

Political Affect: The Drama of Ressentiment

Lecturer: Dr. Sjoerd van Tuinen

Course description

Why do people vote against their economic self-interest? What is the connection between Brexit and Trump? What motivates a lone shooter? Why do people throw themselves in the arms of authoritarian leaders like lemmings into the abyss? The rise of populism, cynicism, fanaticism and fundamentalism challenges us to reconsider the problem of *ressentiment*, a toxic brew of hatred, frustration, humiliation, indignation and passivity. Whereas its conceptualization dates back to the nineteenth century and has gradually dissolved in the course of twentieth century emancipatory processes, the concept of *ressentiment* is now making a comeback in political discourse.

The aims of this module are to explore the genealogy of this concept, to interpret the shifting political stakes that are expressed in it, and to evaluate the consistency and coherence with which it is currently put to use in public and academic discourse. We begin with a comparison of the concepts of resentment and ressentiment, relying on texts by Scottish enlighteners such as Joseph Butler and Adam Smith and comparing them to the texts on the untranslatable *ressentiment* (French word, German concept) one century later by Søren Kierkegaard, Fiodor Dostoevski, and Gustave Flaubert. We then proceed from a detailed reading of various texts by Nietzsche to a systematic mapping of the different ways and political contexts in which the concept has been reinvented in the humanities and the social sciences since. We study sources from philosophical anthropology, political theory, literary history, and anthropology, and rely on a diversity of philosophical methods such as psychoanalysis, post-structuralism, critical theory, and phenomenology. As we will see, ressentiment is one of those thorny issues that constantly threaten to compromise the one who speaks about it. There is no intrinsic good sense or evidency in the application of its concept and no universal criterion, but only a polemical sense. This means that the plausibility of the diagnosis of ressentiment, the real efficacy of its discursive ‘truth’, must be proven in another way than in the dialectical form of a truth judgment. It cannot be abstracted from a political drama in which it takes on a different meaning depending on who uses it. Yet even if there is no a priori rule and no final argument that can mediate or solve this drama, there is nonetheless a systematicity to be explored in it.

Lecture/seminar 2x per week 2 hours

Learning targets:

- To acquire a solid grasp of the philosophical history of the concepts of resentment and ressentiment
- To be able to recognize the different political stakes in the use of the concept of ressentiment in both public and academic discourse
- To recognize and use various diverging and sometimes mutually contradicting theoretizations of ressentiment from the humanities and the social sciences
- To analyze the affective infrastructure of neoliberal democracies with a focus on the reactive attitudes

Examination:

- Each student is expected to attend class regularly, to have completed the readings prior to class, to participate in class discussions, and to engage with the news regularly to make an inventory of cases to compare and work with. You can compensate for missing a class with a 500 words critical reading response that includes a pointed

reconstruction of the main arguments in the mandatory literature within 3 days after class.

- In addition, you will give a *presentation* and write a *research paper* of 3,000 words in which you analyze arguments and discuss resentment in at least two theoretical (literary, socio-political, existential, psychological, cultural, ...) and two actual contexts. In your presentation, please make use of at least one of the recommended sources. Your final mark is based on your research paper.

Guide to success in this course:

- 1) *Do the reading*
- 2) Come to class
- 3) Be prepared to participate in class discussions
- 4) Do not rely on a yellow highlighter pen. You should get in the habit of taking notes on everything you read, including the required texts.
- 5) Read critically and comparatively. Note down questions on the readings that you would like to raise during class, and think critically about the authors' sources and arguments. Take into account the year and place of the publications.
- 6) Try to read some of the books on the syllabus in their entirety.
- 7) Follow up areas of interest by reading other sources besides the required texts, such as the titles mentioned under 'recommended literature'. Check footnotes and bibliographies in the main texts for further, specialized sources in your particular area of interest.

