



On Nietzsche

Georges Bataille , Sylvère Lotringer (Translator) , Bruce Boone (Translator)

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Hailed by Martin Heidegger as "one of France's best minds," Georges Bataille has become increasingly recognized and respected in the realm of academic and popular intellectual thought. Although Bataille died in 1962, interest in his life and writings have never been as strong as they are today--Barthes, Foucault, Derrida, and Kristeva have all acknowledged their debt to him. In his book, *On Nietzsche*, as translated by Bruce Boone, Bataille comes as close as he would ever come to formulating his own unique system of philosophy. One could say that reading Nietzsche was something of a revelation to Bataille, and profoundly affected his life. In 1915, in a crisis of guilt after leaving his blind father in the hands of the Germans, Bataille converted to Catholicism. It was Nietzsche's work that lead him to abandon traditional religion for an idiosyncratic form of godless mysticism. In this volume, Bataille becomes, and goes beyond, Nietzsche, assuming Nietzsche's thought where he left off--with God's death. At the heart of this work is Bataille's exploration of how one can have a spiritual life outside religion. *On Nietzsche* is essentially a journal that brilliantly mixes observations with ruminations in fragments, aphorisms, poems, myths, quotations, and images against the background of World War II and the German occupation. Bataille has a unique way of moving breezily from abstraction to confession, and from theology to eroticism. He skillfully weaves together his own internal experience of anguish with the war and destruction raging outside with arguments against fascist interpretations of Nietzsche and praise for the philosopher as a prophet foretelling "the crude German fate." With an introduction, "Furiously Nietzschean," by Sylvère Lotringer, an Appendix in which Bataille defends himself against Sartre, and an Index, this volume reconfirms Michel Foucault's assertion that Bataille, "broke with traditional narrative to tell us what has never been told before."

On Nietzsche Details

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Michael A. says

4.5/5. This is the third book in Bataille's "Summa Atheologica" (Inner Experience and Guilty were the first and second. I'm not sure how many books he planned for it, but the rest of the work he did for it, I believe, is collected by Stuart Kendall's compilation "The Unfinished System of Nonknowledge". I think some stuff is also in "The Impossible"). It is split into three parts: Mr. Nietzsche, Summit and Decline, and (what takes up roughly 2/3rds of the book) Diary (February-August 1944). Like "Guilty", this is Bataille at his most human, his most sincere. He often describes how much pain he's suffering, how depressed he is, how anxious he is, how he's often lonely: and who could blame him? This was the "summit and decline" of the Nazi occupation of France and Bataille was battling tuberculosis the entire time of the writings.

The title is slightly misleading, at least it was for me, as I thought it might be Bataille's explications on Nietzsche's thought. This is somewhat true, but as Kendall notes in the introduction it is more of an expansion of his thought, to out-Nietzsche Nietzsche, to be "more Nietzschean than Nietzsche."

The main theme of this book seems to be morality, but it is quickly tied to "going beyond being" which includes communication and the ruptures in communication (laughter, sobbing, death, ecstasy, among other things). Bataille's concept of the moral summit was very intriguing to me, but really the best part of this book is the diary. We read about Bataille's fear of death (which he calls nothingness, particularly an "immanent nothingness", which he describes as going beyond being) and his overall negative state of mind, yet he chooses (or so he says) to laugh at his circumstances; to laugh at chance.

Chance plays a bigger role in this book than in Guilty. His thoughts on chance are extremely good to me, and I like his categorization of chance as a "series of interferences" separating being from nothingness. I think at one point he deems chance a (quasi-)God, perhaps in the spirit of Nietzsche and his previous Acephale project of trying to find a new religion, except there's pretty much no tenets other than a Nietzschean life-affirming laughter at everything that happens to you. I suspect it's not a literal laughter, but more of a joyous acceptance (I think in the notes he pretty much says joy and anguish are the same, following Nietzsche's queue that the supreme good and supreme evil are equivalent).

Overall, I thought this book was very good and the Summa Atheologica trilogy, taken as a whole, is probably the best of Bataille I've read. Definitely requires multiple re-readings: especially Inner Experience.

