

The Disciplined Schooling of the Free Spirit: Educational Theory in Nietzsche's Middle Period

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In his article, "Nietzsche's Zarathustra as Educator," Haim Gordon argues that Nietzsche's Zarathustra demonstrates Nietzsche's views on education. Gordon claims that a Nietzschean educator would have an approach that is "extremely anti-dogmatic and anti-catechistic."¹ David Cooper criticizes Gordon's view in "On Reading Nietzsche on Education," where he claims, among other things, that Gordon ought not to draw Nietzsche's views on education from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* alone. Cooper points out that Nietzsche directly confronts the issue of education in three works, *Schopenhauer as Educator*, *The Use and Abuse of History for Life*, and the series of lectures, "On the Future of our Educational Institutions."² Furthermore, Cooper's book *Authenticity and Learning: Nietzsche's Educational Philosophy*, provides a devastating criticism of Gordon's contention, a criticism which is directly relevant for this paper. Contrary to the anti-dogmatic educator which Gordon finds in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Cooper notes that, "Nietzsche leaves us in no doubt that the 'free spirits' to emerge from a true education will have been submitted to a thoroughly disciplined schooling."³

Although Cooper identifies the importance of "disciplined schooling" in Nietzsche's educational theory, he does not discuss why Nietzsche claims that disciplined schooling would be necessary. Nietzsche does speak of the importance of this schooling and the educator of the free spirit in the works of his middle period.⁴ Although Cooper pays some attention to the works in Nietzsche's middle period in *Authenticity and Learning*, it is not uncommon for papers on Nietzsche's theory of education to fail to have a single reference to Nietzsche's middle period. Yet, the works of Nietzsche's middle period contain a myriad of rich, pointed remarks about education. By examining Nietzsche's middle period, I hope to outline the education of the free spirit in an attempt to answer the question that I noted above; why would Nietzschean education require disciplined schooling? I will then create a portrait of the Nietzschean educator that appears in the works of his middle period.

THE EMERGENCE OF THE FREE SPIRIT

Nietzsche's main criticism of education lies in a presupposition inherent in his culture: that education ought to create a good citizen; in other words, the citizen must *learn* to serve society rather than his own selfish goals. Nietzsche reacts against all forms of education that seek to develop an individual for the sake of others. Morality is used in education to subordinate the individual to custom and, thus, to serve his society.⁵

Originally all education and care of health, marriage, cure of sickness, agriculture, war, speech and silence, traffic with one another and with the gods belonged within the domain of morality: they demanded one observe prescriptions *without thinking of oneself* as an individual....The most moral man is he who *sacrifices* the most to custom (D, 9).

Nietzsche refuses to praise virtue because of “the unreason in virtue that leads the individual to allow himself to be transformed into a mere function of the whole. The praise of virtue is the praise of something that is privately harmful” (*GS*, 21).

Nietzsche’s education strives to teach the individual to serve himself and not “the general good.” Nietzsche’s goal is to unshackle the free spirit, who is bound by his society. Nietzsche claims that the free spirit is a “relative concept,” pertaining to someone who manages to free himself from the dominion of his culture. “He is called a free spirit who thinks differently from what, on the basis of his origin, environment, his class and profession, or on the basis of the dominant views of the age, would have been expected of him” (*HAH*, 225). Thus, Nietzsche’s goal is to educate free spirits in much the same way as Socrates “corrupted the youth of Athens” in the teaching of his disciples — Nietzsche wants free spirits to be corrupt, in that they get outside of their own culture’s tradition so that they may question, criticize or reject it. “What characterizes the free spirit is not that his opinions are the more correct but that he has liberated himself from tradition, whether the outcome has been successful or a failure” (*HAH*, 225). The free spirit is not necessarily better off to be free from the shackles of society. Rather, the free spirit has achieved a considerable feat by liberating himself from society, even if he has merely attained a less correct view. Thus, Nietzsche extols the free spirit because he has a better chance for success even though free spirithood does not necessitate greater success.

One may reasonably question why one ought to criticize society. After all, if society is that which has helped humankind reach its current state, then perhaps education should be, as Hegel believed, an initiation of the individual into society so that the individual may play his or her role for the progress of society. Nietzsche explicitly objects to theories of progress that entail subordination of the individual to the state. Progress comes about only by some individual that comes to a culture and makes changes,

The danger facing these strong communities founded on similarly constituted, firm-charactered individuals is that of the gradually increasing inherited stupidity such as haunts all stability like its shadow. It is the more unfettered, uncertain and morally weaker individuals upon whom *spiritual progress* depends in such communities: it is the men who attempt new things and, in general many things (*HAH*, 224).

