

THE VAMPIRIC GAZE

By Rhyd Wildermuth



THE EVIL EYE

The Evil Eye was a widespread belief throughout the ancient world, persisting still in many cultures. The prevalence and universality of this belief can be seen readily in the preponderance of localized names for it throughout completely unrelated languages: *malocchio* in Italian, עין הרע in Hebrew, *kem göz* in Turkish, عين الحسود in Arabic, 邪視 in Japanese, and μάτισμος in Greek.

And while specific variants of the belief (and what to do about it) differ in each culture, the core belief is relatively the same: a person, possessed of resentment or jealousy at the good things in another person's life, has the power to destroy those things through their envious gaze.

This mechanism is written about most by the ancient Greeks, for whom there was a scientific explanation for its power. For instance, [Heliodorus explained](#), "when any one looks at what is excellent with an envious eye he fills the surrounding atmosphere with a pernicious quality, and transmits his own envenomed exhalations into whatever is nearest to him." And Plutarch's [explanation](#): *Envy, ensconced by nature in the mind more than any other passion also fills the body with evil... When, therefore, individuals under envy's sway direct their glance at others, their eyes, which are close to the mind and draw from it envy's evil, then attack these other persons as if with poisoned arrow.*

Children (especially boys) were widely thought to be most susceptible to it, especially from barren women or women whose children were not considered beautiful, talented, or strong. But while the victims of the Evil Eye were often thought to be more often male, it is not true that those who possess or use the Evil Eye were assumed to be primarily female. There are countless stories of men using the Evil Eye, especially those possessing certain physical features. For instance, in Italy the *jettatore* (throwers of the Evil Eye) were thought to be mostly men who had high eyebrows, striking facial features, and intense stares. In other cultures, the Evil Eye was more likely to come from a person of either sex with blue eyes (thus the common blue color of talismans against the Evil Eye, though in much of India black is used). And again regarding gender, in India, crossdressing during a wedding is still sometimes performed as a way of warding off the eye, so that the envious cannot tell who is male and who is female.

Though in Western, secular culture the Evil Eye is widely no longer acknowledged as a magical force, survivals of warding against it still continue. For instance, in many places in Europe it is thought that talking too openly about good things that have come to you (especially if you have been poor) will cause you to lose it, and the continuation of medieval Christian warding against the Evil Eye (attributing good things that happen to you to God instead of to luck or your own actions—which persists still in Islam as well) continue even in American society. In my own childhood in Appalachia for example, I often heard my grandmother and other older relatives speak of how it's best to get rid of any unexpected amounts of wealth (especially gambling winnings) and to not talk too much about good things because someone might get jealous and, anyway, "the Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away."

THE EVIL EYE AND RESENTIMENT

Though Western secular culture appears to have widely abandoned belief in magic or the Evil Eye, modern folk conceptions continue under different names. For instance, the concept of the "psychic vampire" mostly describes the same thing, and psychological concepts such as the Narcissistic Personality Disorder point to the destructive power that people with deep envy of others wield. And a larger philosophical and psychological concept exists which also explains this process, that of *ressentiment*.

While the word *ressentiment* in French translates directly to "resentment," it is often left in its French version to denote it is a different concept than its more simple English equivalent. That is to say, *ressentiment* is not just resentment, but rather an entire ideological and psychological state which acts as a force on social relations.

In *ressentiment*, a person does not just envy the success, wealth, beauty, or good luck of another person, but also builds an ideology and moral framework around why others should not have

those things, explanations founded upon the idea that they are “good” and those they resent are “evil.”

Frederich Nietzsche often discussed *ressentiment*. In one of his most well-known [examples](#), he describes the process through a story of lambs being attacked and killed by large predator birds:

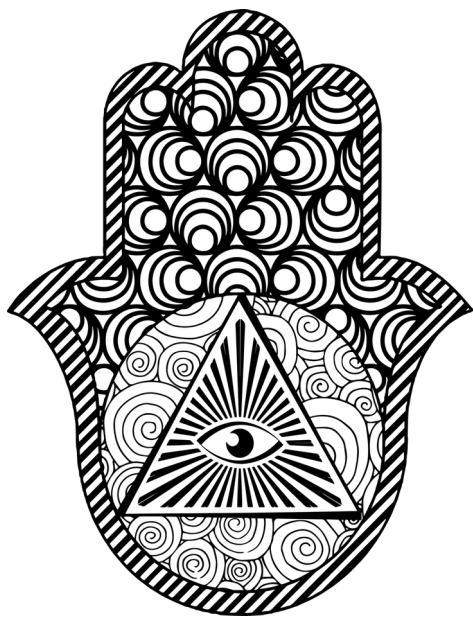
“There is nothing very odd about lambs disliking birds of prey, but this is no reason for holding it against large birds of prey that they carry off lambs. And when the lambs whisper among themselves, ‘These birds of prey are evil, and does this not give us a right to say that whatever of the opposite of a bird of prey must be good?’, there is nothing intrinsically wrong with such an argument—though the birds of prey will look somewhat quizzically and say, ‘We have nothing against these good lambs; in fact, we love them; nothing tastes better than a tender lamb.’”

