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THEY SAID IT

Well, if I had to pick just one French term of art popularized by a 19th-century German philologist to describe the Occupy Wall Street set and its attendants, it would be Nietzsche's *Ressentiment*. Why does good old English "resentment" not suffice? Why is the extra 's' and fancy French pronunciation required? Well, resentment is about begrudging the success of your betters as a way to avoid reflection on your own failures. The Nietzsche scholar Robert Solomon described resentment as an "impotence self-righteousness" directed at your superiors, and contrasted it with anger (directed at your equals) and contempt (directed at your inferiors). But *ressentiment* is what happens when you take that impotent self-righteousness and define a whole morality of good and evil in terms of it, build a whole belief system out of it, build an ideology, a political movement — an occupation.

Daniel Foster, "Occupy Wall Street and *Ressentiment*," *National Review Online's* "The Corner," October 7, 2011.

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RIGHT VS. LEFT. TEA PARTY VS. OCCUPY WALL ST.

Fair or unfair, it is all but certain that the Tea Party movement and the Occupy Wall Street movement will, for at least the time being and perhaps forever, be mentioned together as part and parcel of the same phenomenon. They are, the new conventional wisdom tells us, two sides of the same coin; mirror reflections, on the left and right respectively, of the anger and alienation that the people at large feel from their government. Or, as the *New York Times*, the fount of all wisdom that is considered by the nation's elite to be conventional, put it late last week:

More and more commentators — as well as President Obama — have likened the Occupy forces spreading across the country to the Tea Party movement . . .

In fact, the two movements do share key traits. They emerged out of nowhere but quickly became potent political forces, driven by anxiety about the economy, a belief that big institutions favor the reckless over the hard-working, grievances that are inchoate and even contradictory, and an insistence that they are "leaderless." "End the Fed" signs — and even some of those yellow Gadsden flags — have found a place at Tea Party and Occupy Wall Street protests alike . . .

On Tuesday, President Obama, the man Tea Partiers love to loathe, made the link, telling ABC News that the Occupy protests are "not that different from some of the protests we saw coming from the Tea Party."

“Both on the left and the right I think that people feel separated from their government,” he said. “They feel their institutions aren’t looking out for them.”

Now this linkage is, on one level, a load of garbage. For starters, while the Occupy movement *may* have begun spontaneously, it quickly turned into what the historian Daniel Boorstin famously described as a “synthetic novelty” or “pseudo event,” sustained by someone or some organization other than the participants themselves. And this is not the case with the tea party movement. Moreover, Obama’s spin on the respective movements is fatuous: Uh-huh. It’s the “institutions” fault.”

That said, we’re not all that bothered by the comparison between the two movements, largely because it tells us a great deal about the impulse control of some of the nation’s major political players and the effect that their responses to these movements could have next November -- and perhaps a great deal longer than that as well. Moreover, the juxtaposition of the two movements is eminently flattering to the Tea Party.

In any case, whether these movements spring from the same fount of political anxiety and social fear is largely irrelevant. And whether they share common goals or aspirations is likewise beside the point. What really matters is that the two, taken together, demonstrate, vividly and in real time, the practical differences between the ideologies of the Right and the Left on behavior and attitude under similar, if not exactly identical, conditions.

The mainstream and left-ish critique of the Tea Party has, over time, evolved. First, the Tea Party was foolish. Then it was uninformed. Then rude and disorderly. Then confused. Then crazy. And lastly, racist. These were nonsense, of course. But what is interesting is that no one ever credibly charged that the Tea Partiers were openly violent or criminal in their behavior or a threat to the safety and security of those around them. The few such attempts along those lines

were both nakedly partisan and explicitly panic-driven and were based on “perception” and “mood” rather than on actual incidents.

Contrast this, briefly, with some of what we have seen from the Occupy movement of late. Let’s start with Occupy Cleveland, courtesy of the local CBS affiliate:

“Occupy Cleveland” protester tells police she was raped in her tent over the weekend.

Cleveland police are investigating an alleged sexual assault incident Saturday at the “Occupy Cleveland” rally involving a 19-year-old female student from Parma.

According to police reports, the 19-year-old student was instructed by “Occupy Cleveland” personnel to “share a tent with the suspect due to a shortage of tents.”

From there we move to Seattle and KOMO news:

A man accused of exposing himself to children at least five times across Seattle was arrested early Tuesday morning.

Seattle police say he was taken into custody at his Kenmore residence around 1 a.m.

Officers had been given a composite sketch of the suspect and detectives learned he had been at Westlake Park taking part in the Occupy Seattle protests.

