



EXISTENTIALISM AND SUICIDE: A PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS

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DECLARATION

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December 2023

ABSTRACT

Contemporary suicide theorists describe suicide as "something" that goes wrong when a person's self-preservation fails, if and should there be mental health issues or significant life stressors that a person experiences before their death. By implication, an inborn, predetermined "human nature" usually protects a person against self-harm and suicide, which means that self-preservation follows naturally, unthinkingly, and, as a matter of course, is characteristic of our species. This dissertation will level criticism at the supposition that people are simple, instinctual beings and behave in unison. As an alternative, existentialist thinkers, such as Kierkegaard, Sartre, and, in particular, Camus, show that it takes strenuous ongoing effort to exist because one carries an inescapable imperative *to make oneself*. By creating or bringing about oneself, the self is aware that being human in the world comes with an intricate mix of admirable capabilities and tragic limitations. Considering a person in this light shows that the abilities and constraints residing in the human condition can make it possible for a person to end his or her own life. In this way, one contemplates how scientific advancement and technology showcase the mind subjugating the world to its will and understanding. Yet, it falls short of making sense of oneself and the worth of one's life or what lies inaccessible in the human heart. As mortal and conscious, a human person often understands its strife in an unintelligible universe as absurd and daily life as repetitive and taxing. One is *aware* of the human incapability to create sense and purpose in an irrational universe, except through faith, which often leaves one searching for a reason to live or a justification to die. More so, a human person knows full well that death "solves everything" and extricates one from any condition or situation by ending one's consciousness. On this account, I argue that suicidality implicates the human subject, this curious mix of the extraordinary and the pitiful.

OPSOMMING

Hedendaagse teoretici beskryf selfdood as "iets" wat verkeerd loop wanneer 'n persoon se selfbehoud faal, soos byvoorbeeld wanneer 'n persoon geestesgesondheidskwessies of beduidende lewensstressors ervaar voor hul dood. Dit impliseer dat 'n "menslike natuur," wat aangebore en voorafbepaald is, gewoonlik 'n persoon teen selfdood beskerm. Met ander woorde, dat selfbehoud "natuurlik," onnadenkend, en vanselfsprekend is. Die proefskrif bevraagteken die argument dat mense net eenvoudige, instinktiewe wesens is wat almal dieselfde reageer. In teendeel, eksistensialistiese denkers, soos Kierkegaard, Sartre, en veral Camus, wys daarop dat dit harde werk verg om te bestaan, en dat dit voortdurende inspanning vereis om aan die onvermydelike opdrag om jouself te verwesenlik, te voldoen. Terwyl jy jouself tot stand te bring in hierdie wêreld, bly jy daarvan bewus dat jy, as mens, 'n ingewikkelde kombinasie van bewonderenswaardige vermoëns, maar ook tragiese beperkings, is. Wanneer jy 'n mens so beskou, besef jy dit is hierdie vermoëns en beperkinge wat in die mens lê, wat dit vir hom of haar moontlik maak om sy of haar eie lewe te beëindig. In hierdie verband wys wetenskaplike en tegnologiese vooruitgang oor alle eeue heen baie duidelik hoe die menslike verstand die wêreld aan sy wil en begrip onderwerp. Tog skiet die menslike verstand ver tekort wanneer dit moet sin maak van jouself, die waarde van jou lewe, of dit wat ontoeganklik is in jou hart. 'n Mens weet dat jy sterflik is, en verstaan ook heel dikwels dat jou lewe in absurde stryd gewikkel is met hierdie onverstaanbare wêreld, en dat die daaglikse roetine grootliks sinneloos is, en dat jy swaarkry. Wanneer 'n mens bewus is van die mens se onvermoë om sin en doel te maak van 'n irrasionele heelal, behalwe deur geloof, laat dit mens dikwels soek na 'n rede om te lewe, of selfs om te sterf. Meer nog, alle mense besef dat die dood "alles oplos" en 'n mens uit enige toestand of situasie bevry deur jou bewussyn daarvan te beëindig. Om hierdie rede redeneer ek dat selfdood heenwys na die mens self, hierdie eienaardige kombinasie van die uitsonderlike en die tragiese.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In his remarkable work, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Albert Camus writes how one's thoughts often have a ridiculous beginning on a street corner or in a restaurant's revolving door. More so, I would like to add that such ideas require an audience who is open to considering the merits of these opinions. Consequently, this dissertation would not have been possible had it not been for my promoter, Professor Anton van Niekerk. Without his contribution and guidance, I cannot envisage the completion of these pages.

I would also like to thank my friends and family, particularly Martin, for his support and encouragement, my friend Yvone, and my cat Skye, who spent countless hours with me as I worked on the dissertation.

DEDICATION

For the relatives and friends who mourn someone they lost to suicide and those who live with suicidal thoughts.

In memory of those who died by suicide.¹

¹ "Who cares if one more light goes out?
In a sky of a million stars
It flickers, flickers
Who cares when someone's time runs out?
If a moment is all we are
We're quicker, quicker
Who cares if one more light goes out?
Well I do
Well I do"

Linkin Park. "One More Light". 7. *One More Light*. October 3, 2017. Google.

<https://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=One+more+light+lyrics&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8>

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1. INTRODUCTION

The tragedy of suicide ends the lives of more than 700,000 people every year, and worldwide, many more people think about and attempt suicide.² In the wake of this colossal loss are the loved ones³ who struggle to make sense of these deaths. Jeffery Jackson compares an attempt to decipher the thoughts of those who died by suicide, in this instance, his wife Gail, with trying to understand a foreign language by eavesdropping on a conversation.⁴ "Why did she do it?" is the question that has occupied Jackson's mind for some time. The same question engages many professionals in suicidology⁵ and medicine, particularly psychiatry and public health, and is the central focus of the dissertation.

Theorists understand suicidal behaviour as a complex set of cognitions, emotions and actions.⁶ Foremost in their mind, they think that suicide, i.e. planning a suicide, attempting suicide, and dying by suicide, is *abnormal*.⁷ For example, Obegi writes that suicidal behaviour "describes experiences that, taken together, can hardly be deemed typical of daily living: a preoccupation with thoughts of suicide, preparations to die prematurely, unbearable mental pain and despair, a rigid belief that death is necessary, and distress that is marked by insomnia, nightmares, or agitation."⁸ Nevertheless, though theorists see suicide as a tragic but preventable death, they often disagree about *what* brings about suicidal behaviour.

² "World Suicide Prevention Day 2022 - Creating Hope Through Action," *World Health Organization*, September 10, 2022, <https://www.who.int/news-room/events/detail/2022/09/10/default-calendar/world-suicide-prevention-day-2022>.

³ **Suicide loss survivors** are the family, significant others, or acquaintances who have experienced the loss of a loved one to suicide. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, *National Strategy for Suicide Prevention: Goals and Objectives for action*, (2001). <https://www.sprc.org/sites/default/files/migrate/library/glossary.pdf>.

⁴ Jeffery. A. H. Jackson. *A H, Handbook for Survivors of Suicide*, (Washington: American Association of Suicidology, 2003), 10 https://suicidology.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/SOS_handbook.pdf.

⁵ A multi-professional discipline devoted to the study of suicidal phenomena and their prevention. Major groups involved are (a) scientists (epidemiologists, sociologists, statisticians, demographers, and social psychologists), (b) clinicians (clinical psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, trained volunteers, and members of the clergy), and (c) educators (public health educators and school and college personnel). *American Psychological Association Dictionary*, s.v. "Suicidology." Accessed October 5, 2022, <https://dictionary.apa.org/suicidology>.

⁶ Elizabeth O'Connor, Bradley Gaynes, Brittany U. Burda, Clara Williams, and Evelyn P. Whitlock, "Screening for Suicide Risk in Primary Care: A Systematic Evidence Review for the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force. Table 1, Definitions of Suicide-Related Terms," *National Library of Medicine*, April 2013, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK137739/table/ch1.t1/>.

⁷ Relating to any deviation from what is considered typical, usual, or healthy, particularly if the deviation is considered harmful or maladaptive. The term, however, is most often applied to behaviour that differs from a culturally accepted norm, especially when indicative of a mental disorder. *American Psychological Association Dictionary*, s.v. "Abnormal," accessed June 4, 2018, <https://dictionary.apa.org/abnormal>.

⁸ Joseph H. Obegi, "Is suicidality a mental disorder? Applying DSM-5 guidelines for new diagnoses," *Death Studies*, 45, no. 8, (2021): 638-650, doi: [10.1080/07481187.2019.1671546](https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2019.1671546).

Researchers no longer regard suicidal behaviour as a "tag-on" of mood disorders because other conditions also show increased suicide risks, such as drug and alcohol abuse, opioid use, eating disorders, schizophrenia and personality disorders, acute stress disorders and childhood abuse.^{9 10 11} Sisti, Mann, and Oquendo's 2020 study finds that "approximately 60% are mood disorders; the rest include substance use and personality disorders, eating or psychotic disorders."¹²

More so, some theorists question an exclusive association of suicidal behaviour with mental illness because present-day people without known psychiatric illness also die by suicide.¹³ Studies cite situational risk factors, such as relationships and legal or financial difficulties, as reasons for some of these suicide deaths.^{14 15} The findings are puzzling. Why do seemingly healthy people end their lives when many people diagnosed with a mental illness do not? Joiner¹⁶ draws attention to many people with a mental illness who do not engage in suicidal behaviour, even though some psychiatric conditions are associated with an increased suicide risk.¹⁷ For example, the rate of suicide among bipolar disorder patients¹⁸

⁹ J. Fawcett, 'Diagnosis, Traits, States, and Comorbidity in Suicide,' In *The Neurobiological Basis of Suicide*, ed. Y. Dwivedi Y. (Boca Raton (FL): CRC Press/Taylor & Francis; 2012). <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK107213/>.

¹⁰ EC. Harris and B Barraclough, "Suicide as an outcome for mental disorders. A meta-analysis," *Br J Psychiatry*, Mar;170 (1997): 205-28, doi: 10.1192/bjp.170.3.205. PMID: 9229027.

¹¹ JL. Gradus et al. "Acute stress reaction and completed suicide," *Int J Epidemiol*. 39, no. 6, (Dec 2010):1478-84, doi: 10.1093/ije/dyq112. Epub 2010 Jul 12. PMID: 20624822.

¹² Dominic Sisti et al. "Toward a Distinct Mental Disorder-Suicidal Behaviour," *JAMA Psychiatry*, 77, no. 7 (2020): 661-662 DOI: [10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2020.0111](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2020.0111).

¹³ Bonnie Harmer, et al. "Suicidal Ideation," *StatPearls*, StatPearls Publishing, May 18, 2022, PMID: 33351435.

¹⁴ These are relationship problems (42 per cent of the time), problematic substance use (28 per cent of the time), a crisis in the past or upcoming two weeks (29 per cent of the time), criminal legal problems (9 per cent of the time), physical health problem (22 per cent of the time), loss of housing (4 per cent of the time), and job/financial problem (16 per cent of the time). Hunter, Joseph S, "Understanding and Preventing the Dynamics of Suicide: An Introduction to the Self Preservation Theory of Human Behaviour," *International Journal of Emergency Mental Health and Human Resilience*, 22, no.2, (2020): 21-31, <https://www.omicsonline.org/open-access-pdfs/understanding-and-preventing-the-dynamics-of-suicide-an-introduction-to-the-self-preservation-theory-of-human-behavior.pdf>.

¹⁵ Pridmore writes, "Mental disorders are painful, and there is no doubt that people with mental disorders complete suicide more often than those without mental disorders. However, many people without mental disorders also complete suicide." S. Pridmore, J. Ahmadi J and W. Pridmore, "Two Mistaken Beliefs about Suicide," *Iran J Psychiatry*, 14, no. 2, (2019): 182-183.

¹⁶ Rachel Allman, "Profile: Thomas Joiner And The Study of Suicide," *Psychology Tools*, January 5, 2021, <https://www.psychologytools.com/articles/profile-thomas-joiner-and-the-study-of-suicide/>.

¹⁷ In China, up to 50% of suicides are reported to have no evidence of psychiatric diagnoses, compared to (12.7%) in Western countries. D. Mann and JJ. Oquendo, "Toward a Distinct Mental Disorder—Suicidal Behaviour," *JAMA Psychiatry* 77, no.7 (2020): 661–662, doi:10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2020.0111.

¹⁸ Persons with bipolar disorder have a two- to threefold increased risk of premature mortality compared to the general population. This increased risk includes suicide death, but also cardiovascular disease, respiratory disease, and cancer. Brian Miller, "Premature Mortality in Bipolar Disorder," *Psychiatric Times*, March 14, 2022, <https://www.psychiatrictimes.com/view/premature-mortality-in-bipolar-disorder#:~:text=Bipolar%20disorder%20is%20associated%20with,%2C%20respiratory%20disease%2C%20and%20cancer.>

is approximately 10–30 times higher than the corresponding rate in the general population.

¹⁹ That said, about 29% of people with the disorder report a lifetime history of a suicide attempt, ²⁰ whereas Dome et al. finds that 20% of (mostly untreated) BD subjects end their life by suicide. ²¹ Joiner rightfully asks, "If emotional pain, hopelessness, emotional dysregulation, or any variable is crucial in suicide, how then to explain the fact that most people with any one of these variables do not die by, or even attempt suicide? How do we make sense of the anecdotal and clinical evidence suggesting that there are people who genuinely desire suicide but do not feel able to carry through with it?"²² Obegi answers that suicidal behaviour or suicidality²³ is a disease that develops separately from existing mental illnesses and requires a diagnosis.²⁴ For this reason, the Fifth Edition²⁵ of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, published in 2013,²⁶ lists Suicidal Behaviour Disorder as a separate diagnostic entity.²⁷

Be that as it may, some clinicians oppose the diagnosis. Silverman & Berman consider it premature to "label these thoughts and behaviours as diseases, disorders, disturbances, or

¹⁹ Peter Dome et al. "Suicide Risk in Bipolar Disorder: A Brief Review." *Medicina (Kaunas, Lithuania)* vol. 55,8 403. 24 Jul. 2019, doi:10.3390/medicina55080403.

²⁰ Y. W. Chen and S. C. Dilsaver, "Lifetime rates of suicide attempts among subjects with bipolar and unipolar disorders relative to subjects with other Axis I disorders." *Biological psychiatry*, vol. 39,10 (1996): 896-9. doi:10.1016/0006-3223(95)00295-2.

²¹ Peter Dome et al. "Suicide Risk in Bipolar Disorder: A Brief Review." *Medicina (Kaunas, Lithuania)* vol. 55,8 403. 24 Jul. 2019, doi:10.3390/medicina55080403.

²² Thomas Joiner, "The Capability to Enact Lethal Self-Injury Is Acquired," in *Why People Die by Suicide* (United States: Harvard University Press, 2005), 1/35, Rakuten Kobo Inc.

²³ The risk of suicide is usually indicated by suicidal ideation or intent, especially as evident in the presence of a well-elaborated suicidal plan. *American Psychological Association Dictionary*, s.v. "Suicidality," accessed June 4, 2018, <https://dictionary.apa.org/suicidality>.

²⁴ B. Ahrens et al. "Suicidal behaviour—symptom or disorder?" *Comprehensive Psychiatry*, 41, no. 2, Supplement 1 (2000): 116-121, ISSN 0010-440X, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0010-440X\(00\)80017-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0010-440X(00)80017-6).

²⁵ The American Psychiatric Institute for Research and Education, the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Psychiatric Association, and the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH). Further, the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) and the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) supported the DSM's latest development stage. Darrel A. Regier et al. "The conceptual development of DSM-V," *The American Journal of Psychiatry*, 166, no.6 (2009): 645-50, doi:10.1176/appi.ajp.2009.09020279 <https://ajp.psychiatryonline.org/doi/full/10.1176/appi.ajp.2009.09020279>.

²⁶ Dr. Dilip Jeste, the then President of the American Psychiatric Association, released the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) on May 18, 2013, at the 166th Annual Meeting of the APA in San Francisco. Vihang Nalinkant Vahia, "Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders 5: A quick glance," *Indian Journal of Psychiatry* 55, no. 3 (2013): 220-3. doi:10.4103/0019-5545.117131, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/257250576_Diagnostic_and_statistical_manual_of_mental_disorders_5_A_quick_glance.

²⁷ The DSM 5 task force does not allow for the use of the diagnosis in a clinical setting, but clinicians can nevertheless indicate the conditions' possible presence by using the "Other Specified" designation. American Psychiatric Association, *DSM V Section III*, 2013, https://www.psychiatry.org/File%20Library/Psychiatrists/Practice/DSM/APA_DSM-5-Section-III.pdf.

syndromes."²⁸ The authors think the profession should first describe the suicidal process, its components, and how they develop and present themselves at the individual level. More so, psychiatrist Paul Chodoff differentiates a psychiatric disorder diagnosis, for example, severe episodes of depressive affect, as being different from feeling unhappy or having "the blues" now and then because of stressors.²⁹ For this reason, he implicates "inescapable aspects of the fate of being human"³⁰ as playing a role in suicide. He considers these aspects outside the scope of medicine and psychiatry.

Suppose there are distinct characteristics of being human that could further explain suicidal behaviour. If so, I will argue that examining these elements and their potential role in suicidal behaviour is an all-important topic for philosophical consideration. I will ask what these aspects are and whether they play any part in suicidal behaviour.

Before I discuss the subject and scope of the research, I would like to comment on why I think such an inquiry has merit, especially considering that suicidal behaviour is primarily the concern of health professionals such as psychologists, psychiatrists, and general practitioners.

Re-evaluating suicide as a philosophical problem

Sociology, psychology, psychiatry, medicine, and public health extensively research risk factors, prevention, and numerous aspects of suicidal thoughts and behaviours, which I will elaborate on in the following chapter. Bearing this in mind, why does the issue require philosophical consideration?

²⁸ M. M. Silverman and A. L. Berman, "Feeling ill at ease with a new disease: Labelling suicide-related behaviours as a DSM-5 diagnosis," *Crisis: The Journal of Crisis Intervention and Suicide Prevention*, 41, no. 4 (2020): 241–247. <https://doi.org/10.1027/0227-5910/a000726>.

²⁹ Any event, force, or condition that results in physical or emotional stress. Stressors may be internal or external forces that require adjustment or [coping strategies](#) on the part of the affected individual. *American Psychological Association Dictionary*, s.v. "Stressor," accessed June 4, 2018, <https://dictionary.apa.org/stressor>.

³⁰ Paul Chodoff, "The medicalization of the human condition," *Psychiatric Services*, 53, no.5 (2002): 627-8. doi:10.1176/appi.ps.53.5.627 <https://doi-org.ez.sun.ac.za/10.1176/appi.ps.53.5.627>.

Suicide has a long-lasting legacy as a prominent and much-debated^{31 32 33 34} topic in philosophy.³⁵ Margaret Pabst Battin describes this developing dialogue as "... the astonishingly diverse range of thinking about suicide throughout human intellectual history." These deliberations contribute significantly to how theorists understand suicidal behaviour today. This is evident from the long-standing discussion about a person's role³⁶ in their own death, and this debate contributes today to critical conversations about euthanasia and physician-assisted death. Take, for example, the contribution of philosopher Margaret Pabst Battin to the 2017 statement of The American Association of Suicidology, "*Suicide*" Is Not The Same As "*Physician Aid In Dying*."³⁷

Yet, to fully understand the early suicide debate happening in philosophy, one needs to pay attention to earlier depictions of human nature and what was considered expected and appropriate behaviour. Plato and Aristotle's early views of human nature set a precedent for 'normal' behaviour: an inborn instinct that the faculty of reason oversees to protect a person from harm. Consequently, they accept self-preservation as a natural and God-given instinct and condemn suicide as deviant behaviour, a sin, and a crime. Based on this assumed human nature, they declared suicide rebellious, obstinate, and deviant. Their descriptions of human nature and suicide significantly impact medieval philosophy, theology, and law.

Perceptions of suicide as evil, demonic, and criminal subsided somewhat over time. On the other hand, the association of suicide with internal inadequacies or faults remains and

³¹ Robert Woods, "Ancient and Early Modern Mortality: Experience and Understanding," *Economic History Review* 60, no. 2 (2007): 373–99. doi:10.1111/j.1468-0289.2006.00367.x.

³² Epictetus says, "Recognizing that what is born must also perish. For I am not eternal, but a man; a part of the whole, as an hour is part of a day. I must come on as the hour and like an hour pass away." Epictetus, *The Discourses* (Hastings, UK: Delphi Classics, 2018), Book II Chapter V: 2/7, Rakuten Kobo Inc.

³³ Epictetus describes suicide as "an open door." Epictetus says, "And it is for you to compare these estimates; only do nothing as one burdened, or afflicted, or thinking that he is in a wretched plight; for no one forces you to this. Has someone made smoke in the house? If he has made a moderate amount of smoke, I shall stay; if too much, I go outside. For one ought to remember and hold fast to this, that the door stands open." Epictetus, *The Discourses* (Hastings, UK: Delphi Classics, 2018), Book I Chapter XXV (15): 3/6, Rakuten Kobo Inc.

³⁴ Epictetus describes death as a place of safety and arrival, a refuge and a harbour. "If I am so badly off as all that, death is my harbour. And this is the harbour of all men, even death, and this is their refuge." Epictetus, *The Discourses* (Hastings, UK: Delphi Classics, 2018), Book II Chapter X (25): 3/6, Rakuten Kobo Inc.

³⁵ Battin, *The Ethics of Suicide*, Introduction. <https://ethicsofsuicide.lib.utah.edu/introduction/>.

³⁶ Augustine said, "Many have killed themselves. But we are not inquiring whether it has been done, but whether it ought to have been done." Augustine, *The City of God* (Seltzer Books, 1974), I (22): 2/3, Rakuten Kobo Inc.

³⁷ American Association of Suicidology, Statement, "Suicide" Is Not The Same As "Physician Aid In Dying," October 30, 2017, <https://suicidology.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/AAS-PAD-Statement-Approved-10.30.17-ed-10-30-17.pdf>.

subsequently piqued medicine's interest. By 1845, renowned 19th-century French psychiatrist Jean-Étienne Esquirol pronounced suicide a subject of medicine. He said, "It does not belong to my subject to treat suicide in its legal relations, nor, consequently, of its criminality. I must limit myself to showing it to be one of the most important subjects of clinical medicine."³⁸

In the present day, the onus is on the helping professions³⁹ to figure out how to prevent the illness from overpowering a person's self-preservation instinct. Matthew Nock asks, "So why, then, in some instances, do some people act in complete opposition to this innate and ever-present drive of self-preservation?"⁴⁰ Many psychologists, sociologists, clinicians, and psychiatrists attempt to answer Nock's question⁴¹ even though they perceive the cause of the behaviour and how to prevent it differently. This ambiguity about why people die by suicide may make it difficult for suicide survivors to understand their loss. It also fails to explain how seemingly healthy people with no diagnosable psychiatric disorder can have suicidal behaviour.

Given what has been said, I will argue that the debate about suicide in philosophy is not limited to ancient philosophers and ethics. In their first attempt to describe a human person, Plato and Aristotle envisaged a simple being with a fixed, instinctual human nature. All the more so, I argue that from later contributions in philosophy, particularly existential philosophy, emerges a representation of a being infinitely more complex than Plato and Aristotle envisaged. In this regard, the work of French-Algerian philosopher Albert Camus is of particular interest.

³⁸ Etienne Esquirol, *Mental Maladies; a Treatise on Insanity* (Philadelphia, Lea and Blanchard, 1845): 254, Rakuten Kobo Inc.

³⁹ Occupations that provide health and education services to individuals and groups, including occupations in the fields of psychology, psychiatry, counselling, medicine, nursing, social work, physical and occupational therapy, teaching, and education. *American Psychological Association Dictionary*, s.v. "Helping Professions" Accessed March 29, 2023, <https://dictionary.apa.org/helping-professions>.

⁴⁰ Matthew K. Nock, *The Oxford Handbook of Suicide and Self-Injury*, ed. Peter E. Nathan (Oxford University Press; Reprint edition January 1, 2017): 1/528.

⁴¹ Eve K Mościcki, "Epidemiology of completed and attempted suicide: toward a framework for prevention," *Clinical Neuroscience Research*, 1, no. 5 (November 2001): 310-323, ISSN 1566-2772, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1566-2772\(01\)00032-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1566-2772(01)00032-9). (<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1566277201000329>).

I argue that Camus is of particular interest because he petitions for philosophy's renewed and urgent attention to the problem of suicide in his essay, *The Myth of Sisyphus*. He does this by radically changing the nature and the tone of the debate, thereby not judging suicide as right or wrong. Instead, he expands the discussion beyond ethical concerns. Camus analyses suicidal behaviour ⁴² to understand and describe it. He asks for *careful study* before it becomes clear to the intellect.⁴³ His inquiry is empathic, and he considers suicidal behaviour a subject that should humble the inquirer.

Secondly, he opposes the assumption that only mentally ill people have suicidal experiences. Instead, he links people in general to suicidal behaviour because they find living *unliveable*. In doing so, Camus points to a link between suicidal behaviour and difficulties with *living*. As such, these difficulties *do not* come from an illness or an inability to cope with life stressors. Instead, the problem with living is due to being human and merely being here in the world. In doing so, he theorises that there is a crucial connection between suicidal behaviour and collective aspects of being human.

Thirdly, Camus's different take on suicidal behaviour originates from how he sees a human being. He writes that he owes his essay, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, to specific contemporary thinkers. He mentions Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Jasper, Dostoyevsky, and more. Still, he is also well acquainted with the ancient philosophers, and he credits the Greeks as his foremost philosophical influence. He writes, "I got my first philosophical impressions from the Greeks, not from nineteenth-century Germany, whose philosophy is the basis for today's French existentialism."⁴⁴ As an existentialist thinker in the twentieth century, he describes the human person in an unpredictable and violent world, and with a deep-seated compulsion to make sense of him or herself in the world, bound to answer one fundamental question: Is my life worth living? He also understands that the mind balances the effort to

⁴² He clearly states he intends *to understand* when he says, "One must follow and understand this fatal game that leads from lucidity in the face of experience to flight from light." Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* (UK: Penguin Classics, 2013), Absurdity and Suicide 3/49, Rakuten Kobo Inc.

⁴³ Camus, Absurdity and Suicide, 2/55.

⁴⁴ David Sherman, *Camus*, (Wiley & Sons, UK, 2009), Introduction, 1 / 2, Google Books.

live with the perceived rewards, and the outcome of this analysis then determines and mandates one to act.⁴⁵

That being so, Camus understands the crucial role of a person's cognition in suicidal behaviour. For this reason, Camus questions an exclusive association of suicidal behaviour with mood disorders, as the literature often portrays.^{46 47 48} Still, he affords equal importance to emotion's role in suicidal behaviour. During a person's assessment of the worth of one's life, the feelings one experiences match one's thoughts.

As a final point, Camus describes a thought process that takes its course and precedes the act of suicide.⁴⁹ Does this pathway to suicide provide a philosophical model of suicidal behaviour that accounts for suicidal behaviour, irrespective of mental health status? I will examine Camus's description of this relationship between individual thought and suicide to facilitate a broader understanding of suicidal behaviour.

The scope of the research

In today's world, suicidal behaviour is generally associated with deficit and abnormality, and this supposition relies on a conviction that a person's self-preservation fails. For this reason, theorists consider suicide tragic and preventable. The literature adequately documents the different descriptions of suicide in the human sciences and how each theory defines abnormality. Therefore, the study does not intend to provide detailed assessments of these diverse theories. By way of an alternative, the study aims to highlight their *commonality*, abnormality, or deviance. Therefore, the study intentionally takes a different direction and elaborates on abnormality as a common denominator in suicide theories. This objective is met in chapters 2 and 3.

⁴⁵ Camus says, "The principle can be established that for a man who does not cheat, what he believes to be true must determine his action. Belief in the absurdity of existence must then dictate his conduct. Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurdity and Suicide: 4/55.

⁴⁶ "Suicide Prevention," American Psychiatric Association, 2020, <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/suicide-prevention>.

⁴⁷ "Suicide," Canadian Mental Health Association, 2020, <http://teenmentalhealth.org/suicide/>.

⁴⁸ "Suicide in the Western Pacific," World Health Organization, 2020, <https://www.who.int/westernpacific/health-topics/suicide>.

⁴⁹ Camus said of suicide, "An act like this is prepared within the silence of the heart, as is a great work of art." Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurdity and Suicide, 3/55.

The discussion in chapter two shows that theorists did not always consider suicide abnormal and, therefore, the phenomenon is fluid and transitory, which invites philosophical assessment. I make the point that people in ancient society saw suicide differently than we do nowadays, and therefore, perceptions of suicide are primarily fluid and changing over time. More often, in ancient times, a witness described a suicide like a news reporter would in response to life's challenges and as it happens. For example, Diogenes Laertius writes the story of Anaxagoras, who died by suicide after his embarrassment when he was unjustly accused and imprisoned. After his release, he "could not brook the indignity he had suffered and [died by] suicide."⁵⁰ Laertius also writes about Dionysus, who grew tired of old age, likely due to ill health concerns. "After living till he was nearly eighty years of age, and [died by] suicide by starving himself."⁵¹

The discussion in chapter three makes the point that the different theories lie on a spectrum of abnormality: on the one hand, the biomedical model prioritises individual and pharmacological interventions, whereas, on the other hand, some scholars, activists, providers, and people with lived experience ask for intersectional thinking with cultural, social, historical, economic, and gendered contexts part of the risk assessment. The chapter also shows that suicide is, by and large, considered a subject of scientific study. In this chapter, I analyse how research findings continually challenge what we think we know about suicidal behaviour. Specifically, studies cited mental illness as a factor in about 90% of suicide deaths. Recently, studies cited mental illness in only 54% of fatalities and instead implicate relationship, work, or financial difficulties in these deaths. More so, psychiatrists, such as Saxby Pridmore, stress the importance of cognition in suicidal behaviour. People often pre-plan their deaths, research the topic extensively, and consider various factors when selecting a method, such as lethality, accessibility, and personal comfort. These facts bring into question psychiatrists Pinel and Esquirol's sole association of suicide with mood disorders, which shows suicide is not just an act of overwhelming emotion or incapacitating depression. As mentioned earlier, the findings challenge an exclusive association with

⁵⁰ Diogenes Laërtius, *The Complete Works of Diogenes Laërtius* (Hastings, East Sussex, UK, Delphi Classics, 2015): Carneades 3/5, Rakuten Kobo Inc.

⁵¹ Diogenes Laërtius, *The Complete Works of Diogenes Laërtius*, Dionysus 1/2.

mental illness, typically depression,^{52 53} that is such a deeply ingrained belief. Notably, it appears that suicidality inflicts both the mentally ill and the healthy, indicating the need for an independent diagnosis. Still, theorist Paul Chodoff, among others, oppose the DSM-5 diagnosis. He argues that aspects of being human likely play a role in suicidal behaviour. For these reasons, I say that the opposing arguments question the association of suicidality with abnormality and the assumptions about human nature that are fundamental to this belief.

For this reason, the study investigates the grounds of the assumption that suicide is abnormal, which is the belief that a person is a simple, instinctual entity with a preset "nature." The origin and longevity of this fundamental assumption, from Plato to the current age, are discussed in detail in chapter four. I make the case that, despite revised laws and religious practices, many historical beliefs remain operational in contemporary suicide theory and practice and still influence modern-day thinking about suicidality. For example, the association of suicide with crime and murder still affects how we think and talk about suicide. In this way, to die by suicide is to "commit suicide" or "self-murder". Also, assisting a suffering person to die by suicide is still considered murder by common law in most countries worldwide. More so, it turns out that the personal faults that Plato and Aristotle associated with suicidality, for example, "sloth," a listlessness or apathy, was labelled "melancholy" by the 19th century and paved the way for theories of suicide as a mood disorder, typically depression, by far the dominant contemporary theory of suicide.

In this chapter (4), I go on to claim that beliefs about suicidality, be it as stigma, language, or in contemporary theory and practice, persist in modern-day society because the nature of human identity is not adequately analysed. The perception of what a person is goes unquestioned. Contemporary theory and practice continue to think of a person as basic and instinctual; therefore, suicide is deviant and abnormal.⁵⁴ I argue that these assumptions

⁵² Turecki G, Brent DA. Suicide and suicidal behaviour. *Lancet*. 2016;387(10024):1227-1239. doi:10.1016/S0140-6736(15)00234-2.

⁵³ Brådvik L. Suicide Risk and Mental Disorders. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. 2018;15(9):2028. Published 2018 Sep 17. doi:10.3390/ijerph15092028.

⁵⁴ Despite different theories of suicide causation, theorists are generally united in their quest to prevent suicide. To end suicide and suicidal behaviour is to avoid something terrible and harmful happening because for an individual to choose death is contrary to 'human nature' and behaviour requiring correction. Many philosophers would argue that self-preservation was a basic tenant of what they perceived to be 'human nature' ⁵⁴ and that the herd strives for preservation

about human nature have remained unchallenged for too long. To re-think suicide, theorists should first question how they think about a human person. Camus departs from this view of the human person and, in tandem with his existential colleagues, challenges his audience with a very different understanding of a human being, which, in turn, behests one to reconsider how one thinks about suicide/suicidal behaviour.

In Chapter 5, I argue that we should no longer consider a human person as Plato and Aristotle did, as a simple, instinctual being because existentialism presents an alternative worth considering. Existentialism opens the door to a new way of thinking about a human person. These twentieth-century philosophers make the human subject the primary and sole focus of their inquiries. Their interest does not lie in attaining absolute knowledge nor in abstractions of any kind. They do not approach a human person as an abstraction, an absolute, free-floating spirit, or a knowing Cogito. This way of thinking does not ask about a human person's "virtual footprint" in an imaginary space that exists independently from the real world, as is often the case in modern-day society. Instead, the existentialist philosophers ask about actual footprints in this universe, the real world. A human person's actions, be it walking up a mountain, running a marathon, or any experience for that matter, are of interest. A real person, such as French-Algerian existentialist thinker Albert Camus, living in Nazi-occupied Paris during the Second World War, is of particular interest, as he comes face-to-face with suicide.

I make the case that his description of his personal experiences during the war accentuates vital characteristics and limitations of himself as a human being in this world. I argue that he has these aspects in common with all people, which sets him apart from instinctual, non-human life forms, and that "plays out" a predetermined, instinctual existence. Instead, nothing is *given* about him, but he makes himself from nothing, one decision, choice and action at a time, minute by minute. In doing so, it shows that Camus finds himself as an actual flesh-and-blood person, situated in time, in a locale of his choosing, a situatedness within which he makes compounding and factual decisions. The breathtaking freedom within which he operates implies vast responsibility, and this injects fear and anguish into

and life as the norm(al). As a result, suicide continued to be perceived as 'bad,' 'cowardly' and 'mentally ill,' violating human 'nature' and even deserving of spiritual damnation.

his life. All the while, he has a clear understanding of the power of death that can free him from all responsibility and suffering by ending his consciousness thereof by ending life.

Camus shares the century with other existentialists, and he acknowledges in his essay, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, that he owes much to many contemporary thinkers. But it is Camus who, in particular, asks what it is like to have a suicidal experience. In chapter 6, I go on to examine Camus's depiction of how suicidal ideation plays out in his mind, as he recalls every frightening thought and terrifying feeling first-hand in real life, the 'emotive cognitions'⁵⁵ ⁵⁶ that direct his actions.⁵⁷ Considering the character and limitations of the human condition, I aim to understand, plain and simple, what it means to be a human being in crisis and how "personal sorrows" or "incurable illnesses" aggravate and *set in motion* an all-important assessment or reflection of the worth of one's life. Still, what initiates thoughts of suicide often remains a matter of speculation. ⁵⁸ I set out to describe the steps of a pathway that takes a person beyond these sorrows and implicates the capabilities and limitations of how one is human in the world.⁵⁹

I also ask about the broader implications of this pathway to suicide. I show that an experience of the absurdity of the human condition does not demand death, in the same way that a belief in a transcendental existence does not safeguard a person from suicide. ⁶⁰ As an alternative, I argue that a human person knows the power of death to end his or her consciousness of this life. Therefore, with this awareness, when a person returns to

⁵⁵ Talma Hendler, Pessoa, Luiz and Alexander J. Shackman, "The neurobiology of emotion–cognition interactions: fundamental questions and strategies for future research," *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 9, (2015). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fnhum.2015.00058>.

⁵⁶ A 2020 study shows that 'area 32' of the anterior cingulate cortex maintains emotional equilibrium by relaying information between cognitive regions, like the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex (DLPFC), emotion regions, like area 25, also known as the subgenual cortex, according to new research. "How the brain balances emotion and reason." Society for Neuroscience. *ScienceDaily*. September 28, 2020, www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2020/09/200928133155.htm.

⁵⁷ Camus explains this existential distress as "... a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger. ... All healthy men (people) having thought of their own suicide, it can be seen that there is a direct connection between this feeling and the longing for death." Camus, *Absurdity and Suicide*, 4/55.

⁵⁸ Camus says, "What sets off the crisis is almost always unverifiable." Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, *Absurdity and Suicide*, 3/55.

⁵⁹ "The absurd person is someone who has seen through the ridiculous repetitions of daily life, the grey routine and stifling calendar of existence. But one day, the "why" arises, and everything begins in that weariness tinged with amazement.' Suddenly, the absurd person sees through this routine, and 'the chain of daily gestures is broken.' Now everything begins to seem pointless." Camus, *Afterword: Camus, belief*, 7/15.

⁶⁰ This dissertation does not attempt to examine why people do not engage in suicidal behaviour or do not die by suicide. This work's sole focus is to ask, "Why did they do it?"

everyday life to look there for a reason to live, his or her situation often offers a justification to die instead.

In Chapter 7, I will attempt to identify some of the limits of my study, which invite and provide scope for further investigation. In closing, I will point out some of the broader implications of my argument. I find that the human race marvels at the wonders of science and technology, the proud accomplishments of our' extraordinary human mind. We transplant hearts, and our kind saves lives with vaccines. We go to the moon and have Mars in our sight next. Yet, I will show that we lack understanding of the human self, the most extraordinary of all, and how one lives. Kierkegaard writes, "The simplest task is the most difficult. One thinks that existing is nothing, even less an art, after all, we all exist, but to think abstractly, that is something. However, truly to exist, that is, to permeate one's existence with consciousness, at once eternal as though far beyond it and yet present in it, and nevertheless in the course of becoming – that is truly difficult."⁶¹ ⁶² Because of this oversight, suicidality is assumed to be an abnormality or illness. More so, this historical neglect of the self leaves suicidal persons to figure him or herself out in silence and unaided every 40 seconds⁶³ somewhere in the world. Camus sees the capabilities and limitations of the human condition, as it resides in the individual self, as the key to unlocking suicidal behaviour, and that is the task he sets for philosophy.

⁶¹ Søren Aabye Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, (Cambridge University Press, New York, 2009), 3. *Actual, Ethical, Subjectivity: The Subjective Thinker*, 8/78.

⁶² Kierkegaard explains that it is easier to become a copy of what society prescribes and "however many cowardly, mediocre and hoodwinked individuals joined in a project of abandoning themselves to become something en-masse," ⁶² but, despite this, he argues that "it is the task of every individual to become a whole human being; just as it is the ethical presupposition that everyone is born in the state of being able to do so." Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, 3. *Actual, Ethical, Subjectivity: The Subjective Thinker*, 53/78.

⁶³ "Suicide: one person dies every 40 seconds," *World Health Organization*, September 9, 2019, <https://www.who.int/news/item/09-09-2019-suicide-one-person-dies-every-40-seconds>.

2. Evolving views of suicide: from suicide to suicidal behaviour

Introduction

Evaluating suicide requires an understanding of the established scientific knowledge about the subject. The task is daunting because suicide dates back to ancient societies and is not solely a modern-day phenomenon. Given this long legacy, can one reasonably expect perspectives on suicide to remain the same, or would they inevitably change over time? To what extent do modern-day theorists agree or disagree with their ancient predecessors?

In today's world, one in 100 deaths is by suicide.⁶⁴ Public health organisations consider global suicide mortality a matter of grave concern, even though the worldwide suicide rate is decreasing. The World Health Organisation (WHO) credits restricting people's access to enabling means, for example, pesticides,⁶⁵ and advocates limiting firearm access, particularly in the American region, where the rate is still rising.⁶⁶ Even so, the organisation acknowledges the limited reach of these initiatives because it does not address a perceived link with mental illness. The association of suicide with psychiatric disorders^{67 68} seems so compelling nowadays that it is almost unthinkable to associate the behaviour with anything other than mental illness. Theorists understand and study this as the outcome of a complex set of abnormal thoughts, feelings and behaviours and a necessary subject for scientific study in medicine, particularly psychiatry and the helping professions.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ Peter Kenny, "1 in 100 deaths is by suicide, but global rate falling: World Health Organization," Anadolu Agency (Ankara, Turkey), June 17, 2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/1-in-100-deaths-is-by-suicide-but-global-rate-falling-who/2277625>.

⁶⁵ Pesticides account for 20% of all suicides. Peter Kenny, "1 in 100 deaths is by suicide, but global rate falling: World Health Organization," Anadolu Agency (Ankara, Turkey), June 17, 2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/1-in-100-deaths-is-by-suicide-but-global-rate-falling-who/2277625>.

⁶⁶ "How do People Most Commonly Complete Suicide?" Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, Harvard University, date of Copyright 2022, <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/means-matter/basic-suicide-facts/how/>.

⁶⁷ Gustavo Turecki and David A Brent, "Suicide and Suicidal behaviour," *Lancet* 387, no. 10024 (2016): 1227-39.,doi:10.1016/S0140-6736(15)00234-2.

⁶⁸ Louise Brådvik, "Suicide Risk and Mental Disorder," *International Journal Of Environmental Research And Public Health* 15, no. 9 (September 17 2018), doi:10.3390/ijerph15092028.

⁶⁹ Helping professions are occupations that provide health and education services to individuals and groups, including occupations in the fields of psychology, psychiatry, counselling, medicine, nursing, social work, physical and occupational therapy, teaching, and education. *American Psychological Association Dictionary*, s.v. "Helping Professions." Accessed March 29, 2023, <https://dictionary.apa.org/helping-professions>.

Nevertheless, in the current chapter, I make the initial point that history presents radically different understandings of suicide. To do justice to the subject, one must acknowledge that suicide was not always considered an illness as it is today. I validate that suicide occurred throughout the ancient world, and we know of these deaths in the earliest societies because authors describe them in mythology, hymns, and poems. I will illustrate, with examples, how ancient civilisation tolerated suicide, and I will extricate the reasoning and rationale behind these deaths, for instance, to escape intolerable circumstances or illness, to adhere to social customs, to save a life, or to live up to a particular code or ideal.

Since the time of Plato and Aristotle, well into the eighteenth century, scholars thought of suicide as a matter of ethics and debated the role a person should play in their own death. The foundational ideas of these great philosophers still influence our general understanding of the world today. Plato and Aristotle believed that an upstanding citizen is self-preserving and not suicidal. This belief was pivotal to how generations of scholars have since assessed and mostly condemned suicide as they consider it to stem from an obstinate and rebellious nature. More so, I show that this trail of thought continued with medieval philosophers and theologians, who judged suicide as "a mortal sin"⁷⁰ and against God's law, "Thou shall not kill."⁷¹ Likewise, by law, suicide was self-murder.⁷² As time passed, associations of suicide with evil, sin, and crime lessened somewhat. A declaration of mental insanity was increasingly favoured to (self-)murder to prevent the state from confiscating the deceased's inheritance.

I argue that in the course of this transition of how society thinks about suicide, theorists explained suicides with historical, cultural, legal and moral reasons.⁷³ On the other hand, I describe how today's world no longer thinks suicide is acceptable as a means to escape from intolerable circumstances, such as rape, financial or other difficulties. I show that even

⁷⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (Seltzer Books, 1974), Question 64 Of Murder 156/185, Rakuten Kobo Inc.

⁷¹ Augustine, *The City of God*, I (20) 2/3.

⁷² William Blackstone, the author of the influential 18th-century treatise on common law, *The Commentaries on the Laws of England*, says, "Self-murder, the pretended heroism, but real cowardice, of the Stoic philosophers who destroyed themselves to avoid those ills which they had not the fortitude to endure." Sir William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England* IV (Deutschland, Jazzybee Verlag Jürgen Beck 1829), (XIV) "Homicide" 188-190.

⁷³ Pierre says, "Although most cultures have taboos against suicide, some acts of suicide find moral justification and approval in different cultural settings. These acts typically occur independent of mental illness and are regarded as something other than suicide per se". J.M. Pierre, "Culturally sanctioned suicide: Euthanasia, seppuku, and terrorist martyrdom," *World Journal of Psychiatry*, 5, no. 1 (2015): 4–14, <https://doi.org/10.5498/wjp.v5.i1.4>.

though these suicides were free from judgement in the old world, they are nowadays often considered suicides due to mental illness and consequently the concern of public health, medicine, and science.

Suicide in the Ancient World

Suicide was a much-debated matter in early society, long before epidemiological surveys and scientific research emerged. Suicides were prevalent in Asia, the Middle East, Europe, Africa, and the Americas, including North, Central, and South American indigenous cultures, Caribbean communities, Melanesia, Micronesia, Polynesia, New Zealand, and Hawaii.⁷⁴ In these societies, suicide was a topic of global interest to many poets, jurists, philosophers, and scholars across diverse fields of study.

In early mythology, all-knowing and powerful gods created the universe and the first mortals.

⁷⁵ Suicide figured prominently in this mythical world, brought to light by the great Greek playwrights Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes⁷⁶, and Ovid, the Roman author of *Metamorphoses*. They tell the stories of the shamed Ajax, the grieving father Daedalion, the tragic lovers Pyramus and Thisbe and many more. These myths contain a curious mixture of fact and magic because the gods often took pity on their mortal creations and interfered in their affairs, including in their suicides. In addition, many scholars of old wrote extensively about suicide in historical texts of great importance, such as Egyptian papyrus rolls, the Hebrew Bible and Apocrypha, Hindi, Buddhist, and Chinese texts, the Babylonian Talmud, and the laws and customs from England, and the Norse sagas.⁷⁷

Considering the diverse nature of these texts, suicide was not a subject reserved for the attention of clinicians. No particular field of study claimed ownership of or decided how society should understand suicide. On the contrary, philosophers, poets, playwrights,

⁷⁴ Battin, *The Ethics of Suicide*, Introduction.

⁷⁵ Such as Heracles, the adventurer; Pandora, the first woman whose curiosity brought evil to humanity; and Narcissus, the young man who fell in love with his reflection. Thomas Bulfinch, *Bulfinch's Greek and Roman Mythology*, (New York, Dover Publications, 2000), Rakuten Kobo Inc.

⁷⁶ Hourly History, *Greek Mythology: A Concise Guide to Ancient Gods, Heroes, Beliefs and Myths of Greek Mythology*, (Hourly History, 2016), 6/6, Rakuten Kobo Inc.

⁷⁷ Battin, *The Ethics of Suicide*, Introduction.

jurists, and clerics wrote about and debated suicide at length. There were diverse beliefs and practices about life and death, and they described suicidal experiences from shame, fear, sadness, pride, empathy, and concern. These portrayals are unfiltered and showcase day-to-day practices without cultural distortion,⁷⁸ free from ethical judgment or suspicion of illness. They speak of people's different experiences in the world, what they believed and how they made sense of death.

The literature on suicide is vast and expansive, and I do not intend to give a complete overview of what has been written on the subject. By way of an alternative, this chapter will attempt to elucidate how sentiments about suicide changed over time, showing how society tolerated some suicides whilst others became taboo.

Sanctioned suicides

Obegi excludes historical-, religious and morally motivated types of suicide as being of concern to clinicians, even though he describes these suicides as purposeful and self-inflicted. He also excludes medically assisted suicide, practised in some countries and a handful of states in the USA.⁷⁹ Theorists often do not associate these suicides with mental illness; they generally award these deaths the status of non-suicides. For example, the French psychiatrist Jean-Étienne Esquirol cites an instance in Scandinavia where citizens throw themselves from a height to escape old age and occupy a more distinguished place in Valhalla. He considers these rituals and traditions more potent than the instinct of self-preservation.⁸⁰ Pierre further explains that "some forms of suicide occur independently of mental illness and within a framework of cultural sanctioning such that they aren't regarded as suicide at all. I will briefly mention some examples of historically, legally, and morally sanctioned suicides.

⁷⁸ Battin says, "For traditional oral cultures, contact with indigenous practices concerning suicide and the background worldviews and belief systems in which they are embedded is, to a considerable degree, filtered through Western eyes, since the written records from which the views of oral cultures can be distilled have become available only with the incursion of explorers, missionaries, conquistadores, adventurers, and amateur ethnographers, themselves largely from Western cultures. Just the same, the older sources from these cultures are invaluable since, despite their distortions, they depict societies comparatively innocent of Westernized attitudes about suicide." Battin, *The Ethics of Suicide*, Introduction.

⁷⁹ Joseph H. Obegi, "Is suicidality a mental disorder? Applying DSM-5 guidelines for new diagnoses," *Death Studies*, 45, no. 8, (2021): 638-650, doi: [10.1080/07481187.2019.1671546](https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2019.1671546).

⁸⁰ Jean-Étienne Esquirol, *Mental Maladies; a Treatise on Insanity*, 246/508.

Suicides of old

Pierre gives an informative description of sanctioned suicides: "Although most cultures have taboos against suicide, some acts of suicide find moral justification and approval in different cultural settings."⁸¹ Many historical suicides occur within the framework of a specific culture, and the culture sanctions such suicides. Therefore, he sees no relation to mental illness but believes these deaths express social customs and beliefs particular to the culture. Take, for example, the tradition of death by suicide to show great loyalty and devotion to a spouse, king, superior or royal. In Ashanti culture, the king's sisters can obtain their brother's permission to marry a man of any rank or position, but when she dies and the husband is of low status, he must die by suicide.

