

## **“The Body in Pain”: An Interview with Elaine Scarry**

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### **Abstract**

In this interview, Elaine Scarry, Harvard English professor and author of *The Body in Pain*, discusses a variety of topics, which are connected by the idea that accurate and ethical communication relies on direct and intimate human contact. Scarry's concern for the human body is made evident as she comments on the difficulty of expressing and understanding pain; specifically she explores the politics of pain in the contemporary context of the War on Terror and torture. She argues that national defense can only be effective when individuals are personally and physically involved, drawing on examples from 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina. She ends by making a correlation between beauty and justice and emphasizes the responsibility of the university to foster an understanding of that correlation through inter-disciplinary teaching and study.

### **Keywords**

Elaine Scarry, body, pain, pleasure, power, torture,  
spectacle, justice, expression, beauty, symmetry,  
Abu Ghraib, national defense, university

Elaine Scarry is Professor of English at Harvard University. She has written on such diverse subjects as Thomas Hardy's use of imagery and language, the phenomenon of physical pain, beauty and its connection to justice, airplane crashes, and the United States national defense policy. Her work is varied, but threaded throughout all of it is a careful concern for the human body, for our ability to express ourselves through language, artifacts, and material works, and for the centrality of beauty and its ability to foster meaningful and just lives. *The Body in Pain*, perhaps the work for which she is best known, is a thorough study of the experience of physical pain and of the act of inflicting pain on others (especially through war and torture) as a mode of gaining illegitimate power over them. She writes about the difficulty of expressing physical pain, and I begin by asking her what it is that makes pain unique in its inexpressibility. The interview was conducted on January 16, 2006.

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ELIZABETH IRENE SMITH: *Does the problem of the difficulty of expression apply to other forms of intense bodily experience, such as pleasure?*<sup>1</sup>

ELAINE SCARRY: It is true that if something is intensely physical it can absorb all of one's energy so that one might not have any resources left over for speech. But I do think that pleasure, unlike pain, is really language-building.

*But what about an experience like orgasm, which seems difficult to describe?*

It is true that we often think of lovers as speaking baby-talk, or resorting to monosyllables, so one might say that language is backing up, the way it does when one is suddenly put in pain: language not only disappears, but you can actually chart its disappearance across the sudden reaching for monosyllables or for the kinds of cries and whispers that one made before one learned language. But the fact of the matter is that even intense sexual desire is productive of narratives, as witnessed by the fact that we've got a huge number of wonderful stories about being in love, and even acute desire is included in those stories.

If you think of other kinds of bodily pleasure, such as eating, one again sees the fact that from Homer forward, people in a state of pleasure are often not alone with their food, but in a very social situation—having a dinner party, moving into the

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<sup>1</sup> All questions raised by the interviewer would be indicated in italics.

highest levels of argument and invention. This is an indication that pleasure tends to be world-building and pain to be world-destroying, even though in moments of acute labor or physical work, one might not at that moment be able to put it into words.

*Pain is commonly written about, but is it not productive of narrative because it is only possible to write about it, or to even imagine writing about it, once a certain distance has been made from it? Is pain not productive of narrative because it is so isolating?*

But has physical pain really produced a lot of narratives? I just finished teaching a course on literature and medicine, and the number of texts, of great pieces of literature, that depict physical pain is actually tiny. There is the fantastically rich essay by Virginia Woolf that says, "Why is it that the mere school-girl when she falls in love has Shakespeare or Keats to speak her mind for her, but let a sufferer try to describe a pain in his head to a doctor and language at once runs dry" (194). There's Sophocles' *Philoctetes* and there's Bergman's film *Cries and Whispers* (1973) and there are some extraordinary poems by Emily Dickenson that are very directly about physical pain, but there aren't too many others.

If one moves to the subject of physical injury, to body damage—which is a different subject—then there are a larger number. But the number of books on physical pain still remains tiny, as opposed to psychological pain. There is a wonderful moment in Thomas Mann's *Magic Mountain* (1924): his humanist Settembrini is a part of a larger humanistic project to make an encyclopedia of suffering, and Settembrini's task is to write the volume on literature that is about suffering, and he has to give up his part of the project because he realizes there is no literature that is *not* about suffering. It's a wonderful moment, and it certainly rings true, but the fact is that he is talking about psychological suffering.

