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THE UNIVERSITY OF
NOTRE DAME
A U S T R A L I A

School of Arts and Sciences, Fremantle

Is Pain Really God's Megaphone?

Responding to C.S. Lewis

Bachelor of Arts (Honours)

Philosophy

of

Lisa Moate

Supervised by
Dr. Richard Hamilton

October 2008

DEDICATED TO

C.S. "Jack" Lewis
(1898-1963)

and his beloved wife

Helen Joy Davidman
(1915-1960)



DECLARATION

I declare that this Project is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary institution.

Name

Signature

Date

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ABSTRACT

In this study I will defend C.S. Lewis' claim that people can be morally improved through experiences of pain and suffering and that, as such, attempts to avoid painful experiences are inappropriate. In explaining the context within which Lewis treats pain, a discussion of the nature of pain itself is not necessary since the importance of Lewis' work lies in its practical application and the role it has in people's lives; that is, in contributing towards our moral growth. The nature of pain is examined insofar as clarifying the idea that it can only be understood individually due to the distinct uniqueness of the person as a singular entity and the respective individuality of perspective and linguistic interpretation. Because of this individuality, responses to pain differ vastly, and for this reason it is important to emphasise the benefits of endurance and the consequences of avoidance in painful experiences. Furthermore, I have examined the way Lewis deals with the claim in each of his various genres in order to show how his work collectively contributes toward the development of this position.

CONTENTS

Chapter One – Introductory.....	7
1: Introduction.....	7
2: Lewis’ Task as a Writer.....	9
3: Putting Pain into Context.....	12
Chapter Two – Arguments in <i>The Problem of Pain</i>	21
1: Pain is God’s Megaphone to Rouse a Deaf World.....	21
2: Breaking the Will.....	23
3: Perfection through Suffering at the Hands of Others.....	26
4: Humans are Perfected through ‘Corrective Good’.....	29
Chapter Three – Theological Arguments.....	32
1: The Human Relationship with God.....	32
2: ‘Heaven’ and ‘Hell’.....	37
3: The Fall of Man.....	40
Chapter Four – Literary Arguments, part one.....	44
1: <i>Spirits in Bondage – A Cycle of Lyrics</i>	44
2: <i>A Grief Observed</i>	51
Chapter Five – Literary Arguments, part two.....	57
1: <i>The Screwtape Letters</i>	57
2: <i>The Chronicles of Narnia</i>	62
Conclusion.....	73
Bibliography.....	75

CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTORY

1: Introduction

In this study I will defend C.S. Lewis' claim that human beings are improved through experiences of pain and suffering and I will show that Lewis' work reflects this claim. Lewis writes that "I am only trying to show that the old Christian doctrine of being made 'perfect through suffering' is not incredible".¹ Throughout his work, Lewis uses both the terms 'improvement' and 'perfection' in relation to this concept. 'Perfection' through pain and suffering indicates that these experiences improve people for the purposes of progression towards developing a better moral character. In addition, Lewis' quote that "pain is [God's] megaphone to rouse a deaf world" is reflected in the title of this dissertation because it reflects this claim.² Although it will be dealt with further in Chapter Two, Lewis uses the quote to explain that pain both indicates hindrances to moral development and motivates people to attend to those hindrances. In this way, moral lessons can be acquired through experiences of pain and suffering. The question of whether or not perfection is ever attained through this process, however, is not one that I will seek to answer in this study, which will be limited specifically to showing that Lewis' work supports the claim that suffering is a necessary contribution toward the development of one's moral character.

I must also acknowledge that suffering is perhaps not the only means of improvement. Due to the individual and personal nature of these experiences (as part three of this chapter will argue) people respond in different ways, sometimes resulting in negative rather than positive reactions. However, this does not mean that positive results are not possible for these people. I will argue that all experiences of suffering have the capacity to advance people's moral growth, regardless of their response to it.

¹ C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 1940, Signature Classics Edn, (HarperCollins Publishers; London, 2002), p.105.

² Ibid, p.91.

Lewis' work reflects many different questions and issues regarding pain and suffering and its presence in people's lives. In addition to themes that support the claim of suffering as a means of improvement, *The Problem of Pain* acknowledges the logical dilemma of why an apparently all-loving, all-powerful God would allow pain and suffering to exist, in addition to issues that reflect the difficulty involved with arriving at an adequate understanding of the role pain has in our lives.³ *A Grief Observed* reflects the grieving process Lewis personally experienced following the death of his wife, and much of his poetry and literature reflects similar themes.⁴ In this study, I will argue that the various themes reflected in Lewis' works support the idea that human suffering acts to advance the capacity for moral betterment.

In the remainder of this chapter I will clarify Lewis' task as a writer and the context in which he discusses pain. In Chapter Two of this study I will examine the theoretical themes in *The Problem of Pain*.⁵ Similarly, Chapter Three will focus on the theological themes in Lewis' writing and their symbolic nature and in Chapters Four and Five I will show how the themes in Lewis' literary works support the claim that suffering acts to improve persons; these works include *A Grief Observed* (poetic prose written from the perspective of personal experience), early poetry included in *Spirits in Bondage – A Cycle of Lyrics*, *The Screwtape Letters*, and *The Chronicles of Narnia*.⁶ Each chapter will argue that the relevant themes examined support the claim that humans grow through suffering. In this study this growth is discussed in Aristotelian terms.⁷ While Aristotle's virtue theory will not be extensively dealt with, it will be

³ Ibid, p.3 and C.S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed*, (Faber and Faber Ltd; London, 1966) pp.7-8.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*.

⁶ Lewis, *A Grief Observed*, C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, 1948, Signature Classics Edn, (HarperCollins Publishers; San Francisco, 2001) and C.S. Lewis, *Spirits in Bondage – A Cycle of Lyrics*, 1919, (Harvest Brace Jovanovich Publishers; Orlando, 1984).

⁷ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by J.A.K. Thomson, (Penguin Books; London, 2004).

alluded to where necessary. Chapters Three and Five will also make use of Augustinian foundations.⁸

This study, furthermore, will be restricted to the context of human pain and will not include animal pain, even though Lewis dedicates one chapter to animal pain in *The Problem of Pain*. “We must be careful to attend to what we know and not to what we imagine ... About human pain we know, about animal pain we only speculate”.⁹ It is important, then, for us to maintain positive responses to difficult situations that present themselves in our lives because it is through positivity that these experiences can lead to betterment.

2: Lewis’ Task as a Writer

In this part of the chapter I will clarify Lewis’ task as a writer and academic and show the philosophical importance of his work. Lewis wrote in various genres, all of which contribute collectively to an understanding of painful experiences. In this way, Lewis is able to use a genre to develop ideas which may not be fully developed in another genre. For example, *Mere Christianity* represents Lewis’ attempt at theology, showing his capacity as a Christian apologist.¹⁰ *The Problem of Pain* shows an amalgamation of various theological and philosophical issues. Through a philosophical investigation, Lewis attempts to answer the question of why an omnibenevolent and omnipotent God would allow pain to exist.¹¹ Lewis is also considered to be a literary scholar, as is apparent from such works as *The Screwtape Letters*, *The Great Divorce*, and the series *The Chronicles of Narnia* (in addition to his early attempts at poetry and various short

⁸ St. Augustine, *Confessions*, translated by R. S. Pine-Coffin, (Penguin Classics; 1961 Edn) & St. Augustine, *Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Love*, translated by J.B. Shaw, (Regnery Publishing; Washington D.C., 1996).

⁹ Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, pp.107-108.

¹⁰ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 1952, Signature Classics Edn (HarperCollins Publishers; San Francisco, 2001).

¹¹ Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, p.3.

stories) to name but some.¹² Various published essays also reflect his capacity as a philosopher, and *A Grief Observed* reflects his personal insight into his own experiences of suffering.¹³ The result of such a varied writing career is not that Lewis is either a theologian, novelist, philosopher or self-help writer (if *A Grief Observed* can be counted as such). As a self-confessed layman, rather, his task was to present complex academic concepts in such a manner as are accessible to the general public. “I write, of course, as a layman” he tells us in the preface to *The Problem of Pain*.¹⁴ In this context, Lewis thought of himself as both a writer and a man. In the essay “Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What’s To Be Said” Lewis says that “Every poet was also a man and a citizen; in that capacity he ought to, and would wish to, make his work edifying as well as pleasing”.¹⁵ In further explaining his task he says that

I want to use the distinction between the author as author and the author as man... What this comes to for me is that there are usually two reasons for writing an imaginative work, which may be called Author’s reason and the Man’s. If only one of these is present, then, so far as I am concerned, the book will not be written.¹⁶

This explanation can be applied to most of Lewis’ work, particularly his literature, but he specifically relates it to his children’s books which he prefers to call “fairy tales”: “You will notice that I have throughout spoken of Fairy Tales, not children’s stories”.¹⁷ Lewis says of this genre that “I wrote fairy tales because the Fairy Tale seemed the ideal Form for the stuff I had to say”.¹⁸ Lewis’ literature is important because the use of imagery and metaphor allows him to express ideas in a form that appeal to a person’s inner emotions and values.¹⁹ “One could make [ideas] for the first time appear in their

¹² Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*; C.S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, 1946, Signature Classics Edn, (HarperCollins Publishers; London, 2002); C.S. Lewis, *Essay Collection – Literature, Essays and Short Stories*, Edited by Lesley Walmsley (HarperCollins Publishers; London, 2000); and Lewis, *Spirits in Bondage – A Cycle of Lyrics*.

¹³ Lewis, *A Grief Observed*.

¹⁴ Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, p.xii.

¹⁵ Lewis, “Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What’s To Be Said” from *Essay Collection: Literature, Philosophy and Short Stories*, p.118.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.120.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.119.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.120 and Don W. King, “The Wardrobe as Christian Metaphor”, *Mythlore*, 14, 1987.

real potency”.²⁰ In addition, Lewis’ literature is important to the philosophical discussion because it is able to express philosophical ideas in a way that can be understood by the general public. Public understanding of these ideas is necessary because Lewis centres his work on topics that are of great human importance. Pain, particularly, is present in all people’s lives at one time or another. As such, restricting a discussion of this kind to academic understanding would be inappropriate.

The inhibitions which I hoped my stories would overcome in a child’s mind may exist in a grown-up’s mind too, and may perhaps be overcome by the same means. The Fantastic or Mythical is a Mode available at all ages... At all ages, if it is well used by the author and meets the right reader, it has the same power: to generalise while remaining concrete, to present in palpable form not concepts or even experiences but whole classes of experience, and to throw off irrelevancies.²¹

This approach does not undermine the quality of Lewis’ arguments, academically, though. The claim that humans are improved through suffering is a common theme in most of his work and dealt with using various mediums, as explained above, ensuring that the topic is covered as fully as possible. The result is that by using different modes of expression to cover different angles of a subject, Lewis has in effect attempted to provide a more or less complete view. Whether he achieves this adequately, though, is subject to debate. Different people from different disciplines will inevitably have varying opinions on how a subject should be approached. It remains, however, that Lewis’ work is acclaimed and has received much positive attention, shown in the fact that many international societies exist with the aim of academically responding to his philosophical, theological and literary work. In addition, his children’s books and life story have been popularised by film. Lewis’ work is valuable because of the many different approaches that it covers and its level of accessibility to the general public.

As stated, Lewis’ work deals with poignant issues that are of great importance to human life, such as love, pain and religion. Through his work he suggests that these

²⁰ Lewis, “Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What’s To Be Said” from *Essay Collection: Literature, Philosophy and Short Stories*, p.120.

²¹ *Ibid.*

issues can help us learn to become better people and to live better lives. Lewis' work also provides insight into the particulars of such subjects as these, and in terms of philosophical value we can examine Lewis' perspective of these subjects so as to determine the importance his thought provides in relation to the workings of the human person and the place of humans in the world.

Lewis' work is philosophically important not only because of the aforementioned reasons, but also because of one of its central claims, namely that suffering is present in people's lives in order to improve or 'perfect' them. This claim provides a positive response to troubling issues that are present in all people's lives; hence a philosophical investigation of the way Lewis argues for this claim allows us to attain a better understanding of how it can improve us, and subsequently, how it can benefit our lives.

3: Putting 'Pain' into Context

Lewis uses the terms 'pain' and 'suffering' interchangeably. "Pain... is synonymous with 'suffering', 'anguish', 'tribulation', 'adversity', or 'trouble'".²² In accordance with Lewis' interpretation, I will also use the terms 'pain' and 'suffering' synonymously.

In his work, Lewis discusses pain in context of the role it plays in people's lives, rather than examining the nature of pain itself. This implies that there is both a difficulty in determining a universal definition of pain, and that a universal definition is unimportant to his task. Personal perspectives of pain are particularly emphasised because individual responses direct the extent to which painful experiences have the capacity to improve one's moral character. As Aristotle writes: "What is terrible is not the same for all persons".²³

In terms of meanings associated with pain, it can be said that everyone has an understanding of what pain is. To this extent pain is intelligible universally. It can also

²² Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, p.88.

²³ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, p.67.

be considered a shared experience at this level. However, individual people understand the nature of pain to represent different meanings. For this reason it is difficult to explain the nature of pain in universally understandable terms. Each person is an individual insofar as they consist of a singular entity, and each person will have a specific interpretation of the meanings attached to painful experiences. In terms of Wittgenstein's arguments concerning language this might be a result of the different interpretations people have of the words that are used to describe painful experiences.²⁴ In this respect, the nature of pain can be understood as a private experience due to the individuality of perspective and linguistic interpretation. Thus, the way in which one person will verbally interpret the nature of pain is different from another person's interpretation. However, explanations concerning the nature of pain do not contribute toward Lewis' argument, which specifically concerns the role it has in people's lives. The role pain is able to play is a result of individual response. It is important, then, to discuss individuality of perspective only insofar as it is necessary to appeal to a positive interpretation of painful experiences, since moral betterment results from positive responses.

M. Scott Peck emphasises the role of painful experiences in terms of the value they have in advancing the developmental process of human character formation. In *The Road Less Travelled* Peck says that

Life is difficult. This is a great truth, one of the greatest truths... because once we truly see this truth, we transcend it. Once we truly know that life is difficult – once we truly understand and accept it – then life is no longer difficult. Because once it is accepted, the fact that life is difficult no longer matters.²⁵

Although “seeing this truth” is challenging, such responses reflect a higher good that can be attained through facing and enduring this process.

It is in this whole process of meeting and solving problems that life has its meaning... Problems call forth our courage and our wisdom... It is only because of problems that we

²⁴ Ludwig Wittgenstein, “The Blue Book” in *The Blue and Brown Book*, (Harper and Row; New York, 1980), p.3.