Similarly, at the death of an Ashanti king, wives and servants volunteer to be killed to accompany their husbands to the spiritual world and to serve their masters in this world.⁸² The Incas shared a similar custom, and wives often hung themselves to ensure the community buried them with their Inca king and husband.⁸³ In like fashion, Eskimos consider it an act of devotion to assist an elder in ending their life when they feel life is a burden,⁸⁴ and Eskimo elders enjoy great respect in their community.

Seppuku, death by self-disembowelment, was a ritualised suicide in 15th-century feudal Japan among the samurai, the traditional Japanese military. Seppuku is an excruciating and slow way to die⁸⁵ and, therefore, is considered indicative of great courage, firm resolve, self-control, and customary in terms of the Bushido code. Seppuku was an acceptable

⁸¹ J.M. Pierre, "Culturally sanctioned suicide: Euthanasia, seppuku, and terrorist martyrdom," *World Journal of Psychiatry* 5, no. 1 (2015): 4–14. <https://doi.org/10.5498/wjp.v5.i1.4>.

⁸² Ashanti: "The Price of Intrigue with Women of Royal Blood," in Margaret Pabst Battin, ed., *The Ethics of Suicide, Introduction* (Oxford University Press in Partnership with the University of Utah J. Willard Marriott Library, 2015), <https://ethicsofsuicide.lib.utah.edu/tradition/indigenous-cultures/african-traditional-subsaharan-cultures/ashanti7/>.

⁸³ Pedro de Cieza de León, "The Burial of Wives," in Battin, *The Ethics of Suicide*. <https://ethicsofsuicide.lib.utah.edu/tradition/indigenous-cultures/central-and-south-american-native-cultures/incas11/>.

⁸⁴ E. W. Hawkes, *The Labrador Eskimo*, in Battin, *The Ethics of Suicide*. <https://ethicsofsuicide.lib.utah.edu/tradition/indigenous-cultures/arctic-cultures/labrador-eskimo/>.

⁸⁵ To perform seppuku, the samurai inserts the knife into the left side of his stomach and draws the knife across to the right side of his body. He thereafter turns the blade in his wound and brings it upward, and this crosswise cut completes the act. Immediately after, the Kaishakuin decapitated the samurai, and the spine was severed but with the head still attached to the body, as severing the head dishonoured both the samurai doing seppuku and the Kaishakuin. The decapitation of the samurai prevented prolonged suffering and aided an honourable death. To conclude seppuku was considered a particularly impressive death, and to achieve an honourable death successfully, the samurai kept his composure even on the brink of death, showing strength and complete control of his mind and body in his last moments. Andrew Rankin, *Seppuku, A History of Samurai Suicide* (New York, Kodansha USA, 2011), 3/31, Rakuten Kobo Inc.

custom to repent or make amends for a transgression, such as losing one's temper with a fellow samurai, and as a duty at the death of the samurai's lord, to follow him into death (Junshi), and to live by loyalty, duty, honour, and self-sacrifice.^{86 87} Japanologist Andrew Rankin explained, "When it is no longer possible to live proudly, the samurai should endeavour to die proudly, and the proudest samurai death is by Seppuku."⁸⁸

In Vietnam, the custom of Buddhist monks to practice the ancient tradition of self-immolation serves as an example of sanctioned suicide. Thich Nhat Hanh, an internationally revered figure of Zen Buddhism, distinguishes self-immolation, a social custom, from suicides of mental illness. He writes, "What the monks said in the letters they left before burning themselves, aimed only at alarming, at moving the hearts of the oppressors, and at calling the world's attention to the suffering endured then by the Vietnamese. To burn oneself by fire is to prove that what one says is paramount. There is nothing more painful than burning oneself. To say something while experiencing this pain is to say it with utmost courage, frankness, determination, and sincerity."⁸⁹ Similarly, the protest death of Szmul Zygielbojm against the plight of Polish Jews during WWII was an attempt to plead for the fate of the remaining Polish Jews with the Polish president Wladyslaw Raczekiewicz and the Polish prime minister Wladyslaw Sikorski.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Toyomasa Fusé, "Suicide and culture in Japan: A study of seppuku as an institutionalized form of suicide," *Social Psychiatry* 15 (1980): 57-63. Yamamoto, T. *Hagakur, The book of the samurai*. (Wilson WS, Trans. Tokyo: Kodansha International; 2002).Archive.org.

⁸⁷ Bushido (warrior code) had set the standard for the behaviour, character, and duties of the warrior class and included expectations concerning politeness, sincerity, self-control, honour, dignity, and absolute loyalty to one's lord. Its roots were found in Confucian concepts of loyalty and Buddhist ideas of the nonexistence of the self, the impermanence of life, and the importance of equanimity or preparedness of mind. From the early Heian period (8th–12th centuries), the code of Bushido had taken honour as central. Wounded or defeated warriors were expected to kill themselves; to be taken alive as a prisoner was a great dishonour. The late medieval epic Taiheiki recounts 68 separate occasions of warrior suicide involving 2,140 men". Daidoji Yuzan, 1639-1730, in Battin, *The Ethics of Suicide*, <https://ethicsofsuicide.lib.utah.edu/selections/daidoji-yuzan/>.

⁸⁸ Andrew Rankin, *Seppuku, A History of Samurai Suicide* (New York, Kodansha USA, 2011), 3/31, Rakuten Kobo Inc.

⁸⁹ Thich Nhat Hanh, *Vietnam: Lotus in a Sea of Fire*, in Battin, *The Ethics of Suicide*, <https://ethicsofsuicide.lib.utah.edu/selections/thich-nhat-hanh/>.

⁹⁰ He says, "Perhaps I shall be able by my death to contribute to the arousing from the lethargy of those who could and must act in order that even now, perhaps at the last moment, the handful of Polish Jews who are still alive can be saved from certain destruction. My life belongs to the Jewish people of Poland, and therefore, I hand it over to them now. I yearn that the remnant that has remained of the millions of Polish Jews may live to see liberation together with the Polish masses and that it shall be permitted to breathe freely in Poland and in a world of freedom" Szmul Zygielbojm, "The Last Letter From Szmul Zygielbojm, The Bund Representative With The Polish National Council In Exile," Yad Vashem The World Holocaust Remembrance Centre, May 11, 1943, <https://www.yadvashem.org/docs/zygielbojm-letter-to-polish-national-council-in-exile.html>.

As these examples show, society sanctions suicides selectively because of the specific customs that underlie the choice of death. More so, modern-day society appears to tolerate and often honour those who died by suicide to save others.

Morally Motivated Suicides

Ovid praises the self-inflicted death of Orion's daughters as a sacrifice of great courage for the sake of their community.⁹¹ In like manner, the death of Master-At-Arms Second Class (SEAL) Michael A. Monsoor (Mikey) of the United States Navy on September 29, 2006, is a present-day example.⁹² Michael Monsoor fell onto a grenade to protect his two teammates and Iraqi soldiers who accompanied the platoon. Two years earlier, on April 14, 2004, an unknown insurgent attacked United States Marine Corps Corporal Jason Dunham⁹³ and dropped a grenade with the pin pulled during the struggle. Dunham threw himself on the grenade to absorb the blast with his Kevlar helmet and body armour. He saved the lives of three Marines in his platoon. The United States Navy described the soldiers' deaths as an act of courage and devotion to duty in the face of certain death. Therefore, the Navy posthumously awarded Monsoor and Dunham the Medal of Honour and respectively named a Zumwalt-class destroyer, the USS Michael Monsoor (DDG-1001) and an Arleigh Burke-class destroyer, the USS Jason Dunham (DDG-109), in their honour.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Orion's daughters stood and fell, one striking
Her own throat with the kind of wound no woman
Should kill with, and the other, with a shuttle,
Inflicting futile blows, both falling victims

For the people's sake, so that the race might not be ended.

Ovid, *Metamorphoses* (Indiana University Press, 1955), The Pilgrimage Resumed 41/55, Rakuten Kobo Inc.

⁹² U.S. Navy, "I Will Defend: Michael Monsoor's story," YouTube, Jan 22, 2019, video, 8:21,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=256ymQN8F70>.

⁹³ Michael M. Phillips, *The Gift of Valour: A War Story* (New York, Broadway Books, 2005), Rakuten Kobo Inc.

⁹⁴ America's Navy, An Official Website of the United States Government, Press Office, News Stories "USS Jason Dunham Returns to Homeport," June 26, 2022, <https://www.navy.mil/Press-Office/News-Stories/Article/3074497/uss-jason-dunham-returns-to-homeport/>.

Assisted Death

Carneades ended his life because he was "wasting away with the worst of diseases,"⁹⁵ Dionysus stopped eating when he was about eighty.⁹⁶ Centuries later, philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche strongly approved of ending one's life when facing ill health. He says, "The sick man is a parasite of society. In certain cases, it is indecent to go on living. To continue to vegetate in a state of cowardly dependence upon doctors and special treatments once the meaning of life, the right to life, has been lost ought to be regarded with the greatest contempt by society. One should die proudly when it is no longer possible to live proudly. Death should be chosen freely, at the right time, faced clearly and joyfully and embraced while surrounded by one's children and other witnesses."⁹⁷

Author Charlotte Perkins Gilman took Nietzsche's advice. Diagnosed with terminal cancer, she administered a lethal chloroform to herself. Her suicide note reads, "Human life consists in mutual service. No grief, pain, misfortune or "broken heart" is an excuse for cutting off one's life while any power of service remains. But when all usefulness is over, when one is assured of unavoidable and imminent death, it is the simplest of human rights to choose a quick and easy death in place of a slow and horrible one. Public opinion is changing on this subject. The time is approaching when we shall consider it abhorrent to our civilisation to allow a human being to die in prolonged agony, which we should mercifully end in any other creature. Believing this open choice to be of social service in promoting wiser views on this question, I have preferred chloroform to cancer."

In contrast to the freedom that Perkins Gilman had to bring about her own death, assisted dying is only allowed in a handful of countries today: Austria, Belgium, Canada, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Spain, and Switzerland.⁹⁸ The practice is also

⁹⁵ Diogenes Laërtius, *The Complete Works of Diogenes Laërtius* (Hastings, East Sussex, UK, Delphi Classics, 2015): Carneades 3/5, Rakuten Kobo Inc.

⁹⁶ Diogenes Laërtius, *The Complete Works of Diogenes Laërtius*, Dionysus 1/2.

⁹⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Twilight of the Idols* (Jovian Press, 2016), "Skirmishes in a War with Age 13/24. Rakuten Kobo Inc.

⁹⁸ "Bill Summary: North Carolina End of Life Option Act H.B. 780," Compassion and Choices, <https://compassionandchoices.org/in-your-state/north-carolina/bill-summary>.

allowed in some⁹⁹ of the 52 states of the United States but in all six states of Australia.¹⁰⁰ Gilman predicted in 1938 that public opinion would change concerning assisted death. The 2018 US Gallup poll shows that 72% of Americans approve of euthanasia and that support for physician-assisted dying grew from 52% in 1997 to 65% in 2018.¹⁰¹

Still, society's resistance to death often translates into significant opposition, even towards those who reach the end of medicine's scope to stay alive. Therefore, a person's role in their own death remains a subject of debate and great controversy. For example, the right-to-die organisation Dignity South Africa welcomed an order granted by the High Court on April 30 2015, for the terminally ill Robin Stransham-Ford to die by suicide. The ruling, read by Judge Hans Fabricius, is, in part,

The applicant is entitled to be assisted by a medical practitioner, either by the administration of a lethal agent or by providing the applicant with the necessary lethal agent to administer himself. Any doctor who accedes to the request of the applicant shall not be acting unlawfully and hence shall not be subject to prosecution by the 4th respondent [National Director of Public Prosecutions] or disciplinary proceedings by the 3rd respondent [Health Professions Council of South Africa].¹⁰²

Dignity S.A. board member Professor Willem Landman said of the judge's order, "It's fantastic. It's a huge victory for the applicant. First of all, for the applicant, who now has the right to enlist the support of a doctor to supply him with the medicine to commit suicide. If he is unable to, he can ask the doctor to perform euthanasia."¹⁰³

In its reaction to the ruling, Justice Ministry spokesperson Mthunzi Mhaga said the NPA would appeal the ruling. The lawyer for the justice minister, Lesego Montsho, SC, announced that the state was disappointed with the court's ruling. "We are going to take it

⁹⁹ "States Where Medical Aid in Dying is Authorized," Compassion and Choices,

<https://compassionandchoices.org/resource/states-or-territories-where-medical-aid-in-dying-is-authorized>

¹⁰⁰ Queensland University of Technology, "End of Life in Australia", April 13 2023, <https://end-of-life.qut.edu.au/assisteddying>.

¹⁰¹ Support for euthanasia grew from only 37% in 1951 and 53% in 1975. Megan Brenan, "Americans' Strong Support for Euthanasia Persists," *GALLUP*, May 31, 2018,

<https://news.gallup.com/poll/235145/americans-strong-support-euthanasia-persists.aspx>.

¹⁰² Thomas Hartleb, "Dignity SA welcomes assisted suicide ruling," *News24*, April 30 2015, <https://www.news24.com/news24/dignity-sa-welcomes-assisted-suicide-ruling-20150430-2>.

¹⁰³ Thomas Hartleb, "Dignity SA welcomes assisted suicide ruling," *News24*, April 30 2015, <https://www.news24.com/news24/dignity-sa-welcomes-assisted-suicide-ruling-20150430-2>.

on appeal once we get written reasons because this has far-reaching implications from a health point of view, constitutional rights, and the powers of the NPA on prosecutorial decision-making. We now can't prosecute cases of assisted suicide." It is hard to imagine that the state would think it appropriate to use limited resources to criminally prosecute a merciful and compassionate assisted suicide in a medical setting.¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, the state took the case on appeal to the SCA and the appeal was upheld in December 2016. Stratham-Ford died two hours before the 2015 ruling, and until assisted death is decriminalised and legal,¹⁰⁵ terminal patients will continue to suffer inhumane deaths, while terminal pets, for example, will receive humane deaths.

As a matter of law, opponents of a legal right to euthanasia or assisted suicide typically question the dangers of abuse and where to draw the line (the "slippery slope" argument).¹⁰⁶ Despite these objections, the Oregon Death with Dignity Act has been in practice for 26 years without a single instance of abuse or coercion.¹⁰⁷ Proponents of euthanasia or assisted suicide generally argue that one has the right to die and to a dignified death, that death is a private matter, and that the state has no right to interfere.

Setting aside these opposing arguments, Friesen described increasing support for an all-important distinction between suicide and assisted dying, especially in the United States: "Particularly among U.S. proponents of legalising the practice, there has been a growing push away from calling it "physician-assisted suicide," with assertions that medically assisted dying is fundamentally different from suicide."¹⁰⁸ The American Association of Suicidology (AAS) dissociate medically assisted death from suicide. The association says, "The American Association of Suicidology (AAS) recognises that the practice of physician

¹⁰⁴ Thomas Hartleb, "Dignity SA welcomes assisted suicide ruling," *News24*, April 30 2015, <https://www.news24.com/news24/dignity-sa-welcomes-assisted-suicide-ruling-20150430-2>.

¹⁰⁵ Chris Jones, Mariana Kruger, Juri van den Heever, Anton van Niekerk, *Challenges in Medical Ethics: The South African context*, African Sun Media, Dec 21 2022.

¹⁰⁶ D. Benatar, "A legal right to die: responding to slippery slope and abuse arguments," *Current 18*, no. 5 (2011): 206–207. <https://doi.org/10.3747/co.v18i5.923>.

¹⁰⁷ *Death with Dignity*, "Frequently Asked Questions," <https://deathwithdignity.org/resources/faqs/>

¹⁰⁸ Phoebe Friesen, "Medically Assisted Dying and Suicide: How Are They Different, and How Are They Similar?," *Hastings Center Report* 50, no. 1 (2020): 32–43. doi: [10.1002/hast.1083](https://doi.org/10.1002/hast.1083) <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/hast.1083>.

aid in dying is distinct from the behaviour that has been traditionally and ordinarily described as "suicide," the tragic event our organisation works so hard to prevent."¹⁰⁹ This statement shows the distinction that the AAS makes between suicides that are sometimes allowed, as granting a dignified death, versus suicides that are opposed, as tragic events. Therefore, by implication, excluding the abovementioned categories of suicides, suicide is considered a tragic event because of its association with mental illness. Consequently, suicide is a subject for study and research and of interest to clinical medicine.

Suicide and illness

Medicine is no stranger to dealing with beliefs, half-beliefs and superstition. There was a time in ancient Greece when people believed that Nyx [night],¹¹⁰ the goddess of insanity, madness, evil, and death,¹¹¹ and her daughters, the Maniae, spirits or demons of madness, insanity, and crazed frenzy, inflicted illness and death upon people.¹¹² The shaman, or medicine man, treated mental and physical ailments.¹¹³ His healing practices included religious rituals, magic, medication and surgery and showed that he understood illness as biological^{114 115} but also as spiritual. As such, the Greeks built the first temple dedicated to

¹⁰⁹ American Association of Suicidology, Statement, "Suicide" Is Not The Same As "Physician Aid In Dying," October 30, 2017, <https://suicidology.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/AAS-PAD-Statement-Approved-10.30.17-ed-10-30-17.pdf>.

¹¹⁰ In Greek mythology, Khaos, a state of utter confusion or disorder, a total lack of organization or order, and a "formless or void" state created Gaia (earth) and gave birth to Uranus (the sky), **Nyx (night)**, Pontus (the sea), Tartarus (the Underworld) and Erebus, the darkness that covers the Underworld. Ross Tanner, *Greek Mythology: Captivating Stories of the Ancient Olympians and Titans*, (Ross Tanner, May 18, 2017), Rakuten Kobo Inc.

¹¹¹ Hesiod, *The Theogony, Works and Days and the Shield of Heracles*, (Neeland Media LLC, January 1, 2012), The Theogony 8/35, Rakuten Kobo Inc.

¹¹² These spirits are the Maniae. Lyssa, the sister of the Maniae, was the spirit of rage and rabies. Allen Frances, *Saving Normal*, (Harper Collins, May 14, 2013), 2. From Shaman to Shrink 4/33, Rakuten Kobo Inc.

¹¹³ In doing so, the medicine man fulfilled a crucial protective function in society because abnormal behaviour constitutes a threat not only to the individual but also to the future of the tribe. The shaman was depicted as men in masking animal heads performing ritual dances on the walls of ancient caves up to 17,000 years old. Roy Porter, *Blood and Guts*, (Penguin Books Ltd, June 26, 2003), 1: Disease, 2002, Rakuten Kobo Inc.

¹¹⁴ A. Mohit, "Mental health and psychiatry in the Middle East: historical development," *East Mediterr Health J.* May 7, no. 3, (2001): 336-47. PMID: 12690751. https://applications.emro.who.int/emhj/0703/emhj_2001_7_3_336_347.pdf.

¹¹⁵ For example, three healers practised under a head physician in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia. The seer was an expert in divinity, the priest performed exorcisms and incantations, and the physician-dispensed drugs and performed required surgeries." Frances, *Saving Normal*, 2: From Shaman to Shrink 3/33.

Asclepius, the God of healing ¹¹⁶, circa 8 B.C., and Asclepius's distinctive rod with a coiled snake is today still the symbol of medicine."^{117 118 119 120 121}

The Greek philosophers rejected this supernatural world of gods and goddesses and questioned the cosmos' accepted understanding at the time. Instead, they analysed their world and laid the foundation of what we know about the world, and from their initial inquiries, would later develop many sciences such as physics, chemistry, geology, meteorology, astrology, embryology, psychology, theology, metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics. A similar assessment took place in medicine, and a secular model of diseases replaced superstition.

Medico-philosopher Alcmaeon of Croton^{122 123} lived after Homer, Thales, Anaximander and Anaximenes, and he was a contemporary of Xenophanes, Heraclitus, and Parmenides and

¹¹⁶ Asclepius was the ancient Greek god of medicine and the son of Apollo and Coronis. He was married to Epione, the goddess of soothing; together, they had Panacea (goddess of medicines), Hygeia (goddess of health), Laso (goddess of recuperation), Aceso (goddess of the healing process), Aegle (goddess of magnificence and splendour). Asclepius was given to the Centaur Chiron, who raised him and taught him medicine and the healing arts. At some point, Asclepius healed a snake, which in return taught him secret knowledge - snakes were considered divine beings that were wise and could heal. This is how the symbol of Asclepius and later healing was a rod wreathed with a snake. "Asclepius," Greek Mythology.com, accessed October 4, 2018,

https://www.greekmythology.com/Other_Gods/Asclepius/asclepius.html.

¹¹⁷ Frances, *Saving Normal*, 2: From Shaman to Shrink 5/33.

¹¹⁸ The priests developed a mental illness theory to diagnose the condition and new cures and remedies. The priest determined the diagnosis through a meeting of the gods' minds. Once the priest diagnosed the ailment, the treatment prescribed would follow. The patient would sleep in the temple, where the nature of the dreams would indicate whether the disease was cured. The priest, an expert dream interpreter, explained the treatment's 'effectiveness.' The drinking of wine facilitated this process, as well as a generous thank-you offer to the gods. The temple widely advertised the curing of diseases. These announcements, in turn, increased the prestige of the temple and the priest.

¹¹⁹ Every state-city had a temple, totalling three hundred temples across ancient Greece. The temples offered a combination of faith healing, a spa with natural cure facilities, and a hospital, and they existed for over a thousand years, and the Romans continued with this practice. The temples treated mainly patients with mild physical and emotional symptoms. Frances, *Saving Normal*, 2: From Shaman to Shrink 5/33.

¹²⁰ Roy Porter, *Blood and Guts*, (Penguin Books Ltd, June 26, 2003), 2: Doctors 2002

¹²¹ Francis explained, "The temples delivered a treatment that anticipated aspects of psychoanalysis. The priest, dressed in the robes and carrying the rod of Asclepius, was on duty to assist with expert dream interpretation. He would help you discover the meaning of your dream—deciphering the god's message about the nature of your illness, its cause, and the steps needed to placate divine forces. If you couldn't muster a dream or vision or were too sick or busy to make the trip, some professional dreamers did incubation-by-proxy on your behalf." Frances, *Saving Normal*, 2: 5/33.

¹²² Two seminal schools of Western medical thought was Agrigentum, situated on the southern coast of Sicily, home to Empedocles. Proponents of cure by contraries believed that disease originated from an imbalance of the humours, hot, cold, wet, and dry, and can be corrected by the opposite. "Diseases which arise from repletion are cured by depletion, and those that arise from depletion are cured by repletion; and in general, diseases are cured by their contraries." The medical school of Croton, argued that maintaining good health required a balance of the powers of moist and dry, cold and hot, bitter and sweet. Disease followed when one power dominated the other. Hippocrates, *The Complete Works of Hippocrates*, (Hastings, East Sussex, Delphi Classics, 2015), On Ancient Medicine 1-2/3, Rakuten Kobo Inc.

¹²³ Gastone G. Celesia, "Alcmaeon of Croton's observations on health, brain, mind, and soul." *Journal of the History of the Neurosciences* 21, no. 4 (2012): 409-26. doi:10.1080/0964704X.2011.626265.

a student of Pythagoras. Gastone writes, "Alcmaeon wrote several books about medicine and natural sciences. Laertius indicates that the title of Alcmaeon's most important book was *De Natura*, or "Natural Philosophy." *De Natura* was quoted frequently in ancient times and influenced Hippocrates, Herophilus, Plato, Galen, and others."¹²⁴

The medico-philosophers rejected the idea that illness originates from a spiritual world but holds the body as the locale of disease. The Greek physician Hippocrates later shared this theory because of what he perceived as the brain's susceptibility to disturbed body fluids.¹²⁵

¹²⁶ Alcmaeon thought diseases were likely due to an imbalance due to a disturbed interaction of body fluids with the brain.¹²⁷ Hippocrates believed that medicine could treat mental illnesses more effectively when treated like physical medical conditions, and he recommended treatment inclusive of psychological and environmental elements.¹²⁸ Though his theory lacked support in the West because of superstition, early Arab psychiatry,¹²⁹ circa AD 700 to AD1500, applied sophisticated diagnosis, theory, and treatment of the mentally ill and treated patients with cognitive psychotherapy, dream interpretation, medication, baths, music, and work therapy.^{130 131}

In sharp contrast, in the West, with the fall of Rome circa the fifth century, until around the 17th/18th centuries, medical knowledge stagnated.¹³² Superstition and medical practice

¹²⁴ Gastone G. Celesia, "Alcmaeon of Croton's observations on health, brain, mind, and soul." *Journal of the History of the Neurosciences* 21, no. 4 (2012): 409-26. doi:10.1080/0964704X.2011.626265.

¹²⁵ M. Bujalkova et al. "Hippocrates' humoral pathology in nowadays reflections." *Bratislavske lekarske listy* 102, no. 10 (2001): 489-92, <https://www.duo.uio.no/bitstream/handle/10852/80761/PhD-Drivenes-2020.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

¹²⁶ Hippocrates, *The Sacred Disease*, (UK, The Big Nest, 2016), 18-19/23, Rakuten Kobo Inc.

¹²⁷ J. Angst and A. Marneros. "Bipolarity from ancient to modern times: conception, birth and rebirth." *Journal of Affective Disorders* 67, 1-3 (2001): 3-19. doi:10.1016/s0165-0327(01)00429-3.

¹²⁸ "Moreover, the Hippocratic tradition emphasized environmental causes and natural treatments of diseases, the causes and therapeutic importance of psychological factors, nutrition and lifestyle, independence of mind, body and spirit, and the need for harmony between the individual and the social and natural environment." Christos F. Kleisariis, Sfakianakis, Chrisanthos, and Ioanna V. Papathanasiou, "Health care practices in ancient Greece: The Hippocratic ideal." *Journal of Medical Ethics and History of Medicine* 7, (2014), <https://doi.org/https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4263393/>.

¹²⁹ A. Mohit, "Mental health and psychiatry in the Middle East: historical development," *East Mediterr Health J.* 7, no. 3, (May 2001): 336-47. PMID: 12690751, https://applications.emro.who.int/emhj/0703/emhj_2001_7_3_336_347.pdf.

¹³⁰ A. Mohit, "Mental health and psychiatry in the Middle East: historical development," *East Mediterr Health J.* 7, no. 3, (May 2001): 336-47. PMID: 12690751, https://applications.emro.who.int/emhj/0703/emhj_2001_7_3_336_347.pdf.

¹³¹ Frances credits the interpretation of the Koran at the time as instrumental in the exemplary treatment of the mentally ill. "The Koran has an enlightened view of mental illness, with none of the denigrating demonology of the Judeo-Christian and Greco-Roman traditions. No angry spirits, no jealous gods. Mental illness was a practical problem to be dealt with on human and humane terms, with no supernatural blinders," Frances, *Saving Normal*, 2: 13/33.

¹³² Hajar, Rachel. "The Air of History (Part II) Medicine in the Middle Ages." *Heart Views: The Official Journal of the Gulf Heart Association* vol. 13,4 (2012): 158-62. doi:10.4103/1995-705X.105744.

existed side-by-side for centuries until medicine could finally pry the art of healing from the hands of priests, itinerants, and astrologers.¹³³ Superstition in classical society saw diseases as punishment from angry gods and opposed Hippocrates'¹³⁴ belief in treating mental illnesses as physical medical conditions. ¹³⁵ The language used at the time reflected this association between death, evil, madness and disease, and "evil" with the word "ill." In Old English, *yfel* (Kentish *evel*) meant "bad, vicious, ill, wicked." The Old English word *yfele* meant "what is bad; sin, wickedness; anything that causes injury, morally or physically." Proto-Germanic **ubilaz* (source also of Old Saxon *ubil*, Old Frisian and Middle Dutch *evel*, Dutch *euvel*, Old High German *ubil*, German *übel*, Gothic *ubils*), from PIE **upelo-*, from root **wap-* "bad, evil" (source also of Hittite *huwapp-* "evil"). *Evil* was the word the Anglo-Saxons used where we would use *bad*, *cruel*, *unskillful*, *defective* (adj.), *harm* (n.), *crime*, *misfortune*, and *disease* (n.). In Middle English, bad took the broader range of senses, and *evil* began to focus on moral badness. ¹³⁶ Illnesses became associated with intent and guilt, and the person was an accomplice to the ill that befell him or her because of the sins he or she committed. Therefore, the church subjected the sick and the suicidal to exorcism to drive out the demonic forces that possessed them ¹³⁷ ¹³⁸ until circa 1532, when reformist Martin Luther absolved the ill and the suicidal. He claimed that the suicide decedent was *not* controlling his or her actions. He says, "They do not wish to kill themselves but are overcome by the devil's power. They are like a man murdered in the woods by a robber."¹³⁹ Luther's view brought about a significant shift in how suicidal people were perceived. Thomas More later argued that the devil uses *an illness* to kill the person, namely, disturbed body humours. These malfunctioning humours cause "self-torment into

¹³³ The first psychiatric hospital was built in Baghdad circa 708 and in Cairo in 800. Psychiatry was a secular, holistic and scientific discipline, consisting of clinical observations and the study and categorising of symptoms.

¹³⁴ Hippocrates, *The Complete Works of Hippocrates*, (Hastings, East Sussex, Delphi Classics, 2015), 18-19/23, Rakuten Kobo Inc.

¹³⁵ Kleisariis says, "Moreover, the Hippocratic tradition emphasized environmental causes and natural treatments of diseases, the causes and therapeutic importance of psychological factors, nutrition and lifestyle, independence of mind, body and spirit, and the need for harmony between the individual and the social and natural environment." Christos F. Kleisariis, Sfakianakis, Chrisanthos, and Ioanna V. Papathanasiou, "Health Care Practices in Ancient Greece: The Hippocratic ideal." *Journal of Medical Ethics and History of Medicine* 7, (2014), <https://doi.org/https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4263393/>.

¹³⁶ *Online Etymology Dictionary*, s.v. "ill," Douglas Harper, 2021-2022, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/ill>.

¹³⁷ Frances, *Saving Normal* 2: 10/33.

¹³⁸ Allen says, "The doctor of medicine who diagnosed chemical imbalance was replaced by the doctor of the church who diagnosed demonic possession. Exorcism, inquisition, torture, and the stake replaced medical treatment because dangerously deadly and demonic forces inhabited the mentally ill. The church must destroy these forces as part of God's struggle against the devil." Frances, *Saving Normal* 2: 10/33.

¹³⁹ Luther, Martin, "Table Talk entries DLXXXIX, DCCXXXVIII, *The Table Talk or Familiar Discourse of Martin Luther*," in Battin, *The Ethics of Suicide*, <https://ethicsofsuicide.lib.utah.edu/selections/martin-luther/>.

the mind of the melancholic, or self-destructive fury into the choleric temperament." ¹⁴⁰ ¹⁴¹
¹⁴²

Yampolsky writes about an important transition: "At the turn of the 19th century, with the birth of modern psychiatry and the penal transformations in France, suicide is viewed from a new perspective. Its status transforms from being a crime or a "vice" before the French Revolution to that of a pathology."¹⁴³ As an illness of the mind, suicide requires the focus of a specific branch of medicine, psychiatry, to study and explain suicide, determine the causation, and, above all, cure and prevent suicide. Esquirol's first task is to put the psychiatrist in charge of caring for the mentally ill and declare suicide the subject of medicine. He says, "It does not belong to my subject to treat suicide in its legal relations, nor, consequently, of its criminality. I must limit myself to showing it to be one of the most important subjects of clinical medicine."¹⁴⁴ As a subject of medicine, suicide warrants a scientific assessment. Though stigma such as cowardice, evilness and criminality might linger a while, theorists are optimistic that society can be educated about the medical profile of suicide as a mental disease.

What qualifies suicide as the focus of scientific study?

I surmise that the most significant transition in how we think about suicide is how suicides of escape, in other words, to escape from unbearable and traumatic circumstances, are perceived today. In the old world, the drive to survive in a brutal world existed alongside the idea of suicide as an escape from intolerable suffering and pain in a harsh and unforgiven

¹⁴⁰ He says, "... that the devil had, by his fantastical apparitions, puffed him up in such childish pride that he hath finally persuaded him, by some illusion showed him that God's pleasure is that he shall for his sake with his own hands kill himself. Some have suddenly thought upon the killing of themselves... where the devil useth the blood of a man's own body towards his purpose in provoking him to lechery, ...there evil humours the man hath, that the devil maketh his instruments". Thomas More, *A Dialogue of Comfort Against Tribulation*, (UK, e-artnow, 2019), XVI: 85/129.

¹⁴¹ Sym also associates this sinful nature with Man's sinful nature, in addition to suicide, which leads him toward parasuicidal behaviour, such as risk-taking, self-exposure and self-neglect such as idolatry, perjury, self-starvation, lack of moderation in food or drink, unwarranted use of medicines or surgery, exposing oneself to lethal dangers due to inordinate desire for money and possessions, irrational risk-taking by soldiers on the battlefield or sailors at sea, keeping society with dangerous people, and breaking laws that have capital punishments.

¹⁴² Andreas Bähr, "Between 'Self-Murder' and 'Suicide': The Modern Etymology of Self-Killing," *Journal of Social History* 46, no. 3 (2013): 620–32. doi:10.1093/jsh/shs119.

¹⁴³ Eva Yampolsky and Sarah Chaney, "The pathology of suicide: between insanity and morality," *The History of Emotions Blog*, August 11, 2016, <https://emotionsblog.history.qmul.ac.uk/2016/08/the-pathology-of-suicide-between-insanity-and-morality/>.

¹⁴⁴ Esquirol, *Mental Maladies; a Treatise on Insanity*, 246/508.

world. As such, these suicides were tolerated and understood. For example, in the Greek tale, Daedalion¹⁴⁵ tried three times to throw himself onto the funeral pyre when his daughter died. After the fourth unsuccessful attempt, Apollo took pity on the grieving father and turned him into a mythical hawk when he tried to jump from a height. Also, Ovid writes about a young couple who fell in love against their parent's wishes and agreed to meet in secret. Pyramus killed himself in the mistaken belief that a lion killed Thisbe after she arrived first at the secret meeting place. Thisbe returned from her hiding place and found Pyramus dead. She killed herself once she realised what had occurred because she could not bear to be away from Pyramus.¹⁴⁶

Ancient authors narrated the stories of the countless deaths of those desperate to escape sexual violation and rape or the shame they experienced after being raped.¹⁴⁷ For example, Josephus, a Jewish military commander and historian, approved of the mass suicide at the fortress of Masada to escape slavery and possible torture by the Roman army.¹⁴⁸ Eusebius, the most prominent historian of early Christianity, cited the suicide of a woman of Antioch, St. Pelagia, and her two daughters to avoid sexual assault by Roman soldiers. He writes, "For," she said, "that to surrender their souls to the slavery of demons was worse than all deaths and destruction, and she set before them the only deliverance from all these things—escape to Christ."¹⁴⁹ Circa 508 BC, Lucretia was greatly admired by generations after that, when she killed herself after her rape by Sextus Tarquinius. She was painted by celebrated European artists such as Titian and Botticelli and by the most renowned woman painter of the Renaissance, Artemisia Gentileschi. Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, Dante's *Inferno*, and

¹⁴⁵ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Daedalion XI 21/24.

¹⁴⁶ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, The Story of Pyramus and Thisbe Book 4 11/54.

¹⁴⁷ Father Antonio Gallonio, *Torture of the Christian Martyrs*, (Olympia Press, 2006), Rakuten Kobo Inc.

¹⁴⁸ After the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD, the fortress became one of the last outposts for the Jewish nationalists known as the Zealots. On the 2nd of May, 73, during a major offensive by the Roman army, 960 Zealot revolutionaries under the command of Eleazar chose to commit mass suicide rather than surrender to the Roman army. Eleazar believed that voluntary death guarantees liberty to the soul, preserves honour and protects the pride of the Jewish nation; it spares one's family and oneself from slavery and torture if captured. Incited by Eleazar, each husband killed his wife and children and was then killed by the next man in line; the last man willingly killed himself. Only two women and five children, hiding in the underground aqueducts, survived to tell the tale. Josephus, *The Jewish War*, in Battin, *The Ethics of Suicide*, <https://ethicsofsuicide.lib.utah.edu/selections/josephus/>.

¹⁴⁹ Eusebius, from *Ecclesiastical History*, in Battin, *The Ethics of Suicide*, <https://ethicsofsuicide.lib.utah.edu/selections/eusebius/>.

Shakespeare's long poem *The Rape of Lucrece* tell Lucretia's story.¹⁵⁰ The early church also approved of her act.¹⁵¹

Throughout history, suicide was often a response to intolerable social customs. An example is Sati, an Indian custom in which the new widow immolates herself on her husband's funeral pyre so that she can escape inhuman social customs. An anonymous widow writes,

Once the husband dies, the torture of his wife begins. No sooner does the husband breathe his last than those female fiends literally jump all over her and violently tear all the ornaments from her nose and ears, breaking the delicate bones of the nose and ears. A woman whose husband is dead is like a living corpse. She has no rights in the home. Despite her grief, her relatives brand her with frightening words and gestures. Sometimes, the widows have to work as servants doing household jobs to earn money to pay the Brahmins their dues. Thus, nothing is in our fate but suffering from birth to death. When our husbands are alive, we are their slaves; when they die, our fate is even worse.¹⁵²

Similarly, Mao Tse-tung said the reason for Miss Zhao's death by suicide was because she was caught up in the "three iron nets" of societal expectations. These were the expectations of Chinese society, her family, and the Wu family of the husband she did not want to marry. Mao Tse-tung explains, "These three factors constituted three iron nets, composing a kind of triangular cage. Once caught in these three nets, it was in vain that she sought life in every way possible. There was no way for her to go on living; the contrary of life is death, and Miss Chao thus felt compelled to die."¹⁵³

Marx theorises that a deficient society and the social evils of such a society drive people to end their own lives. He says, "In times of industrial stagnation and its crises, in times of high food prices and hard winters, this symptom (suicide) always becomes more prominent and

¹⁵⁰ JM Hecht, *Stay* (New Haven and London, Yale University Press), 2-3/13, Rakuten Kobo Inc.

¹⁵¹ Tertullian says of Lucretia, "The violated Lucretia, in the presence of her kinsfolk, plunged the knife into herself, that she might have glory for her innocence." Tertullian, *The Sacred Writings of Tertullian*, (Altenmünster, Germany, Jazzybee Verlag Jürgen Beck, July 21, 2012), Chapter IV. 39/77, Rakuten Kobo Inc.

¹⁵² Anonymous, "The Plight of Hindu Widows as Described by a Widow Herself," in Battin, *The Ethics of Suicide* <https://ethicsofsuicide.lib.utah.edu/selections/hindu-widow-anonymous/>.

¹⁵³ Mao Tse-tung, "Miss Chao's Suicide," *Marxists*, (1919). <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/works/1919/miss-chao.htm>.

takes on an epidemic character." Marx condemns such a society. He says, "...what kind of society is it wherein one finds the most profound loneliness in the midst of many millions of people, a society where one can be overwhelmed by an uncontrollable urge to kill oneself without anyone of us suspecting it? This society is no society, but, as Rousseau said, a desert populated by wild animals."¹⁵⁴ Marx said that despair and misfortune make people suicidal because they are overwhelmed by hardship. He says, "If they are religious, they may be thinking about a better world; if they believe in nothing, they may be seeking the peace of nothingness."¹⁵⁵ In the modern world, as in Marx's society, human beings bear gut-wrenching situations and agonising emotions such as grief, heartache, unbearable pain, agony, despair, and love. Yet, to escape these situations is considered to emanate from an incapacitating mental illness. The question is, why? Why are suicides for historical, legal or moral reasons distinguished from suicides to escape an untenable situation?

It is my supposition that, to qualify as a 'real suicide,' the person must aim *to die*. Therefore, this end game determines whether a particular suicide is a concern for suicide prevention professionals because to 'want to die' opposes one's seemingly natural desire to live. By implication, these deaths are brought about by an abnormality of sorts since a person *typically and instinctually* flees from and stays clear of death. Marsh argues that the belief that suicide is pathological, in other words, that people die by suicide because of being mentally ill, is the most held assumption in suicidology.¹⁵⁶ A person with suicidal intent appears to seek death, and this 'embrace' of death flies in the face of one's usual fear of death. For this reason, helping professionals diagnose and treat suicide because it goes against one's natural inclination to preserve oneself and is, therefore, abnormal. Battin writes of the "uniform assumption that suicide is the causal product of mental illness, the normatively monolithic assumption seemingly so prevalent in contemporary times" and argues that "the only substantive discussions about suicide in current Western culture have concerned whether access to psychotherapy, or improved suicide-prevention programs, or

¹⁵⁴ Karl Marx, from "Peuchet on Suicide," in Battin, *The Ethics of Suicide*, <https://ethicsofsuicide.lib.utah.edu/selections/karl-marx/>.

¹⁵⁵ Karl Marx, from "Peuchet on Suicide," in Battin, *The Ethics of Suicide*, <https://ethicsofsuicide.lib.utah.edu/selections/karl-marx/>.

¹⁵⁶ Jennifer White et al. *Critical Suicidology: Transforming Suicide Research and Prevention for the 21st Century*, (Vancouver, Toronto, Canada, UBC Press, 2016): 1.: 4/27, Kobo Books Inc.

more effective antidepressant medications should form the principal lines of defence" (p. 164)¹⁵⁷

This belief about what qualifies as normal behaviour is seldom questioned, as I will show in the next chapter. Isn't people's instinctual distaste for death¹⁵⁸ obvious from our species' pursuit of biomedical technologies to prevent the onset of age-related diseases and improve longevity? More so, pursuing sustainable development goals¹⁵⁹ shows that our species consciously labours to expand its stay on this planet. These efforts increased global life expectancy at birth¹⁶⁰ from 64 years in 1990 to 73 years in 2019. This resistance to death and the drive to preserve humanity affirm an 'inborn 'natural' drive to self-protection, survival, and well-being. In the next chapter, I will argue that this interpretation of human nature comes from the remarkable pen of Plato and Aristotle. Their persuasive view of human nature sets in motion a belief that a death 'wish' and, consequently, suicide violates 'human nature and, therefore, is abnormal, deviant, and reprehensible. I will elaborate on this point in the next chapter.

For this reason, theorists expect people to 'cope' with their circumstances. An inability to do so is associated with an apparent personal defect or illness. Authorities' denial of Noa Pothoven's request for euthanasia in 2019 is an example. A multiple rape survivor, Noa explains her reason for wanting to die as follows: "After years of battling and fighting, I am drained. Out of fear and shame, I relive the fear, that pain, every day. Always scared, always on my guard. And to this day, my body still feels dirty. My house has been broken into, my body, that can never be undone."¹⁶¹ Despite pleading her case, authorities denied

¹⁵⁷ Battin, M.P., *Ending life: Ethics and the way we die*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005): 173.

¹⁵⁸ Suresh I.S. Rattan, "Biogerontology: Research Status, Challenges and Opportunities," *Acta Biomedica Atenei Parmensis* 89, no. 2 (2018): 291-301. <https://doi.org/10.23750/abm.v89i2.7403>.

¹⁵⁹ Developmental goals: No Poverty, Zero Hunger, Good Health and well-being, Quality Education, Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, Clean Water and Sanitation, Affordable and Clean Energy, Decent Work and Economic Growth, Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure, Reduced Inequality. Sustainable Cities and Communities, Responsible Production and Consumption, Climate Action, Life below Water and on Land, Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions. "Sustainable Developmental Goals," United Nations Sustainable Developmental Group, accessed January 22, 2019, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>.

¹⁶⁰ A measure of the age to which a newborn would live if subject to current mortality patterns for its lifetime. "Data Booklet, World Mortality 2019," United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, accessed April 5, 2020, <https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/public>.

¹⁶¹ "Why Dutch teenager Noa's tragic death was misunderstood," *BBC News*, June 6, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-48541233>.

her request for euthanasia. Subsequently, Noa voluntarily stopped eating and drinking (VSED)¹⁶² and died in palliative care on June 2, 2019.

Nowadays, "mental illness" is considered the predominant reason for suicide deaths, especially when the motive for the suicide is unclear. For example, when comedian Robin Williams died by suicide in August 2014, an assumption was made that his death resulted from his sick mental state. It was later determined that a debilitating brain disease called Diffuse Lewy Body Dementia or dementia with Lewy bodies (DLB) was the likely reason for his suicide.¹⁶³ When Kim Cattrall's younger brother, Christopher, died by suicide, she understood it all, citing depression: "He was suffering from depression, but depression is a curious thing, and it can be impossible to detect if someone does not want you to know. And so, I didn't know. We [her family] didn't know."¹⁶⁴

Without an apparent reason, depression and mental illness are popular explanations for suicide. Still, now and then, the grounds emerge for the death, as in the case of Brian Temple, 34, who died by suicide after being falsely branded a paedophile when he was only a petty thief.¹⁶⁵ Or, when Ingrid du Preez shot and killed herself, using the same firearm shortly after her son Erik shot himself, the reason for her suicide was very clear.¹⁶⁶ The principal of St. Albans College, Tom Hamilton, said after the incident, "When the paramedics were called to the house by his mother Ingrid, who was holding his hand as his life ebbed away, he was pronounced dead shortly after the paramedics arrived. She was *distraught* and took what we believe to be the same firearm and took her own life."¹⁶⁷ As in Ovid's tale, *Pyramus and Thisbe*, she could not bear to go on without her son. In like manner, Aaron

¹⁶² John W. Wax et al. "Voluntary Stopping Eating and Drinking," *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society* 66, no. 3 (2018): 441-445. doi:10.1111/jgs.15200.

¹⁶³ Smith, Nigel M, "Robin Williams' widow: 'It was not depression' that killed him," *The Guardian*, November 3, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2015/nov/03/robin-williams-disintegrating-before-suicide-widow-says>.

¹⁶⁴ Gannon, Louise, "'I'll never be the same again': Sex And The City star Kim Cattrall talks for the first time about the suicide of her beloved brother – and reveals how walking for miles across Britain helped her to deal with her grief," *Mail Online*, July 14, 2019, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/home/event/article-7236103/Sex-City-star-Kim-Cattrall-talks-time-suicide-beloved-brother.html>.

¹⁶⁵ Sales, Dan, "Man, 34, who was arrested for stealing Greggs sausage roll hanged himself after he was beaten up and abused in the street after police wrongly named him as a paedophile who attacked a girl, 13, on his custody release papers, inquest hears," *MailOnline*, June 21, 2022, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10937751/Man-34-arrested-Greggs-sausage-roll-theft-hanged-police-paedophile-mistake.html>.

¹⁶⁶ Valeska Abreu, "No crime suspected after mom, son shooting," *Independent Online (IOL)*, February 12, 2014, <https://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/gauteng/no-crime-suspected-after-mom-son-shooting-1645867>.

¹⁶⁷ "Counselling At St Alban's After Double Suicide," *Eyewitness News*, February 12, 2014, <https://ewn.co.za/2014/02/12/Counselling-at-St-Albans-after-double-suicide>.

Beck, 37, died by suicide after his 18-month-old son, Anderson Beck, died in an overheated car in Virginia on June 28. The Virginia father killed himself after he went to work and forgot to drop his son off at day-care.¹⁶⁸

Even so, nowadays, when a person wants to die, the assumption is made that the person is ill. In light of this popular belief, society assumes that it is the job of the helping professions to treat the condition and prevent suicide. These deaths are no longer tolerated like they were in ancient societies, and the helping professions generally consider these deaths to be prevented. All this implies that a dominant perception of suicide as abnormal essentially silences diverse suicides in earlier times. Grief, heartache, unbearable pain, agony, despair, or love are no longer accepted as a matter of fact and the reason people die by suicide.

In the next chapter, I will return to this point when I elaborate on why "wanting" to die is equated to illness and incapacity. Before I go on, I will ask: With suicide such a popular way to escape from our world, what is it about the world that is so terrifying? Why was suicide an acceptable way to exit the old world, but today, one is considered mentally ill? Why was it okay to escape in the ancient world but not permitted to flee from the world today? For example, suicide was honourable when you faced rape, or as per the early church, so one may live up to your religious beliefs, which considered rape the worst thing that could happen to a Christian woman. It was also practised in old age or when an incurable disease ravished your body. What changes took place in the world that support the transition of suicide, as an escape, to an illness?

The world we live in

The old world could often be a scary place. In Greek mythology, powerful gods created the universe and the first humans.¹⁶⁹ These gods enjoyed extraordinary lives because they

¹⁶⁸ Serna, Vanessa, "Virginia father, 37, who shot himself dead outside family home after he accidentally left his 18-month-old son to die in a hot car when he went to work," *MailOnline*, July 5, 2022, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10980799/PICTURED-Virginia-dad-killed-child-died-hot-car.html>.

¹⁶⁹ Khaos created Gaia (earth), who separated heaven from earth, water from land and air from space. She births Uranus (the sky), Nyx (night), Pontus (the sea), Tartarus (the Underworld) and Erebus, the darkness that covers the Underworld. Twelve Titans were born from Gaia and Uranus and after a stand-off between the Olympian gods led by Zeus and the Titans led by Cronus, Zeus prevailed and banished the defeated Titans to Tartarus. As punishment for

were eternal and imperishable.¹⁷⁰ They did not afford the same to the humans they made. As a result of being made mortal, people are subject to great peril and pain. Circa 50 BC, Lucretius describes people as being at the mercy of each other, animals, and the elements. He said that man and animals¹⁷¹ inflict great violence on the soft and damageable human body. The early humans lived in a state of savagery and endured great terrors.¹⁷²

The races of wild beasts which would often render repose fatal to the poor wretches. And driven from their home, they would fly from their rocky shelters on the approach of a foaming bear or a strong lion, and in the dead of night, they would surrender in terror to their savage guests in their sleeping places.¹⁷³

Lucretius compares the life of these early humans as similar to that of the animals. He says, "They led a life after the roving fashion of wild beasts."¹⁷⁴ Living off the land, the first humans¹⁷⁵ were lone survivors but also hardy in order to survive.¹⁷⁶ Venus¹⁷⁷ unites man and woman in a relationship of need, lust and survival. Eventually, they have fire and clothing, they have children,¹⁷⁸ and they form societies for the sake of mutual survival: "Neighbours began to join in a league of friendship mutually desiring neither, nor suffer

siding with Cronus, Zeus tasks the Titan brothers Epimetheus and Prometheus to create the first mortal men. Hourly History, 1/3.

