NIETZSCHE, ETHICS AND EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL FUTURES
RETHINKING THEORY AND PRACTICE
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Nietzsche, Ethics and Education

An Account of Difference

By

Peter Fitzsimons

Auckland, New Zealand
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FOREWORD BY MICHAEL A. PETERS

It is a much too troubled and grandiose claim to say that in postmodernity Nietzsche has replaced Marx. It is the case that a ‘new’ Nietzsche has emerged from contemporary readings by scholars of the relevance of Nietzsche at least since the Nietzsche conferences held in Paris in the early 1960s with the participation of the likes of Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, Pierre Klossowski, Maurice Blanchot, Sarah Kofman, Eric Blondel and Michael Haar. This new Nietzsche, largely a French construction, was highly motivated by Heidegger’s interpretive work published in the 1960s (though first drafted in the mid to late 1930s) and Georges Bataille’s transgressive reading developed in the 1930s and 1940s. Heidegger in his work focused on the will to power as art and as knowledge, the eternal recurrence of the same and the question of nihilism. For Heidegger, Nietzsche marks the culmination of Western metaphysics. The influence of Heidegger’s Nietzsche is unmistakable in the writings of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and many others, even if they were to disagree with his conclusions. Bataille also strongly influenced the new reading through his association with André Breton and Surrealism, his friendship with Klossowski, and the journals he established which published Barthes, Foucault and Derrida (he establish Critique in 1946). While Bataille published only one work that focused on Nietzsche (Sur Nietzsche in 1946), his work and especially his eroticism was infused by Nietzsche.

In this context of new Nietzsche studies we ought to mention also especially the work of Walter Kaufmann, the German Jewish philosopher who translated Nietzsche and anthologized existentialism, and R. J. Hollingdale – both a biographer and translator, who together but independently rehabilitated Nietzsche in the English-speaking world after WWII. To these names we can add the names of many prominent and leading Nietzsche scholars: Richard Schacht, Robert C. Solomon and Kathleen Higgins, Ernst Behler, David Farrell Krell, Alan D. Schrift, Keith Ansell-Pearson, and Duncan Large, to name a few.

Nietzsche is alive and well. His influence is growing rather than waning, and various scholars, especially in the French tradition have manufactured readings that draw on Marx, Freud and Nietzsche in different combinations and registers. This is why I welcome this new book on Nietzsche in the field of education that adds to the beginnings of a now substantial literature that begins the task of serious philosophical engagement not only with Nietzsche’s educational writing but also with his ‘philosophy’ and his works in relation to educational themes, a significant aspect that is overlooked and marginalized in the general philosophical literature.

Peter Fitzsimons’s admirable book takes up the question of ethics and education in Nietzsche to provide ‘an account of difference’, as he says, and in a carefully


2 See the course bibliography for Duncan Large’s French Nietzsches on his webpage at http://www.swan.ac.uk/german/large/frennieb.htm.
argued analysis by turn he provides the historical background on Nietzsche’s education and education’s Nietzsche (his reception and educational philosophy), while also examining his relationship to both German idealism and the Enlightenment. One of the many strengths of Fitzsimons’s reading is the close textual attention he attaches to Nietzsche in relation to liberalism and to democracy through the central concepts of autonomy, subjectivity and Nietzsche’s Übermensch. Another strength is the way that Fitzsimons traces Nietzsche studies in the work of the poststructuralists and its import for Nietzsche studies in education. As he writes in the opening chapter: ‘With his lack of reverence for the authority of truth and reason, his scathing criticism of transcendental authority, and his wariness of communal morality, Nietzsche provides a strong basis from which to question the existing ethical basis for education.’ I cannot provide a better starting point for an interesting, careful and scholarly reading of Nietzsche than this book by Peter Fitzsimons, even if you, the reader, are somewhat cautious about any wholesale embrace of Nietzsche within a normative educational philosophy.

Michael A. Peters
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
September 2006
PREFACE

During rather a smorgasbord of a career, including long periods as a teacher and an educational management consultant, my interest stays in education, particularly in the broad questions about the nature of education, its aims, and its justification, in a world increasingly characterised by difference and dissent. I have long believed that for individual teachers, for institutions and for those charged with education policy direction, it is important to ask what we should be doing and why. It was not surprising, therefore, ten years ago to find myself delving into research on ethics in education.

My interest in Nietzsche was first aroused with a reading of his *Genealogy of Morals*, not only a critique of a specific ethical position, but also an interrogation of the whole basis of morality itself. There was some resonance for me in his early experience of religion, where the word of God was law and religious authority sacrosanct. There was reassurance too in Nietzsche’s refusal to succumb to public opinion, to be marginalised by authority, or to give up in the face of overwhelming difficulty. Here at last was a courageous new (albeit hundred-year old) sacrilege – both poetic and inspirational, and to some extent sanctioned within academia, although less so in the increasingly psychologised world of education that assumes some consensus about how students and teachers should be.

