

Chapter 1

Background

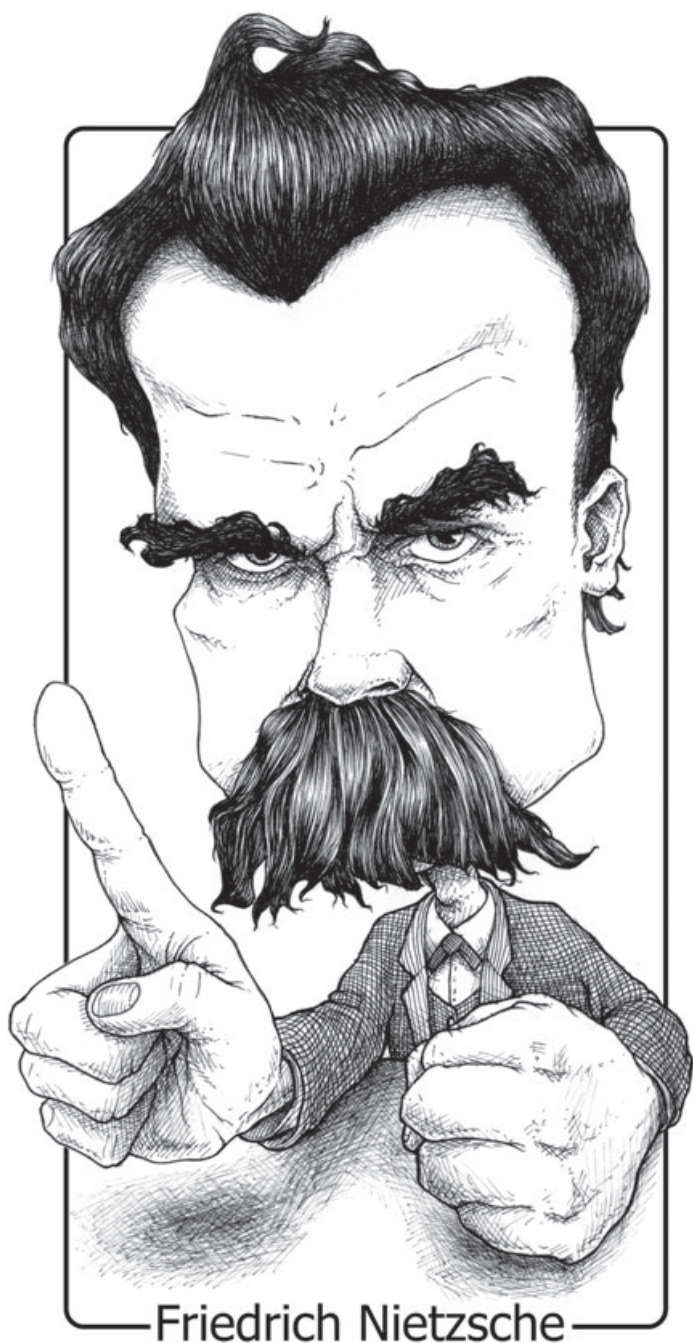
Life of Nietzsche¹

Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche was born on 15 October 1844 in Röcken,² a small village just outside the town of Lützen, not far from the city of Leipzig, in what is now mid-eastern Germany. However, at the time of Nietzsche's birth, the area (the province of Saxony) was part of the Kingdom of Prussia, which at that time was the largest and most powerful of the many independent sovereign states that made up the German Confederation.³ The nineteenth century was a time of great political upheaval in much of Europe, and as he grew up the young Nietzsche could not help but have been aware of the political and social turmoil that surrounded him.⁴

Friedrich was the first child of Carl and Franziska Nietzsche, and was followed by two other children: his sister Elisabeth, in 1846, and his brother Ludwig Joseph, two years after that. Carl was a Lutheran pastor – that is, a Christian Protestant minister who followed the teachings of Martin Luther – and was himself the son of a minister. Franziska's father had also been a minister, and so we can see that the young philosopher would have grown up amidst an atmosphere of sincere religious devotion.