¹⁷⁰ Lucretius says, "For all the gods must of themselves enjoy immortal aeons and supreme repose, withdrawn from our affairs, detached, afar: immune from peril and immune from pain." T. Lucretius Carus, *On the Nature of Things*, (Floyd, Virginia, Dancing Unicorn Books, 2016): Book 2 Atomic Forms and their Combinations 24/30, Rakuten Kobo Inc.

¹⁷¹ Circa 50 B.C. Lucretius illustrates the terrifying lot of early humans and describes an unfortunate man killed by an animal. He says, "An unarmed man is seized in the jaws of a wild beast, who begins to devour his still-living meal. The man fills the woods and the mountains with his cries as he watches his own insides being interred, still living, in a living grave". Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, Book V, 6988-93.

¹⁷² "Wandering terror-stricken over the fields in the shadows of night, but silent and buried in sleep they would wait, till the sun with rosy torch carried light into heaven." Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, V: 50-51/74.

¹⁷³ Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, V: 50-51/74.

¹⁷⁴ "But the race of man then in the fields was much hardier, as beseemed it to be, since the hard earth had produced it; and built on a groundwork of larger and more solid bones within, knit with powerful sinews throughout the frame of flesh, not lightly to be disabled by heat or cold or strange kinds of food or any malady of body." Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, V: 48/74

¹⁷⁵ "No one then was a sturdy guider of the bent plough or knew how to labour the fields with iron or plant in the ground young saplings ... And as yet they knew not how to apply fire to their purposes or to make use of skins and clothe their body in the spoils of wild beasts, but they would dwell in woods and mountain-caves and forests and shelter in the brushwood their squalid limbs when driven to shun the buffeting of the winds and the rains." Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, V: 48-49/74

¹⁷⁶ Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, V: 47/74

¹⁷⁷ "And Venus would join the bodies of lovers in the woods, for each woman was gained over either by mutual desire or the headstrong violence and vehement lust of the man or a bribe of some acorns and arbute-berries or choice pears." Lucretius *On the Nature of Things* V: 49/74

¹⁷⁸ "Next, after they had got themselves huts and skins and fire, and the woman united with the man passed with him into one [domicile and the duties of wedlock were] learnt [by the two], and they saw an offspring born from them, then first mankind began to soften." Lucretius *On The Nature of Things* V: 51/74

harm."¹⁷⁹ The early community was no utopia but one of strife, feud, and war, especially after discovering gold and wealth.^{180 181}

Like Lucretius, many scholars in ancient times described the world as a place of strife and suffering. Circa 400 B.C., the Buddha wrote, "Oblivious of the suffering to which life is subject, man begets children, and is thus the cause of old age and death. If he would only realise what suffering he would add to by his act, he would desist from the procreation of children; and so stop the operation of old age and death."¹⁸² In 144 B.C., the Marcionites taught their followers that the God of the Hebrew Bible was inconsistent, jealous, wrathful and genocidal and created a material world that was defective and a place of suffering.¹⁸³ Plato described the human condition as troubled:

For the body is a source of endless trouble to us because of the mere requirement of food and is liable also to diseases which overtake and impede us in the search after true being: it fills us full of love, and lusts, and fears, and fancies of all kinds, and endless foolery, and, as men say, takes away from us the power of thinking at all. Whence come wars, fighting, and factions? Whence but from the body and the lusts of the body? Wars are occasioned by the love of money, and money has to be acquired for the sake and in the service of the body; and by reason of all these impediments we have no time to give to philosophy; and, last and worst of all, even if we are at leisure and betake ourselves to some speculation, the body is always breaking in upon us, causing turmoil and confusion in our enquiries, and so amazing us that we are prevented from seeing the truth.¹⁸⁴

Centuries later, this perspective has not changed. Schopenhauer says, "In our good days, we are all unconscious of the evil Fate may have in store for us – sickness, poverty,

¹⁷⁹ Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, V: 52/74

¹⁸⁰ The first humans had no conception of the general welfare of the community nor law and order. And they were unable to look to the general weal and knew not how to make common use of any customs or laws. Whatever prize fortune threw in his way, each man would bear off, trained at his own discretion to think of himself and live for himself alone." Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, V: 48-49/74

¹⁸¹ Lucretius says, "For mankind, tired out with a life of brute force, lay exhausted from its feuds, therefore, the more readily it submitted of its own free will to laws and stringent codes. For as each one moved by anger took measures to avenge himself with more severity than is now permitted by equitable laws, for this reason, men grew sick of a life of brute force." Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, V 59/74

¹⁸² Hari Singh Gour, *The Spirit of Buddhism*, (London, Luzac and Co, 1929): 346, Archive.org.

¹⁸³ "Marcionism," *Textus Receptus*, March 10, 2016, <http://textus-receptus.com>.

¹⁸⁴ Plato, Tr. Jowett, *The Complete Works*, (Golden Deer Classics, June 7, 2018), Phaedo 8/98, Rakuten Kobo, Inc.

mutilation, loss of sight and reason."¹⁸⁵ ¹⁸⁶ Still, to be burdened with existence is more than the body's vulnerability, old age or illness.

In addition to these ills, people encounter untenable societal expectations and oppressive cultural practices. Mao Tse-tung cites arranged marriages in Chinese societies as an example of a brutalising custom, "the shameful system of arranged marriages, because of the darkness of the social system, the negation of the individual will, and the absence of the freedom to choose one's own mate." ¹⁸⁷ He says this society is extremely dangerous because it causes people to kill themselves as a last resort to escape these circumstances. Marx, in turn, points to "the deficient organisation of society," which brings about industrial stagnation, leading to high food prices, hard winters, and poverty.¹⁸⁸ Emile Durkheim argued that overwhelming social forces widely impacted people negatively.¹⁸⁹ In the present day, new suicidology names social justice issues, practices of exclusion and oppression, politics, stigma, relations of power, and hate, as overwhelming social forces in the modern world.¹⁹⁰

Camus argues that the universe is not just hostile and brutal, as Lucretius describes it, but meaningless, purposeless, chaotic and irrational, and uncaring and indifferent to the daily plight of people.¹⁹¹ And it is in such an impersonal and brutal world the first Bubonic Plague, the Plague of Justinian, in 541-542, randomly killed about half the population of Europe, an estimated 25 million people. Centuries later, from 1346 to 1353, despite varying estimates, the Black Death randomly took the lives of up to an approximated 200 million people in Europe, Africa, and Asia.¹⁹² In light of this carnage, the emergence of modern medicine is a saving grace and has since spearheaded society's efforts to end death's reign of terror.

¹⁸⁵ Arthur Schopenhauer, *The Essays On Studies in Pessimism*, (1890), On the Sufferings of the World 2/13, Rakuten Kobo Inc.

¹⁸⁶ Like the Buddha, he says, "If children were brought into the world by act of pure reason alone, would the human race continue to exist? Would not a man have so much sympathy with the upcoming generation as to spare it the burden of existence?" Schopenhauer, *The Essays On Studies in Pessimism*, On the Sufferings of the World 3/13.

¹⁸⁷ Mao Tse-tung, "Miss Chao's Suicide," Marxists, (1919).

<https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/works/1919/miss-chao.htm>

¹⁸⁸ Plaut, Eric A & Anderson, K. (Ed.) *Marx on suicide* (Northwestern University Press; 1st edition, (June 23, 1999): 47/103, Archive.org

¹⁸⁹ Emile Durkheim, *On Suicide*, (London and New York, Routledge Classics, 1952), 1: 2/20, Rakuten Kobo Inc.

¹⁹⁰ Jennifer White et al. *Critical Suicidology: Transforming Suicide Research and Prevention for the 21st Century*, (Vancouver, Toronto, Canada, UBC Press, 2016): 1.: 11/25

¹⁹¹ He says, "For the first time, the first, I laid my heart open to the benign indifference of the universe." Albert Camus, *The Stranger* (Hayrapetyan Brothers). 132/133. Rakuten Kobo Inc.

¹⁹² "Outbreak: 10 Of The Worst Pandemics In History," *MPH Online*, 2022, <https://www.mphonline.org/worst-pandemics-in-history/>.

The goal justified all methods in medicine's battle against death, even though some may come at a price. For example, in the early days of breast cancer treatment, radical mastectomies required the removal of the chest and ribs.¹⁹³ Also, several doctors, including Freud, prescribed cocaine to his patients, believing the drug relieves depression, migraines, and toothaches.¹⁹⁴ ¹⁹⁵ Notwithstanding, medicine boasts remarkable historical interventions and discoveries.¹⁹⁶ Successful biopharmaceuticals eradicated smallpox,¹⁹⁷ rinderpest, and largely polio¹⁹⁸ and developed vaccines for COVID-19 in record time. Considering these successes, optimism remains that modern science and medicine can guarantee a world where only the ill would think about killing themselves. I will elaborate on this claim in the next chapter.

Conclusion

The chapter overviews the transition of suicide in early societies to a subject of scientific study today. I argue that in days gone by, there were diverse situations and countless reasons why people end their own lives. In contrast, in the present day, society opposes suicide death as tragic and preventable. That being so, there is a greater tolerance for historical suicides or suicides explained by social customs. Also, it remains acceptable to die willingly to save others. In some countries and specific states within the United States and in Australia, assisted death by law is allowed to ensure a dignified death for terminal persons who are *compos mentis*. However, this act of kindness and humanity is still considered murder in common law in most countries.

¹⁹³ Jeffery A. Lieberman, *Shrinks: The Untold Story of Psychiatry*, (London, Orion Publishing Group, 2016), 1: 11/38, Rakuten Kobo Inc.

¹⁹⁴ "Cocaine: How 'Miracle Drug' Nearly Destroyed Sigmund Freud, William Halsted," Transcript, *PBS News Hour*, October 17, 2011, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/cocaine-how-miracle-drug-nearly-destroyed-sigmund-freud-william-halsted>.

¹⁹⁵ Lieberman said, "All medical specialities have suffered from their share of bogus theories, useless treatments, and misguided practitioners." Lieberman, *Shrinks: The Untold Story of Psychiatry*, 1: 11/38.

¹⁹⁶ "Inventions & Inventors, Medical Inventions and Discoveries," Christchurch City Libraries, (Last updated August 4, 2022), <https://my.christchurchcitylibraries.com/medical-inventions/>.

¹⁹⁷ Smallpox killed between 300-500 million people in its 12,000 years of existence, until its eradication at the hand of the smallpox vaccine by Edward Jenner in 1796, "Outbreak: 10 Of The Worst Pandemics In History," *MPH Online*, 2022, <https://www.mphonline.org/worst-pandemics-in-history/>.

¹⁹⁸ Polio is found only in Afghanistan, Nigeria and Pakistan. "Poliomyelitis: Does polio still exist? Is it curable?" World Health Organization, March 14, 2018, <https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/does-polio-still-exist-is-it-curable>.

Modern-day society no longer tolerates death to escape from untenable situations, except those excluded for cultural, altruistic, or medical reasons. Instead, modern society resists these deaths and considers such suicides as deaths of illness. These suicides of escape are today regarded as a tragic and preventable event, necessitating further focus of science and research. The next chapter will briefly examine suicide research, policy, and practice in modern suicidology.

3. Suicidal Behaviour as a Subject of Science

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I cited many reasons to die by suicide. For example, Master-At-Arms Second Class (SEAL) Michael A. Monsoor (Mikey) of the United States Navy gave his life to save his fellow SEALs and accompanying Iraqi soldiers on September 29, 2006,¹⁹⁹ and Daedalion²⁰⁰ made four suicide attempts after his daughter's death. Perkins Gilman ended her own life when facing terminal cancer. That being so, despite some exceptions, modern society opposes suicide as a tragic event that needs to be prevented.

Ours is a world in which longevity and health drive public health agendas. Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the Director-General of the World Health Organization, says, "For 71 years, the World Health Organization (WHO) has had one vision: the highest attainable standard of health for all people in all countries."²⁰¹ The organisation sees this as every human's fundamental right without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic or social condition."²⁰²

The Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Pan American Health Organization, and other WHO partners understand health as "a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity."²⁰³ This 1948 definition of health by the WHO reflects a post-war optimism of a world where medicine can potentially end illness.²⁰⁴ Still, a changing world poses challenges that the post-war WHO could not foresee. For example, most Americans aged 65 and older manage two or more chronic diseases. One in seven has six or more conditions. Worldwide, non-communicable diseases

¹⁹⁹ "I Will Defend: Michael Monsoor's story," posted by the U.S. Navy, Jan 22, 2019, video, 8:21, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=256ymQN8F70>.

²⁰⁰ Ovid, *Metamorphoses* (Indiana University Press, 1955) Daedalion XI 21/24 Rakuten Kobo.

²⁰¹ "World Health Statistics Overview 2019: Monitoring health for the SDGs, sustainable development goals," World Health Organization, 2019, <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/311696/WHO-DAD-2019.1-eng.pdf>.

²⁰² "Constitution," World Health Organization, 2022, <https://www.who.int/about/governance/constitution>.

²⁰³ "Constitution," World Health Organization, 2022, <https://www.who.int/about/governance/constitution>.

²⁰⁴ Public health has since seen diseases such as smallpox, polio, diphtheria, and tetanus brought under control, a decline in infant and childhood mortality and an increase in global life expectancy from approximately 48 to 71 years for men and 53 to 76 years for women. Cara Kiernan Fallon and Jason Karlawish, "Is the WHO Definition of Health Aging Well? Frameworks for "Health" After Three Score and Ten," *American Journal of Public Health* 109, no. 8 (2019): 1104-1106. doi:10.2105/AJPH.2019.305177.

account for 73% of deaths and a broad spectrum of disabilities.^{205 206} Also, the incidence of global violence, racism, inequality, and gender inequality, coupled with the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, reflects a different reality. The old world was not always survivable, and I argue that this supposition holds today. Van Niekerk says that humans share the world with dangerous pathogens, bacteria, micro-organisms, and viruses that promote their existence without moral guidance and irrespective of our lot.²⁰⁷ All this implies that the world is still a place of frightening pandemics, devastating natural calamities, war, financial hardship, hunger, violence, and suffering that continuously tests human endurance despite increased life expectancy, better health care and impressive medical achievements. Therefore, I argue that the WHO perhaps overlooks that their definition is likely an unobtainable depiction of health for many people worldwide.²⁰⁸ Despite this criticism, it seems that any deviation from this definition logically carries the label of unwellness and disease, resulting in the view that suicide is, first and foremost, a health concern because it impacts global morbidity.

In this chapter, I give a brief overview of suicidal behaviour as studied in science. The discussion in this chapter examines suicide as it is defined in science: as a complex cluster of cognition, emotion, and behaviour. Suicidal behaviour is considered a matter of science and research, and the rest of the chapter summarises this modern-day approach to the subject at hand. As such, I examine the global problem of suicidal behaviour and the challenges of studying it. I touch on how theorists understand it and how it is defined and classified.

I show that theorists often had to re-think what they assumed to be true about suicidal behaviour to the point where many clinicians concluded that suicidal behaviour warrants an

²⁰⁵ Fong, Joelle H. "Disability Incidence and Functional Decline among Older Adults with Major Chronic Diseases." *BMC Geriatrics* 19, (2019). Accessed September 11, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12877-019-1348-z>.

²⁰⁶ Cara Kiernan Fallon and Jason Karlawish, "Is the WHO Definition of Health Aging Well? Frameworks for "Health" After Three Score and Ten," *American Journal of Public Health* 109, no. 8 (2019): 1104-1106. doi:10.2105/AJPH.2019.305177.

²⁰⁷ Anton van Niekerk, "Ons planeet 'n gevaarlike plek," *Netwerk24*, December 21, 2021, <https://www.netwerk24.com/netwerk24/stemme/menings/ons-planeet-n-gevaarlike-plek-20211220>

²⁰⁸ Fallon and Karlawish ask, "Do we need a new definition of health to incorporate ageing populations into its basic tenets? What measures will advance attention to the health needs of this growing, at times vulnerable, and largely overlooked population?" Cara Kiernan Fallon and Jason Karlawish, "Is the WHO Definition of Health Aging Well? Frameworks for "Health" After Three Score and Ten," *American Journal of Public Health* 109, no. 8 (2019): 1104-1106. doi:10.2105/AJPH.2019.305177.

independent diagnosis. Findings showing that suicidality seemingly manifests in mentally ill and healthy persons necessitated such a diagnosis. On the other hand, a contingent of psychiatrists, such as Blumenthal-Barby, Szasz, Pridmore and Chodoff, oppose this position. I argue that these opposing arguments about suicidality are about the fundamental assumptions that theories of suicide rely on. These diverse views point to my central argument earlier in the dissertation: deviance or abnormality defines most suicide theories. As mentioned, there is extensive literature in the human sciences regarding the causes of the abnormality in sociology, psychology, medicine, psychiatry, and more, and on a spectrum of abnormality, from mental illness to socio-political adversity and disorganisation. The literature sufficiently documents these perspectives; therefore, the study instead describes an assumption of abnormality as common ground. In the next chapter, I will explore why suicide theories assume abnormality.

The problem of suicide

Suicide is a worldwide concern for public health organisations such as the WHO and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). It is taxing to most countries worldwide and is a leading cause of excess death. Excess deaths occur during a particular period over and above the usual expected number of deaths under normal conditions.²⁰⁹

Deaths by suicide impact millions of people.²¹⁰ In 2019, Cerel estimated that each suicide affects a large circle of 15 to 20 people. The World Health Organization estimates that about 108 million people are affected by suicide loss every year.²¹¹ Considering this global endemic, the WHO surveys and collects death data from about 80 (41%) of the organisation's 194 Member States^{212 213} and applies demographic techniques to estimate

²⁰⁹A. Ostamo, J. Lönnqvist and J. Lönnqvist, "Excess Mortality of Suicide Attempters," *Social Psychiatry & Psychiatric Epidemiology* 36, no. 1 2001: 29–35. doi:10.1007/s001270050287.

²¹⁰ In the early 1960s, Shneidman estimated that each suicide affects six people. Edwin S. Shneidman established suicide as a field of study as "suicidology" and was the founder of the American Association of Suicidology "History," *American Association of Suicidology*, 2020, <https://suicidology.org/about-aas/#history>.

²¹¹ "World Suicide Prevention Day 2022 - Creating Hope Through Action," *World Health Organization*, September 10, 2022, <https://www.who.int/news-room/events/detail/2022/09/10/default-calendar/world-suicide-prevention-day-2022>.

²¹² "Quality of Suicide Mortality Data, World Health Organization, accessed February 16, 2018 <https://www.who.int/teams/mental-health-and-substance-use/data-research/suicide-data-quality>.

²¹³ "Global, regional, and national life expectancy, all-cause mortality, and cause-specific mortality for 249 causes of death, 1980–2015: a systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2015," *Lancet* 388, no. 10053 (October 8, 2016): 1459-1544, DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(16\)31012-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(16)31012-1).

the completeness of death in the absence of global data. The National Vital Statistics System of the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention collects death data in the United States.²¹⁴ ²¹⁵ Based on this data, the World Health Organization estimates that more than 700,000 people die by suicide every year,²¹⁶ ²¹⁷ a suicide every 40 seconds somewhere in the world.²¹⁸

The majority of deaths occur in low to middle-income countries with larger populations.²¹⁹ The highest regional crude average rates were in Europe (15.4 per 100,000), followed by Southeast Asia (13.2 per 100,000), the Western Pacific (10.2 per 100,000), the Americas (9.8 per 100,000), Africa (7.4 per 100,000), and the Eastern Mediterranean (3.9 per 100,000). The United States and Canada are in the fourth and eighth positions, with rates of 15.3 and 12.5, respectively.²²⁰ With rare exceptions, such as South Africa, countries generally see more suicides than all violent deaths combined, including homicide, terrorism, conflict, and executions.²²¹ Epidemiological data shows that suicide kills indiscriminately, although some people are at a higher risk.²²² For example, suicide is the second leading cause of death among young people between the ages of 14 and 29, even though most

²¹⁴ "Fatal Injury and Violence Data," *Centres for Disease Control and Prevention*, National Centre for Injury Prevention and Control, December 2, 2021, <http://webapp.cdc.gov>.

²¹⁵ "Fatal Injury and Violence Data," *Centres for Disease Control and Prevention*, National Centre for Injury Prevention and Control, December 2, 2021, <http://webapp.cdc.gov>.

²¹⁶ The data consists of the number of deaths and age-standardized death rates by country, year, cause, gender, and age per categories ICD-9 and ICD-10²¹⁶ of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD). Donna J. Cartwright, "ICD-9-CM to ICD-10-CM Codes: What? Why? How?" *Advances in wound care* 2, no. 10 (2013): 588-592. doi:10.1089/wound.2013.0478.

²¹⁷ "WHO Mortality Database," *World Health Organization*, copyright 2023, <https://platform.who.int/mortality>.

²¹⁸ "Suicide: one person dies every 40 seconds," *World Health Organization*, September 9, 2019, <https://www.who.int/news/item/09-09-2019-suicide-one-person-dies-every-40-seconds>.

²¹⁹ J. Bantjes et al. "Poverty and suicide research in low- and middle-income countries: systematic mapping of literature published in English and a proposed research agenda," *Global Mental Health* 3, (2016), <https://doi.org/10.1017/gmh.2016.27>.

²²⁰ Melissa, Henry, "Suicide prevention: A multisectoral public health concern." *Preventive medicine* vol. 152, Pt 1 (2021): 106772. doi:10.1016/j.ypmed.2021.106772.

²²¹ This relationship is reversed in countries where the death rate by violence is high, such as Iraq, Afghanistan, El Salvador, South Africa, Brazil, Colombia, Somalia, Honduras, Guatemala, and the Virgin Islands. H. Ritche, "What do people die from?" *Our World in Data*, Oxford Martin Programme on Global Development, February 14, 2018.

²²² Gustavo Turecki and David A Brent, "Suicide and Suicidal behaviour," *Lancet* 387, no. 10024 (2016): 1227-39.,doi:10.1016/S0140-6736(15)00234-2.

people who die by suicide are 75 and older.²²³ More women think about suicide²²⁴ ²²⁵ and try to kill themselves than men. Still, about three times more men die by suicide,²²⁶ consistently in most societies globally, compared to women.²²⁷ One explanation for this difference is that men use more lethal methods²²⁸ like firearms or jumping²²⁹ from a height.
²³⁰ ²³¹ Pesticides, hanging, and firearms are the most used methods of suicide globally.

The study of suicidal behaviour is not without its challenges. Suicide deaths typically happen in isolation and pose unique difficulties in classifying a death correctly. Officials often perceive deaths as accidental when they are, in fact, self-inflicted, such as unintentional drownings, accidental hangings, -shootings, and overdoses.²³² ²³³ A case at hand is the sharp increase in drug overdose deaths during the pandemic.²³⁴ Some studies suggest that

²²³ Suicide thus follows a standard pattern: the more senior the age group, the higher the death rate. Hannah Ritchie, Max Roser and Esteban Ortiz-Ospina, "Suicide". *Our World in Data* (2015), <https://ourworldindata.org/suicide>.

²²⁴ A study conducted in Turkey 2017 shows a higher increase in suicide mortality for women. The study finds that women aged 15-24 have the highest suicide death rate. Australian mortality statistics show similar results, with a steady increase in suicides since 2004 compared to young males. N. Stefanac et al. "Are young female suicides increasing? A comparison of sex-specific rates and characteristics of youth suicides in Australia over 2004–2014," *BMC Public Health* 19, no. 1389 (October 28, 2019). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-019-7742-9>.

²²⁵ In the United States, the suicide rate increased for both genders, although women had a notably steeper suicide rate. Kristen Monaco, "Suicide Rate in Women Jumps by 50%— From 2000-2016, rates also increased by 21% in men," *MedPage Today*, June 14, 2018, <https://www.medpagetoday.com>.

²²⁶ Globally, in 2019, the age-standardized suicide rate was 2.3 times higher in males than in females. "Suicide worldwide in 2019, Global Health Estimates," World Health Organization, June 16 2021, <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240026643>.

²²⁷ Vörös V et al, "Nemi különbségek a szuicid viselkedésben [Gender differences in suicidal behaviour]," *Neuropsychopharmacol Hung* 6, no. 2 (Jun 2004): 65-71. Hungarian. PMID: 15787203.

²²⁸ For example, in Asian countries and Latin America, pesticide poisoning was more common. In cities and urban societies with many high-rise buildings, such as the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, China, and Singapore, jumping from a high place was the favoured method of suicide. In the United States, firearms were used in over half of all male suicides in 2018. "Lethality of Suicide Methods," Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, Harvard University, date of Copyright 2022, <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/means-matter/means-matter/case-fatality/>.

²²⁹ Konstantinos Tsirigotis, Gruszczynski, Wojciech, and Marta Tsirigotis, "Gender differentiation in methods of suicide attempts," *Medical Science Monitor: International Medical Journal of Experimental and Clinical Research* 17, no. 8 (2011): 65. <https://doi.org/10.12659/MSM.881887>.

²³⁰ Availability and accessibility play a vital role in the choice of suicide method. Peterson L, Peterson M, O'Shanick G, and Swann A. Self-inflicted Gunshot Wounds: Lethality of Method Versus Intent. *American Journal of Psychiatry*. 1985;142:228-231.

MA Skopek and Perkins R, Deliberate exposure to motor vehicle exhaust gas: the psychosocial profile of attempted suicide. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*. 32, no. 6 (1998): 830-38.

²³¹ "Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS)," *Centres for Disease Control and Prevention*, National Centre for Injury Prevention and Control, (2020), www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars.

²³² C. Pritchard and Hansen, L, "Examining Undetermined and Accidental Deaths as Source of 'Under-Reported-Suicide' by Age and Sex in Twenty Western Countries", *Community Mental Health Journal*, 51, no. 3 (2015): 65-376.

²³³ S. Gunnell et al. "Time Trends in Coroners' Use of Different Verdicts for Possible Suicides and Their Impact on Officially Reported Incidence of Suicide in England: 1990–2005," *Psychological Medicine* 43, no. 7 (2013): 1415-422. doi:10.1017/S0033291712002401.

²³⁴ "Overdose Deaths Accelerating During COVID -19," Centres for Disease Control and Prevention Press Release December 17, 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2020/p1218-overdose-deaths-covid-19.html>.

non-suicide death categories such as drug overdose might contain a large potential reservoir of misclassified suicides.^{235 236 237}

As already mentioned, suicide usually takes place in isolation. It poses significant challenges to the scientific study of the behaviour compared to heart disease (CVD),²³⁸ where people generally report the warning signs to their physician, enabling early detection, diagnosis, and treatment to improve the CVD prognosis. People with suicidal intent, on the other hand, don't usually openly talk about their suicidal thoughts or plans.²³⁹ The secrecy surrounding suicidal behaviours makes the behaviour challenging to detect. This situation today is worlds apart from earlier times when the dying and those who died by suicide were openly discussed and displayed. Modern-day society often resists death and ideally wants to remove death from everyday life and hide it from the public eye. Death embarrasses contemporary society because, despite many achievements, humanity cannot conquer death. Consequently, medicine must isolate and insulate the sick and the terminally ill in hospitals and hospices where they remain unseen.^{240 241} Given these difficulties, it is likely that the suicide rates reported to the WHO by the member countries were lower than actual rates, partly because of inaccurate registration of deaths and misclassification²⁴² of the cause of death.²⁴³

²³⁵ S.S. Bakst, T. Braun, I. Zucker, et al. "The accuracy of suicide statistics: are true suicide deaths misclassified?" *Soc Psychiatry Psychiatr Epidemiol* 51, (2016): 115–123, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00127-015-1119-x>.

²³⁶ Stacey Freedenthal, PhD, LCSW, says, "Suicides and accidental overdoses (as well as deaths from alcoholism) are 'deaths of despair.'" Stacey Freedenthal "The Pandemic, Suicide Rates, and Social Isolation" Reader Comments December 30, 2020, <https://www.speakingofsuicide.com/2020/12/30/the-pandemic-suicide-rates-and-social-isolation/>

²³⁷ F Douglas Scutchfield and C William Keck, "Deaths of Despair: Why? What to Do?." *American Journal of Public Health* 107, no.10 (2017): 1564-1565. doi:10.2105/AJPH.2017.303992, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5607684/>.

²³⁸ Ansgar Adams et al. "Early Diagnosis and Treatment of Coronary Heart Disease in Asymptomatic Subjects with Advanced Vascular Atherosclerosis of the Carotid Artery (Type III and IV b Findings Using Ultrasound) and Risk Factors." *Cardiology research* vol. 9,1 (2018): 22-27. doi:10.14740/cr667w

²³⁹ Over a dozen research studies have shown that 75% of patients who die by suicide denied having suicide ideation the final time they were asked by a healthcare professional. Typically, their death by suicide occurred within the month of their last visit. B. Harmer et al. "Suicidal Ideation," *StatPearls*, August 6, 2021, PMID: 33351435, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK565877/>.

²⁴⁰ Anton Van Niekerk, *Die dood en die sin van die lewe*, (Tafelberg, 2017): 1: 14-19.

²⁴¹ For example, in Plato's *Phaedo*, on the day Socrates drank the poison, Socrates and Simmeas discussed his impending suicide at length. Plato, *Complete Works, Phaedo* 8/128.

²⁴² Statisticians code the data annually using the ninth standardised revision of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-9). Still, as is evident from suicide and injury literature, there is reason to believe that suicide death is often misclassified. Suicides are also often misclassified due to human error²⁴² and reported as (ICD-10) "deaths of undetermined intent" (ICD-10 codes Y10-Y34), or "accidents" (codes V01-X59), "homicides" (codes X85-Y09), and "unknown causes" (codes R95-R99).

²⁴³ John Snowdon and Namkee G Choi. "Undercounting of suicides: Where suicide data lie hidden." *Global public health* vol. 15,no.12 (2020): 1894-1901. doi:10.1080/17441692.2020.1801789.

On the upside, theorists generally understand suicide as preventable. As such, it requires scientific study, intervention and treatment. The WHO says, "Suicides are preventable with timely, evidence-based and often low-cost interventions."²⁴⁴ ²⁴⁵ The WHO recommends promoting socio-economical life skills in adolescents to help lower youth suicides and adding measures such as reducing the size of medication packages, installing barriers at jump sites, and responsible reporting by the media to prevent suicides. Furthermore, the organisation endorses limiting access to the means of suicide, such as pesticides, firearms, and medication. Despite these measures, public health organisations such as the CDC and the WHO agree that there is an association with mental illness²⁴⁶ and, therefore, enter into partnerships with the medical profession and other helping professions to research and study the phenomenon. ²⁴⁷

Definitions

Joseph Obegi refers *suicide* to the coroner's finding, in other words, as a cause of death. ²⁴⁸ On the other hand, *suicidality* refers to the risk of suicide, indicated by thoughts about suicide (*ideation*) and intent in the form of *communications* such as verbal threats, planning, and attempts to die.²⁴⁹ Therefore, Silverman, Berman, Sanddal, O'Carroll, and Joiner²⁵⁰ use *suicidality* as inclusive of all suicidal acts and cognitions. Some theorists prefer *suicidal thoughts and behaviours* (STBs) or *self-injurious thoughts and behaviours* (SITBs).²⁵¹ The

²⁴⁴ "Preventing Suicide: A Global Imperative," *World Health Organization*, 17 August 2014, <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241564779>.

²⁴⁵ Nock describes suicide as "an enormous public health problem." Matthew K. Nock, et al. "Suicide and suicidal behaviour," *Epidemiologic Reviews* vol. 30,1 (2008): 133-54. doi:10.1093/epirev/mxn002.

²⁴⁶²⁴⁶ "Suicide," *World Health Organization, Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean Health Topics*, 2023, <https://www.emro.who.int/health-topics/suicide/feed/atom.html>.

²⁴⁷ Thomas Joiner describes this all-important task as "the agenda of prevention and relief of suffering through the culmination of the slow labours of scientific understanding." Thomas Joiner, *Why People Die by Suicide*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 2005), 7: 1/6, Rakuten Kobo Inc.

²⁴⁸ He describes suicide as the end stage, or outcome of *suicidality*, a syndrome consisting of signs and symptoms that meet a consensus definition of a mental disorder. Obegi here differs from Silverman, Berman, Sanddal, O'Carroll, & Joiner, who use the term to include all suicidal thinking and behaviour, including the act of suicide. Joseph H. Obegi, "Is suicidality a mental disorder? Applying DSM-5 guidelines for new diagnoses," *Death Studies*, 45, no. 8, (2021): 638-650, DOI: [10.1080/07481187.2019.1671546](https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2019.1671546).

²⁴⁹ Joseph H. Obegi, "Is suicidality a mental disorder? Applying DSM-5 guidelines for new diagnoses," *Death Studies*, 45, no. 8, (2021): 638-650, DOI: [10.1080/07481187.2019.1671546](https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2019.1671546).

²⁵⁰ Silverman, Morton et al. "Rebuilding the tower of Babel: a revised nomenclature for the study of suicide and suicidal behaviours," *Suicide & life-threatening behaviour* 37, no. 3 (2007): 248-63. doi:10.1521/suli.2007.37.3.248.

²⁵¹ *Suicide ideation*: thoughts of engaging in behaviour intended to end one's life; a *suicide plan*: the formulation of a specific method through which one intends to die; and a *suicide attempt*: to engage in potentially self-injurious

CDC defines suicide as "death caused by injuring oneself with the intent to die." The organisation designate an attempt as "when someone harms themselves with any intent to end their life, but they do not die as a result of their actions."²⁵²

Theorists generally understand *suicidal behaviour* as a chronological process²⁵³ rather than an event. As such, suicidal ideation manifests on a continuum of severity,²⁵⁴ and fleeting and vague thoughts about death often persist;²⁵⁵ after that, planning suicide^{256 257} or an attempt which could be fatal.^{258 259} Arguably, studying these precursors to suicide is essential in anticipating risk. For example, the Mobile Assessment for the Prediction of Suicide (MAPS) study uses smartphone technology and algorithms to detect suicide risk. The study combines technology with known risk factors to determine if mobile devices can predict imminent suicide risk.^{260 261} Similar research tracks wearables that measure vitals such as heart rate, step count, calories, and other metrics to predict affective states and self-harm behaviours.²⁶²

behaviour in which there is at least some intent to die." Matthew K Nock, et al. "Suicide and suicidal behaviour." *Epidemiologic Reviews* 30, no. 1 (2008): 133-54. doi:10.1093/epirev/mxn002 .

²⁵² "Preventing Suicide," Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Updated October 2022.

²⁵³ L. Didier et al. "The gender paradox in suicidal behaviour and its impact on the suicidal process," *Journal of Affective Disorders* 13, no. 1-2 (April 2012): 19-26

April 2012, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0165032711001492>.

²⁵⁴ EM. Kleiman et al. "Digital phenotyping of suicidal thoughts," *Depress Anxiety*. 35 (2018): 601– 608. <https://doi.org/10.1002/da.22730>.

²⁵⁵ Harmer, Bonnie, et al. "Suicidal Ideation." *StatPearls*, StatPearls Publishing, May 18 2022.

²⁵⁶ "Suicide Definitions," National Institute of Mental Health, Mental Health Information, Statistic, <https://www.nimh.nih.gov>.

²⁵⁷ Alex E. Crosby, LaVonne Ortega and Cindi Melanson, "Self-Directed Violence Surveillance: Uniform Definitions and Recommended Data Elements," Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), February 23 2011, <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/Self-Directed-Violence-a.pdf>.

²⁵⁸ L. Didier et al. "The gender paradox in suicidal behaviour and its impact on the suicidal process" *Journal of Affective Disorders* 13, no. 1-2 (April 2012): 19-26

April 2012, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0165032711001492>.

²⁵⁹ Elizabeth O'Connor et al. "Screening for Suicide Risk in Primary Care: A Systematic Evidence Review for the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force. Table 1, Definitions of Suicide-Related Terms," National Library of Medicine, April 2013, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK137739/table/ch1.t1/>.

²⁶⁰ Kelly Servick, "Suicide attempts are hard to anticipate. A study that tracks teens' cell phone use aims to change that," *Science*, August 21, 2019, <https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2019/08/suicide-attempts-are-hard-anticipate-study-tracks-teens-cellphone-use-aims-change>.

²⁶¹ The application, which poses weekly questions to the cellphones of about 50 teenagers between the ages of 13 to 18 living in New York and Pennsylvania, commenced September 2018 through July 31, 2022. The application asks teenagers questions such as "In the past week, how often have you thought of killing yourself?" "Did you make a plan to kill yourself?" "Did you attempt to kill yourself?" The application accesses tone of voice, facial expressions in selfies, the music they stream, and movements of cell phone content in the hope of pre-empting a suicide. Nicolas B. Allen, "MAPS: Mobile Assessment for the Prediction of Suicide," Harvard Catalyst, Harvard Catalyst Profiles, 2022, <https://connects.catalyst.harvard.edu/Profiles/display/116456371>.

²⁶² American Psychological Association, "Wearable devices as therapy tools," *Monitor on Psychology*, 52, no. 6, (September 12021), <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2021/09/sidebar-wearable-devices>.

Classification

There are two diagnostic systems in current, overlapping use worldwide, and they both classify suicide as a disorder. The World Health Organization International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11) (version 5 2021).²⁶³ The ICD-11 serves as a global standard for diagnostic health information. The second diagnostic system is the fifth edition of the DSM manual, published in 2013 by the American Psychiatric Association (APA).²⁶⁴ For the first time, the DMS-5 includes suicidal behaviour disorder (SBD) as a condition for further study. It is psychiatry's first attempt to capture suicidality as *a diagnosis*.

Is suicidal behaviour a separate disease?

Theorists such as Calvo believe suicidal behaviour warrants a separate diagnosis. He says medical science is working to identify a causative agent or process with a reasonably high degree of certainty for suicidal behaviour. When this happens, medical science will no longer view the behaviour as only a symptom of a disease but as a fully-fledged disease.²⁶⁵ For this reason, the fifth edition of the DSM-5 manual,²⁶⁶ published by the APA, lists *Suicidal Behaviour Disorder* as a separate diagnostic entity for further study. It defines the disorder as an attempted suicide within the past two years. The diagnosis excludes non-suicidal, self-injurious behaviour, such as suicidal ideation or preparatory actions, and sanctioned suicides, such as historical, cultural, or morally motivated suicides. DSM-5 lists the diagnosis

²⁶³ World Health Organization, "ICD-11. International Classification of Diseases 11th Revision. The global standard for diagnostic health information," <https://icd.who.int/en>.

²⁶⁴ The American Psychiatric Institute for Research and Education worked jointly with the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Psychiatric Association, and the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH). Further, the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) and the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) supported the DSM's latest development stage. DSM-5 reflected scientific progress seen since the manual's 1994 edition. Darrel A. Regier et al. "The conceptual development of DSM-V," *American Journal of Psychiatry* 166, no. 6 (2009): 645-650, doi:10.1176/appi.ajp.2009.09020279. PMID: 19487400. <https://ajp.psychiatryonline.org/doi/full/10.1176/appi.ajp.2009.09020279>.

²⁶⁵ Calvo, Franz et al. "Diagnoses, Syndromes, and Diseases: A Knowledge Representation Problem." *AMIA Annual Symposium Proceedings* 2003, (2003): 802. <https://doi.org/https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1480257/>.

²⁶⁶ Dr. Dilip Jeste, the then President of the American Psychiatric Association, released the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) on May 18, 2013, at the 166th Annual Meeting of the APA in San Francisco. Vahia, Vihang N, "Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders 5: A quick glance," *Indian Journal of Psychiatry* 55, no. 3 (2013): 220-3. doi:10.4103/0019-5545.117131. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/257250576_Diagnostic_and_statistical_manual_of_mental_disorders_5_A_quick_glance.

as a condition for further study, not clinical use. Still, clinicians can indicate the conditions' possible presence using the "Other Specified" designation. ^{267 268}

Many clinicians support suicide as an independent diagnosis because studies show that some fundamental 'facts' about suicide appear inaccurate. For instance, in 2019, clinical psychologist Joseph Obegi wrote that the assumption that mental illness causes suicide is "an entranced but inaccurate belief about suicide and suicidality,"²⁶⁹ logically flawed²⁷⁰ and at odds with current evidence. He says that previous studies that show that 80 to 90% of the deceased had a diagnosable mental disorder²⁷¹ are overestimating. For example, Sisti et al.'s analysis of psychological autopsies shows many of the dead have no known psychiatric condition.²⁷² In reality, the percentage of the deceased with a diagnosable psychiatric disorder is closer to 54%,²⁷³ varying substantially across cultures.²⁷⁴

The CDC's mortality records in 2017 further substantiate that over 50% of deaths by suicide were by people with no known psychiatric illness.²⁷⁵ In addition, Sisti et al. show that suicidal behaviour is independent of psychiatric disorders and is not considered a complication of a

²⁶⁷ APA DSM V Section III https://www.psychiatry.org/File%20Library/Psychiatrists/Practice/DSM/APA_DSM-5-Section-III.pdf

²⁶⁸ In section III, the diagnosis is a condition for further study and a tool to diagnose SBD independently of, for example, disorders such as Major Depression and Borderline Personality Disorder. <https://www.jys.org/what-is-suicidal-behavior-disorder/>.

²⁶⁹ Joseph H. Obegi, "Is suicidality a mental disorder? Applying DSM-5 guidelines for new diagnoses," *Death Studies*, 45, no. 8, (2021): 638-650, DOI: [10.1080/07481187.2019.1671546](https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2019.1671546).

²⁷⁰ Due to, for example, the reliance on psychological autopsies, called into question by several scholars. An interesting observation by Obegi shows that a recent review of qualitative psychological autopsy studies concluded that informants rarely implicate mental disorders in their narratives of why the people close to them died by suicide. Hjelmeland, Heidi, Gudrun Dieserud, Kari Dyregrov, Birthe L. Knizek, and Antoon A. Leenaars. "Psychological autopsy studies as diagnostic tools: are they methodologically flawed?" *Death Studies* 36, no. 7 (2012): 605-626.

²⁷¹ For example, studies showed that in the United States, about 10% of people who die by suicide have no identifiable mental disorder. In China, the estimate was about 37%. Phillips MR, Yang G, Zhang Y, Wang L, Ji H, Zhou M. Risk factors for suicide in China: a national case-control psychological autopsy study. *Lancet*. 2002 Nov 30;360(9347):1728-36. doi: 10.1016/S0140-6736(02)11681-3. PMID: 12480425. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/12480425/>

²⁷² Sisti, Dominic et al. "Toward a Distinct Mental Disorder-Suicidal Behaviour." *JAMA Psychiatry* Vol. 77,7 (2020): 661-662. doi:10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2020.0111.

²⁷³ Centres for Disease Control and Prevention. (2018). *Suicide rising across the US: More than a mental health concern*. Vital signs. Retrieved from <https://www-cdc-gov.ez.sun.ac.za/vitalsigns/pdf/vs-0618-suicide-H.pdf> [Google Scholar]

²⁷⁴ Milner, Allison et al. "Suicide in the absence of mental disorder? A review of psychological autopsy studies across countries." *The International Journal of Social Psychiatry* vol. 59,6 (2013): 545-54. doi:10.1177/0020764012444259.

²⁷⁵ Harmer, Bonnie, et al. "Suicidal Ideation." *StatPearls*, StatPearls Publishing, 18 May 2022.

disease but likely a separate disease.^{276 277 278} Studies show that suicidal attempts occur without a detectable psychiatric illness^{279 280 281} and that suicidal behaviour is not just a "tag-on" of mood disorders. Studies²⁸² also put this assumed exclusive relationship to bed and point to other conditions with increased suicide risk, such as drug and alcohol abuse, opioid use, eating disorders, schizophrenia and personality disorders, acute stress disorders and childhood abuse.^{283 284 285} Sisti, Mann, and Oquendo's 2020 study shows that "approximately 60% are mood disorders; the rest include substance use and personality, eating, or psychotic disorders."²⁸⁶

Research also indicates that DSM disorders do not predict suicide better than chance.²⁸⁷ Nock et al. cross-national studies show that mental illnesses cannot explain the transition from suicide ideation to an attempt.²⁸⁸ Nock says, "The fact that most people who die by suicide have one of these conditions has led some to suggest that the conditions explain

²⁷⁶ He describes the diagnosis as "a recognizable complex of symptoms and physical findings which indicate a specific condition or disease for which a direct cause is not necessarily understood." Sisti, Dominic et al. "Toward a Distinct Mental Disorder-Suicidal Behaviour." *JAMA Psychiatry* Vol. 77,7 (2020): 661-662. doi:10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2020.0111.

²⁷⁷ Calvo, Franz et al. "Diagnoses, syndromes, and diseases: a knowledge representation problem." *AMIA ... Annual Symposium proceedings. AMIA Symposium* vol. 2003 (2003): 802.

²⁷⁸ Obegi, Joseph H. "Rethinking Suicidal Behaviour Disorder." *Crisis* vol. 40,3 (2019): 209-219. doi:10.1027/0227-5910/a000543.

²⁷⁹ Harmer, Bonnie, et al. "Suicidal Ideation." *StatPearls*, StatPearls Publishing, 18 May 2022.

²⁸⁰ Oquendo, Maria A, and Enrique Baca-Garcia. "Suicidal behaviour disorder as a diagnostic entity in the DSM-5 classification system: advantages outweigh limitations." *World Psychiatry: Official Journal of the World Psychiatric Association (WPA)* vol. 13,2 (2014): 128-30. doi:10.1002/wps.20116

²⁸¹ "Suicide occurs in the presence of any psychiatric diagnosis, but studies repeatedly show that suicide is most common in mood disorders, major depressive disorder, and bipolar disorder." Fawcett J. Diagnosis, Traits, States, and Comorbidity in Suicide. In: Dwivedi Y, editor. *The Neurobiological Basis of Suicide*. Boca Raton (FL): CRC Press/Taylor & Francis; 2012. Chapter 1. Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK107213/>.

²⁸² Arsenault-Lapierre, Geneviève et al. "Psychiatric diagnoses in 3275 suicides: a meta-analysis." *BMC Psychiatry* vol. 4 37. 4 Nov. 2004, doi:10.1186/1471-244X-4-37.

²⁸³ Fawcett J. Diagnosis, Traits, States, and Comorbidity in Suicide. In: Dwivedi Y, editor. *The Neurobiological Basis of Suicide*. Boca Raton (FL): CRC Press/Taylor & Francis; 2012. Chapter 1. Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK107213/>.

²⁸⁴ Harris, E C, and B Barraclough. "Suicide as an outcome for mental disorders. A meta-analysis." *The British Journal of Psychiatry: the Journal of Mental Science* vol. 170 (1997): 205-28. doi:10.1192/bjp.170.3.205.

²⁸⁵ Gradus, Jaimie L et al. "Acute stress reaction and completed suicide." *International Journal of Epidemiology* vol. 39,6 (2010): 1478-84. doi:10.1093/ije/dyq112.

²⁸⁶ Sisti, Dominic et al. "Toward a Distinct Mental Disorder-Suicidal Behaviour." *JAMA Psychiatry* Vol. 77,7 (2020): 661-662. doi:10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2020.0111.

²⁸⁷ Franklin, Joseph C et al. "Risk factors for suicidal thoughts and behaviours: A meta-analysis of 50 years of research." *Psychological Bulletin* vol. 143,2 (2017): 187-232. doi:10.1037/bul0000084.

²⁸⁸ Matthew K. Nock, et al. "Cross-national prevalence and risk factors for suicidal ideation, plans and attempts." *The British Journal of Psychiatry: the Journal of Mental Science* Vol. 192,2 (2008): 98-105. doi:10.1192/bjp.bp.107.040113.

the suicide. However, the explanatory power of such an association is limited, given that most patients with mental and physical conditions never even consider suicide."²⁸⁹

It turns out that even though psychiatric conditions are often associated with suicide risk, most patients suffering from these psychiatric conditions do not die by suicide or attempt suicide.²⁹⁰ Theorists argue that it is not feasible to lower thresholds of defined mental disorders to include all forms of suicidal ideation. Instead, they claim these findings mean that suicide cognition is a symptom of an independent disorder.²⁹¹

A new disease, a new debate

Obegi describes suicidality as the deadliest psychiatric disturbance.²⁹² He argues that the diagnosis of suicidal behaviour disorder (SBD) in the DSM-5 is a starting point for discussing suicidal behaviour as an independent and diagnosable psychiatric condition.²⁹³ Consequently, present-day clinicians and theorists such as Obegi and Joiner see the next step as a suicide debate about the cognitive, affective, and behavioural criteria. Their end game is for clinicians to be able to use the diagnosis in a clinical setting.^{294 295}

It is important to note that this invitation to participate in the diagnostic debate is exclusively reserved for clinicians and to debate²⁹⁶ *only* the diagnosis. Obegi is clear: "Although many questions remain about the suicidal syndrome, existing objections to a suicidality-specific diagnosis have little merit and unnecessarily complicate the discussion. The debate should

²⁸⁹ Matthew K. Nock, et al. "Advancing Our Understanding of the Who, When, and Why of Suicide Risk." *JAMA Psychiatry* vol. 76,1 (2019): 11-12. doi:10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2018.3164.

²⁹⁰ Such cases are uncommon in Western countries (12.7%) but more prevalent in countries like China, where up to 50% of suicides are reported to have no evidence of psychiatric diagnoses. Dominic Sisti, et al. "Toward a Distinct Mental Disorder-Suicidal Behaviour." *JAMA Psychiatry* vol. 77,7 (2020): 661-662. doi:10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2020.0111.

²⁹¹ B. Ahrens, M. Linden, H. Zäske, and H. Berzewski, "Suicidal behaviour—symptom or disorder?" *Comprehensive Psychiatry* 41, no. 2 (2000): 116-121. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0010-440X\(00\)80017-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0010-440X(00)80017-6).

²⁹² John Cooper, "Disorders are different from diseases," *World Psychiatry: Official Journal of the World Psychiatric Association (WPA)* vol. 3,1 (2004): 24.

