Ethos 32, no. 4 (128) (2019): 69–89
DOI 10.12887/32-2019-4-128-05

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SUFFERING AND FLOURISHING*

How many people who live an upper-class life without much serious suffering, without much of any impairment in mind or body, count as having great personal thriving? How many people in a life of ease, with little tribulation in it, seem to be an example of human flourishing that others would love to be like? On the contrary, greatness of personal thriving seems to be found largely if not exclusively among those who suffer greatly too.

Although we sometimes praise a person who suffers for not sinking under his suffering, we still suppose that the sufferer is to be ranked more among life's losers than among life's winners. Even if we think of a person who stands under his suffering as heroic, we tend to think of whatever is good in his life as happening in spite of the suffering. And, in general, we are inclined to find perverse anything that values the suffering itself. On the contrary, anything that undermines physical or mental thriving strikes us as lamentable.

The current disability rights movement is an exception to this general attitude. Like the gay pride movement, the disability rights movement wants to celebrate what others have generally pitied—or disrespected—as the suffering of misfortune. It wants others to see that those with disabilities are not among life's losers, or even among life's heroic overcomers of the tragic. Instead, the disability rights movement holds disability pride parades. Here is an excerpt from a text by Sarah Triano, the founder of the Chicago Disability Pride parade:

> The sad sack, the brave overcomer, and the incapable are worn-out stereotypes the parade refutes by giving us a time and space to celebrate ourselves as we are. First, we want to show the world the incredible joy that exists in our lives. We are part of the richness and diversity of this country and the world. The Parade is an international celebration of our continued and continuing survival. We also, by marching in this parade, are giving the world a chance to express pride in us, too![1]

From the Patristic period onward, the Christian tradition has held a roughly analogous position not as regards disability but rather as regards suffering in

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* The present article is a revised version of an extract from Chapter 9 of the author's book on atonement. See Eleonore S t u m p, *Atonement* (Oxford: Oxford University, Press, 2018).

[1] Quoted after Elizabeth B a r n e s, *The Minority Body: A Theory of Disability* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 185.

general. It has supposed that those who endure serious suffering are not the pitiable losers of life or even the heroic overcomers of tragedy but rather are those specially loved by God. That is because, on this view, suffering is not only medicinal for the human condition but is also a gift of God's to those who are nearer to God. John Chrysostom says of people who are scandalized at the sight of human suffering, "They do not know that to have these sufferings is the privilege of those especially dear to God."[2]

Clearly, there is something right about the contemporary unreflective rejection of suffering as bad. Someone who valued suffering as an intrinsic good would be mentally disturbed at best and evil at worst. But there is nonetheless something worth exploring in the Christian attitude towards suffering as a gift. In this lecture, I want to look closely at the relevant Christian doctrines to see what can be said to explain this attitude towards suffering and to distinguish it from the neighboring perverse attitude seeing suffering as an intrinsic good.

THE CONNECTION OF SUFFERING AND PERSEVERANCE: CONSOLATION, SANCTIFICATION LEADING TO GLORY, AND CHRIST'S ATONEMENT

There is a biblical text in 2 Corinthians that expresses the relevant Christian attitude in a paradigmatic way, and it will be helpful to approach the examination of suffering through the claims in that text.

In 2 Corinthians 1:5, Paul, generally taken to be the writer of the Epistle, makes this claim: "As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so also our consolations abound through Christ." This is not a claim about what justifies God's allowing the suffering of a person in grace or what defeats that suffering for her. The issue here is definitely not theodicy. Rather, the claim in the Pauline epistle is only about a connection between suffering and consolation. According to this claim, for a suffering person in grace in this life, her suffering is somehow correlated with the consolation she has in or with Christ. The comfort and help a sufferer has from Christ can intensify as her suffering increases.[3]

[2] John Chrysostom, "Commentary on Saint John the Apostle and Evangelist: Homilies 48–88," in *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 41, trans. Sister Thomas Aquinas Goggin (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1960), 165.

[3] I say "*can* intensify" because a sufferer is not compelled to accept the consolation that loving presence is able to provide. She can reject it if she chooses to, just as she can reject any offer of love she does not want.

Later in the same Epistle, Paul concludes a complicated analogy between the Israelites at the time of the giving of the Law, on the one hand, and people in the process of sanctification, on the other, by saying of people in sanctification, "Beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, we are all changed into the same image from glory into glory through the Spirit, the Lord" (2 Cor 3:18). The details of Paul's analogy are elaborate, and this concluding claim is also intricate; but the basic idea is that a person in grace comes to have (even in this life) the glory of the loveliness of God (to some, no doubt, small degree) in virtue of being united with God (to one degree or another). And Paul goes on to connect the glory of that union with suffering, in this way: "Our light afflictions, which last only for the moment, bring about for us a far greater eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor 4:17). In other words, according to Paul in this Epistle, the suffering endured by a person in grace is one source of that person's glory or spiritual loveliness. Finally, Paul explains that the role of suffering in bringing about glory has an intrinsic connection to the atonement of Christ. He concludes his exposition of that idea this way: "For us, God made Christ, who knew no sin, [to be] sin, so that in Christ we might be made the righteousness of God" (2 Cor 5:21).

The thought of all these lines of Paul's in 2 Corinthians then is roughly this. A person in grace Paula will experience suffering of one kind and degree or another in this life. But that suffering will help to bring about for Paula, eventually, the greater good of glory, where glory is a matter of a union between God and Paula in which Paula has in herself something of the righteousness, and something of the beauty, of God. And through the suffering which Paula endures and which results in her growing in her own beauty of holiness in union with God, she will also have consolation that grows as her suffering intensifies. In a paradoxical way, then, according to the Epistle, her suffering conduces to her joy. And all of this will be somehow tied to the atoning work of Christ, in which Christ bears—in fact, becomes—human sin so that human beings can become the righteousness of God.

