Making sense out of suffering:
James 1:2-4

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Abstract

The logic of James 1:2-4 is examined. The argument is viewed as a syllogism, with the *demonstrandum*: 'The believer who experiences trials must be happy.' The proof of the argument runs as follows:

* If there are trials, then there is testing (= refining) of faith.
* If there is testing (= refining) of faith, then there is endurance in faith.
* It there is endurance in faith, then there must be perfect works.
* If there are perfect works, then a perfect character develops.
* If there is a perfect character, then each virtue is possessed and each fully developed.
* If each virtue is possessed and each fully developed, then the believer will receive the crown of life.
* If the believer is to receive the crown of life, he will be happy.

1. PURPOSE

This article examines the logical flow of the argument in James 1:2-4. The *demonstrandum* of the argument is posited as a paradox in verse 2:

Πᾶσαν χαρὰν ἡγήσασθε, ἀδελφοί μου, ὅταν πειρασμοῖς περιπέσητε ποικίλοις....

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you fall into various trials....

Traditionally, logic examines declarative sentences which may be either true or false (Hodges 1977:19). The argument in James 1:2-4, however, contains sentences which are not declarative in the strict sense of the word. In verse 2 the imperative ἡγή-σασθε occurs and in verse 4 the imperative ἐχέτω. Fortunately, it is possible to paraphrase these sentences in such a way as to make the argument accessible to logical analysis (Bradley & Swartz 1979:9-12).

The first sentence (verse 2) may be paraphrased accurately as 'It is true in at least one possible world that if x experiences trials x then must experience joy'. The second imperative (verse 4) gives an instruction to the reader on how to construct this possible world: ἡ δὲ ὑπομονὴ ἔργον τέλειον ἐχέτω ('Let endurance have a perfect work'). The function of this sentence in the argument may be paraphrased as, 'It is true that, if x endures then x must do perfect works'. The reader is thus called ed upon to contribute to the sense of suffering.

2. THE SYLLOGISM

James 1:2-4 is argued in the form of a hypothetical syllogism. According to Graham (1973:20), the syllogism has a particular form, involving at least two premises and a conclusion or *demonstrandum*. For the purposes of this article, a premise is defined as a belief which is shared between the writer and the reader and which is not in need of proof. From a premise implications are deduced. The syllogistic form may be expressed symbolically as follows (read $P \longrightarrow Q$ as 'If P then Q'):

Show:		$P \longrightarrow R$
Premises:	(1)	$P \longrightarrow Q$
	(2)	$Q \longrightarrow R$
Therefore:		$P \longrightarrow R$

A simple example of a syllogism would be:

Show:		If I live in Johannesburg, then I live in South Africa.		$P \longrightarrow R$
Premises:	(1)	If I live in Johannesburg, then I live in the Transvaal.	(1)	$P \longrightarrow Q$
	(2)	If I live in the Transvaal, then I live in South Africa.	(2)	$Q \longrightarrow R$
Therefore:		If I live in Johannesburg, then I live in South Africa.		$P \longrightarrow R$

3. THE PROBLEM

The gist and flow of the argument in James 1:2-4 are understood differently by scho-
lars. Dibelius & Greeven (1964:97-105) interpret these verses as referring to a joy
which results from the acquisition of a perfect moral character here and now. Kiste-
maker (1986:30-36) attributes this joy to a Christian who has acquired the capacity
to withstand trials. According to his analysis, the argument is circular: by enduring
trials one acquires the capacity to endure trials! Mussner (1967:62-67), again, views
this joy as one which is present because of eschatological rewards to the person who
resists temptations and thereby acquires a perfect moral character.

There is a reason for these varied interpretations, namely that the text in ques-
tion is representative of what Eco (1976:243) calls 'open signal textures', that is texts
which appear to 'invite the attribution of content, thus issuing a sort of interpretive
challenge to their addressee'.

This 'openness' of the text centres around four problems:

* What is the semantic content of the *demonstrandum*?
* What are the hidden or implicit premises?
* What are the explicit premises?
* What is the logic of the argument?

4. THE CONTENT OF THE *DEMONSTRANDUM*

According to Louw & Nida (1988 vol 1:332, 775) the Greek word πειρασμός (verse
2) may be used in the sense of *trial* or *temptation*. Commentaries accordingly choose
either of the two possibilities, or both.

