Chapter One

On Some Fundamental Themes of
Nietzsche’s Gaya Scienza

The name “Nietzsche” seems to be irredeemably associated with the notion of will to power, and not even so much with the notion of will as with the notion of power pure and simple. The most recent interpretation sees this as a sort of metaphysical commentary on the fait accompli, as a morality of conquest—and then everything else follows: the laboratories and their unspeakable experiments, the suppression of degenerates, foreigners, and the elderly, the crematory ovens, the criminals and the nuclear weapons; everything and everyone can now lay claim to the spirit of the father of modern immoralism: the typical superman is a captain of industry, an explorer, a great cardiologist, chemist, engineer, a benefactor of humanity, passing as the product of the professor of “vital power.” “Who then is Nietzsche?” ask the innocent, and the Larousse responds: His aphorisms have had a great influence on the theorists of German racism. In vain, it seems, in vain the 377th aphorism of the Gaya Scienza clamors with a distant, all-too-distant voice: We who are home- less are too manifold and mixed racially in our descent, being “modern men,” and consequently do not feel tempted to participate in the mendacious racial self-admiration and racial indecency that parades in Germany today as a sign of a German way of thinking and that is doubly false and obscene among the people of the “historical sense.”

As this new edition of the Gaya Scienza is presented to the public—the third since those words first appeared in the French language—we ask ourselves whether, in light of recent events, it is appropriate to verify the enduring value of such a thought. Certainly a spirit who single-handedly constitutes the silent demands of an age acquires more or less “importance” insofar as conventional wisdom attributes to him the inspiration for aberrant tendencies: the erroneous interpretation of the “overman,” deliberately isolated
from its corollary, the doctrine of eternal return; the death of God, the nothing is true, everything is permitted—which has been a stale slogan in the ethical and social domain for the last half-century—this in the context of political machinations which, if one argued for the culpability of every word, spoken or written, would only ever be the inevitable ransom for a spiritual moment lived in the exclusive felicity of a soul carried to the point of incandescence; the retreat, the isolation, but also the compromising of a vision's unity, this is what would allow the appropriate extrication of the experience that bears the name of Nietzsche, both from its own historical context as well as the misappropriations to which it was fatally subjected by posterity.

The first words of the above-cited passage seem to define clearly the intelligible aspect of the first lesson to be drawn from this experience: “We who are homeless—as modern men—are too manifold and mixed.” In its most everyday sense, as far as we are concerned, we who are reading it now. Too manifold and mixed, that is to say, too aligned with everything that has ever lived, fixed firmly in several places; in a word, too rich and hence too free to be forced to alienate this richness and freedom for a belonging concretely determined by space and time, and therefore having such a polyvalence of feeling that no undertaking limited to a concrete interest could exhaust our power of expenditure; this, according to Nietzsche, is what constitutes “modernity.” But lest one misunderstand him: this is not a question of some vague cosmopolitanism; modern means a previously unattained aptitude for sympathy by virtue of which the mind enters into immediate contact not only with what seems to be the most foreign, but also with what was formerly the most bygone world, the most remote past. Conquest of a new possibility for living! We homeless ones; toward what place do they aspire, where then do they in fact live?

On the mountains, isolated, untimely, in past or future centuries; and for Nietzsche this is the same thing: at the apex of knowledge, the mind demands for itself every lived moment of history, identifying the ego with history's different types as with so many versions of itself. Here the vis contemplativa will have been absorbed by will to power, for this will has no other goal than its innermost necessity: to reintegrate this universe which, in its multiplicity, wants to be and remain identical to itself.

In terms of its “modernity” the mind is in the same situation, the same exile of its will, that culminates in the adventure of knowledge lived by the “reborn” humanists, particularly the German humanists of the Reformation that Faustus, the Fortunate doctor—whose fortune is to re-live his life—famously incarnates. For these humanists nourished by the Platonic notion of recollection, knowledge [connaissance] of the past—co-nascence [co-nais-sance] in the past—which ought to deliver the secret of the future [l’avenir], is doubled by the theological conflict of freedom and serfdom [serf-arbitre], of human freedom and divine grace, of damnation and election. If I A
Elected, everything is forgiven in advance. If I am damned, everything is still permitted to me here below. What's the difference? Eternity. Mutatis mutandis, for Nietzsche the atheist, inheritor of the simultaneously Protestant and Platonic humanist speculation (with its components: nostalgia for Antiquity, attraction to the Roman world, contradictory respect for the Neronian Papacy, “Caesar-Christ,” etc.), knowing whether the knowledge of the past assures me eternity remains the obscure theme of his thought, verifiable on the different planes of both the philosophy of history and the doctrine of the eternal return of an identical world. For Nietzsche the “modern” world, with its social conflicts and its nihilistic morality of progress, is only an interlude of shadows just as the Scholastic world was for the humanists: it is on the other side of this interlude that the sun to come [à venir] will rise from the deciphered past. The dilemma freedom—or serfdom? is transparent in the expressions: “will to power,” “death of God,” “nothing is true, everything is permitted,” as is its resolution in the sense of predestination. Such is the necessity of the eternal return (all is forgiven: the ultimate meaning of Zarathustra’s blessing). For humanism (Faust), knowledge, gnosis, finds itself under the sign of the Serpent which promises with its polytheistic prediction: eritis sicut dii, the eternalization of man through knowledge. The day will come when the will of the “murderer of God” will receive its pardon—that is to say when the Serpent will symbolize both the forgetting of knowledge and the consummation of the eternal return of all things. Damnation will come from this “historical sense” that overwhelms modern man because he withdraws from the past, and thus from his original possibilities, from his future; in other words damnation will come from the nihilism of the one who cannot pardon the crime of crimes. And we will see that to be modern, for Nietzsche, amounts to being set free, by the very knowledge of history, from the rectilinear progression of humanity—the irreversible “dialectical” march of historical materialism—in order to attempt to live according to a representation of the circle where not only is everything forgiven, but what's more where everything is paid back—where the notion of grace is reintegrated with myth, even as the possibility of myth is confused with grace.

