche, one generation later, would call the pathos of distance, their pessimist-aristocratic stance betrays an already lost noblesse and a profound ambivalence. Stuck in 'the happiness of even the "smallest superiority"',⁴² their compassion and contempt are inextricably mixed up. This impotence in the cult of the authentic makes their doomsaying either comic or pathetic. Seeking recognition for passions in an age that doesn't really care, Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky, and Flaubert are immobilized in the role of the outsider inside or the droll critic. Worse, in failing to make a plausible

difference, do they not effectively universalize the modern pathologies – resentment, hysteria, anxiety, boredom, and so on – of the bourgeoisie?

Bernd Stegemann has shown that the nineteenth-century resentment of ressentiment played a key ideological role in the legitimation of socio-economic inequality. Its anti-liberalism was not just the trademark of a literary existentialism that attempted to actively realize and appropriate the resentment that inspired it, thus overcoming the decadent culture into which it was born. It was also the replacement of the narrative of class opposition with that of failure of individual character.⁴³ Capital is not bad; humans are bad. On the one hand, resentment became the diagnosis of a general neurosis in which resignation and fatalism take over from solidarity and class strategy. Instead of a political analysis of the structural causes of suffering and repression, there appeared a pathologizing discourse about humans who are just not able to rid themselves of their mental shackles. On the other hand, this moral discourse itself functioned as the dialectical sublimation of the resentment of the ruling class into melancholic self-sacrifice. In the general neuroticization of social conflict, the only justified form of resentment would be that of cynicism – a sophisticated, self-conscious sense of impotence – whereas the very idea of real praxis is repressed from the outset.⁴⁴ (What Dostoevsky diagnosed as the most profound symptom of his malaise – the fully depoliticized rationality of the pursuit of justice, truth, and happiness – Camus would eventually commend as the solution to the absurd situation of modern human beings. If the cognizance of what passes for life above ground blocks any tragic meaning of life and any aspiration for action, ‘the logic of the rebel is to want to serve justice so as not to add to the injustice of the human condition, to insist on plain language so as not to increase the universal falsehood, and to wager, in spite of human misery, for happiness.’⁴⁵)

During the revolutionary age, the notions of universal human nature and human rights had served the bourgeoisie as a weapon against the aristocracy. But confronted with the subsequent growth of a proletarian underclass it was reluctant to recognize as part of that universal humanity, it later turned out that the only way for the liberal entrepreneur to distinguish themselves and defend their property rights was by means of their own reflexively increased nausea. Deprived of its earlier role as defender of the general interest, the bourgeoisie implicitly confirmed its own exploitation of the working classes and simultaneously shrugged off their hatred, since, precisely to the extent that the proletariat failed to turn its hatred back on itself and find solace in the blessings of hard labor, its wounds were, in fact, self-inflicted and therefore well-deserved.⁴⁶ In this way, increased attention to the fragile and the excluded goes hand in hand with an increase of persecutory mechanisms. Lukács famously criticized the ‘romantic anti-capitalism’ that transforms material problems into spiritual problems for

opening the Thermidorian path of reaction and, ultimately, fascism. More recently, Reinhard Olschanski has made a similar claim: 'A ressentimental master-morality of self-sacrifice declares the hatred for the dominating class as ressentimental hatred, as a slave revolt that merely externalizes the general corruption with which everyone is afflicted instead of locating it in one's own inner life and bending it into a self-hatred for one's own wickedness.'⁴⁷ The double bind of patriarchal pretensions and factual violence was not denied or dissolved, in other words, but superseded in the form of a flight forward into a general culture of resentment and bad faith. In a society torn apart by class violence, structural inequality, and the fear of degradation, the bourgeoisie normalized its own passive activity by becoming Victorian. Inspired by a 'ressentiment of distinction' (*Distinktionsressentiment*), it distracted from its frustrated self-awareness through a syncretic *Herrenmoral* ('morality of masters'). The virtuously self-hating victims are still evil, but slightly less evil than those convinced that their hatred of others is justified.⁴⁸ A new post-revolutionary humanism came to define the 'nobility' of humans in terms of their readiness to redirect their resentment inwards. Those who refuse this change of direction were disqualified as morally inferior. 'We are all slaves of the same system, therefore let him among you who is without sin cast the first stone.'

The Problem of Justice: Nietzsche

While the phrasing of Olschanski's critique of existentialism suggests that a similar critique could be made of Nietzsche, it is precisely this dialectic of human culpability and sacrificial realism, of nihilistic nausea (*Ekel*) and compassion (*Mitleid*) in which resentment turns back on itself, that also forms the bone of contention in Nietzsche's polemic with the liberal moralists of his time. His refusal to indulge in the 'absurd' is what sets him apart from his predecessors in moral theory, as well as from most of the discourse on resentment that has since become dominant. It led him to pose the problem of resentment in entirely new terms.

Nietzsche saw himself as a psychologist in the tradition of the French moralists and of writers such as Balzac, Stendhal, and Flaubert. This is not yet psychology as a general human science or moral philosophy but as a school of suspicion – a critical debunking of the self-deceit and self-justification that camouflage the depths of the human soul. The underground man combined skepticism toward pure self-knowledge with mastery in psychological examination in seeking to provide a truthful memoir of his miserable life, repeatedly describing himself as a mouse, a nagging animal born from a laboratory instead of from nature. In a similar vein, Nietzsche, in describing the persons of resentment, hears 'cellar rodents full of vengefulness and hatred' who desire nothing more than 'retaliation.'⁴⁹ As he wrote in

a letter to his friend Franz Overbeck in the winter before writing *On the Genealogy of Morals* and after having discovered the *Notes from Underground*: ‘the instinct of kinship . . . spoke up immediately; my joy was extraordinary.’⁵⁰ His proximity to ‘St Petersburg metapolitics’⁵¹ is further revealed in another letter, written two days later to Peter Gast, where he describes the novella as a ‘psychological stroke of genius’ – a terrible and cruel mockery of the Delphic maxim ‘know thyself,’ ‘written with such an easy boldness and sense of happiness originating in great strength that I was intoxicated with pleasure.’⁵²

Although Dostoevsky does not use ‘ressentiment’ in the original either, Nietzsche most likely read him in French translation, where it is used four times.⁵³ In any case, the theme of sullen vengefulness and its articulation through moral indignation had already preoccupied him for many years.⁵⁴ Nietzsche, of course, agreed with the diagnosis that a general servility has displaced modern politics into morality and the symbolical order. His historical context was the new German Reich (1871–1918) of Bismarck and Wilhelm II – an imperialist state constituted by the specific conjuncture of Protestant Christianity and the failure of the bourgeois revolution, which he despised for its reactionary particularism and racism. It was a time in which nationalism, industrialization, militarization, and conservatism prevailed as answers to industrial transformation and social uprisings. Nietzsche regarded the gradual growth of modern democratic movements, including socialist and anarchist worker movements but especially bourgeois liberalism, as symptoms of the destiny of the West: nihilism.⁵⁵ For him, the chaos of public opinion and its hypocritical bursts of sentimentality, the inevitable despotism of the ‘herd,’ meant a gradual demise of the very power of organization of modern life. It replaced the question of justice with the propensity toward the non-sense of life, the devaluation of values, and the exhaustion of the will.

Yet, what is unique about Nietzsche is his attempt to free the concept of resentment from its entrapment in the reflexive pessimism of his contemporaries. Along with Schopenhauer and Wagner, we must identify both Dostoevsky and Flaubert as the great decadents of his age.⁵⁶ They personify a general reactivity – a form of agency that disavows its own activity and that sees everything from the jaundiced perspective of decline and decay – with the ‘retrospective weariness’ of the latecomer and epigone who believes the future to already be a thing of the past.⁵⁷ Instead of their hypocritical oscillation between a heroic assumption of resentment and a clever resignation – their bad conscience – Nietzsche seeks a new naïveté – the ‘innocence of becoming.’ Unlike the ‘higher men,’ those who are full of their own responsibility at the top of the food chain, Nietzsche holds that the true psychologists can have neither regard for nor interest in their own place in society.⁵⁸ This puts him closer to Charles Baudelaire, whose artistic

attitude to the present was one of untimely affirmation and tied to an indispensable asceticism in which human beings, rather than seeking liberation or redemption, face the task of producing a new version of themselves. As Foucault would later put it, in a description clearly echoing his writing on Nietzsche, Baudelaire sought 'the permanent reactivation of an attitude – that is, of a philosophical ethos' – 'in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them.'⁵⁹

As a self-appointed physician of culture, Nietzsche immediately relates personal existence to the consistency of a whole epoch; that is, the vital tenor among its multiple becomings. He thus takes up the task of the 'genuine historian' of his second 'Untimely Meditation,' someone who is 'both a knower and a creator.' The aim of his writing, indeed the task of the 'artist-philosopher' as Nietzsche sees it, is to create an alternative point of view whenever the reactive affects of one's own time threaten to overtake critical thought. Situated at the limit of the present, a philosophical perspective must not just be a different perspective on the present but also the active production of a different present, and by implication, of a different past. At stake is the possibility of beginning again, a rupture of time. 'If you are to venture to interpret the past you can do so only out of the fullest exertion of the vigor of the present: only when you put forth your noblest qualities in all their strength will you divine what is worth knowing and preserving in the past.'⁶⁰

What this means politically becomes clearer when we recall that, for Nietzsche, Dostoevsky's portrait of the underground man strongly resonated with a very popular contemporary work by Dühring, *Der Wert des Lebens* (1865), in which it is argued, along the lines of the classical liberal philosophy of resentment, that 'the feeling of justice is a form of resentment, to be classified with revenge'⁶¹ – *Gerecht* equals *gerächt*, as revenge restores the natural equilibrium of wills.⁶² Having initially accepted revenge as a means for self-preservation and for defending honor and ambition in his most 'English' book, *Human, All too Human* (1878), which contains both an account of justice and social life in an equilibrium of forces as originating in strife and his first sustained attack on every morality that is based on neighborly love and the prioritization of the other, Nietzsche soon polemicized against any entanglement between moral sentiments and political discourse, as it would legitimate anti-Semites and anarchists, among whom resentment blooms 'like the violet, though, forsooth, with another perfume.' The defense of resentment by 'moral big mouth' Dühring is an attempt 'to sanctify *revenge* with the term *justice*.'⁶³ The main problem for Nietzsche is not just the risk of infinitization inherent to the *ius talionis*, as it was for Smith and Butler. Rather, it is the very notion that justice would merely be a sublimation of the feeling of past grievances, since this glorifies not only revenge but all the reactive impulses that derive from it.⁶⁴

Nietzsche's objection is twofold. First, resentment and indignation are not instruments for protecting and maintaining order but sources of moral degeneration in which aristocratic values of excellence and vigor are sacrificed for a more mediocre society. While, in *Human, All too Human*, Nietzsche had sought to defend the nobility of indignation against the baseness of envy, arguing that the former contains an uplifting appeal whereas the latter has a levelling effect,⁶⁵ in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, they are deemed equally reactionary. The reason for this is the pettiness of revenge, which, precisely to the extent that it is considered proportionate and civil, implies and demands general equality or reciprocity. It is likely that Nietzsche refers to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Robespierre's teacher, when Zarathustra devotes a particularly passionate sermon to denouncing and unmasking moral 'tarantulas' who pose as 'preachers of equality' and agitate under the slogan of 'justice.' In reality, they cherish a desire for 'revenge,' the re-enforcement of social recognition by means of punishment. Here the 'tyrant's madness of impotence'⁶⁶ is problematic not because it leads to more suffering but because it associates suffering with a frustrated sense of entitlement and an attachment to past humiliation, thus decreasing our capacity to affirm suffering and overcome ourselves. Believing that life is fair can make us into terrible people.

As Nietzsche lets Zarathustra teach, history is humanity's greatest 'stone' of 'wrath and annoyance.' It is the stumbling block on which we grind our teeth and that imprisons us in misery. Indeed, the biggest 'stupidity' of the will is its need to compensate for the impossibility of leaving the past behind. Out of the revenge 'towards time and its "it was"' is born the 'spirit of revenge' that constitutes the metaphysical element of our existence: the grudging thinking (*nachdenken*) that opposes being to becoming and decreases our capacity to affirm suffering and overcome ourselves. It also condemns the aspiration to justice as gratuitous suffering inflicted upon the self.⁶⁷ Incapable of breaking or reversing the passage of time, the will turns into the vengeful spectator of what has irrevocably taken place. In its attempt to undo events, it does the greatest harm, seeking to act against whatever it projects as the source of its suffering. Since suffering is in the will itself, however, the will first of all punishes itself. Its repentance though the projection of an 'evil enemy' is its only 'creative' or 'authentic deed'⁶⁸ (*eigentliche Tat*). Ressentiment is therefore the madness Zarathustra encounters everywhere on Earth. It is our incapacity to actively will backwards and redeem ourselves.

Secondly, the valuation of the reactive affects overlooks a more noble class of affects that constitutes the true source of justice – the active ones. 'The active person, the attacking, aggressive person is always a hundred degrees nearer to justice than the person who merely reacts.'⁶⁹ For how could revenge lead to justice? Only if someone first had the power

to determine an equivalence between damage and suffering, and thus, to derive pleasure from cruelty. Only in this case, Nietzsche argues, is justice no longer a reactive demand directed at the past but an active determination of the future. As long as the measure is already given, by contrast, we can only subject ourselves, but realism – resignation, acceptance, adaptation, regulation – cannot lead to justice.⁷⁰ This is why the will to power is not a desire for power or recognition but a creation and even a kind of generosity. Despite their imperiousness and avarice, the active person's need for justice is more authentic and more conscientious, as it is based on freedom and the creation of their own values rather than a settlement of accounts based on already established values. With them, suffering does not yet have anything to do with fault or revenge, as this would presuppose the equivalence, pain = guilt. To find a moral meaning in suffering, by contrast, implies that the world is already divided into victims who seek compensation for an internalized trauma and culprits who must internalize pain.⁷¹ But this division is only the rationalization of a pain that has no intrinsically rational sense apart from a freedom to act rather than a settlement of accounts. If punishment were to have any active sense at all, then it could only be that of the improvement of the punisher.⁷² In the reactive sense, by contrast, it makes a scapegoat of the punished.⁷³ Acting is therefore the only way to externalize and justify suffering; it is a way of giving pleasure to those who inflict suffering and to those who observe it. As with Homer, the challenge is to enact our pain itself as a stimulant, not for moral payback but for life; a life that must be celebrated as a 'festival play,' not for rancorous humans, but 'for the Gods.'⁷⁴

Nietzsche traced the process of social rationalization as far back as the Socratic dialectic. The older, tragic culture consisted of a fragile and primarily artistic synthesis of the Apollonian traits of order and form and the Dionysian traits of ecstasy and terror. Accordingly, pre-Socratic Greece produced healthy, vigorous, and strong bodies and personalities, in which the principle of individuation merges with the inclination to transgress norms and discard self-control. Life here was legitimated not rationally but aesthetically. By contrast, Western culture only really begins with the internalization of reason in the will to preserve one's existence at the cost of the oppression of the body and with the dominance of weak, ugly, and conformist personalities. 'I seek to understand out of what idiosyncrasy that Socratic equation reason=virtue=happiness derives: that bizarrest of equations and one which has in particular all the instincts of the older Hellenes against it.'⁷⁵ Always already pre-meditated, all action becomes reaction at the same time that justice becomes indistinguishable from revenge.

Nietzsche thus brings about a complete inversion of perspective, based on a genealogical expansion of the historical scope of the concept of resentment far beyond the perspective of the psychologists of his time: it is

true that resentment and vengefulness lie at the basis of Western morality and its insatiable need for moral vivisection. However, this testifies not to its noble and civilized but to its corrupt and servile nature. Revenge as justice may be the slaves' 'boldest, subtlest, most ingenious, and mendacious stunt' and a 'masterpiece' of 'black magic.'⁷⁶ But in the end, reactive feelings of injustice bind us to the past and only lead to further injustices and hypocrisies. Just as the person who merely reacts is like a 'headless frog,'⁷⁷ English psychologists operate like 'frogs in a swamp.'⁷⁸ They seek the low motivations that sustain morality everywhere but refuse to question this morality itself; they even warn of committing 'genetic fallacies' ('Nothing is objectionable simply because it has an objectionable origin.'⁷⁹). They sniff around, historicize a little, add a dash of evolution, and ask what the purpose of resentment is. But for Nietzsche, resentment has no use value except for its further proliferation. He thus reinterprets the derivation of the notion of justice from resentment as the ultimate self-rationalization of resentment.⁸⁰ Resentment is not a 'species' of the 'genus' of resentment.⁸¹ This is essentially a modern distortion, since 'for all eternity' – that is, in the history of the will to power that is coextensive with the limited self-understanding of modern humanity – part of justice has always consisted precisely in the attempt to impose laws on the backward-looking passions and so put an end to the 'senseless ravages of resentment amongst those inferior'⁸²:

I say this to the annoyance of the above-mentioned agitator ([Dühring,] who himself once confessed: "The doctrine of revenge has woven its way through all my work and activities as the red thread of justice") – the battle, then, *against* reactive sentiment, the war waged against the same on the part of active and aggressive forces, which have partly expended their strength in trying to put a stop to the spread of reactive pathos, to keep it in check and within bounds, and to force a compromise with it.⁸³

What Dühring's explanation of justice lacks, in other words, is the genealogical difference between high and low, or what, for Nietzsche, comes down to the same: the perspectives of strong and weak, healthy and sick, or in terms of their constituent pathos, happy contempt or sullen vengefulness.⁸⁴ More untimely and incommensurate than the differences between moderate and excessive resentment or between self-reflexive and unacknowledged resentment, the difference between active and reactive affects is all the more important and necessary for a critical understanding of the reactive attitudes and their tense relation to justice. Moreover, it is less a theoretical difference than a practical difference; it is a difference that must constantly be made and remade by the genealogist themselves.

Nietzsche returns to the Greeks and identifies himself, not as a classical Greek already conceived in the image of a German historian but with the Hyperboreans, the mythical giants who live in an eternal present (the time of action).⁸⁵ The time of the eternal return of the same is not the cyclical time of Plato but the paradoxical time of the future. Just as, in art, every new work produces its own predecessors, the retroactivity of action – last always comes first – raises the question: What future action will justify my past mistakes? If the dialectical overcoming of resentment remains stuck in negativity and a post-Christian passion for moral and physical suffering, then its active overcoming can only take the form of a transfiguration of the past; that is, the mixing up of the past with the divergent becomings of the present. Nietzsche wants to safeguard the possibility of a rupture with chronological time. Only by enacting a perspectival difference, by dancing slightly out of phase with the present, are we able to maintain our sense of justice at a distance from modern illusions of history and progress.⁸⁶ This pertains especially to how Nietzsche's work must be read, as a thought bound to modern history neither ideologically nor materially – that is, reactively – but through its aim to 'act counter to our time and thereby acting on our time and, let us hope, for the benefit of a time to come.'⁸⁷

Just Sentiments

Now that we have reconstructed the historical evolution in the problematization of resentment/ressentiment, we can turn to current attempts at distinguishing them. Today, there is widespread agreement once more among moral psychologists and social theorists that resentment arises in a morally legitimate response to those who have deliberately insulted, injured, deprived, or discredited us or those we solidarize with.⁸⁸ Following Peter Strawson's more or less definitive account in *Freedom and Resentment* (1974), resentment rests on and reflects 'an expectation of, and demand for, the manifestation of a certain degree of goodwill or regard on the part of other human beings toward ourselves.'⁸⁹ At stake in resentment are not just our rights or interests but also our self-esteem and dignity and the general norms of coexistence. Resentment is of a piece with the recognition of the other as a free and accountable fellow human and, in turn, with being recognized as such oneself. While its expression may not always be compatible with the law and it is often at risk of becoming irrational and immoral, it is difficult to imagine any idea, let alone any practical politics, of (social) justice without it.⁹⁰

At the same time, there is a strong consensus that not all forms of resentment are equally justified. There is a fine line separating righteous from self-righteous indignation. The juridical contestation of bureaucratic

arbitrariness is more acceptable than the vandalizing of public buildings or even terrorist attacks.⁹¹ Moreover, some resentments, for instance, that of African Americans over police violence, certainly seem more authentic than, say, white supremacist anger over the removal of confederate monuments or the perceived unfairness of affirmative action policies. Despite the structural transformations of the public sphere since the time of eighteenth-century coffee houses and nineteenth-century newspapers, what remains constant in the contemporary discourse on political affect are the well-worn twin problems of rationality and authenticity.

What has changed, perhaps since the mid-twentieth-century rise of the ‘resentment-paradigm’⁹² in social science in response to the historical experience of fascism and rightwing extremism, is that both problems now also tend to be framed in terms of the moral opposition between resentment and resentment. Accordingly, resentment is taken to be the uncivilized and inauthentic form of resentment, just as resentment is supposedly a more constructive and pure articulation of the feeling of injustice. The postulate that this is more than a theoretical distinction and that it must be made time and again appears beyond contestation. It has resulted in a veritable industry of academic and journalistic attempts at unearthing the ultimate principle or criterion over who has the right to enter the political arena and what the rightful means to do so are. Let us therefore have a critical look at how the problems of rationality and authenticity are currently being tackled.

Rationality. From the moment that the vindictive passions are considered to have a rational core, it becomes essential to distinguish them from the risks and dangers they engender in their excessive form. We have already encountered this Janus-face in Butler and Smith. In their judgment, resentment is reasonable to the extent that it is based on cognitive and normative assessment but unreasonable to the extent that it is limited to an eye for an eye retribution and emotional reflex. But on what grounds can such a distinction be made?

While there could be no sense of justice without a sense of being wronged, legitimate resentment is always triangulated. It presupposes a moral or social norm in terms of which it is justified. I resent you stealing something from me because we share certain moral commitments; for example the concepts of private property or the utilitarian pursuit of self-interest. As a consequence, however, there is always a danger that the question of the ‘right’ political reason depoliticizes the wrongs that cause resentment in the first place. For Smith, resentment is legitimized in conformity with a shared notion of communicative action in public space. Since resentment is ‘the most odious, perhaps, of all the passions,’

Smith argues, it must be ‘properly humbled and entirely brought down to the level of the sympathetic indignation of the spectator’⁹³ – that is to say, not the level of those who act and fight for change but the level of those who impartially observe how others act. Smith presupposes a depoliticized equilibrium between benevolence and resentment, but the problem is that these are not harmonious among themselves. With every productive force it sets free, the plausibility of liberalism decreases. Contemporary social philosophers like John Rawls or Robert Solomon, too, concentrate on how to avoid or preempt envy and resentment through an ethics of competition or standards of equity and transparency.⁹⁴ However, in this way, the question of justice is overshadowed by the procedural sufficiency of those who judge others for not playing by the rules of fairness and sportsmanship; in other words, conformity to those rules that hold a liberal society together but that may well be part of the structural causes of the very injustices that the resentments in question are reacting against. Caught up in empty abstractions and missing a real end, the rational order of happiness and general interest is ultimately left to irrational (and potentially fascist) forces.⁹⁵ But, in the absence of any natural balance, the triangulation of resentment by the moral standards of mutual respect, equality, and social justice blocks our view of the political cause of a more deeply entrenched resentment.

To return to the example from the United States, almost immediately after the first Black Lives Matter protests in 2013, the movement was chastised for reinforcing racist stereotypes of angry or overly expressive black people. By focusing on the angry black man and woman, Black Lives Matter was seen to be counterproductive to liberal-democratic politics. As an overdose of anger, it was considered a threat to the public peace, which must be suppressed in the name of the greater good of consensus, deliberation, and majoritarian rule. This shows that the right to angry speech is itself a marker of cultural dominance, ensuring that racial subjectivity remains predicated on subjugation and the suspended agency that ensues from it. The obsession with procedural rationality and tone policing neglects the more substantive protest by interpreting it as a loss of control and as a potential prelude to violence. ‘If anger were to become a voice in politics, every kind of subordination – and by extension, domination itself – would become a legitimate political topic.’⁹⁶ Yet, engaging in a politics of rage and fury may be precisely the way in which Black Lives Matter and related movements can criticize respectability politics as a constitutive element of white supremacy, whereby Black people are forced to alter their public behavior to gain access to the rights that come with white personhood. Black rage is productive precisely to the extent that it can serve a unifying discourse that seeks liberation rather than liberal democratic

incorporation.⁹⁷ In directly confronting the hegemony of narratives, such as that of the American Dream, excessive resentment could well deserve exoneration as a political practice that upsets the established ‘distribution of the sensible.’⁹⁸ As Audre Lorde put it: ‘Anger is an appropriate reaction to racist attitudes, as is fury when the actions arising from those attitudes do not change.’⁹⁹

Authenticity. More persistent than the problem of the disproportionality of resentment, and apparently less susceptible to ideology critique, is the problem of its authenticity or integrity. Resentment comes under suspicion when, for example, it is corrupted by a sour grapes phenomenon. As Bernard Reginster puts it, ‘the fundamental difference between resentment and ressentiment is that resentment appears to presuppose the condemnation of its object and constitutes a reaction of disapproval to its occurrence, whereas ressentiment rests on the implicit endorsement of the very values embodied by those towards whom it is directed.’¹⁰⁰

This stance is illustrated by the contemporary discourse, dominant in North America, about the ‘angry voter.’ Whereas there may have been times when the resentment of the masses made the status quo tremble, today, politicians and the media actively engage in the cultivation and exploitation of resentment. By sowing division and generating fake news, they channel resentment into a rhetorical direction ‘that frustrates citizens’ desires while upholding the very structures that inflame civic resentment in the first place.’¹⁰¹ This leads ‘angry white men,’ otherwise powerless to improve their increasingly precarious living and working conditions, to displace their resentment onto those on the rise. They increasingly focus on cultural issues that actually naturalize and consolidate both their socio-economic condition and the accompanying feelings of bitterness, shame, and fear – perhaps first of all the fear of equality. ‘You/Jews will not replace us,’ the white supremacist’s chant. Or, as one social scientist comments:

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 color, immigrants, and lesbians and gays – when others have fallen.¹⁰²

In addition, there is the discourse about ‘spoilt citizens’ and ‘pampered consumers’ who can no longer live up to the demands of emancipated life and long for authoritarian leaders, mainly out of spite and fear of giving

up privileges. This is a discourse that is perhaps more at home in Europe, where the gradual demise of social democracy articulates in revolts of the middle classes, easily dismissed as ‘professional protesters’ and ‘weekend anarchists.’ In Germany, the massive protests against the Stuttgart 21 railway station project as well as SPD troublemaker Thilo Sarrazin’s attacks on supposedly lax immigration laws led to the neologism *Wutbürger* (irate citizens), which designates older and relatively well-to-do citizens who refuse to participate in civil society out of a supposedly misplaced contempt for arrogant elites. Although at the same time warning of the tendency of said elites to automatically see protest as rooted in base motives – a reflex that reinforces the general process of ‘civic resignation’ (*Bürgerausschaltung*) – Sloterdijk, for example, has no doubt that, here, we are not dealing with a politically bona fide resentment but with resentment. Under the mask of a protest, he says, authoritarian, fascist, populist movements categorically refuse to engage in politics, even though their demands continue to be modelled on the emancipatory achievements of social democracy and its traditional division between right and left: ‘Basically, all politics that stems from resentment corresponds to what we wrongly describe as right-wing radicalism. In fact, it is an emotional radicalism or a rejectionist radicalism that could just as well be left wing as right wing.’¹⁰³

Whether or not there is a rational and emancipatory core of resentment hidden underneath resentment, in both examples, the argument appears to be that the destiny of inauthentic resentment is resentment. Failing to address the true causes of injustice or injury leads to the introversion and multiplication of resentment. Many therefore replace the old distinction between rational and irrational resentment with the distinction between a socio-politically virtuous and accurate resentment and a vicious and unreliable resentment. Whereas social indignation and resentment ‘in their genuine form’ respond to the real cause of lack or harm, as Rahel Jaeggi argues, once they are diverted into free-floating projections, they become indeterminate, infinite, and ‘unreal’ in their persistence and ardor.¹⁰⁴

Such a differentiation seems all the more desirable at a time when the regression of the darling affect of liberal identity politics can count on too much understanding from media that rely on outrage as their main source of profit. One can be envious of the hegemony of angry white men in this respect:

The reduction of white resentment to economic concerns now has been thoroughly debunked. But the exhausting examination of white resentment – mostly by white people, who perhaps were the only ones shocked by the overwhelming white support for Trump – has overshadowed any political possibilities for the affect beyond rallies blanketed

with MAGA hats. Maybe this is because the resentment hasn't been identified as such.¹⁰⁵

The suggestion here is that there also exist less mediated, purer resentments that do more justice to inequalities at the level of class, race, or gender. By implication, justice increasingly becomes a question of the originality of concerns.

But how do we measure this originality? In fact, if the dismissals of 'PC' and 'woke culture,' and with them climate change denialism, xenophobia and misogyny were really only 'codifications' of a more basic anxiety over socio-economic dispossession, then what guarantees that the resentments over any other perceived lack of recognition are more immediate or trustworthy? Here, one risks a regression into the older opposition between reasonable and excessive resentment. Resentment would still be reasonable to the extent that its causes can be deciphered and appropriated by the social scientist, whose task then becomes the reorientation and whitewashing of its articulations according to more objective standards. While this task may be necessary and effective, it has an undeniably patronizing effect. It may even confirm the hegemony of some resentments at the cost of those ressentiments that never lead to political action but only manifest in silent resignation over past atrocities. The diagnosis of resentment, even if it is intended to be an instrument in ideology critique that refuses to psychologize and focuses solely on structural conditions, is never far from blaming the victim.

Insofar as contemporary resentments over identity are actually deemed irreducible to socio-economical concerns, by contrast, what more could authenticity mean than the sincerity of the resentful? In this case, the problem is that the subjective identification with a minority position always bears the danger of narcissism, of becoming part and parcel of an identity politics that, if it doesn't deny or even blame suffering, tends to replace class politics with a moral discourse that incorporates and conserves social divisions. As Brown puts it, the investment in our wounded attachments inevitably reiterates a feeling of powerlessness that substitutes action and thereby makes them all the more unredeemable.¹⁰⁶ The ensuing rancor and recrimination toward one's perceived oppressor are at the same time a kind of renunciation of freedom or power. Struggles for recognition are therefore increasingly inseparable from the call-out culture that is the cultural politics of neoliberalism more than its enemy. Brown 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 by entrenching, restating, dramatizing, and inscribing

its pain in politics; it can hold out no future – for itself or others – that triumphs over this pain.¹⁰⁷

Perhaps what is being overlooked in the search for both objective and subjective criteria in the determination of the authenticity of resentment is that our grievances are much more contingent and less our own than we think. Even if we abstract from the role of the various parties that have an interest in the exploitation of our emotional lives, our pain is almost always overdetermined by a large variety of flows of sensations and feelings that surface in different and displaced ways. As Sara Ahmed has shown, this means that the relation between pain and social injustice is much more fortuitous than we are morally inclined to think.¹⁰⁸ The structure of an affect has no inevitable relation to the emotions that may cluster in the wake of its activity. Resentment is not the only answer to trauma. Furthermore, it can also be felt by those who are neither deprived nor powerless and directed against those who do not have much power at all. In the age of male sensitivity and liberal guilt, the risk is that those who feel strongest or articulate themselves in the loudest fashion automatically prevail.¹⁰⁹ Indeed, it is precisely the fear of such anarchic feelings, of a kind of political entropy, that could unite contemporary progressives with Nietzsche, as it implies the impossibility of critically distinguishing subject-positions and organizing any form of counter-hegemonic solidarity.¹¹⁰

These problems suggest that the contemporary discourse on the difference between resentment and resentment isn't that different from the nineteenth-century discourse of authentic resentment. To be sure, this distinction now tends to function under inverted conditions: it is the minorities and historically marginalized and traumatized whose resentments seem a lot less reactionary or neurotic than the hyper-reflexive resentments that saturate our media, and a lot more empowering. As Elizabeth Warren retorted against Joe Biden's 'angry' criticism in the runup to the 2020 Democratic primaries: 'I am angry and I own it.' But does the specter of nihilism simply disappear once we live up to our resentments and identify with them?

To the extent that such a reflexive appropriation of resentment has nothing to do with guilt or defensiveness, clarity instead of silence could, of course, lead to action and forge new intersectional alliances. As Lorde famously points out, black women and white women are more likely to meet in anger than in moral authority: 'We welcome all women who can meet us, face to face, beyond objectification and beyond guilt.'¹¹¹ As the more hegemonic obsession with white male anger shows, however, there is no guarantee that clarity does not turn cynical. On the contrary, and fantasies of a leftist populism¹¹² aside, the undecidability of the authenticity

of resentment raises the suspicion that this criterion, too, remains predicated on an established distribution of privileges and differences. As Brown observes, this means that identity politics 'is as likely to seek generalized political paralysis, to feast on generalized political impotence, as it is to seek its own or collective liberation. Indeed it is more likely to punish and reproach . . . than to find venues of self-affirming action.'¹¹³ Despite the 'moral shocks'¹¹⁴ that the expression of black rage triggers, such disturbances may well be more conducive to the consolidation of particularist forms of politics than to their upsetting. Even in its most immediate expression, resentment is prone to function in an ideological way. Here, too, the hackneyed distinction between resentment and resentment is only a relative and abstract distinction that presupposes a more fundamental non-distinction.

It is this current interpretative impasse that I propose to call the 'resentment-resentiment complex': the more they are confused, the greater the need to distinguish between the two becomes; indeed, the greater the bad conscience of those attempting to safeguard rational governance from 'populist' or 'extremist' passions. What the constant recurrence of this non-distinction reveals is a tendency to leave it up to our moral sensibility rather than critical thought to set the unit of measurement for political action. This begs the question whether the difference between resentment and resentment, no matter whether it is drawn in terms of proportionality or authenticity, is ultimately only relative to the point of accommodation for bourgeois eyes and has no meaning beyond them.

Politics and Resentment

It counts as proof of the tenacity of the resentment-resentiment complex that Nietzsche, despite his categorical rejection of any role for the reactive attitude in guarding justice, has always remained a reference for the attempts to salvage resentment from resentment in the name of a progressive agenda. While simultaneously treated as either an immoral genius or a radical conservative, some authors even credit Nietzsche for being one of the first to warn us of the slide of resentment into resentment. In a well-known paper, Grayson Hunt seeks to redeem resentment from the shadow of Nietzsche's portrait of the person of resentment and retain it as an essential ingredient in the struggle for recognition. While both are ways of dealing with suffering, resentment only negates the outer world and leads to a triumph of the weak as weak, whereas 'affirmative resentment' is 'a type of empowering reaction that disrupts resentment's tendency to perpetuate the guilty pleasures of cruelty and self-loathing,' in other words, a 'joyful feeling' of 'active resistance' that 'divests the hurt from its potential

to become internalized' and 'restores respect.' Such a healthy riposte and self-affirmation would not only enable one to 'affirm oneself in the face of injury' but also potentially 'work in the interest of justice, whereas reactions overwhelmed by resentment cannot.' In other words, resentment at least has a pathos through which it distances itself from the resentment's tendency to consolidate pain.¹¹⁵

But isn't the wish the father of the thought here? Whereas the advice to act on our suffering makes sense at existential and moral levels or, perhaps, within the confines of a small-scale *agon* of nobles *inter pares*, it ignores Nietzsche's actual rejection of any kind of politics based on vindictory passions – a rejection that could be phrased in the stark words of Brown; namely, that every reactive form of politics is 'a practice that reiterates the existence of an identity whose present past is one of insistently unredeemable injury.'¹¹⁶ In being triangulated against moral or social norms, resentment is a blunt weapon that always risks reinforcing power asymmetries. Far from achieving justice, it always fights yesterday's and someone else's battles. Could it therefore be that Hunt's argument is nothing more than a restatement of the nihilist dictum of the underground man, 'It may be retrograde, but still it's better than nothing'¹¹⁷?

Like Brown, Nietzsche does not distinguish resentment from ressentiment. He leaves no doubt that justice, for him, could never follow from any kind of reactive need. Rather, it originates in the goodwill that prevails among those of roughly equal power to come to terms with each other¹¹⁸ – with each other's 'actual *active* emotions (*Affekte*) such as lust for mastery, greed and the like'¹¹⁹ – through economic and military settlement. In this settlement, the law in no way functions as an abstractly conceived levelling in the interest of fairness or social rights but precisely as a counterbalancing of ressentimental interpretations of justice:

Everywhere that justice is practised and maintained, the stronger power can be seen looking for means of putting an end to the senseless ravages of resentment amongst those inferior to it (whether groups or individuals), partly by lifting the object of resentment out of the hands of revenge, partly by substituting, for revenge, a struggle against the enemies of peace and order, partly by working out compensation, suggesting, sometimes enforcing it, and partly by promoting certain equivalences for wrongs into a norm which resentment, from now on, has to take into account. The most decisive thing, however, that the higher authorities can invent and enforce against the even stronger power of hostile and spiteful feelings – and they do it as soon as they are strong enough – is the setting up of a *legal system*, the imperative declaration of what counts as permissible in their eyes, as just, and what counts as

forbidden, unjust: once the legal code is in place, by treating offence and arbitrary actions against the individual or groups as a crime, as violation of the law, as insurrection against the higher authorities themselves, they distract attention from the damage done by such violations, and ultimately achieve the opposite of what revenge sets out to do, which just sees and regards as valid the injured party's point of view —: from then on the eye is trained for an evermore *impersonal* interpretation of the action, even the eye of the injured party (although, as stated, this happens last). — Therefore 'just' and 'unjust' only start from the moment when a legal system is set up (and *not*, as Dühring says, from the moment when the injury is done.) To talk of 'just' and 'unjust' *as such* is meaningless, an act of injury, violence, exploitation or destruction cannot be 'unjust' *as such*, because life functions *essentially* in an injurious, violent, exploitative and destructive manner, or at least these are its fundamental processes and it cannot be thought of without these characteristics.

Not even obligation law serves the creation of a sense of guilt, in other words, but precisely its inhibition.¹²⁰ Justice is essentially a matter of the composition of resentment with more life-affirming forces, of turning revenge into a question of exchange and debt, of calculation and balancing as opposed to any immediate reaction. In particular, it is the invention of a system that delays and depersonalizes both actions and injuries.

Despite his abhorrence of the anarchism of feeling, Nietzsche's argument is rooted in an anarchism of the political act. Contrary to the modern transformation of law as activity into a knowable object of science, he understood positive law as an art, thereby inverting traditional hierarchies. The law stands above justice as art stands above truth.¹²¹ Instead of taking the distinction between just and unjust as a natural given, Nietzsche localizes justice in the moment of the rational composition of the social. On the one hand, this means that notions of just and unjust have no meaning outside the memory of communal life, even though the artificiality of the law is generally quickly forgotten or denied. On the other hand, they pertain not to the existence of the law but to the consistency of the rivaling forces that install the law. As every morality is only a special case of a-morality — of power grabs and violation — any condition of law is a state of exception — a will to power expressed in law: every law (*Recht*) is a privilege (*Vorrecht*).¹²²

From this it follows, firstly, that the conditions of justice are not themselves rational. As a 'bestiality of the act' rather than the 'bestiality of the idea',¹²³ their 'rationalization' is itself irrational or at least pre-rational. This emphasis on the transgressive nature of the political act puts Nietzsche's

critique of reactivity at light-years remove from those who, like Martha Nussbaum, argue that anger is always normatively or rationally inappropriate.¹²⁴ Secondly, justice is opposed to authenticity. It is found precisely in the forgetfulness and impersonality of a foundational act; in other words, in the innocence of becoming rather than in the fixation on social identity and in the happiness that arises from the exercise of the power to act; it does not derive from grievances over one's past.

Ressentiment, by contrast, conflates truth and injustice. It castrates justice and takes its life from it at the same time that it conceals its own will to power. By turning the initial measuring of social equilibrium into the fetishization of injustice, itself a caricature of an 'original' justice, it dooms 'social justice' to be the form in which justice is repressed and sublimated.¹²⁵ Whereas his contemporaries held that a natural reactive feeling against those who have harmed us is the source of the general idea of justice, so that punishment is always a form of redeeming history, Nietzsche finds in the enforcement of the law first of all the natural joy (*Heiterkeit*) and good conscience – that is, the responsibility and higher duty – that go together with the intuitive affirmation of future possibilities of life. Inspired by the Roman model of legality, he even defends tyranny, insofar as it is the condition for life to flourish. For even though the law is 'stupid' in its generality, regularity and duration are the enabling constraints of the singular. Freedom and justice only exist 'under pressure,' as 'something transfiguring, refined, mad, and divine.'¹²⁶ This is the aporia that makes justice so exceptional. As an end rather than a means, justice is literally self-destructive. While the law outlives and outlaws the vital conditions in which it is made, sovereignty comes at a fatal price. In the form of mercy or grace – a break with the *lex talionis* and social comparison, in other words, with the repetition of the past – all true justice is eventually 'self-overcoming' (*sich selbst aufhebend*).¹²⁷

A consequence of this complete overhaul of our conception of justice appears to be that Nietzsche cannot qualify as a philosopher of social justice in any contemporary sense. Within the social sphere, the law may well sanctify a form of revenge, albeit in the heavily mediated form of rights and duties. But reactivity, according to Nietzsche, is not what makes the law just. On the contrary, this justification lies in the domain of politics; that is, the domain of action instead of feeling. To be sure, this argument does not just affect exonerations of rage against sexism or racism but also more conservative attempts to defend a moderate resentment. For Nietzsche, even physical causality is a matter of revenge – a moral projection – and therefore unjust, whereas for Dühring, justice as equilibrium restored through revenge was based on the Newtonian mechanistic model that says that each action must be followed a specific reaction. The problem

of mechanicism is not that it reduces psychological intentions to a general law but that it is itself only a psychologism ('the oldest psychology'¹²⁸). In effect, justice is only what is enacted and it is as rare as its enactment. Even if the first determining act of culture is punishment in response to harm, this must therefore not be reduced to a vengeful reaction to a preceding cause or experience of injustice. Rather, as generic activity, punishment is precisely the spontaneous self-determination and self-production of justice that legitimates suffering and precedes social triangulation as much as it is excluded by them.

While Nietzsche's brash vitalism raises many new and difficult questions, they need not get in the way of our main concern here. As it stands, we can speak of a legitimacy of social resentment, to the extent that it is the inevitable but already rationalized consequence of the asymmetrical establishment of social order with its winners and losers. However, this reactivity or vengefulness could never be guiding in the further struggle for social justice, since it inherently keeps scratching old wounds. Precisely due to its being rendered socially latent, it tends toward rampant growth and arbitrary raging rather than to its own dissolution.¹²⁹ For Nietzsche, the much-feared slide of resentment into ressentiment therefore seems to be a necessary discontent of civilization. This is not at all to contest that it is necessary to repoliticize the state monopolies on force or finance when a society tends to inequality and the exclusion of minorities, especially when the law is primarily endorsed as necessary to depoliticize rage.¹³⁰ But it cannot be done on the basis of a distinction between legitimate resentment and illegitimate ressentiment. Resentment has only relative standards and ressentiment shows it. What entitles Nietzsche to dismiss resentment along with ressentiment when it comes to justice is precisely his concern with the possibility of politics as such; that is, not a politics within the confines of social and moral subordination but with the only true political event: the production of new practices and rules as much as alternative values we can live by.

In many ways, this argument anticipates Hannah Arendt, whose high-minded contempt for the 'social' equals Nietzsche's. Indispensable for protest and revolt, she recognized resentment as that 'legitimate hatred that makes you ugly nevertheless, the well-founded wrath that makes the voice grow hoarse.'¹³¹ Far from being the basis for yet another liberal argument, however, legitimacy for Arendt is a category that belongs to morality and law, not to political action. What characterizes the latter is that it is, by definition, unexpected, unruly, and irreducible to any social distribution of possibilities.

Unlike human behavior – which the Greeks, like all civilized people, judged according to 'moral standards,' taking into account motives and

intentions on the one hand and consequences on the other – action can be judged only by the criterion of greatness because it is in its nature to break through the commonly accepted and reach into the extraordinary, where whatever is true in common and everyday life no longer applies because everything that exists is unique and *sui generis*.¹³²

As Nietzsche had done before, Arendt argues that true political acts are only possible in the form of new beginnings; that is, as revolutionary moments that are as exceptional as justice itself. Although not exactly cases of Homeric rage, the examples Arendt gives of such moments are Thucydides and Pericles – precisely those founders of state and lawgivers that Nietzsche admires. Pointing to the Greek term *archein*, meaning to begin, to lead, and to rule, Arendt argues that true action does not adhere to the laws of history.¹³³ Irreducible and boundless though it may be, action nonetheless has a tremendous capacity for establishing solidarity and collective empowerment. In fact, exceptional or exemplary actors would be impotent if they did not have a chance of enlisting others to co-act in an open ensemble. Inseparable from its actualization in affective relations with a plurality of others, the power to act is therefore the very *raison d'être* of public life: 'action, though it may proceed from nowhere, so to speak, acts into a medium where every reaction becomes a chain reaction and where every process is the cause of a new process.'¹³⁴ More universal than any relation of domination and exploitation, political action lies in prefiguring and configuring forms of solidarity that are always transversal to existing social and legal relationships. It has 'an inherent tendency to force open all limitations and cut across all boundaries.'¹³⁵

As Arendt points out, political action is especially immune to the questions of authenticity or truthfulness. In politics, nobody is the author of his own life.¹³⁶ Her description of public life bears a remarkable resemblance to Kierkegaard's depiction of the revolutionary age as an age of tumultuous action in contrast to a post-revolutionary age of feeling. Instead of the enthusiasm, participation, decisiveness, decorum, authority, and defiance that characterized the golden age of liberal politics, our age confuses politics with the social sphere in modern life, and as a consequence, has replaced the virtues of active civility with the narcissism of professional politicians and their passive spectators, as well as with impartial calculations and the reflectivity of ethical committee members. In particular, it confuses political acts with emotions that cannot be confirmed in public life. For this reason, Arendt would probably have been as horrified over, say, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, as she was over the tendency to cultivate moral grievances in lieu of political action in the French Revolution.¹³⁷

As much as Nietzsche and Arendt locate politics in action, it does not follow that suffering is irrelevant to politics. To expunge politics from collective moods and thereby arrive at an alternative conception of the political made up solely of exceptional events would be an even graver idealism than the one found in liberal ideology, which subordinates the passions to rational interest. It is never sufficient to distinguish the autonomy of the political from the affective determinants that shape the modes of operation in political conflict and impact its potential outcomes. On the contrary, action always erupts from the inextricable entanglement of moral sentiments and politics. As Ahmed argues against Brown, there is no pure action, since it is impossible to separate the action that could lead to change from the reactions that feel, interpret, resist, and metabolize what happens. Precisely the contingency, fragility, change, and unpredictability of (concerted) action are under threat here. It takes perseverance and momentum to achieve a more just order, and this achievement may well be sustained by resentment. As an assertion of presence and a demand for recognition, anger is a key driver and ‘moral battery’¹³⁸ for political action and resistance. Neither is there such a thing as pure reaction. The passions are the waverings of the mind that either increase or diminish one’s power to act. Thus, anger or ‘against-ness,’ as constituent affect of feminist politics, is not fully determined by the past but also open to future transformations.¹³⁹

Nevertheless, these transformations do not make the passions themselves political, nor does the fact that one can pass by degrees from one thing to another prevent their being different in kind. Rather, the distinction between actions and passions makes it possible to see the latter from a political point of view; that is, not the perspective of their dismissal or exoneration but that of their causes and their passage into action. On the one hand, Ahmed reminds us that ‘although injustice cannot be measured by the existence of suffering, some suffering is an effect of injustice’; that is, ‘of the repetition of some actions rather than others.’¹⁴⁰ This suggests that, notwithstanding Nietzsche’s claim that acts considered in themselves can never be just or unjust,¹⁴¹ their repetitive composition can be. If this weren’t the case, no normative distinction between Trumpist politics and the civil rights movement would be possible. What ultimately constitutes the non-reducibility between politics and social therapy, on the other hand, is the only possible redemption of suffering. Between reaction and action there is no equipollence, as between effect and cause. For Nietzsche, any attempt to rationalize reactivity is itself still the expression of a reactive life. The older problems of proportionality and authenticity thus dissolve into the problem of justice. What matters in politics is the distinction between, on the one hand, emotions such as resentment and resentment, which are only ever effects, and on the other hand, the actions that provide their (de)legitimizing grounds. As Alain Badiou has argued, Nietzsche’s understanding

of action is ‘archi-political,’ not in the sense of foundational eminence but in the sense of being ahead of itself.¹⁴² An indication of what this means can be found in anarchist tracts, such as those of The Invisible Committee, who write: ‘When repression strikes us, let’s begin by not taking ourselves for ourselves.’ It is power that wants to produce its subordinates more than destroy them. It first seduces them to seek to live up to an image of what they are not but only to bury this desire again under the label of resentment or indignation. A strike or even a riot, by contrast, does not originate from a generally recognized social position but belongs to the reign of the initiative – a politics of the accomplished fact that necessarily transgresses the laws of the state and its institutions. Apart from anger and frustration, we also coordinate through the palpable joy of disciplined organization and expansion, such that the insurrectionary action always ‘carries within itself the form of its victory, or that of its defeat.’¹⁴³

This radically immanent sense of justice finally returns us to that other problem we set out with; namely, how to cope with failure while holding on to emancipatory, counter-hegemonic, and self-affirming political practices. We have not yet reached an answer to this question, which belongs to political judgment and only secondarily to academic theorization. However, it is clear that it must be answered outside the limitations and ambivalences of mainstream parameters. In liberal and conservative discourses, the vexed problem of the difference between resentment and ressentiment will always be in need of unraveling, but in reality, there is no such problem. Worse, the industrious overcoding of vindictive feelings, especially when carried out under the mask of critical theory, effectively suppresses the political and bears the unmistakable sign of nihilism; that is, the decline of our capacity to act politically. Or as Nietzsche puts it with characteristic irony:

I will have to be forgiven for discovering that all moral philosophy so far has been boring and belongs among the soporifics – and that “virtue” for me has been hampered by nothing so much as by this boringness of its advocates; although I do not mean to deny their general utility. It matters much that as few people as possible think about morality – consequently it matters *very* much that morality not become interesting someday!¹⁴⁴

Notes

- 1 On ressentiment in Diderot and Burke, see Sunil M. Agnani, *Hating Empire Properly: The Two Indies and the Limits of Enlightenment Anticolonialism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013).
- 2 For Martha Nussbaum, this rationalization is the primal scene of liberal constitution. Martha C. Nussbaum, *Anger and Forgiveness: Resentment, Generosity, Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 3.

- 3 Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 35–62, esp. 45.
- 4 Aristotle, ‘Rhetoric’, in: Jonathan Barnes (ed.), *Vol. II of The Complete Works of Aristotle* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), §2 (1378a31–b9).
- 5 Aristotle, ‘Rhetoric’, §9 (1386b13–20).
- 6 Aristotle, ‘Nicomachean Ethics’, in: Jonathan Barnes (ed.), *Vol. II of The Complete Works of Aristotle* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), Book IV, §5 (1126a20–3).
- 7 Aristotle, ‘Rhetoric’, §9 (1386b34–5).
- 8 Peter Sloterdijk, *Rage and Time*, trans. Mario Wenning (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 15–16. Similarly, for Fukuyama ‘Nietzsche’s well-known doctrine of the “will to power” can be understood as the effort to reassert the primacy of thymos as against desire and reason, and to undo the damage that modern liberalism has done to man’s pride and self-assertiveness.’ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: The Free Press, 1991), 189.
- 9 Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. Ryan Patrick Hanley (London: Penguin, 2009), 92.
- 10 Joseph Butler, *Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel*, ed. David McNaughton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 70.
- 11 Smith, *Moral Sentiments*, 84.
- 12 Smith, *Moral Sentiments*, 47.
- 13 Smith, *Moral Sentiments*, 43.
- 14 Smith, *Moral Sentiments*, 115.
- 15 Butler, *Fifteen Sermons*, 77, 72–3.
- 16 ‘The natural object, or occasion of, settled resentment then being injury, as distinct from pain and loss; it is easy to see, that to prevent and to remedy such injury, and the miseries arising from it, is the end for which this passion was implanted in man.’ Butler, *Fifteen Sermons*, 71–2.
- 17 Joseph Vogl, *Kapital und Ressentiment: Eine kurze Theorie der Gegenwart* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2021), 162, 157–82.
- 18 Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Characteristic of the Present Age*, ed. Daniel N Robinson (New York: University Publications of America, 1977), VI §9.
- 19 Karl Marx, ‘The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte’, in: *The Collected Works of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels* (New York: International Publishers, 1979), vol. 11, I §111 and: ‘The revolution itself paralyzes its own apostles, and equips only its adversaries with passionate violence.’ *Ibid.*, 125.
- 20 Søren Kierkegaard, ‘The Present Age’, in: Alistair Hannay (trans.), *Two Ages: A Literary Review* (London and New York: Penguin, 2002), 63, 96, 33.
- 21 Kierkegaard, *Two Ages*, 72.
- 22 Kierkegaard, *Two Ages*, 73.
- 23 Kierkegaard, *Two Ages*, 77.
- 24 Kierkegaard, *Two Ages*, 60.
- 25 Kierkegaard, *Two Ages*, 70.
- 26 The older, by Alexander Dru (New York: Harper Perennial, 1962), is ‘ressentiment,’ whereas the later translations are by Howard Ong and Edna Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978) and Hannay (2002). In my quotations from Kierkegaard, I have used Hannay’s translation but modified ‘envy’ back into ‘ressentiment.’
- 27 Kierkegaard, *Two Ages*, 76.
- 28 Kierkegaard, *Two Ages*, 90.

- 29 Kierkegaard, *Two Ages*, 74.
- 30 Kierkegaard, *Two Ages*, 75, 86.
- 31 Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*, trans. Richard Pevar and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Everyman's Library, 2004). Dostoevsky turns against revolutionary praxis of Chernyshevsky's 'What Is to Be Done?'. True to form, he later contradicts himself by identifying himself not just as a worm, hunchback, or mouse, but also as an insect: 'I was a fly, a nasty obscene fly – cleverer, better educated, nobler than any of them, that goes without saying – but a fly, always getting out of everybody's way, humiliated and slighted by everybody.'
- 32 Dostoevsky, *Notes*.
- 33 Alina Wyman, 'The Specter of Freedom: "Ressentiment" and Dostoevsky's "Notes from Underground"', *Studies in East European Thought* 59.2 (2007), 119–40.
- 34 Dostoevsky, *Notes*. There is no equivalence possible between his hurt and that of another, which would be the condition for vengeance to happen: 'a man takes revenge because he finds justice in it. That means he has found a primary cause, a basis – namely, justice. So he is set at ease on all sides and, consequently, takes his revenge calmly and successfully, being convinced that he is doing an honest and just thing. Whereas I do not see any justice here, nor do I find any virtue in it, and, consequently, if I set about taking revenge, it will be solely out of wickedness.'
- 35 Dostoevsky, *Notes*.
- 36 See Michael André Bernstein, *Bitter Carnival: Ressentiment and the Abject Hero* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 121–56.
- 37 Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Family Idiot: Gustave Flaubert 1821–1857*, trans. Carol Cosman (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981–1991), 4 vols., I 386–7, 386–409.
- 38 Passive-aggressive behavior, included in the DSM, was first defined clinically by US Colonel William Menninger during World War II with respect to the paradoxically mechanical behavior of men forced into service through conscription. Menninger described soldiers who were not openly defiant but expressed their aggressiveness 'by passive measures, such as pouting, stubbornness, procrastination, inefficiency, and passive obstructionism' due to what Menninger saw as an 'immaturity' and a reaction to 'routine military stress.' See Christopher Lane, 'The Surprising History of Passive-Aggressive Personality Disorder', *Theory & Psychology* 19.1 (2009), 55–70.
- 39 Sartre, *The Family Idiot*, I 44. Like Kierkegaard, Sartre also mentions suicide as example of Flaubert's constant dream of revolt without ever passing into the act. 'Faced with the intolerable prospect of "real life" in a business society, Gustave used his body to invent the ultimate solution to an unresolvable dilemma, committing suicide without dying. After that he was able to live a posthumous life – to die to the world, to bourgeois ambition, to money and profession, as well as to the hated self.' *Ibid.*, 387.
- 40 Sartre, *The Family Idiot*, I 419, 361.
- 41 Daniel Conway describes this position with respect to both Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms (cf. in particular Johannes de Silentio in *Fear and Trembling*) as one 'wherein the accurate diagnosis of this crisis itself is seen – though not by the pseudonyms themselves – to manifest and feed this crisis rather than addressing or alleviating it. . . . Rather than establish their distance from (or immunity to) the crisis in question, their common penchant for hyper-rational analysis and abstract diagnosis confirms their immersion in this crisis.' Daniel

Conway, 'The Happiness of "Slight Superiority": Kierkegaard and Nietzsche on Resentment', *Konturen* 7 (2015), 132–66, 134. A similar argument could be made vis-à-vis Dostoevsky, who consistently addresses himself to an audience of 'gentlemen.' The chicken coop is not really better than the coerced suffering of toothache or the coerced happiness of the Crystal Palace, the authority of which underground man honors by way of obscene gestures. Rather, terrified and intoxicated by the thought of his inevitable humiliation, the rejected humanitarian values continue to dominate his life. Wyman, 'The Specter of Freedom', 125.

- 42 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §18.
- 43 Stegemann emphasizes the role played by literature in the reflexive depoliticization of resentment: 'The class relation has been contorted from a political antagonism into a neurotic relation. Art plays a leading role in the elaboration of these neuroses. The history of its styles is a museum of the relativized racism, with which the possessing class wanted to fend off attacks on its privileges.' Stegemann, *Das Gespenst des Populismus*, 147. Stegemann ignores the vast literature on resentment, as well as the existence of a real culture of rage against the bourgeoisie. Cf. Mitchell Abidor (ed. and trans.), *The Great Anger: Ultra-Revolutionary Writing in France from the Atheist Priest to the Bonnot Gang* (Pacifica: The Marxists Internet Archive, 2015).
- 44 Adorno, following Walter Benjamin, famously argued that the longing (*Sucht*) for authenticity is a fascistic tendency, a substitute for religion, a fetishistic need for the immediacy of a hypermoralized individuality that is itself an abstract reflection of relations of property and exchange modelled after biological unity and the false ideal of self-sovereignty. Theodor W. Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity*, trans. Knut Tarnowski and Frederic Will (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973).
- 45 Camus, *The Rebel*, 285.
- 46 Sartre, *The Family Idiot*, IV, 249–50.
- 47 Reinhard Olschanski, *Ressentiment: Über die Vergiftung des europäischen Geistes* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2015), 48.
- 48 Olschanski, *Ressentiment*, 43, 45–7. Cf. Nietzsche, *Twilight*, Skirmishes §1.
- 49 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I §14.
- 50 Nietzsche, letter to Franz Overbeck, 21 February 1887, in: *Sämtliche Briefe* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2003).
- 51 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §26.
- 52 Letters to Peter Gast, 7 March 1887 and to Overbeck, 23 February 1887, in: *Sämtliche Briefe*.
- 53 Paolo Stellino, *Nietzsche and Dostoevsky: On the Verge of Nihilism* (Bern: Peter Lang Verlag, 2015), 45–56.
- 54 Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, §§213–15; *Beyond Good and Evil*, §219.
- 55 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I §§5, 9, 12.
- 56 Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, §370; Friedrich Nietzsche, 'The Case of Wagner: A Musician's Problem', in: Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman (eds.), Judith Norman (trans.), *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols: And Other Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 231–62, §9; *Twilight*, Arrows and epigrams, §34.
- 57 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, ed. Daniel Breazeale, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) II §5; Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, Preface §5, III §25.

- 58 Nietzsche, *Twilight*, Skirmishes §35. On the 'Higher Man' as mediocrity that considers itself the purpose of history and thus as 'something that is at least relatively successful,' see Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I §§11, 1.
- 59 Michel Foucault, 'What Is Enlightenment?', in: *Essential Works*, vol. 1. Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth, 301–20, 312, 319.
- 60 Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, II §6.
- 61 Eugen Dühring, *Der Wert des Lebens: Popular dargestellt* (Leipzig: Fues's Verlag, 1881 [1865]), 176.
- 62 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*, ed. Adrian del Caro and Robert B. Pippin, trans. Adrian del Caro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), II On the Tarantulas.
- 63 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II §11 and III §14. On Nietzsche's criticism of Dühring, see Guy Elgat, *Nietzsche's Psychology of Ressentiment: Revenge and Justice in On the Genealogy of Morals* (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017).
- 64 For Nietzsche, reaction and revenge come down to the same thing. One almost automatically passes from suffering to blame and punishment because suffering demands interpretation more than joy. As a consequence, there can be no such thing as non-vengeful anger. This is in agreement with Aristotle's definition of anger as 'an impulse, accompanied by pain, to a conspicuous revenge for a conspicuous slight directed without justification towards what concerns oneself or towards what concerns one's friends.' Aristotle, 'Rhetoric', II §2 (1378a31–b9).
- 65 Nietzsche relies on his older distinction between a levelling and an uplifting, agonistic strife (*eris*). Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, II The Wanderer and His Shadows §29, §33. Cf. Nietzsche's commentary on Hesiod's distinction between good and bad *eris*. Cf. 'Homer's Contest', in: *Genealogy*, 174–81, 176.
- 66 Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, II On the Tarantulas.
- 67 Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, II On Redemption.
- 68 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I §§10–11.
- 69 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II §§11–12.
- 70 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II 10.
- 71 'Anyone [in the connection between pain and fault] who clumsily tries to interject the concept "revenge" has merely obscured and darkened his own insight, rather than clarified it.' Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II §6; Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 135.
- 72 Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, §219.
- 73 Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, §252.
- 74 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II §§7, 16.
- 75 Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, The Problem of Socrates §4.
- 76 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I §14.
- 77 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §15.
- 78 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I §1; *Gay Science*, §§3, 345; Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Ecce Homo: How to Become What You Are', in: Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman (eds.), Judith Norman (trans.), *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols: And Other Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 69–152, Why I am so wise §4.
- 79 Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 110.
- 80 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I §1; II §§13–14. Here, Nietzsche comes close to Marx's critique of historicism in the Introduction to the *Grundrisse*, which

- shows how the thought of liberal economists moves from the present to the past to examine it before moving from the past to the present to reproduce it – a double movement that articulates in a contradictory combination of empiricism and romanticism. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (London: Penguin, 1993), 100–8.
- 81 Cf. Andrew Huddleston, ‘Resentment’, *Ethics* 131.4 (2021), 670–96.
- 82 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §14.
- 83 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II §11.
- 84 On Nietzsche’s development of the conceptual distinction between active and reactive in relation to Dühring’s attempt to ground the relation between action and reaction in psychology, see Marco Brusotti, ‘Die “Selbstverkleinerung des Menschen” in der Moderne: Studie zu Nietzsches *Zur Genealogie der Moral*’, *Nietzsche Studien* 21 (1992), 81–136.
- 85 Nietzsche, *Anti-Christ*, §1 and on the physician-philosopher as hyperborean, §7.
- 86 Nietzsche, *Anti-Christ*, §4.
- 87 Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, II Foreword.
- 88 Curiously, Strawson speaks of resentment as one of the ‘spontaneous reactive attitudes,’ among others such as condemnation, praise, punishment, and desert, that humans have toward each other’s action. What the oxymoron of a spontaneous reaction hides is precisely the vengeful aspect that, for Martha Nussbaum – who is the exception in the liberal valuation of the reactive attitudes – morally and politically disqualifies resentment as a motivation. Peter Strawson, *Freedom and Resentment and Other Essays* (London: Methuen, 1974), 6.
- 89 Strawson, *Freedom and Resentment*, 15.
- 90 See Bernard Williams on ‘reasonable resentment’ in *In the Beginning was the Deed: Realism and Moralism in Political Argument* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 122–4.
- 91 The concept of ‘righteous indignation’ is used by Sennett and Cobb in their study of the attitudes of the American working class. Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb, *The Hidden Injuries of Class* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1993).
- 92 Robert A. Schneider, *The Return of Resentment. The Rise and Decline and Rise Again of a Political Emotion* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2023), 91–110.
- 93 Smith, *Moral Sentiments*, 76. For a contemporary example, cf.: ‘I have found it worthwhile to examine the advantages and disadvantages that accrued to me by the exercise of my resentment, and why it should be necessary to guard against it, for like some epidemic disease to which one has never developed immunity, it is likely to recur at any time.’ Theodor Dalrymple, ‘It’s All Your Fault’, *New English Review*, 2010, www.newenglishreview.org/Theodore_Dalrymple/It’s_All_Your_Fault/ (text taken offline).
- 94 Robert C. Solomon, *A Passion for Justice: Emotions and the Origins of the Social Contract* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015), 266.
- 95 Cf. Herbert Marcuse, *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory* (Mayfly, 2009), 5–13, <https://mayflybooks.org/negations-essays-in-critical-theory/>
- 96 Lyman, ‘The Domestication of Anger’, 136, 139.
- 97 Debra Thompson, ‘An Exoneration of Black Rage’, *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 1116.3 (2017), 457–81. n460. For a critique of discourses on African-American ‘animatedness’ (of actions by passions, implying puppeteering) see also Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 12. And: Juliet Hooker, ‘Black Lives Matter and the Paradoxes of U.S.

- Black Politics: From Democratic Sacrifice to Democratic Repair', *Political Theory* 44.4 (2016), 448–69.
- 98 Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2004), 12–20.
- 99 Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 1984), 129.
- 100 Bernard Reginster, 'Nietzsche on Ressentiment and Valuation', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 57.2 (1997), 281–305, 296. Cf. Rawls's distinction between envy and resentment in John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1971), 533. Reginster's analysis follows on those of Camus (*The Rebel*, 17–18) and the sociologist Robert K. Merton, who writes: 'The essential point distinguishing ressentiment from rebellion is that the former does not involve a genuine change in values. Ressentiment involves a sour-grapes pattern which asserts merely that desired but unattainable objectives do not actually embody the prized values – after all, the fox in the fable does not say that he abandons all taste for sweet grapes; he says only that these particular grapes are not sweet. Rebellion, on the other hand, involves a genuine transvaluation, where the direct or vicarious experience of frustration leads to full denunciation of previously prized values—the rebellious fox simply renounces the prevailing taste for sweet grapes. In ressentiment, one condemns what one secretly craves; in rebellion, one condemns the craving itself.' Robert Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (New York: The Free Press, 1968), 209–10.
- 101 Jeremy Engels, *The Politics of Resentment: A Genealogy* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015); Katherine Cramer, *The Politics of Resentment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016); Rory McVeigh and Kevin Estep, *The Politics of Losing: Trump, the Klan, and the Mainstreaming of Resentment* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019).
- 102 Marlia E. Banning, 'The Politics of Resentment', *JAC, Journal of Rhetoric, Culture and Politics* 26.1 (2006), 67–101. On resentment as the motor of class struggle, see Jack Barbalet, *Emotion, Social Theory and Social Structure: A Macro-Sociological Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 71.
- 103 Peter Sloterdijk, *Selected Exaggerations: Conversations and Interviews 1993–2012*, trans. Karen Margolis (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), 59.
- 104 Rahel Jaeggi, 'Modes of Regression: The Case of Ressentiment', *Critical Times: Interventions in Global Critical Theory*, 5 July 2022, <https://read.dukeupress.edu/critical-times/article/doi/10.1215/26410478-10030204/315799/Modes-of-Regression-The-Case-of-Ressentiment> For Jaeggi, inauthenticity distinguishes ressentiment from ideology. Whereas ideology misidentifies interests and explains why the oppressed don't stand up to their oppressors, ressentiment does revolt but on the basis of a misidentification of the enemy. Ideology is both true and false at once and always has something positive about it, even if in an inverted way, as it offers the possibility of getting a hold on its material conditions. Ressentiment, by contrast, is both false and purely negative. The only thing real about ressentiment is the feeling itself, leaving no rational narrative about its true needs which it deprives and devaluates.
- 105 Emily Wang and Matthew Shen Goodman, 'A Note on Resentment', 30 June 2018, www.canopycanopycanopy.com/contents/a-note-on-resentment. Carol Anderson has shown that American history is saturated with white anger and resentment. Carol Anderson, *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of*

- Our Racial Divide* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016). Lyman, too, shows how American democracy tends to condemn the anger of black Americans as inappropriate, misplaced, or dangerous, whereas white Americans ‘appropriate for themselves the right to mobilize anger in defense of the political order.’ Lyman, ‘The Domestication of Anger’, 133–4. Cf. Andrew Breitbart, *Righteous Indignation: Excuse Me While I Save the World!* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2011).
- 106 Brown, *States of Injury*, 52.
- 107 Brown, *States of Injury*, 74. Cf. Cedric Johnson, ‘The Triumph of Black Lives Matter and Neoliberal Redemption’, *Nonsite.org*, 9 June 2020, <https://nonsite.org/editorial/the-triumph-of-black-lives-matter-and-neoliberal-redemption>
- 108 Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotions* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 30–1, 191–203. Against liberal theories of resentment, she argues that justice is neither about the sociability of feelings nor about having the right feelings nor about happiness. At the same time, she implicitly dismisses Nietzsche’s identification of ‘the sick woman’ as the exemplary person of ressentiment and upholds the necessity for the feminist killjoy to protest the ‘right to happiness’ (Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §14) and ‘the costs of agreement’ among the privileged, effectively reversing Nietzsche’s critique of compassion to the extent that shared pain (sorrow, grief – her argument falls outside the resentment-ressentiment conundrum) can also function as a generative, even transformative force leading to new forms of solidarity. Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 208–17.
- 109 Julie Ellison, *Cato’s Tears and the Making of Anglo-American Emotion* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999).
- 110 Cf. Nietzsche’s depiction of ‘righteous indignation’ (*die edle Entrüstung*) as ‘the will of the sick to feel to appear superior in any way’: ‘What expenditure of big words and gestures, what an art of “righteous” slander! . . . They promenade in our midst like living reproaches, like warnings to us, – as though health, success, strength, pride and the feeling of power were in themselves depravities for which penance, bitter penance will one day be exacted: oh, how ready they themselves are, in the last resort, to *make* others penitent, how they thirst to be *hangmen!* Amongst them we find plenty of vengeance-seekers disguised as judges, with the word justice continually in their mouth like poisonous spittle, pursing their lips and always at the ready to spit at anybody who does not look discontented and who cheerfully goes their own way.’ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §14.
- 111 Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 133.
- 112 Chantal Mouffe, ‘Politics and Passions: The Stakes of Democracy’, *Ethical Perspectives* 7 (2000), 146–50. Stephen Dolgert is right to call the difference between resentment and ressentiment ‘a distinction without a difference,’ but he makes this indistinction conditional on the objectively recognizable rationality of the desire for retribution. Stephen Dolgert, ‘The Praise of Ressentiment: Or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Donald Trump’, *New Political Science* 38.3 (2016), 354–70, 361. Understood as the dissatisfaction with suffering or the longing for revenge against those we believe guilty, Dolgert claims that ressentiment ‘makes perfect sense’ and does not necessarily lead to terror, since ressentiment could be less damaging than the hand that feeds it. If ressentiment is truly such an enormous power, he asks, then why not use it ‘properly’? *Ibid.*, 363. The assertion that ressentiment has emancipatory effects remains, however, contestable from a Nietzschean point of view.