It is the exemplary, although rare, individual who can make a conscious decision to create a new type of society. Nietzsche admits that the new culture may not actually be a progress over the previous culture; yet, progress is at least possible. Nietzsche denies the possibility that society progresses along some projection that entails a continuation of the current culture: “progress in the sense and along the paths of the old culture is not even thinkable” (*HAH*, 24). Nietzsche adds that change in society is a painful process. Thus, the person who brings about change in the society inflicts an injury upon that society. The unfettered individuals, who are able to help their culture progress,

effect a loosening up and from time to time inflict an injury on the stable element of a community. It is precisely at this injured and weakened spot that the whole body is as it were *inoculated* with something new; its strength must, however, be as a whole sufficient to receive this new thing into its blood and to assimilate it. . . . Every progress of the whole has to be preceded by a partial weakening (*HAH*, 224).

According to Nietzsche, a society can only be altered through a painful change brought about by one of its degenerate members. Free spirits are viewed as degenerate, weak or immoral by the community because they oppose the tradition.

THE “DISCIPLINED SCHOOLING” OF THE FREE SPIRIT

Nietzsche believes that the emergence of the free spirit can be hastened through education. Nietzsche claims that the progress of the community is directly analogous to progress of the free spirit, insofar as progress is achieved first through stabilization and then through a painful change.

In the case of the individual human being, the task of education is to imbue him with such firmness and certainty he can no longer as a whole be in any way deflected from his path. Then, however, the educator has to inflict injuries upon him, or employ the injuries inflicted on him by fate, and when he has thus come to experience pain and distress something new and noble can be inoculated into the injured places (*HAH*, 224).

When the educator is certain about the firmness of dogmatic education of the free spirit, he may inflict injuries upon the student.⁶ Nietzsche contends that the free spirit will only be able to develop through painful changes, whereby the student will search for “something new and noble” to compensate for his injuries.

Nietzsche notes that the teacher may not necessarily have to inflict the injuries himself but only “employ the injuries inflicted upon him by fate.” If fate has already inflicted injuries on the student, the educator’s role remains just as important. Without the provocation of the educator, the man may choose to endure these injuries.⁷ In this passage, at least, Nietzsche says that the educator must bring the injuries inflicted by fate to the explicit attention of the free spirit, so that the free spirit will become fully conscious of them and will be forced to react to them. Thus, the pain will cause the student to seek a different path than the one that he had hitherto been treading and the free spirit will be liberated.

The development of the free spirit is, in one sense, a progression. However, immediately following the liberation, the progress may be towards something better or something worse, in both the case of the state and the case of the individual (as previously noted in *HAH*, 225).⁸ Nietzsche’s aim of education would, thus, be better called the “strengthening” of the individual (I will continue to use this term throughout the paper). When harms are inflicted upon the individual, the destabilization strengthens him, and allows him to gain new perspectives. Destabilization is that which shakes the student awake, causing the free spirit to question all things, to gaze with a critical and rebellious eye. A dogmatic education is therefore important for two reasons. First, the destabilization can only come after the student has been given a dogmatic education which he has accepted uncritically, as there must be something firm which the student can call into question. On this issue, Stefan Ramaekers makes the same point. He remarks that the dogmatism of a particular perspective “is the precondition in order to be able to see anything at all, to be able to differentiate between things. At the moral level, this means that being in the world neutrally is tantamount to not being in the world at all.”⁹ I would add to Ramaekers’s analysis that before one can experiment with many perspectives, as the free spirit does, Nietzsche seems to imply that one cannot break away from tradition without thoroughly engaging and understanding it first. Only through bearing the full weight

of tradition will the free spirit come to appreciate his fetteredness, and strive to unshackle himself.

The second point about disciplined schooling that arises in the above analysis is the severity and violence which is involved the liberation of a free spirit.¹⁰ To withstand the painful weakening that precedes the free spirit's emergence, one must be sufficiently strong, and it is in this sense that Nietzsche speaks about the importance of dogmatic schooling.¹¹

THE NIETZSCHEAN EDUCATOR

Above I have described how an educator can help liberate the free spirit by inflicting pain or by bringing attention to pain inflicted by fate. I will now turn to other aspects of the relationship between the Nietzschean educator and the free spirit whom he has liberated. An important aspect of the free spirit is that he be able to critically evaluate whatever he hears and have the ability to speak against that which he does not believe. Any student unable to reject the doctrines taught to him would be an "undesirable" disciple (*GS*, 32). The student must resist his teacher and not necessarily adopt his teachings.