I will now turn back to one of Nietzsche’s texts that precedes the publication of The Gay Science by twenty years, the famous Untimely Meditation of 1876 entitled: On the Advantages and Disadvantages of History for Life, in order to retrieve three key notions: the instant, forgetting, and the will, this triad out of which it is precisely knowledge that will be born, and then we will perhaps better understand how from the science of the past one comes, in the feeling of the future, not merely to a knowledge, but to a joyful knowledge [gai savoir], a gaya scienza that coincides with a recuperation of the past, but whose joy is the rediscovery not of a properly historical past, but of the nonhistorical passage of the future in the past, of the present in the eternal.
The pretext for this Untimely Meditation of 1876 is the danger of the hypertrophy of the historical sense, and thus of the obsessive fear of the past, a specifically German problem, quite relative to the time; nevertheless what interests us here is the very paradoxical way in which Nietzsche is led from now on to develop his conception of existence—particularly to discredit the “historical sense” of the past—under the pretext of liberating the present from it, while it is apparently by a positive notion of forgetting—actually by an unconscious remembering—that he seeks to reestablish, on the plane of culture, an even more immediate contact with the most distant past. As a point of departure for this Untimely Meditation Nietzsche chooses the way that the instant is lived differently by the animal, the child, and the adult human being. If the animal, who at once forgets and for whom every moment really dies, sinks back into night and fog and is extinguished for ever, suggests the first image of an unhistorical life, the child offers the adult the moving spectacle of a life that still has nothing to repudiate, because it plays in blissful blindness between the hedges of past and future. For the adult, on the other hand, a moment, now here and then gone, nothing before it came, again nothing after it has gone, nonetheless returns as a ghost and disturbs the peace of a later moment. A leaf flutters from the scroll of time, floats away—and suddenly floats back again and falls into the man’s lap. Then the man says: “I remember.” Torn away from the serene blindness of childhood that conceals forgetting, he comes to understand the phrase: this was, suitable for calling him back to what in fact constitutes his existence “an imperfectum that can never be perfected . . . and death at last brings the desired forgetting, by that act it at the same time extinguishes the present and all being and therewith sets the seal on the knowledge that being is only an uninterrupted has-been, a thing that lives by negating, consuming and contradicting itself.” This is a phrase that already contains and prepares Nietzsche’s future and final doctrine in germinal form, as it is presented in the following proposition: “In the case of the smallest or of the greatest happiness, however, it is always the same thing that makes happiness happiness: the ability to forget or, expressed in more scholarly fashion, the capacity to feel unhistorically during its duration. He who cannot sink down on the threshold of the moment and forget all the past, who cannot stand balanced like a goddess of victory on the threshold of the instant, on a single point, without growing dizzy and afraid, will never know what happiness is—worse, he will never do anything to make others happy . . . Forgetting is essential to action of any kind, just as not only light but darkness too is essential for the life of everything organic. . . . Thus: it is possible to live almost without memory, and to live happily moreover, as the animal demonstrates; but it is altogether impossible to live at all without forgetting.” And, in effect, when the will is liberated from the “historical sense,” it will be identified with this very thing that lives only through its own contradiction; thus in the lived instant it is no longer identified as the ghost of a later instant, but as serenity, no
longer blind, but ludic; the universe itself will no longer appear as an imperfection, but rather will assume the characteristics of a child that plays. In sum:

“There is a degree of sleeplessness, of rumination, of the historical sense, which is harmful and ultimately fatal to the living thing, whether this living thing be a man or a people or a culture. . . . To determine this degree . . . at which the past has to be forgotten . . . one would have to know exactly . . . what the plastic power of a man, a people, a culture is: I mean by plastic power the capacity to develop out of oneself in one’s own way, to transform and incorporate into oneself what is past and foreign.”11 There would thus be a way of existing both within and outside of history. As for a “historical sense” determined at one moment in history, it establishes a fallacious relation of the lived instant with both the historically reflected past and the time left to live; if it exalts the past, it empties the present; if it establishes the tasks for the present as following from those accomplished in the past, it dishonors the past as it reduces the fortunes of the present: for a state of consciousness does not allow one to judge what was previously accomplished in the unconscious, nor can someone ever act [pas plus que l’homme ne saurait jamais agir] in the present if he did not suspend the consciousness of his own past; and, in effect, what constitutes history are essentially acts or works of individuals who proceeded spontaneously by blindness or injustice, at the very moment that they created or acted, thus by forgetting; history is therefore composed exclusively of acts and creations that arise from forgetting, from whence follows a close relation between forgetting and the creative will. History actually teaches the contrary of what the “historical” mind projects into it: not a more and more conscious projection of man, but the uninterrupted return of the same inexhaustible dispositions through the course of successive generations; to understand history in this sense, counter to the science that proclaims its fiat veritas pereat vita,12 is precisely to attain to a life outside of history, thanks to the impetus of the notion of return; what was possible once ought to be possible once again and far from finding in this a motive for idleness or sterility, man ought to begin for the sake of beginning; what he will have willed will have always been the accomplishment of what he thought he did not will, for since he did not escape from this existence by consciously wanting to escape, this existence wants to make him forget the moment to come in order to unerringly rediscover the integrity that characterizes every work or significant action [action d’envergure]. Here the suprahistorical forces par excellence are displayed, art and religion which, diverting the glance from becoming, carries it to everything that gives existence an eternal character and an identical meaning. Science, which wants nothing to do with the eternal nor the existent, nothing except becoming, the historical, can only detest art and religion—these eternalizing forces, these forces of forgetting—the very negation of science—in which past, present, and future are blended together.

This conception, at the antipodes of every philosophy of history that stems from Hegel, interests us here only to the extent that we can later see
Nietzsche, in his own case, capitalizing on this notion of a life outside of history, and confirming with his own life this thought counter to the historical current, ultimately finding there his own fatality. If the possibilities of departed humanity are always valid in every individual, at every instant of history, then for Nietzsche it is a matter of waging a merciless war against everything that wants to smother the continually possible in man: both in moral utilitarianism (which implies a mercantilism) and in that scientific organization of social life that the Hegelian heritage draws as a consequence of the agony of Christianity. On the other hand, because in our world Christianity itself is a beautiful piece of the ancient world for which it was the exit, lifting his gaze beyond two thousand years of Christian morality Nietzsche regards it as an access-way or path of return to Antiquity. Does he not say in another passage from that Untimely Meditation of 1876: If we were really no more than the heirs of Antiquity . . . even if we ourselves decide to take it decidedly seriously in all its grandeur only in order to see in it our unique and characteristic privilege, yet we would nonetheless be obliged to ask whether it really was our eternal destiny to be pupils of fading Antiquity: at some time or other we might be permitted gradually to set our goal higher and more distant, some time or other we ought to be allowed to claim credit for having developed the spirit of the Alexandrian-Roman culture so nobly and fruitfully—among other means through our universal history—that we might now as a reward be permitted to set ourselves the even mightier task of striving to get behind and beyond this Alexandrian world, of aspiring to something more temporally remote in order to seek our models in the original ancient Greek world of greatness, naturalness and humanity. But there we also discover the reality of an essentially unhistorical culture and one which is nonetheless, or rather on that account, an inexpressibly richer and more vital culture. One finds in this passage Nietzsche's persistent nostalgia which, following Hölderlin, always opposed him to his age and that in fact inspires this anti-Hegelian and suprahistorical conception according to which the world, instead of marching toward some sort of final salvation, rediscovers itself at each moment of its history fulfilled and at its end. Thus the past and the present are one, with all their diversity identical in all that is typical and, as the omnipresence of imperishable types, the universe is a motionless structure of a value that cannot alter and a significance that is always the same. First enunciated on the philological and historical plane of culture, this paradoxical attempt to live in the countercurrent of history by recuperating the most distant past through forgetting precipitates Nietzsche into his decisive experience. The stronger the innermost roots of a man's nature, the more readily will he be able to assimilate and appropriate the things of the past, and the most powerful and tremendous nature would be characterized by the fact that it would know no boundary at all at which the historical sense began to overwhelm it; it would draw to itself and incorporate into itself all the past, its own and that most foreign to it, and as it were transform it into blood. Twenty years later the problem of the “historical sense” and of the life
“outside of history” is so bound up with his own existence that he writes in The Gay Science: Anyone who manages to experience the history of humanity as a whole as his own history will feel in an enormously generalized way all the grief of an invalid who thinks of health, of an old man who thinks of the dreams of his youth, of a lover deprived of his beloved, of the martyr whose ideal is perishng, of the hero on the evening after a battle that has decided nothing but brought him wounds and the loss of his friend. But if one endured, if one could endure this immense sum of grief of all kinds while yet being the hero who, as the second day of battle breaks, welcomes the dawn as his fortune, being a person whose horizon encompasses thousands of years past and future, being the heir of all the nobility of all past spirit—an heir with a sense of obligation, the most aristocratic of old nobles and at the same time the first of a new nobility—the like of which no age has yet seen or dreamed of; if one could burden one’s soul with all of this—the oldest, the newest, the losses, hopes, conquests, and the victories of humanity; if one could contain all this in one soul and condense it into a single feeling—this would surely have to result in a happiness that humanity has not yet known: the happiness of a god full of power and love, full of tears and laughter, a happiness that, like the sun in the evening, continually bestows its inexhaustible riches, pouring them into the sea, feeling richest, as the sun does, only when even the poorest fisherman is still rowing with golden oars! This godlike feeling would then be called—humaneness.

