

Nietzsche on Aesthetics, Educators and Education

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Abstract This essay argues that much can be gained from a close examination of Nietzsche’s work with respect to education. In order to contextualise my argument, I provide a brief critique of Nietzsche’s thinking on aesthetics, educators and education. I then turn my attention to the work of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, the figures Zarathustra and the *Übermensch*, and other Nietzschean works with a view to outline what I mean by a Nietzschean education. My central thesis being that a Nietzschean education is primarily concerned with the cultivation of the self. This is certainly not an easy undertaking as it requires both an educator and education that can reveal to students “what one is” now (*being*), and who they could become (*becoming*). In order to bring this about, Nietzsche employs the use of an *aesthetic model* (ideal type) in the form of an exemplar for students to aspire to become. Here, the exemplar plays an important educative function in Nietzsche’s thinking because the role of the ideal type is to unsettle the student so that they are inspired to attain their unattained self that they recognise in the other. Consequently, what makes my account of a Nietzschean education significant is due to its concern with fostering timeless educational aims, such as learning to see, think, speak, write, and feel, by unsettling students with an *ideal educator* and *true education* so that students can get a sense of who they are *now* and who they could *become*.

Keywords Nietzsche · Education · Aesthetics · Culture · Free spirit · Eternal recurrence · *Übermensch* · Zarathustra/Zarathustra

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Introduction

Normally we do not associate Friedrich Nietzsche's work with education, however, much can be gained from a close examination of his oeuvre. Perhaps the best introduction of his thinking about education can be found in his third essay in *Untimely Mediations*.¹ Taking into consideration the title of this essay, its general neglect of Schopenhauer's thinking and work at first seems strange until Nietzsche makes it clear in *Ecce Homo* that in fact he was not referring to "... 'Schopenhauer as Educator' but his *opposite*, 'Nietzsche as Educator' ...[because] it is my innermost history, my *evolution* that is inscribed ..." (*EH, UM*, §3; pp. 57–58).² In one sense, the purpose of *Schopenhauer as Educator*³ is to honour Schopenhauer and outline the decisive role he played in his own intellectual development. Hence why he argues for the importance of "educating" through true "educators" because a student can learn what it means to embody an intellectual life by encountering their *exemplar* without becoming a disciple. In another sense, Nietzsche has in mind another kind of "educating" that is concerned with educators who are "liberators" and capable of undertaking the difficult task of "educating a man to be a man", or a more apt adaptation is a view of educating humans to become more human. The latter is best understood as the cultivation of the self as a form of self-education. In this case, this means more than a scientific and psychological understanding of the self, and involves a great deal more, such as both learning and relearning what it means to *become* fully human. Nietzsche's former concept of an exemplar and the latter concept of the cultivation of the self provides a new *aesthetic model* (ideal type) of perfection for students to aspire to become; however, it is argued that this transformation of the self can only be promoted and revealed to us through "*true culture*". The ramifications for education are significant due to the perennial issue of educational practices and institutions failing and stunting cultural transformation in the sense of challenging, inspiring, provoking and preparing students to be good citizens, thinkers and so on (Jonas 2009; Yacek 2014a, b; Jonas and Nakazawa 2008). Consequently, this is exactly why Nietzsche matters in education because in order to bring about educational reform—particularly long-term school reform—necessarily requires new institutions that educate teachers first, before considering the tasks for which educators are needed (Small 2016).

An important starting point to understanding my central thesis is to highlight how Nietzsche's philosophy connects with education, particularly the notion of culture, or aesthetic experience(s) in the cultivation of the self. The first concerns the diverse uses and roles Nietzsche assigns to the figure of Schopenhauer in his corpus. These range from Schopenhauer as: consolation, master, exemplar, authority, philosophical opponent, antipode, case-study, Nietzsche's educator, and sub-text (Janaway 1998). Although Nietzsche initially accepted Schopenhauer's philosophical ideas and then later subjected them to strong criticism and thereafter rejected them, it would be a mistake to disregard and ignore Schopenhauer's influence in Nietzsche's thinking, particularly in relation to the significant

¹ The essay in question is titled, *Schopenhauer as Educator*.

² From here on in, I will follow the academic convention of citing Nietzsche's work whenever possible with the initials of the English titles in the translations referred to in the reference section of this essay, and by using Arabic numerals to identify Nietzsche's numbered sections. In addition, I will also list the page numbers in all subsequent works because some sections of Nietzsche's work are quite long. In the case of *Ecce Homo*, the Arabic numerals identify the main parts of the work, and the internal initials identify the writings he is discussing. For instance, *EH* (*Ecce Homo*), *US* (*Untimely Essays*), §3; pp. 57–58.

