

ABSTRACT

Theodicy in an Age of Entitlement: an Examination of Western Cultural Consciousness
and its Relation to the Individual's Perception of God in the Modern Age

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The question of how an omnipotent, omniscient, all good God could allow the presence of evil in the world has arisen in every age and every culture wherein the idea of God is elevated to the highest standard. Different cultures throughout the history of Western civilization have responded to this problem of evil in various ways, but never has there been such a demand for a justification of God's goodness in the face of the presence of evil as in the modern age. While this thesis does not explicitly seek to give a justification of God's goodness, it does aim to explain why the modern age is outraged by the problem of evil, perhaps more than any precedent. It does so by examining the cultural environment of the individual and how the individual perceives himself in relation to the community and to God.

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AN EXAMINATION OF WESTERN CULTURAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND ITS
RELATION TO THE INDIVIDUAL'S PERCEPTION OF GOD IN THE MODERN
AGE

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INTRODUCTION

A.W. Tozer writes, “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us” (Tozer, 1). The way that man conceives of God shapes and influences every other aspect of his consciousness and his day to day life. Mankind’s perception of the numinous has prevailed at the forefront of cultural consciousness for millennia, taking nearly as many forms as cultures, and effecting a different response from nearly every culture. These cultural frameworks shape both how the individual perceives the nature of the deity and how the individual perceives himself. These two factors are the main components that influence how the individual responds to the idea of God. Thus, one is presented with the question of how particular cultural climates have shaped and informed the individual’s perception of both himself and of God, and of how these factors are at play today.

One key component that shapes the overall mindset of a culture is how it addresses the idea of ‘bad’ or ‘evil’.¹ The idea of evil exists in tandem with the idea of the numinous. This coexistence, however, becomes a problem when the idea of God is elevated to the point of supreme goodness and power, for the coexistence of a supremely good, omniscient, omnipotent God does not cohere with the prevalence of what seems to be only meaningless suffering. Thus each culture is “confronted with the overwhelming

¹ Here, I do not mean to distinguish between bad and evil in the way that Nietzsche does in his *Genealogy of Morals*. Instead, I mean only to communicate the idea of the knowledge that something is not as it should be.

problem of God: That He *is*; what He is *like*; and what we as moral beings must *do* about Him” (Tozer, 2).

In the following pages, I will begin to dissect the major foundations and shifts in the culture of Western Civilization, examining the mindsets and social atmosphere of the Ancient and post-Enlightenment eras. Through this I seek to show the disparate nature between the ages and how their views of God and of evil have changed, and how this effects their view concerning the human being’s response to God. I will then examine the cultural factors at work upon the present generation and aim to provide an explanation for the profound sense of cosmic injustice that is felt in the post-modern age. This will in turn help to explain why there is such an intense feeling for the need to justify God’s character when it is juxtaposed with the amount and degree of global suffering. I will conclude that it is when a culture's perception of God degrades and decomposes that man feels most entitled to "just" treatment, and that love is the ultimate response that Christianity can offer in the face of suffering.

CHAPTER 1

The Problem of Evil

The problem of pain, and more broadly the problem of evil, is most succinctly stated thusly: “If God were good, He would wish to make His creatures perfectly happy, and if God were almighty He would be able to do what he wished. But the creatures are not happy. Therefore God lacks either goodness, or power, or both” (Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 560). It seems to the observer that when he looks in upon the world and takes stock of its relative amounts of happiness and pain, pain and suffering far outweigh any happiness or pleasure that the world has to offer. When this fact is viewed in light of the belief in an omnipotent deity, the individual is left to wonder about the true nature of that deity and question its goodness. This chapter will address the basics of the problem of evil, explaining the nature of pain, the nature of evil, the absolute attributes of God, and the qualifications of happiness. It will also attempt to explain the main popular objections given in response to the idea of an omnipotent God, and in a brief manner reconcile God’s goodness with the presence of evil in the world as far as possible.

1.1 The Nature of Pain and of Evil

In *The Problem of Pain*, C.S. Lewis outlines two separate types of pain, whose descriptions I find extremely helpful in this conversation. The first kind of pain is “a particular kind of sensation, probably conveyed by specialised [sic] nerve fibers, and recognizable by the patient as that kind of sensation whether he dislikes it or not.” In this

category Lewis includes the ache of muscles at the end of a long day, and I would also add the types of pain which warn us away from greater danger, such as the feeling of discomfort when our hand comes into too close contact with the stove. Indeed, if we are cold and are seeking warmth, the heat of the stove will be a comfort as long as we maintain the appropriate distance. Thus, the pain of sensation does not seem to be a real pain, much less an evil, as “the evil of pain depends on degree, and pains below a certain intensity are not feared or resented at all” (*The Problem of Pain*, 564). Not all pains are bad or harmful, but some are even beneficial as long as they are kept under a certain threshold. Thus we cannot condemn all pains as being evil.

The second category of pain is where many of the complaints against God originate. It includes “any experience, whether physical or mental, which the patient dislikes” (*The Problem of Pain*, 602). Lewis notes that any of the first type of experience, which can rightly be called sensations, become experiences of this second sort when raised above a certain threshold. It is these latter types of experience that we classify as pain, suffering, anguish, and the like. While it is in this type of pain that malcontent against God originates, it is often not the physical pain itself which creates so much anguish for the individual.

Man’s experience of pain is transformed and compounded into the experience of suffering by means of his rational faculty. For it is by reason and his ability to anticipate future events that man must experience two parts to suffering, as “part of every misery is, so to speak, the misery’s shadow or reflection: the fact that you don’t merely suffer but have to keep on thinking about the fact that you suffer” (*A Grief Observed*, 660). Thus it is not only the physical or emotional pain itself which causes the individual to suffer, but

the anticipation of this suffering which inflicts additional pain and anxiety in the form of dread. In the words of C.S. Lewis, man “is enabled to foresee his own pain which henceforth is preceded by acute mental suffering, and to foresee his own death while keenly desiring permanence” (*The Problem of Pain*, 552). While this rationality is what distinguishes man from other animals, it also means that he is subject to the stress and anxieties that accompany forethought and anticipation. It is this dread that often is the source of true suffering and anguish.

Thus the rationality and self-consciousness of man seem not so much like distinctions of blessing, but instead a cruel kind of curse. The history of such rational creatures consists largely of “a record of crime, war, disease, and terror, with just sufficient happiness interposed to give them, while it lasts, an agonizing apprehension of losing it, and, when it is lost, the poignant misery of remembering” (*The Problem of Pain*, 552). One may then ask why an all-powerful, good and loving God would bestow something like self-consciousness and memory if it would only lead to dread and agony. It is rationality which gives man the consciousness that he has the desire for permanence and happiness, and yet it is rationality which informs him that these are the very things that he cannot have.

Evil, too, and our awareness of it, informs us that things are not how they should be, though pain is merely the passive human experience of evil. Yet in our knowledge of evil, we understand that the weak are often oppressed while the wicked prosper, that goodness and the things we aspire to are constantly curtailed, and that this is not right. David Parkins divides evil into three types, those being “the moral, referring to human culpability; the physical, by which is understood destructive elemental forces of nature,

for example earthquakes, storms, or the plague; and the metaphysical, by which disorder in the cosmos or in relations with divinity results from a conflict of principles or wills” (qtd. Csoradas, 526). Though these distinctions are important, I will not be dealing with them here as separate concepts, except to acknowledge that moral and physical evil can both quickly evolve into metaphysical evil by many different avenues. This paper deals primarily with metaphysical evil, as well as either alternate type of pain which can turn into metaphysical evil.

For my more general purposes, evil is the antithesis of goodness, wherein St. Augustine “did not find a substance but a perversity of will twisted away from the highest substance... towards inferior things, rejecting its own inner life” (Augustine, 126). For Augustine, evil is not a substance, but the absence of God, as all that God has created must be good. A thing’s imperfections can only arise from God’s absence, and wherever God is not, evil resides.

It follows, then, that the pain and suffering that man experiences arises from the absence of God in some form. When God is absent in the life of an individual, there is room for his own ambitions and desires to take the place of goodness as his ultimate end. From this type of evil, both accident and moral evil can arise. What I will here call accident evil is any action that is not aimed towards the good or does not achieve the good, though through no malicious intent of the agent. Moral evil, on the other hand, is any act of will which intentionally aims away from the good, and often for the harm of others for the sake of benefitting the self. Each of these types of evil can give rise to pain, though the magnitude of pain incurred does not necessarily correlate to the severity or intentionality of the evil.

There is one last dimension to suffering, and the primary form of pain that this paper will deal with. Like dread, it is made possible through man's rational capacity, but its additional pain comes through a spiritual feeling of abandonment. As chapter two will reveal, most of Western culture does not so much question the power of God, nor is the existence of God doubted so much as it may be believed; instead, man doubts the goodness and love of his Creator. When the individual is faced with so much dread and pain with no apparent answer or help from God, his thoughts become much like those of C.S. Lewis, after the death of his wife:

Not that I am (I think) in much danger of ceasing to believe in God. The real danger is of coming to believe such dreadful things about Him. The conclusion I dread is not 'So there's no God after all,' but 'So this is what God's really like. Deceive yourself no longer' (*A Grief Observed*, 658)

There is some amount of anger and anguish that the individual suffers when he believes that goodness has left him; that God has either turned his face away or else was never good in the first place. Soren Kierkegaard calls this type of experience a "misrelation" of the self to God, and the resulting despair he defines as "a sickness of which the end is death and death is the end," or "the sickness unto death" (Kierkegaard, 15, 14). Because man was made to be in right relation to God, this type of pain due to misrelation is the most tormenting of all, and from which nearly all of the complaints against God arise.

The world cries not so much for the sake of their physical suffering, but for the anguish of being abandoned, or worse yet, of having been created for the pleasure of a sadistic Creator. Thus, we "must face the question in plain language. What reason have we, except our own desperate wishes, to believe that God is, by any standard we can conceive, 'good'?" (Lewis, *A Grief Observed*, 668). We must search out the true nature

of God in order to determine whether we misunderstand our relation to him, or else whether it is true that God is not good, and that he has left us to suffer on our own.

1.2 The Nature of God

One must either reject the nature of God as an omnipotent, omniscient, benevolent being, or else show “that the terms ‘good’ and ‘almighty’, and perhaps also the term ‘happy’, are equivocal” (Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 560). These terms must mean something other than how they are popularly conceived, or else one is unable to reconcile God’s character with the presence of evil, and God’s character is necessarily broken down. Yet while these terms must mean something different than their colloquial conception, the idea of goodness and justice must be objective, even to the mind of God, as well as intelligible and discoverable by the human mind.