In Nietzsche’s understanding of *ressentiment*, those who experience bad things develop a morality not just about those who cause bad things to happen, but also about themselves. As victims of the birds of prey, the lambs are ‘good’ because the birds of prey are ‘evil.’

Nietzsche specifically uses lambs and birds to make the point that there is really no real basis to the moral calculations the person in *ressentiment* makes. The lambs and the birds are acting according to their nature: carnivores eat flesh, herbivores do not. A moral framework as to why the lambs are being eaten is useless (the birds will not stop eating the lambs just because they the lambs consider them evil), and more so, the lamb cannot be said to be more moral or more good than the birds, because there is no moral choice being made. That is, the lambs do not choose to not eat animals, *they just do not*. The birds do not choose to eat animals, *they just do*.

If lambs experienced *ressentiment*, they might build an entire morality around not eating flesh. The logic here would be that, because they do not eat flesh and because they are the victims of those who do, no one should eat flesh. To eat flesh is to be evil, to not eat flesh is to be good. But of course the core problem with this moral framework is that the lambs are not actually choosing to not eat flesh: they cannot digest it. That is, they are not refraining from anything, but they then expect all others to make the same choice (which is not a choice for them at all) in order to be moral.

THE CLINGING DAMPNESS



the Hamsa, a widespread ward
against the Evil Eye

Ressentiment has two core features that are both based on moralizations. The first is that *ressentiment* creates a morality in which victims are “good” because they are victims, and those who are not victims are evil because they are not victims. That is, it is moral to suffer, and suffering is proof of being good.

More importantly for our discussion about the Evil Eye, however, is the second core feature: *ressentiment* creates a morality around refraining from an action that we were not going to do or are not capable of doing anyway. It creates a “good” out of passivity and non-action, while those who are active and act are “evil.”

Together, these two aspects set into motion a process within the person experiencing *ressentiment* which traps them into a state of being unable to act and being unable to experience joy.

I suspect we all have encountered people in our lives who are trapped in this state. The friend who seems to never be happy no matter what happens to them, the relative who is constantly bitter about their own experiences and cannot help but discuss them at every opportunity, the co-worker who complains they will “never find love” because no one will ever truly understand them, or the lover for whom nothing we do is good enough and who constantly moves the goalposts on what it means to truly love them.

Each of these sorts of people are people trapped in *ressentiment*, incapable of ever being happy or satisfied. Those of us who know and love them, who see their potential and the good things that already exist for them, are often left perplexed by their constant state of misery. We might explain it as “depression,” or try repeatedly to help them through their pain and trauma, but ultimately nothing ever truly works.

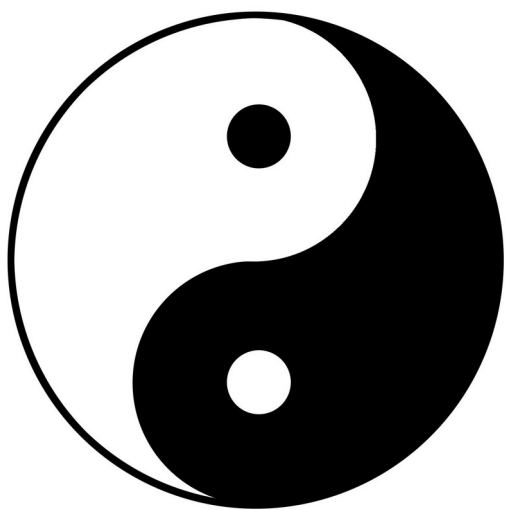
Worst of all, our interactions with them feel like a constant drain on our own joy. Not only do the discussions seem to go nowhere, but they are always one sided and always seem to return to the same problems, the same misery, the same suffering. We become afraid of telling them about the good things in our lives for fear of exacerbating their own sense of lack. When we do speak of good things (a new lover, an opportunity for a new job, an upcoming vacation), they will often say they are happy for us, but then add “I wish nice things like that happened for me, too.”

Even the best interactions with people trapped in *ressentiment* will feel tiring, but the more common ones tend to bleach the color from our own lives. They may convince us that the good things in our life are not as good as we think they are, are stained or tainted with negatives that we failed to notice.

Such interactions occur even more so with the politically-inclined, who might remind you that bad things are happening in the world at the most apropos moments, or trace for you the chains of exploitation that created the gift you just received, or how the international plane trip you are about to take will add more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, or how the film or work of literature you enjoyed was oppressive to others. And while each of these things may indeed be true, their introductions of those facts in your moment of joy and happiness seems willfully timed to dim the sunlight in which you dance.

