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The Morality after Stirner: A Comparative Analysis of Peter Kropotkin's and Friedrich Nietzsche's Ethics*

Die Arbeit beschäftigt sich mit ethischen Fragen im Denken von Peter Kropotkin und Friedrich Nietzsche. Zunächst stellt sich für beide Denker die Frage nach der gemeinsamen Inspiration. Die Frage nach dem Einfluss von Max Stirner, Charles Darwin und Thomas Malthus wurde entwickelt.

The paper deals with ethical questions in the thinking of Peter Kropotkin and Friedrich Nietzsche. Firstly, the question of common inspiration arises for both thinkers. The question of the influence of Max Stirner, Charles Darwin and Thomas Malthus was developed.

Władysław Tatarkiewicz's *Historia filozofii* (The history of philosophy) was an inspiration for the following paper. At the end of the chapter devoted to Max Stirner's philosophy, the author says:

Stirner wielu zachwyił swą śmiałością, ale następców miał niewielu. Praktycznie usiłowali podobne idee wprowadzić w czyn anarchiści: Bakunin, Kropotkin. Teoretycznie najbliższym pozostał mu Nietzsche.¹ (Tatarkiewicz 1981: 54)

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1 Transl. by the author: »Stirner delighted many people with his audacity, yet he had little in the way of successors. Anarchists such as Bakunin and Kropotkin made attempts to bring similar ideas into existence. In the theoretical aspect, Friedrich Nietzsche was closest to him«.

Individualistic anarchism, which was created by Max Stirner, was impartially extreme. Stirner refused to respect authorities of all kinds. Not only stood he against traditional spiritual values but also the existence of society and family. However, two thinkers of the 19th century found some value in his ideology.

Peter Kropotkin's and Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophies have common roots. Both thinkers lived at the same time, tried to answer the same questions, and were influenced by the same ideas. The following paper is a comparative analysis of the moral beliefs of both philosophers. One major aim of the paper is to outline the main differences and similarities between Kropotkin's and Nietzsche's works. Furthermore, the analysis of Max Stirner's, Charles Darwin's, and Thomas Malthus' influence on Kropotkin and Nietzsche is of particular interest.

There has not been an adequate number of studies on the ethical aspects of anarchism. Some scientists believe that anarchists did not formulate a consistent system of moral beliefs (cf. Kutnik 2009: 149–165). Consequently, such research is not rational at all. However, ethical issues were a significant part of Kropotkin's interests. He formulated a thesis on the evolutionary origins of morality. It was an afterthought for his theory of mutual aid (cf. Kropotkin 1972). The philosophical essentials of the communist anarchism majorly base on the critical review of the contemporary system of moral beliefs. Nietzsche made a similar critique. They both believed that modern culture contorts a natural sense of morality. Despite this, they defined good and evil differently, and their value systems were impossible to accommodate. Nietzsche was also visibly antagonistic towards anarchism (cf. Nietzsche 2002: 89–94).

Due to its volume, this research does not claim to be completed. This topic requires further studies.

Darwinism

Kropotkin stands out due to his deep scientism. For the most of his life, he was an established geologist. Even after gaining popularity as a canvasser, he was doing lectures on purely scientific topics. This background had an immense impact on his sociological theories. Above all, Kropotkin was a Darwinist. He believed that evolutionary and biological factors are crucial for all studies on human beings (cf. Drabiński 2019: 30). That is the first aspect, which distinguishes him from Nietzsche. Nietzsche was a philosopher. Unlike Kropotkin, he was against worshipping

science. Nevertheless, he had a desire for knowledge, which is evident in his book *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* (*The Gay Science*). The German philosopher knew the works of Darwin, Spencer, and Stirner. They all had a significant influence on him, yet, Nietzsche's research was generally superficial. As an intuitive thinker, the more he drew from other's theories, the more he criticized them.

Nietzsche did not consider himself a Darwinist. Charles Pence described a part of Nietzsche's criticism towards scientism as aesthetic (cf. Pence 2011: 165–190). It refers to Nietzsche's early theories, specifically to the division of phenomena into Apollonian and Dionysian ones (cf. Nietzsche 1909: 21–28). Apollo was the personification of order, measure, and restraint. Dionysus was chaos, an emanation of spirit and unpredictability. The scientism represented by Darwin (as well as Kropotkin) belonged to the Apollonian world. Nietzsche accused him not only of restricting the world with a clearly defined, scientific framework, but also stripping it of its true values: mystery, unpredictability, and chaos.

