



Jeanne Riou, Mary Gallagher (eds.)

RE-THINKING RESSENTIMENT

On the Limits of Criticism
and the Limits of its Critics

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Jeanne Riou, Mary Gallagher (eds.)

Re-thinking Ressentiment

On the Limits of Criticism and the Limits of its Critics

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The charge of »Ressentiment« can in today's world – less from traditionally conservative quarters than from the neo-positivist discourses of particular forms of liberalism – be used to undermine the argumentative credibility of political opponents, dissidents and those who call for greater »justice«. The essays in this volume draw on the broad spectrum of cultural discourse on »Ressentiment«, both in historical and contemporary contexts. Starting with its conceptual genesis, the essays also show contemporary nuances of »Ressentiment« as well as its influence on literary discourse and philosophical discourse in the 20th century.

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Introduction

The first task of this volume, which aims not only to re-think Ressentiment, but to situate it in relation to criticism, the limits of criticism and the limits of criticism of criticism, is to define the word 'Ressentiment'. The very fact that the term is typically not translated into the language in which it is being conceptualised or analysed (English or German, for example) should alert us to its unusual linguistic status. The first systematic theories or analyses of Ressentiment were written in German and, in deference – or at least with reference – to that fact, this Introduction retains the capitalisation of the term in the German language. This special treatment is intended to foreground the fact that the untranslated importing of the French term into discourses in German and in English affects the extension of the concept, suggesting that its inception coincides in some way with its translingual migration, most notably and most seminally into the discourse of Friedrich Nietzsche and Max Scheler.

The project of the volume as a whole focuses on the relation between Ressentiment on the one hand, and criticism on the other. Arguably, Ressentiment involves, above all, hatred and criticism of that which is desired or envied, but out of reach. Ressentiment is a reactive emotional response which undermines the value of that which, although desired, cannot be attained. Clearly, however, the charge of Ressentiment could then operate as a strategy for undermining any criticism, opposition or dissent, articulated within a given system. We could thus approach it, even though it is – arguably – an emotional phenomenon, from the perspective of Systems theory, showing how, much like intimacy, it is produced in particular ways by the codes of a particular system. In this volume, several contributions address the relationship between Ressentiment, power and criticism. Discussion of the concept in the various essays of the volume thus pursues (discourse on) Ressentiment in a number of directions, beginning with its latency in certain late eighteenth-century commentaries on competitive envy. In the various essays of the volume, some authors examine the lineage and historical associations of Ressentiment, while others look more to its traces in contemporary discourse. For, in today's world, the charge of Ressentiment is often used, less by traditionally conservative forces than by the neo-positivist discourses underlying and fuelling contemporary liberalism, in order to undermine the rational credibility of political opponents, dissidents and of those who critique the status quo.

Towards a History of Ressentiment

Early Theories, from Nietzsche to Scheler

As a translingual term, ‘Ressentiment’ has a relatively short history. As Friedrich Nietzsche and then Max Scheler conceptualised it, Ressentiment is a reactive disposition, based on the subject’s perception of its lack, or falling short, of certain positively connoted qualities, attainments, etc. The resultant feeling of envy is suppressed, however, as such and converted into criticism or indeed denial or negation of the value of the lacked qualities or attainments (this operation is described by Nietzsche as ‘transvaluation’). It was Nietzsche who, in a foundational moment of conservative cultural criticism, first turned the spotlight onto the concept referenced by this French term in his *On the Genealogy of Morals* (*Zur Genealogie der Moral*). According to him, Ressentiment is the real driver of Christian theories of morality. The kernel of the argument is that repressed hatred and envy, allied to a sense of subjective powerlessness, give rise to Ressentiment in multi-faceted symbolic guises.¹ On the one hand, Ressentiment-critique was aimed at the metaphysical tradition and along with this at the intellectual roots of Western culture. On the other, however, it carried over into a theory of political protest as first Nietzsche and then Scheler viewed the movements of protest and dissent that emerged in the nineteenth century as products of Ressentiment. Before looking to the presence of the term Ressentiment in a range of discourses and contexts, as the individual contributions to this volume will do, it may be useful to begin with a more detailed account of its conceptual history.

Most of Nietzsche’s later writings on culture, but especially *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886), [*Jenseits von Gut und Böse*], and *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887), [*Zur Genealogie der Moral*], are characterised by a searing critique of the Judeo-Christian tradition. For Nietzsche, the liberal idea of the common good, a product of the Enlightenment, is in fact a late outgrowth of this tradition. At the heart of the Judeo-Christian tradition, he sees a narrative of victimhood, an aesthetic rendering of (originally Jewish) peoplehood as a story of subjugation. Arising from the oppression of the Jewish people, an aspiration to freedom becomes embedded in a certain aesthetic identity based on an acceptance of suffering. Nietzsche believes an aesthetics of suffering to have intertwined itself both in Judeo-Christian morality and in neo-Platonic Christian teachings on redemption, all of which de-privileged the senses and preached a morality based on an afterlife that would lend *post factum* meaning to suffering.

From his own perspective of late nineteenth-century thought on physiology and on evolution, adaptation and metabolism, Nietzsche was convinced that life

1 | In a compelling study of Nietzsche’s concept of Ressentiment, Esam Abou El Magd writes that envy, alongside a longing for revenge, contributes to the sense of existential powerlessness that fuels Ressentiment. See: Esam Abou El Magd, *Nietzsche. Ressentiment und schlechtem Gewissen auf der Spur*, Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann 1996.

should be conceived of in relation to its physical processes and that to ignore these would be anti-scientific and anti-intellectual. To this extent, his attack on metaphysical thinking *per se* is based on a belief that it ignores or even rejects the physiological reality of life and invents to this end the intellectually cowardly alternative of an interior, spiritualised ideal. Life, real life, for Nietzsche, is the “will to power” [“Wille zur Macht”], as he puts it in *Beyond Good and Evil*.² This concept has little to do, however, with an aspiration towards power or dominion in the political sense. It concerns above all the way in which all processes of life are engaged with each other and more specifically it emphasises the fact that affective nature, desire and the will towards individual development are all intrinsic elements of the life-force. When, as a result of cultural forces, the individual is prevented from realising his or her potential, when vitality is curbed by a submission to belief systems that are hostile to life or development in this sense, an inherently corrupt public morality is the inevitable by-product. This is the state of moral corruption in which Nietzsche believes European philosophy to have colluded, to the signal benefit of the various vested interests of Christian religion.

Critically, he extends this rejection of any morality founded on hostility to the life-force to include an attack on narratives of political emancipation, which he accuses of fostering aspirations that undermine the individual’s life-force. Instead of striving for self-development and instead of embracing experience, those individuals who submit to political calls for group solidarity (whether these concern early Jewish emancipation or nineteenth-century oppositional movements) insidiously suppress their own vital development, in Nietzsche’s view. Where there is no individual achievement or mastery of adversity, the triumph of a group identity is altogether suspect, then, for Nietzsche. Hence, both in *The Genealogy of Morals* and *Beyond Good and Evil*, references to struggles for political emancipation tend to be very critical.

As we shall see, Nietzsche has recourse to the notion of Ressentiment principally with reference to an individual (or group) hiding behind an ideal or a set of values which it has itself done nothing to produce or bring about. Ressentiment is, for Nietzsche, a product of a certain revelling in achievements that are not one’s own. An individual or collective subject driven by Ressentiment is mediocre, in Nietzsche’s terms, but regards itself as superior to others by virtue of the fact that it does not conform to an ideal that it belittles as soon as it realises that it, unlike others, cannot attain to it. Not only has the claimed superiority of Nietzsche’s “man of Ressentiment” nothing to do with real achievement, but it has everything to do with failure, or at least negative capability.

Concurrently with his critique of both Jewish and Christian values, Nietzsche articulates a critique of metaphysics, not merely because of its association with

2 | Friedrich Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Bänden*, Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (eds), Munich: DTV de Gruyter 2007 (=1980), Vol. 5. *Jenseits von Gut und Böse. Zur Genealogie der Moral*. (=1988), 35, p. 54. References to this volume will be abbreviated in the following to KSA, Vol. 5. *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, 36, p. 55. References to the English translations will, however, appear first.

a belief in transcendence, but because of what he perceives to be its didactic morality, a morality opposed to life and to nature. In Nietzsche's view, systems of ethics such as those proposed by Aristotle ignore something very fundamental to human life, namely an urge to do good that can stem from uncurtailed "natural" life. In fact, Nietzsche sees life in its pure form as quite distinct from a subjectivity bound up in identification with, or self-measurement against, external ideals. Whether such ideals are associated with Aristotelian ethics or with Christian teaching on the status of the weak and the sick, both predominate and intermingle, in his view, in Western cultural and political history. Moreover, the Enlightenment association of truth with the political notion of the common good is something that Nietzsche holds in contempt. Like all rationalist ideas, it severs the link with what is natural and therefore (for Nietzsche) good in humanity: namely, the celebration of life itself. It is in this context that he dismisses and indeed ridicules Voltaire's perspective on truth:

O Voltaire! O humanity! O nonsense! There is something to "truth," to the search for truth; and when a human being is too humane about it – when *"il ne cherche le vrai que pour faire le bien"* (he looks for truth only to do good, Translator's note) – I bet he won't find anything!³

Truth, for Nietzsche, is an illusion, since – conflated as it is with notions of the moral good – it has become a cultural ideal underpinned by passivity. Rather than allowing for growth and experience, the individual life becomes stupefied by this passivity which he describes as a "herd morality". From this critique, it is only a short step for Nietzsche to draw the conclusion that liberalism, not unlike German nationalism, is both a product of intellectual laziness and a characteristic of democracy itself.⁴ Ressentiment flourishes in a liberal climate wherein individuals aspire to rights and privileges that they do not deserve or merit and thus easily fall into the begrudging mentality that Nietzsche believes to be so very central to Christian morality.

Nietzsche does not view social inequalities or hierarchies as inherently problematic. Instead, he takes issue with what he regards as the artificial denial of inequalities or hierarchies. In other words, he rejects the call for equality in so far as this involves a denial of the fact that individuals have different talents and different degrees of talent. From Nietzsche's perspective, it is equally mistaken to ascribe an intrinsically positive value to, or bestow privileged status on, culture itself. His view of a "healthy" culture can be inferred from what he sees as positive for individuality, namely allowing life (nature) within oneself to flourish.

3 | *Beyond Good and Evil*, ed. Rolf-Peter Horstmann/Judith Normann, trans. Judith Normann, Cambridge: CUP 2002, p. 35. [F. Nietzsche, *KSA*, Vol. 5. (35), p. 54: "Oh Voltaire! Oh Humanität! Oh Blödsinn! Mit der 'Wahrheit', mit dem Suchen der Wahrheit hat es etwas auf sich; und wenn der Mensch es dabei gar zu menschlich treibt – 'il ne cherche le vrai que pour faire le bien' – ich wette, er findet nichts!"]

4 | See also Christian Emden, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of History*, Cambridge: CUP 2008, p. 257.