³ Here on in the translation by R. J. Hollingdale of *Schopenhauer as Educator* will be cited as *SE*.

role he assigned art and aesthetic phenomenon in *The Birth of Tragedy*.⁴ According to Conant (2001), Nietzsche's concept of an exemplar discloses to use our "higher self" which is concealed within, but can only be revealed when we are confronted by *our* higher self in the *other* (exemplar) that we can get a sense of who we are now (*being*) and who we could become (*becoming*). It is here where the exemplar is crucial and plays an educative function because the role of the exemplar is to both reveal inadequacies and unsettle the student so that they are inspired to attain their unattained self that that they recognise in the other. As a result, Nietzsche places great weight on the *process, context* and *intentionality* between being and becoming (Richardson 1996).

The second concerns Nietzsche's well-known doctrine of "*amor fati*" (love of fate or love of one's fate) and his often misunderstood fatalism. Just as the subtitle of *Ecce Homo* states, "How one becomes what one is" ("Wie man wird, was man ist") is fixed in the sense of our psycho-physical constitution (natural facts or "type-facts"), but these are not *sufficient* reasons to guarantee that one will become "what one is", as other factors still play an important role in the development and trajectory of a person's life, such as circumstance and environment (Leiter 1998, 2002). Indeed, Nietzsche makes it clear in *EH*, that if one wants to answer the question "*how one becomes what one is*", then "one has to begin to *learn anew*" not to be fooled by an illusion that we can choose who we become.⁵ In particular, Nietzsche makes it clear that until we embrace "what one is" (our "eternal recurrence"), it will be almost nigh impossible to become aware of our true nature and why we may come to embrace certain ideas and values over others. Alternatively, even the opportunity to realise that type-facts are not fixed in advance can serve an important educative function. It is not until we make the connexion between Nietzsche's thinking on Schopenhauer, aesthetic phenomenon, notions of the eternal recurrence, to name a few examples, do we get a sense against this background that a Nietzschean education is non-linear and demanding, as it involves making sense of our true nature. Consequently, Nietzsche's fatalism should not be viewed as a negative assessment of life that leads to despair and ultimately withdrawal from it, however, my thesis is that the experience of embracing our "human, all too human" motives that are grounded in the egoistical *will to power* actually contributes and supports the affirmation of life.

In the spirit of Nietzsche, one of my aims in this essay is to carry on the process of reinterpretation and reevaluation of Nietzsche's project,⁶ and at the same time extend on the work of educational philosophers and theorists who have engaged with Nietzsche. It is not my intention to seek to correct previous interpretations of Nietzsche's thinking in relation to education, but more a case of taking both the discourse in a new direction and thereby

⁴ In the new preface to the 2nd edition of *The Birth of Tragedy* titled "Attempt at a Self-criticism" in 1886, this is made evident when Nietzsche argues that we should "... see science under the lens of artist, but art under the lens of life" (§2; p. 5). In this case, Nietzsche is arguing that just as science serves life, so too does art serve life, and hence why it should be given equal importance and value in our culture due to both meeting the basic needs of humans.

⁵ See *EH*, "Why I am so Clever" (§9; pp. 34–36; §10; pp. 36–38).

⁶ This is not an argument to say that I have resolved well-known contradictions found within Nietzsche's sizeable corpus. Nor am I claiming that this essay has discovered Nietzsche's philosophy of education. For the sake of clarity, I want to stress that the "process of reinterpretation and reevaluation" has been predominantly based on Nietzsche's primary sources that have been translated into English, and when required I have referred to the original German translation. Likewise, my reading of, and subsequent reinterpretation of Nietzsche's corpus in relation to education have been nuanced for the point and purpose of this essay. It should be noted that my thinking on Nietzsche does not deviate significantly from well-known Nietzschean scholars.

making a contribution to the literature.⁷ Subsequently, for the purposes of this essay I will be concerned with the discussion of two issues: first, I provide a brief critique of Nietzsche's thinking on aesthetics, educators and education; and lastly, I argue that a Nietzschean education is primarily concerned with the cultivation of the self. This is certainly not an easy undertaking as it requires both an educator and education that aims to reveal to students "what one is" now (*being*), and who they could become (*becoming*).

