

HOMER ON COMPETITION

MIMETIC RIVALRY, SACRIFICIAL VIOLENCE AND AUTOIMMUNITY IN NIETZSCHE

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*In my asinine pride I have congratulated myself so often on being different (...).
Well, I've now lived long enough to understand that difference breeds hatred.*
(Stendhal, *The Red and the Black*)

*The striving for distinction is the striving for domination over the next man,
though it be a very indirect domination and only felt or even dreamed.*
(Nietzsche, *Daybreak*)

Fascination beyond good and evil

Stendhal and Dostoevsky, two masters of the modern novel, are praised by Nietzsche for their psychological and deeply human intuition.¹ As a matter of fact, Nietzsche shares his adoration of Napoleon – “this synthesis of the *inhuman* and the *superhuman*” (Nietzsche 1996^a, 36) – with two main characters from the literary universe of both novelists. All of Julien Sorel’s thoughts and feelings, all his actions in *The Red and the Black* (1830) by Stendhal are dominated by his worship of the divine destiny of the Emperor Napoleon – once called ‘the world-soul on horseback’ by Hegel.² The wandering antihero Raskolnikov in Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment* (1866) wants to rise above his infinite self-contempt and to distinguish himself from all the others by a crime ‘beyond good and evil’ – with Napoleon as a diabolical-destructive role model.

“I wanted to become a Napoleon, that is why I killed her.... Do you understand now?
(...) I wanted to find out then and quickly whether I was a louse like everybody else or

¹ Cf. Nietzsche 1996^b, 317: “[A]ny Russian book – above all Dostoevsky (translated into French, for heaven’s sake not German!) – I count among my greatest moments of pleasurable relief.”

² Stendhal 2002, 103: “Ah! he cried, Napoleon truly was the man sent by God for the youth of France! Who will take his place?” – Hegel 1984, 114: “I saw the Emperor – this world-soul – riding out of the city on reconnaissance. It is indeed a wonderful sensation to see an individual, who, concentrated here at a single point, astride a horse, reaches out over the world and masters it.”

a man. Whether I can step over barriers or not, whether I dare stoop to pick up or not, whether I am a trembling creature or whether I have the right..." "To kill? Have the right to kill?" Sonia clasped her hands (Dostoevsky 2000, 349; 353).

On the eve of the mad murder of the old pawnbroker Alyona Ivanovna, Raskolnikov has a terrible nightmare, in which dream and reality merge meaningfully. The seven-year-old Raskolnikov witnesses together with his father the thorough thrashing of a thin sorrel horse by Mikolka and an excited, drunken mob of peasants. Overwhelmed by pity, the boy puts his arms round the bleeding mouth and kisses the dead animal.³ This striking scene from Dostoevsky evokes the lasting image of Nietzsche, who throws himself, sobbing, around the neck of a beaten up nag in Turin (January 1889) and then collapses mentally – overwhelmed by pity. In *Ecce homo* (1888) Nietzsche counts the overcoming of pity among “the noble virtues”. Yet Nietzsche did not manage to keep up this exalted attitude of (a)moral immunity to oneself and the others so easily in his own life.⁴

From this hypersensitivity to pity, but equally drawn by the enormous (*Ungeheure*), the immeasurable and inhuman, Nietzsche gauges the bottom of the primitive violence in *Homer on Competition* – the bloodthirsty, insatiable hatred and the “tiger-like pleasure in destruction” in Greek culture (Nietzsche 2000^a, 187). The short, leather-bound text *Homer on Competition* (*Homers Wettkampf*) belongs to *Five Prefaces to Five Unwritten Books*, dedicated to Mrs Cosima Wagner,

with heartfelt reverence and as an answer to verbal and epistolary questions, written down cheerfully (*vergnügten Sinnes*) at Christmas time 1872 [our translation]

In a beautifully phrased but rather awkward letter of condolence, addressed to Cosima after the decease of the maestro from Bayreuth eleven years later, Nietzsche will describe her as “the most deeply admired woman, who is in my heart” (Janz 1978: II 176) [our translation].

Cosima, who thanks the family-friend Nietzsche in a letter (12 February 1873) for the warm Christmas and birthday present, and who particularly appreciates

³ Dostoevsky 2000, 47-56.

