

# **Cybersex as the final solution to all philosophical-political challenges**

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Not very often are we presented with a challenging, relevant, conservative alternative in philosophy of education. Bert Lambier and Paul Smeyers, in their “Nihilism: beyond optimism and pessimism”, offer us such an alternative. They enlighten us as to how the cybersex and the drug culture solve the greatest challenges of Western culture and its educational impasses. Their fundamental argument is relevant and convincing in respect to its echoing and serving the logic of the hegemonic powers at the present Western historical moment. The issue at stake here is nothing less than what a worthwhile life is today and what education should be like these days.

In this text the authors call on us actually to abandon education as transcendence, reflection, and dialogue as a worthy suffering with its dangers and commitment to love, overcoming untruth and fighting injustice. Instead, they offer us instant, total, post-modern redemption. The post-modern condition, they imply, is the culmination of the history of nihilism, and it is the one to fulfill the promise of deconstructing the human as a promise, as an abyss, by effectively being de-constructed and swallowed into the totality of the nothingness of drug experience and cybersex. According to the authors, (1) the common ground of Nietzsche and Foucault is their nihilism. Their nihilism is nothing less than the overcoming of Western central philosophical, existential, cultural, and political values, assertions and strivings. (2) The two philosophers offer a way out of the philosophical –cultural-political impasse of searching for paths to meaning and for worthy suffering. (3) Their alternative is

emancipation from everything serious/limiting/standardizing/imposing exterior violences. What Nietzsche and Foucault offer us is knowledge about pleasure "beyond good and evil". (4) The present youth drug culture and current cybersex open for us the gates to the fulfillment of this philosophical nihilistic Utopia of Nietzsche and Foucault.

According to Lambier and Smeyers, not only do drugs "offer new kinds of (physical) pleasure and may intensify other experiences", they "carry the germs for criticism, for new modes of relationships and behavior". Here, they claim, "the self-creating subject looking for new, for different dimensions of her identity, for unconstrained pleasures, has got an unexplored play ground where she can be herself to her heart's content". This is because under the post-modern conditions, even more than in the Garden of Eden, as manifested in the cybersex "everything is possible".

Let us begin with the claims that Nietzsche was a nihilist and that his nihilism is basically similar to the kind of nihilism Foucault and his pupils offer us now. As I already showed elsewhere the philosophies of Nietzsche and Foucault differ substantially in regard to nihilism and philosophical pessimism. Both thinkers belong to the tradition of philosophical pessimism, but only one of the two, Foucault, should be considered a nihilist.

Nietzsche was not a nihilist in the sense attributed to him here: he did not negate all values, did not abandon his responsibility to meaning, mission, and worthy transcendence. He certainly would not have joined a post-modern positive educational Utopia of the kind we are offered by Lambier and Smeyers, which is governed by instrumental rationality, global capitalism, and pleasure machines. All these are part of the lowest strivings in culture, to which Nietzsche was totally opposed. From what one may call "a Nietzscheian perspective" these trends manifest weakness, loss of

courage, self-forgetfulness, to which Nietzsche's Dionysian alternative was committed to becoming an alternative.

Nietzsche's pessimism opened a new stage in the development of philosophical pessimism (Gur-Ze'ev 1996, 24) as one who came to redeem it from its Schopenhauerian half-Christian half-German form. Schopenhauer's pessimism, which denoted the centrality of the will, he understood as "a step forward" (Nietzsche 1968, 520). But he developed it further into "pessimism of strength", an alternative which he calls "Dionysian pessimism" (Nietzsche 2001, 236) as an alternative to the victory of science over wisdom.

Nietzsche explicitly positioned himself against the nihilistic trend of his generation, making it his objective to overcome the philosophies of Schopenhauer and his pupils Meinlender and Bahnsen. In his "Thus Spoke Zarathustra" he explicitly speaks about bringing "new values on new tables" (Nietzsche 1937, 37). Nietzsche's Zarathustra says: "Ye have made your way from the worm to man, and much within you is still worm", before he tells us: "Lo, I teach you the Superman!" (Ibid., 28).

In their implicit defense of the logic of capitalism and their celebration of the demolition of love of LIFE and the exile of Spirit, Lambier and Smeyers present the drug culture and the pursuit of new and ever higher pleasures as the realization of Nietzsche's Utopia. The Dionysian alternative of Nietzsche, however, offers exactly the opposite direction: towards love of LIFE, with its worthy suffering, dangers, abysses, hopes, and potential transcendence.

