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Privation theories of pain

Adam Swenson

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Abstract Most modern writers accept that a privation theory of evil should explicitly account for the evil of pain. But pains are quintessentially real. The evil of pain does not seem to lie in an absence of good. Though many directly take on the challenges this raises, the metaphysics and axiology of their answers is often obscure. In this paper I try to straighten things out. By clarifying and categorizing the possible types of privation views, I explore the ways in which privationists about evil are—or should or could be—privationists about pain's evil.

Keywords Privation theories · Problem of evil · Physical evil · Suffering · Pain · Hick · Christian science

Augustine saw a privation account of evil as the only way to answer the problem of evil without falling into the Manichean heresy. Many of his successors have agreed. If evils are privations, they are not substances that God had to separately and intentionally create. They are mere ontological byproducts of creating finite beings. That's not to say that evils aren't real. It's just that they don't exist apart from particular goods and the particular substances in which they inhere. The hole in a donut is certainly real; it just doesn't exist apart from the dough. Or, put more technically, evils and holes *exist* but they do not *subsist*.¹

Most modern privationists accept that a privation theory of evil should explicitly account for the evil of pain (it's less clear that their medieval antecedents saw

¹ For brevity, I'll sometimes speak loosely of privation theories 'solving' or 'answering' the problem of evil. But such theories only tell us what evil is. Strictly speaking, they are only one part of a theodicy. See *infra* n. 26.

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20 pain as distinctively pressing). As Hume made clear, pain's evil poses a special set
 21 of challenges to any theodicy.² Unfortunately, though many directly take on these
 22 challenges, the metaphysics and axiology of their answers can be rather tangled.

23 In this paper, I'll try to straighten things out. I'll explore the ways in which pri-
 24 vationists about evil are—or should or could be—privationists about pain's evil. My
 25 purpose here is simply exegetical and taxonomic. I won't evaluate the views at hand.
 26 Nor will I assess the solutions to the problem of evil that they suggest. These theories
 27 have been influential and popular.³ It's thus worth focusing just on understanding what
 28 they can hold.

29 Because terms like 'pain', 'evil', and 'bad' can be used in importantly different
 30 ways, a few stipulations about usage and some conceptual assumptions will help
 31 anchor our discussion.

32 First, I'll assume that 'bad' and 'evil' can be used interchangeably in this context.

33 Second, I'll use 'pain' in a relatively broad sense to mean something like 'the expe-
 34 rience of physical pain'. On this use, pains need not be merely painful sensations. For
 35 example, a pain's essential properties might include certain desires or emotions like
 36 fear.⁴ I'll also take pain to be only one kind of suffering. I'll focus herein only on clear
 37 cases of physical pain; I won't use 'pain' to refer to grief, heartache, or other forms
 38 of suffering.

39 Third, pains are bad in many ways. They can ruin your day, indicate bodily dam-
 40 age, or interfere with your love life. But here I'll only discuss the badness of *pain*
 41 *per se*—very roughly, the way a pain is bad in itself (I'll use this interchangeably
 42 with 'badness per se'). This is the epistemically immediate badness of what it is like
 43 to be in pain. Brief reflection on a recent pain should yield a rough sense of this
 44 kind of disvalue that will suffice for this project. Of course, this category ushers in
 45 many deep issues. But aside from the assumption that badness per se is necessary—a
 46 thing has its badness per se in any possible world—these issues can be left unmen-
 47 tioned.

48 Fourth, by 'bad' I shall always mean *bad for*. An account of how x is bad for a
 49 person may not entail an answer to how it is *bad that* there is x, or vice-versa. On
 50 most understandings of the problem of evil, the problem arises with either sort of
 51 badness. Nonetheless, I think the former brings us closer to the heart of the problem.
 52 The problem of evil is most pressing and hardest when we are trying to square the way
 53 evils affect people and animals with the existence of an omnipotent and benevolent
 54 God. Job's pain did diminish the total goodness of the universe. But that's not why it
 55 was a trial for him.

² For example, (Hume 1779, parts X and XI).

³ As Hick describes the metaphysical situation "[Given Christian theological premises, evil] can only consist in a malfunctioning or disorder that has somehow come about within an essentially good creation. The privative view of the status of evil thus follows inevitably from various prior positions of Christian faith and is valid within this context." (Hick 1966, p. 186).

⁴ This use accommodates common, though contentious, claims like 'pains are necessarily disliked' or 'necessarily feared'.

56 Our topic is therefore privationist accounts of the way an experience of pain in itself
57 is necessarily bad for a person. These are the concepts that will always be at issue. But
58 to save words I'll usually just say 'pain's badness'.

59 I'll begin with three challenges the nature of pain and its badness pose for privation
60 theories of evil. I'll then introduce some distinctions to help taxonomize possible pri-
61 vation theories into some rough families by their structures and resources for meeting
62 these challenges. I'll conclude by briefly putting this model into action by suggesting
63 that, contrary to appearances, John Hick holds a kind of privation theory of pain's
64 evil.

