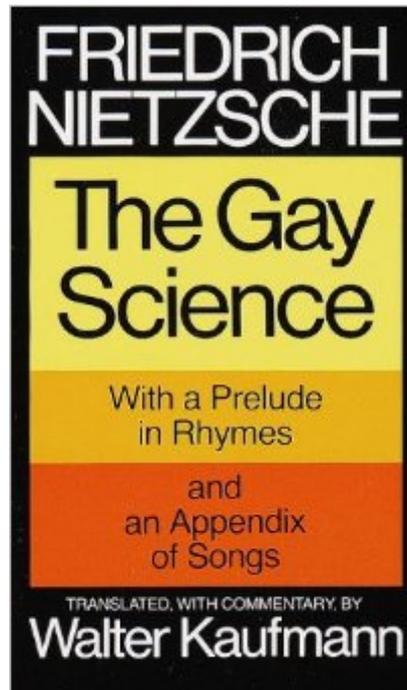


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The Gay Science: With A Prelude In Rhymes And An Appendix Of Songs



Synopsis

Nietzsche called *The Gay Science* "the most personal of all my books." It was here that he first proclaimed the death of God -- to which a large part of the book is devoted -- and his doctrine of the eternal recurrence. Walter Kaufmann's commentary, with its many quotations from previously untranslated letters, brings to life Nietzsche as a human being and illuminates his philosophy. The book contains some of Nietzsche's most sustained discussions of art and morality, knowledge and truth, the intellectual conscience and the origin of logic. Most of the book was written just before *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, the last part five years later, after *Beyond Good and Evil*. We encounter Zarathustra in these pages as well as many of Nietzsche's most interesting philosophical ideas and the largest collection of his own poetry that he himself ever published. Walter Kaufmann's English versions of Nietzsche represent one of the major translation enterprises of our time. He is the first philosopher to have translated Nietzsche's major works, and never before has a single translator given us so much of Nietzsche.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Nietzsche's *The Gay Science* proposes an antidote to the condition of contemporary scholarship. As opposed to what he saw as contemporary scholars' ant-like drudgery in amassing facts, he recommends "the gay science," a kind of scholarship that would be lighthearted and deliberately "superficial--out of profundity" as he claims that the Greeks were. Aware of the murkier aspects of human existence, the ancient Athenians responded by taking aesthetic delight in life and becoming "adorers of forms, tones, of words." In his own era, in which many felt incapable of transforming reality, Nietzsche proposed that this would be the appropriate convalescence for scholars, as it had

been for him in his own personal life. In *The Gay Science*, the infamous statement "God is dead" appears for the first time. The most important mention of this belief comes in the section called "The Madman." The madman in this section appears in the marketplace and makes the announcement "God is dead" to the scientific atheists who have gathered there. After the atheists merely laugh at him, the madman realizes that he has come too early, and he goes around to different towns singing funeral hymns during masses. This parable suggests the inappropriateness of the popular characterization of Nietzsche as the hardened atheist who delights in nothing more than debunking other people's beliefs. Nevertheless, the perspective that Nietzsche proposes throughout *The Gay Science* is naturalistic and aesthetic, in opposition to traditional religious views. Indeed, many of the work's sections might be considered practical advice for the spiritually sensitive atheist who is concerned lest he or she return to old religious habits out of desperation.

It's hard to give a cursory review of a book of aphorisms. This edition of 'The Gay Science' however comes with observations by the superlative Nietzschean commentator, Walter Kaufmann, who says that "this book is a microcosm in which we find almost all of Nietzsche: epigrams and songs, aphorisms and...philosophical problems, ethics and theory of knowledge, reflections on art and on the death of God, the eternal recurrence and even Zarathustra." This is about as good a review of 'The Gay Science' as any. I must say that of the 4 other Nietzschean works I have read (BG&E, Genealogy of Morals, BOT, and Antichrist) this is the best, most complete, and most enjoyable so far. This book showcases Nietzsche for what is probably his most noticeable strength: his ability as a psychologist and sociologist. He seems to have a good understanding of the types of innate moves people possess and utilize in their respective environments. Probably his understanding of exactly what that environment is, namely, his sense of objective reality, is what allows him to comment so precisely on human nature. True, he's an indefensibly offensive misogynist and war monger, and that notwithstanding, many of his observations are still germane in this day and age, which suggests an acute sense of psychology and anthropology on his part; although naturally a bit dated. Of course, I believe that in modern America we tend to discount the utter sagacity of 19th century Europeans in their pragmatism. Perhaps Nietzsche just seems sagacious compared to the discourse of present day America. His comments on hegemony, or how the ruling class manipulates the masses into cooperation are great. Nietzsche's love of science and his comments on the silliness of self-proclaimed objective types is excellent too.

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