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Playing with Fire: Art and the Seductive Power of Pain

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> I almost didn't make it through *Amour*, which won the Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film on Sunday. It wasn't that I wasn't prepared: I knew what the movie was about and, having seen several other of Michael Haneke's movies and read about his work, was familiar with his sadistic tendencies as a filmmaker. 'Depressing' was the word used by everyone I spoke to about the film, but depressing has never been a descriptor that puts me off; it's rare that a movie, even an aggressively tragic one, depresses me. More often, I find myself simply fascinated, and even delighted, by the range of emotions cinema can capture. But *Amour* depressed me. It depressed me to the point that my chest felt tight, that fat tears streamed down my face as I struggled to keep my shoulders from heaving too noticeably. It depressed me to the point that I seriously contemplated escaping to the bathroom to have it out and collect myself, and considered leaving the theatre altogether.[1]

This is how Hannah Goldfield begins a recent *New Yorker* column entitled 'Surviving *Amour*'. Towards the end of the piece, in an attempt to trace the origins of her intense reaction, Goldfield conjectures that her sadness 'arose from how close to home *Amour* hit'. She goes on to say that for her, *Amour* hit close to home because the tragic fate of the film's main characters, Georges and Anne, bore striking resemblance to that of her own grandparents at the end of their lives.

Goldfield's description of her movie-going experience is likely to resonate with viewers familiar with Haneke's film. It is a wrenching, harrowing piece of cinema. Nor would Haneke himself deny the charge of 'sadistic' filmmaking tendencies. He says in a recent interview, 'I've been accused of "raping" the audience in my films, and I admit to

that freely – all movies assault the viewer in one way or another. [...] What's different about my films is this: I'm trying to rape the viewer into independence'.[2] What interests me here is how a work of art that is painful to watch, such as *Amour*, may nonetheless occasion a positive, if challenging, aesthetic experience. I will be particularly, though not exclusively, concerned with works that cause pain in virtue of, as Goldfield puts it, 'hitting too close to home'.

The question is an aspect of a problem in aesthetics signalled by Hume and known in the contemporary literature as the 'paradox of tragedy'.[3] 'Tragedy' here is a pars pro toto label for painful art, and the paradox is briefly this: some works of art give rise to intrinsically unpleasant emotions such as sadness, anger, fear, and grief. As a rule, we tend to avoid unpleasant experiences. (One may take the latter to be a conceptual claim: if there is some experience we tend to *seek* rather than to *avoid*, we won't call it 'unpleasant'.) Yet, we do not avoid works of art that provoke negative emotions in us and, indeed, often actively seek such works. We also frequently value painful art above art meant merely to entertain. Why so?

Different ways to solve the paradox have been proposed. On the one hand, there are those accounts that deny the claim that works of art give rise to unpleasant experiences. These accounts come in different flavours. Some versions proceed by denying that the negative emotions provoked by works of art – pity, sorrow, grief, and so on – are experienced as unpleasant. Others insist that while those emotions themselves are unpleasant, the overall aesthetic experience they are a part of is positive. Hume himself took the former tack. He offers what has been called a 'conversionary'[4] account, on which negative emotions experienced in the context of a work of art are transformed, or 'converted', into an overall positive experience.

Contemporary philosophers who take this route include Berys Gaut, Kendall Walton, and John Morreall. In going against appearances, Gaut's view is more radical than Hume's. Gaut offers a revisionist solution. According to Gaut, negative emotions in the context of engagement with art are not so much 'converted' into positive ones, rather they are never experienced as truly negative. While Gaut cedes that negative emotions must, indeed, *ordinarily* be experienced as unpleasant in order to be properly seen as negative, he argues that it is possible for there to be individual cases in which at least some people *enjoy* experiencing negative emotions. Art consumption is precisely such a special case.[5] Kendall Walton defends a similar conclusion.[6] According to Walton, the experience of grief *can* be painful and unpleasant, but it *need* not be.[7]

