

VIII concentrate produced from the blood of paid donors. The experience of the past 30 years adds complexity and depth to Titmuss' basic description of the blood-transfusion story. More importantly, it highlights the fact that well-organised and competent social institutions are essential to permit altruism and to produce valued social goods, such as a safe blood supply. Without a well-run blood transfusion service the gift of altruism cannot be realised—one of Titmuss' main points.

Led by the USA, celebration of the market as the solution to almost all social problems is the fashion. But people seem to be dubious about its applicability to health care. Interestingly, the US National Bioethics Advisory Commission has conducted hearings on the use of stored pathological specimens. The most consistent finding is that while citizens do not mind if drug and biotechnology companies profit from discoveries made with stored pathological samples, they do not want their pathological samples bought and sold as commodities. *The Gift Relationship's* message that certain items, especially "human hearts,

kidneys, eyes, and other organs of the body", cannot be treated as "commodities to be bought and sold in the marketplace" seems to be the average American's view. And there seems to be a more general scepticism about for-profit health-care companies, a worry that although the profit motive can be a strong motivator for efficiency and improvements in quality and service, it can also motivate people to put money above people's health.

Ironically, the presence of profit and the market in health care has made patients more sceptical of and resistant to efficiency and cutting costs; they wonder why they should agree to less care if the savings are not to be reinvested in more or higher quality health-care services or services for the uninsured but removed from health care as profit for Wall Street investors.

And their suspicions may be accurate. Recent evaluations of the quality of health plans in the USA by the National Committee on Quality Assurance show a statistical association between a not-for-profit health plan and higher quality scores; although there are good for-profit plans, in general they do not provide as high a

quality as not-for-profit plans. Titmuss would have predicted this result had he known about for-profit health plans. In a prescient passage he criticised economists for not recognising that the market dramatically changes and undermines "the roles, functions, standards of practice and behaviour of doctors and medical institutions" in ways not measured in cost-benefit calculations.

At the end of the 1990s, when economic rationality seems to be the only social language and when the battle over commercialisation of not just blood but every aspect of health care is at its most intense, it is wonderful to have *The Gift Relationship* reissued. This book is a useful and well-argued reminder that the market is not a panacea, that in some circumstances the goals of efficiency and quality can be realised without commercialisation, and that there are important social values that can be realised only by restraining the market.

Ezekiel J Emanuel

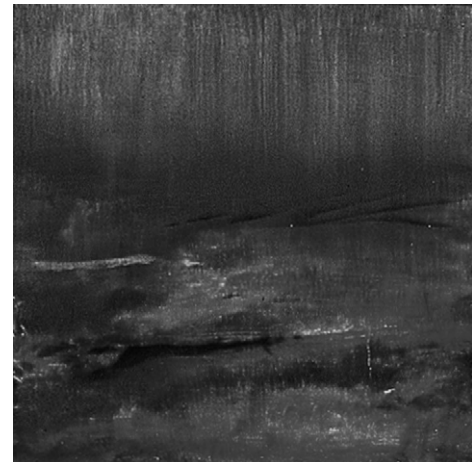
Center for Ethics in Managed Care,
Harvard Medical School,
Boston, MA 02115, USA

Pain

I lifted your limp body out of the courtyard mud,
Where you had lain in the floating litter.
Rain poured down, soaked through my hospital whites.
Alcohol was the addiction to which you had lost a wife, a job, a life.
Whether it had been the sphincterotomy or not,
The incessant pain had abated for a time.
Yet pancreatitis is a demon thing.
It dwells chronically without remorse, a reminder of one's abuses.
Morphine no longer provided comfort.
Now you only wished for another illness!
The slow decline into hepatic coma might do,
Or rather the rupture of varices.
Death by bleeding would at least be swift.
I didn't know the depths of your despair.
Your resources had dwindled with each hospitalization.
Last year you were admitted to University,
But now it was to Bellevue.
You had run out of funds and more than that,
Had joined the Bowery bums you despised.
I was told you were missing, last seen in the men's room.
An abandoned IV bottle, its tubing hanging freely,
Swung back and forth on a solitary pole by the window.
The fluids running nowhere spoke of your life.
The silent men's room screamed of your suicide.
And looking down into the courtyard through the open window,
I saw you there in the mud three stories below.
The heavy overcast skies cried upon you.
Having jumped to your death, in a final irony,
The ME reported drowning as the immediate cause of your demise.

Richard Bronson

Stony Brook, New York, USA



Dank

Jenny Pockley