A good educator knows cases in which he is proud of the fact that this pupil remains true to himself *in opposition to him*: in those cases, that is to say, in which the youth ought not to understand the man or would be harmed if he did understand him (*AOM*, 268).

One can read this statement meaning that the harm that the student would suffer is not of the same type as the transitory harm, which takes the student from the first stage of education (firm, dogmatic inculcation of moral education) to the second stage of education (where the free spirit is destabilized and questions his dogmas). The harm in this quote is a type of harm that would be a regression of the student to the first, dogmatic stage of the education if the student fails to be "true to himself." To exist in the first stage of education, with the rest of the herd, would certainly be a lesser existence. The student would be better off if he could either reject the teacher's interpretations outright or misunderstand them so that they will not convince him.

Nietzsche declares that the supreme principle of education is "that one should offer education only to him *who hungers for it!*" (*D*, 195). The schools in Germany failed to heed this principle by employing a classical education which resulted in the "squandering of [their] youth when [they] had a meager knowledge of the Greeks and Romans and their languages drummed into [them] in a way as clumsy as it was painful." Nietzsche stresses the necessity of the educator's consideration and proper response to the needs of the learner (*WS*, 70). Nietzsche thinks that a drive for knowledge naturally occurs in students and this drive can be successfully satisfied with auspicious teaching. However, if the teaching is inopportune, the drive for knowledge may be crippled or destroyed. Furthermore, Nietzsche's statement could be read not as condemnation of an attempt to teach something to a student who is not prepared to receive it but as a recognition that the teacher must both respond to the hunger of the student and know how to stimulate hunger.

The stimulation of hunger can be linked to the importance of learning through *passionate* experimentalism rather than through a *detached*, "objective" scientific

method. One cannot follow a formulaic approach when striving for knowledge, one must be able employ a variety of means in the search for knowledge: "There are no scientific methods which alone lead to knowledge! We have to tackle things experimentally, now angry with them and now kind, and be successively just passionate and cold with them" (*D*, 432). By claiming that the scientific method cannot alone lead one to knowledge, Nietzsche stresses the need to supplement traditional methods of learning with experimentalism. Nietzsche's stress on a passionate, emotional way to access knowledge reflects a Rousseauian emphasis of education: One should always learn (because that is how one learns best) through activity rather than merely by dry reason.¹² "Science bestows upon him who labors and experiments in it much satisfaction, upon him who *learns* its results very little" (*HAH*, 251).

To strengthen the free spirit, the educator himself must draw attention to the fact that he is educating the pupil much in the same way that postmodern advertisements draw attention to the fact that they are trying to sell something to the consumer. In this way, the educator furthers the strengthening of the free spirit, by making him shoulder the weight of his own decisions. The master must warn the student about the role of educators, "It is part of the humanity of the master to warn the pupil about himself" (*D*, 447). Nietzsche celebrates the life of Wagner as the type of educator whose life announces to his disciples, "Be a man and do not follow me — but yourself! But yourself!" (*GS*, 99).

Similarly, Nietzsche discusses Pyrrho as a teacher who, in a courageous act of honesty, brings his intentions to the forefront when he deals with his disciples. When Pyrrho is asked about his warrant in the "tremendous task of educating men," he replies, "I shall warn men against myself, I shall confess publicly all the faults of my nature and expose to every eye my precipitancies, contradictions, and acts of stupidity" (*WS*, 213). Pyrrho, known for founding the most severe of the sceptical schools, tells the readers that he wants to be the teacher of mistrust, "mistrust such as there has never yet been on earth before, of mistrust of all and everything. It is the only path to truth." Yet, at the end of the dialogue, Pyrrho ceases to speak. When the old man with whom he is conversing asks, "Laughing and staying silent — is that now your whole philosophy?" Pyrrho responds, "It wouldn't be the worst one."

