

That hearing lies behind love, independence, and health puts pressure on the idea that these are contingently available experiences. Like all parts of the body, the ear is of course subject to forces beyond our control. But ears can also be nurtured, developed, and even trained. The ear is an organ whose capacities can be purposefully grown. This is the premise of music—which plays a central role in Nietzsche’s work and in Fortier’s work on Nietzsche—and musical education. Musicality can certainly be stymied as well as strengthened by factors over which we have no power. Yet alongside these, there are measures that can be taken to expand and grow musical facility. There are exercises, forms of practice and immersion, as well as programs of study through which the ear can be taught. And this is the case across any number of tonal and modal systems in which different kinds of aural structures are prioritized and different kinds of aural configurations are heard as consonant.

This opens up more space for agency. We can do some things to cultivate hearing and if hearing is what makes love, independence, and health possible, then we can also do some things to cultivate having these experiences. Love, independence, and health may in many ways simply chance upon us. But they may also be experiences we make ourselves open to and available for. In readying our ears to register and respond to the sounds of love, of independence, and of health, we may also help create and occasion the opportunity to experience each.

## Becoming Good Neighbors to the Nearest Things

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One of the many admirable features of *The Challenge of Nietzsche* is the discussion in its second chapter of a topic that is sadly neglected in the secondary literature: Nietzsche’s emphasis on “becoming good neighbors again to the nearest things”—such as “eating, housing, clothing, social intercourse.” Fortier identifies *The Wanderer and His Shadow* as “a decisive turning point in Nietzsche’s thought” because of this turn to “the nearest things,” and observes that attention to these nearest things “remains one of Nietzsche’s central concerns until the end of his career.” (Witness the discussions of diet, living environment, and climate in *Ecce Homo*.) Fortier argues that this turn to the nearest things is accompanied by Nietzsche’s “return to himself,” which by the time of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* turns into a kind of

“self-forgetting,” exemplifying “a receptivity to and immersion in what lies beyond himself” (51, 153, 156).<sup>15</sup> I would like to show that there is more to Nietzsche’s concern with the nearest things than Fortier acknowledges, and that his initial attention to the nearest things develops naturally, through their interactivity, into what Fortier calls the “world-transformation” of Zarathustra’s affirmation of all things, wherein he wills their eternal recurrence (115–22).

For Nietzsche, our stance toward the nearest things is crucial for whether we thrive or decline. This indifferent ignorance “*in the smallest and most everyday things,*” in our interactions with the people and things around us, is at the root of most of our “physical and psychical frailties,” and for many people this neglect turns the whole world into a “vale of tears.” The reason is that our understanding of what is going on keeps getting misguided toward “the salvation of the soul, service to the state, the promotion of science, fame and fortune” and so forth—“*misdirected and artificially diverted* away from the smallest and nearest things” (WS, §5, 6). Whereas the misdirectors in those days were religious, educational, and social institutions, now they are the tech titans of Silicon Valley: our attention deficit derives from spending so much time almost motionless, spellbound by the screens of smartphones, unaware of our surroundings and of the small things that make for human flourishing.

Even before information and communications technology colonized so much of our awareness, our ability to experience what is in front of us was less than impressive. “Our usual imprecise mode of observation takes a group of phenomena as one and calls it a fact: between this fact and another fact it imagines an empty space, it isolates every fact” (WS, §11). But all our activity and understanding is actually “a constant flux”: the reality—as we realize when we pay attention—is rather complex. (Why all the fuss about “augmented reality” when we are so clueless about the basic version?) “Through words and concepts,” Nietzsche writes, “we are continually misled into imagining things as being simpler than they are, separate from each other, indivisible, each existing in and for itself” (WS, §11, 16). If we can avoid the misdirection, we come to see they are all interacting, in often complicated ways. And when at the end of his career Nietzsche claims again that “these small things—diet, place, climate, recreation” are of paramount importance,<sup>16</sup> it is after devoting many pages to the topic of optimal interactions with his surroundings.

