
BOOK REVIEW

John Moore and Spencer Sunshine (Eds.). ***I am not a Man, I am Dynamite! Friedrich Nietzsche and the Anarchist Tradition.***

Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2004, 147 pp., \$14.95 paper.

Reviewed by **Richard J.F. Day**, Queen's University at Kingston.

I should make it clear at the outset that I am not a big fan of edited collections, as I increasingly find that they don't live up to my expectations, either as a producer or a consumer. The task of the editors, as I see it, is to put together a series (or better, a network) of essays that are coherent, in that they stay on some well-demarcated theme, but are also unique, in that they present a particular perspective on that theme. However, as anyone who has taken on this onerous task knows, meeting these two criteria at the same time can be difficult. In some cases, many of the contributors will have strong and unalterable ideas about what they do and how they do it, and this can work against the emergence of a productive dialogue between them. Or, each of them will simply pound home the same point in more or less the same way, which works well enough for the writer, but can become extremely tedious for the reader. It is with these common pitfalls in mind that I set out to evaluate the text at hand.

Given the title, I expected that each of the essays in the collection would talk about Nietzsche, anarchism, and the connections -- or lack thereof -- between them. Certainly many of the papers did this. Leigh Starcross's chapter provides a subtle and detailed discussion of Emma Goldman's relation to Nietzsche's work. Starcross points out that Goldman traveled widely from 1913 to 1917, giving lectures on the importance of Nietzsche's thought to pressing issues of the day, such as religion, statism, nationalism, and militarism. Since the texts of those lectures have been 'lost', or more precisely repressed out of existence, Starcross reconstructs her version of Goldman's Nietzsche from various texts that Goldman published, working towards the thesis that Nietzsche was an anarchist.

This is, of course, a controversial claim. As Andrew M. Koch points out in his chapter, Nietzsche himself tended to lump together Christians, anarchists, and other socialists as misguided do-gooders, "decadent purveyors of an un-natural and destructive interpretation of the human condition" (48). This should make it difficult for anyone to harness Nietzsche to an anarchist cart, but many contributors to this volume are unable to resist the temptation

to try. Since Nietzsche is dead, and therefore unable to defend himself, I feel an urge to defy the teachings of the master, and take up his cause. At the end of Koch's article, he suggests—and I agree—that the “anarchism” that emerges from Nietzsche's philosophy cannot take the form of a “political prescription” (60). However, Koch goes on to suggest that “the world”, as envisioned by Nietzsche, is “anarchistic”, in that it is “devoid of any specific content and meaning” (60).

To my mind this does an injustice both to Nietzsche, who was always eminently sociological and whose work contributed massively, via people like Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, to the poststructuralist revolution in the humanities and social sciences, as well as to (social) anarchisms, which have always tried to hold themselves (and others) to extremely high ethical standards. Really, there is no one, not even the most zealous of religious converts, who expects more from us flawed, enflashed mortals. Anarchism does not mean ‘anything goes’, despite what Dostoevsky or *Time Magazine* might say, and it is an odd friend of the tradition who says that it does. This is not the last word on this topic, though, as many of the other articles take up this theme in various ways. This constitutes a strength of the collection—it does present a network of answers to the question of whether Nietzsche was an anarchist, or whether he can be turned into one posthumously without boxing his ears too much.

One weakness, though, is the number of articles that appear to be full of pseudo-poststructuralist (postanarchist?) sound and light, signifying, well, not much, at least to me. And I am one who has sufficiently banged his brain against the barrel of the poststructuralist can(n)on, who has looked into its potent abyss and lived to, well, live again. There are really only two pieces like this, though, so one can easily read around them. Another complaint I have is with a couple of entries that seem to deal only glancingly with the main themes of the text, and therefore appear as either ‘recycles’, or attempts to get one's favourite ideas into print, one more time. Finally, I was a bit taken aback by the fact that all but one of the contributors appear to be ‘white men’, based on my knowledge of how they identify in some cases, and what I can glean from the always risky game of using names to ascribe identifications. It is unfortunate that, despite its postmodern inclinations, this collection reproduces a very modernist view of anarchism as something produced by and for men of Eurocolonial origins. Allan Antliff's discussion of Coomaraswamy's Nietzschean-anarchist inclinations provides some relief, but not enough. We really do have to get better at this!

In the end I would say: buy it and read it, there is enough good stuff there to make it worth your while. This collection didn't make me crazy!