If goodness were not objective even to God, then the goodness of God would be meaningless, as God could make any deplorable action ‘good’ simply through his decree or whim. In this matter I will defer to Erik Wielenberg in his book *Value and Virtue in a Godless Universe*, wherein he argues that morality is not subject to any power, not even God’s omnipotence. This idea is based around the concept that moral truths, like mathematical truths, are objective and independent of any agent or mind to perceive or determine them. The concept $1+1=2$ will always be true in the same way that willfully inflicting pain upon another being will always be morally wrong if that pain is not for the purpose of remedy.

Humans must also be able to understand moral goodness and badness, or else the same problem arises as in a situation wherein God has the power to determine what is morally right. That is, if man is not able to determine what is right and wrong, then there

is nothing to determine that what we think of as a moral atrocity is actually a morally commendable act. What is morally right must not only meet a standard which is independent of power and coeternal with God, but this standard must also be comprehensible and evident to humanity, lest man's understanding of morality be entirely worthless (Wielenberg, 42).

Naturally, when faced with the weight of suffering in the world, the individual looks for both the cause and any possible relief from this burden of pain. Thus he comes face to face with the idea God and of evil. In this work I will focus only on those western cultures which recognize the idea of God as that which is eternal, and thus incorruptible and wholly good, as well as omnipotent and omniscient. If, then, there is a good God who has the power to do all things, the individual wonders why he would allow suffering and agony to reign amidst his creation. It seems that logically, God must either not be all powerful, and so he cannot help but allow evil, or he has, so to say, turned his face from the world, and so does not know the state of evil and suffering on earth, or else God is not good, and the world is subject to an omnipotent sadist.

However, if man's rational faculties are to be trusted in any way, then God, if he is to deserve that name, must logically be a morally incorruptible entity, as well as omnipotent. As Aristotle rationally deduced, the nature of God must be incorruptible and eternal (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 375), or else he would have to have been created by another entity, and this creating entity must either be perfect itself or else have also been created. If we are to avoid an eternal regression, there must be some original, perfect and therefore incorruptible being who was never created and created all other things. Furthermore, Plato holds that since the gods are good, they can only cause good things to

happen, and another cause must be found for the majority of circumstances, which he identifies as bad and unfortunate (Plato, *Republic*, 60). It seems, therefore, that though God is all good and omnipotent, there must be some restriction on either his goodness or his power if he does in fact allow a prevalence of evil over good in this world.

With regard to God's omnipotence, it may be that with the advent of creatures with free will, God forfeited a portion of his effective power. C.S. Lewis himself submits "that not even Omnipotence could create a society of free souls without at the same time creating a relatively independent and 'inexorable' nature" (*The Problem of Pain*, 562). There is a necessary requirement which God places on himself when creating beings with free will. That is, a portion of his absolute control must be forfeited to allow for the decisions and free will of his created beings. If man is to be truly able to turn to God of his own free will, then God's control of man's will cannot be absolute. To put it more plainly, "it is objected that the ultimate loss of a single soul means the defeat of omnipotence. And so it does. In creating beings with free will, omnipotence from the outset submits to the possibility of such a defeat" (*The Problem of Pain*, 626). The bestowal of free will entails God's partial forfeiture of omnipotence, which opens up the possibility of that which is less than perfect, namely pain and suffering, and ultimately the possible spiritual loss of the individual by means of his unremitted act of turning away from God.

And so the individual is left in a world filled with imperfections and weaknesses. Yet Lewis is not perturbed by these seeming setbacks, writing, "What you call defeat, I call miracle: for to make things which are not Itself, and thus to become, in a sense, capable of being resisted by its own handiwork, is the most astonishing and unimaginable

of all the feats we attribute to the Deity” (Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 626). The ability of the self to oppose God, to expect certain things of him, and to call its creator unjust is undoubtedly a marvel. If Plato is to be trusted in his assertion that all men aim for the good, it follows, then, that man turns away from God and toward himself in the pursuit of happiness, not realizing that his only happiness lies in God.

1.3 The Nature of Happiness²

Dan Haybron points out that there are two senses to the word ‘happiness.’ One entails a state of mind, while the other denotes a life that goes well for the person who is living it (Haybron). Aristotle discusses this second type of happiness at length, arguing that one must come from a certain family, be given a certain upbringing, and nurture the various virtues in order to be happy. Yet not even these things can guarantee one’s happiness in this sense, for if one’s children go on to lead deplorable lives after the individual is dead, he cannot be said to possess this happiness, or *Eudaimonia* (Aristotle, *Nichimachean Ethics*, 16).

Most cultures, far from having such a high-minded sense of happiness, seem willing to concede contentment as a just cosmic desert for the individual. As John Stuart Mill qualifies the concept,

The happiness which they [the philosophers] meant was not a life of rapture, but moments of such, in an existence made up of few and transitory pains, many and various pleasures, with decided predominance of active over the passive, and having as the foundation of the whole not to expect more from life than it is capable of bestowing. A life thus composed, to those who have been fortunate enough to attain it, has always appeared worthy of the name happiness (Mill, 13)

² This paper will consider happiness rather than pleasure as the corollary to pain and suffering, as that which produces pleasure is often fraught with disproportionate appetites and that which gives rise to great amounts of pain.

Contentment entails that life is not without its struggles and occasional difficulties, but as a whole life is an enjoyable experience, with enough comfort and joy as to make life's difficulties relatively innocuous. I think that this is what most people feel that they deserve from life. There are few people who truly think that they do not deserve any bad or painful experience as a consequence of their poor decisions, yet there are also very few who believe that they deserve a great amount of pain and suffering. As a result, when the individual does undergo a great amount of suffering, be it physical or emotional, he feels that he is suffering an injustice. It is one thing to suffer as punishment for wrongdoing, but it is another thing to suffer undeservedly, and still another to suffer as one abandoned, without a purpose. Meaningless suffering, especially when contrasted with the bliss and happiness which it seems that God could have ensured for his creation, seems the most vile and unjust affliction to experience in what could only be an unjust and disordered world.

With regard to human happiness and divine justice, there has historically been some attempt to prove the goodness of God while taking into account the amount of suffering in the world. One of the most famous of these comes from Leibnitz that this must necessarily be the best of all possible worlds. His argument is utilitarian in nature, as it takes into account the overall quantity of happiness among rational beings. Leibnitz actually quantifies the quality of the happiness and pain on earth, claiming that "the glory and perfection of the Blessed is incomparably greater than the misery and imperfection of the Damned, and that thus the excellence of the total good in the smaller number surpasses the misery of the total evil in the greater number" (Leibnitz, 33). Leibnitz

claims that though there are only a few people who are blessed, their happiness is so great that it eclipses and outweighs the misery of the many.

Yet this quantification of happiness and misery seems to have little to do with the states of happiness and pain on earth and instead seems to refer to the eternal states of those currently inhabiting the earth, as he uses the terms ‘blessed’ and ‘damned’; for though one may be eternally blessed, this offers no guarantee that his life will not be filled with pain and hardship. Though the collective, eternal quantities of happiness and pain may in fact correspond to the way that Leibnitz here describes them, this gives us no indication or explanation for why the amount of pain and suffering here on earth appears to so far outweigh the happiness which man experiences as a whole.

I also find the utilitarian model unsettling due to its tendency to disregard the suffering of the individual and any injustice he may undergo. To have such a utilitarian view is to consider the extreme suffering of a single individual as justifiable or inconsequential, provided that it produces a greater quantity of happiness somewhere else. Additionally, if Leibnitz’s views are closely held and carried to their logical extreme, then the average layman would arguably not be wrong in permitting or even acting out an instance of evil. If the view that God may allow evil for the purpose of bringing about a greater good is applied to every situation, then evil may be allowed for the sake of the expectation of greater good and happiness (Leibnitz, 31).

Indeed, even if the sheer amount of happiness experienced did outweigh the amount of pain felt on earth, it seems that pain and suffering have greater impact in the life of the individual than does happiness; it seems that a traumatic event or even the cutting words of a careless friend are far more likely to leave their mark on the individual

than a kind word or a moment of carefree joy. The impact of suffering seems to have a greater, more lasting influence on the individual than nearly any experience of happiness of a comparative magnitude. Therefore, I will conclude that utilitarianism is not a good model on which to base the goodness of God or the happiness of the world.

Instead, I think it best to borrow from the Aristotelian model of *eudaimonia*. That is, that which makes a man truly happy is an active life in accordance with virtue, or that for which man is best suited (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 15). Yet if we again give ear to Augustine and his assertion that man is restless until he rests in God, and take into consideration Kierkegaard's similar account that the antithesis of despair is when the individual "rests transparently" in God, then it follows that what man needs most is to live in close relation to God (Kierkegaard, 15). While this does not directly prove that a close relation to God is what man is best suited for, it does provide insight to what makes man truly happy, for only when his deepest needs are fulfilled can a man be considered happy.

A thing is best suited for whatever capacity is particular to itself. If we examine Kierkegaard's model of the Self, the individual has a unique capacity to relate in a particular manner to God. While this capacity is often obstructed by sin and despair, it is, nonetheless, the defining capacity of humanity. Humans are thus incomplete and even below their true nature if this relation is not properly satisfied, and so cannot be considered happy unless this relation is intact. Man is happiest when his will is in accordance with God's, and he rests in right relation to his creator. It is when this relation is not intact that man stands at odds with God.

1.4 What man expects/ What god owes his creation

Some hold against God the fact that he allowed sin to enter the world at all, and that he did not create a better world wherein sin could not enter. Indeed, one must ask whether it would be considered an injustice on the part of God if he did not in fact create the best possible universe.

Robert Merrihew Adams offers a promising argument for why God is not obligated to create the best of all possible worlds, contrary to Leibniz's assumption. While Adams sees no reason to believe that there is such a thing as the best possible world, he outlines the given argument for why a morally good God would be obligated to create the best. The first argument claims "that a creator would necessarily wrong someone (violate someone's rights), or be less kind to someone than a perfectly good moral agent must be, if he knowingly created a less excellent world instead of the best that he could." The second claims that the mere choice of God to create a suboptimal world is proof of "a defect in character" (Adams, 318). Adams then asks to whom the creator could have any obligation to create the best of all possible worlds. He reasons that God cannot be wronging any potential creatures who might have been created in the best possible world, but never were, and so concludes that the only possibilities are that God wrongs actual creatures who exist in this world, or else he wrongs no one at all.

