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Is Pain a Problem? *J. J. Rousseau and C. S. Lewis* *on Suffering and Human Nature*

TREVOR SHELLEY AND JACOB SIEGLER

About suffering they were never wrong,
The Old Masters: how well they understood
Its human position; how it takes place
While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully
along.

W. H. Auden, "Musée des Beaux Arts"

Man is uncovered enough to perceive something of himself and veiled
enough so that the rest is sunk in impenetrable darkness, into which he
plunges constantly and always in vain, in order to succeed in grasping
himself.

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, II, 1.17

Over thirty years ago, Christopher Lasch penned the following words: "The contemporary climate is therapeutic, not religious. People today hunger not for personal salvation, let alone for the restoration of an earlier golden age, but for the feeling, the momentary illusion, of personal well-being, health, and psychic security."¹ The desires herein enumerated might otherwise be described as aspiring to a particularly *modern* form of happiness; one different from, for example, Christian *beatitudo* or Greek *eudaemonia*, insofar as it corresponds neither to the

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¹Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York, 1978), 7.

sanctification of the blessed and the hope for salvation, nor to the difficult discipline of cultivating virtue, likely achievable by only the few. One element these earlier understandings have in common is that the aspiration to happiness is itself a process of struggle, without guarantee, while the goal is in some sense recognizable in terms of objective standards. Thus, earlier views of happiness were not defined by painlessness, and were inextricable from an understanding of a hierarchy of values, or a sense of moral order beyond the individual self. In contrast, the particularly modern variety of happiness alluded to is akin to personal or individual satisfaction, deemed available to all by way of a therapeutic process, with the corollary of avoiding as much struggle, or pain, as possible. Such therapeutic hopes and desired satisfaction are sometimes combined today with the notion that happiness is a right, and often proclaimed without serious consideration of moral implications or necessary limits. This logic risks “advanc[ing] toward a state of society in which not only each man but every impulse in each man claims *carte blanche*,” so long as happiness, as understood by the individual, is held to be the aim or end.²

Arguably, one way to understand the “contemporary climate” described by Lasch is to view it as a development within modernity, or within liberal thought in particular. The modern form of happiness considered here is therefore distinguishable from Machiavellian or Hobbesian hedonism, in which men and women seek satisfaction largely by acting on, or consuming, external objects. In fact, this hedonistic view only highlights the tension between the infinite desires of humanity and the limitations in the quest to fulfillment, as Hobbes illustrates in what he determines to be “a general inclination of all mankind, a perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death.” Or, in Machiavelli’s terms, human “desire is always greater than the power of acquisition.”³ There is, therefore, no good reason for believing that the more successful one is in maximizing the satisfaction of wants within the possible range of success, the happier one is likely to be. The realization that consumption and acquisition—or that solely acting on external reality—*fails* to make people happy helped inaugurate what this paper refers to as “a development” within modern liberalism.⁴ This realization resulted

² C. S. Lewis, “We Have No ‘Right to Happiness,’” in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. by Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids, 1970), 317–22.

³ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. by Michael Oakeshott (New York, 1962), 80; Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, trans. by Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov (Chicago, 1998), 123–6.

⁴ Generally speaking, liberalism as a political doctrine aims “to secure the political conditions for the exercise of personal freedom.” See Judith Shklar, “The Liberalism of Fear,” in *Political Thought and Political Thinkers* (Chicago, 1998), 3. Quoted in Peter Berkowitz, *Virtue and the Making of Modern Liberalism* (Princeton, 1999), 4–5. For a fine elaboration on this under-

in the restoration of a semblance of an older view of human pain and suffering as a psychological problem; that is, an issue related to the *internal* structure of the human psyche.

At the core of this more recent pursuit of happiness, there is a redirection of attention away from the outer world towards the inner world, with concomitant techniques of self-adjustment. The aim is psychic balance or equilibrium; the ultimate goal is a certain *self-unity*. In its ideal, such unity is ultimately independent of the impact that things or people beyond the self might have. Rather than striving to minimize the frustrating tension of perpetual desires by continually expanding the self through acquisitiveness or seeking positive impression in the eyes of others, this kind of happiness is based on the achievement of an insular psychological state with a strictly self-referential standard, as the language of “adjustment,” “balance,” and “equilibrium” suggests. The objective of unity is sought through what this paper refers to as “psychic engineering.” The psychological unity of the individual, or self-referential happiness, becomes *the* substantive standard. As Philip Rieff notes in contrast to earlier views, from the modern perspective there is “nothing at stake beyond a *manipulatable sense of well-being*.”⁵ In sum, the modern view of happiness under discussion here is ultimately a self-contained sensation, void of reference to any broader moral order, insofar as the self’s greatest aspiration is contained *within itself alone*, and both individual lifestyles and public policy strive to meet this aim.

To be sure, the “therapeutic” climate limned here, as described (for example) by Lasch and Rieff, has anything but diminished in the past three decades. At least one obvious indication of this is the abundance of books authored by various so-called experts offering means to help oneself in securing “personal well-being, health, and psychic security.” This literary genre is known as “self-help”; for some time boasting its own section in major Western bookstores, it has become nothing short of an “industry” and “culture.”⁶ Self-help, as a reflection of the current thera-

standing of “liberalism” in conjunction with the growth of the (liberal and democratic) “self,” see Pierre Manent, *An Intellectual History of Liberalism*, trans. by Rebecca Balinski (New Jersey, 1995).

⁵ Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith After Freud* (New York, 1966), 13 [emphasis added].

⁶ In fact, it is a “culture” that is administered through a “\$2.48-billion-a-year industry.” See Micki McGee, *Self-Help, Inc: Makeover Culture in American Life* (New York, 2005), 11. McGee’s work illustrates the various ways in which self-help actually enslaves people in “a cycle where the self is not improved but endlessly belabored” (12). Interestingly, this situation has a precursor in the “mind-cure movement” which, among other things, shared a faith in “psychic abundance.” It was in this period that one found the “therapeutic mode in embryo” in the form of the “neurasthenic” which was “paralyzed by introspection and self-doubt, [and] obsessed with

peutic climate, promotes a rather myopic notion of happiness, where almost all focus is placed on the insular self, and the various literary works claim to offer the outstanding key individuals have been missing in their hitherto less-than-satisfied lives.⁷ This is exemplified in Gloria Arenson's *Five Simple Steps to Emotional Healing: The Last Self-Help Book You Will Ever Need*. Arenson writes, "We must trust that the body/mind we call our 'self' has *innate wisdom and will provide whatever each of us needs* in order to restore health"; thus, the book offers "a powerful technique that encourages *any* emotional healing that needs to take place."⁸ Of course, the language of "health" and "healing" speaks directly to the notion that the current climate is "therapeutic."

