Love of Mankind: The Genealogy of Ressentiment and Achilles’ Heel of Amour-Propre

Let strife and rancour
perish from the lives of gods and men,
with anger that envenoms even the wise
and is far sweeter than slow-dripping honey,
clouding the hearts of men like smoke; (18, 105-110)
-Homer's Achilles, The Iliad

From the trunk of that tree of vengefulness and hatred, Jewish hatred—
the profoundest and sublimest kind of hatred, capable of creating ideals
and reversing values, the like of which has never existed on earth before—
there grew something equally incomparable, a new love, the profoundest
and sublimest kind of love—and from what other trunk could it have grown?
-Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morals

I.

In his prescient work Ressentiment, Max Scheler contends that Nietzsche “wrongly equated the
Christian idea of love with a completely different idea which has quite another historical and
psychological origin: the idea and movement of modern universal love of man, 'humanitarianism,' 'love
of man kind,' or more plastically, 'love toward every member of the human race.'”i Scheler makes a
crucial distinction: whereas Christian love demands a definite sacrifice, humanitarian love demands
contingent “sacrifice” which is ultimately aimed at enhancing the degree of pleasure experienced in a
given society. The humanitarian movement is fundamentally a ressentiment phenomenon, a fact that is
evident “from the very fact that this socio-historical emotion is by no means based on a spontaneous
and original affirmation of positive values, but on a protest, a counter-impulse (hatred, envy revenge).”ii
Mankind is more of a “trump card” against a hated thing than an object of love: “Above all, this love of
mankind is the expression of a repressed rejection, of a counter-impulse against God.”iii

Most of Dostoevsky's novels probe the phenomenon of ressentiment with haunting acuity and
dramatization, yet perhaps none of his works other than the largely neglected The Adolescent [A Raw
Youth] so directly explores, in novelistic fashion, the interrelationship of ressentiment and humanitarian
love. At the onset of Part II the protagonist Arkady's father Versilov brings up the “Geneva ideas” which “underlie today's civilization” and which are founded upon the possibility of “virtue without Christ.”iv In a somewhat contradictory, but frank and perceptive moment, he confesses that humans are “vile” but one can do good on their behalf by “clenching your feelings, holding your nose, and shutting your eyes (this last is necessary). Endure evil from them, not getting angry with them if possible, 'remembering that you, too, are a human being.' holding your nose and shutting your eyes.”v As he clarifies in a startling passage: “To love one's neighbor and not despise him is impossible. In my opinion, man is created with a physical inability to love his neighbor. There's some mistake in words here, from the very beginning, and 'love for mankind' should be understood as just for that mankind which you yourself have created in your soul (in other words, you've created your own self and the love for yourself), and which therefore will never exist in reality.”vi Versilov's inability to “break through emotionally to others” even in acts that are objectively moral grows out of the principle of “doing good without Christ.” As Nicholas Rzhevsky notes:

> The crucial ideological point is the concept that man "invents himself to love himself," for this moral-psychological gesture, Versilov suggests, is what is real while abstractions on the order of "mankind" never "really existed." The argument rests on self-involvement and self-imposed morality in which there are no transcendent objects such as God or merger with "man-kind,"—the process of love symbolized by Christ—but only the vision of man standing completely alone and shaping himself into a superior being.vii

On the one hand, Rzhevsky enunciates the “self-imposed” character of this morality, which Pierre Manent, in his A World Beyond Politics? traces to Kant: “If for Thomas Aquinas human dignity consists in freely obeying the natural and divine law, for Kant it consists in obeying the law that human beings give to themselves.”viii According to the Christian comprehension of human beings, any dignity that exists comes as given, as gift, from God, for only God is capable of granting them power to follow their own counsel. For Kant, “the difference is both radical and subtle, to be human is a dignity.”ix
Nevertheless, though some of Versilov's sentiments share a certain fraternity with Kant, he cannot embrace life according to nothing more than a Kantian “respect” for human “dignity,” for he preserves a pseudo-mystical picture of mankind which, he admits, he would “not be able to live without. . .”

