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The End of Education: Nietzsche, Foucault, Genealogy

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Abstract: This paper considers the plight of Western education and the demands it makes upon us. It argues that the feared end of education underpins and unduly shackles reflection on the current crisis of education. As a spectral, abysmal prospect, it both fetters and stimulates educational critique, mobilising critique to the support of a cause it cannot question because it is committed to its rescue. In a time of crisis, we find ourselves tied only more firmly to education, forced to express or enact our faith in educational redemption. Drawing from the work of Friedrich Nietzsche and Michel Foucault, a contrasting, genealogical critique of education is advanced, one that might defer the impulse of educational redemption and defy the limits on thought currently imposed. A genealogy of education is outlined that strips education of its dignity, and thereby challenges its dominion. The necessary incoherence of such an approach is explored.

Blaming and Desiring Education

Forever reaching beyond itself, education promises what it cannot deliver whilst delivering what it would never openly promise (Allen, 2017a; Clarke, 2018). Given this level of deception, the end of education might be welcomed as much as it is feared. But the end of education is just as duplicitous. Like the associated notion of “an educated public,” education “is a ghost that cannot be excised” (MacIntyre, 1987, p. 34). In short, only those who are already conditioned by the idea of education, those with a taste for such falseness, can fear its end. The end of education is a product, an extension, of education itself.

The end of education haunts the educated with threats against truth, the future of liberal polities, if not civilization itself. Admittedly, few would frame a defence of education in these terms. Few would couch the defence of this or that school or university, educational practice or principle, in such frenzied, grandiose language. Only occasionally do these fears break through in gestures of sentimental attachment, approaching hysteria. For example, at the end of an otherwise sober lecture on the history and contemporary plight of the university, Wendy Brown (LSE Podcasts, 2014) suggests that the current crisis in education is so deep-set that it is “impoverishing the future of civilisations.” Those professors who would still defend the old educational values find themselves in a position, Brown argues, akin to the “structurally weak but potentially symbolically potent position of Tiananmen’s tank man, Tunisia’s fruit seller, Palestine’s Rachel Corrie ... going up against the regime as we fight for a cause, a cause of research and teaching that bears on the future of human and cultural enrichment, planetary sustainability, democracy, other such values.”¹

¹ I am indebted to Matthew Charles for drawing my attention to this lecture and episode within it. Though the tank metaphor was subsequently picked up and approvingly used in the question and answer session, it should be noted that fellow panellist Michael Power did object to the rhetoric: “Let’s be a bit careful about

For an older but more sustained example of this educational fear, it is worth turning to Neil Postman's book *The End of Education* (1995). In that book, Postman gives his own portentous account of the crisis in education, claiming that the educational project of modernity is in a terminal condition. At first sight, Postman simply rolls out the old (and deeply problematic²) truism that there is a crisis of value in education following which only renewed commitment to educational ideals will save education and so too ourselves from oblivion. But Postman's polemic goes further, revealing the implicit threat that underpins the argument for education as he suggests that faith in education-as-enlightenment (the idea that universalised education leads to a more civilized, humane existence) has worn so thin and lost so much vigour that urgent action of a more radical sort is required if it is to be revived. This leads *The End of Education* to its polemic conclusion. It must frighten its audience with the prospect of disappearance as a way of forcing a very particular kind of defence. Fear for education must operate as the basis, or prompt, upon which the salvation of education is to be built. It seems as though Postman would have us cleave from desperation to the neglected ends of education, where "end" has now become a synonym for "purpose."

Postman's appeal on behalf of education might seem out of character for an author of the 1969 polemic *Teaching as a Subversive Activity*. That book was designed, so it tells us, to help students develop "built-in, shockproof crap detectors" that would allow them to survive the afflictions of mass media, subvert outdated cultural norms, and escape the sclerotic effects of traditional schooling (Postman & Weingartner, 1969/1971, p. 204). But Postman's argument for education, both there and in *The End of Education*, is characteristic of a pedagogue whose critique is the outgrowth of disappointment; whose outlook, borrowing from his earlier work, is the product of "simple, romantic men" (as he and Weingartner put it) determined to believe against the odds in "the improbability of the human condition through education" (p. 12). Suitably reformed, the school system remains for Postman "the only social institution that exists to fulfil this function" (p. 199). It must produce the kind of "actively inquiring, flexible, creative, innovative, tolerant, liberal personality" that modern civilization is said to require (p. 204). The salvation of education is understood here to be a matter of ensuring the "survival" of civilization no less, protecting it against the tendency of all systems to become rigid and unresponsive, to lose vitality and direction, to "run down" and "reduce to chaos and uselessness" (p. 17).

the tanks metaphor. People in this room still have a pretty good life relative to people who actually stand in front of real tanks."

² This familiar case for education can be objected to on two counts. Firstly, there is Ian Hunter's argument (not much heeded by educational critics) that this call to shore up educational ideals is based on a misunderstanding of how the modern administrative state and its associated educational institutions were built: namely, that both depended for their success on the removal of absolute principles of moral perfection, humanity and justice from the sphere of government, allowing the educational bureaucrat to build education on a more restrained, orderly basis that was not overdetermined and undermined by a politics of conscience. Hence the disturbing realization amongst defenders of education and educational idealists that its institutions will grind on quite happily without them. In other words, education continues to operate despite the "crisis of value" they bemoan (Hunter, 1994; see also our summary of Hunter's argument in Allen & Goddard, 2017, pp. 155–158, 169–171). Secondly, the perceived crisis of educational value is, today, rather oddly, the means by which educational value is produced (Allen, 2017a). Education has long exhausted itself of something that might be described (very roughly) as its intrinsic value. It should be understood today by analogy to the commodity Marx describes in *Capital*, which, as I gloss, "has little intrinsic worth beyond its immediate use-value," achieving universal value "only as a set of relations, established by those who act before thinking, by those who assume value exists and base their actions upon the common assumption of its objectivity. In a similar way, modern education is given its content though the ceaseless activity of educators who begin only with the deed, assuming that education has independent worth beyond the immediate instances of its use" (p. 156). This fragile relation produces the crisis that educators must perpetually solve, as they attempt to save education, and produce educational value, by exhausting themselves as a labour force.

