

Nietzsche Study Guide

PHIL301

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Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900)

- Nietzsche is one of the most enigmatic of Western philosophers. His writings have inspired a wide range of thinkers from Nazi nationalists to Beat poets. He is by turns vilified as an advocate of elitist tyranny and celebrated as a champion of individualism and human freedom, an iconoclast on the one hand and a prophet of the human future on the other. He is perhaps all of these things.
- Nietzsche was the son and grandson of Lutheran ministers. Nietzsche was a boy when his father died and he was raised in a household including his mother, two aunts, and a sister. He was a delicate but precocious and intelligent child. He excelled in school and came to study philology (the study of ancient languages). His brilliant work as a student and early scholar earned him a position at the University of Basel while still in his early twenties. Health difficulties would ultimately lead him to resign his post.
- Nietzsche's training in classical literature (Greek, Latin) acquainted him with an ethos distant and more inspiring to him than his own. The feats of ancient Greek story-telling were his first significant scholarly subject. The heroic age, and the surpassing quality of ancient art remained important influences on his thought.
- Nietzsche's declining health led to a mental collapse in 1890; he died ten years later.

The Birth of Tragedy

§§1-15

1. What is this book about?
2. What is the 'witches' brew' that Nietzsche refers to (e.g., §2)?
3. What, according to Nietzsche, is the significance in ancient Greek thought of the god, Apollo?
4. What, according to Nietzsche, is the significance in ancient Greek thought of the god, Dionysus?
5. What roles do these gods play in art, music?
6. What is the origin of Greek tragedy, according to Nietzsche?
7. What is the significance of Greek tragedy, on Nietzsche's view?
8. How are Socrates and Euripides related, on Nietzsche's view?
9. What would be the significance of a Socrates who practices music, for Nietzsche?

See Nietzsche's preface, the "Attempt at a Self-Criticism" for some useful information from Nietzsche about the themes of this text.