

Nietzsche's New Dawn

Educating students to strive for better
in a dynamic professional world

Henriëtta Joosten

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NIETZSCHE'S NEW DAWN

**Educating students to strive for better
in a dynamic professional world**

NIETZSCHE'S NIEUWE DAGERAAD

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in een dynamische beroepspraktijk

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CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	7
ABBREVIATIONS.....	9
INTRODUCTION	11
1. Professional higher education	22
2. The need for A Nietzschean perspective on professional higher education.....	28
3. Nietzschean philosophers on contemporary higher education	36
4. Nietzsche's educational philosophy	39
5. Five elements of striving for better	41
6. Philosophical methodology	43
7. Overview of the chapters	46
CHAPTER 1: UNCERTAINTY.....	51
1. Today's pedagogic dualism.....	54
2. The Apollinian tendency to order.....	56
3. The Dionysian tendency to disorder.....	61
4. Interaction between the Apollinian and the Dionysian	63
5. The Apollinian and Dionysian in professional higher education	64
6. Uncertain? Sure!	69
CHAPTER 2: EXCELLENCE.....	71
1. Self-transcendence, self-control and self-styling according to Nietzsche	74
2. Nietzsche's pedagogical ideas.....	79
3. A Nietzschean perspective on excellence in the twenty-first century	83
4. Excellence for all: A vital perspective for professional higher education.....	87
5. Excellence for all!	89
CHAPTER 3: CRITICAL THINKING.....	91
1. Nietzsche's critical thinking	94
2. The importance of being embedded	100
3. Teaching critical thinking requires active stimulation	103
4. Levels of critical being	108
5. A contemporary notion of critical thinking	115
6. The art of an experimental 'yes, but!'	118
CHAPTER 4: FRIENDSHIP.....	121
1. Plato's ideal of friendship, as described in Socrates' <i>Symposium</i>	124
2. Nietzsche, friendship and truth.....	126
3. Prevalent metaphors in professional higher education	133
4. Teacher and students as truth seeking friends	138

NIETZSCHE'S NEW DAWN

- 5. Benefits of short-term, truth seeking friendships 143
- 6. Friends rather than learner-friendly manners!..... 146

CHAPTER 5: LEARNING THROUGH UPS AND DOWNS147

- 1. The ideal of a meritocratic society 149
- 2. Nietzsche's critique on cultures of measurement and his answer 155
- 3. Learning through ups and downs in professional higher education 159
- 4. Nietzsche's strategy of withdrawal from society 164
- 5. Learning environment 166
- 6. Ups *and* downs! 169

CHAPTER 6: VERSUCHEN WIR'S! – NIETZSCHEAN EXPERIMENTS171

- Case 1: Close reading..... 172
- Case 2: Students designing a course in project management 176

PRO TEMPORE.....183

- 1. Retrospection 186
- 2. Recommendations 190

REFERENCES195

SAMENVATTING211

CURRICULUM VITAE221

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ABBREVIATIONS

In this book, I have referred to English translations of Nietzsche's works. To facilitate reference to his works, each of Nietzsche's works is cited in the text using an abbreviation of its title, followed by the page number of the English translation. In the reference list, the English translations are included. On the few occasions that I refer to Nietzsche's writings that have not been published by him, I refer to the *Kritische Studienausgabe* (1988).

- BT: *The Birth of Tragedy* (Nietzsche, 1967)
GM: *On the Genealogy of Morality* (Nietzsche, 2006a)
GS: *The Gay Science* (Nietzsche, 2001)
HAH: *Human All too Human* (Nietzsche, 1996)
KSA: *Kritische Studienausgabe* (Nietzsche, 1988)
TI: *Twilight of the Idols* (Nietzsche, 2005)
UM II: *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life – Second Untimely Meditation* (Nietzsche, 1997)
Z: *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Nietzsche, 2006b)

INTRODUCTION

Indeed, at hearing the news that ‘the old god is dead’, we philosophers and ‘free spirits’ feel illuminated by a new dawn; our heart overflows with gratitude, amazement, forebodings, expectation – finally the horizon seems clear again, even if not bright; finally our ships may set out again, set out to face any danger; every daring of the lover of knowledge is allowed again; the sea, *our* sea, lies open again; maybe there has never been such an ‘open sea’. (GS, p. 199)

In this quote of *The Gay Science* (1887/2001), the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) manifests himself as an optimistic and hopeful ‘free spirit’. For centuries, the Christian horizon with its absolute values had been prevailing and giving western man guidance and meaning in life. The elimination of this horizon leaves man behind in a world where no pre-given, guiding horizon exist anymore. With the death of god, man is no longer required to hold on to the Christian horizon and its fixed truths. Although Nietzsche does not underestimate the difficult task of living without a pre-given horizon that awaits mankind, in this quote he underlines the vibrant opportunities that the death of god offers: man can create horizons of his own. In fact, he *has to* create horizons of his own if he does not want to perish in a world where no eternal truths are available any more.

Today’s professionals function in a world that is less characterised by fixed horizons and more by short term horizons. Many professionals face a more open and mobile professional career than their parents did (Sennett, 1998). Due to technological and social changes, professionals have to cope with the fact that jobs move to other parts of the world, that professional functions change or disappear and that new ones come up. Up-skilling and re-training is more necessary than ever before (Allen & De Grip, 2012). The labour market has become more flexible; temporary work contracts are on the rise (Chkalova, Goudswaard, Sanders & Smits, 2015). Developments such as computerisation and robotisation not only result in the disappearance of large numbers of jobs (European Commission, 2014; Frey & Osborne, 2013), they also transform professionals’ landscape time and again. The impact of computerisation on

professional practices differs – especially middle class, cognitive routine work such as administration, calculation, and process control is replaced by information technology – but researchers assert that work at all levels of qualification and in all areas is being transformed by computerisation (Van Est & Kool, 2015). The music industry, for instance, has undergone dramatic changes. Due to new recording methods, mediums, digital distribution technology, and infrastructure, the music industry faces many challenges (Mason & Spring, 2011). How to find new ways to generate revenues in face of these changes and concomitant phenomena such as illegal file sharing? The rise of computer-generated pop stars is one of the latest developments disrupting the music industry. Thousands of fans of the Japanese, computer-generated diva Hatsune Miku are willing to pay a lot of money in order to attend the shows of this hologram. Similar transformations occur in other areas such as publishing, travel agencies, health care, insurance, and the transport sector. Professionals do not just face short term horizons but they also face a dispersion of horizons. They continuously (are expected to) change their perspective and use a growing number of different standards (see Barnett, 2004).

In the social sciences, this condition of dispersive horizons is referred to in terms of liquid modernity (Bauman, 2000). In *Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Uncertainty* (2007), sociologist Zygmunt Bauman depicts the current liquid condition as a condition in which individuals can no longer act nor plan 'life projects' while referring to or relying on stable social forms. As Bauman writes,

structures that limit individual choices, institutions that guard repetitions of routines, patterns of acceptable behaviour [have, HJ] ... short life expectation. (Bauman, 2007, p. 1)

As long-term orientation is no longer possible due to the weakening of social structures, individuals (have to) live fragmented lives. They live 'into a series of short-term projects and episodes which are in principle infinite' (Bauman, 2007, p. 3). In Bauman's view, these changes are reinforced by the separation of power and politics; this separation allows global business interests to dominate. Modern states are unable to regulate these interests. Among the other departures which Bauman deems

characteristic of contemporary life is the dissolution of social safety nets while, at the same time, individuals are increasingly exposed to the whims of 'commodity-and-labour markets'. Furthermore, although unable to foresee the consequences of their choices due to rapidly changing circumstances, individuals are more and more held responsible for the consequences of their supposedly freely chosen actions. The proclaimed answer to individuals' question of how to proceed in such a liquid and uncertain world is flexibility, according to Bauman. Flexibility is a virtue that reflects, as Bauman writes,

a readiness to change tactics and style at short notice, to abandon commitments and loyalties without regret – and to pursue opportunities according to their current availability, rather than following one's own established preferences. (2007, p. 4)

The condition of liquid modernity, depicted by Bauman, applies to all segments of life, including professional practice. Professionals function in liquid professional practices. They face the challenge of finding their way in an increasingly uncertain world where the number of possibilities for long term orientation are rapidly decreasing.

Starting point of the underlying study is that good vocational or professional education equips students to function in and to handle these challenging circumstances. Students need an educational environment where they can acquire professions' knowledge and skills as well as learning how to overcome current routines in thinking and acting. The emphasis of this study is on enabling future professionals to actively relate to changing circumstances and to give form to practices in which they participate rather than teaching them to passively react and adapt to change. The creation of own horizons is no easy undertaking. It requires, among other things, an active and critical attitude towards existing routines in thinking and acting. Central to the underlying study is the question of what it means to teach students to strive for better in a professional world which is more and more characterised by a dispersion of short term horizons.

In most western professional higher education systems, the objective of training students to become critical and innovative professionals is high on the agenda. The European Commission states in her agenda for the modernisation of Europe's higher education systems, that, in order to become a global competitor and to support economic growth and job creation, the European Union needs large numbers of highly qualified and innovative people (2011). National governments and institutes of professional higher education have accepted the challenge of encouraging students to transcend current professional practices and knowledge as well. In *Dedicated to Quality*, a framework which serves as a guideline for Dutch higher education sector's policy, The Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences [*Vereniging Hogescholen*] underlines the importance of educating 'students who can practice a particular profession with a critical perspective and who can contribute to innovation in professional practice' (HBO-raad, 2009, p. 21). The recent strategic agenda of The Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences deems the reinforcement of the innovative potential of the professional practice an important ambition. '[F]uture professionals are critical, entrepreneurial, investigative, and internationally oriented' (Vereniging Hogescholen, 2015, p. 5). In a strategic report of the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science which sketches a long-term perspective on Dutch higher education, universities of applied sciences are expected to train students to become professionals who contribute to the innovative capacity of the professional practice (Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap, 2011). Innovation should be a key notion in higher education. In order to reach that goal, the Minister of Education, Culture and Science asked The Education Council of the Netherlands [*Onderwijsraad*] for advice on the question of how Dutch professional higher education can educate innovative professionals (Onderwijsraad, 2014). The Council recommended the Minister to further incorporate applied research into higher education curricula as a way of stimulating students' critical and innovative capacity. The reinforcement of collaboration between higher education institutes, companies and organisations (in the region) and an increase of lifelong learning programmes offered by professional higher education institutes are two more recommendations aiming at

enabling (future) professionals to proactively and resiliently respond to changing circumstances (Onderwijsraad, 2014).

In what kind of environment are these objectives of teaching students to strive for better expressed? Western societies – the focus of this study – are meritocratic societies. In these societies, social position is above all the result of individuals' and organisations' merits. What counts are one's merits rather than lineage or colour of skin. In these societies, education is generally understood as a means to secure equal opportunities for all to develop their abilities. In at least four ways, current meritocratic environments impose barriers for equipping students adequately for professional practices that are increasingly characterised by dispersive horizons.

First, practices of selection, which are steadily gaining popularity in meritocratic societies, impose barriers for teaching students to create horizons of their own. As processes of selection are closely interdependent with practices of wide participation and diversification in higher education, I will elaborate on these practices as well.

Wide participation in education is deemed worthy of aiming at in meritocratic societies. 'Higher levels of education attainment' are strongly associated with higher employment rates, an increase in earnings, better health, more social engagement and well-being of individuals, as The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reports (2014a). In light of this relationship, it is generally accepted that it is no more than fair that young people have equal access opportunities to higher education. Furthermore, not only individuals profit from education, but also society gains from wide participation in education as it 'broadens the pool of candidates for ... high skilled jobs' (OECD, 2014a, p. 24). Society derives maximum profit if the best performing people occupy the best places in society.

The objective of wide participation in higher education is, however, often accompanied with the fear of loss of quality of education (Brink, 2009). In order to reduce this risk – but also to increase the participation rate (Onderwijsraad, 2014) and improve the quality of education (Commissie Veerman, 2010) – diversification of education is seen as a useful strategy. Diversification refers to either the content or the level of education, to the type of pedagogy used, to the presence of honour programmes, to extra lessons for students with low(er) mastery of language, or to the

extent to which public or corporate organisations and educational institutes co-operate in education programmes. A rich variety of training programmes offers opportunities for each individual who is qualified to follow a programme that fits his or her abilities and ambitions.

Here, selection comes in. Selection of students is generally considered as an appropriate means for aligning the level and profile of training programmes with the capacities and motivation of students (Onderwijsraad 2011). Selection refers to practices in which a subset of all students who are in principle qualified to be considered for admission to a particular programme are allowed to actually enter the programme. Student characteristics such as motivation, talents and capacities (the latter two characteristics are often measured in terms of prior school performance) play an important role in these practices. As far as the benefits, selection is expected to contribute to the educational feasibility of programmes as students' capacities and the requirements of educational programmes are better matched. Furthermore, selection can lead to quality improvements, especially when selection practices stimulate students to develop their potentials (Onderwijsraad, 2011).

Selection has, however, negative effects, some of which directly interfere with the objective of teaching students to strive for better. An often mentioned drawback of selecting students is the absence of valid and fair methods and processes of selection (Onderwijsraad, 2011). Students' motivation, talents and capacities are considered to be rather stable, measurable character traits that quite accurately predict the probability of students completing particular training programmes. There is, however, hardly any evidence that supports this assumption. What is worse, the underlying assumption that talent, motivation and capacities are rather stable features has consequences for taking up the challenge of teaching students to create horizons of their own. The assumption of students having stable features reveals an understanding of students as stable or permanent selves. Students have talents and they may or may not develop them, depending on their efforts and the extent to which their environment supports them. Students are, however, not thought of as being able to go beyond their current potential. In this line of argument, it makes little sense to actively stimulate students to develop new potential. Only students whose potential to perform in a particular area is

already there are offered access to further education. Stimulating students to overcome themselves and to strive for better requires, however, an educational environment in which students are understood as open, not yet determined human beings.

Another disadvantage of selection practices, especially in combination with the before mentioned practices of diversification and wide participation, is that these practices stimulate competition between students.¹ As previous school performance is a determinant factor in selection practices, students are incited to be better than their fellow students. Although many policy makers welcome this effect as it is expected to increase the overall quality of education (that is, the scores of students), this emphasis on scores and rankings reinforces the importance of standards and criteria in educational contexts. Creating own horizons requires, however, the ability to scrutinise current standards and the willingness to let go of routines in thinking and doing that hinder the quest for better. This type of critical attitude is not valued highly within educational systems which stimulate competition between students. Striving for better comes off badly in these environments (see also chapter 5).

A final drawback of selection practices is closely related to the first two disadvantages. Initially, meritocratic societies aimed at guaranteeing equal access to higher education. Lineage should not play a role in selection processes. However, as previous school performances and motivation are becoming determining factors in selecting processes, the meritocratic ideal of equal access results in a competition between unequals as some privileges (such as the education level of one's parents) are unfairly distributed (Swierstra & Tonkens, 2008). Equal access is at stake.

A second way in which meritocratic environments hinder higher professional education to actually reach the objective of teaching students to strive for better has to do with the imperative of consumerism. More and more, higher (professional) education is conceived of as a provider of public services (Ball, 2012). Teachers are expected to offer their customers – among them students, business and government – what they want. Due to this transformation teachers have less options to use their

¹ In this study, I do not read Nietzsche as a proponent of (ruthless) competition between people. I will elaborate a notion of excellence in which comparing oneself with others is not important. Excellence is not understood as 'being the best', but as 'overcoming oneself' (see chapter 2).

expertise to (now and again) question the appropriateness of customers' needs and demands (Biesta, 2015b). In many of the traditional professions (such as health care and social work) the transformation of clients/patients into customers is taking place as well (Mol, 2008). More and more, clients and patients are perceived as customers who know what they need. In the capacity of service supplier, professionals are not expected to take a critical stance towards the customers. Teachers in these professional fields are, sometimes implicitly, required to teach students a customer friendly attitude. The imperative of consumerism goes against the aim of teaching students a critical attitude.

The maxim 'always deliver what the customer is asking for' has a huge impact on the options to train students' critical attitude in the areas of the so called *new professions* as well. In professional areas such as consultancy, IT, and human resource management, economic or market transactions rather than professional transactions are often central. In the realm of economic transactions, customers are deemed informed: they are supposed to know what they need and what options are available to satisfy their needs (Feinberg, 2001). They do not need professionals helping them figuring out what they actually need. Professionals are supposed to deliver. And yet, the work of these professionals has often a major impact on the general well-being. Information technology professionals, for instance, enable public authorities to process huge amounts of data on citizens with the help of information technologies such as data mining and big data. These technologies make it possible to search for conspicuous correlations, and, based on these correlations, forecast civilians' actions. Public authorities use these forecasts in order to intervene. In case of tax fraud, the use of these technologies appears to be acceptable. However, when one applies these technologies on digital dossiers of children and one uses the forecasts in order to intervene in family lives, the picture changes.² The application of information

² See also La Fors-Owczynik (2015) for a critical analysis of a Dutch initiative called ProKid SI12- (ProKid). ProKid is a risk profiling system that is employed by the Dutch police in order to prevent 'crimes against children' and 'crimes committed by children' (La Fors-Owczynik, 2015). As La Fors-Owczynik writes: "[e]mpirical details about ProKid demonstrate, however, that its preventative profiling routines challenge several ... principles ... [among them, HJ] and perhaps most importantly 'the assumption of innocence

technology can have disruptive effects on society and general well-being. When the imperative of consumerism reigns, taking a critical stance towards customers' or clients' needs and demands plays an subordinate role in the professional practice as well as in educational contexts.

A third way in which meritocratic environments discourage teachers to teach students to strive for better has to do with the rise of the culture of measurement. Like students, institutes of professional higher education are subjected to meritocratic assessments. In the race for (international) reputation, these universities must score highly on all kinds of rankings. In order to find resources of funding and attract the best students, they have to focus on criteria that are used to produce the rankings and league tables (Ball, 2015). The criteria are for the most part quantitative, measureable indicators that concentrate on short term relevance. Also, systems of accreditation and funding systems force professional higher education institutes to focus on educational 'outcomes' (Ball, 2012; Biesta, 2009, 2010; Verbrugge & Van Baardewijk, 2014). The OECD describes these outcomes as 'statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completion of a process of learning' on its website about the Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes project (AHELO).³ League tables, rankings and assessments have a huge impact on institutional behaviour; whether one likes it or not, one is becoming what is measured (Biesta, 2009; Hazelkort, 2008). Standards and criteria define what kind of professionals is to be 'produced'. Teacher have few possibilities to teach students to create own horizons. The horizons are constituted as given.

A fourth characteristic of western societies which often prevents teachers to train students to strive for better is the increased emphasis on evidence-based working. Evidence-based working, which is a familiar approach in the medical professions, is becoming popular in educational and other professional contexts. The idea is that professional interventions should be informed by scientific evidence about what works best. The availability of data has clearly positive aspects: a more informed discussion

of a child until proven guilty” (2015, p. 1). Moreover, she asserts that in this system all children, even when registered as victims of violence, are framed as potential perpetrators.

³ See: <http://www.oecd.org/edu/skills-beyond-school/ahelodocuments.htm>. Last seen: 2015-1-26.

about professional practices is, for instance, possible. A one-sided emphasis on evidence informed working has, however, also downsides. For one thing, if evidence-based working is applied strictly, professionals do not have the chance (or seize the opportunity) to interpret the general rule and translate it to the concrete situation at hand. As theorist of education Gert Biesta points out, 'we [professionals, HJ] therefore also always need judgement about how to act – which is a judgement about the application of general and decontextualised knowledge to concrete situations and singular cases' (2015a, p. 9).⁴ Furthermore, evidence-based or informed working discourages professionals to think for themselves. In practices where the quest for 'what works' dominates, critical questions concerning the desirability or appropriateness of (often implicit) ends are not appreciated. It is, however, this type of critical attitude towards existing practices that is a prerequisite for striving for better.

These transformations form the background of contemporary professional higher education. In these dynamic and sometimes demanding circumstances, teachers in higher professional education do their best to equip students for today's and tomorrow's professional practice. This study aims at enabling teachers and policy makers to do this challenging job even better by rethinking what it means to educate students to strive for better in professional fields where horizons tend to disperse and the possibility of long-term orientation is disappearing.

A counter-argument against this undertaking could be that there is nothing new under the sun: learning has always been a matter of learning for an unknown and changing world (see also Barnett, 2004). The plea of Mrs. Muller-Lulofs, the initiator of the first Dutch school for social work, for professionalisation of almoner ship is illustrative. In the speech, which she held in 1910, she emphasised the growing complexity of then prevalent practices of almoner ship due to progressive and sweeping social legislation and a growing emphasis on the scientific and preventive dimensions of the care for the poor (Neij & Huetting, 1989, p. 42).

⁴ Especially starting professionals (in the medical professions) tend to follow rules conscientiously partly for fear of litigation (Greenhalgh, Howick, Maskrey & Evidence Based Medicine Renaissance Group, 2014).

As a rejoinder, it could be argued that it is the *increased pace* of change that requires a rethinking of professional higher education practices. Change per se is not a new phenomenon. But, as Rosa (2005, 2010) asserts, the *acceleration* of the speed of change that is currently occurring is unknown. According to Rosa, the phenomenon of acceleration is characterised by a three dimensional structure: technological acceleration (i.e. ‘instances of intentional, goal-directed acceleration’ such as the speed of communication, of transport, and of data processing), acceleration of social change (which could be measured, as Rosa suggests, by the stability of social institutions and practices) and acceleration of the pace of life. The three dimensions, as Rosa shows, are positively interconnected; nowadays they form a ‘self-propelling system’ (2010, p. 33).

Acceleration of the speed of social change occurs in waves. The introduction of steam, steam-engine technology, and the railway in the eighteenth century and the introduction of electricity, telephone, and automobile in the twentieth century were each enabling conditions of earlier waves of acceleration. Each wave required an active process of adaptation in society: new infrastructures, among them legislation and education, had to be developed (Van Est & Kool, 2015). Stephen Billett, a scholar in the field of learning and work, elaborates on the emergence of vocational education systems and fields as resulting from the rise of industrialisation and the establishment of modern nation states (2011, pp. 111-134). He emphasises that a diversity of educational systems evolved due to the social and industrial revolutions occurring in the nineteenth century. In the Netherlands, as response to the abolishment of the guilds and an increasing need for skilled workers, an education system was developed that localised vocational education in schools (Billett, 2011, p. 126).

The introduction of information technology and processes of globalisation are enablers of the current wave of social acceleration. Rather than remedying the limitations of human and animal muscle power, this technological revolution is characterised by technologies that tackle (some of) the limitations of the human mental powers.⁵ More recent processes of speeding up the pace of social changes require,

⁵ See for instance Brynjolfsson & McAfee (2014) who argue that information technology and digital communication will change the way we live and businesses operate radically.

again, a transformation of society, including the field of education. Measures such as offering so called massive open online courses (MOOC's), encouraging life long learning, or stimulating the development of technical or twenty-first century skills are often mentioned in Dutch public debate (Van Est & Kool, 2015, pp. 209-213) as promising ways to better prepare beginning professionals for today's society. However, as long as these measures are part of the existing educational discourse, which was an adequate response to the speed-up processes prompted by the earlier technological revolution, these measures will not contribute to better preparation of students. Students will not learn to strive for better under these new circumstances.

This study aims at contributing to the endeavour of teaching students to strive for better under these new circumstances by exploring and opening spaces in existing discourses on professional higher education.⁶ Following Nietzsche's critical and experimental thinking, five key elements of striving for better in world of dispersive horizons are explored: uncertainty, excellence, critical thinking, friendship and learning through ups and downs. From these five perspectives, I will scrutinise present practices of professional higher education in search for openings which allow for a transformation into a new, more appropriate discourse. I will tentatively explore educational practices which a new, Nietzsche-inspired discourse allows for.

1. Professional higher education

This study focuses on professional higher education in western, meritocratic societies.

Meritocracy, coined by sociologist Michael Young in 1958, refers to the ideal that merits are the basis for the individual's position in society. In chapter 5, I will explore

⁶ In this study, I will use the notion of discourse. Although Nietzsche did not use the term 'discourse', the idea that systems of dominating valuations, concepts and appearances of truth constitute the world as we know it (including ourselves) can be found in Nietzsche's work. In *The Gay Science*, for instance, this idea is touched upon when Nietzsche refers to everything 'European', and writes: 'by which I mean the sum of commanding value judgements that have become part of our flesh and blood' (p. 244). Only after Nietzsche, the term 'discourse' was coined. It became widely known because of Foucault who interpreted it in a Nietzschean way.

In this study, I have chosen to focus on the primary texts of Nietzsche (see the section 'Philosophical methodology' in this chapter) in order to take a fresh look at Nietzsche.

explicitly how the meritocratic ideal affects professional higher education practices, but the attentive reader will notice that this meritocratic ideal operates at the background of all chapters, even when not expressed in exactly these terms. When sketching educational contexts or giving examples, I focus primarily on the situation of professional higher education in the Netherlands, a meritocratic society par excellence (SCP, 2011). Now and then, I refer to situations in the European Union and the United States. These references serve as illustrations of the general argument.

The choice to focus on professional higher education has not to do with the allegedly special status of professions. Many attempts have been undertaken (most in the 1950s and 1960s) to delineate the professions from other forms of work. The following characteristics are often mentioned: professions contain a normative element as professionals are concerned with the promotion of human well-being; professions are characterised by the need for and the existence of a systematic knowledge base which is only accessible to the members of the profession and it requires (lengthy) formal training to use this knowledge; and, relations between professionals and clients are – partly due to the before mentioned features – characterised by trust and authority (Evetts, 2003, 2006; Freidson, 1994). The three traits are often referred to as arguments for justifying the special status of professions and the infrastructure of professional self-regulation or autonomy. Billett's (2011) analysis of vocational education shows, however, that the issue of defining 'professions' has never been finally settled.⁷ Referring to Winch (2002), Billett claims that the quality of having impact on human well-being applies to (almost) all occupations to a greater or lesser extent. The same applies to the knowledge dimension. Billett's study suggests that, whatever the social status of a particular type of work, the same kind of knowledge is required – that is, a mixture of conceptual, procedural and dispositional knowledge. Depending on situational requirements, a particular mixture and amount of knowledge is needed to effectively conduct the practice. The massiveness of knowledge nor the type of

⁷ The sociologist Evetts (2003, 2006) is critical about demarcating professions from other types of work as well. In retrospect, she asserts that this project is a 'time-wasting diversion' as it did not shed any light on the issue of particular occupational groups having power (such as medicine and law) nor did it increase understanding of 'the contemporary appeal of the discourse of professionalism in all occupations' (Evetts, 2006, p. 134).

knowledge is a quality delineating professions from other occupations (Billett, 2011). Even within one particular occupation, the appropriate mixture and massiveness of knowledge varies. Billett gives the example of medical specialists to illustrate his argument.

Medical specialists who perform lots of important, but, routine activities may well rely less on the massiveness of their knowledge than their particular and very narrow set of specialist knowledge. Moreover, specialists engaging in complex and non-routine medical procedures are also likely to have quite distinct forms of procedural knowledge. (Billett, 2011, p. 105)

Billett disputes some more alleged characteristics of 'professions'. Recognising that the so called professions are deemed more worthwhile than other forms of work, he asserts that 'the premises for what constitutes professions and in what ways they are different from other forms of work is not always clear or easily discernible, if at all' (Billett, 2011, p. 104). Accepting Billett's analysis, one could conclude that the argument of this study applies to vocational education in general.

The reason for focussing on tertiary education rather than for example on vocational secondary education is the fact that the role of higher education is becoming more important with regard to training people for the (changing) labour market. As sociologist Van de Werfhorst (2014) mentions, the occupational structure has changed in the previous century: the primary industries (agriculture, fishing, etc.) declined, the secondary sector of industry and manufacturing grew but later declined, and the tertiary and quaternary sectors (private and public service sectors) steadily grew. Data of the OECD show that in the Netherlands younger adults (25-34 year-olds) have higher tertiary attainment than the elder group (55-64 year-olds): 44 % of the former group and 28 % of the latter group attained tertiary education (2014b, p. 44). Van de Werfhorst (2014) put forward, while referring to a study of Allen and De Grip (2012), that technological developments require up skilling of the workforce.

The reason for putting the emphasis on the institute of professional higher education rather than on academic education is the fact that professional higher

education is explicitly and to a large extent intertwined with society and phenomena such as social acceleration. The history of Dutch professional higher education illustrates this intertwinement. The rise of technical higher education in the Netherlands, for instance, can be traced back to the second half of the nineteenth century – in 1849 (Rotterdam), in 1864 (Enschede) and in 1878 (Amsterdam), the predecessors of contemporary technical higher education were founded – and it is closely related to the process of industrialisation in the Netherlands (Van Bommel, 2014). As the nature of work changed (from personal, artisanal work to impersonal factory work) and the need for skilled workers grew, the vocational education system was expanded (Billett, 2011, p. 126). The emergence of schools for social work can be understood in the context of social changes as well. The industrialisation in the nineteenth century resulted into growing (economic) prosperity as well as into poverty. In order to protect citizens against the excesses of industrialisation, social rights and legislation were introduced – for instance, the prolonged duration of statutory schooling was one way of preventing child labour. Although the phenomenon of social work was not new, in the course of time and in the shadow of changing institutions and practices, training programmes for social workers – mainly female – were developed. In 1899, one of the first schools for social work in the world was established in Amsterdam: *De Opleidingsinrichting voor Socialen Arbeid* (Van der Linde, 2007, p. 172). In other areas as well, predecessors of contemporary professional higher education were established in response to social changes (see Van Bommel, 2014).

A final consideration in defining the scope of this thesis concerns the fact that I have been a teacher in Dutch professional higher education for almost twenty years. I know the sector from within. That does not apply to the academic universities, that is, I have no experience with academic education in the capacity of a teacher nor as a researcher. The same is true with regard to secondary vocational education.

Dutch professional higher education

The Netherlands has a binary higher education system: higher education encompasses research-oriented education [*wetenschappelijk onderwijs*] and professional higher education [*hoger beroepsonderwijs*]. The first, research-oriented education, is provided

by 'universities'. These concentrate more on the theoretical aspects of the field of study. The latter, professional higher education, is provided by 'universities of applied sciences'. These universities train students for particular professional practices.⁸ The programmes of both academic universities and universities of applied sciences fall under the bachelor-master structure that has been introduced in the Dutch higher education system in 2002 as a result of the Bologna process. A university bachelor's programme takes three years; a bachelor's degree programme at a university of applied sciences takes four years. In comparison to most countries with a binary higher education system, a relatively large part of Dutch higher education students enter a programme in professional higher education: in the Netherlands around 65% of all tertiary enrolments, compared to a range between 5% in France and 46% in Finland (Commissie Veerman, 2010, p. 70).

Universities of applied sciences have been given the status of higher education by Dutch law only in 1986. A lot has changed since then. In 1985, there were almost four hundred institutes of professional higher education, providing education for a little less than 200,000 students. Twenty-five years later, more than 440,000 students are educated at thirty-seven public funded universities of applied sciences (Van Bommel, 2014). More emphasis is given to professional higher education as a whole, rather than on the separate institutes (Van Bommel, 2014). Despite the diverse origins of professional higher education's sectors (and programmes) and despite an even wider range of professional practices for which students are educated, a shared discourse on professional higher education evolved. The standard for professional bachelor's programmes which the universities of applied sciences set in 2009 (HBO-raad, 2009) and the report of an expert group 'Protocol' which investigated the desirability and

⁸ The distinction between academic, research-oriented education and professional higher education in the Netherlands is not as black and white as it is presented here. Noorda (2007), for instance, points out that Dutch academic universities once started as a type of professional higher education. He refers to the late latin term 'universitas', meaning 'guild', or 'body of men' in order to illustrate the function that these universities had for centuries: initiating novices into a profession. In the nineteenth and twentieth century, Dutch universities became research-oriented institutes as we know them today. In the academic fields of medicine and law, according to Noorda (2007), traces of universities being academic guilds can still be clearly observed.

possibility of a shared protocol for assessing students' (key) projects (Expertgroep Protocol, 2014) are illustrations of this shared discourse.⁹

As for research, where the research-oriented universities have a long history in doing research, the universities of applied science are newcomers. It was not until 2010 that the Dutch law explicitly recognises research (focused on the world of work) as one of the core tasks of universities of applied sciences (Onderwijsraad, 2014). This change of law (and the concomitant budgets) has resulted into the increase of research capacity of universities of applied sciences. Although some scholars have doubts about the level of available research skills in professional higher education institutes (Verschuren, 2012), research at the universities of applied sciences is seen as an important motor of the Netherlands' innovative capacity (OECD, 2014c). The academic universities, on their turn, have moved towards doing more applied or practice-based research. This is at least partly due to changing criteria for receiving funding in the Netherlands; recently, applications for funding are explicitly assessed to the extent to which a proposed project is appropriate for knowledge utilisation.¹⁰ The differences between academic universities and universities of applied science therefore tend to diminish.

Functions of professional higher education

Biesta (2010) distinguishes three domains in which education operates and in which thus educational purposes can be articulated: qualification (enabling students to 'do something'), socialisation (embedding students in particular cultural, social and political orders), and subjectification (the process of becoming a subject which functions independently from the existing orders). Starting point of this study is that professional higher education functions in all three domains.¹¹

⁹ The standard for professional bachelor's programmes involves four dimensions: 'a sound theoretical basis', 'a critical mind', 'professional expertise', and 'professional ethics and social orientation' (HBO-raad, 2009, pp. 10,11).

¹⁰ See for example: <http://www.nwo.nl/en/our-ambitions>. Last seen: 2015-1-26.

¹¹ In Biesta's perspective (2010), subjectification refers to the process of becoming a subject which functions independently from the existing orders. In the Nietzschean perspective developed in this study, the idea of a subject existing independently from the world is refuted. Human agency does not exist independently from the forces that work on the individual; it is part of it, as will be argued.

However, the emphasis of this study is on the current condition of increasing speed of social change. The focus will be on higher education's task of preparing students for a professional life that is more and more characterised by disruptive horizons. This emphasis has consequences for the set of purposes on which this study focuses. The insertion of students into existing professional orders will be treated both as a task of professional higher education as well as a prerequisite for enabling students to overcome existing orders. The same applies to the qualification function. Qualification is a salient function of professional higher education. Teachers provide students with theoretical and practical tools needed to function within their (future) professional practices. The qualification function serves both students and employers' interests: it aims at optimising students' (future) labour market opportunities as well as optimising employers' production (Van de Werfhorst, 2014). Students should, however, also learn how to strive for better – and thus learn how to overcome the 'things' they learn. As for the subjectification, this function has been often neglected in vocational education contexts (Billett, 2011). In this study, the subjectivity function features prominently. Rather than being a 'plaything' of (external and internal) forces and identifying oneself with or being identified by existing practices, students should learn not to lose sight of the drive for self-realisation.

More functions of higher professional education can be mentioned, for instance 'enhancing the standing of occupations' and 'assisting the material rewards and mobility of workers' (Billett, 2011, p. viii) and optimising knowledge and skill production (Van de Werfhorst, 2014). While I do acknowledge these functions, I will not pay attention to them.

2. The need for A Nietzschean perspective on professional higher education

This study on contemporary professional higher education stands in a young tradition. Since the 1980s, scholars in philosophy reflect on the question of how to prepare students for rapidly changing, uncertain and complex professional life. Two philosophers take the lead: Donald Schön by introducing the notion of reflective practitioner and Ronald Barnett by bringing in the notion of critical being in an age of supercomplexity.

Reflective practitioner

Schön's introduction of the notion of reflective practitioner has played a pivotal role in opening the modern debate on how to equip students for rapidly changing professional practices. In *The Reflective Practitioner. How Professionals Think in Action* (1983), Schön opposed the then prevalent view that real professional knowledge encompasses scientific theories and techniques. Professionals mainly have to learn to apply this knowledge in order to solve the instrumental problems of the professional practice (Schön, 1983, p. 30). According to Schön, this view had become obsolete as the everyday professional practice encompasses 'problematic situations characterized by uncertainty, disorder, and indeterminacy', rather than clear-cut problems that need to be solved (Schön, 1983, p. 15). He introduced the term 'reflective practice' to refer to how professionals handle complex and unpredictable challenges of real-life professional practice. Schön argued that both scientific knowledge *and* professionals' practice can serve as sources of knowledge. Often, professionals act intelligently while not being able to express the grounds on which they act as they do. In their actions, they show their know-how. Schön used the term 'knowing-in-action' to refer to this type of knowing (1983, p. 25). At times, however, both the scientific *body of knowledge* and professionals' *knowing-in-action* do not provide solutions to the challenges of professionals' practice. Schön introduced the term 'reflection-in-action' to refer to how professionals reflect on these situations and their knowing-in-action and how they simultaneously experiment with new actions in order to generate new forms of understanding and action. He called this kind of activity a form of *practice-based research*.

Building on the notion of *reflective practice*, Schön developed an approach that enabled students to handle the challenges of professional life with confidence, skill and care (1987). He emphasised the importance of 'reflective practicum' in professional schools. Reflective practicum is a safe learning environment where students can learn by doing. It 'seeks to represent essential features of a practice to be learned while enabling students to experiment at low risk' (Schön, 1987, p. 170). While doing, the student can acquire the necessary 'artistry'. The teacher's role is mainly that of a coach.

The idea of reflective practice has become hugely influential in educational literature, as well as in educational practice (Erlandson, 2005). Erlandson and Beach underline the importance of Schön's works for the study of education and teaching. 'One could almost argue that reflection as a research field in education and teaching has been a consequence of Schön's works' (Erlandson & Beach, 2008, p. 410). *Reflective Practice*, the first international academic journal that addresses the subject of reflection and reflective practice, is an example of Schön's continued influence in the academic field (Erlandson & Beach, 2008, p. 410). In addition to the field of education, both Schön's works have had huge impact on a broad range of other professional fields, among which the field of health and the social science professions (Kinsella, 2009). Schön's ideas are still quite influential: international research shows, for instance, that reflective practice is a key element in professional preparatory programmes, continuing education programmes and adult learning programmes (Research voor Beleid, 2010).

Critical being in an age of supercomplexity

Ronald Barnett, a prominent scholar in higher education, criticises the prevailing view that it is the task of higher education to teach students to solve problems in a particular setting rather than transferring formal, universal knowledge. Barnett's critique should not be understood as a rejection of Schön's undertaking. To the contrary. Barnett appreciates Schön's account of the reflective practitioner precisely for bringing into focus the action and pragmatic dimension of professional knowledge (Barnett, 1997, p. 134). Barnett asserts that the notion of reflective practice opened up a wider perspective on what it means to be a professional than the then prevailing account on which professionals were expected to apply known rules of thought in order to quickly arrive at secure and cost-effective solutions. According to Barnett, Schön's ideas do more justice to professionals' practices as his ideas contain 'a sense of a limitless repertoire of actions and interpretations that professionals can bring to the presenting situations' (Barnett, 1997, p. 138).¹² Barnett's critique of higher education focuses on

¹² Notwithstanding his appreciation, Barnett deems the notion of reflective practice inadequate for several reasons. First, although the notion of action and the notion of the self

the underlying assumption that all problems can be solved. According to Barnett, professionals are expected to assume a problem-solving or a 'knowing'-attitude: I know I can solve this situation, it is just a matter of finding the right knowledge or perfecting a skill. The assumption that a solution can be found is problematic because it denies the fact that the world is supercomplex, that is, the condition of having multiple and conflicting frameworks for comprehending the world at one's disposal and, therefore, knowing that every description of the world is disputable (Barnett, 2004). Because of this condition of the modern world, a confident and knowing-attitude is no longer possible. 'Our hold on the world is now always fragile' (Barnett, 2004, p. 250).

Barnett argues that higher education should not primarily content itself with knowledge nor skills, but with human dispositions and qualities. He favours an ontological turn in higher education. Barnett writes:

in such a world – of unpredictability and challengeability – knowledge is supplanted by being as the key term for the university. (2004, p. 71)

He argues that knowledge and skills are no longer sufficient to prepare students for a complex and uncertain world. Knowledge becomes outdated fast and, more importantly, knowledge is always insufficient because of the fact that every description of a (new) situation is disputable (Barnett, 2009). Skills, on the other hand, are insufficient because they only deal with known situations. According to Barnett, the key question for higher education is: what 'models of human being [...] may be particularly appropriate for an age of supercomplexity?' (2009, p. 440).

Education scholars Dall'Alba and Barnacle (2007), who favour an ontological turn in higher education as well, emphasise that such an ontological turn should not result in a description of a number of 'skills' or 'competences' as these notions overlook

are addressed, they remain underconceptualised (Barnett, 1997, p. 138). Second, the idea of the reflective practitioner is an excessively individualistic notion as it confines professionals' task to adequately respond to particular situations (Barnett, 1997, p. 135). Third, Schön puts extreme emphasis on action, thereby undervaluing the theoretical component (Barnett, 1997, p. 137). Fourth, Barnett deems the notion of reflective practitioner too uncritical as it situates (or confines, as Barnett writes) professionals to local situations. Professionals' scope of critique is limited to these local situations.

students' involvement, commitment and the fact that in learning, students risk themselves. Personal aspects of learning a profession are not taken into account. Instead, Dall'Alba and Barnacle argue that the question of 'what it means to be(come) a teacher, artist, physicist, historian, engineer, architect, and so on' should be the main focus of higher education programmes (Dall'Alba & Barnacle, 2007, p. 687). These questions cannot be answered decisively, according to these researchers, since professional practices evolve and renew in time. The answers have to be dynamic and the focus should be on becoming.

Barnett professes himself to be a modernist.¹³ In various passages, it becomes clear that he adheres to a modernist notion of autonomy; for instance in *Higher Education: A Critical Business* (1997) where Barnett elaborates the notion of critical being as a core concept of higher education. Widening the notion of critical thinking with critical self-reflection and critical action, higher education is in a better position, Barnett argues, to enable students to make their own choices. Autonomy is the key. Barnett writes:

Widened to embrace not just the capacities to think critically but to understand oneself critically and to act critically, higher education becomes the formation of critical persons who are not subject to the world but able to act autonomously and purposively within it. A higher education for the modern world becomes a process in which critical being is realized. (Barnett, 1997, p. 4)

In chapter 3, Barnett's notion of criticality will be scrutinised.

Harland Bloland, a scholar in higher education, asserts that Barnett does not position himself as a postmodernist. Bloland, however, deems Barnett's analysis of the current condition as supercomplex postmodernist (Bloland, 2005). Bloland summarises Barnett's analysis as 'the reality of multiplying, competing but incommensurable frameworks of meaning' and he uses it to demonstrate that Barnett holds a

¹³ For Barnett, the current condition of supercomplexity is (partly) the result of Western university's brief to 'produce new ideas' (Barnett, 2004, p. 250). Universities are expected to produce new perspectives. He refers to this brief as 'the project of critical enlightenment' (2004, p. 250).

postmodernist perspective in combination with a modernist orientation (Bloland, 2005, p. 140).