Having said as much, the subject of this paper is not the current "self-help" phenomenon. This point of departure nevertheless indicates that the "contemporary climate" is informed, even if unconsciously, by a particular conception of *human nature*. These preliminary remarks, therefore, serve to establish the relevant context for a discussion that addresses a more fundamental, or basic, theoretical question, namely: Is pain a problem? What is meant here is whether the phenomenon of pain can be *intellectually* accounted for, in the sense of why it exists at all and how it relates to the nature of man. Or, to state matters differently: Can the problem of pain's presence in the lives of human beings be *theoretically* solved?⁹ To be perfectly clear, the term "pain" is meant to indicate the most gen-

easing his own psychic tensions" (56). See Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880–1920* (Chicago, 1994), 53–9.

⁷ What is patently obvious is that the *alpha* and *omega* of these approaches is the individual self. Despite this common structure, the industry's diversity is wondrous: one can help oneself to a mode of self-help and a type of happiness as specific to oneself—needless to say, there is "freedom" to choose for oneself. Perhaps predictably, there is even a self-help book to help one write self-help books. See Jean Marie Stine, *Writing Successful Self-Help and How-To Books* (New York, 1997). Telling enough is the title of section 1.1: "It's Easy, It's Rewarding—Do It!" Even the authors of self-help books are apparently more interested in rewarding (or helping) themselves, rather than others. Thus, *everything* becomes therapeutic and self-oriented, even "helping" others.

⁸ Gloria Arenson, *Five Simple Steps to Emotional Healing: The Last Self-Help Book You Will Ever Need* (New York, 2001), 15 [emphasis added].

⁹ To be perfectly clear, the authors are not herein offering an exhaustive phenomenology or typology of human pain and suffering; instead, they are concerned with the question of whether or not pain, broadly conceived in a spiritual or psychical sense, is a problem less to be wondered at than solved. Our question is overwhelmingly theoretical: is pain something that necessarily remains problematic, or is it a malady with at least a *hypothetical* solution? That said, the authors are not claiming that the problem of pain is itself something isolated to the intellect, for, as all human beings can attest, it is experiential at its core and on all levels of being. Indeed, assuming the problem may be thought away, so to speak, even with technical aid of some kind, is precisely the position being contested.

eral, if not universal, pain that all humans (as self-conscious beings) experience to some degree, irrespective of the particular or accidental suffering each grapples with. It should be obvious that pain, as described here, refers to something more than sheer physical pain. To express this differently, this “pain” is the specifically human kind, which might best be thought of as spiritual or psychical pain, inasmuch as it is related to the psyche, or soul, and is a product of self-reflective consciousness and knowledge of death in the explicit absence of knowing why one exists, and how, with any certainty, one should live.¹⁰

To approach this problem, this work will examine the thought of Jean Jacques Rousseau and C. S. Lewis on the problem of pain and happiness and on human nature more generally. Although Rousseau would likely be appalled by much of the superficiality found in current therapeutic approaches, it has been said that he is responsible for inaugurating many of these and other “new moods and feelings.”¹¹ Moreover, it has been convincingly argued that in large part Rousseau’s project is to “render man one,” and thereby overcome the “loss of a unified, integrated personality,” or the problem of the “disunity of soul.”¹² In short, it is suggested that Rousseau best represents the development from an earlier hedonistic view of happiness towards a therapeutic self-based understanding in the unfolding of modern liberalism. By contrast, for a thinker like Lewis, “psychological health demands that the primary object of our interest be something greater than ourselves,” and for him this is “a principle” that runs through all aspects of life—the self is anything but sovereign, or the point of reference and source of ultimate

¹⁰ Peter Augustine Lawler has explored and elaborated these themes in the thought of Tocqueville, and the latter’s adoption of Pascal’s psychology. One example that clarifies what the authors are suggesting here as “general” spiritual pain, is contained in the following: “Human thought or self-awareness of the contingent being placed arbitrarily in the infinite universe, produces misery. For the human mind, this misery is incomprehensible. A human mind cannot know why or for what human beings exist. Human existence is experienced by the human mind as accidental,” and therefore painful. See Lawler, “Was Tocqueville a Philosopher?” in *Interpretation*, 1990, 411.

¹¹ Clifford Orwin, “Moist eyes—from Rousseau to Clinton,” in *Public Interest*, 1997. Rousseau’s influence and importance can hardly be overstated: “he inspired in many a reader a profound longing to establish new institutions capable of transforming the human condition and of reworking thereby the very nature of man. It was the titanic ambition of Jean-Jacques Rousseau that determined the shape that moral, political, and aesthetic speculation would take for decades and even centuries to come. He was, in fact, a legislator of sorts. . . .” See Paul A. Rahe, *Soft Despotism, Democracy’s Drift: Montesquieu, Rousseau, Tocqueville & The Modern Prospect* (New Haven, 2009), 138–9.

¹² Arthur Melzer, *The Natural Goodness of Man* (Chicago, 1990), 63.

well-being. As he makes explicit: “Give up yourself, and you will find your real self.”¹³

Rather than relinquish the self, Rousseau denies any kind of submission of the self to something beyond it, or the granting of sovereignty to anything outside the subject. As Allan Bloom argues, following Arthur Melzer,

Rousseau replaces faith by sincerity in the profession of faith. Faith means belief in another, in the mysterious God who exists objectively. Sincerity puts the onus on the subjective certainty of the self without reference to further authority. The shift in focus is reflected in our parlance when we say we have faith in someone as opposed to saying we are in good faith. The primacy of the latter reflects the dignity and legislative power of the individual. It is a proud affirmation of the dignity of the self rather than the pious annihilation of the self before a higher dignity.¹⁴

Thus, morality, or even education towards moral personhood, is in this sense reduced to subjective claims to sincerity. Rousseau’s therapeutic political and pedagogical project seeks to form the individual person into a being who is “true to oneself,” purporting that a sincere person is indeed a dignified being, and so too a happy one.¹⁵ The subject, therefore, is its own highest authority, and dignity is derived from *sincere self-referential* acts.

On the other hand, Paul L. Holmer describes how Lewis does not deny that moral personality is an individual achievement, but that it is by no means won in and through the self alone:

Instead of the key to this development lying simply within ourselves, as if it will all unfold, Lewis finds that our will is indeed involved. But we have to choose to occupy those places for which we are fitted. Even becoming moral is not a matter of inventing a value, then realizing it. It is like the moral order and reality being there already, and the changes have to be made in us. The drama of becoming a personality is not to assert oneself against everybody and everything as much as it lies in becoming self-cognizant and learning to do what one must. Once more, indirection is the clue.¹⁶

In terms of “indirection,” what Holmer suggests is that, for Lewis, the individual personality is not a “thing,” but is a “relation.” As such, it can *never* be wholly

¹³ Peter Kreeft, *C. S. Lewis: A Critical Essay* (Michigan, 1969), 17; C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (San Francisco, 2001), 226.