Adams offers three characteristics of a world which he believes God could create:

- 1) "None of the individual creatures in it would have existed in the best of all possible worlds,"
- 2) "None of the creatures in it has a life which is so miserable on the whole that it would be better for that creature if it had never existed," which I will moderate into simply that it is better to exist than not to exist, and
- 3) that "every individual creature in the world is at least as happy on the whole as it would have been in any other possible world in which it could have existed" (320).

Adams recognizes that the majority of problems arise from premise (3). The idea behind premise (1) and (2) is that it would be absurd for one of God's creatures to charge him as unjust for not creating them in a better world. This is simply due to the fact that according to premise (1) that individual would not exist in the best of all possible worlds, or any other world for that matter, and according to premise (2) it is better to exist than to not exist. In a sense, then, this is the best possible world in which every existing individual could have been created, and it is, according to Adams, better to exist in this world than in none at all. Premise (3) is then turned into nonsense, for according to premise (1) these creatures would not exist in the best possible world, and so the reasoning repeats.

More to this point, Lewis is of the opinion that "when we talk about what might have happened, of contingencies outside the whole actuality, we do not really know what we are talking about. There are no times or places outside the existing universe in which all this 'could happen' or 'could have happened'" (*The Problem of Pain*, 598). There may be no such thing as an alternate, best possible universe, or at any rate not one which could apply to us as beings who exist in this universe. Thus it is not clear that God must create the best of all possible worlds, as he does not owe a better existence to beings who would have had no existence had he not created them, and who would have no existence had he created a different, better world without pain and suffering.

In addition to pains, not all inconveniences or "wrongings" are the result of the presence of evil in the world. There are certain desires that one individual cannot fulfill without infringing upon the desires of another. Lewis claims that "this is very far from it being an evil: on the contrary, it furnishes occasion for all those acts of courtesy, respect, and unselfishness by which love and good humor and modesty express themselves."

Simply because matters are not arranged in the way that the individual would like does not mean that an injustice is being inflicted upon him. However, such an instance of inconvenience or displeasure “certainly leaves the way open to a great evil, that of competition and hostility. And if souls are free, they cannot be prevented from dealing with the problem by competition instead of courtesy” (*The Problem of Pain*, 564).

Instances wherein the individual has the opportunity to choose between sacrificing his own desires or realizing them will create the possibility for sin in the form of selfishness and possibly of harm to another individual. Be this as it may, the inconvenience to the individual is not an evil in itself; it does not deprive him of any necessary good or inflict any amount of pain upon him. To say that it deprives him of some good or happiness that he would have had if his own will had been fulfilled is not to say that there is some evil or pain which is inflicted against him, as he has no intrinsic right to the best possible treatment or circumstance.

Some argue that while man has free will, God could have intervened and prevented sin from entering the world. While it is theoretically possible for God to have prevented the advent of sin by means of his divine intervention, it is a logical inconsistency with his nature and his purpose. For

God might have arrested this process [of sin being introduced into the world] by miracle: but this—to speak in somewhat irreverent metaphor—would have been to decline the problem which God had set Himself when He created the world, the problem of expressing His goodness through the total drama of a world containing free agents, in spite of, and by means of, their rebellion against Him (*The Problem of Pain*, 597)

Setting aside all other oppositions for the moment, if orthodox Christianity is understood to be true, and the Westminster Shorter Catechism is regarded as a legitimate statement of sound doctrine, then the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

God's aim, the "problem" which he has set himself, is to be glorified through the redemption of a fallen race and through their free adoration of himself. This act is not one of simple self-service on the part of God, but it is also the highest good for the creature to recognize, know, and adore its creator.

It follows that if God's aim is to be freely loved by his creation, then he would not intervene in order to prevent man from choosing to sin. While it is a belief of Christianity that God bestows grace upon man to resist sin, this is something entirely other than actively preventing the sin by an 'act of God,' for instance. If we take into account the argument that it is better for man that he love God of his own accord, and admit that with this license of free will came the accident of sin, then it appears that God is justified in allowing sin to enter the world on account of the actions of man.

Nonetheless, despite the atrocities which man commits as a result of his free will, there exists a large quantity of suffering that is not attributable to man and can only be traced back to God as its final cause. As Lewis states, "even if all suffering were man-made, we should like to know the reason for the enormous permission to torture their fellows which God gives to the worst of men." It is one thing for man to have a free will, and to be allowed to will that which is against the will of God, but it seems another thing entirely to let the will of truly wicked men be actuated and inflict pain upon the weak and lowly. "To say... that good, for such creatures as we now are, means primarily corrective or remedial good, is an incomplete answer" (*The Problem of Pain*, 601).

1.5 The Reconciliation

When a man says that he wants to be happy, he often means that he wants his desires to be met and for life to generally comply with his wishes. Yet as we learn from

Aristotle, happiness is not necessarily what is in accordance with a man's desires, but rather what is good for a man, and what is most suited to his rational and virtuous nature. If we apply this model to man's spiritual component, then what makes a man happy must also be what is most suited to his spiritual nature.

We must now ask why a—we are assuming—wholly good, omnipotent God would make his creation with specific teleological desires, and yet create or allow the world to be in such a way that these desires can never truly be fulfilled on earth.

Man has the desire to belong, to be in a place of permanence and happiness. According to Aristotle, man seeks that which is good, though some come closer than others to realizing it. Aristotle wrote that the soul is drawn toward the good, toward the center of things: the unmoved mover (*Metaphysics*, 373). Similarly, St. Augustine purported that the soul of man is restless until it rests in God (Augustine, 3). Thus, it is according to the cornerstones of antiquity and the founding church fathers that the thing in which man's *telos* resides—the thing in which he finds permanence and happiness, is in the presence and in accordance with God.

Yet man is barred from complete accordance with God while he is on earth. While orthodoxy explains that this is ultimately due to sin, there are some auxiliary explanations as to why man is frustrated in his attempts to achieve happiness on earth. One of these is due to the idea that man is not meant to remain on earth, but his intended destination is in Heaven with God. Thus man is not meant to be so happy on earth that he does not feel the lack of that which makes him complete. Some amount of discomfort, then, is required for man to feel that earth is not his final destination or highest calling; he is meant to long for that which is beyond earthly aspirations. He is meant to feel like

there is a place, or an idea of a place wherein he belongs, but that that place is not on earth. As Lewis describes, “All your life an unattainable ecstasy has hovered just beyond the grasp of your consciousness.... You have experienced the *want* of it,” but “have never *had* it. All the things that have ever deeply possessed your soul have been but hints of it” (*Problem of Pain*, 641, 640).

Man is separated from his ultimate belonging while on earth because of sin, which is only made possible by the existence of free will. Some argue that God is either not wholly good or else not omnipotent for creating a world that is filled with sin, for if God is both of these things, then he presumably has no reason to allow sin and suffering to enter the world. Yet perhaps we live in a universe, wherein God, in his utmost knowledge and love, sees that it is better for his creation to love him freely of their own accord than for them to love him only because they can do nothing else.

Thus, God’s allowance and bestowal of free will upon man made possible man’s choice to sin, to choose his own desires above the desires of God, and so introduce sin to the world and to his own flesh. As C.S. Lewis explains it, the condition of sin “was transmitted by heredity to all other generations, for it was not simply what biologists call an acquired variation; it was the emergence of a new kind of man—a new species, never made by God, had sinned itself into existence” (*The Problem of Pain*, 597). When faced with the decision to undertake self-determination, or to willingly allow God complete control of his life, man chose to create his own values, and to glorify himself over his creator. In this way, man turned from God by means of the freedom which was given to him, and so introduced pain and suffering to the world.

Some of this pain and suffering can be explained as the corrective and guiding hand of God to reconcile the individual to himself. Some pains are simply the constraints of “souls in a world: fixed laws, consequences unfolding by causal necessity, the whole natural order” without which we find that we “have excluded life itself” (*The Problem of Pain*, 665). Yet some pains we cannot seem to justify; even in a broken world, we think, there must be limits, or some reasonable element that helps man endure life’s ‘senseless’ pains. And so man turns to God, either in supplication, defiance, or denial.

The next chapter will explore how various cultures and various ages have turned to God, and how they have dealt with the problem of evil—of senseless pain and suffering. This will in turn give us insight as to how the present age has been influenced by the past before examining what recent history and present stressors have shaped the individual’s response to God in this post-modern culture.

CHAPTER 2

A Brief History of Western Culture and its Attitude toward God

This chapter will briefly look at the changes in Western Culture from ancient Greece up through the late 19th century. While much history will be left out due to space and time, my aim is to show how one vein of thought evolved into another over time, and what influences caused these changes in the cultural consciousness. I have chosen to examine the Ancient and Post-Enlightenment eras in depth, as I believe that these are two of the most formative eras for western culture though they are diametrically opposed to one another. Because of this, they make excellent book ends to western culture by which we can see its evolution of thought. Finally, I hope to show how these changes in cultural climate correspond to changes in the individual's perception and reaction to God in each age and leading up to our present era.

2.1 The Ancients

Ancient Greece

Before the 6th century BC, Homer and Hesiod were regarded as the authorities on all things moral, theological, and historical, if by no other means than through the power of allegory. Around the 6th century, however, there was a “revulsion against the naïve and contradictory concepts of mythology.” Instead, people sought less fantastical explanations that were more true to their perception of life, and desired to discover “what was the fundamental force behind and giving unity to the universe” (Harrison and Sullivan, 86). For a few hundred years after this, people sought these explanations,

though their theories did not make much of a lasting impact on the cultural consciousness until the time of Protagoras. Protagoras was a sophist who could argue and win any position, whether it was right or wrong, true or false. He coined the idea of man as the measure of all things, and introduced what is essentially moral relativism to the agora. It is in this scene that Socrates appears, not staring at the clouds but rapt in conversation about the absolutes. Plato was one of his pupils, and Aristotle one of Plato's.

Their View of God. Aristotle outlines his theology in book 12 (lambda) of his *Metaphysics*. In it he observes that in the world there is constant motion, and reasons that there must be something which effects the motion. While that thing which effects the motion of the first entity may in turn be effected to move by another, in order to avoid an eternal regression, Aristotle reasons that "there must be something that moves without being moved. This will be eternal, and it will be a substance and it will be activation" (*Metaphysics*, 373). Because the motion is constant and regular, never changing, then that which causes the motion must be in the same manner. Thus the unmoved mover must be eternal, and the single cause of all motion (375, 388).

