

## THE EVANGELICAL-CAPITALIST RESONANCE MACHINE

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*The alliance in the United States today between cowboy capitalism and evangelical Christianity cannot be understood sufficiently through the categories of efficient causality or ideological analysis. The constituencies fold similar spiritual dispositions into somewhat different ideologies and creeds. Each party then amplifies these dispositions in the other through the media politics of resonance. The ethos infusing the resonance machine is expressed without being articulated. The inability to grasp this political economy separate from the spiritualities infusing it may carry implications for the form a successful countermovement could assume.*

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Resonance: to resound; a vibration of large amplitude caused by a small periodic stimulus of the same or near the same period as the natural vibration of the system; the intensification and enriching of a musical tone by supplementary vibration; the enhancement of an atomic, nuclear or particle reaction by excitation of internal motion in the system.

—Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary

### I.

What is the connection *today* between evangelical Christianity, cowboy capitalism, the electronic news media, and the Republican Party?<sup>1</sup> Can these connections be understood through the terms of efficient causality, in which you first separate factors and then show how one is the basic cause, or how they cause each other, or how they together reflect a more basic cause? Does, say, a corporate-Republican elite manipulate the evangelical wing of this assemblage, leading the latter to subordinate its economic interests to spurious appeals to faith? Or, are the leading parties to this coalition linked first and foremost by economic interests, in which evangelical and corporate lead-

ers together manipulate their followers? Or, alternatively, do they share a general doctrine or creed that defines their common interests and allegiances? My sense is that none of these explanations, nor others like them, quite fills the bill. If this is correct no political economy or religious practice is self contained. Rather, in politics diverse elements *infiltrate* into the others, metabolizing into a moving complex—Causation as resonance between elements that become fused together to a considerable degree. Here causality, as relations of dependence between separate factors, morphs into energized complexities of mutual imbrication and interinvolvement, in which heretofore unconnected or loosely associated elements *fold, bend, blend, emulsify, and dissolve into each other*, forging a qualitative assemblage resistant to classical models of explanation.<sup>2</sup>

## II.

It is impossible to approach the resonance machine to be interrogated in a mood of political neutrality. Any attempt to do so would defeat itself through the terms of description it deployed. So let me enunciate a few critical axioms, asserted from a perspective that is egalitarian in outlook, pluralist in aspiration, and democratic in ambition. They provide the perspective from which this resonance machine is appraised and assessed.

- (1) It is not cowboy capitalism alone, but it in conjunction with the theocratic ambition of the most militant section of American Christianity that generates the greatest threat to democracy.
- (2) The electronic news media now serve as the echo chamber of this capitalist-evangelical complex, doubling and tripling the obstacles democratic movements face in promoting economic security, reducing inequality, and fostering multidimensional pluralism.
- (3) Movements to reduce economic inequality and to extend cultural diversity are more congruent than opposed to one another. To make progress on either front today it is necessary to make some progress on the other.
- (4) Democratic action on behalf of these objectives must occur at several sites, including local political involvement, countrywide social movements, direct pressure on corporate structures, participation in national party politics, and cross-state citizen networks to challenge the American state from inside and outside at the same time. It is when actions at several sites resonate together that the prospects for positive democratic achievement improve.

The capitalist-evangelical assemblage is aligned against such objectives and aspirations. It finds expression in the market apologism and scandal mongering of the electronic news media, mobilization drives by the Republican Party and Fox News, administrative edicts to overturn environmentalism

and weaken labor, attacks on Social Security, curtailments of minority rights in the name of religious morality, pressure for right-wing appointments to the Supreme Court, support for preemptive wars, tolerance or worse of state practices of torture that flout the Geneva Conventions, and propagation of a climate of fear and loathing against the Islamic world and large parts of Europe. This resonance machine both infiltrates perception and inflects economic interest, even as it subordinates the latter on occasion. So it is important to come to terms with the *affinities of identity* that energize the assemblage, affinities that translate some economic interests into corporate greed and infuse others with religious intensity, affinities that convert some articles of religious faith into vindictive campaigns against the economic interests of those outside the faith and imbue others with a drive to vengeance.

The major constituencies in this machine do not always share the same religious and economic *doctrines*. Affinities of *sensibility* also connect them across links and differences in formal doctrine. The complex becomes a powerful machine as evangelical and corporate sensibilities resonate together, drawing each into a larger movement that dampens the importance of doctrinal differences between them. At first, the parties sense preliminary affinities of sensibility; eventually they provoke each other to transduct those affinities into a massive political machine. And the machine then foments new intensities of solidarity between these constituencies.

