

## UPWARD CONTEMPT

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**C**ONTEMPT AND HUMILIATION, contempt and shame go hand in hand.<sup>1</sup> Actions that should shame us, styles of self-presentation that should humiliate us if we are socially competent enough to have such a purchase on ourselves, are those actions and styles that generate and justify the contempt of others for us. Or, changing the causal order: one's contempt of us will generate shame or humiliation in us if we concur with the judgment of our contemptibility, that is, if the contempt is justified,<sup>2</sup> or indignation and even vengeful fury if it is unjustified. Contempt is thus a mechanism of ranking people or of contesting relative rankings and as such has an intensely political significance.

Contempt raises a myriad of issues involving the relation of emotions to various social orders, to the justice of those social orders, and to the micro-politics of face-to-face interaction in those social orders. I want to narrow my range here. What I wish to speculate about is the nature of something I will call upward contempt, that is, the contempt that the low have for the high; I will then make some suggestions about how this might play out in different social and political regimes: heroic society, the ancien régime, and in democracy.<sup>3</sup>

By some accounts the notion of upward contempt involves a definitional impossibility. Contempt, after all, is usually captured by the metaphor of "looking down on someone or something," and this metaphor is even acted out concretely in the common facial expression of the one-sided smile and of the raised head, the partially closed eyes which view askance the offending contemptible person. However, let me do the necessary justification of upward contempt slowly and indirectly as a matter of the exposition that

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follows. Suffice it to say for the present that what I mean to capture is the contempt teenagers have for adults, women for men, servants for masters, workers for bosses, Jews for Christians, Blacks for Whites, uneducated for the educated, and so forth. Since all of us have at least been teenagers once, I assume we all have had the experience of being the contemner in upward contempt. Please do not take that last statement to mean that I think all upward contempts are the same or are triggered by the same conditions. The Black, the Jew, the woman, the teenager, and the worker may all share an inferior status, but that does not mean that their inferiority is constituted in the same way. A quick example: teenagers will be automatically emancipated from their restricted status simply by marking time. Blacks, on the other hand, are stuck. Jews can convert and in a non-racially-based anti-Semitic regime that can undo their inferior status. Even women suffer different styles of disablement depending on whether they are single, married, divorced, or widowed, or whether fertile or barren, old or young.

Consider this tale of competing contempts. Last summer I hired a mason to do some work on my house. He was a large beefy man, with several tattoos of the conventional sort: dragons, Vikings, and other virile Marvel comic-book-like figures. His jeans were worn low so that when he bent over his rear fissure was exposed.<sup>4</sup> He looked fairly tough, bearing the air of someone for whom the receipt of physical pain was not as much a cause of fear as the giving of it was of pleasure. He had already been on the job for a few days when I rode up on my bicycle, backpack on my back, said hello, and continued peddling back to the garage. The mason said to my wife, "he a teacher?" The failure of the "is" to introduce that question only captures some of the contemptuousness of his tone. I went back to make some small talk, comment on the job and how it was going, and then took my leave.

He and I each have no small amount of contempt for each other. But our contempts are not constructed in quite the same way. His for me is less ambivalent than mine for him, riddled as mine is with conflicting designs and commitments. Let me flesh out first some of the bases of my contempt for him before tackling my contemptibility in his eyes. First were the tattoos. I took them as signs of his will to vulgarity (or at least of his will to offend types like me). He not only did not disown them, but displayed them proudly. His pride in them underwrote the basis of my contempt, for were he ashamed, then I might feel embarrassed on his behalf. Or I may still feel contempt but it would be a benign contempt, almost undifferentiable from pity and compassion, not the sensation of wonderment mixed with disgust and revulsion the tattoos induced in me. His physicality, his obliviousness to seeking pain (the nontattooed are always treated to stories about the painfulness of getting tattooed), his lack of concern for—or even knowledge of—what might offend

me might have made me wary, if not quite fearful.<sup>5</sup> I could, without being paranoid, read in his style an affront. He was bigger, stronger, and tougher than I was and between men such assessments count for something. I suppose I could respect him for his willingness to affront me or for his simply not giving a damn what I thought. But unabashed vulgarity simply does not make it easy to grant even grudging respect on that account. It seems that whatever wariness he generated in me did not go to engendering respect for him; it only undermined certain foundations of respect for myself, as contemptibly unphysical, miserably unmartial. The whole encounter was as far as the total of respect in the world goes less than zero-sum.

Take the exposure of his hind parts when he bent over. This produced a contempt that touches both on amusement and disgust. The amusement is driven by my utter inability to imagine actually choosing to self-present in such a fashion; or, if in fact there had been no choosing, by the incomprehensibility of being so oblivious to one's body and presentability. The amusement is derisory in a way but the smile is not consciously willed as it often is in certain styles of sardonic laughter. The comedy is genuine and experienced as such.<sup>6</sup> He is playing the clownish vulgar mechanic: he is in the mold of Bottom the Weaver or Curly, Mo, and Larry. This is the amusement of contempt and displays an intimate connection between some styles of contempt and the comic.<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, this Rabelaisian kind of comic grotesquerie edges toward horror too; it would not take much for the base mechanic to metamorphose into a monster. Horror can be frightening, or it can be repulsive and disgusting.<sup>8</sup> And while contempt can be a kind of defense against a fear of the contemptible, it also bears some close connections with disgust. The same aspects of his style that amused me also came close to disgusting me. In a sense, he was contaminating. Disgust is the visceral end point of contempt. While both disgust and contempt come heavily mediated by culture, it still makes sense to conceive of disgust as somewhat more immediate, less thought dependent than contempt. Disgust is triggered by the sense that our body has been invaded by impurity; it thus prompts somatic reactions like retching, gagging, vomiting, spitting out.<sup>9</sup> Contempt, on the other hand, depends more on notions of rank, of proper ordering, of decorum. It is complexly intertwined with the rich rules of social and cultural ordering that both elicits it and is maintained by it.

I hope that the reader might suspend his condemnation of the failure of my account to accord with pieties that I actually accept as a matter of political commitment.<sup>10</sup> I need to spin a few things out a little further: at the same time I was having feelings of contempt for him I was also, as I hinted just a minute ago, indulging in no small amount of self-contempt, for my lack of physical-

ity, for my certainty that I could not win a fight with him, for my doubts about the social value of what I do, *and for my feeling contemptuous of him while at the same time realizing (or supposing) he was utterly untroubled by his contempt for me.* Although we both live in the third century of American democracy and liberal democratic political and moral theory, those traditions only seem to undercut my contempt for him, not his for me. For those styles of political, moral, and social thought did much more to delegitimize downward contempt than they did upward contempt. One could even hazard the suggestion (which I will return to later) that democratic theory does more than free upward contempt from having to make a pretense of hiding itself in the servant's quarters; it actually changes the style of that contempt.<sup>11</sup> And we could further suggest that one of the defining markers that distinguishes upward from downward contempt in democratic societies is the greater likelihood that the downward contempt will be accompanied by a sense of its own doubtful legitimacy, whether this sense be experienced as guilt, shame, or a mere sense of concern and doubt. This sense of doubt even makes the downward contemner wonder if his firm sense that the other experiences no anxiety at all for his own feelings of contempt is simply another manifestation of his contempt for the lower classes, seeing them again as insensate.

