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Nietzsche Democracy and Education

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Abstract

The word 'democracy' evokes images of free speech, social justice and an inclusive form of government. However 'democracy' is more than a descriptive term and has been used to justify a variety of competing ideologies, ranging from the 'thin' democracy of liberal politics to strong calls for equality, communal citizenship, political commitment and collective action. Although its meaning is widely contested, what underpins the various notions of democracy is an egalitarian concern for human dignity based on the inherent value of reason. Rational argument is seen as *the* ethical means of proceeding, while reason provides the determining basis for ethical respect.

Although a generous reading of Nietzsche might provide support for some aspects of democratic freedom, his philosophy is a sustained critique of the rational basis of Western thought and an attack on egalitarian concern for human dignity. Any sense of moral obligation or social justice arising from such concerns was, for Nietzsche, a levelling device that snuffed out the light of individual genius, thus preventing the development of 'true' culture. Democracy was another form of collectivist decadence and social control – the antithesis of individual responsibility.

In the light of Nietzsche's critique of enlightenment rationality and his genealogy of morality, this paper examines some prevalent accounts of democracy and problematises its relation to education.

Nietzsche, Democracy and Education

Introduction

The word 'democracy' evokes images of free speech, social justice and an inclusive form of government. However 'democracy' is more than a descriptive term and has been used to justify a variety of competing ideologies, ranging from the 'thin' democracy of liberal politics to strong calls for equality, communal citizenship, political commitment and collective action. Although its meaning is widely contested, what underpins the various notions of democracy is an egalitarian concern for human dignity based on the inherent value of reason. Rational argument is seen as *the* ethical means of proceeding, while reason provides the determining basis for ethical respect.

Although a generous reading of Nietzsche (e.g. Sassone, 1996) might provide support for some aspects of democratic freedom, his philosophy is a sustained critique of the rational basis of Western thought and an attack on egalitarian concern for human dignity. Any sense of moral obligation or social justice arising from such concerns was, for Nietzsche, a levelling device that snuffed out the light of individual genius, thus preventing the development of 'true' culture. Democracy was another form of collectivist decadence and social control – the antithesis of individual responsibility.

In the light of Nietzsche's critique of enlightenment rationality and his genealogy of morality, this paper examines some prevalent accounts of democracy and problematises its relation to education.

Nietzsche's Politics

Kant's rejection of external authority as an ethical source and Schopenhauer's subsequent challenge to universal reason provided fertile ground for Nietzsche's ensuing interrogation of his religious upbringing, his rejection of conformity and his hostility towards domination by the State. While Nietzsche's philosophy developed through a period of idealism in German philosophy, the milieu of the time also featured nationalistic fervour in politics, military dominance as an assertion of culture in Europe, Bismarck's unification of 19th Century Germany, and a progressive trend throughout Western Society towards socialism and industrialisation.

Nietzsche was equally bitter about the negative focus and the transcendent character of the dialectic in Hegel's deification of the 'absolute', enshrined in the promotion of the State as the ultimate good. In Hegelian terms, societal change was interpreted as evolutionary improvement, with human nature as a model of historical progress. The intensification of the State impinged on the expression of personal freedom at the heart of Nietzsche's 'Will to Power'. Throughout the 19th century, Germany opposed radical intellectual movements, removed dissenting intellectuals from universities, burned offending books, and promoted a powerful state under Bismarck's rule of 'blood and iron'. Marxism was popularised as a form of social philosophy, further eroding the possibility of a resurgence of individualism. The 'Age of Progress' was,

for Nietzsche, anything but. Instead he saw nineteenth century society as a stultifying and negative environment for the development of culture and the genius.

As antagonistic as he was towards any notion of transcendence or universal self-hood emanating from Kantian philosophy, Nietzsche was just as vigorously opposed to Rousseau's egalitarian concern for human dignity. Any sense of moral obligation or social justice arising from such concern was seen as a levelling device that snuffed out the light of individual genius, thus preventing the development of 'true' culture.

For Nietzsche, socialism and communism were patterns of collectivist decadence – the antithesis of individual responsibility and an obstacle to personal brilliance. Such systems valued the collective good over any individual, and prevented the emergence of the highest types that carried Nietzsche's hopes for future humanity.

Although the twentieth century has seen to a large extent the demise of socialist and communist regimes throughout Europe, Nietzsche's social critique still applies today in relation to the constraints of democracy on the expression of individuality. In spite of the promise of freedom, democracy represented a subjection to the transcendent world of reason and an abdication of individual responsibility to a wider group¹. For Nietzsche, ethical responsibility resided in knowing one's own traditions, overcoming the nihilism of modernity at an individual level and asserting one's own creative definitions of life.

Meaning of democracy contested

Liberty, equality and fraternity are the catchwords of democratic systems although the particular mix of the three allows for volumes of difference in the resulting politics. The libertarian for example might argue for equal access and freedom from restraint for individuals as a means of achieving a balanced community, while the social democrat would argue for stronger government and more restraint in an attempt to achieve equality of outcomes. Commitment to a particular political perspective goes further than the level of argument; it extends to vocabulary, where words like 'community', 'equality', 'freedom' and even the term 'democratic', are imbued with meaning according to the intention of their speakers. In spite of differences though, it is possible to delineate a few edges of the territory marked out by the word 'democracy'. In its ideals, democracy would not support unwarranted social superiority. Equally, it would not allow for extreme versions of totalitarian government or communism. The difficulty lies with defining what is inside the boundaries of what we might call democracy.

