

But it was far more in the master's interest to motivate his slaves by positive means. Nearly every slave in the South enjoyed a higher standard of living than the poor whites of the South—and had a much easier existence.

Slave owners promoted high standards of morality among their slaves. Marriage was encouraged. Adultery was punished, and divorce was discouraged by the whip.

The thesis that systematic breeding of slaves for sale in the market accounted for a major share of the net income of slaveholders is often espoused. The proponents of the breeding thesis have been misled by *their* failure to recognize the difference between human beings and animals. Promiscuity increases venereal disease and reduces fertility, and emotional factors are of considerable significance in successful human conception. To imply that these factors would not be present in black people is inherently racist.

Furthermore, slave families were not matriarchal, as is commonly assumed. The husband was the head of the house, and there was a strong familial bond between family members. One could argue that the black family has never been stronger than it was under slavery. It was certainly stronger under the southern slave system than it is today under our destructive welfare state.

Critics of the South have consistently accused slave owners and overseers of turning plantations into personal harems. Such arguments overlook the real and potentially large costs that confronted masters and overseers who sought sexual pleasures in the slave quarters. It would have been much easier, and less risky, for owners of large plantations to keep a mistress in town than to risk the destruction of their own families by taking up with a slave woman. Further, to imply that black men would be indifferent to the sexual abuse of their women is to imply that they were somehow less manly than other men. This common assumption about slave men is an insult to their humanity and patently racist.

Slavery produced in the South a genuine affection between the races that we believe we can say has never existed in any nation before the Civil War or since. Listen to a few examples:

George Fleming of Laurens, South Carolina, said: "I longed to see Marse Sam Fleming. Lawd, chile, dat's de best white man what ever breathed de good air. As old as I is, I still draps a tear when I see his grave, fer he sho' was good to me and all his other niggers."

Clara Davis of Alabama said: "Dem was de good ole days. How I longs to be back dar wid my ole folks an' playin' wid de chillun down by de creek. I done tol' de Lawd I don't want

nothin' much . . . only my home, white folks."

Adeline Johnson, Winnsboro, South Carolina: "I want to be in heaven with all my white folks, just to wait on them, and love them, and serve them, sorta like I did in slavery time. That will be enough heaven for Adeline."


There is a nobility to these old servants that humbles us: Nicey Pugh says, "I was born a slave but I ain't neber been one. I'se been a worker for good peoples. You wouldn't calls dat bein' a slave would you, white folks?"

The issue of slavery was used to provoke a revolution in 1861. That revolution has continued to this day, and slavery has *increased* in our land as a result. It is time for us to stand and declare the truth about slavery and to expose the failures of the abolitionist worldview.

[Crescendo]

## THE PAIN SCALE

By Eula Biss. A longer version appeared in the Spring issue of the *Seneca Review*. Biss is the author of *The Balloonists*, a book-length prose poem.

O   
No Pain

The concept of Christ is considerably older than the concept of zero. Both are problematic, but the problem of zero troubles me more than the problem of Christ.

Zero is not a number. Or at least it does not behave like a number. It does not add, subtract, or multiply like other numbers. Zero is a number the way Christ was a man.

Aristotle, for one, did not believe in zero.

Some very complicated mathematical problems cannot be solved without the concept of zero. But zero makes some very simple problems impossible. For example, the value of zero divided by zero is unknown.

I'm sitting in a hospital trying to measure my pain on a scale from zero to ten. For this purpose, I need a zero. A scale of any sort needs fixed points.

Zero, on the Celsius scale, is the point at which water freezes. And one hundred is the point at which water boils. But Anders Celsius, who introduced the scale in 1742, originally fixed zero as the point at which water boils, and one hundred as the point at which water freezes. These fixed points were reversed only after his death.

The deepest circle of Dante's *Inferno* does not burn. It is frozen. In his last glimpse of Hell,

Dante looks back and sees Satan upside down through the ice.

At night, I ice my pain. My mind descends into a strange sinking calm. Any number multiplied by zero is zero. And so with ice and me. I am nullified. I wake up to melted ice and the warm throb of my pain returning.

←————— 1 —————→  
My father is a physician. He treats patients with cancer, who often suffer extreme pain. My father raised me to believe that most pain is minor. He was never impressed by my bleeding cuts or even my weeping sores. In retrospect, neither am I.