During a crucial confession to Arkady, Versilov acknowledges his initial hesitation before the possibility of man living without God. And yet, he admits, as a pensive smile passes over his face, he “imagines to [himself]” that after the initial mudslinging and cursing that follow the death of God, “a calm has come, and people are left alone, as they wished: they great former idea,” their source of nourishment and warmth, has left them, and it seems as though the days of mankind are at their end:

> And people suddenly realized that they remained quite alone, and at once felt a great orphanancy. My dear boy, I've never been able to imagine people ungrateful and grown stupid. The orphaned people would at once begin pressing together more closely and lovingly; they would hold hands, understanding that they alone were now everything for each other. The great idea of immortality would disappear and would have to be replaced; and all the great abundance of the former love for the one who was himself immortality, would be turned in all of them to nature, to the world, to people, to every blade of grass. They would love the earth and life irrepressibly and in the measure to which they gradually became aware of their transient and finite state, and it would be with a special love now, not as formerly...They would wake up and hasten to kiss each other, hurrying to love, conscious that the days were short, and that that was all they had left. They would work for each other, and each would give all he had to everyone, and would be happy in that alone. Every child would know and feel that each person on earth was like a father and mother to him. 'Tomorrow may be my last day,' each of them would think, looking at the setting sun, 'but all the same, though I die, they will all remain, and their children after them'—and this thought that they would remain, loving and trembling for each other in the same way, would replace the thought of a meeting beyond the grave. Oh, they would hasten to love, in order to extinguish the great sadness in their hearts. They would be proud and brave for themselves, but would become timorous for one another. Each would tremble for the life and happiness of each. They would become tender to each other and would not be ashamed of it, as now, and would caress each other like children. Meeting each other, they would exchange deep and meaningful looks, and there would be love and sadness in their eyes.”

> Although Versilov’s fantastic vision of humanitarian love lacks a step by step process by which one could consciously bring it about, although it starts in the aftermath, and in spite of the fact that he admits that this dream will never exist in reality, is more realistic than the many inextricably utopian
formulas propounded in the name of that same love of humanity. Further, the realism of humanism, its achievability, is evident in that it is rooted in a ressentiment, “by no means based on a spontaneous and original affirmation of positive values, but on a protest, a counter-impulse (hatred, evny revenge)” that is founded upon self-love.\textsuperscript{xii} Remember that for Versilov “'love for mankind' should be understood as just for that mankind which you yourself have created in your soul (in other words, you've created your own self and the love for yourself), and which therefore will never exist in reality.”\textsuperscript{xiii} How are we to hold together Versilov's double vision—of an atheistic world wherein love for mankind reigns, and a love of self founded on the premise that 'love for mankind' will never exist \textit{in reality}? Could it be that what we call “love for mankind” is in actuality—through an almost unconscious circuitry—love for oneself?

To honor this line of inquiry it is necessary that we first return to Scheler's analysis of humanitarianism. August Comte, that leading spokesperson of modern humanitarianism and inventor of the term “altruism” takes offense at Christ's command that one “Love God and thy neighbor as thyself.” Christianity, he claims, nourishes egotistic impulses in that it commands one to care for her own salvation. Comte therefore wants to replace this ancient precept by a “new positivistic commandment: 'Love thy neighbor \textit{more} than thyself.'” Scheler insists that Comte “fails to note that it is incomprehensible why our fellow man should have a right to benefaction—since love, for Comte, has value only as a 'cause' for good deeds—for the silliest of reasons: simply because he is the 'other': If I myself am not worthy of love, why should the 'other' be.”\textsuperscript{xiv} Mincing no words, Scheler goes on to proclaim that “Comte ignores [the fact that] his tenet is either a hyperbolical pathetic phrase or a nihilistic demand which destroys all vitality and indeed decomposes any structure of being!”\textsuperscript{xv} The sensuous, undiscriminating “sympathy for the 'other'”—and mainly for his 'suffering'—merely because he is not oneself is a highly leveling and decomposing principle for human life, despite its express
purpose of 'strengthening life.'" This decline in the value of life, this “modern humanitarianism”
grants to love a merely technical value, as its aim does not stretch beyond 'improvement' of the general
welfare. This transvaluation of love, not Christian love, is truly a slave revolt in morality, “Not a revolt
of the slaves, but of the slavish values.” That being said, in concrete historical practice modern
humanitarian love and Christian love are now tangled together, a fact that explains Nietzsche's mistake.

