

Suicide, Faith and God

Suicide is the killing of oneself. Some refine this definition to say that it is the deliberate killing of oneself. Suicide is a health issue not a religious or moral one. To make it a moral or religious issue is judgemental. This is such a serious matter that one should leave and be removed from any religion or ethical community that moralises about suicide. Nobody has the right to use a tragedy as an opportunity to moralise. Do not forget that God and religion and fundamentally about the duty to live - so suicide being morally wrong is core and fundamental.

The Church says suicide is a rejection of God's intention to look after us and a rejection of his plan to bring good out of the evil we do and suffer. The atheist would believe the suicide is judged enough without God being brought into it! The Catechism of the Catholic Church callously worries about how a suicide has supposedly let everybody down: "[Suicide] likewise offends love of neighbor because it unjustly breaks the ties of solidarity with family, nation, and other human societies to which we continue to have obligations. Suicide is contrary to love for the living God (2281).

St Thomas Aquinas condemned suicide because it,

is contrary to natural self-love, whose aim is to preserve us

injures the community of which an individual is a part

violates our duty to God because God has given us life as a gift and in taking our lives we violate His right to determine the duration of our earthly existence (Aquinas 1271, part II, Q64, A5).

But all of the three reasons are over-simplified. Its hugely more complicated than that. If we have that problem with suicide, imagine how much trouble we will have in giving reasons for condemning other things!

Can a person have a suicidal motive? Is your motive to kill the pain? Or yourself? Or both? If you kill yourself to save another person's life, the subjective reason you do it is to save the other person and not to kill yourself. If your motive is only to kill the pain then it follows that it is immoral (if you believe in that word) or evil to condemn or forbid suicide. What you would do is help people but leave them the right to refuse that help and kill themselves and praise them for availing of the right.

Socrates

Socrates said that though he was sure the soul was immortal there was a chance that he was wrong but still he would die for it. Christianity has the same attitude. Christians are told to be willing to stake their lives and the lives of others on the existence of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ. As heterosexual marriage is a core doctrine of the Church, you are expected to be willing to give your life if it means taking a stand against same sex marriage. Such teachings are really about coercing and forcing yourself and brainwashing yourself to die for "ifs". No if is worth dying for. No wonder dedicated believers develop a propensity to start forcing others as well. If you program yourself you will soon lose sight of how you are trying to program others especially your vulnerable children. If you should die for an "if" then it hardly matters if you start going into denial that it is an "if" and start arguing that you are 100% certain that Jesus was the sinless Son of God and the Bible is true.

God Belief Does Nothing to Deter Suicide

Children have straightforward faith and die by suicide at alarming levels. If faith cannot inoculate them how can it protect anybody?

In general we believe that death is the greatest loss we can suffer so our moral codes or codes about good behaviour should work hard to protect human life. Religion takes the force of this way and so is to be condemned outright. It even goes as far as St Paul to say that to die is to gain and to be better off.

Religion says that God forbids suicide as he has a plan for your life. But that ban has no credibility. It is just a mere prohibition and no real reasons are given for it. Merely telling a suicidally depressed person not to do it is a waste of time. It is in fact making the problem worse. It will be perceived as, "She cannot give me a a reason to live. I am not going to degrade myself by living when I don't want to just to please her!" If A provides sufficient motivation to another to die by suicide then A might be responsible for the suicide.

The plan stuff is not helpful. Religion is very hazy about the plan. It amounts to something like saying that God is slowly but surely working to encourage us to be more loving. But that surely means there will be casualties. And a depressed person is not going to feel part of a plan. Telling her or him there is a plan only makes her or him feel worse and that the depression is her or his fault for not having enough faith.

Some would reason that maybe it's God's plan that you die by suicide for he has mysterious purposes that are unknown to us. The religious doctrine that evil is used in God's plan and God only lets evil happen for a good reason says exactly that!

God is ultimately responsible for the depression and despair you experience. Thus if it kills you he is responsible. Belief in God should make depression worse. If it doesn't then does the person understand God at all? Or does the person really believe?

Don't presume that suicide is intervening in nature and so is against God. The person who is dying will use medicine to save her own life so if that intervention is acceptable then it may be acceptable to implement suicide. The intervention argument cannot prove suicide wrong.

And to say suicide is wrong because God forbids it is really saying, "I don't care if suicide hurts you or not. What matters to me is that God has banned it." Such a view will only spur on the suicidal person who is influenced by religion. It will deepen the depression.

Religion holds that if you kill yourself because of unbearable pain or depression you are not fully to blame. If you have lost control of yourself enough, then it follows that you may not sin at all in suicide.

This view implies that if you die by suicide, religion has to hope that you were in such great agony that you had to kill yourself. The pain forced your hand. This view is vicious for it attacks the victim for religious reasons. It wishes evil on him or her for the sake of religious dogma. Suicidal persons who see this will easily feel that their religion has failed them. To the depressed mind, they are personally attacked and despised by their religion.

If a person dies by suicide, the atheist simply regrets that they didn't find whatever it was that might have saved their life. That is caring for the person. We do not have to worry about the so-called sin or how it thwarts God. That is a moral criticism of the person that must be avoided.