²⁹³ Joseph H. Obegi, "Is suicidality a mental disorder? Applying DSM-5 guidelines for new diagnoses," *Death Studies*, 45, no. 8, (2021): 638-650, DOI: [10.1080/07481187.2019.1671546](https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2019.1671546).

²⁹⁴ Joseph H. Obegi, "Rethinking suicidal behaviour disorder," *Crisis: The Journal of Crisis Intervention and Suicide Prevention*, 40(3), (2019). 209–219. <https://doi.org/10.1027/0227-5910/a000543>.

²⁹⁵ Joseph H. Obegi, "Is suicidality a mental disorder? Applying DSM-5 guidelines for new diagnoses," *Death Studies*, 45, no. 8, (2021): 638-650, DOI: [10.1080/07481187.2019.1671546](https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2019.1671546).

²⁹⁶ Kara B. Fehling, and Edward A. Selby, "Suicide in DSM-5: Current Evidence for the Proposed Suicide Behaviour Disorder and Other Possible Improvements," *Frontiers in Psychiatry* 11, (2020), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2020.499980>.

be based on the accepted framework for evaluating diagnostic candidates. A diagnosis of suicidality challenges long-standing beliefs, so a vigorous debate is expected."^{297 298} The invitation excludes non-clinicians who work outside evidence-based, qualitative research. Why this clinician-exclusive invitation only?

Perhaps the answer lies in the fact that the clinician faces the consequences of suicidality and requires the "tools" to deal with the human tragedy and immense suffering accompanying these behaviours. The clinician²⁹⁹ is on the front line of suicidality and is confronted regularly with these deaths. To the clinician, suicidality is real and personal.³⁰⁰

Still, Shneidman argues that "suicide is a multifaceted event, and that biological, cultural, sociological, interpersonal, intrapsychic, logical, conscious and unconscious, and philosophical elements are present, in various degrees, in each suicidal event."³⁰¹ For this reason, critical suicidology today questions a narrow definition of suicidal behaviour as a mental illness and a product of singular pathology only. They point to larger societal and socio-political systems and argue that social pathologies affect suicidal behaviour. The

²⁹⁷ APA President-elect Jeffrey Lieberman, MD, and National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) Director Thomas Insel, MD, acknowledge the International Classification of Diseases and the DSM 5 as the two publications that set the standard for how mental disorders are diagnosed and treated. Jeffrey Lieberman and Thomas Insel, "Lieberman, Insel Issue Joint Statement About DSM-5 and RDoC," Transcript of speech delivered Tuesday, May 14, 2013, <https://alert.psychnews.org/2013/05/lieberman-insel-issue-joint-statement.html>.

²⁹⁸ He says, "Looking forward, laying the groundwork for a future diagnostic system that more directly reflects modern brain science will require openness to rethinking traditional categories. It is increasingly evident that mental illness will be best understood as disorders of brain structure and function that implicate specific domains of cognition, emotion, and behaviour" as the predetermined focus of the RDoC²⁹⁸ initiative. American Psychiatric Association Psychiatric News Alert " Jeffrey Lieberman and Thomas Insel, "Lieberman, Insel Issue Joint Statement About DSM-5 and RDoC," Transcript of speech delivered Tuesday, May 14, 2013, <https://alert.psychnews.org/2013/05/lieberman-insel-issue-joint-statement.html>.

²⁹⁹ Finally, concerns about including suicidal behaviour in DSM-5 may increase liability for psychiatrists have been raised. However, at least in the US, patient suicide has been a leading factor in lawsuits against psychiatrists for decades. Instead of increasing liability, embracing suicidal behavior as a distinct disorder may enhance our ability to communicate during hand-offs and maintain focus on it as a significant clinical concern.

³⁰⁰ Joiner says in this regard, "As perhaps has become clear in the previous chapters, the topic has become mostly scientific and professional for me, with the agenda of prevention and relief of suffering through the culmination of the slow labours of scientific understanding. But it's still personal too. When I hear misinformation or ludicrous claims, like masturbation and nail-biting as relevant to suicide, or the description of a depressed person as "a cognitive-emotionally retarded adult child," it's personal. Or when I am reminded that tomorrow, and the day after that, and the day after that, around 2,500 families worldwide will go through what my family went through, it's personal. And when people scramble to prevent death by a lightning strike or death by bicycle accident on the Golden Gate Bridge, and yet are reticent about preventing death by suicide, it's personal." Joiner, *Why People Die by Suicide*, 7: 1/6.

³⁰¹ Shneidman, *Definition of Suicide*, Part Four Cognitive Aspects of Suicide 3/9.

movement, therefore, defends the point that the subject asks for broader consideration from diverse perspectives.³⁰²

Remarkable or unremarkable: a house divided

The exact nature of the *something* that brings about suicidality is far from settled, even though the assumption that suicide is abnormal is generally accepted. To question this assumption may seem unnecessary, like asking if the earth is round. Therefore, theorists generally assume that the suicidal person's experiences are not normal. For instance, Steinberg argues that suicide attempters exhibit "a cluster of traits that include greater mood dysregulation and subjective distress, more pronounced reactive aggressive traits, impaired problem solving and learning, and distortion of perceived social cues."³⁰³ Joseph Obegi argues that "a preoccupation with thoughts of suicide, preparations to die prematurely, unbearable mental pain and despair, a belief that death is necessary [and inevitable], and distress that is marked by insomnia, nightmares, or agitation" cannot be considered to be typical of daily living.³⁰⁴ As a consequence, he sees suicidal behaviour as deserving of a diagnosis. That being so, some theorists ask if suicidal behaviour warrants a diagnosis or if it may be an unremarkable human experience.^{305 306}

The argument centres around to what extent suicidal behaviour is a medical issue. The difference in opinion, I argue, stems from *perceptions* of suicidal behaviour as either ordinary (unremarkable) or abnormal (remarkable) and raises the question, how does one

³⁰² Jennifer White et al. *Critical Suicidology: Transforming Suicide Research and Prevention for the 21st Century*, (Vancouver, Toronto, Canada, UBC Press, 2016), 1: 11/25, Rakuten Kobo Inc. Inc.

³⁰³ Steinberg, Louisa J., and J. J. Mann. "Abnormal stress responsiveness and suicidal behaviour: A risk phenotype." *Biomarkers in Neuropsychiatry* 2, (2020): 100011. Accessed June 23, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bionps.2020.100011>.

³⁰⁴ Joseph H. Obegi, "Is suicidality a mental disorder? Applying DSM-5 guidelines for new diagnoses," *Death Studies*, 45, no. 8, (2021): 638-650, DOI: [10.1080/07481187.2019.1671546](https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2019.1671546).

³⁰⁵ Examples include the removal of the bereavement exclusion criterion for diagnosis of major depressive episode, which allows grieving persons to be diagnosed with major depression; the new disorders of premenstrual dysphoric disorder, disruptive mood dysregulation disorder, illness anxiety disorder, hoarding disorder, excoriation (skin picking) disorder, binge eating disorder, language/speech/social communication disorders and minor neurocognitive disorder; and the 'conditions for further study' of persistent complex bereavement disorder, attenuated psychosis syndrome, internet gaming disorder, caffeine use disorder, non-suicidal self-injury disorder, suicidal behaviour disorder and neurobehavioral disorder associated with prenatal alcohol disorder.

³⁰⁶ Wortzel, Nazem, Bahraini, Matarazzo and Silverman raised significant concerns regarding the overuse of such a diagnosis. The authors warn of the danger of rendering the diagnosis meaningless when the original intent is to draw attention to the behaviour. H. Wortzel, S. Nazem, N. H. Bahraini, B.B. Matarazzo and M.M. Silverman, "The potential perils of a suicide-specific diagnosis," *Journal of Psychiatric Practice*, 24, no. 5 (2018): 354–358, doi:<https://doi.org.ez.sun.ac.za/10.1097/PRA.0000000000000333> [Crossref], [PubMed], [Web of Science ®], [Google Scholar]

understand the boundaries between health and sickness? For example, Mental Health Europe raises concerns about DSM-5's increased medicalisation of common human reactions such as grief or shyness. The organisation also takes issue with the unnecessary labelling of people they fear might result in potentially harmful treatments, "especially considering the relative ease with which psychiatry prescribed potent psychotropic drugs."³⁰⁷

The German Society for Psychiatry and Psychotherapy, Psychosomatics and Neurology (DGPPN) voices similar concerns.³⁰⁸ Wolfgang Maier, president of the society and director of the University of Bonn's psychiatric clinic, says, "There is the danger of pathologising ordinary states of suffering as well as natural adaptation and ageing processes."³⁰⁹ For example, in DSM-5, sadness for over two weeks after death is diagnosed as depression if the person shows cheerlessness, lack of drive/energy, indifference, sleeping problems, and lack of appetite. DGPPN President Maier says, "Such an overdiagnosis constitutes a threat, which the APA authors put up with open eyes," says DGPPN President Maier. "Their premise is, we prefer false-positive diagnoses before we fail to see a real sick person."³¹⁰ The organisation warns that such a diagnosis could overburden health systems because a false-positive patient will be entitled to medical care through the system, which leaves fewer possibilities for treatment for those who need it.

Patrick Landman, psychiatrist, and associated researcher at the Université de Paris VII, also warns against increasing diagnostic and prescription rates across Europe. Landman called on the WHO to distance itself from DSM-5 and for practitioners worldwide to boycott the edition.³¹¹ Concern about the growing influence of DSM-5 in France led to the creation of 'Stop DSM'. The movement comprised prominent French psychiatrists, psychologists, and psychoanalysts who vehemently opposed the manual's diagnostic power and negative

³⁰⁷ "More harm than good, DSM 5 and exclusively biological psychiatry must be completely rethought," *Mental Health Europe*, May 17, 2013, <https://dxrevisionwatch.files.wordpress.com/2013/05/more-harm-than-good-dsm-5-and-exclusively-biological-psychiatry-must-be-completely-rethought-1.pdf>.

³⁰⁸ C. Weber, "Wenn Trauer zur Krankheit wird," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, April 16, 2013, <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/gesundheit/neue-diagnosekriterien-in-der-psychiatrie-wenn-trauer-zur-krankheit-wird-1.1649873>.

³⁰⁹ Allen. J Frances, "The International Reaction to DSM 5," *Psychology Today*, April 25, 2013 <https://www.psychologytoday.com/za/blog/saving-normal/201304/the-international-reaction-dsm-5>.

³¹⁰ Allen. J Frances, "The International Reaction to DSM 5," *Psychology Today*, April 25, 2013 <https://www.psychologytoday.com/za/blog/saving-normal/201304/the-international-reaction-dsm-5>.

³¹¹ Christopher Lane, "Why DSM-5 Concerns European Psychiatrists," *Psychology Today*, March 18, 2013, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/side-effects/201303/why-dsm-5-concerns-european-psychiatrists>.

social consequences. The group strongly condemned DSM-5 as "the worst of American psychiatry" and the American Psychiatric Association (APA).³¹²

Allen Frances³¹³ cautions against over-diagnosing, specifically regarding ADD and autism.³¹⁴ He is unconvinced by the scientific data supporting DSM-5. He says, "The recklessness of its decisions has irrevocably compromised the credibility of DSM-5; the weak scientific support; and the poor reliabilities in the failed DSM-5 Field Trials."³¹⁵ Frances doubts the DSM-5 will be accepted, particularly outside the United States. He says, "I doubt DSM-5 will remain the international standard for research journals; it will almost certainly not gain any clinical following outside the U.S., and it will also probably lose its role as the lingua franca of American psychiatry. People living in other countries can no more understand the lack of common sense in DSM-5 than they can understand why it remains legal in the U.S. to own an assault rifle."³¹⁶ More so, theorists, such as Blumenthal-Barby, oppose the new diagnosis³¹⁷ and broadening nosology.³¹⁸ Chodoff and Van Praag cautioned against classifying suicide as a medical problem,^{319 320} and "re-badging" it as a medical condition.³²¹ These views express significant doubt about the diagnosis, which they consider to be a further medicalising of suicidal behaviour. Chodoff's input is of particular

³¹² Christopher Lane, "Anti-DSM Sentiment Rises in France," *Psychology Today*, September 28, 2012, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/side-effects/201209/anti-dsm-sentiment-rises-in-france>.

³¹³ Allen Frances, M.D., was the chair of the DSM-IV Task Force and part of the leadership group for DSM-III and DSM-III-R. He is professor emeritus and former chair of the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioural Science at Duke University School of Medicine. A. Frances, *Saving Normal*, About the Author.

³¹⁴ "Autism Prevalence in China," *Health Canal*, February 13, 2017, <https://www.healthcanal.com/mental-health-behavior/37844-autism-prevalence-in-china.html>.

³¹⁵ Allen Frances, "The International Reaction to DSM 5," *Psychiatric Times*, April 24, 2013, <https://www.psychiatrictimes.com/view/international-reaction-dsm-5>.

³¹⁶ Allen Frances, "The International Reaction to DSM 5," *Psychiatric Times*, April 24, 2013, <https://www.psychiatrictimes.com/view/international-reaction-dsm-5>.

³¹⁷ J. S. Blumenthal-Barby, "Psychiatry's new manual (DSM-5): Ethical and conceptual dimensions," *Journal of Medical Ethics*, 40, no. 8 (2014): 531–536, doi:<https://doi-org.ez.sun.ac.za/10.1136/medethics-2013-101468>.

³¹⁸ *Nosology* n. the scientific study and classification of diseases and disorders, both mental and physical. *American Psychological Association Dictionary*, s.v. "Nosology," accessed October 5, 2022, <https://dictionary.apa.org/nosology>.

³¹⁹ Medicalisation takes place when medicine applies "diagnostic labels to unpleasant or undesirable feelings or behaviours," such as shyness as a social anxiety disorder, and worrying as an anxiety disorder. Paul Chodoff, "The medicalization of the human condition," *Psychiatric Services (Washington, D.C.)* 53, no.5 (2002): 627-8. doi:10.1176/appi.ps.53.5.627.

³²⁰ Obegi says, "Some worry that diagnosing suicidal behaviour is part of a growing trend in psychiatry to pathologize everyday life." Joseph H. Obegi, "Is suicidality a mental disorder? Applying DSM-5 guidelines for new diagnoses," *Death Studies*, 45, no. 8, (2021): 638-650, DOI: [10.1080/07481187.2019.1671546](https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2019.1671546).

³²¹ H M. van Praag, "Nosologomania: a disorder of psychiatry." *The World Journal of Biological Psychiatry: The Official Journal of the World Federation of Societies of Biological Psychiatry* 1, no.3 (2000): 151-8. doi:10.3109/15622970009150584.

interest, given that he implicates "inescapable aspects of the fate of being human"³²² as playing a role in suicidal behaviour, even though he sees these aspects as outside medicine.

Abnormal, but not just medical

Chodoff ³²³ argues that a "grey area" exists between being diagnosed with a disorder and the problems with living that people typically experience. Chodoff explains that people often have such problems and that these problems lie outside the scope of a disorder or illness.³²⁴ He reminds his profession that it is impossible "to infallibly separate clinical syndromes that qualify as disorders from various kinds of human discomfort of lesser intensity."³²⁵ For example, being 'high-strung' and 'nervous' does not mean one has a generalised anxiety disorder. Also, one can be suspicious and distrustful, but this does not imply a paranoid personality disorder diagnosis. You don't necessarily have a schizoid personality disorder if you like solitude and quiet, and distinguishing severe episodes of depressive emotions from unhappiness or "the blues" is tricky. He relates these experiences to "inescapable aspects of being human" and as a further reason why the body's self-defence fails, in addition to personal pathology or problems of living such as financial pressures or relationship difficulties, that are commonly cited as reasons for suicide. He reasons that psychiatrists need to be mindful that their work exceeds the confines of medicine. He says, "To medicalise the human condition is to apply a diagnostic label to various unpleasant or undesirable feelings or behaviours that are not distinctly abnormal but that fall within a grey area not readily distinguishable from the range of experiences that are often inescapable aspects of the fate of being human."³²⁶ He says, "ours is a profession that, while it has one foot firmly

³²² Paul Chodoff, "The medicalization of the human condition." *Psychiatric Services (Washington, D.C.)* 53, no.5 (2002): 627-8. doi:10.1176/appi.ps.53.5.627.

³²³ A psychiatrist in private practice and clinical professor of psychiatry at George Washington University, Washington, D.C.

³²⁴ Chodoff says, "Patients who seek psychotherapy often experience what can be called "problems of living," which are defined as conditions that produce psychopathological symptoms that are sufficient to negatively influence a person's well-being and relationships but not to justify a diagnosis of illness or disorder." Paul Chodoff, "The medicalization of the human condition." *Psychiatric services (Washington, D.C.)* 53, no.5 (2002): 627-8. doi:10.1176/appi.ps.53.5.627.

³²⁵ Paul Chodoff, "The medicalization of the human condition." *Psychiatric services (Washington, D.C.)* 53, no.5 (2002): 627-8. doi:10.1176/appi.ps.53.5.627.

³²⁶ Paul Chodoff, "The medicalization of the human condition." *Psychiatric Services (Washington, D.C.)* 53, no.5 (2002): 627-8. doi:10.1176/appi.ps.53.5.627.

planted in medicine, is also deeply involved in other aspects of the human condition. To this extent, it transcends the medical model."³²⁷

Chodoff's assessment raises some concerns. He argues that unpleasant or undesirable feelings or behaviours do not necessarily indicate a diagnosable psychiatric disorder. Having said that, these feelings and behaviours fall within the grey area between normal and abnormal. Consequently, suicidal behaviour is sometimes abnormal, i.e. due to a psychiatric disorder, and sometimes not, since it is due to problems with living. The assertion begs the question as to how suicidal behaviour can be caused by 'normal' aspects of the fate of being human, for example, when one experiences "the blues", and also by 'abnormal' disorders such as depression. Considering it would be difficult for clinicians working with suicidal patients to distinguish between a 'normal' patient, i.e. with the blues, and an 'abnormal' person with a disorder. Furthermore, that being the case that suicidal persons can be mentally ill, but not necessarily so, it would be almost impossible for those who lost a loved one to suicide to make sense of the death. They would have to wonder if their loved one was perhaps overcome by problems of living or rather by a mental illness they were unaware of.

Chodoff does not elaborate on these aspects of being human, as expected, because such aspects lie outside his conventional expertise. However, some theorists ask if suicidal behaviour is *only* a medical problem. In other words, they accept the thinking that suicidal behaviour is abnormal. Still, they think that the abnormality is likely more than only medical, especially given new studies pointing to problems with living as playing a role in suicidal behaviour. The movement of critical suicidology emphasises the complexity of suicidal behaviour and describes suicide as "a complex social problem"³²⁸ at the "intersection of moral, political, and medical domains."³²⁹ Therefore, as first and foremost a social problem, suicidal behaviour is embedded in more significant societal issues. As a result, fully grasping all that is suicidal behaviour requires understanding the dynamics of the societal context it

³²⁷ Paul Chodoff, "The medicalization of the human condition." *Psychiatric Services (Washington, D.C.)* 53, no.5 (2002): 627-8. doi:10.1176/appi.ps.53.5.627.

³²⁸ White, Marsh, Kral, Morris Ed. *Critical Suicidology: Transforming Suicide Research and Prevention for the 21st Century* 2016 1: Introduction 1/19.

³²⁹ White, Marsh, Kral, Morris Ed. *Critical Suicidology: Transforming Suicide Research and Prevention for the 21st Century* 2016 3: 8/26.

interacts with, to the point where it becomes unfathomable and somewhat mysterious.³³⁰ Marsh says, "Suicide as a discursively constituted phenomenon will always resist complete description if, for no other reason than as a cultural product, it lacks any unchanging essence that could act as a stabilising centre by which to secure such a description."³³¹

For this reason, the movement of critical suicidology calls into question the apparent monopoly of quantitative research and invites "fresh thinking and justifies the consideration of alternative approaches" to study suicidal behaviour with multiple frameworks, methodologies, epistemologies, and perspectives."³³² Jaworski and Scott say, "Suicide arcs across human experience, along other axes of understanding and interpretation, which means it is necessary to explore it in other ways."³³³ Even though critical suicidology emphasises the importance of diverse ways to study suicidal behaviour, they accept the notion of suicidal behaviour as a failing or abnormality, but societal. Interpreted in this way, I argue that the assumption that the self-preservation instinct fails, for the most part, today enjoys the status of an undeniable truth. Marsh says, "for what are in essence assumptions, are too often unreflectively taken to be undeniable truths, and the effects of the continual production and reproduction of these truths have remained largely unexamined."³³⁴

Conclusion

In this chapter, I describe suicidal behaviour as an important subject of empirical study and examine how research changes how theorists perceive suicidal behaviour. At first, in the 1800s, psychiatrists Pinel and Esquirol thought suicide to be a mood disorder, typical depression. This theory of suicide remains the most popular in modern-day society despite findings to the contrary. The view that suicide stems from overwhelming and irrational emotion is refuted by the knowledge that suicidal behaviour consists of powerful cognitions,

³³⁰ Jennifer White et al. *Critical Suicidology: Transforming Suicide Research and Prevention for the 21st Century*, (Vancouver, Toronto, Canada, UBC Press, 2016), 1-25/25, Rakuten Kobo Inc.

³³¹ Ian Marsh, *Suicide, Foucault, history, and truth*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

³³² Jennifer White et al. *Critical Suicidology: Transforming Suicide Research and Prevention for the 21st Century* 2016 Introduction 3/17.

³³³ Jennifer White et al. *Critical Suicidology: Transforming Suicide Research and Prevention for the 21st Century* 2016 11: 3/33.

³³⁴ Jennifer White et al. *Critical Suicidology: Transforming Suicide Research and Prevention for the 21st Century* 2016 1.: 3/25.

behaviours, and equally strong emotions. Not only has the exclusive emotive understanding of suicide proved unsubstantiated, but studies refute an exclusive link with mental illness and show that only about half of the deceased had a psychiatric diagnosis, not 90%, as indicated previously.³³⁵ Research further implies that relationships, finances, jobs and other problems with living account for many of these deaths. Therefore, theorists realised that the mentally ill and the healthy seemingly succumb to suicide. Many studies show that suicidal behaviour occurs across various personality and psychiatric disorders and behaviours such as addiction, domestic violence, bullying, and childhood abuse.

The implication of these findings, for theorists such as Joiner, Nock and Obegi, is that clarifications for suicidal behaviour are insufficient. The definition falls short. Suicidal behaviour shows itself not to be symptomatic only but a fully-fledged disease. Therefore, the remaining work is to accept it as a stand-alone and independent disease and set the parameters accordingly. Still, some theorists resist this argument. A contingent of psychiatrists oppose medicalising what they consider aspects of living and being human and the diagnosis of suicidal behaviour disorder in DSM-5. They call on the WHO to oppose such traverse. Theorists such as Chodoff go so far as to claim that it is not up to clinicians only to solve the problem of suicide, and he implicates aspects of suicidal behaviour that likely lie outside the clinician's reach.

At this impasse, one is reminded of how grave the matter of suicide is. People's lives are lost due to it. Joiner writes about the loss of his father to suicide, in addition to his scientific and professional interest as a clinician and a scientist.³³⁶ Obegi reminds the reader that suicide is the deadliest psychiatric disturbance. As recently as 2016, Nock lamented the lack of progress in reducing the rate of suicide over the past 100 years.³³⁷ That being so, I also made mention of the success of public health initiatives, for instance, in countries such as

³³⁵ For example, studies showed that in the United States, about 10% of people who die by suicide have no identifiable mental disorder. In China, the estimate was about 37%. Phillips MR, Yang G, Zhang Y, Wang L, Ji H, Zhou M. Risk factors for suicide in China: a national case-control psychological autopsy study. *Lancet*. 2002 Nov 30;360(9347):1728-36. doi: 10.1016/S0140-6736(02)11681-3. PMID: 12480425. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/12480425/>

³³⁶ Thomas Joiner, *Why People Die by Suicide*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 2005), 7: 1/6, Rakuten Kobo Inc.

³³⁷ Nock says, "If you look at other causes of death, like heart disease or HIV, as we've invested in those problems. Death rates have dropped enormously. But for suicide, the rate 100 years ago is virtually identical to the rate today." Matthew Nock "What do we know about suicide? Not nearly enough". Peter Reuell The Harvard Gazette. November 17, 2016

Sri Lanka, by way of progressive efforts to reduce pesticide poisoning. China, Korea, Australia, and Brazil decreased suicide rates by limiting access to firearms and charcoal.³³⁸

I conclude that the opposing arguments for and against the diagnosis of suicidal behaviour disorder question fundamental assumptions of what regular behaviour is and is not. I contend that this argument challenges an association of suicide with abnormality. For this reason, I consider it opportune to reconsider this narrow association with abnormality. In doing so, I did not intend to provide an exhaustive list of suicides chronologically or by the reason for the deaths. Instead, I describe the similarity between these theories of suicide, and I show that, despite the theoretical differences about precisely *what* causes suicide/suicidal behaviour, theorists generally agree that an abnormality or failure ends in suicide. They do not doubt that self-preservation fails or suspect that there might be more to suicidal behaviour than meets the eye.

In the next chapter, I argue that there is always an opportune time to apply such modest thinking and to reflect on the subject in philosophy precisely because people die from it. At the heart of this discord lies a fundamental disagreement about normalcy, which raises the question, what is a human being? In doing so, I thus argue that the starting point of such a reflection should be the fundamental assumptions on which theories of suicide are based and not only the ideas themselves.

³³⁸ Goswami, Tanmoy. "What does a 'suicidologist' do?" *The Correspondent*, September 14, 2020, <https://thecorrespondent.com/695/what-does-a-suicidologist-do>.

4. Defining abnormal: human nature and suicide

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I argued that theorists generally perceive suicidal behaviour as a tragic but preventable death due to a mental illness. For this reason, they aim to anticipate risks, such as previous suicide attempts, stigma about suicide, or losing a relative to suicide.³³⁹

Stigma is of grave concern to theorists because of its association with social isolation, low self-esteem, and hopelessness. Theorists often associate the stigma of suicide with mental illness. As such, their solution is to lift the veil of silence and do away with outdated notions of mental illness, instead showing it as a deadly disease. Rabe writes,

By keeping quiet, we perpetuate the stigma and the silence around mental diseases, and, as we know too well, they too can have fatal consequences. Depression is a biological disease caused by a chemical imbalance in the brain, and indeed, it can lead to a fatal malfunctioning of our most important organ. By acknowledging mental health issues and speaking openly – and normally – about them, you, as a young generation and community of students, can become a new generation to understand that illnesses above the neck should not be treated differently to those below the neck, and that they should also be diagnosed and treated by a specialist, as with other serious diseases.³⁴⁰

But is the close association with mental illness the only reason for the stigma? Or are there other reasons for this prejudice towards suicide? Descriptions of suicide in mythology show that suicide is a phenomenon as old as humanity and a matter of discourse since ancient civilisations. Therefore, I contend that the stigma about suicide precedes modern society and the association with mental illness. The chapter argues that earlier traits ascribed to

³³⁹ Oexle, N., Rüsche, N. Stigma – Risikofaktor und Konsequenz suizidalen Verhaltens. *Nervenarzt* 89, 779–783 (2018), <https://doi-org.ez.sun.ac.za/10.1007/s00115-017-0450-8>.

³⁴⁰ Lizette Rabe, "Open letter to UCT students on the death of Prof Mayosi," *News24*, July 30 2018, <https://www.news24.com/news24/Columnists/GuestColumn/open-letter-to-uct-students-on-the-death-of-prof-mayosi-20180730>.

suicide are compelling and remain integral to how people perceive suicidal behaviour today. For example, as I will show later in the chapter, Aristotle considers the suicide decedent a coward.³⁴¹ Modern authors, such as Rabe, defend against such a view of suicide, which shows that the belief is still part of the stigma about suicide in modern-day society.³⁴² The stigma of mental illness certainly contributes to the stigma of suicide. Still, I will present arguments that earlier perceptions of suicide in law, theology and philosophy predate the stigma about mental illness today. For this reason, I argue it is necessary to examine these earlier perceptions before re-evaluating suicide in philosophy.

More importantly, in this chapter, I show that *how* theorists see suicide depends mainly on how they sum up "human nature". Therefore, I will first ask what drives a person's behaviour. Plato and Aristotle say that all sentient beings have a *self-preserving* instinct. They say that humans also have intellect or reason to guide their instincts. In the previous chapter, I show that this understanding of human nature is foundational to all suicide theories, past or present. I argue that because scholars agree with Plato and Aristotle's understanding of human nature, the philosopher's views of suicide as abnormal and a failure of self-preservation resonated with many scholars throughout history. For example, Plato and Aristotle described suicide as an offence against the gods and the state. Medieval theology and law interpreted these offences as a sin against God, the Giver of Life, and as the criminal offence of murder.³⁴³ ³⁴⁴ These beliefs were so powerful that they remained the authority on the subject of suicide from the time of Augustine up to the nineteenth century. Despite changing religious practices and legislation, I argue that these beliefs are still entrenched in modern-day society. For example, a person who dies by suicide is described as having "committed" suicide, although in most parts of the world, suicide is not a crime by law. Also, assisting someone who chose to die by suicide is still considered first-degree murder in common law in many countries worldwide, for example, South Africa.

³⁴¹ Aristotle said, "But to die to escape from poverty or love or anything painful is not the mark of a brave man, but rather of a coward; for it is softness to fly from what is troublesome." Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle*, (Radford, VA, Wilder Publishers, 2007), III 7: 23/36, Rakuten Kobo.

³⁴² "Depression is an illness, not a weakness." Lizette Rabe, "Open letter to UCT students on the death of Prof Mayosi," News24, 30 July 2018, <https://www.news24.com/news>.

³⁴³ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 64: 157/185.

³⁴⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 64:178/210.

More so, I argue that Plato and Aristotle's belief that *internal inadequacies* in a particular person cause self-preservation to fail became more believable and has since advanced in science and medicine. For example, Plato describes suicide as the result of *sloth*, [ακηδία • (akidia)] meaning listless, apathetic, indifferent and lethargic.³⁴⁵ By the 19th century, theorists associated acedia with depression and mental illness.³⁴⁶ As a result, suicide emerged as a critical subject in public health, medicine and the helping professions,³⁴⁷ providing prominent explanations for the abnormality at the heart of suicidal behaviour of which Plato and Aristotle were the founding fathers.

A most primitive instinct

Plato and Aristotle loath death by suicide because it is cowardly, a weakness and murder and reveals an obstinate and rebellious nature. Their assessment gave suicide an ill reputation it would never shake off, and the infamy of suicide intensified in medieval philosophy and theology and persisted in modern-day society. The view that suicide is abnormal is credited to their idea of instinctual self-preservation as central to human nature. Therefore, I will show how they promote this profound instinct as a benchmark for expected behaviour. But what is this significant component of a human being?

Theorists today describe self-preservation as a tendency to behave in such a way as to avoid injury and death and maximise one's chances of survival. A determination to live at all costs often persists despite severe illness, disabling disorder, or extreme conditions.³⁴⁸ In *Night*, Elie Wiesel narrates his survival as a Jewish prisoner in Auschwitz-Birkenau and Buchenwald. When SS officers assaulted his father, he stayed silent and, out of fear, pretended that he did not know him. He says, "I shall never forgive myself. Nor shall I ever forgive the world for having pushed me against the wall, for having turned me into a stranger,

³⁴⁵ Definity, "Listlessness", 2022, <https://www.definify.com/word/Listlessness>.

³⁴⁶ By the late 19th century psychiatrists defined acedia as a mental condition of sadness, mental confusion and apathy, bitterness of spirit, loss of liveliness, and utter despair. Stanford Lyman, *The Seven Deadly Sins: Society and Evil*, (Oxford, General Hall, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.1989), 2. On the meaning of sloth: 2/73.

³⁴⁷ Thomas Joiner describes this all-important task as "the agenda of prevention and relief of suffering through the culmination of the slow labours of scientific understanding." Joiner, *Why People Die by Suicide*, 7: 1/6

³⁴⁸ American Psychological Association Dictionary, "Will To Survive" Accessed October 5, 2022, <https://dictionary.apa.org/will-to-survive>.

for having awakened in me the basest, most primitive instincts."³⁴⁹ What is this "most primitive instinct" Wiesel refers to? Where does it come from?

Many present-day theorists refer to people's self-preserving nature. For example, psychologist Matthew Nock³⁵⁰ says, "We select the healthiest mating partners we can find, make enormous sacrifices for our children, and make decisions every day to keep ourselves alive and well."³⁵¹ He describes suicidal behaviour as "seemingly at odds with a desire for health and longevity."³⁵² Still, this understanding of human nature precedes modern-day authors such as Nock. I find that Plato and Aristotle first described people in this way. It turns out that their description of what a person is like was compelling and, stood the test of time and is still popular with scholars today. Moreover, their assessment of human nature has since become a standard for how theorists expect people to act and how not to behave.

To live and preserve

I suspect that Aristotle would likely approve of Elie Wiesel's actions to save himself because he argues that people instinctually resist their demise from a love of self. Aristotle does not refer to a narcissistic personality who typically puts himself first at the expense of others. He says, "People criticise those who love themselves most and call them self-lovers, using this as an epithet of disgrace, and a bad man seems to do everything for his own sake, and the more so, the more wicked he is."³⁵³ The 'bad' people Aristotle describes here "assign to themselves the greater share of wealth, honours, and bodily pleasures;" and, notably, "gratify their appetites and in general their feelings and the irrational element of the soul."³⁵⁴

On the contrary, Aristotle sees the love of self as how one would love one's best friend. He says, "He is his own best friend, and, therefore, ought to love himself best."³⁵⁵ He reasons

³⁴⁹ Elie Wiesel, *Night* (New York, USA, Penguin Classics, 2006): Preface 6/10 Rakuten Kobo Inc.

³⁵⁰ Matthew K. Nock is the Edgar Pierce Professor of Psychology at Harvard College and Chair of Psychology.

³⁵¹ Matthew K. Nock, "Self-Injury," *Annu. Rev. Clin. Psychol.* 6 (2010):339–63, doi:

10.1146/annurev.clinpsy.121208.131258, https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/files/nocklab/files/nock_2010_self-injury_arcp_0.pdf.

³⁵² Matthew K. Nock, "Self-Injury," *Annu. Rev. Clin. Psychol.* 6 (2010):339–63, doi:

10.1146/annurev.clinpsy.121208.131258, https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/files/nocklab/files/nock_2010_self-injury_arcp_0.pdf.

³⁵³ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle*, IX Chapter 4 Friendship is based on self-love 8: 15/29.

³⁵⁴ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle*, IX Chapter 4 Friendship is based on self-love 8: 15/29.

³⁵⁵ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle*, IX Chapter 4 Friendship is based on self-love 8: 17/29.

that a person's foremost relationship is with yourself, and this relationship forms the basis of all other relationships and friendships.³⁵⁶ For a person to act in his own best interest means that he assigns to himself that which ensures his survival. He says, "he wishes for himself what is good and what seems so and does it, and he wishes to live and be preserved."³⁵⁷

Notably, he describes such a person as 'good' because he acts *rationally and controls his emotions*. He makes good choices that benefit his well-being:

Besides, a man is said to have or not to have self-control according to his reason has or has not the control, on the assumption that this is the man himself, and the things men have done on a rational principle are thought most properly their own acts and voluntary acts. That this is the man himself, then, or is so more than anything else, is plain, and that the good man loves this part of him most.³⁵⁸

Aristotle describes to the reader how a human person protects him or herself with movement, sense perception, feeding and sustaining oneself. Still, Aristotle argues that this ability is not unique to humans but is shared with animals. For instance, sentient beings instinctually seek shelter from the elements. Aristotle says,

For all animals have an instinctive perception of the changes of temperature, and, just as men seek shelter in houses in winter, or as men of great possessions spend

³⁵⁶ Aristotle says, "Friendly relations with one's neighbours, and the marks by which friendships are defined, seem to have proceeded from a man's relations to himself." Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle*, IX Chapter 4 Friendship is based on self-love 8: 8/29.

³⁵⁷ Aristoteles says in this regard, "Moreover, such a man wishes to live with himself, for he does so with pleasure since the memories of his past acts are delightful, and his hopes for the future are good, and therefore pleasant. He has, so to speak, nothing to repent of." Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle*, IX Chapter 4 Friendship is based on self-love 8: 15/29.

³⁵⁸ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle*, IX Chapter 4 Friendship is based on self-love 8: 16-17/29.

their summer in cool places and their winter in sunny ones, so also all animals that can do so shift their habitat at various seasons."³⁵⁹ ³⁶⁰ ³⁶¹ ³⁶² ³⁶³

Plato, on the other hand, credits the gods for this ability. In his dialogue, *Protagoras*, Plato's lead character Protagoras, tells Socrates that the gods gave all sentient beings the ability to preserve themselves when they created the first humans and the first animals.³⁶⁴ Zeus tasked Epimetheus and Prometheus, and Epimetheus gave each animal the ability to protect itself from each other ³⁶⁵ and the elements. For example, some animals can fly or burrow in the ground to escape, and others are giant statues.³⁶⁶ Protagoras says,

And when he [Epimetheus] had provided against their destruction by one another, he also contrived a means of protecting them against the seasons of heaven; clothing them with close hair and thick skins sufficient to defend them against the winter cold

³⁵⁹ Aristotle, *Complete Works, The History of Animals* VIII 12: 34/76.

³⁶⁰ Aristotle, *Complete Works, On the Soul*, II 4: 19/5.

³⁶¹ The 'power of the soul' furthermore lies in the ability to take in nutrition and thereby to do self-maintenance "Since nothing except what is alive can be fed, what is fed is the besouled body and just because it has soul in it. Hence food is essentially related to what has soul in it. Food has a power "It is the agent in generation, i.e. not the generation of the individual fed but the reproduction of another like it; the substance of the individual fed is already in existence; the existence of no substance is a self-generation but only a self-maintenance. Hence the psychic power which we are now studying may be described as that which tends to maintain whatever has this power in it of continuing such as it was, and food helps it to do its work. That is why, if deprived of food, it must cease to be." Aristotle, *Complete Works, On the Soul* II 4: 95/54.

³⁶² Aristoteles says, "We must maintain, further, that the soul is also the cause of the living body as the original source of local movement. Sensation is held to be a qualitative alteration, and nothing except what has soul in it is capable of sensation. The same holds of the quantitative changes which constitute growth and decay; nothing grows or decays naturally except what feeds itself, and nothing feeds itself except what has a share of soul in it. "It follows that first of all we must treat of nutrition and reproduction, for the nutritive soul is found along with all the others and is the most primitive and widely distributed power of soul, being indeed that one in virtue of which all are said to have life. The acts in which it manifests itself are reproduction and the use of food-reproduction, I say, because for any living thing that has reached its normal development and which is unimpaired, and whose mode of generation is not spontaneous, the most natural act is the production of another like itself, an animal producing an animal, a plant, in order that, as far as its nature allows, it may partake in the eternal and divine. That is the goal towards which all things strive, that for the sake of which they do whatsoever their nature renders possible." The senses which operate through external media, viz. smelling, hearing, seeing, are found in all animals which possess the faculty of locomotion. To all that possess them, they are a means of preservation; their final cause being that such creatures may, guided by antecedent perception, both pursue their food and shun things that are bad or destructive." Aristotle, *Complete Works, On Sense and the Sensible* 2: 4/59.

³⁶³ Aristotle describes the involuntary blinking of one's eye as an example of this inborn instinct. He says, "It is a safeguard that all these animals blink, and the man most of all; this action (which is not performed from deliberate intention but from a natural instinct) serving to keep objects from falling into the eyes; and being more frequent in man than in the rest of these animals, because of the greater delicacy of his skin." Aristotle, *Complete Works, On the Parts of Animals* II 13: 53/69.

³⁶⁴ He says, "After a while, the desire of self-preservation gathered them into cities; but when they were gathered together, having no art of government, they evil intreated one another, and were again in process of dispersion and destruction." Plato, Tr. Jowett, *The Complete Works*, (Golden Deer Classics, June 7, 2018), *Part 1 Protagoras* 20/79, Rakuten Kobo.

³⁶⁵ Aware of the external world and the natures of other animals, such as potential predators, Holmes, Brooke. "Greco-Roman ethics and the naturalistic fantasy." *Isis; an international review devoted to the history of science and its cultural influences* vol. 105,3 (2014): 569-78. doi:10.1086/678172.

³⁶⁶ "Thus did he compensate them with the view of preventing any race from becoming extinct." Plato, *The Complete Works*, *Part 1 Protagoras* 16/71.

and able to resist the summer heat, so that they might have a natural bed of their own when they wanted to rest; also he furnished them with hoofs and hair and hard and callous skins under their feet.³⁶⁷

Still, whereas Epimetheus gave the animals ample skills to survive, he had nothing left to give to the first humans. Protagoras says that Prometheus found people at a distinct disadvantage because "man alone was naked and shoeless and had neither bed nor arms of defence."³⁶⁸ Prometheus urgently intervened, giving the first humans some of the gods' abilities. Foremost amongst these gifts were the faculty of reason, to enable people to fend for themselves. Protagoras says, "...the gifts spoken of in the old tradition were imparted to man by the gods, together with so much teaching and education as was indispensable; fire was given to them by Prometheus, the arts by Hephaestus and his fellow-worker, Athene, seeds and plants by others. From these is derived all that has helped to frame human life; since the care of the Gods, as I was saying, had now failed men, and they had to order their course of life for themselves and were their own masters."^{369 370} After that, people could survive, but they were also at the mercy of 'the world's troubles.'^{371 372}

Epicurean, Stoic and Roman philosophers share Plato and Aristotle's assessments of human nature.³⁷³ Cicero emphasises Aristotle's belief that self-awareness and self-love³⁷⁴

³⁶⁷ Plato, *The Complete Works, Part 1 Protagoras* 16/71.

³⁶⁸ Plato, *The Complete Works, Part 1 Protagoras* 25-26/71.

³⁶⁹ Plato, *The Complete Works, Part 3 Philebus* 59/137.

³⁷⁰ "They are the Gods who first ordered our lives, and instructed us in the arts for the supply of our daily needs, and taught us the acquisition and use of arms for the defence of the country." Plato, *The Complete Works*, Menexenus 6/18, Rakuten Kobo.

³⁷¹ Plato, *The Complete Works, Part 1 Protagoras* 25-26/104.

³⁷² Plato, *The Complete Works, Part 1 Statesman* 36/110.

³⁷³ Jacobs says the Aristotelian, Stoic and Epicurean philosophers first claim that living organisms naturally tend to preserve themselves and promote their well-being and influence later accounts of natural animal and social behaviour. Jacobs credits Aristotelian, Stoic and Epicurean philosophers' portrayal of the tendency of bodies' innate or instinctual tendency to preserve themselves for Hobbes' account of human social behaviour. He specifically sees Aristotle as the author of the notion of self-preservation. Justin B. Jacobs, "The Ancient Notion Of Self-Preservation In The Theories Of Hobbes And Spinoza," (PhD diss., King's College, University of Cambridge, 2010).

<https://www.repository.cam.ac.uk/bitstream/handle/1810/236974/PhD%20%28Post-Viva%20version%20with%20SJ%20and%20CB%20corrections%29.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

³⁷⁴ He says, "Yet what fact is more self-evident than that every man not merely loves himself but loves himself very much indeed?" Cicero, *The Complete Works of Cicero* (Hastings, East Sussex, Delphi Classics, 2014), V: 23-24/36, Rakuten Kobo.

³⁷⁵ ³⁷⁶ are natural and inborn,³⁷⁷ ³⁷⁸ ³⁷⁹ an "instinctive love of life both among men and animals."³⁸⁰ Hierocles, an influential Stoic philosopher of the 2nd century, says that one is born with an instinct to preserve oneself.³⁸¹ Cicero thinks that self-preservation reacts to the fear of death. He says, "For who is there, what percentage of mankind, whose 'Blood does not ebb with horror, and face turn pale with fear,' at the approach of death? That practically everybody has this feeling proves that nature shrinks from annihilation."³⁸² Therefore, the ability to preserve oneself from harm is not learned; all sentient beings are born with such an ability. Hierocles illustrates this point with the example of the spitting snake. He says, "Its venom is cast, not injected by a bite. This is odd, and one wonders how these snakes realise this about themselves. Surely not by observation or experience? No. They are simply aware of their own natures and act accordingly, the fruit of self-perception."³⁸³ Animals have nails, hoofs, horns, beaks³⁸⁴, speed to defend themselves, and, importantly, brains.³⁸⁵ In the same way, different scents assigned to other creatures led each to its

²⁷⁵ Cicero says, "Every living creature, from the moment of birth, loves itself and all its members; primarily this self-regard embraces the two main divisions of mind and body, and subsequently the parts of each of these." Cicero, *The Complete Works of Cicero*, II: 30/38.

³⁷⁶ Zeno says in his work, *On Ends*, "The dearest thing to every animal is its own constitution and its consciousness thereof; for it was not likely that nature should estrange the living thing from itself or that she should leave the creature she has made without either estrangement from or affection for its own constitution. We are forced then to conclude that nature in constituting the animal made it near and dear to itself; for so it comes to repel all that is injurious and give free access to all that is serviceable or akin to it." Diogenes Laërtius, *The Complete Works of Diogenes Laërtius*, Zeno 55/102.

³⁷⁷ Brad Inwood, "Hierocles: Theory and Argument in the Second Century AD" (1983). *The Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy Newsletter*, 115, 3, (1983), <https://orb.binghamton.edu/sagp/115>.

³⁷⁸ He says in his work, *On Ends*, "The dearest thing to every animal is its own constitution and its consciousness thereof; for it was not likely that nature should estrange the living thing from itself or that she should leave the creature she has made without either estrangement from or affection for its own constitution. We are forced then to conclude that nature in constituting the animal made it near and dear to itself; for so it comes to repel all that is injurious and give free access to all that is serviceable or akin to it." Diogenes Laërtius, *The Complete Works of Diogenes Laërtius*, Zeno 55/102.

³⁷⁹ Cicero says, "Nature has endowed every species of living creature with the instinct of self-preservation, of avoiding what seems likely to cause injury to life or limb, and of procuring and providing everything needful for life — food, shelter, and the like." Cicero, *The Complete Works of Cicero*, IV: 19/35.

³⁸⁰ Cicero, *The Complete Works of Cicero*, XI Cicero's Philosophy 9/29.

³⁸¹ "The telos, the goal of life which is rooted in the oikeiosis to oneself which exists from birth." Brad Inwood, "Hierocles: Theory and Argument in the Second Century AD," (1983). *The Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy Newsletter*, 115, (1983): 3, <https://orb.binghamton.edu/sagp/115>.

³⁸² Cicero, *The Complete Works of Cicero*, V: 23-24/36.

³⁸³ Brad Inwood, "Hierocles: Theory and Argument in the Second Century AD" (1983). *The Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy Newsletter*, 115, 3, (1983), <https://orb.binghamton.edu/sagp/115>.

³⁸⁴ Aristotle says, "Nails, hoofs, whether solid or cloven, horns, and the beaks of birds, all of which are intended to serve as means of defence. For the organs which are made out of these substances, and which are called by the same names as the substances themselves, the organ hoof, for instance, and the organ horn, are contrivances to ensure the preservation of the animals to which they severally belong." These body parts, together with teeth, key in the processing of food for the purpose of survival, serve as tools to defend the animal from danger "The teeth, which in some animals have but a single function, namely the mastication of the food, while in others they have an additional office, namely to serve as weapons." Aristotle, Tr. E.M. Edghill, *Complete Works*, (n.p.), *On the Parts of Animals* II 9: 44/69, Rakuten Kobo Inc.

³⁸⁵ Roman philosopher Lucretius says, "For, in the case of all things which you see breathing the breath of life, either craft or courage or else speed has from the beginning of its existence protected and preserved each particular race." Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, IV: 36/66.

appropriate food and constrained them to recoil from nauseous poison, and in this way, the races of beasts are preserved." All these capacities aim to protect living animals.^{386 387} Still, do the philosophers imply that a person's sense of self-preservation is identical to an animal's? If not, how is self-preservation different in humans?

Devine and impassable reason

French philosopher René Descartes's 1637 statement, "I think; therefore I am", shows the importance scholars historically ascribed to human beings' faculty of reason. Descartes presents his ability to think as proof of his existence because he himself does the doubting and thinking in the first place.³⁸⁸ By the 18th century, French psychiatrist Philippe Pinel elevated one's intellect to the very definition of what it means to be human. He refers to "this faculty, by which man is principally distinguished from the beasts."³⁸⁹ Therefore, the absence of intellect, for example, through conditions such as dementia and idiotism, robs one of one's 'humanness'.³⁹⁰ Pinel reiterates a belief that originated with Aristotle: reason consistently distinguishes humans from animals. Aristotle says, "But in animals which also have the intelligence, they serve for the attainment of a higher perfection. They bring in tidings of many distinctive qualities of things, from which the knowledge of truth, speculative and practical, is generated in the soul."³⁹¹

³⁸⁶ Those who cannot survive or serve a function are not preserved but are heading to destruction. "And many races of living things must then have died out and been unable to beget and continue their breed. But those to whom nature has granted none of these qualities ([craft, courage, speed]), so that they could neither live by their own means nor perform for us any useful service in return for which we should suffer their kind to feed and be safe under our protection, those, you are to know, would lie exposed as a prey and booty of others, hampered all in their own death-bringing shackles, until nature brought that kind to utter destruction." Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, V: 45/74.

³⁸⁷ "For the fact that there were many seeds of things in the earth what time it first shed forth living creatures, is yet no proof that there could have been produced beasts of different kinds mixed together, and limbs of different living things formed into a single frame, because the kinds of herbage and corn and joyous trees which even now spring in plenty out of the earth yet cannot be produced with the several sorts plaited into one, but each thing goes on after its own fashion, and all preserve their distinctive differences according to a fixed law of nature." Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, V: 47/74.

