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Title: NIETZSCHE AND THE PARADOX OF TRAGEDY

Author(s): Amy Price .

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In this paper I examine Friedrich Nietzsche's later writings on tragic drama. I claim that these thoughts are primarily devoted to deciphering the tragic response. Whilst this concern with the nature and significance of tragic art remains consistent with Nietzsche's project in *The Birth of Tragedy*, the examination of the tragic response, and its subsequent value, are but a part of the overarching cultural diagnostics of the early work. The strength of *The Birth of Tragedy* lies in its exploration and explanation of what makes tragic experiences in art possible: the kinds of people, social conditions, music, and art that must be in order for this unique phenomenon and response to arise. The notorious mission of the book is Nietzsche's attempt to understand the foundational conditions prevalent in the Greeks and their dramas so that he can then more readily defend a reincarnation (and the value of this reincarnation) in the work of Richard Wagner. Nietzsche's later writings, however, are exclusively concerned with the nature and value of the tragic experience. Abandoning the monolithic metaphysical explanation evident in *The Birth of Tragedy* he now invokes a more finely tuned assessment of the emotional, psychological, and physiological

responses to representations of the ugly. As his mature reflection on *The Birth of Tragedy*, the 'Attempt at a Self-Criticism', evidences, the basic attitudes that Nietzsche possesses concerning the value of artistic representations of tragic events deviate little from juvenilia to mature thought. But, in later writings, the terms and arguments in which these views are cashed out possess a coherency--and hence lend a stability to their conclusions--that is often felt to be lacking in the theses of *The Birth of Tragedy*, which depend upon a questionable metaphysics and are couched in suggestive imagery and Wagnerian apology. I.

INTRODUCTION There is a problem in the philosophy of art that is motivated by Aristotle's discussion, in the *Poetics*, of our response to tragic drama.(1) If the tragic emotions (fear and pity) are essentially painful, how is it that we derive pleasure from tragic dramas that essentially involve or are defined by or awaken these normally painful emotions? And assuming that we celebrate tragic dramas such as Euripides' *Bacchae* or Shakespeare's *King Lear* precisely because of the experiences that they provide, what could account for this value, given that emotionally disagreeable experiences in themselves (the events and the attendant emotions) are not so valued? Nietzsche's later writings on tragedy are primarily devoted to deciphering this classic problem. My argument is that Nietzsche's analysis of (i) the distinction between the value of tragic drama as art and the value of our experience of tragic drama, and (ii) what tragic pleasure is actually pleasure in, possesses an explanatory power lacking in other accounts. I will concentrate on the philosophies of Aristotle, Schopenhauer, and Hume. Interpretations of Aristotle's philosophy attempt to explain tragic pleasure through his mechanism of *katharsis*. Schopenhauer claims that the pleasure in and value of tragedy lie in its clear and compelling demonstration of the metaphysics...

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