

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

The Gay Science

*With a Prelude in German Rhymes
and an Appendix of Songs*

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infer from his words that he places science above art – strange as this may be for such a friend of the arts – in the end it is nothing but politeness when he does not speak of what he, too, places high above all science: ‘revealed truth’ and the ‘eternal salvation of the soul’. Compared to that, what are ornaments, pride, entertainment, and the security of life to him! ‘Science is something second-class; nothing ultimate, unconditional; not an object of passion’ – this judgement was held back in Leo’s soul: the truly Christian judgement about science! In antiquity the dignity and recognition of science were diminished by the fact that even among her most zealous disciples the striving for *virtue* took first place, and that one thought one had given knowledge one’s highest praise when one celebrated it as the best means to virtue. It is something new in history that knowledge wants to be more than a means.

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In the horizon of the infinite. – We have forsaken the land and gone to sea! We have destroyed the bridge behind us – more so, we have demolished the land behind us! Now, little ship, look out! Beside you is the ocean; it is true, it does not always roar, and at times it lies there like silk and gold and dreams of goodness. But there will be hours when you realize that it is infinite and that there is nothing more awesome than infinity. Oh, the poor bird that has felt free and now strikes against the walls of this cage! Woe, when homesickness for the land overcomes you, as if there had been more *freedom* there – and there is no more ‘land’!

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The madman. – Haven’t you heard of that madman who in the bright morning lit a lantern and ran around the marketplace crying incessantly, ‘I’m looking for God! I’m looking for God!’ Since many of those who did not believe in God were standing around together just then, he caused great laughter. Has he been lost, then? asked one. Did he lose his way like a child? asked another. Or is he hiding? Is he afraid of us? Has he gone to sea? Emigrated? – Thus they shouted and laughed, one interrupting the other. The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his eyes. ‘Where is God?’ he cried; ‘I’ll tell you! *We*

have killed him – you and I! We are all his murderers. But how did we do this? How were we able to drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Where is it moving to now? Where are we moving to? Away from all suns? Are we not continually falling? And backwards, sideways, forwards, in all directions? Is there still an up and a down? Aren’t we straying as though through an infinite nothing? Isn’t empty space breathing at us? Hasn’t it got colder? Isn’t night and more night coming again and again? Don’t lanterns have to be lit in the morning? Do we still hear nothing of the noise of the grave-diggers who are burying God? Do we still smell nothing of the divine decomposition? – Gods, too, decompose! God is dead! God remains dead! And we have killed him! How can we console ourselves, the murderers of all murderers! The holiest and the mightiest thing the world has ever possessed has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood from us? With what water could we clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what holy games will we have to invent for ourselves? Is the magnitude of this deed not too great for us? Do we not ourselves have to become gods merely to appear worthy of it? There was never a greater deed – and whoever is born after us will on account of this deed belong to a higher history than all history up to now! Here the madman fell silent and looked again at his listeners; they too were silent and looked at him disconcertedly. Finally he threw his lantern on the ground so that it broke into pieces and went out. ‘I come too early’, he then said; ‘my time is not yet. This tremendous event is still on its way, wandering; it has not yet reached the ears of men. Lightning and thunder need time; the light of the stars needs time; deeds need time, even after they are done, in order to be seen and heard. This deed is still more remote to them than the remotest stars – *and yet they have done it themselves!*’ It is still recounted how on the same day the madman forced his way into several churches and there started singing his *requiem aeternam deo*.¹⁰ Led out and called to account, he is said always to have replied nothing but, ‘What then are these churches now if not the tombs and sepulchres of God?’

¹⁰ ‘Grant God eternal rest.’ A transformation of that part of the service for the dead which reads ‘Requiem aeternam dona eis [scilicet, mortuis], Domine’ (‘Lord, grant them [the dead] eternal rest’)

the last moments of his life – perhaps he would then belong to a still higher order of minds. Whether it was death or the poison or piety or malice – something loosened his tongue and he said: ‘O Crito, I owe Asclepius a rooster.’ This ridiculous and terrible ‘last word’ means for those who have ears: ‘O Crito, *life is a disease*.’³¹ Is it possible that a man like him, who had lived cheerfully and like a soldier in plain view of everyone, was a pessimist? He had merely kept a cheerful demeanour while all his life hiding his ultimate judgement, his inmost feeling! Socrates, Socrates *suffered from life*! And then he still avenged himself – with this veiled, gruesome, pious, and blasphemous saying. Did a Socrates really need *revenge*? Was there one ounce too little magnanimity in his overabundant virtue? – O friends! We must overcome even the Greeks!

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The heaviest weight. – What if some day or night a demon were to steal into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: ‘This life as you now live it and have lived it you will have to live once again and innumerable times again; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unspeakably small or great in your life must return to you, all in the same succession and sequence – even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned over again and again, and you with it, speck of dust!’ Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him: ‘You are a god, and never have I heard anything more divine.’ If this thought gained power over you, as you are it would transform and possibly crush you; the question in each and every thing, ‘Do you want this again and innumerable times again?’ would lie on your actions as the heaviest weight! Or how well disposed would you have

³¹ See Plato, *Phaedo* 116–18, esp. 118a.5–8. Asclepius was the god of healing and a rooster would have been a usual thank-offering to him from someone whom he had cured of an illness. Nietzsche’s interpretation of what Socrates said was not standard in the ancient world, and became common only in the Renaissance. It is rejected by some modern scholars.

to become to yourself and to life *to long for nothing more fervently* than for this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal?

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*Incipit tragoedia.*³² – When Zarathustra³³ was thirty years old, he left his homeland and Lake Urmi and went into the mountains. There he enjoyed his spirit and solitude, and did not tire of that for ten years. But at last his heart changed – and one morning he arose with rosy dawn, stepped before the sun, and spoke to it thus: ‘You great heavenly body! What would your happiness be if you did not have those for whom you shine! For ten years you have climbed up to my cave; without me, my eagle, and my snake, you would have become tired of your light and of this road; but we awaited you every morning, relieved you of your overabundance, and blessed you for it. Behold, I am sick of my wisdom, like a bee that has collected too much honey; I need outstretched hands; I would like to give away and distribute until the wise among humans once again enjoy their folly and the poor once again their riches. For that I must step into the depths, as you do in the evening when you go behind the sea and bring light even to the underworld, you over-rich heavenly body! Like you I must *go under*, as it is called by the human beings to whom I want to descend. So bless me then, you calm eye that can look without envy upon all-too-great happiness! Bless the cup that wants to overflow in order that the water may flow golden from it and everywhere carry the reflection of your bliss! Behold, this cup wants to become empty again, and Zarathustra wants to become human again.’ Thus began Zarathustra’s going under.

³² ‘The tragedy begins’. At this point, on completing Book iv, Nietzsche went on to write *Also Sprach Zarathustra* (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*), the most prophetic in style among his philosophical works, in 1883–5. He added Book v to *The Gay Science* in 1887.

³³ Nietzsche takes the name from that of the Persian religious thinker of the seventh/sixth century B.C. who propagated a strongly dualistic doctrine, sharply distinguishing between good and evil.