

THE ACTUALITY OF NIETZSCHE'S CRITICISM OF EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM REGARDING MODERN KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY

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Abstract:

„Thus, my friends do not confound this education, this delicately footed, spoiled, ethereal goddess, with that usable maid which occasionally also is called ‘education’, but which is merely the intellectual maid and counselor for distress of life, for earnings, for neediness.”¹

In his five lectures on the “future of educational system” Nietzsche thoroughly criticized the German educational system of his time and the decay of education in general. Although he was very sharp in accusation and pessimistic about his contemporary situation, he nevertheless cherished some hopes regarding some

¹ Translated by the author. Original quote and source: „Also, meine Freunde, verwechselt mir diese Bildung, diese zartfüßige, verwöhnte, ätherische Göttin nicht mit jener nutzbaren Magd, die sich mitunter auch die ‚Bildung‘ nennt, aber nur die intellektuelle Dienerin und Beraterin der Lebensnot, des Erwerbs, der Bedürftigkeit ist.“ (Nietzsche, Friedrich: *Ueber die Zukunft unserer Bildungsanstalten. Sechs öffentliche Vorträge*, in: Nietzsche, Friedrich: *Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Bänden (KSA)*, ed. by Giorgio Colli & Mazzino Montinari, Vol. 1, pp. 641 – 753, Berlin: de Gruyter, 1999, here: *Vortrag IV*, pp. 712 – 733, here p. 715.)

profound and revolutionary changes in the near future that might take place and rescue the classical concept of education.

Looking back from today to Nietzsche's assertions – like the quote above – we can recognize that his critical sketch of former deficiencies of educational system has lost none of its actuality and truth. We rather notice that some of his points just have been actualized only in modern knowledge society than in his time – or at least they have aggravated. Nowadays, knowledge is considered as an economical factor of production, and education is the fundamental precondition for employability. On the way to neoliberal, capitalistic system we have started with exploitation of the knower and have come to reach a status of voluntary self-exploitation of the educated one. Knowledge and education, and the notion of lifelong learning as well as self-actualization and personality growth have become efficient and perfect instruments of neoliberal systems, as they use the freedom and free volition of the individual to enforce their self-exploitation in order to become high-potential consumers.

This contribution points out the still existing actuality of Nietzsche's critical arguments regarding the decay of the concept of education. Moreover, it is to be shown that in the age of the so called knowledge society in neoliberal systems we somehow are on the peak of the era of nihilism, as it was predicted by Nietzsche almost hundred fifty years before.

Keywords: Nietzsche, knowledge society, education, educational system, employability, neoliberal system, self-exploitation, lifelong learning

1. Nietzsche's criticism of educational system of his day

The German poet-philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844 – 1900) lived in a highly changeable time, which can be considered as the threshold period of industrialization, modernization, capitalistic economization, colonialization, and nationalization, namely as the transition from modern to postmodern society. Hence the philosophical

thoughts of Nietzsche have sharply and critically sketched these movements in his criticism of modernity with its terminal points of decadence and nihilism, and he also delineated the necessity of a radical change of the essence of human into the so called super-human (Germ.: *Übermensch*). In this manner, also Nietzsche can be regarded as a threshold philosopher who thoroughly criticized the weakness and decay of culture and education in his time, but hopefully sketched out the possibility of changes into a new and stronger mankind.

Before drawing the characteristics of and naming it the super-human, Nietzsche was taken in by the concept of genius as idealization of man. Therefore his critiques against the educational system and culture at then operated with the concept of genius. But for Nietzsche it seems like such a genius unfortunately hasn't been actualized for long, or – taking into account that Schopenhauer was considered as the last one in occidental history – at least isn't very welcome anymore in modern society and the educational system then, so that, according to Nietzsche, the type of genius should be re-aspired by a radical change of that system.

These critiques, an output of his early period of thinking, have been published in 1872 in form of five public lectures, were not conceptualized as a treatise or essay, but in a literarily highly felicitous narration of a fictive (or non-fictive, as this is not to be figured out) acquaintance of the first-person narrator and his friend as students with a philosopher and his scholar at a place far away from town in the forest. We don't need to recall the setting in detail here, but just describe the content of the mentioned criticism and prospects of the educational system.

