**A New Version of Optimism for Education**

The primary purpose of this paper is to outline the conceptual means by which it is possible to be optimistic about education. To provide this outline I turn to Ian Hunter and David Blacker, after a brief introduction to Nietzsche's conceptions of optimism and pessimism, to show why certain forms of optimism in education are either intellectually unhelpful or dispositionally helpless in the face of current educational issues. The alternative form of optimism – which I argue is both intellectually and practically helpful – is drawn from a reading of Friedrich Nietzsche. This reading of Nietzsche is not a simple exercise representing his views. As Nietzsche never explicitly advocated for any form of optimism – and frequently advocated against many of its manifestations – drawing what I call 'a new version of optimism' from his writings is no straightforward task, and certainly not without risk. As such, I have extended my readings of Nietzsche across his entire oeuvre, including his writings unintended for publication from his Nachlass. At the core of my argument is the claim that when Nietzsche was sketching out what he called 'a new version of pessimism' (Nietzsche 2003: 173), it was actually quite close to what we might now call 'a new version of optimism.' This first claim precipitates a second, which is that this new version of optimism is not only especially suited to contemporary educational thought and practice but is itself a description of an educational experience and disposition.

Is it possible to be optimistic about education without being idealistic? In a narrow and simple sense to be optimistic would mean coming to each particular incidence of education with the mind-set that one might leave it somehow positively transformed from how one found it or how it might otherwise have been. As the discussions of the work of Ian Hunter and David Blacker that follow this introduction show, acting as if ideals might or should reshape the system or structure of education might well be a fool's errand or at least require the kind of revolutionary change that is extremely unlikely to happen. Or, as Nietzsche's Zarathustra puts it: 'The unwise, to be sure, the

people – they are like a river on which a skiff floats; valuations are seated in the skiff, solemn and cloaked […] Now the river carries your skiff along: it *has to* carry it. It matters little whether the breaking wave foams and angrily opposes the keel!' (Nietzsche 2006: 88). The values, ideals, means, and ends of education – in their abstracted and floating forms – are barely reflected upon, even by those (such as teachers, students, parents) who are most invested in them. What comes into question most often are how the minutiae of principles and techniques in education are understood, promoted and administered. Increasing populations, struggling national economies, and their concomitant and necessary systems of accountability, all combine to present a violent swell, which still does not threaten the skiff and the educational valuations it carries. However, while there are powerful themes (shared social morality; systems of accountability; rhetoric of employability, competition and social mobility) within education and society which might dictate our behaviours and even play a significant part in constructing our subjectivities, there are also other powers at work (subcultural, local and personal interests, desires, obligations and responsibilities) which create alternative and conflicting narratives to those which are most dominant. That is not to suggest that these powers should or even could attempt to overthrow the others. In most cases this would either be impossible or unpreferable: despite the clamour, it is not yet clear that we need a new skiff or can give up our cloaked valuations. And even if a few of us might be able to, are the great sea of people?

In terms of Western mass education, Ian Hunter thinks not. He argues that much educational theory unfairly (and unhistorically) 'holds the school accountable to the principle of complete development or "human becoming"' (Hunter 1994: 163). Hunter goes on to describe the traditional pessimism and idealism of these forms of educational theory which find it 'almost impossible to say anything positive, or even empirical, about the existing school system. Rather it views this system only through the prism of what it should be – if it were the vehicle of complete development – and thereby ignores or reprobates what it happens to be' (Hunter 1994: 163). In the same essay, Hunter attests his support for Foucault's genealogical method (itself explicitly

influenced by Nietzsche and his challenge to 'the pursuit of the origin' (Foucault 1977: 142)), writing that:

> On the one hand, Foucault's genealogies show us how to avoid treating the modern school system as a failed attempt to realise the principle of complete personal development. They allow us instead to approach the school as an improvised historical institution; assembled from the available moral and administrative materials; providing a provisional means of dealing with specific exigencies (social disorder, economic backwardness, urban decay); and promising nothing more than fallible solutions to such problems. On the other hand, in adopting this approach, the analyst is less likely to denounce these provisional arrangements in the name of the principle of human completion which they supposedly fail to realise. Hence, rather than conducting themselves as the prophetic bearers of unrealised ideal principles, analysts are given the opportunity to temper their demands of the school system, and to situate their analysis in relation to the kinds of problems that the system has actually been improvised to cope with. (Hunter 1994: 166)