Stanley Benn and Richard Peters (1959) brought together the disciplines of political studies and educational philosophy in an early investigation into the relationship between what is implied in 'being reasonable' and the principles and institutions of the democratic state. The two authors critique a number of common epithets that attempt to encapsulate what democracy means. Among these are such notions as

¹ cf. Hayek's critique of collectivism and state control - Road to Serfdom.

‘majority rule’, ‘sovereignty of the people’, ‘the will of the people’, ‘unified will’, ‘freedom to associate’, and a more utopian ‘government by persons freely chosen by and responsible to the governed’. Although they find each inadequate as a definition and descriptively ambiguous, they suggest the term may still have “prescriptive force in the different contexts in which it is used” (Peters & Benn, 1959: 332).

Democracy, they say, is not merely a set of political institutions like universal suffrage, parliamentary government or majority vote, but also a set of operational principles that make reasons public and allow for public participation in protest and decision-making. Peters and Benn see these ideas as compatible with the principles of impartiality and respect for persons as sources of claims and arguments; principles which underlie political ideals like justice, liberty and equality. Democracy, they argue, is a way of coming to terms with the need for authority while maintaining a sense of individual responsibility.

Harking back to Locke’s theory of natural rights, Peters & Benn argue that the justification of democracy lies in two aspects: firstly, that every person must be respected as a source of claims, and must not be treated as a mere instrument; and secondly, that all interests must be rationally justified and weighed impartially. Their justification of democracy lies then, not in a ‘tyranny of the majority’, but in conferring on every individual “the opportunity to voice a claim which no government could afford to ignore” (1959:350). The giving of reasons is a key factor in this definition of democracy, with government conducted in an atmosphere of criticism and discussion. To prevent discussion degenerating into mere abuse, freedom of discussion must also be accompanied by a minimal respect for each person as a source of arguments.

In a more recent analysis, Held (1996) identifies several constructions of democracy: - the classical idea of democracy in ancient Athens; the republican conception of a self-governing community; liberal democracy, and the Marxist conception of direct democracy. He also examines in detail four twentieth-century models: competitive elitist democracy, pluralism, legal democracy and participatory democracy - four models² which he considers to be of central importance to political debate. Although the term ‘democracy’ serves a legitimating role for political and social life, the nature of democracy is fundamentally contested both as an idea and as a political reality. Also contested are many of the key terms of democracy, such as the proper meaning of ‘political participation’, the idea of choosing freely between political alternatives, and the nature of membership in a democratic community.

Simplistic definitions draw upon the root meanings of the word: *demos* (people) and *kratos* (rule) – signifying a form of government in which the people rule. This implies some form of political community involving equality among the people. Opinion differs though over what constitutes ‘the people’, and what is meant by

² A detailed examination of these is beyond the scope of this paper. Mention is made merely to point out the array of different interpretations.

'rule'. Continuing the proliferation of interpretations, Held (1996) identifies seven distinct conceptions of what 'rule by the people' means, ranging from active involvement in governmental administration to the idea of *representation* in which the rulers should act in the interests of the people. According to Held, democracy offers – in theory at least – fair and just ways of negotiating values and value disputes. It is, he claims, “the only ‘grand’ or ‘meta-’ narrative that can legitimately frame and delimit the competing ‘narratives’ of the contemporary age” (Held, 1996:298). Democracy is seen as important not as just one value among many, such as liberty, equality or justice; but as *the* value that can mediate among different normative concerns. Held argues that democracy does not presuppose a *synthesis* of diverse values, but rather a means of keeping value conflicts open and as a basis for tolerating and negotiating difference. Contrary to Held’s vision, this paper argues that the extent of diversity is limited by the commonality of values that defines democratic society and culture.

In examining the meaning of democracy or comparing various democratic models, it is important to differentiate between descriptive-explanatory and normative statements; that is, between statements about how things are and why they are so, and statements about how things ought to or should be. It is also worth noting too that attempts at defining or promoting democracy in particular ways usually reflect particular political commitments whether consciously or not.

Some constructions of ‘democracy’

Pure democracy

The practice of democracy draws on the tradition of classical Greek thought, although modern democracy occurs in a vastly different environment from the *polis* of ancient Greece. The *polis* (from which we derive our term ‘politics’) was a small fortified village, self-governing, with a strong sense of community. To undertake a life of politics one had to be a free man – a description limited to the male citizen as head of the household. It excluded wives and slaves who were bound to the instrumental role of service to the house. It also excluded merchants because of their commitment to commercial life. Reason and speech (*logos*) were the means to free and equal participation in political life. Barbarians therefore were also considered unworthy since they could not partake in the verbal exchange.

