

© Copyright, Princeton University Press. No part of this book may be distributed, posted, or reproduced in any form by digital or mechanical means without prior written permission of the publisher.

INTRODUCTION

Friedrich Nietzsche's impact on the world of culture, philosophy, and the arts is uncontested, but his contribution to political thought remains mired in controversy. The source of that controversy resides in his political misappropriation by the Nazis during World War II, and we are still counting the cost of that appropriation for contemporary scholarship today. So the price that Walter Kaufmann—in his seminal *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, first published in 1950, now in its fourth edition—paid to rescue Nietzsche from the philosophical abyss he had fallen into after the war was to deny him any interest in politics.¹ Instead, Kaufmann reconstructed Nietzsche as a German humanist whose sole preoccupation was the revival of an “un-” or indeed “antipolitical” high culture. We are unquestionably indebted to Kaufmann for restoring Nietzsche to his rightful place in the philosophical canon, but this image of an unpolitical Nietzsche has cast a long shadow over Nietzsche interpretation in the second half of the twentieth century, and still haunts later work by, for instance, Bernard Williams, Alexander Nehamas, and Brian Leiter, among others. More recently, Nietzsche has been enlisted into attempts to refound American democracy on a radicalized, postmodern, and *agonistic* basis.² Representative of this strand are political theorists such as Bonnie Honig, Wendy Brown, Dana Villa, William Connolly, and Mark Warren, alongside more specifically Nietzsche scholars such as Lawrence Hatab, Alan Schrift, and David Owen. This involves mining Nietzsche for various intellectual resources—often drawn from what is conceived to be his “postmodern” philosophy, separated out from his disappointingly, on this account, “premodern” conception of politics—to be reshaped in the process of formulating a new account of demo-

¹ Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974). A new fourth edition with a foreword by Alexander Nehamas came out in 2013.

² Christa Davis Acampora, *Contesting Nietzsche* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

cratic politics. But we are no closer to understanding what politics meant *for him*.

The aim of this book is to offer an account of Nietzsche's politics that restores him to his time—namely, late nineteenth-century Germany and Europe. It will argue that Nietzsche, in contrast to Kaufmann and others, does make a (highly interesting) contribution to political thought, but his contribution must be understood within its own context and not against the backdrop of the Nazi regime. Moreover, that contribution will turn out to be much more hierarchical than the current democratic readings allow for, which raises the question of how much contact the later postmodern construal of Nietzsche retains with its nineteenth-century original, and therefore of what use is it to call on Nietzsche, outside his undeniable intellectual prestige, for one's cause.

The figure who dominated Nietzsche's political context was Otto von Bismarck, and in fact Nietzsche's productive life maps itself almost perfectly onto Bismarck's era: he served as a medical orderly in the Franco-Prussian War (1870–71), Bismarck's final war in view of German unity; published his first book, *The Birth of Tragedy*, in 1872; and descended into madness in 1889, a year before Bismarck was forced to resign. Perhaps the defining feature of Bismarck's reign was *grosse Politik*: the "power politics" of German unification and maintenance of this newfound greatness within the European balance of power.³ International politics, on this account, was meant to have primacy over domestic concerns, meaning that other policies such as the notorious *Kulturkampf*—the "cultural struggle" against German Catholics—were meant to serve as handmaidens to "grand politics." Against those who claim that Nietzsche had no interest in politics, Nietzsche consistently and thoughtfully engaged with the notion from at least *Human, All Too Human* (1878) onward. At first he was critical of grand politics, linking it to slave-morality-infused concepts such as mass democracy, fragmentation, mediocrity, religion, dynastic politics, and philistinism. But with *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886) he transformed what he labeled "petty politics" into his own theory of what "great politics" should truly be: the master-morality politics of unifying Europe through a cultural elite "good European" caste—which has as its ideal the intermarriage of Prussian officers and Jewish financiers—to serve as a geopolitical counterweight to Russia and the British Empire. Indeed, Nietzsche's final notebook is titled "Great Politics," and there he develops in the most systematic manner his vision of what such politics ought to amount to. That notebook, along with much of the late *Nachlass* (Nietzsche's unpublished notes), has yet to be translated into English and represents an untapped source that this book draws on.

³ See Tracy Strong, "Wars the Like of Which One Has Never Seen: Reading Nietzsche and Politics," in *Friedrich Nietzsche*, ed. Tracy Strong (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2009), xi–xxxiii.

Williams was one of the most prominent moral philosophers of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, and much of his work developed in dialogue with Nietzsche. In *Shame and Necessity* (1993), his celebrated work on the Greeks, Williams explains that “Nietzschean ideas will recur in this inquiry, and, above all, he sets its problem, by joining in a radical way the questions of how we understand the Greeks and of how we understand ourselves.”⁴ Later in *Truth and Truthfulness* (2002), whose subtitle is *An Essay in Genealogy*, he repeated the claim that “the problems that concern this book were discovered, effectively, by Nietzsche.”⁵

Williams also took a keen interest in Nietzsche’s political writings, but ultimately concluded in *Shame and Necessity* that Nietzsche “did not offer a politics.” Yet in the process of doing so, he identified a number of desiderata that Nietzsche would have to meet for him to be considered to have done so. Pinpointing the answers to these questions is a helpful way of making more precise what Nietzsche’s contribution to political theory might be. Williams writes:

Although Nietzsche moved beyond the conception of the world as aesthetic phenomenon that is prominent in his major, early, work devoted to the Greeks, *The Birth of Tragedy*, he did not move to any view that offered a coherent politics. He himself provides no way of relating his ethical and psychological insights to an intelligible account of modern society—a failing only thinly concealed by the impression he gives of having thoughts about modern politics that are determinate but terrible. But we need a politics, in the sense of a coherent set of opinions about the ways in which power should be exercised in modern societies, with what limitations and to what ends.⁶

So there are four elements that comprise a “coherent” politics according to Williams: “ethical and psychological insights,” “an intelligible account of modern society,” the ability to relate these insights to this account of society, and “a coherent set of opinions about the ways in which power should be exercised in modern societies, with what limitations and to what ends.” For Nietzsche to have a politics, he therefore would need to relate his (undeniable, in Williams’s eyes) ethical and psychological insights—for instance, his analysis of master and slave morality, and his theory of the “death of God”—to an intelligible account of modern politics—namely, that of the state, democracy, and international politics.⁷ Moreover, he must posit a vi-

⁴ Bernard Williams, *Shame and Necessity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 10.

⁵ Bernard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness: An Essay in Genealogy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 12.

⁶ Williams, *Shame and Necessity*, 10–11.

