Religious Studies (2016) **52**, 187–204 © Cambridge University Press 2015
doi:10.1017/S0034412515000013

Suffering and charity in the dark night of the soul

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Abstract: **Eleonore Stump's solution to the problem of suffering fails to show how God could be justified in permitting persons to suffer the dark night of the soul. In this article, I explain why and offer an amendment. I contend that a person who responds to the dark night in the right way experiences positive feedback between suffering and charity. This feedback not only enables the sufferer ultimately to attain his heart's desire but also explains why God is justified in permitting persons to suffer the dark night.**

Introduction

Eleonore Stump has argued that it is possible that an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly loving God is justified in permitting human beings to suffer the loss of the desires of their heart (Stump (2010), 465ff.). She argues for this claim by describing a possible world, one in which every such instance of suffering is defeated by serving as a means for God to enable persons ultimately to gain more of what they lost through the suffering. On Stump's view, it is possible that suffering the loss of one's heart's desire either deepens one's desire for God or moves one to value other things as gifts from God, and both of these changes help one eventually to regain one's heart's desires in a more significant way. Thus, according to Stump, in so far as there is a possible world in which every instance of suffering is a means by which God enables human beings to have more of what they care about, it is possible that God is justified in permitting human beings to suffer the loss of their heart's desires.

A phenomenon called the 'dark night of the soul', however, poses a difficulty for Stump's argument, even within the world of her defence.[1] As described by writers in the Christian mystical tradition, the dark night of the soul is a stage of spiritual

progress marked by a profound sense of abandonment and rejection by God, yet it afflicts only persons who have already taken union with God to be the deepest desire of their heart. In the dark night of the soul, a person suffers from the loss of his deepest heart's desire – union with God. Nevertheless, Stump's solution to the problem of suffering seems incapable of justifying God's permission of such a loss, not only because Stump never considers losing one's deepest heart's desire for union with God, but more importantly because her solution depends on one's desire for union with God being constantly open to fulfilment.

In this article, I explain Stump's theory of suffering and its defeat, and I show how the dark night of the soul presents a significant challenge to her view of the way in which God is justified in permitting persons to suffer the loss of their heart's desires. I go on to argue, however, that Stump's own views concerning charity can be used to show that there is an alternative means by which God can turn suffering in the dark night to the sufferer's advantage. I contend that the desire for and loss of personal union with God in the dark night of the soul constitutes a positive feedback system that dramatically increases a person's charity. In the world of Stump's defence, however, an increase in charity ensures an increase in the closeness of one's unending personal union with God, so the suffering present in the dark night is ultimately a means to a person's receiving a greater share of his deepest heart's desire. I conclude that Stump should welcome my analysis of suffering and its defeat in the dark night of the soul as a useful 'patch' to her solution to the problem of suffering.

Stump on suffering and its defeat

In this section, I summarize Stump's views on the different kinds of suffering that human beings experience, and why it is at least possible that God is justified in permitting human beings to suffer in these ways. This summary will provide the background against which the difficulty posed by the dark night of the soul can be better appreciated.

According to Stump, all suffering involves the loss of what we care about (Stump (2010), 10; subsequent references in this section cite this work). But, on Stump's view, the things we care about fall into two broad categories, so there are two corresponding kinds of suffering that must be treated by an adequate theodicy or defence. The first kind of suffering is due to the loss of goods that are essential to full human flourishing. For example, a person suffers whenever he or she is in poor health, since health is a good essential to full human flourishing, and flourishing is something that all human beings care about. The second kind of suffering is due to the loss of goods that we have 'set our heart's on', even if they are not essential to human flourishing. For example, a person may have his heart set on becoming an outstanding golfer. While being an outstanding golfer is not something necessary for full human flourishing, it is nevertheless something that a person can care about deeply, and so a person who has his heart set on becoming

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412515000013 Published online by Cambridge University Press

an outstanding golfer suffers when he is prevented from attaining his heart's desire.

On this view of suffering, the philosophical problem of suffering is the problem of showing how it could be that God is justified in allowing human beings[2] (a) to lose goods conducive to their flourishing and (b) to lose the objects of their heart's desires. In roughest outline, Stump's general strategy for solving the problem of suffering is to show that there is a possible world in which every instance of suffering is *defeated* (13). On her view, an instance of suffering is defeated when it constitutes the best means by which God can enable a person ultimately to receive a greater share of what he lost in the suffering.[3] So, for example, suffering over the loss of one's health is defeated when it is the best means by which God can enable one to attain a significantly greater degree of flourishing than is lost with the loss of health, and suffering over the loss of one's heart's desire is defeated when it is the best means by which God can enable one to attain that heart's desire to a greater degree or in some more significant way. Admittedly, Stump's criterion for the defeat of suffering is a demanding one, since it requires her to describe a world in which (i) every instance of human suffering is a means by which God brings about some benefit; (ii) every instance of suffering is the best available means by which God can bring about that benefit; (iii) the benefit in question is one that goes primarily to the sufferer; (iv) the benefit in question is a greater good than the good lost in the suffering; and (v) the benefit in question is one that the sufferer would be willing to trade his suffering to receive, were he to choose rationally on a complete understanding of the good being offered him (455). Nevertheless, Stump argues that the world of her defence is one in which every instance of suffering is defeated in the sense required by this criterion.

