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<td>In our efforts to get God off the hook, have we ceded too much ground?</td>
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Part I--Introduction

The problem of evil is the philosophical mystery of why an omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent God would allow so much evil in the world. Throughout the history of the western philosophical tradition, various thinkers have invoked it as an argument against the existence of God. Although it is a perennial philosophical question, perhaps its most famous statement comes from David Hume’s *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. Hume speaks through the mouth of the character Philo:

“(God’s) power, we allow, is infinite; whatever he wills is executed: But neither man nor any other animal is happy; therefore, he does not will their happiness. His wisdom is infinite; He is never mistaken is choosing the means to any end; but the course of nature tends not to human or animal felicity: Therefore, it is not established for that purpose. Through the whole compass of human knowledge there are no inferences more certain an infallible than these.

Epicurus’ old questions are yet unanswered.

Is he willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is impotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Whence then is evil?”

Hume’s statement of the problem of evil has been interpreted in at least two ways, as a logical problem and as an evidential problem. The logical problem makes the claim that in order to believe in the orthodox conception of God, one must actually affirm a logically contradictory set of statements. However, it is now generally accepted by the philosophical community that this claim has been refuted, perhaps due most famously to a series of essays by Calvinist philosopher Alvin Plantinga.

The prevalent understanding of the problem today is as an evidential problem. In this understanding, certain arguments and empirical observations about the world are seen as evidence for God’s existence, while other arguments and empirical observations about the world, such as the existence of evil, are seen as evidence against God’s existence. The competing sets of evidence are weighed in order to
wager a guess as to whether God exists. Of course, comparing the sets of evidence presupposes that they can be quantified. Furthermore, a true assessment of quantity in either case, if it is even possible according to the nature of the thing, would require some sort of omniscience. Consequently, the results of such attempts to investigate the possibility of God’s existence in this manner have been inconclusive.

Interestingly, one of the suppositions made in virtually any attempt to argue against the existence of God through evidence is that pain is always and in all circumstances evil and meaningless. Of course, this is a supposition shared with utilitarian ethics. Utilitarianism holds that only absolute good is happiness, and that happiness is equivalent with pleasure. Conversely, the only absolute evil is pain. As one of the school’s founders, John Stuart Mill, states:

> The creed which accepts as the foundation of morals, Utility, or the Greatest Happiness Principle, holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, and wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain, and the privation of pleasure. . . . Pleasure, and freedom from pain, are the only things desirable as ends; and all desirable things . . . are desirable either for the pleasure inherent in themselves, or as means to the promotion of pleasure and the prevention of pain.¹²

As one can see, given this sort of worldview, any instance of pain could be counted as evidence against the benevolence of the Creator. In modern academia and culture, most especially in the English-speaking world, utilitarian orthodoxy has become so entrenched that it is often taken for granted. Consequently, the possibility of the meaningfulness of pain is not frequently addressed.

Christians have responded to the arguments from the problem of pain against God’s existence in an incredible variety of ways. One strategy, with roots deep in the philosophy of Plato and Augustine, is to stress the fact that evil is, metaphysically
speaking, non-existent. It is merely a privation of the good, that is, the absence of a
good that should be present in a given subject. For example, blindness is evil, as it is
the absence of a good, sight, that should be present in a given subject, the eye. On the
contrary, lack of sight in a rock is not evil, as sight is not a good inherent to rocks. So,
as devastating as the effect of evil in our lives may be, it ultimately does not exist. As it
does not exist, it cannot be said to have any meaning or purpose, any part in God’s
plan. In fact, it would be metaphysically impossible for God to will evil, as he is the
fullness of being and hence could not will something lacking in its proper being.

This solution addresses the problem of evil in a variety of ways. Firstly, one
could state that the premise “evil exists” is not true in the proper sense. However this
addresses the logical rather than evidential problem. More to the point, as God cannot
be said to be responsible for the evil in this world, it cannot be counted as evidence
against Him. Only lesser, created beings endowed with free will, whether human or
angelic, can properly cause evil. If there are to be creatures with free will, evil must
always remain a possibility.

I think there is much that is correct and beneficial in such arguments against the
evidential problem of evil in this tradition. However, they inevitably tend to count pain as
a part of evil. I argue that, firstly, pain is not always evil. Pain has a didactic element
and punitive element that even God himself could reasonably be said to will. Each of
these has both natural and supernatural applications. Of course, in the paradisal world,
that is, the world prior to the fall, punishment would not be necessary, and learning
would perhaps not be painful. However, both are necessary in our fallen state, and
good insofar as they help to bring about man’s perfection
Secondly, deeply rooted in the tradition of Christianity is the idea of “redemptive
suffering.” Through suffering and death Christ brought about the salvation of the world;
because we are united to Him in the body of Christ, our suffering can share in that
redemption and bring about the perfection of ourselves and others. Following Hans Urs
von Balthasar, I will argue that Christ’s death follows a “positive death” within God
Himself, insofar as the members of the trinity give themselves totally to each other from
all eternity.

None of these considerations is a complete explanation of the existence of evil.
However, I think they are necessary if we are to have a satisfying answer. Additionally,
they counteract the utilitarian belief that all suffering is evil and meaningless, a belief
that I think some Christians have accepted too quickly.

Part II--Statement of the Evidential Problem of Evil

Perhaps the most famous statement of the evidential problem to evil comes from
William Rowe. Rowe states the argument thusly:

1. There exist instances of intense suffering which an omnipotent, omniscient being could have
   prevented without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.

2. An omniscient, wholly good being would prevent the occurrence of any intense suffering it could,
   unless it could not do so without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally
   bad or worse.