Instead of an optimistic idealism directed towards the assumed 'proper ends' of education, Hunter here helps to outline the context for an optimism which is more clearly directed to the task at hand. His analysis occupies itself with the empirical realities of education and attempts nothing other in practical terms than the support for 'fallible solutions' to the problems mass education is designed to respond to and somewhat alleviate. He goes on to suggest that there is little to be gained from holding our education systems up to unachievable ideals of full human becoming that they were never intended to accommodate or facilitate. Equally, there is little to be lost from rejecting idealism and replacing it with an optimism which attempts to make the most of the situation at hand. I would argue that our conception of what this 'making the most' is might be based on something as simple as an instinct or craving; the practical utilisation of which Nietzsche speculated on, writing 'let us suppose that an instinct or craving has reached that point when it demands gratification, - either the

exercise of its power or the discharge of it, or the filing up of a vacuum (all of this is metaphorical language, - then it will examine every event that occurs in the course of the day to ascertain how it can be utilised with the object of fulfilling its aim' (Nietzsche 2007a: 125). This practical and dispositional optimism is as useful to students as it is for teachers, and as relevant to school administrators as it is to policy makers.

This brief analysis may come across as the presentation of outright pessimism towards the 'betterment' of education but is in fact only pessimism towards idealistic theoretical approaches to it. Just because Western education systems predicate certain accountability-oriented practices, based on idealistic or 'pragmatic' assumptions of outcomes, does not mean other practices are not possible within or outside those systems. Equally, it is a plain fact that many of the practices predicated by the current systems of education are not outright detestable or even necessarily at all bad for the most of those they affect. With this in mind, it might be possible to suggest that there is something unethical in teaching and promoting pessimistic analyses which require idealistic and impracticable solutions. Through the lens of an unattainable 'good' it is of course easy to criticise a historically contingent reality, especially when the sterile, laboratory context of metaphysical research protects it from contamination by an empirical milieu.

Given the ease of criticism, what this paper seeks to convey is an outline of the ways and means by which it is still possible to be optimistic about and within mass education. To do so I would distinguish between two forms of optimism, one that Nietzsche rejects and another that he presents under the banner of pessimism. In *Untimely Meditations* Nietzsche challenges David Strauss – a renowned liberal Protestant theologian of his time – and argues against his use of what he calls 'his shameless philistine optimism' (Nietzsche 2007b: 27) which is 'an inordinately stupid ease-and-contentment doctrine for the benefit of the 'ego'' (Nietzsche untimely 28). Equally, Nietzsche rejected Schopenhauer's pessimism, which he saw as equally constrained by an abstract notion of a metaphysical 'better' or 'worse'. All the way into his final published texts, Nietzsche rejected

common notions of pessimism and optimism, especially 'the wretched and shallow chatter about optimism versus pessimism' (Nietzsche 1969: 271-272). David Strauss versus Arthur Schopenhauer, perhaps. However, in his introduction to the second edition of *The Birth of Tragedy* in 1886, 'An Attempt at Self-Criticism', and again in his late notebooks, Nietzsche began to sketch out 'a new version of pessimism' (2003: 173), 'a pessimism of strength' (2003: 180) (1999: 4).

