

Regression, Ressentiment and the Crisis of Democracy

Democracy in a world of crisis: which at the same time has been analyzed as a crisis of democracy. But this crisis of democracy is not only an institutional crisis – but also a crises concerning what one might call the ethical life of democracy.

We are facing a break down of democratic institutions, neglect and hostility towards democratic procedures: we are facing conflicts within democracy (getting stronger) and conflicts about democracy. We also have to register the long standing apathy towards democracy and the way in which Willy Brandt's famous remark „mehr Demokratie wagen“ and the attempts to democratize our societies all the way down has been more and more forgotten. We also experience the weakness of democracies to defend the powers of the market and so on and so on.

In which way would this be/surmount to a *crisis of democracy*? Remember: I'm not talking here about the *seriousness* of the situation we are confronted with. I'm concerned with the *character* of it.

Are we facing a crisis of democracy? I grant it: it is bad. Frightening. But is it a crisis? And if so, in which respect? My thesis is (in the end): The crisis of democracy is a crisis of addressing and even experiencing crisis.

In what comes I will ask the following question: In what sense is it appropriate to describe the contemporary political and social situation as a moment (or even an age) of regression? Does it make sense to describe the increase of authoritarian attitudes, the rise of ressentiment and the strengthening of authoritarian-populist movements and regimes as a *politically regressive* tendency? And what is the use of the (more and more prevalent) concept of ressentiment (as one of the different types or modes of regression) for analysing and understanding our time?

I. The Return of Regression

In the spring of 2017, a volume called *The Great Regression* appeared simultaneously in five European publishing houses. In this volume, leading contemporary theorists take on pressing questions about Trump's electoral victory in the USA and the worldwide strengthening of authoritarian, right-wing populist and neofascist movements. The introduction asks, among other questions, whether we are facing a "temporary social

WORK IN PROGRESS

regression". Now, on first sight, it makes a lot of sense to grasp our world situation in terms of regression. If social progress is marked by the extension of human and civil rights to previously excluded social groups and by the (legal) codification and facilitation of forms of life which were previously marginalized by a dominant "Leitkultur" (as it is called in Germany),² then there is a clear danger of regressing behind these advances when the increasingly destructive³ hatred of this "new ethical life"—vilified as "political correctness"—becomes institutionalized. If the expansion of the welfare state (forced throughout Europe during its post-war development) and the accompanying "dignification of labor" (typical for Europe at least) counts as social progress, then the dismantling of the welfare state is a step backwards. And, on an even greater time scale, if it can be regarded as a worldwide historical progress that governmental power is not exercised arbitrarily and directly, but mediated by constitutionally secured authorities and generally accepted constitutional and democratic procedures, then it is not a stretch to interpret the governing style of Trump, Erdogan, etc., as a relapse behind historical achievements—and thus as "regression."

Prerequisites of a Theory of Regression

But it's not that simple—especially if the term "regression" should mean something more than the fact of dealing with a number of highly unpleasant contemporary phenomena and trends that are bad, disastrous and even dangerous.⁴ To clarify the meaning of regression with all of its implications, one has to adopt some presuppositions that are not necessarily easy to defend (to say the least);⁵ but at the same time, the concept of regression has quite some potential and interpretive power—which is why I actually do want to advocate it.

I shall briefly point out two essential dimensions of the concept of regression.

First: Regression is a normative and analytically sophisticated concept, one which allows "diagnostic philosophizing" of a certain left-Hegelian type. Thus it has, so I claim, a "surplus value" against freestanding normative judgments (and ultimately: mere moralizing) but also against a merely relativistic or *agonal* diagnosis of hegemony.

Let us take an example from the early history of Critical Theory. When Adorno and Horkheimer, authors who do not have a very progressive-optimistic view of history, describe fascism as a regressive phenomenon, they do not just criticize the absolute evil and cruelty of fascist practices and institutions (although, of course, they also believe this to be true, even contributing greatly to sharpening our view on this). They are

WORK IN PROGRESS

saying something more and different: they criticize fascism as a false, deficient and disastrous development due to social structural causes which produce social structural atrocities. This regressive reaction has its roots in unsolved (or: not "worked through", in the psychoanalytical sense) conflicts that extend from enlightenment all the way to modernity. What is important to me here is that regression is not a freestanding and purely normative evaluation. Rather, Fascism is *analyzed* in and with this evaluation—and *criticized* in and with this analysis.

