

Redeeming Resentment:

Nietzsche's Affirmative Ripostes

Grace Hunt

There seems to be one standard concern about resentment: namely, that even in its most mundane forms, resentment amounts to a form of petty backbiting that wants and hates what it can't have. Seen as a debilitating fixation on the past, resentment amplifies one's sense of injury alongside a desire for revenge.

It is with these negative associations in mind that I suggest resentment is nonetheless a valuable critical resource for combating oppressive moral and religious norms. Of course, my defense of resentment needs to hold up against Nietzsche's contempt, since his *Genealogy of Morals* presents to this day the most scathing critique of the backward-looking emotion's legitimacy. I want to challenge this all too human view within philosophy that resentment is always already governed by the same underlying desire that governs *ressentiment*: namely revenge.¹

Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals* attributes the historical and psychological lineage of Christian morality to the development of *ressentiment*: the chronic internalization of envy, cruelty, hatred, and resentment characteristic of disempowered people. Nietzsche's infamous genealogy, in other words, articulates Christian morality as developing out of the internalization of a desire for revenge and its attendant emotions and provides a new moral psychology

¹ Whereas I understand *ressentiment* as deriving from the internalization of a variety of affects according to a desire for revenge, Ruth Abbey understands *ressentiment* to be rooted in vanity ["The Roots of *Ressentiment*," *New Nietzsche Studies* 3, no. 3/4 (2009): 47-61].

according to which psychic life is the result of the repression of action. The internalization of suffering, in other words, gives rise to a new value system, one that replaces healthy expression of force with the absorption of experience and out of which develops the psychic evolution of morality.

In an effort to redeem resentment as an affirmation against this tendency, my work develops a subtle distinction within Nietzsche's work between *ressentiment* as an inherently disempowering internalization of suffering and resentment as a feeling of empowerment derived from struggle. My work complements other philosophers who consider Nietzsche a philosopher of agonism—notably Gilles Deleuze, William Connolly and most recently Christa Acampora—and ultimately suggests that affirmative resentment is a type of empowering reaction that disrupts *ressentiment's* tendency to perpetuate the guilty pleasures of cruelty and self-loathing. Reading Nietzsche with an eye for locating instances of affirmative reactions, I aim to upset the false antagonism between active and reactive as the definitive markers of empowerment and disempowerment. The value of resentment can and should be measured by its capacity to bring about a feeling of empowerment for the subject, not by whether it is reactive. This essay is therefore guided by the following question: Can resentment be cultivated and expressed as a life-affirming reaction without slipping into the mobilization of *ressentiment* as revenge against life?

This paper develops three claims regarding the emancipatory potential of resentment and its antagonistic relationship towards *ressentiment*. First, in Part One, in order to defend Nietzsche against charges of elitism,² I argue that while *ressentiment* is best

² I am not attempting here to fully reconcile Nietzsche's purported elitism with egalitarian ideals, although I think this has been done in a way by Christina

known as an existentially disempowering individual psychology, Nietzsche's appropriation of the term is intended to expose and critique hegemonic cultural practices of Christian mass morality, not the individual. Second, in Part Two, even if we do accept individual reactivity as the source of *ressentiment*, I argue that this fact does not necessarily lead to the traditionally accepted view that resentment, as we experience it, is always a version of *ressentiment*. In order to redeem a structural possibility for empowered resentment within Nietzsche's work I argue that *ressentiment* is a reaction against remembered, not current affronts. Furthermore, I develop a functional distinction between passive and active forces that upsets traditional distinctions and introduce a new category of "active reactions." Finally, in Part Three, I illustrate the prevalence of these active reactions—which correlate to what I call affirmative resentments at the psychological level—in Nietzsche's work and argue that they resist *ressentiment's* morality of suffering. Nietzsche values plurality and affirmation over and against the purportedly reductive and conformist Christian moral psychology; with this valuation in mind, affirming one's own life can be understood as a condition of possibility for self-empowerment.

My work brings to light novel ways that resentment as an interpersonal dynamic which desires the restoration of respect and *ressentiment* as that which desires power over others can be distinguished in Nietzsche's own work, a move which frees up the emotion as a possibly Nietzschean resource for empowerment. Of course, there is always the risk that one's resentments will develop into an addiction to suffering and moral righteousness that leads to a desire for power over others that remains uncritical of the kind of

Acampora in "Unlikely Illumination: Nietzsche and Frederick Douglass on Power, Struggle, and the *Aisthesis* of Freedom," in *Nietzsche and African American Thought*, eds. Jacqueline Scott and A. Todd Franklin, (New York: SUNY Press, 2006), 175-202.

power it wants. I will not deny that resentment can be deeply misguided. But I do want to suggest that when expressed as an immediate riposte to insult or injury, engaging one's resentments can also be an affirmative measure against what otherwise becomes internalized self-defeat.

I. Ressentiment as a World View

I.1 The Genealogical Development of Ressentiment—R. Lanier Anderson argues that the affect of *ressentiment* recruits a drive for power to shape a vague impulse for revenge against the strong into an incredibly subtle, highly structured, long-term program of activity that Nietzsche calls the slave revolt.³ *Ressentiment* is not a simple affect, nor a drive; it is nested in a myriad of simpler affects (envy, resentment, hatred, despair, anger), and a simpler drive: revenge. Nietzschean moral psychology exposes Christian morality as developing out of a complicated organization of affects and drives. There are at least three levels of development in *Genealogy*: 1) *ressentiment* as individual psychology (the internalization of resentment, envy, hatred, revenge), 2) *ressentiment* as the mobilization of that psychology into the institution of Christianity (through the direction of the ascetic ideal), and finally 3) the legacy of that institution as mass psychology (that is, Christian morality). When Nietzsche criticizes the first type, he does so only in view of the third type. This is to say that the problem with *ressentiment* is that its institutionalization via Christian morality actually redirects what could otherwise be attitudes critical of accepted norms. Since revealing the critical potentiality of resentment is dependent upon its being distinguished from *ressentiment* as a disempowering

³ R. Lanier Anderson, "Nietzsche's Conception of the Self" (lecture, New School for Social Research, March 24, 2011).

psychological type, and since we cannot understand how individual psychology becomes oppressive without understanding its development into the internalization of morality, I will address these three stages in turn.