In English, people like this are often called “wet blankets” and are said to “dampen” a mood, which parallels an observation about people in this state from traditional Chinese medicine. A person in a state of “dampness” has over-extended yin (feminine) energy, which blocks yang (masculine) and qi (life force) energies. Such a dampness gives them a blocked, constipated personality in which nothing really seems to move for them in their life. They are like a stagnant muddy pool which entraps others, reminding us of the other English idiom for such people, “a stick-in-the-mud.”

THE YIN AND YANG OF *RESSENTIMENT*



Here the secular western social justice mind—with its rejection of gender binaries—might bristle a bit at the talk of feminine and masculine energies, so it is useful to clarify that in both Chinese medicine as well as European and Arabic alchemical traditions, feminine and masculine energy are seen **as present in all people, regardless their sex and gender.** For the alchemist, the ultimate goal of spiritual transformation is the “alchemical marriage,” which is the unity of both masculine and feminine principles within the same soul and body of whatever sex. And in Chinese medicine, men

and women both possess the same masculine and feminine energies (in the same way that testosterone and estrogen are both produced in every body regardless its sex) and the healthy body is healthy because those energies are in balance. Too much masculine energy and the person becomes restless and manic, easily angered or irritated, forgets to eat or drink water, and eventually develops coughs and headaches. Too much feminine energy and the person becomes

tired, listless, uninspired, and tends to over-eat, become pale and get chills easily, and generally loses their lust for life.

In these traditions, the masculine and feminine energies are always in flux, balancing each other according to life circumstance. Feminine energy is needed for rest, for recovery, for healing. It is the cuddling calm after an orgasm, the playful embrace and the feeling after a good dinner or a gathering with friends. Masculine energy is needed for action and change, the assertive text to someone you just met that asks them out on a date, the initiation of new projects that will create something beautiful, the passionate heat of sports and sex and the active choice to no longer accept violated boundaries or government oppression.

So to say that *ressentiment* parallels the state of excess feminine energy described within ancient healing cultures is not to say that *ressentiment* is a female problem. As with the Evil Eye, though it is associated with feminine characteristics **it is not inherent to feminine people**. And here we can also note that one of the most common wards against the Evil Eye, used by women and men both, is the phallus (the latin *fascinus*), a sacred object of action, power, and change.

To better understand the interplay of female and male energy in both *ressentiment* and the Evil Eye, here is part of Hakim Bey's [essay](#) on the matter:

A crude anthropology (note the "anthro") claims that "primitive mind" experiences Envy as a female principle—(hence the phallic defense against the Evil Eye). A very limited view. "Envy" may be yin when compared with the yang of "greed," but the Evil Eye, as a prolongation of Invidia, is pointy and penetrative, like a dagger—a death-dealing phallus—to which one opposes the phallus of life, the penis itself. An Italian savant once told me of the most horrendous example of the mal occhio he'd ever encountered, in a withered & hairy-faced old woman. A healer, a charismatic Catholic mystic, undertook the cure of this miserable witch—and discovered that, unknown to her, she was in fact a man (the genitals had never descended).

A gender-analysis of the Eye will get us nowhere. The association of the Eye with women may arise from the tendency of women to be more sensitive to body language than men, and thus to hold on to certain "magics" even as they begin to vanish from those worlds which discover history (which, as everyone knows, is not, by-and-large, *her* story).

[Hakim Bey, "Evil Eye"](#)

So, this state of being is one of excess feminine energy (feminine principle) but not of being female itself, and represents of a lack of masculine (active, transformative) energy or principle in the human body. The person in *ressentiment* is trapped in a state of inaction, of passivity, stuck in the muddy sense that they are only ever acted upon and are not active participants in their own life or circumstances. And in such a state, the actions and moments of others, especially the positive, transformative ones such as joy, delight, and celebration feel offensive to the person, because they (again of whatever gender) exhibit the masculine (transformative, active, assertive) energy their body lacks.

TEMPORARY AND PERMANENT RESENTMENT

Everyone likely experiences these moments occasionally in their lives (I have). In such temporary moments, everyone around us seems to have life better than us, has more success, better health or looks. We resent them for their happiness, wish they would shut up about their amazing lover or exciting job because it feels they are rubbing salt into our invisible wounds.

For most these are only ever temporary moments. The wheel turns and we are happy again, we get our verve or spark back, life returns and feels full again. When the muck is gone we look back and feel a little embarrassed at how overdramatic we were being, apologize for our foul temper, and move on.

However, those more permanently in a state of *ressentiment* do not have such returns to joy and life, and by a bizarre internal process come to hate both the good and beautiful moments as well as the bad. When good things happen to them, they quickly find the bad therein, the cloud in each silver lining, the tree in the way of each view of the forest.