In 1848, Carl Nietzsche suffered a sudden and severe deterioration into illness, and died a year later. This was probably not, as was later claimed by Nietzsche's sister, due to "becoming seriously ill as the result of a fall", but most likely due to some sort of degenerative mental illness.⁵ Sadly for the Nietzsche family, this was not the last tragedy they were to face at this time, and in 1850 the youngest child, Ludwig, died (according to his mother) from "cramps while teething", which may possibly have been epilepsy.⁶

Shortly after, what remained of the Nietzsche family moved to the nearby town of Naumburg. Here, for the next eight years, Nietzsche lived as the only male in a household which consisted of his mother, his sister, his father's mother, and



Friedrich Nietzsche

Background

two unmarried aunts (his father's sisters). As a result, he seems to have grown up in quite a cloistered environment, fussed over by his female relatives, and protected from the outside world. He appears not to have mixed well with other boys, and even at this age showed signs of the aloofness and firm adherence to personal ideals that was characteristic of him in later years.

In 1858, at the age of 14, he entered the boys' boarding school, five miles away at Pforta, on a scholarship. During the six years he spent there, he excelled in the study of religion, German literature and Latin, was good at Greek, and satisfactory in French, history, geography and the natural sciences. However, he showed little skill in mathematics and drawing.⁷

Even at this early stage there are signs of the health problems that were to dog his later life, and the school medical records indicate that he was "shortsighted and often plagued by migraine headaches".⁸ The records also make the connection between Friedrich's health and the circumstances of his father's death, noting that a close eye should be kept on the son for signs of his father's illness. However, modern opinion does not generally agree with there being a connection between the condition which killed Carl and his son's later mental collapse, and most experts now agree that neither condition was a hereditary one.⁹

On graduating from Pforta in 1864, Nietzsche enrolled at the University of Bonn, where he studied theology and philosophy. At first, he made an effort to engage in the type of activity expected of the average German student. Traditionally, this included drinking, singing, the passionate discussion of serious issues, and chasing girls. Whilst at first he seems to have partaken in all of these activities, Nietzsche quickly tired of what he termed – in a letter home – the "coarse, Philistine spirit, reared in the excess of drinking, of rowdiness, of running into debt".¹⁰ (It is good to see that today's student has shaken off these tendencies.) After a year, his disillusion with the atmosphere of Bonn was complete, and he left to take up studies at the University of Leipzig. Here, he was much happier, and he quickly settled down to his studies, which he now changed to philology.

Philology is no longer a subject studied in modern universities – at least, not by that name. Traditionally, it consists in the study of language through an analysis of written texts – traditionally, Greek and Latin literature. Professionally, then, Nietzsche was never a philosopher (in the academic sense), and he often, half-jokingly, refers to himself as an "old philologist".¹¹ However, there is a serious aspect to this self-description, and it does highlight an important difference between Nietzsche's approach and that of the traditional philosopher. Nietzsche, as a mature thinker, was more interested in the role that the personality of the philosopher played in his own philosophy than he was in finding answers to the traditional philosophical questions. As such, it might be said that his training in philology helped him to analyse the *way* in which the philosophical ideas were expressed, and the significance of that for understanding *how* such ideas had originated. So, whilst

Background

he does eventually have something to say about many traditional philosophical problems, he frequently gets there by his own brand of character analysis.

It was whilst at Leipzig that Nietzsche's academic career took off. His ability quickly made him a favourite of one of his teachers, a Professor Ritschl, and Nietzsche's studies flourished under his guidance. The high point of this period came in 1868 when, whilst he was working towards his doctorate, he was offered a chair in philology at the University of Basle, in northwest Switzerland. For a young man of 24, this was an exceptional achievement, but whilst this testifies to the high academic regard that Nietzsche was held in, his appointment to the position may have been in large part due to the sponsorship of his professor. On his move to Basle, Nietzsche renounced his Prussian citizenship, and for the rest of his life he was, in official terms, 'stateless'.