⁴ Nietzsche 1974, 100 (§26): “Life – that is: continually shedding something that wants to die. Life – that is: being cruel and inexorable against everything about us that is growing old and weak – and not only about *us*. Life – that is, then: being without reverence for those who are dying, who are wretched, who are ancient? Constantly being a murderer? – And yet old Moses said: ‘Thou shalt not kill.’”

the fifth preface *Homer on Competition*, nevertheless expresses her astonishment about the surprising ‘cheerfully’ in the dedication in the above paragraph. Nietzsche’s biographer Curt Paul Janz refers in this respect to the opposite ‘grim pathos’ which Nietzsche had experienced for the first time a couple of months before at his musical Manfred composition (1872) – an ambiguous pleasure which would accompany all of his further creative career.

Precisely this Manfred-music gave me a feeling of such fierce (*grimmig*), even scornful pathos (*Vergnügen*) that I enjoyed it as though it were a devilish irony (Nietzsche, in Liébert 2004, 52).

The heavily contested philology professor Nietzsche now wanted in the first place to prove himself as a composer in the eyes of the honoured musician and Wagner director Hans von Bülow – former husband of Cosima – who, however, put Nietzsche’s *Manfred-Meditation* through a merciless critical test. It is no coincidence that Nietzsche’s tone and style change with *Homer on Competition*. His apodictic and polemic way of formulating, betraying offended pride and feelings of inferiority, did not escape the notice of Mr and Mrs Wagner (Janz 1978: II 176; 373).

Dionysian cruelty

In the Dionysian-Heraclitian underbelly of western civilization the young classical scholar Nietzsche discovers war and violence (*polemos*) as the father of all things.

Those capacities of his which are terrible and are viewed as inhuman are perhaps, indeed, the fertile soil from which alone all humanity, in feelings, deeds and works, can grow forth (Nietzsche 2000^a, 187).⁵

As examples of horrendous hatred and wanton cruelty Achilles and Alexander the Great are presented: they drag the bodies of Hector and of Batis, the brave defender of Gaza, behind their chariots and disfigure them in the most horrible way. Who does not remember the furious violation of Hector’s corpse by

⁵ Nietzsche 2000^b, 179: “For we must not forget one thing: the same cruelty which we found at the heart of every culture also lies at the heart of every powerful religion, and in the nature of *power* in general, which is always evil; so we shall understand the matter just as well, if a culture breaks down an all too highly raised bulwark of religious claims (...). Every moment devours the preceding one, every birth is the death of countless beings; procreating, living and murdering are all one.”

Achilles as the sinister dark side of the ‘beautiful death’ which makes the hero immortal? The ‘shameful’ (*aischron*) is, in the Homeric honour-shame culture, the radical opposite of the ‘beautiful’ (*kalon*). The Greek heroic morality, however, is not equal to the appeal of fundamental violence, which breaks down all socio-cultural differences and codes. The brutal mutilation of the enemy’s body violates the holiest laws and puts the symbolic order of culture at stake.⁶

Why did the whole Greek world rejoice over the pictures of battle in the Iliad? I fear we have not understood these in a sufficiently ‘Greek’ way, and even that we should shudder if we ever did understand them in a Greek way (Nietzsche 2000^a, 188).

This dimension of horrendous violence is already purified and moderated by Homer’s Apollonian artistic impulse.⁷ The pre-Homeric world, on the other hand, gives an infernal view of bloody struggle and cruelty. The disgusting and dreadful theogonic legends by Hesiod reflect “a life ruled over by the *children of the night* alone, by strife, lust, deception, age and death.” The Greek genius is rooted in Dionysian urge, rivalry and envy. “[I]f we take away competition from Greek life, we gaze immediately into that pre-Homeric abyss of a gruesome savagery of hatred and pleasure in destruction” (Nietzsche 2000^a, 188; 193).

In *Homer on Competition* Nietzsche quotes the famous text by Hesiod about the two opposing kinds of competition, rivalry and strife (*eris*).

One promotes wicked war (*polemon ... kakon*) and feuding, the cruel thing! (...). Black Night gave birth to this one as the older of the two; but Zeus, who reigned on high, placed the other on the roots of the earth and amongst men as a much better one. (...) neighbour competes with neighbour for prosperity. This Eris is good (*agathè*) for men. Even potters harbour grudges against potters, carpenters against carpenters, beggars envy beggars and minstrels envy minstrels.⁸

According to Nietzsche the grudge and envy in the last lines – the professional envy of the potters – belongs essentially to Hellenic ethics, which stimulates

⁶ Homer, *Iliad*, XXIV, 24; 54: “Thus Achilles in his fury attempted to disfigure noble Hector. / (...) Let him beware lest we grow angry with him, valiant though he is; for in his fury he disfigures the mute earth.”

