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SUMMARIES OF SELECTED WORKS ON SELF DESTRUCTION AND SELF CREATION

Carolyn Gratton

Kockelmans, Joseph J. On suicide: reflections upon Camus' view of the problem. *Psychoanalytic Review*, 1967, 54(3), 31-48.

In the introduction to this article, Kockelmans points out that while today suicide is mainly the subject of "scientific" investigation, (as to its causes and the means of prevention), throughout the ages it has been studied almost exclusively by moralists and philosophers, who define it as "voluntary and freely chosen death." After a cursory survey of contemporary psychoanalytic and psychological thought on the subject, the author states that the primary focus of this paper is on the following questions: "To what extent has existential philosophy contributed to the view, defended by some contemporary psychiatrists and psychologists, who maintain that suicide *as such* is not to be understood as a clear manifestation of mental disorder but as a consequence of a conscious and free human decision? Furthermore, under what conditions, if ever, can such a decision be characterized as really *humanly* motivated?" Declining any explicit consideration of the moral aspects of the suicide question, he takes as his starting point Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus*.

In the 1955 edition of this novel, Camus says that its fundamental thesis is that it is legitimate and even necessary to wonder whether life has a meaning, which brings with it the need of meeting the problem of suicide face to face. In the book, then, Camus considers suicide as an act which is prepared unreflectively within the silence of a man's heart. Perhaps an outside event will precipitate it, but it is not the deepest motivation. Its consequences amount to a confession of the discovery that life is not worth the trouble—that it is absurd. Even here, distinctions are difficult because many people admit the absurdity of life but do not commit suicide, while others evade the problem by hoping for another life or by living for some great idea that gives life meaning. The problem here is, for Kockelmans, the question of whether or not the absurdity of life really does dictate death.

In the brief sketch that follows of Camus' description of the sudden experience of absurdity in life, there is mention of the density and strangeness of the world, man's discomfort in the face of his own inhumanity and the lack of experience of his own death. What does one conclude from these discoveries

of the absurd? Camus seems to be saying that neither science, art, philosophy or religion can show man the way to transcend this paradox of the absurd. The question becomes whether one is to die voluntarily or hope in spite of everything. Man is tempted to escape the paradox by leaping to a religious answer that he does not understand. Otherwise he must learn to live "without appeal" to certainty. This for Camus, is the only context for the notion of suicide. Living becomes a matter of keeping the absurd alive, not of negating it. The sole coherent philosophical position is then, revolt—"the certainty of a crushing fate without the resignation which should accompany it." But suicide would settle the absurd. It is a repudiation of revolt which Camus sees as the defiance that gives value to human life. At the end of his book, he says, "Thus I draw from the absurd three consequences which are: my revolt, my real freedom, and my passion for life. By the mere activity of consciousness in this way I transform into a rule of life what was an invitation to death; and that is why I refuse suicide."

Thus, to be true to the premises of absurdity, man has to reject both suicide and the leap into religion. His most fundamental act, the first and decisive revolt against the meaninglessness of existence is to choose life and to establish life itself as the only necessary good in the face of the collapse of the universe of the sacred. At this point in the article, Kocklemans makes his own personal commentaries on Camus' themes with references to the writing of Sartre, de Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty on man as discloser of meaning and on freedom and suicide as a human possibility.

Lester, David. Psychology and death. *Continuum*, 1967, 5(3), 550-559.

Not only suicide, but death itself is an apparently neglected area of research for psychologists according to David Lester. He points out that the aversion to death on the part of psychologists may arise from their own personal fears about the topic, just as the apparent indifference of the average person to his own death does not accord with his emotional reaction to words connected with it. Measurement of attitudes towards death presents certain problems also, especially when the metaphors used are not seen as appropriate by the subjects. One factor that he finds becomes amenable to study is inconsistency in the attitudes toward death held by an individual. Another factor of particular interest in the study of attitudes toward death is the influence of religious beliefs upon these attitudes. He speculates on the fact that for religious individuals, death can lead either to a better or to a worse condition than life, so that those with religious beliefs may show more extreme attitudes towards death than those with no religious beliefs. On the other hand, according to H. Feifel, those who fear death may resort to a religious outlook in order to cope with their fears of death.