Since one's nature can only be experienced from within, the idea of culture as a valid external expression of personhood is problematic. For Nietzsche, individuals are not equal and what one should strive for is not equality but rather individual growth, development or self-realisation. Whereas this latter aspiration is based, according to him, on intrinsic values, political struggles for freedom or social struggles for equality are, on the contrary, contingent or circumstantial. Not only does Nietzsche regard political emancipation movements as suspect, then, but he links his theory of master-slave morality to a particular interpretation of the Jewish political struggle that he holds to be foundational in Christian moral thinking. For Nietzsche, the struggle that emerged from Middle Eastern oppression of the Jews combined a desire for political liberation on the one hand and an expression of political suffering and victimisation on the other. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, he puts it as follows:

The Jews – a people “born for slavery” as Tacitus and the entire ancient world say, “the people chosen of all peoples” as they themselves say and think – the Jews have achieved that miraculous thing, an inversion of values, thanks to which life on earth has had a new and dangerous charm for several millennia: – their prophets melted together “rich,” “godless,” “evil,” “violent,” “sensual” and for the first time coined an insult out of the word “world.” The significance of the Jewish people lies in this inversion of values (which includes using the word for “poor” as a synonym for “holy” and “friend”): *the slave revolt in morality* begins with the Jews.⁵

What followed this historical Jewish “inversion”, namely the Christian identification with the poor and the sick, had begun, according to Nietzsche, with the early positioning of Jewish political identity and, more specifically, in the lamentations of a suffering, victimised people. It is the subsequent valorisation of such laments that Nietzsche sees as having produced profoundly negative effects. The Jewish “inversion” embraces suffering at the same time as lamenting it. What in this way comes about, he argues, is a new form of slavery, one linked both to Jewish notions of moral uniqueness and to Christian notions of suffering and of redemption based on a belief in transcendence. This is a particularly negative form of slavery, for Nietzsche, because the assumption of a collective identity prevents the individual from striving to make the most of his or her own existence. Nietzsche does not believe that the late-Enlightenment notion of political equality and the burgeoning nineteenth-century social equality movements understood human freedom in anything other than a superficial way, and did

5 | *Beyond Good and Evil*, Rolf-Peter Horstmann/Judith Norman (trans.), Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press 2002, p. 84. [KSA, Vol. 5, 195, p. 117: “Die Juden – ein Volk ‘geboren zur Sklaverei’, wie Tacitus und die ganze antike Welt sagt, ‘das ausgewählte Volk unter den Völkern’, wie sie selbst sagen und glauben – die Juden haben jenes Wunderstück von Umkehrung der Werthe zu Stande gebracht. [...] In dieser Umkehrung der Werthe (zu der es gehört, das Wort für ‘Arm’ als synonym mit ‘Heilig’ und ‘Freund’ zu brauchen) liegt die Bedeutung des jüdischen Volks: mit ihm beginnt der Sklaven-Aufstand in der Moral.”]

not avoid the valorisation of victimhood which he perceived in the Jewish “inversion”. Hence, the ideal of equality – a cornerstone of democratic principles – was highly suspect to him.

But what, one could ask, makes Nietzsche’s viewpoint so significant for re-thinking Ressentiment in the early twenty-first century? After all, should Nietzsche’s objections to equality not be seen simply as his personal response to his nineteenth-century environment and to the political formations he so clearly disliked? *Lebensphilosophie*, an eclectic philosophical movement in which he, along with Bergson, can retrospectively be called a key figure, was intrinsically disinterested, after all, in “group” formations, and could be called subjectivist, or, in Nietzsche’s case, solipsistic and therefore profoundly individualistic. Can Nietzsche’s views not, then, simply be placed in their historical and philosophical context: why should their analysis of particular ills of protest groups concern us today? The reason is this: the significance of Nietzsche’s views on Ressentiment is that they are linked to an understanding of freedom and to the question of whether subjective freedom has an intersubjective dimension. If subjective freedom indeed turns out to be part of something that cannot be understood without recourse to something that is not reducible to, or capable of being contained in, an individual act of understanding, then Nietzsche’s analysis of Ressentiment is worth returning to in order to re-evaluate how we can or, as the case may be, cannot think past societal formations.

Some years after writing *On the Genealogy of Morals* and *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, Nietzsche returned to the theme of Ressentiment in *Ecce Homo* (1888). Reflecting autobiographically, and weaving, in so doing, a web of ironic self-stylization on the one hand and grotesque self-aggrandisement on the other, Nietzsche describes overcoming, and narrowly escaping, Ressentiment. Strikingly, Ressentiment is linked here in more personal (albeit self-consciously so) language to his own recently experienced illness (in all likelihood the onset of the illness that would cause his early dementia and eventual death). It is likened to an inability to heal.⁶ The essence of illness is therefore not so much in keeping with the nineteenth-century bacteriological paradigm which tends to construe illness in terms of invasion of the discrete organism from the outside. Here, in *Ecce homo*, illness is at its most threatening not just by “being”, but by the organism’s own acquiescence, i.e. whether or not it can mobilise its inherent powers of healing, or instead simply succumbs to something more powerful than itself.⁷ The spiritual analogy is of Ressentiment as a paralysed state, a heightened, but unproductive sensitivity, an inability to take revenge against the perpetrators of perceived wrongdoings, an overall sense of being or having been “hurt”, and of thereafter being powerless, ontologically or otherwise, to alter this existential reality. Freedom from Ressentiment, on the other hand, means not being laid

6 | Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, KSA 6, *Der Fall Wagner, Götzen-Dämmerung, Der Antichrist, Ecce homo, Dionysos-Dithyramben, Nietzsche contra Wagner*, eds Giorgio Colli, Mazzino Montinari, dtv: Munich 2011, =²1988, p. 272f.

7 | Ibid.

low by the consciousness of such extreme states of weakness, and Nietzsche adds that this freedom can only be known if its opposite – in other words paralysis – has also been experienced.⁸ As Martin Seel has recently argued, there is a paradox worth noting in Nietzsche's *Ecce homo*. On the one hand a textual enunciation of radical individualism and of self-referential authorial freedom, this text, on the other hand, in its very proclamation of autobiographical, individual rootedness, is appealing to the horizon of its readership for recognition of this and thus, paradoxically, moves beyond the individual.⁹ It situates its claim within a social or, perhaps, intersubjective sphere, since without the reader, who is part of this, the authorship would be either self-contained or in the equivalent to a vacuum. It is not, however, and Seel is right in suggesting that the urge to exemplify (Nietzsche's elucidation of how he has avoided Ressentiment and thus avoided being spiritually broken by illness) has to be seen as an aesthetic gesture and thus as part of the social world in which such gestures take on meaning in a way that is at least partially shared.¹⁰ The question of Ressentiment, therefore, is more than strictly personal. It is not a matter of personal triumph or personal failure. This brings us back to the starting point for several of the attempts in the contributions to this volume to analyse Ressentiment as it is sometimes construed in contemporary discourse. All-too-often encountered as the limit of speech in a hostile environment, the onset of Ressentiment could be the moment where a subject senses that its grievance will be construed from the perspective of more powerful parties in the social world as irrelevant, and, if anything, evidence of an ailing mentality that cannot meet with the demands of its environment. At such moments, the limits of criticism are defined: personal grievance, not rationally legitimate concerns, are thought to be the cause of a person's failure to endorse the values of his or her more dominant environment. Some of the essays in this volume will give examples of this. Looking at the con-

8 | Ibid.

9 | Cf. Martin Seel, *Aktive Passivität. Über den Spielraum des Denkens, Handelns und anderer Künste*, Fischer Verlag: Frankfurt/Main 2014, p. 140. The paradox, for Seel, is that Nietzsche cannot escape the specific rationality of philosophical speech. Precisely the heightened claim to self-referentiality proves, for Seel, that as an example of autobiographical discourse, Nietzsche's text shows itself to participate in aesthetic discourse and, moreover, to exemplify the fact that the aesthetic discourse belongs to rationality.

10 | Ibid.: "Auch die Selbstfeier als eines schlechthin einzigartigen Individuums bleibt – schon weil es sich um eine Feier handelt – eine exemplarische Handlung. Mit ihr weist der Autor doch immer wieder über sich hinaus. Eine Rhetorik der Singularität ist in der Philosophie – wie wohl auch in der sonstigen Literatur – nicht durchzuhalten, nicht einmal von Nietzsche, dem ungehemmtesten und selbstbezogensten Ich-Sager aller Zeiten." [Even the self-celebration of an utterly unique individual remains – simply because it is a celebration – an exemplary act. With this act, its author again and again refers to something beyond himself. A rhetoric of singularity turns out in philosophy, as in other literature, not to be sustainable, not even by Nietzsche, the most uninhibited and self-centred I-sayers of all time. (Trans. J. Riou)]

ceptual history of the term Ressentiment can help foreground those recurring features which may turn out to apply to both contemporary discourse and the origins of the concept in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth centuries.

In two of his most important philosophical writings from 1913 to 1922, the philosopher Max Scheler concurs in many respects with Nietzsche's analysis of Ressentiment.¹¹ These writings are *The Nature of Sympathy* [*Wesen und Formen der Sympathie*], a 1922 revision of his 1913 publication, and a longer essay from 1915, *Ressentiment* [*Über das Ressentiment im Aufbau der Moralen*]. Scheler argues that Ressentiment is not a specifically Christian phenomenon, even though at times it has crept into Christian ethics. For both thinkers, however, Ressentiment is at the root of the "protest movements" (the term is Scheler's) of the nineteenth century and both focus in particular on the Ressentiment that they see as driving socialism, while Scheler takes issue additionally with feminism. As products of an unacknowledged envy of the more (naturally or socially) talented or highly-ranked "Other", these and a whole range of other movements are discredited for Nietzsche and Scheler. And for Scheler, the critique of Ressentiment does not stop there. Instead, it carries over into his countering of criticism itself, into his dismissal of the whole theoretical basis of the critical demand for social change as being based, fundamentally, on Ressentiment.

In his 1915 essay on Ressentiment, Scheler contends that Nietzsche's theory of Ressentiment as the root of Christian morality is based on a number of misreadings of Antiquity.¹² He argues persuasively as to why this is so. Overall, however, he agrees with Nietzsche that the modern industrial Age is characterised by the tendency to produce protest movements that try to lessen the inequality between people by "weakening" the "strong". Where he differs from Nietzsche is that he does not believe Ressentiment to be a product of Christian thinking. Whereas Nietzsche had described the Christian ideal of love as a product of pure Ressentiment in *On the Genealogy of Morals* [*Zur Genealogie der Moral*], I, 8, Scheler claims that with the rise of the bourgeois classes from approximately 1300, a morality of Ressentiment emerged that reached its pinnacle in the French

11 | In a longer study, I have discussed how Scheler's thinking relates to early Phenomenology, incorporating the notion of Intentionality set out by Brentano and developed further by Husserl. Alongside others such as Theodor Lipps, Alexander Pfänder and Edith Stein, Scheler's writings made a significant contribution to empathy theory in the early twentieth century. Some of the ideas which will be mentioned in the following in relation to Ressentiment have been examined in a different context in this longer study. See: Jeanne Riou, *Anthropology of Connection. Perception and its Emotional Undertones in German Philosophical Discourse from 1880–1930*, Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann 2014, pp. 90–131.

