

Anarchist Engagements with Nietzsche's "Will to Power"

Dominique Miething

When the First World War broke out, public opinion, particularly in English-speaking countries, turned against Friedrich Nietzsche. A case in point of this development is a special edition of a book that the London based publisher T. N. Foulis issued at the end of 1914. Sold with an eye-catching dust jacket, bold black letters printed on sturdy red paper, potential buyers are promised "NIETZSCHE / THE PREACHER OF WAR / BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL / WAR EDITION". To further this impression, the dust jacket also quotes future Prime Minister Lloyd George: "The new philosophy of Germany is to *destroy Christianity*", followed by an excerpt from *The Times*: "It is not a mistaken notion of self-interest that has made Germany consent joyfully to this war, but a *wrong moral idea*. War to all the conscious and unconscious followers of Nietzsche is noble and splendid in itself." (Nietzsche 1914a. Emphasis in the original).

Such statements would surface in varying forms throughout the war years, as Nietzsche's philosophy fell into ill repute as the ideology of German military aggression in Europe. Only a small minority objected to this view. A prominent voice was Alfred R. Orage (1873–1934), editor of the avant-garde journal *The New Age*, who in his review of the "War Edition" remarks:

Mr. Foulis, the publisher of Dr. Oscar Levy's splendid complete edition of Nietzsche [...] has just disfigured a cheap edition of "Beyond Good and Evil" [...], with remarks on the cover to the effect that "Nietzsche" is [...] "the Preacher of War," and that this is a "War Edition." The man is [...] indecently opportunist [...]. Has Mr. Foulis, I wonder, ever *read* "Beyond Good and Evil"? Does he know what it is

D. Miething (✉)

Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin, Germany

E-Mail: dominique.miething@fu-berlin.de

about? The book has, of course, just as much to do with the war as the writings of Locke, say, or Epictetus. The edition, however, when the covers are torn off, is all that can be desired – beautifully printed on very good paper. Mr. Foulis is a good producer.¹

An active proponent of Nietzsche himself, Orage was also instrumental in introducing the German philosopher to anarchist intellectuals.² They, too, were part of the minority, which developed a more nuanced approach to Nietzsche. As we shall see, anarchists in the United States, Britain and Germany not only defended him in times of war, they laid claim to anti-authoritarian and even pacifist readings of the infamous *Wille zur Macht* (“will to power”).

By examining the engagement of several key figures of the historical anarchist movement with this notion, I will unearth a little-known branch of Nietzsche’s transnational reception. Proceeding from the 1890s up until the end of the First World War, I will analyze different strategies of interpreting this most glaring of Nietzsche’s motifs that the German thinker introduced into the conceptual repertoire of Western philosophy. What concerns us here are two main threads emerging from reading the will to power anarchistically: first, the will to power as a political and psychological problem of authority and domination; second, the will to power as a call for resistance against this problem through aesthetically and ethically motivated self-restrained individuals.

1 Anxieties about the Will to Power

Anarchist approaches to Nietzsche have most often been accompanied by a discomfort towards the semantics of hierarchy in concepts such as *Übermensch*, master and slave morality, or, as in this case, the will to power. For instance, Seán Sheehan, author of a popular early twenty-first century introduction to anarchism, notes that while Nietzsche’s “subversive attacks on the psychology of conformity, his life-affirming championing of the self’s creative becoming, and the assault on notions of truth and reason at the expense of history” are compatible with the anarchist ideology, other aspects would have to be “rejected in favour of readings that point to more progressive implications.” The “will to power,” Sheehan notes,

¹Orage 1914, p. 149 f. Emphasis in the original. Reference to the quote found in Sommer 2016, p. 38.

²For more details on Orage’s influence on anarchist intellectuals, see Miething 2016a, pp. 257; 299 ff.; 322 ff. and 345.

epitomizes one such example, especially when interpreted "as a ceaseless process of exploitation and domination" (Sheehan 2003: 77).

Writing at the end of the nineteenth century, the German Gustav Landauer (1870–1919) expresses a similar uneasiness about the motif (Miething 2016b). He maintains that the early Nietzsche had only been interested "in the overflowing of his own individuality" while praising "the Dionysian, which he had secretly attributed to Hellenism." Later, however, when Nietzsche developed the will to power more fully, this very concept was conjoined with the right to "the domination of people" (Miething 2016b; Landauer 2012: 116f.).