In any case, there is no experimental evidence at the moment to support any theory of the genesis of the fear of death, including that of Freud which derives fear of death from the projection by the survivors of the hostile component of their ambivalent feelings toward the dead person onto the dead person. After a brief mention of the development of the concept of death in children he moves on to a consideration of differing attitudes towards suicide. He finds an apparent acceptance and welcoming of death by some suicidal individuals. Yet suicide may merely be a way of escaping from the fear of an

predictable death by taking one's own life. There is little evidence regarding the psychodynamics of successful suicide however, since the studies have concentrated on those individuals who did not succeed in the attempt. In attempting to delineate the personality patterns of suicidal individuals, he points to traits like rigidity in thought processes, dichotomous evaluations of persons and events, extreme reaction to interpersonal crises, dependency, resentment, and possibly greater emotional disturbance. Motivations of suicidal persons are even harder to pin down accurately, but Lester notes that the manipulative element is obvious; to make others suffer, to get revenge, to escape from physical or emotional pain, to satisfy a need for punishment, to draw attention, to obtain love and affection from others, to elicit sympathy.

At the end of the essay, Lester returns to the widespread avoidance of death and dying by the greater number of persons, especially physicians. He points to the fact that the social isolation of the dying and the suicidal appears to be a very real occurrence, and that a necessary part of any program for helping those who are dying and scared of dying and who are tired of living, is the education of the general population on matters of death. To do this effectively, it is necessary first to free death from the taboos that surround it. "Men will be able to face death more calmly when they have considered it and discussed it. As long as men suppress thoughts of death, then resolution of their fears is impossible."

McConnell, Theodore. Suicide ethics in cross-disciplinary perspective. *Journal of Religion and Health*, 1968, 7(1), 7-25.

This article is a re-examination of the implicit and explicit structures of moral discourse in various disciplines such as sociology, psychology, psychiatry, law, philosophy and theology, in order to demonstrate the kinds of moral discourse used about suicide and to seek some patterns for the future direction of suicide ethics. Considering suicide from the standpoint of moral discourse raises a number of issues like the status of its truth claim, the proscriptive structures of suicide, the total context of the suicide decision and the kinds of conditions under which such a decision is in fact affirmed.

From the point of view of sociology, with its landmark being Durkheim's research on suicide, the author finds that throughout these sociological considerations there is an absence of attention to the items of moral discourse, and thus that the problem of individual freedom is not easily confronted once this perspective is adopted. On the other hand, in the course of extensive treatment of suicide conditions, he finds that psychologists and psychiatrists have evaluated all aspects of suicide, and it is not unusual to find moral implications and arguments within their literature. He cites both Freud and Jung as examples, and goes on to explain how Harry Stack Sullivan classified suicide into two forms and found a negative value judgment in the destructive character of suicide. In contrast to the perspective of Sullivan and that of Freud, followers of Karen Horney have seen suicide as undesirable because it represents a failure or lack of selfhood. For George Kelly, the significant value issue in suicide evaluation is whether the event can be seen as a mode of validating life, but perhaps the most forceful defense of the suicide decision in certain situations is to be found in the work of the Jungian analyst James Hillman who is clearly anxious to stress the positive attributes of suicide.

In looking at what the law has to say about the problem McConnell finds that in the past the law has dealt with suicide in prohibitive and restrictive terms. He refers to the writings of Clanville Williams, Norman St. John-Stevas and Edmund Cahin. He finds contemporary trends of opinion against fixing penal attachment to attempted suicide, a serious questioning of prohibitive laws against it and an attempt to justify suicide as a means of saving "the intrinsic self." David Hume's essay, *On Suicide*, in which he contends that the proper philosophical attitude toward suicide is never one of negative judgment, is considered by him to be the landmark in philosophical analysis.

