

The Anarchist Aspects of Nietzsche's Philosophy- Presentation

The core of my hypothesis is that Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy promotes basic anarchist notions. Hence, what I am intending to show is the existence of a bond between the anarchist tradition and the German philosopher.

My main idea is to review Nietzsche's work from an anarchist angle. This means I will try to re-examine basic concepts of the Nietzschean philosophy by comparing them to the notions of prominent anarchists and libertarians together with using these concepts in order to give a Nietzschean interpretation to certain anarchistic historical incidents like those of the Schism of the 1st International, the Spanish Revolution, May '68, and even the Revolt of December 2008 in Athens-Greece. The importance of such a connection lies in highlighting the *elective affinity* between Nietzsche and the anarchists and, actually, the whole research is based on this elective relationship.

When I say *elective affinity* I mean “*a special kind of dialectical relationship that develops between two social or cultural configurations, one that cannot be reduced to direct causality or to ‘influences’ in the traditional sense*”.¹ This is Michael Lowy's definition of *elective affinity* in his essay on Jewish libertarian thought,² and that's the way I am going to follow it.

Elective affinity is not something new in Nietzschean scholarship. Almost every dissertation on Nietzsche makes references to the direct or indirect influence the German philosopher had on his contemporaries and successors and therefore, *elective affinity* is present to most, short or extended, relevant works.

Additionally, we can also come across *elective affinity* in essays on anarchy or even in the writings of prominent anarchists. For example, the whole approach of anarchism

¹ Michael Lowy, *Redemption and Utopia*, p. 6.

² Michael Lowy, *Redemption and Utopia: Jewish Libertarian Thought in Central Europe. A Study in Elective Affinity*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 1992.

made by Peter Marshall³ and Max Nettlau⁴ is, in fact, an exposition of historical incidents and the *elective affinity* between anarchists and anarchistic ideas of the past (even of Ancient Greece⁵) and the present. Furthermore, great anarchists, like Peter Kropotkin, never missed the chance to refer to the special affinity anarchist ideas always shared with the libertarian worldview of many well known writers, artists and philosophers of their era.⁶

As a result, *elective affinity* will hold a central role in the process of bringing Friedrich Nietzsche and the anarchists together. Moreover, the usage of such an apparatus can tell us a lot about both anarchism and Nietzsche.

As far as the German philosopher is concerned, this will be an indirect and secondary contribution to the already existing works of various writers that tried, with success, to free Nietzsche from the racial bonds that the Nazis tried to impose on him and to restore his reputation.

Moreover, it will be the first time (apart from the nationalist propaganda) that Nietzsche's philosophic vision can have an application in a social scale. From now on he could be seen not only as a poet or an existential philosopher but as a political philosopher as well and anarchism can become the virtualising field of his theory.

From an anarchist point of view the gain out of this affinity can be even greater. Nietzsche will become the factor which with his compact and mature philosophy will distinguish the identity of anarchism from that of the other movements within the socialist family and will strengthen its special features. What I will argue is that Friedrich Nietzsche is more than suitable to play the role of the catalyst that can, firstly, recognize and put forward the anarchist idiosyncrasy as appeared in the revolutionary deeds of the 19th and 20th century and, secondly, re-locate these features in specific historical events of the present.

³ Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible, A History of Anarchism*, Harper Perennial, London 2008.

⁴ Max Nettlau, *A Short History of Anarchism*, Freedom Press, London 1996.

⁵ See the article of D. Ferraro, "Anarchism in Greek Philosophy", *Anarchy*, No 45 (November 1964), p. 321-325.

⁶ Peter Kropotkin, *Anarchism and Anarchist Communism*, Freedom Press, London, 1987, p. 27-28.

The new dimension I plan to offer to the studies on Nietzsche and the anarchists lies in two basic fields.