But this condensation of humanity that is bound up in a single soul can only be realized in the forgetting of a “historically” determined present, in a forgetting for the benefit of which the resources of the soul are liberated, resources that constitute its plastic force of assimilation; thus, in the project of a return toward the original world of ancient Greece, Nietzsche makes an appeal to “nonhistorical” images, subjacent to their rational elaborations, and thus to myth; this scholar, he for whom science has attained a degree of insomnia, attributes to forgetting the positive function of a sub-coming [sous-venir] all the more fruitful since it is necessarily “untimely” [inactuel], all the more actualizing [actualisant] since it acts in the unconscious. One could speak here of lived “culture,” but this term is only a mediocre translation of the troubling fate of the spirit that says to itself: I am many. The abundance of knowledge “converted into blood” increases along with the spiritual faculty of being other, which does not require an exclusive, normative truth: “It wasn’t I! Not I! But a god through me.” The wonderful art and gift of creating gods previously coincided with a plurality of norms: one god was not considered a negation of some other god, nor blasphemy against him; perhaps the Serpent with its sicut dii insinuated this greatest advantage of polytheism. And to the extent that knowledge thereby develops the power of metamorphosis, a life lived once and for all

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suddenly appears more impoverished than a single instant rich with many ways of existing; this is why a single instant thus charged, thus sub-comed to [sous-venu] in the suspension of the consciousness of the present, suffices to reverse the course of a life. Hence the illuminative character of the Gaya Scienza whose many aphorisms testify to the moments of an ecstatic serenity: because from then on he had the feeling (formulated seven years later at the height of his madness) that at bottom I am every name in history of losing his own identity in the very certitude of finding it again, multiplied, in the identical permanence of the universe; it may be that similar instants are reserved to him precisely by virtue of their familiarity, intense to the point of strangeness, as the manifest proof of the cyclic nature of existence; thus he sub-comed to [sous-venu] what is to come for him, sub-coming [sous-venu] precisely in the forgetting of the coming moment. Similar moments are expressed in the following aphorism: What would you say if some day or night a demon were to steal after you 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 more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and every sigh and everything unutterably small or great will have to 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 is turned upside down 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 possession of you, it would change you as you are or perhaps crush you. The question in each and every thing, “Do you desire this once more and innumerable times more?” would lie upon your actions as the greatest weight. Or how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life to crave nothing more fervently than this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal?

A passage which, in its parabolic form, is hardly capable of rational elucidation, because this is not its object: the eternal life that recovers forgetting. The ego grasps something here that it cannot be reminded of: that life that it has already lived innumerable times. If it has forgotten this life, that is because it has lived it in all of its details, which are exactly like those here and now. But, because the ego has lived it in an identical way, when it relives it again, there will be nothing new in it. And because of this, the ego will no longer be able to remember not only having already lived, but also having already willed—even though it sub-comes [sous-venir] to the very eternity of this willed life. And nevertheless the eternity of the will rises up here in the temporality of the instant like a new event—to answer the question: Would