The mental processes by which this occurs takes multiple forms, but they all are ultimately founded upon an ideological process with certain negative beliefs. “Good things don’t happen to me” is one of those beliefs, and “I don’t deserve good things” is another, and “the world is against me” is yet a third. These beliefs filter each new experience in a way that narrates them as only temporary moments of respite from an otherwise interrupted progression of misery.

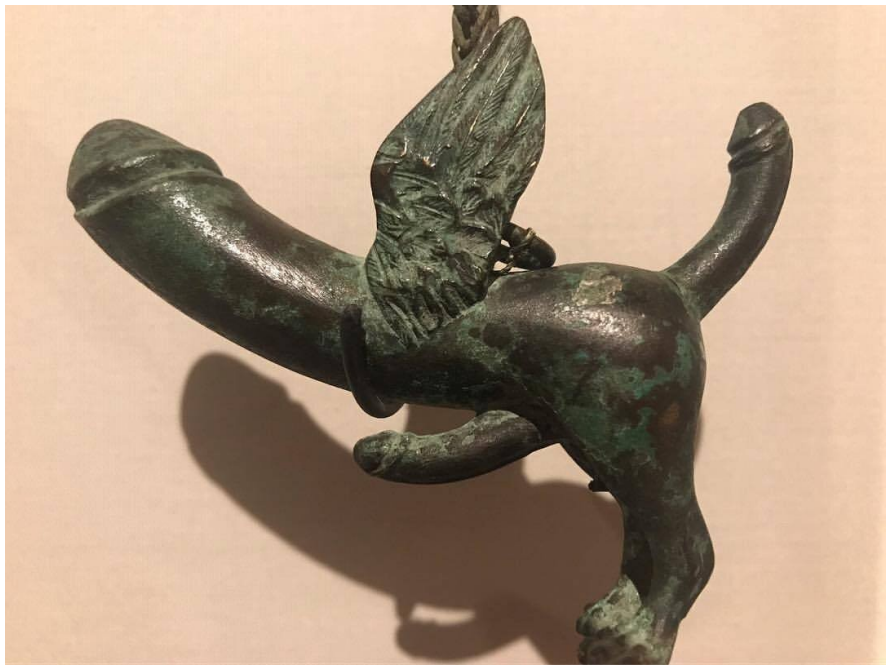
Crucially, though, these beliefs come to form not just an ideology but a morality that eternalizes the *ressentiment* they feel onto others. Think on the well-known trope of the mother who constantly reminds her adult children each time they call her that they “never call, never write,” that she was “sick with worry,” and that she is alone now that they have moved out. Or the incel who blames feminism for the reason why he cannot find a girlfriend, the woman who blames the patriarchy for why none of her male relationships are ever stable, or the person who blames immigrants or “the system” for their inability to find a job.

“IT IS YOUR FAULT I AM MISERABLE”

Here we see that *ressentiment* has yet another characteristic: it displaces and projects personal suffering onto “the other,” whether that is a friend, a family member, a lover, or a symbolic group or system. The person in *ressentiment* does this in order to sustain the *ressentiment*, to avoid ever looking at the terrible possibility they are also actors in their own life, because agency is the opposite and antidote for *ressentiment*.

As Gilles Deleuze puts it in his discussion of Nietzsche,

"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." Here we rediscover the dreadful feminine power of resentment: it is not content to denounce crimes and criminals, it wants sinners, people who are responsible. We can guess what the creature of resentment wants: he wants others to be evil, he needs others to be evil in order to be able to consider himself good. You are evil, therefore I am good; this is the slave's fundamental formula."



Roman fascinus pendant, a common ward against the Evil Eye

[Gilles Deleuze, Nietzsche and Philosophy, p.119](#)

Again, a reader steeped in the Western secular tradition and its social justice co-ordinates might bristle at the mention both of "feminine" power and especially the reference to slave morality. Here we need to remember that again the feminine in these traditions is a co-creative principle within each person, a necessary "cooling" orce which sustains life, too much of which leads to the "dampness" which Chinese medicine identifies with this state of *ressentiment*.

As for the reference to the slave, in Nietzsche and elsewhere, **slave morality is not the morality of people in slavery, but rather people who choose to avoid or relinquish agency.** The slave for Nietzsche is the person who sees themselves always as a passive object, a person incapable or unwilling to take risks or even to act at all. They are those who obey orders unthinkingly because they have no will of their own.

This slave morality is the sustaining ideology of the person in *ressentiment*. Seeing themselves constantly as victims of others, they create moral coordinates in which their suffering is proof of their righteousness. They feel other people harm them (which may be true but need not be for *ressentiment* to occur), therefore those people are evil. And if they are evil for harming them, that means the person they harm must be good, specifically because they suffer harm from those they see as evil.

