INTRODUCTION

There have been many educational Nietzsches, particularly in the past twenty-five years, and all of them claim in one way or another to unlock the hidden educator in the philosopher. There is, for example, the educator-Nietzsche that is reconstructed entirely from Thus Spake Zarathustra.1 The author of this particular hermeneutic wishes us to believe that Nietzsche’s educational “theory” can stand alone and complete from this one text even though much of Nietzsche’s early writings, and indeed some of his later ones, concerned themselves with the state of education in his time.2 And then there are the “one theme” Nietzsches. We have the Nietzsche who uses sublimation in an educational manner.3 And a Nietzsche who advocates “free” education.4 There is also the Dionysian “agonistic” Nietzsche,5 as well as a metaphysical Nietzsche, the “pedagogical anthropologist” who ultimately views all cultural criticism as broadly educative.6 We have the aristocratic, anti-university, anti-system Nietzsche, who purportedly argues for a complete dismantling of the German educational system,7 as well as the Nietzsche who remains sympathetic to education, advocating as he does an aristocracy of the self.8 Not surprisingly, only one recent commentator9 attempts to tackle in any forthright fashion what ultimately figures as the larger question looming on the horizon: What possibility is there to reconcile the ideal of Nietzsche as educator with current democratic education as it is practiced in America?

9. Leslie Sassone, “Philosophy across the Curriculum: A Democratic Nietzschean Pedagogy,” Educational Theory 46, no. 4 (1996): 511-24. This is the first substantial examination of a “Nietzschean” education and its relation to democracy as a whole to come out in the last twenty-five years. Indeed, it is probably the only work to tackle this subject with sufficient depth deserving of this troubling topic. Nevertheless, as I will show, the work as a whole is seriously flawed.
This essay questions the usefulness of Nietzsche as an educator for our democratic society. Nietzsche as educator will be shown to be essentially tied with Nietzsche's concept of the individual; who one is, how one behaves, and why one must ultimately overcome oneself. Ultimately, there are too many hurdles, too many philosophical, social, and political difficulties, for a systematic adoption of a "Nietzschean" education at the university, state, or national level. It is the social realm that is the bedrock of democratic education, for as Dewey states, democracy involves "individuals who participate in an interest so that each has to refer his own action to that of others." The impetus for any Nietzschean education, if indeed there can be such a possibility, begins and ends not with society, not with democracy, not with the school, not with the teacher, but with that multiplicity of individual characterizations known collectively as the self.

In order to answer this question, this essay shall organize itself around three Nietzschean themes taken from Alexander Nehamas's seminal text, Nietzsche: Life as Literature. These themes are: "The Most Multifarious Art of Style," "Beyond Good and Evil," and "How One Becomes Who One Is."

**THE MOST MULTIFARIOUS ART OF STYLE**

Nietzsche struggles to free himself from the confines of metaphysics. Although we must agree with Martin Heidegger that Nietzsche ultimately fails in his project, nevertheless a powerful critique against this foundation of philosophy is launched. Central to Nietzsche's critique of metaphysics is an emphasis on the fragmentation of the states of unity, integration, absolutism, and wholeness. This perspectivism arises as a result of Nietzsche's contention that there are no fixed, immutable truths. Rather, truths exist as a matter of individual perspective and are in turn played upon by social and cultural forces. "Perspectivism, then, in Nietzsche, means something quite different from what it has come to mean in phenomenology: it does not mean that the appearances are profiles of an essential invariant: it means that there are only perspectives."

Nietzsche's multiplicity of styles allows for truth to be embedded in a diverse range of assorted opinions and maxims. Precisely what is true about these is neither

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JAMES SCOTT JOHNSTON is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Sarasota. His preferred mailing address is 1605 Columbia Pines Ave., #1816, Brandon, FL 33511. His primary area of scholarship is philosophy of education, especially as it relates to higher education.
their mutually agreed-upon fixity or absoluteness, nor their social importance; rather it is the determinateness with which the individual who posits, who invents and develops, these truths, is able to self-identify with them and have them exist to provide meaningful and authentic value to his or her life: “Truth is...not something there, that might be found or discovered — but something that must be created.”

Nietzsche’s debt to Hegel is evident, for he recognizes that truths held by the masses exist because of social and cultural forces; that is, they are born of historical conditions. While Nietzsche agrees that social forces play heavily upon the acceptance of truths, he readily argues that truths are reducible in the last to the individual. Social and cultural forces do not create the truths that are in turn accepted by the individual, as Dewey would argue; rather the self-affirming individual creates his or her own truths and then tests them against the predominant truths of the masses for goodness of fit. It is in this way that Nietzsche argues that one can reject outward truth-valuations, that one can “overcome” other truths in favor of one’s own.