In “The Empire of Morality,” Pierre Manent takes up the task of further distinguishing the
different version of humanitarianism and Christian love of neighbor. Christian love is never aimed at
the neighbor in-and-of-herself, but at the Imago Dei that is found in every human being. “Nietzsche,
though furiously anti-Christian, nonetheless says that to love the neighbor for the love of God is the
most refined moral sentiment attained by human beings.” Manent helps us distinguish
humanitarianism from Christian love in part through a linguistic analysis, for the foundation of
humanitarianism is not caritas as much as it is compassion, or pity, in the Rousseauean sense. The
capacity for pity is universal because all human beings have a body that is subject to the strong
possibility of suffering; human beings are objects of suffering. Further, because of the universality of
suffering, human beings are probably subjects of suffering:

Physical suffering is immediately grasped or imagined. One sympathizes with a toothache,
a nervous colic, and two days without eating or drinking more easily than with a moral
humiliation, an intellectual preoccupation, or a spiritual anguish. In short, because
physical pity is rooted in the senses, we communicate immediately with the other,
without the mediation of complex ideas. Pity can be relied on to bind people because
it is a sentiment, an affect, or a disposition that does not demand any moral
transformation or transcendence of self.

The visible suffering of an “other” says to me, “You too could undergo this,” and therefore I
make an effort to assuage his suffering. But, in fact, I do not in truth experience this suffering that I
perceive so vividly. “I know well that I do not effectively experience it and so I rejoice that I am
exempt from it. I experience the pleasure of not suffering. Therefore, there is nothing idealistic or
utopian in pity as the foundation of social morality." For Rousseau, if modern mankind is to transcend the isolation and individualism that comprise its ethos and essence, she must cultivate compassion. Once again, we return to the center of this analysis, and at last see how near Versilov's "Geneva ideas," his "virtue without Christ" are to those of Rousseau, that man from Geneva: 'love for mankind' should be understood as just for that mankind which you yourself have created in your soul (in other words, you've created your own self and the love for yourself), and which therefore will never exist in reality. What at first seems self-sacrificial is revealed as self-love. As Manent maintains, altruistic pity is morally economical, demanding very little from mankind: "there is nothing in pity that is heroic, since its wellspring is the selfishness of each person. Rousseau was giving us the blueprint that has effectively prevailed in liberal democratic society."

The other, whom Comte commanded that we love more than our own selves, is the pitiable other, pitiable to the extent that she become a self that I have created in order to experience the pleasure of pitying. For the humanitarian logic is the logic of compassion, and compassion "reduced to itself has two effects. The first is the desire to to come to the aid of the suffering and even to risk 'dying for Pristina'; but the second is altogether different, and in the contrary. By turning the attention toward the suffering body, compassion quickens in each of us the desire not to suffer and not to die."

Standing alone at the center of the modern humanitarian empire, compassion offers no satisfactory order, law, or aims. Certainly, in Versilov's rendering, these humanitarians "Hasten to love, in order to extinguish the great sadness in their hearts," to, in a slightly different manner than Manent describes, "experience the pleasure of not suffering." If we gaze again at the origin of Versilov's portrait, we witness that all of the love is driven by people's experience that they are "left alone, as they wished: the great former idea has left them," and all at once the people suddenly feel a "great orphancy, which drives them to begin "pressing together more closely and lovingly." Scheler shows that this
“Lovingly’ stooping to man as a natural being” is the “second step” after the phenomenon of ressentiment against “God,” against the symbolic concentration of all positive values. “Man is loved because his pain, his ills and sufferings in themselves form a gladly accepted objection against God's 'wise and benevolent rule.' Wherever Scheler finds evidence of this feeling, he notes, he also discerns a secret delight that the divine lordship can be challenged.

Because the roots of humanitarian compassion lie in ressentiment, because it is first and foremost a protest against the divine and natural laws, against the mandate that one should love the Imago Dei in one's fellow man, it “becomes primarily directed at the lowest, the animal aspects of human nature, those qualities which 'all' men have in common.” We can now configure a common thread of ressentiment tying Versilov, who depicts humanitarian “love” as extending to nature (“they would look at nature with new eyes, the eyes with which a lover looks at his beloved”), to Rousseau. For Rousseau pity or compassion, unlike the caritas of Christianity, is freed from philosophical or religious doctrines; it cannot lead to separatism. And yet, Manent observes, “the physical pity that Rousseau preaches certainly preserves humanity, since humanity is partly animal, but it tends to weaken the consciousness and sentiment of what is specifically human.”