²⁵ M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Travelled*, (Rider; Sydney, 2008), p.3.

grow mentally and spiritually... It is for this reason that wise people learn not to dread but actually to welcome problems and actually to welcome the pain of problems.²⁶

The role of courage in facing and accepting pain allows us to improve toward attaining the moral betterment of our character because, as Aristotle points out, to face fear and pain “in the right way” is more honourable in terms of acting virtuously than avoiding painful situations.²⁷ In this context, one’s personal response to painful situations will determine the extent to which one will improve.²⁸ As I will discuss further in Chapter Two, Lewis’ claim emphasises a similar idea. The statement “I am only trying to show that... being made ‘perfect through suffering’ is not incredible” implies that to avoid pain is inappropriate since it is necessary for our moral improvement.²⁹ Lewis also makes particular use of the Aristotelian concept of courage in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, which will be discussed further in Chapter Five.³⁰

Although my study is specifically concerned with the role pain has, rather than the nature of pain, I will seek to explain Lewis’ interpretation in the context that the nature of pain can only be discussed insofar as it is a product of private interpretation in order to clarify the foundation which the discussion is based on. This will also be examined in terms of ‘thick’ and ‘thin’ moral concepts in order to clarify the perspective from which Lewis argues. The ‘thick’ and ‘thin’ method of thinking aims to provide a more complete understanding of an often complex principle or idea, with ‘thin’ moral concepts referring to those principles that provide a basic overview of an idea, while ‘thick’ moral concepts are much more specific and descriptive. The ‘thick’ concept, then, seeks to provide a specific interpretation of a ‘thin’ universal idea.³¹

²⁶ Ibid, p.4.

²⁷ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, pp.67-68.

²⁸ Ibid, pp.64-66.

²⁹ Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, p.105.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture”, in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (Basic Books; New York, 1973), pp.3-30.

Lewis says that “I am not arguing that pain is not painful. Pain hurts. That is what the word means”.³² This is perhaps the simplest alternative of a definition of pain that Lewis offers. At the most basic level “pain hurts”. This can be understood in a ‘thin’ context because of the generality and because it can be agreed upon by most people. The structure of Lewis’ argument in *The Problem of Pain*, however, is questionable. His definitions are not introduced at the beginning of the book, but rather throughout the final chapters. This emphasises the claim that defining pain beyond this ‘thin’ explanation, and understanding the nature of pain, is unimportant because much of the argument concerns the role such experiences have in people’s lives, and this can be followed adequately without the context of a universal definition. Lewis’ description, though, is used as a supplement to another explanation that he also gives:

Pain has two senses which must now be distinguished. **A.** A particular kind of sensation, probably conveyed by specialised nerve fibres, and recognisable by the patient as that kind of sensation whether he dislikes it or not (e.g., the faint ache in my limbs would be recognised as an ache even if I didn’t object to it). **B.** Any experience, whether physical or mental, which the patient dislikes.³³

Although this can be taken as an acknowledgement of the conventional distinction between uses of the words ‘pain’ and ‘suffering’, both can be used synonymously because almost any painful experience can be understood in the A sense. In a physiological sense, for example, one might be able to explain emotional responses by tracing the hormonal influences. Pain might also be examined in a physiological context. Tears, for example, are often produced when we are sad and heart palpitations when we are feeling afraid or threatened. However, Lewis’ expression in this statement seems to be unclear. The word ‘dislike’ can be applied to many different states. For example, if pain ‘hurts’ then to what degree does something need to hurt if it is to be classified as pain? Or can a simple dislike for something be constituted as pain? Personal human perception means that this is not a clear issue in a universal

³² Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, p.105.

³³ *Ibid*, p.87.

context, regardless of what Lewis writes. Alternatively, it might be better understood on a case-by-case basis in which pain is classified according to the situation. From this we can see that linguistic explanations concerning the nature of pain are problematic in that there is a difficulty in providing an adequate explanation of meanings. Also, because of the individuality of perception and linguistic interpretation, only the person experiencing the situation can adequately determine whether or not it can be interpreted as painful for them. That being said, Lewis' statement that pain is something disliked contradicts other statements he makes about what it feels like to be in pain (which will be examined below). Lewis' other statements suggest that pain must be significantly worse than mere dislike.

Lewis, though, concerns himself primarily with pain in the B sense.³⁴ "Any experience... which the patient dislikes". Leaving aside, for a moment, the connotations of the word 'dislike', as have just been discussed, pain in this sense emphasises the perception of the 'patient' and the idea that pain is an individually interpreted experience. There is an implied emphasis on the interpretation of the 'patient'; "the *patient* dislikes". What the 'patient' dislikes may differ to other 'patients' who may find it tolerable. In other words, what may be interpreted as pain to one person may be interpreted in a different context to another person, thereby meaning that understandings of the nature of pain are unique to the individual person.

As said, in a universal 'thin' sense the idea can be taken to mean that everyone feels pain and that it is disagreeable. What it means to be in pain or what it feels like beyond that "pain hurts", on the other hand, is understood at an individual level.³⁵ This individual interpretation is 'thick' because it is specific to the person in question and offers a much more precise and in-depth alternative.³⁶ This raises the question of what

³⁴ Ibid, p.88.

³⁵ Ibid, p.105.

³⁶ Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture".

it means to be in pain on a personal level according to Lewis. Lewis' definition that "pain hurts", again, can be viewed as his 'thin' interpretation as it is accepted on a general level as explaining the nature of pain. In a more specific 'thick' context, however, Lewis describes pain as

...anxiety that gnaws like fire and loneliness that spreads out like a desert, and the heartbreaking routine of monotonous misery, or again of dull aches that blacken our whole landscape or sudden nauseating pains that knock a man's heart at one blow, of pains that seem already intolerable and then are suddenly increased, of infuriating scorpion-stinging pains that startle into maniacal movement a man who seemed half dead with his previous tortures.³⁷

This description is entirely individual in that it infers the way in which pain is specifically interpreted by Lewis; that is, it is a personal perspective. Lewis uses descriptive words to portray how he perceives personal experiences of pain, reiterating the individuality of his expression. The chosen words may be appropriate to Lewis in communicating his feelings, however the meanings of the words themselves contain a degree of generality, or 'thinness', so the specific meanings intended by Lewis may differ from what another reader may understand those words to mean. The 'thickness' of the experience is lost in the 'thinness' of the communication, therefore problems emerge in the communication of painful experiences. This implies that either a universal definition of pain is not possible due to the difficulties in communication, or that for the same reason such a definition is unimportant.

In expanding the question of what makes something painful, Lewis makes an observation in *A Grief Observed*:

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. I not only live each endless day in grief, but live each day thinking about living each day in grief.³⁸

From this it can be understood that what makes something painful is that we tend to keep thinking about it. We reflect on painful experiences to such an extent that they

³⁷ Ibid, p.105.

³⁸ Lewis, *A Grief Observed*, pp.10-11.

become embedded in our subconscious as memories, in addition to influencing our belief systems and ways of thinking. These can also be prompted at any given time by various reminders. This is a personal process in that 'thinking' is not a shared task. People are not connected in a psychical commonality and mental processes that are undertaken are limited to occurring within a specific singular entity. A person may then choose to linguistically verbalise the thought process, but it cannot become shared unless they do so. The prior mental process that is not verbalised is private. It is impossible to know another individual's mental processes because we are singular unconnected entities. The words we use to convey our thoughts may be understood by us in a specific context, but the way in which another person interprets those words may be different to our own because they cannot know our thought process.

However, Lewis' point is that the effect of mentally prolonging an experience through continually thinking about it and reflecting on it is how it becomes painful to the individual, as opposed to momentarily disagreeable or dislikeable.³⁹ Furthermore, another individual does not think and reflect about the experience in tandem with the one directly experiencing, meaning that only the individual directly experiencing the situation can assess whether it is painful for them. Jerome Neu also explores the claim that mental thought processes contribute toward pain, stating "Why do we cry? My short answer is: because we think".⁴⁰ This can be understood in context of how we think of the world or how we perceive it.⁴¹ This personal perspective is what influences the extent to which we interpret emotions as painful and the extent to which pain is experienced. This further reinforces the idea that a state of being is not painful in itself. What makes something painful is the way it is perceived, and this perception is personal and individual. This act of thinking and reflecting is a result of

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Jerome Neu, "A Tear is an Intellectual Thing", *Representations*, No.19, 1987, p.35.

⁴¹ Ibid.

the capacity of human beings for cognisance, which is what leads to pain as a product of thinking and reflecting. This cycle of continually analysing a bad situation from a negative perspective magnifies the pain felt at that time. Thus, it can be argued that it is the influence of a well-developed cognisance that produces a different degree of pain in human beings.⁴² This theory accounts for how pain is interpreted from the context of personal experience and interpretation, and suggests that our capacity to reflect and cognitively process our experiences has the effect of personalising painful situations so that they become unique to the person experiencing them.

The final important point that Lewis makes with regard to the difficulty involved in discussing the nature of pain is stated in *A Grief Observed*. "I thought I could describe a *state*; make a map of sorrow. Sorrow, however, turns out to be not a state but a process. It needs not a map but a history".⁴³ This process is unique to the person experiencing it and seems to be a recurring theme throughout *A Grief Observed*. This suggests that there is a greater importance on the developmental capacity of such experiences rather than understanding the nature of the experience itself and Lewis uses many different analogies to demonstrate this point, including that of mythology when he relates the idea to the story of Prometheus' punishment for stealing fire from the gods.⁴⁴ Lewis also uses this technique in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, the importance of which will be examined in Chapter Five. The theme, however, suggests that the influence of Lewis' personal experience of loss altered the way he perceived pain. This denotes an Aristotelian process in which our responses to painful experiences have the effect of developing certain understandings of the role pain has in contributing toward our moral betterment.⁴⁵ This implies that experience, for both Lewis and Aristotle, is fundamental to forming an adequate understanding of pain and the role it has in one's

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Lewis, *A Grief Observed*, p.50.

⁴⁴ Ibid, p.49.

⁴⁵ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, pp.20-22.

life. In this case a universal understanding of pain is unimportant if one must come to an understanding of pain through the course of their life experiences. A person's experiences will differ from another's, at least on the level of personal perception and linguistic interpretation, meaning that everyone's definition and understanding of pain will be individual and different.

Regardless of the way in which individuals interpret the nature of pain, such experiences can still be understood in context of the capacity that they retain for influencing one's moral growth, and this way we can intelligibly discuss pain in context of the role it has in people's lives without needing to discuss the specific nature of pain itself. This is why Lewis does not extensively preoccupy himself with universal definitions of pain or explaining the nature of pain.

CHAPTER TWO – ARGUMENTS IN *THE PROBLEM OF PAIN*

This chapter will discuss the theoretical arguments Lewis' makes in *The Problem of Pain* in order to show how they support the claim that people are made perfect through suffering. Through this examination, I will argue that suffering contributes toward moral development because it has the capacity for benefit. However, while *The Problem of Pain* initially refers to Lewis' attempt to account for why an omnibenevolent and omnipotent God would allow pain to exist, many of the arguments advanced in the book also apply to Lewis' mandate to demonstrate that "perfection through suffering is not incredible".⁴⁶ This chapter will be concerned specifically with the latter mandate while the 'problem' of pain will be accounted for in Chapter Three.

1: Pain is God's Megaphone to Rouse a Deaf World

The importance of suffering is based upon the Aristotelian idea that through our experiences we learn lessons and arrive at understandings regarding what is necessary to the formation of our moral character. Lewis' interpretation suggests that these lessons could only conceivably be attained through experiences of pain and suffering. In Chapter One I argued that based on Lewis' work we can make the claim that all suffering has the capacity to advance the development of our moral character (whether we allow it to or not). If we accept this claim then we must also accept the proposition that all suffering is justified, even that which does not at first appear so. Suffering always contains the possibility of benefit, and as such it is always a justifiable means of encouraging moral progression.

We are 'made perfect through suffering' in this way because it awakens us from the safety of complacency. "Pain is [God's] megaphone to rouse a deaf world".⁴⁷ We can interpret this phrase as meaning that painful events and experiences occur to alert us

⁴⁶ Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, p.105.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p.91.

to what is wrong. "Every man knows something is wrong when he is hurt".⁴⁸ It is commonly held that it is natural to attempt to avoid or alleviate suffering, and that it is understandable to seek to avoid what is hurtful.⁴⁹ Lewis challenges this idea by emphasising the Aristotelian notion that actions taken to escape suffering result in cowardice.⁵⁰ Avoidance is inappropriate since suffering is necessary for our growth. To bolster his argument, Lewis takes the view that since God is truly good, and therefore only allows events which have a benefit, then suffering must be both allowable and beneficial in some way, since it does occur.⁵¹ If Aristotle's highest good involves only that which is beneficial or necessary to the moral growth of a person, then the occurrence of suffering must contain some validity, as suffering is prevalent in people's lives.⁵² In view of Aristotle's theory, Lewis' claim that suffering is necessary because it leads to our moral improvement can be supported.

As a result of the common tendency to avoid pain, however, it is not always possible to recognise that which needs to be repaired. For example, one needs to see the crack in the glass window pane in order to realise that the window requires reparation. Knowledge of the breakage might otherwise be difficult to attain. We must witness something terrible either directly or indirectly in order to be moved to action that might overcome the problem. Pain, therefore, is indeed a "megaphone to rouse a deaf world", inasmuch as it has the capacity to motivate us to reparative action.⁵³ Our natural aversion to pain, though, means that not everyone reacts to it in a positive

⁴⁸ Ibid, p.90.

⁴⁹ Lisbet Lindholm, "To Understand and Alleviate Suffering in a Caring Culture", *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 1993, vol.18, pp.1354-1361; Arne Rehnsfeldt and Katie Eriksson, "The Progression of Suffering Implies Alleviated Suffering", *Scand J Caring Sci*, 2004, vol.18, pp.264-272; and Ruth Senter, "Six Steps For Getting Through the Pain", *Campus Life*, November 1994, vol.53 Issue 4, Radical View, p.5.

⁵⁰ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, p.69.

⁵¹ Jeff Jordan, "Divine Love and Human Suffering", *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, vol.56, 2004, pp.170-172.

⁵² Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, pp.35-37 and Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, p.105.

⁵³ Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, p.91.

manner. Yet this does not diminish the importance of pain, which lies in the capacity it has to motivate us to action that leads to a betterment of the situation.

What is more, if pain really is “[God’s] megaphone to rouse a deaf world” and “pain hurts”, then a wide variety of reactions can be elicited. At least one of the stages people undergo when experiencing pain has the capacity to provoke anger.⁵⁴ Reactions to anger can either be positive or negative. It may be negative in that it can have destructive results when not appropriately viewed or expressed. It can be positive, however, because it has the capacity to motivate us to change what is wrong, to accomplish what another believes is not accomplishable, and so on. The importance of anger as a pain related response lies not in the actual results that follow, but rather in the capacity to produce positive results.

