

The Problem of Pain

C.S. Lewis

Week Two

Preface

- 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. (p. xii)

Chapter One – Introductory

- Lewis starts by explaining how, when he was an atheist, he would have answered why he believes there is no God – Earth is arranged so that all creatures have to prey upon one another. Sentient creatures inflict pain, and in pain mostly they die. Human reason lets people foresee pain and even death. Civilizations improve conditions a little but then pass away. The universe is running down. SO, either there is no spirit behind the universe, or it is indifferent to good and evil, or it is evil. (pp. 1-3)
- But then, if the universe is so bad, how did humans come to attribute it to the activity of a wise and good Creator? The direct inference from evil flower to virtuous root, from senseless work to a workman infinitely wise, staggers belief. (p. 3)
- Religion has a different origin. Three strands or elements, plus in Christianity, one more. (p. 5)
 - The Numinous – awe of a mighty spirit (p. 6) There seem to be only two views we can hold about awe. Either it is a mere twist in the human mind, or else it is a direct experience of the really supernatural, to which the name Revelation might be properly given. (p. 10)
 - The moral experience – The second element in religion is the consciousness not merely of a moral law, but of a moral law at once approved and disobeyed. It cannot be inferred from experience. It is either inexplicable illusion or else revelation. (p. 11)
 - The third stage – When people make the Numinous Power the guardian of the morality to which they feel an obligation. (pp. 11-12) It's not a natural linkage. Non-moral religion and non-religious morality still exist.
 - The fourth strand (unique to Christianity) – a historical event, a man born among Jews who claimed to be One With the haunter of nature and the giver of the moral law. (p. 13) You believe him, or you think he is a raving lunatic. If you believe him, then the story of death and resurrection become believable as well.
 - Pain would be no problem unless, side by side with our daily experience of this painful world, we had received what we think a good assurance that ultimate reality is righteous and loving. (p. 14)

Chapter Two – Divine Omnipotence

- The problem of pain, in its simplest form: 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.” (p. 16)
- To counter this argument, we'll need different understandings of these words (good, almighty, happy) than the ones that are popular. (p. 16)

- We also need a clear understanding of what we mean by “impossible.” If something is self-contradictory, it is absolutely impossible for everyone, God included, because it is nonsense, just meaningless combinations of words. So, for example, God can’t both withhold free will and give a creature free will at the same time. (p. 18)
- Not even Omnipotence could create a society of free souls with at the same time creating a relatively independent and “inexorable” Nature. (p. 19)
 - You can’t have a sense of self unless there is something that is not yourself.
 - Something analogous to society exists within the Divine from all eternity – Father, Son, Holy Spirit have a concrete love for one another. Their love exists before all worlds, and creatures derive a sense of love from them. (p. 20)
 - Freedom must mean freedom to choose, and choice implies the existence of things to choose between. (p. 21)
 - So, a minimum condition of self-consciousness and freedom is that a creature knows it is distinct from God and can choose to love God more than self or self more than God. But if that were the only choice, there would be no knowledge of fellow creatures. (p. 20)
 - To experience fellow creatures, we have to be in the same environment – common space and common time. We co-exist. (p. 21)
 - We need a neutral something that we can manipulate to make signs to each other – sound waves, material things. Society implies a common world in which members meet. And to be a neutral field, the world has to have rules, a fixed nature of its own. Otherwise, each of us could manipulate it at will. If you were in a world subject to my every whim, you couldn’t act in it and couldn’t exercise free will (and vice versa). (p. 22)
 - With fixed rules, not all states of matter will be equally agreeable to the wishes of a given soul, and not all will be equally beneficial for our bodies. Fire can warm at one distance, destroy at another. That’s why we need pain sensors. (p. 23)
 - Matter can’t be equally convenient and pleasurable to each member of society. Downhill is uphill for someone else. (p. 23)
 - Facilitates courtesy and respect, but also facilitates competition and hostility. And people with free will can choose either course. If they choose hostility, they can manipulate matter to hurt. (p. 24)
 - God might be able to intervene – to turn a wood beam to grass if it’s being used to hurt someone – but that is counter to free will. Carried to extremes, evil thoughts would be impossible, and once again, free will is lost. (p. 24)
 - God occasionally performs miracles, but the idea of a common, stable world would be lost if he did it all the time. (p. 25)
 - Perhaps this is not the best of all possible universes, but the only possible one. Perfect goodness can never debate about the end to be attained; perfect wisdom cannot debate about the means most suited to attain it. (p. 26)