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you will all of this once again?—and then the affirmative response bears “this eternal confirmation.” But here again the demon’s words raise the least interval up to the “once and for all”: in such a way that this question would also have been posed countless times. And because the eternity of the will is situated only beyond Lethe,” and because one cannot both will again and be

iv. Because the eternal decision and the choice of destiny are made only on the other side of the Lethe, one does not know how to remember immediately, Plato would say here. And it seems that the parable of the heaviest weight here inverts and reflects, like a mirror, the essential scene of the choice of destiny by the souls of the deceased at the threshold of their reincarnation, as it is depicted in the myth of Er in the Tenth Book of Plato’s Republic: at the end of a cycle of a thousand years, passed either in celestial beatitudes or in infernal expiations, according to their merits, the souls of the deceased are instructed to choose a new destiny and in order to do that are reassembled before the three Fates, Lachesis, Clotho, and Atropos, daughters of Necessity and weavers of the destinies of which each one sings: Lachesis the past, Clotho the present, Atropos the future; but, for the deceased there is first “an immediate obligation” to go before Lachesis—thus toward the Fate that figures the past, for it is in the past—on the knees of Lachesis—that the lots are drawn that correspond to the types of existences that may be chosen: “This is the speech of Necessity’s maiden daughter, Lachesis. Souls that live a day, this is the beginning of another death—bringing cycle for the mortal race. A demon will not select you, but you will choose a demon. Let him who gets the first lot make the first choice of a life to which he will be bound by necessity.... The blame belongs to him who chooses; god is blameless.” “He said that this surely was a sight worth seeing: how each of the several souls chose a life. For it was pitiable, laughable, and wonderful to see. For the most part the choice was made according to the habituation of their former life.” (This is precisely the: Would you will all of this once again? of the Nietzschean parable!) .... “When all the souls had chosen lives, in the same order as the lots they had drawn, they went forward to Lachesis. And she sent with each the demon he had chosen as a guardian of the life and a fulfiller of what was chosen. The demon first led the soul to Clotho—under her hand as it turned the whirling spindle—thereby ratifying the fate it had drawn and chosen. After touching her, he next led it to the spinning of Atropos, thus making the threads irreversible. And from there, without turning around, they went under Necessity’s throne. And, having come out through it, when the others had also come through, all made their way through terrible stifling heat to the plain of Lethe (“Forgetting”). For it was barren of trees and all that naturally grows on earth. Then they made their camp, for evening was coming on, by the river of Ameles (“carelessness”) whose water no vessel can contain. Now it was a necessity for all to drink a certain measure of the water, but those who were not saved by prudence drank more than the measure. As he drank, each forgot everything. When they had gone to sleep and it was midnight, there came thunder and an earthquake; and they were suddenly carried from there, each in a different way, up to their birth, shooting like stars.” Plato, Republic, 2nd Edition, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1991), pp. 300, 302–303. [Klossowski cites from the French translation by Léon Robin.]

This myth—quite familiar to Nietzsche—would in this sense clarify his notion of forgetting, more specifically the parable of the heaviest weight that, in the necessity of freely willing the eternal return, we must find again hic et nunc—like recrossing the Lethe—the moment of the choice of our destiny, made outside of present time (“outside of history”),
already living, the parable of the heaviest weight is presented to the understanding as an *aporia:* if one sees here only the coincidence of extreme despair and extreme hope, the ultimate curse and blessing, the vertigo of existence overcoming the mind, as the mind recovers the extreme point of vertigo, following the example of "a goddess of victory on the threshold of the instant, on a single point, growing neither dizzy nor afraid" whose image it projects; as principle of every event, it [the eternity of the will] creates out of this very vertigo to which it attains and that it in some way conquers; and ultimately, when it speaks a sentence exclusive of every creation: *there will be nothing new in this relived life,* it forms, in order to conform to it, the image of this demon that reveals to it its law, the image of the hourglass in which it is reversed . . . for the mind identifying itself in its eternity with the law of the temporal circle where the past and the present necessarily coincide, turns back upon itself in the instant, but as the imperative question that its own eternity addresses to it: by virtue of which the ego, as a willing and responsible being, finds itself instructed to fulfill its destiny as if it were *not already* fulfilled by the sole fact of existing; if I do not freely choose the reiteration (seemingly incomprehensible and absurd) of my actions that are already accomplished many times over, I will have ceased to be myself as master of my own secret, as an incarnation of this sovereign law, without however ceasing to act necessarily as its supreme confirmation: I can only be myself by freely willing my necessarily relived life. But the law of the eternal return abolishes the dilemma at the very moment that it poses it again: not responsible for being reiterated, lost, and immediately found again, the ego at each moment again becomes responsible for willing itself again as it has necessarily always been and necessarily always will be—its free decision will never have exhausted the eternity of its being whose circular movement will always bring back the imperative: *Will yourself!* in order to abolish the moment to come. And nevertheless the question that everything poses to the subject: *Would you still will all of this innumerable times?* must be answered by me, insofar as I am an other; for by virtue of this overwhelming law, I no longer resent *gravity,* I attach less importance to the pretense for my actions, I no longer take my own casualness seriously. . . . In this way the eternalization of the ego, in which the aspiration to eternity wants itself to be explained by a cyclical conception of being, amounts to rationalizing an ecstatic instant inexplicable by nature which, in itself, eliminates through the identification of lived time with eternity every other communicable expression except the image of the circle: a late fragment composed dur-

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guided by our “Demon.” For in order to have drunk only “moderately” from the water of the river “Amelis,” both the faculty of “recollection” that grounds re-cognition and also the anxiousness for willing the accomplishment of this “new” destiny—for Nietzsche, the same—are required of us.
ing the time of the *Revaluation of All Values* (1885) says it again: “in effect willing the universe such as it was and such as it is, re-willing it, for ever, for eternity, shouting insatiably da capo—not only to himself but to the whole play and spectacle, and not only to a spectacle but at bottom to him who needs precisely this spectacle—and who makes it necessary because again and again he needs himself—and makes himself necessary—What? Wouldn’t this be—*circulus vitiosus deus*?”