65 Three challenges

66 Challenge 1: locate pain's badness in its phenomenology

67 Privationists hold that evils are absences. Yet pain as it is experienced seems like an
68 entity unto itself. As Schilling points out

69 Whatever may be the ultimate status of evil, as encountered in human life it is
70 not the absence of anything, but an experience that is agonizingly present.... The
71 relentless pain caused by malignant tissue is no more fictitious than the enjoy-
72 ment of perfect health.... Evils like [pain] may have no essence of their own, but
73 they hurt as much as any substantial evil could. The torment and distress they
74 occasion remains undiminished by redefinition. They come to consciousness as
75 evil, and they must be dealt with as such.⁵

76 Similarly, Kane claims that

77 pain seems clearly to be more than merely the absence of its contrary opposite.
78 There is a marked difference between a limb which merely lacks feeling—is
79 numb or paralyzed or anesthetized—and one that is racked with pain. In the
80 former case it is quite plausible to say that is merely a privation of something,
81 namely normal feeling, that under usual circumstances would belong to the
82 limb. But it is clearly inadequate to describe a limb aching with pain as suffering
83 *merely* a privation of good health or normal feeling. When pain occurs in the
84 body, there is something new and different in a person's experience which is not
85 present when the body has simply lost feeling.⁶

86 These suggest an important challenge which privationists about pain's evil must
87 overcome.⁷

88 It seems like an experiential—if not conceptual—datum that the way pains feel is
a central part of what makes them bad. But pains don't seem to feel like absences.

⁵ (Schilling 1977, pp. 93–94).

⁶ (Kane 1980, p. 49).

⁷ See also, for example, (McCloskey 1964, p. 65; Hick 1966, pp. 61–62).

89 Without some larger metaphysical background, a theory which places pain's badness
90 outside of the way it feels is unlikely to survive a severely stubbed toe.

91

92 Challenge 2: make pain a privation of the right sort of thing

93 Second, a privationist must tell us what pains are privations of. Cold is the absence of
94 heat; ditches the absence of dirt; diseases the absence of health. But what about pain?
95 The traditional suggestions that it is a privation of normal consciousness, pleasure,
96 good health, et cetera, seem misguided. When you slam your fingers in a door, the fact
97 that you're missing normal consciousness isn't at the heart of what seems bad about
98 the pain. Mutatis mutandis for the others.

99 Challenge 3: don't make the privation too ontologically positive

100 Third, the first two challenges suggest that pain's badness as a privation must lie in its
101 phenomenology. But that seems to ascribe qualities to a privation that are too onto-
102 logically positive. Basing the badness in the phenomenology seems to require us to
103 say that some privations hurt. But that sounds like a category mistake; like saying that
104 a hole dug in the earth is brown. A hole's sides can have color. But holes themselves
105 cannot. Similarly, how could a privation have pain's distinctive phenomenological
106 qualities? Insisting that it does seems to slide quickly toward the claim that pain's evil
107 subsists.

108 As we'll see in a bit, these challenges don't affect all privation theories equally.

109 **The parts of a privation theory**

110 Not every loss or absence is a privation. Aquinas writes:

111 Because evil is the privation of good, and not a mere negation ... not every defect
112 of good is an evil, but the defect of the good which is naturally due. For the want
113 of sight is not an evil in a stone, but it is an evil in an animal; since it is against
114 the nature of a stone to see.⁸

115 Thus, a *privation* is a loss or absence in something that a thing of its kind ought to
116 have. Put more carefully,

117 P1: There is a privation of x if and only if something y lacks or loses x, and the nature
118 of y is such that it ought to have x.

119 Privations are therefore parasites. They cannot exist apart from their host substances.⁹

⁸ (Aquinas 1947, I, Q48, A5); see also (Aquinas 1947, I, Q48, A3).

⁹ While holes and cold are common analogies used to explain privations, they are not privations in this sense. Cold is the absence of heat in something. But arctic air is not a great evil; nor is air better off in the tropics. Aquinas does sometimes say things like 'fire is an evil of water.' But this is the product of other features of his view. It needn't be a feature of P1.

120 The claim that x is evil because x is a privation involves at least two theses.

121 P2: x is an ontological parasite. x cannot exist apart from the substance in which it
122 inheres.

123 and

124 P3: x is an axiological parasite. x is bad in virtue
125 of its relationship to a privation of some good y.

126 If these were the whole of a privation theory, we should be able to infer the fact that x
127 is bad from the fact that x is a privation of y. But even given the conception of privation
128 in P1, satisfying P2 does not entail satisfying P3. There are at least two reasons for
129 thinking that there is a conceptual gap between the ontological and axiological theses
130 that a privationist must bridge with some additional claim.

