

# **Criticism of Ethical and Philosophical Foundations of National Socialism**

## **Review**

**Antoniu Alexandru FLANDORFER, “*Criticism of Ethical and Philosophical Foundations of National Socialism*”, Eikon Publishing House, 2016.**

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I think that the topic chosen is likely to highlight original and timely research questions and answers, which are of real interest in the current philosophical, moral and political situation. Moreover, it is a theme of European interest, in the context of political and social developments the old continent is facing.

The paper addresses a topical issue, in a time concerned to find solutions for overcoming the crisis that is being felt in Europe and worldwide, most troubling than ever and that currents of extremist thought and social action know very well. In a time open to all kinds of speeches, in which the far right-wing claims the support necessary for political options in a whole philosophy and mythical thinking of the clearest fascist inspiration, a thorough analysis of the Nazi phenomenon – the archetype of spiritual and actional manifestations of right-wing totalitarianism – seems to be more than appropriate.

1) A legitimate question could be asked: what is the new element that can be brought upon a subject so extensively researched by historians, political scientists, sociologists, psychologists, and even physicians or psychiatrists? It must be emphasized from the very beginning that this book is a philosophical work, not a historical one. And, even if there are analyzes of political philosophy on the National Socialism, one cannot say the same thing about the ethical and moral philosophy perspective on understanding this phenomenon.

Moreover, the very idea that a current of thought with so profound antihumanist implications could be based on a genuine ethical or moral philosophy

seems absurd and irrelevant for a serious scientific explanation about Nazism. The merit of this study is to propose a critical look at the ethical-philosophical foundations of National Socialism, on the premise that *no current of thought, no movement of social action can commit – and affectively and emotionally attach such large groups of supporters / sympathizers, even among the intellectual elite, without a moral component*. The employment or the non-employment of individuals in the community life and, especially, the quality and depth of this participation has a fundamentally ethical determination. Edgar Morin writes that in the same way as man eats not only food, the society lives not only in economic management and efficiency. It also needs hopes, myths, ideals, dreams.

2) Europe invented democracy, undoubtedly, drawing on the ancient Greek rationalist political thought, but it should not be ignored that Europe also turned the twentieth century into “the century of totalitarianism”. The calamity of democracy – wrote in January 1943 Robert Brasillach, one of the intellectuals attached to the extreme right ideas – is to have deprived the nation of *image, of the image of love, of the image of respect, of the image of genuine solidarity*, which feels like living in fraternity. Nazism has shown us how the modern world failed to find its identity in democracy. The National Socialism, fascism in general, was nourished by this symbolic identification – imaginary, figurative and mythical – answering a haunting expectation from individuals and communities of something that would represent them, even a “face”, seen as a “providential face”, identified with the destiny of the community itself.

The criticism of ethical-philosophical foundations of Nazism is an interrogation on the logic specific to its appearance and attraction for an overwhelming number of individuals, which should make us cautious about the possibility of restatement of our current history. It is also a formal guard against the idea that our time could not, in its turn, believe it is saved by the recourse to new myths and dreams.

3) If currently the Nazism seems to be a thing of the past, definitively condemned by history, especially for the bloody seal that it has put on the entire last century, the same cannot be said about Neo-Nazism, neo-fascism, in full resurgence and even in the process to expand their sphere of audience in the contemporary world. And the events that Europe is facing nowadays, related to the identity crisis of the European Union, to the serious problems related to the refugee crisis, to the crisis of interreligious dialogue, are not at all likely to stem the interest of communities to solve or at least manage crisis situations through means specific to the far right-wing.

More specifically, current social movements of National Socialist type feel the need for a re-foundation of values, using the conceptual elements of racialist theories, for the mythical obsessions of founding, programming, fulfilling the destiny of mankind that eventually, even if “upgraded”, fall into the logic of the totalitarian thinking.

This paper is also relevant through the fact that *Nazism has the force of example* for any type of event radicalized towards the far right-wing that propagates in the collective mind. “This approach – states the author – is oriented towards National Socialism, precisely because this German form of radicalized fascism represents a starting point in understanding the trends of any other ideology or social action that competes and contributes to what could dehumanize us.”

Now, once we highlighted the importance and the topicality of the issue studied, let us see to what extent the author has managed to build and to carry out the proposed research project.

4) In line with the logic of the research, the book is divided into three chapters: *A philosophical analysis of racism as an ideological matrix of National Socialism; Superman as the ideal type of the Nazi ethics marked by the theory of Aryan racial superiority; respectively The Reflection of the National-Socialist Weltanschauung as “political religion” and ethical grounds in totalitarian manipulation*, with a consistent introduction and final conclusions. It is worth appreciating the concern of the author to accompany each chapter – and the related subsections – with short explanatory conclusions, clarifying the assumed intentions and theorizations.

I note, from the start, the good organization of the content, as well as the representativeness of themes chosen for supporting the argumentative approach, what defines the author as a good connoisseur and a competent researcher in the field of the issues investigated, especially given the fact that he also uses a truly impressive bibliography, *from which does not lack virtually none of the significant titles of specialty literature*.

It is not easy to do a coherent theoretical exercise on an issue where the difficulties start right at some conceptual notions: racial, racism, racialism, myth – “false fable” (Platon), the myth – identity essence, the myth – founding legend (with Heidegger preferring the term of *Saga*, in order to delineate himself from the Rosenberg’s manner of conceiving the myth), clarifications that the author makes reasonably, not hesitating to often support his own views (for instance in relation

to racism contained in the so-called *myth of progress*, or hidden in the phrase *homo europaeus*).