Changing practices and changing 'selves'

The underlying study stands in the above sketched young tradition that addresses the question of how to prepare students for professionals practices characterised by dispersive horizons. This study aims at contributing to this tradition by taking a critical stance towards Schön's and Barnett's work.

The main critique on Schön's notion of the reflective practitioner that is addressed in this study is twofold. The first point of critique is that the notion of the reflective practitioner remains unclear. Various scholars assert that there is considerable conceptual and practical confusion around the notion (Eraut, 1995; Erlandson, 2005; Kinsella, 2007; Newman, 1999; Procee, 2006). Notwithstanding his appreciation of Schön's notion of the reflective practitioner as it addresses as one of the first the elements of action and the self, Barnett also deems the notion underconceptualised (Barnett, 1997, p. 138). What is Schön's understanding of the self? How are the critical frames that professionals use to reflect on their knowing-in-action generated? What is the role of language?

The second point of critique, which is closely related to the first point, entails the fact that the notion of the reflective practitioner ultimately does not open up a perspective in which students learn to strive for better. Scholar in education, Peter Knight, provides a summary of the critique on the notion of the reflective practitioner and the accompanied notion of reflection-in-action that illustrates the second point of critique. Knight asserts that in Schön's account, there is a major emphasis on the ratio, while the ratio only plays a limited role in human acting. Furthermore, it is unclear how new and old thinking can be distinguished. There is too little attention for the risk of closed circle thinking as well (Knight, 2002). These points of critique all address the risk of professionals remaining stuck in the existing frameworks of the professional practice. Barnett addresses this point of critique as well when he deems the notion of reflective practitioner too uncritical as it situates professionals to 'a series of separate locales' (Barnett, 1997, p. 135). Professionals' scope of critique is limited to these local

situations. No creative framing of the world will occur. While Schön paved the way for taking seriously the rapidly changing and uncertain nature of professional practice, his account is inadequate as the prevailing professional frameworks remain intact. His account of the reflective practitioner does not provide professional higher education with a perspective that enables teachers to train students to become professionals who strive for better in a world of dispersive horizons.

Barnett, on his turn, widens the perspective of professional life by introducing the notion of supercomplexity. In a supercomplex world, professionals do not have stable descriptions of the world at their disposal nor are they able to decide what counts as right or effective interventions as every framework or description is disputable. In a world of change and supercomplexity, higher education's task is to enable students to prosper (Barnett, 2004, p. 252).

Although Barnett's account offers more clues for reflecting on how to enable students to strive for better in today's professional world compared to Schön's account, Barnett does not unconditionally embrace the increasing absence of long term orientation, the dispersion of horizons, and the concomitant uncertainty. In the end, he adheres to the notion of universal reason. He asserts that higher education should educate students to become independent individuals who are able to act in an autonomous and purposeful way. Adhering to the notion of an 'inner', autonomous and independent, rational self, Barnett not only rejects an opportunity to further explore higher education's task of preparing students for a liquid professional world, he also denies a defining characteristic of contemporary life. The position to understand the self as changeable and intertwined with the world is not just a theoretical perspective. Sociologist Richard Sennett (1998) shows that people change in and because of the practices in which they participate. Bauman, on his turn, highlights the fact that modern life (including working life) is characterised by short-term orientation and fragmentation (2000, 2007). Notions such as 'progress' or 'maturation' no longer apply. He writes:

the time-span of life as a whole is sliced into episodes dealt with 'one at a time'. Continuity is no longer the mark of improvement. (Bauman, 2000, p. 137)

Both Bauman and Sennett underline the fact that individuals change due to the changing circumstances in which they live. Their sociological analyses show that the idea of independent selves and autonomously acting human beings are merely illusions. Professionals are constructed by and in the practices in which they take part. Disruptive horizons have become a defining feature of both professional practices *and* the self.

Starting from this critique, the underlying study aims at contributing to the field of thought of which Schön and Barnett are part. In this study, the position of twenty-first century professionals being constituted by a plurality of dispersive (and thus short term) horizons is accepted as a plausible assumption, as it has not (yet) been refuted.

Nietzsche

Reflection on the issue of how to act in uncertain circumstances is not new. One of the first philosophers who have thoroughly explored the issue of uncertainty is Nietzsche. In his works, he elaborates what it means to live in a world where no certainties or fixed horizons exist.

Nietzsche asserts that the human condition is a condition of *becoming*. Nothing is stable or remains as it is. No fixed horizons exist. In a radical manner which is typical of Nietzsche, he embraces the absence of certainties. Not only does he reject the existence of absolute, unchanging truths and values, he also gives up the belief in the existence of an abstract, independent subject that precedes thinking and acting. His thought-provoking understanding of the 'self' as multiple and unstable is of special interest for the underlying study as it opens up the opportunity of further exploring the question of preparing students for contemporary professional life.

How to understand Nietzsche's notion of the self? According to Nietzsche, the self is always *becoming*; the only thing that is natural about the self is the fact that it changes: 'you are always another person' (GS, p. 174). For him, the 'self' is the variable result of the constant struggle and interplay between internal and external forces that are crossing around, in and through the individual. These forces fight for dominance and the predominant force manifests itself in the person's actions and thoughts. One could say that, in this interplay of forces, many 'selves' arise, some of

which are more powerful than others. An example to clarify Nietzsche's notion of the self. At this moment, when I am writing this introduction, it may look as if I, as an independent, invariable self, decided to be disconnected from the Internet in order not to be distracted by email and interesting websites. It is my choice to do so. This choice to be offline could, however, also be understood as the result of a number of forces each striving for dominance. The desire to be connected to my colleagues who communicate by mail and my habit of playing online computer games while being at home are in conflict with my wish to work in a disciplined manner. Fortunately, the last force dominated my actions.

Nietzsche's perspective on human agency – as resulting from its actions, or more accurately, evolving during its actions – embraces uncertainty wholeheartedly. It allows him to rethink what it means to live in a world where man has no predetermined guidance or certainties to go by. Nietzsche's unconditional acceptance of the human condition as *becoming* offers the opportunity to sincerely think through the probabilities and challenges to train today's students to become professionals who are able and willing to strive for better without knowing beforehand what 'better' entails.

3. Nietzschean philosophers on contemporary higher education

Several philosophers of education preceded this project of using Nietzsche's thoughts in an attempt to unsettle the established discourses on education (e.g. Blake, Smeyers, Smith & Standish, 1998, 2000; Coopers, 1983; Fitzsimons, 2007).¹⁴ In *Authenticity and*

¹⁴ A variety of articles have been published on 'Nietzsche and education'. Most of these articles focus on a particular theme. See for a review: Fitzsimons (2007, pp. 54 - 72). I will refer to these articles throughout this book, when appropriate.

The same applies to the published books which contain a collection of essays using Nietzsche's legacy for education. For instance, in *Nietzsche, Culture and Education*, seven articles from seven different authors have been collected and edited by philosopher Thomas Hart (2009). The unifying question of this collection is, as Hart writes in the introduction, 'how Nietzsche could be used, or abused (to borrow from Foucault) in the service of culture and education in today's world' (2009, p. xv). While this question seems to coincide with the aim of the underlying study, there are also substantial differences. To start with, several authors take a historical approach: they are mainly interested in Nietzsche's writing about the issues of culture and education. Furthermore, each chapter stands on its own. As most articles, each essay puts forward a particular Nietzsche interpretation, focusing on one particular theme. In the following chapters, I will refer to Paul van Tongeren's (2009) essay

Learning. Nietzsche's Educational Philosophy (1983), philosopher of education David Cooper takes Nietzsche's notion of authenticity as the central notion. Like Nietzsche, he criticises a one-sided understanding of authenticity as 'individual essence'. Cooper's main argument against such a notion of authenticity is that it is likely to generate a deterministic attitude towards life. Cooper criticises another one-sided notion of authenticity in which the freedom to choose is absolute as well. Following Nietzsche, Cooper argues for an alternative understanding of authenticity, which embraces both aforementioned partial notions. In this notion of authenticity, there is room for both 'situational' self-concern, that is, the ability to assess how one is and how one's situation is, and for 'projective' self-concern, that is, the ability to determine what 'would be worthwhile to aim at in life' (Cooper, 1987, p. 14). Subsequently, he elaborates an alternative perspective on education that revolves around this notion of authenticity.

In *Nietzsche, Ethics and Education. An Account of Difference* (2007), Fitzsimons' endeavour to create 'space for reflective engagement with prevailing discourses in the politics of education' revolves around Nietzsche's problematising of the notion of universal truth (p. 4). He uses different notions and ideas of Nietzsche such as the notion of perspectivism and the notion of the self to question contemporary education policies, theories and practices. In particular, he critiques liberal and democratic theories which dominate the discourses in the politics of education, for putting too much trust in the rational capacity of man. Following Nietzsche, Fitzsimons deems the idea that the human being is characterised by a rational essence, that every human being is subjected 'to the higher authority of an abstract and universal reason' inadequate for founding an ethic of education (Fitzsimons, 2007, p. ix). His main critique is that both approaches, due to their overreliance on the idea of universal reason, banish otherness in advance. There is not any room for difference or creativity. Based on this critique, Fitzsimons develops an 'ethic of difference'. This ethic refers to a perspective in which difference is valued. Starting point of this ethic of difference is that 'we occupy multiple and contradictory subject positions within social life'

since his elaboration of Nietzsche's interpretation of Bildung in relation to the concept of 'measure' touches upon at least three out the five key elements of striving for better.

(Fitzsimons, 2007, p. ix). Fitzsimons provides not only a broad picture of Nietzsche's work and thoughts on education and how it can be used to criticise predominant discourses on education, he also describes Nietzsche's relation with his intellectual predecessors such as Kant and Schopenhauer and how Nietzsche's thoughts influences philosophers who came after him.

My approach is comparable to the approach of these Nietzschean philosophers of education: I will use a number of Nietzschean notions to rethink contemporary education. The aim is to unsettle or disorder the established discourses on professional higher education and transform these discourses from within. I will explore opportunities for elaborating a new discourse that opens up possibilities for better preparing students for contemporary professional life – a life that is more and more characterised by dispersive horizons. Nietzsche's notion of the self in terms of drives which plays an important role in the studies of Cooper and Fitzsimons, will be taken as departure point of this study. Moreover, a number of Nietzschean notions, which have been addressed by these philosophers of education, will be leading in the underlying study as well: among them, the notions of the Apollinian and Dionysian, the notions of the self and of self-overcoming, Nietzsche's perspectivism, and the role of language.

In at least three respects, however, my approach differs from the aforementioned philosophers. First, I will devote a chapter to a subject which has so far received little attention in the context of 'Nietzsche and education', that is, the notion of friendship.¹⁵ Second, I focus on *professional* higher education rather than on academic higher education or education in general.¹⁶ Third, I will criticise current conceptions of professional higher education as well as, against the background of this critique, elaborate new notions. I will explore a variety of educational practices that are opened up by these new notions. These practices mainly concern day-to-day educational practices of teachers.

¹⁵ An exception is Steel's (2014) article 'On the need for Dionysian education in schools today'. Steel points to the importance of 'cultus' for Dionysian festivals and Nietzsche's desire for friendship. He does not, however, elaborate on Nietzsche's ideas on friendship extensively.

¹⁶ As for the articles, most of these are dedicated to education in general or higher education.

With respect to exploring new educational practices, I run counter to the approach of a group of four philosophers of education who together wrote the book *Thinking Again. Education After Postmodernism* (Blake, Smeyers, Smith & Standish, 1998). In this book, they use a number of conceptual tools of previous postmodernist thinkers to rethink education. According to them, our current postmodern condition is characterised by an obsession for efficient solutions for problems. This obsession causes ‘bewilderment’ (Blake et al., 1998, p. 4) and ‘intellectual paralysis’ (p. 5). As they want to resist this obsession, they deliberately do not offer a coherent answer or advice. ‘We have no blueprint [for what schools should be like, HJ] – the very idea of a blueprint is at odds with the argument of this book’ (1998, p. 189).¹⁷ My analysis of contemporary educational life corresponds with theirs. Unlike them, however, I describe a mixture of educational practices. I even end the book with a number of practical recommendations. My proposals are, however, not solutions in the form of a manual or a detailed road map. They are suggestions or, rather conceptual experiments meant as catalysts for constructive debate on how students could be better prepared for contemporary professional practices. In that sense, I stay close to Nietzsche’s motto: ‘Let’s try it!’ (GS, p. 62). For Nietzsche, critical thinking is both critically questioning reality and searching for and experimenting with new possibilities, as I will argue in chapter 3. The underlying study is therefore an audacious attempt to break open the existing discourse on professional higher education and to look for new ways of understanding higher education.

4. Nietzsche’s educational philosophy

Before enthusiastically embarking upon Nietzsche’s works, one bridge has to be crossed. How can Nietzsche’s thoughts be used for professional higher education while Nietzsche is known to be an advocate of elite higher education? Repeatedly, in alternative terms and in various works, he argues that large numbers of students and

¹⁷ In *Education in an Age of Nihilism* (2000), Blake, Smeyers, Smith and Standish continue their search to rethink education. In the last section of this book, they offer a few advisory ‘fragments’ for educational management based on a Nietzschean-inspired creed: ‘laugh a lot, especially at the latest idiocies’ (2000, p. 228).

higher education do not go together well. Higher education is suited for the few, a small group of privileged students. In his time, he was convinced that the democratisation of higher education had ruined German culture (see for example: *Twilight of the Idols* (1888/2005), p. 189, 190). Rather than using Nietzsche's educational thoughts on nineteenth century higher education to plea for a discourse on striving for better by all students, it would be more adequate to use his thoughts to support the current emphasis on excellence in professional higher education, where no money and time is spared to challenge the best students to become even better.

However, it would be a mistake to confine the significance of Nietzsche's legacy for contemporary reflection on professional higher education to Nietzsche's explicit statements about (German) higher education. For one thing, his educational thoughts cannot be applied directly to today's professional higher education because the twenty-first century differs in many aspects from the late nineteenth century. In Nietzsche's time, there was a clear distinction between the educated elite and the illiterate masses, whereas the group of literate people is now much bigger. In Europe, well over three-quarters of the adults have attained at least upper secondary education. About 29 % has attained tertiary level of education (OECD, 2014b, p. 42). Furthermore, Nietzsche's educational philosophy cannot be separated from his entire oeuvre. As Cooper (1983) argues, the understanding of Nietzsche's educational philosophy requires a comprehension of his broader philosophy. Not surprisingly, many of Nietzsche's critical remarks on German higher education and thoughts about the purpose and content of true higher education refer to a number of notions developed in his writings on moral, anthropological and epistemological issues. Especially the notions of self-transcendence, self-control and self-styling form the foundation of an important part of Nietzsche's educational philosophy. In chapter 2, I will elaborate on these notions.

I will try to demonstrate in this thesis that Nietzsche's legacy provides the conceptual tools for rethinking contemporary discourse on professional higher education. The core of Nietzsche's work is criticising culture, including education. Like many Nietzschean philosophers of education, I will use Nietzsche's ideas in order to convert current discourses.

Placing Nietzsche's educational thoughts on German higher education and his aversion to the democratisation of education into his broader philosophy brings to light a surprising inconsistency regarding his thoughts on education. Nietzsche wants to transform the then present culture into a life-affirming culture and he is convinced that it is possible to create a new world – "to create new 'things'" – by creating new names and valuations (GS, p. 70). However, with regard to education, he does not attempt to create a new discourse (see also Bingham, 2001). He treats the forces which dominate higher education discourses and which 'make' it a re-productive undertaking, as insurmountable. I will deviate from Nietzsche in this respect. In this study, I will resume a number of notions from Nietzsche's broader oeuvre and use them to scrutinise contemporary higher education discourse. I will explore these notions from within Nietzsche's thinking in order to position them in, and translate them to the current situation in professional higher education. The choice to take Nietzsche's overall legacy as starting point not only provides a better understanding of his educational thoughts, but also makes it possible to use his thoughts as conceptual tools to reflect on existing professional higher education discourses in search for better.

5. Five elements of striving for better

This study distinguishes five key elements with regard to striving for better – uncertainty, excellence, critical thinking, friendship and learning through ups and downs – which can be traced back to Nietzsche's thoughts.

Human beings prefer the certainty of the known order to not-knowing: uncertainty is a state of being that, according to Nietzsche, most people try to avoid. They tend to hold on to the way things (including themselves) are – Nietzsche calls this tendency: the Apollinian. Challenging this tendency is hard, since it has been prevailing for centuries. Yet, if no room is given to the Dionysian (the human tendency to transcend order), excellence will never be achieved. Excellence, understood as leaving behind 'old' routines of thought and action and embracing new ones, requires the ability of self-control. This ability to retain oneself from giving in to rules and truths, especially those that prevent one from striving for better, has to be practiced. A critical

examination of forces that work on, in and through oneself is necessary in order to know which routines hinder one to excel. In this Nietzschean perspective, critical thinking is not an exercise in logic or an attempt to determine the extent to which our truths resemble reality. As one's perspective and one's knowledge of that perspective coincide in Nietzsche's perspectival view, a critical 'yet, but' goes beyond the present. A critical 'yes, but' involves an attempt to search for better truths. A Nietzschean critical thinker takes the freedom to apprehend contemporary truths as temporary truths and to search for better. This quest for excellence can be a solitary and harsh undertaking: one can get caught up in an ongoing process of severe self-questioning. At several places in his work, Nietzsche expresses his need for friends (or at least the illusion of friends) in order not to perish in this search for better. Friends offer a place to rest and to recover from the constant urge for truth. The main purpose of friendship is, however, a common search for truth. Friends scrutinise each other's beliefs and opinion. It requires contradiction. Friendship is a means in the service of the search for truth. Openness to comments on one's truths, even when they are made by a friend, does not come easy. It is hard to recognise one's human condition of finiteness and imperfection. And yet, Nietzsche deems the embracement of one's imperfections as a prerequisite for excellence. One's imperfections and failures are incentives to continue to reach for a higher level. Working on oneself, that is, setting personal, ambitious goals and trying to attain these goals, requires one to be resilient.

The importance of these five elements is recognised in the literature on professional higher education as well as in Dutch policy context. *Tijdschrift voor Hoger Onderwijs*, a Dutch journal specialising in higher education, published a special issue on excellence in 2014 ('Themanummer Excellentie in het Hoger Onderwijs', 2013/2014). In this issue, four of the five elements of striving for better are addressed. The subject of friendship was not touched upon; however, the question as of what kind of relationships between teacher and students stimulate students to excel was raised and discussed several times. Furthermore, in the aforementioned advice of The Education Council of the Netherlands to the Minister of Education, Culture and Science, the elements of perseverance, critical thinking, uncertainty (not *ad verbum* but in terms of 'not-routine skills') and excellence (in terms of 'innovation', 'adaptability'

and ‘proactive attitude’) were deemed important components of today’s professional higher education in the Netherlands (Onderwijsraad, 2014). The universities of applied sciences also underwrite the importance of teaching students the ability to adapt as well as respond to changes in an active and critical manner (Vereniging Hogescholen, 2015). Again, the theme of friendship has not been touched upon, but the term ‘cooperation’ all the more. From a philosophical point of view, it is as if Nietzsche has been warmly welcomed in Dutch professional higher education.

A closer look into current discourses on education practices and policies reveals, however, a more complicated picture. Many policy makers, researchers, and teachers adhere to the notion of students and professionals as autonomous individuals who can freely choose how to act and what to think. Though the necessity of preparing students for a professional life in which the (professional) landscapes can change overnight is widely recognised, the assumption that human beings are not affected by these changes underlies a large part of educational research and practice. The elements of striving for better are often understood as resulting from independent, autonomous selves. It appears to be a challenge to wholeheartedly – but also critically – embrace the human condition of dispersive horizons.

6. Philosophical methodology

This study aims at contributing to teachers’ and policy makers’ efforts to prepare students for today’s and tomorrow’s challenging professional practices. However, it does not present a fully developed model for thinking about professional education, nor does it offer ready-to-use guidelines for improving educational practices. It aims at contributing to professional higher education’s efforts to properly prepare students by reopening the possibility of a new educational discourse that moves beyond the language of rational and autonomous individuals. I will use Nietzsche’s conceptual tools – of which his understanding of the human being as the variable result of the constant struggle and interplay of forces is the most prominent – to criticise and undermine established discourses and to tentatively seek for new ones.

In the coming chapters, I take up the five elements of striving for better as worked out by Nietzsche. I explain them, reflect on them, look at them from various perspectives, before using (or abusing) them to deliberate about and experiment with professional higher educational discourse in the twenty-first century. I use these five perspectives to examine and question current professional higher education discourses and to look for openings in order to create a new discourse that brings into the picture educational practices that better prepare students for their future professional life. In each chapter, several of such possible educational practices are sketched.

This instrumental use of Nietzsche's thoughts seems to be in line, or better, to fit his philosophy. But Nietzsche had in mind a particular purpose. Rather than realising particular given goals or serving predominant interests, Nietzsche puts *life* at the centre of attention. A quote from *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History of Life*, one of the four books of *Untimely Meditations* (1997/1873-1876), illustrates Nietzsche's life promoting philosophy. In this quote, he encourages his readers to *use* his ideas. He writes: '[k]nowledge ... [that, HJ] no longer acts as an agent for transforming the outside world' does not serve life (UM II, p. 78). Knowledge and ideas have no intrinsic value. Both should be used in the quest for better.

With regard to the interpretation of Nietzsche's thoughts, I use mainly primary works. This choice allows me to look at Nietzsche afresh and to stay close to his ideas. I will explore the ideas of this nineteenth century philosopher in order to try to think independently from the present. I will be, as it were, a 'wanderer'. '[O]ne has to proceed like a wanderer who wants to know how high the towers in a town are: he leaves the town' *pace* Nietzsche (GS, p. 244). I will dwell on Nietzsche's thoughts in order to examine present discourses on professional higher education. Mainly in footnotes, I refer to works of Nietzschean philosophers of education which I have studied in order to highlight my position in the field of Nietzschean thinkers on education.

Books

Nietzsche's numerous books are not among the easiest readings. Though I have read many of his works, I have limited my explorations to the published works.¹⁸ Three of Nietzsche's books are taken as key texts: his first book, *The Birth of Tragedy*, serves as a source for chapter 1; *The Gay Science* is the main source of inspiration for the following three chapters; and, *On the Genealogy of Morality* provides input for chapter 5.¹⁹ The focus on the three mentioned texts allowed me to read these books several times – each time in a new light. This rereading helped me to understand Nietzsche's thoughts better and better. Rereading *The Gay Science*, for instance, helped me to reach a better understanding of Nietzsche's notion of critical thinking (see chapter 3). At the first reading – when I focused attention on the contents of the aphorisms – I tried to construct a coherent, unambiguous and clear Nietzschean concept of critical thinking. At the second reading – when I began to understand the importance of the aphoristic style – I developed a different notion of critical thinking that did more justice to Nietzsche's experimental and liberating spirit. One could say that I took Nietzsche's instruction how to read (his works) to heart: in the preface of *On the Genealogy of Morality*, he writes that the skill or art of reading requires 'ruminatation' (GM, p. 9).

¹⁸ One of Nietzsche's early unpublished writings, *On the Future of our Educational Institutions*, is relevant for the underlying study as it explicitly addresses the issue of education. Unfortunately, Nietzsche did not deem this text fit for publishing. I therefore do not discuss this text in detail. In chapter 2, I will briefly turn to it.

¹⁹ In addition to *The Birth of Tragedy*, *The Gay Science*, and *On the Genealogy of Morality*, I used *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History of Life* (1873-1876/1997), *Twilight of the Idols* (1888/2005) and *Human, All Too Human* (1886/1996). In the second chapter, for instance, I refer to several passages in *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History of Life* (1873-1876/1997) and *Twilight of the Idols* (1888/2005) in order to highlight the pivotal role of the notions of self-transcendence, self-control and self-styling – which he elaborated on in *The Gay Science* – with regard to Nietzsche's critical remarks on late nineteenth century German higher education. In the chapter entitled "Friendship", I use some of his ideas on friendship from *Human, All Too Human*.

7. Overview of the chapters

Chapter 1: Uncertainty

The subject of the first chapter is the notion of uncertainty. Nietzsche explores uncertainty in its most radical form by introducing the Apollinian, the human pursuit of order and coherence, and the Dionysian, the human tendency to nullify order and idealisation. The advantages and shortcomings of both human tendencies and Nietzsche's plea to restore the balance between both forces are explored. The final part of this chapter deals with contemporary professional higher education. Three educational models are elaborated: a commonly used model that manifests a one-sided Apollinian approach, a model where the Dionysian dominates, and a model that combines the Apollinian and the Dionysian. I argue that in order to become professionals who are able to stand their ground and to strive for better, students need an educational environment where they are encouraged to deploy both tendencies.

Chapter 2: Excellence

Since Nietzsche denounces the reassuring belief in the existence of an abstract, independent subject that precedes thinking and acting, and replaces it by the notions of a variable self arising in the interplay of forces, self-transcendence, self-control and self-styling, he is in the position to rethink what it means to live in a world characterised by dispersive horizons. I argue that these notions are fundamental to Nietzsche's educational philosophy. The application of Nietzsche's thoughts to contemporary professional higher education discourse opens up a perspective where excellence can be understood as transcending oneself, rather than being better than others. Excellence is then the ability to let go of 'old' routines in thinking and doing and to embrace new ones. It prevents students from getting stuck in rules and truths that no longer apply as well as being at the mercy of the predominant forces. This Nietzschean understanding of excellence puts the current debate on excellence and the huge investments in honours programmes and colleges in a new light: it offers a perspective in which *all* students can learn to excel. Educational practices come into

the picture which better prepare students for a professional life that is characterised by an increasing pace of change.

Chapter 3: Critical thinking

The ability to excel, that is, to let go of ‘old’ routines in thinking and doing and to embrace new ones, requires a critical attitude. In Dutch professional higher education, training students to become critical professionals who are able to contribute to the innovation of practice is considered pivotal for its mission. However, what ‘critical thinking’ means remains rather vague. In this chapter, I elaborate a new notion of critical thinking, using Nietzsche’s perspectival understanding of reality, his emphasis on the importance of courageously experimenting and his use of humour and paradox. Rather than understanding critical thinking as a neutral, context-independent conceptual skill, a Nietzschean-inspired notion of critical thinking means ‘suspiciously’ questioning the underlying assumptions, values and truths of what one sees as reality and audaciously experimenting in order to create new truths and realities. The introduction of a Nietzschean notion of critical thinking into the context of today’s professional higher education makes it possible to investigate what consequences it would have if students were trained to apprehend truths as (con)temporary truths. A confrontation of this Nietzschean-inspired notion of critical thinking with Barnett’s notion of ‘critical being’ further clarifies the opportunities that Nietzsche’s thinking offers for today’s professional higher education. In accordance with Nietzsche’s philosophy – ‘To be a Nietzschean, one must not be a Nietzschean’ (Kaufmann, 1974, p. 403) –, I weigh the advantages and disadvantages of Nietzsche’s notion of critical thinking in order to subsequently create a notion of critical thinking that takes serious both Nietzsche’s liberating, experimental and creating spirit, and today’s educational horizon.

Chapter 4: Friendship

As the search for better can be a demanding and solitary activity, Nietzsche deems friendship a necessary place where one can recover from this never-ending quest. More importantly, friends contribute to this search. In today’s professional life, friendships

might be relevant as well. Professionals are expected to improve the innovative and competitive capacity of professional practices. Yet, as individuals, professionals are hardly able to renew the truths of a discipline. Teamwork is at the core of innovation due to the complexity of twenty-first century life. Students should, therefore, be trained to become professionals who are able and willing to jointly strive for better. However, in professional higher education teachers and students are not accustomed to partaking in a joint quest for truth. In regular higher education contexts, the terms 'teacher' and 'student' are associated with persons who are unequals, possessing different levels of truth and having different goals. It is not common practice for teacher and students to strive for better together. In this chapter, the probabilities and challenges of introducing a Nietzschean-inspired concept of friendship as a metaphor for the interactions between teacher and students are explored. What can be learned from this metaphor with respect to stimulating students to strive for better in collaboration with others? After elaborating on Nietzsche's notion of friendship and comparing it Plato's ideal of friendship, I explore two commonly used metaphors for the interaction between teacher and students in professional higher education: teacher and student respectively as supplier and consumer of knowledge and as master and apprentice. In contrast to Nietzsche's understanding of friendship, these metaphors emphasize the asymmetry between teacher and students in various respects and do not stimulate teacher and students to initiate a joint quest for new truths. In order to augment current resources for thinking about the interactions between teacher and students that promote a joint quest for truths, I introduce the Nietzschean metaphor of truth seeking friendship. Describing teacher and students *as if* they are truth seeking friends, I explore the responsibilities of teacher and students for bringing about a joint search for truth. I finish the exploration of this metaphor by elaborating the challenges and benefits of truth seeking friendships between teachers and students in contemporary professional higher education.

Chapter 5: Learning through ups and downs

Learning through ups and downs is a prerequisite for excellence. Time and again questioning prevailing truths and reaching for self-set goals requires resilience. The

resumption of Nietzsche's notion of a non-religious, life-affirmative ascetic attitude and his notion of the self unfolds a view in which an attitude of learning through ups and downs can be stimulated in several ways. In this chapter, I start by exploring the widely accepted ideal of a meritocratic society and the concomitant culture of measurement. In professional higher education contexts where this ideal is highly valued, surprisingly little appreciation is given to the ability to learn through ups and downs. Then, I turn to Nietzsche. Nietzsche sharply criticises cultures that only allow for practices of measuring and comparing. His critique is interesting since, from this critique, he elaborates his ideas of learning through ups and downs. For Nietzsche, the embracement of pain and displeasure are necessary ingredients for developing an attitude of learning through ups and downs. Next, I focus on contemporary higher education. How can students be trained to become professionals who persevere in working on themselves in the face of failure and stagnation? After criticising Nietzsche's emphasis on distance and solitude with regard to the development of this ability, I explore the opportunities teachers have to create a learning environment that stimulates students to develop an attitude of learning through ups and downs.

Chapter 6: Versuchen wir's! – Nietzschean experiments

In this chapter, two factual cases are described. As a teacher at The Hague University of Applied Sciences, I have been involved in both cases. The first case relates to an intensive, one-week training programme called *close reading* that has been developed for first-year students of the bachelor programme Business IT & Management. The second case involves the design and development of a project management course of ten weeks by a group of eleven senior students – also students of the bachelor programme Business IT & Management at The Hague University of Applied Sciences.

The emphasis in this chapter is put on the *description* of both cases. I will use the Nietzschean inspired notions which have been developed in this study to describe both cases. These descriptions should be understood as *spielerei* – as a light hearted play with words – as well as a *serious* undertaking. Some fundamental assumptions underlying existing education practices are questioned. The application of Nietzschean inspired notions can have a disruptive effect on existing educational orders. In this

way, the chapter aims at contributing to the project of breaking ground for new discourses on professional higher education allowing for educational practices that better prepare students for twenty-first century professional life.

Chapter 7: Pro tempore

The greatest challenge of this study was the impassioned and never-ending inner dialogue between 'me, as a philosopher' and 'me, as a teacher'. As a philosopher, I wanted to give Nietzsche his dues for his dangerously liberating, critical and untimely thinking. As a teacher wanting to use his thought to better prepare students for professional practices which are more and more characterised by dispersive horizons, I needed to take the edge off Nietzsche's radical thinking in order to make them acceptable. In this chapter, I outline the issues of debate. Furthermore, I will look back and give a brief self-reflection as well as look forward. Based on this study, a number of recommendations are given. They are meant as a catalyst for constructive debate on how teachers and policy makers in professional higher education can further improve the quality of education.

CHAPTER 1: UNCERTAINTY¹

The social structure of Dutch society is changing radically. Being a welfare state for decennia, the Netherlands is becoming a participation society. Public services are cut back. In this new discourse, key terms are participation, independency, prevention, interdisciplinary teamwork, and efficiency. At the same time, public social tasks are decentralised to local government. The above sketch is coming from the report of a Dutch commission assessing the state of Dutch higher education in social work (Verkenningcommissie Hoger Sociaal Agogisch Onderwijs, 2014). The commission points to the necessity of improving the quality of higher education in the area of social work as well as renewing the range of training opportunities in professional higher education as the requirements for social workers have changed drastically.

The sector of social work in the Netherlands is not unique. Professionals in health care, law, information technology or management face radical transformations. They function under harsh market pressures: they have to be accountable, while being pressed to be faster, more flexible and innovative than before. Today, many professionals have to deal with an increasing amount of uncertainties in their field due to the acceleration of the speed of change (Rosa, 2010). These conditions require the ability to let go of the current state of affairs and to live with the uncertainty of ‘not knowing’.

The necessity of training students to deal with uncertainty is generally recognised. Scholars both in America and Europe are searching for ways to train professionals to become more capable of performing effectively in complex and rapidly changing environments (Shapiro, Lauritzen & Irving, 2011). Uncertainty is, however, not a highly appreciated notion in the established discourses on education (Blake et al,

¹ Earlier versions of Chapter 1 have been published in 2011 as ‘De kunst in het kritische denken’ in *Filosofisch houvast in roerige tijden*, edited by Marli Huijter and Frank Meester. Den Haag: De Haagse Hogeschool, p. 95-106, in 2012 as ‘Professionals opleiden in én voor onzekere tijden. Een nietzscheaanse aanpak in het beroepsonderwijs’, in *Filosofie & Praktijk* 33 (4): 33-48, and in 2013 as ‘Learning and Teaching in Uncertain Times: A Nietzschean Approach in Professional Higher Education’, in *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 47: 548-563.

2000). Scholars of education speak of 'troubling times', as the title of a 2012 conference on professional practice, education and learning illustrates: 'Professions and Professional Learning in Troubling Times: Emerging Practices and Transgressive Knowledges'.² Peter Gardner's (1993) study of the way teachers deal with uncertainties in the classroom (such as issues on which experts do not agree) reveals a negative attitude towards uncertainty: teachers do not like to be uncertain about what they perceive as certain.

A common response to uncertainty is to reduce it – or even better, to wipe it away. The assumption of this approach is that uncertainty has only disadvantages. That assumption is, however, not correct as several contemporary authors have argued. The sociologist and social commentator Frank Furedi (2009) deems education systems to be overprotective of children (and students). Out of fear that they are not able to handle the rapid transformations, teachers (and parents) see children as at risk rather than as risk takers. Instead of training children to adapt to forces which are not of their making, teachers should help children to decide how to strive for desirable goals (Furedi, 2009). Barnett (2009), on his turn, reformulates learning as a 'coming-into-active-doubt'. Since one no longer knows what counts as learning – according to Barnett, competing definitions of learning exist – one's understanding of learning has to include some notion of 'going on in a world in which there are no non-contestable rules for going on' (Barnett, 2011, p. 13). The inclusion of this existential sense of uncertainty in the notion of what learning is enables educators, as Barnett writes, to better equip the students for today's (professional) world. Biesta (2014) resists the current tendency of making education a risk-free undertaking as well. He argues that if we care about making possible the subjectness of our children and students, we should acknowledge and embrace the weakness of education, that is, 'the acknowledgement that education isn't a mechanism and shouldn't be turned into one' (Biesta, 2014, p. 4).

In line with these authors, this chapter explores the potential advantages of making uncertainty part of professional learning and teaching. Rather than problematising

² See for more information on this conference that was organised by ProPel, an international network at the University of Stirling, that promotes research and knowledge exchange in leading issues of professional practice, education, and learning: <http://www.propel.stir.ac.uk/conference2012/>. Last seen: 2015-1-1.

uncertainty and searching for ways to eliminate it, I will investigate the pros and cons of embedding uncertainty in the educational practices of institutes of applied sciences.

I will dwell on the ideas of uncertainty which Nietzsche depicted in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872/1967). In this book, he recognises two forces: the Apollinian, that is, the pursuit of order and coherence, and the Dionysian, that is, the human tendency to nullify all systematisation and idealisation. Uncertainty is part of the Dionysian. These two forces coexist and are dependent on each other. Both forces are continually striving to dominate. As a result, the Apollinian reigns at one moment, the Dionysian at the other. Nietzsche argues that in Western culture the Apollinian prevails and he pleads for more room to be created for the Dionysian, in order to restore the balance between the two forces.

Nietzsche explores uncertainty in its most radical form. For him, it is a fundamental notion, necessary to understand life. By starting with Nietzsche's radical thoughts about uncertainty, this chapter aims to sincerely grasp the probabilities and challenges of embedding uncertainty in the learning and teaching processes of professional education.

This chapter consists of five parts. First, I examine Peter Gardner's analysis of the way teachers often deal with certainties and uncertainties in the classroom (1993). I argue that his analysis stills holds today. Despite its popularity, the described approach proves to be an inadequate ground for preparing students for contemporary professional life that is increasingly characterised by short term horizons. Second, I describe Nietzsche's notion of the Apollinian, as well as the advantages and shortcomings of this human tendency. As Nietzsche considers Socrates to be an exponent of the Apollinian, I clarify Nietzsche's critique on the Apollinian by describing Socrates' way of examining issues. In the third part, Nietzsche's notion of the Dionysian is explored. The disadvantages and advantages will be outlined as well. The topic of the fourth section is Nietzsche's plea to restore the balance between the Apollinian and the Dionysian. A balance between these two forces offers the opportunity to engage in ways of thinking and acting one could never have imagined, pace Nietzsche. The final part deals with contemporary educational practices. I elaborate on three educational models starting with a model on an Apollinian reading,

namely pedagogic dualism. Then, I describe a model where the Dionysian dominates, and finally I elucidate a model that combines the Apollinian and the Dionysian. I argue that, if we want to enable students to stand their ground in a (professional) world characterised by dispersive horizons, an educational environment is required in which students are encouraged to deploy both tendencies.

1. Today's pedagogic dualism

In 'Uncertainty, Teaching and Personal Autonomy: An Inquiry into a Pedagogic Dualism', Peter Gardner (1993) outlines two principles concerning the way teachers deal with certainties and uncertainties in education. Teachers often teach students certainties in an authoritative way, 'geared to achieving acceptance' (Gardner, 1993, p. 158). However, when dealing with areas of disagreement and uncertainty, they encourage professionals-to-be to explore these problematic issues themselves and to choose their own standpoint. In case of uncertainties, students are expected to develop autonomy.

Gardner argues that, on this pedagogic dualism, students have to be confronted with uncertainties of substance, if educators want to develop students' autonomy. Yet, teachers should prevent students from developing the idea that whenever they are assigned to finding out the truth for themselves, no correct answers exist or no clear distinction between right and wrong can be established. In order to prevent the devaluation of students' search, some degree of epistemic optimism – the belief that answers can be given with considerable degrees of certainty, now, or in the near future – and epistemic successes is needed (Gardner, 1993). Moreover, teachers have to prevent students from thinking that they are entering unexplored areas. Although no conclusive evidence might be available – for instance, when students out in the field are confronted with other disciplines or complex issues – it does not mean that knowledge is not available at all nor that it cannot be made available. Students should have a realistic idea of what it means to explore an uncertain world. Gardner approves of the pedagogic dualism that he recognises in the educational practice, but he warns teachers to handle it with care.

To what extent does this pedagogic model hold today? In the last decades, a revolution has taken place in higher education: students have become acting, rather than knowing persons. '[N]ow what is at issue is a student's ability to gain information from the databases and much less the student's own mastery of a knowledge field' (Barnett, 2009, p. 430). Twenty-first century students are trained to be(come) acting professionals. And yet, Gardner's pedagogic dualism is still used in today's educational practices. The first principle, authoritative teaching of certainties, can be recognised in the taken for granted idea that scientific knowledge is useful to solve clearly defined, more or less familiar problems in the day-to-day professional practice. Students mainly have to learn how to apply this knowledge. The rise of transferable skills and general skills in higher education underscores the still prevalent certainty that proper ways of acting exist. An authoritative way of teaching seems appropriate in these areas. The second principle, the *laissez faire* attitude towards uncertainty, can be recognised in situations where professional life is uncertain. Whenever students are unsure of how to act because no certain ways of acting are available, they are encouraged to experiment in order to find their own way. By perceiving professionals(-to-be) as *reflective practitioners*, Schön (1983, 1987) was one of the first to focus the attention to the second principle of the pedagogic dualism. At times, professionals can no longer rely on the *body of knowledge* of the discipline and their *knowing-in-action*. In new, complex, unclear situations, these sources of knowledge do not offer any solutions, according to Schön (1983, 1987). Professionals find their way in these uncertain situations while reflecting on their knowing-in-action and at the same time experimenting with new actions. Schön's ideas are still influential in professional education. Large numbers of papers on reflective practice and education are published in peer-reviewed journals in different professional disciplines. A list of papers from different disciplines illustrates the ongoing popularity of Schön's thoughts: Rosin, 2015 (counselling); Wanda, Wilson and Fowler, 2014 (nursing); Morin and Waysdorf, 2013 (law); Tembrioti and Tsangaridou, 2014 (dance); and Dyba, Maiden and Glass, 2014 (engineering). This summary of publications, which is far from complete, shows that pedagogic dualism model still prevails in professional education systems.

And yet, the survival of this dualism is remarkable, since pedagogic dualism has a clear flaw: in the application of the pedagogic dualism, the uncertainty is never on the side of the authority. The authoritative side is not uncertain about its certainties. If contemporary higher education indeed wants students to become professionals who are able to function in complex and changing professional environment, this model is no longer appropriate. In order to further develop this critique, I elaborate on Nietzsche's notions of the Apollinian and the Dionysian.

2. The Apollinian tendency to order

In philosophy, broadly speaking, there are two ways of looking at life. On the one hand, one can understand life as a continuous *becoming*; i.e. everything is becoming, nothing remains as it is.³ On the other hand, one can understand life as a given order of *beings* (the way people, animals, plants and things are). Nietzsche describes as Apollinian the human tendency to construct the world as an ordered reality. By using concepts and perspectives, man makes reality transparent and manageable.

The transformation of the world into an ordered reality presumes that things exist. For Nietzsche, this is not the case. It is an illusion to suppose that the world is a given order of *beings*. The world, according to Nietzsche, is only *becoming*.

And yet, he considers the Apollinian to be an essential human condition. Due to the working of the human brains and intellect, man cannot but perceive the world as a collection of *beings*. Language reinforces the assumption that things exist: 'this is a tree', 'that is a bush'. The use of these fixating categories prevents man from grasping the essence of the world, that is, *becoming*. One only makes arbitrary distinctions with these notions. Even *becoming* becomes a fixed abstraction, when we make it a concept.

The Apollinian has its advantages. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche is clear: the human being needs the illusion of an understandable and coherent world in order to protect himself against the torments, inconceivability, paradoxes and futilities of

³ The concept of becoming is part of contemporary philosophical debates. For an overview of this concept in the work of Bergson, Nietzsche, Deleuze and Darwin see *The Nick of Time: Politics, Evolution, and the Untimely* (2004) of E. Grosz.

existence. Human beings need order, any order, in order to be able to act. Nietzsche writes:

that by means of it [the entire world of suffering, HJ] the individual may be impelled to realize the redeeming vision, and then, sunk in contemplation of it, sit quietly in his tossing bark, amid the waves. (BT, p. 45)

In educational settings full use is made of this beneficial aspect of the Apollinian. Teachers tell students that the world is intelligible and teachers expect them to act according to the order into which they are initiated. A student trained in collaborative processes between people will invariably take a problem in an organisation as an issue between people. A student skilled in building information systems will take the same problem as a shortage or lack of data exchange. Both students will act according to the image they have of the situation.