In contrast to Hume's position, however, both Kant and Hegel contended against suicide under any conditions. The French philosopher Landsberg's disapproval of suicide is criticized because it lacks the social-political dimension, and philosophers in general are taken to task because "philosophy displays a notable lack of disciplined and extensive reflection regarding the problem of suicide."

This philosophical lack of reflection about suicide is surpassed only by that of Protestant theology, whereas Roman Catholic moral theology have devoted considerable attention to the problem. Examples are given from the works of St. Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Edwin Healy, Henry Davis and Thomas O'Donnell. Two Protestant theologians, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Helmut Thielicke are seen to have shared a general rejection of suicide although each has his own distinctions and ways of viewing this moral problem. McConnell concludes then that this examination of reflection within various disciplines shows a marked degree of disapproval, but that much more attention could profitably be devoted to reflection upon the nature of the moral dimension of suicide, including the especially intricate undertaking of discovering conditions and goals.

The author points further to new lines of development regarding the ethical decision of suicide in the thinking of Kelly in psychiatry and Bonhoeffer in theology. He points to the almost total absence within the various disciplines of any consideration for the collective dimension of suicide, and makes suggestions toward a revised perspective on the problem of individual suicide. Among them is the fact that any ethical reflection on the question of suicide must be so structured as to take account of individuals; that the ethical examination should somehow attempt to ascertain what, if anything, was violated in the suicide act; that it is desirable for ethical reflection to maintain a flexibility to handle contingent circumstances; and that an ethical consideration of suicide decision should approach the issues in terms of the responsible self. In the last section of the essay, the author refers to case-centered situation ethics, citing Anglican ethicists like Joseph Fletcher, James Pike and John Robinson. He finds situation ethics to be neither proscriptive, prohibitive, nor affirmative apart from individual cases, and thus it attempts to do what a code of ethics can never accomplish: namely to answer why is this (suicide) right or wrong or most prudential in terms of the intrinsic realities of the situation.

Sanborn, Patricia. Gabriel Marcel's conception of the realized self; a critical exploration. *Journal of Existentialism*, 1967, 8(30), 133-159.

According to Miss Sanborn, three basic themes emerge in Marcel's conception of self-realization. The first is that of a fundamental lack in the self, a pervasive depersonalization and functionalization, an "ontological exigency" that desires to go beyond these two states. Marcel's view of the various means of transcendence of depersonalization and functionalization make up the second theme, with its analysis of activity, receptivity and freedom, and its discussions of hope, intersubjectivity and fidelity. The third theme is that of the realized self. It is on the assumption that the realized self is possible that Marcel bases his discussion of the ontological lack and the ways of transcending it. A shift in experience away from the ontological lack is necessary for the self to be. Yet Marcel's discussion of the realized self leaves something to be desired in the way of explicitness. The aim of this paper then, is to discuss more fully this question of whether the realized self is a discovery that exists but must be unconcealed, or an achievement—something that is created, and the question of the conflict between realization and necessary disquiet in Marcel's thought.

On the question of whether the self is a discovery or an achievement, it is evident that to be a discovery, the self must be present prior to realization, in states in which an ontological lack is still experienced. This ontological lack is, then, a form, a blindness to the center of the individual's being that is imprisoned in his egocentric "no." To be, one must transcend the functionalized or egocentric state in which he is encased, by answering the appeal that pre-exists in the depths of his being. The recognition of this exigency often comes about in the encounter with another person, wherein one experiences dissatisfaction with what he now is, and an urge to move beyond that to what he "really" is.

Marcel argues that his position is not that of a descriptive psychologist, however, but rather his theory of participation is the basis for this description of the realized self as presence that is presupposed. Miss Sanborn concludes that this being or self that is implicitly present is the actual self which has been obscured by egoism or depersonalization, and that self-realization for Marcel is a matter of freeing the real self—not of realizing an ideal or of building a new self. Yet Marcel sometimes argues for more than such a recuperative enterprise in maintaining that creative self-realization is also transformatory, and that the complete self which is the result of creation is different from what went before. So questions emerge not only about the form of its presence and about its being the result of creative activity. In order to cope with these questions, the author proceeds to a discussion of Marcel's notion of "recollection" which includes the notion of an element of return plus the idea of a creative act.

