

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.<sup>5</sup>

## 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*.<sup>6</sup> 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).<sup>7</sup> 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

<sup>5</sup>See, e.g., *Beyond Good and Evil*, §44.

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

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

free spirit who thinks differently from what we expect of him on the basis of his origin, environment, his social rank and position, or on the basis of the prevailing views of the time. He is the exception [the constrained spirits are the rule]." According to Fortier, the free spirit is therefore "one of a kind, not one of society," and he suggests that this definition remains consistent over Nietzsche's career (49). Fortier considers the cases for Socrates and Epicurus in *The Wanderer and His Shadow* as Nietzsche's models for the free spirit. Nietzsche's discussion suggests that the essential task of a Socratic free spirit is political, since it involves the conflict between individual and communal interests: this task is to recover and reaffirm "the inherent disjunction between individual and communal interests," and to contest the "most authoritative claims" of broader society, "in order to enrich [the free spirit's] own self-understanding" (55). The Epicurean free spirit supplements the Socratic task, Fortier contends, by developing and maintaining the "exceptional self-discipline" required for the Socratic task, cleaning up "the cobwebs of tradition and the machinations of social authority," and maintaining the necessary internal disposition of "restraint on the heart that liberates the spirit and frees the mind" (56, 60). The free spirits of Nietzsche's pre-*Zarathustra* works are engaged in a way of life characterized by "a continual process of engaging and challenging the world around them" and "a constant refraining from any attempt to guide or transform that same world" (60).

Fortier could have given more weight to experimentation in his analysis of the free spirit. He mentions experimentation four times, claiming that the free spirit is Nietzsche's cultivation of a class of free spirits with many opportunities for engaging the modern world experimentally, yet who remain unaffiliated with any particular conglomeration of social forces (such as a political party or ideology) (46, 47). He contrasts Nietzsche's "somewhat experimental turn" toward the ideal of the free spirit in *Human, All Too Human* with the "gravely serious matter" that has developed for Nietzsche by the time of *The Wanderer and His Shadow* (48). And he notes, rightly, that Nietzsche makes no promises, and that his work is an experiment and a temptation (163; *Beyond Good and Evil*, §42). Fortier takes a similar view on the significance of custom to understanding the free spirit, for instance in discussing *Human, All Too Human*, §96, where moral behavior increasingly reflects obedience to community customs (28). Fortier's assessment of custom and morality in Nietzsche's remarks on Wagner's Siegfried in *The Case of Wagner* is also similar (92), as is his discussion of Nietzsche's claim that philosophers need to become free from morality and custom in *On the Genealogy of Morals* III (36).

Experimentation is more fundamental to Nietzsche's free spirit than Fortier ultimately allows. Bernard Reginster has pointed out that for Nietzsche, experimentation is an exercise of curiosity understood as an intellectual virtue in inquiry; as I have discussed elsewhere, Nietzsche's campaign against customary morality also treats experimentation as free-spirited, since what the free spirit is becoming free from are the customary moral

constraints that inhibit experimentation and inquiry.<sup>8</sup> While Fortier is certainly right to point out that the free spirit has to strive to overcome its “natural attachments to the broader world” (60), one of the chief ways available to do so is through experiments and attempts. Hence, affirming experimentation more specifically as significant to understanding the free spirit would strengthen Fortier’s analysis.

