



Reflections on the Meaning of Suffering

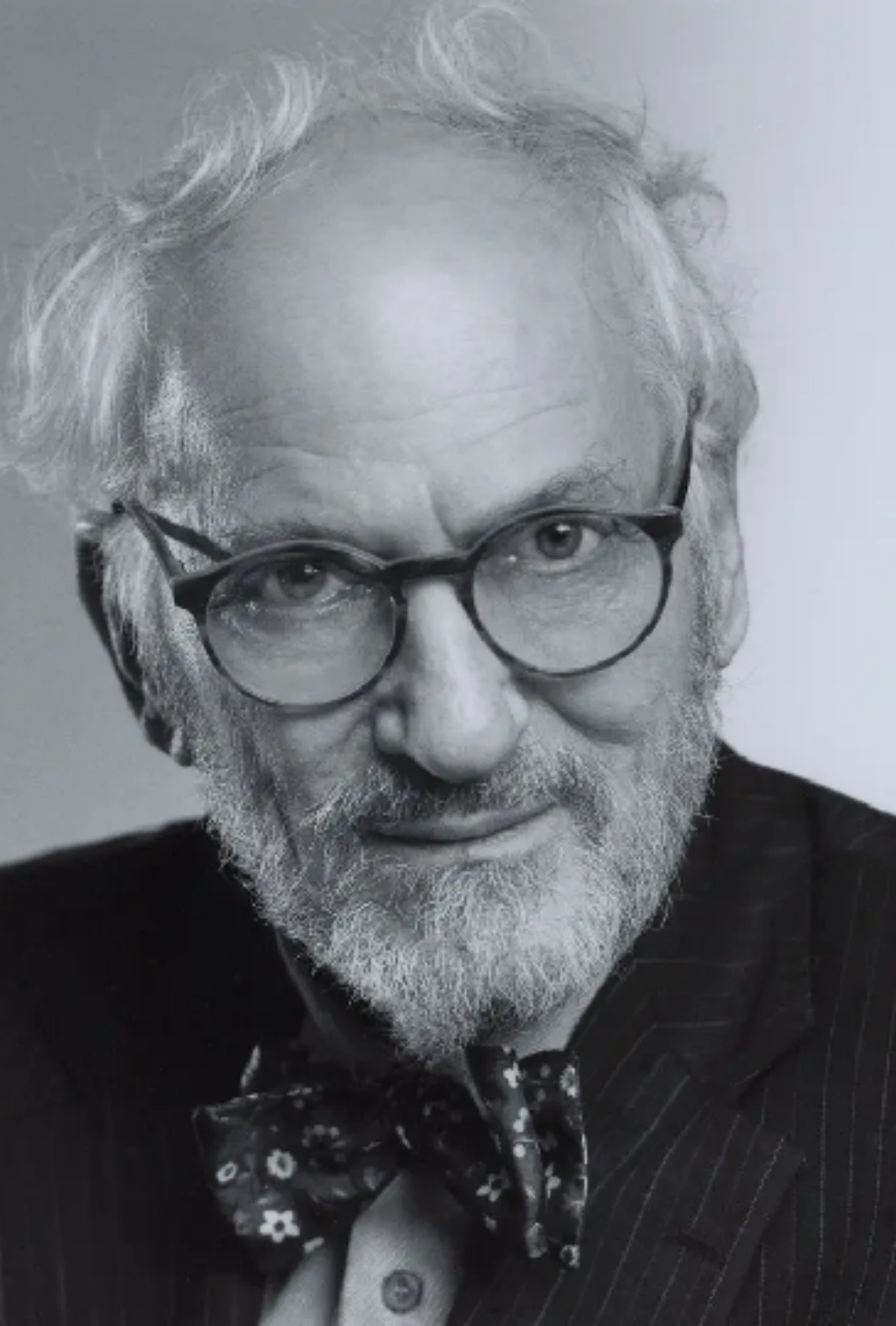
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Suffering

- “Suffering is experienced by persons, not merely by bodies, and has its source in challenges that threaten the intactness of the person as a complex social and psychological entity.
- Suffering can be defined as the state of severe distress associated with events that threaten the intactness of the person.”
 - Eric Cassell, “The nature of suffering and the goals of medicine.”

Table 77-5 List of Factors Contributing to Patient Distress

Physical Symptoms	Psychological	Existential Concerns	Distress Related to Healthcare Services
Pain	Symptoms	Disrupted or distorted personal integrity	Communication
Lack of energy	Anxiety	Changes in body image	Availability
Feeling drowsy	Depression	Changes in body function	Personal and cultural sensitivity
Dry mouth	Sleep disturbance	Changes in intellectual function	Excessively candid
Lack of appetite	Irritability	Changes in social and professional function	Inadequate information
Nausea	Impaired concentration	Diminished attractiveness as a sexual partner	Lack of availability
Feeling bloated	Nightmares	Increased dependency	Lack of services
Change in the way food tastes	Delirium	Distress from retrospection	Exhausted services
Numbness/tingling in hands/feet		Unfulfilled aspirations	Uncommitted services
Constipation		Depreciation of the value of previous achievements	Ineffectual services
Cough		Remorse from unresolved guilt	Expense
Swelling of arms or legs		Distress from future concerns	Empathic suffering with family (see Table 77-6)
Itching		Separation	
Weight loss		Hopelessness	
Weight gain		Futility	
Diarrhea		Meaninglessness	
Dizziness		Concern about death	
Problems with sexual interest or activity		Religious concerns	
		Illness as a punishment	
Shortness of breath		Fear of divine retribution	
Vomiting		Fear of a void	
Problems with urination			
Difficulty swallowing			

Adapted from Cherney NI et al. ⁵⁴



“Refractory” suffering

- What does it mean to have as a goal the ‘prevention and relief of suffering’?
- “Refractory” means “resisting control or authority, stubborn, unmanageable”
- In cases of refractory suffering, who has “failed” – the patient or the providers?
- If we sedate into nonexistence, are we eliminating the suffering by eliminating the sufferer?



Frederik Svenaeus

- “Suffering is a potentially alienating mood overcoming the person and engaging her in a struggle to remain at home in the face of loss of meaning and purpose in life. It involves painful experiences at different levels that are connected through the suffering-mood:
 - (1) embodiment
 - (2) engagements in the world together with others
 - (3) core life values.”



Ways of being at home

- (1) one's house or homelike environment
- (2) one's own body
- (3) the psychosocial environment
- (4) the spiritual dimension



How can I help the patient feel at home, to come home?

- “Palliat” = cloaked
- “Palliative care is the umbrella, not the rain”
- What is the world as the patient is living it now?
- What does it mean to them?
- Accept highly disquieting facts for what they are.

Sources/further reading

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