

Preface

Nietzsche – Economy and Society: The Closed and the Open Questions

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Nietzsche's impact and influence anywhere in and on our civilization was and is immense. This has by now been widely recognized in almost all areas, even in the "hard sciences" (see Babich 1999), but Nietzsche is still completely understudied in the field of economics. This is all the more surprising because influence paths, both serious (e.g., Joseph A. Schumpeter) and pop ones (e.g., Ayn Rand), seem obvious, and because in some of his works, especially *Menschliches*, *Allzumenschliches* (1878-1886), a focus on economics is hard to miss. It would thus be only likely that he had some sort of significant influence there; yet, one can find hardly any references in the Nietzsche or economics literature on what kind of influence that might have been or still is.¹

To remedy this situation, the idea to plan an exploratory conference on Nietzsche and Economics arose. Because of the difficult and indeed unusual topic, we found it necessary to even start with a pre-conference, where the issues, questions, sources and possible approaches would be discussed. This pre-conference took place in Heilbronn, in the framework of the Heilbronn Symposia on Economics and the Social Sciences, in June 2000. The framework was an obvious one, inasmuch as the Heilbronn Symposia (see Drechsler 1998, v-vii) were originally conceived to offer a forum for the reconsideration of a tradition of German economic and social thought that had become almost entirely lost: the Historical School, which in politics is partially symbiotic with the movements of Socialism of the Chair and State Socialism. This oblivion was all the more astounding because it is this tradition upon which much of the currently dominating socio-economic order in Germany, and to a certain extent in many other places as well, the Social Market Economy, is based. The task at Heilbronn is now not only to study the main protagonists of the Historical School, but to apply their methods and insights to the problems of today; in other words, to look for their contemporary relevance. As Nietzsche can be

seen as part of exactly this tradition as well – and this point will be made in this book, he very much belongs to Heilbronn.

On the basis of these preparations, a regular and very intensive conference then took place in Venice, the city so closely associated with Nietzsche, in January 2001.² This was done in the framework of the annual meeting of The Other Canon group (see www.othercanon.org), through the good offices of its convenor and chairman, Erik S. Reinert. The papers presented in Venice were then revised on the basis of the extensive discussion and afterwards subjected to a rigorous peer review; those which passed are contained in the present book. Because of the unusual topic, the review took much longer than usual and explains to a great extent the relatively late publication of this volume. One essay below, that by Sophus A. and Erik S. Reinert, was especially commissioned right after the conference, because the discussion had shown that at least some exploration of Nietzsche and *Kathedersozialisten* was absolutely necessary for the topic.

Nietzsche is difficult to access in any language other than German, and the older standard translations into English are generally flawed (see also segment 2.4 in chapter below). Still, the present book had to be in English, because the fact of the matter is that English is the *lingua franca* of the academic world these days, and knowledge that is not transmitted in it does get lost. Part of the mission of the present series, “The European Heritage in Economics and the Social Sciences”, is precisely to make such language-locked thought accessible to the international audience. Hence also the presentation of Nietzsche quotes in the running text in a (reliable and up-to-date or personal) English translation and in the notes in the original German (also based on a reliable edition).

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This book cannot be exhaustive; it cannot even hope to give a full overview of the issue of Nietzsche and Economics. We believe the topic to be very interesting, important, and worthy of further research, however, and we hope that this volume will at least be a starting point for those interested in its subject – or that it will raise interest in a reader coming accidentally across it. If it will do this, it will have done its job.

NOTES

1. A rare exception from the Nietzsche literature is Ottmann, 1987, esp. pp. 124-146.
2. An atmospheric description of the conference and its surroundings by one of the participants is Busch, 2001.

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