

Book Reviews

The Culture of Pain

David B. Morris

University of California Press,
Berkeley, 1991, 342 pp., \$29.95

WHAT MAKES THIS BOOK WORTH READING is not its thesis but the way the author argues it. The thesis is already widely sensed: Modern scientific medicine explains pain chiefly in organic and biochemical terms, leading us to misinterpret pain as no more than a sensation in the body caused by the stimulation of specific nerve pathways; but human experience tells us pain, especially chronic pain, is always an encounter with meaning and thus is cultural as well as organic.

The development of this thesis is what captures our attention. David B. Morris takes us on a wide-ranging tour of voices and images from the past that expose the poverty of the medical explanation by revealing the link between pain and meaning. Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilych* is his introduction into this

hermeneutics of pain. Ilych's pain began almost unnoticed as a simple bruise when he fell off a ladder. He first thought of it as insignificant, but it persisted and intensified until it represented a terrifying truth of the greatest significance—his annihilation. He began to scream, and screamed for three days as the once-meaningless pain exposed his death and challenged the superficiality of his hitherto unexamined life.

The inquiry into the neglected encounter between pain and meaning then moves across other texts and images to reveal different facets of pain. Morris examines violent pain in *The Iliad*, pious pain in Pascal's *Prayer to Ask God for the Good Use of Sickness*, comic pain in *Don Quixote* and the *Decameron*, gender-biased pain in Charcot's accounts of hysteria, and religious pain in paintings of St. Sebastian's martyrdom by Pollaiuolo and by Reni. Morris goes on to discuss the impenetrable mystery of pain in Job, the pain of political exploitation in the liberation theology of Gutiérrez, pain dominated

by mind in the Stoic writings of Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus, existentially meaningful pain in the logotherapy of Viktor Frankl, and the practical usefulness of pain in Kafka's *In the Penal Colony*. Morris also touches on noble pain found in the late Hellenistic statue depicting the suffering of Laocoön in Virgil's *Aeneid*, the sexual pleasure of pain in the pornographic novels of de Sade, tragic pain in Sophocles's *Philoctetes* and in Joyce Carol Oates's analysis of boxing (which she calls "America's tragic theater"), and a Christian understanding of pain in Piero della Francesca's enigmatic fifteenth century painting *The Flagellation*.

Literature and art can tell us only so much, of course, so Morris takes us to a pain clinic where pain is not symptomatic but pathological: The message is now the disease. He listens to patients' stories and learns from them. In this pain clinic, and perhaps in others as well, medicine is learning to repudiate its narrow view of pain. Physicians are acknowledging the psychosocial and cultural meanings of pain.

BOOK BRIEFS

The TQM Transformation: A Model for Organizational Change

John Persico, Jr., editor, *Quality Resources*, White Plains, NY, 1992, 224 pp., \$24.95

For an organization's total quality management (TQM) movement to succeed, employees and managers must shift their focus from the product or the service to the process—the process by which they can transform their organization into one that supports the quest for quality, write the authors. Through case studies, the authors present managers with a model developed by Process Management International (based on the philosophy of W. Edwards Deming) to institutionalize quality concepts and launch a successful

TQM movement. Nine chapters focus on various players in the organization's transformation process, including the organization leader, the executive steering committee, the TQM coordinator, the process improvement team, and the consultant.

Health Policy and the Hispanic

Antonio Furino, editor, Westview Press, Boulder, CO, 1992, 240 pp., \$36.50

Hispanics will soon represent our nation's largest minority. The contributing authors explore the dimensions of Hispanic health issues by providing recent statistics and offering a view of the magnitude and scope of challenges health policymakers face. The book's 16 chapters are divided among 4

sections that cover conceptual, constitutional, and policy elements of the problem; the clinical evidence of diseases for which Hispanics are disproportionately at risk; economic and social considerations; and future policy options to improve Hispanics' health. An appendix provides abstracts from recent research on issues related to the health of Hispanics in the United States.

