

9. On the Nietzsche-Reception in the GDR

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Abstract

The history of the Friedrich-Nietzsche-reception in the GDR developed controversially and comprises various phases. At the beginning, a verdict on Nietzsche was imposed, since he was considered as an intellectual forerunner of fascism. This verdict was followed by a critical discussion of his work in the 60s and 70s. Finally in the 80s, Nietzsche's integration into the national German cultural heritage began. To comment correctly on this contradictory process of the history of reception the view from "outside", which oriented itself by official announcements is not sufficient. On the contrary, it is necessary to complement this view – against the background of the development of domestic and foreign policy of the GDR – by a precise review of the internal philosophic and cultural-scientific discussion in the GDR.

Keywords:

Anti-fascism, foe image, cultural heritage, tradition, Nietzsche-Archiv

JEL classification: B00, B31, Z00

Venice was for Friedrich Nietzsche the only place in the world that he really loved.² However, he lived only a few months there. In contrast, he did not like Middle-Germany, but it had been his home, and for more than two thirds of his life, his place of residence.

1. INTRODUCTION

"The world, in which we mentally exist, is to a great extent a world formed by Marx and Nietzsche."³ This appraisal, once made by Max Weber, is valid for the entire 20th century, and thus, also for the *divided world* of the Germans between 1945 and 1990. Here though exists an essential restriction. Karl Marx's intellectual influence was restricted to the East and Friedrich Nietzsche's influence to the West. This different and even contrary importance of Marx and Nietzsche in the postwar reality and the replacement of the word "and" by the word "or" in Max Weber's quotation shows that in addition to the political, military and economic partition of Germany, an *intellectual* division existed as well – an unbridgeable ideological dissent.

Although Nietzsche's birth place Röcken and the places of his youth, Naumburg and Schulpforta, are in the former Prussian province of Saxony, that is, on the territory of the former GDR, and although the house of his death and his tomb, and his inheritance is kept in Weimar, where since 1896 the *Nietzsche-Archiv* has been, Friedrich Nietzsche was far from being a historic model in the GDR. His name was not mentioned in any textbook. No streets or places were named after him, not even in Naumburg or Weimar. His image did not decorate any stamp. Regardless of his geographical connection to East-Germany, he was taboo in the public life of the GDR. He was considered for the most of the time as a *non-person*.

It would be wrong, however, to draw the conclusion that Nietzsche did not play any role at all in the intellectual life of East-Germany. This was by no means the case! For, like Luzifer, while being expelled from Christian heaven, finally has his place in the intellectual world of Christianity as the *Prince of Darkness*, Nietzsche had his place in the *intellectual world* of the GDR, although outside the classic philosophers' Olymp, in the hell of the antagonists of socialism and historic progress, in short: as an *ideological foe image*. This implied a one-sided and distorted reception of the philosopher and his ideas and caused confusion of the history of influence and the work on its own, as well as the abuse of his ideas in the "cold war". It further implied his existence in the non-existence,⁴ his becoming a phenomenon⁵ and the loss of authenticity by freeing the ideological image from the historic figure and the authentic work. The verdict imposed on the philosopher in 1945 as a direct response to the National Socialists' favoring of Nietzsche as their intellectual ancestor was not without effect: his name was only rarely mentioned in the postwar years and, if so, it was associated with the *evil*, with fascism. This only changed in the course of the 60s, when Nietzsche and his work were increasingly promoted as a subject of academic criticism and philosophical-historical discussion. Finally in the 70s, he was valued even in the GDR as an excellent critique of culture, important philosopher and great artist, but at the same time he was continuously outlawed and ideologically attacked. This weird contradictory attitude to the historical heritage was maintained in the 80s, when Nietzsche became subject of an acrimonious controversy, in both the philosophic guild and between the disciplines. Simultaneously, first books by Nietzsche were published in the GDR, and he was slowly rediscovered as a representative of the national German cultural heritage.

Numerous documents and evidence exist on the history of the highly controversial Nietzsche-reception in the GDR. Altogether, there are more than 100 titles of essays, articles, dissertations, contributions to collections, dictionaries, and monographs. Compared to the number of publications on Nietzsche in other countries, this number is certainly small. However, for a differentiated analysis of the Nietzsche-reception in the GDR, it is sufficient.⁶ Nevertheless,