When the spectacle of the surf at the edge of the sea shows him in the eager movement of the waves—filled with the lust for buried treasures—the very nature of the will as his own secret: Thus live waves—thus live we who will! was this very secret not in the “as if it were a question of attaining something!” whereas here is nothing but this eager movement, nothing but this lust for buried treasures; in effect nothing but this will to collect oneself in the coming and going of the waves: the soul regains sovereignty over itself precisely through the proclamation of a law of the identical return of all things; it is seen here living outside of history in the fabulous society of waves: Dance as you like, roaring with overweening pleasure and malice—or dive again, pouring your emeralds down into the deepest depths, and throw your infinite white mane of foam and spray over them: Everything suits me, for everything suits you so well, and I am so well disposed toward you for everything; how could I think of betraying you? For—mark my word!—I know you and your secret, I know your kind! You and I—are we not of one kind?—You and I—do we not have one secret?” And this secret—the very lesson of the *Gaya Scienza*—is that this glorification of motion for motion’s sake destroys the notion of any sort of end of existence and exalts the useless presence of being in the absence of every end: an error of pretexts by virtue of which life “wills the misery of lived being,” the human species declines, but “the instinct for conservation” always creates something out of it appropriate to the preservation of the vertigo of being, to the anguish of an existence without purpose; but if pretexts have always functioned to hide the uselessness of existence (as though it were a question of achieving something), only religious symbols as well as artistic simulacra could explain man’s adherence to the uselessness of being.

The greatest recent event, he says at the beginning of the Fifth Book of the *Gay Science*—that “God is dead,” that the belief in the Christian God has become unbelievable—is already beginning to cast its first shadows over Europe. For the few at least, whose eyes—the suspicion in whose eyes is strong and subtle enough for this spectacle, some sun seems to have set and some ancient and profound trust has been turned into doubt; to them our old world must appear daily more like evening, more mistrustful, stranger, “older.” But in essence one can say: The event itself is far too great, too distant, too remote from the multitude’s capacity for comprehension even for the tidings of it to be thought of as having arrived as yet. Much less
may one suppose that many people know as yet what this event really means—and how much must collapse now that this faith has been undermined because it was built upon this faith, propped up by it, grown into it; for example, the whole of our European morality. And further on: As we thus reject the Christian interpretation and condemn its “meaning” as counterfeit, Schopenhauer’s question immediately comes to us in a terrifying way: does existence have any meaning at all? It will require a few centuries before this question can even be heard completely and in its full depth. Nevertheless it is in the death of God, the event of events, proven in the parable of the Madman to be the crime of crimes, that the decisive moment of the will comes to be situated in the circular necessity of being; there on the contrary the event in some way emerges from forgetting as a rewilled action: for men this deed is still more distant from them than the most distant stars—and yet they have done it themselves! And so for Nietzsche, nihilism, following upon the historical situation of the “agony of Christianity,” can only be overcome by taking account of the will as a sacrilegious act: God is dead . . . and we have killed him! . . . What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: who will wash this blood from our hands? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? The notion of overhumanity means nothing if one isolates it from the context in which nihilism must be taken as sacrilege: the overman announces itself as a new maturity of the spirit returned to the without possible end where the fall outside of the human and the flight beyond seem to coincide, they are indiscernible; it is even unclear what the fact of the will should resolve and surpass. The freedom where the murderer of God finds himself again (moral nihilism), because it follows from the suppression of the Decalogue (of the you ought), is immediately reversed into a necessary blindness where the ego survives only if something is imposed upon it again: you ought, the you ought to will.—Will what? Will nothingness! The simple situation of the West’s fate: unconsciously willing, because humanity does not know how to will nothing for the sake of nothing, while it abandons itself to nothingness in its powerlessness to will. (And Nietzsche, who elsewhere denounces the mystique of nothingness, speaks here of the wretched nooks and crannies where our most intelligent contemporaries energetically lose themselves, in the petty aesthetic creeds, such as Parisian naturalism . . . or in nihilism, following the St. Petersburg model, meaning the belief in unbelief even to the point of martyrdom.) On the other hand he sees the consequences of nihilism in the general feeling of emptiness and its compensation, the need for excitement, that characterize

