

PHI1101 Introduction to Philosophy

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### **Is there any value to commit a suicide?**

The unavoidable and vital question in philosophy as a way of life is how and in what way we should look through and evaluate one's death, no matter for our own existences or for someone else who has close connection to our ordinary lives. The reason why it is unavoidable is that one's attitudes towards his or others' death reflect his perspectives on his current life in the world, and therefore if a philosophy system as a way of life is justified to be consistent, then as a sub-question of views of life, views of death are necessary to be clarified in order to maintain a coherent logic system. Schools of philosophy have already purposed many views to look through and evaluate natural death, however in macro scale of linguistic meanings of death, death does not only consist of natural death, but also consists of intentional death, which is suicide in general speaking, and passive death, which includes being murdered or being medically performed euthanasia. Considering these two forms of death besides of natural death, we might agree that compared with one's passive death, one's intentional death has more causalities with his views of current life in the world, and if so, a closely related question comes again, how and in what way we should look through and evaluate one's intentional death, that is to ask, is there any value to commit a suicide? If there is any value to commit a suicide, what is the natural limitation beyond our control?

In thinking about these questions it is necessary to define the value of life before analyzing the value of intentionally terminating one's life, that we need to recognize first what makes one's life valuable, or in more pessimistic speaking, what makes one's life worthless. In Epicurean's points of view, the fundamental aim of human beings is pleasure, and everything of ordinary life whether it is good or bad are therefore judged by using the pleasure feeling as the criterion. The value of life can then be interpreted as an accumulative sum of that the amount of happiness subtracts the amount of miserable, and hence to one itself a valuable life indicates that he receives more pleasures than pains so that his accumulative sum is positive, and similarly, a worthless life corresponds to a negative accumulative sum which indicates that he experiences much more miserable than happiness in his

life. A similar conclusion we can obtain from the container theory is that, if human beings are, as what they claimed, nothing more than a brain-machine in bottles located in a laboratory with some thinking functions embedded, then human beings itself is worthless and meaningless in physical sense, and the immaterial value of our *life* is closely evaluated by the accumulated positive and negative feelings we perceived during our *entire life*.

Combining these perspectives together with the subjective motivations of suicides, the most critical evaluations in suicides' considerations is the evaluation and comparison of their current happiness and pains. To be more specific, if the *accumulative life value* that they could predict or foresee was negative and painful during most of their future life, then before they entirely lose their ability to kill themselves, some of them would rather committing suicide. Someone, for example, has known that he himself got ALS one day, which is known as an incurable disease, and in the predictable future his health and physical conditions would gradually degenerate and the disease would gradually deteriorate. Even though there are cases that mankind can survive and still live a long time after their muscles atrophy caused by ALS, the first thing is that the majority of patients who get ALS would live a miserable and unacceptable life as the rest of their life, which will eventually lead to a worthless life grading from their personal perceptions. And, the second thing is that after their muscles being totally atrophied, they would lose their ability to kill themselves, which means that they have no choice to reject all the pains in the rest of their lives. In this example, I suggest that committing suicide for he himself is valuable, since that his current status is justified to be valuable while his future status can be foreseen to be long-time worthless, then according to the perspectives of Epicurean and the container theory, he avoids painful experiences by killing himself, which will implicitly increase his amount of pleasure, and therefore committing suicide in this case is valuable. Someone might evolve other people related to the patient into evaluation, such as his families, friends, colleagues, and so on. In perception from observers, an intentional death, nevertheless, is nothing different from a natural death when the departed had been claimed to got an incurable and lethal disease, and as what Professor Kagan proved, that a natural death has no badness to the others, an intentional death has no badness to them, neither.

The statement I proposed is showing a general judging process before one killed one himself, however, it is only valid when mankind can foresee their future precisely, that is to say, the value of one's suicide is determined if and only if one's status of future is determined by some ways. It

sounds quite impossible for us to be capable to predict our future precisely, but if the knowledge supporting to our prediction is so determined, just as ALS which is justified to cause an eventual muscle atrophy in previous medical experiments, that the future of ourselves can be therefore foreseen that within a low probability of exception, what we predict will happen eventually.

On this procedure of judging the undetermined future, we might be aware of a fact that due to the limitation of human beings, there are suicides which are committed based on insufficient and imprecise predictions. The value of committing suicides in these cases are becoming unpredictable and ambiguous, that in general, one can only determine whether an intentional action is valuable by comparing the two statuses, status before action and status after action. A man, for example, who resigned his job in a factory and became a full-time writer, holds a point of view that the resignation he made is valuable since he evaluates that even though his salary has declined, he feels much happier under a flexible working schedule than before. The vital reason why his evaluation is valid relates to the fact that he *has ever been in* the both two statuses, status before resignation and status after resignation, and he has the ability to evaluate whether his action, resignation, have more positive impacts on his life. Back to the evaluation of one's suicide, I was always trying to claim that a valuable suicide can only come from a valid prediction, such as predictions from a supporting knowledge system that is able to construct and simulate the behaviors of the reality so that one can still be in and experience the two statuses, status before his death and status after his death, in spite that he does not literally exist in one of them. If there are no such reliable predictions that support man himself to make decisions on whether he is reasonable to commit a suicide, committing a suicide itself is not *en-valuable*, that there is no way he can tell what is his status after his death, and hence there are no reasonable inferences can be established that whether his decision is valuable or worthless.

When we consider the value to commit a suicide, we are actually analyzing this problem using our rational thinking, that based on an assumption that mankind is merely creatures of which nature are pursuing the happiness and pleasure of life, how committing a suicide can be a valuable action. Certainly, committing a suicide can be deconstructed by methods and be judged whether it is valuable in a quantitative scale that if one can gain positive income in a certain evaluation system, then the action itself is valuable, and vice versa. The most tricky components in this procedure are choices of evaluation systems, that as what being mentioned in the introduction, one's view of death

reflects one's view of life in the world. As in the example I purposed, I am holding believes in the medical and natural science, of which results are concluded from a coherent experimental system and in which there gathered almost all the smartest human beings in the world researching on the unexplored topics. Since that their dedicated work represents the very best of human beings, which consist of the ultimate goal of the whole human, the spirit of exploration, the spirit of collaboration, and so on. Most of us might not hold a totally opposite view that their work is worthless and are not capable enough to construct a currently valid evaluation system even though there are few exceptions within a low probability. However, the natural limitation beyond our control is that we are not omniscient creatures and although the experimental system gives us the criterion of evaluation, the raw data of experiments are merely based on what has been seen and thrown into the *gravitational well* we located in. Over hundreds of years being passed by, perhaps there are several evolutions had been taken in medical science, and medical departments can finally cure ALS. However, if we were someone watching back that hundreds of years ago there is a man who got ALS and committed a suicide, we would not think his suicide is worthless because it is a curable disease in the world we live in, that we know the limitation of human beings at that period he lived in, and therefore, the evaluation our purpose is still positive, and his evaluation is consistent and valid, either.

### **Work Cited**

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