Aristotle then goes on to say that "the object of desire and the object of thought produce movement in this way," that is, they cause other things to move towards them out of desire and thought without themselves ever being moved, and he notes that the good and the intrinsically desirable serve as objects of thought rather than that which is drawn by the thought (373). It therefore follows that the unmoved mover must be good and intrinsically desirable.

Based on this model of thought, then, Aristotle asserts that this intrinsic desirability is what makes contemplation pleasurable. It is "the object, rather than the

thought, that is the divine element that thinking is believed to possess. Hence, too, the supreme pleasure and excellence of contemplation.” Contemplation, Aristotle argues, is good in itself because it is reflection on the divine, or on that which moves all other things and yet is itself unmoved. Thus in summary, Aristotle concludes that

“there exists a kind of eternal, unmoved substance that is separate from sensible things. It has further been shown that it is impossible for it to have any magnitude but that it is without parts and indivisible. The reason is that it is a source of movement for infinite time, and nothing that is finite has an infinite capacity.”

On the Greek view of the divine, God is the highest conceivable entity with regard to virtue and excellence. He does not move and “is without affection or alteration,” but causes all other things to move; all things are drawn toward the good (375). Thus God is accessible through contemplation and the perfection of the virtues, but has very little to do with the individual on a personal level. The idea of God is truly an idea on this model, and Aristotle comes close in some ways to Plato’s model of the forms in this respect.

Their view of the individual. In one sense, Greek culture was highly individualized. Those from elevated society, those whose culture, thought, and lifestyle have visibly impacted our own, those few men aimed to be men of distinction. They sought this distinction, however, through service of the public. I am not claiming that these few great men had an overwhelming love for the people they governed, but idealistically, at least, they aimed for excellence and virtue in the realm of politics.

Aristotle begins his inquiry on virtue for the sake of politics, as he seeks the highest form of good that is best suited for man, and asks how he acquires such a good. He claims that “the highest good is the end of politics, while it takes the greatest part of its pains to produce citizens of a certain sort, namely, ones that are good and inclined to

perform beautiful actions” (*Nichomachean Ethics*, 15). It would seem, then, that the highest good of the individual is in service or participation in the political life. Thus, while the individual is an important entity, he is only important insofar as he is in service or participation with the community in virtue.

This stance is strengthened by Aristotle’s position on justice. In the *Nichomachean Ethics*, he claims that justice “is complete virtue, though not simply but in relation to someone else.” It follows then, that one does not acquire virtue merely for his own personal well-being, but so that he may carry out justice with regard to another. “Justice alone among the virtues, seems to be someone else’s good, because it is in relation to someone else, for one does things that are advantageous to another person, either to one who rules or to one who partakes in the community” (81). Justice, like politics, involves those who rule and those who are a part of the community. Both of these concepts, according to Aristotle, are high and complete virtues, but again, they are not complete so long as they aim to serve the self; justice is a complete virtue because it is enacted for another’s good, while politics endeavors to produce good citizens. Therefore, I would argue that the individual, while important to ancient Greek culture, was only important insofar as he served the community well and led his life well, according to virtue.

Because this culture is so focused on virtue, and the idea that a virtuous man lives according to certain principles, then if a man is truly living according to virtue, he has very little freedom to choose how he should live and behave. This too argues against an individualistic society and for civic virtue. In the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle explains that “in a household it is the free members that have the least liberty to do whatever they please”

(*Metaphysics*, 380, 386). By this he means that those who are in charge, who know the correct order of things and undertake the responsibility to maintain that order, these people must abide by certain rules for the sake of the good of the whole house. So with politics, those who keep the city in order have the least freedom or variation in action because virtue instructs them as to what they should do. Rather than adhering to Protagoras' moral relativism, the man of virtue must abide by the virtues for the sake of the city.

Virtue is not able to be cultivated outside of the community. Aside from politics being the highest aim for virtue, virtue is discovered through Socratic dialogue and conversation, and cultivated through the best friendships. Thus the highest aim of man cannot be achieved on his own, not even through his own mind in contemplation, for he must live it out within the community, even acting to incur good for another.

Their Response to Evil. In book two of Plato's *Republic*, the character Socrates argues that God is not in fact the cause of all things, but only of good ones, and that the inquirer must look elsewhere to find the source of bad things (Plato, 60-61). In Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, he recognizes that evil can have no part with good; they must be completely and entirely separate from one another in order for good to truly be "a principle for all things and... in the very highest degree" (*Metaphysics*, 386). Yet overall, the idea of evil or badness is not greatly dealt with by these two authors.

Part of the reason for this is due to their focus on excellence and virtue. The men who practiced philosophy during this time were well-bred, well-educated men who did not experience many of life's hardships. Their lives were quite manageable and rarely affected by the whims of fortune, provided that they lived according to virtue and their

civic responsibilities. The other portion is due to the fact that Aristotle believes that man's life is concerned entirely with pleasures and pains, but these are things that man can in large part control and manipulate (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 25). Therefore any idea of evil would be transmuted into a perception of either ignorance or misfortune on the part of the person experiencing the pain, for a life of cultivated virtues is most skilled at avoiding pain and achieving pleasure.

When bad fortune does strike the virtuous man, he is most capable of withstanding its blows and maintaining his happiness. Aristotle writes that this ability comes from the habit of "acting and contemplating the things that go along with virtue," and so will be able to "bear what fortune brings most beautifully and in complete harmony in every instance, being in the true sense good and flawlessly squared and centered" (17). The virtuous man is best equipped to effectively withstand bad fortune, as both his soul and typically his finances are in the proper order, and are not easily shaken.

If it turns out there are great parts of bad fortune in someone's life, this may inhibit that individual's ability to practice virtue. However, Aristotle claims, there is great beauty in the man who can calmly bear misfortune as a result of his greatness of soul, and if one achieves this, then "one who is happy could never become miserable, though surely one would not be blessed if he were to fall into fortunes like those of Priam" (17). Here Aristotle seems to make a distinction between happiness and blessedness, wherein happiness does not necessarily depend on blessedness but only on the individual's greatness of soul. This is very stoic in thought, and allows the individual to view his suffering in a way that almost brings him honor for the way in which he conducts himself throughout his pain.

What western culture has inherited from this. Western thought is firmly grounded in Greek culture, from the idea that there is absolute truth to the logically derived characteristics of God. Of course, both of these things have been greatly questioned in the modern and post-modern ages, for reasons that we will explore later in this chapter. Nonetheless, Greek philosophy had a profound influence on the Hellenistic world into which Christianity was born, and its logical thoughts and conclusions were in many cases adopted into orthodox theology. Ancient Greek philosophy is in many ways the foundation for Western civilization, and though its surety is significantly called into question today, its basic teachings and reasoning is in some ways engrained into modern thought.

Ancient Israel

The God of Israel is, Christians, the same God of Christianity and around which much of western culture has been formed. Israel is seen as God's chosen people, a group which he singled out and with whom he lives in special covenant.

Example of Job. While most, if not all according to

books of the Bible could offer their own perspective and response to the pain and suffering of the world, Job is one of the best suited for this purpose. It is the story of a righteous man who has every blessing taken from him by what is from Job's perspective an indifferent God of abandonment. Yet in the end Job is able to reconcile himself to God, even if he does not understand God fully, nor the reason for his suffering. Thus Job "offers a challenge to the modern mind, for it views life without illusion, but not with

despair. It punctures traditional beliefs in God, but not in faith. It sees the futility of death, but not of creation” (Terrien, 15). Though Job’s suffering seems to be needless and purposeless, he is nonetheless able to place himself in right relation to his creator.

Their View of God. Judaism holds that God is all-good, omnipotent, and omnipresent. Yet as two of Job’s friends are prepared to remind him, no man can fully understand God (Job 5:9, 36:26). So it is when the scene opens on Job. “The book contains a twofold scene, in heaven and on earth. Above, the action takes place; down below, the discussion. The lower knows not the meaning of the above, hence it counsels hither and thither: the daily condition of all philosophies and theodicies of the world” (Herder, Kroeger, 284). Yet like many, if not all philosophies and theodicies, the answer with which Job concludes is not entirely satisfactory as far as a justification of God’s love and justice goes. There is a part of God’s nature, or thought, or reasoning that Job and the nation of Israel cannot quite understand.

Thus the God of the Old Testament appears to be “a Deity who transcends all human interests and even morality,” as “the questioner scans the heavens and finds the supposed throne of mercy without an occupant” (Terrien, 20). Therefore, God is either hidden, absent, or vindictively observant in the eyes of Job. There are, of course, other options, with which Job’s friends are more than willing to provide him: they suppose that Job must have committed some unrighteousness of which he is unaware, and again remind him of God’s greatness and seemingly hidden nature.

God’s behavior is shocking even to the observer, offering an “intolerable theology” wherein “for the sake of winning a wager over a cynic in the heavenly council, or at best in order to prove the reality of disinterested devotion among men, the Deity

allows that his best servant be brought to destitution and torture” (25). This seems unreasonable and even in some way unconscionable, perhaps especially from the perspective of the reader, who knows that God is acting as a spectator rather than a savior or covenanted party. In such an instance, God appears unjust and incomprehensible both from the reader’s perspective and from Job’s.

At last, however, after chapters of complaints and attempts at consolation and instruction, God reveals himself to Job. He reveals his omnipotence and his eternal nature, and his all-encompassing knowledge. To this Job essentially says that it is one thing to hear about the nature of God, and another thing altogether to see it with one’s own eyes, as he stands dwarfed in the presence of God (Herder, Kroeger, 287). It seems that the sheer magnitude and greatness and glory of God eclipse whatever pain and injustice Job felt he had suffered, and comes to recognize himself as merely a creation of the creator who is not intrinsically owed a thing. In this way Job returns to a right relation between himself and God, and God restores to him all that was lost.

Their view of the individual. By the end of the book of Job, the individual realizes how insignificant his worries are when presented with the glory and majesty of God. He comes to understand that his only correct relation to the divine is that of adoration and obedience.

