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In Praise of Pain

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I. ONE: MY PAIN NOT ME

Pain is quite strange. Pain is me-suffering, yet not-me, for I reject it. Let me explain. I am my body. When I write, my hand writes; when I say, my mouth says. I am born with my hand and my mouth.² But I am not born with pain; I do not want pain. And yet, pain is not elsewhere; pain is my pain and it is not yours but mine alone. Pain is my pain that is mine alone. So, my pain is me yet I reject it; my pain is me not-me, quite strange. I do not understand my own pain.

I do not know where pain comes from. Pain just comes from somewhere else than myself into me, and stays in me as my pain, as cancer seeps all over into my cells and spreads throughout my whole self. Pain is my cancerous sickness unto death that does not die, robbing me of all hope, to make me totally despaired. Pain that is not-me yet me takes a life of its own in me, as part and parcel of me. Pain is mine; it is my curse, my downfall.

Kierkegaard's "seducer's diary" has the victim-beloved that curses the seducer mortally. But I do not "seduce" my pain, nor does my pain seduce me. My

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¹ To simplify to clarify "pain," I must omit the complex case of joy mingling with pain, where the more joy we have, the more pain we get, as love (in joy) suffered (in pain) by lover and beloved, though not its contrary, "more pain, more joy" of perverted masochism or sadomasochism.

² Bernard Bosanquet insists on our body as thinking, feeling, and acting, followed by Gabriel Marcel all his life. See, e.g., *Bosanquet: Three Lectures on Aesthetic* and its good introduction by Ralph Ross, Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1963. *The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel*, eds. Paul Arthur Schilpp and Lewis Edwin Hahn, The Library of Living Philosophers, La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1984, with a complete bibliography of Marcel.

pain just comes from elsewhere inside me into me uninvited, to stay to continue to gnaw me up, and I cannot bear the pain. Pain is my outside inside me so brutal so brute a fact of me. I extremely abhor my pain; I am intensely adverse to pain that is mine alone.³

Of course I instinctively call for help from someone or something outside. But the outside is outside me, while my pain is inside me. Whatever is outside has nothing to do with my inside pain; I cry out in vain, unless the outside somehow melts away my inner twisty pain. Still the outside is out there; how could the outside not-me dissolve my pain that is inside me so unbearable?

In fact, the outside may well be nowhere, just a tattered figment of my imagination. All I see is things that seem, not things in themselves I am not sure of, as Kant also realized. I wonder if his realization is painful or not, though. In any case, in some such ways, "outside" may be too weak or too thin and uncertain to melt my pain away, and, far from soothing me, may well provoke my frustration, adding to my pain, worsening my pain. "Outside" is my annoying addition to my pain already unbearable as it is.

Dissolution of my pain that is me not-me must, then, not come from outside but from "beyond me inside me." The Beyond in me must be found by me to try to make my pain go away, if possible. But who is beyond me in me to melt my pain in me not me? Is Buddha the Beyond in me? Or is it Jesus? Or is it someone else or something else? Let us hear what they tell us.

Buddha says my very desire to be me is my root of my pain, and so I must blow-off the fire in me of my own desire to exist as "I." And then I can enter the unspeakable bliss of vanity of all vanities, called Nirvana, a blow-off. But then such surcease of pain amounts to cutting off my head to cure my headache. It is an odd suicide, not a melt-away of my pain I want. I still want to exist with my head on intact, without pain of my headache in my head.

Jesus offers his pain to death on the cross, where I am crucified with him, to die to pain, to live in him resurrected, rising up again alive for me with me.

³ The reader can see that I stole in my own manner Søren Kierkegaard's inimitable *The Sickness Unto Death* (Doubleday Anchor, 1949) and "Diary of the Seducer" in his volume *Either/Or* (Princeton University Press, 1959, pp. 297-440, esp. 308). He is however too Hegelian in tone to be useful to those in pain. My interpretation puts heart and soul into personal pain with his theoretical insights.

Pain is then nowhere. But all such contortions are so convoluted as to be foreign to me in my straight intimate pain here now. We then suddenly see a third way out in kids' fight with "monster" quite unknown quite "monstrous." But clearly, I can never see how their "monstrous unknown" can melt away my "monstrous known," my pain that is me not-me.