Lewis also says of the importance of suffering that “God intends to give us what we need, not what we now think we want”.⁵⁵ This concept will be further explored in Chapter Three, but for the moment suffice it to say that Lewis is making the point that suffering is only an insoluble problem so long as we insist on attaching inferences of happiness and kindness to the word ‘good’.⁵⁶ For Lewis ‘good’ refers to that which is necessary to the development of our moral character. Therefore, Lewis’ assertion that “pain is [God’s] megaphone to rouse a deaf world” infers a positive response to experiences of pain and suffering.

2: Breaking the Will

Lewis’ early work argues that we have a need to improve because we are imperfect beings, and through this idea the claim emerges that we develop this improvement through suffering. Although I will examine the connotations of human imperfection in

⁵⁴ Robert C. Solomon, “On Grief and Gratitude” from *In Defence of Sentimentality*, (Oxford University Press; New York, 2004) p.94.

⁵⁵ Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, pp.46-47.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, pp.31 & 40.

Chapter Three, here Lewis argues that this issue involves more than a need to improve.

He says that

We are not merely imperfect creatures who must be improved: we are, as Newman said, rebels who must lay down our arms. The first answer, then, to the question why our cure should be painful, is that to render back the will which we have so long claimed for our own, is in itself, wherever and however it is done, a grievous pain.⁵⁷

Rendering back or 'breaking' the will refers not to punishment or driving a person to be obedient to God; rather, it is about learning to act in a way that reflects a virtuous life. Although Lewis' ideas are unorthodox in Christianity, he maintains that we not only need to improve our imperfect nature, but that we also need to overcome our flawed "rebellious" character in order to acquire a more virtuous character. This is what "breaking the will" refers to, and painful events are the means through which we "break our will" and learn to be virtuous.

The problem of human free will, however, means that some people choose to do otherwise. Moral conflicts might result in an individual believing that demands for "breaking their will" are detrimental to their well being and subsequently might choose alternative measures which they view as being better for their well being. This is not necessarily 'bad' or disobedient since such individual choices are made in view of improving the individual's nature toward virtuous development. In this respect, therefore, human free will does not contradict the idea of 'breaking the will' and does not disobey Divine mandates since it is used in accordance with the end of moral advancement, which Lewis asserts is the Divine notion of 'good'.⁵⁸ Lewis expands on the free will discussion by retaining 'God' as his example. Lewis writes that

When we have said that God commands things only because they are good, we must add that one of the things intrinsically good is that rational creatures should freely surrender themselves to their Creator in obedience.⁵⁹

This example can be interpreted either literally or figuratively. His use of 'God' essentially represents what is virtuous. Obeying 'God's' command, then, means

⁵⁷ Ibid, pp.88-89.

⁵⁸ Ibid. pp.31-40.

⁵⁹ Ibid. p.99.

obeying the command to live a virtuous life. A person can choose to follow the command of living virtuously, or a person can reject this mandate. Choosing virtuous good, however, also means choosing to accept pain which is the primary means through which we progress toward goodness.⁶⁰ This is the challenge: we must freely choose the good knowing that we are also choosing pain. But, we can also always choose to reject this challenge. In this case, though, the choice does not reflect an individual path of personal betterment and the notion of developing a virtuous character does not come into play. One might respond that in pursuing personal ends one is simply acting in a way that best suits them. But this does not reflect Aristotle's sense of true goodness, which Lewis argues is the state toward which suffering aims to improve us toward. Good, in Lewis' terms, denotes that which motivates this developmental process, rather than what makes one happy.⁶¹ In Aristotelian terms, this denotes a higher level of goodness and happiness that is attained through virtue, rather than the simple pleasures that content us.⁶² To be truly happy in this way one must choose to accept the path of 'improvement through suffering', rather than reject it in favour of averting pain and attaining simple pleasures.

As aforementioned, Lewis sees us humans as "rebels who must lay down our arms".⁶³ 'Breaking the will' is itself a painful process because "to surrender a self-will inflamed with years of usurpation is a kind of death".⁶⁴ It requires one to relinquish previously accepted ideas and practices and this is a difficult course of action. For example, the 'wounded pride' a person might feel when admitting a mistake they have committed. Again, if we take a non-conformist stance and 'rebel' from the commonly held societal notion of what constitutes virtue, then this does not necessarily mean

⁶⁰ Ibid, p.89.

⁶¹ Ibid, pp.28-33.

⁶² Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, pp.13-15.

⁶³ Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, p.88.

⁶⁴ Ibid, p.89.

that we are rebelling against 'good' itself, depending on the reasons why a person might rebel. As said, if this rebellion is made for the reason of adhering to a personally held conception of what is virtuous, rather than conforming to societal notions of what is virtuous, then in this case Lewis' notion of 'breaking the will' becomes immaterial because the action or 'rebellion' is made for the purposes of moral development. The act of rebellion may be associated with a painful experience because non-acceptance of ideas and practices accepted by the majority is often considered to be 'bad' (at least at the time of occurrence), and given that people tend to be social creatures it is often important for self-esteem purposes that a person has personal acceptance from their peers. Rebelling against this can carry a negative social stigma. Thus, it is necessary to endure the pain associated with the act of rebelling if that is judged to be the most appropriate way to advance in personal betterment. Furthermore, it is conceivable that the experience of rebelling might not have the same impact on the person if an element of suffering were not present. The experience of suffering can help one come to an understanding of how valuable the end result will be. Therefore, whether through 'rebelling' or a 'breaking' of the will in the ways here explained, the pain associated with these processes is necessary if one is to come to personal achievement through such experiences.

3: Perfection through Suffering at the Hands of Others

In this part of the chapter I will explore Lewis' definition of 'evil' and how it can contribute toward moral progress. I will also examine the role of intention in 'bad' situations and acts and show that it is irrelevant, since Lewis' work shows that all bad situations, painful experiences and suffering, have the capacity to contribute towards personal advancement and not solely those in which a person has the intent to commit bad acts.

In *The Problem of Pain* Lewis writes extensively on pain caused by human beings rather than the Divine, posing the question of why the Divine would allow this. As argued in part one of this chapter, sometimes it is necessary for bad things to happen in order for us to understand what is wrong and what therefore requires improvement. Suffering that is caused at the hands of other people is allowable for this reason, in addition to its capacity for helping us develop through learning moral lessons and improving our moral nature. Preben Bertelsen says of this that “the core idea is that we cannot be human beings, we cannot live a human life, and we cannot have human life projects without co-existence”.⁶⁵ This theory refers to the dualist idea that both good and bad co-exist with each other and as such are equally necessary to human life, reiterating Lewis’ statement that to lack bad is to lack something that is essentially human.⁶⁶

Lewis implies that human ‘wickedness’ or ‘evil’ refers to that which seems to be overtly ‘bad’ in such circumstances as when the ‘bad’ is emphasised in lieu of any ‘good’ or positive results that might be possible.⁶⁷ This is an Augustinian interpretation of evil as a lack of good.⁶⁸ Suffering, then, might conceivably be recognised as evil if it does not lead to the bettering of moral character. However, the capacity of pain for moral advancement remains a central issue. Pain as a “megaphone to rouse a deaf world” is “not only immediately recognisable evil, but evil impossible to ignore”.⁶⁹ As a result pain presents us with an unavoidable option: either attend to the pain and attempt to attain a positive outcome, or deny or ignore it and forego any positive results that might have been possible. Thus, painful experiences which do produce a positive result of some kind cannot be called evil. With regard to those experiences

⁶⁵ Preben Bertelsen, “Evilness as Intention: The Intentional Detachment from and the Destruction of the Human Condition of Co-Existence”, *Theory Psychology*, vol.15(5), 2005, p.692.

⁶⁶ Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, p.25.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p.108.

⁶⁸ Augustine, *Confessions*, p.148.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, pp.90-91.

which do not produce actual positive results, it could be argued that since they still retain the capacity for positive results, they should not be called evil either.

The suffering itself is necessary to development, but the effects this has on the one inflicting the suffering perhaps depends on their mindset. Retributivism results in a need to punish these people. Retributivism, traditionally, calls for a need to maintain balance. On this view, when a criminal commits a bad act society becomes unbalanced. Retributive punishment seeks the suffering of the criminal in turn, in order to restore societal balance.⁷⁰ The one inflicting the pain may also suffer, perhaps through a guilty conscience or through the mode of corrective punishment. Punishment may be regarded as positive for both the inflictor and the inflicted insofar as it is necessary to help them to learn and improve. Whether traditional punishments are intended to be restorative or not they certainly have this capacity.

If a bad action is committed unintentionally, however, an appropriate response is not as clearly definable. Can such acts still be considered morally wrong? What must be understood is that bad things will continue to happen irrespective of cause or intention. As a result, 'bad' or 'evil' events should not be dealt with in terms of intention. The importance in responding to such situations lies not in giving an unfavourable response or attempting to avoid the effects of the situation, but in recognising the capacity such situations have for contributing towards our personal improvement. Positive lessons can always be gained from bad situations. The intention or cause of the situation, then, is irrelevant since the situation always has the capacity to produce a positive response of some sort; whether it is through realising the value of human life, appropriate ways to treat people, comradery, and so on.

⁷⁰ Ted Honderich, "The Use of the Basic Proposition of a Theory of Justice", *Mind*, vol.84 no.333, January 1975, p.64 and Igor Primorac, "Is Retributivism Analytic?", *Philosophy*, vol.56 no.216, April 1981, pp.203-211.

Furthermore, there are all manner of justifying reasons for why people might engage in bad acts, including that some bad acts are accidental or random occurrences. Additionally, Lewis' arguments suggest that all perceived painful events that occur, and seem to be bad in the short-term, actually occur for a positive reason or have some kind of long-term benefit. There are many other reasons besides this. For example, people might commit bad acts as a means to achieve a particular result. What can be concluded from this is that humans do not necessarily always have the intention to cause harmful or bad things to happen, but rather they possess a need to engage in something that will aid in their efforts to attain the benefits they want to achieve. Lewis suggests that this idea of doing bad things in order to obtain a particular goal has become considered as something which is relatively normal in that behaviours that are usually unacceptable become practiced by the majority in order to attain a particular goal.⁷¹ "We find in ourselves even now a theoretical approval of this behaviour which no-one practices".⁷² This suggests that there is a need for people to recognise that the bad admits a need for corrective good.

4: Humans are Perfected through 'Corrective Good'

In this part of the chapter I will clarify Lewis' assertion that suffering is a corrective good and argue that corrective good is one of the ways in which suffering can improve people.

Lewis' argument that 'good' means corrective good refers to the idea that "man, as a species, spoiled himself, and that good, to us in our present state, must therefore mean primarily remedial or corrective good".⁷³ Lewis says we must think of good in this sense, rather than our moral perceptions of what makes something 'good' or 'bad'. That is, the terms 'good' and 'bad' refer to the capacity something has for correction

⁷¹ Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, p.49.

⁷² *Ibid*, p.57.

⁷³ Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, p.85.

and moral maturation. Suffering, then, is good in that it has the capacity to motivate a person toward cultivating virtuous temperament. Corrective good, however, does not refer to punishment, nor does it imply that a sense of a 'means to an end' is unjust. In terms of utilitarianism, suffering is a 'means' to gaining the 'end' of improvement and the capacity for positive outcomes justifies the experience of suffering. Suffering as a corrective good is moral so long as there is a justifiable benefit to be gained. Even if it is considered to be a punishment it does not have to carry negative connotations. Punishment, in this respect, is necessary to "treat" the person so that they can learn from it and have an opportunity for personal growth.⁷⁴

Corrective good, then, refers to the lessons people learn as a result of painful experiences so that they become more virtuous people. This begins with realising that bad actions which may have begun with good intentions are still bad and that there is a need to address such issues because they contribute to the reason why people have become 'wicked'. The aim of corrective good is to allow this to be addressed and rectified.

For example, consider Lewis' statement (examined in part One of this chapter) that "Every man knows something is wrong when he is hurt".⁷⁵ This implies the pain is necessary to alert a person to that which requires changing, or a reparative action that is required. If it is true that such experiences are necessary for human growth, then it stands to reason that it must carry some benefit. Suffering, in this respect, is a vehicle for positive change. Lewis clarifies the matter by saying that

[God] thinks that their modest prosperity and the happiness of their children are not enough to make them blessed: that all this must fall from them in the end, and that if they have not learned to know Him they will be wretched. And therefore He troubles them, warning them in advance of an insufficiency that one day they will have to discover.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Lewis, "The Humanitarian Theory of Punishment" from *Essay Collection: Literature, Philosophy and Short Stories*, pp.290-296.

⁷⁵ Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, p.90.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p.95.

If we equate the word 'blessed' with 'good', then we can take this statement to mean that people are not absolutely good, or at not least good enough; even those who appear to be. "Their modest prosperity... [is] not enough to make them blessed".⁷⁷ Pain occurs in order to alert people to insufficiencies and enables them to learn how to positively develop their character. "He troubles them, warning them in advance of an insufficiency".⁷⁸

For this reason, it is better to understand that imperfection is a part of human nature and as such it is important to embrace imperfections. The alternative, perhaps, might be that it is more appropriate to believe that we have the capacity to become as good as we can be in any chosen way. The point Lewis makes through this discussion is that acceptance of what nature provides is not necessarily always the only option available to us. The individuality of people means that any given person has the capacity to take any given situation and learn to create the best possible personal results from it. This idea is particularly demonstrated in a quote from the biographical movie *Shadowlands*: "We are like blocks of stone out of which the sculptor carves the forms of men. The blows of his chisel which hurt us so much are what make us perfect".⁷⁹ This quote, based on allusions Lewis makes in *Mere Christianity*, shows that pain is inevitable in the progression of morality and we cannot be 'perfected' without such experiences.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ *Shadowlands*, 1993, Roadshow Entertainment, Spelling Films International, DVD Recording.

⁸⁰ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Signature Classics Edn (HarperCollins Publishers; San Francisco, 2001) p.158-159.

CHAPTER THREE – THEOLOGICAL ARGUMENTS

This chapter will examine the way Lewis uses theological arguments to support the claim that suffering acts to perfect the moral character of human beings. Specifically, I will focus on the relationship Lewis describes between human beings and God, Lewis' conception of 'Heaven' and 'Hell', and his view of the Fall of Man, all of which can be figuratively interpreted as highlighting humanity's inherent imperfection and the need for reparation and development. These perspectives are important as they constitute significant examples of Lewis' theological perspective of the claim.

1: The Human Relationship with God

In this part of the chapter I will argue that we wrongly interpret situations as painful because of the particulars of our relationship with God. That is, we mistakenly perceive things as painful and negative when God really intends to give us "what we need, not what we now think we want". Thus we fail to appreciate what the words 'good' and 'love' mean in a Divine context.⁸¹ The 'problem of pain', then, is inconsequential. I will clarify and support Lewis' argument that goodness denotes that which is necessary to our moral evolution, rather than happiness and kindness.