This is, however, to make my contempt less sure of itself than it was actually experienced, even though my feelings have a very questionable legitimacy. I actually had to remind myself that he is of equal value with me, of the same dignity, and so forth. Moreover, he merited respect for the skill he had, and for doing his job well, for which indeed I did respect him. Nevertheless, I cannot shake my contempt for what he is independent of his role as a competent mason. It is there with a vengeance, in spite of my lack of confidence about its justifiability. The syndrome I am suffering from is not liberal guilt. That is the sentiment one feels for being privileged when one doubts the justifiability of one's entitlement to such privilege. My contempt is not so much tinged with guilt or even self-doubt as it is colored by a sense of wonderment that my contempt is so incorrigibly part of me, uneradicable by all the years of official discourse to the contrary. Although I feel a sense of my own failure to live up to some high-toned principles about human equality, dignity, and value, I also experience a genuine pleasure in thinking myself superior to those I feel contempt for.

The true source of my uneasiness is not my own failure to live up to noble principles that at one level of consciousness I accept and admire, but the more down-to-earth matter that I discern his contempt for me and fear he may be getting the best of me. It is quite clear to me that the form his contempt takes is that he does not care what I think of him (with a small exception for preferring that I think he is doing a good job rather than a bad one). He is

indifferent to my contempt and I am not indifferent to his. He is unambivalent in his contempt (at least as a conscious matter). To the extent his contempt is tinged with envy, he reinterprets the envy as resentment that someone as unprepossessing as me should have such an easy life.

I feel rather confident that I can construct much of his contempt for me, not only because he so plainly manifests it but also because I am no stranger to feeling this kind of contempt either, recalling quite well having felt it for the type I have come to be; for even if I like to think myself differentiable from the others he associates me with, I expect him to make no such distinctions, nor am I even confident that my sense that I am distinguishable from those I am grouped with is anything but a delusion.<sup>12</sup> He would see me as a feminized male. My build, my bike, my backpack, and my profession mark me as something contemptible in his eyes. I do not work with my hands. Whatever skills I might have are dubiously magical, intangible, never really verifiable. I was a "teacher" in his eyes: someone who gives people what they do not want when they do not need it.<sup>13</sup>

If he cared to notice, he might have found it contemptible in me that I cared to have him think me a man like him. He might have discerned that ever so slightly I was aping him back to him. At one level this could be seen just as competent and graceful condescension in the eighteenth-century sense. He puts on his best manners and I somewhat alter mine downward and we meet in the middle, each having compromised out of respect for the encounter if not quite for each other. But he might pick up that I was not quite dealing from a position of strength, that I was in short trying too hard; to the discerning eye I was somewhat undignified. Here my commitments to democratic egalitarianism only made me a fool in his eyes. I would have been better off to have dealt with him with a kind of cordial aloofness. I wondered if he would have had the same contempt for a corporate executive, an insurance salesman, a woman? He unquestionably won the encounter.

His contempt for me, unlike mine for him, was unlikely to have been mingled with horror or disgust. I simply was a matter of indifference to him other than as a source of livelihood. My role was of a one-shot dispenser of money, nothing else. And then there is the suspicion that for all his indifference the culture's determination of status is not without some effect. I was by the conventional notion of the higher class. I lived in the better neighborhood. This makes me, for all my effeminacy in his eyes, less a pollutant in his world than he could be in mine. Although I was contemptibly risible in his eyes, the fact that I was of the higher class made me not have the capacity to pollute. What is the higher in higher class if not the capacity to put more space, real physical space between yourself and others, to be less polluting even to those who find you contemptible?

This rich and utterly routine interaction raises many issues, only three of which I will pursue further: (1) the content and mechanics of some varieties of contempt, (2) the particular features of upward contempt that distinguish it from the usual downward contempt, and (3) how social and political arrangements might affect the moral economies of competing versions of contempt.

### THE VARIOUS ELEMENTS OF CONTEMPT

“Those things which we neither Desire, nor Hate, we are said to Contemne: Contempt being nothing else but an immobility, or contumacy of the Heart, in resisting the action of certain things.” Thus Hobbes in *Leviathan*. Contempt in this formulation looks like indifference. And although this formulation is not unimaginable to us as a species of contempt, it hardly accords with our core notion of contempt. Yet Hobbes is clear that his version of contempt is a passion, not simply the absence of affect.<sup>14</sup> Hume’s contempt looks something more like how we usually envisage it. For him it is a mix of pride and hatred.<sup>15</sup> Pride gives the necessary downward direction and the elevation of oneself in relation to the person contemned; hatred supplies the moral judgment involved in the comparison. But contempt is much richer than either of these formulations. Seldom is an emotion ever experienced unalloyed with other emotions. It is no easy job, for instance, to separate a pure experience of humiliation from its accompanying despair or indignation; it is difficult to experience jealousy independent of anger; grief independent of frustration. Contempt is especially rich in the protean powers we understand it to have in being able to combine with a multitude of other passions and sentiments. We recognize contempt as a complex which can be made of various admixtures of affect and social style. Without taking the time to give a rich account of each commingling, most of us will have no trouble imagining contempt colluding with pity as well as scorn and derision; bemusement as well as smugness, haughtiness, disgust, revulsion, and horror; love (as with pets and even children) as well as hatred, indifference, disdain, snubbing, ignoring, sneering, and an array of sentiments which motivate various forms of laughter and smiles: the sardonic, the sarcastic, and the indulgent (again as with pets and children). What is common to all these experiences is one’s relation to someone over whom one is claiming some superiority, the very assertion of the claim being identical with the manifestation of contempt. Contempt is itself the claim to relative superiority. This helps explain the nearly polar extremes we suppose for contempt—from pity

to disdain, from hate to love, from bemusement to loathing: all these are possible attitudes the higher may assume vis-à-vis the lower.

Whatever might be the affects and motives that constitute any particular instance of contempt, we should not be surprised to see its styles and meanings intimately connected to the social and cultural setting in which it arises. Rigid hierarchical societies or societies of clearly marked status will have their contempts tend in one direction, while the contempts of democratic culture, or of roughly egalitarian honor cultures, would tend to have its contempts constituted in another way.

