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"The Poem in the Pain"

The Social Significance of Pain in Western Civilization

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OUR success with the medical management of pain has been spectacular. Since Sertürner isolated morphine in the 1st decade of the 19th century, we have seen the development of many opioids, the introduction of aspirin in 1899 and of nonsteroidal analgesic agents, the discovery of local anesthetics in 1884, and, of course, the introduction of surgical anesthesia in 1846. Concurrently, we have learned much about the biology of pain: identifying cells that sense noxious stimuli and conduct the information to the brain and chemicals that act as intermediaries in the response to pain of the whole organism and each of its parts. These accomplishments have given physicians pride and a sense of mastery and have given patients significant relief from pain and suffering. Considering our success, it is difficult to understand how the management of physical pain could become a source of difficulty between physicians and patients.[1,2] Yet it has. Patients complain that physicians treat pain but ignore them, the patients; that they treat pain inadequately; or that they treat pain with inappropriate drugs or techniques.

Why do physicians and patients have such different perceptions about pain and its relief? The answer may lie in the nature of pain and in our understanding of its significance. Traditionally, the word "pain" includes many conditions not necessarily associated with medicine; deprivation, mental depression, poverty, loss of political freedom or social status, and physical or mental discomfort or hardship, to mention just a few. Only in the 19th century did social philosophers and biologists separate "pain" from "suffering" and did physicians begin to study and manage biologic pain, that is, the physical response to noxious stimuli. Initial success may have created unreasonable expectations. Patients assumed that physicians could control pain and that politicians and social scientists could abolish suffering and the public pressured them to do so. Unmindful of the extensive role that pain and suffering play in the formation and maintenance of social bonds, patients and physicians alike may have failed to appreciate the consequences.

In this article I review concepts of pain that developed in the 19th century, discuss how they differ from earlier ideas, and speculate about how the disparity between old and new may create tension between physicians and patients. At each stage I point out the similarities between our understanding and management of physical "pain" and social "suffering" and show how attitudes evolved from an early period of acceptance and resignation, through a stage of revolt, and finally to the present in the attempt to reconcile old and new ideas.

Reactions to Pain before the Discovery of Anesthesia

The Origin and Significance of Pain

Early ideas about pain and suffering reflect a fundamental need to explain those experiences in life that otherwise simply look destructive. People in times past lived more closely with illness than we do now: Life expectancy was short; many children died before their first birthday; few were ever completely free of disease even while they lived. Very simply, disease, pain, and suffering could not be ignored. Lacking a biologic understanding of pain and disease, people sought explanations elsewhere. Contemporary Catholic theologian Schillebeeckx believes that "the history of suffering

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among man, and indeed in the animal world and throughout the universe, is the constant theme of every account of life, every philosophy and every religion; and today even of science and technology." [3] Similarly, art historian Pollit considers art and philosophy tools that the ancient Greeks used to discover order in the "chain of suffering [that] stems from . . . a primeval, chaotic and brutal world of values which confronts human comprehension" [4] and that helped them to cope.

Greek myths illustrate some characteristics of early attempts to deal with pain. Common to many is the idea that pain and suffering, disease, and death signify divine wrath, inflicted on human beings when cupidity, pride, and lust lead them to break divine laws. In *The Odyssey,* for example, Zeus says, "My word, how mortals take the gods to task! All their afflictions come from us, we hear. And what of their own failings? Greed and folly double the suffering in the lot of man." [5] In *The Oresteia* Aeschylus writes, "Every mortal who outraged god or guest or loving parent: each receives the pain his pains exact." [6] The theme also appears in myths about Prometheus and Pandora and in many stories in the Judeo-Christian tradition such as Adam and Eve and Sodom and Gomorrah.

Apart from explaining the origin of pain, such stories convey social values. For example, many extol pain incurred by an act that helped the community: Prometheus, who stole fire from the gods for mankind, is one example. *The Oresteia* is another. It begins with Agamemnon sacrificing his daughter before he leaves for Troy and culminates in Athena's gift to the citizens of Athens, a code of laws that will lead them to a golden new age. The crucifixion story conveys a similar message in the Christian tradition—insofar as it signifies the promise of salvation for mankind. These stories invest some kinds of pain with great social worth.