12 | Max Scheler, *Ressentiment*, Milwaukee Wisconsin: Marquette University Press, trans. Lewis A. Coser/William W. Holdheim with an introduction by Manfred S. Frings. [*Das Ressentiment im Aufbau der Moralen*, ed. Manfred S. Frings, Frankfurt/Main: Klostermann 2004 ('1978).] In the following, references will be made first to the English translation and secondly to the German text.

Revolution.¹³ Scheler's essay is at least as searing in its critique of emancipatory social movements as is Nietzsche's *On The Genealogy of Morals*. Moreover, his arguments, both in relation to what he sees as Nietzsche's misunderstanding of Christian asceticism and his underestimation of Greek "fearfulness" of death show greater differentiation and precision than Nietzsche, the language becomes no less rhetorical than Nietzsche's and the dismissal of what Scheler regards as protest movements no less vituperative: "The man of *Ressentiment* is a weakling; he cannot stand *alone* with his own judgement." ["Der Mensch des *Ressentiments* ist ein Schwächling, er kann mit seinem Urteil nicht *allein* stehen."] ¹⁴ Calls for equality and social solidarity are, according to Scheler, nothing other than a desire to bring somebody else down – someone more naturally entitled, or entitled by the fruits of their labour, to enjoy greater privilege, advantage or luxury. A person capable of advancing by their own means, he claims, does not need to demand equality. To call for equality as a political right is therefore based not only on weakness, but on moral cowardice in the face of this weakness – *Ressentiment*: "Nobody demands equality if he feels he has the strength or grace to triumph in the interplay of forces, in any domain of value!" ["Niemand fordert Gleichheit, der die Kraft oder die Gnade in seinem Besitze fühlt, im Spiel der Kräfte – auf irgendeinem Wertgebiet – zu gewinnen."] ¹⁵

Compared to his arguments elsewhere, including over long stretches of his essay on *Ressentiment*, Scheler's conclusions in this respect are somewhat glib. He makes no effort to substantiate the claim, for instance, that all advocates of socialism or feminism hold these convictions as a result of envy or *Ressentiment*. No attention is given to the respective thinkers and ideas accused by Scheler of being motivated by *Ressentiment*, and the result is conservative political thought that defends what it sees as a natural status quo. At the same time, in contradiction, many aspects of the status quo are rejected by Scheler himself, either in this essay or elsewhere. For instance, in *The Nature of Sympathy*, he is capable of being very critical of what he sees as masculinist, patriarchal and anthropocentric positions. And he is highly critical of the industrial Age, particularly towards the close of the essay on *Ressentiment*, elsewhere also of capitalism, but overall defensive of the conditions of capitalist economy. The crux seems to be that change, where Scheler regards this as necessary, is best brought about by individuals in a stronger position making the sovereign decision to improve the conditions of those less fortunate. This is in keeping with his understanding of "giving" as an act of Christian love.

Far from being an act of self-sacrifice, the individual who is able to give is strong, according to Scheler's reading of Christian morality. Here, he differs from Nietzsche. Where Nietzsche speaks of Christian asceticism and self-denial that turn into a form of hypocrisy, Scheler sees instead a Christian view of

13 | *Ressentiment*, p. 53. [*Das Ressentiment im Aufbau der Moralen*, p. 36].

14 | *Ressentiment*, p. 103. [*Das Ressentiment im Aufbau der Moralen*, p. 89].

15 | *Ressentiment*, p. 102. [*Das Ressentiment im Aufbau der Moralen*, p. 87].

ascetic practice that can only be exercised by a strong individual. Asceticism, and the self-control involved, are therefore not what Nietzsche regards as a weakening of the individual, but are instead possible as a result of the individual's vitality and strength.¹⁶ This "strong" individual, we can extrapolate, has the power to choose whether, for instance, to give or retain, to indulge or abstain, to withhold or knowingly and positively "give" to another.¹⁷ As such, this sovereign individual does not differ greatly from Nietzsche's conception of the medieval knight whose notion of justice is built on an understanding of personal honour.

Scheler also believes that Nietzsche's reading of antiquity is flawed in one crucial respect. He believes that Nietzsche overlooks that certain periods of antiquity, citing Epicureanism as an important example, are marked by a great fear of death. Their favouring of indulgence is, according to Scheler, not so much a by-product of a natural vitality as a last-ditch attempt to defy the limits of mortality.¹⁸ It is therefore driven by fear rather than fearlessness and is, as such, the opposite of what Nietzsche holds it to be. Related to this, he criticises Nietzsche's reading of the Christian morality of self-diminution – wanting to bring oneself "down" to the level of the weak, or the sick, or the poor. The Greeks, he points out, saw weakness and sickness etc as a sign of diminution, whereas the major change that Christianity brings about is that to "give" to the weak or to turn towards the sick is regarded as the property of a life that is full and "healthy".¹⁹ He makes the further distinction that Christian morality does not hold the weak-

16 | See *Ressentiment*, p. 95: "It is quite ridiculous to hold up 'serene Greek monism of life' against 'gloomy and dismal Christian asceticism.' For the asceticism which deserves this name is precisely 'Greek' and 'Hellenistic.' The feeling that the body as such is 'sordid,' a 'fountain of sin,' a confinement to be overcome, a 'dungeon' etc., has its source in the decline of antiquity. From there, it sometimes penetrated into the Christian Church. Christian asceticism is serene and gay; it is a gallant awareness of one's power to control the body! Only the 'sacrifice' made for the sake of a *higher positive* joy is agreeable to God!" [*Ressentiment im Aufbau der Moralen*, p. 80: "Es ist sehr lächerlich, wenn man die 'düstere christliche lebensfeindliche Askese' dem 'heiteren griechischen Lebensmonismus' entgegenstellt. Denn gerade 'griechisch' und 'hellenistisch' ist die Askese, die jenen Namen verdient. Das Gefühl, dass der Leib als solcher 'schmutzig' sei, 'Quell der Sünde', eine zu überwindende Enge, ein 'Kerker' usw., hat seinen Ursprung im Niedergang der antiken Welt, und drang erst von hier aus in die christliche Kirche zuweilen ein. Die christliche Askese ist heiter, froh: ist ritterliches Kraft- und Machtbewußtsein über den Körper! Nur durch das höhere *positive* Freude geweihte 'Opfer' ist in ihr Gott genehm!"]

17 | In chapter three of the *Ressentiment* essay, "Christian Morality and *Ressentiment*", Scheler cites other examples of what he sees as ethical impulses within Christianity that appear to stem from ascetic renunciation, but should be seen instead as an individual's free choice and one which strengthens vitality in a positive way. See *Ressentiment*, p. 61. [*Das Ressentiment im Aufbau der Moralen*, p. 44.]

18 | See *Ibid.*, p. 60. [*Das Ressentiment im Aufbau der Moralen*, p. 43–44.]

19 | *Ibid.*

ness, sickness itself as the phenomenon worthy of “love”, but the spiritual reality behind it.²⁰ Accordingly, it is from an underlying inner health that the stronger person is able to give. In this way, Christianity avoids an equation of the essence of human life with “outer” properties such as weakness or strength, sickness or health. Rightly, Scheler shows that this is a distinction missed by Nietzsche in his definition of Ressentiment.

At this point in his essay, Scheler switches from his analysis of antiquity and the Christian notion of love to a derisory comment on nineteenth-century Realism in literary writing and painting. Realism, he argues, shows quintessential signs of Ressentiment in: “[...] the exposure of social misery, the description of little people, the wallowing in the morbid – a typical *ressentiment* phenomenon. Those people saw something bug-like in everything that lives, whereas Francis sees the holiness of ‘life’ even in a bug.” [“die Aufdeckung des sozialen Elends, die Kleineleutemalerei, das Wühlen im Kranken, – eine durchaus aus Ressentiment geborene Erscheinung. Diese Leute sahen in allem Lebendigen ein Wanzenhaftes, während Franz noch in der Wanze das ‘Leben’, das heilige, erblickt.”]²¹ Scheler’s dislike of the social conscience of the Realist movement is, as has been shown elsewhere, echoed in other Vitalist tendencies which are quite pervasive in philosophy and psychology around 1900.²² A good example of this is Else Voigtländer, whose doctoral dissertation, *On the Different Types of the Sense of Self* (1910), [Über die Typen des Selbstgefühls] engages with both Nietzsche and Scheler. An important theme in her analysis is the Nietzschean trope of “declining life”, something which she sees as having been falsely celebrated in fin-de-siècle art. The opposite to vitality, “declining life” is, for Voigtländer, given inordinate attention in art and literature. She is referring not least to the German stage, where Ibsen’s 1892 play, *The Master Builder*, dramatises lost vitality.²³ Although she does not mention Ibsen’s other dramatic works, it is clear that Voigtländer does not accept Ibsen’s critique of alienation and social stratification in his plays, and that the comments directed specifically at *The Master Builder* apply to Realism in general (although Ibsen is a dramatic forerunner of Modernism rather than purely an exponent of naturalist drama). Paying undue attention to the negative effects of social hierarchy gives rise to what Voigtländer, Scheler, and, before them, Nietzsche saw as a damaging preoccupation with weakness.²⁴ Scheler, as the above quotation illustrates, opposes the “weakness” of declining life to the perceived vitality of Christian acts of “giving” such as

20 | Ibid.

21 | Ibid. (Scheler is referring to St. Francis of Assisi).

22 | Cf. J. Riou, *Anthropology of Connection*, p. 103.

23 | Ibid.

24 | As I have argued elsewhere, these three exponents of Vitalism, in their privileging of vitality over so-called “declining life”, share a certain common ground with populist movements of late nineteenth-century Germany such as *Lebensreform* (Life Reform). See Ibid., p. 100.

those demonstrated by Francis of Assisi, who was proclaimed a saint by the Roman Catholic Church shortly after his death in the thirteenth century. To give should be a choice based on freedom (Francis had freely chosen to forfeit his inherited wealth, and to tend to lepers, among other deeds), and not something that should be brought about by persuasion. Scheler's (along with Voigtländer's) dislike of Naturalism and Realism centres on the urge within these movements to persuade theatre audiences and readers of the necessity for social change. Realism, for Scheler, adds to the mistakes of socialists, feminists and altruists in justifying Ressentiment, adding fuel to a metaphorical fire. Not least this dismissal of Realism places him firmly in the ranks of a burgeoning conservative theory. While he would later grow disillusioned with Christianity, at this point in Scheler's career, the engagement with early Christianity is central to the form of intentionality developed in this essay and in his other major early work, *The Nature of Sympathy*. Arguably, the intentionality of love in a re-reading of Christian ethics is something which is idealised by him in this essay. The somewhat incongruous juxtaposition of St. Francis of Assisi and nineteenth-century Realism is an example of this. Scheler's dismissal of artists and intellectuals who, as was sometimes the case in Realism and Naturalism, drew attention to suffering caused by the social world is unreservedly Vitalist, and indeed, adds a political tone to Vitalism, in saying that they "saw something bug-like in everything that lives". In other words, they focus on life that is diminished, less than human, and abject – and these qualities are directly associated by Scheler with Ressentiment.