Throughout the book, however, the individual appears to be abandoned by God, to suffer meaninglessly and unjustly. Suffering not only from the feeling of being cut off from God, Job also suffers the loss of his children, who are the embodiment of his immortality, the loss of his property and wealth, and earns the scorn of his wife and the alienating commentary of his friends. He seems utterly alone, bereft, and justified, if

anyone can be, of raising a complaint against God. Yet all of his feelings of injustice and anger towards God are dissolved when he is shown his proper place in relation to God. From Job we see that no individual is so righteous that God cannot do with him what he will, though God will always fulfil his promises to his creation in the end.

Their Response to Evil. Samuel Terrien gives a different account of Job than most other interpretations. Terrien argues that the book of Job is not so much a question of why the righteous suffer but is instead a demonstration of “how the self is discovered in relation to society, nature, and the ultimate” “through the medium of suffering” (Terrien, 39). In this way suffering becomes a way through which the individual can understand his place in the universe. Though no one wishes for his place to be one of suffering, nothing informs man of his mortality better than the correct dose of pain, and it is these reminders of our morality and our proper position in life which cause us to form and shape particular social relations.

The problem of evil, for Job, is actually quite like C.S. Lewis’ experience of pain in *A Greif Observed*, as he remarks at the end: “there’s no practical problem before me at all. I know two great commandments, and I’d better get on with them.... What’s left is not a problem about anything I could *do*. It’s all about weights of feelings and motives and that sort of thing. It’s a problem I’m setting myself” (*A Greif Observed*, 685-686). Man’s duty is to do two things: to maintain a certain relation with God (love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength), and to maintain a certain relation with your neighbor (love your neighbor as yourself).

Thus the struggle of Job is not so much that of unjust suffering, but rather the process of suffering with “selfless piety. It did not ask the question, “Why does God

permit undeserved suffering?” Rather, it reflected on the query, “Is there among men such an exquisite love of God which is not a calculating love?” (Terrien, 30). For man’s correct position is to love God at all times, and to understand God’s position as almighty creator and sustainer of the universe. This attitude which Job acquires at the end is “more than a mere concern for the ultimate. It is an act of surrender to a divine person, the maker of nature and my creator, and the surrender is a birth” (21). Job is reborn into a new relation with God, wherein he recognizes his proper place as a created being, subject and surrendered to the omnipotent creator.

Curiously, then, evil does not seem to acquire any representation in the story of Job. God is portrayed as truly sovereign, and there is no effort to wrest his omnipotence from him. Though Job’s friends try to explain the presence of such suffering through the power of sin in the world, God takes full responsibility for his pain. Instead, the whole aim of Job and the aim of humanity in the face of suffering is “submission to the infinite understanding, to the un-graspable plan and the evident goodness of the great father The true theodicy of man is the study of the power, wisdom and goodness of God in all nature, and humble recognition that his plan and his understanding exceed ours” (Herder, Kroeger, 287). Interestingly, the contemplation of the divine is for Greek and Hebrew cultures alike the most remedial activity for life’s anguishes. A life put in proper perspective cannot be aggrandized into any self-centered drama about which the individual can revel. He must instead submit in humility to that which is greater than he.

What western culture has inherited from this. For those who feel that it is wrong for God to allow his creation to suffer without reason, Job’s response and God’s defense of himself will seem unconvincing, disappointing, and more likely than not, quite naïve.

Yet it must be acknowledged that the Israelite's perception of self is vastly different than any mainstream modern perception of self. For Israel as a nation understood that it could expect nothing from God outside of a covenant he chose to make with them. Israel understood the concept of the holy, and was trained as a nation to recognize God as that which is wholly other, hidden behind the veil of the tabernacle (Badè, 183).

Tozer recognizes that in contrast, modernity has lost the idea of the holy, and that without this concept man cannot understand himself as a bad or sinful creature, much less understand the kind of relation put forward by the book of Job (Tozer, 3). As a result the book of Job seems to modernity to be an accurate portrayal of life's suffering; the disagreement lies in accepting the nature of God as grounds enough for his treatment of the sufferer. It is against the mindset of contemporary man to recognize that he does not exist for himself, and that if he is, in fact, endowed with certain inalienable rights, that the obligation to observe these rights may not necessarily hold on the part of man's creator. As we shall soon see, man's entitlement in the modern and post-modern age has led him to expect certain standards of treatment from God for his creation—a mindset that has many of its roots in the post-enlightenment era.

2.2 Post-Enlightenment

Modernity heralds a tectonic shift in the way that the human being perceives himself in relation to God. While this shift is certainly gradual, I will describe only the cultural atmosphere at the temporal poles of Western Culture in an effort to show the vast difference between the ways the culture has and does understand the nature of God and the causes of evil. This will culminate in a demonstration of how a culture's

understanding of the nature of God determines his behavior towards God and his understanding of himself as well. Nietzsche and Dostoevsky are two modern minds who demonstrate the two primary ways that modern man considers and responds to God.

Their view of God

Nietzsche argues that man has taken the place of God as the highest being, and is free to decide the difference between good and bad for himself. Nietzsche declares in his book *The Gay Science* that “God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. . . . Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it?”(Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 125) By this, Nietzsche proclaims that man has disposed with the idea of God, which in his view is beneficial to mankind. Nietzsche believes that the idea of God has devolved into that of a tame lackey who is in service of the weak, rather than an all-powerful God who commands respect and utmost obedience. He believes that man can accomplish more and be more if he creates his own values and dispenses with the idea of God. For Nietzsche, God is a tradition of the past that must be abandoned in order for the greatness of man to be realized.

While Nietzsche was perhaps one of the most extreme and radical thinkers with respect to his views on God at the time, the sense that God’s goodness is incompatible with this world was an idea perceived by many. Fyodor Dostoevsky best voices this feeling through his character Ivan in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Ivan declares that while he believes in God, accepts and believes in “order,” “the meaning of life,” “eternal harmony,” and even “the Word for whom the universe is yearning,” still he cannot reconcile the nature of God to the state of the world. As a result Ivan forces himself into a

dichotomy, and implementing his own tortured autonomy he says, “I do not accept this world of God’s, I do not admit it at all, though I know it exists. It’s not God that I do not accept, you understand, it is this world of God’s, created by God, that I do not accept and cannot agree to accept” (Dostoevsky, 235). Despite the fact that Ivan professes to believe in the greatness and goodness of God, he cannot tolerate or rationally allow the amount and degree of suffering that occurs in the world. God’s goodness, though believed, seems incongruous to the world which he created.

Their view of the individual

Nietzsche’s conception of the individual is split between two groups which he terms masters and slaves. In short, the slaves are those who are weak and who passively resent those who are strong and impose their wills upon the weak. The masters, logically, are those who impose their will upon the weak (Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, 11). Nietzsche’s ideal is the overman, the man who asserts his power over all and creates his own values, establishing the will to power.

Nietzsche asserts in his theory of the will to power that “there is no ‘being’ behind doing, working, becoming; ‘the doer’ is a mere appanage to the action. The action is everything” (26). Nietzsche claims that there is nothing to separate the individual from the action. There is no self, nothing behind the action that chooses to act, “no ‘being’ behind doing”; the self is the will, and the will is the action. Because this is all that man seems to be, Nietzsche sees that it is important for the individual to say “‘yes’ to its own self,” to affirm one’s own nature and actions (19). This idea is the framework for Nietzsche’s will to power. The idea of the will to power is that every man tries to exert his own will over his surroundings in a way that is most suitable to him, all in an effort to

acquire autonomy and dominion. For Nietzsche, man is nothing more than an acquiring animal who should permit himself to exert his own will if he is able.

Dostoevsky also expresses the desire for self-preservation and prolongment, though not through the action of conquering and imposing, but rather through the simple act of choosing to live in the face of reason, absurdity, and pain. Ivan decries the state of the world, yet claims that even if all he ever loved or cared about was stripped away, even if he came to believe that there really is an unjust cosmic order, he says “I would want to live, and as long as I have bent to this cup, I will not tear myself from it until I’ve drunk it all!” Despite the worst evils of life, man is entrenched in the desire to live, the act of declaring his existence and planting the flag of defiance in the face of all absurdities. Ivan trusts in his youth to prevail these absurdities, against “all disillusionment, all aversion to life” (Dostoevsky, 230).

This is the same declaration of self-affirmation that Nietzsche makes, the same process of saying ‘yes’ to oneself in the face of all else. The individual is sure of his autonomy, of his ability to create his own values and his own nature, and chooses to live and actuate himself above all else.

Their view of evil

Nietzsche claims that evil as a moral concept does not exist; it is an idea founded and developed by the weak as a means of asserting their superiority over the masters. Instead, Nietzsche’s morality involves only ‘good’ and ‘bad’, the bad being whatever does not affirm life and resents the will to power (*The Genealogy of Morals*, 1). In the absence of moral evil and the restraints that it places on one’s actions, the master may impose his own values upon the framework of his life, those being “appropriation, injury,

overpowering of what is alien and weaker; suppression, hardness, imposition of one's own forms, incorporation and at least, at its mildest, exploitation" (Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 203). On this view no action can rightly be seen as evil, and no action can be bad so long as it accomplishes its given purpose. To anyone with a normative conception of morality this seems absurd, but it is the absurdity of this world combined with the rise of the belief in the fundamental rights of man which dominate the thought of western culture from the time of the French Revolution through to this Post-Enlightenment era, and continue on today.

Dostoevsky expresses these same thoughts and values concerning the absurdities of life and the right of man to conduct his life with a certain quality of existence. Dostoevsky's Ivan sees life as being morally dichotomous from the all loving, all powerful good God to whom his brother has devoted his life. The world is instead filled with chaos and injustices which do not makes sense. This understanding causes Ivan to declare that "absurdities are all too necessary on earth. The world stands on absurdities, and without them perhaps nothing at all would happen" (Dostoevsky, 243). He feels so lost in the miasma of moral absurdities that he has lost the desire to understand, for he feels that whatever the answer may be he cannot live by it.

The real problem for Ivan is the need for retribution on behalf of the innocent. He cannot accept this world because in it innocent children are tortured, and God not only allows it, but provides no retribution for their torturers on this earth. Ivan declares, "I need retribution, otherwise I will destroy myself. And retribution not somewhere and sometime in infinity, but here and now, on earth, so that I see it myself" (244). Ivan declares that he does not want to cry out with all of creation that God is just, when he

sees the mother and the torturer of her child embrace. He sees the suffering of an innocent child as too high a price to pay for harmony, and so rejects higher harmony altogether. Nowhere is Ivan speaking of evils as an isolated entity or effect, but he instead regards the whole of the world as an unjust, unintelligible system which cannot, or at the very least, is not being redeemed through the retribution of the wicked. As a result, Ivan proclaims, "I absolutely renounce all higher harmony. It is not worth one little tear of even one tormented child who beat her chest with her little fist and prayed to 'dear God' in a stinking outhouse with her unredeemed tears!" (245). The evil that Ivan sees is the failure of God to punish the wicked and protect the innocent. It seems to him as though the world is not governed by the same God who will make all things right in the end, and so Ivan ultimately rejects any higher harmony and resolution which God has planned, because the world in which God has placed innocents is so unjust.