131 First, the inference depends on an auxiliary claim about the relationship between
132 teleological and evaluative facts—for example that what a thing does tells us about
133 what is good for it.

134 Second, the conceptual gap between P2 and P3 can be brought out with a kind of
135 open question argument. We can imagine a blind person who accepts that blindness
136 is a defect in human beings but who denies that blindness per se is bad. The truth of
137 this claim doesn't matter. It seems like we could have a substantive discussion about
138 it (or about the tenability of the example). That would be a discussion of how to get
139 from P2 to P3 for blindness. Thus the privationist needs a *bridge principle* to close
140 this onto-axiological gap.

141 Medieval privationists like Augustine and Aquinas bridge the gap by holding some-
142 thing like

143 BEING: If x subsists, then x is in that respect good per se.¹⁰

144 On P1, the absence of a form of existence that a thing ought to have is a privation.
145 Thus when BEING is combined with a claim like

146 DIMINUTION: It is bad per se to diminish good things

147 the fact that something is a privation entails that it is bad per se as a privation. As we'll
148 see, other privationists might appeal to different bridge principles.

149 Five theories

150 Thus privationist theories have (at least) three elements—a metaphysical thesis, an
151 axiological thesis, and a bridge principle. We can taxonomize privationist theories of
152 pain's badness into five families by how they answer four questions.

153 About the metaphysical thesis we can ask:

¹⁰ See, for example, Augustine's claim that 'Omnis natura bonum est.' (Augustine 1961, Ch. iv. 13).

154 Q1: What are pains privations of?¹¹

155 About the axiological component:

156 Q2: Are pains bad as privations?

157 And, about the bridge principle:

158 Q3: In virtue of what privation is pain bad?

159 Q4: How does a privation make pain bad?

160 There are five basic families of privationist theory:¹²

161 T1: Pains are privations of x and bad in virtue of being privations of x.

162 T2: Pains are privations of x and are not bad.

163 T3: A pain is a privation of x and is bad in virtue of a privation y it accompanies. But
164 x and y needn't be the same privation.

165 T4: Pains are privations of x and are bad in virtue of something that is not a privation.

166 T5: Pains are not themselves privations, but they are bad in virtue of their relationship
167 to a privation.

168 These are conceptual categories. I'm not claiming that all of them have proponents or
169 that the theories they encompass are plausible. Indeed, because few writers explicitly
170 separate the metaphysical and the axiological aspects of privation theories, I suspect
171 that many of these categories have gone unnoticed.¹³

172 I'll now discuss some resources each family has for meeting the three challenges
173 and contributing to a theodicy which answers the problem of evil.

174 T1: pains are privations of x and bad in virtue of being privations of x

175 T1 theories are the stereotypical privation theories we've been imagining so far. They
176 claim that everything evil is a privation. Since they agree that pain is evil, they hold
177 that pains are privations. They thus owe a bridge principle that can account for this.
178 The claim that subsistence is good and that it's bad to diminish good things would be
179 such a principle. Hence what I described above as a medieval privation theory is a T1
180 theory.

181 T1 theories face all three challenges. Because pains are privations, we must worry
182 whether the theories adequately consider pain's phenomenology and whether they

¹¹ Putting this as a question about identity may be tendentious. I suspect it is conceptually possible for a privationist to hold that privations are necessary or sufficient (but not both) conditions of pain, or that some other metaphysical relationship holds between them. Thus other families may be possible. For simplicity, I'll only discuss identity.

¹² Since it takes us away from a privationist account of pain's evil, I won't directly discuss the completely negative answer T0: Pain is neither a privation nor bad.

¹³ In illustrating these categories, I'll use existing views wherever possible. But in several places where a view has gone unnoticed, I'll have to rely on artificial and thinly described examples. Since these are constructed with an eye toward illustration and not truth, some of them may seem far-fetched. That should be taken as a strike against my imaginative faculties; not as a strike against the possibility of better theories with that structure.

183 capture enough of pain's essential properties without making the privation too onto-
184 logically positive to contribute to a solution of the problem of evil for pain.

185 T2: Pains are privations of x and are not bad

186 T2 theories suggest a simple, if hard line, answer to the problem of evil for pains:
187 Pains aren't evil, so the problem of evil doesn't arise for them. Nonetheless, T2 theo-
188 rists are at least privationists about the nature of pain. They don't deny that pain is an
189 ontological parasite.