Take Hobbes's contempt again. This looks like the contempt of complacency, of never doubting your superiority and rank. It is the contempt of the master for the man, the lord for the villein, the lady for the maid. These lower simply do not merit strong affect; they are noticed only sufficiently so as to know that they are not notice worthy. One can condescend to treat them decently; one may in rare circumstances even pity them, but they are really of a different and innocuous species. Not insects, because insects might disgust; these people are the safely disattendable. We are not unfamiliar with this contempt of complacent indifference even in democratic cultures. It still flourishes in spite of democratic principle in particular contexts in which status is fixed and mobility across rankings is relatively rare. We thus find this kind of contempt in the posture of some bosses toward their secretaries, of professionals for the maintenance staff, and so on. There are two qualifiers here. First, I am speaking of one-on-one encounter. It takes an extraordinary amount of complacency to disattend large groupings of the low. Such groupings move the contempt of indifference to the realms of terror and horror (see note 8). And this is why societies that depended on the rigid structuring that enables this kind of Hobbesian contempt are careful to regulate the conditions under which the low can assemble. We may propose that, if the superiors feel secure and can indulge complacency, we will see the Hobbesian style of contempt; if, however, the groups are at war or for whatever reason the superior finds the lower not safely disattendable, then we might expect differently motivated and constituted contempts as in the contempts of anti-Semitism, racism, classicism, and sexism, with sexism perhaps marching to a different beat. Here it is not indifference, but loathing, horror, disgust, hatred, cruelty that accompanies and constitutes the contempt. Second, the indifference that is this kind of Hobbesian contempt depends on a precise knowledge of where you stand relative to the other and of a corresponding confidence in the disattendability of the other. The country bumpkin who through ignorance fails to understand when he should defer is not showing contempt in this Hobbesian way, even though his ignorance may give offense.<sup>16</sup>

Now change the setting so that we are not confirming or establishing hierarchical relations across large status demarcations but are contending for esteem and standing within a status, that is, in a basically egalitarian setting. Here we would expect to see a different style of contempt, the one we usually mean when we refer to treating someone with contempt. This is the treatment we give to let someone know that they have failed, that they are not measuring up, that they are claiming more for themselves than they can worthily discharge. This is the contempt of the bloodfeuder for the antagonist he has on the run, of the courtier whose manners are more refined than the other courtiers, of the academic for his nonpublishing colleague. This is not the contempt for the disattendable, but for those we might become or have just recently ceased to be. It is more active than Hobbes's contempt, more a part of consciously assumed strategies of interaction. It is the contempt that is the correlative of shaming or humiliating others for their failures to maintain group norms.

This active contempt is part of the system of challenge and riposte in the process of status acquisition and status maintenance that is the game of honor. To suffer that latter kind of contempt is, as articulated by a variety of eighteenth-century moralists and not so moralists, the worst that can befall a man. It is the open denial to oneself of what one considers one's due. For Fielding such contempt was crueller than murder.<sup>17</sup> And Lord Chesterfield harps on it continually to his son of which one example will suffice:

However frivolous a company may be, still, while you are among them, do not show them, by your inattention, that you think them so; but rather take their tone, and conform in some degree to their weakness, instead of manifesting your contempt for them. There is nothing that people bear more impatiently, or forgive less, than contempt; and all injury is much sooner forgotten than insult.<sup>18</sup>

These men moved in circles where they felt their self-esteem and status at risk from a number of directions: from above by those whose favor they sought, from the side by those with whom they competed for the favors of those above, by those upstarts immediately below whose very presence would devalue the position they had already attained. If they could still rest secure among their servants, they could not rest secure among the wtlings, the coxcombs, the insolent, and the impudent would-bes.<sup>19</sup>

The contempt these men fear is the contempt from those they honor, respect, and fear. This is the contempt that disciplines and establishes the authority and superiority of the contemner. Not everyone can inflict contempt that hurts. Thus to Chesterfield the contempt that upstarts in good circumstances show for those who "cannot afford as fine clothes, as good an



equipage, or who have not as much money in their pockets" is an "insolent contempt," a contempt that exposes such insolent upstarts to justifiable contempt from judges like himself. This kind of insolent contemptuousness is incessantly pilloried in comedies of manners; these mean souls of whom we might take Mrs. Elton, in *Emma*, as one of many instances, are too dim to recognize merit, rank, or where they stand in the eyes of real blue blood. The contempt that comes from this kind of contemptible person can still cause real pain but not of the soul-killing variety that the contempt of those whose merit you concede can. Contempt from these latter can be a kind of moral and social death.

Let me pursue a different matter for a bit. One school of emotion theorists in modern experimental psychology, following Darwin and to some extent James, have hunted for the emotions independent of their social and cognitive settings and contents and sought them in the adaptive legacy of the species and thus in the hardwiring of the human animal. These theories tend to limit the number of core emotions to those that have distinctive facial expressions that indicate their presence. And so it is that contempt often appears on the list of core emotions, along with joy, sadness, anger, surprise, interest, disgust, fear, shame/shyness, and guilt.<sup>20</sup> Contempt creates some problems for this kind of analysis that the others do not because there is not just one expression that serves to express the sentiment, nor for that matter is any one expression capable of doing service for the entire range of sentiments that can be subsumed within the broad notion of contempt. Darwin, for instance, discusses contempt in company with disdain and disgust, which discussion follows on the heels of sneering and defiance in his preceding chapter.<sup>21</sup> Disdain he views as implying a more angry frame of mind than contempt, while disgust focuses on things offensive to the sense of taste, "nevertheless extreme contempt, or as it is often called loathing contempt, hardly differs from disgust" (p. 253). Contempt, like disdain, sneering, and defiance, is often indicated by a slight uncovering of the canine tooth on one side of the face. This same expression can imperceptibly metamorphose into a smile, which as Darwin notes, "may be real, although one of derision and this implies that the offender is so insignificant that he excites only amusement; but the amusement is generally a pretense." We all know under what circumstances the amusement is a pretense. It is a kind of defensive posture masking horror and revulsion. But the amusement need not be a pretense either; it could just as well be a sign of the genuine laughability of certain kinds of contemptibility.

The one-sided smirking smile (notice how many types of smiles we distinguish that are likely to be one-sided: the smirk, the derisory grin, the sardonic, the wry, the sneer, etc.) is associated with dismissiveness. In this it

differs from the other classic contempt expression which Darwin represents in a plate showing a woman with partially closed eyes that may or may not be looking askance, the nose raised up with a contraction upward of the upper lip in an expression that verges on the expression we show for disgust. This represents something other than dismissiveness. It shows that the thing contemned is vile, revolting, and beneath contempt, a phrase that once probably indicated Hobbesian indifference, but has come to indicate instead the loathing contempt that Darwin refers to. This is the sign of despising. These two expressions differ in how they style one's relation to the would-be offense and offender. The one finds nothing funny in having to be present with something one perceives as undifferentiable from excrement; the other, the one-sided smile, recognizes, if not quite welcomes, the rough comedy of having to suffer fools and clowns. And clowns are significantly less polluting than feces.

I do not have the space to play this out in all its suggestive detail. Suffice it to say that under the rubric of contempt lies a complex of strategy, expression, and affect. By way of reprise, the only thing we can say with reasonable confidence is that whatever the precise style of the particular contempt, whether Hobbesian indifference, or visceral loathing and disgust, what is always being played out in every instance is the articulation of relative social and moral value. Contempt is the emotional complex that articulates and maintains hierarchy, status, rank, and respectability. And differentiated status and rank are the eliciting conditions of contempt. So what we have is a kind of feedback loop in which contempt creates the structures which generate the capacity for contempt. And there is good reason to believe that the particular style of the contempt will be intimately connected with the precise social and political arrangements in which it takes place.

