Philosophy 681, Seminar in Advanced Topics: Friedrich Nietzsche

SEM 001, TR 3:30—4:45, CRT 607
Instructor: William Bristow, bristow@uwm.edu
Prereq: sr st & 12 cr in philos at 300-level or above; or grad st.

Friedrich Nietzsche is one of the most provocative and controversial of modern philosophers. In this seminar, we study the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche through a close reading of a few of his most important works, starting with his first book, The Birth of Tragedy (1872), and ending with On the Genealogy of Morals, published in 1887, not long before he suffered his incapacitating breakdown in 1889. We will also read portions of Thus Spake Zarathustra, Beyond Good and Evil, and a couple of his essays. We will discuss Nietzsche’s critique of modern (Christian) morality and, more generally, of the larger culture in which this moral system is embedded. We will discuss whether Nietzsche’s critique of modern European values itself presupposes a set of values, and, if so, the content of those values, as well as whether they have (or need) philosophical grounding. Also, we will discuss whether Nietzsche’s critique of values is founded upon any metaphysical conception, and, if so, how that might be grounded or justified. We will also read important secondary literature on Nietzsche’s writings, by such authors as Maudemarie Clark, James Conant, Alexander Nehamas, and others.