Introduction

This is a study in intellectual history and, more precisely, the history of modern political thought. It examines the link between history and politics in the writings of the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. Its goal is to assess the role that historical thought, and his notion of "historical philosophizing," play in his understanding of modern political culture. As much as this is reasonably possible, it seeks to cover his entire intellectual career from his years as a student in Bonn and Leipzig during the 1860s to his genealogical project of the 1880s. Part of my effort in this book is to shed light on the state of historical and political culture in Germany at a time when the neo-humanist and cosmopolitan ideals of the Enlightenment gave way to the demands of the modern nation state. In following this line of inquiry, which sets this study somewhat apart from recent more philosophical scholarship on Nietzsche, I hope to contribute to a more historically informed discussion of his critical response to the historical and political predicaments of the nineteenth century and, more generally, modern political culture.

Given that the political is a central aspect of Nietzsche's work, it is not surprising that much recent philosophical scholarship sought to address the value of his critique of morality and to draw lessons from this critique with regard to both the possibilities and the limits of liberalism. At the same time, there is little agreement about the actual orientation of Nietzsche's political thought. Daniel Conway, for instance, has suggested that Nietzsche "wishes to return to the very ground of politics itself, to excavate the site of politics, and to retrieve the founding question of politics." While Conway's interpretation does not necessarily follow the principles of philosophical liberalism in the narrow sense of the term, his conclusion that Nietzsche ultimately delivers a "philosophy of

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resistance," which is continued in the work of Michel Foucault, is based on accepting the pluralist orientation of Nietzsche's political thought.[1] Mark Warren has likewise argued for taking the latter seriously as a "preface to critical, postmodern political theory," which would include "the values of individuation, communal intersubjectivity, egalitarianism, and pluralism."[2] Most recently, Bernard Reginster suggested that Nietzsche's interest in the will to power does not exclude a developed understanding of benevolence.[3]

Other commentators, however, have sought to highlight the ways in which Nietzsche's political ideas center on the limits of liberalism. For Bruce Detwiler, Ofelia Schutte and Richard Wolin, Nietzsche remains a reactionary political thinker with authoritarian desires and direct spiritual affinities to fascism.[4] In a more balanced account, Fredrick Appel contends that at the heart of Nietzsche's thought lies "an uncompromising repudiation of both the ethic of benevolence and the notion of the equality of persons in the name of a radically aristocratic commitment to human excellence." Although critical of Nietzsche's conclusions, Appel portrays his political thought as "genuinely torn between two competing ideals: a stoic notion of autarchy and an Aristotelian sense of our dependence on the right sort of company for the fullest cultivation of our virtue."[5] This assessment is in many ways echoed by Don Dombowsky's recent study on Nietzsche's proximity to Machiavelli, which argues that an "aristocratic liberal critique of democratic society lies at the heart of his political philosophy."[6]

[1] Daniel W. Conway, *Nietzsche and the Political* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 2 and 141–2.

[2] Mark Warren, *Nietzsche and Political Thought* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1988), pp. 12 and 247.

[3] See Bernard Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), pp. 148–200 and 228–68.

[4] See Bruce Detwiler, *Nietzsche and the Politics of Aristocratic Radicalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), pp. 4–5; Ofelia Schutte, *Beyond Nihilism: Nietzsche without Masks* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1985), p. 161; Richard Wolin, *The Seduction of Unreason: The Intellectual Romance with Fascism from Nietzsche to Postmodernism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004), pp. 28–30 and 54–8. While Schutte and Wolin present a literal reading with little contextualization and attention to the complexity of Nietzsche's political thought, only Detwiler's argument is philosophically convincing.

[5] Fredrick Appel, *Nietzsche contra Democracy* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1999), pp. 2 and 13.

[6] Don Dombowsky, *Nietzsche's Machiavellian Politics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 3–4.

Much of the disagreement about the actual orientation of Nietzsche's political ideas is a result of the way in which recent political faultlines tend to overshadow the context within which Nietzsche's own ideas developed. It is, indeed, remarkable that his ideas have rarely been situated in their own intellectual and political setting. While there are some exceptions to this trend – such as the studies by Henning Ottmann and Urs Marti, which have largely been ignored in English-speaking scholarship[7] – many recent investigations into Nietzsche's political ideas lack a willingness to take the political culture of nineteenth-century Germany into account. The latter is, however, crucial for Nietzsche's understanding of the political.