In purporting to provide a normative ethical view of education, both liberal and democratic theories rely on the rational nature of human beings to inform their practices. An examination of Kantian liberal theory as a basis for education reveals a reliance on transcendental values, moral certainty, and a form of subjectivity based on the enlightenment notion of personal autonomy. Social democratic approaches to education in the tradition of Rousseau also valorise the rational ‘self’, elevating forms of communal consensus over private autonomy, and promote a positive view of freedom with a subjectivity based on social cohesion and shared obligation.

This book argues that an ethics based on either approach is inadequate, in that both approaches are founded on belief in a human essence subject to the higher authority of an abstract and universal reason. The book problematises the notion of a universal human ‘nature’, arguing instead that we occupy multiple and contradictory subject positions within social life, and that a preordained liberal or egalitarian order excludes otherness in the very manner that it abhors. The book thus undermines several assumptions that pose as ethical truths, including freedom, equality, goodness and universal reason.

Nietzschean perspectivism undermines any privileged access to transcendental truth and questions the existence of an essential ‘self’. Nietzsche’s pronouncement of the ‘death of god’ provides a metaphor for the limits of universal reason, leaving no possibility for alternative certainties, while his Übermensch provides a critique of rigid adherence to societal norms. Although, post-Nietzsche, there can be no replacement for universal morality, his philosophy provides a useful reference for an educational perspective that honours difference, incorporates otherness, and problematises imposed solutions to the complex unfolding of life as a creative enterprise.
PREFACE

This book has arisen from my doctoral research at the University of Auckland, where I was privileged to be guided by two outstanding philosophers of education, Michael Peters and Jim Marshall, both of whom I acknowledge for their inspiration, their courage and their precision in exploring the troubled path of educational philosophy amid political turmoil. I want to thank my friends, family and colleagues for their understanding and patience through the preparation of this manuscript; in particular, my brother and travelling companion, Patrick, who encouraged me along this academic journey but for health reasons has now retired.

I would like to acknowledge the Philosophy of Education Society of Australasia, the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain, the International Network of Philosophy of Education and the Friedrich Nietzsche Society for the opportunity to present and engage at international conference level many of the ideas developed in this book over the past six years. My thanks also to Bergin and Garvey for publishing an early version of some parts of chapter 5 in the Nietzsche’s Legacy for Education collection.

Peter Fitzsimons

ABBREVIATIONS

To facilitate reference to the various editions of Nietzsche’s writing, and in keeping with common practice in Nietzschean scholarship, each of his works is cited in the text using an abbreviation of its title, followed by (a) Roman numerals to indicate major segments of the work (e.g., a ‘book’ or ‘essay’); and (b) the section number indicated by the symbol ‘§’. Where there is no section number, the section title has been used.

Abbreviations are as follows:

**BGE:** Beyond Good and Evil (Nietzsche, 1990a);
**BT:** The Birth of Tragedy (Nietzsche, 1967);
**CW:** The Case of Wagner (Nietzsche, 1967);
**DB:** Daybreak (Nietzsche, 1982);
**EH:** Ecce Homo (Nietzsche, 1989);
**FEI:** On the Future of Our Educational Institutions (Nietzsche, 1909);
**GM:** On the Genealogy of Morals (Nietzsche, 1989);
**GS:** The Gay Science (Nietzsche, 1974);
**HAH:** Human All Too Human (Nietzsche, 1986a);
**TI:** Twilight of the Idols (Nietzsche, 1990b);
**TL:** On Truth and Lies In A Nonmoral Sense (Nietzsche, 1990c);
**UM II:** On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life – Second Untimely Meditation (Nietzsche, 1983a);
**UM III:** Schopenhauer as Educator – Third Untimely Meditation (Nietzsche, 1983b);
**WP:** The Will to Power (Nietzsche, 1968);
**WS:** The Wanderer and His Shadow (Nietzsche, 1986b);
**Z:** Thus Spoke Zarathustra (Nietzsche, 1982a).
CHAPTER 1

NIETZSCHE AND ETHICS

WHY NIETZSCHE?

With his lack of reverence for the authority of truth and reason, his scathing criticism of transcendental authority, and his wariness of communal morality, Nietzsche provides a strong basis from which to question the existing ethical basis for education. His critique of Enlightenment thinking undermines the Kantian notion of personal autonomy and provides a basis for poststructural challenges to the autonomous individual as the subject of education. His corrosive perspectivism paves the way for multiple interpretations of life as text and the honouring of difference as an ethical principle. His focus on life and health indicates a valorisation of an aesthetic approach to life, and his concept of genealogy provides a tool for varying interpretations of educational practices. His Übermensch provides a model of human becoming rather than reified being, his notion of ‘beyond good and evil’ constitutes a critique of binary modes of thinking, and his notion of will to power theorises much of the interplay between individuals and groups. Surviving manuscript pages indicate that his final and unfinished project was to be entitled The Revaluation of All Values3, signifying the idea that values are not grounded in eternal truths but able to be reconstituted by those capable of rising above the strictures of morality and other socially constructed norms.

