The Drama of *Ressentiment*: The Philosopher versus the Priest

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Following the terrorist attack on Charlie Hebdo on January 7, 2015, Slavoj Žižek took a stance against the consensus that the assailants were fundamentalists. A true fundamentalist, after all, is deeply convinced of the superiority of his own way of life and therefore indifferent toward the non-believers’ way of life. When a Tibetan Buddhist encounters a Western hedonist, he may note that the hedonist’s search for happiness is self-defeating, but he will not condemn him for this. Today’s pseudo-fundamentalists, by contrast, are deeply bothered, intrigued, fascinated by the sinful life of global consumerism. In fighting the other, they are in fact fighting themselves, and this is what makes them all the more passionate. The terrorists, Žižek argues, are driven not by self-confidence but by *ressentiment*:

How fragile the belief of a Muslim must be if he feels threatened by a stupid caricature in a weekly satirical newspaper? […] The problem with fundamentalists is not that we consider them inferior to us, but, rather, that *they themselves* secretly consider themselves inferior. This is why our condescending politically correct assurances that we feel no superiority towards them only makes them more furious and feeds their resentment. The problem is not cultural difference (their ef-
fort to preserve their identity), but the opposite fact that the fundamentalists are already like us, that, secretly, they have already internalized our standards and measure themselves by them.¹

Ressentiment, according to Friedrich Nietzsche, is the feeling of vengefulness.² According to Gilles Deleuze’s succinct definition, it is a reaction which “ceases to be acted in order to become something felt (senti).”³ It results from one’s impotence to either change or forget the cause of one’s suffering. As interiorized suffering, it turns outward only in the form of moral indignation. For a long time, it was thought that the ressentimental need for recrimination and compensation was the main drive behind the French Revolution and subsequent emancipatory processes. Eventually these processes would have led, despite their secret inauthentic motivation as it were, to a mature, i.e., post-historical, post-ideological, and post-political democracy in which all soil on which ressentiment grows has been erased. Except that, the rise of populism, fundamentalism, anti-intellectualism, scapegoating, and the whole culture of naming, blaming, shaming, and claiming by people who experience themselves as victims despite living in affluent societies have put the question of ressentiment back on the agenda.

If in the current post-emancipatory condition everybody can see again the actuality of the notion of *ressentiment*, it is not up to philosophy to prove its relevance or sum up the different forms in which it appears. On the contrary: the problem is that our understanding of the various forms of *ressentiment* is hardly ever based on more than some trivial everyday psychology. Liberal conservative discourse is symptomatic in this respect, as it suffices to reduce any emancipatory movement — from Jacobinism to feminism and populism — to its base motivation in jealousy, frustration, or some other passion deemed pathological and/or irrational in order to disqualify it. Of course, this discourse is not exactly new. Just as Nietzsche despised socialism or anarchism as secularizations of a Judaic-Christian *ressentiment* (and in this way dismissed the French Revolution as “a pathetic and bloody piece of quackery”\(^4\)), later philosophical sociologists and anthropologists from Max Weber and Max Scheler to René Girard see modern egalitarian struggles as expressions of a dangerously regressive envy. Žižek rightfully wonders whether this “obsessive-compulsive urge to find beneath solidarity the envy of the weak and thirst for revenge […] is sustained by a disavowed envy and resentment of its own, the envy of the universal emancipatory position.”\(^5\) But is his own position really different? Does he not also frame the situation around Charlie Hebdo from a majoritarian point of view, such that the scary and attention-seeking “other” turns out to be actually very much like us, only less authentic and more deprived?\(^6\) And in this way, does

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6 Wendy Brown, for example, has made the classical argument that in the multiculturalist mantra of race, class, gender, sexuality, *ressentiment* invariably names class difference but rarely articulates it as such. Thus while she agrees with Žižek that identity politics and its discourse of injustices other than class covers up the subject’s investment in the internal standards of existing societies, such that no difference is counted as a real difference, her analysis has the merit of taking this argument out of the
he not reinforce the very opposition his diagnosis is supposed to overcome?

In fact, the problem of ressentiment is much more obstinate than is generally acknowledged. In his On the Genealogy of Morals, Nietzsche himself was very explicit about the fact that for him ressentiment was not a psychological (or historical, or even biological) problem, but first of all a philosophical problem, the problem of a philosophical clinic.\(^7\) This explains why in his work, the critical unmasking of ressentiment rarely takes the form of a personal reproach or of the attempt to outsmart his opponents by psychopathological means. Whereas Nietzsche would undoubtedly agree with Žižek that such recriminating uses of the notion bespeak a ressentimental moralism of their own, part of the problem is precisely how to prevent this diagnosis from regressing into a never-ending blame game. Following Deleuze’s leading thesis in Nietzsche and Philosophy, everything happens as if Nietzsche has not been taken seriously enough as a philosopher (i.e., as a “pedagogue of the concept”). Warning us like no other of the “modern conformism” in our use of Nietzsche, Deleuze conveys a very “demoralizing” message: it is crucial to emphasize the radically “extra-moral” character of the concept of ressentiment, since this is precisely what has been compromised and betrayed right after Nietzsche. Whereas we can easily speak the truth that belongs to phenomena of ressentiment, the practical meaning and affective direction of this truth (its sens) is usually not as critical as we think it is. As Deleuze, always wary of the puerility and artificiality of truth judgments, writes: “We always have as much truth as we deserve in accordance with the blame structure of a liberal order that alternately denies the real grounds of ressentiment or blames those who suffer from it for their own condition. Cf. Wendy Brown, “Wounded Attachments,” Political Theory 31, no. 3 (1993): 390–410.


