

## On Nietzsche's Gay Science

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**Abstract:** In this article, I aim at explaining a central aspect of Nietzsche's notion of gay science. Fundamentally, *Gaya Scienza* embodies the logic of one's will to power, the passage from a weak state of forces into a stronger one, and is thus a symbol for getting stronger. If will to power is shown to be an increasing force overcoming resistances, gay science is, in turn, a way of rectifying the errors and mistakes that constitute knowledge and science. Nietzsche declares war against, and intends to surpass, all concepts that make life weak, such as identity, the "thing in itself," the unity of things, systems and God, among others. Against the errors that structure modern thought, Nietzsche recommends a method of subverting concepts and categories of knowledge that should be joyful, that is, that intensifies the feeling of power. I suggest that this is precisely what Nietzsche refers to as gay science: a performative knowledge that rewards itself in its progress and results, therefore improving its intellectual strength through joy.<sup>1</sup>

**Key words:** Nietzsche, laughter, gay science, philosophy of humor

### 1. First step: war and play

Nietzsche wrote great prefaces. It is possible to consider them as an exposition of concepts that Nietzsche uses in order to explain his own thought, especially the prefaces of 1886. They reveal how Nietzsche sees himself, and present the point of view from which he describes his own intellectual processes. Nietzsche usually approaches his own thoughts in terms of "sickness and health," "convalescence and weakness," "humor and seriousness," thus providing a perspective that may help us understand the meaning of a gay science.<sup>2</sup> In the first section of the

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<sup>2</sup> Many authors have written on this topic. Within the confines of this article, I can refer only to a few of them: Kathleen Higgins, *Comic Relief: Nietzsche's Gay Science*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000, who specifically relates Nietzsche's book to the central concepts of laughter and the comic. Robert Pippin, *Nietzsche, Psychology, and First Philosophy*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2010, who has a chapter on the gay science. Monika Langer, *Nietzsche's Gay Science: Dancing Coherence*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave

preface to *The Gay Science*<sup>3</sup>, Nietzsche advises the reader about the meaning of his book. It relies on a fundamental and maybe uncommunicable experience: “This book may need more than one preface, and in the end there would still remain room for doubt whether anyone who had never lived through similar experiences could be brought closer to the experience of this book by means of prefaces.”<sup>4</sup> To enquire into this experience seems to be the best way to follow in order to understand Nietzsche’s book. I assume that gaiety is that fundamental experience. Therefore, I argue that Nietzsche’s concept of joy and the meaning of laughter within his philosophy—developed and enhanced by the terms of the prefaces’ self-portrait—are forces that produce new conditions for thinking and for the creation of values.

First, the passages in which Nietzsche invites us to consider joy and humor as essential to his thinking connect themselves to other concepts that create a specific Nietzschean joy, which is inseparable from the struggling exercise of questioning, criticizing, and the resulting thinker’s transformation. To this purpose, along with the short preface of *Twilight of the Idols*, we may evoke a passage from *Ecce Homo*. In the preface of *Twilight of the Idols* Nietzsche writes:

Maintaining cheerfulness in the midst of a gloomy affair, fraught with immeasurable responsibility, is no small feat; and yet what is needed more than cheerfulness? Nothing succeeds if prankishness [*Übermut*] has no part in it. Excess of strength alone is the proof of strength.

A revaluation of all values, this question mark, so black, so tremendous that it casts shadows upon the man who puts it down—such a destiny of a task compels one to run into the sun every moment to shake off a heavy, all-too-heavy seriousness. Every means is proper for this; every “case”—a case of luck. Especially, war. War has always been the great wisdom of all spirits who have become too inward, too profound; even in a wound there is the power to heal. ...

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Macmillan, 2010. In Brazil, Túlio O. Galvão, *Para além da ciência: por uma gaia ciência*. Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Norte – UFRN, Programa de Pós-Graduação em Filosofia – PPGFIL, 2012. About the writing process of *The Gay Science*, see Jörg Salaquarda, “A última fase de surgimento de ‘A gaia ciência,’” *Cadernos Nietzsche* 6: 75-93, 1999.

<sup>3</sup> I always refer to the second edition, which contains Book V, published in 1887. It is actually the second edition that adds the sub-title “la gaya scienza,” together with Book V. It is important to notice that this attention by Nietzsche reveals that he reconsiders the *Gay Science* a part of his later philosophy. No other book had chapters added after publication.