These harms and this suffering can be real or imagined, it does not matter. Deleuze points out that the process occurs in the mind irrespective of the actual conditions the person has been in. The person in *ressentiment* is reacting to “traces,” which is to say memories of the feeling of harm:

*There is therefore no need for him to have experienced an excessive excitation. This may happen, but it is not necessary. He does not need to generalise in order to see the whole world as the object of his *ressentiment*. As a result of his type the man of *ressentiment* does not “react”: his reaction is endless, it is felt instead of being acted. This reaction therefore blames its object, whatever it is, as an object on which revenge must be taken, which must be made to pay for this infinite delay. Excitation can be beautiful and good and the man of *ressentiment* can experience it as such; it can be less than the force of the man of *ressentiment* and he can possess an abstract quantity of force as great as that of anyone else. He will none the less feel the corresponding object as a personal offence and affront because he makes the object responsible for his own powerlessness to invest anything but the trace—a qualitative or typical powerlessness.”*

[Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, p.115](#)

This reaction (felt, not acted out) is not to actual experiences but to a *feeling* of being wronged, and the sense that one is wronged (and therefore “good”) infects every experience the person has. This is how *ressentiment* sustains itself, eventually creating the conditions that keep the person always feeling harmed. So, in the examples I mentioned above, we could see how a bitter mother who constantly complains to her children that they don’t call enough would make it so that her children actually call her less. A man who believes feminism is why he cannot get a girlfriend will act towards women in a way that makes clear his hatred for feminism. A woman who believes all men are patriarchal pigs will treat every man in her life as if he is oppressing her. In these latter cases, any perspective lover will immediately flee the first moment this *ressentiment* surfaces, and the person in *ressentiment* will then find exactly the proof they needed to stay in this state.

THE NARCISSISTIC PERSONALITY DISORDER AND MASS POLITICS



Evil Eye talismans, Turkey

The modern diagnosis of the person with Narcissistic Personality Disorder parallels this process. The person with NPD constantly believes they are a victim of others yet simultaneously believes they are unique and superior. They have a sense that good things should always happen to them yet never do, and thus pose themselves in all their relationships as someone who is owed everyone’s attention, affection, care, and often obedience. And they do

this through manipulation, using guilt, shame, and gaslighting to convince those around them they have harmed the person with NPD and therefore need to make amends.

Constantly casting oneself as the passive victim of life, circumstances, systems, or just bad luck allows the person in *ressentiment* to avoid looking too closely at their own life. Often simple changes of perspective would be enough to alter these patterns, but with that change comes something much harder for the person to grasp: they are not “good” and others are not “evil.” That is, they would need to let go of their most cherished belief that they are a sacred victim, and instead acknowledge they were also active participants in many of the bad things which have happened in their life, and that only they are responsible for how their life is going.

For the person in *ressentiment*, this truth is unbearable. And as the people around them withdraw their presence in order to protect themselves, the person in *ressentiment* must expand their ideological framework to include more people.

Here, then, is where *ressentiment* begins to have larger societal effects, because more and more people to be labeled “evil” are required to sate the desire of those in *ressentiment* to see themselves as good. Mass populist movements are often born from this expansion, when particularly charismatic people find ways to spread their ideological theories as to why they are constantly being harmed to other people. Antisemitic movements are one of the most obvious that come to mind, posing a secret cabal of “evil” Jews as the reason for mass suffering. Eruptions of populist anti-immigrant sentiment, or nationalism during times of war, also are obvious examples of *ressentiment* played out in larger theaters of the absurd.

But less violent—yet still destructive—infections of *ressentiment* occur in society. Because *ressentiment* is ultimately a passive principle, the person in *ressentiment* needs to steal the agency from others in order to maintain their own fantasies of victimhood. We see this particularly in NPD psychological abuse, in which the abusive person convinces their victim that they cannot survive without their abuser. To do this, they must remove from their victim their sense of self and agency, convince them that they are really “nothing,” are not special or unique, and remove from them their sense of self and individuality.

On a larger scale, this is the process that Soren Kirkegaard called “leveling.”

The resentment which is establishing itself is the process of leveling, and while a passionate age storms ahead setting up new things and tearing down old, raising 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. In a burst of momentary enthusiasm people might, in their despondency, even long for a misfortune in order to feel the powers of life, but the apathy which follows is no more helped by a disturbance than an engineer leveling a piece of land. At its most violent a rebellion is like a volcanic eruption and drowns every other sound. At its maximum the leveling process is a deathly silence in which

one can hear one's own heart beat, a silence which nothing can pierce, in which everything is engulfed, powerless to resist.