To begin to understand Paul's thought about suffering, glory, consolation, and the atoning work of Christ, it is necessary to work slowly through its elements, beginning with the nature and effects of suffering. When it is properly unpacked, what Paul's thought in the Epistle shows is the way in which the suffering of a person in grace is connected to the suffering of Christ and contributes to her perseverance in the process of sanctification, to help her complete the process instead of abandoning it. Furthermore, in completing the process of sanctification, a person in grace does not stay in the same state she was in when she began the process. Rather, on Paul's thought, a person who perseveres in sanctification through suffering continues to grow in closeness to God until she has as much joy and union with God, and as much loveliness in that union, as she is willing to have.

THE MODES OF HUMAN FLOURISHING

The complicated thought of 2 Corinthians gives suffering a place in flourishing. That is, on Paul's thought in that Epistle, something about suffering, which seems to deprive a person of flourishing, actually enables or enhances the flourishing of the sufferer.

Although discussions of human flourishing are by now something of a cottage industry, for my purposes here a person's flourishing can be thought of as his thriving.[4] So understood, the opposite of thriving is not being sick but rather something like being dysfunctional. The failure to thrive is a broad category that encompasses any kind of impairment or impediment[5] to the proper functioning of some part of a person or even of the whole person himself.[6] It may be that this usage is not the everyday meaning of the term 'thriving,' but it is one sense of the term; and it is helpful to have some term by which to refer to the phenomenon in question. At any rate, a flourishing human life is a life that is an excellent one for a human being, and 'thriving' is a reasonable way to refer to the excellent condition of something living.

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[4] I am trying to use terminology that does not in effect associate me in a misleading way with one or another side in the disputes over disabilities. In my view, the best current philosophical discussion of disability can be found in Elizabeth Barnes's book *The Minority Body*; and her general view of disability as what she calls 'mere difference' rather than 'bad difference' seems to me entirely right. Her own care to disambiguate her position from other similar-sounding views in the near neighborhood has persuaded me to try expressing my position here with terminology not in regular use in the disability literature as she engages with it. In addition, I am using the terminology of 'flourishing' and 'well-being' in ways that are somewhat out of line with their use in the contemporary literature on well-being and happiness. Because I want terms that correlate with the account of suffering I have given and the connection between suffering and union with God at issue for my interpretation of the doctrine of the atonement, I will use the relevant terms in the way explained here, even if they have somewhat different uses in other areas of philosophy.

[5] When the proper functioning of some organ or activity within a system is diminished or prevented by something else within that system, then there is an impediment to the organ or activity in question. When the proper functioning is diminished or prevented by the something internal to the organ or activity, then there is an impairment. I mean 'impediment' and 'impairment' to be generic enough to cover all the varieties of loss or lack of typical structure and/or function in any part of a person, whether that part has to do with an organ or an activity. For more narrowly defined terms and careful distinction among them, see Sheena L. C a r t e r, "Impairment, Disability and Handicap," Emory School of Medicine, www.pediatrics.emory.edu/divisions/neonatology/dpc/Impairment%20MX.html. I am grateful to Kevin Timpe for calling my attention to this useful site.

[6] It is not my intention to participate in the burgeoning and insightful literature on disability; but there is some overlap between that literature and the issues central for me here. I have learned and benefitted from Elizabeth Barnes's work on disability, but my focus here is not on disability per se. In addition to her book cited above, see also Elizabeth B a r n e s, "Valuing Disability, Causing Disability," *Ethics* 125, no. 1 (2014): 88–113; Elizabeth B a r n e s, "Disability and Adaptive Preference," *Philosophical Perspectives* 23 (2009): 1–22; and Elizabeth B a r n e s, "Disability, Minority and Difference," *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 26, no. 4 (2009): 337–55.

It is worth noting in this connection that even an impediment to the proper functioning of a human body and a consequent loss of some kind of physical thriving is not a disability. Striving for a workable account just of physical disability, Elizabeth Barnes says affirmingly,

> The disability rights movement tends to count a physical condition as a disability (and therefore as something they're working to promote justice for) if it has some sufficient number of features such as: being subject to social stigma and prejudice; being viewed as unusual or atypical; making ordinary daily tasks difficult or complicated; causing chronic pain; causing barriers to access of public spaces; causing barriers to employment; causing shame; requiring use of mobility aids or assistive technology; requiring medical care; and so on. As with most cluster concepts, there will no doubt be vagueness and borderline cases.[7]

Barnes seems to me right in this characterization. By itself, then, an impediment to thriving does not count as a disability, whatever the nature and severity of the impediment, if for no other reason than that a disability is at least in part a function of the society in which a person who has the impediment lives. What is at issue in what follows is therefore not disability, but the lower-level notion of an impairment or impediment[8] and the correlated contrary, thriving.

It is evident that thriving comes in different modes. To begin with, we can distinguish the thriving a person has when he suffers no impediments as regards his body from the thriving he has when he suffers no impediments as regards his mind. We can think of thriving, that is, either as bodily thriving or as thriving of the mind[9]; and it is possible to have one of these modes of thriving without the other. So, for example, there are people who are in excellent

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[7] B a r n e s, *The Minority Body*, 45.

[8] Because it is awkward to write 'impediments or impairments' repeatedly, in what follows I will simply write 'impediments' as shorthand for the longer phrase.