Nietzsche never explicitly sketched out a 'new version' of optimism or an optimism 'of strength.' A search of the *Nachlass* (Nietzschesource)[i] suggests that Nietzsche never had any intention of claiming a new version of optimism as being relevant to his thought. The concept of optimism was, at the time, far too loaded with philosophical and more broadly moral connotations, either in its highly discredited Leibnizian form of our world as 'the best of all possible worlds', or in the quasi-theological belief of good predominating over evil in the universe. Even viewing optimism as a form of hopefulness that 'everything will turn out for the good' is clearly completely antithetical to Nietzsche's thought. So it might seem odd to burden Nietzsche with a concept that he was clearly and vehemently opposed to in all of its typical philosophical or commonplace manifestations. My claim is that Nietzsche was, above all, what I shall call a practical optimist. His well-known yea-saying, his affirmations - perhaps even his entire thought on the will to power in relation to his own experience – reveal a philosophical blueprint for an optimism which optimises. I would go further and suggest that his 'new version of pessimism' was in fact one step on the way to a new version of optimism; an optimism which nonetheless exists in relation to a concomitant pessimism towards ideals and false truths. As Nietzsche states, 'the outcome of a pessimism like this could be that form of a Dionysian saying Yes to the world as it is, to the point of wishing for its absolute recurrence and eternity: which would mean a new ideal of philosophy and sensibility' (2003:173). This form of optimism -- the outline of which I turn to next -- , I believe, is the most sensible disposition to exhibit in our contemporary educational context, this disposition can itself be defined as being productive of educational experience.

In *The Falling Rate of Learning and the Neoliberal Endgame*, David Blacker argues that contrary to 'what most critics of whatever politics believe, and taking everything into consideration, it seems to me that, at least for those opposed to capitalism, *education activism does not matter and is a waste of time*' (2013: 223). He clarifies that this perspective should be understood in terms of the fact that most left and right education activism argues in terms of various manifestations of 'social justice', and that for Blacker, 'we should not be fooled into thinking that reforming schools will generate serious social and political reforms' (2013: 224). He takes this critique further to disavow activism also at the level of individual instructors, arguing that

> "radicals" in academia achieve very little except for furthering their own careers (myself included) in a consumerist environment that rewards novelty, and educators who market themselves accordingly for publication and tenure (where the latter still exists). It almost goes without saying that K-12 school teachers are yoked to an ever-more oppressive assessment-driven curriculum (and even pedagogy) just about everywhere in the industrialized world. (Blacker 2013: 224)

Blacker's description of the special role of radicals in academia can be extended from Ian Hunter's argument vis-a-vis radical educators from *Rethinking the School,* where he suggests that 'today the radical educator is, as the foremost virtuoso of conscience, the foremost exponent of pastoral discipline in the school system (Hunter 1994: 168). While, in many ways, Hunter's assertion is a critique of the overblown and contrary significance that radical educators afford the possible impact of their thought, it also exhibits the normative usefulness of idealistic and critical mind-sets in the context of contemporary education. If we agree, with Blacker, that the radical educator is primarily a marketable novelty and, with Hunter, that they simply assist especially well in serving the pastoral requirements of mass education, then radical educators are not only completely benign in terms of the violence they might seek to do to educational norms, but more than that, (often somewhat un-self-reflecting) prime movers in the perpetuation of those norms.

If both Blacker and Hunter's critiques are to be believed then the radical educator is subject to a rather terminal checkmate, primarily in terms of the effectiveness of their ideology and its associated practices, but also in terms of the position the dominant 'radical' discourse takes on mass education: in defence of the traditional pastoral dimension of education against its usurpation by its now aggressively accountability-orientated – historically consistent – bureaucratic dimension. Such a defence would not be radical but rather completely normative in terms of the history of mass education. However, the checkmate which marks Blacker's 'neoliberal endgame' does not even allow for the completely non-radical articulation of the educational status quo that Hunter outlines. When Ian Hunter was writing *Rethinking the School* over twenty years ago, he wondered if 'this practice of conscience-formation will seem clumsy and quaint from the enlightened perspective of today's progressive educators,' going on to ask 'but have we outgrown its careful pairing of 'unreserved communication' and mentorship, of self-expression and self-doubt?' (Hunter 1994: 85). While we may not have outgrown it then, we may well be on the way to outgrowing it now – but not for the reasons that progressive educators might have hoped. In fact, it may be useful to say again, a defence of the seemingly 'clumsy and quaint' practice that Hunter describes has itself become a somewhat radical position.