⁷ Safranski 2003, 69–70: “Dionysian in general and its bellicose aspect in particular are subject to cultural transformations by means of ritualization and sublimation. (...) There is the danger, however, that Dionysian energy dissipates once it has assumed Apollonian forms. Therefore, Nietzsche concluded, in order to preserve culture it is imperative that its formidable foundation break forth and, like the lava of a volcano, revive the soil to a state of even greater fertility.”

⁸ Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 14–26.

competition. The Greek experiences envy as the action of a benevolent god. At the same time he bows as a mortal being to the jealousy of the heavenly gods by sacrificing the best part of his good fortune.

And this divine envy flares up when it sees a man *without any other competitor, without an opponent*, at the lonely height of fame. He only has the gods near him now – and for that reason he has them against him. But these entice him into an act of hubris, and he collapses under it. (Nietzsche 2000^a, 194) [our italics]

Mimetic rivalry and madness

Unlike Nietzsche we can understand the divine envy rather as a mythicizing representation of the unbearable interhuman hostility. The widespread superstition in the ‘evil eye’ (*in-vidia* in Latin) makes it possible to charge anyone, who is conspicuous and deviates from the norm, with anything that goes wrong in the community. If someone is about to excel others by means of too much virtue or political capacity, he turns indeed into a threat to social equality and harmony: such a person would be “as a god among men”.⁹ Behind the magical evil eye (*malocchio*) of envy the stereotypical accusation of all against one is lurking (THFW 116).¹⁰ “Why serve the gods if *hybris* goes unpunished? Fortunately, *hybris* is always ultimately punished” (JVP 58).

All the time Nietzsche is beating about the bush in his text – as in his own (love) life – when it comes to the ‘enormous’ mimetic desire and the “consuming jealousy”. Mimetic rivalry means: wanting to have and to be like the adored but hated Model/Rival, who has something different, because he is different too, and vice versa.

However, the greater and more eminent a Greek man is, the brighter the flame of ambition to erupt from him, consuming everyone who *runs with him on the same track* (Nietzsche 2000^a, 190) [our italics].

The visionary Nietzsche anticipates the destructive attraction of the mimetic desire going adrift. The ‘meta-physical’ desire of the modern, interindividual

⁹ Aristotle, *Politics* III, 8, 1284 a 6-7; 10-11. – Heracleitus, fr. CXIV (ed. Jones) = DK 22 B 121: “For they banished Hermodorus, the best man of them, saying, ‘We would have none among us who is best; if there be such an one, let him be so elsewhere among other people.’”

¹⁰ We refer by means of sigels to the quoted works by René Girard. DBB: *To Double Business Bound: Essays on Literature, Mimesis, and Anthropology*, 1978. DDN: *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, 1965. JVP: *Job the Victim of his People*, 1987. QC: *Quand ces choses commenceront...* [When these Things Will Begin...], 1994. SG: *The Scapegoat*, 1986. TE: *A Theatre of Envy*, 1991. THFW: *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, 1987. VS: *Violence and the Sacred*, 1988.

subject – fascinated and torn by the irresistible but unreal divinity of the Other – is by definition not directed to, nor restricted by a concrete and tangible object.¹¹

For that reason, the individuals in antiquity were freer, because their aims were nearer and easier to achieve. Modern man, on the other hand, is *crossed everywhere by infinity*, like swift-footed Achilles in the parable of Zeno of Elea: *infinity impedes him*, he cannot even overtake the tortoise (Nietzsche 2000^a, 192) [our italics].

In Nietzsche's romantic perception of the ancient Greek agonal and competitive culture – the contest as “the finest Hellenic principle” (Nietzsche 2000^a, 194) – the violence of mimetic rivalry functions as a magical *pharmakon* in both senses of healing remedy and poison. Dangerous mimetic desire and rivalry can only be cured through good, legitimate mimesis and sacred violence (SF 177). But this homoeopathic¹² charm or *pharmakon*, which depending on the administered dose either cures or causes the disease, hides an invisible *pharmakos* or scapegoat.

Thus the Athenian ostracism is a civilized form of stoning and scapegoat mechanism – “a merciful exorcism of the spirit of jealous hate”.¹³ Legal execution is the ritual imitation of spontaneous violence against a scapegoat. Through the ostracism the Greeks expressed their envy (*phthonos*) without any legal rule or rational motivation, spontaneously and collectively-unanimously (a minimum of 6,000 voters) – “both envy and religious mistrust in regard to one who rises too high, succeeds too well” (Vernant 1978, 491). The accused was charged with nothing but – the transgression of the boundaries (*hubris*) of – his alleged and feared superiority, which evokes the divine revenge on the community.