[9] For a good discussion of these kinds of health and their connection to human flourishing, see, for example, Richard K r a u t, *What is Good and Why: The Ethics of Well-Being* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), and especially the discussion beginning on page 133. Nonetheless, it should be said that this distinction between kinds of health is coarse-grained and imprecise. It is imprecise because human beings are embodied minds and so what affects the body affects the mind and vice versa, if one can even speak this way. To distinguish between health of body and health of mind is therefore only a rough approximation to the correct distinction. And this rough distinction is also coarse-grained because it is based on only a large-scale distinction among parts of human beings. Those parts have parts too, and impairments in the varying smaller-scale parts make correspondingly different impairments for a person suffering from them. Some of these impairments will make life harder for the sufferer than others. For an excellent discussion of even the most philosophically complicated of such issues, namely, the connection between disability and executive function, for example, see Kevin T i m p e, "Executive Function, Disability, and Agency," *Res Philosophica* 93, no. 4 (2016): 767–96. Even with the caveats in this note, however, the imprecise and coarse-grained distinction between health of body and health of mind is useful for showing the theological claim at issue in this paper, and so I will adopt it in what follows.

bodily condition but who suffer from mental illness or some other impediment of mind. Buzz Aldrin was in peak athletic condition when he flew to the moon in 1969, but he later acknowledged that he also suffered from serious depression.

An obstacle to thriving in mind can come not only from some disease of the mind or some damage to the brain; it can come also from heartbreak. A heartbroken person also lacks thriving in mind, in the sense of 'thriving' at issue here. Thriving in mind seems to require energy, confidence, groundedness in oneself, an ability to concern oneself with others, and things of this sort. Heartbreak is like being hit by a truck in one's psyche; it focuses a person intensely on himself. It may produce the energy of rage, but no one would mistake that energy for the constructive energy of thriving in mind.

It is also worth noticing that heartbreak can come from the suffering of another person too. A mother's heart's desire can be that her child thrive; and if that child struggles with a chronic and irremediable sickness, the mother may suffer heartbreak over her child's suffering.[10] That heartbreak will be an impediment to her own thriving in mind too.

It is possible to have great bodily impediments but to be thriving in mind. In her *New York Times Magazine* article chronicling her extended arguments with Peter Singer, Harriet McBryde Johnson, who was a disability rights lawyer, describes herself this way:

> I'm Karen Carpenter—thin, flesh mostly vanished, a jumble of bones in a floppy bag of skin.… My right side is two deep canyons. To keep myself upright, I lean forward, rest my rib cage on my lap, plant my elbows beside my knees… I am the first generation to survive to such decrepitude.[11]

By her own description, Johnson suffers from significant impediments as regards bodily thriving. On the other hand, however, her meaningful work and her excellence at it, her very ability to handle exchanges with such opponents of the disability rights movement as Peter Singer with intelligence and courtesy and wit, all testify to her thriving in mind.

Impediments to either bodily thriving or thriving in mind are generally a suffering for the person who has them. But there is a general consensus that, other things being equal, thriving in mind outranks bodily thriving. For comparable impediments, however roughly such comparison might have to be made, an incapacity in mind is a greater obstacle to human flourishing than

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[10] I am grateful to Claire Crisp for calling my attention to the need to make this point explicit.

[11] Harriet M c B r y d e J o h n s o n, "Unspeakable Conversations," *New York Times Magazine*, February 16, 2003, http://www.nytimes.com/2003/02/16/magazine/unspeakable-conversations.html.

a bodily incapacity. Few people would be willing to trade diminished bodily thriving for comparable diminishments of thriving in mind.[12] And this common attitude seems right. On the scale of value commonly found in the Christian tradition and much contemporary thought, the best thing for human beings is a matter of relationships; and if they are serious enough, impediments with regard to thriving in mind are more of a barrier to relationships than roughly comparable impediments to bodily thriving, ceteris paribus.[13]

And yet even for human beings with serious cognitive impairments, meaningful and fulfilling relationships of love are possible. Eva Kittay makes this point in a moving passage, worth quoting at length. She says,

> Philosophers have made much of the importance of rational capacities for the exercise of moral judgments and moral actions, but many … have seriously understated the critical role other capacities play in our moral life…, such as giving care and responding appropriately to care, empathy and fellow feeling, a sense of what is harmonious and loving, and a willingness to reciprocate giving and receiving kindness and love.… [Consider in this connection] a young woman, whose rational capacities are difficult to determine because she lacks speech among other skills, but her capacity to enjoy life, to share joy through smiles and laughter, to embrace those who love and care for her, and to bring joy to all whose lives she touches—an individual who, through her warmth, her serene and harmonious spirit, and her infectious love of life enriches the lives of others.… Whether or not she would know what it means to determine her own good may be in doubt, but the good she brings into the world is not.[14]

Furthermore, on the traditional Christian scale of value, the greatest human relationship is with God, and so the greatest thriving for a human person is in that relationship. And even serious impediments to thriving in mind are not a bar to a human person's relationship with God. Consider, for example, this

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[12] In arguing for the rationality of those people who say that their disability is not a disadvantage to them, Barnes excepts those who are severely mentally ill. For example, she says, "Ceteris paribus, for any person x, x is a good source of evidence about x's own wellbeing. This is a fairly weak principle, and one that most people would readily agree to.… And the claim is ceteris paribus—[people] are not a good source of evidence if they are crazy…" B a r n e s, "Disability and Adaptive Preference": 9. I disagree with Barnes in the last claim in this quotation. I think that even a person Jerome who is seriously mentally ill can have personal flourishing; and so in that case Jerome's testimony that he is flourishing will be a good source of evidence that he is flourishing, even with mental illness or other mental impairments.

[13] At some point, of course, the two modes of diminishment will converge, in so far as the mind is correlated (in some way or other, depending on one's theory of mind) with the brain. But, clearly, at least in many cases, it is possible to have impediments to bodily thriving without having any impediments to thriving of mind.