190 Since they deny that pains are bad it's odd to call T2 theories 'privation theories'. I
191 do so for two reasons. First, they are solutions to the problem of evil for pain. Second,
192 there are at least two conceptually possible kinds of T2 theory with different bridge
193 principles. On a T2a theory, some, but not all, privations are evil. Pains aren't bad
194 but other absences (perhaps of God's love) may be bad as privations. These theories'
195 bridge principles would explain why not every privation is evil. For example, one
196 might try restricting the class of bad privations to those which involve a person's rela-
197 tionship with God. That might allow sin, but not pain, to be bad as a privation. On a
198 T2b theory, nothing is evil in virtue of its being a privation. The latter's membership
199 in the privationist club is dubious. But the former's credentials are better.¹⁴

200 T2 theories don't face the first or third challenges. On these views pain isn't bad.
201 Thus there is no need to locate pain's badness in the phenomenology or to make the
202 privations ontologically positive enough to support the phenomenology and its bad-
203 ness. However, they do claim that pains are privations. Thus they face the second
204 challenge. They must get the substrate of pain right.

205 T3: a pain is a privation of x and is bad in virtue of a privation y it accompanies. But
206 x and y needn't be the same privation

207 On T3 theories, pain is a privation and is bad in virtue of a privation. But a pain
208 could be the privation of one thing and bad in virtue of a privation of something else.
209 This potentially locates the source of pain's badness outside of the pain itself. But
210 this remains a privationist response to the problem of evil. Since pain's evil lies in a
211 privation, the evil is something God didn't create.

212 Here's an ersatz view with this structure. Suppose, *arguendo*, that pain is just the
213 privation of pleasure and that pain is always accompanied by bodily harm—a pri-
214 vation of bodily function. That is, x being a privation of pleasure is necessary and
215 sufficient for x being a pain. But the absence of pleasure by itself isn't bad. Since
216 there can be bodily harm without pain—for example, under anesthesia—the pres-
217 ence of bodily harm is a necessary but not sufficient condition of being in pain. Thus
218 pains are privations of pleasure and bad in virtue of the privations of normal bod-
219 ily function that always accompany them. On the assumption that badness per se is

¹⁴ For one use of this distinction, see *infra* n.28.

220 the only kind of necessary badness, this would rest the badness of pain per se on a
221 privation.¹⁵

222 I suspect all T3 theorists will have to dig in their heels against the first challenge
223 and insist that the distinctive phenomenology of pain isn't really the source of pain's
224 badness. Though those who claim that pains are the privation of pleasure or normal
225 consciousness can at least appeal to some of the phenomenology, just not the intuitively
226 most central part.

227 Like most other views, T3 theories will have to find a plausible substrate of pain to
228 answer the second challenge. Different theories may favor different candidates. But
229 it's unlikely that there are any problems here that are unique to T3 theories.

230 T3 theories try to avoid making the privation too ontologically positive by pawn-
231 ing pain's badness off on something else—like injury or disease—whose status and
232 badness as a privation is more plausible. Whether they are successful in meeting this
233 third challenge will depend on which privations they choose in answering the first and
234 second challenges.

235 T4: pains are privations of x and are bad in virtue of something that is not a privation
236 Schleiermacher may hold a T4 theory when he writes that

237 as man, were he without sin would not feel what are merely hindrances of sen-
238 suous functions as evils, the very fact that he does so feel them is due to sin, and
239 hence that type of evil, subjectively considered, is a penalty of sin.¹⁶

240 T4 theories suggest an interesting solution to the problem of evil. God doesn't create
241 privations. Hence God doesn't create pain. Somehow we do.¹⁷ Pain's badness then
242 could lie in something ontologically positive outside of the pain. This could be a hu-
243 man construction. For example, pain's badness could lie in our reactions to it—in
244 the fact that we don't like it or that we want it to stop. Even if we are wired so that
245 we always hate pains whenever they occur, pain's badness would nonetheless come
246 from us. Thus, as with T2 theories, on T4 theories it may be that God created neither
247 pain nor pain's evil. But unlike T2 theories, T4 theories put pain's evil in something
248 real.¹⁸

249 If we make pain bad by our reactions to it, the source and object of our reactions
250 should be the way the pain feels. Thus, unlike T2 theories, T4 theories face all three
251 challenges. They must explain how pain's badness lies in its phenomenology. This
252 requires the delicate balancing act posed by the third challenge: They must give the

¹⁵ NB, I've characterized T3 theories only as holding that there is *some* privation for *each* pain. Thus there is room for a T3 theory to hold that the relevant privations are of different kinds for different sorts of pain.

¹⁶ (Schleiermacher 1928, p. 319), referenced in (Hick 1966, 226ff).

¹⁷ Or perhaps the privation that is pain arises through the unguided evolution of life. I admit I have trouble imagining how these claims might be defended.

¹⁸ Of course, on such a view God did create humans as the sort of beings that can be subject to the evil of pain. But that's not a problem for T4 theories alone. It's a general problem that many theodicies face equally.

253 phenomenology enough reality to be the sort of thing we can react to and impose
254 badness upon without claiming that pains subsist in their own right.