My father once told me that an itch is just very mild pain. Both sensations simply signal, he told me, irritated or damaged tissue. But a nasty itch, I observed, can be much more excruciating than a paper cut, which is also mild pain. Digging at an itch until it bleeds and is transformed into pure pain can bring a kind of relief.

Every time I go to the doctor, I am asked to rate my pain on a scale from zero to ten. This practice of quantifying pain was introduced by the hospice movement in the 1970s, with the goal of providing better care for patients who did not respond to curative treatment.

When I complained of pain as a child, my father would ask, "What kind of pain?" Wearily, he would list for me some of the different kinds of pain: "burning, stabbing, throbbing, prickling, dull, sharp, deep, shallow..."

Hospice nurses are trained to identify five types of pain: physical, emotional, spiritual, social, and financial.

Where does pain worth measuring begin? With poison ivy? With a hangnail? With a stubbed toe? A sore throat? A needle prick? A razor cut?

There is a mathematical proof that zero equals one. Which, of course, it doesn't.

←————— 2 —————→  
The set of whole numbers is also known as "God's numbers." The Devil is in the fractions. Although the distance between one and two is finite, it contains infinite fractions. This could also be said of the distance between my mind and my body. My whole and its parts.

The sensations of my own body may be the only subject on which I am qualified to claim expertise. Sad and terrible, then, how little I know. "How do you feel?" the doctor asks, and I cannot accurately answer. "Does this hurt?" he asks. Again, I'm not sure. "Do you have more or less pain than the last time I saw you?" Hard to say. I begin to lie to protect my reputation. I try to act certain.

On occasion, an extraordinary pain swells like a wave under the hands of the doctor, or the chiropractor, or the massage therapist, and floods my body. Sometimes I hear my throat make a sound. Sometimes I see spots. I consider this the pain of treatment, and I have come to find it deeply pleasurable. I long for it.

The International Association for the Study of Pain is very clear on this point—pain must be unpleasant. "Experiences which resemble pain but are not unpleasant," reads their definition of pain, "should not be called pain."

In the second circle of Dante's *Inferno*, the adulterous lovers cling to each other, whirling eternally, caught in an endless wind. My next-door neighbor, who loves Chagall, does not think this sounds like Hell. I think it depends on the wind.

Wind, like pain, is difficult to capture. The poor windsock is always striving, and always failing.

It took sailors more than two hundred years to develop a standardized scale for the measure of wind. The result, the Beaufort scale, provides twelve categories for everything from "Calm" to "Hurricane." The scale offers not just a number but a term for the wind, a range of speed, and a brief description.

A force 2 wind on the Beaufort scale, for example, is a "Light Breeze" moving between four and seven miles per hour. On land it is specified as "wind felt on face; leaves rustle; wind vanes move."

←————— 3 —————→  
Alone in the exam room, I stare at the pain scale, a simple number line complicated by only two phrases. Under zero: "No pain." Under ten: "The worst pain imaginable."

The worst pain imaginable... Stabbed in the eye with a spoon? Buried under an avalanche of sharp rocks? Impaled with hundreds of nails? Dragged over gravel behind a fast truck? Skinned alive?

Determining the intensity of my pain is a blind calculation. On my first attempt, I assigned the value of ten to a theoretical experience—burning alive. Then I tried to determine what percentage of the pain of burning alive I was feeling.

I chose 30 percent—three. Which seemed, at the time, quite substantial.

Three. Mail remains unopened. Thoughts are rarely followed to their conclusions. Sitting still becomes unbearable after one hour. Nausea sets in. Grasping at the pain does not bring relief. Quiet desperation descends.

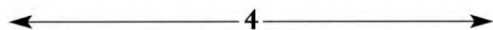
"Three is nothing," my father tells me now. "Three is go home and take two aspirin."

It would be helpful, I tell him, if that could be noted on the scale.

Assigning a value to my own pain has never ceased to feel like a political act. I am a citizen of a country that ranks our comfort above any other concern. People suffer, I know, so that I may eat bananas in February. And then there is history... I struggle to consider my pain in proportion to the pain of a napalmed Vietnamese girl whose skin is slowly melting off as she walks naked in the sun. This exercise itself is painful.

"You are not meant to be rating world suffering," my friend in Honduras advises. "This scale applies only to you and your experience."

This thought unburdens me of factoring the continent of Africa into my calculations. But I am terrified by the reality that I am isolated in this skin—alone with my pain and my own fallibility.



The Wong-Baker Faces scale was developed to help young children rate their pain. The scale features six numbered faces—a smiling happy face at zero and a crying frowning face at five.