Whilst he initially made an attempt at fitting in – and despite the fact that it was here that he formed what was to be a lifelong friendship with Franz Overbeck, a professor of theology – his pickiness about company, and his deeply ingrained love of solitude, gradually started to exert themselves, and the friendly invitations from his fellow professors for walks and meals were mostly politely declined in favour of his own company.

Unfortunately, his teaching duties were interrupted quite early on by the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian war (1870–71). Initially aloof to the whole affair, his patriotic feelings were eventually roused (as was the case with much of the youth of the country), and he volunteered on the Prussian side as a medical orderly. However, his illusions about the glory and nobility of war were quickly shattered, and his miserable experience was compounded by, firstly, contracting both diphtheria and dysentery, and later by a bad riding accident, which saw him 'invalided' out of the service. On returning to Basle, he appears to have shared in the general good feeling at the eventual German victory, but he ultimately began to become sceptical about its value, and his abandonment of patriotism and its motives may be traced here.

It was at this time that Nietzsche's intense and short-lived friendship with the composer Richard Wagner began to develop. The two had already met briefly in 1868, though now Wagner had moved with his wife Cosima to the Lucerne suburb of Tribschen in central Switzerland, and Nietzsche took advantage of this proximity to call on them. Nietzsche was a great admirer of Wagner's music, and possessed no little musical knowledge and ability himself (he played the piano very well, wrote his own compositions, and was generally a keen student of contemporary and classical music). The Wagners admired young Professor Nietzsche also, being drawn to his obvious learning and passion, and he quickly became a member of their close circle of intimate friends.

This friendship was ultimately to influence Nietzsche's first published work, *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music*, published in 1872. In it, he sets out

Background

his conception of the two competing forces at work both in art and life, the *Apollonian* and the *Dionysian*, and argues that the greatest art – such as ancient Greek tragic drama – is a synthesis of both these powers. The Apollonian (after the Greek god Apollo), symbolises the rational desire to order and control experience, and so it represents reality through forms or ideas; the Dionysian (after the Greek god Dionysus), represents a non-rational desire to go *beyond* these forms, and to directly experience reality in its raw state. In this way, the two forces are directly opposed, and constantly war with one another for dominance. Thus, Nietzsche sees his purpose as to try to bring these two forces back into balance by championing the Dionysian in what is otherwise – he considers – a rationalist age.¹²

Whilst the Wagners greatly admired the book (it was, after all, written with Wagner in mind as the great example of the perfect artist), Nietzsche's fellow professors did not view it so highly. It was, for them, insufficiently scholarly for an academic work (they considered its main arguments to be unsubstantiated conjecture), and its poor reception marks a turning point in Nietzsche's ambitions. From this point on, he began more and more to dedicate himself to his own writing, and to neglect traditional scholarly studies. Between 1873 and 1876, Nietzsche wrote four essays on contemporary German culture, which were published together as *Untimely Meditations*.¹³ At this time, Nietzsche was still heavily influenced by the views of Wagner, and the ideas of German pessimistic philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer. However, two events were to begin to turn the tide in his philosophical life: the first of these was a friendship with the German author and philosopher Paul Rée, whose influence caused Nietzsche to question and ultimately abandon the pessimistic attitude he shared with Schopenhauer (and Wagner); the second was the Bayreuth Festival of 1876, which Wagner had created to showcase his music, but in which Nietzsche began to finally recognise those elements in Wagner's music and character which led him to abandon the friendship. This departure from both influences was apparent in the publication of *Human, All Too Human*, in 1878, which set out, in the form of aphorisms (short observations),¹⁴ Nietzsche's views on a wide range of topics.

