
AN UNFASHIONABLE OBSERVATION TAKES HOLD:
SUFFERING AND THE LIMITS OF PEDAGOGY

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Man, the most courageous of beasts and the one most given to suffering, does not turn away from suffering as such: he embraces it, he even seeks it out, provided he has an understanding of it as constructed, a purpose of suffering...(TI, III, 28).

It seems a trivial point to say that suffering occurred as a result of the events of 9/11. What might education have to say about this suffering? Among the many responses that education could have, one might be to investigate the role that education has in alleviating, reducing, or somehow minimizing said suffering. This seems a natural enough task. Theorizing of this suffering might consist of tracing its psychosocial, historical and philosophical origins in an effort to “understand” the trauma. In so doing, theorizing the suffering operates as a first step to its ultimate containment and alleviation. Theorizing can also take the path of investigating among the many classroom techniques those that best foster this goal. Regardless of what origins are examined, or techniques proffered, theorizing the suffering of an event such as 9/11 will undoubtedly have implicit in its tendencies, the desire that the suffering be somehow lessened. Few, I would argue, pause to consider that the very alleviation or minimization of suffering is profoundly mistaken. Here I look at one who seems to argue that it is, and thus seems to resist the tendency of suffering to be theorized with the goal of its lessening.

A statement such as quoted above may trouble the reader. For it seems to hold that a certain sort of suffering, a *meaningful* suffering can and indeed, ought to be had, and that this suffering is something to be cultivated. This in turn suggests that education and, *a fortiori*, pedagogy, ought to remove themselves from any challenges they might make toward a meaningful suffering that occurs, particularly if the ulterior goal is its lessening. Therefore, I want to examine and respond to the following possible challenge: that pedagogical theorizing has no business involving itself with (meaningful) human suffering. In what follows I present the case of this reading of Nietzsche’s for leaving meaningful, human suffering, as experienced by the singular person, well enough alone. If this reading of Nietzsche is correct, the task seems to be to leave the issue of suffering where it lies: with the person who suffers. I look closely at Nietzsche’s typic of suffering: what he described as well-suffering (self-affirming) and ill-suffering (nihilistic). I note the differences between these two. I then turn to statements of Nietzsche’s that are suggestive of leaving the sufferer alone in his suffering.

Why is suffering problematic for pedagogy? Because, on this reading of suffering, if pedagogy was to interfere in the masking, removal, or constraint of (meaningful) suffering, it would be an imposition upon the person. Such an imposition constitutes, for Nietzsche, ill-suffering. It is tantamount to removing the possibility for self-control and self-growth. The fear seems to be that by controlling the ends and means of suffering, pedagogy exists as an instrument that threatens to drain one's subjectivity away. The intensely personal realm of suffering ought to be one upon which no outside institution can intrude. Pedagogy becomes counterproductive and counterintuitive in this instance. If this is right, the claim presents a challenge to a pedagogy that seeks to lessen one's suffering. I turn to ask the question: What, taking this reading of Nietzsche into consideration can be said about the task of pedagogy with respect to suffering? Can there be a place for pedagogy in suffering? Or is this reading of Nietzsche correct, and one's suffering is best left well alone?