Once we can see the complexity of *ressentiment* we will be in a position to view the ways in which the affect of resentment is not always already in the service of something like a deep desire for a slave revolt. Nietzsche's moral psychology allows for a plurality of reactions borne out of an even greater plurality of affect/drive combinations. Not all resentment in other words, leads to *ressentiment*.

I.2 Psychology of the Disempowered—The internalization of suffering develops as a defensive mechanism in the face of overwhelming force. Unable to resist the force of others, the weak swallow rather than act upon vengeful desires. With this internalization, the healthy expression of force and power is replaced with self-defeat and defensive denial. Defensive self-negation nonetheless continues to desire power but must seek "subterranean gratifications" through fantasies of revenge and self-flagellation (*Genealogy of Morals* II §15).⁴ Seeking power without force and through the internalization of instincts gives rise to the chronic passive-aggressive backbiting characteristic of *ressentiment*.⁵ The internalization of resentment effectively replaces

⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, trans. W. Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1989).

⁵ See Max Scheler's analysis of the emotion in his book *Ressentiment*, [trans. W.W. Holdheim, fourth printing (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2007), 39]. I borrow the term backbiting from Nicholas Birns in his critique of Scheler's reading of Nietzschean *ressentiment*. See Nicholas Birns, "Ressentiment and Counter-Ressentiment: Nietzsche, Scheler, and the Reaction Against Equality," in *Nietzsche Circle* (September 2005), 7. Available online at

action with an addiction to cruelty. Those who lacked “external enemies and resistances” took to hurting themselves (*Genealogy of Morals* II §16).

Nietzsche’s critique of morality as the illegitimate spawn of *ressentiment* is most often remembered and valued for its claim about the pathetic and disempowering nature of people overcome by the affect. Even before *Genealogy* Nietzsche had imagined a certain type of person whose ability to feel good about herself depended on the ability to detract value in others. Nietzsche says, in *Human, All too Human*, that “there are not a few people (perhaps it is even most people) who, in order to maintain in themselves a sense of self-respect . . . are obliged to disparage and diminish in their minds all the other people they know” (“Moral Sensation” §62).⁶ This disparaging and detracting attitude towards others is typical of the self-deluded character of Nietzsche’s concept of *ressentiment* as an individualized psychological type.

The contemptible connotation of *ressentiment* following its genealogical introduction by Nietzsche has radically changed the way moral theorists evaluate the moral value of resentment.⁷

<http://www.nietzschecircle.com/RessentimentMaster.pdf>. Birns’ essay offers an excellent distinction between Nietzsche’s and Scheler’s understandings of *ressentiment*, a distinction missing in much of the literature on resentment.

⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, “On the History of Moral Sensations,” in *Human, All Too Human*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁷ Nietzsche was not the first to use *ressentiment* as a term for disempowered resentment. Søren Kierkegaard noted the hateful and leveling effects of the affect in *The Present Age*: “Thus *ressentiment* becomes the constituent principle of want of character, which from utter wretchedness tries to sneak itself a position, all the time safeguarding itself by conceding that it is less than nothing. . . . And *ressentiment* not only defends itself against all existing forms of distinction but against that which is still *to come*. The *ressentiment* which is *establishing itself* is the process of leveling, and while a passionate age storms ahead setting up new things and tearing down old, razing and demolishing as it goes, a reflective and passionless age does exactly the contrary: it *hinders and stifles* all action; it levels. Leveling is a silent, mathematical, and abstract occupation which shuns upheavals” [trans. Alexander Dru (New York: Harper Perennial, 1962), 51]. In a

Whereas the affect had once been defended as deriving from a deeper desire for justice, resentment has become synonymous with the self-defeating and delusional characteristics of *ressentiment*. This conflation, I argue, is a result of both a certain misreading of Nietzsche and a conflation of the three levels of *ressentiment*. First, those who read Nietzsche as an unapologetically elitist thinker of the *Übermensch* undoubtedly read *ressentiment* as the resentment of a pathetic underclass. In other words, what had hitherto been widely understood as a common and morally grounded response to wrong is now portrayed within certain philosophical discourses as a morally and psychologically repugnant character trait of the weak.⁸ Second, the commonly accepted view that Nietzschean *ressentiment* manifests only as an individualized character is itself a result of the unjustified conflation of what is properly understood as the three levels of *ressentiment* already mentioned: an individual psychological type, the institutional mobilization of this psychological type through organized religion, and finally the legacy of Christianity as a mass psychology of suffering.

later translation, *ressentiment* is translated as “envy” [see Søren Kierkegaard, *Two Ages*, ed. and trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978)].

⁸ Bishop Joseph Butler, Adam Smith and Immanuel Kant each believed that resentment was inherently linked to a desire for justice. In *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, Kant says “So hatred arising from an injustice we have suffered—that is, the desire for vengeance—is a passion that proceeds irresistibly from the nature of man; and, malicious as this passion is, maxims of reason are nevertheless entwined with the inclination by virtue of the legitimate appetite for justice, whose analogue it is. This is why the desire for vengeance is one of the most vehement and deeply rooted passions: even when it seems to be extinct, a secret hatred, called *resentment*, is always left over, like fire smoldering under the ashes” [trans. Mary J. Gregor (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1974), 137]. See also Joseph Butler’s *Fifteen Sermons Preached at Rolls Chapel* (1729) and Adam Smith’s *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759). For an excellent comparison of Butler’s and Smith’s views on the moral justification of resentment, see Alice MacLachlan, “Resentment and Moral Judgment in Smith and Butler,” *The Adam Smith Review* 5 (2010).

Disparaging descriptions of subjects of *ressentiment* exemplify Fredrick Appel's concerns about Nietzsche's elitism. Appel says:

Nietzsche's great concern is for the flourishing of those few whom he considers exemplary of the human species. He believes that we can—and should—make qualitative distinctions between higher, admirable modes of human existence and lower contemptible ones, and that these distinctions should compel his target readership to foster higher forms of human life at whatever cost to the many who cannot aspire thereto.⁹

This type of reading understands Nietzsche's philosophical project as a kind of self-help or therapy for the privileged few. But reading *ressentiment* as a personal character type to be avoided at all costs ignores the critical thrust of *Genealogy of Morals*. That is, the critique of *ressentiment* is intended as a critique of morality, which is to say, a critique of hegemonic systems of belief.