Notwithstanding his vehement critique of the ambivalence within Nietzsche's notion of power, Landauer also stresses the existence of a second dimension to it, that is, a sense of having power to shape "the world" according to one's own aesthetic desires. Finally, Landauer admits, the motif in itself "is too ambiguous for me; I call it creation, art."³

2 Will to Power: A Pluralistic Concept

Let me deviate for a moment from the anarchists and direct your attention towards the actual appearance of "will to power" in the German philosopher's own writings. In its most general meaning, it denotes a fundamental drive in all human beings, expressing itself through certain acts, creative or otherwise, and elevating the individual above the status quo. Contrary to the recurring attention that the "will to power" has received during the long history of Nietzsche's reception until today, the motif as such appears very infrequently in the published works. Most instructive are the three thematic uses in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* as the notions of self-legislation (Za I, On a Thousand and One Goals), knowledge and self-overcoming (Za II, On Self-Overcoming), and affirmation (Za II, On Redemption). Wherever Nietzsche explicitly mentions "will to power" in his other writings, he repeats these three uses (Günzel 2009: 392 f.).⁴ Following a scholarly consensus established by Wolfgang Müller-Lauter, this plurality of meaning is crucial to the motif (Mueller-Lauter 1999: 25–96 and Mueller-Lauter 1971). A monolithic "will to power" simply does not exist in the thought of Nietzsche.

³Landauer in a letter to Julius Bab (16 June 1903). As quoted in Landauer 2011, p. 10 f. Translation is mine.

⁴The "will to power" appears in *Beyond Good and Evil*, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, and *The Gay Science*.

Moreover, there is a stark discrepancy between the occurrence of the motif in the German philosopher's writings and the later usage of it as a catchphrase. By no means did Nietzsche ascribe to it the same importance that his sister Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche did after his death when she jumbled together a purportedly authoritative and systematic *magnum opus* entitled *Der Wille zur Macht* ("The Will to Power") in 1902.⁵ Her compilation bears prime responsibility for popularizing the motif, falsely giving the impression that "will to power" was *the* central and unifying principle in her brother's oeuvre. This misrepresentation would later become a mainstay of Nazi readings through the works of Alfred Baeumler and Martin Heidegger (Aschheim 1992: 264 ff. and Niemeyer 2012: 102–104).

Any reference to the will to power as mere political concept betrays an illegitimate one-sidedness, for such interpretation eliminates Nietzsche's pluralistic approach. This is, of course, not to excuse the philosopher's partial responsibility for such approaches, due to the intentionally provocative and violent undertones of the motif.⁶ As Golomb (2013) shows, any failure to differentiate carefully between power ("Macht"), force ("Kraft"), and violence ("Gewalt") has almost automatically resulted in the accusation that Nietzsche was a "proto-fascist"⁷ thinker, or, as Joll (1973) documents, that Nietzsche bore intellectual responsibility for the First World War.

3 Anarchist Positions towards Nietzsche during the First World War

Many anarchists tended to defend Nietzsche against patriotic propaganda during and after the war. We encounter their very public defenses in speeches, various periodicals and other publications. What particularly bewildered some of these radical dissidents was the discrepancy between Nietzsche's popularity before the war and the demonization of his ideas shortly after the war's outbreak.

⁵See the reevaluation of Förster-Nietzsche's role (Holub 2002) and a rebuttal of the same (Niemeyer 2014).

⁶See, for example, FW §13, GM-II §18, AC §17, or JGB §259.

⁷See also Golomb/Wistrich 2002. Considering Nietzsche's derision of democracy, his anti-feminism as well as his praise of war for the sake of war itself, Bernhard H.F. Taureck has most recently made the case for calling Nietzsche a "proto-fascist" thinker, see Newmark 2017.

Our first example is the editor of the famous journal *Mother Earth*, Emma Goldman (1868–1940). She had been touring the United States from coast to coast, lecturing on Nietzsche specifically on at least 32 occasions between 1913 and 1917.⁸ In 1915, she began reacting to the bloodshed in Europe and the interest it stirred in the American public by changing the titles of her speeches. Attracting large audiences to broad topics such as “Nietzsche and War”, “Nietzsche’s Anti-Christ”, “Friedrich Nietzsche, the Anti-Governmentalist”, “The Superman and the Revolution”, “Nietzsche and the German Kaiser”, Goldman continued her speaking tour through to the end of 1916. Unfortunately, the lecture manuscripts are most likely lost (Starcross 2004).