In addition to the honesty of the educator, Nietzsche points to the means by which the student is taught in the second stage of his education: suggestiveness, which is to be recognized as a better way of attaining knowledge. The teacher must be able to educate both by means of honesty — especially brutal honesty — and suggestiveness, whereby the student lacks the advice of the concrete direction which one should take but is given subtle guidance. Nietzsche here implies that perhaps the only way that a teacher can convey an insight to a pupil is not through a detailed argument but by a suggestion, which will inspire the student to either reach the same insight of the educator or an entirely different one.

The educator's importance is not one of leading the free spirit but of suggesting to him ideas which will help him choose his own path. Thus, the term educator becomes increasingly inappropriate as the free spirit begins his self-education.

Nietzsche points to the importance of the educator not as someone who passes on a body of knowledge but as someone who can serve as an example of the life of a free spirit. Nietzsche writes,

One day, when one has long since been educated as the world understands it, one *discovers oneself*: here begins the task of the thinker; now the time has come to call on him for assistance — not as an educator but as one who has educated himself and who thus knows how it is done (*WS*, 267).

A preliminary note on this passage: I believe that the “thinker” can be read as the free spirit who has reached the stage of self-education. Nietzsche’s refusal to label the thinker who educates the liberated free spirit an “educator” highlights the minimal role for the educator at the second stage. Furthermore, the minimal role of the educator at the second stage distinguishes him from that of the first.¹³ The first educator actually presents a body of knowledge to the student while the educator of the second stage does not intend to pass on any body of knowledge. Rather, the educator at the second stage seeks to damage the body of knowledge, which the free spirit has accumulated in the first stage, and to make suggestions, whereby the free spirit may develop his own repertoire of knowledge. The strengthened free spirit will only require someone who serves as an example for self-discovery.

Nietzsche believes that the role of the educator is a “tremendous task” as the old man tells Pyrrho (discussed above). One of the targets of Nietzsche’s educational critique is the quality of the teachers in Nietzsche’s time. Nietzsche declares that for *education* to be better, *educators* need to be better. Nietzsche writes,

[The teachers] themselves are not educated: how should they be able to educate? They themselves are not trees grown straight, strong and full of sap: whoever wants to attach himself to them will have to bend and twist himself, and will in the end appear contorted and deformed (*AOM*, 181).

Teachers, given their tremendous task, cannot be mediocre members of the herd. If one has a bad teacher then one needs to shake off that teacher’s influence later in life. For a teacher to be “strong and full of sap,” he must be a free spirit himself who has discovered himself in self-education. If the educator has not discovered himself, he cannot be “grown straight,” in the Nietzschean sense.

In our youth we take our teachers and guides from the time in which we happen to live and the circle in which we happen to move....For this childishness we have in later years to pay a heavy price: *we have to expiate our teachers in ourself*. We then perhaps go in search of our true guides throughout the whole world, the world of the past included — but perhaps it is too late. In the worst case we discover that they were living when we were young — and that we missed them (*D*, 495).

Nietzsche opens the door for people of the past to be good educators. The way in which the great intellects of the past could be good educators is through their writing. In a passage entitled “The teacher in the age of books,” Nietzsche claims that the teacher has “become almost redundant,” as “Friends anxious to learn who want to acquire knowledge of something together can find in our age of books a shorter and more natural way than ‘school’ and ‘teacher’ are” (*WS*, 180). Of course, Nietzsche himself is offering free spirits the sorts of books which may prove to be more valuable to their education than any living educators.

CONCLUSION

At the beginning of this paper I claimed that I would outline the education of the free spirit and try to account for the role that disciplined schooling may serve in that education. Through a consideration of the free spirit, his education and his educator, I argued that disciplined schooling entails a firm, dogmatic, convincing inculcation of tradition. The dogmatic schooling must be followed by a destabilization, after which the free spirit can search again for firmness but will be able to reevaluate morals, thereby reconsidering the nature of morality itself.

For educators seeking to help their students become individuals or to develop sceptical dispositions, Nietzsche's comments on the education of the free spirit present a forceful argument in two ways. First, Nietzsche presents the idea that suffering is vital to any truly liberating educational experience, and a student must be sufficiently strong to withstand the suffering. Second, one can only become an individual by realizing what he or she is seeking to break away from. A sceptical disposition is a disposition which has something to be sceptical *of*. Education cannot occur in anything other than the context of a tradition. To neglect the situatedness of one's students is to preclude the possibility of the emergence of those students as individuals.

1. Haim Gordon, "Nietzsche's Zarathustra as Educator," *Journal of the Philosophy of Education* 14, no. 2 (1980): 191.

2. David Cooper, "On Reading Nietzsche on Education," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 17 (1983): 120.