⁷ See “Nietzsche Minimalist Moral Psychology,” “Introduction to *The Gay Science*,” and “Unbearable Suffering,” all in Bernard Williams, *The Sense of the Past: Essays in the History of*

sion of how power should be exercised in his ideal society, with what limitations and to what ends. To this account we should add something like a political strategy: given his understanding of modern politics and his advocating of a future ideal, how does Nietzsche propose we move from one to the other? What is his political program?

It is the task of this book to answer these questions. It will argue that Nietzsche offers a highly intelligible account of modern society, specifically in his critique of the modern *Kulturstaat*—the new German “culture-state”—modern democracy, and as we just saw above, international politics. He is able to relate his numerous ethical and psychological insights to this critique, such as in associating his theory of the death of God with the democratic decay of the modern state, and judging his contemporary power politics from the perspectives of master and slave morality. In terms of how power should be distributed in society, he posits a vision of the future comprising two separate spheres—a high cultural one, and a lower democratic one—with their own respective fields of responsibilities, but which importantly retain a degree of exchange between them. Finally, in his later work and notes, he starts to articulate a political strategy of how to achieve this ideal society, notably through his call for the founding of a “party of life” whose goal will be to carry out his great politics.

In an unpublished paper titled “There Are Many Kinds of Eyes,” Williams fleshed out some of his claims concerning his rejection of a Nietzschean politics.⁸ He opens by reiterating the claim that “Nietzsche did not have much conception of politics,” although he adds that

he had some political opinions, of an aristocratic character; he had a well-known dislike of socialism, liberalism, equality, democracy and so on. But as Mark Warren has well argued, he had not the faintest idea of the nature of a modern state. His general political conceptions, such as they were, were largely drawn from the ancient world and were not so much reactionary as archaic. Indeed, he had a poor sense not just of the modern state but of a modern society: it might even be said, of any society at all.⁹

Philosophy, ed. Myles Burnyeat (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 299–310, 331–24, 331–37, respectively.

⁸ Bernard Williams, “There Are Many Kinds of Eyes,” in *The Sense of the Past: Essays in the History of Philosophy*, ed. Myles Burnyeat (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 325–30. We have no exact dating for the paper, but its themes resonate well with what Williams was saying about Nietzsche in *Shame and Necessity*.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 326–27. The reference is to Mark Warren, *Nietzsche and Political Thought* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 209, which argues that Nietzsche combines, unsuccessfully, a “postmodern philosophy with a premodern politics.”

So Nietzsche had no sense of the modern state, or in fact modern society or perhaps even simply society at all, and only offered an archaic view of politics. In the same text, Williams continues by rehearsing a common view about the purportedly “solitary” nature of Nietzsche’s project:

His models of overcoming and transforming *our* values, which is his most enduring concern, tend to be personal, individualistic, occasionally heroic. Often the undertaking is regarded as an expression simply of a personal endeavor, like that of an artist; sometimes it takes on a historical transformative note, as though the individual’s feat of transvaluation will itself change society. . . . [H]e leaves us for the most part with an image of some solitary figure bringing new values into existence, an image which, brought into relation to a transformation of society, is bound to have a certain pathos about it.¹⁰

But perhaps Williams’s most substantive engagement with the content of Nietzsche’s political writings came during a panel discussion on “Nietzsche’s Critique of Liberalism” at the University of Chicago in 1995. There he delivered a paper titled “Can There Be a Nietzschean Politics?” which was pitched as a response to an earlier paper given by Martha Nussbaum, called “Is Nietzsche a Political Thinker?”¹¹

Williams, as we have seen above, continued his engagement with Nietzsche throughout his life, but that this paper was delivered six years after he gave the Sather Lectures at Berkeley in 1989—which formed the basis for *Shame and Necessity*—suggests that the position he expressed there on Nietzsche’s politics was not to be the final one he adopted for the rest of his life. Even though in the paper the content of Nietzsche’s writings on politics left Williams, as we will now explore, feeling rather discouraged, at the same time he believed to have found a way for Nietzsche’s thought to animate our own reflection on politics, which I will return to in the conclusion to this book.

In the paper, anticipating much of the subsequent debate about Nietzsche’s relation to democracy, Williams interests himself in Nietzsche’s so-called middle period, conventionally understood as the period stretching from *Human, All Too Human* (1878) to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883). This

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 327.

¹¹ This paper was published a couple of years later as Martha Nussbaum, “Is Nietzsche a Political Thinker?” *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 5, no. 1 (1997): 1–13. For a critique of this article, see chapter 2. Williams declined permission to publish his contribution on the grounds that it was a “work in progress” and written as a response to Nussbaum rather than a freestanding piece. I am indebted to Adrian Moore and Patricia Williams for permission to view this paper from Williams’s private papers, and the late Geoffrey Hawthorn for facilitating this.

period is thought to represent the phase between Nietzsche's early enthusiasm for Richard Wagner from *The Birth of Tragedy* to the *Untimely Meditations* (1873–76), and his later work starting with *Zarathustra* where Nietzsche develops his own "philosophy" of the "will to power," "eternal return," and "overman."

During this period, Williams sees Nietzsche as more calm, moderate, and almost scientific in tone, as indeed he is often presented in the secondary literature, and—most important—more favorable to "democratic, egalitarian and liberal tendencies."¹² In contrast, Williams describes Nietzsche's later period as "visionarily prophetic," with not only a tone of "rigorous resistance to equality and liberalism" but also one "favoring radical and heroic change."¹³ For Williams, Nietzsche's politics of "aristocratic radicalism," as Nietzsche's first translator and promoter, the Dane Georg Brandes, had labeled it, was primarily of the cultural and spiritual kind, and did not amount to a serious political program. Echoing what he had written previously in "There Are Many Kinds of Eyes," Nietzsche's political proposals, Williams observes, were "nostalgic and poorly informed images of past societies or, again, simply the dream of an isolated intellectual to bring modernity under his hammer."¹⁴ This was followed by a renewed rejection of Nietzsche's grasp of the modern state, and on the basis of Nietzsche's concept of the "pathos of distance" and critique of equality—that equality can only hold between people of roughly equal power—Williams closes his paper with a reflection on the relation between power and right. He concludes that there is a potentially unresolvable tension between the two—in the process dismissing some of the democratic agonistic readings of Nietzsche inspired by Hannah Arendt—but that this tension is a feature of modern politics, which Nietzsche's thinking allows us to see, and does not arise from a tension within Nietzsche's thinking itself.

If *Shame and Necessity* provides us with a structural framework within which to address more precisely, through its different desiderata, the question of whether Nietzsche offers a "coherent" politics, Williams's own engagement with the content of Nietzsche's political writings in the paper "Can There Be a Nietzschean Politics?" affords us a springboard from which to raise a number of the themes I wish to discuss in this book, and as such can serve, in a certain manner, as its *fil conducteur*.