Next to Baltimore and the *Baltimore Sun*:

Efforts by the Occupy Baltimore protest group to evolve into a self-contained, self-governing community have erupted into controversy with the distribution

of a pamphlet that victim advocates and health workers fear discourages victims of sexual assaults from contacting police.

The pamphlet says that members of the protest group who believe they are victims or who suspect sexual abuse “are encouraged to immediately report the incident to the Security Committee,” which will investigate and “supply the abuser with counseling resources.”

The directive also says, in part, “Though we do not encourage the involvement of the police in our community, the survivor has every right, and the support of Occupy Baltimore, to report the abuse to the appropriate authorities.” . . .

Lewis said there have been no reports of sexual assaults or rapes at the Baltimore protest site. But she said that members of the “security committee” have mediated several disputes involving allegations of sexual harassment.

On to Oakland courtesy of the *San Jose Mercury-News*:

Tension had been building for days in the Occupy Oakland camp before it erupted into violence Monday and Tuesday. When it finally did, Don Hughes, a substitute teacher and full-time tent resident of the camp, found himself amid a full-blown melee.

The next thing Hughes knew he was in a headlock, then he was being punched, and then he was on the ground as a large man began to choke him . . .

Sometimes, everyone appears to be on the same page. But the skein of civility has been frequently shattered as bullies, the mentally ill, drunks, thugs and anarchists have threatened the safety and

well-being of the camp’s more peaceful residents.

Back east to Boston and the *Boston Herald*:

A confrontation with a knife-wielding junkie at Occupy Boston and rampant thefts have tensions simmering between the protesters and the homeless, prompting Mayor Thomas M. Menino’s predecessor to say it’s high time for police to clear the tent city.

“It’s causing disruptions to public order,” former Mayor Raymond L. Flynn told the Herald. “They should have been given one day — 24 hours and that’s it. They have to be removed.”

And lastly, back to the mother ship in New York’s Zuccotti Park, with two separate pieces from the *New York Post*. First:

Occupy Wall Street protesters said yesterday that packs of brazen crooks within their ranks have been robbing their fellow demonstrators blind, making off with pricey cameras, phones and laptops – and even a hefty bundle of donated cash and food.

“Stealing is our biggest problem at the moment,” said Nan Terrie, 18, a kitchen and legal-team volunteer from Fort Lauderdale.

“I had my Mac stolen – that was like \$5,500. Every night, something else is gone. Last night, our entire [kitchen] budget for the day was stolen, so the first thing I had to do was . . . get the message out to our supporters that we needed food!”

And second:

“They are defecating on our doorsteps,” fumed Katherine Hughes, a stay at home mom who has the misfortune of living one block from the chaos. “A lot of people are very frustrated. A lot of people are concerned about the safety of our kids.”

Fed up homeowners said that they’ve been subjected to insults and harassment as they trek to their jobs each morning. “The protesters taunt people who are on their way to work,” said James Fernandez, 51, whose apartment overlooks the park.

Board member Paul Cantor said that residents are fed up with the incessant racket that emanates from the protest at all hours. “It’s mostly a noise issue,” he said. If people can’t sleep and children can’t sleep because the protesters are banging drums then that’s a problem.” .

The line to speak at the standing room only meeting spilled out of the board’s office and onto the street outside where Zuccotti sympathizers sparred with angry residents. One elderly woman told a protester to stop screaming and was met with an even higher volume. “Get some earplugs!” retorted David Stano.

Sadly, we could go on. And on. And on. But we figure you probably get the point. If you’re looking for the differences between the Tea Party and Occupy movements, we’ll count that as “one.” And we ask you to keep in mind when counting this one, that the Tea Party movement has existed for roughly two-and-a-half years now, whereas Occupy Wherever has been around for about a month.

As for the other critical difference between the movements – and hence between the ideologies they represent – it is rather clearly evident in the power

structures that have evolved to govern the movements. As noted above, the *New York Times* reports that both movements identify as “leaderless.” How that has played out in practice, of course, has been instructive.

In the Tea Party movement, which was and is a hybrid grassroots-and-sponsored crusade, leadership has evolved as one might expect, both from the top down and the bottom up. Various organizations with various sponsors have taken the lead in national campaigns, but local and regional groups have, by and large, maintained complete independence. The model certainly hasn’t worked perfectly, but for the most part, it represents a working example of decentralized authority and localized autonomy.

