
LET'S TALK ABOUT... ILLNESS AND SUFFERING

THIS SESSION:

What is philosophy?

Philosophical ideas about illness

Philosophical ideas about suffering

Discussion: illness and suffering

Break (10 Minutes)

Open discussion

PHILOSOPHY

Conceptual analysis: asking *what is it* questions (e.g., What is justice? What is the mind?)

Abstract and general: considering the abstract themes that our experiences embody

Distinctions and connections: drawing distinctions and mapping conceptual connections

Reason and argument: constructing arguments, a case, or rationale for our claims

Constructive dialogue: discussion of ideas and arguments that is critical and useful

PHILOSOPHICAL IDEAS ABOUT ILLNESS

There is a divide between **objectivist** and **values-based** conceptions of illness

Objectivists take illness (disorder, disease, etc) to be a matter of **biological dysfunction**. For mental illness, this means that there is mental illness when mental mechanisms that have a natural biological function fail to function properly

Values-based theorists don't define illness exclusively in biological terms, but take illness to be more of a **human construct**: illnesses are certain conditions that are disvalued in some way (e.g., because liable to lead to death or pain)

Discussion Questions:

- Can you think of any arguments for or against these approaches to illness?
- How do **you** think we should define illness?

PHILOSOPHICAL IDEAS ABOUT SUFFERING

There are different kinds of suffering: **physical suffering** (e.g., chronic back pain, fatigue, hunger) and **mental suffering** (e.g., shame, loneliness, anxiety)

There is philosophical debate about what is **essential to suffering**: what is common to the different forms of suffering that help us to define it?

Philosopher Michael Brady proposes that:

- Suffering is a negative experience or emotion
- All forms of suffering involve negative affect: they feel bad or unpleasant
- States of suffering bother us: in the moment we wish we didn't have them

Discussion Questions

- How would **you** define suffering?
- How does suffering differ from other negative states like pain, discomfort, or distress?

DISCUSSION: ILLNESS AND SUFFERING

1. Can you have illness without suffering?
2. Can you have suffering without illness?
3. What value, if any, is there in suffering?

RESOURCES

Michael Brady's book: **Suffering and Virtue**, published by Oxford University Press in 2018 sets out his view of what suffering is, and compares it to some other views.

Rachel Coopers article **Health and Disease**, published in the Bloomsbury Companion to the Philosophy of Medicine in 2017 is an accessible introduction to philosophical debate about illness.

MAILING LIST (OPTIONAL)

Do you want to be part of the Philosophy of Mental Health @ Middle Street electronic mailing list? If so, email Craig.French@nottingham.ac.uk to join (with "Mailing List" in the subject header), or scan this QR code to join:

If you join the mailing list, we will only contact you to advertise events related to Philosophy of Mental Health @ Middle Street, and to distribute materials from these events (e.g., handouts, and videos that we make after each event).



FEEDBACK (OPTIONAL)

We value your views. With your feedback we can (1) improve the ways we discuss the ideas in the philosophy of mental health here at Middle Street Resource Centre, and in society, and (2) use your ideas to inform our thinking for future research and events on the philosophy of mental health. If you would like to provide feedback, please complete the feedback form overleaf.

Please note: the University of Nottingham processes your personal data for the purposes of showcasing the use and impact of UoN research. This can take place through various mechanisms, including statutory assessments such as the Research Excellence Framework (REF), and internal and external research awards and competitions. Please visit <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/utilities/privacy/privacy-information-for-visitors-correspondents-and-prospective-applicants.aspx> for our Privacy Notice which provides further information on the purposes for which we may process your data and the legal basis for this.

FEEDBACK QUESTIONNAIRE
ILLNESS AND SUFFERING

NAME:

CONTACT DETAILS (i.e., email or telephone):

Before this session, to what extent did you agree with the following? For each question, please place an X in the box that most closely represents how you feel.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Before this session, I knew how philosophy could be used to discuss illness and suffering					
I was comfortable with discussing the philosophy of mental health before this event.					

After having participated in this session, to what extent do you agree with the following? For each question, please place an X in the box that most closely represents how you feel.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
This session has increased my understanding of philosophical ideas about illness and suffering'					
Philosophy is a useful discipline for thinking about and discussing illness and suffering'					
This event provided me with tools to think about my experiences of illness and suffering'					
I am more comfortable with discussing the philosophy of mental health after this event					
The session has shown me where to find resources for using philosophical approaches when talking about mental health					

1. Which ideas covered interested you most, and which do you think you will find most helpful, and why?

2. Was there anything about the event that we could have done better?

3. Is there anything else you would like to share?