Much like Williams in *Shame and Necessity*, we must start with the Greeks. My first chapter begins with Nietzsche's interpretation of the ancients, focusing in on what Nietzsche terms—moving away from the more

¹² Bernard Williams, "Can There Be a Nietzschean Politics?" (unpublished manuscript), 2–3.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 6–7.

conventional “pre-Socratics”—the “Pre-Platonic Philosophers,” alongside Plato and Socrates. Plato is the pivotal figure here because he is the first “hybrid” philosopher. Previously all philosophers, in Nietzsche’s eyes, were “pure” in the sense that their philosophy sprung naturally from their own personality. Yet Plato is a mixture of different types of philosophies and personalities: Socrates and Heraclitus are prominent, but not only. Another key difference is that the pre-Platonics all aimed for the “salvation of the whole”—that is, their philosophies, Socrates’s included, aimed at the spiritual purification of their polis, whereas Plato only looked for the salvation of his small sect. He is the first to “fight against his time” and has the desire to “found a new state.” The reason the earlier philosophers were pure had to do with the fact that their philosophy arose from a fundamentally healthy culture. Socrates marks the transition away from this healthy culture because he was the first to realize that the Greek’s instincts had turned decadent. Nevertheless, according to Nietzsche, he remains pure in his dialectical method and desire to save Athens. After Socrates’s death Plato sees the only salvation for philosophy in the future coming of philosopher-kings.

Straddling two different eras—that of the healthy Greeks and their decay into moralism, an era that we are still, according to Nietzsche, in today—Plato is therefore a focal point in Nietzsche’s early history of philosophy. He was also the first to think a way out of it. His “legislative mission,” as Nietzsche describes Plato’s project, thus serves as a model for Nietzsche’s own. That mission is comprised of two facets: to legislate for a new state, and train the men who would found it with him. It will be the mission of Nietzsche’s “new philosophers” to legislate for a new type of society, and in his late call for the founding of a party of life, which will play a crucial role in the elaboration of his political strategy, Nietzsche thinks up an institution within which those men who will found this new state with him can be trained. But Nietzsche clearly saw that while a healthy philosophy could only spring from a healthy culture, it was not the role of philosophy to try to restore that type of culture. Nietzsche, still at this moment under the influence of Wagner, instead thought music would play that part. Later Nietzsche would suggest his own methods for cultural regeneration, and these would turn out to be much more political.

Nietzsche’s published texts, particularly *The Birth of Tragedy* and *Twilight of the Idols* (1888), will feature strongly in this chapter, but the main content of it will be drawn from unpublished sources of that time, notably “Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks” along with his lectures on the “Pre-Platonic Philosophers” and Plato; the latter two in fact provide much of the substance for the former. I will draw out the intimate relationship these published and unpublished texts entertain with one another, although this

brings me to the question of Nietzsche's (quite-substantial) *Nachlass*—his unpublished notes—and what to do with them. Bernd Magnus has separated Nietzsche interpreters into two blocs: “lumpers” and “splitters,”¹⁵ Lumpers are those who take Nietzsche's writings en bloc, making no distinction between his published and unpublished work, whereas the splitters prioritize the published work. In general in this work I tend to side with the splitters in the sense that I find that the majority of Nietzsche's thoughts expressed in the notebooks make their way, in some form or another, into the published texts. As such, the notes are helpful in illuminating or clarifying a certain idea or text, perhaps also helping to tract their evolution, but the published material remains central. This is the case for the majority of Nietzsche's work, especially throughout his active publishing period that makes up most of his adult life. But I suspend this judgment at two moments, which represent the extremities of Nietzsche's corpus: the beginning and the end.

At the beginning of his career Nietzsche had planned to publish a number of works that were to accompany and complement his first book, *The Birth of Tragedy*. These include “Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks” and his lecture series on “The Future of Our Educational Institutions”—which he considered to form a triptych with *The Birth*—and the “Five Prefaces to Five Unwritten Books.”¹⁶ Most of these were in near-complete form, but were subsequently abandoned by Nietzsche because of the falling out with the academic community that resulted from *The Birth*. For reasons of their often near-finalized state, and the role they were meant to play with *The Birth*, I include these unpublished writings in my study. At the other end of the spectrum we come to the controversy concerning Nietzsche's planned “major work,” “The Will to Power,” which I will examine in more detail in chapter 5. Suffice it to say for now that the final notes are indispensable to at the very least get a grasp of what Nietzsche was ultimately planning before he was taken away by madness, and may indeed be central to our understanding of Nietzsche's project for a great politics.

One aspect I wish to emphasize in this chapter is the strong continuity that obtains between Nietzsche's early and later views of Socrates and Plato. This raises the issue of how one is to read Nietzsche. Should we see Nietzsche's thought as one “in becoming,” as has frequently been suggested by the more “continental” readings of Nietzsche, in which he gradually deepens and expands his reflection on his chosen topics over the course of his writings?¹⁷ Or should we distinguish sharply between three different peri-

¹⁵ Bernd Magnus, “Nietzsche's Philosophy in 1888: The Will to Power and the Übermensch,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 24, no. 1 (1986): 79–98.

¹⁶ See Tracy Strong, “Nietzsche and the Political: Tyranny, Tragedy, Cultural Revolution, and Democracy,” *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 35–36 (Spring–Fall 2008): 48–66.

¹⁷ Mazzino Montinari, “Nietzsche's Unpublished Writings from 1885 to 1888; or, Textual

ods in Nietzsche's life, which Nietzsche himself appears to allude to in *Ecce Homo*: an earlier phase, marked by the influence of Wagner, comprising *The Birth of Tragedy* and the *Untimely Meditations*; followed by a more "critical" phase where Nietzsche seeks emancipation from Wagner and starts to develop his own philosophy (*Human, All Too Human* to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, as discussed above); to a final, mature stage, beginning with *Zarathustra* (although in chapter 5, I will argue that this must be understood as a "singular" work, to which all posterior work will refer back to) that sees Nietzsche in full control of his thoughts?

I want to suggest that these two approaches need not be antithetical, and in fact may be complementary. In terms of politics, there are strong continuities between what Nietzsche writes on the state, democracy, and international politics over the course of his early, middle, and later periods, and often we can see a later period explicitly referring back to an earlier one, as I will explore over the course of this book. Nietzsche's thoughts on these topics are certainly not static—they evolve, deepen, and expand over time—but the kernel of his views on those matters remain remarkable consistent. Yet one of the main claims I want to make in this book is that it is through his reevaluating of *grosse Politik* from the perspective of master politics that Nietzsche starts to develop something recognizable as a politics, and thus that there is a difference between Nietzsche's earlier and later views of politics, which stem from the discovery of his philosophical concepts. Instead of seeing a tension between these two views, however, I find both strands of interpretation mutually enlightening. The continuity in Nietzsche's thought is to be found in his rejection of the grand politics of his day, which is remarkably consistent over the course of his writings from *Human, All Too Human* to his last notebook. But when Nietzsche brings his notions of master and slave morality to bear on international politics, he is able to recast that same kernel in a new light: the grand politics he criticizes is relabeled petty politics, while the new policy he puts forward—which can be seen as an inversion of this petty politics—he titles (true) great politics.