Apocalyptic stories illustrate another constructive use of pain and punishment. According to this tradition, at the world's end generations of saints will rise from the dead to destroy oppressors and to lead a chosen people to dominion over the earth. Cohn, describing the origin of this idea and its tendency to reappear in times of turmoil, suggests that such stories may help groups of oppressed people to endure adversity.[7]

The Role of Pain in Early Social Institutions

Apart from explanations of pain in early stories and myths, communities have used pain in legal, political, social, educational, and medical institutions. In some instances, the practices have been harsh or cruel. Even harsh laws, however, may help establish social order, stability, safety, and continuity. In fact, many of these traditions are the source of our contemporary values and social conventions.

Law. Sacred laws foster harmonious living by threatening miscreants with poverty, suffering, disease, and death as well as pain. Those who escape temporal justice cannot evade eternal punishment from an all knowing, all powerful deity.[8] Depictions of hell appear extensively on the walls of early churches and in religious tracts of the Middle Ages, but also in later secular forms such as Dante's *Inferno* and in murals and paintings of the Renaissance. The threat of divine punishment may be particularly effective in cultures with a tradition of corporate guilt, the belief that all members of society are responsible and may be punished for the misdeeds of any of its members. Old Testament stories of Sodom and Gomorrah reflect this idea, but it also appears in *The Iliad* and in later Greek plays. Thus, corporate guilt and punishment help enforce conformity to accepted norms of social behavior.

In European tradition, pain became important in the formation and administration of secular law. From the Code of Hammarabi until the judicial reforms of the 19th century, pain was used legally both as punishment and, in the form of public executions, as a deterrent. In Europe and even the United States, a permanent gibbet and pillory were prominent features of many town squares. In fact, the legal infliction of pain became a source of entertainment. Towns "bought" convicted criminals and advertised public executions to increase attendance at their commercial fairs. Courts also used pain to obtain evidence. Officials did not use torture capriciously but followed established rules that governed the methods, the type of evidence that might be obtained, and the legal and medical situations in which torture might be administered.[9,10]

An important aspect of the judicial use of pain is that it is overt, circumscribed by rules, and socially condoned. It should not be confused with nonjudicial torture, which is inflicted covertly by governments or individuals without social sanction or restraint to terrorize or control individuals or large segments of a population. Nonlegal torture appears designed to create feelings of alienation, abandonment, and depersonalization.[11] This characteristic, if no other, distinguishes it from the judicial use of pain, which is intended to foster or strengthen social structure in groups.

Politics. Pain and suffering also have had significant political repercussions. MacMullen suggests that the spectacle of public persecution of early Christians helped convert Romans, who either simply sought insurance for a better afterlife or were impressed with a religion that gave martyrs the fortitude to seek and endure pain.[12] Threats of persecution from without, in this case from the Romans, helped solidify political bonds and foster the growth of early Christian communities.[13] External threats to Jews probably had a similar effect on the formation of social bonds within their communities.

Certainly, the religious emphasis on redemption through pain influenced the course of holy wars during the Middle Ages. Christians and Moslems alike went into battle believing that the injuries they sustained would guarantee them preferential treatment in the afterlife. In the 10th-century lyric poem *The Song of Roland,* the Archbishop says to his soldiers, who are outnumbered by infidels and clearly close to death, "It is far better for us to die fighting. . . . Holy paradise is open to you. You will take your seat amongst the Innocents." [14] The ideal that prompted the Jihad and the Crusades resembles that which induced religious ascetics to practice self-abuse and mutilation as an act of atonement. In the Middle Ages, the use of self-inflicted pain during the epidemics of plague was widespread among those who believed their plight might arouse God's pity, who would thus spare them some worse pain or experience.[15]

Another facet of pain's role in politics was used by Holy Men, religious ascetics in Christian communities of the eastern Mediterranean in late antiquity.[16] They created for themselves a unique social position as physical representatives of the point of contact between the seen and the unseen worlds—the junction, as it were, of earth and heaven. Their methods included a lifestyle characterized by "prolonged and clearly visible rituals of self mortification," [16] unnatural deeds, which, in the eyes of other men, put them outside normal society. They became "dead" to the world and by doing so gained respect and even secular power and authority. From this favored position they took action where others could not—for example, as mediators in conflicts between communities. The public polemics of one ascetic, Peter the Hermit, helped initiate the First Crusade. The social status of Holy Men developed from long-standing pagan, Jewish, and Christian traditions.[16]

Art, Literature, and Music. Depictions of the martyrdom of saints and the punishment of sinners adorned churches and public places for centuries and inspired poems, books, passion plays, and music. These renderings taught values and served an important psychological function. Aristotle suggested that suffering, experienced vicariously through literature and art, helps to purge or purify those who read or behold it and to elevate their thoughts. In some instances, depictions of pain and suffering in art and literature have been thought to effect political change. For example, the plight of Eliza in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* may have helped lead the United States to abolish slavery during the past century.[17,18]

Learning and Education. Pain has a long-standing role in education. Several verses from the Old Testament Book of Proverbs[19] pertain:

- Good understanding giveth favor: but the way of transgressors is hard (13:15).
- Poverty and shame shall be to him that refuseth instruction; but he that regardeth reproof shall be honored (13:18).
- He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes (13:24).