Nietzsche's Thinking on Aesthetics, Educators and Education

To fully understand what Nietzsche means when he speaks of educators and education as a form "liberation" in *SE*, we first need to understand his call for a new understanding of aesthetics and aesthetic phenomenon found in *The Birth of Tragedy*.⁸ From the outset of the *BT*, Nietzsche outlines what he has learnt from the Greeks and the role of art in making life worth living. According to Nietzsche, we can gain much from "... the science of aesthetics when we have succeeded in perceiving directly, and not only through logical reasoning, that art derives its continuous development from the duality of the *Apolline* and *Dionysiac*..." (*BT*, §1; p. 14). The use of the term "science" for Nietzsche in *BT* is best understood in the broad sense of a systematic pursuit of truth. When combined with the notion of "aesthetics" we get a sense of the significance he places on powerful encounters with artists, such as Wagner and various art forms such as, music, drama, literature and so on. The intention here is to employ different modes of experience so we can come to know and understand our "true self". Here, encounters with aesthetics serve as a *precondition* for transformation due to their power to stimulate and provoke deep metaphysical questions, such as the features and characteristics of those we admire. Nietzsche's preoccupation with the view of the good life or living well is grounded in an aesthetics of what one should value. The correlation between an aesthetic ideal and good character (moral ideal) are strikingly similar to Plato's idea of love found in *Phaedrus*. Here, the power of falling in love with visible beauty leads a person to seek a higher path that can only be satisfied in the beauty of truth and wisdom. Taking into consideration this aesthetic background, it is not surprising that Nietzsche argues that "*aesthetic phenomenon*" can have a profound effect on us because it can unite us with our "primal Oneness", and this in turn reminds us of our essence (*BT*, §5; pp. 28–32). This unifying theme is a common thread in Nietzsche's aesthetics, and is "*justified*" when it stimulates and provokes us to see, think, speak, write, and feel things differently. Although, Nietzsche's concept of aesthetics may appear to take a bleak view of life, the use of Greek tragedy serves the function of revealing a grand narrative of how life imitates art in the sense that the tragic hero of the drama reminds us of our own humanity because we can relate with the primal pain and suffering of the antagonist. Paradoxically, sometimes we can both find joy and consolation in the suffering of others, since it is not us; however, this redeeming function is due to the Apollian drive that distorts reality and makes life tolerable or intolerable, beautiful or ugly (Soll 1998, 2001). As such, Nietzsche approaches art through the lens of life and when combined

⁷ I am cognisant that within the discipline area of educational philosophy and theory, engagement with Nietzsche's corpus and educational discourse is vibrant, particularly in the literature. In saying this, my intention in this essay is not meant to serve as a critical discussion of work considered to be a misreading, misinterpretation or even misrepresentation, as can be found in Jonas (2009) and Yacek's (2014a) work. As already stated, this essay aims to extend on and make a contribution to the literature.

⁸ Here on in, *The Birth of Tragedy* will be cited as *BT*.

with subjective interpretations of our own life, we start to both understand the profoundness of the *aesthetic phenomenon* and come to the realisation that there is no escaping the eternal “horror and absurdity of existence”. According to Nietzsche, attempts by philosophers, such as Socrates to rationalise our existence have failed as the balance between Apollo and Dionysus have been disrupted because “...*theoretical man*... manifests the same features that I have inferred from the spirit of the non-Dionysiac—it opposes Dionysiac wisdom and art, it seeks to destroy myth, replaces metaphysical consolation with ...a *deus ex machina* of its own...” (*BT*, §17; pp. 80–85). Rather than unifying Apollo and Dionysus in everyday experience, Nietzsche is arguing that the dominate drive of Apollo in our everyday life alienates and disrupts... According to Soll (1998, 2001) the attraction of the Dionysian drive is not epistemic, but more a case of overcoming division through the primordial desire for organic unity. Nietzsche’s (*BT*, §1; p. 17) states:

Not only is the bond between man and man sealed by the Dionysiac magic: alienated, hostile or subjugated nature too, celebrates her reconciliation with her lost son, man ... Now, with the gospel of world harmony, each man feel himself not only united, reconciled, and at one with his neighbour, but *one* with him, as if the veil of Maya had been rent and now hung in rags before the mysterious primal Oneness.

It is not until we embrace the “primal Oneness” of our existence can we see how Dionysian experiences of art can turn the “... thoughts of repulsion at the horror and absurdity of existence into ideas compatible with life: these are the *sublime*—the taming of the horror through art; and *comedy*—the artistic release from the repulsion of the absurd” (*BT*, §7; pp. 35–40). Rather than view life negatively like Schopenhauer’s pessimistic philosophies, Nietzsche argues that if we accept the nature of our life is characterised by misery, but still affirm it through the power of overcoming difficulty and pain by realising that “knowledge of misery” contributes importantly to knowing what happiness and goodness is. Indeed, the joy of existence is not found in the phenomena per se, “but behind phenomena” in the form of a metaphysical consolation that our “primal essence itself” and associated states of anger, pain, joy, happiness and so on that we feel are a necessary part of life, and in a sense this is how we know we are human beings (see for example *BT*, §17; pp. 80–85). This is why Nietzsche argues that art at its best, tells the truth and makes it possible for us to bear life because it affords us a glimpse of the possibility of a different kind of life (higher humanity), and hence why it is significance in human life as it makes one see, think, speak, write, and feel things differently.⁹