Lewis echoes St. Augustine's Platonic explanation of the relationship between God and human beings. This relationship refers to the idea that human beings are distinct from God in the sense that we are like Him, rather than being the same as Him, and that as a result human beings perceive events as painful or negative because of this relationship (Gn 1:26). Consequently, human beings generally have an erroneous perception of what God might intend events to signify and accomplish. Lewis discusses the biblical notion of the human as being made in God's image: "Man's resemblance to God" (Gn 1:26-27).⁸² This biblical notion, as said, is distinctly Platonic. Plato's theory of

⁸¹ Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, pp.46-47.

⁸² Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, p.158.

forms was originally described analogically in “The Allegory of the Cave”.⁸³ This theory proposes that the material world is not the real world but only a replica of the original form (the idea or archetype). Given that it is only a material replica existing in temporal time, it cannot be as perfect as the original form which is atemporal or eternal (existing beyond time and space).⁸⁴ Lewis describes the human being’s relationship with God in a similar manner, using the following explanation to demonstrate his point:

If he [man] is a clever enough carver he may make a statue which is very like a man indeed. But, of course, it is not a real man; it only looks like one. It cannot breathe or think. It is not alive... What God creates is not God; just as what man makes is not man... They may be like God in certain ways, but they are not things of the same kind. They are more like statues or pictures of God... Life, in this biological sense, is not the same as the life there is in God: it is only a kind of symbol or shadow of it.⁸⁵

Human beings may be similar to God and in this way we might, in a literal sense, have been made in God’s image. We are likenesses, just as a statue may look like a human but is not itself human.⁸⁶ In a Platonic context, God may be considered the original archetype and human beings the material replica of that archetype.

Additionally, in a chapter of *Mere Christianity* titled “Time and Beyond Time”, Lewis explains the Augustinian concept that human beings are in time and that God is beyond time.⁸⁷ In other words, human beings are temporal and God is atemporal. As an example, Lewis explains the difficulty in understanding the idea that God can listen to thousands of prayers at once.⁸⁸ That God is beyond time means that everything – past, present, and future – is available to Him all at once and all the time.⁸⁹ This leaves Him with eternity in which to attend to everyone’s prayers, just like an author can turn the pages back to the beginning of the book because he is not restricted by the time

⁸³ Plato, “The Simile of the Cave” in *The Republic*, translated by Desmond Lee (Penguin Classics; London, 1987), pp.316-325.

⁸⁴ Richard Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind* (Pimlico; London, 1991), pp.6-9.

⁸⁵ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, pp. 157-158.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* pp.166-171.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

frame of the story line in the same way that the characters are.⁹⁰ Although God is beyond time, this does not mean that God is uninvolved with time. An author, to borrow Lewis' example, while existing in a separate time line to the characters in the story, still has an active and fundamental role in constructing, creating, and guiding the direction of the story. God's relationship with temporality is similar. In terms of God's relationship to human suffering, this means that although God watches and guides us, God does not interfere with human actions and free will (although this does not mean that God is not present in our suffering). Thus, there is a clear distinction between Creator and that which is created, opening the possibility of erroneous interpretation of actions and events on the part of the created, since we lack the perfection that is present in God. Furthermore, this relationship means that we will never be able to know God absolutely, because God is unknowable to us in this respect. We can only know God relatively. Because we are finite, we cannot fathom the Infinite.

Now that this understanding of the relationship between human beings and God has been discussed, the problem of our misunderstood perception of the reason for suffering can be explored. This misconception arises from the temporality of human beings and the atemporality of God, and because of this the meaning we attribute to a concept or event in our lives is likely to differ from God's judgment of the matter.

On the one hand, if God is wiser than we His judgment must differ from ours on many things, and not least on good and evil. What seems to us good may therefore not be good in His eyes, and what seems to us evil may not be evil... God's moral judgment differs from ours so that our 'black' may be His 'white'.⁹¹

This supports the idea that God allows pain to exist because God does not perceive it as negative. "God's idea of goodness is almost certainly unlike ours".⁹² Furthermore, it

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, p.28.

⁹² Jacek Bacz, "C.S. Lewis - The Problem of Pain", *The Newman Rambler*, 1999, pp.23-28.

can be argued that God only permits that which is beneficial or necessary.⁹³ If pain and suffering exist, then it is because there is some benefit to be gained, or because it is necessary in some way.⁹⁴

From this follows that one of the predominant reasons for the existence of the problem of pain is that human beings fail to understand the significance of words such as 'good' and 'love' in relation to God. Lewis states that "the problem of reconciling human suffering with the existence of a God who loves is only insoluble so long as we attach a trivial meaning to the word 'love'".⁹⁵ It therefore can be assumed that once this misunderstanding is overcome, then the problem will no longer exist. Of course this is not intended to be an absolute solution to the problem. There is much more than this that Lewis wrote regarding the subject. The focus here, however, is limited to what Lewis understands by the terms 'good' and 'love'. He says, for example, that

By the goodness of God we mean nowadays almost exclusively His lovingness; and in this we may be right. And by Love, in this context, most of us mean kindness – the desire to see others than the self happy; not happy in this way or in that, but just happy... We want, in fact, not so much a Father in Heaven as a grandfather in Heaven – a senile benevolence who, as they say, 'liked to see young people enjoying themselves'.⁹⁶

What Lewis means here is that rather than the traditional interpretation of 'happy' and 'kind', which amount to a "senile benevolence," we should interpret these words from the standpoint of what is necessary for human growth.

We as humans commonly misunderstand the notion of omnibenevolence, of an all-loving God. Lewis writes that "If God is Love, He is, by definition, something more than mere kindness".⁹⁷ That God is loving, then, means that "whether we like it or not, God intends to give us what we need, not what we now think we want".⁹⁸ Michael J. Dodds explores the notions of love that Lewis sets out in *The Four Loves*, and highlights

⁹³ Jeff Jordan, "Divine Love and Human Suffering", pp.170-172.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, p.40.

⁹⁶ Ibid. p.31.

⁹⁷ Ibid. p.33.

⁹⁸ Ibid. pp.46-47.

the idea of a “fellow-suffering God”.⁹⁹ This notion of a suffering God goes hand in hand with Lewis’ contention that God “intends to give us what we need”.¹⁰⁰ At first, the idea of suffering in God seems to imply that something is wrong, in which case: how can God suffer when the general conception of God seems to be that of perfection? It is important to appreciate that since God is ontologically different to us humans, God does not suffer in the way we humans do. In terms of the way God is involved with temporality, all existing things find their possibility in God’s perfection. If we suffer and we find our possibility in God, then it can be deduced that God suffers because we do. In addition, it might be deduced from Lewis’ argument that a “fellow-suffering God” refers to the importance placed on suffering for human beings. The Divine loves us humans to such a point that we are given what we need to help us become better people, even though what is necessary might not be pleasant, because God’s love demands “the perfecting of the beloved”.¹⁰¹ Human pain is a result, on the one hand, of our misunderstanding of what is meant by an omnipotent and omnibenevolent God, but it is also a result, on the other hand, of the nature of Divine love and its calling to share in the Divine life.

He has paid us the intolerable compliment of loving us, in the deepest, most tragic, most inexorable sense... It is natural for us to wish that God had designed for us a less glorious and less arduous destiny; but then we are wishing not for more love but for less.¹⁰²

It is clear from this that Lewis distances himself from sentimentalised notions of love, as is also apparent in *The Four Loves*.¹⁰³ M. Scott Peck writes that an individual’s “ego boundaries”, the limitations of one’s own awareness and sense of self, dissolve when one experiences “real love”.¹⁰⁴ If love involves what we need to improve our nature then suffering is necessary to instigate the dissolution of an individual’s

⁹⁹ Michael J. Dodds “Thomas Aquinas, Human Suffering, and the Unchanging God of Love”, *Theological Studies*, vol. 52, 1991 p.332.

¹⁰⁰ Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, p.46-47.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. p.38.

¹⁰² Ibid. pp.33-35.

¹⁰³ C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*, Signature Classics Edn, 1960 (HarperCollins Publishers; London, 2001), p.147

¹⁰⁴ M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Travelled*, pp.74-75 & 82-86.

“ego boundaries” in order for them to be able to embrace “real love”. In *A Grief Observed* Lewis struggles with the conception of “the one flesh”, or union in terms of marriage.¹⁰⁵ Experiences are personal in that they are specific to an individual, which results in Lewis’ grief challenging his belief in “the one flesh”.¹⁰⁶ Confronting this crisis of faith, though, enables Lewis to overcome his “ego boundaries” so that his love can continue to pervade his life.¹⁰⁷ Thus, Lewis’ perception of God’s non-sentimentalised love that “gives us what we need, not what we now think we want” improves his capacity to embrace “real love”.

2: ‘Heaven’ and ‘Hell’

Lewis’ use of the concepts ‘Heaven’ and ‘Hell’ are decidedly unorthodox, as he states in *The Problem of Pain*.¹⁰⁸ That he begins his discussion by critiquing the common arguments made against a concept of ‘Hell’ (in order to argue that it is “moral”, although not “tolerable”) immediately creates a predisposition towards an unconventional conception of ‘Hell’.¹⁰⁹ In this respect, his ideas can be more appropriately interpreted as figurative expressions that describe experiences of suffering (those that are prolonged). In this way, Lewis’ discussion provides an apt contribution toward the claim that we are perfected through our experiences of suffering.

In terms of ‘Hell’, Lewis alludes to pain that is ‘unrepented’.¹¹⁰ I have previously suggested that suffering has the capacity to contribute towards betterment, rather than arguing that it always does leads to betterment. If ‘unrepented’ suffering denotes a deliberate negative response (perhaps in terms of rejecting God as “fellow sufferer”), then we can see how Lewis builds on traditional interpretations of the concept of ‘Hell’

¹⁰⁵ Lewis, *A Grief Observed*, p.13.

¹⁰⁶ CF Chapter One.

¹⁰⁷ Lewis, *A Grief Observed*, pp.44-64.

¹⁰⁸ Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, p.xii.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p.121.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, p.122.

by applying it as a human construct. In Chapter Two I referred to Bertelsen's theory of co-existence, in which both 'good' and 'bad' are dually necessary to human nature, and Lewis' subsequent notion that to deny 'bad' is to deny an essential aspect of human nature.¹¹¹ Here we see an example of this same principle, in that a rejection of something essentially human leads to an experience of 'Hell'. That is, an avoidance of 'bad', in favour of prolonging 'good', results in a greater and prolonged suffering since 'bad' is as equal a part of the human experience as 'good'. "To enter hell is to be banished from humanity".¹¹² This reiterates the idea that suffering is necessary to the establishment of a virtuous human character, as the rejection of what is 'bad' (as something essential to human nature) leads to becoming inhuman. Since a denial of something essentially human has taken place, 'Hell' has subsequently been arrived at. 'Hell', in terms of prolonged or worsened suffering, results from attempts to avoid pain in such situations in which a more appropriate response would be an acceptance of its presence. This acceptance, accompanied by a positive attitude, allows the sufferer to source their life from its presence in that a better character can result.¹¹³

Lewis also states that "the characteristic of lost souls is 'their rejection of everything that is not simply themselves'".¹¹⁴ This implies a difficulty with accepting the lessons suffering impresses on us. In such a case, a denial of self also follows in that the sufferer does not accept the negative aspects of their character (which are of course essential since 'bad' and 'suffering' are necessary if we are to truly progress), again reiterating Lewis' conception of 'Hell' as a human construct.

I spoke at the outset of this part of the chapter of the non-redemptive suffering that Lewis' discusses in relation to 'Hell'. Non-redemptive suffering implies an

¹¹¹ Ibid, p.25 and Bertelsen, "Evilness as Intention: The Intention Detachment from and the Destruction of the Human Condition of Co-Existence", p.692.

¹¹² Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, p.128.

¹¹³ Ibid, p.130.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, pp.124-125.

irredeemable state. I counter that since no state of being is permanent, then ‘Hell’s’ prolonged state of suffering, that results from an avoidance of an essentially human characteristic (that is, ‘bad’), is also not a permanent or non-redemptive state. The state remains irredeemable only so long as the person chooses to not change their response to the situation. A person retains the free will to change their response to any given situation at any given time. Thus, all suffering retains the capacity to motivate a person to improve themselves.

Following the account of ‘Hell’, I must now account for ‘Heaven’ since I have argued that both ‘good’ and ‘bad’ are necessary to the whole of human nature. What must first be said is that Lewis’ conception of ‘Heaven’ may figuratively be equated with that state of ‘goodness’ which suffering is intended to develop us toward achieving. Lewis says of this ‘goodness’ that “you have never *had* it. All the things that have ever deeply possessed your soul have been but hints of it”. This explains the need for the process of developing towards attaining it.¹¹⁵

In Chapter One I argued that the nature of pain is only understandable in an individual context. In a similar manner, Lewis explains that ‘Heaven’ denotes something that is also unique and personal to each individual.¹¹⁶ For example, what constitutes ‘Heaven’ to one person is different to what constitutes ‘Heaven’ to another. Accordingly other people may not understand our conception of ‘Heaven’ because of its personal and unique qualities.

We cannot tell each other about it. It is the secret signature of each soul, the incommunicable and unappeasable want, the thing we desired before we met our wives or made our friends or chose our work, and which we shall still desire on our deathbeds, when the mind no longer knows wife or friend or work. While we are, this is. If we lose this, we lose all.¹¹⁷

From this we can understand that Lewis also equates ‘Heaven’ to vocation (or life purpose). “Beyond all possibility of doubt you would say ‘Here at last is the thing I was

¹¹⁵ Ibid, pp.150-151.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, p.150.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, p.151.

made for”’, in terms of attaining ‘good’.¹¹⁸ This idea seems to be Platonic in its overtones. Our vocation, in this respect, is manifested through material instances such as work, friend, or spouse. These instances are not expressions of the vocation itself. In addition, the desire or motivation to attain our vocation is what encourages us to maintain a positive outlook through our life experiences, particularly our suffering.¹¹⁹

Here Lewis relates the argument to ‘Hell’. “It is from this point of view that we can understand hell in its aspect of privation”.¹²⁰ I have said that ‘Heaven’ involves our vocation, including the process of attaining it. ‘Hell’, then, involves removal of the means to arrive at this vocation. This is why suffering that has the capacity to improve us is both important and necessary and why suffering that does not allow this capacity can be considered evil. I have argued that states which constitute ‘Hell’ last only so long as the sufferer chooses not to change their response to it and that as such all suffering retains the capacity to improve us. Subsequently, evil cannot exist.