While Nietzsche uses *ressentiment* to expose a morality of equality premised on the denial of an instinct for freedom,¹⁰ Max Scheler uses the concept to attack humanist movements characteristic of his time, and most recently, Wendy Brown has recuperated the term in order to criticize the way liberalism promotes political identities that maintain injury as a political status, a move she claims is necessarily disempowering.¹¹ In their own ways, all three thinkers identify a class of subjects inflicted with *ressentiment* in order to critique a cultural structure that incites misguided and self-negating demands for power. Against the acknowledged structure of domination, my work hopes to show that resentment can be recuperated as an empowering riposte.

⁹ Fredrick Appel, *Nietzsche Contra Democracy* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1999), 1.

¹⁰ One of the most explicit accounts of Nietzsche's criticism of Christianity as a will to equality that seeks vengeance against all who remain above its leveling effects is "On the Tarantulas" in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.

¹¹ Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

Before turning to the ascetic mobilization of the individual psychology of *ressentiment*, I want to reiterate that the purpose of Nietzsche's genealogy is not to criticize *individual people* who exemplify these “oppressive instincts that thirst for reprisal,” individuals he calls “the descendents of every kind of European and non-European slavery” (*Genealogy of Morals* I §11). He himself says, “I am far from blaming individuals for the calamity of millennia” (*Ecce Homo* “Wise” §8).¹² Rather, I read Nietzsche as being interested in the *moral psychology* out of which such individuals have been bred to feel their weakness in a self-indulgent and self-denying fashion. Far from elitism, what we find in *Genealogy* is that *ressentiment* imprisons all human beings; we suffer from a psychology that favors inwardness: “The *meaning of culture*” is after all “the reduction of the beast of prey ‘man’ to a tame and civilized animal” (I §11). Nietzsche is worried about the fact that subjects of *ressentiment* use internalized suffering and insatiable revenge in order to feel they are owed equality,¹³ yet they simultaneously deny themselves the kind of active response to suffering through which they might attain a fair fight (or, if one wants to push the democratized reading of Nietzsche, equal standing for themselves). Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals* criticizes the ascetic ideal's redirection of desire towards suffering. With this in mind, I will now argue that *ressentiment* is best understood as a result of a certain kind of pedagogy of desire. Certainly, if we read Nietzsche as deriving *ressentiment* from a weakness in character, then emancipatory and egalitarian efforts are more easily censured as forms of mediocrity and mass complacency, and Nietzsche's elitism emerges. Against this trend, I read Nietzsche's criticism of

¹² Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, trans. W. Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1989).

¹³ This is precisely that with which Brown's critique of liberalism is concerned.

the ascetic ideal as a tool for criticizing the legitimacy of religions that organize and siphon the energies of the weak.

I.3 Learning to Desire Suffering: The Ascetic Ideal—In *Genealogy*, Nietzsche identifies ascetic priests as the organizers of *ressentiment*. In the genealogical sense, Nietzschean *ressentiment* is an oppressive tactic of the teachers of asceticism, that is, ascetic priests who Nietzsche finds most contemptible (*Genealogy of Morals* I). The priests themselves are not exempt from the psychology of *ressentiment* (they share its disease with the weak) and they function as its guiding principle. Having developed the ability to rule from a position of self-hatred, the ascetic priests are especially resourceful. The individual psychological type with a propensity for self-hate can therefore invert values only insofar as the internalization of instincts can be further mobilized as an institution that can then protect these weak creatures of conscience. The ascetic priests endorse and validate the natural tendencies of the weak as moral characteristics of the “good.” Nietzsche calls the mobilization of *ressentiment* “bad conscience”:

These fearful bulwarks with which the political organization protected itself against the old instincts of freedom—punishments belong to these bulwarks—brought about that all those instincts for wild, free, prowling man turned back *against man himself*. Hostility, cruelty, joy in persecuting, in attacking, in change, in destruction—all this turned against the possessors of such instincts: *that* is the origin of the “bad conscience.” (*Genealogy of Morals* II §16)

This politically mobilized replacement and its resulting organized affective state results in the “slave revolt”: a growing class of disenfranchised persons who use their deep-seated dissatisfaction to subvert the standard values of the strong and noble class. This festering mix of hatred and envy inverts the formerly valued experience of physical force of the strong privileged few (the noble

class) into the Christian moral category “evil,” while “good” comes to designate self-imposed powerlessness masking a deeper desire for cruelty (*Genealogy of Morals* II §6). Morality, Nietzsche argues, is therefore a dubious enterprise premised on a fictitiously pure notion of the good or the just that turns out to be merely the vengeful fantasies of the weak.¹⁴

One way the ascetic ideal comes to organize the experience of the individual subject is by covering over the pain of repression with a new pain: guilt. Nietzsche explains how this purported “overcoming” takes place:

Man, suffering from himself in some way or other but in any case physiologically like an animal in a cage, uncertain why or wherefore, thirsting for reasons—reasons relieve—thirsting, too, for remedies and narcotics, at last takes counsel with one who knows hidden things, too—and behold! he receives a hint, he receives from his sorcerer, the ascetic priest, the *first* hint as to the “cause” of his suffering; he must seek it in *himself*, in some *guilt*, in a piece of the past, he must understand his suffering as a *punishment*. (*Genealogy of Morals* III §20)

¹⁴ If I am to reveal the power of Nietzsche's critique of *ressentiment* as deriving from three stages of *ressentiment*, then I must make sense of the shift from psychological vulnerability to its mobilization according to principles of the ascetic ideal. One might rightly ask how ascetic priests come to exert power over others if they themselves suffer from the same vulnerability. The affliction of nihilism is not a single state of being, but rather a starting point for the reevaluation of values that captures a range of capabilities and possibilities. Certainly nihilism as a whole acknowledges a world without inherent value or truth (an acknowledgement that Nietzsche respects), but only certain forms of nihilism cling to the ascetic ideal as the only way to interpret suffering (the source of Nietzsche's disdain). Whereas the passive nihilist is more inclined to remain chained to an insatiable desire for suffering and the denial of life, the active nihilist attempts to surpass rather than succumb to his pathos and emerges with an inclination to re-interpret life in different ways. Ascetic priests remain stuck between active and passive nihilism; their will to power is stronger than the herd's but not strong enough to denounce the ascetic ideals. Through their own cleverness, priests capitalize on the vulnerability of others and thereby attain a precarious sense of power for themselves through the redirection of desire. See Grace Hunt, “Will to Power as Interpretation: Unearthing the Authority of Nietzsche's Re-Evaluation of Values,” *Symposia* (2010): 51–68.