[14] Eva K i t t a y, "Deadly Medicine: Project T4, Mental Disability, and Racism," *Res Philosophica* 93, no. 4 (2016): 734.

report of religious experience on the part of someone suffering from significant mental illness:

> At one time, I reached utter despair and wept and prayed to God for mercy instinctively and without faith in reply. That night I stood with other patients in the grounds waiting to be let in to our ward…. Suddenly someone stood beside me … and a voice said, 'Mad or sane, you are one of My sheep'. I never spoke to anyone of this but ever since, twenty years, it has been the pivot of my life.[15]

Even among those with both bodily thriving and thriving in mind, few people have such powerful religious experiences. The religious experience this patient reports was so great as to center his life, for a long time, on his telling of the story, and to bring him consolation throughout that whole period; the closeness to God of the original experience and the on-going relationship with God it provoked were great enough to endure through many years of the patient's life.

One can see, then, that although, other things being equal, serious impediments to thriving in mind are more likely to undermine a person's flourishing than comparable impediments to bodily thriving are, flourishing in loving personal relationship is nonetheless possible even with significant impediments to thriving in mind.[16] Furthermore, as the example of the patient's religious experience illustrates, when God is one of the *relata* in the relationship, then even those things that might obstruct relationship between two human beings, such as major mental illness, are not a bar to relationship. Manifestly, an omnipotent, omnipresent God could make relational contact with a human person challenged by a serious impediment to thriving in mind if only that person did not resist God's love and grace.

What such considerations should help us recognize is that bodily thriving and thriving in mind do not exhaust the modes of thriving for human beings. A human person can have impediments to thriving of both body and mind—because, for example, of the ill-treatment of others and the lasting bodily and

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[15] Quoted in William Alston, *Perceiving God* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 18–9.

[16] It is an open question, which I cannot deal with in passing here, whether flourishing in loving personal relationships is compatible with every kind of impediment to thriving of mind. Nonetheless, as Kevin Timpe has called to my attention, Jean Vanier's work with persons suffering from severe impediments to thriving of mind is suggestive in this regard. For a detailed description of a particular case, see Henri Nouwen, *Adam: God's Beloved* (Maryknoll, NY: 2000). For Jean Vanier's own views on the subject, see Jean Vanier, *Becoming Human* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1998). For a brief discussion of some of Vanier's work in connection with the problem of suffering, see Eleonore Stump, *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), Chapter 14, "What We Care about: The Desires of the Heart," 418–50.

psychological damage of that ill-treatment—and yet that person can have thriving as a human person.[17] There is thus a third mode of thriving.

THE THIRD MODE OF THRIVING

Harriet Tubman seems to me a good example of this third mode of thriving. She was born a slave, and from early childhood she was recurrently separated from her family. When she was 6 or 7, for example, she was farmed out to a different household as a house slave and nanny. In that job, child though she was, she endured severe beatings; and she was often deprived of sufficient food and adequate clothing. Later in life, as a result of the abuse of one slave master, she suffered a serious head wound, which left her with lasting neurological problems. Throughout the rest of her life, she seems to have suffered from narcolepsy and other manifestations of brain damage as a result of that injury.[18] It is difficult to believe that, in addition to the neurological problems she suffered, she did not also have lasting psychological damage from the trauma of the abuse she endured as a child. And this is only the beginning. The story of the suffering of her life is too great to be summarized adequately in short space here, and it is hard to read even in abbreviated form because the cruelty inflicted on her is heart-breaking.

When she was a young woman, Tubman succeeded in escaping from slavery; and she spent all the rest of her long life rescuing other slaves and working for the abolition of slavery, often in perilous circumstances. When a biography of her was being prepared during her lifetime, she asked Fredrick Douglas to write a recommendation for the cover of the book; and this is what he, so worthy of honor himself, wrote to her:

> You ask for what you do not need when you call upon me for a word of commendation. I need such words from you far more than you can need them from me, especially where your superior labors and devotion to the cause of the lately enslaved of our land are known as I know them. The difference between us is very marked. Most that I have done and suffered in the service of our cause has been in public, and I have

[17] In a helpful paper commenting on the controversy generated by the claim that disability is a not a bad difference, Ian Stoner argues for a distinction in kinds of wellbeing and in ways of being worse off. The distinction he makes has at least a family resemblance to the one I make here, although without the metaphysics I depend on here. See Ian Stoner, "Ways to be Worse Off," *Res Philosophica* 93, no. 4 (2016): 921–49.

[18] For two differing biographies of Harriet Tubman, from which I am taking these details of her life, see Sarah Hopkins Bradford, *Harriet, the Moses of Her People* (New York: Corinth Books, 1961 [originally published in 1886]); and Catharine Clinton, *Harriet Tubman: The Road to Freedom* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2004).

> received much encouragement at every step of the way. You, on the other hand, have labored in a private way. I have wrought in the day—you in the night.... The midnight sky and the silent stars have been the witnesses of your devotion to freedom and of your heroism. Excepting John Brown—of sacred memory—I know of no one who has willingly encountered more perils and hardships to serve our enslaved people than you have.[19]

The great honor in which Harriet Tubman was and is so rightly held by so many people, me included, bears witness to her thriving as a human being. She is not a bent or broken or otherwise failing specimen of the human species. On the contrary, she is a shining example of humanity. And we do not honor her out of compassion, as someone who heroically overcame the tragic circumstances of her life. Rather, anyone with integrity has to acknowledge that she sets a standard for human greatness and so also for thriving as a human being. But she had that thriving with serious impediments to thriving of body and of mind.

It is hard to know exactly what to call this third mode of thriving; but because it seems somehow to be the thriving of the whole person, rather than the thriving of a part of a person, as thriving of body or of mind is, I will call it 'personal thriving', for lack of a better term.