The emotional content of the notion of Ressentiment in its nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century readings first by Nietzsche, then by Scheler, and by others such as Else Voigtländer is central to the development of the concept. Emotional attributes often place the phenomenon close to other concepts that can inspire disgust, revulsion or simply condemnation. Scheler's metaphor of the bug, far from being incidental, calls to mind the abjection of Gregor Samsa in Kafka's 1912 short story, *Metamorphosis* [*Die Verwandlung*]. Samsa has become both a bug and an image of human waste, and he has lost the power to partake in human language.²⁵ But Ressentiment first and foremost delivered a theory of envy. Its theorists tended to see at the heart of political dissent and artistic protest not legitimate intellectual stances, but an emotional cry for help. In the aftermath, it is not difficult to see how Ressentiment has become a trope of other discursive formations. From the viewpoints of its critics, it represents the limits of criticism, more precisely the point of its descent into a prediscursive, emotional terrain that has no place in rational discourse. Far too close to a non-verbalised, non-intellectualised, reactive cry of envy, Ressentiment is dismissed in this perspective as a collective call for equality where this equality is not merited.

25 | Franz Kafka, *Sämtliche Erzählungen*, ed. Paul Raabe, Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, pp. 56–99. See the discussion of abjection in relation to Gregor Samsa in: Anne Fuchs, *A Space of Anxiety: Dislocation and Abjection in Modern German-Jewish Literature* (Freud, Kafka, Roth, Drach, Hilsenrath), Amsterdam: Rodopi 1999, p. 72.

While its place in contemporary discourse connects it above all to theories of envy, the genesis of Ressentiment discourse also shows close conceptual ties with notions of pity. In the understanding of mimesis in Aristotle's *Poetics*, pity and terror are part of the cathartic process unleashed by the art of tragedy.²⁶ Famously, Plato in Book 10 of the *Republic* banished the artists from his ideal Republic since art was capable of arousing emotions stronger than rational thought. Conversely, Aristotle sees a purifying role for the pity and terror inspired by witnessing tragic occurrences in drama. The purifying value attributed to pity in Aristotle's theory of catharsis has a certain resonance in the Judeo-Christian tradition, and, when Aristotle's *Poetics* is rediscovered in the Renaissance, it combines with a new, seventeenth-century connotation of purifying as purging.²⁷ Eighteenth-century Enlightenment thought adds to the theory of catharsis a dimension of moral improvement with Lessing's acclaimed argument that the compassionate person is a better person, and that the purpose of art should be at least in part to arouse this improving emotion of compassion (or pity).²⁸

However, at the close of the nineteenth century, Nietzsche takes issue with Aristotle's definition of catharsis, and departs in no uncertain terms from the Enlightenment paradigm of universal moral understanding. Art should not purge us of the experience of fear and of a sense of danger, in Nietzsche's view. On the contrary, the Dionysian anti-hero exposes himself to danger rather than seeking to purge it, and his is thus an aesthetics of withstanding and of experiencing – rather than of distancing through mimetic processes. In Nietzsche's later writing, the anti-Aristotelian aesthetic is developed into a theory of cultural weakness. *Beyond Good and Evil* and *On the Genealogy of Morals* unreservedly associate Ressentiment with the "false" morality of the Judeo-Christian tradition, one built on cowardice rather than Dionysian courage. In the spirit of this cowardice, Nietzsche infers, Ressentiment emerges as the plea for mercy and appeal

26 | The concept logic of catharsis was not, of course, invented by Aristotle, but has a long history in ancient Greek and other mythologies. As Mary Douglas has emphasised, it can be seen at work in rituals of scapegoating as a form of purification. See Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger – an Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, New York: Praeger 1966. For a discussion of catharsis in the pre-Socratics, see: Bernd Seidensticker/Martin Vöhler (eds), *Katharsis vor Aristoteles. Zum kulturellen Hintergrund des Tragödiensatzes*, Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter 2007.

27 | Aristotle's *Poetics* undergoes a revival in the Renaissance but the connotations of purifying and purging change in the course of the seventeenth century. The notion of a clear conscience becomes a moot point and purging, arguably, a dividing line between Lutherans, Calvinists and other reformed Protestant sects. John Milton's evocative portrayal of Lucifer, and the temptation of Adam and Eve in *Paradise Lost* represent an emotional sharpening of the "purifying" and "purging". See John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed./introd. John Leonard, London: Penguin 2000.

28 | For a discussion of Lessing's notion of pity, see Martin Vöhler, "Die Ambivalenz des Mitleids. Käthe Hamburgers Lessing-Kritik", in: Nina Gülcher/Irmela von der Lühse (eds), *Ethik und Ästhetik des Mitleids*, Freiburg i. Br. et al: 2007, pp. 33–45.

for pity from the centre of a weakened and corrupted core. Right up to today, this critique continues to resound in cultural theories of Ressentiment. As a result, dissent – whenever this is voiced by a minority group or isolated viewpoint – all too easily falls under suspicion of a false appeal for mercy. It is inherently under suspicion of looking for unwarranted advantage, undeserved leniency, unmerited protection. Ressentiment, in this way, can be dismissed with the contempt which Nietzsche showed for any social movement, any call for justice, any sense of protest not in keeping with Dionysian self-celebration. Moreover, in line with Nietzsche's use of the term to attack what he saw as the "herd morality" of a culture weakened and "perverted" by a false morality, Ressentiment has been an often unspoken charge at the heart of politically conservative cultural theory.

Later Theories of Ressentiment: From Carl Schmitt to more Contemporary Perspectives

From its origins in antiquity and philosophical anthropology to today's intellectual and political landscape, the discourse on Ressentiment is intrinsically linked to thinking on equality. The degree to which the concept is reified as a theory of envy frequently relates to positions adopted in relation to the question of equality. To put it simply, although perhaps somewhat polemically: if, on the one hand, there is a view that inequality is natural or inevitable, then there is likely to be less Ressentiment, since hierarchy is accepted as being intrinsic to the social order, and the lower positioned will be less inclined to dispute their position. Where, on the other hand, equality is espoused by the culture concerned, Ressentiment is more likely to emerge, since equality, however notional, becomes a driving aspiration permeating the entire symbolic order. In other words, individuals or fractions are more prone to feeling envy or resentment because of their perceived exclusion if the potential for equal achievement (or, perhaps, attainment) is not regarded as being unjustly impeded. As Karl-Heinz Bohrer and Kurt Scheel have quipped, Ressentiment is directed against perceived "winners"; postindustrial capitalist society is, in other words, a globalised field of comparison and competition, in which the "losers" do not take their places readily.²⁹ Indeed, prefacing their 2004 special edition of the journal *Merkur*, a collection of essays entitled *Ressentiment! Zur Kritik der Kultur* [Ressentiment! On Cultural Criticism], Bohrer and Scheel remark that the charge of Ressentiment is particularly hurtful because the accused stand charged not just with entertaining various ignoble emotions, but also with displaying lesser powers of intellectual discernment. Ressentiment is dismissed as offering would-be critics or protesters the means of hiding behind something similar to mass protest, and as requiring neither individual distinction nor suitable qualification to argue a critical case. Those deemed to bear the mark of Ressentiment are thus judged (a pri-

29 | Karl Heinz Bohrer/Kurt Scheel (eds), *Ressentiment! Zur Kritik der Kultur. Sonderheft Merkur. Deutsche Zeitschrift für europäisches Denken*, 2004, cf. 9/10, 58, Preface.

ori) not to merit intellectually the “just” treatment to which they lay claim.³⁰ This dismissal is founded on the conservative argument that finds strong expression in the thinking both of Nietzsche and of Scheler, for whom the movements of political protest of the nineteenth century were, as we have just seen, anathema.

Articulated in the late 1930s, Carl Schmitt’s theory of power posits that calls for equality are under certain circumstances misplaced and are little other than envy-led or at the very least pointless. In *The Leviathan* [*Der Leviathan*], his account of Hobbes’ theory of the modern state includes comments on the emergence of this state as part mythical-machine (the Leviathan), part rationalist intelligence. He notes, for example, that whereas the medieval right to protest against an unjust feudal overlord was seen as God-given, this legitimate right disappears in the Modern age.³¹ In other words, the Leviathan state is a colossus that subsumes individual resistance within fully rationalised structures with the result that, effectively, resistance becomes impossible. Dissidence henceforth becomes superfluous; dispossessed of any practicality, it will, at best, fuel utopian ideals which will, in turn, remain extrinsic to the controlling institutional powers. It is not difficult to imagine how this understanding of power in modernity construes Ressentiment as the futile disgruntlement of the utopian dissident. As such, it is disregarded, not necessarily as unreasonable or incorrect, but as inherently unproductive or futile. And although Schmitt does not say so, the next logical step is to conclude that if disgruntlement is already a sign of protest at a state of affairs that is factually irreversible, then it is little other than an impotent expression of envy of the authority that the dissident does not possess. Since this authority or power is never within the reach of the utopian protester,

30 | “Ressentiment gehört zu den Wörtern, die man als Vorwurf am wenigsten auf sich selbst beziehen möchte: Gemeint sind die anderen, und zwar die besonders Kleinkarierten. Jemanden vorzuwerfen, er habe Ressentiments, heißt ihm zu sagen, er sei ein Mensch ohne Selbstbewußtsein, der sich dafür rächen will. Ressentiment ist unter den negativen Eigenschaften wie Neid oder Haß der niedrigste und der Vorwurf daher besonders verletzend.” [Ressentiment is one of those words which one would least like to hear used about oneself. It refers to others, therefore, who are particularly small-minded and petty. To accuse someone of Ressentiment is tantamount to telling them they are a person who lacks a sense of self and wants to take revenge for this. Amongst those negative characteristics such as envy or hatred, Ressentiment is the lowest form, and the accusation therefore particularly hurtful. (Trans., Jeanne Riou.)]

31 | Carl Schmitt, *Der Leviathan*, Stuttgart: Klett-Kotta 1982, (11938), p. 70–71: “Die Entfernung, die einen technisch-neutralen Staat von einem mittelalterlichen Gemeinwesen trennt, ist weltenweit. Das wird nicht nur in der Begründung und Konstruktion des ‘Souveräns’ sichtbar, wo der Gegensatz des göttlichen Rechts der Könige als sakraler ‘Personen’ gegen den rationalistisch durchkonstruierten Befehlsmechanismus ‘Staat’ zutage tritt.” [There is a world of difference between the technical, neutral state and the medieval commune. This can be seen not least in the foundation and construction of the ‘sovereign’, and the contrast which emerges between divine right of kings as sacred ‘persons’ and the rationalist construct of the state as an ordering mechanism. (Trans. Jeanne Riou)], 70f.

the protest itself is, in logical or rational terms, misplaced, and the authoritarian state is vilified to no material effect. The state thrives on a logic that cannot be disputed, since its laws are the product of a rationalisation that has already taken place. Although the protestor's disgruntlement may not be unreasonable, the ground has shifted, leaving him or her nowhere to protest. The magnitude of the Leviathan is such that one small pocket of resistance will easily be overwhelmed. Taking the Leviathan to be the state, then this, for Schmitt, is a historical development rather than a universal or pre-ordained order of things. Be that as it may, there is little the weaker party can do.