vii. Ibid., §357, p. 308, translation modified.
the modern world.) The reaction that Nietzsche is trying to formulate against nihilism, after having raised it to the conscious formulation of a historical situation, finds its motivating force not only in the notion of death, but in the putting to death of God, as a sacrificial act of a sacrilegious will, from the moment that the will rediscovers the integrity of being as a reintegration of its sovereignty; it is by acquiescing to the very movement that carries the ego to the deepest pit (where the death of God and deicide merge) and that brings it back to the highest summit that the will is affirmed in an ultimate act, in the moment when the you must will, passing into a willing itself as itself, attains to: I am as I always was and always will be. But this reintegration of the sovereignty of being in the statement I am is not conceived here in the sense of an accidental ego who utters it to the exclusion of everything else, like that of Max Stirner, the post-Hegelian who proclaimed the pure and simple assumption of nothingness by the ego proper: I have based my cause upon nothing. Thus if Nietzsche wants to give to the nihilism of fate, to vulgar atheism, the pathetic tone of the deicide proclaimed by the Madman, he is not trying to promote nothing for the sake of nothing, nor negation for the sake of negation, but rather the acquiescence to being that the moral God of Christianity, according to him, granted only to a utilitarian alienation, an alienation of the richness of existence by morality (for Nietzsche synonymous with greed); and the destruction of the Christian morality has as its goal not license in the sense given it by vulgar atheism, the rejection of Christianity does not aim to overcome a religion of suffering with a passion for existence, but through a negotiation where passion, reduced to pain, reclaims salvation as the only misery. We are, in a word—and let this be our word of honor!—good Europeans, the heirs of Europe, the rich, overjoyed, but also overly obligated heirs of thousands of years of European spirit. As such, we have also outgrown Christianity and are averse to it—precisely because we have grown out of it, because our ancestors were Christians who in their Christianity were uncompromisingly upright: for their faith they willingly sacrificed possessions and position, blood and fatherland. We—do the same. For what? For our unbelief? For every kind of unbelief? No, you know better than that, friends! The hidden yes in you is stronger than all nos and maybes that afflict you and your age like a disease; and when you have to embark on the sea, you emigrants, you, too, are compelled to this by—a faith!

If, for Nietzsche, the notion of God “consolidates all the hatreds that have ever been directed against life,” the overman, in the parables of Zarathustra, reintegrates the sovereignty of being with the divine only in the mythic sense, thus renewing the myth of an ancient divinity as well as a divinity to come: Dionysus, supreme figure of unceasing possibility, who, through Dionysian pessimism, will free man from his present nihilism.
To what extent can this doctrine be taught? Is it even communicable? To whom could it be? To whom is it addressed today? To whom? Or are these questions already out-of-date? This doctrine is not at all separate from his life, which, in our modern world, attempts to renew the ancient meaning of *fatum*: *I am a destiny.*22 It remains to be seen whether the *amor fati*, a “willed” *fatum*, is not precisely the paradox of the modern consciousness that has “reintegrated” it by “interiorizing” it, the *Edict of Lachesis.*xi This willed *fatum* is incommunicable, inalienable precisely in its “alienation” in the pathological sense of the term. Ever since Nietzsche, for whom this was the only possible “modern” version of the Empedoclean descent into Etna, “mental alienation” has become part of the career of some men of letters and willed indiscretion is thereby subordinated to commercial vulgarization. Today a poet already knows that, if he becomes mad, his sanctification is assured. He knows in advance that: a few thousand years more on the path of the last century!—and the highest intelligence will be manifest in everything that man will do: but precisely the kind of intelligence that is completely stripped of its dignity. It will certainly be necessary to be intelligent, but it will also be so ordinary that a more noble taste will experience this necessity as a vulgarity. And just as a tyranny of truth and science is capable of highly esteeming a lie, so a tyranny of the intelligence is capable of producing a new type of noble sense. To be noble, perhaps that means: to be mad.23 Because it is situated at the decisive turning point of Nietzsche’s life, it is fitting that the *Gaya Scienza* contains several considerations regarding the communicability of his experiences. Nietzsche had a nostalgia for disciples and perhaps also for an active, but closed, community. He always dreamed of a grand action, of social upheavals or disruptions of political institutions (did he not at Turin, swept along in the first fevers of madness, that is to say at the height of lucidity, having become at once Dionysus and the Crucified, want to convene the sovereigns of Europe in Rome in order to shoot the young Kaiser and the anti-Semites?).24 And, to the extent that he estimated the possibility of an understanding, of an affinity with others, he also set forth the infallible law of the depreciation of a rare and authentic experience as soon as it enters into the habitude of a number of minds—to the point that it becomes the slogan of the fool, of a mass that appropriates it without passing through the torments, through the pains and the rightly inalienable fortunes of a solitary man. Gide’s statement, “because he had to become mad, we can no longer become so,”25 is true only if one draws a practical lesson from his teaching and particularly from his “immoralism.” But regarding this relation, depreciation has done its work by way of industrial standardization. If there is a lesson that the reading of Nietzsche provides to every attentive reader, it is the horror of futility, and today immorality and futility are synonyms. The old women, the white geese that have received nothing but innocence