In James 1:12 the word refers to temptation. Accordingly, Mussner (1967:63),
Grosheide (1961:15) and Ruckstuhl (1985:11) choose *temptation*.

Adamson (1976:52) and Balz & Schrage (1973:14) are of the opinion that the
word πειρασμός refers to trials in the broader sense of the word, to include tempta-
tion. They distinguish between external trials, for example poverty, and internal
trials, for example temptation. The totality of the possible meanings of πειρασμός
is read into this one occurrence. According to Louw & Nida (1988 vol 1:332, 775)
the word is nowhere used in this broader sense and this interpretation can therefore
not be accepted.

Dibelius & Greeven (1964:99) argues that an unbiased reading of the text, with-
out taking 1:12 into account, forces one to accept the meaning *trial* in the narrow
sense of the word in 1:2, referring, for example, to poverty and exploitation. He is
followed by Kistemaker (1986:31), Smelik (1980:18) and Laws (1980:49). The con-
text seems to favour this interpretation.

The *demonstrandum* may therefore be formulated as follows:

It is necessary that, if *x* experiences trials, *x* then experiences joy.

5. THE CONTENT OF PREMISES 1 AND 2

The first sentence of the argument is stated in verse 3 as τὸ δοκίμιον ὑμῶν τῆς πίστεως κατεργάζεται ὑπομονήν. This sentence is interpreted differently according to the meaning allocated to the words δοκίμιον and ὑπομονή.

The word δοκίμιον may be used in the sense of *genuineness* if taken as the neuter singular of the adjective δοκίμιος which means *genuine, without alloy* (Arndt & Gingrich 1957). If taken as a variant form of δοκιμεῖον, it may be used in the sense of *testing*, or the *means of testing* (Arndt & Gingrich 1957).

The word ὑπομονή is used in the sense of *endurance* in some action or against some adversity (Arndt & Gingrich 1957; Thayer 1901) under difficult circumstances (Louw & Nida 1988:308). In the current context, the implied action or adversity is unclear.

In some New Testament contexts, it implies endurance *in faith* amid trials and sufferings (Lk 8:15; 2 Pt 1:6; Rv 2:19). It may also imply endurance *in doing good deeds* (Rm 2:7). On the other hand, it may imply an endurance *against hardships* (2 Cor 1:6).

Taking into account that the word δοκίμιον could be translated as *genuineness, testing*, or *means of testing*, and considering that ὑπομονή may imply endurance *in faith, in doing good deeds,* or *against hardships,* the sentence τὸ δοκίμιον ὑμῶν τῆς πίστεως κατεργάζεται ὑπομονήν could theoretically have at least three times three, or nine possible paraphrases:

(1) The genuineness of your faith results in endurance in faith.
(2) The genuineness of your faith results in endurance in good works.
(3) The genuineness of your faith results in endurance against adversity.
(4) The testing of your faith results in endurance in faith.
(5) The testing of your faith results in endurance in good works.
(6) The testing of your faith results in endurance against adversity.
(7) The means of testing your faith results in endurance in faith.
(8) The means of testing your faith results in endurance in good works.
(9) The means of testing your faith results in endurance against adversity.

The interpretation of this premise in terms of sentences (4) and (7) does not occur in commentaries.

Kistemaker (1986:34) chooses (1) to (3) combined. Pretorius (1988:34) chooses (1), Grosheide (1961:16) (3), Laws (1980:53) seemingly (5) ('...active steadfastness

in circumstances...'), Ruckstuhl (1985:11) (6), and Dibelius & Greeven (1964:100-101) (8), specifying it as endurance in heroic deeds. Mussner (1967:65), Smelik (1980:19-20) and Balz & Schrage (1973:14) accept (9).

Adamson (1976:52, 54) has a curious interpretation, not supported by the syntax of the sentence, namely that constancy in endurance accomplishes perfection of character.

Sentences (7) to (9) are based upon Dibelius & Greeven's (1964:100) view that the word δοκίμιον cannot be used in the sense of *testing*. However, Arndt & Gingrich (1957) as well as Liddell & Scott (1940) cite this meaning. The context requires this word to refer to a process rather than to an object. The possibilities expressed in (7) to (9) may therefore be eliminated as not fitting the context.

As for sentences (1) to (3), Dibelius & Greeven (1964:101) convincingly argue against this line of interpretation. They demonstrates that δοκίμιον must take up πειρασμός in the previous sentence. Therefore, a meaning referring to the quality of an action or object (*genuiness*) does not fit the context. It is furthermore quite unclear in what way 'genuineness of faith' results in the quality of endurance. Logically, one may just as well argue that endurance gives proof of genuine faith. The solution, therefore, must lie in sentences (4) to (6).

