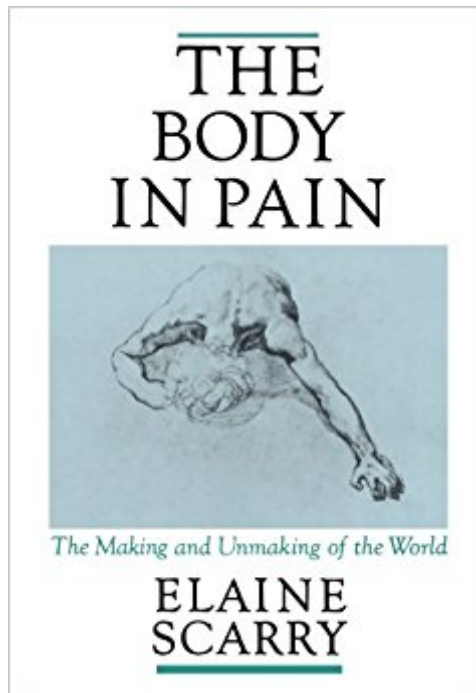




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# **The Body In Pain: The Making And Unmaking Of The World**



## Synopsis

Part philosophical meditation, part cultural critique, *The Body in Pain* is a profoundly original study that has already stirred excitement in a wide range of intellectual circles. The book is an analysis of physical suffering and its relation to the numerous vocabularies and cultural forces--literary, political, philosophical, medical, religious--that confront it. Elaine Scarry bases her study on a wide range of sources: literature and art, medical case histories, documents on torture compiled by Amnesty International, legal transcripts of personal injury trials, and military and strategic writings by such figures as Clausewitz, Churchill, Liddell Hart, and Kissinger. She weaves these into her discussion with an eloquence, humanity, and insight that recall the writings of Hannah Arendt and Jean-Paul Sartre. Scarry begins with the fact of pain's inexpressibility. Not only is physical pain enormously difficult to describe in words--confronted with it, Virginia Woolf once noted, "language runs dry"--it also actively destroys language, reducing sufferers in the most extreme instances to an inarticulate state of cries and moans. Scarry analyzes the political ramifications of deliberately inflicted pain, specifically in the cases of torture and warfare, and shows how to be fictive. From these actions of "unmaking" Scarry turns finally to the actions of "making"--the examples of artistic and cultural creation that work against pain and the debased uses that are made of it. Challenging and inventive, *The Body in Pain* is landmark work that promises to spark widespread debate.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"I believe this project to be perhaps one of the most significant books on language, philosophy, and

literature of the coming years."--Emory Elliott, Princeton University"Stunningly original, enormously important, powerfully written....The beauty of her writing is that she can make us see torture and war as we have never seen them before, read the Bible and Marx as we have never read them before--indeed, see our day-to-day world in a usefully new manner."--Eric J. Cassell, M.D., Cornell Medical Center"One of the most important books I have read this year [1987]."--Judith Fryer, University of Massachusetts"Not for some time have we read a more original book on an announced subject than this review of pain's locations in torture, war and wherever people would do violence to others."--The Christian Century"An extraordinary book: large-spirited, heroically truthful. A necessary book."--Susan Sontag"A richly original, provocative book which makes one reconsider torture, war, and creativity from a new perspective."--Anthony Storr, Washington Post Book World"Brilliant, ambitious and controversial...an all-encompassing discourse on creativity, imagination and the distribution of power."--Los Angeles Times Book Review"In its breadth and humaneness of vision, in the density and richness of its prose, above all in the compelling nature of its argument, this is indeed an extraordinary book."--Susan Rubin Suleiman, The New York Times Book Review"A brilliant and difficult book...Scarry's compassionate linguistics documents how [the] bridge between torturer and victim is cut."--Michael Ignatieff, The New Republic"One of the most important books I have read this year."--Judith Fryer, University of Massachusetts"Only by following Scarry step by step may a reader gradually discern the daringly encompassing scope of Scarry's vision on body and pain, making and unmaking. [Her] style of writing is at once profoundly personal and succinctly scholarly."--Religious Studies Review"Scarry has written a dramatic and provocative discourse on the power of pain and man's reaction to it....The flow of the text is fluid and creative; the book is a well-disciplined example of literary thinking."--the Yale Journal of Biology and Medicine"The book is large, ambitious, intricate and alternately illuminating, baffling and irritating....[It] is a brave book, and worth persevering with."--The Times Literary Supplement (London)"An absolutely astonishing achievement...I believe it will change many lives, not by persuasion, but by widening the scope of consciousness. The book itself is a great act of courage, intelligence, and style."--Allen Grossman, Brandeis University

Elaine Scarry is at Harvard University.

I was required to read a section of this book for a Biomedical Ethics class in college. It is incredibly thick and academic. But every message is valuable. Later in life, I decided to read it cover to cover, it took me an inordinate amount of time to read this book. It is incredibly difficult, I often found myself

spending minutes reading and rereading a page, or even a paragraph. But this was the most valuable book I have ever read. This book changed my life. I recall many of its lessons on a daily basis.