3: The Fall of Man

Lewis seeks to answer the question of how human beings became flawed (or ‘wicked’) and examines the Christian doctrine of the ‘Fall’ (Gn 2-3) in his attempt to account for why we are imperfect. The ‘Fall’ can either be taken literally or as a figurative representation of the inherent imperfection of humankind. I will here examine Lewis’ conception of it in terms of this figurative value in order to show its importance in emphasising the notion of being perfected through suffering.

The ‘Fall’ is a biblical story in which Adam and Eve reside in Eden, the garden of paradise. Only one thing is not allowable, namely, taking the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The story culminates in the temptation by the serpent, which results in Adam and Eve’s banishment from the garden because they have eaten

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, p.152.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

the forbidden fruit. Three concepts are of significant interest to my claim here: free will, disobedience and knowledge. I will examine each of these in turn.

The first characteristic that I will discuss is that of free will. The issue that surrounds the story regards human choice and whether Adam and Eve choose to obey God's command or not.¹²¹ Inevitably, free choice includes the choice between 'good' and 'bad'.¹²² In the story, to choose to disobey God and take the fruit represents 'bad' and obeying God represents 'good'. When the couple choose the 'bad' alternative (that is, taking the fruit) they become conscious of their "nakedness" and flawed nature, and of the empty promises of the serpent. Thus, bad choices have influenced the imperfection of human nature. Lewis explains that it would be possible for God to maintain the perfection of humankind through miracles, but that God does not do so because this would leave no room for human choice.¹²³

The problem that emerges here, however, is that if we have the freedom to choose, then is it really a 'sin' not to choose the good (and for Adam and Eve to eat the forbidden fruit)? The idea that this question points to is that it is a lesson in morality; that is, with free will comes responsibility. Maturity is needed in order to understand the difference between 'right' and 'wrong' and to be able to will the good, even if what is good for us is painful or difficult to understand.

The second characteristic is that it is a story about disobedience (disobeying God's command not to take the fruit).¹²⁴ Lewis says that although the story teaches morality, the more important lesson lies in the idea of obedience, in that the 'sin' is in choosing the self over God.¹²⁵ That is, choosing actions as a means to achieve material, or earthly, ends (such as that which will provide knowledge, pleasure, and so on). The

¹²¹ Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, p.63.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid, p.65.

¹²⁴ Ibid, p.66.

¹²⁵ Ibid, p.69.

difference between humans and animals, Lewis says, is that humans have non-material capacities like self-awareness and rationality.¹²⁶ Choosing the material is a 'sin', then, given that we have this capacity. What is 'good', in addition, is to choose the non-material virtuous goodness (symbolised in the story as obeying God) as the end goal. Any pleasure that is then attained incidentally is a reward for that end.

Being 'obedient' does not necessarily conflict with free will. "Despite their differences regarding the basis for this freedom, however... divine power does not, in fact, override the freedom of persons".¹²⁷ Human free will and 'obedience' can work in conjunction with one another because 'obedience' is Lewis' figurative means of showing how we are taught the responsibility that comes with choosing between 'right' and 'wrong' (morality) and not simply doing as one pleases (that is, Adam and Eve cannot take the fruit as they wish). If we suffer when we make a 'wrong' choice (as we see when Adam and Eve become aware of their guilt and are banished from Eden) then this helps to demonstrate the importance of taking responsibility and doing the 'right' thing (obeying God's command not to take the fruit).

Briefly, the third characteristic of the story involves the role of knowledge. Lewis explains that knowledge is acquired by learning through trial and error.¹²⁸ In this explanation, Lewis examines the development of human beings from prehistoric times through to current times and argues that we have always learned, developed, through trial and error, meaning that we suffer through making mistakes in order to learn what is 'good' and what is 'bad'.

In conclusion, understanding that we have a need to overcome our flawed nature through moral development does not mean that this imperfection is bad. In the context of accepting 'bad', this means accepting that imperfection is part of human

¹²⁶ Ibid, p.72.

¹²⁷ Gary Chartier, "The Incarnation and the Problem of Evil", *Heythrop Journal*, 2008, pp.112-113.

¹²⁸ Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, p.68.

nature. This is important as it motivates our need to evolve, and to understand what is wrong helps us recognise exactly what needs to be changed. The theological arguments put forward by Lewis, although obviously valuable to the Christian reader, are also valuable to the secular reader in their figurative representation of the claim.

CHAPTER FOUR – LITERARY ARGUMENTS PART ONE

In this chapter I will examine Lewis' non-fiction literary work, in which he provides personalised accounts of his views in a literary format. This will include the poetry he wrote in *Spirits in Bondage – A Cycle of Lyrics* and his personal account of pain in *A Grief Observed*, in order to show how these texts support the claim that suffering constitutes a significant contribution toward our moral growth. As explained in Chapter One, Lewis found literary form to be an effective means of expressing concepts that would not have been adequately expressed with other forms.¹²⁹ Because literary form was so important to Lewis, an examination of the way he argues the claim in his literary texts is fundamental to the study.

1: *Spirits in Bondage – A Cycle of Lyrics*

I will here examine a selection of poems from *Spirits in Bondage – A Cycle of Lyrics* and argue as to how this poetical work defends the claim that human character is positively developed through suffering. Lewis' poetry deals extensively with the subject of painful experiences and *Spirits in Bondage – A Cycle of Lyrics*, a collection of similarly themed poems, in particular deals well with issues concerning acceptance of pain as well as joy if a person is to take up a meaningful life.¹³⁰

In the opening stanzas of "French Nocturne", Lewis describes a scene which is characterised by the barren and bleak state that has followed an episode of painful upheaval.¹³¹ "Long leagues on either hand the trenches spread and all is still... jaws of a sacked village, stark and grim".¹³² Lewis then goes on to describe the consideration of rebuilding the scene. This represents the notion of rebuilding hopes and dreams which symbolise the 'good' after a painful experience has occurred. In the poem, Lewis

¹²⁹ Lewis, "Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What's To Be Said" from *Essay Collection: Literature, Philosophy and Short Stories*, p.120.

¹³⁰ Lewis, *Spirits in Bondage – A Cycle of Lyrics*.

¹³¹ Ibid, "French Nocturne" in *Spirits in Bondage – A Cycle of Lyrics*, p.4.

¹³² Ibid.

subsequently promotes the realisation that such 'dreams' are impossible. "False mocking fancy! ...What call have I to dream of anything".¹³³ Furthermore, in this context, the statement "back to the world again" suggests the importance of maintaining a grounded perspective because pain is an unavoidable part of the world. Aristotle suggests that to do otherwise would be to display a "weakness of character" that undermines the process of advancing virtuous character.¹³⁴ As such, it is inappropriate to deny pain in favour of the pleasure of 'dreams'. From this we can see that avoiding pain to gain lower (everyday or material) pleasures is inappropriate and that a focus must remain on accepting pain (that is, not avoiding it) because it is an important part of life and an important aspect of developing a moral character.

"Ode for New Year's Day" expands on this theme by exploring the reason for maintaining an acceptance of pain.¹³⁵ Lewis introduces this idea in the lines "lie low with fast-closed eyelids, clenched teeth, enduring heart" which suggests that a courageous, perhaps stoic, endurance of pain is necessary.¹³⁶ Lewis adds to this by writing that "sorrow on sorrow is coming wherein all flesh has part" in order to reiterate the idea that pain is an unavoidable part of life for everyone.¹³⁷ Furthermore, Lewis states that

Body and soul shall suffer beyond all word or thought, till the pain and noisy terror that these first years have wrought seem but the soft arising and prelude of the storm that fiercer still and heavier with sharper lightnings fraught shall pour red wrath upon us over a world deform.¹³⁸

This suggests that pain might seem negative but when examined from an unbiased perspective it acts as a preparation for lessons of transcendental importance and future difficulties. The importance of painful experiences in this context lies in learning lessons that enable one to better manage future experiences. Finally, Lewis writes "yet

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, p.67.

¹³⁵ Lewis, "Ode for New Year's Day" in *Spirits in Bondage – A Cycle of Lyrics*, pp.13-15.

¹³⁶ Ibid, p.13 and Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, p.66-67.

¹³⁷ Lewis, "Ode for New Year's Day" in *Spirits in Bondage – A Cycle of Lyrics*, p.13

¹³⁸ Ibid.

I too have been made in the hour of bitter paining and lifted up my voice to God, thinking that he could hear the curse wherewith I cursed Him because the Good was dead. But lo! I am grown wiser".¹³⁹ This suggests that wisdom is acquired through painful experiences.¹⁴⁰ From this we can understand that we become wiser as a result of the lessons we have learnt from painful experiences.

"In Prison" explains the prison-like state that can sometimes be affected due to the apparent inescapability of painful experiences.¹⁴¹ "I cried out for the pain of man", "hopeless life" and "from death to death since all began", all reiterate this theme.¹⁴² "A lonely pin-prick spark of light, upon the wide, enfolding night", however, admits a sense of duality in that an aspect of 'good' is always present in even the most painful experiences, but because pain is so prevalent we do not often realise this.¹⁴³ "And if some tears be shed, some evil God have power, some crown of sorrow sit upon a little world for a little hour – who shall remember? Who shall care for it"?¹⁴⁴

"Victory" explains the importance of not overvaluing earthly things (not just the physical or material but other things that are involved in human life on earth) because they will inevitably "decay".¹⁴⁵ The importance, perhaps, is not avoidance but rather recognition that rebirth emerges from the endings that pain and suffering sometimes signify. "Though often bruised, oft broken by the rod, yet like the phoenix, from each fiery bed higher the stricken spirit lifts its head and higher-till the beast become a god".¹⁴⁶ This concept remained important in Lewis' philosophy, as the final chapters of *The Problem of Pain*, demonstrate.¹⁴⁷ This concept suggests that an overthrow of the existing status quo is necessary to allow for the new to emerge. Suffering is necessary

¹³⁹ Ibid, p.14.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Lewis, "In Prison" in *Spirits in Bondage – A Cycle of Lyrics*, p.19.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Lewis, "Victory" in *Spirits in Bondage – A Cycle of Lyrics*, pp.7-8.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, p.8.

¹⁴⁷ Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, pp.127 & 154.

to instigate this overthrow, and thus it acts to better us, as the new that emerges is an evolved adaptation of the previous state of being.

“Dungeon Gates” suggests that we perceive things as ‘good’ because of the pain we have previously experienced.¹⁴⁸ Furthermore, pain can become bearable because of the ‘good’ moments, even if those ‘good’ moments are scarce. This is a product of the attitude one takes toward the painful experience, and the challenge involved in maintaining a positive outlook. Lewis states “so grievous is the burden and the pain, so heavy weighs the long, material chain”.¹⁴⁹ This description highlights the challenge involved in maintaining a positive outlook because painful experiences can be difficult to tolerate. The importance of maintaining a positive attitude towards pain is also made apparent when Lewis discusses the idea that while there is hope in the face of pain, the ‘good’ in it cannot be found by maintaining happiness or pleasure as the goal. This is shown in the phrases “it lies beyond endeavour” and “wise men have sought for it and still returned again with hope undone”.¹⁵⁰ The ‘good’ is attained, rather, by maintaining a focus on what can be gained from the painful experience. The object should be, as says Aristotle, learning from painful experiences, rather than trying to maximise the positive and minimise the negative. This is important because virtue is acquired from the lessons gained in enduring painful experiences.¹⁵¹ “Only the strange power of unsought Beauty in some casual hour can build a bridge of life or sound or form to lead you out of all this strife and storm”.¹⁵² For Lewis, if this focus is maintained, then the ‘good’ we subsequently attain is of a much higher calibre than any pleasures or happiness that might have been gained from avoiding pain in favour of maximising the positive. Aristotle writes that this is important because virtuous

¹⁴⁸ Lewis, “Dungeon Gates” in *Spirits in Bondage – A Cycle of Lyrics*, pp.25-26.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, p.25.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, pp.159-160.

¹⁵² Lewis, “Dungeon Gates” in *Spirits in Bondage – A Cycle of Lyrics*, p.25.

actions, in this case courageously enduring painful experiences, help to advance one towards attaining this 'good' and true happiness.¹⁵³ "Out leaps a sudden beam of larger light into our souls. All things are seen aright amid the blinding pillar of its gold, seven times more true than what for truth we hold in vulgar hours".¹⁵⁴ Thus, we can see how pain has the capacity to develop us inasmuch as coming to terms with such experiences enables us to ascend towards a state of being that allows true 'good' to be found.

"L'Apprenti Sorcier" reiterates notions of dualism through accentuating the claim that 'good' can be attained through acceptance of painful experiences.¹⁵⁵ This poem accentuates the notion of 'taking a leap of faith'. Beginning with the theme of indecision, the central character is faced with the dilemma of whether to jump from a ledge into the ocean (which represents life), knowing that he will be jumping into pain and 'bad'. He also knows, however, that the ocean contains 'good' and that this 'good' will be unattainable unless he also accepts the pain, for the ocean is formed of both. "Leap in! Leap in and take thy fill of all the cosmic good and ill, be as the living ones that know enormous joy, enormous woe".¹⁵⁶ This highlights the idea that to be truly alive is to accept both positive and negative (pain) because life is formed equally of both. As discussed in Chapter Two, Bertelson's theory of co-existence echoes this theme.¹⁵⁷ Through this, acceptance, rather than avoidance, of pain is then able to better us because it leads to 'good'; through accepting one you accept the other. This idea was particularly pertinent to Lewis' notions of love, which will be explored in the second part of this chapter.

¹⁵³ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, pp.20-22.

¹⁵⁴ Lewis, "Dungeon Gates" in *Spirits in Bondage – A Cycle of Lyrics*, pp.25-26.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid; "L'Apprenti Sorcier" in *Spirits in Bondage – A Cycle of Lyrics*, pp.39-40.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, p.40.

¹⁵⁷ Bertelson, "Evilness as Intention: The Intentional Detachment from and Destruction of the Human Condition of Co-Existence", p.692.

“In Praise of Solid People” also expresses themes which are of significant importance to an understanding of the role pain has in people’s lives.¹⁵⁸ Lewis says that “now thro’ weariness and strife I learn your worthiness indeed. The world is better for such a life as stout suburban people lead”.¹⁵⁹ This implies that values and strength of personal character are most clearly identifiable in a person’s response to painful experiences. Lewis uses the poem to show his admiration for those who accept ‘bad’ experiences with a positive attitude, which in turn forms them into stronger and better persons.

The challenge in recognising what ‘good’ really is (by distinguishing simple pleasures derived from minimising ‘bad’ from the ‘good’ that can be found in not avoiding painful experiences) is made clear in “Tu Ne Quaesieris”. This means “don’t be too eager to ask what the gods have in mind for us”, which Lewis quotes from Quintus Horatius Flaccus’ *The Odes of Horace*.¹⁶⁰ The passage from which the quote is taken reflects the well-known “carpe diem” concept, or “hold on to the day” as David Berry translates the phrase.¹⁶¹ Lewis does not directly relate his poem to this passage, but it does loosely reflect similar themes in that Lewis promotes a need for people to positively utilise all of their experiences, including those that are painful or ‘bad’, in order to make our lives meaningful; to “hold on to the day”.