PERSONAL THRIVING AND FLOURISHING

On orthodox Christian theology, the best state for a human person requires willing what God wills; and the sanctification of a person Paula has as its ultimate aim the complete integration of Paula's will around the good, so that Paula wills always and only what God wills.[20] But Paula could be significantly fragmented in will and still count as willing what God wills, provided that Paula has and retains a second-order willing for a will that wills what God wills.[21] As Aquinas understands Christ's will in the garden of Gethsemane, when Christ desired not to die, Christ had a will for something that God did not will; and, nonetheless, Christ was willing what God wills in virtue of having a second-order will to have a will that wills what God wills. On Aquinas's view, then, in this life a person Paula can count as being in grace, even as being Christ-like,

[19] Quoted in B r a d f o r d, *Harriet Tubman*, 134–5.

[20] For further discussion of this claim, see S t u m p, *Atonement*, Chapters 6 and 7. See also in this connection Kevin T i m p e, "Cooperative Grace, Cooperative Agency," *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 7, no. 3 (2015): 225–47.

[21] For detailed discussion of this view, see S t u m p, *Atonement*, Chapter 7.

when there is still significant fragmentation and brokenness in her will.[22] But if, on this view, a person can count as being in the best state for human beings in this life even with significant brokenness in the will, then it should not be surprising that, on this same view, someone's having impediments in other parts of a human person is also compatible with her personal thriving.

So thriving of body and thriving of mind are neither individually necessary nor jointly sufficient for personal thriving, as the cases canvassed here illustrate. And because it is the thriving of the whole person, personal thriving outranks thriving of either of the other two modes of thriving or both of them combined (ceteris paribus).[23] So, for example, a person who has significant impediments as regards the body might have greater personal thriving than someone who lacks those impediments (ceteris paribus). In my view, Harriet McBryde Johnson illustrates this point. She is greatly admirable for the thriving of her life, even with serious impediments to thriving of body. Similarly, a person can have personal thriving even with serious impediments to thriving of mind as well as body. The story of Tubman's life shines through the many years since her death as an example of the power and beauty of the human spirit. Her great-heartedness, the indomitable power of her will, the generosity of her work, the accomplishments of her life, are magnificent. Even with the impediments as regards both mind and body from which she suffered, the personal thriving exemplified in her life sets a standard for others.

Furthermore, insofar as personal thriving includes those things characteristic of a life marked not by defeat but by joy, then personal thriving, the thriving of the whole person, seems clearly also to be the flourishing of that person. Human flourishing, then, is not just a matter of thriving in body or in mind or both. It is a matter of thriving as a whole person, and this thriving can occur even when a person suffers from significant impediments as regards both mind and body. As the example of Harriet Tubman illustrates, the depredations of other human beings, the consequences of severe poverty, the misfortunes of nature, and other similar afflictions cannot take away from a sufferer the possibility of flourishing. For even resplendent human flourishing, it is not necessary that the impediments to thriving of mind or body be prevented or removed.

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[22] In this connection, see the section on exclusivism in S t u m p, *Atonement*, Chapter 8. By parity of reasoning with the arguments in that chapter, on this Christian view of thriving, personal thriving is not limited to those who identify themselves as Christians.

[23] Underlying these claims is a rejection of a certain kind of reductionism; on these claims, the whole is not just the sum of its parts. That is why there can be thriving of the whole even when the parts of the whole have some impediments to thriving. For further discussion of the metaphysical position at issue here, see Eleonore S t u m p, "Emergence, Causal Powers, and Aristotelianism in Metaphysics," in *Powers and Capacities in Philosophy: The New Aristotelianism*, ed. Ruth Groff and John Greco (New York and London: Routledge, 2012).

I recognize, of course, the troublesome appearance of this claim and the dreadful misuses to which it can be put. But think of the matter this way. If this claim were not true, then human flourishing would be another monopoly of the wealthy Western industrialized countries, or at least the upper classes in them. Wealth can go a long way towards the prevention and amelioration of impediments to the thriving of mind and body through the nutrition, medical care, and education that wealth makes possible. But wealth is neither necessary nor sufficient for human flourishing, and consequently neither is the thriving of body or thriving of mind that wealth helps to produce. I want to add hastily that this claim should be no consolation for those people who cause suffering to others, or whose indifference contributes to it, or who fail to remedy it when they can readily do so. That flourishing is compatible with suffering does not imply that such people are not execrable in their conduct.[24]

THE FURTHER CLAIM
SUFFERING AND FLOURISHING

It is hard not to notice that, as the Patristic thinkers regarded suffering, some diminishments in thriving of body or mind can in fact be woven into personal thriving. That is, the bodily or mental diminishments in thriving can in fact contribute to personal thriving not because they constitute challenges that a person surmounts, but because those very diminishments are themselves ingredient in that person's thriving. The diminishments are integral to the personal thriving, in the sense that their removal would constitute the removal (or at least the lessening) of the personal thriving.[25]

For example, it is hard not to suppose that Harriet McBryde Johnson is as superlatively courteous and generous to her enemies as she is because of her life with impairments of body. And Harriet Tubman's suffering from the depredations of the slave society around her and her consequent impairments in both

[24] For detailed defense of this claim, see S t u m p, *Wandering in Darkness*, Chapter 13, "Theodicy in Another World," 451–81.

[25] There might, of course, be flourishing of some different sort if the impediments to thriving of body and of mind were removed. The point is only that for the flourishing under discussion, the impediments to thriving are woven into the fabric of the flourishing which a person actually has and are not related to that flourishing in any merely accidental or instrumental way. Furthermore, nothing about the removing of one kind of impediment to thriving, as, for example, the miraculous removal of blindness when Jesus restores the sight of a man born blind, prevents there from being other impediments to thriving of mind or of body in the same person which lead to flourishing of a different sort. Short of perfection in heaven, human beings in this life will not be entirely without some impediments to thriving in mind or body.

mind and body seem to be part of the fabric of her character, marked by her charismatic leadership in her society and her self-sacrificial care for others.