Bringing together the Greek word *idios* (meaning personal, peculiar, distinct, separate, or private), and our contemporary pejorative term ‘idiot’, Berry (1989) locates the critique of contemporary individualism within a sphere of ‘idiotic politics’ – this in contrast to an attitude of sociality and communal participation. The political community of ancient Greece was a source of identity and value, so it was by participating in the life of the *polis* that individuals expressed their humanity. Berry suggests that failure to participate in politics was to “suffer the condition of idiocy, which means that a less than fully human life is being led” (1989:9).

Representative democracy

Democracy in its pure form suggests a system in which all people govern themselves in all public matters all of the time. Such a form could hardly be expected to function efficiently in a nation of continental proportions with millions of citizens. Unlike the early Greek political community (the *polis*) where it was possible for direct participation in political decision-making (for some anyway), what we have in Western society today is generally described as representative democracy. Distinction can be drawn between two broad classifications of representative democracy: firstly, 'liberal' or 'representative' democracy (a system of rule embracing elected 'officers' who undertake to 'represent' the interests and/or views of citizens within the framework of 'the rule of law'); and secondly, 'direct or 'participatory' democracy (a system of decision making about public affairs requiring active involvement of citizens).

According to Barber (1984), representative democracy substituted for the pure principle a definition of democracy as a form of government in which *some* of the people, chosen by (arguably) all, govern in all public matters all of the time. This approach purchased efficiency without sacrificing accountability, but he suggests, at an enormous cost to participation and to citizenship. The degree of representation and the subsequent legitimacy of elected government are moderated considerably by the degree of voter participation. Underpinning liberal democracy is the Kantian account of autonomous individuals as essentially rational, free to pursue their own notion of the good life, and deserving respect as 'ends in themselves'. As such, they would be free from authoritarianism, living with authority structures and social institutions subject to rational scrutiny.

From a *neo*-liberal perspective, Strike argues that the central public function of schooling in a liberal state is the "democratic distribution of rationality" (1982:12). Good pedagogy would thus be determined by the concept of rationality and would be oriented to the promotion of rational autonomy. Within this perspective, justice is defined as equal opportunity rather than equal outcome, family is seen as neutral and natural in the opportunity stakes, and the market is left to mediate any extremes of wealth and poverty. Such thinking echoes the philosophy of Hayek³ used to underpin the political direction of Western economies for the last two decades. In this view, education has gradually been subsumed under the general rubric of economics, and it is now common for education to be evaluated in terms of its *return on investment*⁴ and to be justified in terms of its instrumental contribution to a knowledge *economy*. Such an approach is criticised by Marshall (1995) for its re-definition of persons as 'rational autonomous choosers' amid consumerist and market approaches to education.

³ See for example: Hayek, F. (1978) *The Constitution of Liberty*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago; or Hayek, F. (1962) *The Road to Serfdom*, Routledge, London.

⁴ See for example, Ministry of Education (2002): Tertiary Education Strategy

Critiques of liberal and neo-liberal democracy point to the absence of any firm theory of citizenship, participation, public goods or civic virtue, and expose it as based on the advancement of individualistic and private ends. Barber (1984), for example, argues that the language and imagery of liberalism reflects the Newtonian atomistic view emanating from Hobbes, Locke, Hume, Bentham, Mill and Nozick. As such, it reflects the physical cosmos of the scientists - the human world inhabited by units, particles and atoms, rather than the traditional teleological, psychic, and spiritual understandings of the essence of humanity:

With a vocabulary of such materiality, liberal theory cannot be expected to give an adequate account of human interdependency, mutualism, cooperation, fellowship, fraternity, community and citizenship. (Barber, 1984:35)

Because of the shortcomings outlined above, Barber depicts liberal government as a *thin* form of democracy, deficient in the pleasures of communal participation and in the commitment to a shared politics. It is, he argues, a politics of static interest, never a politics of transformation (Barber, 1984:24).

Strong Democracy

Contrasted with the thin democracy of liberal government is a notion of *strong* democracy that advocates a more comprehensive commitment to citizenship, participation and political community. Strong democracy is a call for political involvement in everyday decisions that affect our lives. It is concerned to “expand our understanding of what counts as democratic ... both the impulse towards liberty, property, and privacy... and the impulse towards equality, -participation, and communal citizenship” (Barber, 1984:xiv). It represents an attempt to revitalize citizenship while still promoting efficient government.

Berry (1989) does not want the language of liberalism denigrated by the worst aspects of competitive individualism – which he associates more with capitalism. There is no necessary connection, Berry claims, between liberal values and capitalist practices in which the individual sees himself unrestrained by society. Rather, he argues, the central ethical principle of liberalism – the freedom of the individual to realise his or her human capacities is more likely to reach fruition in a socialist rather than a capitalist society. Introducing a stronger focus on the social, Berry advances the idea of ‘democratic community’ and draws upon Walzer's vision of:

a strong welfare state run, in part at least, by local and amateur officials; a constrained market; an open and demystified civil service; independent public schools; the sharing of hard work and free time; the protection of religious and familial life; a system of public honoring and dishonoring free from all considerations of rank or class; workers’ control of companies and factories; a politics of parties, movements, meetings, and public debate (Berry 1989: x).