Since not every good needed for flourishing is the object of a heart's desire, and since not every heart's desire is directed to a good needed for flourishing, Stump's conception of the problem of suffering and its solution leads her to provide two distinct explanations for the defeat of suffering, one pertaining to the loss of goods needed for flourishing, and another pertaining to the loss of one's heart's desires. This article will be more concerned with the latter explanation, but it will be useful to say something about the former. Stump thinks it possible that God's allowing the loss of flourishing-related goods is justified because, in the world of her defence, every instance of suffering is the best available means by which God can enable a person to be willing to let God be close to him (457–463). Closeness and shared union with God sit at the intrinsic upper limit of the scale of objective value in the world of her defence (387ff.), so the opportunity to grow in closeness and shared union with God is the opportunity to flourish to a greater degree than the loss of any flourishing-related good could cause one to suffer (400–402). Furthermore, Stump argues that suffering itself can be the best means by which persons attain a greater closeness to God, in so far as a

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412515000013 Published online by Cambridge University Press

person's right response to suffering can remove the internal disintegration that prevents God from being close to him or her (461).

To say this much about Stump's explanation for suffering over the loss of flourishing-related goods does not even begin to do justice to her detailed and nuanced accounts of value, flourishing, closeness, and internal integration. Nevertheless, to say just this much does show why a different explanation is needed to account for suffering over the loss of one's heart's desires. For suppose that a husband has set his heart on his wife and desires more than anything else that she live and be together with him. If the husband has set his heart on his wife in this way, it seems possible that such a husband would be willing to trade his own flourishing in order to keep his wife with him. If, then, his wife were to die, the husband's suffering over her death could not be defeated in the way outlined above, since even if his suffering were a means for God to enable him to flourish, his own flourishing might be something he cares less about than having his wife with him. Thus, to the defence focused on the objective side of what we care about, there must be added a different defence that deals with the subjective side.

The general claim regulating both sides of Stump's solution to the problem of suffering is that, in the world of the defence, every instance of suffering is the best means by which God can enable persons to receive more of what they lost through the suffering. Stump concedes, however, that applying this general claim to suffering over the loss of one's heart's desires seems problematic, since the particularity of one's heart's desires makes it hard to see how one could ever receive from God *more of* one's heart's desire. For example, if one's heart is set on one's wife, or on being an outstanding golfer, what besides one's wife or being an excellent golfer could possibly fulfil those desires of one's heart? Stump's answer to this question turns on her account of the scale of subjective value and the way in which items on that scale can be related to each other. In Stump's view, the measure for subjective value is *depth*, where what a person values most as his heart's desire is intrinsically deepest on the scale, and deeper relative to all other more superficial desires (437). Thus, for a husband who has fixed his heart on his wife, his wife is deepest on his scale of subjective value. Furthermore, things on the subjective scale can be related to each other by deriving their value from other things deeper on the scale. For example, the husband who has fixed his heart on his wife can value a certain key chain because it was a gift from his wife. The subjective value the key chain has for him is measured by its connection to his wife, not primarily by its own characteristics.

Stump's account of the scale of subjective value and the ways in which items on the scale can be related points out a way in which the very same heart's desire can be desired in two different ways and thus acquire two different degrees of subjective value. Suppose that the same man has heart's desires both for his wife and for becoming an outstanding golfer, but that his desire for his wife is deeper than his desire to become an outstanding golfer. Consider now his desire to become an outstanding golfer. On Stump's view, there are two ways in which the husband

could desire this. On the one hand, he could desire it simply, without any relation to his heart's desire for his wife. For example, the husband's golf habit might be something to which his wife is indifferent and that neither adds to nor subtracts from the quality of their relationship. In such a case, becoming an outstanding golfer has only the subjective value due to it from its place on the husband's subjective scale. On the other hand, the husband could desire to become an excellent golfer as something somehow related to his deeper heart's desire for his wife. For example, the husband might have received as a gift from his wife a year's worth of lessons with a top golf professional. In such a case, becoming an outstanding golfer has not only its own subjective value, but also the subjective value it derives from its connection to his wife. In Stump's terminology, when a heart's desire for A derives new additional subjective value by acquiring some connection to a deeper heart's desire for B, the heart's desire for A is said to be 'interwoven' with the heart's desire for B (442).

According to Stump, the notion of interwoven desires can be used not only to show how a person might be positioned to receive more of his heart's desire than he was previously positioned to receive but also to explain the role of suffering as a means to receiving more of one's heart's desires. On Stump's account, a person becomes positioned to attain his heart's desire for A to a greater degree or in a more significant way when his desire for A becomes interwoven with his heart's desire for B, which desire is deeper than the desire for A. For example, the husband attains his heart's desire to be an excellent golfer in a more significant way when he attains his goal through the gift of his wife, who is his deepest heart's desire, than when he attains it merely by his own efforts.