By overriding an earlier repression with guilt, suffering is reinterpreted anew. Fear and punishment are the *new pain* that allow “life again [to become] *very* interesting: awake, everlastingly awake, sleepless, glowing charred, spent and yet not weary” (*Genealogy of Morals* III §20). The ascetic ideal replaces one symptom with another and *infuses suffering with new meaning*. More specifically, the ascetic ideal redirects suffering back towards the sufferer by introducing the concept of sin and its correlate, guilt.

One must not underestimate the power of the ascetic ideal: it *redirects desires*. Pain is sought as that which liberates the sufferer from one kind of pain while tethering the sufferer to another. The ascetic ideal creates a kind of death-drive, a compulsion towards pain that might deaden something more intolerable, namely the repression of instincts. The ascetic priests' medication “makes the sick sicker” because it “does *not* aim at curing the sickness but at combating the depression by relieving and deadening its displeasure” (*Genealogy of Morals* III §20). Repressed feelings are re-felt and used against oneself as a kind self-control attained through the experience of guilt.

The shift from the individual psychology to the mass psychology of Christianity is in part accounted for through the organization of *ressentiment* according to the ascetic ideal. The ascetic priests, far from being mysterious actors, are weak, cruel, and clever characters that experience power for themselves through shepherding the weaker masses. The priests have not escaped the repression of instincts, but through the organization of others, gain a false sense of freedom. Meanwhile, the organization of *ressentiment* effectively extinguishes the possibility for creative action for the weak by mobilizing *ressentiment* into a new relation to suffering.

I.4 Morality as Hegemony: Nietzsche's Critique of Christianity—

The third element of Nietzsche's critique of Christian morality focuses on the legacy of the inversion of values: the mass psychology that privileges charity, pity, and forgiveness as virtues of the ascetic ideal; virtues intended to assuage guilt. At this level, Nietzsche's critique of *ressentiment* is revealed as a critique of Christian morality as that which values and crystallizes certain responses to suffering. Having explored the role of *ressentiment* and suffering within Christianity in the previous section, I now suggest that the reification of *ressentiment* as a mere character trait deactivates the affirmative potentiality of resentment. Claiming that resentment can be deactivated admittedly assumes that there is active resentment; I will return to and develop this claim in Part Three.

Rather than attributing disempowered reactions merely to weakness of the individual, I understand *ressentiment* as the orchestrated redirection of desire towards the will to nothingness. The problem of *ressentiment* is best understood as the socialization of weakness rather than its individualization. Moreover, socialized *ressentiment* actually disarms what could otherwise represent particular resentments expressing active dissent or refusal of accepted norms. That is, if we understand the problem of *ressentiment* as the redirecting of desire away from emancipatory projects, we can see that *ressentiment* is an obvious threat to reactive feelings that express individual force and creativity. Reading the relationship between resentment and *ressentiment* in this way honors the point I made about Nietzsche earlier—that he is not interested in further disenfranchising the weak, but rather in critiquing the origins of morality that prevent creative and self-fashioning projects of the individual.

My reading of the problem of *ressentiment* takes seriously the way that the prohibitive ascetic ideal creates desires that are

themselves disempowering. When resentments are assimilated and delegitimized under the veil *ressentiment*, what might have otherwise been a valid performance and affirmation is rendered indistinguishable from mere grievance or gripe. The demands of *ressentiment*, I argue below, are projections of internalized self-dissatisfaction rather than the externalization of self-worth. *Ressentiment* becomes a personal assertion of pain or a naturalized state since *ressentiment* involves “construing inequality, subordination, marginalization, and social conflict as personal and individual, on the one hand, or as natural, religious, or cultural on the other.”¹⁵ Reactions experienced through *ressentiment* lack the potential for self-expression because they are always already shaped by the interests of the ascetic ideal. But whereas resentment has also been understood as a desire for justice,¹⁶ Nietzsche’s work shows us that Christian ideals divest reactions of any such affirmative potential. What I am suggesting here is that expressive negative reactions can be affirmative for Nietzsche, but not for Christian mass psychology. To develop this claim we must turn to the psychological and physiological underpinnings of *ressentiment*: memory and the concept of force. These two elements will enable us to better understand the inner workings of Nietzsche’s psychology of suffering.

II. *Action and Reaction in Genealogy of Morals*

II.1 Ressentiment as a Reaction against Memory—If *ressentiment* is the internalization of resentments, how are we to distinguish symptoms of *ressentiment* and reactions of resentment? Nietzsche gives us many clues, but one of the most telling is found in “On

¹⁵ Brown, *States of Injury*, 15.

¹⁶ See note 8.

Redemption”, where Zarathustra says: “It was’—that is the name of the will's gnashing teeth and most secret melancholy. Powerless against what has been done, he is an angry spectator of all that is past” (Part II “On Redemption”).¹⁷ Subjects of *ressentiment* are afflicted by *memories* of the past. But as long as events and excitations are remembered, nothing can be digested. A person who can't forget has lost the ability to “assimilate and appropriate the things of the past . . . and transform it” (“On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life” §1).¹⁸ Pain is intimately related to memory, however, and in an obvious prelude to Freud, Nietzsche announces, “if something is to stay in the memory it must be burned in: only that which never ceases to *hurt* stays in the memory” (*Genealogy of Morals* II §3). These unforgettable and irrepressible memories obscure the source of the threat: memories—not external stimuli—confront sufferers of *ressentiment*.¹⁹ With all past experiences kept conscious, the psyche is overwhelmed by experience, and since experience and memory are no longer distinguished, everything is perceived as a painful affront. The undigested memory traces eventually creep into conscious life, making it insufferable.

