Jeff Malpas · Norelle Lickiss *Editors*

Perspectives on Human Suffering

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Foreword

His Excellency, the Honourable Peter Underwood AC, Governor of Tasmania

The philosopher Thomas Hobbes, in his 1651 treatise *Leviathan* written during the English Civil War, famously concluded that without the protection of political society people's lives would be 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short'. The bluntness of the statement reinforces the reality that governance by laws reduces individual and collective suffering. It is equally the case that medical treatment reduces suffering. Arguably therefore these two great pillars of civilization—the legal and the medical—exist in their sophistication substantially because of human suffering. Hence to examine the phenomenon is to examine considerably more than pain and anguish; a feat ably achieved in *Perspectives on Human Suffering*.

The task is complex, ranging as it must from overarching philosophical considerations (of which the progenitor may be the frequently invoked 'The Book of Job'), through great ravages caused by nature and war, to the vicarious suffering experienced by a carer or loved one empathizing with a single sufferer. As suggested by one contributor, suffering 'raises fundamental questions to which all our disciplines offer but a partial answer'. Furthermore, 'tracing the history of suffering is an immense task'. Who would have thought that such an apparently base condition could be so vexatious and elusive?

Definitions of suffering are offered throughout the book. Collectively they take into account the innumerable ways that one can 'suffer', be that physically, psychologically, spiritually or in some combination of these. An agreed generic definition seems to be this: 'A state of severe distress associated with events that threaten the intactness of the person [as a person]'. This is a description of suffering as a personal phenomenon, and it is accepted that suffering is overwhelmingly realized as an individual experience. Even so, one person's severe distress might not be another's. The language of suffering, as befitting the subject and its investigation in a philosophical treatise, is sensitive and requires handling with care. To take another example, 'illness' is defined in these pages as 'a deficit of well-being', which seems uncomfortably bland, yet is entirely accurate. (It would however be a brave contributor to any debate about suffering, and thankfully there is none here, describing with equal accuracy a torturer as engaging with the tortured in a negatively physical manner for a desired outcome.)

Not surprisingly suffering has always been a key component of religious thought. Whether caused by 'an act of God', accident, disease, infamous human behaviour or something else altogether, the question is invoked: why must the innocent and the righteous suffer? Consider these as answers: we suffer in this life because of sins in a previous life; suffering in this life will lead to reward in the next life; Christ suffered for our sins; suffering is proof that there is no divine benevolent being. These are foundational matters underpinning the great religions; surely another indication of the overbearing influence of suffering on humanity.

The contributors to *Perspectives on Human Suffering* write with considerable authority, in a range of disciplines, the latter evidenced by the division of the work into three discrete sections, which themselves are somewhat multi-faceted. The contributors also represent a truly international viewpoint, an essential feature when considering the meaning and purpose of a book such as this one. Editors Jeff Malpas and Norelle Lickiss, following on their editorship of *Perspectives on Human Dignity*, have ensured that impressive intellect and variety is brought to bear upon this difficult subject. Indeed, the very act of pondering the meaning and modes of suffering and then writing about it cannot be easy.

Perspectives on Human Suffering makes an important contribution to contemporary thinking about mortality and morality, be it in a small hospital ward or in the Security Council of the United Nations. We can individually desire not to suffer, but can never be immune from it. We therefore need to continually strive to increase our understanding of this fundamental aspect of our being, in order to be able to deal with suffering—for ourselves, and for our fellow human beings where we can.

Acknowledgements

The idea of conversation that underpins this volume has its physical realization in a series of interdisciplinary colloquia that have been held at the University of Tasmania in Hobart, Tasmania, more or less every two years since 2004 (now known as the W. D. Joske Interdisciplinary Colloquium), and that have focused on human dignity, human suffering, human hope, and, in 2012, on human presence. The physical event is the counterpart to the printed volume, but only in the sense that the one provides the impetus and inspiration for the other. The Colloquium series has its own dynamic and its own outcomes that are very different from those of a published work, while the list of contributors to *Perspectives on Human Suffering* only partially matches the list of participants in the corresponding Colloquium. Nevertheless, since this volume would not have occurred without the Colloquium, we would like both to acknowledge and to thank those who have been participated in those meetings, who have provided support for them, and who have contributed to in a range of other ways to their success.

In particular, we wish to thank the University of Tasmania, including both the School of Philosophy and the Office of Events and Protocol (especially Amanda Wojtowicz); Jane Frankin Hall; Mundipharma Australia; Sydney University and the Sydney Institute for Palliative Medicine. We are also grateful to the family of the late Prof W. D. Joske for ensuring that the Colloquium will continue into the future.

More specific to the volume itself, we are grateful to Maja de Keijzer at Springer (as well as Fritz Schmuhl) for supporting our proposal to publish a sequel to *Perspectives on Human Dignity*. Thanks go to Maja and her team for their work in getting the volume into press—edited volumes such as this are complex and sometimes difficult beasts, and to have an understanding and supportive editor makes an enormous difference. We thank the Governor of Tasmania, the Honourable Peter Underwood, for providing a Foreword to the volume. We are also extremely grateful to our contributors for providing us with the material without which this volume would not exist, and for their willingness to take part in the conversation.

