

Discussion 1

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All three presentations seem that they share a common problem about the passiveness and the activeness which has something to do with Dr. Frank's basic idea in terms of the reflections on illness.

It has been construed as a matter of course that the activeness is valuable in itself particularly in the modern Western world. Human beings should be absolutely rational and accordingly could control everything around them by themselves. Therefore the body has been thought as a perfect tool to work and control environment well. If it would be out of order, it must be repaired as soon as possible. "...Institutions consider bodies only as resources for production, not as lives being lived. Thus the sympathy an ill person receives has institutional limits. While I was in active treatment, the university where I work was most solicitous. ...But as soon as treatment ended, the other institutional face appeared. Some of the same people now asked for the work I was supposed to have been doing. It didn't count that I had been ill..."(Frank, 1991) I would like to call this type of activeness as "an external activeness" since it is mainly relevant to the control of an external world.

Modern Western man is gradually being troubled by the suspicion that an external activeness may have been only a controversial concept. Post-modern thoughts, introduced by Nietzsche, Freud, and Marx, who argued that the spirit of human should be out of control by itself, commonly denied the existence of unconditional external activeness.

There are some post-modern thinkers such as Sartre who has still dwelled on the will and activeness as the absolute in a society and emphasized on

solidarity with others through participation, in which the case the Western idea of activeness becomes ultimately something not so different from the Japanese. In Japan or in the East Asia, an external activeness is not unconditionally thought as a good thing from the beginning.

Then what kind of activeness has been thought in Japan?

There is another type of activeness which is rather relevant to an inner world, so I would like to call this type as “an internal activeness” making reference to Dr. Frank’s same book above. “...But living among the everyday is also the opportunity of illness, which brings me back to gravity. Gravity is beyond health or illness, beyond the desire of health, which necessarily brings the fear of the illness. Gravity does not romanticize illness but is willing to accept it for what it can bring.”(Frank, 1991) This type of activeness needs contradictorily an absolute passiveness since the gravity is something like a blessing or a godsend, which one can not actively get it by oneself but rather only can passively accept it by one’s own will.

It is noteworthy that the book “Tannisho” of Shinran’s sayings is rather like Martin Luther’s “On Christian Liberty” which is one of the most important Christian writings. There are amazing similarities found in these works. Shinran is the representative priest of the ‘other-power’ school of Buddhism in the medieval era in Japan. Although some would say that Shinran’s idea is quite different from another Buddhist schools like Zen (‘self-power’ school), if we look closely at what Zen masters work, we find a striking similarity to Shinran’s writing easily. This example could be used as evidence that different religions do not conflict each other even among East and West.

How do we get internal activeness? Not until we confront death or serious disease do we have an opportunity to access to an internal activeness. In other words, we must go beyond the absolute passiveness like birth and death before attaining the state of selflessness. Perhaps one would call it into question that the absolute passiveness includes not only death but also birth as its example.

Needless to say, we can not choose when, where, from whom to be born, and which race, family, class, neither.

This idea ought to be discussed in relation to Erikson's concept of identity sharing a question who am I. And inevitably, it also related to the last stage known as a sense of integrity which is defined as the individual's ability to accept his personal life cycle as meaningful. It might lead up to the problem of euthanasia.