<sup>4</sup> GS, Preface. See references for a list of common shortages of Nietzsche’s books. The posthumous fragments [PF] follow the Colli/Montinari online edition <[www.nietzschesource.org](http://www.nietzschesource.org)> (*Digital Kritische Gesamtausgabe*), and are referred to directly with the link of the fragment.

Another mode of convalescence—under certain circumstances even more to my liking—is sounding out idols.<sup>5</sup>

There are at least four topics to highlight in this passage:

- 1) Cheerfulness is necessary for the thinker. A gloomy affair, with immeasurable responsibility, demands cheerfulness as excess of strength. It is the condition of success.
- 2) One of those “gloomy affairs” seems to be the “revaluation of all values.” This task demands that one “run to sun to shake off a heavy seriousness.”
- 3) Any means is appropriate for shaking off “seriousness,” “especially war.” War is the wisdom of the profound spirit.
- 4) This is another mode of convalescence, which is “sounding out idols.” It is also evident that there is another mode.

On the basis of this passage, we can formulate the following proposition: war against the idols is one mode of convalescence that shakes off the seriousness of heavy tasks and questionings.

In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche writes:

“Life was easy for me—easiest when it made the hardest demands on me...I do not know any other way of associating with great tasks than play: as a sign of greatness, this is an essential presupposition.”<sup>6</sup> Here the oppositions (hard-easy; heavy-light; cheerfulness-gloomy affairs) establish a new order of “things,” asking for a new evaluation. Nietzsche does not make a “real distinction” between them, only a formal one. As they are different degrees of the feeling of life, it is possible to convert and reevaluate each state.

Thus, another proposition is possible: the best way to deal with great tasks is play [*spiel*]. Play is a sign of greatness and an essential presupposition to convert and reevaluate the “hard” into the “easy.” One may wonder how war and play convey the same sense and are both considered as essential to great tasks and gloomy affairs. Two additional quotes may be helpful, this time from the preface of *On the Genealogy of Morals* and the *Gay Science*. In the *Gay Science*, Nietzsche writes:

“Gay science”: that signifies the saturnalia of a mind who has patiently resisted a terrible, long pressure—patiently, severely, coldly, without yielding, but also without hope—and who is now all at once attacked by hope, the hope for health,

<sup>5</sup> TI, Preface.

<sup>6</sup> EH, *Why am I so clever?* p. 257.

and the *intoxication* of convalescence.<sup>7</sup>

In *On the Genealogy of Morals*, he writes:

“For cheerfulness—or in my own language gay science—is a reward: the reward of a long, brave, industrious, and subterranean seriousness, of which, to be sure, not everyone is capable.”<sup>8</sup>

Nietzsche’s most direct definitions of the gay science reveals a subtle process. The gay science is an effect or a reward of long pressure and industrious seriousness. I suggest that this reward does not follow hard work, however. Rather, it comes during this resilient yet hopeless permanence among great tasks and gloomy affairs, and it arrives as a change or intoxication of the feeling, perception, thinking, and evaluation involved. The gay science, therefore, is more than a philosophical expression of the thinker’s joy. It is one of Nietzsche’s most original concepts, which also enables a profound understanding of his philosophy.

## 2. Gay science as will to power

To understand Nietzsche’s concept of *gaya scienza* it is neither sufficient to say that he was inspired by the medieval troubadours nor that he conceives it as an antipode of normative sciences.<sup>9</sup> It is also not enough to make an endless classifications of themes (perspectivism, psychology, morality, etc.) with the intention of organising what seems disorganized. Let’s consider as an example Monika Langer’s introduction to *Nietzsche’s Gay Science: Dancing Coherence* (2010). In order to differentiate her work from various other scholars’, Langer makes a brief portrait of their interpretations:

Ruth Abbey [2000] argues the works of his middle period...reveal a Nietzsche who ‘is more careful’, ‘more open’, less individualist, ‘less extreme’, and more productively engaged with the philosophical tradition than in his later writings...to make her case, Abby focuses on Nietzsche’s approach to morality, psychology, vanity, pity...friendship, science, woman, marriage, and western intellectual tradition.

Like Abbey, Kathleen Higgins [2000] observes the *Gay Science* ‘has typically been read as a collection of freestanding sections, their interconnections scarcely noted’. By

<sup>7</sup> GS, Preface, §1.

<sup>8</sup> GM, Preface, §7.