Marcel sees recollection as a turning inward of one's attention upon the self and away from the world and at the same time, as a contemplative act in which silence is imposed on oneself. In this highly disciplined activity, one first distances himself or withdraws from his present life in order to take up a position opposite it in order to both appraise and condemn it. The condemnation is of the self of distractions, emotion and appetite that estranges the person from his real self. The second phase of the return to the self is

characterized as a re-grasping of the self, a re-establishment of contact with one's ontological base. Yet in order to have a standard for judgment, there must exist already a premonition of this realized self—which is related to the earlier self that one left, as a transformed musical theme is related to its initial theme. The "I" that judges, the "me" that is judged, and the final realized self to which I return are all one the same self that becomes more than it is in recollection.

A second submerged conflict appears in Marcel's views about whether the state of realization is achievable. Again we find an attempt to combine two seemingly incompatible views in that he sees the realized self as a valuable and attainable goal, the "person" as over and against the depersonalized "one," yet at the same time he also stresses the necessity of disquiet or nostalgia which is experienced in the life of every man and carries him beyond existence insofar as existence is seen as one's present life. The discussion of disquiet implies that what one longs for in this state is one's true being or center—one's equilibrium. This longing to come home to the self, to be what one really is, concerns an aspiration for an inner peace or harmony which is not given at the start—an aspiration of a "being-less" for a "being-more." This experience of disquiet is a requisite in order that one fully be a self—yet seems to imply that there is no possibility of full realization of the self. Philosophy cannot resolve this dilemma. In fact, for Marcel there must always be a gap between my present self and my realized self—and I am always more or less a stranger to my own depths. For him, the realized self is the self that experiences disquiet—that is always seeking—and thus, according to Miss Sanborn, Marcel can never resolve this conflict unless his conception of the self is modified. This she proceeds to do in the last section of this essay.

She would like to propose a conception of the self that focuses upon structural continuity of the self as "an organized whole, and integrated structure. . . which is organized and "makes sense"—that is intimately connected with one's experiences, yet cannot be identified with anyone or with the sum of these experiences." The author points to the works of Risieri Frondizi and Gordon Allport as sources of this idea of the self as a particular kind of structure which can include the experiences which Marcel describes—experiences such as fidelity, hope and love. Also with this idea of self as structure she argues that the sense of dissatisfaction, one's present state and the desire to transcend it are frequently experienced. However, the change in mode that she envisages as a result of awareness of a new goal is not recognition of a self that is already there, but rather of a self that *can* be in terms of goals appropriate to the person. The freedom which is experienced as a result of this self-actualization could not be used to interpret Marcel's position, because of his stress on a return to the self, but only if the change in self is seen as a change in one's experience accompanied by an alteration in the structure of that experience. For this one must shift from the language of discovery to that of achievement, and see recollection, not as a recovery or return but rather as an attempt to alter the present self. Marcel's musical analogy breaks down, according to Miss Sanborn, who feels that her solution also solves the problem of disquiet and realization as being mutually exclusive elements in the self.

Schneidman, Edwin S. Orientations toward death. In White, R. W., *The study of lives*. New York: Atherton Press, 1963. Pp. 200-227.

The purpose of this chapter from *The study of lives* is to "stimulate a rethinking of conventional notions of death and suicide," and. . . "to create a psychologically oriented classification of death phenomena—an ordering based in large part on the role of the individual in his own demise." But before pursuing this aim, the author devotes a critical section to what he considers to be current misconceptions about the nature of death and suicide.

