

10. Wolfgang Harich and Friedrich Nietzsche – A Chapter of the East German Nietzsche Debate

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Abstract

The paper analyzes the reception of Friedrich Nietzsche in the work of Wolfgang Harich who was one of the most famous philosophers and political thinkers of the GDR. It is discussed the approaches of Harich to the philosopher from Röcken and argued that Harich's main approach to Nietzsche was characterized by an ideological concept of an enemy. Its hard core was to present Friedrich Nietzsche as the most eminent creator of the Nazi ideology. The paper shows that Wolfgang Harich's treatment of Nietzsche was very strongly influenced by the Hungarian Marxist philosopher Georg Lukacs and his concept of the late bourgeois philosophy.

Keywords:

Nietzsche debate in the GDR, Harich's philosophical work and his preoccupation with Nietzsche, Marxist approaches to the traditions of the German philosophy, philosophical roots of the fascist ideology

JEL classification: B00, B31, Z00

1. INTRODUCTION

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) was one of the most influential German philosophers during the second half of the 19th century. His work inspired several streams of the modern European philosophy, social sciences and cultural studies in the 20th century.

Among contemporary philosophers and historians of philosophy Nietzsche is often recognized as one of the leading representatives of the so-called philosophy of life, as one of the founders of this philosophical school. Furthermore he is considered as very important when it comes to the debate on the irrational

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streams of European thinking. In this special context the topic of the affinity of Nietzsche's philosophy to fascism is discussed (see Taureck 2000) and a central question is raised: did Friedrich Nietzsche play the role as "a forerunner"¹ of the Nazism?

An interesting topic of the today's international Nietzsche discourse is the reception of Nietzsche's thought in Europe and Germany, particularly in the German philosophy and social sciences of the 20th century (see Aschheim 1992; Riedel 2000).

This topic includes the question how the GDR dealt with Friedrich Nietzsche? Did exist an academic Nietzsche reception? What did leading East German intellectuals think about the advocate of the philosophy of life? And what approach to Nietzsche and his philosophy was prevailing among GDR philosophers and social scientists?

The aim of this is paper is to present some interesting insights into the East German Nietzsche reception, to show how the internationally known GDR philosopher Wolfgang Harich (1923-1995) was dealing with Nietzsche, to evaluate his Nietzsche interpretation and to have a look at the roots of this interpretation.

The section 2 of the paper describes in broad outline the biography of Harich. The aim of section 3 is to analyze Harich's views regarding Friedrich Nietzsche. The relationship between Harich's main approach to Nietzsche and Georg Lukacs' concept of the late bourgeois philosophy is shown in the section 4.

2. SOME REMARKS ON WOLFGANG HARICH AND HIS BIOGRAPHY

Among the numerous GDR protagonists of the preoccupation with Friedrich Nietzsche the philosopher Wolfgang Harich has played an eminent role. An expression for this fact is that at the beginning of the 80s Harich was requested by the deputy minister of culture to write an "official" book on Nietzsche (see Harich 1994, p. 172; Höpcke 1998, p. 170/171).

Harich's approach to Nietzsche has very intensively influenced the GDR debates on this issue. His "yes" or "no" was often the decisive factor when editorial boards of academic journals had to decide to publish papers on Nietzsche and his work or when publishing houses were seriously discussing the question of editing works of Nietzsche or books dealing with his thinking and with the reception of his thoughts.

In 1986 the East German philosopher and economist Günther Rudolph was preparing the edition of two works of Ferdinand Tönnies: "Der Nietzsche-Kultus. Eine Kritik" published in 1897 and "Nietzsche-Narren", the chapter 1