

That said, the contributors to this symposium all weigh the balance between the different elements of Nietzsche's thought somewhat differently: Paul Franco, Rebecca Bamford, and Rebecca Ploof all highlight constructive, world-changing features of Nietzsche's thought that I put less emphasis on, while Graham Parkes argues that Nietzsche affirmed the world in a more thoroughgoing way than I recognize.

From Free Spirit to Zarathustra?

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Fortier has written an original and thought-provoking book. Part of its originality derives from its engagement with some of the less familiar texts in Nietzsche's oeuvre—for example, *The Wanderer and His Shadow* and *The Case of Wagner*; and part derives from the way this book avoids some of the standard debates in the voluminous scholarship on Nietzsche and establishes an analytic framework uniquely its own. The result is an interpretation of Nietzsche's thought that is both fresh and instructive.

The book puts forward two main claims, one methodological, the other more substantive. The methodological claim, alluded to in the subtitle of the book, asserts the primacy of personal experience in Nietzsche's thought. Nietzsche's writings are to be understood as growing out of and commenting on his life experiences. Fortier focuses on three such experiences: the drive for independence, the feeling of love, and the sense of one's overall health. And he draws heavily on Nietzsche's autobiographical writings—especially the preface to *Genealogy*, the 1886 prefaces to *The Birth of Tragedy*, *Human, All Too Human*, and *The Gay Science*, and *Ecce Homo*—to make the connection between his life and thought explicit.

The second, more substantive claim goes to the development of Nietzsche's thought and revolves around the figures of the free spirit and Zarathustra. Through an analysis of *Human, All Too Human* and its two supplements, Fortier shows that the free spirit is characterized by independence from and a critical posture toward the world. This position, however, proves to be untenable. In his later writings, Nietzsche comes to realize that the free spirit's desire for independence leads him to underestimate his dependence on community. Nietzsche remedies this defect with the figure of Zarathustra, who, out of love for the world, seeks to creatively transform it. But Fortier resists the easy conclusion that Zarathustra is simply superior to

the free spirit. Zarathustra too, suffers from a certain one-sidedness that leads to the forgetting of self. Therefore, Fortier concludes that Zarathustra and the free spirit are both necessary aspects of Nietzsche's experience and understanding of the world. "The tension between the different dispositions represented by the Free Spirit and Zarathustra is one that Nietzsche wants us to understand as an essential tension—a natural, universal, and unavoidable feature of human life" (11).

The two claims of Fortier's book are obviously connected, but I want to focus on the second one, concerning the relationship between the free spirit and Zarathustra. Fortier asks the crucial question: "Why was [Nietzsche] moved to go beyond the ideal of the Free Spirit by creating the figure of Zarathustra?" (11). The answer has to do with the drive for independence that characterizes the free spirit. Fortier argues that this drive emerges in *Human, All Too Human*, largely as a consequence of Nietzsche's break with Wagner. But his more original claim is that Nietzsche only came to fully appreciate the grave implications of this philosophical drive for independence in *The Wanderer and His Shadow*. Fortier believes this work represents a substantial development in Nietzsche's thinking about the free spirit ideal. In it, Nietzsche turns his attention to what he calls the "closest things," our most elemental needs and desires. By restricting ourselves to the "closest things," we become less dependent on others. But such restriction requires rigorous self-discipline and the denial of our more expansive and communal inclinations; it involves the suppression of a "persistently simmering set of desires woven into [our] nature" (60). It is this ascetic dimension of the free spirit ideal that ultimately makes the move to Zarathustra necessary.

I want to raise a few questions about Fortier's understanding of the free spirit and his interpretation of *The Wanderer and His Shadow*. Fortier exaggerates the ascetic character of this book and underestimates its appreciation for the simple pleasures of life, an appreciation that comes through in Nietzsche's description of Epicurus's sensual pleasures—"a little garden, figs, little cheeses and in addition three or four good friends"¹—as well as in the beautiful aphorism on Epicurus's "heroic-idyllic mode of philosophizing."² Though Nietzsche (refreshingly) praises moderation in *The Wanderer and His Shadow*, he does not think it necessarily involves denying or extirpating our passions.³ The suppressed passions Fortier is particularly concerned to highlight are the ones that reach beyond the independent self: love, communal solidarity, and the religious longing for transcendence. He often refers to these as natural passions or longings, and in doing so seems to naturalize what Nietzsche historicizes. At the beginning of *Human, All Too Human* (§2), Nietzsche enunciates the cardinal principle of his philosophical method: human beings and everything about them have *become*; "lack of

¹Nietzsche, *The Wanderer and His Shadow*, §192.

²Ibid., §295.