Second: The example of facism, then, also allows us to clarify the second crucial point for understanding the meaning of regression. What is evaluated here is the course of a specific historical development—the course of a crisis-prone dynamic of transformation. Fascism, analyzed as a regressive tendency, is the result of a deficient development that follows a certain logic, albeit neither deterministically nor one-dimensionally. Here it is important to note that regression is not a step backwards in the sense of a simple return to a previous state, but a falling behind a historically achieved condition or even a mode of experience, a kind of undoing of an accumulative, socio-historical process, or (although the word is ugly) a *de-accumulation*. Fascism, as “Modern barbarism is a new phenomenon that historically developed on its own, one in which certain historical experiences are “preserved” and reflected—but in a regressive way.”

Regression then denotes a certain loss of complexity where complexity is not a matter of quantity. The trope of accumulation and de-accumulation suggests that social experiences can react to each other or follow one another either in a productive way or in a destructive manner. If regression then is not a linear decline, this is because we are dealing with conditions that are as they are because they emerged out of each other, reacting to the specific deficits of the former situation (Hegelians would call this a “determinate negation”). There is no chronologically prior state that one could go back to without consequences. Strictly spoken, the former condition doesn't even exist any more. Regression is thus an “unlearning” that is not simply a forgetting, not even a motivated forgetting. Rather, as unlearning it is consequential—and as such it is false.

Regression in Psychoanalysis

In this regard the concept of regression used in psychoanalysis is informative. If regression here means the return of a patient to earlier, childlike “and thus more primitive modes of experience and processing,” then, of course, the prior state the

WORK IN PROGRESS

patient regresses to is not the original mode of a child's experience. It doesn't turn him into a child, but into someone who re-appropriates child-like reactions and modes of behavior. But why is this even a problem? What is wrong with this kind of relapse? The quick and easy answer would be: It is wrong because (and in as much as) it is an inadequate reaction to a given situation. We will get a clearer view of this once we take another decisive point into account that can be learned from the analogy with psychoanalysis: Regression in psychoanalytic terms occurs because of an “inability for other (more appropriate?) modes of conflict resolution.” Regression is triggered by unresolved crises or problems (and sometimes by confrontation with traumatic experiences) while its opposite (the more highly structured, “more adult” mode of functioning) signals the progressive resolution of conflict at the level of their emergence and the biographically (developmental, personality-based) achieved mode of conflict resolution.

My proposal is now to understand *regression as a specific kind of blockage of social experience*. Speaking of a “process of experience” assumes that we conceive of social events *dynamically*, as an ever-changing process of crisis-prone transformation in which problems (sometimes) arise that (often) turn into crises—with reactions to both. “Regression” is then a processual concept: aimed at identifying deficits or dislocations in crisis-prone, problem-solving processes.

In order to pursue these thoughts and apply them to social reality, a whole typology of different experiential blockages and corresponding patterns of regression should be developed. One type of regression is ressentiment.

II. Thinking about our times in terms of Ressentiment

The increase of resentment as a contemporary phenomenon

It has been repeatedly pointed out that “the strengthening of authoritarian based resentment belongs to one of the most disturbing developments of recent times”⁹ As Wendy Brown notes in an illuminating analysis of the political situation, resentment is a “vital energy of right wing populism”, an effective mechanism for the affective triggering of emotions, which gives contemporary neo-authoritarianism its explosive power. Rage against “political correctness,” “social justice,” social democracy and even formal inclusion and equality are (...) animated and fueled by the resentments of aggrieved power. (...) ¹⁰

WORK IN PROGRESS

It seems as though the concept of resentment gives us another tool to address a question that usually takes place in debates about the function of ideology. That is: How does it come about that social suffering, indignation, the present crisis (of capitalism, of neoliberalism...) do not lead to emancipatory movements but instead to reactionary, authoritarian and even proto-fascist tendencies? Since this obviously cannot be explained by the ruthless pursuit of self-interest — just think of the fact that those who are most dependent on a functioning system of health insurance and more generally on a functioning welfare state choose politicians who are openly trying to destroy it!—it appears that what motivates the support of these politics is in need of explanation – and can be explained by the existence of resentment. Even though their *real interests* are not satisfied, their *ressentiment* is.