Furthermore, Stump argues that, in the world of her defence, there is the potential for any heart's desire to receive additional subjective value by being interwoven with a heart's desire for God. This is because, regardless of what a person *happens* to take as his deepest heart's desire, it is always the case that he *ought* to take God as his deepest desire, since, in the world of the defence, every person has in his deepest core an inbuilt desire for God, and a person's failure to take God as his deepest heart's desire will inevitably leave him with a vague, ill-understood, or dimly grasped sense that he is missing something on which his heart is set (441). Thus, on Stump's view, there are two changes to the structure of a person's heart's desires that stand to increase the subjective value of any given item on the scale. The first change occurs when a person takes God to be his deepest heart's desire, and the second occurs when his desire for an item on the scale is interwoven with his deepest heart's desire for God. Furthermore, according to Stump, suffering the loss of one's heart's desires can be the best available means to effecting both of these changes in the structure of a person's subjective values. Concerning these changes, Stump writes:

> [T]he suffering endured by the loss of the heart's desires enables increased closeness to God. Flourishing of that sort enables an increase in desire for God and shared union with God as

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412515000013 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> the deepest heart's desire. And this in turn enables the integration of other heart's desires into this deepest desire. (464)

Suffering over the loss of one's heart's desires, then, can be a means to gaining those desires in a more significant way either by enabling greater closeness to God or by interweaving one's desire for the good lost with one's deepest heart's desire for God.

But on Stump's view, it is not only the case that suffering over the loss of one's heart's desires changes the structure of one's subjective values, it is also the case that the structure of one's subjective values can change the nature of one's suffering over the loss of a heart's desire. For, in so far as God is omnipresent and always makes personal union with himself available to every person, human beings are never deprived of their deepest heart's desire, which makes the loss of other heart's desires easier to bear in the present and keeps alive a hope for their fulfilment in the future. Indeed, Stump argues that the consolation experienced by a human being from his union with God is felt with increased intensity in direct proportion to his suffering (406). Stump summarizes her view in this way:

> [I]f a person loses or fails to receive a heart's desire in the process of deepening her closeness to God, she will grieve, because she has lost something that she had set her heart on. But, even so, what is at the center of the web of desire for her is *not* lost. Things do not fall apart for her; the center holds. And, because what is at that center is a perfectly loving God, even in grief she need not, should not, abandon her desire for the heart's desires she lost or failed to have . . . [B]ecause the person who is her deepest heart's desire is also perfectly good and loving, she can trust him to give her the desires of her heart, in one form or another, but recognizable in their particularity. (449–450)

In the world of Stump's theodicy, then, suffering due to the loss of one's heart's desires is a means to regaining one's heart's desires in a more significant way. Such suffering not only inclines one to take God as the deepest desire of one's heart but also interweaves every other desire with one's deepest desire for God, thereby investing every other desire with additional value derived from one's deepest heart's desire. A person, therefore, who suffers the loss of his heart's desire, but who is changed by his suffering in these ways, stands to attain his heart's desire in a far more significant way in the future.

For the purposes of this article, it will be useful before moving on to highlight two features of Stump's account of the defeat of suffering due to the loss of a heart's desire. The first is that suffering over the loss of a heart's desire is not defeated unless it is possible for that suffering either (a) to make a person's desire for God deeper on the subjective scale or (b) to interweave a heart's desire with his deepest heart's desire for God. The second feature is that neither of these changes in the structure of a person's subjective values is possible unless God is actually present to the person, consoling him within a dynamic and ongoing personal union and strengthening his desire for greater closeness with God.

Mother Teresa's 'dark night of the soul'

Having summarized Stump's positions on suffering and its defeat, I move now to develop a problem for her account, a problem that arises from features internal to the possible world in which Stump's defence is supposed to take place. Roughly speaking, the problem is that, even in the world of Stump's defence, some persons who take God and union with God as their deepest heart's desire suffer the loss of their deepest heart's desire. That is, through no fault of their own, persons lose any sense of dynamic personal union with God. But, as we have seen, the defeat of suffering due to the loss of one's heart's desires depends crucially on the relationship of those desires to one's deepest desire for God and union with God. It seems, then, Stump's defence has no resources to explain how this suffering could be defeated.

Let us say that a person suffers a 'dark night of the soul' if that person has God and union with God as his or her deepest heart's desire but who suffers from the loss of any sense of dynamic personal union with God.[4] It seems that Mother Teresa suffered a dark night of the soul in this sense, and it will be useful to examine Mother Teresa's case in order to get a grip on the nature and severity of the problem for Stump's account.

If we take her words at face value, it is clear that Mother Teresa suffered from the lack of any sense of union with God for the last fifty years of her life. In a typical passage, Mother Teresa writes of her darkness to her spiritual director, Joseph Neuner:

> Now Father – since [19]49 or 50 this terrible sense of loss – this untold darkness – this loneliness – this continual longing for God – which gives me that pain deep down in my heart. – Darkness is such that I really do not see – neither with my mind nor with my reason. – The place of God in my soul is blank. – There is no God in me. – When the pain of longing is so great – I just long & long for God – and then it is that I feel – He does not want me – He is not there. . . . God does not want me. – Sometimes – I just hear my own heart cry out – 'My God' and nothing else comes. – The torture and pain I can't explain. (Mother Teresa (2007), 1–2)[5]

And in another place, she writes:

> Lord, my God, who am I that You should forsake me? The child of your love – and now become as the most hated one – the one You have thrown away as unwanted – unloved. I call, I cling, I want – and there is no One to answer – no One on Whom I can cling – no, No One. – Alone. The darkness is so dark – and I am alone. – Unwanted, forsaken. – The loneliness of the heart that wants love is unbearable . . . Love – the word – it brings nothing. – I am told God loves me – and yet the reality of darkness & coldness & emptiness is so great that nothing touches my soul. (*ibid.*, 188)

While a complete analysis of these passages is beyond the scope of this article,[6] the passages make two things clear: (i) Mother Teresa regarded God as relationally distant from her, and (ii) the experience of God's relational distance caused Mother Teresa to suffer. Other parts of Mother Teresa's writings confirm that she endured this sense of God's distance continuously from 1950 until her

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412515000013 Published online by Cambridge University Press

death in 1997.[7] Since suffering at another person's perceived relational distance is contrary to an ongoing, dynamic personal union with that person, it is clear that Mother Teresa suffered from the absence of personal union with God.

It is likewise clear that Mother Teresa suffered the loss of personal union with God not as the loss of one good among many, but rather as the loss of her deepest heart's desire. Her writings are filled with passages like the following:

> All these years I have only wanted one thing – to know and do the Will of God. And now even in this hard and deep darkness – I keep on wanting only that. The rest He has taken all – and I think, He has destroyed everything in me. (*ibid.*, 191)
>
> I want God with all the powers of my soul – and yet there between us – there is terrible separation . . . My soul is not one with You – and yet when alone in the streets – I talk to You for hours – of my longing for You. (*ibid.*, 193)

For at least two reasons, these passages are good evidence that Mother Teresa's heart's desire for God and union with God was her deepest heart's desire. First, there are Mother Teresa's self-reports about the content and strength of her desires. She says that she has 'only wanted one thing', and that this one thing was to know and do God's will. Furthermore, she says that she wants God with 'all the powers of her soul'. Since Mother Teresa believed knowing and doing God's will to be constitutive of union with God (*ibid.*, 223), her self-report is good evidence that she desired God and union with God more deeply than anything else. Second, there is the way in which God's relational distance affected all of her other heart's desires. Mother Teresa speaks of everything in her being 'destroyed', and she says that 'the rest' has been 'taken' by God. These comments are readily explained if God and union with God were deepest among Mother Teresa's heart's desires and interwoven with every other desire. Indeed, if 'the rest' of Mother Teresa's heart's desires received most of their subjective value for her derivatively from their relation to her heart's desire for God, then the loss of dynamic union with God would mean that none of her other heart's desires could be properly fulfilled. Thus, it seems that Mother Teresa's desire for God and union with God was deepest among her heart's desires; it was also interwoven with every other desire, such that all her other desires became impossible to fulfil when she lost her dynamic personal union with God.

The evidence concerning Mother Teresa's experience of God's relational distance and her deep desire for God suggests that Mother Teresa suffered a dark night of the soul in the sense defined above. Consequently, on the assumption that an experience like Mother Teresa's is possible in the world of Stump's defence,[8] the case of Mother Teresa raises a problem for Stump's account of suffering and its defeat. As we have seen, on Stump's account, suffering over the loss of a heart's desire is defeated only if it is possible for that suffering either to move a person's heart's desire for God deeper within his web of subjective values or to interweave the heart's desire into his heart's desire for God. Nevertheless, the particular type of suffering experienced by Mother Teresa does

not seem to be a means to realizing either of these possibilities for her, since her suffering was caused by the loss of her deepest heart's desire for God, and on Stump's account, it is only through fulfilment of one's deepest heart's desire for God that other heart's desires can be interwoven and their loss defeated.

The problem, then, for Stump's view is that the type of suffering experienced by Mother Teresa does not seem susceptible of defeat in the way that she describes for other heart's desires. This is a significant problem for Stump's defence, since it raises the more serious worry that, even in the world of her defence, not every instance of suffering is defeated.

Mother Teresa's dark night as a positive feedback system

My solution to the problem for Stump's account takes her general approach to the defeat of suffering as its starting point. That is, my solution aims to show that, even for a person suffering a dark night of the soul, there is a way in which that suffering can enable a person ultimately to receive more of what she lost in the suffering. My arguments so far have ruled out applying Stump's solution to suffering in the dark night, since there is no way for a person to get more of his or her deepest heart's desire for God by interweaving that heart's desire with others. Thus, if the suffering proper to the dark night can be defeated, it must be by some means other than the one identified by Stump.

Nevertheless, I will argue that Stump's views regarding charity and suffering can be extended in certain ways that help to show how suffering like Mother Teresa's can be defeated. More precisely, I will argue that suffering and charity in a dark night can constitute a *positive feedback system* by which God increases a person's degree of charity. In turn, this increase in charity positions the sufferer to attain her heart's desire for God in a more significant way. Roughly speaking, a positive feedback system is any ampliative system of inputs and outputs in which the output is reintroduced to the system as input, thereby increasing the overall output of the system indefinitely (Ziegler et al. (2000), 55). A familiar example of positive feedback occurs when a microphone picks up the output from its own speaker. Positive feedback, however, is also an important phenomenon in chemical, biological, economic, sociological, and economic systems. Applying the idea of positive feedback to the case of Mother Teresa's dark night, I will contend that, if in cooperation with God's grace Mother Teresa accepted her suffering out of love for God, Mother Teresa grew in charity, but this increase in charity then caused her to suffer even more intensely at God's absence. By repeated cycles of suffering and acceptance under cooperative grace, Mother Teresa might be seen to have experienced great growth in charity due to her experience of God's absence.