To arrive at a possible solution, it is important to note that the terms τὸ δοκίμιον and ἡ ὑπομονή allude to the sphere of metallurgy. Faith is implicitly compared to metal. The process of testing or refining this metal is called τὸ δοκίμιον. Heating, hammering and cooling the metal, rids it of impurities. The quality of the metal, that which 'remains behind', is called ὑπομονή or durability. This contrasts with the quality of the impure metal, which is not durable and easily becomes brittle. (For a detailed discussion of metallurgical procedures in antiquity, see Hammond & Scullard 1970:676.)

The spectacle of the smith at work suggests to the observer at least two parallels concerning human suffering:

(1)   The genuiness of a metal is tested by submitting it to fire and hammering.
        If gold, silver or iron are pure, then they are able to withstand proofing.
        In the same way human qualities are tested when submitted to trials.

1 Peter 1:5-7 is written against this background, where it is stated that faith is put to the test, so that its genuineness might be clear at Christ's coming and it might receive praise and glory and honour.

This viewpoint is not valid here, as it is clear from the context that the implied reader's faith has many impurities. This leaves us with the second parallel:

(2)   The process of testing refines metal by removing impurities. In the same way, trials refine human qualities.

A relevant intertext is 1QH V,16, where it is stated that God put the poor in the crucible to purify them sevenfold.

Applied to sentences (4) to (6), it seems that number (5) 'endurance in good works', may be excluded, as it is faith which is tested. Furthermore, in the following sentence (verse 4a) it is stated that an ἔργον τέλειον must accompany the endurance. If this 'perfect work' is interpreted as endurance in good works, then it is impossible to interpret verse 3 as referring to endurance in good works, as the element of endurance in good works is only added as an imperative in verse 4.

This leaves us with sentences (4) and (6). In James 5:11 Job is utilised as the prime example of somebody with the quality of endurance in his faith. Job's faith specifically was tested by trials and tribulations. He stayed true to his faith; his faith endured. This leaves us with sentence (4) as more likely to fit the immediate as well as the broader context of James.

The next sentence, ἡ δὲ ὑπομονὴ ἔργον τέλειον ἐχέτω, reveals that this 'endurance' is not 'endurance against' but 'endurance in'. The only plausible choice would be 'endurance in faith' in this instance.

If we choose sentence (6), the argument would in any case be circular: Testing of faith effects endurance against testing.

The simile underlying verse 3 may therefore be explained as follows:

	METALLURGY	HUMAN BEHAVIOUR
OBJECT	Impure metal	Impure faith
TRIALS	Refining through fire and hammering	Refining through trials
RESULT	Refined and durable metal	Refined and durable faith

A final problem becomes evident. If faith endures, until when should it endure? From the context it could only refer to the Second Coming of Christ. James 5:7-11 interprets this endurance eschatologically. This premise assures the reader that

trials assist his faith to endure till the end. In 1 Peter 1:5-7 the same premise is found.

This first sentence of the argument may be split into two premises, namely:

(1) If x experiences trials, then God tests (refines) the faith of x.
(2) If God tests (refines) the faith of x, then x endures in faith until the coming of Christ.

6. THE CONTENT OF PREMISE 3

The third premise appears in verse 4 and reads ἡ δὲ ὑπομονὴ ἔργον τέλειον ἐχέτω ('Let endurance have a perfect work').

Our first task is to paraphrase this sentence in such a way as to make it accessible to logical analysis. This may be done as follows: 'It is necessary that, if there is endurance, then a perfect work follows.'

Concerning the content of this premise, the reference of the phrase ἔργον τέλειον ἐχέτω is unclear. It is generally seen as encouraging the reader to carry on enduring for a complete period of time. The sense is then that endurance should be kept for as long as the testing continues. This would ensure that the virtues practised during this time become perfect (Adamson 1976:55; Grosheide 1961:16; Kistemaker 1986:34; Louw & Nida 1988 vol 1:658).

This interpretation seems tautological in the sense that the reader is expected to endure in endurance. The meaning *endurance* already contains the distinctive feature of a complete span of time. Furthermore, the connection between enduring in faith and the following sentence ἵνα ἧτε τέλειοι ('in order that you may be perfect') is unclear, as James stresses the connection between faith and works (1:25). One would expect the idea here that perfection is reached through an active faith.