¹⁴ Allan Bloom, *Love and Friendship* (New York, 1993), 75 [citation removed].

¹⁵ Melzer speaks of “Rousseau’s new ‘coherence theory of happiness’: any content will do so long as it is self-consistent.” Meltzer, *The Natural Goodness of Man*, 90.

¹⁶ Paul L. Holmer, *C. S. Lewis: The Shape of His Faith and Thought* (New York, 1976), 81–2.

unified, for by definition that which is relational always stands in relation to something else; moreover, the person as a relation is never strictly *self*-referential but is outward-directed. For Lewis, the “out-there,” so to speak, does not simply consist of things or other people in the material sense; instead, the individual stands in relation to an objective moral order, which suggests a robust understanding of reality as beyond the strictly immanent or physical. According to Lewis, one of the goals of education is to improve human understanding of the relations, both immanent and transcendent, in which a man or a woman stands as a human person, so as to properly respond with or in them—often not a painless process, as his argument would have it. Because the “personality is neither godlike and truly original, nor simply an effect and made only by externals” and is therefore “both made and maker, debtor and giver,” one has a duty to recognize as much and act accordingly.¹⁷

Therefore, while at first glance it might seem strange to place Rousseau and Lewis in dialogue with one another, the ensuing argument shall demonstrate how the latter offers an implicit critique of the former, which is to say that Lewis’ work is a helpful defense against the current therapeutic climate and development of the modern liberal self. Although the work of each takes seriously the Delphic injunction, *gnothi seauton*, and thus the greater desire to understand human nature generally, the differences become striking, not least in terms of their views on pain and the possibility of happiness. As this paper illustrates, while Rousseau seeks to *de-problematize* pain (that is, to make it a problem with a possible solution), Lewis *problematizes* it, insofar as he argues that it is an inevitable part of existence to dwell within and on. For Lewis, pain is not something strictly “within” us, however much this too is the case; it is also found in our very relation with, or participation in, the unalterable “out-there”—pain and suffering is, one might say, woven into the very structure of reality. As a result, no human strategy, whether psycho-therapeutic, educational, or otherwise, can transform and ultimately ameliorate this individual condition *in toto*, which is precisely what Rousseau’s project purportedly offers in and through separation of the self from an objective or external order. Finally, pain just might be one important way of awakening a person’s awareness of an order beyond his or her individual self. To speak of something beyond the self is another way of returning to the language of soul, the difference of which is nicely characterized as follows:

The ‘self’ is obviously a descendent of the soul; that is, it is not the soul. The soul may be responsible for its being good or bad, but it is not responsible for its being a soul; of the self, on the other hand, it is not certain whether it is

¹⁷ Holmer, *C. S. Lewis*, 86.

not a self by virtue of its own effort. The soul is a part of an order which does not originate in the soul; of the self it is not certain whether it is a part of an order which does not originate in the self.¹⁸

To be clear, the intention of this work is not *simply* to pit a Christian against a (seemingly) non-Christian, and refute a (rather) non-theological thinker by means of a lay theologian. Lewis' thought has an integrity of its own, which is certainly not independent of Christian doctrine, but is rooted in philosophical arguments and personal experience that make it intelligible to Christians and non-Christians alike; just as Rousseau has been influential for both believers and non-believers.¹⁹ Furthermore, insofar as both Lewis and Rousseau are critical of modernity, the former provides a particularly powerful example of response to the contemporary therapeutic climate by drawing insights from earlier thought, as well as from personal experience.²⁰ Because pain is a fundamental human experience, and happiness of some kind a widespread human desire, it is worthwhile bringing these two thinkers into discussion with one another, to shed light on what Leo Strauss refers to as the modern "joyless quest for joy."²¹

To this end, this work proceeds as follows: it begins with a section on each thinker's respective "myth" of human nature, wherein each provides an account of how pain entered the lives of human beings. The emphasis on the mythic aspect of these accounts is important, for while both consciously acknowledge this element, Rousseau's historical-naturalistic approach nonetheless indicates that a non-mythic account of human nature is at least conceivable. In other words, part of his hope for making human beings happy as unified selves consists in treating human nature as an object to be exhaustively studied and perhaps one day fully disclosed. The act of successfully unifying something is dependent upon knowledge of the thing as a whole, or complete knowledge of all that is to be brought into unity.

¹⁸ Leo Strauss, "Perspectives on the Good Society," in *Liberalism Ancient and Modern* (Chicago, 1995), 261.

¹⁹ By no means is this paper intended to provide an exhaustive interpretation of either thinker, and its selection of texts is admittedly narrow; moreover, the argument could clearly be extended by closer examination and inclusion of additional works. Especially worthwhile for present purposes would be to delve into the works of fiction by both authors, not least of all because of the presence of myth and imagination in the artful construction of novels; however, this task remains beyond this scope of this investigation. Nevertheless, it may still provide direction or guidance for interested readers to examine, for example, *Julie* and *Perelandra* in just this fashion.

²⁰ Ultimately, the decision to bring these two together stems from the following: both take a critical stance towards the prevailing attitudes of their respective times while simultaneously achieving a relatively high degree of popularity and readership. That said, Lewis has not achieved the same influence as Rousseau; after all, it is the moods and feelings inaugurated by the latter to which Lewis stands athwart.

²¹ Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago, 1965), 251.

Rousseau's naturalistic and objectivist assumption of the human self is critiqued by Lewis' trans-naturalistic and relational approach. As a result, Lewis maintains the integrity of myth and thereby what is inevitably mysterious about human nature—not least because each reflective account of human nature is itself an additional datum to be considered by the inquirer.²² Furthermore, any account of the self must include consideration of what lies beyond, or in relation to it; therefore, properly accounting for human nature cannot neglect broader questions about our place in the structure of reality at large and its apparent order. As Lewis eloquently expresses this point:

Even to think and act in the natural world we have to assume something beyond it and even assume that we partly belong to that something. In order to think we must claim for our own reasoning a validity which is not credible if our own thought is merely a function of our brain, and our brains a by-product of irrational physical processes. In order to act, above the level of mere impulse, we must claim a similar validity for our judgments of good and evil. In both cases we get the same disquieting result. The concept of nature itself is one we have reached only tacitly by claiming a sort of *super*-natural status for ourselves.²³

In short, human “nature” cannot be isolated to the singular and insular self and its desire for well-being without being reductionistic. After dealing with human nature and the mythic, this paper concludes with a discussion of the implications of these two possible approaches to the problem of pain, suggesting that Lewis' approach is at least more open to the reality of pain, as well as to the reality that pain might serve to awaken in men and women.