To Nietzsche in *Homer on Competition* ostracism is a protective measure against the dangers of the monopoly and the exclusiveness of the genius which threaten the mutual competition and the eternal ground of life of the Hellenic state. “The original function of this strange institution is, however, not as a safety valve but as a stimulant: the pre-eminent individual is removed so that

¹¹ DDN 283: “The obstinate search for an obstacle gradually assures the elimination of accessible objects and benevolent mediators.”

¹² VS 287: “The medicine is considered capable of aggravating the symptoms, bringing about a salutary crisis that will lead to recovery.”

¹³ Plutarchus, *Aristides* 7, 2, 6 – Solon, fr. 9, 3-4 = Diogenes Laertius, I, 50, 5-6: “So from proud men comes ruin, and their state / Falls unaware to slavery and a king.” – SG 87: “It does not matter whether the agent is real or not as long as everyone is convinced of his reality and identity.”

a new contest of powers can be awakened” (Nietzsche 2000^a, 191). The expulsion of the unique genius is the necessary condition to save and to cultivate the universal genius. – *Nietzsche contra Wagner* (1888-1889)! – “The literal madness of Nietzsche’s attitude is that, close as he was to recognizing the truth of human culture, he wilfully espoused its lie. He views the rehabilitation of the victim as a futile and destructive rebellion against the iron law of superior strength” (TE 281).

The sacred idol is an admired but feared competitor, an inevitable and insuperable stumbling block which indicates but at the same time obstructs the way to the desired objects and the road to being oneself. The will to power which constantly changes into resentment is mimetic desire which is deadlocked and goes off the rails through the inevitable obstacle of the modelling desire (CS 211), which dispossesses – ‘dis-own-s’ – and alienates the self from itself and the world. In his ‘meta-physical’ hubris Nietzsche tries in vain to embody the numinous Being of the Other. Nietzsche could not but discover the ‘true’ incarnation of Dionysus in his idolized and hated obstacle/model Richard Wagner (THFW 403).¹⁴ “Nothing is more intelligible in the mimetic perspective than that alternating impulse to overthrow and “fuse with” the monstrous idol” (DBB 52).

After the death of God the subject, who yearns for divine autonomy is extradited to the tyranny of the horizontal transcendence – the idol in human shape. “Denial of God does not eliminate transcendency but diverts it from the *au-delà* to the *en-deçà*. The imitation of Christ becomes the imitation of one’s neighbor” (DDN 59). When the inaccessible creator Wagner dies in 1883,¹⁵ Nietzsche – abandoned and devastated – is condemned to abyssal loneliness and despair; he wants to ‘disappear’ himself too.¹⁶ The mimetic double bind

¹⁴ Janz 1978: II 555-556. – Nietzsche in Klossowski 2005, 189: “Dionysus without jealousy: ‘That which I love in you, how could a Theseus love that ...’ (...) ‘One is not jealous when one is God’, said Dionysus, ‘unless it be of gods.’”

¹⁵ Cf. Janz 1978, II 185: “To Nietzsche, here too, only one point of view mattered: there is one who dared to defy the ‘Master’ of Bayreuth, *whom he fought as his rival ever more doggedly – the dead Wagner almost even more than the living one* – and to create an oeuvre contra the mythical poet Wagner.” [our translation and italics]

¹⁶ Nietzsche 1997^a, 1165: “Ich für mein Teil leide abscheulich, wenn ich der Sympathie entbehre; und durch nichts kann es mir z.B. ausgeglichen werden, daß ich in den letzten Jahren der Sympathie Wagners verlustig gegangen bin. Wie oft träume ich von ihm, und immer im Stile unsers damaligen vertraulichen Zusammenseins! – “I for my part suffer horribly when I am deprived of affection. Nothing, for example, can replace Wagner’s, which the past few years have taken away from me. How often I dream of him, and always as he was in the time of our intimacy.” (<http://davemckay.co.uk/philosophy/nietzsche/nietzsche.php?name=nietzsche.letters.1880.01>)

with the inexorable but indispensable rival/model is strikingly formulated in ‘The Magician’ from the fourth part of *Thus spoke Zarathustra* (1885).