Hence, we can only infer from second-hand sources how Goldman mounted her defense of the German philosopher. When she spoke about “Nietzsche, the Intellectual Storm Center of the War” in San Francisco on 25 July 1915, a journalist reported that her topic

elicited a banner attendance and the keenest attention. Plainly the majority of those who came to hear that lecture had no understanding of nor interest in the philosophy of Anarchism; but they wanted to know why the man who had advocated “the Will to Power” should not be held responsible for the present carnage in Europe. Clearly they interpreted his teachings as favoring the elevation of one weakling over another, whereas nothing could have been further from the intent of the great iconoclast.

Miss Goldman pointed out that Friedrich Nietzsche’s “superman”—if he emerged at all—must emerge from a revised conception of present standards; that Nietzsche’s vision was above and beyond the concepts of today; that only through the effacement of limitation could man measure up to the height conceived by this gigantic intellect. She quoted Nietzsche’s “Thus Spoke Zarathustra” to show not only his attitude toward the uniformed brand of debility we term “aristocracy,” but also his healthy contempt for the buzzing satellites that know only how to whirr but never how to whack. No one having heard Miss Goldman’s interpretation could longer list Nietzsche on the side of short-sighted aspiration. She made plain that he stood for the fathoming of depths which at present are hardly conceivable; and that those who dispute this fact prove merely that they do not understand Friedrich Nietzsche.⁹

⁸See for a chronological list of these lectures: Miething 2016a, p. 525 f. Missing from this list are at least two additional lectures given on 10/12 April 1914 at the International Labor Hall in Chicago at 8 pm, as advertised in Max Baginski’s *InternationaleArbeiter-Chronik* (Chicago), 1. Jg., Nr. 1, 30. März 1914.

⁹Leigh 1915, p. 278 f. Reference to the article found in Starcross 2004, p. 34 but quoted from the original due to misquotation in Ibid.

Since the journalist did not cover more details of Goldman's argument, we will have to rely on the sporadic references to and reprints of Nietzsche's texts in *Mother Earth*. To understand them properly though, we first need to illuminate the transnational anarchist Nietzsche-discourse a bit more by looking at the anarchist press on both sides of the Atlantic.

Take the example of Henry Sara (1886–1953), a British conscientious objector. He deplored the turncoat behaviour of a self-styled cultural elite, which could not get enough of Nietzsche but now reviled him as the bogeyman of Germany's military aggression. "There is that man Nietzsche [...]," Sara writes:

whose aphorisms were at one time quoted daily almost, in [...] *The Daily Mirror*. Who would have thought that his poetical and critical works, would have produced, or helped to produce, the fearful havoc that is raging between the great armies of humans. Literary men occupying high positions in the realm of art and letters: journals with a credited thoughtful public; all have presented a solid phalanx in showing their hatred of the writings of the disciple and afterwards critic of Schopenhauer and Wagner. [...] To have flirted with Nietzscheanism all this long time and suddenly to discover what a terrible gospel it is, and, drop it like a hot brick at the first mention of that vibrating word—war, might be confusing if it were not for certain explanations, which give the clue to the acrobatic feat of "our cultured class." In the first place they are chiefly Christian nations who are taking part in the present conflict. Christianity, is professedly a religion of love, opposed to all strife and hatred between men—God's lambs, or children—and so war is, and must be, anti-Christian. Germany is admittedly a Christian country, then how is it that war—anti-Christ—is rampant throughout the land? "Our cultured class" explains the phenomena. It is the result of the teachings of the devil incarnate—Nietzsche [sic]: *the* Anti-Christ. [...] The same old Germany, the same old England, and—the same old religious cant. Patriotism had to be played up for all it was worth, and Nietzsche has served as a peg upon which to hang the cloak of shame (Sara 1914: 42 f. Emphasis in the original).

A popular strategy against such hypocrisy involved quoting anti-German or pacifist-sounding passages from the works of Nietzsche. The aforementioned Sara, contributing to the Glasgow-based anarchist periodical *The Spur*, chose the aphorism "The means to real peace" (MA-II Wanderer §284) from *Human, All Too Human* for this purpose. After the war, Anselm Ruest (pseudonym of Ernst Samuel, 1878–1943), an individualist-anarchist writing in Berlin, repeated this strategy in his Dadaist periodical *Der Einzige*, aiming at rehabilitating the philosopher (Nietzsche 1919).