II.

We find ourselves face to face with the aporia of humanitarian “love”/compassion/pity. Who can in good faith dream Versilov's dream? What sober soul can clamor with the reactionary chatter for a return to some Romanticized Christendom? Remember Scheler's insistence that though Nietzsche correctly diagnosed ressentiment as the major character trait of modern humanitarian man, he did violence by laying the blame at Christ's beatitudes. Perhaps we can follow Nietzsche's impulse to turn toward the pre-Socratic Greeks, particularly Homer, in an attempt to locate the forces and framework of a world freed from ressentiment, even as his idealization of Greek vitality, of the Greeks as human
beings who countenanced the chaotic, cruel, and irrational world while simultaneously lovingly affirming “the infinite primordial joy of existence” was mistaken (qtd. in Ahrensdorf 773).

In *Genealogy of Morals* Nietzsche puts forth his portrait of the “noble” or “Greek” man: “Such a man shakes off with a single shrug much vermin that eats deep into others; here alone genuine 'love of one's enemies' is possible—supposing it to be possible at all on earth. How much reverence has a noble man for his enemies!—and such reverence is a bridge to love.” Unlike the man of *ressentiment*, who moralizes his weakness into a protective value system and subsequently regards the enemy as “the evil enemy,” the noble man can endure only that enemy “in whom there is nothing to despise and very much to honor.”

Nietzsche establishes *ressentiment*, crowning fruit of Judeo-Christian morality, as opposed to the Greek nobility. He argues that unlike the Christian, who claims to seek not retaliation but “the triumph of justice,” the “victory of God, of the just God,” the Greek relishes and holds in high regard the hope of revenge, the “intoxication of sweet revenge ('sweeter than honey,' Homer called it).”

And yet, as Henry Staten makes clear, “Nothing could be more indicative of the idealizing falsification of the idea of the 'noble Greek' in which Nietzsche engages, than his attendant quotation of Homer as an antithesis to the dishonest and therefore poisonous vengefulness of the slave mentality.” Nietzsche crystallizes his idealization of Homeric “Greekness” and description of pessimistic Christianity in the following passage:

Let me declare expressly that in the days when mankind was not yet ashamed of its cruelty, life on earth was more cheerful than it is now that pessimists exist. The darkening of the sky above mankind has deepened in step with the increase of man's feeling of shame at man...On his way to becoming an 'angel'... man has evolved that queasy stomach and coated tongue through which...the joy and innocence of the animal has become repugnant to him...Today, when suffering is always brought forward as the principal argument against existence...one does well to recall the ages in which the opposite opinion prevailed because men were unwilling to refrain from making men suffer and saw it as an enchantment of the first order, a genuine seduction to life...It is certain, at any rate, that the Greeks still knew
of no tastier spice to offer their gods...than the pleasures of cruelty.”

But does Nietzsche not profoundly misread Homer's presentation of these tastiest spices, of cruelty's pleasures, this “intoxication of sweet revenge (—‘sweeter than honey’ Homer called it)”? For, as Staten illuminates, the very phrase “sweeter than honey,” located near the end of *The Iliad* (in book 18) is tied not to the satisfaction of unleashed vengefulness, but, rather the dripping poison of a vengeful anger that is never satisfied and ends in the destruction of Achilles. Mourning the death of Patroclus at the hands of Hector, Achilles admits that his impotence, his dwelling apart in his tent, is powerful proof that he has been poisoned by *ressentiment*:

Here I sat/
my weight a useless burden to the earth,
and I am one who has no peer in war
among Achaeans—though in council
there are wiser. Ai! Let strife and rancour
perish from the lives of gods and men,
with anger that envenoms even the wise
and is far sweeter than slow-dripping honey,
clouding the hearts of men like smoke

Nietzsche's nostalgic account of ancient heroism falsifies the very heart of Homer's poem, articulated at its genesis: “Anger be now your song, immortal one,/ Achilles' anger, doomed and ruinous, that caused the Achaeans loss on bitter loss/ and crowded brave souls into the undergloom,/ leaving so many dead men—carrion/ for dogs and birds.” Scheler describes *ressentiment* as a “self-poisoning of the mind which has quite definite consequences. It is a lasting mental attitude, caused by the systematic repression of certain emotions and affects which, as such, are normal components of human nature. Their repression leads to the constant tendency to indulge in certain kinds of value delusions and corresponding value judgments.” More than any other emotions, the *ressentiment* phenomenon is connected to hatred, revenge, malice, envy, spite, and the impulse to detract.