But can one infer from the preceding that, since truth is not an immutable fixity, and truths rely on individual perspectives in turn influenced by social and cultural forces, all views, all opinions, are equally correct, equally as good as each other? The answer, perhaps unexpectedly so, is no. Nietzsche does not value each and every truth as equal. In point of fact, he took upon himself the task of being a cultural critic of the age. Nietzsche juxtaposed accepted truths with deviant ones in order to expose truths for their contextual nature. In this way, individual truths long held in check by hegemonic, sociocultural truths could at least emerge on what might be called a level playing field. Leveling the field allows individual truths to compete with socially constructed ones. And this strengthens the worthiness of the individual, who remains in perpetual conflict with social, cultural, and historical forces.

A manifold art of style supports, in the main, a view of diversity. But perspectivism also argues for diverse opportunities beyond the paradigm of truth. In terms of education, this can mean diverse bodies of diverse students studying diverse topics in diverse schools. It is certainly very fragmentary when compared to the homogeneous system of higher education, with its structured four-year degree plan, minimum 120 hour credit load, SACS accreditation requirements, CLAST exams, ACT and SAT entrance examinations, specific requirements for government funding, and the like. To champion diversity while at the same time insisting upon the myriad national, state, and regional regulations that are necessary to govern our current higher education institutions seems at once contradictory.

Not that there aren’t pockets of fragmentation in education that come close to the diversity that Nietzsche champions in his perspectivism. Distance learning facilities, weekend education, portfolio assessment, non-SACS accredited schooling, nontraditional and interdisciplinary degrees, and so forth, are some examples of


diverging from the traditional “system” that have had some success. But by and large, higher education of the traditional variety, having its base in the Middle Ages and its full development in the nineteenth century, remains entrenched. To have a total break from education as it is currently practiced requires a shift in our thinking from a support of the social realm to one of the individual. Nietzsche is adamant regarding the primary place of the individual in all social and cultural matters.

Therefore I am in agreement with Eliyahu Rosenow that, at the very least, a total break from education as it is currently practiced is what would be needed if one were to adopt a thoroughly Nietzschean stand on education. It is precisely the lengths, however, to which Rosenow attempts to produce a systematic Nietzsche, while ignoring completely the antihegemonic, multifaceted, perspectival Nietzsche, that is disconcerting. For example, Rosenow argues:

However, if we wish to have a free education, we have no choice but to turn to Nietzsche. His educational theory is the most systematic and the most consistent working out of the idea of radical free education in the history of educational thought — a theory which treats the autonomous individual as the center of educational activity without at the same time giving up all ideas of intervention, thus sanctifying anarchy or involving itself in inescapable contradictions.

Although Rosenow is correct in assuming that one must be skeptical of a Nietzschean education because it is inherently antisocial, Rosenow nonetheless argues for the existence of education on the basis of the possibility of a “free education,” one that “eliminates the possibility of interpersonal communication and which isolates man.”

Education for Rosenow must therefore exist beyond or apart from the social, a concept that would certainly make Dewey uneasy. However, since Rosenow discounts the possibility of interpersonal communication, he must therefore discount by the same argument the possibility of mutual dialogue between teacher and student. Self-education seems the only appropriate option when the social is removed from the notion of education. And since education has historically involved itself in the dissemination of knowledge from teacher or mentor to student, the term education seems no longer an appropriate title for what occurs in Rosenow’s conception of the activity. Systematizing Nietzsche in this way ignores the thematic evidence embedded in his perspectivism — the notion that things must succumb to a multiplicity of styles. To systematize Nietzsche in such a way is to contain him. And this is precisely what Nietzsche wants to avoid.

To be fair to Rosenow, though, one must agree with his diagnosis, prodded on as it is by James Hillesheim’s critique, that contemporary education provides a

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18. Rosenow, “What is Free Education?”
19. Ibid., 570.
20. Ibid.
jumbled and confused message with respect to the desirability of the dual metaphors of self-mastery (self-control) and self-overcoming. It is in Rosenow's essay that we see the first glimpse of a view that deconstructs education's utility for the self-overcoming individual. Rosenow argues that one can only accept Nietzsche partially. Turning this around, one could argue that, to accept the ideal of a self-overcoming individual in toto, one must stop midway and extirpate the "ideal" of education not partially, but rather completely.

A similar misappropriation of Nietzsche has been undertaken by authors who, using a faulty hermeneutic, wish to attempt a reconstruction that fits their particular ideological belief. Allan Bloom champions a view that has become one of the most pervasive of the contemporary trends in education: the so-called Back to Basics movement. The argument here is that schools have become too fragmented, standards too lax, curricula too broad. He sees as necessary a toughening of standards, higher entrance scores, more rigorous evaluation, teacher and student competency testing, and a return to a "basic" curriculum emphasizing humanities and hard sciences. In particular, he argues for a return to an aristocratic education along the lines described by Plato in *The Republic*. Bloom calls upon Nietzsche the "aristocrat" to help him further these goals.