*Are physical pain and emotional pain so different?*

Emotional pain can sometimes be so severe that it approaches the kinds of features that come about in physical pain. Loss of a beloved person such as a mate or a child would come very close to that, and yet even there the ability to talk about it seems to remain much more intact, in part because people can understand the external object in the world that has been lost—the child or the lover or the spouse. Think of *The Year of Magical Thinking* by Joan Didion which came out last year

and has received a great deal of attention: it's about excruciating emotional pain, but fortunately she was able to write about it and fortunately it's something that many people are able to read, whereas it is hard to find . . . someone who has been in prolonged severe physical pain who has written a book that is then read and even partially understood by the readers.

*Do you think that a central aspect of being human is the attempt to find ways to express physical pain?*

I think that in the midst of a great deal of uncertainty about what one ought to do or what one ought not to do and what we in a larger group—whether in a nation or across many nations—ought to do, the one thing we can say is that we need to abstain from injury and we need to repair injuries that already exist. Insofar as expressing physical pain or understanding physical pain is part of working to prevent the infliction of injury or working to help repair injuries that exist, then yes it is absolutely important to express physical pain. Maybe an even more elementary way of answering the question is to say that people who are in great pain feel that the fact that they're alone with it compounds what is already a great amount of averseness. The fact that they feel the need to have it expressed or are grateful for some attempts made by physicians and others to find a language for it would suggest that it certainly is a positive good.

An essay I wrote, "The Difficulty of Imagining Other People," is about the fact that there is a direct relationship between our inability to imagine other people and the ease with which we injure people (98-110). We are capable of injuring even people who are standing right in front of us, and the extreme case is the case of somebody who tortures. We know that people will inflict small amounts of pain on people in their own environment, but if they actually don't know the other people—because the people live on the other side of town or the people are on a different work shift or the people speak a different language—then the ease with which people will license injuring increases, as in a war that one doesn't fight in oneself but that one agrees to authorize.

In general, two safeguards against injury are important: trying to imagine other people better and having laws that are not independent of our imagination, laws that require us to imagine other people (this is what much of what I work on attempts to affirm). If we follow laws that only require that we have a big debate [as] an absolute obligation, then we're not endangered by the fact that many, many people can just shrug and say, "Yeah, let's go to war, let somebody else fight it." In other

words, the law should require that we stop and really imagine the other people, because having such a law would protect us from the weakness of our own imaginations which fail to essentially rap us on the forehead and say, "Wait a minute, you can't even imagine the people you are so blithely alluding to at this moment."

*And those sorts of laws are not in place now?*

No, they are very much not in place. The present political era, the Bush era, is one that has acted beyond the laws more than in most other time periods when I've been alive, so it represents an extreme sample, but actually this problem is a very long-standing one that I see coming in part from the fact that once you invent forms of weapons such as nuclear weapons (and) let a president fire the weapons, then presidents get very impatient when they are conducting non-nuclear wars, like invading a Latin American country or invading Iraq. They become very impatient with the idea of having to get Congressional authorization. In part, they think that if they can use nuclear weapons without Congressional authorization, why would they need to go through all of this outside approval for an act of conducting conventional war? We live in a period that has been more and more willing to put these laws aside.

*You show, in The Body in Pain, that nuclear warfare is an especially horrific form of warfare because it, more than any other form of war, does not involve consent. You state, "It might be argued that even in conventional war, the 'agents' of the war are the 'kings and cabinets' rather than the populations of the disputing countries. By comparison with nuclear war, however, this assertion is simply untrue; for if there theoretically exist a hundred degrees of consent, in nuclear war the level is zero while in conventional war it may fluctuate between, for example, eighty-eight and one hundred" (153). I wonder if you see modern warfare, and especially the War on Terror, moving closer to this non-consensual version of warfare even without the use of nuclear weapons.*

I think that nuclear weapons are an extreme example, but I see why you are asking this question. My own view is that the Constitution and our laws require us to have a Congressional declaration of war and they require that the United States population authorize the war. This is an argument that I put forward on the second amendment that was published in the early 90s in the *University of Pennsylvania*

*Law Review*<sup>2</sup> and several other places. The idea is that if a country is going to go to war it has to distribute responsibility to the whole population, and that probably does mean that we have to have a draft.