I choose a two-pronged approach in responding to this challenge. The first is to suggest that, for Nietzsche, the goal of self-creation was a goal not meant for schoolchildren. Thus, the specific concerns that Nietzsche has for self-creation, the "creation" of the higher man, Eternal Recurrence of the Same, etc., and as a consequence, his talk of "well-suffering," would have no bearing on our present-day K-12 public (or private) schooling, as children of school age are simply not ready for the intensely difficult task of self-creation. Further, most of Nietzsche's criticism is primarily leveled at the then German universities, not *Realschules* or *Gymnasia*. And when it is leveled at both, it is in response to what Nietzsche sees as a lack of what would best be described as a "serious" education. The second approach is to assert, with Richard Rorty, that while such talk of suffering has, as with most everything else of Nietzsche, its value for private edification, it has little to offer in the way of a cogent critique for education, which is clearly a social and public enterprise. There is little challenge here to a pedagogy whose avowed goal is precisely to help cultivate a certain sort of person; one who, *contra* Nietzsche, is respectful enough of the laws, norms, and institutions of our democratic nation and the democratic vision that pedagogy entails, to not advocate for oneself a surreptitious overcoming of these. Nietzsche's talk of self-affirmation is a high romance that is not concerned with the development of a social individual; rather the development of a private one. Nietzsche's self-overcoming man (his Dionysus) is manifest insight into a kind of self-creation premised on the abandonment of social conventions and values that includes education. Thus, what one should argue is that, in this instance at least, what Nietzsche offers to a pedagogy that would consciously strive to cultivate well-suffering in its pupils is nothing. If anything, the pedagogy that Nietzsche offers is a negative one.

NIETZSCHE'S READING OF SUFFERING

Suffering occupies an important place within Nietzsche's thematic motifs. In several texts, Nietzsche describes what can be argued as two approaches to suffering; a well-suffering which is internal, individual, and life affirming, and an ill-suffering which is hidden and externally regulated. The distinction is important for Nietzsche. Well-suffering is characterized as a condition "born of fullness, of super-fullness, a Yes-saying without fear, even to suffering, even to guilt, even to everything that is questionable and strange in existence" (*TI*, III, 7). Ill-suffering is a cultural condition; a "degenerating instinct that turns against life with hidden vengeance" (*TI*, III, 7).

The roots of Nietzsche's talk of suffering are found in *The Birth of Tragedy*. Here, tragedy is seen as that great life-affirming alternative to the pervasive nihilism that characterized the German artistic scene (*BT*, III, 1). It was through tragedy, Nietzsche argued, that one was able to experience the sense of joy, of the profundity and nobility of life. This of course, was the just the Dionysian tenor that ran throughout all of his subsequent works. Here Nietzsche anticipated that German art and music would return Germany to a state where tragedy and the tragic sense of life were able to overcome the prevailing pessimism and nihilism that he so acutely diagnosed. His greatest hopes for the two greatest supposed vanguards of this return, Schopenhauer and Wagner, were not however, to be realized. Rather, Nietzsche's worst fears were confirmed. After the disillusionment of the failure of these "higher men," Nietzsche began the abandonment of the search for an existing anti-nihilistic cultural redeemer and turned his attention inward.

In Nietzsche's opinion, well-suffering was inhibited by the contemporary European Christian culture, a culture that denigrated this suffering through the manipulation of pity, guilt and shame. German philosophy in particular bore much of the blame. "They are all, in the cry and the impatience of pity, in their mortifying hatred of suffering generally, in their almost womanly inability to remain spectators, to let someone suffer" (*BGE*, VI, 2, 202). To this ethos, it is the senselessness, the irrationality, of suffering, that is antithetical to life itself. Thus suffering itself must become rationalized, and in so doing, corrupted. As Nietzsche observed, "As they have hated the irrational, the arbitrary, the uncaused as the cause of incalculable physical suffering. As a result, they negated this element in being-in-itself and posited it as absolute 'rationality' and purposiveness" (*WP*, VIII, 3, 576).

For Nietzsche, well-suffering exists as something alien, something untouchable and out of reach to others. The suffering of the one cannot be comprehended. Indeed, the ability to suffer well, to endow oneself with the sense of the tragic, is among those higher drives that Nietzsche considers culture destroying.

The highest and most robust drives, when they break out passionately and drive the individual far above the average and the fields of herd conscience, destroy the self-confidence of the community, its faith in itself, and it is as if its spine had fractured. Hence just these drives are labeled and derided most. High and self-sustaining spirituality, the will to stand alone, even the strongest reason, are experienced as dangers; everything that heightens an individual above the herd and intimidates the neighbour is thus called evil..." (*BGE*, VI, 2, 201).