In his poem, Lewis writes that “if still my narrow self I be... to play for stakes of pleasure and pain and hope and fail and hope again, deluded, thwarted, striving elf that through the window of my self as through a dark glass scarce can see a warped and masked reality”.¹⁶² What can be taken from this statement is the idea that people tend to conform to an illusion of what they think ‘good’ is, compared to what the true

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, “In Praise of Solid People” in *Spirits in Bondage – A Cycle of Lyrics*, pp.42-44.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, p.43.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, “Tu Ne Quaesieris” in *Spirits in Bondage – A Cycle of Lyrics*, pp.68-69 and Quintus Horatius Flaccus, *The Odes of Horace: Bilingual Edition*, translated by David Ferry, (Farrar, Straus and Giroux; New York, 1997) pp.32-33.

¹⁶¹ Flaccus, *The Odes of Horace: Bilingual Edition*, pp.32-33.

¹⁶² Ibid, p.68.

nature of 'good' really is. Lewis again highlights the recurring theme of *Spirits in Bondage – A Cycle of Lyrics* that true 'good' is found through not acting to avoid or minimise pain. "But when this searching thought of mine is mingled in the large Divine... when glory I have built in dreams... grow one with Nature's whole distress, to perfect being I shall win, and where I end will Life begin".¹⁶³ Through accepting that 'bad' and painful experiences are as equal a part of life as pleasurable and happy experiences, a truly full and meaningful life can be lived. We can also see here the above explained notion that the apparent destruction involved in painful experiences does not necessarily constitute an absolute or negative ending. An end is necessary for rebirth, that is, to allow for the new to emerge in life.¹⁶⁴ Thus, painful experiences are necessary in order to arrive at positive outcomes.

In "World's Desire" Lewis again uses powerful imagery to symbolise life. While "L'Apprenti Sorcier" uses the metaphor of the ocean to symbolise life, "World's Desire" makes use of the metaphor of a castle.¹⁶⁵ In this poem, Lewis first describes the bad side of the castle, which reiterates the idea that the first impression people often see in their interaction with the world is the negative aspect of experiences. "A castle built in a country desolate".¹⁶⁶ What this initial impression masks, however, is that the far side of the castle is positive. "But upon the further side of the barren, sharp ravine with the sunlight on its turrets is the castle seen, calm and very wonderful".¹⁶⁷ That is, while a situation may at first seem negative, there is often an underlying positive aspect. What is again evident in this poem is the recurring theme that only through accepting the negative, as well as positive, can a higher state of being be attained (seen in his description of both the positive and negative sides of the castle); that is, a state which

¹⁶³ Ibid, pp.68-69.

¹⁶⁴ Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, pp.127 & 154.

¹⁶⁵ Lewis, "World's Desire" in *Spirits in Bondage – A Cycle of Lyrics*, pp.72-73.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, p.72.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

can no longer be troubled by anything. “Nothing can trouble it, hate of the gods nor man’s endeavour, and it shall be a resting-place dear heart, for you and me”.¹⁶⁸ Such a state of being often appears unattainable, however; hence the challenge pain often presents. “Often to the castle gate up she looks with vain endeavour, for her soulless loveliness to the castle winneth never”.¹⁶⁹ What is important to remember is that even though understanding the necessity of accepting both positivity and negativity poses difficulty for people, it is not an unattainable state of being. When one accepts the presence of both positive and negative, then one accepts the attainability of this higher and ‘good’ state of being.

Considering *Spirits in Bondage – A Cycle of Lyrics* was Lewis’ earliest work, written between seventeen and twenty years of age, it shows remarkable maturity of insight into what is a challenging personal subject. In terms of experience, however, Lewis’ encounter with love and grief provided perhaps his most poignant insights into the idea that painful experiences have the capacity to improve us. Part two of this chapter will seek to explain this further.

2: A Grief Observed

In this part of the chapter I will explore two major themes in *A Grief Observed*; namely, the challenge of experience and the experience of pain in love. I will demonstrate how these two themes emphasise the claim that humans are perfected through suffering. The content of the text is predominantly Lewis’ dissection of his own experience of grief, but I have chosen to include it in the “Literary Arguments” section because it is a good example of Lewis’ typical poetic-prose style of writing; a style which allows him to portray to readers a more accessible understanding of the issues.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, p.73.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ King, “A Grief Observed as Free Verse”, p.1

The first theme in *A Grief Observed* that I will explore is the assertion that our betterment progresses through overcoming the challenges involved with painful experiences and situations. In this respect, experiences of pain and suffering have a practical quality in their necessity. That is, the pain each individual person feels is necessary to their capacity to achieve particular goals. Take this quote, for instance:

But suppose that what you are up against is a surgeon whose intentions are wholly good. The kinder and more conscientious he is, the more inexorably he will go on cutting. If he yielded to your entreaties, if he stopped before the operation was complete, all the pain up to that point would have been useless. But is it credible that such extremities of torture should be necessary for us? Well, take your choice. The tortures occur. If they are unnecessary, then there is no God or a bad one. If there is a good God, then these tortures are necessary. For no even moderately good Being could possibly inflict or permit them if they weren't.¹⁷¹

Lewis' words here explain the importance of persisting through bad experiences, rather than avoiding them or attempting to alleviate the situation which would mean that pain, suffering and effort ultimately serve no purpose. Lewis qualifies his assertion of necessity by relating the issue to the question of why God allows pain to exist. If He is all-powerful, as Lewis argues that He is, then pain must exist because He allows it to. Because God is also all-loving it must be necessary or beneficial in some way. Therefore, the value of suffering is intrinsically built into the concept of this kind of Divine being. Our persistence improves our stamina and courage, then, and it is through this that we gain the intended benefit.

Experiencing pain is necessary to the process of developing an understanding of one's own personal character. A person's response to adversity (in terms of perception and action) often provides this insight.¹⁷² That is, the more pain one experiences, the more they understand themselves in terms of their depth of character and their awareness of what they are capable of accomplishing.¹⁷³ Thus, developing this understanding contributes toward one's improvement, and as pain is necessary to

¹⁷¹ Lewis, *A Grief Observed*, pp.37-38

¹⁷² Associate Professor Anthony Imbrosciano, email conversation with author, 30 April 2007.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

developing this understanding, then one evolves through pain. Lewis demonstrates this process extensively in *A Grief Observed*, which I will further explore when I examine the second theme (perfection through pain in love). This, it must be said, is the primary aim of *A Grief Observed*: examining the process of grieving and how it affects Lewis' character.

Through the experience of painful events, then, we learn and overcome the challenges that such experiences present. Namely, it is a test of character.¹⁷⁴ Lewis, though, writes that "God has not been trying an experiment on my faith or love in order to find out their quality. He knew it already. It was I who didn't".¹⁷⁵ In other words, painful experiences happen so that we can determine the strength of our own faith. If we find that our faith is not as strong as we would like, then the experiences alert us to this so that we may address the reason for it and attempt an improvement. Lewis finds himself facing this situation; "[God] always knew that my temple was a house of cards. His only way of making me realise the fact was to knock it down".¹⁷⁶ Pain acts to strengthen our resolve, then.

The second important theme in the book is that of pain in love. Specifically, Lewis discusses it in terms of grief at the death of a loved one. His predominant aim in providing an account of his grief was to detail this grieving process. Through the experience that Lewis shares, we can see the personal transformation he undergoes. At the outset of the book, Lewis deals with angry emotions, a loss of faith and an inability to comprehend a spiritual reason for his wife's death. The grieving process brings him to a position of acceptance that allows him to rediscover his faith, in spite of his acknowledgment that he cannot understand the reason for the situation. Through this painful process, Lewis demonstrates personal growth insofar as he is no longer bitter

¹⁷⁴ Lewis, *A Grief Observed*, pp.32 & 43-45.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p.45.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid*.

and angry; he is closer to attaining peace and a security in his faith: this is a positive response to a difficult situation.

In *The Four Loves*, Lewis examines St. Augustine's objection to love. One of the most common arguments against love, Lewis says, is that it causes suffering; that is, one will 'get hurt'. In that case, it is better for a person to avoid love and protect themselves from injury.¹⁷⁷ "Of course this is excellent sense. Don't put your goods in a leaky vessel".¹⁷⁸ While Lewis acknowledges the value of Augustine's perspective, he also argues that the objection is not necessarily accurate.

There is no escape along the lines St. Augustine suggests. Nor along any other lines. There is no safe investment. To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no-one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness.¹⁷⁹

If this is the case, then it would be unreasonable for a person to love. Lewis, however, explains the detrimental effects of avoiding love in this manner:

But in that casket – safe, dark, motionless, airless – it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. The only place outside Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers and perturbations of love is Hell.¹⁸⁰

It is, therefore, in our best interest to accept love and the suffering that is present in it because it brings us closer to 'God' (good).¹⁸¹ "We shall draw nearer to God, not by trying to avoid the sufferings inherent in all loves, but by accepting them and offering them to Him".¹⁸² This idea of pain and grief as being integral to love is also emphasised in much of the literature written on coming to terms with such experiences. Both Robert C. Solomon and Philip Yancey suggest that grief represents a continuation of love, rather than its cessation.¹⁸³ Yancey explains that "you feel grief because you did

¹⁷⁷ Lewis, *The Four Loves*, p.146.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, p.147.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid, p.148.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Solomon, "On Grief and Gratitude", p.81 and Philip Yancey, "Where is God when it Hurts", *Christianity Today*, Vol.51, Issue 6, June 2007.

have a connection".¹⁸⁴ This reiterates the idea that pain is built into the very concept of love. Lewis concurs with this view in *A Grief Observed* when he says "if, as I can't help suspecting, the dead also feel the pains of separation... then for both lovers, and for all pairs of lovers without exception, bereavement is a universal and integral part of our experience of love".¹⁸⁵ Lewis makes this statement later in the book (and subsequently later in his grieving process), which shows that he is beginning to both come to terms with and accept the place loss has in love and in his love for another.

Solomon describes the grieving process in terms of the following sequence:

...the sequence is now commonly associated with Elizabeth Kübler-Ross, who identified it many years ago. The basic sequence is *shock or denial-agitation-yearning-depression-anger-guilt-recovery*.¹⁸⁶

Lewis' own grieving process (as shared with his readers) is similar in that his sentiments begin with frustration at his own lack of understanding and his subsequent loss of spiritual faith. He reflects on these sentiments in such statements as "I know. Does that make it any easier to understand?" and "So this is what God's really like. Deceive yourself no longer".¹⁸⁷ His anger is evident in his outbursts of frustration at other people. "It is hard to have patience with people who say 'there is no death' or 'death doesn't matter'... You might as well say that birth doesn't matter... She died. She is dead. Is the word so difficult to learn?"¹⁸⁸ His loss of faith is expressed in the statement, "I thought I trusted the rope until it mattered to me whether it would bear me. Now it matters, and I find I didn't".¹⁸⁹ Lewis' poetic-prose style of expression portrays a depth of personal feeling that might be confrontational to his readers; people might understandably prefer to avoid such confrontational insights.¹⁹⁰ In spite of the fact that he suffers such strong negative emotions, the final chapter of the book

¹⁸⁴ Yancey, "Where is God When it Hurts".

¹⁸⁵ Lewis, *A Grief Observed*, p.43.

¹⁸⁶ Solomon, "On Grief and Gratitude", p.94.

¹⁸⁷ Lewis, *A Grief Observed*, p.8.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, p.15.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, p.33.

¹⁹⁰ Ann Loades, "The Grief of C.S. Lewis", *Theology Today*, October 1989, 46, 3, p.269.

reflects a steady progression towards a degree of acceptance and, finally, his rediscovered and strengthened faith. “Turned toward God, my mind no longer meets that vacuum – nor all that fuss about my mental image of her”¹⁹¹; “...that would have been best for me. Praise is the mode of love which always has some element of joy in it... Thus up from the garden to the Gardener, from the sword to the Smith. To the life-giving Life and the Beauty that makes beauty”.¹⁹²

Love, in the end, is an undeniable experience that has the capacity to change one’s perspective of life. Lewis writes of the emotional difficulty in returning to the state of being that was occupied before the experience of love occurred.¹⁹³ Since the experience is undeniable (that is, it cannot be ignored or avoided), the only option available is to decide how to respond to it. After all, “pain is unmasked, undeniable evil”.¹⁹⁴ If pain is accepted, then it may be allowed to act as the medium that motivates personal growth. If pain is ignored, however, only the negative results of ‘being hurt’ might accompany the experience. Lewis’ choice to embrace his experience with a positive outlook despite his lack of ability to understand in an intellectual capacity implies that faith of this kind is perhaps a better alternative for us in times of pain. “We cannot understand. The best is perhaps what we understand least”.¹⁹⁵ In choosing to accept suffering, we have the capacity to neutralise it, since acceptance leads to openness, growth and subsequently greater well-being and happiness.

¹⁹¹ Lewis, *A Grief Observed*, p.52.

¹⁹² Ibid, pp.52-53.

¹⁹³ Ibid, p.51.

¹⁹⁴ Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, p.90.

¹⁹⁵ Lewis, *A Grief Observed*, p.64.

CHAPTER FIVE – LITERARY ARGUMENTS PART TWO

In this chapter I will continue the discussion of the philosophical themes in Lewis' literary works that I began in Chapter Four. Here, I will specifically examine Lewis' fictionalised literary texts, including the satirical *The Screwtape Letters*, and *The Chronicles of Narnia*, a series of books written in the fantasy genre. These works will be examined in order to show how Lewis uses fiction to promote the claim that pain and suffering is central to our moral growth.

1: The Screwtape Letters

This story tells of a demon called Screwtape who writes letters to his nephew, Wormwood (a novice demon). Through the letters, Screwtape gives advice on how to 'claim' a human soul.¹⁹⁶ God is referred to as "the Enemy" and a reigning devil-figure is referred to as "our Father below".¹⁹⁷ The satirical nature of the work is used to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of human nature, particularly Christians, from the perspective of demons. Screwtape, symbolically, represents 'bad' and painful experiences, whereas the Christian man, whose soul he and Wormwood are trying to 'claim', shows how, through their suffering, people can improve their moral character towards being truly 'good'. The final letter of the book reveals Screwtape's frustration that Wormwood's attempts to 'claim' the man's soul have failed.¹⁹⁸

You have let a soul slip through your fingers. The howl of sharpened famine for that loss re-echoes at this moment through all the levels of the Kingdom of Noise down to the very Throne itself. It makes me mad to think of it.¹⁹⁹

However, what is demonstrated in the process is that the Christian man has met the challenges presented to him by the bad and painful experiences and that they serve to improve him because he is able to confront them, and in so doing he overcomes the challenges resulting in the overall advancement of his moral character. "There was a

¹⁹⁶ Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid, pp.1-2.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid, p.171.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

sudden clearing of his eyes... as he saw you for the first time, and recognised the part you had had in him”.²⁰⁰ It is evident here that not only have Screwtape and Wormwood ‘lost’ the man’s soul to ‘good’, but that their attempts to ‘claim’ it (these attempts symbolise painful experiences) have actually contributed toward instigating the man’s transformation – that is, their attempts have contributed toward his journey to attaining ‘good’.