In *SE*, Nietzsche takes up this thought of the higher humanity in the form of the “cultured man” as a way of outlining how this is possible through a *true* education and educators who can provide the standards to aspire to. Nietzsche cites Schopenhauer as the ideal “educator” because he stands out as the one person who he encountered that

⁹ It is important to remember that Nietzsche’s account is predicated on a non-metaphysical reality. This being that metaphysical variants we normally apply to our existence and our world, to Nietzsche are illusory and consist in phenomena that are our doing. It is also important to note, in a later piece of work, titled “Attempt at a Self-Criticism” written some fourteen years later after the publication of the *BT*, Nietzsche acknowledges that his book may be perceived to be “romantic”; however, the book still poses a number of important questions that are important, such as the problem of science, the significance of morality, the value of existence and so on, which he picks-up on in later works. As for the concept of “high humanity”, this idea shares similarities with Plato’s aesthetics.

challenged, provoked, and inspired him by serving as an *exemplar*. This is further reinforced by Nietzsche (*SE-UO*, §1; p. 166)¹⁰ when he states:

For your true nature does not lie hidden deep inside you but immeasurably high above you, or at least above that which you customarily consider to be your ego. Your true educators and moulders reveal to you the true original meaning and basic stuff of your nature, something absolutely incapable of being educated and molded, but in any case something fettered and paralyzed and difficult to access. Your teachers can be nobody but your liberators. And that is the secret of all education; it does not provide artificial limbs, wax noses, or corrective lenses – on the contrary, what might provide such things is merely a parody of education. Education is rather liberation, the clearing away of all weeds, rubble and vermin that might harm the delicate shoots, a radiance of light and warmth ...

It is one's "true self" that needs to be liberated from "deep inside you" that Nietzsche has in mind. This is poignantly described by Nietzsche in the following passage:

But how can we find ourselves again? How can man know himself? He is a thing dark and veiled; and if the hare has seven skins, man can slough off seventy times seven and still not be able to say: 'this is really you, this is no longer outer shell'. Moreover, it is painful and dangerous undertaking thus to tunnel into oneself and to force one's way down into the shaft of one's being by the nearest path. ... [Hence why it is only when we enquire into the most important aspect or aspects of our true nature can we liberate our] *true self* [italics added for emphasis by the author]. (*SE*, §1; p. 129)

To Nietzsche, the aim of "finding oneself" is one of the central tasks of education, however, at the same time we need to realise that to find our "true nature" does not miraculously emerge from within us as it takes great effort and a strong "will to power" to overcome and transform our "all-too-human" nature.

Nietzsche was cognisant that Schopenhauer may not appeal to everyone as their educator, and so was seriously concerned with finding other educators who stood out like Schopenhauer did for him. He goes on to identify the ideal images of "Rousseau", "Goethe" and "Schopenhauer" (*SE*, §4; p. 150). Of these, the image of Rousseau represents a naturalised or idealised form of humanity that Nietzsche considers to be dangerous because the false facade of being liberated from all-too-human social conventions and animal instincts "can easily become a Catilina" and hence self-destructive (*SE*, §4; p. 152). Goethe is less dangerous to Nietzsche because he is a "contemplative man" who is closer to being truly human than Rousseau, but the problem is that such a contemplative life is essentially withdrawn from active involvement in life and lends itself to "philistine" tendencies. When Nietzsche turns to Schopenhauerian man *qua* Nietzschean man, he "...voluntarily takes upon himself the suffering involved in being truthful ..." by superseding both by becoming truly and fully human (*SE*, §4; p. 152). The role of the exemplar is to "lift us" up in a metaphysical sense, just like "*philosophers*", "*artists*" and

¹⁰ The source of the cited passage from *SE (Schopenhauer as Educator)*, originates in an alternative translation of *Untimely Meditations* by Arrowsmith. This work is titled *Unmodern Observations (1874/1990)*, and as a result I will cite this work as *SE-UO* from here on in.

¹¹ The term "Catilina" refers to the Roman politician Lucius Catiline (circa 108–162 BC) who attempted a coup when he failed to gain the consulship. I am indebted to Arrowsmith's footnote in *SE-UO*, particularly the insight provided by the note on "Catilina's existence" which is apt for making sense of the strong emotions surrounding something that is coveted and does not eventuate.