255 Interestingly, some T4 theories may have less trouble meeting the second and third
256 challenges than T1 and T3 theories. A T4 theorist may only need to show that pain's
257 evil lies in our negative reactions to the experience of a privation. She might begin do-
258 ing this by pointing out that we often negatively react to feelings of absence in cases
259 like grief, heartache, and sorrow. If these feelings are privations in our sense, they
260 might provide a model for how our reactions confer badness per se on non-subsisting
261 pain.

262 T5: pains are not themselves privations, but they are bad in virtue of their
263 relationship(s) to a privation

264 Anglin and Goetz may hold a T5 theory:

265 However, just insofar as it is an experienced quality, pain is not an evil. Indeed,
266 in some cases, the *absence* of this experienced quality would be an evil. If you
267 cut your finger it would be worse if you did not than if you did feel pain.¹⁹

268 Similarly, this may be what Ahern has in mind when he writes:

269 Pain can have no absolute goodness or value in it, for, if it had, it might right-
270 fully be sought for its own sake and then cultivated. Its goodness is only relative
271 to a situation in which physical evil already exists. In these circumstances, it
272 is appropriate and good that sensations of well-being give way to sensations
273 of unwell-being or of pain. Of course, there may be privation here. The body
274 may be deprived of the sensation of well-being, the good which is part of the
275 body's perfection and, therefore, which may be sought as an end in itself. This
276 is brought about by the presence of pain, a good which is not part of the body's
277 perfection and which has meaning only in reference to physical evil. I conclude,
278 therefore, that pain, agonizing though it may be, should not be called evil in any
279 proper sense. Rather, given the circumstances in which it exists—a sick man or
280 a sick dog—it has the particular type of value which I have attempted to point
281 out. Hence, it offers no special difficulty to the privation theory.²⁰

282 Like T3 theories which metaphysically separate the nature of pain from the privation
283 which makes it bad, T5 theorists take the traditional privationist route to solving the
284 problem of evil and make it more attractive by pawning pain's badness off onto some-
285 thing that is more plausibly bad as a privation. For Anglin and Goetz this seems to be
286 bodily damage; for Ahern it is physical evil.

287 Since pains aren't privations, T5 theorists sidestep the second and third challenges.
288 Their accounts of pain's substrate need not avoid making pain subsist. They do owe

¹⁹ (Anglin and Goetz 1982, p. 5; italics original).

²⁰ (Ahern 1965, pp. 20–21). He makes the priority of the privation to pain clear when he writes that “it is the question of pain which [McCloskey] takes up, saying little about the more fundamental thing, the physical evil which causes pain.”(Ibid, p. 21).

289 an explanation of the phenomenology and properties of pain which meets the first
 290 challenge. But this is not a challenge they face as privation theorists—any account of
 291 pain’s badness owes us such an explanation.

292 Christian science

293 An example may help. The Christian Science theodicy is often mentioned as a par-
 294 adigmatic privation theory. There are at least three interpretations of its basic claims
 295 on our taxonomy.

296 First, unlike Aquinas and Augustine, Christian Scientists sometimes seem to deny
 297 that pains are real at all. For example, its founder Mary Baker Eddy writes

298 Sin, disease, whatever seems real to material sense, is unreal ... All in harmony
 299 of mortal mind or body is illusion, possessing neither reality nor identity though
 300 seeming to be real and identical.²¹

301 and

302 the immortal fact that neither pleasure nor pain, appetite nor passion, can exist in
 303 or of matter, while divine Mind can and does destroy the false beliefs of pleasure,
 304 pain, or fear and all the sinful appetites of the human mind.²²

305 In our sense, privations are parasites. But they are nonetheless real. Hence this version
 306 of the Christian Science theodicy wouldn’t be a privation theory.

307 Second, Eddy may be using ‘unreal’ in a way compatible with the traditional claim
 308 that evils exist but don’t subsist. Her claim thus might be that pains are real, but their
 309 apparent evil is not. That is a T2 theory.

310 Third, she could be claiming that the badness of pain per se is somehow imposed
 311 upon the pain by its sufferer. That may be implied by passages such as

312 When a sufferer is convinced that there is no reality in his belief of pain—because
 313 matter has no sensation, hence pain in matter is a false belief—how can he suffer
 314 longer?²³

315 This could be a T4 theory.

316 Suffering theories

317 We now face a further wrinkle: How much does the badness of pain per se matter
 318 for the problem of evil? On most of the theories so far, this is uninteresting. But on
 319 another group of privation theories, the real problem of (physical) evil involves both
 320 the badness of pain per se and the badness of suffering per se (though many discount
 321 the former).

21 (Eddy 1971, p. 257).

22 (Eddy 1971, p. 327).

23 (Eddy 1971, p. 346).

322 My broad usage of ‘pain’ suggests a complication for fitting these *suffering theories*
 323 into our taxonomy. I’ve been using ‘pain’ to refer to something broader than a painful
 324 sensation and narrower than suffering in general. In doing so, I’ve assumed that pain is
 325 a subclass of suffering which also includes (seemingly) sensation-free psychological
 326 states like grief, despair, and depression.

