



# The Smile of Tragedy: Nietzsche and the Art of Virtue (Literature and Philosophy)

*Daniel R. Ahern*

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In *The Smile of Tragedy*, Daniel Ahern examines Nietzsche's attitude toward what he called "the tragic age of the Greeks," showing it to be the foundation not only for his attack upon the birth of philosophy during the Socratic era but also for his overall critique of Western culture. Through an interpretation of "Dionysian pessimism," Ahern clarifies the ways in which Nietzsche sees ethics and aesthetics as inseparable and how their theoretical separation is at the root of Western nihilism. Ahern explains why Nietzsche, in creating this precursor to a new aesthetics, rejects Aristotle's medicinal interpretation of tragic art and concentrates on Apollinian cruelty as a form of intoxication without which there can be no art. Ahern shows that Nietzsche saw the human body as the vessel through which virtue and art are possible, as the path to an interpretation of "selflessness," as the means to determining an order of rank among human beings, and as the site where ethics and aesthetics coincide.

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