<sup>9</sup> This is Robert Pippin’s view: “a radical break with all the authoritative normal ‘science’ of the day.” See Robert Pippin, *Nietzsche, Psychology, and First Philosophy*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2010, p. 33.

contrast with this approach, Higgins interprets the work as a unified project that is ‘very carefully orchestrated’. ...Concentrating on his presentation of comedy in the *Gay Science*, she explores his ‘attempt at lighthearted scholarship’, his ‘use of humorous strategies’, and his ‘parodic play with literary precedents’. ...

Unlike Higgins, David Allison [2001] does not regard the *Gay Science* as a unified and carefully orchestrated work, although he interprets it as having a central concern. ...‘to question the position and the significance of human existence within an age that no longer seemed to have a discernible center’. ...He contends Nietzsche intentionally made the work nondirective, to achieve ‘the existential effect’ of having to ponder and respond to a world with no ultimate purpose or moral absolutes.<sup>10</sup>

In her discussion with other authors, Langer argues that the *Gay Science* has a specific coherence “that eschews the tradition’s ponderous stance and reflects Nietzsche’s desire to dance with the pen.”<sup>11</sup>

Although the views of all these authors are correct, as they help us understand the *Gay Science* historically and structurally, I believe that the meaning of the concept of gay science evades them. The “fundamental experience” Nietzsche refers to is not found in these interpretative efforts. Commenting on his *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche refers to the centrality of an “experience” by stating: “Now, seriously, this book is earnest as any other, even if it introduces laughter in the core of the religion.”<sup>12</sup> We may proceed with the *Gay Science* in the same manner for two reasons: first, Nietzsche wrote *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* right after finishing the *Gay Science*. In fact, many issues he developed in *Zarathustra* Nietzsche has already presented in the latter book. Second, laughter itself is one of the issues, and there is a continuity between the two books regarding this concept.

On the significance of laughter and joy in Nietzsche’s book, the interpretative effort of Kathleen Higgins’s *Comic Relief: Nietzsche’s Gay Science* is notable. The author undoubtedly examines Nietzsche’s gay science in light of a fundamental joy toward an “attempt to promote

<sup>10</sup> David B. Allison, *Reading the New Nietzsche: The Birth of Tragedy, The Gay Science, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, and On the Genealogy of Morals*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001. Ruth Abbey, *Nietzsche’s Middle Period*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. Kathleen Higgins, *Comic Relief: Nietzsche’s Gay Science*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000. Monika Langer, *Nietzsche’s Gay Science: Dancing Coherence*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, p. xii.

<sup>11</sup> Idem.

<sup>12</sup> Letter to Malwida von Meysenbug, BVN-1883-404. In <http://www.nietzschesource.org/#eKGWB/BVN-1883,404>

mental resilience,”<sup>13</sup> but at the same time assumes that this joy has common meaning. She insists that the overall project of the gay science should reveal itself as an attempt of relief regarding the pressure of a sad and reactive science, but also seems to conceive of this relief as similar to any other.<sup>14</sup>

According to Higgins, Nietzsche searched in his book for a joyful and lighthearted scientific approach through a release or liberation. Laughter and the comic should work together in order to make the heavy themes he struggled with less terrible: “The book not only encourages but also actually engages its readers in practices of approaching topics flexibility, often doing so by means of humor.”<sup>15</sup> In order to present Nietzsche’s book as a “unified project,” however, Higgins proceeds by an analysis of the structural movement of its themes, and when some passages offer her a chance to think of laughter and humor according to the preface, her account is limited. Even if Higgins’s remarks about the concept of perspectivism in Nietzsche’s book are right, for example, she does not elaborate on its relations to laughter. The notion of such relief does not embrace completely and internally the idea of an “enforcement”; and, it does not point to a very important question about the reason for Nietzsche’s announcement of a “future for laughter”<sup>16</sup> and a “dangerous use”<sup>17</sup> for it.

I believe that the significance and pervasiveness of the problem of laughter barely comes to light. I agree with Peter Gunter, who insists that “Nietzsche’s concept of laughter cannot be understood in splendid isolation from the development of his philosophy.”<sup>18</sup> I suggest that such effort should immediately bring to light strange problems, such as “what does Nietzsche think is funny?”, “why does Nietzsche think this or that is funny?”, “what would look like a Nietzschean humor?”<sup>19</sup> Those questions imply that one does not explain Nietzsche’s laughter, humor, and joyfulness by any other theory of laughter: it is necessary to find out what is Nietzsche’s own theory of laughter.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Kathleen Higgins, *Comic relief: Nietzsche's Gay Science*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000, p. viii.