In practice then, democracy usually involves some form of popular power in which people are engaged in self-government and self-regulation, usually involving representatives voted into power. Democracy is legitimated by the promotion of various ethical and political positions such as political equality, liberty, moral self-development, common interest and social utility. Its proponents suggest that it provides a fair compromise in the satisfaction of wants, and that it serves as an efficient vehicle for making decisions that take everyone’s interest into account.

Democracy and Education

RS Peters

A defining moment for philosophy of education in Britain was the publication of Richard Peters (1966) treatise on ethics and education that drew together the Kantian idea of rational autonomy and the political process of democracy. He provides three interpretations of the nexus between democracy and education – all of which he sees as relevant and important. Firstly, the democratisation of education – a process in which education should be available for all and fairly distributed; and in which teachers should make themselves more effectively into a 'profession' with attention to training and a code of ethics. Secondly, the school can be thought of as a democratic institution. Although formal authorities are appointed, staff are to be consulted on certain issues and pupils encouraged to participate in decision-making. This is not to speak against authority, for Peters is a firm believer in properly constituted authority⁵; but rather a call for schools to be based on rational discussion. The third interpretation is what Peters calls education *for* democracy, involving preparation for participation in public life and development of the willingness to participate in its institutions. This is to be promoted through initiation into traditions and rituals in which the fundamental principles of reason are implicit. Peters sees this as the paradox of moral education, i.e. “the palace of reason has to be entered by the courtyard of habit” (1966:314). This implies practical peer-group experience of a democratic way of life, with its emphasis on discussion and the use of reason, and built-in standards such as those of relevance, consistency and impartiality. The fundamental attitudes underlying this way of life are an overall concern for truth, respect for persons and a feeling of fraternity for others as persons; while the fundamental principles underlying such a life are those of fairness, tolerance and the consideration of other people’s interests. Peters’ focus on democracy in relation to education is a legacy of his association with Stanley Benn and echoes their earlier joint publication (1959) which examined the close relationship between what is implied in ‘being reasonable’ and the principles and institutions of the democratic state.

Dewey

Perhaps the most influential work on democracy and education emanated from the American, John Dewey. He criticised traditional approaches to education as rote learning or as the imposition of extrinsic truths on inert learners. He argued instead for a close link between education and meaningful experience, defining education as "that reconstruction or reorganisation of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience" (Dewey, 1916:76). This implies a shaping and directing of experiences for learners. It also implies a notion of continuing education and the ongoing capacity for growth. This idea could only be applied to members of a society where there was a free exchange of ideas, and "adequate provision for the reconstruction of social habits and

⁵ Peters, R. (1974). *Authority, Responsibility and Education*. London: Allen & Unwin.

institutions by means of wide stimulation arising from equitably distributed interests” (1916:100). For Dewey, this meant a democratic society.

His advocacy of a democratic approach to education reflects his background in science – in particular his pragmatic view of learning as constructing hypotheses and then testing them in practice. Dewey claimed that the experimental method was not limited to technical matters but "holds equally to the forming and testing of ideas in social and moral matters" (1916:339). Dewey's 'democratic ideal' in education involves the sharing of common interests, and free interaction and subsequent readjustments between social groups. A democracy, he suggests is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of 'conjoint communicated experience'.

By way of clarification, Dewey provides a number of contrasts for his democratic conception of education. Firstly, he points to the Platonic model of education involving a teleological ideal (the ultimate good), a model he criticised for its stratifying effect on society. Secondly, he outlines the individualist ideal of the eighteenth century - one that promoted the free development of individuality, an interest in social progress, the ideal of a cosmopolitan humanity, and a faith in nature and the natural sciences. His third contrast is with the nineteenth-century rise in nationalism and the subordination of individuals to the superior interests of the state, a situation in which the aim of education was the formation of the 'citizen' rather than the 'man'.

For Dewey, education is a social process, with the value of a group's social life measured in two ways: firstly, by the extent to which the interests of a group are shared by all its members; and secondly, by the fullness and freedom with which the group interacts with other groups. Such a 'good life' requires a democratic society, involving free intercourse and communication of experience, participation by all members on equal terms, and institutions flexible enough to readjust to changing circumstances.

Such a society must have a type of education which gives individuals a personal interest in social relationships and control, and the habits of mind which secure social changes without introducing disorder.”
(Dewey, 1916:99)

Although sometimes labeled 'progressive' in his formulation of education, Dewey argued explicitly against what he saw as the worst aspects of progressivism. He advocated a sound philosophy of experience as the basis for education, with children undergoing guidance into organised activity. Power was achievable through the inhibition of impulses, through reflection and evaluation of desires, and through the postponement of immediate action. He even described the ideal aim of education as the "power of self control" (Dewey: 1938:64).

A Nietzschean critique of democracy

On the basis of the territory exposed so far in this paper, it would be fruitless to attempt an exhaustive definition of democracy in the quest for a definitive account of the relationship between democracy and education. To do so would be to proffer yet

another political position. Instead it is proposed to identify some similarities among the positions discussed so far, to be so bold as to suggest that these might reveal some of the assumptions underpinning democratic notions of education, and to suggest a Nietzschean perspective on such principles and assumptions.