An ingrained moral belief that suicide is wrong is not going to stop a person from attempting or dying by suicide. A suffering mind can be convinced its right and that morality is not a consideration. A person may decide to die by suicide and if they believe its immoral that is further confirmation to them that their belief that they have no control over improving themselves is correct. They will reason, "I want to do bad and this proves that I and everybody else is better off if I die."

Suicide is not necessarily selfish. Many suicides are people of good character. They see themselves as a curse on the earth. They see their death as a kind act that relieves others of having to endure them. It does not feel selfish to them. They think they are doing everybody that counts a service by killing themselves. Suicide bombers think they are doing a service too.

Believers say that God is bigger than our sins. That surely means that if you kill yourself to do others a favour you get a free pass into Heaven and are a saint! Suicide is implicitly encouraged!

The example of Christ who deliberately provoked people to murder him so that he could pay for their sins, as the gospels say, is not the kind of example we need in a society riddled with suicide.

A study found, "Religion has typically been seen as something that would protect somebody from thoughts of suicide or trying to kill themselves, and in our study our evidence suggests that may not be the case for everyone, particularly for those we refer to as sexual minority people". The quote comes from John Blosnich of the Injury Control Research Center at West Virginia University in Morgantown (2017).

Nihilism gets the blame for suicides and students gunning down their classmates at random but nihilism and God are compatible. Nihilism is the idea that nothing has value so suicide is neither here nor there. Nihilism is confused with a command to commit suicide but that would mean it is not nihilism for it values suicide. If life is valuable it does not follow that God can create a universe where it is valuable for everybody - assuming it is true that God and evil are agreeable.

If you believe in God, you will have no real reason for opposing suicide. Moreover, you will have reason for accepting or condoning or encouraging it.

Hume's Reply to Aquinas

David Hume had an answer for Aquinas's silly reasons for opposing suicide. The following borrows his main points and adds clarifications.

If God exists, then he lets us fight the way he has laid things out. For example, we have to reclaim land. We have to get cures for the diseases he makes.

If God lets us contravene the laws of nature he has made, then it follows that if we are better off committing suicide then we should do it. You may argue that suicide is never the answer. But what if it was? That would show that God only forbids suicide because it is never for the best and not because it is killing yourself. Killing yourself would then not be wrong in itself.

If you assume that suicide is never the answer for anybody, then how do you know everybody else well enough to make such a global statement? Your arrogance is not going to help a person rethink. They want understanding. If there are reasons to kill yourself, you need people to understand them so that you might see a better way.

If we have free will because of God and not in spite of him, then we are still fitting in with his will by killing ourselves.

Sometimes suicide does not upset other people. Families may want a relative who is suffering extremely and who is dying anyway to end it all.

Hume says that suicide does not violate our duty to love ourselves if our continued existence can be seen as worse than death. He said the fear of death which is a natural instinct means that we will deliberate carefully and assess the pros and cons fully to develop the courage and the clarity of mind to end it all.

Kant argued that Hume was wrong for our moral worth and capacity comes from our rational will and its a contradiction to say that such a rational power should be destroyed by the one who exercises it. To annihilate the subject of morality in one's person is to root out the existence of morality itself from the world as far as one can, even though morality is an end in itself. Consequently, disposing of oneself as a mere means to some discretionary end is debasing humanity in one's person... (Kant 423).

Depression

It is thought that depression can lead to suicide and that most depression is caused by a perception that one cannot control one's life to help improve how one feels. It would be a sense of powerlessness.

You could feel powerless as an atheist. Belief in God does not insulate you against feeling powerless either for ultimately God makes all the decisions and you are dependent on him - you even use your free will (assuming free will is real) because of him.

The atheists should feel they are at the mercy of random forces.

The believers should feel their destiny is in God's hands.

Either view can be damaging but which one is the worst?

The atheists strive to feel that though life is random it can be good because of that randomness. They do not feel that there is something else out there to put another spanner in the works - God. And the notion that God uses evil to do good justifies evil befalling you. If random forces hurt you that is not justified in any sense. It is 100% regretful. The atheist stance is realistic and courageous and the best option. The atheist hopes not for a miracle but for a random event that saves her or him. The atheist's hope is better for she or he will know from life experience how to expect the unexpected and how it can be surprisingly good.

We can know, intellectually, that we might win. Emotionally is a different story. We may not feel that at all. It is thought that knowing might help us cling on to enough hope to keep us alive.

But knowing it when you don't feel it enough will only make you feel worse. You will be frustrated at yourself for you will expect yourself to feel a bit less gloomy.

It is said we can know we can win though we might not believe it at all. This is really the same thing as saying we know we might win. Can only means you can do it not that anything is guaranteed.

Conclusion...

Suicide is a health issue not a religious or moral one. Religion must not be allowed to steal the right to comment on it or condemn it. As death and suicide is the biggest issue or matter of all, and religion cannot speak to it or about it then religion should not exist. It is a matter for medics and family not faithheads. Religion costs lives through suicide. Belief in God costs lives through suicide. First it cannot discourage it. Second it also commands it in certain ways. Third, it hides its role. Religion and faith in God must be opposed - it is better to oppose them strongly than for one life to be lost over them. Too much blood has been spilt. What is the point of religion and God when they have no answer for the biggest question of all: "Why should I not die by suicide?" They do not help therefore they hinder. The good they do is shabby when the biggest problem is left in limbo and not dealt with and cannot be dealt with.