The elimination of mass education that is at the heart of David Blacker's critique is based significantly on Karl Marx's suspicions on the 'tendency of the rate of profit to fall' or TRPF whereby is it understood that '*"normal" production cannot durably turn profits*' and so capitalism destroys itself (Blacker 2013: 87). Blacker's other touchstone is the phenomenon of a surplus population of global workers who are no longer needed for exploitation: '*No longer do they want to exploit you; now they want you gone*' (Blacker 2013: 95). In the light of these two concomitant perspectives, mass education is undergoing a process of elimination 'across a number of fronts: crushing student debt, impatience with student expression, the looting of vestigial public institutions and, finally, as *coup de grace*, an abandonment of the historic ideal of universal education' (Blacker 2013: 1).

Unsurprisingly – if we are to take his diagnosis seriously, which my own paper intends to - Blacker argues that 'a certain kind of pessimism is wholly rational in this situation; it is ethically warranted and even survival positive' (Blacker 2013: 226). He defines what he subsequently terms a '*targeted pessimism*' (Blacker 2013: 229), writing that:

> My argument for pessimism in formal education is not an argument for the cessation of teachers' conscientiousness and caring. On the contrary. At the level of interpersonal ethics, it is optimal for individual young people to have wise and caring adults around them. Plus, it is independently valuable (I mean independent of economics and politics) to bring students into their cultural inheritance, turn them on to a particular subject, and help them develop communicative and other mental skills with a wide range of potential applications. These achievements are worthy of apolitical celebration whenever they occur. But it would be easier if we dropped the political shtick. (Blacker 2013: 227-228)

The particular 'political shtick' that Blacker refers to is what the political philosopher Raymond Geuss (2008) describes as the 'ethics-first view' of politics, wherein the perceived goal of the political is to mete out social justice. While Blacker suggests we would do well to reject this perspective as a guide to an internal critique of mass education, Geuss goes further and argues that we should reject an 'ethics-first' view of politics all together:

> One of the main affects motivating those who cling to the ethics-first view [of politics] is, I think, the fear that if we don't keep talking about morality in the abstract, we will lose the motivation to act in ways that require a certain amount of self-discipline, self-restraint, or self-sacrifice. This fear is ungrounded. Evaluative discourse is a part of the very texture of our lives, and we are not in any danger of losing our grip on it. Perhaps all humans have potential access to – or perhaps one should, rather, say, "are subject to" – experiences in which the very distinctions between good and bad, useful and useless, attractive and

> repulsive, blur or drop away completely. Perhaps it represents a particularly high form of the religious life or poetic consciousness, not merely to be occasionally and inexplicably felled by such experiences, but systematically to *unlearn* the distinction between attractive and repulsive, good and bad, horrible and sublime; this, however, is an exhausting task of which few humans have seemed capable. (Geuss 2008: 100)

This extremely rich passage is, firstly, politically aligned with Blacker in rejecting the notion that politics is or can be primarily determined by the 'necessities' of social justice: 'ethics-first'. For Nietzsche therefore, to believe this would be an incredibly weak and decadent form of optimism. But Geuss and Blacker's targeted pessimism at education activism or an ethics-first politics is not a disabling pessimism. It has much more in common with Nietzsche's 'pessimism of strength' than with the pessimism of a defeated idealist. It is only the holders of illusory ideals who can be defeated by non-ethical political intransigencies in contexts such as education. Dropping the 'ethics-first view of politics' and dropping 'the political shtick' in education are steps along the path 'to a Dionysian saying Yes to the world as it is' (Nietzsche 2003: 173). Geuss's Nietzsche-inflected, systematic unlearning of customary value sentiments flags several of the educational aspects of my proposed 'new version of optimism.' Unlearning is itself educational and completely concomitant with a saying yes to the world as it is. It also has much in common with what Nietzsche, in *Twilight of the Idols*, calls 'learning to see', the practical application of which he defines in no uncertain terms: 'one will have become slow, mistrustful, resistant as a *learner* in general' (Nietzsche 1968: 65). To relate this 'unlearning' or 'learning to think' to application in terms of optimism, one can simply turn to the first page of the same text, where in the very first lines of the foreword Nietzsche writes that