On Walton's reckoning, it is not the negative emotions *themselves* that we find disagreeable, but their objects, that is, the circumstances that give rise to them. Yet, if circumstances calling for negative emotions do arise, we may well embrace and enjoy the negative emotions they occasion.[8] John Morreall advances a 'control thesis' view that belongs in this category as well: according to Morreall, it is a familiar fact of life that, upon occasion, we enjoy negative emotions.[9] Fear provides a case in point – people deliberately engage in risky and dangerous games and activities in order to experience fear, and they do so because they enjoy the experience. Morreall goes on to ask under what conditions we take pleasure in negative emotions, and he settles on 'control' as the key to the answer: the experience of such emotions is pleasurable when we can keep them within certain boundaries. Much like the person who enjoys a little spice in her food but would not enjoy too much spice as she would find the burning sensation painful, the viewer of challenging art finds negative emotions enjoyable below a certain threshold but unpleasant above that threshold, and in the context of art, it is up to her to keep them from crossing that threshold.

On the other hand, there are those accounts on which the negative emotions provoked by art are, indeed, experienced as unpleasant considered *in themselves*, but the *overall experience* they are a part of is either pleasant or in some other way desirable. These theories include the doctrine of catharsis, compensatory responses, rich experience views, and meta-response views. All can be said to share a key feature: the denial of the 'universal avoidance' thesis, that is, the thesis that we have a tendency to avoid all unpleasant experiences. This denial can be made plausible by appealing to an ordinary observation: sometimes we see value in a painful and unpleasant experience and deliberately choose to undergo rather than avoid it. Thus, some women choose to give birth without anaesthesia. Some bereaved spouses refuse to take any medication that would help blunt the feelings of grief. We may embrace painful experiences for a variety of reasons: because they are meaningful to us in some way; because they harmonize with our self-conception; because they offer cognitive or emotional benefits, and so forth.[10] Aristotle's doctrine of catharsis belongs here. Aristotle suggests (though he does not elaborate on the suggestion) that tragedies that occasion pity and fear in their viewers help 'purge' the viewer of excess negative emotions so that the viewer's emotional balance may be restored.

Among contemporary philosophers, Noël Carroll, Aaron Smuts, and Susan Feagin offer accounts along these lines. Carroll focuses on the paradox of horror and advances a compensatory solution. He argues

that the negative emotions in art, while intrinsically unpleasant, are instrumental in enabling us to experience *other*, positive and pleasant emotions.[11] Much like the roller skater who may not enjoy the fear occasioned by the ride but may enjoy the accompanying thrill and recognize that the thrill comes packaged with the fear, so the viewer of a horror film does not like being scared; rather, she enjoys having her curiosity piqued and then satisfied, and she understands that she cannot have her curiosity piqued and satisfied in this way without being scared. Smuts, on the other hand, finds fault with the suggestion that viewers somehow compare pleasures and pains and 'calculate' which outweighs which, whether consciously or not. More generally, he finds it implausible to suppose that pleasure is the sole source of value and goes on to reject the hedonic theory of value. His solution to the paradox is a-hedonic. He contends that an experience may be unpleasant but valuable and perfectly desirable, a view he dubs the 'rich experience' view. On the rich experience view, the pain associated with negative emotions is neither converted nor compensated for; rather, it is seen as an integral part of a complex experience which, though it may have painful aspects, is desirable on the whole, without necessarily being pleasant.[12] Finally, Susan Feagin argues that the experience of negative emotions in the context of a work of art is a complex attitude that consists of a direct response and a meta-response. On the first-order level, we may be saddened by art and pained by it, but on the meta-level, we may recognize our first-order responses as appropriate, and be pleased by their appropriateness. If, on the contrary, I notice that I am unmoved by human tragedy, this may be a depressing self-discovery, which suggests that I resemble a machine lacking the normal human emotions. [13]

It is also possible to offer a deflationary account, one on which the emotions experienced in the context of art are not real emotions, and so the negative ones aren't really negative either. While a number of philosophers have argued, for various reasons, that art-generated emotions are not full-fledged instances of the emotions they are labelled as being, the stronger claim that they are not real emotions at all is not very attractive. Still, there is conceptual space for this view, and it is not entirely without supporters.[14]