One way to challenge the machine is to focus publicity and protest on the economic effects on ordinary people of corporate-government practices. Many attempt this strategy. Thus, to focus on the alliance between the Enron debacle and the Bush administration for a moment, you could show how Enron manipulated the energy market, Dick Cheney and Enron cooperated to stifle state regulation of the market, the electronic news media ignored the emerging crisis, and media programming after the event helped to draw attention away from it.<sup>3</sup> All that is very relevant. But *what* draws Cheney, Fox News, the Republican Party, and Enron together here? Is it simply that they all believe in the free market? Or, a bit better, that they support deregulations that give specific corporations the power to manipulate markets? Or, better yet, that they are linked by a history of economic ties, campaign contributions, and so on? Yes, all those things. But, again, how did those links become so overwhelming? And what separates the parties to this alliance from other parties who hold similar formal views about the market and role of the government? Is it greed magnetized to maximum intensity? Or would any party, company, CEO, or media outlet participate in it if given the chance? Perhaps so, to some degree. But, still, what impels this particular constituency to push the envelope so relentlessly? Here, as elsewhere, the question of degree is critical. What else, then, draws these parties together into such an aggressive

constellation, *calling upon them* to manipulate the market and to defend the market interpretation of events belligerently even when it strains available evidence?

### III.

One possibility is that amidst the creedal linkages and differences the parties also share a spiritual disposition to existence. Their ruthlessness, ideological extremism, readiness to defend a market ideology in the face of significant evidence, and compulsion to create or condone scandals against any party who opposes their vision of the world, express a fundamental disposition toward being in the world. The imbrications between that spirituality and those programs then amplify the spirituality. To the extent they succeed in installing the structures they support the practices become more imperative institutionally, even to those who do not share the spirituality.

Do not get me wrong. I am not saying that a particular existential sensibility is the cause. Rather, it works by infiltrating and inflecting a variety of perceptions, creeds, interests, institutions, and political priorities; each of them in turn recoils back upon it, modifying it in this way and intensifying it in that. Nor do I suggest, as we shall see, that other doctrines and movements are immune to this sort of contagion. Nor will I surmise here what propels one socially defined constituency more than others toward such an economic spirituality. The variety of possible influences is large. Finally, I am not saying that everyone who believes in a deregulated market economy is infused with such a bellicose sensibility. Clearly, many are not. I am saying that the corporate side of the resonance machine is imbued with an existential orientation that encourages it to transfigure interest into greed, greed into anti-market ideology, anti-market ideology into market manipulation, market manipulation into state institutionalization of these operations, and the entire complex into policies to pull the security net away from ordinary workers, consumers, and retirees—setting some of the latter up, too, to translate new intensities of resentment and/or cynicism into participation in this machine. Above all, the spirituality encourages its participants to forge alliances with those in other walks of life who share its dispositional intensities.

Given the *intensity* of the ethos binding the parties together amidst variations in religious doctrine, economic creed, and life conditions; any constituency or social movement that crosses them is subject to sharp castigation and accusation. This is the kernel of truth in Bill Clinton's assertion that the Republican Party possesses a "destruction machine" that the Democrats lack. He should know. What Clinton underplays, however, is how the machine

extends well beyond a political party and how it is as much involved in initiating corporate policies and political programs as in the character destruction of opponents.

I am confident that this account, as so far presented, will seem implausible to many, partly because it draws into the fabric of political economy itself existential elements many take to be irrelevant to those structures. The account may become a bit more plausible, however, as we shift another gear in the same machine. As a preliminary to that turn, consider political economist Mark Blyth's account of how Keynesianism, which had been hegemonic for a couple of decades in Europe and the United States, was overturned in the 1970s and 80s by the doctrine of an unfettered market, supply-side economics, and state deregulation. Blyth contends that this shift cannot be explained sufficiently by reference either to structural determinants or to the economic interests of those who supported the doctrine. He looks beyond that to the emergence of a distinctive set of economic *ideas*, their publication through new think tanks on the Right, their amplification through the media, their partial acceptance by President Carter, and their embrace by President Reagan.

In periods of economic uncertainty, Blyth suggests, ideas and the differential capacities agents have to publicize them, play a significant role in shaping political and economic interests. Keynesians, in this instance, lost the competition of ideas, even though the predictions and promises attached to the contending economic theory failed dismally. Later in the book Blyth asks how some economic ideas come to prevail over others during periods of uncertainty. He says that "one possible answer is that in moments of crises, when agents are uncertain about their interests, they resort to repertoires of action that resonate with their core identities."<sup>4</sup>

Today, too, identity plays a role in the second installment of this same movement. Identities are composed of a mixture of faith, doctrine, and sensibility. The affect-imbued ideas that compose them are installed in the soft tissues of affect, emotion, habit, and posture as well as the upper reaches of the intellect. These sensibilities trigger the responses of those imbued with them even before they begin to think about this or that event. This is particularly so when complementary dispositions loop back and forth in a large political machine, with each constituency helping to crystallize, amplify, and legitimize the dispositions of the whole.