### *UPWARD CONTEMPT*

I would like to suggest that the notion of contempt moving upward is more than just a play on words, more than quickly dismissed by a quick relativist move of the sort that asks: "By whose view are you judging high and low? Surely, you must admit, the mason did not feel himself below you at all, so to the extent he felt superior to you he could hold you in contempt of the classic variety." I do not dispute that upward contempt involves seeing the higher party as contemptible and thus as risible and in some respects as lesser. It is contempt, after all, we are dealing with. The lower might know himself more intelligent, physically stronger, more moral, better looking, and so forth.

But what I am positing is that upward contempt will still have a different feel, a different style. We have already noted some: (1) that upward contempt is less likely to be coupled with disgust and that it is thus less concerned to protect oneself from pollution; (2) that in democratic settings upward contempt, unlike contempt proper, is secure in its legitimacy. Upward contempt, in spite of the fact that it allows the lower to claim superiority regarding a particular attribute, does not take place in a vacuum. The person below knows that they are below in the eyes of the other, knows that they are in some sense held in contempt by those others, whereas the higher by the usual conventions of rank can indulge themselves even legitimately in the thought that they are held in esteem, admired, or envied by the lower.<sup>22</sup>

This knowledge is not without consequences. This means that upward contempt is played out in a larger setting of power relations that define its ranges and meanings. If conventional contempt constitutes hierarchy, upward contempt makes for some psychic space for the low. It never loses the sense of its own limits; it knows itself to be secondary, a kind of remedy for the contempt that is rained down on one, never constitutive, always reactive. In other words, no matter how contemptible I might be to the mason I hired, the fact remains that I hired him, not he me.<sup>23</sup> There follows from this another crucial distinction between upward and conventional contempt. The contempt of the low for the high, unlike conventional contempt, will often be coupled with a distinctive kind of *Schadenfreude*. If the pleasure of normal contempt is often tinged with complacency, self-satisfaction, and smugness, or even with a simple and less culpable delight in one's own superiority, the pleasure in upward contempt is seldom separable from the knowledge that the superior you hold in contempt is humiliating himself, is, in short, looking foolish. Notice that in this case it is not that the lower person is necessarily seeing the high as beneath him, as lower, in other words, than the low, but only as seeing the high as lower than where the high sees himself.<sup>24</sup> Let me expand upon this briefly.

Occupying the high position is not without its risks. It supposes, of course, superiority, demonstrable superiority. The high have to maintain the standards that justify admiration and deference or suffer contempt and resentment for failing to maintain them.<sup>25</sup> We must speak in probabilities here, but it might justly be supposed that upward contempt is both generated by and generates the capacity to discern and expose hypocrisy in superiors. Upward contempt is often intimately connected with the revelation of hypocrisy in its object, the identification of hypocrisy fueling and justifying the resentment as well as the mirthful derision that will be its consequence. This process will tend, in other words, to admit the authority of the higher while revealing the higher's moral unworthiness for the position they occupy. The style of

upward contempt will then often be characterized by a certain satiric mockery. The satirist drives a contempt that finds in the higher not so much the bases for disgust as the basis for scornful laughter. If one cannot quite render them clowns and fools, satire can surely show them to be the knaves they are. Upward contempt in this style then does not deny the superior power of the other; it just finds the hypocrisy of the high to be the substance of a kind of moralistic, sardonic, and bitter comedy.

The exposure of hypocrisy and the upward contempt that accompanies it depends on the high not adhering to their own publicly stated standards of conduct and virtue. And the bitterness of the satire that exposes such hypocrisy suggests that the satirist judges those values and standards worthy of being adhered to.<sup>26</sup> Satire, then, to the extent it embodies the lower exposing and admonishing the higher is usually the bailiwick not of the utterly disempowered, but of the middling and ministerial sorts: it is the contempt of those who actually have to clean up the messes and implement the policies of those they contemn.

Another kind of upward contempt more clearly associated with hierarchical society (but not necessarily so) simply finds the high's standards of conduct and virtue and the social institutions which maintain them silly, a cause for general mirth. Here the strategy is not to paint the higher as knaves, but to see them as clowns and fools. This is the feast of misrule. Here the standards and virtues of the powerful are meaningless. Only their power matters. The glee, mirth, laughter, the giggles, deny for the moment the forms of constrained deference. To the extent that pomposity is an attribute of so much institutionalized power there is always an entry for the glee and delight of seeing it punctured.<sup>27</sup> And these little scenes of punctured pomposity need not occur only during periods set aside for it each year but whenever the contents of a chamber pot fell on the finely dressed lady or whenever a lord tripped over his sword. Imagine how hard it must have been for the footman to keep a straight face. Minifeasts of misrule, therein lies the image of this style of upward contempt. Contrast it with the usual style of downward contempt: sardonic, indifferent, smug, or disgusted, but all in all dismissive. Note too that the two styles of contempt can each have their defensive aspects. Downward contempt defends against the possibility of impudence by denying the capacity of the offender to offend; upward contempt tries to carve out spaces of self-respect, by making the contemnors of one's respectability comic characters.<sup>28</sup>

Let me add as an aside that contempt of the higher's values and standards of conduct need not only lead to the mirthful contempt of feasts of misrule. Contempt can be the consequence of calculated self-interest that thrives at the expense of a superior whose values leave the door wide-open to fleece

him. The embezzlements of Chaucer's Manciple and Reeve<sup>29</sup> were the simple price of a noble ethic that made work and attention to the balance sheet a contemptible badge of baseness. Masters were hardly unaware that such thieving went on. They supported and delighted in a comedic literature in which cunning servants outwitted them. But masters, I suppose, indulged in the fantasy that it was everybody else's reeves and stewards who were engaged in such activities. His own steward, after all, was always the exception that proved the rule. And yet you were almost supposed to be cheated by your servants; if you cared enough to put a stop to it you were base, illiberal, and small-minded. In that kind of society your moral standing and self-esteem were still safely independent of what your servants or other lower-status people thought of you.

Let me baldly state a proposition which, given the constraints of space, I can only sketch out as a rough story, more in the nature of an hypothesis. Upward contempt, as noted above, is marked by its reactive quality. It is a payback of sorts, a response to the contempt being rained down from above. I suspect that the style of upward contempt might vary with the style of contempt it is responding to and that both might be locked together in a circle of mutual elicitation and influence. We might state it broadly thus: Hobbesian contempt, the style of disattending the other, of being indifferent to him or her, is something that characterizes the contempt of the high for the low in rigid hierarchies until we get to democracy when it becomes available as a style of upward contempt. In the pre-French-revolution west, Hobbesian indifference was largely unavailable to the low as a style of contempt, at least in such a form that it evoked anxiety and concern among the high. In that world the public form of upward contempt was feasts of misrule, or the grim laughter of hypocrisy exposed. And one suspects that even these styles of upward contempt were not quite evenly distributed among the various rankings beneath the nobility. Feasts of misrule were for those at the social antipodes of the nobility, while the bitter delight in exposing hypocrisy was more a style, as indicated above, of those who were nearer the high, who actually had a chance to observe them closely, but were still contemned by them.