Common to most attempts to encapsulate the 'essence' of democracy are a number of themes. Although Nietzsche never published a critique of democracy as a formal explicit essay, his writing contains many references to the term – mostly derogatory, while his philosophical project constituted a condemnation of its constituent elements. For the purpose of analysis, these are now treated separately, although from Nietzsche's perspective, they are closely interwoven and in many respects interdependent in his genealogy of moral life and his formulation of modern culture as “combating instinct”, and thus, as a “formula for decadence” (TI, The Problem of Socrates: 11).

Democracy as a meta-narrative

Political attempts to define 'democracy' (including those posing as neutral philosophy) usually tend to work towards similar ends - a precise definition of the term, an analytic account of its constituent elements, and a clear prescription for an ethical society. Such attempts presuppose a singular 'truth' about democracy waiting to be revealed through verbal analysis or perhaps through active participation in a particular type of society. Although Held (1996) advocates democracy as a means of keeping value conflicts open and negotiating difference, his view of democracy as the overriding value is itself not negotiable.

However, Nietzsche's ideas about truth render such solutions problematic. Breazeale's (1979) account of Nietzsche's early notebooks presents 'truth' not as singular certainty, but as 'lies' and 'illusions', or more gently, as 'conventional designations' useful in facilitating social life, and as giving human form to a hostile world in order to gain anthropomorphic mastery over life. Although Nietzsche did not self-consciously and overtly use the term 'ideology', his approach to the problem of truth ('a mobile army of metaphors'⁶) presupposed a critical awareness of what later became the sociology of knowledge and of what Foucault was later to term 'power/knowledge'. Truth then was not a metaphysical certainty, but a mask for the relations of power.

Convictions are, Nietzsche suggests, “more dangerous enemies of truth than lies” (HAH 483). An insistence on objective certainty masks feelings of weakness, limiting the possibility of agonistic diversity and promoting instead a single destination. Such closure is anathema for Nietzsche. He advocates instead a multi-perspectival view, "seeing the world with more and different eyes" (GM, III: 12). To posit democracy as a universal solution to political and ethical debate is to ignore the contested nature of what we call 'truth', to take the moral high ground, and to close down the possibility of new and different perspectives. We then run the risk, as

⁶ In his early essay 'On truth and lie in an extra-moral sense'.

Connolly (1991) points out, of acquiescing to such strategies as conquest, conversion, community, or tolerance - strategies that impinge upon the individual freedom that underpins theories of democracy.

The great levelling

A persisting concern for Nietzsche was the egalitarian view of human nature and its stultifying effect on the development of culture. During his early lectures he criticised the way that outstanding people were subjected to the levelling effect of herd mentality, resulting in a culture based around the lowest common denominator. Consistent with this is his view of democratism as the “decadent form of the state” (TI, Incursions of the Untimely: 39). Such contempt for democracy is evident in his formulation of the French Revolution as the beginning of the “great slave rebellion”:

“the democratic movement is not only a form of the decay of political organization but a form of the decay, namely the diminution, of man, making him mediocre and lowering his value.” BGE 203

Proponents of democratic community are wedded to notions of equality and organic unity as the basis of ethical action. In its idealised form, community provides equal access and outcomes for its members, elevating life beyond competition as a means of survival, and promoting positive freedom through mutual empowerment of its members. Such egalitarian concerns are to the fore in normative calls for social democracy.

However, the practice of community can also be seen to limit the exercise of individual freedom. This view was at the heart of early liberal theory - in particular the private individualism of Locke, revived in the neoliberal conception of the competitive individual exercising freedom of choice as consumer in the marketplace. From the individualist (as opposed to communitarian) perspective, calls for equality in the name of democratic community can be criticised as a form of social control. The imposition of a levelling morality acts as a preventative for the emergence of genius and constitutes the egalitarian focus of Nietzsche's *slave rebellion* or what he called the “herd instinct in the individual” (GS: 116). His central objection to egalitarian movements appears to be that they treat people as equal when they are really not so, an objection obvious in his attack on Rousseau:

The doctrine of equality! There is no more poisonous poison anywhere: for it seems to be preached by justice itself, whereas it really is the termination of justice. 'Equal to the equal, unequal to the unequal' - that would be the true slogan of justice (TI, Skirmishes: 48)

In contrast, he defends the contributions historically made by aristocratic societies, particularly the Romans and the Greeks. He admires those who were prepared to stand against the prevailing social, political and academic milieu, assert their own power, and rise above the mediocre. He holds the Romantic view that a strong spirit survives the worst and emerges stronger still, and that only the weak perish from hardship. It is this model that explains the promotion of great culture, ‘higher types’, and his idea of *Übermensch*.

... a synthetic, summarizing, justifying man for whose existence this transformation of mankind into a machine is a precondition, as a base on which he can invent his *higher form of being*.... He needs the opposition of the masses, of the 'leveled,' a feeling of distance from them! he stands on them, he lives off them. (WP 866)

Nietzsche's unpublished note here seems to support a view of *Übermensch* arising *because of* (rather than *in spite of*) hardship. However, his early eulogy on Schopenhauer (1874) argues that greatness arising through difficult times may have been greater still were it not for the unnecessary difficulties and hard times presented by the pseudoculture of the day.

Liberal ethnocentrism

Since the time of Kant, the human subject has entertained ethical notions of autonomy through its rational essence. Western society prides itself on its aspiration to (and arguably its attainment of) liberal ideals, based on notions of freedom, equality and various notions of community.