He – and for clarity reason we address only to one person, namely Nietzsche as the first-person narrator of all these thoughts – detects two directions of educational development. On one side, education is going to be broadened and extended, in order to produce a higher amount of well-educated people, i.e., a mass of scholars. On the other side, education is going to be reduced and mitigated on a level of mediocrity, in order to reach the first aim of educating the masses; because there never exists a mass of geniuses, hence the level needs to be lowered on the level of the mediocre masses. Therefore the former highest aim of education, namely education itself, is cut off, and is taken into services for other areas of life, e. g. the polity, or economy, or mere survival.

The first line of development follows a dogma of national economics: *as much as possible*; hence to achieve as much knowledge and education as possible, which leads to as much production and needs as possible, which, according to Nietzsche, further results in as much happiness as possible. Utility, more precisely, acquisition or earnings are the new objectives and purposes of education.² From this perspective, education is considered as access and sense to keep oneself up-dated, to know the ways of easily earning money, and to handle the means to commerce with other humans and peoples. Thus the actual purpose of education is to build up human beings as “courant” as, as circulating as possible. Nietzsche here alludes to the feature of a coin; a courant coin is one that has a prevailing value and can be commonly used for widespread economical exchange. He states that the more “courant” persons exist, the happier a folk will be. The intention of modern educational institutes should thus be to facilitate each individual to become as “courant” as it is his own inner nature, to educate everyone as much that he/she is able to achieve the utmost profit and happiness out of his own measurement of knowledge and education.³

By this Nietzsche means that the objective of the educational system at then will be the provision of as much knowledge and education as possible, in order to give everyone the chance for self-development according to his own height of education or of his ability getting educated, which warrants him as much profit and earnings, considered as happiness, as individually possible. This, so Nietzsche, requires a *rapid* education, in order to become rapidly a *money earning* being, but yet also a *profound* education, in order to be able to become a *very much money earning* being. By this objective of education, the education for building, improving or only enjoying culture, or getting culturally engaged, has somehow fallen by the wayside. But it’s not totally neglected or inhibited, because culture is just and exactly as much conceded for the individual, as it is in the interest of acquisition, i.e., earnings. Thus, on the other side,

² Ibid., Vortrag I, p. 667: “Diese Erweiterung gehört unter die beliebten nationalökonomischen Dogmen der Gegenwart. Möglichst viel Erkenntniß und Bildung – daher möglichst viel Produktion und Bedürfniß – daher möglichst viel Glück: – so lautet etwa die Formel. Hier haben wir den Nutzen als Ziel und Zweck der Bildung, noch genauer den Erwerb, den möglichst großen Geldgewinn.“

³ In this critical thought of Nietzsche we already foresee the notion of the postmodern coercion of individual self-actualization – admitted within bounds of economical life.

it is also demanded from everyone exactly as much culture, i.e., to be engaged as much in cultural issues, as it is necessary to remain able to follow the aim of acquisition or profit-making.⁴

In summary this means that the individual should be educated to be interested in culture as much as it serves the aim of profit making, but he also shouldn't be more interested in culture as it is needed to follow this objective.

As a consequence of all this results the second line of development as mentioned above, the mitigation of education. The education for the masses, in order to serve one's needs for a wealthy life, leads to the necessity of specialization in a certain, but narrow field of science, in order to remain competitive against others. Such a pundit resembles any factory worker who does nothing else in his whole working life than producing the same kind of screws or handling a type of machine. Sure, he achieved a high virtuosity in his field of specialization, but missed the essence of "true", i.e., classic education.