The Tea Party, of course, has its crackpots. It has its jerks, its loons, its degenerates, and its bullies. It has its glory-hounds and attention-hogs. But they are mere individuals among literally hundreds of thousands. And they speak for themselves and themselves only, with no pretensions to greater authority, which is to say that they are, in the grand scheme of things, irrelevant.

Even the Koch Brothers, whom the Left and the mainstream press have tried so desperately both to demonize and to mark as the financial and intellectual heart of the Tea Party movement, are just two men among many. If they were, for some reason forced to abandon their Tea-Party-related efforts, the movement would suffer, but it would, we suspect, survive just the same.

As for the Occupy Wall St. folks, their version of “leaderless” appears to be evolving a little differently. *New York* magazine tells the story thusly:

All occupiers are equal — but some occupiers are more equal than others. In wind-whipped Zuccotti Park, new divisions and hierarchies are threatening to upend Occupy Wall Street and its leaderless collective. As the protest has grown, some of the occupiers have spontaneously taken charge on projects large and small. But many of the people

in Zuccotti Park aren't taking direction well, leading to a tense Thursday of political disagreements, the occasional shouting match, and at least one fistfight.

It began, as it so often does, with a drum circle. The ten-hour groove marathons weren't sitting well with the neighborhood's community board, the ironically situated High School of Economics and Finance that sits on the corner of Zuccotti Park, or many of the sleep-deprived protesters.

"[The high school] couldn't teach," explained Josh Nelson, a 27-year-old occupier from Nebraska. "And we've had issues with the drummers too. They drum incessantly all day, and really loud." Facilitators spearheaded a General Assembly proposal to limit the drumming to two hours a day. "The drumming is a major issue which has the potential to get us kicked out," said Lauren Digion, a leader on the sanitation working group. But the drums were fun. They brought in publicity and money. Many non-facilitators were infuriated by the decision and claimed that it had been forced through the General Assembly.

"They're imposing a structure on the natural flow of music," said Seth Harper, an 18-year-old from Georgia. "The GA decided to do it . . . they suppressed people's opinions. I wanted to do introduce a different proposal, but a big black organizer chick with an Afro said I couldn't."

To Shane Engelerdt, a 19-year-old from Jersey City and self-described former "head drummer," this amounted to a Jacobinic betrayal. "They are becoming the government we're trying to protest," he said. "They didn't even give the drummers a say . . . Drumming is the

heartbeat of this movement. Look around: This is dead, you need a pulse to keep something alive." . . .

All belongings and money in the park are supposed to be held in common, but property rights reared their capitalistic head when facilitators went to clean up the park, which was looking more like a shantytown than usual after several days of wind and rain. The local community board was due to send in an inspector, so the facilitators and cleaners started moving tarps, bags, and personal belongings into a big pile in order to clean the park. But some refused to budge. A bearded man began to gather up a tarp and an occupier emerged from beneath, screaming: "You're going to break my [censored] tent, get that [censored] off!" Near the front of the park, two men in hoodies staged a meta-sit-in, fearful that their belongings would be lost or appropriated . . .

In response to dissatisfaction with the consensus General Assembly, many facilitators have adopted a new "spokescouncil" model, which allows each working group to act independently without securing the will of the collective. "This streamlines it," argued Zonkers. "The GA is unwieldy, cumbersome, and redundant."

From today's battles, it's not yet clear who will win the day: the organizers or the organized. But the month-long protest has clearly grown and evolved to a point where a truly leaderless movement will risk eviction — or, worse, insurrection.

As the communal sleeping bag argument between Lauren Digion and Sage Roberts threatened to get out of hand,

a facilitator in a red hat walked by, brow furrowed. “Remember? You’re not allowed to do any more interviews,” he said to Digion. She nodded and went back to work. But when Roberts shouted, “Don’t tell me what to do!” Digion couldn’t hold back. “Someone has to be told what to do,” she said. “Someone needs to give orders. There’s no sense of order in this [censored] place.”

This is hilarious. Or at least it would be hilarious if it weren’t so utterly predictable. And if the purported leaders of one of the nation’s two major political parties hadn’t embraced these buffoons and tacitly admitted that they intend to turn these protests into a model for their 2012 campaign. But it was predictable, utterly predictable. And the “leaders” in question have indeed embraced the buffoons and their mission. Which means that the “joke” – such as it is – is on the American people.

The question, of course, given all of this, is why on God’s green earth any politicians, but especially those who still have hopes of retaining or expanding his or her power, would embrace these manifestly maladjusted malcontents. And the answer is surprisingly simple. Because they can’t help themselves.