First on his list of "idols" or false notions, is the idea that maximally effective programs and treatment can be developed in the absence of better taxonomic (or classificatory) understanding of death and suicidal phenomena. Secondly, the author feels that the present classification of suicidal phenomena is not meaningful, since individuals with clear lethal intention as well as those with ambivalent or no lethal intention are currently grouped under the heading of attempted suicide. A third "idol" lies in the presumption that living and dying are separate activities, which is contradicted by Feifel in his book *The meaning of death*, where he shows that how an individual dies reflects his personal philosophy, the goodness of his personal adjustment, his sense of fruition, fulfillment and self-realization. He concludes that suicidal and/or dying behaviors do not exist *in vacuo*, but are an integral part of the life style of the individual. The fact that some persons do not fit easily into any one of the four traditional classifications of death phenomena (natural death, accident, suicide and homicide) which omits the role of the individual in his own demise, is the fourth "idol" treated in this section. The fifth, "the most radical and iconoclastic aspect of our presentation so far," suggests that a major portion of the concept of death itself is operationally meaningless and ought therefore to be eschewed. The author (drawing from the writing of the physicist Percy W. Bridgman) wishes instead to "use concepts and terms which are operationally viable," and as a consequence, the next section of his essay is devoted to proposing a tentative psychological classification of all behaviors involving demise.

For purposes of definition, he begins with four key concepts, the first of which is "cessation," which refers to the stopping of the potentiality of any (further) conscious experience, to the demise of the psychic processes, and which the author calls in his own shorthand, "Psyde." The concept "termination," defined as the stopping of the physiological functions of the body, is dealt with next. The shorthand terms for this biological termination is "Somize." The third concept, "interruption" refers to a stopping of consciousness with the actuality, and usually expectation, of further conscious experiences—a kind of temporary cessation. In order to describe the opposite of the interruption state, he uses a fourth concept—that of "continuation" which he defines as experiencing the stream of temporally contiguous conscious events in the absence of interruption.

After defining these four key concepts, Schneidman, in a section entitled "Basic orientations toward cessation," turns to four subcategories relating to the role of the individual in his own demise. Role of the individual here means his overt and covert behaviors and non-behaviors which reflect conscious and unconscious attitudes relative to his cessation. The four subcategories are: intentional, subintentional, unintentional, and contraintentional. The first,

"intentional," refers to persons who actively precipitate their cessation, to those cases in which the individual plays a direct and conscious role in his own demise. Using the word "Psyde" as defined above, he cites a number of subcategories: 1) Psyde-seekers; 2) Psyde-initiators; 3) Psyde-ignorers; and 4) Psyde-darers—and proceeds to comment on each one. He then moves to a second subcategory, that of the "subintentional" person, the one who plays an indirect, partial, or unconscious role in his own demise, and whose orientation towards cessation he characterizes by the following groupings: 1) Psyde-chancer; 2) Psyde-hastener; 3) Psyde-capitulator; and 4) Psyde-experimenter—all of which are explained briefly but in detail. "Unintentional" cessation describes those occurrences in which, for all intents and purposes, the person psychologically plays no significant role in his own demise. These persons: 1) Psyde-welcomer; 2) Psyde-acceptor; 3) Psyde-postponer; 4) Psyde-disdainer; and 5) Psyde-fearer, are judged by the author to have *omitted* suicide. Lastly, in this section on orientation toward cessation, comes the category of the "contra-intentional" which applies to individuals who usurp the labels and the semantic trappings of death or suicide while having a clear, conscious intention not to commit suicide and not to run any risk of cessation. They, the 1) Psyde-feigners and 2) Psyde-threatener, may be said to have *remitted* or refrained from suicide. The author feels that these contra-intentional acts merit fully as much professional attention as any other maladaptive behavior. He also suggests that coroners who make judgments about suicides every day are badly in need of a psychologically oriented classification such as the one he has been suggesting.

The chapter ends with a detailed study of Captain Ahab in Melville's *Moby Dick*, in which Schneidman proceeds as if he were a Nantucket coroner having to recommend the appropriate labelings for Ahab's death certificate.

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