The element of identity most significant to this movement, I suggest, is the insistence by its members that they are being persecuted *unless* they are thoroughly in power, and the compensatory sense of special entitlement that accompanies the rise to power of a constituency that so construes itself. It remains to be seen whether such a bellicose disposition also expresses a deeper existential orientation.

## IV.

The right leg of the evangelical movement is joined at the hip to the left leg of the capitalist juggernaut. Neither leg could hop far unless it was joined to the other. Some may explain the association between them in simple terms: corporate self-interest harmonizes with the economic interest of the evangelical right, as the latter manipulates poor and older citizens to pour money into its coffers to save their souls. True enough, to some extent. But again, why does one wing of the evangelical movement give such intense priority to its economic interest, instead of pressing the state and corporations to protect the weakest among us? Why not preach the Social Gospel, as innumerable Christian believers have in the past, giving the Jesus of *Luke* priority over the Christ of *Revelation*?

The cutting edge of the evangelical Right is organized around a vision of the Second Coming, dramatized in the best-selling series of novels, *Left Behind*. The series has sold more than 50 million copies to date. In the first novel, itself entitled *Left Behind*, millions of born-again Christians around the world are lifted suddenly to heaven during the Rapture. The rest of humanity is "left behind." The sudden departure of these millions creates innumerable traffic jams, interruptions in medical surgery, airplane crashes, government chaos, and grieving spouses who have lost partners and children. If you think the terrorism of Al Qaeda and the Bush torture machine has been traumatic, it is a tempest in a seaside resort by comparison to the global terror of this Christ figure.

A few of those left behind figure out what has happened, and they eventually give themselves totally to the Christ of *Revelation*. As they are born again—a process covering 400 pages—and just after the UN has been taken over by a benevolent appearing Antichrist, the new cadre prepares itself for seven years of total war against nonbelievers and the UN. "The task of the Tribulation Force was clear and their goal nothing less than to stand and fight the enemies of God during the seven most chaotic years the planet would ever see."<sup>5</sup> That is the closing line of the first novel, with several others to follow.

Later, on the day of judgment, Christ will heave the world's Muslims, Jews, agnostics, atheists, and many Catholics into everlasting fire. Looking back on this wondrous day to come in a vision a crusader recalls that "Jesus merely raised one hand a few inches and they . . . tumbled in, howling and screeching."<sup>6</sup>

The most significant thing about the heartfelt promise of Rapture, Christoterrorism, and the Day of Judgment is not the horrendous future it anticipates, though that is notable. It is its effect upon the current conduct of millions of

people who entertain the vision. To embrace this vision is to place a series of defiled doctrines, institutions, and constituencies under daily suspicion; it is to foment a collective will to revenge against nonbelievers held to be responsible for the time of tribulation and obstacles to future bliss awaiting believers. Moreover, the Antichrist and his followers are visualized as consummate masters of deception and intrigue. Believers must distrust those who promise social progress by humanist means. For followers of the devil often present themselves as agents of beneficence. So an aura of suspicion, resentment, and revenge is slipped into the daily perceptions of the faithful, encouraging them to make the worst interpretations of outsiders and to accept any scandalous story against them contrived by right-wing talk shows, the Republican advertising machine, Internet blogs, and preachers on the Right.

The combination of the terrible fate reserved for most and radiant promise for a few triggers feelings of anxiety among the faithful—who worry whether they are faithful enough. One way to ward off that anxiety is to displace it by defining your adversaries as wanton sinners. The pressures to do so escalate during a period of enhanced global awareness, as believers discover that Christianity is very much a minority religion in the world as a whole. Hence the worldwide compass of the *Left Behind* series. These doubts and uncertainties are transfigured into an implacable drive to revenge against those who deny that Christ is the son of God, has been resurrected, and will return to pass judgment.

To be born again is to be protected; it is also to adopt unquestioning obedience to those ordained to interpret the will of Christ before the Rapture. As you come to grips with this existential element in the evangelical movement it is possible to discern affinities of sensibility between it and the right edge of the corporate machine. It also becomes clear why correlations between economic interest, class position, formal religious doctrine, education level, and age, on the one hand, and participation in the resonance machine of the right, on the other, are incomplete and uncertain. The elements of sensibility and ethos intervene, drawing some in congenial subject positions toward the machine, touching others in the same positions less intensely, rendering others indifferent, and impelling others yet to run as fast as possible. The social factors deployed to explain participation in a political assemblage are compromised and complicated by the disparate intensities of spirituality that also help to compose it. That is why it is a mistake to equate belief in evangelical doctrine with fervent commitment to the resonance machine. The *Left Behind* series, indeed, is designed to tap latent intensities so that a larger number of believers are drawn into the machine.