Choices and Conflict: Explorations in Health Care Ethics

Emily Friedman, ed., *American Hospital Association*, Chicago, 1992, 224 pp., \$32 (AHA members), \$42 (nonmembers) (paperback)

Current ethical dilemmas facing hospital decision makers are addressed in 22 pre-

Morris's goal is clear: to deconstruct the modern, one-dimensional, organic model of pain to make way for a multidimensional model embracing emotional, cognitive, and social features. Thus will pain once again have meaning—more exactly, many meanings—for the postmodern future “implies that your pain and my pain might have totally different explanations and meanings,” writes Morris.

Morris may carry his postmodernism too far, however. Following French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard, he describes postmodernism as the withering away of vast, overarching, general systems of explanation called “metanarratives.” The demise of these—Lyotard is thinking of Marxism and Christianity—is supposed to leave multiple subsystems of explanation, each with its own language and discourse. According to Morris, the organic model of pain is another metanarrative destined to lose its power, along with Marxism and Christianity. But I believe the organic model of pain is not on the same level of generality as

Marxism or Christianity and therefore is better considered a particular narrative within the metanarrative of scientific materialism.

Moreover, Morris's idea that a postmodern multiplicity of discourse is incompatible with the metanarrative of Christianity appears inconsistent both with his text and with the historical reality of Christianity. As Morris shows well, the perceptions of pain varied widely in the writings of Dante, Cervantes, Pascal, and Gutiérrez and in the paintings of Pollaiuolo, Reni, da Vinci, and della Francesca—despite their shared Roman Catholic Christianity.

Historically, Christianity has embraced a plurality of paradoxical attitudes toward pain. Many medieval theologians gave the impression that redemption is secured chiefly by the painful passion and death of Jesus on the cross, but earlier Christians identified the crucial moment of redemption as that of the resurrection of a glorified body immune to all suffering, a theology confirmed by the early Christian choice of Sunday, not

Friday, as the weekly holy day.

And Christianity recognizes a pacifist tradition, condemning all violence in war, as well as a just war tradition that condones lethal force. Christianity preaches that pain is God's will, yet mounts a mighty struggle against it by feeding the hungry and caring for the sick. Christianity has valued both the roughness and concealment of the hair shirt and the softness and display of watered silk. One can live in the postmodern world of diverse attitudes toward pain without ever leaving the metanarrative of Christianity.

Healthcare administrators will find this volume worthwhile because it sharpens our sensitivity to suffering. More than 30 well-chosen photographs and figures complement a text so well written that, oddly enough, it is a pleasure to read this book on pain.

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viously published and 6 original articles by healthcare attorneys, ethicists, sociologists, physicians, and nurses. *Choices and Conflict* is divided into six parts: “Rationing: Issues and Reasons”; “Rationing: The Health Care Professional's Role”; “Dilemmas in the Patient-Provider Relationship”; “Ethics and the Health Care Professional”; “The Practice of Bioethics”; and “The Individual and Society: Seeking Fairness.”

The editor notes in her preface that the issues the authors addressed in *Choices and Conflicts: Explorations in Health Care Ethics* reflect “changes in the environment of bioethics” that have occurred since the first volume in the series (*Making Choices: Ethics Issues for Health Care Professionals*) was published in 1986.

BOOKS RECEIVED

Marketing Management Issues in Ambulatory Health Care, Charles D. Schewe, ed., Haworth Press, Binghamton, NY, 1991

The Pocket Dictionary of Signing, Rod R. Butterworth and Mickey Flodin, Perigee Books, New York City, 1992

Quality Audit Systems for Primary Care Centers, Dale S. Benson and William Van Osdol, Community Health Network and Methodist Hospital of Indiana, Indianapolis, 1992

Quality Medical Records for Primary Care Centers, William Van

Osdol and Philip E. Johnston, Community Health Network and Methodist Hospital of Indiana, Indianapolis, 1989

Quality Primary Care Management . . . Ideas That Work, Deloris Merrill and Peyton G. Townes, Jr., Community Health Network and Methodist Hospital of Indiana, Indianapolis, 1990

Telephone Triage Protocols for Primary Care Centers, Dale Woodke, Community Health Network and Methodist Hospital of Indiana, Indianapolis, 1991

A Way without Words: A Guide for Spiritually Emerging Adults, Marsha Sinetar, Paulist Press, Mahwah, NJ, 1992