Now, Bloom makes many fine points in regard to Nietzsche, particularly in reference to Nietzsche's misappropriation by ideologues bent on using the philosopher for their particular political activities. However, Bloom falls into a similar trap. Although he concedes that Nietzsche's task is to overturn hitherto accepted social and cultural values, no mention is made of the thinker's myriad cache of perspectives. For Bloom, the current educational values are synonymous with a rejection of instrumental reason and unity in curricula, a playful acceptance of other's cultures and values, and a questioning of tradition. In contrast, Bloom would cast aside these values for an aristocratic education, a Great Books emphasis similar to Mortimer Adler's, a firm foundation in the liberal arts and sciences, and a return to philosophy as a structured and educable discipline. In order to appropriate Nietzsche for these goals, Bloom has to emphasize the overturning of values. But these are not the values that Nietzsche himself is set on overturning; rather they are the values of heteronomy, fragmentation, and diversity — values that Nietzsche champions through his perspectival outlook.

Does Nietzsche thus emphasize an "anarchistic" education for children? To be certain, he does not. In fact, he values obedience, rigorous study, and stern discipline:

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24. Ibid.
For this is what distinguishes the hard school as a good school from all others: that much is demanded; and sternly demanded; that the good, even the exceptional, is demanded as the norm; that praise is rare, that indulgence is non-existent; that blame is apportioned sharply, objectively, without regard for talent or antecedents (WP, p. 482).

But there is a disparity here between "elementary" education, as this quote is directed to, and "higher" education, on which Nietzsche heaps scorn: ""Higher" education: essentially the means of directing taste against the exceptions for the good of the mediocre" (WP, p. 492). For Nietzsche, the organization of higher education in no way prepares the individual for the task of self-overcoming. That institution is simply a hegemonic presence designed to reinforce the insipid cultural decay of the time. To argue a return to an educational philosophy or system that espouses an aristocratic, higher education in a "Back to Basics" style is not Nietzsche's ultimate intention. Rather, it is his stated aim to remove the individual completely from education as it existed at that time. It is the goal of Nietzsche to have those capable of doing so, in effect, reject the hegemony of the educational-cultural institution (Bildung) in favor of their individual self-overcoming. Nietzsche's "hard school" exists as the nexus for the means to the creation of a thinking individual who could then potentially cast off his or her education in favor of what would ultimately emerge as a self-overcoming.

The aristocratic "Back to Basics" movement has resulted in a general call for improvements in education that move away from a stress toward diversity and multiplicity, and back to one of uniformity. The net effect of this particular narrative of education is to argue that diversity has had a negative effect upon education, and therefore to propose that the discipline once again shorten its boundaries and contain the diversity that has of late begun to characterize higher education in this country. What lies just beneath the surface of this particular educational ideology is a justification of education as a predominantly social medium intended to produce a capable and enlightened citizenry. This view of course goes back to Plato, by way of Dewey. It is implicit in much contemporary thinking. In contrast, it must be reemphasized that Nietzsche champions an education that develops the individual so that he or she may be able to attain the lauded status of self-overcoming. Education is merely a means for Nietzsche, and not a self-contained telos, as Bloom seems to suggest. Any education that does not champion the individual's struggle to self-overcome the social and the cultural influences that impinge upon him or her, must be in league with those self-alienating social and cultural forces. Such leads Nietzsche to conclude that education, because it is coterminous with the dominant social and cultural forces at play, contradicts a person's nature.

The aporia of a Nietzschean/Democratic education must by rights be taken up. Sharp, for example, concludes that Nietzsche views the educator or teacher as that

individual who has the stated purpose of assisting the student to reach liberation from the teacher. In the main, this is correct. For example, we find in Thus Spake Zarathustra: “Now I bid you lose me and find yourselves; and only when you have all denied me will I return to you.” Nonetheless, Sharp misunderstands Nietzsche’s radical individualism, when she writes:

The good educator for Nietzsche is one who can seduce the students into a love of knowledge and truth and who can show them the usefulness of sublimation as a means to an end, and nothing more. He also must have the ability to manipulate the environment at all times so that the student is endlessly challenged with experiences which involve growth and expansion of his horizons.

What is disconcerting about this particular statement is the appropriation of Nietzsche to what is ultimately a Deweyan task. Nietzsche does not create a telos out of growth, as Dewey does in Democracy and Education. Indeed, Nietzsche rejects the whole doctrine of ends (WP, pp. 12-13).

Nietzsche recognizes the futility of struggling with the cultural and social environment, which it is the supposed task of education to help overcome. To self-overcome requires the very overcoming of education, as far as education is itself a product and a minion of the dominant society and culture. Nietzsche argues,

As such, education, insofar as it is firmly rooted in the social and cultural, cannot be entertained in a properly Nietzschean manner. Nietzsche can no more be appropriated to Dewey than to any other thinker. And although there are certainly elements of Nietzsche’s thought that come close to Dewey’s, one must, nonetheless, remain cognizant of Nietzsche’s antihegemonic and antidemocratic stance. It is basic to Nietzsche that a multiplicity of styles, of seeming contradictions, is to be more highly valued than an overarching view or paradigm. One can only appropriate Nietzsche for a particular view, cause, or ideology if one is willing to have him appropriated equally and for all others. Attempting to categorize Nietzsche in a singular fashion perverts the very argument the thinker invokes to overcome metaphysics, the dominant culture, and the self.

BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL

Nietzsche’s criticism of the prevailing European culture is primarily an issue of morals. Of particular concern to Nietzsche is the state of nihilism; the state of cultural decadence traceable both to Christian influences and to the hegemony exerted by ratio. Characteristically, it is these tendencies that Nietzsche wishes for the individual, through the Will to Power, to overcome (EH, p. 128). This self-same

opposition to the search for absolutes and this embracing of all fullness leads Nietzsche to the Transvaluation of Values: In the same sense that no a priori truths can be admitted, no canonical valuations or fixed principles of justice can likewise be said to exist.\(^\text{35}\)

Nietzsche follows Hegel's *Rechtsphilosophie* in his insistence that moral laws rest within and upon the sociocultural sphere that culminates in the state. But whereas Hegel champions the dominant sociocultural values that coalesce to form Objective Mind, Nietzsche pauses to critique those social values and their manifest Hegelian notions:

> Man cannot be made responsible for anything, neither for his nature, nor his motives, nor his actions, nor the effects of his actions. And thus we come to understand that the history of moral feelings is the history of an error; an error called "responsibility," which in turn rests on an error called "freedom of the will."\(^\text{36}\)

Nietzsche's resolute disbelief in a fixed and canonical ethic, together with his scorn of the contemporary Christian-Platonic-European culture, leads him to challenge the prevailing valuations in a hitherto novel manner. For Nietzsche argues an overcoming or transvaluation of the then-dominant values through a reversal of what is to be considered good, by that which is clearly evil. In this manner, Nietzsche posits the possibility of a realm defined by extra-morality, a realm in which the hitherto dominant valuations become meaningless.\(^\text{37}\) The overturning of the accepted valuations in favor of their opposites would, for Nietzsche, result in a cultural catastrophe. Indeed, this is prophesied in numerous places throughout his work [see *EH*, especially "Why I am a Destiny"). Nonetheless, Nietzsche sees this as a necessary precursor to what will ultimately emerge like a phoenix from the ashes of the ruined cultural landscape: the self-overcoming individual, able to posit his or her own valuations as over and above the decadent values of the mass culture.

To be certain, this would not be a simple task. For not only must valuations as they exist be deconstructed, but the individual must be content to endure the suffering of the self-imposed alienation that breaking away from the dominant sociocultural traditions necessitates. That individual must, according to Nietzsche, not only accept the fate of alienation, disparagement, and loneliness, but embrace it as well (*EH*, p. 58).

One of Nietzsche's resolute goals is to champion the self-overcoming individual. This means in the first instance to point the way to an overturning of prevalent sociocultural valuations that are considered hegemonic, decadent, and lamentable. Education as a process, does not, for Nietzsche, assist a self-overcoming individual to overcome hitherto accepted valuations; rather, education serves paradoxically as a medium for their transmission. Therefore Nietzsche is able to argue, somewhat facetiously,


\(^{36}\) Ibid., 43.

\(^{37}\) Nietzsche, "Beyond Good and Evil."
To learn something that is of no concern to us, and to find one's "duty" precisely in this "objective" activity: to learn to value pleasure and duty as altogether separate things—that is the invaluable task and achievement of higher schooling. This is why the philologist has hitherto been the educator as such: because his activity provides the model of sublime monotony in action: under his banner the young man learns to "grind": first prerequisite for future efficiency in the fulfillment of mechanical duties (as civil servant, husband, office slave, newspaper reader, and soldier) (WF, p. 474).

Education cannot supply the task of overturning valuations that education itself comprises. Education is a social function. It exists to produce citizenry who are able to interact intelligently with each other, thereby maintaining the ideal of democracy. No discipline and no science, education included, is value-free. To adopt a Nietzschean view of education would, in the main, necessitate a movement away from the social ideal to an individual one. What characterizes education, however, is precisely its social function: To educate means, in a historical sense ranging from Plato through Rousseau and onward to Dewey, the dissemination of knowledge from one generation to another. Nietzsche, however, castigates the values of this interpersonal function, of the shared intersubjective relation that education favors and within which it participates, in favor of an intrapersonal, intrasubjective, and individual one. Education cannot supply the task of an individual transvaluation because, simply put, it contains. The ideal and the practice of education contain discreet yet pervasive narratives that are passed from teacher, policy, and curriculum, to the student. While these may exist on a subconscious level, they nonetheless influence. Valuations that reflect the dominant social ideals are contained within these narratives, and these narratives work, in turn, to contain those individuals who encounter them.