There are several decent handbooks to Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morality*. As general secondary literature to our theme, I recommend the following volumes:

- Peter Sloterdijk, *Rage and Time. A Psychopolitical Investigation*, trans. Mario Wenning (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).
- Sjoerd van Tuinen (ed.) *Polemics of Resentment. Variations on Nietzsche* (London/New York: Bloomsbury, 2018).
- Jeanne Riou / Mary Gallagher (eds., 2016), *Re-thinking Resentment. On the Limits of Criticism and the Limits of its Critics*, Transkript Verlag.
- Ira Sugarman, *The Phenomenology of Resentment* (Humanities Press, 1979).

And videos:

Together with my colleague in Anthropology from Heidelberg/FU Berlin, Dr. Jürgen Schaflechner, and with the financial support of the Princeton Institute of International and Regional Studies, I have made a video documentary about resentment/resentment and its various political ramifications. <https://www.eur.nl/en/esphil/events/politics-anger-film-and-discussion-2019-11-26> As part of this course I will organize another screening.

Course plan and literature

1. Ugly Feelings

Mandatory reading:

- Emily Wang & Matthew Shen Goodman, 'A Note on Resentment', <https://www.canopycanopycanopy.com/issues/25/contents/a-note-on-resentment>
- Slavoj Žižek, "Slavoj Žižek on the Charlie Hebdo massacre: Are the worst really full of passionate intensity?," *New Statesman*, January 10, 2015,

<http://www.newstatesman.com/world-affairs/2015/01/slavoj-i-ek-charlie-hebdo-massacre-are-worst-really-full-passionate-intensity>.

Recommended literature:

- Fiodor Dostoievski, *Notes from the Underground*
- Pankaj Mishra, *Age of Anger. A History of the Present* (London: Allen Lane, 2017).
- Sjoerd van Tuinen, 'Introduction', in: Sjoerd van Tuinen (ed.) *Polemics of Ressentiment. Variations on Nietzsche* (London/New York: Bloomsbury, 2018),
https://www.academia.edu/40293125/The_Polemics_of_Ressentiment_-_Introduction_Bloomsbury_2018

2. From Resentment to Ressentiment

Mandatory reading:

- Joseph Butler, 'Upon Resentment' + 'Upon Forgiveness of Injuries', in: *Fifteen sermons preached at the Rolls Chapel* (Cambridge: Hilliard & Brown, 1827 [1726]), pp. 68-83.
- Soren Kierkegaard, 'The Present Age', in: *A Literary Review* [1846]), trans. Alexander Dru (Harper Perennial, 1962) or trans. Howard Ong and Edna Hong (Princeton: Princeton UP, republished by Penguin 2006), pp. 60-101.

Recommended literature on resentment:

- Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 2.8-2.10
- Martha Nussbaum, *Anger and Forgiveness. Resentment, Generosity, Justice* (Oxford UP, 2016)
- Adam Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (London: Penguin, 2010 [1759]), esp. 42-8, 82-94, 112-6.
- Peter Strawson, *Freedom and Resentment and Other Essays* (London: Methuen, 1974).
- Jeffrey Murphy, *Getting Even: Forgiveness and its Limits* (Oxford: OUP, 2003).
- Michael Ure, 'Resentment/Ressentiment', in: *Constellations. An International Journal of Critical and Democratic Theory* 22 (4), 599-613,
<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/1467-8675.12098>
- Clint Jones, 2013, *A Genealogy of Social Violence. Founding Murder, Rawlsian Fairness, and the Future of the Family*, Ashgate.