Peters (1996) identifies Bloom and Finkelkraut as neo-conservatives in the notion of community they aspire to. They promote a vision of a common national culture in which all individuals, freed from their ethnic origins, their tribal histories, and their traditional cultural beliefs, can participate in a modern democratic society. In this view, cultural pluralism and ethnic diversity are seen as a threat to group identity, group loyalties and group rights. It is, Peters argues, not surprising that:

"modern liberal discourse in its conception of citizenship has systematically excluded groups historically defined as Other. It has effectively pursued this end by promoting an idea of civic community that is both homogeneous and monocultural" (Peters, 1996: 188)

Worldwide television now promotes American-style democracy as a universal panacea for world trouble, extending neo-conservative views to the identification and eradication of Muslim otherness in the name of a 'war against terror'⁷. Although such perspectives may be American artifact, they have a significant effect on shaping the discourse of freedom and the international marketing of subjectivity. The free-thinking individual has risen to prominence amidst a monocultural, universal view of human nature as rational and free – autonomous chooser in the market economy and responsible voter within national electoral systems. It may of course just be coincidental that liberal economies benefit immensely from such internationalism. However, the extent of military muscle applied by individual nations to the maintenance of international capitalism and the creation of a world citizenry reinforces the dominance of Western political thought and reduces the possibility of otherness through the eradication of difference. This international marketing of subjectivity can be seen as preservation of liberal ideals (albeit for ethnocentric purposes and through illiberal means).

The social-democratic ideal of universal citizenship has been criticised for failing to recognise and take account of group differences. Iris Marion Young offers instead a notion of *differentiated* citizenship as "the best way of realising the inclusion and

⁷ The American response to 'terrorist' attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York, September 11 2001.

participation of everyone in full citizenship” (Young, 1997:257). She argues that universal citizenship involves a trend towards uniformity and equal treatment, resulting in exclusions and/or homogeneity. She claims that inclusion or participation of everyone on a fair basis is only possible under three conditions: firstly, if there are specific mechanisms for group representation; secondly, if the rule of equal treatment is departed from in specific cases so as to ensure fair and just treatment, and thirdly, where the articulation of special rights exists that attend to group differences so as to combat oppression and disadvantage.

However, Young’s ‘differentiated citizenship’ does not relieve us from the problems of exclusion, marginalisation and suppression of difference. It merely relocates them at a different level. With a conceptual shift from universal to differentiated citizenship, these same groups become the oppressor rather than the oppressed. In the same way that groups comply with universal norms, individuals would now comply with group norms. The penalty for non-compliance is non-representation. i.e. the individual’s interests would not be represented through ‘differentiated citizenship’. Pragmatically of course we need to define some order into the world as a means of making sense of our experience, and education is part of the defining process. However let us not confuse that with any essential coherence or tendency towards power sharing in human nature. A plea for sharing the right to oppress is hardly a philosophical solution to the problem of individual freedom. Differentiated citizenship is really a political and pragmatic attempt to solve a philosophical problem.

Whether one’s notion of liberal democracy embraces the notion of the ‘unencumbered individual’ as an ethical centre, or whether one aspires to the ideals of global or differentiated citizenship as part of a democratic community, the promotion of democratic practice involves the promotion of liberal ideals, usually by those benefiting from such promotion. This is evident in the development of world markets through the identification of ‘otherness’ and its subsequent eradication⁸. Liberal democracy also excludes otherness in less obvious ways. There are restrictions on who has a voice in democratic systems - excluded from participation are those considered not old enough (children), not rational enough (the ‘insane’) or not moral enough (criminals), echoing the rightness of Kantian morality based on rational autonomy. Liberal democracy is thus reproduced through its own mechanisms. From the perspective of liberalism, the promotion of liberal ideals is both ‘reason’-able and desirable, although in terms of process, it is a self-referential process. In this respect it shares some features with blind faith and indoctrination – faith in reason as a totalising mechanism, and indoctrination through limiting the possibilities of other perspectives. Admittedly, in theory at least, liberalism involves toleration and respect for difference, yet its self-promotion as a system through the mechanisms of

⁸ Last century’s wars (in their various guises) against communism have opened up markets for strong Western economies.

democracy limits the possibility of difference, suggesting a form of ethnocentrism under the guise of rational and purportedly 'neutral' examination.

Reason as transcendent

Kant is generally credited with having undermined the divine right of kings through his reliance on reason as a guide to moral thought and action. Kant conceived of rational beings as living in a 'kingdom of ends' whose laws were the objective principles formulated and accepted by rational beings. Peters (1966) suggests this kingdom was a moral philosopher's version of the kingdom of heaven rather than an account of a concrete community, and notes that for Kant the existence of individual rational beings was not just a fact about the world; it was a fact of 'supreme ethical importance':

The notion of 'persons' picked out not simply the fact; it also bore witness to the ethical importance of the fact. And this fact was intimately connected with the activity of men as rational beings in deliberating about what they ought to do. (RS Peters p167.doc)

Since the time of Kant, the human subject has based its claim to a higher status and its ownership of a moral dimension on its rational capacity. Reason is accorded priority status in determining ethical principles, for it is both our rational capacity as human beings and our 'religious' (i.e. non-rational) belief in reason as transcendent that provide the basis of moral judgment. Kantian philosophy provided a new universal, beyond contradiction by rational agents and thus a universal prescription for man. The authority formerly enjoyed by the Christian 'God' lived on in the new rational 'religion', particularly in Kant's *noumena* - the 'true' world as a world that cannot be challenged empirically.