- Dolger's argument is based on a logical reversal of conservative fears but remains empirically without proof and makes no difference in perspective.
- 113 Brown, *States of Injury*, 403. Of course, when politics is understood within the constraints of rational choice theories and consensus-oriented deliberation, the non-cognitive, 'irrational' factors remain in the dark. It does not follow, however, that antagonism must be left to the so-called populists, since populism does not want to get rid of the dominant signifiers. On the contrary, to the extent that it thinks that the collective subject really exists and that the concreteness of the enemy is not misplaced, it wants to restore a balance deemed lost. In seeking to separate its own pain, it remains with a frustrated self-image. Stuck in false projections, misidentifying both the other and, as the other's negative mirror image, itself, populism remains deeply reactionary.
- 114 James M. Jasper, *The Art of Moral Protest: Culture, Biography, and Creativity in Social Movements* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 106, 129.
- 115 Hunt, 'Redeeming Resentment', 119, 138, 144, 147. The attempt to develop a Nietzschean distinction between symptoms of resentment and reactions of resentment rests on the condition that resentment be both a feeling and an action – which, however, it cannot be, since to affirm resentment is already to transmute it under the impact of an act that comes from the future. To be sure, this doesn't mean that an active assumption of suffering would end suffering or make suffering superfluous, but that suffering is not what defines the act. The feeling of pleasure in the externalization of resentment does not stem from a 'resentment' – at least, not exclusively – but receives its vital 'tonality' from the act that triggers its dissipation in a 'burst of creativity' (Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 111); in other words, its de- and recomposition. Resentment therefore is no longer an adequate description of the 'felt experience of creative distancing from of resentment.' Hunt, 'Redeeming Resentment', 143.
- 116 Brown, *States of Injury*, 73.
- 117 Dostoevsky, *Notes*.
- 118 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §259.
- 119 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II §11.
- 120 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II §14.
- 121 Roger Berkowitz, 'Friedrich Nietzsche, the Code of Manu, and the Art of Legislation', *New Nietzsche Studies* 6–7.3/4/1/2 (2006–7), 155–69.
- 122 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §202; *Genealogy*, II §§11–12.
- 123 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II §22.
- 124 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II §2. According to Nussbaum, the seeker of payback would be mistaken in thinking that the suffering of the wrongdoer somehow restores or contributes to restoring what has been damaged (there is no cosmic balance), and also that the higher status of the victim is only possible at the cost of the lowering of the status of the wrongdoer (the focus on relative status is never sufficient): 'when anger makes sense, it is normatively problematic (focused narrowly on status); when it is normatively reasonable (focused on the injury), it doesn't make good sense'; and 'In a rational person, anger, realizing that, soon laughs at itself and goes away.' Nussbaum, *Anger and Forgiveness*, 31. This shows how Nussbaum has a strictly mechanical interpretation of English psychology, according to which human relations can be reduced to a zero-sum tussle: women can only gain status if men lose it; hence, all revenge is narcissistic and its general utility is zero. Karen Adkins, '“We

- Will March Side by Side and Demand a Bigger Table”: Anger as a Dignity Claim’, *Global Discourse* 10.2 (2020), 191–210. For Nietzsche, however, the problem of resentment is precisely not that it is irrational, but rather that it is too rational and that it takes rationality too seriously.
- 125 Sarah Kofman, *Nietzsche and Metaphor*, trans. Duncan Large (London: The Athlone Press, 1993), 42–9. Diametrically opposed to the idea that intersubjective symmetry and equality are the means of pre-empting or undoing the fixations of resentment is the Confucian idea about statehood, in which only the radical asymmetrical recognition of the priority of the other can prevent or dissolve resentment. Eric S. Nelson, ‘The Question of Resentment in Western and Confucian Philosophy’, in: Jeanne Riou and Mary Gallagher (eds.), *Re-Thinking Resentment: On the Limits of Criticism and the Limits of Its Critics* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2016), 33–52.
- 126 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 188; Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, 58. On the tension between the dynamism of life and the rigidity of law, see also Herman Siemens, ‘The Problem of Law and Life in Nietzsche’s Thought’, in *The New Centennial Review* 10.3 (2010), 189–216.
- 127 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II §10.
- 128 Nietzsche, *Twilight*, The four great errors §3.
- 129 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II §10.
- 130 Thompson, ‘An Exoneration of Black Rage’, 469.
- 131 Hannah Arendt, *Men in Dark Times* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1968), viii.
- 132 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1958), 184.
- 133 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 157.
- 134 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 168–9, 178, 183.
- 135 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 170. As Rancière has demonstrated, a politics or the order of the event is not itself distributed but what distributes. Democracy itself can happen only as exception to the polity and its societal hierarchies. ‘Democracy is not a modern “limitlessness” which allegedly destroys the heterotopy necessary to politics. It is on the contrary the founding power of this heterotopy, the primary limitation of the power of forms of authority that govern the social body.’ Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*, 45. This leads him to oppose to ‘the new sociology of narcissistic consumerism’ (Ibid., 22), both a radically non-bourgeois understanding of egalitarianism and a non-sacrilegious and non-elitist, in short non-theatrical understanding of democracy: ‘Democracy is . . . the whim of a God, that of chance. . . . The scandal lies in the disjoining of entitlements to govern from any analogy to those that order social relations, from any analogy between human convention and the order of nature. It is the scandal based on no other title than the very absence of superiority.’ Ibid., 41. Along similar lines, it has been argued that solidarity can only be (re)generated in the act of radical insurgency. Assad Haider, *Mistaken Identity: Race and Class in the Age of Trump* (New York: Verso, 2018).
- 136 Siemens identifies ten aspects in which Nietzsche’s and Arendt’s understanding of action converge. It is revelatory, unpredictable, sudden, creative, distinguishing, inter-actional, conflictual, phenomenal, transgressive, and to be judged by the standard of greatness. Because action is performative rather than content-driven, self-alienation, rather than a problem, is the key to freedom, while justice, in the form of an agonal equilibrium exists only medially and cannot be claimed by anyone. Herman Siemens, ‘Action, Performance

- and Freedom in Hannah Arendt and Friedrich Nietzsche', *International Studies in Philosophy* 37.30 (2005), 107–26.
- 137 Arendt allocates emotions to the private sphere, since, in her estimation, it was their immoderation that sent the Revolution to its doom. Suffering, transformed into rage, releases overwhelming forces of terror and distracts from the foundation of freedom in the name of the liberation from suffering. Accordingly, Arendt saw the American revolution as inspired by rational principles but the French revolution as inspired by sentimental feelings of compassion and pity. Hannah Arendt, 'The Social Question', in: *On Revolution* (London: Penguin, 2006), 49–105.
- 138 James M. Jasper, 'Emotions and Social Movements: Twenty Years of Theory and Research', *Annual Review of Sociology* 37 (2011), 285–303, 291. See also the notion of the 'rage bank' in Sloterdijk, *Rage and Time*.
- 139 Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 172–8.
- 140 Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 196.
- 141 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II §11.
- 142 Alain Badiou, 'Who Is Nietzsche?', *Pli: Warwick Journal of Philosophy* 11 (2001), 1–11.
- 143 The Invisible Committee, *To Our Friends*, trans. Robert Hurley (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2015), 54, 163, 131, 235. Seen from the perspective of immediate action, nobody lies more than the indignant about their estrangement from what makes them indignant, pretending they have no part in what upsets them and washing their hands in powerlessness. 'Spectacle's maneuver is well known, which consists in taking symbolic control of movements by celebrating them in a first phase for what they are not, the better to bury them when the right moment comes. By assigning indignation as their content, one was consigning them to helplessness and untruth. . . . He believes he has rights, poor thing.' *Ibid.*, 56–7.
- 144 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 228, 186.

2 What is Ressentiment?

Typology

Nietzsche first proposed the concept of ressentiment in the context of his inquiry into the ‘breeding ground’ of moral judgments of good and evil and the value of these judgments. ‘Under what conditions did the human devise these value judgments good and evil? *And what value do they themselves have?*’¹ The purpose of genealogy (‘our problem’), as opposed to histories of the English kind, is to determine the status of these conditions as high or low.² The tracing of morality’s descent is inspired by the promise of a return to an element where what counts is not the strife between good and evil but the ‘dispute’ (*Entzweiung*) between the aristocratic and the common, which is all the more disparate, as the two parties don’t experience this struggle in the same way.

Aristocrats do not perceive struggle as struggle but as the ‘normal’³ way things should be. They create their values out of the ‘pathos of distance,’ ‘the continuing and predominant feeling of complete and fundamental superiority of a higher ruling kind in relation to a lower kind, to a “below”.’⁴ Good is the affirmation of the happiness enjoyed by the nobles in what they are, have, and do; bad is what, ‘as a copy and counterpart’ to this primary affirmation, they despise. Nietzsche sees both values as part of a natural hierarchy between nobles and slaves that leaves no space for lasting rancor or guilt. The nobles simply judge as good what they individually strive for and are ‘unable to take their enemies, their misfortunes and even their *misdeeds* seriously for long.’⁵ Slaves, by contrast, cannot create value out of themselves and instead flock around the value creation of their masters in envious admiration of what they themselves are not, do not have, and are not capable of. In principle – that is, from the aristocratic point of view – the values of a ‘noble morality’ thus originate in the spontaneous and joyful activity and creativity of nobles, whereas ressentiment amounts to no more than the private illness of slaves.

Describing rules more than facts, however, what is here referred to as the normality of aristocratic culture must be understood as normative and singular rather than as historically true or based in gregariousness. In reality, the typological difference between masters and slaves exists only in principle, as it tends to be blurred, distorted, or even reversed by *ressentiment*. Nietzsche nonetheless relies on it for maximal shock value in his critique of modern life. Contrasting ‘slave morality’ with noble morality, he argues that it is the passivity and negativity of the ‘person of *ressentiment*’⁶ that have paved the way for the defining event in Western culture, ‘the slaves’ revolt in morality’:

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, denied the proper response of action, compensate for it only with imaginary revenge. Whereas all noble morality grows out of a triumphant saying ‘yes’ to itself, slave morality says ‘no’ on principle to everything that is ‘outside,’ ‘other,’ ‘non-self’: and *this* ‘no’ is its creative deed. This reversal of the evaluating glance – this *essential* orientation to the outside instead of back onto itself – is a feature of *ressentiment*: in order to come about, slave morality first has to have an opposing, external world, it needs, physiologically speaking, external stimuli in order to act at all, – its action is basically a reaction.⁷

Even if this does not yet tell us how the slaves’ impulse for revenge against the strong will eventually become culturally dominant and institutionalized, what matters for now is that at the source of this history lies a neurotic fixation or ‘habitual state’⁸ that defines what it is to be a slave: an inhibition of affects that occurs when a reaction is no longer acted out and is forced to express itself in moral indignation over the actions of others. While the slaves adopt the form of the good from the activity of the noble, they also concoct their own value-content – evil – but this time, ‘from the cauldron of unassuaged hatred’ towards the very activity that constituted the original content of the good. Rooted in feeling instead of action, evil is thus not the creation of a new value, but only a negative reversal of an already existing value. This denunciative reversal of a noble valuation by the slave is their only authentic or ‘actual [*eigentliche*] deed’:⁹ ‘Here we have his deed, his creation: he has conceived of the “evil enemy”, “*the evil one*” as a basic idea to which he now thinks up a copy and counterpart, the “good one” – himself!’¹⁰ In short, this explains the asymmetry of the dispute at the origin of moral values. It is the asymmetry between active and reactive. Whereas both the master and the slave are self-serving, the

master begins from the pathos of distance and affirms: 'I am good, therefore you are bad,' whereas the slave begins from the 'pathos of negativity' and judges: 'you are evil, therefore I am good.'

Thirty years after Nietzsche, it was Max Scheler who provided a first systematic, as well as a more sober, account of Nietzsche's take on ressentiment, starting from the following definition:

Ressentiment is a self-poisoning of the mind which has quite definite causes and consequences. It is a lasting mental attitude, caused by the systematic repression of certain emotions and affects which, as such, are normal components of human nature. Their repression leads to the constant tendency to indulge in certain kinds of value delusions and corresponding value judgments. The emotions and affects primarily concerned are revenge, hatred, malice, envy, the impulse to detract, and spite.¹¹

Setting aside, for now, their enormous differences, which, however, we can already summarize by the divergent meanings attributed to the word 'normal' (normality for Scheler indicates a normative generalization of the empirical as opposed to singularity), Nietzsche's and Scheler's accounts permit us the identification of four essential components of the concept of ressentiment. The first two are constituted physiologically, while the last two are psychological defense mechanisms.

First, ressentiment is essentially *reactive*. It is a response to a perceived breach of our integrity, a wounding or humiliation that gives rise to the impulse for revenge. Second, it is not an actual response but a delayed reaction that continues and deepens its efficacy as latent but hostile *sentiment*. Because of these first two constituents, we can equate ressentiment with an irremediable 'feeling of hatred and vengefulness.'¹² But this is not all, since ressentiment as a physiological state is inseparable from its psychological articulation. A third component of the concept of ressentiment is therefore its *demand for compensation*. In the attempt to claim indemnity for their passivity, the slaves, by way of projective identification, imagine a culprit who is responsible for their hurt, upon whom they can exact a postponed and imaginary revenge. This fiction of an evil other of whom one is currently the victim simultaneously obfuscates the original trauma and transforms revenge from an act into a reflexive idea, leading to ever more chronic suffering; it is 'the self-deception of powerlessness.'¹³ The fourth component lies in the *need for self-legitimation*. Unable to affirm their place in a world shared with others, the slaves never cease to justify themselves through the negation and blaming of a hostile world that they nonetheless remain dependent upon. This legitimation initially takes the form of a psychological reversal of pre-existing values, which turns

weakness into merit, impotence into benevolence, baseness into humility, subjection into obeisance, cowardice into patience, painful memories into acts of forgiveness, and hatred into love for one's enemy.¹⁴ As the promises of these paralyzing reversals are precarious and continue to depend on noble value creation, however, they must be morally consolidated as unconditional and universally valid, such that what was good and bad for some is now transformed into Evil and Good for all.

Although it shares a certain vengefulness and longing for justice with its cognate, resentment, all components except the first indicate that resentment or 'repressed vengefulness'¹⁵ is more complex than what the liberal proponents of resentment intend. Reactions, when stuck in reflection, become meta-reactions. Ressentiment is not a reaction to a breach of justice but a repercussion due to the inability to restore an imaginary justice. Denied action, it needs injustice to persist. It may even ostensibly inflict more suffering on the self as a weapon against others. Ressentiment is thus a torpidity immune to experience or argument; it is a fear of losing hold of life. There is no immediate connection between the original trauma and the values to which it gives birth. It is not because of having been overpowered that the person of resentment wants to take it out on the whole world – a mechanistic explanation that is itself already the symptom of a servile interpretation. Rather, the incapacity to respond to their environment means that anything at all can be perceived as a source and occasion for outrage. If resentment is a form of vengefulness, resentment's only recourse is an imagined refusal of vengeance that replaces the contempt for one's own passivity with, and attenuates it by, the moralizing contempt for the activity of others. Bigoted and hypertense, resentment is both a desire for revenge and the jamming and subsequent long-term sublimation of that same desire in halfhearted valuations and false representations of both self and others. Unlike resentment, therefore, it is barely a passion but a smoldering sense of wounded self-esteem. It is a simmering obsession that cannot afford to express itself and forces itself to become latent.

As a bottled-up desire, moreover, resentment is not bound by resentment. Since its object is no longer an external act but this act's internal doubling in the form of a lingering feeling, resentment is not just another sentiment but a re-sentiment – a second-order feeling made from the remainders of many others. Combined with impotence, the feelings of jealousy, envy, suspicion, melancholia, rancor, indignation, resentment, chagrin, grudge, malice, spite, and bitterness all tend towards ossification and generalization.¹⁶ A profound confusion between internal and external aggression together with an extraordinary sensitivity to insult make possible the peculiar enjoyment of pain that makes resentment the archetypal neurosis – a guilty pleasure that is nested in a myriad of simpler affects but that it represses and combines with (self-)hatred and the illusory promise

of tension relief. Juggling a whole series of feelings and modes of reaction, resentment is the sour element of all passions – Dostoevsky calls it their ‘chemical breakdown.’¹⁷ It is their multiple-mediated affect, which leads to the following two considerations:

1. If such a wide range of emotions is involved, then why is resentment even limited to the sad passions? The reason that there couldn’t be a resentment of joy is that, physiologically speaking, the joyful passions increase our capacity to act or affect and to be affected, while the sad passions decrease this capacity and thus already contain a germ of resentment. A surge of love does not linger the way a surge of hatred does. Nor is it in need of psychological interpretation. Whereas love enables us to forge new engagements with others, hatred is invested in the painful trace of the past and the attempt to repel or destroy the object that it deems to be its cause. As the object is internal and therefore left unchecked, however, it must be legitimized. This is why vengefulness eventually leads to an immobilization of our power, which can no longer do anything but react inwardly.¹⁸
2. If resentment is the becoming passive of our reactions, then why do virtually all theorists of resentment, including Nietzsche, nonetheless speak of ‘explosions’ of resentment? If resentment were only a spurious expression of resentment, in other words, how could it escalate in a slave revolt? Psychologically speaking, the point is that, even if resentment is ultimately a deepening of the sad passions, this does not mean that resentment cannot articulate itself on the full spectrum of the passions (the ‘reactive affects’) between glory and shame, love and hate, admiration and contempt, gratitude and resentment, happiness and envy, trust and suspicion. On the contrary, the values spawned by resentment set off eruptions of previously arrested as well as new sentiments. The resentimental people need all the ‘excesses’ and ‘explosions of feeling’ (*Gefühlsaussschweifungen*) they can muster in order to compensate for their internal suffering.¹⁹ They hide their hatred by pretending to be beautiful souls, by signaling their moral virtues through melodramatic fits of disgust or pity, and by representing justice, love, wisdom, and most of all, their ‘purity of heart.’²⁰ But lacking rationality or authenticity, it is all moral self-gratification and self-intoxication. Instead of describing a spontaneous act, an explosion is a burst of reactivity – a sudden unrestrained sequence of reactions to reactions – and thus, a general making reactive of activity. This is why Nietzsche refers to resentment as ‘that most dangerous of blasting and explosive materials.’²¹ It is both exothermic – aimed at the persistence of an affective state – and endothermic, or self-consuming. Rather than the dauntlessness and regenerative ‘animation’ (*Begeisterung*) that characterizes

and constrains the noble affects, resentment offers only the reversed image of an action degenerated into vehement feeling: 'They resemble the inspired, but it is not the heart that inspires them – but revenge. And when they are refined and cold, it is not the spirit but envy that makes them refined and cold.'²² Put differently, resentment is certainly a force of sudden disinhibition, but for an organized revolt, it lacks even the minimum of rigor and focus.

Sartre, too, emphasizes how it is precisely through the spiral of endless compensation through vehement feelings that Flaubert remains stuck in a shackled sensibility at the intersection of fatalities:

The malaise, the ambiguity of feelings, the shame, the rage, the flight into torpor, Gustave's constant assumption of guilt – this is pathos, a way of suffering the situation, of living experience which is intentional, certainly, but without a definite objective. Resentment is a passive activity: intention, means, end, everything is there but everything is hidden, secondary; it is a manipulation of pathos, a hyperbolic secret which gives meaning and direction by the very exaggeration of a way of life and which temporalizes experience by surpassing it in the direction of the worst, not of course willfully but out of belief and anguish. Thus passive activity needs pathos – or the suffered situation – in order, vampirelike, to sustain itself.²³

Similarly, Dostoevsky's underground man is the subject of the most intense emotions and sometimes dreams about being a lone-wolf terrorist plotting revenge against the world, but at no point is he on the verge of radicalization, trapped as he (and with him, the reader²⁴) is in his interior monologue. Although one should not underestimate the danger of resentment turning into a sudden passage to the act, it is ironic when contemporary theorists of resentment look to the nineteenth-century critique of passive nihilism for their own critique of active nihilism. For no matter how much they feign passion and grandeur, what makes the slaves instinctively into persons of resentment is the relentless brooding and sulking by which they remain forever out of phase with the activity in the world of which they nonetheless never cease to passively undergo the consequences.

Because of this tragic condition, Nietzsche understands the impotence that lies at the root of resentment qualitatively rather than quantitatively. Living through a perpetual ruminating (*grübeln*) and grumbling (*grol-len*), the resentimental people are weak in essence, not by comparison. The disempowerment of the slave is not a relative degree of powerlessness. It defines their whole nature. Since resentment is a feeling of the past without an act, what defines the mode of existence of the persons

of resentment is their *incapacity to forget*. While nobles live in the present and actively shape its future becomings, the slaves relive the past as a punctual and oppositional present that is strictly their own. They cannot overcome their fixation on painful impressions and failures from the past – a condition that articulates itself in indiscriminate dissatisfaction with the present and hopelessness about the future. This makes them extremely vulnerable to new impressions. ‘You do not know how to get rid of anything, you do not know how to get over anything, you do not know how to push anything back, – everything hurts. People and things become obtrusive, events cut too deep, memory is a festering wound.’²⁵ As happens in spite, the traces of previous impressions replace new external stimuli or become indiscernible from them, such that reactive feelings take the place of action or transform it into reaction. The underground man ‘will forgive nothing’²⁶ because his consciousness is completely overrun by the past. At the same time, his original trauma loses its distinctness, as it is constantly displaced in a concatenation of overwhelming new challenges. The experience of reality is a priori colored, deformed, and disqualified by what Nietzsche calls an ‘instinctual hatred,’ a ‘poisoned eye’ or ‘green eye on every action.’²⁷ Ressentiment is not bound to any particular object or event because it is the world as such that serves as infinite resource for accusations and self-legitimations.

To understand resentment qualitatively rather than quantitatively is to understand it typologically rather than empirically.²⁸ Ressentiment is the triumph of a way of being, not a character trait. As Dostoevsky puts it, the underground man is less a really existing individual than the necessary individuation of a certain epoch; less the profile of a pathological psychology than a profile of psychology as trap. At the same time, the typological description does not forbid multiple psychological characterizations, such as Freud’s anal-aggressive personality type or, especially, Melanie Klein’s paranoid-schizoid position: the excessive tendency, out of frustration, to split off all negative aspects of the self and project them outwards beyond one’s grasp. When the outside world is bad and oppressive and at the same time the self remains beyond reproach, the result is an ever-weaker self-experience, in which one’s own aggression returns from the outside in a downward spiral in which feelings of envy and grievance take over without any real concern with their original object.²⁹

Nietzsche further specifies the typology of slaves in that they know neither how to love those close to them nor how to respect their enemies. They may thus be magically attracted to all that is positive and beautiful, even if, to them, this is nothing but a thorn in the eye.

The sufferers, one and all, are frighteningly willing and inventive in their pretexts for painful emotions; they even enjoy being mistrustful and

dwelling on wrongs and imagined slights: they rummage through the bowels of their past and present for obscure, questionable stories that will allow them to wallow in tortured suspicion, and intoxicate themselves with their own poisonous wickedness – they rip open the oldest wounds and make themselves bleed to death from scars long-since healed, they make evil-doers out of friend, wife, child and anyone else near to them.³⁰

The slaves do not know how to actively love, not even themselves, but still want to be loved. At the same time, their irascibility is infinite, since they expect to be compensated for all the activities they don't participate in. Bitterness and scorn infect the most tender love and memory. When the underground man encounters Liza, a young prostitute with a heart of gold, he does not repent, as the cliché would have it. Rather, he responds with tyranny and cynicism, 'mansplaining' that her hopes for romantic love are worth nothing and that she will slowly become unwanted and die a graceless death. After holding him off at first, she gradually becomes enthralled by his seemingly poignant grasp of the destructive nature of modern society and visits him at his dilapidated apartment shortly after, only to be verbally abused and told that he hadn't meant what he said. When, near the end of his outburst, he wells up in tears of self-hatred, Liza embraces him in pity. But, by the time she gets ready to leave, the underground man, in an act 'conceived from the brain and not from the heart,' stuffs a five-ruble note into her hand. Discovering that she had left the money on the table as she quietly went out onto the stairs and embarrassed over his own cruelty, he tries in vain to catch her. Withdrawn in and defeated by his own ruinous sentimentality, his spite toward the outside world forever blocks him from making contact with real humanity. All that is left is for him to kill the memory of what he loves over and over again, with ever-accumulating interest. He obsessively castigates himself for something he secretly blames those whose memory he pretends to revere.

The same abusive mixture of cruelty and apathy also causes the person of resentment's utter incapacity to admire or even respect their enemies. Whenever hatred thrives in secret and fails to be expressed, it has no measure. If, among the strong, there can be such a thing as an agonal friendship or respect – Nietzsche speaks of 'love for one's enemies' in Homeric Greece – this possibility is foreclosed as soon as the enemy is judged morally.³¹ It suffices to hold someone responsible for our suffering to make us lose all respect for them, and as a consequence, also for ourselves. The Trojans were capable of admiring Helen as their tragic misfortune, but the persons of resentment, through a projective mystification of the aggregate symptoms of their own suffering as caused by an 'evil enemy,' transform every mishap into something mediocre – after all, it could and should have been

different.³² But how much malice and unslaked thirst for revenge are hidden behind this false modesty? As the underground man manically plots revenge against an officer who frequently passes him on the street without ever noticing his existence, he eventually borrows money to buy a stylish overcoat and deliberately bumps into the officer to assert their equality. To his surprise, however, the officer does not even notice this mishap, let alone recognize him as a worthy opponent. Inevitably, underground man redirects his ‘revenge’ back on himself – an investment in an ego constructed on the basis of denying the other’s superiority. It is impossible to distinguish between self-loathing and social humiliation. Each attempt at revulsion over their unresolved class difference leads to more self-deception and self-deprivation, until the hero’s self becomes part and parcel of what he hates the most. The abjection is global.³³

In sum, frustration and hatred are the a priori conditions of ressentiment under which both the world and the self are simultaneously constituted and deformed. They are at the basis of a progressive denial of reality in which life itself is ultimately experienced as affront and burdened with guilt. As in Nietzsche’s image of the ebb’s indignation over the flow, only rage, self-induced and perpetuated by means of a fictional representation of evil, can make difference – that is, suffering the presence of the other – tolerable. In the tight contraction of past and present, everything happens between reactive affects. Furious at both its object and itself, the type of the person of ressentiment is composed as an interiorized affect constellation that is essentially reactionary. This takes us back to our initial discussion of ressentiment as a process of autointoxication in which passivity and grievance are internalized and legitimized in the form of the zero-sum game of an imaginary revenge. The impotence to act and the incapacity to forget are, in fact, one and the same pathology. At the root of memory lies a breach with actuality understood as the time of action: a traumatic feeling in which exteriority and interiority, the activity of others and our own reactivity, are fatefully disconnected.

Physiology

So far, we have acquainted ourselves with the symptomatology of ressentiment, but what is its etiology? Nietzsche often refers to the resentimental people as ‘those who came off badly’ (*die Schlechthinweggekommenen* or the *Missrathenen*), as opposed to the ‘well constituted’ (*Wohlgeratenen*). This designation indicates that it does not suffice to hold the people of ressentiment responsible for their condition. Because ressentiment is self-undermining and self-deepening, it is tempting to treat it as a subjective delusion. But it is first of all an ‘objective’ illness that constitutes the vital point of view of the people of ressentiment. It is integrated in

their personality and character (ethos) but it remains inseparable from an impersonal and contingent dynamic of instincts (*Triebe*) that precedes and exceeds them: their pathos. Like the conatus in Spinoza, this is a capacity for being affected that comes into being passively yet intensifies a mode of existence insofar as it persists in existence.

In the struggle between noble and slave, the occurrence of some form of resentment is inevitable and perennial. Even among the well constituted, resentment can appear, but it remains a relatively innocent affect, like a resentment that is still recognizable as an affect of self-affirmation and is soon laughed off through a pathos of distance. 'When resentment does occur in the noble person themselves, it is consumed and exhausted in an immediate reaction, and therefore it does not *poison*, on the other hand, it does not occur at all in countless cases where it is unavoidable for all who are weak and powerless.'³⁴ Among the badly constituted, by contrast, the pathos of negativity takes over. The persons of resentment cannot but look for a narcotic that alleviates their incessant despondency. Such is the role of explosions of feelings, to overwhelm the present and so briefly annihilate the past. Typical resentimental emotions such as rage or righteousness place the blame for one's suffering on someone else upon whom, in turn, pain can be inflicted in order to displace that same suffering:

For every sufferer instinctively looks for a cause of their 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 they can release their 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, their 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*.³⁵

Whereas an 'immediate reaction' frees consciousness in the form of an act that makes resentment superfluous, resentment itself wants to free consciousness through an excess of feeling. Anaesthetization is not a mere reactive protective measure to prevent further injury but the way to suppress an otherwise tormenting secret pain from consciousness. When our hatred discharges in emotion, this is a source of immense pleasure, as it temporarily ameliorates and externalizes a 'physiological upset' (*physiologische Verstimmung*) that otherwise quickly becomes unendurable. Since it doesn't affect the cause of suffering and is only revenge 'in effigy,' however, the alleviation cannot last. Worse, it generates new, long-term feelings of displeasure that will reinforce both the experience of powerlessness and the need for revenge. For Nietzsche, it lies in the very nature of the person of

ressentiment that they cannot access the true cause of their suffering and are doomed to seek a poisonous treatment of symptoms alone. Whereas a healthy nature affirms pain as a necessary condition, ressentiment traps its sufferers in a vicious circle, in which ever more creative pretexts are needed to mitigate suffering even as they further inflame it.

In his role as a ‘physician’ of both culture at large and of himself, Nietzsche describes the psychic defense mechanisms that are an essential component of ressentiment. But we should be wary of the temptation to reduce ressentiment to a psychological impediment. The guideline to dealing with therapeutical problems is the metabolism of the body, which decides what is internalized and what gets externalized. Just as Dostoevsky identifies his spite as an ailment of the liver, Nietzsche writes: ‘If someone cannot cope with his “psychic suffering”, this does *not* stem from his psyche, to speak crudely; more probably from his stomach. . . . A strong and well-formed person digests their experiences (including deeds and misdeeds) as they digest their meals, even when they have hard lumps to swallow.’³⁶ The true cause and meaning of ressentiment lies in a corporeal inhibition or fatigue: ‘this can, perhaps, be a disease of the *nervus sympathicus*, or lie in an excessive secretion of bile, or in a deficiency of potassium sulphate and phosphate in the blood, or in abdominal stricture interrupting the blood circulation, or in degeneration of the ovaries and such like.’³⁷ Throughout the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche refers to ressentiment as impeded digestion, while in *Ecce Homo*, he retrospectively claims it to be the archetype of sickness in general: ‘Being ill is a kind of ressentiment itself.’³⁸ This doesn’t mean that its psychological manifestations are not ‘real,’ but, as we will see, that psychological phenomena and even psychology itself must be approached as symptoms of the body. The physician’s most important task is to re-naturalize morality as a problem of medical science – a science that works solely in service of a medical rather than biological conception of life.

What exactly is a body understood as the physician’s object? Physiology is not anatomical but dispositional. Instead of offering a general model of the human body that would equally apply to all, physiology is the interpretation and evaluation of distinctive modalities or types of life.³⁹ Far from being some kind of neutral substance underlying these modes – nor even the functional whole that is the human organism or, by analogy, a society – life is the singularity of a capacity to act; that is, will to power.⁴⁰ Against homeostatic models of unity geared toward stability or self-preservation, life must be understood as a dynamics (the spontaneity and expansiveness of the will), a pluralism (qua types of will), and a conflict (between wills). In short, what Nietzsche understands by life is the activity of growth; the complexification and self-overcoming of the will through the transmission of its own force in tension and struggle. The will nourishes itself through others by ‘appropriating, injuring, overpowering the alien and the weaker,

oppressing, being harsh, imposing your own form, incorporating, and at least, the very least, exploiting.⁴¹

In *On the Genealogy of Morality* and the *Nachlass*, Nietzsche develops this account of life in terms of a multiplicity of ‘forces,’ sometimes also referred to by Nietzsche as ‘instincts’ or ‘drives’ that, when entering into a relationship, form a body of will or type of will. Of course, force is always activity. But to command and to obey are qualitatively distinct types of activity. It is due to the will to power that dynamic relations acquire a complex hierarchy, or ‘depth,’ in which active forces are said to ‘dominate’ reactive forces and reactive forces are said to ‘obey’ active forces. Provoked and precipitated by active forces, the activity of reactive forces is adaptive and regulative. They contain and mediate an action by dividing it and slowing it down, to the effect that it becomes felt. At the same time, they offer the resistance and chain effect that allow active forces to accumulate energy and emerge as bursts of creativity. What Nietzsche calls ‘authentic activity’ is not necessarily an immediate act, but rather, a disposition of not reacting immediately. The slower the response and the bigger the arc of tension, the more spontaneous action can become.⁴² Since every force is, by nature, both acting on others and being acted upon, however, active and reactive are not primarily quantitative distinctions. Reactive forces either prevent active forces from doing their work or redirect them but do not, for that matter, work or act any less strongly themselves; from a quantitative point of view, they can even be much stronger. It is the will to power, understood as ‘differential element’ of forces, that shows us two irreducible faces of life qua value – noble and base – that correspond to a qualitative distinction between forces qua sense (*Sinn*) – active and passive.⁴³

The will is the collective assemblage or effective arrangement of a series of forces in an individuating configuration that is characterized by the way in which it is experienced or felt; in short, lived. ‘The old word “will” only serves to describe a result, a type of individual reaction that necessarily follows from a quantity of partly contradictory, partly harmonious stimuli.’⁴⁴ In the will to power that Nietzsche evaluates as healthy or noble, the active force maintains a certain balance between action and reaction and determines how their relation is felt. The multitudinous reactivity and ‘individual action’ are coordinated. This type of will is not free from reactive forces, but it incorporates and enacts suffering in its own way and thereby derives a ‘feeling of power’⁴⁵ (*Machtsgefühl*), a pathos of self-affirmation, from it. The will appears as ‘active and manifests itself’ in ‘the prime importance that the spontaneous, aggressive, expansive, re-interpreting, redirecting and formative forces have, which “adaptation” follows only when they have had their effect.’⁴⁶ The servile will is the type in which the organization of forces tends to fall apart, such that reactive forces are, then, no longer subject to a predominant impulse and remain effective only among

themselves. Its weakness or lack of resilience lies not in a lack of action but in their ‘inability *not* to react to a stimulus,’ resulting in a perpetual oscillation between stimuli in constant need of containment.⁴⁷ Its pathos is reactionary or poisoned, as the operative equilibrium of active and reactive forces can no longer be appropriated and must be rejected and condemned as unnecessary suffering. ‘The polar opposite of struggle, of any feeling of doing-battle, has become instinct here: an incapacity for resistance has become morality here.’⁴⁸ No longer capable of affirming themselves in resistance, slaves rely on feelings such as pity and guilt in order to maintain themselves. Active forces thus constitute the working arrangement or sense of the noble or strong will, and reactive forces, the sense of the servile or weak will. The noble will is the principle of individuation of the reactive forces that obey its activity, but the persons of resentment do not dominate anything, least of all themselves, and can only react passively to processes of individuation that continue to escape them.⁴⁹

Seen and evaluated from Nietzsche’s normal-normative perspective on life, the slaves are the elastic material to be worked and formed by the plastic forces of a noble or healthy will to power.⁵⁰ Meanwhile resentment is a sickly or reactionary arrangement in which reactive forces are no longer acted out and active forces are deprived of their material. Reactive forces take over as soon as they reverse the relation between active and reactive. Passivity marks the triumph of reactive forces in the becoming reactive of active forces.⁵¹ Everything that tends to limit activity by making it revolve around its own reproduction and preservation bears the mark of this triumph. The self, customs, states, religions, ‘man’ – that is, all things that make up history – generally tend toward stasis, even if they owe their initial existence to an activity that is not theirs. This means that, despite themselves, it always remains possible, in principle, for them to be put to active use again. This reactivation, in the form of their unstiffening or relaxation – their relativization and dissipation – to the use for life, is ultimately what the physician’s project is about.

No matter whether the will to power is noble or base, healthy or sick, affirmative or negative – in neither case is there any less power than in the other. The (physiological) impotence to counter-act does not mean that the desire for revenge will stop seeking to indemnify itself otherwise but only that it is forced to seek recourse in more indirect (psychological) strategies of cunning. Just as the will does not refer to a desire for power or will to dominate but to the nature or type of a configuration of forces, power is not the finality but the immanent cause of the will itself. A slave remains a slave even when they acquire power, and the eventual success of the slave revolt in morality is a triumph of passivity – of slaves as slaves. By contrast, a master remains a master even under the cruelest regime of repression and servitude. Hence, the double aim of genealogy as the etiological and

symptomatological instrument of the cultural therapist: not only to interpret historical phenomena in terms of forces – are we dealing of active or reactive forces? – but also to evaluate their provenance and milieu; that is, both their descent and their becoming: Is it an affirmative will or a resentimental will that lays down its values?

Mnemonology

Both genealogy and physiology are essentially a question of memory, even if the criterion for the distinction between high and low can only lie, paradoxically, in the present; that is, in actuality. With the two types of will, Nietzsche presents two profoundly different modes of distinguishing past and present. The key to this distinction is their different plasticity – their capacity to incorporate active and reactive forces in a consistent orientation towards the future. As we have seen, to act is to forget. Forgetfulness is an essential component of the plastic capacity of the will to become and overcome itself. Without it, the past would become the gravedigger of the future, as we would constantly relive old wounds. ‘I mean by plastic force the strength to grow out of oneself in one’s own way, to transform and incorporate into oneself what is past and foreign, to heal wounds, to replace what has been lost, to recreate broken moulds.’⁵² But plasticity means not only that the will has a faculty of forgetting (or ‘looking away’⁵³); it also involves the memory of the heterogeneity of forces from which the will derives and which it holds together. Whether we are dealing with a thing, an organism, an institution, or a whole society, plasticity is always both the memory of the forces that have inscribed themselves in it and the capacity for the relative dissolution and metamorphosis of their traces.

The health of a will is tied to its power to assimilate the past with its own actions. Whereas the will of the weak is chained by memory to heteronomous forces, only a strong will has a certain sovereignty over the past. Autonomy is therefore the power of the will to detach itself from the past by re-appropriating it in a manner that is entirely its own. The noble has an active memory that dominates the long-unbroken ‘work-net’ of reactive forces and other wills that come between their own will and its expression in an act. A noble memory is ‘an active *desire* not to let go, a desire to keep on desiring what has been.’⁵⁴ It is an impersonal memory, entirely subordinate to the ‘frenzied sudden fits’ of ‘rage, love, respect, gratitude and revenge’⁵⁵ towards other wills in its presence. The people of resentment, by contrast, have a passive memory. They experience the becoming of the world in contradiction with their own present and as equal to personal suffering rather than as a misfortune that remains exterior. They remember more than their will can integrate, with the result that the bond that

makes reactive forces react to activity is broken. As their reactions prevail over actions and their living unity falls apart, the experience of time itself is diminished. No longer affirmed as an open horizon of possibilities, the passage of time is reduced to an object of rancor. For the people of resentment, the fundamental attitude toward life is therefore one of skepticism. Having lost their sense of becoming, everything revolves around their own self-preservation; the future – *ag-gressio*, something to come – demands endless adaptation and regulation without ever compensating for the past.

Since no will stands completely on its own but is always connected to others through memory, crucially, this typological distinction between noble and base is less a problem of individual persons than of culture or morality.⁵⁶ For Nietzsche, the work of culture is the physiological ‘composition’ of forces in a memory system.⁵⁷ This composition also occurs at the level of our individual bodies, since each of us is a hierarchical mixture for both active and reactive forces. But for us to be able to integrate our biological drives and become the subjects of our actions and desires, we need virtues and institutions that pre-exist and exceed us. Indeed, it is for society to exist and persist that human animals must be made into uniform, calculable, regular, and necessary beings that adhere to general laws and hierarchy. This lawgiving process in which humankind is made ‘rational’ or repetitive makes up ‘humanity’s prehistoric labor on itself.’ It is what Nietzsche calls the ‘morality of customs’ (*Sittlichkeit der Sitte*, also meaning the recursive being – ‘provenance,’ ‘community,’ ‘feeling’ – of, and ‘obeyance’ to, commands, that is, the ‘normativity of normality’); the always ongoing species activity of the training and selection of its reactive forces.⁵⁸

Plato called the process by which culture organizes and transmits itself to next generations *paideia*, the ‘art on the child’; humanists prefer to call it *Bildung*, or formation. In order to take away moralistic prejudices, Nietzsche describes the morality of customs as a system of coercion that gradually takes the shape of virtue and finds its moral legitimation and utility only retrospectively, when it has become customary. Accordingly, the initiation into cultural memory, or ‘history,’ occurs as a process of arbitrary cruelty and dissipative violence. As Nietzsche points out against Rousseau and nineteenth-century liberals, the ‘nature of culture’ has always been the opposite of *laissez-faire*. Rather, it begins as the contingent but unquestionable imposition of a collective power of command.⁵⁹ Imposed by a handful of ‘blond beasts’ – Nietzsche’s anti-contractualist alternative to the original myth of the foundation of the state – it is the molding of our nervous systems into a registration surface for abstract codings such as will, debt, guilt, sin, cause and effect, means and ends.⁶⁰ The ‘mnemotechnics’ by which these ideas are fixed and turned into second nature are mostly those of torture, while pain is the primordial currency for comparison and exchange. In the relationship between debtors and creditors – the original

asymmetrical power relation – punishment appears as the equivalent of a forgetting (pain undergone = injury caused); for ‘only something that continues to hurt stays in the memory.’⁶¹ Subsequent historical and moral acquisitions such as freedom, reason, refinement, intersubjective recognition, and art all presuppose this latent but enduring discipline that conditions and purifies the natural instincts. Hence, all of culture, all composition, is initially the forced inheritance of collective tradition, and all morality is, in the first place, slave morality.⁶²

If punishment and the law are the means by which culture inscribes itself into the bodies of human animals, then only the outcome – a corporeal memory and the capacity to make promises – is what actually makes up our ‘conscience’ or ‘soul’; that is, our internalized sense of moral responsibility and justice:

The whole inner world, originally stretched thinly as though between two layers of skin, was expanded and extended itself and gained depth, breadth and height in proportion to the degree that the external discharge of human instincts was obstructed. Those terrible bulwarks with which state organizations protected themselves against the old instincts of freedom – punishments are a primary instance of this kind of bulwark – had the result that all those instincts of the wild, free, roving human were turned backwards, against this human themselves.⁶³

On the one hand, society and the law initially appear when a nomadic ‘conqueror and master race,’ having arrived ‘by chance’⁶⁴ (*von ohngefähr*), imposes its ‘dreadful paws on a populace which . . . is still shapeless and shifting.’ Thus, blond beasts are forthright and unabashedly active agents untouched by disavowal. The outcome of cultural composition, on the other hand, is conscience as a necessary means for maintaining order even among these marauding warriors themselves. The urge for ‘cruelty, . . . the pleasure of pursuing, . . . and destroying’ turns back on its bearers, who lose their instinctual innocence.⁶⁵ Every form of organization must absorb and transfigure the violence of species activity as the means to protect its own peace and enforce an internalization that interrupts the immediate discharge of the will to power.⁶⁶ This necessary perversion of training and selection into the straightjacket of habit – this forgetfulness of the ‘moral difference’⁶⁷ between a fluid morality (*Sittlichkeit*) and its coagulation into custom (*Sitte*) – is the cost of conscience and the catalyst of a gnawing sense of injustice. It leads to the prevalence of a ‘herd morality’ that doesn’t value self-intensification and self-overcoming but only self-preservation.⁶⁸ Hence, Nietzsche’s typological determination of the human as the gregarious animal – as the triumph of reactive forces. As a species being, humanity is the product of an a-historical species activity, but precisely as such, it

has become the reactive subject of a history in which cruelty turns inwards such that it ‘fixes itself firmly, eats into them, spreads out, and grows like a polyp in every breadth and depth.’⁶⁹ The human is the domesticated animal ‘that beats itself raw on the bars of its cage’.⁷⁰

Because of this servile nature of ‘man’ as the animal endowed with memory, it is tempting to confuse the process of subjectivation and the origin of justice with the birth and proliferation of resentment. We have already seen how the rule of law originates in a commanding authority immanent to life and functions as a compromise with reactive forces. It is by training the weak to be objective and to inhibit their prejudices that the strong seek to impede the overflow of reactive affects. While affirmative and aggressive in origin, moral justice itself – the moral equality of all and the universalization of rights and duties – is a means in the subordination of slaves. But, once there is no longer any outside to cultural achievement, every expression of the will to power also constitutes a partial restriction, such that noble and base, active and reactive become indistinct under third-party jurisdiction. Both the perpetrator and the avenger are protected by, and indebted to, the same latency regime of civilization, which is rampant with resentimental memories and hallucinations. Scheler therefore suggests that, for Nietzsche, all morality rests on resentment.⁷¹ Yet, if the reactive interpretation of culture is not to be the last word, then it remains crucial to distinguish between a meaningless resentment and its egregious interpretation as human fallibility, or guilt. Does cultural discipline not also provide the means for the active curtailment of resentment, even for its own dissolution? Is a noble morality – a morality not based on bad conscience – possible?

While Nietzsche needs the genealogical difference between active and reactive forces, he argues against those anti-contractualists who oppose a purely active origin to the social life of reactivity, as if it would be better to return to some animal state of nature. Not only is it better to have some form of order than none at all, the main point is that, even if all inchoate forms of memory and conscience are reactive, they are not always the symptom of a physiological weakness. Ascetic internalization processes are ambivalent. For, even if the prehistory of culture is one of tyrannical enslavement, the actual functioning and outcome of culture does not have to resemble the ground from which it springs and may well exceed it. At stake is the instinct for freedom that is always repressed but that remains no less operative for that. Internalized suffering is the generic consequence of culture – its immanent and imminent deformation. But couldn’t the sense and value of this suffering be changed in the movement by which people emancipate themselves from the process that discipline them? This is the question that Nietzsche raises with the concept of the *Übermensch*, which resonates with other revolutionary attempts to produce a new human out

of the decadent bourgeois world.⁷² Is there a point of saturation, after which training is no longer a taming? Couldn't culture also consist of habits and institutions that prepare human reactive forces for further species activity in a post-human world?

In order to understand Nietzsche's self-understanding as physician of culture, we must again distinguish between matter and form or, more precisely, between means and ends. In some exceptional cases, the outcome of culture is the composition of sovereignty understood as an individual's capacity to take responsibility for their reactivity, whereas the genesis of resentment is only its side-effect.⁷³ As Nietzsche repeatedly emphasizes, the passive memory of resentment, albeit unavoidable, has no constitutive role to play in questions of justice and sovereignty.⁷⁴ For how could it lead to more than a rationalization of the reactive demand for retribution; that is, of a mere feeling predicated on the original mnemonic function of active punishment? Instead, he asks how much cruelty it takes to breed a people of autonomous poets and thinkers.⁷⁵ The common type of the dyspeptic may be a normal 'discontent' of the laws of civilization, as Freud says, but it is not their only product, let alone their normative justification. This, too, proves that the difference between noble and slave is not a difference of degree. It's not that noble souls have an unmediated character because of a relatively low degree of internalization.⁷⁶ On the contrary, they know well how to keep themselves in check, but their instincts are increased, not lost, when they choose to do so. Their immediacy in acting – their virtuosity – marks the success of culture, even though the absence of the 'pang of conscience' among them appears to some eyes as overwhelmingly primitive or criminal.⁷⁷

Corresponding to the two types of memory, there are therefore two senses of culture or morality, distinguished not by their means, which in both cases involves the production of conscience at the cost of resentment, but by their outcome.⁷⁸ Contrary to the gregarious sense of justice that characterizes the practico-inert nature of slave culture, what characterizes an aristocratic culture is a strong sense of hierarchy and difference. It is thanks to this pathos of distance – the 'continuing and predominant feeling' of measure – that morality can eventually overcome itself:

Without the *pathos of distance* as it grows out of the ingrained differences between stations, out of the way the ruling caste maintains an overview and keeps looking down on subservient types and tools, and out of this caste's equally continuous exercise in obeying and commanding, in keeping away and below – without *this* pathos, that *other*, more mysterious pathos could not have grown at all, that demand for new expansions of distance within the soul itself, the development of states that are increasingly high, rare, distant, tautly drawn and comprehensive, and in short, the enhancement of the type 'man,' the constant 'self-overcoming of man.'⁷⁹

A noble culture therefore has as its most mature product ‘sovereign individuals’ who have the courage to hold on to their singular idiosyncrasies, themselves the contingent product of cultural hierarchy, in order to durably and affirmatively distinguish themselves from their inherited society. These ‘syntheses of the inhuman and the superhuman’⁸⁰ belong to a spiritual rather than a socio-political aristocracy.⁸¹ They are primarily artist types such as Caesar, Cesare Borgia, Shakespeare, Napoleon, and Goethe, and to a lesser degree also Stendhal, Beethoven, Heine, and Schopenhauer. They individuate an entire civilization to the extent that they embody its past and seamlessly unify it with their own present striving towards a new future. They are the normal exceptions or normative abnormalities that retroactively legitimate the senseless tyranny of social straightjacketing. With them, the reactive forces that are the means of culture are incorporated into an experiment with the future. That is to say, only in the case of these ‘supra-ethical’ (*übersittliche*), self-legislating individuals does the law as a means in species activity coincide with the active determination of justice.

The sovereign person, then, does not have the unhappy consciousness of those who cannot find their place in civilization, but a ‘second innocence’⁸² for whom suffering itself becomes the object of a proud responsibility and an increase in the power of composition.⁸³ They are animals with a maximally distended soul, which gives them the true ‘prerogative to promise’; they ‘merit’ trust, fear, and respect.⁸⁴ Of the culture in which they have been prepared and of which they are the inheritors, the appearance of resentment is still an inevitable side-effect. But, even though the people of resentment greatly outnumber the noble, they do not determine the sense and value of the customs to which they belong. In a slave culture, by contrast, the moralizing resentment of the masses against all hierarchy is what prevents sovereign individuals from appearing. Here, the active composition of forces in the body politic falls prey to a passive contagion with decadence,⁸⁵ such that any connection between the will and the act is immediately blocked and can only be reestablished indirectly – typically, as Freud would say, through ‘sublimation.’

How this contagion proceeds is one of the main points of contention central to all understandings of resentment that have come after Nietzsche, and it takes us beyond the domain of physiology alone. But we can already see what is at stake: the possibility of an applied physiology that is able to experiment and compose (in the sense of a ‘com-positioning’ of forces) with resentment, in contrast to a psychology in which resentment appears as destiny. Beyond good and evil, the two most fundamental values in the preservation of the social species,⁸⁶ this is the anarchic challenge of the eternal return: Is it possible for the physician of culture to retrieve a barbaric and prehistorical impulse of species activity and thereby become the

philosopher-legislator prefiguring the constitution of a new body politic; that is, to become the artist of memory capable of reinventing (unbinding and rebinding) the past in a new formation of sovereignty? Far from a return to the primitive, this retrieval is, in fact, a future-oriented return of the return – of the moral difference that had been blocked from view by the self-generalizing recursivity of custom.⁸⁷ Where are the future masters capable of legitimating our present servitude; that is, of opening it up to renewed selection? Who are the new moral educators capable of restoring habit to the level of the event, thereby turning repetition against itself? Who can ‘prepare the way for great risk-taking and joint experiments in discipline and breeding’ and in this way ‘put an end to that terrible reign of nonsense and coincidence that until now has been known as “history”’?⁸⁸

Psychology

The soul of the noble type barely has a psychology. Between action and reaction, ‘blond beasts’ have only the most superficial consciousness. They act fast and lightly, with mastery and freedom, and their spontaneity is the immediate expression of an instinctual self-certainty. This is also the case with the sovereign individuals whose subjectivity has acquired a certain depth – a second, civilized nature, and has lost its first, animal nature. For them, too, consciousness is only the interface that connects internal reactions to outer excitations. Its function is to identify when and how reactions can be enacted and when it is more opportune to relegate their impressions of the world to the unconscious. This consciousness is supported by the will’s plastic faculty of forgetfulness, which constantly renews its receptivity and guarantees that reactions to mnemonic traces remain imperceptible.⁸⁹

Forgetfulness is not just a *vis inertiae*, as superficial people believe, but is rather an active ability to suppress, positive in the strongest sense of the word, to which we owe the fact that what we simply live through, experience, take in, no more enters our consciousness during digestion (one could call it spiritual ingestion [*Einverseelung*]) than does the thousand-fold process which takes place with our physical consumption of food, our so-called ingestion [*Einverleibung*]. To shut the doors and windows of consciousness for a while; not to be bothered by the noise and battle with which our underworld of serviceable organs work with and against each other; a little peace, a little *tabula rasa* of consciousness to make room for something new, above all for the nobler functions and functionaries, for ruling, predicting, predetermining (our organism runs along oligarchic lines, you see) – that, as I said, is the benefit of active forgetfulness, like a doorkeeper or guardian of mental order, rest and

etiquette: from which we can immediately see how there could be no happiness, cheerfulness, hope, pride, *present*, without forgetfulness.⁹⁰

No matter how many reactive forces are involved, as long as consciousness is not invaded by memory and functions as medium for the selection and affirmation of new excitations, the nobles keep their agility and decisiveness. Condensing the past and the present in the present perfect without ever confusing them, they leave no unactualized potential. They have no reason for self-doubt, since there is nothing they could have done differently. For this reason, Nietzsche evaluates the will of the sovereign individual as the ‘ripest fruit’ of cultural production – of a morality without moralization.⁹¹

In the form of secondary offspring, every culture also produces lower types of will in which the soul remains indeterminate in relation to actuality. Disturbed by indigestion – a lapse in the faculty of forgetting – consciousness hardens as traces from the past mix with new excitations and deprive active forces from the possibility of doing their job. Subjectivity loses its naturalness and appears in the form of an insomniac consciousness and ‘free will.’ This inner life of the subject is deeply ambivalent, as it is tied up with natural instincts that stem from before the work of internalization but that it is no longer able to discharge or unify in an independent inner life. It also acquires an entirely new function. Missing practical certainty, the people of resentment need to go through extensive calculation and deliberation of possibilities for expression on the basis of reactive forces alone. Things could and should have been different, they complain, as the initiative slips from their hands. The typical traits of reactivity are therefore stupefaction and spinelessness.⁹² Bound to a passive-aggressive paraparesis, consciousness now becomes inseparable from a whole psychology of depths through which the will copes with the basic indeterminacy of its existence:

While the noble human is confident and frank with themselves (genaios, ‘of noble birth,’ underlines the nuance ‘upright’ and probably ‘naïve’ as well), the person of resentment is neither upright nor naïve, nor honest and straight with themselves. Their soul *squints*; their mind loves dark corners, secret paths and back-doors, everything secretive appeals to them as being *their* world, *their* security, *their* comfort; they know all about keeping quiet, not forgetting, waiting, temporarily humbling and abasing themselves. A race of such persons of resentment 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.⁹³

Slaves, in other words, are always the slaves of their own refinement. Consciousness is the means with which they universalize and deepen their own condition in the endless pursuit of self-preservation and self-legitimation. But the depth of their psyche is never more than the symptom of a failure of self-control. They may momentarily experience themselves as noble, but they inevitably lose themselves again in confusion and self-reversals. When applied to the slave, Nietzsche therefore agrees with the complaint of Dostoevsky's underground man that 'not only too much consciousness but even any consciousness at all is a disease.'⁹⁴ Here, consciousness corresponds to what Hegel had already called 'the unhappy consciousness' – the pain of a self-reflection lacking unity, authenticity, and self-certainty because the master-slave dialectic remains unresolved: 'At one time, it has cognizance of its freedom as an elevation above all the disarray and contingency of existence, and at another time it again just as much avows that it is backsliding into inessentiality and wandering aimlessly within it.'⁹⁵ Frightened and fascinated by the senselessness and ephemerality of the world passing by, consciousness wants to save and maintain itself at the expense of the world and of its own actuality. Both now appear as a negation of its own ideal essence. But with all action suspended, the only thing it gains from its gratuitous nonconformism is a close-up of its own disconcertedness.

To the typological definition and physiological explanation of resentment, we must therefore add a psychological analysis, which introduces us to an interior world of mythical projections, constant self-revisions, and calculating elisions – in short, a whole 'underground world' (*Hinterwelt*) of imaginary causes and sublime representations that fetter the vital instincts in their struggle 'with death (to be more exact: with disgust at life, with exhaustion and with the wish for the "end")'.⁹⁶ At the same time, we must bear in mind that there is nothing universal about psychology and that psychology as a form of knowing is itself already a decadence phenomenon, in the European case prepared by the 'dark workshop' of the Christian psyche.⁹⁷ Since, for the noble type, consciousness is limited to the joyous affirmation of activity, psychological phenomena mainly occur in the servile type. The general mode of existence of the psyche is the spirit of revenge, not the revenge of spirit.

Consequently, the only reliable standpoint for the observation of the soul remains that of its physical efficacy. On the one hand, the soul has real effects, for even if its revenge remains imaginary and spiritual, this is not just an intention or frustrated desire. Rather, the psyche – consciousness as revenge, not revenge as the aim of consciousness – is precisely the means through which the normal relation of active and reactive forces can be reversed, just as resentment is the success of this reversal.⁹⁸ As symptoms of a real state of forces, psychological phenomena already mark the

surreptitious triumph of the weak as weak. Because they are only indirect expressions of the will to power, on the other hand, the thirst for revenge that sustains them never appears to itself for what it is. Psychological reasons are not physiological causes, and there is no point in rationalizing their side-effect-like character.⁹⁹ The slaves betray their disingenuity to the noble, but not to themselves: ‘People who do not *want* to see someone’s height will look all the more closely at everything about him that is low and in the foreground – in so doing, they show themselves for what they really are.’¹⁰⁰ This is also the case with the English psychologists and historians of morality who occasion Nietzsche to suggest that ‘us knowers are foreign to ourselves.’¹⁰¹ The lack of distance between the object and the subject of psychology reminds us of the severe tension between the truth of psychology and its plausibility, which must therefore be conceived as entirely inherent to the physiological drama of the will to power and its hierarchy of types.¹⁰² More accurately yet, physiology and psychology are themselves two immanent modes of interpreting and evaluating life, and for this reason, all the more unequal. For Nietzsche, all of psychology is, in the last instance, physiological. It is only from the physiological point of view that psychological phenomena lose their phantasmagorical quality and become concrete. Only physiology has the right to determine psychological problems, such that psychology must be primarily understood as the ‘morphology and development doctrine of the will to power.’¹⁰³

As Deleuze has elaborated, Nietzsche’s ‘psychology’ – that is, the elementary language of the psyche – can be understood in the form of a physiological drama of syllogisms.¹⁰⁴ Affirmation and negation are the typical ways of speaking and acting, corresponding to the different kinds of pathos characterizing the noble and the slave. This is not to say that logical judgment coincides with affect but that it first comes into the world as affect, even though it also means the becoming discursive of affect.¹⁰⁵ The nobles derive pleasure from their own distinction. Whenever they speak, it is to augment the tenor of their actions and to redouble the corresponding enjoyment. They say: ‘I am good, therefore you are bad.’ The syllogism expresses the self-confident pride in acting, such that the negation of the other is secondary to self-affirmation.¹⁰⁶ Strictly speaking, it isn’t even a judgment. Their value-positing ‘acts and grows spontaneously, seeking out its opposite only so that it can say “yes” to itself even more thankfully and exultantly, – its negative concept “low”, “common”, “bad” is only a pale contrast.’¹⁰⁷ For the slaves, however, the contrast becomes an opposition. They suffer from difference in the form of comparison, perceiving themselves through a primary condemnation of the other and judging as good what the other lacks. ‘You are Evil, therefore I am Good.’ This is why resentment differs in nature from aggression. If the nobles affirm aggression over passivity,

conflict over peace, and so forth, this is not because they identify with it but because they need it in order to overcome themselves. Even when they harm the slaves, this is out of carelessness rather than maliciousness, which, of course, fuels the resentment of the slaves even more. As the latter secure their identity in opposition to the noble, the invention of moral judgment turns out to be their only creative act. Instead of the conclusion following from positive premises, negativity itself then becomes a premise and the positive is only conceived as conclusion. No longer a consequence of acting out, aggression turns covert and becomes the vital premise of a will to overcome by fictitious means.

We can already see why, as negation appears as ‘the original idea, the beginning’¹⁰⁸ in the drama of the slave revolt, Deleuze finds in Nietzsche the unmasking of the dialectic as the ‘natural ideology of resentment.’¹⁰⁹ All of the dialectic is a psychologism that is parasitical on the mnemotechnical coding of bodies, to the extent that, without the model of conscience and the discipline of language that comes with it, the slave would have no stable subject to hold responsible. Indeed, if subject-predicate logic goes back to the founding of state, this means that the slave cannot find a subjection position of their own except through an inauthentic self-deprecation and self-minimalization. Instead of the playful affirmation of difference between the gregarious and those who are different, the other is first negated and then the slave positions themselves through a negation of the negation. It is through double negation that the person of resentment effectively delimits their own position and constitutes their own values. Let’s take a closer look at both steps:

Negation. To begin with, logic answers to the basic need for ceaseless recrimination. If we are good, then why do we suffer? Hidden among the ‘good wretches’ is a profound hatred of life, which is their premise and without which they wouldn’t survive a day. Scheler describes the progression of feeling toward resentment as the calling back of the desire for revenge into a general tendency to depreciate others.¹¹⁰ This makes the persons of resentment profoundly pessimistic about humanity, always preferring whatever alleviates suffering, fearing evil, and downgrading what is beyond him.¹¹¹ They live in an evil world that constantly offers new occasions for moral indignation. But how exactly does the logic of indignation proceed?

The slave commits what, from the perspective of physiology, is the basic ‘paralogism of resentment’¹¹²; namely, the projection of a force separated from what it can do. With the cultural production of subjectivity as doer behind the deed in place, inevitably, the general grammatical tendency appears where reality is divided up according to subject and predicate or among acting substrata that condition operative effects. All basic grammar,

Nietzsche says, emerges from ‘the time of the most rudimentary form of psychology.’¹¹³ As with the famous parable of the bird of prey and the lamb, it is through a substantialization of force-operations that we first encounter the projection of a free will that can be held morally responsible for its actions:

It is just as absurd to ask strength *not* to express itself as strength, *not* to be a desire to overthrow, crush, become master, to be a thirst for enemies, resistance, and triumphs, as it is to ask weakness to express itself as strength. A quantum of force is just such a quantum of drive, will, action – in fact, it is nothing but this driving, willing, and acting, and only the seduction of language (and the fundamental errors of reason petrified within it), which construes and misconstrues all actions as conditional upon an agency – a ‘subject’ – can make it appear otherwise. And, just as the common people separate lighting from its flash and takes the latter to be a *deed* – something performed by a subject, which is called lightning – popular morality separates strength from the manifestations of strength, as though there were an indifferent substratum behind the strong person that had the *freedom* to manifest strength or not. But there is no such substratum; there is no ‘being’ behind the deed, its effect, and what becomes of it; ‘the doer’ is invented as an afterthought – the doing is everything. Basically, the common people double a deed . . . they posit the same event, first as cause and then as its effect. The scientists do no better when they say ‘force moves, force causes’ and such like. . . . No wonder, then, if the entrenched, secretly smoldering emotions of revenge and hatred put this belief to their own use and, in fact, do not defend any belief more passionately than that *the strong are free* to be weak, and the birds of prey are free to be lambs: in this way, they gain the right to make the birds of prey *responsible* for being birds of prey . . . as though the weakness of the weak were itself – I mean its *essence*, its effect, its whole unique, unavoidable, irredeemable reality – a voluntary achievement, something wanted, chosen, a *deed*, an *accomplishment*.¹¹⁴

Although it is derived from an image of sovereignty that prevails in science as much as in good sense, the fiction of free will is the product of a sclerotic consciousness. It is the basic ‘counterfeit’ (*Falschmünzerei*) that enables the weak to reproach the strong for being strong. As their expectations are perpetually disappointed, they are not content with denouncing wrongs but need someone who can be held responsible. They want others to be evil from the outset in order to consider themselves good, even if this dialectical move is not made openly, since it would reveal their dependency on their

enemy. As Sartre has shown in *Anti-Semite and Jew*, the anti-Semite, when pressed, will always deny that, if the Jew is free to do evil, they can just as easily do good. This denial serves to draw up an even darker portrait of his enemy: 'The Jew is free to do evil, not good; he has only so much free will as is necessary for him to take full responsibility for his crimes of which he is the author; he does not have enough to be able to achieve a reformation.'¹¹⁵ For what counts in moralization is not the action of the one who acts or cannot but act, but the intentions as assumed on the part of their interpreter.¹¹⁶ 'You poor beast of prey, I understand you better than you do yourself.' All moralization is paralogistic psychologization. The strong can now be called evil because they are not willing to take into account the effects of their actions on others. The weak, instead of acting, judge intentions from the perspective of those who merely bear the consequences. This transcendence of the cause to the effect paves the way for the fiction of a supra-sensible world and a God whose mode of existence is opposed to life but to whom can be delegated the task of avenging the weak.¹¹⁷ Since they are locked up in bitter memories, to the people of resentment, any action is potentially blameworthy. Doomed to insinuation and confusion, anything at all qualifies as a cause for their pain. Slave culture is essentially blame culture.

Negation of the negation. The self-serving myth of free will also caters to the people of resentment for their need to redeem their own passivity. The nobles find a self-congratulatory happiness in activity; their happiness is essentially the production of their own happiness. The slaves consume their passivity as happiness by means of a lie about its cause.¹¹⁸ 'You are evil; we are the opposite of what you are; therefore we are good.' Defining themselves in opposition to forces that are inseparable from their manifestations (minor premise), all the while holding that these forces could and should have remained latent (major premise), they conclude that one and the same force is effectively held back in the virtuous lamb but given free rein in the evil bird of prey. The point of this dedifferentiation of force into something neutral and abstract is not just that it equalizes but that it seems like holding back takes more force than is needed to act. This not only makes a force appear blameworthy when it acts and praiseworthy when it refrains from acting but also implies an imaginary redistribution of the capacity to act. For, if the strong could prevent themselves from acting, then could not the weak act as if they, contrary to the strong, exercised restraint?¹¹⁹ 'We would do what they are doing, but we don't, and therefore we are good.' It is through this specter of freedom – the assumption of the freedom in not doing what one is too weak to do anyway, such that this weakness itself appears as a willed and acted merit – that the people of resentment reverse the relation between active

and reactive forces and claim moral superiority. Happiness now ‘manifests itself as essentially a narcotic, an anaesthetic, rest, peace, “sabbath”, relaxation of the mind and stretching of the limbs, in short as something *passive*.’¹²⁰ And: ‘Let us be good! And a good person is anyone who does not rape, does not harm anyone, who does not attack, does not retaliate, who leaves the taking of revenge to God, who keeps hidden as we do, avoids all evil and asks little from life in general, like we who are patient, humble and upright.’¹²¹

Because of this mode of redeeming revaluation, resentment bears a certain affinity with the sour-grapes phenomenon as articulated in the fable of the fox and grapes. In order to ease the tension between his desire and his inability to reach high enough, the fox feigns contempt and indifference. His feeling of power rises as a reflected preference makes his original desire seem unmotivated.¹²² Whether it is prestige, education, wealth, noble descent, beauty, or youth, they can all be detracted, denied, or slandered. The fox is like the contemporary incel who claims that all women are shallow because he cannot have sex with them.¹²³ The less his love or respect is reciprocated, the more he sees the negative aspects of the other. But, as Scheler has emphasized, the problem is that the old values, if they are replaced with new values, continue to be felt unconsciously. As a consequence, the fox is conscious of the falseness of his values while not really being able to see beyond them. It believes that ‘the positive values are still felt as such, but they are *overcast* by the false values and can shine through only dimly. The resentment experience is always characterized by this “transparent” presence of the true and objective values behind the illusory ones.’¹²⁴ Precisely because the person of resentment remains tantalized by the glitter of riches, vitality, and power, every attempt at self-affirmation comes at the cost of further cognitive dissonance. A discrepancy opens between the will to power and a feeling of power. Their desire has not really changed, but their feeling of value is corrupted by deceit to the point that sweet becomes sour and sour becomes sweet. This inability to look away, according to Scheler, explains why resignation doesn’t work as a remedy against resentment but is only one more step in a progressive falsification of a whole worldview. The nagging feeling of living in a world of appearances without the power to see beyond them only deepens the original lack and makes the need for compensation infinite.

Finally, it is this dual need for self-legitimation and compensation that causes the people of resentment to claim that they have a moral right to profit from the activity of others and participate in their enjoyment. The ground for this claim is found in a perfect reversal of noble valuation; namely, in the notion that everybody has the same claim to happiness and that the common good is said to evolve in opposition to the evil enemy.

While remaining parasitical on older and more particularistic understandings of justice and rationality, these are transformed into the conception of a moral justice and the general faith in reason.¹²⁵ Whereas the Greek aristocrats earned the respect of others through their personal difference, all the while maintaining the tension between the pathos of distance and self-knowledge/self-doubt, this is what Nietzsche holds against modern English psychologists and German dialecticians: they pursue a disavowed instinct to belittle others.¹²⁶ Good and evil now appear as uncreated, transcendent, and universal values that make sense only from the perspective of a passive third party. 'All psychology begins with idleness. What? So psychology would be – a vice?'¹²⁷

Taken together, perpetual moral accusation and the revaluation of passivity constitute the elementary psychology of the person of resentment, who is, at the same time, the subject of psychology in general. In its physiological account, we have discovered resentment in its brute state as 'the oldest psychology on earth.'¹²⁸ Reactive forces escape the action of active forces through displacement and, as a consequence, consciousness is swamped by memories. This displacement is then consolidated in the morality of customs – the general conformism that makes resentment appear as universal human condition. In turn, the triumph of reactive forces is endlessly deepened through psychologization. The spirit of revenge projects its inverted image of the will to power, in which active forces are separated, depreciated, and negated in order for passivity and utility to prevail. This dialectical reversal is, of course, imaginary because it betrays actuality by means of judgment and exists only in the symbolic and axiological order, but it is no less real, to the extent that its judgment feeds back into the physiological drama from which it comes and gives it a new orientation. In a 'spiritual revenge,'¹²⁹ the psychological or the imaginary is not vengeance itself but the element in which it is exercised and self-valorized. It is the modality in which resentment is 'pregnant.' But what is it that makes it effective on the physiological plane? What makes the strong susceptible to the complaints of the weak, if they have a high opinion of themselves, believe in themselves, and live at a distance?