The Greek philosopher Socrates is, according to Nietzsche, an exponent of the Apollinian. He sees Socrates as the prototype of the theoretical man.⁴ This theoretical man lives with the unshakable confidence that the world can be made comprehensible and coherent. He lives (or wants to live) in a definite, rational and well-balanced order. He dedicates his life to the pursuit of truth. In a Socratic culture, an optimistic ‘belief in the earthly happiness of all, [...] the belief in the possibility of such a general intellectual culture’ rules (BT, p. 111). The Apollinian rules: consistency, order and thoughtfulness characterise Socrates’ approach. A striking example can be found in *The Republic*, one of the, probably, fictional dialogues of Socrates written down by Plato.

⁴ Philosopher of education Sean Steel (2014), who investigates on what a Dionysian education might look like in a modern-day school setting, emphasises the anti-Dionysian forces when referring to the “rationalistic optimism” of the theoretical man. Steel posits that after *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche is no longer interested in the antagonism between Apollinian and Dionysian; Nietzsche shifts the attention to the opposition between the Dionysian and the anti-Dionysian. Steel takes the anti-Dionysian forces as the focus of his study.

Socrates as exponent of the Apollinian

In *The Republic*, some men, among them Socrates, have a conversation in the house of Polemarchus, a successful immigrant who was one of a group of people who were striving for democracy in Athens circa 400 BC. The central question of the dialogue is: what is justice? Are consequences the most important reason to follow the rules or is moral behaviour in itself valuable? Socrates is looking for a definition of 'the whole conduct of life – how each of us can live his life in the most profitable way' (Plato, *The Republic*, 344e).

Socrates is, however, not just interested in the right answer. Later in the discussion, he proposes to the participants in the dialogue to judge themselves with regard to the way they live and have been living. Rather than arguing with one another in order to prove themselves right, he wants them to critically examine their statements and to search for counter-arguments in order to test their statements. Socrates wants to persuade the interlocutors to put the testing of their lives in the centre of the attention in order to distinguish between right and wrong. 'Don't you think it's a disgrace, and a sure sign of poor education, to be forced to rely on an extraneous justice – that of masters or judges – for want of a sense of justice of one's own?' (Plato, *The Republic*, 405b).

What does this testing mean? When the interlocutors account for their actions, Socrates examines to what extent their answers to the question of just behaviour is consistent and clear. Can their answers pass the critical test of reason? Do they overlook any possibilities? 'Or is it sometimes right to behave in these ways, and sometimes wrong?' (Plato, *The Republic*, 331c). Socrates not only examines the individual statements, he also connects the statements to each other and examines whether they fit together. If their statements form a consistent unity, if the one follows from the other, Socrates subjects the underlying assumptions to a critical examination. To what extent are they valid? Although he does not explicitly compare the statements to the interlocutors' ways of living, Socrates values the way someone acts highly: '[a]nd judging by the evidence of your whole way of life, I believe you when you say you are really not convinced' (Plato, *The Republic*, 368b).

Socrates' systematic approach is also manifest in the way he keeps the examination focused on the goal of the conversation. He does so by regularly summarising the conversation and by summing up the main conclusions. More than once Socrates wonders whether a chosen path or a path to be taken will contribute to the examination of the central problem.

In short, Socrates relates all contributions of his interlocutors to each other. Whenever he thinks he is on to something inconsistent or unclear, he continues to examine it until his interlocutor gives an unambiguous, specific and 'as perfect as possible' answer to the question of accounting for one's way of living.

In addition to the critical and systematic examination of the answers, Socrates argues that a particular attitude of the interlocutors is necessary, if they want to learn to judge the way they live and have lived so far themselves. First of all, they need to feel strongly about the issue at stake, or better, the problem at hand. Although the dialogue is about concrete problems, the interlocutors also need to maintain the necessary distance from the issue so as to avoid being carried away by emotion. Third, one should approach the other in an unprovoking way, calmly and with an open mind. The interlocutors should not let emotions guide them because these will lead them away from the search for the justification of their lives.

Another precondition is that every participant in the conversation should be open to whatever contribution is made to the examination, including his own. 'No need for reluctance. Your audience is neither ignorant, nor sceptical, nor hostile' (Plato, *The Republic*, 450d).

Both the description of the systematic and logical approach to the critical examination and the description of the required attitude of the interlocutors show that Socrates puts 'knowing' first and foremost. Knowing is the path along which the interlocutors search for the definition of a way of life that is valid for everyone. Whenever one is willing to search hard enough, it is possible to find the truth, that is, the essence of reality. If one knows – or better: has found – the truth, the proper thing to do, follows automatically.

Nietzsche acknowledges that man needs the Apollinian. Since Socrates, mankind has focused its massive strength and power on the production of knowledge. This worldwide tendency has made 'knowing' prevail over 'the practical, i.e., egoistic aims of individuals and peoples' (BT, p. 96). Nietzsche argues that this Socratic 'turning point' has prevented humanity from depositing itself in a self-destructive spiral of wars and migrations. The pleasure of Socratic insight, which Nietzsche considers to be part of human nature, kept the excesses of the warlike instincts in control.

The Apollinian makes the world an ordered and stable reality. It enables man to keep his emotions and instincts in control and to create a comprehensible and meaningful reality in which he can act. Despite these positive remarks, Nietzsche is critical on Socrates' ordering approach. How does Nietzsche judge the theoretical man?

Shortcomings of the Apollinian

What shortcomings does the Apollinian have? A first disadvantage Nietzsche mentions, is that when the Apollinian reigns, life is transformed into a rigid reality in which man is no longer open to renewal. The Apollinian makes man desperately cling to the ordered reality as he has learned to see it. He is not inclined to renew the existing order.

According to philosopher Alexander Nehamas, this is exactly what Nietzsche disapproves of in Socrates: he leaves no room for the possibility that his approach or perspective is 'only' a vision. In *Nietzsche, Life as Literature* (1985), Nehamas argues that Nietzsche is suspicious of Socrates because the former believes that the latter's approach is in essence dogmatic (p. 32). Socrates focuses his attention on the general issues in the dialogues by putting himself in the background and saying that he himself is of no importance in the dialogue. In this way, Socrates puts forward his ideas as 'the result of a discovery about the unalterable features of the world' rather than 'the product of a particular person or idiosyncrasy' (Nehamas, 1985, p. 33). Socrates had every reason to hide the origins of his ideas. If something has a beginning, there is also the inherent possibility of an end. That is what Socrates wanted to avoid. He wanted his ideas to be unconditionally and invariably accepted.

A second disadvantage of a one-sided emphasis on the Apollinian is the absence of the ability to adapt to new circumstances. If one learns to adhere to the known order, and no room is available for transcending this order, man can not adjust to new conditions. For a period of time, a particular order or perspective can be the most appropriate order, yet circumstances and people change. The existing order is no longer the best possible order. The Apollinian with its emphasis on a 'historical sense, which insists on strict psychological causality' does not allow for adaptation to new circumstances (BT, p. 135).

A third disadvantage of an Apollinian supremacy is that it leads to one order or perspective rather than multiple perspectives. There is no room for deviant points of view, man is caught in one perspective. 'All our educational methods originally have this ideal [of the theoretical man, HJ] in view: every other form of existence must struggle on laboriously beside it, as something tolerated, but not intended' (BT, p. 110).

The Apollinian does not stand on its own. The Apollinian and the Dionysian coexist and depend on each other. What happens if the latter tendency, the Dionysian, dominates? Does the Dionysian surpass the shortcomings or disadvantages of the Apollinian?

3. The Dionysian tendency to disorder

The Dionysian represents the human tendency or longing to abolish order and ideals. In a Dionysian state, man transcends the bounds and norms he once set upon the world. He gives up his self-made dream world, in which all things, animals, plants, and human beings, including himself, are the way they are. He recognises that his idea that he exists as a separate being is an invention of his intellect. The Dionysian means giving up the individual and the particular, and transcending into the wholeness of life. Nietzsche calls this mode of being '[a] state of mystical self-abnegation and oneness' (BT, p. 50).

For Nietzsche, the Dionysian is a fundamental notion, necessary to understand life. According to some interpreters, Nietzsche is using a particular metaphysics in *The*

Birth of Tragedy: behind the continuously changing or becoming phenomena, a universal will exists, which drives the phenomena into being and into perishing. Several sections in *The Birth of Tragedy* give rise to a metaphysical interpretation. In one passage, Nietzsche writes that this universal will cries out to man: 'I am the eternally creative primordial mother, eternally impelling to existence, eternally finding satisfaction in this change of phenomena!' (BT, p. 104). In a Dionysian ecstasy, man can hear this universal voice, or, he can experience this primordial being itself. This study does, however, not aim at transposing a metaphysical view to today's educational discourse. It prioritises another interpretation for which Nietzsche give rise to in *The Birth of Tragedy*. He refers to the Dionysian as a state in which man experiences life as a continuous *becoming*. As the Apollinian, the Dionysian is a force seeking for domination.

Surrender to the Dionysian offers consolation. The individual, the self-invented order, purposes and things may be temporary, life is indestructible. 'We have become, as it were, one with the infinite primordial joy in existence' (BT, p. 105). For a few moments one breaks away from the normal and forgets the limitations of the prevalent order. In this Dionysian state, man experiences how life takes its own course and that everything is possible. Man experiences the force and fertility of life.

One comment should be made. Consolation is comforting. The Dionysian state is, however, a temporary state in which man briefly forgets who, what and where he is. When he returns to his senses, the existing order has not changed. And yet, everything has changed. He has experienced the eternal cycle of destruction and genesis. He now 'knows' that any universal claim to truth has to be rejected. 'A new form of insight ... [has broken] through, *tragic insight*' (BT, p. 98).

Shortcomings of the Dionysian

Like the Apollinian, the Dionysian has shortcomings as well. A first shortcoming is that the idea of life as something that is always becoming is not very attractive. Although one experiences the indestructible force of life, a Dionysian state also forces one to look into the suffering and destructive side of life, and into the 'terror of the individual existence' (BT, p. 104). 'We are to recognise that all that comes into being

must be ready for a sorrowful end' (BT, p. 104). Why would one bother to act in such a state of ever becoming? As Nietzsche writes: '[n]ot reflection, no – true knowledge, an insight into the horrible truth, outweighs any motive for action, [...] in the Dionysian man' (BT, p. 60).

A second shortcoming is the risk of dominance of primitive forms of the Dionysian. In the second section of *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche depicts 'the immense gap which separates the *Dionysian Greek* from the Dionysian barbarian' (BT, p. 39). In the context of these Dionysian barbarians, Nietzsche refers to '[t]he horrible "witches' brew" of sensuality and cruelty' (p. 40). These primitive forms not only lead to *symbolic* annihilation of the individual ('the self-abnegation'), but also result into physical self-destruction. The Apollinian is required in order to counteract the shortcomings of the Dionysian.

4. Interaction between the Apollinian and the Dionysian

Nietzsche criticises his own time, the late nineteenth century, for being too Apollinian. He warns his readers that if man discards the Dionysian from life completely, life becomes rigid and fixed. If man clings to his truths and to how things and people are, he transforms the dynamic world into a static reality. In this way, he escapes the Dionysian truth that life is a meaningless undertaking and a continuous becoming. He does not jeopardise himself as everything stays the same. At the same time, however, he deprives himself of the opportunity to experience that everything is changing, that he can be different than he is, and that he can take up forms of thinking and acting that he could never have imagined.

And yet, Nietzsche does not consider the Dionysian as an end in itself. He wants to restore the interaction between the Apollinian and the Dionysian so that our Apollinian inclination can benefit from the Dionysian and vice versa. It is possible, according to Nietzsche, to create order *without* denying the all too human tendency to transcend these orders. In this case, man deliberately chooses to honour the illusion of a comprehensible world. This is another manner of creating order than clinging to the known reality. He creates order out of a feeling of being connected to the force and

fertility of life. Since he acknowledges that his reality is an illusion, he does not have to anxiously adhere to that reality. There remains room to play, to think, to see and to act differently, room to adapt to changing circumstances and to create multiple perspectives.

One could say that his mission to renew the interaction between the two forces puts Nietzsche in a difficult position. He wants to convince his readers of the value of his vision and way of life and, in order to do so, he is fighting the philosophical tradition that can be traced to Socrates. At the same time, Nietzsche wants to emphasise that his vision is 'only' a vision. However, simply saying that his vision is a vision among others, would be detrimental to what he wants to convince his readers of. According to Nehamas (1985), Nietzsche resolved this dilemma with his particular style of writing. His style is unique, especially his use of the hyperbole and his variety of writing styles. When reading his work, it is clear that Nietzsche is the author. His unique style ensures that the reader never forgets that he is reading *Nietzsche's* vision. As such, Nietzsche does not have to emphasise that it is *his* vision. It is obvious without affecting the eloquence of his thoughts (Nehamas, 1985).

5. The Apollinian and Dionysian in professional higher education

Nietzsche's radical argument offers educators the possibility of evaluating current professional education systems. Do institutes of applied sciences adequately prepare students for contemporary professional life where the possibility of long term orientation is more and more disappearing? On which model is their education system based? Is it founded on the Apollinian (like the pedagogic dualism) or on the Dionysian? Or does the educational setting offer room for both the Apollinian and the Dionysian?

An educational model on an Apollinian basis

Pedagogic dualism is an example of an educational model that reflects the Apollinian.⁵ The two principles of pedagogic dualism – certainties are taught in an authoritative manner and students are encouraged to decide for themselves how they relate to issues of uncertainty – seem to offer students room for the development of their autonomy. At first glance, pedagogic dualism enables students to search for their own truths. A closer look at the application of the two principles reveals, however, the domination of the Apollinian in at least two ways.

First, pedagogic dualism is an expression of the human tendency to order the (educational) world. The model itself offers grip; it allows teachers to make the educational world transparent and manageable. The model provides teachers guidance on the issues of when to teach in an authoritative way and when to offer students the opportunity to look for their own order. It helps teachers decide how to teach.

Second, pedagogic dualism reveals a tendency to teach students an Apollinian approach to the professional world. This predisposition becomes manifest when Gardner urges teachers to use the dualistic model in an educational setting with care. He argues that there has to be some epistemic optimism and success when students are encouraged to look for their own order. This means that, every time students are confronted with uncertain situations, they have the experience that answers can be found within a reasonable degree of certainty. They learn that the professional world *can* be known. These professionals-to-be develop a ‘knowing’ attitude: I know I can

⁵ Numerous examples of manifestations of the Apollinian in educational contexts can be given. The wide spread practice of classifying human qualities, abilities and capacities under the heading of ‘skills’ or ‘competences’, for instance, is a clear display of the wish to keep everything in control and predictable. Although this practice has often been criticised, attempts to change it have been resisted. The Apollinian rules, as a quote from *Education in an Age of Nihilism* illustrates: ‘Talk of vitalism is all very well; but there is a system that needs to be operated here – set out, approved, monitored and inspected. And that requires measures (call them competencies, standards or what you will) that are specific, explicit and assessable’ (Blake et al, 2000, p. 29).

Steel (2014) discusses a number of trends in education barring the Dionysian, among them the individualisation of education programmes with help of education technology. Steel argues that “‘delivery’ of education according to each student’s psycho-mental identity” strengthens students’ drive to hold on to their selves rather than *loosening* their attention to themselves and their current preferences.

solve this problem, it is only a matter of finding the right knowledge or a matter of perfecting a skill. Gardner's warning that students must have a realistic notion of what it means to enter an uncertain world, emphasises the choice in favour of the illusion of a coherent and intelligible reality as well.

The application of the dualistic model reveals a one-sided domination of the Apollinian in approaching the world. The teacher passes on the certainties of the professional discipline to students in an authoritative way. In case of uncertain matters, students learn to be confident that a proper solution will be found.

An educational environment where the Apollinian reigns is not an appropriate environment for preparing students for professional practices characterised by diversive horizons. Education based on the model of the pedagogic dualism does not connect to the context of the professional practice. The principles of this dualism are not suitable if one wants to initiate students in a professional discipline *and* teach them to be open for renewal, adaptation, and deviant perspectives.

What does an education model that is based on the Dionysian look like? Is it possible to develop a model that takes *becoming* as its ground, that teaches students to abandon the known order, rather than desperately hold to it?

The Dionysian prevails

An educational model that offers only room for the Dionysian does not exist. The Dionysian without the Apollinian implies the absence of language and order. Education or any other form of culture is not possible when emotions and instincts freely rule. Educational models in which the Dionysian is given broad scope do, however, exist. An example of such a model is the anti-authoritarian approach to education which became popular in the Netherlands and Germany in the 1960s. In this perspective, teachers and parents should intervene in the development of children as little as possible so that they can freely develop. Freedom to play, discovering one's own sexuality and taking own decisions are among the key principles of the educational approach (Tasman, 1996, p. 260). Anti-authoritarian education was seen as an instrument to change the prevailing, authoritarian mentality and to bring about emancipation in society. In Amsterdam, several anti-authoritarian crèches were founded at

the end of the 60s (Tasman, 1996, pp. 263-267).⁶ In a documentary titled ‘Onze kresj’, the founders of one of these crèches reflect on the experiment.⁷ Children could freely play with paint, poo, knives, scissors and an iron hammer. Intervening in a fight between children was out of the question. One parent tells that, in retrospect, she had left her baby in an unsafe environment. One of the filmmakers, who was brought up at the crèche, asserts that due to the chaos and the lack of boundaries, children were forced to grow up early. Despite good intentions, the potential destructive side of the Dionysian became actual.⁸

It is hard to imagine an educational environment that let go of all ordering in today’s world of testing, accounting and surveys. And yet, depriving students from the opportunity to learn to deal with uncertainty is no option. Is it possible to create a learning environment that offers room for both the Apollinian and the Dionysian?

The Apollinian and Dionysian in an educational context

Teachers initiate students in what they consider to be the truths of a professional discipline and they do it in an authoritative way. However, teachers who recognise the Dionysian truth ‘know’ that absolute truths do not exist. Because of this insight, they teach students to doubt the certainties they have been teaching them by deliberately and actively confronting them with the supercomplex and changing professional practice. Students are given the opportunity to experience that clear and unambiguous answers or solutions to the questions of professional life are sometimes lacking.

This strategy of confronting students with professional life’s inconceivability and chaos requires teachers’ ability to retain their Apollinian inclination. Especially in the pragmatic ambiance of institutes of applied sciences, this is not an easy to learn ability as teachers are used to (and expected to) offer students good advice, tools, or solutions

⁶ See for another illustration of the anti-authoritarian approach of education Hülsenbeck, Louman and Oskamp (1970). It is a small red booklet for students [*het rode boekje voor scholieren*] which prescribes a ‘democratic school’ in which students are encouraged to decide for themselves what good education is. Personal freedom and autonomy rather than obedience should be the focus of education.

⁷ <http://www.vpro.nl/programmas/2doc/onze-kresj.html>. Last seen: 2015-2-15.

⁸ See De Mul (2014, pp. 115-120) for an elaboration on the aggressive and destructive force that drives the Dionysian ecstasy.

to these kind of painful situations. Moreover, when teachers refrain from providing students with answers, there is the danger that students write these teachers off as worthless teachers who do not know anything. This strategy can get out of hand.

Philosopher of education Sean Steel (2014) elaborates on another aspect of contemporary educational practices which can be an obstacle for teachers to embrace the Dionysian. Steel points out that the allowance of the Dionysian puts at risk the reality of students' selves. Rather than affirming students' sense of themselves, the Dionysian jeopardises it.⁹ No wonder that the Dionysian is not welcomed by students in contemporary educational settings where, according to Steel, the measurement of students' skills and rational capacities are central – students are continuously incited to attach importance to their selves.

Despite these obstacles or dangers, there are arguments to make the Dionysian part of the educational setting in professional higher education. If students merely learn present truths, as professionals, many of them will pay the price for not being able to handle changing circumstances.

Teachers do not have to intentionally create uncertain situations for students in order to allow for the Dionysian. The students probably undergo more uncertain situations than students (and teachers) are aware of. One can think of the tragic moral situations that students encounter during their studies – situations in which students are unable to fulfil two mutually exclusive but for them equally important requirements or values.¹⁰ It could involve a choice between being loyal to one's family or to one's education, or between honesty and collegiality, or between openness and confidentiality. What is at stake is the ability of teachers to recognise these painful and

⁹ Steel (2014) refers to whatever reinforces the reality of one's sense of oneself – 'the reality of our own individuated egoselves', as he writes – as what is generally called "the up" (p. 132). Anything that jeopardises this reality is taken up as "the down" according to Steel (2014, p. 132). In chapter 5, I introduce the terms 'ups' and 'downs' as well but I give them a different meaning. I use these terms in the context of overcoming oneself in a Nietzschean sense. I posit that learning through ups *and* downs is a prerequisite if students are to excel. I understand 'downs' to be incentives to strive for better.

¹⁰ See also Blake et al. who deem 'Nietzschean realism' a more credible guide to educational practice than commitment to rational autonomy (2000, pp. 30-52). They point out that the acceptance of reality 'as it is' in a Nietzschean sense includes the act of letting go of the idea that coherent choices with regard to values is always feasible.

insoluble situations and invite students to become aware of them. For the teacher, making students aware of these situations is not without risk. Students might take the teacher's intervention badly as it confronts them with painful aspects of life. A teacher who chooses to approach these situations as practical issues, will probably be more appreciated by students. A decrease in popularity is the price teachers have to pay for embedding uncertainty in the education practice.

The experience of being uncertain about the scope and validity of one's knowledge and doings is not sufficient to prepare students for contemporary professional life. The risk of inactivity looms. In order to prevent students from being paralysed, teachers should encourage them to manifest their truths in their actions (rather than eliminating the uncertainty and discomfort). Teachers could create space to play and try out new forms of thinking and acting in order to expand the area of the possible, even when these new forms turn out to be different truths than teachers expect or can imagine. The creation and appreciation of diversity and 'redundancy' are manners to make room for the development of students' creativity and style. It should be noted that these manners not only apply to issues of uncertainty. Teachers should encourage students to challenge the 'certainties' as well. The key issue is that teachers take themselves, curricula, sets of competences, criteria, methods, and techniques with a pinch of salt in order to give professionals-to-be the chance to develop their own way in professional life.

To sum up, making room for the interaction between the Apollinian and the Dionysian in educational settings enables students to develop a willingness to be open for new orders or for orders which are different from the ones they are familiar with. Students realise that what they have learned are, for now, the best possible answers to the questions of professional life. But these answers may change.

6. Uncertain? Sure!

The strategy of depriving students of the illusion that certainties exist is the best way of training them to become professionals who act confidently in today's world of increasing pace of change.

In contemporary professional higher education, a pragmatic and safe approach prevails: teachers impart the routines and rules of a profession that have been proven successful. The Apollinian rules, in Nietzsche's words. Although this seems a valid strategy of preparing students for professional practice, a one-sided emphasis on training students to confide in (current) truths is insufficient. As graduates, they will be struggling with the demanding job of striving for better in a professional world where only temporary certainties are available. When their certainties become outdated, they will have nothing to go by.

Moving forward requires the ability of letting go of rules and truths that hinder the quest for better. This ability can only be trained in an environment in which students are deprived of the illusion that certainties exist. Such a learning environment allows for both the human tendency to order, the Apollinian, and the tendency to disorder, the Dionysian. Students who 'know' the tragic but also exciting insight that things can be different are better equipped to strive for adaptation, variety, and renewal. Excellence is on the horizon.

CHAPTER 2: EXCELLENCE¹

In the European Union, promoting excellence is understood as an efficient way of constituting Europe as a leading knowledge-based society and economy. Communication no. 567 from the Commission to the Parliament lists a number of educational reforms that should be implemented in order to train a large number of highly qualified people in an effort to create jobs and economic growth (European Commission, 2011). Some of the proposed measures explicitly focus on promoting excellence, such as the creation of ‘effective governance and funding mechanisms in support of excellence’ (European Commission, 2011, p. 3). Although it remains rather vague what ‘excellence’ means, stimulating excellence is considered to be an effective way to accomplish the goals of economic growth and job creation.

In Dutch professional higher education, excellence has become an important topic as well. In 2008, the Dutch government spent €61 million on a four-year programme called ‘Sirius’ to promote excellence in higher education. This programme allowed universities (both research-based universities and universities of applied science) to get the best out of students (‘Excellentiebevordering in het Nederlandse hoger onderwijs’, n.d.). Stimulated by this programme, higher education institutes have developed a variety of excellence stimulating programmes such as top classes and honours programmes (Van Eijl, Pilot & Wolfensberger, 2010; Wolfensberger, De Jong & Drayer, 2012). A special advisory committee for the future stability of Dutch higher education nevertheless concluded that Dutch higher education pays too little attention to excellence. Talented students are rarely stretched or encouraged to reach for higher levels (Commissie Veerman, 2010). Furthermore, *Tijdschrift voor Hoger Onderwijs*, a Dutch journal specialising in higher education, published two special issues on excellence and talent development: the first issue in 2010 (‘Themanummer Excellentie en talentontwikkeling in het Hoger Onderwijs’, 2010), the second in 2014

¹ Earlier versions of Chapter 2 have been published in 2014 as ‘Excelleren voor iedereen: Nietzsche als inspiratiebron voor het hoger beroepsonderwijs’, in *Tijdschrift voor Hoger Onderwijs* 32: 156-167, and in 2014 as ‘Excellence for All: A Nietzschean-inspired approach in professional higher education’, in *Educational Philosophy and Theory*. Advance online publication. doi:10.1080/00131857.2014.963491.

(‘Themanummer Excellentie in het Hoger Onderwijs’, 2013/2014). And while in the literature on Dutch higher education, the question is repeatedly posed of whether and, if so, how higher education wants to challenge the large group of regular students to excel (Van Eijl et al., 2010; Terlouw & Pilot, 2010; Tiesinga & Wolfensberger, 2014; Wolfensberger & Pilot, 2014), the efforts and investments focus on a small, select group of talented and motivated students.

This focus on the ‘best’ students demonstrates that excellence is understood in terms of ‘ranking’ and ‘selecting’. The best students are challenged to reach even higher levels (than the other students).² If, however, teachers in Dutch professional higher education want to challenge many more or all students to excel, the current concept of excellence is inadequate.

In this chapter, a notion of excellence is developed in which comparing oneself with others is not important. Excellence is not understood as ‘being the best’, but as ‘overcoming oneself’. Excellence is the ability to let go of ‘old’ routines in thinking and doing and to embrace new ones. It is the ability to free oneself from truths and rules that hinder one to strive for better and to embrace better ones.

There are at least two arguments why it is important to elaborate a perspective of ‘excellence for all’. First, the broad European objectives of creating economic growth and jobs require a large majority of excelling students. If Dutch professional higher education is truly committed to these objectives, a notion of excellence is required that can be broadly applied in professional higher education.

The second argument focuses on the general objective of professional higher education, that is, to prepare *all* students for a future professional life. Nowadays, professional practices are characterised by increasing complexity, supercomplexity, an increased pace of change and concomitant shorter horizons of expectation (Barnett, 2009; Baumann, 2000, 2007; Rosa, 2005, 2010; Sennett, 1998). This means that

² Educational expansion is an important explanation for the coming forth of a discourse of excellence and selection, according to sociologist Van de Werfhorst (2014). As there has been a spectacular increase of the number of students in higher education, credential inflation occurs. In order to respond to employers’ needs for discrimination between applicants, Van de Werfhorst writes, excellence and selection are increasingly emphasised in higher education. Van de Werfhorst understands excellence in terms of ‘ranking’ and ‘comparing with others’.

students are not adequately prepared for present professional life if they have only learned the prevailing routines of thinking and doing in their profession. They should be willing and able to let go of routines that prevent them from striving for better and create new ones. Excellence should be part of the regular programmes in professional higher education.³

While this chapter focuses on the situation of professional higher education in the Netherlands, this new perspective on excellence may be relevant for higher education systems and institutes in other countries, where excellence is also understood mainly in terms of ‘ranking’ and ‘selecting’.

In order to develop a notion of excellence that can be broadly applied in professional higher education, I use three notions that Nietzsche developed in *The Gay Science* (1887/2001): self-transcendence, self-control and self-styling. What makes his thinking especially interesting for reflection on how to further improve the quality of today’s professional higher education is his radical theoretical position that an abstract, independent subject that precedes thinking and acting does not exist. According to Nietzsche, the ‘self’ is the variable result of the constant struggle and interplay between internal and external forces that are crossing around, in and through the individual. This theoretical position offers opportunities to develop an understanding of excellence that focuses on the individuality or style of students rather than on the comparison between students. By starting with Nietzsche’s thoughts, I want to sincerely grasp the probabilities and challenges of preparing *all* students for contemporary professional life rather than a small group of the most talented ones.

First, I explore the notions of self-transcendence, self-control and self-styling based on Nietzsche’s work. The second part focuses on Nietzsche’s criticism of

³ Philosopher Ruth Irwin (2001) argues that education should resist the vocationalisation of schooling. Rather than ‘producing individuals capable of citizenship or vocation’ (2001, p. 55), she argues, we should better embrace a Nietzschean-Foucaultian model of education in which (higher) education is understood as a critical public sphere where the endeavour of ‘subverting the blind reproduction of norms’ (p. 55) is central. I agree with her analysis of the present, skilled based education and its accompanied assumptions: these produce homogeneity and weaken students and the labour force. Like Irwin, I plea for the promotion of education’s critical role: to what extent is it possible to let go of this reproduction role and embrace what Irwin calls “the critic and conscience of society” role?

German higher education in the late nineteenth century and his view on the purpose of *higher* education. In the third part, I explore the possibilities that a radical Nietzschean notion of excellence offers when it is translated to the present situation in professional higher education. Several proposals for educational practices are then outlined from this perspective of 'excellence for all'. Fourth, I argue that the undertaking of teaching *all* students to excel is a vital component of higher professional education programmes that aim at preparing students for today's professional practices where the possibility of long term orientation is rapidly decreasing.

1. Self-transcendence, self-control and self-styling according to Nietzsche

In this section, Nietzsche's ideas of excellence are explored by elaborating on the notions of self-transcendence, self-control and self-styling.

Self-transcendence

For Nietzsche, as we have seen in chapter 1, life is only *becoming*. This means that all regulations and rules, however detailed, apply only to the outside of actions as every action is unique. Nietzsche writes that

every act ever performed was done in an altogether unique and unrepeatable way, and [...] that all prescriptions of action [...] relate only to their rough exterior. (GS, p. 189)

And yet, a life that requires permanent improvisation is intolerable for him: 'that would be my exile and my Siberia' (GS, p. 168). Living would be a difficult and maybe an impossible undertaking if one had to continuously deliberate on and determine how to act. Moreover, Nietzsche acknowledges that, due to the working of the human intellect, human beings cannot but perceive the world as a collection of *beings*. Although Nietzsche understands life as *becoming*, he admits that the human being needs routines in thinking and doing.

A routine in thinking or doing can be the best possible manner to function in a particular context, but only for a limited period of time, as Nietzsche repeatedly argues

in *The Gay Science*. At some moment in time, a particular routine is no longer appropriate: one's needs may have changed, or the world may have transformed so significantly that new contexts create new demands. New routines are required. He writes:

In every age the good men are those who bury the old thoughts deeply and make them bear fruit – the farmers of the spirit. But that land is eventually exhausted, and the ploughshare of evil must come time and again. (GS, p. 32)

For Nietzsche, self-transcendence means letting go of old routines and adopting new ones. Self-transcendence is not an easy undertaking as one runs counter to the habits in society. One overthrows existing boundary-posts, as Nietzsche asserts. From the perspective of the people of the old routines, these new routines are considered evil as these new routines are striving to overpower the old ones. And these old routines are generally deemed good (as one is used to them): 'only what is old is good!' (GS, p. 32)

In order to understand the notion of self-transcendence, it is necessary first to explain Nietzsche's vision on the 'self'.⁴ In his view, the 'I' or the 'self' is being driven by the drives, instincts, passions and abilities that are active in the individual. These forces, for example faith, conviction, suspicion and contradiction, fight for dominance (GS, p. 111). The for this moment predominant force manifests itself in the person's actions and thinking. The 'I' or the 'self' is the result of the power play of these external and internal forces. The 'I' arises in the interplay of forces. More accurately, many selves arise in this play of which some are more powerful than others.

⁴ Philosopher of education Douglas Yacek (2014) emphasises the need of to understand Nietzsche's view of the self in order to grasp his notion of self-overcoming. He criticises his predecessors (especially Jonas (2009)) for offering an analysis of Nietzsche's notion of self-overcoming while not paying (sufficient) attention to the self. I agree with Yacek's critique and therefore offer a brief analysis of my understanding of Nietzsche's notion of the self.

See also Ramaekers (2001) who criticises Johnston's (1998) reading of Nietzsche's self-imposed task 'to point the way to the possibility of a new individual, a self-overcoming individual, one able to create and live within his or her own valuations' *pace* Johnston for failing to give a clarification of how to understand the notion of the self.

In Nietzsche's vision, no self exists in the sense of an abstract, independent, invariable self that has several routines at its disposal and decides whether it wants to make use of them or not. Man *thinks* that when he acts, he is the one who is acting. Nietzsche gives the example of striking something. Someone thinks that he is striking 'because he *wanted* to strike' (GS, p. 121). For Nietzsche, such a personal, independent and 'absolutely given, underivable' willing as the cause of one's acting does not exist (GS, p. 121). This 'self' with a free will is no more than a belief or a fiction. As Nietzsche writes: 'that our will is free [is one of, HJ] ... those basic errors that had been incorporated since time immemorial' (GS, p. 110).

In light of this notion of the 'self' – a collection of forces each striving for control – Nietzsche distinguishes two forms of self-transcendence. I will put the first form of self-transcendence between quotation marks and the second not. The first form, 'self-transcendence', consists of a passively submitting to each new drive that directs one's actions (GS, p. 62). In the interplay of forces, a new drive may become more powerful and take over. It will manifest itself in someone's actions. If the person submitted to these forces has no control over them, he will passively give in to each new, dominating drive. In posthumously published writings (spring of 1888), Nietzsche refers to this type of person as chameleons: they change but they do not grow (KSA, p. 342).⁵ The second form of self-transcendence is of more interest to Nietzsche. This self-transcendence (without quotation marks) consists of a transcending of oneself while being in control of the passions and drives. In this type of self-transcendence, one becomes oneself while transcending oneself. The self is thus always becoming.

⁵ See also Paul van Tongeren (2009) who points out that Nietzsche often articulates his critique of the nineteenth century culture in terms of 'standards' and 'measures'. Van Tongeren distinguishes two (contradictory) ways. First, Nietzsche criticises the dogmatic character of the used standards which, on top of that, are diminishing standards (they impoverish life). Second, he criticises modern man's measurelessness. Van Tongeren asserts that the ability to use many different standards is especially characteristic for "our post-modern identity" (2009, p. 101). We use a multiplicity of standards and we are very able to put ourselves in others' positions. And although we deem this ability in a positive manner – calling it 'tolerance' – it is a weakening condition; it is a 'laisser-faire' attitude which lacks measurement.

Self-control

If man is not capable of controlling the drives, he is at their mercy. A drive which is not kept in balance by other drives has free play. Such a drive would strive to manifest itself in all of a person's actions and thoughts. Nietzsche claims that the domination of one drive is usually detrimental to the development and strength of the individual. He speaks of the 'blind drive [...] that refuses to be held in check by the overall advantage of the individual' (GS, p. 44). Such a drive seeks for unlimited power.

How to control such a drive? By critically scrutinising them, pace Nietzsche. Thorough examination of his routines makes man aware of the forces and drives that are influencing his existence. By distrusting his convictions, by questioning his routines, by showing a dislike of big words and gestures, and by contradicting what is generally accepted as valid, he can learn to restrain the drives. Man has to 'survey all the strengths and weaknesses that their nature has to offer' (GS, p. 163). Yet, opposing the normal or the conventional is not without risk. Countering the masses and the spirit of the age may be dangerous for a person who is seeking for self-control. Nevertheless, Nietzsche prompts his readers to be critical and suspicious.

Nietzsche seems to contradict himself here. On the one hand, internal and external forces determine the acting and thinking of man. A 'self' does not exist apart from or independent of these forces. On the other hand, he encourages his readers to learn to control these forces. At this point, Nietzsche seems to assume the existence of a 'self' that is able to control the forces interacting upon it.

Both assumptions seem to be incompatible. And yet, both assumptions need not necessarily be mutually exclusive. As philosopher Judith Butler (1997) shows it is not a case of either the one or the other. She argues that the forces that form the 'self' do not 'remain continuous with the power that is the subject's agency' (p. 12). Forces may, as it were, turn back upon themselves and react on themselves. In this interplay of forces and counterforces, a 'self' is constituted that is capable of reflecting on itself and of setting up a hierarchy between the various 'selves'. It is, however, impossible to make a conceptual transition between the forces that constitute the 'self' and 'the subject's "own" power', Butler argues (p. 15).

In Nietzsche's notion of self-control, a distinction between forces and counter forces cannot be made either. Controlling oneself does not exist independently from the forces, but is part of it.

Before *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche had already written about the importance of self-control. For example, in *Human, All Too Human* (1886/1996), he urges his readers to practise 'self-mastery in small things' because 'this gymnastic is indispensable if one wants to preserve in oneself the joy of being one's own master' (HAH, p. 387). And once man has learned to control himself, this ability is not at his disposal forever. It needs practice and maintenance. 'Every day is ill employed, and a danger for the next day, in which one has not denied oneself some small thing at least once' (HAH, p. 386-387).

Self-styling

Controlling oneself, not automatically giving in to the prevailing drive, enables one to give oneself style, that is, to shape a better hierarchy of 'selves' than the hierarchy one is accustomed to. In this way, man can become himself while transcending himself. He can learn to give his character style.

Nietzsche writes about self-styling in terms of art. Thanks to artists, man can conceive of himself as an 'aesthetic phenomenon' (GS, p. 104). Art has accustomed human eyes to observing oneself from a distance 'with some pleasure' as a completed whole (GS, p. 78). 'To "give style" to one's character' refers to understanding oneself as something that can be made more beautiful and whose ugly sides can be hidden (GS, p. 163). It is about obeying laws that one prescribes to oneself, or fixing one's doing and thinking in routines that enable one to cope with life's chaotic forces in the best possible manner.

Being aware of the forces which influence physical existence is a prerequisite for construing the most appropriate routines. A critical stance towards one's own routines is needed to get to know oneself and to be able to style one's character. Only those 'who survey all the strengths and weaknesses that their nature has to offer' can 'fit them into an artistic plan' and give style to their character (GS, p. 163).

Style or a ‘self’ is not given by nature: they are no dispositions. The only thing that is natural about the self is the fact that it changes: ‘you are always another person’ (GS, p. 174). This means that a person cannot find his style after thorough self-examination. Style comes about in the future.⁶ Nietzsche writes:

[w]e, however, want to *become who we are* – human beings who are new, unique, incomparable, who give themselves laws, who create themselves! (GS, p. 189)

Although Nietzsche speaks of an artistic plan, the self-styler has no ultimate ideal to focus on. When he believes he has found the best way of living, it will prove to be the most appropriate way of living just for that moment. Rather than holding on to a particular habit, man should have the courage to embrace ‘[b]rief habits’ (GS, p. 167). The art of living consists of understanding oneself as a multitude of short artworks: one can prescribe oneself new laws, time and again.

2. Nietzsche’s pedagogical ideas

Nietzsche repeatedly criticised the German higher education of his time. He also gave some hints about the purpose and content of true *higher* education. Many of his critical remarks and instructions refer to the notions of self-transcendence, self-control and self-styling as elaborated in *The Gay Science*. I refer to several passages on higher education in different works of Nietzsche to show that these notions are fundamental to Nietzsche’s educational philosophy.⁷

⁶ I agree with Yacek’s construal of the Nietzschean self as ‘a locus of drives and affects which are engaged in a constant struggle for power’ (2014, p. 396). I also agree with his elaboration on the extent to which the social environment molds our identity in some way. In chapter 3, I will elaborate this human condition which Nietzsche repeatedly emphasised in his works.

⁷ *On the Future of our Educational Institutions* encompasses five lectures on higher education which Nietzsche gave in 1972. In these lectures, Nietzsche is very critical on German higher education in his time. According to Nietzsche, it is merely focused on making students useful for society, rather than contributing to culture. Even in the preface, where he instructs his readers how to read the book – one should not be in a hurry; moreover, one should not expect to find concrete results nor read the text from one’s own perspective or the common perspective of society – this critique already resonates. In the

In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche criticises education because of its general aim of making individuals useful for society. Rather than focusing on the preservation and development of the individual, the individual is educated in such a way that the public interest is the driving force of his actions, even if it is at his own expense. Nietzsche writes:

[t]hat is how education always proceeds: it tries to condition the individual through various attractions and advantages to adopt a way of thinking and behaving that, when it has become habit, drive and passion, will rule in him and over him *against his ultimate advantage* but 'for the common good'. (GS, p. 44)

In *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History of Life*, the second of the four *Untimely Meditations* (1873-1876/1997), Nietzsche criticises higher education because it only fills the heads of students with concepts derived from earlier times. This approach makes little sense if the purpose of education is to develop youth into free, cultivated individuals – the goal of true higher education, according to Nietzsche. What is more, these concepts and truths are very likely to stand in the way of 'living, for right and simple seeing and hearing, for happily seizing what is nearest and most natural to us' (UM II, p. 119). Rather than overwhelming a student with facts and truths, '[h]is desire to experience something himself and to feel evolving within him a coherent living complex of experiences of his own' should be strengthened (UM II, p. 118).

Nietzsche does not want to abolish all knowledge, nor does he deny that the past forms man, nor that he is the result of previous generations. '[I]t is not possible wholly to free oneself from this chain' (UM II, p. 76). But if someone strives for knowledge just for the sake of knowledge, he gets stuck in the past. For Nietzsche, the point is to learn to take one's *need* for knowledge into account. Knowledge that does not lead to decisions, that does not function as 'an agent for transforming the outside world', does not serve life (UM II, p. 78).

texts, Nietzsche addresses a number of issues, among them self-control and self-styling, which are of interest for the underlying study. As he deemed the lectures unfit for publication, I chose not to use this book. Fortunately, he elaborates on this notions in more detail in his later works.

In order not to be stuck in the past, man has to relate to his own past in another way than he is accustomed to. By reinterpreting previous routines and integrating them into a coherent whole (and forgetting what is not worth remembering), he can shape his character. Nietzsche writes about the undertaking to forget about one's past:

[i]t is an attempt to give oneself, as it were *a posteriori*, a past in which one would like to originate in opposition to that in which one did originate. (UM II, p. 76)

The revision and integration of the past is, however, not an easy task, especially not because it is this past that has made us what we are. What is needed, according to Nietzsche, to fulfil this remaking of the past, is 'a new, stern discipline' (UM II, p. 76).

