

**Havi Carel**

*Illness.*

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A central debate in the philosophy of medicine addresses the question: Which is the more basic concept, illness or disease? Many who side with objective biology say that disease is a scientific concept that applies not only to humans, but also to non-human animals and to plant life, and they maintain that while the concept of illness, as the human experiential aspect of disease, is important, it is dependent on the concept of disease. On the other side are those who argue that the notions of illness and disease are both fundamentally normative, and that while biology can be scientific and objective, our conceptualization of certain processes as diseases is based on our understanding of what is good for the individual or the species. Viewed in the context of this debate, Carel's *Illness* is particularly illuminating.

The book is a short text, mixing an exposition of a phenomenological approach to illness with Carel's account of her own disease and how she lives with it. She had trouble with getting tired easily and catching her breath and after some wrong diagnoses, the problem was determined to be a rare lung disease known as LAM. There is a significant chance of mortality within ten years of onset of symptoms, and it progressively gets worse, presenting the person afflicted by it with distinct challenges in carrying on with life. At various points Carel discusses her own feelings on getting the diagnosis; the difficulty of explaining it to other people; her relationships with her family, friends, health care providers and new acquaintances; her emotions as she has to change her conception of what her life will be; and how she thinks about the prospect of a shortened life. The book has five main chapters: the body in illness, the social world of illness, illness as dis-ability and health within illness, fearing death, and living in the present. Although Carel is deeply influenced by Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger, she uses little of their jargon. This is a book that will be accessible to a broad range of readers who are philosophically interested in illness.

Carel argues for the importance of understanding human subjectivity, with emphasis on the role of the body. She explains that it is only when we become ill that we see the role of the body in our experience, because we normally take the body for granted. Illness makes us more aware of the lived body as it interrupts our habits, and so makes us more conscious of the background of our experience. Furthermore, it makes a profound difference to one's interaction with others, shifting expectations, making one vulnerable, and forcing one to be more self-protective. As one learns to live with illness, one gains new habits and changed expectations, so that one's changed bodily condition does not feel so startling or even upsetting, and even becomes a new state of being. Carel emphasizes how we are adaptable and can creatively adjust to our new existence. The state of illness

becomes one's baseline, and with that baseline, one can be (relatively) healthy. She points out that many chronically ill people rate their own health as good. This idea is important in disability studies, where it has long been argued that having physical impairments is not the same thing as being ill, and that a medical model is inappropriate to much disability.

These first three chapters are an investigation of our ways of thinking and the concepts we use to frame our lives. The last two chapters are more to do with value, regarding the rationality of the fear of death and finding meaning in life. Carel defends Epicurus and argues that there really is no reason to regret one's own early death except for the sorrow that it will cause others. She argues that mortality is essential to one's authenticity, and expounds several other Heideggerian themes regarding death. They are plausible, although Carel does not provide much reason to adopt them. Her more striking argument comes in her discussion of Epicurus, with a sophisticated defense of his hedonism and his claim that 'death is nothing to us'. The standard objection to Epicurus' claim that after our death we will not experience the loss of our lives is that it misses the point, which is that when we die, especially if we die young, we are robbed of our futures: we cannot carry on the relationships and projects that we had expected to continue. Carel argues that if this objection were well founded, then we should always fear death, no matter how old we are, because it always deprives us of some future good, and this is not a conclusion we want to embrace. She highlights the fact that sometimes in illness life can be bad, and in those cases it can be rational to welcome death. She also says that the deprivation argument does not compare like with like, and it is incoherent to compare the happiness of life with the state of death, so the whole notion of deprivation is inapplicable. The argument here goes quickly, and leaves unanswered questions, but it is a provocative claim. She ends the chapter with important comments about the need for philosophy to be able to connect with the personal, and the difficulty of achieving that given the current impersonal conception of philosophy adopted by most philosophy teachers. Carel builds on this in the final chapter with a discussion of philosophy as therapy and learning to take pleasure in the present moment.

*Illness* makes a powerful argument for exploring the experience of illness and the associated philosophical questions. Carel's inclusion of herself in the book is often moving and shows well the power of bringing philosophy and personal life together. Furthermore, it shows that it is not necessary to argue for the logical priority of the concept of illness over naturalistic approaches in order for phenomenological and narrative approaches to illness to have great value, and so it (perhaps unintentionally) provides a model for the equal status of the concepts of illness and disease.

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