The combined factors of the reception of his published books, a related drop in the number of students choosing his courses, the attitude of his fellow professors, increased ill health, and a growing feeling that he didn't belong in academia, caused Nietzsche to withdraw further and further from university life. He took long holidays, had few teaching responsibilities, and generally gave every sign that he no longer wished to be a part of the institution. The institution itself, when, in 1879, it finally recognised this, accepted his resignation on the grounds of ill health, and for the rest of his life he was financially dependent upon its teaching pension.

Freed from his academic duties, the next ten years see Nietzsche produce his greatest and most influential works, living the life of a wandering philosopher as he moved between towns and cities in France, Italy and Switzerland, and

Background

occasionally making visits back home to see family. During this period, he maintained the habit of isolation that had been growing throughout his time at Basle, keeping contact with his few friends through regular correspondence and occasional meetings. A new friendship developed with an ex-student, Peter Gast, who aided Nietzsche in a secretarial capacity, and who, together with Franz Overbeck, remained a loyal friend of the philosopher until his death. Generally, though, whilst his many physical complaints were still present, his health generally improved at this time – though it is difficult to say how much of this was due to the freedom to constantly change his surroundings, the release from his teaching duties, or the various self-prescribed medicines, diets and treatments that he increasingly followed.

The next major work to come from Nietzsche's pen was *The Gay Science*,¹⁵ in which he sets out his vision of the ideal life whereby the search for knowledge is tempered by a positive passion for living. At this time, he also becomes involved with Lou Salomé, whom we know him to have sought romantic involvement with. She was undoubtedly an intellectual, and though Nietzsche eventually came to see her as a prospective student rather than an equal, he obviously felt her to be enough of a kindred spirit to be his wife, delivering a proposal of marriage to her through their mutual friend, Paul Rée. However, she turned him down, and there is some suggestion that she even for a time became involved with Rée himself (though this is still open to debate). From this point on, the idea of marriage, or even female companionship, seems to disappear from Nietzsche's mind.¹⁶

Following the emotional upheaval caused by the peculiar situation between himself, Rée and Salomé, and amidst quarrels with his sister and mother over his involvement, Nietzsche appears to have suffered a nervous and emotional crisis. However, this was to lead to a breakthrough in his philosophy, and in the winter of 1883 he completed the first part of his great work, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in only ten days. The work, which he was to complete over the next two years, represents an embodiment of Nietzsche's philosophical ideals in the person of Zarathustra, or, as he is also sometimes called, Zoroaster, a Persian mystic and founder of Zoroastrianism.¹⁷ However, Nietzsche's Zarathustra is his own invention, and he is rather a symbol and vehicle for Nietzsche's thought than a portrait of the historical figure. Written in poetic form, *Zarathustra* sets out Nietzsche's ideas in a series of parables, sermons, and other forms of prose traditional to religious literature, strongly echoing on a grander scale Nietzsche's own conception of himself and his mission: he is the philosophical prophet of the age, come down from his hermetic isolation on the mountain to expound the truth to his fellow man.

In 1886, Nietzsche fell out with his publisher, E. W. Fritzsch, because of his publication of anti-Semitic material. From this point on, he bore his own publishing costs, and entrusted the publication to C. G. Naumann, whom Fritzsch had used as a printer; Naumann was eventually to become responsible for the printing,

Background

publication and distribution of Nietzsche's books. The first book to appear after the break with Fritzsche was *Beyond Good and Evil*, followed by second editions of some of his earlier works. This year also saw the marriage of his sister Elisabeth to the anti-Semite Bernhard Förster, an event which caused friction between them. Förster's attitudes were, in many ways, a fore-echo of Nazism, and together the couple were eventually to leave for Paraguay, where they hoped to form a racially 'pure' Germanic colony.