> To stay cheerful when involved in a gloomy and exceedingly responsible business is no inconsiderable art: yet what could be more necessary than cheerfulness? Nothing succeeds in which the high spirits play no part. Only excess of strength is proof of strength. − *A revaluation of all values*, this question-mark so black, so huge it casts a shadow over him

who sets it up – such a destiny of a task compels one every instant to run into the sunshine

so as to shake off a seriousness grown all too oppressive. Every expedient for doing so is

justified, every 'occasion' a joyful occasion. (Nietzsche 1968: 21)

Cheerfulness, high spirits, and joy all get a mention here, but not optimism. And yet, all three of

these characteristics are associated with an optimistic disposition. With an even greater nod to the

possibility of defining Nietzsche as a practical optimist, high spirits are defined in terms of the part

they play in 'success', in the general sense of the term that Nietzsche describes above. Thus, these

characteristics are not simply constitutive of a passive affirmation but are considered necessary for

success in practical affairs, which finds a striking counterpart in Hunter, for whom educational

success is measured in terms of a bureaucratic, non-idealistic, serious minded ethos of work. That is

not to say that these high-spirited dispositions will always bring about success in action, or that they

are necessary to success in Hunter's terms, but that for Nietzsche successful action is never possible

without them playing a part. To clarify: rather than an optimism that suggests all will be well, it is an

optimism which plays an active part in making things as successfully as it can, in terms of a personal

evaluation of 'success.' It is not an optimism which idealises, it is an optimism which optimises; a

configuration which is only tautological in the sense that it emphasises one aspect of optimism over

its other possible, more idealistic, meanings.

Given the possible accusations of conceptual violence this argument might well provoke, it is

necessary to somewhat pedantically draw on the primary dictionary definitions of 'optimism' and

'optimist' and then continue to read these alongside Nietzsche's writing.

Optimism - Hopefulness and confidence about the future or the successful outcome of

something; a tendency to take a favourable or hopeful view (OED)

> Optimist - A person who is inclined to practical optimism; a person who looks on the bright side of things, and is disposed, with or without sufficient reason, to interpret situations favourably (OED)

Given that Nietzsche explicitly refers to the causal relation between high spirits and successful outcomes in the foreword to *Twilight of the Idols*, it seems clear that his thinking is at the very least inflected with this non-moral form of optimism. Due to this assertion of a causal connection it seems equally clear that this optimism is a 'practical optimism', the primary inclination of an 'optimist.' Nietzsche was completely opposed to any form of morally inclined optimism but this opposition was primarily to the moral character of the optimists he despised:

> In the great economy of the whole, the terrible aspects of reality (in affects, in desires, in the will to power) are to an incalculable degree more necessary than that form of petty happiness which people call "goodness"; one actually has to be quite lenient to accord the latter any place at all, considering that is presupposes an instinctive mendaciousness. I shall have a major occasion to demonstrate how the historical consequences of *optimism*, this abortion of the *homines optimi*, have been uncanny beyond measure. Zarathustra, who was the first to grasp that the optimist is just as decadent as the pessimist, and perhaps more harmful, says: *"Good men never speak the truth."* (Nietzsche 1969: 329)

One does not have to be a good man to be an optimist in the now most common definitions of optimism and the optimist. As such, Nietzsche's critique of the *homines optimi* has little or nothing to do with amoral optimism. The decadence of the moral form of optimism is characterised elsewhere in *Ecce Homo* in terms of its relations to an 'ideal': 'Knowledge, saying Yes to reality, is just as necessary for the strong as cowardice and the slight from reality – as the "ideal" is for the weak, who are inspired by weakness. They are not free to know: the decadents *need* the lie – it is one of the conditions of their preservation' (Nietzsche 1969: 272). Moral and religious optimism isn't

a saying yes to reality, it is a saying yes to an ideal. Nietzsche's Zarathustra also challenges the weakness of these idealists when he says 'You still want to create the world before which you could kneel: this is your ultimate hope and intoxication' (Nietzsche 2006: 88). To be commanded by an abstract ideal is the greatest taint of a moral or religious optimism. Thus, what I claim is Nietzsche's practical optimism is a positive movement towards taking command of oneself and one's actions. That is not to say that this is a simple movement, as Zarathustra states: 'Whoever cannot command himself should obey. And though many a person *can* command himself, much is still missing before he obeys himself!' (Nietzsche 2006: 159). We must obey the action our new version of optimism commands us to. Our obedience is then also a freedom, acknowledged as the power we wield or channel in governing and optimising our own conduct.