This is why applying Nietzsche’s phrase “return to myself,” as Fortier does, to the project of *The Wanderer and His Shadow* as a whole is to take “myself” too personally. Several aphorisms toward the end of the book reflect Nietzsche’s discovery of the magnificent landscape of the Upper Engadine,

<sup>15</sup>See also Nietzsche, *The Wanderer and His Shadow* [WS], §16, 5; *Ecce Homo* [EH], “Why I Am So Clever,” §§1–3, 10. All translations from Nietzsche are my own.

<sup>16</sup>EH, “Why I Am So Clever,” 10.

to which he would often return and which would be a major inspiration for *Zarathustra*. He leads up to a key statement of his relation to the natural world with an aphorism titled “Forgotten Nature”: “We talk of nature and in doing so forget ourselves: we ourselves *are* nature” (WS, §27). Then comes “Nature Double” (*Doppelgängerei der Natur*), which begins with the statement: “In many places in nature we discover ourselves again, with enjoyable horror: it’s the most beautiful case of having a double.” And after a lyrical description of the mountain landscape around him he concludes by remarking on the good fortune of one who can say: “*This* part of nature is intimate and familiar to me, related by blood, and even more.”<sup>17</sup>

Even more than by blood? Nietzsche may be thinking of how the minerals and water in the body are the same stuff as the rocks and streams of landscape. “How distant and superior is our attitude toward what is dead, the anorganic,” he writes in a typical note from the period; “and all the while we are three-quarters water, and have anorganic minerals in us that perhaps do more for our well- and ill-being than the whole of living society!”<sup>18</sup> Nietzsche’s lifelong concern with stone affords him a standpoint beneath the level of life, beyond biocentrism: what we might call his “death perspective” grants him insight into the inorganic realm of nature. You simply suspend the drive for self-preservation and just look, or contemplate, without wanting or aiming at anything.

In the aphorism “Midday,” Nietzsche writes of himself as a man in the noontime of life who is lying in a meadow surrounded by woods. “He wants nothing, he frets about nothing, his heart stands still, only his eyes are alive—it is a death with open eyes. Now the man sees much that he has never seen before, and for as far as he can see everything is spun into a net of light, and as it were buried in it” (WS, §308). “To think oneself away out of humanity” in this way takes Nietzsche beyond the all-too-human perspective, to a vision of the world as a net of light, of all things dissolved into their interrelations.<sup>19</sup>

The net of light appears in another aphorism, “Et in Arcadia ego” (where the “I” refers to death), which celebrates a momentary revelation of the beauty of the landscape of the Engadine as a “pure, sharp world of light” — into which “one involuntarily projects Greek heroes,” as in the painting by Poussin (WS, §295). Not that the scene was “inspired by the painting,” as Fortier suggests (57): Nietzsche sees cowherds from Bergamo, not shepherds

<sup>17</sup>WS, §32, 338. Also WS, §§176, 205, 295, 308, 332.

<sup>18</sup>Friedrich Nietzsche, *Kritische Studienausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980), 9: 11[207], 1881; also 9: 11[210] and 11[125]. References to the KSA are by volume, notebook, and section number. For more on this topic see my “Nietzsche’s Care for Stone: The Dead, Dance, and Flying,” in *Nietzsche’s Therapeutic Teaching*, ed. Horst Hutter and Eli Freidland (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 175–90.

<sup>19</sup>KSA 9:11[35].

from Arcadia. As passages from the notebooks show, Nietzsche had the revelation—"I didn't know the Earth could appear like this, having thought that great painters had invented it"—which reminded him of the painting.<sup>20</sup> But the main point, which concludes the aphorism by invoking Epicurus, is this: "Certain human beings have lived this way, have constantly felt themselves thus in the world and the world in themselves" (WS, §295). They can feel the world in themselves and themselves out in the world when "the heart stands still," when the ego, or "I," dies.