³See *ibid.*, §§37, 53, 83.

historical sense is the family failing of all philosophers." Fortier claims that Nietzsche abandons this historical approach in *The Wanderer and His Shadow* and replaces it with a concern with the permanent facts of human psychology. This strikes me as a dubious claim insofar as Nietzsche, throughout his career, always approached psychology historically.⁴

Let me turn to Fortier's discussion of the figure that corrects for the alleged defects of the free spirit, namely, Zarathustra. A full explanation of the need to move beyond the free spirit to the figure of Zarathustra would have to consider Nietzsche's other middle-period works, *Daybreak* and *The Gay Science*, in which the ascetic character of the free spirit is further qualified. For Fortier, *Zarathustra* goes beyond the "austere model of independence" in *The Wanderer and His Shadow* by engaging "in a more thorough and fulfilling way with human needs and longings that *Wanderer* had insisted on remaining independent of" (66). The key need that Fortier focuses on is love, about which he intriguingly remarks: "Few subjects are as central to Nietzsche's oeuvre as love" (69). Before taking up *Zarathustra*, however, Fortier analyzes Nietzsche's treatment of love in *The Case of Wagner*. In this oft-overlooked work, he finds that the self-transcending, intoxicating view of love that Nietzsche had rejected in *Human, All Too Human* receives more sympathetic treatment, as does religion, which Nietzsche shows "is more deeply rooted in human nature, in our natural experience of the world, than [he] had suggested when first breaking with Wagner" (98). Nietzsche's new appreciation of redemptive love and of a certain kind of religiosity receives its fullest expression in the world-transforming project of Zarathustra. But as pointed out above, Fortier does not see Zarathustra as simply superior to the free spirit. Through a careful analysis of Nietzsche's 1886 prefaces and *Ecce Homo*, he shows that the self-immersing illness that Nietzsche associates with the free spirit and the self-forgetting health that he associates with Zarathustra are both necessary for complete self-understanding and what he calls "great health."

I have the same reservations about Fortier's tendency to view as natural certain psychic needs—such as the religious longing for redemption—that Nietzsche considers to be historically constructed. Second, I am not sure I entirely grasp Fortier's argument as to why the standpoint of Zarathustra falls short and requires a dialectical return to the standpoint of the free spirit. Fortier explains this dynamic partly through an analysis of the aphorism on "great health" in *The Gay Science* (§382). But as I read this aphorism, "great health" does not refer to a state beyond the health of Zarathustra, incorporating the illness of the free spirit. Rather, Nietzsche seems to see "great health" as the precondition of the "jubilant curiosity" of the free spirit, a curiosity that "craves to have experienced the whole range of values and desiderata to date." Because such curiosity does not cure our profound nausea with present-day humans but only deepens it, we need a new

⁴See, e.g., Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §45.

ideal that goes beyond the knowledge-seeking free spirit, an “ideal of a spirit who plays naively. . . with all that was hitherto called holy, good, untouchable, divine,” that is, the *Übermensch* announced in *Zarathustra*. But if this is the case, the relationship between the free spirit and *Zarathustra* cannot be, as Fortier suggests, a permanent tension between two equally necessary dispositions but, as Nietzsche himself suggests in several places, a historical progression from the figure who serves as herald and precursor to the figure who represents the ultimate, nihilism-overcoming ideal.⁵

Free Spirits and Experimentation

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Fortier’s critical engagement with textual periodization in Nietzsche scholarship is important. As he explains, scholars have often followed Lou Salomé’s division of Nietzsche’s works into three so-called early, middle, and late periods, which has influenced understanding of Nietzsche’s philosophy (17). Tripartite textual periodization has tended to lead to privileging of later texts such as *On the Genealogy of Morals*, at the expense of attention to middle writings, such as *Dawn*.⁶ Yet as Fortier claims, these three periods are “not entirely compatible with how Nietzsche judged his own work” (5). As he argues, while the so-called middle period corresponds to what Nietzsche called the free-spirit trilogy (*Human, All Too Human, Dawn, and The Gay Science*), it does not include yes-saying books such as *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, or the final two of the free spirit trilogy that Nietzsche also treats as yes-saying works (17, 19).⁷ I welcome Fortier’s provision of an alternative, six-part, interpretative framework, which he grounds in the claim that we should attend to “what Nietzsche himself had to say about his development as an author” (4). However, I do have some friendly amendments to suggest with regard to Fortier’s analysis of the free spirit produced within that framework.

Fortier begins his analysis of the free spirit by examining Nietzsche’s definition of a free spirit from *Human, All Too Human*, §225: “We call someone a

⁵See, e.g., *Beyond Good and Evil*, §44.

⁶Ruth Abbey drew attention to this imbalance in *Nietzsche’s Middle Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁷See Paul Loeb, *The Death of Nietzsche’s Zarathustra* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 207.