C. S. LEWIS’ THE PROBLEM OF PAIN (1940)

KEY POINTS FROM LEWIS, W/ ELABORATION BY DR. M
Chp. 1: Introductory
ONE ATHEIST’S POINT OF VIEW
(C. S. LEWIS, PRIOR TO FAITH)

- immense universe; tiny, suffering humans (1-2)
- pain (physical or psychological) & death as the foundational problems of human existence. Pain the only real evil (1-2)
- if God exists and allows suffering, God must be grotesque: powerless, indifferent, or sadistic (3)
ONE ATHEIST’S QUESTIONING

• if the universe is inherently violent and its denizens innately self-interested, why is it so hard to accept that this is the way things are? Why do we long for peace and happiness?

• how did we ever fabricate the idea of a good Creator (3)?
SOME KEY ELEMENTS OF RELIGION: THE NUMINOUS

- awareness of *Numinous*: the spiritual (intangible & uncanny) which sparks awe & dread (5-8)
- such awe & dread are fundamentally unlike danger-inducing fear, and have not faded w/ advances in science (9-10)
- synonyms for *Numinous*: the Sublime, the Ineffable
SOME KEY ELEMENTS OF RELIGION: MORALITY

- awareness of Moral Law that distinguishes right from wrong (10-11)

- morality cannot be deduced from physical events alone, as sometimes a thing that helps us survive we still recognize as wrong

- morality is tied to emotion, emotions which both affirm the importance of a moral law, and signal discomfort w/ breaking that law
MOVING TOWARDS CHRISTIANITY

• a next stage in religious development: connecting the *Numinous* to the moral law, a *non-intuitive* link since the ill-behaved universe does not match the standard to which the moral law calls us (12-13)

• a particularly Christian step: accepting the notion that *Jesus was one with that God* linked to the *Numinous* and the moral law. Jesus either an abominable lunatic or a truth-teller (13-14).
“Christianity . . . [i]n a sense . . . creates, rather than solves, the problem of pain, for pain would be no problem unless, side by side with our daily experience of this painful world, we had received what we think a good assurance that ultimate reality is righteous and loving” (14).

*The Problem of Pain*
“[I]rrversible entropy gives time a real direction and the cosmos, no longer static or cyclic, moves like a drama from a real beginning to a real end” (15).

The Problem of Pain
Chp. 4: Human Wickedness
OUR TENDENCY TO REJECT THE NOTION OF SIN

- modernity considers kindness the greatest virtue, cruelty the worst transgression (48-49). Accordingly, many think themselves rather good (50-51)

- being in a pleasant mood inclines us to think we’re feeling kind towards others; true kindness is rather rare (48-49)

- believing one is better than s/he really is generates resentment against an unjust world (51)

- on occasion, even the most self-deceived confront real, profound guilt within themselves and recognize that absolute good (i.e. God) would not condone their behavior (51)
POPULAR STRATEGIES FOR JUSTIFYING SINFUL BEHAVIOR

• relying on surface-level analysis of self & others (52-53)

• admitting to our failings in a tone & manner that does not match their severity (53)

• implying that habitual vices are instead exceptional, isolated acts: vice versa concerning our virtues (53)

• we foreground large-scale social failings and move personal failings to the background (54)
POPULAR STRATEGIES FOR JUSTIFYING SINFUL BEHAVIOR

• we dismiss and sometimes laugh at distant sins of ours, as if time erases their severity, instead of recognizing the accumulation of sin requires grace (55). Lewis posits that salvation might involve our eternally rejoicing in our shame because it requires the intervention of God’s compassion (55-56).

• we downplay individual sins by pointing to their ubiquity/omnipresence in society (55-56)
POPULAR STRATEGIES FOR JUSTIFYING SINFUL BEHAVIOR

• we celebrate our *humaneness* relative to earlier eras, ignoring their own virtues (which we lack), such as courage or chastity (58).

• we ignore the fact that being *truly* kind requires the presence of other virtues (patience, humility, etc.), as well as the fact that every vice eventually leads to kindness’ antithesis, cruelty (59)

• we blame selfishness on evolution & the struggle to survive. If God created the world, God is at fault (60)
"The emotion of shame has been valued not as an emotion but because of the insight to which it leads. I think that insight should be permanent in each man’s mind: but whether the painful emotions that attend it should also be encouraged . . . My own idea, for what it is worth, is that all sadness which is not either arising from the repentance of a concrete sin and hastening towards concrete amendment or restitution, or else arising from pity and hastening to active assistance, is simply bad" (61).
Chp. 5: The Fall of Man
SIN:
AN UNCOMFORTABLE CONCEPT

• the fallen state of humankind results from an abuse of free will; without free will, human action would have no meaning whatsoever (63-65).

• however literally or figuratively we read the first chapters of Genesis, it posits that the first sin was not a social sin, but a deeper, “timeless” sin against God

• Pride is the 1st, foundational sin, involving a creature’s trying “to set up on its own, to exist for itself” (69-70).

• all action & motivation slides towards self-interest (70-71)
“Such a sin requires no complex social conditions, no extended experience, no great intellectual development. From the moment a creature becomes aware of God as God and of itself as self, the terrible alternative of choosing God or self for the centre is opened to it. . . . It is the fall in every individual life, and in each day of each individual life, the basic sin behind all particular sins” (69-70).

The Problem of Pain
THE FALL:
ONE HYPOTHESIS . . .

- at some point in ancient human history, humans became aware of self and Creator; at another point, they decided to live for self, not God, attempting to be nouns, not adjectives (71-76)

- ceasing to obey God and be governed by the laws of spirit, humans gave themselves over to biochemical laws and desires spawned not by reason but by body & environment (77-78)

- the human will forced some of these new thoughts and desires into the background, creating the “subconscious” (78)

- human spirit because a prisoner of human nature, instead of its governor (78)
DID GOD SET US UP TO FAIL?

Lewis asserts that God did not orchestra humankind’s fall from a state of grace, though God knew (being omniscient) that it would happen. “In fact, of course, God saw the crucifixion in the act of creating the first nebula. The world is a dance in which good, descending from God, is disturbed by evil arising from the creatures, and the resulting conflict is resolved by God’s own assumption [through Christ] of the suffering nature which evil produces” (80).