For all this, however, all three ways tell me clearly that only the Beyond inside me, known or unknown, can dissolve my pain; it is so for this reason. The Beyond-in-me must be me myself as my pain is, for the Beyond-in-me is deep in me. Still, even the Beyond-in-me must be beyond me as my pain is beyond me though still me. So, the Beyond-in-me matches my pain in me beyond me, to heal me.

But then, *what* is the Beyond-in-me? This crucial question stays unanswered, and so my pain stays with my question. Thus it is that pain lives on me as I live on, as enigmatic as I am unknown to myself. But then, all of a sudden, some turnaround erupts, because now, this enigma of all enigmas occurs here. As I am in so much pain as to unload the pain this way on paper, because I simply cannot help it, my pain is somehow eased! It is so incredible but true.

Psychology calls it "graphotherapy" but seems unaware of why it works or even how my writing relates to my pain not-me. "Counseling" is a glorified misnomer of confessing to "my pain" one to another, to heal at last, without knowing how or why. Is my unloading of pain, on paper, on pals, part of the Beyond-in-me at work? Am I my Beyond-in-me at work beyond me? Only the Beyond-me can tell.

In all this, I realize this point, all of a sudden. The like cures the like. As pain is not-me that is me, so the Beyond in me allows me, even urges me, to spill my pain on paper not me, on pals not me, and pain vanishes with the dawn dew, unawares, without rhyme or reason.

II. TWO: PAIN TRUTH-FULL TRAINING GREATNESS

Now my surprise continues! All the above I realized that I have discovered so far, I now realize is part of the following prudential wisdom that is larger than I realize so far. Pain is a "moment of truths" o great as to astonish us. There must be many more wisdom out there, and so my pain beyond me continues to be a pivot around which these points revolve, expanding on and on, like this in three points.

To begin, sometimes all life gives you is a perfect moment, and that is all it is meant to be. In fact, just a second of infinite perfection is everywhere available at every moment. Life changes as people change. And we should be happy that we had that happy moment then, and then this happy moment now, never regret that those moments do not stay forever with

me, for me to keep forever. It is thus that we do not always have to see everything through to the end. It is perfectly all right to walk away after we enjoy the happy moment of perfection.

And then, if anything hurts in the meantime, there is a lesson to be learned. We gain knowledge through pain, wiser after the fact of pain in pain, to contribute to happiness everywhere every time. In contrast, constantly exposed to joys (as children of wealthy families are) simply turns us into "spoiled brats" quite insensitive and stupid, if not crass, flabby, and selfish to boot, never tough and wise. Joys that we all desire actually stuns wisdom that comes through suffering pain, deserved or undeserved.

No wonder, thirdly, great resilient sages are often brutally pounded forth in agony out of suffering from devastating impoverishments and terminal diseases, all in daunting pain. Not joy we want but pain we avoid is a great unasked-for training ground toward greatness flexuous and astute.

"But doesn't pain destroy us?" Of course it can. That is why pain daunts us. But pain's destruction unites two opposites. Pain can destroy me, but me-destruction does not smash a stone painless; the pain in me-devastation establishes me in pain as "me." Pain destroys me as it consolidates me. Thus it is precisely this lethal risk of pain that invincibly trains us worldly wise, sensitive, and astute flexuous. Now let us tarry here a while at this astounding point.

We think of Kant the Copernican revolutionary in philosophy who was frail and sickly and China's great genius Wang Bi 王弼 who died at 24 of pestilence. We see shy Schubert to die at 31, at younger age than even Mozart who only lived to 35, and the multiple-talented Pascal with stomach cancer to die at 39. The great Freud single-handedly founded psychology, and wrote so much so beautifully, in 21 volumes of English translations alone, not despite but precisely because of his devastating depression and mouth cancer so unbearably painful.