If a country has a standing army, the leaders do not need to explain to the whole population the reasons for going to war; then it's much easier to start wars that aren't something the whole country is willing to pay for with lives. Our country has a volunteer army—and we know those volunteers are very specifically recruited from cities and neighborhoods where the young people don't have as rich a sense of what their options are—but the kind of critical discussion that needs to take place would be much more rigorous and sustained if all of us, in Congress and universities and businesses and stores and the restaurant where you work, either stood to be drafted or knew people we adore who stood to be drafted. The level of discussion would suddenly become much higher. And of course the ground troops right now are tremendously at risk without there being a continuous, ongoing conversation between the soldiers and the widespread civilian world, as there would be if people from all our neighborhoods were there and were writing back home to us.

*Torture is a major part of this War on Terror. Why is it being so heavily relied upon by the United States government?*

Working on *The Body in Pain*, drawing on materials that were available from countries all over the world, it became clear that torture often is carried out when a country ceases to believe in itself, and therefore there is a certain element of spectacle involved in it. I cite in *The Body in Pain* the fact that in Chile the torture room was called the “blue-lit stage” and in the Philippines it was called the “production room” and in South Vietnam it was called the “cinema room.” If you look at the American acts of torture in Abu Ghraib, people often commented on the fact that some soldiers had taken pictures of themselves inflicting humiliation on the prisoners. And we also know that at least one of those pictures was used as a screen saver on a computer system in the prison. Much of the reaction to those photographs seemed to imply that there was something unusual about that kind of willingness to display the cruelty, but actually those pictures are very compatible with the “blue lit stage” and the “production room” and the “cinema room”; that is,

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<sup>2</sup> Please see “War and Social Contact: Nuclear Policy, Distribution, and the Right to Bear Arms.”

they are compatible with the idea that there is some kind of compensatory drama that is going on.

We have a country right now that understandably doesn't know how to respond to terrorism, and that is part of the problem. But we also have a country whose intelligence reports have failed again and again and again. The pre-9/11 intelligence reports failed; that's been carefully documented by the 9/11 report. The intelligence reports on weapons of mass destruction in Iraq failed. The big report done by Laurence Silberman showed elaborate failures of intelligence.<sup>3</sup> The anthrax acts of terrorism right after 9/11 have not been solved and we even seem to have forgotten about the fact that our law enforcement agencies aren't able to solve this. When a country loses belief in legitimate forms of intelligence gathering, then it begins to use false forms of intelligence gathering. Torture is a preposterous means for gathering intelligence. To fall back on that and swagger around is a kind of announcement to ourselves and the world that we've lost belief in ourselves. We could stop and sympathize with ourselves for having lost belief. Admittedly, gathering intelligence lawfully is hard. But it can't be that the way to repair it is to fall back on ludicrous and deeply cruel mimesis, "pretend intelligence."

*Do you think that regimes that rely on torture convince themselves that they are gathering intelligence or simply strive to convince others of that?*

I think they convince themselves that they are gathering intelligence. We can look at the Abu Ghraib story. Now there has been plenty of evidence to connect high members of the Bush administration condoning certain acts like nakedness and dogs in Guantanamo Bay and those acts migrated over to Abu Ghraib. They believed that they had what they saw as the power to go around the Geneva Conventions. In Guantanamo Bay, Bush said that the Geneva Conventions didn't apply. In Bagram, Afghanistan, he said that the Geneva Conventions didn't apply but he was going to follow them anyway; this might sound like a good thing but what he was saying was that he personally gets to decide whether or not the Geneva Conventions hold. In Abu Ghraib, the Geneva Conventions had not been suspended, and were supposedly being followed. But if you've got prison guards from Guantanamo and Bagram—and we know that there were prison guards from those two locations who then migrated to Abu Ghraib—and in those other places those conventions had been suspended in the first case and made an issue of personal presidential privilege in the second case, then it isn't all that surprising that

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<sup>3</sup> Please see Laurence and Robb.

individual soldiers would lose their bearing as to whether they had to follow the Geneva Conventions. After all, the idea of the law usually is that the law applies to everyone in the country, whether you're the president or a soldier. So it's not much more egregious for a soldier to think that he or she can go around the Geneva conventions than for the President to think that.