As a renowned and popular cultural commentator, Postman constructs his argument by appealing to a common concern amongst educators and educational critics: the idea that true education, sometimes called “real” or “authentic” education, is either losing ground in late modernity to a range of anti-educational forces (as reported in Moore & Clarke, 2016), or submitting to its own deadening inertia. The catalogue of anti-educational forces includes the usual suspects: capital, instrumentalism and audit (or, for technology enthusiasts and educational entrepreneurs, the unfortunate persistence of out-dated and reactionary educational traditions). This catalogue is sometimes expanded to include all believed enemies of truth and civilized culture, ranging from the so-called dupes of post-truth politics to the threat of radicals and feared extremists. Nonetheless, and despite the (apparent) on-going debasement of education by foes such as listed above, those wishing to shore up the institutions of civil society, or better orient it to the demands of technological progress and social flux, still return unflinchingly to education, attempting to find hope and affordance in its decaying architectures.³ Education is at once blamed for its failures and invoked as a solution to an endless list of social, economic and political woes, having achieved the near “messianic role of bearer of personal, national and global redemption” (Peim, 2012, p. 235). This formula, at once blaming education as the source of social ills and desiring the reform of education as a solution to those same ills, is commonplace, and symptomatic of our continued attachment to an educational project of some description.

The pervasive and circular logic of this redemptive formula underpins reform efforts involving a complex mix of voluntary, faith, social enterprise, philanthropic and corporate interests (where the latter attack “failing” educational systems to justify their own educational and profit-making interventions; see Ball, Junemann & Santori, 2017; Ball & Junemann, 2011). It extends to the work of critical pedagogues and academic critics who believe that education can still operate as a collective good, establishing itself as the basis of new forms of democratic sociality. Even work that explicitly recognises the extent of the crisis facing the West, a crisis which is “rooted in the erosion of a common moral value base ... insists on responding educationally,” in this case by “*making values common in and through education*” in a context where a pre-existing set of common values can no longer be assumed (Bergdahl & Langmann, 2017, emphasis in original). This circular redemptive formula is also repeated at a disciplinary level. In relation to the philosophy of education as an area of study, and in response to its on-going marginalisation, proponents can only offer the solution of *more* philosophy of education. Very few critics within the field are able to entertain the idea that *less* philosophy of education in its current form might be preferable (Carr, 2004).

As I argue below, this tendency to make education culpable and then position education as a solution forecloses thought about education, basing such thought within an assumed good it cannot deny or properly question. Education endures as a belief system and retains its assumed dignity,

³ To indicate just how well entrenched this position might be, it is worth pointing out that even when the architectures of education are viewed as objectively hopeless—insofar as they appear unable to achieve their ideals—a role for education and its professional educators remains. It has been argued using the work of the existentialist philosopher Gabriel Marcel that education should be invested with an unflagging form of “absolute hope” that can never be disappointed (Zipory, 2017). Drawing from a very different Autonomist Marxist tradition, and arguing for a very different outcome, Richard Hall (2018) has suggested that the current *Weltschmerz* experienced by academics be intensified, by “teaching hopelessness” (p. 109), as a starting point for “re-imagining higher learning through mass intellectuality” (p. 110)—a process that would reclaim and put to revolutionary use what remains socially useful in academic labour: “This is our socially useful, pedagogic task” (p. 110). Finally, and again issuing from a very different political and philosophical point of view, Emile Bojesen (2018) has argued, drawing from Nietzsche, that educators should attempt an optimistic disposition “in spite of it all” because education is inescapable, unavoidable—where this would be an optimism unlike any other since it issues from more or less complete disenchantment—and that this state of optimism would itself be educational.

despite its failure (from the perspective of capital) to open itself to the wisdom of the market and the affordances of technology, or despite (from the perspective of humanist critique) its daily reduction to technocratic procedure. Though it has become commonplace to argue in the latter case that there is too much that is technocratic, performative and instrumental about today's education, it could also be suggested (not a little deviously) that, just as there is perhaps still "too much theology in politics" (Balibar, 2016, p. 13), there is still too much of the sacred in education.

This paper will suggest that a genealogy of education—drawing from the work of Friedrich Nietzsche and Michel Foucault—might help desacralize it. Clearly, such a project lies beyond the scope of a single paper, even a single book. I only offer a gesture here towards what a genealogy of education might achieve. The idea of offering a gesture is nonetheless more than it seems, since the manner in which such a genealogy proceeds is as important as the arguments it mobilises. In this respect, the greatest failing of this paper—a necessary, unavoidable failing—is that it still makes too much sense to the educated.

Framing the Problem

At its most reductive, the logic of educational redemption operating today is as follows: Education (and educated being) can only be saved by the faithful commitments of educators and educated people (like Postman). If our educational institutions are to remain worthy of their mission of upholding ideals of enlightenment and justice, they must (so it is said) rescue themselves from cynicism, despair and performative self-interest. Educational critics may well resist this depiction of the educator as some kind of martyr to the faith, arguing perhaps that it exaggerates the extent to which responsibility for redeeming education is heaped onto the individual. Most educators and almost all critical academics would like to see themselves operating at a different level, defending education by maintaining educational structures, by building educational relationships and community attachments, and by understanding and justifying their work not in the language of belief, but in the languages of social justice, evidence and commitment to truth. But the feared destruction of education operates here too. It acts as a stimulus to educational critique and reform, which, in its anatomization of educational problems, only ever speaks *for* education. As such, arguments for the defence of education trick us into an enlistment we cannot escape. They stimulate modes of educational critique that are, despite all protestation, also acts of faith.

This is perfectly understandable. A world without education is, intellectually speaking, unthinkable. As educated beings we cannot *think* the end of it. The end of education is not considered in its full, abysmal sense, because it is a stupefying prospect. It is hard to approach the end of education without becoming stupefied (struck senseless) when the condition of being educated defines our intellectual, social and moral being, when it conditions how we view the world and interact with one another. Neil Postman's failure to grapple with the problem he announces is hardly unusual. Despite its title, *The End of Education* is not really about the end of education at all, but the end of a particular disposition towards popular schooling, a potential disappearance which is easier to comprehend and yet by no means easy to envisage. Here, Postman's approach, his invocation of a prospect that is immediately deferred, is typical of every lament concerning the unfulfilled aims of the great formative endeavour of modern mass schooling, and every complaint at the changing function of a university that looks and operates every day more like a business. The feared destruction or end of education is widely felt, often implied, and sometimes invoked, but remains largely untouched as a problem. We will not approach it, but run from it, as we flee to the

school, university or educational moment we seek to defend. Some Gods fail, Postman argues, but we cannot allow the education God to fail. That prospect is always ruled out and denied from the outset.