Much of Nietzsche's philosophical effort should be understood not so much in his heralding the death of God but his attempt to establish an opposition to the effects of the death of God, namely overcoming the culture of the nihilists of his generation. This was his grand effort, within an attempt to establish "Dionysian pessimism"

which would overcome the attraction of "weak values" and the "negation of life" as presented by Schopenhauer and Meinlaender, his pupil who articulated a Hegelian model turned on its head: the advancement of humanity prepares its aim: the negation of LIFE. Within the framework of present-day philosophical pessimism, as evident in post-modern rhetoric, nihilism is not considered religiously or tragically; it is celebrated, it becomes a *spiel*. In opposition to the post-modern education praised by Lambier and Smeyers, Nietzsche's work tells the nihilists of all generations: Abstract self-satisfaction like the one represented in the quest for returning to the Garden of Eden or plugging in to a post-modern pleasure-machine are nothing but a rejection of LIFE; a return to the dictates of the strivings of the world of the "worm".

Nietzsche's commitment to values – to the values of the future – is as explicit as his devotion to LIFE and to new values.

In advancing the claim concerning the similarity between Nietzsche's nihilism and the nihilism of the philosophy of Foucault, Lambier and Smeyers offer us an alternative ethics to the governing one. The kind of nihilism to which Nietzsche was so opposed is here to become the heart of a genuine "critique" and a foundation for a critically oriented "self-creating ethical subject". This reading of Foucault is presented as a Utopia, which is already realized in post-modern arenas such as the drug culture and cybersex. Here I partly agree with Lambier and Smeyers.

There is a close resemblance between the philosophy of Foucault and the needs, truths, and possibilities of the post-modern condition as exemplified in the drug culture and in cybersex. It is, however, for reasons opposite to those presented by Lambier and Smeyers. Namely, it is anchored in the immanent conservatism of this kind of nihilism, not in its radical critical or empowering dimensions.

In line with an important conservative dimension of much of current postmodern rhetoric, they claim that "each of us" is nothing but "a nexus of relations". They praise the plurality of identities, omnipotent contingency, "the fragmentation of the elements that constitute the self", and subjectivities in/of the subject and society so that "individual and society are not opposed to one another". In opposition to the thesis of Lambier and Smeyers I would claim that here, in a space where there is no alienation, and no potential transcendence, in an arena where the responsibility towards "perusing new pleasures for the subject" are actualizing Utopia, the human subject becomes identical with the logic and dynamics of the system, part of the continuum, some-thing and not some-one, an unproblematic part of thingness, which is always satisfiable with new pleasures and gifts that the hegemonic system offers her in order to make her forget the forgetfulness of her mission and her responsibilities. To plug in into the ultimate orgy, to be at home in that which is offered by the best of pleasure-machines, or by the finest of drugs, is to be something very similar to actually being in the nearness of Being, as Odysseus knew already when faced with the ultimate beauty of the songs of the nymphs.

Here we are presented with one of the most demanding questions: What is a worthy reply and how do we learn properly to reply to the "voice" which addresses us, while imposing on us attention, and maybe even the response, like God and Moses in the case of the burning bush, while "to learn means to make everything we do answer to whatever addresses itself to us as essential" (Heidegger 1996, 373).

The call to return home to nothingness is a genuine invitation. The invitation to forgetfulness and to self-deconstruction, to totally depart from philosophical eros and even from self-consciousness, should not be underestimated, since it genuinely enables the human to forget her mission, to overcome humanity, and return "home" –

to nothingness. And isn't this "homecoming" and the alternative of philosophical life as Diaspora what everything is about (Gur-Ze'ev 2003). It seems that Lambier and Smeyers understand it, when they call us to neglect ontological Diaspora and human life, and comply with the voice which directs us to return "home", to nothingness. Another alternative which this "solution" opens for us is "total self-fulfillment" in sadomasochism and aimless violence, as offered today by other disciples of the post-modern party, via new interpretations of Nietzsche, Bataii, Heidegger, and Lacan. One of the best ways to ensure the forgetfulness of human forgetfulness is to assure the human's responding to the "wrong" "call". What is the response that is "inauthentic", or of the kind that responds to a spurious "call"? Heidegger on the one hand, and Adorno on the other, tell us that there is no such "inauthentic" response as there is no "false" "call". And rightly so. There is, however, a kind of "call" which domesticates the human, and enslaves her to the given, to the self-evident, to mere (pleasurable) life as the aim of life, and there is a "call" which invites/imposes awakening, which opens new possibilities for overcoming mere (pleasurable) life or aimless violence as the aim of aimless life. While it makes all the difference in the world, you will never overcome skepticism concerning what is the genuinely awakening "call". But this does not mean that you cannot recognize the "call" to forgetfulness and "homecoming" to the infinite pleasures of nothingness.