In order to establish my claim that there exists a positive feedback system within certain experiences of the dark night of the soul, I will explain and defend three principles concerning suffering, the increase of charity, and the desire for union

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412515000013 Published online by Cambridge University Press

with God that together formally characterize a positive feedback system. In order of increasing contentiousness, these principles are:

1. The intensity of a human's desire for union with God is proportional to her degree of charity.
2. The intensity of any instance of human suffering is proportional to the intensity of the desire for the good lost in suffering.
3. The increase in charity that results from accepting suffering in the appropriate way is proportional to the intensity of the suffering accepted.

I will argue that, on Stump's views of charity, the mechanisms of grace, and the most appropriate way to accept suffering, we have good reason to think that the above principles are applicable in the case of Mother Teresa's dark night, and therefore that Mother Teresa's dark night might have been for her a means for significant growth in charity. If it is plausible that Mother Teresa's suffering at God's absence played some crucial role in a positive feedback system by which God increased her charity, then her suffering in the dark night could have been a means for her ultimately to receive more of her deepest heart's desire for God. I will conclude by responding to some objections to the principles themselves and to their application to the case of Mother Teresa.

Charity and desire for union with God

Let us turn first to principle (1). Charity, on Stump's view, is simply the love of God, which is a matter of two interconnected desires (Stump (2010), ch. 5). The first desire is for God's good, and a person has this desire in so far as he desires that God's will be fulfilled by creatures and that God exist and be Himself. The second desire of charity is for union with God, and this desire is fulfilled through mutual closeness and significant personal presence with God (*ibid.*, 91). On Stump's account of charity, principle (1) is a conceptual truth. That is, it is a conceptual truth that the intensity of a person's desire for union with God is proportional to her degree of charity. For, on Stump's view, the two desires of charity are interconnected, since a human being cannot desire God's good without desiring union with God, and vice versa. The connection between the two desires of charity arises from the fact that, in the world of Stump's defence, the ultimate human good is *identical* to union with God, and also that God desires every human being to achieve his or her ultimate good (*ibid.*, 386–388). Thus, a human being who rightly desires that God's will be fulfilled thereby desires union with God, and a person who rightly desires union with God thereby desires that God's will be fulfilled. Since growth in charity is nothing more than a person's more intensely desiring God's good and union with God, it follows that, as one's degree of charity increases, the intensity of one's desire for union with God increases.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412515000013 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Love and suffering

We turn next to principle (2), which states that there is a relation of proportionality between the intensity of a person's suffering and the intensity of his or her desire for the good lost in the suffering. As mentioned above, Stump thinks that suffering arises from the loss of what we care about, and what we care about can be divided into goods that conduce to our flourishing and goods that we have set our hearts on. Consider a case in which Sam suffers due to the loss of some good, say, his ability to play golf. On Stump's view, Sam might care about golfing either as something that contributes to his flourishing (e.g. as exercise) or as something that he values for purely subjective reasons, either simply, or as interwoven with other deeper desires (e.g. his heart's desire for his wife). Given the two ways in which Sam might care about golfing, Sam might suffer from his loss in two ways. On the one hand, the golfing conduces to Sam's flourishing, so Sam will suffer more at its loss to the extent that golfing is something conducive to his objective good. On the other hand, golfing might be something that Sam has 'set his heart on' for purely subjective reasons, so Sam will suffer more at its loss to the extent that golfing is deeper on his scale of subjective values.

Stump's analysis of suffering can also help us to see what might mitigate Sam's suffering due to the loss of his ability to play golf. Indeed, Sam's suffering will be reduced to the extent that he has access to other goods he cares about. For example, if Sam has other ways to exercise besides golfing, or other ways to get his golf 'fix', or other ways to remember and cherish his wife, then Sam's care for these things to some degree swamps the suffering he experiences at losing his ability to play golf.

On Stump's view of suffering, then, the intensity of any instance of suffering will be proportional to both the objective goodness of the good lost and one's subjective attachment to it, and inversely proportional to the number and intensity of desires one has for goods besides the good lost. Since objective goodness, subjective attachment, and exclusivity are all factors that contribute to the intensity of one's desire for some good, principle (2) provides a tidy summary of these proportionality claims when it says that the intensity of a person's suffering over some lost good is proportional to the intensity of her desire for the good lost.

Increase in charity and acceptance of suffering

We turn finally to principle (3), which maintains that the increase in charity one receives by accepting suffering appropriately is proportional to the intensity of the suffering one appropriately accepts. Consider again Sam, and suppose that Sam is now suffering at the death of his wife, for whom Sam had a deep heart's desire. Assuming that Sam has an even deeper heart's desire for God and for union with God, how should Sam respond to his suffering in the situation?