One of the implications of the in-becoming reading of Nietzsche is that his later work will be richer and deeper than his earlier work, not simply due to the effect of accumulation, but also because of the deepening of his *philosophical* reflection, which, as we just saw, has an impact on his *political* thinking. This gives credit to the view that Nietzsche's fuller contribution to political thought is best found in his later work, notably in how it is articulated through the notion of great politics, which becomes much more prominent over time, rather than focusing on the supposed proto-democratic thinking of his middle period.

Criticism and the Will to Power," in *Reading Nietzsche*, ed. Mazzino Montinari, trans. Greg Whitlock (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 80–102.

In my second chapter, I turn to tackling Williams's claim that Nietzsche had a poor grasp of the state. I will argue that against someone like Brian Leiter, Nietzsche does offer a theory of the state and its justification. By placing Nietzsche's early, unpublished text "The Greek State" alongside what he says about the birth of the state in *The Genealogy of Morality* (1887)—and there are good reasons to read both texts side by side—we can see that for Nietzsche, the birth of the state can be located in the conquering horde that are the infamous "blond beasts of prey," who seize on an unformed population and establish a hierarchical society. But this original act of violence is justified, according to Nietzsche, because it allows for the development of genius and culture through a division of labor. It leads to, as he puts it in *The Birth*, the justification of the world and existence as an aesthetic phenomenon.

Nietzsche did not confine his analysis to the ancient state, and he turns his gaze to the modern nation-state, particularly in its *Kulturstaat* variety, which he was highly critical of. Here we start to get a better sense of the intelligible account of modern society that Williams denies Nietzsche has. If with the Greeks the state existed as a means to genius, the modern culture-state instrumentalizes culture for its own end, notably by arrogating to itself the best talents and forcing them to work for the sole promotion of the state, instead of following their own true path to culture. Yet Nietzsche sees some hope for the future, in the sense that as the ancient state did not last, nor would the modern one, which he believes will "decay" because of the demands modern democracy will make on it, and which it will not be able to meet. This has to do with Nietzsche's famous declaration of the death of God in *The Gay Science* (1882)—already we can see Nietzsche relating his philosophical insights to his account of modern society—that once religion can no longer provide the support to the state it once did, and that the state comes to be seen simply as an "instrument of the popular will, then the modern state will become obsolete and be replaced by "better suited institutions." "Private companies" (*Privatgesellschaften*) will take over the business of the state, including those activities that are the "most resistant remainder of what was formerly the work of the government"—that is, "protecting the private person from the private person."

We should not, however, understand the decay of the *modern* state as the death of the state tout court. Instead, we should understand it as the superseding of the modern state, much like that of the ancient state by the modern, by a new type of entity. This entity will take on a more regulatory and minimalist function, allowing private companies to take over the role they formerly played, including that of protecting the private person from the private person, but still maintaining overall jurisdiction; the key here is the difference between the state and government. There will be space, within this new configuration, for culture, and Nietzsche speculates about the

role new cultural “institutions” can play as counterparts to the private companies.

We can pause at this juncture to note that the cultural mission Nietzsche ascribes to these new institutions are strongly communal ones, thus challenging the view Williams rehearses about the solitary nature of Nietzsche’s revaluative project.¹⁸ Indeed, the figures that Nietzsche calls on, from the “republic of geniuses” to the “free spirits,” good Europeans, new philosophers, and the party of life, are all conceived of in the plural. And while the *Übermensch* is mostly styled in the singular, particularly in *Zarathustra*, this has more to do with the exceptionalism of their appearance; in *The Antichrist* (1888), Nietzsche is clear that there have been a number of these “lucky hits” in the past. Regardless of how many overmen may appear in the future, the ground from which they may appear—the soil of Nietzsche’s revaluative project—is undeniably collective.

Williams is quite aware of Nietzsche’s speculation about the state’s decay, asking in his paper whether “the belief in the power of the state can survive the decline of the belief in religion. In this context Nietzsche indeed foresees the excesses of privatization, predicting that even the prison service may be handed over to private companies when people’s belief in the state finally declines.”¹⁹ Williams associates this view with Nietzsche’s middle period, and while it is certainly the case that the claim about the state’s decay is first made in *Human, All Too Human*, that passage from *Human* is again explicitly quoted in *Twilight of the Idols*, from Nietzsche’s later period, underlining the strong continuities of this theme over the course of his writings. The repetition of this claim also makes it, to my mind, Nietzsche’s final prognosis of the modern state’s future. Nor should we understand Nietzsche as being reticent about the future “excesses” of privatization; he is rather looking forward to “new stories in the history of mankind,” which he is hoping will be “good ones,” where culture can be restored to its true path outside the clutches of the modern state.

A key figure in this chapter, and for Nietzsche’s engagement with the Greeks more generally, is Wagner. Nietzsche’s theory of the state arose in the first place from a disagreement with Wagner over the role slavery played in ancient Greece, and therefore whether it was needed to re-create high culture in Germany. It must be understood that for the early German Romantics, the ancient Greeks were their single reference point, in what makes for a strange historical arc that leads, on their account, from ancient times directly to nineteenth-century Germany, while eliding everything else in between.

¹⁸ Tracy Strong had already challenged this view in his *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2000).

¹⁹ Williams, “Can There Be a Nietzschean Politics?” 3.

Their politics was crucial too; Nietzsche calls the Greeks the “political men *as such*.” What this allows us to see is that exactly as Wagner’s “total revolution” necessarily involved both art and politics—Wagner believed that the liberation of the modern factory slave was essential to the successful completion of his cultural revolution—so it was for Nietzsche as well. On the question of slavery, however, Nietzsche begged to disagree. In a chapter on the state and slavery originally intended for *The Birth*, he argued that “slavery belongs to the essence of a culture.” This did not sit well with Wagner’s more left-leaning tendencies, and it appears that the offending chapter was removed at his insistence. What that disagreement obscured was the fact that for Nietzsche, and certainly from the onset of his writing career, politics and art were inseparable. That Nietzsche was not advocating the same politics as Wagner in the re-creation of Greek high culture should not blind us to the reality that the overall structure of this total revolution remained the same. Indeed, Nietzsche’s enduring commitment to those views is testified to by the fact that he offered a word-for-word copy of the chapter, now titled “The Greek State,” to Cosima Wagner for Christmas 1872 (i.e., after *The Birth* had been published earlier in the year) as part of his “Five Prefaces to Five Unwritten Books”—a poisoned gift if there ever was one. Moreover, *The Genealogy* echoes the opinions expressed in that essay, and in so doing offers a public endorsement of his earlier, unpublished views.

