

Exodus 10:1-20 | Then the Lord said to Moses, “Go in to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants, that I may show these signs of mine among them, ² and that you may tell in the hearing of your son and of your grandson how I have dealt harshly with the Egyptians and what signs I have done among them, that you may know that I am the Lord.”

³ So Moses and Aaron went in to Pharaoh and said to him, “Thus says the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, ‘How long will you refuse to humble yourself before me? Let my people go, that they may serve me. ⁴ For if you refuse to let my people go, behold, tomorrow I will bring locusts into your country, ⁵ and they shall cover the face of the land, so that no one can see the land. And they shall eat what is left to you after the hail, and they shall eat every tree of yours that grows in the field, ⁶ and they shall fill your houses and the houses of all your servants and of all the Egyptians, as neither your fathers nor your grandfathers have seen, from the day they came on earth to this day.’” Then he turned and went out from Pharaoh.

⁷ Then Pharaoh’s servants said to him, “How long shall this man be a snare to us? Let the men go, that they may serve the Lord their God. Do you not yet understand that Egypt is ruined?” ⁸ So Moses and Aaron were brought back to Pharaoh. And he said to them, “Go, serve the Lord your God. But which ones are to go?” ⁹ Moses said, “We will go with our young and our old. We will go with our sons and daughters and with our flocks and herds, for we must hold a feast to the Lord.” ¹⁰ But he said to them, “The Lord be with you, if ever I let you and your little ones go! Look, you have some evil purpose in mind. ¹¹ No! Go, the men among you, and serve the Lord, for that is what you are asking.” And they were driven out from Pharaoh’s presence.

¹² Then the Lord said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand over the land of Egypt for the locusts, so that they may come upon the land of Egypt and eat every plant in the land, all that the hail has left.” ¹³ So Moses stretched out his staff over the land of Egypt, and the Lord brought an east wind upon the land all that day and all that night. When it was morning, the east wind had brought the locusts. ¹⁴ The locusts came up over all the land of Egypt and settled on the whole country of Egypt, such a dense swarm of locusts as had never been before, nor ever will be again. ¹⁵ They covered the face of the whole land, so that the land was darkened, and they ate all the plants in the land and all the fruit of the trees that the hail had left. Not a green thing remained, neither tree nor plant of the field, through all the land of Egypt. ¹⁶ Then Pharaoh hastily called Moses and Aaron and said, “I have sinned against the Lord your God, and against you. ¹⁷ Now therefore, forgive my sin, please, only this once, and plead with the Lord your God only to remove this death from me.” ¹⁸ So he went out from Pharaoh and pleaded with the Lord. ¹⁹ And the Lord turned the wind into a very strong west wind, which lifted the locusts and drove them into the Red Sea. Not a single locust was left in all the country of Egypt. ²⁰ But the Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he did not let the people of Israel go.

Exodus 9.10-20 | Locusts

Here is a statement that’s technically true, “nothing compares to non-existence.” One of the books that really framed my thinking early on in my Christian life was John Piper’s Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist. It’s a provocative term, Christian hedonism. The

Hedonist is of course the person who lives purely in pursuit of pleasure, and the Christian hedonist is the one who recognizes that our highest pleasure is found in Christ. Therefore our pursuit of pleasure is united to our pursuit of God. Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. Our enjoyment of God is an aspect of our chief end (WSC 1). I, however, think there has been a shift in our culture. It is rare to hear talk of a life spent maximizing pleasure, it is common to hear talk of a life spent minimizing pain. If we used to be a culture of utilitarians whose moral framework was grounded in maximizing happiness, we are now a culture of negative utilitarians who actually see very little intrinsic value to happiness and rather find our moral imperatives in terms of eliminating pain. The term Negative Utilitarianism was coined by Sir Karl Popper;

"I believe that there is, from the ethical point of view, no symmetry between suffering and happiness, or between pain and pleasure. ...In my opinion...human suffering makes a direct moral appeal for help, while there is no similar call to increase the happiness of a man who is doing well anyway."¹

Now I find that quote very compelling at face value. But we must recognize that the implications are dire. Played to its end the most ethical choice for humanity is mass euthanasia. You can hear this line of thinking in abortion arguments which often describe an inevitable life of difficulty for a child allowed to live. This negative utilitarianism is likewise present in our own state's Medical Aid in Dying (MaID) law which passed in 2016 and was amended this month by Governor Polis. If you're over 18, terminally ill, with a less than 6 month prognosis, then you can be prescribed a medication to commit suicide. The waiting period used to be two weeks, but in last months amendment was mercifully lessened to seven days. This negative utilitarian perspective is likewise present in any conversation which describes the lowering of birth rate positively. As in this excerpt from the world bank blog.

In a nutshell, data show that the higher the level of a woman's educational attainment, the fewer children she is likely to bear. Given that fewer children per woman and delayed marriage and childbearing could mean more resources per child and better health and survival rates for mothers and children, this is an important link.²

It may be worth noting that this consideration is for women in Ghana, Kenya and Ethiopia. Experts agree, it may be better if you don't exist. Here's a technically true statement, nothing compares to non-existence. Isn't Pharaoh absurd? How can a whole culture become suicidal? Pride is absurd, as absurd as comparing life to death. But in humility there is hope. Hope is about the future, and in this plague we see that Pharaoh wants to control the future of

¹ <https://www.utilitarianism.com/karl-popper.html>

² <https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/health/female-education-and-childbearing-closer-look-data#:~:text=These are large effects, suggesting,are consistent with observed data.>

1. Warning & Bartering

Exodus 10:1-2 | Then the Lord said to Moses, “Go in to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants, that I may show these signs of mine among them, that you may tell in the hearing of your son and of your grandson how I have dealt harshly with the Egyptians and what signs I have done among them, that you may know that I am the Lord.”