American activists such as Max Baginski (1864–1943) in his Chicago journal *Internationale Arbeiter-Chronik*, and Emma Goldman together with her editorial staff at *Mother Earth* in New York, followed suit, albeit picking a section from Nietzsche's *Untimely Meditations* (1873). More specifically, both journals drew

from the essay "David Strauss: the Confessor and the Writer" (UB-I §1) and presented a snippet to their readers. Baginski, writing in his native German, was careful enough first to provide some contextualization for his American readership unfamiliar with the situation in Britain:

Newspapers in London have circulated the allegation of Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy being responsible for the European butchery of war. Nietzsche is said to have proclaimed the "Will to Power," "the law of the strong." And upon these pillars, Germany is said to have built her terrible militarism. Who knows more of Nietzsche than these expressions, knows that this allegation is a product of a complete lack of comprehension. Nietzsche dismissed Bismarck, whose feet were doggishly kissed by Germany's "poets and thinkers" after the great victory in the war against France. Insinuating that Nietzsche would have sensed in the purveyors of utmost barbarian violence the beginning of the era of the Uebermensch, this should happen at most to a seventh-grader raving about the onslaughts of great cavalry generals.¹⁰

In the section from *Untimely Meditations* quoted by Goldman and Baginski in their journals, Nietzsche reflects about the negative consequences for cultural life resulting from the war between Prussia and France in 1870–1871. The German philosopher cautions against accepting a victory in war as evidence for the grandeur of a culture and criticized those contemporary writers who merely echoed public opinion's glorification of war. Culture, he writes, has nothing to do with soldierly virtues such as "[s]tern discipline, natural bravery and endurance, superior generalship, unity and obedience in the ranks" (Nietzsche 2007: 3). Nietzsche simultaneously attacks the predominant belief in a superior German culture. All such talk is ridiculous, since German culture continues to depend upon the French, "from whom we have hitherto copied everything, though usually with little skill" (Ibid, 6). Nietzsche recognizes no genuine culture in his contemporary

¹⁰Baginski 1914: 3. Translation is mine. The original German reads: "Londoner Blätter haben die Behauptung in Umlauf gesetzt, Friedrich Nietzsches Philosophie sei für die europäische Kriegsschächtereie verantwortlich zu machen. Nietzsche habe den ‚Willen zur Macht,‘ ‚das Recht des Starken‘ proklamiert. Und Deutschland habe auf diesen Pfeilern seinen furchtbaren Militarismus erbaut. Wer von Nietzsche mehr kennt wie diese Ausdrücke, weiss, dass diese Behauptung ein Ausfluss völliger Verständnisslosigkeit ist. Nietzsche lehnte Bismarck ab, dem nach dem grossen Siege im Kriege gegen Frankreich, Deutschlands ‚Dichter und Denker‘ winselnd die Füsse küssten. Nietzsche zu unterstellen, er habe in den Repräsentanten äusserer barbarischer Gewalt den Beginn der Aera des Uebermenschen gewittert, das sollte höchstens einem Quartaner passiren, der von den Attacken der grossen Reitergeneräle schwärmt."

Germany, because there would have to be, as he phrases it, “unity of artistic style in all the expressions of the life of a people” (Ibid, 5). Rather, he characterizes the present situation as chaotic “barbarism” that would probably last only a few more centuries. Thus, again rebuking the conformist writers of his times, Nietzsche concludes: “only if we had imposed upon the French an original German culture could there be any question of a victory of German culture” (Ibid, 6).

Apparently, the editors at *Mother Earth* deemed this excerpt suitable to frame Nietzsche as one of their own. The introductory paragraph testifies as much:

Many newspaper editors and other less superficial readers of Nietzsche—among them some Individualist Anarchists—have savagely attacked Nietzsche as “responsible” for the European war. The deeper students of the great-poet philosopher appreciate him as a bitter opponent of war who saw clearly the distinction between the spirit of culture and the spirit of Empire. The following excerpt from Nietzsche leaves no doubt of his attitude in the matter (Nietzsche 1914b: 260).