In *Twilight of the Idols* (1888/2005), Nietzsche criticises the 'indecent sense of hurry' in German higher education and the emphasis on efficiency in order to prepare students for a job with a minimum loss of time (TI, p. 190). In his view, higher education and large numbers of students do not go together well. Nietzsche writes, '*Bildung*' has become 'common and commonplace' rather than a privilege (TI, 190); and '[n]othing great or beautiful could ever be common property' (TI, p. 189). He is convinced that the democratisation of higher education ruined German culture.

For Nietzsche, there is no doubt: higher education suites only a few privileged students, and of them only a few will actually succeed in shaping their own character. Should we thus stop our attempts to use Nietzsche's notions for deliberation about the question of how to improve the quality of today's higher professional education? Certainly not. As I have elaborated in the introduction of this study, the twenty-first century is not comparable to the late nineteenth century. In Nietzsche's time, the small, highly educated elite was strictly demarcated from the large, illiterate masses. This was particularly the case in Germany (see Elias, 1982). Today, this demarcation has become blurred. Many more people receive higher education and the boundaries between social classes have become porous. Second, and more importantly, Nietzsche offers us conceptual tools that are helpful in seeking for openings in existing educational discourses. Especially his notions of the self, self-transcendence, self-

control and self-styling offer opportunities to rethink the present excellence discourse in which only the allegedly talented students are encouraged to excel.

One of the books that offers these tools is the *Twilight of the Idols*. In this book, he gives some hints about what higher education is. He mentions three tasks for which we need educators: learning to see, learning to think and learning to speak and write. The task of learning to see is especially important. Rather than responding immediately to a stimulus or directly judging an impetus, students should learn to calmly see a stimulus from all sides and to try to understand it. The postponement of response or judgement is comparable to what Nietzsche calls 'a strong will: the essential thing here is precisely *not* "to will", to be *able* to suspend the decision' (TI, p. 190). Once a person has learned to see in this way, he has acquired a critical attitude: 'your learning process *in general* becomes slow, mistrustful, reluctant' (TI, p. 191). Seeing in this way helps him to resist the attitude of giving in to whatever presents itself, 'to be constantly poised and ready to put yourself into – *plunge* yourself into – other things' (TI, p. 191).

Nietzsche contrasts this way of seeing to the observing of 'the man of science, (...) who stands aside from life so as to know it unobstructedly' (UM II, p. 117). This scholarly man has been trained to neglect his instincts and needs. He cannot scrutinise, nor try to understand stimuli, as they are 'artificially and forcibly shattered by this [by Nietzsche criticised late nineteenth German] education' (UM, p. 117). In *On The Genealogy of Morality* (1887/2006a), Nietzsche further elaborates on this difference. He emphasises that the kind of seeing he has in mind is not objective in the sense of 'contemplation [...] without interest', which he calls a 'non-concept and an absurdity' (GM, p. 87). Our thinking and seeing *are* being determined by the drives and instincts (see also chapter 3). The point is to train self-control, that is, the 'ability to engage and disengage our 'pros' and 'cons'' (GM, p. 87).

For Nietzsche, rather than training students to become useful instruments for society, teachers should train them to give style to their character. Knowledge of the past is not an end in itself: the whole point is that students should learn to make use of this knowledge and put it into service of the process of excelling. In order to give style to

their character, students must learn to become critical and to control their ‘pros’ and ‘cons’.

3. A Nietzschean perspective on excellence in the twenty-first century

In this section, I explore the possibilities and challenges that a radical Nietzschean notion of excellence offers when translated to the present situation in Dutch professional higher education where approximately 100,000 students annually start their training for the first time. Several possible educational practices are outlined from this perspective of ‘excellence for all’.

Excellence in professional higher education

From a Nietzschean perspective, students excel when they leave behind old habits and embrace new ones while being in control of the forces that act on them. They dictate laws for themselves that enable them to cope with (professional) life in the best possible manner. In excelling, the style or individuality of students is presenting itself.

The introduction of competition between students is not an adequate tool to stimulate students to excel. Competition forces students to focus on others’ criteria. They have to meet external standards, while excellence in a Nietzschean sense is about setting personal goals.

Teaching students to excel does not necessarily imply that they have to replace *all* habits that they have learned at school. Some of these habits, or maybe all, might be ‘appropriate’ (for a certain period of time), but ‘being appropriate’ is no longer determined externally. Neither the teacher nor representatives of the professional discipline decide whether a particular routine is adequate. It is the student’s drive for self-realisation that is decisive.

Philosopher Charles Bingham describes how this process of self-styling in educational environments – he speaks of ‘an educational strategy of self-fashion’ (2005b, p. 8) – entails at least two steps. Each of these steps is concerned with asking a specific kind of question. The first kind of question is directed at examining one’s routines and the prevailing forces and drives that determine them. It involves asking

oneself questions like: What makes me behave like I do? What am I good at? Which skills or knowledge do I enjoy learning? Against which professional norms do I have an aversion? Which strong opinions do I have? Which of these opinions are beneficial for me? Stimulating students to regularly ask themselves these kind of questions trains their ability not to react automatically to stimuli.

Being critical with respect to habits in thinking and doing is a first step. Taking an active stance towards these routines is the second and more daring step. After the first step, in which students ask themselves how they relate to the internal and external forces, this step is, according to Bingham (2005b), concerned with questions like: how do I *want* to relate to my abilities? Do I really want to withstand a particular professional norm to which I have an aversion? What kind of resistance suits me, or what kind of resistance fits my prior behaviour? How do I want to relate to a particular opinion which is damaging to me?

Taking an active stance towards the forces that manifest themselves in routines of thinking and doing does not mean that future professionals should be taught which forces to disregard as 'unwanted' forces and which forces to embrace as 'desired' or 'positive' ones. If teachers want to train future professionals to excel, they have to teach them to scrutinise *all* influences, including the forces that are commonly depicted as unpleasant or despicable. These influences exist and constitute their current routines. Rather than beforehand accepting *or* rejecting them, students better learn to examine these forces themselves and to choose which forces they want to put into service of the process of giving style to their character.

'Excellence for all' in practice: some examples

Bingham's educational strategy of self-fashioning focuses on the individual, or as he says – 'the level of the one-educated' (2005b, p. 2). What about the level of the institute? Teaching students the prevailing habits of a discipline is already a practical impossibility within a timeframe of three or four years, let alone training them to question these routines and take an active stance towards them. Is teaching all students to overcome themselves a realistic undertaking?

Teaching students to excel would take an immense amount of time if they had to scrutinise *every* routine in thinking and doing or to relate to everything they learned and encountered during their training. But there is no need to encourage students to question everything if they are to become professionals who are able to overcome themselves. In fact, constant scrutinisation would even be detrimental for students as it prevents them from acting altogether. The point is *that* they practise self-control. In order to develop and maintain the ability to control oneself, it has to be practiced on a regular basis. It does not require *constant* discussion. Furthermore, as Nietzsche has already pointed out, the skill in ‘having reservations’ can also be practiced in small things.

Students are no tabula rasa when entering the university. During childhood and schooling, they have acquired certain routines of speaking, writing, humour and thinking. At a daily basis, students can be trained in being critical towards these routines. If first-year students have to learn how to write a marketing or communication report, they can be encouraged to wonder whether they really like their way of writing or what makes them write the way they do (for example, using the passive voice).

A second example of an exercise in ‘having reservations’ is discussing a textbook case study illustrating some theory. After reading carefully the case description, questions to lead the discussion of the case could include: On what assumptions is this case based? Do I recognise these assumptions in my patterns of thinking and acting? What do I think of these assumptions? How do I *want* to relate to them?

A third example is taking the experiences of students, rather than teaching materials, as the subject of inquiry, for example in a Socratic dialogue. Using real-life examples, students jointly examine the ‘correctness’ of their beliefs and principles on which they have based their actions (Kessels, 1997). This ‘correctness’ should not be examined by way of external criteria. The participants in the dialogue are invited not to rely on external authorities. What matters is that they find their inner compass, though this compass is not constant if the purpose of these examinations is a Nietzschean-inspired type of excellence. The laws or rules to which students submit themselves are

only temporarily the most 'appropriate' ones. Searching for an inner compass can be made a recurrent activity in the classroom.

One of the rules of a Socratic dialogue can also be helpful to train self-control. At any time during the dialogue, the facilitator can ask participants to summarise what has been said so far. This rule seeks to encourage participants to make a continuous effort to listen to and understand the other participants (Kessels, 1997, p. 159). When teachers use this rule in the classroom, students learn not to concentrate only on their own thoughts but to deliberately pay attention to the perspective of other students. They learn to control their own thoughts.

Other examples of daily exercises to practice self-control are pedagogical practices in which the role of the teacher is taken over by senior-students. The tutoring of first-year students by senior students can stimulate senior students to excel because they need to relate to what they have learned and experienced during their studies so far. The following remark of a Dutch nursing student in an interview about his tutorship is illustrative: '[T]he tutor can prevent them [the tutees, HJ] from walking into the traps of others' (De Haagse Hogeschool, n.d.; translation HJ). The only reason why this tutor can speak of 'traps' is that he has adopted a critical attitude towards his own habits. Whether a tutor actually excels remains a question, but being a tutor encourages him to take a critical stance towards himself.

Student quality circles (SQC) also stimulate students to question what they have learned at school. SQCs are self-managed groups of students, facilitated by the educational institute, who collectively identify, analyse and solve problems concerning their training programme. Although Nahai and Österberg (2012) do not pay attention to the opportunities that SQCs offer to train students' ability of self-control, a wide range of SQC practices and similar initiatives that aim at increasing the participation of students in quality improvement can be found in their article 'Higher education in a state of crisis: a perspective from a Students' Quality Circle' (2012).

It is also possible to create assignments that offer *all* students the opportunity to relate to what they have learned and experienced so far. For example, after an internship, students could be set an assignment to design a course (in detail) which they would have liked to follow *before* their internship. This assignment invites students to

critically reflect on their training programme and to think about the ways and actions they would have preferred during their internship.

It is even more exciting when students are asked to relate to courses that they are currently following. Philosopher and university teacher Anthony Weston (1998) describes how he invites students taking his course in 'philosophy of education' to critically examine the underlying assumptions of the lessons. He uses a different style in each lesson such as an 'old fashioned' lecture, a talk show format and a lesson without a teacher. A few days after each class, students and teacher come together and jointly investigate the hidden messages of the previous class, using questions like: What counts as knowledge in this style of teaching? What as education? What as learning? The assumptions of the students manifested in their behaviour are also discussed (for example: no teacher? Nothing can be learned). Similar experiments can be done in professional higher education, attuned to the professions for which the students are being trained. As a guiding principle, questions can be used like: What counts as advice? What counts as leadership? Or what counts as quality of life?

4. Excellence for all: A vital perspective for professional higher education

What objections could be formulated against the aim to train all students to excel?

Professional higher education is already emphasising the individual style of students

A first objection is that sufficient attention is already being paid to the individuality or style of students in professional higher education. Tools such as personal development plans are used to help students think about questions like: Who am I? What am I good at? What are my ambitions? What should I do to achieve my goals? In short, developing one's style is already part of the curriculum.

In every day practice, however, the use of personal development plans is determined by various interests. Take the example of the advisory report, *HBO Techniek in Bedrijf. Advies van de Sectorale Verkenningcommissie HBO Techniek*, that was written for The Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences [*Vereniging Hogescholen*]. The committee recommends that the association includes

the use of personal development plans and portfolios in order to increase the percentage of Dutch engineering students who successfully complete their studies (Sectorale Verkenningcommissie HBO Techniek, 2011). The committee introduces these plans as a means of increasing completion rates (and of decreasing drop-out rates). This example illustrates Nietzsche's view that the world, including man himself, is a constant struggle between forces. From this perspective, a personal development plan is not a neutral instrument. The strongest force determines the student's use of the plan. In the example, the will to be economically useful to society or professional life dominates. Using these plans does not automatically result in the development of the students' own style.

Students excel anyway

A second objection is that paying attention to excellence is a waste of time. Students excel anyway because they learn the routines of the profession. These skills and ways of thinking are new to them. After graduation, they have become more professional persons than they were as freshmen. It is *because of* education that students overcome themselves.

This is, however, the kind of self-transcendence that Nietzsche puts between quotation marks. If education ensures only that students become tools in the interest of the profession, no room is left for the drive for self-styling. If students are being trained in such a way that the general interest determines their routines, they are indeed transformed into professionals, but they have not become 'themselves'.

Students cannot excel (yet)

A critical reader might say that students are only then capable of relating to the routines in their profession when they have acquired a certain level of expertise. Most students are young and have too little knowledge of and experience with professional life to be able to take up their own position. They can better use their energy to learn the routines that have been proven in practice. Their professional style will develop as the years go by.

This argument is correct in so far as students indeed have to be initiated into the prevailing routines of the profession in order to become professionals. But, just like learning the prevailing routines requires exercise, developing one's own style takes time and exercise as well. It does not spontaneously come into existence. Only if students both learn the prevailing routines and simultaneously learn to reflect on them, they can become professionals who overcome themselves.

The economy is forcing professionals to excel

Professionals need to adapt to changing circumstances. The drive for flexibility dominates. There is, however, a limit to professionals' ability to be flexible. According to a number of contemporary thinkers, the detrimental effects of the prevalent drive for flexibility and acceleration are already manifesting themselves (Barnett, 2009; Byung-Chul, 2010; Rosa, 2005, 2010; Sennett 1998). Considering these negative effects, it would be wise to train students to resist this urge for flexibility rather than training them to excel.

The detrimental effects are all the more reason to train students to excel. Students who are trained to understand themselves as a multitude of short artworks start their professional careers from a less vulnerable position. As they have learned to scrutinise and to relate to the forces and impulses which are acting on them, they are less likely to be at the mercy of the labour market and the drive to be flexible. Professionals might decide that they are better off striving for stability or the *status quo* rather than for better (for now). Moreover, the drive for self-styling is subject of critical examination as well. At times, professionals might even negate the drive for self-styling and just give in to whatever presents itself.

Teaching students to excel is an excellent way of equipping them for today's professional life where the urge to be flexible prevails.

5. Excellence for all!

Excellence should be part of everyday educational practice in regular professional higher education.

In society, the need for professionals with an innovative attitude becomes stronger everyday (Onderwijsraad, 2014). In order to meet this need, the training of students to excel should not be restricted to an elite group of 'talented' students. Moreover, in contemporary professional life with its dispersive horizons, professionals need to be trained to handle these challenging circumstances and give form to their professional lives.

Nietzsche's notions of self-transcendence, self-control and self-styling can be used to reconceptualise the prevailing concept of excellence which, by definition, focuses on a small group of students. In this Nietzschean-inspired understanding of excellence, the comparison with others is of no importance. Excellence is understood as overcoming oneself. In principle, every student is able to overcome himself, independent of talent or origin.

In this Nietzschean perspective, the human condition of not yet being determined is acknowledged. It is recognised that students (like professionals) are continuously constituted anew in the practices in which they participate. Talents, just like truths and routines, are not solid.

Working on oneself, that is, reaching for self-set goals concerning one's professional practice requires self-control. Students have to learn to not automatically give in to the prevailing forces but to scrutinise them and take an active stance towards them. This skill in 'having reservations' does not demand *constant* discussion of everything, but it does require daily exercise.

CHAPTER 3: CRITICAL THINKING¹

The existence of autonomous or sovereign subjects who freely choose what kind of person they want to become is an illusion. The human being is driven by forces. This is not a philosophical principle; it is a fact of life. People change continually in and because of the practices in which they participate (Sennett, 1998). The ability to excel, that is, the ability to give style to one's character, requires a critical attitude towards these practices. In order to strive for better, professionals have to scrutinise current ideas, routines and authorities – or better formulated, they have to scrutinise the forces that manifest themselves in these truths, thoughts and behaviours. Which routines hinder one to excel? Critical thinking, one of the five elements of striving for better, is a prerequisite for excellence.

Critical thinking is considered to be an important topic in Dutch higher professional education. The Education Council of the Netherlands [*Onderwijsraad*] deems critical thinking a necessary capability of professionals with regard to the innovative capacity of society (2011, 2014). Higher education institutes should increase efforts to train students to ask critical questions if they are to contribute to the renewal of their professions. 'Innovation requires critical minds' (Onderwijsraad, 2011, p. 16; translation, HJ). The Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences [*Vereniging Hogescholen, voorheen HBO-raad*] emphasises the importance of educating students to become critical professionals as well. In *Dedicated to Quality*, the Association writes:

[t]he universities of applied sciences feel that it is necessary to educate students who can practice their profession with a critical perspective and who can contribute to innovation in professional practice. (HBO-raad, 2009, p. 21)

¹ An earlier version of this chapter has been published in 2011 as 'Studenten opleiden tot kritische professionals. Maar hoeveel 'ja, maar' kan het hbo aan?', in *Tijdschrift voor Hoger Onderwijs* 29 (2): 108-124.

In the association's strategic agenda for 2015-2025, society's need for critical professionals who are able to improve professional practice is emphasised again (Vereniging Hogescholen, 2015). Several Dutch universities of applied sciences explicitly underlined the importance of a critical and innovating 'yes, but' of students in their strategic documents (Avans Hogeschool, n.d.; De Haagse Hogeschool, 2015; Hogeschool van Amsterdam, 2015).

Critical thinking is since long a common and highly valued feature of academic life. In his analysis of the reciprocal relations between science and society, sociologist Robert Merton (1949) claims that a questioning attitude towards knowledge and truths has been the norm in science since long. Organised scepticism is part of the scientific ethos. Karl Popper, philosopher of science, also emphasises the importance of critical thinking for the progression of scientific knowledge: a claim is considered to be true, if, and as long as, it withstands all attempts to refute it (Popper, 1963). At the universities of applied sciences, this scepticism is not yet taken for granted. Although it is claimed that Dutch students in professional higher education are trained to reflect on used methods and knowledge (Van Hout, 2007), the transition to an education system where truths and facts are under discussion has not yet been fully introduced. The statement of the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences and the Educational Council of the Netherlands make clear that teaching students an inquisitive attitude is not yet commonplace in Dutch professional higher education.

In the literature, different understanding of what it is to be critical are elaborated on. Biesta (2001) distinguishes three forms or styles of critique. The first style is critical dogmatism: here, critique is conceived of as 'the application of a criterion in order to evaluate a specific state of affairs', *pace* Biesta (2001, p. 60). The second style is transcendental critique. This style of critique relies on the so-called conditions of possibility of knowledge and of speaking in a positive and unambiguous way. Third, Biesta refers to deconstruction, not as a method, but as a phenomenon that is already present. It tries to open up what is excluded and what cannot be articulated yet.

Barnett (1997) takes another approach to critical thinking. He introduces the broad notion of 'criticality' which encompasses four levels in the domain of knowledge: critical skills, reflexivity, refashion of traditions, and transformatory critique (Barnett,

1997).² He understands ‘criticality’ to be a core activity of universities. In his view, the prevalent view on critical thinking as an individualistic, conceptual skill is too narrowly defined.

As far as Dutch professional higher education institutes teach students the art of critical thinking, it is often viewed as a neutral, context-independent conceptual skill. The way that students are trained to think critically reflects a rather instrumental and de-contextualised understanding of critical thinking. Illustrative is the method ‘Critical Thinking with Rationale’ that has been enthusiastically embraced by various Dutch universities of applied sciences.³ This method is supported by a software programme called Rationale, which enables users to make argumentation structures visible in the form of so-called argumentation maps. While I do not doubt the value of training students’ reasoning skills, it is a rather narrow understanding of critical thinking – it fits Biesta’s (2001) description of critical dogmatism and ‘Barnett’s’ level of critical skills. Students mainly learn to use concepts or to think according to certain predefined, commonly accepted rules. Students are not supposed to question the predominant forces that manifest themselves in these concepts and rules of thinking. Renewal of routines of thinking is not likely to be achieved. Furthermore, perceived as rational, logically thinking subjects, students do not put themselves at risk either. This narrow understanding of critical thinking does not stimulate students to strive for better.

Inspired by Nietzsche’s *The Gay Science* (1887/2001), this chapter introduces a new notion of critical thinking that opens up opportunities to teach students a kind of critical thinking that is supportive of students’ attempts to strive for better. Especially Nietzsche’s perspectival understanding of reality, his emphasis on courage and experiment and his use of paradox and humour provide opportunities to elaborate such a notion of critical thinking.

² Barnett (1997) adheres to the existence of standards for critical thinking. What these standards entail remains unclear. I will explain this further on in this chapter.

³ See for a list of Dutch universities of applied sciences that have included the methodology ‘Critical Thinking with Rationale’ in their curricula:

http://www.kritischdenken.nl/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=8&Itemid=17&lang=nl. Last seen: 2015-1-7

First, I will introduce the notion of critical thinking which is central to *The Gay Science*. Second, I will analyse the importance of being embedded in a Nietzschean understanding of critical thinking and the consequences of this analysis for everyday practice of higher professional education. Third, the question of how to train students in critical thinking will be the focus of attention. Fourth, I will confront the Nietzschean notion of critical thinking with Barnett's notion of critical being. As Barnett has in mind the objective of training students to become autonomously and purposefully acting human beings, this confrontation urges me to explicate Nietzsche's position in even more detail. Finally, I consider the cons of a Nietzschean notion of critical thinking in order to elaborate a new notion of critical thinking that does justice to both Nietzsche's liberating, experimental and creative spirit and to the educational requirements of contemporary professional higher education.

1. Nietzsche's critical thinking

Critical thinking means questioning, time and again, accepted truths and searching for new truths, according to Nietzsche. He writes:

[it is, HJ] the willingness which a seeker after knowledge must have to declare himself *against* his previous opinion and to mistrust anything that wishes to become *firm* in us. (GS, p. 168)

In order to elaborate on this Nietzschean understanding of critical thinking, I turn to his perspectival understanding of reality, his emphasis on courage and experiment and his use of paradox and humour.

Perspectivism

Nietzsche's emphasis on the importance of an inquisitive and questioning attitude is closely related to his perspectival view of reality. In his view, it is absurd to speak of a perspective *on*, or a conceptual view *of* the world. The perspective from which a person perceives, believes, or thinks does not refer to something else. Nothing is behind it. Nietzsche rejects the distinction between reality itself and knowledge of that reality.

Man cannot know whether a ‘thing in itself’ exists: ‘[w]e simply have no organ for *knowing*, for “truth”’ (GS, p. 214). Man’s perspective *is* his reality.

Nietzsche has changed his understanding of perspectivism in the course of his life. In the secondary literature, at least two interpretations can be found. In his earlier writings, Nietzsche accepts the existence of an objective reality. However, due to the distorting effects of the senses, human beings cannot really know this objective reality. Man’s perceptions of reality are necessarily false as they distort reality. The ‘later’ Nietzsche rejects the positivist idea of an objective reality. Human beings’ perceptions of the world are no longer false (or true) as there is nothing to be false (or true) about. Reality is constituted in man’s knowledge of reality.⁴

In *The Gay Science*, the ‘later’ Nietzsche manifests himself. Various passages contain clues pointing to a perspectival understanding of reality, an understanding of reality that repudiates the distinction between an objective world and a ‘seeming’ world altogether. Man cannot but perceive reality, which includes himself, as a perspectival reality. One passage reads:

the human intellect cannot avoid seeing itself under its perspectival forms, and *solely* in these. We cannot look around our corner: it is a hopeless curiosity to want to know what other kinds of intellects and perspectives there *might* be. (GS, p. 239)

An important feature of Nietzsche’s perspectival understanding of reality is that human beings are able to create new perspectives. He writes about this ability:

the power to create for ourselves our own new eyes and ever again new eyes that are ever more our own – so that for humans alone among the animals there are no eternal horizons and perspectives. (GS, p. 128)

⁴ See also Bingham (2005a) for a description of two different ways to interpret Nietzsche’s statements on perspectivism.

As 'reality' depends on the perspective one 'takes' – Nietzsche calls this characteristic the perspectival character of existence – man can establish new realities.

In his later work, *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1887/2006), Nietzsche again explicitly underlines the fact that man's reality is a perspectival reality. In this book, he advocates a willingness to 'see differently', to approach life from different perspectives. As life is *becoming* and infinitely complex, there are many ways to 'interpret' or 'explain' reality.⁵ Nietzsche writes:

the *more* affects we are able to put into words about a thing, the *more* eyes, various eyes, we are able to use for the same thing, the more complete will be our 'concept' of the thing, our 'objectivity'. (GM, p. 87)

In Nietzsche's view, 'knowing' is not a disinterested activity. On the contrary, he summons his readers to embrace the affects and emotions and allow them to 'speak'.

In his works, Nietzsche scrutinises forces that prevent man from developing his ability to create new horizons. Not surprisingly, he fiercely criticises Christianity for enforcing its moral horizon as a fixed horizon. His critique focuses on the absoluteness of the truths and values that Christianity propagates, among them "the idea of 'another world (behind, below, above)'" (GS, p. 131). The Christian framework disapproved of any deviation from its framework.

According to Nietzsche, the same critique applies to the late-nineteenth-century sciences. With the death of god, the religious need for 'another world' did not disappear but transformed into a need for a metaphysical world. In the sciences of his time, the human habit of believing in 'another world' still prevailed. 'Under the rule of religious ideas, one has got used to the idea of "another world (behind, below, above)"' (GS, p. 131). Predicates such as 'essence', 'eternal', and 'truth' still dominate the sciences. Rather than submitting to this drive to search for this metaphysical world, Nietzsche aims at another kind of science, a *gay science*, a Dionysian, life-affirming science where truths are only temporary truths and where the eternal cycle of genesis and destruction 'applies'.

⁵ See also GS, pp. 239, 240.

Courage and experiment

The search for better is not an easy undertaking, according to Nietzsche, as the creation of new horizons (and thus new realities) requires the courage to destroy current truths, beliefs and values that hinder the quest for better. The search for better truths requires the scrutinisation of old routines of thought. To what extent do these routines make man hold on to the present? To what extent do they manifest a need for ‘another world’? Truths that obstruct the seeker of knowledge in his quest for better are to be eliminated. In order to create anything new, a warlike and courageous attitude is required. ‘*War is the father of all good things*’ (GS, p. 90). The sometimes offensive and provocative style in *The Gay Science* can be understood against this background.

Critical thinking is an aggressive activity – it is after the destruction of hindering truths – as well as a creative undertaking. The ultimate aim is the search for better. The creation of new truths is not merely an academic enterprise. For Nietzsche, critical thinking also involves fearless experimenting with new truths. A critical thinker à la Nietzsche tests new truths by trying them out. In an aphorism, entitled ‘*The sense of truth*’, Nietzsche writes:

I approve of any form of scepticism to which I can reply, ‘Let’s try it!’ But I want to hear nothing more about all the things and questions that don’t admit of experiment. This is the limit of my ‘sense of truth’; for there, courage has lost its right. (GS, p. 62)⁶

The Gay Science itself can be understood as an experiment. It is a manifestation of Nietzsche’s undertaking to develop a different notion of science than the one that he had experienced during his academic career. In Nietzsche’s time (and also in the twenty-first century), typical academic literature offered a well structured, clearly articulated theory, that is supported by evidence. Contrary to the academic literature, *The Gay Science* is a collection of brief statements on various topics which can be read

⁶ One could understand Nietzsche’s whole body of work as a manifestation of the motto ‘Let’s try it!’ [‘*Versuchen wir’s!*’]. He thinks through a variety of figures of thought in order to find a way to overcome the nihilistic conditions of his time.

independently from each other, supplemented with a number of short, subtle poems. This aphoristic style allows Nietzsche to approach a topic or a question from different angles without 'being stuck' in one particular way of thinking. *The Gay Science* is an attempt to actually answer the question whether it is possible to create a 'gay science'. Nietzsche scholar Walter Kaufmann writes about Nietzsche's new notion of science:

he had in mind the "gay science" of fearless experiment and the good will to accept new evidence and to abandon previous positions, if necessary. (1974, p. 86)

Critical thinking requires courage, precisely because the generally accepted truths and practices are at stake.

Paradox and humour

At first sight, Nietzsche wants to complete a 'mission impossible' in and with *The Gay Science*. He aims to convince his readers that frameworks or perspectives simplify by definition and that each framework merely offers one perspective among many other possible perspectives (GS, pp. 212, 213). One could say that they make life shallow. In order to communicate his position, Nietzsche has to use language. Language is, however, a storehouse of values and beliefs. Like all frameworks, language offers a simplified perspective (see also Claessens, 2008, p. 10). Nietzsche faces a paradoxical situation: in order to free people from the predominant simplifying framework, he has to use the simplifying perspective of language. And yet, this paradox did not stop Nietzsche from trying. In fact, he uses the paradox to prevent himself and his readers from being stuck in one (necessarily restricting) way of thinking. An illustrative quote reads:

this life which shouts at every one of us: 'Be a man and do not follow me – but yourself! Yourself!' (GS, p. 98)⁷

⁷ In a footnote of the translation of *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, the translator asserts that Goethe (1775) used these words as a motto in the second edition of his novel *The Sufferings of Young Werther*. This motto was meant to prevent his young male readers from imitating the main character of the novel, who was unhappy in love and shot himself (GS, p. 98).

In addition to the paradox and an aphoristic style of writing, Nietzsche uses humour and self mockery to prevent himself from being stuck in the logic of a particular framework. He writes: ‘we need all exuberant, floating, dancing, mocking, childish, and blissful art lest we lose that *freedom over things*’ (GS, p. 104). He laughs at his own existence and criticism. At the one moment, he answers his own questions, at the next he sets his readers on the wrong path. One does not know whether to take his statements seriously or not. With humour and irony, he challenges readers to give their own answers (see also Chamberlain, 2000, p. 73).

Nietzsche’s drive not to be confined to the boundaries of existing frameworks manifests itself in the way he relates to his philosophical predecessors as well. Not surprisingly, he has a rather ambiguous relationship with them. In *The Gay Science*, he repeatedly refers to philosophers such as Socrates, Plato, Schopenhauer and Kant, but he makes little (visible) effort to summarise their legacy or to further develop their theoretical labour. At times, he makes appreciative comments of their work, for example: ‘I admire the courage and wisdom of Socrates in everything he did, said – and did not say’ (GS, p. 193). However, immediately in the next sentence, Nietzsche calls him a ‘chatterer’ – although one can argue that Nietzsche uses this word in a positive and appreciating way, he still calls Socrates a ‘chatterer’. Another illustration of Nietzsche’s ironic way of relating to earlier philosophers is the title of an aphorism in the third book of *The Gay Science*: ‘Kant’s joke’ (GS, p. 140).

To summarise, critical thinking à la Nietzsche does not evolve around the question to what extent does one’s truths best represent reality in-itself. Critical thinking involves inquisitively and boldly questioning the underlying assumptions, values and truths of what one perceives as reality. A Nietzschean critical thinker aims at destroying anything ‘that wishes to be *firm* in us’ (GS, p. 168) as it prevents the quest for better to arise. He laughs at truths. He knows that they are merely temporary truths. A critical and aggressive attitude is required in order to make room for experiments with new truths. Critical thinking involves an active and ongoing search for new perspectives.

2. The importance of being embedded

What does this Nietzschean notion of critical thinking mean for today's higher professional education?

At first sight, one could argue that teachers should train students to criticise current truths and routines of thinking and to experiment with new perspectives. In this way, students can become professionals who are able to create own horizons. Philosopher of education Stefan Ramaekers (2001) argues, however, against such a subjectivistic understanding of Nietzsche's (educational) thoughts. Ramaekers' main point of critique is that such an understanding denies the human condition of embeddedness. Ramaekers emphasises that Nietzsche repeatedly emphasises the importance of acknowledging the human condition of being embedded in a particular historical and cultural frame.

In my reading of *The Gay Science*, I found many passages and arguments supporting Ramaekers' interpretation of Nietzsche's view on the importance of being embedded. First, Nietzsche's perspectival view of reality supports Ramaekers' reading. As I have argued before, in Nietzsche's perspectival understanding of reality, reality and knowledge of reality coincide in the perspective that one 'takes'. Human beings *cannot* distance themselves from this perspectival condition. A second argument concerns the human need for language. Human beings are, among other things, social beings who need language in order to live together.⁸ The use of language involves the use of '*communication symbols*' (GS, p. 213). When one becomes conscious of a thought or an experience, one translates it in signs of communication. Man translates his purely individual and unique action or experience into a shared, conceptual framework. This is not to say that one first gets to know one's experience or thought and then searches for signs of communication in order to share them with others. Conscious thinking *is* the use of communication symbols (see also Yacek, 2014, pp. 397, 398).

⁸ In Nietzsche's view, language has its origins in individuals' need to communicate their needs (GS, pp. 112, 212). Language enabled mankind to survive in difficult circumstances.

As for critical thinking, critical thinking is linguistically mediated. Therefore, it is an simplifying activity. But it is a necessarily simplifying activity, otherwise, knowledge and critique would not be possible. A third argument concerns the difficulties man experiences in facing the unknown. The fact that it is hard to hear or see anything new presupposes that the human being is accustomed to a particular way of looking and listening. Nietzsche writes: ‘[o]ne hears only those questions to which one is able to find an answer’ (GS, p. 140).

Embedding children is a key task of teachers, according to Ramaekers’ interpretation of Nietzsche’s educational philosophy. Education is the process by which children are initiated into a particular view of what is worth living for. Ramaekers asserts: ‘[e]ducation consists in teaching the child to see and to value particular things, to handle a perspective’ (2001, p. 260). It is only when a child is embedded in a particular perspective, that he can act and think meaningfully. Even freedom can only be interpreted as freedom from a particular perspective (Ramaekers, 2001, p. 257).⁹ Ramaekers completes his interpretation of Nietzsche’s educational philosophy by asserting that the child should be made aware that it is not a universal or absolute perspective in which it is embedded. It is part of teacher’s task to make the child realise that it is not limited to this particular perspective and that self-overcoming is possible.¹⁰ ‘[T]he impetus to self-overcoming arises from embeddedness itself’ (Ramaekers, 2001, p. 264).

⁹ This requirement of embeddedness in order to give meaning also applies to the term ‘critical thinking’. Only from a particular perspective, critical thinking can be interpreted as critical thinking. Depending on the perspective, critical thinking gets meaning. Illustrative is a study of the Australian researcher Anna Jones. It suggests that the way critical thinking is conceptualised and taught differs, depending on the discipline. In economics, for example, critical thinking is seen as a technical skill. It is understood as ‘an exercise in logic and analysis within the established theoretical view (Jones, 2009, p. 93). In the discipline of history, students learn to critically examine themselves and the validity of their arguments (Jones, 2009).

¹⁰ Rosenow (2004) criticises Ramaekers’ account for not taking into account the consecutive dimension of the educational process. Rosenow poses the question: ‘how can a process of socialization and indoctrination be simultaneously a process of emancipation and individual fulfillment?’ (Rosenow, 2004, p. 193). He refers to “On the Three Metamorphoses” in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (2006b) to underpin his critique. I will elaborate on this sequential aspect of education further on in this chapter.

Ramaekers focuses on the early stages of education in particular. Throughout the article, he uses the term 'child' to refer to those being educated.¹¹ Notwithstanding Ramaekers' focus, his argument that embeddedness is a prerequisite for understanding and for getting to know the unfamiliar (Ramaekers, 2001, p. 260) applies to professional higher education as well. Just like children in primary school, students in professional higher education are to be introduced into an unfamiliar world. Students are to be embedded in a particular professional perspective.

What are the consequences of Ramaekers' argument for professional higher education? If teachers are to educate students to become critical professionals à la Nietzsche, students first have to get thoroughly embedded in a particular professional perspective. Students should study the body of knowledge and participate in the professional practices in which they are to be embedded. In this way, they learn to see and appreciate a particular professional reality. Students not only learn to appreciate the practice in a particular perspective, they also get used to perceiving themselves in this perspective. Education is not a matter of learning some propositional knowledge and skills which students can use on demand. They *become* professionals. They learn to become conscious of their experiences and actions and they learn to reflect on them from the professional perspective in which they are initiated during their schooling. They are trained to represent their experiences and actions in the words and symbols of the profession, that is, to make them general and shallow. In more positive terms, students are trained to think, observe, and evaluate things from a shared professional perspective.¹² The more and the better students are able to reflect, the more they are

¹¹ Jonas & Nakazawa (2008) suggest that Ramaekers' account of embedding children in a particular perspective is more concerned with child-rearing rather than with schooling. The fact that Ramaekers uses the word 'child' gives rise to this suggestion. As Ramaekers uses the term 'education', I think it is justified to assume that he had in mind child-rearing as well as schooling.

¹² In Biesta's language on the purposes of education, the process of teaching students to perceive themselves in a dominant professional perspective belongs to the domain of socialisation (Biesta, 2010, chapter 1). 'It has to do with', as Biesta writes, 'the ways in which we identify with and are identified by existing traditions and practices' (2015b, p. 85). He sharply distinguishes the domain of socialisation from the domain of subjectification. This latter domain revolves around the process of students coming to exist as 'subjects of initiative and responsibility rather than as objects of the actions of others' (Biesta, 2015b, p. 77).

embedded in the professional perspective that is offered to them. Following Ramaekers (2001), it does not matter into which particular shape students are moulded, as long as the teacher and the educational system do not present this particular perspective as an absolute truth. According to Ramaekers,

the thorn in his [Nietzsche's, HJ] (philosophical) side is not that the system of morals mould human beings and their world into a particular shape, but that it *absolutises* that particular shape. (2001, p. 262)

3. Teaching critical thinking requires active stimulation

One could argue that, in the twenty-first century, hardly anyone believes in the existence of truths in a foundationalist way. We live in a pluralistic society where it is generally acknowledged that a multiplicity of incompatible viewpoints exists. This condition of plurality is characteristic for modern society. And yet, the quest for secure foundations of practice which can be measured and demonstrated is predominant in many professional fields. Terms such as 'evidence-based medicine', 'evidence-based nursing', and 'evidence-based care' are prominent terms, for instance in the context of Dutch professional higher education in nursing (Dekker-van Doorn, 2015; Lambregts, Grotendorst & Van Merwijk, 2015). The focus on secure foundations is combined and reinforced by the increasing need for nurses to make the results of their work visible (Schuurmans, Lambregts, Grotendorst & Van Merwijk, 2012, pp. 11-18). The growing influence of health insurance industry and the increasing level of litigation involving the work of medical professionals underlines the importance of standards even more (Schuurmans et al., 2012, p. 6). Philosopher John Drummond (2000), who analyses the contexts in which British nurses function from a Nietzschean perspective, points out:

the standard becomes objectified to a degree that quality-monitoring takes on the appearance of a foundation, an outside reality, in that it both drives and is seen to underpin the very process of what we take ourselves to be about. (2000, p. 153).

It is as if these standards have a life of their own. They get the same quality as the platonian (or Christian) truths: they are eternal and invariable. Despite an environment that discourages critical thinking, many nurses feel the need for critical reflection on their day-to-day practices, as a Dutch study on moral case deliberation among 255 nurses and 78 managers in an elderly homes shows (Weidema, Molewijk, Kamsteeg & Widdershoven, 2013).

In a meritocratic society, the quest for secure foundations of practice is a predominant force. Embedding students in a particular perspective – even if it is accompanied with the message that this particular perspective is not an absolute or universal one and that things can be different – is therefore not a sufficient condition for training students to become truth seeking professionals who boldly scrutinise current truths. On the one hand, when professional higher education's task of embedding students prevails, there is no impetus for students to scrutinise current perspectives. Students are expected to acquire the professional perspective that is offered to them in order to become members of a particular profession. They become 'good' professionals who learn to follow the rules of the professional game. Contrary to this 'obedient' professional, a Nietzschean truth seeker does not hold on to a particular habit of thinking because of it being a habit, nor does he adhere to a particular habit of thinking because of it being shared by (many) others. As far as Nietzsche refers to communities in positive terms, he speaks of a community of free spirits who scrutinise every routine in thinking and doing that wants to become enduring and thus prevents the strive for better. He writes about this (future) community, this 'we':

we are delighted by all who love, as we do, danger, war, and adventure; who refuse to compromise, to be captured, to reconcile, to be castrated; we consider ourselves conquerors; we contemplate the necessity for new orders as well as for a new slavery – for every strengthening and enhancement of the human type also involves a new kind of enslavement – doesn't it? (GS, p. 241)

On the other hand, when teachers emphasise that the perspective into which students are initiated, is just one among (possible) other ones, they run the risk of students not taking this perspective seriously. A relativistic and indifferent attitude of students lies in wait. Philosophers of education Jonas and Nakazawa (2008) follow the same line of argument, while disputing Ramaekers' interpretation of Nietzsche. They criticise Ramaekers for not realising all implications of Nietzsche's perspectival position for educational settings. Although Ramaekers does not intent to situate Nietzsche's philosophy of education as a relativistic philosophy, they assert that his argument leads to this conclusion. According to them, Ramaekers seems to conclude that Nietzsche's perspectival position does not offer any criteria for the evaluation of perspectives. He is in danger of making his readers believe that 'all perspectives are equally worthy or unworthy of belief' (Jonas & Nakazawa, 2008, p. 271).

Although I agree with Jonas and Nakazawa's critique of Ramaekers' account, I do not agree with their further reading of Nietzsche when they argue that Nietzsche's perspectival thinking offer criteria to evaluate perspectives. In their reading, some perspectives are more true than others. 'More true' does not mean that a perspective better reflects reality in itself, according to these philosophers of education, but it means that it better reflects the everyday reality one lives in. There is 'the possibility that certain perspectives are, from an *empirical point of view*, truer and more faithful to reality than others' (Jonas & Nakazawa, 2008, p. 279). They put on the forefront the fact that Nietzsche's rejection of the distinction between the true world and the apparent world 'opens up the possibility for what we might call his "everyday realism"' (Jonas & Nakazawa, 2008, p. 279). Jonas and Nakazawa's argument does not do justice to Nietzsche's perspectival thinking as they adhere to a reflective reading of Nietzsche. Contrary to their reading, I argue that Nietzsche promotes a pragmatic, life affirming, perspectival approach to life in which truthfulness refers to 'what promotes life'. It revolves around the endeavour to give shape to reality while being connected with the force and fertility of life. The more perspectives man is able to 'take', the broader and richer his repertoire of actions is.