None of the biblical statements differs substantively from the comment repeated so often in *The Oresteia:* "Zeus has led us on to know, the Helmsman lays it down as law, that we must suffer, suffer unto truth." [6] The Roman equivalent was *per aspera ad astra.*

The association between pain and learning appears in the work of 17th-century writer Malebranche. He cites Proverbs 13 and suggests that children sometimes must be taught through their senses when reason fails.[20] Thus, "if they refuse to do what reason shows them they ought to do, they need never be endured but instead one must go so far as some kind of violence; for in such situations, he who spares his son shows him more hatred than love." [20] Locke also acknowledged pain was no less important than pleasure as a motivation for learning: "Pain has the same efficacy and use to set us on work that pleasure has." [21] Similar ideas appear in writings of the Utilitarian social philosophers Bentham[22] and Mill.[23]

Anthropologists suggest that some cultures used pain and suffering in order to build bonds and influence behavior. Paleolithic cave paintings may have been part of puberty rites.[24] Elders frightened pubescent boys with confinement in dark caves, and then overwhelmed

them with the illumination of animal paintings on the walls. The "psychological value of such a shock treatment for the shattering of a no longer wanted personality structure appears to have been utilized in a time-tested pedagogical crisis of brainwashing . . . for the conversion of babes into men, dependable hunters and courageous defenders of the tribe." [25]

Medicine. Attributing pain and suffering to divine wrath also influenced the development of western medicine. Starting with the premise that pain and disease were punishment for sin, clergy assumed that healing the soul would heal the body. Accordingly, the church developed liturgies for the sick and religious orders to care for them. The involvement of the church had important social effects. It gave the sick comfort and hope for recovery and reinforced the idea that every member of the community had a responsibility toward those who were less fortunate. The religious association also brought the resources of church and community to the care and healing of the destitute and sick. Accordingly, the church dispensed alms, formed the first hospitals, and disseminated information and regulations about public health practices. In fact, many communities combined the roles of priests and physicians, a tradition carried from Northern Europe to the United States and one that persisted into the 19th century.[26–29] Such overt demonstrations of support publicized the plight of the sufferer and mobilized the community, which presumably helped forestall feelings of social isolation otherwise accompanying disease.

Attitudes toward Pain and Suffering in the 19th Century

The Attack on Pain and Suffering

The reform movement that swept through western Europe and the United States during the 19th century developed, in part, from a new found desire to abolish pain and suffering. Underlying the movement was a transformation in the prevailing view of human nature. During the Renaissance and the Enlightenment people began to place special value on the worth of the individual and to emphasize the inherent dignity rather than the depravity of man.[30] With this society jettisoned the centuries-old belief that pain, suffering, poverty, disease, and death represent punishment for sin. Instead people sinned *because* they were poor or sick. Accordingly, social activists argued improvements in education and living conditions would help restore people to the state of innocence and purity to which they all were born. The activists also stated that it was the responsibility of society to help the less fortunate.[31,32]

Coincident with the change in sensibilities, new feelings of power and control developed. Advances in science and technology improved living conditions and offered the illusion of unlimited prospects for the future. Governments enacted laws to abolish slavery, to protect children from physical abuse, to improve the conditions for laborers in factories and mines, and to eliminate torture and physical punishment from the judicial systems. Concurrently, the church, some private organizations, and, later, the state assumed more responsibility for the health and welfare of the poor.[31]

Developments in medicine contributed to the surge of confidence and optimism. Physicians learned to distinguish diseases and to associate symptoms and physical signs of each with specific morphologic and functional abnormalities. They discarded mesmerism, hydrotherapy, homeopathy, and blood-letting and replaced them with medical practices based on principles of physiology, chemistry, pathology, and pharmacology. Similarly, physicians questioned theories based simply on personal experience and used experimentation and statistics to obtain facts and new ideas.[28,30,33]

