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Aligning Nietzsche's "Genealogical" Philosophy With Democratic Educational Reform

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Jonas and Nakazawa (2008) write that Nietzsche's epistemological "perspectivism" holds potential value for education, which is an understanding of truth that is pragmatic, or instrumental, in nature. Nietzsche's philosophy of knowledge, "demands that students be rigorously inculcated into a pedagogical framework that teaches students to discern between 'truth' and 'falsity.' This framework is essential for the development of an intellectually robust and life-affirming culture" (p. 269). This statement requires unpacking if we are to understand what scholars have claimed is one of the most important aspect of Nietzsche's philosophy, which is all but ignored by the authors, namely, Nietzsche's "genealogical method," or as it has come to be known, "psycho-genealogy," which includes Nietzsche's unique anti-essentialist form of epistemology in its connection with radical psychology. This method stresses the intimate communion between truth and value in Nietzsche's philosophy, which holds the potential to inspire the ascending life of a culture.

The authors do an excellent job of rescuing Nietzsche's position from the label of epistemological relativism. They argue, quite effectively, that although eschewing the notion of objective truth in terms of the Kantian "thing-in-itself" behind a veil of appearance, Nietzsche is undoubtedly concerned with perspectives that are most useful to humankind's functioning and flourishing. In short, Nietzsche believes that some positions, or perspectives, are "truer" than others, and are beneficial to our higher-level aesthetic, spiritual, and intellectual development. It is possible to classify Nietzsche's notion of truth in terms of the instrumentalist, or pragmatic, model. Admittedly, the authors do focus, albeit in a fleeting manner, on the issue of

psychological motives underpinning our notions of truth, but they fail to thoroughly develop the all-important notion of psycho-genealogy in Nietzsche's philosophy as it might relate to education, and, according to Schrift (1990) et al, from Nietzsche's early essay on truth and lies (1872), a document curiously absent from the authors' essay, through the *Nachless,* the genealogical (psychological) method remains crucial to his thought in its entirety (p. 138).

As stated, the authors do mention Nietzsche's concern with motivation and its connection with the understanding of truth, stating that Nietzsche "rejects certain perspectives because they are, by virtue of a debilitating intellectual weakness, fundamentally distorted and therefore less true" (p. 277). The author's incorporate a typical example extracted from Nietzsche's corpus that focuses on the Christian understanding of truth and world and its inherent lack of courageous intellectual rigor and creative aesthetic expression, as it is grounded in the will-to-revenge, or *ressentiment.* The Christian notion of truth is far removed from Nietzsche's conception of truth in terms of its pragmatic value. If we relate this aforementioned notion directly to education and Dewey's progressivist model, wherein the scientific method is employed, we see that both thinkers adopt a similar notion of truth that is grounded in the principle of utility, e.g., truth gets us from point A to point B in the most efficacious manner, and so is therefore valued for that reason above other positions that might fall short of this end. However, it is at this point that Dewey and Nietzsche part ways, for Nietzsche would take serious issue with Dewey's notion of democracy that undergirds his entire educational philosophy, as a phenomenon that is substantive, communicative, and shot through to the core with egalitarian moral virtues. According to Nietzsche, democracy represents a weak, anemic form of government, of social arrangement, for it gives equal voice to all, and in doing so, it makes all things common and mediocre due to its leveling effect.

Prior to elucidating the genealogical method, a brief description of Nietzsche's conception of truth as it appears in the 1872 essay, "On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Context" will be presented. It is a unique notion of truth based on language and semiotics, most specifically, the process of metaphor formation. This view of truth is unique in that Nietzsche, in this text, adopts a *formalist* position, which is to say, he explicates the processes of perception, thought, language, and concept formation. In short, Nietzsche performs an inquiry into the processes of cognition and human understanding, concluding that we arrive at concepts by way of a process that actually puts us at a three-tier remove from our original encounter with sensate experience. So, in a radical move, he suggests that our thoughts, which we require to bring the world closer to us in knowledge, actually situates us farther from our original experiences, which casts a bleak, skeptical shadow over any and all claims to categorical, objective truths about the world.