Despite such habitual foreclosure, there are still things that can be done to perturb education and open it to questioning. Even Postman hints at a way out, making reference to Friedrich Nietzsche's "death of God" thesis, alluding to it in passing but without getting involved in any detail. This paper will attempt to find a way around the impasse that *The End of Education* highlights by asking what a more detailed confrontation with Nietzsche might look like. It asks if Nietzschean thought might help us to grapple with the problem Postman sets up but fails to confront.⁴

For the purposes of this paper, I will not approach Nietzschean texts with exegetical intent, given Staten's (1993) point that no authentic Nietzschean position or systematic argument is to be found in them. We encounter instead a plurality of voices that tell us "with the greatest conviction and sense of authority the most contradictory things" (p. 4). This does not mean that for Nietzsche anything goes. According to Staten, the textual dynamic of Nietzsche's work should be understood by appreciating his texts as in part "dream texts" (p. 8), or texts that betray a "libidinal economy" (p. 2). This libidinal economy exists alongside and is modulated through the "texture of the philosophical text" (the part that typically becomes the object of systematic commentary), where the latter defines its "logical economy," constraining but never entirely overriding the libidinal economy via its textual laws, laws of logic and dialectic. It is within this battleground of competing forces that the text is constituted, where the work signed "Nietzsche" passes through various subject positions, pursuing thought to its extreme consequences, as he attempted to find out which lines of thought and personae drew him most strongly.

To put this in slightly different terms, one might say that there is a derangement of conscious intentionality in Nietzsche's work, an intrusion into the text of the contradictory forces that constitute the subject. This is why his texts will always undermine systematic commentary, the type of commentary that would relate them to the relatively stable subject position of an originating thinker. In this regard, debating what Nietzsche actually made of education is less important, it seems to me, than extending the derangement of his writing to our faith in education. With this in mind, I draw in part from the work of Michel Foucault who alongside others (such as Pierre Klossowski, Gilles Deleuze and Jacques Derrida) was prepared to engage with what some might consider Nietzsche's more fiendish insights. In particular, I focus on the vexed issue of genealogy as a (potentially devastating) mode of critique, where my reading of Foucault on Nietzsche, and Foucault in relation to Nietzschean genealogy, is guided by my interest in how Nietzsche might unsettle our attachment to education. There is no broader appraisal here of Foucault's work in relation to Nietzsche, nor do I discuss in any particular detail how Foucault's readings of Nietzsche have been received. I seek to indicate only a direction one might take, where Foucault helps us accompany Nietzsche to the brink of educated being, a place we naturally abhor and find unfathomable as educated subjects.

⁴ If nothing else, one might suggest that the considerable hostility to education (particularly modern education) displayed in Nietzsche's work makes it easier to consider its end as something we could approach with dark interest rather than plain horror. But, as I have explored elsewhere, this interpretation of Nietzschean thought and its relation to the question of education is not without controversy (Allen, 2017b). Previous scholarship agrees that Nietzsche leads us to question aspects of education, but does not take Nietzschean thought to its limit, as we wonder if modern education and its associated moral and intellectual devices, its Western ancestral traditions and biases, might be questionable as a whole.

Nietzsche, Foucault, Genealogy

Foucault's essay "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" (1971/2000a) provides a point of entry to those who might attempt a genealogy of education. Part commentary on Nietzsche, part elaboration of his own philosophy, Foucault shows how a genealogy of the Nietzschean sort sets out to undermine everything we take for granted, making our commitments and everyday assumptions questionable, perhaps even untenable.

Previous academic work has sought to distinguish between Nietzschean and Foucauldian genealogy. Some argue that there are "deep continuities" between the two (Saar, 2008, p. 312). Both Nietzsche and Foucault attempt to disturb the reader by interrogating the ambiguous and contradictory historical forces from which we have been constituted. And both supplement this kind of analytic, cognitive disturbance with rhetorical devices designed to further undermine the subjective attachments of their readers. Finally, both suggest that alternative, rival subjectivities and modes of self-formation are possible. Other commentators have claimed that, even if we admit these continuities, there is still considerable divergence between Nietzschean genealogy (as found, for example, in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 1887/1998) and Foucault's own genealogical works (most notably *Discipline and Punish*, 1975/1991; see, for example, Gutting, 2005). A rough caricature of this commonly held position is that Nietzschean genealogy is more speculative, fanciful and freewheeling, whereas Foucauldian genealogy is patiently diligent, resolutely scholarly, analytically cool, and (one might hope) academically credible.⁵ From this perspective, Foucault's essay "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" is potentially misleading, since it makes it difficult to disentangle the two thinkers. In his exposition of Nietzsche, Foucault does not explain where he diverges from Nietzschean thought. In a similar way, this essay is not driven by the idea that there are two distinct versions of genealogy that require dividing or separating out. It offers an exposition of Nietzschean genealogy that is necessarily distorted by engagement with Foucault's work.

This kind of approach fits with the irreverent but nonetheless serious and attentive strategy of genealogical investigation. As Foucault declared, "I am simply a Nietzschean," describing a position from which he would develop a number of "anti-Nietzschean theses (which are nevertheless Nietzschean)" (1984/1996, p. 471). Foucault's engagement with Nietzsche was complex and cannot be reduced to discussion of the relative (in)fidelities in Foucault's use of Nietzsche. Foucault appropriated Nietzsche, but in ways that were at the same time faithful to Nietzschean philosophy, as he saw it. This complex relationship has generated its own commentary (see, for example, Sluga, 2005; Mahon, 1992; Lash, 1984). Without wishing to assimilate the two thinkers or reduce genealogy to a single principle, I would argue that both versions of genealogy (Foucauldian and Nietzschean) converge on the emphasis that guides my reading below: namely, the idea that genealogy works to undermine secure attachments. As Foucault put it, this mode of analysis "is capable of decomposing itself, capable of shattering the unity of man's being through which it was thought that he could extend his sovereignty to the events of the past" (1971/2000a, p. 379). For Foucault, as for Nietzsche, it can no longer be assumed that "the nature of consciousness is always identical to itself." There is nothing, no single entity or point of view, that would provide the