God offers this incredibly hopeful encouragement to Moses as he calls him back into Pharaoh to announce the eighth plague. Why has Pharaoh’s heart been hardened Moses might know it is because God through Pharaoh’s hardness of heart is orchestrating a wonder which will convince his future generations that God is the Lord. The promise is for his sons and grandsons. If Moses would humbly serve the Lord he can live in the Lord’s promise of a future hope with no fear of Pharaoh’s hardness of heart.

Exodus 10:3 | So Moses and Aaron went in to Pharaoh and said to him, “Thus says the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, ‘How long will you refuse to humble yourself before me? Let my people go, that they may serve me.’”

And here is the opposite side shown to Pharaoh. “How long will you refuse to humble yourself before me” This is the question for Pharaoh. It is finally an issue of pride. Pharaoh stands in opposition to God because he exalts himself over God by refusing to acknowledge him as God. The cost of pride before the Lord is laid out for Pharaoh, a plague of Locusts will come and devour all that was leftover by the hail. The promise to Moses is of news of the Lord’s deliverance to sons and grandsons, the news to Pharaoh is of a plague the likes of which his father or fathers never saw. Humility stretches to the future, pride brings the past to an end.

2. Egypt is Ruined

Exodus 7:7 | Then Pharaoh’s servants said to him, “How long shall this man be a snare to us? Let the men go, that they may serve the Lord their God. Do you not yet understand that Egypt is ruined?”

Interestingly, Pharaoh’s servants at least in part see the absurdity of Pharaoh’s position. They offer a plea to Pharaoh to let the men of Israel go because does he not yet see that Egypt is ruined. Now their plea betrays their split allegiance. They recognize God as above them in some sense, but they likewise recognize Pharaoh as above them, even in his opposition to the Lord. The truth is they must switch sides to join the Lord. But they still barter with Pharaoh appealing to him regarding what they think is their shared aim, the preservation of Egypt. Pharaoh heeds the advice and asks Moses who will go.

Exodus 10:9 | Moses said, “We will go with our young and our old. We will go with our sons and daughters and with our flocks and herds, for we must hold a feast to the Lord.”

You see the humility of Moses means that they are heading towards a feast, towards a future hope. And he will not retreat the glory and wonder of his hope to leave any out of whom the Lord has come to save. The Lord will preserve them absolutely, their young old sons daughters flocks and herds. Do you see how the Lord saves his people, he saves them as a people. The promise is for you and your children. Like a good negative utilitarian he won't let those people have their children.

Exodus 10:10 | But he said to them, “The Lord be with you, if ever I let you and your little ones go! Look, you have some evil purpose in mind. ¹¹ No! Go, the men among you, and serve the Lord, for that is what you are asking.”

It is almost like a Freudian slip. The Lord be with you if I ever let you go! If I ever let you go then God is God and he is with you! What does he finally care about? Denying God.

3. The East Wind

Exodus 10:13 | So Moses stretched out his staff over the land of Egypt, and the Lord brought an east wind upon the land all that day and all that night. When it was morning, the east wind had brought the locusts.

The east wind brings the Locusts. The east wind is wind from the land not the sea, it brings dryness and drought, and here after blowing all night and day, from the east rather than the rising of the light in the morning comes a swarm which darkens the whole land. All that was left from the hail is devoured by the plague of Locusts. There is nothing green left in all the land of Egypt. There is no food. Pharaoh pleads once again, offers a false repentance, and once again Moses Pleaded with the Lord who sent a west wind which drives all of the Locusts into the Red Sea. A glimpse of the end shows itself. As God will throw the armies of Pharaoh into the Red Sea. Pharaoh by the wind of the Lord will be brought to an end. In his pride he is hopeless.

Exodus 4:1-3 | Again I saw all the oppressions that are done under the sun. And behold, the tears of the oppressed, and they had no one to comfort them! On the side of their oppressors there was power, and there was no one to comfort them. ² And I thought the dead who are already dead more fortunate than the living who are still alive. ³ But better than both is he who has not yet been and has not seen the evil deeds that are done under the sun.

You know there is some truth to the negative utilitarian case for non-existence. Here perhaps the wisest man to live arrives at the same conclusion. You know for all who are outside of Christ, it seems difficult to argue that existence is better. It would have been

better for Judas himself if he had never been born, because the east wind always comes. Judgement is on its way. But even in this story the judgement of the East wind takes on a different shape. Because the judgment of the East wind upon Pharaoh becomes the deliverance of the Israelites.

Exodus 14:21 | Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided.

But there is more to be said, because the judgement of God you know must fall upon you. The pain of our sin and the curse of the world fall upon us all. Jonah, the prophet of God faces this same east wind, as do the Israelites in Amos. But this judgement ultimately fell upon Christ. He bore the wrath of God and in his bearing that wrath we are saved. Even lives full of pain and suffering that end in death, in Christ are lives of hope which have a future. The negative utilitarians in their pride like Pharaoh are in senses right, until we consider Christ our God who is mighty to save even unto death.