If for Nietzsche politics and art are inseparable, I do not mean to suggest that they are the same. This is a view that has become popular of late, which characterizes Nietzsche’s politics as “cultural politics,” understood in the sense that it is through cultural means that a political transformation can be effected.²⁰ It is often how Nietzsche’s project for a “revaluation of all values” is presented, as being solely of the cultural or spiritual kind, much in the same way Williams does. But building on the structural similarity between Wagner’s total revolution and Nietzsche’s own project that I develop in the first part of the book—namely, that the project for a cultural renewal contains both a necessary, if independent, political facet—in the second part I will argue more attentively that Nietzsche’s revaluation of all values also has an indispensable political aspect to it, notably articulated through the notion of great politics. If we desire to understand what such a cultural politics could amount to, we must understand what the political element of that politics is meant to entail. What is puzzling about this view is that although it recognizes that Nietzsche does write about politics, it refuses to look at these writings on their own terms, instead casting them as cultural demands. To my mind, this makes understanding Nietzsche’s political writ-

²⁰ See Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen, *American Nietzsche: A History of an Icon and His Ideas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

ings on their own grounds even more urgent, so that we may correctly theorize their relationship to the cultural aspect of his work.

While for Nietzsche one cannot have high culture without it being rooted in a hierarchical society, this does not mean that the spheres of art and politics overlap perfectly. Although one cannot exist without the other—or to be more precise, the sphere of higher art cannot exist without a politics of rank—they both, in Nietzsche's work, retain a degree of autonomy from one another. If in his early life Nietzsche's cultural sphere takes a Wagnerian form, it will take a distinctively more Nietzschean shape over time. For the sphere of politics it is the same: while Nietzsche maintains throughout his life that a caste society is essential to underpin a high culture, the exact relationship that the two castes entertain with one another—the higher and the lower—evolve over the course of his writings. Tracking his historical interests, initially Nietzsche posits a society in which the higher is placed firmly above the lower, much like it was with his interpretation of the Greeks, yet later he advocates a somewhat more horizontal relationship between the two in a vision of a future societal organization, which nevertheless retains a key transferral of resources from the lower to the higher.²¹ It will be the object of chapter 3 to fully explore that relationship.

I should clarify at this point that I do not mean to suggest in this book that Nietzsche is first and foremost a political thinker. His prime concern is culture, and I have no wish to deny that. What I want to refuse is that one can have a reflection about Nietzsche's views on culture that is completely divorced from his views on politics. I do not wish to exclude the possibility of an analytic distinction, but on the one hand, I want to deny that for Nietzsche there can and should be a separation between the two, and on the other, I want to affirm that if we are interested in Nietzsche's view of culture we must interest ourselves in the conditions that made that culture, for Nietzsche, possible—and what did not.

There has been a strong push in the recent literature, particularly in discussions surrounding Nietzsche's notion of the pathos of distance, that attempt to portray Nietzsche as having himself come to see how the two might be separated, but in chapter 3 I will give reasons for wanting to resist such a move, at least in terms of how Nietzsche saw it. Some have tried to argue that we need not see politics and art as closely intertwined as Nietzsche did, and those contentions have to be assessed on their own merits—something I will not attempt to do here. Yet if we take Nietzsche's views about culture seriously, then we must try hard to understand in the first instance what Nietzsche himself said about it. Whatever that might be must

²¹ On this point, see also John Richardson, *Nietzsche's System* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

surely be of interest to those who are concerned about the relationship culture entertains with politics today.

Chapter 3 also takes aim at Williams's view, which anticipated much of the contemporary debate on the matter, that Nietzsche's so-called middle period is more sympathetic to democracy. This, I will argue, is mistaken. While it is certainly the case that Nietzsche in this period approaches democracy from its own point of view, positing that what it must aim for is more independence, he nonetheless concludes that democracy will ultimately serve as a means toward forming a new type of aristocracy. In the section Williams relies on in *The Wanderer and His Shadow*, which has as its title "The Age of Cyclopean Building" (WS 275)—hardly the most democratic of imageries—Nietzsche clearly states that the democratization of Europe is a link in the chain to what he calls those "tremendous prophylactic measure." Moreover, he explains that the independence-inducing "stone barriers" and "trellises" that are built by the gray and sullen democratic workers to keep out the barbarians will in fact ultimately be used by a future "higher artist of horticulture," who will erect a new higher culture on the basis democracy provides. This vision of a forthcoming aristocracy using democratic tools with which to build a new culture is strikingly similar to the one found in *Beyond Good and Evil*, belonging to Nietzsche's later period, where he notes that what he is trying to say is that "the democratization of Europe is at the same time an involuntary exercise in the breeding of *tyrants*—understanding that word in every sense, including the most spiritual." Thus while Nietzsche made certain statements in his middle period that have supplied inspiration for a number of postmodern reconceptualizations of democratic politics, his own view is that democracy will lead to a new type of aristocracy. Nor can this middle period be considered to be especially singular, as in his later work he reaffirmed his vision of democracy serving as building blocks toward a new nobility.

Analyzing Nietzsche's theory of democracy will continue to provide substance to the view that Nietzsche does, pace Williams, offer an intelligible account of modern society. He is, for one, quite capable of discerning behind the facade of democratic politics taking place in the new *Reichstag* the fact that it is still Bismarck who is holding the reins of power and implementing his *realpolitik*, in the process dispelling the notion that democratic politics is meant to be more pacific. Nietzsche also hits on a number of critiques of modern democracy—the problem of minorities and secession; the difficulty of finding a unanimous democratic basis to institute an electoral system—that have become classics in the field. In this sense the secondary literature is right in depicting Nietzsche as one of the sharpest critics of modern democracy, but at the same time he cannot be restricted to being only that, as his theory of the future superseding of democracy also provides a positive vision of what politics might become. Furthermore, and

building on chapter 2 where we will see how the notion of the death of God informed his theory of the democratic decay of the modern state, many of Nietzsche's most famous pronouncements about democracy—that it represents the political arm of Christianity; that it is best described as a form of “misarchism,” the mind-set of being against everything that dominates and wants to dominate; that it represents not solely a form of spiritual but also physiological degeneration, an example of the darker European races regaining the upper hand against the original blond beasts of prey—take their lead from his concept of slave morality, thereby underlining how Nietzsche continues to relate his ethical and psychological insights to his account of modern politics.