In respect to this classic education, Nietzsche emphasizes a rather aristocratic, hierarchic order of the nature of mind. He believes in the type of genius who should be the purpose of the true education, and who should guide and lead the masses to a higher culture. All the mediocre people have to serve for, and to accept a subordinate role under the reign of the genius. But the advocates of the ideal of education at Nietzsche's time shout for free and broad education, in order to liberate the masses from the reign of the great, single genius, and to overturn the above mentioned order in the realm of intellect and genius.⁵ Hence, with this assessment Nietzsche also

⁴ Nietzsche, Friedrich: *Ueber die Zukunft unserer Bildungsanstalten*; loc. cit., Vortrag I, p. 668: "Nach der hier geltenden Sittlichkeit wird freilich etwas Umgekehrtes verlangt, nämlich eine *rasche* Bildung, um schnell ein geldverdienendes Wesen werden zu können und doch eine so gründliche Bildung, um ein *sehr viel* Geld verdienendes Wesen werden zu können. Dem Menschen wird nur so viel Kultur gestattet als im Interesse des Erwerbs ist, aber so viel wird auch von ihm gefordert." (emphasis in original).

⁵ *Ibid.*, Vortrag III, p. 698: "... jene lauten Herolde des Bildungsbedürfnisses verwandeln sich plötzlich, bei einer ersten Besichtigung aus der Nähe, in eifrige, ja fanatische Gegner der wahren Bildung d. h. derjenigen, welche an der aristokratischen Natur des Geistes festhält: denn im Grunde meinen sie, als ihr Ziel, die Emancipation der Massen von der Herrschaft der großen Einzelnen, im Grunde streben sie

criticizes the emphasis of freedom and free self-development in education, especially in the educational system of “gymnasium”, i.e., high school. He holds the opinion that students first have to learn how to read and write by thoroughly studying the traditional and ancient literature, as well as languages and its grammar, by following the instructions of teachers who ideally should be geniuses.⁶

Nietzsche doesn't neglect the necessity of learning and knowledge acquisition in general, because he also knows that people do have to know something in order to survive. But this kind of knowledge has nothing to do with education; the latter just starts above the world of distress, struggle for survival, and neediness. It all comes down to leave behind one's neediness, i.e., one's subject or subjectivity. Hence, true education disdains to contaminate itself with a needy and coveting individual; rather she knows how to escape the one who tries to secure her as a means for egoistic intentions.

Here at this point of Nietzsche's critiques it comes to the warning we've quoted already above, that no one should confound this true education with the one, which also often is called education, but which only is considered as the maid and counselor for distress of life, earning and neediness. Every educating, which ends its career with an official position or only with earning a living, cannot be considered as educating for education in the way Nietzsche understands it, but only as instruction for the best way to rescue and secure one's subject or subjectivity in the struggle for life. Consequently the educational system and all its institutions are considered only as institutions to overcome the distress of life, what professions ever they promise to train or educate.⁷

Summarizing, we can state that Nietzsche thoroughly criticized education as untruthful when only being considered as a means for satisfying one's individual, earthly, life concerning needs and wishes, when only being used to survive the struggle for life, when only being taken in its character of usability and applicability for

darnach, die heiligste Ordnung im Reiche des Intellectes umzustürzen, die Dienstbarkeit der Masse, ihren unterwürfigen Gehorsam, ihren Instinkt der Treue unter dem Scepter des Genius.”

⁶ Cf., *ibid.*, Vortrag II, pp. 683 – 689.

⁷ *ibid.*, Vortrag IV, pp. 713 – 715.

short-sighted and rather egoistic necessities. He also criticized the educational system and institutions which merely serve these purposes. Nietzsche sketched out these features as subdued to the economical premise of “as much as possible”, which cuts down man’s aspirations and fields of living and experiences into a mere calculation of making benefit and profit. Thereby the glorious height of culture, as preexisting in ancient, pre-Socratic Greece, seems to be dismissed for the sake of an economically functioning society with its own cultural outgrowths under the premise of consuming utility.

We now want to take a look at the modern society, characterized as knowledge society, and its educational system, in order to figure out, if and how Nietzsche’s criticism is still valid. Therefore it is necessary as a first step to describe in short the notion knowledge society.

2. Nowadays’ society as knowledge society

Looking back on societal development man tends to classify certain historical coherent phenomena into certain epochs. So he did also with Western societies, and differentiated an agricultural from an industrial era, which is succeeded by the post industrial resp. post modernity, classified as information or knowledge society.