In the preface to their edited volume, *Ressentiment! Zur Kritik der Kultur*, (2004), Karl Heinz Bohrer and Kurt Scheel offer a somewhat different reading of Ressentiment, one that foregrounds its utopian potential, a dimension that can be inferred from Schmitt's theory of power, but which remains inchoate and even ambivalent in Schmitt's thinking. For Bohrer and Scheel, the critical power of Ressentiment is indeed tied up with the rejection of the world as it is, in the name of something better. Indeed, it can articulate or reveal, in artistic as well as intellectual terms, a need for radical review of power and of thought itself (they refer in this connection to the aims of Critical Theory and to the work of a large range of thinkers).

In one of the essays collected in the 2004 *Ressentiment*-volume, Hans-Peter Müller gives an account of the major cultural transition towards an equality paradigm. For thousands of years, as Müller puts it, inequality was sanctioned by what almost appeared as natural law, innate differences and distinctions being assumed to stratify society naturally.³² With the shift towards modernity, this presumption was gradually subjected to revision, notably by the Enlightenment, the French Revolution and then, not least, by Marx'/Engels' publication of the *Communist Manifesto* [*Manifest der kommunistischen Partei*] in 1847. Indeed, the tables were turned to the extent that, as Müller suggests, it was not the call for equality but rather the defence of inequality that became increasingly morally suspect, even though – as the emergence of anarchy, socialism and communism clearly showed – the discrepancy between the ideal of equality and the social reality of modernity was immense.³³

Müller cites the work of Alexis de Tocqueville from the first half of the nineteenth century, who, in the wake of his travels in America observed that the freedom and mobility associated with bourgeois capitalism brought with them a persistent striving and loss of security as accompanying features of the rise of the middle class. Rather than being content with their places in a status quo, the inherent sense of possibility in a society where upward mobility was no longer foreclosed meant that any achievement or potential achievement for the citizens brought with it equal potential for loss. Indeed, such a loss of status would be far more difficult to accept than the static condition of the lower-classes in the

32 | Hans-Peter Müller, "Soziale Ungleichheit und Ressentiment", in: Bohrer/Scheel: *Ressentiment!*, pp. 885–894, 886f.

33 | *Ibid.*

pre-modern age.³⁴ Therefore, according to de Tocqueville, a constant sense of restlessness and aspiration are features of democracy.³⁵

De Tocqueville's sense of foreboding and of the ambivalence of the desire not just for equality itself, but for advancement, is not far removed from Nietzsche's distrust of democracy. Clearly, however, de Tocqueville is more interested in the comparative ethnographic observation of Ressentiment than in providing a critique of its morality, as Nietzsche would towards the end of the century. De Tocqueville observes a fundamental openness in American democracy that distinguishes it from forms of society with either aristocratic structures or caste-systems. Theoretically, every American citizen can aspire to social mobility. De Tocqueville sees envy and Ressentiment as inevitable by-products of meritocracies, since the aspiration to achieving higher status and greater wealth, and to securing a better position in society leads to a certain vulnerability, "defeat" being as distinct a possibility for the individual as "success". Müller then cites Max Scheler's notion of Ressentiment, in particular the sense of helplessness Scheler believes can result from an individual's holding an unequal position in a society where equality is an aspiration. In Scheler's essay, the helplessness in question fuels the desire for revenge. This appears an almost inevitable consequence of the dream of equality which de Tocqueville finds so ambivalent in early American democracy.³⁶ Nevertheless, compared to the social closure of feudalism, the utopian dimension of a society that no longer entirely constrains individual movement is difficult to overlook, even if Ressentiment is the occasional by-product.

As a counterpoint to the argument for the utopian potential of Ressentiment, Norbert Bolz presents a negative reading in his essay on Adorno in the Bohrer/Scheel volume. Adorno's *Critical Theory* contains, as Bolz contends, a dialectical movement of negation in which the "appearance of the artistic object", perhaps better described as its phenomenality, defies either the terms of the fetish-character which Marx ascribes to consumer-capitalism or the totalizing tendencies of instrumental rationalism.³⁷ Art is therefore for Adorno the locus of Ressentiment; it refuses to be pinned down, resisting the terms of what Marx described as the illusionary structures of capitalist fetishism. The very freedom within aesthetic discourse that allows for the creation of an appearance can also provide a means of expression for troubled and, indeed, alienated subjectivity

34 | Alexis de Tocqueville, quoted from *On Democracy in America*, in *Ibid.*, p. 887.

35 | In a similar vein, Georg Simmel would later describe the ceaseless competition and the striving for attainment within a constantly shifting and fluid set of value-driven objects as a feature of modern culture, indeed, as its defining psychological feature. This is evident in many of his writings, not least the lesser-known essay, "Sociology of Competition", [*Sociologie der Konkurrenz*], (1902). For a discussion of this, see: Jeanne Riou, *Anthropology of Connection*, pp. 195–217.

36 | H. P. Müller, "Soziale Ungleichheit und Ressentiment", p. 889. Müller refers to Scheler's *Ressentiment*.

37 | Norbert Bolz, "Lust der Negation", in: Bohrer/Scheel (eds), *Ressentiment! Zur Kritik der Kultur*, pp. 753–761, 757f.

that does not otherwise have ready access to self-translation. Along these lines, Adorno pins his hopes on art for the articulation of disenchantment with modernity. The aesthetic ubiquity of art makes this possible without art's falling back into the "trap" of Hegelian dialectics wherein all temporary states of being, no matter how politically undesirable, can be resolved. The latter are, after all, only phases in the teleological movement towards progress in history.

Bolz' argument proceeds along the lines that Critical Theory is a manifestation of Ressentiment. What he means by this is that the view of modernity espoused by Critical Theory is one that allows for no politically affirmative vision, and also demands ongoing critique of the alienation produced by the capitalist system. Since neither capitalism nor the instrumental reason of the modern world seem able to be reversed, Critical Theory is an intellectual position that predisposes the critic both to suffering and, perhaps, to melancholia. Adorno is critical of Hegel's teleological view of history and equally critical of earlier attempts at utopian synthesis such as that ventured by the Romantics. Beyond both Romanticism and Hegelian dialectics, Adorno holds the aesthetic as the only possibility of non-falsified, non-reductionist and non-dialectical expression.³⁸ And this expression must be of a certain suffering occasioned by the inadequacy of the modern world. Whether this leads to any possibility of change or of improvement, or whether Carl Schmitt's laconic insight into the futility of subjective critique of totalised power shows something indeed irreversible, is bound up with how we see Ressentiment. What does it achieve to criticise? Does it involve a negation, simply, a descent into aporia, a retreat beyond what can be realistically achieved? Bolz concludes that there is a Gnostic and a theological dimension to Adorno's conception of the work of art:

As is the case with all Gnostic thinking, Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* promises redemption through complete alienation. To this end, this type of thinking has a strong interest in construing the world in which we live as the worst of all possible worlds. In contrast to naïve Gnostic theology, redemption does not feature in Adorno as the unknown god who saves, rather manifests itself incognito as art. That which is wholly other disguises itself along Marxist lines in the changeability of what exists. That the world should thus be changeable is what art can show. That 'that which is is not everything' is the most fundamental formula of Gnosticism. The concept of that which exists thereby takes on a theological accent.³⁹

38 | Bolz, in this article, refers to *Ästhetische Theorie*, Adorno's final and uncompleted work, but degrees of this stance are implicitly (and correctly) seen by him as present elsewhere in Critical Theory.

39 | *Ibid.*, p. 759 (Trans. Jeanne Riou). ["Wie jede Gnosis verspricht auch Adornos *Ästhetische Theorie* die Erlösung gerade durch eine Vollendung der Entfremdung. Insofern hat dieses Denken ein großes Interesse daran, dass die Welt, in der wir leben, die schlechteste aller möglichen Welten ist. Im Unterschied zur naiven gnostischen Theologie tritt das Heil bei Adorno aber nicht als fremder Erlösergott auf, sondern eben im Incognito der Kunst. Das ganz Andere verpuppt sich marxistisch in der Veränder-

Tentatively, perhaps, Adorno keeps open the possibility of change. However, change is most likely to come about through that level of understanding and reflection enabled by aesthetic discourse. This is because, in Adorno's thinking, as Bolz rightly infers, there is a meta-critique (and thus non-mimetic critique) of reality in the work of art. Since its critique will always be indirect, avoiding positivist reductionism on the one hand and dialectical argument and counter-argument on the other, aesthetic discourse (for Adorno) can make of Ressentiment a critique that nevertheless holds some real transformative potential.

While acknowledging what he calls Adorno's Ressentiment-critique, Bolz nevertheless builds up to a dismissal of all other, ensuing critiques of Ressentiment. Critical theory, he tells the reader, is dead, and Ressentiment-critiques have outlived it.⁴⁰ Echoing Nietzsche's disdain for political protest movements, Bolz argues that an abundance of groupings in the modern world stake their claim to moral righteousness via rhetorical strategies which suggest that they are on the side of justice. Effectively, he seems to discredit quite an array of what he perhaps sees (along with Nietzsche) as disgruntled and outdated dissidents. Among those ridiculed are (paraphrasing Bolz) "ageing 68ers", "medieval environmentalists" (mittelalterliche(n) Umweltschützer), "feminists", adolescents who seek refuge in subcultures and critics of globalization.⁴¹ Bolz thus groups together many shades of political opposition and protest, claiming that all are united by what Lionel Trilling has called "adversary culture". To belong to a subculture is dismissed as either a characteristic of adolescent rebellion, thus a passing phase, or a nostalgic yearning for battles which have long since been fought and lost. This line of argument in Bolz's article is worth noting, as it is indicative of broader cultural dismissals of counter-culture. Such dismissals can take many forms – for instance non-engagement with an individual or grouping accused of Ressentiment. Considerable attention has been given to Bolz's article here because its account of Critical Theory as Ressentiment-critique is particularly illuminating. It is unclear, however, whether the subsequent critique of counterculturalism offered by Bolz is, in fact, a logical extension of Critical Theory. If the latter is the case, the hypothesis would be that unlike the work of art, which is capable of complexity, counterculturalism is dialectical and reductive. The question remains whether the proposition that counterculturalism is dialectical and reductive is really consistent with Critical Theory. Bolz also argues that anti-capitalist protest can be seen as a struggle for belonging. Intellectuals, students and young people, he continues, have an abundance of time on their hands, which can result in idle or even vexatious protest. In this version of Ressentiment, protest movements are driven by the pure pleasure of negation.

barkeit des Bestehenden, und diese Veränderbarkeit der Welt wird durch Kunstwerke verbürgt- Dass das, was ist, nicht alles ist, ist die gnostische Minimalformel. Damit bekommt der Begriff des Bestehenden aber einen theologischen Akzent.”]