Recommended literature on ressentiment:

- Daniel Conway, "'The Happiness of "Slight Superiority": Kierkegaard and Nietzsche on Resentment', *Konturen* 7 (2015),
<http://journals.oregondigital.org/index.php/konturen/article/view/3655/3433>
- Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Family Idiot: Gustave Flaubert*, vols. I-5, trans. Carol Cosman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994)

3. Nietzsche on Ressentiment I

Mandatory reading:

- Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, Why I am so Wise, 6-8 (Numbers always refer to paragraphs, not pages!)
- Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Part II 'On Redemption', 'Tarantulas'
- F.N. *Human, All too Human* I par60 + II The Wanderer and his Shadow par29, par33
- F.N. *Second Untimely Meditation*, 'The Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life', 1, 2, 3

Recommended literature:

- Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, sections 25-28, pp. 155-85.
- Martin Heidegger, 'Wer ist Nietzsches Zarathustra' and 'What is Called Thinking'
- Sjoerd van Tuinen (2020), 'The Resentment-Ressentiment Complex: A Critique of Liberal Discourse,' *Global Discourse* vol 10, no 2, pp. ###.

4. Nietzsche on Ressentiment 2

Mandatory reading:

- Friedrich Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, preface + Essay I, 1-5, 10-17 + Essay II sections 1 and 11.

Recommended literature:

- Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 186-204, 257-61.
- Esam Abou El Magd, 1996, *Nietzsche: Ressentiment und schlechtem Gewissen auf der Spur*, Leipzig: Königshausen & Neumann.

5. Nietzsche on the Priest 1

Primary literature:

- Nietzsche, *Anti-Christ*, 20-43.

Recommended secondary literature:

- Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, ch. 4 'From Ressentiment to Bad Conscience'
- Sjoerd van Tuinen, 'A Thymotic Left. Peter Sloterdijk and the Psychopolitics of Ressentiment', in: *Symploke* 18 (1/2), pp. 217-34,
https://www.academia.edu/1500671/A_Thymotic_Left_Peter_Sloterdijk_and_the_Psychopolitics_of_Ressentiment_2010

6. Ressentiment and Envy 1: Christianity and Democracy

Primary literature:

- Max Scheler, *Ressentiment*, trans. William W. Holdheim (New York: Schocken Books, 1972).

Recommended primary literature:

- Nicholas Birns, 'Ressentiment and Counter-Ressentiment: Nietzsche, Scheler and the Reaction against Equality', in: *Nietzsche Circle*, <http://nietzschecircle.com/RessentimentMaster.pdf>
- Menno Ter Braak (1937), 'Het Nationaal-Socialisme als Rancuneleer',
https://www.dbnl.org/tekst/braa002nati01_01/braa002nati01_01_0001.php
- René Girard, 'Dionysus versus the Crucified', in: *MLN* 99 (4), 816-635, <https://www-jstor-org.eur.idm.oclc.org/stable/pdf/2905504.pdf>
- Sjaak Koenis, 'Democracy and Resentment', in: Sjoerd van Tuinen (ed.) *Polemics of Ressentiment. Variations on Nietzsche* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 187-98.
- Bernard N. Meltzer & Gil Richard Musolf, 'Resentment and Ressentiment', in: *Sociological Inquiry* 72 (2), 240-55.
- Hans-Peter Müller in *Merkur* 2004, 'Soziale Ungleichheit und Ressentiment', 885-94.
- Merijn Oudenampsen, 'The Return of Ressentiment', in: Sjoerd van Tuinen (ed.) *Polemics of Ressentiment. Variations on Nietzsche* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 167-86.
- John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, chs. 74, 80, 81.

- Peter Sloterdijk. 'The Power of Ambivalence. A Conversation with Peter Sloterdijk', in: Sjoerd van Tuinen (ed.) *Polemics of Ressentiment. Variations on Nietzsche* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 215-26,
https://www.academia.edu/40293219/The_Power_of_Ambivalence_-_Interview_with_Peter_Sloterdijk_for_The_Polemics_of_Ressentiment_Bloomsbury_2018
- Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America and Two Essays on America*, trans. Gerald E. Bevan (London: Penguin, 2003).
- Stefano Tomelleri, *Ressentiment. Reflections on Mimetic Desire and Society* (East Lansing: University of Michigan Press, 2015).
- Daniël de Zeeuw, 'The Revenge of Baudrillard's Silent Majorities: Ressentiment or amor fati?', in: Sjoerd van Tuinen (ed.) *Polemics of Ressentiment. Variations on Nietzsche* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 199-214.