These last two terms are rather new and have been invented and established since the sixties of the twentieth century onwards (R. Lane, P. Drucker, D. Bell et al.), when information and communication technology (ICT) has been rapidly developed and swamped the daily life. ICTs have influenced many fields of societal life, such as politics, economy, educational system, health system, right up to the daily life of average persons, at least in the Western industrialized countries. ICTs also have boosted the development of globalization, which, on return, again accelerated the transition from the industrialized production society into information, or knowledge society (with its economical characteristics of service industry). Especially since the late nineties of the last century this at first only theoretically and academically constructed concept got a self-selling item which influenced thoroughly political and economical institutions and their objectives. It got a keyword for political programs, and still is highly valued as an aspired target for the design of modern societies.

In the beginning, information and knowledge society was used quite interchangeable, but over time more and more the term knowledge society was established, because its connotation is much more far-reaching than that of information. The latter was more and more just considered as a mass of data which is the basis for knowledge. Information itself has no value, it is rather neutral, and needs to be interpreted, contextualized, and utilized; hence, it needs to be transformed into knowledge by all this. Knowledge, on the other hand, is the skillful and intelligent handling and processing of information into life supporting⁸ actions or devices. Thus, information is a kind of raw material, a precondition for producing knowledge.

The rise of the term knowledge society was associated with the insight that, besides capital, knowledge also got a more and more important factor of production in modern economy of neo-liberalism. In its objectified form we will find knowledge in every kind of technology. But also the non-objectified knowledge as it is subjectively present in the individuals as “knowing-how”, and as it comes into presence only in interactive processes of problem-solving or organizational cooperation, plays a significant role, if not the significant role at all, in modern economy.⁹

These two types of knowledge are defined in the study of the United Nations “Understanding Knowledge Societies” from 2005, as follows:

“Explicit knowledge (information) refers to ‘justified (true) belief’ that is codified in formal, systemic language. It can be combined, stored, retrieved and transmitted with relative ease and through various means, including modern ICT.

Tacit knowledge is a fluid mix of framed experience, values, contextual information and expert insights that provides an individual with a framework for evaluating and incorporating new experiences and information. Tacit knowledge is information combined with experience, context, interpretation and judgment. It is acquired through one’s own experience or reflections on the experiences of others. It

⁸ It’s clear that knowledge also can be used in life destroying actions, but it’s not the place here for discussing ethical issues of the application of knowledge and information.

⁹ Poltermann, Andreas: *Wissensgesellschaft*; Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung; online publication: https://www.boell.de/sites/default/files/uploads/2013/09/ausfuehrliche_fassung_des_textes_wissensgesellschaft.pdf, p. 1.

is intangible, without boundaries and dynamic. It is highly personal and hard to formalize, making it difficult to communicate or share with others. Subjective insights, intuitions and hunches all fall into the category of tacit knowledge.¹⁰

What the UN calls “explicit knowledge” or “information”, Poltermann names as “objectified knowledge”, and UN’s “tacit knowledge” is called “lively” or “active knowledge”. Poltermann states that due to its feature as highly personal tacit knowledge is hardly controllable on behalf of the employer, so that employers need to count on the gratuitousness of the employee to serve them with their incorporated, individual knowledge.

Because of nowadays economical organization in the highly knowledgeable production industries as well as in service industries all market players – employers, employees, customers, etc. – are bound to the above mentioned willingness of voluntarily sharing one’s personal tacit knowledge with each other. This, on the other hand, implies that the level of knowing how to access, acquire, and process knowledge must be significantly higher than in former industrial society. Thus, the overall and average education also needs to be higher and democratically widespread. In order to meet and match the market’s demands, which is the availability of an army of “high-potentials”, of well educated and well trained, also voluntary obedient, freely self-offering workers, people have to assure that they got educated as much as possible. Also the state’s interest lies in the higher and job focused education for the market, so that national programs were established to form an educational system, accessible for the masses, and which trains the students in fitness for the job market.