³⁸⁸ "And as I observed that in the words I think, therefore I am, there is nothing at all which gives me assurance of their truth beyond this, that I see very clearly that in order to think it is necessary to exist." René Descartes, *Discourse on the Method*, (n.p., 1637): 2/8, Rakuten Kobo Inc.

³⁸⁹ Philippe Pinel, *A Treatise on Insanity*, (Sheffield, London, 1806), Introduction xvi, Google Books, <https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=4snWNO1IETAC&pg=GBS.PR2&printsec=frontcover>.

³⁹⁰ He says of such a person, "The figure of the human species is now all that remains to him, and like the ruins of a once magnificent edifice, it only serves to remind us of its former dignity and grandeur and to awaken our gloomiest reflections – our tenderest regret for the departure of the real and respectable man." Philippe Pinel, *A Treatise on Insanity*, (Sheffield, London, 1806): Introduction xvi, Google Books, <https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=4snWNO1IETAC&pg=GBS.PR2&printsec=frontcover>.

³⁹¹ Aristotle, Tr. E.M. Edghill, *Complete Works*, (n.p.), On Sense and The Sensible 2: 4/60, Rakuten Kobo Inc.

It turns out that, despite Epimetheus's neglect to grant humans the appropriate survival skills, Prometheus's intervention awarded humans a distinct advantage: their reason.^{392 393} Aristotle credits the 'good' person for his rational and honourable acts. He links intelligence to a love of self, which brings about rational behaviour and control of one's emotions. Aristotle says, "In all the actions, therefore, that men are praised for, the good man is seen to assign to himself the greater share in what is noble. In this sense, then, as has been said, a man should be a lover of self."³⁹⁴ Plato calls the intellect a saviour. He says, "The soul, besides other things, contains mind, and the head, besides other things, contains sight and hearing; and the mind, mingling with the noblest of the senses, and becoming one with them, may be truly called the salvation of all."^{395 396 397}

Plato distinguishes the intellect from emotion:

When a man is always occupied with the cravings of desire and ambition and is eagerly striving to satisfy them, all his thoughts must be mortal, and, as far as it is possible altogether to become such, he must be mortal every whit, because he has cherished his mortal part. But he who has been earnest in the love of knowledge and of true wisdom, and has exercised his intellect more than any other part of him, must have thoughts immortal and divine, if he attains truth, and in so far as human nature is capable of sharing in immortality, he must altogether be immortal; and since he is ever cherishing the divine power, and has the divinity within him in perfect order, he will be perfectly happy.³⁹⁸

Therefore, the mind or intellect is immortal and universal and exceeds a singular individual. It is the part of us we share with the gods. Importantly, it cannot perish like a human being. Aristotle says,

³⁹² A psychical faculty unique to man or an order superior to man. F. Granger. "Aristotle's Theory of Reason." *Mind* 2, no. 7 (1893): 307–18. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2247887>.

³⁹³ Aristotle, *On the Soul* II 3:11/54.

³⁹⁴ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle*, IX Chapter 4 Friendship is based on self-love 8 - 18/29.

³⁹⁵ Plato, *The Complete Works, Timaeus* Book XII 26/37, Rakuten Kobo Inc.

³⁹⁶ "Socrates: And is the fire in the universe nourished and generated and ruled by the fire in us, or is the fire in you and me, and in other animals, dependent on the universal fire?" Plato, *The Complete Works, Philebus* 33/107.

³⁹⁷ "When a person starts on the discovery of the absolute by the light of reason only, and without any assistance of sense, and perseveres until by pure intelligence he arrives at the perception of the absolute good, he, at last, finds himself at the end of the intellectual world, as in the case of sight at the end of the visible." Plato, *The Complete Works, The Republic* Book VII 26/40.

³⁹⁸ Plato, *The Complete Works, Timaeus* 84/86.

Thinking, loving, and hating are affections not of mind, but of *that which has mind*, so far as it has it. That is why, when this vehicle decays (in other words, the person, *that which has mind*), memory and love cease; they were activities not of mind, but of the composite which has perished; mind is, no doubt, something more divine and impassable.³⁹⁹

Epicurean, Stoic and Roman philosophers thus embraced Plato and Aristotle's inference that living by one's reason guarantees life and preservation. Moreover, Cicero describes one's intellect as dominant in people's self-preservation and survival. He says,

Man's body is of a structure surpassing that of other animals, and that his mind is so constituted as not only to be equipped with senses but also to possess the dominant factor of intellect, which commands the obedience of the whole of man's nature, being endowed with the marvellous faculties of reason, of cognition, of knowledge and all the virtues.⁴⁰⁰

For this reason, Cicero places one's instincts under the control of this 'marvel,' one's intellect. "Having made it sufficiently clear that self-love is an instinct of nature, we must next examine what is the nature of man, for it is human nature that is the object of our investigation. Now it is manifest that man consists of body and mind, although the mind plays the more important part and the body the less."⁴⁰¹ Zeno also highlights that to act 'naturally' is different for people than for animals. Animals act instinctually, but people's reason guides their desires, emotions, and impulses. He says, "Human beings, in contrast, are endowed with natural reason, and when they in turn act naturally, they follow their reason, not their impulses or instincts."^{402 403 404 405}

³⁹⁹ Aristotle, *Complete Works, On the Soul* Book I 4: 19/27.

⁴⁰⁰ Cicero, *The Complete Works of Cicero*, V: 26/36.

⁴⁰¹ Cicero, *The Complete Works of Cicero*, V: 26/36.

⁴⁰² Diogenes Laërtius, *The Complete Works of Diogenes Laërtius* Life of Zeno 33/57.

⁴⁰³ Zeno says, "Reason is given to rational animals according to a more perfect principle, it follows, that to live correctly according to reason, is properly predicated of those who live according to nature. For nature is as it were the artist who produces the inclination." Diogenes Laërtius, *The Complete Works of Diogenes Laërtius*, Life of Zeno 33/57.

⁴⁰⁴ Diogenes Laërtius, discussing Zeno's treatise *On The Nature of Man* which regrettably did not survive, describes wo(man) first and foremost as rational beings. Diogenes Laërtius, *The Complete Works of Diogenes Laërtius* Zeno 57/101.

⁴⁰⁵ He says, "But when reason by way of a more perfect leadership has been bestowed on the beings we call rational, for them life according to reason rightly becomes the natural life. For reason supervenes to shape impulse scientifically. This is why Zeno was the first (in his treatise *On the Nature of Man*) to designate as the end "life in agreement with nature" (or living agreeably to nature), which is the same as a virtuous life, virtue being the goal towards which nature guides us. So too Cleanthes in his treatise *On Pleasure*, as also Posidonius, and Hecato in his work *On Ends*. Again, living virtuously is equivalent to living by the experience of the actual course of nature, as Cicero says," Then comes the

The immortality of the mind, as first described by Aristotle and Plato, lies in the supernatural nature of the intellect. The Stoics created many images or notions to capture the divinity of the intellect, such as *reason*, *ideas or notions* or figuratively as *seeds or sparks* imparted by God. Still, these different descriptions depict one commodity only: the part God shares with man. Horowitz says, "Man's reason is said to be a part of the reason governing the universe"⁴⁰⁶; the "notion"^{407 408} of goodness is common to all people; "seeds" implanted by God in man at birth blossom into true virtue and "sparks"^{409 410} kindle in man, enlightening him with wisdom,"⁴¹¹ the wisdom Plato alluded to as "the wisdom necessary to the support of life".⁴¹² Originating from Herakleitos, the Stoics also express a conception of God as pyr, fire, leaving igniculi, sparks of the divinity in man. Cicero sounds like Plato in the third book of his treatise, *On a Commonwealth*. He says, "Nature has treated man less like a mother than a step-mother, for she has cast him into mortal life with a body naked, fragile, and infirm, and with a mind agitated by troubles, depressed by fears, broken by labours, and exposed to passions. In this mind, however, there lies hidden, and, as it were, buried, a certain divine spark of genius and intellect." At birth, man has the faculty to reason, the ability to form common notions, the seeds of knowledge, and the spark of divinity. Combined as

question, What is this nature that is so precious to each of us? Clearly it is compounded of body and mind, each with many virtues of its own; but as the mind should rule the body, so reason, as the dominant faculty, should rule the mind. Virtue itself is only "the perfection of this reason", and, call it what you will, genius or intellect is something divine."

Cicero, *The Complete Works of Cicero*, XI Cicero's Philosophy 9/29.

⁴⁰⁶ Cleanthes, in *Hymn to Zeus* describes man as participating in a universal Word of Reason. He says, "The whole universe, spinning around the earth, goes wherever you lead it and is willingly guided by you. By its strokes all the works of nature came to be established, and with it, you guide the universal Word of Reason which moves through all creation, if they obey it [the universal Word of Reason] intelligently, they would have the good life." Cleanthes, tr. M. A. C. Ellery, "Hymn to Zeus," *Religious Forums*, (June 14, 2015), <https://www.religiousforums.com>.

⁴⁰⁷ "Epicurus rightly observed that both animals and human beings from the moment of birth not only reach out for food and avoid pain but also exhibit soon a pre-disposition to fall into patterns of behaviour agreeable to their respective kinds. In the case of human beings, he speaks of this predisposition as an idea faintly sketched on the mind at birth. Since it there exists in advance of experience of life and of conscious reflection it is styled by him an Anticipation or Prolepsis." Epicurus describes the link between man and God as a prolepsis, a preconception that exists in the mind of humans. It is not learned, it is given naturally to all humans, a kind of "knowing" all living organisms are born with, each to its kind. Cassius Amicus, *A Life Worthy of the Gods: The Life and Work of Epicurus*, (Smashwords Edition June 11, 2011), 8/14 ISBN 978-1-4581-2730-3, Rakuten Kobo Inc.

⁴⁰⁸ The ancient Stoics believe that the mind is born predisposed to certain ideas, but which are not yet consciously held. The stimulus of sense impressions and the development of reason then develops these ideas. Seneca explains that "At our birth nature made us teachable, and gave us reason, not perfect, but capable of being perfected." Seneca The Younger, *Complete Works* (Hastings, East Sussex, Delphi Classics, 2014), XLIX: 4/5, Rakuten Kobo Inc.

⁴⁰⁹ Seneca says, "Then she [wisdom] goes back to the beginnings of things, to the eternal Reason which was imparted to the whole, and to the force which inheres in all the seeds of things, giving them the power to fashion each thing according to its kind." Seneca The Younger *Complete Works* 2014 XC: 11/1, Rakuten Kobo Inc.

⁴¹⁰ Cicero, *The Complete Works of Cicero*, Book III: 1/25.

⁴¹¹ Maryanne Cline. Horowitz, "The Stoic Synthesis of the Idea of Natural Law in Man: Four Themes." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 35, no. 1 (1974): 3–16. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2708739>.

⁴¹² Plato, *The Complete Works*, Part 1 Protagoras 25-26104.

one, it is the special gift of God to man.⁴¹³ Seneca says, "Reason is the light of the soul, the best gift from God and nature".^{414 415 416} These ideas are claimed to be innate to all people.⁴¹⁷ By way of the substance of one's soul, people collectively participate in^{418 419 420} the pure and incorruptible universal reason. The Stoic precept, "to live according to nature," also means to live according to one's own (human) nature. For one's nature is merely a "part" of the universal nature, and one's own reason only a manifestation of the universal cosmic reason which, as an impersonal cosmic principle, is the same with the individual and the universe. Hence, cosmic reason is identified with God, God with nature, and nature with the individual.^{421 422 423} Therefore, God guarantees humanity's survival with a godlike and powerful reason guiding an equally powerful instinct. It turns out that this view of man's faculty of reason and the central role it plays in human survival prevailed and resonated with later scholars.

⁴¹³ Cicero says, "We observe in children those sparks of virtue I have mentioned, from which the philosopher's torch of reason must be kindled, that he may follow reason as his divine guide and so arrive at nature's goal." Cicero, *The Complete Works of Cicero*, Book V: 24/25.

⁴¹⁴ Cicero, *The Complete Works of Cicero*, On Old Age 20/26.

⁴¹⁵ Maryanne Cline Horowitz, "Natural Law as the Foundation for an Autonomous Ethic: Pierre Charron's De La Sagesse." *Studies in the Renaissance* 21 (1974): 209/227. Accessed June 17, 2020. doi:10.2307/2857155.

⁴¹⁶ "Lex aeterna means the eternal law; the moral law; the law of nature. Lex Aeterna is the law which God at the time of the creation of the nature of man infused into his heart, for his preservation and direction." *US Legal*, "Lex aeterna," accessed March 26, 2019, <https://definitions.uslegal.com/lex-aeterna>.

⁴¹⁷ He says, "But as to good and evil, and beautiful and ugly, and becoming and unbecoming, and happiness and misfortune, and proper and improper, and what we ought to do and what we ought not to do, who ever came into the world without having an innate idea of them?" Arrian Epictetus, *Enchiridion & The Discourses of Epictetus*, Tr. William Abbott Oldfather, (e-artnow, 2018), ISBN 978-80-268-9336-3, Book II: 30/91, Rakuten Kobo Inc.

⁴¹⁸ According to Chrysippus in the first book of his *De Finibus*, our individual natures are parts of the nature of the whole universe. Diogenes Laërtius, *The Complete Works of Diogenes Laërtius*, Zeno 49/86.

⁴¹⁹ Diogenes Laërtius, *The Complete Works of Diogenes Laërtius*, Zeno 49/86.

⁴²⁰ "Endowed with reason, by which s(he) comprehends the chain of consequences, perceives the causes of things, understands the relation of cause to effect and of effect to cause, draws analogies, and connects and associates the present and the future — easily surveys the course of her (his) whole life and makes the necessary preparations for its conduct." Cicero, *The Complete Works of Cicero*, I: 8/-936.

⁴²¹ Anton-Hermann Chroust, "The Philosophy of Law of St. Augustine." *The Philosophical Review* 53, no. 2 (1944): 195–202. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2182025>.

⁴²² Cicero says, "What is this nature that is so precious to each of us? Clearly it is compounded of body and mind, each with many virtues of its own; but as the mind should rule the body, so reason, as the dominant faculty, should rule the mind. Virtue itself is only "the perfection of this reason", and call it what you will, genius or intellect is something divine. Furthermore, there is in man a gradual progress of reason, growing with his growth until it has reached perfection. Even in the infant, there are "as it were sparks of virtue" — half-unconscious principles of love and gratitude; and these germs bear fruit, as the child develops into the man." Cicero, *The Complete Works of Cicero*, XI Cicero's Philosophy 10/29.

⁴²³ It is for this reason that Epictetus says that there is consensus amongst people about certain preconceptions. He says, "Preconceptions are common to all men, and one preconception does not contradict another. For who among us does not assume that the good is profitable and something to be chosen and that in every circumstance, we ought to seek and pursue it? And who among us does not assume that righteousness is beautiful and becoming? "Arrian Epictetus, *Enchiridion & The Discourses of Epictetus*, Tr. William Abbott Oldfather, (e-artnow, 2018), Book XXII: 1/3, Rakuten Kobo Inc.

The persistence of self-preservation

The central role of self-preservation in human behaviour remained unquestioned in medieval theology and philosophy. For example, Aquinas reaffirms self-preservation as an inherent, inborn, and natural trait.⁴²⁴ He says, "Because everything naturally loves itself, the result being that everything naturally keeps itself in being and resists corruptions so far as it can."⁴²⁵ ⁴²⁶ Locke, in turn, describes the right to life as the first inalienable right and the obligation not to harm others or be harmed by another. He says, "Everyone, as he is bound to preserve himself, and not to quit his station wilfully, so by the like reason, when his own preservation comes not in competition, ought he, as much as he can, to preserve the rest of mankind, and may not, unless it is to do justice on an offender, take away, or impair the life, or what tends to the preservation of the life, the liberty, health, limb, or goods of another."

⁴²⁷

Just the same, Hobbes sees self-preservation as the motivation behind the social contract, even though he refutes Aristotle's idea that man is primarily a social being. That being so, he agrees that self-preservation is a universal and natural quality of humankind, despite seeing a person as mainly concerned with his own selfish interests and wants.⁴²⁸ Therefore, it is by following one's reason that people can enter into a mutual agreement as a means to gain safety and security and escape the persistent condition of war. This peaceful state under the social contract is the second law of nature, and it is dependent on the primordial law of nature that everything seeks to keep itself in being.⁴²⁹ The drive to self-preservation,

⁴²⁴ Aquinas described self-preservation as the most basic instinct. Aquinas said, "Love of self-preservation, for the sake of which one shuns perils of death, is much more connatural than any pleasures whatever of food and sex which are directed to the preservation of life. Hence it is more difficult to overcome the fear of the dangers of death than the desire for pleasure in matters of food and sex." Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 142: 82/169.

⁴²⁵ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 64: 135/159.

⁴²⁶ Aquinas assumed that the love of self-preservation was equal to fleeing from and escaping from pain. Aquinas said, "For the love of pleasure is less than the love of self-preservation, to which corresponds flight from pain. Wherefore we flee from pain more than we love pleasure." Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 29: 98/167.

⁴²⁷ John Locke, *The Complete Works of John Locke*, (Oakshot Press, 2016), Chapter II. Of The State of Nature 3/9, Rakuten Kobo Inc.

⁴²⁸ "A Law Of Nature, (Lex Naturalis,) is a Precept, or general Rule, found out by Reason, by which a man is forbidden to do, that, which is destructive of his life, or taketh away the means of preserving the same; and to omit, that, by which he thinketh it may be best preserved," Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, (Jovian Press, 2017) XIV: 1/10, Rakuten Kobo Inc.

⁴²⁹ Hobbes said, "The right of nature, ... is the Liberty each man hath, to use his own power, as he will himself, for the preservation of his own Nature; that is to say, of his own life, and consequently, of doing anything, which in his own Judgement, and Reason, thee shall conceive the aptest means thereunto." Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XIV: 1/9.

therefore, is the basis of political society.⁴³⁰ Sym claims that this first law of nature is so apparent, so irrefutable, that no law against it is necessary.⁴³¹ This belief also resonates with Spinoza⁴³² and Rousseau well into the 18th century. Spinoza writes, "His first law is to provide for his own preservation, his first cares are those which he owes to himself; and, as soon as he reaches years of discretion, he is the sole judge of the proper means of preserving himself, and consequently becomes his own master."⁴³³

In today's world, self-preservation is often a right by law. In a recent self-defence case, *North Carolina v. Ayers*, the North Carolina Court of Appeals Judge John M. Tyson describes self-preservation as "The most basic and fundamental natural right any individual possesses."⁴³⁴ It is, therefore, evident that the notion of self-preservation as the basis for behaviour remains unquestioned in theology, philosophy, law, and modern-day suicide theories.

Self-preservation in science

Theorists generally assume people's instinctual self-preservation natures. Thomas Joiner says, "People have strong tendencies toward self-preservation; evolution has seen to that. Through an array of means described later, some people develop the ability to beat back this pressing urge toward self-preservation."⁴³⁵ Therefore, if normality equals self-

⁴³⁰ "To understand political power right, and derive it from its original, we must consider, what state all men are naturally in, and that is, a state of perfect freedom to order their actions, and dispose of their possessions and persons, as they think fit, within the bounds of the law of nature, without asking leave, or depending upon the will of any other man. A state also of equality wherein all the power and jurisdiction is reciprocal, no one having more than another;the creatures of the same species and rank promiscuously born to all the same advantages of nature, and the use of the same faculties, should also be equal one amongst another without subordination or subjection." Locke, *The Complete Works of John Locke*, Chapter II. Of The State of Nature 1/9.

⁴³¹ "When a man, who by nature is most bound to preserve himself, reflects upon himself to destroy himself, the horribleness whereof is so monstrous that we read no Law made against it as if it were a thing not to be supposed possible. Moreover, this sin, of all others, is most against the Law of Nature. And also, it is against that self-love, which is the rule of our love to others and therefore what we may not lawfully, in this case, do to others, we can less lawfully do it to ourselves against this general law of love." John Sym, *Life's Preservative Against Self-Killing*, (Routledge, 1988), 7: 53-57, Google Books.

⁴³² He says, "As reason makes no demands contrary to nature, it demands, that every man should love himself, should seek that which is useful to him - I mean, that which is really useful to him, should desire everything which really brings man to greater perfection, and should, each for himself, endeavour as far as he can to preserve his own being." Baruch Spinoza, *Classic Philosophy: three books by Spinoza in a single file*, (B & R Samizdat Express, December 15, 2009), The *Ethics*, Part IV: Of Human Bondage, or the Strength of the Emotions, Prop. XVIII-XXII, 1883, Rakuten Kobo Inc.

⁴³³ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, (1762), I. The First Societies, <https://www.marxists.org>.

⁴³⁴ Jon Guze, "Self-preservation is the most basic and fundamental natural right any individual possesses," *John Locke Foundation*, September 27, 2018, <https://johnlocke.org>.

⁴³⁵ Joiner, *Why People Die by Suicide*, 2: 3/36.

protection, suicide is logically the result of a malfunction or a fault with human nature. Thus, they question the efficiency and workings of this drive. Such a failure of a person's self-preservation is primarily to blame for suicidal behaviour disorder,^{436 437 438} and, therefore, theorists task themselves with isolating and identifying the defect, fault or pathology that results in suicide.⁴³⁹

Joiner^{440 441} accepts self-preservation as one of nature's most potent forces and a product of evolution, inborn, pre-programmed, and genetically determined. He says, "The simple but compelling idea here is that the first step to death by suicide is to grapple with the results of aeons of evolution, grapple with one of nature's strongest forces—self-preservation."⁴⁴² For this reason, Joiner argues that precisely because of the strength of this force, suicidal behaviour only becomes possible after exposure to self-harm and violence.

English clergyman Robert Burton argues that the self-preservation instinct is 'flawed' because a person's instinct protects him or her when physically ill but fails to protect a person from suicide in case of a mental illness. He says,

In all other maladies, we seek help if a leg or an arm ache, through any distemperature or wound, or if we have an ordinary disease, above all things whatsoever, we desire help and health, a present recovery, if by any means possible it may be procured; we will take freely part with all our other fortunes, substance, endure any misery, drink bitter potions, swallow those distasteful pills, suffer our joints to be seared, to be cut

⁴³⁶ Joseph H. Obegi, "Rethinking suicidal behaviour disorder," *Crisis: The Journal of Crisis Intervention and Suicide Prevention*, 40(3), 209–219, (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1027/0227-5910/a000543>.

⁴³⁷ Joseph H. Obegi, "Is suicidality a mental disorder? Applying DSM-5 guidelines for new diagnoses," *Death Studies*, 45, no. 8, (2021): 638–650, DOI: [10.1080/07481187.2019.1671546](https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2019.1671546).

⁴³⁸ Fehling, Kara B., and Edward A. Selby. "Suicide in DSM-5: Current Evidence for the Proposed Suicide Behaviour Disorder and Other Possible Improvements." *Frontiers in Psychiatry* 11, (2020). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2020.499980>.

⁴³⁹ For example, psychoanalysis defines the term as, "The set of behaviours by means of which individuals attempt to preserve their existence and the psychical processes that establish these behaviours." Roger Perron, s.v. "Self-Preservation." *International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*, Ed. Alain de Mijolla, vol. 3. (Macmillan Reference USA, 2005, 1575–1576, accessed 22 Nov. 2021. Gale eBooks.

⁴⁴⁰ Thomas Joiner, academic psychologist and leading expert on suicide, is the Robert O. Lawton Professor of Psychology at Florida State University, where he operates his Laboratory for the Study of the Psychology and Neurobiology of Mood Disorders, Suicide, and Related Conditions.

⁴⁴¹ Thomas Joiner, "The interpersonal-psychological theory of suicidal behaviour: Current empirical status," *American Psychological Association, Psychological Science Agenda*, June 2009," Accessed October 5, 2022, <https://www.apa.org/science/about/psa/2009/06/sci-brief>.

⁴⁴² Joiner, *Why People Die by Suicide*, 2: 3/36.

off, anything for future health: so sweet, so dear, so precious above all other things in this world is life.⁴⁴³

In contrast, when a person faces mental agony, one desires the cessation of consciousness⁴⁴⁴ because the pain and suffering greatly exceed the instinct to preserve oneself.^{445 446 447} Burton says, "They can take no rest in the night, nor sleep, or if they do slumber, fearful dreams astonish them." In the daytime, they are scared still by some terrible object and torn in pieces with suspicion, fear, sorrow, discontent, cares, shame, and anguish, ..., they cannot be quiet an hour, a minute, but even against their wills, they are intent, and still thinking of it, they cannot forget it, it grinds their souls day and night, they are perpetually tormented, a burden to themselves, as Job was, they can neither eat, drink or sleep."⁴⁴⁸

Freud, Beck and Burton all agree that the instinct of self-preservation is no match for mental illnesses such as depression. Freud grapples with the same question: What is so lethal that it can overwhelm such a powerful instinct to survive? He says,

We were anxious above all to know how it becomes possible for the extraordinarily powerful life instinct to be overcome: whether this can only come about with the help of a disappointed libido or whether the ego can renounce its self-preservation for its egoistic motives.⁴⁴⁹

⁴⁴³ Robert Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy*, (Consumer Oriented eBooks Publisher, March 3, 2015), O Sad and Odious: 2/113, Rakuten Kobo Inc.

⁴⁴⁴ "Seldom this malady procures death, except (which is the greatest, most grievous calamity, and the misery of all miseries,) they make away themselves, which is a frequent thing." Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy*, Abstulit atra dies et 98/101: 2735.

⁴⁴⁵ Burton says, "The torture and extremity of his misery torment him, that he can take no pleasure in his life, but is in a manner enforced to offer violence unto himself, to be freed from his present insufferable pains. ... in a fury, but most in despair, sorrow, fear, and out of the anguish and vexation of their souls, offer violence to themselves: for their life is unhappy and miserable." Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy*, Abstulit atra dies et 99/101: 2738-9.

⁴⁴⁶ Burton distinguished melancholy from other "ordinary diseases and awards diseases of the mind the status as the most serious condition, and more so than any bodily conditions, and the most unbearable of all diseases" "... some make a question, whether the diseases of the body or mind be more grievous, but there is no comparison, no doubt to be made of it, the diseases of the mind are far more grievous." Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy*, 4: 5/130.

⁴⁴⁷ He says, "One hangs himself before his own door, another throws himself from the house-top, to avoid his master's anger,—a third, to escape expulsion, plunges a dagger into his heart,.... 'Tis a common calamity, a fatal end to this disease, they are condemned to a violent death." Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy*, Abstulit atra dies et 100/101: 2748.

⁴⁴⁸ Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy*, Abstulit atra dies et 99/101: 2738-9.

⁴⁴⁹ Sigmund Freud, *The Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, (Inktree, July 30, 2013), Contributions to a Discussion on Suicide, Introductory Remarks, 1/2 Rakuten Kobo Inc.

Like Burton, he speculates⁴⁵⁰ that depression may be the force that can take on the mighty life instinct.⁴⁵¹ When aggression turns inward, low self-regard and self-hate⁴⁵² could end in suicide.⁴⁵³ Aaron Beck says,

This disorder appeared to violate the time-honoured canons of human nature: the self-preservation instinct, the maternal instinct, the sexual instinct, and the pleasure principle. All of these normal human yearnings were dulled or reversed. Even vital biological functions like eating or sleeping were attenuated.⁴⁵⁴

Many more theorists consider this question: What can be so strong as to 'overpower' this force? They attempt to define and understand the 'defect' that can 'oppose' the self-preservation drive in people. English physician James Cowley Pritchard acknowledges self-preservation as "the strongest instinct of nature."⁴⁵⁵ ⁴⁵⁶ He thinks the "something" that goes wrong with human nature when suicide happens is that a person's feelings and impulses⁴⁵⁷ are somehow perverted. He writes, "Like the impulse to homicide, this propensity to suicide is simply a moral perversion, ... there is a perversion of the strongest instinct of nature, that

⁴⁵⁰ He says, "We can, I think, only take as our starting point the condition of melancholia, which is so familiar to us clinically, and a comparison between it and the effect of mourning. However, the affective processes in melancholia and the vicissitudes the libido undergo in that condition are unknown. Nor have we arrived at a psycho-analytic understanding of the chronic effect of mourning. Let us suspend our judgement till experience has solved this problem." Freud, *The Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, "Contributions to a Discussion on Suicide, Introductory Remarks, 1/2.

⁴⁵¹ <https://www.mollymerson.com/blog/problems-of-suicide-freud>.

⁴⁵² Freud, *The Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, "Contributions to a Discussion on Suicide, Introductory Remarks, 2/24.

⁴⁵³ Freud defines depression as a pathological condition he holds responsible for behaviours of self-harm and suicide. When a person internalises the object they lost, that particular object *becomes the same as themselves*. They overlay the object onto themselves, as though they are that object. Once the object and the person are the same, there is a risk of significant harm. When the person experiences the hurt, pain and punishment meant for this object, and the person and object are one, suicide becomes a way to rid oneself of the bad object. Freud suggests that the depressed person may believe that to kill off that object once and for all, they must kill themselves. The person becomes a target of hostility, anger, rage, and aggression. Suicide is, therefore the likely the end stage of a process where internal conflict is acted out, and aggression turns inward. Freud, *The Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, "An Outline of Psycho-Analysis 10/90 2013.

⁴⁵⁴ Beck says, "This disorder, appeared to violate the time-honoured canons of human nature: the self-preservation instinct, the maternal instinct, the sexual instinct, and the pleasure principle. All of these normal human yearnings were dulled or reversed. Even vital biological functions like eating or sleeping were attenuated." Aaron T. Beck, "The Evolution of the Cognitive Model of Depression and Its Neurobiological Correlates," *The American Journal of Psychiatry*, 165, no. 8, (August 2008): 969-977, <https://doi-org.ez.sun.ac.za/10.1176/appi.ajp.2008.08050721>.

⁴⁵⁵ James Cowles Pritchard, "A Treatise on Insanity and Other Disorders Affecting the Mind," (E. L. Carey & A. Hart, 1837), Section VII: 285/339, Google Books.

⁴⁵⁶ Pritchard says, "Nature has ordained no law more universal in its influence than the desire which all animated beings display, and which is indeed the governing principle in the greater part of their actions, to preserve their existence, and to secure themselves from the influence of circumstances which bring it into danger." James Cowles Pritchard, "A Treatise on Insanity and Other Disorders Affecting the Mind," (E. L. Carey & A. Hart, 1837), Section VII: 285/339

⁴⁵⁷ Pritchard says, "It is the characteristic of moral insanity to pervert the natural instincts or propensities, and suicide displays the most signal of these perversions." Pritchard, "A Treatise on Insanity and Other Disorders Affecting the Mind," Section VII: 285/339.

of self-preservation."⁴⁵⁸ Famed sociologist Emile Durkheim says suicide is impossible for an 'average' person because they are 'hardwired' to preserve themselves. He says, "The force of the instinct for self-preservation in the average person is fundamentally opposed to it; the average man does not kill himself."⁴⁵⁹ He associates suicide with a malfunction or abnormality.⁴⁶⁰

Joiner asks, "What about human nature can go so wrong that suicide happens?"⁴⁶¹ He argues that an effective way to understand human nature is to "use psychopathology as a lens to study human nature itself."⁴⁶² He writes,

One way to approach this would be to explore how people achieve thriving, flourishing, connection and fulfilment. That's a defensible way to try to understand human nature, but it may well be that an even better way to understand it is through malfunctions. Looking at catastrophic, disastrous malfunctions and piecing together the implications for human nature from that.⁴⁶³

For this reason, the focus shifts from self-preservation as central to normal behaviour to pathology in the following section. I ask, what then goes wrong when suicide happens?

Suicide as a catastrophic malfunction

The quest to find the holy grail of suicide is not new. Throughout history, many scholars and theorists have attempted to describe the "something" that goes wrong with human nature when suicide happens. Despite differing opinions about precisely what causes the pathology, theorists often perceive it unfavourably. In the present day, De Beradis writes,

⁴⁵⁸ He sees the 'impulse' to suicide as similar to the 'impulse' to kill but much worse. Pritchard, "A Treatise on Insanity and Other Disorders Affecting the Mind," Section VII: 285/339.

⁴⁵⁹ Émile Durkheim, *On Suicide* (Penguin UK, 28 Sept 2006), 225/530, Rakuten Kobo Inc.

⁴⁶⁰ He says, "Now, it does appear that suicides are generally under the influence of some abnormal emotion and that this either exhausts its energy in a single event or only develops it over the long term; and one might even find some semblance of justification for believing that a force of this kind is always necessary to overcome the instinct of self-preservation, which is so fundamental." Durkheim, *On Suicide*, 1: 41/530.

⁴⁶¹ Thomas Joiner, "The interpersonal-psychological theory of suicidal behaviour: Current empirical status," *American Psychological Association, Psychological Science Agenda*, June 2009, Accessed October 5, 2022, <https://www.apa.org/science/about/psa/2009/06/sci-brief>

⁴⁶² Rachel Allman, "Profile: Thomas Joiner And The Study of Suicide," *Psychology Tools*, January 5, 2021, <https://www.psychologytools.com/articles/profile-thomas-joiner-and-the-study-of-suicide/>.

⁴⁶³ Rachel Allman, "Profile: Thomas Joiner And The Study of Suicide," *Psychology Tools*, January 5, 2021, <https://www.psychologytools.com/articles/profile-thomas-joiner-and-the-study-of-suicide/>.

"The suicide is always a plague for the population at risk and one of the most disgraceful events for a human being."⁴⁶⁴ That contemporary scientists express this sentiment comes as no surprise and brings to light the long-standing infamy of suicide: that it is abnormal to [want to] end your own life. Moreover, there appears to be a significant stigma associated with this malfunction. Why is that? What leads to these descriptions of suicide as "a plague" and "disgraceful"?

In the next section, I make the case that suicide's poor reputation primarily emanates from the views Plato and Aristotle expressed on the subject. In this section, I make a *critical point* that these beliefs are not historical facts but only of interest. Though they may go unobserved or are masked by modern-day scientific terminology, these beliefs remain highly influential in modern-day society, to the point where they are obstacles to rethinking suicide. I will distinguish two categories of beliefs. I will briefly point out what is primarily considered transitory beliefs. Still, I will show that even if *the practices that underlie* these perceptions are mostly obsolete today, their association with criminality and evil left suicide with a lingering stigma that continues to influence perceptions of suicide. After that, I will examine beliefs *deeply entrenched* in modern-day society and which give way to the association of suicidal behaviour with abnormality and illness. I find that stigmatised beliefs about suicide seem to live on in the hearts and minds of many generations.

Transitory beliefs about suicide

It is my supposition that Plato and Aristotle essentially fashioned the notoriety of suicide. Their depictions of suicide as evil, a sin, and a crime had a transitory influence on medieval theology and philosophy.⁴⁶⁵ Their doctrine that condemns suicide as the worst murder and unforgivable sin led to a harsh and relentless prosecution of the suicide decedent from the 6th century well into the 19th century and showcased the philosophers' powerful influence on

⁴⁶⁴ Domenico De Berardis, Martinotti, Giovanni and Massimo Di Giannantonio, "Editorial: Understanding the Complex Phenomenon of Suicide: From Research to Clinical Practice." *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, (2018), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2018.00061>.

⁴⁶⁵ "He who obeys the law will never know the fatal consequences of disobedience, but he who despises the law shall be liable to a double penalty, the first coming from the Gods, and the second from the law." Plato, *The Complete Works*, The Laws Book VIII: 29/43.

how people thought about suicide for centuries. For instance, in *Phaedo*, Plato described people as the gods' property. People owed their lives to these guardians of humankind who supplied them with the means to life.^{466 467} For this reason, a person must stay the course until the gods summon one, even though remaining in the body ties one to the world's troubles.⁴⁶⁸ These beliefs strongly resonated with Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, who condemned suicide because of Divine command.^{469 470} Through Augustine's influence, opposition to suicide became official doctrine in Latin Christendom, the Middle Ages, and the early modern period.^{471 472}

Aristotle, in turn, sees suicide foremost as a wrongful and intentional act perpetrated against society and harming the state. In his work, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, he describes suicide in the first instances as a terrible offence against the state:

A voluntary agent is one who knows both the person he is affecting by his action and the instrument he is using; and he who, through anger voluntarily stabs himself does this contrary to the right rule of life, and this the law does not allow; therefore he is acting unjustly. But towards whom? Surely towards the state, not towards himself.

⁴⁶⁶ Plato, *The Complete Works*, *Phaedo* 8/98.

⁴⁶⁷ [Socrates] "And if one of your own possessions, an ox or an ass, for example, took the liberty of putting himself out of the way when you had given no intimation of your wish that he should die, would you not be angry with him, and would you not punish him if you could? Certainly, replied Cebes. Then, if we look at the matter thus, there may be reason in saying that a man should wait, and not take his own life until God summons him, as he is now summoning me." Plato, *The Complete Works*, *Phaedo* 8/98.

⁴⁶⁸ "For the body is a source of endless trouble to us by reason of the mere requirement of food; and is liable also to diseases which overtake and impede us in the search after true being: it fills us full of loves, and lusts, and fears, and fancies of all kinds, and endless foolery, and in fact, as men say, takes away from us the power of thinking at all. Whence come wars, and fighting, and factions? whence but from the body and the lusts of the body? wars are occasioned by the love of money, and money has to be acquired for the sake and in the service of the body; and by reason of all these impediments we have no time to give to philosophy; and, last and worst of all, even if we are at leisure and betake ourselves to some speculation, the body is always breaking in upon us, causing turmoil and confusion in our enquiries, and so amazing us that we are prevented from seeing the truth." Plato, *The Complete Works*, *Phaedo* 8/98.

⁴⁶⁹ "For your lifeblood, I will most certainly require an accounting; from every animal [that kills a person], I will require it. And from man, from every man's brother [that is, anyone who murders] I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds man's blood [unlawfully], by man (judicial government) shall his blood be shed, For in the image of God He made man." Genesis 9: 5-6 (AMP).

⁴⁷⁰ Aquinas says, " Thirdly because life is God's gift to man and is subject to His power, Who kills and makes to live. Hence whoever takes his life sins against God, even as he who kills another's slave, sins against that slave's master, and as he who usurps to himself judgement of a matter not entrusted to him. For it belongs to God alone to pronounce the sentence of death and life, according to Deut. 32:39, "I will kill, and I will make to live." Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 64: 178/210.

⁴⁷¹ Daniel Gordon, "From Act to Fact: The Transformation of Suicide in Western Thought," *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques* 42, no. 2 (2016): 32-51, accessed April 16, 2020, www.jstor.org/stable/44631071.

⁴⁷² For Augustine suicide was a sin and Christians have no authority for suicide in any circumstances whatsoever. He says, "It is not without significance that in no passage of the holy canonical books, there can be found either divine precept or permission to take away our own life, whether for the sake of entering on the enjoyment of immortality, or of shunning, or ridding ourselves of anything whatever. The commandment is: You shall not kill man; therefore neither another nor yourself, for he who kills himself still kills nothing else than man." Augustine *The City of God*, I (20) 1/3.

For he suffers voluntarily, but no one is voluntarily treated unjustly. This is also the reason why the state punishes; a certain loss of civil rights attaches to the man who destroys himself, on the ground that he is treating the state unjustly.⁴⁷³

Aquinas was well-versed in the philosophy of Aristotle and wrote commentaries on Aristotle's major works during the last seven years of his life.⁴⁷⁴ Many of Aristotle's ideas found favour with Aquinas, such as that suicide harms the state and is a crime.⁴⁷⁵ Aquinas says, "It is altogether unlawful to kill oneself," and cites the transgression against God and the state as the foundation of the 'marriage' between church and state on suicide. Aquinas says, "Secondly, because every part, as such, belongs to the whole. Now every man is part of the community, and so, as such, he belongs to the community. Hence by killing himself, he injures the community, as the Philosopher [Aristotle] declares".⁴⁷⁶

The statement that suicide harms the state goes hand in hand with Plato's finding that suicide is a premeditated crime and the worst kind of murder because a person who dies by suicide kills one's own best friend: yourself.⁴⁷⁷ In Book IX of *The Laws*, he describes suicide as a *lawsuit* and an *offence*.^{478 479} He says, "He who obeys the law will never know the fatal consequences of disobedience, but he who despises the law shall be liable to a double penalty, the first coming from the gods, and the second from the law."⁴⁸⁰ To kill oneself to avoid the sufferings of life and do so without good reason is inappropriate.⁴⁸¹ Plato considers this offence on par with killing one's father, mother, or sibling because he writes about it in the same paragraph. In other words, it is an offence similar to killing your parents or siblings.⁴⁸²

⁴⁷³ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics* of Aristotle, 11:44/47.

⁴⁷⁴ Elders, Leo. "The Aristotelian Commentaries of St. Thomas Aquinas." *The Review of Metaphysics* 63, no. 1 (2009): 29–53. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40387727>.

⁴⁷⁵ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 64:1157/185.

⁴⁷⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 64:178/210.

⁴⁷⁷ Plato, *The Complete Works, The Laws* Book VIII: 29/43.

⁴⁷⁸ Plato says, "Next to all the matters which have preceded in the natural order of legislation will come suits of law. Of suits those which relate to agriculture have been already described, but the more important have not been described. Having mentioned them severally under their usual names, we will proceed to say what punishments are to be inflicted for each offence, and who are to be the judges of them." Plato, *The Complete Works, The Laws* IX 1/38.

⁴⁷⁹ Plato considered suicide a premeditated and voluntary offence and therefore punishable by law. Plato says, "They who meet their death in this way shall be buried alone, and none shall be laid by their side; they shall be buried ingloriously in the borders of the twelve portions the land, in such places as are uncultivated and nameless, and no column or inscription shall mark the place of their interment." Plato, *The Complete Works, The Laws* IX 31/43.

⁴⁸⁰ Plato, *The Complete Works, The Laws* Book VIII: 29/43.

⁴⁸¹ Plato, *The Complete Works, Phaedo* 7/88.

⁴⁸² Plato, *The Complete Works, The Laws* IX 27/38.

Plato's view of suicide as the worst kind of murder later found expression *In Commentaries On The Laws of England*, in which William Blackstone described suicide as murder. His work was foundational to the university system of legal education in both England and the United States. Blackstone characterises suicide as "among the highest crimes" and reiterates Aristotle's sentiments that it is an act of a weakling and a coward. He criticises the Stoic philosophers who portrayed suicide as heroism when, in fact, it was cowardice due to an inability to endure the ups and downs of life.⁴⁸³ "Felonious homicide is an act of a very different nature from the former, being the killing of a human creature, of any age or sex, without justification or excuse. This may be done either by killing oneself, or another man."⁴⁸⁴ Blackstone condemns suicide as a multifaceted crime of murder that is also, as per Plato's notion, an offence against the gods. He says, "Man hath a power to destroy life, but by commission from God, one spiritual, in invading the prerogative of the Almighty, and rushing into his immediate presence uncalled for."⁴⁸⁵ Drawing inspiration from Aristotle, he also finds suicide an offence against the king. He describes the crime as not just against God, but says the violation is "temporal, against the king, who hath an interest in the preservation of all his subjects."⁴⁸⁶ There was no excuse for suicide. Blackstone believed that even if one has depression or mental illness, a person retains the capacity to know what is expected of you:

The law very rationally judges, that every melancholy or hypochondriac fit does not deprive a man of the capacity of discerning right from wrong, which is necessary, as was observed in a former chapter, to form a legal excuse. And therefore, if a real lunatic kills himself in a lucid interval, he is a *felo de se* as much as another man.⁴⁸⁷

Plato recommended that the suicide decedent be severely punished for his "crime". He says, "And what shall he suffer who slays him who of all men, as they say, is his own best friend? I mean the suicide, who deprives himself by violence of his appointed share of life, not because the law of the state requires him, nor yet under the compulsion of some painful

⁴⁸³ Sir William Blackstone, *Commentaries On The Laws of England Book IV*, (Jazzybee Verlag, Germany, December 2, 2016), XIV: Of Homicide 13/27, Rakuten Kobo Inc.

⁴⁸⁴ Blackstone, *Commentaries On The Laws of England Book IV*, XIV: Of Homicide 12/27.

⁴⁸⁵ Blackstone, *Commentaries On The Laws of England Book IV*, XIV: Of Homicide 13/27.

⁴⁸⁶ Blackstone, *Commentaries On The Laws of England Book IV*, XIV: Of Homicide 12/27.

⁴⁸⁷ Blackstone, *Commentaries On The Laws of England Book IV*, XIV: Of Homicide 12/27.

and inevitable misfortune which has come upon him, nor because he has had to suffer from irremediable and intolerable shame, but who from sloth or want of manliness imposes upon himself an unjust penalty."⁴⁸⁸ For this 'worst' kind of murder, an offence to God, society should disgrace and shun the suicide decedent in death. They should receive no burial rituals and remain nameless in death.⁴⁸⁹ The church would eventually put into practice what Plato earlier recommended for those who died by suicide.

The treatment of the body of the suicide decedent in the medieval world up to the 19th century showed the immense influence of Plato's and Aristotle's beliefs. Only an officer of the court was allowed to remove the deceased's body. The body had to be removed only through a window, a door, or a hole in the wall because popular belief and superstition considered the body 'not worthy,' leaving through the same door it entered. Once the body exited the house, it was dragged to its next destination, often by horse, a plight usually reserved for criminals guilty of arson, highway robbery, rape, and treason.⁴⁹⁰ In the event of a suicide, even after death, the executioner hangs the deceased if he is a man and burns the dead if female. In line with Plato's earlier recommendation, the church withheld burial rites or church burial ceremonies and banned the bodies from burial at churchyard graveyards. As a result, the community buried suicide decedents in open fields, near public roads, the municipal dumpsite, or in a pit used to dump criminals' bodies. From the 16th century onwards, bodies were often buried at a crossroads or junctions, usually with a stake through the heart, decapitated, or buried under stones, as was the custom to prevent dangerous souls from returning to haunt the living.⁴⁹¹

Medieval suicide laws treated the body on par with the property. In Germany, it was customary for the hangman who executed the body to help himself to the belongings of the deceased suicide. Like the body's desecration, it was also allowed to desecrate the property, such as removing a part of the house or the land's crops. In France, the Customs

⁴⁸⁸ Plato, *The Complete Works*, *The Laws*, IX, 29/38.

⁴⁸⁹ Plato says, "They who meet their death in this way shall be buried alone, and none shall be laid by their side; they shall be buried ingloriously in the borders of the twelve portions of the land, in such places as are uncultivated and nameless, and no column or inscription shall mark the place of their interment." Plato, *The Complete Works*, *The Laws* IX 29/38.

⁴⁹⁰ Alexander Murray, *Suicide in the Middle Ages: Volume 2: The Curse on Self-Murder*, (Oxford University Press; (March 3, 2011), 1: 1/95, Rakuten Kobo Inc.

⁴⁹¹ Murray, *Suicide in the Middle Ages: Volume 2: The Curse on Self-Murder*, 1: 1/95.

of Anjou and Maine allowed for the confiscation of property for three types of offences, i.e., rape, the killing of a pregnant woman, and homicide, which included suicide.⁴⁹² Homes were destroyed, looted, or burned, and vineyards were confiscated for use by the church, especially if the deceased died inside the home, as folk belief saw a suicide death as contaminating the house. The king could seize the property and the body, as both belonged to the king.⁴⁹³

Reform came about because untenable penal laws against suicide^{494 495} more and more ruled suicide a verdict of insanity. Was insanity increasingly considered the reason for suicide in a desperate bid to safeguard the family's inheritance? John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, certainly thought so. He declared that the laws on suicide, a felony criminal offence (*felo de se*), were ineffective in deterring suicide because the court avoids convictions by declaring the person insane. Wesley considers the trial of a suicide decedent a farce because, as the lesser of the two evils, more suicides at the time coincided with findings of mental disability. In 1823, parliamentarian Sir James Mackintosh pointed out that persons of means and high standing more often received verdicts of insanity, while the poor received rulings of *felo de se*. Consequently, parliament accepted the 'Burial of Suicide Act' of 1823, which ended England's legal requirement of burying suicides at a crossroads.

In modern-day society, suicide is no longer a criminal offence or prosecuted in most countries. That being so, attempted suicide, as well as "nonfatal suicidal behaviour," "failed suicide attempt," "nonfatal suicidal attempt," or "parasuicide," is regarded as a criminal offence in several countries such as Bangladesh, Ghana, India, Kuwait, Nigeria, Pakistan,

⁴⁹² Murray, *Suicide in the Middle Ages: Volume 2: The Curse on Self-Murder*, 2: 2/97.

⁴⁹³ Murray, *Suicide in the Middle Ages: Volume 2: The Curse on Self-Murder*, 2: 2/97.

⁴⁹⁴ De Bracton describes suicide as 'self-slaying', 'kills himself' and 'laying violent hands on himself' and said that "Just as a man may commit a felony by slaying another so may he do so by slaying himself the felony is said to be done to himself (*felo de se*). Henry De Bracton, *On the Laws and Customs of England*, (Harvard University Press, 1968) 2:423.

⁴⁹⁵ Forfeiture of the inheritance of a self-murderer was motivated by political reasons. Suicide or self-killing was made a crime in order to enrich the crown [king]. Per the feudal system, the "grave crimes" were known as felonies. The penalty for felonies was death after attainder. Attainder was the extinction of civil rights and capacities which occurred when judgment of death or outlawry was recorded against a person convicted of treason or felony. A felon was, therefore, legally prohibited from holding or inheriting land or transmitting a title to it. Sir John Vincent Barry, "Suicide and the Law," *Melbourne University Law Review*, June 1965 5: 2/16 <http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/MelbULawRw/1965/1.pdf>.

Rwanda and Singapore.^{496 497} Even though attempted suicide is no longer prosecuted in most countries, the stigma associated with suicide influences how many people think and talk about suicide. I make the case that, in many instances, the church and the state no longer implement laws, practices and institutions to punish the suicidal, the deceased, or the deceased's family. That being so, I argue that prejudice lives on in the hearts and minds of people, and it shows in public discourse and societal "wisdom." For example, "commit suicide" is still predominantly used instead of stigma-free terminology such as "die by suicide." This implies that people continue to think about suicide as a criminal and wrongful act. Also, I find it surprising that to assist a person suffering an undignified and excruciatingly painful end of life, to die by suicide is considered murder in canon law in most countries worldwide. I argue that it is illogical that a humane death is afforded a terminal non-human animal, a household pet, but a human person is not given the same empathy and consideration. That the humane practice of assisted death is legal in only about ten states in the US and only in a handful of countries around the world shows the powerful and detrimental effect of the association of suicide with murder.