On the one hand, up to now, all relative researches deal with the Nietzschean philosophy selectively and partially, something logical and acceptable if we take into consideration that the most substantial essays are academic papers and that Nietzsche's philosophy embodies quite contradictory concepts. For example, the dominance of the Dionysian force over the Apollonian one (actually, the preference of Nietzsche to the former than to the latter), as presented in Andrew Koch's exceptional article,⁷ is a subsequent thought of the German philosopher and does not reflect the true vital contribution of the Apollonian force to the *transvaluation of the existent values* and to the birth of the *overman*. Therefore, I intend to carry out an extended research that, through a deep analysis will combine all aspects of Nietzschean philosophy in order to clarify the philosophical bonds between anarchism and the German thinker and promote a way of an anarchist interpretation of Nietzsche.

On the other hand, I am going to apply Nietzsche's notions to specific incidents of anarchist history, that is, re-examine and interpret certain historical events and choices of the anarchist movement from a Nietzschean angle. This is something that has happened before but, again, quite limitedly.⁸

All the above, meaning the re-introduction of Nietzschean terms, their comparison to anarchist tradition and application on specific historical incidents, not only will be used as a path leading to the validation of my hypothesis but will also give an answer to two rising questions of great interest:

a/ *What is the importance of reading Nietzsche not only as a philosopher or a poet but as a political thinker as well?* and

b/ *What does Nietzsche have to say to contemporary radical movements and especially to the anarchist one?*

The first question is clearly associated to the need for a refreshment and

⁷ Andrew M. Koch, "Dionysian Politics: The Anarchistic Implications of Friedrich Nietzsche's Critique of Western Epistemology", in John Moore (ed.), *I am not a Man, I am Dynamite, Friedrich Nietzsche and the Anarchist Tradition*, Autonomedia, New York 2005.

⁸ See for example the comparison between Nietzsche and the Libertarian Worker's Movement: Daniel Colson, "Nietzsche and the Libertarian Worker's Movement", in John Moore (ed.), *I am not a Man, I am Dynamite, Friedrich Nietzsche and the Anarchist Tradition*, Autonomedia, New York 2005.

renovation of politics through a subverting and radical path. If Nietzsche's thought is acknowledged as political, then it can become the starting point of a metamorphosis of the contemporary political scenery, taking for granted, of course, that contrarily to what happened in the past, this time it will be the radical and not the reactionary currents that will adopt, interpret and put his vision into effect .

Possible answers to the second question can offer an informal guide to the anarchist movements, which will help them proceed to a thorough self-criticism and a re-interpretation of important historical incidents. This will, consequently, lead to the justification or rejection of the respective historical choices, whilst the main goal for the anarchist movements is to reach a high level of self-consciousness and self-determination and, finally, trace a route for the present and the future.

Now, the methodological issues raised by the *elective affinity* between Nietzsche and the anarchists include the definition of both sides – anarchy as an ideology and Nietzsche as a political thinker, the context theory that will allow me to interpret the two parts, and the selection of specific incidents from the history of anarchy where this *elective affinity* will be identified.

This desirable theory of interpretation will be following the basic theses of Mark Bevir, Rod Rhodes and John Keane concerning the importance of understanding the meanings behind utterances and the vital role that traditions play regarding the context of explanation, as well as the rejection of an a priori methodological validity and of the existence of an ultimate methodology.

As far as the historical incidents are concerned, I chose to refer to four historical periods, and these are the schism of the First International (Hague, 1872), the Spanish Revolution (Catalunya, 1936), the uprising of the students and workers in May '68, in Paris and is the revolt that took place in Greece, and mainly in the city of Athens, in December 2008.

The short presentation and analysis of all the above historical events will be based on the Nietzschean notions that will structure my thesis: Anti-determinism, autonomy, *resentment*, *eternal return*, *overman*, *will to power*, *Apollonian and Dionysian*, *master and slave morality*, *bad conscience*. These concepts shall make their appearance

through a Nietzschean review of the historical events by connecting certain incidents and behaviours with a Nietzschean notion and explaining them through this prism, and this is how such an analysis will form an alternative reading of history and contemporary radical politics, that is, through a psychological procedure of analysis rather than a strict social-political one.

In conclusion, I believe that Nietzsche's relationship to the anarchist and libertarian tradition is something that is worth our attention and patience in order to come up with the desirable results. Results that will help us, among other things, connect the vitalizing aura of Anarchy to a philosopher drunk with the sweet wine of Dionysus...