

Born October 15 1844, in Röcken, Germany, son of Lutheran pastor who dies when Nietzsche is 5, family moves to Naumburg. Nietzsche studies philology at Bonn University, reads Schopenhauer 1865, meets Wagner 1868. Appointed Professor Extraordinarius of Classical Philology at University of Basel, Switzerland in 1869, promoted to full Professor 1870 at age of 26. A Swiss subject, he volunteers as medical orderly in Franco-Prussian war (1870), serves briefly with Prussians, returns to Basel with broken health.

1872, age 28, publishes his first book, THE BIRTH OF TRAGEDY (Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik) {The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music}.

Other books to follow: HUMAN, ALL TOO HUMAN; THE GAY SCIENCE; ALSO SPRACH ZARATHUSTRA; BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL; TOWARD A GENEALOGY OF MORALS; TWILIGHT OF THE IDOLS; THE WILL TO POWER.

Important ideas: transvaluation of all values; eternal recurrence of all things; man is something to be surpassed.

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His first book, published in 1872: THE BIRTH OF TRAGEDY. The topic was the sudden birth and no less sudden death of tragedy among the Greeks. The thesis: born of music, it died of that rationalism which found its outstanding incarnation in Socrates and which is evident in the works of Euripedes. The significance: an iconoclastic conception of the Greeks, far removed from the "noble simplicity and calm grandeur" of Winckelmann and Goethe, then still popular. The style: an essay, now brilliant, now florid -- without any scholarly apparatus. The greatest weakness: to the fifteen sections on Greek tragedy, Nietzsche added another ten on Wagner and his new music dramas, thus giving the whole work the appearance of mere special pleading for his idol. Forty years later the great British classicist F. M. Cornford was to hail the book as "a work of profound imaginative insight, which left the scholarship of a generation toiling in the rear." But most of the philologists of Nietzsche's own generation considered the book preposterous. What it is best known for today is its contrast between the Apollonian (the serene sense of proportion which Winckelmann had so admired and which found its crowning expression in Greek sculpture) and the Dionysian (that flood which breaks through all restraints in the Dionysian festivals and which finds artistic expression in music).

Walter Kaufmann, Preface to PORTABLE NIETZSCHE, Penguin

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