



Nietzsche in the Streets

Ruud Kaulingfreks

review of:

John Moore with Spencer Sunshine (ed.) (2004) *I Am Not A Man, I Am Dynamite! Friedrich Nietzsche and the Anarchist Tradition*. Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia (pbk., 160p, \$14.95, ISBN 1570271216)

When is an anarchist a real anarchist? When his thoughts are in line with the teachings of Proudhon, Kropotkin, Bakunin and the like? When he engages in direct political action behind a black flag? Or when his thoughts are clearly libertarian? Anarchism has always struggled with the impossibility of becoming a movement. In a sense it fits Groucho Marx's famous paradox of not wanting to become a member of a club who would like to accept him as a member. By its own principles, becoming an anarchist is a kind of paradox – that is, as long as one thinks in terms of movements or affiliations. Libertarianism, freedom for man to choose his own rules (and definitely not the so-called democratic freedom for man to accept his ruler) and be master of his own destiny in a society without private ownership goes against affiliation. The struggle against all forms of authority and the permanent revolt against institutions that coerce freedom make it quite difficult – if not impossible – to define somebody as an anarchist. In a sense the last thing an anarchist accepts is being pinned down as such. He will probably deny it.

Does a philosopher who preaches the transvaluation of all values, who defines mankind as a sick animal in need of a herd, and as full of resentment because he is not able to live by himself qualify as an anarchist? Can a philosopher who writes in almost every line about the old adagio '*ni dieu ni maitre*' (nor god nor master) and pleads for a morality of laughing and mocking at all moral precepts to the point of attacking social movements all together still be considered a libertarian? Would this thinker who wanted us to live and dance and not to be preoccupied with the oughts and don'ts but who was realistic enough to realize that this is an impossible task to ask from this weak animal called man so he had to invent a new name for it: Overman, be pleased with the qualification anarchist? Can we still ask the question if the writer of Zarathustra, the preacher of the strong will, of living beyond moral precepts, of being able to invent ones

own life and not to be submissive to anything at all, the most libertarian of all philosophers, Friedrich Nietzsche, is an anarchist?

As said, he would be the first to roar with laughter at such a question. Probably he would take his hammer out and attack anarchism with the same vehemence he attacked almost everything. He would remind us that the only life worth living is the one we make ourselves beyond any label or ideology: *'primum vivere deinde philosophare'* (live first philosophize later).

Still, the book I have in front of me poses this question and tries to answer it in eleven essays. *I Am not A Man, I Am Dynamite*, edited by John Moore with Spencer Sunshine, claims to look in detail to Nietzsche and the anarchist tradition. It may be of no surprise, all the authors consider the German moustache in line with anarchism. Still, this is remarkable. Nietzsche is so overtly against authoritarianism that it is almost impossible to read him otherwise. Yes, Nietzsche has had some bad publicity in the past, but that was mainly by people who didn't make the effort to read him and because of the travesty his sister made of his unpublished work. Since the beginning of the 1980s, when the edition of the complete works by Colli and Montinari appeared, we are not dependent any more on dubious editions by the *'Nachlass'*. The completed edition was also responsible for new books on Nietzsche that left behind them his so-called relation with Fascism and other dubious figures. French philosophers paid tribute to him and with the discovering of modern French philosophy outside France Nietzsche has widely been acclaimed as one of the most influential sources of post-modern philosophy. Nowadays, almost 30 years after, very few will even think of Nietzsche's involvement with oppressing philosophies.

Although some of the essays draw on the work of French Philosophers like Deleuze Foucault and Derrida (for instance Franco Riccio's analysis of the death of God and contemporary thinking), the main canon of the book is seeking for parallels between Nietzsche's philosophy and the classical writings of anarchism and libertarian socialism – such as Saul Newman's article on the relation between Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals* and the writings of Bakunin and Kropotkin, Daniel Colson's contribution on the relation between Nietzsche and the Libertarian Workers Movement, and Leigh Starcross on Emma Goldman's lectures in the USA. This difference in approaches is not explained in the introduction. The editor sadly passed out before the completion of the book which was subsequently finished by Spencer Sunshine. So, the introduction is a necrology of John Moore. The article by Guy Aldred more or less sets the stage in presenting the main issue of Nietzsche as an anarchist. He explains the importance of Nietzsche's individualism for social movements. In the end Nietzsche is of course an advocate of individualism. But in order to have a social movement we need individuals who are able to be social. A real social movement should not be purely an expression of resentment but a movement of free individuals. As the authors clearly explain, Nietzsche shows the way.

So, it sounds like it is a book proving a point already well made. But that is not fair. What is interesting is the struggle to identify Nietzsche as an inspiration source for libertarian social action and therefore an attempt to take him out of academic philosophy. It shows how squatters, antiglobalists, anarcho-syndicalists, find in

Nietzsche and Deleuze's reading of him a ground for their actions and a broadening of Nietzsche's philosophy into the praxis of social movements. Philosophy almost becomes practical and enriches a tradition of social struggle with the libertarian morality of the free spirit.

By doing so, it opens the way to a further integration of Nietzsche's thought into protest movements. It takes Nietzsche outside academia into the streets, the squatted buildings, alternative cultural centres and the like. And then of course the old nagging question appears again; how can we make theory that is useful for political action? After all I'm writing this review from a very comfortable office surrounded by books and trying to be erudite. A transvaluation of all values looks quite different from the streets. Maybe radical political activism has leaned too long on an established social theory and has now turned into the moral struggle Nietzsche envisaged. After all, God is dead. Even the God of socialist utopia.

A concept of Dionysian politics, for instance, as it is put forward by Andrew Koch in his essay on Dionysian politics, opens up a new perspective on radical protest. A light-hearted protest that is willing to dance and to laugh even about serious matters like social change. In the end Nietzsche expresses a libertarian political philosophy of living without imposed structures that make us despise ourselves. As said, he leads the way into a politics of creation of aesthetic judgement without founding morality. Therefore man has first to recognize the lack of a foundation of values; he has to be able to live in a bottomless world beyond metaphysics. It is the light-heartedness of Koch's programme, the willingness to laugh at the own enterprise that brings it beyond the mere translation of a philosophy into praxis. Nietzsche, as a strong antidote against all too high ideas of ourselves, makes us laugh even at our ideals. This is not only an inspiration for libertarian activist but also for academics and certainly for management and organization scholars.

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