But I haven't directly answered your question. The individuals who torture do convince themselves that they are gathering important information. We know that some of the people at Abu Ghraib thought that the White House took a special interest in the information they could produce. The White House even had high-level people visiting the prison. The inquiries into the Abu Ghraib disaster—like the Taguba report<sup>4</sup> and the Fay-Jones report<sup>5</sup>—for the most part don't go into what questions were being asked of the prisoners. And I'm glad that they don't because in every instance of torture that I know of, the questions are not real questions. But the single subject area that does come up in every one of the reports is weapons of mass destruction. So, watch how this works. First you have the U. N. Commission and other international commissions going in and trying to see if there are nuclear weapons and finding that there are none. And then you have certain contingents of your army, which is now occupying the country, looking for these secret nuclear weapons, even though the international organizations have told you that there don't seem to be any. And when even that army search fails, you start torturing people to ask them where the nuclear weapons are. That would be a kind of direct example of a country using torture when it no longer believes in itself. Unable to get any confirmation of nuclear weapons through any lawful international or national procedure, the United States resorts to torture; maybe if this person is put in enough humiliation and pain, they will begin to tell us that there are nuclear weapons.

*Why does this losing faith in oneself, as a country, lead to the desire for spectacle?*

It is a very two-directional act, because on the one hand torture is happening in secret chambers and on the other hand, many regimes that torture want the population to know enough about what is going on in the torture rooms that the procedures of terror will work to make the population see this regime as tremendously powerful.

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<sup>4</sup> The National Commission of Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, *The Taguba Report on Treatment of Abu Ghraib Prisoners in Iraq* (New York: Cosimo-on-Demand, 2004).

<sup>5</sup> Fay, George R. and Anthony R. Jones, "Investigation of Intelligence Activities at Abu Ghraib." August 2004. <<http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Aug2004/d20040825fay.pdf>>.

And of course, on one level, the regime that tortures does have power, in the sense that if you took a 40-pound eight-year-old and tied him to a chair and then took a six-foot man with lots of weapons in his hand, on some level it is true to say that the big man does have a lot of power. So, too, if we have a mountain lion that is marauding through Santa Cruz or Cambridge we have to say that that is a form of power, if it's mauling everyone. But this is never a form of power that we consider legitimate. This is not just an impression that the torturers look like impotent people. The fact is that regimes that use torture use it when their own populations don't support them, or when they have failed in some other way. This compensatory nature becomes clearest in international situations. If a country is both fighting a war abroad and torturing, sometimes you can see that the torturing is happening at moments when it is suffering the highest losses internationally. As has been pointed out by historians of World War II, up until about 1941, moments when Germany brutalized people in concentration camps or let them be freer very much corresponded to whether they were seeming to win or seeming to lose the war. And we can see a similar pattern in other countries. In our own country, the Abu Ghraib situation actually did happen—as Darius Rejali pointed out to me—at a time when we were having the most trouble with the insurgents in Iraq.

*I would like to turn now to your analysis of 9/11 in Who Defended the Country? You argue in that piece that the passengers on board United Airlines Flight 93 (which crashed in Pennsylvania) were more successful at defending the United States than the Pentagon because they faced a threat that was within their immediate sensory perception and because they were exercising authority and consent over their own lives (20). You use this analysis to discuss the fallacy of the government's claim to be able to act quickly in order to defend this country. I wonder if you would draw parallels between the government's response to 9/11 and its response to Hurricane Katrina.*

Both events revealed the same thing. September 11<sup>th</sup> and Hurricane Katrina both revealed that whatever we mean by defense in this country, it's not a defense of the population, unfortunately. Our Department of Defense on 9/11 hadn't actually been very practiced in defending this country, even though one might have thought that is what a Department of Defense is. We had to go ahead and actually invent something called a Department of Homeland Defense because the Department of Defense itself is actually a Department of Non-Homeland Defense.

And similarly, with Hurricane Katrina none of the systems were in place for rapidly assisting people in our own country.

Going back to the subject of nuclear arms, at one point I read a set of articles by Ted Gup on the amount of money the country has spent on the nuclear fallout shelter for the president. Many people in this country think fallout shelters are useless, but in other countries, such as Switzerland, there are required fallout shelters for the whole population. The presidential fallout shelter involves a kind of city inside a big mountain that has an artificial lake and buildings two or three stories high. More money was spent on this not just than what was spent on the fallout shelters for the population (that wouldn't have been hard to do since the money spent on the fallout shelters for the population was zero), but more money had been spent by far on this than had been spent on *all forms* of civilian defense, protecting people from floods, fire and other forms of natural catastrophes.

