

Narratives of 'Harm' and Those of 'Illness': Considering the Difference between Them

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It is my great honor and pleasure to have this opportunity to address some questions to Professor Frank. I would first like to thank Professor Frank and the organizers of this symposium for providing me with this opportunity. Among the many works by Professor Frank, I was particularly impressed by *The Wounded Storyteller*, from which I gained significant inspiration. Today, however, I would like to ask a few questions based on my own experiences.

In *The Wounded Storyteller*, Professor Frank discusses the benefit of storytelling, stating that the act of storytelling is both a moral and ethical practice. Through storytelling, ill people can draw a “new destination and map” for navigating a path through the life that remains to them. By doing so, ill people can find the meaning of their life and accept their destiny or contingency in life. In short, I understand that wounded people’s storytelling is an attempt and a step designed to lead to a better life. Moreover, Professor Frank notes that storytelling is good not only the storytellers, but also their listeners. When ill people tell their self-stories to others, by expressing the suffering in their lives in order to share it with others, the storytellers can present to others good models for living. Listeners, on the other hand, can receive the “boon” that the storytellers gained through their suffering by reaching the state referred to as “dyadic bodies.” Through the act of storytelling, wounded people can open their bodies to others and link them with others. This bond between storytellers and listeners enables both parties to share in the boon. This is why storytelling is considered to be a moral and ethical practice. This is my understanding of Professor Frank’s work.

Professor Frank argues that telling a story of suffering comes along with understanding suffering as destiny or contingency in life, therefore that telling a story of suffering is sublimated to both a moral and ethical practice. A man-made disaster and illness are regarded as the same kind of suffering there.

However I would like to interrogate whether we can really understand these sufferings as destiny or contingency in life. I will ask a few questions concerning this point. The case which I

would like to interrogate is that of an event that “should not happen.” For example, a case in which intention and act of someone causes suffering, i.e. a man-made disaster. For example, please imagine the case in which an important person has been murdered by an assailant.

Of course, even in the case of illness, human action may intervene. In the latter case, however, no one should take the responsibility of the outbreak of illness. In contrast, in the case of a man-made disaster, the responsibility of someone who causes an outbreak of suffering is or seems engaged. When someone’s act or intention causes someone’s suffering, I believe that understanding the suffering as an outcome of "contingency" is very difficult for a victim.

In *The Wounded Storyteller*, Professor Frank mentions the difference between the suffering of illness and suffering that is humanly intended to inflict pain by comparing the difference between the suffering of illness and the suffering from the Holocaust. Professor Frank considers the suffering of the man-made disaster and that of illness are the same in the dismantling of the body and self. I agree with this point.

However, I believe that there still is a significant difference between the suffering of illness and the suffering of man-made disaster. Let me explain.

Professor Frank says that “the difference is between suffering that has its cry attended to, and suffering that is left in its own uselessness” (179). The former is designated as the suffering of illness; the latter is designated as the suffering of the Holocaust.

A point at stake here is whether "a cry is blocked".

Professor Frank argues that, it is ““useless”.....because it is an anti-narrative, a non-self-story” (178) , so he defines it as “chaos suffering”. In contrast, there is the suffering that is not useless, i.e. “the just suffering”. Professor Frank talks about the uselessness of suffering in this way, “suffering becomes useless precisely because any person’s suffering is irreducible: being nothing more than what it is, suffering can have no meaning” (179). But, he says that, the uselessness of suffering becomes, “but also, in its call to others, not useless” (180). In other words, suffering acquires a meaning, and it is converted to something useful by telling others about suffering. I understand that this is the “quest narrative” in the framework of the narrative theory of Professor Frank. According to Professor Frank, the difference between the suffering of illness and the suffering of the Holocaust can be found in the difference between this uselessness and usefulness.

However, Professor Frank does not mention the difference between the suffering of illness

and the suffering of man-made disaster I mentioned above, i.e. the particular feeling of the victim of man-made disasters.

Therefore I would like to ask you some questions.

As I mentioned above, it is considerably difficult to think that the suffering of man-made disaster is "an unavoidable event", in comparison with this; it is easy to think that the suffering of illness is "an unavoidable event" at least to the extent that we do not investigate the responsibility of the person. Here, it is the difference in suffering of a man-made disaster and illness. This is because it is difficult to think a man-made disaster as contingency in life. I think that the burden of telling a story of suffering varies according to this difference; I would like to know Prof. Frank's view regarding this point.

And next question is about the uselessness of suffering.

I believe that the reason why suffering is useless is not because the comparison of various sufferings is impossible, nor because the story is not supposed to be told by others, nor because others do not listen to the story of suffering.

I argue that the reason why suffering is useless is precisely because suffering becomes meaningful only after something bad happens. In other words, the reason why suffering is useless is because that for victims or for those who suffer, experiencing no suffering is much better than experiencing suffering. It is because there is no suffering which should exist.

This is shown in expression when we accept suffering as contingency in life, for example in an expression such as an "unavoidable event" "incurable event." In designating pains as "unavoidable" or "incurable" events, suffering is reduced to the matter of "contingency" simply because suffering does not have any meaning and is useless inherently?

A storyteller can positively undertake to understand life as contingency and as "unavoidable events" simply because useless pains "have attacked" him or her. Here is the fact to which I would like to draw your attention. The fact is that telling a story of pain depends on the uselessness of pain.

I understand the point of Professor Frank's narrative theory exists in the fact that wounded people can live better life by telling stories of suffering, exactly because suffering people undertake the contingency in life positively.

Accordingly, in a situation in which we doubt contingency, for example, the case of man-made disaster, we might invalidate someone's responsibility by regarding someone's responsibility as just contingency in life. In other words, by regarding suffering as contingency

in life, will we not designate the suffering of the victim simply as "something good that occurred?" This may be going to evaluate that injuring someone as a good act.

Concerning this problem of understanding a man-made disaster as contingency in this way, I am wondering how Professor Frank might think? Related to this issue, what do you think the conclusive difference between suffering of illness and that of man-made disaster when we undertake suffering as contingency in life?