It can be observed that in the last two decades the education policy in almost all industrialized countries of Western hemisphere seek to raise the quota of high-school graduates and academics, and to establish more and new disciplines in colleges and universities, which are designed to meet the more practical and specialized needs of new jobs and branches in the modern fields of ICT and service industries. A lot of these new jobs, hence, are only accessible with an academic degree or supplemental certifications. Also, the jobs and their occupational profiles change quickly, because

¹⁰ United Nations: *Understanding Knowledge Societies*; UN Publ., New York 2005, p. 32.

especially in knowledge based branches like the ITC information rapidly gets obsolete, and on the contrary knowledge globally doubles almost every 15 years, as de Solla Price once claimed.¹¹ This requires from the employee to seek for continuing education. Even when de Solla Price is not right in his assumptions and information knowledge grows much slower than predicted, it is still increasing fast and in such a quantity that keeps people extremely busy to catch-up, especially those who work in technical and natural science fields.

But due to nowadays high demand for so called soft or social skills, encompassing communicative, rhetoric, meditative skills, capacity for teamwork, flexibility, capability for cooperation, compromising, self-organizing, leading etc., the continuing education not only comprises specialized knowledge and information, but also courses for self-development and personality growth. Hence, to remain employable the employee not only has to be well educated, best with an academic degree, highly specialized in the narrow field for actual application of work requirements, but also well developed in his/her personality, which means highly engaged, target focused, sociable, loyal, morally upright, committed, social competent etc.

This development of educational demands in modern knowledge society leads to the requirement of so called “lifelong learning”, where people are invisibly forced by the market’s demands to bother themselves with constant education of oneself from the very beginning of one’s career in primary school (in some countries – like Hong Kong or Singapore, and for sure many others – already in kindergarten) till the end of working life when getting retired, if so at all.¹²

This evolution in knowledge society sets people under massive stress from the very first beginning of education. The pressure of being successful at any price, in

¹¹ Extracts of Derek J. de Solla-Price, *Little Science, Big Science* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1974), accessed April, 2, 2016, <http://www.ib.hu-berlin.de/~wumsta/infopub/price/price14.html>.

¹² This afterthought is mentioned here, because in modern economy of neo-liberalism more and more people are forced to take the status of being freelancer, and hence being an isolated competitor against all the others. As a result, this direction undermines the social welfare and pension system, thus many of these freelancers are not able to touch pension and retire in an appropriate age.

order to reach a certain comfortable social position by achieving a certain job position with appropriate income, forms an attitude and mind-set which only focuses on competition and the aim to “win the race”.

In my opinion the demand for life-long learning under these harsh and speedy conditions, which keeps the individual busy from the beginning of its learning career until it will exit or retire this racetrack, is not only a by-product of the evolution of modernity and postmodernism, but has an inner intention, inherent to the system, that keeps the ordinary living people in their status of “worker bees”, or in other and harsher words, of capitalistic slavery. This will be exemplified in some more details in the next chapter.

There are many more examples which could be consulted for describing the nowadays situation in the so called and yet still aspired knowledge society. But in my opinion the afore mentioned depictions are sufficient enough to conclude with the assertion that actual educational systems in Western industrialized knowledge societies have transformed into highly efficient and specialized institutions with the essential target to educate as many people as possible and making them as much employable as possible. To summarize, the contemporary educational systems aim at the highest possible amount of employable people, aim at the employability of as many people as possible. Hence, *employability* can be considered as the only target of education in general.

3. Actuality of Nietzsche’s criticisms in modern knowledge society

As we have summarized in chapter one, Nietzsche’s ideal of education is based on his understanding of classic Greek education which has its target in itself, i.e., education educates people merely for being educated. This interpretation is repeated by Nietzsche in one of his last texts (1889), *Götzen-Dämmerung (Twilight of the Idols)*, when he again criticized the higher educational system of Germany in his days as

having lost its main issue, namely being purpose as well as means for the purpose, it forgot that education is purpose in itself.¹³

For Nietzsche the criteria to distinguish the ones being worth for aspiring the ideal of a genius and, hence, following his ideal of classic education, from the others who don't value this ideal, are their inner disposition of *craving for philosophy*, their *instinct for and sense of art*, especially music, and their *appreciation of classic Greco-Roman antiquity*.¹⁴ If students have these dispositions and attitudes, they follow Nietzsche's ideal of education. All the others just run after the criticized aim of education and educational system, which is, in summary, fulfilling the individual needs of making a good living, and/or mere surviving.