Political culture in Germany between the 1850s and 1880s is to a considerable extent marked by the historical identity and self-conception of the emerging nation state. It is precisely in this respect that the importance of historical thought for Nietzsche's philosophical and political criticism should not be underestimated. Surprisingly, Nietzsche's historical thought has rarely been examined in sufficient detail and is primarily treated as a philosophical, or epistemological issue, that comes to the fore in his second "Untimely Meditation," *Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil der Historie für das Leben* (1874) and his genealogical project of the 1880s.[8] What I attempt to show in the following chapters is that Nietzsche's political ideas cannot be really understood properly without linking them to the crucial importance he attached to historical knowledge and to the historical strategies that constitute a central part of his philosophical criticism. As such, it is necessary to address in more detail the intellectual configurations within which his political thought gained momentum. Nietzsche's political orientation

[7] See Henning Ottmann, *Philosophie und Politik bei Nietzsche* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1987), and Urs Marti, *"Der grosse Pöbel- und Sklavenaufstand": Nietzsches Auseinandersetzung mit Revolution und Demokratie* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1993).

[8] See, for instance, Ofelia Schutte, "The Place of History in Nietzsche's Thought," in Bernard P. Dauenhauer (ed.), *At the Nexus of Philosophy and History* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1987), pp. 97–115, and the contributions in Dieter Borchmeyer (ed.), *"Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben": Nietzsche und die Erinnerung in der Moderne* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1996). For notable exceptions, see Aldo Lanfranconi, *Nietzsches historische Philosophie* (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 2000), and Thomas H. Brobjer's articles, "Nietzsche's View of the Value of Historical Studies and Methods," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 65 (2004), 301–22, "Nietzsche's Relation to Historical Methods and Nineteenth-Century German Historiography," *History and Theory* 46 (2007), 155–79.

undergoes crucial and at times even radical changes from the early 1860s to the late 1880s. Needless to say, these changes respond to developments in the environment within which his ideas gained momentum.

While the philosophical discussion of Nietzsche has made substantial achievements over the last few decades, on which I will draw throughout this study, the image of Nietzsche among intellectual historians is still surprisingly marked by his presumed aestheticism and his longing for myth as an alternative to modernity and liberalism. Even though Allan Megill, for instance, has emphasized the complexity and ambivalence of Nietzsche's arguments, he concludes that myth and art remain the main foci of the latter's thought.[9] More recently, George S. Williamson has followed this example in a detailed study, which seeks to outline the development of mythical thought in nineteenth-century Germany, examining "the influence of a persistent discourse on myth from the era of early Romanticism (*Frühromantik*) up through the later thought of Friedrich Nietzsche."[10] Nevertheless, his assessment of Nietzsche's position remains highly problematic: Williamson reduces the entire corpus of Nietzsche's writings to an elaborate aestheticist mythology that seeks to counter the negative effects of modernity. Nietzsche, he argues, was mainly interested in "articulating a new sacred narrative" within which myth served "as the necessary condition for cultural life in any future Germany."[11] Along somewhat different lines, Henning Ottmann has suggested that, during the early 1870s, Nietzsche sought to correct the political consciousness of his time with a homogeneous notion of culture that was based on a peculiar mixture of neo-humanist ideals and aestheticist beliefs and that was rooted in an imaginary ancient Greece as opposed to the modern technocratic nation state of the new Imperial Germany.[12] But in contrast to Williamson, Ottman rightly points out that, by the mid-1870s, Nietzsche had adopted a position that came increasingly close to cosmopolitan Enlightenment ideals, thus leaving his earlier aestheticism behind.[13]

[9] See Allan Megill, *Prophets of Extremity: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1985), p. 30.
[10] George S. Williamson, *The Longing for Myth in Germany: Religion and Aesthetic Culture from Romanticism to Nietzsche* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 4.
[11] Ibid., pp. 235 and 275.
[12] See Ottmann, *Philosophie und Politik bei Nietzsche*, pp. 22–42 and 75–99.
[13] See ibid., pp. 99–108.