Education within liberal societies is valorised as a way of developing self-hood, for promoting knowledge as part of social and economic development, and for promoting shared values and traditions for society. Education is an ethical enterprise in that it is concerned with values that guide both private and social action. Typical of a liberal prescription for the focus of ethics is “what ends we ought, as fully rational human beings, to choose and pursue and what moral principles should govern our action” (Deigh, 1995, p. 244). Such prescriptions emanate from Kantian philosophy in which moral agency relies on a rational subject with free will, with a sense of duty and able to choose right from wrong. Although appealing to commonsense notions of right and wrong, they presuppose a universal notion of the good and a common approach to inquiry, although no such consensus is forthcoming. Instead, there is disagreement over both substance and

3 The phrase is used as a subtitle for the collection of Nietzsche's previously unpublished notes The Will to Power (WP) compiled by his sister. However, Hollingdale notes in the introduction to Nietzsche's last published work that The Antichrist was intended as the first part of a larger project The Revaluation of All Values, for which Nietzsche’s plan still survives. The revaluation involved a critique of Christianity, a critique of philosophy, a critique of morality and a book on the philosophy of eternal recurrence.
process, extending all the way to foundational yet incommensurate values and so differences are not readily resolvable.

In her survey of feminist perspectives on the self, Meyers (2004) points to the injustice done to women (as ‘other’) in promoting the rational individual – either as the Kantian subject who uses reason to transcend cultural norms and to discover absolute moral truth, or as *homo economicus*, the subject of neoliberalism who uses rational choice to maximise satisfaction of desire. Whether the self is identified with pure abstract reason or with the instrumental rationality of the marketplace, restricting the view of self to a rational entity isolates the individual from personal relationships and larger social forces. Prevailing conceptions of the self, she argues, minimise the impact of interpersonal relationships, ignoring the multiple sources of social identity constituted by such factors as gender, sexual orientation, race, class, age and ethnicity, and denying the complex world of the unconscious. Rather than considering the self in terms of decontextualised individualism and privileging reason over other capacities, this book agrees with Meyers’ view of the self as unstable and discursive – a ‘shifting confluence of multiple discursive currents’ (Meyers, 2004).

Given the interplay between metaphysical issues about the self and moral and political theory, it is a concern for educational philosophy how particular subject positions are established and maintained, and what different perspectives might be brought to bear on the relationship between the ‘self’ and the social. As a critique of the rational ‘essence’ attributed to human ‘nature’, this book offers a Nietzschean genealogy of the subject, which treats as problematic the way we become who we are. The question of subjectivity, driven by Nietzsche’s critique of modernity and amplified in the work of Foucault, Derrida, Lyotard and others4, not only challenges the abstract idea of the autonomous rational subject, but also critiques the nature of educational engagement conducted under the name of democracy within liberal societies and the way in which subjects in education are increasingly individuated and governed.

Over the past two decades, social policy in Western society has seen a neo-conservative emphasis on individual responsibility and a neo-liberal reconstruction of individual freedom in matters traditionally considered as social. Citizens have been transformed through market economies into pay-as-you-go consumers; individuals and nations have increasingly subscribed to the power of technology and the rhetoric of globalisation; and welfare society has given way to notions of ‘thin community’ (Olssen, 2001). Economic rationalism underpins this direction with its emphasis on individual competition and the dismantling of social cohesion and the welfare state – a direction frequently referred to as ‘new right’ or ‘neo-liberal’ (Upton, 1987; Haworth, 1994; Kelsey, 2002). Recent shifts in government terminology towards ‘new-left’ or ‘centre-left’ politics provide a superficial mask for the same economic and social direction, in which citizens are still ‘consumers’ and in which social participation and belonging still give way to the notion of community as merely an aggregate of individual responses.

4 Chapter 6 examines Nietzsche’s relationship to poststructural accounts of education.
Recent calls for a ‘third way’ (Giddens, 1998; 2002) are a thin disguise for an intensification of managerialism and the responsibilisation of individuals in a heavily prescribed social space. Critical social traditions in education are increasingly giving way to an intensified focus on pedagogy and assessment as a means to individual achievement, with a corresponding diminishing of concern for ethics and social participation. Given the imperative for growth and expansion inherent in capitalist economies, the rate of change in technological development shows no sign of abating, leaving a raft of uncertainties in the legal, ethical and political domain. Of concern for education here is the lack of certainty in the face of the poststructuralist critique of the rational metanarratives, and the uncertain future of the technological and political world the subjects of today’s education are being prepared for. Liberal and democratic theories have assumed a position of narrative dominance in determining political and educational ethics, even though, it will be argued, the practices they underwrite are questionable.

Under the guise of personal autonomy and the amelioration of the human condition, proponents of liberal education (e.g., R. Peters, 1966) valorise the Kantian concept of universal reason to constitute and justify educational ethics. However, over-reliance on reason constitutes an intolerance of otherness, ignoring much of what is valuable in social life – an outcome that offends liberal principles of tolerance, fairness and respect for others. Nietzschean perspectivism challenges the universal certainty of the liberal account of educational ethics, treating identity as negotiable and ethical prescriptions as contestable. Democratic approaches to education (e.g., Dewey, 1916) recognise the social nature of education and thus promise an egalitarian sensitivity to a range of interests. However, such approaches still uphold liberal values in the reliance on reasoned argument for the promotion of a consensus, often resulting in compromise between public good and individual preference. Thus, neither liberal nor democratic theory offers sufficient basis for a universal educational ethic.