As has been suggested, understanding Rousseau's and Lewis' views on pain and happiness necessitates discussion of their respective philosophical anthropologies. Both share the assumption that any attempt to deal with the problem of pain must be informed by an understanding of human nature. Contained in each of their accounts of human nature is a distinction between men and women in their original state and the position in which they now find themselves, as well as the relationship of that beginning (or “those origins”) to present circumstances. For Rousseau, the beginning is signified by men and women as they “issued from the hands of Nature,” while for Lewis it is represented by men and women as God initially created them. In both cases, humans were originally good and happy

²² On this, see, Michael Polanyi, *The Study of Man* (Chicago, 1969).

²³ Lewis, “Miracles,” in *God in the Dock*, 27.

creatures.²⁴ Nonetheless, so far as common sense is concerned, the *actual* origins of humanity remain unknown in any definitive sense; therefore, such accounts inevitably incorporate what, for example, Rousseau refers to as “conjectures” that concern “men in general,” and are akin to what Lewis calls “a ‘myth’ in the Socratic sense,” or “a not unlikely tale.”²⁵ Accounting for *original* humanity requires combining reason and imagination in order to produce a resemblance, or an image, of men and women as they were and have come to be in light of this moment of emergence.

Such an “image” necessarily remains incomplete and imperfect not only because of the problem of a remote past, but also because human nature is not, strictly speaking, merely an object in the world to be scrutinized in the manner of other material phenomena. Men and women’s complex identity as partly an object of sense, yet also much more than a strictly physical being, only heightens the necessity of mythical or metaphorical language. As Lewis argues, “all language, except about objects of sense, is metaphorical through and through.” He elaborates with the following example: “To call God a ‘Force’ (that is, something like a wind or a dynamo) is as metaphorical as to call Him a Father or a King. On such matters we can make our language more polysyllabic and duller: we cannot make it more literal.”²⁶ And while this might be more obvious for theological purposes, he rightly adds that “the difficulty is not peculiar to theologians. Scientists, poets, psychoanalysts, and metaphysicians are all in the same boat.”²⁷ Keeping linguistic problems in mind, it is nevertheless fair to say that there is a certain amount of existing knowledge available to aid one’s reason and imagination in addressing the problem of human nature—the inquirer need not begin *de novo*. Rousseau and Lewis each rely on accounts found in various fields of study. In particular, the former turns to natural history while the latter draws upon Christian theology. As such, one might suggest that Rousseau’s approach is naturalistic whereas Lewis’ is theistic. However, this characterization has its limitations, for neither thinker reduces the field of inquiry to a reliance upon these (or even to other) areas of *empereia* alone—upon which, to be sure, each brings his reason to bear—because of the already suggested role of imagination. Thus, imagination projects and con-

²⁴ J. J. Rousseau, “Discourse on the Origin of Inequality” (hereafter referred to as “Second Discourse”), in *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, trans. by Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge, 1997), 134, 197; C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (San Francisco, 1996), 66.

²⁵ Rousseau, “Second Discourse,” 132, *et passim*; Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 71.

²⁶ C. S. Lewis, “‘Horrid Red Things,’” in *God in the Dock*, 71.

²⁷ Lewis, “‘Horrid Red Things,’” 71. On the non-phenomenalist nature of human beings and the inevitable multiplicity of language and method, see Max Scheler, *Man’s Place in Nature* (Virginia, 1968), and Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (London, 1962).

jures out from the consciousness of the reasoning and informed imaginer the resultant evocation of a *myth*, which is rightly determined to be conjectural, or “a not unlikely tale.”²⁸

At least one task of the interpreter is to determine the implications of such mytho-rational symbolizations and the effects that these respective images of men and women might have for the self-understanding of an individual or a community. As argued below, Rousseau’s mythic representation of human nature eventuates an attempt to advocate a scientific or phenomenalist account of human nature; or at least it moves in that direction. While he is conscious of the role of myth and metaphor in his own work, there is reason to believe that he holds to the idea that one day human nature will be fully disclosed through natural science, turning otherwise philosophical problems into empirical-scientific ones to be solved.²⁹ Once human nature is viewed as a self-contained entity, the unification of the self becomes all the more likely. In other words, the argument goes that once the historical trajectory of human development is fully mapped out, the process of psychic engineering can more successfully resolve erroneous pathways and guide each individual towards the goal of self-unity, or perfectibility, thereby approximating the original condition’s lost happiness while living in civil society. Thus, returning to the sketch used in the introduction, the myth of the unified self and the assumption that one can help oneself to happiness are not unrelated to the mythical powers of science, if not the faith in science’s ultimate curative and palliative abilities.³⁰ As will become clear, at least some of these assumptions are misleading.

Despite Rousseau’s ideal of demythologizing, it is the mythic property of both his and Lewis’ accounts of human nature that structurally tie them together;

²⁸ In addition to what has been suggested as a Platonic understanding of myth, equivalent views of myth have been restored, for example, in the works of Eric Voegelin and Mircea Eliade. See Eric Voegelin, *Anamnesis*, ed. by David Walsh (Columbia, 2002), esp. 69–74; Glenn Hughes, *Mystery and Myth in the Philosophy of Eric Voegelin* (Columbia, 1993); Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality* (New York, 1968).

²⁹ For an example of this argument in theory and practice, in the very spirit of Rousseau (that is, carried out by a long-time reader, translator and scholar of Rousseau), see Roger D. Masters, *The Nature of Politics* (New Haven, 1989).

³⁰ To take an example in the extreme, research is currently underway to find a cure for death—an often physically *and* spiritually painful fact of human existence. See, “Special Report: Cheating Death” and “Death Special,” in *The New Scientist*, 2007, 40–1, 42–57; and, Charles B. Olson, “A Possible Cure for Death” *Medical Hypothesis*, 1988, 77–84. Descartes himself writes at the outset of his *Method* that part of the work’s inspiration includes the confidence that what is now known by science “is almost nothing in comparison of what remains to be discovered; and that we could free ourselves from an infinity of maladies of body as well as of mind, and perhaps also even from the debility of age, if we had sufficiently ample knowledge of their causes, and of all the remedies provided for us by nature.” See René Descartes, *Discourse on the Method and the Meditations*, trans. by J. Veitch (New York, 2008), 48.

each of these accounts serves as the background or horizon for their considerations of other human problems, such as that of pain or suffering. This bond extends to the fact that both point to a Fall (or “break”), at which point men and women were cast out of their original state and became subject to pain and suffering. To be sure, neither insists that these first humans were altogether immune from a degree of physical pain, but pain was not yet a problem in the strict sense insofar as it was not spiritual, nor was it raised to the level of conscious consideration.³¹ In brief, both see the Fall from a primary state as coeval with the emergence of the uniquely human problem of pain.³² So far as contemporary men and women are concerned, therefore, both agree that they are beings who suffer and are distant from their original happy self, and neither thinks it possible to regain or return to this original condition in the strict sense. Both treat the original state of human nature as *the ideal* (at least for life in this world) that has been forever lost.³³ Accordingly, Rousseau and Lewis find a grave tension between the nature of original men and women and men and women as found in their present state: a tension constituted in and by the movement from the former to the latter. It is to this tension and transition that these two thinkers look when considering the problem of pain and suffering. Moreover, it is this tension that Rousseau believes can be minimized, if not dispelled, whereas Lewis argues it is an irresolvable, if painful, aspect of human existence, and one that must be lived in and with. Before examining their implications, the discussion first turns to some of the content of these accounts.