According to Stump, the short answer is to say that Sam should respond to suffering by imitating Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane (Stump (n.d.), 13). In

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412515000013 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the Garden, Christ is seen to possess both a desire for and aversion to His impending death. According to Stump, we can make sense of the tension in Christ's will by reference to the will's hierarchical structure (*ibid.*; Stump (2010), 132). For example, a human being might will to have a certain good, such as his life. For Stump, this is a 'first-order will', and Christ's aversion to death is His first-order will for something rightly loved as good, namely, His own life. But a human being might also will to have a will that is oriented in a particular way, such as a will that no longer wills to smoke. For Stump, this is a 'second-order will', and Christ's will to suffer and die is His second-order desire for a will that wills what God wills. Since God willed that Christ should suffer and die, Christ accepted His suffering and death from His second-order will, and God strengthened Christ to form a first-order will corresponding to this second-order will without annihilating His first-order will not to die.

Stump calls the appropriate response to suffering the 'Thomistic will', where the Thomistic will is the complex first- and second-order state of will modelled by Christ in the Garden. She writes:

> In the Thomistic will, there is a surrender of the self (because of the second-order desire for willing what God wills even when it is contrary to one's own first-order will) but not an abandonment of the self (because of the persisting first-order desire for what is lost in suffering). Furthermore, although the Thomistic will is still an internally divided state, it does have an integrated character. The will is not at war with itself, because the second-order volition rules the first-order desires. (Stump (n.d.), 16)

Every instance of suffering is an occasion for a person to grow in charity because every instance of suffering is an occasion to form the Thomistic will. While Sam upon losing his wife can rage against his suffering, he can also accept his wife's death by forming the Thomistic will, which not only draws on God's grace when he acts from his second-order will for a will that wills what God wills, but also preserves Sam's humanity by allowing him to retain his heart's desire for his wife. A person who forms the Thomistic will in response to suffering increases in charity, since God strengthens the person with grace to form a first-order volition in accord with God's own.

Having now described the appropriate response to suffering, we return to principle (3), which states that the increase in charity one receives from accepting suffering in the appropriate way is proportional to the intensity of the suffering accepted. In support of (3), consider that to form the Thomistic will in response to suffering is to act from a second-order will to have a will in harmony with God's will. Furthermore, to form the Thomistic will in this way is to act through a first-order will contrary to one's persisting first-order will for the lost good. Now it is a greater act of charity to form the Thomistic will when one's persisting first-order will for some lost good is more intense. For example, it is a greater act of charity for Sam to form the Thomistic will at the death of his wife than at the death of someone entirely unknown to him. Moreover, the more intense one's persisting

first-order will for some lost good, the greater one's suffering at the loss. Hence, it follows that it is a greater act of charity to accept suffering through the Thomistic will when the suffering accepted is greater. Consequently, since the virtue of charity increases more with greater acts of charity, the increase in charity from accepting suffering through the Thomistic will is proportional to the intensity of suffering accepted. I conclude that principle (3) is true on Stump's views concerning suffering and the love of God: someone who accepts suffering by imitating Christ in the Garden receives grace to grow in charity in the measure that he suffers.

Positive feedback between suffering and charity in Mother Teresa's dark night

We return now to Mother Teresa's dark night in order to see how principles (1)–(3) help to illuminate a positive feedback system increasing both her suffering and charity. Consider Mother Teresa during her dark night, and suppose that the cause of her suffering is the loss of dynamic, personal union with God. If we suppose that Mother Teresa accepted her suffering by forming the Thomistic will, then her act of charity together with God's grace constitutes a positive feedback system that takes as its input Mother Teresa's initial degree of charity, and, through forming the Thomistic will at God's absence, produces as its output an even greater degree of charity. To see this, consider Mother Teresa at the outset of her experience of the dark night of the soul. By principle (2), Mother Teresa suffered intensely at losing union with God, since this good was both maximally conducive to her flourishing and deepest among her heart's desires, and no other goods could mitigate the suffering caused by this loss.[9] If we suppose, however, that Mother Teresa accepted her suffering by forming the Thomistic will, it follows by principle (3) that Mother Teresa received a proportionately great increase in charity. But if Mother Teresa experienced an increase in charity, then it follows by principle (1) that she also came to possess a more intense desire for union with God. But then, since her desire for union with God increased, it follows by principle (2) that her suffering also increased. In this way, the output of the system feeds back into the input of the system, and so a person who continually forms the Thomistic will in response to her suffering the dark night of the soul is poised to receive from God an unlimited increase in the virtue of charity.