Towards the end of this decade, Nietzsche's output speeds up even further: 1887 saw the *Genealogy of Morals*, followed in 1888 by *Twilight of the Idols*, *The Antichrist*, *The Wagner Case* and *Ecce Homo*, a sort of philosophical biography. Some commentators have claimed that there are growing signs of Nietzsche's imminent mental collapse in these last four books – one going so far as to say that they are, "as all but a few of the most extreme Nietzscheans admit, the work of a madman"¹⁸ (though few modern commentators now share this view). By this time, his long-term ill health, as well as the strain of his mental exertions, had begun to take their toll. On 3 January 1889, in Turin, Italy, he was arrested by the police after causing a public disturbance. The exact events are unknown, but legend has it that, seeing a man whipping a horse about the eyes, he ran to protect it by throwing his arms around its neck, after which he collapsed.

From this point on, Nietzsche's descent into madness was swift. He wrote letters to various friends, acquaintances, and even the then King of Italy, containing cryptic and half-sensical statements of his grandiose plans to save Europe. Realising what had happened, his remaining friends and family quickly came to his aid. He was first transferred to a clinic, where various treatments failed to cure him, and ultimately was brought back to live with his mother. Here he lived, for the next ten years, in a state that the medical experts of the day termed "incurable insanity",¹⁹ paralysed down the right side of his body, and looked after by his relatives. The traditional view as to what caused Nietzsche's madness is that it was brought on by syphilis contracted from a prostitute during his student days, though there is still debate about this. Some modern research suggests that this is just part of the long smear campaign against the philosopher, and that other diagnoses – e.g., a brain tumour – provide a better fit to the evidence.²⁰

On the death of her husband in Paraguay, and despite the great rift that had grown between her and her brother in the latter years, Nietzsche's sister now returned to look after him. Ultimately, it was Elisabeth's control of her brother's legacy, and her manipulation of his writing for her own anti-Semitic and nationalist ends, that distorted his message into a form that was to appeal to such warped minds as that of Adolf Hitler.

Finally, on 25 August 1900, Nietzsche died after contracting pneumonia. He was buried at the Church in Röcken according to his sister's wishes.

Nineteenth-century Europe

In understanding Nietzsche, it is important to be familiar with some of the intellectual and social forces that would have influenced him. We may take as our starting point the end of the eighteenth century, which is generally considered to be the end of the so-called *Age of Enlightenment*, during which there was an increased emphasis on the importance of rational principles as the primary basis for government and the formation of law. During this period, key thinkers in America and Europe questioned the authority of Church and State, attacking what they saw as elitism and privilege. In America (1776) and France (1789), the ideas of figures such as Thomas Paine, Voltaire and Jean Jacques Rousseau ultimately led to revolution and the overthrow of the previous regime, and to the establishment of democratic republics. In science and philosophy, the *empiricist* ideas of John Locke and David Hume embodied a new desire to get away from the abstract metaphysical theorising associated with such *rationalist* philosophers as René Descartes and Baruch de Spinoza, and the discoveries of Sir Isaac Newton continued to inspire a new generation of scientists to account for the forces behind the workings of the universe in mathematical terms.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, other forces began to exert an influence. As war and conflict continued to redraw the map of Europe, overthrowing monarchies and reshaping nations, a gradual *Industrial Revolution* began to sweep through Europe and America, as developments in science and technology allowed many labour-intensive manual processes to be replaced by faster, more efficient mechanical ones. Industrialisation led to *urbanisation*, as a growing population formed through the expansion of towns and cities as rural workers left the country to look for better-paid factory work. In some countries (such as the UK), concerns regarding the conditions of workers and their living conditions etc. led to the formation of the first trade unions. This in turn led to the demand for social reforms and equal rights, and strike action by the workers in major industries was a major factor in – for example – the establishment of *universal suffrage*, whereby all male adults were accorded the right to vote (all of Europe did not grant women equal voting rights until the twentieth century, some not until its last quarter – e.g. Portugal in 1976 and Lichtenstein in 1984). In philosophy, this democratic, scientific and rational spirit was embodied by the English *utilitarians* Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, who tried to show that happiness could be reduced to a simple calculation involving pleasure. In such a way, the growth of democracy, industry, business, philosophy and science can be seen to have gone hand in hand.