The similarity between Kantian rationality and Christian faith led Nietzsche to call Kant a 'cunning Christian' and is evident in a number of ways. First, there is a singular conception of reason underpinning the way we should live our lives. Such singularity used to be reserved for the deity – the 'One'. Second, both systems are self-referential: just as God was accountable to God alone, reason itself is the court of appeal when adjudicating on rational matters - thus the charge of a 'religious' belief in reason. Third, the elevation of the ethereal realm depreciates the value of the embodied world, the sensory and the instinctual. The biblical 'heavenly realm' has been replaced by the faculty of reason, signifying a move from salvation to enlightenment, or perhaps a synthesis of salvation *through* enlightenment.

Kant holds that as all rational beings come under the law:

"each of them must treat itself and all others never merely as means, but in every case at the same time as ends in themselves. Hence results a systematic union of rational beings by common objective laws and the political justification for social democracy" (1923:52).

The rational basis for democracy then presupposes the higher order of our rational capacity in much the same way that religious faith elevates the divine. Nietzsche's *Twilight of the Idols* portrays such elevation as a 'hostility towards life', with the Church waging its 'war against passion' through the 'excision', 'castration' and 'extirpation' of such human qualities as sensuality, pride and lust for power. Such hostility is for Nietzsche necessary for those too weak-willed and too degenerate to

moderate their own desire, those deficient of will, of sovereignty, of strength. He conceives instead of a free spirit taking such pleasure in the power of self-determination and celebrating the joy of uncertainty:

the spirit would take leave of all faith and every wish for certainty, being practiced in maintaining himself on insubstantial ropes and possibilities and dancing even near abysses. Such a spirit would be the *free spirit* par excellence (GS: 347)

The unreal ideal

In line with Nietzsche's rejection of a 'higher' realm for spiritual salvation, the efficacy of a social system might be determined by the degree to which it enhances life. Even though the idea of democracy provides a promise of harmony in people living and working together as a form of social life, there is a chasm between theory and practice. Even pro-democracy commentators admit that there may be more promise than delivery.

democracy is an impracticable form of government because it demands of the ordinary citizen qualities which only the few can possess. It must, in the end, represent the views of the 20 per cent -who understand what 20 per cent means" (Peters, 1966: 304).

Held also points out shortcomings in the institutions of liberal representative democracy:

the disjuncture between the agencies which possess formal control and those with actual control, between the power that is claimed for the people and their limited actual power, between the promises of representatives and their actual performance, is striking" (Held, 1996:334)

As a palliative for the disjuncture, Held advocates an 'ideal normative agreement'; in other words, an agreement to follow rules and laws on the grounds that they are the regulations that would be agreed to in ideal conditions. It is not clear in the literature though how such an agreement might be reached. War, trade sanctions and international boycotts escalate from failed attempts to reach such agreements – even between countries that aspire to similar democratic ideals. Expecting normative ideals to resolve socio-political and religious difference is problematic to say the least.

Within democratic nations, order is maintained through the use and the threat of violence and the application of power, not only in the actions of its enforcement agencies, but also through the structure of its institutions as mechanisms of social exclusion determining who will have a say. Definitions of terms like 'persons', 'citizens' or 'eligible voters' exclude categories of people deemed not ready or not fit to be 'persons' (e.g. criminals, children, the insane), thus normalising institutional patterns of self-preservation. The difficulty lies not in the fact that such exclusions exist *per se*, but that they operate within a system that purports to represent *all*. Such marginalisation is usually justified in terms of 'welfare rights' or 'best interests', although the net effect of such exclusion is a reduction in participation. If the basis of exclusion is the idea that these people have insufficient knowledge and/or morality to participate independently, their sacrifice is really in the interests of system efficiency.

Conclusion - Democracy to come

Johnson (2001) attempts an examination of Nietzsche in relation to democracy and education, although his vision is short in a number of ways. He limits discussion of

democracy to how it is “practiced in America” (p74). He equates education with 'curriculum' and 'instruction', seeing the educator's role as a 'task' to 'accomplish' (p89). He also treats the 'social' as a conglomerate with no possibility of freedom or individual emergence, with "...no question of a reconciliation between the realms of the individual and social" (p89). Inside such limited parameters, Johnson concludes that with "no shared methods of instruction, no curricula that can be perused, no contents to be discovered ... there is only the Nietzschean individual".