<sup>14</sup> Idem.

<sup>15</sup> Idem.

<sup>16</sup> GS, §1.

<sup>17</sup> [http://www.nietzschesource.org/#eKGWB/NF-1885,41\[15\]](http://www.nietzschesource.org/#eKGWB/NF-1885,41[15])

<sup>18</sup> Peter A. Gunter, “Nietzschean Laughter,” *The Sewanee Review*, 76 (3): 493-506, 1968, p. 493.

<sup>19</sup> This approach is also seen in other authors, who incorporated laughter and humor as part of their thinking, not as a topic of discussion, but as a living concept which works along reason. See, for example, Lydia Amir, *Humor and the Good Life in Modern Philosophy: Shaftesbury, Hamann, Kierkegaard*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2014.

<sup>20</sup> On this topic, see the important work of John Morreall, who presents a summary of theories of laughter. John Morreall, “A New Theory of Laughter,” *Philosophical Studies* 42 (2): 243-254, 1982.



In addition, all those explanations and comments appeal to a discursive approach, a rational effort, and they suggest that one needs to pay attention to the book's intrinsic coherence. This division between an epistemic dimension and life is far from Nietzsche's ambitions. I suggest that in order to read and understand the *Gay Science* we must have, as Nietzsche himself have warned, "the experience of this book." I argue that what comes first is the experience of a high and elevated feeling; afterwards comes the rational effort; thus, is the will to power that explains reasoning. Consequently, I assume that "gaya scienza" is for Nietzsche a functional concept, more like an affective disposition, or a specific mood that Nietzsche conceives through the will to power's perspective, and which giving it direction, use, and meaning within his philosophy. This is why Nietzsche compares the gay science to an amulet. By doing so Nietzsche indicates intrinsic properties that we cannot ignore: it protects from something, it irradiates some kind of power, and it has a target and a specificity. Moreover, one must have it around one's heart (feeling/body) and neck (reason) at the same time:

This latest type of bad taste needs to be forcefully and thoroughly exorcized; and ultimately, I would like people to put the good amulet of "gai saber" around their hearts and necks to fight it off,—"gay science," to make it germane to Germans.<sup>21</sup>

It is true that the concept of a *gaya scienza* was created among the great European poets from the 13th and 14th centuries, and that it reappears afterwards in various authors. At the end of the middle ages, the troubadours represented adventurous spirits, searching for their beloved ones or muses. Traveling and singing, like gypsies, composing poems and music, and competing for their abilities against other poets, they claimed to have a *gaya scienza*, a gay science or joyful knowledge of life. From these characteristics, we may retain some general features that are important to Nietzsche: an adventurous life; an artistic view of the world; the noble competition; music and rhythm as the leading aspects of poetry. Why are all these features significant for Nietzsche? Because to him science and philosophy must also have those elements in order to naturalize themselves in the will to power. Thinking and philosophizing are activities that should embrace those heroic elements.<sup>22</sup> Then, two concepts are important here. The former, as explained above, is the will to power that must explain the need for a joyful science. The other is

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<sup>21</sup> BGE, §293.

<sup>22</sup> In that sense, Nietzsche writes, "I welcome all the signs of a more virile, warlike age approaching that will above all restore honor to bravery! For it shall pave the way for a higher age and gather the strength that the latter will need one day—the age that will carry heroism into the search of knowledge and wage wars for the sake of thoughts and their consequences" (GS, §283).

the idea of “intellectual conscience,”<sup>23</sup> which is a rigorous scientific caution associated with the thinker’s need to transform himself through his philosophical effort: “knowledge wants to be more than a means.”<sup>24</sup> That is, the philosophical investigation and its results must change and affect the philosopher, leading him to renounce certain concepts and actions to build new ones. Thus, as the philosopher reveals what each concept presupposes, he finds new perspectives of life.

After several questionings of moral values and intense research on various morals, it became clear to Nietzsche that one impulse was constant in all actions and evaluations. Every value, idea, and interpretation express a will to power. We know the will to power in ourselves as a feeling of power. Mainly presented in *Daybreak*<sup>25</sup>, the idea of a feeling of power clarifies what later will be the will to power: happiness, laughter, victory, the feeling of having something done, the achievements, the pleasure when one understands something, dancing, and inebriation—everything that can be translated as an intensity of feeling. In fact, all these moments of life are a will to power communicated to us. As an intensification of power, the will to power indicates what is to be wanted: not the power itself, but the constant intensification of it. Life itself is, to Nietzsche, the plurality of forces qualified as will to power.