However, the suffering of the many can be played upon. Through affirmation of "group" suffering and the denigration of inward suffering arises a curious phenomenon; that of a culturally imposed suffering from which the pitiable draw. Suffering, becomes externally regulated. It is the culture that defines when, where and how and to whom suffering occurs. Such a suffering is closely tied to the prevailing cultural standards; those of rationalization and self-denial in particular. The irrational, inward suffering that is questionable by (existing) cultural and philosophical standards is thus exorcised. A culture of ill suffering is created in the vacuum. The masses are taught to believe that only one type of suffering, external suffering, can have merit, and this consequently shuts them off from authentic, life-affirming distress. Nietzsche's narrative of ill-suffering, and its traits and consequences, is well-mapped out in the following passage,

For every sufferer instinctively seeks a cause for his suffering. More precisely, an agent; still more specifically, a guilty agent who is susceptible to suffering-thus, some living thing upon which he can, on some dubious distinction or other, vent his affects, actually or in effigy: for the venting of his affects represents (*vorstellen*) the greatest attempt on the part of the suffering to win relief, anaesthesia-the drug he cannot help desiring to deaden pain of any kind. This alone, I claim, constitutes the actual physiological cause of resentment, vengefulness...it is to deaden, by means of a more violent emotion of any kind, a tormenting, hidden pain that is becoming unstoppable...for that requires an affect, as hateful an affect as possible, and, in order to excite that, any pretext at all. Someone or other must be held responsible for my feeling ill...this kind of reasoning is common to all the sick, and is indeed more stubbornly held the more the real cause of their feeling ill, the physiological cause, remains in hiding" (*BGE*, VI, 2, 201).

The theme of suffering does not stand alone. It exists side by side with the philosopher's other chief themes, notably *Amor Fati*, *Eternal Recurrence of the Same*, and *Self-Overcoming*. Suffering and the ability to suffer well are

prerequisites for the self-creation that Nietzsche challenges one to undertake in the quest to become fully human. Nietzsche's metaphor of "Become Who You Are" calls for self-overcoming based on strength from within. This theme of overcoming is the ability to be a Yes-sayer in the face of nihilism. The fact that this is an ongoing struggle requiring moment-to-moment engagement with the self leads Nietzsche to the idea of Amor Fati, or love of (one's) fate, and of Eternal Recurrence of the Same. "My recipe for highness in a human being is amor fati: that one wants nothing to be different, not ahead, not behind, not in all eternity. Not merely to shoulder what is necessary, still less hide it...but love it" (*TI*, VI, 3, 4).

To love one's fate reaches beyond mere contentment. It assumes intoxication with life. All joy and all pain are held in highest esteem. Every emotion is felt viscerally. There is no room for the half-hearted; life and all of its tragic consequences must be pursued vigorously. To be a Yes-sayer, to respond in the dramatic affirmative to all of this life, that is the kernel of Amor Fati. A telling example of this is found as Zarathustra pronounces to his supposed "higher-men," in what is perhaps the most famous passage of that text: the Midnight Song, "Have you ever said yes to a single joy? O my friend, then you said yes too to all sadness. All things are bound up, enmeshed, intimate; if ever you wanted one thing twice, if ever you said; you loved the world. Eternal ones, love it eternally and forever; and woe to you too, you say: go, but return! For all joy wants-eternity" (*TZ*, VI, 1, IV, 9-10).

Self-overcoming, the Eternal Recurrence of the Same, and Amor Fati, are most obviously occasions that social institutions cannot participate in. Indeed, even a superficial reading of Nietzsche demonstrates a marked antipathy towards many of the prevailing social institutions as hindering the self-creation he has in mind. These institutions are (in part) considered responsible for the nihilism of the contemporary European scene that Nietzsche so acutely diagnoses. And the German universities in particular come in for a sound thrashing. For example, in talking of the collusion amongst educators and business people, Nietzsche states, "Education would be defined by its supporters as the insight that, through demand and its satisfaction, one becomes temporal through and through but at the same time best acquires all the ways and means of making money as easily as possible...Thus the sole point behind our educational institutions should be to help everyone in such a way that they can use the degree of knowledge and learning of which they are capable for the accumulation of the greatest possible profit" (*SE*, III, 2, 6). And again, in *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche states, "What the "higher schools" in Germany really achieve is a sadistic training, designed to prepare volumes of young men, with as little loss of time as possible, to become usable, abusable, in service of the state" (*TI*, VI, 3, 5).