During the early decades of the century physicians began the systematic study of pain. By 1850 they had identified neurologic receptors and pathways and even measured rates of transmission of nerve impulses. With each new discovery, pain lost more of its mystical and religious connotations and became just another biologic phenomenon. To many, anesthesia resembled the discovery of steam and electric power, in that it was an inevitable product of rational thought and experimentation.[30]

Buoyed by tangible evidence of the efficacy of science and medicine, prominent people expressed unlimited optimism about the future:

- Noted North American physician Mitchell: "It is, indeed, possible to eliminate all pain." [34]
- Professor of Matera Medica at Harvard, Clark: "Anesthetic agents . . . enabled the physician at his will to compel pain to disappear and distress to be quiet." [35]
- Political philosopher Mill: "Most of the great positive evils of the world are . . . removable and will . . .

be in the end completely extinguished by the wisdom of society . . . even the most intractable of enemies, disease." [36]

Ambivalence toward Pain

Considering the important role of pain and suffering in the formation and maintenance of early social institutions, it is not surprising that many people had difficulty with the 19th-century idea that these experiences should be abolished. For example, not all physicians believed surgical anesthesia to be an unqualified benefit. Acquiring the means to abolish pain forced them to face fundamental questions about its biologic significance.[29,30] Is pain good or is it bad? Is it part of the disease or part of the healing? Can there be healing without pain? When an organism is free from all pain does it still live? On a practical level, surgeons, who relied on the reactions of the patient to guide them during surgery, wondered whether it was safe to operate on unconscious patients. Obstetricians speculated that pain and uterine contractions could not be dissociated, and any diminution of pain would necessarily diminish contractions.[37] Physicians had asked some of these questions before 1846. Not until they had drugs that could abolish pain, however, were they forced to answer them and to develop new patterns of critical thought.

Just as physicians expressed ambiguity about the treatment of biologic pain, so politicians and political philosophers expressed doubts about the wisdom of eliminating pain and suffering from social institutions. Locke, for example, never suggested that punishment be dropped from education; he simply said that rewards tend to work better.[21] Even Parliament questioned the consequences of eliminating social pain and suffering: Politicians who wanted to help the poor acknowledged that some people would not work without the threat of hunger. Accordingly, as they devised the first welfare systems, they argued how to distinguish the "earnest" or "deserving poor," those who truly would benefit from the programs, from the "undeserving poor," [32] those who would not work without the threat of suffering.

Even the most outspoken humanists retained some use of pain and suffering in their ideal political schemes. Bentham and Mill, for example, did not say that society should eliminate the infliction of pain from penal codes but said society should impose no more pain than was necessary to achieve its goals. These utilitarians emphasized rehabilitation rather than retribution and argued that legal codes had to appear legitimate to the public if they were to be effective. This could be achieved only if punishments were fair, that is, in proportion to the offense. Offenders could not then complain about the capriciousness of the law; they would be forced to confront the nature of their crimes and to feel shame. In accord with this argument, reformers explored ways that they could administer a "just measure of pain." [38] For example, hoping to eliminate variation in the severity of the whipping related to the strength of the executioner, reformers considered using machines to flog prisoners. Composers Gilbert and Sullivan satirized this idea in their light opera *The Mikado,* in which the Lord High Executioner sings, "My purpose all sublime, I shall achieve in time, To make the punishment fit the crime."

Despite a sometimes ambiguous reaction to the alleviation of biologic pain and social suffering, this effort became an important motive for extensive change. Science, medicine, and technology made significant improvements in material life. Private organizations and the state developed welfare programs and extended care to more people. Some governments even developed programs to help those beyond their own political borders, through foreign aid or under the auspices of organizations such as the United Nations. In some instances, war was declared to ensure "natural" or "human" rights of citizens of another country. Underlying many of these developments was the idea that pain, suffering, and disease were wrong and unnecessary, and that individuals and society should do whatever possible to eliminate such experiences. Ostensibly, pain and suffering ceased to have social value.