40 | Ibid., p. 760.

41 | Cf., pp. 760–761.

Articulated in 2004, thus four years before the so-called economic crisis, a credit crash that tore through the social and economic layers of the European Union and, to an extent, of the USA, such an argument has a very particular ring given the political reality that would follow in the wake of this crash: a reality that took shape in the critical silence resounding from the managerialism of academe and in the apparent nonchalance of media commentators in the face of seemingly automated policies of austerity. If all forms of counter-culturalism are dismissed out of hand, it is easy to see how an intellectual vacuum might arise, of which indifference towards equality *per se* is a natural by-product.

Throughout the European Union in the aftermath of 2008, a political trend emerged with Germany as the “creditor” nation along with a small group of strongly performing euro-economies who, arguably, held the balance of power and determined the credit terms of “bail-out” nations with devastating consequences. The brutal reining-in of public spending in some, if not all of these countries (Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Spain) reflected a growing political tendency to regard the public sector, i.e. the state, as a burden on the taxpayer rather than an essential infrastructure for a functioning, citizen-led society. An example of Ressentiment in action in this broad political sense has been the demonisation of the “wasteful state” with its expensive, supposedly overpaid and idle civil and public servants. In Ireland, to give one example, public sector pay was cut drastically, but along with this, rights also disappeared as unions gradually acquiesced with government plans out of fear that failure to make concessions would result in job losses. One by one, the different sectors of the large public services union in Ireland that had protested most loudly against one particular round of cuts in 2013 were granted concessions. This had the effect of offsetting opposition to the damage which overall spending cuts would do to the public sector. To protest from within would, in a climate increasingly hostile to those regarded as superfluous public servants, have been met with outpourings of public hatred. Although the banking crisis and the credit bubble as well as deeply corrupt management of these private systems were the cause of the crash, Irish newspaper and television reports bore daily witness to the fact that although the population excoriated the banks, the more immediate venom seemed directed at anyone who, in hard times, was perceived to be suffering *less* hardship than others. If those thought to be suffering “less” were state employees, in particular in education, then their salaries often seemed to be regarded as an unfair expense and a burden on “the taxpayer”. As citizens were transformed in rhetorical terms into taxpayers, the culprits became those workers perceived as being paid directly from tax revenue: i.e. civil and public servants, and not just the upper echelons thereof. Instead, the lower and middle scales had their wages and pensions cut and their numbers slashed. Daily laments in the media about collapsing standards of public health care, inhuman waiting lists for urgent specialist medical attention and queues in accident and emergency units, a university system that is cash-starved in the extreme and offering less and less choice to students made no difference as austerity policies accelerated. None of the all-too-evident failures of unrestrained neoliberalism brought about any sustained critique of this model. Unlike in Ireland, whose electorate the left-leaning German broadsheet

Süddeutsche Zeitung regards as historically passive,⁴² there were frequent street protests in the Spanish, Portuguese and Greek capitals. However, the concerns so vigorously expressed in these countries regarding the decimating effects of mass-unemployment and reduced public service capacity were not widely debated in the EU. Therefore, protests against the demolition of what many would hold to be the two essential pillars of a functioning civil society, namely health and education, were largely dismissed as born of the Ressentiment of vested interest groups on the periphery.

Returning to Norbert Bolz's argument, it is clear that protests against the culture of austerity cannot all be seen to be driven by Ressentiment. Indeed, the suggestion that they are based on Ressentiment can itself be seen as the product of a reified notion of the existing order, for instance the order that preserves political continuity in a state like Ireland, effectively bankrupted by the greed of its banking sector and by an unshakable faith in a property bubble. What needs to be recognised here is the degree of consensus required in order to suppress alternative viewpoints. If sufficient numbers of people tacitly agree that things are "as they must be", then the likelihood of non-compliant voices being heard becomes slimmer. And the charge of Ressentiment is not infrequently a call for collusion in the suppression of unwelcome identities, communities, interests or demands.

A more nuanced approach to Ressentiment is taken by Martin Seel in the same 2004 volume edited by Bohrer and Scheel. Unlike Bolz, Seel turns to the question of morality in relation to the imperative of respect for the particular. His phenomenological approach to morality, which accords to the other the right to differ, avoids the trap identified by Nietzsche: namely morality as the idealisation of norms or as obedience to the herd instinct. In this approach, the other may not be liked or approved of and does not have to be understood either, for morality is not reduced to an obligation to conform. A homogenous community, for instance, can uphold certain traditional values, and may under some circumstances deny that different values held by "outsiders" can have equal moral status. But a moral intention to do justice to that which is neither liked nor understood has to avoid universalist aspirations. Seel's openness to relativism or at least his openness to the limits of social understanding leads him to claim that Ressentiment is often linked to a disrespect, or even an envy, of otherness.⁴³ This can come about when mediocre attainment, sensing its own limits, claims a higher moral ground on the basis of external value references. Effectively, such an argument follows the reasoning on Ressentiment of both Nietzsche and Scheler, namely, that an element of morality (perhaps all morality for Nietzsche

42 | *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 29/30 June 2013. A translation of this article was published in the *Irish Times* on 6 July 2013, underlining the claims of this German newspaper report that Ireland had been exploited on a number of levels apart altogether from the banking crisis, and its electorate had passively accepted the corruption and mismanagement that extended in no small degree to some former government ministers.

43 | Martin Seel, "Zuneigung, Abneigung/Moral", in: Bohrer, Scheel (eds): *Ressentiment*, pp. 774–782, cf. 782.

and certainly the morality of the modern world of work for Scheler) is premised on collective Ressentiment.⁴⁴ In other words, such an argument arises, essentially, from mediocrity. On the basis of perceived shared value, and resting on collective identity, it empowers people, irrespective of their ability, to feel moral superiority and injustice at their lack of status, recognition or political rights. As Seel notes, however, both Nietzsche and Scheler themselves demonstrate an elitist morality in adopting this position. Nietzsche, for instance, considers morality to be intrinsically opposed to exceptional individual talent, so that it is a very small step indeed from morality to its by-product, Ressentiment. For Seel, on the other hand, even if morality and Ressentiment are intimately connected, morality can and should be separated from its affective tenor. Certainly, human beings are essentially driven by combinations of emotional responses: likes and dislikes, desires and repulsions inform and sometimes dictate their behaviour. There is an echo of Schopenhauer's implicit emotionality in consciousness here. But Seel, unlike Schopenhauer, tries to reconcile this emotionality with a possibility of morality that is not entirely determined by affect. Although Seel recognises that attraction and repulsion are not merely affective antipodes, but rather inherent and indeed productive forces in all human activity,⁴⁵ he avoids the more negatively-focussed "abstinence" ethics proposed by Schopenhauer as an answer to the problem of upholding morality in the face of emotional life as an inner battleground of appetites. Instead, he envisages the phenomenology of the other as a space neither reducible to, nor disconnected from, the antithetical forces of attraction and repulsion, desire and disgust, love and hate, friendship and enmity. For Seel, it would be futile to deny the existence of such dynamics of affect, and equally futile to expect rational activity to override them somehow. Instead, he emphasises the mobility of these affective forces. Attraction and repulsion are never static; and if the relation between self and other is based on an ongoing movement between attraction and repulsion, then it is possible within this relation to settle on, or for, an acceptance that the other is somehow not quite defined. In this non-definition, there is the space for the other to move, and to be accorded a saving "indifference" in the sense that its otherness negates the need for an immediate and binding emotional order, and therefore neutralises the sense of evaluation or value that can so easily lead to Ressentiment. Unlike the indifference with which Bolz pronounces (the same) judgement on subcultures, youth movements and various forms of political protest alike, Seel's "indifference" is a space which defers evaluation. Although he does not invoke the aesthetic precedent of Romanticism, its influence is, to a degree, palpable. In this way, Ressentiment can be thought of in terms of an unstable, unfixed, dynamic relation of antithetic affect rather than in terms of a fixed affective constellation with a clear identity.⁴⁶

44 | Ibid.

45 | "Zuneigung, Abneigung – Moral", p. 774.

46 | The German Romantic thinker, Novalis, reflecting elements of both Schelling's

The concept of Ressentiment is undoubtedly connected to the history of subjectivity in the Western world and perhaps beyond. The point of separation between self and other, or imagined and real community, could doubtless be studied with a view to questioning whether Ressentiment, like René Girard's scapegoating, is an anthropological constant that emerges under particular sets of (sociological, ethnological and political) circumstances. Ressentiment, an emotional phenomenon in Nietzsche's reading of Judeo-Christian culture, asks questions of religious history, of Christian ideals of goodness and justice, as well as of philosophy.⁴⁷ How does morality, and the political adaptation of morality both on the "left" and on the "right" relate to the *emotional* phenomenon in its historical sense? And how might all this relate to today's world? Has Ressentiment been a trope used to offset more serious criticism of a world whose economic foundations have been called into question?

Jeanne Riou
Berlin, July 2014

and Fichte's thought, tended to represent life itself as a reciprocal relation between plus and minus poles, like the electrical charge of a battery. As he writes in a fragment from "Allgemeiner Brouillon" (1798–99), "Aus der Wechselsättigung eines Plus- und Minustodes entspringt das Leben". [From the mutual saturation of 'plus and minus', life emerges. (Trans. Jeanne Riou)]. This fifth fragment reflects an idea to which Novalis frequently returns. It derives from a combination of Schelling's thoughts on reciprocity, and Fichte's development of this line of thinking into the concept of an entirely antithetical relation between self and other, 'the I' and the 'not-I' ['das Ich' und 'das Nicht-Ich'].

47 | Gilles Deleuze links both Hegelian dialectics and Christian ethical thinking to an 'ideology of ressentiment' and a guilty conscience ("mauvaise conscience"), in Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche et la philosophie*, Presses Universitaires de France: Paris 1962, p. 183. Arguing along similar lines to Nietzsche, he sees both as falling within a tradition that devalues life, favouring a "reactive" life to one of vitality. In this is implicit the Nietzschean trope of "declining" versus "ascending" life.

The Critical Focus of *Re-thinking Ressentiment*

If the two main functions of language are naming (putting words on the world) and relating (to other beings), then the question of language, including the critical matter of linguistic difference, lies at the heart of this project. One of the reasons for this is obvious: namely the fact that *Re-thinking Ressentiment*, although written in English, focuses on a French word that was radically redefined more than a century ago by two German thinkers. Many, if not most, of the authors of the present volume reflect at some length in their individual contributions on the word “Ressentiment” and/or on its particular linguistic status. Critically, the term cannot be translated neatly into English. In any case, as Walter Benjamin memorably stated, “[a]ll translation is only a somewhat provisional way of coming to terms with the foreignness of languages”.⁴⁸ In drawing attention to this non-translation (and thereby to what translation is not able to do), the volume continually highlights this “foreignness of languages” and bears witness, in particular, to the relation between English and other languages.