As we could have seen in chapter two, modern knowledge society seems to have merely this criticized aim which was summarized in the concept of *employability*. In sum, we can assert that Nietzsche's criticisms still apply for modern educational systems – at least in Western industrialized countries – which emphasize the higher education as a necessity for making a socially reasonable living, and which addresses itself not to a kind of elite, who aspires the ideal of a genius and who additionally has the capacity for it, but rather to the masses.¹⁵

This resume not only allows to ascertain the yet actuality of Nietzsche's critiques, but also to claim that these critiques apply only now, in modern knowledge society, in their full weight. But what's the problem with education, which aims at preparation

¹³ Nietzsche, Friedrich: *Götzen-Dämmerung. Oder: Wie man mit dem Hammer philosophiert*, loc. cit., Vol. 6, pp. 55 – 163, here p. 107: „Dem ganzen höheren Erziehungswesen in Deutschland ist die Hauptsache abhanden gekommen: Zweck sowohl als Mittel zum Zweck. Dass Erziehung, *Bildung* selbst Zweck ist – und *nicht* ‚das Reich‘“. (emphasis in original)

¹⁴ Id.: *Ueber die Zukunft unserer Bildungsanstalten*, loc. cit., Vortrag V, p. 741: „Was dünkt euch über seine [the student's; A.S.] Bildung, wenn ihr diese an drei Gradmessern zu messen wißt, einmal an seinem Bedürfnis zur Philosophie, sodann an seinem Instinkte für die Kunst und endlich an dem griechischen und römischen Alterthum als an dem leibhaften kategorischen Imperativ aller Kultur.“

¹⁵ That we need to educate masses, and not only elites, will be clear after deliberating about capitalistic system without any delusion: the system necessarily needs an overproduction of any of its traded goods, may these be technical products, daily stuff, or just knowledge or educated workers.

the masses of people for their employability, or for its improvement? What's wrong with the demand for "lifelong learning" and voluntarily working on higher education and personality development?

For Nietzsche it's clear, this purpose of education and educational system doesn't lead to the modest aspiration of classic education for having its purpose merely in itself, namely being educated. Nietzsche wasn't generally against certain purpose oriented trainings or school education, but this one, who leads to mere employability, was placed in the institutions of middle school and professional trainings. The concept "education" in its full sense for Nietzsche was reserved for higher education, provided in high school and university curriculum. Only satisfying daily needs and providing an economically good living wasn't a defined aim of classic education, on which Nietzsche targeted at, rather it should educate with the mere purpose of education, as mentioned above.

What he rejected is the instrumental access to education as education for something, hence for an individually better life. For Nietzsche the purpose of education as education lies in the cultivation of the type of a genius. And he was convinced that these geniuses only could be a certain, but little amount of people, not the masses. In *Twilight of the Idols* he again and sharply makes clear that the higher education is not compatible with the myriads; that this is self-contradicting as every higher education is an exception for which one needs to be privileged. He emphasizes that all great and beautiful goods never could serve as a common good.¹⁶

It's not clearly mentioned what the purpose of the genius would be, but we may conclude that the genius finally serves for the good of society in general. The task of the genius is to elevate society onto a higher level which step by step helps developing the concept of super-human.

We may draw the conclusion that Nietzsche's worries about the deterioration of educational systems to mere training institutions must be seen as fulfilled today, as

¹⁶ Id.: *Götzen-Dämmerung. Oder: Wie man mit dem Hammer philosophiert*, loc. cit., p. 107: „Höhere Erziehung“ und *Unzahl* – das widerspricht sich von vornherein. Jede höhere Erziehung gehört nur der Ausnahme: man muss privilegiert sein, um ein Recht auf ein so hohes Privilegium zu haben. Alle grossen, alle schönen Dine können nie Gemeingut sein“. (emphasis in original)

we have seen in the analysis above. Nevertheless – like Nietzsche’s aim of classic education – also the modern educational systems in knowledge societies claim to work on society’s improvement, although under the reign of individual freedom and responsibility. But this kind of education and its claim, that it also looks for the overall good of society, is to be noticed only as chimera.