Romanticism and German Idealism

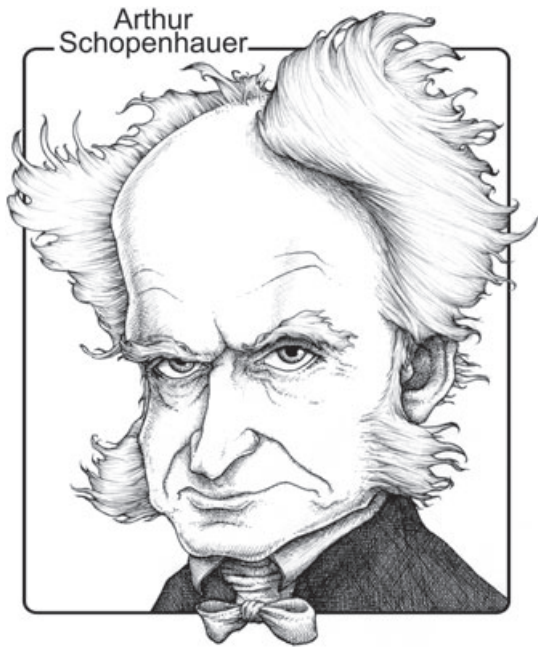
At this time in Germany, two further important movements can be identified: *Romanticism* and *idealism*. The first of these can be seen as a response to the rationalism of the Age of Enlightenment, and a reaction against what many saw as the dehumanising effect of the Industrial Revolution. Romanticism spans the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the next, and can be characterised by an appeal to the emotions over reason, and a desire to return to a direct experience of nature (as opposed to a scientific understanding of it). Such attitudes were embodied by, for example, the poetry of William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Lord Byron (England), and the writing of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (Germany); the music of Ludwig van Beethoven (Germany) and Hector Berlioz (France); the paintings of J. M. W. Turner and John Constable (England), Eugene Delacroix (France), and Caspar David Friedrich (Germany); and the philosophy of Jean Jacques Rousseau (France) and Joseph Schelling (Germany). Romantics also explored the darker side of human emotion, and the birth of the *Gothic* movement in art, literature and music can be traced from here.

German idealism stems from the writings of Immanuel Kant, whose philosophy is often termed *transcendental idealism*. Kant believed that human beings could only experience *phenomena*, and that the real objects of experience (which he termed *noumena*) could not be directly known. So, for instance, human beings experience the world in terms of sound, colour, sensation etc., but we cannot know what the world is *actually* like independent of these sense impressions. Following Kant, many philosophers took up his ideas and adapted them to their own ends. So, figures such as Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Friedrich Schelling and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel all used Kant's ideas to talk about *exactly those things* that Kant considered to be beyond experience. In this way, their ideas became *metaphysical* in that they took it upon themselves to talk about the true nature of such things as God, the soul, free will, and other issues which Kant himself had considered unknowable. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche is critical not only of Kant (for setting up these philosophical distinctions), but also his followers (for making their own metaphysical truths using Kant's ideas).

Pessimism

Besides Kant, the other great philosophical influence in nineteenth-century Germany was Arthur Schopenhauer, whose ideas were very popular at the time, heavily influencing not only philosophers (such as the young Nietzsche himself), but also artists

Background



and musicians (such as Richard Wagner). Schopenhauer is traditionally associated with *pessimism*, or the philosophical view that existence has a negative value. However, rather than presenting this as a mere attitude or opinion, Schopenhauer presented arguments to show that this was logically the case. For instance, if the orbit of the earth were to shift minutely, the temperature of the earth were to change by a few degrees, or other similarly small changes were to take place, then life as we know it would end. So, in this sense, we are already living a mere step away from total extinction, and therefore in what he termed 'the worst of all possible worlds' (in direct opposition to Leibniz, who had made popular the idea that we are living in 'the best of all possible worlds').