Incisive and with real personal contributions is also the comparative analysis of several Nazi themes (racism, which the State being allowed to do anything if “motives are noble”, the eugenics, the myth of the superiority of cultures and civilizations, the authoritarianism, the biological conservatism), also found dissipatedly in democratic regimes.

5) And the analyze of the conceptual elements of racism as an ideological matrix of National Socialism; the transgression of racialism in anti-Semitism, anti-Judaism, anti-rabinism with the inhuman implementing of the so-called *Hebrew issue*; the Aryanization of Christianity, and last, but not least, the politicization of theology, represent an inspired and interesting release on the topics mentioned in the title.

The criticism of the manner in which Nazism took over and distorted Nietzsche’s ideas, rebuilding ideologically the original connotations that the philosopher ascribed to metaphors “superman”, “blond beast”, or to the distinction “master’s moral” versus “slave’s moral”, is also remarkable and admirable.

The Superman theory, with its symbolic identification, the blond beast was able to impose the racial mirage of Aryan superiority and of the right of Germans to pursue the legitimate aim of ensuring the so-called *Living space*. Rightly, the author identifies the philosophical origins of the theory of vital space in the German political romanticism who claimed the racial superiority that shaped the cultural characteristics of Germanness, insisting, however, that these Nationalistic connotations, in terms of cultural hegemony and Germans’ character of “chosen people”, meant to arise the pride and responsibility of belonging of this nation, *do not justify Nazi slippages and concrete measures meant to control the population, conceptually united in Nazi biopolitics: racial hygiene, genetically controlled human reproduction or “the final solution”*. “All these facets of Evil have found their last expression in the theory of Vital Space (*Lebensraum*).” states the author, surprising on the basis of his own analysis, the evolution of such theories in the current political thought, from population control to geopolitics, consistent with the expansionist and hegemonic totalitarian ideology promoted.

Mr. Antoniu Flandorfer legitimately notes that the theory of Vital Space was developed not only in Germany, but was generated by the emergence of pan-nationalist ideologies; however, in the case of National Socialists, this theory, geopolitical in essence, was subject to totalitarian ideology, at the expense of state policy, even at the risk of collapse of the Third Reich.

The idea of achieving to get the prototype of Superman – including through programs of euthanasia of many people whose *lives need not be lived*, from persons with disabilities to alcoholics and homosexuals – in order to populate the vital space with this one, the ultimate objective of Nazism, assumed as state policy, demonstrates “[...] the fact that National Socialism sought to substantiate an ethic against human nature, in which the individual has undergone a total control, beyond the atomisation imposed by the totalitarian punitive system.”

6) The work investigates in the end the building of totalitarian ethics of Nazism in the context of the paradigm of modernity, starting with a necessary and well done analysis of the research methods of the National Socialist imaginary, analysis all the more valuable as, among experts, there is controversy regarding the methodology of investigating the imaginary.

Stressing the complexity of the research of the Nazi phenomenon and the difficulty in identifying a methodology on the imaginary accepted by the academic field, the author does not hesitate to state, as a result of his own analysis, the approaches that suit best his theoretical endeavour: “In this study we are interested to probe the Nazi imagery from an ideological perspective, as well as in terms of moral criticism, and we intend to highlight the manner of taking up the individual consciousnesses of adherents who have been manipulated to commit a series of atrocities under the auspices of an anti-humanist ethical hypostasis without living with the guilt, but, on the contrary, feeling entitled or elected to participate in building a better world.”

Consequently, in accordance with the methodological specifications explicitly formulated, the author pursues the ethical determinations imposed by the structures of political imaginary built by Nazi symbolism assumed by the instruments of propaganda and manipulation, concluding with the analysis of the utopian position of National Socialism in a *political religion*.

Perhaps it is precisely in this conclusion that lays the greatest danger represented by such movements of thought and social action: to turn themselves into *political religions*, which have the force to transmit to individuals utopian ideals, which these ones are ready *to believe in and to sacrifice themselves for*.

In conclusion, the author legitimately states that “The stakes of the research project undertaken was to demonstrate that any current theoretical thinking and / or social movement, albeit a deeply anti-humanist one, is based on certain ethical and philosophical foundations”, without which it cannot win a mass base.

The critical analysis conducted in this paper, the correct identification of the main themes that serve the argumentative approach proposed, the capacity for

synthesis, the systematizations and interpretations, often original, are conclusive that as a whole, *Criticism of ethical and philosophical foundations of National Socialism* is a success, proposing to the more or less circumspect reader, serious reasons of reflection on the worrying perspectives that the theoretical slips and extremist actions transmit to the contemporary world.

I recommend a careful reading of this book, and I am convinced that the message sent will get beyond the narrow circle of specialists, whether they are political philosophers or thinkers and address a wider audience interested – and worried in a responsible way! – in the spiritual prospects and possible actionable experiences regarding Europe and even our current world as a whole.

### **Bibliography:**

1. Flandorfer, Antoniu Alexandru. *Critica Fundamentelor etico-filosofice ale național-socialismului* (Criticism of Ethical and Philosophical Foundations of National Socialism). Bucharest: Eikon Publishing House, 2016.