We see this tendency in the works of our most prominent educator-philosophers. Dewey attempts an overturning of the then-accepted educational values. Education prior to the turn of the century was purposefully designated to augment an individual's mind. Through a fixed and canonical reading of selected texts, combined with an aristocratic, "top down" instructional style, it was believed that education could somehow improve a person's intellectual situation, irrespective of the surrounding lifeworld. Dewey attempts a unification of the self and the world; the fragmentation brought about by an artificial and pedantic curriculum and an isolated didactic instructional technique is to be replaced by a methodology emphasizing the individual's thoroughgoing interconnectedness with the world. For Dewey, education is designed to foster intelligence: the ability of the person to draw from the connections among experience, society, and culture to emerge as a fully functioning individual capable of self-sustainment in the modern world. For Dewey, education is always to be considered a social and cultural function. Consider the following:

38. Dewey, Democracy and Education.
41. Dewey, Democracy and Education.
We often fancy that institutions, social customs, collective habit, have been formed by the consolidation of individual habits. In the main this supposition is false to fact. To a considerable extent, customs, or widespread uniformities of habit, exist because individuals face the same situation and react in like fashion. But to a larger extent, customs persist because individuals form their personal habits under conditions set by prior customs. An individual usually acquires the morality as he inherits the speech of his social group.  

And again:

It is a sound educational principle that students should be introduced to acquaintance with everyday social applications. Adherence to this method is not only the most direct avenue to an understanding of science itself, but as the pupils grow more mature it is also the surest road to the understanding of the economic and industrial problems of present society.

Now Nietzsche would not disagree with Dewey that morals and morality traditionally exist within the social sphere. Nor would he disagree, I think, with the passage of social norms from person to person via that medium of communication known as speech. What Nietzsche does disagree with, however, is the ideal of social morality. In the main, Nietzsche argues that to self-overcome, to "transvalue all values," requires a renunciation of social valuations. This of course is inimical to Dewey, who would argue that just such an activity splits an individual off from society, resulting in an individual existing outside and beyond the boundaries of the social as self-governance, of the particular self-control that Dewey characteristically equates with the Hegelian concept of freedom embodied within society in the Rechtsphilosophie.

Educators who wish to appropriate Nietzsche for their particular agenda seem also to forget that, for Nietzsche, the task is to overcome the hegemonic valuations that characterize the decadence and insipidity of the then-contemporary European culture. In short, the task is for individuals to overcome themselves. Any talk of education that does not serve to fulfill this task is antithetical in the main to Nietzsche's concern. It commits the error of projecting one's valuations onto Nietzsche. Haim Gordon uses Nietzsche's Zarathustra to point out aspects of an educator that seem, in his view, worth emulating. Gordon correctly argues that the starting point for any discussion of "teaching" is the pupil, and argues that, to teach as Zarathustra, one's approach must be "antidogmatic and anticatechistic." Certainly, to a Nietzsche who stresses always the individual, together with the overcoming of the dominant valuations as well as oneself, this is correct. Finally, Gordon argues that to have Zarathustra as educator is to celebrate the joys of life, "to express...love in a joyous dance." And there is certainly in existence this quality about Nietzsche.

Nonetheless, Gordon errs in assuming that, because Zarathustra attempted to teach his disciples using the aforementioned techniques, the realm of education, of

44. Gordon, "Nietzsche's Zarathustra as Educator."
45. Ibid., 191.
46. Ibid.
a formal instructional methodology, can thereby be validated. In point of fact, Zarathustra’s educational techniques fail: He is not able to reach the higher men that he strives so hard to obtain.47 His techniques, as challenging and unorthodox as they are, ultimately prove unsuccessful, leaving Zarathustra with the realization that only the self-overcoming, self-valuating individual, can reach the higher state.

In contrast, Hillesheim projects onto Nietzsche an aristocratic “agonistic” educator, one whose “primary concern is with the education of these few rare individuals.”48 Hillesheim argues that, because Nietzsche makes allusions in his literature to the production of the genius, of higher men, Nietzsche necessarily commands a strong education for these higher men. But Hillesheim too, misreads what seems Nietzsche’s higher purpose, which is that those self-overcoming individuals, if they are truly to become “higher,” must cast off the shackles of society, cast off the shackles of an education in favor of what ultimately must be termed self-instruction. For, as Nietzsche argues, “Not ‘mankind’ but overman is the goal!” [WP, p. 519].

Now Hillesheim is correct in advancing the view that the masses, the herd, are unable to forecast social welfare. But it would be a mistake to agree that the Overmen, those higher ones whom Nietzsche designates as the true cultural leaders, necessitate an education crafted for “the intellectual and artistic elite.”49 To effect a self-overcoming individual requires something that education ultimately cannot provide, a moment-to-moment, hour-to-hour, day-to-day self-realization of one’s strengths and weaknesses, together with a profound ability to suffer well. It cannot be imitated, as Hillesheim seems to believe, even though examples that serve to illuminate the undertaking are provided in Nietzsche’s corpus.50 The higher individual cannot be disseminated but rather must be self-taught, as Zarathustra learns (TSZ, p. 329). Education, therefore, cannot be an elitist project, inasmuch as elitism is made to equate with the self-overcoming individual, the Overman. Rather, education holds an important function in terms of the masses. And this of course is to pass along the acceptable values from one generation to the next. Nietzsche is not inimical to this function, as long as this function remains entirely a “mass” undertaking.