Consider the broad types of social arrangements that follow and the various contempts that maintain them. The heroic world, those cultures described in epic, cannot tolerate too much upward contempt of the sort that questions the very value of honor itself. When we see someone dare risk it they are put down quickly and the hierarchy is maintained in spite of how comical it may look to the underlings. True, Thersites is given his say, but no one responds to the content of his speech. Odysseus' *ad hominem* assault is deemed to dispose of the issue.<sup>30</sup> In the Icelandic sagas Thersites makes a

brief appearance in the guise of a poor farmer named Thorkel of Hafratindar. He has the temerity to refuse to warn the hero of an impending ambush because he finds the disputes of the honorable vaguely amusing and proposes instead to have fun from a safe distance watching them kill each other off. His arguments are not dealt with either, except *ad hominem*. He is killed for his derision.<sup>31</sup>

Heroic society, however, knows of contempt; it depends on it. Contempt is the correlative of shame and humiliation. Contempt is what the honorable have right to show for the less honorable; it is part of the give-and-take of honor maintenance and honor acquisition. Fear of contempt or shame is what fuels the engine of honor. The literatures of heroic honor only rarely give us a glimpse of those too mean to be part of the competition for honor: Thersites and Thorkel suffer grievously for their contemptuous ridicule of the ethics of honor. Upward contempt of their sort is dangerous and not tolerable. When one laughs at one's superiors, one better make sure it is safely behind their back unless you have been granted the privilege of the fool or madman.<sup>32</sup>

It is often the case that those down one in the feud, that is, those who have been wronged and have not yet avenged themselves, may defy their opponents, may in fact have contempt for them. Such contempt, however, is not upward contempt for it is banded around within a group of rough equals, people in the game. The views of true inferiors, that is, of servants, the lowly, the nonplayers, do not interest the authors. Except, in the saga literature, for the women. In Iceland the thoughts of the wives, mothers, and daughters of warrior men do count and they are nothing if not experts at subjecting their men to blistering contempt for their failings. They are masters of knowing how to shame and humiliate. Yet this too is not upward contempt. The women are charged with voicing the norms of honor. They are protecting the interests of the honor ethic.<sup>33</sup>

For insistent interest in upward contempt we need hierarchies that are not as fluid as they are in the rough egalitarianism of honor systems. We need more formal or less mobile hierarchies that assign whole groups to a rank rather than a game in which individuals compete for relative rank. We also need certain instabilities in the confidence with which the hierarchy is maintained. Consider these accounts in the generation or two that precede the French Revolution and then some that follow reasonably soon upon it.

In his *Essay on Conversation*, Fielding asks us to consider a setting in which we are to "suppose a conversation between Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and three dancing masters" (p. 267).<sup>34</sup> The mere posing of the hypothetical suggests the problem: mutual contempt. The "heel sophists would be as little pleased with the company of the philosophers as the philosophers with theirs." What can be done to remedy the situation? Two courses are proposed:

raising the lower or lowering the higher. The former is impossible. What must become of "our dancing masters" should Socrates discourse on the nature of the soul, Plato on the beauty of virtue, or Aristotle on occult qualities? "Would they not stare at one another with surprise and . . . at our philosophers with contempt?" The philosophers must condescend to those topics which are mutually intelligible.

Here is a little vignette in which mutual contempt between high and low is assumed. But note the tone. The dancing masters are no threat to order, only to interesting conversation. Their contempt for Plato and his pals types them as comically contemptible. If the contempt of dancing masters is all that philosophers have to concern themselves with, then they are safe indeed. The dancing master is not some rude mechanic. He is contemptible especially because his skill is one that he gets no credit for having. There are ideologies, among which we might count Christianity, that grudgingly concede virtue to tillers of the soil and to the builders of things, but the dancing master is simply a low abettor of the vanities of the privileged. Rude mechanics and tillers of the soil occasionally produce Wat Tylers and Jack Cades, but no one fears a dancing master, whose position makes him oily, serviceable, and obsequious. The only basis a dancing master has for laughing behind your back is his dancing skill and that is what he is paid to impart to you. So should he laugh at your son's ungainliness, he only calls into question his own skills as a teacher. This makes his smirking much less pointy than that of your footman or valet de chambre, or chambermaids. If one needs to suffer occasionally the contempt of the low, what better than have it come from the dancing master? In this world a gentleman is still in control. He is not anxious about the figure he cuts before his servants. He adopts a condescending confident and benevolent style: Thus Lord Chesterfield:

There is a *bienséance* also with regard to people of the lowest degree; a gentleman observes it with his footman, even with the beggar in the street. He considers them as objects of compassion, not of insult; he speaks to neither *d'un ton brusque*, but corrects the one coolly, and refuses the other with humanity. (to his son, June 13, O.S. 1751)

Nonetheless, Chesterfield's gentleman calmly keeps his money in his pocket. So the humanity of his refusal must simply be that he refrains from beating, berating, or ridiculing the beggar. The compassion he shows then does not lead to deeds either good or bad, but simply to inaction. Evidently, inaction counts as an improvement since the benchmark expectation is that beating and beratement are in order.

But some fifty years later we have a more anxious world. William Godwin can observe that

in England at the present day there are few poor men who do not console themselves, by the freedom of their animadversions upon their superiors. The new-fangled gentleman is by no means secure against having his tranquillity disturbed by their surly and pointed sarcasms. This propensity might easily be encouraged, and made conducive to the most salutary purposes.<sup>35</sup>

In this threatening, panicky postrevolution world we soon begin to observe the nervous anxieties of the protomodern paranoid who feels that every servant, every inferior, is laughing at him. From the jovial contemplation of shallow and empty dancing masters having contempt for Plato and Aristotle we move to a world in which every encounter with a social inferior holds the prospect of one's own humiliation. Democratic ideals have, if not quite transformed the old style, surely altered expectations and perceptions. Downward contempt becomes less complacent because it now suspects it is being paid back in kind. The high can no longer as easily maintain the Hobbesian contempt of indifference. Only the insentient fool is indifferent to threat. One can pose as indifferent, but this is a strategy designed to veneer fear and gnawing doubts about the figure one cuts in a world all of a sudden much more densely populated. The servants are no longer quite invisible. William Hazlitt, for instance, sees himself in a constant struggle with servants out to ridicule and humiliate him. "Their betters," he writes,

try all they can to set themselves up above them, and they try all they can to pull them down to their own level. They do this by getting up a little comic interlude, a daily, domestic, homely drama out of the odds and ends of the family failings, of which there is in general a plentiful supply or make up the deficiency with materials out of their own heads.<sup>36</sup>

No point in preempting their mockery with kindness: "Any real kindness or condescension only sets them the more against you. They are not to be taken in in that way." Notice again that the style of upward contempt is the style of comedy and drama. And it is not just your own servants who are cheeky and cheat, but "after a familiar conversation with a waiter at a tavern, you over-hear him calling you by some provoking nickname" (p. 107).