All horrors have followed the same course, getting worse and worse and forcing you into a kind of bottle-neck till, at the very moment when you thought you must be crushed, behold! you were out of the narrows and all was suddenly well. The extraction hurt more and more and then the tooth was out. The dream became a nightmare and then you woke. You die and die and then you are beyond death.²⁰¹

In further emphasis of the point that pain is present as an aspect of the ‘good’ of life, Screwtape tells Wormwood that, “As he saw you, he also saw Them”.²⁰² That is, the man saw ‘good’, or “them”, at the same time as he saw ‘bad’, or “you”. ‘Good’ is attainable or able to be “seen” because of the painful experiences that have occurred; because he has been able to confront the painful experiences, rather than avoid them. This confrontation of his pain has improved him and allowed him to attain ‘good’. This is reiterated in the remark “that central music in every pure experience which had always just evaded memory was now at last recovered”.²⁰³ This recovery was instigated by the painful experiences represented by Screwtape and Wormwood. As said above, this is also reiterated when Screwtape speaks of “the sudden clearing of his eyes as he saw you for the first time and recognised the part you had had in him”.²⁰⁴ In the concluding paragraph of the book, Lewis writes of the Christian man in the context that “pains he may still have to encounter, but they *embrace* those pains. They would not barter them for any earthly pleasure”.²⁰⁵ This notion of embracing pain and subsequently attaining a higher ‘good’ than earthly pleasures provide, reflects a fitting

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid, p.173.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ibid, p.174.

²⁰⁴ Ibid, p.171.

²⁰⁵ Ibid, p.174.

end to the meaning of the story and the extent to which it supports the claim that painful experiences have the capacity to contribute significantly toward moral growth and the establishment of virtuous character.

Generally, Lewis' work provides a number of 'reasons' why endurance of painful experiences is appropriate. As has been examined previously, Lewis came to the view that "God intends to give us what we need, not what we now think we want".²⁰⁶ This theme also features in *The Screwtape Letters* when Lewis writes that "He [God] wants them to learn to walk and must therefore take away His hand; and if only the will to walk is really there He is pleased even with their stumbles".²⁰⁷ This ties in closely with the idea that painful experiences are necessary for people to learn and grow, thus it improves people toward becoming better, in the sense of developing a virtuous nature. It also reiterates the idea that pleasure or being given something 'nice' that will provide us with pleasure is insufficient to achieve this end. It can be said, then, that if this type of learning is linked to mental-wellbeing, then mental-wellbeing, or 'good', must mean more than being happy. In addition, Lewis writes that "[God] *really* loves the hairless bipeds He has created and always gives back to them with His right hand what He has taken away with His left".²⁰⁸ From this we can understand that even though we experience pain and suffering, we always have the capacity to gain a positive result.

In letter eight, *Screwtape* introduces the "law of undulation" which he explains as follows:²⁰⁹

Their nearest approach to constancy, therefore, is undulation – the repeated return to a level from which they repeatedly fall back, a series of troughs and peaks... As long as he lives on earth periods of emotional and bodily richness and liveliness will alternate with periods of numbness and poverty.²¹⁰

²⁰⁶ Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, p.46-47.

²⁰⁷ Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, p.40.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid*, p.72.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p.37.

²¹⁰ *Ibid*, pp.37-38.

Life, on this view, can be understood in terms of the constant fluctuation between positive and negative experiences. The trough periods represent painful experiences and, Lewis explains through *Screwtape*, these trough periods are of greater benefit than the peaks which represent the happier experiences.

Now it may surprise you to learn that in His efforts to get permanent possession of a soul, He relies on the troughs even more than on the peaks; some of His special favourites have gone through longer and deeper troughs than anyone else.²¹¹

The reason for this is, again, the idea that we learn from difficult and painful experiences and this learning helps advance toward becoming better, more virtuous, people. “He leaves the creature to stand up on its own legs... It is during such trough periods, much more than during the peak periods, that it is growing into the sort of creature He wants it to be”.²¹² From this notion we can see the importance of the role that painful experiences play in perfecting us toward becoming ‘good’.

Also apparent here is the previously explained concept of ‘Hell’. *Screwtape* tells Wormwood that “to get the man’s soul and give him *nothing* in return – that is what really gladdens Our Father’s heart. And the troughs are the time for beginning the process”.²¹³ This reflects the idea of Hell as pain and suffering that has no capacity to instigate moral growth and therefore lacks ‘redemptive’ qualities. The troughs, however, are not positive or negative in themselves. The nature of the situation is determined according to how a person responds to the experience of the troughs, from which arises the idea that pain has the *capacity* to generate positive results; rather than the notion that pain always does generate positive results.

Furthermore, the “whole philosophy of Hell” according to *Screwtape* refers to the idea that “my good is my good and your good is yours. What one gains another loses. Even an inanimate object is what it is by excluding all other objects from the

²¹¹ Ibid, p.38.

²¹² Ibid, p.40.

²¹³ Ibid, pp.44-45.

space it occupies”.²¹⁴ Screwtape is deceived in his assertion that pain is negative (seen in his attempts to exploit certain experiences in order to ‘claim’ the man’s soul). Screwtape’s thoughts point to a higher good that conforms to the “Enemy’s” (God’s) law of undulation. Because each person has different experiences, as Chapter One argues, the nature of pain and the role it has in the life of a specific person is interpreted using specific language and concepts that the individual understands in a specific context. It is not necessary to understand the nature of pain in a universally understandable sense because the meaning that is derived from such experiences is drawn from an individual’s personal response.

If Screwtape’s notion constitutes ‘Hell’ then we can interpret ‘Hell’ as a possible positive state of being, which would contradict the negative connotations that the concept is meant to carry. In terms of the law of undulation, both pain and joy are necessary to the development of the person and this process is unique to that person. Therefore if, as Chapter Three states, ‘Hell’ constitutes a painful state in which no redemptive quality or capacity for progression is possible, then what Screwtape is referring to is not ‘Hell’. Lewis highlights this truth about how the “Enemy” (God) teaches humans, while the demons cannot understand because they lack ‘redemptive’ qualities or the capacity for restitution.

From this analysis we can see how *The Screwtape Letters* builds on various themes that Lewis explores throughout his work, generally, in relation to the claim that humans are perfected through suffering. This highlights how significant the claim is in Lewis’ work (since he explored the same themes in a multitude of ways in numerous works) and the overall importance involved in confronting painful experiences rather than avoiding them.

²¹⁴ Ibid, p.94.

2: The Chronicles of Narnia

In this part of the chapter I will argue that painful experiences have the capacity to improve our character because they act to strengthen the quality of our faith (as opposed to reason). This notion is predominantly argued by Lewis in *The Chronicles of Narnia* series, which I will examine in order to show how the series supports the claim that humans are perfected through pain and suffering. As shown in Chapter Three, many of the themes in Lewis' work are Augustinian, and his assertions in *The Chronicles of Narnia* indicate likewise, for they draw increasingly on the 'faith precedes reason' concept that was prevalent in Augustine's work.

The 'faith precedes reason' concept, as it is presented in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, suggests that one cannot adequately understand 'life lessons' [knowledge] unless one first has faith. Pain is one of the most prominent ways in which faith, and virtuous character, can be attained and strengthened, as Aristotle and Lewis suggest.²¹⁵ This shows that it is necessary to undertake the process of the 'journey', representing pain, and necessary to maintain faith through that 'journey' in order to attain subsequent understanding.

Augustine writes of the 'faith precedes reason' concept that "my soul, you too must listen to the word of God. Do not be foolish; do not let the din of your folly deafen the ears of your heart".²¹⁶ This suggests that rational thought processes may have the effect of preventing a higher understanding from being gained; an understanding that may otherwise have been better achieved through first attaining faith. Augustine first developed the 'faith precedes reason' concept in his *Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Love*, but St. Anselm popularly explored the concept further.²¹⁷

²¹⁵ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, pp.66-67 and Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, p.99.

²¹⁶ Augustine, *Confessions*, p.81.

²¹⁷ Augustine, *Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Love*, and Julius R. Weinberg, *A Short History of Medieval Philosophy*, (Princeton University Press; New Jersey, 1991), pp.32-33 & 62-63.

I do desire to understand a little of your truth which my heart already believes and loves. I do not seek to understand so that I may believe, but I believe so that I may understand; and what is more, I believe that unless I do believe I shall not understand.²¹⁸

A failure of faith, then, results in a failure of understanding. As can be seen in “Prince Caspian”, where rational thought processes precede faith true understanding cannot be attained.²¹⁹ In *The Chronicles of Narnia*, Lewis extensively promotes this concept through emphasising the importance of faith as ‘belief’. Lewis’ application of the ‘faith precedes reason’ concept can also be understood as Aristotelian in that the process of enduring painful experiences in faith displays the virtue of courage which results in a truer understanding and the moral betterment of the person in question.²²⁰

In terms of faith as ‘belief’, Lewis uses a similar definition to the one that Augustine gives in *The Enchiridion*. Augustine writes that “faith believes” and “faith is defined ‘the evidence of things not seen’”.²²¹ Lewis writes in *Mere Christianity* that “it simply means Belief – accepting or regarding as true”.²²² Faith is prominently referred to as belief in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, through which Lewis emphasises the Augustinian concept that we believe in order to understand the things we have knowledge of.

Ann Loades writes of Lewis’ understanding of faith and pain that “bereavement forces us to try to believe what we cannot feel, that God is our true Beloved”.²²³ If we take ‘God’ to figuratively represent faith, then Loades’ statement echoes the difficulty in maintaining faith in painful situations, as is reiterated in *A Grief Observed* when Lewis writes of God’s apparent desertion at the time he needs Him most.²²⁴ The pain presents a choice: a person can either confront the ‘journey’ (process) of the situation and undergo the experience of the painful situation in order to rediscover faith (in

²¹⁸ St. Anselm, *The Prayers and Meditations of Saint Anselm with the Proslogion*, translated by Sister Benedicta Ward, (Penguin Books; London, 1986), p.244.

²¹⁹ Augustine, *Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Love*, chapter 20.

²²⁰ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, pp.66-67 & 159-160.

²²¹ Augustine, *Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Love*, chapter’s 7 and 8.

²²² Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, p.138.

²²³ Loades, “The Grief of C.S. Lewis”, p.275.

²²⁴ Lewis, *A Grief Observed*, p.8.

Aristotelian terms we must endure painful experiences and display the virtue of courage and faith in order to achieve the higher good), or a person can choose to avoid confrontation and in doing so meet with a non-redemptive form of misery that is worse than the initial pain of the ‘journey’. While this concept shows a connection between the themes in *A Grief Observed* and *The Chronicles of Narnia* (and even *Spirits in Bondage – A Cycle of Lyrics* in places), it also reinforces the idea that pain has the capacity to advance the progress of our moral growth us through helping us to understand the strength of our faith.

The best examples of the ‘faith precedes reason’ concept in *The Chronicles of Narnia* are provided through two prominent recurring themes. *The Chronicles* show prominent examples of situations in which the characters experience periods of suffering in order to learn lessons of wisdom. This theme demonstrates that painful experiences are necessary to help a person learn ‘life lessons’ that will contribute to improving them toward attaining ‘goodness’. The series also expresses the theme of ‘believing’ [in the magic] in order to know or understand underlying truths behind various difficult situations. As the definition Lewis gives in *Mere Christianity* emphasises, ‘belief’ is symbolic for having faith. Therefore, we need to maintain faith through painful situations, as well as positivity in our response to pain, in order to arrive at moral betterment.

“The Magician’s Nephew”, although one of the last books in the series to be written, is the first in the series chronologically, and tells of the creation of Narnia.²²⁵ Digory accidentally brings a Witch into Narnia, and is subsequently given a task by Aslan (a lordly, King-like lion); he must retrieve an apple from the tree of eternal youth. Once Digory and Polly reach the garden which houses the tree of eternal youth, the Witch explains to them the importance of the apple. “Do you know what that fruit

²²⁵ C.S. Lewis “The Magician’s Nephew” in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, 1955 (HarperCollins Publisher; London, 2005).

is? I will tell you. It is the apple of youth, the apple of life. I know, for I have tasted it; and I feel already such changes in myself that I know I shall never grow old or die".²²⁶ The apple, then, represents a tempting commodity, the goodness of which is bound in the equal positive and negative attributes of this item, symbolising the goodness and badness of life. "Take of my fruit for others or forbear, for those who steal... shall find their heart's desire and find despair".²²⁷ This emphasises that avoiding pain for the end of maximising pleasure will result in the non-redemptive pain of 'Hell' that has no capacity to improve the person, rather than the sought after pleasure. Through this, it also shows that both pain and happiness are equally necessary to 'good'. The following quote emphasises this duality:

[The Witch] was just throwing away the core of an apple which she had eaten... and he began to see that there might be some sense in that last line about getting your heart's desire and getting despair along with it. For the Witch looked stronger and prouder than ever, and even, in a way, triumphant; but her face was deadly white, white as salt.²²⁸

This duality is also emphasised in the character Puddleglum (whom we meet in "The Silver Chair"). "Puddleglum... often pointed out that bright mornings brought on wet afternoons, and that you couldn't expect good times to last".²²⁹ Although Puddleglum is introduced as being serious in nature, this quote emphasises the idea that both good and bad are necessary to each other. In Chapter Two, I discussed this duality in terms of Preben Bertelson's theory of co-existence. That is, human nature consists of an equal co-existence of good and bad.²³⁰ Augustine's *Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Love* emphasises the same idea.

Evil cannot exist without good... If good did not exist in what is evil, neither could evil exist; because corruption could not have either a place to dwell in, or a source to spring from, if there were nothing that could be corrupted; and nothing can be corrupted except what is good, for corruption is nothing else but the destruction of good. From

²²⁶ Ibid, p.186.

²²⁷ Ibid, p.182.

²²⁸ Ibid, p.185.

²²⁹ C.S. Lewis, "The Silver Chair" in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, 1953 (HarperCollins Publishers; London, 1998), p.253.