Without ignoring its depth or subtlety, Lewis interprets the account of the Fall in Genesis to be a story about human disobedience to God. God’s role as Creator increases the significance of human disobedience. In other words, understanding the tension between human nature as created and human’s present state begins with the recognition of the Creator/creature relationship—that is, the fact that men and women are not the source of themselves and have not willed themselves into existence (or the reality in which they find themselves). As Lewis writes, “the proper good of a creature is to surrender itself to its Creator—to enact intellectually, volitionally, and emotionally, that relationship which is given in the mere fact of being a creature.”³⁴ The problem of pain and suffering emerges at the pivotal moment when the creature ceases to surrender its *will* to its Creator, which is to

³¹ Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 23, 73, 87; Rousseau, “Second Discourse,” 218. To put matters somewhat differently, man had yet to gain knowledge of death.

³² See also Bloom, *Love and Friendship*, 53.

³³ To be clear, for Rousseau this “ideal” is lost insofar as man cannot return to the state of nature; however, due to his view of human nature as “malleable,” the ideal is still the standard for later approximations of happiness.

³⁴ Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 88.

say, when humans turn from God to the “self,” or when the self usurps the role of self-creation.³⁵ Thus, the story of the Fall is one in which human will is of central importance.

The myth Lewis recounts begins with this pre-human creature. Prior to the birth of men and women, the creatures on earth were each “only an animal because all its physical and psychical processes were directed to purely material and natural ends.” Eventually, however, a “new kind of consciousness” emerged; one that could “look upon itself as an object, which knew God, which could make judgments of truth, beauty, and goodness, and which was so far above time that it could perceive time flowing past.”³⁶ According to Lewis, this new form of self-consciousness, which is able to refer to itself as “I” or “me,” lies outside of time, for it cannot perceive the movement of that within which it is an inseparable participant. This first man was “all consciousness,” and this “new consciousness ruled and illuminated the whole organism” to the extent that all his organic processes “obeyed the law of his own will.” In short, he was wholly in command of himself and of all lower life he encountered. Lewis refers to this man as “Paradisaal man.”

Despite this power over himself and other beings, for Paradisaal man “God came first in his love and in his thought, and that without painful effort.”³⁷ In terms of his artifacts and his language, he was certainly “a savage” with little practical experience and was probably very clumsy. Though not perfectly suited to his material environment, he was flawlessly integrated with the spiritual whole. There was, Lewis writes, a “perfect cyclical movement” whereby “being, power and joy descended from God to man in the form of gift and returned from man to God in the form of obedient love and ecstatic adoration.” At some unknown point, however, these men and women fell from grace. Consequently, they became privy to the knowledge that they too might be gods: “that they could cease directing their lives to their Creator and taking all their delights as uncovenanted mercies, as ‘accidents’ (in the logical sense) which arose in the course of a life directed not to those delights but to the adoration of God.” Or: “They wanted, as we say, to ‘call their souls their own.’”³⁸ Regardless of how this happened—whether actually by eating a fruit or not—this “act of self-will” is the element of falsity, or the variable of error, because a created being, or a creature, contradicts the ineluctability of its creatureliness in seeking to usurp, change, or deny it.

The symbol of “Fall” indicates precisely this sinful act; furthermore, it is a sin that is possible for any being with a self to commit, the existence of which gives

³⁵ Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 76.

³⁶ Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 72.

³⁷ Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 73–4.

³⁸ Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 75.

rise to the possibility of “the danger of self-idolatry.”³⁹ The struggle *after* the Fall is contained herein: the practice of surrendering oneself to God and thus the challenge of overcoming “an infinitesimal self-adherence”—that is, the difficulty when faced with the temptation to choose the self above all else. Whereas prior to the Fall God ruled the organism through the “human spirit” or by “spiritual laws,” once the human spirit rebelled against Him, “He began to rule the organism in a more external way.” It is in this way, Lewis claims, that men and women came to be ruled by the laws of *nature*, and so became subject to the natural order. Rather than being in control of themselves through God, they were exposed to new desires produced by their surroundings and the circumstances or events in the natural world. They therefore began to suffer “whatever the inter-workings of [natural] laws might bring about in the way of pain, senility and death.”⁴⁰ Spirit was reduced to but “a fitful spotlight resting on a small part of the cerebral motions.” In sum, through the Fall, men and women lost their “*original* specific nature.”

It was the emergence of a *new kind of man*—a new species, . . . The change which man had undergone was not parallel to the development of a new habit; it was a radical alteration of his constitution, a disturbance of the relation between his component parts, and an internal perversion of one of them.⁴¹

This “radical alteration” is a fact of present human constitution, and the “disturbance” or “perversion” is at the very core of human existence. For Lewis, the transformation is irreversible so long as men and women remain their embodied selves in the world. No amount of hope, will, education, reformation—political, social, religious—or other human deed or intention can wholly alleviate the situation of their “disturbance” and “internal perversion.” Somehow, they must learn to cope and live with this fact—a difficulty that is ameliorated by the emergence of the “good news” of Jesus Christ. Regardless of whether one accepts the specifically Christian details, the mythic account as portrayed indicates that man, as a self, is in relation with a broader reality that he or she cannot ultimately

³⁹ Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 76. Part of the correction of this danger, which Lewis held to be prevalent in modern culture, consists in what has been referred to as “reenchantment” of the world. “An enchanted world is one that intrigues a person and that presents itself as being, at least in some respects, *more significant than the person and his or her own interests.*” The “disenchanted world” is one where people “think of the world as subject to their own interests and designs” so that once the world is drained of significance, “modern people conclude that nothing outside themselves is more important than they are.” See Wesley A. Kort, *C. S. Lewis: Then and Now* (Oxford, 2001), 33–4 [emphasis added].

⁴⁰ Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 77.

⁴¹ Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 78–9 [emphasis added].

subsume, know, or master. As a result, they are not whole unto themselves, and the idea of self-unity is precluded given the relational nature of their being in the world.