Such a formulation is however, unhelpful as a normative educational philosophy and blind to the possibilities of Nietzsche's *Übermensch* as embracing 'otherness' in an attitude of adversarial respect. Nietzsche's project is very much in the realm of the social, engaging to a large extent the democracy of his day⁹. At no time was Nietzsche prepared to simply ignore the social in favour of some theoretical notion of ungrounded individuality. To equate education with curriculum and instruction might be a suitable formula for training of the masses and the promotion of *bildung*, but education for Nietzsche's *free spirits* requires far broader horizons and higher reaching goals. The higher type would learn in spite of curriculum and instruction, with the locus of control firmly inside an active learner, rather than in an educator with a 'task' to perform. Although Nietzsche might agree with the idea of the 'social' as a conglomerate (the 'herd'), he would not be satisfied with Johnson's deterministic view that there is no possibility of a 'reconciliation between the realms of the individual and social'. Nietzsche's *Übermensch* is just such a reconciliation and one which Nietzsche envisaged in his early essay on Schopenhauer as one who achieved greatness by overcoming extreme hardship in his social world. A Nietzschean take on democracy and education must then go further than a myopic self-construction through introspective isolation.

Other commentators try to defend democratic readings of Nietzsche by appealing to the familiarity of contemporary cultural practices. Hatab (1995) for example sees a form of agonistic contest in the practice of political speech making where one view wins in the vote for government. However, Nietzsche's hope for the emergence of greatness is not well served by the short lived nature of such contests, in which a political candidate can be erased from the landscape a few months after victory.

The whole of the West no longer possesses the instincts out of which institutions grow, out of which a *future* grows.... That which makes an institution an institution is despised, hated, repudiated: one fears the danger of a new slavery the moment the word 'authority' is even spoken out loud. That is how far decadence has advanced in the value-instincts of our politicians, of our political parties: *instinctively* they prefer what disintegrates, what hastens the end. (Nietzsche, TI, Skirmishes of an Untimely Man, §39).

In a recent examination of Nietzsche's thoughts in relation to democracy, Mangiafico (2002) criticises those who would excuse Nietzsche's anti-democratic remarks, or distance these remarks from the core of Nietzsche's thought. He sees the postmodern defence of Nietzsche as adopting the Nietzschean language of power while at the

⁹ There are many barbed comments throughout Nietzsche's work about both Hegel and Bismarck in relation to the German State. In addition, his major work, the *Genealogy of Morals* is almost a total focus on the social development of morality.

same time defending democracy as the arena for a rich and free expression of power. He argues that rather than search for ways to read Nietzsche so that he will conform to the current democratic consensus, we should remake ourselves with the help of someone who will disagree with us. Dissonance is not to be resolved but to be lived with as a challenge and as an opportunity to grow.

A politics of difference

Peters (1996) examination of culture and democracy points out that the debate between liberals and communitarians has been tied on both sides to the binary logic of modernism. Each side seeks to privilege one term or concept that the other seeks to deny. Liberalism, in its commitment to an ideology of individualism, privileges the individual in universal and ahistorical terms as the ultimate unit of analysis. Communitarians, on the other hand, argue that our identity depends on our membership in a community of shared values and meanings - a collective that Peters argues can be undesirably utopian and politically problematic in its ignoring of endemic alienation and violence.

Beyond the binary opposition between individual and community, a poststructural view of the subject leaves behind the unitary, rational ego; inserting instead a social identity - not as already produced but 'in-process' and often fragmented. With the subject as contingent, and the relation between individual and community problematic, Cornell West's formulation of a 'politics of difference' is opportune. Its function is:

to trash the monolithic and homogeneous in the name of diversity, multiplicity, and heterogeneity; to reject the abstract, general and universal in light of the concrete, specific and particular; and to historicize, contextualize and pluralize by highlighting the contingent, provisional, variable, tentative shifting and changing. (Peters, 1996: 187)

A politics of difference is suspicious of universalist, foundationalist and essentialist thinking and treats homogeneous constructions of individual or community identity as deliberate and systematic exclusion. It treats difference as variation rather than as opposition and treats identity as both relational and contextual.

Such a tendency is available through the Nietzschean figure of the *Übermensch*. Wrongly interpreted at times as a violent dominating force¹⁰, *Übermensch* is a metaphor for an agonism of difference, a commitment to reflection and self-creation, and an opportunity for individual genius to arise out of mediocrity. As the epitome of Nietzsche's idea of 'untimeliness', *Übermensch* refuses any social obligation arising out of tradition or group morality. Being grounded in the physical world rather than transcendent, *Übermensch* is also an expression of life and health. Nietzsche, like his *Übermensch* character, was opposed to the levelling effect of the prevailing practices of democracy and social justice, based as they were on a collective egalitarian morality. As an antidote to the nihilism of communal tradition, of social obligation and of unquestioning conformity, Nietzsche posited the notion of 'untimeliness', with

¹⁰ Kaufmann (1974: 316) refutes interpretations of Nietzsche's work as a justification for domination.

his *Übermensch* rising above herd mentality, challenging accepted definitions, creating new values, ensuring sufficient social space for difference, and promoting 'true' education and culture. Liberty, equality and fraternity were not a rallying cry for Nietzsche, but the recipe for societal decay and the destruction of individual greatness. The resurrection of humanity through the *Übermensch* redefines democracy as the promotion of independence and thus as "something yet to come" (WS 293). It signifies the undoing of liberal ethnocentrism, an interrogation of taken for granted assertions called 'truth', and the beginnings of a society where the desire is for challenge rather than stasis.

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