This position undermines the Kantian account of the liberal subject of education and its recent transformation within neoliberal societies as the rational autonomous chooser (Marshall, 1995). The following chapters argue that what we call ‘community’ and ‘democracy’ leave much to be desired as ethical systems of engagement, particularly in terms of their urgency for reconciliation and closure. Exploration of the ethical basis for education, then, is vital. Nietzsche’s philosophy is particularly relevant to the task because of his self-professed perspective as an ‘immoralist’ (EH, Why I am a Destiny §6), his lack of compromise in his clarity of vision, and his sustained critique of Western metaphysics.

Calling into question the modernist notion of universal truth (and therefore the truth of a singular ethic) generates multiple responses to the problem of education – a multiplicity engendered and pre-configured by Nietzsche’s philosophical and political project. Of interest here is a redefinition of the self and what it is to be human; an examination of nature and culture; a perspective on man as artist and

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5 Nietzsche uses the word to distinguish himself from those indoctrinated by the prevailing morality. In a different sense, Nietzsche’s major focus on values constitutes him very much as a ‘moralist’.
creator (vs. creature); a synthesis of the Apollonian and the Dionysian; and the positing of Übermensch as the basis for a Nietzschean ethic for education. Nietzsche’s ideas provide alternatives to commonly accepted perspectives on social policy, on education, and on the nature of our ‘selves’. Nietzschean thought suggests an explanation for the breakdown of individual and national identity; it provides grounds for the celebration of difference; and raises the possibility of an ethics outside liberalism and traditional forms of social democracy. His notions of the emancipated ‘genius’ and the conformist ‘herd’ provide ground for an exploration of freedom and morality, and can be seen as a metaphor for the relationship between individual and society in a working out of the philosophical play between freedom and equality.

Nietzsche’s philosophy suggests that traditional approaches to ethics do not provide sufficient basis for educational thought. Objectivist accounts of truth belie their interpretive stance, Kantian rationality is seen as just another self-referential belief system, while current formulations of democracy and social justice prevent the emergence of individual difference and cultural excellence. Obviously, a Nietzschean account cannot posit an alternative certainty, since the ‘death of god’ does not leave room for another transcendental truth, another supreme god or false idol/ideal. Instead, the Nietzschean calls into question the ‘taken for granted’, revealing ethics as an arguable realm with no point of refuge outside this world. Rather than appealing to universal truth or morality based on the power of abstract reason, Nietzsche’s impassioned plea for resuscitating the embodied self as a source of ethics (taken up in Foucault’s genealogy of disciplined and ‘docile’ bodies in chapter seven) provides a new perspective on educational philosophy.

Within the concept of will to power, Nietzsche offers the notion of the Übermensch as a model of overcoming the social limitations of Christian morality and the dictates of fashion. In a continuous formative state, ‘untimely men’ (and here, read ‘Nietzsche’) stand outside the homogenising influence of the State and are not caught up in the rhetoric of political slogans like ‘knowledge economy’ or ‘third way’. Nor are they standard-bearers of liberal autonomy or champions of an egalitarian model of social justice. Nietzsche’s Übermensch, involving a continuous process of ‘overcoming’ and ‘becoming’, is promoted over the autonomous liberal subject as a hope for education, providing a perspective that contrasts with the egalitarian and collectivist notions that underpin social democracy and social justice as guiding ideals for educational endeavour.

In the spirit of agonism, however, it is not proposed that we do away with the existing social order or the organising principles of modern society, since they constitute the shared social space that we currently inhabit and thus offer the possibility of a starting place for new perspectives. What is argued for is a space for reflective engagement with prevailing discourses in the politics of education, and in particular, an interrogation of the inflated authority that Western thought attributes to the rational capacity of the human animal to dictate all aspects of life’s direction.

Interrogating authority and adopting multiple points of view constitutes an ongoing challenge to both the rational overlay on social life and the discursive practices that subjugate otherness. What emerges from this exploration is a respectful ethic of
difference, characterised within the Nietzschean/Derridean project of a ‘democracy to come’, interpretable as Chantal Mouffe’s (1988) idea of a ‘radical democracy’ or as Iris Young’s (1986; 2000) ‘politics of difference’. Prevalent views of education are problematised and a strong call issued for a new ethical justification of educational direction – beyond the promotion of universal reason, social homogeneity or the commercial production of qualifications. It is argued that traditional approaches to ethics in education are inadequate in their reliance either on the abstract idea of the liberal individual grounded in a transcendental idea of reason, or on the production of useful social and economic lives couched in the rhetoric of democracy and community. Rather than searching for a universal solution or any reconciled subject position, the following chapters promote subjectivity as a process of becoming, and welcome multiplicity and otherness as opportunities for engagement, for challenge and for educational growth.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

This first chapter provides a necessarily brief summary of the argument, suggesting how Nietzsche’s perspective might contribute to new thinking about educational ethics. Having set the scene, the rest of the chapter offers an outline of the structure of the book, arranged and explained in terms of chapter sequence.

