

“To Be or Not to Be”: An Essay on the Essence of Suicide

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Suicide has been an epidemic that society has faced for many centuries. Many have claimed that it robbed the individual of the multiple opportunities that would've come their way had they chosen to live. There are many reasons why an individual chooses to go through with suicide, whether it is due to mental health or other conditions, suicide can seem like the only way to end their suffering. To that individual, killing themselves may be a better option than living through the pain because of the hurt they think they cause others. This can be the result of multiple things such as not having the access or support to seek help or simply not knowing of the resources they could've reached out to. Society has an expectation that it can't be justified for an individual to take their life because it results in a loss of life and hurts a community. However, I would argue otherwise. I find that suicide can, in fact, be justified because the individual has the right to choose what they want to do with their life. Even though, suicide is considered a sin in many religions and is frowned upon by many individuals and society, it is clear that when done under the right circumstances, an individual can justify taking their own life. In this essay, I will go over reasons why society needs to change its perspective on suicide and those who do go through with it. In particular, I will be looking at suicide cases that caused by mental illness.

Before going looking at the three reasons why society needs to change its perspective, I will present a roadmap for how these arguments will be presented. First, I will be presenting two philosophers whose work will be used continuously throughout this essay. Following that, I will open with the first argument, that suicide can be justified as long as it is done out of their own will. This does open up the debate on free will but in terms of those suffering from mental illness, you can see that it takes a sort of deterministic route and therefore ends in suicide. The second argument will be acknowledging death as something that is constant. What is important

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to note here is the fact that everyone will die, it is just a matter of time and how. If we look at suicide as an act of death occurring at a certain time, then it could lighten the burden people place on themselves who choose to go through with it. The final argument will be identifying hidden causes, so to speak. It is highly unlikely that one individual knows exactly what is going on in another person's mind, and so using this argument, I will be arguing that we can't know for sure, why someone chose to kill themselves. Again, this will help lighten the burden that is mentioned in the second argument.

To argue the premise that suicide can be justified, I will be referring to Nietzsche's ideologies as well as Seneca's. Seneca's main ideology is based around the notion of "mere living is not good, but living well". This means that simply living for the sake of being alive is not enough. As a rational individual, you're supposed to live the best life you can and if you can't do that then there is no point in being alive. He suggests that individuals can justify killing themselves when they feel like they are lacking in certain areas that results in their happiness as well as the fact that they realize that killing themselves wouldn't enhance or diminish their moral virtue, so what do they have to lose? Nietzsche believes that people should only look out for themselves, and that being mindful of others' needs would be costly in the end. It falls back on the Master Morality which is a subsection of Nietzsche's Herd argument. This is where Nietzsche suggests that individuals should strive for power and make a better life for themselves. He also suggests that it is better to have a master morality type ideology instead of a slave morality one, because you run the risk of being used if you follow the slave morality ideology.

First, I will argue that suicide can be justified because the act of suicide is done out of the individual's own will, meaning they are choosing to do so without any input from anyone else. If someone were to choose to kill themselves, one can assume that they are doing it for their own interests. One can also assume that the individual has a natural inclination to live rather than to die. Aristotle would also suggest that if suicide is done out of complete consent of the individual then it can be justified as it is not being forced upon them. If countries tell their citizens that they are free to do as they please then legally it is an individual's right to take their own life, as they

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have rights that suggest that they are free. Seneca believes that we are judges that judge what we should be doing and what we should not be doing based on our own needs and desires. Seneca also believes that every action is done either voluntarily or involuntarily and are meant to reflect the impressions of the soul. If so, these impressions of the soul essentially are the desires and needs of an individual. In the case of an individual taking their life, the action is done voluntarily and can reflect the extreme sorrow that individual was dealing. It is possible that at times, the sadness a person is feeling is so thick that death seems like the only option. If this is the case, then that action of taking their own life is done out of their own free will and can be justified because that is what the individual may be looking for; an escape from the horrors of their reality.