There is an initial nerve stimulus from which we form an idea that is verbalized, and, through the process of naming, we then abstract to our concepts. Nietzsche (1979) states that as we move between these different levels, or realms, there can be no authentic, or epistemologically valid, relation between our concepts and the real world, "there is at most , an aesthetic relation" (p. 86). Therefore, we can never hope to know things as they really are, and so the notion of truth as a form of deception is born, and it is a necessary game of deception in which we are at once all involved. As opposed to the traditional notion of truth that seeks to overcome any and all illusions, Nietzsche views truth metaphorically, and in metaphor we play with the illusion that there is an implied comparison between two or more things. According to Schrift (1990), it grows from the understanding that the human requires "life-preserving fictions, which apparently must be believed to be true if they are to serve their intended function" (p. 79).

Viewed in this manner truths are illusory and as false as lies, however, if we attend to Nietzsche's instrumentalist view, and its utility for human life, we understand that some products of the intellect are more true than others, and, in addition, some perspectives more valuable than others. As Schrift (1990) states, "Truth for Nietzsche is ultimately a collection of perspectival illusions which, while necessary for the preservation of the human species, stands as a function not of truth [epistemology] but of *power*" (p. 138). Truth, for Nietzsche, much unlike traditional notions of epistemology, or any other form of pragmatism in philosophy, becomes a concern for *axiology* and not merely epistemology. And with this crucial understanding we move to examine the genealogical method, or psycho-genealogy.

According to Nehamas (1985), Nietzsche's "genealogy reveals both the origins and the mechanisms by which the views in question try to conceal themselves" (p. 32). In Short, Nietzsche's radical psychology seeks to unearth the hidden motives beneath our behaviors, which includes our drive to and formation of truth (as metaphor). This is completely at odds with traditional philosophy and the notions of "classical" metaphysics and epistemology. Nietzsche is always asking, out of what type of impulses did the drive to truth arise, and toward what end is it ultimately directed? Does the human's drive to truth, which is always an expression of the *will-to-power,* for Nietzsche, arise out of life-affirming drives or life negating drives? Schrift (2000) is quite correct in claiming that Nietzsche's radical psychology is concerned ultimately with the complete and total *transvaluations of* values, which is the creation and determination of values anew. Importantly, it is an ethical project that is not limited to the domain of epistemology. To understand this, allows us to see that all epistemological concerns are intimately linked with axiological concerns, and "it is the question of value of will to power, and even concerns such as the quest for truth is never at a remove from the crucial assessment of values in and for human

life" (p. 142).

Since it is impossible to divorce Nietzsche's understanding of truth from the values that underlie it, and, considering Nietzsche was ultimately a conservative with respect to his conception of a national system of education, e.g., Nietzsche's conception stems from the ancient Greek ideal (where misogyny, culturally elitism, phallo-centricism, and logo-centricism ruled the day), and most particularly from the "virtue-ethics" of Aristotle, it is difficult to rectify Nietzsche's view with any contemporary notion of a liberal, democratic education. In closing, while Nietzsche's perspectivism has certain implications for a notion of education that embraces a multiplicity of perspectives for experiencing knowledge and eschews any and all notions of objective, authoritarian notions of truth with a capital "T," it is Nietzsche's antiquated value-system, which can never be divorced from his epistemology, that poses the problem of incorporating his views into the movement for educational reform in this contemporary age. If we read Nietzsche closely and attempt to remain true to his philosophy, it is impossible to square him completely with the current movement for equitable and just educational reform in this ever-changing, heterogeneous landscape.

However, this is not to indicate that we should refrain from reexamining certain aspects of Nietzsche's perspectivism in the attempt to tease out its positive potential value for our futural educational purposes, but whether or not this project would amount to what philosopher's term, "winnowing the chaff from the grain" in Nietzsche's philosophy, remains to be seen, and this issue might serve as the subject for another paper.

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