In the process of exploring these ideas, we will come into contact with some of Nietzsche's more unsavory statements. I do not, as has sometimes been the case in recent scholarship, simply want to brush these under the carpet, but at the same time there are two points I want to emphasize. The first is that while Nietzsche undeniably toys with eugenic ideas, in particular in his later reflections on “breeding,” he is hardly the only one in his day to do so; such ideas were in that period quite ubiquitous, and frequently part and parcel of accepted scientific discourse, as we will see.²² Nor, it must be said, does that immediately make him the preserve of the Far Right; that thinking has a longer legacy in European left-wing thought than we would often like to admit.²³ Indeed, it is not surprising that someone who is so interested in education, culture, and health should have more than a passing interest in the topic. While I by no means want to absolve him of his responsibilities, I do find that this type of language sometimes sees Nietzsche a prisoner of his own time. Second, it should also be clear that against certain writers like Joseph-Arthur, comte de Gobineau for whom race was the key concern, for Nietzsche it was morality, which does not map itself perfectly onto questions of race. Williams is quick to the mark here spotting that at least one and perhaps two (depending on whether by “Arabs” Nietzsche had in mind the Berbers, typically thought to have been more fair-headed) of the figures Nietzsche lists as his infamous blond beasts of prey—the Arabs and the Japanese—could not have been blond.²⁴ In any case, we can hardly understand Nietzsche's call for a mixing of Prussian military officers with Jews in view of creating the good Europeans as a ringing endorsement of a vulgar Aryanism, whose main theses Nietzsche, as a trained philologist, would have been patently aware of.

²² On breeding, see John Richardson, *Nietzsche's New Darwinism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

²³ See Dan Stone, *Breeding Superman: Nietzsche, Race, and Eugenics in Edwardian and Interwar Britain* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2002).

²⁴ Williams, “Can There Be a Nietzschean Politics,” 7.

It would be remiss of a book on Nietzsche not to discuss his principle philosophical concepts—the notions of the will to power, eternal return, and Übermensch—and this will be the task of chapter 4. So if chapters 1 and 5 are principally concerned with the structure of Nietzsche’s political project, and chapter 2, 3, and 6 with the content of that project, chapter 4 stands a little aside in dealing primarily with Nietzsche’s philosophy. But it will not aim to offer a comprehensive interpretation of these ideas, which would require three more separate studies. Rather, it aims to propose a political reading of the terms in question. Starting with the will to power, it will link that notion strongly to what Nietzsche says about the Greek agon, particularly in the early essay “Homer’s Contest,” which appeared alongside “The Greek State” in Nietzsche’s “Five Prefaces to Five Unwritten Books.” There Nietzsche discusses the two opposing yet twin patron deities of the agon—the good and the bad Eris—and how the “wicked” eldest leads to strife and destruction, whereas the younger promotes a positive contest that is not only beneficial to the competitors in question but also captured, through the different institutions of the agon, for the benefit of the city-state as a whole. It is through this institutional setup that we can glean a sense of how Nietzsche’s future party of life is to be internally structured, and what form the “war of spirits” it will be brought to fight against its enemies, the “Christian Reich” and the “party of Christianity,” will take. On the topic of the party of life, the political role that Nietzsche’s “doctrine” of the eternal return plays is in separating ascending from descending life, and thus serving as a selective device for separating those who are to join the party from those who are not.

One prominent strand that has appeared in recent American interpretations of Nietzsche has been to tie him to debates about ethical perfectionism, and one entry point into that discussion has been Nietzsche’s highly debated concept of the Übermensch. The line here—one I wish to challenge—is that we should understand that figure in Nietzsche’s writing as some form of perfected humanity. But the true question is, to my mind, what *type* of humanity is to be perfected? If it is to be modern man, then in Nietzsche’s eyes, as Zarathustra comes to quickly realize in his opening speech in the marketplace, the perfection of that type leads not to the Übermensch but instead exactly to his opposite—the “last man.” In fact, if we are to translate the *Über* in Übermensch as “over,” then what Nietzsche appears to be saying is that the overman represents precisely the overcoming of modern man into something new, in the same way the ancient philosophers represented the overcoming of the ancient poets—a thought I will explore in this chapter. This Emersonian perfectionist reading therefore seems quite at odds with Nietzsche’s project, particularly the democratic element of universal self-creation that goes along with it, when we know Nietzsche’s views about the hierarchical nature of high culture. But if that

ethical perfectionist reading of Nietzsche does not hold, John Rawls's account of Nietzsche's *political* perfectionism put forward in *A Theory of Justice*—that society should be organized with the sole goal of creating new geniuses—might be closer to the mark. Indeed, while Rawls's reconstruction may be a fair reflection of Nietzsche's early views of political organization, his later years, as I have suggested above, see a more subtle account of what the interaction between the different spheres of that caste society might look like, thereby lowering Nietzsche on the scale of political perfectionism—from extreme to more moderate—that Rawls offers us.

Near the end of his productive life Nietzsche, as Tracy Strong has rightly highlighted, starts to become impatient with simply remaining a “spectator” to the politics of his time.²⁵ He desires to enter the political arena; he wants to act. Why this sudden desire? If we hark back to the relationship that Nietzsche's project entertained with Wagner's total revolution, we can see the logic behind this move. Having expounded from *Zarathustra* onward his philosophy of the will to power, eternal return, and overman—the new theoretical underpinning to his project, after abandoning Wagner's “*artist's metaphysics*”—Nietzsche naturally returns to the other, inseparable aspect of the revolution: politics. And if what Nietzsche learned from the Greeks was that a healthy philosophy only sprung from a healthy culture, then there is every reason to start with politics, as first the instincts—Nietzsche's politics has a strong educational aspect to it—and then the structure on which that culture can come about needs to be restored. To begin with philosophy itself would be to simply perpetuate the moralism it is already rooted in. Williams himself may have intuited such a move in *Shame and Necessity*. In discussing the possible “structural substitutions” one would need to better relate the Greek world to our own, Williams alights on the fact that “Napoleon remarked to [Johann Wolfgang] Goethe that what fate was in the ancient world, politics was in the modern, and in the same spirit Benjamin Constant said that the significance of the supernatural in ancient tragedy could be transferred to the modern theatre only in politics terms.”²⁶ Politics having replaced tragedy in the modern world, Nietzsche, having himself internalized such a transformation, should in his recovery of the Greeks instinctively turn to it.

A good sense of Nietzsche's final intentions can only be acquired through a close philological study of Nietzsche's final plans, especially his plans for a famous *Hauptwerk*, which had for a long time the title “The Will to Power.” This will be the focus of chapter 5. And while I completely subscribe to

²⁵ See Tracy Strong, “Nietzsche's Political Aesthetics,” in *Nietzsche's New Seas: Explorations in Philosophy, Aesthetics, and Politics*, ed. Michael Gillespie and Tracy Strong, trans. Thomas Heilke (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 153–76.