3. There does not exist an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being.iii

He then proceeds to consider possible objections to premise (2). He examines
the example of S1, “an instance of intense human or animal suffering which an
omniscient, wholly good being could prevent.”iv He considers what could be a
necessary condition for omnipotent, omnibenevolent being allowing S1. He comes up
with what he thinks is an exhaustive list of possible necessary (although not necessarily sufficient) conditions:

“Either:

1. There is some greater good, G, such that G is obtainable by OG only if OG permits S1.

2. There is some greater good, G, such that G is obtainable by OG only if OG permits either S1 or some equally bad or worse.

3. S1 is such that it is preventable by OG only if OG permits some evil equally bad or worse.”

Given such a list, he thinks that all, theists and non-theists alike, will agree on premise (2). Consequently, he thinks the only way to counter the argument would be to attack premise (1). As Rowe admits, it is impossible to prove (1) without being omniscient. However, every day observations seem to make it reasonable to believe (1), even if it is improvable. He gives the examples of a fawn burned to death in a forest fire as evidence for it. Although we cannot prove that the fawn’s burning to death does not bring about a greater good or prevent a greater or equal evil, it certainly does not seem reasonable to think so. Consequently, Rowe suggests that the best move for a theist to make in light of the evidential problem is a piece of logical trickery called the G.E. Moore shift, which results in one having to accept that premise (1) as true more or less as a matter of faith. However, I do not think it is necessary for the theist to argue against the almost certainly true premise (1), or to invoke the silly G.E. Moore Shift. Although I certainly cannot speak for all theists, I can safely say that those coming from the Christian tradition are not required to, and in fact should not, accept premise (2).
Part III—One Christian Response

Specifically, the difficulty with premise (2) is that it requires God to be personally responsible not only for the ultimate outcome of creation, but also for every individual event of history. This makes no room for the rightful autonomy of nature revealed by modern natural science, or human angelic freedom. It makes God a micro-manager.

As David Bentley Hart states in his impeccable prose:

“It is strange enough that the skeptic demands of Christians that they account for evil—physical and moral—in a way that draws a perfectly immediate connection between the will of God for his creatures and the conditions of earthly life; it is stranger still when Christians attempt to oblige. For the scriptural understanding of evil has always been more radical and "fantastic" than anything that can be fitted within a deistic theodicy or, for that matter, within any philosophical indictment of such a theodicy. Christian thought, from the outset, denies that (in themselves) suffering, death and evil have any value or spiritual meaning at all. It claims that they are cosmic contingencies, ontological shadows, intrinsically devoid of substance or purpose, however much God may—under the conditions of a fallen order—make them the occasions for accomplishing his good ends.”

The previous passage is taken from Hart’s recent work *The Doors to the Sea: Where was God in the Tsunami?*, written in response to the 2005 tsunami in the Indian Ocean. This work comes from the viewpoint of the Augustinian tradition discussed above, and I believe it is a powerful response to the evidential problem. However, I will argue that in his desire to emphasize God’s innocence in the face of suffering, Hart over-corrects the problem. He blurs the distinction between hurt and harm, and underemphasizes the importance of redemptive suffering.

Hart begins by rightly pointing out that most people who argue against God on the basis of evil or suffering do not attack the authentically Christian God revealed by scripture. Rather, they attack either an overly anthropomorphized God, or some sort of optimistic God such as Leibnitz has. The anthropomorphized God sees and judges exactly as man does, and thus is in a stark contrast with the transcendent God of
Christian revelation. Leibnitz argued that the world as it is is the “best of all possible worlds,” while the Bible reveals that the world is fallen. Hume’s famous arguments, referred to in the introduction, attack the deistic watchmaker God of Paley. Hume rightly pointed out that, given this conception of the divine, God quickly begins to look like a rather shoddy craftsman. As Hart reminds us, Christian revelation clearly states that evil is not a part of the order of the world as God intended it. On the contrary, the world currently exists in a fallen state that is only a shadow of what God originally intended. Following the Augustinian tradition, evil is, properly speaking, nothing. God is the fullness of being. Our world exists somewhere in between the two, between the fullness of what God intended it to be, and the nothingness out of which it was called. The cause of the fall is, of course, the choices of humans. God takes the freedom of man so seriously that he has allowed us to rebel against Him and cast ourselves into the fallen state. To some, human freedom might seem not worth the risk. Hart invokes the famous and haunting character of Ivan Karamazov as an example of such an individual. However, God alone is omniscient, so He is the best to judge.

To elaborate on Hart, I will add that, in addition to the freedom of man, there is an analogous autonomy of nature. Aristotle once argued that there is an essential similarity between nature and art, as art is part of the manifesting of man’s essence, and man is just one instance of the workings of nature. This is the warrant for drawing an analogy between the two, in this case with respect to freedom. So, as God does not determine the actions of man, he is not the immediate cause of every action of nature. This is reflected in that Genesis states that “the earth produced vegetation.” The
earth, rather than God, is the agent. This verse gives testimony to the fact that God has given nature an independent share in His power.\textsuperscript{viii}

Hart also reminds us of the Christian tradition that man is the horizon between the material and spiritual worlds; thus in his choices he speaks for all of creation. As humanity is fallen, creation is fallen as well. Finally, the New Testament makes clear that Satan and his angels rule the fallen world. Although God’s plan will ultimately be victorious, we still live in the shadowy fallen world until that day comes.

Hart also clarifies the concept of providence. Providence means that God will accomplish His ultimate ends, not that He dictates every little thing that happens. The latter is not providence at all but determinism.\textsuperscript{ix} In fact, God cannot will all that happens because He is metaphysically incapable of willing evil. God is perfectly free, in the classical understanding of the word freedom. In this sense, freedom is not the ability to choose arbitrarily according to one’s preferences, but the ability to fulfill one’s nature without impediment. Man is prevented from fulfilling his nature perhaps by external circumstances in some cases, but above all by his own vices. Evil will always run contrary to nature, as it is precisely a privation of good proper to a given nature. God, on the other hand, as He is perfectly free, always fulfill His nature, which is pure goodness.