For the purposes of this paper, it is important to stress three points Lewis makes: (1) that there is an original and secondary situation (or an old and a new person); (2) that the movement from the former to the latter is the very source, or origin, of pain as a problem and happiness as something desirous rather than possessed; (3) that there is no *human* means of returning from the latter to the former. The combination of these three suggests that pain is now an inevitable problem of human existence; suffering is an inextricable part of human reality. No matter what success medical science has in addressing various diseases and particular illnesses—a process certainly to be encouraged—human existence nonetheless involves pain. By virtue of human nature men and women suffer. With the awakening of self-consciousness, men and women became aware of their own mortality, aware of their painful and rebellious beginning and their earthly or conscious end; moreover, they came to see that they were anything but harmoniously constituted and that, despite their best efforts, they will always be in imperfect relation to their true and ideal self. In a word, they recognize themselves as not whole. Inasmuch as the self cannot be unified, given its relational structure, in the context just adumbrated they also troublesomely became aware that they may be “damned” if they rebel or fail to live in attunement with that which stands beyond the self and ever in relation to it.⁴² As Lewis describes it:

At every stage of religious development man may rebel, if not without violence to his own nature, yet without absurdity. He can close his spiritual eyes against the Numinous, if he is prepared to part company with half the great poets and prophets of his race, with his own childhood, with the richness and depth of uninhibited experience. He can regard the moral law as an illusion, and so cut himself off from the common ground of humanity.⁴³

⁴² Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 130; C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York, 1953), 31. In terms of “damnation” it is helpful to consider that Heaven is a place “prepared for” the saved and so entering it is “to become more human than you ever succeeded in being on earth,” whereas Hell is “a place never made for men at all,” and thus it signifies total banishment from humanity; a loss of one’s humanness. Therefore, “What is cast (or casts itself) into Hell is not a man, it is “remains.” To be a complete man means to have the passions obedient to the will offered to God: to *have been* a man—to be an ex-man or ‘damned ghost’—would presumably mean to consist of a will utterly centered in its self and passions utterly uncontrolled by the will.” See Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 127–8. To this it is worth adding that Orthodox Christianity insists on the existence of Hell, but does not construe its nature strictly in terms of fire and brimstone. See Kreeft, *C. S. Lewis*, 25.

⁴³ Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 14.

Interpreting this suggests that as men and women became aware of themselves and their human existence—as being both related to, yet distinct from, “the Numinous”—they also became aware of their freedom. However, with freedom comes risk, for when an end is no longer guaranteed but left up to the free agent to strive towards, men and women may fail to reach this *true* end, or to live in accordance with “the Way,” or the *Tao*.⁴⁴ In brief, the choice between the self and God, or falsity and truth, is left undetermined. As we have seen, such is the nature of what Lewis refers to as “struggle.” And struggle is never a painless experience, least of all when it is a constant and incessant aspect of human existence.⁴⁵ The continued struggle of even attentively striving to live in the *Tao* is not without the painful fact of uncertainty that one might be led astray—that is, in the struggle along the way one may get lost. Following von Hügel, Lewis characterizes the truly lost soul as one who has rejected everything that is not simply himself.⁴⁶

Insofar as humans cannot *historically* restore the older and original situation of “innocence,” a man or woman’s *ultimate* happiness as an embodied individual is precluded; thus, various tensions remain in human existence.⁴⁷ What compounds the pain is the fact that men and women suffer while (it appears) God looks on—an issue that Lewis addresses at length. According to the Christian self-understanding, Christianity “is not a system into which we have to fit the awkward fact of pain.” Instead, “it is itself one of the awkward facts which have to be fitted into any system we make.” Moreover,

in a sense, it 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

⁴⁴ The latter are more universal symbols Lewis uses in *The Abolition of Man*, 11, 17, *et passim*.

⁴⁵ While the etymological origin of the verb “struggle” remains subject to debate, it is sometimes suggested as being associated with the German *straucheln*, which means “to stumble”—a verb that evokes both difficulty and suffering.

⁴⁶ Lewis, *Problem of Pain*, 125.

⁴⁷ Undoubtedly one of the powerful Christian symbolizations of the tension and pain that results from the Fall, as continuous with man’s present state (and thus the state that stands in contrast to “innocence”), is the deeply human sense of *guilt*. While the details of this issue, as particularly related to “guilt,” remain beyond the scope of this paper, suffice it to say that, according to Lewis’ argument, anything along the lines of psychic engineering, or modern psychology in general, can only ever provide tools to cope with guilt and the concomitant pain, but cannot ultimately absolve humans of it. On the one hand, there is an existential aspect to it putting it out of reach of the techniques of psychiatry, and, on the other hand, such techniques, in seeking to cope with such pain, might in fact exacerbate it by masking it, that is, by treating only the symptoms rather than grappling with the source. See also Kreeft, *C. S. Lewis*.

world, we had received what we think a good assurance that ultimate reality is righteous and loving.⁴⁸

True pain is found in the paradox of a painful particular existence and in the assurance of an ordered and good whole. It is in the search for meaning and for truth, and in the attempt to live in attunement with what is most emphatically good (defining characteristics or acts of what it means to be a human being), that men and women experience the greatest spiritual pain. Once again, this dire yet characteristic search falls within the context of their existence as struggle—their quest without definitive and guaranteed end.

While Rousseau does not offer a depiction of the Fall in Christian terms, he offers an imaginative-historical trajectory for how it is that human existence came to be full of misery. He too speaks of a lost original position in “the state of nature” or of “savage man” in contrast to the new man of “civil society,” which is a development that results in great unhappiness, only increasing over time with further distance from the original position. As he asks, rhetorically: “what kind of misery can there be for a free being whose heart is at peace and whose body is in good health?”⁴⁹ We find here a glimpse of the simple and happy existence that he suggests has been lost. Natural man, for example, does not commit suicide, something only civil men do, indicating “on which side real misery lies.” And even for those who fall short of suicidal misery, the misery of civil society is universal, as indicated from the outset of life with the first rebellion of all sons and daughters whose desires are frustrated. “From these tears that we might think so little worthy of attention is born man’s first relation to all that surrounds him; here is formed the first link in that long chain of which the social order is formed”⁵⁰—a chain without satisfaction, so long as the social order is out of tune with man’s natural disposition. The Fall from natural happiness is a part of human “history,” which Rousseau traces “not in the books by your kind [that is, his audience’s fellowmen], who are liars, but in Nature, which never lies.”⁵¹

⁴⁸ Kreeft, C. S. *Lewis*, 14. In *Mere Christianity* (32), Lewis speaks about the importance of “dismay” and that, “In religion, as in war and everything else, comfort is the one thing you cannot get by looking for it.” Also, in a most personal and experiential manner, one finds Lewis describing his faith tested while grieving for the death of his wife: “You never know how much you really believe something until its truth or falsehood becomes a matter of life and death to you.” See C. S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (San Francisco, 1996), 22.

⁴⁹ Rousseau, “Discourse on the Origin of Inequality,” 52.

⁵⁰ Rousseau, *Emile*, trans. by Allan Bloom (New York, 1979), 65. Although this lies beyond the scope of this study, in *Emile* the subject of pain and its causal, effective, resultant and other roles is present throughout.