By reprinting this specific excerpt, the editors tried to infuse Nietzsche’s thoughts from 1873 with renewed relevance after the recent German attack on France. Consequently, the purportedly timeless heading “Nietzsche on War” (Nietzsche 1914b) replaced the original title of the piece when it appeared in *Mother Earth* in October 1914. The choice of this text seemed to suggest that Nietzsche was by no means an apologist of Prussian militarism, but rather cherished French culture. Still, the editors glossed over the fact that Nietzsche was far from being a principled pacifist or an opponent of coercion, as the reprinted section itself reveals. Perhaps, the editorial staff at *Mother Earth* had little ideological difficulty with such obfuscation, since they were anti-militarists only, not Tolstoyan pacifists and thus had less ethical reservations about the use of force for the achievement of their goals. Even more difficult to integrate into their anarchist self-conception must have been Nietzsche’s opinion expressed in the excerpt, according to which a nation should display a uniform aesthetic style, i.e. an ultimately nationalistic idea that artistic products can be distinctly French or German.

In light of these dissonances between the anarchist ideal of non-domination and some of Nietzsche’s ideas, disagreement about the latter’s value to the cause of peace and freedom was sure to follow. Two months before the United States entered the war, John William Lloyd (1857–1940), a proponent of individualist anarchism and gay rights activist¹¹, made clear his affiliation with those highly

¹¹For an excellent account of Lloyd’s activities, see Kissack 2008.

skeptical of the Nietzsche cult. In a monthly magazine called *The Modern School* (Stelton, New Jersey), he published a series of six articles that was entirely devoted to dissecting Nietzsche's ideas. Warning his readers, Lloyd admitted:

Many have called Nietzsche an anarchist, and I have done so myself, but it is really incorrect. By setting his powerful individual above all laws and codes, calling him a "free spirit" and denouncing the State as the "coldest of all monsters", he logically should be an anarchist. But one must never expect logic from Nietzsche. And when you reflect that he incites and morally justifies this same strong individual to impose his will on others and invade them as he pleases, pleads always for an aristocracy, founds his social system on slavery, and finally specifically repudiates anarchy and its cult, the injustice of the appellation becomes clear. Or you may say that individually and personally Nietzsche was an anarchist, while socially and humanly he was an archist and aristocrat (Lloyd 1917: 12).

Lloyd saw absolutely no reason, then, to praise the German philosopher, let alone drop the allegations brought forth against his ideas:

There can be no reasonable doubt that Europe is bathed in blood at this very time (1916) largely as a result of his applied teachings. It does no good to show that Nietzsche himself might have been a gentle, chivalrous and even tender man. [...] The logic of all his teachings is selfishness, cruelty, severity, and his occasional lapses to the human and humane are only flaws and blemishes in the shield of the Hero of Hardness (Lloyd 1917: 13).

Indeed, the ideal of hardness had already prompted significant anarchists such as Landauer and Peter Kropotkin (1842–1921) to direct massive criticism against the German thinker (Miething 2016a). Lloyd's indictment, however, completely missed Nietzsche self-identification with the "good Europeans" (Nietzsche 2008: 242). Emphasis in the original, leading him to a wholesale rejection of the philosopher and, as a byproduct, to overlook certain aspects, which starkly conflict with the propaganda of the nations at war, for instance, Nietzsche's explicit disdain towards his own fellow Germans, who "advocate nationalism and racial hatred" (Ibid). Quite rightly, then, *Der Syndikalist*, the main anarchist-syndicalist journal during the Weimar Republic, would present to its readership antinationalist passages from *Beyond Good and Evil* and *Human, All Too Human* against the growing threat of Nazism in 1928 (Ibid).

4 Confronting the “Will to Power”

During the last two years of the First World War, anarchists oscillated between psycho-political and ethico-aesthetic readings in their interpretations of the “will to power”. Subverting a growing vulgarization of Nietzsche in America, the essayist Randolph Bourne (1886–1918) insisted in 1917 that

... the will-to-power is merely an impersonal description of life not a defence of tyranny. So, too, the idea that the mass exists for the benefit of superior persons, is not so much an ideal as a sober analysis of the inevitable in a society where all do not strive – as Nietzsche would have them – toward harmless and creative expressions of power (Bourne 1965).