As elsewhere, China has more than a full share of suffering sages. Besides Confucius, we see the Han grand historian Ssu-ma Ch'ien 司馬遷 who guaranteed his friend a general's loyalty who, failed in a campaign, was captured and capitulated. Accused of serious deception, Ssu-ma was not money-bribed out of punishment; all his friends deserted him. Braving devastating castration, he devoted many long ashamed decades to crafting the monumental all-time classic, History Records 史記, and suddenly vanished when completed.

Centuries later, the Sung cultural dynasty collapsed into the nomadic Yuan, which spared Sung royalty Chao Meng-fu 趙孟頫 the calligraphic genius. His gentle and balanced brush-beauty hid his eternal pathos, as he passionately advocated "Return to

Ancient" movement 復古運動 that gloriously retrieved his nostalgic China, precisely under the barbarian rulership; he was thus comforted in pain, to calmly complete his natural lifespan from 1254 to 1322.

Thus it was that pain in China provoked at least two historic accomplishments as above, sparkling special, for us all to admire to extol. And the list goes on throughout the world. Great people suffer so greatly to be great. So, when we see pain coming, we should lift up our heads, for our greatness draws near.

In short, defective personality comes from joyful happiness we all aspire to, while beautifully perfect personality arises out of pain we all try to avoid, in woefully defective milieu. Such is the great irony of life human, all too human. Now, the good man Job's "good question" of why good people suffer is turned ridiculously rhetorical and transparently obvious. Of course, good people suffer to turn better.

Still, pain stays unbearable, however. When unbearable in pain, Job's response was to wail it out in heartfelt confessions to his friends who, however ineptly and inappropriately, kindly responded to Job in kind. Their inter-confessions served to while away unbearable hours and days of pain, seemingly senseless yet actually bettering the good Job in pain. It is such a magnificent sight to behold quite unintelligible.

My undergoing of pain thus contributes to my joy of happy moment every time I undergo pain, to become more and more "apt and wise" through thick and thin in pain. I need not see through all at every moment; I need only to bravely undergo pain whenever it comes. As my life changes, my wise moments change, and I turn by and by wiser at any moment, sad or in joy. All this while, I confess to my ups and downs of living, often unbearable, spilling the pain out heartfelt onto paper and onto my friends, whoever listen.

It is in this manner that my pain-confession takes in life-prudence harvested in pain to enhance the wisdom, beginning precisely at my pain all mine not mine, to spread socially beyond me as I share my confessions with my friends, on and on, to spread all over our lifeworld.

All this human cosmism begins stunningly at my pain in me, pain as me not-me. Pain pulses out in confession to con-fess, con-fari, together-speak,⁴ to literally inter-tell my self to my self, and then my self to other beloved selves, on and on, to spread everywhere all over the globe in pain in joy.

III. THREE: IN JOY, IN PAIN; PAIN PRAISED

To punch out how crucial pain is, pain can be further compared with joy. In joy, we may be able to afford keeping it to ourselves, forgetting friends and relatives; joy can thus foster selfish hoarding as wealthy

people often do, though even then we may sometimes want to share joy, as in wedding celebration. Though pain is something altogether different, quite offensive, "sharing" enhances our being, in joy and in pain. Joy shared enhances joy; pain shared in confession eases pain to enable us to live on tougher and wiser.

When in pain unbearable, I simply cannot help but wail it *out*; and wailing out inevitably shares my pain. Pain is intensely personal to inherently spread inter-personal on and on. Sharing pain intimate turns us into "intimate pals" indissoluble; pain makes true friends through thick and thin, more often than sharing joys to make fair-weather friends.

Let me repeat my reflection on this pain in wailing confession that cannot repeat often enough. Job and his friends simply cannot help but mutually confess to pain in pain, loading on one another all sorts of their ignorance on pain and their wrong misguided guesswork on pain. Pain is a vast ocean in which we helplessly swim, as Buddha saw and sighed. So, our life consists in vainly wallowing in futile confessions senseless continuous.

Thus our wailing confessions one to another among these pain-waves are sound and fury, signifying nothing at all. Still, however, even such a mutual exercise in total futility somehow, for reasons unknown to us mutually confessing, eases pain as hours and days in pain are whiled away. Such is the usefulness of useless confessions back and forth all wrong all futile, yet all inevitable, writhing in all pain, to somehow uselessly eases useless pain.