Finally, Prof Jeff Malpas's work on this volume has been undertaken as part of an Australian Research Council Professorial Fellowship, and we gratefully acknowledge this support.

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Chapter 1
Introduction: Human Suffering

Jeff Malpas and Norelle Lickiss

The fact of suffering, whether in the catastrophic form that extends across entire communities—cruelly exemplified, as we write this Introduction, by the distressing famine that now threatens hundreds of thousands of people in conflict-riven Somalia—or the suffering that focuses on just one person as a result of individual illness or misfortune, is so closely bound to the character of human life, that it seems we cannot address the question of what it is to be human without also attending to the question of what it is to suffer, of how suffering is to be understood, and of what suffering calls for by way of response. Suffering ought thus to be a fundamental concern regardless of whether we are now suffering, regardless of whether we have suffered in the past, regardless of whether we will do so, or think we will do so, in the future.

To attend to suffering, to recognize the fact of suffering, to respond to the suffering around us, is simply to attend to the fact our own humanity; and so to ignore it, to fail to respond to its call, is also a failure to face up to the character of our own being. In this respect, given the ethical imperative that suffering and the response to suffering surely carries with it, one might also argue that to attend to suffering is to attend to the fundamentally ethical character of the human. The human situation is always an ethical situation, so that to be human is already to be given over to the ethical, and it is the fact of suffering that ought to bring this home to us in an especially exemplary and incontrovertible fashion. It is perhaps with suffering that we are first brought to face our own humanity, as well as the humanity of those around us, and so are brought to face the essentially ethical dimension in which human being essentially moves.

The focus of the volume on specifically *human* suffering, as well as on the connection between suffering and human being, is not intended to imply any denial of

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the distress that may be experienced by non-human animals. Indeed, the violation of (or failure to respect) the dignity of non-human animals or the deliberate inflicting of distress upon them (no matter the larger purpose that may be served) is properly understood as itself a failure in our own humanity—which is why it is correctly termed 'inhumane'. Whether the distress experienced by non-human animals is itself to be termed 'suffering' is a complex question. Here we have chosen to refer to animal 'distress' rather than 'suffering' largely because of the way in which, throughout most of the essays that make up this volume, 'suffering' is understood, in the sense championed by Cassell (1982), as involving a sense of impending personal disintegration, that is distinct from pain or distress taken alone, and that is not immediately translatable (which is not to say that it cannot be so translated) into terms appropriate to the being of non-human animals. There are, however, a number of reasons why one might favor a broader use of the term 'suffering', even while remaining attentive to Cassell's characterization: since suffering does carry such a strong ethical component, the refusal to allow the term to be applied beyond the human may actually serve to encourage and support inhumane and unethical behavior in relation to non-human animals, and even perhaps to those members of the human community who may have difficulty in articulating their suffering to others or who may be inappropriately viewed as somehow having a diminished sense of their own being as persons. Thus, while we will continue to talk specifically about *human* suffering, this usage should be understood against the larger background that is also important here.

The focus on the human, as well as the ethical, is one of the central themes that unites this volume, on *human suffering*, with its predecessor, on *human dignity* (Malpas and Lickiss 2006), as it also unites almost all of the essays contained in the two volumes. Yet although the concern with the human character and significance of suffering is a constant throughout this volume, the range of perspectives that are encompassed also reflects the complexity and variability that is to be found within the phenomenon of suffering itself. It should thus not be surprising, that, in spite of the fact that many of the contributors to this volume take Cassell's characterization of suffering as their starting-point, their explorations take them in many different directions. The complexity and variability of suffering reflects the complexity and variability of human life itself. Of course, the plurality of perspectives that are evident here is also a function of the plurality of disciplines that the volume encompasses. Like the previous volume on dignity, *Perspectives on Human Suffering* is explicitly interdisciplinary in its approach, even while it acknowledges the importance of also drawing upon the strengths of deep disciplinary expertise. It thus includes essays by philosophers, medical practitioners and researchers, anthropologists, historians, lawyers, Judaic and literary scholars. Suffering, like dignity, and like the concept of the human, cannot belong solely to one discipline or one perspective alone.

One of the aims of this volume, and of its predecessor, is to open up a broader conversation than is usual between medicine and other disciplines—a conversation oriented around a set of essentially philosophical questions that is nevertheless not restricted by the standard disciplinary frameworks of philosophy itself or, indeed, of medicine. Too often, the treatment of philosophical issues within medicine or of

medical issues within philosophy depends on a relatively weak engagement with the human issues at stake, frequently tending towards an almost legalistic discourse built around a narrow range of biomedical concepts, and typically drawing on a relatively narrow ranges of sources and experiences. This volume, again reflecting an approach continuous with the previous work, presents an alternative discourse that emphasizes a much broader set of concerns—concerns that run through almost all of the essays here, no matter their disciplinary origin—as they center on the character of the human, and as they also implicate literature, art, history, and other dimensions of human experience and existence. In this respect, while the volume can be seen as arguing for a broader interdisciplinary engagement in medicine that would also be more genuinely humanistic, it also aims to present a form of philosophical engagement that is equally expansive and inclusive in character and approach. The idea of the philosophical as exemplified in this volume is thus one oriented by a set of existential and phenomenological concerns as much as by any desire for conceptual precision and analytical rigor.