\(^8\) Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morals, 55–56.
sense of what we say. Sense is the genesis or the production of the true, and truth is only the empirical result of sense.”

Ressentiment, then, is one of those thorny issues that constantly threaten to compromise the one who speaks about it. There is no intrinsic good sense in the application of its concept and no universal criterion, but only, as we will see, a polemical sense. It is precisely its conflictual politics that is forgotten when, for example, leftist intellectuals blame rightwing populists for pursuing a vulgar politics of rancor, or when the latter blame the traditional leftist elite for being stuck in the past. In fact, the more we tend to think we have overcome our ressentiment, the more we should wonder whether our own discursive position is not itself infected by the very moralizing ressentiment which we like to think we have acquired the right to dismiss. In what follows, I will practice Deleuze’s method of dramatization in order to distinguish two almost opposed senses in which the concept of ressentiment has been put to use: a speculative sense and a nihilistic sense. Whereas the former is typical for the conceptual persona of the philosopher, the latter corresponds to that of the priest. I will argue that while there is no a priori rule and no final argument that can mediate or solve their conflict, the former acquires the highest or best consistency between theory and practice in the concept of ressentiment.

The forgetting of the priest

Nietzsche proposed the concept of ressentiment in order to trace the origins of Western nihilism. While the “morality of morals [Sittlichkeit der Sitte]” is constituted in principle, although hardly ever in fact, by the spontaneous activity and creativity of nobles, ressentiment is only the local and surreptitious illness of slaves. If this typological difference between aristocrats and slaves is first of all a hierarchy in principle, then because in history it tends to be blurred, distorted or even reversed by ressentiment—

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ment, which fictionalizes a reversal of values in which weakness turns into merit, baseness into humility, passivity into patience, or more generally good into Evil and bad into Good.

How does ressentiment become capable of this historical reversal, given the slaves’ essential impotence to act? This is the genealogical question par excellence and Nietzsche’s answer is extremely original: the victory of reactive forces over active forces is due to the calculating genius of a third type, the (Pauline) priest. The role of the priest is that of a healer or redeemer who suffers from, and relies on, the same illness he is supposed to heal. By a constant appeal to bad conscience, he turns the outward recriminations inward and thus pacifies ressentiment, whereas a constant appeal to pity enables him to seduce and reduce even the most noble forces to passivity and thus disseminate ressentiment ad infinitum. In protecting the weak against the strong, the priest thus leads the “slave revolt in morality,” that moment when “ressentiment itself becomes creative and gives birth to values,” in other words, when it constitutes a global culture of its own. From the genealogical point of view the priest is the most important type, because without him it is not clear why the whole of life would succumb to passivity. While ressentiment is the source of slave morality, it takes an artist capable of giving an adaptive and regulative form to passive matter for the fictional reversal of values to bring about real effects. It is thus up to the priest to usher in the long history of a postponed and imaginary revenge, even if this revenge will ultimately acquire a secular form in the modern ideal of universal equality, just as the place of the priest will be taken up by demagogues, politicians, journalists, psychotherapists, and all the more anonymous media of contemporary biopolitics.

Authors such as Scheler and Girard also see an intrinsic relation between ressentiment and modernity, but following in the

10 Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morals, 36.
footsteps of Max Weber’s criticism of Nietzsche, they reverse the causal relation. Whereas vengefulness would be of all times, they argue, *resentment* could only become a formative power because of egalitarian ideals that constantly confront us with a discrepancy between principle and fact, and thus encourage rancor as a universal human right. Whereas the “untimely” originality of Nietzsche’s genealogical method lies in emphasizing the necessity of millennia of slow cultural preparation and consolidation, Scheler and Girard turn Nietzsche’s genealogical tracing of democratic ideals to *resentment* into a much more immediate and determinate, yet also much more trivial and circumstantial connection: only in modern democracies and its egalitarian cultivation of the frustration of the unprivileged over the persistence of inequality could *resentment* have its disruptive and militant effect on social order. Instead of the progenitor of modernity, the culture of *resentment* would thus be its child. It is no longer *resentment* that fictionalizes egalitarian ideology, but egalitarian ideology (what Žižek calls “our standards”) that generates *resentment*.¹²