My second argument to justify suicide would be that everyone dies eventually and that death is the same no matter who you are, the only difference is how you die. To start off, death is inevitable. No matter how hard you try to avoid it, you simply can't, it is one of the only truths of the world that remains true: death comes for all and does not discriminate. An individual will die no matter what, whether they choose the time of death or not. And so when justifying suicide, you can assume that the only difference is that the person chooses to die at a time that seems convenient to them. Suicide cannot be ethically wrong if it were to be done out of an individual's own will. Another aspect of death is that people cannot decide when you can die. As much as society would like to make it seem that doctors or physicians can choose when you get to die, they really don't. An individual alone has the right to death, just as much as they have the right to life. If they choose to end their life sooner than people wanted, then that's just the sad truth people have to live with. To support this premise, I refer to Friedrich Nietzsche's *Twilight of the Idols*, where he writes about a moral code for physicians. He suggests that physicians undermine the patient's rights by determining their right to reproduce, be born and to live. He goes on to say that the patient has lost the right, "to die proudly when it is no longer possible to live proudly", as well as saying, "[...] Death of one's own free choice, death at the proper time, with a clear head and with joyfulness, consummated in the midst of children and with who is leaving is still

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there, likewise an actual evaluation of what has been desired and what achieved in life, an adding up of life [...]”. Not only does this quote emphasize the idea of an individual having the right to die on their own terms, but it also suggests that death isn’t as bad as religions will make it. While death is a loss suffered by a community, it is important to consider the latter; death can be a final reflection of one’s accomplishments. For an individual who is struggling to make it through each day, death can be liberating as it finally means that they can let go and stop worrying.

Finally, my last argument is as such, no individual can really ever know what another person is going through. This is important because some individuals may feel inclined to believe that they have power over another’s decisions, this will inevitably eliminate any such feeling of responsibility over another person’s actions. We can assume we know but we really don’t, we only get our own interpretation of part of the whole story. A Japanese proverb would suggest that we have three faces, the first is the one we show the world, the second is the one we show to our family and friends and the third is the one that we keep to ourselves. This proverb emphasizes the idea of people not being able to know the whole story, we only get a portion of it or choose to accept a few details that help our side. Keeping this in mind, I would argue that the individual themselves does not know the full damage they have undergone as it is highly possible that it lies in the unconscious. The unconscious part of the mind is what lies below the water of an iceberg, it is unknown to many and remains unknown. To support this notion, I turn to Friedrich Nietzsche’s *Twilight of the Idols* where he writes, “men were thought of as ‘free’ so that they could become guilty; consequently every action had to be thought of as willed, the origin of every action as lying in the consciousness”. As stated, it is possible that there are unknown causes to why an individual chooses to kill themselves. This leads me into my second point for this argument, sometimes the cause of an action isn’t as it seems. Nietzsche once said, “if we possess our why of life we can put up with almost any how - man does not strive after happiness; only the Englishman does that”, this meant that the why of actions may always remain unanswered. If we don’t have the why then we can’t assume that we know the how. Moreover, in the case of someone killing

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themselves, we would like to think that we know why they killed themselves when really we don't. We can't place ourselves in someone else's shoes because oftentimes we won't know the full extent of things even if we tried. Imagine it like this, no one else can drink your glass of water for you, only you can do that. Similarly, no one can live your life for you, no one can really know your struggles or deepest desires as that is solely your own. To support this notion of unknown causes, I look to Nietzsche's Four Great Errors as proof of what I said, to be true. One of Nietzsche's Four Great Errors is the error of imaginary causes. Nietzsche suggests that people add false causes to everything to accept things. This is clear when he writes, "It never suffices us simply to establish the mere fact that we feel as we do: we acknowledge this fact - become conscious of it - only when we have furnished it with a motivation of some kind". It is no surprise that people crave a purpose or a why to their actions, but as I stated before, sometimes there simply is no why. Suicide is something that simply happens, people search for reasons in places where it doesn't exist, only the individual can truly know what they felt and what led them to kill themselves. This in turn eliminates the argument that suicide can be morally wrong, because each case of suicide is subjective therefore, it is impossible to come up with a general solution to the problem.

To conclude, I argue that suicide can be justified as it is done out of free will, doesn't change the fact that you die and that no individual can ever know what another is going through. Rather than looking at suicide as an action that is wrong on all accounts, it is important to acknowledge that the individual had gone through with suicide in order to feel a sense of liberation from the pain they were feeling. Sometimes a person may feel so hurt and their mental health may be so bad that death seems like a good option, and in those cases, the best we can do is support them. People leave behind suicide notes to help their loved ones feel less guilty but why does it have to fall upon them to apologize? We can't blame an individual for wanting to feel better, even if what they chose hurt us in the end.

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