The centrality of language to the project goes beyond this fundamental point, however. The core aim of the volume is to explore the ethics and politics of critique, specifically in relation to the position of perceived, or self-identified, “losers”. Undiscriminating as the latter term might appear, and in need of scarequotes, it is an apt contemporary synonym for the Ressentiment-ridden subjects whom Nietzsche and Scheler constructed as “weak”, “dominated” or “subordinate”. In today’s “global” world, “non-global” languages, cultures and values might quite accurately be thus identified. This is a particularly critical matter for the two editors of the present volume. Both used to work in different modern language “departments”, respectively “German” and “French”, in a university on a – nominally and vestigially at least – bilingual island on the edge of Europe, in the only country in the Euro zone in which English is an official language. They still work in the same fields as heretofore, but these have been institutionally re-configured or re-formed in their home university, as they have been indeed in most universities across the English-speaking world, including the United Kingdom. Most erstwhile “departments” of French and German have been integrated into larger units, in this specific case, into a “School of Languages and Literatures”. The particular circumstances of this shift merit attention. Most significantly, perhaps, the “School of Languages and Literatures” does not encompass in its remit the two ancient languages, Greek and Latin (housed in a “School of Classics”) nor does it encompass either of the two official languages of the Irish state: one local and national, Irish; the other global and transnational, English. Moreover, it is not involved in the teaching of the other global language studied in a separate unit on campus since 2004, Mandarin Chinese. One can only surmise that the reason for these anomalies is the exceptional symbolic importance – cultural and/or commercial – of the three languages accorded independent, sovereign

48 | Walter Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator” in: *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn, New York: Schocken Books 1969, p. 75.

academic status within the humanities at our university. Thus, the languages deemed non-strategic are merged under a School name that fails to identify them in any way (as modern/foreign/European etc). And yet, while this name strips the language subjects of their separate identities, the addendum ‘and Literatures’ does, at least, point away from instrumentalism and towards the separate symbolic riches embedded in the different languages.⁴⁹

In what sense, however, are the “sovereign” languages more strategically and symbolically important than the five subject languages assembled and semi-asphyxiated in the contracted space of a single cost centre (German, Italian, French, and Spanish/Portuguese)? English is, of course, *the* global language and indeed Ireland’s Globish currency is the country’s economic trump card. The “School of English” is “out on its own” and is, moreover, the largest School in the university’s College of Arts. Paradoxically, the language itself is not taught in this school, which is more concerned with the symbolic and cultural capital of literature, film, drama etc. produced in English or in historical versions of English. In fact, the university’s lucrative TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) operation is taught in a separate language provision unit, an “applied language” centre, along with the other global and non-global languages envisaged more instrumentally than symbolically. As for the Chinese language provision, deemed to be of strategic importance because China is the top world economy of the future, it is part of no academic School, much less of the “School of Languages and Literatures”: instead it is taught from an on-campus Confucius Institute partly gifted by the Chinese government. Irish is the third language taught as a sovereign academic subject at University College Dublin in a unit called the “School of Irish, Linguistics, Folklore and Celtic Studies”. The exceptional visibility and value thereby conferred on this language relates to its local and “heritage” value.

It is worth noting that, although the structure is a legacy of the erstwhile flush “Celtic Tiger” economy, the “School of Languages and Literatures” is, predictably, in crisis. It has lost, through the recent economic recession, more than one third of its academic posts; it has also lost two actual languages along with the full academic viability of two others (Portuguese and Italian). The two definitive losses were, inexplicably, the Near- and Middle-Eastern languages, Arabic and Hebrew, which could scarcely be more critically crucial to any university aspiring to, or claiming, the status of Ireland’s “global university”. It needs, perhaps, to be emphasised that, far from constituting an exception in Ireland or elsewhere, the apparent erasure of linguistic and cultural diversity or divergence described above is widespread.

This book is, in its very conception, critical of the values that have driven the foregoing narrative. It is in fundamental dissonance with the academic expansion of a narrow, economic conception of the global at the expense, less of the immediately local, than of the entire human, cultural, linguistic spectrum. Its

49 | Ironically, as this book was going to press, our unit was re-structured and re-named as the “School of Languages, Cultures and Linguistics”. The erasure of the above-mentioned gesture towards the unique linguistic embeddedness of literature(s) speaks for itself.

very composition contests, in other words, the consensus that privileges image over word, global code over distinct language, and the transnational over the international. In respecting the non-economic and non-economical resonance of two global and two non-global languages (respectively English and Chinese, and German and French), the volume bears witness to the fact that, despite Ireland's elective affinities with the Anglo world and the economic bet that it has placed on South-East Asia, it remains for the foreseeable future located – in space and time, if not always in mind – closer to Europe than to any other continent.

In its stereo quality, this book as a whole, including this Introduction, registers the very different voices of the two editors: one immersed in German-language thought in particular, the other in French-language thought. While the individual essays of the two editors – along with this two-part Introduction – underline that double perspective, the entire volume pervasively foregrounds the play and uneconomical excess of linguistic difference and the work of translation. This reverberation comes to the fore in a singularly and simultaneously arresting and moving manner in the Mandarin symbols inscribed in the text of the very first essay, by Eric S. Nelson. However, it also resounds in the way that the entire book honours the original language of expression of the thinking that it studies. Although this respect for linguistic difference and divergence is critical to academic endeavour in the humanities, it is in crisis in the contemporary academy worldwide. It should be noted that attention to language and to linguistic diversity was not a matter of editorial policy but rather a spontaneous concern of the various co-authors. Thus, to an overwhelming extent right across the volume, although an English version of all quotations is supplied, readers can generally see, and – if they are able to, read – for themselves quotations in the original language (German, French, Mandarin). In addition, many of the authors, most notably perhaps Victoria Fareld and Mary Gallagher, focus in a particularly concentrated way on the act of translation itself.

Inevitably, the term “ressentiment” gives rise to much meta-linguistic commentary: Eric Nelson, in particular, explores in some detail the relation between “resentment” and “ressentiment”. The writing of the term “ressentiment” has not been harmonised throughout the volume or even throughout this co-authored Introduction. Some authors italicise and/or capitalise it, others do not. In respect of these variations, but of course much more significantly in respect of the breadth of approaches to Ressentiment and to its re-evaluation, the guiding values of the project were not standardisation, closure or coverage, but rather suggestiveness, openness and reflectiveness.

* * *

Some of the essays concentrate on the politics of Ressentiment, and this is the case in the studies by Jeanne Riou, Caroline Mannweiler and Mary Gallagher. Others – Eric Nelson, Helen Finch and Victoria Fareld – focus more closely on the ethical stakes of the concept or on its connection with aesthetics or poetics (Dominique Jeannerod and Christine A. Knoop). However, this subdivision into political, ethical and aesthetic concerns is in many respects artificial; more-

over, the three groups of essays are connected by many revealing conceptual bridges. For example, Christine Knoop's study of the dynamic of Ressentiment as it plays out in the interdisciplinary study of literature often intersects with Mary Gallagher's attempt to situate that dynamic in relation to the values of the contemporary academy as a whole. Helen Finch's commentary on H. G. Adler's views on the dangers of mechanical materialism resonate strongly with Mary Gallagher's echoing of Richard Roberts's concerns regarding the socio-political cost of the global spread of the techniques of Human Resource Management, a cost that includes the kind of "loss of self" and "self-subjugation" discussed also in Jeanne Riou's study of Contagion. Similarly, Victoria Fareld's analysis of Jean Améry's rejection of memory as closure and purification is echoed in Jeanne Riou's comments on aesthetics and catharsis. The question of literary value, while it is particularly central, of course, to Dominique Jeannerod's essay and to Christine Knoop's study of interdisciplinary approaches to literature, also underlies Helen Finch's forensic reading of Adler's post-traumatic autofiction. Most significantly of all perhaps, the relation between the ethics and the politics of equality and dissent unifies the volume as a whole. And yet, what clearly emerges from the collection is not at all a consensus, but rather a sense of divergence suggestive of the extraordinary, intellectually and ideationally generative reach of the nodal concept of Ressentiment, particularly when its significance is situated in relation to the value of criticism or critique.

In "The Question of Resentment in Western and Confucian Philosophy", Eric Nelson presents a comparative study of the way that resentment is conceptualised as a moral force in early Confucian and modern Western thought. In contrast to modern European discourse (the work of Strawson, Scheler and Nietzsche, in particular), early Confucian ethics concentrates on undoing resentment, both in oneself and in others. This stripping is indeed a major step towards becoming an ethically exemplary person in early Confucian ethics. Much Western thinking on resentment assumes that the creation or existence of inter-subjective symmetry and equality provides the means of pre-empting or undoing the fixations of resentment (and also the trap of Ressentiment into which resentment can, in certain circumstances, develop). In complete contrast to this approach, early Confucian ethics stresses that only a radically asymmetrical recognition of the priority of the other person can prevent or dissolve resentment. Nelson shows the exact terms in which the author(s) of the *Analects* recognised both the pervasiveness of resentment under certain social conditions and the double ethical requirement to counter it within oneself and to avoid provoking it in others. Self-cultivation and ritual propriety were held to be the means towards this dual ethical end. Not only does the early Confucian ethics of combined self-care and care of the other contrast with the morality of calculation, but its central value of humane benevolence could be seen as a reversal of Nietzsche's moral order. Far from valuing strength over weakness, early Confucianism prioritises the responsibility of the strong for the weak. More specifically, in a move that is somewhat reminiscent of Levinasian ethics, it makes the "superior" self responsible for preventing not just itself, but also the "inferior" other, from feeling resentment, and – even worse – from entering the dead-end of Ressentiment.

Continuing this exploration of the relation between Ressentiment and ethics or morality, two essays, one by Helen Finch and the other by Victoria Fareld, discuss the notion of victimhood in relation to the crimes of German National Socialism. For Victoria Fareld (in “Ressentiment as Moral Imperative: Jean Améry’s Nietzschean Revaluation of Victim Morality”), the significance of Jean Améry’s Ressentiment is intimately bound up with a refusal to let go of the past, even if this author is concerned also to conjugate the past somehow with the present and the future. Fareld argues that the Austrian Jewish Améry (formerly named Hans Mayer), a survivor of the Shoah, produced a radical re-evaluation of Ressentiment, thus conferring on this notion, so discredited by Nietzsche, a critical and even revolutionary meaning. Furthermore, Améry’s thinking on the experience of the victim operates a Nietzschean “Umwertung” by revaluating the Nietzschean notion of Ressentiment itself. Améry’s “Umwertung” is founded on the notion of a trans-temporal, if not anachronistic or untimely, moral responsibility. Fareld shows how Améry’s Ressentiment forces the past back into the present in a temporal disorder that the author of *Beyond Guilt and Atonement* refuses to pathologise. Thus, instead of viewing victim experience as trauma from which one must recover, Améry focuses instead on making history moral. He rejects the teleology of memory as accomplishment, instead calling for the present to pursue indefinitely a continuous and perpetual remembering. If Améry’s implicit critique of memory as closure is directed at all of society in the present, it is because of his radical understanding of victim morality. Crucially, he does not see this simply as a morality for those who were subordinated, powerless and victimised in the past, but also as a morality for all of those/us who, in the present, because of their/our belatedness and hence their/our powerlessness to undo what was done in the past, are subject to the same moral imperative of remembrance as the victims of past wrongs. If suffering and sacrifice are to have a positive sense, if they are to have the value of an intended action, then the experience of victimhood must not be purged or “cured”; instead it must be remembered, kept in mind, not just by the victims themselves but by all of posterity.