Thinking that suicide is evil or demonic appears to be less prevalent today. Still, in the Catholic church, for example, suicide decedents were barred from receiving a church burial as recently as 1983, when the Code of Canon Law was revised.⁴⁹⁸ Congregates and society often ostracise those who mourn the loss of a loved one by suicide. Marita Swartz, mother of Hannes Swartz, who died by suicide in 2007, writes,

To lose a child to suicide means that you have to deal with even more issues, such as guilt, unforgiveness, "what if's" and rejection from people. You are hurting so much inside, and then all of a sudden someone's words or actions are like a knife pushed into your back and twisted in all directions. And you have to walk away and forgive

⁴⁹⁶ Mensah Adinkrah, "Anti-Suicide Laws in Nine African Countries: Criminalization, Prosecution and Penalization," *African Journal of Criminology and Justice Studies: AJCJS* 9, no.1, May 2016,

[https://www.umes.edu/uploadedFiles/ WEBSITES/AJCJS/Content/VOL9.%20ADINKRAH%20FINAL.pdf](https://www.umes.edu/uploadedFiles/WEBSITES/AJCJS/Content/VOL9.%20ADINKRAH%20FINAL.pdf)

⁴⁹⁷ Paul Marcus, "Suicide: Legal Aspects – Bibliography," *Law Library – American Law and Legal Information*, 2022.

<https://law.jrank.org/pages/2180/Suicide-Legal-Aspects.html>.

⁴⁹⁸ Ranana Leigh Dine, "You Shall Bury Him: Burial, Suicide and the Development of Catholic Law and Theology," *Medical Humanities* 46, no. 3 (2020): 299-310. doi:10.1136/medhum-2018-011622.

them, for they know not what they are doing. I avoid negative, critical, condemning people, and try hard to be positive, encouraging and caring.⁴⁹⁹

Examples such as these illustrate the persistent power of the stigma about suicide. In addition, though the strong association with criminality and divine condemnation lessened, so grew the conviction that suicide is a matter of health and medicine. In the following section, I will show that Plato and Aristotle first introduced specific intrapersonal *inadequacies* of suicidal people. I will next argue that these internal inadequacies later piqued medicine's interest, and in 1845, French psychiatrist Jean-Étienne Esquirol declared suicide a subject of clinical medicine.⁵⁰⁰ Nowadays, theorists understand these Platonic-Aristotelian intrapersonal deficiencies as internal pathology.⁵⁰¹

Personal inadequacies: from vice to illness

Most theorists are aware and well acquainted with Plato and Aristotle's association of suicide with a lack of courage and cowardice, which they likewise attribute to the act itself. That said, I find that the full scope of the intrapersonal "deficiencies" they attributed to a suicidal person is perhaps lesser known. I will show that linking suicide with internal deficiencies was significantly more potent than any associations with criminality and immorality, which diminished somewhat over time. In stark contrast, the association with intrapersonal faults would gain wider acceptance and influence. Moreover, I contend that the latter association stood the test of time and subsequently found its way into medicine's description of suicidal behaviour. I will now elaborate on these claims.

What medicine today considers symptoms of a mental illness appears similar to what Plato and Aristotle describe as unethical behaviour stemming from apathy and cowardice. Plato sees these moral failings as originating from the body but also from a lack of education. He says,

⁴⁹⁹ Swartz, Marita, "Hannes Swartz, 4/7/88 – 16/1/07, Survivors of Suicide. In Memoriam. Accessed May 19, 2018. <https://www.survivorsofsuicide.org.za/SOS%20WoM%20Hannes%20Swartz.pdf>.

⁵⁰⁰ "It does not belong to my subject to treat of suicide in its legal relations, nor, consequently, of its criminality. I must limit myself to showing it to be one of the most important subjects of clinical medicine." Etienne Esquirol, *Mental Maladies; a Treatise on Insanity*, (Lea and Blanchard, Philadelphia, 1845), 246/508, Google Books.

⁵⁰¹ Eve K Mościcki, "Epidemiology of completed and attempted suicide: toward a framework for prevention," *Clinical Neuroscience Research* 1, no, 5, (2001): 310-323, ISSN 1566-2772, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1566-2772\(01\)00032-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1566-2772(01)00032-9). <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1566277201000329>.

For no man is voluntarily bad; but the bad become bad by reason of an ill disposition of the body and bad education, things which are hateful to every man and happen to him against his will. And in the case of pain, too, in like manner, the soul suffers much evil from the body. For where the acid and briny phlegm and other bitter and bilious humours wander about in the body, and find no exit or escape, but are pent up within and mingle their own vapours with the motions of the soul, and are blended with them, they produce all sorts of diseases, more or fewer, and in every degree of intensity; and being carried to the three places of the soul, whichever they may severally assail, they create infinite varieties of ill-temper and melancholy, of rashness and cowardice, and also of forgetfulness and stupidity.⁵⁰²

For Aristotle, the suicidal person has no natural inner desire to live and lacks self-love because he/she is weak and cowardly. Such a person is constantly overcome with anxiety⁵⁰³ and wants to escape life.⁵⁰⁴ Aristotle firmly believes that people must endure life despite misfortune and life's burdens. Aristotle says, "Courage and cowardice: for upon the one of them virtue follows, and vice upon the other; and upon the one, it follows that it is desirable, while upon the other it follows that it is objectionable."⁵⁰⁵

Many scholars today agree with Aristotle. As discussed in Chapter Two, it would be best if you did not want to escape. It would be considered 'healthy.' Aristotle first makes this significant association of cowardice with disease and evil. This association of cowardice with evil and disease opposes an association of courage with health and goodness. He says, "The coward, then, is a despairing sort of person, for he fears everything. That the contrary of a good is an evil is shown by induction: the contrary of health is a disease, of courage, cowardice."⁵⁰⁶

⁵⁰² Plato, *The Complete Works, Timaeus* 80/86.

⁵⁰³ Aristoteles defines a coward as "the man who flies from and fears everything and does not stand his ground against anything becomes a coward.", Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle*, II 4/19.

⁵⁰⁴ Aristotle says, "But to die to escape from poverty or love or anything painful is not the mark of a brave man, but rather of a coward; for it is softness to fly from what is troublesome, and such a man endures death not because it is noble but to fly from evil." Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle*, III 8: 20/32.

⁵⁰⁵ Aristotle, *Complete Works, Topics* Book II 8: 17/24.

⁵⁰⁶ Aristotle, *Complete Works, Categories* 11: 36 & 37/43.

Centuries later, modern-day theorists would agree with the association of suicide with a disease, even if they disagree with Aristotle that suicide equals cowardice. Instead, they argue that the desire to escape life stems from illness. Edwin A. Shneidman, the father of contemporary suicidology, says you escape from *psychache*,⁵⁰⁷ that is, psychological pain, hurt, and anguish accompanied by shame, guilt, fear, anxiety, or loneliness.^{508 509} Beck says people escape hopelessness. Linehan⁵¹⁰ hypothesises that self-injury and suicide⁵¹¹ are ways to cope with pain and escape from *aversive* emotional states. For Baumeister,⁵¹² suicide releases pain or emotion and provides an escape from the self when the person sees no hope for a future without suffering.⁵¹³

Plato weighs in on the topic and uses the term sloth, a medieval translation of the Latin term *acedia* (Middle English, *accidie*), to describe suicide as he sees it. In ancient Greece, ἀκηδία (akidía) described behaviour such as listlessness, apathy, indifference and lethargy.⁵¹⁴ By the 19th century, the term was explained as melancholia: a mental condition of sadness, mental confusion and apathy, bitterness of spirit, loss of liveliness, and utter despair.⁵¹⁵ Nowadays, theorists generally associate suicidal behaviour with impaired emotion and mood disorders, the most prominent of which is depression.

⁵⁰⁷ Shneidman says, "In almost every case, suicide is caused by pain, a certain kind of pain—psychological pain, which I call psychache. Furthermore, this psychache stems from thwarted or distorted psychological needs." Shneidman acknowledges biological, cultural, sociological, interpersonal, and other risk factors for suicide, but he thought psychache is the essential underlying risk. Edwin S. Shneidman, *The Suicidal Mind*, (New York, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996).

⁵⁰⁸ Shneidman says, "the idea of cessation, the insight that it is possible to put an end to suffering by stopping the unbearable flow of consciousness." Shneidman, *Definition of Suicide*, C Classifications and Approaches, 17/23.

⁵⁰⁹ Ricardo Flamenbaum, "Testing Shneidman's theory of suicide: psychache as a prospective predictor of suicidality and comparison with hopelessness," (PhD diss, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada, 2009). <https://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/obj/thesescanada/vol2/OKQ/TC-OKQ-5338.pdf>

⁵¹⁰ Alexander L. Chapman, "Dialectical Behaviour therapy: current indications and unique elements." *Psychiatry*, 3, no. 9 (2006): 62-8.

⁵¹¹ Ian H Stanley et al. "Understanding Suicide among Older Adults: A Review of Psychological and Sociological Theories of Suicide," *Aging & Mental Health* 20, no. 2, (2016.): 113–22. doi:10.1080/13607863.2015.1012045.

⁵¹² Baumeister intended his escape theory of suicide to improve on an earlier escape theory of Baechler who considered suicide largely a rational calculation and a problem-solving attempt. J. Baechler, "A Strategic Theory. Suicide and Life-Threatening Behaviour," 10 (1980): 70-99. <https://doi-org.ez.sun.ac.za/10.1111/j.1943-278X.1980.tb00768.x>.

⁵¹³ He thought of his escape theory as one form of suicide among others such as altruistic self-sacrifice, ritual suicide, and honour suicide and explained his theory as a sequential process with six steps. R. F. Baumeister, "Suicide as escape from self," *Psychological Review* 97, no. 1, (1990): 90-113. doi:10.1037/0033-295X.97.1.90.

⁵¹⁴ Definity, s.v. "Listlessness", 2022, <https://www.definify.com/word/Listlessness>.

⁵¹⁵ Stanford Lyman, *The Seven Deadly Sins: Society and Evil*, (Oxford, General Hall, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 1989), 2. On the meaning of sloth: 2/73, Rakuten Kobo Inc.

French psychiatrist Pinel first described emotions as symptomatic of medical conditions.⁵¹⁶ He identifies suicide as a type of *melancholia with a predisposition to commit suicide*, which he calls "a horrid deed" and an inevitable outcome of melancholy.⁵¹⁷ ⁵¹⁸ Since Pinel, many quantitative studies that associate most⁵¹⁹ suicides with psychiatric diseases, particularly depression,⁵²⁰ find historical support in psychology. Freud's theory catalyses the search for the psychological determinants of suicide ⁵²¹ ⁵²² ⁵²³ ⁵²⁴ and points to depression, which he distinguishes from mourning after a personal loss. Depression, however, is pathological, a "disturbance of self-regard,"⁵²⁵ requiring treatment.⁵²⁶ Freud's theory of intrapsychic turmoil from depression creates a link between depression and suicidal behaviour that still exists today.

I argue that this association of suicide with mood or emotion is the brainchild of Plato and his student Aristotle. Bear in mind that Plato describes suicide as a voluntary and deliberate⁵²⁷ offence because the suicidal person *chooses to follow his pleasures, desires,*

⁵¹⁶ Philippe Pinel, *A Treatise on Insanity*, (Sheffield, London, 1806), Introduction 138/302, Google Books.

<https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=4snWNO1IETAC&pg=GBS.PR2&printsec=frontcover>.

⁵¹⁷ He says, "Nothing can sway the melancholic from "the internal struggles he felt, and the insuperable disgust with life, which bore him irresistibly to self-destruction." Pinel, *A Treatise on Insanity*, Introduction 151/302.

<https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=4snWNO1IETAC&pg=GBS.PR2&printsec=frontcover>.

⁵¹⁸ Pinel considers depression in some instances as the consequence of traumatic events in life. "The life of man may so abound with calamitous events, which may immediately affect his honour, his existence, and even all that he holds most dear to him, as to induce extreme depression and anxiety, and unsurmountable disgust with life, and a strong propensity to terminate it by suicide." Pinel, *A Treatise on Insanity*, 182/302.

<https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=4snWNO1IETAC&pg=GBS.PR2&printsec=frontcover>

⁵¹⁹ Bachmann Silk, "Epidemiology of Suicide and the Psychiatric Perspective." *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 15, no. 7, (6 Jul. 2018): 1425., doi:10.3390/ijerph15071425.

⁵²⁰ Duleeka Knipe, et al. "Psychiatric morbidity and suicidal behaviour in low- and middle-income countries: A systematic review and meta-analysis." *PLoS Medicine* vol. 16, 10 e1002905. 9 Oct. 2019, doi:10.1371/journal.pmed.1002905.

⁵²¹ Freud explains that the suicide decedent has a narcissistic identification with a lost and ambivalently loved and hated object. As a result, one part of the ego splits and sets itself opposite the ego and criticises it.' The superego's attacks drive the ego to suicide. "So, we find the key to the clinical picture: we perceive that the self-reproaches are reproaches against a loved object which have been shifted away from it onto the patient's ego." Sigmund Freud, *The Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, (Inktree, July 30, 2013), *Mourning and Melancholia*: 9/24, Rakuten Kobo Inc.

⁵²² Freud, *The Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, *Mourning and Melancholia*: 11/24.

⁵²³ Molly Merson, "The problems of suicide, and how Freud helps us think about depression," *Molly Person Blog*, January 10, 2018, <https://www.mollymerson.com/blog/problems-of-suicide-freud>.

⁵²⁴ Freud says, "The analysis of melancholia now shows that the ego can kill itself only if, owing to the return of the object-cathexis, it can treat itself as an object - if it is able to direct against itself the hostility which relates to an object and which represents the ego's original reaction to objects in the external world." Freud, *The Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, *Mourning and Melancholia*: 15/24.

⁵²⁵ Freud, *The Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, *Mourning and Melancholia*: 3/24.

⁵²⁶ Freud said, "Mourning is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on. In some people, the same influences produce melancholia instead of mourning, and we consequently suspect them of a pathological disposition. Freud, *The Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, *Mourning and Melancholia*: 2/24.

⁵²⁷ "Enough has been said of murders violent and involuntary and committed in passion: we have now to speak of voluntary crimes done with injustice of every kind and with premeditation, through the influence of pleasures, and desires, and jealousies." Plato, *The Complete Works*, *The Laws IX* 25/43.

and jealousies - hence his emotions.⁵²⁸ For this reason, he associates suicide with 'a vice', which follows from an evil nature. He says the person lacks virtue and acts out of *want of manliness*.⁵²⁹ In *Craytlus*, Plato describes *manliness* as a "hard and unchangeable nature."⁵³⁰ In *Statesman*, he uses the term synonymous with *courage*⁵³¹ as the opposite of *sluggishness and cowardice*. In *The Symposium*, the term is associated with *natural temperance and self-restraint*,⁵³² enabling a good and courageous person to stay and live his appointed share of life. Aristotle later adds to Plato's description. He says that emotions such as fear and anxiety overcome a suicidal person because he is a coward! He argues that the suicidal person is somehow overwhelmed by emotion and acts *contrary* to reason. Therefore, suicide is contrary to the common good, as guided by the "right rule of life."⁵³³ Plato and Aristotle see a suicidal person as someone whose emotions overpower one to act irrationally (contrary to reason). Centuries later, physician James Cowles Prichard put this idea forward in his *Treatise on Insanity and Other Disorders Affecting the Mind*.

Prichard distinguishes intellectual insanity, such as dementia, from moral insanity.⁵³⁴ He describes moral insanity as "a form of mental derangement in which the intellectual faculties appear to have sustained little or no injury, while the disorder is manifested principally or alone, in the state of the feelings, temper, or habits."⁵³⁵ Like Plato and Aristotle, he defines

⁵²⁸ "For the body is a source of endless trouble to us by reason of the mere requirement of food; and is liable also to diseases which overtake and impede us in the search after true being: it fills us full of loves, and lusts, and fears, and fancies of all kinds, and endless foolery, and in fact, as men say, takes away from us the power of thinking at all. Whence come wars, and fighting, and factions? whence but from the body and the lusts of the body? wars are occasioned by the love of money, and money has to be acquired for the sake and in the service of the body; and by reason of all these impediments we have no time to give to philosophy; and, last and worst of all, even if we are at leisure and betake ourselves to some speculation, the body is always breaking in upon us, causing turmoil and confusion in our enquiries, and so amazing us that we are prevented from seeing the truth." Plato, *The Complete Works, Phaedo* 8/98.

⁵²⁹ "And what shall he suffer who slays him who of all men, as they say, is his own best friend? I mean the suicide, who deprives himself by violence of his appointed share of life, not because the law of the state requires him, nor yet under the compulsion of some painful and inevitable misfortune which has come upon him, nor because he has had to suffer from irremediable and intolerable shame, but who from sloth or want of manliness imposes upon himself an unjust penalty." Plato, *The Complete Works, The Laws* IX 30/43.

⁵³⁰ Plato, *The Complete Works, Cratylus*, 37/86.

⁵³¹ Plato, *The Complete Works, Statesman*, 81/89.

⁵³² Plato, *The Complete Works, The Symposium*, 56/60.

⁵³³ He says, "But there is a sort of man which is carried away as a result of passion and contrary to the right rule – a man whom passion masters so that he does not act according to the right rule, but does not master to the extent of making him ready to believe that he ought to pursue such pleasures without reserve." Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle*, 8:432/52.

⁵³⁴ He described intellectual insanity as "In which the mind is totally deranged, and the individual affected talks nonsense, or expresses himself wildly and absurdly on every subject." Prichard, "A Treatise on Insanity and Other Disorders Affecting the Mind," 49/332.

⁵³⁵ Understanding and rational powers are affected, and a total collapse of the rational faculties. "The mind is perpetually in a state of confusion and disturbance, which affects all the intellectual faculties, and interferes with their exercise even for the shortest period." Prichard, "A Treatise on Insanity and Other Disorders Affecting the Mind," 49/332.

suicide as a condition that affects "natural feelings, affections, inclinations, temper, habits, moral dispositions, and natural impulses, *without any remarkable disorder or defect of the intellect or knowing and reasoning faculties*."⁵³⁶ Therefore, like Plato and Aristotle, he sees a human person's faculty of reason as largely absent from suicidal behaviour. Pritchard concludes this mental (emotional) derangement is perverse and corrupts the 'natural' self-preserving instinct.⁵³⁷ Markedly, French psychiatrist Jean Etienne Esquirol, the authority at the time, sanctions Pritchard's assessment of suicide as an *emotional* disorder.⁵³⁸ He describes suicide as "the fatal impulse which urges man to the commission of self-murder and says that suicide, and murder-suicide, are "acts most opposed to natural laws and the instinct of self-preservation."⁵³⁹ ⁵⁴⁰ The association of suicide with mood disorders remain strong despite Esquirol showing that suicide is a symptom of many psychiatric illnesses,⁵⁴¹ a theory that is proven in science today.

Aristotle argues that a lack of courage, self-restraint and 'manliness' motivates one to follow one's destructive emotions and desires and not one's rational mind. Such a person eventually destroys oneself because of a lack of self-love. Because the person follows passions and destructive emotions (because of a lack of self-love), one does not do what benefits one: "This is true, for instance, of incontinent people; for they choose, instead of the things they themselves think good, things that are pleasant but hurtful; while others again, through cowardice and laziness, shrink from doing what they think best for themselves."⁵⁴² Eventually, one's incorrect choices add up and cause one's destruction. He writes,

And those who have done many terrible deeds and are hated for their wickedness even shrink from life and destroy themselves. And wicked men seek for people with

⁵³⁶ Pritchard, "A Treatise on Insanity and Other Disorders Affecting the Mind," 4/332.

⁵³⁷ Pritchard, "A Treatise on Insanity and Other Disorders Affecting the Mind," 271/332.

⁵³⁸ Greg Eghigian, "A "Sickness of Our Time,": How Suicide First Became a Research Question," *Psychiatric Times* 35 No 4, Volume 35, Issue 4 (April 27, 2018),

<https://www.psychiatrictimes.com/view/sickness-our-time-how-suicide-first-became-research-question>.

⁵³⁹ Esquirol, *Mental Maladies; a Treatise on Insanity*, 262/508.

⁵⁴⁰ He says, "When the soul is strongly moved, by a violent and unexpected affection, organic functions are perverted, the reason is disturbed, the individual loses his self-consciousness and is in true delirium, and commits acts the most thoughtless; those most opposed to his instinct, to his affections and interests." Esquirol, *Mental Maladies; a Treatise on Insanity*, 246/508, *Google Books*.

⁵⁴¹ All that I have said hitherto, together with the facts which I have related, prove that suicide offers all the characteristics of mental alienation, of which it is, in reality, a symptom: that we must not look for a single and peculiar sign of suicide, since we observe it under circumstances the most opposite, and since it is symptomatic or secondary, either in acute or feeble delirium or in chronic delirium." Esquirol, *Mental Maladies; a Treatise on Insanity*, 289/508.

⁵⁴² Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle*, IX, Chapter 4 Friendship is based on self-love, 10/29.

whom to spend their days and shun themselves; for they remember many a grievous deed and anticipate others like them when they are by themselves, but when they are with others, they forget. And having nothing lovable in them, they have no feeling of love to themselves.⁵⁴³

To Aristotle and later Aquinas,⁵⁴⁴ this lack of self-love is 'unnatural', indicative of an obstinate and rebellious nature that leads the person to incorrect choices and, eventually, self-destruction.⁵⁴⁵ In due course, clinical medicine would understand these internal 'faults' as symptomatic of an inner psychiatric or psychological failure or malfunction.^{546 547 548} The prominent association between suicide and mood disorders, mainly depression, is generally fixed in present-day society's mind: suicide is a medical matter and a subject of science and research.

Conclusion

After the philosophers turned from mythology to rational analysis⁵⁴⁹ to understand their universe, they inevitably also asked: "What is a human being?" Plato and Aristotle replied that humans are instinctually self-preserving. This understanding of human nature became the standard of how successive generations of scholars thought about how one usually acts.

⁵⁴³ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle IX Chapter 4 Friendship is based on self-love* 10/29.

⁵⁴⁴ "First, because everything naturally loves itself, the result being that everything naturally keeps itself in being, and resists corruption so far as it can. Therefore suicide was contrary to the inclination of nature and to charity whereby a man should love himself. Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle*, (Radford, VA, Wilder Publishers, 2007) s IX Chapter 4 Friendship is based on self-love 10/29.

⁵⁴⁵ "This is true, for instance, of incontinent people; for they choose, instead of the things they themselves think good, things that are pleasant but hurtful; while others again, through cowardice and laziness, shrink from doing what they think best for themselves." Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle IX Chapter 4 Friendship is based on self-love* 10/29.

⁵⁴⁶ Matthew K. Nock et al. "Measuring the Suicidal Mind: Implicit Cognition Predicts Suicidal Behaviour." *Psychological Science* 21, no. 4 (2010): 511–17. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41062239>.

⁵⁴⁷ Douglas Jacobs, *The Harvard Medical School Guide to Suicide Assessment and Intervention*, (Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998): 12 to 20/707, Archive.org.

⁵⁴⁸ In psychology researchers bundle multiple risk factors together such as mental disorders, be it depression and anxiety, substance abuse, socio-demographics, adverse life events, and prior suicidal thoughts or behaviour. These factors are researched similarly to external factors like diet, exercise, and family history assessing heart disease risk. Different aspects of the explanatory model of the individual's psychological state model are assumed to cause suicide and STBs, such as high emotional/physiological reactivity to stressful life events, poor distress tolerance, and poor social problem-solving and decision-making skills. Peter Reuell, "What do we know about suicide? Not nearly enough," *The Harvard Gazette* (Harvard University) November 17, 2016, <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2016/11/what-do-we-know-about-suicide-not-nearly-enough/>.

⁵⁴⁹ Xenophanes refuted the belief that the gods created the universe. He says, "Homer and Hesiod attributed to the gods all things which are disreputable and worthy of blame when done by men; and they told of the many lawless deeds, stealing, adultery, and deception of each other. For all things come from earth, and all things end by becoming earth. For we are all sprung from earth and water. All things that come into being and grow are earth and water." "Xenophanes Fragments, edited by Arthur Fairbanks, *Hanover Historical Texts Project*, (June 2013): 7-10, <https://history.hanover.edu/texts/presoc/Xenophan.html>.

This view of human nature implies that suicidal behaviour is reprehensible and cowardly but entirely under one's control.

These historical descriptions of human nature and suicidal behaviour raise pertinent questions, which I will address in the next chapter. First, the philosophers assume that a human person's faculty of reason is a potent ally in protecting oneself, guiding all actions towards what is good for him or herself. Suppose one's intellect guarantees self-preservation, as the philosophers argued. Then, the mystery of suicide deepens further. With not one but two powerful tools to protect oneself, the possibility of suicide is even more remote and, therefore, more perplexing. Clearly, with a person's intellect in the influential role of protector, the culprit *must, by implication*, be the body and its pleasures, desires, and jealousies, as Plato claims.

On the other hand, research confirms suicidal behaviour is a complex set of emotions, behaviour and cognition. Therefore, cognition and emotion are implicated in suicidal behaviour, and the mind is an unlikely protector, as Plato and Aristotle believed. This fact raises another question that the philosophers neglected to investigate. Knowing that suicidal behaviour is also associated with powerful cognitions, if not the guardian of the instincts, what is the role of cognition in suicidal behaviour?

More so, a person is assumed to be 'determined' to protect oneself, implying that it is impossible to harm oneself unless "something" can neutralise the self-preservation instinct. The identity of this "something" is what Freud, Burton, Prichard, Nock, Joiner, Pinel, Esquirol, and many others in medicine and the helping professions pursue. Still, a different way to look at this conundrum is to ask if this view of human nature is still valid. Suppose one is *more than instinct*. How does one understand a human being? Importantly, should one rethink suicidality if self-preservation is not a measure of normal behaviour?

5. "Human Nature" and Existentialism

Introduction

In ancient society, suicide was once thought of casually and available - a door that always stood open.⁵⁵⁰ Since then, suicide has been viewed on a continuum of abnormality and as the act of a weakling, a crime against the state and a sin against God. Those who opposed such sentiments were often lone voices in a wilderness of condemnation. For instance, Nietzsche advocates assisted death for the terminally ill.⁵⁵¹ Hume justifies suicide when "age, sickness, or misfortune may render life a burden,"⁵⁵² and Marx held society primarily responsible for driving people to suicide.⁵⁵³ The suicide debate continues in modern-day society. Sociologists oppose a view that is overly dependent on illness at the expense of systemic societal problems. In contrast, other theorists believe that suicide warrants a distinctive diagnosis because it is an autonomous disorder and a matter for clinical medicine.⁵⁵⁴ All in all, I argue that the subject of suicide seems to be far from conclusively settled.

In the previous chapters, I explained how theories of suicide, past and present, generally rely on a narrow and determinate understanding of what a human being is. In this chapter, I make the case that the belief that suicide happens when instinctual self-preservation fails is selling a human person short. I dispute the notion that a human person is involuntary and like a non-human animal. I also voice my reservations about the assumption that reason is

⁵⁵⁰ "What is born, must also perish. I must come on as the hour, and like an hour pass away. For one ought to remember that the door stands open." Epictetus *The Discourse*, Book II Chapter V: 2/7 & Book I Chapter (15) XXV: 3/6 Rakuten Kobo Inc.

⁵⁵¹ "The sick man is a parasite of society. In certain cases, it is indecent to go on living. To continue to vegetate in a state of cowardly dependence upon doctors and special treatments, once the meaning of life, the right to life, has been lost, ought to be regarded with the greatest contempt by society." Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Twilight of the Idols* 2016 Skirmishes In A War With The Age 17/31, Rakuten Kobo Inc.

⁵⁵² David Hume, *On Suicide* (Penguin Books, London, August 25, 2005): 12/12, Rakuten Kobo Inc.

⁵⁵³ "...what kind of society is it wherein one finds the most profound loneliness in the midst of many millions of people, a society where one can be overwhelmed by an uncontrollable urge to kill oneself without anyone of us suspecting it?" Eric A. Plaut, and Kevin Anderson, eds., *Marx on Suicide*, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1999): 45-70.

⁵⁵⁴ Suicidal behaviour is not limited to mood disorders, but figures across various disorders, such as anxiety, personality, eating- and trauma-related disorders, organic mental disorders, substance abuse, and psychosis. Louise Brådvik, "Suicide Risk and Mental Disorders." *International Journal of Environmental Research And Public Health* 15, no. 9 (Sep. 2018): 2028, doi:10.3390/ijerph15092028.

a guardian of instincts, which implies illness and abnormality cause self-harm. I argue that it is due time to examine the underlying assumptions about human nature that shoulder suicide theories. Therefore, in order to re-evaluate suicidal behaviour, I consider it imperative to ask: What is a human person? Should we keep thinking about a human person as a simple, instinctual being?

In this chapter, I examine an alternative understanding of what it means to be a human person that developed in the twentieth century in philosophy, particularly existentialism. In the wake of the death and destruction of the Second World War, principal attributes of the human condition took shape as existentialist thinkers, such as Søren Kierkegaard, Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Albert Camus, made the human person their exclusive focus. I consider their analysis of what it means to be a human being, substantial and transformative. The existentialist thinkers' insights are as valid and necessary in modern-day society as they were at inception in the previous century⁵⁵⁵ because they reply to timeless questions, such as, *who are we as human beings*, and *how do we live?* For example, Salcedo's 2020 study shows remarkable similarities in the reactions of Camus' main characters in *The Plague* to people's experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. As such, the essay speaks to a timelessness in people's past and present reactions to a pandemic's aftermath.⁵⁵⁶

I make the case that the existentialists go about unlocking a universal human condition, and they bring to light the limitations that a priori define a human person's fundamental situation in the universe. For example, a human person is nothing to begin with but has to *make* him or herself and *accomplish* his or her subjective existence. One's existence is not given. A human person is what he or she establishes himself or herself as and receives no guidance in this assignment of "how to exist."⁵⁵⁷ Such limitations are subjective because a human

⁵⁵⁵ I acknowledge and hold these investigators of the human subject in equal standing to key innovators in science such as Copernicus, Galileo, Lavoisier, Darwin, and Einstein.

⁵⁵⁶ Francis Xavier R. Salcedo, "Albert Camus' La Peste and The COVID -19 Pandemic: Exile and Imprisonment, Suffering And Death, Defiance And Heroism," *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 19, no. 56 (2020): 136+. *Gale Academic OneFile* (accessed October 20, 2022). <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A631810195/AONE?u=27uos&sid=bookmark-AONE&id=21f1b315>.

⁵⁵⁷ Sartre writes, "If I regard a certain course of action as good, it is I who will choose to say that it is good, rather than bad. Man is nothing other than his own project. He exists only to the extent that he realizes himself, therefore he is nothing more than the sum of his actions, nothing more than his life." Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, (Yale University Press, New Haven/New York, 2007), 16/43.

person *experiences* his or her existence in terms of these limitations. Still, these limitations of existence are shared by everyone and, therefore, have an objective dimension.⁵⁵⁸ I argue that the limitations of the human condition cannot be dismissed or discredited as unreliable, quantitative or unscientific but should change how we think about a human person and, by implication, human behaviour. With this claim, I see my inquiry in the remaining chapters as a modest attempt *to begin* such a discussion, which I believe might gain from broader philosophical consideration, particularly in existentialism.

In this chapter, I examine Camus's suicidal behaviour in the context of the capabilities and the limitations of the human condition that emerge from the pen of the existentialists. I examine his suicidal experience as he describes it and ask how it implicates aspects of himself as a human person. For example, I find that Camus does not act instinctually as one would expect a non-human animal to do. That being so, I question the assumption that he has a predetermined and fixed nature. More so, his behaviour is not fractured, and I find that he does not stand opposite himself, as a cold and uninterested subject gaining objective knowledge about himself. Quite the opposite, he is a flesh-and-blood individual who exists in concrete, real-life circumstances.

That being so, I find Camus' self-description shows him as *more* than a self-preserving instinctual being because he acts in unforeseen, unexpected, and undetermined ways. With this assumption, I ask to what extent his circumstances determine his actions or if he is largely the author of his respective lot, as the existentialists claim.⁵⁵⁹ I assess the existentialists' claim that a human person such as Camus also carries full responsibility for how he creates and chooses himself, and, therefore, he despairs and is anguished as a result. Sartre describes anguish as that which all human beings experience because they are all responsible for creating themselves and that even if a human person believes in God,

⁵⁵⁸ Sartre writes, "These limitations are neither subjective nor objective; rather they have an objective as well as a subjective dimension: objective, because they affect everyone and are evident everywhere; subjective because they are experienced and are meaningless if man does not experience them—that is to say, if man does not freely determine himself and his existence in relation to them." Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, (Yale University Press, New Haven/New York, 2007): 20/43.

⁵⁵⁹ Sartre writes, "If man as existentialists conceive him cannot be defined, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself and he wills himself to be, and since he conceives of himself only after he exists, just as he wills himself to be after being thrown into existence, man is nothing other than what he makes of himself." Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, (Yale University Press, New Haven/New York, 2007): 5/47.

that responsibility, and hence anguish, stands.⁵⁶⁰ Camus confirms this claim by referring to the world as a place where anguish reigns. He writes, "Whatever may be or have been their (Jaspers to Heidegger, from Kierkegaard to Chestov, from the phenomenologists to Scheler) ambitions, all started out from that indescribable universe where contradiction, antinomy, *anguish* or impotence reigns."⁵⁶¹

Camus describes human existence as difficult. He does not think this "difficulty of living" is because of his tuberculosis, growing up extremely poor, or being exiled during the war. In its place, he seems to be mostly concerned with *unfamiliarity*, and he relates this to the fact that he exists in an irrational universe that exceeds his cognitive understanding thereof. This strangeness and alienation, this out-of-placeness of a human person, confronts him with the Absurd. I make the case that Camus considers such an encounter potentially lethal because it makes him want to die. Notably, he comprehends that this encounter has to do with how he is a human person and, therefore, understands that all healthy people think about suicide. Sartre writes of this generic condition,

Furthermore, although it is impossible to find in every man a universal essence that could be said to comprise human nature, there is nonetheless *a universal human condition*. It is no accident that today's thinkers are more likely to speak of the condition of man rather than of his nature. By "condition", they refer, more or less clearly, to *all limitations that a priori define man's fundamental situation in the universe*.⁵⁶²

For this reason, I say that it is imperative to understand, consider and factor these limitations that define who we are and to ascertain to what extent they play a role in subjective human behaviour, particularly in suicidal behaviour. That being so, I say that because such limitations apply to "all healthy people, having thought of their own suicide," they hold far-reaching implications for the millions of people who experience suicidal behaviour.

⁵⁶⁰ Sartre writes, "Existentialism is not so much an atheism in the sense that it would exhaust itself attempting to demonstrate the nonexistence of God; rather, it affirms that even if God were to exist, it would make no difference—that is our point of view. It is not that we believe that God exists, but we think that the real problem is not one of his existence; what man needs is to rediscover himself and to comprehend that nothing can save him from himself, not even valid proof of the existence of God. In this sense, existentialism is optimistic. It is a doctrine of action, and it is only in bad faith—in confusing their own despair with ours—that Christians are able to assert that we are "without hope." Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, (Yale University Press, New Haven/New York, 2007): 29/43.

⁵⁶¹ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, *Absurd Walls*, 19/55.

⁵⁶² Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, (Yale University Press, New Haven/New York, 2007): 20/43.

Why Camus?

Camus claims that suicidal experiences "are facts the heart can feel; yet they call for careful study."⁵⁶³ But before I endeavour to take the first step of an inquiry into these generic limitations of the human condition, I should ask first. Why Camus? Why do I choose the work of Camus as a potential framework and focus to examine the matter?

Advances in the understanding of the human subject first emerged in existentialism when interest in the work of Danish philosopher and theologian Søren Aabye Kierkegaard, 1813–55, and German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, 1844–1900, began early in the century, in particular in Germany. Barrett describes Kierkegaard and Nietzsche's subject matter as "something of a revolution in Western philosophy: their central subject is the unique experience of the single one, *the individual*."⁵⁶⁴ Kierkegaard's ideas were developed before and during the First World War by Edmund Gustav Albert Husserl, 1859–1938, a German mathematician and a principal founder of phenomenology. After the war, the philosophy of Husserl's pupil, the German existentialist Martin Heidegger, 1889–1976, emerged and significantly influenced later twentieth-century thought, even though it was clouded by his association with Naziism. Kierkegaard is generally regarded as the founder of existentialist philosophy.

Algerian-born French novelist and thinker Albert Camus,⁵⁶⁵ 1913–60, is considered part of a wider circle of twentieth-century existentialist thinkers, such as Jean-Paul Sartre, 1905–80, French philosopher, novelist, and dominant French intellectual, Simone de Beauvoir,

⁵⁶³ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus, Absurdity and Suicide*, 1/55.

⁵⁶⁴ William Barrett, *Irrational Man*, (Anchor Books Editions 1962, 1990, New York), One. The Abvent of Existentialism, 15/28.

⁵⁶⁵ Albert Camus was born November 7, 1913, in Mondovi, Algeria to a deaf, illiterate mother. His father died in the Battle of the Marne when Camus was eleven months old. He lived in Belcourt, a working-class neighbourhood of Algiers with his mother, of Spanish descent, a housecleaner, a brother, maternal grandmother and a paralyzed uncle. His second collection of essays, *Noces* (1938; "Nuptials"), contains lyrical meditations on the Algerian countryside and presents natural beauty as a form of wealth that even the very poor can enjoy. Camus proves himself as a keen observer, and in both his first and second collection of essays, he contrasts the fragile mortality of human beings with the enduring nature of the physical world. Working as a journalist and later as the editor of the Parisian Daily *Combat*, he eventually developed into a leading literary figure. He published his first novel *L'Étranger* in 1942, and in the same year the influential philosophical essay, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (*The Myth of Sisyphus*). He died on January 4, 1960, near Sens, France). Simpson, David. "Albert Camus, 1913-1960, *Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, Accessed April 12, 2019, <https://iep.utm.edu/albert-camus/>.

1908–86, French feminist philosopher and novelist, and the French phenomenologist, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 1908–61 to name but a few. The existential thought of both Sartre and de Beauvoir came of age during World War II,⁵⁶⁶ and Camus also wrote his seminal work, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, during this time of upheaval. Critics acknowledge Camus⁵⁶⁷ as a prominent cultural and intellectual figure of the twentieth century^{568 569 570 571} and in the existentialist tradition of Continental philosophy.^{572 573} Still, despite his critical acclaim as an existential philosopher, Camus often describes himself as an artist and a writer.^{574 575} As such, Camus is revered for this literacy, and he was awarded The Nobel Prize in Literature on December 10, 1957, "for his important literary production, which with clear-sighted earnestness illuminates the problems of the human conscience in our times."⁵⁷⁶ B. Karlgren, a Member of the Royal Academy of Sciences, addressed the French writer as "a student of history and literature."⁵⁷⁷

I argue that Camus' work has a timelessness that keeps drawing scholars back to his work as a way to understand the world,⁵⁷⁸ and his ability "to illuminate the problems of human

⁵⁶⁶ Sarah Bakewell, *At the Existentialist Café*, (Penguin Random House, London, 2016).

⁵⁶⁷ Daniel Stern, "The Fellowship of Men that Die: The Legacy of Albert Camus," *Law & Literature* 10, no. 2 (1998): 183-198, DOI: 10.1080/1535685X.1998.11015580.

⁵⁶⁸ Stephen Eric Bronner, *Camus: Portrait of a Moralizer*, (Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1999), Archive.org.

⁵⁶⁹ Edward J. Hughes, *The Cambridge Companion to Camus*. (Cambridge University Press, 2007), <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A233126326/AONE?u=27uos&sid=bookmark-AONE&xid=e191f655>.

⁵⁷⁰ Hughes, *The Cambridge Companion to Camus*.

⁵⁷¹ R. Srigley, *Camus' Critique of Modernity*, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2011).

⁵⁷² D. West, *Continental Philosophy*, (Polity Press, Cambridge, M, 2010).

⁵⁷³ At his untimely death, friend and nemesis Sartre's eulogy reads: "At the age of twenty, Camus, suddenly afflicted with a malady that upset his whole life, discovered the Absurd-the senseless negation of man. He became accustomed to it, he *thought out his* unbearable condition, he came through. The Absurd might be that question that no one will ask him now, that he will ask no one, that silence that is not even a silence now, that is absolutely *nothing* now." Jean-Paul. Sartre, "Tribute to Albert Camus. In: Bree, G (ed.) *Camus: A Collection of Critical Essays*. (Englewood, Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1962): 173-185. <http://faculty.webster.edu/corbetre/philosophy/existentialism/camus/sartre-tribute.html>.

⁵⁷⁴ Albert Camus, "A Banquet speech," "Albert Camus' speech at the Nobel Banquet at the City Hall in Stockholm, December 10, 1957, <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1957/camus/speech/>.

⁵⁷⁵ I understand that Camus's description as an existentialist can be further debated but consider this debate outside the scope of the dissertation. Greg Stone, "Why Camus was not an Existentialist, *Philosophy Now*, 2016, https://philosophynow.org/issues/115/Why_Camus_Was_Not_An_Existentialist. J.R. Pita, "The Splendid Legacy of Albert Camus," *Society*, 50, no. 6 (2013), 636-640. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/1446229736?parentSessionId=1w86TdCYLQNOWEwvsG3u6N%2B%2F3KPgCmgpWSnSFblhZlo%3D&pg-origsite=primo&accountid=14049>

⁵⁷⁶ Camus, "A Banquet speech." "Albert Camus' speech at the Nobel Banquet at the City Hall in Stockholm, December 10, 1957, <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1957/camus/speech/>.

⁵⁷⁷ He says, "In your writings, we find manifested to a high degree the clarity and the lucidity, the penetration and the subtlety, the inimitable art inherent in your literary language, all of which we admire and warmly love." Camus, "A Banquet speech."

⁵⁷⁸ Zaretsky says this about Camus' writing: "He appears to us, in a way that few other writers do, as someone who wrote for his life and our lives as well. If there is one conviction that scholars and non-scholars share, it is that Camus is still

conscience,"⁵⁷⁹ goes to the heart of this enduring influence. I make a case that it is owing to his descriptive ability, coupled with his philosophical schooling and insight, that Camus was able to look anew at what it means to be human and, by implication, suicide. I reason that advances in the understanding of the human person come into focus when the problem of suicide resurfaces in the work of Camus. For this reason, his essay is the central focus of the dissertation.⁵⁸⁰ It is Camus, in his work, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, who brings the problem of suicide to the fore and who positions the subject of suicide as the central problem of philosophy. In this task, he exceeds the historical-philosophical reflections about the role an individual can or should play in his or her death. His method is descriptive, non-normative,⁵⁸¹ and immensely personal. I consider Camus uniquely qualified to enhance the subject, perhaps more so than his existentialist colleagues, because he comes face-to-face with the "thing of suicide itself,"⁵⁸² and he understands suicide as a critical priority for philosophy. He writes, "The fundamental subject of *The Myth of Sisyphus* is this: it is legitimate and necessary to wonder whether life has a meaning; therefore, it is legitimate to meet the problem of suicide face to face."⁵⁸³

The limitations of the human condition

Camus shares the century of existentialism with the likes of Sartre and de Beauvoir, and he draws from the insights of those who came before him, such as Husserl, Kierkegaard, and Heidegger. Together, they catapult an understanding of who we are and how we are to live.⁵⁸⁴ I argue that their insights are foundational to Camus's contradistinctive presentation of suicide, which I will discuss in the following chapter.

an indispensable companion in our intellectual and ethical lives." Zaretsky, *A Life Worth Living: Albert Camus and the Quest for Meaning*. (Harvard University Press, November 7, 2013), Rakuten Kobo Inc.

⁵⁷⁹ Camus, "A Banquet speech," "Albert Camus' speech at the Nobel Banquet at the City Hall in Stockholm, December 10, 1957, <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1957/camus/speech/>.

⁵⁸⁰ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Preface, 1/2.

⁵⁸¹ Augustine said that "Many have killed themselves. But we are not inquiring whether it has been done, but whether it ought to have been done." Augustine *The City of God* (1974) I (22) 2/3. The intent of the study is different to the motivation of Augustine, and the 'existential toolbox' will be applied to examine suicide face to face and to inquire 'how' it is possible.

⁵⁸² Edmund Husserl, "To the things themselves!", *Logical Investigations*, I, (Routledge, London, and New York, 2001), 252.

⁵⁸³ Camus *The Myth of Sisyphus*, An Absurd Reasoning, 1/55.

⁵⁸⁴ "It is therefore simply fair to point out, at the outset, what these pages owe to certain contemporary thinkers. It is so far from my intention to hide this that they will be found cited and commented upon throughout this work". Camus *The Myth of Sisyphus*, An Absurd Reasoning, 1/55.

But it is Camus who stands in 1940, "amidst the French and European disaster" of World War II, and proclaims that external values and beliefs are stripped away or distorted. He asks: *Is my life worth living, or shall I kill myself?*⁵⁸⁵ In his essay, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, he writes about this situation in which he contemplates suicide. Some years later, he will be revered as a Nobel prize-winning writer and a prominent existentialist philosopher, but at this point in his life, he is suicidal. He is "the desperate man"⁵⁸⁶ who is ready to jump or to pull the trigger.

In the Preface of the English publication of his work, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, he lets the reader in on why he is at this low point in his life. His main concern appears to be about a *loss*. He says that living with death and devastation in war-torn Europe, at a time when values and beliefs are eroded or lost, he believes in nothing and has no allegiance or purpose. Nietzsche writes, "God is dead! God remains dead! And we have killed him!"⁵⁸⁷ Camus understands that humankind killed God and how, in the aftermath of the Enlightenment, the products of human reason negated the necessity for God.

Camus finds the method of science, philosophy and mathematics, his reason, painfully inadequate to understand himself as a flesh-and-blood person. He describes his loss as being: "In a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger." He says that he feels "deprived of the memory of a lost home"⁵⁸⁸ and that his belief in nothing "deprived [him] of the hope of a promised land." He calls this junction where he is The Absurd. Camus describes the Absurd as a gateway or a passage to suicide because it brings about a longing in him to be dead.

Before I examine the Absurd and attempt to understand Camus' suicidal behaviour in the following chapter, I argue that it is imperative first to understand *how he is able to* experience the Absurd. What about Camus as a human person makes it possible for him to be concerned with the Absurd in the first place? In other words, what human qualities or limitations allow such experiences, and how do the concerns he writes about speak to these

⁵⁸⁵ Camus *The Myth of Sisyphus*, An Absurd Reasoning, 1/55.

⁵⁸⁶ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurdity and Suicide, 3/55

⁵⁸⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (1882), Rakuten Kobo Inc.

⁵⁸⁸ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurdity and Suicide, 4/55.

human characteristics? Does he account for his failing instinct because he suspects he has a mental illness, such as depression, or is he perhaps overwhelmed by problems of living, which are both implicated in contemporary suicide theories as causing suicide? Instead, I make the case that Camus's description of his suicidal behaviour implicates, as Sartre describes it, "limitations that a priori define man's fundamental situation in the universe."⁵⁸⁹ To test this claim, I briefly reiterate the prevailing understanding of an experience such as Camus'.

Beating down the instinct

In the previous chapter, I explained that Plato and Aristotle consider all sentient beings as having a powerful instinct protecting them from self-harm. Scholars since believed that instinct fails because of specifics innate to certain people, such as an obstinate or an evil nature. By the 19th century, theorists generally described these inherent qualities as symptoms of mental illness. At first, these symptoms were primarily associated with emotional upset or distress. However, of late, theorists acknowledge that suicidal behaviour also includes suicidal cognition across a broad spectrum of disorders and behaviours, such as, for example, substance abuse, alcohol abuse, and sexual abuse.

Despite associating suicidal behaviour with many behaviours and disorders, theorists generally acknowledge how difficult it is to kill yourself, as described by suicide attempt survivors. In his work, *Why People Die by Suicide*, Thomas Joiner reminds the reader of this fact. He says, "Though the fact has been neglected by theorists and researchers, those who repeatedly attempt suicide emphasise how very difficult it is."⁵⁹⁰ He references Voltaire, who says of Roman statesman Cato: "It seems rather absurd to say that Cato slew himself through weakness. None but a strong man can surmount the most powerful instinct of nature."⁵⁹¹ He also cites Schopenhauer, who says that very few of us can destroy our bodies. In the final instance, he quotes Edwin Shneidman, the father of suicidology, saying: "Each day contains the threat of failure and assaults by others, but it is the threat of self-

⁵⁸⁹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, (Yale University Press, New Haven/New York, 2007): 20/43

⁵⁹⁰ Joiner, Thomas. "What We Know and Don't Know About Suicide," in *Why People Die by Suicide* (United States: Harvard University Press, 2005): 6/23, Rakuten Kobo Inc.

⁵⁹¹ Joiner, Thomas. "The Ability to Enact Lethal Self-Injury is Acquired," in *Why People Die by Suicide*, 3/36.

destruction that we are most afraid to touch."⁵⁹² Shneidman's case study, *Beatrix*, depicts this difficulty.⁵⁹³

Despite this difficulty, Joiner nevertheless believes suicide happens when self-preservation fails and, therefore, that it is possible to overpower this instinct. So, how does the self-preservation instinct get broken down? Joiner argues that human beings are alike with Pavlovian dogs; they can learn how to inflict self-harm. They learn to harm themselves through repeat exposure to risky and dangerous experiences, such as long-term substance abuse. In doing so, they gradually beat down the instinct to survive by this repetitive exposure. More so, he theorises that even though the ability to enact lethal self-injury is learned through experiences, 'faulty' genetics and neurobiology also play an essential role.⁵⁹⁴ In other words, you must hit a triple jackpot of abnormality to wage war against the instinct successfully.

