

11. Justice and Economy from *Human, All Too Human* to *Thus Spake Zarathustra*

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Abstract

This essay argues that in Nietzsche's critique of morality – in particular during the time he wrote from *Human, All Too Human* to *Thus Spake Zarathustra* –, two basic modes of relation of the human being to the world come apparent, viz., practical wisdom and technical skill. Nietzsche discusses these through the phenomena of justice and the economy. Discussing Nietzsche's understanding of the nature of human action and of technical skill, the essay shows that for him, both the morality of principles and industrialized economic activity have become nihilistic in mass society.

Keywords:

Nietzsche, Friedrich, ethics, economy

JEL classification:

B3, Z0

1.¹

The name of Friedrich Nietzsche, it seems, gives voice to much more than to a great philosopher of the late 19th century. It resonates as few others do, as if it was giving a name to an experience, “das Erlebnis Nietzsche”, as Thomas Mann writes. (1960, 25)² An experience not of reading and study, not first of all; but rather of encounter, gathered and culled from nameless other encounters and experiences. Nietzsche is part of our own life-story, part of what is closest to us.³ To deny him this immediacy means, as Löwith implies, to misunderstand him. (1937, 405, 407; also Foot 2001, 103) However, not Nietzsche's polemics, but rather the phenomena becoming apparent in his questions as well as in his answers,⁴ are the substance of that encounter. To be sure, Nietzsche's polemics, his critique, questions and answers often dwell between myth-creating evocations and rational argument, and his response is as often part of the question, further unraveling both, as if always on the way. It is that way, writes Friedrich Georg Jünger in his magnificent book on Nietzsche, “which leads through the plenty of contradiction” and where “the polemical [is] left behind. It is nothing else but the skin which the snake

leaves behind when she rejuvenates and renews herself.” (2000, 3; see also M II, “Vorrede”, 2)

This essay sets out to show that these phenomena belong, to use a phrase from Martin Heidegger, to the place of the ethical as the genuine place of the human being. (1991, 47)⁵ It is through Nietzsche’s critique of the seemingly lucid clarity of what modernity has come to know as morality or ethics, coined by the stream of times and moulded into principles and yet apparently void of anything common,⁶ that these phenomena become apparent. They fall, as this essay will argue, into the categories of practical wisdom and technical skill; more generally speaking, these are the phenomena of justice and economy.

2.

In the writings of his convalescent years (M II, “Vorrede”, 5) – that is, roughly, from *Human, All Too Human* to *Zarathustra*⁷ – Nietzsche pronounces the breakdown of the idea of the Christian God – metaphorically expressed in WS and pronounced in FW⁸ –, under the spell of perspectivism. (FW, 343) Nietzsche recognizes that this leaves us at the shore of an “open sea” which has perhaps never been so open before. (343; also 356) It is the *conditio humana* as such which is laid open by the fall of transcendental beliefs. The focus on and realization of the openness of the condition of man is the main underlying characteristic of Nietzsche’s writings of this period, culminating in the idea of overcoming the human being. (See Kaiser in this volume) This focus encompasses almost all important topics – also those concerning economical, social and political matters⁹ – in his work. Yet, not least because of the aphoristic and poetic character of Nietzsche’s work, this focus and openness created the difficulty to be moulded into comprehensive conceptual expressions. Nietzsche himself, writing in 1885 a new (but unpublished) preface to *Human, All Too Human*, brings forward one overarching concept of this focus of a convalescent:

It happened late – I was already beyond my twenties – that I came to realize what I had utterly missed so far: namely, the justice. “What is justice? Is it possible? And if not, how can one then go on living?” – such questions I asked myself constantly. . . . Perhaps I will find justice on the way! And so there began for me a time of wandering. (KSA 11, August-September 1885, 40, 65)¹⁰

What drives this realization, throwing light onto way left behind and yet to go, is the possibility that justice, taken – as Nietzsche seems to take it in the quote above – in the widest possible sense of the word,¹¹ is indeed impossible, or – to paraphrase Nietzsche’s famous sentence from *European Nihilism*, “‘Gott’ ist eine viel zu extreme Hypothese” (KSA 12, Sommer 1886 – Herbst 1887, 5, 71) – that justice is a much too radical hypothesis. This doubt falls into two possibilities: “To elevate to rearrange the concept of justice – or to