Art of Healing, Medicine and Humanity: A Conceptual Discourse

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ABSTRACT

Medicine is the art of relieving others of their suffering. It requires technology and methodologies that science has helped us develop. However the understanding of pain and its impact in peoples’ lives and on the society as a whole is often missed out in the skewed focus on the search for happiness (“Definition of happiness - state (British & World English),” n.d.). Pain is an important symptom that serves as a warning as well as a pointer for an illness. Here the authors re-examine the reasons that connect pain and suffering to artists and healers as well as the connection between an artist and a healer. It also dwells on the age old science versus arts argument and its validity.

Keywords: Archimedes, Art, Empathy, Galileo, Humanity, Medicine, Melancholia, Pain, Passion, Science, Suffering

Medicine was born from pain and suffering! It came to life to steer those in pain towards a life without suffering. Pain - and all its synonyms like discomfort, distress, suffering etc. is therefore the key symptom that guides a healer towards the diagnosis of almost every illness. History taking cannot lead us to a disease unless there is a distress that points towards either physical or emotional pain. It is this point of pain from where a doctor begins his/her work - first to apply the knowledge of medicine to understand the problem and then to work towards the best possible way of alleviating that pain. Thus it becomes imperative for a doctor to understand pain. For the person who is suffering, it is just the pain that matters and not the physiology, anatomy or pathology of it.

By its very nature, pain makes us pull away from the stimulus that causes it and/or seek ways to ease it. Even a toddler instinctively raises an alarm when experiencing a painful stimulus. Hence ‘pain’ serves as one of the key survival-mode-triggering-mechanisms in the body - a danger-warning mechanism to help us survive.

Physical pain is easy to understand and empathize with. Everyone has suffered an injury, a fall, a cut or something else that causes pain. It is therefore easy for most of us (but surely not all - and I will come to that a little later) to express it in most situations. Emotional pain on the other hand remains a huge grey area of confusion. Those suffering it as well as those who wish to care for the sufferers, struggle to
understand it. Often the person suffering from emotional pain, is not sure of what he or she is going through. A look at the medical history of someone suffering from depression or anxiety is enough to deduce that. The amount of time it takes a person to articulate and seek help, since the first symptoms of emotional distress appear, points to the confusion (at least in our society).

The appreciation of this pain is more difficult for a number of reasons. An important one being that it colors one’s perception and outlook towards life itself with a negative tone. While this is not the happiest of the situations, this very emotion has been the reason for many creative works of art and literature across cultures and land. Poetry, prose, paintings, sculptures, films and many other forms of art have come out of the pain that either the creator went through or others with whom the creator was able to empathize. Countless creative souls went through the pangs of broken heart, dejection, pathos and a struggle-filled life that added further to their stresses and strife for survival, pushing them further into the depths of emotional pain and often, even breaking them down completely. In arts, the word melancholia (arising from melancholy) (“Definition of melancholy - sadness (British & World English),” n.d.) is commonly used to describe this negative mood, that many artists tend to turn into a time for introspection, often preceding a creation.

Mirza Ghalib, the well known Urdu poet summarized the struggles of love - for a partner (or life) - as:

*Ye ishq nahin aasaan bas itna samajh lijey,
Ek aag ka dariya hai aur doob ke jaana hai*
(Love isn’t easy, get that my friend, It’s a river of fire, and to cross it, you must drown and accept its ire).

Vincent Van Gogh, the Dutch painter, on the other hand wandered through a more defined insanity and languished at mental asylums while still painting his apparently crazy ideas furiously. The critics and the gentry of his time, rejected his work as useless. But, the force of his painful creativity kept him on that path of doing what he wanted - suffering the demons of social acceptance while expressing his turmoil through the harsh strokes and striking colors on canvasses, perhaps the only things that accepted him silently.

Many may believe so, but science (“Science,” 2012) can not be devoid of art. Whenever art is taken out of science, it becomes mere technology. Consider for example the story of the so called Eureka moment of Archimedes (“The story behind Archimedes’ legendary ‘Eureka!’ moment #ItsNotMagicItsScience.com,” n.d.) when he realized that water gets displaced from his bath tub when he enters it. Whether he shouted ‘Eureka’ and ran naked through the streets in his excitement to inform the king, could well be fiction. The fact that his discovery happened neither in a laboratory nor while he was performing an experiment, points towards the ability of the mind to constantly wonder, question, analyze, deduce and express... exactly the process an artist undergoes.

August Kekule (“Friedrich August Kekulé von Stradonitz - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia,” n.d.), in 1865, published a paper describing the structure of the Benzene molecule. He had fallen asleep while pondering over the structure and dreamt of a snake holding its tail in its mouth, forming a ring like structure. He woke up and interpreted that ring as six Carbon atoms with alternating double and single bonds. Newton watched an apple fall and contemplated about gravity. Galileo Galilei’s (“The Galileo Project,” n.d.) passion turned him almost blind towards the end of his life because of his gazing at the sky and the sun for years through his telescope, to confirm, re-confirm and re-affirm that the earth is not as holy and powerful as religion suggested and that it revolved around the sun. Having uttered the blasphemous words and post his inquest by the church, he was made to retract his statement and confined to his house for the rest of his life because of his gazing at the sky and the sun for years through his telescope, to confirm, re-confirm and re-affirm that the earth is not as holy and powerful as religion suggested and that it revolved around the sun. Having uttered the blasphemous words and post his inquest by the church, he was made to retract his statement and confined to his house for the rest of his life because of his gazing at the sky and the sun for years through his telescope, to confirm, re-confirm and re-affirm that the earth is not as holy and powerful as religion suggested and that it revolved around the sun. 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