Despite Nietzsche's description of *ressentiment* as an intestinal problem, the incapacity to forget is a kind of psychical powerlessness, not a physical affliction: failure to digest is the failure to forget, or to allow things to become unconscious. In *Genealogy*, the noble man avoids indigestion with “the perfect functioning of the regulating *unconscious* instincts” (I §2). The unconscious is

¹⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. W. Kaufmann (New York: Penguin Viking Inc. 1982).

¹⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

¹⁹ In Deleuze's words, “the man of *ressentiment* is like a dog, a kind of dog which only reacts to traces (for example, a bloodhound)” [*Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 115].

essential for psychological health, since “all perfect acts are unconscious and no longer subject to will; consciousness is the expression of an imperfect and often morbid state in a person” (*Will to Power* §289).²⁰ Before Nietzsche had developed an understanding of the psychological health of forgetting, he understood forgetting as a healthy relation to history, and as a requirement for happiness. In “The Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,” he says, “one who cannot leave himself behind on the threshold of the moment and forget the past . . . will never know what happiness is” (§1). Later in *Ecce Homo*, the inability to forget means that one “cannot get rid of anything, [cannot] get over anything, [cannot] repel anything—everything hurts. Men and things obtrude too closely; experiences strike one too deeply; memory becomes a festering wound” (“Wise” §6). This wound allows too many experiences to enter and calcify into what Deleuze calls: “the sclerosis . . . of his consciousness, the rapidity with which every excitation sets and freezes within him, the weight of traces that invade him are so many cruel sufferings.”²¹ Nothing can be invested, divested or healed; everything becomes a scar. The whole world becomes a source of overwhelming hatred. Deleuze describes the accusatory character of *ressentiment’s* memories:

And, more deeply, the *memory trace is full of hatred in itself and by itself*. It is venomous and depreciative because it blames the object in order to compensate for its own inability to escape from the traces of the corresponding excitation. This is why *ressentiment’s* revenge, even when it is realized, remains “spiritual,” imaginary and symbolic in principle.²²

This failure to forget therefore results in an inability to distinguish those conscious stimuli (affronts) that would otherwise provoke

²⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, trans. W. Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1967).

²¹ Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 116.

²² *Ibid.*

appropriately resentful reactions. Hatred grows out of this incapacity to resist, as is the case with the psychological type “the Redeemer,” a person whose overwhelming experience of pain results in his or her hatred of the world. Nietzsche says in *The Antichrist*, “*The instinctive hatred for reality: a consequence of an extreme capacity for suffering and excitement which no longer wants any contact at all because it feels every contact too deeply*” (§30).²³ The subject of *ressentiment* suffers from an inability to digest experience, an incapacity that leaves no energy for active retaliation.²⁴

With this understanding of *ressentiment as internalized and subsequently projected* suffering, I will now develop a crucial distinction within Nietzsche's pluralistic understanding of reaction.

II.2 Passive versus Active Reactions—Having developed the problem of *ressentiment* as the problem of internalized suffering, and in order to argue that *ressentiment* does not exhaust all of reactivity's resources, I develop a further distinction in Nietzsche's moral psychology between active and passive *reactions*. Resentment, I argue, is an active and immediate mode of resistance

²³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Antichrist*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. W. Kaufmann (New York: Penguin Viking Inc. 1982).

²⁴ Of course, if the subject can find an external “cause” of suffering, the suffering can then be released, the subject can “vent his affects” (*Genealogy of Morals* III §15). Zarathustra calls the tendency to retroactively find a target to blame the “*spirit of revenge*.” Wherever there is suffering, there is for this spirit as desire to punish, “for ‘punishment’ is that revenge calls itself; with a hypocritical lie it creates a good conscience for itself” (Part II “On Redemption”). This projected hatred (originally aimed at oneself) results in “imaginary revenge” that nonetheless is unable to assuage the original displeasure but merely overwhelms itself with new hatred (*Genealogy of Morals*, I §10). Deleuze calls this revenge symbolic: the bad conscience blames others as a way to compensation for the inability to forget the trace of the experience. One is trying to avenge the inability to forget *by blaming* the excitation itself. That is why the revenge is symbolic or imaginary (*Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 116).

that affirms its own particularity against the conformist tendencies of passive reaction.

While the subject of *ressentiment* is denied a “true reaction, that of deeds” (*Genealogy of Morals* I §10), Nietzsche’s psychology of reactive force complicates the attempt to rigidly distinguish action and reaction in terms of creativity and passivity. The ability to discriminate between action and reaction in terms of creativity is also obscured by Nietzsche’s understanding of health as a matter of balancing acted and un-acted, or active and passive *reactions*. Rather than understand this ambiguity as a failure, the difference between active and reactive can be clarified at the underlying physiological level of force. Deleuze’s account of the central role of reactive forces in Nietzsche’s psychology is helpful:

In the normal or healthy state the role of reactive forces is always to limit action. They divide, delay or hinder it by means of another action whose effects we *feel*. But conversely, active forces produce a burst of creativity: they set it off at a chosen instant, at a favorable moment, in a given direction, in order to carry out a quick and precise piece of adjustment. In this way a *riposte* is formed. This is why Nietzsche can say: “The true reaction is that of action” ([*Genealogy of Morals*] I §10). The active type, in this sense, is not a type that only contains active forces, it expresses the “normal” relation between reaction that delays action and an action that precipitates reaction. The master is said to react precisely because he acts his reactions.²⁵

A reactive force is active insofar as it resists other forces that seek to overpower or outnumber it. Through resistance, active reaction thereby distinguishes itself.²⁶ Conversely, passive reactive forces cannot resist, so they seek to bond with like forces in order to accumulate collective power. The passive forces “can bring about the disintegration, the scission of superior forces; [passive forces]

²⁵ Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 111.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 63.

can explode the energy [active forces] have accumulated.”²⁷ A passive force cannot itself accumulate power, it can only divide and separate active forces; by dividing and separating creative accumulation, passive reactions can combine to create a force capable of preventing creative force. Passive reactions are able to level differentiating forces without exerting the force required to resist. Passive reactions combine and accumulate collective power without strength. Passive reactions are analogous in this way to the psychology of *ressentiment*. Nietzsche says, “Just the opposite of all wrestling, of all feeling-oneself-in-a-struggle has here become instinct: the incapacity for resistance becomes morality” (*Antichrist* §29). The analogy enables an understanding of the relation between the capacity to rule from a position of weakness and the creation of morality. Crucially, however, for my work, it also reveals active reactions at the heart of Nietzsche's moral psychology.