Two separate standards seem to be at work here, a dualism, if one wishes. One standard, for the masses, includes the prospect of education for the dissemination, the passage, of sociocultural values; another, the prospect of self-teaching, of self-instruction, for the creation of the self-overcoming individual. Education cannot reach a self-overcoming individual. Education, for such a person, is something that must also be overcome.

49. Ibid.
HOW ONE BECOMES WHO ONE IS

Nietzsche’s self-styled metaphor “Become Who You Are,” is an amalgam of all his other metaphorical tasks. What will ultimately come to the fore, what will ultimately take hold, is a self-overcoming individual, the one who has the locus of existence firmly entrenched within. The task of becoming who one is requires a tendency toward a heightened self-preservation: a selfishness that concedes to itself even the appearance of the most “selfless” acts as being of ultimate gain for the individual (EH, p. 63). This selfish, self-overcoming individual is celebratory, understanding and responding joyously to the vagaries of life. In this respect, the self-overcoming individual is one who is able to suffer and suffer well:

Man does not seek pleasure and does not avoid displeasure….Pleasure and displeasure are mere consequences, mere epiphenomena — what man wants, what every smallest part of a living organism wants, is an increase in power. Displeasure, as an obstacle to its will to power, is therefore a normal fact, the normal ingredient of every organic event; man does not avoid it, he is rather in continual need of it; every victory, every feeling of pleasure, every event, presupposes a resistance overcome.51

The self-overcoming individual replaces the will with the Will to Power, a will to create and live within one’s own truths. Static being gives way to a dynamic becoming. Every moment of every day of every year is spent in self-overcoming — an eternal cycle of return:

Have you ever said Yes to a single joy? O my friends, then you said yes too to all woe. All things are entangled, ensnared, enamored; if ever you wanted one thing twice, if ever you said, “You please me, happiness! Abide, moment! then you wanted all back. All anew, all eternally, all entangled, ensnared, enamored — oh, then you loved the world. Eternal ones, love it eternally and evermore; and to woe too, you say: go, but return! For all joy wants — eternity (TSZ, p. 323).

The new system of valuations provided by and for this individual takes its point of reference from the individual, and not the outward society, church, state, nation, or culture. Education, bound as it is to the dissemination of social customs and habits, is ill-equipped to assist the self-overcoming individual in his or her chosen task. Although education can certainly provide instruction and content that the individual can use to gain knowledge, the valuations that are passed along with this knowledge are antithetical to the selfish, transvaluing, self-overcoming individual that Nietzsche maintains. At best, education can provide a solid base from which the individual is able to gain a myriad of diverse perspectives — something like the diversity that is currently in vogue in many educational circles today. And Nietzsche would certainly argue that, if education is to remain a function of society [and this he certainly does], it must improve the opportunities it has to foster a critical mind. All else is of secondary importance. Indeed, some of Nietzsche’s admonitions toward the German educational scene would make Bloom, Adler, the National Commission on Excellence in Education, and various other “back to basics” organizations extremely satisfied. He castigates “the learned louts whom secondary schools and universities today offer our youth” as “higher wet nurses” and points out, “What conditions the decline of German culture? That ‘higher’ education is no longer a privilege — the democratism of Bildung, which has become ‘common’ — too common” (TI, p. 510).

Viewing Nietzsche’s polemic as presented could easily bring one to the conclusion that Nietzsche valued a harsh, aristocratic education, and that this was in keeping with his dictum to produce the “higher” individual: sound, self-overcoming persons able to return the German spirit and culture to a long-forgotten state of excellence. In point of fact, this is not the case. Although Nietzsche laments the state of Bildung, he does not supply needed material for its improvement. The reason, quite simply, is that Bildung has degenerated to a point where anything less than a total destruction would not suffice. Nietzsche may have indeed prophesied this coming destruction with a glimmer of hope; nonetheless, his answer to the crisis of culture was not to rebuild — it was to break away, to demolish [EH, pp. 126-127].

To reconstruct culture, whether through education or through some other means, is not Nietzsche’s task. Rather, it is to point the way to the possibility of a new individual, a self-overcoming individual, one able to create and live within his or her own valuations. Education merely exists as a means to creating social beings. In point of fact, education is a necessity of society that, as with other necessities, must be overcome in the formation of this new individual. Nietzsche would concede that, so long as education provides the pedagogical function of shaping people, it best performs the task with what could be termed aristocratic and noble standards. However, even this is suspect, because, as with Nietzsche’s perspectivist outlook, he would also favor a view that considers differing approaches in instruction and curriculum. Yet it is far from clear whether an aristocratic and noble education can be conjoined with a diverse, multifaceted, pluralistic one.