Attitudes toward Pain and Suffering in the 20th Century

The Persistence of Old Values

Despite overt attempts to abolish pain and suffering, traditional concepts remain strong. Many remain, virtually unchanged in contemporary thought and practice. Consider politics. Calling America's involvement in World War II a "crusade," arranging "photo opportunities" in a church or mosque before the onset of war, or labeling a hostile nation "an evil empire" invests political acts with connotations of a "holy war." Presumably it motivates people to sacrifice for some

greater good. Religious concepts of hell also remain. Witness the financial success of recent movies such as "Jason Goes to Hell; The Final Friday" and "Hell Raiser 3: Hell on Earth." [39] Though offered primarily as entertainment, these moving pictures may represent a 20th-century equivalent of early church murals and paintings. Another example is the popularity of performances of the Requiem Mass. Even versions by modern composers contain traditional interpretations of the divine origin of pain[40,41]: "Day of wrath . . . when the judge sits, hidden sins will become known: no sins will go unpunished" or "Deliver me, Lord, from eternal death upon that day of terror when You sit in judgement and heaven and earth will be moved and consumed."

Secular concepts of the social value of pain and suffering also persist. For example, even after one and a half centuries of experience with social legislation and welfare programs, politicians and the public still debate the role of suffering in the maintenance of community bonds, family structure, and personal and public morality. Others, pointing to rising crime rates, suggest the law should be "harder" on criminals and argue for capital punishment and reinstitution of corporal punishment. Educators speak of discipline by "the carrot or the stick" and athletes seek motivation by mumbling "no pain, no gain."

The social role of pain and suffering surfaces even in the behavioral sciences. For example, ethologists suggest that many animal species have an innate social response that may be elicited by a cry of distress or pain from any of its members. Such calls will cause birds to congregate and attack a predator, will evoke aggressive behavior of a mother for its young, or cause animals to flock for protection.[42] In modern medicine physicians suggest that pain may have an adaptive function because it prompts patients to seek medical help or promotes healing by causing the sufferer to rest an injured part.[43] Common to all these explanations is the idea that pain may be integral to the individual and to the development and maintenance of social order and cohesion.

Portrayals of Pain and Suffering in 20th-Century Literature

Traditional concepts of pain and suffering appear often in literature. For example, religious themes appear in many novels. Consider *Bread and Wine,* first published in 1936, which deals with a revolutionary's attempt to fight social decay brought on by fascism: "God acts in accordance with our sins. Every experience of pain is a visitation from Heaven." [44] Similarly, Lawrence explores the traditional religious idea that sacrificial pain has social value in the short story "The Woman Who Rode Away." In it, he describes the semivoluntary sacrifice of an American woman at the hands of an isolated Central American Indian tribe who believe that her ritual death will realign discordant elements of their world.[45] Apropos to both stories are comments by critic Frye. In an observation that evokes descriptions of the lives of the antique Holy Men,[16] he notes how often tragic figures in literature—Prometheus, Hamlet, Faustus, Tamburlaine, and Macbeth, for example—through their pain occupy a position separate from others, "on top of the wheel of fortune, halfway between human society on the ground and the something greater in the sky." [46]

Other authors link pain to creativity. Hemingway suggests that pain may be an important stimulus for writing. In his short story "The Snows of Kilimanjaro," he contrasts the "death" of a writer's creativity with his physical death from gangrene.[47] The writer recalls that his drive to write diminished as his material life became more comfortable: "The marvelous thing is that it's painless. . . . Thats how you know when it starts." [47] Hemingway's story gains poignancy from a comment in a letter he wrote to Fitzgerald: "You especially have to be hurt like hell before you can write seriously. But when you get the damned hurt, use it—don't cheat with it. Be as faithful to it as a scientist." [48]

Several other authors explore the idea that meaning emerges from pain and suffering. Wright observes that even as a youth he developed "a conviction that the meaning of living came only when one was struggling to wring a meaning out of meaningless suffering." [49] Physician–novelist Percy, exploring a similar theme in *Love in the Ruins,* describes a woman terrified by her "well-nigh perfect life, really death in life, in Paradise, where all her needs were satisfied and all she had to do was play golf and bridge." [50] In *The Moviegoer,* Percy depicts an ordinary man who welcomes tragedies, accidents, and other untoward events as a release from the "pain of malaise," which otherwise envelops him.[51] Such reactions may explain how "the grave and constant in human suffering may . . . lead to an experience that is regarded by those who have known it as that apogee of their lives." [25]

Poet and critic Alvarez explores the significance of suffering in a history of suicide, particularly as it per-

tains to several of his poet friends who took their own lives. In words reminiscent of those of Locke, he suggests that "if secularized man were kept going only by the pleasure principle, the human race would already be extinct." He speculates that, for some, the absence of pain and suffering may signify a loss of meaning and excitement.[52] Alvarez, like Hemingway and Percy, implies that the soul may wither in the absence of adversity. This is especially poignant in view of the circumstances of the death of Hemingway and of Alvarez's disclosure that he once attempted suicide. For many the struggle against pain may represent an affirmation of life: "Pain makes things valuable." [53]