And again, just as on 9/11 the real defense of the country came from citizens who could find the resources and ways to defend themselves and defend the country, in the Katrina disaster, when you hear of the successful actions in the first few days, it's very often individual people who went in there and helped. In some cases, those who tried to help were deterred by official agencies. For example, a group of paramedics were at a convention in New Orleans at the time of the hurricane. They helped move civilians and were in the process of getting them out of the city when they were actually imperiled and prevented from getting to safety by official channels. I do think that there is a strong connection between the two events, and that Katrina confirms that since 9/11 it continues to be a question whether we have an intact or improved civil defense.

*But how do we have a more localized, individualized sense of national defense without it turning into a dangerous vigilante system, such as what has happened with the Minutemen in Arizona, who have taken it upon themselves to secure the Mexico-U.S. border, and have often resorted to cruel and unnecessary violence?*

I'm not a fan of right-wing militias, but I do think that at a certain point the right and the left need to talk to one another. I disapprove of a great deal of what the militia people do, and I certainly don't think that what we should do is get our own guns and make our own decisions outside of procedures of debate that involve the whole country. So there is a lot that I disagree with. However, the feeling that the federal government is not well set up to defend the country, the feeling that if you give up defending the country you have infantilized the population, the feeling that

once you disenfranchise the population by weeding them out of military questions you also actually imperil their civil rights and their civil liberties—those are things that I do agree with, and therefore I hope that at a certain point, people can hear that not everything on the left is correct, and not everything on the right is wrong.

*This morning I was listening to the radio, and since today is Martin Luther King Jr. Day, the station was airing some of his speeches. He said that "we are living in revolutionary times," and I thought of your article "Consent and the Body: Injury, Departure and Desire" and your discussion of the era of nuclear war as pre-revolutionary. Can you say a little about what you mean by "pre-revolution" and if you think that there is the potential for some sort of revolution in our world?*

When one is reminded of what was happening in the Civil Rights Era, the fact is that was a revolution that was being paid for day by day by horrible physical injuries that people were receiving. When I say that the nuclear period is a pre-revolutionary time, it would be like living before you even realized there was a civil-rights problem. The fact that we are living with a kind of nuclear double standard is simply not acknowledged. Even in the last few days, we've heard a lot about the fact that Iran is developing nuclear technology. Nowhere in the public discussion does anyone admit that we, the U.S., have thousands of these weapons! It's true that we do sometimes quote the Iranians who say that if other places in the world are going to have these weapons they are too. But that's quoted as if we think it's odd or weird, when actually what could be more comprehensible and straightforward than the request for symmetry between countries? Any account of justice has always seen symmetry as a key feature.

All of these things we have been talking about follow from this form of weaponry that has put so much power in the executive hands. Our own powers as citizens can seem to have escaped us.

I think it is useful to remember that any extension of rights has always involved attention to military rights. The Fifteenth Amendment, which extended the right to vote to African-Americans, was argued primarily on the basis that 180,000 blacks had fought in the Civil War. And the Nineteenth Amendment, extending the right to vote to women, was not as highly dependent on the military argument as the Fifteenth Amendment had been, but it was a strong part of Suffragette pageants and plays and arguments that women were needed to contribute to the defense of the country and therefore ought to have equal voting powers. And the Twenty-sixth Amendment, which lowered the voting age from twenty-one to eighteen, again was

made on the basis that if you are old enough to fight in Vietnam or to argue on campuses about whether there should be a Vietnam War, then you are old enough to vote. And both statements were advocated in Congress as reasons to change the voting age. The idea is that Civil Rights is connected to fulfilling military responsibilities, whether “responsibilities” means actually agreeing to fight or standing in the home market-place and saying that this war is wrong—both of these are connected to obtaining a full civil stature.

*The last question I would like to ask you brings us back to the issue of the journal. In our discussion you have shown that too often the executive branch of the government, especially in its control of nuclear weapons, speaks unilaterally and unjustly for “the human” today. What is the role of the University and of the Humanities in counteracting that voice or in speaking differently for “the human”?*

I think that beauty is opposed to injury. Beauty is continually reminding us of what it can look like when things are symmetrical and fair. The Humanities, by having beautiful paintings, great works of literature, and poems, pieces of music, great historical accounts of what a debate looks like, etc, are keeping those things in front of us.