Charity and the fulfilment of the heart's desire for God

If my argument here is correct, then the suffering present in a dark night like that of Mother Teresa's is a means for human beings to undergo a significant increase in their degree of charity. But, in the world of Stump's defence, this is just to say that suffering of the kind present in the dark night is a means for a person ultimately to receive a greater share of one's deepest heart's desire for God. For, in the world of Stump's defence, every human life is divided into a portion spent on

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412515000013 Published online by Cambridge University Press

earth and a portion spent either in permanent isolation from God or in permanent union with God (Stump (2010), 390). But even if attaining permanent union with God is an all-or-nothing affair, the closeness of one's permanent union with God comes in degrees, and one's degree of closeness depends only on the intensity of one's desire for closeness with God. Stump puts the point in this way:

> [T]he degree of closeness between God and any particular human being is solely dependent on the will of the human being in question. This point applies even to those in union with God in heaven. For this reason, how close to God a human person is in heaven . . . is a function only of how much of God's love she wants and is willing to receive. Therefore, in the unending shared union with God in heaven, each person has all the union with God and all the greatness of human persons that she desires. (*ibid.*, 391)

In the world of Stump's defence, God's perfect goodness ensures that every person ultimately attains whatever degree of closeness he or she desires. Consequently, an increase in a person's degree of charity during earthly life positions him or her to receive a closer personal union unendingly with God. Because of this, and because of the feedback between suffering and charity in his dark night, a person who suffers a dark night of the soul and who accepts his or her suffering by forming the Thomistic will stands to attain his heart's desire in far greater measure. Since this benefit extended by God to such a person meets the criteria for the defeat of suffering outlined above, I conclude that the feedback system between suffering and charity in the dark night of the soul constitutes a means by which one of the more difficult problems of suffering might be explained and resolved.

Objections and replies

Alienation from first-order volitions

Principle (2) says that the intensity of a person's suffering is proportional to his subjective attraction to the good he has lost. Someone might object to this claim by pointing out that it is possible for human beings to be alienated from their first-order volitions. Consequently, suffering might arise from second-order volitions whose intensity is not proportional to one's first-order attraction to a lost good.[10] For example, consider Max, an intemperate smoker. As an intemperate smoker, Max has a strong first-order will to smoke, but he also has a second-order will that he will not to smoke. Max is thus somewhat alienated from his first-order will to smoke. Now, if and when Max experiences a strong first-order will to smoke but cannot smoke (say, during a departmental meeting), Max suffers, but his suffering arises not only from his inability to smoke, but also from his loathing himself for wanting to smoke. But the suffering that Max experiences from self-loathing is not necessarily proportional to the intensity of his first-order attraction to smoking: Max might loathe himself intensely for even the slightest urge to smoke. Thus, says the objector, principle (2) is false.

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In reply, I note that even if the intensity of the suffering one experiences from a conflict between first- and second-order volitions is not proportional to one's degree of first-order attraction, this does not imply that the total amount of suffering one experiences from the loss of the good is not so proportional. Indeed, Max might suffer in *several* ways in the situation, and surely, even if Max loathes himself on the second-order level for wanting to smoke, and even if his second-order loathing is not proportional to his first-order will to smoke, he will suffer proportionately more on the whole for having a stronger first-order desire to smoke. Thus, if a person suffers from alienation from his first-order desires, the intensity of such a person's suffering will be *at least* proportional to the intensity of his first-order subjective attraction, if not *greater*. Hence, the possibility of alienation from one's first-order volitions does not undermine the role of principle (2) in the positive feedback system.

Alternative motives for forming the Thomistic will

Principle (3) says that the increase in charity one receives from accepting suffering in the appropriate way is proportional to the intensity of the suffering accepted. One might object to this principle, however, on the grounds that it is possible to form the Thomistic will from motives other than the love of God. Consider, for instance, a Nazi guard who is deliberating about whether to shoot a prisoner who has broken a rule. Suppose that the guard is internally conflicted, having not only a first-order will not to shoot the prisoner but also a second-order will to will what the camp commandant wills (namely, to shoot rule-breakers). If the guard shoots the prisoner despite his first-order will not to shoot, it appears that the guard's volitional structure matches the Thomistic will: the guard acts from a second-order will for a will that wills what the commandant wills while retaining a first-order will to the contrary. Nevertheless, it seems unlikely that the Nazi guard grows in charity by this act, so no matter how much the guard may have suffered from shooting the prisoner, he did not experience a proportionate increase in charity. Thus, principle (3) fails: charity does not increase with the intensity of suffering.[11]

In reply, I say that it is not clear that the Nazi guard accepts his suffering in the appropriate way because it is not clear that the guard accepts his suffering in a way that models Christ's acceptance in the Garden. But even if one concedes that the Nazi guard forms the Thomistic will, the objection can be avoided simply by restricting the scope of principle (3) to those cases where a person forms a Thomistic will out of a desire for a will that wills what God wills. We can then maintain that principle (3) is true in cases where a person accepts suffering out of love for God, and, since persons suffering the dark night accept God's absence out of love for God, principle (3) is true in the relevant class of cases. The possibility of alternate (and disordered) motives, therefore, does not undermine the possibility of the positive feedback system for charity.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412515000013 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The object of Mother Teresa's suffering

In explaining how the positive feedback system might have been instantiated in Mother Teresa's experience of the dark night, I assumed above that she suffered from the loss of union with God. One might object to this assumption, however, by saying that the good she lost during her dark night was not *union with God* but rather the *phenomenal experience* of union with God, i.e. its merely *seeming* to her that God loved and cared for her. For, on standard Christian doctrine, God is omnipresent, and it is plausible that anyone who does not reject God is able to access God's goodness or love, whether or not this access is accompanied by phenomenal experience. If, then, we assume that Mother Teresa's dark night was not the result of rejecting God, it follows that Mother Teresa was not ultimately cut off from God's goodness or love and therefore could not suffer the loss of union with God. Furthermore, once one concedes that Mother Teresa suffered not from the loss of union with God but from the loss of the experience of that union, it is no longer clear that the positive feedback system could occur within her dark night, since it is not obvious that the mere experience of union is sufficiently objectively valuable to drive a feedback system, or that Mother Teresa was sufficiently subjectively attracted to the mere experience of union as her deepest heart's desire.