Read to complete Masters thesis! Excellent!

one of my top five books, that i have ever read.

Essential reading.

First, a little background. I took a course in War Literature in college, and one of the excerpts we read was an excerpt from the section in this book on war. It had such interesting points on the topic that I wanted to read the rest of it for a long time, but also knew it was a philosophy book so it never went on any of my wishlists until recently. I put it on my Christmas 2014 wishlist this year, got it on Christmas and began reading it immediately, with almost no breaks for other books or magazines, and finished the book on May 1st, 2015. This book is at times supremely enlightening, and at other times hopelessly dense. How much it is of one or the other depends on the chapter, so I'd like to review each of its five chapters individually. Chapter 1: The Structure of Torture was an equal mix dense and enlightening. Scarry uses the chapter as a bedrock for the rest of the book, and to introduce concepts of embodiment and disembodiment, how pain works into those structures, and how civilization is deconstructed through torture. However, I got this book primarily for its insights on war, and going through chapter 1 was slow going, and I just read it because I felt I had to. Chapter 2: The Structure of War was an extremely enlightening chapter. It may seem like a hyperbole, but I would say that to read The Structure of War is to understand the concept of war itself. She notes that war is a contest between two parties to out-injure each other, and the goal is for one side to get the other side injured to the point that the other side believes that acceding to the first side's demands would be less distasteful than further injury - in effect bringing about a reversal of the concept both sides had at the start of the conflict: that the possibility of being injured is more acceptable than accepting whatever demands the other side made. In about 100 pages she investigates the concept of war and gives logical responses to the deep questions that vex everyone that thinks upon war: why people go to war, what the point of war is, what IS war, why must war be a contest of injury rather than a contest of production or healing, why so often wars end not in the total destruction of the other side but the surrender of the other side, and how nuclear war

fits into the ancient conceptions of conventional war. If you wonder about the answers to any of those questions, this is the book for you, and if you can't devote the time and energy to read all 372 pages, including the ample side notes, these 100 pages about war are the most important part of the book. Chapter 3: Pain and Imagining is just a 20 page transition between the focus on unmaking in the first two chapters and the focus on making in the last two chapters, and is a short section of pure philosophy. Chapter 4: The Structure of Belief and Its Modulation into Material Making (Body and Voice in the Judeo-Christian Scriptures and the writings of Marx) combines into one chapter what really were two distinct sections. The section on Body and Voice in the Judeo-Christian Scriptures was an unexpected treat. I bought the book for its ruminations on war, and wasn't even aware of the other topics it covered besides torture. I am currently an atheist, but was raised Presbyterian, so I am familiar with the Bible. However, the fact that I had questions on the points of logic in the Bible that couldn't be logically resolved without seeing the entire belief in God as illogical was one of the primary reasons I became atheist. When asked questions on specific points of the Bible, the only answers that ministers could give me were completely illogical, and were necessarily so because they had to speak with some degree of Biblical literalism. Scarry dives into the Bible completely unhindered by Biblical literalism, and reading this section was a special treat for me. Since I was young, questions on the Bible have confused me. Scarry, in the course of examining the Bible for its perspective on making and unmaking, body and voice, pain and invulnerability to harm, provides logical answers to some of the most deep and puzzling questions on the Bible: Why does God make a tree of knowledge, then let humans eat from the tree? Why once they ate from the tree do they immediately create artifacts, clothing themselves in leaves? Why is the point of those long, droning sections in Genesis where complex genealogies are given? Why does God in the Old Testament so often cause pain and suffering on the creatures He created? Why is it that when He commands people to make objects that they are acceptable to him, but when people create their own objects it so often makes Him desire to cause His people pain? What is the point of the coming of Jesus, and why is the Jesus of the New Testament so dissimilar from the God of the Old Testament? Jesus a healer who substantiates himself by having a physical body and feeling physical pain like a mortal, and God a being that after creation is finished, is unable to substantiate his disembodied voice without causing pain and suffering on those that have bodies? I would still say that Scarry's ruminations on war are the more important, if for no other reason than war is a much more immediate and practical concept to study, but this section of this chapter comes in a close second, because this section studies the concept of God and by extension religion in general, and while its real-world applications may be diminished

