The Great Economy

1. Nietzsche's account of the emergence of human identity is developed in terms of his narrative account of prehistory. Central to this is his conception of the 'internalization' of humankind. This occurs through the violent colonisation of one primitive community by another. Subjugation provokes in the colonised the appearance of a sense of identity that becomes the self-consciousness characteristic of what we now call the human soul. This springs from what Nietzsche calls the 'bad conscience' and is an enforced reinterpretation of the economically determined relation between creditor and debtor that precedes it. This change is also marked by the formalisation of communal relationships. Community becomes society (replete with state structures, legality and the like). The self, in turn, emerges as a being at war with itself, capable of challenging and overcoming its own inclinations and habits. In the account of internalisation Nietzsche offers an account of human development that invokes the notions of instincts being channelled within a general economy of existence.

We have seen that for Nietzsche not only modernity but also the most primitive conditions fostering the development of culture are permeated by economic characteristics. Central to this contention is the conception of humanity as measurer. Measuring and estimating abilities are defining features of the emergence of community, social relationships, formal social order including legality and human self-understanding. In the second essay of the Genealogy, this conception of 'man as measurer' blossoms into an analysis of human culture as emerging from practices denoted by concepts of exchange, credit and debit. Human nature itself thereby becomes definable by Nietzsche in purely economic terms. The notion of economy that is at work in the Genealogy's second essay covers a multiplicity of domains and simultaneously binds these domains.
together by way of defining what kind of creatures we are. However, the notion of economy has broader implications even than this. One may approach this issue by briefly considering a further contention Nietzsche puts forward in the *Genealogy*. The contention concerns the nature of the prehistoric transformation from communal social order to something akin to the kind of civil society we live in today and revolves around his claim that this transformation initiated another, which he baptises the 'internalization of man' (*On the Genealogy of Morality*, II, 16). The notion of internalisation concerns the manner in which human-kind has been *spiritualised*, that is endowed with the inner illumination of self-reflective understanding.

Civil society, on the account offered in the *Genealogy*, emerges in a relatively straightforward fashion. Let us envisage Nietzsche's conception of the prehistoric human community. It is a domain governed by norms. Customs predominate, woven together in the form of tradition. Individuals exist in virtue of the shared observance of these norms and relate to one another on the basis of them as economic beings engaged in various practices (exchange-related activity of all kinds, including barter and sacrifice). These practices are all at bottom economic, springing from the creditor–debtor relationship and involving the mutual evaluation of one another (communal hierarchy), or the estimation and putting to use of the environment through measurement and weighing. It scarcely needs to be added that Nietzsche has thereby constructed a narrative account of the development of human beings. He is telling us a story. This is a prehistoric narrative and it is designed to reveal the primitive underpinnings of modern culture, as is revealed by the claim that prehistory involves criteria of evaluation that are present at all times and can hence always erupt into modern society with an overt and uncanny violence (ibid., 9). The idea of 'historical philosophy' first outlined at the beginning of *Human, All Too Human* has in this way borne fruit. The concept of humanity offered here is one that is arrived at in tandem with that of historical development. Nietzsche's historical analysis, in turn, has reached back beyond even itself into the realms of that which constitutes its own precondition. This may produce an account of the past that is, as he himself notices, sometimes obliged to hover in the domain of supposition (ibid., 6), but Nietzsche doubtless feels that his conjectures to be worth more than the empty and discredited metaphysical accounts he himself so forcibly gives us good reason to reject.

There is, one should add to the above, no single human community envisaged at this stage in Nietzsche's prehistoric narrative. The world of