1. What is Resentment?

But what then is resentment and how does it work? Resentment is a negative-hostile attitude, an “ill will” which aims at the disparagement of others and their way of life and at a devaluation of what they cherish and represent. Resentment is comparable, but not identical, to the vengefulness and envy that begrudges others and wishes them harm. It is a genuinely social feeling, based on a relational comparison with others.

Let us take a closer look at the inner structure and operation of resentment.

(1) Resentment as a second-order affect

First: Resentment, according to Nietzsche, is “fundamentally *reaction*.” (GM, I, 10, p37 Kaufmann), an “emotional response reaction.”¹¹ as the German phenomenologist Max Scheler, whose essay “Resentment in the Construction of Morality”¹² (written in 1915) sheds profound insight into the character and operation of resentment, also describes it. But then: Resentment is not simply “reactive” in general. Everything we do and feel is “reactive” in a completely unproblematic and also inevitable sense: we react to our environment, to what we experience and what happens to us. And these reactions are embedded in evaluative frameworks. However, resentment is reactive in a more specific sense. It is *not* a direct reaction to a certain social situation, to a lack that one suffers. Rather Resentment is a reaction to a reaction, a reaction to the experienced rage or indignation itself – and, as we will see later, an affect based on the repression of an affect. It is not a simple or immediate affect, but a multiple mediated affect. This is the reason why I would like to call resentment a second-order affect¹³.

What are these mediating instances?

WORK IN PROGRESS

Ressentiment is initially mediated, already at the primary level, *through a normative assessment* of a wrong, harm, or lack suffered. We do not react here—in the sense of an original or “primitive” reaction—solely to the actual (objectively determinable) absence of certain desired social gratifications or goods, or to the mere fact that we do not have something we would like to have. It is a reaction to a deprivation that is perceived as an injustice and affront. The “material” from which resentment is formed is correspondingly not immediate suffering or immediate lack, but *indignation*¹⁴ over such¹⁵.

Furthermore, resentment is not only normatively, but also socially mediated. It reacts to a (real or perceived) neglect compared to others; it is mediated through the assessment of one’s own situation as compared to others, to what others have or represent.¹⁶ Resentment is not about what I have or have not – but about what I have not while the others have it.

Thus, resentiment is triggered by normative as well as comparative assessments, not by a pure lack of resources. But this alone does not constitute resentment; the normative and comparative character is a necessary, but not sufficient condition of the internal grammar of resentment.

The other “ingredient” of this dangerous cocktail now is what I would like to call

(2) Impotence and Refusal: Second-Order Impotence

Ressentiment always occurs in combination with a feeling of impotence, a feeling of powerlessness. In other words, resentment is not only a reaction to *a lack of something* (judged in a certain way), but a reaction to an *inability to do something about it*. This impotence (be it real or imagined) is the *ferment* that allows resentment to emerge from feelings of indignation, revenge and envy. Again, following Scheler’s brilliant anatomy of resentment:

~~“There will be no resentment if he who thirsts for revenge really acts and avenges himself, if he who is consumed by hatred harms his enemy, gives him ‘a piece of his mind,’ or even merely vents his spleen in the presence of others. Nor will the envious fall under the dominion of resentment if he seeks to acquire the envied possession by means of work, barter, crime, or violence. Resentment can only arise if these emotions are particularly powerful and yet must be suppressed because they are coupled with the feeling that one is unable to act them out—either because of weakness, physical or mental, or because of fear.” (Scheler, p30)~~

Now this impotence that triggers resentment is, again, not a first order feature. It is not only impotence against the causes triggering deprivation or lack; it is not only

WORK IN PROGRESS

powerlessness against the circumstances or groups of people who are responsible for it. It is this too, of course. But the powerlessness leading to resentment is above all essentially impotence against one's own feelings and inclinations. An impotence to act upon one's own feelings. Resentment is reactively mediated through the impossibility of giving any space and articulation to the negative affects described above, for example, the nascent feelings of revenge.

To put it simply: the (judgmental, affective) indignation (possibly) based on lack and injustice produces indignation and feelings of revenge. Resentment in the proper sense then arises as a response to the fact that one must refuse these feelings of revenge, that one is impotent to express them.