However, Kropotkin and Nietzsche shared a significant part of critique towards Darwinism. In the first place, it concerns the Malthusian aspect. Thomas Malthus (1766–1834) was an English economist who created a theory that emphasized the value of demographical factors in survival (cf. Malthus 1798: 17–36). He claimed that struggle for existence is the most important factor regulating population. He pointed out fighting for food as the essential aspect of it. Darwin adopted this approach in his theses.

Kropotkin was antagonistic toward this idea. He based his critique on the research, made in Siberia and Manchuria. As he claimed:

[...] even in those few spots where animal life teemed in abundance, I failed to find – although I was eagerly looking for it – that bitter struggle for the means of existence, among animals belonging to the same species, which was considered by most Darwinists (though not always by Darwin himself) as the dominant characteristic of struggle for life, and the main factor of evolution. (Kropotkin 1972: 2)

He noticed that struggle for existence is not a literal fight among individuals of the same species. Apparently, in the vast majority of cases, it is a fight against nature. A fight in which mutual aid is in favour (cf. Kropotkin 1972: 6).

On the other hand, Nietzsche's conviction that life was more than struggle for existence significantly separated him from Malthusianism. Nietzsche saw life as a

supreme value and development as the main goal. Thus, it was utterly unacceptable for him to consider life to be based on simple combat mechanisms (cf. Nietzsche 2001: 207–208).

Both thinkers were also consistent when it comes to the state of constant fight. Malthusian theories assumed that struggle for existence is a never-ending war between representatives of same species. Nietzsche perceived periods of intense struggle for existence as a deviation from norm when will to power cannot come to the fore. Therefore, he perceived them as moments of regression and not as a factor conducive to development. Kropotkin also argued that constant war is not a natural state for any species. A fight leads to impoverishment, and yields lower natural increase. Hence, survival of the finest is, in fact, a myth. It applies to all species, starting with insects like ants or termites. In his book *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution*, Kropotkin gave many examples, including invertebrates, birds, and mammals (cf. Kropotkin 1972: 20–56). Moreover, he believed that higher animals have developed social instincts even better, thanks to their higher intelligence.

In the 19th century, interpreting Darwin without the reservations mentioned above was widespread among social Darwinists. Kropotkin was in opposition to this trend, which is unquestionably visible in his argument with Thomas Huxley (cf. Harman 2012: 89–110). However, Nietzsche shared some views with social Darwinists, what differentiates him from Kropotkin. That included the assumption that one must be separated from his primal instincts by some external force. In the opinion of social Darwinists, culture was the barrier, and they called it *the facade*. For Nietzsche, the inner will to power played this role. On the other hand, Kropotkin believed that instincts are always on behalf of a community. Hence, on behalf of an individual. Consequently, there is no need to be separated from them (cf. Drabiński 2019: 33–34).

Individualism and morality

That leads to the question about the meaning of *the individual*. Nietzsche and Kropotkin understood it utterly differently, which was the main cause of disagreement between them. According to Kropotkin, the ability to perceive an individual primarily as a part of society was crucial for humanity. However, an individual initiative was also desirable. Many posterior researchers criticized this idea as utopian, because it is based on the belief that people without any instruments of coercion would act on behalf of a community. I quote after Daniel Grinberg:

Interes jednostki zlewa się u Kropotkina z interesem ogólnospołecznym. Jej potrzeba duchowej autonomii zepchnięta jest na daleki plan przez przyrodzone i dominujące skłonności do kooperacji i solidarności z innymi jednostkami. Wrodzona dobroć i łagodność skłaniają w warunkach naturalnych do altruizmu. Wytwory ludzkości są jej wspólnym dziedzictwem, w którym nie da się precyzyjnie wyznaczyć wkładu poszczególnych osób. Dlatego stać się powinny własnością ogółu.² (Grinberg 1994: 119–120)

Nietzsche denied such attitude putting individual development on a pedestal. In Kropotkin's opinion, every initiative was directly related to the good of a community. Outside of it, an individual had no chance of survival or development. Nietzsche saw individualism more in a spirit of Stirner. Morality allowed the will to power to develop, and was a manifestation of inner strength. Thus, all demonstrations of altruism aimed at supporting weaker parts of a community were a perversion of morality (cf. Nietzsche 2002: 24–27).

Individualism in Stirner's theses was, in plain view, extreme. He attacked not only a state but also family, society, and faith (cf. Stirner 1995). Nietzsche considered them as factors victimizing natural freedom. He argued that everything that morally restricts people is harmful, and therefore should be banished. The only moral compass that should exist is *me*. He goes a step further with Protagoras' »Man is the measure of all things«. For Stirner: »I am the measure of all things«, because *I* is the only claim that matters (cf. Tatarkiewicz 1981: 53). Anything else should not be trusted. The similarities between this theory and Nietzsche's individualism are evident.