Unsurprisingly, it is this inverted perspective that lies at the basis of most modern understandings of *resentment*, in which Nietzsche features less as philosophical authority than as half-madman, half-malevolent genius.¹³ But the price for this newfound realism is a blindness to the problem that necessitated Nietzsche to invent the concept of *resentment* in the first place, i.e., the slave revolt in morality, in which the priest plays a crucial role. We either openly deny (Weber, Scheler, Girard, Charles Taylor) or at least ignore (John Rawls, Ronald Dworkin, Marc Angenot, Marc Ferro, Norbert Bolz) the priestly nature of every culture of *resentment*. Instead, we get a retroactive revaluation

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of the mediating role of Christianity modelled on, and often also put forward as a model for, civil society.\textsuperscript{14} The Christian love of one’s neighbor does not turn \textit{ressentiment} into a formative power, but precisely prevents it from becoming so. After all, in Christ we are all equal. Only in modernity is the patient waiting for the Last Judgment transformed into the impatience of the Last Man who wants to be compensated for every suffering and every perceived injustice here on earth. Only here does \textit{ressentiment} become something that can no longer be repressed.

From a Nietzschean point of view, the later confusion of the causality of \textit{ressentiment} with its ideological consequences and the subsequent forgetting of the priest can usually be recognized by two methodological consequences. Firstly, it implies the depoliticization of the concept of \textit{ressentiment} by empirical psychology and neurosciences, which focus on emotions of individuals instead of socio-political passions. Secondly, this depoliticization of \textit{ressentiment} comes at the price of its subsequent sociological moralization, according to which the \textit{ressentiment} of individuals threatens the public order instead of being an intrinsic part of it. But aren’t psychologization and moralization precisely the \textit{modus operandi} of the priest as identified by Nietzsche? Is this not exactly how the neo-liberal pacification of the loser as guilty individual, the discrete management of depressed egos, proceeds, arguing that if you were not successful on the market, you have nobody to blame but yourself?\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{14} The exception here is Žižek, for whom the \textit{ressentiment} of Holocaust victims (rather than that of the Charlie Hebdo attackers) appears to be affi- rmable as the very persistence of the negative (i.e., as a contradictory “authentic \textit{ressentiment},” see Žižek, \textit{Violence}, 159) instead of having to be negated itself.

\textsuperscript{15} For a historical development, see Sjoerd van Tuinen, “Physiology versus Psychology: The Priest and the Biopolitics of \textit{Ressentiment},” in \textit{Inside. Outside. Other. The Body in the Work of Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault}, eds. Ann-Cathrin Drews and Katharina D. Martin (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, forthcoming 2016). Drawing on a distinction from \textit{What Is Philosophy?}, the priest and the philosopher are both psychosocial types and conceptual personae. Psychosocial types are historical constellations. They are defined by what they render perceptible, the three movements
We should remember that the *Genealogy of Morals* is a polemic with priestly modes of thought, and that it opens not simply by rejecting previous attempts to locate the source of Western morality in *ressentiment* made by Paul Rée or Eugen Dühring, but by displacing their inquiry to these moral theorists themselves. It is their rancor, mistrust, impotence, disappointments, ideals, habits, hatred, and tastes, in other words, the typical symptomatology of their will to power, that Nietzsche is interested in. By itself, as a mere historical fact, the problem of *ressentiment* is not interesting. It becomes so only “on the soil of this essentially dangerous form of human existence, the priestly form.” The relevance of an inquiry into *ressentiment* lies exclusively in the non-trivial struggle against the priests who derive their power from its cultivation, and as we should now add, its interpretation and evaluation. This leads us to a fourth type, the one with which Nietzsche identifies himself: the philosopher, or the true genealogist. For Nietzsche, the meaning we attribute to *ressentiment* constitutes the very conflict that separates the philosopher and the priest as radically incommensurable perspectives of evaluation. Who has the right to wield the concept of *ressentiment* and on the basis of which principle?

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17 Ibid., 33.
Transcendental typology

Every genealogical discussion requires a certain agonal, dramatic or perspectivist sensibility: not for the relativity of truth, but for the truth of the relational, which takes into account the affects of the one who uses the concept of *ressentiment* no less than those of the one to whom it is applied. As Peter Sloterdijk puts it in his essay on cultural struggle (*Kulturkampf*), *Die Verachtung der Massen*:

Nietzsche’s theorem of *ressentiment* as flight of the weak into moralizing contempt for the strong […] until today has remained the most powerful instrument for the interpretation of the social-psychological relations in mass culture — an instrument of which it is admittedly not easy to say, who could or should wield it. It offers the most plausible description of the behavior of the majorities in modern societies, but also its most polemogenous interpretation — polemogenous, since it reduces the psychic dispositions of individuals who attest themselves morally first-rate motives to reactive and detractive mechanisms of antiverticality on the level of their intimate drives — such that between “truth” and “plausibility” a relation of mutual exclusion sets in. It is plausible nonetheless, as it attests to the quasi-omnipresent need for degradation of humiliated self-consciousness which empirically speaking effectively belongs to it.18

