



Cheerful Creation of Words and Worlds
Nietzsche's *The Gay Science* in English Translation

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Abstract: The aim of this essay is to review Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Gay Science* in English Translation. It compares and contrasts the translations by Thomas Common, Walter Kaufmann, Josefine Nauckhoff, and R. Kevin Hill. First, I argue in favor of translating the work's title *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft* as *The Gay Science* or perhaps more precisely as *The Gay Knowledge*. Nietzsche who is likely the greatest stylist in the German language wrote with philological precision and succinctness. This exactitude and awareness of the shaping influence of linguistic means on the contents expressed therefore needs to be reflected throughout in any kind of rendition of Nietzsche's artful texts and the evaluation and assessment thereof.

Keywords: Nietzsche, Friedrich; Common, Thomas; Kaufmann, Walter; Josefine Nauckhoff; Hill, R. Kevin; *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, *The Gay Science*; translation; style; philology.

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In this review I aim to assess the precision and the overall quality of the translations by Thomas Common,¹ Walter Kaufmann,² Josefine Nauckhoff,³ and R. Kevin Hill⁴ of Friedrich Nietzsche's *Die*

fröhliche Wissenschaft (1882).⁵ Nietzsche had altered its original title *Morgenröte II* (*Dawn II* or *Daybreak II*) to *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*. The four books of a total of 342 aphorisms of *The Gay Science* constitute the culmination of Nietzsche's thought in his middle period. It also announces prominently that "God is dead" as provider of value, meaning, and sense in life; yet precisely this demise allows for a new dawn (GSK 279, §343). With his methodology of having deep suspicion of established bodies of knowledge (GSK 38), Nietzsche unearths in *The Gay Science* highly valuable moral psychological insights regarding the origin of moral feelings that he elaborates on in the Third Essay of his *Genealogy of Morals*. In a late note

¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Joyful Wisdom* ("La Gaya Scienza"), transl. Thomas Common, poetry rendered by Paul V. Cohn and Maude D. Petre, London, UK: Foulis, 1910.

² Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With A Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, transl. Walter Kaufmann, New York, NY: Random House, 1974. [Henceforth cited as GSK]

³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With A Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, transl. Josefine Nauckhoff, poems transl. Adrian del Caro, ed. Bernard Williams, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001. [Henceforth cited as GSN]

⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Joyous Science*, transl. R. Kevin Hill, London, UK: Penguin Classics, 2018. [Henceforth cited as JS]

⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, "Die fröhliche Wissenschaft ("la gaya scienza")," in *Friedrich Nietzsche: Sämtliche Werke, Kritische Studienausgabe*, Vol. 3, eds. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, Berlin, DE: de Gruyter 1988, pp. 343-651, here pp. . [Henceforth cited as FW]