“saints”.¹² Nietzsche’s point is to demonstrate how an “ideal educates” through a “practical activity”, and so this where his authoring of the essay (*SE*) exemplifies one aspect of his “extravagant goal” (*SE*, §5; p. 156).

It is not until later in *SE* that we get a clear picture of those dispositions which Nietzsche admired in Schopenhauer’s “philosophical genius” and the conditions needed for its cultivation. He goes on to list six conditions,¹³ however, the key concepts of “freedom” (in later works “free spirit”) and “truth” emerge as important concepts. In the former, the concept of “freedom” relates to a certain form of liberated independence from institutional thinking, overcoming conventions of thought, and even our biological and historical conditioning. In the latter, the concept of “truth” is a central and reoccurring concept in Nietzsche’s work because an honest person cannot escape from or ignore the truth of their existence.¹⁴ Indeed, Nietzsche argues quite strongly that if we are serious about philosophy then we should “desire truth”, but this is not enough as we need to embody and live “truthfulness” in everything we do so that we both become human again and ultimately attain our highest possibilities. Therefore, the measure of a *true* education is judged according to the extent in which one finds their “true self”.

In this section of my essay, I briefly outlined Nietzsche’s preliminary thoughts on aesthetics, educators and education. In the next section, my attention turns to the work of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, the figures Zarathustra and the *Übermensch*, and other Nietzschean works, with a view to outline what I mean by a Nietzschean education.

A Nietzschean Education: Cultivating the Self as a Form of Self-Education

In *SE*, the “heroic one” can be viewed as Nietzsche’s initial thoughts on the *Übermensch* as apotheosis; however, before I go on to discuss the importance of the *Übermensch* (often translated as “superman” or “overman”) and Zarathustra the figure that found expression in *The Gay Science* and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*¹⁵ in this section, more needs to be said about Nietzsche’s concept of the “free spirit” and its connexion with education. An obvious starting point is Nietzsche’s work titled, *Human, All Too Human*.¹⁶ In §5 of *HH*, Nietzsche outlines what he considers to be the role of “free spirit” (*Freigeist*) within education. Nietzsche argues that individuals need to challenge traditions, customs and so on wherever possible because it is only by partially weakening or wounding society that it

¹² Nietzsche’s use of “Rousseau”, Goethe”, “Schopenhauer”, “philosophers”, “artists” and “saints” refer to basic “types” of ontologies he assigns persons according to drives. In later works, Nietzsche uses such terms as “the master”, “the slave”, and “the overman”.

¹³ These being: “... manliness of character, early knowledge of mankind, no scholarly education, no narrow patriotism, no necessity of bread winning, no ties with the state ...” (see *SE*, §8; pp. 182–194). It is not too hard to see from this list why the establishment of the time felt threatened, particularly his polemical style. It is interesting to note that earlier in *SE*, he lists three qualities of Schopenhauer—“honesty”, “cheerfulness”, and “constancy”—that are required to advance this endeavour.

¹⁴ Nietzsche argues we should live by the motto “*vitam impendere vero*” (devote one’s life to the truth).

¹⁵ Here on in, *The Gay Science* will be cited as *GS* and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* referred to as *Zarathustra* in my essay and cited as *Z* where it appropriate to do so. When citing from *Zarathustra*, I will use Roman numerals to refer to the four main parts of the book, and the Arabic numerals that follow either refer to the numbered sections. Ensuing Arabic numerals refer to sub-sections within these sections.

¹⁶ Here on in, *Human, All Too Human* will be cited as *HH* followed by the abbreviation “Aph” for Aphorism and its associated number. The subtitle (“A Book for Free Spirits”) of this work is worth noting.