Plausibility is disconnected from truth, as Nietzsche already knew, whenever truth becomes a moral, i.e., universalizable or absolute aim in itself. For truth itself then becomes marked by the *ressentiment* of the slave who denies the irreducible “difference” between higher and lower points of view. “[D]ifference,”

18 Peter Sloterdijk, *Die Verachtung der Massen: Versuch über Kulturkämpfe in der modernen Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2000), 56.
Nietzsche writes, “engenders hatred.” As a consequence, the plausibility of the diagnosis of ressentiment, the real efficacy of the perspectival truth of ressentiment, must be proven in another way than merely in the form of a claim to empirical knowledge. It does not suffice to know the difference in point of view; what is crucial is that it is actually and continuously being made by the genealogist himself. Genealogy, as Deleuze emphasizes, means both the origin of value and the value of the origin. Or as Sloterdijk puts it: every attempt to “make a difference” and resist ressentiment implies a cultural struggle over the legitimacy and origin of differences in general.

The problem of genealogy, then, is the necessity of distinguishing between high and low, active and ressentimental applications of the concept of ressentiment, independent from established values and empirical distributions between rich and poor, capitalist and proletarian, elite and mass, man and woman, and so on. “We cannot use the state of a system of forces as it in fact is, or the result of the struggle between forces, in order to decide which are active and which are reactive.” High and low are not just empirical values but refer to a difference in the conditions with which their evaluation takes place. After all, if difference is at the origin, the origin itself already includes the inverted image of its own genealogy — for example, the caricaturized form of evolution, whether dialectical (German) or utilitarian (English), or indeed the modernist discourse around ressentiment. This is why, even where we are dealing with a single fact such as ressentiment, the philosopher and the priest do not interpret and evaluate it in the same way. Rather, they each perceive the ver-

20 “The difference in the origin does not appear at the origin — except perhaps to a particularly practiced eye, the eye which sees from afar, the eye of the far-sighted, the eye of the genealogist” (Deleuze, Nietzsche and Philosophy, 5).
21 Sloterdijk, Die Verachtung der Massen, 95, 84.
22 Deleuze, Nietzsche and Philosophy, 58.
23 Ibid., 56.
sion of *ressentiment* that corresponds to their point of view. The difference between the philosopher and the priest, as Nietzsche announces already in the preface to the *Genealogy of Morals*, is therefore transcendental or “a priori.” It is a critical difference, a difference of imagination that is hard to discern within the fact of *ressentiment*, since it is also constitutive of this fact. Or better still: it is made in the fact itself, such that, strictly speaking, we do not even speak of the same fact at all. “To have *ressentiment* or not to have *ressentiment* — there is no greater difference, beyond psychology, beyond history, beyond metaphysics. It is the true difference or transcendental typology — the genealogical and hierarchical difference.” The difference can only be discovered when we dramatize the fact of *ressentiment* and effectively construct its concept as a multiplicity of becomings, or put differently, when instead of asking what it is, we ask who it is that claims its truth and what passions are involved.

This is why Deleuze emphasizes Nietzsche’s typological approach, which aims to characterize in each thing and in each passion a principle of internal genesis and qualitative difference. Passions are always mixtures of high and low tendencies, such that the noble is constantly translated and reduced by the servile, and the servile is continuously reversed and transmuted by the noble. But whatever the factual mixtures, the fact that the two types do not communicate in the same way effectively proves that they continue to differ in principle. They are different vectors of feeling: while the slave is one of negation, the noble is one of affirmation.

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26 Types are neither empirical portraits to be compared against an original, nor ideal types in the Weberian sense. Rather, they are ensembles of forces, which are physiological, but also psychological, political, historical, and social. Deleuze therefore insists that we make a difference between the type of the will to power (quality) and the relations of force (quantity), the former being the sufficient reason for the latter and as such inseparable from, but by no means identical with them (Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 44). Between them there is no simple opposition (this already betrays the one-sided perspective of negation of difference), but rather a
we also need to distinguish the type of the philosopher and the priest, this is because only the philosopher has an interest in the art of typology. The very artificiality or imaginary character of the types is precisely what enables him to distinguish the deep distances between the grounds on which the passions become empirically visible and truths are produced. And it is this original and originary contrast that must be restored every time the passions are interpreted and evaluated — it is the very condition of their philosophical enunciation. Only on the basis of the distinct type can we diagnose the sense of a mixture: when does *ressentiment* become a problem (at the beginning of history or at its end), in what form does it come about (frustrated revenge or envy), and in what order (as consequence or as principle of justice)?