One would be tempted to say that educational institutions are at best unhelpful in the promulgation of self-creation and an impediment at worst. Indeed, Nietzsche heaps many more abuses upon the educational systems of Germany, and outright includes them as participatory in the decline of European culture and the advent of nihilism. Educational institutions, with their herd-fostering capacities, are foremost among those that Nietzsche charges with advocating and inculcating ill suffering. And, *a fortiori*, a pedagogy that seeks to “understand” suffering, or devise strategies to deal with suffering within the context of the classroom, would also be guilty as charged. “What constitutes the decline of German culture? That “higher education” is no longer a privilege—the democratization of culture, which has become “common-“ too common...In contemporary Germany no one is now free to give his children an aristocratic education: our “higher schools” are all set up for the most unassuming rabble, with their teachers, curricula, and pedagogy” (*TI*, VI, 3, 5). It seems that, considering the impossibility of social institutions as having a positive role to play in the task of self-overcoming, and the tendency of institutions to foment ill suffering, educational institutions in general, and pedagogy in particular, must leave the issue of suffering well-enough alone. However, I shall argue in part 3 that this cannot, for Nietzsche or for us, be the case.

SUFFERING AND TEACHING

I find two strong arguments as to why Nietzsche’s talk of well- and ill suffering cannot be seen as hostile to pedagogies that might seek to lessen suffering. The first is that Nietzsche’s themes of Self-overcoming, Eternal Recurrence of the Same, Amor Fati, and, *a fortiori*, well- and ill-suffering, are nowhere in Nietzsche’s writings suggested for development or emulation by schoolchildren. This leaves adults as the only ones capable of individual self-transformation, presumably because schoolchildren have not had the opportunity to develop the rigorous insight and cultural knowledge that are surely requisite for this task. One must feel what one is struggling against.

But, one may argue, there are specific passages in Nietzsche that do deal with the education of schoolchildren. What might those passages have to say with respect to this issue? Is it still conceivable that, though Nietzsche says nothing directly relating the education of schoolchildren to suffering, he nonetheless insists upon education as not fomenting the ill-suffering so vilified in his many works? Here I suggest that what Nietzsche demands of schools is that they supply a “serious” education, one that promotes pedagogy that presumably “toughens” schoolchildren, through rigorous discipline and a severe course of (cultural) study. But I believe Nietzsche is agnostic on the specific issue of suffering and pedagogy. Let us see why.

The admission that Nietzsche intended the figure of Schopenhauer, and the values that Schopenhauer displayed, to educate as many that could understand and embrace the man and the message, is made. I do not challenge this. Nietzsche was clearly, at this early stage of his writing, of the mind that such a cultural education could take place, and that men (many men) might be able to succeed in this education and lead the culture toward a new ideal; one reminiscent of the pre-Socratic Greeks. So, for example, Nietzsche states, “But I have attempted to portray my experience of Schopenhauer as an educator, and it is thus not nearly enough for me to paint, and to paint crudely, that ideal man who, as his Platonic ideal, holds sway around him. The most difficult task is ever-present; to say how a new circle of duties may be developed from this ideal and how one can work towards so ambitious a goal through praxis—in short, to show that this ideal educates” (*SE*, III, I, 6). Nevertheless, statements such as these refer to adults, not children. It is false to conclude that they can be used to buttress an argument for Nietzsche's desire to have schoolchildren educated in a thoroughgoing Schopenhauerian manner. And nowhere in the text does Nietzsche suggest it should. Presumably, one would need some textual evidence of this sort to support this claim. When Nietzsche does speak of schooling in this text, his words are more critical than constructive. “Here [in the contemporary educational system] there is malice towards any kind of education that isolates, that proposes goals that go beyond money and the accumulation of capital, that takes a long time; such more important forms of education are usually denigrated as ‘subtle egoism’ and ‘immoral cultural Epicureanism’” (*SE*, III, 1, 6). This suggests that the education that Nietzsche has in mind is one that is concentrated on intensity and seriousness, as well as the development of a “refined” individual, only. And in *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche reserves his criticism of education for the universities, the “higher schools,” as he calls them. There is no mention of elementary or secondary schools in this text.

