FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE AND THE POLITICS OF HISTORY

Friedrich Nietzsche is now widely recognised as being among the most important and influential European thinkers of the past two centuries. In this major new addition to Ideas in Context, Christian Emden explores Nietzsche’s understanding of modern political culture and his position in the history of modern political thought. Professor Emden surveys Nietzsche’s entire intellectual career from his years as a student in Bonn and Leipzig during the 1860s to his genealogical project of the 1880s, and challenges current, exclusively philosophical interpretations of Nietzsche’s political thought that tend to pay little attention to the complex historical settings within which his ideas gain momentum. Nietzsche’s repeated demand for a “historical philosophizing” that connects our understanding of modern political culture to a critical examination of modernity’s historical emergence stands at the center of this study, which combines a detailed contextual reading of Nietzsche’s writings and notebooks with a philosophical assessment of his political thought. By focusing on the influence that fundamental themes of nineteenth-century intellectual and political culture exerted on the development of his political thinking – from classical scholarship and German historicism to the rise of cultural anthropology, the growing importance of the life sciences, and the politics of nationalism – Christian Emden argues that Nietzsche’s actual position is best understood as an exercise in political realism, which seeks to transcend the traditional ideological faultlines of modern political culture. By contributing to a more historically informed discussion of Nietzsche’s critical response to the political predicaments of modernity, this study also sheds new light on the state of historical and political culture in Germany at a time when the ideals of the Enlightenment gave way to the demands of the modern nation state.

CHRISTIAN J. EMDEN is Associate Professor of German Studies at Rice University.
Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of History
The books in this series will discuss the emergence of intellectual traditions and of related new disciplines. The procedures, aims and vocabularies that were generated will be set in the context of the alternatives available within the contemporary frameworks of ideas and institutions. Through detailed studies of the evolution of such traditions, and their modification by different audiences, it is hoped that a new picture will form of the development of ideas in their concrete contexts. By this means, artificial distinctions between the history of philosophy, of the various sciences, of society and politics, and of literature may be seen to dissolve.

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A list of books in the series will be found at the end of the volume.
FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE
AND THE POLITICS
OF HISTORY

CHRISTIAN J. EMDEN

Rice University
It is impossible to understand the present without knowing the past, and, to compare them with each other, one would need more time and fewer distractions.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

*Italienische Reise* (January 25, 1787)

I go along the new streets of our cities and think how, of all these gruesome houses which the generation of public opinion has built for itself, not one will be standing in a hundred years’ time, and how the opinions of these house-builders will no doubt by then likewise have collapsed.

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Schopenhauer als Erzieher* (1875)
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Acknowledgments

This book is much longer than I originally thought it should be. While it started out as an article, a short addendum to my *Nietzsche on Language, Consciousness, and the Body* (2005), since I felt that I had not paid enough attention to the historical strategies Nietzsche employed throughout his writings, it quickly grew into a much larger project. One of the reasons for this was the prominent role Nietzsche’s intellectual and political environment played for both his historical thought and his understanding of the political. In short, the topic of this book is Nietzsche’s response to the historical and political culture of Europe in the age of the modern nation state. As such, it seeks to fill a notable gap in recent, and not so recent, scholarship and seeks to situate Nietzsche firmly in the history of modern political thought.

From the initial stages of this project I was privileged to receive support from many sources. As a Fellow at Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge, I was able to rely on the College’s generous support for research in Germany, and I also have to thank the Trustees of the Tiarks Fund at Cambridge University’s Department of German. At Rice University three President’s Faculty Research Awards made the completion of this book much easier than anticipated and facilitated, among other things, a crucial trip to the Niedersächsische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Göttingen, Germany.

Work in an area such as intellectual history is possible only because of the hard work of librarians, locating and making available even the most obscure sources. I wish to express my gratitude, once again, to the enormously helpful staff at the university libraries in Cambridge, Konstanz, Göttingen, and Basel, at Harvard, Rice, and at the Goethe-und-Schiller Archiv in Weimar, Germany. In the final stages of this project, Anna
Shparberg at Rice’s Fondren Library jumped over every administrative hurdle to make available publications in German intellectual history more quickly than any university library could normally do.

The final version of this book owes much to discussions with friends, teachers and colleagues, whose personal encouragement, intellectual example, and wit contributed a great deal to the completion of this book. For many critical interventions, surprising hints and uncomfortable questions, I am grateful to Aleida Assmann, Nicholas Boyle, Thomas Brobjer, Peter Burke, Peter C. Caldwell, Steven Crowell, John Flower, Ulrich Gaier, Duncan Large, Anthony LaVopa, David Midgley, David Mikics, Gregory Moore, Hugh Barr Nisbet, David Owen, Gabriele Rippl, Richard Schacht, Quentin Skinner, Uwe Steiner, James Tully, Sarah Westphal, Joachim Whaley, Harvey Yunis, John H. Zammito, and Rachel Zuckert. The argument has also benefited from passing conversations with Maudemarie Clark, Jean Grondin, Paul Michael Lützeler, John Richardson, and Dermot Moran, which took place at conferences or during guest lectures.