*Right and fact*

Following Nietzsche and Deleuze, the delicate but rigorous art of the philosopher is to diagnose and evaluate our present becomings by differentiating between high and low, noble or base, and to keep them apart “to all eternity [*für alle Ewigkeit*].” 27 To diagnose is therefore not just to produce an empirical truth about an actual state of affairs, but also, as in medical diagnosis, to propose a strategy of healing and self-overcoming — in other words, to construct a type or symptomatology and negotiate a new vital relation to it. Inseparable from the becomings that insist in the diagnosed, the diagnosis must itself have the power of a performative: “The *diagnosis* of becomings in every passing present is what Nietzsche assigned to the philosopher as physician, ‘physician of civilization,’ or inventor of new immanent modes of existence.” 28 In this sense, philosophers such as

contrast: “two things can be thought as being really distinct without being separable, no matter how little they may have requisites in common” (Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. Tom Conley [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press], 55).

Baruch Spinoza or Epictetus are interested in the becoming better or active of empirically given affections and passions. Since becoming is not only polar (active or passive) but also complex (a becoming-active of reactive forces or a becoming-reactive of active forces), they would never demand from those to whom the diagnosis applies that they give up or repress their specific passions. For it is these passions which, no matter how negative or sickening, enable the latter to become. An immanent diagnosis must therefore always be both affirmative and speculative. It cannot be content to remain at the level of critical judgment, but has to effectively encounter them in a kind of mutual inclusion or co-presence. It must risk an inventive perspective that renders visible our actual passions at the same time as those virtual passions that can be associated with their becoming. This is how Nietzsche, in *Ecce Homo*, discusses the art of perspectival reversal by which we not only learn to evaluate healthy modes of living from the perspective of the sick, but also to distance ourselves from our illnesses from the fuller perspective of the healthy. The point is that between the two points of view, there is no reciprocity or commensurability, or indeed no pity. A true change of perspectives is already a becoming, a construction of force relations according to a vital mode of evaluation. While the schizophrenic movement from health to illness or from illness to health appears to be double, in reality it is a single movement, a single act of thought. As such it is itself the sign of a virtual health superior to every actual affective state (Nietzsche’s “great health”). Health, after all, is never a static state, but always also a dynamic act of counter-effectuation: a *Genesung*, both healing and genesis.

With respect to *ressentiment*, too, this means that its overcoming implies a pure becoming, or in other words, a difference that is actively made with respect to every status quo. It is never

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sufficient to merely establish the individual fact of ressentiment. Like every passion, it possesses a “grey zone” where it becomes indiscernible from a whole spectrum of contrasting individuations. Ressentiment, as Bernard Stiegler writes, “is the nihilistic face of a combat that must be led within becoming, with it, but in order to transform it into a future.” Every becoming is at least duplicitous, such that the worst lies within the best and conversely. “The larger question is, therefore: what must actually be combated, that is, what must one do, after one recognizes the scourge of ressentiment?”31 The diagnosis itself must be dramatized in the virtual presence of a superior tenor of life, such that ressentiment becomes that which we cease to embody, not that in which we are locked up. After all, it is never the lower class or the poor who have ressentiment, but the slaves, that is, those lacking the potential of becoming. Ressentiment is without a doubt bad, but it is not Evil and this means that, instead of judging over it, we need to expose its contagious effects in such a manner that we give it the opportunity to morph into something else. As Deleuze and Guattari put it in What Is Philosophy?: “A mode of existence is good or bad, noble or vulgar, complete or empty, independently of Good and Evil or any transcendent value: there are never any criteria other than the tenor of existence, the intensification of life.”32 Only the generous affirmation of this dramatic occasion that is the neutral event of ressentiment enables us to distinguish between true and false physicians of civilization, or indeed between the philosopher and the priest. The point is not that the physician must himself be free of ressentiment, but rather that he must re-activate or repeat the difference between the noble and servile becomings that insist in ressentiment and return them to the level of a drama of thought where one is the intermediary of the other.33 This hierarchy is precisely

33 This is why Deleuze contrasts the theater of repetition with the theater of representation (Deleuze, Difference and Repetition, 10).
the genealogical difference that eternally returns in whatever
exists at a certain moment and never ceases to select the noble
from the ressentimental—its eternal return is the very test of
their becoming, the only hammer with which the philosopher
can crush the “re-” of ressentiment and reintegrate the feeling
with the wider activity of the world in a becoming-active.