In a very real and palpable way, the Occupy Wall Street movement represents post-modern leftism in microcosm. And at an emotional level, politicians like Nancy Pelosi, John Kerry, Joe Biden, and, most notably Barack Obama, sense that. And, as is often the case, their emotions simply have gotten the better of them and moved them to do and say some things that appear likely to come back to haunt them.

The differences between the Occupy and the Tea Party movements show very clearly the differences between the Left and the Right on at least a couple of critical concerns, notably the very definitions of right and wrong and the nature and function of governmental authority.

Long-time readers will, of course, recognize this first concern as our old notion of the clash of moral systems. On the one hand we have the traditionalists, the Tea Partiers, the men and women who believe that while government receives its authority from individuals, those individuals nonetheless retain personal responsibility for their own actions. The Tea Partiers, for the most part, have behaved accordingly, and have conducted themselves and expected their brethren protestors to conduct themselves in a manner that reflects the norms of civil society.

On the other hand, we have the post-modernists, the men and women (boys and girls) of the Occupy Wall Street movement, who believe that morality is defined by what you believe and the collective entities for which you choose to fight. They don’t concern themselves with personal acts of debauchery or traditional immorality so much as they do with “principled” sentiments and fighting for the “proper” people and against the “proper” enemies. To them, it is much more important to make a stand against the *real* bad guys, who “hurt” people on the aggregate rather than the individual level.

In short, then, what you have is the morality of individual responsibility vs. the morality of the collective.

At the same time, in the respective movements, we see reflected the various beliefs about the nature of man, the nature of authority, and the implicit contract that exists between man and the authority.

With the Tea Party, we have men and women assembled together in pursuit of common ends, and in full acknowledgement that collective action in pursuit of those ends is more effective than individual action. The Tea Party, naturally, has a “man bites dog” quality about it because men and women of the right are generally hesitant to engage in collective action, hesitant to sacrifice individual autonomy to a collective and centralized authority.

Nevertheless, the importance of the issues under consideration moved these erstwhile cautious individuals to embrace an authority, under the

stipulation that said authority maintain as decentralized administration as possible. In the organizational structure of the Tea Party, we see much of what was once so simple and yet so beautiful in the organizational structure of the nation that the Founders built upon the Social Contract illustrated by Locke and described as follows by Tocqueville:

It is not the administrative, but the political effects of decentralization that I most admire in America. In the United States the interests of the country are everywhere kept in view; they are an object of solicitude to the people of the whole Union, and every citizen is as warmly attached to them as if they were his own. He takes pride in the glory of his nation; he boasts of its success, to which he conceives himself to have contributed; and he rejoices in the general prosperity by which he profits. The feeling he entertains towards the state is analogous to that which unites him to his family, and it is by a kind of selfishness that he interests himself in the welfare of his country.

The Occupy Wall Street movement, by contrast, was, at least initially, organized around the competing, Rousseauian notion of governance and presumes that everyone and everything will be well and good if organization itself is simply forsaken and each protestor is allowed to do as he pleases. In the beginning (an entire MONTH ago!) some called it anarchy; some called it liberation; all called it “revolution.” Rousseau himself would have called it the “state of nature.”

The only problem with this anarchistic state of nature is that it lends itself to chaos. And chaos lends itself to failure. So the Occupy movement, as all such movements before it, had to combat the chaos by amending the egalitarian character of the movement and thereby compelling some of the participants to do that which they did not want to do. Again, in the words of *New York Magazine*:

The drummers claim that the finance working group even levied a percussion tax of sorts, taking up to half of the \$150-300 a day that the drum circle was receiving in tips. “Now they have over \$500,000 from all sorts of places,” said Engelerdt. “We’re like, what’s going on here? They’re like the banks we’re protesting.”

Engelerdt is right, almost. They’re not like “the banks.” They’re like a government. They *are* a government. And they are a government bent on achieving goals, which means that those who stand in the way of those goals must be forced to comply or removed from the mini-society. To wit:

Zetah, tall and imposing with a fiery red beard, closed debate with a sigh. “We’re all big boys and girls. Let’s do this.” As he told me afterwards, “A lot of people are like spoiled children.” The cure? A cold snap. “Personally, I cannot wait for winter. It will clear out these people who aren’t here for the right reasons. Bring on the snow. The real revolutionaries will stay in -50 degrees.”

“The sunshine protestors will leave,” said “Zonkers,” a 20-year-old cleaner and longtime occupier from Tennessee. (He asked that his name not be used due to a felony marijuana conviction.) “The people who remain are the people who care. You get a lot of crust punks, silly kids, people who want to panhandle . . . It disgusts me. These people are here for a block party.”