The response to the call to be swallowed by that which the clouds of hashish and the pleasures of cybersex serve does not open the gates to the quest for the call of "the totally other". It is not an invitation to transcendence. Like cyberfeminism and other alternatives adored by the cyberoptimists it brings no hope or impetus for human awakening (Gur-Ze'ev 1999, 437-456). There is no room here for the voice of God, or human responsibility, in a totally rationalized society, but for the given

facts/possibilities/strivings. It is a surrender to the omnipotence of mere pleasure in the sense of satisfying a mechanistically elementary drive, which has become co-opted by the system, by the infinity of the thingness. Here the response to being addressed by a “call” of Being, nature, or fantasy has become part and parcel of the standing reserve of the given factuality. But “if man is challenged, ordered, to do this, then does not man himself belong even more originally than nature within the standing reserve” (Heidegger 1996, 323)? Under the flag of “the whole” this anti-erotic response to the “call” can only face nothingness and self-deconstruction. Here no dialectics, abyss, alienation, love, or worthy suffering might become part of the homelessness within which the human question is to be addressed, and counter-education might become possible.

Michel Foucault, whom the authors praise so much, is actually celebrated for presenting us with a de-humanized concept of the human subject, where responsibility, reflection, love, and happiness become mere contingent effects of the various manifestations of changing power relations. It is vital to the work of Foucault that the subjectification process within which the subject is being formed is omnipotent. According to his nihilism the subject is always but an effect/reflection/dimension of the governing violences/conditions in the arena where it is produced. Only within this framework does Foucault speak of the freedom of the subject. Not only is contingency omnipotent and meaningless, or the meaningless dynamics of truth production in their “regimes” are not to be essentially transcendent, deciphered, or challenged, but it is another manifestation of mere power, which constitutes and manifests itself even in the production of the subject, her resistance, and her pleasures/pains and possible meanings. For Foucault, “The individual is not to be conceived as a sort of elementary nucleus...In fact, it is already one of the prime

effects of power that certain bodies, certain gestures, certain discourses, certain desires, come to be identified and constituted as individuals” (Foucault 1980, 98).

The result is not “an ethics of responsibility for the truths one speaks, for political strategies which these truths inform” as Lambier and Smeyers suggest, since there is no room for ethics in an arena where there is no air for human freedom and transcendence. Cybersex or the Garden of Eden incubated in the clouds of the new Mount Nevo, which instead of the Torah of Moses introduces “pleasures” to the participants of the perfect hashish parties and cannot offer a solution to essential existential, philosophical, and political challenges.

The kind of education for pleasure and irresponsibility, for conformity and for accepting the invitation of Tanathus of the kind of that we are here offered should be seriously addressed. This is because their text manifests in such a brilliant manner the inner logic of the age of globalizing capitalism, the seductions of its culture industry, and its McDonaldization of the entire life world.

This kind of quest to death, this suggestive kind of normalizing education, offers us the perfect Platonic cave, in which ultimately pleasure alone reigns.

But what about the actual world of suffering, of political developments which enlarge the number of actual starving people as a result of “rational” interest-rate policies which serve and facilitate this post-modern redemption in the form of the most advanced normalizing education? What about the response to the new challenges of post-colonialism, of which the events of September 11 were only a light prelude? What about the possibility of finding meaning in suffering and establishing an aim for life in an era when Spirit is exiled and new master signifiers have not yet arrived? This version of normalizing education that we are proffered here cannot yield any answer to actual political, existential, and philosophical questions. Any

enlargement in the rate of unemployment or new wave of political violence, or personal meeting with real pain or genuine love might immediately dissolve its suggestive power. This is also the source of its relevance and its “truth”. This is why it is such a challenge for the possibility of counter-education. And, for this too, we should thank Lambier and Smeyers for their articulate affirmation of Tanathus.

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