It is not my purpose here to arbitrate among these different theories. This is partly because I am interested in one particular class of painful experiences – namely, those that are painful by virtue of 'hitting too close to home' – and partly because I believe that works of art that occasion negative emotions can be enjoyed for a variety of reasons. While we may have a fruitful discussion regarding individual cases, I am sceptical

with regard to the possibility of a unified theory. It seems to me likely, for instance, that films portraying a lot of violence and killing may be doing for their viewers what boxing and violent sports appear to do for theirs: helping re-channel aggressive drives.[15] Young people who watch and report enjoying a film meant to nauseate, such as *Pink Flamingos*, are probably pleased with their own rebellion against the comfort and convenience of art that appeals to middle-class sensibility.[16] Again, a person who takes pleasure in horror films or novels may enjoy them for reasons similar to those that Graham Greene reports to have had when making a decision to enrol in the army and go to the front: because to be scared is better than to be bored. And a person who loves tragedies may delight in both the emotional stimulation tragedy offers and in her own capacity to appreciate the beauty of an artwork despite the fact that the work in question occasions pain.

Some, though not all, of the theories listed above are of little help when it comes to the sorts of cases that interest me. Neither the revisionary view nor the deflationary view, for instance, will do. The emotions we experience when watching a film such as *Amour*, at least for viewers moved by the film, are genuine and genuinely painful (this is why a viewer may, like Goldfield, be tempted to leave the theatre). They seem to be largely out of our control as well, which speaks against Morreall's 'control thesis'. Neither is it feasible to say, à la Feagin, that we are at the meta-level pleased with our first-order response. For, in this case, our first-order response is sadness and fear in the face of the prospect of aging. Why should we be pleased by this sadness and fear? After all, if one can think about aging (and watch the movie *Amour*) without the sorrow, that would probably be a good thing. This is not to suggest that none of the views mentioned can offer any guidance. It is only to say that none of them offers a prima facie plausible and roughly complete account of the sort of case I have in mind. I will, therefore, instead of picking a theory to defend, consider the case on its own merits, noting resonances with the views mentioned along the way.

Before I turn to the questions of how and why viewers may enjoy painful works, I wish to ask a related but different question, namely, what may tempt an artist to try to cause viewers pain, to 'rape' them, as Haneke claims. This may give us an insight into how the sorts of works we are discussing function.

Speaking from personal experience, I thought I knew exactly what Haneke meant with the 'rape' metaphor. And I thought I knew because, although I am a professor and not a movie director, I myself adopt a similar strategy on a much smaller scale with students in class. I would

not say I try to 'rape students into independence', but I certainly try to 'wake them up', and this often requires disturbing them a little. For instance, the topic of discussion in one of my recent seminars was racial segregation. Now, there are safe ways to approach this topic. One is to present the data in a matter-of-fact fashion: research suggests that there is a slight but steady trend towards racial integration. The trend is especially visible in big cities, such as LA and New York City. One could also deplore the speed with which things are changing or salute the modest but steady progress. I could have done one of these things. To do so would have been to 'play it safe' – to proceed on the assumption that both I and my students are free of racial bias, guilty of nothing, and that we simply happen to have found ourselves in a society in which racial biases exist.

It may well be true that some students are, indeed, free of bias. It is unlikely that most of them are. After all, the status quo cannot be sustained if the majority of people did not go along with it, and there is no reason to think that my students are *mostly* outliers. There is also direct evidence that most people do, indeed, have racial biases, if only implicit ones.[17] Perhaps more importantly for my instructional purposes, however, assuming all these things would make for a conventional and somewhat uninteresting class. For those reasons, I chose another approach. I dropped the assumption that everyone present is deeply committed to racial equality and invited them to imagine a neighbourhood that's 80 per cent white and 20 per cent black. And to imagine further that more black families start moving into that neighbourhood, gradually changing the ratio until it becomes 50 per cent black and 50 per cent white. I then asked students to estimate what per cent of white residents will leave the neighbourhood. The question made some of them visibly uncomfortable, but it also 'woke them up'. They grew even more uncomfortable when I asked them whether they, personally, regardless of race, would leave a neighbourhood because they don't like the blacks-to-whites ratio, and what ratio would make them uncomfortable. I knew I was venturing into dangerous territory, but I also thought that the risk was worth it.

It was. The questions prompted a lively discussion, and even normally taciturn students spoke up. Some emailed me later to say the class was exceptional. What I would like to suggest here is that there is a parallel between a daring lecture and a daring work on art, and that the parallel can help shed light on how painful art functions. When you disturb viewers, you engage their emotions, and you make them pay attention to the art and care about its content. Both paying attention and caring

are necessary features of a powerful art experience. So a real and powerful art experience may be painful and disturbing.