The idea of conversation that underpins this broader engagement is itself grounded in a conception of the project of inquiry and understanding as always shaped through linguistic encounter and articulation—even though it also encompasses more than just the linguistic as narrowly construed. To speak in ways that are adequate to suffering is always a challenge—the danger is that one's words, no matter how eloquent, will always seem to fall short of what is undergone, to be incapable of meeting the needs of the one who suffers. Sometimes we can do no more than stand as witnesses, and yet even then silence is itself meaningful only in the light of a deliberate forbearance from speech. In this respect, language pervades our lives, our actions, and our experiences even when it may appear to be absent. The significance of language in the attempt to engage with suffering is evident in many of the essays contained here—and nowhere more so than in the centrality given by so many contributors to literary and poetic sources in their discussions. Here suffering is able, as Frank Brennan puts it, to find 'a voice',[1] and not only that, but to find a voice that is itself reflects the concrete singularity that, as Malpas argues, is so central to suffering in its relation to the human.[2]

The volume divides into three main sections (although the division is not to be construed as strict or precise): *Philosophical considerations; Humanities approaches; Legal, medical, and therapeutic contexts*.

The essays that make up the first part of the volume are the most explicitly philosophical in the materials on which they draw and in the nature of their approach: Malpas addresses the relation between suffering, temporality, and the self, asking to what extent there can be a proper response to suffering within the realm of the political; Chiurazzi takes up ideas from Nietzsche and others to explore the connection between suffering and knowledge; Benjamin and Snow use Kierkegaard and Levinas to explore the way suffering is connected to the ethical understood in essentially relational terms (the emphasis on relationality being a theme that emerges in

[1] See Brennan, 'Suffering Seeks a Voice', Chap. 20.

[2] See Malpas, 'Suffering, Compassion, and the Possibility of a Humane Politics', Chap. 2.

a number of contributions); Tatman undertakes a phenomenological exploration of the logic of suffering, laying bare some of the problematic associations that seem to have accrued to the idea of suffering within western culture; Metz examines the ways in which suffering appears from a non-western, and specifically, African philosophical perspective; Mack uses Žižek and Arendt to take up the encounter with suffering as that occurs in literature and the arts suggesting ways in which these can provide ways better to understand, and perhaps even to ameliorate, suffering; Brennan and Lo use the focus on suffering as a starting point to examine what is surely a crucial counterpart to suffering, namely, forgiveness.

The second group of essays are more disparate in the perspectives they encompass although all of them are strongly oriented towards historical considerations, whether of the ancient or the more recent past. Pellach takes up the archetypal figure of Job, exploring the way Job's suffering is understood from within the tradition of Talmudic commentary, while also considering some of its wider implications; positioning himself explicitly as an historian, Tarling addresses suffering as it appears in the life and work or artists, especially musicians, as well as in the life of the nation; Turner, echoing some of Pellach's concerns, examines the response to suffering as articulated within Jewish thought and culture; Blyth discusses the response to suffering within the tradition of classical thought, notably as exemplified in Cicero; Hall continues the classical theme, though with a focus on tragedy more so than philosophy, through consideration of the suffering figure of Philoctetes; Hudson looks to place suffering within a temporal-historical frame, emphasizing the way the experience and understanding of suffering is affected by changing social and cultural frameworks; Sutton examines an instance of the politicization of suffering as that occurs in health policy affecting Aboriginal Australians.

In the final, and largest, section, the focus is on matters legal and medical, although once again philosophical concerns, and literary and historical engagement, are never far away: Green explores the way suffering appears in the criminal law, and may even arise as a consequence of the operation of the criminal justice system itself; Talib considers the treatment of suffering as handled in civil law and the award of damages; Coulehan addresses suffering as it arises in medical practice, arguing for the importance of 'compassionate solidarity' in the physicians' response to suffering, but also exploring the possibilities for the relief of suffering through 'symbolic healing'; Lickiss gives closer attention to the concept of person that is at the heart of Cassell's concept of suffering, thereby also arguing for the importance of that concept (along with the commitment to the relief of suffering) to clinical practice in medicine; Brennan argues for the importance of giving a voice to suffering and provides some striking examples of the way such a voice can be heard; Pullman, like many of the contributors, takes up the connection between suffering and the person, but does so in a way that gives particular attention to the way both are shaped by the technologies in which they are embedded; drawing on lessons from Lacanian theory, Hamilton and Gillett examine the way the relief of suffering, and the process of healing, are themselves tied to processes of personal integration and signification; Lobb examines that particular form of suffering, 'complicated

grief', that arises in the wake of bereavement; Vachon examines the effect of being witness to suffering on caregivers, and the manner in which this may be addressed for the benefit of patients as well as caregivers; Mellick brings together neurology and literature to explore the way suffering may be illuminated by reference to the underlying physical structure of the brain.