The priest, by contrast, is unable to repeat the original genea-
logical difference and possesses only a representation of it. As
a consequence, he must derive the sense of ressentiment from
its empirical appearance. For Scheler, for example, ressentiment
is the lived state of Jews, dwarves, cripples, women, and social
democrats, who are forced to repress their envy and frustra-
tion by the socio-political order of Wilhelmine Germany. Even
if he is factually correct, the real interest of this diagnosis lies
in his defense of the values of a heroic-Christian class society.34
His diagnosis, in other words, produces no new difference and
merely identifies and consolidates already differentiated facts.
Half a century later, Girard makes an empirically different but
formally similar point. Consumer societies set free an unbridled
cultivation of envy and ambition, and thus generate a constant
experience of lack and insatiability. The only way to curb this ex-
losion of ressentiment is to repress or forbid our desires by the
transcendent mediation of the Law modeled on the Decalogue
(“thou shalt not covet your neighbor’s wife” etcetera).35 Again,
we find an exclusively negative representation of our ressentimen-
t with no active differentiation between noble and base be-
comings. Worse still, the egalitarian conception of desire rules
out the very possibility of such a difference (“admit it, in the end
we all want the same anyway”).36

34 Max Scheler, Ressentiment, trans. William W. Holdheim (New York: The
Free Press, 1961), 96, 133, 177. See also Birns, “Ressentiment and Counter-
Ressentiment.”
35 René Girard, I See Satan Fall Like Lightning, trans. James G. Williams
36 For a more extensive critique of the positions of Scheler and Girard, see
Sjoerd van Tuinen, “Links of rechts ressentiment? Pedagogie van een
From a genealogical perspective, then, the priest’s diagnosis of *ressentiment* is neither plausible nor interesting, precisely because its truth obliterates the difference in the origin and prevents it from changing the facts.\(^{37}\) In his hands, *ressentiment* is reduced to a conceptual readymade. Like the positivist historian, he is the passive inheritor of forms from the past, but remains blind to the real forces that produced this form and that will continue to develop it in the future. Content with having identified the truth of *ressentiment*’s existence, his hybris is to betray the consistency of its becomings by replacing it with his own law of its mediation and repression. Incapable of seeing difference at the origin, the priest does not believe in any positive future for *ressentiment* but merely invests in the perpetuation of the actual fact as legitimation of his own image of justice.\(^{38}\) Lacking all sense of cultural elevation, however, this can only be a reverse image, the least imaginative or speculative one. Thus even when the priest is correct to debunk the idea of social or political justice — and as a consequence the cause of political desire and struggle in general — as the ideological mask for the secret revenge of “those who came off badly [die Schlechthinweggekommenen],” as Dühring thought, he still sees it topsy-turvy, on the basis of a reactive interpretation of the facts.\(^{39}\) For such a reduction is too “English,” as Nietzsche would say, that is, too utilitarian. It relies entirely on established values and existing categories of recognition and stays methodologically blind for

\(^{37}\) Christoph Narholz makes a similar point on (lack of) “interest” as transcendental criterion with respect to Weber’s reading of Nietzsche and *ressentiment* in his essays on the sociology of religion. See Christop Narholz, *Die Politik des Schönen* (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2012), 22.

\(^{38}\) Tyranny and tragedy, according to Stiegler, are the two forms in which consistence is reduced to existence. (Bernard Stiegler, *Uncontrollable Societies of Disaffected Individuals: Disbelief and Discredit*, Volume 2, trans. Daniel Ross [Cambridge/Malden: Polite Press, 2013], 35). Following Deleuze (and Gilbert Simondon), Stiegler understands the plane of consistence as the schematism of the transcendental imagination, producing an image of a real drama that remains unrepresentable and without analogy yet accompanies every actualization in the imagination (ibid., 77).

\(^{39}\) Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 73–75.
the difference in principle between high and low, which is now reduced to a historical difference between principle and fact.\textsuperscript{40} As a consequence, the priest fails to acquire the diagnostician’s “right” to wield the concept of \textit{ressentiment} at the same time that he exhausts its critical power of problematization in “shameful compromises”\textsuperscript{41} with the present and reduces those to whom it applies into guilty subsistence.

For the presence of \textit{ressentiment} to be made interesting again for thought, we must re-dramatize its genealogical difference and thus turn it into a singularity that bears within itself the possibility of its transformation. Dramatization is the art of differences that matter, a matter of conceiving of difference differentially. An active genealogy speculates on the plasticity of those it addresses under the guidance of the eternal return’s authority of the best.\textsuperscript{42} Nietzsche himself sets the example with his concept of bad conscience, which he puts forward in relation to a new conceptual persona, the priest, and in relation to a new image of thought based on the will to power understood from the point of nihilism, the will to truth.\textsuperscript{43} Instead of declaring man guilty of being as ignoble to have interpreted his own suffering as a desirable penal state, he says that it is here that man becomes interesting, “more questionable, \textit{worthier} of asking questions; perhaps also worthier — of living?”\textsuperscript{44} In this way, he affirms his own distance to the perspective of the priest at the same time that he reclaims the concept of \textit{ressentiment}. Everything happens as the philosopher enters into an athletic competition where what is at stake is who can see furthest, who can stretch his perspective to comprehend not just more facts but also other perspectives, until finally, the other is no longer rejected, but affirmed as the