In “*Ressentiment* beyond Nietzsche and Améry: H. G. Adler between literary *ressentiment* and divine grace”, Helen Finch studies the work of H. G. Adler, like Améry an Austrian Jewish author and survivor of the Shoah. Adler, best known as a scholar rather than as a literary writer, authored pioneering studies of Theresienstadt and of the deportation of Eastern European Jews by the German National Socialist regime. As these works show, rather than remaining stuck in the detached, distrustful or resentful stance of the victim, Adler is at pains to participate in the rebuilding of dialogue in post-war Germany. Finch argues, however, that whereas Adler’s intellectual and scholarly engagement with Germany’s present and future suggests a certain transcendence of his personal suffering and losses, his literary work, especially the posthumously-published novel, *The Wall*, registers the post-camp suffering of an alter-ego narrator. This fictional protagonist’s predicament bears indirect witness to the resentment felt by Adler not in relation to Nazi persecution per se, but rather in relation to the short memories of his so-called friends and to the general lack of empathy shown

to him as a survivor in the post-Nazi world. Finch compares and contrasts Adler's approach to Nietzsche's version of Ressentiment with that of Jean Améry. She notes the complexity, but also the ironies and contradictions of their respective approaches to the notion of victimhood, not least of which is the fact of Améry's eventual suicide. Adler's apparent willingness to participate in, or facilitate, a forward-looking, intellectual "working through" of social and political guilt might seem to have protected him to some degree from the emotions that can be surmised to have led Améry ultimately to take his own life. Moreover, the resentment inscribed in Adler's "autofiction" might suggest that the indirect revelation or exorcism of an otherwise hidden Ressentiment is not necessarily incompatible either with survival or with creative self-expression.

In an effort to relate the ethical frame of reference to the political, and to connect historical reflection on the critical value of Ressentiment to contemporary thinking on equality and on political protest and dissent, Jeanne Riou's essay, entitled "Contagion" begins with a discussion of Ressentiment as it features in the writings of Nietzsche, largely as a response to, and a repudiation of, Christian morality and more specifically early Christian asceticism (Tertullian). For Nietzsche, Christian morality is based on a contagious weakness: while it lays claim to a certain altruism, this morality serves above all the self-righteousness of the weak. The latter use it to hoist themselves up above the "strong" (whom they can then look down upon as fallen sinners). Although Max Scheler, writing as a phenomenologist, counters Nietzsche's view of Christian morality, arguing that a merciful approach to the other can reflect an ethically beneficial intentionality, there is no room in either author's thinking for "demands" for equality. For both Nietzsche and Scheler, equality can be granted or given freely, but it cannot be fought for politically. Any such struggle would inevitably involve Ressentiment. Focusing in the final part of her essay on the present political and economic world climate, and more especially on the notion of "contagious weakness" as an economic argument for the post-2008 politics of austerity, Riou explores the dynamics of the relation between "demand" and "dissent". Contagious weakness is not just an economic notion; it is understood by Riou as a metaphorical undercurrent of economic discourse after 2008. Originating in theories of Ressentiment, it takes on a new and insidious resonance in the contemporary climate.

The dynamic of political protest and dissent is also to the fore in Caroline Mannweiler's essay on political reaction to "Stuttgart 21", a major infrastructural project involving the destruction of the historic Stuttgart railway station in order to facilitate more rapid rail travel in the region. This project, spearheaded by Chancellor Merkel's conservative federal-party colleagues at local state government level, dismissed not only the bitter protests by environmentalists and conservationists, but also an unprecedented level of public outrage from all sections of the socio-political spectrum. As Mannweiler shows, the manner in which the government and supporters of Stuttgart 21 attempted to discredit anti-project protesters drew on the trope of Ressentiment. Yet so too did the mediation process put in place by the authorities after the event in order to give both sides an

opportunity to listen to one another. For what the transcriptions of this process highlight is an exhaustive, not to say exhausting, effort, closely followed by the public, to demonstrate on the part of the political authorities an apparent concern to move beyond the Ressentiment trope by allowing the two sides (the expert-supported local authorities and the counterexpert-supported protesters), to demonstrate a willingness not to pre-judge the other side's arguments as being motivated by Ressentiment, or as relying on presumptions of an a priori discursive, intellectual or politico-social superiority or inferiority. In this way, Mannweiler's painstaking analysis of the transformative potential of the mediation process shows not just the contemporary discursive power of the trope of Ressentiment, but more specifically its apparently preemptive role in establishing conditions of putative discursive equality. It also shows the way in which the mass media captured/communicated or failed to capture and communicate the full import of what the analysis of the transcripts reveals. More broadly, this essay raises questions about what is at stake in the neutralisation or apparent neutralisation of Ressentiment in a polarised context where one side (more powerful in political terms) must win or has already won and the other (less powerful in political terms) must lose or has already lost.

It is the almost dizzying, specular manipulation of the trope of Ressentiment that is studied in Dominique Jeannerod's essay, "Specular Ressentiment: San-Antonio, or the Art of Faking Resentment", which is focused on the figure of the writer and on the value of literature and of the literary institution, including literary criticism. San-Antonio (alias Frédéric Dard) is the (pseudonymous) name of the best-selling French writer of the twentieth-century; his one hundred and eighty-four crime fiction volumes centre on a detective narrator-protagonist/writer of the same name. Dominique Jeannerod shows how, through an elaborate double-cross of (distorting) mirrors, the eponymous writer/detective deploys a real/fake Ressentiment based on an apparent envy and hatred of, and contempt for, the values and the style of the anointees of the literary establishment and above all of their anointers (the critics). In so doing, San-Antonio performs not just self-parody but also bravura pastiches both of condescending literary criticism and also of canonised literary authors. He imitates above all the style and posturing of the most acclaimed popular/literary cross-over or genre-bending French writer of all time, Louis-Ferdinand Céline. The principal message conveyed by this polyphonic scriptural ventriloquism is that the consummate art of San-Antonio transcends all the writing (including Céline's) that he is able to re-produce with unparalleled verbal vigour and pyrotechnics, but that he *transcends it critically rather than creatively*. In this way, what might be read as the subversive, transgressive, anti-hierarchical instrumentalisation of a real/fake Ressentiment towards the literary establishment could in fact be regarded as lending itself to recuperation for a conservative reinforcement not just of the value of literary criticism and discrimination, but also of the value of literary style as a recognisable and thereby imitable originality. What distinguishes San-Antonio's relationship both to other popular writers and to the crime novel genre, as well as to the distinctly literary writing that he mocks, is its staged Ressentiment.

What is at stake, in other words, is the inherent subordination of secondary discourse, whether pastiche, parody or criticism. Nowhere does San-Antonio's Ressentiment resound as loudly as in his relation to Céline, a consecrated literary author who had himself used the pose of the popular writer as a cover for his literary ambition and accomplishment. It reverberates in the wide gap that separates San-Antonio's commercially enviable facility for copying the corrosive Ressentiment expressed by the critically celebrated, but deeply unpopular and impoverished author, Céline, from the "real thing". The "real thing" is not, then, the Ressentiment that the wealthy, prolific and popular San-Antonio affects in relation to his non-consecration by the gate-keepers of literature, but rather the first-degree Ressentiment that he could quite conceivably feel as a writer whose style might have been (recognised as) just as literary (i.e. genre-transcending, singular, original) as that of Céline, but is not, and partly, if not entirely, because it is "after Céline".

Christine A. Knoop's essay on interdisciplinarity and on a particular instance of the latter, which she terms the "empirical humanities". Noting the extent to which humanities disciplines have come under immense political and economic pressure in recent years to justify their *raison d'être*, Knoop takes as her starting point the question regarding the potential contribution to literary study of science in general and of cognitive neuroscience in particular. What she probes more especially is the complicated moral boundary between criticism and Ressentiment in the discursive politics of one particular instance of interdisciplinarity. As Knoop pertinently observes, the current recessionary context in the US and in Europe, which has led to the closure or merging of entire literature and other humanities departments, means that the practitioners both of discrete disciplines and of interdisciplinarity are required not just to prove their productivity and their intellectual and social value, but also to position themselves politically in order to attract or to maintain their funding. In this highly competitive context, Ressentiment is, according to Knoop, a frequent cause of what she calls an "unwillingness to accept a pluralism of methods and/or opinions". Moreover, in a high-stakes game of critical and disciplinary hierarchies, it can happen that "the simple fact of *not* belonging to a group accused of methodological or theoretical naïveté is erroneously taken for proof of the academic superiority of one's own approach."

Continuing this discussion of Ressentiment in relation to the intrinsic value of academic work, Mary Gallagher reflects – in "Ressentiment and Dissensus: the Place of Critique in the Contemporary Academy" – on the distinction between critique and dissensus. She notes in particular the radically anti-critical configuration or formatting of the global university of the twenty-first century. Referring to the thinking of Jacques Rancière, Jean-François Lyotard and Michel Foucault and also to the work of Bill Readings and various other critics of the contemporary university, she discusses the distinction, but also the possible connections, between the roles of dissensus and critique in relation to the academy. The limits of criticism and even of critique are all too evident in the context of today's almost hermetically closed economy of knowledge. While criticism, cri-

tique and most especially, perhaps, self-critique have a role in correcting error and exposing untruth, an uncomfortable dissonance risks neutralising the value of critique when it is incorporated into, or recuperated for, a closed economy. If Ressentiment pushes critique towards its negative limits, that is towards closure and stasis, dissensus attracts it towards its positive horizon of openness and action. Although Foucault presents what he terms the “critical attitude” as a (public or civic as well as a private) good, describing it in moral terms as a “virtue”, dissensus might offer a more effective “virtue” for the academy of our times, a critical virtue less likely to feed into the commodification, instrumentalisation and reification at work in the contemporary academic economy of knowledge. This essay tends, therefore, to conclude that dissensus, not least because of its non-contamination by negativity or reactivity, might offer the best chance of opening up, beyond dialectics, disruptive or at least interruptive and critical spaces of true academic freedom and responsibility. Unfortunately, however, dissensus cannot be manufactured, programmed or produced, although the conditions under which it becomes impossible can be readily identified.

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