The popular image of Nietzsche as a myth-maker that still influences much work on nineteenth-century German intellectual history in the English-speaking world remains indebted to a particular reading of German history as a somewhat precarious case within an otherwise liberal and democratic Western world. While there are clearly specific circumstances that influence the formation of the nation state and the rise of nationalism in nineteenth-century Germany, the vision of an essentially illiberal Germany is oddly one-sided.[14] The idea of Germany's *Sonderweg,* or "special path," is suggestive of an autonomy of German history that never existed in the first place and that, like any other national history, was only able to gain currency as a politically motivated fiction.[15] As such, it is more than questionable to assume that Nietzsche's reflections on history and political culture are part of an overall "longing for myth" in German intellectual history which culminates in the political catastrophes of the twentieth century. Taking the link between Nietzsche's historical critique and his response to the political situation of his time seriously will show that he in fact sought to dismantle the imaginary mythical conjectures that characterize nineteenth-century political culture, from the Austro-Prussian War of 1866 via the formation of a German nation state after the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–71 to Imperial Germany as an authoritarian nation state in the 1880s. I will argue that Nietzsche's conception of the political, and his critique of contemporary political culture, are closely related to his demand for "*historical philosophizing,*" as he notes in 1878 in the first volume of *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* (*HA* I: 2). His political thought, in other words, is inextricably linked to historical strategies

[14] Nevertheless, as far as the second half of the nineteenth century is concerned, even German historians have insisted on a *Sonderweg* of German history. See Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte, III: Von der "Deutschen Doppelrevolution" bis zum Beginn des Ersten Weltkrieges, 1849–1914* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1995), and Heinrich August Winkler, *Der lange Weg nach Westen* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2000). Such interpretations seem mainly interested, however, in delivering a "national history" for a "Berlin Republic" after 1990 as a hard-won teleological process on the road to "normality." See Anselm Doering-Manteuffel, "Eine politische Nationalgeschichte für die Berliner Republik: Überlegungen zu Heinrich August Winklers *Der lange Weg nach Westen,*" *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 27 (2001), 446–62.

[15] See Michael Geyer, "Historical Fictions of Autonomy and the Europeanisation of National History," *Central European History* 22 (1989), 316–42: 341. See also Michael Geyer and Konrad H. Jarausch, *Shattered Past: Reconstructing German Histories* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002), pp. 37–59 and 221–43.

that enable him to take stock of the political conditions and foundations of European modernity.

In a thick contextual reading I will argue that one of the most central concerns of Nietzsche's work is a direct response to the crisis of modern German and, ultimately, European historical and political culture. This crisis unfolds in the period between the 1840s and 1900 and thus runs parallel to Nietzsche's intellectual career. Three overlapping developments have contributed to this crisis. It is these developments that furnish the background to this study. First, the neo-humanist ideals that originated in the cosmopolitanism of the Enlightenment, and that were rooted in a specific understanding of the classical tradition around 1800, had to face new political realities in the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars, which ultimately led to their demise. Second, the formation of Imperial Germany as a modern nation state after the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–71 was deeply connected to the emergence of cultural foundation myths that stabilized the uncertain political identity of the new German nation state, which was still marked by older federal structures as well as regional differences and confessional tensions. The status of nationalism in the political culture of Imperial Germany needs to be viewed against this background. Third, while history was widely seen as being able to provide cultural and political orientation, on a theoretical level the historical disciplines at large had to face the so-called crisis of historicism. Marked by the tension between, on the one hand, the need for causal explanation and teleological models, and on the other, the growing realization that historical knowledge and social experience were irreducibly contingent, the crisis of historicism posed the question of how to think about history and politics under conditions of flux.

While there are many other political and social trends that shape the intellectual and political landscape of nineteenth-century Germany, especially after 1870, it is these three developments that constitute a substantial part of the environment within which Nietzsche's political thought gains momentum. I will develop this argument in six steps that roughly follow Nietzsche's intellectual biography. The first chapter focuses on Nietzsche's educational experience at the universities of Bonn and Leipzig between 1864 and 1869. Nietzsche turns to classical scholarship, one of the most prestigious historical disciplines with a professional ethos like few

others, at precisely that moment when its neo-humanist ideals were increasingly pushed aside by the new political demands of the modern nation state. It is within this context, I contend, that Nietzsche, in his correspondence and his early notebooks, begins to pay attention to the political constellations of his time, such as the problem of national identity, the Austro-Prussian War, and Bismarck's vision for Prussia's German vocation.