This is a world in which the once invisible is now monstrous and flexing its muscle. Breaches of deference are apparently becoming just frequent enough that there can be no longer any complacency in the smallest exchange, even though most of them still pass off with all deference intact and all respectfulness preserved. Hazlitt casts about for strategies to save face. Condescension, humanity, he says, do not work. The low will simply hold you in greater contempt (here writing of dull and low people rather than specifically of servants):



All the humility in the world will only pass for weakness and folly. They have no notion of such a thing. They always put their best foot forward; and argue that you would do the same if you had any such wonderful talents as people say. You had better, therefore, play off the great man at once—hector, swagger, talk big, and ride the high horse over them: you may by this means extort outward respect or common civility; but you will get nothing (with low people) by forbearance and good-nature but open insult or silent contempt.<sup>37</sup>

Hazlitt is desperate and at loose ends. He is still enough of the world of rank and order that he can suppose that pretentiousness is a viable humiliation-avoiding strategy. Or we may see him as a proto-Dostoyevskian underground man in which the defining trait of the new modern order is precisely the inevitability of humiliation, the inevitability of appearing contemptible to those whom you style yourself as better than. In this kind of world the only safe strategy for the preservation of a virtually unattainable self-esteem is paradoxically to seek humiliation.<sup>38</sup> Be pretentious, put on airs, hector and upbraid the social inferior, because if you do not, they will see you as even more contemptible for being embarrassed about your own superiority. This is modernity itself: suffering upward contempt, self-loathing, and looking ridiculous to those you fancy yourself better than. Instead of being admired, you are now spurned for your attempts at “democratic condescension” when lordly condescension is what is preferred. We have not quite reached me and the mason, but we are very close.

We are in the midst of big changes here. But just what has changed? Are the low less deferential? Or is it that the same old cheekiness, buffoonery, and cunning is now seen where once it was safely disattendable? Is the change, in other words, more in the masters than in their lackeys? There were always cheeky servants and swindling stewards. Both provided their superiors with stock characters in the comedies that amused them. What I suspect Hazlitt observes are not his inferiors literally laughing in his face where once they never would have dared, but that now types like him care obsessively about impudence and effrontery. They are panicked in seeing what they were once able to ignore; they even imagine being laughed at when they are not. They are now actively concerned about how they are seen by their inferiors, and they fear that the earlier strategies of dealing with effrontery are no longer so easily available: caning, whipping, or contemptuously refusing to recognize the affront. It is this concern and this fear that look new. A hundred years earlier Swift could imagine his servants laughing at him, knows, in fact, that they do, but the tone is not of urgent desperation; it is a slapstick comedy in which servants smirk at their superior’s bowel movements, guffaw at their pratfalls, and waste their lord’s estate with their knavery and incompetence.

The fear is not of revolution, but of bankruptcy. The master is still the master even in spite of frequent effrontery.<sup>39</sup>

Hazlitt is writing at the outset of a new ordering of assumptions about rank and status. Things, he feels, are in flux. But one wonders if he indeed is picking up on something different in style from the usual cheekiness and impudence in the low—that was there from Plautus onward. The new democratic order allows for a real inversion of contempts. It is now the low who can indulge a Hobbesian contempt; they can treat their superiors with indifference. The waitperson cares less about you than you do about him or her. Contrast this to how the Manciple's and the Reeve's contempt depended on assiduous concern and attention to their masters, on pleasing them, yes, but also on knowing them better than they knew themselves, on becoming utterly indispensable to them, so as to construct the basis for their planned violations of their masters' trust. These cunning operators could never relax; there was no time that they could be indifferent to their masters. The modern inferior might need to display obsequiousness in some settings but these settings are severely restricted. For the most part she does not give a damn and has her own spaces within which she has more important things to worry about: like competing for esteem among her peers.

Tocqueville tells another story in which he contrasts English and American customs of treating strangers. Why is it that Americans abroad greet each other but the English do not?<sup>40</sup> The short answer is that the English are nervous wrecks about the security of their rank; hence their distinctive reserve. According to Tocqueville, the security of an aristocracy of birth has given way to one of wealth and "the immediate result is an unspoken warfare between all the citizens. . . . Aristocratic pride still being a very strong force with the English and the boundaries of the aristocracy having become doubtful each man is constantly afraid lest advantage be taken of his familiarity." In America, on the other hand,

where privileges of birth never existed and where wealth brings its possessor no peculiar right, men unacquainted with one another readily frequent the same places and find neither danger nor advantage in telling each other freely what they think. Meeting by chance, they neither seek nor avoid each other. Their manner is therefore natural, frank, and open. One sees that there is practically nothing that they either hope or fear from each other and that they are not concerned to show or to hide their social position.

One wonders where he found this egalitarian utopia in the United States. It seems that before all this natural frank openness can take place it must be preceded by a judgment that the other person is indeed entitled to such free intercourse. The openness does not precede a determination of who exactly

is entitled to it, but itself follows on the ascertainment that one is dealing with a rough equal. Tocqueville is comparing apples and oranges. He compares an Englishman who has yet to judge whether the person he is dealing with is his peer to Americans who have already made that judgment. The Englishman is wary of a person about whose exact rank he is uncertain; the American has that settled already because the place frequented will be a place for his kind of people to frequent. I am overstating it. There surely was something more open about America for broad ranges of men (and I mean men) when compared with Europe and even the large freedoms of England. The English did and do cut distinctions of rank in much finer gradients than Americans. Yet I imagine that we would see these natural, frank Americans quickly settling among themselves who was a man to be reckoned with and who was not, who was to be deferred to and who was not, who was to be respected and who was not, even if this form of respect was less hedged in with formalized conventions than English relations between classes and ranks would be. If the class of people an American admitted as his equals was more broadly recruited than an Englishman's, it was rather sharply delimited nonetheless and those boundaries were maintained as before by contempt and humiliation. Consider further the following extract from a letter a young New Yorker in 1852 writes home to his sister about his travels in the Caribbean:

Here a black man is as good as a white one. . . . They do not hesitate to offer their hands to be shaken. Our washerwoman, sits upon the sofa in the cabin and talks as bold and loud as tho' the ship was hers. A washerwoman in NY, a white one too, would not open her lips or think of sitting down. Nor would she offer to shake hands, as our Antiguan lady washerwoman did, which I politely refused to accept. The English say much against what they call equality in the states. They call it the most disagreeable part of their travels in our country that any man can ride who pays. If they think our equality disagreeable, I think theirs disgusting—for certainly our servants would not offer to shake hands with us, a thing often occurring in Antigua.<sup>41</sup>

I want to limit myself to two main points about this wonderfully rich passage. It serves a useful corrective to Tocqueville and to me. For Tocqueville it makes the point that equality comes in all kinds of sizes and shapes. And that the American size and shape still had plenty of room for rank and status, not only for race and gender as in the young traveler's letter, but we suspect among White men too, even, I would guess, on the egalitarian Western frontier. There is English equality and American equality, and each style seems to appall the other and provide the basis for competing contempts between Americans and the English. And what is it that makes them appalling? The impudence of people clearly designated as inferior. Both equalities want ranks maintained even if the grand theory of ranks has fallen on hard

times. The English do not like the idea that American common carriers do not distinguish rank among paying passengers, while the American finds it disgusting that the English allow servants such familiarity as to think to shake hands with their social superiors (one suspects our traveler is mistaking a frontier colonial style as representative of a particularly English style). Upstartism of some sort (the passage indicates that not all upstartism has the same content) is as upsetting to Americans as it is to the English in spite of the polemical point Tocqueville wishes to make. One wonders, by the way, how our young traveler thought it was possible to refuse the washerwoman's hand *politely*? Presumably, he, like Chesterfield to the beggar, assumes an appallingly low benchmark in which caning, raping, or spitting in the face is the norm.