xi. Cf. note iv.
from nature, with which Nietzsche identifies the right-thinkers of his age, have dropped out of sight. One would almost love for them to return! The tempting woman is a rare bird. This sign of the times would change Nietzsche’s optics. I note this in passing in order to recall the confusion, around 1900, between “Nietzscheanism” and the emancipation of women, the suffragette movement, the feminism in which he saw a symptom of decadence. Within the perspective of ascendant nihilism (in particular, the socialization, the massive proletarianization brought about by the industrial world with its excessive production, its cult of productivity for the sake of productivity—all conditions of a generalized demoralization), Nietzsche foresaw two movements that he placed in his own personal context, the climate of the “death of God.” Two movements are then possible; one is absolute: a leveling of humanity, great anthills, etc.; the other movement, my own: which, on the contrary, will accentuate all the antagonisms, all the intervals—a suppression of equality, which will constitute the task of superpowerful men. The first movement engenders the type of the last man, my own movement that of the overman. Its goal is absolutely not to conceive or to institute this category like the teachers of the preceding, but rather to make the two categories coexist: separated as much as possible—one hardly caring about the other like the Epicurean gods.” I am emphasizing the last phrase here in order to indicate clearly that every idea of an “ideological” organization exercising power is opposed to his aspirations which are here of a utopian order. Thus it is still interesting to sketch what he thought of the chances for a closed community. Whenever the reformation of a whole people fails and it is only sects that elevate their leader, we may conclude that the people has become relatively heterogeneous and has begun to move away from rude herd instincts and the morality of mores: they are hovering in an interesting intermediate position that is usually dismissed as a mere decay of morals and corruption, although in fact it proclaims that the egg is approaching maturity and that the eggshell is about to be broken. . . . The more general and unconditional the influence of an individual or the idea of an individual can be, the more homogeneous and the lower must the mass be that is influenced, while countermovements give evidence of counterneeds that also want to be satisfied and recognized. Conversely, we may always infer that a civilization is really superior when powerful and domineering natures have little influence and create only sects. This applies also to the various arts and the field of knowledge. Where someone rules, there are masses; and where we find masses we also find a need to be enslaved. Where men are enslaved, there are few individuals, and these are opposed by herd instincts and conscience.” The Gaya

xii. cf. The Will to Power [This passage comes from the Nachlass material, but is not included in the English edition of Will to Power. Friedrich Nietzsche, Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, Vol. 10 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980), pp. 244–245, 7[21], Spring–Summer, 1883.—trans.]

Scienza, fruit of the greatest imaginable solitude, speaks essentially to those spirits who, themselves, have found this solitude again, thus to those natures that a depth of nobility disposes to refuse distraction and work at any price, thus to bear l’ennui: here we touch upon the resources of solitude, which, despite his extreme isolation, gave him the feeling of always being “among us” [entre nous]. Whatever in nature and in history is of my own kind, speaks to me, spurs me on, and comforts me; the rest I do not hear or forget right away. We are always in our own company. Regarding states of elevation, it seems to him, he says, that most people hardly believe in the reality of such states of the soul, except those who know firsthand an extended state of elevation [un état d’élévation de longue durée]. He adds that the fate of the individual being who incarnates a unique state of elevation has until then hardly been an elevating possibility, but that one day it could happen that history will bring forth such men, once a great many favorable preconditions have been created and determined that even the dice throws of the luckiest chance could not bring together today. What has so far entered our souls only now and then as an exception that made us shudder might perhaps be the usual state for these future souls: a perpetual movement between high and low, the feeling of high and low, a continual ascent as on stairs and at the same time a sense of resting on clouds.

Is it not striking that he awaits from history, that is to say from human evolution, the creation of these “preconditions” by virtue of which the exceptional state of the soul would become an ordinary state? Is he not saying here that these so-endowed future souls would be every soul? But even when he imagined here an elect few—indeed a quasi-“priestly” class—he who so strongly appreciates the laws of Manu—knowing that these prerequisite conditions are created in the ascetic field proper to religious communities, he nonetheless seems to have foreseen, again, that his own privileged instants—the feeling of an incessant movement between the high and the low—lead to his own living conditions, his solitude, that never escapes the inexorable law of depreciation [dépréciation]. That is to say: the expropriation of a personal case, which necessarily accompanies the creation of prerequisite conditions which are accessible to many, and soon to everyone; unless a superior “new spirituality” is attained by the entire human species. Either case confirms the eternal return that implies the abolition of every personal life returned to being, for the greater glory of being.

xv. Ibid., §166, p. 200.