can grow and develop into something new (“*spiritual progress*”).¹⁷ In this case, Faber’s (1994) introduction to *HH* provides an interesting insight into this concept and how the essence of the free spirit is what Nietzsche perceives to be a philosopher who “... hovers above the human fray, coolly testing the culture for its truths and errors; for while there is no Truth for Nietzsche—neither in metaphysical, moral, religious, nor aesthetic terms—there are truths, and it is these which the free spirit will seek out ... (pp. xxi–xxii). Later, the concept of free spirit is developed further by Nietzsche in the *GS* and evolves into the figure of Zarathustra who paves the way for the highest image and ideal of humanity. From §341 (“*The greatest weight*” or “*Das grösste Schwergewicht*”) onwards of the *GS*, “the tragedy begins” (“*Incipit tragoedia*”), and it is here where he announces his famous doctrine of the “eternal recurrence” with the question: “...how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life *to crave nothing more fervently* than this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal?” (*HH*, §341; pp. 273–274).¹⁸ It is worth heeding Kaufmann’s (1974) comments in the introductory comments of the *GS*, that the idea of the eternal recurrence needs to be understood within the context of the “*The madman*” found in §125.¹⁹ He goes on to argue that Nietzsche’s concept of the eternal recurrence is complex, but cannot be understood unless we acknowledge the following points: (1) Nietzsche was firmly convinced about the untenability of the God-hypothesis and metaphysical explanations of the world and our existence; (2) initially Nietzsche was terrified by the idea of nihilism²⁰ and found it difficult to accept; (3) Nietzsche himself transforms and comes to the realisation that in order to overcome these problems he argues that we need to prepare human beings to reinterpret their lives, and at the same time relearn how “to live dangerously” (*GS*, §283; pp. 228–229). This is pursued with gusto from the fourth and fifth book onward of the *GS*, and it is here where Nietzsche starts to learn from “artists” how things are “beautiful when they are not” (*GS*, §299; 239–240); learning to live “not only boldly but even gaily, and laugh gaily, too” when things are not (*GS*, §324; p. 255); learning to love because “love, too, has to be learned” (*GS*, §334; p. 262); learning to become “human beings who are new, unique...[and can] create themselves” (*GS*, §335; pp. 263–266); learning “the ‘humanness’ of the future” (*GS*, §337; pp. 267–269); and, learning to deal with the notion of existence by “turning” the eternal recurrence up-side down; and, (4) as the previous point alludes to, the eternal recurrence might serve a positive function (*GS*, §48; pp. 112–113; §56; pp. 117–118).

I now turn my attention to the latter two points made above, as this is where Nietzsche comes to the realisation that his work is a reflection of his own purposeful transformation from *being* to *becoming* the kind of philosopher, thinker, free spirit or the type of person he wants to become; however, whilst there is both God and man this cannot take place. For this reason, the *Übermensch* can only appear after the death of God because the *Übermensch* is that which man will become if he overcomes God (*Z*, I, P, §1–4; pp. 39–45). Due to God’s absence, this has left a meaningless void to be filled, and so unless we give purpose and meaning to our lives, the nihilistic void awaits those who think otherwise (*Z*, I,

¹⁷ See *HH* (Aph. 224 & 225; pp. 138–140). It is interesting to note that Aph. 224 is aptly titled, “*Ennoblement through degeneration*”.

¹⁸ Although already quoted, it is worth repeating in another form. So when the madman speaks of the killing of God, he says: “... shall we not ourselves have to become Gods, merely to seem worthy of it?”

¹⁹ §108–125 are famous sections in the *GS* because this is where Nietzsche pronounces that “God is dead”. This phrase is part of a long train of thought and so needs to be considered within this context and not in isolation.

²⁰ For Nietzsche’s thought on nihilism, see *The Will to Power* (here on in cited *WP* followed by section).

P, §5; pp. 45–47). Even though it is not clear in *Zarathustra* that the *Übermensch* fills the void left by God, we need to be cautious which interpretation to endorse so we are not led astray (Schrift 2001). For this reason, Magnus's (1983, 1986) extensive review of the literature highlights that the interpretation of the *Übermensch* as an "ideal type" or model of human perfection is problematic. In contrast, it is suggested that it may be more useful to interpret the concept of the *Übermensch* as a particular *attitude* or *diagnostic* mechanism towards life. Indeed, the attitudinal and diagnostic interpretation of the *Übermensch* and the eternal recurrence have significant educational implications because the former interpretation of being-in-the-world portrays a particular attitude towards life which positively affirms life and accepts the truth of "what one is" (type-facts) and at the same time embraces *amor fati* for what it is. If one takes this interpretation of Nietzsche seriously, and I think we should, then this attitude toward life captured in the concept of the eternal recurrence is an expression of nihilism already overcome. In the latter case, a diagnostic interpretation brings to our attention the nature of the person having the attitude toward the eternal recurrence. With this in mind, the greatest obstacle is the self that one already is. In one sense, part of the problem with understanding *Zarathustra*, the figures of Zarathustra and the *Übermensch* is whether we accept Nietzsche's fatalism as truth or even whether one can decide to believe (or not believe) it to be true, particularly if believing or not believing has been fated in advance. In another sense, the affirmation of overcoming or self-overcoming is an infinite process and so always a "work-in-progress" and never complete. Undeniably, Nietzsche's fatalism is confronting and could potentially be debilitating, particularly if we deny our "true self" and become spectators upon our own life. This is why Nietzsche in *Daybreak* argues that we should undertake a "revaluation of all values" because values do make a causal difference, in so far as we contribute to the shaping of our environment, which in turn has the potential to determine what he or she becomes. As such, my interpretation of a Nietzschean education is concerned with the cultivation of the self, and is best understood as a form of self-education. By this I mean students becoming aware of "what one is" or "true self" (type-facts) and realising that these type-facts do not causally determine or sufficiently guarantee the trajectory of their life because other factors, such as circumstances and environment also influence the trajectory of a person's life.