Even the feeling of powerlessness is, therefore, not impotence with respect to a first order problem, for example, the fact of being unemployed or having no health insurance. Remaining within the conceptual framework introduced above, this powerlessness is again a kind of *second-order impotence*.^{17 18}

(3) *Inversion*

We have examined resentment as a multiply mediated affect. But yet another feature is crucial for resentment: As a reaction to a denial and rejection resentment debases those goods and resources whose lack has caused resentment in the first instance. Other than envy, resentment does not leave the value of the desired goods intact – it works as a devaluation of the initially desired object, a devaluation of the value one is deprived of. This is a moment of inversion – not only a second order reaction but an inverted second order reaction. (and, as it is, some kind of "sour grape" effect)

The structural dimension of resentment

Resentment is a genuinely social feeling. I have already pointed out above that resentment (as in the case of envy) relies on a social comparison with others. Thus the withdrawal of important goods in a non-social situation, due to non-social causes—for example, due to a natural catastrophe—would produce lack and misery, but not resentment. Moreover, many of the goods in question are genuinely social or positional goods such as honor, fame, or recognition, that is to say, goods which can only arise within social relationships in the first place. And finally, the feeling of impotence, which arouses resentment, is a social impotence, that is, impotence within and with respect to the social order.

WORK IN PROGRESS

If resentment is a genuinely social feeling, inconceivable apart from social relations, one should try to grasp the strengthening of authoritarian resentment not only as a social psychological phenomenon, but also as a social structural phenomenon. It is important to note here that resentment is not only a social affect in general; it is rather an affect induced by a historically specific and determinate social order, related to tensions (or even contradictions?) that emerge in a specific social constellation. Resentment, then, is not the result of a general (anthropological) disposition to “compare oneself with others”¹⁹²⁰. It is rather, to use Fred Neuhouser's term a "Pathology of Self-Love", and a *pathological* kind of comparison which in turn is a reaction to a pathological social situation. Not every social order then is so inclined to lead to the formation of resentment – and on the other hand it must be possible to identify specific features or inner tensions within a social order which render the rise of resentment likely.

At this point, I can only give a general indication and some short remarks of how to imagine the interrelation of the social order and the disposition towards resentment, again, borrowing from the illuminating analyses of Max Scheler.

There are two social-structural factors that render the emergence of resentment more probable.

The first relates to the social structure and the hierarchical division of society. According to Scheler, the discrepancy between the expectation of status and the fulfillment of this expectation fosters the likelihood that resentment will emerge. A particular kind of social vindictiveness can only arise in a social structure in which a certain expectation arising from the “the discrepancy between the political, constitutional, or traditional status of a group and its factual power.” (Scheler, 31-2) exists²¹. In our (bourgeois) society, this plays out as a discrepancy between an assumed (formal) equality and a real tangible (social, economic or cultural) inequality.

“Resentment must therefore be strongest in a society like ours, where approximately equal rights (political and otherwise) or formal social equality, publicly recognized, go hand in hand with wide factual differences in power, property, and education. While each has the "right" to compare himself with everyone else, he cannot do so in fact. Quite independently of the characters and experiences of individuals, a potent charge of resentment is here accumulated by the very structure of society.”²² (Scheler 32)

This has already been the case for the basic tension (or even, basic contradiction) of capitalist organized bourgeois society, from the outset. But of course, the alleged discrepancy has taken on a new form and new dimensions: What confronts us today and

WORK IN PROGRESS

promotes that same tension is a specific neoliberal form of precarity along with the ideological expectation imposed on the individual to independently (and creatively) solve her own problems. Above all, this can explain how feelings of envy and revenge can be repressively blocked in such a way that they seek the escape of resentment.

The second aspect concerns the distribution of power within a society and, along with it, the specific experiential forms of powerlessness it is not the direct result of an immediate subjugation under a ruling power or else appear indirectly and diffusely but the particular form of powerlessness, that is characteristic of our societies, the powerlessness within social and economic mechanisms and systematic constraints of a (global) capitalist society. That is, experiences of alienation and a very specific form of experiencing impotence.

2. What are the questions "resentment" is supposed to be the answer to (and is it?)

With these insights into the anatomy of resentment we can now explain some characteristics of the so-called rise of authoritarian resentment.