Ambivalence toward pain and suffering appears in Greene's *The Power and the Glory,*[54] the story of a whiskey priest who voluntarily gives his life to minister to parishioners who are persecuted by a ruthless government. Greene contrasts the moral and spiritual suffering of the priest, a timid man, with the physical pain of his adversary, the police lieutenant, who has a toothache. The priest eventually comes to accept pain as an unavoidable part of life. In a statement that resembles a passage from a medieval text, he says, "One of the fathers has told us that joy always depends on pain. Pain is part of joy. We are hungry and then think how we enjoy our food at last. . . . This is why I tell you that heaven is here: this is a part of heaven just as pain is a part of heaven." [54] In contrast, the lieutenant utters a statement that epitomizes the attitude of 19th-century reformers: "We'll give people food . . . teach them to read, give them books. We'll see they don't suffer. . . . Suffering is wrong." [54]

Stegner's *All the Little Live Things* also captures the range of contemporary attitudes toward pain, including the ambivalence toward it.[53] In it, an older man says, "Pain is fine when you can turn it off. It may even be good for the soul in small quantities . . . [but] pain is poison! Don't go hunting for it . . . Avoid it all you can and bear it if you must but never mistake it for something desirable!" [53] A pregnant woman dying of metastatic breast cancer counters, "How would women feel if having babies was as easy as picking apples? Don't you get pleasure–satisfaction—no, pleasure it really is—out of all the rough, hot, cold, scratchy, hard uncomfortable things?" [53] Childbirth is an interesting choice to illustrate ambivalence about pain because this has been a particularly contentious area between physicians and patients.[37,55]

The revolt against pain and suffering in the 19th century was spectacular and successful—or so it seemed. Against this background it is surprising to learn how soon people developed misgivings and how long misgivings persisted. Perhaps early proclamations of success gave the public unrealistic expectations so that any achievement less than a miracle appeared to them a failure. Perhaps they sensed emptiness in the rhetoric or early proclamations of medicine's "victory" over pain and suffering. Certainly the public came to learn, almost as quickly as did physicians, that drugs that treat pain also have deleterious side effects; that modern medicine may ameliorate disease but can not abolish it; and that human suffering cannot be eliminated simply by manipulating the physical and social environment. Perhaps some of the tension is a residual of unrealistic predictions not just by physicians, but also by politicians and social philosophers.

Perhaps the very factors that contributed to the success of modern medicine unwittingly deprived patients of other important ways of coping. Recognizing the biologic basis of pain and disease encouraged people to study natural processes and to develop ways to control them. The longevity and physical comfort that people now enjoy is a direct outgrowth of this approach. On the other hand, the emphasis on medicine, biology, and psychology may have distracted us from religion and other traditional ways to deal with pain and suffering. However well medicine describes mechanisms of pain, it does not explain "why." Perhaps this void explains the plethora of recent books seeking the answers to questions such as, Why do bad things happen to good people?[56–61] Hauerwas suggests that people would not have asked this question 200 yr ago; they *knew* pain was a punishment for sin.[56]

Today, we believe pain is disruptive and destructive. We accept as natural the desire to be free of pain and suffering in our personal lives, and we praise efforts to expunge them from human experience. Despite this, we appear never to have rid ourselves of an atavistic belief that pain and suffering may, in fact, be an integral part of life; that such experience, however unpleasant, may be necessary for personal development, as well as for the formation and maintenance of communal bonds, as manifest in a primal response to a distress call, the exercise of force through the legal system, or interpersonal bonds that develop from some shared tragedy. Thus, an important source of tension between physicians and patients may come from our collective failure

to deal with pain and suffering. The ambivalence that physicians encounter as they treat their patients' pain and disease may be part of a greater problem—the ambivalence we all feel, physicians as well as patients, as we grapple with social problems such as poverty, crime, and social injustice. However strongly we believe that pain and suffering must be abolished, we may have lingering doubts that they may serve some purpose. Without resolution of this problem, we must, like a poet, continue to search for the "poem in the pain." [62,†]

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† And I standing in the shade
Have seen it a thousand times
Happen: first theft, then murder;
Rape; the rueful acts
Of the blind hand . . .
Seeking the poem
In the pain, I have learned
Silence is best.

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