Without a doubt, this is no easy undertaking because "finding oneself" requires an enormous amount of courage to affirm how we think about ourselves in the world. Indeed, it is of utmost importance in Zarathustra's educational approach to cultivate within his students the courage to "step out of our cave" and wake-up to our existence in the "sun", with the view of leaving behind our emblematic animals and realise its possible truth that "...who you are and must become: behold, *you are the teacher of the eternal recurrence* ..." (Z, III, §13, 2; pp. 233–238). It is not until we confront our existence and learn that *amor fati* is beautiful can we posit a general standard of a kind of life in which the assertive-transformative (will to power) is present in its highest intensity and quality. Only uncompromising truthfulness and truth can make one immune to the disillusionment that plagues one's existence since the absence of God. In *EH*, Nietzsche makes it clear that in order to make sense of Zarathustra, we need to understand that his teaching is basically about *truthfulness* and *truth* (see *EH*, WD, §3; pp. 97–98).²¹ This is reinforced in the following striking passage (*EH*, WD, §5; pp. 100–101):

²¹ The section of *EH* that I am referring to is "Why I am a destiny". Here on cited as *EH*, followed by the initials "WD" to denote "Why I am a destiny" with subsequent Arabic numerals referring to relevant section.

... if one is to understand what Zarathustra's intentions are: the species of man he delineates reality *as it is*: he is strong enough for it – he is not estranged from or entranced by it, he is *reality itself*, he still has all that is fearful and questionable in reality in him, *only thus can man possess greatness* ...

The “reality” or justification of Zarathustra as educator lies in the necessity of transforming man back into nature enabling humanity to come to understand something about ourselves, our lives and our world, but on a positive side, unless God is dead, human freedom is not complete. Here, Nietzsche's metaphor for the death of God brings to our attention the questions of meaning and value that can no longer be answered by traditional religious and philosophical means. As for what Nietzsche means by “*only thus can man possess greatness*”, in this case it refers to the need to stand against nihilism by producing a *Übermensch* who can be called “God's successor” (see for example, Z, II, 2; pp. 109–112). Understandably, much of *Zarathustra* has to do with the cultivation of a new sensibility in response to the complete “de-deification of nature” that affirms human life and potentiality (Schacht 1983, 1995, 1998). Hollingdale (1999), reinforces the view that Nietzsche's *Übermensch* was intended to oppose the growth of nihilism in Europe and at the same time restore a positive image of man (no-longer-animal) that was obliterated by Darwin. He goes on to argue that Nietzsche refused to allow God back into his thoughts and ideas once he rejected God, and so instead of God, he created the *Übermensch* as an alternative, instead of divine grace, he created the “will to power” as an alternative, and instead of eternal life, he created the “eternal recurrence” as an alternative. Nietzsche (*GS*, §109; pp. 167–169) realised that a consequence of the “death of God” was a universe of “chaos” and as a result the only way to restore order in our lives was to give meaning to our existence. Taking into consideration my account of a Nietzschean education that has been presented, two interesting points emerge.

The first point is grounded within the tradition of art and aesthetics that is primarily concerned with the cultivation of the self, and is best understood as a form of self-education. Here, aesthetic encounters serve as a *precondition* for transformation due to the deep metaphysical questions that arise, such as: “What is beauty?”, “What is culture?”, “What does it mean to live a good life?” and so on and so forth. In order to answer these questions in any meaningful way entails an investigation by students into their own lives. As such, the potential and value of art is due to its power to reveal to students their humanity, and at the same time afford students a glimpse into the possibility of an alternative kind of life (exemplar or ideal types), which in turn can assist students find who they would like to become (*becoming*). Consequently, what makes my account of a Nietzschean education significant is due to its concern with fostering timeless educational aims, such as learning to see, think, speak, write, and feel, by unsettling students with an *ideal educator* and *true education* so that students can get a sense of who they are *now* and who they could *become*.