Joiner theorises that the common denominator in many tales of suicide is repetition and practice because he assumes that the opponent is the instinct. He acknowledges the formidable strength of this opponent, which can only be overcome by repeat exposure to situations that one may "work up to" suicide.⁵⁹⁵ Joiner sees these reactions as proof of people's ambivalence towards dying because they grapple with their self-preservation instinct until they win, only to regret it minutes later. This theory raises the question as to what extent Camus's experience bears some resemblance to him, thereby beating down his instinct.

⁵⁹² Joiner, Thomas. "The Ability to Enact Lethal Self-Injury is Acquired," in *Why People Die by Suicide*, 3/36.

⁵⁹³ Beatrix wrote: "I know now that slitting my wrists was not as poetic nor as easy as I imagined. Due to blood clotting and fainting, it is actually difficult to die from such wounds. The evening dragged on with me busy reopening the stubborn veins that insisted upon clotting up. I was patient and persistent, and cut away at myself for over an hour. The battle with my body to die was unexpected, and after waging a good fight, I passed out." Joiner, Thomas. "The Ability to Enact Lethal Self-Injury is Acquired," in *Why People Die by Suicide*, 6/36.

⁵⁹⁴ Joiner, Thomas. "The Ability to Enact Lethal Self-Injury is Acquired," in *Why People Die by Suicide*, 1/36.

⁵⁹⁵ He cites the example of some people who have jumped from a height and survived to tell the tale of how they regret the act as soon as they've jumped. For instance, Kevin Hines jumped off the Golden Gate Bridge in 2000 and survived. He says, "I thought it was too late, I said to myself, '*What have I done, I don't want to die*,'" says Hines, now 38. "I realized I made the greatest mistake of my life." Diane Herbst, "Kevin Hines Survived a Jump Off the Golden Gate Bridge—Now, He's Helping Others Avoid Suicide," *Psychom*, September 30, 2022, <https://www.psychom.net/kevin-hines-survived-golden-gate-bridge-suicide>.

Camus is in Paris when the Nazis advance on the city. From an assumption that Camus primarily acts instinctually, one would expect that his concern is his personal safety. Being foremost on his mind, he would likely write about a deep-seated need to flee, perhaps detailing an elaborate escape plan that showcases how meticulously his mind guides his instinct. On the other hand, because Camus is suicidal, it is fair to expect that there are likely indications of how he beats down the instinct to die by suicide. He might stay in Paris despite the war to expose himself to grave danger, hoping to be killed. He might regularly visit hazardous areas of the city to witness or risk violence. Being a writer, he would likely detail these experiences in his essay.

It turns out, against expectation, that Camus does not stay in Paris where his life is in danger, in a suicidal hope to perish in the war-torn city, which could likely indicate such failure. He flees Paris to safety in 1940 and returns four years later to join the resistance to overthrow the Nazis. His escape is not the subject of any of his works, and it is evident that his concerns far exceed his physical survival and well-being. He does not associate his experience with a failure of his body's instinctual self-preservation, nor does he write about such intentions. More so, he never questions if human beings are instinctually self-preserving. Well-versed in the classical thinkers, he cites Cicero, who notes that the body instinctively "shrinks from annihilation"⁵⁹⁶ and guards a person against the onslaught of *daily life*.⁵⁹⁷ Therefore, Camus, in particular, does not experience a biological, cultural, sociological, or even philosophical cause that accounts for a loss of instinctive self-preservation.

Quite the opposite, Camus' reaction to his suicidal crisis calls attention to a central tenet of existentialism: his behaviour underlines how a human person differs from objects and animals. An object, such as a fork, is equal to its essence or function. Unlike a human person, it remains in place until it is moved. More so, a human person is unlike a non-human animal, who acts instinctually and behaves as is characteristic of its species. Camus' concerns bear no such resemblance. If anything, he points to a difficulty with *living* as

⁵⁹⁶ "For who is there, what percentage of mankind, whose 'Blood does not ebb with horror, and face turn pale with fear,' at the approach of death? That practically everybody has this feeling proves that nature shrinks from annihilation." Cicero, *The Complete Works of Cicero*, V: 23-24/36.

⁵⁹⁷ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurdity and Suicide, 6/55.

instrumental in his suicidal experience. He implicates *living* because it is so complicated that a person might not think it is worth the trouble.⁵⁹⁸

Living's difficulty

In earlier chapters of the dissertation, I explained that theorists consider problems of living, such as relationship or financial difficulties, as the causes of about half of the suicide deaths cited in recent studies.⁵⁹⁹ ⁶⁰⁰ Considering this finding, one may suspect that Camus concerns himself with personal problems associated with his suicidal state. One might think that Camus is likely depressed or has anxiety, perhaps due to financial difficulties because of the war, suffering, and death he witnessed. Indeed, Blackwell describes his life at the time as pretty gloomy. She writes,

Since his lonely interlude in Paris in 1940, Camus had travelled to and from Algeria a few times. His wife Francine was still there, having become stuck in the country when Allied forces captured it – Albert being near Lyons at the time, receiving treatment for a bout of tuberculosis he suffered throughout his life. He had now finished the 'absurds' he had been working on three years earlier, which spoke above all of his dislocated experience as a French Algerian, caught between two countries and never fully at home in either.⁶⁰¹

If he thinks that the difficulty with living has to do with his loneliness or illness, it will be understandable, and in such suffering, Camus is undoubtedly not alone. An ancient Egyptian didactic tale tells of a man, such as Camus, who wants to end his life because he finds living unbearable. He thinks people are evil and there is nothing good on earth.⁶⁰²

⁵⁹⁸ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurdity and Suicide 4/55.

⁵⁹⁹ These are relationship problems (42 per cent of the time), problematic substance use (28 per cent of the time), a crisis in the past or upcoming two weeks (29 per cent of the time), criminal legal problems (9 per cent of the time), physical health problem (22 per cent of the time), loss of housing (4 per cent of the time), and job/financial problem (16 per cent of the time). Hunter, Joseph S, "Understanding and Preventing the Dynamics of Suicide: An Introduction to the Self Preservation Theory of Human Behaviour," *International Journal of Emergency Mental Health and Human Resilience*, 22, no.2, (2020): 21-31, <https://www.omicsonline.org/open-access-pdfs/understanding-and-preventing-the-dynamics-of-suicide-an-introduction-to-the-self-preservation-theory-of-human-behavior.pdf>.

⁶⁰⁰ Pridmore writes, "Mental disorders are painful, and there is no doubt that people with mental disorders complete suicide more often than those without mental disorders. However, many people without mental disorders also complete suicide." S.Pridmore, J. Ahmadi J and W. Pridmore, "Two Mistaken Beliefs about Suicide," *Iran J Psychiatry*, 14, no. 2, (2019): 182-183.

⁶⁰¹ Sarah Bakewell, *At the Existentialist Café*, (Penguin Random House, London, 2016), 7. Occupation, Liberation, 13/50

⁶⁰² Dialogue of a Man with His Soul" (c. 1937-1759 B.C.)," in Battin, *The Ethics of Suicide*, <https://ethicsofsuicide.lib.utah.edu/selections/egyptian-didactic-tale/>.

Also, as I mentioned earlier, many scholars consider the world inhospitable and intolerable. For instance, the Bible describes the nature of the newly created world as hostile to humankind.⁶⁰³ Similar sentiments are expressed circa 400 B.C. by the Buddha⁶⁰⁴ and later by Schopenhauer,⁶⁰⁵ as I elaborated on in chapter two. The father of existentialism, Søren Kierkegaard himself, speaks of "earthly and temporal suffering: want, sickness, wretchedness, affliction, adversities, torments, mental sufferings, sorrow, grief."⁶⁰⁶

Surprisingly, despite such adversaries, Camus reasons that a human person does not end his or her life indiscriminately but generally copes⁶⁰⁷ with stressful events,⁶⁰⁸ be it financial and relationship problems, substance abuse, or other problems. In other words, these are problems the human person is familiar with, which his or her self-preservation instinct guards against. These problems are part of life, and a person typically anticipates these difficulties. With this in mind, it now makes sense that Camus never points to his harrowing situation in Paris as the grounds for his suicidal encounter. He does not implicate his illness or the death and destruction he witnessed as what caused his encounter with suicide. Except for describing the war as "the most stupid of wars",⁶⁰⁹ he does not relate his suicidal experience to living with the pending war on his doorstep because, as a human person, he is well acquainted with such hardships. He writes, "A world that can be explained even with bad reasons is a familiar world."⁶¹⁰

⁶⁰³ "The ground is [now] under a curse because of you; In sorrow and toil you shall eat [the fruit] of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you, By the sweat of your face, you will eat bread until you return to the ground, for from it you were taken." Genesis 3: 17 (AMP).

⁶⁰⁴ "Oblivious of the suffering to which life is subject, man begets children, and is thus the cause of old age and death. If he would only realise what suffering he would add to by his act, he would desist from the procreation of children; and so, stop the operation of old age and death." H. Singh Gour, *The Spirit of Buddhism*, Whitefish: Kessinger Publishing, 2005, 286–288.

⁶⁰⁵ "If children were brought into the world by act of pure reason alone, would the human race continue to exist? Would not a man have so much sympathy with the upcoming generation as to spare it the burden of existence? " We are like lambs in a field, disporting themselves under the eye of the butcher, who chooses out first one and then another for its prey. ... in our good days we are all unconscious of the evil fate may have presently in store for us – sickness, poverty, mutilation, loss of sight and reason." Arthur Schopenhauer, *The Essays On Studies in Pessimism*, (1890), On the Sufferings of the World 2/13 3/31.

⁶⁰⁶ Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, (Jovian Press, January 25, 2018) Introduction 2/2, Rakuten Kobo Inc.

⁶⁰⁷ Coping is the use of cognitive and behavioural strategies to manage the demands of a situation when these are appraised as taxing or exceeding one's resources or to reduce the negative emotions and conflict caused by stress. American Psychological Association Dictionary, s.v. "Coping," accessed October 5, 2022, See also [coping strategy](https://dictionary.apa.org/coping). <https://dictionary.apa.org/coping>

⁶⁰⁸ Camus says, "A world that can be explained even with bad reasons is a familiar world." Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurdity and Suicide 4/55.

⁶⁰⁹ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurd Creation, 1/22.

⁶¹⁰ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurdity and Suicide, 3/55.

I argue that Camus's claim that these seemingly obvious personal sorrows and incurable illnesses of daily living do not bring about such a crisis is a startling omission, considering that relationship, financial, legal, job and other difficulties are often cited as causes of suicide. Quite the contrary, he associates his suicidal ideation with his *inability to make sense of the world*. I argue that Camus's uppermost concern is that he *cannot make sense or understand*. This concern raises the question: What limitation of a human person makes him unable to make sense of things that can be potentially fatal? I suspect this limitation lies in the circumstances within which Camus finds himself and likely contributes to the problems of living that suicide theories today implicate as causes of suicide.

Situatedness

When I examine Camus' actions whilst in Paris, I find that these illustrate the existentialist insight that a human person always finds him or herself in a pre-existing situation within which he or she has to act. When the Germans invaded France during World War II, Camus volunteered to join the Allied Forces, but he was rejected due to his bouts of tuberculosis throughout his life. Unable to join the army, Camus instead joins the resistance, and he serves as editor-in-chief at *Combat*, an outlawed newspaper, until he has to flee the city from the advancing Nazis, only to return to Paris in 1943. This decision to return to Paris is how he befriended Jean-Paul Sartre and joined a circle of intellectuals – Simone de Beauvoir, André Breton and others. Like Sartre, Camus wrote and published political commentary on the war, and it was his criticism of communist theory which eventually led to a rift with Sartre.

As a tuberculosis sufferer, Camus's situation in war-torn Paris shows that the freedom to act does not mean a human person is unconstrained. Heidegger denotes the characteristics of our being with *facticity*, which he describes as "being-there for a while at the particular time."⁶¹¹ He understands that a human being finds him or herself thrown into the world, at a given time in history, in a country, a social class, a race, and a gender. Camus acknowledges his situatedness as a central tenant of his existence in the universe when he writes, "A man

⁶¹¹ Martin Heidegger, *Ontology – The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, (Indiana University Press, Indiana, 1999), Part One, 1/2

situates himself in relation to time. He takes his place in it."⁶¹² A human person may find him or herself living in peacetime or wartime, like Camus. Some people are healthy, and some are ill, such as Camus, suffering from tuberculosis or a mental illness. These factors are often interpreted as constraints in suicide theory, generally thought of, and cited as causes for suicidal behaviour. Camus, as does Sartre, absolves these situational factors in suicidal behaviour. Sartre writes, "For if, we were to blame [their] behaviour on their heredity, or environmental influences, their society, or factors of an organic or psychological nature, people would be reassured and would say, 'That is the way we are. No one can do anything about it.'"⁶¹³ Contrastingly, Camus's decision to join the resistance when he could not join the army underlines the existentialist insight that a human person acts from within a particular situation. Such a situation is the background against which a human person makes his or her choices, as per the constraints of the situation they find themselves in.

Nowhere does it appear that Camus is predetermined to act in a certain way, as one's biology or psychological makeup determines past experiences or moral laws. Sartre argues I create myself by what I choose to do. Freedom lies at the heart of human experience. I make myself up as I go along, I am always in progress. Existence precedes essence; this, for Sartre, is the human condition. He writes,

What we mean to say is that man first exists; that is, that man primarily exists—that man is, before all else, something that projects itself into a future and is conscious of doing so. Man is indeed a project that has a subjective existence, rather like that of a patch of moss, a spreading fungus, or a cauliflower.⁶¹⁴

And in *Nausea*, Sartre describes a human being as a dough. He writes,

'That's it, I used to think that hate, love, or death descended on us like tongues of fire on Good Friday. I used to think that one could radiate hate or death. What a mistake! Yes, I really thought that "Hate" existed, that it settled on people and raised them above themselves. Naturally, I am the only one, I am the one who hates, I am the one who loves. And that "I" is always the same thing, a dough which goes on stretching and stretching."⁶¹⁵

⁶¹² Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurd Walls, 9/55.

⁶¹³ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, (Yale University Press, New Haven/New York, 2007): 17/43.

⁶¹⁴ Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, 6/47.

⁶¹⁵ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea*, (Penguin Modern Classics, 2020): Diary, 200/238.

A human person is not a Hegelian, free-floating spirit, nor a Cartesian thinker first. You exist first. Kierkegaard explains Camus's *difficulty in living*. He writes,

"The simplest task is the most difficult. One thinks that existing is nothing, even less an art, after all we all exist, but to think abstractly, that is something. However, truly to exist, that is, to permeate one's existence with consciousness, at once eternal as though far beyond it and yet present in it, and nevertheless in the course of becoming – that is truly difficult."⁶¹⁶

Kierkegaard explains that it is easier to become a copy of what society prescribes and "however many cowardly, mediocre and hoodwinked individuals joined in a project of abandoning themselves to become something en-masse,"⁶¹⁷ but, despite this, he argues that "it is the task of every individual to become a whole human being; just as it is the ethical presupposition that everyone is born in the state of being able to do so."⁶¹⁸

To be an existing thinker, you must figure out how to exist as yourself.⁶¹⁹ Even in a challenging situation of war, a human person figures out what to make of it in his or her mind and how to act. A person chooses how he or she will act and thereby decides who he or she will be. Per Camus' example, he remains unconcerned with the constraints of his situation, which is just the deck of cards he is dealt with. Instead, his concern seems to be with unfamiliar and unknowable rules of the game.

Inexplicable world

Camus claims that a human person mostly misunderstands the true nature of the world and that he or she does not see the world as it is. A person often lives his or her life under the illusion that the world, as he or she is, is *human*. He writes,

⁶¹⁶ Søren Aabye Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscripts*, (Cambridge University Press, New York, 2009), 3. Actual, Ethical, Subjectivity: The Subjective Thinker, 8/78, Rakuten Kobo Inc.

⁶¹⁷ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 3. Actual, Ethical, Subjectivity: The Subjective Thinker, 53/78.

⁶¹⁸ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 3. Actual, Ethical, Subjectivity: The Subjective Thinker, 53/78.

⁶¹⁹ Kierkegaard refers to Socrates and writes, "The infinite merit of Socrates is precisely to be an existing thinker, not a speculator who forgets what it is to exist." Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, B. The Subjective Truth; Inwardness; Truth is Subjectivity, 20/78.

Understanding the world for a man (human person) is reducing it to the human, stamping it with his seal. The cat's universe is not the universe of the ant-hill. The truism 'All thought is anthropomorphic' has no other meaning. Likewise the mind that aims to understand reality can consider itself satisfied, only by reducing it to terms of thought. If man realised that the universe, like him, can love and suffer, he would be reconciled.⁶²⁰

For example, a human person gives meaning and purpose to things and believes that things happen for a reason, due to karma, fate or a higher being. One loves, has empathy, cares, and is kind, and thus relates to things similarly, and expects love, empathy, and kindness in return. Still, the world cannot stand with us in a reciprocal relationship and return care, love, warmth, clarity, or provide safety, purpose or meaning⁶²¹ because it is irrational and non-human. The world is foreign to us and different. More so, this planet opposes us because it is mostly hostile. Camus writes,

"At the heart of all beauty lies something inhuman, and these hills, the softness of the sky, the outline of these trees at this very minute lose the illusory meaning with which we had clothed them, henceforth more remote than a lost paradise. The primitive hostility of the world 'rises up' to face us across millennia."⁶²²

Being at the mercy of such a world, a human person is often a hair's breadth away from tragedy, death or destruction.^{623 624} Camus implies that 'Mother' nature is a myth but is a brutal force, with hurricanes, tsunamis, earthquakes, and tornadoes. Soul-less pests and viruses, such as the Black Death or COVID-19, pick humans carelessly, randomly, with no apparent rhyme or reason. In Camus' *The Plague*, first published in France as *La Peste* 1947, the doctor, Bernard Rieux, says to Jean Tarrow,

'You must come to the hospital tomorrow,' he said. 'To get your preventative vaccine. But, once and for all, before you become involved, tell yourself that you have a one-in-three chance of surviving.'

⁶²⁰ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurd Walls, 9/55.

⁶²¹ Camus says, "Likewise the mind that aims to understand reality can consider itself satisfied only by reducing it to terms of thought. If man realized that the universe like him can love and suffer, he would be reconciled." Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurd Walls 14/55.

⁶²² Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurd Walls 11/55.

⁶²³ T Santhosh Kumar, "What happened to Willem Kruger?," *Freshers Live*, Nov 24, 2022, <https://latestnews.fresherslive.com/articles/what-happened-to-willem-kruger-is-willem-kruger-missing-1105852> .

⁶²⁴ Anton van Niekerk, "Ons planeet 'n gevaarlike plek," *Netwerk24*, December 21, 2021, <https://www.netwerk24.com/netwerk24/stemme/menings/ons-planeet-n-gevaarlike-plek-20211220>.

Tarrow replies:

"Calculations like that are meaningless, doctor, and you know it as well as I do. A hundred years ago, an outbreak of plague killed all the inhabitants of a town in Persia, except the man who washed bodies, who had carried on with his job throughout. He got his one chance in three, that's all,'

Rieux said; and suddenly the sound of his voice was duller. 'But it's true: we still know nothing about this matter.'⁶²⁵

The similarity with the COVID-19 virus in modern-day society is striking. Researchers cannot determine why some patients become infected and even mortally sick with the coronavirus that causes COVID-19 or contract long COVID. In contrast, others show brief or no symptoms or never contract the disease.⁶²⁶ A person's chances of contracting, dying or not getting COVID appear random at best and eerily exactly as Camus describes in *The Plague*.

It seems reasonable to suspect that Camus's awareness of the world's inhumanness is associated with the loss that Camus describes in the Preface to his essay. Considering that Camus can do so implicates his mind in this experience, and, more so, his loss implicates an essential limitation of the human condition: that the mind seemingly does not guide instinct but is an impediment.

The mind: protector or investigative problem-solver?

As I elaborated earlier in the thesis, many scholars, such as Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Hobbes, and Rousseau, appointed the mind a godlike protector: an assistant and a manager that guides the instinct. For this reason, French psychiatrist Esquirol established a close association of suicide with emotion, clearing reason from any involvement in suicidal behaviour. As discussed in chapter three, theorists have since corrected this oversight and suicidal behaviour is acknowledged as inclusive of emotion, behaviours, and cognition.

⁶²⁵ Albert Camus, *The Plague*, (Penguin Classics, London, October 31, 2013), Part II, 56/88.

⁶²⁶ "COVID-19: Why is it mild for some, deadly for others?" *Health Matters*, 2023, <https://healthmatters.nyp.org/covid-19-and-disease-severity/>.

Theorists generally understand *suicidal behaviour* as a chronological process⁶²⁷ that manifests on a continuum of severity,⁶²⁸ with fleeting and vague thoughts about death that often persist:⁶²⁹ after that, planning suicide⁶³⁰ ⁶³¹ or an attempt that could be fatal.⁶³² ⁶³³ In this respect, Australian psychiatrist Saxby Pridmore points out that many people who die by suicide think about suicide, often for long periods. They research the topic and select a method based on lethality, accessibility, and personal comfort. They pre-plan and leave behind warnings to protect relatives and friends. For example, Mr Max Mosely died by suicide on May 23 2021, once he had exhausted all available treatment for terminal cancer and had only weeks to live. He told his assistant the day before his death that he would kill himself. On the day of his suicide, he left a note warning people not to enter and to call the police, and he also left a suicide note.⁶³⁴

Camus had insight into the role of cognition in suicidal behaviour long before modern-day science described suicidal behaviour as a complex phenomenon consisting of affect, cognition, and behaviour. Except for Durkheim, Camus was a lone voice questioning the absence of cognition in suicide. Durkheim criticised Esquirol's theory of partial insanity. Durkheim believes the mind does not have separate organs with separate functionality. Instead, like the human body, it functions as one. Therefore, the mind cannot be insane without affecting the emotions and vice versa because cognition and affection function in unity. He says, "The different modes of conscious activity are no longer seen as separate

⁶²⁷ L. Didier et al, "The gender paradox in suicidal behaviour and its impact on the suicidal process" *Journal of Affective Disorders* 13, no. 1-2 (April 2012): 19-26 April 2012, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0165032711001492>.

⁶²⁸ EM. Kleiman et al, "Digital phenotyping of suicidal thoughts," *Depress Anxiety*. 35 (2018): 601– 608. <https://doi.org/10.1002/da.22730>.

⁶²⁹ Harmer, Bonnie, et al. "Suicidal Ideation." *StatPearls*, StatPearls Publishing, May 18 2022.

⁶³⁰ "Suicide Definitions," National Institute of Mental Health, Mental Health Information, Statistic, <https://www.nimh.nih.gov>.

⁶³¹ Alex E. Crosby, LaVonne Ortega and Cindi Melanson, "Self-Directed Violence Surveillance: Uniform Definitions and Recommended Data Elements," Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), February 23 2011, <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/Self-Directed-Violence-a.pdf>.

⁶³² L. Didier et al, "The gender paradox in suicidal behaviour and its impact on the suicidal process" *Journal of Affective Disorders* 13, no. 1-2 (April 2012): 19-26 April 2012, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0165032711001492>.

⁶³³ Elizabeth O'Connor, Bradley Gaynes, Brittany U. Burda, Clara Williams, and Evelyn P. Whitlock, "Screening for Suicide Risk in Primary Care: A Systematic Evidence Review for the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force. Table 1, Definitions of Suicide-Related Terms," National Library of Medicine, April 2013, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK137739/table/ch1.t1/>.

⁶³⁴ Stewart Carr, Harry Howard, "F1 boss Max Mosley killed himself by shooting himself in the head with a shotgun after learning he had terminal cancer and had only 'weeks' left to live, inquest hears," *Mail Online* (London, Associated Newspapers Ltd, Part of the Daily Mail), March 30, 2022 <https://mol.im/a/10663809>.

forces that only come together and achieve unity in the context of some metaphysical substance, but as interdependent functions, making it impossible for one of them to be damaged without the damage affecting the others. They are consequently too closely meshed for it to be possible that madness can affect some while leaving the rest intact. For that reason, it is all the more impossible that it can impair a particular idea or feeling without impairing the mind at its root because representations and tendencies do not have any existence of their own; they are not a collection of small substances or spiritual atoms that cluster together to form the mind."⁶³⁵ Be that as it may, by the time Camus wrote *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Esquirol had already laid claim to suicide as a subject of clinical medicine.⁶³⁶

Camus implicates his mind in his suicidal experience, showing that a human person turns to reason *to make sense* of his suicidal experience and that the mind is central to his question about the meaning and worth of his life. How does the mind figure in Camus's experience? Camus describes the business of reason as that of inquiry. The mind is a Sherlock Holmes that needs to 'solve' and understand, comprehend, get to the bottom of, and get one's head around stuff, and this has been so since the beginning of critical thought. It is this ability that lies at the base of the superiority and brilliance of our kind. The mind is curious, it assesses, analyses and questions. It concludes and solves problems as it perceives them. Its primary mode is *to understand*, which Camus identifies as an innate, deep-seated need that trumps anything else. He describes a human person's innermost compulsion for 'things' to make sense to him or her: "The mind's deepest desire parallels man's unconscious feelings in the face of his universe: it is an insistence upon familiarity, an appetite for clarity."⁶³⁷

Inquisitive founding fathers

Human beings think, question, and analyse. The pre-Socratic philosophers questioned and rejected supernatural, mythological explanations of the universe. Their assessment refuted

⁶³⁵ Émile Durkheim, *On Suicide* (Penguin UK, 28 Sept 2006), 42/530, Kobo Books Inc.

⁶³⁶ "It does not belong to my subject to treat of suicide in its legal relations, nor, consequently, of its criminality. I must limit myself to showing it to be one of the most important subjects of clinical medicine." Etienne Esquirol, *Mental Maladies; a Treatise on Insanity*, (Lea and Blanchard, Philadelphia, 1845), 246/508, Google Books.

⁶³⁷ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurd Walls 13/55.

the belief that the gods are the universe's origin, as was popular with writers and poets at that time.⁶³⁸ For instance, Epicurean philosophers Democritus and Lucretius considered the myths of old as a ruse, serving the political order of the priests and rulers. They aimed to rid ancient society of these "fabrications"⁶³⁹ by rejecting mythical understanding in favour of rational analysis. From their initial questioning, the sciences would later develop, such as physics, chemistry, geology, meteorology, astronomy, embryology, psychology, theology, metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics.

They rejected the status quo and central beliefs that gave meaning and helped people make sense of the world.⁶⁴⁰ From this point onward, the philosophers, through rational analysis, assume responsibility for figuring out the world and everything in it for themselves. They show that human beings do not survive, like other sentient beings, because they have a formidable self-preservation instinct. More so, they owe their ability to explore, conquer and solve problems to their unique faculty of reason.

Present-day society credits and reveres the Greek philosophers for paving the way for the sciences. We hail philosophy as the mother of these sciences. We admire these incredible philosophers' early quests for familiarity and clarity, and their efforts underline the deep-seated and fundamental need of the human mind *to understand*. Consequently, modern-day technology, scientific advancement, and cutting-edge medicine: the first heart transplant, antibiotics, the COVID-19 Vaccine, the automobile, and the first moon landing, hail from these inquiries. These human achievements serve as impressive dimensions of the human mind's ability. Indeed, the human race basks in the glory of the mind and its life-changing discoveries and inventions, from the most astonishing life-saving technology to freeing humans from the mindless routine of talking! robotic vacuum cleaner-mops, and

⁶³⁸ Xenophanes says, "Homer and Hesiod attributed to the gods all things which are disreputable and worthy of blame when done by men; and they told of the many lawless deeds, stealing, adultery, and deception of each other. For all things come from earth, and all things end by becoming earth. For we are all sprung from earth and water. All things that come into being and grow are earth and water." Arthur Fairbanks Ed., "Xenophanes Fragments" *Hanover Historical Texts Project*, (June 2013) 7-10 <https://history.hanover.edu/texts/presoc/Xenophan.html>.

⁶³⁹ Bidney, David. "Myth, Symbolism, and Truth." *The Journal of American Folklore* 68, no. 270 (1955): 379-92. Accessed May 15, 2020. doi:10.2307/536765. https://www.jstor.org/stable/536765?read-now=1&refregid=excelsior%3Aaf25854b337c9bd4b4a6e584521f96cf&seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents.

⁶⁴⁰ "In ancient Greece, stories about gods and goddesses and heroes and monsters were an important part of everyday life. They explained everything from religious rituals to the weather, and they gave meaning to the world people saw around them." "Greek Mythology," *History*, Updated Jul 21, 2022, <https://www.history.com/topics/ancient-history/greek-mythology>.

robotic window cleaners. It is euphoric to realise that our kind is the author of such life-changing technology. Still, Camus's experience serves as a sobering reminder of the mind's far-reaching inability when the human subject is under investigation.

Knowing the Self

Camus's assessment of the worth of his own life shows that the mind's investigation is not limited to objects in the world. The mind does not discriminate. No subject is off limits. Camus shows this investigation as most urgent. An inquiry into himself takes preference. The fact that so many people die as a consequence of a human person's inability to make sense of his or her own life underlines the critical importance of the matter of the self.

Barrett writes of a story Kierkegaard told of an absent-minded man, so distracted from his own life that he does not realise that he exists until he wakes up to find himself dead.⁶⁴¹ Camus agrees that the matter of the human subject is gravely urgent because he sees the devastation and destruction of the human person when, all the while, the attention is on the products the human mind forged. He writes, "I see many people die because they judge that life is not worth living."⁶⁴² Therein, in the suicide death of so many, lies the urgency. Many years later, this urgency is still close to his heart. He writes, "After fifteen years, I have progressed beyond several of the positions which are set down here; but I have remained faithful, it seems to me, to *the exigency* which prompted them."⁶⁴³

Chester Bennington,⁶⁴⁴ lead vocalist of the rock band Linkin Park, describes his experience at this impasse during a radio interview about four months before he dies by suicide: "I drive myself nuts, actually thinking that all these are real problems. All the stuff that's going on (in

⁶⁴¹ William Barrett, *Irrational Man*, (Anchor Books Editions 1962, 1990, New York), One. The Abvent of Existentialism, 15/28.

⁶⁴² Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurdity and Suicide, 3/55.

⁶⁴³ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Preface, 1/2.

⁶⁴⁴ Chester Bennington was the frontman of Linkin Park until his death. Linkin Park is among the best-selling bands of the 21st century and the world's best-selling music artists, having sold over 100 million records worldwide. They have won two Grammy Awards, six American Music Awards, two *Billboard* Music Awards, four MTV Video Music Awards, 10 MTV Europe Music Awards and three World Music Awards. In 2003, MTV2 named Linkin Park the sixth-greatest band of the music video era and the third-best of the new millennium. *Billboard* ranked Linkin Park No. 19 on the Best Artists of the Decade list. In 2012, the band was voted as the greatest artist of the 2000s in a Bracket Madness poll on VH1. In 2014, the band was declared "The Biggest Rock Band in the World Right Now" by *Kerrang!* "Linkin Park." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, accessed October 16, 2022. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Linkin_Park.

my head) is actually just... I'm doing this to myself, regardless of whatever that thing is. So, this is that conscious awareness of that thing. When you can step back and look at something, you're actually elevating yourself consciously — you're enlightened at that point, to a certain degree."⁶⁴⁵ In the song *Heavy*, he says,

I don't like my mind right now
Stacking up problems that are so unnecessary
And I drive myself crazy
Thinking everything is about me.

Camus would likely shout out, yes! It is about you, Chester, and it is not unnecessary at all! Such an investigation is most urgent and much more so when compared to the Greek philosopher's inquiries about the world. This examination may not lay the foundations of science, but this is an examination that you cannot walk away from as Galileo did when his life was at stake for his theory that the earth is round.⁶⁴⁶

I argue that it is Camus, among the existentialist thinkers, who grasp the importance of such self-assessment to the extent that he prioritises suicide as *the* subject of the philosophers' inquiry. I agree with Camus that the key to understanding suicidal behaviour lies in the human subject, particularly in how he or she *exists*. I cannot agree more with Kierkegaard when he writes, "That the cognising spirit (the self) is one that exists, and that every human being is one such who exists for himself, is something I cannot repeat often enough, since the fanciful neglect of this is responsible for much confusion."⁶⁴⁷ Camus understands this when he writes,

When Karl Jaspers, revealing the impossibility of constituting the world as a unity, exclaims: 'This limitation leads me to myself, where I can no longer withdraw behind an objective point of view that I am merely representing, where neither I myself nor the existence of others, can any longer become an object for me,' he is evoking after many others those waterless deserts where thought reaches its confines. After many others, yes indeed, but how eager they were to get out of them! At that last crossroad

⁶⁴⁵ Bennington, Chester. "I Have A Hard Time With Life." February 2017 interview by JoJo Wright of iHeartRadio's 102.7 KIIS-FM. Blabbermouth, July 22, 2017. <https://blabbermouth.net/news/chester-bennington-in-february-2017-interview-i-have-a-hard-time-with-life-video>.

⁶⁴⁶ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurdity and Suicide 3/55, Rakuten Kobo Inc.

⁶⁴⁷ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, B. The Subjective Truth; Inwardness; Truth is Subjectivity, 1/78.

where thought hesitates, many men have arrived and even some of the humblest. They then abdicated what was most precious to them, their life.⁶⁴⁸

Camus, and likely Kierkegaard, would respond to Bennington, saying that your mind is stacking up problems, and what you examine is up close and personal. The 'I' is under investigation, asking about *my* life's worth to *me*. Kierkegaard warns of the danger of losing oneself. He writes, "In the world, the greatest danger, that of losing one's self, can occur so quietly that it is as if it were nothing at all. No other loss can take place so quietly; every other loss—an arm, a leg, five rixdollars, a spouse, etc.—is noticed, however."⁶⁴⁹ This happens as the result of the diversion of everydayness and busyness. Kierkegaard writes that a human person can "go on living, he can be, as it seems, a person engaged in temporal affairs, he can get married, beget children, be honoured and respected—and perhaps people fail to notice that, in the deeper sense, he is lacking a self."⁶⁵⁰ Camus writes, "the mind that studies itself gets lost in a giddy whirling."⁶⁵¹ I argue that both Camus and Bennington dislike what is going on in their minds, because "the end of the mind is failure."⁶⁵²

The Absurd

The Absurd embodies the confession behind Camus's loss, that his life is absurd, irrational and random, with no definable structure, and devoid of real meaning or purpose. Camus shares this cynical conclusion with the likes of Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. This mindset brought about the Theatre of the Absurd around 1940 to 1960, a literary and theatrical branch of existentialism. Sartre and Camus, in particular, wrote several important plays and novels exploring this theme, such as Camus's iconic novel *L'Etranger* (*The Outsider*), 1942. At the time, it aimed to shock the audience and confront it with the meaninglessness of life. Though it inevitably portrays the despair of the human person in

⁶⁴⁸ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurdity and Suicide 7/55, Rakuten Kobo Inc.

⁶⁴⁹ Søren Aabye Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death. A New Translation*, (Jovian Press, January 25, 2018) A. Infinitude's Despair is to Lack Finitude, *The Sickness Unto Death*, 4/43.

⁶⁵⁰ Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death. A New Translation*, A. Infinitude's Despair is to Lack Finitude, *The Sickness Unto Death*, 4/43.

⁶⁵¹ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurd Walls 13/55.

⁶⁵² Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurd Walls 18/55.

such a pointless universe, it challenges the audience to a dignified acceptance of one's lot, however pointless, in the face of one's limited mortality.

Kim argues that Sartre sees the absurd as an inability to explain contingency or existence, and she defines the Sartrean Absurd as "The groundlessness of being—the fact that things exist without a reason or an explanation — is the absurd. In contrast, the Camusian absurd is essentially a tension between a need and the inability to meet the need."⁶⁵³ That being so, I argue that the more important question, as I alluded to earlier in the chapter, is what limitation in the human condition is implicated in an encounter with the Absurd?

Camus would argue that the fact that the human mind is curious is not a concern,⁶⁵⁴ whereas Sartre would perhaps point to the irrational universe where things exist without rhyme or reason. They would likely agree that the Absurd does not pose a challenge for a cat because a cat is not a meaning-seeking entity, as is a human person. Sartre writes, "But since man's essential nature is "being-in-the-world," the absurd is ultimately an inseparable part of the human condition."⁶⁵⁵ For Camus, the crucial impediment of a human person lies in her or *his togetherness* in the world. In other words, the fact that it is within one structure because this togetherness reveals a mismatch: the human mind performs its relentless assessment in a world that is fundamentally different to it. Human beings, by their nature, *need* meaning to exist; nevertheless, the world, by its nature, resists answering. Herein lies the condition Camus describes as *absurdity*, the impediment that Camus calls "a divorce." In other words, two elements are thrown together, even though they are incompatible.

Sartre, in *A Commentary on The Stranger*, writes, "The "absurd" is both a factual state and the lucid awareness that some people acquire from that state."⁶⁵⁶ In other words, Sartre argues that Camus conveys *the feeling* of the Absurd in *The Stranger* while *The Myth of Sisyphus* aims to convey *the idea* of the absurd. Camus goes to great lengths to describe this inappropriate relationship to the reader. The strangeness is this 'stupidness' of putting

⁶⁵³ Hannah H. Kim, "Camus and Sartre on the Absurd," *Philosophers Imprint* 21 No 32, (April 2021), <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/p/pod/dod-idx/camus-and-sartre-on-the-absurd.pdf?c=phimp;idno=3521354.0021.032;format=pdf>, 2/11.

⁶⁵⁴ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurd Freedom 38/55.

⁶⁵⁵ Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, A Commentary on *The Stranger*, 4/22.

⁶⁵⁶ Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, A Commentary on *The Stranger*, 2/22.

a sense-making human being in a world where sense-making humans can't make sense and can find no meaning. He compares this with taking a knife to a gunfight. He says, "It lies in neither of the elements compared; it is born of their confrontation. I can, therefore say that the Absurd is not in man (if such a metaphor could have a meaning) nor in the world, but in their presence together."⁶⁵⁷ He says, "The absurd is born of this confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world."⁶⁵⁸ Camus describes this as an irreparable divide that leaves the self in the dark and unknowable and brings about a longing to die. He writes, "This very heart which is mine will for ever remain indefinable to me. Between the certainty I have of my existence and the content I try to give to that assurance, the gap will never be filled. For ever I shall be a stranger to myself."⁶⁵⁹

The longing for death

Camus argues that an awareness of the Absurd brings about a longing for death. He writes, "This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity. All healthy men having thought of their own suicide, it can be seen, without further explanation, that there is a direct connection between this feeling and the longing for death."⁶⁶⁰

I argue that this implies that there must be, in every human person, an ability to understand what death "can do", a mechanism to make such a longing possible. For example, Camus cannot write about how he longs to die unless he fathoms that there is some point to death. Put another way, death has some characteristic or feature, a power, that can "do" something for him.

But before I elaborate on death's ability, it is essential to note that there are different ways in which a human person may perceive death, depending on his or her beliefs. For example, absent from any faith in God,⁶⁶¹ Camus says for him, all that is, is *this* life, and everything happens and ends in this life. He writes, "For, humanly speaking, death is the last thing of

⁶⁵⁷ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Philosophical Suicide 22/55

⁶⁵⁸ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Philosophical Suicide 21/55.

⁶⁵⁹ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurd Walls, 14/55.

⁶⁶⁰ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurdity and Suicide, 4/55.

⁶⁶¹ He says, "A heart so keyed up eludes the eternal, and all churches, divine or political, lay claim to the eternal. Happiness and courage, retribution or justice are secondary ends for them. It is a doctrine they bring, and one must subscribe to it. But I have no concern with ideas or with the eternal." Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Conquest 19/21.

all; and, humanly speaking, there is hope only so long as there is life. Yes, man is his own end. And he is his only end. If he aims to be something, it is in this life."

In contrast, existentialist Kierkegaard believes in the existence of God and a transcendent reality by taking a leap of faith. In doing so, faith abolishes reason altogether.⁶⁶² That being so, Kierkegaard sees the grave and death not as the end but conquered by Christ as "the resurrection and the life."⁶⁶³ He finds *his* life meaningful and worth living because he believes wholeheartedly in an actual personal God.⁶⁶⁴

Camus thinks that, unless one opts for revolt, suicide might be likely because when death is perceived as the end, it reveals a certain pointlessness of life. Camus tells us that in the myth of Sisyphus, the tragic hero ceaselessly rolls a rock to the top of a mountain, only to fall back because of its weight.⁶⁶⁵ This ceaseless task is his punishment for tricking death and putting death in chains so that nobody could die.⁶⁶⁶ It is in the face of death that endless living becomes pointless. He writes about Sisyphus,

If this myth is tragic, that is because its hero is conscious. Where would his torture be, indeed, if at every step the hope of succeeding upheld him? But it is tragic only at the rare moments when it becomes conscious. Sisyphus, proletarian of the gods, powerless and rebellious, knows the whole extent of his wretched condition; it is what he thinks of during his descent. The boundless grief is too heavy to bear. These are our nights of Gethsemane [when a person grasps the inevitability of his or her own death].⁶⁶⁷

⁶⁶² He says, "It is essential to know whether one can live with it or whether, on the other hand, logic commands one to die of it. I am not interested in philosophical suicide but rather in plain suicide. I merely wish to purge it of its emotional content and know its logic and its integrity. Any other position implies for the absurd mind deceit and the mind's retreat before what the mind itself has brought to light. Husserl claims to obey the desire to escape 'the inveterate habit of living and thinking in certain well-known and convenient conditions of existence', but the final leap restores in him the eternal and its comfort. The leap does not represent an extreme danger as Kierkegaard would like it to do. The danger, on the contrary, lies in the subtle instant that precedes the leap. Being able to remain on that dizzying crest – that is integrity and the rest is subterfuge. I know also that never has helplessness inspired such striking harmonies as those of Kierkegaard. But if helplessness has its place in the indifferent landscapes of history, it has none in a reasoning whose exigence is now known." Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Philosophical Suicide 37/55.

⁶⁶³ Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, Introduction 1/3.

⁶⁶⁴ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurd Freedom 38/55.

⁶⁶⁵ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* The Myth of Sisyphus 3/5.

⁶⁶⁶ Jupiter with his brothers Neptune and Pluto divided Saturn's dominions after his dethronement. Jupiter's portion was the heavens, Neptune's the ocean, and Pluto's the realms of the dead. With Death in chains, Pluto's empire was silent and empty, and he dispatched the god of war to liberate Death. Thomas Bulfinch *Bulfinch's Greek and Roman Mythology* (New York, Dover Publications, March 5, 2012): I, 7/15, Rakuten Kobo Inc.

⁶⁶⁷ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* The Myth of Sisyphus 1/5.

Considering these different views of death, I now argue that death has a particular advantage for a human person, *which does not depend on how the person sees death*. Death's significance lies in that it can *end a human person's consciousness*: death ends Camus' consciousness of the Absurd, and death ushers in a transcendental existence for Kierkegaard. Thus, as a consequence, death brings life's pointless routine and unnecessary suffering to a close. Therefore, its particular significance lies in the premise that death sentences a person to a lifetime of needless labour and suffering. Still, it also frees him or her from this sentence.

Importantly, I argue that a human person has this insight into death's ability, as Camus shows when he writes: "Death, too, has patrician hands which, while crushing, also liberate."⁶⁶⁸ In this way, death brings relief to those who suffer ailments, disorders, violence, abuse or bullying, to those who are overcome by despair and weary of the Absurd, and to those who look toward eternal life hereafter in the same way, that a sleeping pill brings sleep to the exhausted. A human person who dies by suicide *knows* that he or she can free him or herself and extricate him or herself from any life circumstance, and herein, a human person is unique compared to instinctual life forms. An anonymous survivor of a suicide attempt said, "When you set on the idea of killing yourself, the more you contemplate it, the more ideal it seems. It solves everything!"⁶⁶⁹ Camus confirms this awareness, and he says, "At the end of all that, despite everything, is death. We also know that it ends everything."⁶⁷⁰

Consider, for example, how Bennington describes this awareness. He says, "I know that for me when I'm inside myself, when I'm in my own head, it gets... This place right here (*points to his head*), this skull between my ears, that is a bad neighbourhood, and I should not be in there alone," he continued, "I can't be in there by myself. It's insane! It's crazy in here."⁶⁷¹ This is also Camus' call out when he finds himself in war-torn Paris and wonders if his life

⁶⁶⁸ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurd Freedom 50/55.

⁶⁶⁹ Personal email exchanges with a suicide survivor living in Scandinavia. The survivor provided me with written permission to use the above direct quote.

⁶⁷⁰ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* Conquest 18-19/21.

⁶⁷¹ Bennington, Chester. "I Have A Hard Time With Life." February 2017 interview by JoJo Wright of iHeartRadio's 102.7 KIIS-FM. Blabbermouth, July 22, 2017. <https://blabbermouth.net/news/chester-bennington-in-february-2017-interview-i-have-a-hard-time-with-life-video>.

has any meaning, having lost all ability to make sense of that life. He writes about the craziness-in-his-head that Bennington refers to,

Dying voluntarily implies that you have recognised, even instinctively, the *ridiculous* character of that habit, the *absence of* any profound *reason* for living, the *insane* character of that daily agitation and the *uselessness* of suffering.⁶⁷²

More so, the examples of Camus, Bennington, and many others show that the awareness that death can free one from the Absurd prompts a reply, a need to act. Camus writes, "The mind, when it reaches its limits, must make a judgement and choose its conclusions. This is where suicide and the reply stand."⁶⁷³ How a person responds is a topic for discussion in the following chapter. But a response is inevitable because a human person cannot stand indifferent towards what renders human existence so ridiculous, pointless, insane and useless.⁶⁷⁴

Conclusion

Theorists, such as Obegi, reason that what a person like Camus or Bennington experiences can hardly be considered normal and that their suicidality indicates a failing instinct. He describes such experiences as "a preoccupation with thoughts of suicide, preparations to die prematurely, unbearable mental pain and despair, a belief that death is necessary (and inevitable), and distress that is marked by insomnia, nightmares, or agitation."⁶⁷⁵ I disagree with such an assessment because I understand suicidal behaviour as an experience people typically have, as it goes hand in hand with the human condition. Suicide attempt survivor Andrea Rowe⁶⁷⁶ alludes to this generic human condition when she claims, "I felt a communion with human suffering: we, all human beings, suffer. I am not alone. And I am "normal." I am like every other human being in that we share this common experience called

⁶⁷² Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurdity and Suicide, 3/55

⁶⁷³ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurd Walls, 23/55.

⁶⁷⁴ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurdity and Suicide, 3/55

⁶⁷⁵ Joseph H. Obegi, "Is suicidality a mental disorder? Applying DSM-5 guidelines for new diagnoses," *Death Studies*, 45, no. 8, (2021): 638-650, DOI: [10.1080/07481187.2019.1671546](https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2019.1671546).

⁶⁷⁶ Andrea Rowe works as a peer support worker at Regeneration Community Services in Toronto. She is a peer facilitator in a group intervention for people with recurrent suicide, "Skills for Safer Living: A Psychosocial, Psychoeducational Intervention for People with Recurrent Suicide Attempts." White, Marsh, Kral, Morris Ed. *Critical Suicidology: Transforming Suicide Research and Prevention for the 21st Century*, (Vancouver, Toronto, Canada, UBC Press, 2016): Contributors, 6/7, Rakuten Kobo Inc.

suffering."⁶⁷⁷ That being so, I ask what it means to be human, "normal", and to share in the communal suffering of humankind. In this chapter, I argue that the difference between the two depictions of suicidal behaviour lies in how one replies to the question, What is a human person? The answer to this question holds far-reaching implications for understanding suicidal behaviour, which I examine in the following chapter.

First to examine the human subject, existentialist thinkers, such as Søren Kierkegaard, Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Albert Camus wanted to understand what it means to be alive and how we live. Their subject is the human person and his or her existence. They find that in the first instance, I *exist* before I attempt to engage with the world as a knowing entity, as described by Descartes.⁶⁷⁸ The existentialist thinkers refused to accept that all that can be known about a human person is that he or she exists. They subsequently explore a human person, flesh and blood in-the-world, without reserve, beyond reason or logic, and outside philosophical systems. As the existentialists gain insight into their human subject, a new picture emerges of what a person is and what this implies for living.

For Camus, suicidal experience illustrates how such an individual subject is situated in time in the world that Camus describes as non-sensical. He "takes his place in it," in war-torn Europe as the Nazis invade Paris. He thinks that no God chose where, when and to whom he was born. He is purely random, as are his personality, talents, and abilities. He reports no God who creates and equips him with a higher purpose. Instead, the world is as it is, for him and many others around him, abandoned (by God) and without meaning. With other existentialists, he echoes the creed that a human person such as himself is not part of God's sovereign, determined plan. Therefore, he has no inherent, predetermined state or "human nature." This central tenant of existentialism enables Camus to think about a human being beyond the narrow confines of a failing instinct or a mind that seemingly fails to guide and manage the instinct.

⁶⁷⁷ White, Marsh, Kral, Morris Ed. *Critical Suicidology: Transforming Suicide Research and Prevention for the 21st Century*, 8: No Regrets 5/16.

⁶⁷⁸ "As I observed that in the words I think, therefore I am, there is nothing at all which gives me assurance of their truth beyond this, that I see very clearly that in order to think it is necessary to exist." René Descartes, *Discourse on the Method*, (n.p., 1637): 2/8, Rakuten Kobo Inc.

Camus understands that a human person such as himself may successfully navigate the seemingly random hardships of daily life with the assistance of instinct guided by reason. We do this masterly, and the products of our reason show us superior amongst all living things: medicine, technology, and modernity. Yet, when we attempt to understand ourselves as a human subject, an existing self, our reason fails dismally. Amid his singular crisis, Camus must have wondered, what does all the progress I enjoy in my daily life matter when the feeling of absurdity comes over me that I cannot reconcile and stirs up a longing for death in me?