⁵¹ Rousseau, “Second Discourse,” 133.

Lewis' reliance on metaphysical or theological principles allows him to speak of an historic, or prehistoric, Paradisal man who embodies an ideal of human nature without restricting that nature to its physical existence. Paradisal man's embrace of his relationship to his Creator, and thereby his happiness, is not strictly dependent upon his living under "savage" conditions. For Rousseau, however, because *nature* has well suited man to life and organized him in such a manner that he could hardly be better adapted—as he emerges whole from the outset—any alteration of his physical surroundings or of his psyche threatens this balance and thereby his happiness. Rousseau's analysis makes him the "first great exponent of social evolution," given his stance towards mankind's natural evolution.⁵² As Rousseau argues: "most of our ills are of our own making, and that we could have avoided nearly all of them by preserving the simple, regular and solitary lifestyle prescribed to us by nature." He then adds, strikingly, "If nature has destined us to be healthy, I almost dare to affirm that the state of reflection is a state contrary to nature and that the man who meditates is a depraved animal."⁵³ Yet, despite his generally critical stance towards human enlightenment, Rousseau embraces the methods of his contemporaries. Strauss argues that Rousseau's account of humanity in the *Second Discourse* is meant to be "scientific" and to be placed "on the most solid ground." Accordingly, Rousseau's investigation of the state of nature is a "physical" one.⁵⁴ For Rousseau, the account of the Fall is the *physical* story of men and women evolving beyond their natural happy state.

It is worth noting that, despite this attempt to make his account of human nature "scientific," Rousseau nevertheless moves in the realm of the mythic, even perhaps despite himself. As Lester Crocker argues,

we see at once that to Rousseau the word 'natural' means 'original,' or 'pre-cultural'—and of this we must never lose sight. It does not signify an end or a capacity, and above all, it is not what (in Rousseau's words) is 'natural to man in society'; it is, rather, a starting point.⁵⁵

The presumption that human nature can be found in the species' "starting point" is not a position that science itself can establish. As argued above, a comprehensive and strictly rational account of men and women as they were originally—not only physically, but spiritually, which is to say as they understood themselves to be—is out of the question, and thereby necessitates speculation, if not a degree of arbi-

⁵² Bertrand de Jouvenel, "Rousseau's Theory of the Forms of Government," in *Hobbes and Rousseau: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by M. W. Cranston and R. S. Peters (New York, 1972), 484.

⁵³ Rousseau, "Second Discourse," 137–8.

⁵⁴ Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 266.

⁵⁵ Lester Crocker, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (New York, 1968), 256.

trary selection. To put matters differently, the myth of the happy savage is Rousseau's attempt to cloak a personal-imaginative account of human nature (or one containing numerous "conjectures") in the language of natural science.⁵⁶ What seems quite likely is that Rousseau presumes what he purportedly discovers in the course of his investigation: namely, that men and women are naturally happy. Had he discovered that men and women are naturally miserable, it seems doubtful that his myth would have included an appeal to the state of nature.

Rousseau undertakes this "physical" investigation of human nature by stripping man "of all the supernatural gifts he may have received, and of all the artificial faculties he could only have acquired by prolonged progress; by considering him, in a word, such as he must have issued from the hands of nature."⁵⁷ Only by doing so can Rousseau reduce man to an isolated sub-rational being whose desires do not extend beyond that which he can easily achieve. As he writes:

Let us conclude that . . . subject to few passions and self-sufficient, Savage man had only the sentiments and the enlightenment suited to this state, that he sensed only his true needs, looked only at what he believed it to be in his interest to see, and that his intelligence made no more progress than his vanity.⁵⁸

The savage's hopes and fears are minimal and limited to the natural. It is the introduction of superfluous goods and desires that largely complicates matters; Rousseau writes that this addition "might very well have never taken place."⁵⁹ For none should fail to see "that everything seems to remove savage man from the temptation and the means of ceasing to be savage," because "his soul, agitated by nothing, is given over to the single feeling of his own present existence." After sufficient meditation on such matters, Rousseau is convinced that "it is impossible to conceive how a man could have crossed such a wide gap by his forces alone"—that is, the gap from an unagitated soul in a simple, perfect existence to a miserable and difficult existence filled with internal and external conflicts.⁶⁰

The circumstances of social man are different. Social man's soul does not experience the "sentiment of its present existence," as does the savage. Rousseau

⁵⁶ For an impressive discussion of how "a careful reading of Rousseau soon establishes the central importance of imagination in his writing," thereby providing a "more complete understanding of Rousseau's contribution to modern thought," see Matthew W. Maguire, *The Conversion of Imagination: From Pascal through Rousseau to Tocqueville* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2006), esp. 70–184.

⁵⁷ Rousseau, "Second Discourse," 134.

⁵⁸ Rousseau, "Second Discourse," 212.

⁵⁹ Rousseau, "Second Discourse," 44.

⁶⁰ Rousseau, "Second Discourse," 46–7.

argues that social men can only “be happy and satisfied with themselves on the testimony of others rather than on their own.” Furthermore, “the genuine cause of all these differences” can be traced to the following: “the Savage lives within himself; sociable man, always outside himself, is capable of living only in the opinion of others and, so to speak, derives the sentiment of his own existence solely from their own judgment.”⁶¹ Natural man’s soul can be described as unified in the sense that he is focused only on his own existence; the savage can satisfy all of his desires and needs little in terms of relations with external reality, in any broad sense of the term. In contrast, social man’s soul is characterized by disorder because it remains concerned with the existence of the individual, while simultaneously perceiving his existence through the eyes of others. Because social man is concerned with the “testimony of others,” he no longer possesses the means to satisfy all of his desires. He is dependent, inasmuch as he needs others to view him in a certain light. His soul is torn between its natural narcissistic tendencies and its new and artificial concern with the “testimony of others.” The disunity of soul, or of the psyche, that social man experiences robs him of felicity and supreme happiness.

Although the savage does not possess social man’s moral freedom, he does have a natural freedom. His limitations are simply part of nature, insofar as he is a kind of slave to “blind appetite.” Regardless of these natural limitations, Rousseau argues that natural man perceives himself to be free because he is “without any need of others” and thus “self-sufficient.”⁶² Because he is independent, natural man *perceives* himself to be free. This perception is the key to his happiness. Rousseau points to a corollary between the state of natural man’s soul and his mental capacity: “nothing must be so calm as his soul and *nothing so limited as his mind*.”⁶³ No matter how circumscribed his actions may be by natural circumstances, so long as he perceives these limitations to be natural, he suffers no harm. More likely, he will not even be aware of the existence of such limitations.

