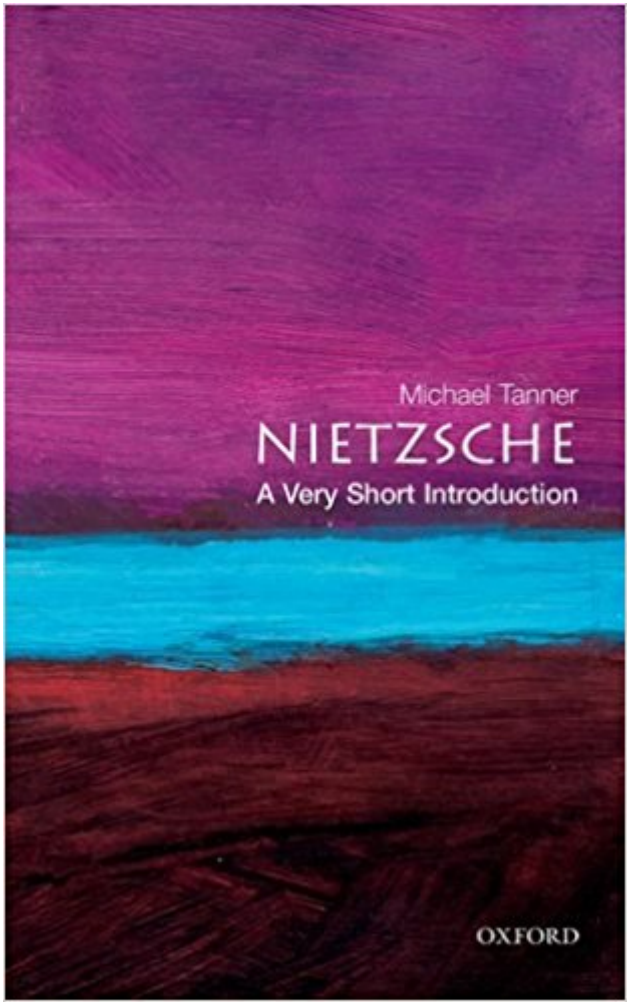
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Nietzsche: A Very Short Introduction



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Synopsis

With his well-known idiosyncrasies and aphoristic style, Friedrich Nietzsche is always bracing and provocative, and temptingly easy to dip into. Michael Tanner’s introduction to the philosopher’s life and work examines the numerous ambiguities inherent in his writings and explodes many of the misconceptions that have grown in the hundred years since Nietzsche wrote "do not, above all, confound me with what I am not!"About the Series: Combining authority with wit, accessibility, and style, Very Short Introductions offer an introduction to some of life’s most interesting topics. Written by experts for the newcomer, they demonstrate the finest contemporary thinking about the central problems and issues in hundreds of key topics, from philosophy to Freud, quantum theory to Islam.

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Customer Reviews

"...I find Tanner’s book enormously useful for introducing Nietzsche philosophically.... Tanner manages to be succinct without being boring or pedantic.... I think his succinct and highly critical readings encourage genuine philosophical grappling with our modern self-proclaimed Dionysus, who after all needs to be treated as a philosopher, not an idol or a god."--Teaching Philosophy"A breezy first look at Nietzsche...useful for undergraduates who need a quick and painless dose of Nietzsche’s ideas."--Ethics

Michael Tanner is Fellow and University Lecturer in Philosophy at Corpus Christi College.