As we free ourselves from "the error of the I," Nietzsche remarks in an unpublished note, we come to appreciate their interrelations, "the affinities and antagonisms among things, multiplicities therefore and their laws."<sup>21</sup> Or, as he puts it more explicitly toward the end of his career: the "prejudice of reason" gives us concepts such as unity, identity, and substance that induce us to perceive flux as things. This prejudice "believes in the 'I,' in the I as being and as substance, and projects its belief in the I substance onto all things—thereby creating the concept 'thing.'"<sup>22</sup> The self is out in the world and the world is in the self.

In his chapter on *Zarathustra* Fortier acknowledges that the protagonist comes to experience "a renewed openness toward and insight into the nature of all things," yet his treatment of this "world transformation" focuses exclusively on "human things" (119)—suggesting an anthropocentrism that is actually absent from Nietzsche's favorite book. Fortier's acknowledgment introduces a quote from "The Return Home," but he ignores Zarathustra's solitude telling him that he can now talk "directly and sincerely to all things." This familiarity comes as no surprise, since Zarathustra had said at the beginning of the book: "I love him whose soul is overfull, so that he forgets himself, and all things are in him: thus all things become his going-under." A contemporaneous note suggests that by this time Nietzsche was living like Epicurus—feeling "himself in the world and the world in himself."<sup>23</sup>

On the topic of "the bestowing virtue" Zarathustra encourages his disciples to open up: "Compel all things toward you and into you, that they may flow back out of your wells as gifts of your love." The resulting intensification of the body's energy lets the spirit "become creator and evaluator and lover and benefactor of all things."<sup>24</sup> What makes such an ambitious enterprise possible is what Nietzsche calls "the whole interconnection of all things,"<sup>25</sup> which

<sup>20</sup>KSA 8:43[2] and [3].

<sup>21</sup>KSA 9.11[21]. Several other notes from the period make similar points: 10.4[189], 10.4[207], 11.34[46], 11.35[35].

<sup>22</sup>Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, "Reason in Philosophy," §5.

<sup>23</sup>Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* [TSZ], trans. Graham Parkes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), "The Return Home"; KSA 10:5[1] 238.

<sup>24</sup>TSZ, "On the Bestowing Virtue"; KSA 9:11[148].

<sup>25</sup>See KSA 9:11[148]; *The Gay Science*, §341.

derives from the fact that things are not, as we heard him insist earlier, “separate from each other, indivisible, each existing in and for itself.”<sup>26</sup> To the contrary, “all things are knotted together so tightly,” as Zarathustra suggests in a later speech, that any moment “draws after it all things that are to come.”<sup>27</sup> It all hangs together. And if we can follow Zarathustra in experiencing the world as “perfect” — *vollkommen*, “complete” — we realize that “all things are chained together, entwined, in love,” and that by learning to love our fate (*amor fati*) we can come to “love the world.”<sup>28</sup> We can indeed—beginning by becoming good neighbors to the nearest things.

## Response

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### *Nature or History?*

Franco raises one of the furthest-reaching questions about my approach to Nietzsche, regarding the relationship between nature and history. Franco notes that whereas “Nietzsche always approached psychology historically. . . [Fortier] seems to naturalize what Nietzsche historicizes,” by presenting “as natural certain psychic needs—such as the religious longing for redemption—that Nietzsche considers to be historically constructed.” I agree that for Nietzsche certain psychic needs, including the longing for redemption, are in key respects historically constructed (cf. 92–93), so I think the difference between Franco and myself concerns the weight of history in Nietzsche’s analysis. On my reading, to say that a psychic need is “historically constructed” is to say that it is shaped or intensified by history, but there remains an enduring framework of human nature within

I am grateful to Rebecca Bamford, Paul Franco, Rebecca Ploof, and Graham Parkes for their insightful comments on *The Challenge of Nietzsche*, and for their insights into Nietzsche more generally. I have learned from each of them, although in the comments that follow, I concentrate on some of our differences.

<sup>26</sup>WS, §11, 16

<sup>27</sup>TSZ, “On the Vision and the Riddle.”

<sup>28</sup>TSZ, “The Drunken Song,” §10.