## V.

Why, though, assert that the economic leg of the assemblage is joined at the hip to the religious leg? Do not some cowboy marketeers hold their noses when they hear the promise of divine revenge? Do not others identify with creeds and cultures, such as Judaism and secularism, that place them at risk on the last day? Yes, yes, yes. . . . But, still, why *merely* hold your nose while participating in this ugly alliance, rather than breaking publicly with constituencies who press such vengeful stories and promises? Or, at the very least, working openly to curtail the intensities insinuated in them? What, that is, is the attraction to the *spirit* of the story amid dissent from the letter of its *doctrine*?

An abstract will to revenge against the world and the weight of the future helps to differentiate cowboys who align themselves with the right edge of the evangelical movement from marketeers who break with it. The existential bellicosity of those infused with economic greed *reverberates* with the transcendental resentment of those visualizing the righteous violence of Christ. One party discounts the future of the earth to extend its economic entitlements now, the other to prepare for the day of judgment against nonbelievers. These electrical charges resonate back and forth, generating a political machine more potent than the aggregation of its parts. They find expression in the promise to plunge millions into a fiery hell; the legitimization and displacement of corporate crime; decisions to support a preemptive war in the name of antiterrorism when you could know that Al Qaeda was not based in Iraq; casual acceptance of Abu Ghraib and the Guantanamo Gulag disguised as insistence that it is merely the work of a few “bad apples”; the production, purchase, use, and state deregulation of SUVs even when the parties know the threats the vehicle poses;<sup>7</sup> the demand for new tax breaks for the rich when they impose sacrifices on the poor now and entire generations in the future; the decision by the gang of five on the Supreme Court to cast aside their own myth of “strict constructionism” to put their man in office; the endless scandal campaigns pushed by Fox News against Clinton and any actor or activist to the left of him; the constant sense of urgency in the voice of Wolf Blitzer as he charts new dangers to the country and deflects every critical voice; and a generalized readiness to table any economic evidence or theological uncertainty that might temper the drive to revenge against economic egalitarians, pluralists, and nonbelievers.

You could epitomize this machine as “The O’Reilly Factor” to dramatize how the poster boy expresses its temper in his facial expressions, timbre of voice, insistent interruptions, demand for unquestioned authority, and accu-

satory style. You could also call it “The Bush Syndrome” to dramatize how George W. pulls its elements together in one persona, through his rhetoric drawn from *Revelation*, cadence of voice, definitive phrasing, shady governmental accounting, economic cronyism, aggressive nationalism, and readiness to impose new economic burdens on low-income citizens and future retirees. Recall the argument, widely reported in the media, that George W. had with his mother about whether those who do not believe in Christ are doomed to hell. She denied it was so, according to the reports, and called upon Billy Graham to support her. George W.’s apparent belief that all who are unbaptized are doomed to burn in hell resonates with the practices of the Guantanamo Gulag and Abu Ghraib.

It is pertinent to see how figures such as Bush and O’Reilly dramatize the resonance machine. But while doing so, it is critical to remember that they would merely be oddball characters unless they triggered, expressed, and amplified a resonance machine larger than them. They are catalyzing agents and shimmering points in the machine; their departure will weaken it only if it does not spawn new persona to replace them.

## VI.

Is it possible to deepen our understanding of the ethos circulating through the machine? One might draw upon Baruch Spinoza or Max Weber here. Spinoza draws attention to how the results of the struggle between the positive and negative passions that always circulate in a society infuse the state, economy, and religious dispositions. Weber charts how the paradoxically structured spirituality of one wing of Protestantism set the historical table for the pursuit of profit without pleasure and disciplinary labor without love even before the institutions of capitalism were wheeled securely into place. Valuable as his analysis of the emergence of capitalism is, the spirituality he charts differs in tone from that discerned here. And he believes that once the appropriate institutional structures were installed, a spirituality no longer played such a prominent role in the system.<sup>8</sup> I suggest that the porous structures of capitalism move along a relatively open temporal trajectory, one less closed than either Weberian, neoclassical, or Marxist theory sometimes suggests. Thus the quality of the ethos inhabiting these structures is pertinent to its operation.

A little closer to the bone, then, are the insights of Nietzsche’s Zarathustra. He speaks to a cultural spirituality of resentment that grows out of a will to revenge against mortality, time, and the world.

Behold, this is the hole of the tarantula . . . Welcome tarantula! And I also know what sits in your soul. Revenge sits in your soul. Wherever you bite, black scabs grow; your poison makes the soul whirl with revenge.

. . . And where there was suffering, one always wanted punishment too.