Hart points out that this understanding of God has important ramifications for our understanding of the cross. God does not need evil, or specifically the fall of man, in order to redeem man. In undertaking the cross, God did not make evil part of His plan, or submit Himself to some sort of metaphysical necessity. Rather, He willingly
subverted death’s power. By uniting His pure being to death, He made it the pathway to new life.

Hart also argues that God cannot really be affected by evil. He is impassible because He is pure being. Hence, the sufferings of the cross affect only Christ’s humanity, not His divinity.

In these clarifications of Christian revelation, we see an important response to Rowe’s premise (2) that an omniscient, wholly good being would prevent the occurrence of any intense suffering it could, unless it could not do so without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse. Because God respects the freedom of man and the autonomy of nature, He does not prevent every instance of evil. Because He is metaphysically incapable of willing evil, He is not responsible for the various ills of the universe. Rather, the freedom of man and angels who have turned away from God have plunged the universe into its current state.

Hart ends his work with the reflection that when faced with enormous human suffering, an attempt to find some deeper meaning seems only callous and inappropriate. Hart takes this intuition to be a guide to the truth of the matter, that suffering is ultimately meaningless, wrong, and contrary to God’s plan. The best thing one can do in the light of catastrophic sorrow is to remember that in the world to come, all will be better. He sums up his position again in that stunning prose that deserves to be quoted for its own sake:

“We can rejoice that we are saved not through the immanent mechanisms of history and nature, but by grace; that God will not unite all of history’s many strands in one great synthesis, but will judge much of history false and damnable; that He will not simply reveal the sublime logic of fallen nature, but will strike off the fetters in which creation languishes; and that, rather than
showing us how the tears of a small girl suffering in the dark were necessary for the building of the Kingdom, He will instead raise her up and wipe away all tears from her eyes—and there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying, not any more pain, for the former things will have passed away, and He that sits on the throne will say, “Behold, I make all things new.”

Part IV—An Addition to Hart

Now, much of Hart’s thesis I cannot dispute. Evil is in no way necessary for God to unite Himself to His creatures. Any attempt to ontologize evil is incoherent, as is any attempt to say that God actively wills evil. The world is indeed fallen, and evil comes from the bad choices of humanity and angels. God does not manipulate every single event in history. In the world to come, evil will be no more. God will heal all, and all creation will be perfectly free. However, I do not think this explanation of evil goes far enough to be satisfying. As we see in the Hart’s first quote, he recognizes that “God may—under the conditions of a fallen order—make (instances of suffering) the occasions for accomplishing his good ends.” I want—with the utmost caution and humility before such mysteries—to explore some of the possibilities of ways is which suffering may be used for good.

Firstly, a clarification: although suffering is by definition the subjective experience of evil, it seems that, in our fragmented world, there is a distinction between “hurt” and “harm.” In other words, some things may harm us without our realization that they are in fact bad for us. For example, drinking to excess can be very pleasurable, but it can damage the body in ways that one does not realize—at least not initially. On the other hand, sometimes things that hurt are in fact good for a person. Examples of this kind come forth in training to develop any kind of virtue. Athletic training may make the body ache, but this does not mean that this pain is really evil, at least not in any profound sense. Perhaps in the preternatural world, in which mind was in perfect
control of matter, our muscles would not become sore. But even though they do in the present state of things, no one holds this to be really evil. Thus, hurt and harm seem to be at least logically distinct. I think it is important to maintain this distinction while doing philosophy. In examining arguments, we must be careful not to blanket all suffering as necessarily evil.

Now, let us consider some ways in which pain might actually be good—or, at minimum, ways in which suffering might be used for good. At least three aspects come to my mind—the punitive, didactic and redemptive aspects. I do not hold this list to be exhaustive. Additionally, I do not believe each of the three is entirely exclusive of the others. On the contrary, they seem to bleed over, one into the others. Finally, I think each has applications both naturally and supernaturally, which can be examined as distinct, but are not ultimately separate.

Part V—The Punitive Aspect of Pain

The punitive element of suffering has deep roots in the Old Testament. Adam and Eve are punished for eating the apple by being expelled from the garden. Eve is condemned to suffer in childbirth, and Adam is sentenced to toil hard in pain in order to make the land produce food. The Israelites must wander in the desert for forty years before entering the Promised Land as punishment for their disobedience. David and Bathsheba’s first child, conceived in adultery, dies. The examples could be multiplied. Thomas Aquinas states that God is the cause of the evil of punishment. As emphasized above, God cannot actively will evil, and thus He does not will evil and
death for their own sake. However, He does will justice, which includes death and corruption in some instances. Therefore, God wills the evil of penalty.

We can see the meaning of pain played out in the lives of individual Christians, especially the saints. St. Augustine is a fantastic example, as he is both a saint who recorded his autobiography, and a philosopher who reflected on the meaning of the events of his life. Even though he strongly advocates the idea that evil is essentially nothing, he still emphasizes the didactic and punitive elements of suffering. That evil (including suffering) is metaphysically nothing does not entail that it is morally nothing. For example, he analyzes his mother, St. Monica’s, grief at his departure for Rome, and God’s response to her. He states, “she was frantic with grief and filled Your ears with her moaning and complaints because You seemed to treat her tears so lightly, when in fact You were using my own desires to snatch me away for the healing of those desires, and were justly punishing her own too earthly affection for me with the scourge of grief.” Augustine sees that, although God is not making him leave Carthage for Rome, He uses this event to punish Monica justly for loving her son disproportionally.