What does this exploration of Jonas and Nakazawa's critique on Ramaekers' account contribute to the undertaking of combining teachers' task of embedding

students in a professional perspective and the task of stimulating students to scrutinise these perspectives? First, although not all perspectives are equally (in)valuable, higher education teachers cannot decide what perspective is best for students. Students have to find out for themselves what works for them. Teachers should encourage students to discriminate between different perspectives and to search for better ones. Pivotal is the question of how students can be taught to become professionals (that is, to become embedded) while preventing books, methods, criteria for assessment, lessons and teachers from depriving students of the opportunity to strive for better. In, and with *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche shows a useful strategy. An aphoristic design of the curriculum can be a strategy for preventing students *and* teachers being trapped in the logic of a one-sided curriculum. Both literature, assignments, teachers and methods can highlight different and even contradictory aspects of the professional practice. One could think of teaching students best practices which evidently contradict each other. Furthermore, assessment criteria could, to some extent, be ambiguous and contradicting in order to allow for multiple perspectives. This is quite challenging. Confronting students with a variety of (partly contradicting) perspectives is not commonplace practice in professional higher education, as has been argued in chapter 1. Although sociologists and philosophers like Barnett, Bauman and Sennett have shown (professional) life to be liquid, uncertain, changeable, and supercomplex (i.e. condition of having multiple and conflicting frameworks for comprehending the world at one's disposal), the Apollinian urge for order and certainty often prevails in professional higher education contexts.

Second, the role of teachers is a different one if students are to be encouraged to scrutinise current truths. Rather than being an expert who represents *the* truth or being an expert who initiate students into a more or less arbitrary truths, the teacher is an expert in *temporary* truths. He tells students about profession's current truths. In order to make students realise that these truths are temporary truths, the teacher tells about obsolete truths as well. The truths that were available at that time, were considered to be the best possible truths. Right now, these truths no longer apply. In this way, the teacher shows students that truths come and go.

Furthermore, the teacher can actively invite students to question current (but only after thorough appropriation of these truths) and to experiment with new truths. He encourages professionals-to-be to scrutinise their experiences and the results of these experiments as well. Nietzsche provides some useful questions:

[w]hat did I really experience? What was going on inside and around me? Was my reason bright enough? Was my will turned against all deceptions of the senses and stalwart in warding off the fantastic? (GS, p. 179)

The teacher stimulates students to, time and again, answer the question of to what extent are these experiences and truths ‘truthful’? In this way, the teacher wants to prevent students from getting stuck. He stimulates them to develop own professional perspectives. As for these experiments, students do not have to succeed in creating better or more ‘truthful’ perspectives. What matters are the experiments themselves. ‘The thinker sees his own actions as experiments and questions, as seeking explanations of something: to him, success and failure are primarily *answers*’ (GS, p. 57).

Nietzschean education seems a ‘gay’ affair. In a way, it is. Room is available for wandering, for trying, for striving for better. No absolute right and wrong exist, only better (or worse). Choices are considered to be tentative decisions. Philosopher and Nietzsche-scholar Niels Helsloot writes:

he [Nietzsche] feels that the ability to make well-funded, right decisions has become less important because eternal guidelines for salvation have fallen in disuse. This offers room for to wander cheerfully, experiment and to regard choices as temporary. (Helsloot, 1999, p. 156; translation HJ)

However, it is a demanding affair as well. Wandering cheerfully is only possible if one is thoroughly embedded in a particular perspective. Moreover, courage is required if one really wants to engage into scrutinising current practices and experiment with new truths. Students’ and teacher’s certainties are at stake.

4. Levels of critical being

Barnett deems 'criticality' an essential activity of universities. In *Higher Education: A Critical Business* (1997), he introduces the notion *critical being* as an alternative for the prevalent concept of critical thinking which he deems too narrowly defined. The predominant understanding of critical thinking as an individualistic, conceptual skill does not enable higher education to fulfil the objective of enabling graduates to take on the supercomplex and rapidly changing world of the modern age. In Barnett's view, critical persons are not just critical thinkers. Their critical attitude is not restricted to the domain of formal knowledge, it also encompasses the domain of the world (of actions) and the domain of persons (Barnett, 1997, p. 65). In the domain of knowledge, Barnett identifies four levels of criticality: critical thinking skills, critical thinking of one's understanding, critical thought (malleable traditions of thought), and critical thinking about the profession (reframing of knowledge). He applies a similar classification to the domain of the world and to the domain of persons.

Although Barnett's book dates from almost twenty years ago, a confrontation of the present Nietzschean inspired understanding of critical thinking with Barnett's approach is interesting for several reasons. First, Barnett's subdivision of criticality into four levels offers opportunities to further elaborate a Nietzschean understanding of critical thinking. Furthermore, both positions with regard to the self differ significantly. Barnett inserts that, in the end, higher education revolves around the objective of forming 'critical persons who are not subject to the world but able to act autonomously and purposively within it' (1997, p. 4). In Barnett's view, the ideal that higher education is to accomplish is to train students to become autonomous professionals. For Nietzsche, such an independent, autonomously acting 'self' is an illusion. The self is the variable result of the forces that act in, on and through the individual.

Critical thinking skills

At the lowest level of criticality, Barnett takes critical thinking to be an individualistic, cognitive ability. Critical thinking can be learned independently from intellectual or practical contexts. It is seen as an assembly of skills which can be identified separately.

Students are supposed to apply these skills to given problem situations in a value-free way. It is a procedural activity. ‘[P]roviding the permitted procedures are followed, legitimate outcomes will flow’ (Barnett, 1997, p. 16). This instrumental form of critical thinking leads to an ‘unquestioned programme of activity and is even generating an intellectual sub-culture in its own right’ (Barnett, 1997, p. 16). Almost twenty years later, this understanding of critical thinking is still widely favoured.¹³ Despite its popularity, this concept of critical thinking is, according to Barnett, inadequate as it does not lead to the transformation of critical thinkers, nor does it lead to wider forms of social change. ‘[T]his is a critical thinking without a critical edge’ (Barnett, 1997, p. 17).

From a Nietzschean perspective, it makes no sense to speak of critical thinking when it is perceived as a neutral, context-independent conceptual skill. In this understanding of critical thinking, no room is available for criticising and further developing the procedural ways of thinking themselves. Students learn to use concepts and standards in a predefined way. They are supposed to stay within the existing framework. The predominant forces that manifest themselves in these rules of thinking remain unquestioned. Having said this, one could argue that teaching students these general critical thinking skills is, in another sense, beneficial to the undertaking of training students to become Nietzschean critical thinkers. It is a way of embedding students in the perspective of their future profession. They first need to think as professionals before they can scrutinise profession’s truths. Critical thinking skills have, however, nothing to do with critical thinking. Moreover, from a Nietzschean viewpoint, skills or knowledge do not exist independently of contexts or people.

Critical thinking of one’s understanding

When students realise that every knowledge claim is questionable and contestable, another kind of critical thinking presents itself: students become critical on their own understanding. The insight that ‘the next book, lecture or experiment is not going to yield all the secrets even on one small topic’ leads to an open attitude towards all knowledge (Barnett, 1997, p. 71). Every knowledge claim is an invitation for debate

¹³ See the introduction of this chapter and footnote 2 of this chapter.

and further research. Barnett claims that he does not provide his readers with a psychological description of students' cognitive development. He describes the kind of persons that students should become: professionals with an open mind who understand that 'an inquiry after truth is never-ending' (Barnett, 1997, p. 71). In order to reach this state of mind, students need to be confronted with various, (partly) conflicting, cognitive perspectives. Within a particular perspective, the rules of thinking and the criteria for evaluating situations are unambiguous. The criteria of different perspectives are, however, (partly) incompatible. The encounter with incompatible perspectives is expected to make students aware of the insufficiency of knowledge claims. It also encourages them to ask questions about their own understanding of a topic, such as:

How secure is it? ... How wide-ranging are the connections that I am making with other topics? How much reliance am I placing on authorities and how much is this position the result of my own thinking? ... How clear is it? (Barnett, 1997, pp. 70-71)

Barnett asserts that critical thinking on one's understanding refutes a relativistic attitude of students as it relies on critical standards (1997, p. 71). The purpose of teaching students these metacritical capacities is to enable them to act autonomously in a world where every description of the world is disputable (Barnett, 1997, p. 71). Yet, Barnett deems this level of critical thinking inadequate as it is a capacity of individuals.

The link between Nietzsche's perspectivism and Barnett's account seems obvious. As no perspective can 'reveal' the whole truth, students should be encouraged to engage in a variety of different perspectives. An 'aphoristic' curriculum offers students the opportunity to approach a question or theme from different angles without 'being stuck' in one particular way of thinking. However, in at least one respect, Nietzsche's view deviates significantly from Barnett's. Barnett has in mind the transformation of students into independent persons who are able to purposively and autonomously act in the modern world. For Nietzsche, this kind of autonomy and independence is an illusion. Human beings are driven by forces. Man can scrutinise these forces and relate to them – but one cannot escape the human condition of being subjected to them.

Indeed, these forces are involved in the process of thinking itself. Thinking is not a disinterested activity. One's needs, interests, but also external forces strive for dominance.

Critical thinking of collective standards within the profession

At this level of criticality, Barnett underlines the importance of collectivity. Individual professionals may understand profession's truths as invitations for debate, but, as individuals, they are unable to bring about any change in the profession. Barnett extends the notion of critical thinking to a collaborative activity that revolves around shared standards. He asserts that 'critical thought develops and takes off through sustained interchange around collective standards' (Barnett, 1997, p. 17). Within a particular profession, deviant opinions and efforts to further develop standards are allowed. Outsiders, however, are denied access to the debate. Professionals define their own critical standards for evaluating professional practices. Outsiders are expected to accept these standards. According to Barnett, higher education has embraced this vision: students are turned 'into faithful and expert followers of the faith' that professionals decide for themselves how they perceive the world and how they act (Barnett, 1997, p. 18).¹⁴ In contemporary society, this faith is unproblematic because experts are (still) in high esteem. And yet, in Barnett's view, this level of critical thinking has its limits as it is inside-oriented. He wonders:

[w]hat do they [professionals, HJ] know of a discipline when all they know of the world is through the perspective of that discipline? (Barnett, 1997, p. 18)

This level of critical thinking appears to correspond with a Nietzschean-inspired notion of critical thinking. Inside the profession, professionals are allowed to express a critical

¹⁴ See the website of the LOOV [*Landelijk Overleg Opleidingen Verpleegkunde*] – a partnership of Dutch higher education institutes which offer nursing programmes – for an illustration of how these institutes excluded 'outsiders' from the debate on a new educational profile *Bachelor Nursing 2020* (2015). The sounding board groups of the Bachelor Nursing 2020 project encompassed merely professionals from the educational and the medical fields. Experts from other areas were not involved. Website: <http://www.loov2020.nl/klankbordgroepen/>. Last seen: 2015-08-20

'yes, but'. They are permitted to scrutinise current practices, collective standards, and values. However, the critical examination of profession's truths and values is only permitted to members of the profession. Non-experts are excluded. Students do not (yet) belong to the group of insiders. They have to be introduced into the prevailing perspective before they are allowed to contribute to the debate about the profession's criteria. In many professional communities, a higher education diploma is proof of being initiated into the perspective of the profession successfully. It provides the holder the right to speak critically. Since they are not yet initiated, students' attempts to scrutinise profession's truths are not taken seriously. Moreover, in order to get a diploma and become a member of the community, students better hold their tongue and accept the profession's standards without questioning them. Teacher's task is to make students think like professionals do. Students hardly have the opportunity to practice critical thinking. Furthermore, if students are taught to understand critical thinking as an exclusive activity of professionals, they learn to dismiss the possibility of non-experts (that is, according to the profession's rules) being brothers-in-arms in the struggle for better (see also chapter 4).

Critical thinking about the profession

The highest level of critical thinking concerns criticism about the discipline or the profession itself. Insiders and outsiders are allowed to criticise the truths and values of the profession. Barnett calls this form of criticism metacritique because it places the profession in a broader context. This metacritique does not have to meet the rules and values of the profession; it comments on the rules and conventions themselves. Metacritique can have an epistemic character: it interrogates the fundamental concepts and truths of the discipline (which do not necessarily have to be understood as transcendental truths, according to Barnett). It can also focus on the wider social role of the discipline. The central question is to what extent the profession is able to accept 'extramural form of criticism' from outsiders as well as from insiders (Barnett, 1997, p. 18). For Barnett, the level of metacritique has educational implications. Interdisciplinarity is required and it should be *critical interdisciplinarity* (Barnett, 1997, p. 19). Students should be given the opportunity to observe their discipline or a

topic from different cognitive perspectives. Barnett emphasises that this level of critical thinking is not easy. He points to the epistemological and operational problems associated with this undertaking. How can students be confronted with various perspectives, including perspectives of other disciplines, in a serious way? Barnett deems the risk high that a superficial confrontation lies in wait. An even more problematic issue is the question of how these experiences with different (cognitive) perspectives can be related to each other in order to let students really gain from their experiences. As students (and many teachers) are not accustomed to leaving behind their own outlook on things, this is quite a difficult task. Barnett writes:

[y]et this is what critique as external reflection ultimately requires – the capacity to become an *other*, to inhabit, if only briefly, a cognitive perspective that is unfamiliar. (Barnett, 1997, p. 19)

At the highest level of critical thinking, there are no taboos. One can freely scrutinise the practices, values and rules of the profession. A radical Nietzschean critical examination of truths and practices is allowed in professional as well as educational settings. The incorporation of interdisciplinarity into the curriculum is one way of enabling and encouraging students to question the truths of the profession and to ‘wander cheerfully’. Yet more ways are available for training a radically critical attitude. Question is to what extent are professionals(-to-be) allowed to use their experiences in other areas as sources of inspiration for scrutinisation and experiment. Can they use their upbringing and cultural backgrounds to question assumptions of the profession? Or, are attempts to critique conventions only heard if they are expressed in the language of the profession, that is, if they have lost their sharp edges due to the ‘translation’?

The comparison of a Nietzschean inspired notion of critical thinking and Barnett’s notion of critical being shows many similarities with regard to their understanding of critical thinking. Both thinkers adhere to a type of critical thinking that goes beyond the

level of arguing or applying rules of logic. Furthermore, both Nietzsche and Barnett start from the assumption that reality is plural.

Yet, there are also differences. Whereas Nietzsche is often mentioned the forefather of postmodernism, Barnett is critical about post-modernism and does not expect much of it. Barnett's main critique is that postmodernism leads to an understanding of critical thinking as a local affair. As postmodernism denies the existence of universal, independent critical standards, man is trapped in his local framework. Barnett writes:

[p]ostmodernism [...] refuses to accept that there are *any* secure frameworks or critical standards on which we can agree and from which criticism can get going. (Barnett, 1997, p. 24)

From a postmodern viewpoint, according to Barnett, the highest level of critical thinking is not possible since secure, cross-disciplinary standards for critical thinking are missing. In the end, postmodernism does not provide modern professionals with means to face the challenge of handling a growing number of conflicting discourses. No standards are available to answer the recurrent question of 'in what framework will I act?' (Barnett, 1997, p. 141).

Barnett is right that Nietzsche does not offer any fixed standards to evaluate perspectives. In Nietzsche's perspectival view, subject and object cannot be distinguished. One can only critique a framework from within that same framework. Being constructed in and because of the practices in which one participates, one needs to scrutinise these practices in search for truths and rules of thought that prevents one to strive for better. What 'better' is, is open. No definite answers are available. Barnett, on the other hand, adheres to the existence of fixed, universal, cross-disciplinary standards (he is not quite clear what these standards are). He does not want to give up the idea of critical standards.

5. A contemporary notion of critical thinking

Barnett's criticism may contain some truth when he questions the value of postmodernism for elaborating a notion of critical thinking that better enables higher professional education teachers to prepare students for professional practices that are characterised by dispersive and short term horizons. A Nietzschean-inspired notion of critical thinking does not appear to fit within current educational practices in which clearly defined, result-oriented criteria for assessment are highly valued and reflection is conceived of as an appropriate means for 'producing' critical professionals. To what extent could a Nietzschean notion of critical thinking take into account the educational needs and demands of today's higher professional education? In line with Nietzsche's thinking – '[t]o be a Nietzschean, one must not be a Nietzschean' (Kaufmann, 1974, p. 403) – I will consider the arguments against a Nietzschean notion of critical thinking in order to create a notion of critical thinking that does justice to both Nietzsche's experimenting, creative but also subversive spirit and the educational requirements of today's higher education.

A Nietzschean-inspired form of critical thinking does not fit modern higher education

A first objection to a Nietzschean-inspired notion of critical thinking is that this type of critical thinking runs counter to the spirit of today's professional higher education – and thus *unzeitgemäß* is, to use a Nietzschean term.

Educator and scholar Pasi Sahlberg outlines three trends that have dominated education development policies and reform strategies since the 1980s: standardisation of education, increased focus on literacy and numeracy, and consequential accountability systems for schools (2007, p. 150). In many parts of the world, these trends have been taken on as an official agenda, aiming at the improvement of the quality of education. Dutch professional higher education has adopted this agenda as well. As for standardisation, all universities of applied sciences offer outcome-based curricula. The programmes are oriented towards 'delivering' educational outcomes. Moreover, there is the intention of introducing a central examination of core subjects

(Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap, 2011, pp. 26-27). Proficiency in literacy and numeracy is time and again emphasised as a prerequisite for high-level professional practice. A large number of Dutch professional higher education institutes offer additional tuition to increase first-year students' proficiency (HBO-raad, 2009, p. 14). One fears that this emphasis – reinforced by the increasing importance of structural knowledge, technical skills and cognition (Sahlberg, 2007) – leads to the decline of education on moral and social issues.¹⁵ As regards consequential accountability, the funding of higher education institutes is largely based on the number of graduates (see also chapter 5). The present-day horizon offers little room for wander, ambiguous criteria or experiment in higher professional education.

Nietzsche's critical thinking might indeed be called 'untimely'; it does not seem to fit our time. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, professional higher education has little room to manoeuvre or to transform existing instrumental concepts of critical thinking. However, the objection that Nietzsche's thinking is 'untimely' applies, mainly to twenty-first century professional higher education. Nietzsche's critical thinking is 'timely' where today's professional practices are concerned. These practices are characterised by an acceleration of the speed of change. Professionals need to be able to handle these new circumstances. Professionals who know the art of a critical and experimental 'yes, but' are better equipped to strive for better in today's world than professionals who only know of a type of critical thinking that is confined to applying existing rules of thinking. Students have to learn to scrutinise truths and rules of thinking if they are to become professionals who are able to contribute to the renewal of profession's truths.

If the objective of teaching students to create horizons of their own is to be taken seriously, teachers and policy makers have to be prepared to be(come) critical professionals themselves. One could argue that the advice of The Education Council of the Netherlands [*Onderwijsraad*] to reinforce students' research competences is an example of criticism of the current situation. The Council deems so-called twenty-first century skills such as critical thinking, creativity and reflective ability necessary to

¹⁵ See Onderwijsraad (2013a) for a description of the situation with regard to the implementation of reference levels of literacy and numeracy in Dutch education system.

enable professionals to contribute to productivity and innovation (Onderwijsraad, 2014). The aforementioned trends of standardisation, increased focus on literacy and numeracy and consequential accountability are, however, not questioned. The instrumental perspective of professional higher education remains intact. To what extent has professional higher education the courage to scrutinise its own horizons and to create new perspectives allowing for a definition of critical thinking that is more helpful in encouraging students to strive for better?

The survival of higher education is at stake

Opponents of a Nietzschean notion of critical thinking fear that students (and teachers) will carry on their distrust too far (see for example Barnett, 1997). As a result, all truths and standards will be abolished and one will end up in a situation of relativism and anarchy.¹⁶ The institute of higher education will be at stake since the transfer of society's and profession's truths, which is fundamental to the very existence of the institute, will be undermined. Philosopher Paul van Tongeren writes:

once infected by Nietzsche's distrust towards all systematisers, someone who is reading texts from the canon of classics is going to hear Nietzsche's commenting voice from the margins of the texts [...] The philosopher seeks for truth. Nietzsche asks: why, in fact, truth? And: what in us makes us continuously seek for truth? (Van Tongeren, 2000, p. 12; translation HJ)

In this Nietzschean-inspired perspective, professional higher education's function of preparing students for professional life (which includes the initiation of students in the current truths of the profession) is not at stake. What is, however, questioned is an understanding of professional higher education as a 'producer' of professionals who have only learned to function according to the existing truths and rules of the discipline. Such an understanding hinders an appropriate preparation of students for

¹⁶ Martha Nussbaum (1992) refers to the risk of extreme relativism and subjectivism. If evaluation becomes a question of power (or self-assertion, or usefulness), there is no point for any discussion. Rational debate is no longer possible (Nussbaum, 1992).

present-day professional life. If students are to become professionals who are able and willing to strive for better truths in a constantly changing world, precisely a questioning attitude towards truths, authorities and rules is needed. Teacher's truths are not exempted from scrutinisation. Teachers offer merely temporary truths and even these truths are questionable.

The emphasis on experiment leads to a jumble of barely-founded assumptions

Professionals who are trained in Nietzsche's critical spirit are (at least) as much committed to experimenting as to thinking. But, is there any room in Nietzsche's thinking to transform the results of these experiments into *shared* new truths? What is the use of a Nietzschean inspired notion of critical thinking if experiments only result in a collection of separate results and observations which have no effect on the professional practice? In this light, Kaufmann's criticism of Nietzsche's method can be understood. Kaufmann (1974) argues that, as Nietzsche rejects all systems, he refuses to consider the possibility that systematisation can be beneficial for the kind of experimental project he had in mind. Systematisation or attempts 'to integrate a host of insights into a coherent system' can reveal inconsistencies and errors in a system and they can give rise to more inquiry and experiment (Kaufmann, 1974, p. 93). Kaufmann's second point of critique is that without any systematisation, new insights will remain insignificant. 'Though a system may be false in spite of its internal coherence, an unsystematic collection of sundry observations can hardly lay any greater claim to truth' (Kaufmann, 1974, p. 94). If higher education wants students to prepare students appropriately, students need the ability to systematise the outcomes of critical thinking and experimenting. Innovation and renewal of a profession can only occur when these new truths are put into (and reduced to) new, temporary systems and perspectives.

6. The art of an experimental 'yes, but!'

Students have to be trained in the art of a radically critical and experimental 'yes, but!' if they are to become critical and innovative professionals who are able to handle

(rapid) change and uncertainty. Striving for better in a professional world with dispersive horizons requires a critical attitude.

In contemporary professional higher education, a narrow and instrumental notion of critical thinking prevails. Often, critical thinking is put on a par with making argumentation structures. This type of exercises could be valued for their potential to embed students in the prevailing perspective of the profession as students learn to apply profession's rules of thought. This narrow understanding of critical thinking denies, however, the present-day condition of an increasing speed of change and concomitant uncertainty. A far more critical and subversive notion of critical thinking is required if students are to become innovative professionals.

Critical thinking consists of at least two features if it is to enable the quest for better. First, critical thinking involves the scrutinisation of current ideas, routines of thinking and authorities – or better formulated, the scrutinisation of the forces that manifest themselves in these truths. Critical thinking is not confined to the application of rules, nor does it cease when contradicting truths or negating evidence are found. It involves the underlying assumptions and rules of thinking as well. It seeks for truths and rules that prevent the quest for better.

Second, if critical thinking is to contribute to the quest for better, it involves experiment as well. A critical 'yes, but' both questions existing reality and searches for new possibilities. As there are no fixed standards to evaluate existing truths or new truths (these standards are subject to examination as well), students have to be encouraged to test their answers to the questions of professional life in real life. The proof of the pudding is in the eating.

Stimulating this type of critical thinking requires courage from both teachers and students as they put their truths at stake and to 'cheerfully' experiment in order to search for better.

CHAPTER 4: FRIENDSHIP

In 2011 a special committee was formed in order to advise The Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences [*Vereniging Hogescholen*] on developments in the engineering sector. In its report, the committee stated that the profile of the engineer is outdated and should be re-evaluated (Sectorale Verkenningcommissie HBO Techniek, 2011). The reason for this advice was that developments in technology were taking place more rapidly than before and that these rapid transformations affected the function, the sector and the place in which engineers work. Furthermore, today's engineers have to deal with more sectors than their own, such as health care, logistics and the creative industries. The committee labels the new engineer a 'connector': 'he makes connections with other sectors and he brings people with different interests together in order to set an evidently common goal' (2011, p. 5, translation HJ). As connectors, they need to be prepared for a task that is performed in an interdisciplinary and ever faster transforming environment.

The innovation and improvement of social structures such as the truths of a discipline are collaborative activities (Barnett, 1997). Professionals need each other to bring about new truths.¹ Striving for better is to a certain extent a joint undertaking.

The importance of and the need for co-operation can be found in Nietzsche's works as well. He expresses this need in terms of friendship, the next element of striving for better. As the search for better can be a demanding, solitary and never-ending activity, Nietzsche deems friendship a place where one can recover from this quest. More importantly, friends contribute to this search. In professional life, friendships are also relevant.

In Dutch professional higher education, bringing truths into discussion and searching for new truths are not (yet) common activities (see chapter 3). An exception is the group of honours programmes in professional higher education, which are

¹ Writer and biographer Walter Isaacson (2014) depicts how collectives of bright individuals created the digital revolution. He asserts that in the age of the Internet, individuals do not invent things on their own. The digital revolution is the result of teamwork.

accessible to a small, select group of talented and motivated students. The focus of these programmes is on educating these students to become leading professionals or innovating professionals (Van Eijl, Pilot & Wolfensberger, 2010, p. 31). As in the academic honour programmes, students are stimulated to search for new truths. In both types of programmes, this search is associated with a specific educational environment, that is, small groups of students and intense interactions between teacher and students (Coppoolse, Van Eijl & Pilot, 2013; Van Eijl et al. 2010; Van Ginkel, Van Eijl & Pilot, 2014; Wolfensberger & Pilot, 2014). International scholars (Chickering & Gamson, 1987) emphasise the importance of the interaction between teacher and students as well.

In regular (professional) higher education contexts, the terms 'teacher' and 'student' are associated with persons who are unequals with regard to possessing truth and who have different goals. The educators Paul Hager and Phil Hodgkinson (2009) argue that contemporary educational policy makers, but also employers in higher education, adhere especially to "common sense" notions of transfer' and acquisition, when speaking and thinking about learning (p. 619). These notions highlight, indeed, that teachers and students are unequal with regard to having expertise (teachers are more knowledgeable and skilful than students), and that they have different objectives (teachers want to impart their knowledge and experience, students want to acquire knowledge and skills). Furthermore, these notions presume that knowledge and skills are identifiable, solid things.

These notions, and accompanied presumptions, are quite influential in educational thought. However, their influence is not restricted to the way we speak about educational practices. Following Nietzsche's perspectival understanding of reality, these notions constitute reality as reality and knowledge about reality coincide in the perspective people take (see chapter 3). Considering these brief remarks on prevailing notions and presumptions with regard to learning, teachers and policy makers face quite a challenge to train students to function in today's practices where innovation requires collaboration.

How could interactions between teacher and students that stimulate a joint quest for truth be encouraged in educational environments with equal access?² In this chapter, I introduce the metaphor of friendship to augment and enrich the available resources for reflecting on the interactions between teachers and students.³ I dwell on Nietzsche's ideas of friendship, especially the ones that he described in *The Gay Science* (1887/2001) and *Human, All Too Human. A Book for Free Spirits* (1887/1996). While Aristotle started the long lasting philosophical tradition of investigating the subject of friendship, Nietzsche is one of the most prominent philosophers who explored friendship in relation to the search for truth in a world where no absolute truths exist. To a large extent, Nietzsche contrasted his conception of friendship on Plato's ideal of friendship, another important philosopher who elaborated on the subject of friendship. As for Plato, Nietzsche understands friendship as a joint quest for truth. An important difference between these two philosophers is that Plato's search is aimed at an eternal and unchanging truth, whereas Nietzsche's truth is temporary and constantly changing. Nietzsche describes friendship as a shared quest for truth that requires struggle and opposition, even if this opposition is at the expense of friendship itself. However, he also comprehends friendship as a resting place where one can take a rest from the urge for truth. For the sake of friendship as a resting place, friends are required not to blandly say everything. Nietzsche's notion of friendship is a challenging one. While comparing teachers and students to truth seeking friends, this chapter aims at sincerely grasping the probabilities and challenges of preparing students for a liquid society where the endeavour to strive for better is a joint undertaking. What can be learned from this comparison with respect to stimulating students to search for new truths in cooperation with others?⁴

² Although life on campus, particular rituals, excellent housing or the interaction between students are important factors in stimulating students to strive for better as well, this chapter is limited to the interaction between teacher and students.

³ See De Mul (1999, pp. 46-49) for an elaboration on Nietzsche's use of the metaphor. According to De Mul (1999), Nietzsche strategically deploys the metaphor as a weapon to compete the rigid complex of concepts of the philosophical, moral and religious tradition.

⁴ For the sake of clarity, I do not understand friendship between teachers and students as a prerequisite for teaching students to jointly search for new truths. I use friendship as a metaphor. Students and teachers *might*, coincidentally, become real friends, but that is something that happens by coincidence.

Taking truth seeking friendship as a metaphor for the relationship between teacher and students, the design of this chapter is as follows: first, I focus on Plato's ideal of friendship as described in *Symposium*. In this dialogue, friendship is understood as a joint quest for truth. Second, I explore Nietzsche's notion of friendship. In the third part, I analyse two prevalent metaphors in professional higher education that are used to describe the interaction between teacher and students: as supplier and consumers of knowledge and as master and apprentice. I argue that, in contrast to the notion of friendship, these metaphors emphasis the asymmetry between teacher and students and direct attention away from the search for new truths as a joint endeavour of teachers and students. In the fourth part, I introduce the metaphor of truth seeking friendship to augment the resources for thinking about the interactions between students and teacher. I describe these interactions *as if* they are truth seeking friends. What responsibilities do teacher and students have for bringing about a joint search for truth? And, what are the challenges of truth seeking friendships in professional higher education? I finish this chapter by describing the benefits of truth seeking friendships between teachers and students.

1. Plato's ideal of friendship, as described in Socrates' *Symposium*

Nietzsche's notion of truth seeking friendship has its precursor in the Greek ideal of friendship. Plato writes about this ideal in *Symposium*, one of the probably fictional dialogues of Socrates written down by Plato. In this dialogue, Apollodorus, a prominent follower of Socrates, tells about a banquet where seven participants, among them Socrates, sing love's praise. In their eulogies to love, the ideal of love is described in various manners. Aristophanes, a famous comic playwright, argues that love is the longing of a human being for his first or original form of oneness. '[O]riginally that's exactly how we were—whole beings. "Love" is just the name we give to the desire for and pursuit of wholeness' (Plato, *Symposium*, 192e-193a).

Socrates, at his turn, starts saying that he can only speak the truth when he praises love. Contrary to the previous speakers, he is not willing (nor able) to ascribe characteristics to love that are inconsistent with the facts. With this statement, Socrates tells his friends the truth – their speeches are untruthful, that is, they are not about the

nature of friendship itself – and thus accepts the risk of jeopardising their friendship. For him, love or friendship is the longing to possess what is valuable, in this case truth, for ever. Socrates understands friendship as a joint search for truth.

Plato's model of friendship is based on his world of Ideas. This world, where Ideas are eternal and do not change, exists alongside the apparent, constantly changing world. To know truth, a human being has to have knowledge of these Ideas. Friendship revolves around a joint quest for these eternal, unchangeable and incorporeal truths.

Socrates illustrates Plato's belief that truth is unchangeable and eternal, when he examines the speech of tragedy writer Agathon that precedes Socrates' speech. Agathon argues 'that Love is himself without equal in attractiveness and in goodness, and Second is responsible for similar qualities in others' (Plato, *Symposium*, 197c). Socrates contradicts him and shows him that his speech is based on ignorance. In reaction to Socrates' objection, Agathon says that he cannot refute Socrates' words. Socrates replies: 'No [...] it's the truth you can't refute, my dear Agathon. Socrates is a pushover' (Plato, *Symposium*, 201c). Truth is unchangeable and eternal and cannot be disputed.

A prominent feature of Socrates' idea of friendship is the object of friends' love. Most speakers at the banquet understand the youngster or the young man – their speeches revolve around pederasty – as the object of love.⁵ In these relations, the elder man (the subject) loves the young man (the object). Contrary to this asymmetrical position of both lovers, Socrates presumes a symmetrical position: both friends are subjects. Both friends long for the same object, that is, truth. Their love is aimed at truth. This feature of symmetry is closely related to another feature: reciprocity. Both friends profit from the friendship in the same manner, as they share the same goal of truth.

Although Socrates assumes a symmetrical position of friends, he does not exclude the possibility that one of the friends knows more about love than the other. The former can help the latter to direct his love towards truth by teaching him self-control. The

⁵ See Nails (*Spring 2014 Edition*) for a critical comment on the English word 'pederasty'. In her view, 'pederasty' is a misleading term if one wants to refer to the Greek practices of socialisation and education of young men.

speech of the drunken Alcibiades, a public figure in Athens who at the end of Socrates' speech drops by and invites himself at the symposium, is illustrative. In his speech, Alcibiades praises Socrates for not succumbing to the temptation of Alcibiades' beauty, wealth or status. No matter how hard Alcibiades tried, he did not succeed in seducing Socrates. Alcibiades asserts that Socrates seeks to focus his friend's love on truth, rather than on appearance. As an illustration, he tells his audience what Socrates said to him during one of his attempts to charm Socrates: 'I tell you, it's only when your eyesight goes into decline that your mental vision begins to see clearly, and you've got a long way to go yet' (Plato, Symposium, 219a). In his study on Ancient Greece, philosopher Michel Foucault articulates the role of the friend thus:

[t]he one who is better versed in love will also be the master of truth; and it will be his role to teach the loved one how to triumph over his desires and become "stronger than himself". (1985, p. 241)

Socrates did not acquire insight into the essence of love and friendship on his own. He was educated in love by an instructor too. As a student, he consulted Diotima, a wise old woman from Mantinea.⁶ He tells the symposium visitors what he said to her during one of their conversations: '[b]ut that's exactly why I come to you, Diotima, as I've told you before, because I'm aware of my need for teachers' (Plato, Symposium, 207c). Even Socrates, who was far advanced in approaching truth, had to be trained.

2. Nietzsche, friendship and truth

Nietzsche contrasted his ideas of friendship with Plato's ideal of friendship. Like Plato, Nietzsche understands friendship as a shared quest for truth. The friends are involved in a reciprocal relation that revolves around a shared goal, that is, truth. However, there are differences between Plato's and Nietzsche's notion of friendship. A prominent difference concerns their understanding of truth. Unlike Plato, Nietzsche understands truths as subject to variation. For Nietzsche, eternal and invariable things, ideas or

⁶ It is also asserted that Diotima is probably a fiction of Plato's. He has made her up for the purpose of the dialogue (Plato, 1994, p. 99).

truths do not exist. Everything is constantly changing. Adhering to 'ideas' or 'truth' is a way of ignoring or denying life's sensuous and changing nature. Nietzsche refers to Plato's world of Ideas as 'the cold kingdom of "ideas"' (GS, p. 237). Sticking to these platonian truths hinders the real search for truth (GS, p. 50).

Nietzsche is a fervent searcher for truth. But unlike Plato, he is not searching for eternal, independent truths. For Nietzsche, truths change; truths are always temporary. As time passes by, the truth seeker has to search for new, more appropriate truths. His search for truth is never-ending. One could say that Nietzsche emphasises the *search* for truth, rather than truth itself. This emphasis on the *search* for truth also resonates with his understanding of friendship as a joint *search* for truth.

Nietzsche criticises the many illusions and mirages that hinder the search for truth, such as the platonian truths. In this context, he also scrutinises the generally accepted meaning of the term 'knowledge'. He argues that the word 'knowledge' is used to refer to 'what we are used to' (GS, p. 214). Instinctively fearing the unfamiliar, people are constantly looking for ways to reduce the unfamiliar to the familiar. The desire for security makes them abstain from questioning the known. For Nietzsche, seeking truth requires courage and experiment. While searching for truth, Nietzsche's motto is: let's try! (GS, p. 62).

Nietzsche's critique also involves himself; it is always accompanied by self-criticism. The forces and impulses which he criticises manifest themselves in his own thinking and acting. Philosopher and Nietzsche scholar Paul van Tongeren argues: knowledge is critique; this critique is self-critique; knowledge is self-critique (1993, p. 124).

Friendship as a resting place

How is Nietzsche's notion of friendship linked to the search for truth?

In the preface of *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche stresses that he needs friends, or at least the *belief* that friends exist, as a counterweight to the solitude resulting from the desire for truth (HAH, p. 5). His urge to overturn common evaluations is a danger to life. '[T]he fears and frosts of the isolation to which that unconditional *disparity of view* condemns him who is infected with it' threaten life (HAH, p. 5). But why is this

isolation of the truth seeker dangerous? And, how can friendship provide protection against this threat?

Van Tongeren (1993) answers these questions on the basis of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra. A Book for All and None* (2006b/1883-1885). He demonstrates that the suspicious, solitary man is never really alone. He would wish he were! The solitary man is constantly talking to himself. This lasting, inner dialogue is probably a painful dialogue because of the truth seeking nature of this dialogue. Whatever the truth seeker criticises also involves himself. He scrutinises his own thoughts and actions in minute detail as well. He does not spare himself. According to Van Tongeren, the critical philosopher is engaged in a constant, unmasking self-questioning (1993, p. 125). Van Tongeren points out that an ongoing critical self-examination hinders the solitary truth seeker from committing himself unambiguously, that is, to actually live (1993, p. 126).

In order to counterbalance the negative effects of the inner dialogue, it is important to have a friend. Friendship prevents the solitary man from perishing because of the severe self-questioning. A friend is a third person, 'who keeps the solitary man at the surface of life, who keeps him in the everyday reality of life' (Van Tongeren, 1993, p. 126; translation HJ). In the company of his friend, the truth seeker can take a break and recover from the constant urge for truth. A friend pulls him out of the depths of his continuous self-interrogation. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche writes: 'Oh, there are too many depths for all hermits. That is why they long so for a friend and his height' (2006b, p. 40).

In the preface of *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche describes friendship as a resting place, where friends can take a break from their quest for truth and share the joy of life. It is an opportunity to recover from the isolation. He writes about friendship:

[w]hat I again and again needed most for my cure and self-restoration, however, was the belief that I was *not* thus isolated, not alone in *seeing* as I did – an enchanted surmising of relatedness and identity in eye and desires, a reposing in a trust of friendship, a blindness in concert with another without suspicion or question-marks, a pleasure in foregrounds, surfaces, things close and closest, in everything possessing colour, skin and appartionality. (HAH, p. 5)

The knowledge seeker needs friendship in order not to perish. At the same time, the knowledge seeker knows that friendship cannot be grounded on mutual understanding. He knows that misunderstanding and disagreement cannot be avoided (HAH, p. 148). Friends may have different opinions and even if their opinions are similar, they may value these differently. It seems an obvious conclusion that friendships are impossible. However, for Nietzsche, that is not necessarily the case. He asserts that, if a person realises that misunderstandings are inevitable and if he understands the 'inner necessity of opinions originating in the inextricable interweaving of character, occupation, talent, environment', he does not necessarily have to conclude that friendship is impossible (HAH, p. 148). The friendship that Nietzsche deems feasible is based on secrecy, deception and on the willingness to accept each other's masking, rather than on mutual understanding. He articulates this ground for friendship as follows:

[y]es, there are friends, but it is error and deception regarding yourself that led them to you; and they must have learned how to keep silent in order to remain your friend; for such human relationships almost always depend upon the fact that two or three things are never said or even so much as touched upon: if these little boulders do start to roll, however, friendship follows after them and shatters. (HAH, p. 148)

It is an illusion that someone knows himself or his friends thoroughly. Only if two persons have this insight and act in accordance with it, they can be friends. 'Self-knowledge makes friends allow each other the concealment, the secret, the misunderstanding, and therefore: makes friendship possible' (Van Tongeren, 1993, p. 124; translation, HJ).⁷

⁷ In his article, entitled 'Friendship and nihilism' [*Vriendschap en nihilisme*] (2013), Van Tongeren argues that Nietzsche's critique on Aristotle's and Kant's views on friendship – for them, friendship exists just as an idea – suffer from the same idealism. Despite his criticism, Nietzsche adheres to the same longing for a perfect friendship. However, in contrast with his predecessors, this self-referentiality is at the heart of Nietzsche's ideas of friendship (Van Tongeren, 2013). Referring to various literary works on nihilism, Van Tongeren elaborates on a more modest notion of friendship: friendship as knowing that you are not alone (2013, p. 23).

Friendship as a battle field

The truth searching human being needs friends in order not to be trapped in the nets of loneliness. Friendship as a resting place offers friends the opportunity to escape from continuous self-subverting self-questioning. This is not to say that the search for truth does not play a role in friendship. To the contrary. The common quest for truth is precisely the purpose of friendship. In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche defines friendship as 'a *shared* higher thirst for an ideal above them' (GS, p. 41). The pursuit of this higher ideal, that is, higher truth, is the core of friendship. Friends search for truth together.

This quest for truth requires opposition and contradiction. If men really want to seek their own truth, they have to invite contradiction (GS, p. 169). They need objections and disagreement in order to keep themselves from having too much faith in their convictions. If struggle is missing and opinions are tacitly accepted, a joint search for truth does not come about. In Nietzsche's view, friends fight with each other. 'Happiness on earth, friends, only stems from war! Powder smoke, in fact, mends friendship even more!' (GS, p. 19).

This battle between friends is neither aimed at victory nor at agreement. The goal is to acquire a better understanding of themselves. This requires from both friends harshness with regard to the opinions and judgements of themselves and their friend. A man who seeks for truth does not tolerate 'slack feelings in his believing and judging' (GS, p. 30). Friends scrutinise each other's beliefs and even endanger the friendship for the sake of truth.

Friendship: resting place and battle ground

How can friendship be both resting place and battle ground? Friendship as a resting place requires from friends the ability to be silent. Friends who blandly say everything that comes to their mind cannot enjoy the friendship for a long period of time as the friendship will not survive this carefree honesty. However, friendship as a battle field requires from friends the ability to scrutinise each other's truths. How can both requirements be combined: telling each other what is wrong about their truths and remaining silent?

Nietzsche solves this conflict by introducing the distinction between horizontal and vertical relationships between friends. Being quiet for the sake of the survival of the friendship relates to the former. Within a horizontal relationship, friends offer each other refuge. The provision of shelter is, however, not the primary goal of the friendship. According to Nietzsche, friendship is first of all a quest for truth. This pursuit for truth requires friends to critically examine each other's truth. In this vertical relationship – the relationship between friends on the bottom and truth on the top – friends are honest to each other for the sake of truth.

For Nietzsche, the search for truth has priority in friendships. As long as the friendship contributes to this higher end, it pays to continue the friendship and be silent occasionally. If a friend becomes, however, an obstacle to the search for truth, it is time to end the friendship.