²⁶ Williams, *Shame and Necessity*, 164.

Mazzino Montinari's—the eminent editor of Nietzsche's work—analysis of the fraudulent nature of the editions compiled by Nietzsche's sister after his death, I am less convinced by his conclusion that when Nietzsche transformed his “Will to Power” project into one of a “Revaluation of All Values” that signaled the end of everything he wanted to achieve. Nietzsche certainly may have achieved everything he wanted to achieve philosophically and intellectually at the end of his sane life, but before the onset of madness he was turning to the other aspect of his mission: politics. This is why Nietzsche's late texts and notes on great politics are so crucial: they are a fundamental part of his “Revaluation of All Values,” and in fact served as the planned title for his book 4 of the magnum opus—*The Antichrist* was meant to be book 1—and offer a vision of how that project was meant to be accomplished. Moreover, they explain why the project was never completed in full literary form, as the end point of it was in a different register—one of political action.

My sixth and final chapter will flesh out the vision of Nietzsche's great politics that I opened with—one that advocates the unification of continental Europe through a good European ruling class, and whose aim is to foster a new European culture that is specially called on to guarantee world culture. The notion of great politics, as I have been arguing, represents the best way to my mind of meeting Williams's challenge as laid down in *Shame and Necessity*: of whether Nietzsche offers a “coherent politics.” Nietzsche instantly, both in his second *Untimely Meditation* and *Human, All Too Human*, seizes on the novelty of the power politics of his day, and quickly links that type of politics to the arrival of the masses on the political stage. He also is able to see how in this new configuration domestic politics is to serve as the handmaiden of international politics, as I will examine in more detail in this chapter in relation to colonization and the Kulturkampf. As such, and building on his analysis of the modern state and modern democracy, Nietzsche yet again demonstrates his ability to offer an “intelligible account of modern society.” In relating master and slave morality to this account—revaluing the slave-like grand politics of his time into petty politics and supplying a new vision of great politics on the basis of master morality—Nietzsche thereby fulfills the first three desiderata that Williams had set out: to 3) relate his 1) “ethical and psychological insights” to an 2) intelligible account of modern politics. Furthermore, as we saw in chapter 3, Nietzsche is able to 4) posit a vision of a future society divided into two spheres, each with its own responsibilities and goals, which the vision of great politics is able to add to. Finally, in starting to fill out the content of what such a great politics should look like, particularly in his call for the founding of a party of life that is to fight a war of spirits against the Christian Reich, Nietzsche begins to formulate a political strategy for successfully moving from his contemporary society to his ideal future.

That Nietzsche's conception of great politics serves as the best inlet into theorizing his politics is one of the core claims of this book. To get a good grasp of what that politics amounts to, three methodological moves are made that demark it from other studies in the field. First, that to correctly understand what Nietzsche's vision of great politics entails it must be placed back within its own context of late nineteenth-century international politics. Second, that Nietzsche's late notes need to be taken into consideration to fully flesh out that vision. These notes have yet to be entirely translated into English, particularly Nietzsche's last notebook titled "Great Politics," and remain to a certain degree unexplored. They therefore comprise the innovative source material this book draws from for its study. Lastly, that there are strong continuities across Nietzsche's writings on politics throughout his active life, which both goes against the grain of much contemporary scholarship that focuses on Nietzsche's middle period and reinforces the view that Nietzsche's later period, because of the depth of its reflection, is of more interest to those who aim to understand what politics meant for him.

The key context for Nietzsche's vision of great politics is the so-called great game being played by Britain and Russia over control of India and Afghanistan. Whoever controlled that area, so it was thought at the time, controlled the world. Many of the international events of the period—whether that be the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–78, Congress of Berlin (1878), or general "scramble for Africa" and its denouement in the Berlin Conference of 1884–85—shed light on Nietzsche's statements about great politics in both *Human, All Too Human* and *Beyond Good and Evil*, and are central to our understanding of them. Perhaps most pivotal is the Panjdeh Incident (1885), which took place one year before the publication of *Beyond Good and Evil*, where Russian troops seized an area of Afghanistan, almost triggering a full-scale conflict with Britain (diplomacy saved the day). It is in reaction to these events that Nietzsche demands that Russia become more aggressive so that Europe can unify and become more aggressive in return, which signals his reevaluation of the grand politics he had so far decried into a truly Nietzschean great politics.

There are a number of different conceptions of politics at work here whose relationships need to be elucidated. Nietzsche, as is well known, had little time for the internal politics of democracies, elections, and party competition—what he describes as the "miserable, ephemeral gossip of politics" in his preface to *The Antichrist*—which he was used to seeing as being beneath him. In this sense Nietzsche is the antipolitical thinker he is so frequently made out to be. But he also, however, wanted to reopen what for him was the true question of political legislation, now that Christianity no longer held sway over a portion of the population, which was what type of humanity we want to become. This transcendence of everyday politics is matched in the international sphere: Nietzsche rejects as petty politics the

grand posturing and jostling for territory that the Great Powers engage in, instead positing the unification of Europe as the basis for a new European culture. Thus, if Nietzsche's engagement with the international politics of his day helps us make better sense of his different pronouncements on great politics, it also allows him to develop the geopolitical facet—the unification of Europe as a counterweight to Russia and England—of this vision.

Williams was quite aware that Nietzsche had little time for what he labeled petty politics, and that his own politics would seek to transcend such a practice. He writes in his paper that “the notion of being ‘antipolitical’ has a special significance in terms of the rejection of the politics of parties and in general of the modern state, the politics, one might say, of politicians, and it is hardly in dispute that Nietzsche had small patience for that.” But this leads Williams to conclude that Nietzsche gave up on politics altogether: “There was no way in which ideas of aristocratic radicalism or whatever could be inserted into the politics of Bismarckian Germany, nor did he think that there was any route, whether revolutionary or not, to replace Bismarckian Germany with a field of political action in which the ideas of aristocratic radicalism could be expressed.”²⁷ The main claim of this book is that it is precisely through the notion of great politics that Nietzsche was able to link his aristocratic radicalism to the politics of Bismarckian Germany. In reevaluating the petty antipolitics of modern states, parties, and politicians into a great politics of European unification through a pan-racial and pan-national elite, Nietzsche, pace Williams, was able to find a field of political action in which his aristocratic radicalism could be expressed. This is, to my mind, the element Williams was missing for him to answer in the affirmative the question that formed the title of his paper: whether there could be a such a thing as a Nietzschean politics.