because of it, the fact that it is a more abstract concept in some ways also elevates its importance. The second section of Chapter 4, on the writings of Marx, didn't speak to me anywhere near as much as the first section did. I know very little of Marx in general, and have never read Capital, so progressing from the first to the second section of this chapter was like exiting a highway and driving through a town. Whereas in the first section I could read up to 10 pages sitting, interested and riveted to the book as I took in Scarry's knowledge, the second section found me disinterested and confused, frequently only reading a few pages before stopping for the night. The points Scarry made about Marx's conceptions of workers and capitalists are important, to be sure. She points out how Marx implies that workers are deeply embodied, often feeling physical pain and only having the time and money for the very basics of body rejuvenation while capitalists are deeply disembodied, in that they are often far removed from having to feel physical pain as they have the money for all manner of artifacts designed to prevent them from feeling displeasure, and when they do feel it it's their money and possessions rather than body they feel it. However, Marx's use of long droning sections, which she summarizes, as well as dry lists, combined with my general unfamiliarity with Capital to make the entire section a chore to read. If reading the second section of Chapter 4 was like driving through a town, reading Chapter 5 was like driving on a dirt road. In The Interior Structure of the Artifact, Scarry breaks off from focusing on one specific concept or work and focuses on the general concept of making. With that lack of focus, the last chapter turned into a dense and at times almost impassable quagmire of philosophy. Now, let me be clear, I have a Bachelor of Science in English from SUNY Brockport, and there weren't any words she used that I didn't know. The problem was the denseness and meandering nature of the philosophy of the last section. It would be best demonstrated with an excerpt from the last few pages of the book: "Though the objects are projected fictions of the responsibilities, responsiveness, and reciprocating powers of sentience, they characteristically perform this mimesis more successfully if not framed by their functionality or surrounded by self-conscious issues of reality and unreality. If that doesn't make sense out of context, let me assure you it only makes a little more sense if you have already read the previous 324 pages of the book before that line. Now, don't get me wrong, the logic of the chapter isn't at fault. She makes very interesting points about three things in particular. First, though we all know on reflection that inanimate objects don't have feeling, don't care about us, and don't feel pain, we often act as if they do "kicking a door that we slammed our fingers in, hugging a teddy bear, and in ancient times punishing the objects themselves when they have caused injury or

harm on a person. Second, she points out that the reciprocating actions of artifacts are typically far in excess of the time and effort put in to make them. How a person can spend 3 weeks investing the time, money, and energy to make a coat that could last 15 months and could protect that person from dying of cold. Third, I found particularly interesting how she points out the different form that authorship takes for artifacts. Some artifacts, like a conception of a deity, will only work effectively if the fact that humans made that concept is obscured. Most artifacts (cars, bridges, coats, computers, etc.) we could all recognize as being man-made, and often could, if we really wanted to, find record of the individual people that designed (made-up) those artifacts, and perhaps even those that took those designs and made the physical object (made-real) but constant self-conscious reflection on the made-ness of those objects would distract from using those objects. And there are some artifacts, like poems, where the fact that it is made by a person isn't just possible to know, but easily known and advertised, such that a person using the artifact could very easily identify the artifact as manmade, and identify with the person that made that artifact. So, it's a section with interesting points. The problem with section 5 is that it so often strays into the near-gibberish that I quoted that trying to unravel the meaning of the words and the point Scarry is trying to make can be a long, difficult, and unpleasant chore. So, long story short, the book has its highs and lows. At best, it will make you a smarter person with a new, logical perspective on some part of life that you may rarely reflect on, and if you did reflect on, perhaps reflect on unsuccessfully. At worst, parts of reading the book are grinding chores that could leave you torn between wanting to know the wisdom Scarry is imparting and wanting to switch to reading something lighter and more enjoyable. For me, I know two things for certain. First, that now I am finished reading the book, I plan to read something far lighter for a while. Second, I am very glad that I read the book, and doubly-glad I read it cover to cover, because now I can go the rest of my life knowing Scarry's logically consistent perspectives on such weighty concepts as war, God, and human creation.

I love it! I would recommend it to other women. The book was well thought out and provokes deep thought.

What an odd and wonderful book! It attempts to address three topics -- pain/torture, warfare, and creativity. On the subject of pain/torture it is remarkably acute. The description of what pain is and what it does to consciousness and life's enjoyment is terrific and, in my experience, unprecedented. Similarly, its description of torture and what torture means is stunning in its immediacy. However,

when it goes from torture to warfare, the book goes off the rails. It is clear that Ms Scarry has a limited knowledge of warfare and a very limited understanding of what it means and how it is carried out. Warfare is usually a last resort and often involves activity by those who are free against those who are trying to create and perpetuate some form of slavery. (see the work of Victor Davis Hanson, e.g., *The Soul of Battle*.) This applies whether the war is conventional or nuclear. Her idea that taking the process of war to the civilian population is somehow a function of nuclear war is simply wrong. This approach to war is thousands of years old and, as Hanson points out, important and -- in some contexts -- virtuous. War is a horror, but it is better than slavery, torture, or conquest plus annihilation. Scarry doesn't address this. This book makes the experience of pain clear, but offers a wooly and uncertain explanation of war. Its Marxist approach to creativity is shallow and forgettable.

Altho the info in this book is excellent, it is quite disturbing and therefor difficult to read. It is important info and needs an audience, but still is hard to digest as it is truth we have difficulty digesting. Read it if you can...maybe the world can be changed by knowledge.

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