⁵ As MacIntyre (1990) argues, this divergence in style and approach is also reflected in their life trajectories: "Nietzsche's progress was from professor to genealogist" (p. 49)—where the latter made life in the academy untenable for Nietzsche—whereas Foucault's progress was in the opposite direction and "ended with nearly fifteen years speaking *ex cathedra* from the Collège de France" (p. 53). In MacIntyre's assessment, Foucault was in part responsible for "restoring Nietzsche's project to the professoriate from which Nietzsche had rescued it" (p. 53). Though MacIntyre's assessment is a little too neat, there is undoubtedly some truth in the observation that with (or at least following) Foucault, genealogy "regressed into academia" (p. 54).

connecting framework along which a continuous history of humankind could be built: “Nothing in man—not even his body—is sufficiently stable to serve as the basis for self-recognition or for understanding other men.” Genealogy “reintroduces into the realm of becoming everything considered immortal in man” (pp. 379–380). It is with this object in view that education—assumed to be foundational to civilized being—comes under genealogical interrogation.

Reframing Genealogy

Before submitting education to genealogical investigation, there are some inherited problems that need to be addressed. Since Foucault, genealogy has been adapted to become a recognised methodological approach in educational research and in the social sciences more generally (for examples, see Scheurich & McKenzie, 2005; Meadmore, Hatcher, & McWilliam, 2000; Tamboukou, 1999). Arguably, the accumulated effect of its adoption has been to reduce the disturbance genealogy might otherwise cause as it is clarified, codified and blended with other philosophies and methods, as it is made amenable to the exigencies of research endeavour. What I envisage here is a departure from that tradition, taking genealogical analysis beyond a point most academics will countenance.

Following Foucault, and heavily influenced by a loose group of researchers associated with the journal *Economy and Society* (including but not limited to the work of Nikolas Rose, Thomas Osborne and Peter Miller), genealogy has been enacted as a mode of critique that attends to the mundane, sensitising us to historical phenomena we might otherwise overlook. Such interpreters correctly identify the “anti-Platonic” aspects of genealogical work, which positions itself against the pursuit of truth as an abstract objective, investigating instead the conditions that produce truth effects. They draw attention to the localised nature of genealogy as it pays attention to the particular. At their most political, these researchers tend to identify with the idea that genealogical work allows for some kind of insurrection of knowledge, where historically marginalised practices, discourses and voices are to be uncovered through the deployment of critique that disturbs dominant narratives and assumptions. These analytic trends, which owe more to a received view of Foucault’s significance than they do to Nietzsche, have the effect of segmenting and perhaps isolating enquiry, as they reduce larger issues to their local contexts where they can be approached in a piecemeal fashion. The analyst tends to leave the actual labour of insurrection to those who have been “assisted” by the attention given them by researchers, where it is not the role of the researcher, so the argument goes, to step in and fight on behalf of others. Such intervention would fail anyway, since power is too distributed and localised for global critique and denunciation to succeed in disturbing its operations.⁶

Extending these ideas to the “end of education,” it becomes apparent that, from the above view of genealogical analysis, this *end* is a non-issue; it is a global abstraction. Genealogy does not operate at this level. It does not engage with grandiose problems. From this point of view, the end of education is a diversion that serious analysts occupying themselves with the everyday nature of power do well to avoid. The end of education is a distracting idea that prevents the post-Foucauldian analyst from examining the multifaceted nature of educational experience. Such problems impede analysis by reducing investigation to a single imperative.

Whilst I am sympathetic to many of the genealogical insights that are transmitted through this received view, it risks becoming institutionalised in such a way that ignores other salient features of

⁶ For reasons of space, I only offer here a brief characterization of this dominant interpretation and enactment of Foucault’s work. For a more detailed critique, see Allen and Goddard (2014).

genealogical intervention. As I have argued elsewhere in collaboration with Roy Goddard, Foucault's determination to localize and particularize problems, and his overall avoidance of political position-taking, has been translated by key figures in the field into a self-imposed ethic of analytic caution, a form of reserve amounting to political quietism, a position that associates all bolder forms of critique with the kind of intellectual closed-mindedness that Foucault was careful to avoid (Allen & Goddard, 2014). This is based on a reading of Foucault that marginalises the role and significance of his "hyper- and pessimistic activism" (Foucault, 1983/2000b, p. 256), where Foucault was himself able to switch between cautious analysis and moments of direct action (see, for example, Macey, 1993, pp. 205, 226, 270, 312, 341–352). Though Nietzsche was hardly a political figure in this sense, his writing did not lack boldness or shy away from confrontation. In the persistence and vehemence of his attacks, one encounters the obsessional, slightly deranged, multifaceted force of Nietzsche's work (see Klossowski, 1969/2000, for an early and influential commentary here). This speaks for genealogy as it refuses rest, security and the comfort of calmer modes of investigation. The tone of genealogy appears decidedly out of kilter when compared to the self-contained poise of the analyst, which Nietzsche might argue is nothing but a deceptive act, a pretence. Genealogy attacks its object on multiple (sometimes contradictory) fronts. Indeed, as its arguments multiply, objects of analysis change form. Enemies in some contexts become allies in others. And so, whilst Nietzsche developed genealogical critique as a means to broach, for example, the disturbing idea that Christian morality might one day be extinguished, this was accompanied by a fragmentary, impassioned mode of analysis that did not suffer the kind of closure that post-Foucauldian analysts seem to fear. In a similar way, Foucault undermined the pretensions of the Cartesian subject from multiple angles, through work that was diligently scholarly *and* impassioned. The two do not have to be mutually exclusive.