The wider developments at stake in this context are, of course, closely related to the question of Germany's historical identity and political culture.[16] Of course, historical identity is formed within the public realm of political culture.[17] Classical scholarship and neo-humanism were part of this public realm and sought to redefine themselves vis-à-vis the political demands of the emerging nation state.[18] At the same time, a religious version of historical consciousness, which was rooted in German Romanticism and which fell on fertile ground after the Napoleonic Wars, aestheticized political realities into mythical conjectures. Nietzsche responds to precisely this context, which will continue to shape his own interest in the value of historical knowledge for a critical assessment of the foundations of modern political culture.

A crucial concern in Nietzsche's notebooks between 1866 and 1869 is the philosophical status of historical knowledge and the historical method. I wish to suggest that these notebooks in fact constitute a decisive turning point within Nietzsche's intellectual development. On the one hand, they highlight the importance of his practical experience as a student of classical scholarship and lead him to question the foundations of the historical method as it is applied by his teachers and peers. The problem of what it means to think historically, which has a profound influence on his genealogical project of the 1880s, emerges first in the pages of these notebooks. On the other hand, it is in these notebooks that we can

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[16] See Georg G. Iggers, *The German Conception of History: The National Tradition of Historical Thought from Herder to the Present*, 2nd, rev. edn. (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1983); Bernd Faulenbach, *Ideologie des deutschen Weges: Die deutsche Geschichte in der Historiographie zwischen Kaiserreich und Nationalsozialismus* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1980); Stefan Berger, *The Search for Normality: National Identity and Historical Consciousness in Germany since 1800* (Oxford: Berghahn, 1997), pp. 1–18.

[17] See John E. Toews, *Becoming Historical: Cultural Reformation and Public Memory in Early Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 117–206.

[18] See Suzanne L. Marchand, *Down from Olympus: Archaeology and Philhellenism in Germany, 1750–1970* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 3–74.

observe the formation of Nietzsche's philosophical interests, especially his encounter with the work of Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Albert Lange. It is necessary to point out, however, that these philosophical interests are more ambiguous than commonly assumed and they furthermore influence his understanding of the value of historical knowledge. But it is his reading of Kant, and his interpretation of "teleology," that finally forces Nietzsche to take the problem of historical knowledge seriously.[19] In Kant he finds the philosophical instruments to formulate a critique of the contemporary status of historical knowledge: rejecting the explanatory value of teleological models in history, and German idealism's obsession with the philosophy of history, he needs to address the intellectual value of historical knowledge within modern culture from a different angle. It is within this context that Nietzsche also encounters the political implications of a teleological notion of historical development, including the emancipatory ideals of Enlightenment cosmopolitanism.

Standard accounts of Nietzsche's first years as a professor of classical scholarship at the University of Basel in Switzerland are by and large dominated by the scandal surrounding his first book, *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik*, published in 1872. The latter is seen as representing Nietzsche's emphasis on art and aesthetics as guiding philosophical paradigms. While these are undoubtedly important issues, in the second chapter I will provide an alternative account of Nietzsche's orientation during the early 1870s, which will focus on the intellectual environment of Basel. In the period between 1869 and 1873, one of Nietzsche's main concerns is the political formation of Imperial Germany as a unified modern nation state and the consequences of this development for the outlook of German political culture. Nietzsche's observation of these developments is predominantly shaped by the lasting presence of neo-humanist ideals in the slightly anti-modern intellectual setting of Basel, represented by Johann Jakob Bachofen and Jacob Burckhardt.[20] Indeed, after his short experience of the

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[19] On Nietzsche's early reading of Kant, see R. Kevin Hill, *Nietzsche's Critiques: The Kantian Foundations of his Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), pp. 1–37.