Gone! / He himself fled, / My last, my only companion, / My great enemy, / My unknown, / My executioner god! – / – No! / Come back, / With all your torments! / To the last of all lonely ones, / Oh, come back! / All my rivers of tears flow / Their course to you! / And my last heart flames – / *For you* they flicker! / Oh come back, / My unknown god! My pain! / My last – happiness! (Nietzsche 2006, 205-206)

The old path that evil men have walked

At the end of his text about Homer, Nietzsche refers to the “ultimate fate” of the famous general Miltiades as the prototype of a great personality, who *hors concours* and “far beyond every fellow competitor” feels “a base lust for vengeance”. Nietzsche apparently relies on a story by the historian Herodotus about Miltiades the Younger, the unexpected conqueror of the Persians at Marathon (490), “doomed to make an ill end”.¹⁷ After the unequalled triumph at Marathon Miltiades was worshipped in Athens.

In a suggestive scandal story which Herodotus, by his own account, borrowed from the pro-Persian Parians, the people’s hero topples from his pedestal due to a tragic error. The unsuspecting and deceived¹⁸ Miltiades goes on trial charged with treason, shortly after he succumbs to gangrene. The moral of the story, according to Nietzsche, is that the Greeks have never been able to “to bear fame without further competition or fortune at the end of the competition”. As in the example of Miltiades even the most noble Greek states such as Athens and Sparta have executed their own fatal sentence through hubris.

This proves that without envy, jealousy and competitive ambition, the Hellenic state, like Hellenic man, deteriorates. It becomes evil and cruel, it becomes vengeful and godless, in short, it becomes ‘pre-Homeric’ – it then only takes a panicky fright to make it fall and smash it. (Nietzsche 2000^a, 194).

Nietzsche, who despises and condemns the Christian herd instinct, nevertheless seems to share the sacralizing representation of the persecution of the people versus a statesman whose career is eventually broken, only because the latter had started it so well. The one who is put on a pedestal finds himself at the

¹⁷ Herodotus VI, 135, 12-136, 1.

¹⁸ Cf. SG 82: “The victim did indeed do what he is accused of, but he did not do it intentionally. (...) At a critical stage of their evolution, or rather of their interpretation, myths frequently reveal innocent culprits”.

same time on a scaffold. Nietzsche too puts the ill-fated Miltiades on the path of collective blinding – “the ancient trail trodden by the wicked” (Job 22,15).¹⁹ “We have discovered, at the heart of every religion, the same single central event that generates its mythical significance and its ritual acts: the action of a crowd as it turns on someone it adored yesterday, and may adore again tomorrow, and transforms him into a scapegoat in order to secure by his death a period of peace for the community” (JVP 160).

The aristocratic yes-saying, which is no longer inhibited by the Jewish-Christian slave morality, implies to Nietzsche the affirmation of pain and suffering, destruction and death, violence and sacrifice. Already in 1873 Nietzsche writes that the individuals should subordinate themselves to the well-being of the most superior ones – the creative minds. Torn by resentment and prey to impotent fantasies of destruction, the later Nietzsche will hold the individual’s death essential for the survival of the very best in the human race.

Through Christianity, the individual was made so important, so absolute, that he could no longer be sacrificed: but the species endures only through human sacrifice (...). Genuine charity demands sacrifice for the good of the species – it is hard, it is full of self-overcoming, because it needs human sacrifice. And this pseudo humaneness called Christianity wants it established that no one should be sacrificed (Nietzsche 1967, 142).²⁰

Ethos and autoimmunity

In the second part of our contribution, Nietzsche’s attitude of resentment is put – by a seemingly roundabout way – in a wider cultural-psychological and ‘anthropo-ethical’ context. The starting point is the trifunctional hypothesis of the French comparatist Georges Dumézil (1898-1986), who recognizes a tripartite basic pattern in the mythical-epic and mental universe of the Indo-European culture. Three functions typically belonging to three different categories ensure the survival and continuation of the community: (1) sacral and

¹⁹ JVP 15; 18; 27: “The violent downfall of the wicked is alive in everyone’s memory. These reversals leave too deep an impression to be forgotten, and their stereotypical character makes them easy to remember. (...) *Vox populi, vox dei*. As in Greek tragedy, the rise and fall of great men constitutes a truly sacred *mystery* and its conclusion is the part most appreciated. Although it never changes, it is always anticipated with great impatience. (...) Whenever opinion turns against a leader formerly elevated by the people’s favour, the community automatically attributes the change to the intervention of an absolute Justice. Thus a whole mythology of divine vengeance unfolds”.