Although the reversals of value mark only a passive triumph that, as yet, only anticipates their introjection by the strong, they are nonetheless functional precisely because, in the form of moral indignation, they are both an open invitation for reactive forces to take the place of active forces and a temptation for active forces to become reactive as well. After all, not even the happiest of consciousnesses can be perpetually certain of itself. In times of peace, when there is little resistance to act upon, why would a strong soul not be susceptible to discontent and doubt?¹³⁰ Ressentiment obliges. It is at moments when the strong drop their guard that the weak, infinitely

cleverer, inject their ‘small doses of poison’ and ‘pinpricks,’¹³¹ hiding their hatred under the cover of charity: I accuse you of injustice but it is for your own good; I give you my love so that you will join me, until you will have been marred by pain and tamed into a sick and mediocre but good animal like myself.

As Nietzsche writes, the weak, the slaves, the ill triumph not through an open combination of forces but through their ‘favorite revenge’¹³²: the sly dissemination of moral judgment (‘the indignant barking of sick dogs’) over all authentic happiness, with which they infect the conscience of the masters and bury it under sad passions:

These worm-eaten physiological casualties are all men of resentment, a whole, vibrating realm of subterranean revenge, inexhaustible and insatiable in its eruptions against the happy, and likewise in masquerades of revenge and pretexts for revenge: when will they actually achieve their ultimate, finest, most sublime triumph of revenge? Doubtless if they succeeded in shoving their own misery, in fact all misery, *on to the conscience* of the happy: so that the latter eventually start to be ashamed of their happiness and perhaps say to one another: ‘It’s a disgrace to be happy! *There is too much misery!*’¹³³

Hence, if resentment is explosive and spreads like a forest fire, this is not because it leads to great deeds but because it has a will to self-diffuse and make the active react. Ressentiment is not only endemic to social life; it is also epidemic and pandemic. Once the cultural formation of conscience is in place, the paralogism of resentment can be projected on anyone. The whole world lies waiting to be interpreted through this lens and to be purified of the injustices it decries everywhere. And who could be completely immune to the pressure of bad conscience? To the healthy and strong, it may not seem very convincing at first, but even to them, the purifying spectacle of the associated explosions of hatred, love, disgust, and pity never fails to exert a certain fascination. This is why, for Nietzsche, resentment is never only a psychological trick but also a physiological, and therefore a social and political, problem. There is no psychology that does not psychologize.

Genealogy

Now that we have a schematic notion of what resentment is, of how it corrupts the sense of justice in (slave) morality, and what its main physiological and psychological features look like, a problem remains. How it

is possible for the slaves to revolt and establish their own moral values in the first place? Ressentiment can reverse values, and in this sense, has an ephemeral creativity, but can it overturn hierarchy as well? In terms of numbers, slave revolts are not too hard to imagine. From Spartacus to the German Peasant's War to the Arab Spring, history has no shortage of mass uprisings. But who knows whether ressentiment played the constitutive role in these events and, more importantly, who would want this to become a universal law? In fact, the momentary energies, the resonances and possibilities of acting that these collective effervescences set free, indicate the opposite. To further complicate things: Is their lack of historical success not precisely an indication that, when it comes to ressentiment, we are not dealing with revolting slaves at all? Is the true slave revolt perhaps an event that fails to happen in history because it constitutes the reactionary nature of history as a whole?

The difference between genealogy and history is what enables us to set Nietzsche's project apart from the historical inquiries of his – and our own – contemporaries. For, as we have already seen, Nietzsche's problem is not to legitimize Western morality, despite its base motivations, but 'the problem of rank.'¹³⁴ Nietzsche does not write as a psychologist but as a physiologist; that is, as a physician and artist. What he seeks to explain and experiment with throughout his work are the conditions of new beginnings. Why is the active life so difficult, and how can we prevent new freedoms from turning into their opposite? Not content with the ritual observation that revolutions tend to transform into counterrevolutions, Nietzsche wants to know what makes this a general rule. What makes our exceptional acts so susceptible to being adapted and regulated, that is, to reactivity? Why is it that, time and again, the whole of life seems to succumb to passivity?

In particular, it is through questions like these that Nietzsche maximally distances himself from Darwinism and its various socio-psychological translations. To their 'blue,' naive method of thought experiments, Nietzsche opposes his own 'grey' method of diligent genealogical research.¹³⁵ Any reduction of the struggle of life to processes of natural selection based on processes of adaption and regulation at the level of the historical stability of a species can only favor secondary and weak forces. Similarly, social evolutionism describes statistical aggregates in which leaders do not acquire their position through their decisive personal strengths but through the contaminating propagation of their own baseness, such that, ultimately, all active forces turn reactive in their wake. 'Darwin forgot about spirit (– that is English!), the weak have more spirit.'¹³⁶ Worse, fitness as defined by the English is not an affirmation of the will to power but a naturalization of moral custom and its psychological prejudices. Not

only do the strong generally not prevail; the very notion of survival is itself uncritically bound by its own time and lacks the *longue durée* perspective of genealogy.¹³⁷

Again, we discover the crucial ethical difference between active and reactive at the heart of any genealogical undertaking. If the masses are the problem for Nietzsche, this is not primarily because of their number but because of their reactive nature. As the subject of history, they claim universality, but they can only do so as slaves. At this point, we find in the opening lines of Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire* a more likely precursor to Nietzsche's own genealogical-political enterprise than in the work of the liberal ideologues:

Humans make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living. And just when they seem engaged in revolutionising themselves and things, in creating something that has never yet existed, precisely in such periods of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service . . . a beginner who has learnt a new language always translates it back into his mother tongue, but they have assimilated the spirit of the new language and can freely express themselves in it only when they find their way in it without recalling the old and forget their native tongue in the use of the new.¹³⁸

Contemporary inheritors of Marx are right to warn us against the ideological function of the concept of resentment. Moreover, did Hegel not already demonstrate how, through the hard labor of the dialectic, the slaves will eventually relieve their historical predicament? One cannot emphasize enough, however, that Nietzsche, too, does not regard resentment as the last word on the reactionary and levelling nature of history, even if it is a necessary part of it. Besides keeping open the possibility of an as-yet-unknown, retro-active legitimation, which makes history progress from singularity to singularity rather than in the form of profit and recognition for all, his genealogical question is the following: How could the impotent fictions of slave morality acquire enough strength and effectively attain universality? It is true that resentment acts, in the sense that it can become creative and generate new values. But it does so only in the form of a parasitical reversal of older values – a reversal that simultaneously hinders the invention of new ones. How, then, do the masses achieve their own culture in the first place? How does quantity become quality? How can resentment become 'genius'?¹³⁹ These questions belong to the 'actual history' (*wirkliche Historie*) of morality¹⁴⁰ – the drama of the will to power

that forms the constitutive outside of psychology – and comprise the core of the genealogical project.

The true conceptual innovation of Nietzsche's genealogical project is not resentment but its ultimate ideological development and expression: bad conscience. Where does it come from and where will it lead us? We know that the slaves seek to exact their revenge on the powerful and noble. As they are incapable of acting and are thus essentially their own slaves, they seek to drag the others along in degeneration. Ressentiment would not amount to anything if its target could not occasionally be persuaded to confess their guilt. It is through the psychological conjunction of conscience and resentment in the self-torture of bad conscience that the strong must be moralized. But is such a rudimentary psychologization enough for a slave morality to transcend the particularity and mutually conflicting projections of the persons of resentment? How does bad conscience get organized and constitute a cultural formation of its own; that is, a society so persuasive that the healthy can no longer afford to ignore it?¹⁴¹ And how, in turn, can the genealogist themselves escape it?

Initially, the historical efficacy of bad conscience seems prodigiously unlikely:

They do not know what guilt, responsibility, consideration are, these born organizers; they are ruled by that terrible inner artist's egoism which has a brazen countenance and sees itself justified to all eternity by the 'work,' like the mother in her child. . . . *They* are not the ones in whom 'bad conscience' grew; that is obvious – but it would not have grown *without* them.¹⁴²

The cultural formation of conscience under 'the dreadful paws' of 'a conqueror and master race' occurs at the cost of immense suffering but only indirectly implies the reactive interpretation of conscience as bad conscience. 'In its beginnings,' Nietzsche writes, the process of internalization is active, even if it is quickly overtaken by resentment: 'In fact, this explains why the aggressive person, as the stronger, more courageous, nobler human, has always had a *clearer* eye, a *better* conscience on their side: on the other hand it is easy to guess who has the invention of "bad conscience" on their conscience, – the person of *ressentiment!*'¹⁴³ It is important to uphold this primacy of the active cultural production of conscience in principle, for it implies that, while the training of the reactive forces as the condition of justice is the seed from which resentment and bad conscience stem, it is not sufficient for their triumph. Ressentiment, inversely, typically comes into being as a function of conscience but does not lie at its origin. Even if all conscience tends toward bad conscience, it remains the product of a will; that is, an instinct for freedom. It is always possible that the culturally

subdued and transformed will, despite itself as it were, puts bad conscience to an active use again.¹⁴⁴ In this sense, internalization may still turn out to be a regression with progressive consequences:

This secret self-violation, this artist's cruelty, this desire to give form to oneself as a piece of difficult, resisting, suffering matter, to brand it with a will, a critique, a contradiction, a contempt, a 'no,' this uncanny, terrible but joyous labor of a soul voluntarily split within itself, which makes itself suffer out of the pleasure of making suffer, this whole *active* 'bad conscience' has finally – we have already guessed – as true womb of ideal and imaginative events, brought a wealth of novel, disconcerting beauty and affirmation to light, and perhaps for the first time, beauty *itself*.¹⁴⁵

If, nevertheless, bad conscience generally tends to develop into the opposite of beauty and affirmation, this is not only because of the bad infinity of resentment that seeks to decompose everything it encounters. It is, first of all, because conscience is claimed by a will to power that is neither unequivocally noble nor base and that has a stake in deepening resentment. In order to explain how bad conscience could become the general medium for the effective spreading of the raw material of resentment, Nietzsche therefore introduces a third type besides those of the master and the slave, the priest:

Only in the hands of the priest, this real artist in feelings of guilt, did it take shape – and what a shape! 'Sin' – for that is the name for the priestly reinterpretation of the animal 'bad conscience' (cruelty turned back on itself) – has been the greatest event in the history of the sick soul up until now: with sin, we have the most dangerous and disastrous trick of religious interpretation.¹⁴⁶

As remains to be seen, the paradoxical victory of an imaginary revenge of the slaves over the real activity of the nobles is due to a will to power that redeems the spirit of resentment by means of its organization and redirection. Since resentment misidentifies both itself and its enemies, and its explosive force threatens to tear apart the herd, bad conscience serves as the psychological instrument for simultaneously curbing the senseless raging of resentment among the weak and protecting them against the predations of the strong. While resentment is merely the source of slave morality, the disease that binds us to the past, it takes an artist to stabilize its recriminations and persecutions and give them a future.¹⁴⁷ From the

genealogical point of view, the priest is therefore the more important type and also the philosopher's most formidable enemy.

Notes

- 1 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, Preface §3.
- 2 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I §5.
- 3 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II §9.
- 4 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I §2; *Beyond Good and Evil*, §260.
- 5 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I, 10.
- 6 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I §§10, 12–14, II §11, III §14.
- 7 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I §10.
- 8 Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, §359.
- 9 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I §11.
- 10 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I §10.
- 11 Max Scheler, *Ressentiment*, trans. William W. Holdheim (New York: Schocken, 1972), 45–6.
- 12 Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, I §§62, 103, 615. Following Gilles Deleuze's succinct definition, resentment is a reaction that 'ceases to be acted in order to become something felt (*senti*).'² Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 111, 114–15; Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 214–15 and footnote. In the words of Scheler: 'We do not use the word "ressentiment" because of a special predilection for the French language, but because we did not succeed in translating it into German. Moreover, Nietzsche has made it a *terminus technicus*. In the natural meaning of the French word I detect two elements. First of all, *ressentiment* is the repeated experiencing and reliving of a particular emotional response reaction against someone else. The continual reliving of the emotion sinks it more deeply into the center of the personality, but concomitantly removes it from the person's zone of action and expression. It is not a mere intellectual recollection of the emotion and of the events to which it "responded" – it is a re-experiencing of the emotion itself, a renewal of the original feeling. Secondly, the word implies that the quality of this emotion is negative, i.e., that it contains a movement of hostility.'³ Scheler, *Ressentiment*, 43.
- 13 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I §13.
- 14 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I §14.
- 15 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I §7.
- 16 Among which, Nietzsche mentions 'hate, envy, mistrust, jealousy, suspicion, rancor, revenge.'⁴ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II §11. Or: 'Annoyance, abnormal vulnerability, inability to take revenge, the desire, the thirst for revenge, every type of poisoning.'⁵ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, Why I am so wise §6.
- 17 Dostoevsky, *Notes*. The psychological defense mechanisms poison the motives. Spite figures as fuel for an anger that cannot express itself in revenge, nor let the matter go, because it sustains itself precisely in the middle, where it decomposes without fully disappearing.
- 18 As Deleuze puts it in relation to Spinoza: 'The ability to be affected is necessarily realized in every case, according to the given affections (ideas of the objects encountered). Even illness is a fulfillment in this sense. But the major difference

- between the two cases is the following: in sadness our power as a *conatus* serves entirely to invest the painful trace and to repel or destroy the object which is its cause. Our power is immobilized, and can no longer do anything but react.’ Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, trans. Robert Hurley (San Francisco: City Light Books, 2007), 101.
- 19 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §§19–20.
 - 20 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §§14, 17.
 - 21 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §15; Scheler, *Ressentiment*, 177n4; Jeffrey Nealon, ‘The Most Dangerous of All Explosives: “Ressentiment”’, *International Studies of Philosophy* 31.3 (1999), 91–100.
 - 22 Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, II On the Tarantulas. And: ‘The mother of excess is not joy but joylessness.’ Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, II Assorted Opinions and Maxims §77.
 - 23 Sartre, *The Family Idiot*, I 408–9.
 - 24 ‘I declare once and for all that even if I write as if I were addressing readers, that is merely a front, because it’s easier for me to write that way. It’s a form, just an empty form, and I shall never have any readers. I have already declared as much.’ Dostoevsky, *Notes*.
 - 25 Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, Why I am so wise §6; Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §244.
 - 26 Dostoevsky, *Notes*.
 - 27 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §§11, 20.
 - 28 Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 115.
 - 29 Melanie Klein, *Envy and Gratitude and Other Works 1946–1963* (London: Vintage, 1997), 183–203.
 - 30 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §15.
 - 31 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I §14. And: ‘anyone who came to know these “good people” as enemies came to know nothing but “evil enemies”.’ *Ibid.*, I §11. By contrast, ‘To be able to be an enemy, to be an enemy, perhaps that presupposes a strong nature, in any case it is a part of every strong nature. Strong natures need resistance, this is why they look for resistance.’ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, Why I am so wise §7.
 - 32 Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 117.
 - 33 Bernstein, *Bitter Carnival*, 90.
 - 34 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I §§10, 22.
 - 35 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §15.
 - 36 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §16.
 - 37 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §15.
 - 38 Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, Why I am so wise, §6. Already in *Daybreak*, §409, Nietzsche sees illness as at once somatic and moral: ‘Under the term “illness” we should understand an untimely approach of old age, of spite and pessimistic judgments – things which are implied (*zueinander gehören*) by illness.’
 - 39 As a physiological notion that anchors affectivity and defines health through metabolism, what Nietzsche calls pathos comes close to what Spinoza calls the ‘temperament’ that colors our experience of the world. Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise in Collected Works*, II 405–7. Spinoza too distinguishes active and reactive types of temperament. *Ethics in Collected Works*, IV 42–3, 343.
 - 40 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II §12.
 - 41 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §409, 259; Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II §11.
 - 42 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II §12; *Twilight*, Skirmishes §44; *Ecce Homo*, Why I am so wise §3. As Deleuze comments, the active type acts ‘at a chosen instant, at a favorable moment, in a given direction, in order to carry out a quick and precise

- piece of adjustment. In this way a *riposte* is formed. This is why Nietzsche can say: “The true reaction is that of action”.’ Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 111, 63, 57.
- 43 One could call this shift from a mechanical to a dynamic conception of force, as well as the perspectivism that is inherent to this conception, Nietzsche’s Leibnizian moment. I borrow the distinction between quantity and quality, essential both to Nietzsche’s concept of physiology and to the genealogical explanation of the slave revolt in morality, from Deleuze’s pitting of Nietzsche against Hegel. Types are ensembles of forces, which are physiological, but also psychological, political, historical, and social. Deleuze therefore insists that we make a difference between the type of the will to power (quality) and the relations of force (quantity), the former being the sufficient reason (*ratio*) for the latter and, as such, inseparable from, but by no means identical with, them. Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 44.
- 44 Nietzsche, *Anti-Christ*, §14.
- 45 Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, §23; *Gay Science*, §13.
- 46 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II §12. And: ‘An *aggressive* pathos is an essential component of strength in the same way that lingering feelings of revenge are an essential component of weakness.’ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, Why I am so wise §7; cf. *Anti-Christ*, §29.
- 47 Nietzsche, *Twilight*, Morality as Anti-Nature §2. Jared Russell, *Nietzsche and the Clinic: Psychoanalysis, Philosophy, Metaphysics* (London: Karnac, 2017), 76.
- 48 Nietzsche, *Anti-Christ*, §29.
- 49 Inspired by Nietzsche’s ‘manipulation of the notion of reaction’ – his various repossessions and relaunches – as ‘exemplary of the *singular* appropriations to which the term “reaction” lent itself and will continue to lend itself,’ Starobinski traces the physical, chemical, vitalist, moral, and psychological meanings of the action/reaction couple. He demonstrates how Nietzsche’s use of the action/reaction couple is ultimately physiological and comes close to the opposition between abreaction (*abreagieren*) and reminiscences (*Reminiszenzen*) in Freud and Breuer’s development of the concept of neurosis in their *Studies in Hysteria*. Jean Starobinski, *Action and Reaction: The Life and Adventures of a Couple*, trans. Sophie Hawkes and Jeff Fort (New York: Zone Books, 2013), 352–60 and on ‘reactive pathologies,’ 153–226.
- 50 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, §§16–18.
- 51 ‘In Nietzsche “passive” does not mean “non-active”; “non-active” means “reactive”; but “passive” means “non-acted.” The only thing that is passive is reaction insofar as it is not acted. The term “passive” stands for the triumph of reaction, the moment when, ceasing to be acted, it becomes a resentment.’ Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 118.
- 52 Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, II §1. The concept of plastic force is a precursor to later concept of the will to power. In the *Genealogy*, for example, it returns as ‘a superabundance of a power which is flexible, formative, healing and can make on forget,’ exemplified by Mirabeau, who claimed he had no memory for insults and humiliations and that he had nothing to forgive because he actively preferred to forget. Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I §10.
- 53 Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, §276.
- 54 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II §1. Life ‘has to be in all reality a single living unity and not fall wretchedly apart into inner and outer, content and form.’ Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, II §4. See also Nietzsche, *Twilight*, Skirmishes §49.
- 55 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I §10; II §2.

- 56 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §260.
- 57 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II §1. In ancient Germanic law, it was not through *compensation* for a loss of profit that justice was restored as in Roman Law but the restoration of communal relations through a procedure called *composition* – the payment of *weregild* (‘man price’) to the victim.
- 58 Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, §§9, 19; *Gay Science*, §43. Since there can be no virtue without violence, morality is founded upon a ‘mendaciousness that is abysmal but innocent, truehearted, blue-eyed, and virtuous.’ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §19, I §14; *Daybreak*, §18; *Beyond Good and Evil*, §229. The compulsion that precedes morality but that eventually becomes associated with virtue and is called virtue has been a constant theme since *Human, All Too Human*, §99, 96–7; *Gay Science*, §29.
- 59 Here again, Nietzsche comes very close to Marx, this time to the latter’s account of primitive accumulation: ‘The truth is harsh. Let us not be deceived about how every higher culture on earth has *begun!* Humans whose nature was still natural, barbarians in every terrible sense of the world, predatory people who still possessed an unbroken strength of will and lust for power threw themselves on weaker, more civilized, more peaceful races.’ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §257.
- 60 ‘Some pack of blond beasts of prey, a conqueror and master race, . . . organized on a war footing, and with the power to organize. . . . What they do is to create and imprint forms instinctively, they are the most involuntary, unconscious artists there are: – where they appear, soon something new arises, a structure of domination [*Herrschafts-Gebilde*] that *lives*, in which parts and functions are differentiated and related to one another, in which there is absolutely no room for anything that does not first acquire “meaning” with regard to the whole.’ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II §17, I §11.
- 61 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, §§1–3. On why punishments make us more careful, suspicious, secretive, cleverer, fearful, see Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II §15.
- 62 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §§188–9.
- 63 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II §16.
- 64 Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, III Before Sunrise.
- 65 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II §17.
- 66 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §16.
- 67 In the sense of a difference between cause and effect analogous to an ontological difference between Being and beings or a political difference between *la politique* and *le politique*. ‘To become moral is not in itself moral.’ Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, §97; *Twilight*, Four great errors §1.
- 68 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §18.
- 69 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II §21; *Beyond Good and Evil*, §62.
- 70 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II §16.
- 71 Scheler, *Ressentiment*, 29.
- 72 Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, Zarathustra’s Prologue §1, §3, §4, §7. In fact, it is precisely corrupt societies that tend to produce *enfants terribles*, tyrannies, individuals who retroactively work on the culture they come from. Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, §§34, 149.
- 73 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I §11.
- 74 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II §§11, 16–17.
- 75 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §§229–30; *Genealogy*, II §3.
- 76 This is suggested by David Owen and Aaron Ridley in ‘Dramatis Personae: Nietzsche, Culture, and Human Types’, in: Alan D. Schrift (ed.), *Why Nietzsche*

Still? Reflections on Drama, Culture, and Politics (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 136–53, 144.

- 77 ‘The criminal type is the type of the strong person under unfavorable conditions.’ Nietzsche, *Twilight*, Reconnaissance raids, §45. ‘The real pang of conscience, precisely amongst criminals and convicts, is something extremely rare, prisons and goals are not nurseries where this type of gnawing pang chooses to thrive.’ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II §14; *Zarathustra*, I The Pale Criminal; *Daybreak*, §366. Echoing Dostoevsky’s positive impressions of the inmates of his Omsk prison camp in *Notes from the House of the Dead*, which Nietzsche read shortly after the *Notes from the Underground*, he claims that the lack of a sense of guilt and even resentment among them was a sign of their courage and resilience, which he interprets as the fruit of long domination: ‘For millennia, wrongdoers overtaken by punishment have felt *no different than Spinoza* with regard to their “offence”: “something has gone unexpectedly wrong here”, *not* “I ought not to have done that” –, they submitted to punishment as you submit to illness or misfortune or death, with that brave, unrebelling fatalism that still gives the Russians, for example, an advantage over us Westerners in the way they handle life.’ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II §15. For a similar argument in relation to witch trials, *ibid.*, III §16.
- 78 For their comparison, see Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §§257–9.
- 79 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §257; *Gay Science*, §23.
- 80 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I §16; *Daybreak*, §245.
- 81 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §257.
- 82 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II §20.
- 83 Nietzsche, *Anti-Christ*, §24.
- 84 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II §§2–3.
- 85 The slaves ‘triumph not because of the composition of their power but because of the power of their contagion. This is what “degeneration” means.’ Gilles Deleuze, *Pure Immanence*, trans. Anne Boyman (New York: Zone Books, 2012), 75.
- 86 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §4.
- 87 Pierre Klossowski emphasizes Nietzsche’s paradoxical conservatism in a world of rapid changes. The advocate of the exception is also the advocate of the morality of custom, since only where habits remain constant for a long time can atavisms of nobility occur. Klossowski, *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, 10. Klossowski suggests that, along with the criteria of what is healthy and what is morbid, Nietzsche also appealed to criteria of a different order, which must nonetheless be combined with the preceding criteria: what is singular and what is gregarious? *Ibid.*, 59. Nietzsche’s challenge thus becomes: If custom attributes what is healthy, sovereign and powerful to gregarious conformity, how can these attributes be restored to the singular, the unexchangeable, the mute? *Ibid.*, 62.
- 88 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §203.
- 89 Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, Why I am so wise §9.
- 90 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II §1.
- 91 The noble person avoids indigestion with ‘the perfect functioning of the regulating unconscious instincts.’ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II §2.
- 92 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II §16; *Anti-Christ*, §§7, 15.
- 93 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I §10; cf. *Daybreak*, §214.
- 94 Dostoevsky, *Notes*.
- 95 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Terry Pinkard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), §205. Hegel describes the unhappy consciousness as a failure of the emancipated subjectivity of the

- bondsman, which is posed for itself but not yet in itself, and thus, constantly finds itself at risk of being thrown back on nothingness. Whereas happy consciousness is always naïve, either because it is not yet aware of its misfortune or because it has found real unity, unhappy consciousness is the pain of a self-reflection rent between thought and life. It is a self-consciousness that is certain of its own liberty but that nonetheless exists only through its desire, infinite and unattainable, to realize itself. As such, it combines the perspectives of the master and the slave but without their reconciliation: 'In this way, the splitting that attributed the respective roles to two specific beings – the master and the slave – comes to be situated in only one. The split of self-consciousness within itself, a split essential to the concept of spirit, is by that very fact present, but the unity of that duality is not yet present; and unhappy consciousness is self-consciousness as split essence, as yet only entangled in contradiction.' Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, §232, 137.
- 96 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §13.
- 97 Nietzsche, *Anti-Christ*, §6.
- 98 Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 116–17.
- 99 This is what distinguishes Nietzsche's account of ressentiment from more cognitive approaches such as Scheler's. Scheler, *Ressentiment*, 46. Just the cause of the original trauma is irrelevant, whether the initial impotence was caused by reasonable anticipation of an inevitable defeat or irrational fear doesn't matter. The apparent counternaturalness of psychological content is never more than 'a sort of provisional expression, an explanation, formula, adjustment, a psychological misunderstanding of something, the real nature of which was far from being understood, was far from being able to be designated as it is *in itself*, – a mere word wedged into an old *gap* in human knowledge.' Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §13.
- 100 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §§275, 197.
- 101 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, Preface §1, III §24. 'Psychologists need to stop looking at themselves if they want to see anything at all.' Nietzsche, *Twilight*, Arrows and epigrams §35.
- 102 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §186; *Genealogy*, III §2.
- 103 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §23.
- 104 Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 119–22.
- 105 Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, §35.
- 106 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §287.
- 107 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I §10.
- 108 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I §11; *Twilight*, The problem of Socrates §§1–12.
- 109 Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 121, 159.
- 110 Scheler, *Ressentiment*, 6.
- 111 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §§260–1.
- 112 Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 122–4; cf. Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, §370. Kant used the notion of paralogism to criticize the fundamental Cartesian fallacy, which consists of a transcendent use of propositional synthesis, deducing with immediate certainty from the act of thinking the existence of a subject-substance that would be the acting cause of this event of thinking even though pure formal self-consciousness lacks intuitive content. Nietzsche radicalizes this criticism in *Beyond Good and Evil*, ridiculing even the idea that there could be an 'I' that already 'knows' what it means to think irrespective of what it actually does – i.e., 'willing' and 'feeling.' Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §16–17. Both the Cartesian cogito and the Kantian transcendental

- subject, in other words, are illusions that subordinate the differential processes of production of experience to an identity derived from the products.
- 113 Nietzsche, *Twilight*, “Reason” in philosophy §5.
- 114 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I §13.
- 115 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, trans. George J. Becker (New York: Schocken Books, 1944), 27.
- 116 ‘Negation is not added to *what it denies*, but only indicates a weakness in *the person who denies*’ Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 19; *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 121. See also Scheler, *Ressentiment*, 24.
- 117 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I §13; *Anti-Christ*, §24.
- 118 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I §10; *Anti-Christ*, §29.
- 119 In the paralogism of ressentiment, Deleuze distinguishes the moment of causality (force is split between cause and effect), the moment of substance (force is projected into the neutral and abstract image of a free subject), and the moment of reciprocation (if a force ‘is’ able not to manifest the force it ‘has,’ then a force could also manifest a force it ‘has not’ but remains morally superior if it doesn’t). Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 123–4.
- 120 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I §10.
- 121 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I §13.
- 122 Scheler, *Ressentiment*, 29.
- 123 ‘My Twisted World: The Story of Elliott Rodger’, contributed by: Lauren Johnston, *New York Daily News*, www.documentcloud.org/documents/1173808-elliott-rodger-manifesto.html.
- 124 Scheler, *Ressentiment*, 14.
- 125 In *Daybreak*, this universally distributed good sense is said to ultimately lead to ‘the *self-sublimation of morality*.’ Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, Preface §4.
- 126 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I §§1–2.
- 127 Nietzsche, *Twilight*, Arrows and epigrams §1.
- 128 Nietzsche, *Twilight*, The four great errors §§3, 7.
- 129 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I §7.
- 130 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §76.
- 131 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §14.
- 132 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §219.
- 133 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §14; *Anti-Christ*, §15.
- 134 Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, I, Preface §7; *Genealogy*, I §17.
- 135 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, Preface §7.
- 136 Nietzsche, *Twilight*, Skirmishes §14; *Gay Science*, §§349, 373. As Deleuze stresses, Nietzsche does not confuse psychology with physiology. Rather, all of Nietzsche’s concepts are ‘categories’ of the unconscious, and Nietzsche’s ‘psychology’ is, in fact, a ‘psychology of the cosmos.’ Deleuze, *Pure Immanence*, 75, 82.
- 137 Hence also, Nietzsche’s resistance to the interpretation of the will or conatus as drive of self-preservation. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §13.
- 138 Marx, ‘The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte’, I §1. Drawing on Adorno’s concept of the impoverishment of experience, Jaeggi defines ressentiment as a regression: both the expression of a blockage of historical action and a cause of additional blockages. By understanding ressentiment as a regression, it acquires a historical index: it is not just a step backward in the sense of a return to a previous state but a falling behind what has already been achieved; not a forgetting but an unlearning or ‘de-mancipation.’ Like fascism, ressentiment

- is therefore false for being consequential. As a determinate negation emerging out of existing conditions, it reinforces deficient and disastrous social structures instead of offering a point of resistance. Jaeggi, 'Modes of Regression'.
- 139 Nietzsche, *Anti-Christ*, §24; *Genealogy*, I §16, III §17.
- 140 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, Preface §7. Cf. the term 'echte Geschichte' in *Anti-Christ*, §39.
- 141 On the difference between fascination and persuasion, see Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, The Problem of Socrates §11.
- 142 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II §17.
- 143 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II §11. As Deleuze has argued, bad conscience is not a new type vis-à-vis ressentiment, but a variety of ressentiment that covers it up. Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 128.
- 144 Brussotti, 'Die "Selbstverkleinerung des Menschen" in der Moderne', 103, 109–10.
- 145 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II §18.
- 146 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §20.
- 147 Nietzsche, *Anti-Christ*, §24.

3 The Priest

The Two Functions of the Priest

The double task of orienting and pacifying the decadent instincts gives the priest a complex typological lineage. In the first essay of the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche, himself the son of a preacher man, introduces the priests as members of the ruling class, emphasizing the creativity and spontaneity they share with warriors. The main difference is that, physiologically speaking, they did not ‘turn out well.’ Due to their ‘inevitable bowel complaints and neurasthenia,’ they have a tendency to internalize their values and, in this way, universalize and sharpen them beyond the range of their own point of view. No longer able to laugh off their relatively bad fortune, they interpret the values of good and bad as the transcendent postulates of pure and impure, just as strong and weak become truthful and untruthful. This rigid adherence to what was originally a pragmatic distinction inevitably puts the priests at odds with the rest of nobility, since it pushes the pathos of distance to the point where the evaluator is no longer free with respect to this same pathos.¹ It becomes a pathos of faith. Although they often appear in alliance with power and have no difficulty combining domination with devotion, the priest’s way of maintaining themselves politically is the prioritization of spiritual depth over physical strength. They moralize the cultural sense of the answerability for deeds and the obligation to honor debts until it reaches its summit with the infinite indebtedness to God for one’s very existence. To compensate, they rely on discipline and abstinence as well as a kind of hypnotherapy based on endlessly refined experiences of austerity, honesty, guilt, arrogance, hatred, love, and imperiousness. The priests are the *esprits de sérieux* whose heavy truths are based on a reactive use of the prevailing moral system and function as a strategic tool against its aristocratic origins.²

Eventually, it is through a psychological anchoring of morality that the priest mobilizes the slaves as a weapon against the noble. While the combination of ambition with relative impotence makes priests the natural

partners of the people of resentment, what sets them apart is their power of imagination; that is, their power to make things ugly. For, if the resource of resentment is the element of fiction, it takes artistry to ignite its potential. As advocates of the weak, priests are the masters of the psychological paraloxism; the ones who make 'the most fundamental counterfeit *in psychologicis* into the very principle of psychology.'³ They stabilize the vengeful reversal of values through the fetishization of subjectivity and the degrading and distorting fiction of the evil enemy. Instead of the contempt of the noble based on careless indifference, and instead of the rancor of the slaves, doomed to remain without effect, the fanatical hatred of the priests produces the caricature of the overpowering other as a guilty monster, thus sowing division among the strong and agitating the weak. Under their hands, life itself is made into something conflictual and odious in need of correction. Whereas the Greeks dreamt up their Gods as affirmations of their own actions and passions, the Jews and then the Christians, the exemplary pastoral people (Nietzsche hardly ever mentions Muslims⁴), forged an entire counter-world administered by a punishing God: 'This entirely fictitious world can be distinguished from the world of dreams (to the detriment of the former) in that dreams reflect reality while Christianity falsifies, devalues, and negates reality.'⁵ Predicated on the suppression of political inequality they are powerless to change, it is thus with the priests that the hatred and frustration of the people of resentment grow into their spiritual superlative. Their action-averse, 'partly brooding and partly emotionally explosive' nature make the priests, for Nietzsche, simultaneously the most malicious of enemies but also the most admirable, and certainly, the most sophisticated opponents.

Out of this powerlessness, their hate swells into something huge and uncanny to a most intellectual and poisonous level. The greatest haters in world history, and the most intelligent [*die geistreichsten Hasser*], have always been priests: – nobody else's intelligence [*Geist*] stands a chance against the intelligence [*Geist*] of priestly revenge. The history of mankind would be far too stupid a thing if it had not had the spirit [*Geist*] of the powerless injected into it.⁶

Then, in the third essay, Nietzsche mostly stresses the priest's complicity with the people of resentment, even though their aims and will to power are not identical. If warriors bring harm, the priests function as healers. But instead of making the weak strong, they provide their suffering with a new meaning and consolation that culminates in a new interpretation of responsibility. We have seen how resentment predisposes the weak to seek a culprit for their pain, if only to bury the afterlife of their original

trauma under fiercer, more gratifying passions. Priests, however, draw the instinct for revenge to the surface and make it discharge inwards, where it gains a new sense: guilt or being at fault. Whereas the sovereign individual is responsible for their word because it rests on the actuality of forces agglutinated in personal necessity, the moralization of responsibility is permeated with the paranoia of not being able to live up to it and the need for guidance. By means of the notion of 'free will' – the ultimate grammatical and metaphysical lure – priests aim at 'making humanity "responsible" in their sense of the term, which is to say dependent on them.'⁷ As the 'artist in feelings of guilt,'⁸ the priest-type is that of the shepherd who disciplines, punishes, and surveils the weak. The priest is 'the direction-changer of resentment' who tells those in their care 'Quite right, my sheep! Somebody must be to blame: but you yourself are this somebody, you yourself alone are to blame for it, you yourself alone are to blame for yourself.'⁹ Thus, whereas Homer sought to transfigure human suffering into joy, the priest sanctifies it as a sign of sin. Instead of the agon of the Greeks, we get the agony of inner conflict. Shamanism, Brahmanism, Judaism, and Christianity each in their own way have claimed for themselves the reactive meaning of pain: contrary to its exteriorization for the pleasure of the Gods, suffering is internalized and pacified as the punishment for existence itself.

In their role as guardian of the soul, priests simultaneously perform a specialist role in the management of the morality of customs and mark its bombastic perversion. They still symbolize nobility, yet their aim is not to cure those who suffer from the inhibition of the vital instincts but to deaden their outward vengefulness by turning the instincts back upon themselves. On the one hand, priests can only poison 'the physiological ailments . . . with the worm of conscience'¹⁰ if a moral memory already exists. They parasitically exploit the cultural composition of bodies because they need its outcome – the (still innocent) capacity to make promises – as their starting point. By reinterpreting and revaluing the formation of conscience as the ultimate meaning of a gregarious resentment that was originally only a side effect in need of containment, on the other hand, they subject their followers to a mnemotechnics that is all the crueller for being rooted in self-hatred. While apparently an honorable remedy against resentment, bad conscience is, in fact, its most extreme development and ultimate consequence. If the slaves had already been forced to speak the language of their masters, relying on abstract moral categories and grammatical hypostatizations, it is the priests who turn this language against them in the locutionary capture of psychological interpretation.¹¹ Whereas the person of resentment seeks the structural unity of a doer behind the deed as the object of reproach, the priest seeks a feeler behind suffering who must be made conscious of their own deficiency. The priest thus transforms infinite debt into infinite guilt. The past to which the debtor remains bound is now

interpreted as sinful, such that any new suffering is justified as its sanctioning. Whereas the nobles affirm their suffering as the consequence of their own actions, the slaves now come to denounce themselves as the source of evil and see their misfortune as the rightful negation of their own, innermost desires.

Such is Nietzsche's hypothesis on the origin of bad conscience: it takes shape when the psychology of resentment is introjected into the vast labyrinth of the soul. If civilization is the sense of debt to the other, resentment is the sense of the guilty other. Neither sense involves a natural interest in the vivisection of one's own conscience. Rather, it takes a special intervention to erase the difference between debt and guilt; to make conscience itself function as a general feeling of guilt. Only priests transform conscience into the autosadistic agent of permanent self-scrutiny and self-control. Firstly, this transformation enables them to protect the weak against the strong. The new form of conscience allows them to spread contempt for all 'crude, stormy, unbridled, hard, violently predatory health and might'¹² because it makes active forces appear barbaric and anachronistic. It is not only the weak who feel redeemed by the contempt for vitality; the strong themselves are equally enticed into self-contempt. Whereas, in an aristocratic culture, the noble moves among the slaves as a living reproach, in a pastoral culture, the sense of reproach is reversed. The sight of the suffering of the weak chastising themselves makes the nobles view their 'natural inclinations with an "evil eye", so that they finally came [come] to be intertwined with "bad conscience" in them.'¹³ Secondly, by making resentment discharge inwardly, the priest also protects the weak against the explosions of feeling that would otherwise disperse the herd. He protects it 'against itself . . . he carries out a clever, hard and secret struggle against anarchy and the ever-present threat of the inner disintegration of the herd, where that most dangerous of blasting and explosive materials, resentment, continually piles up.'¹⁴

Even though priests make resentment into a fault, it goes without saying that they do not make resentment disappear. On the contrary, there is no internalization of suffering without its vertiginous multiplication, and vice versa. Frustration and hatred remain the very conditions of existence of the pastoral type. Still, the persons of resentment and the priests do not share the same evaluating point of view. The persons of resentment, like the fox in Aesop's fable, may reverse values without establishing new values, as long as a semblance of their own preferential agency is preserved (the grapes are good, if fresh). But only the priests create new values (the desire for grapes is replaced with ideals of abstinence that are deemed superior). And, while slaves can never really rely on their own judgment, the priests make themselves indispensable as the only ones who understand all the complexities of the psychic life; who know everything about our

unpaid debts and broken promises. Indeed, it is in order to hide the ambiguity in themselves that they become all the more intolerant of ambiguity in others. Incapable of affirming physiological life, they teach virtues such as patience, obedience, cooperation, perseverance, and last but not least, pity. These are forms of self-punishment that allow for psychological compensation and self-legitimation while appealing to the life-denying quality of resentment because they protect the lambs against the greed of the birds of prey no less than against the eruptions of resentment within the herd itself. Contrary to the psychological prejudice that the ascetic ideal is hostile to life, Nietzsche therefore argues that it 'springs from the protective and healing instincts of a degenerating life,' since it makes the denial of life the condition for persisting in life. The priest-psychologists are 'a corporeal [*leibhafter*] will to contradiction and counternature,'¹⁵ but as such, there is nothing contradictory or counter-natural about them. Rather, it is in the self-interest of resentimental life to mobilize all the cruelty that life is capable of, especially in the name of higher values.

In doubling resentment – with the resentment against resentment – by means of bad conscience and its corresponding ascetic virtues, the priest brings about the paradox of a life exerting its revenge on life. It is precisely through the pretense of curtailing resentment that the priest simultaneously becomes the catalyst for its limitless spread and ultimate triumph:

Here an unparalleled resentment rules, that of an unfulfilled instinct and power-will, that wants to be master, not over something in life, but over life itself and its deepest, strongest, most profound conditions; here, an attempt is made to use power to block the sources of power; here the green eye of spite turns on physiological growth itself, in particular the manifestation of this in beauty and joy; while satisfaction is *looked for* and found in failure, decay, pain, misfortune, ugliness, voluntary deprivation, destruction of selfhood, self-flagellation and self-sacrifice.¹⁶

In sum, resentment is both what motivates the priests and what makes the slaves receptive to their spiritual leadership. Priests tame resentment by moralizing it, but it is resentment itself that has a real need for their charismatic justification. If the tactic of resentment is to reverse the hierarchy of values by means of guilt, the priests are the strategists who consolidate this reversal by turning guilt into the meaning of life as such. They never fail to come up with new forms of pain and new ways of suffering that enable resentment to turn against the bodily senses and thus consolidate itself. Insofar as it is only with them that resentment effectively becomes creative and spawns values, the priests embody a whole new mode of existence: that of bad conscience. Genealogically speaking, not the person of resentment but the priest typifies the slave revolt in morality. Priests are

the will to power of an alternative cultural formation – not a noble culture of strength and vitality but an authoritarian slave culture based on a diffuse, self-contradictory, and counter-natural will to overcome life as such. Wherever they dominate, nobles and slaves alike need to fear, denounce, and repress their own desire for power in order to live peacefully: we are all slaves now.

The Religious Dialectic of Ressentiment (First- to Fourth-Order Negations)

Among various historical examples of priest figures, Nietzsche mentions Socrates, Tertullian, Paul, and Luther. Yet, whenever he speaks of types, he does not mean empirical individuals but affect constellations that characterize a modality of life. The ascetic priest exists among, and generally mixed up with, other types such as ‘slaves,’ ‘warriors,’ ‘saints,’ ‘women,’ ‘philosophers,’ ‘artists.’ What still needs to be determined is how, at some point in time, the type of the priest manages to incorporate the other two types of the warrior and the slave. Corresponding with the two systematic functions of priesthood, the accusation of the strong through a transvaluation of values and the subsequent reversal of the sense of resentment itself under the sign of ascetic ideals, Nietzsche identifies two historical moments in the slave revolt in morality: Judaism and Christianity. Paraphrasing Hegel, we could say that, both logically and historically, the second function follows dialectically from the first. It is inherent in the resentment of the herd that its need for recrimination does not disappear when the priest triumphs over the strong; it will always need to find new enemies in its midst. The triumph of the priest as a cultural type is therefore only complete once they manage to redirect negativity back on itself.

It was with the Jews that, for the first time, a whole people identified itself with the priestly form of life – not out of decadence, as Nietzsche never fails to emphasize, but out of an extremely tough instinct for survival. This is in line with common anthropological lore of the late nineteenth century; namely, that the pariah people were forced to reinvent themselves as the chosen people.¹⁷ In Nietzsche’s version, it means that the Jews, born as slaves and for slavery, needed resentment, not so much because they were possessed by it but because they betted on its power to help them assert themselves against an unjust world. After having lost the strong monarchic rule of Israel under David and Solomon due to internal division and then finding themselves physically and politically overpowered and repressed in Babylonian exile, the Jewish kings sided with their priests in order to prevail over stronger enemies and overcome internal anarchy. The Jewish priest is the dialectician who generalizes the reactive syllogism and forges its negative premises: ‘Only those who suffer are good, only the poor, the powerless, the lowly are good; the suffering, the deprived, the sick, the ugly, are

the only pious people, the only ones saved, salvation is for them alone, whereas you rich, the noble and powerful, you are eternally wicked, cruel, lustful, insatiate, godless, you will also be eternally wretched, cursed and damned!’¹⁸ With the concept of ‘sin’ as injustice done to God rather than to anyone in particular, the Jewish priest managed to upend cause and effect. Suddenly inequality turned out to rest on the injustice of the privileged. The pious are the weak and poor; the guilty are the powerful and wealthy. This cold-blooded denial and inversion of natural values makes of the Jews the most ‘morally sublime’ and ‘unnatural people,’ those who are capable of persisting under the most unlikely conditions. For Nietzsche, this is how, historically speaking, the ‘slave revolt’ took flight.¹⁹

The price of this spiritual revenge is not just a devaluation of nature but also the installation of another, transcendent world in which affirmation appears only as evil. Henceforth, nothing can remain what it was: the God, the morality, the law, and the actual history of Israel must all be counterfeited and incorporated in a new element: the religious. From the universal hatred of life (God) follows a particular love of life (Jewish brotherhood), provided that it is currently sick and reactive. The law that was first instated to socially inhibit reactive forces is now recast as ordained by God, and by consequence, the Jews become the People of the Law. This is the genius of the Judaic ‘priest-agitators’ – a spiritedness that will eventually be lost again with Christianity: to have discovered religion as a continuation of politics by other means. Having lost the feeling of power that is normally invested by a people in its Gods, they reinvented their rather unsublime redeemer Jahwe who leads his people through the exodus as a ‘God that bristles with anger’ and destroys their persecutors in thunderstorms and floods. The Old Testament is the book of a divine justice that is completely atavistic in its violence and cruelty, compared to Roman law and even to Homeric Greece. For the first time in history, God becomes the transcendent principle of a morality that is in open contradiction with life; namely, a demagogic tool for interpreting pleasure as reward for obedience and pain as punishment for disobedience. No longer the sign of affirmation of what is, God becomes the sign of the infinite demand for what is not, just as the misfortune of his people becomes the punishment for their disobedient past – a time before the priest had attained the ultimate authority.²⁰

Despite his reckless use of the nineteenth-century vocabulary against ‘Judaification,’ Nietzsche is not an antisemite. He admires the Hebrew bible, the Torah, which he calls ‘the grand style’ in morality²¹ and evaluates the religious life form as an ethico-political strategy beyond good and evil.²² His ironic message to his contemporaries is that they are actually already much more Jewish than they think. The real purpose of genealogy is to criticize not the morality of the past but that of one’s own time, which he

interprets as a secularization of Christian values. Nietzsche's aim is to demonstrate that the whole of the Christian doctrine of universal love of one's neighbor (*agape*) and its implied antisemitism is not the contrary of the Jewish thirst for revenge but has grown out of it like a crown of thorns that seals its success. For, while the Jews merely instrumentalized resentment for their spiritual revenge on the warrior class and their self-foundation as 'the theological people,' Christianity is founded in resentimental falsifications from the outset. In order to hide its merely consequential nature, love had to be established as the antithesis of hate and premised on a new ecumenism. But precisely for this reason, it is 'the Jewish instinct *once again*.'²³ It is a pastoral will to power that can no longer tolerate the power of the priest and that wants to domesticate the Jewish people itself. With Christianity, Jewish hatred itself undergoes a 'turn' (*Umschlag*) into its apparent opposite: the 'truly *grand* politics of revenge.'²⁴

For what has happened? After the triumph of the Assyrians and internal anarchy, the Jews lost confidence. In order to oppose the power of their enemies, the ultimate evil, God had to become good and peaceful, opposed to war. Hence, in Abrahamic religion, the moment when the father is subsumed in the son marks the transformation of universal hatred into a new 'cosmopolitan' love.²⁵ Yet if, out of suffering, the Jews had to invert the natural values of strength, power, and beauty, Christianity never even had the chance to familiarize itself with such values. The material respect for food, house, intellectual diet, sickness, purity, the weather – all this is lost.²⁶ As a consequence of its late arrival, the Christian regime could only bring the spiritual derealization and devaluation of nature to their conclusion. Regarding power and the law themselves as evil, harmful, and illegal, it denies all institutions of power, including the hierarchy and privilege of the church and the priestly caste, which had enslaved their people to a system of taxation and squalor legitimated by religious dogma. The son kills the father.

This is how Jesus of Nazareth, the redeemer not of one people but of all humanity, was able to teach how to die like a kind of Buddha. His good news was not the promise of a future redemption for some but an actual practice of reconciliation, individual but available to all. It was a praxis paradoxically guided by an inner feeling liberated from the gravity of life; that is, the practice of someone who comes late; a passive nihilist who, coolly and soberly – perhaps we should say immorally – recognizes his own inability to cope with the reality of pain and struggles to return to an infantile spiritual state that is exempt from resentment.²⁷ As Nietzsche emphasizes, Christ was not a hero or a priest but more like Dostoevsky's idiot, a saint. He had no interest in politics and did not need abstract concepts such as sin or faith. His parables, his overturning of the money changers' tables, and his turning the other cheek brought the ultimate wrath of the priestly caste down upon him. And yet he anticipated this and planned

for it. Instead of finding yet another paradoxical use for resentment, he merely turned against vengefulness as such and helped even the most spiteful passions to die a peaceful death. The meek shall inherit the Earth – how else could this master of forgiveness appear to the Jews, if not as a ‘political criminal of an *absurdly apolitical* society’²⁸?

Yet his followers, less advanced, and out of a life-denying resentment inherited from Judaism, could not forgive his death. With them, a surreptitious longing for and belief in revenge returns, which is all the more severe for being in contradiction with the explicit lessons of forgiveness and love.²⁹ This dialectical return of an utterly unchristian will to power in the form of Christianity marks, for Nietzsche, the moment of the consolidation of the slave revolt in morality: ‘But *that* is what happened: from the trunk of the tree of revenge and hatred, Jewish hatred – the deepest and most sublime, indeed a hatred which created ideals and changed values, the like of which has never been seen on earth – there grew something just as incomparable, a *new love*, the deepest and most sublime kind of love.’³⁰ The Jewish priest organized the accusations and directed them against the non-Jews. Love was still a consequence of hate. Once the gregarious resentment had fully immunized itself against external enemies, however, it had to adapt to new conditions. Finding itself in a fully established theocracy, it was no longer content to accuse those on the outside. From anti-Jewish resentment, a new priest and a new God are born. In order to establish their own power, the Christian priests tame Jewish vengefulness by seeking absolution in universal love, not just as opposed to hate but also as entirely separate from it.³¹ After all, there is power in doing good.³² Charity (to make sure one is hurt by nobody), pity (to escape from oneself and collectively remain weak), and altruism (to meliorate the self-contempt of suffering) are the means by which the Christian priest seduces and contaminates. They are virtues born out of the sheer necessity for survival and out of fear of the other, all the while remaining the expression of the will to power of the weakest.³³ The new seduction, which promises intoxications of ecstatic feeling, is neither the death of God in his son nor the life of Christ but the death of the son and the resurrection of the father. God lives only through our faith as measured by our guilt for having killed him in the first place. The ‘detour’ of the crucifixion thus paves the way for a new God, one whose death must still be overcome. As a maximization of the awareness of sacrifice, the new idea of communal love renders our guilt infinite, as only God could redeem humanity, and this out of forgiving love to his debtors.³⁴ Henceforth, the death of Christ will be interpreted as a revolt against Jewish particularism – a negation that, in line with the very notion of the resurrection, shows that what is ultimately at stake is still the atavism of Judaic revenge. As Nietzsche emphasizes, the slave revolt in morality is not just a negation but the negation of a negation. Far from

noble animatedness, ‘the birth of Christianity’ happens ‘out of the spirit of resentment, not, as is believed, out of the “spirit”’.³⁵

In *The Anti-Christ*, Nietzsche famously identifies Paul the Apostle as the most ingenious conductor of these explosions of guilt and pity as well as his own most daunting opponent. But we should remember that, as a Christian, Paul is already a priest of the second order. At first appearing as a fanatical defender of the law, always on the watch for transgressors and doubters like a ‘Jewish Pascal,’ Saul also finds himself confronted with its unrealizability. Tempted by transgression himself, the law becomes ‘the cross to which he felt himself nailed,’³⁶ while the event of the crucifixion marks a redemption from the law and enables him to imagine he is freely communing with Christ. Thus, whereas, for the Jews, only the law guaranteed that they had never been abandoned by their God despite their historical vicissitudes, Paul believed one could be the father’s favorite while dispensing with submission to a law that always puts you in the wrong. This is how Christianity located itself beyond Judaism. Paul conceived of a new form of life based on the complete subsumption, not just of his own former life but of the power of the old form of life of the Jews, to the extent that he reinterprets the Old Testament as a book on Christ.³⁷ Instead of claiming to be an ultimate realization of Judaism or a special branch of Judaism, which the Jews themselves refused to believe, it is now possible to become Christian without first becoming Jewish; that is, without the law. The presence of Christ makes transgression no longer insurmountable or inevitable. Christ died for nothing. Paul is the appropriator of the end of the life of Jesus, whose death he represents as a glaring injustice – the death of the innocent one, waiting to be redeemed. He is the genius of hatred who deified Jesus so as to use him as a weapon of revenge. He ‘keeps Christ nailed to the Cross,’³⁸ the better to propagate the idea of the resurrection, from which he will garner the political authority for Christian revelation and church building.

With Paul, another falsification of the past and of a people’s history begins, as does a new stage in the double history of a demise of political institutions and of a narcissism that seeks to become ecumenical.³⁹ If Christ teaches humility and skepticism, Paul teaches ambition. You turn the other cheek only to heap burning coals on the heads of your enemies. After the good message that real redemption is possible, what remains is the entirely fictional ‘dysangelicum’⁴⁰ according to which God sacrificed his son, to forgive his people – all people – for their sins, but on the condition that they continue to identify as sinners. Instead of the Jewish perversion of noble morality in terms of a hermeneutics of punishment (first order negation) and reward (second order negation), and beyond Jesus’s teaching of a compassion that exceeds every barrier of ethnicity, gender, or class (third

order negation), organized Christianity thereby effectively universalizes sin in gaping contradiction with the lessons of Christ himself (fourth order negation). We answer to the loving presence of Christ only insofar as we assume guilt for his death. Henceforth, only spiritual faith in his return, as opposed to his actual deeds, can mediate between the reality of suffering in the flesh and eternal bliss. The death of Christ becomes the judgment of God, carried out by the priest who tolerates no blasphemy. Irreconcilable with Christ himself or his earliest disciples, it is thus by way of the opposition – a pseudo-opposition, but for that reason all the more universal – of God versus the Devil, or Love versus Hatred, that Paul carries out the final attack on the animal instincts. The result is the ‘tyranny’ of indistinct signs disconnected from nature that is the New Testament, that ‘book of small souls’ and ‘pet requirements.’⁴¹ Spirituality retreats into an infantile world without enemies, war, politics, or even civility, a hallucinatory world of divine splendors based on a ‘pathos of *faith*’⁴² in grace, life after death, the last judgment, transubstantiation, immortality, creation out of nothing, wonders, where there is no symbol with a more ‘enticing, intoxicating, numbing, corrupting power’ than the holy cross.⁴³

While the slave revolt in morality only really gets underway with the projections of the Jewish priest, it is completed with the introjections of the Christian priest. By accusing all that is strong, noble, and healthy, the former had already revalued suffering in terms of punishment and reward that work fearfully on our imagination. Whereas the good taste of Greek tragedy was to contain the measureless sense of injustice and moral responsibility by refusing any equation of injustice with misfortune, the priest indulgently cleaves to life by balancing suffering with guilt.⁴⁴ Unhappiness is a punishment for sin; happiness is a reward for piety. But the priest’s most important task is to overturn the meaning of the charge and to exhort those in their care to seek the cause of their suffering within themselves. It is with the ascetic ideals, opening up a whole new domain of motifs and penal practices for explosive feelings, that the priest’s ‘far-sighted, subterranean revenge, slow to grip and calculating’⁴⁵ fully come into its own. The priest’s stroke of genius is not just the suppression of feelings of revenge and hatred through the ideas of guilt and sacrifice, but more ingenious still, the invention of the means that make them felt and that effectively dull both the slaves’ suffering and vitality: ‘the total dampening of the awareness of life, mechanical activity, the small pleasure, above all the pleasure of “loving one’s neighbour”, herd-organization, the awakening of the communal feeling of power, consequently the individual’s dissatisfaction with himself is overridden by his delight in the prosperity of the community.’⁴⁶ To combat pain with pain, this is the only way in which, for Nietzsche, we can speak of making productive use of resentment. Pity is the praxis of

nihilism because it replaces the ‘tonical affects’ that intensify vital energy with the general resonance of sad passions.⁴⁷ The result is always the same: the molding of slaves into a stable, tranquil, mediocre collective.

In sum, just as the Jewish priest is the limit case of the resentment of slaves, its eruption into a new form of life, Christ marks the singular point at which Judaic resentment reverts to its most idealized version, which reveals how it can be turned against life itself and which Paul would eventually sanction at the scale of a whole civilization. With Paul, the most unevangelical and particularist of passions crystallize into the most universal form of solidarity. Sin and pity combine in resentment’s boundlessly extravagant lust for power⁴⁸ and the first-time emergence of that homogenic and global but for this reason all the more oppressive and docile subject: ‘humanity.’

Now, at last, I can hear what they have been saying so often: ‘We good people – *we are the just*’ – what they are demanding is not called retribution, but ‘the triumph of *justice*’; what they hate is not their enemy, oh no! they hate ‘*injustice*,’ ‘godlessness’; what they believe and hope for is not the prospect of revenge, the delirium of sweet revenge (– Homer early on dubbed it ‘sweeter than honey’), but the victory of God, the just God, over the Godless; all that remains for them to love on earth are not their brothers in hate but their ‘brothers in love,’ as they say, all good and just people on earth. – And what do they call that which serves as a consolation for all the sufferings of the world – their phantasmagoria of anticipated future bliss? – What? Do I hear correctly? They call it ‘the last judgment,’ the coming of *their* kingdom, the ‘kingdom of God’ – but *in the meantime* they live ‘in faith,’ ‘in love,’ ‘in hope.’⁴⁹

In themselves, the principle Christian virtues of faith, hope, and love have nothing positive about them. Because they are obsessed with what is absent; they are typically sad passions whose ‘overweight’ attracts more suffering rather than less.⁵⁰ At best, they make a virtue of necessity. They are clever strategies that distract the will from the present and allow us to endure suffering in a dignified way. However, once they are combined with the messianic promise – that is, the promise of a society in which the priest determines the values of things – they temporalize a stowaway revenge far beyond the realistic prospect of its consummation. As long as we don’t lose faith or give up hope, moreover, the promise of redemption is already universalizable within the remaining time. In this way, the notion of universal justice both redeems our passivity as a noble form of patience and legitimates our claims for compensation. This infinite longing for postponed justice marks the birth of the history of the West. The long history of waiting for the eternity in which each of us will receive our due is the history of prophets and priests, of the Apocalypse, of Sisyphus dwelling in the absence of justice . . .

From Christ to the Bourgeoisie (Fifth-Order Negation)

For Nietzsche, the dialectical sequence of the slave revolt in morality and the subsequent triumph of resentment constitutes history as such. While the Jewish and Christian priests, each in their own way, stabilize a transition from negation to the negation of negation, it is the pathos of negativity that continues to fuel history. This resonates closely with Hegel's equally parabolic and fictional but also more familiar account of the restless and portentous power of the negative. Corresponding to Nietzsche's three moments in the genealogy of Christianity, Hegel discerns three moments in the dialectic of the unhappy consciousness, which is itself an atavistic form of the master-slave dialectic: Judaism, or the reign of the father; Christ, or the reign of the son; and the Christian Church, or the reign of complete self-negation and self-sacrifice in the Holy Spirit. Whereas the Greeks remained in the bosom of life and attained harmonious unity of self and nature in the form of art, the Jews, in the first total reflection of consciousness away from life, could only oppose themselves to nature, setting their own changeable consciousness against that of an immutable God. Christ, the universal incarnation of what was previously unattainable, brought about a new reconciliation that was all the more profound for the depth of the preceding separation; but the stage of his immediate presence would soon vanish. Henceforth, the unity of mankind and the life of Christ would be engendered only in spirit, such that the unification of reality with self-consciousness – in the overcoming of the paranoia about one's own idolatry – remains a problem for modern reason.⁵¹

Do modern science or the French and American revolutions mark the moment when the unhappy consciousness is no longer enmeshed in servitude and finally learns to take control of its own historical existence? Or, put differently, does the passage of absolutist rule and the authority of the Church into the secular institutions of modern life – the market, mass media, the nation-state, and family life – reflect the final self-realization of human reason? It would be strange if the master-slave dialectic were suddenly to come to rest. After all, if the unhappy consciousness is more than a moment in the phenomenology of spirit, this is precisely because it contains the disenchanting uncertainty that drives freedom and reason, and without which they cannot be had. The whole of the dialectic is based on a critical subjectivity that perpetually feels alienated from itself in new ways and for which reflection remains in conflict with life. Marx ('the icy water of egotistical calculation') and Freud ('the narcissism of little differences') already attested that modern life comes at the price of new, self-fabricated discontents. The slaves become the masters of the masters without ceasing to be slaves. They continue to experience their freedom as a burden that must be compensated for by means of an internalization of external authority in

the form of new disciplinary offices. Their self-contempt matches the transience and suffering of the human condition as such. Alienation is therefore not something that can or must be overcome at the level of consciousness. Herbert Marcuse would later argue that the 'happy consciousness' is only the ideology of consumerist society, in which the satisfaction of people's basic and manufactured needs covers up an underlying anxiety and disorientation that are themselves functional to marketing and the culture industries in their attempt to close the critical gap between subjectivity and the prevailing parameters of socio-economic life.⁵²

Nietzsche's aim, too, is to demonstrate that history is not without further mutations of resentment. In later Christianity, these generally take the form of intensifications of feelings of guilt – for example, by means of the endless soul-searching induced by the introduction, and subsequent gradual democratization, of confessional practice at the fourth Lateran council in 1215 and through the levelling effects of Luther's doctrine of universal priesthood. But the event that matters above all, both for Nietzsche and in the subsequent discourse on resentment, is the advent of modernity: the third moment in the history of the slave revolt, in which the role of the Church in the organization and mediation of resentment pales compared to work-and-abstinence-ethics of bourgeois life.

Nietzsche's history of resentment must ultimately be conceived as a rival to modern ideas of historical progress. In particular, it sets itself apart from a dialectical lineage leading from Socrates to Hegel, which it considers only as a survival strategy of the weak. The disparity between master and slave cannot be sublated and is merely covered up in the metaphysical idea of a reconciliation between them. The dialectic itself is a slave revolt – not in the sense of the bondsman who initiates the transition into unhappy consciousness and achieves collective emancipation in and through labor but in the sense of the vassal who lacks the power of nobility and comes to extoll their own limitations as evidence of moral superiority. In Hegel, after all, the subject is not a self-generating agency but something that comes into the world through self-denial. To the extent that unsurpassable internal tension is the condition of all subjectivity, we find here a morality that is powerless to create new ways of thinking and feeling, except for new forms of pain and new ways of suffering.⁵³ But this morality of the slave become master is by no means limited to dialectics. As we will see, it is as a genealogical interpretation and evaluation of modern culture and consciousness that Nietzsche's account of the slave revolt in morality – the 'Jewifying or Christifying or mobifying'⁵⁴ of the world – also differs the most from and competes with other, less dialectical accounts of modern resentment.

Much more than a straightforward liberation of mankind from religion, modernity meant a new stage, rather than the end, of the history of resentment: *nihilism* – both the exhaustion of old values and a failure to

create new ones. Moreover, insofar as doubt (negation) rather than belief constitutes the essence of Christianity, nihilism is not a modern phenomenon, but rather, a succession of events that reaches back much further. Modern science is itself the offshoot of a confessional training through which the pastoral conscience seeks to drill and overcome its most elementary desires.⁵⁵ It is a mutation of a pious ‘will to truth’ under which all belief in higher values, including the belief in God and the opposition of truth and appearance, would ultimately collapse, and science has as its main object to ‘dissuade humans of their former respect for themselves.’⁵⁶ The ‘Enlightenment’ is effectively a rationalization of much older forms of discipline and social engineering in which we have learned to seek certainty and security, not freedom.⁵⁷ Capitalism is a moral order – a compulsive mode of production ruled by abstract labor, in which renunciation no longer underpins a self-relation of mastery but becomes a renunciation of pleasure as such. Among its degrading realities are a superabundance of entropic feelings, leading to an impoverished affective life, excessive intellectualization, and general spiritual abasement. In short, modern phenomena first of all express a radicalization of the ascetic virtues in the form of that unprecedented instrumentalization of life, which Nietzsche calls ‘human self-deprecation’ (*Selbstverkleinerung*).⁵⁸

If God is dead, Nietzsche warns us, nothing is permitted but the most modest expenditures of the will to power. Paul already founded Christianity on the principle that Christ died for our sins. With the Reformation, the death of God increasingly becomes a problem between God and the human until the day humans discover themselves as the murderers of God, wishing to see themselves as such and to carry this new weight. The modern humanist, Higher Man, longs for the logical outcome of this death: to become God himself; to take on the burden of being God and carrying humanity to perfection. Thus, if, previously, nihilism had meant depreciation of life in the name of higher values, with human values replacing the higher values, this difference, too, is negated. The murderer of God is ‘the ugliest of humans.’⁵⁹ No longer in need of external authority, he denies himself what was denied to him and spontaneously assumes the burdens of self-policing. What remains of the idea of divine love is social science – ‘the psychology of the “improvers” of humanity.’⁶⁰ Had Auguste Comte not already proposed his new science – ‘sociology’ – with sociologists playing the role of priests in a new religion that would mediate between the dogs of the market and the everyday communism that makes up social life, inspiring the people with the love of order, community, work discipline, and family values? The functions of the despot and the priest in the forging of individuals into compliant ‘herds’ by means of ascetic ideals are taken up by the massifying force of state bureaucracy. Its ultimate goal is ‘to manage [life] more cheaply, more safely, more equitably, more uniformly.’⁶¹

Anticipating Max Weber's warning of the 'iron cage' of calculation that replaces religious forms of solidarity, Nietzsche speaks of 'iron chains' and a 'fearful discipline' that replicate slave values and lead to fragmented societies of disaffected individuals.⁶² But, unlike Weber, he evaluates modern rationalization processes and the work ethic less as a break with the past than as the last stage of a cultural decay that had already started with Socratism (dialectical truth) and Christianity (universalism). 'Mankind does not represent a development toward something better or stronger or higher, in the sense accepted today. "Progress" is merely a modern idea, that is, a false idea.'⁶³ Rational progress and economic valorization are false, in that they falsify nobility (for example, the unconditional expense of art or basic politeness) to the point that it can only appear as the opposite of the reasonable or normal life.⁶⁴ The '*euthanasia* of Christianity'⁶⁵ has resulted in the modest moralism of the 'last man' – the one-dimensional cultural formation in which humans, sensitive and banal like Dostoevsky's devil, despair of themselves yet blinkingly conform to whatever values they find on their way:

No shepherd and one herd! Each wants the same, each is the same, and whoever feels differently goes voluntary into the insane asylum. 'Formerly the whole world was insane' – the finest one says, blinking. One is clever and knows everything that happened, and so there is no end to their mockery. People still quarrel but they reconcile quickly – otherwise it is bad for the stomach. One has one's little pleasure for the day and one's little pleasure for the night: but one honors health. 'We invented happiness,' say the last human beings, and they blink.⁶⁶

For the underground man, the death of God means that those lacking the serenity of faith are doomed to the torment of resentment. Like the grand inquisitor, haunted by the memory of Christ – the 'true Crystal Palace' – they seek freedom to replace the transcendent other. Similarly, for Nietzsche, the very notion that the free pursuit of health and happiness is an inalienable right is only the symptom of the atrophy of the life instincts. Modern happiness is not the feeling of power that arises from a sovereign life but the passive happiness of those who come late; that is, those who seek to diminish their suffering through the consumption of relative, comparative advantages by means of trade, sport, sleep, yoga, diligent work, porn, psychopharmaceuticals, escapades, scientific 'facts,' and other sedatives.⁶⁷ The modern obsession with health summarizes a culture of moderation, peace, obedience, and harmony; that is, an apparently hedonistic yet deeply neurotic culture of entrepreneurs who live life to the fullest but in ideological denial of their servile asceticism, preferring 'to will *nothingness* rather than *not* will.'⁶⁸

Inextricable from the modern pursuit of happiness and health, it is the modern understanding of equality or justice – for Nietzsche, they boil down to the same ‘democratic bias’⁶⁹ of general equivalence – that best expresses the cultural mediocrity of modern life. The Christian mutation of hatred into love through the ‘lie’ of the equality of souls before God⁷⁰ triumphs in the ‘common person’ who prefers the useful over the vital and loathes expressions of strength as an animal residuum at odds with their own ‘interests.’ The common people claim to love their neighbor as themselves but still get the thrill of *schadenfreude* under the guise of the triumph of justice:

Common natures consider all noble, magnanimous feelings inexpedient and therefore first of all incredible. . . . What distinguishes the common type is that it never loses sight of its advantage, and that this thought of purpose and advantage is even stronger than the strongest instincts; not to allow these instincts to lead one astray to perform inexpedient acts – that is their wisdom and pride.⁷¹

The Christian God was the ultimate fiction about a third party who would eventually avenge the suffering of slaves and restore justice in the form of happiness for all. Yet, what appeared to be the total depoliticization of resentment in the form an infinite waiting was, in fact, its surreptitious organization and preparation. For, whereas, in the Brahmanistic book of laws of Manu, the lord of naming, Nietzsche finds the creation of a ‘natural order’ of castes with discriminative laws that can contain envy and thereby keep the lower castes at bay, Christian universalism paved the way for the envious identification with those who are more successful.⁷² We tend to compare ourselves most to those closest to us, such that the demand for equality transforms into a perpetual sense of lack.⁷³ Modern philanthropy is the secular offspring of a long-established culture of ‘the happiness of even the “smallest superiority”’ through almsgiving and reciprocal care-taking.⁷⁴ What replaces the politics of divine justice is a constant, hypocritical need to compensate for the newly perceived opposition between egoism and altruism with ascetic morality: ‘This innocence among opposites, this “good conscience” in lying, is really modern par excellence, it is almost definitive of modernity.’⁷⁵

Under secular conditions, what is left of history is its resource. Resentment continues to fret over everything like a ‘psychic and moral wound that does not heal and which creates its own corrupt temporality, the bad infinity of an unanswered complaint.’⁷⁶ For no matter whether its articulation is religious or secular, Nietzsche argues, it is the same hatred of difference that constitutes the foundation of universalism. In such hatred, too, lies the natural affinity between the Christian believer and the terrorist anarchist,

or between the priests and the revolutionaries to whom they provide moral support.⁷⁷ Nietzsche finds examples of such hatred in Savonarola, Luther, Rousseau, Robespierre, and Saint-Simon, in whose fanaticism conviction and the lie coincide. Still, it would be a mistake to think that Nietzsche aligned himself with counterrevolutionaries or moderates. His main enemy is not anarchism or socialism but liberalism and its hegemonic idea of political and moral progress.⁷⁸ What he detests is its post-Christian legitimation of a fundamental passivity, according to which justice no longer needs to be produced and freedom means freedom from discipline and law. Liberalism is the symptom of the contemporary replacement of politics with a universal parasitism as the only possible remaining form of praxis.⁷⁹ 'Liberal institutions stop being liberal as soon as they have been attained: after that, nothing damages freedom more terribly or more thoroughly than liberal institutions.'⁸⁰

Nietzsche's aristocratic critique of the universal good continues the critique of what, at first glance, seems to be religion's opposite: the utilitarianism of the English psychologists (and by extension, the 'American' lack of *otium*, the paranoia over time wasted⁸¹) that still lies at the basis of neoliberal economics. What this ideology shares with the theology that precedes it is precisely the socio-economical and evolutionary understanding of value as based on universal usefulness or gain. This is as trivial as it is obscurantist. The real problem of the economy, the problem of value-creation, and the definition of happiness, is, from the outset, excluded from positive knowledge and is only approached from the perspective of reactive forces. As Nietzsche reminds us, 'the judgment "good" does *not* emanate from those to whom goodness is shown!⁸² And: 'People *don't* strive for happiness, only the English do.'⁸³ The modern obsession with the 'greatest happiness of the greatest number' is nihilist because it expresses an impoverishment of life that ultimately leads us to deny even the happiest fate or the greatest stroke of luck. Its levelling function devaluates all other values and weakens the possibility of inquiring into the value of values and also of the creation of new values. Profit or utility is considered a right, but at the same time, remains parasitical upon the contingent value creation of others. The very notion of general interest suggests that we are all entitled to a piece of the action, such that bitter allegation, suspicion, and envy ensue whenever this right is not respected.⁸⁴ Thus, whereas Smith discovers in indignation the very locus of the impartial spectator who inspires the mutual recognition of others and finds an analogical social use for resentment, Nietzsche makes Zarathustra teach that the whole bourgeois culture of trade and work itself goes back to its mythical origin in revenge. For, which will to power has imposed its mode of evaluation in rational choice, and at what cultural cost? 'Slave morality is essentially a morality of utility,'⁸⁵ Nietzsche concludes, but as for the nobles, 'usefulness was none of their concern!'⁸⁶

With these provocations begins a long-standing tradition in philosophy and social science that combines the criticism of middle-class culture and its materialist, technological, and politically conformist modes of valuation with the question of what is noble. Modern democracies and their market economies are perceived to come at the cost of a crisis of hierarchy – a specific confusion of equality and inequality whereby mediocrity and envy disqualify the prevailing moral and political subjectivity. From Oscar Wilde to Georges Bataille, from José Ortega y Gasset to Jacques Lacan, and from Martin Heidegger to Adorno, we see a rich variety of revolts against the total mobilization and instrumentalization of life. Some of them are conservative and some revolutionary. In any case, they all seem to draw some of their inspiration from Nietzsche, even if, in its elaboration, some could not be further removed from it. (As Nietzsche reminds us, the longing for nobility is not itself noble.⁸⁷) This is especially the case with those critics of modernity who tend to see resentment less as the affective ground of the principle of equality than as its consequence, and who therefore end up in a kind of nostalgia for pre-modern times.