Ressentiment and its underlying passively reactive forces gain power by lowering and leveling expressions of resistance and difference. The will to power of passive reaction, in other words, is not creative of new meaning. Deleuze describes passive reactions as that which decompose contestation:

They decompose; *they separate active force from what it can do*; they take away part or almost all of its power. In this way reactive forces do not become active but, on the contrary, they make the active forces rejoin them and become reactive in a new sense . . . an active force *becomes reactive* when reactive forces separate it from what it can do. [Nietzsche] is careful never to present the triumph of reactive forces as the putting together of a force superior to active force, but as a subtraction or division. . . . And in each case this separation rests on a fiction, a mystification, or a falsification.²⁸

²⁷ Ibid. Interestingly, active forces, when they appear in a subject of *ressentiment*, are themselves separated and turned back against the subject.

²⁸ Ibid., 57.

Passive reactions triumph only insofar as they can divide and level active forces *without* having to assert their own power.²⁹

The genealogical analogy of the “triumph of the weak *as weak*” is the point of *Genealogy of Morals*: that is, passive forces triumph by separating active forces, not by forming a superior force, and that the resulting leveling is best understood as a problem arising and manifesting itself at the level of individual force.³⁰ Against those who read Nietzsche's commitment to the plurality of types as hierarchical in the elitist sense, I read his worry as directed against the leveling of creativity and difference at the level of the will to power; in Nietzsche's words, “the will to be oneself, to stand out” (“Skirmishes of an Untimely Man” §37). Nietzsche's psychology of force expresses concern for the maintenance of productive struggle, “to 'reconcile' nothing, a tremendous variety that is nevertheless the opposite of chaos” (*Ecce Homo* “Clever” §9). Passive reactions attempt to incorporate and reconcile all contest and struggle. Active reactions take up the struggle and through it, preserving the viability of challenge, maintain a flexible enough contest to “generate decisions about excellence that are relative not only to past performances but also in accordance with new standards produced through the contest itself.”³¹ Active resistances enable a plurality of new meaning.

As a way to illustrate this point, in “Wanderer and his Shadow” Nietzsche describes two ways the indignant person can overcome envy: either by pushing down the envied other to restore the lowest common denominator of equality, or raise herself up to the height of the other (§29).³² Against those who misread Nietzsche

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 58-59.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 57.

³¹ Acampora, “Unlikely Illuminations,” 182.

³² Friedrich Nietzsche, “Wanderer and his Shadow” in *Human, all too Human*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

as a philosopher of domination, I understand his committed struggle against equalization as a mode of affirmative individuation. This individuation entails an elastic space of contest within which new values can arise.³³ Empowering values are determined through a feeling of freedom, not a feeling of suffering.³⁴ This feeling of freedom is not independent of suffering, however. Nietzsche suggests that although we tend to attribute freedom to independence, the opposite might also be true: “that he is *always* living in manifold dependence but regards himself *as free* when, out of long habituation, he *no longer perceives* the weight of the chains” (“Wanderer and his Shadow” §10). Freedom is also felt when the weight of oppression is no longer experienced. But if this is the case, we are still missing the evaluative tool with which to distinguish empowered freedom from disempowered freedom. In Part Three, I will argue that the capacity to resist the mobilization of one's resistances into the moral fabric of *ressentiment* is ultimately an ability to affirm oneself in the face of injury. It is at the level of experience—not the underlying forces—that will enable us to better understand how our resentments can be expressive of freedom.

In turning to the underlying level of forces at work in Nietzsche's physiology of psychology, we find that productive and destructive struggle or empowering and disempowering reactivity is measured according to a standard of individuality and particularity. This new distinction between active and passive reactions acknowledges the inalienable role of reaction in our lives, provoking

³³ Acampora, “Unlikely Illuminations,” 180.

³⁴ Acampora offers an excellent analysis of how this struggle for individuation and the resulting “*aisthesis* of freedom” is not necessarily at odds with the pursuit of meaningful community. On the contrary, she believes that the feeling of freedom realized in struggle “educes erotic and imaginative resources vital for shaping a collective identity of who we are and the future we want as ours.” See Acampora, “Unlikely Illuminations,” 176.

further investigation into the value of reactions insofar as they maintain difference.

III. Affirmative Reactions

III.1 Ripostes—Having hopefully developed the depth and complexity of Nietzschean moral psychology, this section reveals that in addition to contemptuous *ressentiment* as an individual psychological type, there exists in Nietzsche's writings a character type that rebukes the seriousness of others and thereby disrupts the leveling of reaction with a plurality of what Nietzsche might call healthy reactions.

Within Nietzschean moral psychology of action and reactive force, we find that not all forms of reaction are to be reviled as self-defeating and self-denying. We find a plurality of active reactions that I argue function as creative disruptions of *ressentiment*; disruptions that are experienced as what Acampora calls "the transformative and liberating affects of the felt quality of the experience of struggle."³⁵ Health for Nietzsche includes at least three different kinds of response to injury and insult: distance, digestion, and riposte. All three are healthy reactions, but the riposte, I aim to show, is an affirmative kind of resentment.

Resentment acts in the service of releasing the self-inflicted revenge (first developed in *Human, all too Human*) and thereby prevents the internalization of resentment and its transformation into a pathological condition. Seeking and enacting revenge, despite its negative connotations elsewhere, releases the tension of an otherwise seething *desire for revenge*:

To desire revenge and then to carry out revenge means to be the victim of a vehement attack of *fever* which then, however, passes: but to desire

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 184.

to revenge without possessing the strength and courage to carry out revenge means to carry about a *chronic illness*, a poisoning of body and soul. Morality, which looks only at the intentions, assesses both cases equally; in the ordinary way the former case is assessed as being the worse (on account of the evil consequences which the act of revenge will perhaps produce). ("Moral Sensations" §60)

This distinction between realized (externalized) and unrealized (internalized) desires for revenge is essential to Nietzsche's understanding of health. Actively carrying out revenge produces a sudden and brief illness that can quickly expel the poison of internalized revenge. Left as an unrealized desire, the condition becomes chronic. Revenge, in this passage is viewed as that which enables the poison of *ressentiment* to be released. Revenge, an enacted resentment, attempts to restore a balance of health.

