25. On Truth as Justice

Nancy A. Weston, Berkeley, USA

In this paper I offer a meditation on Heidegger’s thought, articulated in the third of the Nietzsche course-volumes, that the essence of truth, as Nietzsche—and we—understand it, is justice.

1.

The thought is a strange one; we do not see at first what sense it makes, or how it could possibly be true. While we may see, with Heidegger, that and how it is that the history of truth passes from aletheia, to veritas, to certitudo, to secured representation, to the claim of will to power to determine truth from out of its own creative willing, we may not see how that culmination is, as he tells us, justice; we may not recognize what he shows to be the ways of will to power in connection with truth as those of justice—still less, essentially so. And yet, we must do so, he says, “for only a clarified look at” “these connections and their necessity” within this history of truth, culminating in “the interpretation of truth as ‘justice’,” “will reveal the essence of truth and knowledge as a configuration of will to power, and the latter itself as the fundamental trait of beings as a whole.”

---

An exploration of possible understandings, and misunderstandings, taken up next, intensifies the question without resolving it; these serve to remind us of the thought’s ample strangeness—and of the all-too-available temptation merely to dismiss it, or to reduce it to some more familiar truism. We are thus returned to the puzzling pronouncement before us: Justice is the essence of truth, specifically of the truth of beings as will to power. How are we to understand this?

2.

Investigating the phenomenal appearance of justice in contemporary discourse, we see that justice makes its appearance as a claim whose satisfaction is demanded as a matter of right. It is a claim—a positing of value—set forth as a duty. This setting-forth, in any given instance, is the act that actualizes justice, establishing it as such, thereby justifying it and its concomitant demand for effectuation. Yet before it can posit any such claims and demands, justice must first establish itself, as having the right and priority from which to do so.

The claim of justice to its self-bestowed entitlement, to its self-justification as justified, rests and must rest, solely on its own self-assertion: Justice posits itself, sheerly from out of itself qua positing, as the ground of itself, claiming the self-justification of itself as justice. It thereby posits positing as its own ground—more, as ground and warrant, judge and jury, of its own right, validity, and justification as positing, that is, of its claim to be the sufficient and exhaustive ground of right, validity, and justification themselves. It thus grants the claim of warrant to positing as such, to the posited self-sufficiency of positing.

Such positing, at once claiming and granting its own claim, is justice’s own essential activity, as it sets forth and stakes its claim to be justice. In this decisive positing-claiming, justice thus demands the