One form art's challenge may take is the suggestion, recurring in some of the most memorable works of art, that ordinary people, people just like you and me, may have terrible thoughts and impulses or else lack the kinds of attitudes we expect them to have. Consider, for instance, Ibsen's exceptional play *Little Eyolf*. In it, the young and physically disabled son of a respectable, middle-class couple drowns. The boy drowns in front of the eyes of a number of other children. The mother and father talk about why none of the other children came to the boy's rescue. One of them says (paraphrasing), 'Well, you and I cannot swim, would you have jumped?' to which the other replies, 'I don't know.' This is a chilling scene. How certain are we that we will be any different from the parents portrayed? More frightening yet, that our parents would be any different? We dare not ask.

The messages of powerful art are not things we can directly and comfortably say to each other. Certainly not to strangers, but, likely, not to those we are closest with, or even to ourselves. Only art is allowed to give voice to them, thanks to its fictional or symbolic nature. Since an work of art is typically not about any particular person, we all have plausible deniability. Yet we only perceive the art as compelling because we sense it is about all of us, despite, or perhaps because of, the fact that it is normally about no one in particular.

Note, however, that here we are not yet talking of art that's 'too close to home'. For suppose, by contrast, a couple whose son has drowned watches the play. And suppose that neither of the two parents can swim and both are afraid of the water. The two are likely to find the scene so disturbing as to make them incapable of focusing on the rest of the play or enjoying any of it. When we retain a critical distance, the disturbance in question is primarily moral. When the work hits too close to home and such distance is reduced, the disturbance is psychological. In the former case, we feel that the challenge is addressed to everyone, not primarily to us. There is, thus, an element of truth in the view inspired by Hobbes (and at another remote, Lucretius) on which tragedy reminds us how fortunate we are, which reminder is pleasant.[18]

But then, what about works of art that do hit too close to home? There are two different ways in which art can pain us in a personal way. The first is by making us its primary object by *coincidence*. A woman in Anna Karenina's situation – in a loveless marriage and in love with someone else, a woman who struggles to get a divorce only to find that her lover begins cheating on her as soon as she and her lover can be together

without restrictions – may find that the proximity between the narrative and her own life makes watching too painful and interferes with her aesthetic experience of that narrative. Note that such coincidences can happen even when we see art that is not at all meant to provoke negative emotions. For instance, watching a feel-good movie about the value of friendship may make one feel a lot of pain if one has just lost a friendship on account of a bitter verbal exchange. Such cases do not give rise to a paradox, since we do not seek such experiences and, indeed, deliberately try to avoid them. 'I couldn't continue watching' or 'It was just too painful' are common reactions in cases such as these. The viewer who happens to be personally pained in this way is not the primary target audience of the art. The author may, of course, have private reasons to hope that some particular person will read the book or see the film in question and recognize herself in it, but those reasons are not an integral part of the author's artistic intention.

There is a second and, for my present purposes, more important way in which we can be pained and disturbed in a personal manner. A work of art may be explicitly *meant* to disturb its audience, and in very profound ways. It may be meant to hit too close to home for everybody. The viewer who, not being herself in Anna Karenina's situation, commiserates with Anna's fate does so from a 'safe place', as it were – knowing that the narrative does not apply to her. The pain she shares is truly someone else's pain, and while others' pain may pain us, it's rarely *quite* in the way in which our own pain does.

There is, thus, a grain of truth to deflationist intuitions. Note, incidentally, that there are two different levels of emotional deflation operating here: when someone else suffers, the pain we feel for that person is, typically, not as acute as it would be in our own case (of course, it depends on who the person is; we may also love someone so much that we'd be more pained to see that person suffer than to suffer ourselves). This level of deflation is present in real life, for instance, in our experience of reading tragic stories in the newspapers. Newspapers often print tragic stories, presumably because readers read them. One may wonder why anyone reads them. The answer must, at least in part, have to do with the fact that the tragedy has happened to someone else and we can commiserate from a distance, from our own safe havens. There is a second level of deflation in art, one that has to do with the fact that the object of tragedy is fictional. This helps further minimize the pain and produce an overall positive experience.