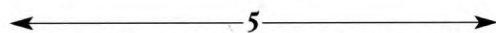
Several studies have suggested that children using the Wong-Baker scale tend to conflate emotional pain and physical pain. A child who is not

in physical pain but is very frightened of surgery, for example, might choose the crying face. One researcher observed that "hurting" and "feeling" seemed to be synonymous to some children. I myself am puzzled by the distinction. Both words are used to describe emotions as well as physical sensations, and pain is defined as a "sensory and emotional experience." In an attempt to rate only the physical pain of children, a more emotionally "neutral" scale was developed.

When my aunt became a nurse, twenty years ago, it was not unusual for surgery to be performed on infants without any pain medication. Babies, it was believed, did not have the fully developed nervous systems necessary to feel pain. Medical evidence that infants experience pain in response to anything that would cause an adult pain has only recently emerged.

The face I remember, always, was on the front page of a local newspaper in an Arizona gas station. The man's face was horrifyingly distorted in an open-mouthed cry of raw pain. His house, the caption explained, had just been destroyed in a fire. But the man himself, the article revealed, had not been hurt.

There is no evidence of pain on my body. No marks. No swelling. No terrible tumor. The X-rays revealed nothing. Two MRIs of my brain and spine revealed nothing. There was no ghastly white cloud on the film. There was nothing to illustrate my pain except a number, which I was told to choose from between zero and ten. My proof.



"The problem with scales from zero to ten," my father tells me, "is the tyranny of the mean."

Overwhelmingly, patients tend to rate their pain as a five, unless they are in excruciating pain. At best, this renders the scale far less sensitive to gradations in pain. At worst, it renders the scale useless.

I understand the desire to be average only when I am in pain. To be normal is to be okay in a fundamental way.

The fact that 50 million Americans suffer from chronic pain does not comfort me. Rather, it confounds me. "This is not normal," I keep thinking. A thought invariably followed by a doubt: "Is this normal?"

The distinction between test results that are normal or abnormal is often determined by how far the results deviate from the mean. My X-rays did not reveal a cause for my pain, but they did reveal an abnormality. "See this." The doctor pointed to the string of vertebrae hanging down from the

[Nostrum]

## MATTRESS OF EVIL

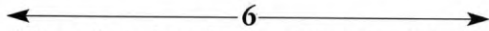
*From Kim Il Sung's Secrets for Health and Longevity, by his former doctor, Seok Yeong-hwan, published in South Korea last year by Pampas Press. Translated from the Korean by Ha-yun Jung.*

**K**im Il Sung's bed had to be set up at the right altitude. All of his vacation homes, located at scenic tourist spots around North Korea, were built at exactly 500 meters above sea level. Kim's mattresses at these resorts had medicinal herbs inserted in all the parts that came into direct contact with his body. His pillows were filled with thirty-two different kinds of herbs. The duvets were specially handcrafted, filled with only the finest, fluffiest down that grows on the lower chin of sparrows. It is said that as many as 700,000 sparrows were needed to fill a single duvet.



*Windräder*, a woodcut by Christiane Baumgartner, whose work will be on exhibit in August at the Ikon Gallery, in Birmingham, England.

base of my skull like a loose line finding plumb. "Your spine," he told me, "is abnormally straight."



A force 6 wind on the Beaufort scale, a "Strong Breeze," is characterized by "large branches in motion; telegraph wires whistle; umbrellas used with difficulty."

Several centuries before the Beaufort scale was developed to quantify the wind, serious efforts were made to produce an accurate map of Hell. Infernal cartography was considered an important undertaking for the architects and mathematicians of the Renaissance, who based their calculations on the distances and proportions described by Dante.

Galileo Galilei delivered extensive lectures on the mapping of Hell. He applied recent advances in geometry to determine the exact location of the entrance to the underworld and then figured the dimensions that would be necessary to maintain the structural integrity of Hell's interior.

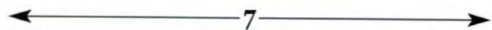
Imagination is treacherous. It builds a Hell so real that the ceiling is vulnerable to collapse. To

be safe, I think I should map my pain only in proportion to pain I have already felt.

But my nerves have short memories. My mind remembers crashing my bicycle as a teenager, but my body does not. I cannot seem to conjure the sensation of lost skin without actually losing skin. My nerves cannot, or will not, imagine past pain—this, I think, is for the best.