Education, beyond the most basic attempts to instill in the individual a firm grasp of essential skills — those of, for example, language, logic, critical examination, in short, “learning to think” — is antithetical in the main to the task of encouraging potential self-overcoming individuals toward their anticipated end [TI, p. 512]. Education can be but the beginning: the real work rests firmly with the individual. And this is why Nimrod Aloni’s task of creating a pedagogical dimension out of Nietzsche’s critique of anemic educational institutions is misguided. While Aloni’s attempt at rescuing Nietzsche from the accusation of nihilism is admirable, Aloni falters when he argues that Nietzsche intended for teachers “to liberate and empower individuals toward authentic, autonomous, and creative life.” The problem is that Aloni ignores the overriding evidence suggesting that, for Nietzsche, education is neither liberating nor empowering. If individuals wish, “authentic, autonomous, and creative life,” as Aloni maintains, they must achieve this outside of education, for it is an entirely personal goal. Education, as mentioned before, is simply a means to the task of thinking. Education cannot, as Aloni suggests, provide “conceptual means [such as the Will to Power, the Overman, and the Dionysian] for promoting the rise of noble cultures and great human beings.” If these are indeed to arise, they will do so precisely because they form outside of education, outside of that hegemonic environment that, paradoxically, creates mediocrity, not nobility.

53. Ibid., 305.
Martin Simons’s "Montessori, Superman, and Catwoman" fashions an Overman closer to the spirit of the free-thinking inner individual than perhaps do any of the other commentators. One almost becomes hopeful when Simons announces:

He will resist and strive to overcome society, public opinion, state, employer, school, friends, priests, wife, or anything standing in the way, suffering in consequence all the way. It would be better to die striving than never to make the effort. Without struggle there can be no worthwhile achievement."

Sadly though, Simons’s pronouncement of the self-sustaining, self-overcoming individual proves premature; but not because he identifies with the antiaristocratic Nietzsche of Bloom and Adler. In point of fact, he argues that Nietzsche is indeed able to tolerate a schooling for the majority, for the herd. But Simons is unable to see what the self-overcoming individual must overcome as a vestige of democracy, society, school, and schooling. Simons suggests that schooling itself may serve to suppress individuals, but dismisses the possibility that the whole philosophy of education might be complicit in this. Rather, he entertains only the possibility of certain schools being corrupt. Simons refuses to affirm the notion that education itself, not simply schools of a certain kind, is the point of contention for a self-overcoming individual and writes, “In an atmosphere where each one’s development is encouraged there is no apparent reason why the exceptional ones should not flourish as the more ordinary ones also grow. Well-organized schools surely should exemplify this.”

Leslie Sassone is the first commentator to tackle the difficult issue of the appropriation of Nietzsche for a democratic education. Her attempt is a bold and ambitious enterprise. Sassone argues for a democratized Nietzschean pedagogy; that is, teaching practices that are allied both with Nietzsche and with democracy. For Sassone, Nietzschean teaching practices and democracy are compatible. This is so in part because of an assumption that the democratic Nietzsche is one who champions “being-in-and-for-self.” Hegelianizing Nietzsche in this way allows Sassone to fix the democratic Nietzsche as firmly supporting a self-referential view. The Deweyan ideal of democracy as conjoint communication amongst peoples is seemingly cast aside in favor of a more radical and ultimately individual ideal. The self-referential, self-observational individual is certainly a goal to which Nietzsche aspires. And Sassone is correct in exemplifying this aspect of Nietzsche: “Democratic Nietzsche offers a philosophical pedagogy adapted to encouraging each to live as much of the dare as each has the strength for. In this voice, individualization is more than something we cannot escape, it is something we must cultivate.”

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55. Ibid., 348.
56. Sassone, “Philosophy Across the Curriculum.”
57. Ibid., 515.
58. Of course, Hegelianizing the individual in this way ignores the fact that for Hegel, being in and for itself was inchoate; it was incomplete without the referential “being for other” that completed it, and propelled it towards actuality. See “The Science of Logic,” in G.W.F. Hegel, Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Outline and Critical Writings, ed. Ernst Behler and trans. Steve Taubeneck (New York: Continuum, 1990).
An erroneous assumption, however, creeps into Sassone’s argument — the equation of pedagogy, or the general dissemination of Nietzsche’s themes to a captive audience, with education, the formal dissemination of (shared) knowledge. The two are not coterminous. Although it may indeed be appropriate to argue that Nietzsche’s themes and statements constitute a pedagogy, inasmuch as Nietzsche himself alludes to this in Zarathustra, nevertheless Nietzsche has no illusions about the role of formal education in the dissemination of his themes. For this is an impossibility, inasmuch as the effort that leads to self-overcoming is an entirely self-involved task.

In Sassone’s estimation, democracy exists coterminously with a self-referential, self-observing individual. Indeed, in this relationship, individuality is argued to be predicated upon democracy, and vice-versa. But the social import of this relation is briefly mentioned only toward the end of the essay, and the exact relation of the individual to the social in terms of a Nietzschean pedagogy is left unclear:

The Nietzschean democratic project as developed here is a pedagogy of and for the self by the self. For this Nietzsche, education is primarily self-education. Yet individualization is not solipsistic or narcissistic. In any of Nietzsche’s voices, he teaches that we are in a social relationship, a give and take with others, as soon as we have language.... For democratic Nietzsche, pedagogy in any subject is a social encounter that at its best is a relation of love.