\textsuperscript{40} Nietzsche, \textit{Genealogy of Morals}, 17–18.
\textsuperscript{41} Deleuze and Guattari, \textit{What Is Philosophy?}, 108.
\textsuperscript{42} For Stiegler, the tragic or dialectic spirit, like the priest, sees \textit{ressentiment} as a fault (\textit{faute}), whereas it is only a flaw (\textit{défaut}) or imperfection (the best as relativization and dynamization of perfection) (Stiegler, \textit{The Decadence of Industrial Democracies}, 55, 58).
\textsuperscript{43} Deleuze, \textit{What Is Philosophy?}, 83.
\textsuperscript{44} Nietzsche, \textit{Genealogy of Morals}, 113.
other within the self. It is precisely through his struggle with the priest that the philosopher disentangles ressentiment from its internalization in guilt and conceives of it as a mere imperfection under the horizon of the self-overcoming of man. If, as Deleuze argues, the inherited passion of the modern philosopher is shame, “the shame of being human,” then in the case of ressentiment we should say that the philosopher’s shame over the priest’s lack of shame constitutes the “pathos of distance” that entitles him to discover in man the project of a future.45

Conceptual personae

The purpose of our dramatization has been to learn to differentiate, with Nietzsche, between philosophical and priestly manners of diagnosing ressentiment. The two types function as markers or references whenever the sense of the concept of ressentiment is to be determined. Everything happens as if the concept, even before it was first created, was already internally divided between different, asymmetrical modes in which it can be thought and exercised. The actual concept is signed Nietzsche, but the problem it answers to retains a pre-individual and impersonal problematic, a multiplicity of unknown movements of thought that insist one in the other. This is why Deleuze and Guattari emphasize that Nietzsche’s concept of ressentiment is inseparable from the various conceptual personae that form its “intercessors,” its real thinking subjects of enunciation or “thought-events” by which the concepts come alive and become oriented.46 Conceptual personae are the powers of imagination that function as navigators and compass in the determination of the undetermined concept. For if the will to power together with the eternal return of difference is Nietzsche’s plane of immanence (and the critique of the will to truth is his image of

45 On shame as the inherited sentiment of the philosopher, see Sjoerd van Tuinen “Populism and Grandeur: From Marx to Arafat,” in This Deleuzian Century: Art, Activism, Life, eds. Rick Dolphijn and Rosi Braidotti, 87–114 (Amsterdam: Brill | Rodopi, 2014).
thought), this plane must include not only repulsive concepts such as ressentiment and bad conscience, but also the pretensions of those who understand the will to power only from the point of view of nihilism. As a persona in the Nietzschean dramaturgy of ressentiment, the priest is the negative mirror image of the philosopher, a minimal power of imagination that immediately turns against its “author” by fixating the thought-movement in an empirical judgment. But precisely by being affirmed as immanent, he is nonetheless integrated in a transcendental field of thought which, distributed over a proliferating plurality of irreducible and sometimes apparently mutually exclusive points of view, has a compelling and all the more powerful objective structure—a polemical and dramatic consistency—all of its own: “another always thinks in me, another who must also be thought.”

What orients us in this spastic schizophrenia of thought and distinguishes the philosopher from the priest cannot be the subjectivity or mentality of the thinker. Rather, what distinguishes them is their respective “pathos” and their mutual sympathies and antipathies. Whereas knowledge and ethics are already subjective manners of inhabiting and imagining the world, pathos precedes all subjectivity and constitutes the place in the world

47 Ibid., 65, 83.
48 Deleuze, Difference and Repetition, 199–200. Philosophy, Deleuze and Guattari write, proceeds “blow by blow” (Deleuze and Guattari, What Is Philosophy?, 76), in a constant combat with all the other personae that are enfolded within its own plane of consistency. Hence philosophy’s affinity with schizophrenia, or the stammering of the Idiot as yet another persona that forms an internal condition for the reality of a thought movement. If the coherence of the drama is a witch’s ride, the personae are the marionettes of the philosopher’s delirium. “I am no longer myself but thought’s aptitude for finding itself and spreading across a plane that passes through me at several places. The philosopher is the idiosyncrasy of his conceptual personae. The destiny of the philosopher is to become his conceptual persona or personae, at the same time that these personae themselves become something other than what they are historically, mythologically or commonly (the Socrates of Plato, the Dionysus of Nietzsche, the Idiot of Nicholas of Cusa)” (ibid., 64, 70).
that the subject comes to occupy. It is the singularly embodied experience that defines a perspective, the implicit condition for there to be any empirical fact at all; it is the “being-potential of the concept,” an “instinctive, almost animal sapere — a Fiat or a Fatum that gives each philosopher the right of access to certain problems, like an imprint on his name or an affinity from which his works flow.” Whereas the priest, like a scientist, registers and knows ressentiment on the basis of its general recognizability or form and therefore lacks the taste for its relevance for the becoming of (a) life, the wisdom (sapientia, which Nietzsche equals to its etymological root in sapio, taste) of the philosopher consists of a taste for what is worthy of knowing (wissenswürdig). “Philosophy does not consist in knowing and is not inspired by truth,” as Deleuze and Guattari repeat in the manner of the pragmatists, “Rather, it is categories like Interesting, Remarkable, or Important that determine success or failure.” The criterion of thought is not adequacy to the given, but the efficacy of an act of thought that hierarchizes the given. The only criterion for its failure or success is the movement it