In "The Wanderer and his Shadow" (§33) Nietzsche again acknowledges the value of actual (instead of imaginary) revenge. Interestingly, he makes a familiar distinction between immediate and deliberate revenge. He suggests that we can "distinguish first of all that defensive return blow which one delivers even against lifeless objects (moving machinery, for example) which have hurt us: the sense of our counter-action is *to put a stop to the injury* by putting a stop to the machine." The immediate and instinctual response is merely preventative. For Nietzsche, anyone with a sense of self-preservation will act in this way, for this counter-action requires little thought and thought only regarding oneself: "self-preservation alone has here set its clockwork of reason in motion, and that one has fundamentally been thinking, not of the person who caused the injury, but only of oneself: we act thus *without* wanting to do harm in return, but only so as *to get out* with life and limb." The only "thought" that occurs in this instinctual or life-preserving act is a thought about the force required to survive. Revenge, now contrasted to the instinctive return blow, takes time because it requires thought about the other person's vulnerability, a reflection

that is not immediate when other-directed. The presupposition of the second kind of deliberate revenge “is a reflection over the other’s vulnerability and capacity for suffering: one wants to hurt.” Self-preservation and deliberate revenge are distinctions found within Nietzsche’s understanding of revenge.

We find in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra’s* “On the Adder’s Bite” the complicated nature of returning the ‘favor’ of the insult so as to avoid revenge altogether. Zarathustra advises that anger is a best response for an enemy, rather than putting him to shame. He says, “And if you are cursed, I do not like it that you want to bless. Rather join a little in the cursing. And if you have been done a great wrong, then quickly add five little ones: a gruesome sight is a person single-mindedly obsessed by a wrong. A little revenge is more human than no revenge.” Reacting to an insult with an insult maintains a space for conflict and difference between the two that prevents any lingering *ressentiment*.

In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche’s resentments appear measured and deliberate, not vengeful:

I forbid myself all countermeasures, all protective measures, and, as is only fair, also any defense, any ‘justification,’ in cases when some small or *very great* folly is perpetrated against me. My kind of retaliation consists in following up the stupidity as fast as possible with some good sense: that way one may actually catch up with it. Metaphorically speaking, I send a box of confections to get rid of a painful story. (“Wise” §5)

The idea of reciprocating the affront suggests equality between offender and offended. Nietzsche “thanks” his opponents as a way to compensate the original affront, whether the affront is an insult or a helpful gesture. Gratitude is the riposte that enables strong characters to maintain their strength, “it is a milder form of revenge” (“Wise” §5). Where there is no need to despise, hate, fear or harm those who intrude, an agonistic friendship can be maintained

through gratitude, or as William Connolly suggests, laughter. Resentment actively divests the intrusion by actively and sometimes cheerfully affirming oneself as a worthy opponent:

Ressentiment is stored resentment that has poisoned the soul and migrated to places where it is hidden and denied. Nothing said here about ressentiment implies that it is never appropriate to act out of resentment. . . . Ressentiment is the thing to struggle against, then, particularly when it becomes folded into established practices of law. So laugh off those fools who think they have 'caught you in a contradiction' if you resent their misrepresentations of their beliefs. Laughing here can both express resentment and fend off its tendency to flow into the form of the ressentiment you resist.³⁶

Resentment, expressed through laughter delivers a burst of particularity to those fed up with the mass psychology of seriousness and internalized cruelty. This externalization of what would otherwise become an infection entails a certain amount of risk. The externalization of one's resentment, as an action, cannot know ahead of time what will happen in response. But, unlike revenge, where the return blow can be anticipated, resentment does not secure its fate. Rather, it interrupts the legacy of Christianity by introducing a new type of reaction. Resentment in other words, resists oppressive collective culture.³⁷ Enacted resentments are also owed to oneself as a matter of personal well-being and to others as a matter of respect:

It also seems to me that the rudest word, the rudest word, the rudest letter are still more benign, more decent than silence. Those who remain silent are almost always lacking in delicacy and courtesy of heart. Silence is an objection; swallowing things leads of necessity to a bad character—it even upsets the stomach. All who remain silent are dyspeptic." ("Wise" §5)

³⁶ William Connolly, *Ethos of Pluralization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 214.

³⁷ Resentment, I would like to suggest, resists oppressive collective culture (a culture that disavows the value and meaningfulness of contestation) without also thereby denying the value of collective action. More work needs to be done to show whether Nietzsche's individualism could allow for and value collectivity. I consider that work beyond the scope of this paper.

Resentments can be understood as healthy reactions insofar as they externalize feelings and desires that are otherwise swallowed without having been chewed first, so to speak. The healthy person can integrate good and bad experiences more easily and readily; “he digests his experiences as he digests his meals, even when he has to swallow some tough morsels” (*Genealogy of Morals* III §17). The ‘man of *ressentiment*’ suffers from *repressed vengefulness* whereas healthier types digest or express their aggression more readily.

The ability to act upon and thereby digest one’s resentments protects the subject from internalized aggression that festers and becomes a poisonous feeling of victimization. “*Ressentiment* itself, if it should appear in the noble man, consummates and exhausts itself in an immediate reaction, and therefore does not poison: on the other hand, it fails to appear at all on countless occasions on which it inevitably appears in the weak and impotent.” Those who can effectuate *ressentiment* rather than succumb to it are said to have “a certain imprudence, perhaps a bold recklessness whether in the face of danger or of the enemy, or that enthusiastic impulsiveness in anger, love, reverence, gratitude, and revenge.” When one reacts un-self-consciously to insult, one “shakes off with a *single* shrug many vermin that eat deep into others” (*Genealogy of Morals* I §10). Resentment is, in this sense, a felt experience of creative distancing from of *ressentiment*.