Chapter two explores a number of explicit outcomes that Nietzsche envisaged for education, including his call for a strengthening of culture through the promotion of individual brilliance (‘the genius’), expressed through his early reverence for Schopenhauer. The chapter also explores Nietzsche’s strong criticisms of educational institutions of his day, many of which are seen as relevant to today’s institutions as they respond to economic and political necessity.

Nietzsche wrote explicitly about education, more extensively in his early career, and his work can, in part, be attributed to his existential concern with the growing strictures on individual freedom emanating from the formation and intensification of a socialist State. However, his educational ideas go beyond mere ressentiment and political reaction, with his formulation of what might be called an educational philosophy not only explicit in his educational writing, but inherent in his poetic and sometimes exhilarating treatment of other philosophical issues. He saw much academic endeavour as ‘scholarly grinding’ and acknowledged some value in technicist education as appropriate for the masses, although he also saw the need for special individuals – those with higher aspirations – to rise above mediocrity. His higher process involves admiration, emulation, and then a moving beyond the images of people, real or imaginary, that we consider worthy of being our educators. In this process, we learn to “become those we are”6 (GS §335).

Commentators have debated the relevance of Nietzsche’s corpus to educational theory. While some disparage his work as elitist ranting and others ignore him altogether, many characterise him not only as a productive educational theorist, but also as a personification of his own style of educator, a personification extended

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6 Obviously, given Nietzsche’s non-essentialist position in relation to ‘self’, this is not a call for the emergence of an underlying ‘being’. Rather, the call is interpreted as an unravelling of the conditions which led to our current ‘becoming’ and the positing of the possibility of creating anew.
into his most famous character – the wandering prophet Zarathustra. Nietzsche’s social and political location were major influences on the development of his philosophical stance. His perspectives on human subjectivity draw heavily upon his own religious upbringing, on German politics through his formative years, on Kantian scepticism, on Schopenhauerian pessimism, and also on a lifelong engagement with his own health. The chapter finishes by drawing together a number of themes emerging from Nietzsche’s perspective on education, that suggest a preliminary formulation of what might be called Nietzsche’s educational philosophy.

Chapter three provides a particular historical view of the German intellectual tradition, illustrative of the social and cultural environment in which Nietzsche’s philosophy developed – in particular, the political environment of nineteenth century Europe, and German intellectual traditions in the shadow of Kant. Specific focus is given to the Enlightenment and German idealism as informing the political and philosophical milieu from which Nietzsche emerged, explaining to some extent the ‘driven’ nature of his message.

Following Descartes and Kant, religious fundamentalism and the divine right of kings had given way to the ideal of the rational human being as the basis for ethical responsibility. Liberal thought promoted the twin threads of freedom and equality; both intertwined with the dignity accorded to humanity because of its rational ‘essence’, and both acting as foundation stones for Western morality and politics. Nineteenth century German philosophy was to a large degree underpinned by Kant’s metaphysics. The chapter explores Nietzsche’s criticism of Kant as a ‘cunning Christian’ in that the replacement of ‘faith in God’ as the source of ethical commitment still required a leap of faith – into the realm of transcendental reason. With no justification other than itself, reason was to form the basis of morality. Kant’s ‘categorical imperative’ and his notion of ‘duty’ still required a commitment to the universal good – a secularisation of the ultimate and unknowable realm outside of human perception and sensation. From this universal realm, and aware of the limitations of human reason, Kant derived his ethical concern for autonomy and the notion of respect for persons as ends in themselves. It is from Kantian metaphysics that liberal thought draws much of its ethical support for the dignity of the individual at the heart of secular morality.

Nietzsche’s antipathy to Kant is evident in his early eulogising of Schopenhauer for elevating the status of embodied presence, for his notion of the will as a metaphysical force, and his uptake of Eastern mysticism as a counterbalance to Kantian reason. Upholding Schopenhauer’s rejection of universal and transcendental ideals, Nietzsche posited will to power rather than rational essence as the driver for humanity. He promoted embodied, worldly presence – the real rather than an idea(l) of heavenly salvation or deified truth, and espoused individual character over equality or social conformity.

Nietzsche’s view of morality is intertwined with his view of herd mentality, and although holding a deep respect for Christ himself, Nietzsche ridiculed the Christian technology of subservience and self-denial. He also refused any morality that relied on an afterlife or a ‘better world’ for salvation, believing instead that the life to be celebrated is of this world – not some elevation of the good (or godliness)
to a realm beyond human perception. As a critique of Kantian thought, Nietzsche’s Übermensch functions as a personification of worldly freedom, a (debatably) human form that projects Nietzsche’s valuation of the aesthetic over the transcendent, his espousal of individual overcoming over social obligation or public acceptance, and his promotion of health and power over sickness and duty. The role of culture and education was to prepare the way for Übermenschlich development, with the power of humanity manifest in its highest specimens. The chapter finishes with a short overview of the philosophical relationship between Schopenhauer (Nietzsche’s mentor for many years) and Kant, in relation to Nietzsche’s subsequent conception of the Übermensch.