Prompted by the above arguments, a genealogy of education might concentrate more firmly, insistently and obsessively on the problem of education. A more radically configured genealogy of education repeatedly questions the necessity of education—a perfectly genealogical, perfectly scandalous question. It renders doubtful our commitment to the idea that education at its best or most true is necessarily good and beneficent. In doing so, it may still adopt the kind of indirect, piecemeal, localised approach characteristic of most post-Foucauldian genealogies. It will not attempt to depose or dispose of education directly, once and for all. A genealogy of this sort does not approach the problem of education as if this thing we call education were reducible to some intrinsic educational ideal or truth that could be exposed, challenged and undermined. From a genealogical perspective, the very notion that education *could* be refuted or undermined (or supported) by reasonable argument makes little sense. Genealogy argues but at the same time undermines the grounds of debate, carrying out its critique within the normative structures it attacks. It works within these normative frameworks, rendering them unstable and liable to collapse in their own terms. Since these frameworks are distributed across space and throughout history, they cannot be undermined at all points and in all respects. They are beyond the reach of complete understanding and synoptic critique, and can only ever be gestured at. Hence, genealogy uses exaggeration and hyperbole just as much as it anatomizes (Saar, 2008). It deploys its analysis within a stylistic framework that is affective and compelling, not simply convincing (Rayner, 2003). In arranging its attacks, genealogy does not attempt to cut to the core of an issue or grasp it in its essence in order to refute or overcome it. It confronts our commitment to education by more insidious means, undermining that commitment from within.

Towards a Genealogy of Education

The genealogy I have in mind offers its own history of our commitment to the idea of education. In so doing, it destabilises the very notion that education is something about which a distinct history could be organised, diversifying our understanding of what education has entailed throughout history to such an extent that education can no longer function so easily as a historical signifier or principle of continuity through change. Though the word “education” does not fall out of use, it is shorn of its dignity, the presumption that educational activities have some kind of intrinsic consistency and value that allows them to be identified as such across histories and cultures. Given this situation, a predicament where education signifies everything and nothing, the genealogist can only ever take up a position in relation to education that is inescapably, self-consciously *ironic*.

The (Self-)Destruction of a Field of Study

It might seem trifling to point out that, ancillary to this destruction of our faith in education, a field of study must also confront the idea of its end. A genealogy of education makes educational studies, sometimes known as educational research, appear redundant. It no longer makes sense according to this point of view to speak of educational psychology, the history of education, the philosophy of education, or the sociology of education (as the field was traditionally divided). Admittedly, these sub-disciplines have been disintegrating of their own accord for some time now, at least in the UK, or in the case of educational psychology, have become detached from educational studies, focusing on educational concerns only insofar as they raise psychological questions or professional issues for the educational psychologist (see Lawn and Furlong, 2009; Burton & Bartlett, 2006; McCulloch, 2002; Crook, 2002). The old disciplinary arrangements are no longer seen to be foundational, or necessary, with the study of education divided by theme (i.e., educational management and administration, disability and inclusion) or phase (i.e., early childhood education, childhood and youth studies, higher education). This new settlement is welcomed by some, who either believe that it affords new opportunities for dialogue between disciplines in a field too complex and far-reaching to be restrained within such boundaries (see Pirrie & Gillies, 2012; Hofstetter, 2012; Palaiologou, 2010), or that it allows education to develop as a discipline in its own right, no longer dependent on the sanctioning of the “parent” disciplines (see Biesta, 2011; Tubbs & Grimes, 2001). Whilst the former position assumes that education is still worthy as a point about which (trans)disciplinary endeavour is organised, the latter position shifts education to its adjectival form, variously understood as a means to enlightenment and *Bildung*, a route to becoming human and achieving autonomy. Those defending educational studies from this latter position come to depend on their insistence that the study of education can resource itself, build itself from itself, based on its ability as an *educational* endeavour to identify and evaluate activities as distinctly educational. The study of education comes to rely on the assumed presence, distinct consistency and inherent respectability of these educational commitments.

In sum, all of these positions remain founded on their implicit faith in the beneficence of education and its unassailably objective existence. What has changed, however, is that it seems even less likely now that those working in education departments will pose themselves the question, “*What is the study of education a study of?*” Due to the disintegration of the old disciplines (at least three of which adopted the formula “X of education” in their titles), there is even less incentive to confront the problem of what it means to be of education, and hence, of what education is, of what these disciplines are engaging in the study of, all questions that must entertain doubt if they are to

be truly asked. The problem of an underpinning commitment to education is left largely unaddressed in the very places where it might be most diligently troubled.⁷ It is indeed possible to work in such departments and give all the outward signs of indifference to the question of education. Crucially, however, this growing indifference, this disinclination to interrogate the meaning of education, is not the same as expressing indifference to the *value* of education, merely to its questioning as an idea. In these departments as elsewhere, faith in education persists. This faith is what a genealogy of education unpicks. A genealogy of education reveals that even in such environments, even in places where the question of education is no longer posed, a basic attachment to education remains to be confronted.

The (Self-)Destruction of Educational Passion

A genealogy of education begins by confronting the cynical and pragmatic accommodations that serve to conceal and thereby protect our more basic attachment to a project of educational redemption. It sets out by invoking a passion for education, so to speak, drawing out a commitment to education, a commitment to some implicitly unifying and culturally pre-eminent notion of education that gives educational work its moral seriousness. This implicit, submerged attachment to the idea of education that may still be found in education departments and in educational institutions more broadly is paraded as a necessary prelude/rehearsal before educators and educated people experience its disintegration. A genealogy of education undermines our belief in education, in part by drawing it from the shadows, bringing its historical formulation, its discursive structuring to full expression, showing how our faith must collapse with the failure of education as an organising idea. Those who study education, and those who work in the shadow of the idea that education is worth studying, are faced with the realisation that they organise themselves about an imaginary point. The object of study that we call education can no longer be maintained so easily as their implicit rationale. There would no longer be a secure point or central axis about which historical, philosophical, sociological, psychological or any other kind of disciplinary reflection could be organised, or to which everything that goes on under these banners and the more general banner of educational research could be at least notionally attached. If a genealogy of education was attempted, its findings understood, and its implications seriously attended to, these areas of study would discover why they could never succeed in attaining their object, and so were always doomed to incoherence.