However, there are different states and degrees of the will to power. For example, Nietzsche states that “...most people simply do not believe in elevated moods, unless these last for moments only or at most a quarter of an hour ...”<sup>26</sup> The fact that there is a healthy/strong and a sick/weak state of the will to power (which manifests two modes of evaluation, the noble and the slave) indicates a constant play of variations in it. In fact, human beings have several means to achieve high states of the feeling of power, but not every high state is a manifestation of a healthy will to power. For Nietzsche, the narcotic is an example of a sick state of intensification, as it is local, temporary, and demands the repetition of the dose.

W. Müller-Lauter uses the expression “harmony with will to power” to highlight a specific state of a will to power *as* will to power: the state of the will constituted by a constant “elevated mood” that searches an intensification of its force. In Nietzsche’s words: “to be a

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<sup>23</sup> GS, §2. Likewise, Langer argues that the concept of “intellectual conscience” is among the requirements of a gay science.

<sup>24</sup> GS, §123.

<sup>25</sup> D, §18, §23, §65, §113, §128, §140, §176... There are at least 19 sections in which Nietzsche develops the idea of a “feeling of power.”

<sup>26</sup> GS, §288.



single great mood incarnate...a perpetual movement between high and low, the feeling of high and low, a continual sense of ascending stairs and at the same time a sense of resting on clouds.”<sup>27</sup>

In order to understand this, we should notice that the movement of high and low have a third element: the overcoming of resistances. Nietzsche, in fact, defines the will to power as an overcoming of resistances. One of his posthumous writings points that the will to power can only exteriorizes itself through resistances. That is, I achieve a higher state when I overcome a lower one. For example, I cannot expand my abilities or finish a work; both are situations in which I face a resistance. Or, I am sad, I am feeling down or degraded, and this creates a tension inside me. In order to feel better with myself, I need to overcome that lower sensation, overcome the resistance. However, overcoming it is the very feeling of a higher state. The resistance stimulates my will to overcome.

Every form of life searches for an opposition, for something that creates resistance to overcome in order to achieve a higher feeling of power; it fights to be more. It is in overcoming the lower that the higher appears as elevation. A healthy being, then, would live its difficulties or lower states of will to power in order to overcome them. War, as Nietzsche quotes from Heraclitus, “is the mother of all good things.”<sup>28</sup> In this state of affairs, the will to power can act, manifest and reinforce itself, thus producing new possibilities in internal states, new perspectives, and new feelings.

In Nietzsche’s posthumous fragments, a definition of pleasure clarifies this meaning: “Pleasure is nothing but the exciting of the feeling of power through an obstacle (excitation even stronger through barriers and rhythmic resistances), in order to increase it.”<sup>29</sup> Here we have different nouns expressing the same concept of the will to power and the feeling of power associated to it. Pleasure, joy and the increase of power are equivalents; they are the same moment of the process of the will to power. It is also clear that the concept of will to power immediately refers to the overcoming of obstacles. Therefore, when Nietzsche defines the concept of “gay science” as a reward after long and hard seriousness, and when this reward is an intoxication of convalescence, a high feeling of health, an expansion of life, we can easily understand that the gay science is a concept that expresses the logic of will to power.

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<sup>27</sup> GS, §288.

<sup>28</sup> GS, §92. Nietzsche changes the original. Heraclitus, in fragment 53, writes: “war is the father of all.”

<sup>29</sup> [http://www.nietzschesource.org/#eKGWB/NF-1885,35\[15\]](http://www.nietzschesource.org/#eKGWB/NF-1885,35[15])

### 3. The war against the errors of knowledge as a joyful exercise

The gay science is completely necessary for those who want to think and desire as I do.<sup>30</sup> According to Nietzsche, human beings have a strange relation with science. Since humans have created science, they believe it to be special and unique. They think that knowledge is their most precious ability. For Nietzsche, it is nothing but a good opportunity for laugh:

In some remote corner of the universe, poured out and glittering in innumerable solar systems, there once was a star on which clever animals invented knowledge. That was the highest and most mendacious minute of “world history”—yet only a minute.<sup>31</sup>

