

**Vermeir & Heiremans
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Intro

Loki is a god in Norse mythology who is often simply described as the 'trickster' god for his love of playing pranks on both his fellow gods and his or their opponents. Sworn brother of Odin and often the one to dig the other gods out of inconveniently deep holes, Loki's name nonetheless has many negative connotations due to his deceitful nature and especially the hand he had in the death of the god Baldr, thus setting in motion the coming of the Ragnarök (the 'final destiny of the gods' in which the world is destroyed).

With no cult attached to him and no clear function in Viking Age belief, yet being one of only three gods who headlines in more than one myth (the other two being Odin and Thor), Loki takes up a unique spot in the Norse pantheon. While treated as a nominal member of the gods, Loki occupies a highly ambivalent and ultimately unique position among the gods, giants, and the other kinds of spiritual beings that populate the pre-Christian Norse religion. Loki alternately helps both the gods and the giants, depending on which course of action is most pleasurable and advantageous to him at the time.

Lewis Hyde

Trickster Makes this World

Our main sources for Norse mythology are The Poetic Edda and The Prose Edda, the former being a collection of Icelandic poems, some dating back to the early years of the Viking Age (as early as 850), and the latter being a book written around 1220 by an Icelandic aristocrat named Snorri Sturluson. (There is debate over what "Edda" means, but it has come to signify a collection of traditional poetry.) The Eddas contain two key moments in which the trickster Loki threatens the Norse Gods with old age and death. The first begins and ends quickly. It seems that Loki was once captured by a giant (disguised as an eagle) who agreed to free him on condition that he promised to go to the goddess Idunn ("The Rejuvenating One"), who tended the orchard where the Apples of Immortality grew, and bring her and her fruit out of the Asgard (the gods are Aesir, their home Asgard). In Snorri's version:

"At the time agreed on, Loki enticed Idunn out from Asgard into a wood, telling her that he had found some apples she would prize greatly and asking her to bring her own with her for comparison. Then the giant... came in the form of an eagle, and seizing Idunn flew away with her to his house...

The Aesir... were much dismayed at Idunn's disappearance, and they soon grew old and gray-haired."

In later Norse mythology, Loki will take on a more devilish cast, but in this tale he is a mere mischief-monger. When the gods confront him with what he's done, he willingly repairs the wrong, changing himself into a falcon and stealing Idunn back from Giantland.

No permanent harm is done, then, but the story nonetheless indicates Loki's potential as a cataclysmic change-agent, a capacity we find starkly realized in a later story having to do with the death of the god Baldr. Baldr is the Pure One of the Norse pantheon. Handsome and good, he is associated with the sun ("so fair of face and bright that a splendour radiates from him"). One day, however, Baldr begins to be troubled by nightmares indicating some harm will come to him. His mother Frigg therefore sets about exacting an oath from everything in heaven and earth - from men and beasts, from fire and water, from metals and stones - not to harm Baldr. When everything in heaven and earth has so sworn, it follows that the assembled Aesir amuse themselves by throwing things at their invulnerable companion, watching their darts and arrows drop before they touch his shining body.

All this annoys Loki, who disguises himself as a woman and quizzes Frigg as to the details of her oath-taking. In this way he discovers that she has, in fact, omitted one item. "West of Valhalla," she says, "grows a little bush called mistletoe. I did not exact an oath from it; I thought it too young." Loki immediately shapes a dart from the wood of the mistletoe and, finding the assembled gods throwing their weapons in sport at Baldr, approaches one of them, Hod, who stands doing nothing at the edge of the group. "Why are you not honoring Baldr as the others are?" Loki asks, and Hod explains that he is blind, "and besides, I have no weapon." Loki gives Hod the mistletoe and guides his hand. The dart goes straight through Baldr and he falls dead to the ground.

Tales of the Prose Edda

The Punishment of Loki

The gods were so angry with Loki that he had to run away and hide himself in the mountains, and there he built a house which had four doors, so that he could see around him on every side. He would often in the day- time change himself into a salmon and hide in the water called Franangursfors, and he thought over what trick the gods might devise to capture him there.

One day while he sat in his house, he took flax and yarn, and with it made meshes like those of a net, a fire burning in front of him. Then he became aware that the gods were near at hand, for Odin had seen out of Hlidskjalf where he was. Loki sprang up, threw his work into the fire, and went to the river. When the gods came to the house, the first that entered was Kvasir, who was the most acute of them all. In the hot embers he saw the ashes of a net, such as is used in fishing, and he told the gods of it, and they made a net like that which they saw in the ashes.