It would no longer even make sense to speak of the end of education as if the idea of education could culminate and terminate at some final, abysmal moment. As a single, monumental event, the end of education would be revealed as just another phantom or effect of the idea of education. Here, in drawing attention to the insubstantiality of the idea of education, other, more recent

⁷ Within the broad field of educational studies, there are notable exceptions, including work cited in this paper (by Clarke, Bojesen, Peim, Moran and Kendall). Nonetheless, such work can at times struggle to negotiate its own commitment to education, often reasserting the importance of education, and doing so sometimes despite itself. In a similar way, and to offer another example, recent work drawing attention to the inherent negativity of educational experience, noting the place of despair, suffering, doubt and pain (Roberts, 2016), does so in order to reassert the importance of education for helping us negotiate these experiences. The possibility that education *by its very operation* produces despair and its own kind of anguish remains off the agenda. Coming from a very different direction, a recently published collection arguing “against value” in education—that is to say, against the felt need to defend the value of education for the benefit of its auditors (Ladkin, McKay, & Bojesen, 2016)—only reasserts its commitment to the importance of education in making its argument “against value.” The mode of that commitment is heterodox, but it is a commitment to education nonetheless.

thinkers have proved useful: Following the example of Roland Barthes' *Mythologies*, education has been presented as the "master myth of our time"—its promise of social salvation bearing little relation to its reality (Peim, 2013, p. 32). In a similar direction, Jean Baudrillard's work has been used to draw attention to the "ontological fetishism" of those who believe in education and "insist on a reality behind the sign" (Moran & Kendall, 2009, p. 334). There is "no real education, no real of education," Moran and Kendall argue, only "a series of forgeries; an endless number of simulations" (p. 327). Real education is a metaphysical spectre, a simulation, produced in part by the activities of educational researchers and critics who continue to insist on the reality of the thing they claim to investigate. Those hoping to evade its grasp must attempt to "step away from the omnipresence" of this simulation "for long enough to acquire a critical displacement, sufficient to take stock of the myth of education," in all its fragmented, elusive and hence near-unassailable supremacy (p. 334).

Another way of framing this problem, drawing now from Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, would be to understand education as a "fantasmatic narrative" (Clarke, 2012, p. 179) that maintains our commitment to it beyond all rational argument. In our attachment to education, Matthew Clarke argues, there is an element of fantasy operating, motivating and horrifying us in equal measure. We find ourselves switching between (a) a "beatific form" of the narrative, "involving promises of harmony and fullness once the obstacle to our full enjoyment [the current imperfection of education] is overcome," and (b) a "horrific form, in which the obstacle to our full enjoyment [anything that hinders real education] proves insurmountable" (p. 179). The beatific narrative "offers promise of social salvation [via education] in the form of complete social harmony or efficiency," whilst the horrific narrative threatens us with spectres of "inexorable societal decline" (p. 179). We might read Postman's position through this fantasmatic logic.

Nonetheless, from a genealogical perspective, the affective grip of education extends beyond its mythological, simulated, or fantasmatic presence. It is located just as much in the mundane everyday practices, in the habitual behaviours and banal protocols that form our educational experience and constitute us as functional, functioning educated beings. Emile Bojesen (2016) suggests that contemporary education is constituted just as much by its repeatable physical gestures as it is by metaphysical notions. It is made up of habits and everyday procedures that operate without much reference to a cogent metaphysical rationale, educational or otherwise. There is, indeed, some pleasure to be gained from the rather pointless practices education has us enact—all of which must be admitted if these educational habits are to be confronted. And yet, despite its emphasis on the banal practices of everyday life (and the necessity of disrupting them), the genealogical perspective concurs with the positions outlined above (by Peim, Moran, Kendall and Clarke). Education must also still be attacked as a master-narrative, and here it cannot be disturbed by reason alone. Hence, the genealogist seeks to cultivate, and should expect to encounter, a degree of shock and consternation as the myth, simulated presence, or fantasmatic logic of education is perturbed. Genealogy operates by affective means as much as it does by rational argument, where the reactions it provokes are the product of myth, simulation or fantasmatic narrative under strain. Most commonly, however, it will encounter a refusal to engage, a resolute and quiet dismissal issuing from those who still believe that education exists as something of singular (divine) importance that we might be deprived of.

The genealogist does not welcome the affective states genealogy provokes as if their very manifestation were a sign of victory, nor pretend we can escape the grasp of education simply by drawing attention to its mythological, fantasmatic or simulated presence, or by refusing its everyday habits. In a move that may well invite bewilderment, the genealogist attempts to escape, or at least loosen the grasp of education by educational means. And so, whilst a genealogy of education seeks

to disturb our infatuation with the idea of education by revealing its growing dispersal across sites and practices that share nothing but the common illusion that they are united by their “educational” intent (and so shares much with the arguments presented above), the genealogist remains attached to education, working within a discursive realm that is brought (and bringing itself) to ruin. Like Nietzsche, the genealogist “is painfully aware that he [or she] is a creature of the crisis rather than its resolution.” Indeed, it has been suggested that it is precisely this awareness that “lends a strained sometimes fractured quality to his argument [in *On the Genealogy of Morals*],” where “the complexities arising from Nietzsche’s implication in his own problem are all too easy to underestimate” (Ridley, 1998, p. 12). The genealogist is symptomatic of the ruin of education; a wretched figure, both of and against education. The genealogist is an exemplary though undeniably odd manifestation of its distended, unbearably strained predicament.

Working Within a Discursive Realm Brought to Ruin

It should be clear by now that a genealogy of education undermines the ground upon which it sits. As it proceeds, genealogical analysis discovers that education can only be encountered (if at all) by tracing the descent of a motley array of sentiments, articles of faith, and systems of conscience loosely associated with the idea of education. A genealogy of this sort discovers that it must always encounter anything but education. Tracing the descent of associated ideas and practices that surround but never give substance to the idea of education, genealogy is “sensitive to their recurrence,” as Foucault writes, “not in order to trace the gradual curve of their evolution but to isolate the different scenes where they engaged in different roles” (1971/2000a, p. 369). Resisting the word “education” as if that word had kept its meaning throughout time, genealogy gradually undermines our use of the word in any context. Rejecting, in Foucault’s terms, “the metahistorical deployment of ideal significations” (p. 370)—of ideas such as education—genealogy sets out to reveal their inherent instability, their tendency to shift and adjust, deceive, disappoint, and co-opt. But a genealogy of this kind also remains obsessed by education since it is not possible to step outside the master-narrative of education by power of will alone.