The Book of Job in the Old Testament is a classical record of useless confessions that heal, without rhyme or reason, as no commentator I know of has ever charted the random series of their inter-confessions to reach easing of pain; after all, randomness cannot be charted. Much less do these commentators probe into how such random useless confessions somehow ease and heal pain, for reasons completely unknown.

And yet, surprisingly, all these idle confessions are ultimately blessed by the Ultimate Beyond-All, the brute All-Creator without rhyme or reason that rightly occupy the major center of the record. And the ultimate blessedness here amounts of course to the spread, homo-cosmic, of inter-healing confessions heartfelt, though all superfluous, useless, and yet inevitable.⁵

We realize thus that the Book of Job is a classic of such inter-confessions in unbearable pain. Their inter-confessions are an ultimate bliss conferred by the Ultimate Beyond-all, God-with-us in pain, as finally the

⁴ See "confess" in *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, Eleventh Edition, 2008, p. 260.

⁵ This is the meaning of Epilogue (chapters 38-42) clumsily slapped onto the end of the Book of Job. In this light, we also see how useless an addendum the brief Prologue (chapters 1-2) is, without rhyme or reason. The major or main theme is mutual idle confessions without rhyme or reason that rightly occupy the bulk of the Book of Job.

New Testament divulges so in the cross of Christ. God in silence forever silently watches our pain as he takes part silently in pain so unbearable.

So, without pain, there would be no confession, and without confession, there would be no sociality human and cosmic, to harvest sagely greatness. May pain be praised, we confess heartfelt, personally and interpersonally, in global concord together heartfelt, all in pain personal interpersonal! Let us repeat. Pain spreads our heartfelt friendship worldwide as no joy does.

Now, a tiny note on this tiny essay itself is in order. Pain cannot be praised when in pain, for I writhe in pain so much that I cannot write, much less write to praise pain. Nor can I praise pain when I am not in pain, for I forget pain so cleanly that I could not have written on pain so intimate, since pain is hated so much it is forgotten as soon as it ceases. I must be in and out of pain at once, must be in pain not in pain, to praise pain as mine not-mine.

Such writing on pain *itself* confesses to pain, as pain is so intimate that it cannot be written without confessing it. "In praise of pain" thus confesses to pain, in pain out of pain. This pain-confession heals pain as the like heals the like; the Beyond-me unknown eases the beyond-me in pain. Writing on pain, in pain not-in-pain, heals pain mine not-mine, unloaded on paper, to load it on pals who stare at me, saying "I hear you, pal." "In praise of pain"—engulfed in pain—heals pain as it lets pain be pain, in this intimacy unbearable and unknown.

"Still, what you said above sounds so odd and alien to my pain." I hear you, my pal. We have no "generic pain"; what I said above is actually imaged and tinged with my own pain, to be adjusted and added to your own pain-specification, as all pain is intensely personal, as it is incorrigibly individual and infinitely varied.

Besides, what is said above is an image of intimate pain mirrored outside, no mirror-image looks like the imaged original, and so you feel odd about the mirrored description of pain in the above. You must tell me how odd the above description is, and I will try my very best to adjust to your specifications, I promise in the name of my own pain, pal.

Still, you yourself must do it, after all, for individual differences are so intimate so infinitely various as to defy precise outside adjustment. But I can assure you I can approximate your specifications, as I am also your fellow human being with pain as human. Let us co-adjust our mirror-images of human pain asymptotically, shall we?

Such mutual adjustment amounts to mutual confessions that in turn redound to inter-heal. Thus all this is not superfluous. Our adjustments are crucial in inter-mirroring inter-confessing to inter-heal pain that is intensely personal yet sharable interpersonally, on and

on, worldwide. Again, in such a way as this, we mutually share pain.

As pain is an intimate unknown, so easing of pain is confessional unknown so intimate. This essay has discovered that inter-confession of pain eases pain, and therefore that our inter-confession in pain praises pain. Confessional sharing of pain amounts to being engulfed in praise of pain, as pain vanishes by and by without rhyme or reason.