But what if there is no real deflation? What if the viewer is the object of unabashedly sadistic film-making or novel-writing tendencies? How

can we enjoy having genuine pain? This is the puzzle that interests me. How can we derive aesthetic enjoyment out of feeling genuinely pained and disturbed?

I will begin by noting first that art meant to pain everyone must do so by virtue of addressing common human concerns such as death and aging, rather than concerns specific to this or that person's case – for instance, the difficulties in being a lawyer. And these concerns must be concerns we do not frequently address. This is precisely what daring works such as Haneke's *Amour* do: they challenge the boundaries of acceptable conversation. We do not like to openly discuss issues of aging. We try to cover up the signs of it and turn away from the evidence of its ubiquity. There are probably a few hundred pictures of young and dashing people for every photo of an elderly person on the internet. And while a Google search for 'elderly couples' delivers such photos, the photos readily available are of happy, healthy, smiling retirees, holding hands or embracing each other. The kinds of radiant pictures one sees on postcards and, occasionally, on the food product packages of family-owned farms.

It is against this background that *Amour* can be said to 'rape' the viewer. *Amour* begins with an image of a dignified, middle-class couple, Georges and Anne, who come back from a moving classical music concert, which both of them have thoroughly enjoyed. The enjoyment is obviously heightened by the fact that it is shared: Georges and Anne appear connected by myriad links of intimacy, and the pleasure felt by each is vicariously felt by the other, enhancing the other's own positive experience. The very next morning, however, Anne has a stroke. It's the beginning of the end. Anne is soon paralysed on the right side, and then gradually loses her mental capacities. She becomes a shadow of her former self. Indeed, her 'self' gradually disintegrates. The two do not talk about her condition. It would be too painful to do so, and there is no point in doing it either: talking about the pain will do no good. Both Georges and Anne know that they will never walk to the concert hall hand-in-hand again and Anne who, as we learn later, is a retired music teacher (as well as the teacher of the brilliant pianist whose concert she and Georges are listening to in the opening scene) will never play the piano again; but each of them endures silently the suffering which this knowledge occasions. Georges sometimes has visions of Anne playing the piano. Things go steadily downhill after Anne's stroke, until one day, Georges cannot cope anymore and, faithful to a promise he's made to Anne not to let her die in a hospital or a nursing home, smothers her with his own hands.

In one of *Amour*'s most striking scenes, Georges props his paralyzed wife, helping her move from one place to another. The ritual resembles a dance embrace, and is as close to either an embrace or a dance as the couple ever come after Anne's stroke. And very soon, even this shadow of an embrace is not an option. There is a beautiful Leonard Cohen song in which Cohen sings, 'Dance me to the end of love.' *Amour* makes us painfully aware that, in all likelihood, we won't be able to 'dance' each other to the end of love. Love, the message appears to be, does not end with a dance – it ends with one partner propping the other so the other can go to the restroom. There is no way to live happily ever after, not because passion may subside – if we are lucky, as Georges and Anne are, it will not – but because life will come to an end, and the ending isn't likely to be happy. *Amour* is a film about the painful end of love, and of life.

Goldfield tells us that for her, *Amour* struck too close to home, because it reminded her of her grandparents' fate. And it is probably true that her experience was more intense on account of the fact that it conjured up images of her own grandmother and grandfather. At bottom, however, *Amour* disturbs not by coincidence – not because it happens to resemble this or that piece of one's life – but as a matter of course. You may not have had grandparents who suffered at the end of their lives (your grandparents may still be healthy), or you may not have been privy to your grandparents' suffering (you may not have been close enough with them to go see them, or they may have, like Georges and Anne, deliberately tried to avoid being seen in a humiliating condition). But you probably know of some couple like Georges and Anne. More importantly, you know you too are likely to end up like them. And that only if things turn out well – that is, if you find love. The alternative is to simply die alone. Goldfield, by the way, acknowledges all that as well. She ends her essay by saying: 'As I sat crying in the movie theater, I realized that if I was lucky enough [...] to find love that lasted, I would be unlucky enough to see it end.'[19]

That love comes to an end, and an awfully painful one at that, is not what we want to believe, and ordinarily we are careful to avoid reminders that this may be so. *Amour*, thus, works on us by transgressing boundaries we make a careful effort to observe. Imagine, by contrast, a society in which we openly confront the terrible side of aging daily. In that society, a film such as *Amour* will not be as powerful as it is for us. (Probably it is even beautiful, rather than painful, for medical staff working in nursing homes and accustomed to seeing life ending).