Consequently, a few months before his premature death in December 1918, Bourne, whose Socialist political stance for years had been “practically that of Kropotkin”¹², now mediated his appreciation for Nietzsche’s vitalism with his Tolstoyan pacifism. This is most obvious in Bourne’s famous essay fragment “The State”, in which he argues that war brings to the fore the worst tendencies in a society. Bourne specifies that an unquestioned loyalty of the masses towards the state posed the greatest threat to democracy. After witnessing first-hand how his fellow Americans directed their energy towards the so-called war effort, Bourne promoted an even firmer Nietzschean conviction; the more vital the state, the sicklier the individual. This translates into a slogan repeated several times throughout the essay: “War is the health of the state.”

What puzzled Bourne was the readiness of workers of different nations to kill each other, to be more loyal to their respective nation-states rather than adhering to peaceful and universal cooperation between all peoples. After consulting the psychological aspect of Nietzsche’s work, Bourne found that a key factor in understanding this tendency was the individual’s decline to irrelevance in modern mass society. Prefiguring insights by Gustave Le Bon and Sigmund Freud’s crowd psychology, Nietzsche’s observations led Bourne to conclude that:

The gregarious impulse keeps its hold all the more virulently because when the group is in motion or is taking any positive action, this feeling of being with and supported by the collective herd very greatly feeds that will to power, the nourishment of which the individual organism so constantly demands. You feel powerful

¹²Bourne to Alyse Gregory (September 8, 1913), in Sandeen 1981: 133.

by conforming, and you feel forlorn and hopeless if you are out of the crowd. While even if you do not get any access to power by thinking and feeling just as everybody else in your group does, you get at least the warm feeling of obedience, the soothing irresponsibility of protection (Bourne 1977a: 363)¹³.

Thus, Bourne referred to Nietzsche's "will to power" to gain a socio-psychological insight: the atomized individual desires to be relevant and may gain enormous psychological satisfaction from merging with others into a group-entity that fuels the feeling of power in all of its members. War carries the herd instinct to its extreme. The individual's will to power promises greater flourishing when conforming with others, which ultimately explains the war effort's appeal to many despite its irrationality, namely, that of engaging in collective suicide on the battlefield and of depriving oneself of any reasoning capability as a member of the most authoritarian group arrangement known to humanity, the military.

If crowd psychology explains the willingness of workers to go to war, then a reliable counter-strategy begins with immunizing the individual's psyche against the temptations to participate in a uniform collective. This is a train of thought shared by a number of anarchist-pacifists concerned with rescuing Nietzsche's "will to power" from its aggressive undertones.

An important example of such intervention is the Indian-American art historian Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy (1877–1947), whose Nietzschean anarchism emerges from two essays in his little known book *The Dance of Shiva* (1918), first discovered by Allan Antliff (2004). Coomaraswamy included in his book the two essays "Cosmopolitan View of Nietzsche" and "Individuality, Autonomy and Function" (1918: 115–121, 137–139). The general anti-colonialist thrust of these tracts draws on elements of East Asian religions, on the idea of Mutual Aid put forth by Kropotkin since the 1890s, and on Nietzsche's "Idealistic Individualism" (Ibid, 115). Coomaraswamy begins by distancing himself from all those "who bracket our poet-philosopher and mystic with the [Heinrich von] Treitschkes and [John Adam] Crambs, and would make him one of the prime instigators of a 'Euro-Nietzschean' war" (Ibid, 117).¹⁴ It is easy, through direct

¹³See also Bourne 1977b, which makes clear that he derives this observation primarily from Nietzsche. This is not to neglect other possible influences from others such as Wilfred Trotter, see Moreau 1966: 179.

¹⁴The reference to "The Euro-Nietzschean War" most likely stems from the journal *The New Age* to which Coomaraswamy himself contributed articles. A bookseller had used this slogan in an advertisement in the issue of 1 October 1914. See Joll 1973: 305.

quotation, Coomaraswamy writes, to show “how little [Nietzsche] could ever have associated patriotism with greatness” (1918: 117). Instead, Coomaraswamy considers the *Übermensch* to be a modern version of a mystical ideal, capable of undermining the Christian dichotomy of the sacred and the secular, thus inspiring a global feeling of humanity’s unity. Those who embrace this ideal will stage a “protest against unworthy values” and adopt the cosmopolitan “sense of being everywhere at home—unlike the religions of reward and punishment, which speak of a future paradise and hell, and attach and absolute and eternal value to good and evil” (Ibid, 115). Coomaraswamy’s ultimate goal was the true autonomy of the individual. In order to reach this goal, one would have to be critical not only of tyrannical forms of government, but also of majoritarian and representative democratic arrangements, including their utilitarian self-legitimization (Ibid, 117). The key to securing the individual’s freedom from encroachments, governmental or otherwise, and to attaining inner harmony, Coomaraswamy argues, lies in the art of self-discipline. It is here that his interpretation of will to power as voluntary “renunciation of the will to govern” (Ibid, 138) comes into play. This stress on voluntary acts ultimately leads back to Nietzsche and Coomaraswamy’s own need to clarify terminology. He writes:

The “will to govern” must not be confused with the “will to power.” The will to govern is the will to govern others: the will to power is the will to govern oneself. Those who would be free should have the will to power without the will to govern (Ibid, 139).

Coomaraswamy thus challenged contemporary ideologues of war, disassociating the will to power from their nationalist agendas. He did so through interpreting the *Übermensch* anarchistically as a person who, through a self-imposed will to power, succeeds in rejecting her or his drive to dominate others.

Very similar interpretations of the “will to power” circulated in the European anarchist milieus after the war. Anselm Ruest, for instance, idealized power over one’s own body and spirit, engaging in conscientious objection against military service and the state.¹⁵ Ruest translated Nietzsche’s motif into a stoic attitude of the pacifist, who, refusing to bear arms and kill other human beings, willingly accepts the consequences this behavior might bring upon him. Without having a concrete roadmap in mind, Ruest surmised that a kind of “Ueberpolitik” was necessary to eradicate the roots of the past war. Ueberpolitik, then, referred to a

¹⁵See the chapter “The Rejection of Politics II. Anselm Ruest and *Der Einzige*” in Taylor 1990: 142–163, particularly 150 f. See also Parvulescu 2006.

kind of politics that abstained from the subjugation of the individual to prescribed grand ideals and instead grounded itself in an egoist outlook. Ruest writes:

And let it be understood, not out of pity, not out of love, it shall be said: Stop this stupid killing! Enough of "Love thy enemies" – unfortunately proclaimed (and always only proclaimed), to those "wretched and burdened", who maintain in their breast the desire for revenge, their *ressentiment*, in order to brew the stifling air of a century, which every moment unleashes explosions (Ruest 1919: 109 f.)¹⁶.

Such a peculiar mixture of Nietzschean tone and libertarian attitude fell on the fertile soil of Expressionism and continued to bloom immediately after the war. To become conscious of the self, to express one's own subjective perception in literature and painting instead of reproducing reality in a photo-realistic manner or analyzing it in a merely rationalistic way—these were the artistic principles of Ruest and other Expressionists sympathetic to anarchism (Haug 1991). Yet their political outreach suffered from a certain weakness in organizing. As Seth Taylor in his study on left-wing Nietzscheans remarks:

... Expressionism stood between aestheticism and political activism. In early Expressionism's cultural revolution, the artist was a prophet calling for the ethical self-transformation of every individual in society, not the political activist he would become in the Weimar years. Even for the more politically inclined wing of Expressionism, politics essentially meant a more active role in promoting a transformation of culture, not the attainment of concrete political goals in cooperation with other groups in society (Taylor 1990: 38).

Mere individualistically and culturally minded action was useful only to a limited extent if the goal was large scale, coordinated refusal of the people against their government's orders to go to war. Still, even Bart de Ligt (1883–1938), a Dutch anarcho-pacifist and critical admirer of Gandhi's campaigns of non-violence¹⁷, deeply committed to drafting plans of collective action to sabotage military mobilization whenever it occurred, pointed to Nietzsche in proclaiming that there is a need to analyze the self and the individual's perpetual "love of power [...] in

¹⁶Translation from the German is based on Taylor 1990: 154. Translation of the first sentence missing in Taylor is mine.

¹⁷For a comprehensive account and documentation of the correspondence between Gandhi and de Ligt, see Bartolf 2000.

order to thoroughly understand war” (de Ligt 1989: 14). De Ligt, in his seminal *Conquest of Violence* (1938), also admitted that

we must take into account the love of power, the innate passion for domination, the need of self-expression and dominance which are as typical of the great individual as of the great nation, and which are some of the deepest roots of political imperialism. The *Libido Dominandi*, the will to live and expand in order to survive, which Hobbes in his treatise on *Human Nature* characterized as love of power and which two centuries later Nietzsche christened *die* [sic!] *Wille zur Macht*, is one of the mainsprings of human passion, especially in the male (Ibid, 14).