Democracy, Envy, and Ressentiment: Tocqueville to Scheler

Half a century after Rousseau had already warned of the advent of *amour-propre* – the morally corrupting, inflated concern over one's social status arising out of modern individuals' ability to compete and compare themselves with one another – Alexis de Tocqueville was one of the first conservatives who diagnosed the rule of envy in modernity. In his examination of the consequences of the American Revolution, he began from the observation that 'the desire for equality becomes more insatiable as equality extends to all.'⁸⁸ The more social status and material property become available to all, the more differences tend to be perceived as unjust. The explanation of this paradox lies in the increase of comparability and status anxiety. Traditionally, one would get a sense of one's place and identity in society on the basis of birth in a certain position, caste, or class. A warrior does not compare himself, or compete, with a farmer or a cobbler. But conversely, the more the offended can identify with the offender, the more offended he will feel over any persisting inequality. Comparison and envy mutually reinforce one another in an unstoppable dynamic that feeds the tyranny of the majority, both in its tendency towards conformism and in its proneness to anarchy:⁸⁹

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.

For Tocqueville, the price of the American dream is thus that it provides an unfree language about freedom and leaves us ‘restless in prosperity.’ With the withering of traditional authority, ‘everyone shuts himself up in his own breast, and affects from that point to judge the world.’⁹⁰ Or, as many present-day commentators and sympathizers with the new right claim, henceforth, any persisting inequality could be rejected as the unwarranted symptom of a ‘class society,’ just as today, any form racial or sexual difference is contested through an intersectional art of combinations of victimhood.

Tocqueville’s account of the time and place of the American Revolution was intended as a rebuttal of Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s postulate that all humans are equal by natural right, even if they are not so in fact. ‘Man is born free and everywhere in chains’ – as an immoderate call for insurrection, Rousseau’s dictum can function as a starting pistol in the struggle for social justice anywhere and at any time. For Tocqueville, however, the notion of a discrepancy between the ideal state and reality is only a modern phenomenon. The problem with universal principles such as equal rights, equal treatment before the law, and universal citizenship is that, by denying ‘natural’ inequalities pertaining to material conditions and dispositions, they animate an infinite potential for social upheaval that would lead to anarchism, socialism, communism, and also infest middle-class liberalism. In all these cases, the greater the asymptotic approximation of formal or procedural equality and substantial inequality, the more hysterical or violent the scandalization over the remaining disparity becomes. Whereas Hegel and Marx would follow Rousseau in pointing out that concrete freedom could not be had without equality and vice versa, to the extent that the construction of their apparent contradiction is a threat to both, Tocqueville was the staunch defender of an aristocratic society rooted in an increasingly abstract freedom against an individualistic society based on a latent, liberty-opposing equality.

Almost a century later, Scheler, in *Ressentiment* (1912), was the first to take up this line of argumentation through the Nietzschean lens of

ressentiment. Accordingly, the genealogy of resentment begins with bourgeois morality as it gradually took shape from the thirteenth century onwards and reached its first peak in the French Revolution. It is based on three main falsifications of value: 1) The value of the self-made and the independently acquired replaces a more noble generosity and grace. 2) Standardization and uniformization produce the idea of the universally human; that is, the intersubjective recognition of value over any objective hierarchy of value. 3) The exaltation of use-value prevails over life-value.⁹¹ What all these revaluations betray is a desacralized interpretation of ascetic ideals. Self-control, loyalty, industriousness, truthfulness, discipline, austerity, and blind obedience may serve market utility in the same way that altruism and empathy serve the survival of the species, but they certainly do not serve the elevation of the soul. As Scheler paraphrases Nietzsche, life itself is now treated as an accident (*Zwischenfall*) in the general mechanization of the world – that ‘immense intellectual *symbol* of the slave revolt in morality.’⁹²

What drives each of these falsifications and what causes resentment to spread and become a culturally dominant factor is value comparison. Whereas the aristocrats experience value out of an unreflected self-esteem and by consequence naïvely recognize others as positive additions to their own world, the common experience their own value and that of others only in and through comparison.⁹³ As a consequence, morality itself can henceforth be grounded only in the lowest common denominator: the human. The difference between intrinsic value and comparison is that between sovereignty in evaluating what counts and measuring oneself against others, in which the ‘what’ is replaced with ‘more’ or ‘less.’ In utilitarianism, the public good is what, at a certain time and place, is deemed to be useful. But for Scheler, this means that nothing has value in itself, least of all the nobility and creativity of the Christian act of love that previously was considered the source and meaning of values. The more we rely on comparison and competition over status or property to find our self-worth, the more frustration and hatred there is, articulated in the infinite subjectivization of value and lack.

A caste society or feudal society – a hierarchical system of ‘*objective*’ and ‘*clearly “evident”*’⁹⁴ values – is not a condition under which resentment thrives, since both high and low, the blessed and the damned, receive objective recognition. But perhaps neither would a perfectly achieved democracy with equal property distribution foster resentment, even though equal distribution is itself a resentimental value. Rather, the problem lies in modern – that is, imperfect – democracies, which promise both political (relating to power) and social (relating to private property) equality but without ever quite realizing either. Here,

the rampant growth of resentment is due to what Scheler calls a 'sociological law':

There follows the important sociological law that this psychological dynamite will spread with the *discrepancy* between the political, constitutional, or traditional status of a group and its *factual* power. It is the difference between these two factors which is decisive, not one of them alone. Social resentment, 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. Resentment 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.⁹⁵

The main historical condition for 'the enormous explosion of resentment in the French Revolution,'⁹⁶ in other words, is the rise of a subjective sense of entitlement that becomes all the more insatiable and despairing the more it is confronted with proofs of its opposite existing in objective reality. When all value is relative, competition can endlessly fuel envy, vanity, and greed, which, in turn, feed a feeling of impotence, such that they become fraught with an irrevocable sense of victimhood and social injustice: 'the more the injury is experienced as a destiny . . . [the more] a person or group feels that the very fact and quality of its existence is a matter that calls for revenge.'⁹⁷

For Scheler, it is, thus, essentially the mutual reinforcement of envy and impotence based on the disjuncture between social rights and social outcomes that makes resentment a key ingredient in the spirit of capitalism. Based on the denial and protest against ruling minorities, bourgeois life leaves only two options: one either becomes a careerist (*Streber*), a fetishist who believes in social mobility and for whom money becomes an aim in itself, or one joins the league of losers for whom the grapes are sour and who therefore struggles to resign themselves to their impotence. The former is doomed to remain base because of the 'materialist' nature of their desires – as Goethe once put it, 'one is conscious of the intention, and put off.' The latter remain stuck in value delusion. Either way, we are doomed to vulgarity. Both tactics are recipes for disappointment, as it is well-nigh inevitable that the former ultimately collapse into the latter.

Class Struggle from Above (Sixth-Order Negation)

Scheler claims that, originally, values are given to us according to an immutable a priori hierarchy consisting of four levels: sensuous values (agreeable/

disagreeable), vital values (noble/vulgar), spiritual values (among which are the aesthetic: beautiful/ugly; the juridic: right/wrong; and the cognitive: true/false), and finally, the highest values of holiness (holy/unholy).⁹⁸ In other words, the objective order of values stems from the Christian-heroic class-based society that Scheler mourns and that bourgeois culture has turned against. But, while this value hierarchy is certainly less volatile than the utilitarian mode of valuation, the aristocratic Scheler, just like the 'vulgar' English psychologists, hardly offers an answer to the main genealogical question of the value of these values. For what is the value to life of this 'objective' axiology? And what use does the dismissal of any attack on it as illusory serve, except, of course, in the pastoral mediation of the conditions of emergence of resentment?

At this point, we must return to Nietzsche's functionalist critique, which shows that objectivity and general knowledge always only exist as forms of general subordination; they are yet another form of universalism, even if the particularity and exclusivity at the level of their content at the same time explicitly contradicts that universalism. Tocqueville's and Scheler's pessimism bear the sign of precisely that nineteenth-century problem with authenticity that characterized the discourse from which Nietzsche wanted to escape. Scheler thought that a position outside resentment could be found in the past but failed to investigate whether the critique of resentment is itself part of bourgeois morality, like an internal declaration of war. Does he not, rather, fully belong to the self-hating middle classes, of which we are now in a better position to recognize the pastoral nature, or rather, a mutation thereof in the form of a sixth-order negation, triggered by the antinomy of value comparison in the long genealogy of the slave revolt?

Scheler thought that he completed the work that remained to be done in the service of Nietzsche's discovery. But the matter he wished to correct was that Christian neighborly love (*agape*), rather than a sublime expression of resentment and corruption of hierarchy, in fact, is older than the resentment that would eventually corrupt it. *Agape* also represents the aristocratic answer to the existential problems issuing from the phenomenon of resentment. Contrary to the avenging God of the Old Testament, he argued, the love of Christ has nothing to do with social justice, moderation, the search for an equivalence, or passive retribution, because it principally transcends all rationality. Rather, as the objectively highest value, it is a 'supranatural spiritual intention' that has the power to dissolve precisely those self-interested 'natural' instincts of hatred, revenge, and self-assertion that lie at the basis of liberal societies. Not only is Christian love exempt from resentment; it must be understood as a noble act capable of disarming base desires. *Agape* is the gift of non-reactive empathy.⁹⁹

Scheler's argument is twofold. First, it is not resentment that changes direction in the guise of love but love itself that, between the Greeks and the Christians, changes direction. Instead of being aimed upward toward

something better according to a hierarchy of aspirations, a striving (*eros*) susceptible to feelings of relative deprivation,¹⁰⁰ *agape* turns downward. It is the love of the noble for the slave, of the healthy for the ill, the strong for the weak, the holy for the common. By contrast, resentment is but a dynamic inversion of Christian love, a begrudging of that which it does not possess, and is experienced as an attractive lure – an illegitimate love that takes on the semblance of suffering rather than happiness. There is no longer an unattainable Idea of the Good, or some lacking object of desire turned infinite, only the *sui generis* act of love itself – an act that grows in force in its enactment. Secondly, whatever help or assistance may follow from this act is to be regarded strictly as a consequence, not as the aim or premise of love. Unlike bourgeois philanthropy, which is inseparable from (self-)hatred, Christian love is unconditional. It knows no instrumentality, altruism, or social disposition; rather, it is pure spontaneity, pure expression – the sheer act of giving that ennobles and enriches the giver themselves. Instead of a calculated escape out of self-hatred or envy (*Scheelsucht*), it knows only generosity and abundance.¹⁰¹

The real difficulty inherent in Christian love, according to Scheler, is, rather, that there has never been an idea that is more prone to abuse, to the extent ‘that even the sharpest observer can no longer distinguish real love from resentment which poses as love.’¹⁰² Less than three decades after Nietzsche had exposed the hypocritical needs and desires of Western’s society’s ‘last men,’ Scheler, too, found that the fundamental value of modernity – its humanitarianism (*allgemeine Menschenliebe*) and obsession with the general interest – is built on the infrastructure (*im Aufbau*) of resentment. It is an abstract love for the human animal and his basest drives, but out of a denial of anything that could transcend them, such that our pain, failings, and illnesses only form an all-too-gladly-accepted objection against any higher benevolence. In a world where the unimpeded spread of resentment falsifies all values, all that remains of Christian morality is ‘the clamor for greater sensuous happiness’; that is, the sentimental need for humaneness, compassion, world peace, or general welfare.

According to Scheler, Nietzsche’s mistake was to have understood religion itself from a modern perspective instead of through the Christian notion of transcendence.¹⁰³ Nietzsche makes the transcendence of neighborly love appear as a hypocritical expression of the will to power; that is, as an immanent, ‘animal’ state. For Scheler, by contrast, all analogies between modern egalitarian movements and the equality of souls before God are misleading, even if the former can indeed be understood as a secularization (and hence profanation) of the latter. It is precisely when the conflict of interests that determines our willing and acting fails to contribute to the general interest that Christian love can truly appear for what it is: a sacrifice and forgiveness that finds its aim exclusively in the spiritual dimension, as opposed to

any form of brotherhood that claims that love for its self-preservation and justice on earth.¹⁰⁴ Thus, Scheler agrees with Nietzsche that the criterion for distinguishing true love from any kind of resentimental feeling is whether it is based on a heroic consciousness of one's own security and power. But whereas Nietzsche sought the counter-image to modern, democratic humanitarianism in ancient Greek agonism and *thymos*, for Scheler, this has the effect of fear coming to play a key role in society. The true counter-image would be that of feudal chivalry, which was both aristocratic and individualistic. Scheler finds it in the cheerful, light, bold, fearless love born out of the fullness of life of Francis of Assisi – a love grounded in a knightly sense of generosity and sacrifice out of self-confidence.¹⁰⁵

Scheler and Nietzsche converge in their interpretation and evaluation not only of the aporias of bourgeois resentment but also of the nobility and universality of love as we find it with Jesus and his immediate followers. Only, Scheler reproaches Nietzsche for seeing modern humanitarianism as its immediate consequence. 'Strangely enough, he [i.e. Nietzsche] thought that the growing vulgarization and deformation of true Christianity, its defeat by modern civilization, was equivalent with genuine Christian morality – indeed that Christianity was the "source" of that civilization!¹⁰⁶ Is it surprising that Scheler's bemusement depends on the almost complete erasure of the Pauline priest – the genius of resentment who, in Nietzsche's genealogy, is situated between Christ and the moderns and establishes a connection not with Christ but precisely with Jewish vengefulness? Instead, Scheler, who would become a great inspiration to both Pope John Paul II and the Argentinian dictatorship, takes Christian love at face value.¹⁰⁷ He absolves Christianity on the basis of the purity of the inherited contents and meaning of its doctrine, independent of their pastoral translations, whereas Nietzsche, the philologist, invented a new technology for its interpretation and evaluation from the immanent perspective of the priest's will to power.

Since this difference in perspective cannot be emphasized enough, let us remember that Nietzsche already pointed out that his discovery was neither the love of Christ nor the omnipresence of resentment; it was the role of the priest in the implementation of resentimental values and in the establishment of a new collective form of life. As final acts in the long history of the slave revolt in morality, modern democratic breakthroughs were only secular transformations of a much older Judeo-Christian culture in which the foundation for universalism and its associated excesses of feeling are laid. Like Nietzsche, Scheler cautions against hasty analogies between modern altruism and the love of Christ – the former being only a derivative concoction of its original inspiration. Yet, although he does not hesitate to identify priests and apostates as two of the many figures of resentment,¹⁰⁸ he simultaneously bagatellizes the historical distinction between

Christ and his priestly mediators, insofar as it would still be possible to return to the authenticity of Christian love. That is, he underplays the vast distance between a tactic for overcoming resentment that is as universal as it is unlikely and said resentment's strategic genius that continues to define modern life. Doesn't this confirm what Nietzsche had already warned against; namely, that the slave revolt in morality has a history that we are no longer able to perceive, precisely because it has been victorious?

In fact, with Scheler, we see how the notion of the slave revolt loses its *longue durée*, just as the genealogical eye is traded in for rather pedestrian contemporary concerns.¹⁰⁹ Scheler is not interested in the role of the priest. Instead, he writes in a more or less journalistic *métier* about instances of resentment in Wilhelmenian Germany, each more gratuitous than the next: cripples, dwarfs, Jews, the oppositional (socialist) politicians who only criticize for the sake of criticism, the petty bourgeoisie, hand workers, lower civil service employees who are not allowed to curse at work but get treated badly, mothers-in-law, latecomers in the family, romantics, criminals, women, spinsters, suffragettes, priests, retired officials, prostitutes, the older in their relative deprivation toward the young, the young in their relative deprivation toward the old, and dialecticians for whom negation is the main productive force.¹¹⁰ But in obsessing over the sheer abundance of resentimental phenomena of his own time, Scheler seems to lack the dialectical scope necessary to interpret and evaluate the difference between Christ and modernity. His historical investigation is limited by the same short timeframe as that of the English moralists; that is, what Nietzsche dismisses as "no more than five spans of their own, merely "modern" experience."¹¹¹

Scheler accepts that the Church has played its role in the gradual corruption of both original Christianity and medieval aristocracy under pressure of the slow rise of the bourgeoisie. Increasing expectations of equality have inevitably led to increased resentment. At the same time, this resentment, through a reversal of values, has reinvigorated egalitarian demands. But for Scheler, the circular logic of this development is not a problem. On the contrary, it enables him to keep the idea of Christian love pure while subsuming the history of Christianity under the general sociological law of modernity that gives the slave revolt a grounding in the social sciences. This law is also the basis of the sociologist's authority; resentment leads to the false notion of equality as a right, leading, in turn, to further resentiments that he, the expert, will unmask for all of us. Scheler practices precisely that mixture of a merely nominal *agape* and real hatred in the cognitive-political drama of resentment that Nietzsche attributes to the priest. This is not so much because of his empirical correction of Nietzsche's speculative genealogy of the slave revolt. Rather, it is because he provides a typically modern performance of the two essential functions

of the priest: the reinterpretation of the suffering of others as punishment for their envy and of one's own suffering as one's own noble sacrifice.

What is the politics of Scheler's *agape*? First, it reveals an unmistakable class bias. The sense of aristocratic decline informs Scheler's work with such a barely veiled feeling of bitterness and aversion toward 'the small, the lowly, and the common' that it leads to a real contradiction in his theory of resentment. Its negative focus on the ambitions of his contemporaries rather than on the 'triumphant acceptance and affirmation of oneself' that is the supposed hallmark of noble morality betrays a reactive quality. It thus proves Jameson's diagnosis that the theory of resentment will always itself be the production and the expression of resentment. The shadow of the concept's connotations renders implausible precisely its use by those who claim to speak its objective truth. Second, despite his romantic longing for an authentic existence, Scheler's conclusion is that of a skeptical anthropology: regardless of class or standing, in bourgeois societies, all humans are corrupt; only, some are more corrupt than others; namely, those who do not concede that their affected 'social conscience' was nothing but a disguise for resentful self-hatred unworthy of any comparison to the love of God. The ideological performance of this logic is clear: to recriminate against modern individuals for being envious sinners (negation) and to pacify the discontents of individuals and lock them up in precisely that kind of universal bad conscience (negation of the negation) from which Nietzsche had sought to distance himself at all cost.

The only exception to Jameson's rule, then, is Nietzsche himself, who used the concept of resentment in no other context than in his polemic against the secular inheritors of Christian slave morality – those priests who also happen to be all too interested in its general truth and who, in the name of scientific laws, claim the right of curing it. Certainly, Nietzsche shared the diagnosis of aristocratic decline. He dismissed certain forms of socialism or anarchism as secularizations of a Judeo-Christian resentment. But his suspicions about the industrial world were motivated by sensitivity to false aristocrats more than a sense of the omnipresence of resentment. Above all, he was allergic to those pessimistic psychologists who obsess over the baseness of the human passions as the bad conscience of modernity but who, lacking necessity, at the same time, make themselves necessary for the interpretation and mediation of those passions.¹¹²

Yet it should hardly surprise us that it was not Nietzsche's perspectival play but Scheler's patronizing hermeneutics that has determined the mainstream discourse on resentment over the past century. Initially finding its charge in conservative cultural criticism, the concept of resentment quickly became part of a neo-positivist discourse shared by essayists, publicists, and journalists. This is no doubt because, as Jameson suggests, its depoliticizing effect has implicitly served a double political purpose. First, it

accounts for mass uprisings through a reductionist psychology rather than material factors, invoking the destructive envy that the impoverished strata are supposed to harbor against the rich. As a concept, resentment delegitimizes any kind of popular revolt against hierarchy, which is demonstrated to have communitarian virtue. Second, it also accounts for the fanatical behavior of the leaders of such revolts, whose private dissatisfactions supposedly lead them to their militant vocation. Either way, the ideological meaning of resentment is hidden by the very visibility of resentment, its caricatured figures, and its primitive story lines. Bourgeois principles such as meritocracy and equality of opportunity may have sufficed to explain both the popular demand for a redistribution of wealth and the anger of the unprivileged over the persisting inequality of status and property. But the notion that this demand and anger are proof of more base motivations has generally been, as Axel Honneth once put it, ‘the intellectual spawn of a class struggle from above.’¹¹³

The popularization of the concept of resentment occurred in Germany around the time of World War I and the treaty of Versailles. In *The Genius of War and the German War* (1915), his defense of the Junker class, Scheler had appealed to the virile experience of war, contrasting an alliance of Christian spirituality and warrior ethic against the rise of liberalism and the English aggressor in the First World War. Seemingly inspired by Nietzsche’s notion of the warrior as a figure of sovereignty, he expected this alliance to curb the explosion of resentment and nihilism. Around the same time, Werner Sombart, in *Merchants and Heroes* (1915), argued that ‘the 1914 war is Nietzsche’s war.’¹¹⁴ For both, the necessity of containing resentment served the openly reactionary – nationalist in Scheler’s case, antisemitic in Sombart’s – call for a more authentic life and questioning of the values of the bourgeois class.

During the Weimar Republic, the critique of emancipatory struggle and the forward defense of a heroic-Christian class society was taken up by the *Konservative Revolution*, which attacked political parties across the ideological spectrum and comprised figures such as Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, Ernst Jünger, and Oswald Spengler. Their rejection of Western powers tout court facilitated the rise of National Socialism with an intellectual legitimation in terms of myth, totality, race, and *Volk*. But having initially believed they could use the Nazi movement for their own ends, after the 1933 parliamentary coup, it rapidly became clear they were no longer welcome. Retreating into an aristocratic stance, Hermann Rauschnig argued that Nazism was not a path out of bourgeois nihilism but the ultimate embodiment of its opportunism. The Nazi elite did not really believe in concepts such as the identity of a people but had used conservative ideology only as a cover, with Hitler ‘living in a world of resentment and vengefulness.’¹¹⁵

In all the above cases, the concept of resentment describes a supposedly unacknowledged vulgarity in modern life at large, which generally takes the form of a surreptitious rancor both against and among the entrepreneurial class. As Scheler stresses, it applies less to the proletariat than to the petty bourgeoisie, for whom the hope of climbing the social ladder and the fear of a social fall alternate abruptly.¹¹⁶ This also explains its later association with status anxiety, which highlights the inauthentic politics that follows from it and complicates the argument that resentment is reducible to unjust socio-economic conditions. Still, there appears to have been a shift in discursive function that lasts until today. The concept is mobilized not only to disqualify egalitarian claims within middle-class societies, as Tocqueville and Scheler did, but to distance oneself from false attempts to provide an alternative – attempts which, moreover, are decidedly inequalitarian. For example, the slogan of the white power movement – ‘You will not replace us’ – seems to express a fear of the equality and emancipation of others more than a claim to emancipation: I count as special, not in the same way as you, Jews, diversity-loving and inclusive liberals. Resentment thus has increasingly come to be associated not merely with a lack of power or social disadvantages but with the privations and entitlements of particular identities. As is the case of today’s liberal dismissals of ‘populism,’ Merijn Oudenampsen observes that ‘it is not the lack of equality that is seen as the source of anger, but rather the excess thereof.’¹¹⁷ Whether it’s the backlash against the Woke movement, the abuse of welfare dependents, or the refusal to participate in government vaccination campaigns, the pathos of complaint is now seen less as an articulation of a lacking emancipation than as a narcissistic response to its success.

However, this recent shift does not mean that, as Oudenampsen claims, resentment has ‘changed political color.’ No matter whether in conservative or liberal hands, it remains limited to what it appears to have been almost from the start: a key ideologeme in the conceptual arsenal of reactionary politics. Humans simply cannot handle equality, and society must be defended at all costs. This bleak world view offers no prospect of overcoming resentment, of course, except to soothe the bad conscience of the liberal who realizes that the civil institutions of Empire have lost their global function of moderation and mediation. For what is the source of the resentment that our contemporary priests discern everywhere? It is still considered to stem from the frustration inherent in a culture of comparison – a global winner-take-all society in which the have-nots rub shoulders with the haves in a way that makes the struggle for wealth and recognition infinite. Or, as Pankaj Mishra puts it, resentment remains ‘the default metaphysics of the modern world since Rousseau defined it.’¹¹⁸ In the end, it hardly matters whether the dismissed resentments stem from the global envy of ‘the alienated young man of promise,’¹¹⁹ ‘radical losers,’¹²⁰ or from

the *gilets jaunes* protesting against ecotax. Fascism, communism, nationalism, antisemitism, feminism, postcolonialism, white supremacism, cultural Marxism – basically any ‘-ism’ – can be interpreted as the false consciousness of an ‘alienated emancipation.’¹²¹ Instead of identifying a bona fide sense of injustice, the concept of resentment derives its good sense, first of all, from an ideological discourse that either explicitly consolidates existing hierarchies of power or withdraws into nostalgia for simpler times. It was only a matter of time before someone would undertake the inevitable rebourgeoisement of Scheler’s trickle-down economy of grace. This typically takes the form of a defense of the surplus happiness of the rich against the anti-bourgeois resentment found among alternative subcultures as much as among liberals attached to ‘political correctness.’¹²²

Narcissism: Girard

All this is not to deny that envy is the main resource for setting in motion the wheel of resentment as it spins through the avenues, television channels, fiber-optic cables, and satellites of the modern world. The problem is that envy gives the impression of resentment in its pure state. In the absence of nobility – that is, of otherness – the English psychologists from Hobbes and Mandeville onwards describe as neutral human characteristics the surreptitious and anxiously concealed passions that premodern morality regarded as sinful. But this newfound neutrality is only a pretext for a much older need for their management. This is why, from John Rawls and Ronald Dworkin to the contemporary defenders of fairness and distributive justice, it is the perceived ubiquity of envy that makes it a necessary exercise to purify a pseudo-noble resentment as serving a natural purpose in democratic life from resentment, which is contaminated with envy. Ure: ‘Resentment does not entail envy; resentment is fueled by it.’¹²³ Brighi: ‘Resentment . . . can emerge as something other than the mere operations of envy and mimetic rivalry. Not all resentment, in other words, is about resentment.’¹²⁴ Yet, what appears to be an empowering reevaluation of our affective life is really only a modern mutation of a sophism stemming from Christian mass psychology haunted by the reactive life.

The same lack of difference in perspective forces Scheler to naturalize modern resentment at the level of human ‘desire’ – a concept that, in the pastoral discourse on resentment, replaces and homogenizes the will to power as original fact. Life is vulgar; competition and calculation are characteristic of the human condition at large, making envy our fate. In defending the superiority of a counter-natural, Christian love, Scheler responds to Nietzsche’s question ‘What is noble?’ Yet, he simultaneously denies the immanent possibility of a truly active or spontaneous value

creation. Whenever we think it possible to create new values that are free of comparison, this is immediately dispelled as a narcissistic illusion. Or, as Scheler argues against Spinoza and Simmel, nothing is good simply because it is desired. Lacking intersubjective recognition (that is, 'objectivity') and limiting value consciousness to one's subjective striving prior to any form of measuring or 'value-ception,' the very notion of a spontaneous desire is itself the 'product and at the same time a description of resentment.'¹²⁵ When Nietzsche exalts the primacy of 'spontaneous, expansive, aggressive . . . formative forces' who have no need of comparison,¹²⁶ his value blindness reminds Scheler of those elderly people who delude themselves in desiring what only the young can have. Inheriting the age-old Christian prejudice against everything self-affirmative, the very notion of a self-valoring and self-validating desire is thus suspiciously relocated to the domain of psychopathology. The true 'cause' of resentment, envy, is virtually identical with the symptom it is meant to explain.

More than fifty years after Scheler, and even more openly, Girard embraces the priestly core of this pessimistic anthropology. Inspired by Alexandre Kojève's reading of the master-slave dialectic in Hegel and by Lacan's notion of the 'desire of the Other,'¹²⁷ he emphasizes the free-floating, unattached 'nature' of desire. Rather than arising spontaneously or having a primary object that, when acquired, satisfies it, desire always originates comparatively, in imitating the conduct and attitudes of others:

Humankind is that creature who lost part of its animal instincts in order to gain access to 'desire,' as it is called. Once their natural needs are satisfied, humans desire intensely, but they don't know exactly what they desire, for no instinct guides them. . . . The essence of desire is to have no essential goal. Truly to desire, we must have recourse to people about us; we have to borrow their desires.¹²⁸

Due to its contagious nature, desire tends to entangle itself in 'double binds' between modelling itself on the other and entering into a rivalry with the other. The love and admiration resulting from the first identification with our models can quickly turn into bitterness and rancor. Indeed, whenever a conflict between a 'master-desire' and a 'disciple-desire' arises, the notion of an original desire and the concomitant sense of victimhood are themselves already the projection of a desire for revenge. At the same time, the mimetic nature of desire dooms revenge to fail, increasing risk of a vicious circle of violence (what Girard calls 'Dionysos'), so that it can only be avoided at the cost of further deepening the vengeful feelings. No desire is therefore completely free of resentment, and all resentment presupposes mimetic desire. 'The re-of resentment is the resurgence of

desire colliding with the obstacle of the model-desire. Necessarily opposed by the model, the disciple desire returns towards its source to poison it. Ressentiment is only truly intelligible if we begin with mimetic desire.¹²⁹

At the same time, and contrary to Scheler, Girard sees resentment not just as general destiny; it is also to be preferred to its violent mobilization.¹³⁰ This leads him to a slightly different genealogy of modernity: resentment is neither the progenitor of Christianity (Nietzsche) nor its natural counterpart (Scheler) but its child. With Nietzsche, he argues that Christianity plays a key role in preparing the ground for modern resentments. But instead of blaming Christianity, he follows Scheler in its defense, less because of its inherent nobility, however, than because of its capacity to contain resentment.¹³¹ The Bible and the Gospels were essentially recipes for the interiorization and weakening of the real vengefulness that is characteristic of the ancient world. This is not because they originate in resentment but because their real target is the barbaric modality of mediating the contagious force of rivalry, and their aim is to avert its tendency toward violent outburst.

According to Girard, all pagan societies are constituted through a primordial scene in which the mimetic desire of the lynch mob culminates in sacrificing a scapegoat, thereby overcoming the need for revenge and restoring the recognition of mutual dependency. Through the ritual identification and elimination of a culprit chosen from among their midst, the mob enables its members to channel their rivalry and converge upon a victim. Christian revelation, by contrast, introduced a new means of social pacification based on the innocence of the scapegoat. No violence is ever justified, since no morality is ‘without sin,’¹³² but Christ, the ultimate victim, sacrificed himself in order to absolve us all. For Girard, it was Jesus himself who both unmasked the violence at the basis of human culture and offered an alternative in the form of the equality of humans as children of one loving God. When struck on one’s left cheek, this enables one to turn the right and thereby end the reciprocity. By teaching the *imitatio Christi*, or imitation of the love of Christ above acquisitive mimesis, the Christian priest establishes a symbolic distance between master and imitator and imposes a social barrier between his followers. Girard calls this form of mediation between rival desires ‘external mediation’ because it keeps the higher desire separate from more profane desires. Due to the mediator’s elevation above the subject, one can speak here of a form of transcendence. It does not give rise to jealousy; rather, it creates room for feelings like admiration, adoration, and submission that channel our desires differently.

If this strategy was successful at ‘wounding vengeance,’ however, it did not eliminate it. Rather, by rendering vengefulness latent, it created new kinds of reactors, ‘*marktintegrierte Eifersuchsreaktoren oder Neidkraftwerke*’¹³³

as Sloterdijk calls them, that work with internal mediations of envy and ambition that explode as soon as transcendent mediation fails. Ressentiment is the manner in which the spirit of vengeance survives the impact of Christianity and turns the Gospels to its own use. With respect to Nietzsche, Girard brings about a reprioritization of the problem: he sees the problem of vengeance as older than the problem of ressentiment and, due to the mimetic nature of desire, more real. Nietzsche tells us that the cruelty of the strong, though we may fear it, is still less dangerous than the nausea and compassion triggered by the normality of ressentiment.¹³⁴ Girard claims the opposite. Ressentiment does not delegitimize moral claims such as pity; rather, pity licenses ressentiment and allows it to appear as an objectively given, anthropological fact. Against Nietzsche, Girard thus claims that the Christian priest does not inaugurate a regression of Jewish politics but the era of a more civilized mediation of revenge. In charge of the proliferation of ressentiment, he also prevented its eruptions caused by any worldly differences.

However, in the management of ressentiment, whether the model is a hero, a saint, or a proximate peer makes a big difference. When the only model is provided by direct competitors, external mediation becomes an obstacle and the model of imitative desire becomes entirely immanent. In the global mobility of capital and people, we all end up as each other's symmetric rivals. But, once a formal equality between subject and model is in place, the subject of desire is forced to deny the mimetic origin of his own desire in the assertion of his autonomy. An 'internal mediation' is typical of modern Western culture, along with the affects of unchecked rivalry that have been forced underground: frustration and hatred. Expediency never fails to trigger ressentiment. With the desacralization of the victim, no inequality seems justified. As a consequence, victimhood becomes the advantageous form that ressentiment takes in a world of *de facto* inequality. The smaller social differences are, the greater and the more intolerable they are perceived to be, resulting in a thwarted, narcissistic desire for identity instead of an affirmation of difference. Hence, the specific risk of modernity is for vengeance to return – with a vengeance, since it is now internally amplified through ressentiment.

In this view, the unbridled explosions of ressentiment are not the fault of the priest, then, but solely of those who killed God. Or, as Girard formulates it: 'The gospels are indirectly responsible; we alone are directly responsible.'¹³⁵ The implication being, of course, that the priest is still necessary for upholding the taboo on revenge. His strategy is to make the son feel guilty about his newfound sovereignty after killing his father. Mimetic desire not only explains ressentiment; it also explains bad conscience in the form of the Freudian Oedipus complex. Being both model and rival, the father is the ultimate mediator of a mimetic desire and its Oedipal

normalization. More than wanting the object of the other's desire – the mother – the son wants to be the other. It is what Scheler had already called a truly metaphysical *Existentialneid* – the projection on the other of a sovereignty which, due to the inauthentic nature of desire, is unachievable for oneself: 'The son desires mastery. He desires his father's being, meaning that which his father possesses and seemingly never ceases to desire in the midst of the blissful autonomy that he enjoys.'¹³⁶ With the loss of symbolic distance, the son and the father become each other's competitors. The only thing left to do is to search for possibilities of sacralization. This takes the form of a revival of external mediation in the form of the law – embodied, for Girard, in the decalogue ('thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife' etcetera) – a repression and censure of desire that is as timeless as the laws of mimetic desire and the scapegoat mechanism themselves.

Having arrived at this essentially pastoral conclusion, it is no surprise that Girardians tend to blame Nietzsche for maintaining 'an essentialist image of resentment,'¹³⁷ by which they refer to the transcendental (absolute) character of his distinction between noble and base, healthy and sick, which they argue precludes any grey zone. Whereas, for Nietzsche, even resentment, although it produces its own fixation, is not entirely fated, Girard claims more affinity with Dostoevsky and Flaubert when, in all earnestness, he democratizes the concept; supposedly, it is part and parcel of the human condition in general – a generalizable fact resulting from communicative interaction. Only, whereas Dostoevsky and Flaubert merely paved the way for modern-day priests while, at the same time, refusing their authority (they both turn explicitly against their doctors 'out of spite'¹³⁸), Girard returns to an older path. The more universal resentment is, the more essentialist his own interpretation and recommended treatment becomes. The ultimate aim is not to deny that baseness is our essence but to reveal nobility or difference as a figment of the narcissistic mind that looks upon those it supposes to be living a carefree and confident life through the lens of a repressed aggression. 'Nietzsche's politics is slave resentment's mirror-image.'¹³⁹

Girard criticizes precisely the critique of resentment that supposedly stems from the illusion of sovereignty. At first, this critique of the critique appears to be in agreement with Jameson's notion of the autoreferentiality of resentment: 'One essential thing about resentment is that its ultimate target is always resentment, its own mirror image, under a slightly different mask that makes it unrecognizable.'¹⁴⁰ The problem, however, is that Jameson is talking about the actual use of the concept, whereas Girard merely addresses the universality of the phenomenon, which he deems to be as contagious as the psychological algorithm of mimetic desire itself.¹⁴¹ 'The discovery of resentment is a contribution of great importance to our

knowledge, which is, unfortunately, distorted by poor Nietzsche's illusion of possessing the strongest will to power, for no other reason than it was his excellent discovery.¹⁴² Indeed, the very fact that Nietzsche – himself a sickly intellectual spectator, a marginal figure who had to go mad – ‘could afford the luxury of resenting resentment so much that it appeared as a fate worse than real vengeance,’¹⁴³ disqualifies him as the true father of the concept. He may have given it its name, but only Scheler uncovered its true origin.¹⁴⁴ Once we realize that the true etiology of resentment lies in envy – that is, in the reactive nature of desire – we acknowledge both its anthropological necessity and the vanity of every claim to be free from it:

Next to resentment, Nietzsche posits an original and spontaneous desire, a desire *causa sui* called the will to power. If desire has no object unique to itself, on what can the will to power be exerted? Unless it is reduced to exercises of mystical gymnastics, it will necessarily pursue objects valorized by others. The power is revealed in the rivalry with the other, this time in competition undertaken voluntarily. Either the will to power amounts to nothing or it chooses objects in function of the rival desire in order to steal them. In other words, the will to power and resentment have one and the same definition. . . . As long as desire is triumphant in rivalry, it can believe that it owes the other nothing, that it is truly spontaneous. On the other hand, desire cannot face defeat without recognizing its own resentment, now all the more humiliating since it originally believed it could transcend it as will to power. There can only be a will to power in victory.¹⁴⁵

What appears as a spontaneous and innocent expression of the will to power, in other words, is, in reality, only a misguided and unacknowledged glorification of vengeance, over which the resentimental internalization is much to be preferred. According to Girard's utilitarian argument, resentment is only one of many ‘nineteenth-century annoyances,’ the only significance of which is ‘the increasing rage everywhere that turns resentment back into irrepressible vengeance.’¹⁴⁶ Was it not Nietzsche's very glorification of sacred violence, his ‘base elitism,’ that led to his final breakdown? As universal and unavoidable as resentment, therefore, is bad conscience. Girard's paranoid message is the same as that of psychology in general: we are all victims, slaves of desire, so be careful what you wish for!

But is this inverse hierarchy, according to which the existence of resentment is the sign that an original aggression has been tempered, really the result of progressive insight? Is it not just a return to the Christian taboo on revenge, only this time inspired by the worry that modern egalitarianism could open up the Pandora's box of resentment and set free

unprecedented acts of spite? Is the diagnosis of the democratization of resentment (nobody is exempt) perhaps no more than the mirror image of the terror that seizes the Hegelian bondsman when he recognizes his freedom?

In the end, Girard is only one of many who link the problem of resentment to that of narcissism understood as a frustrated desire for authenticity. We find the same connection at work in Richard Sennett's classic study of the fall of public man in postmodern media culture, in Wendy Brown's description of the disfigurement that happens when minorities remain attached to their wounded identities, or indeed, in those English psychologists who want to save the sense of socio-political injustice from the indiscriminate blaming and envious spoiling of the public good. What all these authors agree on is that democracy itself is, at the very least, Janus-faced; it is at once a fraught emotional condition and the locus of metaphysical redemption. On the one hand, Christianity and then modernity put an end to many forms of violence and created alternative forms of organizing society – the abolition of the death penalty, the refusal to accept revenge and ritual sacrifices, the explicit condemnation of wars – and instituted in their place the declaration of human rights, equality between men and women, and so on. On the other hand, a society driven by resentment is faced with impossible demands for emancipation, solidarity, and benevolence on a global scale. This typically modern confusion of the cause of resentment (resentment translates as demands for universal equality) with its ideological consequences (demands for equality inevitably fuel resentment) is articulated in the form of moral psychologization that is the *modus operandi* of the priest as identified by Nietzsche. It is how the liberal pacification of the loser as guilty individual – the paranoid management of depressed egos – proceeds; namely, by arguing that, if you are not successful on the market, you have nobody to blame but yourself.

In postmodern times, coinciding with the rise of neo-liberalism, this naturalization of resentment gives the impression of a Malthusian growth model of libidinal economy: the more the ever-growing majority desires the consumer goods or claims the social recognition that have thus far belonged to a fortunate minority, the harder it will be to realize them. A veritable perversion of our erotic and thymotic energies has taken place, in which pleasure or pride is experienced only passively, as something that depends on others, while economy and morality converge in reflexes against others. Civil war on a global scale and the destruction of the natural environment constitute the internal limits to the growth of democratic life. Constantly balancing between outbursts of violence, on the one hand, and surges of love, on the other, the practical reason of well-meaning democrats is therefore necessarily concerned less with the positive effects and

affects of collective political action than with the distribution of negative ones and with the impossibility of satisfying the demands of resentment. 'Our investigation accepts that both challenges must be taken up: the challenge of never diverting our gaze from our human baseness and the challenge of not forgetting the extreme and antidemocratic consequences that arise from limiting oneself to the Nietzschean condemnation of such lowness.'¹⁴⁷ The challenge, in other words, is how to love civil society, human rights, and so on, without losing sight of their ambiguous ground. In order to protect us from populists – that is, from contamination with the militantly disaffected masses and their demagogues – and in order to protect our freedom, we need savants who cater to the infinite need for alleviating the antagonisms that characterize everyday life. It is as Jacques Rancière says, the entire discourse on democratic affect – not the institutions but the people and their real demand for equality are the problem – boils down to a technocratic hatred of democracy: 'Such is the standard form by which experts state the democratic paradox: as a social and political form of life, democracy is the reign of excess. This excess signifies the ruin of democratic government and must therefore be repressed by it.'¹⁴⁸

'Enough! Enough!'¹⁴⁹ So far, we have followed a certain continuity of lineage between Nietzsche himself and the landscape of twentieth-century pseudo-Nietzschean parlance on resentment. But overlooking this landscape, how can one not sympathize with Nietzsche's warning against the frogs in the swamp? The melancholy science of resentment and its long sequence of higher order negations says more about its interpreters than about the phenomenon itself. Precisely because resentment is intrinsically authoritarian, it is always in need of a priest or anthropologist to interpret it. A critique of resentment, by contrast, can only emerge from a radical break with the dialectical continuity that binds the interpretations to their object. A true genealogy must begin from the necessity of a struggle against the various priesthoods, to which the question of resentment remains entirely subordinate.

Notes

- 1 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I §§6–7; *Daybreak*, §39; *Anti-Christ*, §8.
- 2 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §11.
- 3 Nietzsche, *Twilight*, The four great errors §7.
- 4 The main exception is the alignment of Paul and Mohammed in *Anti-Christ*, §42.
- 5 Nietzsche, *Anti-Christ*, §15; *Gay Science*, §139.
- 6 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I §§7, 6, III §11. On priests as aristocrats, see also *Daybreak*, §60.
- 7 Nietzsche, *Twilight*, The four great errors §7, §§1–8. On the pastoral invention of free will as an 'instrument of torture,' *Ecce Homo*, Why I am destiny §8.

- 8 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §20.
- 9 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §§15–16.
- 10 Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, §25.
- 11 This is where Nietzsche is close to Louis Althusser's celebrated understanding of 'interpellation': the recruitment, transformation, and recognition of individuals into subjects through linguistic dramatization. Althusser, *On Ideology*, 47, 51–7.
- 12 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §15.
- 13 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II §24.
- 14 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §15.
- 15 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §12.
- 16 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §§11, 13.
- 17 See, in particular, Max Weber, *Ancient Judaism*, trans. Hans H. Gerth and Don Martindale (Glencoe: Free Press, 1952).
- 18 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I §7.
- 19 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §195; *Daybreak* §§68, 40. 'For the type of person who wields power inside Judaism and Christianity, a *priestly* type, decadence is only a *means*.' *Anti-Christ*, §24.
- 20 Nietzsche, *Anti-Christ*, §§25–6.
- 21 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §52.
- 22 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §20.
- 23 Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, §§27, 39.
- 24 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I §8.
- 25 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I §8; *Anti-Christ*, §17.
- 26 Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, Why I am destiny §8.
- 27 Nietzsche, *Anti-Christ*, §§31, 28–35.
- 28 Nietzsche, *Anti-Christ*, §27.
- 29 Nietzsche, *Anti-Christ*, §40.
- 30 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I §8.
- 31 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §201.
- 32 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §18.
- 33 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §14.
- 34 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II §§19–21.
- 35 Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, Why I write such good books, 'Genealogy.'
- 36 'The law existed so that sins might be committed.' *Daybreak*, §68. On the 'Jewish Pascal,' see also §39.
- 37 Nietzsche, *Anti-Christ*, §27.
- 38 Nietzsche, *Anti-Christ*, §42.
- 39 Nietzsche, *Anti-Christ*, §43.
- 40 Nietzsche, *Anti-Christ*, §39.
- 41 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §52. On the 'baseness' of the New Testament, see also Nietzsche, *Anti-Christ*, §§42–3, 46; *Genealogy*, III §22.
- 42 Nietzsche, *Anti-Christ*, §§9, 32.
- 43 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I §8.
- 44 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §21; *Daybreak*, §78.
- 45 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I §8.
- 46 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §§19, 18.
- 47 Nietzsche, *Anti-Christ*, §7.
- 48 Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, §68.
- 49 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I §14.
- 50 Nietzsche, *Anti-Christ*, §15.

- 51 For an exposition of this historical development as set out in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, see Jean Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Samuyl Cherniak and John Heckman (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 196–215. Hyppolite follows Wahl in arguing that the unhappy consciousness, although described by Hegel as an immature stage of reason, is not just another stage in the historical development of human spirit but the actual driving force of subjectivity throughout history; that is, 'an effort toward the rationalization of a ground that reason does not attain.' Jean Wahl, *Le Malheur de la conscience dans la philosophie de Hegel* (Paris: Rieder, 1929), 108.
- 52 Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 79–87.
- 53 As Deleuze comments, 'the discovery dear to the dialectic is the unhappy consciousness, the deepening, the re-solution and glorification of the unhappy consciousness and its resources.' Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 159. And: 'There is no unhappy consciousness which is not also man's enslavement.' *Ibid.*, 190.
- 54 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I §§9, 16.
- 55 Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, §§357, 344.
- 56 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §§25, 23–4.
- 57 Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, §§12, 115, 347; *Twilight*, The four great errors §5.
- 58 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §25.
- 59 Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, IV The Ugliest Man.
- 60 Nietzsche, *Twilight*, "Improving" humanity §5, The problem of Socrates §11; *Genealogy*, III §21.
- 61 Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, §132.
- 62 Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, §184.
- 63 Nietzsche, *Anti-Christ*, Preface §4.
- 64 Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, §76; on normality as monotheism, §§143, 299.
- 65 Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, §92.
- 66 Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, Zarathustra's Prologue §5.
- 67 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §§17–18.
- 68 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §1.
- 69 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I §4.
- 70 Nietzsche, *Anti-Christ*, §43. 'In the end, it comes down to the *purpose* the lie is supposed to serve.' Nietzsche, *Anti-Christ*, §§56, 57.
- 71 Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, 3. Distinguishing between 'actors' in the marketplace and 'inventors of values' in *Zarathustra*, I The Flies in the Marketplace, Nietzsche uses the metaphors of pesky flies to denote the purveyors of the goods, services, and values of the modern economy, and to exhort his readers to flee from its temptations and seductions.
- 72 Nietzsche, *Anti-Christ*, §57.
- 73 Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, I §23.
- 74 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §18; Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, §§131–48.
- 75 Nietzsche, 'The Case of Wagner', Epilogue; *Gay Science*, §§14, 119.
- 76 Sloterdijk, *Rage and Time*, 49.
- 77 Nietzsche, *Anti-Christ*, §§46, 54, 56–8; *Twilight of the Idols*, Skirmishes, §34.
- 78 Nietzsche, *Anti-Christ*, §§37–8.
- 79 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II §12; *Beyond Good and Evil*, §43; *Anti-Christ*, §62; *Twilight*, Skirmishes §41.
- 80 Nietzsche, *Twilight*, Skirmishes §38.
- 81 Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, §329.

- 82 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I §2.
- 83 Nietzsche, *Twilight*, Arrows and epigrams, §§12, 15.
- 84 Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, §21.
- 85 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §260. Whereas the general striving for profit constitutes the consumer's logic (Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, §§173–5, 344), the 'utilitarianism' that comes before profit is that of obedience to the morality of customs. Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, §§9, 37.
- 86 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I §2.
- 87 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §287.
- 88 Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. Eduard Nolla, trans. James T. Schleiffer (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2009), vol. II, 946.
- 89 The same logic is also found in Emile Durkheim's *Suicide* (1897), one of the founding books in modern sociology, written at a time when 'aristocratic prejudices began to lose their old ascendancy' and set free unforeseen aspirations, which lead to an increase of the sense of alienation from the social order ('anomy'): '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. . . . The state of de-regulation or anomy is thus further heightened by passions being less disciplined, precisely when they need more disciplining.' Emile Durkheim, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*, ed. George Simpson, trans. John A. Spaulding and George Simpson (London: Routledge, 2005), 212, 214.
- 90 Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, II 701.
- 91 Scheler, *Ressentiment*, 69–82.
- 92 Scheler, *Ressentiment*, 58, 72, 89.
- 93 Scheler, *Ressentiment*, 55–7. 'The medieval peasant prior to the 13th century does not compare himself to the feudal lord, nor does the artisan compare himself to the knight . . . such periods are dominated by the idea that everyone has his "place" which has been assigned to him by God and nature in which he has his personal duty to fulfill. . . . From the king down to the hangman and the prostitute, everyone is "noble" in the sense that he considers himself as irreplaceable.' Scheler, *Ressentiment*, 56.
- 94 Scheler, *Ressentiment*, 72.
- 95 Scheler, *Ressentiment*, 50.
- 96 Scheler, *Ressentiment*, 177n4.
- 97 Scheler, *Ressentiment*, 50, 68–9.
- 98 Max Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values: A New Attempt toward the Foundation of an Ethical Personalism*, trans. M.S. Frings and R.L. Funk (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973).
- 99 Wyman, 'The Specter of Freedom', 137–8.
- 100 To use the generally prevailing term of another English psychologist, Rawls in *A Theory of Justice*, 534–41.
- 101 Scheler, *Ressentiment*, 83–8.
- 102 Scheler, *Ressentiment*, 79.
- 103 Scheler, *Ressentiment*, 105–11.
- 104 Scheler, *Ressentiment*, 112–13.
- 105 Scheler, *Ressentiment*, 91–2.
- 106 Scheler, *Ressentiment*, 134.

- 107 Scheler, *Ressentiment*, 97–101. Scheler only mentions in passing Paul and Luke the Evangelist as examples of instrumentalizing Christian love for a resentful hatred. *Ibid.*, 71, 99.
- 108 Scheler does acknowledge that, unlike the religion person, ‘the false martyrdom of priestly policy’ is guided by resentment. *Ibid.*, 46–7.
- 109 Nicholas Birns emphasizes Scheler’s polemical op-ed style, so different from Nietzsche’s outlandishness, in his focus on garden-variety resentments, which allows for no wide vision or gestural brio, only the good will, to be pragmatic and responsible. Nicholas Birns, ‘*Ressentiment and Counter-Ressentiment: Nietzsche, Scheler, and the Reaction Against Equality*’, *Nietzsche Circle: A Philosophical Community*, 2010, <http://nietzschecircle.com/RessentimentMaster.pdf>
- 110 Scheler, *Ressentiment*, 50, 61–8, 73.
- 111 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II §4.
- 112 Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, §§48, 56, 346.
- 113 Axel Honneth, ‘Fataler Tiefsinn aus Karlsruhe’, *Die Zeit*, 24 September 2009, www.zeit.de/2009/40/Sloterdijk-Blasen/seite-1. Following Honneth, Olschanski applies this critique to Nietzsche’s alleged conservative elitism. Ironically, he proposes a return to Scheler to correct Nietzsche’s elitism, since Scheler at least allows us to see resentment sociologically – i.e., empirically and in mixed forms across the social spectrum as opposed to Nietzsche’s ‘absolute’ types of master and slave – as ‘expression of problematic differences of power, prestige and property.’ Olschanski, *Ressentiment*, 16–19.
- 114 Steven E. Aschheim, *The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany 1890–1990* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), 149.
- 115 Herman Rauschning, *The Revolution of Nihilism: Warning to the West*, trans. Ernest W. Dickes (New York: Alliance Book Corporation, 1939), 276, translation modified.
- 116 Scheler, *Ressentiment*, 66. Yet, it is not hard to tell where Scheler’s sympathies would have been. In this context, it is interesting that, in India, resentment is considered to be much more prevalent among Brahmins (e.g., the politics of the Other Backward Class (OBC), than among Dalits, who speak the universal language of constitutional liberty and equality. Pratap Bannu Metha, ‘The Idea of Political Resentment: India in Comparative Context’, talk at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, 14 April 2021, <https://historyprogram.commons.gc.cuny.edu/4-14-second-satadru-sen-memorial-lecture-pratap-bhanu-mehta-on-the-idea-of-political-resentment-india-in-comparative-context/>
- 117 Merijn Oudenampsen, ‘The Return of Resentment’, in: Sjoerd van Tuinen (ed.), *The Polemics of Resentment: Variations on Nietzsche* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 167–86, 183.
- 118 Mishra, *Age of Anger*, 274.
- 119 Mishra, *Age of Anger*, 31, 159.
- 120 Hans Magnus Enzensberger, ‘The Radical Loser’, *Der Spiegel*, 20 December 2006, www.spiegel.de/international/spiegel/the-terrorist-mindset-the-radical-loser-a-451379.html
- 121 Angenot, *Les ideologies du ressentiment*, 19.
- 122 See the recent books of the media professor and AfD sympathizer Norbert Bolz: ‘Through robust economical growth the situation of every individual is changed more positively than would be possible through redistribution in stagnation. And this economical growth is precisely driven by the observation

- of possibilities for consumption, which initially are available only for the successful at the top. The desires that come about in this way are satisfied – over time. This means that the luxury of this generation becomes the standard of the next and the self-evident basic equipment of one after the next one. The successful form the avantgarde of consumption, and it is inequality which drives the others to imitate them. In this way the good things of life spread gradually from above to below.’ Norbert Bolz, *Diskurs über die Ungleichheit* (Munich: Fink Verlag, 2009), 15. ‘Ressentiment,’ by contrast, ‘is the hatred of success. What the envious hates about success, is not the wealth of others, but the requirement of discipline and hard labour that are the very precondition of success. This resentment has become creative in bohemian culture – in the form of a will to unhappiness.’ *Ibid.*, 3, 9–12.
- 123 Ure, ‘Resentment/Ressentiment’, 604.
- 124 Elisabetta Brighi, ‘Sentiments of Resentment: Desiring Others, Desiring Justice’, *Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture* 26 (2019), 179–94, 181. For Brighi, resentment is a mimetic sentiment, insofar as it starts by ‘looking outside of oneself,’ whereas resentment ‘is an anti-mimetic emotion in so far as it starts from self-affirmation and dis-identification.’ The former ‘presupposes and upholds a negative view of equality which it interprets merely as an envy-inducing competition over status,’ the latter, conversely, ‘takes democracy seriously by appealing to and re-affirming shared norms of justice.’ *Ibid.*, 188.
- 125 Scheler, *Ressentiment*, 59.
- 126 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II §12, I §2; *Beyond Good and Evil*, §260.
- 127 ‘The problem with human desire is that . . . it is always “desire for the Other” in all the senses of the term: desire for the Other, desire to be desired by the Other, and especially desire for what the Other desires. This last makes envy, which includes resentment, constitutive components of human desire.’ Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (London: Profile Books, 2009), 87.
- 128 René Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, trans. James G. Williams (Leominster: Gracewing, 2001), 15.
- 129 René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 91; René Girard, ‘Foreword’, in: Stefano Tomelleri (ed.), *Ressentiment: Reflections on Mimetic Desire and Society* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2015), vii–xiv, x; cf. Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, §370.
- 130 ‘All the phenomena explored by Max Scheler in *Ressentiment* are, in our opinion, the result of internal mediation.’ René Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 11–12.
- 131 ‘Max Scheler did not understand the imitative nature of desire and for this reason never succeeded in distinguishing resentment 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.’ Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, 59.
- 132 Tomelleri, *Ressentiment*, xli.
- 133 Peter Sloterdijk, ‘Erwachen im Reich der Eifersucht. Notiz zu René Girards anthropologische Sendung’, in: René Girard, *Ich sah den Satan vom Himmel fallen wie einen Blitz: Eine kritische Apologie des Christentums*, trans. Elisabeth Mainberger-Ruh (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2002), 241–53, 253.
- 134 Nietzsche, *Anti-Christ*, §3.

- 135 René Girard, 'Dionysus versus the Crucified', *MLN* 99.4 (1984), 816–35, 825.
- 136 René Girard, *Oedipus Unbound: Selected Writings on Rivalry and Desire* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 15.
- 137 Tomelleri, *Ressentiment*, 41, 18, 32.
- 138 Dostoevsky, *Notes*.
- 139 Ure, 'Resentment/Ressentiment', 609.
- 140 Girard, 'Dionysus versus the Crucified', 825.
- 141 For this reason, Girard is less the 'Darwin of the human sciences' (Michel Serres) than their Herbert Spencer. See Justin E.H. Smith, 'Who Is René Girard', *Justin E. H. Smith's Hinternet*, 3 January 2021, <https://justinehsmith.substack.com/p/who-is-ren-girard>
- 142 Girard, 'Dionysus versus the Crucified', in: Tomelleri, *Ressentiment*, xiii.
- 143 Girard, 'Dionysus versus the Crucified', 825–6.
- 144 Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, 11–14; cf. Scheler's analysis of 'existential resentment' in Scheler, *Ressentiment*, 52.
- 145 René Girard, *To Double Business Bound: Essays on Literature, Mimesis and Anthropology* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 84–120, 91–2; And: '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.' Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, 12.
- 146 Girard, 'Dionysus versus the Crucified', 826.
- 147 Tomelleri, *Ressentiment*, xxxv.
- 148 Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*, 8. Or as Rancière writes: 'We are accustomed to hearing that democracy is the worst of governments with the exception of all the others. But the new antidemocratic sentiment gives the general formula a more troubling expression. Democratic government, it says, is bad when it is all owed to be corrupted by democratic society, which wants for everyone to be equal and for all differences to be respected. It is good, on the other hand, when it rallies individuals enfeebled by democratic society to the vitality of war in order to defend the values of civilization, the values pertaining to the clash of civilizations. The thesis of the new hatred of democracy can be succinctly put: there is only one good democracy, the one that represses the catastrophe of democratic civilization.' Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*, 4. For Rancière, democracy has no Janus-face because it has no natural balance between the social desire for equality and its governance. Rather, democracy is a principle of heterogeneous equality – a displacement in the distribution of government-society relations that comes, to use Nietzsche's description of noble origin, from nowhere (*von obngefähr*): 'Democracy can never be identified with the simple domination of the universal over the particular. . . . The democratic process must therefore constantly bring the universal into play in a polemical form. . . . Democracy really means, in this sense, the impurity of politics, the challenging of governments' claims to embody the sole principle of public life and in so doing be able to circumscribe the understanding and extension of public life. If there is a 'limitlessness' specific to democracy, then that's exactly where it lies: not in the exponential multiplication of needs or of desires emanating from individuals, but in the movement that ceaselessly displaces the limits of the public and the private, of the political and the social.' *Ibid.*, 61–2.
- 149 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I §14.

4 The Physician

The Right of the Philosopher

From the genealogical point of view, the resentimental mode of interpreting and valuing life is the raw material that slave morality is made of. As a primitive sense of guilt and punishment, it marks the inchoate stage of the internalization of the human within the confines of a peaceful society. It belongs to a completely natural psychology that allows only for cursory contempt¹ and the most superficial diagnosis of culture; it is ‘a piece of animal psychology, no more.’² Accordingly, Nietzsche attacked neither the persons of resentment nor those ‘beasts of prey’ whose cruel activity lies at the root of every culture, regardless of the shape it takes. Of the former, he stated that, even though resentment now reigns supreme, he would never blame ‘individuals for the calamity of millennia.’³ And while the latter may occasion resentment, they are forces that ‘cannot be reckoned with, they come like fate, without cause, reason, consideration or pretext, they appear just like lightning appears, too terrible, sudden, convincing and “other” even to be hated.’⁴

Nevertheless, what makes resentment essential to the modern world is its invention of and subsequent transformation into bad conscience: ‘the most uncanny and most interesting plant of our earthly vegetation.’⁵ Here, resentment loses its innocence. It is not so much the problem of an individually based psychology but of a whole civilization based on human interiority. Nietzsche recognized his only real and worthy enemy in the priest-type, as it is through the priest’s appropriation of resentimental conscience that it acquires psychological depth and a stable cultural form.

Priests make everything more dangerous, not just medicaments and healing arts but pride, revenge, acumen, debauchery, love, lust for power, virtue, sickness; – in any case, with some justification one could add that the human first became an interesting animal on the foundation of this essentially dangerous form of human existence, the priest, and that the

human soul became deep in the higher sense and turned evil for the first time – and of course, these are the two basic forms of man’s superiority, hitherto, over other animals!⁶

Priests are the curators and disseminators of resentment. Through a constant appeal to bad conscience, they pacify the persons of resentment, seduce the artist-warrior types, and reduce them to passivity. Under their patronage (their ‘proselytizing psychology’ [*Colportage-Psychologie*]),⁷ moral values such as compassion, altruism, selflessness, and equality consolidate the paradoxical victory of reactive forces, which has proven decisive for European history and its nihilistic endgame. Looking back on the *Genealogy of Morality* in *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche boasted that his book contained not quite the first psychology of resentment but ‘the first psychology of the priest.’⁸

The ‘psychology of the priest’ should be understood in a dual sense as both the typology of the priest and the pastoral nature of psychology. First, priests are revealed to establish their power not through direct physical engagement but through contagion with a psychologizing dialectic. Or, as Freud allegedly surmised while travelling to America with Carl Gustav Jung, where they were to introduce psychoanalysis: ‘We are bringing them the plague.’⁹ Second, psychology, as the predominant form of human (self-)knowledge, is the outcome of the gregarious moralization that only the priest brings about. With the intervention of a priest, resentment becomes intertwined with other-worldly aspirations turned against the senses, the instincts, the body – in short, against physiology. Not only is psychology the method employed by the priest, the priest is also typical of psychology; the priest is the psychologist par excellence – the very sense and value of psychology’s will to power. As Deleuze and Guattari put it in *Anti-Oedipus*: ‘there never was but one psychology, that of the priest.’¹⁰ At once sick and strong, servile and noble, the priest is the artist of the soul.¹¹

For Nietzsche, the importance of an inquiry into resentment lies exclusively in the political struggle with the priests who derive their power from interpreting and evaluating it. This struggle also leads him to introduce a fourth type – ‘an overman in comparison’ – into the drama of resentment: that of the philosopher, or ‘first psychologist of the good.’¹² If Nietzsche fully identifies with the role of the philosopher, this is not because he believes it is possible to get rid of his antitype. On the contrary, he emphasizes the necessary existence of the priest at all times and in all places.¹³ The distinction of roles, then, is not a cold opposition but a composition; not a negation but a multiple affirmation. As a force of the future, philosophy does not engage the prevailing powers directly but from a position of concealment. At first, it is even opaque to itself. It can only enter the world and survive by

wearing the uncontroversial mask of the priestly sage, and is always at risk of being taken in by that mask.¹⁴ Like Heraclitus, who dressed like an oriental priest, Nietzsche imitates the contemplative air of Zoroaster in order to take possession of it and thereby become himself. It is precisely through its critical difference from the priest that the singularity of Nietzsche's aristocratic rebellion – its controversy – becomes visible. If it fails, philosophy turns into Zarathustra's donkey. From Socrates to Hegel, Nietzsche finds in it little more than the inventory of reasons humans give themselves to obey.

Nietzsche's polemic with the priest resides in his rival claim to the title of physician of culture, the model for which is found in the pre-Socratic unity of philosopher and physician. This role is articulated both through the general object of medicine and through a kind of triage. If psychology is the politics and language of the priest, then the politics and language of the philosopher is physiology. Nietzsche never ceases to emphasize that resentment is not an illness of the soul that should be fought with psychical means but a somatic ossification of forces or affects that, if organized, pose a danger to socio-cultural hierarchy, which is the condition for the self-overcoming of the modern human.¹⁵ In retrieving the body from its 'disparagers' and returning it to the battlefield of species-activity, the therapeutic task of philosophy consists of separating the healthy from the sick and treating only the afflictions of the strong. 'If philosophy ever manifested itself as helpful, redeeming, or prophylactic, it was in a healthy culture. The sick, it made ever sicker.'¹⁶

The obvious scandal of this self-understanding of the philosopher is its reversal of the moral assumptions of medicine. The aim is to protect the 'right to happiness' of the strong against the contaminative grudges of the weak in the interest of the ascending life.¹⁷ Priests claim to cure the ailments and alleviate the pain of the weak. The rejection of violence and the elimination of conflict as causes of suffering and disease are inherent in the priests' understanding of therapy. The philosopher, by contrast, protects the healthy from the self-deceptive devaluation of life by the sick. In refusing the mantle of the priest, Zarathustra not only tells his disciples to forsake and deny him; he also declines to heal the blind, the crippled, and the hunchbacks.¹⁸ His 'tragic insight' is that growth requires struggle and that, as a consequence, the exceptional need to be kept from becoming complacent: 'The more normal this sickliness is in the human – and we cannot dispute this normality –, the higher we should esteem the unusual cases of spiritual and physical powerfulness, human *strokes of luck*, and the better we should protect the successful from the worst kind of air, that of the sickroom.' Whereas 'mollycoddling of feeling' leads to a confusion of healthy and sick, of quality and quantity of life, a pathos of distance must ensure that the healthy are never assigned the task of tending to the

mediocre. Since the strong are the only 'guarantors of the future,' this is nothing less than the philosopher's 'chief concern on earth.'¹⁹

The implication of this understanding of the physician as someone who discerns between 'patients' is that the sick themselves need more compassionate doctors; that is, doctors who are themselves sick with guilt. Nietzsche relegates to the priest-psychologist the insidious role of the paranoid healer or redeemer who suffers from the very illness he is supposed to heal, but who rules over the suffering by further poisoning their wounds and domesticating what is still strong in them.²⁰ For the psychologist, pain is an affliction of the soul rather than of the body. This means that he can only interpret the pain of the suffering, not its physiological cause, which could be either an impediment to or part of the process of healing. The very notion of psychic pain is itself already the moral interpretation and justification of a sad science for which the senselessness of suffering is the default problem.²¹ Sickness is burdened with guilt. This is why psychology – *interpretosis* – precisely insofar as it denies its own destructiveness, is the most universal manifestation of the spirit of revenge and the degeneration of the body politic. It is the all too human way in which humanity reflects on itself: 'Ressentiment is not part of psychology but the whole of our psychology, without knowing it, is a part of ressentiment.'²²

Why does Nietzsche still designate his own work as a psychology – from the 'psychology of the priest' to the 'psychology of tragedy' and the 'psychology of the professor'?²³ How does he distinguish his own understanding of psychology as 'queen of the sciences'²⁴ from the priest, whose morbid pathos he prided himself in having unmasked? Psychology is the pastoral mask of the modern philosopher.²⁵ The general aim of *Ecce Homo* is for Nietzsche to present himself as 'a psychologist without equal.' He reinterprets his entire oeuvre under the banner of a psychology that functions as a new image of thought geared not toward truth but toward healing. Yet what sets him apart is precisely that, at least from *Human, All too Human* onwards, he consistently maintains that the only method of psychology is 'physiology, medicine, and physics.'²⁶ Taken together, these approaches constitute perspectivism – the effort to maintain a healthy distance from the diagnosed, so that things do not 'obtrude too closely.' In practice, this means that philosophy re-naturalizes every psychologizing gesture; for example, by exposing the decadent constitution of the English psychologists and of the modern human in general.²⁷ The only acceptable psychology is 'a proper physio-psychology';²⁸ that is, an active psychology. Its point of application is not the subconscious stirrings of the soul that we should somehow learn to become the subject of but the unconscious activity of a body that is forever at odds with consciousness and that must be kept from falling prey to the moralizing judgments of bad conscience.