As well, the challenge of creating higher men through cultural education, an education that would in turn somehow “uplift” humankind, was set aside with the realization that it could not be accomplished. And it is in the fourth book of *Thus Spake Zarathustra* that this realization occurs. I therefore disagree with interpreters, such as Richard Schacht, who suggest that the goal of finding and cultivating “higher men” was maintained throughout Nietzsche's writings, and in particular, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. Schacht puts it this way, “But who, or what, is the educator here? Neither Zarathustra nor even Nietzsche himself at the outset, for both themselves had much to learn. The real educator, I suggest, is neither of them, but rather the work itself. What Nietzsche wrought in this work is the means of a remarkable possible educational experience and transformation that may reach into and affect the fundamental character of our humanity....” (1998, 323). Schacht continues, “Zarathustra is not only the presentation of an educator who attempts to educate by free-spirited and

wholesomely naturalistic enlightenment and counsel, doing a good deal of vivid debunking and reinterpreting and re-evaluating along the way...It is also the presentation of the educator's education-and further the vehicle and record of its author's education" (1998, 324). And further, "We are not taught what to think, or how to live, but we are shown the prospect of a possible humanity and the way toward a manner of life that Nietzsche believes can sustain us beyond all disillusionment" (1998, 324).

There is no doubt that the work itself is educative. But to what end? Richard Schacht's reading of *Zarathustra* misses the central challenge of the fourth book of *Zarathustra*: what to do when the "higher men" that Zarathustra so gladly attempted to draw out, fail him. Let me return to book Four briefly. The dawn has broken and Zarathustra is awake. The higher men are sleeping soundly in his cave, after a night of drunkenness. Zarathustra has sung his "Midnight Song" to them the evening before. Zarathustra exclaims, "Alas, they still sleep, these higher men, while I am awake: *these* are not my sought-after companions" (*TZ*, VI, 1, 12). Zarathustra's lion roars and heads toward the cave, prompting the higher men to quickly flee. Zarathustra cries at the sight of this. And then, in a moment of self-composure, declares, "Pity! Pity for the higher man!"...Well then, that is enough of that! My suffering and my pity for suffering-what does it matter? Am I concerned with *happiness*? I am concerned with my goals" (*TZ*, VI, 1, 13). I draw two conclusions from this passage. First, that Zarathustra has recognized within himself, the tendency to ill-suffering. Second, and most important, Zarathustra realizes that these higher men cannot succeed at the challenge posed to them. Zarathustra's pedagogy has failed. And in this moment of failure, of pity, he realizes that he can only educate himself. Schacht's portrayal of Nietzsche's Zarathustra as somehow educating us beyond the example of his failure, misses the central message that humanity and the way of life Nietzsche recommends cannot be gained through pedagogy: Zarathustra tried and failed at this. Humanity can only be improved one person at a time, and this education resides only within. This in itself seems to render the fear of cultural intrusion on self-affirmation, or indeed, any pedagogical maneuver from without, unnecessary.

