

Let's talk about suicide. We've had several intense discussions about this topic in class. Conversations about suicide and its cousin euthanasia tend to produce strong emotions – in fact I was a little surprised that these conversations were the only ones this semester that provoked such emotional responses, given the many other sensitive topics we have covered. The major theme of our discussions was whether or not suicide is moral. Some believed suicide to be a courageous act, while others believed it to be the height of cowardice.

This is the wrong question to be asking. Suicide is not a moral act, not in the sense that it is *immoral* but that it is *amoral*. This statement is not to be taken absolutely, but it should be structuring our discussion. It is also important to note that here I am referring to the type of suicide that proceeds from emotional causes such as depression or grief, rather than the kind more commonly seen in Eastern cultures in which one commits suicide out of a sense of honor. This kind of suicide is neither brave, nor cowardly. It is not something someone *does*, it is something that *happens to* someone.

Human beings have an innate drive to stay alive. If we didn't our species would have disappeared a long time ago. This drive is not overcome easily, and it is this overcoming that some people call bravery. However, in many cases it is not so much an overcoming as an involuntary suppression of the survival instinct produced by chemical imbalance. Yet to take the opposing view is just as incorrect – suicide is not cowardly. Cowardice is the deliberate choice, when faced with fear or difficulty, to take the easier path, even though it is not the right one. This is a common perception of suicide, but it is the external perception of those looking from the outside at the victim.

For someone prepared to commit suicide, it is not the easier path – it is the only path. The difficulty, the pain, of continued life is too great to bear. Moreover, it is perceived as the right path. Those who choose to exit life see no reason to continue living. Suicide is not a cop-out. It is the exhausted collapse of someone too tired to keep marching on. It is the glowing exit sign that leads to somewhere without pain. Anyone who thinks that suicide is cowardly is welcome to spend years living under the cloud of depression and see what they feel like then.