Soren Kirkegaard, *The Present Age* (relevant excerpts [here](#))

Leveling is ultimately the damp yin principle spread throughout society, a constant wet blanket cast upon every fiery manifestation of difference, uniqueness, individuality, and distinction. Leveling propagates the “slave morality” the same way that slave owners degraded the sense of self of their slaves. Instead of being individuals with agency, they were objects that existed only as part of a category or role (slave).

Reducing individuals to a category or role unfortunately often plays out in both left wing and right wing identity politics. People are not individuals with the agency to choose their own life, but rather members of larger identity categories which define them. All men, all Black people, all disabled, all heterosexuals: individuals become subsumed into these larger categories and become judged by them.

Each category of human becomes inescapable, defines the individual more than the entire sum of their behaviors. In its right-wing flavors, identity politics sees Black skin or immigrant status first about a person and judges them according to these categories. In its left-wing (social justice) versions, identity politics likewise defines each person first by their categories (oppressor or oppressive) and creates coordinates and scales of good and evil (“intersecting oppression identities”) by which a person is to judged.

In both versions, what is erased is difference and individuality. Everyone within a category is defined by that category first, and any apparent aberration from this definition is either discarded or re-inscribed back into the slave morality of “you are evil, therefore I am good.” So, for the antisemitist, a person might agree with them politically yet still nonetheless be inferior because they are a Jew; for the social justice activist, a white man might be a staunch leftist and fight against racism and sexism yet still nonetheless be defined more by their whiteness and maleness than what they actually do.

In both versions, *ressentiment* maintains itself here by eliminating all contrary evidence to its sustaining ideologies. Just as the bitter mother ignores every time her children *actually call* in order to pose herself as the “good” victim of children who never call, *ressentiment* that levels must ignore every individual within an identity category whose actions might prove the category false. A homeless poor white person must still nevertheless benefit from white supremacy and therefore be an oppressor, a poor Jewish person must still nevertheless be part of a rich cabal controlling humanity and therefore be an oppressor. And here the vampirism of people in *ressentiment* drains not just the joy from all others in order to feed its moral belief in its own goodness, but also the very life of others as well.

THE SLAVE MORALITY OF THE CAPITALIST

But there is one more way that *ressentiment* propagates itself throughout society. *Ressentiment*—as the core feature of slave morality—ultimately seeks to control the actions of others by making them also slaves. Again returning to the bitter mother, the entire reason why she guilts her children for not calling her enough is to convince them they have wronged her. If they have wronged her, than she is absolved from any guilt she herself might feel about her own parenting, since the moral equation of slave morality is “you are evil, therefore I am good.”

Here we can change the words “evil” and “good” for other dichotomies. In identity politics we see “you are oppressive, therefore I am oppressed” or “you are illegal, therefore I am legal.” That is, it is the other’s negative qualities that make true our own qualities. Without that other, the person in *ressentiment* cannot sustain the necessary feeling of righteousness to stay in *ressentiment*. And without forcing the other to accept the co-ordinates (through state violence in the case of undocumented immigrants, for example, or confessional statements about acknowledging one’s own privilege in the case of social justice discourse), that righteousness gets harder to justify.

In all these instances, the goal is to force the “evil” person to submit to the will of the “good,” even if for a little while. That is, *ressentiment* as a core feature of slave morality seeks to make others slaves so that the person in *ressentiment* no longer feels like a slave. It is ultimately a method of control, specifically the method of control used on slaves themselves to force them to forget they were capable of escaping when the master was not looking. It is also the method of control used on displaced peoples from Europe during the birth of capitalism to turn them from peasants to proletariat.

While it easy to think that the relationship of capitalist to worker or slave owner to slave is a master relationship (the owner or the capitalist being the master), we discover in Deleuze’s reading of Nietzsche that the master is actually also a slave—or rather, possesses also the slave morality of *ressentiment*.

The man of ressentiment does not know how to and does not want to love, but wants to be loved. He wants to be loved, fed, watered, caressed and put to sleep. He is the impotent, the dyspeptic, the frigid, the insomniac, the slave. Furthermore the man of ressentiment is extremely touchy: faced with all the activities he cannot undertake he considers that, at the very least, he ought to be compensated by benefiting from them. He therefore considers it a proof of obvious malice that he is not loved, that he is not fed. The man of ressentiment is the man of profit and gain. Moreover, ressentiment could only be imposed on the world through the triumph of the principle of gain, by making profit not only a desire and a way of thinking but an economic, social and theological system, a complete system, a divine mechanism. A failure to recognise profit—this is the theological crime and the only crime against the spirit.