The second argument as to why Nietzsche's talk of well- and ill-suffering cannot be seen as hostile to pedagogies that might seek to lessen or ameliorate it follows from the first. If, as Nietzsche suggests in the forth book of *Zarathustra*, self-overcoming and the improvement of humanity can only occur from within, then the task seems to be a private one. Suffering, as Nietzsche suggests, is (and ought to remain) a private act. In the end, one chooses how one wishes to suffer. Despite the imposition of ill-suffering borne of the "higher schools," the act of well-suffering, in contrast, is borne of the activity arising from the choice of Yes-saying. The claim here is that the task of well-suffering is of a piece with what Richard Rorty has called private self-creation.

Nietzsche, according to Rorty, has helped us to see that “The final victory of poetry in its ancient quarrel with philosophy—the final victory of metaphors of self-creation over metaphors of discovery—would consist in our becoming reconciled to the thought that this is the only sort of power over the world which we can hope to have” (1989, 40). But Nietzsche, Rorty argues, attempts to empower the poet with divine features, thus inverting the Platonic estimation of divinity through access to the Forms with that of self-creation. Rorty does not think that there can be fully Nietzschean lives, in the sense of a private self-creating individual that is also at once a public figure and conflating the two lives. For Rorty suspects that this (despite the passage in the Fourth book of *Zarathustra*, already alluded to) is one of Nietzsche’s goals.

Rorty calls the attempts of Nietzsche (and Heidegger) to poeticize the route to the divine, “ironist theory” (1989, 96-97). For Rorty, the problem with ironist theory is that it attempted the same feat as metaphysics, the feat of trying to “bring together our private and our public lives by showing us that self-discovery and political utility could be united” (1989, 120). Rorty thinks this an impossible feat. He argues, forcefully, that, “Colligation and redescription of the little things that are important to one—even if those little things are philosophy books—will not result in an understanding of anything larger than oneself, anything like “Europe” or “history.” We should stop trying to combine self-creation and politics, especially if we are liberals” (1989, 120).

Rorty is suspicious that Nietzsche wants to collapse the distinction between public and private; a distinction he deems necessary for the well-functioning of a liberal society. He sees the sort of self-creation that Nietzsche proffers as a species of divinization and responds by placing it in a realm all of its own and away from the public. Again, in taking into consideration the passages earlier quoted from *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Rorty’s reading of Nietzsche’s task is suspect. At the very least, there seems a profound ambivalence on the part of Nietzsche, as to what Zarathustra the teacher was to do: was he to serve as a leader to other, “higher” men through his pronouncements, thus provoking Rorty’s suspicions that the public and the private may be collapsed? Or was he to turn inward, and by turning away from others, serve as a pedagogical exemplar of how not to go about self-overcoming? The question that Rorty raises; the question of whether such manifestly poetic practices as self-overcoming should be encouraged in the schools is answered to Rorty’s satisfaction only when the reading of Nietzsche as unsupportive of the schools as having a role in private, self-creation, is maintained.

On this reading of Nietzsche, the question of the appropriateness of teaching for well-suffering has been raised. The question, after all this, remains: what is the appropriate role for the teacher given that students, in the aftermath of a tragic event such as that of 9/11, do suffer? As I have shown, Nietzsche

does include characteristics of ill-suffering, such as pity, fear, and hatred of others. Presumably, these artifacts of *ressentiment* are clues that ill-suffering is undergone. But it remains unclear what teachers, on Nietzsche's account, are to do with these, inasmuch as Nietzsche does not think it the role of teachers to intrude, beyond providing for a rigorous (and presumably aristocratic) education. Though their certainly seems no impulsion to promote the traits of ill-suffering, there seems little that Nietzsche offers in the way of challenging them, beyond the rather obvious insistence of teaching that which is culturally highest and strongest-virtues such as courage and heroism. In the final analysis, Nietzsche's talk of well-and ill-suffering is at the very least unhelpful to a teacher who would seek some way of coming to terms with her students' reactions in the aftermath of such tragedies as 9/11.

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Birth of Tragedy (*BT*) III:I

Schopenhauer as Educator (*SE*) III:I 2

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