

3. Nietzsche and Economics*

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Abstract

This paper is devoted to the economic problems dealt with in Nietzsche's publications. First, it considers the references to the economists of his time. Then it examines the economic statements of Nietzsche. Some of them relate to Europe. They are the subject of a third part. In each part quotations from Nietzsche illustrate the contentions of the paper. A conclusion examines the significance of Nietzsche for economics.

Keywords:

Nietzsche, philosophy, state intervention, public sector, private sector, European integration, price, wages, privatisation, socialism, culture, democratisation

JEL classification: B31, F15, H00, L30

*Dort, wo der Staat aufhört,
Da beginnt der Mensch.*

F. Nietzsche

*Son défaut (de la philosophie) est un penchant à blâmer,
et une prédilection pour le doute.*

Alain

Nietzsche and economics? At first sight a relation seems problematic. Nietzsche is not known for economic discoveries nor even for economic considerations. I am not aware of any publication dealing with Nietzsche's influence on economics or studying the impact of economics on Nietzsche's work (see, however, below the reference to Müller-Lauter).

Nietzsche certainly read a lot of economists, such as Bagehot, Carey, Galiani, Malthus, Mill, and many other authors like Bentham, Carlyle,

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Mirabeau, Montesquieu. He could not be aware of Schmoller and Marshall. He felt the need to study more economics: on 19 July 1875 while in Steiner Bad, he wrote to a friend in Basel:

To enable myself to relax, I occupy myself with a science I have scarcely had time for up to now, although it deserves to be made time for, viz. Business and Business Administration and Development of World Trade, as well as National and Social Economics.¹

Hereafter, I shall examine the place of economics in Nietzsche's work. I shall deal successively with his references to the economists of his time and the economic statements in his publications. The passages quoted offer the advantage of bringing together Nietzsche's most important texts relating to economics. Of course, it is not an exhaustive list. Then follows a short conclusion.

The source of Nietzsche's quotations is Colli and Montinari's *Kritische Studienausgabe*. Since Nietzsche's focus of attention, areas of interest, style, and not least state of mind changed so considerably, it is necessary to know the period of his life to which each quotation corresponds. Needless to say, Nietzsche's general philosophy is presumed to be known.

Since most English translations are not always reliable and some quotations have not even been translated, I was fortunate in having contacts who assisted me in this field.

1. QUOTED ECONOMISTS

As said above, the number of economists cited by Nietzsche is fairly limited and it is not necessarily the most important ones that are referred to. For example, both Carey (e.g. *Nachlass 1875-1879*, 8, p. 587, *Kommentar zu Band 1-13*, July 1879, 14, p. 621) and Bagehot (e.g. *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen III*, 1874, 1, p. 420, *Nachlass 1869-1874*, 7, p. 710) are mentioned three times. On 8 June 1879, Nietzsche ordered Carey's (translated) *Volkswirtschaftslehre* and according to the same source he was (re)reading the book in July 1881 (Benders and Oettermann, 2000, p. 454, p. 490). Like Bagehot Nietzsche is against abstract, unproven principles (*Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen III*, 1874, 1, p. 420).

From the French physiocrat Mirabeau some aphorisms are quoted. The best one: 'If I said the truth, why should my violence in expressing it lower its price?' ('Si j'ai dit la vérité, pourquoi ma véhémence en l'exprimant, diminuerait-elle de son prix' (*Nachlass, 1869-1874*, 7, p. 672). Montesquieu is quoted a few times (e.g. 'For a man to rise above all others is too costly for all the others': 'Pour qu'un homme soit au-dessus de l'humanité, il en coûte trop cher à tous les autres', *Nachlass 1885-1887*, 12, p. 222), but without a reference to or a discussion of his work.