The quarrel is infamous. Agamemnon declares that, as the gods demand Chryseis, his war-prize,
he will in turn call for Briseis, Achilles’ own war-prize. Indeed, countenancing Achilles he says that he will call for Briseis at his hut, “and take her, flower of young girls that she is, your prize, to show you here and now who is the stronger and make the next man sick at heart—if any think of claiming equal place with me.”

What happens next is of utmost importance for our investigation. We are told that a “pain like grief weighed on the son of Peleus, and in his shaggy chest this way and that the passion of his heart ran: should he draw longsword from his hip, stand off the rest, and kill in single combat the great son of Atreus or hold his rage in check and give it time?”

Athena appears, visible to no one but Achilles, and in response to his word: “this time, and soon, he pays for his behaviour with blood,” the grey-eyed goddess tells him “It was to check this killing rage I came from heaven, if you will listen... break off this combat stay your hand upon the sword hilt. Let him have a lashing with words, instead: tell him how things will be.”

Achilles obeys, noting that when immortals speak, man complies, “though his heart burst.”

Certainly he conducts his lashing with words, calling Agamemnon a “Sack of wine” with “cur's eyes” and an “antelope heart,” and telling him that he will suffer remorse for this dishonor.

Achilles may vent his spleen, but this opening of the valve of his mouth is no real revenge, no catharsis for the rage stirred by his suffering.

In Genealogy of Morals Nietzsche himself observes that “neither for the Christian, who has interpreted a whole mysterious machinery of salvation into suffering, nor for the naïve man of more ancient times, who understood all suffering in relation to the spectator of it or the causer of it, was there any such thing as senseless suffering.” In order to abolish undetected, unwitnessed suffering, and furthermore to deny it, man was compelled to invent gods, which allowed life to “work the trick which it has always known how to work, that of justifying itself, of justifying its 'evil'.”

The above instance from The Iliad illustrates the insufficiency of Nietzsche’s analysis. Athena’s appearance and instruction justifies not Achilles’ evil or his embrace of “life-forces,” but his
ressentiment. She gives his mind-poisoning divine sanction, which represses his rage absolutely, and which gives birth to various value-delusions. I would like to propose that Achilles (or, from another angle, Homer) invents this visit from Athena, and in so doing we see that ressentiment, rather than being the crowning “virtue” of a Christian slave morality, or even exclusively the root of modern humanitarian love, transforms slavishness into virtuous submission in the oldest poem known to the Western world. But The Iliad does not glorify in Achille's resentful wrath. Rather, as Staten postulates, “we recognize in Homer's story of Achilles both levels of the economics of ressentiment described by Nietzsche, the empirical level at which Achilles suffers an actual injury for which he demands compensation and, behind this, the transcendental level at which the injury of time—Achille's death sentence, sealed at birth” is ultimately the cause of his resentfulness.” xlvi As accurate as Staten's reading is, we need to reiterate the importance of Athena's sanctioning. For her command, from the vantage point of our allegation against the Achilles-Athena alliance, means that the invention of the Greek god's mandate against a vengeance which would have assuaged a ruinous wrath precedes what Nietzsche envisions as the “invention” of the Christian God who feeds the slave revolt.

But the affinity between The Iliad and the Gospels as texts tied to ressentiment does not end here; it is precisely the further affinities that will allow us to war with Nietzsche's allegations. We must return to Nietzsche's contention that the roots of ressentiment, found in Jewish hatred, find their

From the trunk of that tree of vengefulness and hatred, Jewish hatred—the profoundest and sublimest kind of hatred, capable of creating ideals and reversing values, the like of which has never existed on earth before—there grew something equally incomparable, a new love, the profoundest and sublimest kind of love—and from what other trunk could it have grown?...This Jesus of Nazareth, as the living Gospel of Love, this “Savior” who brought bliss and victory to the poor, the sick, the sinners—did he not represent seduction in its most sinister and most irresistible form? xlvii