Of course, punishment is not a sufficient explanation of suffering, nor does it apply to all instances of suffering. As Hart points out, to say all suffering is punishment amounts to little more than a theory of karma. Suffering only has meaning as punishment when it is connected with a fault. In the Old Testament, the Book of Job makes this point emphatically. Job is a just man, and his punishments come not as a penalty for wrongdoing, but as a test of his righteousness. The Book of Job does not contradict the Biblical teaching that suffering can be punishment, but it does show that this is not a totalizing explanation.
Part VI—The Didactic Aspect of Pain

This brings us to the next aspect of meaningful suffering, the didactic aspect. In the example of God’s action in the life of St. Monica, we can already see the sense in which punishment is simultaneously instructive. In allowing her to suffer, God not only punishes her for her disproportional attachment to Augustine, but also teaches her to not be so attached. He weans her off her earthly affections, so to speak.

Three traditional reasons for punishment are retribution, correction, and deterrence. The retributive aspect is notoriously difficult to justify if taken as the only reason for punishment. For example, how does a murderer’s serving time in prison make right what they did? It cannot undo or repay their wrongdoing. Of course, this becomes even more complicated in the case of man’s trespasses against God. Our sins cannot really hurt Him, as He is impassible, yet they are still wrong, and still hurt others and ourselves. Certainly, we cannot pay Him back, as we would if, for example, we crashed a friend’s car. So even in punishment, it seems there must be something more at work than just retribution. Thus the retributive aspect, which flows from God’s perfect justice, gives way to the corrective, which flows from God’s mercy. This is fitting, as of course God’s justice and mercy are really one. We can see this idea in the image of a parent disciplining a child. When a child misbehaves, the parent does not punish him primarily out of a desire for justice, to give him what he deserves so to speak, but in order to make the child a better person.

As John Paul II notes, even in the Old Testament, we start to see suffering as not merely punitive, but didactic as well. God’s punishments also show His mercy, as they
invite the people to conversion. John Paul states, “Punishment had a meaning not only because it serves to repay the objective evil of the transgression with another evil, but first and foremost because it creates the possibility of rebuilding goodness in the one who suffers.” For example, the Israelites were subjected to various captors and exiled as punishment for their sins. But God offers mercy and new life to the people. He speaks through the prophet Ezekiel:

For I shall take you from among the nations and gather you back from all the countries, and bring you home to your own country. I shall pour clean water over you and you will be cleansed; I shall cleanse you of all your filth and of all your foul idols. I shall give you a new heart, and put a new spirit in you; I shall remove the heart of stone from your bodies and give you a heart of flesh instead. I shall put my spirit in you, and make you keep my laws, and respect and practice my judgments. You will live in the country which I gave your ancestors. You will be my people and I shall be your God. Then you will remember your evil conduct and actions. You will loathe yourselves for your guilt and your loathsome practices.

God states that He will take away their suffering and punishment by restoring them to their native land. However, a necessary part of this restoration is that the people will learn to have a “new heart.” The reference to the “heart” and “spirit” shows that it is not merely the external actions that must change; the people must truly learn virtue. Consequently, as the passage state, they will not only realize the folly of their old ways, but also come to hate their sinful actions.

Also, we can look again to the life of St. Augustine for examples, this time for instances of God using pain to teach. For example, Augustine describes God’s role in his life as an adolescent, during which he indulged in many pleasures of the flesh. He states, “You were always by me, mercifully hard upon me, and besprinkling all my illicit pleasures with certain elements of bitterness, to draw me to seek for pleasures in which no bitterness should be. And where was I to find such pleasures save in You O Lord,
You who use sorrow to teach, and wound us to heal, and kill us lest we die to You.\textsuperscript{xx}

Augustine states that God was “mercifully hard” upon him. This phrase may at first appear like a contradiction, as mercy generally implies a lessening of a punishment. However, God is merciful in this instance in that, by punishing Augustine severely, He encourages him to seek what is truly good for him, and consequently to avoid far greater suffering in the future.

I think we can make a further distinction within the didactic element of suffering. I think there are at least two ways in which suffering can be didactic, although, like the different aspects of pain, they are not totally mutually exclusive. The first kind of didactic suffering is that which teaches us to distinguish good and evil, that teaches us that we are doing wrong. As Diotima pointed out in Plato’s \textit{Symposium}, it is not only the gods but the ignorant as well who have no use for philosophy. This pain makes us realize our folly, and thus calls us to repentance. This use of pain is epitomized by the second quote from Augustine, in which he described how God made his hedonic life unpleasant in order to show him that it was not truly good. If the first kind of didactic pain kind teaches us to know good and evil, the second teaches us to \textit{love} good and \textit{hate} evil—to develop virtue. This is a practical knowledge, while the first is theoretical. I think the meaning of suffering applies to any kind of training—intellectual, athletic, moral, etc. It seems that in any sort of serious commitment towards achieving a goal, there will be some sort of suffering, or at minimum, self-denial. For example, a runner will certainly experience bodily pain while training for a marathon. However, as mentioned previously, no one would seriously call this pain evil. Of course, the concept of training and virtue has supernatural application to the spiritual life. Most literally, this
finds application in ascetic practice. However, it has wider application to any efforts to grow in moral virtue.

As C.S. Lewis argues in *The Problem of Pain*, if God truly loves us, He will aim at our good even if it is painful. If we are less than perfect (and this premise approaches self-evidence), the best thing for us will involve us changing. The proper good of a creature is, ultimately, to surrender to the will of the creator. This takes its basis from the Trinitarian life of God Himself, in which the Father gives Himself to the Son, and the Son back to the Father, and both to the Spirit (more on this later). Fallen man is in a state of rebellion against God. Every time we sin, we choose our own will over God’s.