And what Mr. Dudley, our letter writer, shows me is that any claim about democracy liberating upward contempt to combat the usual fare being rained down from above must be accompanied with a much more nuanced and detailed story than I am providing here. Apparently, these two opposing contempts established various equilibria at different times and places. The New York washerwoman is still all deference to Mr. Dudley's mind. But is she? She may simply be utterly indifferent to this confident young prig, finding him at best a bore, at worst a pain in the butt. And what of our Black washerwoman in Antigua? Why assume with Mr. Dudley that she is simply too dense to understand the effect of her lack of deference on the young American man? She might very well be putting him on, exposing him to a very heavy dose of a more broadly comic contempt, rendering him the pretentious fool. It is not as if Mr. Dudley was able to ignore her. Quite the contrary. He thought she was really worth writing home about.

I conclude by restating my broad claim. Democracy does not destroy the conditions for upward contempt. In spite of the language of equality, we still recognize statuses, classes, and ranks that construct hierarchies. We can, in other words, still safely mark many instances of contempt as upward or conventionally downward. While some contempts surely represent competing claims for dominance as in the style of contempt among rough equals in heroic society, other contempts relatively easily map onto the styles of contempt discoverable in rigidly hierarchical societies. Democracy, far from undoing the basis for contempts of high and low, simply makes it possible for the low to add to the styles of upward contempt they already had in the old order. If the dominant form of upward contempt was, and still largely is, that of making the superior look ridiculous, either by feasts of misrule or by exposing the hypocrisy and incompetence of the superior, it became possible with role proliferation, role division, and democratic assumptions simply to be indifferent, to find more than enough space for oneself in which the

superior was disattendable and simply did not matter much at all. The low now have available to them the Hobbesian contempt of simply not caring to attend to their superiors and it is this which does so much to engender anxieties in the superior, for the superior cannot fathom that he or she could be so utterly disattendable. And what possible strategy is there to oppose to such indifference? Ignoring it? That is simply to battle his indifference with your feigned indifference. Caning is no longer permissible and firing and not hiring are severely circumscribed. It just might be that the mutuality of contempt is much of what pluralistic democracy is all about. What democracy has done is arm the lower with some of the contempts that only the high had available to them before. This is no small achievement. It is much of what makes it so different from the old order.

### NOTES

1. See Allan Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 136-40 for the notion that shame is the first-person counterpart to disdain, contempt, or derision. On the distinction between shame and humiliation, see my discussion in William Ian Miller, *Humiliation* (Cornell University Press, 1993), 134-48.

2. Not that our concurrence will always be sufficient as a matter of justice. We may not concur with the judgment and simply be behaving obstreperously or incorrigibly, or, we may concur with the judgment and be the victim of an unjust social order that deprives us of the ability to make sufficiently autonomous evaluations of our lot in that particular social order.

3. James C. Scott in his *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), as his title suggests, deals with the styles of resistance the lower take with regard to the higher, but he plays this out almost solely in societies with institutionalized slavery, untouchability, or racial domination. His discussion, somewhat too sentimental and pious for my tastes, only indirectly alludes to the emotional force motivating the "hidden transcripts" of the disempowered. His discussion largely assumes that resentment, indignation, and fear mark the style. Contempt makes only a rare appearance (e.g., pp. 2, 199). Many of Scott's points are anticipated by M. P. Baumgartner, "Social Control from Below," *Toward a General Theory of Social Control*, 2 vols., ed. Donald Black (New York: Academic Press, 1984), 1:303-45. See Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Managed Heart* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983) for a rich ethnography of the costs of emotion management and constraint among flight attendants.

4. I realize "fissure" is rather prissy, but the more direct alternatives are too great a breach of decorum at present. Please know I struggled with this.

5. My view of the significance of tattooing dates me. Now that upper-middle-class young of both sexes get tattoos the relation between tattoos and notions of vulgarity will undergo some shift. Still the classbound significance of tattoos is likely to survive for some time the recent upper-middle-class attraction to them. There is not much difficulty in discerning the difference between tattoos designed to shock parents and those designed to identify with them.

6. On another day, he and my wife met each other in a kind of dueling T-shirts: hers read "save endangered mammals" and his "crack kills" inscribed beneath a cartoon of a human being crushed between the cheeks of a naked butt. His, of course, was meant to be funny, not only in its scatology but by its piercing the pretensions of the grave style of a somber and self-consciously virtuous "concerned citizenry"; the perverse result is that my wife's T-shirt ends up as funny as his. Funny how most of us live so as to justify the not-so-friendly stereotypes others impose on us.

7. See further Miller, *Humiliation*, 136-48.

8. See Robert C. Solomon, *The Passions: The Myth and Nature of Human Emotion* (Garden City: Anchor Press, 1976), 292, who asks us to imagine a cockroach, then a six-foot cockroach. On the grotesque, the obligatory cite is Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

9. On disgust see Paul Rozin and April E. Fallon, "A Perspective on Disgust," *Psychological Review* 94, no. 1 (1987): 23-41.

10. Before you excoriate me, would you treat the unambivalent expression of contempt by Ice-T to the same condemnation?: "Let me tell you something about the masses. You ever watch wrestling? Hulk Hogan and all that, guys jumping off the ropes? And the arena's always packed? Those same people vote, man." John Anderson, "Ice-T's Role Reversal," *Newsday*, March 3, 1991, pt. 2, 3. Ice-T's views on democracy reduplicate those of the conservative anti-democrats in England during the decades following the French Revolution. I find in Ice-T's espousal of the same anti-democratic views a paradoxical emblem of the triumph of democracy, for the contempt of the people that once was a prerogative of high-Toryism is now readily available to everyone.

11. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 4-5, throughout.