327 This affects how we understand the suffering theorist’s claims about pain’s badness.
 328 Some writers seem to use ‘pain’ in a narrow sense to refer to just a painful sensation.
 329 They might, for example, adopt the well-worn distinction between

330 the ‘pain sensation’ (i.e. physical pain as such) and the ‘pain experience’, which
 331 latter [sic] includes the affective state of distress or suffering that is normally
 332 produced by physical pain.²⁴

333 This helps these views gain support from the common observation that some painful
 334 sensations aren’t bad (masochism and prefrontal leucotomies are commonly alleged
 335 examples). That may deflect some of the force of the three challenges—suffering is
 336 in some ways more abstract and more general than pain, and it often involves some
 337 kind of loss.

338 Some of these views can be easily assimilated into our taxonomy. We haven’t been
 339 talking about pain as just a sensation. Thus for some suffering theories which use
 340 ‘pain’ in the narrow sense we might be able to simply cross out ‘pain’ in T1–T5 and
 341 pencil in ‘suffering’ without adding any new categories.

342 But other suffering theorists could use ‘pain’ in my sense. For them, a person in
 343 severe pain is in two distinct states—she is in pain and she is suffering. This does
 344 complicate matters. These theories make three sets of claims: one about pain; another
 345 about suffering; and a third about the relationships between the two.

346 To begin classifying these views we can ask the analogues of Q1–Q4 for suffering.
 347 That is, we can ask both

348 Q1: What are pains privations of?
 349 and

350 Q5: What is suffering the privation of?

351 Mutatis mutandis for Q2–Q4.

352 The answers to Q5–Q8 are analogues of T1–T5 which explain the axiological and
 353 metaphysical structure of suffering as a privation:

354 S1: Sufferings are privations of x and are bad in virtue of being privations of x .

355 S2: Sufferings are privations of x and are not bad.

356 S3: A suffering is a privation of x and is bad in virtue of a privation y it accompanies.
 357 But x and y needn’t be the same privation.

358 S4: Sufferings are privations of x and are bad in virtue of something that is not a
 359 privation.

360 S5: Sufferings are not themselves privations, but they are bad in virtue of their rela-
 361 tionship to a privation.

²⁴ (Hick 1966, p. 329).

362 We can then ask two questions about the relationship between pain and suffering:

363 Q9: What is the metaphysical relationship between pain and suffering?

364 Q10: Which evil matters for the problem of evil (and how much)?²⁵

365 Let me begin with the latter.

366 The phrase ‘matters for the problem of evil’ may be misleading. Writers like Ahern
367 have emphasized that privationist theories of evil are not themselves answers to the
368 problem of evil.²⁶ They tell us what evil is. They don’t tell us why there should be any
369 of it. That requires a further theory. Answers to Q10 help connect the two projects.
370 For example, some privationists understand evil as a privation and ultimately solve
371 the problem by claiming that the presence of evil permits a much greater amount of
372 goodness than there could’ve been otherwise (Augustine’s principle of plenitude is
373 one example).²⁷ In telling us what matters for the problem of evil, answers to Q10
374 thus tell us what needs to be outweighed for these solutions to work.

375 Because they depend in part on our answers to Q1–Q9, there are many possible
376 answers to Q10. Nonetheless, for our purposes they can be divided into six broad
377 categories:

378 R1: Since only pain is bad, only pain matters for the problem of evil.

379 R2: Since only suffering is bad, only suffering matters for the problem of evil.

380 R3: Both pain and suffering are bad. But only suffering’s badness matters for the
381 problem of evil.

382 R4: Both pain and suffering are bad and matter for the problem of evil, but suffering’s
383 badness matters much more.

384 R5: Both pain and suffering are bad and matter for the problem of evil, but pain’s
385 badness matters much more.

386 R6: Both pain and suffering are bad. Both matter equally for the problem of evil.

387 R1 is not a suffering theory. Let me make a couple of brief comments about some of
388 the others.

389 R4–R6 raise interesting questions about the different ways the two evils might be
390 weighted in an answer to the problem of evil. For example, one sort of R4 account
391 might invoke an Augustinian idea of orders of being to claim that, while physical pain
392 is easily outweighed by a small increase in human happiness, a great deal of happi-
393 ness would be required to outweigh even a small amount of suffering. This might help
394 narrow the range of things involved in the problem of evil. For example, it might help
395 with the difficulty of accounting for animal pain since most animals don’t have the
396 psychological complexity necessary for suffering.

²⁵ We could raise a version of Q10 for some non-suffering views too. There is conceptual room for a view which explains pain and its evil as privations and denies that it matters to the problem of evil. Also, since T3–T5 invoke a second entity, they also may face a version of Q9.