3. David Cooper, *Authenticity and Learning: Nietzsche's Educational Philosophy* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983), 38.

4. Nietzsche's middle period includes the following books: *Human, All Too Human (HAH)*. (Including *Assorted Opinions and Maxims* and *The Wanderer and His Shadow*), trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); *Assorted Opinions and Maxims (AOM)*, *The Wanderer and His Shadow (WS)*, *Daybreak (D)*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), and books I-IV of *The Gay Science (GS)*; trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Vintage Books, 1974). All parenthetical references to Nietzsche's work will include the abbreviated title of the work followed by a numerical reference to the section.

5. When speaking of the free spirit, I will use only masculine language, as did Nietzsche. Ruth Abbey, "Beyond Misogyny and Metaphor: Women in Nietzsche's Middle Period," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 34, no. 2 (April 1996): 233-57 has made an interesting argument about women's eligibility for free spirituality. However, I do not think that her argument is convincing enough for me to adopt it in this paper. For a criticism of Abbey's argument see Amy Mullin, "Nietzsche's Free Spirit," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 38, no. 3 (July 2000), 384 and n. 9.

6. In this paper, I use the terms "student" and "free spirit" interchangeably. The student referred to in this paper will therefore be the free spirit who is about to be liberated or who has been recently liberated.

7. Nietzsche does appear to leave room, however, for the free spirit to recognize his own injuries, without the aid of the teacher.

8. The philosophers of the future certainly do achieve a superior perspective, and this is the position that most educational theorists have pointed out as a worthy ideal in an authentic education. The newly liberated free spirit — and Nietzsche tells us that free spirits are precursors to the philosophers of the future in *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), 44 — is necessarily rebellious, merely grasping for the opposite of all the values that he previously held. For an analysis of the stages of the development of the free spirit and the differences between the free spirit and the philosopher of the future (including a review of other recent work on the distinction), see Mullin, "Nietzsche's Free Spirit."

9. Stefan Ramaeker's, "Subjectivism and Beyond: On the Embeddedness of the Nietzschean Individual," in *Nietzsche's Legacy for Education: Past and Present Values*, ed. Peters, Marshall, and Smeyers (Westport, Conn.: Bergin and Garvey, 2001), 160.

10. In this paper, I have only spoken of the suffering tied to the moment of liberation of the free spirit. James Hillesheim, in "Suffering and Self-Cultivation: The Case of Nietzsche," *Educational Theory* 36, no. 2 (Spring 1986): 171-78 gives an account of the continual importance of suffering which is integral to the concept of self-surpassing in Nietzsche's educational theory. Eliyahu Rosenow responded to Hillesheim's paper in "Nietzsche's Educational Dynamite," *Educational Theory* 39, no. 4 (Fall 1989): 307-16.

11. This point casts doubt on the applicability of Nietzsche's ideas about "becoming oneself" to children. It is unlikely that any child would be sufficiently strong to withstand the weakening that precedes liberation. Ramaeker is one of the few people who gives a detailed account about how obedience fits into Nietzsche's educational theory, but he refers to the *child's* "educational task 'to become what you are'" (Ramaeker, "Subjectivism and Beyond," 163; emphasis mine). I do not see this point as a fundamental criticism of Ramaeker's project, but I do think that it is important to keep in mind the severity of the transition from a dogmatic education to free spiritedness.

12. Rousseau makes several statements about the need for educational methods to be more than scientific and rational if one wants his or her students to actually learn something. "Never reason in a dry manner with youth. Clothe reason in a body if you want to make youth able to grasp it. Make the language of the mind pass through the heart, so that it may make itself understood.... I shall be very careful not to go all of a sudden to Emile's room and pompously make a long speech to him about a subject in which I want to instruct him. I shall begin by moving his imagination"; Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile: or On Education*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979), 323. I believe that Rousseau's point about the need to consider both the mind and the heart in learning is similar to Nietzsche's point that one cannot learn through scientific reasoning alone because one must amalgamate the various aspects of a human's drives in learning — one must have a relationship with the subject matter. One cannot, according to Nietzsche, pursue knowledge merely through one's rational faculties as though it were distinct from the rest of one's being.

13. Although Nietzsche does not label the teacher at the second stage an educator, I will continue to do so since Nietzsche makes this distinction purely to differentiate the function of the educator at each stage.