In the first place, the "inner grammar of resentment" can help to explain the frequent projective displacement of the "enemy" onto free-floating projections. Social indignation in its genuine form is directed to the cause of harm or lack (whether the target is correctly identified or not).²⁴ Even the socially induced, envy-driven thirst for revenge is still directed towards something. With resentment, however, the feeling of revenge is diverted to increasingly undefined objects, so that there can be no rebuttal, no resolution, not even a victory. Thus, resentment becomes potentially unquenchable, eternal and indeterminate. In a certain sense, it does not even matter whether resentment hits "the correct" target (not even to those who hold them). The diffuse nature and sometimes unreal character of resentment is thus not accidental, but a systematic feature of resentment. Consider, for example, the fact, that in Germany the ultra-ethnic-nationalist and decisively anti-immigrant and anti-refugee party AfD (the new right-wing populist party called "Alternative for Germany") achieves some of their highest results in areas that have rarely been confronted with immigrants or refugees at all.²⁵ The fear of "Überfremdung" (an ugly German word referring to the possible cultural infiltration by non-Germans) seems to be especially prevalent when it doesn't have a counterpart in reality; the more illusionary the alleged "danger", the more persistent the resentment²⁶. The persistence and vehemence of the affect has nothing

WORK IN PROGRESS

to do with “reality” (if we naively assume that the content of reality is a first-order problem). What’s “real” at the end of the day is resentment itself. The open, cynical contempt of categories like reality, truth, and politics as well as the open disdain for “facts” is, in this sense, programmatic. It is striking how well a remark from Adorno’s *Minima Moralia* (written 1944, published 1951) speaks to this situation:

“Among today's adept practitioners, the lie has long since lost its *honest function* of misrepresenting reality. Nobody believes anybody, everyone is in the know.”²⁷

The structure of resentment also provides a clue about why the right-wing populist thesis of the alleged “ban on thinking” enforced by liberal hegemony and the struggle against all kinds of political correctness plays such an irrationally large role in movements as diverse as the German AfD , the front national, the US supporters of Trump, and so on. This struggle against political correctness²⁸ and emancipatory movements of all kinds, which in the authoritarian worldview leads vaguely to the idea of global domination by a liberal-multicultural hegemonic elite—the structural analogy to antisemitism here is striking and disturbing—is not some secondary battlefield, as it may appear to us at first sight. When viewed from the standpoint of resentment, the supposed “thought ban”—the fact that political correctness prevents them from expressing their vindictive and envious feelings towards those whom they believe “don’t deserve” the respective resources, attention, and public recognition—is (and must be) one of the main fronts.²⁹ If “cultural liberalization,” for its opponents, is a primary, not a secondary problem, this is because it marks the place of impotence and the inability to act in the affective-motivational structure of resentment.

Thus the power of resentment, even though it may be obvious that equal rights for LGBTQs do not harm anybody (certainly not economically), since this is not a question of divisible goods and not a zero-sum game; and even though it is clear that no jobs are coming back to the *rust belt* or to the German coal industry if gays cannot adopt children or *transgender* persons are not allowed to join the army.

Resentment then can be felt by those who are neither objectively deprived nor objectively powerless, and it can be directed against those who, objectively speaking, do not have that much power at all.

WORK IN PROGRESS

The Social Function and Social Origins of Ressentiment

As I have spelled out, resentment can be systematically unfocused, projectively displaced in its orientation, not aiming at any direct resolution or even at the enforcement of the own interest of those who held it. Ressentiment is frequently characterized by a "Kausaltäuschung" (Scheler), a delusion about the causal mechanisms that are at work and that are responsible for one's own suffering, misrecognition or sense of displacement. In Nietzsche's words: " someone *has* to be responsible for my misery, *whoever it is*."

But, in spelling out the apparent aimlessness and appalling irrationality of resentments, I do not mean that they don't have solid social causes, an inner logic as well as solid consequences. If reality is obstructed and twisted here this doesn't mean that there is nothing at stake. To the contrary.

Ressentiment is certainly socially effective, with effects that fulfill certain "real" social functions. And if those who are made responsible for my miserable condition in some sense could be anyone it is still not contingent which group is sought out and blamed³². If resentment against the liberal-feminist-queer-multicultural mafia does not restore jobs in the *rust belt*, but rather brings Trump to power and thus leads to the loss of affordable health insurance for millions of people, inquiring into the grammar of resentment leads us to "functions of a second order". It is not the lack of (first order) resources that resentment will provide a solution for – but the second order "suffering" from not even being able to express one's outrage and to address one's sense of displacement and powerlessness.