Learning how to surrender our self-will is always painful, even in a certain sense a death. Lewis, in his brilliance for finding appropriate analogies and illustrations, points to the example of children. When children are being reared, their will must be broken. They must learn to overcome their own immediate desires for the sake of a greater good, such as the proper functioning of the household. Generally, as their parents are aware of the good they are trying to be accomplished at a given moment, a child must learn to cede to the will of the parent, whether or not he understands the reason for the parent’s command. Hence we speak of the “terrible twos,” when first death-throws of the self-will manifest violently.

In order for the giving up of self-will to become a habit, one must train. Indeed, all virtue is a good habit established by training. As previously mentioned, the most literal form of this training in the Christ tradition is ascetic practice. Hart himself waxes eloquently on this topic. As a good Orthodox, he is committed to the importance of asceticism in the spiritual life. Thus, at least in this aspect, he recognizes the possible
value of suffering. For example, at the end of “Christ and Nothing,” he suggests a recommitment to the ascetic tradition as an antidote to the nihilism of the modern age:

“We need to recognize, in the light of this history, that (the commandment to love God above all and have no other gods) is a hard discipline: it destroys, it breaks in order to bind; like a cautery, it wounds in order to heal; and now, in order to heal the damage it has in part inflicted, it must be applied again. In practical terms, I suspect his means that Christians must make an ever more concerted effort to recall and recover the wisdom and centrality of the ascetic tradition….Christian asceticism is not, after all, a cruel disfigurement of the will, contaminated by the world-weariness or malice towards creation that one can justly ascribe to many other varieties of religious detachment. It is, rather, the cultivation of the pure heart and pure eye, which allows one to receive the world, and rejoice in it, not as a possession of the will or an occasion for the exercise of power, but as the good gift of God. It is, so to speak, a kind of “Marian” waiting upon the Word of God and its fruitfulness….Christian asceticism is the practice of love, what Maximus the Confessor calls learning to see the logos of each thing within the Logos of God, and it eventuates most properly in the grateful reverence of a Bonaventure or the lyrical ecstasy of a Thomas Traherne.”

Hart states that ascetic practice allows one to enjoy the world without seeking to control it. Rather, one waits upon God and His action—one surrenders the self-will. The reference to the “Marian” aspect of course refers to a certain theological type, but it also analogously applies to the Mother of God herself, who embodies that which she represents. Mary gave her fiat at the annunciation, and thus renounced any plans of her own in order to fulfill the will of God. This is precisely the sort of surrendering of the will to which Lewis referred. The ascetic practice that, according to Hart, allows one to achieve this posture before reality consists in undertaking certain privations, whether of food, sleep or some other comfort. The privation of something proper to man is what, in the Platonic tradition, we would call evil. Certainly, it will result in some sort of pain for man, yet this pain is fruitful for learning to do God’s will.

Interestingly, scripture even says that Christ “learnt obedience, Son though he was, through his sufferings.” I will elaborate on this at a later point.
Another way in which pain is didactic is in the undertaking of penance. Penance is the practice of certain acts to atone for sins. It is like a punishment, with the essential differences being that punishment comes from outside and goes against one’s will, while penance is voluntarily undertaken by the one who is at fault. Frequently, similar acts are used in both penance and acetic practice, such as fasting. As John Paul II states, “the purpose of penance is to overcome evil, which under different forms lies dormant in man. Its purpose is also to strengthen goodness both in man himself and his relationships with others and especially with God.” xxvi Again, we see how pain can teach man to be truly good. Undertaking certain privations can actually help us rid ourselves of evil habits and inclinations.

St. Paul, an extraordinarily long-suffering man, also speaks of the way in which suffering can build virtue. For example, he states, “we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us.” xxvii Here, pain is specifically linked to the theological virtue of hope. Enduring trials allows one to build greater hope in the life of the world to come.

Not only can suffering build virtue, it can also provide the opportunity to display supererogatory virtue. Of course, in the Christian tradition, this reaches its most perfect form in martyrdom. However, even outside of the faith, heroic virtue shows itself most clearly in the face of affliction. As John Paul II says, “(the glory of the martyrs) must be acknowledged in many who, at times, even without belief in Christ, suffer and give their lives for the truth and for a just cause. In the sufferings of all of these people the great
dignity of man is strikingly confirmed.

Man’s ability to put the good itself before his own personal good is what makes him man and not merely animal; the ability to do so even in the face of great suffering shows the nobility to which man can rise.

Part VII—The Redemptive Aspect of Suffering

The third aspect of value in suffering is specific to the Christian tradition, although it is certainly possible to find natural analogues as well. This is the concept of redemptive suffering, which takes as its origins the cross of Christ.

There is a long tradition through the Christian saints that Christ is united in a special way with those who suffer. At first, this seems counterintuitive. As Hart would point out, God does not need evil, including suffering, in order to unite Himself to His creatures and manifest His glory through them. And of course, this is true. However, God’s use of pain as a means of drawing men to Him seems appropriate given two other considerations: the fall of man, and human freedom. Because of original sin, man is estranged from God. This estrangement is a result of man’s own choice. If God were to force man to reunite with Him would be to falsely depict the relationship, or to do violence to man’s free will. God can do various things to attract man back to Him. For example, as previously discussed, God can use pain to show man the error of his ways, or to remind him that earthly goods will never make him entirely happy. Certainly, He can speak to man in other ways—through beauty, scripture, other people, spiritual experiences; through a little boy crying “Tolle, Lege!” However, man must ultimately choose to come to God of his own will. Christ has restored the break between God and humanity, but each individual must still choose to
join Him. To suffer for God is to do something to open oneself up to Him in a special way. “To suffer means to become particularly susceptible, particularly open to the working of the salvific powers of God, offered to humanity in Christ.” There is nothing in suffering to attract our will. In this alone do we love God purely for Himself—although certainly this is only possible because of His grace. Because Christ took all suffering upon Himself on the cross, our repentance in suffering, no matter how weak, is joined to Christ. By participation, we share in His perfect repentance, and thus are united more perfectly to God. Thus, the punitive, didactic and redemptive elements of suffering come together in the cross.