To understand how Nietzsche makes his way towards what I am calling a new version of optimism, it is helpful to turn to some of his late notebooks. Under the heading '*My new path to 'Yes''*, in his third entry in his final full notebook of 1887 Nietzsche writes:

> My new version of *pessimism*: willingly to seek out the dreadful and questionable sides of existence: which made clear to me related phenomena of the past. 'How much "truth" can a spirit endure and dare?' – a question of its strength. The *outcome* of a pessimism like this *could be* that form of a Dionysian *saying Yes* to the world as it is, to the point of wishing for its absolute recurrence and eternity: which would mean a new ideal of philosophy and sensibility. (Nietzsche 2003:173)

The pessimism, perhaps not wholly unlike David Blacker's 'targeted pessimism,' is not nihilistic or resignatory, it is a means to saying yes and to hope (as evidenced by the title of *The Falling Rate of Learning*, 'Fatalism, pessimism and other reasons for hope'). And, I would argue further, it is a means to a new version of optimism. In terms of education one might then be pessimistic about the ability of education systems to match the high-minded and often morally framed ideals that the state, the

public, and philosophers of education think that they should. Equally, one might be pessimistic about the ability to come up with an alternative system, either to better match the same ideals or to match a different set of ideals altogether. Ian Hunter's conception of mass education might then also be pessimistic in this very specific 'new' Nietzschean sense. But really, for both Blacker and Hunter, their 'pessimism' is just a means to a 'saying yes' – seeking out and recognising the existence of certain things as being the case, without an implied moral judgement.

Education today requires both Nietzsche's new version of pessimism and his saying yes, the new version of optimism, or the optimism which optimises. The outcome of this optimism, or, if you will, the pessimism of strength, then, seems far closer to common definitions of non-moral optimism than it does any definition of pessimism outside of Nietzsche's notebooks. However, it is not until the thirty-eighth entry of the following notebook that we find an unreservedly enthusiastic definition of what follows from Nietzsche's much nuanced form of pessimism, where he writes:

> Out of the pressure of plenitude, out of the tension of forces that constantly grow within us and don't yet know how to discharge themselves, a state arises like that preceding a storm: nature, which we are, *darkens*. That too is pessimism…A doctrine which puts an end to such a state by *commanding* something, a revaluation of values by means of which the accumulated forces are shown a path, a direction, so that they explode in lightning and deeds – certainly doesn't have to be a doctrine of happiness: by releasing force which had been cramped and damned to the point of agony, *it brings happiness*. (Nietzsche 2003: 208-209)

Optimism commands an end to the state of pessimism: it is an optimism which optimises in terms of what path or direction is to be taken, which isn't happiness but brings happiness. This also recalls one of the final sections of Nietzsche's *The Dawn of Day*, where he writes a section explicitly challenging pessimism, titled 'Letting our Happiness Also Shine' (Nietzsche 2007a: 391-392).

Optimism brings happiness because it is the means by which the will to power is optimised. Teaching, learning, and educational administration, explode as lightning deeds. To stay with pessimism is to stay in the darkness of the storm without its lightning. To feel oneself subdued and subjugated by our systems of education, to be cramped and damned by them to the point of agony, is perhaps as far as pessimism can take us; even the new version of pessimism. To recognise and experience the darkest depths of the storms of education and society, and still to *command* something, this is the doctrine of the new version of optimism which 'brings happiness', even though it does in no way imply the absence of unhappiness. Quite to the contrary, happiness is often the result of a response to a seemingly negative situation. It is therefore little surprise that in the seventy-sixth and seventy-seventh entries in the eleventh notebook Nietzsche writes that:

> The normal *unsatisfaction* of our drives, e.g., of hunger, the sexual drive, the drive to move, does not in itself imply something dispiriting; instead, it has a piquing effect on the feeling of life, just as every rhythm of small painful stimuli *strengthens* that feeling, whatever the pessimists would have us believe. The unsatisfaction, far from blighting life, is life's great *stimulus*.