According to Fortier, the free spirit has an essentially destructive task: the free spirit is Nietzsche’s model for criticizing existing ideals, yet the free spirit does not propose to “refurbish or replace them” (46). Fortier further claims that the free spirit’s task involves them in separating themselves from the spirit of their age, and the free spirit must confront social-political authority (49, 52). Yet I would suggest that free spirits are not entirely destructive, since Nietzsche allows for free spirits to form part of an experimental developmental trajectory, as Amy Mullin has suggested: from unfree or fettered spirits, to free spirits, to very free spirits, to freed spirits.<sup>9</sup> Nietzsche’s free spirits are already “able to alter” their opinions (*Dawn*, §56); changing one’s mind via inquiry is plausibly constructive, and is a key part of experimental inquiry. Free spirits, as experimenters, embody “the spirit of inquiry after truth” (*Human, All Too Human*, §225). Nietzsche’s *very* free spirits are philosophers of the future, who “will not be free spirits merely, but something more, higher, greater, and fundamentally different, something that would not go unrecognized or misidentified” (*Beyond Good and Evil*, §44). Mullin differentiates these *very* free spirits from mature free spirits via several key characteristics that support adding a more positive component to our understanding of free spirits as forming part of a developmental trajectory: (1) they integrate diverse perspectives and employ diverse “perspectives and affective interpretations” in knowing (*On the Genealogy of Morals* III 12); (2) they have a taste for what is good for them, which separates them from the decadence of merely free spirits; (3) they are able to command and to legislate values (*Beyond Good and Evil*, §211), and thus to organize themselves and society. The free spirit is not (as Fortier agrees) Nietzsche’s ultimate philosophical ideal or end point—Nietzsche specifies no particular end point for humanity. Rather, the free spirit is a key component of generating fresh developmental possibility for humanity.<sup>10</sup> I do not claim that Nietzsche proposes human breeding in a problematic eugenicist sense in his free spirit works; rather, my point is that through his thinking on

<sup>8</sup>Bernard Reginster, “Honesty and Curiosity in Nietzsche’s Free Spirits,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 51, no. 3 (2013): 441–63; Rebecca Bamford, “Experimentation, Curiosity, and Forgetting,” *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 50, no. 1 (2019): 11–32.

<sup>9</sup>Amy Mullin, “Nietzsche’s Free Spirit,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 38, no. 3 (2000): 383–405.

<sup>10</sup>Rebecca Bamford, “Health and Self-Cultivation in *Dawn*,” in *Nietzsche’s Free Spirit Philosophy*, ed. Rebecca Bamford (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 85–109.

experimentation and free-spiritedness, he explores a holistic way to reflect on the possibilities for human intergenerational development and individual self-development.<sup>11</sup>

In sum: while Fortier's analysis is already illuminating, greater attention to the experimental dimension of the free spirit would have further bolstered his interesting and worthwhile argument.

## On Hearing Nietzsche and Nietzsche on Being Heard

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"Did anyone have ears," Nietzsche asked in *Ecce Homo*, "for my definition of love?"<sup>12</sup> *The Challenge of Nietzsche* is carefully attuned not only to the Nietzschean experience of love, but also to Nietzsche's emphasis on the importance of experience more generally. Growth and development are to be found, for Fortier's Nietzsche, not in "great books" but in "great experiences," specifically, in the experiences of love, independence, and health (1). Behind each of these experiences, though, lies an even more foundational one: the experience of hearing. Building on Fortier's insightful analysis, I suggest that having the "ears" to listen out for them is what makes love, independence, and health possible. And because the ability to listen is a skill that can be actively cultivated, love, independence, and health are not merely experiences that happen to us, but also ones we help to create ones we can participate in creating.

It is helpful to understand what each of these experiences entails for Nietzsche. Love and independence, as Fortier explains, are antipodes. Associated with the archetypal figure of the free spirit or philosopher, independence takes the form of solitary, ascetic withdrawal. Rejecting the world as it is and searching for freedom from it, the free spirit avoids being reliant on anyone else. This philosophical outlook is also identified, in Fortier's reading, with a physiological condition: that of illness. It is when we find ourselves in the grips of illness that we are liable to reject the

<sup>11</sup>See Keith Ansell-Pearson and Rebecca Bamford, *Nietzsche's Dawn: Philosophy, Ethics, and the Passion of Knowledge* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2020).

<sup>12</sup>Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, trans. Duncan Large (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), "Why I Write Such Good Books," §5.