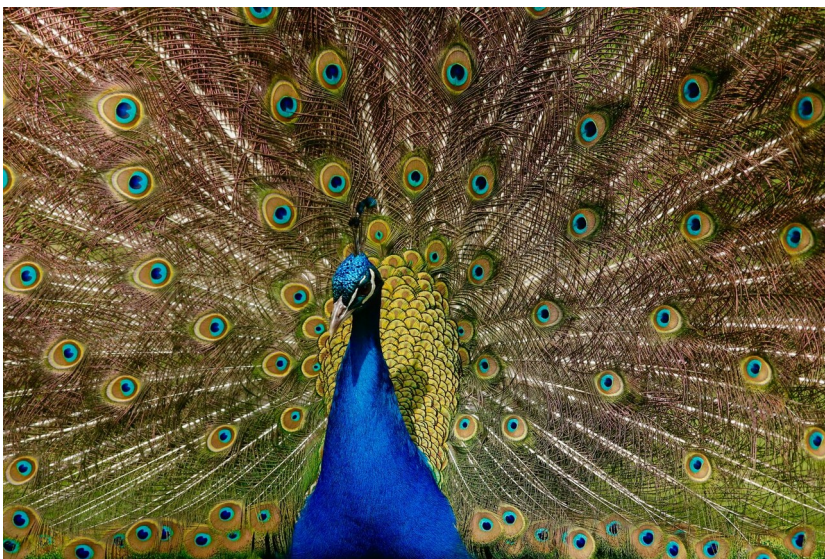
[Gilles Deleuze, Nietzsche and Philosophy, p.118](#)

While this may seem counter-intuitive, it isn't hard to unravel how this is actually the case. It was no less than Karl Marx who famously first pointed to the vampiric nature of capital:

Capital is dead labor which, vampire-like, sucks the life of living labor, and it lives the more, the more it sucks.

[Karl Marx, Capital, Chapter 10](#)

Consider briefly someone like Elon Musk, the CEO of Tesla. Musk actually does not do any of the design engineering for the company, nor does he actually build anything. Musk is also not the founder of the company, either. Instead, all of the work is done by employees of the company, yet none of them get the credit for it, he does. Yet Elon Musk appears for all the world to be the “master” of Tesla, the active agent creating all these things.



Peacock. In some witch traditions and in Yezidi religion, Melek Taus or The Peacock Angel is a god of masculine creator force (sometimes associated with Lucifer). Note the eyes in its feathers, which can be used as powerful charms

Elon Musk is a perfect example of how *ressentiment* and slave morality defines life within capitalism. The capitalist does not actually act or do work: instead, it is their exploited workers who act for them, who transform their capital through their labor into more capital. Similarly, the slave owner does not work the fields, it is the slaves who do so. Both the capitalist and the slave owner have managed to translate their *ressentiment* into a perpetuating system where they need never

act and never acknowledge their displaced agency. The capitalist and the slave owner do not create at all, and live in perpetual passive states where things are done for and to them.

To sustain this state of *ressentiment*, to ensure their slave morality remained intact, they need then to convince others that they were the real slaves and infect them with slave morality. In the case of actual slavery, this meant literally enslaving people (though they paid others to do the enslaving); in the case of capitalism, this meant the long displacement and domestication process (again, performed not by the capitalists but by others—the state, the church, the educational systems) of peasants into the proletariat.

Inculcating slave morality into the masses required convincing us that what we would otherwise think of as an ethical good (acting in the world, creating, being agents of our own lives) was actually “evil.” Deleuze’s explanation of Nietzsche here elucidates this well:

"The good of ethics has become the evil of morality, the bad has become the good of morality. Good and evil are not the good and the bad but, on the contrary, the exchange, the inversion, the reversal of their determination. Nietzsche stresses the following point: "Beyond good and evil" does not mean: "Beyond the good and the bad", on the contrary... (GM I 17). Good and evil are new values, but how strangely these values are created! They are created by reversing good and bad. They are not created by acting but by holding back from acting, not by affirming, but by beginning with denial. This is why they are called un-created, divine, transcendent, superior to life. But think of what these values hide, of their mode of creation. They hide an extraordinary hatred, a hatred for life, a hatred for all that is active and affirmative in life.

[Gillees Deleuze, Nietzsche and Philosophy, p.122](#)

To act, to have agency, and to affect the world around you were all things thought ethically good in the ancient world. To not act, to be victim, and to be a mere passive object in the actions of others were considered bad, states of being that were not good. *Ressentiment* reverses this, makes being an active agent in the world "evil" specifically in order to make being a passive victim the "good."

Just as an abuser must degrade the soul and sense of self of their victim, capitalist slave morality convinced us that we were passive victims incapable of agency. That is, we have no choice but to do what we are told, obey the laws and conform ourselves within the moral coordinates they set out. What is "good" is to work for others, to obey, to be good subjects of Empire. What is "evil" is to enjoy the full fruits of our labor, to decide what is done with the hours of our day and how we live our lives.