If this be so, if Christ's Love comes not as the antithesis of, but as the crown of “Jewish” hatred,
then it simultaneously serves as the crown of Greek hatred. For, as Simone Weil sees lucidly in her

“The Iliad, Or the Poem of Force”:

But the purest triumph of love, the crowning grace of war, is the friendship that floods
the hearts of mortal enemies. Before it a murdered son or a murdered friend no longer
cries out for vengeance. Before it—even more miraculous—the distance between
benefactor and suppliant, between victor and vanquished, shrinks to nothing:

*But when thirst and hunger had been appeased,/ The Dardanian Priam fell to
admiring Achilles./ How tall he was, and handsome; he had the face of a god;
And in his turn Dardanian Priam was admired by/ Achilles./ Who watched his
handsome face and listened to his words. And when they were satisfied with
contemplation of each other...”*

How can we fail to find here the same spiritual force that allowed the “Greeks, generally
speaking, to avoid self-deception. The rewards of this were great; they discovered how to achieve in all
their acts the greatest lucidity, purity, and simplicity,” fruits of a spiritual force that, for Weil, is

“transmitted from *The Iliad* to the Gospels by way of the tragic poets.”*

Whether there is textual or anthropological evidence for this spiritual transference is, for this present examination, inconsequential.

It is enough that forgiveness, and love of enemy, emerge as more than reactions of slaves—as so much
more than the twisted sublimation of *ressentiment.*

In “Priam and Achilles Break Bread,” Rachel Bespaloff remarks on the majestic moment when
Priam visits Achille's to reclaim his son's dead body. Priam exhorts Achilles to remember his own
father “and take pity on me. I am far more pitiable than he, for I have endured what no other mortal on
ever has, to put to my mouth the hand of a man who has killed my sons.”*

Bespaloff asserts that this
speech lacks all vehemence, that this absurd errand he shoulders has nothing base about it, as it is

“equal to the love that sustains him.”*

Suddenly we see Achilles emerging as Achilles' victim, at least
as much as Priam's sons were. Achilles the conqueror is “struck dumb; he seems to come to himself and
be cured of his frenzy”; “Hatred is disconcerted and relents. The two adversaries can exchange looks
without seeing each other as targets, as objects which there is merit in destroying.”*

*Achilles invites
Priam to “Come now, sit upon a seat, and let sorrows rest in our minds, in spite of our pain. Chill grief is profitless.” Although he is remorseless, Achilles is, in Bespaloff’s words, “overwhelmed by compassion,” to the point that he comforts and praises Priam. Hector's body is anointed with oil. Achilles weeps, then breaks bread with Priam. Afterward, as though the bread exuded the graces of a type of eucharist that births a virtue not entirely “without Christ,” we behold what Bespaloff calls a “premise[] of truth, where forgetfulness of an offense in the contemplation of the eternal is made possible (pardon for an offense being unknown to the ancient world).” Bespaloff posits Priam as the poem's dominant character, the poet's delegate, the one who:

 typifies the watcher of tragedy, the man who sees it all, more completely and more truly than Zeus on Mount Ida because he is also a sufferer in the drama he is witnessing. Thanks to him, the prestige of weakness triumphs momentarily over the prestige of force. When he admires the enemy who is crushing him and justifies the stranger whose presence is the ruin of his city, the old man gives absolution to life in its totality.

*The Iliad*, then, is as much the poem of Priam's *forgetfulness of offense*, his absolution, as it is of Achilles' rancor, regardless of the disproportion in lines devoted to each them respectively, for, as Scheler notes, in terms of authentic “Christian” love, what reigns is not that a maximum amount of welfare produced, but “that there should be a *maximum of love* among men.” And Priam's presence before Achilles, though it be no container of pardon or forgiveness per se, certainly incarnates central characteristics of Christian love. For what could be more miraculous—albeit more subject to Nietzsche's critique—than Luke 6:27-29: “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you.” Scheler is adamantly against Nietzsche on this point, for this precept of “love your enemies” demands more than the mere passivity “which is only 'justified' by the inability to seek revenge...Nor do they seek to shame the enemy in secret vengefulness, or indicate a hidden self-torment which satisfies itself through paradoxical
behavior. These precepts demand extreme activity against the natural instincts which push us in the opposite direction.” Versilov, the post-Christian humanitarian, with his admission that humans are “vile,” exemplifies the hidden self-torment and the secret vengefulness when he indicates that one can do good on others' behalves only by “clenching your feelings, holding your nose, and shutting your eyes (this last is necessary). Endure evil from them, not getting angry with them if possible, 'remembering that you, too, are a human being.' holding your nose and shutting your eyes.” Priam, the pre-Christian Greek, in manifesting love before Achilles, exemplifies the extreme activity against the natural instincts which Christ demands, and the moment in which, in Bespaloff’s words, the prestige of weakness triumphs momentarily over the prestige of force he defeats both ressentiment and rage.