And further:

For Nietzsche, to heal oneself is to overcome ressentiment, which for democratic Nietzsche can only be done by practicing a self-observational discourse that finds its fruition in ever-renewed amor fati. In terms of the schools, a Nietzschean pedagogy across the curriculum is first and foremost a pedagogy of self-education for teachers; that is, teachers need to “heal” themselves to make themselves fit to help students individualize.

Now, Sassone has a difficult task here, and I think the strains begin to show at the point where the individual and the social are to merge. Democracy is principally a social activity. Sassone, I think, recognizes this, and therefore attempts to evade the aporia of exactly how to reconcile a social institution such as education with a view of individual self-reflection, fulfillment, and observation. While summarily emphasizing the importance of the social in democratic Nietzsche, she eludes the difficult question of how to be at once both social and radically individual, as Nietzsche, if we are to agree with Sassone, seems to desire.

For Nietzsche, though, there is no question of a reconciliation between the realms of the individual and social. One simply has to overcome the social if one desires in turn to self-overcome. To propose a democratic Nietzsche requires one to somehow fashion a compatible solution that does not give too much control, too much weight, to either the social or the individual. A democratic Nietzsche cannot exist in this respect and at the same time recommend to the individual a radical turning away from society and the social in favor of oneself. Nietzsche chooses where Sassone cannot. And the choice he makes is the individual. Because of this, Sassone fails in her project.

60. See Nietzsche, Zarathustra book 1, p. 78: “Now I bid you lose me and find yourselves; and only when you have all denied me will I return to you.”
61. Sassone, “Philosophy Across the Curriculum.”
62. Ibid., 523.
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EDUCATION AND THE FUTURE OF NIETZSCHEAN RESEARCH

Ultimately, one must agree with Cooper's critique of Gordon's "Zarathustra as Educator" wherein he states,

The "legislation" of this new aristocracy is self-legislation... The "power" of philosophical men, as we know from Nietzsche's discussions of philosophy and the will to power, is the creative power to revalue, construct perspectives, confer meanings, and escape the constricting mediocrity of the values and ideas which dominate in the "herd"... The riches of the masters are those of spirit and character.63

Inasmuch as education is a social institution, with social valuations, it contains. It is hegemonic. It self-creates and maintains its specific narratives and it in turn passes these along to its pupils. It aims to produce critical thinkers: individuals who are able to use their training and skills in a purposeful fashion.64 It aims to enlighten, to emancipate.65 But Dewey is perhaps most correct when he argues that education's chief function, above all else, is to provide intelligence of a kind that will allow the production of a democratic citizenry.66 This is clearly not what Nietzsche's overriding task with respect to the individual seems to be. The production of an enlightened, emancipatory, democratized citizen is antithetical to the self-overcoming individual who Nietzsche champions: one who would cast off the vestiges of sociocultural valuations in order to become who he or she is.

The question, therefore, is precisely what kind of instruction, what kind of curriculum, would Nietzsche accept? To answer this question requires one to specify precisely what task it is one wishes to accomplish. If the task is self-overcoming, Nietzsche's primary goal for the individual, then the answer is simple: a self-created and self-instructed teaching and curriculum. There is no room for education in this achievement. But if the goal is to educate the masses, then the answer can be found in what Cooper considers Nietzsche's educational corpus.67

The noble and aristocratic education for the masses has been well-documented, particularly by Bloom, Rosenow, and Hillesheim. In contrast to this, the emphasis that Nietzsche places on the self-instruction necessary for self-overcoming has received scant attention. Sassone and Simons are perhaps the first to consider this facet of pedagogy.68 There are many examples, many maxims, in Nietzsche that one can point to for assistance in this endeavor. Ultimately though, the task is, as Nietzsche would agree, a thoroughly individual one. One must not only create the self that one wishes to become, but create also the means, the instruction, and

63. Cooper, "On Reading Nietzsche on Education," 125.
64. Bloom, Closing of the American Mind.
66. Dewey, Democracy and Education.
68. Sassone, "Philosophy Across the Curriculum" and Simons, "Montessori, Superman, and Catwoman."
content, if you will, of how one wishes to achieve this stature. There can be, unfortunate as this is to educators, no blueprint for this task. At the most elemental level, there is a requirement to integrate Nietzsche's themes into a schema; a schema that will function solely for that individual. And this is perhaps why educators who use Nietzsche for their respective "philosophies" hesitate to challenge that most basic labor of the Nietzschean corpus. It is because, ultimately, there is no place for a reasoned discussion of the techniques or the content of self-overcoming, beyond those general opinions that Nietzsche himself proffers in respect to this goal. There are no "shared" methods of instruction, no curricula that can be perused, no contents to be discovered. There is only the individual, making up these rules as he or she goes along.