> -Perhaps one could even describe pleasure in general as a rhythm of small unpleasurable stimuli… (Nietzsche 2003: 214)

> The greater the resistances a force seeks out in order to master them, the greater is the magnitude of the failure and misfortune thus provoked: and as every force can only expend itself on what resists, every action necessarily contains an *ingredient of unpleasure*. But the effect of that unpleasure is to stimulate life – and to strengthen the *will to power*! (Nietzsche 2003: 214)

Nietzsche's description of unpleasure and unsatifsaction here are similar to his description of the new verison of pessimism, as they are also a means to something positive; a saying yes; a new

version of optimism. In fact, in Nietzsche's reading, unpleasurable stimuli actually seem to help to teach us to optimise through provocation. Nietzsche is clear that there is little to be gained from being pessimistic about unpleasure, as it is a condition of life. However, there is much to be gained from seeing, as Nietzsche does, that even the most optimal action contains 'an ingredient of unpleasure.' In this way unpleasure can be seen as educational but *only* if it is perceived optimistically. As such, it is possible to be optimistic about education if we strive to remember what most of what constitutes education actually *is*. The pleasure that education brings about is heavily interposed and provoked by a rhythm of small - and perhaps also large – unpleasurable stimuli. To succumb to unpleasure and unsatisfaction would be the weakest form of pessimism for Nietzsche. The new version of pessimism sees them only as a means to an optimistic and happiness-inducing self-commanding action.

This reading of Nietzsche leaves us with three things to avoid and three things to embrace. One must avoid 1) an optimism informed by abstract idealism, which holds the world to metaphysical standards 2) a pessimism informed by abstract idealism, which holds the world to metaphysical standards 3) not moving beyond the new version of pessimism to a new version of optimism. One must embrace 1) a new version of pessimism, which accepts the world as it is 2) a movement beyond pessimism, stimulated by unsatisfaction and unpleasure 3) a new version of optimism. I have argued that this new version of optimism is the most sensible disposition to exhibit in our contemporary educational context and that this optimistic disposition is itself productive of educational experience.

As Hunter, Blacker and Nietzsche help to show, there is little to be gained from holding our education systems up to a standard they cannot and were not intended to meet. By the same token, there is no great loss in refusing idealism and replacing it with an optimism that seeks to make the individually and contextually specific 'best' of the situations we find ourselves in.

**References**

Blacker, David. 2013. *The Falling Rate of Learning and the Neoliberal Endgame*. Winchester & Washington: Zero Books.

Geuss, Raymond. 2008. *Philosophy and Real Politics*. Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press.

Hunter, Ian. 1994. *Rethinking the School: Subjectivity, Bureaucracy, Criticism*. New South Wales: Allen and Unwin.

Foucault, Michel. 1977. 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" in Michel Foucault. & D.F. Bouchard (ed.). *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Nietzsche, Friedrich.

1968. *Twilight of the Idols*. Trans. R. J. Hollingdale. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

1969. *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage.

1999. *The Birth of Tragedy and other writings*. Trans. Ronald Speirs. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

2003. *Writings from the Late Notebooks*. Trans. Kate Sturge. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

2006. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Trans. Adrian Del Caro. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

2007a *The Dawn of the Day.* Trans. J.M. Kennedy. New York: Dover Publications.

2007b. *Untimely Meditations*. Trans. R.J. Hollingdale. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

2009- . http://www.nietzschesource.org/#eKGWB. Digital critical edition of the complete works and letters, based on the critical text by G. Colli and M. Montinari, Berlin/New York, de Gruyter 1967-, edited by Paolo D'Iorio.

"optimism, n." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, March 2016. Web. 10 March 2016.

"optimist, n. and adj." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, March 2016. Web. 10 March 2016

---

[i] Search terms included optimismus, optimistisch, optimistische, optimistischen, optimist, optimisten, optimistischer, optimistisches, and optimistin.