But now learn this too: the will itself is still a prisoner. Willing liberates; but what is that puts even the liberator himself in fetters? "It was" – that is the name of the will's gnashing of teeth and most secret melancholy. Powerless against what has been done, he is angry spectator of all that is past. The will cannot will backwards; and that he cannot break time and time's covetousness. . . . That time does not run backwards, that is his wrath.<sup>9</sup>

Zarathustra says existential revenge *whirls* in those who resent most intensely "the obdurate fact" of mortality and a world in which you cannot will the past again. This is the resentment of time and its "it was." Such resentments can also whirl, as he understood, in a larger complex, producing a hurricane out of heretofore loosely associated elements. Cultural induction into the idea of a vengeful God; intensification of the human fear of death and secret resentment against a world that requires it; floating resentment against the imperious demands of your God that must not be articulated; compensatory drives for special economic entitlement and comforts in this world; ugly campaigns to vilify those whose difference in faith throws the self-confidence of yours into doubt—these are some of the dispositions a powerful political assemblage can foment and amplify, installing them in habitual patterns of perception, identity, interest, and judgments of entitlement.<sup>10</sup>

Prior to World War II, the vengeful side of the evangelical movement was somewhat less connected to an overt political movement.<sup>11</sup> The dominant tendency was to warn followers to prepare for an event that human politics could not promote or prevent. But, today, partly because of political initiatives from the corporate right initiated in the 1980s, partly because of Karl Rove's campaigns to put key issues such as abortion and gay marriage on the political agenda, and partly because of 9/11 and the intensified antagonism between Christianity and Islam it fomented on the right, the right edge of evangelism is highly politicized. The important thing, under these conditions, is to come to terms with the spiritual element that draws two major constituencies into one theo-econopolitical machine.

It is pertinent to see, first, how neither party in the machine ever declares the ugliest existential investments that inspire it and, second, how this silence itself is politically potent. Such a spirituality does its most effective political and theological work when it finds indirect expression in the tonalities and intensities of its leaders and their selection of enemies. Consider, in this regard, the structure of Robert Schumann's *Humoreske* (1838), as reported

by Frank Ankersmit. There are three staves. The upper is played with the right hand, the lower with the left. But the melody in the middle is not played. Rather, it is heard by the listener because of its location between the upper and lower hands. Here is what Ankersmit and Charles Rosen, the historian of music he draws upon, say:

Put differently, the melody . . . will be *listened to* by the listener, without actually being *heard* by him. Hence what one listens to . . . is the echo of an unperformed melody; it is both interior and inward, a double sense calculated by the composer. . . . It has . . . its existence only through the echo.<sup>12</sup>

The will to revenge energizing the evangelical-corporate machine subsists as an unsung melody. It reverberates back and forth between leaders and followers, until it becomes uncertain who directs and who sings the chorus.<sup>13</sup> Thus early in the 2004 presidential campaign the George W. Bush entourage sped around a NASCAR track in front of 100,000 fans. He emerged from the only SUV in the entourage to an incredible roar of approval. The crowd responded to the SUV as a symbol of disdain for womanly ecologists, safety advocates, supporters of fuel economy, weak-willed pluralists, and internationalists. Bush played upon the symbol and drew energy from the crowd's acclamation of it. Resentment against those who express an ethos of care for the world was never named: a message expressed without being articulated.

Today resentment against cultural diversity, economic egalitarianism, and the future whirl together in the same resonance machine. That is why its participants identify similar targets of hatred and marginalization, such as gay marriage, women who seek equal status in work, family and business; secularists, atheists, devotees of Islamic faith, and African American residents of the inner city who do not appreciate the abstract beauty of cowboy capitalism.

Take, for instance, the Bush-Rove campaign of feminization against John Kerry in 2004. The logic is first to consign women implicitly to a subordinate status as flighty beings—a view already circulating within cowboy marketers and the evangelical movement, and then to define the Democratic candidate as womanly during a time when the unwavering hand of a masterful leader of military aggression is required. The TV image of Kerry tacking back and forth as he windsurfs amplifies resentment against the effete branch of the upper class as it visualizes the style of a flip-flop artist. The contrast is to Bush in blue jeans cutting underbrush with a no-nonsense look on his face. The Karl Rove campaign of 2004, indeed, replicated one Richard Nixon ran against George McGovern in 1970 in the middle of the Vietnam War. To be a “flip flop artist” is to be womanly, to lack unwavering commitment to a jeal-

ous God (“the Almighty”), to be wary of neoliberal economic policy, and to retreat from bellicose nationalism. The conviction that Kerry is a flip-flop artist was first peddled in ads early in the campaign when most people were not attentive to the campaign. That strategy, according to advertising specialists attentive to the findings of neuroscience, is an excellent way to plant an idea.<sup>14</sup> It enters the thought-imbued feelings of viewers before being subjected to critical scrutiny. The plant is then harvested months later, when much of the electorate concludes that it is now being reminded of a disposition it had already discerned. The politics of perception. Fox News iterations, Bush ads, endless repetition by the Cheneys, and statements by Catholic Bishops that Kerry did not deserve communion because he was a soft supporter of his own faith coalesced to consolidate the perception. Kerry himself did not help to disperse these charges, of course, and the security frenzy gripping the country set the stage for them. But the campaign took its toll too.

