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Preface

Ruth HaCohen

The articles gathered in this volume are the fruit of an interdisciplinary workshop that took place in the framework of the Martin Buber Society of Fellows in the Humanities and Social Sciences at the Hebrew University in June 2013. The workshop was organized by the three editors of this volume, Laura Jockusch, Andreas Kraft, and Kim Wünschmann, who were all research fellows of the program at the time. The rich and well-structured conception of that intellectual endeavor is now beautifully revealed in the individual contributions as well as in the book as a whole. It is indeed a product of a continuous German-Israeli dialogue, the strength of which emerges both from the force of the chosen concepts and their thoughtful deployment and elaboration in the various studies. Additional strength is gained from the serious and often passionate personal engagement of the writers with the subject they are exploring. The triangle of revenge, retribution, and reconciliation, resonant of Jewish-German postwar sensibilities, are soberly examined through various disciplinary and historical contexts, mostly modern and postmodern. The steady focus is on the human condition that they involve – whether defined in historical, literary, biological, psychological, sociological, legal, cultural, or philosophical terms – along with their motley complicated configurations in each of the studied cases, including recent conflict zones and their aftermaths. Modernism, as the philosopher tells us, is in the present contexts a Godforsaken universe, consigned to the self-governance of humans endowed with free will, who are more responsible than ever before for the just and proper direction of

human society. Aware of inevitable wrongs and of the limits of justice, this volume attests to various attempts of individuals and communities to rationally seek for and realize possibilities to channel reactions to wrongdoings beyond revenge or indirect retaliation. Such efforts, we learn, were sometimes spontaneous, and admirably so, even within the most extreme conditions of concentration camps or in their aftermath. When reactive measures are not so directed, violence persists and injustice reigns supreme.

Nonetheless, we should not assume that the better options end conflict or pain. Whatever the author's perspective in this volume and the subject s/he examines is, there is a story or stories to tell, which always begin "in medias res" and never actually come to an end. The three R's here engaged refer to conditions "after the misdeed" or deeds; even in the most benevolent scenarios, their imprint can never be erased or entirely forgotten. The stories are about affronting justice, doing evil, committing crimes and betrayal, undermining stable social, political, or cultural regimes, sometimes reaching colossal dimensions of destruction. Society and individuals wish to recover equilibrium, dignity, sanity, and these are hard won gains. Emotions are always involved; in the first place, they are the triggers of revenge. But even with retributive acts against perpetrators, or when reconciliation is apparently achieved, hard emotions do not easily leave the stage, if ever. They persist in various modes, overt and covert, individually and collectively. Sometimes we call these traces trauma, and the question of the price of their resurfacing – even in the reconciliatory cases – could be too high to pay on the level of the individual actor and even on that of wider circles.

Indeed, if Aristotle, whose presence is felt in the spirit of this collection, conceives in his *Poetics* the traumatic drama that the Greek brand tragedy as a staged action evoking fear and compassion, which in turn resolves in the totality of the cathartic effect, in history, at least the histories here engaged, even if catharsis is achieved (as some authors claim) emotions will never be entirely purged. The question that then arises is how to work through them so that retaliation, or transferred aggression, will not return, leading to further injustices and wrongs,

whether in relation to the original parties or elsewhere digressed.

Art and literature can indeed help us think on the micro level, whether as condensed realities or as allegories of sorts. Sensing this potential, the editors poignantly open the volume with Homer and Aeschylus and further invite us to reflect on the moving and thought-provoking poem "Revenge" by the late Taha Muhammad Ali, a Palestinian poet from Nazareth. Moving in similar lines, one can think of the biblical Joseph, or for that matter of Shakespeare's Prospero. Both heroes could revenge, retaliate, or at least punish their wrongdoers – close kin in their cases, who hatefully exposed them to a cruel fate. They chose not to. Both had enough time to reflect on the horrendous events, living many years in exile. Both had the power, enormous power, to bring about their offenders' ruin. Instead they staged a virtual crisis, similar to the initial traumatic event, whereby they witnessed the regret and remorse of those who were involved in the first crime of envy and resentment. Thus they achieved, though to a different degree in each case, disarming moments of recognition, of candid repentance, leading to a gradual though never full appeasement. Catharsis is nonetheless attained both in their own fictional world and, to a different degree, in that of their readers/spectators.

