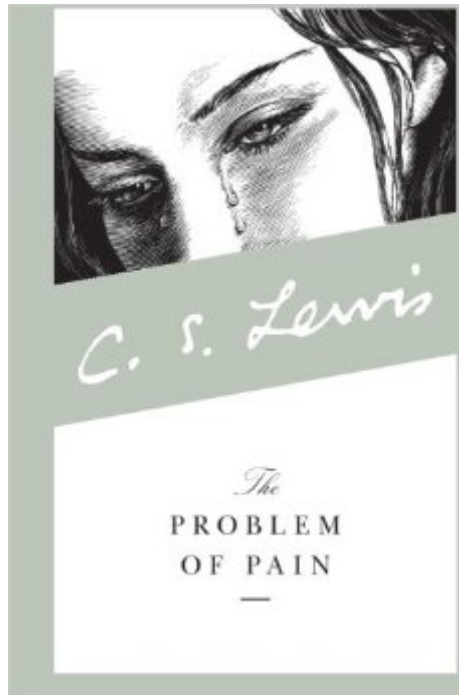


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The Problem Of Pain



Synopsis

In *The Problem of Pain*, C.S. Lewis, one of the most renowned Christian authors and thinkers, examines a universally applicable question within the human condition: "If God is good and all-powerful, why does he allow his creatures to suffer pain?" With his signature wealth of compassion and insight, C.S. Lewis offers answers to these crucial questions and shares his hope and wisdom to help heal a world hungering for a true understanding of human nature.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

A quick warning to those who have been pointed to this book but are not Christian: you are not the audience Lewis is speaking to. This book cannot be fully grasped in its original context without some degree of belief or acceptance of Christian doctrine. It is apologetics at its best, but cannot be considered in the "self-help" category like many contemporary titles are. That said, this must be the finest treatise on the apparent contradiction between the existence of pain and the existence of a supposedly loving God that has been written. Succinct, well-organized, thorough, yet "The Problem of Pain" still reads like it was written by a human being rather than a scholar. Some chapters bring conviction. The chapter on Hell brings fear and dread, and respect for Him who can "destroy both body and soul in Hell". The chapter on Heaven, which Lewis admits is his own philosophical foray, no one else's -- brings hope and reassurance that Heaven is your true calling, your one True Home. This is not light reading, at least not at first. This may not be a book to recommend to someone at the height of a crisis; Lewis taxes your attention and does not take any short cuts. A

"Cliff Notes" version of this book would miss the point. Pain is one of the toughest theological problems a Christian can face, either in their lives or the life of another person they know -- and Lewis does not want you going in armed with half an argument or some "Precious Moments" sentiment. From a non-Christian POV, I would be surprised if this book made much sense -- so many of the pillars are set on Christian theology, philosophy, and tradition. If you cannot (or will not) accept the possibility of the existence of Heaven, Hell, or God, this book will be just so much incomprehensible babble. But, as I said, it is not written for that segment of the market. This book is best read by the thinking Christian who has reservations about aspects of Christianity that seem to gloss over, avoid, or ignore the issue of human suffering.

Lewis analyzes the fundamental question, or problem, of pain: how can God be omnipotent and yet allow pain (war, injury, cruelty, etc.)? Lewis's answer has many levels. Foremost, is that nature had to be created with certain unchangeable properties. For example, the same hardness which allows wood to serve as a beam in my house allows it to serve as an instrument of potential injury, as when that beam collapses and hits my head. The world also had to be created neutral so that humans could interact equally with one another, i.e., those same, unchanging properties of wood allow it to be manipulated similarly by anyone. But, obviously a neutral world contains the potential for good or evil. Wood can be used to build a home, which is good, or to create a weapon, which is evil. But, this is what makes us human. We have free will. If I choose evil, God could not intervene. For to intervene some times but not others would be unjust and illogical (this is why miracles, if you believe in them, are extraordinarily rare). And to intervene once is to intervene always. Imagine if God intervened each time one person was going to cause another, or himself, pain. If he did, we all would be puppets, not humans. Another interesting idea in this book is that of Original Sin. According to Lewis, we have not inherited Adam's sin, as is commonly believed, but instead everyday face Adam's identical choice, perhaps thousands of times a day. For Adam's sin was not disobedience in eating the apple, but in choosing himself over God. Adam had the opportunity to see himself either as a creation or an individual self existing apart from God. Thus, according to Lewis, a final reason for pain, is that it is God's wake-up call that we have, in constantly choosing ourselves, chosen the wrong thing. This is a profound and provocative book.

This book clarified many issues in my life and turned my God from One that was a bit of a stretch to fit into my everyday world, into a God which makes himself evident in every aspect of the earth, evil and pain included. I think this book frankly is a better apology for Christianity than Mere Christianity.

Definitely a good introduction to the problem of pain, and the clearest exposition of the free-will defense I have read. C.S. Lewis deals with a concept lofty and philosophical in a manner that grips my attention and bolsters my faith. I recommend this book first above all Lewis' other books on theology.

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