According to Rousseau, the psychological independence of natural man falls in sharp contrast to the slavery that social man endures. As Strauss writes, “Man in the state of nature is happy because he is radically independent, whereas man in civil society is unhappy because he is radically dependent.”⁶⁴ The freedom that men and women experience in the state of nature consists in their ability independently to satisfy all their desires. They are free because they have no need of others. The savage is happy because of his radical psychological independence; that is, his natural freedom. His soul is unified because it is focused on nothing

⁶¹ Rousseau, “Second Discourse,” 193.

⁶² Rousseau, “Second Discourse,” 160.

⁶³ Rousseau, “Second Discourse,” 214. (emphasis added)

⁶⁴ Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 282.

other than its own particular existence; it possesses what Strauss describes as “godlike self-sufficiency.”⁶⁵ Or, as Melzer writes:

Rousseau is certainly not the first to have claimed that there is a natural sweetness to mere life but he seems to be the first to have made that sweetness the final end and the root of all happiness. Most of the thinkers who spoke of the sentiment of existence,⁷ for example, also described it as pleasant, but they did not attribute to it such completeness and self-sufficiency. They did not go on to conclude, as Rousseau does, that man possesses the ground of his happiness and being within himself.⁶⁶

Natural freedom is human freedom not only from dependence on others in achieving happiness, but dependence from reality as a whole. In other words, that which cannot be harmonized with the self and by the self is to be ignored or excluded. Painful facts, such as questions regarding ultimate meaning—unanswerable questions—need to be either settled or ignored, insofar as they do not accord with the self that is in possession of its own ground, and they may potentially fragment the soul.

At the outset of his “Second Discourse,” Rousseau argues that “the most useful and the least advanced of all human knowledge seems to me to be that of man.” Having determined true human nature, Rousseau believes an advance has been made, the usefulness of which is to be found in helping to guide the pursuit of human happiness and limit the problem of pain.⁶⁷ The struggle and strife of existence discussed by Lewis, given men and women’s limited understanding of themselves in relation to an external source, is only apparently solved in Rousseau’s account. That is, in an account that relies on a shift in focus towards the self—to a view that is inner-directed—or to the self deemed to be the source of itself, and thus the sole creator of standards for itself, not least in terms of its own well-being.

In the introduction, the desire to engage a preliminary question was made clear, namely how best to *approach* the problem of human suffering and pain. Both Lewis and Rousseau take it for granted that the first step in approaching the problem includes some representation of human nature. Consequently, both offer mythical accounts with the intention of illuminating the problem of pain as it relates to human nature. The implication of Rousseau’s approach is to *deproblematize* pain, whereas Lewis *problematizes* it. For the former, the “problem” appears to be completely accounted for and the disruption in the individual’s psychic unity

⁶⁵ Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 292.

⁶⁶ Melzer, *The Natural Goodness of Man*, 41.

⁶⁷ Rousseau, “Second Discourse,” 124, 197.

repairable, inasmuch as he holds the self to be a phenomenon of nature, in the strict sense. As a natural phenomenon, and a self-enclosed one without any necessary relation to reality's broader order (or to standards or values beyond the individual self), men and women, as portrayed in Rousseau's image, can cultivate their own happiness through the unification of their individual psyche. Rousseau presents pain as having been diagnosed in a quasi-scientific manner. Thus, "psychic engineering" can contribute to the alleviation of much of the pain humans experience due to the transition from their original form of existence. This accomplishment is achieved, however, by narrowing the problem to the level of the individual through neglect of the self's broader, if not mysterious, relationship with reality as a whole. Ultimately, his account of humanity is arbitrary; as Melzer notes, "Rousseau assumes . . . that the results of his own introspections, unique and strange as they are, reveal the elusive truth about human nature as such."⁶⁸ Despite his ostensible reliance on reason and natural science, ultimately his mythical account of the happy savage is the product of his own "natural" impulses.

Lewis is well aware of this tendency. As he writes,

either we are rational spirit obliged forever to obey the absolute values of the *Tao*, or else we are mere nature to be kneaded and cut into new shapes for the pleasures of masters who must, by hypothesis, have no motive but their own 'natural' impulses.⁶⁹

Admittedly, Lewis' account has its own limitations: its biblical foundation will not prove acceptable to everyone. Yet, Lewis rightly demonstrates that, in addition to the Christian self-understanding, one can also look to Platonic, Aristotelian, Stoic, and Oriental philosophy for mutual recognition of the doctrine of objective values, or the *Tao*. This suggests that in the individual's search for meaning as well as in the approach to the problem of pain itself, such inquiries must consider a broader structure or order. The desire to alleviate pain is itself a value-based decision, which further suggests that pain might have value of its own. More precisely, the doctrine of objective values holds "the belief that certain attitudes are really true, and others really false, to the kind of thing the universe is and the kind of things we are."⁷⁰ The implication of such an ordered view of reality is that pain is precisely *problematic*, because it seems to suggest that something is out of order: pain *is* a problem, and perhaps necessarily so. The attempt to remove the problematic nature of pain has a tendency to neglect objective reality. Moreover, it skirts questions associated with *why* painless existence is so desired, and what kind of exis-

⁶⁸ Melzer, *The Natural Goodness of Man*, 34.

⁶⁹ Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, 73.

⁷⁰ Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, 18

tence it might be. It thereby fails adequately to address the inherent costs of pursuing such an existence.

The current therapeutic climate that holds a personal sense of well-being to be one of the highest desires or values does not itself provide an account for this assumed evaluation. There is nothing self-evident about the fact that *all* suffering should be alleviated, and that the seemingly arbitrary or *individual* sense of well being is always preferable to suffering. Once the question of beginnings (or how to approach the problem of pain) is raised, and the importance of accounting for human nature is recalled, it becomes clear that the variety of imagined views of humanity offer alternative possibilities for considering the problem. In recognition of this broader fact the very presence of pain calls men and women to question and consider the nature of the order and disorder of their own lives and how pain might be significant. Thus, spiritual pain might signify something fundamentally disordered about human existence in its present state, while nonetheless holding out hope for happiness beyond, or at least in relation to what is beyond the self. To reiterate, the modern presumption that the problem of pain can be settled by the natural sciences, and that it is ultimately up to individuals to determine their own standard of well being while drawing upon the insights of modern science or expertise to achieve it, is questionable, to say the least.⁷¹ As Lewis himself indicates: “try to exclude the possibility of suffering which the order of nature and the existence of free wills involves,” and you might “find that you have excluded life itself.”⁷²

⁷¹ As a final note of Rousseau’s purported radicalism, consider the following: “If [Rousseau] had the ring of Gyges he would certainly use it to make mankind happy.” See Judith Shklar, “Rousseau’s Images of Authority,” in *The American Political Science Review*, 1964, 925. Also, the epigraph for Rousseau’s *Emile*, taken from Seneca’s *On Anger*, is telling: “We are sick with evils that can be cured; and nature, having brought us forth sound, itself helps us if we wish to be cured.”

⁷² Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 25.