The human pattern is so complex and the human canvas so immense, that no volume of essays can do adequate justice to the issues surrounding any aspect of human being, let alone the complexities of human suffering. Moreover, like any conversation, the one enacted here has its own idiosyncrasies, its own preoccupations, its own elisions and omissions. There are many instances and forms of suffering that receive little or no sustained consideration in these pages: the use of suffering as an instrument of power, whether through torture or through other forms of control and subjugation; the experience of suffering that arises through the burden of impossible decision or the destruction of deeply-held commitments and ideals; the often silent suffering of those in situations of isolation and deprivation whether caused by economic or social circumstance or psychological impairment. There is too little consideration of the enormous suffering that arises through war, famine, commercial exploitation, and the continuing legacies of slavery, colonialism and other forms of past and present injustice. There are many disciplinary, as well as cultural and religious perspectives that the volume does not properly encompass. There is little by way of the ethnographic exploration of suffering; the aesthetic response to suffering outside of the literary and the poetic is barely touched upon; suffering as it might be addressed in sociological terms is largely absent. Some notable exceptions notwithstanding, the compass of many of the discussions remains tied to what might well be thought of as a predominantly 'western' or 'European' perspective, and although one might argue that there are currents of Christian and Buddhist thinking that run through many of the contributions, the explicit discussion of suffering within religious contexts is largely restricted to the Judaic (perhaps not surprisingly given the way in which the experience of the Holocaust looms so large here).

Yet the threads that run through this volume, even though they are indeed tied to a particular set of experiences and contexts (and often reflect accidental circumstances of the volume's production), nevertheless run beyond the specificities and contingencies of this volume alone. The richness of a conversation, and its capacity to contribute to understanding, is not exhausted merely by what is said or, indeed, by what is written. A genuine conversation opens up the subject matter that is addressed as well as opening up the participants to that subject matter. In this respect one might say that the real aim of a volume such as this is merely to open up a larger space of discourse to which it can only ever be a partial contribution. Even more than this, however, a genuine conversation also brings to the fore its own character as an encounter in which we are opened up to ourselves and to one another. What appears at the heart of conversation is the fact of human presence and encounter—significantly, it is this same human presence and encounter that suffering, understood not only as something undergone but as that to which we must respond, brings to the fore.

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Part I
Philosophical Considerations

Chapter 2
Suffering, Compassion, and the Possibility of a Humane Politics

Jeff Malpas

I merely wanted to express that anguish I feel every day when faced with the prostituting of words, the slandered victims, the smug justification of oppression, the insane admiration of force.
Albert Camus, Resistance, Rebellion and Death

The issue of human suffering is one that I will approach here through three questions: (1) What is the relation between suffering and temporality; (2) What is the relation between suffering and the singularity of the person, and (3) What is the relation between suffering and a humane politics? These questions are not arbitrary, since not only are they interconnected in ways that I hope will become evident as my discussion proceeds, but they also concern the relation between suffering and human being, and it is this issue that seems to me to be central here. The focus on this relation is not meant to suggest that humanity *requires* suffering, which is true at least to the extent that being human requires the *capacity* to suffer (and perhaps simply having that capacity will make some degree of suffering inevitable), nor that only human beings can suffer (which is manifestly false[1]), but rather that coming

[1] That non-human animals can suffer seems clear even if their suffering is not, in all respects, identical to human suffering. One might argue, in fact, that there is a distinction between suffering and mere pain or discomfort that holds in the case of adult human experience, but that does not hold in the case of the experience of non-human animals or human infants. The suffering of animals is an issue that I do not address in the discussion below, although it undoubtedly introduces further complications for any attempt to articulate an ethical and political stance that is indeed attentive to the fact of suffering. In particular, one of the questions that my account here immediately raises is whether the *refusal* of suffering must also entail a refusal of the suffering *of non-human animals*, and if so, what the implications of this would be (would it not imply the alignment of the position outlined here with some of the stronger animal rights positions?) While I agree that this is an important and pressing issue, it is not one that I have time properly to address here.

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to a proper recognition of the human, and maintaining a sense of that recognition, is fundamentally tied to a proper recognition of the nature and reality of *human* suffering, and that this is what also supports the possibility of any properly ethical stance or indeed an ethical, which is to say also, a humane, politics. In this respect, the relation between human suffering and human being directs our attention to the centrality of *compassion* as an essential element in what it is to be human, and so also in any proper response to the human.