Moreover, the subject who reacts immediately with a riposte is “a hundred steps closer to justice” not because he or she does not react, but precisely because the reaction tries to restore order by imposing “measure and bounds on the excesses of the reactive pathos,” by “substituting for revenge the struggle against the enemies of peace and order.” Active reactions, according to Nietzsche, seek a means of “putting an end to the senseless raging of *ressentiment*” (*Genealogy of Morals* II §11). In other words, active

reactions can work in the interest of justice, whereas reactions overwhelmed by *ressentiment* cannot. The development of the distinction between actively reacting and passively reacting in *Genealogy*, I argue, can be developed into a functional distinction between resentment and *ressentiment*.

Granting that the crucial distinction of health in Nietzsche's psychology is made in terms of active/passive or externalized/internalized *reactions*, actively externalizing one's reactions rather than swallowing them is the Nietzschean variation of my claim that one's resentments, in order to resist harm and affirm oneself, must be enacted. In doing so, they become externalized and thereby lighten one's load and maintain particularity. An apparent paradox of Nietzschean resentment remains: while resentment is a kind of feeling and thus internal (not an action), it can also be externalized and hence become an action. Resentment is therefore *both* a pathos (feeling) and action (active reaction).

III.2 Resentment as Affirmation—Having interpreted these healthy reactions as enacted resentments that externalize (rather than project) conflict and difference, resentment is shown to have an active relationship to *ressentiment*. Resentment, I argue, is not cathartic, but rather creatively disruptive for the subject of *ressentiment*. Granting this, resentment is redeemed against any tendency to view all reactions within Nietzsche's work as self-deluding and inherently disempowering.

Another way to articulate the distinction is to show experientially how the claims of *ressentiment* and resentment differ. On the one hand, resentment's claim properly understood is something like this: I value my life as meaningful and am therefore ready and willing to defend it through contest. The person who

expresses her resentments therefore *names herself and affirms her worth*; resentment signals self-affirmation³⁸ that may or may not be at odds with the beliefs of the community. The claim of resentment also does not need to affirm self-value in comparison to others. “Who is it,” Deleuze asks, “that *begins* by saying ‘I am good’? It is certainly not the one who compares himself to others, not the one who compares his actions and his works to superior and transcendent values.”³⁹ The claim of *ressentiment*, on the other hand, says something like the following: since I am suffering and you aren’t, you are evil and I’m good. The claim of *ressentiment* begins with the fact of suffering in comparison to others, followed by the degradation of others and *finally* with self-affirmation. Deleuze’s depiction of the claim highlights the fact that responsibility and self-empowerment are missing from *ressentiment*: “It is your fault if no one loves me, it is your fault if I’ve failed in life *and also your fault if you fail in yours, your misfortunes and mine are equally your fault.*”⁴⁰ Since *ressentiment* experiences everything as an affront (it cannot avoid anything since it can forget nothing) the whole world becomes hostile. In order to find value for itself the subject of *ressentiment* must disparage and thereby detract in value the external world. A person who experiences her resentments, however, names herself as being

³⁸ Who is this self that can reflexively affirm? Admittedly, I have here smuggled a “self” into my interpretation of Nietzsche. For resentment to be affirmative in a way that is empowering, it seems that it can’t merely riposte, but riposte in defense of something worthy of defending. And to have something worthy of defending one would need to step back from the immediacy of the drives and affects and make a kind of self-reflective evaluation. But what is a self for Nietzsche? Lanier Anderson, in “Nietzsche’s Conception of the Self,” offers an excellent account of a middle way between naturalistic readings of Nietzsche that effectively deny any type of self beyond a mere bundle of affects and drives, and Kantian readings that read an autonomous, self-reflective subjectivity in Nietzsche’s philosophy.

³⁹ Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 119.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, (my emphasis).

worthy of respect and finds distance from the original affront through its expression. Note that this active expression does not need to be an action in relation to the aggressor since resentment is, as I mentioned, both a feeling and action; one can be privately resentful, which is another way of saying that inactivity cannot be equated with passivity.⁴¹ She will also find herself, however, delegitimizing the institution that validates demands of suffering. Affirmative resentment, as we find it in Nietzsche, is therefore empowering only as much as it is alienating. Particularity in Nietzsche is secured for oneself against collectivity and therefore brings with it loneliness.

Conclusion

By illuminating the plurality of protests to come out of the reaction to suffering, this paper challenges the widely held belief that resentment is merely reactive, passive and determined. Nietzsche's middle and late work shows us that there are active and passive reactions to suffering and that the externalization of such reactions is empowering.

With an emphasis on the value of active reactions, we see that subjects of *ressentiment* use the fact of subordinate standing as proof of the immorality of the values against which they feel judged. Both resentment and *ressentiment* are connected to beliefs about what is due, and each expresses itself as a self-righteous protest. But the distinguishing structural feature between resentment and *ressentiment* turns out to be the relationship each tends to have to suffering. The claim of resentment as I have developed and defended it is a felt reaction to suffering that divests the hurt of its

⁴¹ For an extended discussion of the value of resignation as an active type of nihilism, see Book One of *Will to Power*.

potential to become internalized and is experienced as empowering. *Ressentiment* strives for the “triumph of the weak as weak.” Resentment, I maintain, represents an attempt to restore self-affirmation and difference through the enactment of reaction.

In order to recuperate the possibility of empowered resentment within Nietzsche's work, I first developed his critique of Christianity according to its three developmental stages. Distinguishing morality according to the varied stages of *ressentiment* supports my view that it is the socialization of this repression according to the ascetic ideals and finally, the Christian moral legacy of this internalization that entail *ressentiment*, not individual psychology. Second, and within human psychology of the individual, there remains a plurality of reactions to suffering. By identifying what Nietzsche himself described as active and passive reactions, I was able to redeem a kind of active reaction at the level of force, the fundamental physiological unit of Nietzsche's psychology. Our individual psychology is not reducible to *ressentiment* (since it must be organized and mobilized according to an external ideal); we can conceive of experiences of resentment that are not a symptom of *ressentiment*. In other words, an experience of emancipatory resentment can be grounded in Nietzsche's critique of morality. Finally, I recuperate the individual experience of resentment as an affirmation of one's own freedom against the ascetic designation that all suffering be taken seriously. When we allow ourselves to feel our resentment without lingering in it, we prevent the feeling of suffering from becoming the determining value of our lives. Resentment, as that which actively reacts through riposte or self-affirmation, brings with it a feeling of freedom despite the fact of suffering.