So if on first sight, it is becoming more and more obscure what benefits are to be gained from living out one's resentment, this turns out to be wrong. It seems to be sensible to conceive of resentment as a crucial element in a more general ideological *defense mechanism*. When the limits of order begin to break down (e.g., the dissolution of gender identities and the respective forms of life as well as national borders threatened by immigration), the precarious work and life situation as well as the more generalized experience of impotence and precarious social orientation brings forth the need to be "master in one's own house" (Build the wall!) again, which can only be satisfied in the imagination. Authoritarian resentment is then urgently directed against those who are blamed for having violated and dissolved "the sanctity of the home" and also, the established and naturalized self-understandings of the social order. This gives us a clue about the emotional force with which the (liberal) left is attacked: If racism, sexism,

WORK IN PROGRESS

antisemitism are *ideologies*, *ressentiment* is directed against those who prevent us from innocently enjoying the comfort of those ideologies.³³³⁴

Now, if the diffuse character and plasticity of *ressentiment* allows one to project this experience onto groups that for some reason or other are well-suited to adopt the role of those who have taken power “from us” or have turned “our homeland” into a strange place *ressentiment* restores an illusionary feeling of being at home. The mechanism here seems to be: If we have a culprit, someone who is responsible for our loss, our transcendental and not so transcendental “homelessness” – then, by implication, the possibility of a “home”, of being at home in a nation for example, must exist.

(Preliminary) Conclusion

In what respect is the increase in authoritarian *ressentiment* a symptom of a regressive crisis, or rather a regressive response to a crisis, as I said at the outset? I have tried to outline the concept of regression and the phenomenon of *ressentiment* in order to better understand our time and in order to “stock up” the toolbox of critical theory. I have also provided some initial thoughts on why *ressentiment* should be conceived as a mode of regression. But to what extent does understanding *ressentiment* as a regressive phenomenon allow us to bring into play the analytical-critical diagnosis mentioned at the beginning? And what, from a normative perspective, is the problem with *ressentiment*? Time is short now and my answer will be very short at this point as well: *Ressentiment is a regressive blockage of experience*, an example of the de-accumulation of experience, or, a deficient reaction to crisis. The answer to the question “what is the problem of *ressentiment*” is then: it is problematic insofar as it is both an *expression of* a socially induced blockage of experience and, in turn, a *cause* of such blockages and the accompanying blockages of action. *Ressentiment*, similar to ideology, is a mechanism that prevents the causes of *ressentiment* (the indignation-causing injustice and powerlessness) from being addressed. It thus leads to a structural inability to act and to a systematic destruction of “sozialer Erfahrungsfähigkeit”, the ability to make social experiences (Leo Löwenthal).^{35 36} And thus, to act on those experiences that can rightfully be conceived of as a crisis. This is what we might want to call a “regressive” instead of a progressive or emancipatory reaction.

“Socialism or barbarism”—that was Rosa Luxemburg’s resolute and, unfortunately, not entirely outdated description of this alternative.³⁷

2 Vgl. dazu auch Hark/Neckel; Nachtwey, Abstiegs-gesellschaft und viele andere

3 Vgl. von Redecker

4 This especially true if we want to use the term "regression" in order to analyse overarching, comprehensive tendencies – as Oliver Nachtwey does when speaking of "regressive modernity".

5 Zum anderen aber ist die Bezugnahme auf den Regressionsbegriff auch vom methodischen Standpunkt aus bemerkenswert: Der Begriff der Regression, ein in der Psychoanalyse viel verwendeter Begriff (wenn auch nicht exklusiv dieser zugehörig) evoziert eine Durchdringung von Gesellschaftsanalyse mit sozialpsychologischen Fragestellungen, wie sie an das klassische Projekt der Kritischen Theorie/Frankfurter Schule erinnert – auch dies ein Aspekt dieser Traditionslinie, der in den letzten Jahrzehnten nicht unbedingt im Zentrum der Aufmerksamkeit gestanden ist, aber zur Zeit neue Virulenz erfährt. Dafür spricht auch, dass der Begriff der autoritären Persönlichkeit und die Studien zum autoritären Charakter eine kleine Renaissance zu erleben scheinen.

9 See Butler/Hark, "Die Verleumdung" in: DIE ZEIT, 2. August 2017. XXX. One can, of course, use the idea of resentment without such a framework. Its inclusion in precisely this (ultimately historical-philosophical motivated) context is not compatible with the theoretical intuitions of most of those who use the concept of resentment.