²³⁰ Bertelson, "Evilness as Intention: The Intentional Detachment from and Destruction of the Human Condition of Co-Existence", p.692.

what is good, then, evils arose, and except in what is good they do not exist; nor was there any other source from which any evil nature could arise.²³¹

If bad includes experiences of pain and suffering, then we can reasonably claim that Lewis' descriptive analogy of the Witch after she has eaten the apple explains duality in the sense that bad and painful experiences are necessary to virtuously achieve true good and emphasising the pleasurable at the expense of painful experiences results in worse misery. In Aristotle's terms, this leads to the vice of cowardice (which he explains using the example of suicide) "because it shows weakness of character to run away from hardships... not because it is a fine thing to do".²³²

In "The Magician's Nephew", furthermore, the Witch continues her efforts to lure Digory into vice by tempting him with the knowledge that if he disobeys Aslan he will be able to take the apple back to his own world and use it to heal his sick Mother.²³³ Digory is conflicted between the desire to serve his own purposes (however altruistic in intention) and Aslan's command (representing faith).²³⁴ Finally, the Witch commits a reasoning error in her attempt to persuade him to disobey Aslan. Digory, although pained in doing so, is then able to find the strength to ignore the Witch.²³⁵ This shows that even if endurance through pain is difficult or reasons for a painful experience are unable to be understood, both faith and confrontation of the situation remain fundamental to enhancement of character. As previously discussed, Digory's ordeal can be explained in terms of Aristotle's claim that courage is a virtue. In terms of suffering, endurance rather than avoidance is a characteristic of courage. "In the case of courage, death and wounds will be painful to the courageous man, and he will not willingly endure them; but endure them he will, because that is the fine thing to do,

²³¹ Augustine, *Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Love*, chapter 14.

²³² Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, p.69.

²³³ Lewis, "The Magician's Nephew", pp.187-189.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Ibid.

or because it is a disgrace not to endure them”.²³⁶ Digory displays the virtue of courage because he obeys Aslan even though he is tempted to deviate in order to pursue his own goals and even though obeying is emotionally difficult for him. This also implies that Digory’s courage is a result of faith. Faith that Aslan’s command was for the greater good would have been necessary for Digory to obey at the expense of acting to help heal his ill Mother. “The Last Battle” also reiterates this when King Tirian tells Jill: “There’s no knowing. But courage, child: we are all in the paws of the true Aslan”.²³⁷ The virtue of courage, displayed in times of suffering, then, is the result of faith. A lack of faith would have resulted in a lack of courage in face of the situation.

In further emphasis of the importance of faith and endurance, in “The Magician’s Nephew” Aslan rewards Digory for obeying his command and fulfilling the task, but first explains the effects the apple would have had on his Mother if it had been given to her under the Witch’s circumstances.²³⁸

Understand... that it would have healed her; but not to your joy or hers. The day would have come when both you and she would have looked back and said it would have been better to die in that illness”. And Digory could say nothing, for tears choked him and he gave up all hopes of saving his Mother’s life; but at the same time he knew that the Lion knew what would have happened, and that there might be things more terrible even than losing someone you love by death.²³⁹

This further demonstrates the idea that ‘goodness’ is attained through faith and endurance of pain, not through avoiding pain in order to maximise pleasure (as seen in the idea that Digory could only safely take the apple under virtuous circumstances). Digory’s reward for undertaking his task virtuously is that now Aslan allows him to take an apple for his Mother, and because it is taken in the right circumstances (that is, virtuously), it will heal her in joy rather than misery, as it would have done if she had been given an apple that was not taken virtuously. This bolsters the view that virtuous lessons are learnt through confronting and enduring painful experiences, and by

²³⁶ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, p.74.

²³⁷ C.S Lewis, “The Last Battle” in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, 1956 (HarperCollins Publishers; London, 1998), pp.132-133.

²³⁸ Ibid, p.203.

²³⁹ Ibid.

maintaining faith through the experiences, thereby improving the moral character of the person.

“The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe” is the second book in the series.²⁴⁰ The story presents a scene in which Aslan sacrifices himself on the stone table in order to save Edmund (who through naïveté betrayed his brother and sisters to gain the Witch’s favour) from being sacrificed as the Deep Magic of Narnia requires when a betrayal occurs.

Though the Witch knew the Deep Magic, there is a magic deeper still which she did not know. Her knowledge goes back only to the dawn of time. But if she could have looked a little further back, into the stillness and the darkness before Time dawned, she would have read there a different incantation. She would have known that when a willing victim who had committed no treachery was killed in a traitor’s stead, the Table would crack and Death itself would start working backwards.²⁴¹

This situation improves Aslan in that he must have faith that the magic will work as it is meant to. He courageously risks his life through enduring the most painful of experiences and as a result of his faith he is strengthened in the standing he has as a leader. Lucy and Susan, who watch unseen, grow through the situation because they must have faith that Aslan is acting in the most appropriate manner. This scene demonstrates a Christ-like enrichment in that altruistic self-sacrifice, or self-surrender, results in a perfection of the self through the enlightenment that results from Divine (or Magical in the case of *The Chronicles of Narnia*) reincarnation. Thus, improvement of the self occurs in proportion to the suffering experienced: the greater the extent of the suffering, the greater the capacity for improvement.

In “The Horse and his Boy”, we meet a character dubbed ‘Rabadash the Ridiculous’.²⁴² The pride, selfishness and treachery of Rabadash causes Aslan to instigate a transformation in which Rabadash has to endure the pain of ridicule

²⁴⁰ C.S.Lewis, “The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe” in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, 1950 (HarperCollins Publishers; London, 2001).

²⁴¹ Ibid, p.176.

²⁴² C.S. Lewis, “The Horse and His Boy” in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, 1954 (HarperCollins Publishers; London, 2005).

through being publicly turned into a donkey.²⁴³ Rabadash is made to endure the situation, which is painful for him, in order to learn to be a respectable person, in the sense of virtuousness of character; otherwise he will stay a donkey permanently.²⁴⁴ Thus, painful situations serve to heighten one's personal standard of virtue. This book also features prominent examples of the difficult journey characters must endure to achieve a particular goal. The characters (Shasta, Bree, Hwin, and Aravis) will not reach Narnia (symbolising 'good'), which is their destination, unless they endure the pain and difficulty of the journey and take on the lessons it teaches in the process. The journey, then, is more important than the destination, for one will not achieve 'good' without the growth process made possible by painful experiences.

"Prince Caspian" draws attention to Susan's growing skepticism.²⁴⁵ In a situation that embodies the 'faith precedes reason' concept, Susan refuses to believe that Aslan is with the group because she cannot see him, not realising that this is his test; she must first believe that he is there and then she will be able to see him.²⁴⁶ "You have listened to fears, child," Aslan tells Susan.²⁴⁷ In terms of Augustine's 'faith precedes reason' concept, this scene demonstrates the idea that intellectual reasoning can prevent people from understanding truths that are better understood from the context of faith or experience. "There are truths, whether we know them or not, which must be believed if we would attain to a happy life, that is, to eternal life".²⁴⁸ Painful situations present the challenge of having faith, or 'belief', in which case an adequate understanding of the lessons that the painful situation might provide will not be gained unless one first has the attitude of faith.

²⁴³ Ibid, pp.237-242.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ C.S. Lewis, "Prince Caspian" in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, 1951(HarperCollins Publishers; London, 1998).

²⁴⁶ Ibid, pp.158-163.

²⁴⁷ Ibid, p.165.

²⁴⁸ Augustine, *Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Love*, chapter 20.

“Prince Caspian” also reflects the theme of enduring suffering in order to gain wisdom in that Peter, Susan, Lucy and Edmund must complete a difficult journey through Narnia in order to find the place where Prince Caspian’s army are camped – the purpose of this journey is to prepare the characters for the battle to come. Again, prominence is given to the theme of being improved as a result of the lessons learnt through the process (‘journey’) involved in going through painful experiences.

“The Voyage of the Dawn Treader” covers themes that are not unlike those examined in previous books in the series. Similar to ‘Rabadash the Ridiculous’ in “The Horse and his Boy”, we meet the character Eustace, a selfish cousin, who suffers the experience of turning into a dragon in order to learn that he must be considerate towards other people. “He had turned into a dragon while he was asleep. Sleeping on a dragon’s hoard with greedy, dragonish thoughts in his heart, he had become a dragon himself”.²⁴⁹ This demonstrates that bad experiences are necessary to help people learn how to reach their full potential in terms of goodness. Chapter Twelve of the book sees the characters visit ‘the dark island’. This island is not a land mass. It is a “blackness” which recreates dreams and nightmares in reality and the crew of the ship, who find themselves surrounded by the “blackness”, must sail through it in order to be able to banish it. This further demonstrates the idea that you need to confront painful situations in order to be able to overcome them.²⁵⁰ The book closes with a scene in which the children finally speak to Aslan who tells them that they will not return to Narnia again. The children become upset at the thought that they will never see Aslan again who, in turn, comforts them by saying that they will meet him in their world too. “But there I have another name. You must learn to know me by that name. This was the very reason why you were brought to Narnia, that by knowing me here for a little,

²⁴⁹ C.S. Lewis, “The Voyage of the Dawn Treader” in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, 1952 (HarperCollins Publishers; London, 1998), p.99.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid*, pp.184-196.

you may know me better there”.²⁵¹ Again this shows that painful experiences are necessary to prepare a person for future situations, and that people are able to deal with present experiences in such a way as their prior painful experiences have taught them. Aslan’s distance in this book is important, too. “Lewis deepens the spiritual experience of his characters by making Aslan harder to find. Faith now enters into the equation: belief without seeing”.²⁵² This emphasises the theme that faith, as belief, is of the highest importance in arriving at an adequate understanding of the role pain plays in developing our character.

“The Last Battle”, the final book in the series, contains two scenes (among many) that are of particular importance. In Chapter Thirteen the characters meet a group of dwarves.²⁵³ The obstinate attitudes of these dwarves results in their blindness; that is, they literally cannot see the good things that surround them. In addition, their further refusal to believe what they are told about Aslan prevents them from enjoying the emancipation that would have led them to experience the joys of Narnia. Aslan tells his followers, “They have chosen cunning instead of belief. Their prison is only in their minds, yet they are in that prison; and so afraid of being taken in that they cannot be taken out”.²⁵⁴ This suggests that such methods of obtaining intellectual insight and control can have the effect of hindering understanding, rather than aiding it. This idea operates in conjunction with the claim Lewis makes in his conclusion of *A Grief Observed*. As examined previously, sometimes “the best is perhaps what we understand least”.²⁵⁵ Painful situations help us to grow through aiding our learning of appropriate responses. In this case, ‘believing’ rather than

²⁵¹ Ibid, p.255.

²⁵² Mark Bane, “Myth Made Truth: The Origins of the Chronicles of Narnia”, *Index of Papers*, 1989.

²⁵³ Lewis, “The Last Battle” in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, pp.167-181.

²⁵⁴ Ibid, p.181.

²⁵⁵ Lewis, *A Grief Observed*, p.64.

attempting to find intellectual solutions is more appropriate, since the foundation it provides us with results in a more adequate personal understanding of the situation.

The last chapter of “The Last Battle” sees the characters return to a Narnia they thought had been destroyed and they enjoy a reunion with all of the friends they had previously known in Narnia.²⁵⁶ When Aslan questions Lucy as to why she is not happy she tells him of her concerns that they will be sent away from Narnia again. Aslan tells them that the railway accident they had been involved in had been real and that they had subsequently died. So Narnia is now, in essence, ‘Heaven’. Lewis again draws on Plato to explain the difference between the “Shadowlands” (that is, the physical Narnia that had been destroyed) and the real Narnia that they are in now. The physical Narnia, it is explained, is only an example or a “copy” of the real archetype of Narnia which they now occupy. This scene shows that the pain of death and destruction is necessary to arrive at ‘Heaven’, again symbolising a proportionate view of the level of ‘goodness’ achieved as a result of pain. The characters have experienced one of the highest levels of pain and upheaval, and have subsequently been rewarded with the highest ‘good’.

Thus we can see how *The Chronicles of Narnia* show that through confronting painful experiences, and maintaining faith through confronting such experiences, both improvement toward perfection and increased understanding are the result.

²⁵⁶ Lewis, “The Last Battle” in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, pp.209-221.

CONCLUSION

In terms of moral character, experiences of pain and suffering present at the same time the most difficult challenge and the best opportunity for personal and moral development. C.S. Lewis uses his typical humble poetic-prose tone to demonstrate the idea that enduring pain and suffering is important because it has the capacity to lead to moral betterment and a life that is more meaningful in terms of the resulting higher good. My use of the word “capacity” is central here because the importance of pain lies in individual responses to pain, and consequently the role it potentially has in our lives, rather than definitions and ideas about the how the nature of pain can be understood universally. As such, it is more appropriate to write that pain has the capacity to instigate improvement as opposed to notion that it always does.

The way in which an individual responds to the painful experiences that arise in the course of their life demonstrates a valuable insight into their character. For any number of reasons, the way one person responds to a painful situation may be significantly different to the way that their neighbour responds to the same situation. For this reason I have emphasised the concept that the situation itself retains the capacity to instigate moral improvement, but the extent to which improvement occurs in the individual depends on the attitude embedded in their response to the situation. However, if a person responds negatively this does not indicate that the situation loses its capacity to instigate moral progression. A person still retains the freedom to choose to change their attitude toward the given situation and in such a case, the experience can still be utilised for the purposes of personal and moral advancement. It is for this reason that emphasising non-avoidance of pain and suffering is important. If people can choose the way in which they respond to a given situation, then it is imperative for me to show the benefit of acceptance, in terms of moral betterment, as opposed to

avoidance which is inappropriate since it only serves to compound the negativity of the situation.

I have used Lewis' work as an example because of the many varied ways in which he deals with the concept that suffering leads to improvement. The different genres used by Lewis, and his poetic-prose writing style, enable him to promote the claim in such a way that is accessible to "the layman" without losing the importance of the idea in the generality of its expression. In much of his work, he overtly makes use of a Christian perspective. This does not limit his ideas to followers of the Christian faith, though. His expression of such ideas can be understood symbolically, especially as he makes extensive use of metaphor in his expression. This means that his expression of the claim in his Christian work is equally accessible to non-Christian readers. His literary work is significant also because it portrays his ideas and claims in a way that readers can understand and relate to emotionally and personally. His book *The Problem of Pain* puts all of these theories and ideas into a directly analytical context, providing an adequate philosophical foundation for the ideas he expressed in other forms (theology and literature, for example). In addition, I have explained Lewis' philosophical ideas in an Aristotelian context where appropriate, since Aristotle's virtue theory of ethics explains Lewis' claim well. Through this interpretation of Lewis' work, I have sought to show the importance of courageously enduring pain and suffering because of the capacity it has for improving one towards leading a more meaningful life and attaining a higher good.

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