The point is to discern how media presentations both do much of their work below the level of explicit attention and encourage the intense coding of those experiences as they do so. Part of the reason, I think, is that the TV and film viewer is immobilized before a moving image and sound track, while the everyday perceiver is either mobile or one step removed from mobility. The position of immobility amplifies the affective intensities received, just as a basketball coach *feels* the intensities of the contest more than the players on the floor who *absorb* the intensities into action.<sup>15</sup> This difference, indeed, dramatizes the wisdom of Nietzsche’s commendation to act upon specific resentments before they ossify into resentment.

Alongside the feminization campaign was another that deflected public attention from how politics and show business have melded together. Talking heads on Fox News repeatedly debated the question, “Should actors take public positions on political issues?”, focusing as they did so on actors who criticized the war in Iraq. The question was not posed about business celebrities or retired generals or several Republican candidates who had been actors. The form of the question thus encourages people to identify show business with unpatriotic criticism, instead of discerning how critical films, rock music, selective TV dramas, and jazz are often associated with the Democratic left while country music, radio “talk shows,” and evangelical-corporate celebrities are often linked to the right. Reiteration of the question in this form delinks the resonance machine of the right from show business while binding its opponents to it. The result is to divert attention from how politics, religion, and advertising all participate in show business today.<sup>16</sup> Those who received these messages, however, were not simply manipulated by the media to accept them; many were predisposed to the message through the spirit of their preliminary orientations to being.

## VII.

To expose and counter the politics of existential revenge does not mean that you demean specific grievances, resentments, and critical energies that propel positive democratic energies forward. That would be to subtract critical energies from your own cause in the name of a spurious intellectualism that ignores the role of passion in religious practice, economic activity, thinking, and political struggle. The target is the congealed disposition of resentment, not every mode of resentment.

Nonetheless, the drive to existential revenge, while more amenable to some economic creeds and religious doctrines than others, can in fact inhabit *any* faith, constituency, doctrine, institution, or machine. That is the rub, and the challenge. Zarathustra eventually came to appreciate this danger after “his ape” repeated his own phrases back to him in a frothy tone of existential revenge. Indeed, I suspect that no major existential tradition anywhere, including Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Judaism, and no minor or minute tradition such as Epicureanism, Kantianism, Nietzscheanism, and Levinasianism has succeeded in forging a fully satisfactory response to the obdurate fact of mortality, time, and undeserved suffering. The possibility of existential resentment thus resides in any and every mortal, existential faith, and political movement.

As a corollary, some advocates of any creed can overcome the drive to revenge often attached to it, particularly if a counter-machine is available to them. It is faith in this potential tear or rent between a mode of *sensibility* and a *creed or doctrine* to which it is commonly attached that makes it possible for Nietzsche to call for a “spiritualization of enmity” between noble partisans of different existential and religious doctrines.

So let’s turn to a legitimate question posed to people like me: How do *you* forestall the all-too-human slide from specific political resentments to resentment? For the risk grows as disaffection from the electronic news media, state economic policy, and a large segment of the American electorate deepens. Accumulated resentments can, in this way, congeal into a disposition of fixed resentment against the actually existing world.

So how to respond to the risk? The most noble collective response would be to transduce the mutual inability of diverse existential faiths to resolve definitively some of the very issues and needs that call them into being into reciprocal connections across lines of doctrinal difference. Common points of insufficiency or uncertainty could provide a basis for political connection across notable differences in creed and philosophy. But such an agenda of deep pluralism is not in the cards today, to say the least. Today, the most viable response involves moving back and forth between diagnosing the reso-

nance machine of the right and pursuing selective lines of connection with constituencies on the edge of it. Such an effort involves engaging the economic, security, and existential pressures that encourage the politics of resentment in many, a task I have explored elsewhere.<sup>17</sup> A complementary task is to engage a positive minority movement within either evangelism or market capitalism itself.

### VIII.

I note, then, a minority report within evangelism that may plant the seed of a future coalition. Evangelical proponents of "Open Theism" contend that the view of God as omnipotent and omniscient makes God complicit in evil. Open theists pray to a limited, loving God who learns as the world turns. They thus embrace an image of time as becoming which touches both the nontheist Nietzsche and the American philosopher of a limited God in a world of becoming, William James.