10 Wendy Brown: By themselves, neither neoliberal expansions of the private nor neoliberal devastations of economic and political security generate the ferocious energies of right wing populism and the freedom cry through which it is born: this third ingredient is necessary. The master philosopher of aggrieved power, of course, is Nietzsche. There is, to begin with, his account of how suffering, especially humiliation, routed through *ressentiment* becomes moralizing condemnation of the object it holds responsible. If Nietzsche here focused mainly on the pious self-valorization of the meek and weak, he also recognized the slave morality practiced by bombastic haters, anti-Semites and racists; he diagnosed the compensatory swagger and slugging of the stupid as part of the order of "reactive feelings...grudges and rancor." (GM 75) Mobism, bullying, bellicosity—Nietzsche castigated these grievous, resentful energies as opposites to the self-overcoming, proud, world-making energies of the powerful and creative.

11 Scheler, *Ressentiment*, Marquette: 1994, p25: "In the natural meaning of the French word I detect two elements. First of all, resentment is the repeated experiencing and reliving of a particular emotional response reaction against someone else. The continual reliving of the emotion sinks it more deeply into the center of the personality, but concomitantly removes it from the person's zone of action and expression. It is not a mere intellectual recollection of the emotion and of the events to which it 'responded'—it is a re-experiencing of the emotion itself, a renewal of the original feeling. Secondly, the word implies that the quality of this emotion is negative, i.e., that it contains a movement of hostility." See also, p29: "Ressentiment is a self-poisoning of the mind which has quite definite causes and consequences. It is a lasting mental attitude, caused by the systematic repression of certain emotions and affects which, as such, are normal components of human nature. Their repression leads to the constant tendency to indulge in certain kinds of value delusions and corresponding value judgments. The emotions and affects primarily concerned are revenge, hatred, malice, envy, the impulse to detract, and spite. Thirst for revenge is the most important

source of resentment. As we have seen, the very term ‘resentment’ indicates that we have to do with reactions which presuppose the previous apprehension of another person’s state of mind.” A primary source, mainly a desire for revenge, is here repressed.

12 I owe this reference to Matthias Schlossberger.

13 See also R. Jay Wallace’s excellent article: “*Ressentiment* can be understood as a general emotional orientation of the person. It emerges under conditions in which people find themselves systematically deprived of things that they want very much to possess, without any prospects for improvement in this respect. But systematic deprivation is not sufficient for the emergence of *ressentiment*. If everyone was equally subject to a condition in which he is denied coveted goods—as for instance in a natural emergency, such as a devastating famine or earthquake—the result might be a tendency to feelings of rage, frustration, and depression in the populace at large, but not the kind of focused hatred characteristic of *ressentiment*. For the latter emotions to emerge, there need to be some people who are singled out from the rest in not being deprived of the coveted goods, and who are publicly known not to be deprived. The ur-context of *ressentiment* is one in which some people have things that you very much desire, but that you lack and feel yourself unable ever to obtain. Thus Nietzsche’s slaves are systematically excluded from enjoying many of the desirable things that the masters in their society have in abundance, including status, material possessions, and above all political power and influence. *Ressentiment* is fundamentally occasioned by invidious comparisons of this kind.” I totally agree. To add, however: not only something the others have more than I and I will never get. In addition (that is the normative aspect): something of which I believe I am entitled to have. I do not want it. I think I am entitled to it. This also gives us a key to the contemporary atmosphere. The “others” (the refugees, women, ethnic minorities) do not just get something. The resentment-laden racists rather believe that “others” get something (whether material resources or attention) that does not belong to them, but to themselves (the resentment carriers).

14 In this point, I seem to deviate from Jay Wallace. However, I am not sure how serious our differences are here, or whether the point around which he is concerned—the proof that resentment is not caught up in a paradox—can not be solved in my interpretation.

15 Es ist in diesem Zusammenhang interessant, dass Nietzsche den Begriff des Ressentiments aus Eugen Dührings "Der Wert des Lebens" übernimmt – allerdings, wie Frank Nullmeyer und Henning Ottmann feststellen, unter Veränderung des Vorzeichens. (Nullmeyer, Sozialstaat, S. 42; Ottmann, Nietzsche und die POlitik). Ist bei Dühring Ressentiment Reaktion auf Erfahrungen sozialer Verletzung und somit "Motor moralischer Entwicklung", also in etwa das hier von mir unter 2) beschriebene Motiv moralischer Empörung, so wendet Nietzsche dieses Motiv um indem er den "Rache-Kern" der Moral identifiziert.