Of course, de Ligt’s confidence that humanity could some day contain the power drive had been common currency among anarchists long before the outbreak of the First World War. Otto Gross (1878–1920) for instance, another Nietzschean anarchist, stressed the psychological liberation of the individual as necessary precondition for social revolution. Later labelled a “sexual immoralist”, he called for an overcoming of repressive sexual morality, the bourgeois nuclear family as well as hetero-normative gender standards (Gasser 1997: 58–61). Any revolution is doomed to fail without self-reflection, concluded Gross in a public exchange with Landauer, who doubted the validity of the psychoanalytic method (Gross 2005). Gross mainly disseminated his views in scientific and literary journals, but did not shy away from publishing in anarchist and Dadaist magazines such as *Die freie Straße* (1915–1918). Moreover, in the struggle against patriarchal authority he found a prominent ally in Franz Kafka (1883–1924), the famous Prague-based writer who displayed profound sympathies for anarchism (Löwy 1997: 71–94). Both collaborated in 1917 to publish a new journal entitled *Blätter zur Bekämpfung des Machtwillens* (literally: Journal for Combatting the Will to Power). Unfortunately, they never produced a single issue (Taylor 1990: 106).¹⁸

5 Outlook

Two years after the First World War, anarchists’ references to the “will to power” drastically declined. There are several reasons for this trend, most importantly, the significant weakening of the anarchist movement in the wake of the war and the

¹⁸The author incorrectly quotes the title of the journal as “*Blätter für Bekämpfung des Machtwillens*”. A more recent Kafka biography (Alt 2005: 449) gives the correct title but does not mention the anarchist interconnection.

death of several of anarchism's Nietzsche-enthusiasts. It is only with the transfer of power to Adolf Hitler on 30 January 1933 and the Nazis' ensuing abuse of Nietzsche's name that activists from Landauer's generation returned to the German philosopher. Throughout the coming decade, the Swiss Fritz Brupbacher (1874–1945), the exiled German Rudolf Rocker (1873–1958), and the British art critic Herbert Read (1893–1968) would all revisit the notions of will to power and *ressentiment* to explain the near complete lack of serious resistance to Nazism and other forms of totalitarianism.¹⁹

From their selective reading of Nietzsche's will to power, the three derived specific recommendations of how to deal with *ressentiment*. Rocker pleaded for a strengthening of a cosmopolitan conscience, which recognizes culture as a shared heritage of humanity. Read and Brupbacher on their part intended to sublimate the aggressive aspects of the power drive. Both were convinced that one would have to begin with the youth. While Read proposed a certain aesthetic barrier, capable of taming aggression through creative activities and education, Brupbacher directly recommended reading Nietzsche on how *ressentiment* works its way into the minds of people and what kind of negative effects an internalized bad conscience can have on others. Read finally gave his proposal to sublimate the will to power a very public forum through his 1948 contribution to the founding of the UNESCO-organization "International Society for Education through Art". Read drew on Nietzsche's diagnosis of nihilism, which he saw as ever more relevant now that another World War had devastated Europe for a second time. In order to generate new meaning for human existence after this catastrophe, art was to play a crucial role in any future society.

Fritz Brupbacher, finally, penned dozens of aphorisms akin to an obituary for the European workers' movement in 1943. The anarchist hope for social revolution and universal freedom was shattered by the totalitarian regimes of the Nazis in Germany, the Fascists in Italy and Spain as well as the Bolsheviks in Eastern Europe and Russia, all of which had surrounded Brupbacher's home country Switzerland with their brutal governance machineries. Depressed by these dark times, Brupbacher's aphorisms aimed at the description of certain psychological mechanisms that would enable people to resist authoritarian politics in the future. For this purpose, the Swiss anarchist repeatedly referred to the concept of "will to power" and in doing so, he joined the ranks of many other radicals from his

¹⁹For a comprehensive account of Brupbacher, Read and Rocker's readings of Nietzsche, see Miething 2016a.

generation who before him had critically probed Nietzsche's ideas for their theoretical value to their own political aspirations. Addressing humanity's coming generations, Brupbacher pleads, "May our will to power become a protest against all forms of oppression ..." (Brupbacher 1979: 44 f.).

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