[20] My discussion of this area has profited enormously from Lionel Gossman, *Basel in the Age of Burckhardt: A Study in Unseasonable Ideas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

Franco-Prussian War, Nietzsche begins to adopt a more critical
stance toward the political imagination and the historical founda-
tion myths of Imperial Germany, which even in the early 1870s
were still marked by references to the Wars of Liberation against
Napoleon as a historical turning point that dominated the cultural
politics of a Prussian-led Germany.[21] While his scholarly work, such
as the lectures on *Encyclopaedie der klassischen Philologie* (1871),
deepened his understanding of the historical method and of his-
tory's cultural value, his public lecture series *Ueber die Zukunft unserer
Bildungsanstalten* (1872) and his four "Untimely Meditations"
(1873–76) increasingly seek to advance a cultural critique of
modernity's political conditions. It is in this respect that he con-
ceives of philosophical education as a basis for the critique of
modernity, which differs sharply from the aestheticist outlook
often attributed to Nietzsche's writings of this period.

The third chapter investigates how this new emphasis on cultural
critique through historical awareness shapes Nietzsche's views
about the political dimension of historical knowledge, which stand
at the center of his second "Untimely Meditation," *Vom Nutzen und
Nachtheil der Historie für das Leben.* In this essay he reacts to rather
specific developments within the contemporary intellectual con-
text, such as the establishment of historical foundation myths for a
new German nation state, exemplified by the public monuments
and commemorations of the 1870s, and the effect of such foun-
dation myths on the political imagination of historical scholarship.

My interest in this issue is related to the crisis of historicism that
begins to take shape in Germany from the 1840s onward. It is often
argued that this crisis only emerges around 1900, that is, once
Georg Simmel's *Die Probleme der Geschichtsphilosophie* (1892) and
Ernst Troeltsch's *Der Historismus und seine Probleme* (1922) begin to
give this crisis a name and once the neo-Kantians Wilhelm Wind-
elband and Heinrich Rickert have separated the historical sciences
from other fields of knowledge, most notably the natural sciences.[22]

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[21] On the Wars of Liberation as a cultural point of reference, see Frank Becker, *Bilder von Krieg
und Nation: Die Einigungskriege in der bürgerlichen Öffentlichkeit Deutschlands, 1864–1913*
(Munich: Oldenbourg, 2001), pp. 306–21.

[22] See Iggers, *The German Conception of History*, pp. 124 and 128, and Charles R. Bambach,
Heidegger, Dilthey, and the Crisis of Historicism (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press,
1995), p. 22.

It is possible to argue, however, that the much-debated crisis of historicism surfaces already during the 1830s as an intellectual constellation within German Protestant thought.[23] In any event, it is reasonable to assume that the crisis of historicism begins as soon as we can observe a historical turn among disciplines that were traditionally outside the historical profession in the narrow sense of the term.[24] Most importantly, though, the cultural politics of the Prussian state between 1814 and the late 1840s always linked the historicization of knowledge to its political self-definition.[25] As soon as the direct influence of German idealism, especially Hegel and Schelling, began to wane, and as soon as historical consciousness and Protestantism began to define political identity in an attempt to turn a vague notion of "the people" into a modern state, the question about the cultural value and the integrity of historicism came to the fore. It is this complex intellectual constellation that Nietzsche responds to in his second "Untimely Meditation." His own position during the mid-1870s can best be described as a cautious or critical historicism. But the second "Untimely Meditation" is also a transitional piece in that it formulates a set of problems with regard to the cultural relevance of historical knowledge and the political dimension of historical consciousness without really being able to deliver a convincing solution. Nevertheless, this essay is an important step on the way to the genealogical project that gains shape in *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* (1882/87), *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* (1886), and *Zur Genealogie der Moral* (1887).

Although this has rarely been discussed in sufficient detail, from around 1875 Nietzsche begins to become interested in contemporary cultural anthropology.[26] Given the rise of anthropological thought in Europe and its institutionalization from the middle of the nineteenth century onward, this is not really surprising. Classical scholarship itself often entertained a close

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[23] See Allan Megill, "Why Was There a Crisis of Historicism?" *History and Theory* 36 (1997), 416–29: 419–29.

[24] See Theodore Ziolkowski, *Clio, the Romantic Muse: Historicizing the Faculties in Germany* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2004), and Peter Fritzsche, *Stranded in the Present: Modern Time and the Melancholy of History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004).

[25] See Toews, *Becoming Historical*, pp. 19–65.

[26] One of the few exceptions is Andrea Orsucci, *Orient – Okzident: Nietzsches Versuch einer Loslösung vom europäischen Weltbild* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1996).