16 1 and 2 are in fact related, insofar as normative indignation is derived from the comparative aspect; they are nevertheless distinct aspects.

17 Scheler’s formula for the emergence of resentment is thus: lack → feeling of revenge → verdict against this → impotence → resentment.

18 Now it is debatable whether this emasculation of the desire for revenge is based on internalization. Thus, a tension can be identified in immanent moral values, or merely that the others are factually, objectively stronger, and those affected have to refuse their revenge from the situation of subjugation. I do not know how Nietzsche meant it. (See the interpretation of Jay Wallace). At least in our situation, however, it seems clear to me: in a certain sense, it is self-induced.

19 Jay Wallace's otherwise very instructive article leaves this vague when he says:

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20 Fred Neuhouser, *Rousseau's Theodicy of Self-Love: Evil, Rationality, and the Drive for Recognition*

21 Scheler: "A slave who has a slavish nature and accepts his status does not desire revenge when he is injured by his master; nor does a servile servant who is reprimanded or a child that is slapped. Conversely, feelings of revenge are favored by strong pretensions which remain concealed, or by great pride coupled with an inadequate social position."

22 dialectic of progress; the bG is based on equality and creates new inequality; not only the old inequality which it was not yet able to abolish, but inequalities which would not exist without the equality of the bG)

24 Thus, even the Luddites, in the early days of the romantic critique of capitalism, acted out of social indignation, not resentment, even through, from a Marxist perspective, they did not correctly identify the cause of their suffering. This is true regardless of how one stands in relation to the question of causation.

25 Belege zitieren; Heilbronn Artikel aus ZEIT. Koppetsch; others.

26 This is not to deny that there might be real conflicts of interests between different groups; but those then are not rightfully subsumed under the header resentment.

27 Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, Verso, 2005: p30.

28 Alice Weibel (AfD leader): "Political correctness belongs on the ash heap of history".

29 Reference to Wendy Browns Typology

32 Again, what is supposedly "banned" here seems, to a certain extent, replaceable: whether it's nationalism – the well deserved feeling of being proud of one's nation, which, according to the German right-wing has been poisoned by the anti-fascist left; or, in the American case, undermined by globalized liberals, it's antisemitism, sexism or racism. (It would be worth though to have another look at Adorno's *Elements of Antisemitism* in order to spell out how these "targets" are both contingent and not contingent.) Das ist ein komplexes Verhältnis. Adorno/Horkheimers "Elemente des Antisemitismus" zeichnen meisterhaft nach inwiefern "die Juden" einerseits austauschbare Projektionsfläche des Antisemitismus sind, andererseits eben gerade nicht.

33 See Eva von Redecker in *Radical Philosophy*

34 As A. Hochschild discovered in her research on the *tea party* movement, the feeling of "being a stranger in one's own land," seems to be widespread

35 Bei Nietzsche ist die Antwort: das Ressentiment selbst ist problematisch; als reaktives Gefühl steht es im Gegensatz zu den aktiv-vitalen Energien...

36 Das bedeutet dann auch (in Antwort auf die oben gestellte Frage): Das Problem liegt im Ressentiment selbst. Ist aber dennoch eine Frage des Kontextes. Ressentiments können dann (und manchmal tun sie es auch nicht) in einem sozialen Kontext stehen in dem es eine regressive soziale Funktion hat. Es ist dabei aber nicht selbst neutral, sondern bezeichnet einen bestimmten Mechanismus und einen bestimmten Modus der Regression.

37 Wir wissen jetzt, dass Rosa Luxemburg erschreckend Recht hatte damit. Aber natürlich werden die beiden Pole selten "rein" verwirklicht, so dass wir uns meist im unklaren oder undeutlichen Zwischenreich von beiden befinden: gerade zur Zeit im undeutlichen Vorfeld des Barbarei-Pols. Und in den westlichen Nachkriegssozialstaaten

WORK IN PROGRESS

in einer undeutlich halbherzigen Verwirklichung einer eher sozialstaatlich integrativen Option. Es wäre aber auch schon wieder nicht verkehrt, ohne hier unangemessen dramatisieren zu wollen, auch in Bezug auf diese Situation zu sagen, dass die undeutliche Tendenz Richtung Barbarei auf eine Nichtverwirklichung der sozialistischen Option (als einer angemessenen Form der Krisenbewältigung) zurückzuführen ist.