Nevertheless, this theory had an immense impact on Peter Kropotkin as well. He disagreed with Nietzsche about the role that individual plays in society. However, he agreed with the destructive repercussions of any formalized authorities. It was essential for the creation of communist anarchism. Kropotkin believed that inherent sociability fulfils best in small communities. He claimed that anarchism was not only the best system but also a natural one (cf. Kropotkin 1906: 40).

Interestingly, both thinkers perceived morality as something inherent. However, there are some fundamental differences. For Kropotkin, morality was something

2 Transl. by the author: »For Kropotkin, the interest of an individual merges with the interest of a general public. The need for spiritual autonomy is pushed to the distant plane by the innate and dominant propensities for cooperation and solidarity with other individuals. The inborn goodness and gentleness incline to altruism in natural conditions. The products of humanity are common heritage, in which it is impossible to precisely define the contribution of individual people. Therefore, they should become the property of a general public«.

natural and universal, although it was changing over time (cf. Drabiński 2019: 26–49). Not only humans but every living being was born with a certain sense of what is good. According to him, the universalism of morality was described best by the statement: »Treat others how you want to be treated«. What is more, even with changing moral levels of societies, this principle remained a constant and unchanging compass. Nietzsche perceived morality as something inherent to every human being. He believed in the statement: »You have morality as you are by nature«, and divided people into two categories. Some had the morality of masters, and some had the morality of slaves (cf. Nietzsche 2002: 201–206). At first, he assumed that it is appropriate to belong to both groups. However, he fell into the trap of his own system. He began to glorify the morality of masters as the only right one.

That leads to another aspect – the critique of contemporary morality. Both Nietzsche and Kropotkin believed that an enforced value system of any type is harmful to natural virtues. This is noticeable in their approaches towards religion. Kropotkin criticized theism. In his opinion, the perfect society had to be secular (cf. Kropotkin 1906: 6). He argued that culture and religion are the reflections of morality in one particular moment. However, morality is not constant. It keeps evolving. Thus, things that were moral in the past can be immoral now. He considered religion to be a thread coming with high intelligence. According to him, humanity developed abstract concepts such as God. However, due to that development, people got enslaved by fossilized moral beliefs coming with theism. As for God, Nietzsche adapted Feuerbach's idea of death of God. Stirner also was developing this concept.

In his essay *Das Wesen des Christentums (The Essence of Christianity)*, Feuerbach claims that God and human beings were identical. However, Stirner criticized Feuerbach's approach, because he did not eliminate humbling God, but replaced it with an equally humbling abstract Man. As Stirner said: »It was not noticed that Man killed God by becoming God« (Stirner 1995: 39).

However, Nietzsche pointed his sharpest critique towards Christianity and Western culture connected with it (cf. Nietzsche 1907). Above all, he pointed to a cult of the weak, and to altruism as factors distorting the proper sense of human existence.

Tatarkiewicz characterizes Nietzsche's understanding of the *contemporary morality* with three pillars:

- 1) Założenie równości: wszyscy są równi, mają równe prawa i obowiązki.
- 2) Założenie wolności: każdy powinien być wolny, byle nie stawał na drodze wolności innych.
- 3) Założenie wartości moralnej: wartość moralna jest

bezwzględna i zbędne jest ją uzasadniać, [...] nie jest bowiem środkiem, lecz celem ostatecznym.³ (Tatarkiewicz 1981: 165–166)

He claims that Nietzsche's ethics is an answer to these postulates. He concludes them into three alternative statements:

1) Założenie wartości życia: jedynie ono posiada wartość bezwzględną i z niego rodzi się wszystko inne, co w ogóle wartość posiada. 2) Założenie wolności silnego: wolność należy się tylko temu, kto posiada dość siły, by ją sobie zapewnić. 3) Założenie nierówności: ludzie nie są równi, między nimi są lepsi i gorsi, zależnie właśnie od tego, ile mają w sobie życia i siły.⁴ (Tatarkiewicz 1981: 165–166)

Kropotkin also believed that fossilized modern morality detracts us from what is natural and best for society. However, he preached completely different theses. He built his whole political vision on the belief that all people are equal. This approach implicated the lack of strict hierarchy, which is characteristic for anarchism. That situates him closer to Stirner's theses.