Or think of the same point the other way around. How many people who live an upper-class life without much serious suffering, without much of any impairment in mind or body, count as having great personal thriving? How many people in a life of ease, with little tribulation in it, seem to be an example of human flourishing that others would love to be like? On the contrary, greatness of personal thriving seems to be found largely if not exclusively among those who suffer greatly too.[26] It is difficult to think of anyone who lacks such suffering and yet excites powerful admiration for the personal thriving of his life.

That suffering can lead to great personal thriving seems to me overwhelmingly confirmed by evidence of all kinds, including historical reflection, psychological studies, and plausible fictional narratives.[27] But *why* it should be so is harder to see.

On the scale of value for flourishing which is maintained in orthodox Christian theology, and which is widely held even by those who do not accept that theology, human flourishing has relationships of love at its heart. But the post-Fall human condition is characterized by a tendency to turn away from such relationships into willed loneliness and isolation[28]; and so the post-Fall human condition inclines a person in a direction that undermines flourishing, when flourishing is understood as a matter of relationships of love.

Suffering can make a difference to this condition in varying ways.

In the first place, because suffering is generally aversive, it can drive a person to seek amelioration from the suffering,[29] and it will have to be sought at least in part in the remedies other people can provide. Or, if all remedies fail, then suffering can incline a person to seek just the consolation that other people can give by their presence and compassion. Even when suffering cannot be taken away or diminished, it can somehow be made more bearable by the consolation of the presence of loving others. That is one reason why women in labor find it good to have a caring labor coach with them. The presence of the labor coach cannot diminish the physical pain of childbirth. How could it? But nonetheless the presence of a kind person personally engaged and responsive to

[26] I do not mean to say that suffering is sufficient for personal thriving or that everyone who suffers has personal thriving in virtue of suffering. For some people, suffering is destructive rather than productive of thriving. For further discussion of this point, see S t u m p, *Wandering in Darkness*, Chapter 13.

[27] For some attempt to describe the evidence and argue for the claim, see ibidem, Chapters 13–15, p. 371–481.

[28] See ibidem, Chapters 5–7, p. 85–150.

[29] For more discussion of this claim, see S t u m p, *Atonement*, Chapter 6.

a woman in labor will make the pains of the labor more tolerable if the woman in labor will accept the care and compassion which that person offers.

Secondly, it has to be said that, for those who suffer involuntarily[30] and whose wills are therefore set against the suffering, suffering can be an affront to the ego. In saying this, I do not mean to imply that this reaction is blameworthy. On the contrary, there can be something pathological about passivity in the face of suffering.[31] When, to the great scandal of the Comforters in the story, Job unleashes his furious protests to God for God's allowing his suffering, God himself says at the end of the story that only Job—not the pious Comforters but Job—has said what was right.[32] So I do not mean to imply any negative assessment by saying that the mere fact of suffering can be an affront to the ego of the sufferer. I mean only to call attention to the fact that, when a person cannot ward off from himself what his will is set against, he is driven to acknowledge that he is not sufficient for himself. In this spirit, he will also be more likely to be willing to seek help, human help or God's help.

For one reason or another, then, suffering can break in on a person's inwardness and isolation.[33] The aversiveness of suffering can fuel a person's willingness to seek connection with others. A suffering person may turn to other human beings, but it is also widely recognized that in suffering a person is likely to turn to God, even if this turning comes with anger or remonstrance, as it does in Job's case.[34] It is common to find religious belief and religious experience among those in deep distress. It is less common to find true religiosity among those at ease.

For Tubman, God was always present to her and engaged with her. One of her biographers describes an experience that was typical for her; it occurred at the time in her life when she was first contemplating returning to slave territory to rescue other slaves:

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[30] Even those suffering only involuntarily *secundum quid.*

[31] For a defense of this claim, see the discussion of Eckhart's views in S t u m p, *Atonement*, Chapter 6.

[32] For a discussion of this case, see S t u m p, *Wandering in Darkness*, Chapter 9, "The Story of Job: Suffering and the Second-Personal," 177–226.

[33] It is certainly true, as some readers will be quick to point out, that suffering can also cement a person into angry or despairing isolation. Insofar as a person's surrender to love, or even just to the compassion and care of others, is always in the control of that person, nothing can guarantee that a person will incline to such surrender.

[34] Some people suppose that there are special cases in which a person suffers from a trauma associated with a religious context, so that the one thing such a person is unlikely to do is turn to God in suffering. For discussion of such cases, see Michael R e a, "*Though the Darkness Hide Thee": Seeking the Face of the Invisible God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). If in fact there are such cases, then I will omit them from the claims made here.

> She had great fears about her future course, and confided, 'The Lord told me to do this. I said, "Oh Lord, I can't—don't ask me—take somebody else."' But Tubman also reported that God spoke directly to her: 'It's you I want, Harriet Tubman.'[35]

As this and other anecdotes from Tubman's life illustrate, suffering is part of an on-going process in a person's life in which flourishing can develop and increase. The correlation between suffering and flourishing depends on second-personal relationships of love; and such relationships are dynamic, not static, even where God is concerned. It is part of traditional Christian theology that God will give grace to anyone who does not refuse it,[36] but, clearly, a process of this sort will expand rapidly if it is continued. That is because the grace given enables a person to ameliorate her own inner fragmentation and so to be more willing to be open to love and goodness—and this increased openness on her part will be met with more grace that grows her in goodness, thereby resulting in more grace given, and so on. Seeing the relationship between God and a person in grace in this way explains the line in the Gospels (see, e.g., Mt 25:29) that to him who has, more will be given. This is an odd distribution principle if one is thinking of goods that diminish when they are distributed, such as money or human honor; but it makes sense if one is thinking of grace and love. Love grows in consequence of being accepted and shared. Insofar as suffering opens a person to love and deepens her in closeness to God and others, it is an element in this growth. What makes Tubman exemplary for us increased in her throughout her life.[37]

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So here is what I want to say in conclusion.