Most importantly, though, Steven Crowell, David Mikics, David Owen, and James Tully have been extraordinarily generous in reading, dissecting and commenting upon several drafts; their keen attention to detail has forced me to readdress central issues and prevented several mistakes that would have otherwise gone unnoticed. Also, I would like to express my gratitude to the two anonymous reviewers for Cambridge University Press, whose criticisms and suggestions were of considerable help, and to my enormously patient editor, Richard Fisher, who had to wait for several months until all revisions were completed. Finally, I have to thank Jodie Barnes, Rosanna Christian and Sue Dickinson, my copyeditor, for guiding me through the entire production process.

The Master and Fellows of Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge provided the ideal environment for finishing an early draft of this book, as did the Department of German at the University of Cambridge. The congenial atmosphere at Rice University, especially the debates in the History of Philosophy Workshop at the Center for the Study of Cultures, now the Humanities Research Center, allowed me to learn much from neighboring disciplines and sharpened my understanding of issues I might have simply overlooked. Likewise, I have profited greatly from discussions
with colleagues in the research group Cultural History & Literary Imagination at Cambridge, some of which took place within the context of a two-year collaboration between Rice and Cambridge on “Changing Perceptions of the Public Sphere.” In an increasingly specialized academic environment it is all too rare to be able to exchange ideas with colleagues from other fields, and many of these exchanges – often over lunch or dinner – have made academic life more bearable and the argument of this book, I hope, more lucid.

Portions of this book have been presented on different occasions at the University of Cambridge, England, at the University of Glasgow in Scotland, at the University of Sussex in Brighton, England, and at the Annual Conference of the German Studies Association in Pittsburgh, USA. I am grateful to the audiences, whose critical questions forced me to rethink central arguments. Some of the themes I could only touch upon in Chapter 1 are discussed in more detail in “Learning How to Read: Nietzsche in Leipzig,” *Oxford German Studies* 35 (2006), 97–110. An abridged version of Chapter 3 has been published as “Toward a Critical Historicism: History and Politics in Nietzsche’s Second Untimely Meditation,” *Modern Intellectual History* 3 (2006), 1–31, and parts of Chapter 6 have been published as “The Uneasy European: Nietzsche, Nationalism and the Idea of Europe,” *Journal of European Studies* 38/1 (2008), 27–51. I am grateful to the editors for their permission to reuse and reshape this material.

Over the last years my students at Cambridge and Rice had to listen to what must have seemed to them a variety of obscurities about German and European intellectual history, which they often forced me to clarify. A seminar on German nationalism and another seminar on Nietzsche, the latter of which I had the pleasure of co-teaching with Steven Crowell, left them sufficiently bewildered. I hope they continue to have patience with my digressions.

As always, this book is for Carla, a proper *Wissenschaftlerin*, who has tolerated, often with her eyes rolling, the many late nights it took to turn a wild draft into a readable book. Without her smile, patience and intelligence it would not have seen the light of day. But it is also for my parents, who have made these intellectual travels possible.

Houston, USA
Winter 2007/8
Abbreviations and translations

Friedrich Nietzsche’s writings and notes are quoted according to the following abbreviations:


**BGE** Beyond Good and Evil, trans. Judith Norman, ed. Rolf-Peter Horstmann and Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). Quoted according to section.


**D** Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, ed. Maudemarie Clark and Brian Leiter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). Quoted according to section.


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Abbreviations and translations


KGB Briefwechsel: Kritische Gesamtausgabe, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1975–). Quoted according to volume and page reference.

KGW Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe, founded by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, ed. Volker Gerhardt, Norbert Miller, Wolfgang Müller-Lauter, and Karl Pestalozzi (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1967–). The Philologica are quoted according to volume and page number. The Nachlaß is quoted according to volume and fragment number.


All translations from Nietzsche’s Philologica, correspondence, and Nachlaß are my own, although other translations have been consulted whenever possible.
As a general rule, I have simply referred to, or quoted from, standard English translations of any given source when they were available. In some cases, I have also referred to sources in their original language, for instance, when it was necessary to clarify a particular passage. On a very few occasions I have quoted from the original source even though an English translation is available. I have done so for three reasons: either the text was translated only partially, the translation was seriously out of date, or I found the translation to be somewhat misleading. When no English translations are available, I have quoted from standard editions in the original language. All translations, unless otherwise noted, are my own.

For reasons of consistency, all titles in a language other than English have been left in the original. This includes all references to Nietzsche’s writings.