In the style of a literature review, chapter four draws mainly upon a debate conducted across a number of articles in three philosophy of education journals; their authors engaged with a wide range of Nietzsche’s writing to examine his relevance to educational thought. Extending the scope beyond the works generally considered to be ‘about education’, these authors extract a range of themes that yield fresh perspectives and enrich discussions in the field of educational philosophy. Interpretations include: a redefinition of the self and what it is to be human (GM); an examination of nature and culture as issues for education (UM III); a perspective on man as artist and ‘creator’ rather than ‘creature’; the elevation of genius and untimeliness as a model of individual freedom; a synthesis of the Apollonian and the Dionysian as a reconciliation of competing forces within our psyche (GM); and the positing of Übermensch as a basis for a Nietzschean ethic for education. This last formulation, representing much of Nietzsche’s philosophical contribution to the educational discourse, will be expanded in a later chapter as a metaphor for education: as an interpretation of individual freedom in relation to society; as a mechanism for facing adversity and challenge; and as an icon for the value of reflection and creativity in becoming who we are.

Nietzsche’s other writing, although not explicitly focussed on education, also serves to illuminate educational debate, particularly his iconoclastic ‘death of god’ as a radical approach to perspectivism and the recognition of difference as an ethical principle; his attitude towards overcoming difficulties as a constant spur to higher achievement; and his counter-nihilistic approach to the creation of new values while facing up to the end of certainty. His parable of Zarathustra is often taken as a metaphor for his own educational philosophy, with its main character a model of the teacher Nietzsche saw himself as. The chapter finishes by recalling some specific themes from chapter two (i.e. Nietzsche’s specific educational writing), which, combined with the academic commentary of chapter four suggest what might be translated into the modern idiom as a Nietzschean educational philosophy – a collection of thoughts that point strongly to his figure of the Übermensch as a metaphor for education.

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7 The character and function of Nietzsche’s Übermensch is explored in chapter nine.
8 The range, style and extent of Nietzsche’s writing preclude a full review of his writing. This book limits the focus to that which is either explicitly or implicitly educational. Other commentators are drawn upon throughout to highlight specific points, their work summarised and analysed where appropriate.
Chapter five explores the dual traditions of liberalism and democracy in the British school of educational philosophy, where Richard Peters (1966) adopted a substantially Kantian position to advocate a universal ethics for education; a position that required on the one hand, individual rationality, concern for truth and the giving of reasons; and on the other hand, a concern for democratic process and respect for others as ends in themselves. The fundamental ethical system for Peters is democracy, not because the majority holds power, but because it allows for deliberation by informed individuals operating within a paradigm of Kantian rationality.

The chapter argues that Nietzschean perspectivism and genealogy undermine Peters’ claims, providing a vigorous challenge to universal rational morality as the fundamental basis for ethical theory. In an early essay, Nietzsche portrayed truth as human construction rather than as a reflection of objective reality; preferring to interpret reason as an object of faith rather than as the basis for a categorical imperative or as a source of respect for others. A Nietzschean perspective on the notion of ethics in education suggests that a multi-dimensional perspective may be more appropriate than a universal morality in determining an ethical basis for educational direction. Such a view resists final closure on any individual identity, suggesting that identity formation is a political process that rests on social definitions of difference, with the resulting identity not an inherent truth about one’s being, but a self-reinforcing ‘circle of significations’ (Connolly, 1991). The chapter argues for an agonistic relationship, in which contending identities and ‘otherness’ are nurtured – a position that challenges the reliance on the giving of reasons as the basis for ethics. With difference as an ethical principle and considering Peters’ own call for fairness and respect for persons, his theory is exposed as insufficient to embrace the complex and not always rational processes of subjects under liberal democracy.

Chapter six brings together a number of authors generally considered within postmodern and poststructural analysis, examining Nietzsche’s contribution to their educational philosophy. The varied perspectives within poststructural critique provide a strong counterbalance to essentialist and reified notions of the self within liberal thought. The chapter explores some recurring themes in poststructuralist endeavour, linked to Nietzsche’s corrosive effect on the humanist subject. Through a critical examination of the fundamental place of scientific reason in defining our social ‘reality’, assumptions underlying educational theory and practice are challenged – in particular, the assumption of a unified reason and the Hegelian notion of progress as part of modernity. The chapter also explores the relation between power and truth in the maintenance of social order, the play of difference as a critique of ‘grand narrative’, deconstruction of the ‘text’ and ‘the author’ in favour of an interpretive paradigm, and the ‘self’ as multiplicity and creation. The deconstruction of singular meaning challenges educators to enter into critical and constructive dialogue, to interpret ‘otherness’ as tentative and to avoid the closure of final definitions.

Chapter seven explores the notion of autonomy in relation to the Nietzschean subject, referring in particular to Foucault’s notions of ‘governmentality’ and ‘subjectivity’, locating the modern self firmly within the rationality of government.
Drawing heavily on Kantian thought, the notion of autonomy promotes a sovereign view of the self, operating according to rational principles largely removed from social and political encumbrance. As the teacher of will to power at the heart of existence, Nietzsche might be expected to support such an empowered and ‘liberated’ view of the self. However, the autonomous individual is a misguided notion for Nietzsche, since the guiding light of reason is neither transcendental nor internal, representing a false ideal (‘idol’) that can be neither known nor experienced. His vision is of higher types attempting to break free into a realm of individual perception, but being dragged down by mediocrity and a lowly morality that attempts to homogenise and ‘make small’.