In reply, I say that there is a perfectly good sense in which a good is lost to a person when that person can no longer experience that good. For example, if Sam's wife were kidnapped and never again seen by Sam, there is a perfectly good sense in which Sam has lost not only the *experience* of his wife, but also his *wife* and *union with his wife*, even if the kidnappers kept Sam's wife alive and fully informed of Sam's activities. Typically, human beings have and enjoy goods through their experience of them, and this is particularly true when the good in question is another person. Consequently, when a person's experience of a certain good is inhibited, that good is thereby 'lost' to the person, even if the good itself remains intact. Hence, this objection cannot succeed without an additional argument for the claim that this ordinary sense of a good's being lost to a person does not apply in the case of Mother Teresa's loss of God and union with God.

Nevertheless, let us grant for the sake of argument that Mother Teresa lost not union with God but the experience of union with God. The objection still fails to show that the positive feedback system at issue cannot exist. For the only requirements on a good suitable to drive the feedback system are that (a) a person's desire for the good increases with increasing charity and that (b) appropriately accepting the absence of this good increases the person's charity. Furthermore, it is plausible that the experience of God is a good that fulfils both of these requirements. To see this, suppose that Mother Teresa has lost the experience of union with God. Even though the experience of God is a good far less valuable than union with God, it is still a great good and one that lovers of God should desire.[12] Mother Teresa therefore suffers at lacking the experience of union with God, in so far as she suffers at

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412515000013 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the loss of something good for her and something she correctly desires. Suppose further that she accepts this suffering by forming the Thomistic will. Then, since God by grace strengthens her first-order will for a will that wills what God wills, Mother Teresa grows in charity, and therefore in her desire for union with God. But this increased desire for union with God will lead her to suffer more intensely at the absence of the experience of union with God, and thus the feedback cycle is secured.

Conclusion

In this article, I have argued that, by itself, Stump's defence is insufficient to show that the suffering experienced by human beings in the dark night of the soul is defeated. On Stump's view, a person's suffering over the loss of his heart's desires is defeated only if that suffering either moves him to take God as his deepest heart's desire or interweaves his heart's desire with his deepest heart's desire. Since these options are not open to a person suffering the dark night of the soul, Stump's defence cannot explain how every instance of human suffering helps persons to gain more of what they lost through the suffering. On the other hand, I have argued that Stump's views regarding charity and suffering can be used to show that there is another means by which the suffering experienced by persons in the dark night of the soul is conducive to their ultimately receiving more of their heart's desires. Within the dark night of the soul, positive feedback occurs between a person's degrees of suffering and charity when he or she accepts suffering by forming the Thomistic will. Thus, a person who responds to suffering in the dark night in the right way stands to receive an ever closer union with God, and thus an ever more perfect fulfilment of his deepest heart's desire.[13]

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412515000013 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Notes

1. For the paradigmatic account of the dark night of the soul, see John of the Cross (1990). For an important related account, see Teresa of Avila (2007), 86–145.
2. Stump restricts her attention to the involuntary suffering of innocent, mentally fully functional adults. She thus excludes consideration of the involuntary suffering of children, mentally handicapped persons, or non-rational animals, whose suffering might require a different explanation.
3. That is, provided that the sufferer respond to the suffering in the right way. Thus, it would be more precise to say that the aim is to show that, possibly, every instance of suffering offers the *opportunity* ultimately to receive a greater share of whatever one has lost through the suffering.
4. I do not claim to be providing a sufficient condition for the dark night of the soul that holds generally. It is not clear that the 'dark night of the soul' is experienced in the same way by every person. For a more general account of the dark night and its various manifestations, see Garrigou-Lagrange (1937), chs 5, 6.
5. The extensive hyphenation is Mother Teresa's own and characteristic of her hasty writing style.
6. For such an analysis, see Bungum (2013).
7. The one exception was a brief respite in 1958 in which she said she had been relieved of 'the long darkness . . . that strange suffering of ten years'. Five weeks later, however, the darkness resumed and remained until her death. See Mother Teresa (2007), 177.
8. Notably, Stump does not rule out the occurrence of dark night experiences in the world of her defence. See Stump (2010), 407.
9. Recall Mother Teresa's comment that everything was 'destroyed' her by God's absence.
10. Thanks to Eleonore Stump for this objection.
11. Thanks to Dane Muckler for this objection.
12. If Stump is correct that the fulfilment of charity involves the experience of union, then Stump's broadly Thomistic view of charity implies that a human being should desire experience of God out of charity Stump (2010), 117. Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II–II, q. 25, a. 2, where Aquinas contends that charity should be loved out of charity.
13. I am grateful to Eleonore Stump, Dane Muckler, and to an anonymous referee for helpful comments on earlier drafts.