Christ undertook the cross out of a radical love for humanity, and thus forever redeemed suffering by uniting it to love. As a result, our suffering in love can serve as redemptive for others. Once again, we can turn for illustration to St. Augustine, who recounted his mother’s intercession on his behalf. He states, “from the blood of my mother’s heart, sacrifice for me was offered Thee day and night by her tears, and Thou didst at with me in marvelous ways;” And Ambrose on beholding her faith responds with the iconic line “Go your way; as sure as you live, it is impossible that the son of these tears should perish.” Monica serves as a model of love poured out in suffering for the good of another. Her heart bore great sorrow that Augustine did not love God. She offered this sorrow to God and He in turn used this sorrow to bring about this redemption.
Part VIII—The Trinitarian Basis of Redemptive Suffering

Perhaps it is not fully correct to say that Christ united suffering to love. Some have suggested that Christ's actions on the cross revealed that, in a certain, nuanced, sense, that there has been a connection between the two from all eternity.

It is a basic and almost universally agreed tenet of Christianity that Christ is fully God and fully man. As the pinnacle of God's self-revelation, He reveals both God and man. As the perfect man, He is what man should be, and therefore what man truly is. The process of discerning what aspects of Christ reveal humanity and which reveal divinity can be daunting. Hans Urs von Balthasar argues that, if we break free from the Platonic distrust of the material temporal world, which was so deeply embedded in the ancients including, to varying extents, the church fathers, we will see that even the aspects of Christ's life that seem the most human reveal the divine as well. An example of this would be Christ's lowliness and obedience to the father. As references above, Paul states that Christ "learnt obedience through his sufferings." This does not merely reveal the proper attitude of creature towards creator, but the attitude of the Son to the Father from all eternity. Thus, even the kenosis, that is, the total self-emptying of the incarnation and of the cross reveal something about the Trinity. In fact, the kenosis of the incarnation and the death on the cross is only possible because of an eternal self-emptying of the members of the Trinity. The Father gives Himself to the Son holding, nothing back. He does not give something, He gives His very self. This pouring out of self is so complete that it is like a death, a complete loss of life. When the Father gives himself to the Son, the Son's return in gratitude is not guaranteed by some fate or law. The Son's return is equally free; hence, were it not for the Son's
perfect goodness, the Father’s gift of self would be a risk. The two breathe forth the Spirit, who is equally free as well. It is in this sense that even death can be said to have its basis in God. It is the death of giving of oneself completely with the “risk” of not getting a return. However, it is not absolute death, as in the absolute cessation of life. This later kind of death is the antithesis of God, as God is life. The death of self-surrender, on the contrary, is the only path to new life. We know this from our daily experience. No one is more dead than one trapped in the prison of the ego. C.S. Lewis states it best in The Four Loves:

“There is no safe investment. To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket - safe, dark, motionless, airless - it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. The alternative to tragedy, or at least to the risk of tragedy, is damnation. The only place outside Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers and perturbations of love is Hell.”

To love at all, to give of oneself, is to die and to risk. However, to refuse to love and be loved is to die a death far more terrible and absolute. In pouring out His being, dying to Himself, the Father generates the Son into life. Thus from all eternity, to die to oneself is the very path to new life. Man is made is God’s image, and hence this eternally law stands for man as well as God. The death of sin is in fact a refusal to give of oneself—a refusal to die in the second sense. This is perhaps the highest meaning of John 12:25—“anyone who loves his life loses it; anyone who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.”

Despite the enormous differences between the two types of death, both can rightly be called “death” because they share the analogue of ceasing one’s life. One important difference between the two, nicely captured by Lewis’s quote, is the will.
death of sacrifice is always freely given; whereas to the one who is dead from sin, all that is taken from him will be taken by force. Christ’s will is perfect and perfectly free; thus He gives His life freely, just like He gives Himself back to the Father freely: “No one takes (my life) from me; I lay it down of my own free will, and as I have power to lay it down, so I have power to take it up again; and this is the command I have received from my Father.” This verse shows us that not only does Christ act in freedom, but He also acts in order to fulfill the will of the Father. Even on the cross, Christ says, “into your hands I commit my spirit.” Even in the utmost agony, He is still acting freely and still radically oriented towards the Father.

Christ’s kenosis on the cross is both consistent with God’s immutable self from all eternity and totally new. It is the same pouring out of self unto death that the Son has completed from all eternity. However, on the cross it accomplishes the taking up of the death of sin into the death of life. For God, death is always the beginning of new life, and thus He has made it so for man as well. Thus, Balthasar says,

“When the son accepts the agony of dying in God-forsakenness, it is for him (and the other divine persons) not only an “external work” undertaken out of absolute love and joy, but also the expression of his own, very specific, life.”

Balthasar’s dear friend Ferdinand Ulrich summarizes this theology eloquently in a letter:

“It is only because pain and death are internal to God, as a fluid form of love, that God can conquer death and pain as by His Death and resurrection…Pain and death are superseded, not in virtue of some eternal indifference on the part of God’s essence, but because, by his absolute free will, pain and death are eternally the language of his glory (and this applies even to the cry of death, the silence of death, and to being dead itself.) Of course, this must not lead to the view that the Son, in His life in the world, has already—from all eternity—finished and dealt with pain and suffering. On the contrary, both are innermost modes of love, as we see from Jesus’s defenselessness, giving Himself into the hands of men and learning through obedience what the Son eternally is.” (emphasis added)
Thus in God, the lines between comedy and tragedy, joy and sorrow, are blurred. Even the cross, Christ’s ultimate sorrow, sorrow unto death, flows from and expresses the eternal joy of God the Trinity. Even the yes on the Mount of Olives was a yes said in love and joy. This does not mean that Christ consciously felt joy while undergoing His passion, but, objectively speaking, it was an act of love and joy. Thus we see this reality manifested in the lives of St. Paul, and the other saints. Even in natural life, pain and joy are constantly intermingled. It seems no joy can come without difficulties, and no sorrow without some consolation.