What western culture has inherited from this

The writings of Nietzsche have greatly influenced the mindset of western civilization today. The ideas of self-actualization, affirming the self, and the will to power are deeply ingrained into what it means to be a self-possessed individual. These are also some of the characteristics which the individual feels entitles him to a certain level of respect, and at times even privilege from other individuals, and at root from God, as well.

Dostoevsky's Ivan similarly feels that God owes his creation justice and consistency, and cannot abide by a world in which the anguish of an innocent child is required for greater ecumenical reconciliation; injustice is injustice, and for Ivan as for many in the present age, there is no justification for God when he abandons his creation to suffer alone.

2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have tried to convey how western thought has evolved with regard to the individual's perception of God. While western thought begins in an age which values reason and the order of the universe together with the supremacy of God even over suffering, it concludes in a time, thus far explored, which cannot see that the universe is rationally ordered, and believes that if God is supreme, then he has done his creation some injustice. In the next chapter, I will elaborate on how these eras effected the present age, and how the post-modern man responds to suffering and the idea of God.

CHAPTER 3

The Roots of Entitlement in the Post-Modern Age

The feeling of entitlement arises from one's perception of himself. In order to understand how the individual understands himself, we must first explore how the individual perceives God, as this will inform the way in which he responds to evil. Finally, understanding how God and the nature of evil relate to one another in the individual's mind, we can come to understand how the individual perceives his place and being in the universe, and why the post-modern individual feels that he is entitled to 'just' treatment from God, or at least a justification of God's character and actions.

In this chapter I will show how the individual's perception of God as an unjust authority causes him to attribute evil to life's absurdities and God's irresponsibility. Because the individual views God as an irresponsible creator, the individual feels that he deserves better from God, or rather, deserves a better god. In lieu of such an entity, the post-modern individual, in practice if not in conscious thought, sets himself up to be his own god, who advocates, defends, and fights for himself. This, I believe, is the spiritual root of entitlement.

3.1 How the Individual Perceives God

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the individual's self-perception has grown to the point where he believes in his own autonomy, or at the very least in his ability to defy God in a declaration of his belief in God's injustice. In the present age man's perception

of God has been degraded to that of an illegitimate authority, whose holiness is not understood, and who both fails and is unjust in his role of divine judge.

A Figure of Authority

From Judaism, to the Holy Roman Empire, through the Protestant Reformation, and persisting into the modern age, God has existed as a figure of authority over the world, and for most of history over the individual. Yet as man began to gain more and more individuality, he saw himself as more of an autonomous entity, and as not being dependent on another entity to give value or meaning to his existence; in his mind, these are things the individual creates for himself. As a result, the idea that God requires the obedient surrender of the self seems like an infringement on the right of the supposedly self-made man.

A common analogy of God's relation to man is that of father-to-son. There seems to be four major paternal archetypes for God, those being the Buffoon, as Fyodor Dostoevsky is meant to represent in *The Brothers Karamazov*, the Rigid Father of expectation and discipline, the Absent Father, or, somewhat removed from these types, the wisened though distant Grandfather in the Clouds. All of these archetypes are insufficient in their character to warrant the unflagging obedience of his 'children'—especially when these children do not identify him as their 'father' in any real or meaningful sense of the word.

Lewis notes how the understanding of the father-son relationship has changed since the time of Christ, a time “where paternal authority stood much higher than it does in modern England, “where a father often acts as though he is “half apologetic for having brought his son into the world, afraid to restrain him lest he should interfere with his

independence of mind” (*Problem of Pain*, 572). Post-modern man has no framework or concept of authority which would help him understand how he should relate to God, and instead writes off the demands of God as unjust, based on his understanding of God’s nature and perceived actions. Nonetheless, it may be that man feels the inescapable tie between creature and creator, even if he desperately wishes to lose it. This leads to the individual’s feeling of resentment and abandonment by God, and the general impression of God as an imperfect, hidden, and unjust entity.

Man’s Perception of the Holy

Modern man has no conception of what it truly means for something to be holy and separate. Ancient Israel was trained in this mindset from the time it was brought out of Egypt. The idea of a holy God was instilled in the minds of the Israelites by designating a place where God resides—not with a force or place in nature, but with a people group. Yet the dwelling place of God was not accessible to anyone—in fact it was accessible to almost no one. Only the high priest could enter the dwelling place of God, and he had to do so with a rope tied around his leg lest he be struck down. It is this concept of holiness—something so great that other beings are unworthy to be in its presence—which is wholly lost on this present age.

Instead, man’s perception of God is his own depiction of him, and this, even at its best, falls far short of the complete being of God. The concept of the holy, though surely never fully realized by man, has been degraded and generally fallen short of throughout the whole of history, from its union with the state, to a schism between itself, to an effort of the individual to do justice to the idea of God in his personal life. Contemporary life has no time or place which it regimentally keeps separate from the outside in order to

keep the inside holy; this is the job and the function of the individual self, though the post-modern man does not understand what this entails.

Divine Judgement/Justice

Another one of God's traditional roles is that of judge. In post-modernity, however, man does not see the goodness or justice of God being implemented in the world; God seems to be either absent, or else evil himself for allowing the wicked to suffer. The man of the present age sees God as an unjust or negligent judge, as "a perception of this truth lies at the back of the universal human feeling that bad men ought to suffer... On its mildest level it appeals to everyone's sense of justice" (*The Problem of Pain*, 604). Though God promises judgment for all at the end of time, post-modern man, much like Dostoevsky's Ivan, must see that justice is done on earth in order to believe in the divine goodness.

There is, however, an ironic corollary that occurs when divine judgment is turned toward the individual. In this era, we tend to think that the sins most of us commit should not be worthy of condemnation—we are "mostly good" people, after all, and have done nothing *really* wrong. Lewis explains that "when men attempt to be Christians without this preliminary consciousness of sin, the result is almost bound to be a certain resentment against God as to one always inexplicably angry" (581). Though the post-modern man resents God for not condemning others, he also resents God for his claim upon the individual's life and for his condemnation of the individual's sin.

Though history has many moral and historical instances which could incite such outrage at injustice retrospectively, current events are enough to arouse the individual's awareness that all is not right in this world.

The Effect this has on Man

The overall effect of this understanding of God upon the individual is the awareness of a void. There is the need for an authority to order the world, there is a need for the wicked to be brought to justice, and there is even the vague perception of a need for something that is truly innocent, truly holy, for only such a thing could save the world from its current state. Yet post-modern man does not think that God adequately fills these positions; instead, he is the void. In this void swims the post-modern understanding of evil, with no one and nothing but the individual himself to intervene.

3.2 How the Individual Perceives Evil

The Origin of our Post-Modern Conception of Evil

In his work entitled *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, Alain Badiou claims the idea that the Nazi extermination of European Jews as the contemporary “‘example’” of radical Evil. Badiou is careful when using the term ‘example,’ noting that while a normative example is something which is repeated, “relating to the Nazi extermination, it exemplifies radical Evil by pointing to that whose imitation or repetition must be prevented at all costs” (Badiou, 62). Badiou develops a theory of evil as a simulacrum, or evil as an imitation and representation of the good.

This simulacrum is only made possible by what Badiou terms ‘the void’: the foundation of the situation in which the simulacrum takes root, “around which is organized the plenitude (or the stable multiples) of the situation in question” (Badiou, 68). The void is the uniting factor which makes the fidelity to the simulacrum possible.

The void is an idea around which members of a group convene out of fidelity and adherence to the simulacrum. Badiou writes that

in the case of Nazism, the void made its return under one privileged name in particular, the name ‘Jew’. There were certainly others as well: the Gypsies, the mentally ill, homosexuals, communists... But the name ‘Jew’ was the name of names, serving to designate those people whose disappearance created... a void that would suffice to identify the substance. The choice of this name relates, without any doubt, to... what was *connected to the universality and eternity of truths* (Badiou, 75).

The Nazi party needed an idea around which it could unite, and as a political entity professing the ideals of unity, so argues Badiou, the party had need of an entity against which to unite. While there were many people groups lumped into the void, the title of ‘Jew’ seems to hang over them all, evoking a sense of desolation.

This sense of desolation, this recognition that there is a void both in the technical colloquial sense, is amplified by the associations attached to the name ‘Jew’. It is explicitly and unavoidably connected to the transcendent, to that which is beyond and other, mysterious and unknowable. The absence effected by the simulacrum cannot but be felt.

The holocaust left its imprint on the mind of contemporary man. Many view it as an example of what man is capable of—of how much harm one man is able to inflict on another. There are holocaust museums all over the world to ensure we do not forget the evil we can incur if we submit to the simulacrum. But I do not think it is what man did to man that shocks and disturbs the post-modern man most.

The scattered nation of Israel was assembled to be tortured. The chosen people of God cried out together with a loud voice, but there was no answer. The people of God were sent out into the void; they *became* the void. And God seemed to do nothing—or

did he watch? Did he still expect the praise of a people so bitterly betrayed and abandoned? Elie Wiesel, in his personal account of his time in Nazi concentration camps, recalls asking, and perhaps asks in the same breath, “how could I say to [God]: Blessed be thou, Almighty, Master of the Universe, who chose us among all nations to be tortured day and night, to watch our fathers, our mothers, our brothers end up in the furnaces? Praised by Thy Holy Name, for having chosen us to be slaughtered on thine altar?” (Wiesel, 67) This, so says man, is the ultimate evil of the holocaust; for God has abandoned or else willingly surrendered his chosen people to unspeakable treatment, and has done nothing to come to their aid.

The Absurdity of life

If God has abandoned his chosen people, then surely he will not bend to the rest of the world; thus, in the absence of God, or at least the absence of his righteous character, the natural order of the universe falls into absurdity and chaos. Without a God to judge, there is no one to stop the ambitious man from creating his own values and imposing his will on the weak, in true will to power fashion. There is no cosmic justice and no fulfilling of that which is perceived to be upright and just. And amid all of this, the individual wonders where God is.