I have found, however, that I can ask my body to imagine the pain it feels as something else. For example, with some effort I can imagine the sensation of pain as heat.

Perhaps, with a stronger mind, I could imagine the heat as warmth, and then the warmth as nothing at all.



When I cry from the pain, I cry over the idea of it lasting forever, not over the pain itself. The psychologist, in her rational way, suggests that I do not let myself imagine it lasting forever. "Choose an amount of time you know you can endure," she says, "and then challenge yourself to make it through only that time." I make it through the night, and then sob through the morning.

The pain scale measures only the intensity of pain, not the duration. This may be its greatest flaw. A measure of pain, I believe, requires at least two dimensions. The suffering of Hell is terrifying not because of any specific torture but because it is eternal.

Seven is the largest prime number between zero and ten. Out of all the numbers, the very largest primes are unknown. Still, every year, the largest known prime is larger. Euclid proved the number of primes to be infinite, but the infinity of primes is slightly smaller than the infinity of the rest of the numbers. It is here, exactly at this point, that my ability to comprehend begins to fail.

Experts do not know why some pain resolves and other pain becomes chronic. One theory is that the body begins to react to its own reaction, trapping itself in a cycle of its own pain response. This can go on indefinitely, twisting like the figure eight of infinity.

Several recent studies have suggested that women feel pain differently than men. Further studies have suggested that pain medications act differently on women than they do on men. I am suspicious of these studies, favored by *Newsweek* and heaped upon waiting-room tables. I dislike the idea that our flesh is so essentially unique that it does not even register pain as a man's does—a fact that renders our bodies, again, objects of supreme mystery.

The medical definition of pain specifies "actual or potential tissue damage." Pain that does not signal tissue damage is not, technically, pain.

"This is a pathology," the doctor assured me when he informed me that there was no definitive cause of my pain, no effective treatment for it, and very probably no end to it. "This is not in your head."

It would not have occurred to me to think that I was imagining the pain. But the longer the pain persisted, and the harder it became for me to imagine what it was like not to be in pain, the more seriously I considered the disturbing possibility that I was not, in fact, in pain.

Another theory of chronic pain is that it is a faulty message sent by malfunctioning nerves. "For example," the Mayo Clinic suggests, "your pain could be similar to the phantom pain some amputees feel in their amputated limbs."

I walked out of a lecture on chronic pain after too many repetitions of the phrase "We have reason to believe that you are in pain, even if there is no physical evidence of your pain." I had not realized that the fact that I believed myself to be in pain was not reason enough.

We have reason to believe in infinity, but everything we know ends.

←————— 9 —————→

Once, for a study of chronic pain, I was asked to rate not just my pain but also my suffering. I rated my pain as a three. Having been sleepless for nearly a week, I rated my suffering as a seven.

"Pain is the hurt, either physical or emotional, that we experience," writes the Reverend James Chase. "Suffering is the story we tell ourselves of our pain. . . ."

Christianity is not mine. I do not know it and I cannot claim it. But I've seen the sacred heart ringed with thorns, the gaping wound in Christ's side, the blood, the nails, the cross to bear . . . Pain is holy, I understand. Suffering is divine.

In my worst pain, I can remember thinking, "This is not beautiful." I can remember being disgusted by the very idea.

But in my worst pain, I also found myself cherishing the phrase "This too shall pass." The longer the pain lasted, the more beautiful and impossible and absolutely holy this phrase became.

←————— 10 —————→

#### *The Worst Pain Imaginable*

Through a failure of my imagination, I have discovered that the pain I am in is always the worst pain imaginable.

But I would like to believe that there is an upper limit to pain. That there is a maximum intensity nerves can register.

There is no tenth circle to Dante's Hell.

"One of the functions of the pain scale," my father explains, "is to protect doctors—to spare them some emotional pain. Hearing patients describe their pain as a ten is much easier than hearing them describe it as a hot poker driven through their eyeball into their brain."

A better scale, my father thinks, might rate what patients would be willing to do to relieve their pain. "Would you," he asks, "visit five specialists and take three prescription narcotics?" I laugh, because I have done just that. "Would you," I offer, "give up a limb?" I would not. "Would you surrender your sense of sight for the next ten years?" my father asks. I would not. "Would you accept a shorter life span?" I might. We are laughing, having fun with this game. But later, reading statements collected by the American Pain Foundation, I am alarmed by the references to suicide.

The description of hurricane-force winds on the Beaufort scale is simply "devastation occurs."

Bringing us, of course, back to zero. ■