I have no wish to support anything that would seem in any way to make light of Tubman's suffering. The suffering inflicted on her by the people promoting and maintaining slavery highlight the terribleness of the human post-Fall disorder, for which no words seem negative enough. Nonetheless, with diffidence, I want to suggest that Tubman's life also illustrates well the complicated thought in 2 Corinthians set out above and the traditional Christian attitude towards suffering represented by the quotation from Chrysostom I gave at the outset of this paper.

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[35] C l i n t o n, *Harriet Tubman*, 83.

[36] For more explanation of this claim, see S t u m p, *Atonement*, Chapter 2.

[37] It would be a mistake to suppose that her suffering increased simultaneously and correlatively. Nothing about the role of suffering in flourishing implies that the suffering and the flourishing are simultaneous.

On the complex thought in the Pauline Epistle, in virtue of suffering, a person can grow in flourishing, even with irremediable and significant impediments to thriving of body or mind, until there is in her life such flourishing that it is right to think of it as glory. And—to take the next part of the Epistle's thought—the affliction that a person suffers in this process will have a correlated consolation in the presence of God with her.

Tubman's flourishing came to her in virtue of her suffering, and the result is that her life is an example of the best a human life can be. The connection that the Epistle makes between suffering and glory is illustrated in her life. And so is the Epistle's claim that consolation increases with affliction. That Harriet Tubman is as exceptional in her on-going religious experience as in her great-heartedness and her suffering is evident not only from her own testimony but also that of others who knew her. Her contemporary biographer summed the matter up this way:

> [Harriet] spoke of 'consulting with God,' and trusted that He would keep her safe. Thomas Garrett once said of her, 'I never met with any person of any color who had more confidence in the voice of God, as spoken direct to her soul.'[38]

Thomas Garrett's evaluation of Harriet Tubman's religious life is surely right. At any rate, it is highly doubtful whether any of those in the relatively well-to-do slaveholding communities around her lived in the kind of on-going powerful religious experience she had. And so the Epistle's correlation of glory and of consolation with suffering seems well illustrated in her life. On this way of thinking of suffering, it is not hard to see why Chrysostom would think that those who suffer more are also especially dear to God.

And here it is important to me to reiterate caveats I have made elsewhere also.

I am not claiming that the good of human flourishing justifies any human being in causing or permitting or failing to remedy suffering of the sort Tubman endured. To say that a person flourishes as she does at least in part in virtue of her suffering does not imply that it would be acceptable for another human being to permit it, or to cause it, or to refuse to remedy it if he could readily do so. It is one thing to claim that some suffering can lead to the flourishing of the sufferer and another thing entirely to claim that a person is justified in causing or allowing such suffering on the part of another for the sake of that flourishing.[39]

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[38] C l i n t o n, *Harriet Tubman*, 91.

[39] For discussion and defense of this claim, see S t u m p, *Wandering in Darkness*, Chapter 13. From the fact that an impediment of one part of a person can exist together with great thriving of the whole person, it does not follow that any such impediment itself is a good thing. It means only that an impediment with regard to one part of a human person can be completely eclipsed or defe-

Furthermore, nothing about suffering guarantees that a sufferer will grow in closeness to God; human free will rules out such guarantees.

In addition, the consolation that increases with affliction, as the Epistle describes it, may not come at the same time as the affliction; it may come only later. Even those who seem to lack all consolation because they are burdened by depression or something else that leaves them destitute of ordinary human peace may yet find that their suffering enables them to flourish later with greater peace and greater joy than others who have not experienced such desolation.

Finally, someone may suppose that, for every one person such as Harriet McBryde Johnson or Harriet Tubman, there are countless others who do not flourish in their suffering. But such a claim about the relative proportion of people who suffer without ever flourishing in consequence seems to me unsupported by any good evidence. Suffering is not always transparent even to the sufferer, let alone to those around the sufferer;[40] and flourishing is similarly not transparent either. In this respect, consider Sophie Scholl, who was executed by the Nazis after a speedy show trial and buried in an outcast's grave at what was then the edge of Munich. Hardly anyone around the world then knew who she was, or cared to know either. But now she is honored the world over for the flourishing of her life, and her grave is never without fresh flowers. So it is possible for a person both to suffer and to flourish in ways invisible to others, at least for a time, at least in this life. Consequently, the claim that most sufferers

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ated by the thriving of the whole person. In a related point regarding disability, Elizabeth Barnes has argued in various works that this claim: (1) disability by itself does not make a life worse than it otherwise would be, does not entail this claim: (2) it is morally permissible to cause disability or to fail to remedy disability. See, e.g., B a r n e s, "Disability, Minority and Difference," 339. Her position seems to me entirely correct. One can think of the point this way. An impediment to the flourishing of a part of a person Paula is something bad for that part; and insofar as it is bad for that part, it ought to be prevented or remedied if it can be so ceteris paribus. But it is also possible for Paula to thrive as a person in virtue of the impediment of one of her parts. In that case, Paula's personal thriving defeats the badness of the impediment to the flourishing of a part of Paula. When the badness of the impediment is defeated by the thriving of the whole person, then it may well be the case that the conditions in the ceteris paribus clause are not met. Consequently, in a case of that sort, Paula might well prefer to keep the impediment and to be glad of it (as, in an analogous case, the disability rights movement argues with respect to disability). But in cases where the prevention or the remedy of some impediment to the flourishing of a part of Paula would not diminish or destroy Paula's personal thriving, the prevention or remedy of the impediment ought to be sought. Since the impediment itself is some defect in a part of Paula, and since human beings are rarely in a position to know whether keeping or causing such a defect will enhance the personal thriving of a person who has that defect, then if a person Jerome caused or kept such a defect in Paula when he could readily prevent or repair it, Jerome's actions are not rendered morally permissible by any good effects that might follow for Paula.