Suffering is made meaningful in the context of love. All love is a certain death to self. Dying to self is always in a certain sense painful. What this would have looked like in the paradisal world, no one knows. Most likely, it would not have manifested in the violent destruction of the tsunami. But even the most horrendous happenings of the fallen world can be redeemed by God. Christ’s crucifixion was also his glorification: “Now the hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified.” Thus suffering borne in love reveals the glory of man’s dignity—a glory that will surely manifest in the life to come.

Part IX—Dialogue with Hart

Hart, in line with a long tradition, argued that by the cross Christ subverted death’s power and made it the way to new life. This interpretation seems consistent with Balthasar’s view, although Hart would not necessarily have to accept everything Balthasar says in order to maintain his own position. Hart would probably reject the notion that the cross reveals the inner life of the trinity, as, emphasizing God’s
impassibility, he believes that only Christ’s humanity experienced suffering and death on the cross. A follower of Balthasar would respond that as the dynamism of self-gift has been present in the Trinity from all ages, that dynamism could manifest itself on the cross without any change in God. Additionally, we must remember when considering the attributes of God to respect the “ever greater dissimilarity” between God and man. Hence, his immutability is not immutability exactly as we understand it. Balthasar invokes Francois Varillon on this topic, who states, “In God, becoming is a perfection of being, motion a perfection of rest, and change a perfection of immutability…Can we consider life without movement to be life? Is not God's eternity an ever-welling spring?” Thus, as explained above, from Balthasar’s perspective, the cross is at once new and continuous with God’s action from all eternity.

As Hart argues, the cross made death a path to life. Thus it does analogously for any instance of suffering. The cross reveals that God desires to work through our weakness. Christ made this point emphatically in giving us the beatitudes. As argued above, the gift of self, which can be any suffering borne in love, is the path to new life. As Balthasar’s friend, the mystic Adrienne von Speyr, states, “through suffering we are constantly being called back to love, suffering keeps us open to love.”

We suffer in love, and sufferings can also ignite love in others, manifested in compassion: “Suffering is also present in order to unleash love in the human person, that unselfish gift of one's "I" on behalf of other people, especially those who suffer. The world of human suffering unceasingly calls for, so to speak, another world: the world of human love; and in a certain sense man owes to suffering that unselfish love which stirs in his heart and actions.” Christ, through His life, showed us the absolute importance
of compassion and of corporal works of mercy. The sufferings of other can call us out of ourselves, to give ourselves in love as we are called to do.

Hart states that, through ascetic practice, the Christian should be able to see the glory of the paradisal world in creation. Should not the true ascetic be able to see the glory of the redeemed world as well? Hart invokes the powerful image of God on his throne in heaven saying, “Behold, I make all things new.” But new does not mean merely restored to how they used to be. Things can never actually go back to how they used to be. We all know this from life. As Plato said in his Laws, even the God could not make an act to be undone. Christ still bears His scars after the resurrection. God does not merely restore paradise—He redeems it in an even more glorious way. This is not because He needs evil, or somehow evil makes him more powerful or more effective at redeeming his creatures. It is because, as said before, things cannot be undone, cannot just go back to how they were before. Of course, God did not want the fall to happen. He does not desire the state of human misery—the tears of a little girl. However, He can still make them beautiful, still redeem even that horror. He can still make them even glorious, as He made even the crucifixion glorious. And this is perhaps because death to self—something analogous to suffering, although certainly without the aspect of the experience of evil—is intrinsic to the life and love of God Himself. As previously mentioned, Hart invokes the example of Ivan Karamazov, who protested that even if God could show how a little girl’s pain contributes to an ever more glorious kingdom to come, he still would reject the system. Tragically, the little girl’s tears did happen. They did not happen because God wanted or needed them, but because He takes seriously the drama of human freedom, and man rebelled. Those
tears do not make the world to come more glorious by way of some mechanical necessity, as Ivan seems to have in mind. But since they did happen, God still subsumes them into his perfect love on the cross. As previously mentioned, Christ’s cross was also His glory, the glory of perfect love given for humanity back to the Father. As Christ still bears His scars, that little girl will bear her sorrows like a crown.

For an analogy from nature, consider the image of a human relationship. For example, if a person is to commit a major wrong against his friend, and does not recognize what he has done wrong, or does recognize it but does not repent of it, there is no longer a friendship. Even if his friend is to act like everything is the same, this is really just a lie. On the other hand, if the one who has transgressed is truly sorry for what he has done, this sorrow goes a long way to rectifying the harm. Of course, that never can make the wrongdoing good; nor can it excuse it or undo it. But it can in a certain sense heal it, or at least begin the healing process. The relationship can never go back to being exactly the same as it was prior to the wrong being committed. However, it can become stronger. In a similar way, God cannot just undo man’s rejection of him. Doing so would either portray the relationship untruthfully, or violate man’s freedom. Even if man is to repent (which he can only do with the help to God), man’s relationship with God cannot just go back to how it was in the garden. So God, in his infinite goodness, subsumes our sin in His love, which will bring about a world even more glorious than that of Eden, or even of a redeemed Eden. It is perhaps in this sense that we can justly say “o felix culpa.”
Part X—Relationship to Modern Utilitarian Ethics

Mill argued that pain is always evil, and the only intrinsic evil. Hart, of course, does not go that far. However, his passionate emphasis on the meaningless of pain does at some points appear to creep in that direction. His goal is to emphasize God’s innocence, and to combat any view that evil is ultimately necessary in God’s plans—all such views being either metaphysically incoherent or just simply immoral. I agree wholeheartedly with this effort, but I think a study of how God makes suffering meaningful (something which Hart allows) is necessary to have a satisfying theodicy, and useful for combating modern utilitarian ethics. Hart’s mistake is one of omission rather than commission.