²⁰ Cf. Dostoevsky 2000, 222: “<Raskolnikov> I simply hinted that an ‘extraordinary’ man has the right... that is not an official right, but an inner right to decide in his own conscience to overstep... certain obstacles, and only in case it is essential for the practical fulfilment of his idea (sometimes, perhaps, of benefit to the whole of humanity).”

juridical sovereignty (= priests); (2) physical strength (= warriors); (3) (re) productivity (= farmers and craftsmen). The hierarchy of the three functions is obvious in Plato's *Republic*. The ideal state consists of three different orders and classes: (1) kings-philosophers (= rulers); (2) soldiers (= auxiliaries); (3) farmers and craftsmen (= producers). The three parts of the soul and the corresponding cardinal virtues according to Plato reflect the same tripartite division: (1) reason (*logistikon*) and wisdom (*sophia*); (2) fighting spirit (*thumoeides*) and bravery (*andreia*); (3) desire (*epithumètikon*) and self-control (*egkrateia*).

At least formally comparable is the ternary structure of Aristotle's rhetoric 'patho-etho-logy' (Van Coillie 2008, 93-97) – the triad of the technical means of persuasion (*pisteis entechnoi*). The three interactive sources of rhetoric are in accordance with the order of elaboration in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (bk II): (3) the emotion of the audience (= *pathos*), (2) the speaker's moral personality (= *èthos*) and (1) the argumentation (= *logos*). Predominant is the character (*èthos*) – the favourable and reliable self-image explicitly or implicitly established by the speaker. Aristotle's analysis of the speaker's *èthos* reveals "what a person can and should mean for another" (IJsseling 1976, 33).

The greatest virtues are necessarily those which are *most useful to others*, if virtue is the faculty of conferring benefits. For this reason justice and courage are the most esteemed.²¹ [our italics]

(re)productivity	physical strength	sovereignty
(farmers – craftsmen)	(warriors)	(priests)
farmers and craftsmen	soldiers	kings-philosophers
desire (<i>epithumètikon</i>)	fighting spirit (<i>thumoeides</i>)	reason (<i>logistikon</i>)
self-control (<i>egkrateia</i>)	bravery (<i>andreia</i>)	wisdom (<i>sophia</i>)
pathos	èthos	logos

²¹ Aristotle, *The "Art" of Rhetoric* I, 9, 1366 b 3-6. – In Nietzsche's view bravery and justice, respectively, are accounted as the most important virtues in the first and the second era of higher humanity. Nietzsche, *Human all too Human*, II, 'The Wanderer and his Shadow' (§64): "The noblest virtue. – In the first era of higher humanity bravery (*Tapferkeit*) is accounted the noblest of the virtues, in the second justice (*Gerechtigkeit*), in the third moderation (*Mässigung*), in the fourth wisdom (*Weisheit*). In which era do we live? In which do you live?" (trans. Van Tongeren 2002, 5)

The second function in Dumézil's hypothesis thus concerns the physical courage and the moral power (of persuasion). The 'ethical' resilience – “the human instinct for *weapons and war*” in Nietzsche's offensive perception of courage²² – defends itself against external aggression, internal tensions, and obstacles so as to safeguard the collective or individual identity and integrity. Psychosomatically translated in the words of Zarathustra (Nietzsche 1978, 157): “But there is something in me that I call courage; that has so far slain my every discouragement.” *Courage*, etymologically derived from *cor*: ‘heart’ in Latin, suggests “strength in overcoming fear and carrying on against difficulties” (Merriam-Webster).²³ The Dutch substantive *weerbaarheid*: ‘ability to defend’, formed after the verb *weren*: ‘to resist’, is – as *sich wehren (gegen)* (German): ‘to defend (against)’ – related to *rhusthai* (Greek): ‘to protect, guard’, *werian* (Old English): ‘to defend, protect’ and *wear* (English) with intransitive meaning: ‘to endure use; to retain quality or vitality’.

Moral resilience is in patho-*etho*-logical perspective the capacity to resist the many forms and faces of violence, evil, and suffering. Odysseus, the epic hero who in Homer gradually becomes human, is the prototype of cunning intelligence (*mètis*), with patience and endurance as the main components of the ‘second function’ in the tripartite ideology of the Indo-Europeans.²⁴

Endure, my heart; a worse thing even than this you once endured on that day when the Cyclops, irresistible in strength, devoured my stalwart comrades; but you endured until your wit (*mètis*) got you out of the cave where you thought to die. So he spoke, chiding the heart in his breast, and for him in utter obedience his heart remained sternly enduring; but he himself lay tossing this way and that.²⁵

The cunning survivor Odysseus incarnates a crucial transformation – the clever manipulation – of the sacrificial violence as a way out of a desperate situation. But literary criticism speaks remarkably little of the act of revenge at the end of the *Odyssey*. The detailed, graphic description of the gruesome slaughtering of the one hundred suitors and pretenders to the throne by Odysseus in the

²² Nietzsche 2005, 80. – Nietzsche 2006, 125: “Courage after all is the best slayer – courage that *attacks*: for in every attack there is sounding brass.”