Daring art, thus, disturbs by challenging conventional conversational boundaries, as well as boundaries of thought. Not everyone will be up for the challenge. This is why those who are will experience a sense of freedom and liberation. The freedom can be intoxicating: in art, we can

give voice to concerns we don't know quite how to address. Relatedly, the reader or viewer of painful art feels respected: handled without gloves, treated like a grown-up who can be presumed to be capable of 'taking it'. This is another reason why the overall experience is seen as positive. Finally, a reader or viewer of such art may take delight in her own ability to retain her aesthetic sense even in the face of pain, and to appreciate a work of art as a work of art, not letting the pain overwhelm her and make her incapable of judging it aesthetically.[20]

There is more. An element of what views such as those of expression theorists like Collingwood claim may also be correct. Carroll rejects the expressionist suggestion that works of horror effect a beneficial transformation of harmful emotions by saying that horror films truly scare their audience, instead of 'lightening up', in Collingwood's phrase, fears that the audience may already harbour. But Carroll is at least partly wrong: horror films may scare us, but they may at the same time serve to assuage latent fears, such as fear of death. By confronting what we find scariest, we tame the fears and, as it were, domesticate them. Gaut agrees partly with Carroll here, arguing that if horror movies could 'lighten up' fears, we would enjoy watching them when we are most frightened. But this is not so; it may be that we have to be in the right frame of mind in order to confront our dormant fears. It won't follow from this that we are not really confronting those fears just because we can't watch the fear-provoking fictions unless in a robust state of mind.

Similar considerations apply to the sorts of cases I have had in mind: painful art may help us confront our latent fear of aging, for instance, although in all likelihood we must be in a robust state of mind to derive any enjoyment from powerful works of art whose benefits pass by way of, or must be purchased by, real pain on the part of their audiences.

There is something else as well. In violating conversational restrictions and exposing our deepest fears and our darkest side, art helps connect each of us to the rest of humanity. This is another positive function that painful art serves. While each of us knows, intellectually, that it is not only him or her, that everyone will age and die, we have very little serious shared conversation about these things and, as a consequence, each of us may feel lonely in his or her predicament. The loneliness will be mitigated if one has a partner, but it won't go away entirely, since a couple too may feel lonely. They will, however, feel less so if given the opportunity to ponder the existence of other couples in a similar plight. Some truths about being human are so heavy that we need to share them not just with one (however special) other, but with many others.

I have underlined here that painful art feeds on conversational restrictions. This leads to an interesting question. If we progress to the point

of abandoning such restrictions, if we become able to talk about everything, what kind of art will there be? John Stuart Mill suggested once that the discovery of all truths will be the end of liberty and democracy, since liberty and democracy require diversity of opinions, and that's possible only if we don't know everything. Perhaps, we may say similarly, the abolition of all conversational boundaries could spell the end of art, or, at the least, of powerful and provocative art.

That does not seem like a desirable prospect. Just as we want truth but do not want to be omniscient, because we fear that if we are, life will lose its meaning, so we want to play with fire and gain more independence but not to become completely independent, like gods who cannot be burned by fire. This suggests a final reason why we may enjoy the experience of pain: pain assures us that we are human.

Mill, incidentally, would agree with this fully. In a chapter entitled 'A Crisis in My Mental History' in his *Autobiography*, he describes an onset of depression, triggered by the thought that if all the objects of his thoughts and pursuits were realized, this would bring him no joy, and life would lose its meaning. He then falls into a state that, in Mill's own words, was best captured by Coleridge's poem 'Dejection':

> A grief without a pang, void, dark and drear,
> A drowsy, stifled, unimpassioned grief,
> Which finds no natural outlet or relief
> In word, or sigh, or tear.[21]

Note that the key characteristic of this 'dejection', what appears to make it truly unbearable, is that it is emotionless. Mill goes on to tell us that what helped him overcome the state of depression was his being moved to tears by the *Memoires* of Jean-Francois Marmontel. Crying over the passage in which Marmontel describes his father's death, Mill says, made his being 'grow lighter' and gave him hope, because he was assured he was not 'a stock or a stone'.[22] We can take this a step further. It is probably safe to assume that we all have a latent fear of losing the capacity to feel, and of turning into stones or the like. Painful art helps assuage this fear by making us feel, most unmistakably.[23]

Notes

1. Hannah Goldfield, 'Surviving *Amour*', *New Yorker*, 26 February 2013, accessed 31 March 2013, http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/culture/2013/02/surviving-amour.html.