12. But then am I not simply projecting my self-contempt, making it his contempt for me? I do not want to get lost in this problem except to note a few things: if we are to function competently in this world, we have to be reasonably good at discerning the motivations and intentions of others. We do it all the time. To be sure, some of us are better at it than others and those who are better at it seem to have, over the long haul, a competitive advantage over those who are not. Those inept at discerning motivation in others get easily swindled; they are also more likely to give offense and thus elicit more hostile reactions, and so on (see my "I can take a hint": Social Ineptitude, Embarrassment, and *The King of Comedy*," *Michigan Quarterly Review* 33, no. 2 [1994], 322-344). That still does not answer whether I am projecting or not, but it seems that I am no more likely to know whether I am projecting than I am likely to know his motivation. Consider that our therapeutic society seems to depend on an implicit assumption that we are less likely to know ourselves than certain licensed others are likely to know us. Furthermore, it may not be all that important whether I am right about this particular interaction as that such an interaction as I describe seems to make complete social and psychological sense; that is, there is nothing all that surprising in my account either about my inner states or about his. Nor do I feel it necessary to apologize for an inevitable subjectivity in the account: how, after all, are we to get at motivation without the datum of our own inner states?

13. Notice how the type of work he does will affect the content of his contempt. As a mason he has a skill which he prides himself on not being easily reproduced in others without years of training. If, however, he were simply providing a lawn service, or even painting, he might look at the very fact that I have hired him as an indication of my moral failing. Shouldn't any reasonably manly man be able to paint his own house or cut his lawn, especially someone who has a schedule that allows him to be home at eleven in the morning or by three in the afternoon?

14. See *Leviathan*, pt. 2, chap. 6.

15. *A Treatise of Human Nature*, bk. 2, pt. 2, sec. 10.

16. Consider, however, that the superior may blame the lower's inability to recognize under what circumstances certain forms of deference should be due. The lower's ignorance would not excuse his offense but simply reveal a reckless disregard of the obvious. A swift caning might be considered appropriate instruction. This kind of instruction looks vaguely similar to the kind of discipline meted out by constituted authority when it invokes, for example, the notion of contempt of court. Failure to show deference becomes a kind of strict liability offense in the eyes of authority. Ignorance is no excuse.

17. "An Essay on Conversation," vol. 1, *Miscellaneous Writings*, ed. William E. Henley, *The Complete Works of Henry Fielding* (New York: Croscup and Sterling, 1902), 251, 262.

18. To his son October 9, O.S. 1746. This sentiment is repeated in about ten other letters almost verbatim. Also: "Wrongs are often forgiven, but contempt never is. Our pride remembers it for ever" (July 1, 1748, to his son).

19. "Of all the Fops in Nature, none are so ridiculously contemptible as the Wouldbees." London Mag. I.240, cited in *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. would-be, B. sb.

20. See, generally, the work of Paul Ekman and Carroll Izard. For example, Paul Ekman, "An Argument for Basic Emotions," *Cognition and Emotion* 6, nos. 3-4 (1992): 169-200; and Carroll Izard, *The Face of Emotion* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1971). For a lucid critique of these theories see Jerome Neu, "'A Tear is an Intellectual Thing,'" *Representations* 19 (1987): 35-61.

21. Charles Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 247-61.

22. I am painting broadly here. In the actual micropolitics of any particular encounter, all kinds of competing factors may alter the precise style of mutual status adjustment. Given role proliferation, pluralism, and the significance of certain public spaces, the conventionally low may at certain times actually be able to compete freely as to whose contempt gets styled as reactive and whose as constitutive. For instance, it makes a difference that the mason and me met on my front porch rather than, for example, in a working-class bar. Upward contempt, by my reckoning, always has some consciousness of its own reactivity. When it ceases to be thus aware we have either the inadvertent offensiveness of the country bumpkin or the open competition for dominance played out among people contesting their rank.

23. The hiring of someone to do manual labor constructs the relative ranking in favor of the hirer. But when one hires (we do not even say hire), but rather *engages*, or *retains*, or *sees* a doctor, lawyer, or some other person engaged in some of the more magical and suspect professions, it is often the hiring rather than the hirer who occupies the higher ranking.

24. Upward contempt can also make use of the self-loathing of the lower (if present) to make the higher the object of contempt. Thus, in certain instances of upward contempt, the pleasure of the lower is not quite separable from the knowledge that the superior you hold in contempt is at least in some respects lower even than you yourself are; lower, in other words, than the low.

25. Here we would want to distinguish the phenomenon of the high not living up to their own standards from finding the standards that the high aspire to risible; see further below.

26. "Satire is an unwilling tribute to power; but it also implies the recognition of a certain inevitability in the thing satirized, a lack of any constructive alternative": R. W. Southern, *The Making of the Middle Ages* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1953), 154.

27. Note that kings and lords would inoculate themselves somewhat against the risk of punctured pomposity by privileging fools and lower-class jesters who were allowed to ridicule their superiors to their faces. One way to deal with those laughing behind your back is to make them perform some of the same routine before you defuse most of its danger. The institution of the privileged fool also indicates that the higher were in some respects willing and able to see themselves as their inferiors saw them.

28. The mirthfulness of the feast of misrule style of upward contempt is plainly not Nietzsche's value-transforming *ressentiment*, although the moralizing style of upward contempt has clear resemblances to it. See *Genealogy of Morals* I.10.

29. The Manciple's skills in thievery were especially noteworthy because, as steward of the temple housing the best lawyers in England, he was able to fleece his masters; in other words, he fleeced the fleecers. And of the Reeve it is said, that "His lord wel koude he plesen subtilly / To yeve and lene [give and lend] hym of his [the lord's] owene good." (*Canterbury Tales*, A. vv. 569-88, 612-13).

30. See *The Iliad* II.214-82.

31. *Laxdæla saga*, chaps. 49, 52.

32. Note that Thersites tries to gain such privilege by playing the clown. It is denied him.

33. For more on the remarkable women of the Icelandic sagas see William Ian Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking: Feud, Law, and Society in Saga Iceland* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), esp. 212-13.

34. No figure comes in for more generalized contempt in higher circles in the first half of the eighteenth century than the dancing master. By the end of the century the dancing master has passed his unenviable torch to the hair dresser. See the wonderful account of the significance of references to hair dressers by Don Herzog, forthcoming in *Representations*.

35. William Godwin, *The Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793; bk. 1, chap. 5) ed. F.E.L. Priestly (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1946), 3:141.

36. Hazlitt, "On the Knowledge of Character" (1821), *William Hazlitt: Selected Writings*, ed. Ronald Blythe (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982), 105.

37. Hazlitt, "On the Disadvantages of Intellectual Superiority" (1821), *ibid.*, 188.

38. I discuss humiliation-avoidance strategies at length in *Humiliation*. The general observation is that the risk of humiliation inheres in pretension, but that so dolorous is the social world that pretensions of some sort are never completely avoidable. Hence the despairing strategy of underground man to seek out humiliation so as to have it on his own terms. Note too that Hazlitt, and in a lesser way my account of the mason, suggest, in contrast to Nietzsche, that self-consciousness is a function of the higher's fears of the mockery of the low rather than a function of the low's resentment of the high.

39. See Jonathan Swift, *Directions to Servants*, ed. Herbert Davis (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1959).

40. *Democracy in America*, II.iii.2.

41. Letter of Thomas C. Dudley, a young ship's purser from Yonkers, New York, to his sister Fanny, 16 June, 1852 in the Dudley collection at the Clements Library, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

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