This rather instrumental understanding of friendship seems to be in sharp contrast to a more common discourse on friendship, where friendship is spoken of in terms of: surrendering to the friendship, taking care of friends, meaning well by a friend and doing everything for a friend. It also seems to be in conflict with a number of passages in which Nietzsche writes about friendship in terms of shared joy. For example, in *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche argues that friends teach each other 'to share [...] joy (*Mitfreude*)!' (GS, p. 193). In *Human, All Too Human*, he describes the 'anticipatory man striving towards a higher human culture', as a human being who – in contrast with the 'retarded man' – does not avoid different opinions and strives for a higher ideal:

[He] readily rejoices with his fellow men, wins friends everywhere, welcomes everything new and developing, takes pleasure in the honours and successes of others and makes no claim to be in the sole possession of the truth but is full of a diffident mistrust. (HAH, p. 195)

At some places, Nietzsche calls friendship a feast. In *The Gay Science*, he compares friends with 'two ships, each of which has its own goal and course; we may cross and have a feast together' (GS, p. 159). Such a feast may be brief, but if there is a feast, it consists of moments of deeply felt proximity (GS, p. 41, 42). This emphasis on the

temporary nature of friendships reveals Nietzsche's instrumental use of friendships. Notwithstanding friendship being a feast, as soon as the feast is over, Nietzsche ends the friendship. Although Nietzsche has not a detached understanding of friendship, he uses it for personal gain. It is a means in the search for truth.

Sympathy as a prerequisite for maintaining friendship

The philosopher and Nietzsche scholar Robert Miner emphasises that Nietzsche does not have a merely detached understanding of friendship. Miner (2010) argues that, according to Nietzsche, sympathy is required in order to let the struggle and opposition feed the friendship. Sharing 'a higher thirst for an ideal above them' (GS, p. 41) is not a sufficient condition for maintaining a friendship, not even for a brief period. Sympathy prevents the friendship from being destroyed.

Sympathy is different from pity, in Nietzsche's view. A person who feels sorry for his friend wants to take away his friend's suffering as soon as possible. But by labelling his friend's suffering—in this case, as something bad—, he reduces it to something general; he deprives his friend's suffering of 'what is truly personal' (GS, p. 191). Furthermore, this 'benefactor' takes suffering to be a negative thing, as something 'evil, hateful, deserving of annihilation, as a defect of existence' (GS, p. 191). In Nietzsche's view, suffering belongs to life (see also chapter 5). It is part of who a person is. When compassion or pity prevails, these 'benefactors' do not recognise 'that terrors, deprivations, impoverishments, midnights, adventures, risks, and blunders are as necessary for me and you as their opposites' (GS, p. 191). Someone who is approaching his friend's suffering with sympathy, does not ignore who his friend is. He has an eye for the forces and influences that make his friend who he is.

Although pity is not beneficial to the friendship, it does not mean that friends do not *want* to help each other. Nobody can escape the lure of a suffering person who is asking for help. The wish to immediately relieve his distress is, however, an attractive and effective way to avoid '*one's own path!*' (GS, p. 192). Rather than choosing one's own path which is a hard and demanding undertaking, it is tempting to choose love and thankfulness of others, according to Nietzsche. He speaks of the '*religion of snug*

cosiness' (GS, p. 192). Nor does Nietzsche rule out the possibility that someone actually helps his friend. But rather than taking away his suffering, a friend teaches his friend 'to share [...] joy (*Mitfreude*)!' (GS, p. 193).

In summary, friends share the same objective, that is, the quest for truth in a world where everything (including truth) is constantly changing. They criticise the illusions that obstruct the search for truth. In doing so, they also bring each other's truths into discussion. Struggle and opposition are part of a friendship that aims at seeking truth. At the same time, friends can rest at their friend and take a (short) break from the urge for truth. The friendship functions as a necessary refuge in order not to perish because of the solitude which is the result of the urge for truth. Friendship requires navigating between maintaining (the illusion of) friendship by not saying everything and critically questioning each other's beliefs by being open to each other. What matters is that the friendship contributes to the shared pursuit of truth.

3. Prevalent metaphors in professional higher education

A first step towards creating a learning environment that better stimulates students to become professionals who are able and willing to jointly strive for better is the analysis of the current situation. How do teachers and policy makers speak and think about the interactions between teacher and students? Which metaphors are used to speak about these interactions? To what extent, and why, are these metaphors beneficial or detrimental to a joint undertaking of teacher and students to search for truth? I analyse two widely used metaphors in professional higher education: teacher and student as supplier and consumer of knowledge and as master and apprentice.

Teacher and student as supplier and consumer of knowledge

A well-known metaphor of interaction between teacher and students is the interaction between supplier and consumers of knowledge. The teacher provides knowledge and students are the consumers or recipients of this knowledge. The purpose of the interaction is the transfer of knowledge from teacher to students.

This metaphor can be categorised under what Hager and Hodkinson (2009) call the 'propositional learning lens'. According to these contemporary educational thinkers, this lens is mainly used to explain learning phenomena such as 'the learning of facts, concepts, propositions' (2009, p. 622). Metaphors of 'acquisition' and 'transfer' are characteristic of this lens, which is very popular particularly among policy makers and employers in higher education. This lens is accompanied with at least three assumptions: First, '[w]hat is learnt is a product, a thing or substance that is independent of the learner'. Second, '[l]earning involves movement of this thing or substance from place to place'. Third, '[w]hat is learnt is independent of and separate from the context in which it is learnt' (Hager & Hodkinson, 2009, pp. 622-623). According to Hager and Hodkinson (2009), this propositional learning lens is of limited use, especially if one wants to understand professional learning, because real expertise in a particular discipline consists only partially of the memorisation of factual information. The ability to access information that is relevant in a particular case and the ability to use this information in a way that fits the situation are far more important abilities. This is even more the case in fields of more practical expertise, where 'there is no one correct way to proceed and where much of the knowledge involves tacit dimensions' (Hager & Hodkinson, 2009, p. 624).

The metaphor of supplier and consumer does not fit into Nietzsche's notion of friendship. One reason is that, within the context of this metaphor, the knowledge to be transferred, is predetermined and it is not supposed to be questioned. The teacher's feedback regarding students' thinking and acting concentrates on deviations from the objectives that are formulated in terms of knowledge: do students receive the knowledge in the right way? Do they understand the knowledge? Did they receive all knowledge that has been offered to them? The treatment of knowledge as if it is a solid thing does not promote a search for truth.

Another reason for this misfit is the fact that in the metaphor of supplier and consumer, students are expected to have a passive attitude. Students, as consumers, only need to receive the knowledge. In this context, sociologist Raf Vanderstraeten and educational theorist Gert Biesta speak of '*the mechanical transmission of bits of information through a medium*' (2006, p. 165). Through a medium (for example, a

book or the ether), a written or spoken text is sent from the sender (teacher) to the receiver (student). In this type of representation of the communicative nature of educational processes, the recipients of information do not actively give meaning to the received knowledge, let alone, question the interpretation of the sender or themselves. It is because of this omission, Vanderstraeten and Biesta consider this representation inadequate (2006, p. 165).

A Nietzschean-inspired notion of friendship does not fit into an environment where the metaphor of supplier and consumer of knowledge prevails. This does not mean that the term 'friendship' is completely inappropriate. For example, in *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle offers two notions of friendship, which fit the phenomenon of propositional learning nicely: friendship of utility and friendship of pleasure. The motive of a friendship of utility is usefulness or utility. Friends love each other because of what the other can give in return and they know that this exchange is the motive of both of them. An (expected) exchange of equally valuable goods is the base of this type of friendship. But it is not a purely business-like relationship. Both friends wish each other well. According to Aristotle, this type of friendship will not last long. The relationship is easily broken off when friends are no longer useful to each other. It is easy to understand teachers and students as this kind of friends. As a supplier of knowledge, the teacher is useful for students. Students can get a degree thanks to the teacher's lessons. Students, in turn, are useful for the teacher as consumers of his knowledge: the teacher can fulfil his task and earn a living by teaching students. Unlike Nietzschean friends, utility focused friends do not share a common goal other than the exchange of utility.

A friendship of pleasure is like a friendship of utility. The only difference is that the motive of a friendship of pleasure is the enjoyment of each other. According to Aristotle, such friends like to be together. But as soon as they no longer enjoy shared activities or are unable to participate in it, the friendship is over. One could say that as long as teachers and students take satisfaction in the participation in the educational

practice, and, at the end of every lesson say: 'that was a sociable meeting. I felt involved and enjoyed myself', they remain friends.⁸

The metaphor of supplier and consumer of knowledge allows for notions of friendship, that is, the Aristotelian notion of friendship of utility and friendship of pleasure. A Nietzschean metaphor of friendship which consists of a joint search for truth is excluded.

Teacher and student as master and apprentice

A second metaphor for the interaction between teacher and students is the interaction between master and apprentices (or master and pupils). The master teaches apprentices the skills and knowledge of the profession. He or she ensures that the apprentice learns the required skills in order to become a (starting) professional. The teacher, as a master, gives feedback to students about the extent to which they possess the necessary skills.

There are two, slightly different interpretations of the metaphor of master and apprentice. The first is provided by Hager and Hodkinson (2009). They use the term 'skill learning lens' to identify this type of understanding of learning (2009, p. 624). According to them, this lens is accompanied with the same assumptions as the propositional learning lens, with the exception that the attention is focused on the transfer of skills rather than propositional knowledge (2009, p. 624). The specification of skills or competences is more difficult than the specification of propositional knowledge. Often, performance outcomes are described, rather than the abilities and capacities that are required to produce these outputs (Hager & Hodkinsons, 2009, p.

⁸ Aristotle identifies a third type of friendship: friendship based on character. Aristotle calls this form of friendship a perfect friendship: friends love each other for who they are. This kind of friendship is not for everyone. Only perfect people, that is, virtuous persons, can become friends in the fullest sense. They gladly spend a great deal of time with each other and often participate in shared activity for the sake of the friendship. The difference between Nietzsche's friendship and an Aristotelian friendship is that for Aristotle, the friendship revolves around perfect, or virtuous individuals. A virtuous person can enjoy his own happiness even better when he sees it reflected in the qualities of his friend. For Nietzsche, perfect individuals do not exist. Friendships are about becoming who one is. A second difference is closely related to these different conceptions of the self. For Aristotle, friendship (based on character) is a goal in itself. Nietzsche's friendship is a means for finding one's way. It is of value to the process of becoming who one is.

625). At best, this lens provides limited and deficient insight into the phenomena of learning.

For various reasons, it is not very likely that teachers and students undertake a joint quest for truth if they are functioning in a context where this metaphor is prevalent. The feedback of the master to apprentices focuses on deviations from fixed objectives, that is, the profile of a junior professional. Students are not expected to question the appropriateness of the skills to be transferred. Teacher and students have different goals. As for expertise, the master surpasses students by far. A joint quest for truth is not supposed to come about.

A second interpretation of the metaphor of master and apprentice is provided by sociologist Richard Sennett (2008). In his interpretation, the teacher aims at training students to become skilled professionals with passion for their work rather than transferring a set of predefined skills to them. Sennett describes these passionate professionals as craftsmen who 'are dedicated to good work for its own sake' and who are continuously searching for ways to improve their work (2008, p. 20). Dedicated craftsmen not only solve problems that they encounter in their work, they also actively search for problems because these problems offer them opportunities to improve their skills and work (Sennett, 2008, p. 26). In the context of the metaphor of the passionate professional, the feedback that students receive is not aimed at a fixed goal. The aim is to continuously improve the level of their work and skills. Furthermore, students are expected to search for problems and to critically examine themselves and the situation. This metaphor seems to provide some room for a joint quest for truth.

Although Sennett describes an experimenting kind of craftsmanship, he claims that craftsmanship cannot exist without standards. Without the existence of 'fixed objective standards', the craftsman cannot decide whether his efforts – 'the experimental rhythm of problem solving and problem finding' (2008, p. 26) – result in a higher level of work (2008, p. 159). Sennett gives the example of the Stradivarius Davidoff cello, that 'defines what a cello can be, what is possible' (2008, p. 79). For (beginning) professionals, craftsmanship can only be developed and practised within fixed standards. While beginning professionals are encouraged to question their work, these standards of truth are given. They are not object of scrutinisation.

Moreover, a master is an authority in his field. As an authority, he does not put himself on the line. He uses his knowledge and experience in order to steer the communication between himself and students in the direction of which he expects students to be in need of, considering the stage of their professional development. Students, in turn, do not question the teacher because he is the expert, after all. Reciprocal communication between teacher and students about the truths of the profession does not come about. This metaphor does not allow for Nietzschean friendship between master and apprentices.

The metaphors of master and apprentice and of supplier and consumer do not stimulate teachers and students to engage in reciprocal relationships and to jointly strive for better truths. Speaking in terms of supplier and consumers or master and apprentices does not contribute to a learning environment that prepares students for professional life where the speed of change is increasing and innovation requires teamwork.

4. Teacher and students as truth seeking friends

In this section, the metaphor of friendship is introduced in order to augment and enrich the available resources for reflecting on the interactions between teacher and students. The interactions between teacher and students are described *as if* they are truth seeking friends. What responsibilities do teachers and students bear for bringing about a joint search for truth? What are the challenges of a Nietzschean friendship?

A shared search for truth starts with what is already known. In most cases, the teacher knows (much) more about the topic of the lesson than students. The quest for truth begins with the transfer of knowledge from teacher to students.

Besides transferring his knowledge, the teacher has to indicate where his knowledge ceases, if a shared quest for knowledge is to be realised. This is not about challenging students to think for themselves by pretending not to know. The teacher tells students when he genuinely does not know the truth anymore. The explication of the limits of his knowledge is a necessary step towards a symmetrical relationship between teacher and students. Symmetry in 'not-knowing' is a necessary condition for a shared quest for truth. It is especially the responsibility of the teacher to make explicit his ignorance,

as his is in most cases superior to students when it comes to knowledge. In this respect, teacher and students are not equals.

Students also have responsibilities with regard to the realisation of a joint search for truth. Like teachers, students are responsible for taking the position of an active subject. A shared quest demands an active attitude of all participants. One way of demonstrating their willingness to participate in a joint quest for truth is to complete teacher's knowledge with their own knowledge.

Knowledge transfer, even if it takes place from both sides, does not automatically result in a shared search for truth. More is needed. The teacher must be prepared to bring his truths into discussion. He must be prepared to put himself on the line. When he articulates his truths, he knows that this knowledge can be opposed by students. If students actually oppose him, it is up to the teacher to take students' critical interventions seriously and not to surrender to the temptation (or habit) of using his authority in order to silence critical students. Although the teacher was thoroughly convinced that he was telling the truth, he is responsible for welcoming the opposition on the students' part. He knows that opposition and struggle is part of truth searching friendships. Without struggle, the search for truth is not possible.

Besides sharing their knowledge and showing the courage to criticise teacher's truths – two ways of taking responsibility for being active subjects –, students should also accept the fact that truths change. Contrary to what Plato makes Socrates say, Nietzschean friends search for *temporary* truths. The search for truth is never ending. What is true today can be outdated tomorrow. The point is to focus the attention on what is true, *right now*. The acceptance of the temporality of truths and the accompanied uncertainty is a prerequisite for entering a Nietzschean search for truth.

Students and teacher do not have to worry about the question of whether they like each other. In fact, the wish to be liked interferes with the joint search for truth. The quest for new truths requires the willingness to critically examine each other's truths. Contradiction and opposition are necessary in order to obtain truth and a better self-understanding. But it is not a ruthless, merciless honesty. Friends should also have the ability to hold their tongues for the sake of the continuation of the friendship.

This ability to control oneself is also required in order to alternate periods of opposition with periods of rest and recovery. The critical examination of illusions and mirages cannot be carried out non-stop. Teachers and students need periods of 'superficiality'. Once in a while, they should let go of the search for truth and enjoy the friendship.

A shared quest for truth is a worthwhile ideal. But how realistic is this ideal in the context of twenty-first century higher professional education? In order to answer this question, the exploration of the metaphor of truth seeking friendship will be continued. What are the challenges and risks of truth searching friendships in today's professional higher education setting? In particular, the discussion of the feasibility of long-term relationships between teacher and students clarifies how truth seeking friendships can be realised while taking into account the context of contemporary higher education institutes.

Friendships can go astray and become destructive

One of the risks of engaging in truth searching friendships is that it is unclear where friendships will lead to. The effects of friendships are unknown in advance. When someone engages in a joint search for truth, he gives the power to be influenced to his friend.⁹ He hands over this power if, and only if, he has the (vague) confidence or hope that the friendship will bring him something positive. Yet, that may not be the case. A friend who abruptly ends the friendship causes the other friend to be empty-handed. Or a friendship does not come about. This can easily happen at school when a student puts himself at risk by openly questioning a teacher's truth. When the teacher ignores student's attempts to engage in a joint quest, he or she embarrasses the students in front of his fellow students.

Sometimes, the friendship cannot keep the promise that it seemed to hold in the beginnings. Or, even worse, the friendship can be detrimental to both friends. An

⁹ See also Gadamer's (1986) idea of a genuine dialogue. In such a dialogue, both subjects risk themselves as a fusion of horizons (*Horizontverschmelzung*) characterises their dialogue. According to Gadamer, both participants change due to the exposure to the other participant's perspective.

insightful example of a friendship between six students that becomes detrimental is given in the novel *The Secret History* (Tartt, 1992). The six friends started to read Nietzsche and became fascinated with the Dionysian. The friendship goes astray (one of the friend, Edmund ‘Bunny’, is killed by others). The impact of this destructive friendship on their lives is huge. The same can happen with friendships between teacher and students.

This risk is part of every truth seeking friendship. It makes friendship an exciting and lively enterprise. It is, however, also a risky undertaking: a friendship can lead to a friend’s (symbolic) collapse.

Not everybody is capable of entering into truth seeking friendships

A second disadvantage of these kinds of relationships is that not everybody is capable of forming truth searching friendships. Miner (2010) describes four types of people who, according to Nietzsche, are unable to be friends: lazy people who use others in order to fight boredom; the needy types who expect their friends to do everything for them; those who think that friends discuss everything, including the status of the friendship; and finally, people who are led by envy and revenge. These types of people have another goal in mind than the shared search for truth.

When students belong to one of these types of persons and are unable (or unwilling) to join the search for truth, it does not mean that they will never enter into truth searching friendships. As time goes by, they may change. It is the teacher’s responsibility to influence these students and ‘seduce’ them to join the search. To this end, the teacher has to recognise the background and intentions of students. Likewise, he has to be aware that friends – just like truths – are not fixed: the objectives of friends can change too.

Feasibility of friendships in professional higher education

A third challenge concerns the feasibility of friendships between teacher and students in the context of twenty-first century higher education. The largeness of scale, the way education is organised and the limited amount of resources prevent teachers and students from building up long-lasting friendships which are especially beneficial to a

common quest for truth.¹⁰ 'Old' friends know each other better and therefore are more valuable as a source of knowledge about each other than 'new' friends.¹¹ Moreover, friends who share a long history are more confident that the friendship will survive opposition and critical examination than persons who entered a friendship recently. Since long-term friendships best promote the joint search for truth, it makes little sense to further explore these kinds of relationships in the context of current professional higher education institutes.

The assumption that only long-term friendships are beneficial to the joint search for truth is, however, an incorrect assumption. In various passages, Nietzsche underlines the finiteness of friendships. In the aphorism 'Star friendship' in *The Gay Science*, he even claims that only short friendship are possible (GS, p. 159). Why does Nietzsche put emphasis on the limited duration of truth seeking friendships?

In the first place, friends become different persons due to the friendship.¹² As they scrutinise each others' truths, friends influence the way they understand themselves and the kind of persons they become. Since they change, the option that friends do no longer share the same goals in due course becomes real. In that case, the basis of the friendship dissolves. A quote from *Human, All Too Human* is illustrative:

If we greatly transform ourselves, those friends of ours who have not been transformed become ghosts of our past. (p. 274)

Friends have to renew the truth seeking friendship, if they want it to last.

There is also the risk of habituation. If friends interact for a long time, they get familiarised with each other and develop an idea of who their friend is. In the long run, they run the risk of reducing their friends' thoughts and acts to the image that they have

¹⁰ In contrast to Dutch regular professional higher education institutes, university colleges and honour programmes have at their disposal extra resources that allow them to organise education so that students and teachers interact in small groups regularly.

¹¹ Aristotle also asserts that friendship (based on character) takes times. Friends have to gain each other's trust.

¹² See also Huijer (1995, 1999) for an exploration of the role of friendship in the ethical-aesthetic undertaking of transforming oneself into a work of art. Following Foucault, Huijer understands friendship as a confrontation with the other within a larger interplay of forces, rather than a commitment or relationship for life.

of each other. The friendship runs the risk of repeating itself and of no longer being able to contribute to the search for truth.

Miner (2010) elucidates a third reason for Nietzsche's emphasis on the temporary nature of truth seeking friendships: the risk of valuing like-mindedness higher than struggle and contradiction. This risk is particularly relevant in the case of a stable group of friends. A community of truth seeking friends can easily become a closed community where dissidents are excluded from membership because of their deviating thoughts. Although joining a community of like-minded people is a comfortable and attractive way to enter relationships, Nietzsche does not deem membership of these communities as an alternative to truth seeking friendships (Miner, 2010, p. 62). In closed communities, the scrutinisation of the opinions and judgements of oneself and one's friends – which is a prerequisite for seeking truth – is not a shared ambition. Short friendships run little risks of turning into closed communities.

For Nietzsche, the finiteness of friendships is no reason not to appreciate friendship. On the contrary, Nietzsche looks back at past friendships with gratitude. Rather than sticking with friendships, a more reserved attitude is appropriate that allows for thankfulness. 'That we had to become estranged is the law *above* us; through it we should come to have more respect for each other – and the thought of our former friendship should become more sacred!' (GS, p. 159).

The fact that in professional higher education mainly brief relationships are possible is no reason for abandoning the pursuit of a joint quest for truth. What is more, the temporary nature of truth seeking friendships reduces the risk of habituation and prevents truth seeking friendships from transforming into closed communities.

5. Benefits of short-term, truth seeking friendships

I continue to explore the metaphor of truth seeking friendships. What are the advantages of short-term, truth seeking friendships between teacher and students?

New truths and self control

A common quest for what is true for this moment can result into new truths, but it does not have to be that way. A critical examination of their beliefs and truths can make students and teachers more convinced of the value of their current truths. But even if this is the case, the joint quest for truth has had effect. For one thing, friends have risked their truths (and thereby themselves) and they have acquired them anew, so to speak. Their truths have become more experienced and more personal. Moreover, teacher and students have practiced self-control. The endeavour to search for better truths requires the ability to withhold oneself and not to give in to the forces that present themselves. Truth seekers do not adhere to a particular habit of thinking because of it being a habit. Nor do they hold on to an opinion out of fear of no longer belonging to a community of like-minded people. They also resist the human desire for security that makes human beings ignore new facts which do not fit their current opinions. These (and many more) forces have to be controlled, otherwise a search for truth is not to be established. Regardless of the outcomes of the search for truth, friends practice this ability of self-control. Every search for truth trains this ability and increases the opportunities for a next quest for truth.

'Mitfreude'

A joint quest for truth comes together with pleasure in learning. Nietzsche speaks of friends who teach each other to share joy: 'Fellow rejoicing [*Mitfreude*], not fellow suffering [*Mitleiden*], makes the friend' (HAH, p. 180).¹³ As the purpose of the friendship is a common goal, friends share the joy and successes of their fellow seekers. A teacher's honour is not injured when students find new truths and achieve success. As a friend, the teacher congratulates them. They celebrate success together.

Although this chapter is not concerned with increasing students' success rate, truth seeking friendships between teacher and students could have a positive effect. In a study on tutors' role in problem based learning environments, the researchers Chung, Yew and Schmidt (2011) show that tutors can create an open and positive learning environment by communicating informally and empathetically. This environment has a

¹³ See also: HH, p. 195.

positive effect on the learning processes and on the learning results of students. Subject-master expertise and the ability of clarifying theoretical and practical issues both play a less important role than this ability to create a learning environment that encourages an open exchange of ideas (Chung, et al., 2011).

Reciprocity

A final advantage of friendships in professional higher education is that students experience that *all* friends profit from a joint search for truth. Both students and teachers gain. In the aforementioned special issue on excellence and talent development of the Dutch journal specialising in higher education, *Tijdschrift voor Hoger Onderwijs* (2010), the scholars Cees Terlouw and Albert Pilot pay attention to this reciprocity. They claim that the curiosity, enthusiasm, perseverance and lust to experiment of talented students stimulate teachers to further develop their professional expertise, thereby raising the level of educational programmes (2010, p. 254). Both researchers understand this reciprocity ‘as an interesting motive for attention for talent development’, but they also draw attention to the question of how to encourage *all* students to demonstrate this kind of behaviour (2010, p. 254, translation HJ).¹⁴

A major part of contemporary professional life involves teamwork. Teaching future professionals a ‘jointly truth seeking’ attitude becomes more important every day. Reciprocity is the key.

¹⁴ With respect to reciprocity, ‘Rotterdam skillcity’ is an interesting example. It is a research model for urban revitalisation and renovation. Interesting is the fact that it is based on the assumption that pupils and youth are relational beings. As all human beings, pupils find themselves in a web of interhuman relationships and these relations constitute the self. The reinforcement of the environment of pupils (family, street, belief, work, politics) is a fruitful way of reinforcing pupils’ development. However, not only children gain, the environment profits as well. Philosopher Henk Oosterling, who initiated this successful project, formulates this reciprocity as follows: ‘Every individual forms a knot in his relations with others. Within, each individual’s behaviour functions as a boomerang: it influences the network, but, in the end, the network affects the individual’s behaviour as well’ (2009, p. 15). See for more information on the (results of) projects: Oosterling, 2013 and <http://www.vakmanstad.nl/>. Retrieved: 2015-1-5.

6. Friends rather than learner-friendly manners!

Students get the best lessons, when a teacher does not teach but invites them to contribute to his search for better truths.

The teacher who invites students to join his search for better truths does not meet students' expectations of transferring knowledge and skills in an interesting and clear manner, while facilitating their learning process (Kazemier, Offringa, Eggen & Wolfensberger, 2014). Instead, the teacher approaches them as if they are equals. He urges them to join his quest for better truths as he expects their knowledge, experience, questions and youthful audacity to contribute to this quest. A joint search for truth is not an easy undertaking; it requires the ability of teacher and students to navigate between maintaining the friendship by not saying everything and critically questioning and contradicting each other's beliefs. But when students respond to the teacher's appeal and partake in the search, the teacher can learn them to focus their attention to the search for better. Furthermore, students can experience the advantages of engaging in short-term, truth seeking friendships, like reciprocity and shared joy. They get to 'know' what it is to partake in a lively and 'gay science'. A teacher who does not teach but invites them to search for better provides students the opportunity to learn a most essential lesson in preparation for their professional future: in principle, everybody is able to contribute to the joint endeavour of improving discipline's truths.

CHAPTER 5: LEARNING THROUGH UPS AND DOWNS

The last element of striving for better is learning through ups and downs. Setting personal, ambitious goals concerning one's practice is one thing; actually reaching for these goals is another, more challenging thing. Excellence requires an attitude of learning through ups and downs. Professionals who have learned to remain resilient in the face of failure or stagnation are better equipped to transcend themselves.

Students hardly have the chance, however, to develop an attitude of learning through ups and downs in contemporary Dutch professional higher education institutes. At first glance, this is quite surprising because the Netherlands is a meritocratic society. In these kinds of societies, a social position is, above all, the result of individual merit. If someone wants to succeed in a meritocratic society, the only appropriate answer to failure (understood as not meeting external criteria) is to persevere. Research shows that people who are persistent are more successful than talented people who have never learned to persevere in the face of failure (Duckworth, Kirby, Tsukayama, Berstein & Ericsson, 2010; Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews & Kelly, 2007; Dweck, 1986; OECD, 2013). And yet, in (professional) higher education, hardly any appreciation is given to this feature.¹ The education system is organised in such a way that every effort is supposed to lead to immediate, desirable outcomes (Ball, 2012; Biesta, 2009, 2010; Verbrugge & Van Baardewijk, 2014). Teachers and students are forced to focus on productivity.

This unexpected insight challenges teachers and policy makers to rethink the role of the ideal of a meritocratic society and the accompanying culture of measurement in educational contexts and to re-examine the question of how to develop a learning environment that fosters an attitude of learning through ups and downs. To be clear, it is not my aim to facilitate only the most talented students to become (even) more successful. In meritocratic societies, talented people are already warmly applauded;

¹ Furedi criticises current educational practices that do not allow for learning through ups and downs: 'Experience shows that the project of abolishing failure in school infantilizes children and actually undermines their capacity to deal with the challenges they face' (2009, p. 15).

people with little or no talents are easily overlooked. Rather than reinforcing the division between winners and losers, my aim is to explore how *all* students can be given the opportunity to develop an attitude of learning through ups and downs, which is a prerequisite for self-overcoming. As a by-effect, this attitude might enable students to become more successful in terms of external criteria, but the aim of this chapter is to empower them to work on themselves.

Nietzsche has written extensively about learning through ups and downs in relation to transcending oneself. His thoughts are at least partly based on his personal experiences. Due to ill health, he needed solitude to develop an attitude of perseverance and to become resilient. Having been professor at Basel University for several years, he needed solitude and freedom from others (including books) to be able to further develop his thoughts and to overcome himself. Reflecting on his experiences, he understood perseverance as an attitude that can be developed on one's own.

While Nietzsche's thoughts on perseverance are relevant for contemporary professional higher education, most students are healthy and do not need solitude to become resilient. Students find themselves in a phase of their lives in which meeting others and becoming members of society are important issues. Understanding the skill to learn through ups and downs as an attitude that can be trained in solitude would be counter-productive.

Moreover, Nietzsche's thoughts on the self provide grounds for questioning the appropriateness of a strategy of withdrawal. Nietzsche rejects the belief that an independent, invariable, purposeful self exists apart from one's actions. He understands the human being as the variable result of the constant struggle and interplay between internal and external forces. A human being is always embedded in his environment. Therefore, rather than understanding learning through ups and downs as an attitude that can be trained in solitude, I focus on the question of what kind of *environment* promotes this attitude. In order to answer this question, I turn to Nietzsche's thoughts on perseverance and excellence, which he described in *On the Genealogy of Morality* (2006a/1887) and *The Gay Science* (2001/1887). I will also use some of the ideas of philosopher Peter Sloterdijk, who elaborated Nietzsche's ideas of asceticism and explicated the role of models and trainers in the process of acquiring an attitude of

learning through ups and downs (Sloterdijk, 2009). While Nietzsche and Sloterdijk are not advocates of the meritocratic ideal, their writings provide insight in the phenomenon of perseverance.

First, I explore the widely accepted ideal of a meritocratic society and the accompanying culture of measurement. I elaborate one of the consequences of the pursuit of this ideal: in professional higher education, little appreciation is given to the skill to learn through ups and downs. The second part deals with Nietzsche's critique of cultures that allow only for practices of measuring and comparing. His critique is interesting since, from this critique, he elaborates his ideas of learning from ups and downs. In the third part, I focus on contemporary professional higher education. How can students be trained to become professionals who persevere in working on themselves in the face of failure and stagnation? Fourth, I question Nietzsche's emphasis on distance. His strategy of withdrawal from society is not appropriate for twenty-first century students. The final part is a response to the question of what kind of learning environment stimulates students to learn through ups and downs. How can teachers create a learning environment that stimulates students to develop an attitude of learning from ups and downs without the need to withdraw from society?

1. The ideal of a meritocratic society

In contemporary western societies, a person's social position is the result of his merits. Rather than heritage, sex or race, his performance and contribution to society should be the basis for his social position, provided that everyone has had equal opportunities to develop their talents and make themselves useful for society. In *The Rise of the Meritocracy* (1958) – the book was meant as a satire and a warning against the dangers of such an ideal – sociologist Michael Young coined the term 'meritocracy' to refer to this ideal.²

Philosopher Tsjalling Swierstra and sociologist Evelien Tonkens (2008) argue that it is methodologically impossible to determine the extent to which a society is actually

² Although the idea that merits are the basis for the individual's position in society has existed for centuries, Young (1958) coined the term 'meritocracy' to refer to this ideal.

a meritocratic society. Notwithstanding this impossibility, they claim that the *ideal* of a meritocratic society is widely accepted and, more importantly, that it has actual effects in society, including the area of education. According to them, the effects of the meritocratic ideal on education can be distinguished at two levels. First, education is seen as an important instrument to secure equal opportunities for everyone to develop their abilities to perform. In the Netherlands, this effect is indeed apparent. The Netherlands Institute for Social Research [*Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau*] argues that the Dutch government has had a policy that focuses on equal opportunities in the area of education for many decades (Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, 2011). In the sixties and seventies of the last century, the focus was on the children of the working classes; in the eighties, children of immigrants from countries like Morocco and Turkey became the target group for measures to undo learning disadvantages; nowadays, students with non-Western backgrounds are an important target group for measures to ensure equal opportunities (Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, 2011, p. 250). Second, *within* educational contexts, the meritocratic ideal is becoming more influential. School performance is becoming a determinant factor in further schooling opportunities. The Netherlands Institute for Social Research explicitly calls attention to the fact that in the Dutch education system, school performance in primary education largely determines the final education level of individuals (Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, 2011, p. 54). The introduction of honour programmes in Dutch higher education, which are only accessible for students with high degrees, also illustrates the tendency to value school performance. This second effect (partly) opposes the first, the aim of securing equal opportunities for all students.

The Netherlands are not unique in this sense. In other western countries, the meritocratic ideal has also been embraced enthusiastically. In *The Big Test. The Secret History of the American Meritocracy* (1999), journalist and writer Nicholas Lemann describes how in 20th century America the meritocratic ideal became accepted. Students were admitted to the elite schools on the basis of their merits, rather than because of family lineage or skin colour. Also in the European Union, the meritocratic ideal is an important topic. Tackling educational disadvantages is a prominent theme on the agenda of the European Union. In its Communication on 'Efficiency and Equity

in European Education and Training Systems' (2006), the European Commission underlines the importance of inclusiveness through education. In the Education and Training 2020 Strategic Framework, it is also emphasised that education systems should provide quality education for all citizens to enable them to develop their full potential (European Council, 2009).³

In meritocratic societies, students find themselves in an ambiguous position: during their training, they are expected to develop their talents in order to bring out the best of themselves. Simultaneously, teachers frequently assess their learning outcomes and these assessments are increasingly determining their further schooling opportunities. Room to learn through ups and downs is limited. Immediate success according to generally accepted criteria is the standard.

Swierstra and Tonkens (2008) raise a number of objections against the ideal of meritocracy. One objection is that security and solidarity make way for fair but harsh and compelling competition. They also question the ethical ground for rewarding talents (talents understood as a potential to perform that is already there, before entering higher education). One could object that talents are not a person's merit. Man acquires his talents through birth and upbringing. Moreover, the reward of talent often results in undesirable differences in income; when a meritocratic society becomes reality, the resulting social inequality forms an assault on the self-respect of individuals who end up occupying the lowest ranks in society. Finally, in order to give all children, including children of poorly educated parents, equal opportunities, the autonomy of family life has to be violated. Swierstra and Tonkens recommend replacing this ideal with the ideal of a society where every person has equal opportunities to acquire self-respect. They propose a pluralisation of merits: performance in literacy and numeracy is only one way of acquiring self-respect. Rather than dwelling on their solutions, that appear to be 'not very realistic' (Tonkens & Swierstra, 2008, p. 9; translation, HJ), I want to further explore the culture of measurement that accompanies the ideal of meritocracy.

³ See also *Modernisation of Higher Education in Europe: Access, Retention and Employability 2014* (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2014) for a comparison of national policies and actions in Europe that support students entering higher education, during their studies and when moving on to the labour market.

Culture of measurement

Young (1958) foretold the emergence of a culture of measurement in his future sketch of the meritocratic society: if merits are the basis for social status, merits should be assessed accurately. In order to measure and compare achievements of individuals and to give them social positions that correspond with their level of performance, these achievements have to be made transparent. Young's prediction has come true: nowadays, a true culture of measurement has arisen. Not only individuals – as Young predicted – but also organisations are assessed on a regular basis and these assessments are decisive for the positions they occupy in society.

An important economic argument to justify the current intensive culture of measurement is the increase in quality of products and services. Highly performing persons and organisations should get the best positions in society, so that society derives maximum profit from their abilities (Swierstra & Tonkens, 2008, p. 16). Badly scoring individuals and organisations are expected to feel stimulated to try harder and to improve their performance. Swierstra and Tonkens (2008) summarise, however, a number of reasons why assessments of performance and transparency of these assessments in education contexts (but also in other contexts) can also lead to loss of quality: assessment of performance takes time and money⁴; measurement of performance can have a demotivating effect: badly scoring individuals easily become demoralised because no matter how hard they try, they do not succeed in increasing their scores; the regular assessment of performances does not lead to quality improvement because it does not trigger action at all or it triggers actions that have

⁴ In *Achieving progress with the funding intended for tackling disadvantage*, The Education Council of The Netherlands gives several recommendations how to tackle educational disadvantages (Onderwijsraad, 2013b). In this report, the repeated emphasis of the need to reduce the administrative pressure for schools, or at least to prevent extra paperwork while implementing these recommendations, illustrates a certain awareness of the costs of assessments among Dutch policy makers.

See also a newspaper article in *NRC Handelsblad* (Funnekoter, 2014). Researchers of the Dutch Leiden University Medical Center (LUMC) conclude that the accreditation of bachelor and master programmes by the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO) takes too much time and does not improve education.

nothing to do with quality improvement⁵; and, performance measurement can have unintended and perverse effects, such as tunnel vision.⁶

Learning through ups and downs

How does this analysis relate to the skill to learn through ups and downs? In meritocratic societies, perseverance and resilience seem to be appropriate answers to failure, understood as not meeting the criteria. Giving up is no option if one wants to succeed in society; one has to keep on striving to reach a higher level of performance. Perseverance and the skill to learn through ups and downs are vital abilities for students to succeed in professional life.

Surprisingly, in (professional) higher education, hardly any appreciation is given to this skill. Since the nineties of the last century, the attention of policy makers and teachers has been focused more and more on the measurement of educational ‘outcomes’ (Biesta, 2009, 2010). Neither the experience of failure, nor the willingness to take risks and to try something again after failure are valued: as long as these undertakings do not immediately lead to desirable and measurable outcomes, they are considered as unimportant.

I am not claiming that all teachers disregard students’ skill to learn from ups and downs but teachers have to function in a context where they are forced to focus on productivity. Funding systems, systems of accreditation and the regime of league tables

⁵ See for examples of measures and actions that do not lead to quality improvement in Dutch primary and secondary education: Kneyber, R. & Evers, J. (2013) *Het Alternatief. Weg met de afrekencultuur in het onderwijs!* Amsterdam: Boom. An example of a measure in Dutch professional and academic higher education that does not improve the quality of education is the introduction of a test for all potential first-year students in order to check whether they have chosen an appropriate study. From the year 2014, Dutch institutes of higher education are obliged to offer these tests to potential freshmen. While the introduction of the test is intended to increase the success rate, previous experiments with these tests at several Dutch higher education institutes showed that the number of students that drop out or switched studies after one year hardly decreased (Huisman, 2014).

⁶ Biesta (2009, 2010) also brings up the issue of perverse effects of performance measurement in educational contexts when he asks his readers whether we are ‘valuing what we measure or measuring what we value’ (2009, p. 33). Too much attention is given to the question of what constitutes effective education, that is, effective according to agreed criteria (Biesta, 2009, p. 43). According to him, ‘the question as to what constitutes *good* education’ should become more prominent in present debates about education (idem).

force them to concentrate on educational 'outcomes' (Biesta, 2009, 2010; Verbrugge & Van Baardewijk, 2014). One of the scholars, who are very critical of this emphasis on productivity in higher education contexts, is the sociologist Stephen Ball (2012, 2015). According to him, higher education has become a market place where education 'services' are bought and sold, students are perceived as fee-paying customers, and academics understand themselves in terms of sources whose capacity to produce efficiently and effectively should constantly be monitored and enhanced (2012). '[E]ffort, values, purposes and self-understanding [are constantly linked, HJ] to measures and comparisons of output' (Ball, 2012, p. 19). Teachers (but also students) are more and more held accountable for their actions and the results of their actions. Even more, teachers (and students) are re-formed as accountable and productive subjects, who learn to think about themselves and organisations in terms of performance worth value (Ball, 2008). In these regimes, what cannot be defined in numbers is not relevant; 'experience is nothing, productivity is everything' (Ball, 2012, p. 19).

One could say that the emphasis on productivity and the reward of achievements stimulate individuals to reach for higher levels of performance. But even if this is the case, it will only stimulate the small group of best students to bring the best out of themselves. The efforts of the large group of less talented students to strive for a higher level of performance will not be appreciated or rewarded. They become disheartened and will give up trying.

At this point, I return to the aim of this chapter, that is, stimulating students to develop an attitude of learning through ups and downs. If teachers want to train all students to become professionals who regularly work on themselves, a critical stance towards the effects of the meritocratic ideal and the accompanied culture of measurement is necessary. They have to re-examine the question of what kind of learning environment stimulates all students to become professionals who despite failure and stagnation continue to work on themselves in order to attain self-set goals concerning their professional practice. It is all the better if such a learning environment enables students to score better according to existing standards, but that is a bonus. The aim of this chapter is to elaborate on the question of what kind of learning environment

helps all students to develop an attitude of learning through ups and downs that enables them to excel. In order to answer this question, I turn to Nietzsche's critique of science in the late nineteenth century.

2. Nietzsche's critique on cultures of measurement and his answer

In the aphorism ‘“*Science*” as *prejudice*’, Nietzsche claims that one should not wish to see existence be degraded to a mere exercise of counting, calculating and using formulas. In this aphorism, he criticises the faith of the materialistic natural scientists in the existence of a ‘world of truth’ (GS, p. 238). Nietzsche argues that these scientists understand the ‘world of truth’ to be a final or ultimate truth behind the everyday world; they are convinced that this truth can be traced by human intellect. He criticises their arrogant belief in human intellect that is supposed to be able to interpret the world in the right way. For Nietzsche, their interpretation of the world is just one interpretation among others. He writes:

[t]hat the only rightful interpretation of the world should be one to which *you* [the materialistic natural scientist, HJ] have a right; one by which one can do research and go on scientifically in *your* sense of the term (you really mean *mechanistically*?) – one that permits counting, calculating, weighing, seeing, grasping, and nothing else – that is a crudity and naiveté, assuming it is not a mental illness, and idiocy. (GS, p. 238, 239)

Nietzsche opposes the pretence of these scientists that their perspective is the only rightful perspective and that it should be turned into a general principle. For him, that is an overestimation of the human intellect.⁷ Moreover, their faith in an ultimate perspective, a perspective that transcends everyday life, deprives life of its ‘ambiguous character’ (GS, p. 238).

In *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche refers both to Christian ideals and to the above mentioned faith of the scientists ‘in a *metaphysical* value, a *value as such of*

⁷ See also: Prange, 2009, p. 87

truth' as ascetic ideals (GM, p. 112). These moralities incite people to strive for self-denial. Nietzsche calls these ideals '*hostile to life*' (GM, p. 86). Human flourishing, power, health, and growth are held in contempt. Striving for a goal in an ascetic sense means striving for and finding satisfaction 'in failure, decay, pain, misfortune, ugliness, voluntary deprivation, destruction of selfhood, self-flagellation and self-sacrifice' (GM, p. 86).