51 Ibid., 79. Or as Deleuze wrote more than twenty years earlier: “There is something irreducible in the depths of the spirit: a monolithic bloc of Fatum, of decision already taken on all problems in their measure and their relation to us; and also a right that we have to accede to certain problems, like a hot-iron brand imprinted on our names” (Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 200).
53 Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, 82. Dramatization is therefore the method of philosophical pragmatism: “A true idea, in the pragmatic sense, is an idea that changes something in a satisfactory way in the mind of the person thinking it. The true idea is not only what one believes, does, or thinks; it is what makes us believe, makes us act or makes us think. Pragmatism is thus at the same time a method of evaluation of truth. […] In effect, truth is now evaluated in function of a value that exceeds it: the Interesting” (David Lapoujade, *William James: Empirisme et pragmatisme* [Paris: Seuil, 2007], 74).
implies. Hence whereas the priest always speaks with calm reason, the philosopher’s taste for exceptions finds its element in something that is all but reasonable.\textsuperscript{54} If both the philosopher and the priest refer to the empirical fact of ressentiment, and yet only the former can lay claim to the full complexity of its problem, this is because he is inspired by a pathos of distance. Not only is there no logos without pathos; the philosophical pathos situates us within a polemos, that is, a rivalry of taste. Variety and conflict are not shortcomings of thought, but the original, primitive form of dramaturgy that belongs to philosophy and distinguishes it from its rivals. To formulate general rules and categories of thought, by contrast, already comes down to the end of taste. For this reason, dialectics, from Socrates to Hegel, is bad taste in philosophy.\textsuperscript{55} Inspired precisely by the pathos of the priest, it is a taste for judgment, not for the problematization of becomings. Dialectics is never a real mediation as it reduces conflict to the general criteria of true knowledge, conflating the plane of immanence and the personae that occupy it within a propositional form without a real thought-movement. The taste of the philosopher, by contrast, acquires its validity and apodicticity only through its medial position, through enveloping into but also away from the competing becomings against which it has to be measured itself. Always beginning “from the middle,” taking effect through shocks and proceeding in bursts, only the philosopher has the “power of decision”\textsuperscript{56} to give ressentiment its proper name, even if the word has been abused by so many coming before or after him.\textsuperscript{57}

\textsuperscript{54} Nietzsche, \textit{Gay Science}, 77.
\textsuperscript{55} Deleuze and Guattari, \textit{What Is Philosophy?}, 80.
\textsuperscript{56} Deleuze, \textit{Difference and Repetition}, 199.
\textsuperscript{57} If the body is the domain of becomings before they are fixed by discourse and words, the task of the philosopher is to reach for the body and determine the consistency of its becomings, and thus give the body its first name. Cf. Gilles Deleuze, \textit{Cinema 2: The Time-Image}, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 172–73.
In this sense of “[t]he lordly right of giving names,”\textsuperscript{58} we may conclude that while the priest is the heteronym of Nietzsche, a character who thinks in Nietzsche, Nietzsche is only the pseudonym of the priest. The priest is a necessary co-pilot or wingman\textsuperscript{59} in the flight of the concept surveying the plane of immanence, but he does not explain the becoming of Nietzschean philosophy. Whereas the priest consumes the concept of ressentiment as a psychological readymade (recognizing ressentiment everywhere) and reverses its critical sense (passing a moral judgment by identifying it with envy), he lacks the pathos that was necessary to invent the concept in the first place. While the philosopher offers the belief, orientation, or sense for combatting ressentiment, the priest merely possesses its truth and in this way continues morality, even in the criticism of morality itself.\textsuperscript{60} Just as philosophy is folded over a sensual analogy, that \textit{je ne sais quoi} that is the drama of the body in its silent and obscure becomings, the priest is its clear but confused abjection, the betrayal of the body’s potential of becoming-other, or indeed, of the very justice and consistency of its passions. The priest, in other words, is the very embodiment of the risk of philosophy’s moralization.

\textsuperscript{58} Nietzsche, \textit{Genealogy of Morals}, 26.
\textsuperscript{59} Deleuze and Guattari, \textit{What Is Philosophy?}, 78.
\textsuperscript{60} Nietzsche, \textit{Genealogy of Morals}, 151–52.