When it was ready they went to the river and cast the net in, Thor holding one end and the rest of the gods the other, and so they drew it. Loki travelled in front of it and lay down between two stones so that the net went over him, but the gods felt that something living had been against the net. Then they cast the net a second time, binding up in it a weight so that nothing could pass under it. Loki travelled before it till he saw the sea in front of him. Then he leapt over the top of the net and again made his way up the stream. The gods saw this, so they once more dragged the stream, while Thor waded in the middle of it. So they went to the sea.

Then Loki saw in what a dangerous situation he was. He must risk his life if he swam out to sea. The only other alternative was to leap over the net. That he did, jumping as quickly as he could over the top cord. Thor snatched at him, and tried to hold him, but he slipped through his hand, and would have escaped, but for his tail, and this is the reason why salmon have their tails so thin.

Grundtvig's Philosophy of Enlightenment and Education

Ove Korsgaard

The charge against Grundtvig of self-contradiction for his many inconsistent views can be made largely because he stands at a crossroads in the history of ideas between British liberalism and German idealism. He is deeply influenced by German philosophers such as Herder, Fichte, and Hegel, but it is equally clear that he is indebted to John Locke and the ideals of liberty in English liberalism. Grundtvig undertakes four trips to England – in 1829, 1830, 1831, and 1843 – which have a great influence on his thinking, not least in the field of educational theory and practice.

In England he comes face to face with modern society. Although he is horrified at the shadow side of industrialism, he is also enthused by the power and energy that he witnesses. In his meeting with modernity he sharpens his understanding of the importance of the liberal view of liberty, economics, politics, and the life of the spirit, and this leads him to write a call to arms under the title 'Nordic Mythology' (1832). He has become a champion of freedom, as can be seen from his introduction to the work, in which spirit and freedom constitute the core of his program.

He gives the essence of this view in poetic form: 'Freedom for Loki as well as for Thor'. The two Nordic Gods, Loki and Thor, each have their view of the world, but both must enjoy the same free-

dom. It may well be that the majority side with Thor, but there must be room for Loki's worldview too, although his concept of freedom is egocentric. Despite the fact that Grundtvig is critical of the selfish tendency in Loki's concept of freedom he gives the provocative trickster a special place in the introductory poem. It is Loki who with his teasing wit ensures that the battle is fought with word and spirit as weapons rather than the fist. Grundtvig argues for a freedom that is not only tolerant of divergent thinking but is itself the condition for an exchange of views in a living interplay.

The increasing focus on the individual and self-awareness that characterises the age of individualisation and the school necessitates new conditions for social education. In Grundtvig's view, this means that education must play a much greater role than before in the relation between the individual and society. Where the church previously enjoyed a close relationship with the state, it is now the school that moves to the centre of social education. For all governments, says Grundtvig, 'the encouragement of education is the most important affair of state, since the welfare of the state now and hereafter depends upon it.'

At the same time Grundtvig is well aware that education is a double-edged sword. For how can the necessary bonds be secured between the individual and the community, when education inevitably leads to increasing individualisation and self-awareness? Grundtvig circles around the dilemma, which can be formulated as follows: On the one hand education promotes individualisation, on the other hand it is education and not power that ensures social cohesion. As he says, "Enlightenment" is a very ambiguous word'. It has a Janus face. The state can risk 'perishing from enlightenment'.

This, in Grundtvig's view, is because there exist both a true and a false enlightenment. False enlightenment is that 'which always begins with the needs of the individual', and as such 'it is a serious danger to civil society in all ages and under all skies', because all societies rest on 'a respect for a higher right than the individual's'. If enlightenment undermines the individual's sense for the community and the common bonds among people, then the base on which social education rests is threatened. True enlightenment has its origin in the fact that as individuals we exist only by virtue of our community – not just with 'the people' but with all mankind.

Despite Grundtvig's view that liberty can undermine society's necessary sense of the common good, he does not argue for less freedom than before the French Revolution, but for more. To be a member of a community means taking a responsibility for its common life. And this is best ensured if the community allows each individual the liberty to do so. Grundtvig's social philosophy rests on the liberal view that only in freedom will individuals freely impose on themselves the necessary bonds. Grundtvig does not argue for total individual freedom. Such an understanding of freedom will in the long run lead to the dissolution of society. Boundless freedom is not an option for 'the citizen'. Absolute individualism is incompatible with any idea of a society, for every society is dependent on the ties between the individual and the state, the people and the nation.

Social education always builds on a certain agreement on the common good. Where this understanding does not exist, the survival of the fittest takes over. Without some agreement on 'the common good' the relationship between the individual and the state therefore reaches a deadlock. How can this then be resolved? And if the damage has been done, can the knot be undone by any other means than the sword? This is where the school becomes a vital institution. For, according to Grundtvig, it is the historical task of the school to loosen the knot between the individual and the state by other means than force.