²⁶ See (Ahern 1965; Ahern 1966; Ahern 1971). Similarly, Hick writes that “the privative doctrine is not offered ... as a solution to the problem of evil. All that it does is rule out a dualist solution and thereby advance the definition of the problem a stage by posing the question, How does privation of good come about in a universe that is created and ruled by a good God?” (Hick 1966, p. 187).

²⁷ For example, (Augustine 1955, vii, 13).

397 One plausible form of R2 theory holds that pain isn't bad per se, but it does inherit
 398 badness from the badness per se of the suffering it often accompanies. The apparent
 399 badness of pain per se might be explained away by the fact that the phenomenologies
 400 of the pain and the suffering are very close in the way a pain is experienced. Hence,
 401 on this view, we spuriously think that the pain is bad per se when it is only bad insofar
 402 as (and in virtue of) its accompanying suffering.

403 This diagnosis is also available to an R3 theorist. Though she must tread a thin line
 404 by explaining how pain can be bad without its badness mattering for the problem of
 405 evil.²⁸

406 This completes my rough taxonomy of privation theories of pain's evil. Let me
 407 close by briefly putting it into practice.

408 Hick

409 In *Evil and the God of Love*, John Hick seems to reject—or at least be intentionally
 410 ambivalent about—privationist accounts of pain's evil. For example, he writes

411 Apart from [the traditional Christian] theological framework, however, an affir-
 412 mation of the privative character of evil would be as arbitrary as a contrary
 413 affirmation of the privative character of good. Either would represent an optional
 414 way of thinking about the relation between good and evil, one seeing good as
 415 primary and evil as its shadow, and the other seeing evil as positive and good
 416 as filling only the interstices of an evil universe. Neither view can claim to be
 417 read off unambiguously from the facts of human experience. As experienced,
 418 good and evil are equally real, equally positive, equally insistent as forces to be
 419 reckoned with.²⁹

420 I'll now use our taxonomy to suggest that he may in fact hold a kind of privationist
 421 theory of the badness of suffering and pain.

422 Let's begin with his answer to Q1/Q5. An answer to these questions requires an
 423 account of what pain and suffering are. Hick understands pain in the narrow sense:

424 Pain is ... a specific physical sensation. Suffering, however, is a mental state
 425 which may be as complex as human life itself.³⁰

²⁸ The tenability of R2 and R3 theories depends on which T and S theories we accept. If they use 'pain' in the broad sense, some R2/R3 theories may seem logically inconsistent. Consider an R2/R3 theory which answers Q6 by holding that suffering is bad as a privation (an S1, S3, or S5 account). This seems to hold: (a) pains are a species of suffering; and (b) suffering is bad per se; and (c) pains aren't bad per se. But an R2 theorist has an easy way out. She can deny that pains are a species of suffering by adopting a T0 theory (see *supra* n.14). Combined with an S1 or S3 account on which sufferings are privations, (a) is false. Interestingly, a R2 theorist could instead square (a), (b), and (c), by adopting a T2a theory. If the badness of privations is the only evil that matters, she could hold a version of a T2a theory which has a bridge principle that allows some but not all privations to be bad per se. An R3 theorist is in more trouble. Though she might be able to deny (a) by using 'pain' in the narrow sense.

²⁹ (Hick 1966, pp. 187–188).

³⁰ (Hick 1966, p. 354). Even though he is using the narrow sense here, we cannot simply translate his account into the T1–T5 framework. As we'll see, he'll have to address Q9 and Q10—that requires one of the S-theories.

426 And, on his understanding of suffering,

427 the characteristic elements of human suffering are such relatively complex and
 428 high-level modes of consciousness as regret and remorse; anxiety and despair;
 429 guilt, shame, and embarrassment; the loss of someone loved, the sense of rejec-
 430 tion, of frustrated wishes, and of failure.... To be miserable is to be aware of a
 431 larger context of existence than one's immediate physical sensations, and to be
 432 overcome by the anguished wish that this wider situation were other than it is.³¹

433 This tells us what pain and suffering are. The rest of his answer to Q1/Q5 is negative:
 434 neither is a privation. Pains

435 are at least as emphatic and intrusive realities of experience as are pleasure and
 436 happiness.³²

437 Hence they are too ontologically positive to be privations. In the passage above, suf-
 438 fering is (or constitutes) an awareness and a wish. These are also ontologically positive
 439 mental states.