John Sanders, author of *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence*, came to Open Theism a few years after his young brother died and fellow parishioners explained to him how the death was part of God's inscrutable plan. He resisted that story. Later, he read scripture with this issue in mind, dissecting sections in the Old and New *Testaments*, as he calls them, where God listens, reconsiders, or reassesses. The *Bible*, he says, is full of such instances, including the successful attempt by Moses to convince Yahweh not to kill the Jews who had sacrificed the calf and moments when Jesus implores his God to listen. Prayer itself may suggest a God who listens, thinks anew, and periodically changes its mind. Sanders summarizes his reading of Scripture at one point,

In wisdom God decided to fulfill his promises through the particular path Jesus took. In wisdom God decides how he continues to fulfill his promises, and the divine wisdom takes the changing circumstances of the world into account . . . God is free to do new things and so identify himself in new ways.<sup>18</sup>

Some advocates of Open Theism have been convicted of heresy in their schools and churches, but others seem to be standing tall to date.<sup>19</sup> And the debate is moving into the pews of evangelical churches.

This countermovement holds some promise to pluralize evangelical Christianity from within, as it challenges the dominant theology of omnipotence, time, knowledge, morality, and responsibility. Most profoundly, its leaders express a desire to replace a spirituality infused with revenge with one

inspired by care for the fragility of the world. Those confessing this faith also make contact with the worldly quest of Zarathustra when he says “For that man be delivered from revenge, that is for me . . . the bridge to the highest hope and a rainbow after long storms.”<sup>20</sup> There are here, then, affinities of sensibility stretching across significant doctrinal difference, affinities that might be worked upon to draw proponents of several creeds into a larger assemblage of resonance. To undertake the effort, however, requires radicals, liberals, and secularists to reconsider the role that existential dispositions play in politics and economic life, overturning the self-defeating drive to quarantine creeds and modes of spirituality in the private realm.

Consider the potential. A risking and learning God might learn to expand its care for the diversity of being. It might decide someday that homosexuality is not a sin, that the world’s resources are not infinite, that women are not ordained to be subordinate, that morality does not always take the shape of a command, and that neoliberalism is no more necessary to economic life as such than an omnipotent God is to religion as such. Of course, such issues and questions would be subjected to a series of painful debates, within churches as well as outside them, for any of these moves to emerge. And those of us outside the evangelical movement who appreciate the role of spirituality inside a cultural economy and a culture of economic life would have to place some of our favorite orientations under critical review too. The intercoded domains of scripture, philosophy, literature, church, labor organization, investment portfolios, media, and family turmoil would all be brought into play. To remain outside those debates and domains today is to withdraw from the passion of politics.

Those who resist the drive to existential revenge whirling within the evangelical-capitalist machine need to make connections with dissidents on the edge of that machine. Not because our creeds reflect theirs, though they may in some cases. But, first, because they seek to insinuate an active pluralization of faith into evangelical Christianity; second, because they convey a protean care for being that must grow if democratic energies are to expand; third, because they diminish the element of dogmatism in the ethos of faith; and fourth, because they drive a wedge into that ungodly alliance between cowboy capitalism and extremist Christianity that smothers the prospects for egalitarianism and pluralist democracy.

The participants in such a countermachine might assemble around an anonymous bit of graffiti scrawled on a wall after 9/11. It said, “Protect us God from those who believe in you,” forecasting as it did so the connection between those who terrorize in the name of Allah and those who remain silent about the Bush torture machine under the rubric of Godliness. Many in such a countermovement would embrace (some variant of) the God called upon to

protect us, while others might draw a complementary disposition from this or that nontheistic faith. A series of existential affinities across lines of creedal difference might lay the seedbed for a larger political movement. The struggle might not be *that* much more difficult than it was to draw the carriers of capitalist greed and transcendental revenge into a theopolitical machine of resentment.

### NOTES

1. An earlier presentation of the evangelical element in contemporary political economy was given in the spring of 2005, at the WPSA panel in Oakland, CA organized around the new edition of Sheldon Wolin's *Politics and Vision* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005). That edition adds a Part II to the classic 1960 text. While I disagreed with his account of Nietzsche, I drew upon Wolin's account of America as "Superpower" in Part II. This essay is dedicated to Sheldon Wolin, in appreciation of his groundbreaking work and the inspiration he provides to many who practice the vocation of theory.

2. For the idea of emergent causality drawn upon here see William E. Connolly, "Method, Problem, Faith," in Ian Shapiro, Rogers M. Smith, and Tarek E. Masoud, *Problems and Methods in the Study of Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 332–339. That essay, as well as this one, is indebted in turn to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, "Micropolitics and Segmentarity" in Brian Massumi trans., *A Thousand Plateaus* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 208–231.

3. Here are some pieces that focus on the role that greed plays in this alliance. They do not, however, anchor that greed in anything over and above the normal processes of under-regulated capitalism. "Enron's Smoking Gun," *The Foundation for Taxpayer and Consumer Rights*, <http://www.consumerwatchdog.org/utilities/nw/nw002172.php3>; "Unveiling the Corporate GreedMarket," <http://www.consciouschoice.com/cc1709/hightower1709.html>; "Enron Flew Under the Radar," Common Dreams New Center, <http://www.commondreams.org/views02/0212-03.htm>

4. Mark Blyth, *Great Transformations: Economic Ideas and Institutional Change in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 267.