Arguing that Foucault extends and elaborates on Nietzschean thought, the chapter provides a Foucauldian critique of Kantian autonomy as an aim of education, offering instead the notion of ‘subjectivity’ to represent the social nature of self-government. Rather than adopting a universal and transcendental notion of ‘self’, the Nietzschean/Foucauldian direction reveals a contingent identity that develops in relation to the prevailing discourse – as much ‘subjected’ as ‘subjecting’. The notion of autonomy, then, can be seen as a mantra to keep individuals believing in individual freedom and self-government, while operating within the sphere of power and obligation.

Social and political considerations are therefore important in determining the direction and extent to which people might take charge of their own lives within particular social groupings such as family, community, nation or humankind. All these social groupings require particular constellations of subjectivity, with a belief in individual autonomy acting to secure willing compliance and cooperation, especially if that is to be achieved through consensus or community. The chapter explores an extension of this subjectivity into ‘third way’ politics – a recent manifestation of social democracy and a euphemism for political management of human aspiration that extends into the domain of education. The chapter concludes that ‘third way’ rhetoric masks a highly governed form of individuality bearing little resemblance to participation in a caring community.

Chapter eight begins by highlighting some aspects of Nietzsche’s relationship with social and political life relevant to his attitudes about democracy. The chapter then explores various accounts of democracy suggesting some common features, including: a reliance on rational deliberation; the promotion of self-government and self-regulation; and a belief that it enables fair compromise in the satisfaction of wants. Democracy is then examined in relation to education, drawing particularly on the work of Dewey (1916; 1938), Gutmann (1999), and R. Peters (1966); to suggest that democratic approaches to education involve: initiation into certain traditions and rituals, a reliance on rational debate and deliberation; a respect for equality in the interplay between self and social cooperation; a strong relationship between education and lived experience; and a considerable presumption of freedom in the exercise of one’s rights and responsibilities. Dewey (1916) argued further for shared values, free interaction, and the inhibition of impulses through critical reflection.

Nietzsche’s critique of democracy is explored from a number of angles: its metanarrative status; its egalitarian focus, its exclusion of otherness; its privileging
of reason in human affairs; and its elevation of a social system above the individuals it purports to serve. The chapter suggests Nietzsche’s thinking on these matters reflects not only his critique of transcendental reason, but also his unease about limitations on personal expressions of difference, possibly stemming from his experience of German nationalism and progressive socialism.

Although Nietzsche’s writing is strong in his criticism of democracy, Derrida notes that Nietzsche is not an “enemy of democracy in general” (2002, p. 234). Rather, Nietzsche can be seen as criticising particular forms of democracy. The chapter finishes with a Nietzschean perspective on the relationship between democracy and education, engaging with the debate about whether ‘anti-democratic’ Nietzsche can be used to support a vision of democracy in education. Nietzsche’s whole stand against Kantian metaphysics and against many of the political practices that bear the name ‘democracy’ is really the beginning of his notion of a democracy ‘yet to come’ – a Nietzschean idea developed by Derrida and others as a way to proceed. Its lack of closure and respect for otherness is congruent with Iris Young’s notion of a ‘politics of difference’ – an acknowledgement of the contingent and tentative grip human knowledge has on what it calls ‘social reality’. ‘Democracy to come’ is not about the power of majorities or the rights of minorities. It is not about consensus or rational debate. It represents a space for diversity and mutual recognition of otherness – necessarily a site of tension and one that calls for agonistic engagement with difference. Such is the function of Nietzsche’s Übermensch.

Chapter nine draws together a number of Nietzschean themes in the figure of the Übermensch as a metaphor for education. It is argued that a focus on Übermensch is not so much an examination of an ontological state, but a reflective critique of one’s own ability to operate in a social environment in celebration of this life; a celebration in which the creator is secure, independent, and highly individualistic, with a healthy balance between passion and reason. Given Nietzsche’s rejection of conformity and transcendental ideals, Übermensch represents a plurality of norms, an undermining of the doctrine of one normal human type, and the possibility for multiple perspectives – a possibility that underpins an ethical direction towards multiplicity and celebration of difference rather than any closure into certainty and unity.

In his stand over and beyond nihilism, Nietzsche attributed the power of creation to a new possibility for humanity – his Übermensch, the development of which can be seen as a continuous project throughout his work. Contrasted with the sickly specimens Nietzsche saw as weakened and tamed in the servitude of Christianity, morality and societal decadence, Übermensch represented a warrior strength emanating from facing up to life’s challenges and an agonistic process of overcoming difficulties. In this engagement, one’s enemies are welcomed as contributing to one’s own strength – thus a philosophy of respect for otherness rather than the rejection of negativity that constitutes the Hegelian dialectic. The kind of overcoming defended here and modelled in the Übermensch is, then, one

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9 Derrida’s (2001; 2002) ‘democracy to come’ is put forward in chapter eight as an interpretation of Nietzsche’s thinking, and expanded by others following Derrida. See, for example, Caputo (1997); Touraine (1997); Peters (1996); and West (1990).
that incorporates difference with a cumulative strengthening of character. Inherent in the notion of *Übermensch* is a continuous and dynamic overcoming of the currently known.