Taking into consideration Byung-Chul Han’s analyses of modern capitalistic system, we notice that freedom and individuality are only instruments for the actual reign of neo-liberalism.¹⁷ And this leads only to a deeper entrapment of individuals in the economical paradigm of “as much as possible”, and “fulfillment of needs”, i.e., making a good living.

Han analyses our contemporary society of 21st century as a *performance society*, whose characteristics, besides a high degree of individuality and a seeming freedom, are also a high grade of *fatigue*. Knowledge and education, as well as freedom and individuality, are mere instruments for achieving high performance in order to survive. In nowadays performing knowledge society its members are no longer suppressed from exterior subjects, and don’t need to follow the societal and economical demands by discipline, i.e., they don’t need to be held under the reign of the modal verb “have to”; rather the claim of individual freedom and the demand for personality development and self-actualization are under the aegis of the verb “to be able to”. The dictum “yes, we can” is symptomatic for our times. It is an expression of this new aegis, of the change from disciplinary to performance society with the radical use of individual freedom. But the latter is not only a positive fact of now; it is simultaneously a force which demands the use of this freedom from all individuals in order to attempt to achieve a performance as high as possible.

In general, freedom is a positively connoted value which everyone normally tends to actualize. Denying freedom seems to be ridiculous and inhuman. Hence, if freedom and even more freedom are possible to achieve, it is assumed to attempt to actualize it. But if freedom gets an instrument of controlling power, as it is like in neo-liberal systems, people are forced to act out their free willing. Unfortunately this willing isn’t

¹⁷ Han, Byung-Chul: Psychopolitik. Neoliberalismus und die neuen Machttechniken; Frankfurt/M. 2014, p. 12f.

that free as it seems to or as it was promised to be like. The individuals are free to choose, yes, but the selection to choose from is systematically restricted to – not only some few goods, like in former communist countries, but – consumption. And for consuming properly according to the neo-liberal system people need to earn means for consumption, i.e., money. Hence, people in modern capitalistic knowledge societies are forced to enter the highly competitive “rat race” of voluntarily learning more and more, and being active as an all around competitor against every other, in order to further consume and hence stay alive (survive) in the system.

The flipside of this freedom is the so called responsibility. But in this case it is a “lethal” weapon of neo-liberalism. Each individual in modern knowledge society, as mentioned just above, is coerced to use his freedom for his own education in order to achieve employability, which means he is forced to be in competition with each other individual. Modern meritocratic knowledge society under the aegis of neo-liberalism compels each person to compete against all others, to run a race which he necessarily has to win (, but systematically is condemned to lose). If he nevertheless loses, the failure will be blamed on him. The loser of the game will be accused for his failure by his own responsibility. Hence, the one, who cannot fit the demands of modern knowledge society by his own responsibility of taking care of his own education from the beginning, naturally will get tired about his fruitless efforts, which will lead to despondency, desperation, frustration, burn-out, and finally depression. And that’s why, according to Han, one of the main symptoms of contemporary society is fatigue on the one side, and the mode of being as an “animal laborans”, as working humans, i.e., of activity, rushing, and haste on the other side.

Although, as Han detects, the subject of performance society is free of any externally dominating authority, which is able to coerce to work and to exploit it, and the performing subject is the sovereign of itself, and is subjected to nobody, this subject leaves itself to the coercing freedom – or the free coercion – for maximizing its performance. This leads to a highly efficient form of *self-exploitation*, based on the free will to “win the race” of employability.¹⁸

¹⁸ Han, Byung-Chul: *Müdigkeitsgesellschaft*, Berlin 2010, p. 22: „Das Leistungssubjekt ist frei von äußerer Herrschaftsinstanz, die es zur Arbeit zwingen oder gar ausbeuten würde. Es ist der Herr und Souverän seiner selbst. So ist es niemandem bzw. nur sich selbst unterworfen. Darin unterscheidet es

What is getting lost in this state of hyperactivity and working attitude, which also applies to the attitude of education, for sure, is the ability for contemplation, for slowing down, for looking at things and situations without immediate reactions, i.e., training the contemplative attentiveness.