Nevertheless, Nietzsche assumes that many errors are the basis of human knowledge. He asserts in the famous section 110 of the *Gay Science*, entitled “The origin of knowledge”: Over immense periods of time the intellect produced nothing but errors:...that there are enduring things; that there are identical things; that there are things, kinds of material, bodies; that a thing is what it appears to be; that our will is free; that what is good for me is also good in and for itself.<sup>32</sup>

In his earlier writings, Nietzsche has emphasized this notion of error as the basis of human knowledge, for example, in *On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense*. In this text, the idea of truth as the one and only essence of things disappears in several degrees of metaphors. There is no real thing, and nothing that humans can say about nature can attain to objective truths. Everything is a metaphor of metaphor.

A sufficient example of our error basis is that our knowledge supposes that two moments are equal in order to relate and classify them. Therefore, the basis here is that knowledge must assume that there are equal things in the nature. Although all these errors have a “utilitarian” sense, they remain inaccurate. Moreover, they express a will to power. Nietzsche describes concepts and values as historical creations that emerge under certain circumstances in order to make a type of life endure. A weak type of life, however, needs to be smart in order to overcome others physical strength and power and achieve higher states. With this, a weak type could win through reasoning and conviction. Historically, after a long time of use, those inventions

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<sup>30</sup> [http://www.nietzschesource.org/#eKGWB/NF-1883,17\[88\]](http://www.nietzschesource.org/#eKGWB/NF-1883,17[88])

<sup>31</sup> TL, §1.

<sup>32</sup> GS, §110.

appear to be pure; they become a second nature. Concepts that were born from irrational impulses transform into a second nature, and covering their tracks, they promote themselves and become the ground of problematic conceptions of humanity, nature, politics, and so on. That is why Nietzsche define them as errors.

What is Nietzsche's intent in defining them as errors? It is necessary to notice that this naming has evaluative background. Error, in philosophy, has a long and problematic history, and when Nietzsche evokes this idea against the very rational core of philosophy, this assertion is significant. It is like a trick game with the philosophical type who cannot stand the presence of an error. Despising or laughing at these erratic concepts, Nietzsche exposes his evaluative ground as a philosophic gesture. Nevertheless, the critic of errors demands a new posture. The conception of errors leads to a posture, which forces the philosopher to renounce the use and the veneration of those errors. That is why Nietzsche claims, in section 109 of the *Gay Science*:

Let us beware of thinking that the world is a living being. ...Let us beware even of believing that the universe is a machine; ...Let us beware of assuming in general and everywhere anything as elegant as the cyclical movements of our neighboring stars; ...Let us beware of saying that there are laws in nature.<sup>33</sup>

I suggest that renouncing errors and the research of errors are, for Nietzsche, a procedure full of difficulties, resistances, obstacles, and Nietzsche realized that in fighting and overcoming them he could exercise a joyous science. At the same time, making fun of them is identical with the exercise of power, that is, an increase of feeling and the philosophic or evaluative critique. What normally would one feel when all the concepts that used to organize one's reality are considered errors? Besides, why should anyone seek for new errors, and distrust everything, if the feeling involved is nothing but nausea? Nietzsche proposes that we make gay science, I suggest, in searching for elevated moods by overcoming the resistances within the errors that constitute our perspectives. Moreover, laughing in a philosophical manner means changing the need for reasoning for the feeling of power and evaluation, making thereby laughter a strong argument. In this way, the thinker must find joy in his critical enterprise and actively search for difficulties and obstacles in order to increase his feeling of power; at the same time, he builds a particular taste, an evaluative scale as well as a form of expression. Science, says Nietzsche, cannot be a sad endeavor; it cannot lead us to a cold and indifferent posture, nor to pessimism.

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<sup>33</sup> GS, §109.

Science is a passion, and when it shows painful relations within us and with the world, when it puts difficult tasks in front of us, it is then that it reveals “its immense capacity for making new galaxies of joy flare up.”<sup>34</sup> This is why the death of God has great consequences for Nietzsche:

The consequences for *ourselves*, are the opposite of what one might expect—not at all sad and gloomy, but much more like a new barely describable type of light, happiness, relief, amusement, encouragement, dawn... Indeed, at hearing the new that “the old god is dead,” we philosophers and “free spirits” feel illuminated by a new dawn...<sup>35</sup>

Science is no longer a means for virtue, a quest for an ultimate truth, nor the salvation of the soul. The thinker must feel himself as a satyr, not a saint, and happily destroy everything that makes life weak and narrow; and he should do it as his most funny game. For Nietzsche, finally, laughter, joy, cheerfulness, are the elements of a new science, they are the components of thoughts that renounce trust in errors, and by overcoming these errors, this new science makes the whole body stronger in order to laugh again even more profoundly at everything that could undermine the feeling of power, which is life itself.