Suffering and Temporality

> So it is that Tasmania has never come to terms with its past. That past has the stature of a dark family secret – quite literally a dark family secret – the half-brother bogeyman boarded up out of sight in the attic. He/it is shame for our bastard birth as a prison for the unwanted dregs of the British slums and our subsequent legacy of depravity hard upon vileness, brutality fast upon atrocity. He/it is institutionalized sodomist rape, its echoes clearly audible in the hysteria that surrounded the 1990s debate about the legal status of sodomy. He/it is the unbearable legacy of brutal dispossession and the near-complete genocide of those whose land this was. He/it is a weight of guilt that could not be borne. (Hay 2002, p. 29)

Tasmania is a large island (about the size of Switzerland) that lies off the south-east coast of Australia, and was first known to Europeans as Van Dieman's Land. Tasmania has had a dark and difficult history. Its settlement by Europeans in the first half of the nineteenth century, settlement based in the island's role as a place of banishment and exile, was accompanied by the destruction of the original Aboriginal population as a direct consequence of that settlement. The convict industry that was the mainstay of the island's early development included a system of harsh and often brutal treatment that led to misery and death for many. Not only have subsequent public debates within the island often been determined by the ever-present spectre of the past (including, for instance, the debate about the legalization of sodomy referred to by the Tasmanian essayist, geographer, and poet Pete Hay in the passage quoted above), but those spectres seemed to return with a vengeance when, in 1996, at the site of the main convict settlement at Port Arthur (which had become a set of 'picturesque' ruins popular for picnics and family outings), 35 people were shot dead and 37 injured in a single horrendous killing spree—the Port Arthur Massacre.[2]

Hay argues that the failure to acknowledge the suffering that has taken place in the island—the denial of the past and the refusal of memory—has also contributed to a loss of meaning for Tasmanians. Such a loss of meaning takes the form of an inability to shape a proper sense of one's own identity and place in the world or to reconstitute a sense of self that allows an adequate recognition of what has gone before as well as a genuine capacity to act productively in the face of what is to come. Here *recognition of suffering* appears as the key to the constitution of meaning, and to a proper sense of history and futurity. Yet might time itself, or perhaps better, the

[2] The man was Martin Bryant, later condemned to life imprisonment in Hobart's Risdon jail.

sense of lived time at issue in the idea of history (time as worked out in concrete places and lives), stand in a special relation to suffering? Can there be suffering, *human* suffering, without time, without memory, without history?

In the now-classic definition advanced by Eric Cassell, suffering is said to be 'a state of severe distress associated with events that threaten the intactness of the person' (Cassell 1982, p. 639). As he emphasizes elsewhere, 'What is threatened or injured [in suffering] is the intactness of the person as a person' (Cassell 2004, p. 274). Suffering is thus not to be simply identified with physical pain, nor, Cassell argues, can it be understood on the basis of any bifurcation of the human into different domains, bodily and mental, natural and cultural, physical and spiritual. The notion of the person encompasses all of these, and cannot be decomposed into them—it is a concept of personhood as essentially *holistic*.

The emphasis in Cassell's definition on suffering as a form of distress that is directly related to one's sense of personhood, itself suggests a connection to the idea of memory, time, and history, since the person would seem to be formed precisely through the working out of time in relation to place and to person, through a sense of history, both personal and communal. In fact, Cassell himself makes a direct connection to time, writing that 'it follows, then, that suffering has a temporal element. For a situation to be a source of suffering, it must influence the person's perception of future events'[3]—events, one might add, that relate to that person, and their capacity to remain intact as a person, hence it is not time alone that is at issue here, but time as it is involved in a genuine sense of the personal, and as it contributes to the formation of the person. Moreover, while Cassell emphasizes the future here, neither is it the case that what is implicated is only *futural* time. To have a grasp of the future is to have a grasp of the past, as well as the present, and this, indeed, is what it is to have a grasp of time. Futurity is thus bound up with memory, as well as with current activity and affectivity.

In this respect, and although he himself does not develop the point in this way, Cassell's reference to time suggests an immediate connection with contemporary narrative accounts of personhood, particularly as worked out in the work of such as Paul Ricoeur (1992). Indeed, while Ricoeur does not specifically address the issue of human suffering, his account of personhood almost exactly dovetails with that to be found in Cassell. Similarly holistic in orientation, and refusing the dichotomies of conventional philosophical analyses, Ricoeur understands human persons as formed through the complex interweaving of elements that occurs primarily in and through narrative—and narrative itself cannot be divorced from the temporal and the historical. The formation of personhood is thus the formation of a sense of self, of the sense of a life, as that is shaped in the constant formation and reformation of accounts of past and future. Something like such an account may also be seen to be invoked in Hay's comments above—although in his case, the connection at issue encompasses, not only the relation between the temporal and the personal, but also the way in which collective identity and community, with which the personal is itself implicated, has an essentially temporal element, such that the collective

[3] Cassell (2004, p. 35).

suppression of memory may create problems for the collective ability to act in the present and project into the future, as well as for the personal.