A genealogy of education of the sort envisaged here outsteps all educational genealogies hitherto attempted. But it borrows from them too, and so remains in tension with the kinds of post-Foucauldian scholarship outlined above, with their commitment to a cautious, modest erudition, from which any statements of position or political commitments that exceed their expressions of determined humility are treated as symptomatic of intellectual simple-mindedness. This, precisely, is what a genealogy of education must risk. In their commitment to the study of education, to the idea that education is worthy of, actually demands, study, prior genealogies function as unwitting echoes of precisely the educated stance a more radically configured genealogy of education will undermine. To continue the argument made earlier in this paper, post-Foucauldian analysis (particularly “governmentality” inspired work, which reaches back to *The Foucault Effect*; see Burchell, Gordon, & Miller, 1991) has been unduly hobbled by its scrupulous “microphysical” descriptions of power, which rule out any form of speculative thought that exceeds the protocols of its analysis. In its diligence, it has largely avoided engagement with the performed, immanent and uncomfortable critique of the genealogist. But again, this kind of discomfort is precisely what a genealogy of education must risk. Nonetheless, and despite its suspicion of the study of education, a genealogy of education—of the more radically configured Nietzschean sort—does not step outside education or scholarship, placing itself in direct opposition. Not only is this positioning outside education impossible, but any attempt to achieve an exterior point of view would regenerate the idealised conception of education genealogy seeks to make questionable. The

genealogist is neither anti-intellectual, nor anti-education for that reason, though the genealogist is never entirely at home in intellectual and educated circles either. Drawing inspiration from ancient Cynic philosophy, which both Foucault (2011) and Nietzsche (Bracht Branham, 2004) invoke in their work, it would be better to describe the genealogist as an intellectual, educational *irritant*.

Dismantling our commitment to education, a genealogy of education remains invested in, and perhaps infected by, its educational zeitgeist. Genealogy is insurgent in that sense. Tediously, relentlessly educational, a genealogy of this sort has no option but to work with the very materials of education and educated thought, which already contain within themselves the workings of their destruction. As such, the genealogist is still closer to Nietzsche's "last man"—the exhausted and barren end point of Western civilization—than his triumphant *Übermensch* (1883–1891/2008).

If a genealogy of education does not escape what it anatomises, and must accompany education in its decline, this reflects in part the genealogical determination to avoid claims to some kind of transcendence, "apocalyptic objectivity," or view from above (Foucault, 1971/2000a, p. 379). It also reflects the genealogist's understanding of historical change, which occurs only through the "dissention of other things"—and as such, often depends on the "derisive and ironic" reversal or inversion of preceding forms (p. 372; see also, Nietzsche, 1887/1998, II§12). Education today is largely composed of such accumulated material, a motley array of educational assumptions, affective states and technologies. These materials are all piled upon one another, just as, according to Nietzsche, each historically successive interpretation of Christian doctrine piled another layer of meaning on preceding habits and religious ways of life (Geuss, 1994). This complex of techniques and ideas we call "education" is the historical aggregate of preceding modes of educational activity that have been repeatedly modified and invested with new meaning for the duration of their descent.

These educational techniques and dispositions find themselves thrust alongside one another and given functional form in the unhappy, overcommitted personage of today's educator. The strange assemblage that forms the contemporary educator is, indeed, key to understanding how such diverse, warped and seemingly contradictory educational traditions are made to work. Of course, genealogy specialises in character studies (Ridley, 1998)—some might say character assassination—and is suited to this mode of analysis. We may look no further than Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals* for a conceptual frame by which we could begin to understand the subjectivity of the educator. One could indeed argue that the educator inherits character traits and dispositions from the six main personality types outlined in that text. The educator is at times slave, priest and scientist, and may even display traits derived from the noble, philosopher and artist (see Ridley, 1998, for a close analysis of these personality types). Suffering these conflicting evaluative positions, the educator has no natural home and is forced to shift from one to another in search of a grounding and security that remains forever elusive.

Education can be understood, then, as a rather disordered but nonetheless operationally functional cultural and technical conglomerate. It is the accumulated effect of attempts to secure the dominion of cultures that have come and gone. A genealogy of education represents the culmination and fruit of this process. It lays bare that piled-up assemblage of battered, repurposed and reinvested educational techniques and demonstrates how they are held together in the contorted being of the educator. Genealogy observes this accumulated disorder of ideals and intentions from below, offering itself as an illuminating spectacle; appearing as a "parodic and farcical" extension of the educational masquerade it sets out to attack (Foucault, 1971/2000a, p. 385). In so doing, it seeks to "push that masquerade to its limit" (p. 386), accepting the fragmented history of Western education as its own inheritance, picking up the various masks that we use to

justify educated being, and parading them about in all their incoherence.⁸

It is well known or at least well documented that Western education suffers from its conflicting and fragmented aims. It lacks the synthesis that a clear vision of the moral purpose of education might offer. As Alasdair MacIntyre puts it, when debating the present purpose and future of education, we scarcely have “enough agreement to be able to arrive at a common mind about what it is that we should be quarrelling about” (1987, p. 28). This is the basis of his accompanying claim that the teaching profession has come to represent the “forlorn hope of the culture of Western modernity” (p. 16). All of which can be admitted, and still we do not approach the position adopted by the genealogist, who does not lament the conflicted state of education as MacIntyre might, and finds his depiction in *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (1990) decidedly irksome. Despite MacIntyre’s claim to have become “a native speaker” in the genealogical tradition (p. 114),⁹ the genealogist senses that, although MacIntyre engages with genealogy better than most, he nonetheless arrives with colonial intent.

The genealogist does not heed arguments to the effect that we should construct new “forms of community within which civility and the intellectual and moral life” of educated people “can be sustained through the new dark ages which are already upon us” (MacIntyre, 1985, p. 263). Though MacIntyre is famous for his pessimism, the genealogist finds that he is not nearly pessimistic enough. Do conceptions of the moral worth and unifying effects of the “educated mind” get any more overt support than in MacIntyre’s writing? MacIntyre argues for the cultivation of an educated disposition (currently lacking at all levels) that is just as “crucial for plain persons” (2009, p. 360), he tells us, as it is for those in positions of power. In MacIntyre’s assessment, those lacking such a disposition (and this represents nearly all of us) are not only unable to participate in the “higher” realms of culture, but are also, more generally speaking, “defective practical reasoners” (p. 359). With MacIntyre, we return most explicitly to the formula that underpins educational thought: education is both the source of the problem and its own solution. He concludes with the grandiose claim that “a surprising number of the major disorders” of recent decades “have been brought about by some of the most distinguished graduates of some of the most distinguished universities” and are, as a result, “the result of an inadequate general education”—as if a better version of education could have prevented such disasters as “the Vietnam War, the policies of the United States towards Iran for more than half a century, and the present world economic crisis” (p. 361).