This is a better book than many on Nietzsche that embrace Nietzsche more fully, but it seems more like a brief critical engagement than an very short introduction. Tanner interrogates many Nietzschean ideas, but often skips over prior philosopher's exegeses of the more unclear ideas. When he does meant the ways Nietzsche's work has been used, he does so almost off-hand and without specifics as if someone needing a very short introduction to Nietzsche would know interpretative traditions around Nietzsche.Tanner does lay out some biography, but recounts some "facts" we now know were untrue: such as NIetzsche's madness being caused by the onto of syphilis despite the fact that even at the time, photographic evidence of Nietzsche shows no degeneration of soft tissue that comes with syphilis. Tanner does bring up key bits of information, but not consistently. Often it is used to psychologize elements of Nietzsche's thought that Tanner finds inconsistent or distasteful. Tanner is also dismissive of Kaufman's work on Nietzsche, a view that I somewhat share, but Kaufman has been the primary introduction to Nietzsche in United States and many of Kaufman's more liberalizing existentialist readings of Nietzsche remain dominant and should be addressed more completely if they are going to be addressed at all.Tanner also seems to be highly sympathetic to Wagner and seems to bristle a bit a Nietzsche's reading of Wagner. This makes some sense given that Tanner has written on Wagner extensively in a philosophical vein. Tanner's last chapter is a philosophical and psychological critique of Nietzsche. It does simplify some points and inside one not bring other interpretations into the text, but then psychologizes Nietzsche the more. Tanner in all of his run down of the major works and his critical chapter, hints at problems, hints at interpretations, alludes, but rarely explicates completely. He also gives no sense of why Nietzsche would have been so important.While Tanner does interrogate Nietzsche, which is more useful than a sycophantic reading that also imposes outside ideas unto Nietzsche's anti-system, I don't think this functions well as introduction and it is too allusive to be substantive critique. It is slightly unsympathetic, and seems to be short mainly by alluding instead of completely arguing out key points.

I start with the caveat that I have only read the first 1/4 of this book but I can't stand the style of writing, and so won't continue with it. Mr. Tanner has to learn how to write simple declarative sentences. He has the English disease of stuffing sentences with meaningless qualifying clauses like...almost if not entirely....and of saying something with as many words as possible. I could barely get through the first chapter & barely know what he was trying to say.

If you're looking for quick introduction to Nietzsche, this book will do the job. Nietzsche's life, his

philosophical influences, and his basic philosophical ideas are covered in a short and compact way. For the beginning student of Nietzsche, it will propel you to further study. For the seasoned reader, the book will serve as a helpful review.Readers of this book may also like "Jenna’s Flaw," a novel about Nietzsche, the death of God, the crumbling of Western civilization, and what the West can do to stop it.

"Very short" indeed but like Tanner’s equally brief study of Schopenhauer exceedingly pithy and insightful.Interesting that Tanner dismisses Walter Kaufmann’s famous verdict that Nietzsche’s was really a "liberal humanist", not the amoral enemy of reason that Foucault and his copains describe. Very interesting because Thomas Mann is on record as saying Kaufmann’s book was a "great advance" on all previous critical books about Nietzsche (almost certainly from a review by Mann of the original 1950 edition). And for what it’s worth, A.J.P. Taylor, one of the best British historians of the 20th century, seconds Mann in another blurb on the cover of Kaufmann’s book. Myself, I’ve always thought Kaufmann was tendentiously beating an indefensible thesis, ironic because his translations of Nietzsche’s ouevre are excellent, though, as Tanner notes, his interlarded commentary shouldn’t be trusted.The puzzle about Tanner is that he’s an academic Oxbridge philosopher who’s resisted writing long books on his subject, witness the brevity of the volume under review and the already mentioned Schopenhauer (which may be the best book about Schopenhauer in English, though this isn’t a crowded field). His only full-length study is of Wagner, and very good it is, though you might wonder if Tanner’s Wagner isn’t , in its own way, as tendentious as Kaufmann’s Nietzsche. It’s hard to take Wagner the "philosopher/psychologist" very seriously, and in spite of Tanner and the many others who do, I’m more or less convinced that Ernest Newman, Wagner’s best biographer, is correct when he says Wagner was a musician of genius, but a total failure as a thinker and, even worse, as a dramatist, particularly the former.However, Tanner on Nietzsche is well worth reading, far more than the majority of academics who write at greater length but with much less understanding and, almost inevitably--and unlike Tanner, who knows how to push words around on the page--in unreadable prose.

Not a particularly good introduction to Nietzsche. I read it as a refresher after leaving Nietzsche behind for several years, and it proved ultimately unsatisfying because Tanner does way too much editorializing. He constantly uses the first person, saying "I believe this" and "I disagree with that." Tanner is clearly a sophisticated thinker, but I did not buy this book because I wanted to learn about his views. In fact, I don’t really care about his views. He also adopts a tone of superiority when

discussing the Nietzschean ideas, condescendingly approving of this and condemning that. Why didn't the editors at Oxford UP see this? Surely, any close, careful reader could easily identify Tanner's biases.

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