According to philosopher Peter Sloterdijk, Nietzsche uses the term 'Christianity' [in German: *Christentum*] not to refer to the Christian religion, but to refer to an ascetic attitude towards the world that expresses itself in repentance and neglect (Sloterdijk, 2009, p. 58). For Nietzsche, science is only a new manifestation of the Christian ascetic ideal (GM, p. 110). One could say that both moralities focus on values that transcend everyday life; they make people strive for another world than the human world.

However, Nietzsche does not evaluate the human phenomenon of striving itself as abject or life undermining. According to Nietzsche, man needs an aim, any aim, as a medicine against his fear of emptiness and meaninglessness. Any ideal, even the Christian ascetic ideal, gives life and suffering a meaning. Twice in the third essay in *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche writes that man 'prefers to will *nothingness* rather than *not will*' (GM, p. 68, 120). Even a will to self-destruction is a will and makes life meaningful. 'Within it [the ascetic ideal, HJ], suffering was interpreted; the enormous emptiness seemed filled' (GM, p. 120).

Notwithstanding it being a will, the Christian ascetic ideal and the methods used are criticised by Nietzsche. In *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche mentions four types of methods: 'the total dampening of the awareness of life, mechanical activity, the small pleasure, above all the pleasure of 'loving one's neighbour', [...] the awakening of the communal feeling of power (GM, p. 101). These methods only tackle suffering. The causes of suffering are left alone. Nietzsche writes:

[i]t is only suffering itself, the discomfort of the sufferer, that he [the ascetic priest, HJ] combats, *not* its cause, *not* the actual state of being ill – this must constitute our most fundamental objection to priestly medication. (GM, p. 96)

He describes one more method, which he even calls ‘guilty’: ‘*to produce excess of feelings*’ (GM, p. 103). In Nietzsche’s view, this method succeeds in only temporary putting the feelings of suffering and depression to flight. What is worse, this method makes suffering people more ill (GM, p. 104).

The crux of Nietzsche’s critique on these strategies for dealing with pain and displeasure is that these strategies impoverish life. They promote a negative attitude towards the human capacity to be affected and to suffer. For Nietzsche, openness to pain and displeasure is a fundamental condition for growth and the promotion of human flourishing. In *The Gay Science*, he explicitly underlines the importance of a positive attitude towards this human capacity, when he criticises the Stoic strategy for dealing with pain and displeasure. He describes the Stoic strategy as diminishing one’s sensitiveness in order to avoid pain (GS, p. 38). The Stoics advocate a strategy of withdrawal. Nietzsche contests this negative attitude towards the human susceptibility to pain because the decrease of the capacity to suffer leads also to the diminution of the ‘*capacity for joy*’ (GS, p. 38). For him – but also for the Stoics, as Nietzsche writes in *The Gay Science* – these two capacities cannot be separated:

happiness and misfortune (Glück und Unglück) are two siblings and twins who either grow up together or [...] *remain small* together! (GS, p. 192)⁸

Nietzsche advocates a positive attitude towards the human capacity to be affected and to suffer.

Nietzsche encourages his readers to embrace their imperfections, their physical and mental suffering. Though suffering itself is no source of inspiration for Nietzsche, the

⁸ The philosopher Aurelia Armstrong (2013) qualifies Nietzsche’s critique on the Stoic strategy. Based on an unpublished note (see KSA 9, pp. 652-653) and his published comments, she argues that Nietzsche does not a priori reject Stoic strategies for dealing with pain and failure. According to her, Nietzsche acknowledges that ‘radical measures like anaesthesia and extirpation in the struggle against unbearable suffering or debilitating passions like fear’ are useful and even necessary strategies to rescue life (2013, p. 19). Nietzsche is, however, critical about the ‘Stoic *ideal* of virtue as freedom from passion, along with the interpretation and evaluation of existence that undergirds this ideal’ (Armstrong, 2013, p. 20).

flaws and defects of the human being give him reason to strive for 'the less imperfect'. He needs to accept his suffering in order to overcome himself. In order to become healthy, one needs 'being ill'. In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche writes:

[o]nly great pain is the liberator of the spirit, as the teacher of *the great suspicion* [...] Only great pain [...] forces us philosophers to descent into our ultimate depths and put aside all trust, everything good-natured, veiling, mild, average – things in which formerly we may have found our humanity [...] I doubt that such pain makes us 'better' – but I know that it makes us *deeper*. (GS, p. 6-7)

In *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche is positive about suffering as well: 'being ill is instructive, we do not doubt, more instructive than being well' (GM, p. 82).

Nietzsche underlines that the human being is a striving being: he cannot survive without having something to strive for. But contrary to Christian morality, Nietzsche advocates a non-religious, life-affirmative ascetic attitude. He advocates a form of training that gives one's personal life meaning. Rather than focusing on values that transcend life and incite man to neglect himself and adapt to these values, he should focus and work on his own flourishing. A quote from *The Gay Science* summarises Nietzsche's view:

[b]asically I abhor every morality that says: 'Do not do this! Renounce! Overcome yourself!' [*'Ueberwinde dich!'*, HJ]. But I am well disposed towards those moralities that impel me to do something again and again from morning till evening, and to dream of it at night, and to think of nothing else than doing this *well*, as well as *I* alone can! [...] But I do not want to strive for my impoverishment with open eyes; I do not like negative virtues – virtues whose very essence is negation and self-denial. (p. 173)⁹

⁹ Nietzsche appears to contradict himself by saying 'I abhor every morality that says: [...] Overcome yourself!'. Although Nietzsche contradicts himself often (and he does not mind at all), here, he does not stand up against the project of self-overcoming. In this quote, he rejects moralities that tells us to overcome our everyday desires, i.e. moralities that are hostile to life.

In *Du mußt dein Leben ändern. Über Anthropotechnik* (2009), Sloterdijk has elaborated Nietzsche's ideas on the attitude of learning through ups and downs. Among other aspects, he explicates the function of role models (or attractors) and trainers in the process of acquiring this attitude. He argues that role models embody what is valued highly in society, but impossible to achieve. These attractors fascinate people and provide direction for their lives. Role models function as divine attractors: they are worshipped and they seduce individuals to reach for the impossible. They inspire them to work hard in order to reach their level. If someone has come under the spell of an attractor, his life has meaning: he has something to strive for.

And yet, being under the spell of an attractor is not sufficient; a person needs someone who stands by his side and who wants him to want (Sloterdijk, 2009, p. 91). Sloterdijk introduces the figure of the trainer as the guide to the impossible. A trainer uses that what is impossible to mimic as an impulse for people to invest major efforts in trying to reach the level of their attractors. According to Sloterdijk (2009), the trainer has to camouflage the unattainability of what a role model embodies. His task is to make the paradox – ‘the most excessive vertical tensions are created by the elevation of what is inimitable to the rank of exemplary’ invisible (Sloterdijk, 2009, p. 430; translation HJ).¹⁰ The trainer makes it appear to be a realistic undertaking to reach for the level of the impossible.

3. Learning through ups and downs in professional higher education

Nietzsche's critique on the late nineteenth century materialistic natural scientists' belief in the existence of a 'world of truth' is also applicable to western societies in the twenty-first century. The late nineteenth century cultures and contemporary, meritocratic cultures share the practice of taking one particular perspective as general principle. On the basis of this one perspective, it is decided what is valued in society. Due to this correspondence, Nietzsche's critique on the cultures in the late nineteenth century is also applicable to contemporary higher education contexts. His critique is

¹⁰ The original text is: 'Die Vertikalspannungen der überschwenglichsten Art entstehen durch die Erhebung des Unnachahmlichen in den Rang des Exemplarischen' (Sloterdijk, 2009, p. 430).

interesting since Nietzsche is not only critical of these practices, but, from his critique, he elaborates his ideas of learning through ups and downs. What can Nietzsche's ideas contribute to the understanding of learning through ups and downs in professional higher education? How can students be trained to become professionals who persevere in working on themselves in the face of failure or stagnation?

Embracing experiences of failure

Teachers should encourage students to pay attention to experiences of bad luck, frustration and failure, rather than one-sidedly focusing the attention on the goals of the training programmes (in most cases, the transfer and acquisition of knowledge and skills). The experience of being frustrated, of not succeeding in approaching a higher level can be an unpleasant experience, but this experience also gives students reason to strive for the 'less imperfect'. The experience of not succeeding to bring one's life at a higher level can be an incentive to keep on trying. Rather than moderating (expected) feelings of frustration, teachers should encourage students to pay attention to their experiences of frustration and failure. The embracement of their flaws and defects and the experience of frustration are necessary to overcome themselves.

The encouragement of students to embrace experiences of frustration and failure contradicts the intuition that praising them is an effective way to motivate them not to give up.¹¹ However, if teachers choose to pay attention only to things that go well, students are encouraged to develop a positive attitude towards successes, that is, successes in the eyes of teachers, and to dismiss experiences of failure. As a result of this emphasis on success, students learn to ignore their feelings of frustration and suffering and miss out on the opportunity to use these experiences as stimuli to continue to work on themselves. The same is true of the strategy of making high demands or having high expectations of the performance of students while not making students pay attention to their failures. If teachers use this strategy to make students persevere, the attention of students and teachers will be focused on teachers' criteria; students' experiences of failure and frustrated are ignored. The result of both strategies is that students are deprived of the opportunity to use their experiences of frustration as

¹¹ See also: Dweck, 1986.

an impulse to reach for a higher level. If students are to become professionals who keep on working on themselves, a positive attitude towards the human capacity to be affected and to suffer has to be promoted. However, it can be a painful experience to become aware of one's flaws and inadequacies.

Being under the spell of a role model

How can focusing the attention on experiences of frustration be an affirmative action? It is important that students are under the spell of an attractor or role model. A role model embodies a highly valued and worthwhile ideal that challenges people to reach for the level of the attractor.¹² It makes a person realise that his current life is imperfect. A role model triggers students and teachers to work on themselves, to give style to their characters. It gives meaning to their lives.

Becoming under the spell of an attractor is not a matter of *choosing* a role model. Neither students nor teachers decide who will function as role models. Even teachers cannot make students search for attractors. A role model finds you, as Sloterdijk explains. A role model appeals to you; it directly addresses you to strive for its level.

This does not imply that teachers are empty-handed. They have various techniques at their disposal to support students in coming under the spell of an attractor. First of all, teachers can explain the function of attractors by telling stories. They can tell students stories about their own professional lives: who were/are their role models, and how did/do these role models inspire them to persevere? They can tell students about moments of failure in their professional lives and how they managed to remain or become resilient (again) and keep on working on themselves. Teachers can also tell stories about other persons. A well known example of someone who kept on working on himself despite misfortune is sociologist Richard Sennett. He started his professional career as a practising musician, but due to a hand injury, he had to stop his musical career. Rather than remaining frustrated, he started an academic career.

¹² Blake et al. (2000) assert that psychologically, it is narratives that provide for motivation and interest (pp. 50-51). They are, however, quite pessimistic about the possibility of narratives dictating motivation as the narrative context of contemporary working life is more and more disappearing. They refer to Sennett's analysis of new work and modern society in *The Corrosion of Character* (1998).

Nowadays, he is an outstanding and famous sociologist whose works have been translated in many languages.¹³ Teachers with a tool box full of stories at their disposal can use these stories to explain the principle of role models and to restore a culture of respect for role models.

Another way for teachers to encourage students to embrace the challenging and appealing function of attractors is telling them that it is no big deal that the aim of reaching for the level of their role model is unattainable. Contrary to Sloterdijk (2009), who understands the task of a trainer to make the impossible appear to be realistic and liveable, I think that teachers do not need to deny or camouflage the impossibility of reaching the attractor's level. An attractor embodies an unobtainable ideal; no matter how hard students practice, they will never reach its level. What matters is that they are on their way to 'the less imperfect'. An attractor gives their lives meaning. Teachers can illustrate this by (again) telling stories from their lives and the lives of others.

The increase of students' susceptibility for role models can be dangerous as one does not know beforehand what attractor will dominate. Some students might become more easily influenced by role models who encourage students, for example, to go to Syria and fight for the Jihad. This danger, which is part and parcel of the project of restoring respect for role models, should not be an argument to refrain from teaching students to learn through ups and downs. In the present situation, in which students hardly have the chance to learn to persevere, students as well as society (will) pay the price for not being able to persevere when striving for better or being confronted with (radically) changing circumstances. Rather than preventing students from embracing inspiring role models, teachers better reflect on the question of how to encourage students to, now and then, take a more critical approach towards their role model.

Keeping an eye on the appealing function of attractors

Encouraging students to pay attention to experiences of frustration and failure and supporting them to become under the spell of an attractor are two ways of promoting an attitude of learning through ups and downs. At times, a slightly tempering approach of teachers is required. They should have their eyes on students' current ability to

¹³ See: www.richardsennett.com. Last seen: 2015-1-26.

endure suffering and measure out failure. There are at least two reasons for occasionally limiting the amount of failure that students are experiencing. One reason has to do with the risks of exaggeration if teachers encourage students to strive for ‘the less imperfect’. In *Fatigue Society* (original German title: *Müdigkeitsgesellschaft* (2010)), philosopher Byung-Chul Han argues that the downside of contemporary society where people have to excel and to grasp opportunities to bring out the best out of themselves with both hands, is fatigue and loneliness. The encouragement of students to keep on striving for a higher level and to learn through ups and downs has a dangerous side: students can become victims of their own striving. Rather than making students go for mediocrity, as the author Jeroen van Baar (2014) pleads for, teachers should encourage students to value their frustrations but they should do it within limits. Teachers should apply techniques to reduce frustration. Another reason to moderate the amount of failure is that, in some instances, it is not wise to highlight all imperfections. It becomes an insurmountable task to overcome oneself. In order to prevent students from giving up, teachers can also accompany messages like ‘the assignment you handed in, is not good enough’ with messages like ‘I expect more from you’. In this way, teachers pay attention to what is inadequate and arouse students’ frustration. At the same time, they encourage students to persevere and invite them to keep on working on themselves. To prevent misunderstandings, these techniques to moderate failure are not meant as a means for reducing frustration per se. The moderation of frustration that students have to handle is sometimes required in order to prevent them from giving up.

Furthermore, a more questioning approach of students towards their role models is sometimes required. Blindly giving in to an attractor, or any other force, can be detrimental. Although they are not the ones who choose a role model – an attractor chooses you – students can exercise self-control and set up a new hierarchy between attractors. In this way they can reinforce or down play the appealing function of a role model. As the examination of one’s attractor involves the risk of undermining the appealing function of role models, teachers should encourage this questioning approach to role models with prudence. In western culture, a culture of learning through ups and downs is not popular. Authority is distrusted from the outset, whether it is based on

expertise or not. Moreover, people want to reach the top without taking pains (Huijter, 2013; Sloterdijk, 2009).

4. Nietzsche's strategy of withdrawal from society

One pressing question to be answered is whether these techniques and clues are feasible in contemporary professional higher education contexts. The culture of measurement and comparison is invading all aspects of twenty-first century educational life. From a Nietzschean perspective, the meritocratic practice of making educational life transparent and comparing the merits of teachers, students, training programmes and institutes are symptoms of the impoverishment of (educational) life. Educational practices are constantly adapted to satisfy the requirements and criteria of inspectors, top ten lists and funding bodies. They are more and more moulded into a uniform practice. Teachers and students have to satisfy standards. Little room is left for acquiring an attitude of learning through ups and downs. Does Nietzsche offer any answer for the problem of an intrusive culture of measurement?

Nietzsche's solution was to distance himself from society in order to be able to steer his life towards a higher level. Philosopher Martine Prange (2005) describes how Nietzsche withdrew from the academic world where he had been appointed as professor in philology at the age of twenty-four. Ill-health hindered him to continue academic work – he suffered severe attacks of headache and diminishing eyesight – and forced him to resign. His resignation, however, had an unexpected advantage: it enabled him to dedicate his life to the cultivation of his own philosophical thoughts. Prange sketches how Nietzsche experimented with different ways of living in order to find out what lifestyle enabled him best to develop his own thoughts. He 'tries to reach a physical and psychological mood from which he can find *and* tolerate his deepest thoughts' (Prange, 2005, p. 18; translation HJ). While writing *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche travelled often to the south (Italy, Austria etc.) in order to find the right climate, experimented with his diet (milk and eggs, herbs and minerals played an important role), walked for hours and sat still in the dark from seven to nine in the evening. According to Prange, his resignation and withdrawal into solitude enabled him to become a free thinker (2005, p. 17).

Nietzsche needed solitude to become resilient again. What is more, he was at a phase of his intellectual, philosophical development in which he needed to distance himself from the academic world for the purpose of ordering his thoughts and further developing these. He flourished in solitude. Solitude enabled him to develop an attitude of learning from ups and downs.

Nietzsche's personal life functions as a source for his thoughts. As an author, he reflected on his personal need for distance. Based on his experiences, he understood the creation of distance as a useful strategy for individuals to overcome themselves. In various passages, he refers to this strategy. An example of such a passage can be found in *On Genealogy of Morality*, where he writes about healthy people needing distance from the sick:

[t]hat the sick should *not* make the healthy sick [...] but for that, it is essential that the healthy should remain *separated* from the sick, should even be spared the sight of the sick so that they do not confuse themselves with the sick. (GM, p. 91)¹⁴

Nietzsche understands the attitude of learning through ups and downs as an attitude that can be developed on one's own.

What weight should be given to his personal experiences? Philosopher Mariëtta Willemsen (1996) warns against an approach of Nietzsche's philosophical texts that puts too much emphasis on his life. Though his life and ideas are closely connected, a one-sided biographical approach of his legacy would be at the expense of the general significance of his ideas (Willemsen, 1996).¹⁵

Nietzsche's understanding of the 'self' provides another, more substantive reason for questioning Nietzsche's understanding of the attitude of learning through ups and

¹⁴ The passage continues: 'Or would it be their task, perhaps, to be nurses and doctors? ... But they [the healthy, HJ] could not be more mistaken and deceived about *their task*, – the higher *ought* not to abase itself as the tool of the lower, the pathos of distance *ought* to ensure that their tasks are kept separate for all eternity! [...] they alone are *guarantors* of the future, they alone have a *bounden duty* to man's future'.

¹⁵ Van Tongeren (1990) elaborates on the metaphor of Nietzsche as a physician. To what extent should Nietzsche be understood as a physician who wanted to heal himself or as a physician of mankind (Van Tongeren, 1990, pp. 13-20)?

downs as an attitude that can be developed on one's own. He understands the 'self' as the variable result of the constant struggle and interplay between internal and external forces that are crossing around, in and through the individual. A human being is always embedded in his environment. He cannot avoid the external forces. The strategy of distance understood as a withdrawal from society contradicts his theoretical position of the self as subject to forces.

5. Learning environment

Withdrawal is not an appropriate strategy for twenty-first century professional higher education. This strategy contradicts one of the main functions of professional higher education, that is, embedding students in the perspective of their future profession. Students are expected to acquire the habits and beliefs of their profession. Biesta refers to it as one of the actual functions of higher education: 'the transmission of particular norms and values, in relation to the continuation of particular cultural or religious traditions, or for the purpose of professional socialisation' is a major function of education (2009, p. 40).

Students are in a phase of their lives, where meeting others and becoming members of society are important issues. Distancing oneself of others is part of a later stage in life. Moreover, most students are healthy and do not need solitude to become (or remain) resilient. While Nietzsche's thoughts on perseverance in relation to working on oneself are relevant for contemporary higher education, it would be counter-productive to understand the skill to learn through ups and downs as an attitude that can only be trained in solitude. Therefore, I focus on the question of what kind of learning environments bring about the development of students' attitude of learning through ups and downs.

Two ways of creating an environment that promotes the development of students' attitude of learning through ups and downs have been described: teachers reinstating a culture of respect for practicing life by telling stories about the function of attractors and encouraging students to embrace their experiences of frustration and failure.

Making students aware of the reciprocal influence of cognitive, physical and emotional aspects of life is a third way of creating such an environment. On the way to

their goals, students encounter all kinds of obstacles. These obstacles can have a cognitive character (for example, still not having enough knowledge at one's disposal), but also a physical nature (stuttering or becoming ill) or emotional nature (being in love or being in mourning). Students who are able to identify these different kinds of obstacles are better equipped for approaching the level of their attractor. Also, goals on the cognitive level (for example, mastering the substance at a higher level) are intertwined with goals on the physical level (feeling fit) and the emotional level. On all levels, students need to embrace their imperfections and suffering and use them as incentives to keep on trying to bring their lives at a higher level. As teachers give examples to explain role models' function, teachers can illustrate the interaction between these aspects by telling stories about themselves and others.

Another effective way is the creation of an environment where students actually observe the reciprocal influences of cognitive, physical and emotional aspects and the advantages of an attitude of learning through ups and downs. Training programmes could be offered in which students are required to train a skill that most of them have never done before, for example ice skating, in order to let them experience and observe that learning through ups and downs is the basis for learning something well.¹⁶ Some students probably want to quit after one or two lessons, especially students who have not been raised in an environment that stimulates an attitude of perseverance. However, after several lessons, they can observe fellow students managing to skate quite well. Even the ones, who fell every two minutes during the first lesson, manage to ride a lap in the ice skating rink. These perseverant students can stimulate others to be perseverant too.

Graduates with some years of working experience can also set an example with respect to learning through ups and downs. In preparation for practical training or internship, students could be offered the opportunity to meet professionals, who graduated a few years earlier, and ask them about their training: how did these

¹⁶ See for an example where students take ice skating lessons in order to let them experience that repetition and learning through ups and downs are the basis of learning something well: *Handleiding: Minor Vakmanschap is Meesterschap. Blok 2 2013-2014* (De Regt, P, n.d.) and <http://www.dehaagsehogeschool.nl/filmpjes/lectoraten/vakmanschap>. Last seen: 2015-1-11.

graduates experience their first internship? What barriers did they meet? What made them persevere in the face of obstacles? How did they handle them? These graduates may provide solutions to some of the problems and obstacles that students encounter now. That is a nice bonus but it is not the aim of these encounters. What matters is that these graduates can trigger students to become resilient professionals, just as these graduates are.

A learning environment that brings about the development of students' attitude of learning through ups and downs is necessarily a learning environment where students and teachers meet each other face to face. If students are offered exclusively an online learning environments, it is tempting for them to hide, ignore or avoid experiences of frustration. A stuttering way of speaking does not form an obstacle in chat sessions, photos on Face book or Instagram do not show nervous tics, and students can wait with sending an email till one's frustration or anger has faded away. Online learning environments contain the danger of abstracting from experiences of frustration, vulnerability and imperfections and students cannot use them as impulses to strive for better. Moreover, the interaction between cognitive, emotional and physical aspects of learning are easily overlooked as online learning environments overemphasis the cognitive element. Moreover, teachers are not able to moderate failure and frustration. The function of having a caring eye to students' current ability to endure and handle frustration requires face-to-face class meetings.

Purely digital learning environments also deprive students of the opportunity to be inspired by fellow students or teachers who know how to use frustration as an incentive to strive for better. Philosopher Hubert Dreyfus mentions this drawback when he questions today's optimistic belief in the possibilities of digital environments. In *On the Internet* (2009), he warns his readers not to leave behind their physical constraints and to indulge themselves in the (seemingly) unrestrained possibilities of the internet. As he elaborates the possibilities and downsides of the digital world, he particularly focuses on digital learning environments. According to Dreyfus, presence and emotional involvement are diminished in a purely digital world, while both are necessary conditions for students to develop themselves beyond the level of learning and applying the rules and maxims of a profession. He argues that, for at least two

reasons, students and teachers should regularly meet face-to-face: students who are actively involved in the lessons, who ask critical questions and are reluctant to take everything teachers tell them at face value, take a greater risk if teacher and students are present in person than if they are interacting in an online learning environment. There is more at stake – success or failure – if teacher and students are physically present. The second reason explicitly refers to the teacher’s function of being a role model. In Dreyfus’ view, teachers affect what kind of professionals students will become: detached professionals or emotional involved professionals. He writes:

[s]ince students tend to imitate their teachers, teachers can play a crucial role in whether students will withdraw into being disembodied minds or become more and more emotionally involved in the learning situation. (Dreyfus, 2009, p. 32-33)

In digital learning environments, students probably ‘choose’ the former option.

A learning environment where students and teachers regularly meet face to face, where cognitive, physical and emotional aspects of learning are embraced, provides students the opportunity to become under the spell of a persistent role model and to learn how to use their experiences of failure and frustration as an incentive to keep on working on themselves.

6. Ups *and* downs!

Downs are to be welcomed as warmly as the ups in professional higher education.

Studies demonstrate that students who have acquired an attitude of learning through ups and downs are more successful than talented students who have not learned to persevere. Moreover, Nietzsche has pointed out that resilience is a prerequisite for the endeavour to reach for *self-set*, higher levels. The skill to continue to strive for better in the face of failure and stagnation is a precondition for self-overcoming.

An environment in which students learn to value ups and downs and in which they are encouraged to understand failure and imperfection as incentives to strive for better is an important means of preparing them for today’s professional practices. Despite the

NIETZSCHE'S NEW DAWN

risks of exceeding students' capacity of dealing with frustration and of students becoming under the spell of life-impoverishing role models, learning through ups and downs is crucial for students to excel. The creation of such learning environments is, however, a challenge in itself as mass professional higher education systems are not primed for embracing downs. Success (according to predefined criteria) is the standard. Nietzsche's legacy provides a perspective that opens up a variety of tools and practices to stimulate students to look up and to use their downs in the service of a quest for better.

CHAPTER 6: VERSUCHEN WIR'S! – NIETZSCHEAN EXPERIMENTS

The sense of truth. – I approve of any form of scepticism to which I can reply, 'Let's try it!' But I want to hear nothing more about all the things and questions that don't admit of experiment. This is the limit of my 'sense of truth'; for there, courage has lost its right. (GS, p. 62)

In this chapter, I will describe two cases. The first case relates to an intensive, one-week training programme called *close reading* that has been developed for first-year students of the bachelor programme Business IT & Management at The Hague University of Applied Sciences in 2012. As the skill to use scientific knowledge becomes more important in professional life, tools are needed to teach students to approach and use this knowledge in a critical way. In response to this need, the training programme 'close reading' was developed in co-operation with the Department of Philosophy and Professional Practice [*Lectoraat Filosofie en Beroepspraktijk*].¹ The second case involves the design and development of a project management course of ten weeks by a group of senior students – also students of the bachelor programme Business IT & Management at The Hague University of Applied Sciences. As existing educational material on project management was considered to be outdated, a group of eleven students was asked to design and develop a training programme.

Both cases could be understood as attempts to explore and create space for new educational practices within the existing curriculum. This is, however, not the approach of this chapter. Both cases are not meant as social scientific experiments. The emphasis in this chapter is put on the *description* of both cases. I will use the Nietzschean inspired notions which have been developed in this study to describe both cases. These descriptions could be perceived as *spielerei*, as a light hearted play with words. It is, however, a very *serious* game as well. They are an attempt to question current foundations of professional higher education practices and to find openings in the

¹ The main figures in developing this course and training the teachers were Marli Huijer (lector) and Frank Meester (assistent lector).

current discourse on professional education. This chapter should be understood as a conceptual experiment in the Nietzschean sense of the word.

Case 1: Close reading²

The purpose of close reading is to augment the understanding of the text. The training I am describing lasts one week. On a daily base, a group of approximately twelve to fifteen freshmen and a teacher meet for a session of about two or three hours. During a session, the participants slowly and conscientiously read difficult texts, such as philosophical texts and scientific articles. The texts concern both subject matters of the studies (in this case, IT related issues) and more general themes such as freedom of speech or the multiple relations between morality and technology. During every session, one text, which students and teachers have read in advance, is in the centre of attention. Teacher and students jointly try to find out what truths the text is passing.

Before offering the close reading sessions to students, all teachers have been trained in order to be prepared for their new role. During the training sessions, teachers' initial unease with not being the expert (none of them was a philosopher or academic researcher) diminished, as they got tools to fulfil their facilitating role. The pleasure of jointly struggling with difficult but interesting texts prevailed.³

No final authority

There is one important rule that applies to close reading: the text is the only authority. During a reading session, students' and teacher's personal experiences, opinions, and expert knowledge are irrelevant. This rule undeniably introduces uncertainty. The rule entails that neither students, nor teachers can conclusively answer the question of what truths the text presents. This is quite a different setting than the educational contexts that most students and teacher are accustomed to. When students do not understand the

² I helped develop this course while I was doing my PhD research. I therefore had the chance to consider this course as an experiment in order to find out whether it was possible to incorporate some of the insights of this study in the day-to-day educational practice of teachers. In turn, the experience with the development and introduction of this course deepened and sharpened my thinking on the subject of striving for better.

³ See for a more extensive elaboration on close reading: Meester, Huijjer & Joosten, 2014.

literature or when they do not know what to do, they normally ask the teacher for help. The teacher, on his turn, deems it his task to answer their questions. This is, however, not the teacher's function during a close reading training. To the contrary, what matters is teacher's ability to retain his inclination to answer students' questions and to offer them (a false sense of) certainty. His task is to leave the door open for new readings of the text and stimulate students to continue to search for a better understanding of the texts themselves rather than offering them his reading.

At the end of a successful close reading session, many participants leave the classroom with mixed feelings. On the one hand, students are excited as they have reached a deepened understanding of the text which they deemed too difficult to understand at the start of the session. At the other hand, they have the (slightly) worrying feeling that the search for the text's truth has not been finished yet. No final answer to the question of the text has been found. They have to live with the exciting, but also worrisome insight that no conclusive answers were found or offered: there remains room for renewal and deviant perspectives.

Training self-control

In this course, all readers are challenged to read texts with an open mind and to understand it unbiasedly. That is quite a challenge as students and teachers often (are expected to) read or scan texts from a practical point of view: to what use is this text, or, what do I have to know to pass the next test? In order to find out what the text is saying, the participants are required to control this habit of focusing on the usability of texts. The same applies to the inclination to be in a hurry or to prematurely express one's opinion about the text or to speak about one's experiences and knowledge with regard to the text's subject. If students are not yet accustomed to close reading, the teacher will ask them to refrain from giving in to these habits and to concentrate on the text, time and again. A third tendency that has to be controlled is the very human practice of holding on to one's own reading. Participants need to put aside their own interpretation and listen to others' proposals. Teacher and students are asked to park their own thoughts and to focus on the perspective of their fellow readers. In order to facilitate this joint endeavour, the teacher repeatedly asks his fellow readers: what did

she say? Can you summarise what the previous speaker just said? It is clear that, in the context of close reading, teacher's task of 'facilitating' should not be put on a par with making things easier for students. On the contrary, it is hard work (learning) to control oneself.

In search for multiple readings

Every truth has to be established time and again. Even texts that have been taken for true for centuries have to furnish proof of their truthfulness again and again. Only if a claim can withstand all attempts to refute it, it can be considered as (temporary!) true. As none of the participants has a monopoly on the right interpretation, it seems an impossible undertaking to determine what readings can be considered true. It seems like anything goes. And yet, not all interpretations are acceptable. All interpretations have to be underpinned with arguments found in the text. The proposed reading and accompanied underpinnings are subject to critical examination.

Making a structure of the argumentation of a text that is under investigation is a way of getting a better grip on the text as well as a useful strategy for searching for different readings of the text. When contradicting or irrelevant passages emerge at this inquiry, the teacher stimulates students to search for an alternative interpretation of the text that does include all passages in an understandable, coherent way. Instead of putting the text aside as incorrect or unclear, students are pressed to look for different readings of the text.

Even when teacher and students agree upon a particular reading, the teacher continues to urge students not to sit back but to search for a new reading. The teacher encourages the students to examine the text from a diversity of perspectives. That is one of the advantages of close reading as a collective undertaking: there is a better chance of multiple perspectives.

Excellence

The joint undertaking of close reading enables many participants to approach the text from unexpected angles. As their repertoire of readings of the text increases, they have the opportunity to find out what reading suits them best, that is, to experience what

reading works best for them. The experience of being able to impose one's reading on the world – in this case, on the text – can be an exciting experience of self-transcendence.

Friends jointly reading a text

Close reading is like reading a text as if it were a friend. It is about trying to open up for what the text is saying to its readers. In another sense, a close reading session can be understood as a short-term, truth seeking friendship as well. Teacher and students jointly try to understand the text and each participant expects others to contribute to this quest. The teacher urges students to join the close reading as he expects to gain from their questions and youthful audacity to propose different readings. Students expect the teacher to foster the search by creating an open and safe environment where new readings can be explored. The responsibility of creating a learning environment is a responsibility of students as well. If a teacher relapses into the 'old' habit of explaining the text without showing any willingness to risk his reading, it is up to the other searchers for truth to call the teacher to order – that is, the order of close reading. If one of the students has the courage to stop the teacher and the teacher courageously accepts the student's comment, close reading can become a joint and animated undertaking. Slowly and attentively reading a text is, however, a demanding activity. Periods of relaxation and humour should be part of this temporary friendship.

Frustration lies in wait!

Jointly reading a text in a truth seeking spirit can be an exiting and joyful experience. It is, however, a demanding undertaking for participants as well. For many students, it is the first time that they have to read difficult texts. On top of that, there is no teacher who explains to them the difficult parts. Frustration lies in wait!

In this classes, frustration is welcome. When participants become frustrated, the teacher could, once in a while, identify the feelings of frustration and failure and grasp the opportunity to explain the phenomenon of learning through ups and downs. The teacher can tell students how he perseveres in face of failure or frustration in his

professional life. He could, for instance, tell about his frustrations when he started to learn close reading.

Students can also observe and experience the interdependence of physical, cognitive and emotional factors. For example, fatigue due to a part-time job in the evening is a major obstacle for attentively reading difficult texts, especially when the close reading training is taking place during an uninterrupted period of five days. As close reading is an intensive, joint undertaking, it is impossible to ignore or hide one's physical condition. This experience of failure due to tiredness can be a very unpleasant experience which is reinforced by the fact that one's fellow students are aware of it as well. This experience can be an incentive to strive for better physical conditions.

Close reading is also an opportunity for students to observe how fellow students persevere despite failure to better understand the text. Their continued efforts to reach for a higher level of understanding could inspire them to keep on offering new interpretations or counter-arguments against other interpretations. When teacher and students achieve a deeper and clearer understanding of the text at the end of a session, the benefits of learning through ups and downs become clear.

Student evaluations of the close reading programme showed that most students deemed the training demanding. The fact that it was challenging did not result into a negative evaluation of the close reading programme. A huge majority of the students (in 2013: 83 out of 91 students) gave the training a positive evaluation.

Case 2: Students designing a course in project management⁴

In 2007, I (as a teacher) asked a group of eleven students, most of whom were seriously considering a career as project manager, to design a course for other students that better prepare them for a (possible) professional career in the area of project management. I wanted these eleven students to find out what it means to be or become a project manager in their specific discipline (IT) and, based on their answers, to design and develop a course for their fellow students. The students accepted this challenging

⁴ This course is not directly linked to the underlying study as the course in project management has been developed before I started this study on teaching students to strive for better.

undertaking which had to be done in ten weeks time. As for support, every week the students presented the results of their work so far and I gave them feedback. Furthermore, I gave them a few additional, small assignments providing some guidance.

Embedding uncertainty

Most students know what to expect and what to do when entering a course. In this case, there were little certainties. All they had was a short project brief, explaining the need for the undertaking of designing a new course, and a small number of additional assignments which they had to complete such as interviewing experienced project managers and playing a particular card game.

Initially, the students put their hope on available project management books and methods. However, these books and methods did not offer any advice on how to create a course in project management for students. Furthermore, these books turned out to be (partly) contradictory. My answer to the question of what I expected them to deliver at the end of the project did not offer any guidance either. I told them that they had all freedom to do as they saw fit, as long as they could underpin their decisions and the resulting course did not exceed available budgets. The students had to decide for themselves what to do and where to start.

In order to prevent the students from lapsing into inactivity or quitting the project due to an overload of uncertainties, I encouraged them to experiment with different ideas, rather than to search for *the* right answer to question of what it means to be or become a project manager in the field of IT.

The group of students surpassed itself. The resulting course in project management has been offered for six years to students as an optional subject and the students learned a lot about project management. During the project, however, the teacher and many students were not sure about a positive outcome. Being a teacher, it felt like I took a risk when I introduced this level of uncertainty. A bad outcome (students prematurely quitting or learning nothing or officially accusing me of not doing my job) was a possibility. But that is part and parcel of embedding uncertainty in the curriculum.

Stimulating excellence

One assignment involved playing a card game called 'The Feedback Game'. This game involves a pile of cards with qualities such as 'honest' and 'enterprising' written on them. In turn, students pick up one card and decide whether this quality fits their own behaviour or whether it better reflects another player's doings. If a student decides to give the card to someone else, he has to give feedback concerning the quality of the receiver of the card. After the game, the students had to write a one-page paper answering the following questions:

- To what extent does the received feedback correspond with or deviate from your view of yourself?
- What does this analysis mean for the kind of (beginning) project manager you are?
- What qualities should a project manager possess in your view?
- To what extent do you reflect these qualities?

The objective of this assignment was to make the students aware of the images they had of a project manager and of themselves. Rather than let these images dominate their thoughts and actions, these images were subject of examination.

The interview assignment, which included the task of reflecting on the senior project managers' views and to compare these views with their own, was another way of encouraging students to examine their own routines in thinking and acting.

The invitation to take an active stance towards these habits was not an explicit part of the assignments. And yet, students did change their minds. At the end of the project, when the students handed in the final result (the course in project management), many students had altered their initial intention of becoming a project manager. Some were even more convinced that a career in project management suited them. They experienced what it was like to overcome themselves and to eventually succeed in managing a project (that is, the project of designing a course) in a complex environment. Other students decided to give up their plans. The project turned out to be detrimental to their ambition of becoming a project manager. In this respect, the project was a failure. This failure has, however, a positive side as well: these students have been saved from a career that might have brought them a lot of misery as it did not suit them.

Encouraging critical thinking

At the beginning, most students were fairly confident that they would succeed in designing a course, as standard project management methods for IT-projects are available.⁵ As the project went on, they were confronted with the fact that in a group of eleven students, eleven (slightly) different views on the subject were available. An extra complicating factor was the contradictory data resulting from interviews with experienced project managers.⁶ These senior project managers provided the students with contradicting, but each time convincing views on the profession.

At first, this broad range of perspectives made many students uncertain. With time, however, most students began to understand that there was not one right answer to the question of what the undertaking of becoming a project managers entails. Confronted with these multiple perspectives, they became more critical towards their own thinking as well as towards other students' understanding and the teacher's feedback.

In another way, the students were invited to review their own thoughts on project management. Half way through the ten week period, I told the students to redistribute the functions of project manager and team manager among the students (the students had organised the work as a project). After a brief period of commotion caused by this (for students) unexpected intervention, the newly appointed 'managers' were eager to avoid the mistakes of the earlier managers. They began to appreciate the available options to 'play' and to try out new styles of managing the project. They used the opportunity to find out what notion of project management worked best for them.

Searching for truth together

Both students and teacher were to gain from an answer to the question as to what does it mean to be or become a project manager. Most students expected the answer to be useful in realising their aim of starting a career in project management. My objective

⁵ An example of project management method that was originally developed for IT-projects is Prince2 (see: <https://www.axelos.com/prince2>). Scrum is another framework that supports teams to work together to develop (IT) projects (see: <https://www.scrum.org/>).

⁶ In teams of two persons (one group consisted of three persons), each student had to interview two experienced project managers. In this way, they collected information about what it means to be a project managers from at least ten different angles.

was to respond to the need for a course that better prepares future students who are thinking about entering the profession of project management.

Every week, the students presented the results of their work so far. As I (thought I) had more knowledge of project management, I scrutinised these products and criticised their work. As the students began to understand that I was really interested in the best possible answer, they sometimes countered my comment with persuasive arguments based on the insights of the interviews and their experience of being a student. A joint quest for truth arose.

The joined efforts of students and teacher made a success of the project: for six years (academic years: 2008/2009-2013/2014), the resulting minor course has been offered (in a slightly altered form) to bachelor students as the best possible way of preparing students for a career in the field of project management. All these years, the names of the eleven students have been prominently mentioned in the course tutorial as the co-makers of this course (see for example: Joosten et al., 2012).

Learning through ups and downs

The project was challenging and demanding: the students had to work their way in a relatively unfamiliar part of their discipline and for most of them, it was the first time that they had to design and construct a course. At times, as a teacher, I exceeded the limits of some students' ability to handle frustration appropriately – that is, to use frustration as an incentive to strive for better. These students panicked and became agitated about the chaos and uncertainty. When that was the case, I sometimes decided to reduce the amount of frustration that students had to deal with. At times, it was sufficient to acknowledge their frustration and jointly (but shortly) examine the source(s) of their frustration, not in order to remove this source, but in order to find out what was driving them.

Whether the interviews with experienced project managers provided the students an opportunity to 'find' a role model or inspiration is a question, but after the project, several students were remarkably positive about these interviews.

Conclusion

This chapter presented a Nietzschean inspired perspective on two widely differing educational practices in professional higher education.⁷

It is tempting to conclude this chapter by highlighting the fact that both cases were successful: the involved teachers as well as students appreciated both experiments and both experiments produced lasting – but not ever-lasting – results: in 2015, close reading is still a compulsory subject of the bachelor programme Business IT & Management and the resulting course in project management has been offered for six years as an optional subject for students. It is, however, not the purpose of this chapter to deliver evidence of the validity of a new theory of professional higher education. Nor did this chapter aim at demonstrating that the factual courses succeeded in creating room for new educational practices. Moreover, the use of terms such as success run the risk of giving ground to existing, meritocratic and neo-liberal discourses – even when the criteria for success are given a deviant content. The same risk applies to the strategy of contradicting the Nietzschean inspired notions with the notions that constitute existing discourse. One remains stuck in the ‘old’ discourse.

The purpose of this chapter is to contribute to the project of breaking ground for new discourses on professional higher education that allow for educational practices that better prepare students for twenty-first century professional life. As the descriptions of both cases show, some fundamental assumptions are questioned: does one need teachers to develop courses? If so, what exactly is their added value? Does it make sense to frame education in terms of ‘usefulness’? The application of Nietzschean inspired notions can have a disruptive effect on existing educational orders. It aims at transforming the existing order from within in search for better.

⁷ The close reading training is a compulsory, one-week training whereas the project of creating a project management course took ten weeks and the eleven involved students freely chose to participate in it. Both cases also vary with regard to the number of students and teachers involved: annually, approximately eight teachers provide the close reading training for over hundred students. The project of creating a project management course involved eleven students and one teacher. Furthermore, in the case of close reading, the students followed a course that was developed down to the last detail by teachers and lector. In the second case, for the most part, the students constructed their own programme.

Where one decides to realise the ideas described in the underlying study and to translate these ideas into higher education policy – an endeavour which requires an adaptation to the particular circumstances of a higher education institute (or programme) – scientific experiments are appropriate. Research on the effects of interventions does, however, not apply to this chapter. The text (and indeed, the whole study) proposes new ways of thinking and speaking by reformulating higher education from a learning factory aiming at the production of flexible and reactive professionals into a place where teachers teach students to strive for better in a world where the life expectation of what counts as ‘better’ is increasingly shortened.