Narrative accounts of personhood typically emphasize the relational character of the person. Not only does this mean that persons are constituted through the relating of the parts of a life, but also that the life of the person is itself formed through the relating of persons, and the relating of persons to the entities and events that surround them and with which they are already engaged. One of the ways in which this idea can be expressed is in the form of an emphasis on the character of persons, and of human lives, as formed always in and through the places in which persons are shaped and in which human lives are lived. Since places themselves carry within them a strongly narrative structure—places are not static containers, but are instead dynamic openings of action and movement—so the complex holistic and relational character of personhood is mirrored in the complexity of place. Indeed, the relation between person and place can be seen to exemplify the same holistic and dynamic character: places are shaped by human interaction with them, while human lives are shaped by those places. There is no absolute priority to place over person or person over place, and each can be understood only as worked out in relation to the other (Malpas 1999).

The relationality of the person, and the essential interconnection of personal life with a larger inter-personal and worldly context, means that we can never completely separate ourselves from those around us, nor indeed from the places in which we find ourselves and the entities and events in those places. If we are to think about this in temporal terms, we might say that what this means is that the experience of temporality, and perhaps the very idea of time (bound up as it is, in human terms, with structures of narrativity that give form and content to both past and future), is never an experience separated from the experience of the world, or from the engagement with others. Temporality, properly understood (which means understood as more than merely the passage of a series of discrete moments), always takes us to a greater or lesser extent outside of ourselves, always connects us to frameworks of meaning that implicate ourselves with others as they also differentiate us from others—that give us a sense of identity and commonality, that give a place and orientation to our lives—but in so doing also enable our lives as such.

On this account, even our own suffering can never be completely removed from the suffering of others. Not only does our suffering implicate others, but the suffering of others also implicates us. At least, this is so just insofar as meaning can be attached to such suffering, and insofar as the experience of suffering forces us to attend to the meaningful character of our lives, and to the interdependence of our lives with others. There is a reverse side to this, however, in that if, as in Cassell's characterization, human suffering is indeed to be understood as occurring in the face of a threat to the intactness of the person, then suffering must also threaten the very relationality that is constitutive of persons—both the internal relationality of the person and the integrally connected relationality of the person to the wider context in which the life of the person is formed and shaped. The experience of suffering can thus be characterized, not only in terms of the experience of an imminent

breakdown in one's sense of personhood, but more than this, as the experience of an imminent breakdown in one's sense of the world.

Suffering is always borne by the singular individual, but that does not mean that it remains the individual's alone. The singularity of suffering is thus not incompatible with the temporality of suffering according to which suffering, while directly connected with the sense of personhood, always implicates more than just the individual who suffers. What I have referred to as the temporality of suffering is itself tied to the way in which suffering, while it threatens the intactness of the person, is also tied to the character of the person as formed through the complex narratives that connect persons to themselves, to other persons, and to the world. Suffering threatens just that connectedness. The connectedness of persons does not, however, entail a dissolution of the person into mere connections or relations. The person remains, but their being as a person is not given only through the way in which they are differentiated from other persons through the qualities or properties that pertain to them—there are no such qualities or properties that mark us out as somehow unique in relation to others, since such qualities or properties are themselves constituted in and through our relations with others.

If we recognize the temporality of suffering, then we must also recognize the way in which suffering extends beyond the individual. The recognition of suffering, and the experience of compassion (which is not to experience the *same* suffering as the one who suffers, although it may entail a suffering *with*), are correlative with one another. Thus while suffering may threaten the integrity of the self, the recognition of suffering is also a recognition of the being of others, and so opens up the possibility of a felt relation with others (which is true compassion). Suffering may be singular, but compassion, with which it is conjoined, is always double.

Yet if suffering threatens a breakdown in the intactness of the person, then the refusal to recognize the suffering of others represents a double threat: it is a refusal to acknowledge the persons who bear that suffering, and a refusal to recognize them as persons (no matter how implicit that refusal might be), but in addition, it is a refusal to recognize our own connectedness to those persons, and so is a refusal of our own personhood, our own being human, as it is formed in and by that relation. Where the suffering at issue is a suffering with which we are ourselves implicated, even if the implication is historically mediated through our common belonging to a place, then the refusal at issue is a refusal of our own identity, and so also has the potential to compromise our own being as persons. This is why, in Hay's account, the attitude Tasmanians take to their past, and to the past suffering that has left its marks on the island, is intimately tied to the way in which Tasmanians engage with themselves, and so with their own sense of personhood, with their own being as human. Put in terms of the temporal (which is more than a matter of time alone), we might say that recognizing the temporality of suffering, which is tied to the very recognition of suffering as suffering, is also to open oneself, in varying degrees, to the sufferings of others.