²³ Nietzsche 2003, §277: “Courage as cold valorousness and intrepidity, and courage as hotheaded, half-blind bravery – both are called by the same name!”

²⁴ Cf. Nietzsche 1968, 183: “One cannot have too much respect for man when one sees how well he understands how to fight his way through, to endure, to turn circumstances to his own use, to overthrow his adversaries (...). The spiritual poverty and lack of inventiveness of this inventive and resourceful animal are terrible.”

²⁵ Homer, *Odyssey*, 20, 18-24.

palace at Ithaca takes the bigger part of the twenty-second book, though. Ulysses' famous cunning intelligence (*mètis*) has totally changed into furious sacrificial violence (*bia*).

The vital but vulnerable *ethos* – the courage to act and to withstand obstruction or frustration – is, as already stated, in a delicate and precarious intermediary position. The strength of character or moral resilience (*ethos*) is, in the Platonic image of man, literally and figuratively stuck between desire (*pathos*) and reason (*logos*) – between Dionysus and Apollo. In Freud's trichotomy of the psychic apparatus the *ego* as mediator is also exposed to the double pressure of the *id* – the drives and impulses – on the one hand, and of the *superego* – the prohibitions and moral standards – on the other hand.

The biography of Nietzsche may probably be read from the philosopher's inability to defend himself against his hypersensitive 'first nature' of pity and resentment. The quest toward a 'second nature' of playful and creative self-overcoming eventually results in the traumatic experience and the destructive representation of a universally hostile world, and of life itself as the invincible obstacle for the unbridled will to power. In vain Nietzsche tries to conquer the resistance of the heart against his cold, cruel and amoral viewpoint (Safranski 2003, 216).

A proper physio-psychology has to contend with unconscious antagonism in the heart of the investigator, it has "the heart" against it (Nietzsche 1967, §23).

The conflict between his own – mimetic – *pathos* and the ruthless *logos* of his heroic and imperious way of thinking leads Nietzsche literally to 'patho-logical' madness.

In the Preface to *The Case of Wagner* (1888) Nietzsche claims that he, unlike his model/rival Wagner, resisted as a philosopher the contemporary decadence and negation of life. But in his lonely resistance and sacrificial fight against the Other, Nietzsche is – as 'his own executioner' (Safranski) – at the same time warrior and battlefield (Van de Wiele & De Bleeckere 1982, 88). His mental illness is symptomatic of an autoimmune crisis – the spontaneous self-destruction of the defence mechanisms which protect the organism against aggression from outside. "There is no immunity without autoimmunity, which is the self-destruction of one's own defences" (Derrida, in Borradori 2003, 159).

The notion of autoimmunity deconstructs the 'pathos of distance', which as an oxymoron frequently turns up in Nietzsche's later work.

'Equality' (a certain factual increase in similarity that the theory of 'equal rights' only gives expression to) essentially belongs to decline: the rift between people, between

classes, the myriad number of types, the will to be yourself, to stand out, what I call the *pathos of distance*, is characteristic of every *strong* age (Nietzsche 2005, §37).²⁶

The illusion of difference – the denial of the interindividual intrigue and the dividing identity – between Oneself and the Other is the blind spot of Nietzsche’s madness.²⁷ Like nobody else, the lucid philosopher Nietzsche lives through what he sees happening all around him in his own time, but at the same time he fails to see – and he hardly has any recourse against – what he goes through in his obsession with Wagner, who embodies the unbearable of the Other. The link between what touches Nietzsche deeply and what he thinks about himself, the outside world, and others is disconnected. The *ethos* as intermediary element and buffer between emotion (*pathos*) and reason (*logos*) is annulled in a fatal way. Paraphrasing Nietzsche expert Rüdiger Safranski (1993), we may raise the question what dose of – mimetic – truth do philosophers actually tolerate? “There is no purely ‘intellectual’ process that can arrive at true knowledge because the very detachment of the person who contemplates the warring brothers from the heights of his wisdom is an illusion. It may never confront that challenge and remain intact in its vanity and pride, but that will only result in sterility” (THFW 277).

