After the talk: Weber - Nietzsche

Considerations of Edith Hanke

To the indirectly transmitted Weber quotation:

The world in which we spiritually and intellectually live today is a world substantially shaped by Marx and Nietzsche.[1]

Through our discussion on Friday evening, which was very lively, I came up with a thought that I did not have before. Weber makes this statement after the Spengler debate in February 1920, in which Spengler was virtually "executed" by the socialist Otto Neurath. When Weber refers to Marx and Nietzsche after this lively discussion towards the young students, that probably means: Do not deal with Spengler's "Decline of the West", but with the really decisive critics of our modern (Christian-occidental) culture: Karl Marx and Friedrich Nietzsche. Only this is intellectually valuable!

Can Nietzscheanism and democracy go together?

Nietzsche is considered the great anti-democrat. The question is whether Nietzscheanism and democracy can be reconciled. In German political science, there is a new book by Dieter Thomä that plays with Nietzschean terminology: *Warum Demokratien Helden brauchen. Plädoyer für einen zeitgemäßen Heroismus* (Berlin 2019) [Why democracies need heroes. A plea for a contemporary heroism].

Robert Eden interprets Nietzsche as antidemocratic and non-moralistic,[2] but he is convinced that Weber transformed Nietzsche's ideas in a liberal program. Can Weber be a mediator?

I was amazed by Weber's statement in "Wahlrecht und Demokratie in Deutschland" (Suffrage and Democracy in Germany):

Und das neueste Literatentum mit seinem Bedürfnis, seine „Erlebnisse", erotische oder „religiöse" oder welcher Art sie sonst seien, zu beschwatzen oder drucken zu lassen, ist der Feind aller Würde, gleichviel welcher Art. „Distanz" ist aber keineswegs, wie der Mißverstand der verschiedenen auf Nietzsche zurückgehenden „Prophetien" bei uns glaubt, nur auf dem Kothurn der „aristokratischen" Kontrastierung seiner selbst gegen die „Vielzuvielen" zu / gewinnen: - sie ist im Gegenteil stets unecht, wenn sie heute dieser inneren Stütze bedarf. Gerade als Probe ihrer Echtheit kann ihr vielleicht die Notwendigkeit, sich innerhalb einer „demokratischen" Welt innerlich zu behaupten, nur dienlich sein.[3]

The latest breed of the litérateurs with their need to prattle about their 'experiences' in word and print, be they erotic, 'religious' or whatever, are the enemies of all dignity, Various 'prophecies' produces under the influence of Nietzsche are based on a misconception, for 'distance' is certainly not to be achieved by standing on the pedestal of some 'aristocratic' contrast between oneself and the 'all too many'; indeed, on the / contrary, distance is always inauthentic if it needs this inner support nowadays. It may be that the need to maintain one's inner distance within a 'democratic' world will prove to be a valuable test of its genuineness.[4]

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[1] Cf. Wilhelm Hennis, "The Traces of Nietzsche in the Work of Max Weber", in: Hennis, Max Weber. Essays in Reconstruction, translated by Keith Tribe. - London et al. 1988, p. 146.
[2] Cf. Robert Eden, Political Leadership & Nihilism. A Study of Weber & Nietzsche. – Tampa 1983, p. 34.
[3] Max Weber, Zur Politik im Weltkrieg, MWG I/15, p. 389-390.
[4] Max Weber, Political Writings, ed. by Peter Lassman and Ronald Speirs. - Cambridge 1994, p. 122-123.