Suffering and the Singularity of the Person

> The fifth paragraph of chapter four in the 'Sanhedrin' of the Mishnah declares that, for the Justice of God, he who kills a single man destroys the world; if there is no plurality, he who annihilated all men would be no more guilty than the primitive and solitary Cain, which is orthodox, nor more universal in his destruction, which can be magic. I believe that is true. The tumultuous general catastrophes – fires, wars, epidemics – are but a single sorrow, illusorily multiplied in many mirrors. That is Bernard Shaw's judgment when he states (*Guide to Socialism*, 86) that what one person can suffer is the maximum that can be suffered on earth. If one person dies of starvation, he will suffer all the starvation that has been or will be. If ten thousand other persons die with him, he will not be ten thousand times hungrier nor will he suffer ten thousand times longer. There is no point in being overwhelmed by the appalling total of human suffering; such a total does not exist. Neither poverty nor pain is accumulable. (Borges 1964, p. 178)

The idea for which Borges argues in the above passage appears in many different places (and not only those that Borges himself catalogues). It is an idea that need not be taken to diminish the horror of suffering on a mass scale, but can rather be taken to direct attention to the *singularity* of suffering. The way this appears in Borges is, of course, that there can be no more suffering for the many than there can be for the one, but perhaps another way of putting the point is to say that there cannot be suffering of the many *without* the suffering of the one. Suffering is always borne by individual human beings, and to recognize suffering is to recognize the suffering of individuals, and not merely of the mass. Suffering, we may say, is always *singular*.

Could we conceive of suffering that was not the suffering of an individual? To say that we can conceive of the sufferings of a society, a nation, or of a people is not necessarily to say that we can therefore conceive of a mode of suffering that is other than the suffering of individuals. Indeed, very often to talk in this way is already to presuppose the idea of a common mode of identity, shared *among individuals*, that enables each of them, to a greater or lesser extent, to understand their own identity as bound up with that of the larger whole to which they take themselves to belong, and to understand the trials that may afflict the many as also, therefore, a burden borne by each individual. To talk of the suffering of a society, a nation, or a people may thus be taken not as an alternative mode of suffering, but as one of the ways in which *individuals* may suffer—through the harms that befall the larger communities to which they belong.

To emphasize the singularity of suffering is not the same as merely adopting a generalized individualism as against some form of collectivism. What is at issue here is not a question concerning a choice of ontologies, but instead concerns the character of suffering as itself directly related to the very character of human being, to the character of personhood, to the being of the self. Just as it is the integrity of the person or the self that is threatened in the face of suffering, so it is also the person or the self—*this one*—that suffers. One might argue that the singularity of suffering is a specific instance of the singularity, perhaps even the uniqueness, of the person. Uniqueness, however, is almost certainly the wrong term to use here, since it is all too readily associated with ideas of a uniqueness given in some special quality or set of qualities, in a uniqueness of personality or character. For the most part,

human beings are not so different from one another, and it is hard to see why we should focus merely on some abstract concept of the 'unique' as that which marks out persons as persons. The singularity of the person does not derive from anything that belongs to one person over another—it is, in fact, more a point of commonality than of simple difference. Instead, singularity belongs to the very nature of personhood so that to be a person is to be singular, while singularity is, one might say, most fully realized in the person. This is why suffering, as distinct from almost any of the other affections or activities of human being, is itself singular in character, since it is in suffering that the being of the person, the intactness of the self, is itself directly threatened—the singularity of suffering is a direct correlate to the absolute singularity of personal being.[4]

One of the most powerful, although also perhaps the most difficult, evocations of personhood in English literature is to be found in the famous passage in Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice (Shakespeare 2007) in which Shylock challenges his Christian persecutors:

> I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? Fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer, as a Christian is? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you prick us, do we not bleed? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge? (*Merchant of Venice*, Act 3, Scene 1)

On the one hand Shylock can here be seen to be drawing attention to a set of attributes that belong to Jews, of whom Shylock is one, and that they also share with Christians—the possession of certain bodily parts, certain capacities, dispositions, dependencies and vulnerabilities. On the other hand, the power of this passage derives from the fact that it is not some faceless representative, even if of a particular religion and culture, who speaks here, but *this singular human being*, who draws attention, to his own singular capacity *to suffer*, and in bringing attention to this, to his own singular being *as a person*, and so as one whose being can never completely be taken up under any of the appellations that may be applied to him, whether as Jew or Christian. In his own standing before us as this one who suffers, Shylock also makes a demand on us for a recognition of that suffering, and for a recognition of his own being as one who, when his suffering is unrecognized, may seek to impose suffering on others—the latter being itself an expression of the relationality of personhood in a manner as unlooked-for, at least to modern eyes, as it is awful.

The singularity of suffering is not incompatible with the temporality of suffering that was evident in the discussion above. The temporality of suffering is tied

[4] While the connection is not made explicit in the text, the account of personhood that is presented here clearly resonates with the account of the ethical relation to be found in the work of Emmanuel Levinas—particularly in its emphasis on the singularity of the ethical relation and its character as given in the face-to-face encounter with another—see, for instance, Levinas (1969). Although there are important features of the Levinasian account that are replicated here, there are also aspects of Levinas' approach that I would contest—particularly his emphasis on the ethical relation as preceding anything ontological. In fact, on the account sketched here, and also I would argue in Levinas' own account (in spite of his own claims to the contrary), the ethical and the ontological converge: ethics is ontology and any adequate ontology is also an ethics.

to the way in which suffering, while it threatens the intactness of the person, is also tied to the character of the person as formed through the complex narratives that connect persons to themselves, to other persons, and to the world. Suffering threatens just that connectedness. Yet the connectedness of persons does not imply that persons are nothing but concatenations of connections or relations. Persons are constituted through the complex relations in which they participate, and yet it is precisely through such relationality that persons emerge as single entities—as beings who have a sense of their own being as persons, and not merely as persons in some generic sense, but as persons for whom their being as persons matters to them. It is thus that suffering emerges as a possible mode of such being—suffering is what occurs in the face of an imminent threat to one's being as a person, and so also to one's own singularity.