2. Quoted by John Wray in 'The Minister of Fear', *New York Times Magazine*, September 2007, accessed 1 April 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/23/magazine/23haneke-t.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0.
3. He writes: 'It seems an unaccountable pleasure which the spectators of a well-written tragedy receive from sorrow, terror, anxiety, and other passions that are in themselves disagreeable.' David Hume, 'Of Tragedy', in *Of the Standard of Taste and Other Essays* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965 [1757]), 29. Aristotle had already noted that we seem to take pleasure in tragedy, but there is nothing in Aristotle's writings to suggest that Aristotle perceived any particular difficulty, let alone a paradox, here: Aristotle appears to have seen the task of the philosopher as simply that of offering a correct account of the 'mechanics' of the process. Of course, Aristotle's own explanation of the mechanics can be read as a solution to the paradox. I return to this point later.
4. For instance by Smuts and Levinson. See Aaron Smuts, 'The Paradox of Painful Art', *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 41, Fall 2007 and Jerrold Levinson, 'Emotion in Response to Art: A Survey of the Terrain', in *Emotion and the Arts*, ed. Mette Hjort and Sue Laver (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 20–37.
5. Berys Gaut, 'The Paradox of Horror', *British Journal of Aesthetics* 33 (1993): 333–345.
6. Kendall Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), section 7.3.
7. Walton writes: 'There is nothing in the notion of sorrow or grief to make it surprising that the opposite is sometimes true, that we sometimes seek and enjoy the experience of real sorrow', *Mimesis*, 257.
8. One might have expected that Walton would help himself to his own deflationist theory of emotion in art in order to solve Hume's paradox. Indeed, Tamar Gendler, in her Stanford Encyclopedia entry on imagination, comes close to ascribing to Walton a deflationist solution to the paradox of tragedy. See Tamar Gendler, 'Imagination', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 14 March 2011, accessed 10 May 2013, http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/imagination/. Morreall also makes a remark that implies he would have expected Walton to appeal to the belief requirement on emotion that he championed. See John Morreall, 'Enjoying Negative Emotions in Fictions', *Philosophy and Literature* 9 (1985): 95–103, particularly 95. A close reading of section 7.3. from *Mimesis*, however, suggests that Walton's favoured solution to the paradox is close in spirit to Gaut's. Walton says of the paradox of tragedy, 'Hume's characterization of sorrow as a passion that is "in itself disagreeable" is very much open to question. What is clearly disagreeable are the things we are sorrowful about – the loss of an opportunity, the death of a friend – not the feeling or experience of sorrow itself. [...] Much of Hume's paradox thus evaporates without help from the fact that it is only fictional that the appreciator feels sorrow', Walton, *Mimesis*, 258. Note, though, that it is possible to reject Walton's particular solution to the paradox of painful art but offer a deflationist response along Waltonian lines, a response based on the premise that the painful emotions generated by tragic art and horror are merely *make-believe* emotions. On such a view, we are never *truly* afraid, sad, or bereaved, in virtue of engaging with a fictional work of art.