Fortunately for these “sunshine protestors,” this “government” has a plan for removing them without actually hurting them. Nevertheless, the Occupy Wall Street movement is a microcosm of the Rousseauian leftist utopian vision gone bad: the glorious state of nature becomes anarchy, which become chaos, which,

in turn begets authoritarianism designed to maintain order and focus on the “omelet” regardless of the eggs that might need to be broken.

Now, the political ramifications of all of this – and specifically of high-profile Democrats’ support for and appropriation of the Occupy Wall Street movement – are ultimately unknowable and may, in fact, turn out to be minor, negligible even. But if the movement persists for any length of time; if it continues to garner media attention; if it continues to draw the admiration of high-profile figures on the political left, then it will all but certainly represent a long-term disaster for the Democratic Party – even if it doesn’t prevent Barack Obama from winning re-election.

It is worth remembering, we think, that the Democratic Party has been here before. In 1968, the establishment still controlled the party. And despite the counter-culture outcry that had led Johnson to withdraw from the race, his Vice President, Hubert Humphrey, was still the choice of that establishment and of the majority of Democratic voters. And he was, therefore, the nominee.

But, by 1970, the counter-culture elements in the party – the precursors to today’s Wall St. occupiers – had grown more powerful, and their impact on Democratic candidates was more pronounced, which alienated mainstream voters and made the GOP an anomaly, a party of the president that actually *gained* seats at the midterm. By 1972, of course, the takeover of the party was complete, and the counter-culture presidential nominee, George McGovern, went on to lose 49 out of 50 states, including his home state of South Dakota.

The Democratic Party, of course, went on to win back the White House just four years later, but it is worth remembering as well that this was a fluke, predicated principally on the personal corruption of Richard Nixon. Had Nixon not been the crook he denied he was, it is distinctly possible that the Democrats would have been locked out of the White House for nearly three decades, from Johnson’s victory in ’64 until Clinton’s first victory in 1992. Whatever the case, the Republican Revolution that finally turned the tide of

the New Deal began in 1968, the same year that the counter-culture movement began making its political presence felt at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago.

Historians and political scientists can and do argue about the causes of the collapse of the Democratic coalition in the late ‘60s. But whatever conclusion is reached, one thing that is undeniable is that the counter-culture movement within the party alienated it considerably from a great many “normal” voters, who thought that the hippies, the yippies, and eventually the party officials themselves had had lost their minds and had embraced values that were contrary to their own and to those of the majority of Americans. And naturally, they were right.

By the early ‘90s, with the arrival of the Clintons in Washington, Democrats seemed to have figured out their mistake. And they tried their darnedest to reconnect with “average” voters with traditional values. We hear all the time about how crazy Republicans are too religious and too public in their professions of faith, but truth be told, over the last two decades nobody has been more emphatic about their Christian faith and their traditional religiosity than high-profile Democrats – from Bill and Hillary Clinton to Al Gore to Nancy Pelosi and Barack Obama. If you see a politician on television carrying a bible or quoting a scripture verse, invariably he or she is a Democrat.

Part of this is sincere, we’re sure, but a bigger part of it is an attempt to overcome the electoral damage done by the obvious rift over values that was opened up when the Democratic Party became subsumed by the counter-culture more than four decades ago. Unfortunately for these Democrats and for others who will come after them, many of these same scripture-quoters are the very same politicians who have let the proverbial mask slip and who have embraced the Occupy Wall St. movement, thereby openly embracing the non-traditionalist moral code, making the same mistake the likes of McGovern made, and, worst of all, undoing two decades’ worth of rehab effort.

And that, we guess, is the bottom line here: if the Occupy movement persists – something about which we are dubious – it will once again tie the Democrats to the non-traditionalist, post-modern moral code. And it will hurt them with a majority of voters.

The same cannot be said about the Tea Party and the GOP. If anything, the GOP should consider itself lucky to be tied as closely to the Tea Party as it is, given the disparity in the behavior and accomplishments of late between the Tea Party insurgents and the Republican political class.

For all their similarities, that is the difference between the Tea Party and the Occupy Wall Street movements. In the case of the former, it is an undertaking designed expressly to take a tired, out-of-touch political class and bring it closer to the country class. In the case of the latter, it is a movement that, albeit unwittingly, will take the same out-of-touch political class and move it further from the country class. In short, one holds the possibility of political reform while the other holds the possibility of political disaster.

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