7. Nietzsche on the Priest 2

Mandatory reading:

- Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, Essays I, 6-9 + II, 14-25 + III, 1 and 11-28.
- Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, 'On the Genealogy of Morals'

Recommended secondary literature:

- Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 52, 195.
- Simon Scott, 'The Artistry of the Priest and the Philosopher: Ressentiment in Gilles Deleuze's Nietzsche and Philosophy', in: Sjoerd van Tuinen (ed.) *Polemics of Ressentiment. Variations on Nietzsche* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 51-66.
- Sjoerd van Tuinen, 'The Drama of Ressentiment: The Philosopher versus the Priest' in: Ceciel Meiborg & Sjoerd van Tuinen, *Deleuze and the Passions* (New York: Punctum Books, 2016), pp. 97-102.
https://www.academia.edu/15364259/The_Drama_of_Ressentiment_the_Philosopher_versus_the_Priest_essay_on_Nietzsche_Deleuze_and_conceptual_personae_2015

8. From Pastoral Power to Biopolitics

Primary literature:

- Wendy Brown (1993), 'Wounded Attachments', in: *Political Theory* 21 (3), 390-410,
<https://www.scribd.com/document/256610039/Wendy-Brown-Wounded-Attachments>

Recommended reading:

- Sjoerd van Tuinen, 'Physiology versus Psychology. The Priest and the Biopolitics of Ressentiment', in: Drews, Ann-Cathrin & Martin, Katharina D (eds.). *Inside. Outside. Other. The Body in the Work of Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2017), pp. 265-82.
https://www.academia.edu/9523477/Physiology_versus_Psychology_The_Priest_and_the_Biopolitics_of_Ressentiment_essay_on_Nietzsche_Foucault_Deleuze_and_the_priest_as_psychosocial_type_2014

9. Ressentiment and Envy 2: Narcissism and Identity Politics

- Albert Camus, *The Rebel. An Essay on Man in Revolt* (New York: Vintage, 1991), 'Introduction' (3-11) + Part I 'The Rebel' (13-22)

- Chantal Mouffe, 'Politics and Passions: the Stakes of Democracy', in: *Ethical Perspectives* 7 (2000), 146-50.
- Robert Pfaller, 'How the Other Becomes our Beast', in: Sjoerd van Tuinen (ed.) *Polemics of Ressentiment. Variations on Nietzsche* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), pp. 129-46.

Recommended reading:

- Nicolas Demertzis, 'Emotions and Populism', in Simon Clarke, Paul Hoggett, and Simon Thompson (eds.) *Emotions, Politics and Society* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 103-122.
- Francis Fukuyama, *Identity. The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment* (London: Profile Books, 2018).
- Christoph Narholz, 'Failure as Triumph: The Political Anthropology of the Death Drive in Slavoj Žižek', in: Sjoerd van Tuinen (ed.) *Polemics of Ressentiment. Variations on Nietzsche* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 147-64.
- Frank Vande Veire, 'Envy: Sin of Sins, Painful Birth of Desire: Towards a Metapsychology of Ressentiment', in: Sjoerd van Tuinen (ed.) *Polemics of Ressentiment. Variations on Nietzsche* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 89-106.

10. Authentic Ressentiment? Witnessing Witnessing

Primary literature:

- Jean Améry, 'Ressentiments', in: *At the Mind's Limits. Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and its Realities*, trans. Sidney Rosenfeld and Stella P. Rosenfeld (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1980), pp. 62-81.