The second point relates to the educational implications of the figures Zarathustra and the *Übermensch*. Due to the death of God, an empty meaningless void has been left. Since the genesis and cause of nihilism can be attributed to both a lack of higher goals to aspire to, and a general lack of faith in humanity has meant that the only way to overcome nihilism is to prepare students to consider their existential situation (*WP*, I). In my opinion, unless students have a purpose and meaning to their lives, the educational process has the potential to be too easily undermined by pessimism and the eternal recurrence. With this in mind, Nietzsche provides a profound insight into the human condition and brings to our attention that the greatest obstacle in life is the self. Indeed, Nietzsche makes it quite clear

at the end of *SE*, that if an educator and education has not “disturbed anybody” it has failed in its purpose. Nietzsche’s point being that it is only when students have been provoked and unsettled can they come to the realisation that their type-facts do not causally determine the trajectory of their life because other factors still have an important role to play. This is further reinforced by Gordon’s (1980) account of Zarathustra the educator, which highlights that despite the loneliness and suffering which afflicted him, the mistakes he made, Zarathustra shows us how the experience transformed him and made him capable of teaching his vision of the *Übermensch* and the eternal recurrence, primarily due his positive attitude toward life. Schacht (1998, p. 323) said it well when he stated “... that Zarathustra and *Zarathustra* were conceived to meet this need, “for all and none”—for none, if none were ready for the encounter, but for all who ...” may be up to it and ready to accept and overcome *amor forti*, then such a powerful educational experience can open our eyes to what we are, or can be all about in a positive way, and when combined with a call to find ways to make them come true makes this idea profoundly compelling, particularly in education.²²

Conclusion

In the first section of this essay I provided a brief critique of Nietzsche’s thinking on aesthetics, educators and education. In order to make sense of Nietzsche’s thinking on educators and education, I argued that we first need to understand his theory of aesthetics, the function of art in life, and the potential and value of art in the wider context of life. A common thread of Nietzsche’s aesthetics found in the *BT* is grounded in a unifying theme where powerful encounters (*aesthetic phenomenon*) with artists, such as Wagner and various art forms such as, music, drama, literature, and so on can unite us with our “primal Oneness”, and this in turn reveals to us our primordial essence (“*true self*”). As such, Nietzsche approaches art like science, in the sense that art serves life because its valuable for its own sake, but also as a mechanism that cultivates the basic instincts of life for the purposes of promoting the self by revealing to students “what one is” now (*being*), and who they could become (*becoming*). In order to bring this about, Nietzsche employs the use of an *aesthetic model* (ideal type) of perfection in the form of an exemplar for students to aspire to become. Here, the exemplar plays an important educative function in Nietzsche’s thinking because the role of the ideal type is to unsettle the student so that they are inspired to attain their unattained self that they recognise in the other, and hence why an *ideal educator* and *true education* is judged according to the extent in which a student finds their “*true self*”.

In the second section of this essay I turned my attention to *Zarathustra* the work, the figures of Zarathustra and the *Übermensch*, and other Nietzschean works with a view to outline what I mean by a Nietzschean education. In order to undertake this task, I provided a critique of Nietzsche’s concept of the “free spirit” and the evolution of the figures Zarathustra and the *Übermensch* which finds expression in the *GS*, and is developed further in *Zarathustra*. It was at this point, that Nietzsche’s crucial idea of “eternal recurrence” was outlined, particularly its connexion with education. I argued that due to the death of God, an empty meaningless void has been left. Since the genesis and cause of

²² These ideas share similarities with Christian theology, particularly the Lutheran doctrine of justification. Taking into consideration Nietzsche’s family background and Lutheran upbringing it is not too hard to see this connexion.

nihilism can be attributed to both a lack of higher goals to aspire to, and a general lack of faith in humanity has meant that the only way to overcome nihilism is to prepare students to consider their meaning and purpose in their lives. With this in mind, Nietzsche provides a number of profound insights that have significant educational implications, particularly if an *attitudinal* and *diagnostic* interpretation of the *Übermensch* and the eternal recurrence are employed. In the former case, an attitudinal interpretation positively affirms life and accepts the truth of “what one is” (type-facts) and at the same time embraces *amor fati* for what it is; however, rather than deny our “true self” and become mere spectators to our own lives we need to realise that these type-facts do not causally determine or sufficiently guarantee the trajectory of our life because other factors, such as circumstances and environment also influence the trajectory of a person’s life. In the latter case, a diagnostic interpretation both brings to our attention the nature of the person having the attitude toward the eternal recurrence and also highlights that the greatest obstacle is the self that one already is. As such, my interpretation of a Nietzschean education is concerned with the cultivation of the self, and is best understood as a form of self-education. Without a doubt, this is no easy undertaking because “finding oneself” requires an enormous amount of courage to affirm how we think about ourselves in the world. Indeed, it is of utmost importance in Zarathustra’s educational approach to cultivate the courage within his students to confront their existence and learn to embrace “what one is”, but despite this truth, their experiences can transform them, particularly if they have a positive attitude towards life. Indeed, the latter is a powerful and profound message to students and educators everywhere, and I would argue is the starting point in any educational endeavour or process.

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