It is this love, the authentic love of the enemy, that needs to replace humanitarian compassion, but that humanitarian compassion covers over with its content-less claims to authority. Christ asks not that one has no enemies, that the distinctions of “friend” and “enemy” disappear from the earth. But he does demand a level of heroism that we can justly call excellence. Not the heroism of Achilles, or Agamemnon, but the heroism of Priam, who loves the “other” not merely because he is the “other,” for Achilles is not a blank-signifying “other” but the man who killed his son; whose pity for his enemy is founded not on modern humanitarian compassion, for there is “nothing [in this] that is heroic since its wellspring is the selfishness of each person,” and, furthermore, because the pity humanitarianism demands is too general to muster the moral strength forgetting or granting absolution to an enemy requires.

The “new humanitarian empire” is the Achilles' heel of our age, founded, like his festering rage, on the phenomenon of ressentiment. As Pierre Manent warns, it is a question of moral weakness. Put simply, “in humanitarian action, one does not know what one is doing.” This is so in spite of the fact that nothing is clearer and more defined than the purpose of humanitarian action, built as it is on
humanitarian compassion, that corruption of Christian love: “to save lives, to end violence...” But in the name of humanitarian intervention, in the name of reducing human suffering through compassionate missions, “anyone is authorized to do anything whatsoever.” To be even more blunt, “The humanitarian demand is a real demand, but one should not ignore that, left to its logic alone, it means the war of all against all,” the condition of the state of nature. For in the state of nature, “everyone is authorized to judge and to punish violations of the law of nature, and that leads to the war of all against all.”

This harsh truth of humanitarianism now established, it may not seem so ironic, so idiotic, so Quixotic, to look to *The Iliad* in order to learn how to love “the other” and “the enemy” in the time that remains, in this spans that precedes that state of being in which mankind will learn war no more. We, inhabitants of that most subtle humanitarian empire, can hold ourselves above *The Iliad’s* force, like those dreamers who “considered that force, thanks to progress, would soon be a thing of the past,” or we can join those others “whose powers of recognition are more acute and who perceive force, today as yesterday, at the very center of human history,” for whom “the *Iliad* is the purest and the loveliest of mirrors.” For if Heraclitus is in part right that “War is the father of all and king of all, who manifests some as gods and some as men, who makes some slaves and some freemen,” it is equally true that “Love is the father of all and king of all, who manifests God as man, who sifts the slaves to rancor from the freemen.”

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ii Ibid., 85.

iii Ibid.

Ibid., 213.


Dostoevsky, *The Adolescent*, 471


Scheler, *Ressentiment*, 87.

Ibid. 88.

Manent, *A World Beyond Politics*, 188.

Ibid., 189-190.

Ibid., 190.


Ibid.

Ibid., 86.


Ibid., 484.


Ibid., 1. 1-5.


Ibid., 1. 185-190.

Ibid., 1. 191-195.

Ibid., 1. 200-225.

Ibid., 1. 225.

Ibid., 1. 235-240.

Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, 504.

Ibid., 504.


Ibid., 35.
1 qtd. in Rachel Bespaloff, “Priam and Achilles Break Bread,” War and the Iliad. trans. Mary McCarthy (New

ii Ibid., 79.

ili Ibid., 80-81.

lii Ibid., 81.

liv Ibid., 83.

lv Ibid., 84.

lvi Scheler, Ressentiment, 62.

lvii Ibid., 67.

lviii Dostoevsky, The Adolescent, 213.

lix Manent, A World Beyond Politics, 194.

lx Ibid., 204.

lxi Ibid.

lxii Ibid.

lxiii Ibid.

lxiv Ibid.

lxv Weil, “The Iliad, or the Poem of Force,” 3.