Herein lie the ‘good taste’²⁹ of the philosopher, their ‘rank’³⁰ as a psychologist, as well as their ‘right’³¹ to certain problems.

The critical questions of taste, rank, and right pertain especially to the problem of resentment. In philosophy, concepts mean nothing in isolation. Resentment is not a worthy problem in itself. It becomes so if we restore the long sequence of events that leads from resentment to Oedipal conscience and identify the perspectival drama of diverging types at work in this development. We must especially heed Nietzsche’s warning not to confuse him with his doubles, those who, under the generalizing discourse of social science, judge and punish resentment and in this way repeat the basic gestures of resentment itself.³² There is ‘a hierarchy of psychic states’ that corresponds to ‘the hierarchy of problems.’³³ As banal as the psychological, sociological, and anthropological interpretations of resentment tend to be, so ‘interesting’ are the rancor, mistrust, impotence, disappointments, ideals, habits, hatred, and ambivalences that motivate them – interesting in the sense that learning to recognize them is essential to overcoming them. The general truths and laws taught by the liberal defenders of resentment and the conservative critics of resentment, for example, may be ‘in itself rational and psychologically tenable,’³⁴ yet their practical consequences make them implausible, since their interpretation of the limitlessness of egoism and desire remains all too Christian. What they take too seriously is also what betrays them.³⁵ If we nonetheless consider resentment to be an important philosophical problem, we must criticize the typical symptomatology of the will to its interpretation. It is essential that this occurs from a radically new perspective; otherwise, we end up psychologizing the psychologists, in turn, and remain stuck in the same mode of pseudo-critique. It does not suffice to know the difference in point of view; it is crucial to keep making the distinction.

Nietzsche’s critique of mistaking the priest for a philosopher is, of course, based on his strong hunch that most of psychology and even philosophy is a dialectical strategy to prove oneself intellectually and morally superior. Yet, this is especially true of the self-gratification of the anti-resentment rhetoric that unmasks resentment everywhere and indiscriminately. It asks: Wasn’t Rousseau the son of a petit bourgeois who failed to adhere to the Socratic maxim of knowing himself?³⁶ Wasn’t the Frankfurt School a classic case of what Scheler had identified as ‘resentment criticism,’ ‘the growing pleasure afforded by invective and negation’ with no interest in actually improving its conditions or having its wishes satisfied?³⁷ And what about Nietzsche himself, the raging theorist who was not exactly free of resentment, as illustrated by the ‘one-upmanship temptation’³⁸ and ‘boomerang effect’³⁹ of the self-praise in *Ecce Homo*? In each of these critical gestures, it is clear what the sought-for superiority really consists of. We see the dialectics of resentment at work, reveling in having become more reflective and

pedantic; indeed, more pastoral. It is a criticism that disqualifies itself, as it is unable to set its truths apart from what it criticizes. Scheler's reproach to Nietzsche that ressentiment is inevitable or normal, as all culture is slave culture, in reality only pertains to those for whom ressentiment is so omnipresent that they cannot see beyond it. Their pathos of suspicion – the flipside of the pathos of faith – is pathological. It is stuck in a false immediacy that lacks historical sense, leading them to what Nietzsche calls out as indulging 'in psychology and curiosity in the wrong place.'⁴⁰ Whereas it is intrinsic to the genealogical method that one have doubts about one's own descent, their suspicion is directed against everything except their own suspicious nature.⁴¹ The lack of Heraclitean respect for masks and differences in perspective merely leads them to absolutize an empirical insight: ressentiment must be the universal, secret motivation of everything that claims to be free from it.

In return, one could succumb to the polemical temptation of pointing to, say, Girard's own barely hidden envy of the authority of French intellectuals of the '68 generation, both in France and the United States.⁴² If we are to avoid getting stuck in a petty 'war of consciousness,'⁴³ however, we must direct our 'psychological' curiosity elsewhere. How does philosophy gauge the rivalling opinions if there is no empirical rule or measure? This is where the method of dramatization and the importance of taste comes in. Whereas reasons are always pious, only taste makes a real difference.⁴⁴ If everything depends on how we understand life and who claims the right to treat its symptoms, truth cannot be read only from concepts or the subjects to which those concepts are bound. Rather than thought being a mere reflection or representation of the real, taste makes thought intrinsically social, conflictual, and real.⁴⁵

Whereas to understand is already to equalize, Nietzsche's antidote to the seriousness of the priest is a new art of interpreting the world. Genealogy is a critique of the historical imagination, polemically challenging the very sense of causality of his (and our) time. While overlapping with and hyperbolically mimicking the historical arguments of Rée's *The Origin of Moral Sentiments* (1877), Nietzsche challenges Rée's frog-like historicism. To restore a sequence of events is not to interpret the present through the past – a sign of decadence that leaves everything unchanged – but to interpret the past as immanent in the present. It is not the present reacting to the past but making the past react to a new present⁴⁶; to tighten the spiritual 'bowstring' around the 'pressure of millennia.'⁴⁷ A genealogy is a philosophy of the future and a history of the present, not of the past it disintegrates and sets free. Instead of ostentatious explanations that reveal a hidden, rigid meaning behind facts, genealogical interpretation produces meaning as an active motivating force in the world; that is, in the semiotic chain of command. It ultimately invents not historical sequences but their

becomings. Along with the fable of the blond beast, unlocalizable in time and space despite obvious resonances with nineteenth-century imperialism and colonialism, it is in particular the anti-modern distinction between high and low that must be understood in this light. Nietzsche's insistence on categories of hierarchy is based less on their coarse derivation from established relations of domination and subordination than on the constant possibility of a reshuffling. We often don't see vengeful slaves and aggressive masters, but rather, the reverse. Since its normativity is at odds with normality, however, this does not necessitate an empirical correction of Nietzsche's typology. Hierarchy-effects do not correspond to a historical reality but move in a realm of unknown facts and counterfactual presuppositions.⁴⁸ As mythical 'hypotheses',⁴⁹ they make us ruminate on the fragmentary and often random convergences of forces whose accreted effects confront us as real. More importantly, they provide a new interpretative ground under simplified psychological motifs and reactions.

This is Nietzsche's idea of philosophy as 'legislator'⁵⁰ – its 'lordly right of giving names'⁵¹ – whereas the empirical sciences and popular discourse 'invert the nature and names of things',⁵² offering only a moral interpretation in which knowledge serves obedience. If philosophy wants to govern the real (politics), the sciences merely enable a realist government (regularity, statistics, nihilism). Their observations may be correct, but they lack both conceptual apprehension and the associated practice of difference. They lack the affirmation of multiplicity that comes with the aggressive pathos of a *style*.⁵³ Since language is a 'mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms',⁵⁴ a style (*stylus*, stake or pointed weapon) is never merely aesthetic or even philosophical or scientific but contains the arrogant health (*firmitas*) of a pre-theoretical self-assertion: 'anything truly productive is offensive.'⁵⁵ Science and philosophy are both implicated in the problem of resentment, but in unequal ways. The power or rank of thought does not lie in its adequacy to what is already given but in the efficacy of a creative act that transforms the given out of a different mode of articulating life.

Whereas it is easy to truthfully identify instances of resentment, the functional meaning and affective direction of this truth (its *sens* or plausibility) is usually not as critical as we think it is. As Deleuze, always wary of the puerility and artificiality of truth judgments, writes: 'we always have as much truth as we deserve in accordance with the sense of what we say. Sense is the genesis or the production of the true, and truth is only the empirical result of sense.'⁵⁶ Instead of the determinist simplemindedness of a Scheler, his historical unidirectionality, the basic principle of genealogy is that effects do not resemble causes. Every phenomenon has multiple senses. Whoever claims to surmise the ultimate truth or origin of resentment already denies the complexity of disseminating forces that express

themselves in it. The essence of a thing appears when it has grown up and intensified, but even then, this essence remains immanent to the play of forces that take hold of it. For, as we have seen, resentment appears in many shapes and at many scales, from the mere feeling of revenge to bad conscience to modern boredom and the culture of narcissism. Each of these phenomena comes with its own etiology and moral assessment. What we see in resentment therefore constitutes the very conflict that separates the perspective of the philosopher from that of the priest as radically incommensurable. At the same time, this is why, for Nietzsche, the unmasking of resentment rarely takes the form of a personal reproach or of an attempt to outsmart his opponent. If the priest is the genius of hatred, then it is essential not to reproduce or mirror this hatred. Luther is a 'farmer' 'whose body had all the vindictive instincts of a wounded priest'⁵⁷ but also a prophet, the author of 'the masterpiece of German prose' compared to which 'almost everything else is merely "literature".'⁵⁸ Precisely because it does not proclaim a final truth, the polemic is freed of insulting and abusive tendencies. There is nothing to 'discover' in resentment – it is no longer a matter of the stupid debunking of what we already know but of 'hurting stupidity'⁵⁹ itself.

The critical purpose of a philosophical clinic is to recharge the present with maximally contrasting, 'alternative' historical truths.⁶⁰ Contrary to a historical correction, this requires the training of a genealogical 'eye' that sees further than the given.⁶¹ The importance of ascesis in the production of a style – style understood as the unity in the composition of forces – cannot be underestimated. Whereas the resentimental disequilibrium between active and reactive forces leads to an insistence on the immediately apparent as reflecting objective reality, the genealogist must incorporate consciousness itself in a discipline that is bound to a transformative pathos.⁶² It is not critical reflection but only the constraint of an acquired taste for what is singular in the problem of resentment that can justify a philosophical critique of morality. This taste consists of a sensitivity to mutations in resentment's empirical determination and a particular aversion to its superior appearance in the phenomenon of bad conscience as incorporated in the type of the priest. Nietzsche's speculative generosity, as opposed to the spirit of gravity, is rooted in Heraclitus's famous dictum that you must expect the unexpected or you will never find it. 'In *all things* only the higher degrees count!'⁶³ Singularity is the dynamite that explodes the labyrinth of history.⁶⁴ As the highest degree in the realization of a will to power, it is both its limit and its threshold of mutation.⁶⁵ What are the tipping points in the composition of forces that will decide the future meaning and value of any given phenomenon?

Resentment is undeniably a key ingredient in populist politics, for example, but does not necessarily shape or explain it. Many infrastructural

forces and signifying chains have to conspire for the underbelly of a certain sub-segment of society to achieve hegemony. Comparing populism to other manifestations of resentment, or ‘listening more carefully to ordinary people’ in the hope of understanding their motives, will only generate the basest or least differentiated of explanations. The mania for understanding phenomena in terms of reactive forces is due to the illusion that resentment is the bearer of a deeper meaning or secret message – hence the specter of a more authentic, leftwing populism. What Žižek, à propos the ritual burning of cars in Paris suburbs since 2005, calls the ‘hermeneutic temptation’⁶⁶ is symptomatic of thought’s complicity with mediocrity and even smugness: the bad conscience of those who realize that the institutions of liberal democracy have lost their global function of moderation and mediation. Instead, entirely new principles need to be invented as a basis for imagining and assessing the great transformation of our political system and the disinhibition of drives that accompanies it. What is the highest degree – the exceptional, the untimely, the contingent, the normative, the unreasonable, the innocent, the incomparable, in short, the active principle – in the contemporary milieu of resentment’s and bad conscience’s multiple becomings? And who or what embodies it?

If there is still a use for Nietzsche’s elitism, it is in this sense of a pedagogy of the concept – a philosophical training for discerning and activating the conditions of the new that resists the priest’s myopically levelling eye. As Deleuze writes, ‘Nietzsche’s most general project is the introduction of the concepts of sense and value into philosophy.’⁶⁷ The concept of resentment is critical, insofar as it is the key to Nietzsche-the-philologue’s interpretation of the servility at the heart of the self-forgetfulness of metaphysics (‘truth’). Indeed, Nietzsche can be said to have radicalized the critical turn in philosophy inaugurated by Kant. He demonstrated how transcendental philosophy denied that it had derived its concepts from the impotence of its material situation by freely asserting as universal what in reality is the imposed result of a damaged life (‘Who needs the truth?’; that is, ‘in what sense?’). The concept of resentment is also clinical, since Nietzsche-the-physician’s aim was no longer to legitimize what was already known, but rather, to destroy old values and perspectives and invent new ones (‘What is the value of truth?’). As a concept, resentment remains an anti-revolutionary trope as long as its main purpose is to translate revolutionary politics into psychology. Could it also become part of an attempt to re-politicize psychology?

This question of transvaluation (*Umwertung*) is what motivates our return to Nietzsche as well as to the explorations of contemporary pastoral power by critical theorists like Adorno and genealogists such as Foucault and Deleuze and Guattari. It allows for a differentiation between two contrasting ways in which the concept of resentment can be put to

use: a speculative sense and a nihilistic sense. While their dramatization offers no way of superseding the contrast between them, it demonstrates how the philosophical understanding achieves a higher or better consistency between theory and practice, and thus, produces the maximum difference, not just at the level of the solution to the problem of resentment but in the problem itself.

Critique of Psychopower: Foucault, Adorno, Deleuze and Guattari

The physiological importance of priests lies in their use of language, in which they transform fleeting somatic states into fixed emotions. Moral psychology is a way of capturing affect, of giving form to sense experience by delimiting and absorbing it in the symbolic realm – the realm of what Nietzsche calls imaginary causes and signs without external reference.⁶⁸ The repression of bodily affect is thus less a burying or elimination than an initiation and conversion. Human beings become responsible subjects not when they renounce their animal aggression but when they come to understand its discharge as the dispensation of punishment under the lawful rule of their representatives. Following Nietzsche's account of disciplinary mnemotechnics, Deleuze and Guattari observe that resentment is the price of this 'imperialism of language' or 'significance'⁶⁹: the signifying process in which signs come to be formed and used to objectify the living body and render it latent. With the lingering hatred and frustration of a cruelty turned inwards, the need arises for priests who can compensate for it with a transcendent meaning. This means that, on the one hand, priests derive their authority from the 'imperial-despotic system,' where written signifiers are representations of a secret voice, whether of the emperor or of God, requiring interpretation. On the other hand, this despotic overcoding could never have such a hold on its subjects without the reinterpretation of the non-subjective life in terms of the bad conscience. If all attempts to illuminate the dark recesses of the soul presuppose, like a thorn in the flesh, a discursive subjugation, only the pastoral mediation of our negative relation to the unconscious keeps us from revolting and instead makes us take pleasure in suffering. In short, it is the work of the priest to guarantee that, as Adorno aptly observes, 'the so-called slave morality that [Nietzsche] excoriates is in truth always a master morality, namely, the morality imposed on the oppressed by the rulers.'⁷⁰ Of old, it is the hermeneutical alliance of the despot and the priest, of logos and paralogism, that enthrals the will to reproduce itself according to the terms of order, and that substitutes the revealed truth of our culpability for efficacious expression. 'Instead of language being interpreted by us, it has set about interpreting us, and interpreting itself. Significance and interpretosis are the two diseases of the earth, the pair of despot and priest.'⁷¹

Spinoza, in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, draws a portrait of the Hebraic priest, who, in the interpretation of scripture, takes the extrinsic determinations of God for his real expressions and appeals to our imagination and fear to make us obey laws while we remain ignorant of what they are. Through the Mosaic law, a grid of rules and regulations that permeated the most private and intimate space of a person's life, priests moved the hearts of the people to pious devotion and collective discipline. Their authority rested on encoding their servility as a virtue sanctioned by a punishing and rewarding God (the covenant with Yahweh, who led the people out of slavery in Egypt). Once the word was internalized, they would experience their affects (changes in their power of acting) and accompanying affections (joy, sadness) as consequences of the law instead of reflecting natural (physiological) causes. It is thanks to these imperative and revelatory signs, Spinoza concludes, that the Hebrew state was able to stabilize and preserve its power over time.

For Nietzsche, too, the Hebrew Bible is a 'great literary forgery' and the 'most powerful book and the most effective moral law in the world,' since the reterritorialization of the body on the written word provided a 'house on stilts'⁷² for the Jewish people. While the religious reintegration of the people in Babylonian exile replaces lost statehood with anti-royal, utopian, and eschatological moral laws, this does not make them less powerful politically. Rather, it means that all psychology begins as psychopower and, as the interpretation of a despotic voice, it remains immanent to a body politic:

If the highest caste is at the same time the *clerical* caste that chooses a title for its overall description that calls its priestly function to mind, this does not constitute an exception to the rule that the concept of political superiority always resolves itself into the concept of psychological superiority (although this may be the occasion giving rise to exceptions).⁷³

However, the theological-political hermeneutics of the Jewish priest is not yet modern and psychological. Instead, it is the Christian priest who is typical of European culture, as it is he who teaches the will to desire its own repression, first of all in the form of a taboo on its own vengefulness. The Christian is the 'great symbolist'⁷⁴ who invented the depoliticizing semiotics through which the meaning of individual confession can be uncovered while the speakers are made to accept, adapt to, and identify with the behavioral model of the flock. This vulgarization of higher authority already carries within it the anarchic beginnings of modernity.⁷⁵ By way of an individualist desire for truth, the priest introduces a narcotic asceticism that could be secularized in the Kantian ideal of emancipated subjects capable of prescribing the law of reason to themselves. Once it is freed from the power of the Church, subjectivity acquires the neurotic unity of

priest and believer, despot and subject, conquering and conquered slave (or lord and bondsman); in other words, the unity of Oedipal personhood: where there was *id*, there I shall come to be.⁷⁶

Given this persistence and deepening of the unhappy consciousness after the death of God, it does not come as a surprise that the moderns need priests no less than their ancestors did, and perhaps, even more so. In the past two centuries, the task of helping to interpret the secret truth of repressed desire while simultaneously civilizing it has typically been assumed by the human sciences. 'There is no State that does not need an image of thought that serves as its axiomatic system or abstract machine, and to which it gives in return the strength to function.'⁷⁷ Post-Kantian philosophy, liberal economics, the rest of the social sciences, ethical committees, mass media, marketing, and psychotherapy all contribute to and participate in a general image of thought – a dominant language and cognitive system in which life is made to judge and reproduce itself as a cliché. And what are all these practices of human self-understanding, if not variants of an encompassing psychology?

In a 1965 interview with Alain Badiou entitled *Philosophy and Psychology*, Foucault claims that psychology is not a science but the

cultural form . . . with which Western culture has been familiar for a long time, and in which there emerged such things as confession, casuistry, dialogues, discourses, and argumentations that could be articulated in certain milieus of the Middle Ages, love courtships or whatnot in the mannered circles of the seventeenth century.⁷⁸

All his later works on the hermeneutics of the self, pastoral and psychiatric power, and the ministry of the body as flesh are already anticipated here. Psychology is not just a form of knowing but also a practice – a form of ordering the world: 'Every psychology is a pedagogy, all decipherment is a therapeutics: you cannot know without transforming.'⁷⁹ Yet it is precisely with the onset of modernity and its privileging of psychology as the transcendental framework for spirituality, in general, that psychology's transformative potential has become minimized and locked up in empirically pre-scripted forms of subjectivity. Philosophy and the human sciences converge in the psychology of finite human self-reflection, or in what Foucault also calls 'anthropology.' Instead of a transformative passage, psychology has become an 'absolutely unavoidable and inevitable impasse' symptomatic of the 'anthropological slumber' in which both philosophy and the human sciences are 'put to sleep by one another,'⁸⁰ just as, in the classical episteme, critical thought was kept asleep by the dogmatic slumber of the relationship between humans and God.

As is well-known, through his work, Foucault has endeavored ‘a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects,’⁸¹ in the sense of both a subjection (*assujettissement*) and a production of subjectivity (*subjectivation*). Corresponding to the two classical forms of power – the despot and the priest – Foucault develops the themes of modern disciplinary power and biopolitics. It is in the context of the latter that Foucault, in his research in the middle and late seventies, is quick to rediscover the theme of ‘pastoral power’ and its specific mode of psychologization. Rather than in the discipline of the army or the hospital, the ancestor of modern governmentality is found in monastic discipline, which is based on the more tender techniques of individual care of the soul and dutiful guidance (*conduit*) of the shepherd over its flock of free sheep.

Pastoral power is concerned with the worldly order of everyday conduct.⁸² Precisely at the moment when political power is no longer modelled on the virtues and wisdom of the sovereign and God’s rule of the world but on the anonymity of the state apparatus and the rational government of free individuals, the new, centralized state begins to secularize and integrate the technologies of the self and individualization of Christian pastoral power. Embodied by the mixed figures of the minister and the clerk, the shift in the relationship between religion and politics from church and state to pastorate and government is made possible by the Reformation and Counter-Reformation and their struggle over the correct manner of governing in the Church.⁸³ As a result, priests gained increasing power at a local level and caused confessional technologies and codes of conduct to spread through society at large.⁸⁴ From the sixteenth century onwards, the police became the integrated solution to the tricky adjustment between political power wielded over legal subjects of the state and pastoral power wielded over free individuals.⁸⁵ If the pastor provided for salvation in the afterlife, now, the state seeks man’s worldly happiness by regulating society and the moral quality of life. Combining economic and religious themes, the aim of the modern art of government is the bio-economical health and security of the body politic of floating populations, commercial networks, and technical innovations, and as such, it also constitutes the biopolitical core of the neoliberal welfare state.⁸⁶

The moment in the Middle Ages when early Christian technologies of penance became confessional is also the moment when the priest first acquired a medical role (the administration of the proper satisfaction corresponding to a sin in order to heal the patient suffering the effects of sin). It is true that, with the appearance of the medical rationality of politics and governance (the *medizinische Polizei*) at the end of the eighteenth century, the authority of the pastor was replaced by the competence of the economist and the doctor. If, from the seventeenth-century pastoral and Jean-Baptiste de la Salle’s concern for detail to autobiographical literature

in nineteenth century, ours has nonetheless become a singularly confessional society, this indicates that the intricate links between confession and medicine have never really been broken. Psychoanalysis' 'talking cure' was perhaps the first domain in which confessional procedures and psychiatric medicalization of sexuality were explicitly combined.⁸⁷ But what all biopolitical technologies of medical psychology share is that, unlike the psychiatric hospital or analytical session, they focus on everyday life as centered around the nuclear family, where power functions not through meticulous composition but by infinite contagion. In this aspect, they are discourses that function like a generalized psychoanalysis, which Deleuze and Guattari find 'worse than the hospital, precisely because it operates in the pores of capitalist society' and in 'open air.'⁸⁸

At the same time that the Cartesian cogito became the transcendental or universal model for the management of the freedom and rationality of the individual, the demand for medical psychology became insatiable and pastoral power dispersed into the complete governmentalization of society. Foucault defines 'the Cartesian moment' in the rise of biopolitics as an alienation of thought and ethics. Truth is no longer an expression of virtue but of a method that substitutes 'the truth of life' for 'the true life,' thus reversing the ascetic tradition from the post-Socratics and to the Christian mystics.⁸⁹ As hermeneutics was replaced by analysis, the new confessor is no longer a spiritual guide but a master of scientific discourse. In the name of liberation, we now prefer a doctor to a spiritual guide and pity those who choose otherwise for their lack of emancipation. Yet, this last vestige of sovereignty at the same time implies an infinite process of empirical psychologization of all that remains stubbornly irrational, such that, from kindergarten to elderly care, we are turned into obedient students of psychological method and evidence, which drains us from all political subjectivity. For, as Nietzsche already knew, scientific knowledge plays an 'anaesthetic' role. Both medicine and disease, non-belief is also the last refuge of belief, just as the Cartesian non-spirituality based on pure self-knowledge instead of self-transformation is the degree-zero of spirituality.

It is therefore not enough to say that psychologists are the pastors and priests of our time, since everybody has become their own psychologist. Indeed, while Christianity's preoccupation with self-knowledge still presupposed a spiritual practice and transformation of the self, the Enlightenment would suppress any spirituality and thus finally alienate truth from practical subjectivity.⁹⁰ Biopolitics defines and limits subjectivity by its relationship to its individual truth, while politics is reduced to the administration of bio-economic life. In the first part of the *History of Madness*, Foucault therefore describes this new claim of politics on life, which begins at the end of the sixteenth century, as the 'Great confinement' of everything deemed unreasonable: the enclosures, the conversion of moral obligation

to civil law, the displacement of the sacred meanings of poverty and charity by the moralization of work and laziness.⁹¹ Or, as Deleuze and Guattari extrapolate: ‘Oedipus is one of those things that becomes all the more dangerous the less people believe in it; then the cops are there to replace the high priests.’⁹² What was once mild paternalism now becomes a matter of continuous surveillance, profiling, medication, and psycho-education. In the scientifically constructed world, psychology is the concluding piece – the necessary complementary truth to neurobiology and economics and their guiding ideal of completely desubjectivated knowledge.⁹³

Contemporary biopolitics is psychopolitics, in which big pharma, policy makers, the entertainment industry, and the ‘psy’-sector increasingly rely on one another. After the economization of the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, the psychologization of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries not only meant the full subjection of the emotional life to the logic of exchange but also the establishment of a ‘therapeutical culture’: the appearance of a discourse in which emotional life takes center stage in culture as well as of the linguistic, scientific, interactive techniques to understand and maintain it.⁹⁴ From the Church to new discursive authorities, such as practitioners of neurocognitivism and all the media experts, teachers, and trainers that accompany it, we are the patients as much as the consumers of our emotional lives. We are educated in private coping strategies that define what seems doable within given bio-economical coordinates. At the same time, these strategies publicly legitimize trauma. As Jan De Vos phrases it: ‘Psychologization is more than the design of alienation and discontent in contemporary global culture. It is a part of the processes that create that very alienation and discontent.’⁹⁵ Thus, from criminals asking for psychiatric guidance to war veterans learning to observe themselves and to debt-ridden people who live in constant distrust of themselves and others, we are all obsessed with a psychology that forces us to become the subject of our own desubjectivation and that precedes in an a priori fashion any other political role we might occupy. Henceforth, the problem is no longer a lack of subjectivity but an excess of it. As a coping strategy, psychology not only gives meaning or form to our suffering; it thrives on it. Lack and castration become constituents of our self-identity, now defined by fatigue and neurosis. ‘Life itself is a biological impairment for which medication, psycho-education and frameworks for adaptation are appropriate.’⁹⁶

Whereas Foucault’s ‘new genealogy of morals’⁹⁷ stands alone when it comes to historical detail and allows for a broader perspective, Deleuze and Guattari, in their critique of a virulent Oedipalization, stay truest to Nietzsche both conceptually and programmatically.⁹⁸ Nowhere did the impasse of psychology become clearer than in the spread of psychoanalysis, which

simultaneously held the promise of liberation and proved to be one of the most cunning pedagogies of resignation. As Adorno already observed in 1951, after having witnessed the rapid spread of psychoanalysis in America:

Always speak of it, never think of it. Now that depth-psychology, with the help of films, soap operas and Horney, has delved into the deepest recesses, people's last possibility of experiencing themselves has been cut off by organized culture. Ready-made enlightenment turns not only spontaneous reflection but also analytical insights – whose power equals the energy and suffering that it cost to gain them – into mass-produced articles, and the painful secrets of the individual history, which the orthodox method is already inclined to reduce to formulae, into commonplace conventions. Dispelling rationalizations becomes itself rationalization.⁹⁹

Adorno's critique of psychoanalysis, and by implication, of the ideological function of psychological knowledge at large, anticipates Deleuze and Guattari. He takes inspiration from Freud's discovery of the pleasure principle – the materialist claim that the desire for sustenance and proto-sexual gratification is our primal motivation. But he also detects an idealist hypocrisy in Freud's interpretation of pleasure as raw and spontaneous individualism that poses a threat to collective reason. 'In the teeth of bourgeois ideology, he tracked down conscious actions materialistically to their unconscious instinctual basis but at the same time concurred with the bourgeois contempt of instinct which is itself a product of precisely the rationalizations that he dismantled.'¹⁰⁰ Freud's enlightenment is unenlightened, insofar as it denies that desire could be codified in other ways than it already is. Once it encounters something that resists interpretation, it can only replicate the original violence (and resentment as the accompanying taste for castration) that rationalization implies. Despite appearing to liberate the unconscious, psychoanalysis constantly succumbs to an instrument of oppression, speaking in a language of myths and fantasies, never anything real. In the end, Adorno concludes, Freud merely repeated the already-familiar double gesture of liberal psychology. He offers disillusionment about our real motivations while reaffirming bourgeois disgust with all things bodily, sensual, and irrational. In this way, psychoanalytical reason becomes a tool the ego needs to navigate a world ruled by the reality principle and reproduces the reification of an ascetic society in which the achievement of individual pleasure is entirely subordinate to profitable work. 'The psychoanalyst's wisdom' quickly became a 'technique' and a 'racket' that bound 'suffering and helpless people to itself, in order to command and exploit them' – a way of silencing those who suffer by making them talk about themselves like a 'business-manager.'¹⁰¹

If there is still a positive task for psychoanalysis, Adorno argues in *Minima Moralia*, it would be to ‘show the sickness proper to the time to consist precisely in normality.’¹⁰² More specifically, it would need a hyperbolic style that goes against the domesticating and dulling effects of socially authorized categories that are exchanged in the marketplace. This is an essential aspect of Adorno’s and, as we will see in the next chapter, Améry’s inverted Nietzscheanism. Only exaggeration can cast the particular tendencies he observed into greater relief and illuminate a truth that the mere recitation of facts, figures, and statistics does not yield. ‘In psychoanalysis nothing is true except the exaggerations.’¹⁰³ However, it seems that psychoanalysis is no longer fit even for this task, as its practical message tends to be that, while we cannot avoid having to relate to something that cannot be symbolized (‘the real’), we can at least consider ourselves securely embedded within the symbolic order and its world of phantasms (‘enjoy your symptom’). This indicates in what sense the impasse of psychology – its legitimation of resentment in the form of bad conscience – is the contemporary form of nihilism. It raises again the question of whether it is possible to critically and clinically transform subjectivity. To conceive of such a possibility, it is necessary first of all to imagine how the liberation from oppression need not be primitive and chaotic.

This is Deleuze and Guattari’s starting point in *Anti-Oedipus*, in which they oppose the logic of foundationalism that is inherent in unattractive existential options such as psychosis versus neurosis:

It is said that the unconscious is dark and somber. Reich and Marcuse are often reproached for their ‘Rousseauism,’ their naturalism: a conception of the unconscious that is thought to be too idyllic. But doesn’t one indeed lend to the unconscious horrors that could only be those of consciousness, and of a belief too sure of itself? Would it be an exaggeration to say that in the unconscious there is necessarily less cruelty and terror, and of a different type, than in the consciousness of an heir, a soldier, or a Chief of State? The unconscious has its horrors, but they are not anthropomorphic. It is not the slumber of reason that engenders monsters, but vigilant and insomniac rationality. The unconscious is Rousseauistic, being man-nature. And how much malice and ruse there are in Rousseau! Transgression, guilt, castration: are these determinations of the unconscious, or is this the way a priest sees things? Doubtless there are many other forces besides psychoanalysis for oedipalizing the unconscious, rendering it guilty, castrating it. But psychoanalysis reinforces the movement, it invents a last priest. Oedipal analysis imposes a transcendent use on all the syntheses of the unconscious, ensuring their conversion. The practical problem of schizoanalysis is, then, to ensure the contrasting reversion: restoring the syntheses of the unconscious to their immanent use.¹⁰⁴

Among the many paralogisms of psychoanalysis (Deleuze and Guattari count five, all of which can be understood as variations on the paralogism of resentment), it is through ‘the paralogism of the double-bind’¹⁰⁵ – the illegitimate construction of a dark and fraudulent outside (relativism, nonsense, irrationalism, poetry) – that the status quo maintains its air of legitimacy: everybody knows and nobody can deny what is necessary. But the price is a terrible reduction of life. For Deleuze and Guattari, the unconscious is not something you must leave behind; it is something you must produce and set aflow. Accordingly, they share with Adorno an appreciation of the ‘eruption of materialism’¹⁰⁶ in Freud’s discovery of the polymorphic activity of infantile sexuality. The problem is, rather, that while the inspiration of psychoanalysis is psychosis, its work is tailored to neurosis. This made it idealistic and authoritarian from the start.¹⁰⁷ The problem is not that the Oedipus complex is not real but that psychoanalysis reinforces it without telling us anything about where it comes from.¹⁰⁸ The unconscious is like a factory of disparate ‘machines,’ capable of synthesizing itself in an endless proliferation of libidinal investments. Crucially, these syntheses are anonymous. None of them presupposes the ressentimental solidifications of the ego-formation to which they are said to belong. Only when some objects are coded and overcoded as desirable do desiring, lacking subjects appear: we find out what we want when we also find out that we cannot have it. The point is that semiotics does not mean the tragic loss of any direct contact between consciousness and the bodily drives, but rather, that the displacing representation is a real semiosis – a production, and anti-production, of desire. The ‘paralogism of displacement,’ according to which we ‘conclude directly from psychic repression the nature of the repressed, and from the prohibition the nature of what is prohibited,’¹⁰⁹ is what allows the psychoanalyst-priests to interpret and effectuate the products of desiring-production propositionally, as if our symptoms, dreams, delusions, and so on all belong to the Oedipal theatre of ‘the human’:

The great discovery of psychoanalysis was that of the production of desire, of the production of the unconscious. But once Oedipus entered the picture, the discovery was soon buried beneath the new brand of idealism: a classical theater was substituted for the unconscious as a factory: representation was substituted for the units of production of the unconscious; and an unconscious that was capable of nothing but expressing itself – in myth, tragedy, dreams – was substituted for the productive unconscious.¹¹⁰

In deepening instead of contesting despotic overcoding, psychoanalysis reproduces three illusions concerning desire: it interprets the pleasure principle through lack (castration, life as lack-to-be of the forbidden fruit that

is the mother); it interprets the reality principle as the law (the constant risk of transgressing the incest prohibition, of murdering the rival that is the father); and it interprets desire by displacing it onto the signifier (the interiority of unhappy consciousness, the adult understanding of the child's desire). It is on this threefold basis that libidinal tension is produced, sublimated, and distorted in representation.

If desire is repressed, this is not because it is desire for the mother and for the death of the father; on the contrary, desire becomes that only because it is repressed, it takes on that mask only under the reign of the repression that models the mask for it and plasters it on its face.¹¹¹

We learn to say no to the unconscious, which gets framed as the enemy that needs to be diminished, exorcised, and destroyed. What remains is a single, general perspective, together with a set of categories and presuppositions, in which desires are reduced to recognizable and manageable interests and resentiments in accordance with the dominant model of subjectivation: the triangular family – the enclosure of the unconscious in isolation from the social field as cornerstone and last bastion of stability in a world of capitalist disruptions.¹¹²

The function of schizoanalysis is not to attack resentment under the pretense of being its critical friend – the priest already takes care of that – but to attack bad conscience – its superior organization. It is to burst all the traditional masks; that is, to accelerate the capitalist decoding in order to ‘abolish the family,’ as Engels and Marx had already demanded well over a century earlier. The problem is not that capitalism, understood as the synthesis of the deterritorialization of the flow of labor and the deterritorialization of the flow of capital, is a form of schizophrenia inasmuch as it breaks down the mediating schemas of representation between subject and world. In fact, in this regard, capitalism is precisely what fails to produce resentment and even has the capacity to dissolve it. The problem is, rather, that while capital does not need religious faith in order to function, it triggers the compensatory demand for a new kind of piety. It cannot do without our subjective investment – ‘belief.’ The pathological character of anarchic capitalism is that it is ‘continually reterritorializing with one hand what it was deterritorializing with the other’¹¹³ such that ‘the age of bad conscience is also the age of pure cynicism.’¹¹⁴ As another synthesis of two flows – one of money and one of speech – psychoanalysis produces a reterritorialization in the form of a new regime of signification. It generates lack in abundance and produces ignorance in a wealth of knowledge so that we are always ready to submit to servile compromises with the institutions of bourgeois life.¹¹⁵ The result is narcissistic ‘stupidity’:¹¹⁶ the total destruction

of the ability to imagine other modes of life – those not based on exploitation and extraction in the name of ‘freedom.’

Yet, beyond the state and the ego, or the corporation and the manager-genius, our becomings resemble those of a wave or a swarm more than an atom or a collection of atoms. That is to say, most of what comes to pass in our lives is transindividual rather than individual. It is here that Deleuze and Guattari modify Nietzsche’s still very individualistic image of spiritual sovereignty. As they never cease to emphasize, the modern world is packed with impersonal (non-romantic) individuations and pre-individual (non-classical) singularities, flows, and breaks. Only the forces of repression need determinate selves on which to exercise their power. The police and the psychoanalyst hated the fluidity of May ’68, where new modes of living occurred like schools of fish in water.

This is no different today. It explains why Girard has so many disciples among Silicon Valley venture capitalists. Peter Thiel celebrates the digital encoding of a mimetic ‘going viral’ at the basis of marketing, which privatizes and disinhibits desire through lack as an objective function of market production. But he also sees the founding role of conflict everywhere, making governance a matter of determining the correct mixture of violence and peace. Homo economicus must be saved from the apocalyptic moment of the present – the trend of globalized terrorism due to the ‘desacralized’ and ‘unlimited violence of runaway mimesis’ – through a new techno-social *katechon*, a clerical institution inspired by Girardian Catholicism that would be ideally suited to the newly emerging techno-feudalist order.¹¹⁷ Needless to say, this is the precise opposite of Nietzsche’s project of ‘hastening’ the ‘homogenizing of European man’ in order to actively push nihilism over the brink of exhaustion.¹¹⁸ For what if it is not actually the poor and underprivileged who have resentment or even many mimetic desires, even though what they do need is continually taken away from them, but those afraid of losing what they already have?¹¹⁹ Closer to Nietzsche is the rallying cry of *Anti-Oedipus* – the affirmation of the explosive mixture of capitalism *and* schizophrenia. If the Freudian conception of sense could be recoded into the dominant language of the family and the Marxist conception of value could be recoded into the dominant language of the state – the two regimes of coding under which modern resentment abounds – only Nietzsche provides Deleuze and Guattari with a hermeneutics of innocence – a mode of interpretation and evaluation stringent enough to re-activate both Freud and Marx by resisting the established codes and the hermeneutics of suspicion inherent in their bureaucratic tendencies in order to experiment with new modes of living beyond the struggle for self-preservation.¹²⁰

The Art of Diagnosis

In the context of pervasive narratives of illness in which marketing asserts and enforces the psychic failures that it claims to transform and improve, it is not difficult to see the psychological impasse at work in the power-effects of contemporary discourses on resentment (or the negative emotions more generally). First, they are inspired by the shift in focus in empirical psychology and the neurosciences from inherently socio-political affects and structures toward the emotions of private individuals. The problem of inequality is no longer a social problem but a narcissistic wound (lack). Second, this shift comes at the price of its subsequent sociological moralization: the resentment of individuals both threatens the public order and is a constituent part of it (the law). Within the general framework of a philosophical anthropology, this depoliticization may even pretend to be the completion of the critical project begun by Immanuel Kant but now drawing on all sorts of sociological, economical, and biological sources while denying, if asked, its own psychologizing function and priestly descent. The social scientist offers the tools for deciphering and representing our dreams, judging our desires, and mediating our conflicts (signification) but without giving a plausible account of their own standpoint and without giving us the means to overcome our pitiful situation. The political problem is that knowing that our subjectivity is determined by resentment is by no means sufficient to overcome it. At best, we take offense at our own powerlessness; at worst, we feel guilty. Either way, we become patients, which means that we are locked in a passive relation to ourselves. In this regard, the stupidity of neoliberal psychopolitics is not that different from the common sense of the mid-nineteenth-century bourgeois world criticized by Marx for its contradictory combination of melancholy and shame – of narrow-minded realism and the unfulfillable desire for a wider grasp of the world.

In Deleuze's definition, stupidity is the confusion of a problem with its solution, or of the singular with the ordinary. As long as resentment remains a readymade problem, we remain stupid. We remain 'slaves so long as we do not control the problems themselves, so long as we do not possess a right to the problems, to a participation in and management (*gestion*) of the problems.'¹²¹ We remain slaves because we are not yet thinking; because nothing plausibly forces us to think. This is also Nietzsche's point. If philosophy is a flirtation with madness – the becoming-chaos of life – most psychologists are not interested in exceptions¹²² and can only bear an indifferent minimum of truth.¹²³ Their compassion with the suffering of those who are different embitters the psychologists, leading them to criminalize the abnormal and to prefer 'normal' people as their escape from and cure for what their science tells them; namely, that the higher, stranger types must be castrated.¹²⁴ In the same way, the pastoral critique of resentment

betrays an inversion of Nietzsche's original genealogical difference between high and low, such that reactive forces must limit active forces and control them through the labor of the negative. The hermeneuts of resentment are those who have much to gain from it and who are eager to provide it with a meaning or even a justification. At the same time, they regress into a moral psychology in which the emancipatory motives and modern sense of justice can only appear as the incensed expression of a supposedly universal egoism that ought to be kept in check by the powers of the state.

If there nonetheless persists a need for the concept of resentment, this is precisely because of the struggle with those who base their authority and their conception of justice on it. The delicate but rigorous art of the philosopher is not only to diagnose and evaluate our present becomings by differentiating between high and low but also to keep them apart 'to all eternity.'¹²⁵ For us, this means that the problem of genealogy is the necessity of distinguishing between high and low applications of the concept of resentment, independent from established values and historical distributions between rich and poor, capitalist and proletarian, elite and mass, man and woman, white and black, and so on. 'We cannot use the state of a system of forces as it in fact is, or the result of the struggle between forces, in order to decide which are active and which are reactive.'¹²⁶ High and low are not empirical values but refer to a difference in the conditions with which their evaluation takes place. After all, if difference is at the origin, the origin itself already includes the inverted image of its own genealogy¹²⁷; for example, the caricaturized form of cultural evolution, whether dialectical or utilitarian, or indeed most of the past 150 years of theorizing of resentment. This is why, even when we are dealing with a single fact, the philosopher and the priest do not historicize it in the same way. Rather, they each perceive the version of resentment that is worthy of their point of view. The difference between philosophy and psychology, as Nietzsche already announces in the preface to the *Genealogy*, is therefore transcendental or 'a priori.'¹²⁸ It is a critical difference – a difference of imagination – that is hard to discern within the fact of resentment, since it is also constitutive of this fact. Or better still: it is made in the fact itself, such that, strictly speaking, we do not even speak of the same fact at all. 'To have resentment or not to have resentment – there is no greater difference, beyond psychology, beyond history, beyond metaphysics. It is the true difference or transcendental typology – the genealogical and hierarchical difference.'¹²⁹ This difference can only be discovered when we 'eventalize'¹³⁰ the fact of resentment and analyze the concept as a multiplicity of becomings, or put differently, when, instead of asking what it is, we ask who claims its truth and on the basis of what affinity of passions.

The scientific and clinical model of Nietzsche's physio-typological approach is provided by chemistry rather than psychology.¹³¹ In chemistry, one does not have a direct knowledge of the processes of mutation;

knowledge is gained only through manipulations and operations. Whereas psychology tends to aim at containment of the passions; the issue of their vital training and selection raises a very different question: What acts as catalyst and what as dissolvent? We cannot afford to repress or ignore certain affects; we can only compensate and recombine. Passions are always impure mixtures of high and low tendencies. The noble is constantly translated and reduced by the servile, and the servile is continuously reversed and transmuted by the noble. But, whatever the factual mixtures, the fact that the two types do not communicate in the same way effectively proves that they continue to differ in principle. They are different vectors of feeling; while the one is a vector of negation, the other is one of affirmation.

If, in addition to the noble and the slave, we also need to distinguish the types of the philosopher and the priest, this is because only the philosopher has an interest in their differentiation; that is, in the art of typology. The very artificiality or formal character of the types is precisely what enables them to distinguish the deep distances in the ground on which the passions become empirically visible and truths are produced. Types are not portraits we might want to compare with the original.¹³² It is not the individual case that matters but collective practices; the phenomenon is not you, you are the type. If totalitarianism is a regime of slaves, for example, this is not because the people are repressed but because of the type of ruler: a tyrant institutionalizes cowardice, cruelty, baseness, and stupidity, but he is also the first servant of his own system and the first to be installed within it.¹³³ This originality of types and their originary contrasts must be reconstructed every time the passions are interpreted and evaluated; it is the very condition of their philosophical enunciation. Only on the basis of a distinct type can we diagnose the sense of a mixture: when does resentment become a problem (at the beginning of history or at its end), in what form does it come about (frustrated revenge or envy), and in what order (as a consequence or as principle of justice)? The aim of these questions is to open up the asynchronous becomings of modernity and return them to the battlefield of diverging interpretations and opposing possibilities.

Whereas psychology is inextricably interwoven with morality, chemistry provides the model for ethics. *Morality* deals with justice and what is right, which are founded on the basic paralogism of the good as something that you can desire and that you can lose (hence the law that creates transgression). Nietzsche tendentiously identifies the concept of morality with slave morality, since it is a resentimental demand that people be perfect or pure. This expectation implies the ideas of transgression, punishment, and reward with which priests separate us from what we can do. Yet, moralizing critique helps no one, since it relies on a negative and external relation to what we hate yet what, to our shame, we are all bound up with.¹³⁴ *Ethics* deals with flourishing and the good. Not intimidated by impurity

or hypocrisy, it asks: Does any given affective state go up or down?¹³⁵ To diagnose is not to produce an empirical truth about an actual state of affairs – a judgment – but rather, as in medical diagnosis, to initiate a process of healing and self-overcoming; in other words, to construct a type or symptomatology and negotiate a new vital relation to it. Inseparable from the differential becomings that insist in the diagnosed, the diagnosis must itself contribute to the invention of new modes of existence. In this ethical sense, philosophers such as Epictetus or Spinoza are already schizoanalysts. They offer a practical art of interpretation that exceeds the conditions that determine empirically given affections and passions. Since becoming is not only polar (active or passive) but also complex (a becoming-active of reactive forces or a becoming-reactive of active forces), an immanent diagnosis must always be both affirmative and speculative. It cannot be content to remain at the level of critical judgment but has to effectively engage with these becomings in a mutual inclusion or co-presence. It must risk an inventive perspective that renders visible our actual passions at the same time as those virtual passions that can be associated with their possible becomings.

Ressentiment, Stiegler writes, ‘is the nihilistic face of a combat that must be led within becoming, with it, but in order to transform it into a future. . . . The larger question is, therefore: what must actually be combated, that is, what must one *do*, after one recognizes the scourge of resentment?’¹³⁶ Like every passion, even resentment possesses a grey zone where it becomes indiscernible from a whole spectrum of contrasting modes of feeling and acting – a whole plane of consistency, as opposed to its individuated existence. Every becoming is at least duplicitous, such that the worst tendency conditions the best (*ariston*), and the other way around. It is in this sense of an emulative belief in the just becoming of injustice – the projected horizon desired by all as opposed to the vulgarization of justice through the law – that a culture with a future is necessarily an aristocracy. We need to fight those contagious forces of decomposition, both in others and within ourselves, that let only the worst prevail. ‘Combat’ (*eris*) is what replaces judgment. It does not consist of the elimination of the other but constitutes the stage for a new thought and practice of composition. Our very diagnosis must come from the virtual consistency of a superior tenor of life, such that resentment becomes that which we cease to embody, not that in which we are locked up. Only by fully surrendering to dramatization – by plunging into the affective undercurrents of a situation – do we become capable of the task of ‘freeing life wherever it is imprisoned, or tempting it into an uncertain combat’ – a task from which the philosopher themselves may well emerge with ‘bloodshot eyes.’¹³⁷

Although it is beyond question that it is bad, not even resentment is outright evil. Only the generous affirmation of this dramatic occasion that is resentment distinguishes between true and false physicians of

civilization. The point is not that the physician must themselves be free of resentment, but rather, that they must re-activate or work through the difference between the noble and servile becomings. Insofar as different becomings insist in resentment, the task is to return them to that drama where one is the intermediary of the other without there being an ego or subject that keeps a grip on them. Their hierarchy is precisely the genealogical difference that eternally returns in whatever exists at a certain moment and never ceases to select the noble from the resentimental; its eternal return is the very test of their becoming. The only hammer with which the philosopher can crush the 're-' of resentment and reintegrate the feeling with the wider activity of the world.

Priests and psychologists, by contrast, are unable to repeat the original genealogical difference. Instead of affirming active forces, they possess only the representation of those forces: their credentials. They suffice with the derivation of the sense of resentment from its empirical appearance alone. While the priests are psychologically correct about the explosion of envy and ambition in bourgeois and consumer societies, the real interest of their diagnosis lies in a defense of established values. It produces no new physiological difference and merely identifies and consolidates already differentiated facts. What Sloterdijk says of Scheler, 'every small neurosis becomes an anthropological constant with him,'¹³⁸ equally applies to Girard's apocalyptic renewal of Christianity out of the spirit of mimetic anthropology.¹³⁹ Yet ironically, Sloterdijk's 'thymotic' alternative to the pastoral critique of excessive desire is not that different. While ostentatiously enacting a break away from the one-sided eroticization of our primal drives, it approximates Fukuyama's deadpan conclusion that, since 'isothymia,' the passion for equality, is always simultaneously driven by the 'megalothymic' ambition to be recognized as superior to others, the modern thymotic economy is doomed and inequality remains destiny.¹⁴⁰ All we get in this endless repetition of gambits is an exclusively negative representation of our resentment as original sin with no active differentiation between noble and base becomings. Worse still, the egalitarian conceptions of eros and thymos rule out the very possibility of such a difference. It is therefore not the philosopher but only the priest who is obsessed with this sociological law.¹⁴¹ Whereas the person of resentment says, 'if I can't have what you have, then you can't have it either, everything must be the same!' the priest, arriving late on the scene, merely insists: 'admit it, in the end we all want the same.'

From a genealogical perspective, the priest's diagnosis of resentment is neither plausible nor interesting, precisely because its truth obliterates the difference in its origin and prevents a change of facts.¹⁴² Like the positivist historian, the priest is the passive inheritor of forms from the past

who remains blind to the real forces that produced these forms and that will continue to develop them in the future. Scheler never asks: How do we become what we are?, let alone: How is it that we already no longer are what we became? As Nietzsche says, since they do not command the future, psychologists want to abbreviate time itself and thus bear down on the past.¹⁴³ Yet, in this way, they repeat the ressentimental devaluation of time.¹⁴⁴ Content with having identified the truth of ressentiment's existence, their hubris is to betray the consistency of its becomings by replacing it with the law – their own – of its mediation and repression. Incapable of seeing difference at the origin, priests do not believe in any positive future for ressentiment. They merely invest in the perpetuation of the actual fact as legitimation of their own image of justice.¹⁴⁵ Lacking any real sense of cultural elevation, however, this can only be a reverse image – the least imaginative or speculative one. It relies entirely on established values and existing categories of recognition and stays methodologically blind to the principle difference between high and low, which is now brought back to a historical difference between principle and fact – a recipe for inconsistency and hypocrisy.¹⁴⁶ As a consequence, priests fail to acquire the diagnostician's right to wield the concept of ressentiment at the same time that they deplete its critical power of problematization in shameful compromises with the present and condemn those to whom it applies into guilty subsistence.

Is this not precisely how we are lulled into our anthropological slumber?¹⁴⁷ What philosophical anthropology has called the 'non-fixity' of the human animal (Nietzsche) or the human's 'openness to the world' (Scheler) practically tends to be interpreted in terms of a lack of natural instincts necessitating institutional discipline and control. In the discourse on ressentiment, we face a veritable metaphysics of poverty, in which the empirical condition of lack becomes a transcendental norm for its own abolition. The only problems we can handle are those of scarcity within the confines of the law, not those of justice. At the end of a process of enlightenment stand those without illusions, who 'think and act on the damaging assumption that entropy always wins.'¹⁴⁸ Still oscillating between the positions of the philosopher and the priest, the early Sloterdijk points out that this stiffening of anthropology into vulgarity suits the self-satisfied, semi-depressive mediocrity of last man. But it is also what we, following Heidegger and Foucault, must denounce as 'base' or 'gloomy' anthropologies that erase the indetermination of the future under the weight of the present. This raises the question of a 'noble' or 'creative anthropology' (or what Stiegler calls a neganthropology) that neither solidifies the human nor leaves it in the open but situates it in a series that exceeds it. Such an anthropology, in its very mode of address, must turn the anthropogenetic point of

view against the 'lack of faith' (*Kleingläubigkeit*) and 'lack of generosity' implicit in the belief that the current version of homo sapiens is the final destination of evolution.¹⁴⁹

For resentment to be made interesting again for a future philosophical anthropology, writing about it must itself become a life-experiment rather than life's interpretation.¹⁵⁰ It is, then, not an authoritative stance and it does not have an end in itself or even a meaning of its own. Rather, it is an art of combinations. Every multiplicity is open to more than one director. Dramatization is the art of making differences that matter – a way of conceiving difference differentially. An active genealogy speculates on the plasticity of those it addresses under the guidance of the eternal return as the ultimate principle of training and selection. In this way, it affirms its own distance from the positions of the priest and the person of resentment while it reclaims the concept of resentment. The philosopher enters into a polemical rivalry where what is at stake is who can see furthest; who can stretch their perspective to comprehend not more facts but other perspectives, until finally, the other is no longer rejected but affirmed as the other within the self. It is precisely through the combat with the priest that the philosopher disentangles resentment from its internalized form of crime and punishment. It then appears as a transitional and shareable imperfection within the horizon of its overcoming.¹⁵¹

Yet how to distinguish noble and base when the eye of the genealogist is on the brink of exhaustion? What resource for bifurcation do we have left after two millennia of volitional depletion in a culture based on revenge, therapy, and redemption? For Deleuze, the inherited passion of the modern philosopher is shame – 'the shame of being human' – which includes that of being tainted by resentment and bad conscience. In the case of resentment, we could say that only the philosopher's shame about stupidity (both that of the priest in general, and that of the inner priest who 'lives intensely within the thinker and forces him to think'¹⁵² by pushing for shame's internalization as guilt) – the shame about the priest's lack of shame – constitutes the polemical pathos that entitles it to rediscover in the human the project of a future.¹⁵³ We may therefore conclude with Deleuze and Guattari that, while the priest is the heteronym of Nietzsche, Nietzsche is only the pseudonym of the priest. The priest is a necessary co-pilot¹⁵⁴ in the flight of the concept surveying the plane of its immanent becoming, but he does not explain the becoming of Nietzschean philosophy. Whereas the priest consumes the concept of resentment as a psychological ready-made (discerning resentment everywhere) and reverses its critical sense (passing a moral judgment by identifying it with envy and developing it into bad conscience), he lacks the pathos that was necessary to invent the concept in the first place. While the philosopher offers the belief, orientation, or sense for combatting resentment, the priest merely possesses its

truth and, in this way, continues morality, even in the criticism of morality itself. Just as philosophy is folded over a sensual analogy – the drama of the body in its distinct yet obscure becomings – the priest is its clear but confused abjection – the betrayal of the body’s potential of becoming-other, or indeed, of the very justice and consistency of its passions. If the person of resentment is the anti-philosophical moralist, the priest is the very embodiment of the risk of the moralization of philosophy itself.

Can Resentment Be Overcome?

Having dramatized the rivalry between the two physicians of culture, the philosopher and the priest, the question remains what it means to heal resentment. At first sight, such healing seems impossible. As a second-order affect, resentment is less an affect than a specific mode of producing affects. Primary emotions such as anger, envy, guilt, or shame are affective capacities distinct from their exercise. I may not always feel ashamed, but this does not imply that I never do. Their enactment generally depends on an external event, such as a slight or a humiliation. Resentment, by contrast, is an internal accelerator of emotions. The affective life of the persons of resentment is fundamentally reactive and explosive: they cannot choose not to react. Wherever resentment can be produced, it is produced. Here, affect and mode of production are the same.¹⁵⁵

Consequently, Nietzsche does not actually seem to believe in resentment’s overcoming. There is something irreparable, irremediable, irreversible about it, unlike alienation to be overcome. The persons of resentment are the ‘weak and incurable sick people’¹⁵⁶ for whom humiliation is their fate and virtue. The only means for the sick to ‘heal’ from resentment is to avoid any reaction, any emotional distraction. The person of resentment should never attempt to fight their condition or judge and punish those they hold responsible for it because ‘any sort of reaction wears you out too quickly’ and ‘nothing burns you up more quickly than the affects of resentment.’¹⁵⁷ Thus, instead of reacting, the only plausible remedy that we have encountered so far is that of Christ, who, unlike the Christian priest, demonstrated how the reactive life can die peacefully.

More generally speaking, the solution offered by Christ is no different from ‘that physiologist Buddha,’ who practiced a ‘hygiene’ of which the ‘effectiveness . . . depends on conquering resentment.’¹⁵⁸ Both Buddhism and Christianity are confronted with ‘an excessively acute sensitivity,’ not just with suffering but also with depression about suffering, which they reject.¹⁵⁹ Yet, whereas the Christian priest fights fire with fire, Buddhism is a praxis that springs from a higher type of life – that of saints. The priest relies on ‘the ascetic ideal utilized to produce an excess of feelings’ – in particular, fault or sin but also pity and nausea as clever but secret narcotics for, and

an imaginary victory over, resentment.¹⁶⁰ The problem is that these redirections of the will do not really empower the people of resentment but merely socialize them.¹⁶¹ For Nietzsche, this psychological exploitation of pessimism is itself a ‘guilty’ kind of medication, since every explosion of feeling makes itself physiologically paid for afterwards.¹⁶² The saint, by contrast, is ascetic in turning against suffering, not against sin:

Buddhism is a religion for mature people, for kindly, gentle races that have become excessively spiritual and are too sensitive to pain . . . Christianity wants to rule over beasts of prey; its method is to make them sick . . . Buddhism is a religion for the end and exhaustion of civilization, while Christianity has not even managed to locate civilization yet – it might lay the foundation for it, though.¹⁶³

Nietzsche finds a contemporary version of Buddhism in ‘*Russian fatalism*, the fatalism without revolt that you find when a military campaign becomes too difficult and the Russian soldier finally lies down in the snow.’¹⁶⁴ What unites these examples is that they do not involve a priest but entail a personal practice of abstaining from stimuli that could cause resentment. Even the ‘Indian priest’ is a harmless physician in this regard, as they interpellate in their subjects what is still strong and innocent instead of what is weak and guilty, while not pretending to be able to heal them in any way.¹⁶⁵ Throughout his work, Nietzsche thus contrasts Buddhism with Judeo-Christianity. If Christianity seeks to save the nihilistic will by deepening its condition, ‘Nirvanism’ practices an entirely passive nihilism. Natural, mild, ‘positivistic,’ it seeks to eliminate desire – the will to be different – but it does not blame, burden, or even pretend to heal it in any way.

Since all doctors who are interested in healing resentment are, by definition, suspect, is it misguided to ask whether it can be healed at all? What about those nobles who are exponents of the decadence of their age? Indeed, what about Nietzsche’s own resentment? Was Nietzsche not himself a deeply hysterical figure who polemicized and self-eulogized in the most megalomaniac fashion when restraint would have been the better course?

Recent Nietzsche scholarship suggests agonistics as a life-affirming measure and model of healing. Nietzsche’s early classical studies had yielded a distinction between two types of rivalry. One is based on an entropic envy, reaching back to an age of cruelty and returning in the mimetic deindividuation of modern democracies; the other is based on the public contest (*agon*, *Wettkampf*) between competing values, ideas, and ways of life that allowed the strongest and most creative to individuate in cultural diversity, leading to an appreciation of art and religion over knowledge. It is this second kind of rivalry that, before, we have called combat. Less historically

bound variations of this kind of dynamic and relational composition can be found in gift-giving, potlach, certain forms of market competition, and various forms of play. Unlike dialectics, agonal relations are all-inclusive. They allow for a wild circulation of affects in which there is no black and white – just an ongoing composition and decomposition of a conflict in which each party can be right but in a mutually empowering way. Crucially, the ritual and game-like character of agonistics allow us to take lightly ‘the heaviest weight’¹⁶⁶ – the eternal return of all that is reactive. It involves the constant reenactment of reactions that otherwise end up repressed. Having its being in difference and repetition, agonal play combats historical resistances to forgetting while it repeats the forgotten, not as memory but as act, without the need to do so consciously. Everything – stupidity, cowardice, even negation – then becomes a power of affirmation and acquires a new force of aggression. Various authors have drawn parallels with psychoanalysis in this regard. An ‘agonal transference of vengeful, destructive impulses’ occurs, which ‘releases energy for an open-ended contestation of sickness that would empower us to master it.’¹⁶⁷ Thus, instead of a proliferation of internalized aggression, health is connected to struggle in externalized deeds of agonally limited but self-affirmative aggression. It is through struggle without fixed intention or goal that destructive drives such as hatred or revenge could be transferred into rivalry and ambition, which stimulate cultural production.

The agon is, indeed, at the heart of Nietzsche’s philosophical practice, insofar as polemical discourse is the repeatable medium through which thought acquires the spiritual amplitude of the separation between two positions as its intrinsic validation. Nietzsche conceived of the agon not only as a stage for excelling individuals but for psychosocial individuation. It is not limited to the typical form of intersubjectivity among nobles but also at work within himself, where hierarchy or perspectival difference must be enacted intra-subjectively, in relation to one’s empirical self. In fact, the very concept of self-healing is based on it. Yet, isn’t the very notion of overcoming resentment at odds with the assumption that ‘any sort of reaction’ is doomed to worsen it? Here, it must be remembered that types or masks are not facts. While purity distinguishes the types, the facts are always duplicitous, although in an asymmetrical way: noble and base are not the same difference; from health to sickness and from sickness to health, the disjunction is unequal within itself. As analyzed by Freud in his early topographical model, there is a base or neurotic way of being sick, insofar as conscious suffering is a means for deepening unconscious enjoyment. What, by contrast, could a noble way of being implicated in one’s sickness look like?¹⁶⁸

In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche reflected extensively on his deep affinity with resentment as well as his ability to act as his own doctor.¹⁶⁹ What makes him ‘so

wise,' in contradistinction to both the persons of resentment and the priests, is his refusal to assume his resentment as his own. Or rather, he assumes resentment as part of his past, but only insofar as it is already part of the material of an instinct that is capable of transfiguring it through conquest.

Freedom from resentment, lucidity [*Aufklärung*] about resentment – who knows how much I ultimately have to thank my long sickness for these as well! The problem is not exactly a simple one: you need to have experienced it out of strength and out of weakness. . . . Resentment should be what is forbidden most rigorously for people who are sick – it is their great evil: and unfortunately their most natural tendency as well. . . . Born from weakness, resentment is most harmful to the weak themselves, – wherever a rich nature is presupposed, an *overflowing* feeling, a feeling of maintaining control over resentment, is almost the proof of richness. Anyone who knows how seriously my philosophy has taken up the fight against lingering and vengeful feelings, right up into the doctrine of 'free will' – the fight against Christianity is just one instance of this – anyone aware of this will understand why I am calling attention to my own behavior, my *sureness of instinct* in practice. When I was a decadent I prohibited these feelings as being harmful to me; as soon as my life became rich and proud enough again, I prohibited these feelings as being beneath me.¹⁷⁰

A key to understanding this agonal repositing of the problem of whether resentment can be healed is that strength and weakness are not opposite psychosomatic states but contrasting viewpoints. Difference is also communication and resonance between heterogeneities. Like the poles of a battery, it is only when they are connected that a field of tension appears, as well as the movement that traverses it. Since suffering is an intrinsic part of health, what appears to one as fixed turns out as divergent ways of being in good health to the other. Whereas the sick can only contemplate being healthy but not actually become healthy, the healthy do not stand between health and sickness but move between them, such that resentment is experienced both out of sickness and out of health.

What, then, is the 'sureness of instinct' that enables Nietzsche to 'prohibit' resentment and eventually grow out of it? It consists of the practice of switching perspectives:

To be able to look out from the optic of sickness towards *healthier* concepts and values, and again the other way around, to look down from the fullness and self-assurance of the *rich* life into the secret work of the instinct of decadence – that was my longest training, my genuine experience, if I became the master of anything, it was this. I have a hand for switching perspectives: the first reason why a 'revaluation of values' is even possible, perhaps for me alone.¹⁷¹

The aim of perspectival reversal is to therapeutically treat and neutralize resentment without internalizing it. Instead of finding one's own perspective on illness, it consists of discovering illness as another perspective – as a mask of oneself. Health is one mask; suffering, another mask; but both are masks for health. Nietzsche looks back on himself as a 'double' who constantly puts up different masks, including those of his former heroes and friends. Life means playing at the risk of being had. Madness is when the mask rigidifies, when it stops communicating with other virtual masks, but health is when the mask bursts.¹⁷² Moving between entropy and negentropy, it is through this inner agon that the subtle relations of power and evaluation between different 'selves' is composed. We learn not only to evaluate healthy modes of living from the perspective of the sick but also to distance ourselves from our illnesses from the fuller perspective of health. Between the two points of view, there is an empathy but no commensurability, and indeed, no pity. A true change of perspectives is already a becoming – a recomposition of forces according to a vital mode of evaluation. While the schizophrenic movement from health to illness or from illness to health appears to be double, in reality, it is a single movement. As a single instinct that has become second nature, it is the sign of a virtual health superior to every passing affective state (Nietzsche's 'great health'¹⁷³). Health, after all, is never a static state but a convalescence: a *Genesung*, both healing and genesis.¹⁷⁴

The de-purification of health and sickness serves to the ethical naturalization of morality, so that health becomes an interpretation of sickness and sickness a transvaluation of health. Their ethical difference is the dynamic processes of becoming-strong and becoming-weak that tend toward imperceptible reversals. Only for those who lack this perspectivist instinct, by contrast, is healing impossible. In resentment, life turns against itself according to the logic of sameness and negativity. Weakness, then, comes to dominate and nihilism becomes the principle of adaptation. This is also how the priest sees things: sickness as an enemy. Health, or a 'sound constitution' (*Wohlgerathenheit*), by contrast, presupposes variation and difference. By countering negative efforts to merely wishing that one were different, which amounts to preserving sameness against all obstacles over time, affirmative healing means that one becomes capable of active differentiation, of opening up a hierarchical distance within oneself. Illness then becomes a 'relief' for health. It is not an opposing death force but the 'generative and curative' force of life itself which, going too far in one direction, pulls away from death and 'overflows' itself in a kind of chronic renewal of energy. Different forms of health must therefore relieve each other or be relieved by illness.¹⁷⁵

On the basis of this agonal model, could the philosopher be the therapist not only of their own life but also of that of others? This would entail seeking out the strength of others in a field of co-individuation of which the

internal agon was ever only one aspect. Just as alcoholics cannot overcome their condition by themselves, the philosopher could, perhaps, act as the true friend of the strong who interrupts the conversation between ‘I and me’ in the solitary individual and, by setting their own ethical example, generate in those who are currently afflicted with resentment the desire to overcome themselves. As Deleuze says, while priests need the sadness of their patients (negation of the negation), joy is the sole finality of philosophy (affirmation of affirmation).¹⁷⁶ There is a joy in the conquest of illness that has nothing to do with self-satisfaction but that allows each ‘individual to grasp itself as event’ or ‘effect’; that is, as the impersonal drama through which they leave their character behind and become the ‘theme’ of the becomings that overflow them.¹⁷⁷ The event, then, has the form of a battle where, in principle, every self is allowed to collapse under its ‘best’.¹⁷⁸ What force has taken hold of us and threatens to crack us up? And what pasts does it set free and what futures does it open up?

Such is the joy of *amor fati*, which renders the *fait accompli* unaccomplished by re-willing it innumerable times. Zarathustra teaches the will to transform the ‘it was’ into ‘thus I willed it’ but also into: ‘I shall will it thus!’¹⁷⁹ This willing backward is neither to want anything to be different nor to cease willing at all but to no longer take things personally. Since the will is not originary but resultant – not an individual but a wave – there is not even anything voluntaristic about it. In teaching the will how to redeem itself and become a bringer of joy, what is at stake is a recomposition – a reassociation or reshuffling of the impersonal and the personal. Even our complaints acquire a new function when, instead of emphasizing how terrible the non-willed life is, we turn them into the question ‘why me?’¹⁸⁰ In wanting the past’s eternal recurrence, I acknowledge that nothing is self-sufficient and that everything can be my doctor. There is nothing to retrieve from this past, just something to select: in forgetting myself in my present willing, I rediscover a virtual memory outside my own limits. I re-will myself and my pain, not as necessary outcome of the past but as fortuitous moment, thereby opening up to the integral return of possibilities. Here, there is no space left for narcissism, unless it is transvalued as ‘hetero-narcissism.’¹⁸¹ *L’effet c’est moi*: this does not only mean that consciousness is an aftereffect of an unconscious physiological affirmation of power. It means that I am you rather than that you are (a paranoid projection of) me.¹⁸² I make myself available to the world; my strength emerges as the effect of an engagement with otherness and is manifested in the world as hierarchy and command.

As the phrasing ‘healthier concepts and values’ suggests, it is through this future-oriented training in the ability to switch perspectives by means of repetition that Nietzsche lays claim to a noble lineage, and in the same move, to the status of philosophical therapist.¹⁸³ When taken together, Buddhism

and philosophy are therefore Nietzsche's two medical prescriptions for the problem of ressentiment. Although united in their distance from the Judeo-Christian priest, they differ in terms of their relation to nihilism. Instead of the priest's conservation of decadence (and their obsessive fear of being contaminated), and instead of the saint's quiet undergoing of illness, only the philosopher actively calls out in nihilism what could grow out of it. What Nietzsche variously calls taste, rank, right, health – they all concern this will, its 'sureness of instinct in practice,' the pathos of distance.

Can Bad Conscience Be Overcome?