The vision of his ideal future society that Nietzsche leaves us with, of one divided into two spheres, with the first dedicated to art, and the other to democratic politics, allows us to address one of the final questions Williams raises in his paper in reference to the notion of the pathos of distance. Given that “Nietzsche's master is distinguished from [Georg Wilhelm Friedrich] Hegel's precisely in the respect that he does not require recognition,” Williams asks, then “this leaves us less than clear why the masters need the slaves at all.”²⁸ It is indeed the case that Nietzsche's masters do not need the Hegelian recognition of their slaves, but their existence is required for two reasons. First, it is from the surplus of their work that the masters are liberated from having to work for their own subsistence, and therefore can fully engage in their pursuit of high art; second, it is in looking down and outward on the “slaves” that their souls are pushed toward the even higher de-

²⁷ Williams, ‘Can There Be a Nietzschean Politics?’ 2, 10.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

mands and expectations they place on themselves as an internal form of demarcation. And while with Nietzsche there can never be an equality of power between individuals but only an order of rank, a degree of equality of power can obtain between the two future spheres Nietzsche imagines because of their respective size and power, and hence a degree of equality. This potential reconciliation between aristocratic and democratic modes of life was a theme Williams was particularly interested in, yet one he was unable to resolve, believing it to be an inherent tension in modern politics.²⁹ Nietzsche offers us at least one way of thinking about it.

Mine is not the first study to use great politics as an inlet into Nietzsche's political thought, although the prominence of those who do not see it primarily as a cultural phenomenon, much like Williams, has dwindled over the years. Even Bruce Detwiler, for a long time the standard-bearer of the "political" Nietzsche, while admitting that if one is serious about understanding Nietzsche's politics then one must focus on the notion of great politics, fails to heed his own advice and concentrates instead, again much like Williams, on the putatively proto-democratic views of his middle period.³⁰ One must return to the lead up to World War II to rediscover great politics as the focal point in interpreting Nietzsche's politics. The reasons for that are patently clear, and reside in the political context, but that does not make the debate any less intriguing; quite the contrary. In fact, one of the problems with Kaufmann's interpretation of Nietzsche is that it paints all that came before him with the same brushstroke. While there is no doubt that the National Socialist reading of Nietzsche was the politically dominant one on both sides of the war divide—Bertrand Russell labeled the war "Nietzsche's war"—the same could not be said of the intellectual milieu. It was Alfred Baeumler who was responsible for the characterization of Nietzsche as a "Hitler prophecy," as Thomas Mann put it, and he wielded much force from his position as head of pedagogy in Berlin for the Nazi regime. It is also in part his fault that the controversy surrounding "The Will to Power" grew over the period, as Baeumler based his quite-dubious interpretation on that text.³¹ But his was hardly the only voice.

For one, during the first part of the twentieth century Nietzsche was an inspiration across the political spectrum, and one of the main points of discussion was how to successfully combine him with Karl Marx.³² Indeed,

²⁹ Ibid., 13.

³⁰ Bruce Detwiler, *Nietzsche and the Politics of Aristocratic Radicalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

³¹ On Bauml, see also Michael Halberstam, *Totalitarianism and the Modern Conception of Politics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000).

³² See Steven Aschheim, *The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany, 1890–1990* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994). Compare Max Weber's later comment that one could measure a scholar's integrity by their intellectual posture toward Marx and Nietzsche.

we can note that the unpolitical phase of Nietzsche interpretation has been quite a minority one over the course of over a century of Nietzsche interpretation—twenty-five years to be precise, from the publication of Kaufmann’s *Nietzsche* in 1950 to Strong’s *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration* exactly twenty-five years later in 1975.³³ Before that, one of the first book-length studies of Nietzsche was Ernst Bertram’s *Nietzsche: Attempt at a Mythology* (1918), written under the auspices of the George circle.³⁴ Martin Heidegger’s relation to Nietzsche is famously complicated, and he claimed that it is through his war-years lectures on Nietzsche that he turned and fought against Nazism. Whatever is to be said about that assertion, it is certainly the case that Heidegger disagreed with Baeumler’s interpretation of the concepts of the will to power and eternal return. Nonetheless, in the final analysis Heidegger had a tendency to renationalize Nietzsche’s European vision of great politics into an agon or struggle between different cultures, which seems to have brought him to justifying the Nazi invasion of the Mediterranean, construing grand politics as the de facto victory of force.³⁵

Still through all this Karl Jaspers’s book on Nietzsche (1936), recognized as one of the first truly scholarly studies of him, was written explicitly against the Nazi interpretation: “In the years 1934 and 1935, I also intended to marshal against the National Socialists the world of thought of the man whom they had proclaimed as their own philosopher.”³⁶ There Jaspers devoted his longest chapter to discussing *grosse Politik*, which he saw as the most promising entry point into theorizing Nietzsche’s politics. In spite of its *parti pris* for Jaspers’s own *Existenzphilosophie*, that text remains a great source of inspiration, and many of the themes it develops will also be treated here, although not from the same perspective.

Of course Williams’s interest in Nietzsche’s political thought stemmed from his interest in what a Nietzschean politics would look like *today*. He opens his paper with the line: “The question I am asking in my title is whether there are Nietzschean ideas that can be of some distinctive use in thinking about issues of politics for us today.”³⁷ But he was well aware that to start answering that question, one must first ask what Nietzsche’s politics meant for him: “To ask this is obviously not the same as to ask whether

³³ Strong, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration*.

³⁴ Ernst Bertram, *Nietzsche: Attempt at a Mythology* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2009). See also Melissa Lane and Martin Ruehl, eds., *A Poet’s Reich: Politics and Culture in the George Circle* (London: Camden House, 2011).

³⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, vols. 1–4 (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991).

³⁶ See the preface to the second and third editions in Karl Jaspers, *Nietzsche: An Introduction to the Understanding of His Philosophical Activity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), xiii.

³⁷ Williams, “Can There Be a Nietzschean Politics?” 1.

Nietzsche himself held political opinions, and what they were.” Answering that second question is the main aim of this book, and one I hope it will be judged on. It is only on the basis of that response, as Williams recognized, that we can start to get a sense of the answer to the first question.

Nietzsche’s political opinions, or at least Williams’s interpretation of them, left him feeling rather discouraged, for reasons I have explored above. Yet we need not be disheartened, and I will contend over the course of this book that they were in fact much more encouraging than Williams allowed them to be. In fact, many of the themes Nietzsche deals with—the geopolitics of Afghanistan, Russian threat, superseding of the European nation-state by a supranational entity, privatization of public services, globalization of politics, and persistence of hierarchies in modern society—resonate strongly in the world we inhabit today, thus making a full recovery of them especially urgent.

In answer to Williams’s question, I will argue that there *is* a Nietzschean politics, but that it is first and foremost a politics for the nineteenth century. Yet in the process of doing so, I hope to bring to light numerous insights, prognostics, theories, and themes that can be of some use to us in thinking about politics today.