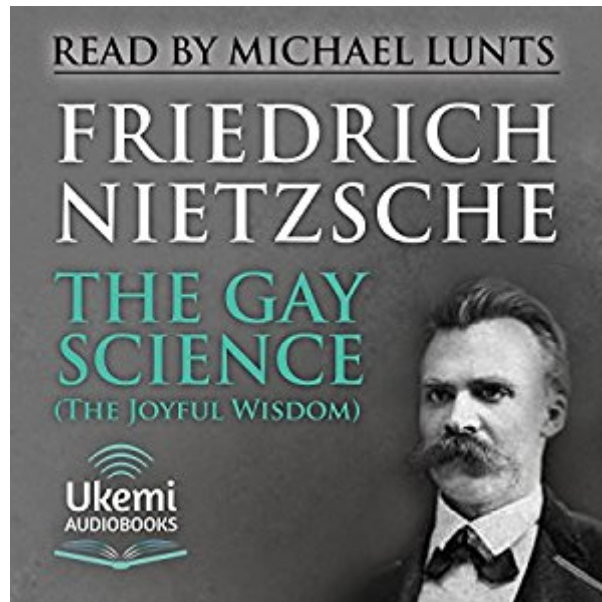


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The Gay Science (The Joyful Wisdom)



Synopsis

The Gay Science (The Joyful Wisdom) is one of Nietzsche's greatest books. His wonderfully fertile mind roams over mankind, his thoughts, his emotions, his behaviour and his weaknesses with remarkable clarity, with insight - but also with humour! In this work are 383 separate paragraphs, some short, some long, but all singular observations - the epitome of his famous aphoristic style. 'Morality is the herd instinct in the individual.' 'The world is overfull of beautiful things, but it is nevertheless poor, very poor, in beautiful moments.' Being intellectual, he declares, is not equivalent to 'taking things seriously': why not laugh while thinking! When should one be an Epicurean and when a Stoic? Nietzsche may be best known for Thus Spoke Zarathustra (The Gay Science was published in 1882, a year before Zarathustra, and actually contains its opening paragraph!) but with its potpourri of comments, some wild, some sharp, some rather odd, it is totally different in tone. The Gay Science represents the Friedrich Nietzsche one would want to meet. All of the 77 poems included by Nietzsche in The Gay Science have been placed at the end of the main text, to be enjoyed by dedicated Nietzscheans. The aphorisms and poems are persuasively read by Michael Lunts.

Book Information

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Philosophy

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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