Nietzsche’s themes of *eternal recurrence* and *will to power* can be understood in terms of his *Übermensch* construction, although it can be argued that the theme of *eternal recurrence* is best understood as a call to action rather than a description of a metaphysical cycle of actual events. To embrace the idea of *eternal recurrence* is to face the hypothetical possibility of being stuck in one’s existential predicament forever, and so the imperative is to create that cycle (as if it were true) at the highest possible level of achievement.

Given that Nietzsche never painted an explicit picture of the *Übermensch* for us, we are left to decipher possibilities from the literature that preceded Nietzsche, from his references to *Übermenschlich* qualities of the people he admired, and from his depiction of his own physical health and socio-cultural predicament. Nietzsche’s *Übermensch* is portrayed as a form of ‘overcoming’ and challenges some prevailing assumptions about human identity. Unlike the autonomous individual espoused by Kant, *Übermensch* is particular (not universal), impassioned (not just rational), in the image of man (not God), embodied (not spiritual), and worldly (not ideal or transcendental). It is also social, interactive and pragmatic; and, through agonistic contest, incorporates *otherness*. It provides a useful metaphor for education, signifying a level of development beyond the currently known, and promoting life as subjective challenge and self-determination.

Also explored in chapter nine is the challenge laid down by Heidegger in his characterisation of technology as a danger for humanity in its capacity to enframe our way of thinking. As education is increasingly being called upon to deal with the nihilism of modernity through the development of *Übermensch*, we run the risk of casting education itself as a neutral technology and thus of losing our ability to stand back and reflect on the process to which we are committed. Nietzsche’s *Übermensch*, then, has an added dimension of introducing the self-reflective capacity to the process of its own development, and thus for philosophy of education in terms of what education is doing, how it goes about that, and to what ends.

The final chapter provides a short summing up of the book’s argument, concluding that traditional approaches to ethics do not provide sufficient basis for educational thought today. Nietzsche’s philosophy, in its dismantling of metaphysics, is unable to posit an alternative certainty either; although it provides a strong platform from which to problematise the relationship between self and society, to question the governing role played by reason in the development of social selves, and to question the political structures that are charged with maintaining the current order. With no referent in a supernatural realm and no divine inspiration for truth, human enterprise becomes the possibility of multiple subjectivities and the creation of new values. The value of Nietzsche’s thinking for education is its refusal of unwarranted subjugation and its agonistic engagement with *otherness* – a ‘celebration of difference’.
CHAPTER 2

NIETZSCHE’S EDUCATION

NIETZSCHE’S EDUCATIONAL WRITING

In attempting to locate Nietzsche’s work in the realm of ethics, it is illuminating to examine the specific focus he gave to the topic of education. It would be a straightforward exercise to assemble his written comments about education or to search indexes from his published works that focus specifically on that topic. However, Nietzschean scholars do not concur about what Nietzsche is ‘really saying’, especially when various aphorisms are decontextualised either in relation to a particular book or in relation to the rest of his philosophy.

It has also become something of an art form to interpret his other work (not clearly identified as ‘education’) as evidence of what might be called Nietzsche’s ‘educational philosophy’; particularly his ideas on the ‘death of god’ as an approach to perspectivism, his attitude towards overcoming difficulties, his counter-nihilistic approach to the end of certainty, and his exhortation to be all we can be in the face of the threat of life as an eternally recurring repetition of events (GS §341). His parable of Zarathustra is often taken as a metaphor for his own educational philosophy and as a model of the teacher Nietzsche saw himself as. The contentiousness of the interpretive approach stems partly from a lack of consensus about what constitutes ‘education’. It also stems, however, from the extended period of Nietzsche’s writing and what are often thought to be inconsistencies and contradictions in his ideas. The project is further complicated by the different status usually accorded to his published work from that accorded to his unpublished manuscripts, with not all commentators agreeing over which should take precedence (Golomb, 1997, p. 23). However, throughout Nietzsche’s work there is a consistent thread, and some ongoing relevance to issues that educators grapple with today.

The current chapter examines some historical influences on the development of Nietzsche’s elitist perspective on culture and education, in particular the role played by Schopenhauer, the intensification of the German State, and a gradual redefinition of education as a commercial utility. Drawing from Nietzsche’s sometimes extravagant ideas, the chapter offers some perspectives on culture and education that may be relevant to the political milieu of today’s institutions. The focus is on Nietzsche’s specific writing about education and interpretations of his own references to the topic. In the interests of clarity, recent commentary on the educational implications of his wider philosophy will be left until a later chapter.

10 Gordon (1980) goes as far as suggesting that Nietzsche’s whole educational philosophy can be gleaned from Thus Spoke Zarathustra.