After the death of his wife, C.S. Lewis wrote in his pseudonymous work *A Grief*

Observed,

And grief still feels like fear. Perhaps, more strictly, like suspense. Or like waiting; just hanging about waiting for something to happen. It gives one a permanently provisional feeling. It doesn't seem worth starting anything. I can't settle down. I yawn, I fidget, I smoke too much. Up till this I always has too little time. Now there is nothing but time. Almost pure time, empty successiveness. (Lewis, ago, 670)

It seems to me that this is an accurate description of what it is to live in the modern and post-modern age. We feel that there is something missing, and something amiss. Most have this vague sensation that God is out there somewhere, but like Ivan refuse to accept this world, and go perhaps one step further in refusing God altogether. Yet still the sense of the numinous lurks, so we wait for something to happen, full of suspense and dread, feeling our own provisional nature in the face of what might be out there.

We are antsy and anxious, trying to distract ourselves from the emptiness of time that might at any moment be interrupted by what can only be termed the fullness of time. And so we wait in dread, “as damned souls wandering through the void, souls condemned to wander through space until the end of time, seeking redemption, seeking oblivion, without any hope of finding either” (Wiesel, 36). We are waiting for Godot, though instead of a park bench we inhabit the void.

Moral Relativism

As noted in the section above, if God sits neither on his throne of judgment nor his mercy seat, it seems that the world is involved in a perpetual open season of crime, hatred, selfishness—generally all things which perpetuate the self at the expense of someone or something else. There appears to be no effective God in place, and so there is no moral entity to impose a moral law upon us. It follows, according to the cultural consciousness, that the individual may create and act upon his own set of values.

Csordas warns, however, that moral relativism takes its toll on the psyche of the individual. He observes that “moral relativism is not only experience-distant but challenges the very integrity of experience,” which serves as a “challenge to the definition of morality that invites existential vertigo” (Csordas, 525). The individual

cannot know how to relate to anyone in a morally relativistic society—indeed, no relation can take place in such a society but that of conqueror and conquered. Moral relativism provides no social framework for the individual to understand any social exchange, and clearly dissolves all concrete conceptions of right and wrong. In this way, the absurdity of life is in a perpetual cycle with moral relativism, with each one feeding the other.

Summary

To the post-modern mind, the ultimate source of evil seems to be from God himself. If God appeared to intervene for those who suffer, perhaps we would attribute it elsewhere; but the fact that God has created us only to abandon us to suffer alone, when he has the power to do otherwise, this points to God as the cause of our suffering. He imposes no social order, dispenses no justice for either the righteous or the wicked, and so opens the door to absurdity and moral relativism in a generally chaotic world. This does not appear to be the God of justice and love, but rather the God of chaos and indifference.

It is important to note, in addition, that the contemporary age does not understand the concept of suffering as a remedial good. Therefore suffering as something with which one is afflicted by another is avoided at all costs, and can only be understood by the post-modern man as that which is harmful to the individual. When this harm is inflicted upon the individual by God, it cannot be understood as anything but an injustice.

What about this Age?

It may rightly be asked why it is in this age that such a cry against God is raised. There are likely several different answers to this question, but I will address the ones which seem most apparent in my mind.

It is in part, no doubt, a reaction to the concept of the holocaust, as its existence was for many the proof that a good God did not. More subtly, however, is the idea that one's global awareness of suffering is greatly increased by the advent of technology, and the immediacy of this awareness is unprecedented.

Local news channels are busy with reports of crime and stories of tragedy, national newspapers are filled with political conflicts, war, death tolls; the entirety of the world's major problems are all centralized in one innocent looking website or folded bundle of papers, ready to accost their reader with the question, "Where is the omnipotent God of order, now? Why does he allow or inflict *so much* disorder?" This is contrasted to former times, when the individual was largely limited to the scope of his eyes and a comparatively local newspaper.

These questions are simply unavoidable in this present age. Whereas in former times the individual could see that God is good in his own life, today God must be seen to be good for all persons at all times, excepting those who we believe God should judge harshly. Western culture is so individualized that it insists that a righteous loving God would protect and defend each individual's every right. The concept of communal suffering is entirely lost on us, and in an age obsessed with the pursuit of pleasure and the prolonging of life, we fail to understand suffering as something that can be redemptive.

As a result, we feel that suffering can result only in harm, and view every instance as an injustice.

3.3 How the Individual Perceives Himself

The individual forms an understanding of his place in the universe based on his understanding and his relation to God. His degree of willful autonomy will vary in accordance with how good and just he believes that God is; the worse he believes God to be, the more of his own autonomy he will strive to possess.

Abandoned by God

As has been said in a previous section, the individual finds himself in an absurd world, where justice is not served and moral distinctions become increasingly blurred. If God is present, he does not make himself known, and so the individual discovers that he is abandoned by God. This sense of being alone, of being outside of any relation which ties man to something greater than himself, results in a heightened sense of individuality, autonomy, and importance. It is often the case that man becomes the protagonist to his own story with God featuring the antagonist. Man desires to overthrow the power of God, and acts in opposition to the submission of the self.

Rebels against God, and Individuals

In this way man finds himself desiring to sever all ties to his unjust progenitor, and to defy his authority over man's life. They desire to "call their souls their own'. . . . They [want] some corner in the universe of which they [can] say to God, 'This is our business, not yours.'" (*Problem of Pain*, 595). Man adheres to what is a Nietzschean perspective of himself, affirming his own desires and values over God's, while reaching

and grasping for the things that he desires in the face of a God who demands surrender. Nietzsche, together with Freud, informs the individual that his most base desires are natural, and as such should be encouraged rather than suppressed. He smothers all sense of shame, trying “to overcome that sense of shrinking, that desire to conceal, which either Nature herself or the tradition of almost all mankind has attached to cowardice, unchastity, falsehood, and envy” (580). Man comes to feel that these desires are a natural part of his being, and that it is unjust for God, having created him in this way, to demand that he kill this part of himself.

Self-Aggrandizement

Far from denying any part of himself, man is consumed by the feeling that he is life’s protagonist. Equipped with man’s inherent rationality, every event is reflected back upon by the individual as looking back upon life’s great drama. As Terrien says of Job, man “conceives divine justice, not in relation to a God-revolving macrocosm, but as a function of his self-centered microcosm” (Terrien, 236). Man is fixated upon his own suffering and anguish, for it is only in these that he is able to serve as the unjustly treated protagonist in his own narrative. The individual nurses his sickly-sweet feelings of resentment and victimization, falling into a pattern and habit of resentful thought. He comes to desire “the only pleasure a man in anguish can get; the pleasure of hitting back” and “condemns God to human finiteness in an attempt to justify himself” (*A Greif* Observed, 673; Terrien, 236). Man can only afflict God through accusation and defiance, but the individual cannot accuse God if he is not unhappy. As a result, the individual seeks to “cherish and foment and prolong one’s unhappiness” in an effort to sustain the

impression of God's injustice, thus fueling the individual's belief in his right to self-actualize.

Amid all of this, the individual seeks to live a life which is worth living as a defector. He is tied to the romantic ideal of defiance despite any and all consequences. Seeing ourselves as part of this thought, Lewis comments on how "we want to prove to ourselves that we are... tragic heroes" (*A Greif Observed*, 679). While Lewis writes this in reference to maintaining and forbearing the pain one feels when a loved one has died, it is a good description of the feeling one has whenever he grasps at what he knows is already lost. The desired object is gone, lost forever, but the desire to be one who suffers in greatness of soul for the lost ideal remains. In a way this suffering is itself an act of defiance, declaring that the individual would rather wallow in misery than conform to the state of the world.

The Concept of Entitlement and Conclusion

We have seen how the individual views himself as the protagonist of the world beset by suffering from an indifferent or sadistic God. Contemporary man understands suffering as something which almost exclusively connotes injustice, and so he does not understand suffering as leading to any type of good. As a result suffering causes the individual to feel as though he deserves different treatment from God, but seeing as how he does not receive this, the individual becomes his own god and acquires for himself his own desires. It is out of this mentality that entitlement has its roots. Because God is unjust and the world is disordered, man, feeling abandoned into his individuality, invokes his personal power to acquire his desires, and still resenting God for his absence, he feels entitled to a life of happiness and order which a good God, he thinks, would have

bestowed. Life for the contemporary man, therefore, consists of the individual striving to amend what he believes to be injustice.

A Final Explanation

Here I will offer one final effort at an explanation for why the present age so vehemently demands a justification of God's goodness. Chapter one outlined four different types of pain, the most excruciating being that of feeling abandoned by God and thus existing in a misrelation to the creator. However, this fourth type of pain may in fact be two different types of pain, subtly though importantly distinguished. I will call these the pain of abandonment and the pain of despair.

The pain of abandonment is as it is described in chapter one; the individual feels as though God has left him, and this causes him to feel pain as a result of his loneliness and the struggle to maintain a right relation to God when he feels so distant. Though man may struggle to remember what a right relation to God looks like in his perceived absence, however, the pain of abandonment does not have to result in a misrelation of the individual to the creator. The individual may suffer, feeling distant and abandoned by God, be he is still able to maintain the appropriate relation of created to creator, subservient to superseding.

The pain of misrelation, on the other hand, is a severance between the individual and his creator, resulting from man's assertion that God is not who he says he is. Thus man suffers, but suffers without recognition of God's omnipotence and true nature. Without this understanding of God's sovereignty, man is thrown from the pain of abandonment, which still exists in a divinely ruled world, into the pain of misrelation, which exists in a world of seeming total chaos.

In the present age in the west, man doubts the true nature and even the existence of God more than in any time previous. He is also daily met with proofs that the world is filled with chaos, with media streaming in from various easily accessed sources. It seems likely to me, therefore, that there are more individuals—a greater proportion, too—who suffer under the pain of misrelation than ever before. This is the source of the outcry in the modern and post-modern eras.

CHAPTER 4

Christianity's Reply

Though modernity presents its own challenges, the suffering of the individual's human heart and soul has reached no greater depths in the present age than was possible in the ancient era; there are instead simply more people feeling the deepest kind of pain than ever before, and this as a result of misunderstanding the divine person. When omnipotence is truly possessed by the creator of the universe, remedial pain becomes possible, and the created is able to stand in a right relation to the creator once again, and to love; for it is love which provides the best proof of a good God.