Yet how does this pathos entitle the philosopher to the role of physician of culture at large? It entails that we must not conceive of civilization only as a collective, statistical entity, like a species, but as a threshold phenomenon temporarily blotting out differences. As Klossowski has emphasized, what Nietzsche is after is not a deindividuated humanity at large but its novel individuations; not society but 'sovereign formations (*Herrschaftsgebilde*).'¹⁸⁴ The liberals, like so many moderns, are part of an enormous experiment, but they are like foxes who return to the cage after having broken out of it. Their concept of freedom lacks (physiological) necessity: 'The entire West has lost those instincts out of which institutions grow, out of which the future grows. . . . One lives for today, one lives very fast – one lives very irresponsibly: it is precisely this which one calls "freedom".'¹⁸⁵ We must therefore recover a more 'authentic spontaneity' from 'the ideological disavowal of constraints.'¹⁸⁶ How to become a mediator between past and future again? The true sense of justice and custom, for Nietzsche, lies exclusively in this development of a noble disposition out of decadence. It originates in the pleasure of acting (blond beasts) and it culminates in a different pleasure of acting (sovereign individuals). Society, by contrast, appears only as the transactional means that disappears in its end. But as such, everything depends on how it is organized and how much freedom its mnemotechnics afford. Here, too, genuine (trans-)individuation seems to require enhancement of difference over and against moral programs that idealize equality and indifference in order to maintain systems of both psychic and social equilibrium.

Insofar as hatred is the main passional resource of the moderns, albeit unknowingly, the agonal model for transvaluation might seem particularly suited for their therapy, as it means that nobody will be asked to give up the reactive affects that already constitute them. Some even see it as a contemporary alternative to the pathos of distance, as the latter would entail a regression from democracy to the division between aristocracy and enslavement, whereas agonism could also be a way of training the reactive attitudes within the constraints of contemporary democratic cultures

as a kind of soft power opening spaces for cultivating that ‘other, more mysterious form of pathos’ (the magnanimity [*megalopsychia*] of sovereign individuals, the spiritual capacity to take in differences and affirm them as critical test for oneself¹⁸⁷) that generates meaning and tradition. Yet as soon as we leave the scale of the personal behind, all the problems of the resentment-ressentiment conundrum return. Insofar as the ineradicability of the other must be recognized and, at the same time, appeased, the agonal distinction between good and bad *eris* comes with all the usual moral impasses: what is a proportionate riposte and what is excessive? Are we dealing with authentic struggles or are they just a pretext for regressive violence? Is there such a thing as good or just revenge?

Agonistic politics is always stuck in a paradox between violence and reason, conflict and harmony, otherness and sameness, historicity and futurity, and of course, resentment and resentment. Although it is deemed an alternative to foundational or procedural schemes, we are compelled to play by the rules of the agon if it is not to degenerate into a ‘struggle unto annihilation’ (*Vernichtungskampf*).¹⁸⁸ The very alternative implies a highly stylized form of contestation that belongs to the fragile condition of a relatively egalitarian historical community. While it can be reproduced on the scale of a therapeutic session, nothing indicates that it has an equivalent at the global scale of nihilism –this ‘growing desert’¹⁸⁹ in which the affects of cynicism, realism and mistrust, tend to annul, through their own mass, every conceivable counter-tendency.¹⁹⁰ It is true that the Ancient Greek agon reappeared as a model of socio-political composition in eighteenth-century civil society, insofar as taste is part of a drama of intersubjective mediation in which judgments acquire their validity and apodicticity by competition and limited mutual disqualification. Yet, it is blatantly at odds with the sharpened socio-economic contradictions and liquidation of the super-ego in the (post-) industrial age, with the serious risk of just covering them up. Worse, what attracts the liberal mind to agonism is also its weakness, especially as its proponents mostly ignore the main conditioning obstacles, which they either imagine to have already overcome or cannot come to terms with: the post-historical hegemony of priests and their avatars, who act as the false (destructive) friends of the weak and annul any agonist sensibility, as well as the cruel, archaic layer of anthropogenetic repetition and the despotic overcodings that precede any culture of agonism.

Insofar as it enters into a struggle with pastoral power, genealogical polemics is, at the same time, an exceptional or extreme case of agonism and more fundamental than it. The agon consists of a playful rivalry among you and me – friends who respect each other according to the shared rules of the polis. It is a productive form for the organization of hatred and a circuit for value production and change, in which the demands of enhancement and measure guarantee an open pluralism; in it, individual agency is not just

defined through the subject-position of the antagonists but from a medial position in the competitive relations between them. 'Polemos,' by contrast, refers to the war between us and them – the polis and the barbarians. It becomes a key concept only in Nietzsche's struggle with the cultural formation of bad conscience and its Oedipal legacy, precisely because the latter marks the deepest point of negation. As Nietzsche writes, when it comes to the confusion of the priest and the philosopher, he 'cannot take jokes.'¹⁹¹

This categorical rejection pertains especially to Saint Paul, who, in Nietzsche's eyes, remains Saul, as a persecutor of God. That is, far from taking Christ as a model to emulate, he carries out a (self-)destructive rebellion.¹⁹² Hostile to contest itself, he does not distinguish friend from foe. Redemption is paid for with the price of hell for all and the elimination of any possibility of meaningful struggle, measure, or friendship. In fact, for Nietzsche, Paul singularly personifies the figure of the tyrannical priest who reigns through sin (the transformation of the death of Christ from an individual gift into a collective debt/guilt) combined with the undying hatred of a reactive life (the resurrection as interest and reinvestment that renders debt/guilt infinite), initiating a long and non-inflationary revenge campaign that will have to pass through all the stages of nihilism. On the one hand, it is because of his incomparable significance in the history of nihilism that Nietzsche finds in Paul his worthy adversary and the measure of his animosity, yet on the other hand, this symmetry articulates in an absolute mutual exclusion. Just as there are the millennia before and after Paul, there is a before and after Nietzsche.¹⁹³ Every time he describes himself and his discoveries and books as events, Nietzsche seeks to make himself the inheritor of the broken lineage of past eruptions of nobility that Paul's enormous shadow had blotted out.¹⁹⁴ This does not mean that Nietzsche despises or resents priests but that there can be no continuity between them – no mediation that could attenuate their polemic. There is no reciprocal pattern of provocation and restraint between geniuses – no congenial community of taste in which varying and conflicting positions continue to mediate one another for the best.

Still, the key to Nietzsche's sense of polemics is that it is not driven by priest's idea of a power of the negative that manifests itself in opposition and contradiction – in splitting and tearing apart. Rather, it demands that we reconceive of the future of humanity as 'a test of whether it is possible to supersede resentment as the foremost historical force. . . . History splits into the time of the economy of debt and the time of generosity.'¹⁹⁵ The ultimate test case for a noble anthropology and, perhaps, for the possibility of rediscovering some kind of agonistic practice beyond modern psychopower is whether we can redouble the global grammar of bad conscience. Is it possible not to resent it? If bad conscience is the highest degree of resentment, then what is the highest degree of bad conscience?

Nietzsche initially broaches bad conscience in relation to the conceptual persona of the priest and the image of thought based on the will to power, understood from the vantage point of nihilism.¹⁹⁶ But he also raises the question whether it can become a medium for something else. On the one hand, there is ‘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.’¹⁹⁷ Yet, according to genealogy’s aversion to unwanted identification, modern science too is ‘still pious’¹⁹⁸ in this regard. Just as Christianity is a religion that unmasks itself, the prohibition of all convictions or metaphysical beliefs is ‘not the opposite of the ascetic ideal but rather the latest and most refined form of it.’¹⁹⁹ In his writings on culture, Freud, for example, eventually secularizes and normalizes the guilty conscience due to the antagonism between desire and social life. Slave psychology and slave morality do not disappear when contingent forms of social and political oppression disappear but necessarily belong to the substance of social life itself.²⁰⁰

Nietzsche (or Marx for that matter), on the other hand, would never write of generic ‘discontent’ or sublimated frustration, since, for him, neurosis is the object of relentless critique. He asks us to conceive of bad conscience as an ‘illness’ rather like pregnancy.²⁰¹ Instead of denouncing humans for having interpreted – with some priestly help – their own suffering as a desirable state of penance for some kind of original sin, he states that it is here that they become interesting, ‘more questionable, *worthier* of asking questions; perhaps also *worthier* – of living?’²⁰² However, it is not ‘this closed system of will, goal and interpretation,’²⁰³ the millennia of conscience vivisection and ascetic self-torment – of which we moderns are the inheritors – that is interesting, but rather, its exceptions or exaggerations: the contingent but extreme case of the active self-destruction of reactive man – that ‘midday-midnight’ in the long history of nihilism that connects bad conscience to the emergence of new, innocent forms of life – even if this emergence can only appear to modern psychologists as a monstrosity. Whereas Christianity and modern psychology must be seen as attacks on contingency, remaining ‘too close to themselves,’ Nietzsche advocates nothing less than what Stiegler describes as a ‘rational theory of the miracle.’²⁰⁴ The ‘psychologist’ or ‘philosopher of the future’ is the one who keeps this secret gift of possibility – the secret of irresponsibility:

To have to rediscover this ‘innocence’ everywhere – that is, perhaps, the most revolting task among the somewhat dubious tasks a psychologist today has to perform; it is part of *our* great danger, – it is a path that, perhaps, leads *us*, too, to the great nausea.²⁰⁵

As long as we rigorously uphold Nietzsche's distinction between a thing's practical function and its historical significance, it is always possible that this thing can be put to an innocent use again. What makes the philosopher socially criminal in the eye of the priest is this reverse asceticism, in which the ascetic ideal is no longer a self-renunciation with universal pretensions but a practice of transformation.²⁰⁶ What new health, what good conscience can grow out of all our counternatural tendencies? Nietzsche grounds the sovereignty of philosophy in three ascetic virtues – poverty, humility, chastity – but emphasizes that their use is no longer one of bitter survival but an expression of self-consciousness about the militant will to experiment with one's own body as much as with culture at large. One must learn, through a protracted pedagogy, 'to possess the right to affirm oneself'²⁰⁷ (as effect of culture) and, one should add, to dissolve what one is into what one becomes (a new sovereign formation). What was a psychological paradox made perfect physiological sense as a mode of stabilizing life.²⁰⁸ But disequilibrium was only ever a problem of the head or of society, not of the body. As Spinoza says, 'nobody as yet has learned from experience what the body can and cannot do.'²⁰⁹ This is not because of some shortcoming in our knowledge but because of the unknowable nature of the body. Physiology is not some kind of biological materialism. It is the perspective of active and plastic forces that seek to break out of servitude to the body politic. It comes with a new, depersonalized mode of health ('great health'²¹⁰), an intelligence of the nervous system superior to language ('great reason'²¹¹), and a responsibility for future cultural cohesion ('great politics'²¹²).

To experiment (*versuchen*) is to tempt life – to leave the morosity and false modesty of irony behind by redoubling it with a new humor – a Dionysian pessimism that suffers from an abundance of creativity as well as an appetite for destruction.²¹³ It involves an approach to life as a means for knowledge and to knowledge as a stimulant of life.²¹⁴ Perhaps, here, physiological experimentation and agonal writing converge. Since there is no ontology of life apart from social norms and the organization of power, their object is ultimately nothing less than the ensemble of reiterations through which anthropogenesis occurs in all its senseless cruelty, while their aim is to wrench from it a new 'responsibility' and 'freedom of will.'²¹⁵ To do philosophy in the form of genealogy is 'to empathize with those tremendous eras of "morality of custom" which precede "world history" as the *actual and decisive eras of history which determined the character of mankind*.'²¹⁶ We can contrast this philosophical a priori²¹⁷ with the idiotic forgetting of automation – the mnemotechnic of the 'like-button' of today's so-called social media. It is precisely on the grounds of a pedagogy of the longest retentions and protentions that Nietzsche seeks to conceive of new

circuits of psychic and collective individuation. He is not an elegiac romantic longing for past hierarchies and retrograde economic conditions. As the ‘wheel of the world,’²¹⁸ repetition is both the stumbling block on the path of becoming and the an-archic element that generates it. There is nothing to return to and nothing to liberate. While lasting habits make us numb, there is nothing worse than a life without habits. What genealogy identifies is not the repression of specific contents but the misrecognition of historical sediment unconsciously pressing down upon everyday awareness – what constitutes repression. It recuperates not what is forgotten but the act of forgetting itself.²¹⁹ If human existence is ‘merely an uninterrupted living in the past (*Gewesensein*),’²²⁰ philosophy works in service of a whole epoch but against normality, nature, and resentment. To know our habits is to raise them to the level of the event, not as an object, but as assemblages we partake of. They have an open future not unlike the relative schizophrenia of ‘short habits’²²¹ or customs (*Sitten*) that short-circuit the ancient morality (*Sittlichkeit*) of conscience, promise, exchange, and debt. While we cannot be free from it, the past is never complete, even though temporal diffusion and complacency in contemporary society make it seem so. All philosophy asks, as Deleuze and Guattari write, is ‘a little bit of a *relation to the outside*, a little real reality.’²²²

In sum, the priest asks how, writing under the functionalist conditions of an industrializing society, Nietzsche’s ‘noble’ concerns could refer to more than the figment of resentment. Does living a modern life not necessarily mean that one wills one’s own slavery as its implication and unavowed product, regardless of what class, race, or gender one belongs to? Yet, the priest is just one artist of bad conscience, and the real question is whether there could be others. Nietzsche frequently points to the affinity of the artist with the criminal as an irretrievable force virtually superior to the order that excludes it. Cruelty and mass servitude are the objects of bourgeois guilt – its injustice. But Nietzsche also raises a new question: What can still be created from the accomplishments of our knowledge, practices, and customs? In the face of everyone’s servitude, the ‘why?’ question is no longer just that of the decadent pessimist craving meaning but of the experimenter and ‘free spirit.’ If the priest is the artist of the soul, who will become the artist of the economy and its technologies? If our sovereign is not the capitalist who is enslaved by the satisfaction of their own gregarious needs, then who or what is capable of producing a difference in the present? Who are the real masters of composition? To whom do we grant the right to legitimate and redeem our suffering beyond all sense of punishment? Could bad conscience be the cultural formation that lets itself be bound by these innocent forces that extricate themselves from the impasse of psychology?

This is not the place for exploring the open-ended nature of these questions, which allow for wildly divergent answers varying from anarchism and Marxism to fascism and rightwing libertarianism.²²³ But, in terms of our polemic between the philosopher and the despot-priest, the answer is clear. Nietzsche teaches us that we should not fight our destiny, but rather, those who claim it on our behalf. Or, as Deleuze and Guattari put it: 'You *must* produce the unconscious. Produce it, or be happy with your symptoms, your ego, and your psychoanalyst.'²²⁴ It is only through this activist repositing of the problem that resentment can be reclaimed for a critical, polemical, and decidedly non-empirical psychology that disconnects it from the paranoid problem of bad conscience and returns it to the schizophrenia of the body. The political alternative does not lie in the choice between revolutionary hatred or counterrevolutionary remorse. Far from being a matter of moral psychologizing, the real problem of resentment is that of explaining and overcoming the subjective identification with impotence as a prison we choose to live in. Here, resentment is no longer an irrational pathology that we must somehow be made conscious of. It would be a mistake to think that we can become fully 'known to ourselves' or even that this is Nietzsche's aim. If consciousness is our poorest organ, as Nietzsche says, this is because its root is common utility, not individual existence. The question is, rather, whether it can be turned into the object of a pathos of experimentation and assemblage at the wider level of culture. Just as one can only become oneself if one remains a stranger to oneself, to see far and to think 'lengthy things'²²⁵ is to become further from oneself. It is precisely knowing that is reinvented here as the premeditation of an action that no longer wants to come to pass as intellection or doctrine but as event 'that brings thought back to its own origin,'²²⁶ which is action, not reaction. The philosophical answer to the priest is to focus on the health-promoting, revolutionary character of desire without letting oneself be dragged down by the reactionary reflexes of its subjective encapsulation. In fact, it is only with this focus in mind that a genealogical approach to our subjectivation becomes indispensable and that the interest in the passions need not necessarily facilitate moral self-gratification but could also provide the practical conditions for a politics of liberation.

Notes

- 1 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I §10. Cf. Spinoza's definition of contempt as 'the imagining of some thing that makes so little impact on the mind that the presence of the thing motivates the mind to think of what is not in the thing rather than of what is in the thing.' *Ethics* III Definitions of the Emotions, 312; EIII52S.
- 2 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §20.
- 3 Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, Why I am so wise §§8, 7.
- 4 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II §17.

- 5 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II §14.
- 6 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I §6, III §20.
- 7 Nietzsche, *Twilight*, Skirmishes §7.
- 8 Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, Why I write such good books, 'Genealogy.'
- 9 Eva Illouz situates the appearance of 'the therapeutical emotional style' in 1909, the year Freud went to the US to give the Clark lectures. Eva Illouz, *Cold Intimacies: The Making of Emotional Capitalism* (London: Polity Press, 2007), 5–15.
- 10 Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 111.
- 11 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §15.
- 12 Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, Why I am destiny §5.
- 13 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §§11, I 6.
- 14 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §10; *Gay Science*, §346.
- 15 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §16. On affect and emotion, *Gay Science*, §370.
- 16 Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, §1.
- 17 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §14; *Twilight*, Skirmishes §36. This is a telling inversion of Kierkegaard's and Sartre's (exaggerated) complaint that, among the passive, not even suicide is an act. As Nietzsche argues, among the men of resentment even 'normal death' is an 'unnatural suicide.' *Ibid.*
- 18 Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, Preface; *Zarathustra*, Of Redemption.
- 19 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §14; Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Nietzsche contra Wagner: From the Files of a Psychologist', in: Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman (eds.), Judith Norman (trans.), *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols: And Other Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 263–82, The psychologist has a word §1; *Anti-Christ*, §3.
- 20 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I §6; *Daybreak*, §52.
- 21 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II §17, III §§14–16, 28. By contrast, Nietzsche opens *The Gay Science* with a report on healing as a passage made possible by the radical affirmation of the consequences of decadence, which include the nausea and contempt of psychological knowledge of the human. It is only under the pressure of illness that he passes from tragedy to parody and philosophy itself is this art of transfiguration. *Gay Science*, Preface §§1–2.
- 22 Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 34; see also Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II §16. On interpretosis, see Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 114, 117.
- 23 Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, Why I write such good books, 'Birth of Tragedy', §3; *Untimely Meditations*, III §3.
- 24 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §23.
- 25 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §§270, 278.
- 26 Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, Why I write such good books §5; *Human, All Too Human*, §3.
- 27 The task of the philologist is to 'retranslate' the language of priests into the 'language of reality (*ins Wirkliche übersetzt*)' ('The Case of Wagner', §3), that is, 'into a physiological language.' *Genealogy*, III §17.
- 28 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §23.
- 29 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §19, 26; *Gay Science*, §§345, 373.
- 30 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §§294, 6.
- 31 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §204.
- 32 Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, Preface §§1–3.
- 33 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §213.
- 34 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I §3.

- 35 Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, §88. 'It is characteristic of such an unphilosophical race that it adheres rigidly to Christianity: it needs Christianity's discipline in order to become "moralized" and more humanized.' Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §252.
- 36 Mishra, *Age of Anger*, 20–1, 29.
- 37 Scheler, *Ressentiment*, 51. Harold Bloom, *Agon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1982), 35; Thomas E. Schmidt, 'Dialektik der Aufklärung. Zu einer Grundschrift des kulturkritischen Ressentiments', *Merkur* 665–6 (2004), 745–53; see also: Norbert Bolz, 'Lust der Negation. Die Geburt der Kritischen Theorie aus dem Geist des Ressentiments,' *ibid.*, 754–61.
- 38 Paul Dumouchel, 'Foreword', in: Tomelleri, *Ressentiment*, xv–xxvi, xxv.
- 39 Girard, 'Dionysus versus the Crucified', in: Tommelleri, *Ressentiment*, xiii–xiv.
- 40 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §270.
- 41 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, Preface §1. As Sloterdijk warns: 'Anybody who embarks on investigations of this kind should be wary of the suggestive pathos of his questions. Their foundations are shaky, and nobody knew this better than the author of *The Gay Science*. He was not only the master of suspicion of fake noble coats of arms; he suspected the suspicion itself and confirmed that it derived in turn from obscure parentage.' Peter Sloterdijk, *The Art of Philosophy: Wisdom as a Practice*, trans. Karen Margolis (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 39.
- 42 Their resentment, Girard suggests, would be 'intense enough to generate more and more intellectual nihilism but not intense enough so far to annihilate real being.' Girard, 'Dionysus versus the Crucified', 826. In addition, Girard thought of himself in a direct rivalry with Heidegger over the interpretation of the death of God, but at the same time, complained how he felt unheard.
- 43 Peter Sloterdijk, *The Critique of Cynical Reason*, trans. Michael Eldred (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 18.
- 44 Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, 132.
- 45 Nietzsche distinguishes taste from opinion. *Gay Science*, §38. Doxa offers a 'grotesque image of culture,' since it only allows for the same differences, 'where everyone is called upon to choose according to his or her taste, on condition that this taste coincides with that of everyone else.' Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 158. Taste, by contrast, concerns the co-adaptation of the concept, the plane of immanence, and the conceptual persona. Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, 77, 81.
- 46 James I. Porter, 'Nietzsche's Genealogy as Performative Critique', in: Karin de Boer and Ruth Sonderegger (eds.), *Conceptions of Critique in Modern and Contemporary Philosophy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 119–38, 126. See also Nietzsche on 'the power to utilize the past for life and to reshape past events into history once more,' *Untimely Meditations*, II §1.
- 47 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, Preface.
- 48 'It is obvious that Nietzsche's hypothetical model of stratification (strong versus weak) is hopelessly naive from the vantage point of sociology. Yet it is an experimental, not a sociological model, not for society but for power effects.' Martin Saar, *Genealogie als Kritik: Geschichte und Theorie des Subjekts nach Nietzsche und Foucault* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2007), 118.
- 49 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, Preface §4.
- 50 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §§204–5.
- 51 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I §§2, 4–5, 10; cf. *Gay Science*, §58.
- 52 Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, I §11.
- 53 Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, §381.

- 54 Friedrich Nietzsche, 'On Truth and Lie in an Extramoral Sense', in: Walter Kaufmann (trans.), *The Portable Nietzsche* (New York: Viking Press, 1976), 42–6, 46.
- 55 Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, I §11. Style does not presuppose the unity of a subject; rather, there is a style corresponding with each inner state (and each conceptual persona). Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, Why I write such excellent books §4.
- 56 Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 154.
- 57 Nietzsche, *Anti-Christ*, §61.
- 58 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §247.
- 59 Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, §328. 'The only illusion is that of unmasking something or someone' (Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 106), since in reality all we have is the differential play of masks (repetition).
- 60 'Governing point of view: to open up distances, but not to create oppositions. To dissolve the intermediate forms and diminish their influence: chief means to maintain distances.' Friedrich Nietzsche, *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, ed. Rüdiger Bittner, trans. Kate Sturge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 186.
- 61 Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, Why I am so wise §1. On the training of the philosophical eye, see *Genealogy*, III §12; *Beyond Good and Evil*, §210, 213.
- 62 Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, §§11, 290.
- 63 Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* §1; *Gay Science*, §§55, 228, 373; Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, Preface §3.
- 64 Nietzsche, *Anti-Christ*, §1.
- 65 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §265.
- 66 Žižek, *Violence*, 76.
- 67 Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 1. Following Nietzsche's own division of tasks between the philologue and the physician (*Anti-Christ*, 47), Deleuze defines Nietzsche's pre-Socratic understanding of the philosopher as legislator as consisting of the double task of interpretation and evaluation: 'The interpreter is the physiologist or doctor, the one who sees phenomena as symptoms and speaks through aphorisms. The evaluator is the artist who considers and creates "perspectives" and speaks through poetry. The philosopher of the future is both artist and doctor – in one word, legislator.' Deleuze, *Pure Immanence*, 66.
- 68 Nietzsche, *Anti-Christ*, §15; Deleuze and Parnet, *Dialogues*, 86.
- 69 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 143.
- 70 Theodor W. Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 174.
- 71 Deleuze and Parnet, *Dialogues*, 46–7; Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 114.
- 72 Nietzsche, *Anti-Christ*, §§26–7.
- 73 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I §6.
- 74 Nietzsche, *Anti-Christ*, §34.
- 75 Nietzsche, *Anti-Christ*, §§37–8.
- 76 Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 87, 93–4.
- 77 Deleuze and Parnet, *Dialogues*, 88.
- 78 Michel Foucault, 'Philosophy and Psychology', in: *Essential Works*, vol. 2 *Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology*, 249–59, 250.
- 79 Foucault, 'Philosophy and Psychology', 255.
- 80 Foucault, 'Philosophy and Psychology', 259.

- 81 Michel Foucault, 'The Subject and Power', in: James D. Faubion (ed.), *Power. Essential Works of Foucault: 1954–1984* (New York: The New Press, 2000), 326.
- 82 Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977–1978*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2007), 154.
- 83 Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 192.
- 84 Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 89, 227–31.
- 85 Michel Foucault, "‘*Omnis et singulatim*’: Towards a Critique of Political Reason', in: *Essential Works*, vol. 3 *Power*, 298–325, 307; Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 191–226.
- 86 Foucault, 'Subject and Power', 307.
- 87 Wendy Grace, 'Foucault and the Freudians', in: Christopher Falzon, Timothy O'Leary and Jana Sawicki (eds.), *A Companion to Foucault* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2013), 226–42, 230.
- 88 Deleuze, *Desert Islands*, 220, 274.
- 89 Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 204–8.
- 90 Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France 1981–1982*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), 17–19, 26, 190–1.
- 91 Michel Foucault, *History of Madness*, trans. Jonathan Murphy and Jean Khalfa (London and New York: Routledge), 77. As Edward F. McGushin, from whom I borrow the analogy between biopolitics and the Great Confinement, has argued, religion itself becomes a moralizing force, such that the modern desacralization of poverty and instrumentalization of charity is inseparable from the imperative to work. Edward F. McGushin, *Foucault's Askesis: An Introduction to the Philosophical Life* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 228–37.
- 92 Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 81.
- 93 Jan de Vos, *Psychologisering in tijden van globalisering: Een kritische analyse van psychologie en psychologisering* (Leuven: Acco, 2011), 186–7.
- 94 Illouz, *Cold Intimacies*, 13, 78.
- 95 Illouz, *Cold Intimacies*, 19, 163.
- 96 De Vos, *Psychologisering*, 46, 149.
- 97 Michel Foucault, *Foucault Live: Collected Interviews, 1961–1984*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer, trans. Lysa Hochrot and John Johnston (New York: Semiotext(e), 1996), 451.
- 98 Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 265. While De Vos consistently contrasts psychoanalysis as spiritual practice with medical psychology, Deleuze explains the paradoxical popularity of psychoanalysis after May '68 by situating it squarely in terms of the process of psychologization, precisely because its popularity lies outside the traditional institutions and even outside the family, where '[n]eurosis has acquired its most frightening power, that of propagation by contagion: "I will not let go of you until you have joined me in this condition."' Deleuze and Parnet, *Dialogues*, 83. He identifies three mechanisms of (mimetic) contagion of 'psychoanalytic power': the recruitment of 'patients,' which no longer works by familial filiation but by alliance (friends telling you that 'you ought to try it yourself!'), the juridical transition from a contractual relationship to statutory fixity between analyst and analysand (while the psychiatrist deals only with the clear cases of 'madness,' the analyst deals with a whole psychopathology of everyday life,

- from those who appear to be mad but are not exactly mad to those who are mad but do not immediately appear to be so), and the transition from signified to signifier (psychoanalysts are like marketeers, such that the consultation room offers a better understanding of Oedipus than our parents' bedroom). *Ibid.*, 82–7.
- 99 Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E.F.N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1974), §40. Adorno criticizes the psychoanalytical exorcism of the unhappy consciousness in the 'prescribed happiness' or 'champagne jollity' of the 'regular guy, the popular girl' that became hegemonic in postwar America, because the focus on adjustment rather than conflict came 'at the cost of the profoundest mutilation, of internalized castration.' *Ibid.*, §§36, 38. See also Shannon Mariotti, 'Damaged Life as Exuberant Vitality in America: Adorno, Alienation, and the Psychic Economy', *Telos* 149 (2009), 169–90; Nan-Nan Lee, 'Sublimated or Castrated Psychoanalysis? Adorno's Critique of the Revisionist Psychoanalysis: An Introduction to 'The Revisionist Psychoanalysis'', *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 40.3 (2014), 309–38.
- 100 Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, §37.
- 101 Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, §§39, 147.
- 102 Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, §36.
- 103 Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, §29.
- 104 Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 112, 332.
- 105 Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 80.
- 106 Deleuze, *Desert Islands*, 220.
- 107 'The psychoanalyst-aspriest, the pious psychoanalyst who is forever chanting the incurable insufficiency of being: don't you see that Oedipus saves us from Oedipus, it is our agony but also our ecstasy, depending on whether we live it neurotically or live its structure; it is the mother of the holy faith.' Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 108. As a consequence of this making all of life pass through the Oedipal grid, a straight line runs from the priest to the culture industry: 'The psychoanalyst has become like the journalist: he creates the event.' Deleuze and Parnet, *Dialogues*, 87.
- 108 The nuclear family is the product of a historical-materialist semiotics. Psychoanalysis did not invent Oedipus but merely 'adds a last burst of energy to the displacement of the entire unconscious.' Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 121. Deleuze sees the Nietzschean critique of psychology converge with Marx's critique of liberal economics: we cannot tell from the mere taste of wheat who grew it (the product gives no hint as to the system and relations of production). 'The same thing happens in psychoanalysis as Marx saw happening in economics: Adam Smith and Ricardo discovered the essence of wealth in productive labor but constantly forced it back into representations of ownership. It's the way it projects desire back onto the domestic stage that accounts for the failure of psychoanalysis to understand psychosis.' Deleuze, *Negotiations*, 16. Cf. '[P]sychology repeats in the case of properties (*Eigenschaften*) what was done to property (*Eigentum*).' Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, §39.
- 109 Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 114.
- 110 Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 24.
- 111 Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 116.
- 112 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 154–5.
- 113 Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 259.
- 114 Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 247, 222. 'Capitalism institutes or restores all sorts of residual and artificial, imaginary, or symbolic territorialities,

- thereby attempting, as best it can, to recode, to rechannel persons who have been defined in terms of abstract quantities. Everything returns or recurs: States, nations, families. That is what makes the ideology of capitalism “a motley painting of everything that has ever been believed.” Ibid., 34.
- 115 For example, capital enforces a regime of ‘anti-production’ on the creativity of scientists and artists, ‘as though they risked unleashing flows that would be dangerous for capitalist production and charged with a revolutionary potential, so long as these flows are not co-opted or absorbed by the laws of the market.’ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 245. Capital doubles the flows of cultural production with a ‘flow of *stupidity* that effects an absorption and a realization, and that ensures the integration of groups and individuals into the system.’ Ibid., 236.
- 116 Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 216.
- 117 Peter Thiel, ‘The Straussian Moment’, 2007, <https://gwern.net/docs/politics/2007-thiel.pdf>; ‘Peter Thiel Explains How an Esoteric Book Shaped His Worldview’, *Business Insider*, 10 November 2014, www.businessinsider.com/peter-thiel-on-rene-girards-influence-2014-11?IR=T
- 118 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968), §898; Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 239–40.
- 119 ‘It is no use saying: We are not green plants; we have long since been unable to synthesize chlorophyll, so it’s necessary to eat. . . . Desire then becomes this abject fear of lacking something. But it should be noted that this is not a phrase uttered by the poor or the dispossessed. On the contrary, such people know that they are close to grass, almost akin to it, and that desire “needs” very few things – not those leftovers that chance to come their way, but the very things that are continually taken from them – and that what is missing is not things a subject feels the lack of somewhere deep down inside himself, but rather the objectivity of man, the objective being of man, for whom to desire is to produce, to produce within the realm of the real.’ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 27.
- 120 Deleuze, *Desert Islands*, 135–8, 252–5. On Nietzsche as ‘the great decoder of the Western world,’ see also Henri Lefebvre, *Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, or, the Realm of Shadows*, trans. David Fernbach (London and New York: Verso, 2020), 133.
- 121 Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 158.
- 122 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §269.
- 123 Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, Preface §3.
- 124 Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, §202.
- 125 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §14.
- 126 Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 58. Genealogy, as Deleuze emphasizes, means both the origin of value and the value of the origin: ‘The difference *in* the origin does not appear *at* the origin – except perhaps to a particularly practiced eye, the eye which sees from afar, the eye of the far-sighted, the eye of the genealogist.’ Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 5.
- 127 Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 51, 56.
- 128 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, Preface §3, III §17.
- 129 Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 33.
- 130 Foucault, ‘Questions of Method’, in: *Essential Works*, vol. 3 *Power*, 223–38, 226–9.
- 131 Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, I §1. In chemistry, the laboratory is not a place for demonstrating knowledge but for the transformation of materials.

- What comes in is different from what comes out. Chemistry is therefore an art that involves physical and mental activity. Like cookery, it involves practical recipes stabilized through long processes of trial and error. Just as handbooks do not explain phenomena but make sense of them using stories, models or types show what is possible rather than what is real. Moreover, chemistry has no single scale for reflection. There are no ultimate particles or constituent elements from which all properties and behaviors can be deduced. Rather, bodies are agencies rather than constituent elements; relations prevail over substance. Bernadette Bensaude-Vincent, 'The Chemists' Style of Thinking', *Berichte zur Wissenschaftsgeschichte* 32.3 (2009), 365–78.
- 132 Stengers, *Cosmopolitics I*, 7.
- 133 Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, x; *Difference and Repetition*, 151.
- 134 For Stiegler, the tragic or dialectic spirit, like the priest, condemns resentment as a fault (*faute*), whereas it the philosophical task is to reinterpret it as only a flaw (*défaut*) or imperfection (the best as relativization and dynamization of perfection). Bernard Stiegler, *The Decadence of Industrial Democracies: Disbelief and Discredit*, trans. Daniel Ross and Suzanne Arnold (Cambridge and Malden: Polity Press, 2011), 55, 58.
- 135 Nietzsche, *Twilight*, Skirmishes §33. And: 'A mode of existence is good or bad, noble or vulgar, complete or empty, independently of Good and Evil or any transcendent value: there are never any criteria other than the tenor of existence, the intensification of life.' Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, 74.
- 136 Stiegler, *Decadence*, 55, 59. The essence of aristocratic culture, Stiegler writes, lies in a dedication to, or cult of, difference in the interior of the same. Stiegler, *The Decadence*, 84.
- 137 Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, 171, 41; Deleuze, *Negotiations*, Epigraph.
- 138 Peter Sloterdijk, *Zeilen und Tage: Notizen 2008–2011* (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2012), 108–9.
- 139 Sloterdijk, 'Erwachen im Reich der Eifersucht', 250–2.
- 140 For Sloterdijk, the 'egalitarian effect' of modern democracies is the principle of 'differentiated indifference' due to which any striving for recognition of the masses blocks itself and terminates in contempt (no culture of authenticity can disguise that, in practice, equal regard is not high regard). Sloterdijk, *Die Verachtung der Massen*, 87–8. For Fukuyama, 'modern liberal democracies promise and large deliver a minimal degree of equal respect, embodied in individual rights, the rule of law, and the franchise. What this does not guarantee is that people in a democracy will be equally respected in practice. . . . Isothymia will therefore continue to drive demands for equal recognition, which are unlikely to ever be completely fulfilled. The other big problem is megalothymia. . . . Megalothymia thrives on exceptionality' (Francis Fukuyama, *Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018), xiii–xiv) such that 'the desire for equal recognition can easily slide over into a demand for recognition of the group's superiority. . . . A further problem with isothymia is that certain human activities will inevitably entail greater respect than others. . . . Recognition of everyone's equal worth means a failure to recognize the worth of people who are actually superior in some sense.' *Ibid.*, 22–3.
- 141 See also Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, §428.

- 142 Christoph Narholz makes a similar point on (the lack of) ‘interest’ as transcendental criterion with respect to Weber’s reading of Nietzsche and resentment in his essays on the sociology of religion. Narholz, *Die Politik des Schönen*, 22.
- 143 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §§211–12; *Twilight*, Skirmishes §43.
- 144 In contrasting Heidegger’s ontological reading of Nietzsche’s understanding of resentment to Scheler’s psychologization, we could say that the ground of resentment is not envy but rancor against the past that withholds itself, perhaps still enhanced by the modern reduction of time to transitory progress and of authentic presence to the present. Ira Sugarman, *Rancor Against Time: The Phenomenology of “Resentment”* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1980).
- 145 Tyranny and tragedy, according to Stiegler, are the two forms in which consistency is reduced to existence. Bernard Stiegler, *Uncontrollable Societies of Disaffected Individuals: Disbelief and Discredit*, trans. Daniel Ross (Cambridge and Malden: Polity Press, 2013), 35. Following Deleuze (and Gilbert Simondon), Stiegler understands the plane of consistency as the schematism of the transcendental imagination, producing an image of a real drama that remains unrepresentable and without analogy yet accompanies every actualization in the imagination. *Ibid.*, 77.
- 146 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, §§17–18.
- 147 ‘The anthropological configuration of modern philosophy consists in doubling over dogmatism, in dividing it into two different levels each lending support to and limiting the other: the pre-critical analysis of what man is in his essence becomes the analytic of everything that can, in general, be presented to man’s experience.’ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 372.
- 148 Sloterdijk, *Selected Exaggerations*, 68.
- 149 Sloterdijk, *Selected Exaggerations*, 104. ‘Anthropology is the science of the descending of man into the just human (*Nurmenschlichkeit*) – [I]t is from the outset determined to become human, all too human itself.’ Peter Sloterdijk, *Weltfremdheit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1993), 38. Inspired by Eugen Rosenstock-Huussy’s account of the binding and energizing capacities of Apostolic and prophetic speech, Sloterdijk wants to relieve (*freisprechen*) anthropological language: ‘Anthropologists should augment their capacity to describe humans to the extent that they can speak of heroic and prophetic subjects without occupying the perspective of the manservant (*Kammerdiener*) or the republican. . . . Without a philosophy that perceives of the human at its height – or its over-tension – we remain condemned to be just the onlookers of humanity, and this means to be anthropologists in the contemptible sense that Heidegger has given to this word. . . . Anthropogenesis has always been an event, in which the eminent speakers prompt their co-humans with models of being human – exemplary stories of ancestors, heroes, saints, artists. I call this demiurgic power of language the promise (*Versprechen*). Humans must be promised their humanity before they test on themselves what they can become.’ Sloterdijk, *Weltfremdheit*, 28–9.
- 150 ‘Writing carries out the conjunction, the transmutation of fluxes, through which life escapes from the resentment of persons, societies and reigns.’ Deleuze and Parnet, *Dialogues*, 50 (translation modified), 119–20.

- 151 Needless to say, Girardians will always remoralize this ethical concept of imperfection. 'Our affective life takes shape from our natural condition of incompleteness, of unavoidable lack.' Tomelleri, *Ressentiment*, 154. While the danger of affirmationism is often thought to be that it proceeds in the name of some esoteric power of life at the expense of any substantial means of critical assessment, in reality, the purpose of the inclusion of the priest in the dialectic of resentment is therefore to relentlessly criticize and overcome the priest's medical shortsightedness, which Rancière denounces as the 'virtues of governmental empiricism.' Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*, 8–9.
- 152 Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, 70.
- 153 'We do not feel ourselves outside of time but continue to undergo shameful compromises with it.' Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, 108. As Deleuze and Guattari demonstrate in their book on Kafka, interpreting this shame in terms of guilt would be shameful in itself, as it implies the confusion of victim and executioner. Whereas guilt presupposes the law, shame emerges from the immanence of desire, which should no longer be conceived (and disfigured) as opposed to the law or unachievable justice. It is not desire against the law, because 'where one believed there was the law, there is in fact desire and desire alone. Justice is desire and not law. . . . If everything, everyone, is part of justice, if everyone is an auxiliary of justice, from the priest to the little girls, this is not because of the transcendence of the law but because of the immanence of desire.' Gilles Deleuze, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 49–50, 30–3.
- 154 Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, 78.
- 155 Robert Pfaller, *Erwachsenensprache: Über ihr Verschwinden aus Politik und Kultur* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2018), 124.
- 156 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §14.
- 157 Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, Why I Am so wise, §6.
- 158 Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, Why I am so wise, §6; *Daybreak*, §65; *Anti-Christ*, §§20–9, 39–46.
- 159 Nietzsche, *Anti-Christ*, §20.
- 160 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §20; *Anti-Christ*, §§39–40.
- 161 Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, §202; Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II §7.
- 162 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §§21, 19; *Daybreak*, §236.
- 163 Nietzsche, *Anti-Christ*, §22. 'It is not the ascetics or the impotent who say the most poisonous things about the senses, it is the impossible ascetics, those who really *needed* to be ascetics.' *Twilight*, Morality as anti-nature §2.
- 164 Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, Why I am so wise §6.
- 165 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §17. Nietzsche essentially repeats his recommendation from *Daybreak* to approach the sick neither with 'hatred' nor with 'an arrogant show of being merciful, but with the prudence and goodwill of a physician.' *Daybreak*, §§202, 411.
- 166 Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, §341.
- 167 Herman W. Siemens, *Agonal Perspectives on Nietzsche's Philosophy of Critical Transvaluation* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021), 240. And: 'agonal transvaluation enacts a compulsive repetitive contestation of the sickness animating it (resentiment).' *Ibid.*, 20.
- 168 Russell, *Nietzsche and the Clinic*, 31.
- 169 As Klossowski puts it, Nietzsche sought to steal from his suffering brain, taking pride in the absence of traces of suffering or depression to be found in his

- writings even though the valetudinary states were so present in their coming about. Klossowski, *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, 12–42, 58.
- 170 Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, ‘Why I am so wise §6.
- 171 Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, Why I am so wise §1.
- 172 Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, Preface.
- 173 Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, §382.
- 174 Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, I Preface §§3–5. For a detailed reconstruction of this process of healing, see also Sarah Mann-O’Donnell, ‘From Hypochondria to Convalescence: Health as Chronic Critique in Nietzsche, Deleuze and Guattari’, *Deleuze Studies* 4.2 (2010), 161–82.
- 175 Kofman, *Nietzsche and Metaphor*, 52–3.
- 176 Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 188–90.
- 177 ‘Either ethics makes no sense at all, or this is what it means and has nothing else to say: not to be unworthy of what happens to us. To grasp whatever happens as unjust and unwarranted (it is always someone else’s fault) is, on the contrary, what renders our sores repugnant – veritable *ressentiment*, *ressentiment* of the event.’ Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester and Charles Stivale (London and New York: Continuum, 1990), 149. On the theme as ‘constituted by the components of the event, that is, by the communicating singularities effectively liberated from the limits of individuals and persons,’ *ibid.*, 150, 178–9. And: ‘There is a dignity of the event that has always been inseparable from philosophy as *amor fati*. Philosophy’s sole aim is to become worthy of the event.’ Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, 160.
- 178 Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, §28; *Beyond Good and Evil*, §262.
- 179 Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, On Redemption.
- 180 Deleuze illustrates his ethics of the event by distinguishing the complaint of the prophet or the artistic genius (‘why me?’) from that of the priest (‘how terrible life is!’). If, for the latter, the complaint is a moral calculation, for the former it is a mask for the joy about something that overwhelms them; perhaps also an expression of anxiety about the risks involved. Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parinet, *L’Abécédaire de Gilles Deleuze*, dir. Pierre-André Boutang (DVD) (Paris: Editions Montparnasse, 2004), ‘J.’
- 181 Peter Sloterdijk, *Nietzsche Apostle*, trans. Steven Corcoran (New York: Semiotext(e), 2013), 81.
- 182 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §19; Russell, *Nietzsche and the Clinic*, 86.
- 183 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §12.
- 184 Klossowski, *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, 111.
- 185 Nietzsche, *Twilight*, Skirmishes §39.
- 186 Klossowski, *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, 6–7, 39.
- 187 ‘He does not nurse resentment, because it is beneath magnanimous man to remember things against people, especially wrongs; it is more like him to overlook them.’ Aristotle, *Nicomachian Ethics*, IV, iii, 1123b–5a.
- 188 Nietzsche, ‘Homer’s Contest’, 177.
- 189 Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, Introduction §2.
- 190 Whereas in Greece, as Sloterdijk writes, ‘[t]o be in good reputation among competing men creates the thymotic fluidity of a self-confident community’ (*Rage and Time*, 13), Deleuze and Guattari observe that, in capitalism, the society of friends or brothers has been overcome by a ‘catastrophe’ in which ‘weariness’ and ‘mistrust’ have overtaken healthy ‘rivalry.’ Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, 107.
- 191 Nietzsche, *Anti-Christ*, §§8, 8–12; *Genealogy*, III §11.

- 192 Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, §68. 'The aristocratic outlook has been undermined most deeply by the lie of equality of souls. . . . Christianity is a revolt of everything that crawls along the ground directed against that which is *elevated*.' *Anti-Christ*, §43. See also Christa Davis Acampora, *Contesting Nietzsche* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2013), 112–22.
- 193 'If Nietzsche is so violent toward Paul, this is because he is his rival far more than his opponent,' insofar as the former makes use of the same formally universalist themes as the latter: the self-declaration of character, the breaking of History in two, and the new human as the end of slavery. Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 61.
- 194 Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, §§9, 337.
- 195 Sloterdijk, *Nietzsche Apostle*, 59. Just as Nietzsche finds in morality 'a narcotic, so that the present is *lived at the expense of the future*' (*Genealogy*, Preface §6) and seeks relief in writing a fifth 'gospel' (letter to Ernst Schmeitzner, 13 February 1883) and claims the 'right of the evangel' (*Anti-Christ*, §36, 42) based on relentless self-praise as an act of immunization against 'metaphysically coded resentment' (Sloterdijk, *Nietzsche Apostle*, 33), we must learn to escape from the necessity to pay of discursive debts (responsibility) and to withhold credit (criticality) by making an 'improved glad tidings.' *Ibid.*, 33. A 'bestowing virtue' initiates a generous way of being, in which the giver becomes a self-referential sign producing the community that recognizes itself in the gift and the taker on their part is activated by the gift to participate in the capacity of further opening up richer futures, thus raising the gift to the nth power. Sloterdijk therefore sees Nietzsche as 'the first real sponsor,' (*ibid.*, 57) standing 'at the start of a new moral functional chain.' *Ibid.*, 59.
- 196 Deleuze, *What Is Philosophy?*, 83.
- 197 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II §24.
- 198 Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, §§344, 347.
- 199 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §23, 24. This is why the overcoming of Christianity is not a matter of secular grounding of morality. *Beyond Good and Evil*, §186. All forms of knowledge (mythical, dialectical, religious, scientific, . . .) are instances of immunization and incorporation. As a condition of life, historically accumulated knowledge offers protection against the returning specters of the past and an intrusion of nature – precisely those spectral intrusions that genealogy mobilizes to alter and disrupt the present. *Gay Science*, §11.
- 200 For Freud, human restlessness is inevitable, making sublimation through strategies of self-domination a necessary condition of social harmony and morality. But sublimation excludes good conscience and even makes goodness itself fundamentally reactive and negative in character. Donovan Miyasaka therefore follows Nietzsche in arguing for the contingency of bad conscience, claiming that bad conscience is a modality of a more primordial good conscience: 'on Nietzsche's theory of conscience, the moral negation of a desire is possible only in obedience to a more primary self-affirmation: to the will it affirms and maintains in this act of negation.' Donovan Miyasaka, 'Nietzsche Contra Freud on Bad Conscience', *Nietzsche Studien* 39.2 (2010), 434–54, 451. However, Miyasaka's opportunistic suggestion that it is in liberalism that Nietzschean good conscience prevails over bad conscience misses the distinction between the ordinary and the singular. In modern life, the ordinary is bad conscience, whereas the sovereign individual is its exceptional outcome.

- In general, then, Freud is right, even though it is the exceptions – not liberal normality – that count.
- 201 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II §19.
- 202 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §9.
- 203 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §23.
- 204 In attacking strokes of luck (Nietzsche, *Anti-Christ*, §3), Christianity attacks these conditions of the new. *Ibid.*, §5. It attacks the self-preserving instincts of the strong life, as it is against the organization of power (*ibid.*, §6) and its processes of selection. *Ibid.*, §7.
- 205 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §19.
- 206 ‘The ascetic,’ by contrast, ‘treats life as a wrong path that he has to walk along backwards till he reaches the point where he starts; or, like a mistake which can only be set right by action – *ought* to be set right: he *demand*s that we should accompany him, and when he can, he imposes his valuation of existence.’ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §11.
- 207 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II §3; *Beyond Good and Evil*, §188.
- 208 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §§11, 13.
- 209 Spinoza, *Ethics*, III2S 280. ‘Nietzsche did not speak on behalf of a “hygiene” of the body, established by reason. He spoke on behalf of corporeal states as the authentic data that consciousness must conjure away in order to be an individual. . . . The body is a product of chance; it is nothing but the locus where a group of individuated impulses confront each other so as to produce this interval that constitutes a human life, impulses whose sole ambition is to de-individuate themselves.’ Klossowski, *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, 21, 12–42. Or, as Roberto Esposito warns, we should not consider the body as organic metaphor for the state but as a place of disparity and war that foreshadows the Foucauldian theorization of biopolitics. In Nietzsche’s understanding, the body is literally the material of politics and politics the form of the body: ‘Certainly, using a physiological terminology in politics is anything but original. Still, the absolute originality of the Nietzschean text resides in the transferal of the relation between state and body from the classical level of analogy or metaphor, in which the ancient and modern tradition positions it, to that of an effectual reality: no politics exists other than that of bodies, conducted *on* bodies, *through* bodies.’ Roberto Esposito, *Bíos: Biopolitics and Philosophy*, trans. Timothy Campbell (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 84.
- 210 Nietzsche, *Ecco Homo*, Why I write such good books, ‘Zarathustra’ §2.
- 211 Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, I On the Despisers of the Body.
- 212 Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, Why I am destiny §1. Great politics can be understood as the opposite of the small politics of ‘punitive justice,’ *Beyond Good and Evil*, §202.
- 213 Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, §377.
- 214 Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, §§319, 324, 335.
- 215 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §10.
- 216 Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, §18; *Genealogy*, III §9. On custom or habit as something outside us that is the hardest to know and problematize, see *Gay Science*, §§355, 296.
- 217 Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, §57.
- 218 Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, §106.
- 219 Porter, ‘Nietzsche’s Genealogy as Performative Critique’, 123.

- 220 Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, II §1.
- 221 Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, §295.
- 222 Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 334. The immanence of desire means that it is not some cosmic energy repressed by the social system but what directly invests the social field and produces itself, as well as effects of repression, through social production: 'Ascesis has always been the condition of desire, not its disciplining or prohibition.' Deleuze and Parnet, *Dialogues*, 100–1; Gilles Deleuze, *Two Regimes of Madness: Texts and Interviews 1975–1995*, trans. Ames Hodges and Michael Taormina (New York: Semiotext(e), 2006), 126.
- 223 Does Nietzsche's Dionysian pessimism make him the herald of unimpeded industrial development and disruptive innovation, whose jovial self-praise facilitates a staunch clearing of bourgeois conscience and an agonistically enhanced defense of the trickle-down economy? The least, we should say, is that this possibility is not excluded from Klossowski's provocation in his version of the Nietzsche's eternal return (or Sloterdijk's reading of Nietzsche's 'total sponsoring'), which functions like a 'vicious circle' through which the freedom of individuation bursts forth and justifies all slavery. Its role is to exacerbate the tension between the surplus existence of the singular and its gregarious absorption, or the 'erectile power of particular cases' and its castration in the species and its social institutions. Accordingly, the task of Nietzschean philosophy would be to liberate from bad conscience everything that industrialism anticipates it makes possible. The new justice is that of a kind of general economy of gifts and expenditures, in which what exists is justified not by itself but in terms of its power of propagation; that is, the intensive differences it is able to produce in relation to its own intentionality. Klossowski, *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, 117, 127.
- 224 Deleuze, *Two Regimes of Madness*, 81.
- 225 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I §§8, 17, III §11.
- 226 Klossowski, *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, 256.

5 The Witness

Authentic Resentment?

In the polemics of the philosopher and the priest, we have become acquainted with two physicians who identify resentment as civilization's main infectious disease, or discontent. Philosophers estimate it as an incurable condition that one should stay away from; priests build their careers on the pretense of being able to heal it. Perhaps we could say that philosophers naturalize resentment, whereas priests psychologize it. They nonetheless agree in two respects. First, they both emphasize the surreptitious, self-deluding, and self-defeating nature of resentment. Whatever the moral judgments it spawns, they cannot be trusted. For Nietzsche, the critique of resentment lies at the basis of his attack on metaphysics as rooted in Platonism and monotheism, culminating in modern nihilism. For the priest, the task has always been to channel and manage resentment, first of all by psychologizing it as envy. But they both approach resentment through a hermeneutics of suspicion. Second, they agree that resentment, at least in its outward, recriminating form, should not and cannot constitute the basis of justice or of social life. For the Nietzschean philosopher, the only adequate response to resentment is to speculate on its self-exhaustion and self-overcoming (that is, to reclaim innocence), while, for the priest, the answer is to reorganize it in a pacified form (that is, to plead guilty). But for both, unmediated resentment, although an intrinsic part of society, can never sufficiently ground the values we live by.

At first sight, these two therapeutic positions appear to exhaust the ways in which we can talk about and thus relate to resentment – at least, the resentment of others. The problem is, of course, that they exclude what patients themselves have to say about how they interpret and evaluate their condition. Neither Nietzsche nor the priest are much interested in this, since the persons of resentment are a priori disqualified from interpreting their own resentment; the self-reflective experience of resentment and the

existential condition of resentment never fully coincide. What is at stake is the integrity of our relations to our values, which is hard to discern in the hysterical gestures of those who can only exist in the eyes of others and therefore need to draw attention to themselves with constant provocations. As can be learned from Dostoevsky's underground man, not even the admission of one's own resentment is a sign of its overcoming but merely deepens it through a false sense of superiority. It is simply impossible for the persons of resentment to recognize their own base desires, since, as Nietzsche put it, their soul squints and loves to hide. Although they reveal their true essence to the other, they are incapable, in principle, of such revelation to themselves.

But what help is all this condescension to the persons of resentment themselves? They are either informed that their very being is an inescapable tragedy or they are told to submit to the clinical overcoding of their own experience. The result may be the same in both cases: a deep and insurmountable ambivalence. Subjectively, we feel guilt, shame, and paranoia; objectively, most likely still more resentment. Does this mean that no authentic reflection about, let alone emancipation from or empowerment through, resentment is possible? Or again: does resentment, as the philosopher argues, really have no constitutive role to play at all in questions of justice? And does it follow that, as the priest concludes, it is illegitimate even as a lived condition in itself?

We have already seen that the persons of resentment disagree with this assessment, but so do some of those invested in emancipatory struggle. While he is critical of the ideological use of the concept of resentment, Jameson points to another type of resentment: its 'final form,' which he labels 'authentic resentment': an 'unhappy consciousness too absolute to find any rest in conventional snobbery,' a pool of 'mixed feelings' that no bourgeois reader can sustain.¹ So far, it has seemed obvious to interpret the inauthenticity or self-alienation of the person of resentment as the wavering of an inferior character. But wouldn't it be possible to rehabilitate it positively as a dialectical mediation between consciousness and substantial identity – one that can be stabilized through social recognition, even if it can never be fully satisfied? Perhaps in this way, resentment could still be a resource for dealing with the contradictions of modern life, including those stemming from class, race, and gender inequalities. Whereas society tends to naturalize itself and to represent any desire for change as a caricatured evil resulting from powerlessness, resentment keeps open a utopian dimension. An appreciation of this dimension would involve turning the sociopathy of the soul – its very capacity to distort and confabulate but also its inability to forget – to an actual, critical use that lies beyond the scope of either the philosopher or the priest.

Following Jameson, Žižek, too, suggests the possibility of an authentic resentment in the form of 'a Nietzschean' yet 'heroic resentment.'² He

reminds us of an essay written by W.G. Sebald on Jean Améry's confrontation with the trauma experienced by intellectuals in the Nazi concentration camps. In his essay 'Resentments,' originally titled *Ressentiments*, from *At the Mind's Limits*, Améry shifts the perspective on resentment from disinterested third-person description to first-person narration. For who would deny the right to resentment to someone who is reminded daily of the past by the number on his forearm? It is part of their very condition that victims of genocides or of mass violations of human rights cannot receive compensation for what was done. For them, the promise of reconciliation with their perpetrators is no less irrational than the idea of revenge. Should we therefore condemn them for being their 'wounded attachments,' for 'wallowing' in grievances, or for remaining 'prisoners of the past'? Or are there circumstances when asking for forgiveness is itself a promise of relief that is morally and politically abject?

The problem of resentment over extreme atrocities constitutes the ethico-political limit of all medicalizing and psychologizing accounts of settlement, forgiveness, and reconciliation. From Desmond Tutu and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) to the courtroom proceedings at the International Criminal Court, there is a consensus that dangerous and undesirable emotions need to be managed, with the aim of restoring trust. Society must be defended against routines of retaliation according to the Augustinian dictum: 'to hate the sin but love the sinner.' As Arendt famously argues, forgiveness constitutes an essential precondition for public life, if political action and justice are not to be bartered for legal protection and dissolve into the mere narcissistic communication of feeling. While the actions from the past are irreversible, forgiving, as distinct from pardoning or exoneration, releases the actors from their actions and can contribute to the creative transformation of their consequences in the present. Having the metaphysical power of breaking the circle of revenge, it 'is the only reaction which does not merely re-act but acts anew and unexpectedly.'³

At the same time, Arendt makes it plain that, while actions can be forgiven as long as the wrongdoer shows signs of contrition or transformation, violence cannot. As an exponent of totalitarian regimes, Eichmann is unforgivable precisely because he destroys all human potentiality of beginning anew.⁴ The wound is not in the past but in the present, such that it is the past that must be retained as moral ground of the present. In cases like this, it is better to acknowledge injustice and punish injuries rather than forgive or even forget. For the risk here is not only, as Jacques Derrida has pointed out, the tactical application of the 'therapy of reconciliation' as a political tool⁵ – in South Africa, for example, the initial aim of the TRC was to reassure the white National Party and its constituency; only later did it become the spectacle of remorse and forgiveness that was meant to lay the moral foundation of the rainbow nation – but also a transfer of

moral categories into the sphere of politics.⁶ As Scheler emphasizes, the love of Christ (as opposed to Nietzsche's will to power) it is not aimed at redistribution or justice on Earth, where resentment is a given, but at the transcendence of politics itself.⁷ The dominant discourses of transitional justice effectively take up the ideological role of the priest, precisely to the extent that they oppose a rationalistic spirit of repair and redemption to a stance that is reduced to the 'blind' refusal of conflict resolution.

It is crucial not to confuse the victims with the executioners. While it may be ethically and politically true that nobody should be imprisoned in their crime and be condemned as irretrievably and irredeemably bad, for the victims, clemency is an implausible proposition, precisely because they are bound to their unceasing suffering. The problem is that forgiveness may work, at least in theory, against some first-order, reactive attitudes – for example in excusing minor wrongdoings – but that it is powerless against resentment, which blocks the very possibility of acting anew. It may be the appropriate cure in the domain of action, in other words, but it has no effect outside of that domain.

Primo Levi had already summarized this problem in terms of the shame of being human. There is a lot of shame in submission and the impotence to respond, in feeling the aches of resentment – a feeling that reaches backward toward injustice and injury as much as it is the sense of indignity resulting from one's own complicity in one's condition. Yet, this is hardly an experience that the victims have entitled us to dismiss or discard, no matter how practically urgent such a closure of the past may seem to so-called post-conflict societies. On the contrary, the very perspectival existence of resentment can be used to make the crime a reality to and to spread self-doubt in a society that wants nothing more than to let bygones be bygones. Even if no vindication of resentment is possible, we can therefore still describe its role in history without continuing the power discourse of the philosopher and the priest.

Žižek is right to point to the 'anti-Nietzschean weight' of this authentic resentment. Contrary to the vitalist celebration of a health that is assumed to lie in the active overcoming of resentment, Améry claims the exclusive expertise over his suffering and thereby renders victimhood productive for critical theory. In fact, Adorno, having already described how society annuls memory of the degraded life of the intellectual in exile ('To them shall no thoughts be turned'⁸), recognized in Améry the attempt to enlighten us about a suffering that is total and knows no end. Just as society and history want to take the memory and identity of the victims away; remembrance is 'the one thing that our powerlessness can grant.'⁹ It is impossible to remember; nonetheless, one has to.

But even more than an anti-Nietzschean stance, Améry's lucidity about resentment is anti-pastoral. Améry finds in resentment precisely the

source of morality that society is lacking. Instead of seeing resentment as a problem that needs to be dealt with, Améry offers a painful exposure that defies bad conscience. His unwillingness to abandon resentment is not (just) a symptom of his private indulgence but also reveals the indifference of his contemporaries. By showing how a 'public use of resentment' is possible, he makes of it a kind of a concrete universal outside the totality of recognizable or sociable partialities.¹⁰ Améry frequently speaks on behalf of victims in the plural,¹¹ identifying them as 'Shylocks' who are 'not only morally condemnable in the eyes of the nations, but already cheated of the pound of flesh too,'¹² and argues that his work 'could concern all those who wish to live together as fellow human beings.'¹³ Whereas justice in the usual (liberal) sense is too 'hypothetical,'¹⁴ as the *vae victis* of its appointed guardians is never far away, the function of resentment is, thus, in the exposure of injustice and the stubborn holding on to a necessarily utopian demand (just as somatic abhorrence, for Adorno, had become the principle of the new categorical imperative that Auschwitz never repeat itself¹⁵).

The question whether resentment could serve as a basis for justice is, thus, not intended to bring back the confusion between resentment and resentment. Liberal political theory generally regards the former as the most anti-emancipatory passion around, whereas it finds in the latter the most powerful affect for emancipatory politics. But, at a point in time when professionalized critical theory has traded in the dialectical idea of utopia for the more prosaic notion of justice (hence the widespread but uncritical attention paid to the concept of resentment), the real question is the same as that already implied by Sartre in his study of resentment as objective neurosis: If the self-detestation of resentment is an essential component of bourgeois class strategy, can resentment also become a legitimate inspiration in and of itself?

Legitimizing Resentment

In order to make sure we do not take up the rationalizing and authoritarian position of the priest, and bearing in mind Nietzsche's warning that, in the discussion of types, only extreme cases count, let us turn to the total inversion of the Nietzschean evaluation of the person of resentment by Améry himself. Shortly after the war, with the state destroyed and expelled from the international order, the moral and political status of German society was unambiguous. The country's very brokenness reflected the crimes that had gone before. But things gradually changed with Konrad Adenauer's policies of amnesty and reintegration, which reflected the Germans' more general wish to leave the past behind. A certain impatience arose among those who had heard enough of the Nazi past and 'collective guilt,' who did not want to be burdened by a 'small minority,' and who also called

attention to the victimization of the Germans by both the Nazis and the Allied Forces. The general need for an *Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit* now came to connote something very different from what it had meant in the first years following the defeat/liberation. As Adorno observed in 1959, contemporary discourse did not imply a serious working through of the past, but rather, suggested ‘wishing to turn the page and, if possible, wiping it from memory.’ There remains an ‘objective potential of an afterlife of National Socialism’ in the totalitarian demands of the social-economic conditions of prosperity. These facilitated the post-war generation with a superficial negation of previous nationalist delusions:

The attitude [*Gestus*] that it would be proper for everything to be forgiven and forgotten by those who were wronged is expressed by the party that committed the injustice. In a scholarly controversy I once wrote that in the hangman’s house one shouldn’t speak of the noose; otherwise, you wind up with resentment. . . . One wants to get free of the past: rightly so, since one cannot live in its shadow. . . . But wrongly so, since the past one wishes to evade is still so intensely alive.¹⁶

Similarly, Arendt observed a certain lack of response to what was all too easily dismissed as the victim’s vindictiveness:

It [i.e. the majority opinion] was manifest in the behavior of the defendants – in their laughing, smiling, smirking impertinence toward prosecution and witnesses, their lack of respect for the court, their ‘disdainful and threatening’ glances toward the public in rare instances where gasps of horror were heard. . . . It was manifest in the behavior of the lawyers who kept reminding the judges that they must pay no attention to ‘what one will think of us in the outside world,’ implying over and over again that not a German desire for justice but the world opinion influenced by the victims’ desire for ‘retribution’ and ‘vengeance’ was the true cause of their clients’ present trouble.¹⁷

At the same time, with former Nazis still in key positions of society, a growing number of voices testified to the mass atrocities that had preceded the newfound stability. Many of the particularities of the genocide were still dawning on the world. Inspired by the trial of Eichmann in Jerusalem (1961) and the so-called Auschwitz trial in Frankfurt (1963–65), the German public became more critical and self-reflective. More and more young people condemned their parents’ generation. Or as Sebald says, ‘moral capital was now being made from denunciation of the collective amnesia.’¹⁸

The problem with this critique was that it wasn’t free of hypocrisy, since it was premised on the new wealth that came with the post-war

Wirtschaftswunder. Because of the profound ambivalences in the growing cultural industry of ‘coming to terms with the past’ (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*), there was a new need for authentic voices. Literature proved a very adequate platform for resisting the moral deficits of post-war societies. With first-hand accounts of the Nazi crimes, figures as Levi, Améry, and Peter Weiss sought to reclaim the experience of exile, torture, and the death camps as their proper past – an experience, moreover, that remains inaccessible to anyone who was not present at the moment of horror. What mattered, Sebald explains, was a ‘difference,’ to be made in literature, as opposed to social engineering, ‘from all who were now contributing their own mite of accusation, although their change of attitude to the dreadful chapter of events now becoming past history did not otherwise affect their quality of life.’ What these witnesses had to generate for themselves, in other words, was a pathos of distance – a strategy of understatement, of pity and self-pity, something Sebald describes as a kind of *impassibilité* toward the cheap moralizations that inevitably came to dominate social life.¹⁹

At the Mind's Limits (1980) is the English translation of Améry's collection *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne* (1966, literally ‘Beyond Guilt and Atonement’) and also the title essay; the entire collection of essays was written to be broadcast in 1964–5 on the Süddeutscher Rundfunk. Whereas the German title indicates Améry's direct engagement with Nietzsche, the English title conveys the impossibility of the long-standing exercise to which he has committed perhaps most of his literary production: the attempt to make an at first glance shameful and semi-conscious resentment transparent to itself. This task is set out most clearly in the aforementioned essay on ‘Resentment,’ but it is also reflected in the almost exclusively autobiographical approach and relatively slight narrative content of the essay form. As a reader of Nietzsche, Améry is not only aware of the contradictory nature of his undertaking but affirms it from the outset. ‘Mistrustingly, I examine myself.’²⁰ Refusing to delegate the hermeneutics of his resentment to others, he immediately puts himself in the subjective position of the deviant victim and assumes his ‘retrospective grudge [*Groll*],’ even if this implies treating it more as a stubborn and distinct intuition than as a clear concept and resisting all final, historical, psychological, sociological, and political explanation.²¹

The problem of interpreting resentment is not just the problem of avoiding a false description of resentment. Given his ‘paradoxical and contradictory undertaking,’ as Levi calls it, Améry cannot simply claim its truth from the first-person perspective.²² He knows well that it would be impossible to refute the suspicion that he is ‘drowning the ugly reality of a malicious instinct in the verbal torrent of an unverifiable thesis.’²³ In fact, every objective recognition of resentment presupposes an intersubjective

understanding that makes it generally valid, and it is precisely this *sensus communis* in moral judgment that was destroyed in the Nazi camps. Instead, Améry adopts the radically subjective perspective proper to his role as a witness. For what sense does it make to demand objectivity from those who were tortured and betrayed? Objectivity may pertain to ‘facts’ in a physical system but not to ‘deeds’ in a moral system.²⁴ This also means that not all perspectives are equal and not all moral sensibilities are common. What must be kept open at all cost is the moral chasm between victims and hangmen – a chasm that will be bridged only when the victims die out. It is his unique perspective as an Austrian Jew, a member of the Belgian resistance movement, an Auschwitz survivor, and an intellectual witness of his own victimhood that legitimizes his testimony of resentment.

But how to stand by our resentments when we are so obviously ‘biased’? How to share our stubborn attachment to the past when a common intellectual or artistic language no longer exist? Precisely by not writing as a social scientist corroborating the concept of resentment with empirical claims but by defending its moral or transcendental necessity in a particular historical situation – the exigency of a subjective memory of the totalitarian regime that proceeded ‘objectively’; that is, under which the dignity and integrity of the individual were worth nothing.

The crimes of National Socialism had no moral quality for the doer, who always trusted in the norm system of his Führer and his Reich. The monster, who is not chained by his conscience to his deed, sees it from his viewpoint only as an objectification of his will, not as a moral event. The Flemish SS-man Wajs who . . . beat me on the head with a shovel handle whenever I didn’t work fast enough, felt the tool to be emanations of his psycho-physical dynamics. Only I possessed, and still possess, the moral truth of the blows that even today roar in my skull, and for that reason I am more entitled to judge, not only more than the culprit but also more than society – which thinks only about its continued existence.²⁵

The personal grievance of the moral witness is the limit of the criticism that pathologizes resentment as symptom of an inner conflict that poses a danger to its environment.²⁶ Améry sees his resentment not as a mental sickness waiting to be treated. The neurosis is on the part of historical occurrence, not the subject: ‘I know that what oppresses me is no neurosis,’ writes Améry, ‘but rather precisely reflected reality.’²⁷ And for this reason, ‘I am not “traumatized,” but rather my spiritual and psychic condition corresponds completely to reality.’²⁸ Améry’s overarching aim is therefore phenomenological: a *Wesensbeschreibung* of the irreparable existential dominant of the victim, hostilely withdrawn in themselves, to be arrived

at through ‘introspection’²⁹ of their own lived experience (*le vécu*). Despite all attempts at jurisdiction and compensation, Améry still needs to break through the silence. Beyond guilt and atonement, he presents us with the bare facticity of resentment.³⁰ He is the ugly saint who says: I stand here; I can do no other.