PRO TEMPORE...

On the Friend

[...] I and me are always too eager in conversation. (Z, p. 40)

This study is the result of impassionate dialogues and heated argument. Using Nietzsche's conceptual tools to reflect on what it means to prepare twenty-first century students for professional practices which are changing with an increasing pace proved to be an exciting undertaking with ifs and buts. As a philosopher, I wanted to do justice to Nietzsche as a dangerous, untimely philosopher. For him, no taboos exist. He goes radically against the spirit of time. He reverses the meaning of words in a provocative manner. He destroys current values in order to create new ones. He opens up new horizons. As a teacher, I wanted to introduce Nietzsche's thoughts in the context of today's professional higher education. I wanted to use his thoughts in order to contribute to the further improvement of teaching students to strive for better in a world where the possibility of long term orientation is rapidly reducing. I was in two minds. On the one hand, I wanted to give Nietzsche his dues for his dangerously liberating, critical and untimely thinking. On the other hand, applying his thoughts to today's professional higher education contexts required me to take the edge off Nietzsche's radical thinking. I had to moderate the subversive aspects of his thoughts in order to make them acceptable. At one moment, the philosopher in me reigned, at the next, I was a teacher in heart and soul.

One area of argument was the extent to which uncertainty should be part of learning environments. A learning environment that aims at initiating students in a clear, unambiguous professional perspective and that incites them to adhere to this perspective bars uncertainty. Teaching students best practices without encouraging them to question these practices is one example of such a learning environment. Nietzsche is very critical on environments where the urge to hold on to the existing order reigns – he calls this urge the Apollinian. However widely shared or valid these orders or perspectives might be, these environments hinders students to develop the ability to strive for better. Students should be deprived of the illusion that certainties

exist. Teachers have, however, to provide students with a safe learning environment. Too much uncertainty will be counterproductive to the efforts of teachers to teach students to strive for better.

The introduction of Nietzsche's understanding of the self as the variable result of forces that strive for dominance in contemporary higher education opens up a new perspective on excellence. In this perspective, excellence is understood as overcoming oneself, rather than being better than others. As a philosopher, I embrace this perspective in which *all* students can learn to excel as this type of excellence is a prerequisite for going on in a professional world characterised by a plurality of dispersive (and thus short term) horizons. Although this Nietzschean perspective is timely with regard to present-day professional life, with regard to higher education practices it is quite inopportune. A Nietzschean understanding of the self undermines the prevailing aim of educating students to become autonomously and purposefully acting professionals. Moreover, teaching all students to excel, that is, to create horizons of their own, goes against the present educational horizon of competition and the assumption that excellence is suitable for a small elite.

The subject of critical thinking was also an arena where 'the philosopher' and 'the teacher' argued. For Nietzsche, no truth, value or routine has special status and is therefore to be excluded from scrutinisation. All routines in thinking and doing that prevent one to strive for better are to be destroyed. Period! As a teacher, my first reaction was to take the sting out of Nietzsche's radical notion of critical thinking. I deemed it too extreme as it would probably lead to an excessively distrustful attitude of students (and teachers). Teachers' authority might be at stake as well as professional higher education's task of initiating students into today's professional practices. As a teacher, I have no intention of jeopardising neither. And yet, Nietzsche's notion of critical thinking might be 'untimely' for professional higher education, but with regard to present-day professional practices, it is timely. The moderation of Nietzsche's dangerous notion of critical thinking easily transforms into an 'attempt' to maintain the educational status quo at the expense of students' preparation for today's professional practices which are more and more characterised by an increased pace of change.

The introduction of truth seeking friendship as a metaphor for the relationship between teacher and students might be a provocative undertaking, from a teacher's perspective. A joint quest for truth does not merely imply that teacher and students jointly work together – for example, innovating a service or product for a company or designing new educational programmes. In a truth seeking friendship, both friends scrutinise and contradict each other's beliefs. Truth seeking friends put their truths (and thus themselves) on the line. Furthermore, though truth seeking friendships are aimed at striving for better, there is no guarantee for better. Friendships can go astray and become destructive. And yet, innovation and active adaptation in today's world require both teamwork and the willingness to let go of truths that hinder the quest for better. Students need to learn the ability to enter short truth seeking friendships.

Another area of argument involves Nietzsche being an advocate of a hard and negative attitude towards oneself. According to him, one should embrace one's imperfections and failures as they are incentives to continue to reach for a higher level. Experiences of frustration are the motor of striving for better. Be that as it may, Nietzsche's call to strive for better manifests a deeply negative attitude towards the present and towards one's present 'self'. It is never good enough. No room is available for being at peace with and celebrating life as it is, unless it aims at recharging one's batteries for the next series of self-overcoming. Though I resist a learning environment in which the human condition of infiniteness and the accompanied feelings of pain and frustration are ignored, as a teacher, I deem the complete reversal (always striving for better) too harsh. Furthermore, Nietzsche's strategy of withdrawal (from society) in order to enable himself to strive for better is not an appropriate strategy for twenty-first century students who are to be initiated into a particular professional practice. Nor does this strategy fit students' stage in life in which meeting others is important.

Sometimes, I wanted to remain loyal to Nietzsche and sometimes, the teacher in me prevailed. There were also times that I tried to reconcile these two selves. I argued that, in working out the five key elements of striving for better, I could not stay completely faithful to Nietzsche's subversive spirit if I wanted to bring change. If I did adhere to his untimely – that is, untimely for professional higher education contexts – thoughts, my work would have been dismissed as too extreme and too dangerous. Yet,

in another respect, I stayed loyal to Nietzsche. Since I wanted to contribute to changes for the better rather than to reinforce then existing educational practices, I did stay faithful to Nietzsche's call to go against the *Zeitgeist*. Tempering the ruthlessness and dangerousness of his notions serves Nietzsche's mission of bringing about a new dawn.

Either way, the underlying study presents the results of this exploring, challenging and sometimes confusing process of submerging into Nietzsche's 'open sea' of vibrant and dangerous opportunities and keeping my ear to the educational ground.

1. Retrospection

And yet, it seems as if I want to contribute to the elaboration of a new professional higher education discourse that allows for educational practices teaching students to excel, while, at the same time, keeping the institute of professional higher education out of the firing line. That does not sound like a Nietzschean undertaking. As Johnston asserts, '[t]o self-overcome requires the very overcoming of education, as far as education is itself a product and a minion of the dominant society and culture' (1998, p. 73).¹ Moderating Nietzsche's subversive spirit, I run the risk of remaining bogged down in the existing educational discourse of professional higher education. Is this thesis informed by the same forces that I want to tackle?

The transfer of what is generally accepted as worthwhile valuations is, in Johnston's (1998) opinion, pivotal to education's function. Whatever the content, education is a social institution aiming at transmitting sociocultural valuations. This function is, in Johnston's view, directly opposed to the undertaking of teaching students to become self-overcoming individuals – indeed, according to Johnston's interpretation of Nietzsche's pedagogical ideas, the only way that is open for individuals to excel is self-education. Criticising Sassone's interpretation of Nietzsche – Johnston writes that she argues that democracy and Nietzschean teaching practices are going well together – Johnston claims that for Nietzsche the social and the individual are two domains which cannot be reconciled and the individual who sets his

¹ See also Rosenow (1973) who claims that Nietzschean education is intrinsically antisocial.

or her heart on becoming who he or she is, needs to overcome the social. Johnston writes:

Sassone [...] attempts to evade the aporia of exactly how to reconcile a social institution such as education with a view of individual self-reflection, fulfilment, and observation [...] she eludes the difficult question of how to be at once both social and radically individual, as Nietzsche, if we are to agree with Sassone, seems to desire. (1998, p. 81)

Johnston concludes that the dilemma of individual and society cannot be solved. The task of an individual transvaluation is a radical individual task. Education, understood as a social institute, has no role to play.

How do I relate to this dilemma? I deem initiating students into the existing routines of their profession an important task of professional higher education. Furthermore, I agree with Johnston's claim that the transmission of social valuations and the endeavour of training students to strive for better (an endeavour that leads to excellence) cannot be merged. These are different realms. That being said, the conclusion need not be that education, as an institute, has no role to play in educating students to become professionals who strive for better. First, education has multiple functions. Socialisation and subjectification, to use Biesta's words, are among the functions of education. And indeed, this plurality is not always easy to handle, but that is no reason for rejecting it.² Second, life is a matter of multiple and conflicting impulses, as Nietzsche has argued. The condition of being confronted with multiple, (partly) mutually exclusive realms, goals, intentions and forces is characteristic for professional life, as well. Rather than rejecting these contradictory impulses, Nietzsche urges man to embrace these incompatibilities and make them subservient to life. As Bingham writes: '[w]hat if [...] we were to praise them [incompatible educational

² The observation that education fulfils multiple functions does not serve as an argument that these functions are therefore necessary or desirable, nor do the concomitant paradoxical and contradictory situations provide reason for rejection. However, in chapter 3, I have argued that education needs to function in multiple areas if excellence is to be part of the curriculum: becoming embedded in a professional field is a prerequisite for taking an active stance towards professional practices.

aims, HJ] as inconsistent while at the same time looking for models that might embrace the resultant paradoxes?' (2005b, pp. 1,2).

When it comes to actually teaching students to excel, I agree with Johnston that neither teachers nor anyone else can make students actually overcome themselves. That is up to students themselves. Teachers can offer them a learning environment allowing for both the human tendency to order and the tendency to disorder; they can train students' ability of self-control; they can invite them to take an active stance towards (the forces that manifest themselves in) their behavior and thoughts, the educational practices, and the professional field; they can encourage them to develop a critical, experimental attitude and let them experience the joy of a joint quest for truth; and they can create an environment where the downs are welcomed as warmly as the ups. Teachers can pave the way, but, in the end, whether or not a particular student excels is beyond their control.

A second criticism of this study involves the extent to which I used Nietzsche's legacy for own purposes. Did I project my own valuations onto Nietzsche, as Johnston (1998) accuses some of his colleague philosophers of education of? Did I shop in Nietzsche's legacy, exclusively focussing on passages which suited my purposes and leaving behind contradicting passages, as Yacek (2014) criticises several Nietzsche scholars?

In a way, I have to answer these questions with a 'yes'. My frustration with then existing educational practices in which I participated was the starting point for this study. I experienced less pleasure and joy in teaching students and I felt less engaged with what happened at the university. I had a feeling that I did not (and could not) teach subjects and in ways which seemed important to me in preparing students for professional life – the project management course experiment which I described in chapter 6 was born out of this frustration. I knew that many of my colleague teachers felt the same way. This urge for better education definitely influenced my way of comprehending Nietzsche. The approach of doing research that takes concrete problems as a starting point fits Nietzsche's philosophy. As Kaufmann argues: 'science is for Nietzsche not a finished and impersonal system, but a passionate quest for knowledge' (Kaufmann, 1974, p. 90).

This urge did not provide a *carte blanche* for picking out whatever suited me and forgetting about what was in conflict with my intentions. In the underlying study, I have discussed some of his ideas in a critical manner. Furthermore, the selection of notions reflects a critical approach to Nietzsche as well. I found some notions difficult to grasp, among them ‘the eternal recurrence’. I did not use his provocative and offensive way of speaking about women and Jews either. But, in the end, I took an *interested* (and thus partial) stance towards Nietzsche’s legacy.

Did I succeed in transforming existing discourses into a new discourse on professional higher education?

Nietzschean philosophy does not search for origins or essences. In this perspectival philosophy, each meaning is an exercise of power. The meaning of a word or notion is the (temporary) result of the constant struggle and interplay of forces that are crossing around, in, and through it. There is no such thing as an absolute first or original substance that has to be interpreted. Put simply, everything *is* interpretation.

I do not have the illusion nor the pretension that this thesis will, on its own, succeed in creating a new discourse; rather, I want to disclose the space for the emergence of such a new discourse. This disclosure is not an easy undertaking as the dominant frameworks on education appear to be very persistent (Blake et al., 1998, 2000; Oosterling, 2013). But then again, illusions and fiction can be very powerful. As Nietzsche in *The Gay Science* asserts:

It is we, the thinking-sensing ones, who really and continually *make* something that is not yet there: the whole perpetually growing world of valuations, colours, weights, perspectives, scales, affirmations, and negations. (p. 302)

Furthermore, I am not alone in attempting to make education a more joyful and lively undertaking (see e.g. Bingham, 2005, Blake et al., 1998, 2000; Cooper, 1983, Fitzsimons, 2007; Hart, 2009).

Who or what will win the clash of western neoliberal or meritocratic ways of thinking and a Nietzsche-inspired way of thinking remains to be seen. But, whatever

the outcome, it is not a final outcome. Any outcome must be ready for its 'sorrowful end'. This 'truth' applies to this thesis as well: it will be appropriated by other forces and it will be used for different purposes than the ones I had in mind. A new temporary outcome will arise. So be it. I take comfort in the fact that – from a Nietzschean perspective – the force which has been set in motion through this thesis does not get lost; it will continue to work on the readers of this thesis.

2. Recommendations

The following recommendations are intended to fortify the functioning of my work. These recommendations are based on the Nietzschean inspired perspective on professional higher education that has been elaborated in this study. They are meant as a catalyst for constructive debate on how teachers and policy makers in professional higher education can further improve the quality of education.

Make students talented, rather than select talented students

Meeting the increasing need for innovative professionals requires professional higher education to provide all students with a learning environment that encourages them to excel, that is to leave behind old routines in thinking and acting and to embrace new ones. Moreover, such a learning environment is also essential as excelling professionals are better equipped to cope with the challenges of today's professional world in a way that promotes their personal flourishing. Creating such a learning environment is challenging but feasible. Offering students too difficult assignments, letting students design minor programmes and making students scrutinise assessment tools and criteria are educational practices that stimulate students to go beyond their current potential.

Selection practices, which are rapidly becoming common practice in higher education, prevent, however, the creation of excellence promoting environments. Selection practices ignore students' condition of not yet being determined. In practices of selection, students' motivation, talents and capacities are treated as rather stable character traits having predictive features. Only students whose

potential to perform in a particular area is already there are offered access to further education. Promoting selection, even if it is meant as a tool for quality improvement, interferes with the challenge of teaching *all* students to create horizons of their own. For the sake of students and society, it is better to let go of selection. All students should be taught to excel.

Promote critical thinking rather than introduce central examination of core subjects

Well equipped professionals are able and willing to scrutinise the truths of the discipline. They critically examine the truths and rules of the profession and they let go of truths that hinder innovation and active adjustment to changing circumstances. They do not adhere to a particular routine of thinking just because it is widely shared or highly valued by fellow professionals. They go beyond an instrumental application of concepts and rules of thought as well as experiment with new truths. Striving for better is their motto.

The introduction of central examination of core subjects, which aims at improving the quality of higher education, reinforces the prevailing emphasis on educational outcomes. More and more, students, teachers as well as universities are subjected to external testing and evaluation systems in order to assess how well they meet externally determined standards. When this urge for performance assessments and evaluation dominates, there is no impetus for teachers to encourage students to scrutinise the truths of the profession. Students are expected to unquestioningly acquire profession's truths and meet the standards. Pinning one's hopes on central assessments will be counter-productive to the objective of better preparing students for present professional practices characterised by dispersive and short term horizons. In order to educate innovative and creative professionals, policy makers better promote educational practices which aim at making students think critically in a Nietzschean spirit.

Train teachers with respect to the five qualities of striving for better

Realising truth seeking friendships between teacher and students has not been part of most teachers' training programmes, nor has allowing for uncertainty in classroom and challenging students to scrutinise teacher's truths. Furthermore, stimulating students to overcome themselves and learning through ups and downs have been deemed appropriate strategies for teachers working with an elite group of 'talented' students. In regular higher professional education, these are not common practices. The incorporation of the five elements of striving for better into everyday educational practices requires the training of teachers with respect to these qualities.

For at least two reasons, it can be recommended to train teachers to give close reading sessions to students. First, from a Nietzschean perspective, close reading programmes are educational practices addressing all elements of striving for better. Second, it can easily be organised. It does not require large scale reorganisations of curricula nor complete reorientation of educational models currently in use. Close reading programmes offer opportunities to experiment with the implementation of educational practices that better prepare students for a professional world characterised by dispersive and short term horizons.¹ Mastering close reading, teachers can apply the qualities in other parts of the curriculum as well.

Let students scrutinise assessment tools and criteria

Letting students scrutinise assessment tools and criteria of training programmes rather than subjecting them to these tools serves at least three purposes. First, students have to immerse themselves both in the professional practice and the programme in order to be able to examine the assessment tools and criteria. Second, this assignment challenges students to develop the ability to scrutinise truths, rather than to give expected answers. Third, jeopardising the truths of training programmes is a way of embedding uncertainty into the curriculum.

¹ An additional reason for including close reading in the curriculum is given by the OECD: high skills in literacy proficiency are rewarded by the labour market (OECD, 2014a).

Take an aphoristic approach to the curriculum

An aphoristic approach to the curriculum prevents students from being stuck in one particular perspective. An aphoristic approach contrasts with a concentric approach in which the subject matters are spread out over several years with increasing complexity. An important advantage of a concentric approach seems to be that topics which are addressed repeatedly, are better remembered by students. However, in today's dynamic (and uncertain) professional world, the ability to let go of truths and rules that hinder the quest for better is becoming an increasingly valuable asset. Rather than making students adhere to one particular perspective, even if it is regarded as the best available perspective, curricula should better encourage students to approach problems, topics or questions from various, partly contradicting angles. An aphoristic curriculum prevents them from getting used to holding on to the way 'things' are.

Encourage students to design and develop minor programmes

For various reasons, letting students design and develop better minor programmes is an exciting and promising way of teaching students to strive for better. First, students have to deal with the uncertain situation of not knowing from the outset what is expected from them. They have to create their own course. Second, as students are challenged to create their own education, it is more likely that they take a critical stance towards available literature and practices. Especially if they are required to investigate current professional practices and interview various experienced professionals, they will be faced with different and (partly) contradicting views. Each time when students are confronted with a different view, they have to review their own positions. Third, both students and teacher gain from better minors. A joint quest can arise providing students with the experience that everybody – regardless of one's position – is able to contribute to a joint undertaking of improving discipline's truths. Fourth, as creating a course is a challenging undertaking for students, the teacher can take the opportunity to explain students about learning through ups and downs.

Demand the impossible!

Studies demonstrate that students who have acquired an attitude of learning through ups and downs are more successful than talented students who have not learned to persevere. More importantly, resilience is a prerequisite for striving for better. The skill to continue to strive for better in the face of failure and stagnation is a precondition for self-overcoming.

Too difficult assignments offer teachers the opportunity to train students' ability to handle frustration and failure – that is to use experiences of frustration as incentives to strive for better. These assignments could also involve more physical activities such as ice skating or making sculptures. These (for most students) unfamiliar activities enable students to even more clearly experience (and observe) the importance of an attitude of learning through ups and downs and as well as to experience the reciprocal influences of cognitive, physical and emotional factors which are involved in every process of striving for better. Once aware of the advantages of learning through ups and downs, students can practice this attitude further on in the curriculum.

The creation of a learning environment in which students are encouraged to learn through ups and downs is, however, a challenge in itself as contemporary professional higher education systems are not primed for embracing downs. Nevertheless, this attitude is necessary in order to be prepared for a world which is increasingly characterised by dispersive and (thus) short term horizons.

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SAMENVATTING

In *De Vrolijke Wetenschap* (1999/1887) verschijnt een optimistische en hoopvolle Nietzsche. Hoewel deze Duitse filosoof de lastige taak om te leven zonder god, dat wil zeggen zonder de christelijke horizon, niet onderschat, omarmt hij hartstochtelijk de mogelijkheden die de dood van god biedt. De mens kan weer eigen horizonten creëren, sterker nog, hij moet nu eigen perspectieven creëren om niet ten onder te gaan in een wereld zonder eeuwige waarheden.

We leven nu ruim een eeuw later. Het lijkt erop dat het hoger beroepsonderwijs de uitdaging heeft aangenomen om studenten te leren eigen horizonten te creëren: het opleiden van studenten tot kritische en innovatieve professionals staat hoog op de agenda. Toch blijkt het een uitdagende opdracht om studenten te leren streven naar beter gezien de meritocratische omstandigheden waarin het hoger beroepsonderwijs functioneert: de roep om transparantie en de druk om te presteren volgens extern bepaalde criteria laten weinig ruimte voor eigen horizonten. Ook het zogenaamde klantdenken en de nadruk op *evidence based working* staan de ontwikkeling van een kritische houding van studenten in de weg. Bovendien worden veel onderwijspraktijken vormgegeven vanuit de achterliggende gedachte dat studenten in essentie onveranderlijke ‘zelden’ zijn. Talent en motivatie worden opgevat als stabiele kenmerken. De mogelijkheid dat studenten zich voorbij hun huidige potentieel ontwikkelen wordt genegeerd.

In deze studie staat de vraag centraal wat het betekent om *alle* studenten te leren streven naar beter in een beroepspraktijk waar niet alleen het tempo van de veranderingen toeneemt maar waar professionals ook geconfronteerd worden met een toenemende pluraliteit aan horizonten. Daarbij sluit deze studie aan bij een jonge traditie waarin Donald Schön (1983, 1987) met de notie van de ‘reflective practitioner’ en Ronald Barnett (1997) met de notie ‘critical being’ het voortouw hebben genomen. Beide denkers houden echter vast aan het (ideaal)beeld van de onafhankelijke professional die op autonome en doelgerichte wijze handelt. Deze aanname is echter problematisch. Verschillende sociologen hebben op overtuigende wijze laten zien dat mensen veranderen in en door de praktijken waaraan ze deelnemen. De conditie van

versnippering en verandering geldt niet alleen de praktijk maar ook de professional zelf. Deze studie neemt, in tegenstelling tot de genoemde denkers, de huidige conditie als uitgangspunt.

De vraag hoe te handelen in een wereld van verandering en versnippering is niet nieuw. Nietzsche heeft als een van de eerste filosofen deze vraag op radicale wijze doordacht. Zijn uitdagende opvatting van het zelf als het veranderlijke resultaat van de krachten die op, in en rondom het individu inwerken, omarmt de menselijke conditie van onzekerheid op radicale wijze. In navolging van Nietzsches kritische en experimentele denken worden in deze studie de volgende vijf elementen van het streven naar beter uitgewerkt: onzekerheid, excellentie, kritisch denken, vriendschap en leren met vallen en opstaan. Vanuit deze vijf perspectieven wordt het huidige discours in het Nederlandse hoger beroepsonderwijs aan een kritisch onderzoek onderworpen op zoek naar openingen voor een nieuw discours.

Het vernieuwende van deze studie ten opzichte van eerdere studies die Nietzsches denken gebruikten om onderwijs opnieuw te doordenken is de focus op het hoger beroepsonderwijs. Daarnaast staat een hoofdstuk in het teken van waarheidszoekende vriendschap, een Nietzscheaanse notie die tot nu toe weinig aandacht heeft gekregen. Bovendien gaat deze studie verder dan het bekritisieren van het huidige onderwijsdiscours. In lijn met Nietzsche's motto '[l]aten we het maar eens proberen!' worden nieuwe noties ontwikkeld en nieuwe onderwijspraktijken geschetst (VW, p. 74). Deze voorstellen zijn geen kant en klare oplossingen. Het zijn suggesties bedoeld als aanjager van een constructief debat over de vraag hoe studenten (nog) beter voorbereid kunnen worden op de beroepspraktijken van vandaag en morgen.

Hoofdstuk 1: Onzekerheid

Zelfverzekerd streven naar beter in een wereld die steeds sneller verandert vereist het vermogen om met onzekerheid om te gaan. Maar onzekerheid wordt vaak niet op prijs gesteld. De eerste reactie is om deze te reduceren – of beter, te elimineren – door vast te houden aan de illusie dat de wereld transparant en begrijpelijk gemaakt kan worden. Nietzsche noemt het streven om de werkelijkheid op te vatten als een geordende wereld het apollinische – Nietzsche beschouwt Socrates als exponent van het apollinische. In

het hoger beroepsonderwijs domineert deze neiging: docenten dragen de routines in denken en doen die zich in de beroepspraktijk bewezen hebben op autoritaire wijze over aan studenten. Van studenten wordt verwacht dat ze deze waarheden zonder meer overnemen. Wanneer docenten, in het geval van onzekere kwesties, studenten aanmoedigen om al onderzoekend een eigen positie in te nemen blijft het apollinische domineren. Studenten wordt een 'wetende' houding aangeleerd: ik weet dat ik deze situatie kan oplossen, het is slechts een kwestie van de juiste kennis vinden of het perfectioneren van een vaardigheid.

Streven naar beter in een professionele wereld waar het landschap in korte tijd drastisch kan veranderen vereist echter het vermogen om regels en waarheden die de zoektocht naar beter hinderen los te laten. Om studenten dit vermogen te leren is een leeromgeving nodig waarin er ruimte is voor de wisselwerking tussen het menselijke streven naar orde, het apollinische, en het verlangen om bestaande ordeningen te overstijgen, het dionysische.

In dit type leeromgeving maakt de docent studenten nog steeds vertrouwd met de vigerende waarheden van de professie, en hij doet dat op autoritaire wijze. Tegelijkertijd ontnemt de docent studenten diezelfde zekerheden door hen te laten ervaren dat er in de complexe en veranderlijke praktijk soms geen heldere en eensluidende antwoorden of oplossingen beschikbaar zijn. Dit vergt van docenten het vermogen hun apollinische neiging te beheersen en er soms vanaf te zien om studenten te 'helpen' met goede adviezen en hulpmiddelen waarmee ze de onzekere of pijnlijke situaties te lijf kunnen. Bovendien is de docent bereid zijn zekerheden ter discussie te stellen. Om het risico van passiviteit en onverschilligheid te beperken moedigt de docent studenten aan actief te experimenteren en te zoeken naar betere routines – ook als dat andere blijken te zijn dan de docent verwacht of zou willen zien.

Het zal de docent niet altijd in dank worden afgenomen wanneer hij studenten ermee confronteert dat geen enkele ordening of betekenisgeving blijvend is. Toch moeten docenten zich hierdoor niet laten weerhouden. Studenten bij wie het tragische maar tegelijkertijd ook enerverende inzicht is doorgebroken dat niets blijvend is zijn immers beter toegerust voor de professionele praktijk. Ze staan meer open voor verandering, variatie en vernieuwing van de bestaande orde.

Hoofdstuk 2: Excellentie

In dit hoofdstuk wordt aan de hand van Nietzsches noties van zelftranscendentie, zelfbeheersing en zelfstilering een begrip van excelleren ontwikkeld dat het vigerende excellentie-discours en de huidige investeringen in excellentieprogramma's in een ander licht zetten. In dit perspectief wordt excelleren opgevat als het vermogen om zichzelf te overwinnen. De vergelijking met anderen speelt geen rol. Ongeacht talent of afkomst is elke student in principe in staat om te excelleren.

Het opnieuw doordenken van excellentie toont een perspectief waarin het hoger beroepsonderwijs in staat is om te voorzien in de groeiende behoefte aan innoverende professionals in de samenleving. Maar belangrijker nog is dat deze opvatting van excelleren het mogelijk maakt om *alle* studenten te leren zelf hun professionele leven vorm te geven.

Studenten excelleren wanneer ze 'oude', belemmerende routines in denken en doen achter zich laten en nieuwe routines omarmen die hen beter in staat stellen met de uitdagingen in de praktijk om te gaan. Het is niet eenvoudig om zichzelf eigen wetten voor te schrijven. Het vereist het vermogen om zich niet automatisch over te geven aan de dominante krachten die zich manifesteren in de routines van denken en doen.

De ontwikkeling van zelfbeheersing vraagt dagelijkse oefening. Vanaf de eerste dag van de opleiding moeten studenten gestimuleerd worden om de krachten die hen drijven te onderzoeken. Dit onderzoek betreft alle krachten, inclusief de drang om flexibel, innovatief of productief te zijn. Ook de eis om te excelleren, zelfs als dit wordt begrepen als zelfoverwinning, ontkomt hier niet aan. Behalve het onderzoeken van de eigen routines vereist zelfstilering ook van studenten dat ze de vraag beantwoorden hoe ze zich willen verhouden tot de krachten die op hen inwerken. Docenten nodigen studenten keer op keer uit om een actieve positie in te nemen ten opzichte van wie ze zijn, wat de hedendaagse beroepspraktijk van hen verwacht en ten opzichte van wat ze op school leren.

Dit perspectief 'excelleren voor allen' opent een breed scala aan mogelijke onderwijspraktijken die studenten stimuleren om steeds weer opnieuw een eigen stijl vorm te geven. Het belangrijkste van deze nieuwe praktijken is dat ze studenten leren

om de krachten die in, om en door hen heen werken in te zetten ten dienste van het streven naar beter.

Hoofdstuk 3: Kritisch denken

Professionals veranderen in en door de praktijken waarin ze participeren. Excellentie vereist een kritische houding ten opzichte van deze praktijken: welke routines hinderen het streven naar beter?

Hoewel het belang van kritisch denken breed wordt onderkend, is studenten een kritische en onderzoekende houding aanleren nog geen gemeengoed in het Nederlandse hoger beroepsonderwijs. Voor zover studenten de kunst in kritisch denken leren, gaat het vaak om het maken van argumentatieschema's. Kritisch denken wordt opgevat als een oefening in logica. Deze activiteiten zijn waardevol als het om het aanleren van de (denk)regels van de professie gaat. In deze smalle en instrumentele opvatting van kritisch denken staan de denkgeregels zelf echter niet ter discussie. Bovendien blijft de student, opgevat als autonome, rationele denker zelf buiten schot. Vernieuwing komt niet tot stand.

In dit hoofdstuk wordt met behulp van Nietzsche's perspectivisme, zijn nadruk op moed, het belang van experimenteren en het gebruik van de paradox en humor een radicale opvatting van kritisch denken ontwikkeld. Een nietzscheaans 'ja, maar' stelt alle waarheden, inclusief die van autoriteiten, ter discussie. Het heeft noodzakelijkerwijs een agressieve kant omdat het beoogt 'oude', belemmerende waarheden onderuit te halen. Daarnaast heeft een kritisch 'ja, maar' een experimentele dimensie. Aangezien er geen zekere of absolute standaarden zijn om bestaande en nieuwe waarheden te evalueren, is het uitproberen van nieuwe waarheden onderdeel van het kritische 'ja, maar'.

Kritisch denken vindt niet in het luchtledige plaats. De docent leert studenten eerst de praktijk en zichzelf in het vigerende perspectief van de professie waar te nemen. De docent is echter een expert in *tijdelijke* waarheden en moedigt studenten aan de onderliggende aannames, waarden en waarheden van wat ze als werkelijkheid ervaren aan een nauwgezet, kritisch onderzoek te onderwerpen. Alleen van binnenuit kan men een discours bekritisieren. Een aforistische opzet van het curriculum voorkomt dat

studenten zichzelf verliezen in een eenzijdig professioneel perspectief. Bovendien worden studenten actief uitgedaagd om met nieuwe waarheden te experimenteren aangezien er geen vaste, universele standaarden zijn: wat 'beter' inhoudt, is open.

Kritisch denken à la Nietzsche stelt professionals in staat bij te dragen aan de zoektocht naar beter in beroepspraktijken die worden gekenmerkt door verandering en versnippering van horizons. Deze nietzscheaanse opvatting van kritisch denken is binnen de bestaande, instrumentele onderwijshorizon echter 'oneigentijds'. Studenten de kunst van een kritisch en creatief 'ja, maar' leren vraagt van onderwijsprofessionals moed om de bestaande onderwijshorizon ter discussie te stellen en te experimenteren met nieuwe perspectieven.

Hoofdstuk 4: Vriendschap

Streven naar beter is tot op zekere hoogte een gedeelde onderneming. Als individuen kunnen professionals de waarheden van de professie niet vernieuwen. In het reguliere hoger beroepsonderwijs zijn docenten en studenten niet gewend om samen naar beter te streven. De termen 'docent' en 'student' worden al snel geassocieerd met personen die ongelijk zijn voor wat betreft hun doelen en expertise. De wijdverbreide metaforen van aanbieder en consument van kennis en van meester en gezelschap bieden weinig ruimte voor een gezamenlijke zoektocht naar waarheid. Met de introductie van het nietzscheaanse perspectief van waarheidszoekende vriendschap beoogt dit hoofdstuk de manier waarop er gedacht wordt over de interactie tussen docent en studenten te verrijken.

Hoe ziet de interactie tussen docent en studenten eruit wanneer de docent studenten benadert als medezoekers naar betere waarheden? Docent en studenten wisselen allereerst hun kennis uit. Daarbij geeft de docent aan wanneer hij het niet meer weet om zo een gelijkwaardige relatie (wat betreft 'niet-weten') tussen hem en studenten tot stand te brengen. Ook stimuleert hij studenten om kritiek te geven op zijn waarheden in de verwachting te profiteren van hun jeugdige onverschrokkenheid. Hij weet dat zonder strijd de zoektocht naar waarheid niet tot stand komt. Het is overigens geen nietsontziende eerlijkheid. Vriendschap vereist de bereidheid om niet alles te zeggen wat in je opkomt wil de strijd en de bedenkingen de vriendschap voeden in plaats van vernietigen. De zoektocht wordt bovendien afgewisseld met plezier en

‘oppervlakkigheid’. Vriendschap is ook een plek om bij te komen van de veeleisende en vaak eenzame zoektocht naar waarheid.

Vriendschap kent ook risico's: ze kan slecht uitpakken en niet iedereen heeft hetzelfde doel op het oog. Ondanks deze nadelen bieden kortdurende vriendschappen – een korte horizon reduceert het risico van gewenning en gelijkgestemdheid tot een minimum – voordelen voor zowel docenten als studenten. Naast het plezier van het samen zoeken naar waarheid kunnen deze samenwerkingsverbanden daadwerkelijk leiden tot nieuwe, betere – maar immer tijdelijke – waarheden. Maar zelfs als dat niet het geval is, hebben beide vrienden in ieder geval geoefend in het samen zoeken naar waarheid, het uiteindelijke doel van de vriendschap. De kansen van een volgende zoektocht op succes zijn hierdoor groter. Bovendien ervaren ze dat docent *en* studenten profiteren: wederkerigheid is het motto.

Hoofdstuk 5: Leren met vallen en opstaan

Leren met vallen en opstaan is belangrijk. Een reden daarvoor is dat onderzoek laat zien dat mensen die ondanks tegenslag hebben leren volhouden succesvoller zijn dan getalenteerde mensen die dat niet geleerd hebben. Maar belangrijker is wat Nietzsche heeft laten zien: leren met vallen en opstaan is een voorwaarde om naar persoonlijke, ambitieuze doelen te streven. Excelleren vereist de bereidheid om met vallen en opstaan te leren.

Nietzsche roept zijn lezers dan ook op om ervaringen van mislukking en frustratie te omarmen. Ze geven de mens reden om naar ‘minder imperfect’, of positief geformuleerd, naar ‘beter’ te streven. Hoewel Nietzsche ervoor kiest om in eenzaamheid dit vermogen te trainen, biedt dit nietzscheaanse perspectief hulpmiddelen om een cultuur van oefenen (of streven) in ere te herstellen.

Het opleiden van studenten tot professionals die volhardend streven naar beter vereist een leeromgeving waarin studenten worden aangemoedigd een gezonde hoeveelheid frustratie en mislukkingen te omarmen. Dit gaat in tegen de intuïtie om studenten te leren volhouden door ze te prijzen, aan te moedigen of door de lat hoog te leggen. Wanneer er echter alleen aandacht is voor succes – dat wil zeggen, succes in andermans ogen, – missen studenten de gelegenheid om mislukking en frustratie op te

vatten als stimuli om te streven naar beter. Docenten kunnen studenten aanmoedigen aandacht te geven aan hun frustraties door bijvoorbeeld verhalen te vertellen over hoe ze zelf (of anderen) met frustratie omgaan en welke functie rolmodellen daarbij spelen. Behalve medestudenten en docenten kunnen ook (net) afgestudeerden studenten inspireren om vol te houden. Daarnaast worden studenten bewust gemaakt van de wisselwerking tussen cognitieve, fysieke en emotionele aspecten. Online leeromgevingen werken hierbij contraproductief omdat het in zo'n omgeving verleidelijk is om frustraties, fysieke beperkingen en kwetsbaarheid te negeren. Bovendien kunnen docenten noch medestudenten dienen als rolmodel. Regelmatig *face to face* contact tussen docent en studenten is een voorwaarde om studenten te leren met vallen en opstaan te streven naar beter.

Het ontwikkelen van een leeromgeving waarin de *ups* net zo welkom zijn als de *downs* is een uitdaging niet alleen omdat er ook risico's verbonden zijn aan zo'n omgeving maar vooral om dat het hoger beroepsonderwijs in een meritocratische samenleving functioneert. Direct succes (volgens externe criteria) is de standaard. Het vergt doorzettingsvermogen om zo'n voor studenten noodzakelijk leeromgeving te creëren.

Hoofdstuk 6: Laten we het proberen! – Nietzscheaanse experimenten

Dit hoofdstuk beschrijft twee casussen waar ik als docent bij betrokken ben geweest. De eerste casus betreft een verplichte, intensieve vijfdaagse training in *close reading* voor ruim honderd eerstejaarsstudenten van de opleiding Business IT & Management aan De Haagse Hogeschool. Het doel van de training is het nauwkeurig en met aandacht lezen van filosofische en wetenschappelijke teksten. De tweede casus gaat over de ontwikkeling van een onderwijsprogramma in projectmanagement door een groep van elf studenten van dezelfde opleiding. In tien weken tijd hebben deze studenten een onderwijsprogramma ontwikkeld dat zes lang als minor is aangeboden.

De nadruk in dit hoofdstuk ligt op de beschrijving van beide casussen. Beide casussen worden beschreven met behulp van de in deze studie ontwikkelde noties. De beschrijvingen zijn bedoeld als *spielerei* – als een lichtvoetig spel met woorden. Tegelijkertijd is het een door en door serieuze onderneming omdat een aantal

fundamentele uitgangspunten van de bestaande onderwijspraktijken ter discussie worden gesteld. De toepassing van de door Nietzsche geïnspireerde ideeën kunnen een ontwrichtend effect op de bestaande educatieve orde hebben. Dit hoofdstuk wil zo bijdragen aan de transformatie van het huidige hoger beroepsonderwijs discours tot een discours dat onderwijspraktijken mogelijk maakt die studenten beter voorbereidt op een professionele wereld waar zich een ongekende versnelling van het veranderingstempo voordoet.

Pro tempore

Deze studie is het resultaat van een bevlogen en soms vurige, interne dialoog. Als filosoof wilde ik trouw blijven aan Nietzsche, de gevaarlijke en tegendraadse denker die onverschrokken oude waarheden vernietigt om nieuwe horizonten mogelijk te maken. Als docent wilde ik Nietzsches denken introduceren in de context van het hedendaagse hoger beroepsonderwijs. Ik wilde de scherpe kanten er vanaf halen zodat zijn denken acceptabel zou zijn. Enkele voorbeelden van discussie: een goede voorbereiding van studenten vergt de inbedding van onzekerheid in het onderwijs maar tegelijkertijd hebben studenten ook een veilige leeromgeving nodig; ‘excelleren voor allen’ gaat regelrecht in tegen het vigerende onderwijsbeleid om alleen de beste studenten uit te dagen nog beter te worden; het trainen van studenten tot kritische denkers a la Nietzsche zou het gezag van de docent en daarmee de socialisatiefunctie van het onderwijs op het spel kunnen zetten maar het handhaven van de status quo in het onderwijs is geen optie; vanuit het perspectief van een docent kan de introductie van de waarheidszoekende metafoor voor de relatie tussen docent en studenten wel eens (te) provocerend zijn; hoewel ik me verzet tegen een leeromgeving die de gebrekkigheid van de mens ontkent, vind ik Nietzsche’s volledige omkering – het is nooit goed genoeg – te hardvochtig.

Soms domineerde de filosoof, dan weer de docent. Ook heb ik gepoogd de filosoof en de docent te verzoenen: het temperen van het meedogenloze aspect van Nietzsche’s denken was nodig om zijn missie – het dichterbij brengen van een ‘nieuw morgenrood’ – te doen slagen. Hoe het ook zij, deze studie presenteert de resultaten van het

uitdagende en zoekende proces waarin ik me onderdompelde in Nietzsches 'open zee' en mijn oor te luister legde bij de hedendaagse hoger onderwijspraktijk.

Nog enkele beschouwende opmerkingen. Ik heb Nietzsche's gedachtegoed niet opgevat en gebruikt als een pleidooi voor zelfeducatie. Het hoger beroepsonderwijs heeft meerdere, tegenstrijdige functies te vervullen waaronder het initiëren van studenten in het perspectief van de professie en ze leren streven naar beter. Het gaat er om (studenten te leren) deze en andere soms tegenstrijdige impulsen te omarmen en in dienst te stellen van het leven.

In zekere zin heb ik Nietzsche voor eigen gewin ingezet. Mijn frustratie met de onderwijspraktijk is bepalend voor deze studie geweest. De drang naar beter onderwijs heeft mijn interpretatie van Nietzsche gekleurd. Dit past overigens bij Nietzsche's opvatting van wetenschap als een gepassioneerde zoektocht naar kennis.

Om mijn pleidooi kracht bij te zetten volgen een aantal aanbevelingen. Ze dienen als katalysator van een constructief debat over de vraag hoe docenten en beleidsmakers studenten (nog) beter kunnen voorbereiden op de beroepspraktijk:

- maak studenten getalenteerd in plaats van te selecteren op getalenteerde studenten;
- stimuleer kritisch denken in plaats van centrale examinering van kernvakken te introduceren;
- train docenten met betrekking tot de vijf elementen van het streven naar beter;
- laat studenten assessmentinstrumenten en -criteria kritisch bekijken in plaats van studenten eraan te onderwerpen;
- kies voor een aforistische (in plaats van een concentrische) opzet van curricula;
- laat studenten minor onderwijs ontwikkelen;
- geef studenten opdrachten die te moeilijk zijn: eis het onmogelijke!

CURRICULUM VITAE

Henriëtta Joosten (1968) studied business administration as well as philosophy at Erasmus University Rotterdam. After graduation, she has worked at several organisations in the area of information management. In 1997, she started working as a teacher at the Faculty of IT & Design (The Hague University of Applied Sciences). While working as a teacher, she set up a private practice for Gestalt therapy. Since 2009, she combines lecturing at the Faculty of IT & Design and conducting research at the Department of Philosophy and Professional Practice (The Hague University of Applied Sciences). Among other activities, she regularly moderates Socratic dialogues and facilitates close reading sessions in order to further improve the quality of professional higher education practices. She published, inter alia, in *Journal of Philosophy of Education, Educational Philosophy and Theory, Tijdschrift voor Hoger Onderwijs, Filosofie & Praktijk* and contributed to various books. In 2016, a Dutch version of this thesis will be published by publisher Klement.