Switching to the generally more moderate, or perhaps cloaked perspective of critics working within education departments, the genealogist again fails to heed those who would still seek to defend the teaching profession as a whole against disintegration, as if, with sufficient critical effort, the conflicting aims and purposes of education might be someday reconciled. Rather, the genealogist *pursues* the fragmentation of education and does so with mixed feelings, including some measure of malicious delight.

⁸ Arguably, this is what was attempted by the second century satirist Lucian (see Branham, 1989), an author from whom Nietzsche drew considerable inspiration (and through whom we might understand Nietzsche’s *Übermensch* as a parody of self-transcendence; see Babich, 2011). Lucian’s objectives were likely more conservative than Nietzsche’s, adopting multiple masks, playing one Hellenic character off another in a dizzying parody of forms that nonetheless asserted the value of a common, high-brow intellectual tradition (see Branham, 1989, p. 214). In other words, Lucian’s satire was “trimmed to the irony of those in power” (Sloterdijk, 1987, p. 174).

⁹ Or, as MacIntyre puts it earlier in the book, one can “learn the idiom of each [the 19th century encyclopaedist and genealogist] from within as a new first language, much in the way that an anthropologist constitutes him or herself a linguistic and cultural beginner in some alien culture” (p. 43).

The Body of the Educated

The body becomes the principal site of analysis, viewed as the key operator and source of caprice within the system. Drawing from Nietzsche, a genealogy of education begins and remains with the body. It explores how the body, in all its weakness and failure to endure, became the rationale and point of flight for the “contemplative life.” To deliver themselves to the contemplative life, those hoping to be educated turned to what Adriana Cavarero called the philosophy of the “birth-giving male” (1995, p. 92). In so doing, they did not exclude the body from their operations. The body was trained and ordered by the spiritual practices of ancient philosophy, Roman antiquity and aesthetic Christianity, producing the thinker, prophet and priest of Greek and late antiquity, as well as a model of intellectual seriousness and moral virtuosity to which we remain indebted (see Hadot, 1995/2004; Brown, 1992, 1988/2008; Foucault, 2005, 2014). For the genealogist, the body was never entirely superseded, nor was it completely domesticated by these inheritances, and it still bears traces of its denial. Despite all effort to transcend the body and locate educated discourse in a more respectable higher realm, for Nietzsche (and so too for Foucault) the body remained a key operator via its warped appetites, channelled desires, hidden discharges and acquired habits.

Trained and part domesticated, the body is still firmly in place as “the sanction of every truth or error,” as Foucault put it (1971/2000a, p. 375). Educated people remain trapped within the descendent bodily functions of their great intellectual inheritance. This integrated body forms the basis of the Western educational tradition; it defines the bearing of educated people. For Nietzsche, one particularly notable example of the contorted and abused educational body belongs of course to the scholar who suffers “cramped intestines” from too much time bent over books and print (1887/1974, §366). Stiff limbed, this character goes about with “the awkward embarrassment or strutting gate” of someone who remains bogged down, suffering the long after-effects of emurement in study (1873–1876/1997, p. 134). As Nietzsche makes plain, scholarship offers no escape from the materiality of the body; the scholar’s activity is just another way of contorting it. Though his portrait of the scholar is dated¹⁰—offering a Gutenberg-age vision of intellectual life—it still serves its function, drawing attention to the physiognomy of educated people, where those who aspire to some version of the contemplative life, those who attempt to conjure some kind of rich interiority, will contort themselves and force themselves upright, uptight, according to the demands of educated intercourse. Following this line of thought, a genealogy of education insists that we attend to the continued presence of the “educated” body and its ongoing manipulation. This kind of attention does not imply a celebration of bodily materiality, as if the body could at last be released from centuries of repression. Rather, a genealogy of education points to the decidedly ugly, convoluted features of civilized bearing—as it ties itself in knots—and explores why those contorted attitudes are so very difficult to escape.

Some of this may sound familiar. For a few years now, academics have been focusing on bodily materiality, seeking to address a denial of the body in Western intellectual discourse, and emphasise instead the continued role of embodied experience and material artefacts in the operations of thought and everyday life. But a genealogy of education of the kind envisaged here will again outstep its apparent associates—this time scholars of bodily materiality—observing that this

¹⁰ As Peter Roberts puts it, the figure of the bookish, book-bound scholar “now stands as an almost forgotten *ideal* to which many academics would adhere—if only they had the time” (2001, p. 134). Or the space to store the requisite books, I should add, given the tendency in some UK universities to move to open-plan offices; a switch that is accompanied by the depiction of the academic preference for “cellular” offices as archaic and insular.

emphasis on the body has only managed to feed new waves of research endeavour, or “book-scribbling” as Nietzsche (1910/2016, p. 81) might put it. Research that attempts to divert attention to the embodied dimension of social life continues to operate according to the norms of academic enquiry. It upholds and perpetuates the contorted being of the analyst. In a similar way, although some critics may now claim to pursue the apparently anti-educational idea of failure, attacking mastery and success in education for their patriarchal undertones (Halberstam, 2011), a genealogy of education makes the point that academic arguments for failure are still delivered and received according to the rubrics of academic success. A genealogy of education risks undermining the comfort of each position and lays itself open to ridicule by attacking the subject positions of the educated person, the educator and the successful academic, who remain safely within the boundaries of educated being even when claiming to exceed or trouble its confines. Almost by default, academic debate will reject a genealogy of education configured in this way, and refuse its attempts to undermine the status of educated people. Such educated intercourse will, most likely, continue to proliferate without too much embarrassment. More debate is always the solution it offers, its only solution to itself, as it remains assured of its intrinsic value and importance. Reducing our expectations somewhat then, the best one might expect of academic discourse is that it acknowledges the extent to which it must domesticate Nietzsche by putting him to use within the frameworks of educational critique. It must reconcile itself to the uncomfortable realisation that every output of Nietzschean scholarship would, if placed before its originating thinker, “have earned Nietzsche’s undying contempt” (Ridley, 1998, p. 14).

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