Améry’s reclaiming of the understanding of resentment is as much a rebellion against his contemporaries’ ‘hollow, thoughtless, utterly false conciliatoriness,’³¹ including the ‘pathos of forgiveness and reconciliation’³² that he encountered even among fellow Jews. For him, it is a rebellion against the presumption of those who judge the victim’s unyielding distrust and refusal as spiteful. To demand of the survivor to pardon the hangmen would add a third injustice to the injustice suffered at the time of the crimes and the injustice suffered afterwards through the lack of acknowledgment. Not that by assuming his own resentment Améry claims some kind of honor or even only innocence for himself. In the prisons and camps of the Third Reich, he had already come to scorn himself. There is nothing to be gained or learned from his suffering, nor is his revolt a Camusian one of a potent will to freedom against a mute world of objects.³³ What doesn’t kill him never ceases to overwhelm him. Besides his own interpretation, he also needs to give a new kind of evaluation for his own inglorious condition:

My personal task is to justify a psychic condition that has been condemned by moralists and psychologists alike. The former regard it as a taint, the latter as a kind of sickness. I must acknowledge it [i.e. resentment], bear the social taint, and first accept the sickness as an integrating part of my personality and then legitimize it. A less rewarding business of confession cannot be imagined.³⁴

A confession that is at the same time a justification cannot derive its authority from the confessor (the priest). It must be authorized by the one who speaks and defies the right of others to judge him. At stake is a *conditio inhumana*³⁵ that lies beyond guilt and atonement – the latter having ‘only theological meaning.’³⁶ Resentment is precisely the self-defense mechanism of those moral witnesses who struggle to retain or regain their self-worth:

I ‘stuck out,’ as I once had in the camp because of poor posture at roll call; I attracted the disapproving attention no less of my former fellows in battle and suffering, who were now gushing over about reconciliation, than of my enemies, who had just been converted to tolerance. I preserved my resentments. And since I neither can nor want to get rid of them, I must live with them and am obliged to clarify them for those against whom they are directed.³⁷

Améry proceeds with his justification in two steps. He begins by emphasizing that his resentment is not about the fact that he, personally, had to endure all the horrors visited on millions. In fact, describing the situation immediately after the end of the Second World War, he says that the situation hardly allowed a possibility for resentment to form. He initially trusted the world to recognize his identity as a victim and put the culprits behind bars:

Those who had tortured me and turned me into a bug . . . were themselves an abomination to the victorious camp. Not only National Socialism, Germany was the object of a general feeling that before our eyes crystallized from hate into contempt. It would be an outright distortion of the truth if I did not confess here without any concealment that this was fine with me.

In other words, Améry admitted to and espoused vengefulness, which guaranteed a 'mutual understanding between me and the rest of the world.' Precisely because revenge was a social reality, however, there was no ground for resentment to form. In tune with public opinion, Améry 'felt just fine in the entirely unaccustomed role of conformist.'³⁸

At the same time, Améry repeatedly emphasizes that he does not live under the illusion that revenge could compensate for his suffering. The attitude of defiance and the refusal of oblivion do not imply that one is giving in to the pleasure of punishing. On the contrary, Améry seems to agree with Nietzsche that there is no necessary relation between punishment and guilt.³⁹ Only this time, the argument is not that the active pleasure of punishing precedes any equivalence between deed and consequence but that the pain itself knows no exterior legitimization. Although he certainly felt content in the knowledge that the country of his tormentors was in ashes, the idea of personal revenge appears to him nonsensical as a response to the Holocaust – that is, as a response to a crime that had occurred once and ought never to occur again: no 'sane person among us [would] ever venture the morally impossible thought that four to six million Germans should be forcibly taken to their death.'⁴⁰ Repeating the Holocaust is neither Améry's secret wish, nor is its impossibility the hidden cause of his resentment.

Rather, the problem is that, as the *Wirtschaftswunder* was taking shape, his belief in the possibility of a world that would do justice to his suffering started to wane. 'I thought I was right in the middle of contemporary reality and was already thrown back onto an illusion.'⁴¹ And: 'Every day anew I lose my trust in the world.'⁴² It is at this time that society became less interested in the abhorrence of the past and more in glossing over it. Germany was not turned into a 'potato field,' as US Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau Jr. had once recommended. Rather, it was accepted by

the UN and ‘dispassionately reckoned with in the power game.’ The world, in other words, forgot and forgave the Germans and the victims became a nuisance:

The Germans saw themselves absolutely as victims. . . . Thus, as can all too easily be understood, they were not inclined to do more than to take the past of the Third Reich and, in their own way, to ‘overcome’ it. . . . In those days, at the same time as the Germans were conquering the world markets for their industrial products and were busy at home – not without a certain equanimity – with overcoming, our resentments increased; or perhaps I must restrain myself and say only that *my* resentments increased. . . . Suddenly there was good reason for resentment.⁴³

A good reason for resentment, then, is not the impossibility of revenge but the impossibility of intersubjective recognition. Revenge is still a conciliatory gesture that reenacts a minimal trust in the present instead of problematizing it. The humiliation of the victim continues in the compensation proceedings themselves. What causes his resentment is the new consensus that society has no place for people like him. ‘At stake for me is the release [*Erlösung*] from the abandonment [*Verlassensein*] that has persisted from that time until today.’⁴⁴ In the victim’s loneliness, the unceasing suffering begins feeding on itself in opposition to a world that moves on. As the murderers that were convicted formed only a small portion of a multitude, an ‘inverted pyramid’ of SS men, SS helpers, officials, kapos, and medal-bedecked generals still weighs on him and drives him into the ground. Worse still, society or history itself is this inverted pyramid, since outside of statistics, it knows no such thing as collective guilt – only collective innocence.⁴⁵ Nobody knows exactly how many Germans recognized, approved of, or committed the Nazi crimes, or simply let them happen: ‘I am burdened with collective guilt, I say; not they.’⁴⁶ The very experience of the other – indeed, the experience of time itself – becomes ‘an existential consummation of destruction.’⁴⁷

In many ways, then, Améry’s problem is precisely the opposite of that of the priest, whose task is to socialize resentment. The historian Marc Ferro, author of *Resentment in History* (‘Le ressentiment dans l’histoire’ [2008]) presents as an archetypal case of resentment the French soldiers who, upon their return from the front after the Great War (1914–1918), discovered that nobody wanted to be reminded of the cruelties that had taken place. Just as the populace did not prove particularly thankful for their sacrifice or even show much empathy over the suffering they had lived through, the new government failed to live up to previous promises of care and a pension for its veterans. Unable to deal with the ‘grey zone’ of old and new expectations that characterized the post-war period and full of

moral certainty, they found themselves alienated from society and disregarded by the state they had sacrificed themselves for. It was their rancor towards the Republic, according to Ferro, that formed the seeds of fascism as the ideology of a state purged of ambiguity.⁴⁸ What has driven history, according to Ferro, is the endless dialectic between society and the resentment of those who feel excluded from it. The challenge for the state, including the social science and history that serves it, is to seek to contain this dialectic for the sake of the future.

Unlike, say, a lone-wolf terrorist, Améry is not a psychiatric case posing a danger to society. Nevertheless, a point has been reached where the existential is no longer limited to one's private life. Society may well want to prevent crimes from recurring, but the victims are ultimately the only ones who can claim the right to decide what to do about the offenses of the criminals. Remembrance and rancor have the moral function of keeping alive for the perpetrators the meaning of what they have done in a way that far exceeds mere historical or factual remembrance: 'My resentment is there in order that the crime become a moral reality for the criminal, in order that he be swept (*hingerissen*) into the truth of his atrocity.'⁴⁹ The response to trauma 'can be a matter neither of revenge on the one side nor of a problematic atonement on the other'; it is, rather, a question of 'permitting resentment to remain alive in the one camp and, aroused by it, self-mistrust in the other.'⁵⁰

This dissemination of resentment is not a question of personal triumph over the perpetrators, moreover, but a way of dealing with the immorality of social life as such, which places politics on one side and life on the other, as if what is said on one side is not real and what is lived on the other cannot be said. Challenging the post-Nuremberg discourse in which only a small group of top Nazi leaders is demonized, Améry relies on the irreducibility of his own grudge in order to make it a common concern. Instead of socializing resentment, he wants to 'resentimentalize' society with the constant reminder of the gravity of the past. If the victim's truth hurts, this is because it must be forced upon non-victims. Whereas his environment frames resentment as an irrelevant grievance or a sign of mental illness, Améry requires his subjective resentment to remain an objectively lived reality for generations to come. His greatest worry is that

Everything will be submerged in a general 'Century of Barbarism.' We, the victims, will appear as the truly incorrigible, irreconcilable ones, as the antihistorical reactionaries in the exact sense of the word, and in the end it will seem like a technical mishap that some of us still survived.⁵¹

The 'moral power to resist'⁵² is at risk, as is 'the moral truth of the conflict' that the perpetrator doesn't know and society doesn't care about.⁵³

Améry's Polemics

Améry's resentments are directed against both his torturers and a society that becomes more and more indifferent to his fate. At several points, Améry directly addresses the young Germans – the new generations eager to leave the past behind. But who are the immoral 'moralists and psychologists' that Améry turns against? He identifies his double enemy quite precisely and fights the social judgment implicit in both: 'I must delimit our resentments on two sides and shield them against two explications: that of Nietzsche, who morally condemned resentment, and that of modern psychology, which is able to picture it only as a disturbing conflict.' Améry feels obliged by resentment itself, both in the sense of being fatefully bound to it and of being driven by it. Nietzsche, by contrast, warns against the contagiousness of resentment, while the priest disseminates it under the pretense of disarming it. Insofar as they value health over sickness, the philosopher and the priest require resentment either to be overcome or healed. Worse, they vindicate suffering instead of accepting its taint. They still share this basic good sense with society at large and, by implication, cannot but confuse the victims and the executioners:

It is said that we are 'warped.' That causes me to recall fleetingly the way my arms were twisted high behind my back when they tortured me. But it also sets me the task of defining anew our warped state, namely as a form of the human condition that morally as well as historically is of a higher order than that of healthy straightness.⁵⁴

It is with Améry's total rejection of the straightness of those who place the healthy – the health of individuals or the health of society – above the sick that the polemical nature of the concept of resentment returns in all its vehemence, albeit in a new modality. It is not a polemic about the proper meaning and role of resentment in modernity, or about whether one perspective is more irrational and inauthentic than another. Rather, Améry's authenticity lies precisely in the fact that he consistently wants his resentment to be judged only for itself and refuses all external criteria of health or moral uprightness. It lies in the bracketing of exactly that good sense that is stronger than any resentment, which implies that, in the painful transition of resentment from private to public, there is no expectation of release, just an open wound: 'natural time will reject the demands of our resentments and finally extinguish them. . . . Germany will not make it good, and our rancor will have been for nothing'; and hence, 'the fears of Nietzsche and Scheler actually were not warranted. Our slave morality will not triumph.'⁵⁵

Deeply inspired by the uncompromising negativity of figures such as Georges Bataille and Emil Cioran, Améry openly vents and fulminates. Without identifying as a Jew in any positive form of cultural heritage or religious ties, he assumes without reservation the role reserved for him as ‘a vehemently protesting Jew.’⁵⁶ He consciously leaves behind all tact and gives only a half-hearted attempt at rationalization: ‘Emigration, Resistance, prison, torture, concentration camp – all that is no excuse for rejecting tact and is not intended to be one. But it is a sufficient causal explanation.’⁵⁷ Against the priest, Améry makes it known that forgiveness granted socially and objectively will inevitably bring back the past as return of the repressed in the form of neurotic forms of fear, hatred, and guilt.⁵⁸ Against Nietzsche, Améry defends the right not to forget and to let the past ulcerate the present and the future. No matter how functional forgiving and forgetting are for society at large, there is justice only in the permanent accommodation of the perspective of victimhood and the unremitting denunciation of injustice. This places Améry outside the moral framework of the commonly possible and the socially acceptable. Exposing one’s own resentment is, by definition, a tactless thing to do, since it cannot but be perceived as a moral hazard.⁵⁹ But in his case, even tactlessness is a form of tact, as it offers a basic intuition or orientation. In the form of an implacable passion of militancy and rebellion, he finally renders resentment politically relevant in itself. It is emancipated from both the Nietzschean philosopher’s bio-medical problem of the degeneration of the human species and the priest’s psycho-sociological problem of the sociopathic individual. Améry presents us with the physiologically lived experience of resentment; his work is the very embodiment of the wound as it spreads its impact on society.

It is precisely this visceral defense of immoderation against the self-complacency of reason that Améry shares with Nietzsche. This is because they both speak of resentment in an anti-pastoral fashion. Justice is not defined through the problem of social (in)equality, just as resentment is not defined through envy. There is no hidden meaning to resentment and no criterion of proportionality or truth. Améry’s immediate opponent is the priest who asks for ascetic values and moderate responses such as amnesty and pardon for what cannot be forgiven:

We victims of persecution, the high-soaring man says, ought to internalize our past suffering and bear it in emotional asceticism, as our torturers should do with their guilt. But I must confess: I lack the desire, the talent, and the conviction for something like that. . . . I do not want to become the accomplice of my torturers; rather, I demand that the latter negate themselves and in the negation coordinate with me. The pile of corpses that lie between them and me cannot be removed in the process

of internalization, so it seems to me, but, on the contrary, through actualization, or, more strongly stated, by actively settling the unresolved conflict in the field of historical practice.⁶⁰

But, if this restoration of the past has nothing to do with nostalgia, just as the refusal to forgive does not mean that revenge is enacted, then what does it mean for a crime to be re-actualized? It means that the victim's past must be relived and shared by those who would prefer to leave the past behind. This is the paradox: whoever says that people should move on obliterates the proximity of perpetrators and victims precisely by suggesting they are the same. While the perpetrators are forgiven, the victims are forgotten. Internalization is the pacification process by which the priest redirects the outward accusations of resentment. But for victims, what this really comes down to is isolation. Améry wants to restore proximity both socially and temporally. For it to remain clear who the torturers were and who the victims, the perspectival distance between them must be bridged. This won't rescue the victim from self-estrangement, but it saves him from facing it alone.⁶¹ Améry wants to actualize the conflict for everyone. 'Where there is a common bond between me and the world, whose unrevoked death sentence I acknowledge as a social reality, it dissolves in polemics. You don't want to listen? Listen anyhow. You don't want to know to where your indifference can again lead you and me at any time? I'll tell you.'⁶² His resentment is itself a historical fact that should be universalized; that is, it must be externalized, socialized, moralized, and politicized – only this time, by the person of resentment themselves.

The aim of this externalization is neither to take revenge nor to forgive but to convert the perpetrator to the position of the victim:

When SS-man Wajs stood before the firing squad, he experienced the moral truth of his crimes. At that moment, he was with me – and I was no longer alone with the shovel handle. I would like to believe that at the instant of his execution he wanted exactly as much as I to turn back time, to undo what had been done. When they led him to the place of execution, the anti-man had once again become a fellow man.⁶³

This is no assumption of power on Améry's behalf. Where no compensation for suffering is possible, all he wants is for others to want to reverse the flow of time as much as he does. It is only once the perpetrator comes to share his past and once it is clear that there is no future for either that forgiveness becomes thinkable for Améry. Forgiveness here is about the common consummation of resentment, not about the annulment of guilt through the rituals of atonement. Its purpose is to bind the criminal to his offence in a suspension of time outside any official social platform for

reconciliation. A genuine reconciliation with the past presupposes this undoing of the past. It's not about the SS man's enlightenment or the re-introduction of the *jus talionis*. Améry pursues a consistently non-pastoral conversion. His aim is to constantly re-actualize a conflict that knows no societal triangulation, only the dyad between victim and executioner.⁶⁴

This coordination in negativity without mediation is not only how Améry sees the relation with his torturer but also how he relates to society at large. It was, after all, the participation and passivity of an entire people that made the Holocaust possible. Therefore, Améry craves a society-wide but no less fantastic 'revolution' catalyzed by resentment, in which the 'realized,' 'total negation' of the Third Reich is finally relived and thus relieved.⁶⁵

On the field of history there would occur what I hypothetically described earlier for the more limited, individual circle: two groups of people, the overpowered and those who overpowered them, would be joined in the desire that time be turned back and, with it, that history become moral. If this demand were raised by the German people, who as a matter of fact have been victorious and already been rehabilitated by time, it would have tremendous weight, enough so that by this alone it would already be fulfilled. The German revolution would be made good, Hitler disowned. And in the end Germans would really achieve what the people once did not have the might or the will to do, and what later, in the political power game, no longer appeared to be a vital necessity: the eradication of the ignominy.⁶⁶

As opposed to the French revolution, Heinrich Heine famously prophesied a revolution springing from German philosophy, in which the word becomes flesh. While many liberal historians draw an immediate relation between the fanaticism of will found in Fichte and the romantics, on the one hand, and later Nazi terrorism, on the other, for Améry, resentment here has the revolutionary function that the priest seeks to avoid at all cost. It performs not just a negation – the Nazi crimes had already accomplished that – but the 'negation of the negation' by which its historical consciousness would displace German history. Only when the overturning of history is complete does it become moral and resentment become superfluous. As long as this doesn't happen, society must live with its negation.⁶⁷ In Hegelian terms: the resentimental consciousness is that of a determinate negation that is paradoxically also a form of 'unemployed negativity,' insofar as it blocks the speculative affirmation of sacrifice in the name of historical progress.⁶⁸ That is to say, it is a positive relation – a relation that posits its own objectivity, but only in the form of perennial strife in which the dialectic comes to a standstill.

While the need for externalization sounds vaguely Nietzschean, it is also obvious that Améry does not share Nietzsche's condemnation of resentment as the reliving of a morally deficient past. He is precisely the neurasthenic type singled out by Nietzsche, for whom passive memory inevitably recalls past torments, whereas active forgetting allows mental peace and social order. While, for the priest, forgiveness is essential for a future-oriented society, for Nietzsche, forgetfulness is a function of political futurity. Améry's revolution, by contrast, is entirely oriented toward the past. His demand that others coordinate with him in negation in order for the past to remain current couldn't be further removed from the thinker of affirmation. For Nietzsche, the future is an extra-moral category (the innocence of becoming). For Améry, by contrast, time is 'anti-moral.'⁶⁹ He pursues a moralization of time out of the rancor against time's 'it was.' All his work constitutes a *nachdenken* – a 'personal protest against the anti-moral natural process of healing that time brings about.'⁷⁰ Time as natural process is a time that flows, or flies like an arrow in a straight line from past to future. This is the social and biological sense of time the healer of all wounds.⁷¹ Contrary to this 'objective time,' Améry posits history not as neutral and objective but as irreducibly subjective. The moral person refuses to go with the flow and demands the cancellation of time 'by nailing the criminal to his deed.'⁷²

In *Remnants of Auschwitz*, Agamben argues that the testimonial literature after Auschwitz serves as a correction of twentieth-century ethics, beginning with Nietzsche's innocence of becoming. After all, the critique of Judeo-Christian morality is completed in the name of a capacity to fully assume and will the past, liberating oneself, once and for all, of guilt and bad conscience. As soon as we apply Nietzsche's test of the eternal return to Auschwitz, however, the experiment breaks down and renders obsolete the very challenge to overcome resentment:

'One day or one night,' a demon glides beside a survivor and asks: 'Do you want Auschwitz to return again and again, innumerable times, do you want every instant, every single detail of the camp to repeat itself for eternity, returning eternally in the same precise sequence in which they took place? Do you want this to happen again, again and again for eternity?' This simple reformulation of the experiment suffices to refute it beyond all doubt, excluding the possibility of its even being proposed. Yet this failure of twentieth-century ethics does not depend on the fact that what happened at Auschwitz is too atrocious for anyone ever to wish for its repetition and to love it as destiny. In Nietzsche's experiment, the horror of what happened appears at the start, indeed, so much so that the first effect of listening to it is, precisely, to 'gnash one's teeth and curse the demon who has spoken in such way.'⁷³

For Agamben, however, the failure of Zarathustra's lesson in no way implies the pure and simple restoration of the morality of resentment. He gives the example of Levi, for whom the impossibility of wanting Auschwitz to return for eternity is rooted in the ferocious, implacable experience of shame: 'One cannot want Auschwitz to return for eternity, since in truth it has never ceased to take place; it is always already repeating itself.'⁷⁴ Isn't it precisely this ongoing repetition that also explains Améry's condition? Does Améry not express his resentment precisely in the gnashing and cursing form of a genuine anti-Nietzschean ethics?

In order to appreciate the full extent of Améry's ill will towards good sense, one must therefore begin with his demand for the impossible. Pinned to the past, with the exit to the future blocked, he wants to turn back time:

It did not escape me that resentment is not only an unnatural but also a logically inconsistent condition [*Zustand*]. It nails every one of us onto the cross of his ruined past. Absurdly, it demands that the irreversible be turned around, that the event be undone. Resentment blocks the exit to the genuine human dimension, the future. I know that the time-sense of the person trapped in resentment is twisted around, dis-ordered, if you wish, for it desires two impossible things: regression into the past and nullification of what happened.⁷⁵

Of course, Améry knows well that the past cannot be nullified. He is no Tertullian fanatic who believes in the face of absurdity. The demand of an undoing of the past is as preposterous as the demand directed to German society, since the social is precisely 'a present that places the incomprehensible in the cold storage of history.'⁷⁶ Yet, his demand for the absurd is not so much predicated on a continued distrust of the natural consciousness of time, as it is time itself that forces the survivor to survive that which it becomes increasingly impossible to survive.⁷⁷ Sympathizing with the imprisoned members of the Rote Armee Fraktion, he sees the need to 'strike back' (*zurückschlagen*) every time the ideological delusions of progress, cheered on by mass media and fellow intellectuals, risk changing into their tyrannical opposite. His polemical tactlessness makes for a reckless immoderation and unsociability as much as for the cultivation of a certain out-of-sync-ness with the demands of the present. To remain a victim is to revolt against the very difference between past and future; it is to inhabit a time out of joint – a 'twisted' (*ver-rückt*) temporality in which the spirits of the dead walk the Earth. The German subtitle of his book, *Bewältigungsversuche eines Überwältigten*, says it all: attempts to overcome by one who has been overcome. Real resentment is not something that can or wants to be overcome or administered (*bewaltet*). On the contrary, as a remnant of Auschwitz, it comes with the moral exigency that others negate

themselves in the active remembrance of what is constantly forgotten and that they confront ceaselessly that which it is impossible to undo. The revolt against time is the same as the revolt against the unworthy attitude of false conciliatoriness.

Such is the total reversal of the Nietzschean account of resentment that Améry brings about: Nietzsche wants to live; Améry wants to survive. In the vitalist schema of a tension between life and morality, Améry chooses morality. Similar to the demand for justice through revenge that typifies the slave revolt, Améry claims universality beyond what is currently possible. Yet, it is a universality without (false) content. Justice is not based on a secretive and parasitic reversal of older valuations of unforgiveness and rancor into moral values such as altruism and selflessness. Rather, Améry's 'principled revolt'⁷⁸ consists of a reinterpretation and revaluation of resentment itself as just. This self-presentation is not the hallucination of the weak's hypocritical will to power, but rather, mirroring Nietzsche's sovereign individual, the victim's sovereign answer; namely, his will to remember and his capacity to make promises. In other words, his revaluation of the values of reconciliation and overcoming is as much a revolt against life as it is an honorable reaction to those who fail to be outraged over massive injustice. His demand that time be reversed is not merely the fanciful demand of a subject left behind by society but effectuates itself as a real state of the world – as something defined by Adorno as a 'difference with respect to what exists.'⁷⁹ Whereas Nietzsche's person of resentment hides behind the fiction of a culpable agent and compassion with others in order to find temporary relief from suffering, there is nothing abstract about Améry's agonal energy and intellectual vigor. Placed in polemical opposition to the world by forces that exceed him, his very agitation is the wager by which he seeks to unite with the suffering and anger of others who are equally lost and at risk of being buried in the past. Despite the unseemly nature of his means and the utopian nature of his claims, Améry in this way embodies a universal demand for solidarity with all those who fall under the wheels of history in opposition to those who ask of them this sacrifice.⁸⁰ It may not be recognized as objectively possible or true, but perhaps it is all the more plausible for that.

What is most interesting from a philosophical point of view is that all these reversals nonetheless leave the entire Nietzschean edifice of resentment and the slave revolt intact. Améry's self-description stays true to Nietzsche's characterization of resentment in its raw state as a piece of animal psychology – more still than the cultivated resentment of ancient Judaism – but, likewise, makes an active, instrumental use of it. He proposes not so much a new, deflated concept of resentment, as the new priests who came after Nietzsche did, but its systematic transvaluation from the perspective of the person of resentment themselves. Instead of

being predicated on a bourgeois culture of envy and comparison, his resentment is of a pure, Nietzschean kind, as it is directed solely against the passage of time. Only, where Nietzsche sometimes comes surprisingly close to the priest when, at the level of cultural politics, he emphasizes the necessity to overcome the history of revenge, Améry writes directly and affirmatively out of the spirit of revenge and its will to impart to others the same antipathy against time, even though it is clear that, rationally speaking, revenge has never been an option. It's as if he accepts the entire Nietzschean edifice, except the notion that time always wins in the end. The belief in healing is as ideological and fictional as the belief in original sin.⁸¹ This is the core of Améry's polemics against good sense, and it takes him one step further than Nietzsche, who saw physiological entropy and moral decadence as irreversible, where the Christian priest still left a possibility of turning against the reality principle in the form of the Last Judgment.⁸² The passing of time brings decay to most things but precisely not to resentment. This passionate fidelity to a past that will not defend itself is what makes it moral. For Améry, for the victim, there can be no common sense without nonsense.⁸³

The Persistence of the Negative

The uncompromising revolt of morality against nature and history and the full assumption of incurable alienation set Améry apart not just from Nietzsche and Scheler but from all philosophical and pastoral discourses on resentment. For example, it distinguishes him from Levi, who said of Améry that he had been led to 'positions of such severity and intransigence as to make him incapable of finding joy in life.'⁸⁴ It also puts him at odds with a moral philosopher such as Avishai Margalit, who argues that 'we do not in general owe forgiveness to others, but we may owe it to ourselves. . . . This duty stems from not wanting to live with feelings of resentment and the desire for revenge. Those are poisonous attitudes and states of mind.'⁸⁵ According to Margalit, Améry's authenticity is equivalent to self-betrayal. Restlessly tarrying with the negative, the resistance to change and his masochistic nursing of grievance recall the Freudian death drive. Améry's attitude is a poisonous one, rooted in pure despair. Does this mean his utopian fantasies are doomed to remain fruitless?

As a testament to this general prevalence of therapeutic good sense over political reason, Améry's radical polemic has also proved resistant to interpretation by some of his most careful readers. The problem is that they fall into the trap of wanting to rationalize and exonerate resentment, whereas Améry, writing as a literary essayist and not as a social scientist or moral philosopher, has no difficulty in taking on its illogical and absurd nature. Instead of reading him as a martyr, they are inevitably led back to

the resentment-ressentiment complex, where the question of the legitimacy of resentment and ressentiment is reduced to a question of triangulation: What is the social proportionality and integrity of his anti-social position?

Eager to oppose the denunciation of ressentiment yet also wary of arbitrating between resentment and ressentiment, Didier Fassin writes: 'To the almost unanimous celebration of Christian moral sentiments over the past two centuries and its recent revival through humanitarianism and reconciliation in international relations, he [Améry] offers a solitary resistance by introducing this linguistic and ethical differentiation between resentment and ressentiment.'⁸⁶ Nowhere, however, does Améry seek to legitimate his ressentiment in terms of resentment or even make this distinction at all. Yet Fassin is confident: 'The man who invokes ressentiment as a personal stance toward his former torturers is neither the man of ressentiment, whom Nietzsche associates with revenge, nor merely a vengeful man, whom Smith would be willing to absolve: he is a man defending a form of dignity that is increasingly censored and that has become unintelligible.'⁸⁷ This description of Améry's 'politics' misses the real problem. Améry is both vengeful and immoderately undignified. He certainly wants recognition, but he seeks it by demanding the impossible, and as a consequence, his ressentimental call for morality can never be satisfied in principle and guarantees only its infinite self-perpetuation.

Fassin's main inspiration, Thomas Brudholm's study on Améry, is similarly permeated with pastoral good sense when he blames Améry for being 'unnecessarily polemical.'⁸⁸ At the same time, he also regards it as his task to save Améry from his own excessiveness. He thus describes the particularity of Améry's ressentiment as being exempt from envy, blindness, self-centeredness, revenge – indeed, from ressentiment⁸⁹:

The 'man of ressentiment' is commonly imagined as an unforgiving and irreconcilable, ignoble, and vengeful character. At first glance Améry seems to confirm this picture as he addresses the advocacy of forgiveness and reconciliation only to express his antipathy to its pathetic, hollow, and thoughtless aspects. However, Améry's attempt to rehabilitate a special kind of ressentiment is connected to a notion of reconciliation or re-creation of human community; this connection alone makes the effort to read the essay worthwhile.⁹⁰

Here, the problem is that re-creation and reconciliation are not the same. For Améry, they are even opposed. Brudholm emphasizes Améry's forward-looking considerations and reassures us that he 'does not want a fellow sufferer but a fellow man.'⁹¹ But what Améry wants to re-create is precisely the proximity of torturer and victim that characterizes the past alone and can never define his relation to his (future) contemporaries. He

is not enduring his resentment and isolation in the hope that they will eventually be redeemed.⁹² His rehabilitation of resentment is far more zealous than that.

Both Fassin and Brudholm defend resentment as an ethical stance of a minority who explicitly believe that their position cannot shake the complacency of the majority. In this attenuated understanding, justified by an exceptional context of an objectively recognized and morally superior victimhood, resentment would be justifiable resentment, whereas true Nietzschean resentment is only its toxic counterpart. As a second-order passion, it blends resentment with paranoia, shame, envy, and self-hatred. Yet, if the careful Nietzsche reader, Améry, had intended something different than Nietzsche's phrase, then what prevented him from coining a new term?

For Améry no less than for Nietzsche, the difference between good resentment and evil resentment is ultimately irrelevant. Against all rehabilitation over time for the executioners, against the guilt of the survivor, and against the goodwill of his tepid defenders and his contemporaries, Améry wants recognition of his resentment, for what it is in all its ugly reality. Does this lead to the kind of victimization and identity politics that prevent the very possibility of mutual recognition? As Jameson reminds us, the very idea that there could only be an emancipatory politics if we leave our wounded attachments behind is utopian. While, for a long time, this has indeed been the benign dream of liberal Nietzscheans, questions arise not only about what they make of victims such as Améry but also about how they see the more quotidian resentments of non-transitional, neoliberal democracies, such as those caused by racism and sexism as well as relative deprivation, increasing precariousness and loss of community.⁹³ Améry's revolt against the irreversible past may have more in common with the revolt of others against their intolerable present than it seems to. As long as we remain focused on their difference – the irreducibly political significance of resentment – its affective potential for a new political imperative cannot even appear. In this sense, Améry's position really lies beyond guilt and atonement.

If Améry's resentment is also to be an emancipatory stance, as Žižek suggests, we need to find a way out of the problem of testimony. For the person of resentment, it is the very impossibility of the satisfaction of their demands to the world that makes their entrapment in the past chronic and inescapable. Améry is well aware of this aporia in his politics of remembrance and does not claim innocence. While resisting the therapeutic dissolution or sublimation of his resentment, he has no illusions of ever convincing his contemporaries to join him in negation. On the contrary, in his polemical struggle for fraternity, he willingly collaborates with them in the commodification of his own lived experience.⁹⁴ As a disconnected

individual, he gets paid to leave his isolation and sell his tactlessness on the radio and in the feuilletons for consumption as a literary curiosity. Having wanted to turn himself into a moral event – a thorn in the side of society – he became a media star instead. In short, Améry knew well that it is impossible to relate authentically to one's own alienation.

Worse, Améry also anticipated the contemporary fetishization of victimhood that Brown warns us about. Once there is a market for suffering, the equivalence between forms of injury inevitably allows his wounded attachments to become an entitlement available to others. The many Holocaust testimonials have been ground-breaking in this respect, even if, today, it is not exceptional violence but phenomena of social violence and subordination that trigger feelings of defenselessness. Ahmed describes our current 'testimonial culture' as a general tendency to look back in anger, such that wounds are no longer lived as event but consumed as identity. From feminism to the self-victimization of the white male subject, narratives of pain and injury proliferate in a general discourse of entitlement and recognition without getting translated into political action: 'Sensational stories can turn pain into a form of media spectacle, in which the pain of others produces laughter and enjoyment, rather than sadness or anger.'⁹⁵

Would a contemporary Améry be on Twitter or Instagram? The general tendency toward self-sabotage inherent to resentment, while ignored by Jameson and Žižek, further complicates the question that is central to almost all Holocaust literature; namely, that of the integrity of moral and political engagement. Did Améry really only refuse reconciliation or did he actually want to preserve his entitlement to victimhood indefinitely?⁹⁶ Is his another case of what Scheler dismissed as resentment criticism – a resentment that criticizes the world as a whole for its falseness and finds its only guarantee of authenticity (and surreptitious satisfaction) in impotent and elitist negativity? What emancipatory promise could we actually expect from those who seek sociality with a-social means? Unlike Sartre's Flaubert, whose passive activity as an alienated writer and public intellectual implies a disavowal of his own bad faith,⁹⁷ and unlike Kierkegaard's pseudonymous critics, whose spiritual superiority seems to remain relative to the crisis they diagnose with in others, Améry actually does revolt openly and absolutely.

Perhaps Améry's whole idea of emancipation could be said to culminate in the refusal to fully integrate the personal in the social and in the attempt to save the reality of his own experience by writing. If, for Hegel, this refusal of the unhappy consciousness is only a necessary subjective moment in the development of an objective system shared with others, Améry does not allow his existential anxiety to be fixed and dissolved within a larger whole. For him as for Sartre, negativity is the very mode of existence of consciousness in its situatedness in the world, such that an authentic relation

to the empirical other is blocked from the outset – hell is other people. This gives his work an ascetic quality without being self-renunciative, since it is also the basis of an authentic, albeit outlandish, hope that resists being turned into guilt before collective mores – or worse, the general interest.

It is vis-à-vis the vexed question of authenticity that Améry's existentialist background resonates most strongly with Adorno's negative dialectics. With revolution farther away than ever, perhaps we should say that resentment coincides with the critical stance par excellence. It is the politics of reconciliation – and not that of ressentiment – that is essentially intolerant and totalitarian. As Améry tells the priest: 'Whoever submerges his individuality in society and is able to comprehend himself only as a function of the social, that is, the insensitive and indifferent person, really does forgive.'⁹⁸ And, as he could have reminded Nietzsche: only a plastic individual such as Mirabeau, someone whose careless and carefree sovereignty is founded on the absence of pain, can socially afford to forget, if at the cost of a 'self-overcoming of justice.'⁹⁹ None of this applies to those who have been cast out of society without being able to escape from it. Precisely because its claims are objectively impossible, Améry's resentment exceeds the merely pathological and, at the same time, becomes the source of a certain sovereignty and a potential universality.¹⁰⁰ Améry's paranoia is an objective paranoia, not just a 'subjective' experience. Or rather, the only experience of subjectivity left is that of resentment. This experience is an objective reflection of the social totality of the post-war era. The present world is false, but my experience of its falsity still contains some truth. What Adorno says of his own 'sad science' of objectivated experience under late capitalism – a fusion of subjective dismay and objective participation in the 'hardened world' – fully applies to the singular universality of Améry. 'Only what does not fit into the world is true.'¹⁰¹

Ultimately, it is not up to good sense to decide on the emancipatory potential of this self-exposition of resentment, since resentment, precisely if it is to express itself authentically, can only be consistent in its polemical inconsistency. It would be good sense to accept that demanding the absurd is justified in the limited case of victims of mass atrocities, but not in less severe cases ('what were the other options?'). However, Améry is much more rigorous: resentment must be embraced for what it is: a self-legitimizing and self-perpetuating negativity independent of its objective trauma or its present commercial environment. His writing on resentment is that of a self-validating 'performance.'¹⁰² It is neither in bad faith nor, for that matter, in good faith. We may conclude that the ideal of authenticity still bears the imprint of a priestly vivisection of conscience – something that resentment has no natural interest in and is not a precondition for universal emancipation at all.

For Adorno, art is one of the last redoubts of negativity, bearing within itself the power to resist the norms of social life. If modern progress is, in fact, a regression, the very negativity of modernism contains the truth of the positive. Instead of merely reproducing actuality, writing operationalizes a 'more' of language with respect to the actuality that traps individual consciousness.¹⁰³ In his existential psychoanalyses of Flaubert and Genet, Sartre argues that both are masters of dialectical inversions of their social world in literary works. Excluded from recognition by the Other, Améry, too, seeks compensation in the imaginary. What distinguishes all three of them from Nietzsche's person of resentment is that, as writers, they do so openly, in an extroverted way. In other words, they cannot remain the passive effect of exterior causes but, as effects, must also become an acting cause themselves and, thus, seek to become worthy of the event of resentment. Instead of being merely imaginary, their literary dream of the absurd forces others to dream as well and, in this way, contributes to the transformation of the world. Since even passivity, if it is not to remain the strategy of bad faith, must be turned into a project, as Sartre writes, literature is a 'praxis [that] becomes the efficacy of the passive.'¹⁰⁴ Améry committed suicide, but it is through his writings that the social void of his own subjectivity is really present and demands recognition as the insistent life force of a defeated being.

Beyond questions of the truth or falsity of his resentment, we thus need to move beyond the restrictions of phenomenology. Speaking about your life is constitutive – even a project of self-fashioning. It is impossible to transmit a pre-linguistic and pre-reflective experience into language without a distorted duplication.¹⁰⁵ Améry is aware that trauma is what blocks one's ability to make sense of it yet assumes full responsibility for this rationalization. We can therefore interpret and evaluate Améry's resentment as a writer's literary and even philosophical construction that far exceeds the description of lived experience. Such an approach becomes all the more relevant given that all aspects of resentment – hatred, loneliness, collective identity, physical pain, and suicide – are already present in a short story entitled 'Die Schiffbrüchigen' (1935) that pre-dates almost all of the Nazi crimes. Moreover, in *At the Mind's Limits*, Améry is adamant that he does not even write as a (religious or cultural) Jew but as a self-defined humanist, intellectual, and rebel.¹⁰⁶ Perhaps we should say that Améry does not wait for objective history in order to hide behind it.

In a book with the telling title *On Aging: Revolt and Resignation*, written at age 55, Améry discusses his rancor against time in a way that is no less severe than his resentment about the waning memory of the Holocaust. From the outset, he lets his readers know that they should not count on his good will. He has no advice for them on how to age well or even come to

terms with the process of growing old. Moreover, aging without complaint and with a positive attitude does not necessarily mean growing old with dignity because it presupposes that it is possible to design old age, which is only a 'marketing façade.'¹⁰⁷ In fact, there is nothing worthy about aging. Biology, thermodynamics, and physics offer us objective concepts of time and irreversibility. As Bergson would say, they neutrally represent time by spatializing it. But the subjective experience of time, Améry argues, is to become alien to oneself and the world. To grow old is to be extracted from space and to be reduced to time – a schizophrenic experience of irreversibility.¹⁰⁸ The look of the other gradually fixates us and the world loses interest in our potential. It consolidates its consensual judgment over us like the inverted social pyramid that drives the individual into the ground. All that's left for us is 'dull ruminations and dilettantish brooding'; in other words, a resentimental consciousness.¹⁰⁹ While we are dealing here not with a crime but with a natural phenomenon, Améry, again, defends the rights of the subjectively lived and turns against the objective and its constituent – the intersubjective. To reflect on time is already a form of resistance. He revolts in vain, yet what he has to say has universal value, even though its sense has nothing to do with truth. Since we all grow old alone, his aim is 'to invalidate consolation.'¹¹⁰ The analysis of the rebellion coincides with the rebellion itself but also, paradoxically, presupposes total acceptance of the inescapable and scandalous. His next book (*On Suicide*) affirms and commodifies suicide as ultimate tactlessness. Here again, the conclusion is not resignation but an expression of endurance and the final act of protest: 'the discourse of suicide begins where psychology ends.'¹¹¹

The opposition of Améry's discourse to psychology suggests that it takes literature to render plausible concrete experiences that take place 'at the limits of the mind.' If we are interested in authenticity or consistency, then, despite Améry's constant use of 'the little word "I",' we must look to the text and its 'literary decorum'¹¹² more than to the intentionality of the person. Sebald writes:

One of the most impressive aspects of Améry's stance as a writer is that although he knew of the real limits of the power to resist as few others did, he maintains the validity of resistance even to the point of absurdity. Resistance without any confidence that it will be effective, resistance *quand même*, out of a principle of solidarity with victims and as a deliberate affront to those who simply let the stream of history sweep them along, is the essence of Améry's philosophy.¹¹³

The point is that, while one's individual fate may be insurmountable, literature and politics are not opposed. There is solidarity in pure negativity and distrust, not just in shared victimhood. The function of polemical

discourse is to produce a language that ‘sticks’; that shares a rigid attitude of concern with others.¹¹⁴ This is how Améry gives suffering a validity that exceeds the reification of the subjectively lived and of historical facts. He claims the right to denounce what society makes of the traumatized when it labels them as paranoid, but also what society makes of literature when it contrasts artistic sublimation with unconstructive and pathological resentment. Instead of an opposition between ethics and literature, the latter must be understood as a literal transformation of life – not its cure but its moralization.

Améry, one could argue, construes his own persona as an ‘idiot,’ not in the sustained manner of the passive nihilism of Christ, but nevertheless, as someone who refuses to speak in the idiom of public discourse. More like the underground man – another literary construction that condenses a whole age in a single type – his place is not in society because he cannot not, however much he might want to, accept the ‘perpetual and unchangeable ordinariness’ of the compromises and thoughtlessness on which social life is based. His discord with the world makes him a ‘private thinker’ in the sense of Lev Shestov: someone who thinks in an untimely and cold-blooded fashion, usually at the cost of being despised. The public use of reason is the guarantor of ideas – indeed, the equal distribution of ‘critical thought’ for all and in the general interest – but thereby also a stupefying matter of general dictates that even God would have to obey. Its ‘function,’ as Deleuze comments, is the ‘conservation, adaptation and utility’ of a ‘reactive life that is satisfied with itself.’ The private thinker, by contrast, ‘wants the lost, the incomprehensible and the absurd restored to him.’¹¹⁵ As living proof that there is currently no such thing as common sense, only good sense and its enemies, the private thinker is provoked by the fact that ‘we are still not thinking.’ His demand for justice is a passionate and isolated cry that, even if it proceeds from resentment, makes for a much more urgent necessity to think than good sense could ever provide. It also has more value than a socially recognized ‘nobility’ or ‘self-respect.’

For society, Améry’s work is quite literally the return of the repressed. It is as a writer more than as a victim that Améry positions himself as an archetypal ‘killjoy.’¹¹⁶ His exposure of resentment is less the fetishization of trauma than what Ahmed calls ‘the work of exposure’: the narrating that makes grief visible and that, in reminding us of the necessity not to forget, makes us rethink the relation between present and past and returns our wounded attachments to actuality. Retelling the past is a seriation of contaminations beyond lived experience. For what returns in resentment – the constant repetition of ‘the first blow’¹¹⁷ – is not just a memory but the future reverberations of the past, and thus, the possibility of a redistribution of our historical sense of the present.

Améry's text is not just a timeless meditation on violence but must also be set within the French debate on torture during the Algerian War.¹¹⁸ Améry revisited the Holocaust through the prism of colonialism. He did not only erect a monument to the memory of the survivors but also activated its critical force. To bear witness to the Holocaust means struggling against oppression in the present, not surround a lived trauma with the aura of sacredness. It is only when confronted with the absolutely unthinkable, such as was also the case with Kierkegaard's demand for a 'repetition' or 'forward recollection' of that which has been, that we begin to think effectively.¹¹⁹ It is true that Améry ostensibly has no stake in the future. His demand that that which has been not have been violates the law of contradiction. But it also implies that a radically new thought and a new society are possible. He insists because only repetition gives him the power to connect with other exiles and other becomings, which come back from the future as so many unrealized possibilities retrieved from the past.¹²⁰ In this sense, at least, resentment is not primarily an existential pathology but a political pathos that enforces the destruction of good sense and the affirmation of a different orientation toward time.

Notes

- 1 Instead of getting rid of the notion of resentment altogether, Jameson reinterprets it affirmatively as 'among all human passions, the most deeply driven by bad faith of the Sartrean type.' Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 193. Sartre associated resentment with mommy's boys such as Flaubert and Genet as well as with anti-Semitism. In *Being and Nothingness*, however, Sartre makes a distinction between resentment, typically embodied in 'caretakers, overseers, goalers' who 'establish their human personality as a perpetual negation' of the outer world, and bad faith as the Victorian attitude of those who have turned negation inward. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel Estella Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1992), 45–6.
- 2 Žižek, *Violence*, 80, 159.
- 3 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 241. Nussbaum, by contrast, makes the argument that forgiveness is already 'one thought too many' and betrays an inquisitorial and transactional mentality. It figures narcissistically as a form of revenge to the extent that, in our (Pauline) culture of apology and forgiveness, abasement is a precondition of elevation. While anger may have limited utility as signal (of injustice), motivation (for political struggle), or deterrent (outrage over wrongs), for her, only generosity (unconditionality), justice (law), and truth (authenticity) – her models are Nelson Mandela and Mohandas Ghandi – contain the forward-looking spirit necessary for trust and reconciliation, and thus to greater 'welfare,' which is rationally preferable over retribution. Nussbaum, *Anger and Forgiveness*, 12–13, 30.
- 4 Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Orlando: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1973), 459.
- 5 Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, trans. Mark Dooley and Michael Hughes (New York: Routledge, 2001), 32, 41.

- 6 Magdalena Zolkos, 'Jean Améry's Concept of Resentment at the Crossroads of Ethics and Politics', *The European Legacy* 12.1 (2007), 23–38, 25.
- 7 Scheler, *Ressentiment*, 57–61.
- 8 Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, §25.
- 9 Theodor W. Adorno, 'What Does Coming to Terms with the Past Mean?', in: Geoffrey Hartman (ed.), *Bitburg in Moral and Political Perspective* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 114–29, 115.
- 10 See Zahi Zalloua, 'Betting on Resentment: Žižek with Nietzsche', *Symploke* 20.1–2 (2012), 53–65.
- 11 Jean Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, trans. Sidney Rosenfeld and Stella P. Rosenfeld (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), viii–ix, 63, 80.
- 12 Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, 75.
- 13 Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, xiv.
- 14 Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, 645, 81.
- 15 Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton (London: Routledge, 2004), 365. The proviso should be made that Améry's revolution is fully past-oriented, meaning that he does not want to erase past crimes, whereas Adorno is a more classical moralist who wants to make sure Auschwitz does not recur in the future.
- 16 Adorno, 'What Does Coming to Terms with the Past Mean?', 115.
- 17 Hannah Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2003), 228.
- 18 W.G. Sebald, *On the Natural History of Destruction* (Toronto: Vintage, 2004), 146.
- 19 Sebald, *On the Natural History of Destruction*, 146, 152.
- 20 Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, 63.
- 21 'I had no clarity when I was writing this little book, I do not have it today, and I hope that I never will. Clarification would amount to disposal, settlement of the case, which can then be placed in the files of history. My book is meant to aid in preventing precisely this. For nothing is resolved, no conflict is settled, no remembering has become mere memory. . . . Emotions? For all I care, yes. Where is it decreed that enlightenment must be free of emotion? To me the opposite seems to be true. Enlightenment can properly fulfill its task only if it sets to work with passion.' Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, xi.
- 22 Primo Levi quoted in Thomas Brudholm, *Resentment's Virtue: Jean Améry and the Refusal to Forgive* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008), 89.
- 23 Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, 69.
- 24 Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, 70.
- 25 Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, 70.
- 26 Victoria Fareld, 'Ressentiment as Moral Imperative: Jean Améry's Nietzschean Reevaluation of Victim Morality', in: Jeanne Riou and Mary Gallagher (eds.), *Re-Thinking Resentment: On the Limits of Criticism and the Limits of Its Critics* (Bielefeld: Transkript Verlag, 2016), 53–70. While the objective circumstances of the extermination of the Jews have been sufficiently clarified, at issue is the aporia of testimony: the truth of what happened – its tragic and frightening comprehension – is more real to the survivors than the historical facts and their verification. Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York: Zone Books, 1999), 11–12.
- 27 Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, 96.
- 28 Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, 99.

- 29 Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, 64, xiii. Following Ahmed and Jan Slaby, the phenomenology 'of one's own cause' (*in eigener Sache*) thus turns into political activism. The 'thing' (*Sache*) is precisely the assemblage of the social reality that affects us and our own affective state. Both as a feeling and as a descriptive word, resentment immediately generates insights, impulses for action, and solidarity between kindred spirits. Jan Slaby, 'Die Kraft des Zorns – Sara Ahmeds aktivistische Post-Phänomenologie', in: Isabelle Marcinski and Hilge Landweer (eds.), *Dem Erleben auf der Spur: Feminismus und Phänomenologie* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2016), 279–303.
- 30 Matthias Bormuth, 'Kritik als Passion. Einleitung zu Person und Werk von Jean Améry', in: Matthias Bormuth and Susan Normi-chomers (eds.), *Kritik aus Passion: Studien zu Jean Améry* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2005), 7–25, esp. 16–17.
- 31 Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, ix.
- 32 Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, 65.
- 33 Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, 19, 68. For, as Adorno argued, 'In the end, the glorification of splendid underdogs is nothing other than glorification of the splendid system that makes them.' Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, §7.
- 34 Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, 64, 68, 71.
- 35 Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, vii.
- 36 Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, 77.
- 37 Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, 67.
- 38 Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, 65. See also Brudholm, *Resentment's Virtue*, 154.
- 39 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, II §14.
- 40 Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, 70. Améry's dismissal of revenge cannot be seen independently from this impossibility, which again points to the resentimental experience of impotence: 'Nowhere else could the *jus talionis* make less historical and moral sense than in this instance. It can be a matter neither of revenge on the one side nor of a problematic atonement which has only theological meaning and therefore is not relevant for me on the other. Of course, it cannot be a matter of settlement by force, which is historically unthinkable anyhow.' Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, 77.
- 41 Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, 66.
- 42 Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, 94, 28, 40.
- 43 Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, 66.
- 44 Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, 70.
- 45 Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, 72–5.
- 46 Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, 75, 72–3.
- 47 Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, 28, cf. 40.
- 48 Ferro, *Le Ressentiment dans L'histoire*, 11.
- 49 Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, x.
- 50 Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, 77.
- 51 Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, 80.
- 52 Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, 72.
- 53 Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, 70, 120.
- 54 Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, 68.
- 55 Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, 79–81, ix. Here, Améry goes straight against the good sense that we can have no resentment against the necessary and the accidental. For an exemplary articulation of such good sense, see Amélie Oksenberg Rorty's opposition of progressive Enlightenment projects to the dialectic of resentment: 'no one resents mortality or the common cold.' Amélie Oksenberg Rorty, 'The Dramas of Resentment', *The Yale Review* 88.3 (2000), 89–100, 91, 94.

- 56 Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, x. 'Only stagnant, Old Testament, barbaric hate could come dragging its burden and want to load it onto the shoulders of innocent German youth.' Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, 75.
- 57 Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, 63.
- 58 Taking as a precedent the Athenian amnesty of 403 BCE, which aimed to prevent civil war, Muldoon argues that the 1960s commandment to forget 'is more likely to cause, rather than cure, resentment, and insofar as it [is] exercised by the citizenry upon themselves it is more likely to enervate the political than energize it.' Paul Muldoon, 'The Power of Forgetting: Resentment, Guilt and Transformative Politics', *Political Psychology* 38.4 (2007), 669–83, 681.
- 59 David Heyd, 'Die Ethik des Ressentiments des Jean Améry', in Ulrich Bielefeld and Yfaat Weiss (eds.), *Jean Améry* (Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2014), 1–30.
- 60 Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, 69.
- 61 Zolkos, 'Jean Améry's Concept of Resentment', 32.
- 62 Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, 96.
- 63 Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, 70.
- 64 Zolkos emphasizes the strictly dyadic (as opposed to triangular or social) structure of victim versus perpetrator of Améry's resentment. Zolkos, 'Jean Améry's Concept of Resentment', 23–38.
- 65 Derrida translated the Hegelian *aufheben* as *relever*, to be 'surpassed and conserved' in once's past, 'retained, interiorized (*erinnert*) and *relevé* raised up.' Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 121.
- 66 Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, 78. Also: 'I hope that my resentment . . . will also perform a historical function [and] . . . represent the German revolution that did not take place.' *Ibid.*
- 67 'The spiritual reduction to pulp by the German people, not only of the books, but of everything that was carried out in those twelve years, would be the negation of the negation: a highly positive, a redeeming act.' Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, 79.
- 68 While the term 'unemployed negativity' stems from Georges Bataille, we can define it as the infinite reproduction of a finite present that has to founder (*zugrundegehen*) because it refuses self-limitation through mediation. Unemployed negativity is like a straight line that refuses to become a circle or an unfulfilled moral demand (*sollen*). It becomes 'boring' because it can only be repeated without ever being satisfied. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, trans. George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 130, 193.
- 69 Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, 72.
- 70 Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, 77.
- 71 For Améry, the notion that time heal wounds is 'a platitudinous revelation' that becomes irrelevant for the person 'who perceives himself to be morally unique.' Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, 70–1.
- 72 Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, 72.
- 73 Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 99–100.
- 74 Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 100.
- 75 Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, 68–9.
- 76 Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, xi.
- 77 Roy Ben-Shai, 'To Reverse the Irreversible: On Time Disorder in the Work of Jean Améry', in: James R. Watson (ed.), *Metacide: In the Pursuit of Excellence* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 73–92.
- 78 Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, xi, 72.

- 79 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 313; *Minima Moralia* §§22, 43–5. Against the conformism that sees a contradiction between possibility and impossibility – the logical form of what Adorno identified as identification with the aggressor – Améry's appeal is the utopian demand that what is neither fully actual nor fully nonactual – the really existing impossibility of individual consciousness – become possible again (rather than what is really impossible becoming possible again). It is precisely this modality of the anachronistic and self-infiniteizing 'ought' (*sollen*) that society suppresses in order to maintain itself and the illusion of wholeness.
- 80 See also: Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, §§51–2. With Deleuze, we can therefore see resentment as part of those 'non-respectable means' that help the thinker orientate in the element of non-thought. Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, 41; cf. Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 68–72.
- 81 Roy Ben-Shai, 'In Sickness and in Health: Nietzsche, Améry, and "the Moral Difference"', in: Roy Ben-Shai and Nitzan Lebovic (eds.), *The Politics of Nihilism* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 125–50.
- 82 'What people did not use to know, what people these days do know, can know –, a *regressive development* or turnaround in any way, shape or form is absolutely impossible. This is something that we psychologists, at least, do know. But all priests and moralists have believed that it was possible.' Nietzsche, *Twilight*, Skirmishes §43. What makes Nietzsche a moralist in Améry's eyes is that he, too – and contrary to his popular image as an individualist for whom the weak individual is of paramount importance for the evolutionary process, summarized as 'ennoblement through degeneration' (Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, V §224) – regards untethered individuals mostly as an affront, as functionless survivors of themselves and society, who preserve themselves without growing, thereby decomposing unity into multiplicity, order into chaos, and sense into nonsense. On this theme, see Werner Hamacher, '“Desintegration des Willens”: Nietzsche über Individuum und Individualität', in: *Entferntes Verstehen* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 1998), 113–50.
- 83 'The paradox of searching for a time which, to the author's own distress, cannot in the last resort be forgotten entails a quest for a form of language in which experiences paralyzing the power of articulation could be expressed.' Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, 150.
- 84 Primo Levi cited in Jacob Howland, 'Intellectuals at Auschwitz: Jean Améry and Primo Levi on the Mind and Its Limits', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 29.3 (2015), 353–73.
- 85 Avishai Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 207.
- 86 Didier Fassin, 'On Resentment and Ressentiment: The Politics and Ethics of Moral Emotions', *Current Anthropology* 54.3 (2013), 249–61, 251.
- 87 Fassin, 'On Resentment and Ressentiment', 252.
- 88 Brudholm, *Resentment's Virtue*, 93.
- 89 'Améryean resentment – if it is to be categorized as a kind of resentment at all – is certainly of a special kind. It is not fueled by spiteful and malicious envy – which is often used to distinguish resentment from resentment – and it is not characterized by an excessive self-concern. It does not crave revenge, its attributions of guilt and responsibility are not expressive of a blind and unjustifiable generalization of blame, and Améry does not seem to take secret delight in the continuation of his resentments. Also unlike the conventional image of the "man of resentment," Améry's anger and fear are not expressive of an irrational or disturbed understanding of the social reality.' Brudholm, *Resentment's Virtue*, 174.

- 90 Brudholm, *Resentment's Virtue*, 66. Contrary to Améry's radical perspectivism, Brudholm relies on the disconnection of the value or claim to justice from the claimant's resentment: 'This brings us back to the question of the affinity between Améryean resentment and moral philosophical concepts of resentment, which I argue is based on their shared beliefs that legitimate expectations have been violated. One can both accept the notion of a resentment occasioned by a genuine moral wrong and still insist on the condemnation of the attitude, the reason being that the condemnable or regrettable aspect of resentment can be an effect, either of the excessive and gloomy nature of the way in which resentment is preserved in resentment, or of the vengeful desires to which resentment may give rise. In other words, persons plagued by resentment might reasonably believe that a serious moral wrong has been done, and at the same time, be appropriately criticized both for the way in which they hold on to their resentment and for the vengeful kind of retribution they wish to be inflicted on those responsible for the wrong in question.' Brudholm, *Resentment's Virtue*, 131–2.
- 91 Brudholm, *Resentment's Virtue*, 166, 126.
- 92 Cf. Brudholm, *Resentment's Virtue*, 158. Zolkos is right to object to Brudholm's attempt to welcome Améry's resentment into the reconciliatory process, precisely because it would return Améry to normalcy and reason, and thus normalize and neutralize his expressions of resentment. Zolkos, 'Jean Améry's Concept of Resentment', 25–30.
- 93 Dolgert, 'The Praise of Resentment', 357; Sebald, *On the Natural History of Destruction*, 158.
- 94 Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, 80.
- 95 Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotions*, 32.
- 96 Brudholm, *Resentment's Virtue*, 131, 133.
- 97 Sartre, *The Family Idiot*, I 396–7.
- 98 Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, 71.
- 99 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I §10, II §10.
- 100 Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 59.
- 101 'Nevertheless, considerations which start from the subject remain false to the extent that life has become appearance. For since the overwhelming objectivity of historical movement in its present phase consists so far only in the dissolution of the subject, without yet giving rise to a new one, individual experience necessarily bases itself on the old subject, now historically condemned, which is still for-itself, but no longer in-itself. The subject still feels sure of its autonomy, but the nullity demonstrated to subjects by the concentration camp is already overtaking the form of subjectivity itself. Subjective reflection, even if critically alerted to itself, has something sentimental and anachronistic about it: something of a lament over the course of the world, a lament to be rejected not for its good faith, but because the lamenting subject threatens to become arrested in its condition and so to fulfil in its turn the law of the world's course. Fidelity to one's own state of consciousness and experience is forever in temptation of lapsing into infidelity, by denying the insight that transcends the individual and calls his substance by its name.' Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, Dedication.
- 102 See Grayson Hunt, 'Performing Dignity: The Restorative Value of Bodily Resentments', *Women in Philosophy Annual Journal of Papers* 6 (2010–2011), 47–61.

- 103 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 106.
- 104 Sartre, *The Family Idiot*, I 139.
- 105 'Just as the name Hans Mayer does not completely disappear in the anagram Améry, so neither Améry's identity nor his work can be reduced to these experiences.' Alan Itkin, 'Introduction: The Untimely Jean Améry', *The Germanic Review* 89 (2014), 195–201. As Sartre says of Genet, he transforms victimhood by changing his motives and creating a 'duplication of the original situation.' Jean-Paul Sartre, *Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Plume Books, 1991), 158, 282.
- 106 Anderson, *White Rage*, 75.
- 107 Jean Améry, *On Aging: Revolt and Resignation*, trans. John D. Barlow (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 74–5.
- 108 Left without plans for the future and lost among cultural signs, the social system absorbs our individuality and dissolves our chronological experience – the experience of time in space such as the lived difference between five or fifteen years ago – in the disorienting sequence of the impersonal 'event': The present becomes 'like a water flowing from rock to rock,' with death awaiting us as ultimate humiliation. Améry, *On Aging*, 111–16.
- 109 Améry, *On Aging*, 4.
- 110 Améry, *On Aging*, xxii.
- 111 Jean Améry, *On Suicide: A Discourse on Voluntary Death*, trans. John D. Barlow (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999), 16.
- 112 Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, 2, 63.
- 113 Sebald, *On the Natural History of Destruction*, 155; cf. Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, 68.
- 114 Nietzsche, in another context, warned against precisely this stickiness of language: "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." Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I §14.
- 115 Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 40, 150; Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, 63.
- 116 Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 33, 58–59.
- 117 Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, 26, 90.
- 118 Enzo Traverso, 'No, Post-Nazi Germany Isn't a Model of Atoning for the Past', *Jacobin* 6 June 2022, <https://jacobin.com/2022/06/post-nazi-germany-colonialism-holocaust-israel-atonement>
- 119 Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling/Repetition*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 131–3, 147–8. On the 'unprofessional thinker' (Job) as opposed to the *professor publicus ordinaries* (Hegel), *ibid.*, 186. And as Deleuze comments: 'It is a serious mistake to think that irrationalism opposes anything but thought to reason. . . . In irrationalism, it is always a matter of thought, nothing else but thinking. What is opposed to reason is thought itself; what is opposed to the reasonable being is the thinker himself.' Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 93.
- 120 Bruce Baugh, 'Private Thinkers, Untimely Thoughts: Deleuze, Shestov and Fondane', *Continental Philosophy Review* 48.3 (2015), 313–9, 330, 334–6.

6 The Diplomat

Limits of the Dialectic

‘We contemplate history as this slaughter-bench upon which the happiness of nations, the wisdom of states, and the virtues of individuals are sacrificed.’¹ Presupposing nothing but its own light, Hegel saw it the speculative task of reason to discover how, in history, despite its moments of shock, loss, and disillusionment, suffering points to the future. Reason enables us to affirm (*aufheben*, to erase, dissolve, overcome, retain, relieve, sublimate) the present as our own developing freedom. We may very well perceive an opposition between self-conscious spirit and the given reality of customs and nature, but this opposition is only an obfuscating abstraction. Individual alienation and sacrifice are both essential and to be overcome. Grasping the identity of subjective and objective spirit means finding in the external phenomena the dialectical inner pulse that makes for a ‘warmer peace.’²

From an emancipatory point of view, it may, indeed, be hard to imagine a whining Caesar – a world historical figure who is unaware how world history moves through him.³ But what would Hegel make of Améry’s project of enlightenment concerning his own resentment? We have already seen how resentment constitutes a key moment in Hegel’s system in the form of the unhappy consciousness. As a moment, however, it is necessarily the object of extensive critique, in the form of overcoming critical reflection as such. Like a pervasive whataboutism, the critical stance is the expression of alienation, and thus, opposed to the Idea. Criticism is, by definition, pedantic, particularist, and bellicose; it pretends to teach but is, in fact, only a ‘litany of lamentation.’⁴ In opposing ‘ought’ to ‘is,’ reflection spoils our enthusiasm by keeping us trapped in passivity. It functions as a trigger for signals that come from without but that cannot be exorcised. Not only is reflection unable to rise above itself; no trigger warning can protect it from itself. It is stuck in an entropic ‘yes but’ – the boring alternation of the finite and the infinite that was characteristic of negative theology and that also characterizes today’s petty polemics in the name of free speech and moral sensitization.

Enlightenment, by contrast, only occurs when consciousness undergoes the shock of learning that what it took to be true 'in itself,' it had really only taken to be true 'for itself.' In order to emancipate itself, the negation must be negated. Consciousness must alter not only its defective knowledge of the object of its complaints but also the object itself, for which it remains responsible, no matter how atrocious it is. Herein lies the famous cunning of reason: there is always more going on than you think. The free play of particularist passions is the appearance of reason in history. All the while, reason takes place independently of our individual selves. The actuality (*Wirklichkeit*) of reason is the deep relationality and triangularity of Hegel's thought. The only way forward in history is through the mediation of all society's contradictions, which must be determinately negated, one by one. That which cannot contain contradiction within itself – that which refuses the burden of becoming – must 'perish (*zugrundegehen*).'⁵ It is therefore out of the question that Améry would have accepted this offer of moral 'inclusivity.' Even though he is steeped in the dialectic and acknowledges its natural necessity, he would resist it absolutely, to his own demise.⁵

Hegel discovers the archetypical case of resentment criticism in the 'inner indignation' of 'the rabble' – those for whom there is no place within the organized totality of the modern state, although they formally belong to it.⁶ Like the lumpenproletariat for Marx and Engels, the rabble subjectively redoubles the nihilism of the objective system from which it originates with its own irrational particularity. In addition, Hegel would probably have identified resentment among contemporary 'denialists' and 'deplorables' who have free rein in humiliating civil society, insofar as their cynicism puts them in a highly effective alliance with the 'rich rabble.'⁷ Following Marx's critique of critique, it can also be found in the half-hearted morality of the citizenry who are too attached to their liberal comfort zone. The proletarian revolution, after all, is a negation producing a new positivity. It does not constitute a slave revolt in the Nietzschean sense, for the obvious reason that those who have something to win do not ruminate over their grudges in the way that the heroes of Dostoevsky and Flaubert do. If there is a convergence between Nietzsche and Marx, it lies, perhaps first of all, in their shared distaste for the 'inverse cripples,' 'who were missing everything except the one thing they have too much of.'⁸

What all these examples tell us is that, from Hegel to Nietzsche and from Marx to Améry, the dialectical use of the concept of resentment remains polemical and, despite its claim to totality, unacceptable to those it objectifies. Any notion of reconciliation is only the effect of a logical confrontation pushed to the extreme. Indeed, the syllogism will always prioritize the negation of the negation over the negation itself. Insofar as the rabble, or lumpenproletariat, is a necessary product of capitalism, for example, we can speak of a contemporary 'revenge capitalism,' in which

accumulation relies on preemptive strategies to put down rebellion.⁹ From hyper-incarceration to gentrification and from the making of indebted persons to the myths of the ‘welfare queen’ and the ‘bogus asylum seeker,’ we are dealing with a vindictive cruelty directed against those on whom the system depends yet excludes in order to contain its own contradictions. What is the politics of white supremacy, if not a revenge that necessarily precedes black rage, insofar as not much of the latter would remain if the system of racial capitalism itself would change? And did the EU, during the summer of the Greek debt crisis in 2015, not show itself, already before the Greek *oxi*, to be a completely irrational penal state ready to go to any length to crush all hope of debt relief? In all these cases, not only does the punishment precede the crime; capitalism justifies itself and operates essentially in the form of cruelty. Order always shows its teeth first. It feeds on a hatred based on domination, not on anger or grief over perceived inequality among peers. Resentment is not just its unfortunate outcome but also the key ingredient of its agents, as comes to the fore in the sadistic jouissance of the neo-reactionaries and their liberal institutional protectors, all of whom blame the victim and long for payback, and who differ only in the degree in which they sublimate this vindictiveness.

If, in addition to the resentimental nature of anti-resentiment polemics, we also accept a more authentic form of resentment that takes the form of a negative dialectic, this implies that dialectics, too, requires the essentially pastoral business of arbitrating the reactive attitudes in the name of some higher good sense. Žižek’s various critiques of resentment are illustrative of this Janus face of dialectics with regard to the pathos of negativity. The still-pious notion of authentic resentment that he finds with Améry implies that there must also exist an inauthentic resentment – a non-dialectical negativity. Following the terrorist attack on Charlie Hebdo on 7 January 2015, for example, Žižek took a stance against the consensus that the assailants were fundamentalists. A true fundamentalist, after all, is deeply convinced of the superiority of his own way of life and therefore indifferent toward the non-believers’ way of life. When a Tibetan Buddhist encounters a Western hedonist, they may note that the hedonist’s search for happiness is self-defeating, but they will not condemn them for this. Today’s pseudo-fundamentalists, by contrast, are deeply offended but also intrigued by the sinful life of global consumerism. In fighting the other, they are, in fact, fighting themselves, and this is what makes them all the more passionate. The terrorists are driven not by self-confidence but by resentment:

How fragile the belief of a Muslim must be if he feels threatened by a stupid caricature in a weekly satirical newspaper? . . . The problem with fundamentalists is not that we consider them inferior to us, but,

rather, that *they themselves* secretly consider themselves inferior. This is why our condescending politically correct assurances that we feel no superiority towards them only makes them more furious and feeds their resentment. The problem is not cultural difference (their effort to preserve their identity), but the opposite fact that the fundamentalists are already like us, that, secretly, they have already internalized our standards and measure themselves by them.¹⁰

How can Žižek's use of the concept of resentment slide so quickly from one position into its opposite? What the two opposed types of resentment, the universal emancipatory version and the particularist entrenching version, have in common is that they both refuse the false universality of liberal democracy; only authentic resentment rejects a society that it seeks to overcome, whereas envious resentment remains predicated on the very system it denies. It is consistent with his defense of the former that Žižek, in the context of an argument with Sloterdijk, to whom he assigns the role of the priest, wonders whether the 'obsessive-compulsive urge to find beneath solidarity the envy of the weak and thirst for revenge . . . is sustained by a disavowed envy and resentment of its own, the envy of the universal emancipatory position.'¹¹ Yet how different is his own position really? Like Sartre and Adorno, Žižek no longer assumes that all negativity must be harnessed and resolved within a common framework. His interpretation of the terrorist attack is meant as a lesson for those who mistake pseudo-fundamentalism for liberalism's other. Nevertheless, he still frames the situation around Charlie Hebdo from a majoritarian point of view, such that the scary and attention-seeking 'other' turns out actually to be very much like us, only less authentic and more deprived. In negating any positive difference their negation of the liberal order might contain, in remaining silent on the injustice of which they are also the victim, Žižek entrenches the very opposition between us and them that his diagnosis pretends to have already overcome. (He could actually learn something from the Tibetan monks in this regard.) Inversely, why would his judgment over the authenticity of resentment suddenly be less condescending in the case of Améry?

We see why the polemical charge of the concept, like the return of the repressed, becomes all the more treacherous when it goes unacknowledged. The very conditions of its enunciation are parasitic on the opposition between the established identities it consolidates and from which resentment springs. In his *Critique of Cynical Reason*, Sloterdijk observes that the dialectic always plays the role of both the polemicist and the arbiter.¹² It is right to distrust those priests who criticize resentment from an enunciative position that claims to speak 'reasonably'; that is, in the name of some bland generality. But it returns to good sense as soon as, in turn, it

points to the resentment that allegedly constitutes their position, as this immediately contaminates its own position with the hypocrisy of the other. What is dialectics if not this logic of mutual contamination? In succumbing to the sanitary temptation to oppose good and bad resentment, dialectics remains trapped in opposition, seeking to eliminate the guilty one, instead of the Nietzschean gesture of composing with it by taking it as the flawed yet conditioning countertendency of creation.

This oscillation between the roles of polemicist and arbiter – that is, of the philosopher and the priest – first of all proves how quickly the pseudo-critical diagnosis of resentment runs out of steam. As Hegel himself would say, it is a typical case of unimposing (*unscheinbar*) truth that is estimated highly but without reason. Every attempt at taking it seriously already produces something of a caricature. There is a systematic and functional link between truth and entropy: observing the fact of resentment triggers no new momentum; it makes no difference in the way we think; it makes nothing transpire but merely consolidates a chronic polemical state in which the critical truth of the statement and its plausibility remain at odds with one another. The negation of the negation comes to a standstill.