Let us consider an example of modern utilitarian ethics. Recently, an article was published in the *Cambridge Quarterly of Healthcare Ethics* in which the author argued that it would be preferable that all babies were gestated in artificial wombs, and hence distributive justice demands that society develop such technology. The basic argument for the claim that extracorporeal gestation is preferable to natural gestation follows as such:

1) Pregnancy causes pain and suffering.
2) Pregnancy only affects women.
3) Therefore, pregnancy is a natural inequality between men and women.
4) Inequality is unjust.
5) Therefore, it is just to seek to rectify the inequality of pregnancy.

Now, one could go about attacking this argument many ways. For example, it seems to presuppose that pregnancy is a disease, which is a contentious claim.
However, relevant to this paper, there is the glaring assumption that pain is *prima facie* evil, and hence should be avoided as long as avoiding it does not bring about some greater pain. That the meaningfulness of sacrifice and bonding are discounted is strikingly counterintuitive. The author does consider the objection that some women may enjoy pregnancy. She replies that this is only because it is their only option to having a genetically related child. If given the option of ectogenesis, perhaps they would realize they only valued pregnancy as the means to the desired end. Of course, this response is based on data from a purely hypothetical world, and thus does not seem to carry much weight. More to the point, it assumes that the only value that could possibly be in pregnancy would come from pleasure. The possibility that one can find meaning in something without necessarily enjoying it is blatantly ignored.

Of course, I could analyze the article at greater length, but that is not the point of this paper. I point to the article only as an example of how deeply the presupposition that pain is always evil has penetrated academia and the greater world. This view stands in stark contrast to the Christian teaching love can embrace and redeem all suffering. In fact, to suffer for another is the greatest act of love: “No one can have greater love than to lay down his life for his friends.”

Let us consider a few quotes from Balthasar on family life which drive home this point. He states, “The passion is the highest act of the Lord’s love, just as the birth pangs are for the women giving birth.” He then refers to a quote by von Speyr: “A woman’s birth pangs stand between her love for her husband and her love for her child. The Lord, too, causes love to embrace pain.” Pain is evil, and by definition unpleasant, but precisely by bearing this evil one can demonstrate love. This is
especially true in light of the cross. Far from being an “inequality,” the pain a mother endures in bearing children is noble and meaningful, even glorious.

Finally, I end with a quote from Balthasar on God’s decision to involve man in the suffering of love:

“The removal of the rib was for Adam an infinitely ennobling grace: the grace of being allowed to participate in the mystery of the Father’s self-giving to the Son, by which the Father empties Himself of His own Godhead in order to bestow it on the Son who is eternally of the same nature as He is. It is a wound of love that God inflicted on Adam in order to initiate him into the mystery, the lavish prodigality, of divine love.”

Part XI--Conclusion

This essay, of course, is only relevant to a person of faith. I think it is possible and worthwhile to explore options in theodicy on a natural level. However, if one is going to address the problem from the perspective of Christianity, one might as well go all the way, and include redemptive suffering in the explanation. Hart acknowledges in his book that redemptive suffering is important, but is not the totalizing explanation that some tend to make it sound like. I agree that it is not a totalizing explanation. However, I think it is still an essential part of Christian theology. In particular, the pastoral value cannot be underestimated. Finally, the recognition of the importance, even the nobility, or bearing pain is useful for combating modern utilitarian ethics. In my desire to make this point clearly, I have probably overemphasized the this aspect of the truth, and failed the recognize the profundity of evil, the necessity of acts of mercy in the Christian life, and over all come across as lacking in compassion. As Hart the good Orthodox has overstressed the resurrection, I the good Catholic have overstressed the cross. However, I offer this work in hoping it can serve a corrective.
vii (GN 1:12, NJB).
 ix Hart, p. 85.
 x Ibid, p. 104.
 xi Ibid, p. 61.
 xii Of course, the greatest punishment that comes with expulsion is death. This is a clear case of not only pain, but, and thus Christ comes to destroy it. But more on that later.
 xiii ST, I.49.2.
 x v Hart, p. 28.
 x xviii Hart, 12.
 xix Ezekial 36:24-28, 31, NJB.
 xx Augustine, 2.II.4.
 x x x Ibid, p. 88.
 x x xi Ibid, p. 89.
 x x xv Hebrew 5:8, NJB
 x x vi John Paul II, 12.
 x x vii Ibid, 23.
 x x viii Ibid, 22.
 x x ix Ibid, 24.
 x x x Ibid, 23.
 x x x i Augustine, S.VII.13.
 x x x xii Hebrews 5:8, NJB
 x x x xiii TD V, p. 243.
 x x x x iv Ibid, p. 245.
 x x x x vii John 12:25, NJB.
 x x x x viii John 10:18, NJB.
 x x x x ix Luke 23:46, NJB.
 x x x x x TD V, p. 251.
 x x x x xi Ibid, 255.
 x x x x x ii Ibid, 246.
Ibid, p. 252.
As matter and spirit would not have been in conflict with each other as they are in the fallen world.
John 12:23, NJB.
Howsare, p. 142.
TD V, 243.
Ibid, 253.
Ibid, p. 255.
JP II, 29.
John 15:13, NJB.
TD V, p. 253.
The Christian State of Life, p. 228.
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