DEFENSE AGAINST THE EVIL EYE

The victim of the Evil Eye becomes convinced that the reason they have lost the thing they enjoyed is because of the agency of another. They lose not just the object of their joy, but the ability to actively experience joy. That is, the purpose of the Evil Eye is to infect its victim with passivity, drain from them their agency, and put them also into a state where the joy of life is no longer possible.

Everywhere in our world this deadly gaze is directed at us, as in Bentham's Panopticon. We are described to ourselves as victims, as patients, as passive focal points of misery—we are shown ourselves deprived of this or that commodity or "right" or quality which we most desire. The ones who tell us this—are they not the rich, the powerful, the politicians, the corporations? What could we still possess to awaken in them such invidia, and the endless assaults of their malocchio? Could it be that unknown to us or to them we are alive and they are dead?

[Hakim Bey, "Evil Eye"](#)

The Evil Eye then is merely *ressentiment* in its magical manifestation. And perhaps the reason why our modern Western secular societies have abandoned belief in the Evil Eye is because we have all collectively become victims to it. Capitalism is an ideology operating completely on *ressentiment*: we are manipulated through advertising to believe we are lacking, that we are not able to experience joy until we purchase things, that happiness is not a result of agency but of passive consumption. We have been made to believe we cannot act for ourselves, that we are mere slaves to larger systems. We come to believe we are inherently lazy, passive victims who can only obey rather than sacred beings bearing the spark of life, of change, of transformation.

Cultures with a belief in the Evil Eye have developed wards against its use, and the most fascinating of these is the *fascinus*, the phallus of life (again, not maleness but the masculine change principle flowing through both men and women). It serves as a reminder that we have the power to influence our own lives, to take control of our circumstances. It is agency itself.

Such cultures have not only wards against the Evil Eye, but strong social rituals to decrease the poisonous power of envy. Not flaunting wealth is one of the most common which still persists in some modern European societies, but more important are the rituals of care created to prevent a person from being overcome by *ressentiment*. Giving alms to the poor and to widows, for instance, persist in all these cultures, as do rituals of hospitality.

In such rituals, the magical gesture is not “I have more and I must protect it,” but “I have much and I would like to share it.” Societies with such rituals lessen the pain of unequal circumstances by physically showing the person that suffering is only ever a temporary state. The victim of traumatic events—of personal loss, of grief, of poverty, of bad health—when left to their own bitterness, becomes susceptible to the dark poison of envy and *ressentiment* because it is easy for them to feel they no longer have agency.

Ultimately, though, the choice whether to stay in a state of *ressentiment* belongs only to the individual. Though we can perhaps trace the societal paths which led them to such decisions, the only person who could prevent them from being in that state is themselves, because *ressentiment* is an abdication of personal agency. Treating a person who believes they have been wronged by society as a victim of circumstances does not heal the *ressentiment*, it only further justifies their beliefs.

Thus the wards against the Evil Eye must also be personal, not societal. Each of us must cling tightly to our agency and balance within ourselves both the masculine principle of agency and the feminine principle of receptivity. We act and are acted upon equally, live independent and interdependently at the same time.

Physical wards against the Evil Eye are useful, but so too are physical activities. In Chinese medicine the prescription for someone experiencing too much dampness is to eat fragrant and spicy foods (including that well-known ward against vampirism, garlic) and to exercise. Exercise

dries out dampness the same way that it clears the foggy mind, reduces depression and sluggishness, and reminds us we are bodies with physical presences and agency. A run, a bike ride, even a brisk walk wakens within us the desire to be more than mere passive participants life and the world around us.

As Silvia Federici [has noted](#), the key to keeping us passive, to inculcating within us the slave morality of the capitalist, has been to divorce us from our bodies and the nature of which we are part. Modern life is full of screens in front of which we sit passively, forgetting we are bodies with agency. Modern work is passive, drained of individual creativity and passion. And modern social relations cast us all as victims to forces, structures, and systems we have no control over.

Breaking the vampiric gaze, then, starts in our body, in our agency, and our ability to gaze back into the world with joy and life. Though we may not ever be able to change the *ressentiment* in others, we can embody a life of fierce agency, power, joy, and love that will fascinate the world. And though that may make us even larger targets for those trapped in *ressentiment*, the wisdom of the ancient world is full of wards and protections we can use to guard ourselves from their envy. As Hakim Bey says,

Envy is an abstraction because it wants to “take away from.” The Evil Eye is its weapon in the psychic/physical world. Against it, then, must stand not another abstraction (such as morality) but the solidest of fleshy realities, the over-abundant power of birth, of fucking, of azure breezes. The amulet we fashion against an entire society of the Evil Eye can be no more and no less than our own life, adamantite as stone & horn, soft as sky.

[Hakim Bey, “Evil Eye”](#)

RHYD WILDERMUTH



Rhyd is a druid and theorist, as well as the director of publishing for Gods&Radicals Press. Find out more about him at RhydWildermuth.com