It was the radicalness of Améry's complaint, provoked by a much more violent necessity to think than reason could ever provide, that already revealed how the concept of resentment is immune to good sense and resists explanation. Not only is there nothing morally uplifting about his trauma (or about being poor, weak, or disenfranchised from common life), resentment is as conflicted about itself as it is about the other. Its own truth is no different from that upheld by Adorno against Marx: any dream of emerging as victor at the end of a rationally unfolding history is a return to the idealist trap, as it mystifies negativity.¹³ It is true that, for Améry, the protest of the non-identical surplus could still be said to contain an element of reason, which makes suffering function as the condition of objectivity.¹⁴ However, the belief in universality will not lead to the overcoming of resentment but only exacerbate it, as it is inertly prompted by the passage of time and the rejuvenation of society. This is why the justification of the negative cannot, itself, proceed objectively; that is, through the work of setting a limit to negativity by authenticating some forms of suffering at the cost of others. The person of resentment – a type that includes a vast array of figures, including the underground man, Améry, Fanon's wretched of the earth – understands us better than we understand them. For, if justice were truly universal and indivisible, any legitimation of destruction and loss as essential moments of universal progress immediately disqualifies the claim to the right of being right. Hegelians, in this regard, can simply never be dialectical enough. Always wanting to be right, they never quite are. Like good priests, they are intrinsically tempted to pass too quickly from the individual to the general.

Good Sense and Common Sense

Do we not encounter here the limits of the Enlightenment tradition in which the polemical use of reason plays such an essential, even if usually only implicit, role? It is at this point that we need to contrast the notion of good sense to that of common sense. From Descartes to the eighteenth-century *philosophes*, there emerges a distinctive kind of provocateur whose trademark was not just an immoderate appeal to *le bon sens*, which is considered to be simple, reasonable, and universal, but also its militant setting against *le sens commun*, which is considered to be widespread, irrational, and customary.¹⁵ Ever since Aristotle, common sense has been understood as the natural sense of being in tune with the ‘world.’ It is the intrasubjective sixth sense that guarantees that the five senses all have the same object, and it is the intersubjective feeling of fellowship with other humans that bestows this object with identity and meaning. The juxtaposition of good sense with this latent, inarticulate, preliminary background feeling of common sense marked the birth of ‘critique.’¹⁶ With the lifting of censorship on speech and print, and in alliance with the new sciences, the person of good sense established themselves as independent spokesperson for truth, even for a renewed understanding of ‘common sense.’ But rather than putting an end to conflict, this led to exclusive claims to rationality, effectively ruling out any possibility of common experience; there are as many forms of ‘common sense’ as there are arbiters and experts of good sense.

The price paid for this polemical multiplication is precisely the care for a sense organ that would be common and not at all natural but truly civil. By the end of the eighteenth century, Arendt bemoans, good sense had fully transformed common sense into an inner sense. It is nothing less than the tragic event ‘characteristic of the whole modern age.’ She contrasts Lessing’s still ‘Greek’ notion of critique – a theatrical agon in which the criterion for thought is the continuing process of public speech and action – to the modern notion of critique, in which the criterion is the subjective certainty of being right and the corresponding claim to objectivity.¹⁷ What is left of the ideal, however unlikely, of discourse among friends is a philistine language of disdain, of which we are the heirs to this day. Under these circumstances, any dream of the restoration of the Greek agon as a model for social composition can only regress to the same old polemics with other means. This raises the question of what it would mean, in the discourse of resentment, not only to break with good sense, as Améry did, but also to generate something like a shared experience and common articulation beyond belligerent struggle?

Throughout this book so far, we have critically investigated the conditions of *consistency* between theory and practice in the drama of resentment. For each of the three conceptual personae, we have examined the

ethical relation between logos and pathos, the internal connection between the truths produced and the interests their enunciations serve, as well as the polemical modalities in which they harden and contradict each other. In this way, we claim to have given a schematically exhaustive account of all existing uses of the concept of resentment, both in its various forms of good sense and in its vehement critique of good sense. What remains to be seen is where this shared situation is going, and hence, in what non-totalitarian kind of commonality, ultimately, the future relevance of the concept lies.

This takes us back to the post-dialectical problem from which we set out but which also appears in a new form: What does it mean to achieve *coherence* in the drama of resentment, if there is no synthetizing consciousness and nobody has the last word? Isn't the divisive drama of resentment a little bit too neatly divided up? Is there a standpoint from which we can recognize that our discourse is, indeed, a chaotic field of mutually reinforcing resentments, without immediately being sucked into polemics ourselves? And how does our own critical analysis translate the entropic tendencies of this very debate? Can it be an invitation to think less polemically? Can philosophical reason function as an art of articulation that is emotionally intelligent? An art in which words don't just reflect practice but also maintain and enhance a transformative sensibility for the diversity of other practices and perspectives? And where justice is rendered to the often-tortuous history of their relations? What sense, in short, is there in writing about resentment at all?

These questions about the sense and value of critique do not just suspend good sense but demand an imagination rooted in complexification instead of reduction and in slowing down instead of acceleration. They are meant to change the problem one more time, insofar as, even in Améry's polemical reason, like an unintended remainder, a claim to good sense about resentment continues to take precedence – further proof that resentment and good sense, despite appearances to the contrary, have always been bedfellows. Put differently: the (self-) criticism of good sense is important but only insofar as it is not itself put to a reactive use. As Sloterdijk warns: 'A rationality that has offered its services to the hardening of subjects is already no longer rational. Reason that maintains us without extending us was not reason at all. Thus, mature rationality cannot elude "dialectical" becoming. In the end, the most rigorous thinking, as the mere thinking of a subject, must go beyond itself.'¹⁸ The new challenge is to turn the very concept of resentment into an instrument of rapprochement no less than of critical decipherment. We must introduce the reasons for naming resentment in such a way that our own good sense does not impede a slowly advancing 'com-positioning' in which resentment and polemics no longer set the tone and in which we ourselves are only the effect and partial cause

of a collective learning process. The aim of such a dialectic is precisely common sense, now understood like Heraclitus's river, which you cannot enter twice because, each time, its components have already entered into new relations. This relational rationality evaporates, by contrast, as soon as things seem to have consolidated into sameness and contradiction. War or violence always begins out of indifference. In order to simultaneously speak with and speak about, we can therefore not suffice with describing the conflicted consciousness of resentment. We must also learn to co-adapt – that is, to give up our own position as knowing subject separate from what it knows – and we must prevent the objectification of our knowledge through the vitriol of others.

What the concept of resentment has lacked most so far is a sufficient reason, understood not just as a question of reckoning and accounting but also of desire and belief. It is not only the holographic projections and identifications of resentment that suffer from misplaced concreteness ('the greedy Jew,' 'the honest worker,' the 'secret enjoyment' of others); the concept itself is far too abstract in that it is the most stigmatizing way of addressing the passions. In order to speak about resentment in a fashion that is literally inter-esting, our speech must be *as plausible as it is truthful*. This implies a pragmatic understanding of truth as a process of experimentation-verification; that is the efficacy with which the eventual consequences of a concept are produced in the world more than in our heads. What counts is the process in which thought does not dissolve or fragment our sensation of reality but proves relevant to its transformation.¹⁹ We must, at all costs, avoid establishing ourselves as the privileged representative and arbiter of truth. Instead, addressing the problem of resentment is a matter of grounding ourselves in a situation in which it matters for all parties present and is no longer just a fact in an antagonistic argument.

Borrowing from contemporary anthropology, we must learn to understand resentment as a matter of concern as opposed to a matter of fact.²⁰ Can we speak symmetrically of resentment? This challenge involves responding to the question how resentment brings together those critics who would normally only relate to one another in a polemical fashion. And even more, how it involves those to whom it is said to apply: the infamous persons of resentment themselves. After all, it is not easy to persuade someone that it feels good not to feel bad, when feeling bad feels so good. What must be avoided at all costs is the kind of auto-immune problem in which sentiments mutate into shame or guilt, which is the best recipe for furthering resentment. This is why critique must transform itself into the analysis of the limits of the process in which an affective tendency becomes both hegemonic and self-destructive. If resentment is to be affirmed as co-present, we must seek to dissociate it from its moral disqualification as 'evil' and ethically re-relate to it in terms of its precarious and vulnerable potential.

Our final task is to explore what it takes to transform the obstinate problem of resentment from a problem of critical or good sense into one of care for common sense.²¹ This means that, while resentment will always remain an intrinsically critical concept, care implies that its use no longer finds its reason solely within itself. Rather, resentment must be affirmed as a non-negligible quantity in the work of composition of a common sense, without first having to be sanctioned by what is often taken for common sense but is, in fact, its opposite. Can the diagnostician become the intercessor of the person of resentment *as well as vice versa*? How to compose with what is of itself a force of decomposition?

Care

Today, we are still dealing with affective epidemics of resentment, although the traditional functions of the church and the state have long been absorbed by the global media spectacle accompanying the total financialization of socio-economic life. In the attention economy, anger sells. The opinion market, with its click bait, filter bubbles, influencers, and tight circularity between senders and receivers – what is a ‘trigger’ if not a little algorithm, a short cycle of automated responses? – is facilitated by a new, computational mnemotechnics that transforms the ‘we’ into ‘they.’ In short-circuiting our collective attention span, algorithmic governance does not rely on psychosocial individuation but on social necrosis. Instead of an individualistic society, it creates the herd, or the rabble. Inherent to platform capitalism is the mixture of extremism and survival instincts that paralyzes the life of the spirit and induces the cynical reign of disinhibited drives.²² Its high-precision, ultra-fast communication has already proved to be extremely fertile (and toxic) ground for all sorts of uncontrollable revenge fantasies. What, under these circumstances, does a psycho-politics of non-proliferation look like? (Hint: the long-winded circuit of a book such as this may be necessary but remains far from sufficient.)

Whenever a politician or a journalist or expert – themselves classical functionaries struggling for survival in the post-truth age – identifies an omnipresent resentment, this still comes down to a blind renunciation of established beliefs. The diagnosis is part of the problem, not its solution. For how can a historical explanation not pin down its targets to their resentment in the name of its own rationality? There is a secret enjoyment, not only in resentment but also in self-aggrandizing anti-resentment rhetoric. The cynical ‘realism’ of the commentariat in the race for explanation is as irrational as the resentment it diagnoses. Only the affective becomings of common sense – the shared world – and not our own good sense can serve as the sufficient ground for our rationality. As Stiegler puts it, the only thing that could face up to resentment is a ‘collective

intelligence, that is, an intelligence that does not take those to whom it addresses itself to be simpletons.²³

While we should not lose sight of Nietzsche's lesson that naming resentment is a way of escaping from the hold it has on others, the challenge for us remains to find a perspective in which the diagnosis of resentment does not acquit us of the responsibility for the becoming of 'the weak.' Neither can we demand of the people of resentment that they reject or prohibit their sentiments, since, no matter how negative, neurotic, or sickening, it is only by starting from these sentiments that their individual bearers can leave behind their fixation. There is no becoming without history. The only way out lies in teaming up – in streaming energy together in making a common cause. In meeting the needs of its object, our knowledge must induce a mutual engagement that has a chance of transforming both knower and known.²⁴

Good sense is the major key in morality – the tonality of 'everybody knows, nobody can deny.' It is intrinsically averse to resentment.²⁵ The priest effectively subsumes any possibility of the common under good sense, no matter whether this is called faith or the general interest or personal resilience. Care understood in the priestly sense means the necessity to govern over the herd and protect its members against a generally acknowledged evil, which essentially consists of their destructive desires as condensed in resentment. The Nietzschean physician of culture does not even pretend to care about the people of resentment, no matter their number. His immunitarian good sense and his idea of great politics, both rooted in the pathos of distance, exclude any immediately gregarious concerns, which are left to the priest.²⁶ Meanwhile, the person of resentment negates both common sense and good sense. They not only refuse to be part of a world that they perceive to have made them other; they also reject any external moral authority over their own resentment, even if their subjectivity depends on it. This leaves only one available position: that of a *diplomat* capable of diagnosing resentment, while contributing to a common sense in which the good sense of the polemical labelling of resentment no longer prevails.

Considered in themselves, the priest, the philosopher, and the person of resentment are the symmetrical outer reflections of the same polemical triangle. Because their interests are fundamentally at odds, truth and plausibility cannot be reconciled. The diplomat, by contrast, occupies a position that is the inverse of the other three, but, if successful, also makes the original three lose some of their oppositionality. The diplomat starts from the demand that the reasons for our interest in resentment be produced immanently, as part of a concrete truth produced as a movement from within the variation of interests. Taking the chance that their gestures do not leave the others unaffected, they invite the bellicose positions to enter into a kind of reciprocal deterritorialization.

In *The Invention of Modern Science*, Stengers analyzes 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, that requires us to trust science, and that prepares us to die for the truth, which she finds summarized in Galileo Galilei’s stubborn rebuttal: *eppure si muove!* – and its complicity with capitalism’s uprooting tendencies. The role of the diplomat, by contrast, is a cosmopolitical one: ‘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 differences through a goodwill reference to abstract principles of togetherness, but toward a creation of concrete, interlocked, asymmetrical, and always partial graspings.’²⁷ We must be careful to differentiate Stengers’s understanding of cosmopolitics from the Kantian project of world peace, understood as the hegemony of good sense and Hegelian *Aufhebung*. The latter is the recipe par excellence for more resentment, as it is always eager to usurp into its own totalitarian image of thought what it simultaneously reduces to a reactionary obstacle. The question is, rather, whether ‘we’ can think and speak of resentment in such a way that the diverging passions are not reduced to those kinds of market competition and struggle for recognition for which only the single humanistic-rationalistic project of global citizenship is the solution. This would imply that, through our mode of enunciation, we participate in a sensibilization to the irreducibility of those passions, while, at the same time, opening up the possibility of their local and spontaneous peace. From a pragmatist point of view, common sense is less a matter of intersubjectivity than of collective individuation. Reason does not take common sense as its natural starting point, nor as the ideal orientation of humanity, but rather, as the external finality of its own decentered presence, and therefore, as something that is always open to change.

Ironically, it is Améry who demonstrates that common sense has nothing to do with the clarity of good sense, precisely because it is composed of passions, not reasons. His version of enlightenment is itself emotion: ‘I had no clarity when I was writing this little book, I do not have it today, and I hope that I never will. Clarification would also amount to a disposal, settlement of the case, which can then be placed in the files of history. My book is meant to aid in preventing precisely this.’²⁸ Is there a better description of what ‘staying with the trouble’ means, namely, to demand recognition while refusing to sacrifice singularity for a new consensus?

Yet, at first sight, Améry does not risk much in sharing his story. His work is the cry of someone who demands that we learn how to share a world with him again. But, do we really hear it, and does he even want this? It seems that we again encounter the mutual exclusion of truth and plausibility. Améry’s tactlessness is a refusal to be touched. His truth is so

consistent and humorless that the outcome is clear from the outset. It cannot be argued with and serves as its own reward. It produces no effects that the person of resentment cannot control, such that it is actually hard to learn from or with them – indeed, to recognize them.

However, every position and every opposition marks a more profound composition. There is no such thing as a simple act or feeling, especially not resentment, which is why transmutation always remains possible. Améry is searching for a language capable of capturing an experience that is not his but that continues to make him into what he is and locks him up in himself. Part of this experience is the sense that he owns his pain and completely coincides with it. In his self-reflectivity without self-distance, the negativity of the for-itself appears reduced to the positivity of the in-itself. Yet, it is precisely through this desire to immediately coincide with himself that Améry remains subjected to the other and fully realizes their lack of recognition. Inversely, this means that, while his pain is determined, it is not exhausted in this determination. The notion of ownership or authenticity betrays something like ‘the petty-bourgeois version of bourgeois liberty’²⁹ that Louis Althusser detected in existentialism. It leads to the paradox that, while he cannot forget anything – implying that his consciousness is a perpetual confluence of past and present – Améry simultaneously claims that his memories are adequate. This claim is expressed in the anal fantasy of control, of ‘preserving’ and ‘encapsulating’ without mutation what he consistently refers to as ‘my resentments,’³⁰ instead of being truly overwhelmed by them. Even in his case, however, the wounded attachments to the world are not pure but contingent and already overdetermined. What Améry says about Nietzsche’s and Scheler’s fear – namely, that resentment will triumph – is the reverse side of his own fear that resentment will fail to triumph and that it will be taken away from him. Like the underground man, he simultaneously understands himself as a superfluous, arbitrary creature and jealously guards and wills his own suffering. His very act of storytelling already betrays the illusory character of resistance and, in this regard, deauthorizes him. Even if there is no redress for Améry, there may still be a redress for his resentment.

How to inherit the past differently? Améry imagined that his resentments would only disappear if the past could be undone. He thereby killed the time of the living. As Arendt would say, the withdrawal into pariah status offers him an all too ‘warm’ retreat from the ‘care for the world.’³¹ Contrast this with Fanon, with whose struggle to break out of the circuit of hatred, contempt, and resentment Améry identified.³² Fanon recounts how his overdetermination as a black man gives him the dread of not really existing (almost white but not quite) but concludes that, for him, the condition to ‘exist absolutely’ – that is, as a man recognizing others and being recognized by others – lies precisely in a kind of grey zone, as opposed to

any form of zealous identification.³³ Deeply disturbed by the risk of making himself a slave of the past, he set himself the task ‘to induce man to be actional,’³⁴ finding in revolutionary violence and the struggle for reparations the means to do so.

Perhaps the work of undoing (not erasing) the past is less absurd than Améry makes it seem. As long as those who suffer persist in the act of translation, Ahmed writes, ‘pain is moved into the public domain, and in moving, transformed.’³⁵ Through witnessing and testimony, we feel the other while not knowing what to say. Like throwing a stone into a pond, telling stories about the past is a pragmatic art of situating ourselves otherwise. The truth and cunning of storytelling do not lie in the past but in the interest of the problem that requires these stories in the first place; namely, the necessity of a break in equilibrium between past and future. Multiple stories can ‘unstiffen’ (James) the current history of reactions and provide us with a solidarity – indeed, a common sense – based on the hope that the future is more than the repetition of the past, and hence, that ‘“What I am against” is not inevitable.’³⁶

What Améry seems unable to affirm is what Deleuze and contemporary affect theorists, following Bergson, call the virtual. Bergson, too, likened the past to something like a pyramid (a ‘cone’) that stands on its apex, full of ‘dead weight,’ ‘surviving images,’ and ‘ghosts.’³⁷ The difference is that, while Améry conceives of this continuity of past and present as a pathological kind of schizophrenia,³⁸ this is only the negative mirror image of his own fixation. Améry situates himself at the point of the inverted apex – the tightest possible contraction of memory – that of a subjectivity that reduces itself to the immediate repetition of what Bergson calls ‘matter.’ Because of this, he takes his own actuality so personally that he is unaware of the impersonal becomings that are just as much part of the problematic of any existence. What we have called the ‘moreness’ of his insistence – the event-like quality of his writing – is precisely what does not come into view for him.

The reality of the composed and therefore by-definition incomplete and elastic nature of our existence is affirmed, by contrast, by feminist and post-colonial theorists who uphold a more contingent, or at least non-linear, relation between traumatic events and the affective tendencies that individuate us. As Ahmed puts it, it is precisely those whose being is in question who can question being because they write from the immanence of what happens:

The emotional struggles against injustice are not about finding good or bad feelings, and then expressing them. Rather, they are about how we are moved by feelings into a different relation to the norms that we wish to contest, or the wounds we wish to heal. Moving here is not about

‘moving on,’ or about ‘using’ emotions to move away, but moving and being moved as a form of labour or work, which opens up different kinds of attachments to others, in part through the recognition of this work *as work*.³⁹

Pain, in this account, is not a foundation of politics but it does play a key role in it. This is because it is an affect rather than a mere effect. Affects are the bodily memories and becomings of history. Améry insists on not returning to the biological body, since bodies are leaking vessels that know great variety in affective responses: we are touched differently by different others. Pain is never just about the past and how it persists but also, as in Nietzsche’s eternal return, an iteration that opens up futures in the way it weaves, with each repetition, different relations to others. It is less a capacity for having or being in pain than a passive-active doing. And to act is already to rethink the past.

Ahmed emphasizes the plasticity of affect through which an effect becomes the cause of a future-oriented movement. An affect is the impersonal capacity to affect and to be affected that gives the world its ‘common’ quality. As a tangle of potential connections – as event of ‘worlding’ – it enables her to speak, contrary to Brown, of the wound not as a resentimental fetish but as a ‘feminist attachment’: ‘In order to move away from attachments that are hurtful, we must act on them, an action which requires, at the same time, that we do not ontologize women’s pain as the automatic ground of politics.’⁴⁰ The challenge, then, is not to rush toward a world in which we leave our wounded attachments behind and feminism is no longer necessary but to compose with a history that is continually coexistent with the present and is, itself, composed as a cluster of affects capable of further (re)combination.

Among the risks of peace, there is a clear danger of returning to good sense, even to the rationale of a present power that retrospectively posits contingency rather than necessity – in short, a dominating rather than a creative power. In Hegel, this is the role played by the ‘beautiful souls’ who feel the injustice of their situation but without rationally thinking through their material conditions or – what comes down to the same – acting on them. Full of nostalgia, oscillating between innocence and guilt, the beautiful souls (like Sartre’s *salauds*) are capable of sensing moral beauty but incapable of denouncing their own skeptical reflexivity.⁴¹ They therefore objectify themselves by taking refuge in silence and rejecting the work of communication and communion that is a prerequisite for mutual recognition. (‘Everybody knows racism is terrible, but is this really our problem?’)

As a guerilla tactic against the pressure to reconcile and resolve difference, Ahmed identifies as a ‘feminist killjoy’ who embraces anger as key motivation and defies liberal theories that make social justice about the

sociability of feelings. Unlike Aristotle's or Smith's equation of anger with vengeance in need of a social contract, here, anger is a necessary attachment to the past, but, insofar as every action presupposes a history of reactions, also an opening to the future. While there is always a risk of resentment and indignation becoming an unconscious affirmation of one's subordinate position, which they then merely transgress and repudiate in ineffective ways, it is still we who decide what we are against, not (just) those who wrong us. Anger, moreover, can trigger moral shocks in which positive and negative emotions combine to motivate new forms of solidarity. Ahmed invokes Lorde: we must learn to hear the anger of others, without blocking the anger through a defense of our own angry position. She calls upon the ability for anger to mobilize a shared plane of action – a commonality or com-*passion* not yet demarcated into a separated mine or yours (and that recalls Nietzsche's play of masks): 'if I fail to recognize them as *other faces of myself*, then I am contributing not only to each of their oppressions but also to my own, and the anger which stands *between* us must be used for the clarity and mutual empowerment, not for evasion by guilt or for further separation.'⁴²

However, it is not just the figure of the killjoy who is capable of bringing about a destitution of the good sense that haunts cosmopolitics; so is the diplomat, though perhaps they bring with them a little more humor. Their pathos is neither that of the priest nor that of the beautiful soul. Peace does not mean pacification. It presupposes that we first decide to see the present situation as a state of war – and thus, to have enemies. At the same time, this recognition is not a declaration of war; it suffices to be explicit about there being a polemical situation. While irreducible, war is the most entropic version of struggle and the most discrediting form of exhaustion of current social aggregates. It is the 'the reign of resentment wedded to stupidity.'⁴³ Can it also be the horizon of something better? How do we address those who do not yet adhere to the obligation to properly introduce themselves?

The diplomat is the prudent artist of associations and disassociations immanent to war. They take care not to add to the devastation that comes with the polemical idea of an equivalence between truth and the defeat of moral illusion. To think-care (*panser*), as Stiegler says, is to dedicate oneself to difference at the heart of the same. Whereas a war that mobilizes in the name of truth demands simplifications that arm contradiction, diplomacy has a stake in demobilizing truths. It calls for a new dimension to the matter-of-war that does not bring peace all by itself but disentangles conflict from its relation to truth-claims. Negotiating instead of arguing, diplomats extrapolate from the facts to change the facts. Or, to paraphrase Whitehead, they weld imagination and common sense into a restraint on all those who seek to modify common sense on their own terms.⁴⁴

In the drama of resentment, the detoxifying task of the diplomat is not to make us feel guilty about our feelings but to nurture and foster them, while never blindly trusting them and thus also betraying them. In a positional field, pious soul-searching does not suffice. Instead, the diplomat experiments with the brittleness of bodies and welcomes the interstitial becomings through which they communicate. While this might trigger the suspicion of priests, Nietzsche himself would not be completely averse to their propositions. He dislikes professional representation, but he defends diplomats.⁴⁵ It is the priests and persons of resentment, he reminds us, who are the enemies of good manners and civility. The Christian God is an impolite God because he sees and remembers everything. For the philosopher with the hammer, the debunking of resentment is less inspired by arrogance than by a new kind of therapeutics – one that requires a hammer the size of a surgical mallet. More important than truth (*Wahrheit*) are the veracity (*Wahrhaftigkeit*) of free spirits and the probity (*Redlichkeit*) of thinkers who love their enemies. Even where his take on resentment is at its most polemical – when he identifies ‘that most disgusting type of dandy, the lying freaks who want to impersonate “beautiful souls” and put their wrecked sensuality on the market, . . . the type of moral onanists and “self-gratifiers”. . . . In particular, the sick woman’⁴⁶ – Nietzsche is not addressing resentment in its pure state but as the outcome of a depoliticized, patriarchal culture. Instead of the lie of selflessness, he therefore recommends a subtle reevaluation of egoism: ‘*Seducing into love.*— We have cause to fear him who hates himself, for we shall be the victims of his wrath and his revenge. Let us therefore see if we cannot seduce him into loving himself.’⁴⁷ Nietzsche, of course, fully assumes the condescending discourse on resentment, but, in stripping it of its weight, he replaces the pessimism of his contemporaries with a kind of humor and even calls for a ranking of philosophers according to their capacity for laughter.⁴⁸ Accordingly, it seems that we can continue Nietzsche’s art of diagnosis while also changing its purpose. The slightly perverse question that may or may not have preoccupied him but that we, nevertheless, finally feel entitled to ask, is: How can we turn resentment from a critical fact into an event with future potential? Or who, in the drama of resentment, could play this new role of the philosopher – that of Nietzsche’s diplomatic agent?

Damnation: Leibniz

In philosophy, the dialectic of the diplomat finds its model not in Hegel or Nietzsche but in Leibniz, the ‘tender-minded’ courtier, alchemist, theologian, and mathematician of universal harmony. Instead of mobilizing reason at the cost of common sense, he had a ‘tempered’ (in the baroque sense of *wohl temperiert*) understanding of rationality that is at once more

integral and more differential; namely, of rationality as the attuning of divergent becomings based on the historical multiplicity of reasons and passions. Perhaps we should say that Leibniz was a minor key philosopher in the same sense that Deleuze and Guattari speak of a minor literature or a minor science. Major and minor refer to modes of thinking *and* feeling. A minor rationality has no reality principle but only a possible world that corresponds to it.

Philosophy, for Leibniz, was essentially a form of what Stengers refers to as *cosmopolitese*. Contrary to a deduction of the world from first principles, and following the calculus of minima and maxima, it is a disciplined attempt 'to minimize requirements and maximize obligations.'⁴⁹ Or, in Leibniz's own words, to perfect a system that is 'the simplest in hypotheses and the richest in appearances.'⁵⁰ The point is that perfection has no economy – only an ecology. His method, the *ars inveniendi*, was to multiply and decenter good sense in such a way that self-definitions, normative ideals, the sense of manifest destiny (aka modernity), or other delusions of grandeur no longer impede the slow process of composition by which we acquire a sense of what might be commonly possible. Always ready to meet the demands of endless forms of religious and scientific good sense, he bet on the novelty that thought brings into the world to accomplish their convergence in the informal dimension of a common sense-to-be. Well over two centuries before pragmatism in philosophy, he thus formulated the following constraint on good sense:

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. 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.⁵¹

This demand that philosophy should never break with received opinion is generally criticized as the irrational or 'abominable and shameful'⁵² will of the 'moderate enlightenment' to compromise truth and avoid conflict. It clearly runs the risk of a cynical refusal to resist, in which case it would be yet another expression of a methodological good sense that, like a categorical imperative of critique, is equally available to all. But Leibniz's demand is, first of all, a specific constraint that forbids us from passing judgment on what doesn't measure up to our standards. In addition to demands, there are also obligations, especially those stemming from the consequences drawn by others. 'I despise nothing,' Leibniz used to say in explaining his monadological perspectivism, 'one must always see people from their good side.'⁵³ He sees no insurmountable obstacle in the self-maintaining inertia

of the masses. Harmony is not taken for granted as a moral starting point waiting to be destroyed by critical reason but as the end of a system for which the new – inventivity – is only the means. After all, common sense, or the ‘enlarged mind (*erweiterte Denkungsart*)’ as Kant calls it, can only come about as ‘the free play of our cognitive powers.’⁵⁴

The inseparability of reason and passion is far from an anti-intellectualist or antirationalist attitude. It is precisely good sense that risks stupefying thought and blocking the ongoing experiment with the potentiality of the common, as it can easily make us indifferent to its efficacy as a ready-made reason to act or judge. As Stengers puts it: ‘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.’⁵⁵ The Leibnizian constraint is a principle of non-innocence with respect to the consequences for our shared conditions of what we say and do.⁵⁶ Analogous to a move in a game of chess, in order to prove why a certain proposition is relevant, one has to be able to indicate how it affects all participants of a situation. Only in the case of the passions, the aim cannot be victory. What matters is, rather, that the passions are detached from their fixation and are thereby ‘betrayed.’ Only in this way can a polite reorientation of established identities and a repoliticization of the ways in which they extend into one another, instead of their mere confirmation, become possible. If our trust in good sense is polemical by definition, diplomats are recalcitrant precisely because they connect the passion for truth with ‘a possible peace, a humour of truth.’⁵⁷

What is the place of negativity in such a dialectic? Following Deleuze, Stengers points to Leibniz’s *Confessio Philosophi*, which draws up a moral psychology of ‘the damned’ that, although the counterpart of the classical doctrine of eternal punishment, bears a striking similarity to that of Nietzsche’s person of resentment. 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 all-consuming hatred of God out of their profound dissatisfaction with the world. The life of these ‘furious haters of the nature of things’⁵⁸ is tormented by this single polemical certainty, which blocks their belief in the possibility of a better world that transcends the immediate consequences of their own negativity.

This polemical fatalism constitutes the problem of the ‘theodicy’ – the ingenious legitimization of God’s creation against skeptical and disillusioned souls resenting culpable wrongdoing such as Beelzebub and Judas, who are ‘perpetually irritated by new material for indignation, hatred, envy, and, in a word, madness.’⁵⁹ From a Leibnizian point of view, resentment

is a 'refusal of grace, or as sacred Scripture calls it, hardening of the heart.'⁶⁰ The very knowledge that they are eternally deprived of the glory of the blessed – the only clear perception of the damned – is the ultimate reason for, and thus simultaneously the very origin of, their lamentations. They are still part of the common world they hate above all things, and as such, are exposed to the possibility of other modes of existence present in this world. But this possibility is blocked for them by their own malicious affectivity. The damned 'are always damnable but never damned.'⁶¹ It is not their creator but their own voracious opposition to everything else that binds them to the worst of all possible worlds. Insofar as their damnation is self-imposed, Judas or Beelzebub do not suffer retribution for their past, but rather, for the hatred that constitutes – and diminishes – their becoming. They are not damned because they have betrayed God but because, having betrayed the ultimate ground of their own existence, they hate him all the more, never ceasing to further betray him. 'If someone damns himself because he hates God, he, by the continuation and, indeed, augmentation of that hatred will continue and augment his own damnation.'⁶²

Yet, even if they are the unworthy par excellence, Leibniz never ceases to emphasize that the damned still belong to the same world as the elect. While it is better for such individual souls not to have been born, it is still better for the universe to be as it is.⁶³ 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. The relation of the damned to the world may be entirely negative, but this oppositional relation itself is still a positive difference with its own relevance to the whole, like a local 'dissonance' that makes, in its unintended consequences, for a richer global harmony – provided we have an ear to hear it. Thus, Leibniz's speculative proposition is that the best of all possible worlds rests on the shoulders of the damned:

Even if the entire harmony is pleasing, nevertheless the dissonant aspects of it in themselves are not pleasing, in spite of the fact that they are combined according to the rules of the art. But the unpleasantness that exists in these things considered in themselves is dispelled by the departure or, rather, actually by the increase from that source of the pleasantness of the whole.⁶⁴

It is not despite but thanks to their reactive manners that the damned contribute the necessary material to the progress of the totality of the world. As a torsion of the world, their self-torture provides maximal contrast. Their very existence transforms the whole and leads to a dialectical overcoming

of the opposition of individuality and totality: 'the whole is greater than the part.'⁶⁵

If the opposition nonetheless persists, that is so only from the point of view of the damned. As with fully individualized and introverted doomsday preppers, their negativity is a utopianism that has run out of options. But, precisely by constantly subtracting themselves from the world, the damned set free all other possible becomings for the blessed and the elect. Grace is not a zero-sum game, in the sense of a proportionality between the number of the damned and that of the elect based on some kind of 'maximin principle' (the best worst-case scenario). The number of sinners far exceeds that of the elect, but the latter 'make such progress in good as is impossible for the damned to make in evil.'⁶⁶ How could this prevalence of quality over quantity not make every damned soul experience itself as 'one monad too many' (Pessoa)? Or, as the damned say with Kafka, 'There is an infinite amount of hope in the universe . . . but not for us.'

Surely, this is how Nietzschean slave morality can be understood in its raw state: as a form of self-abandonment, which, at the same time, makes possible and sustains an external system of power. Despite themselves, even the greatest pessimists are material for the becoming of the world.⁶⁷ This is also the cruel optimism that regulates the baroque doctrine of affects: there is plenty of room at the bottom and no limit to negation. It is no doubt through his greater-good defense, moreover, that Leibniz comes close to Hegelian *Aufhebung*. But, in the end, he is closer to Nietzsche, insofar as the negative is never opposed to the affirmative and does not limit it in any way. It is merely selected out in the constant re-emergence of all of existence.⁶⁸ The greater good is not the general interest, and it makes most of us unhappy. Rather like the hermit in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Leibniz says: 'Let the accursed ones be gone, and let them keep the madness they have resolved upon themselves.'⁶⁹

Yet, how could such an apparently indifferent gesture change the feelings of the damned, let alone convert them? Does it not, rather, enhance the feelings of the saved at the expense of the damned? It may seem like the essential oppositionality of the latter – as was the case with Hegel's rabble, they are the part of no part – constitutes the limit of the Leibnizian dialectic, thereby reintroducing the interchangeability of opposition and limitation. Read like this, Leibniz would, indeed, be the prototype of the self-indulgently rational realist. There is a danger that even the speculative belief in the possible only has as its 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.⁷⁰ Put differently, Leibniz appears to be yet another priest in the Nietzschean sense – someone who, in the face of daily injustice crying to the heavens, tells the oppressed that punishment and reward are not

what they imagine them to be, and worse, that their suffering may be their own fault. In this way, however, is he not at odds with his own dictum never to break with established sentiments, not even those of the people of resentment?

A Speculative Gesture

To ask these questions about a speculative proposition is to ask about its appeal. How does our manner of speaking interpellate and grip subjects, and how do subjects modify our manner of speaking in turn? Throughout this book, we have investigated various modes of address. Among these, only the diplomat is obliged to seek a mode capable of attracting and infecting established sentiments with the possibility to transmute, instead of merely confirming them. Whereas the criterion of good sense is self-evidence, any stake in common sense has to prove itself relevant to all those who don't feel part of the 'we' of good sense and who cannot identify common sense with the common good. This constraint gives Leibniz a practical edge over Nietzsche and Hegel, as it means neither shocking common sense nor subsuming it under a more universal abstraction but calling on the freedom of all the interlocutors to evolve and reinvent themselves.⁷¹ How does this constraint hold up in practice?

What is true of the composition of the world at large, Leibniz argues, is also true of the composition of the individual. The ontological tension between gravity and levity constitutes the soul's mode of existence. Consequently, even the damned continue to bear within themselves a potential of self-overcoming. No affect or desire is bad in itself. The key lies in how it composes with other tendencies in agency and intentionality. While we cannot choose our pathos – 'the will itself will not be under the power of the will'⁷² – we can consciously choose our actions and feelings in willing, in the sense that we can ascribe motives to them. Reasons co-determine how we let ourselves be affected and transformed by our encounters in the world, and thus, contribute to the activation and generation of further processes of composition. This means that deliberate reason is a speculative tool that can help us in opening up the gap between the past we inherit and the future to which we contribute our own decisions in order to inhabit a thicker, ongoing present. That which the reason will be the reason of must still be produced and experienced, and it is precisely in this production and experience that reason intervenes.

The problem is that the damned succumb to the sophism of a lazy reason that extrapolates the future from what it knows of the past. They forsake their task of 'pulling themselves together and thinking "say why you do this now".'⁷³ This '*dic cur hic*' – which also translates as 'Why am I here?' – does not mean that they must state the true reasons for their decision; these cannot be known – they are nothing but the world expressed by

the choice. Rather, Leibniz derives the ‘why’ (*cur*) from ‘care’ or ‘concern’ (*cura*).⁷⁴ To think the present means to re-singularize or render contingent the hatred that inheres in it, so that different generalizations may follow. By contrast, in restricting themselves to a summary of what they know of their past potential, the damned block the redirection of their attention toward grace. They explain their present action in causal terms. But they ignore that, among the reasons, there is the ethical decision of that which is inherited and comes into the world only through this decision and through the actions that follow from this decision.⁷⁵

Since the past cannot provide a complete explanation of the present, formulating motives is a spiritual exercise and artifice through which we give a historical situation the power to make itself felt and to make us think – that is, to modify the relation we entertain to our own reasons. It is a creative expression of the present itself. Leibniz demands that we reflect on why we choose to say *this*, on *this* precise occasion, and thus excludes the possibility of protecting ourselves behind readymade justifications (God’s transcendence, the baseness of man, technological development, and so on) that would be valid in any possible world and therefore lack relevance and authenticity. In saying ‘why this here and now,’ we become the author of the exchange with the world that constitutes us, either in sin or in fortune. Although discursive, stating our reasons is inseparable from an affective differentiation by which the speaker’s reticular resonances are composed as a common horizon of transmutation.⁷⁶

Propositions, then, are neither representations of the past nor representations of the future. Rather, they are possibilities, scenarios, or possible worlds, both in the speculative sense (they introduce novelty that transcends the given) and in the empirical sense (their relevance and meaning depends on their irreversible consequences in experience). The aim of formulating propositions is to develop a feeling for the always-incomplete composition of a common situation and its transformative possibilities. It contributes to giving oneself a higher amplitude on the swing of one’s confused inclinations toward various impossible actions, such that we bend entirely in one distinct direction rather than another: ‘the initial affects and motions of the mind cannot be destroyed, but they can be nullified by contrary affects, with the result that they lack efficacy.’⁷⁷ Reason, here, is not a motive of some indeterminate hope (or the lack of it) but an ‘abduction’ (Peirce) or ‘adventure’ (Whitehead) – an articulation of the present that comes flush with its own unfolding experience of freedom. If successful, it is pathos itself that undergoes a transmutation, like a quantum leap or instantaneous metamorphosis: ‘if someone turns to God or . . . if he seeks the truth with a sincere affection, then the darkness will be split as by some unexpected stroke of light, and through the dense fog in the middle of the night the way is shown.’⁷⁸

Since this is an event in the strong sense, it is less a matter of subjective deliberation than of impersonal dramatization. It is not only the damned whom Leibniz invites to answer to the call of *dic cur hic*. To the extent that their task is not to manage resentment but to curate what becomes of it, the irenic philosopher must be able to communicate how their own gestures add to what potentially ceases to be resentment pure and simple. One cannot affirm the world as being the best without the obligation to feel and think all that this affirmation entails, and thus, without being transformed by it. In the shift from psychic to collective individuation, what is at stake is not the past but a still-unknown future that includes other versions of the past. Instead of a mere deduction of reasons that would rob the situation of the importance accorded to these reasons, 'stating why here' prevents us from yielding to the temptation to explain away anything that belongs to the here and now.⁷⁹ It thus offers a new version of the therapeutical problem: not signaling resentment means that you will eventually come up against it, but being too tactless about it will have the same outcome. How do we name the damned without deepening their current damnation or even our own, future damnation?

The priest blames others for their resentment and calls for moral laws and mediating apparatuses that are somehow able to organize and redirect it. By contrast, the immanence of judgment and selection leads the diplomat to a new dialectic, which unlike its Hegelian counterpart, is not based on the overcoming of the opposition of individuality and totality but on a reconciliation of novelty and totality. 'There is no thought and, accordingly, no pleasure without perpetual novelty,' and hence, our task is to 'unite novelty with completeness.'⁸⁰ The speculative challenge, in other words, is to pry open the present in order to reconcile the necessary and the impossible with the contingent and the possible.⁸¹

Common sense is not a spontaneous outgrowth of our life together but the result of civilized activity in which we compare perspectives on the world through speech. This is why, for Hegel, the genuine unity of the singular and the universal only exists in language. The confession of one's particular way of being in the world is a key to conquering one's universality and making it recognizable. But, for Leibniz, the objective function of adding a reason is not a way of universalizing a subject position but of enriching the affective composition of a subject's situation. Instead of a logic, and more like a group form of therapy, the 'art' of the diplomat is an alchemical one. The analysis and synthesis, decomposition and recombination, takes place not just at the scale of the individual but on various mutually intersecting scales. Rather than addressing the person of resentment head on, then, we must acknowledge their felt presence. In doing so, we already add something new, which not only reveals the incompleteness of

the present but is capable of conducting further reactions in which internal conflicts, grievances, prejudices, and misunderstandings are not erased or selected out but might still be ‘canceled . . . by compensation.’⁸²

In opening the situation from within, the new contains the pull of a kind of active forgetting. It is in this speculative humor that we find the un-Christian or, at least, non-pastoral inspiration that Leibniz shares with Nietzsche. While Christ assumed penitence instead of our guilt, the philosopher finds more grace in infinite generosity: ‘I get over a bitter episode by sending a pot of jam.’⁸³ Instead of the goodwill of pity – a show of weakness in which I displace the other’s feeling and invite the other to feel bad like me – comes an act of recomposition based on an empathic show of strength. Harmony does not result from a coordination in negation or the negation of negation but, like resounding laughter, from affirmation and the affirmation of affirmation.⁸⁴ Every true affirmation has a retroactive effect, or rather, a retrograde movement. The joy of speculation lies in its investment in growing retentions and protentions, not of the proximate past and future but of distant pasts and distant futures – what Nietzsche calls *Fernstenliebe*.

The task of philosophy consists in proposing concepts that allow us to speak of what our habitual subject positions oppose, but in such a way that our habitual attachments remain both the main ingredient and the target. When we elucidate our reasons together with various other viewpoints, we seek to trigger sensory feedback between all of them. Sensibilities do not articulate as one but cluster in particular and variable orders. A diagnosis of resentment that is both affirmative and speculative imputes a chain-reactive relation between affective activity and their emotional states. Bringing them into contact with a different recursive futurity and seducing them to become less operationally closed and loop out of themselves is precisely what allows for our attachments to become separate from our initial intentionality. While some knowledge of what makes up a perspective and how it combines with others is necessary, the freedom of the other’s will also guarantee that the outcome is both more indeterminate and more inclusive than we can ever think of on our own. It is impossible to know in advance whether our way of characterizing the modes of mutual implication will actually make a difference. Irreducible to human psychology or a logical system, the overcoming of resentment is therefore a cosmological adventure in the sense of Whitehead.⁸⁵ This uncertainty is akin to a leap of faith: the diplomat must risk not being heard (and losing touch with common sense), but must also seize the opportunity to really make a difference (and betray good sense).

The first, Stengers warns, happened to Leibniz when – despite himself, as it were – he was so naïve as to question the most established of all

sentiments: good sense – the passion that measures truth by its polemical vector. If the ‘Monadology’ was an irenic gesture to reconcile Aristotelianism with the modern world, it has not helped the credibility of his rationalism. It didn’t take much for a skeptic such as Voltaire to ridicule Leibniz’s most counter-intuitive propositions. With no less polemical delight, the Hannoverian faithful 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.⁸⁶

Yet, precisely by refusing to judge the damned, and instead, letting their presence force him to think with them, Leibniz bet on the possibility of an event that would convert them. For, without an ‘idiotic’ belief in the world based on the affordance of necessary evil, there is no chance of common sense becoming any ‘better.’ The affirmation of our world as the best of all possible worlds is already a relativization of the absolute Good. It may not quite conform to any perceived state of affairs, but as possibility, it might just provoke our curiosity where indifference prevails. Precisely because it necessarily triggers resistance, it offers everyone the possibility of re-evaluating their relation to the world. Good sense erases difference and thereby betrays common sense and the activity of thought alike. Instead, a contrast allows us to define what is specific about different viewpoints. It may thus activate, otherwise, perspectives that first present themselves as mutually inhibiting or indifferent. Perhaps Leibniz’s speculative proposition was never meant as a pious dogma with which to legitimate the status quo, but rather, as a beckoning perspective that enables us to redefine our world as a constant practical choice between a plurality of possible worlds, and thus, between the further enrichment or 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. This is the diplomat’s answer to the *esprit de sérieux* of the priest: a trickster intelligence that appears to believe nothing because everything becomes part of an effect without a clear cause.

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, ‘there is no freedom of indifference,’⁸⁷ only servitude. The choice is always between the affirmation of difference or indifference, yet even the latter is a choice – the choice of resentment. Possessing a zero-degree of subjectivity, the damned bury the possible under the weight of the probable. For them, temporality itself has ceased. They have the affective capacity of naked matter (*mens momentanea*), as their single-minded consciousness perishes and is reborn at every moment. This destines them 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 gamble on the presence of, another way of life.⁸⁸ If there was still something of an aristocracy of the damned among the likes of Flaubert and Dostoevsky, those who unwittingly imitate their gestures today have lost all nostalgia. Clever enough to think they have escaped the worst, they conspire with the banal skepticism 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.⁸⁹ In a secular Anthropocene, there is no difference between damned and elect. Neither the minions nor their guardians are therefore 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. Because minions are in the know about capitalism, they fall under its spell and become cynical followers. Their good sense only tells them that they must avoid ‘being had’; to be prepared for the suffering that will and must come. Solely in the name of preserving their own miserable selves, they will forever reproduce their impotent hatred, to the detriment of all common sense. Thus, they fall prey to resentment: not only the feeling of revenge that binds them to the past but also that which makes them participate in the destruction of the future.

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 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 expression of the all-too-familiar logic of the priest; namely, that you are somehow responsible for that which you are subjected to. As Stengers warns, it is not enough to denounce minions for what they are, as even this could 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”.’⁹⁰ Thus, naming minions, for Pignarre and Stengers, is not a matter of legitimating our own indifference but a testing experience in the name of others. This is not to say we are responsible for their existence, but rather, to wonder whether we can take active responsibility before their future consistence within the larger coherence of a still virtual ‘we.’⁹¹ Its pragmatic interest can only lie

in attesting to the way in which the world matters to those we speak to. Instead of prolonging the polemics and cynical solidarity to which their presence summons us, the only way to save the damned from damnation is to compassionately include them in the identification of reasons not only for their damnation but also for further collective individuation.

This brings us back to the necessity to speculate with established sentiments. Is the diagnosis of resentment, like the proposition that we live in the best of all possible worlds, at all shareable? The diagnostician belongs to and intervenes in the same common world as those they talk about. Precisely to the extent that this milieu is a common ground that cannot be appropriated, they cannot assume it as already given. Instead, they have to produce some intensity of feeling capable of pervading those they diagnose with its presence. It is only in the form of a mild atmospheric perturbation in the conditions and terms of the continuity of a situation – an experimental disruption of present dystopian historicity – that we participate in the construction of an anonymous intelligence that endures for ourselves no more and no less than for others. Thus, the truth of the diagnosis may be already clear but its plausibility to those it concerns depends on consequences that still remain obscure.

Of course, even Leibniz himself 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, who demanded from Beelzebub as a condition for his salvation that he pray for forgiveness. Not only does Beelzebub refuse; God's permissiveness – while he is not the author of it, God understands it and, as the saying goes, *tout comprendre c'est tout pardonner* – merely exacerbates Beelzebub's rage against his benevolent creator, precisely because he asks so little in return.⁹² Montaigne describes how, after a battle, the victor forever anchors their superiority in the loser's unconscious through an act of generosity.⁹³ As a consequence, satanic desire is strikingly close to Klein's description of the infant envying the breast that satisfies it for the ease with which the milk comes, but who, as soon as it imagines that a gratification has been actively withheld from it, can no longer discern between the good and the bad breast and therefore spoils the breast by defecating over it. What is persecuted and debased no longer needs to be envied, yet precisely to the extent that suffering is evacuated instead of owned, it will return in the form of persecution.

And yet, the message of Leibnizian rationalism is that we must remain generous and continue to call on the freedom of the people of resentment instead of judging and punishing them, no matter how 'irrational' they may seem. Stengers translates this Leibnizian obligation (*calculemus!*) with a quote from Virginia Woolf: *think we must*. Only this restless affirmation can distinguish care from critique. It contains an 'ought' that is more fundamental than any good sense. We are obliged to think for the possibility

of an as of yet unknown ‘we,’ of which racists, rightwing trolls, social scientists, fundamentalists, and the polemical commentariat could also partake. Irreducible to psychology or logic, the overcoming of resentment is a cosmo-political drama. The very word ‘resentment’ is already a test. And it remains no more than a gamble; namely, that the damned become interested in speculating on the future of their own condition when they are invited to do so.

Notes

- 1 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, trans. Leo Rauch (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998), 24.
- 2 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 23.
- 3 Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, 25, 31–5, 37–9.
- 4 Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, 8, 17, 24–5, 27, 48.
- 5 Améry held Hegel to be a reactionary: ‘More than his unintellectual mates the intellectual in the camp was lamed by his historically and sociologically explicable deeper respect for power; in fact, the intellectual always and everywhere has been totally under the sway of power. He was, and is, accustomed to doubt it intellectually, to subject it to his critical analysis, and yet in the same intellectual process to capitulate to it. The capitulation became entirely unavoidable when there was no visible opposition to the hostile force. Although outside gigantic armies might battle the destroyer, in the camp one heard of it only from afar and was really unable to believe it. The power structure of the SS state towered up before the prisoner monstrously and indomitably, a reality that could not be escaped and that therefore finally seemed *reasonable*. No matter what thinking may have been on the outside, in this sense here he became a Hegelian: in the metallic brilliance of its totality the SS state appeared as a state in which the idea was becoming reality.’ Améry, *At the Minds Limits*, 12.
- 6 For ‘a Hegelian theory of resentment’ as characterizing the (rich, any) rabble: ‘To claim a right that is not only a right of the particular but that is merely particular as a right marks a central feature in the structure of the rabble’s attitude. To claim a right that fundamentally does not fulfill the conditions of possibility of being a right – by being merely particular – by being a *right without right* is the basic structure of that which one can call *resentment* in Hegel.’ Frank Ruda, *Hegel’s Rabble: An Investigation into Hegel’s Philosophy of Right* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2011), 61, 59–68.
- 7 Björn Vedder argues that, in the absence of revolutions since 1968, the merely compensatory humanism no longer suffices to buy off the deplorables, who perceive themselves to be the victim of a system that does not allow one to live well and be good. ‘Fuck their arrogance, Bolsonaro will deal with it.’ Björn Vedder, *Reicher Pöbel: Über die Monster des Kapitalismus* (Marburg: Büchner Verlag, 2018).
- 8 Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, II Of Redemption.
- 9 Although it is not the motivation of capitalism, revenge could be said to be its inevitable outcome. Max Haiven discusses the revenge politics of neo-reactionaries who wish to become ‘the Fanon of the whites’ (cf. the White Lives Matter movement) by blaming the victim for any discrepancy between

the propounded ideology of normalcy and the actuality of exploitation and oppressive violence: ‘capitalism, like all systems of domination, is held together through a kind of normalized vengefulness, which is mystified as law, tradition, economic necessity, or justice. Within this order, the dreams and demands of the oppressed brew, but are denied full articulation or expression except when they are publicly decried as heinous, vengeful fantasies and as evidence that the powerful must exercise vigilance and vengeance to keep them in check. As this moral and economic cracks in the heat of its own inherent contradictions and crises, those dreams of a kind of unimaginable justice seep to the surface. Yet those dreams are much more easily harnessed, mobilized and preyed upon by reactionary forces that would ultimately entrench oppression by offering the oppressed vengeful expression and release against disposable targets, rather than by revolutionaries who would truly overturn the ruling order.’ Max Haiven, *Revenge Capitalism: The Ghosts of Empire, the Demons of Capital, and the Settling of Unpayable Debts* (London: Pluto Press, 2020), 9, 20, 33.

- 10 Slavoj Žižek, ‘Slavoj Žižek on the Charlie Hebdo Massacre: Are the Worst Really Full of Passionate Intensity?’, *New Statesman*, 10 January 2015, accessed 14 August 2015, www.newstatesman.com/world-affairs/2015/01/slavoj-i-ek-charlie-hebdo-massacre-are-worst-really-full-passionate-intensity
- 11 Žižek, *Violence*, 287.
- 12 As Sloterdijk observes, dialectics has been an affront to an endless series of voices that speak out as its victims, opponents, or critics: empiricism, materialism, existentialism, pragmatism, and so on. It is stuck in a chronic polemic, in which the third moment of sublation (the false, redoubled polemical moment), coincides with the first, positing moment. It both posits reality as struggle and wants to be its victor. In simultaneously repressing resistance and repressing the repression of resistance – for example in the form of the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ – it wants to be the ‘dialectic of the dialectic,’ that is, ‘to disputatiously think the dispute.’ Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, 371. I am indebted to Sloterdijk’s early notion of a ‘transcendental’ or ‘universal’ polemic, a ‘theory of dispute’ rooted in 1) the attempts of Marx and Adorno to ‘avoid the dualistic danger of paranoia’ and give up on the compulsion of the unhappy consciousness to be right (i.e., its idealist demand for universality), and 2) a Heraclitean-kynical depolemization of the ‘chronical polemic’ of modern subject positions through ‘a rational – that is, physiognomically sympathetic – reason,’ a rhythmical rationality that excludes all fantasies of victory and has the pathos of peace as its ‘last norm.’ Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, 357–81.
- 13 ‘Even the representation of a completely classless society [is no consideration] for the fate of all those who suffered to no purpose and fell by the wayside.’ Theodor W. Adorno, *History and Freedom: Lectures 1964–1965*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), 44.
- 14 ‘For suffering is objectivity that weighs upon the subject; its most subjective experience, its expression, is objectively conveyed.’ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 18. Adorno calls this coincidence of subjective and objective ‘the monadological principle.’ Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, §6.
- 15 Sophia Rosenfeld contrasts the defenders of common sense of the Scottish Enlightenment with figures such as Voltaire, d’Holbach, Helvétius, and the authors of the *Portable Library of Good Sense* (1773). The latter’s assumption of the voice of good sense ‘has much more to do with effortlessly accepting obvious truths than with arriving at new ones, and it was most useful for

- eliminating questions that simply could not be answered.' Sophia Rosenfeld, *Common Sense: A Political History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 119. 'If, in eighteenth-century Britain, common sense promised to fulfill a regulatory function, maintaining community norms in the absence of an elaborate apparatus of censorship laws, in continental Europe its cognate, good sense, promised to do the opposite.' *Ibid.*, 95.
- 16 Sjoerd van Tuinen, 'Common Sense: From Critique to Care', in: Joke Brouwer and Sjoerd van Tuinen (eds.), *To Mind Is to Care* (Rotterdam: V2_ Publishers, 2019), 124–57.
 - 17 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 283, 257. Whereas, for Lessing, criticism 'is always taking side for the world's sake' (Arendt, *Men in Dark Times*, 7–8), the reason for the demise of common sense and friendship is that, in modernity, science rather than philosophy defines truth, turning it into an individual property rather than a link between acting and thinking as collective (free) movements: 'it is rare to meet people who believe they possess the truth; instead we are constantly confronted by those who are sure that they are right.' *Ibid.*, 9, 25–6, 28.
 - 18 Sloterdijk seeks to replace the 'the dialectics of hindrance (*Verhinderung*),' in which subjectivity is essentially defined by the handicaps it adds to the rhythm of things, with a philosophy of 'polarities' that refuses to occupy its own 'position': 'The "subject," born of manifold hindering and threatening of itself, can only interfere everywhere as hinderer, combatant, and producer of "objects." In society, it arises out of the thousands of large and small restrictions, denials, definitions, enmities, inhibitions, and alien regulations that merge into its "identity." To attack the subject means to drive it all the more into itself. . . . However, insofar as the liquefaction of subjects, which was always the concern of inspired thinking, remains the decisive task of practical reason, philosophy too as theory of reason, also gains with this, its ultimate norm.' Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, 379.
 - 19 True is what works, on the condition that we define 'work' as the reaching of stable agreement over the course of an experience in mutation: 'We must find a theory that will work; and that means something extremely difficult; for our theory must mediate between all previous truths and certain new experiences. It must derange common sense and previous beliefs as little as possible, and it must lead to some sensible terminus or other that can be verified exactly.' William James, *Pragmatism and Other Writings* (New York: Penguin, 2000), 95. And: 'Truths emerge from facts; but they dip forward into facts again and add to them; which facts again create or reveal new truth . . . and so on indefinitely. The "facts" themselves meanwhile are not *true*. They simply *are*.' *Ibid.*, 99.
 - 20 Bruno Latour, 'Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern', *Critical Inquiry* 30 (2004), 225–48; on recursive thinking see Martin Holbraad and Morten Axel Pederson, *The Ontological Turn: An Anthropological Exposition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017). The clearest formulation of this challenge can already be found in Günther Anders: '*Rule*: Only then, when the "about" and the "to", the subject of speech and the subject spoken to, coincide; only then, when we both aim at, and get to, those who, since it is their destiny that is at stake, must be won by us and have a right to be won by us; only then do our utterances have "sense," only then do they become effectively true.' Günther Anders, 'Sprache und Endzeit (II)', *FORVM* 426–7 (1989), 30, <http://forvm.contextxxi.org/sprache-und-endzeit-ii.html>
 - 21 Mary Gallagher aptly summarizes this challenge: 'firstly, the question of how to circumvent the moral and epistemic limits of critique, insofar as these relate

- both to the implication of resentment in the critique in question, and to the fact that resentment is associated with extreme reactivity, negativity and reductivity, along with a deficit of critical reason; and secondly the question of how to avoid, disarm, deflect, or defuse the charge of resentment used to discredit or to dismiss responsible and careful critique or as an excuse not to engage in it.' Mary Gallagher, 'Resentment and Dissensus: The Place of Critique in the Contemporary Academy', in: Jeanne Riou and Mary Gallagher (eds.), *Re-Thinking Resentment: On the Limits of Criticism and the Limits of Its Critics* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2016), 166–205, 205.
- 22 Stiegler, *Uncontrollable Societies*, 26, 86.
 - 23 Stiegler, *The Decadence*, 54. The problem is that, as a Nietzschean, he sees the answer to this question in 'affirming before any other consideration that the only way to encounter an adversary is to understand better than they do, if at all possible, their adversity,' as if it were a matter of constructing a political strategy that hopes to inscribe itself as such in our history by hijacking existing interests and relations of force. *Ibid.*, 55.
 - 24 '[S]peaking about misery always entails exposing oneself to the risk of becoming miserable, or impoverished, or destitute, in all kinds of ways: in the sense that one speaks of people without shame as being misérables . . . but also, miserable in the sense that it is only possible to speak of that which affects the miserable to the extent that one finds oneself affected in some way or other, to the degree that one is oneself such a "miserable".' Stiegler, *Uncontrollable Societies*, 12.
 - 25 Cf. Martin Seel, 'Zuneigung, Abneigung – Moral', *Merkur* 58.9–10 (2004), 774–82, 779.
 - 26 As Nietzsche writes on 'the question of the working masses,' doctors have contempt, not prescriptions, for them: 'Certain things should not be called into question: first imperative of the instinct.' Nietzsche, *Twilight*, Skirmishes §40.
 - 27 Isabelle Stengers, 'Beyond Conversation Risks of Peace', in: Catherine Keller and Anne Daniell (eds.), *Process and Difference: Between Cosmological and Poststructuralist Postmodernisms* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002), 235–56, 248–9.
 - 28 Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, 11.
 - 29 Althusser, *On Ideology*, 76.
 - 30 Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, 66, 81.
 - 31 Arendt refers to those who, in 'dark times,' hide from responsibility for the world by preferring humanity in the form of fraternity and passive compassion; that is, 'the fact that the pariahs of this world enjoy the great privilege of being unburdened by care for the world,' whereas from the point of view of friendship 'sharing joy is absolutely superior . . . to sharing suffering.' Arendt, *Men in Dark Times*, 14–15. For her, the question is therefore 'how much reality must be retained even in a world become inhuman if humanity is not to be reduced to an empty phrase or a phantom. Or to put in in another way, to what extent do we remain obligated to the world even when we have been expelled from it or have withdrawn from it?' *Ibid.*, 22.
 - 32 Jean Améry, 'Die Geburt des Menschen aus dem Geiste der Gewalt', in: *Widerprüche* (Frankfurt am Main: Ullstein, 1981), 147–63.
 - 33 Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, xiii.
 - 34 Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, 197, 201, 204–5.
 - 35 Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 173.
 - 36 Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 187.

- 37 Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 145, 150–5.
- 38 Améry, *On Ageing*, 78–102.
- 39 Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 201.
- 40 Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 173.
- 41 For example, Sartre interprets the alibi of the innocence of the child as a projection of resentment, and hence, as the inverse of the evil adult. ‘This child is the victim of a cruel hoax. If you say to adults that they *are* innocent, they get annoyed, but they like to have *been* innocent. It is an alibi, an occasion for sentiment, a pathway to resentment and all forms of “*passéiste*” thinking, a ready-made refuge for times of misfortune, a way of asserting or implying that one was better than one’s life.’ Sartre, *Saint Genet*, 6. While many children will internalize this resentment, in turn, typically in the form of the sainthood of the eldest child, ‘Saint Genet’ chooses the opposite option and condemns himself to a subhuman life of willing evil for evil’s sake: ‘Genet goes round in circles: in order to avoid evil-out-of-resentment, which is only sulkiness, he plunges into evil-as-torment, which very soon changes into pure asceticism. In order to escape both, he finally invents the notion of doing Evil gratuitously, but, as a result, it is gratuitousness which becomes his final end because it manifests the solitude of his freedom.’ Sartre, *Saint Genet*, 161.
- 42 Audre Lorde, ‘The Uses of Anger’, 284–5.
- 43 Stiegler, *Uncontrollable Societies*, 22.
- 44 Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York: Free Press, 1979), 9, 17, 39.
- 45 Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, §§356, 361, 368.
- 46 Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, III §14.
- 47 Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, §517. And: ‘aiding those whose head is *confused by opinions* without their being really aware who has aided them! Not desiring to maintain his own opinion or celebrate a victory over them, but to address them in such a way that, after the slightest of imperceptible hints or contradictions, they themselves arrive at the truth and go away proud of the fact! To be like a little inn which rejects no one who is in need but which is afterwards forgotten or ridiculed!’ *Ibid.*, §449.
- 48 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §294.
- 49 Isabelle Stengers, *Cosmopolitics II*, trans. Robert Bononno (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 403.
- 50 Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, ‘Discourse on Metaphysics’ §6; ‘Monadology’, §11, in: Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber (ed. and trans.), *Philosophical Essays* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989).
- 51 Letter to Count Ernst von Hessen-Rheinfels, 12 April 1686, in Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Akademieausgabe* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1923), vi, iii, 573–4.
- 52 Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 116.
- 53 Leibniz, *Akademieausgabe*, vi, iii, 377.
- 54 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, ed. Paul Guyer, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), §§21, 40.
- 55 Isabelle Stengers, *The Invention of Modern Science*, trans. Daniel W. Smith (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 15.
- 56 Leibniz describes this non-innocence as follows: God wants harmony, but not everything that follows from harmony is pleasing. Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Confessio philosophi*, trans. R. Sleigh (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), 63.

- 57 Stengers, *Cosmopolitics I*, 4.
- 58 Leibniz, *Confessio philosophi*, 85.
- 59 Leibniz, *Confessio philosophi*, 139. Nietzsche, by contrast, points to Thomas Aquinas, who finds the same envy among the blessed, thus testifying to the universality of Christian resentment: ‘The blessed in the heavenly kingdom will see the torment of the damned so that they may even more thoroughly enjoy their blessedness.’ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I §15.
- 60 Leibniz, *Confessio philosophi*, 75.
- 61 Leibniz, *Confessio philosophi*, 83.
- 62 Leibniz, *Confessio philosophi*, 83.
- 63 Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Die philosophischen Schriften*, ed. C.J. Gerhardt (Berlin and Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1875–1890), IV 454–6.
- 64 Leibniz, *Confessio philosophi*, 63, 53.
- 65 Leibniz, *Confessio philosophi*, 35.
- 66 Leibniz, *Die philosophischen Schriften*, VI 378, 47.
- 67 Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, §24. Leibniz agrees with Hegel that, as Whitehead, too, would later say, evil is always particular. ‘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 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. In her thinking along with Whitehead’s concept of God, Stengers seeks to bridge the gap between American theism and the Nietzschean indictment that relates the call for divine justice to resentment: ‘The Nietzschean eternal return: you who judge, you will return again and again, carried, produced, and nourished by what you think you can judge. Tender Whiteheadian perversity: the rights conferred upon you by the critical consciousness by which you authorize yourself are a wonderful illustration of creativity; they will be added to the many, and perhaps be articulated with what they claimed to disengage themselves from.’ Isabelle Stengers, *Thinking with Whitehead: A Free and Wild Creation of Concepts*, trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2011), 293.
- 68 Leibniz’s solution to the problem of evil is like an inclusion of opposition without limitation. Each affirmation of the limitations of my being already implies a transmutation and transvalued existence that passes beyond those limitations and enters into the circle of eternity. Indeed, as Deleuze phrases it: ‘The critique of the negative is effective only when it denounces the interchangeability of opposition and limitation.’ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 202–3.
- 69 Leibniz, *Confessio philosophi*, 99.
- 70 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. Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).
- 71 Leibniz, *Confessio philosophi*, 51–2.
- 72 Leibniz, *Confessio philosophi*, 67.
- 73 Leibniz, *Confessio philosophi*, 74. Stengers interprets this passage as follows: ‘*Dic cur hic* – suspend your action, let yourself be affected by this “here”, that

- is, by this world; don't give to your reasons a power they don't have, always general, valid for an innumerable host of different worlds, but mute as to the way in which that which they justify will contribute to each of these worlds. . . . In a world where everything conspires, learning not to confer on a judgement the power of a reason does not guarantee a better choice, but it implies an act of consent, a "feeling-with" this world, against that which Nietzsche would only very late call resentment – the sentiment of impotence that nourishes contempt for oneself, for this world, for the reasons that make this world, rather than another, exist.' Isabelle Stengers, 'L'insistence du possible,' in Didier Debaise and Isabelle Stengers (eds.), *Gestes Spéculatifs* (Dijon: Presses du Réel, 2015), 5–19, 10.
- 74 Leibniz, *Confessio philosophi*, 33.
- 75 Stengers, *Cosmopolitics II*, 245, 263.
- 76 As a speculative tool, reason consist of the formulation of what Whitehead calls 'propositions': 'the tales that might be told about particular entities' making up our actuality that function as 'lures for feeling.' Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 256, 184. Sentences, concepts, and other linguistic entities might, but need not, conform to actual states of affairs. In their effects, they produce a reflective excess that can act as a lure for an aesthetic appreciation of our diverging, specialized abstractions, deepening our capacity for judgment in such a way that dialectical oppositions are converted into the contrasts of a common horizon of experience that exists only on its way to novelty. *Ibid.*, 346. 'Transmutation is the way in which the actual world is felt as a community, and is so felt in virtue of its prevalent order.' *Ibid.*, 251. Besides conformal propositions that induce a cumulative re-enactment, Whitehead puts his trust in the efficacy of non-conformal propositions to deepen and convert established sentiments. *Ibid.*, 187, 245, 249. While some non-conformal propositions are irrelevant or even harmful for their creative advance – for example, when they scoff at established sentiments too much ('Insistence on birth at the wrong season is the trick of evil.' [*ibid.*, 223]) – the conceptual feeling of relevant alternatives and proximate novelties introduces original contrasts that will saturate the way in which we experience and express the world. Relevance and proximity are not given criteria that we can know beforehand, since, as Whitehead argues, a proposition is entertained as soon as it is admitted into feeling, such that consciousness, the appearance of which is itself a consequence of non-conformal propositions, merely perceives the movement it has traced and the intensity it has created. *Ibid.*, 188, 267.
- 77 Leibniz, *Confessio philosophi*, 89. Cf. Spinoza on consciousness as field of experimentation. The mind does not control the body. But the mind can aid the body's power of acting by imagining those things that can increase the power of action. Spinoza, *Ethics*, E3P12.
- 78 Leibniz, *Confessio philosophi*, 41, 73.
- 79 Stengers, *Cosmopolitics II*, 494.
- 80 Leibniz, *Confessio philosophi*, 87.
- 81 Leibniz, *Confessio philosophi*, 57.
- 82 Leibniz, *Confessio philosophi*, 63.
- 83 Nietzsche, *Ecco Homo*, Why I am so wise, §5, 4. And: 'Like everyone else who has never lived among equals and who has as little access to the idea of "retaliation" as to the idea of "equal rights", I do not allow myself to take steps or precautions, – or, as is proper, defensive or "justificatory" measures – in cases where I find myself the target of some piece of stupidity, small or very large. My

- type of retaliation consists of following up the stupidity as quickly as possible with something clever: and this might make up for it.' Ibid.
- 84 Deleuze defines comic relief as the art of multiplicities instead of the one and the many. Deleuze, *Desert Islands*, 258.
- 85 Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 3, 108.
- 86 Isabelle Stengers, 'Introductory Notes on an Ecology of Practices', *Cultural Studies Review* 11.1 (2005), 183–96, 188.
- 87 Leibniz, *Confessio philosophi*, 137. While this strongly resonates with existentialism, it perhaps even closer to James's claim that the first act of free will is to believe in free will.
- 88 Philippe Pignarre and Isabelle Stengers, *Capitalist Sorcery: Breaking the Spell*, trans. Andrew Goffey (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 31–5.
- 89 Isabelle Stengers, *In Catastrophic Times: Resisting the Coming Barbarism*, trans. Andrew Goffey (London: Open Humanities Press, 2015), 27–34.
- 90 Pignarre and Stengers, *Capitalist Sorcery*, 33.
- 91 On the distinction between being responsible for actual atrocities and being responsible before them, Deleuze and Guattari *What Is Philosophy?*, 108–9.
- 92 Leibniz, *Confessio philosophi*, 99.
- 93 Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, trans. M.A. Screech (London: Penguin, 1991), II On cowardice, the mother of cruelty.

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