On the other hand, some commentators follow Dibelius & Greeven (1964:101-2) in referring the phrase ἔργον τέλειον ἐχέτω to the result of endurance. The believer is called upon to acquire a perfect character (Mussner 1967:67 referring to the hereafter; Laws 1980:53; Pretorius 1988:35 referring to this life). The sense then would be that the reader's endurance should result in a perfect character.

This interpretation also produces difficulties with regard to its connection to the next sentence. It seems that something, some action, should precede the quality of perfection, otherwise the argument again becomes tautological: endurance must produce a perfect character, in order that one may have a perfect character.

There is, however, another avenue, represented by Balz & Schrage (1973:15). They state that the phrase ἔργον τέλειον ἐχέτω refers to perfect deeds: 'Standhaftigkeit...führen zu vollkommenem Wirken, das seinerseits den Menschen vollkommen macht. Das Tun konstituiert das Sein des Menschen.'

The sense then would be that endurance [in faith] must imply (be accompanied by) endurance in perfect works.

The fact that the Greek uses the singular form ἔργον τέλειον to refer to a plural is no real problem. In an inscription (Dittenberger 1903-1905:308) found in Hierapolis, dating from the second century BC, the phrase ἔργον καλλίστον in the dative singular is used to refer to deeds done in a lifetime:

> καὶ τῆ(ς) πρὸς θεοὺς εὐσεβείας ἔ[ργ]ωι καλλίσ[τω]ι οὐ μεικρὸν δοκιμεῖον
> ἀπέλιπεν.

> And he left behind not a small proof of reverence to the gods by means of excellent work(s).

The interpretation would furthermore fit in with James' call in 1:25 that faith (in the sense of intellectual assent) should be accompanied by deeds.

The third premise may therefore be stated as:

(3) It is necessary that, if x endures in faith until the coming of Christ, x then endures in perfect works until the coming of Christ.

7. THE CONTENT OF PREMISE 4

The next problem concerns the connection between ἔργον τέλειον and τέλειος (doing and being) in verse 4. The final sentence, introduced by ἵνα, expresses the implication of the previous proposition. To make the connection between premise (3) and its final sentence clear, it is necessary to postulate an implicit premise, that is that doing perfect deeds results in a perfect character:

(4) If x endures in perfect works until the coming of Christ, then x acquires a perfect character.

Balz & Schrage, whose interpretation of ἔργον τέλειον is accepted in the previous section, do not elaborate on how it is possible that a premise like (4) may be posited without explaining it to the reader. A modern reader would rather expect the premise that a perfect character leads to perfect deeds.

The same basic premise, namely that character is formed by deeds, is found in Aristotle (*E.N.* 1103 a14-b25). Aristotle states here that people become house-builders through building houses, harpplayers through playing the harp. In the same way we grow to be just by doing things that are just (see Lloyd 1968:214-217; Ross 1949:192-197).

It is not suggested here that the author of our epistle had a direct knowledge of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. It is, however, quite plausible that Aristotle's idea worked through to the popular consciousness where it became embedded as a pre-

mise. This would explain how the author could accept uncritically his readers' sharing of this viewpoint.

8. THE CONTENT OF PREMISE 5

There seems to be a relative consensus in the commentaries concerning the interpretation of the last two phrases of the argument, καὶ ὁλόκληροι ἐν μηδενὶ λειπό-μενοι ('...and whole, lacking in nothing'). Syntactically speaking, the καί before ὁλό-κληροι is best taken as explanatory (Blass & Debrunner 1961:§ 442.9). The two concluding phrases would then give a definition, first positively and then negatively, of the term τέλειος. A symbolic translation would then read:

If *x* acquires a perfect character, then *x* is whole, lacking in nothing.

Concerning the reference of these two phrases, Balz & Schrage (1973:15) are of the opinion that they refer to a quality of faith, which is not doubting or partial. This interpretation would destroy the connection between deeds and moral character shown in premise 4.

Adamson (1976:52, 55) refers the phrase ὁλόκληροι to undivided obedience and the phrase ἐν μηδενὶ λειπόμενοι to an unblemished life. Neither fits the context.