440 This also answers Q2/Q6. Pain and suffering are not privations so they cannot be
 441 bad as privations.

442 Skipping ahead to Q9, Hick's account of the metaphysical relationship between
 443 pain and suffering is a bit puzzling. Pain and suffering are categorically distinct:

444 The endurance of pain is sometimes, but not always or even usually, an ingredient
 445 of suffering.³³

446 When they are related, it is through causation:

447 Suffering, however, is not attached to pain in an exact and invariable proportion.
 448 The extent to which a given quantity of *the pain sensation causes us to suffer,*
 449 *and comes to determine the quality of our consciousness,* varies enormously
 450 both from person to person and from time to time for the same person.³⁴

451 But, in

452 a limiting case, very intense pain may so dominate consciousness as for the
 453 time being to shut out the wider context of our existence and *itself constitute* a
 454 situation of suffering—a situation that we violently desire to escape from.³⁵

455 Given the narrow conception of pain, this invocation of constitution is odd—it seems to
 456 drag the complex state of suffering down to the simplicity of brute sensation. Though
 457 this wouldn't be odd if he's just using the broad conception of pain in these special
 458 cases.

³¹ (Hick 1966, pp. 354–355).

³² (Hick 1966, p. 62).

³³ (Hick 1966, p. 354).

³⁴ (Hick 1966, p. 331; my italics).

³⁵ (Hick 1966, p. 355; my italics).

459 To answer Q10, suppose that we can read the degree of importance to the problem
 460 of evil off of the relative badness of pain and suffering. With the possible exception
 461 of a few extreme pains, Hick's general answer is that suffering matters (much) more.
 462 For example, he writes that

463 emotional suffering, quite unconnected with physical pain, can grip us more
 464 inwardly and encroach more inexorably upon the center of our personal being,
 465 and be therefore less endurable, than physical pain.³⁶

466 This is at least an R4 theory—it clearly privileges suffering over pain in the problem
 467 of evil. Depending on the precise answer to Q9, it may be an R2 or R3 account and
 468 thus give even less of a role to pain's badness.

469 So far this doesn't seem to be a privation theory. The root of suffering's evil seems
 470 to lie in a kind of desire—an ontologically positive mental state. Indeed, his answer
 471 to Q3/Q7 rejects the perennial privationist standbys of disease or physical defect as
 472 the source of physical evil.³⁷

473 the quality of evil is not attributed to physical disintegration as such.... It is in
 474 fact not the loss of 'measure, form and order' *per se* that is evil, but only this
 475 considered as a *cause* of pain and suffering. But the resulting *pain and suffering*,
 476 which make us stigmatize their cause as evil, are positive.³⁸

477 Instead, a major culprit is sin. He writes,

478 Suffering, so characterized, is a function of sin. Our human experience can
 479 become an experience of suffering to us because we engage in it self-centeredly.
 480 But in themselves our finitude, weakness, and mortality do not constitute sensa-
 481 tions from which we should violently wish to escape; if we were fully conscious
 482 of God and of His universal purpose of good we should be able to accept our
 483 life in its entirety as God's gift and be free from anguish on account of it.³⁹

484 Part of the answer to Q8 is that sin—traditionally a paradigm privation—metaphys-
 485 ically makes the badness of suffering possible.⁴⁰ Without sin we would not suffer.
 486 Sin does not cause or entail the badness of suffering. The relation is more subtle: The
 487 presence of sin *makes possible* the desires which constitute suffering.⁴¹

³⁶ (Hick 1966, p. 329).

³⁷ This seems to be the route taken in, for example, (Augustine 1961, p. xi; Ahern 1971).

³⁸ (Hick 1966, p. 62); the italics beginning with 'cause' are mine).

³⁹ (Hick 1966, p. 355).

⁴⁰ My categorization of Hick's view depends on the extent to which he conceives of sin as a privation. His view here are complex, but I think they support my claims. For example, he writes that sin "in the singular, consists in man's imperfect relationship to God whilst sins, in the plural, are men's wrong volitions and actions, occurring against God's will ... and arising within that disordered relationship." (Hick 1966, p. 16) and elsewhere that sin "is a disorientation at the very centre of man's being where he stands in relationship with the Source and Lord of his life and the Determiner of his destiny.... our sinfulness expresses itself in various kinds of broken, distorted, perverted, or destructive relationships to our fellows and to the natural world." (Hick 1966, p. 300).

⁴¹ See also his comments about Jesus' suffering at (Hick 1966, p. 355).

488 This, I think, is an S5 theory. Suffering is bad in virtue of its standing in the ‘making
 489 possible’ relation to a privation. Sin, a privation, makes the badness of pain possible
 490 by making the desires which constitute suffering possible. Thus in most cases pain is
 491 bad in virtue of its causing suffering. On the pain side, this could be either a T4 or a
 492 T5 theory depending on whether the ‘making possible’ relation is transitive.

493 So, roughly, Hick holds that pain and suffering are ontologically positive entities
 494 that get their badness per se from a privation. Of the two, suffering is the more funda-
 495 mental evil. While this doesn’t make pain and suffering ontological parasites, Hick’s
 496 view remains a privationist account by making the source of their evil something which
 497 God did not create.

498 I don’t mean to suggest that this is a problem for Hick. I only hope to have sketched
 499 a useful framework for understanding his and other privation theories, and for thinking
 500 more generally about pain and the problem of evil.

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