9. Morreall, 'Negative Emotions'.
10. A number of authors have remarked that suffering may be endured gladly and often even ceases to be suffering altogether if seen as meaningful. For instance, Nietzsche writes: 'Man, the bravest of animals and the one most accustomed to suffering, does not repudiate suffering as such; he desires it, he even seeks it out, provided he is shown a meaning for it, a purpose for it.' *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, in *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo* (New York: Random House, 1967), 3: 28. Viktor Frankl makes an almost identical point in *Man's Search for Meaning* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006).
11. Noël Carroll, 'Enjoying Horror Fictions: Reply to Gaut', *British Journal of Aesthetics* 35 (1995): 67–72.
12. Aaron Smuts, 'Art and Negative Affect' *Philosophy Compass* 4 (2009): 39–55. A similar view in the context of music experience is developed by Stephen Davies in his *Musical Meaning and Expression* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), chapter 9.
13. Susan Feagin, 'The Pleasures of Tragedy', *American Philosophical Quarterly* 20 (1993): 95–104. Jerrold Levinson labels Feagin's view 'organicist.' See Levinson, 'Emotion'.
14. Peter Kivy, for instance, incorporates this line of reasoning in his account of emotions provoked by music. He writes: 'The general conclusion then [...] is that absolute music simply does not possess the materials necessary to arouse the garden-variety emotions in listeners, in any artistically relevant way.' *Antithetical Arts: On the Ancient Quarrel between Literature and Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 277. Noël Carroll, in 'On Kendall Walton's *Mimesis as Make-Believe*', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 51 (1991): 383–387, raises important objections to deflationary solutions to the paradox of horror, ones that anyone attracted to this type of view would have to come to terms with.
15. A recent study conducted by Anne Bartsch from the University of Augsburg, Germany and Louise Mares from the University of Wisconsin–Madison suggests also that audiences are more attracted to gory movies featuring bloodshed if they expect the narratives to be thought-provoking. The study was reported in 'What Attracts People to Violent Movies', *Science Daily*, 28 March 2013, accessed 1 April 2013, http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2013/03/130328091750.htm. The result is interesting and provides some support for cognitivist versions of compensation theories, but we must be cautious what conclusions, precisely, we draw from the study: while it may well be true that people are more likely to watch a thought-provoking violent film than they are to watch violence for violence's sake, many appear to watch violent films that are *not* thought-provoking (which is why many such films are produced on a regular basis).
16. Carroll makes a suggestion along these lines as well. See Carroll, 'Reply to Gaut', 70.
17. See, for instance, John T. Jost et al. 'The Existence of Implicit Bias is Beyond Reasonable Doubt: A Refutation of Ideological and Methodological Objections and Executive Summary of Ten Studies that No Manager Should Ignore', *Research in Organizational Behavior* 29 (2009): 39–69. See also Anthony Greenwald and Mahzarin Banaji, *Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good*

People (New York: Delacorte Press, 2013) for a summary of primary research on this topic.

18. Hobbes himself did not directly address the paradox of tragedy, but he elaborated on Lucretius's observation that we appear to take a certain amount of enjoyment in contemplating the suffering of others. He writes: 'From what passion proceedeth it, that men take pleasure to behold from the shore the danger of them that are at sea in a tempest, or in fight, or from a safe castle to behold two armies charge one another in the field? It is certainly in the whole sum joy. Else men would never flock to such a spectacle. Nevertheless there is in it both joy and grief. For as there is novelty and remembrance of [one's] own security present, which is delight; so is there also pity, which is grief. But the delight is so far predominant, that men usually are content in such a case to be spectators of the misery of their friends.' Thomas Hobbes, *The Elements of Law*, in John Gaskin (ed.), *The Elements of Law, Natural and Politic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), chapter 9, section 19. Lucretius makes essentially the same point: 'What joy it is, when out at sea the storm winds are lashing the waters, to gaze from the shore at the heavy stress some other man is enduring! Not that anyone's afflictions are in themselves a source of delight; but to realize from what troubles you yourself are free is a joy indeed.' Lucretius, *The Nature of the Universe* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1951), 2: 1–5.
19. Goldfield, 'Surviving *Amour*'.
20. This enjoyment resembles the delight that accompanies the realization that one can promote the value of truth even when the truth would cause pain. Thus, suppose I am partial to the outcome of some controversy: I want it to be the case that I am right rather than my opponent. Yet, I acknowledge evidence to the effect my opponent is right. This ability to promote the value of truth even when the truth would be painful is itself pleasurable. Something similar may be true of the ability to promote the value of beauty.
21. John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography* (ValdeBooks, 2010 [1873]), 54.
22. Mill, *Autobiography*, 56.
23. Jerrold Levinson makes a similar point, linking the ability to feel emotions to dignity and self-respect. He writes, 'Central to most people's ideal image of themselves is the capacity to feel deeply a range of emotions [...] Because music has the power to put us into the feeling state of a negative emotion [...], it allows us to partly reassure ourselves [...] in the depth and breadth of our ability to feel.' 'Music and Negative Emotion', in *Music, Art, and Metaphysics*, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 232.