
CYNTHIA FLEURY, *HERE LIES BITTERNESS: HEALING FROM RESENTMENT*,
CAMBRIDGE: POLITY PRESS, 2023.

Zona Zarić, Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, University of Belgrade

In an insightful and probing exploration, Cynthia Fleury's book *Here Lies Bitterness: Healing from Resentment*, translated from French by Cory Stockwell, delves into the shared domain of political philosophy and psychoanalysis, confronting an issue fundamental to both the life of individuals and the fabric of societies – the pervasive discontent that undermines our existence. At the heart of this analysis is the quest to trace origins, to understand the inner self, its failings, disturbances, and desires. However, the book reveals a critical juncture where knowledge alone proves inadequate for healing, calming, or soothing the troubled psyche. It argues that overcoming sorrow, anger, mourning, resignation, and, most notably, resentment – the bitter sentiment that threatens to consume us, even as we might find its subtle and liberating flavor – is essential.

Here Lies Bitterness: Healing from Resentment presents a profound examination of the multifaceted nature of bitterness, exploring its genesis from personal grievances to its expansive influence on societal discord and political unrest. Fleury's exploration is not just an academic endeavor; it is a timely intervention into current sociopolitical debates and discourses. Amidst growing

polarizations, her insights into the internal and external manifestations of bitterness offer a critical lens through which to understand and navigate the challenges facing modern democracies. By contextualizing the book within her broader body of work, it becomes evident that Fleury is not merely diagnosing societal ailments but also proposing pathways towards reconciliation and healing. Fleury's book emerges as a crucial resource for scholars, and anyone seeking to comprehend the complex interplay between individual emotions and the structural dynamics of power and inequality in our contemporary world. Fleury's contributions to philosophy and psychoanalysis are not just academic; they encompass a broader societal impact, particularly in the domain of healthcare, where she emphasizes the importance of humanity in patient care, describing it as more than mere repair work. She also asserts the significance of care as a fundamental truth within democracy, suggesting a deep connection between ethical caregiving and democratic values. Her work also enriches the discourse on power, social hierarchies, and personal agency, offering a poignant critique of the mechanisms through which resentment is cultivated

and sustained. The uniqueness of her contribution lies in elucidating the pathways through which individuals and societies can recognize and overcome the bitterness that undermines social cohesion and personal fulfillment.

The democratic adventure, the book posits, similarly engages with this challenge of victimhood rumination. It raises a pivotal question: How can the democratic entity, at any level, whether institutional or otherwise, manage to curb the resentful impulse that endangers its longevity? Both individuals and the rule of law are presented with the same daunting task: to diagnose resentment, acknowledge its dark power, and resist the temptation to let it drive our personal and collective narratives.

The book is composed of three parts, each containing a collection of very small subchapters, an average of two to three pages. This unorthodox structure makes for an easier, almost encyclopedic or dictionary entry style read, to which the reader can easily return, thus making a not so accessible and highly intellectual style more welcoming. Part I explores the essence of bitterness, delineating its universality and its intricate relationship with individual experiences and societal structures. Fleury introduces the concept of resentment as a deeply ingrained emotional and psychological state that affects individuals' interactions within society, as well as the collective ethos of communities and nations. The chapters within this section systematically unravel the layers of resentment, from its origins to its manifestations in personal identity, societal dynamics, and even literature. Part II shifts the focus towards the socio-political dimensions of resentment, particularly its role in shaping political ideologies and movements. Fleury examines how resentment fuels the rise of fascism and other forms of political extremism. Through a detailed analysis, she elucidates how collective

resentment can be manipulated by political entities, leading to the erosion of democratic values and the perpetuation of social divisions. Part III, entitled "The Sea," symbolically represents the potential for healing and transcendence beyond the confines of resentment. Fleury posits that through understanding and confronting our bitterness, individuals and societies can navigate towards reconciliation and unity. This section offers a philosophical and practical guide for overcoming the barriers erected by resentment, emphasizing the importance of empathy, self-reflection, and the willingness to engage with the 'other.'

It is important to underscore the book's compelling argument that the path to overcoming the undercurrent of discontent lies not only in understanding our deepest troubles but also in transcending them, through personal agency, thus fostering a society capable of confronting and mitigating the seeds of its own potential undoing. Through a nuanced examination of the interplay between personal psyche and political governance, it calls for a collective effort to address and overcome the resentment that imperils both individual well-being and democratic resilience. "That said," as Fleury writes, "it is good to remember the extent to which pathologies are integrated into eras, and that the two are difficult to separate, even if certain pathologies are personal in nature" (2023: 24).

Fleury's book demonstrates significant strengths, primarily through its meticulous analysis, interdisciplinary methodology, and the lucidity of its arguments. The book's strength lies in its ability to weave together insights from psychoanalysis, philosophy, and political science, providing a holistic view of how resentment and bitterness permeate individual and societal levels. Fleury's clear and persuasive arguments facilitate an in-depth understanding of complex concepts, making them accessible to a broad audience. Her analysis

can be juxtaposed with Nietzsche's philosophical examination of resentment, particularly as discussed in works exploring Nietzsche's views on resentment, love, and pity. While Nietzsche views resentment as stemming from a place of powerlessness and a reactive stance towards perceived injustices, Fleury extends this concept to critique contemporary societal structures and the dynamics of power within them. Fleury's in-depth exploration illuminates how these emotions, rooted in feelings of inferiority and unmet expectations, can destabilize democratic institutions and social harmony. Engaging with authors ranging from Frantz Fanon, Theodore Adorno, Max Scheler, Donald Winnicott, Emil Cioran to Wilhelm Reich, the book stands out for bridging theoretical insights with empirical realities, enriching the academic discourse on the emotional underpinnings of political and social behavior.

The practical implications of Fleury's book are manifold. For policymakers, understanding the root causes of resentment can inform the creation of more inclusive, equitable policies that address societal grievances before they escalate. Social scientists can leverage Fleury's interdisciplinary framework to further examine the intersections of emotion, power dynamics, and societal structures. For the general public, this book demystifies the sources of societal division, offering a roadmap towards empathy, dialogue, and reconciliation. *Here Lies Bitterness: Healing from Resentment* not only advances academic discussions but also serves as a crucial guide for addressing the challenges of modern democracy. Fleury's call to acknowledge and address resentment's corrosive effects is a timely reminder of the urgent need for comprehensive strategies that foster societal resilience and unity.