In a mimetic-dramatic anthropology the *ethos* – the strength of character and moral resilience – acquires a pre-eminently social and relational meaning. The middle part of the soul – “the middle principle of high-spirited emulation” – is in Plato’s description of the degeneration of the human types and political regimes unmistakably seen from the perspective of mimetic comparison, the struggle for honour and recognition, and social prestige. “Then, as each keeps an envious eye on his neighbour, their rivalry infects the great mass of them.”²⁸ Intuitively, Plato anticipates the modern disease of the internally mediated desire – the mimetic sickness of antagonistic identity, mutual non-recognition

²⁶ Safranski 2002, 166: “Nietzsche chose to leave aside the mystery of being, though the more limited mystery of the social sphere continued to preoccupy him. He was highly susceptible to it and, for this very reason, sought to be “lifted above” it to a safe distance.” – The pathos of distance and difference implies a “relationship of violence, desire, and divinity” (VS 151). Nietzsche 1968, 129: “Pride, pathos of distance, great responsibility, exuberance, splendid animality, the instincts that delight in war and conquest, the deification of passion, of revenge, of cunning, of anger, of voluptuousness, of adventure, of knowledge”.

²⁷ Gardner 1998, 37: “Yet “recognition,” I suggest, is the problem, not the solution, of history; it is the equality or “reciprocity” of recognition that catalyzes the violence of modern life; it is precisely the “mediation” of desire by the recognitive process that intensifies its propensity for conflict and disorder.”

²⁸ Plato, *The Republic*, VIII, 550 b 6; 550 e 1-2.

and psychosocial resentment. “What has come about with the modern age is not the need for recognition but the conditions in which the attempt to be recognized can fail” (Taylor 1995, 231).

The need of recognition of the *homo aequalis* is at stake in a – ‘meta-physical’ – mimetic war of attrition. According to Nietzsche in *Homer on Competition*, ambition in ancient Athens was “not a boundless and indeterminate ambition like most modern ambition” (Nietzsche 2000^a, 192). When the boundaries and differences between people become blurred and disappear in a world of universal pursuit of equality, underground feelings of envy, hatred and resentment prevail as “thwarted and traumatized desire” (Girard 1976, 1174). “Whoever is dissatisfied with himself is continually ready for revenge, and we others will be his victims” (Nietzsche 1973, §290). An extract from *Ecce Homo* (1888) strikingly illustrates the ‘patho-logy’ – knowledge (*logos*) alienated from desire (*pathos*) – of the resentment which paralyzes every fibre of the moral resistance (*ethos*) in relation to the Other.

Freedom from *ressentiment*, lucidity about *ressentiment* – who knows how much I ultimately have to thank my long sickness for these as well! The problem is not exactly a simple one: you need to have experienced it out of strength and out of weakness. If there are any drawbacks to being sick and weak, it is that these states wear down the true instinct for healing, which is the human instinct for *weapons and war*. You do not know how to get rid of anything, you do not know how to get over anything, you do not know how to push anything back, – everything hurts. People and things become obtrusive, events cut too deep, memory is a festering wound. Sickness is itself a kind of *ressentiment*. – The sick person has only one great remedy for this – I call it *Russian fatalism*, the fatalism without revolt that you find when a military campaign becomes too difficult and the Russian soldier finally lies down in the snow. Not taking anything else on or in, – not reacting any more (Nietzsche 2005, 80-81).

Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) dies in the same year as Nietzsche. From jail the fallen writer reports on his descent into hell and catharsis in a long letter, which is published only posthumously under the title *De Profundis*.

What the paradox was to me in the sphere of thought, perversity became to me in the sphere of passion. Desire, at the end, was a malady, or a madness, or both. (...) I ceased to be the lord over myself. I was no longer the captain of my soul, and did not know it (Wilde 1969, 47).

Nietzsche’s choice of *pathos* and the ‘perversion’ of Dionysus as a promise of life and divine Being impedes an authentic Christian ‘conversion’ – “the ‘Kingdom of Heaven’ in the heart” (Nietzsche 1967, 98). For Nietzsche there is nothing left but the venture “to take a look into the wilderness of bitterest and most superfluous agonies of soul”, and the paralyzed strength to throw

himself into the abyss of madness. To Oscar Wilde 'metaphysical' desire turns out to be a mental disorder. To Nietzsche madness turns into a self-destructive desire.

Ah, give me madness, you heavenly powers! Madness, that I may at last believe in myself! (Nietzsche 2003, §14)

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