Music makes such processes audible, to paraphrase a well-known formulation by the American philosopher Susanne Langer. In the happy moments of its comic manifestations, it ridicules vengeance and slights the aggressor. Music, moreover, has the capacity to sonically embody the moment of recognition, when the aggressor stands bare in front of the entire community, unable to hide any longer his hypocrisy, lust, and unfounded jealousy. Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* (1786) performs all of these miracles, and more: it exposes this activity as the stagecraft of emotionally mature and cunningly playful women friends, who like their peers in the aforementioned fictional universes understand something about how such moral-psychological processes work. As it turns out, their target, a stubborn and rather infantile male chauvinist, Count Almaviva (the husband of one and the sexual harasser of the other), does not easily

relinquish his narcissistic self-centered positions. When such a man falls at last on his knees and begs for candid forgiveness (in the most exquisite tones) the women forgive – they cannot do otherwise – while the whole community witnesses the transformation. How deep and persistent is such a reconciliation? We will never know. The transition from that sublime spectacle to the stormy, albeit music of *contenti* and *allegria*, of the closing ensemble, discloses relief but also anxiety; the *caprici* and *tormenti* can always return. All such awe-inspiring moments are fragile and transitory, Mozart admonishes, and the effort to maintain the state of mind they brought about never ceases. The work of forgiveness, as the other philosopher in this volume tells us, is never complete, and should dialogically engage both partners over and over again.

In the final analysis, reconciliatory processes move beyond rational procedures, calling for imagination, openness, and compassion. Not all of these avenues are always open to us, especially when we return to collective crimes: victims are often no longer around, and the perpetrators have also disappeared. Who will forgive and whom? And what could replace forgiveness in the attempt to open new historical pages between adversarial communities? That is indeed where dialogue enters, a dialogue of search and research, between those who bear the memory of the atrocities, whomever their ancestors were, and the various responsibilities they undertake as such. In the second decade of the twenty-first century, in the year in which we celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of Germany-Israel relations, both diplomatic and scientific, for us, in the Martin Buber Society of Fellows, consisting of Germans, Europeans from other countries, Israelis and Palestinians, such informed dialogue becomes a daily engagement, that should contribute not only to a better understanding of the past but no less to the improvement of the present and the future.

Ruth HaCohen
Director, The Martin Buber Society of Fellows
Jerusalem, August 2015

Introduction

Laura Jockusch, Andreas Kraft,
and Kim Wünschmann

What happens after harm is done and injustice has to be endured? Is revenge really sweet? Should the injured claim an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth? Who has the right to impose sanctions and mete out punishment? Is it at all possible for perpetrator and victim to settle their scores and "make good" again? Or are there things that can never be undone?

This volume explores how individuals, groups, and societies in a variety of cultural contexts, political settings, and time periods respond to the perpetration of injustices. Approaching the concepts of revenge, retribution, and reconciliation from multi-disciplinary and cross-cultural perspectives, the contributors to this anthology offer a broad spectrum of scholarly analyses.[1] Their expertise includes the

1 Given the wide scope of the scholarly discussions of each of the three concepts, only a few works shall be referenced here: David P. Barash and Judith Eve Lipton, *Payback: Why We Retaliate, Redirect Aggression, and Take Revenge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Ya'acov Bar-Siman-Tov, ed., *From Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Thomas Böhm and Suzanne Kaplan, *Revenge: On the Dynamics of a Frightening Urge and its Taming* (London: Karnac, 2011); Norman J. Finkel and W. Gerrod Parrot, *Emotions and Culpability: How The Law is at Odds with Psychology, Jurors, and Itself* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2006); Alexander Hirsch, *Theorizing Post-Conflict Reconciliation: Agonism, Restitution & Repair* (London: Routledge, 2012); Susan Jacoby, *Wild*

fields of psychology, biology, political science, communications, sociology, law, philosophy, religious studies, literature, and history, thereby enabling us to recognize the complexity of these themes, to ask new questions, and to discuss them against a wider background of observations. What emerges are findings that are deeply unsettling yet utterly relevant to anyone who – sometimes against all odds – seeks a better understanding of those perplexing, man-made phenomena that remain part and parcel of the world we live in.

"Wrath" (μῆνις = mínis) is the opening word of Homer's *Iliad* and, according to the philosopher Peter Sloterdijk, it is also the birth pang of European culture.[2] In this understanding, the demigod Achilles, the hero of the *Iliad*, figures as the epitome of the avenger. Easily enraged, he is the (in)famous example of an insatiable need for revenge that loses all sense of proportion. After his beloved friend Patroclus is killed by Hector, Achilles not only takes revenge by killing the assailant, he ties the corpse of his adversary to his chariot and drags it around the tomb of Patroclus three times. Further adding to the violation, he then lets the dead body lie in the dust exposed to the heat of the sun.

> The man has lost all mercy;
> he has no shame – that gift that hinders mortals
> but helps them, too. A sane one may endure
> an even dearer loss: a blood brother,
> a son; and yet, by heaven, having grieved
> and passed through mourning, he will let it go.[3]

Justice: The Evolution of Revenge (New York: Harper and Row, 1983); William Ian Miller, *Eye for an Eye* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Martha Minow, *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness: Facing History after Genocide and Mass Violence* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1998); Robert C. Solomon, *A Passion for Justice: Emotions and the Origins of the Social Contract* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1990); Mark D. White, ed., *Retributivism: Essays on Theory and Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

2 Peter Sloterdijk, *Rage and Time*: *A Psychopolitical Investigation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

3 Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. Robert Fitzgerald (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/

Achilles' desecration of Hector's corpse severely violates all customs and his inhumane act of almost mad furor even fills the gods with indignation. Apollo, who feels pity for Hector, intervenes and prevents the body from further debasement and decay.