A joyful science means that the dark and painful work of demystification, the demolition of beliefs, systems, solid fundamentals, are actually a fount of joy. This is more a transformation of mood and disposition towards those destructions than a science that writes with jokes. In this sense, Nietzsche has not only offered a means for being a good warrior against those errors and metaphysical concepts, but also a means of getting stronger in each effort or task, opening up perspectives and enforcing an evaluative posture. It is against ancient habits of thought and veneration of certain concepts that, according to Nietzsche, is possible to associate joy with knowledge. The great joke is the metaphysical one: God is dead. There humor and reason are working together in order to free themselves from sadness and dogmatism. In this sense, the needs of life are not exterior to scientific efforts; those needs must guide and build our concepts. Nietzsche notes in section 324 of *The Gay Science*:

“Life as a means to knowledge”—with this principle in one’s heart one can live not only boldly but even gaily, and laugh gaily, too. And who knows how to laugh anyway and live well if does not first know a good deal about the war and victory?<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> GS, §12.

<sup>35</sup> GS, §343.

<sup>36</sup> GS, §324.

#### 4. Concluding Remarks

As far as the confines of this article permit, I conclude that the concept of gay science, understood as a relation between the exercise of a philosophical strength and the result of its critical effort (the elevated mood), creates a circuit of empowerment. As soon as the thinker can laugh at errors that constitute knowledge and general science, and when the critique is an effect of joy, he achieves not only a good disposition towards the chaotic nature of things, but also opens himself to the affectivity of the will to power as nature. The gay science is then a response to the idea that an awful truth should be “bad,” because it may makes us laugh. The opposite is more prosperous, the truth that makes us laugh is valuable. Therefore, the concept of gay science reveals a change of one’s will, a transformation of one’s evaluation and interpretation. It is, in fact, the turning point of Nietzsche’s intellectual journey as he abandons both Schopenhauer’s philosophy and scientific positivism. Gay science celebrates a new path and the new possibility of knowledge. To those, then, who fight against every ideal, who guard themselves from every “truth,” who resist any final word about things, and who search as well new idols to destroy and new galaxies to explore, Nietzsche recommends this “consolation”<sup>37</sup>: laughter, the core element of a gay science. The victorious skepticism achieves a purpose even more consistent than the mere skeptical Pyrrhonian suspension of judgment: “Perhaps it’s that, when nothing else from today has a future, our laughter is the one thing that does!”<sup>38</sup> The philosopher and freethinker can only feel himself as a traveler, a homeless, who does not experience any firm ground to step on, any stable reality to believe in. However, he has laughter as his *milieu* and method, a light heart and a dancing soul that withstand any sadness and pessimism that could ruin the task of questioning and thinking in a consistent manner.

The meaning of the following quotation, taken from a section added in 1887 together with Book V to the *Gay Science*’s second edition, presupposes, as far as I understand, this intrinsic and specific experience of a joyful scientific posture, embodied by laughter, which Nietzsche describes in several moments of his work through various forms. However, for those who have a Nietzschean laughter, it is clear enough:

Among Europeans today there is no lack of those who are entitled to call themselves

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<sup>37</sup> BT, Preface, §7: “You should for the time being learn the art of consolation in this life: you should learn to laugh, my young friends, even if you wish to remain thoroughly pessimistic.”

<sup>38</sup> BGE, §223.

homeless in a distinctive and honorable sense: it is to them that I especially commend my secret wisdom and *gaya scienza*. For their fate is hard, their hopes are uncertain; it is quite a feat to devise some comfort for them—but what avail? We children of the future. How could we be at home in this today? We feel disfavor for all ideals that might lead one to feel at home even in this fragile, broken time of transition; as for its “realities,” we do not believe that they will last. The ice that still supports people today has become very thin; the wind that brings the thaw is blowing; we ourselves who are homeless constitute a force that breaks open ice and other all too thin “realities.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> GS, § 377.



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