4. Conclusion: Prospects regarding the preceding analysis

In *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* (1878) (Engl.: *Human, All Too Human*) Nietzsche criticizes already in his time, that the velocity of living has enormously accelerated, and that those, who are obviously restless and busy, are worth more than people, who are able for contemplation. Thus he proclaims the necessity of a correction of human's character by strengthening his ability for contemplation.¹⁹

Still in his late text *Twilight of the Idols* he complains an overall obscene hurry, so as if something is omitted or missed when a young man in his early twenty isn't "ready" yet and still has no answer to the main question of what profession he wants to exert.²⁰

Against this hurry and bustle he detects three tasks for which we would need educators in the sense of Nietzsche's higher education: People, before entering the curriculum of higher education, need to learn how to *look*, to *think*, and to *speak* and *write*, in order to develop a noble culture.

sich vom Gehorsamssubjekt. Der Wegfall der Herrschaftsinstanz führt nicht zur Freiheit. Er lässt vielmehr Freiheit und Zwang zusammenfallen. So überlässt sich das Leistungssubjekt der *zwingenden Freiheit* oder dem *freien Zwang* zur Maximierung der Leistung.“ (emphasis in original)

¹⁹ Nietzsche, Friedrich: *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches I*, loc. cit., vol. 2, pp. 9 – 367, here p. 232: „Zu keiner Zeit haben die Thätigen, das heisst die Ruhelosen, mehr gegolten. Es gehört deshalb zu den nothwendigen Correcturen, welche man am Charakter der Menschheit vornehmen muss, das beschauliche Element in grossem Maasse zu verstärken.“

²⁰ Id.: *Götzen-Dämmerung*, loc. cit., p 108: „Und überall herrscht eine unanständige Hast, wie als ob Etwas versäumt wäre, wenn der junge Mann mit 23 Jahren noch nicht ‚fertig‘ ist, noch nicht Antwort weiss auf die ‚Hauptfrage‘: *welchen Beruf?*“ (emphasis in original)

It is highly interesting, how Nietzsche describes these competencies, especially the first one: how to *look*. We need to learn a certain patience of the eye, letting things approaching us, to delay the judgment, and to comprise each individual case from all sides and perspectives. Knowing to look in Nietzsche's interpretation means to be able not to will, not to decide, to inhibit rapid reactions. In contrast, all common, unspiritual people are unable to resist a stimulus or attraction; they necessarily need to react and follow their inner impulses. Regarding how to *think*, Nietzsche compares it with dancing, even as a kind of dance, which inevitably has to be learned. And if someone has learned thinking, i.e., logical thinking, like dancing, he also has to have learned to "dance" with the words in his *writing* and *speaking*.²¹

If we thoroughly consider all above what was said by Nietzsche and hold it against our style of life in modern knowledge society, we can conclude with the assertion that Nietzsche's critiques and advices for changes are still valid, or are even more valid in our times than when he announced it. Learning being more attentive, not so hasty in our judgments, decisions, actions and reactions, and more contemplative would save us from being trapped in the neo-liberal instruments of freedom and lifelong learning. It will slow down our pace of living and transform us into a society not of fatigue, but of a contemplative sleepiness, which acknowledges all fellow human beings and all situations by attentively looking at and thinking about them. And this is it, what Han meant by his little essay of *Society of Sleepiness (Müdigkeitsgesellschaft)*. We all should learn to get a bit more tired, more sleepy, and abstain from fast reactions and actions as they are necessary when "running in the rat-race" and following the demands of modern knowledge society.

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²¹ Ibid., pp. 108 – 110.

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