5. *Left Behind: A Novel of the Earth's Last Days*, by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale Publishers, 1995), 468.

6. This quotation comes from a column by Nicholas Kristof, "Apocalypse (Almost) Now" *New York Times*, 11/24/04, 27. It is from the last volume in the series. I have not read that one yet.

7. There are now large, fuel-eating, dangerous, and destructive SUVs and others of smaller, more efficient design. The differences are reviewed in the April 1, 2005 *New York Times* report on the vehicles Republicans and Democrats respectively buy. Correlations between party and vehicle are fine, but what is needed are refined correlations between existential disposition and vehicle use. These, too, could be pursued, particularly in light of new brain-imaging techniques which, advancing beyond those available for a few decades, can discern specific brain states that join communicants together in a relation of trust.

8. See Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. by Talcott Parsons (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958). "Wealth is thus bad ethically only in so far as it is a temptation to idleness and sinful enjoyment of life, and its acquisition is bad only when it is with the purpose of later living merrily and without care . . . . The emphasis on the ascetic importance

of a fixed calling provided an ethical justification of the modern specialized division of labor. In a similar way the providential interpretation of profit making justified the activities of the business man" (163). These two statements measure both the contact and difference between Weber's analysis of the spiritual element in the formation of capitalism and my more modest attempt to decipher the spirituality of a particular constellation in one country today.

9. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 99, 140.

10. To read Zarathustra as I do is to discern that the drive to "be equal"—which he connects to the will to revenge—is mostly the demand that everyone either become *the same* (e.g., have the same faith, the same sexuality, the same ethnicity, the same belief in the market) *or be punished for not being so*. The "overman" is not a separate kind of human for Zarathustra by the end of the text; it eventually becomes a noble voice in many selves on behalf of affirmation. More than Zarathustra, I separate revenge against difference from the drive to reduce economic inequality. The first is a measure of my debt to him; the second of my agonistic response to his unconcern about economic inequality.

11. See Timothy P. Weber, *Waiting for the Second Coming*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). Weber charts the movement from the beginning of the twentieth century to the 1980s. His view that "relative deprivation" only helps to explain its attractions is pertinent to the account here. His attention to millennialists, such as former Oregon Senator Mark Hatfield, who hold the key creedal beliefs but do not embrace the ugly politics, is also pertinent. Once again, it is the formal belief in conjunction with susceptibility or resistance to existential resentment that is important. That is why it may be possible to pluralize further the political orientations of evangelists.

12. Frank Ankersmit, "Democracy's Inner Voice: Political Style as Unintended Consequence of Political Action," in John Corner and Dick Pels eds., *Media and the Restyling of Politics*, (London: Sage, 2003), 19. Ankersmit's objective is to show how political reality is not exhausted by the articulations of its contestants.

13. Perhaps this is the point at which to note that existential resentment can be *expressed* without being *articulated* because such an affective disposition is filled with ideas. So to say that people can share the same formal creed while differing in the sensibility infused into it is not to say that a sensibility consists of pure affect. Rather, an idea-imbued sensibility inflects the meaning of a publicly defined creed in this way or that. The explicit creed may say "Only Jesus can save you." The implicit, affectively charged idea might be either "and you will burn in hell if you are not baptized" *or* "if you are a decent person he will save you." Moreover, two people could share the first disposition but differ significantly in the *intensity* with which it is felt.

14. Robert Heath, *The Hidden Power of Advertising: How Low Involvement Processing Influences the Ways We Choose Brands* (Oxford: Admap Publications, 2001).

15. The Heath book noted above can profitably be read in conjunction with Mark B. N. Hansen, *New Philosophy for New Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004), especially chapter 6. Hansen explores experimental art, which draws to the foreground *affective* dimensions usually left in the background of perception. An effective counterpolitics of perception must draw upon such experiments to fashion ways to challenge the image-sound media campaigns with which we are bombarded.

16. For an essay that explores the imbrications between media, show business, and electoral politics in England and the Netherlands see John Street, "The Celebrity Politician: Political Style and Popular Culture," in John Corner and Dick Pels, eds., *Media and the Restyling of Politics*, 85–98. An insightful book that examines the role of entertainment in politics in the United States is Jeffrey Jones, *Entertaining Politics* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004).

17. I pursue this question on the registers of identity and economics in *The Ethos of Pluralization*, chapter 4, "Fundamentalism in America" (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press,

1994). I am indebted to Patchen Markell, who after making thoughtful comments on a first draft of this essay, also encouraged me to recall this earlier moment in my thinking.

18. John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1998), 108.

19. "Can God See the Future?" *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (November 26, 2004), 12.

20. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 99.

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