Recommended primary literature:

- Giorgio Agamben 1999, *Remnants of Auschwitz. The Witness and the Archive*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen, New York: Zone Books
- Thomas Brudholm (2008), *Resentment's Virtue. Jean Améry and the Refusal to Forgive*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press
- Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, trans. Mark Dooley and Michael Hughes, London and New York: Routledge, 2001.
- Didier Fassin (2013), 'On Resentment and Ressentiment. The Politics and Ethics of Moral Emotions', in: *Current Anthropology*, 54(3), 249-67.
- Vladimir Jankélévitch (2005), *Forgiveness*, trans. Andrew Kelly, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Fredric Jameson, 'Authentic Ressentiment: Generic Discontinuities and Ideologemes in the "Experimental" Novels of George Gissing', in: *The Political Unconscious* (Oxford: Routledge, 2002), pp. 172-93.
- W.G. Sebald, 'Against the Irreversible. On Jean Améry', in *On the Natural History of Destruction*, Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003.
- Arne Hønan Vetlesen, 'A Case for Resentment: Jean Améry versus Primo Levi'
- Slavoj Žižek, 'Divine Violence', in: *Violence. Six Sideways Reflections* (London: Profile Books, 2008), pp. 151-73.
- Magdalena Zolkos (2007), 'Jean Améry's Concept of Resentment at the Crossroads of Ethics and Politics', in: *The European Legacy*, 12 (1), 23-38

11. Authentic Ressentiment? Race and Gender

-Sara Ahmed *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Routledge, 2014), ch. 1 'The Contingency of Pain' (pp. 20-41) + ch. 8 'Feminist Attachments' (pp. 168-90) + 'Conclusion: Just Emotions' (pp 191-203).

-Audre Lorde (1981), 'The Uses of Anger', in: *Women's Studies Quarterly* 25 (1/2), 278-85, <https://www.scribd.com/doc/157368878/Audre-Lorde-The-Uses-of-Anger>

Recommended literature:

-Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham/London: Duke UP, 2017)

-Stefan Dolgert, 2016. "The praise of resentment: or, how I learned to stop worrying and love Donald Trump." *New Political Science* 38(3): 354-370

-Frantz Fanon, 'The Black Man and Recognition', in: *Black Skin White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008), pp. 185-97.

-Grace Hunt, 'Redeeming Resentment: Nietzsche's Affirmative Ripostes', in: *American Dialectic*, 3 (2/3), pp. 118-47.

https://www.academia.edu/5223799/Redeeming_Resentment_Nietzsches_Affirmative_Ripostes

-Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2005), 'Introduction' (pp 1-37) + 'Envy' (pp. 126-73)

-Debra Thompson, 'An Exoneration of Black Rage', in: *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 116 (3), 457-81.

12. Irenics of Resentment

-G.W. Leibniz, *Confessio philosophi. Papers Concerning the Problem of Evil, 1671-1678*, trans. Sleigh R. (New Haven/London: Yale UP, 2005), pp. 26-109 (40 pages).

-Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, I 15.

Recommend literature:

-Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza Practical Philosophy*, trans. Robert Hurley (San Francisco: City Light Books, 1988).

-Pignarre P and Stengers I (2011) *Capitalist Sorcery: Breaking the Spell*. Trans. Goffey A. London: Palgrave MacMillan.

-Bernard Stiegler, *Disbelief and Discredit*, vols. 1-3, trans Daniel Ross (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011-2014).

-Stolze, Ted. n.d. "Indignation: Spinoza and the desire to revolt" https://www.academia.edu/2578459/Indignation_Spinoza_on_the_Desire_to_Revolt

-Sjoerd van Tuinen, "The Irenics of Resentment: From Good Sense to Common Sense", in: Sjoerd van Tuinen (ed.), *The Polemics of Resentment. Variations on Nietzsche* (London/New York: Bloomsbury, 2018), pp. 67-88.

https://www.academia.edu/34558825/The_Irenics_of_Resentment_From_Good_Sense_to_Common_Sense_2017

-Sjoerd van Tuinen, "Die beste aller möglichen Welten?", in: *Profil* (Fall 2017), https://www.academia.edu/35009801/Die_beste_aller_m%C3%B6glichen_Welten_In_Profil_2017_Special_Issue_on_Peter_Sloterdijk_pp._3_17