Another key feature of Schopenhauer's pessimism is his contention that the most powerful source of human behaviour is not *intellect*, but *will*. By *will*, Schopenhauer here means the basic instinctive drives of the human being, such as the need to reproduce, to eat, to find shelter and security, to defend oneself and preserve one's life, and so on. It was these drives, Schopenhauer argued, that underlie all our motives to thought and action, and not any spiritual or moral motivation. So, for Schopenhauer, humans were closer to animals than Plato or Kant would care to admit.

As is apparent from *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche is in accord with many of these ideas: he points out the basic drives ('prejudices') motivating many philoso-

Background

phers, and his idea of *will to power* is quite close to Schopenhauer's conception of the will. However, Nietzsche diverges from Schopenhauer in the conclusions that he draws from these ideas. For Schopenhauer, the fact that we are driven by our basic drives is the source of misery, because such desires are ultimately selfish, and apart from being the source of constant frustration, also produce conflict as we strive to achieve our own goals at the expense of others. In this sense, Schopenhauer's pessimism is close to *Buddhism* (which he was very influenced by) in that desire is seen as the cause of suffering, and happiness (or *enlightenment*) is considered to arise from freedom from desire. Conversely, for Nietzsche, even to give life a negative value is to make a choice, and so if we *do* have a choice, then it is better to make a positive one, and in so doing choose the highest values possible. But these values must be based on a clear acceptance of the sometimes unpleasant truths about life, and not a set of pleasant lies. Furthermore, rather than seeing the dominance of the will in the human personality as a bad thing, Nietzsche viewed it as the source of all possible happiness, and the development of stronger and more refined expressions of will (through his own enlightened brand of philosophy) as the goal of life; in this way, the temptation to falsify life – even to paint it negatively – could be overcome.

German Politics

Many of Nietzsche's comments regarding Germany in *Beyond Good and Evil* can only be fully understood against the backdrop of great political upheaval that took place from the end of the eighteenth century and through the next hundred years or so. Up until the Napoleonic wars in 1806, Germany, as it is now called, was merely part of a large collection of states in Western and Central Europe which made up the Holy Roman Empire. It was created by the great warrior-king Charlemagne who, through conquest, had expanded his initial rule over the kingdom of the Franks. After his conquest of Rome, Charlemagne considered his achievements fitting of the title of Emperor, and he was so crowned by Pope Leo III in ad 800. At its height, the Empire comprised not only Germany, but also Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Switzerland, and parts of France, Italy and Poland. By the time it came to be broken up in 1806, the Empire had lasted over 1,000 years, though during this time it had undergone many internal changes, and many of its member states governed themselves.

In 1815, following the Napoleonic wars, during which Emperor Napoleon of France sought to unify much of Europe under his rule, the German Confederation was formed, combining 39 sovereign states into a loose union pledging to defend one another from outside aggressors. In 1848, revolution in Paris inspired popular

O1

Background

revolt in various states in the Confederation as, fuelled by the ideals of Romanticism, people expressed their discontent at aristocratic rule and lack of democratic freedom. These events caused many of the states to give way and implement constitutional reform. Underlying this was a popular call for national unity, held back by a constant struggle for dominance between the member states – particularly the two strongest, Austria and Prussia, who feared that unity would require one state to be dominant (a supremacy which they both desired for themselves).

This situation continued until, in the 1860s, the Prussian Prime Minister, Otto von Bismarck, began to exert an influence towards founding a Prussian-dominated, unified Germany that excluded Austria. Bismarck's attitude embodied a new approach to politics, using both diplomacy and military might in a manner that was not driven by ideologies or belief systems, but rather by a clear, pragmatic focus on what needed to be achieved; this became known as *Realpolitik*. The situation ultimately resulted in three wars: the Danish–Prussian war (1864), the Austro-Prussian war (1866), and the Franco-Prussian War (1870–71) – Nietzsche himself served as a medical orderly in the latter. Unification was achieved in 1871, and, from this date to the end of the First World War, the German Empire (or the *Second Reich*, as it is sometimes known), was ruled by Wilhelm I (formerly King of Prussia), with Bismarck as its First Chancellor (equivalent to the British Prime Minister).