Achilles' reaction to his pain over the loss of his friend illustrates how anger-driven revenge seeks to soothe suffering by causing even greater pain to others. However human his reaction may be, the ability to feel compassion is also part of human nature. By striking back excessively, Achilles loses this quality and acts as if blinded by his frantic thirst for vengeance. He only returns to his "human senses" after Hector's father implores him to cease and appeals to Achilles' feelings as a son. Regaining the ability to feel empathy, Achilles grants Hector and his kin the honor of a proper funeral.

While Homer's epic, a document of early Greek culture, illustrates the destructive side of anger and revenge, Aeschylus' *Eumenides*, written some five hundred years later, depicts the moment in which revenge – in Francis Bacon's words "a kind of wild justice"[4] – is replaced by a juridical system. The vortex of revenge which plays out in the last part of Aeschylus' trilogy, *Orestea*, begins with Clytaemestra's murder of her husband Agamemnon, killing him with an axe in his bath. Commanded by Apollo, their son Orestes then avenges his father by killing his mother. Thereafter the Furies, who are the deities of vengeance, "the daughters of primeval darkness,"[5] relentlessly chase Orestes, first to Delphi and then to Athens, where he seeks the intervention of the goddess Athena. While the Furies insist that Orestes must be punished for matricide, he claims that he acted according to Apollo's dictate and can therefore not be held responsible for the crime. Athena convenes a special court to hear the

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Doubleday, 1974), 568–69.

4 Francis Bacon, *The Essays of Francis Bacon*, ed. Mary Augusta Scott (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908), 19.

5 Aeschylus, *The Eumenides*, in *The Oresteia,* trans. Ted Hughes (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1990), 149–98, 170.

case. The Furies appear as Orestes' accusers, while Apollo speaks in his defense. But since the jurors of the court are unable to reach a verdict, Athena casts the deciding vote and Orestes is acquitted. The Furies angrily threaten vengeance on Athens. Offering them a position of honor in the cult of her city, she transforms them into benevolent spirits.[6] Their name changes to the Eumenides, or "the kindly ones," to symbolize their new character. Thus speaks Athena:

> ...the time of brute force
> Is past.
> The day of reasoned persuasion,
> With its long vision,
> With its mercy, its forgiveness,
> Has arrived.
> The word hurled in anger shall be caught
> In a net of gentle words,
> Words of quiet strength.
> The angry mouth shall be given a full hearing.
> I understand your fury.
> But the vendetta cannot end,
> The bloody weapon cannot be set aside
> Till all understand it.[7]

The Furies, who were originally the uncompromising agents of revenge and divine retribution, are mystically converted into benevolent spirits. A new social and moral order is established by Zeus through his daughter Athena, the personification of wisdom. Justice will now be secured by an impartial and rational human court. The new justice will be tempered by mercy and understanding, as in the trial of Orestes. In the words of Sloterdijk: "What is at issue is nothing less than the complete break with the older culture of revenge and fate as well the introduction of a political concern

6 Ibid., 190–91.
7 Ibid., 189.

for justice. This form of political justice should be practiced in the future exclusively in civil courts."[8]

The desire for justice and fairness – arguably a part of human nature[9] – does not only influence our individual interpretations of the world, it also shapes the ways in which societies and human relations are organized. Social institutions as well as public discourses and the media play significant roles in our quest for justice. Established legal systems and agencies of law enforcement, whether their authority is based on the rational foundations of the social contract or on the moral codes of religious laws, have the function of maintaining social order by dispensing justice. While collective life rests on the notion that individuals surrender their natural rights to an authority that pursues justice for them, violations of laws and transgressions of social norms constantly probe this agreement. Perennial questions touching upon the validity of social values, norms, and laws as well as the appropriateness of mediated punishment arise time and again and challenge social cohesion.

In complex modern societies, these essentially philosophical discourses on justice remain central themes for human interaction. Extreme reactions to offences, sometimes deliberately circumventing institutionalized forms of punishment, attest to the strong emotional side of justice.[10] Aristotle defined revenge as an emotion deriving from anger, "as a longing, accompanied by pain, for a real or apparent revenge for a real or apparent slight."[11] Rage, disgust, or the urge for vengeance are emotional reactions that accompany the human

8 Sloterdijk, *Rage and Time,* 50–51.

9 Political theorist Hanna Fenichel Pitkin speaks of a "human hunger for justice. It is more powerful than any physical hunger, and endlessly resilient." Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, "Justice: On Relating Private and Public," *Political Theory* 9/3 (August 1981): 327–52, 357.

10 For a sociological approach of justice see, for example Ronald L. Cohen, ed., *Justice*: *Views from the Social Sciences* (New York: Plenum Press, 1986).

11 Aristotle, *The "Art" of Rhetoric*, trans. John Henry Freese (London: William Heinemann, 1926), 173.

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