What I have been calling the 'temporality' of personhood thus encompasses a sense of the person as both relational *and* singular. Similarly, while suffering is always borne by the individual, suffering does not remain the individual's alone. As was already evident in the discussion above, once we recognize the temporality of suffering, then we must also recognize the way in which suffering extends beyond the individual. To have a sense of personhood cannot only be to have a sense of oneself as a person, but requires, instead, a sense of participation and involvement with other persons. But recognizing others as person also means recognizing their singularity as persons, and their capacity to suffer as persons. Moreover, the singularity of suffering and of personhood means that the recognition of suffering is not a recognition merely of some set of objectively specifiable responses. Recognition of suffering must involve a recognition, a felt sense even, of the singularity of the one who suffers, and so the singularity of that suffering. Suffering and compassion are thus, as I noted above, essentially conjoined.

If suffering is always singular, then when we look to the suffering of the many, presented not in terms of the suffering of any single individual, but only in the suffering of a population, in the suffering of numbers, it may well be that such suffering will no longer present itself to us as suffering. This is not because such a mode of presentation lacks the same emotional impact—even though it may well be less emotionally confronting—but rather that there is no suffering in numbers alone, only in those who suffer. Who suffers is not a number, not a population, but a singular human being—even when there are many such. Borges tells us that 'there is no point in being overwhelmed by the appalling total of human suffering'. Not only is there no point, but to be overwhelmed in that way is to lose one's own sense of the suffering that is at issue—it is to be overwhelmed by a multiplicity that does not itself reflect the genuine suffering undergone. If we wish to avoid the reality of suffering, if we do not wish to be moved to recognize our own implication in such suffering, then perhaps we need do no more than turn our attention away from the individual and on to the mass, the population, the number. It is perhaps for this reason that we can remain relatively insensitive to the suffering of a million no less than of a thousand or a hundred. For when we look at suffering in this way, the real fact of suffering all but disappears. Not only, then, is suffering not increased through the multiplication of those who suffer, but suffering is also removed from us, ren-

dered in a form that no longer makes the same demands upon us, perhaps no longer gives rise to the same compassion.

Suffering and a Humane Politics

> The end of the movement of absurdity, or rebellion etc, and consequently the end of the contemporary world, is compassion in the original meaning of the word, that is to say, in the last analysis, love and poetry. (Camus 1966, p. 103)

Albert Camus' politics and ethics of rebellion—an ethics and politics that emerges at its strongest in his writing after the end of the Second World War, and especially in his writings on the Algerian situation—is an ethics based on a simple idea: the absolute refusal of human suffering. Already this idea is clear in a passage from *The Plague* in which Camus presents his own unequivocal answer to the question that appears in Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*: can any amount of good be justified if it depends on the suffering of one innocent human being? Camus describes a scene in which the novel's main protagonist, the doctor Rieux, has just attended the tortured death from plague of a young girl. When the priest who is with him offers what is intended to be the consoling advice that the divine order that allows the girl's death and suffering cannot be understood but must simply be loved, Rieux angrily replies: 'I've a very different idea of love. And until my dying day I shall refuse to love a scheme of things in which children are put to torture' (Camus 1960, p. 178).

The response that Rieux, and through him, Camus, makes here can be seen, not only to be based on the conception of human suffering as an absolute evil, one that is not able to be mitigated even by the role it may play in some larger divine order, but as also embodying a recognition of the singular character of suffering. If suffering is not multiplied by the multiplication of those who suffer, then neither is suffering reduced by the reduction of those who suffer—not even if the suffering at issue is reduced from the suffering of an entire world to the suffering of a single child. Rieux's refusal of what is put to him by the priest should not be construed as directed only against suffering as it might be taken to be ordained by God. It is as much a rejection of any order that issues from human beings as from the divine. 'I shall refuse to love a scheme of things in which children are put to torture', Rieux says, and when we read this in conjunction with Camus' explorations elsewhere, we know that this means a refusal willingly to go along with any ordering of the world in which suffering is not itself refused and in which it is not struggled against. Camus' philosophy of rebellion is thus above all a rebellion *against suffering*—a rebellion against our own suffering and against the suffering we may impose on others—a rebellion in which Camus rejects the roles both of victim and of executioner.[5]

If what Camus refuses is indeed any scheme of things 'in which children are put to torture', then what he refuses is the very scheme of things that we find in the con-

[5] See Camus (2005) written shortly after the end of the Second World War, and originally published in 1946 in the Resistance newspaper *Combat*.