[40] For further explication and defense of this claim, see S t u m p, *Wandering in Darkness*, Chapter 1, "Suffering: Theodicy and Defense," 3–22.

find no flourishing in their suffering is not only unsupported but in fact is such that empirical support for it is in principle hard to come by.

With these caveats underlined, it seems to me right to acknowledge that there is a connection between the flourishing of Tubman's life and the suffering she endured. It seems to me true to say, with the thought of the Epistle, that she flourished in virtue of her suffering. If there is something heart-breakingly shaming about the human species in consequence of its part in such horrors as the slavery of the ante-bellum South, then the gloriousness of Tubman's life is highlighted by contrast. With all the impediments as regards mind and body which were a suffering for her, who would not grant that the flourishing of her life greatly outranked that of the slaveholders whose lives had vastly less suffering than hers or even that of the Northerners who lived at ease and were content not to mingle themselves into the troubles of others? Who would pick one of those Southern slaveholders or those indifferent Northerners as exemplary of human flourishing? By contrast with the life of Harriet Tubman, their lives look sad or shaming for our species. And if, like the slaveholding Southerners or the uninterested Northerners, Tubman had just lived a life of relative wealth and comfort, it seems unlikely that she would have become the woman we now are honored to honor.

And so there is something deeply right in the traditional Christian attitude about suffering, as there is also something supremely right in the disability pride movement. A person is more than the sum of her mind and body, and there can be a magnificent flourishing of the whole person not in spite of but because of the suffering she endures.

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ABSTRACT /ABSTRAKT

Eleonore STUMP, Suffering and Flourishing
DOI 10.12887/32-2019-4-128-05

Although we sometimes praise a person who suffers for not sinking under his suffering, we still suppose that the sufferer is to be ranked more among life's losers than among life's winners. And, in general, we are inclined to find perverse anything that values suffering itself. On the contrary, anything that undermines physical or mental thriving strikes us as lamentable. The current disability rights movement is an exception to this general attitude. It wants others to see that those with disabilities are not among life's losers, or even among life's heroic overcomers of the tragic, but are instead people to celebrate. From

the Patristic period onward, the Christian tradition has held a roughly analogous position not as regards disability but rather as regards suffering in general. It has supposed that those who endure serious suffering are not the pitiable losers of life or even the heroic overcomers of tragedy but rather are those specially loved by God. In this paper, I want to look closely at the relevant Christian doctrines to see what can be said to explain this attitude towards suffering and to distinguish it from the neighboring perverse attitude that sees suffering as an intrinsic good.

Keywords: suffering and flourishing of a human person, disability, disability rights movement, the Christian approach to suffering

The present article is a revised version of an extract from Chapter 9 of Eleonore Stump's *Atonement* (Oxford: Oxford University, Press, 2018).

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Eleonore STUMP, Cierpienie a rozkwit człowieczeństwa

DOI 10.12887/32-2019-4-128-05

Mimo że niekiedy zdarza się nam wychwalać człowieka, który nie ugina się pod ciężarem cierpienia, pozostajemy w przekonaniu, że cierpiących należy postrzegać jako przegranych, nie zaś jako tych, którym się w życiu powiodło. We wszelkich próbach pozytywnego wartościowania cierpienia dostrzegamy ponadto pewną przewrotność. I przeciwnie, wszystko to, co zagraża ludzkiemu rozwojowi czy sukcesowi, natychmiast uznajemy za godne współczucia. Na tle takiego właśnie generalnego postrzegania cierpienia jako wyjątek jawi się ruch na rzecz praw osób niepełnosprawnych. Zmierza on do tego, by dostrzeżono, że osób dotkniętych niepełnosprawnością nie należy z góry zaliczać do ludzi przegranych w życiu, ani też widzieć w nich jednostek heroicznie przezwyciężających swój tragiczny los. Przeciwnie, należy upatrywać w nich osoby, których obecność trzeba uroczyście afirmować. Tradycja chrześcijańska już od okresu patrystycznego utrzymuje zasadniczo podobne stanowisko w kwestii cierpienia jako takiego. Zakłada ona, że ludzie dotknięci poważnym cierpieniem nie są przegranymi, którzy zasługują na współczucie, ani też osobami, które starają się w heroiczny sposób przeciwstawiać tragedii; zostali oni raczej w szczególny sposób umiłowani przez Boga. W obecnym tekście pragnę bliżej przyjrzeć się odnośnym doktrynom chrześcijańskim, aby wskazać na możliwy sposób uzasadnienia takiego właśnie pojmowania cierpienia i wyraźnie odróżnić to stanowisko od zbliżonego doń poglądu, który nakazuje dostrzegać w cierpieniu wewnętrzne dobro.

Słowa kluczowe: cierpienie i rozkwit osoby ludzkiej, niepełnosprawność, ruch na rzecz praw osób niepełnosprawnych, chrześcijańska interpretacja cierpienia

Artykuł stanowi zmienioną wersję fragmentu rozdziału dziewiątego książki Eleonore Stump *Atonement* (Oxford: Oxford University, Press, 2018).

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