I do think that the University has a crucial role in all of this. I think that there is a strange double-think about the University right now. Often you will see slighting references to universities in the media, and yet I think that there is a wide-spread opinion that universities are crucial to this country. I am often struck by the fact that certain companies—for example, I once visited Apple headquarters in California—are arranged as campuses. So there are many places that emulate the campus model. And there are many other ways in which this country shows its valuing of universities: the age of seventeen to twenty-two is revered in this country (I know that education extends all through life; people go back to school; I myself take courses and everybody does; but there is still this key university age). We can see this just in the number of campuses; whether it’s large universities or small colleges, if you just look at the physical image of them, the often striking buildings and landscapes, they usually have immense resources put into them. So despite the less than celebratory way in which universities are referred to in the media, there is a tremendous recognition that we can’t do anything without widespread education and intense education.

*What distinction would you make between the Sciences and the Humanities within universities? Is it the University as a whole that is precious, as you call it in "On Beauty and Being Just," or is there something that the Humanities contributes that is unique to this world-making recognition of beauty?*

I do think that there are specific things that the Humanities do, but I certainly think the Sciences are also part of that being precious. If we take the questions that are being asked in the Sciences right now, there are extremely thoughtful answers being given and of course my view is that the more scientists who are in touch with humanists and working in interdisciplinary groups, the more likely they are to have a large vision.

There is a website edited by John Brockman ([www.edge.org](http://www.edge.org)), and every year he asks a wide array of leading scientists a question. Last year the question was, "Name something which you believe is true but for which there doesn't yet exist any evidence?" and this year the question is "What do you think is the most dangerous idea?" Each scientist writes a little essay, and many of them are about different forms of creativity, things that everybody in the Humanities and the Sciences alike would agree is our great gift, but that everybody also sees as containing risks. Different essays give different examples of either a specific invention that is a problem or a specific feature of inventing that is a problem. For example, the MIT intellectual Sherry Terkl (one of the few women who was asked) worries that children who are growing up right now won't have an appreciation for the real or the authentic because they are so adept at entering into virtual reality. And Douglas Rushkoff worries about "open source currency." And Jaron Lanier worries about what he calls "homoncular flexibility," the fact that we have such a good ability to imagine ourselves in different bodies; he worries that it is so fluid that maybe there is no brake on it.

I think that all the people called upon in this example are scientists, or closer to the sciences, yet a lot of them are people with a great deal of contact with the Humanities. For example, Jamshed Bharucha is someone who works on music and neuroscience, and Jaron Lanier is in computer science and music, and Stephen Kosslyn, who gives a very thought-provoking answer about how frightened people are of the idea of God, is in neurosciences but is always doing cross-disciplinary projects with people in the Humanities. Quite a few people on the list are in the neurosciences which is an area of thought that brings together the University in both the Arts and the Sciences.

I may have an exaggerated sense of that because for many years there was at Harvard in the 90s a group called the “Mind/Brain/Behavior Group.” I was part of that group, as were many scientists. So there were always weekly conversations about these things.<sup>6</sup>

The only reason for singling out the Humanities and talking about this is that there is so much emphasis on the Sciences today that one might forget that the Humanities are equally key. We see the resources, what buildings are being built, and we see how far more resources are being put in the Sciences than in the Humanities. But here and there you do see the physical evidence of the belief in the Humanities. I recently visited Middlebury [College], and the new library there is astonishing and beautiful.

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Abruptly our interview ends, as we both rush off to our next obligations. But I find lingering in my mind images of verdant and blooming college campuses, of stately libraries—well-lit cathedrals that smell of hard work and old glue. It is fitting that we should end our talk discussing the importance of beauty: we began with words on pain, the other end, for Elaine Scarry, of the spectrum of being human. Being in pain, she says, causes us to be least human because we are least able to express ourselves and share ourselves with others. Inflicting pain is an illegitimate and unjust way of gaining power over other human beings because in essence we obliterate their ability to be human. Recognizing beauty, in contrast, allows us to be most fully human. It inspires us toward two of humanity’s greatest traits: towards a desire for justice, as justice like beauty is fair and symmetrical; and towards acts of creation, as we desire to replicate beauty—to create something of beauty, to express our feeling of the beautiful to someone else, or simply to hold onto the experience of beauty as long as possible, and replicate this moment in all our perceptions. Some of Elaine Scarry’s ideas are contentious and some have been met with skepticism. But I think that if more of us spoke of the human in the way she does, and acted accordingly, the world would be a fairer place.

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<sup>6</sup> See Schacter and Scarry.

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