

Nietzsche, the “First Psychologist” and Genealogist of *Ressentiment*

As the keystone of Nietzsche's deconstruction of morality, the mechanism of *ressentiment* shows, above and beyond external appearances, the snares of a universal, moralizing law that makes "mistrust of the instincts second nature", as the author claims in *Ecce Homo*. In Nietzsche's thought, indeed, morals themselves are conceived, as a "symbolic language of the emotions" (*Eine Zeichensprache der Affekte*, BGV, V, 187), to be analyzed by bringing in philosophy, psychology and even medicine. So, unlike other recurring, literary or even philosophical uses of this term, *ressentiment* is not, in Nietzsche's view, a simple passing feeling or a restricted event, but rather rises to the rank of a true theoretical system. In other words, it becomes the root of a particular vision of the world, a real *episteme*, with all its "thousand-year lies" and its damaging metaphysical misunderstandings, or the false moral values marking what goes by the name of *décadence*. This conference will focus on the very peculiar method (the "genealogical" one) employed in Nietzsche's approach to *ressentiment* and the related sense of his self-definition as the first psychologist (*der erste große Psychologe*) in the whole history of philosophy. Furthermore, we will provide an interpretation of *ressentiment*'s theory in connection with Nietzsche's polemic against Darwin's evolutionism. More specifically, Nietzsche's *ressentiment* might be considered as the most acute and insidious objection to Darwin's idea of "fitness" and, at the same time, as an attempt to solve one of the hardest of Nietzsche's dilemmas, namely: how could the herd (of priests and slaves) defeat the Overman? Analysing the famous passage about lambs and eagles (GM, I, 13) we will see that Nietzsche seems to introduce an important difference between "evolution" (in a Darwinian sense) and "progress". According to Nietzsche, each man must try to satisfy his self-preservation instinct not by using treacherous, revengeful and repressive mechanisms, such as those of *ressentiment*, to fight other people, but rather by adopting the attitudes of *will to power* and *amor fati*: in other words, he has to overcome his human condition by rising to the superior, aristocratic status of the Overman (also symbolized by Dionysus versus the Crucified). Thus, as we will further argue, the theory of *ressentiment* brings out by contrast the virtues of Nietzsche's *Übermensch* without any requirement for a true, concrete political or juridical proposal, but with many references to the crucial scientific Darwinian debate of the late 19th century, and also with all the limits and advantages of a magnificent "utopia".