Pain as a Remedial Good

The post-modern man seeks to avoid pain at all costs, as it reminds him that even with the progress of medicine, all men remain mortal. He understands pain only as harm, as a threat of death, and therefore only as an evil. Yet it is widely accepted, in doctrine, at least, that pain can be a corrective or remedial good, leading the individual away from what is harmful and towards what is good. In some ways, pain such as this can be thought of as spiritual sensory pain, for just as our nerve endings put us in pain to keep us from danger, so too may certain pains direct us away from particular behaviors.

Suffering, too, may be the only means by which the individual becomes willing to surrender all to his creator. When man becomes steeped in his own rebellion and the belief that he is an independent creature, pain may be the only thing which causes him to see his intrinsic need for another, and the necessary relation that must exist between the

individual and God. Terrien says that the book of Job “uses suffering as a way of isolating man from society, from God and from himself, in order to place him in the situation of creatureliness fulfilled” (Terrien, 142). The height of creaturely existence, then, is to possess a heart which recognizes the greatness of God in the face of any amount of pain or misfortunes. Like the sacrifice of Isaac, then, suffering may become the altar on which the individual sacrifices his own desires in favor of union with God.

God’s desire is for the free love of his creation, as he “knows what we are and that our happiness lies in Him. Yet we will not seek it in Him as long as He leaves us any other resort where it can even plausibly be looked for” (Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 606). The role of pain, then, is to force the individual’s recognition of his need for God, and the recognition that he is the only source of true happiness. Because of God’s absolute love, then, “our tribulations cannot cease until God either sees us remade or sees that our remaking is now hopeless” (Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 613). His absolute love requires that God be cruel to be kind; for the temporary and temporal feelings of pain are far better than the anguish of eternal separation from God.

So it is that man can be made perfect through suffering. As Lewis wrote, pain demands to be felt, and it alerts man to the fact that something is not how it should be. Through the process of suffering, the individual may come to the climax of faith, arriving at an understanding of God’s greatness which eclipses all earthly pains. Thus it is here that the doctrine of the ancients makes its reappearance, as a life of happiness consists in the contemplation of the divine, placing all of life’s temporary pains in their proper perspective.

Right Relation of Created to Creator

Contemporary man, generalized as we have been considering him, wants no part in a relation to God which would obligate him to any degree of reverence or duty. As we have seen, the individual wishes to plant the flag of autonomy, to adhere to his own moral values, always affirming his own existence, if for no other reason than to spite the God which gave him existence only to suffer. Yet despite his beliefs, man is not his own creator, but “we are, not metaphorically but in very truth, a Divine work of art, something that God is making, and therefore something with which He will not be satisfied until it has a certain character” (Lewis, *pop*, 571). As we have seen in the previous section, the rebellious man, and all men, for that matter, will encounter pains in his life. In the end, these pains will either result in the final rebellion or the final surrender of the individual.

Because of God’s love for us, he desires our ultimate good, “and our good is to love Him (with that responsive love proper to creatures) and to love Him we must know Him: and if we know Him, we shall in fact fall on our faces” (Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 577). It follows, then, that our ultimate good is to fall down in admiration and reverence for God. “For we are only creatures: our role must always be that of patient to agent, female to male, mirror to light, echo to voice. Our highest activity must be response, not initiative” (Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 576). This is what it means to exist in a right relation to God; it is our highest good, and the source of man’s ultimate happiness.

This response is, however, utterly opposite to man’s natural inclinations and his desire to be none other than his own. Because of man’s free will, he has the ability to refuse this correct relation with God, and when he does so it is due to the belief that God

is unjust or unloving. Lewis explains that man believes this largely because “we attach a trivial meaning to the word ‘love’, and look on things as if man were the center of them. Man is not the centre. God does not exist for the sake of man. Man does not exist for his own sake” (Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 574).

Indeed, Terrien claims that the book of Job “points to a God beyond the God of ethical concept.” Regardless of the complete validity or implications of this statement, man is left to stand in awe of the nature of God. On Terrien’s view, however, “the sense of wonder, in the end, is insufficient. It is contemplation of God at work which is called for” (Terrien, 246). To be in true relation with God, one cannot stand idly by, mouth agape at the grandeur of God; he must know God and understand him, and in this understanding, love him. “In perfect cyclic movement, being, power, and joy descended from God to man in the form of gift and returned from man to God in the form of obedient love and ecstatic adoration” (Lewis, *A Grief Observed*, 675).

When man is in a right relation with his creator, he can submit to divine authority, believing that despite appearances or human reason, God is good, and “perfect goodness can never debate about the end to be attained, and perfect wisdom cannot debate about the means most suited to achieve it” (Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 566). The human soul shrouded in sin instinctively rages against the idea that God, understood as truly good, loving, and omnipotent, could choose to create a world such as this. When the individual takes the time to remove himself in contemplation of the divine, however, and comes to understand a glimmer of what it means to be holy, he is reminded of his position in relation to the divine, and so is allowed to submit both his will and his confusion to the

Master of the universe. Yet this is not all. For in the fullness of time the Creator will “come to him in person. And this means love” (Terrien, 241).

The Greatest Commandment, the Greatest Gift

Love is Christianity’s ultimate reply to the problem of pain and suffering. It is curiously difficult to adequately discuss, as it takes many different forms and accomplishes many different aims. This should not surprise us, for we know that love is an ultimate, an absolute: For God *is* love.

Love as surrender. As the previous section discussed, surrender is the process of the individual coming into right relation with the creator. This right relation on the part of man is one of love for God, and reverence for his being. “To experience the love of God in a true, and not illusory form, is therefore to experience it as our surrender to His demand, our conformity to His desire” (Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 576). Love as surrender is one aspect of Christianity’s reply to suffering, for in it man achieves his greatest need, that is, the correct relation and contemplation of God. If man exists in this way, though he lose his property, his family, his health, he will not fall into utter despair, for he understands the nature of God and man’s subservient role in the universe. This is, of course, a dissatisfactory answer for the individual who rages against God, but this individual desires neither the truth nor his own peace, only his own way. Man’s surrender to God removes the division within himself, preventing the individual’s despair and promoting his joy in God.

The perfect model of this love was of course in Christ, who perfectly enacted “joy and ease of all the faculties and all the sense that filial self-surrender which our Lord

enacted in the agonies of the crucifixion” (Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 594). Christ was obedient in surrender even unto death—and this act of love as surrender is the ultimate reply to a suffering world. The world was not abandoned to itself, but was saved from itself through an act of supreme love and Christ’s death. It is because of this that man may hope in things greater than this life.

Love as suffering. There is perhaps no greater demonstration of selfless love than to choose to suffer for another, whether with them in company or on their behalf. C.E. Rolt “interprets the power of perfect love as power to endure suffering, love Whose perfection lies not in the mere capacity of suffering but requires its actual endurance” (qtd. in Adams, Marilyn, 71). This provides a way out from the problem of meaningless suffering, for if God is love, then he must necessarily endure the pain of another. Therefore, when man suffers, he does not do so alone, but God suffers with him. Man is not abandoned by God to suffer alone, for “there is no love without sharing and a God who loves is a God who suffers” (Terrien, 241). It also follows that if suffering is an injustice, then God is subject to this injustice along with man.

God’s participation in human suffering gives man hope for a life filled with transcendent meaning in contemplation of the divine, and thus holds the power to “transfigure the perplexity of existence into the will to live triumphantly” (Terrien, 247). Man need not rail against the meaninglessness of suffering, for as long as God participate with him, the suffering cannot be meaningless.

God’s love. In his preface to *The Problem of Pain*, C.S. Lewis writes, “when pain is to be borne, a little courage helps more than much knowledge, a little human sympathy

more than much courage, and the least tincture of the love of God more than all” (Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 149). Even in the midst of suffering, the knowledge that man’s creator regards him with love is enough to lessen the degree of his suffering. As long as man is aware of God’s love, he will not fall into either the pain of abandonment or the pain of despair. God’s love decreases and sanctifies the suffering of man, ensuring that man does not despair of the absence of God, and that any pain experienced would direct him back towards the good.

Though the individual often accuses God of creating man in less-than-fortunate circumstances, Robert Adams proposes that God’s desire to create each individual out of love is reason enough to justify his action. He further argues that

they need not be the best of all possible creatures, or included in the best of all possible worlds, in order for this qualification of His kindness to be consistent with His perfect goodness. The desire to create *those* creatures is as legitimate a ground for Him to qualify His kindness toward some, as the desire to create the best of all possible worlds (Adams, 322)

God’s love is seen as a kind of just compensation for this being a presumably sub-optimal universe in every other respect. Man’s existence is given value and purpose through the love of God, refuting the sense of absurdity and emptiness so often felt by the post-modern man.

Conclusion

Against the complaint that God has unjustly placed man in a world where he is subject to pain and suffering, which is most often perceived as undeserved, Christianity replies that pain is not always a bad thing for the individual, as it may lead him towards the good and a right relation with God. This right relation then bolsters man through life’s vicissitudes, and prevents him from succumbing to either the pain of abandonment or the

pain of despair, and places man in the proper position of reverence, contemplation, and love with respect to God. Finally, the presence and power of love in the world sustains man through his experience of suffering. Love, whether from God or man, informs the individual that he is not alone, does not have to suffer alone, and does not have to stay in his present state of suffering. Because Christ chose to love through surrender, he also loved through suffering and death on the cross, so that we might be able to exist in a right relation to God and to regard him and be regarded with love.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this work has shown how the individual's perception of God shapes the way he thinks about all other aspects of his life, especially the idea of evil and his own autonomy. Ultimately, we have learned that the more a culture's idea of God is degraded, the more entitled that society will feel, as they do not understand the true nature of God and believe they have been unjustly abandoned to suffer a life of cruelty. Through the book of Job and the ultimate being of Love, however, the individual is able to restore his relation to God, and is able to honor and love him in active contemplation. This is the life which will make men truly happy, regardless of his circumstances.

In chapter one, I outlined and briefly discussed the general problem of pain, including an exploration of the nature of pain, the nature of God, the nature of happiness, and what man feels that he deserves, until finally offering a brief reconciliation of these factors. Chapter two offered insight into the present age's cultural precedents, aiming to show how culture's dissatisfaction with God changes in accord with certain social changes that affect how the individual perceives God. With an understanding of what has led up to the present culture, chapter three deals with the origins behind the feeling of entitlement and its direct relation to the way a culture thinks about God. Finally, in chapter four I give what response Christianity offers to those who claim that this world and the suffering it undergoes is unjust, and argue that God's love for his creatures justifies his act of creating them even in a less than best possible world.

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