Nietzsche's attitude to these events underlies much of Part Eight of *Beyond Good and Evil* ('Peoples and Fatherlands'). Reading between the lines, we can see that he appears to have been caught up in the romantic patriotism behind the German wars of unification, but to have quickly got over it following his disillusioning experiences in the last of these wars. His opinion of Bismarck is therefore of someone who, whilst strong (he was nicknamed the 'Iron Chancellor'), lacked the ideals of previous conquering heroes (such as Charlemagne, or even Napoleon). However, he also realised that the future of Germany lay in moving *forward*, rather than in harking back to the days of the Holy Roman Empire, or in looking to a falsely romantic nationalism, the only purpose of which was the increased political power of a unified Germany.²¹

The Text

Before progressing to an analysis of the text itself, it is perhaps useful to consider some of its history. *Beyond Good and Evil* (hereafter *BGE*) was initially intended by Nietzsche to form part of a larger work which he had provisionally entitled *The Will to Power*,²² and later *The Revaluation of All Values* (initially the book's

Background

subtitle). However, whilst this work never materialised, it is still useful to consider *BGE* as fulfilling a definite purpose in this overall project.

Nietzsche began collecting material for the *Will to Power* project after *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, and at least as early as 1885, but did not announce his intention to write such a work until the publication of the *Genealogy of Morals* in 1886. As such, he drafted a number of different plans as to the project's organisation, and it looks as if his central purpose was to organise his philosophy into a comprehensive whole. From this point of view, *BGE* can be seen partly as an elaboration of the ideas presented in *Zarathustra* in poetic form, but also as a selection from the material that Nietzsche had amassed toward the larger work. In *Ecce Homo*, published in 1888, Nietzsche describes *BGE* as "an attack on modernity", and we can view one of the central purposes of the book as providing a critique of contemporary values and philosophies. Therefore, *BGE* may have formed part of the 'negative phase' of the *Will to Power* project; a destruction of false foundations before the building stage – the 'revaluation of all values' – which was to follow. However, these plans were all ultimately abandoned. *The Anti-Christ*, published in 1888, originally bore the subtitle 'Book One of the Revaluation of All Values', but even this was removed from later editions. Some see this as a suggestion that, rather than being a future work that Nietzsche never completed, the *Will to Power/Revaluation of All Values* project was actually complete, and that with the publication of *The Anti-Christ*, Nietzsche had actually reached the conclusion of the project.²³ If this is so, then *The Will to Power* would begin with *BGE* and contain all Nietzsche's publications from there on, up to and including *The Anti-Christ*.

As for *BGE* itself, it was begun in the summer of 1885 and finished sometime around the spring of 1886, being published in August of that year. As noted above, *BGE* was the first of his books to be published at his own expense, but it sold poorly and he was unable even to cover his publishing costs. This was largely the case with all Nietzsche's books from *Human, All Too Human* onwards, and, as a result, *BGE* went largely unread.²⁴

However, this began to change following Nietzsche's breakdown in 1889. There were three editions of *BGE* in the early 1890s, and it has never been out of print since that time. More generally, Nietzsche's philosophical stock also began to rise, and – whilst his ideas were not ignored during his lifetime – his influence and recognition continued to increase. With the exception of his appropriation by the Nazis as the 'Aryan philosopher', and the anti-Nietzsche propaganda arising from the two world wars, Nietzsche's standing has continued to grow, and his influence upon modern philosophers – such as Sartre, Heidegger, Derrida and Foucault – is unquestioned, as is his place amongst the most influential thinkers of modern times. As such, *BGE* may now genuinely be considered "one of the greatest books by a very great thinker".²⁵