Some intertexts shed light on the possible reference of these two phrases. Stobaeus (*Eclogae* II 7:11) reads:

πάντα δὲ τὸν καλὸν καὶ ἀγαθὸν ἄνδρα τέλειον εἶναι λέγουσι διὰ τὸ μηδεμιᾶς ἀπολείπεσθαι ἀρετῆς.

They say that the good and honourable man is perfect in every respect, because he has no lack of virtue.

The adjective τέλειος is used of Noah (in Gn 6:9 LXX). Philo (*de Abrah* 34:6) has the following comment:

φησὶ δ' αὐτὸν [Noah] καὶ 'τέλειον' γεγονέναι διὰ τούτου παριστάς, ὡς οὐ μίαν ἀρετὴν ἀλλὰ πάσας ἐκτήσατο καὶ κτησάμενος ἑκάστῃ κατὰ τὸ ἐπιβάλ-λον χρώμενος διετέλεσεν.

It [the Scripture] says that he [Noah] became perfect, having proved himself in this: because he did not acquire one virtue, but all and, having acquired them, he perfected them by utilising each one abundantly.

The two final phrases, the first describing it positively, the second describing it negatively, must therefore refer to the totality of virtues acquired and the ripeness attained in each virtue (Dibelius & Greeven 1964:103) through practice.

In the rest of the epistle, these virtues are specified and discussed – for example, wisdom, resistance to temptation, knowledge of the Word, control of the tongue, control of anger, being impartial, having brotherly love, being humble, not judging a brother and not boasting. As is the case in other similar intertexts (for example Mt 5:38), the relativity of human perfection is not at issue here.

It should again be noted that this perfection refers to an eschatological condition (against Balz & Schrage 1973:15; Dibelius & Greeven 1964:97-105; Pretorius 1988:34; Ruckstuhl 1985:11), the reason being that the underlying argument of this pericope fits in with the rest of the epistle, where James often states that half a work is not good enough for the coming of Christ (1:12; 2:12; 4:10; 5:7), which James considers to be imminent. Mussner (1967:66-67) contends in this respect:

> Eine innerweltliche Vollendung im Sinn der stoischen Humanismus kennt er nicht.

Premise 5 should then be formulated as:

(5)   If x acquires a perfect character at the coming of Christ, then x possesses each virtue and x has developed each virtue fully.

9. THE CONTENT OF PREMISES 6 AND 7
It should be clear that two final premises ought to be postulated to complete the argument:

(6)   If x possesses each virtue and x has developed each virtue fully [at the coming of Christ] then x will receive the crown of life.

(7)   It is necessary that, if x is to receive the crown of life, x then must be happy [presently].

From these premises it becomes manifest that the joy of the Christian is a joy in anticipation of the coming of Christ when earthly roles are reversed – when those who are happy now start to cry, and those who are tearful now become joyful.

10. SYMBOLIC REPRESENTATION OF ARGUMENT
The argument of James 1:2-4 may now be represented symbolically using a scheme of abbreviation (see Allwood, Andersson & Dahl 1977:109 for symbolic conventions used here).

SCHEME OF ABBREVIATION:

N: It is necessary
P: x experiences trials
Q: x experiences joy.
R: God tests (refines) the faith of x
S: x endures in faith until the coming of Christ
T: x endures in perfect works until the coming of Christ
U: x acquires a perfect character
V: x possesses each virtue
W: x has developed each virtue fully
Y: x will receive the crown of life.

ARGUMENT:

SHOW: $\qquad$ $N(P \longrightarrow Q)$

(1)	$P \longrightarrow R$
(2)	$R \longrightarrow S$
(3)	$N(S \longrightarrow T)$
(4)	$T \longrightarrow U$
(5)	$U \longrightarrow V \& W$
(6)	$V \& W \longrightarrow Y$
(7)	$N(Y \longrightarrow Q)$

THEREFORE:

$$N(P \longrightarrow Q)$$

11. CONCLUSION

The analysis of the syllogism in James 1:2-4 exposes the train of thought deployed to prove that in at least one possible world the experience of trials can result in joy. The condition for this possible world to become a reality is for the believer to endure in doing perfect works while experiencing trials. The reader is called upon to make sense out of suffering.

This insight, of course, opens our eyes to the areas of blindness within the text, stretches of silence, its invisible but present message. There is at least one implied possible world in which trials produce unhappiness and bitterness. The reader also has control over the creation of this world. If the testing of faith leads, for example,

to the abandonment of faith and persistence in sinful deeds, then the results are despondency and tears.

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