Rob says

Definitely a fun, aphoristic read. Bataille doesn't really seem to be too keen on explaining the logical connections between his claims, but I suppose that part of his point is that one shouldn't have to be.

Kevin Q says

Bataille's violent philosophical readings are perfect for a schematic understanding of Freddy.

Dusan says

One of the most important books on the state of perpetuated boredom. 'Man would sooner have the void for his purpose than be void of purpose,' (Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morals) quoted in the book

Daniel says

Read this if you don't want to think. Bataille takes chance to be a 'key theme' inhabiting Nietzsche's work. By chance Bataille means non-goal oriented activity. Anything done for the sake of a goal is a project. Anything done without any reason at all is chance. The will to power is not the will to consume or the will to expand one's influence. The will to power, Bataille claims, is the will to live and live for no external goals at all. But this is problematic for as soon as our goal is to 'live without goals' we have subsumed chance within project.

Moreover, when we communicate, we risk ourselves. We risk ourselves because we never know how the other will respond; we do not even know who our interlocutor is

On Nietzsche is the third installment (of three) in Bataille's Summa Atheologica and it consists of journal entries Bataille made in 1944 while experimenting with chance and non-meaning.

Joe says

"We were like a meadow about to be drenched by rain--vulnerable under wan skies. We had only one choice: to lift our glasses to our lips, drink softly of the immense gentleness of the turbulence of things."

"Sun, clouds. Women all dressed up, looking like a gray day. The sun naked under the clouds"

Peyman Gh says

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d says

1944/1945

Bataille, enfermo y solo. En la campiña francesa se dedica a escribir sobre su compañero de vida intelectual, rescatándolo de la vergonzosa apropiación que los nazis hicieron de parte de su obra. Mezcla de aforismo dionisíaco, fragmento delirante y diario de guerra in disguise. Texto de una vulnerabilidad increíble, este buen hombre siempre quemando naves.

Michael G says

A fun but rambly exposure to Bataille's thought. At times inspirational at other times just pointlessly meandering. Still, been meaning to read some of his work for a while and this had all of the immoralism, lacerating, mystical 'nothingness' that I was promised.

Not an in depth Nietzsche study, more inspired by than critical of.

John says

Standing with GUILTY and INNER EXPERIENCE, ON NIETZSCHE is another one of Bataille's philosophical memoirs. He works through the isolated desperation of the War, separation from lovers, and his own psychic struggles in these pages. Using Nietzsche as the push off point, Bataille does a considerable bit of heavy lifting. Always looking to lacerate himself to the limits of experience and ecstasy, he mediates on how intoxicating the nonknowledge of nothingness binds and liberates him. Time and memory and the fall before God are also exploded with the Allied night bombing and laughter at the fall of Paris.

"The certainty of incoherence in reading, the inevitable crumbling of the soundest construction, is the deep truth of books. Since appearance constitutes a limit, what truly exists is a dissolution into common opacity rather than a development of lucid thinking. The apparent unchangingness of books is deceptive: each book is also the sum of the misunderstandings it occasions."

Rhys says

Bataille's laugh is forced. He looks around to see if anyone is listening. He is afraid.

His is not Zarathustra's laugh.

Toby Austin Locke says

Just amazing!

Brian says

Torn (lacerated?) between giving this 3 and 4 stars. On one hand, a truly honest attempt to understand and communicate, with some great insights and moments of beauty. On the other, a bit of a slog, stylistically. In the end, worth the time and effort spent. His concepts of chance and risk were especially enriching.

Tosh says

This is almost scary. Georges Bataille's collection of essays on one of his great heroes, Herr Nietzsche. An overlooked man of letters in my opinion. And Bataille himself is not exactly overlooked, but seriously needs to be read and studied.

Cary Aurand says

bataille completely grasps the transgressive nature of philosophy. it has to be dangerous, it has to make you uncomfortable. in *on nietzsche* he defines the will to power as the will to evil, the will to transgress. not to say that we should go around raping and pillaging, but to transgress against ourselves, against time. thought, and life, should never be constrained.