Another significant aspect is the understanding of good and evil. The atheistic nature of the world-views of Kropotkin and Nietzsche is essential in these considerations. In Christian-based theistic systems, the categories of good and evil are defined through the prism of God. Good is what is close to God, comes from him, or is following his will. What is against God is evil. Alternatively, evil is no good, hence no God. However, in atheistic systems, these categories must be redefined and designated through other prisms. In theories of both philosophers, what defines morality is nature.

Kropotkin's theories about good and evil are simpler. What favours survival is good (cf. Kropotkin 1972: 428–455). Thus, what is favourable for the group's well-being is genuinely good. The ability to differentiate good and evil is inherent. What is more, it is possessed not only by humans but also by all animals. Actions to harm the com-

3 Transl. by the author: »1) The assumption of equality: everyone is equal, has equal rights and obligations. 2) The assumption of freedom: everyone should be free, as long as it does not interfere with the freedom of others. 3) The assumption of moral value: moral value is absolute, and it is irrelevant to justify it, [...] it is not a means but an ultimate purpose«.

4 Transl. by the author: »1) The assumption of the value of life: it has an absolute value alone, and from it arises everything else that has any value. 2) The assumption of the freedom of the strong: freedom belongs only to those who have the strength to secure it. 3) The assumption of inequality: people are not equal, there are better and worse between them, depending on how much life and strength they have in themselves«.

munity are an example of evil. However, the instinctive ability to catch evil allows its elimination. Phenomena occurring in the animal kingdom, such as laziness, the tendency to assault, and plunder, are nearly fully reduced. The culture (with the institutions that force one to obey the rules) interferes with our ability to perceive good and evil. Artificial morality built on fear ceases to fulfil its primary role.

Nietzsche, in turn, negates the very notions of good and evil (cf. Nietzsche 2002: 4). He believed that this dichotomy has been distorted. Hence, there is no point in using such concepts any further. Additionally, cognitive relativism is not conducive to differentiating phenomena into obviously good and evil. However, he considered every symptom of altruism as a deprivation of morality. That states him in opposition to Kropotkin.

Nietzsche's philosophy was characterized not only by moral relativism but also by cognitive relativism, which proves his interest in Stirner's output. The well-known »death of God« was a legacy of Feuerbach's thoughts on which both German thinkers drew. However, Nietzsche, like Stirner, went further in his negation. According to him, any knowledge and any human truths are always false, because reason perceives the world in its way. Everything we hold to be genuine is authentic only for us. These theses were supported by Nietzsche with his biological interests. All judgments and values we perceive are a reflection of our natural needs. Each valuation reflects biological usefulness. Kropotkin, as a scientist, did not write much about the ontological aspects of reality.

Summary

The preceding paper compared the moral systems created by two dissimilar personalities. On the one hand, widely educated Peter Kropotkin who came from the family of the prince. On the other hand, the impulsive and selective Friedrich Nietzsche, finally consumed by his own madness. It is not surprising that two such different characters, with such different levels of scientific preparation, answered the same questions quite differently. Besides, the aim of the paper was to analyse their achievements for the sake of being inspired by the works of another, no less unique person. Max Stirner was a living contradiction. His rebellious theories of denying any form of sovereignty contrasted badly with his biography. He lived and died in extreme poverty, not achieving much success in his private or professional life.

The end of the 19th century was a period of reevaluation. People's attitude to the world around them has changed. Ideas such as nihilism, anarchism, Marxism, and socialism, which defined the transformations at the turn of the century, gained popularity. It should not be surprising then that the socio-political considerations were accompanied by moral transformations.

As has been shown, an important factor connecting the ideas of Kropotkin and Nietzsche was their fascination with Darwinism. It was obviously related to the epoch in which they lived. Both thinkers were critical of the Malthusian aspect of Darwinism. Both also interpreted the work of the British evolutionist far beyond his default intention.

However, from the point of view of morality, the figure of Stirner is much more important – his absolute negation and the constant pursuit of phantoms and illusions. Stirner's attitude to statehood was a significant inspiration for the emerging mature anarchism, which seems to be forgotten today. Most anarchist studies revolve around the figures of Bakunin and Kropotkin. Stirner was also an ideological ancestor to nihilism in the form devised by Nietzsche. The following paper aimed to highlight the most important similarities between all these processes.

The coexistence of nihilism and anarchism was marked by eternal conflict. Starting with the situation in Russia at the turn of the 1860s and 1870s, and ending with Nietzsche's very critical attitude towards the assumptions of anarchism. However, it should be remembered that both these ideological trends were a sign of their times and the young generation's response to the coming great changes.

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