He figures that a human person's predicament is that he or she has a deep-seated need, a compulsion to create order, have clarity, and give meaning to his or her life. By implication, suicidal behaviour is a subjective, personal experience playing off in a human person's mind, during which he or she assesses the worth their life. Such an experience is made possible by the human person being self-aware. Camus very clearly identifies this as a cognitive experience. He says, "Beginning to think is beginning to be undermined. Society has but little connection with such beginnings."⁶⁷⁹ The subject under investigation is individual thought preceding death. His sole focus is the relationship between individual *thought* and suicide.⁶⁸⁰

Camus asks, "Is there a logic leading to the choice to die?" He suspects there is such reasoning, which commences when a person comes face-to-face with the Absurd.⁶⁸¹ Does this mean that suicide is inevitable when one understands the pointlessness of suffering in the face of inevitable death?⁶⁸² In other words, does the belief in the absurdity of existence dictate suicide? Earlier in the chapter, I alluded to the fact that a human person is not acted upon, as one does with a non-living object. It would be utterly ridiculous to think that a human person is like a fork, waiting to be picked up and moved from point A to point B. Still, though theorists may not put a person on equal footing with an object, they think a human

⁶⁷⁹ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurdity and Suicide 3/55.

⁶⁸⁰ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurdity and Suicide 3/55.

⁶⁸¹ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurd Walls 7/55.

⁶⁸² Steward Carr and Harry Howard, "F1 boss Max Mosley killed himself by shooting himself in the head with a shotgun after learning he had terminal cancer and had only 'weeks' left to live, inquest hears," DailyMail, March 30 2022, <https://mol.im/a/10663809>.

person is similar to an instinctual non-human animal. They even go so far as to assume that the instinctual self-preservation observed in animals is a measure of normalcy in human persons.

I argue that existentialist thinkers refute this view of a human person. They say that a human person makes him or herself up as he or she goes along. He or she thinks, chooses, and acts. Sartre writes, "We can never explain our actions by reference to a given and immutable human nature. In other words, there is no determinism—man is free, man is freedom."⁶⁸³ The mind reflects on itself and assesses every situation one finds oneself in, even situations in which one finds oneself under severe duress. The mind considers and concludes. It offers solutions to problematic situations. I reason that people who die by suicide, in all situations or circumstances, make a similar assessment. This assessment is not a point of failure; instead, it is a point of logic: "The mind, when it reaches its limits, must make a judgement, and choose its conclusions. This is where suicide and the reply stand."⁶⁸⁴ Therefore, Camus argues that even in the face of the Absurd, a human person can exercise the freedom to stay, and he or she can revolt against The Absurd. Camus contrasts his reply to that of Kierkegaard, who opens the door to faith, meaning, purpose and hope in a transcendent reality and a personal God, making it possible to escape the Absurd. But is faith a disclaimer for suicide? I will further examine this question in more detail in the following chapter. In doing so, I will elaborate on a human person's responsibility for his or her choices, which creates anxiety and despair that Camus describes as harrowing. In his earlier novel, *The Stranger*, Camus first introduces and lets the reader *feel* the absurdity before discussing and further exploring the Absurd in *The Myth of Sisyphus*.

In closing, Camus's essay, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, shows that Camus realises that he is not alone and that what he goes through is not only his subjective experience but an experience people generally have⁶⁸⁵ because he shares aspects of being human with all people collectively. He writes, "*All healthy men (person)] having thought of their own suicide*, it can be seen, without further explanation, that there is a direct connection between this feeling

⁶⁸³ Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, 10/43.

⁶⁸⁴ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Philosophical Suicide 23/55.

⁶⁸⁵ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurdity and Suicide 2/55.

and the longing for death." I make the case that these aspects are implicated in suicidality. No one escapes these aspects of being human, irrespective of financial or social status, income, health status, personal problems, culture, gender, or nationality. They offer no protection, as these aspects are inescapable to being human. Camus relates the difficulty of living to suicidal behaviour, and the nature of the difficulty lies in *what we are*. In the next chapter, I argue that it is because Camus realises that his own experience stems from his human condition that he sees suicide as an urgent priority for philosophy.

6. Suicidal Behaviour Is The Fundamental Question of Philosophy

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I argued that, for the most part, society perceives a person who turns his or her back on life with aversion and fear. Suicide is judged evil, criminal, cowardly and an illness. In chapter four, I showed that theorists think a human person is instinctually self-preserving. One may even believe that instinct requires little effort on our part and that one can 'breathe easy' because it has our backs. It simply does its job, and it does so for everyone, irrespective of race, creed or nationality. It is "human nature" and the measure of what is normal. Overlooking this, however, as life happens, sometimes, something goes wrong, and suicide happens. And it goes wrong: every 40 seconds, a person dies by suicide somewhere in the world.⁶⁸⁶ With this in mind, I argue against the notion that "something" goes wrong with a minority and the suicide theories attuned to this narrative.

I defend the position that a human person would generally confront suicide at some point(s) in his or her life because of how he or she *exists* in the world. I envisage that to live is not instinctual. In the previous chapter, I argued that to exist takes effort. To exist is to "manage" a self and to create such a self through choices, decisions and actions. To exist is not to "live out" a predetermined course because there is no inborn or determinate guidance or know-how. It is not like sitting back in a comfortable armchair, waiting for life to unfold in front of your eyes. Indeed, it mandates action. To exist is thrilling because you get to choose yourself, not just your car or house. You make yourself into who you want to be!

Still, exciting as it may be, as previously discussed, it comes with responsibility and, therefore, anxiety, dread, and anguish, especially considering the limitations that come with being a human person in the world. In this way, Camus's example shows that it is up to him when the Nazis advance on Paris; he decides to leave the city in the fall of 1940, only to return some years later. In doing so, the specifics of his situation are the framework within which his actions are taken and nothing more. For instance, having recently recovered from

⁶⁸⁶ "Suicide: one person dies every 40 seconds," *World Health Organization*, September 9, 2019, <https://www.who.int/news/item/09-09-2019-suicide-one-person-dies-every-40-seconds>.

recurring tuberculosis, Camus cannot enlist with the Allied Forces. Instead, he joins the French Resistance as editor-in-chief of the clandestine newspaper of the Resistance, *Combat*.⁶⁸⁷ Living in war-stricken Paris, he comes to distrust all moral, religious or political systems because he is critical and reflective of societal values and beliefs, which he subsequently judges as distorted and eroded. He responds to his perceived loss by questioning and doubting God and existing societal values. He finds the world irrational and the occupiers' actions brutal and senseless. Camus writes,

We learn of comrades who had their guts ripped out, their limbs torn off, and their faces kicked in, and the men who did these things were men polite enough to give up their seats on the subway, just as Himmler, who made an art and a science of torture, used the back door when he returned home at night, so as not to wake his pet canary."⁶⁸⁸

Being a sense-seeking self in such a universe, Camus concludes that life is absurd. He weighs its worth, and his experience comes with significant anxiety and anguish because he grasps the limitations of his mind to make sense of himself in this equation. Far from reacting instinctually, Camus is an "existing thinker" who troubleshoots and solves the difficulty of living as he experiences it. Importantly, I argue that he, being aware of himself in his situation, is playing out suicide as a potential possibility in his mind because he understands that death can free him from this absurdity. More so, during this time of death and destruction, Camus sees many people die by suicide when they judge their lives as not worth living. He notices that people seemingly kill themselves when they find life meaningless, but he sees that some do not. On the other hand, he observes that it is also true that those who assured themselves of the meaning of life also die by suicide, and Camus asks himself why that is. With these concerns and his own experience, Camus sets off on his exploration of suicide in his essay, *The Myth of Sisyphus*.

Many years later, on September 11, 2001, the same question would come to the attention of photographer José Jiménez-Tirado when he witnessed how some of the survivors trapped

⁶⁸⁷ Albert Camus, *Camus at Combat, Writing, 1944-1947*, (Recorded Books, November 15, 2022), Rakuten Kobo Inc, Audiobook.

⁶⁸⁸ Camus, *Camus at Combat, Writing, 1944-1947*, Track 6.

on the upper floors of World Trade Centres 1 and 2 jumped to their deaths.⁶⁸⁹ The photographer says, "Those images have stayed with me, and I often wonder what must have gone through their minds before they decided to jump."⁶⁹⁰ With this in mind, the chapter questions to what extent Camus's insights into the matter at hand can shed some light on Jiménez-Tirado haunting question, which is also asked by so many people locally and around the world who experience the loss of a loved one by suicide.

In the first part of the chapter, I examine Camus's suicidal experience. I make the argument that when suicidal behaviour is looked at from the perspective of a real-life, flesh-and-blood individual in his or her situation, it implicates aspects of how one is a human person in the universe, which I discussed in the previous chapter. I argue that such a perception of how we are human questions views of suicidal behaviour as abnormal, which are currently in effect. As an alternative, I say that the mind takes centre stage and assesses oneself within the constraints of one's situation, only to suggest a course of action upon that assessment. I aim to find a process, a pathway or logic to suicide, and I set out to describe the steps in such a process.

From this discussion, I will next assess the broader implications of Camus's experience, and I ask why some people, such as Camus, refuse suicide and stay, even though many others die by suicide. I find that a human person does not necessarily find life intolerable just because he or she finds it meaningless. In other words, it appears that to believe that life is pointless does not mandate suicide. On the other hand, I argue that a belief in a transcendental existence after death, a "leap into faith", as both Kierkegaard and Camus describe it, may bestow meaning on life. Still, I find that such a belief does not necessarily "protect" a human person from suicide.

In closing, I find that Camus realises that the question that the self asks, "Is life worth it?" is asked by people generally. This is so because the limitations implicated in suicidal behaviour that Camus experiences as an individual are also shared by people commonly. I

⁶⁸⁹ Tom Junod, "The Falling Man," *Esquire*, September 9, 2021, <https://www.esquire.com/news-politics/a48031/the-falling-man-tom-junod/>.

⁶⁹⁰ José Jiménez-Tirado, "Photographing 9/11: 'What did they think as they jumped?'" *Al Jazeera*, September 12, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2021/>.

argue that it is for this reason that Camus awards the subject of suicide the status of the foremost problem of philosophy.

A suicidal logic

On May 30 1920, Ludwig Wittgenstein, in a heart-wrenching letter to his friend Paul Engelmann, describes how shameful he feels about his suicidal ideation.

I have had a most miserable time lately. Of course, only as a result of my own baseness and rottenness. I have continually thought of taking my own life, and the idea still haunts me sometimes. I have sunk to the lowest point. May you never be in that position! ⁶⁹¹

What is this "lowest point" that Wittgenstein makes mention of? Sadly, no one knows, as he does not elaborate beyond blaming himself ⁶⁹² for feeling this way. Also, a few months before his suicide, Linkin Park frontman and songwriter Chester Bennington asked for forgiveness for the "wrong" he did. He writes,

When my time comes
Forget the wrong that I've done
 Help me leave behind some reasons to be missed
And don't resent me
 And when you're feeling empty
 Keep me in your memory
 Leave out all the rest
 Leave out all the rest⁶⁹³

Even though many people, such as Wittgenstein and Bennington, might think about suicide, people hardly talk about it openly because it is immensely stigmatised. That being so, talking about suicide or suicidal thoughts frightens or makes them uncomfortable, so they generally refrain from talking about it, especially in the first person. It is clear from Wittgenstein and Bennington that people don't understand their thoughts of suicide but feel guilty and secretly

⁶⁹¹ Paul Engelmann, *Letters from Ludwig Wittgenstein, with a Memoir* (New York, Horizon Press, 1968): 33.

⁶⁹² Michael A. Peters (2019) Wittgenstein and the Ethics of Suicide. Homosexuality and Jewish Self-hatred in Fin De Siècle Vienna, *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 51:10, 981-990, DOI: [10.1080/00131857.2018.1548881](https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2018.1548881)

⁶⁹³ Linkin Park. "Leave Out All The Rest." 3. Linkin Park. *Minutes to Midnight*. The Mansion, Los Angeles, CA. March 3, 2008. Google. <https://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=leave+out+all+the+rest&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8>.

blame themselves or are ashamed of their suicidality. It is remarkable that Bennington, as does Camus, realises this is not just his experience. For instance, a few months before his suicide, Bennington, together with Joseph Hahn, Brad Delson, Mike Shinoda, Robert G. Bourdon and David Farrell, writes,

When this began
 I had nothing to say
 And I get lost in the nothingness inside of me
 (I was confused)
 And I let it all out to find
That I'm not the only person with these things in mind,
 But all that they can see is the words revealed
 Is the only real thing that I've got left to feel
 (Nothing to lose)
 Just stuck, hollow and alone
 And the fault is my own, and the fault is my own⁶⁹⁴

About twenty-two years after Wittgenstein wrote his letter, Camus experienced a similar low as Wittgenstein and Bennington. In contrast, Camus meticulously describes the thoughts and feelings that play out in his heart and mind and publishes his candid analysis in his essay, *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Like Bennington, he realises that he is not the only one thinking these thoughts, and he opens up about how he thinks about ending his life. As such, Camus allows one to be privy to a candid account of his mind at the time. Considering the general silence on the matter, I argue that it is most fortunate that a writer of such skill and stature as Camus allows one insight into his mind.

I reason that Camus is well qualified for the task at hand. A writer of great skill, he uses these abilities to account for his experiences. More so, he has a unique take on suicide, being familiar with and having experienced the stigma of tuberculosis for himself. Society at the time viewed tuberculosis similarly to suicide, a form of social deviance, an expression

⁶⁹⁴ Linkin Park. "Somewhere I belong." 3. *Meteora*. Don Gilmore, Linkin Park. February 24, 2002. Google. <https://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=somewhere+i+belong&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8>.

of a weak moral character, criminal, uncontrolled libido, and inherently self-destructive.⁶⁹⁵

A high incidence of suicide among tubercular patients contributed unfairly to this image of a tubercular character, and Camus recalls his initial shame for having tuberculosis. He writes,

In our well-policed society, we recognise that an illness is serious because we don't dare speak of it directly. For a long time, in middle-class families, people said no more than that the elder daughter had a "suspicious cough" or that the father had a "growth" because tuberculosis and cancer were looked upon as somewhat shameful maladies.⁶⁹⁶

Camus understood the stigma of tuberculosis and the close association with suicide and, therefore, could look beyond the stigma of both and understand that suicidal behaviour is, in fact, a philosophical problem.

As an existentialist thinker, I argue that Camus has insight into his own experience. First, he understands that his suicidality has to do with how he exists as a human person in the world. He knows that his suicidal ideation stems from his notion of the Absurd. He understands this awareness as both inevitable and necessary. He writes, "The fundamental subject of *The Myth of Sisyphus* is this: it is legitimate and necessary to wonder whether life has a meaning; therefore, it is legitimate to meet the problem of suicide face to face."⁶⁹⁷

Secondly, I argue that what sets him apart is that he understands that because "it is legitimate and necessary" to ask about the worth of one's life, it is what "all (healthy) people" do. He knows full well that he is not alone; therefore, his concerns lie beyond the relationship between *his* mind and suicide and how it plays out. He understands the urgency of the matter because he knows that many people face up to the same question and die. He writes, "On the other hand, I see many people die because they judge that life is not worth living." I argue it is for this reason that Camus so meticulously documents his thoughts on

⁶⁹⁵ That being so, it comes as no surprise that suicide was common among tuberculosis sufferers. At the age of twenty Camus wrote about an attempted suicide while he was hospitalised for treatment himself. He writes, "Early in his illness, the man [a hairdresser] had found himself prevented from working, weakened, with no resources, and in despair over the poverty that had settled on his wife and children. He had not been thinking about death, but one day he threw himself beneath the wheels of a passing automobile. "Like that." Only, the driver had braked in time, and in his fury as a man in good health whom someone is trying to annoy, he chased the hairdresser away with a well-placed kick. The hairdresser had not dared consider suicide since." Camus, *Reflections on the Guillotine* 1957 2/44 (UK, Penguin Books, 2020). Rakuten Kobo Inc.

⁶⁹⁶ Camus, *Reflections on the Guillotine*, 2/44.

⁶⁹⁷ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurdity and Suicide, 2/55.

the matter in the *Myth of Sisyphus*. He mentions this urgency fifteen years later when he wrote the preface to the English edition of his essay. He makes it clear that, though he "progressed beyond several of the positions which are set down here," he "remained faithful, to *the exigency* which prompted them."⁶⁹⁸ Fifteen years after he wrote *The Myth of Sisyphus*, he still feels strongly about the matter because so many people die by suicide.

With this urgency in mind, I attempt to navigate Camus's rich imagery to understand what plays out in his heart and mind during his suicidal experience, in the hope that it is possible to identify and map the steps he goes through that bring him face-to-face with suicide.

Camus's assessment of his life's worth

In this chapter, I reason that Camus assesses the worth of his life from the vantage point of the self and as a first-person experience of suicidal behaviour. I argue that, from the understanding that the self is a meaning-seeking entity, such an assessment is to be expected, even mandated: "What man needs is to rediscover himself and to comprehend that nothing can save him from himself, not even valid proof of the existence of God. In this sense, existentialism is optimistic."⁶⁹⁹ Like Sartre, Camus considers exploring the self as legitimate and necessary. He writes, "The fundamental subject of *The Myth of Sisyphus* is this: it is legitimate and necessary to wonder whether life has a meaning; therefore, it is legitimate to meet the problem of suicide face to face."⁷⁰⁰ In other words, it is healthy, honest, and free from blame, guilt, or censure. More so, it is inevitable. Camus says it is imperative for the self's well-being. It is optimistic, and it is the privilege of humans. Camus writes, "However, it is good for man to judge himself occasionally. He is alone in being able to do so."⁷⁰¹

In stark contrast, as I discussed earlier, modern-day theorists cite intense distress or feelings of deep sadness, anguish from trauma, hardship, mental illness, and factors from a person's

⁶⁹⁸ Camus says, "The unity of this book resides in the reflection, alternately cold and impassioned, in which an artist may indulge as to his reasons for living and for creating. After fifteen years, I have progressed beyond several of the positions which are set down here; but I have remained faithful, it seems to me, to the exigency which prompted them." Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Preface 1 / 2.

⁶⁹⁹ Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, 28/43.

⁷⁰⁰ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Preface, 1/2.

⁷⁰¹ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurd Freedom, 48/55.

environment to explain why people succumb to suicide or experience thoughts of suicide. All this implies that a person dies by suicide when ill health or significant physical or mental pain overpowers self-preservation. Why is this belief so entrenched? I believe that it is sensible to draw this conclusion when one accepts that all sentient beings are, in the first instance, self-preserving. Looking at suicide from the outside, what else can entice a self-preserving entity's instinct to fail, except for life's visible hardships and illnesses? If a lion approaches an antelope and makes no attempt to flee, one would assume some abnormality with the animal because one believes the animal to be instinctually self-preserving, as is characteristic of its species. When thinking about a human person similarly, it is understandable to reason that immediate personal sorrows or incurable illnesses bring about suicide.

Notwithstanding that, Camus's suicidal behaviour is not related to any daily hardships and stresses he is *familiar* with. I argue that this familiarity enables a person to defend against these daily onslaughts because the mind can make sense of what is familiar; however unbearable one's hardship might be. For example, Ellie Wiesel, from his experiences and ultimate survival as a Jewish prisoner in Auschwitz-Birkenau and Buchenwald, asks in the preface to *Night*, "Did I write it so as not to go mad or, on the contrary, to go mad in order to understand the nature of madness, the immense, terrifying madness that had erupted in history and in the conscience of humankind?"⁷⁰² Camus answers that one should be fine as long as one can make sense of oneself and one's world, even a 'mad' world such as Wiesel's.⁷⁰³

Instead, it is *the unfamiliar* that Camus associates with suicidal behaviour. Camus postulates that the human mind comes to understand the inability of its singular instrument to bestow sense on an irrational universe, and this understanding renders life absurd and impossible. Having said that, such a cognitive assessment comes from a particular vantage point that affords a human person a comprehensive view of the subject at hand, the self. This implies that the suicidal person experiences suicidal behaviour from a contrasting

⁷⁰² Wiesel, *Night*, 1/11.

⁷⁰³ "A world that can be explained even with bad reasons is a familiar world." Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurdity and Suicide, 3-4 /55.

perspective to the theorist's. The suicidal person looks at suicide from his or her inwardness or internal perspective. In other words, what is under assessment is the self; what it means to exist inside the self as a human self in the universe; to what extent the self finds life worth "it", and whatever the self then awards it, be it absurdity and meaninglessness or hope, purpose and meaning.

That said, the mind is inquisitive, as I elaborated on in the previous chapter. A similar curiosity is at the centre of Camus's inquiry. He sees this assessment of himself as a *regular function* of his mind and tries to understand who he is and why he is alive. He says all people are self-aware and assess themselves,⁷⁰⁴ and when they do, they follow logical steps one can differentiate. I will next examine each step in the process separately. But where does one begin to analyse such a process? I will describe the steps *preceding* a suicide death. In other words, I will ask, "How did his assessment start?" and "What came first?". Once I answer this question, I will ask, "What came next?" and so forth, until the final step, where his mind draws its conclusion. For this reason, I will commence by turning my attention to Camus just before he examines himself.

One: Daily Life

Despite the challenges of living in war-ravaged Paris, Camus describes himself at this time in his life as "the thoughtless man" or "the everyday man," a time when everyday life carries and contains him. He describes this as "the acts of a mechanical life,"⁷⁰⁵ the mundane routine living tasks, such as eating, sleeping, working, brushing one's teeth, etcetera, which everyone performs daily, unreflective and unthinking.

Camus describes one's daily routine as a conveyor-belt type of existence that is repetitive and non-stop, and he cites a factory worker's day as an example of such routine.⁷⁰⁶ He has

⁷⁰⁴ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurdity and Suicide, 4/55.

⁷⁰⁵ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurd Walls, 9 /55.

⁷⁰⁶ He says, "Rising, streetcar [tram], four hours in the office or the factory, meal, streetcar [tram], four hours of work, meal, sleep, and Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday and Saturday according to the same rhythm – this path is easily followed most of the time." Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurd Walls, 9/55.

goals and looks forward to his future, to "'someday', his retirement or the labour of his sons."⁷⁰⁷ He is an achiever, goal-orientated, he is ambitious. He writes,

Everything hurries him onward. But at the same time, nothing interests him more than himself and his potential. Whence his interest in the theatre, in the show, where so many fates are offered to him, where he can accept the poetry without feeling the sorrow. There, at least, can be recognised the thoughtless man, and he continues to hasten towards some hope or other.⁷⁰⁸

He thinks he directs his own life and is free⁷⁰⁹ until one day when there is a disruption in his business-as-usual existence, a moment Camus describes as one "in which the chain of daily gestures is broken."⁷¹⁰

Two: A break in the chain

Camus tells of an apartment-building manager whose daughter died. After her death, people noticed that her father had changed considerably since her demise and that her death somehow 'undermined' him. Five years after her passing, he killed himself. Camus argues that these "personal sorrows" or "incurable illnesses" disrupt daily life but do not *cause* suicide,⁷¹¹ even if this is regularly perceived as such. In this way, stressors, such as War, a global pandemic, prolonged stress from work or study, personal trauma, loss, terminal illness, or death, set in motion a process of reflection which could result in a wish to die, especially when they coincide with an awareness of the Absurd. Should this happen, I make a case that a human person will likely find the suffering, pain, and anguish that these events bring about to be in vain, being aware of the Absurd. Therefore, I reason that the anguish these events bring about might be a tipping point in some suicides, even though I agree that these events do not simply "cause" suicide.

Very often, in many cases of suicide death, one will never know what exactly starts the process, which is evident from the fact that people often speculate about why a particular person kills him or herself. Camus writes that the break in the chain that brings about

⁷⁰⁷ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurd Freedom, 43/55.

⁷⁰⁸ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Drama, 10/21.

⁷⁰⁹ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurd Freedom, 43/55.

⁷¹⁰ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurd Walls, 8 /55.

⁷¹¹ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurdity and Suicide, 2/55.

awareness of the Absurd very often goes undetermined. He writes, "What sets off the crisis is almost always unverifiable."⁷¹² To demonstrate his point, when billionaire Thomas H. Lee died of an apparent suicide in his office at his Fifth Avenue headquarters in New York on February 23, 2023, anonymous sources who knew Mr. Lee indicate that nobody seems to know why he took his life.⁷¹³ In this way, Camus says that a "break in the chain" can be like a thought or an inspiration that comes to a writer unexpectedly and suddenly. The idea might be insignificant, but it can bring about a great work of art. So is the 'spark' that brings about awareness. He talks about this beginning as an "abject birth," and he is almost surprised that something so insightful and significant as one's awareness of the Absurd can come from something so insignificant.⁷¹⁴ Camus says that any event in a human person's life can bring about the awareness that life is absurd but that death can end it. In the example he narrates, it could be the death of the man's daughter, though he implies that it can also be how someone looked at him on that particular day. In other words, the cumulative effect of seemingly insignificant incidents can be the straw that breaks the camel's back.

One can only speculate about what brought on Camus's particular brush with suicide. He was diagnosed with tuberculosis at seventeen, and death was a reality he constantly faced.⁷¹⁵ The disease was a death sentence in Algeria in the 1930s because even though Robert Koch isolated the *tubercule bacillus* in 1882, advancement in medical treatment was slow. There was no cure then, and the prescribed folk cures, like overeating red meat, drinking blood, and high-altitude sanatoriums, were often out of reach of sufferers.⁷¹⁶ Fortunately, Camus had access to free⁷¹⁷ medical treatment,⁷¹⁸ and his uncle, a butcher,

⁷¹² Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurdity and Suicide, 3/55.

⁷¹³ Stephen M. Lepore, "Billionaire financier Thomas H. Lee's family are 'suffering' after his shock gunshot suicide at his Manhattan office," *MailOnline*, 26 February 2023, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-11793619/Billionaire-financier-Thomas-H-Lees-family-suffering-shock-gunshot-suicide.html>.

⁷¹⁴ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* Absurd Walls, 8/55.

⁷¹⁵ "Unsurprisingly, in Camus' early writing, his notes and essays, being autobiographical in nature, are replete with observations about Camus' own illness even if they are sometimes veiled. He was also by then acutely aware of the role of illness in those around him, and in death generally, which had ceased to be for him an abstract event in some vague and distant future, but a diurnal probability." Lamb, Matthew, *On the influence of tuberculosis on Camus' early life and work, 1931-1941*, Sep 20, 2021, *Public Things Newsletter*, <https://publicthings.substack.com/p/7-on-the-influence-of-tuberculosis-af6>.

⁷¹⁶ Camus comes from a very poor family, and he shares a two-room dwelling with his brother, mother, uncle and grandmother.

⁷¹⁷ Due to the fact his father had died in WWI in the service of France.

⁷¹⁸ A more invasive treatment was artificial pneumothorax – or collapsed lung – therapy. This is an invasive procedure in which air is injected between the lung and chest wall, so the lung collapses, allowing the lesions of the infected area to heal, albeit temporarily. Lamb, Matthew, *On the influence of tuberculosis on Camus' early life and work, 1931-1941*, Sep 20, 2021, *Public Things Newsletter*, <https://publicthings.substack.com/p/7-on-the-influence-of-tuberculosis-af6>.

provided him with fresh meat and a room where he could live in semi-quarantine because of the contagious nature of his illness. Later, at the time of the writing of *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus resided in Paris during the fall of France, and he witnessed millions of refugees, including himself, flee from advancing German armies. He writes about this experience fifteen years later and recalls "the French and European disasters" of 1940.⁷¹⁹ Therefore, any of these experiences could have brought about his awareness of the Absurd.

Three: Awareness of the Absurd

In this section, I present three points about the Absurd as it applies to suicidal behaviour. First, I show that Camus experiences the Absurd cognitively, as a state he finds himself in *and* harrowing feelings of anxiety and anguish. In *A Commentary on the Stranger*, Sartre writes, "The "absurd" is both a factual state and the lucid awareness that some people acquire from that state."⁷²⁰ Sartre explains that, whereas in *The Stranger*, Camus lets the reader feel the Absurd, whereas in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, he elaborates on the state of the Absurd.

Second, I emphasise that when the self becomes aware of the Absurd, the self is implicated as strange, as "the odd one out". The strangeness is experienced as a state of being and feeling. In the third, I argue that a human person's understanding of the Absurd is a choice one makes, and I will elaborate on this point in the next section. But before I go on, I will expound on what it is like to experience a state of the Absurd.

The State of the Absurd

When it comes to the cognitive experience of the Absurd, reason shows itself as a detrimental limitation of the human condition. I argue that at the centre of Camus's suicidal experience is his mind's inability to make sense of the worth of his life. He says there are no set rules he can live by, which, if he follows such rules, will enable him to make sense of

⁷¹⁹ Camus says, "The unity of this book resides in the reflection, alternately cold and impassioned, in which an artist may indulge as to his reasons for living and for creating. After fifteen years, I have progressed beyond several of the positions which are set down here; but I have remained faithful, it seems to me, to the exigency which prompted them." Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* Preface 1 / 2.

⁷²⁰ Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, A Commentary on *The Stranger*, 1/22.

things and be safe. But there are no such rules or values, neither confirming nor denying meaning.

Despite this inability, there appears to be no retreat for Camus. Here, it seems that he hints at a choice that his mind makes. Can he shrug off the awareness, disregard it as insignificant, walk away and return to the ignorant bliss of everydayness? He describes his choice: "What follows is the gradual return into the chain, or it is the definitive awakening."⁷²¹ It turns out that he can't return to everydayness because to do that, he must resist the *amazement that permeates the weariness*.⁷²² And so, even though the strangeness scares him, it also amazes and intrigues Camus. His curiosity gets the better of him and results from the deep-seated compulsion in his mind to understand, which I explained in the previous chapter. He cannot resist the allure of the amazement that accompanies the weariness. Camus says, "Weariness comes at the end of the acts of a mechanical life, but at the same time, it inaugurates the impulse of consciousness. It awakens consciousness and provokes what follows."⁷²³ But, I argue, herein lies the potential deadliness of the Absurd, and this is the problem with living, which Camus associates with suicide.

What is it that Camus assesses, and why is it so frightening? Because Camus himself is the focus of his reflection, and he is both the assessor and that which is under investigation. Camus says, "A more exact word cannot be imagined. Beginning to think is beginning to be undermined."⁷²⁴ His assessment excavates beneath the surface of his daily life. What his mind unearths in the process can pose a grave danger to him because, unknowingly, what he is about to dig up might erode his reasons for living.⁷²⁵ He stands face to face with the limitation of his condition as a human person: his mind's inability to bestow meaning on what is a meaningless universe but forever straining in the need to do so. It is why he says living is "never easy." He now understands that he finds himself in unfamiliar territory. He describes this as "that last crossroad where thought hesitates".⁷²⁶ Unable to answer these

⁷²¹ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurd Walls, 9/55.

⁷²² Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurd Walls, 9/49.

⁷²³ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurd Walls, 9/49.

⁷²⁴ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurd Walls 9 /55.

⁷²⁵ "For everything begins with consciousness and nothing is worth anything except through it. There is nothing original about these remarks. But they are obvious; that is enough for a while, during a sketchy reconnaissance in the origins of the absurd." Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurd Walls 9 /55.

⁷²⁶ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurdity and Suicide 7/55.

questions, Camus realises his reason is mute when facing an unreasonable and nonsensical reality. *It is what Camus thinks at this moment of awareness.* He says it takes a real effort to stay here, as far as possible,⁷²⁷ because his feelings intensify his cognitive understanding of the absurd. In other words, as strangeness becomes awareness, thoughts and feelings stand side-by-side, inseparable, like sides of the same coin, as *an experience, which, I argue, makes a human person's abdication of life more likely and more understandable.*

Feeling the Absurd

Camus explains that his reflection commences when he does not quite feel himself. He is in an "odd state of soul." He feels a "weariness" protruding through his daily routine. He says that his mind longs to return to his daily business, but his heart, in vain, seeks a link to return to before the weariness sets in. This agony of absurdity lies in this inappropriate or poor fit of Camus with the world. All is revealed to him in anxiety "tinged with weariness" - a feeling of angst and unease about how he is in the world and the divide between himself and the cruel world he finds himself in. Camus explains that he cannot do so because of "an elusive feeling" he senses, which he identifies as the "first sign of absurdity."⁷²⁸

This elusive feeling brings about intense anxiety, which he relates to the words of Heidegger when he says, "Mere anxiety is the source of everything."⁷²⁹ Camus says Heidegger writes about that moment when the everyday world slips away, and he first feels a strangeness that 'peaks through' daily life, which solicits this immense anxiety and distress. It is stomach-churning and horrifying, and he writes that it "sickens" him.⁷³⁰ What is it that peaks through? What is this strangeness that Camus became aware of? Camus no longer emerges in everydayness, but at that moment, he stands outside everydayness, aware of

⁷²⁷ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurdity and Suicide, 7/55.

⁷²⁸ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurd Walls, 9 /55.

⁷²⁹ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurd Walls, 10/55.

⁷³⁰ "In itself weariness has something sickening about it." Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurd Walls, 9 /55.

⁷³⁰ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Preface, 1/2.

⁷³⁰ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurd Walls, 10/55.

⁷³⁰ Edmund Husserl, "To the things themselves!" *Logical Investigations*, I, (Routledge, London, and New York, 2001), 252.

⁷³⁰ Camus *The Myth of Sisyphus*, An Absurd Reasoning, 1/49.

⁷³⁰ "It is therefore simply fair to point out, at the outset, what these pages owe to certain contemporary thinkers. It is so far from my intention to hide this that they will be found cited and commented upon throughout this work." Camus *The Myth of Sisyphus*, An Absurd Reasoning, 1/49.

how he finds himself in the world. In other words, of his 'design' as a human being. He is now aware of this elusive dimension. He feels what it is like to be an occupant of this elusive, hidden dimension that he shares with all humanity.⁷³¹

Camus's intense anxiety and distress, however, do not lift. On the contrary, it is intensified by a sensation of horror⁷³² when he realises that he can die at any moment. He used to long for tomorrow, but at this moment, it dawns on him that tomorrow is his biggest enemy because his death lies in wait there. He realises life is nothing but "a daily race that hastens him towards death." He wants nothing more than the present and as many successive present moments as possible.⁷³³ He says, "Tomorrow, he was longing for tomorrow, whereas everything in him ought to reject it."⁷³⁴ Still, as unlikely as it may seem, his harrowing experience is about to worsen.

Camus's horror deepens when it dawns on him that he is very unlike the world around him. He senses the foreignness of a world that is *nothing* like him. More so, as I elaborated on in the previous chapter, Camus experiences the world not just as different to him but feels undermined by the world. This experience of strangeness deprives and disposes him of his familiarity with himself⁷³⁵ and the world.⁷³⁶ He experiences strangeness because he sees the world as it is: stripped of meaning, lacking reason, unresponsive, hostile, inhuman and uncaring. He eventually feels this inhumanness in the natural world, other people⁷³⁷, and himself! He senses a strangeness in the faces of people he knows. Even when he looks at himself in the mirror or at a photo of himself, a stranger looks back at him.⁷³⁸ He feels an absurdity that "suddenly leaves us so alone."⁷³⁹

⁷³¹ In the Afterword to *The Myth of Sisyphus*, James Wood writes, "The absurd person is someone who has seen through the ridiculous repetitions of daily life, the grey routine and stifling calendar of existence. But one day the "why" arises and everything begins in that weariness tinged with amazement. Suddenly, the absurd person sees through this routine, and 'the chain of daily gestures is broken'. Now everything begins to seem pointless." Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Afterword: Camus, *Belief*, 7/13.

⁷³² Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurdity and Suicide, 9/55.

⁷³³ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurd Freedom, 48/55.

⁷³⁴ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurd Freedom, 41/55.

⁷³⁵ "This very heart which is mine will for ever remain indefinable to me." Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurd Walls, 15/55.

⁷³⁶ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurd Walls, 14 - 15/55.

⁷³⁷ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurd Walls, 10 /55.

⁷³⁸ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurd Walls, 10 /55.

⁷³⁹ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurd Walls, 10 /55.

The Self is The Stranger

In the previous chapter, I argued that the Absurd lies for Camus in the mismatched relationship between the self and the world and because of their dissimilarity. The self is disjointed because it is the piece that does not fit. Everything else fits into that senseless world: the trees, the mountains, the oceans, the animals, and all living and non-living matter fits perfectly into the irrational and intelligible world, except the self. The self is the stranger. As I elaborated in the previous chapter, the self is not only a sense-seeking being but is *aware of being aware*.

More so, only the self is aware of this fact in the entire world. He or she is *the stranger*, the *alien*, and the *refugee*. Camus describes himself as being conscious of this fact. He says he is 'homeless,' in limbo and that he cannot be *sure*, *secure* and be at *home*. He describes the experience as a "distressing nudity" as "deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of a promised land."⁷⁴⁰ He *feels* this disparity is intensely frightening, horrifying, alienating, and isolating. He explains, "From the moment absurdity is recognised, it becomes a passion, the most harrowing of all. But whether or not one can live with one's passions, whether or not one can accept their law, which is to burn the heart they simultaneously exalt, that is the whole question."⁷⁴¹ Furthermore, he is not simply aware that he is out of place but that his strangeness causes his torturous existence, the unfamiliarity that makes his living so intolerable.

Camus analogises his life with that of Sisyphus, of whom he says, "If this myth is tragic, that is because its hero is conscious. Where would his torture be, indeed, if at every step the hope of succeeding upheld him? Sisyphus, proletarian of the gods, powerless and rebellious, *knows the whole extent of his wretched condition; it is what he thinks of* during his descent."⁷⁴² I argue that it is likely what the apartment-building manager has thought about ever since the death of his daughter. I suspect it is what some of the 9/11 survivors thought about when they found themselves trapped, and it is likely what Chester Bennington thought about and described in his lyrics. As an artist, Bennington, like Camus, expressed

⁷⁴⁰ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurdity and Suicide, 1/55.

⁷⁴¹ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurd Walls, 14 - 15/55.

⁷⁴² Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, The Myth of Sisyphus, 3/5.

his thoughts in the lyrics of many of the songs he co-wrote. For example, the lyrics of *Somewhere I Belong*⁷⁴³ is about an inability to find a place to belong.⁷⁴⁴ In *Given Up* and *Leave Out All the Rest*, he ideates suicide and death. And *One More Light*, released in May 2017, two months before his suicide, speaks to the futility of life.⁷⁴⁵

Four: What to do about the Absurd

Chester Bennington enjoyed significant fame, with an estimated net worth of \$30 million at his death. For all his success, Bennington said, "I don't know if anybody out there can relate, but I have a hard time with life... sometimes. Sometimes it's great, but a lot of times for me, it's really hard."⁷⁴⁶ Bennington died by suicide five months after this February 2017 interview. Had Camus been the interviewer, he would answer, of course, Chester! Living is never easy, more so, *living* can be intolerable! Living is not easy because of *living*, not because of your daily struggles. It concerns a condition or imperfection in all of human *living*. Camus would say that one should not think something is the matter with *you* if you find living difficult or even unbearable. Camus points to the fact that the difficulty of living lies in *how* we are human.

And once a human person is aware of one's absurd condition, it demands you to reply. Camus works out that the human condition becomes a thorn in one's side. It takes effort. One has to factor it in and come to terms with it. You may run a household, a million-dollar fund, a career and a family, but you also run a self. You may have amassed a fortune, but when your conscious self reflects on itself as tragic, suicide is a possible possibility.

Camus concludes that the mind can very well opt for death once it *understands* the absurdity and futility of one's existence. Why is this realisation so potentially deadly? I argue that one

⁷⁴³ Linkin Park. "Somewhere I belong". 3. *Meteora*. Don Gilmore, Linkin Park. February 24, 2002. Google. <https://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=somewhere+i+belong&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8>.

⁷⁴⁴ Linkin Park. "Given Up". 2. *Minutes to Midnight*. The Mansion, Los Angeles, CA. March 3, 2008. Google. <https://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=Given+Up+lyrics&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8>

⁷⁴⁵ Linkin Park. "One More Light". 7. *One More Light*. October 3, 2017. Google. <https://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=One+more+light+lyrics&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8>

⁷⁴⁶ Bennington, Chester. "I Have a Hard Time With Life." February 2017 interview by JoJo Wright of iHeartRadio's 102.7 KIIS-FM. Blabbermouth, July 22, 2017, <https://blabbermouth.net/news/chester-bennington-in-february-2017-interview-i-have-a-hard-time-with-life-video>.

would think twice when you suffer or face immense trauma or shame because you weigh up death against the futility of life. Though I agree with Camus that daily hardships do not cause suicide, I argue that an encounter with the Absurd shows these sufferings to be equally pointless. Therefore, if you experience your everyday life as pointless, by implication, so is anything that brings you suffering, be it living with alcoholism, drug addiction, abuse, relationship problems, work problems, chronic study, work stress, living with a mental illness, or facing a terminal illness. For example, when women in the ancient world faced rape and assault, they often found suicide a way to avoid shame, humiliation, and painful suffering.

What becomes evident from Camus's experience in this end phase of the assessment process is that a human person is mandated to act once he or she becomes aware of the Absurd. He or she cannot refute or neutralise the absurd. Camus explains, "The subject of this essay is precisely this relationship between the absurd and suicide, the exact degree to which suicide is a solution to the Absurd. The principle can be established that what he believes to be true for a person who does not cheat *must determine his action*. Belief in the absurdity of existence must then dictate his conduct."⁷⁴⁷ He explains the inevitability of a reaction to the Absurd by using the analogy of World War II raging around him. He says you survive a war or you die because of it. He says, "War cannot be negated. One must live it or die of it. So it is with the absurd: it is a question of breathing with it, of recognising its lessons and recovering their flesh."⁷⁴⁸ He uses the image of living in "waterless deserts"⁷⁴⁹ to describe to the reader what it feels like. He says it is a perilous place to find oneself once disillusionment sets in and one feels the absurdity.

I make the case that in modern-day society, this occurs in an increasingly complex and technologically advanced world, with the self often obscured in an en-masse social media. Considering this, the mind draws its conclusions. Since it is seeing through the ridiculous repetitions of daily life, the grey routine, and the stifling calendar of existence. Camus says

⁷⁴⁷ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurdity and Suicide, 4/55.

⁷⁴⁸ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurd Creation, 1/20.

⁷⁴⁹ Camus writes, "At that last crossroad where thought hesitates [the waterless deserts], many men have arrived and even some of the humblest. They then abdicated what was most precious to them, their life." Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurdity and Suicide, 6/55.

that once one becomes aware of one's ignorant and repetitive everyday life, one looks at oneself as tragic, as if in a comic dumb show.⁷⁵⁰ Camus infers *he* wonders why he is alive, and *you* do too. The mind announces its finding after it assesses the case of its subject's life's worth: living the Absurd, this satirical dumb show is excruciating. The mind now knows that this is an intolerable state of being. Camus defines this as "the extent of his wretched condition."⁷⁵¹ That being so, the mind readies itself to take the next step: to come up with a reply to the question, do I go on living?

At this point, many people are a likely danger to themselves when they understand that death could end *feeling* this absurdity.⁷⁵² Camus says, "People die because they judge that living is not worth the effort."⁷⁵³ Linkin Park frontman Chester Bennington is a co-writer of the lyrics of the album *One More Light*, the last release before his death on July 20, 2017. In *Nobody Can Save Me Now*, from the same album, he writes,

I'm hanging off the edge
 Storm clouds gather beneath me
 Waves break above my head
 But nobody can save me now
 I'm holding up a light
 I'm chasing out the darkness inside
 Cause nobody can save me now.⁷⁵⁴

Five: Camus' decision

Once a human person experiences the painful limitations in how he or she is human, it immerses the self, this stranger, in itself. That which should free a person from senselessness is what fails a person. As I explained in the last section of the previous

⁷⁵⁰ He writes, "At certain moments of lucidity[clarity], the mechanical aspect of their gestures, their meaningless pantomime make silly everything that surrounds them. A man is talking on the telephone behind a glass partition; you cannot hear him, but you see his incomprehensible dumb show: you wonder why he is alive." Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurd Walls, 10 /49.

⁷⁵¹ He writes, "Sisyphus, proletarian of the gods, powerless and rebellious, knows the whole extent of his wretched condition; it is what he thinks of during his descent." Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, The Myth of Sisyphus 3/5.

⁷⁵² Camus confirms this by saying, "There can be no absurd outside the human mind. Thus, like everything else, the absurd ends with death." Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Philosophical Suicide, 23/55.

⁷⁵³ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurdity and Suicide, 2/55.

⁷⁵⁴ Linkin Park. "Nobody Can Save Me Now". 1. *One More Light*. October 3, 2017. Google.

<https://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=nobody+can+same+me+now&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8>

chapter, understanding that one is not immortal and that death can free one from this state can greatly comfort a person. How do you respond? On this account, Camus claims that a human person will continue to strain against the world. Camus clarifies to the reader that one's awareness of the Absurd is not a fleeting moment of clarity that soon subsides. The strangeness will not eventually pass, so you cannot hang in there until it ends. There will never come a time when he is no longer a stranger or an alien without citizenship rights. Camus says this way of being is "without remedy".⁷⁵⁵ There is no harbour where he can dock and call home, and there is no hope of ever finding a home.⁷⁵⁶

Despite the difficulty of living, Camus decides not to end his own life. He says that despite coming face-to-face with the Absurd, he found it possible to continue. In the preface of his essay, he explains,

Written fifteen years ago, in 1940, amidst the French and European disaster, this book declares that even within the limits of nihilism it is possible to find the means to proceed beyond nihilism. In all the books I have written since, I have attempted to pursue this direction. Although *The Myth of Sisyphus* poses mortal problems, it sums itself up for me as a lucid invitation to live and to create, in the very midst of the desert.⁷⁵⁷

What is his secret? How did Camus escape the pull of death? Camus rebels against the Absurd and decides to give life a go. He says let's have a crack at it. Let's see if I can make it work. Perhaps he is a little intrigued. Maybe he thinks, let's see if I can manage.⁷⁵⁸ He admits that it is likely a tall order. The mind is a phenomenal problem-solver. It solves the issue: you must live with the absurd *only* until you die. The mind calculates that this can take place at any moment, and it logically assesses these components and solves the problem for you: when you are *conscious* of the futility of your daily life, the absence of any reason for living, and the needlessness of suffering, there is no *logical reason* why you should not

⁷⁵⁵ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurdity and Suicide, 4/55.

⁷⁵⁶ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurdity and Suicide, 4/55.

⁷⁵⁷ Camus *The Myth of Sisyphus* 1955 Preface, 1/2.

⁷⁵⁸ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurd Walls, 7/55.

die voluntarily.⁷⁵⁹ From this vantage point, one senses that death offers a suitable escape. Camus knows full well there is no logical reason why he should stay alive.

Be that as it may, despite his dislocated experience as a French Algerian, living in both Algeria and France and perhaps feeling himself a stranger in both, he stands up to the Absurd. Growing up poor and suffering bouts of tuberculosis throughout his life, Camus moves beyond his nihilism, even if he understands life as pointless. Camus casts his mind back to the early years of his tuberculosis and how he lived daily with the fear of death. He thinks, who cares if life does not have meaning? Perhaps I can even have a better life for it! Keeping this experience in mind, he values a long life to experience the joys of life.⁷⁶⁰ Most of all, he now wants *time*: "The present and the succession of presents, before a constantly conscious soul, is the ideal of the absurd man."⁷⁶¹ During the War, he was wondering if he should kill himself. Now, what is most important to him is to have "the luck" of time. He writes,

Thus, it is that no depth, emotion, passion, and sacrifice could render equal in the eyes of the absurd man (even if he wished it so) a conscious life of forty years and a lucidity spread over sixty years. Man does not choose. Therefore, the absurd and the extra life it involves do not depend on man's will but on its contrary, which is death. Weighing words carefully, it is altogether a question of luck. One just has to be able to consent to this. There will never be any substitute for twenty years of life and experience.⁷⁶²

Many years later, after receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature, Camus wrote a letter of thanks to Monsieur Germain, who played a pivotal role in his life as a young child.⁷⁶³ He credits his teacher for helping him find his life niche – to write and create.⁷⁶⁴ It turns out that

⁷⁵⁹ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurdity and Suicide, 4/55.

⁷⁶⁰ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurd Freedom, 48/55.

⁷⁶¹ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurd Freedom, 48/55.

⁷⁶² Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurd Freedom, 47/55.

⁷⁶³ Camus writes, "I let the commotion around me these days subside a bit before speaking to you from the bottom of my heart. I have just been given far too great an honour, one I neither sought nor solicited. But when I heard the news, my first thought, after my mother, was of you." Albert Camus, *The First Man*, (Penguin Books Ltd, October 31, 2013), Two Letters 1 /4, Rakuten Kobo Inc.

⁷⁶⁴ He writes, "Without you, without the affectionate hand you extended to the small poor child that I was, without your teaching, and your example, none of all this would have happened. I don't make too much of this sort of honour. But at

this is his very particular reason for wanting time. Like Sisyphus, he loves life. In 1958, two years before his death, he wrote, "There is no love of life without despair of life," I wrote, rather pompously, in these pages. I didn't know at the time how right I was; I had not yet been through years of real despair. They came and managed to destroy everything in me except an uncontrolled appetite for life."⁷⁶⁵ He writes, "Although *The Myth of Sisyphus* poses mortal problems, it sums itself up for me as a lucid invitation to live and to create, in the very midst of the desert."⁷⁶⁶ Thus, he sees the Absurd as an opportunity to live out his creativity as a writer.

In this situation, where he comes face-to-face with the Absurd, he is *more than*. He is writing his story, and his decision shows not only his reason for living but also his *self*: he who accepts the limits of his mind to bestow him meaning or purpose wants nothing more than to live and write. One can imagine Camus happy. He left the War behind. Like Sisyphus, he scorns death. He says, "Entering the ridiculous world of the gods is for ever losing the purest of joys, which is feeling and feeling on this earth."⁷⁶⁷ Since he longed to live and create, he accepts his fate, like Sisyphus accepts his rock.⁷⁶⁸ He does not care if he has to face the absurdity of his existence head-on every day to do so! He writes, "Living is keeping the absurd alive. Keeping it alive is, above all, contemplating it."⁷⁶⁹ He does this until, in a reverse of fortune, he is deprived of the luck of extra life until 60 years or beyond. At age 46, a car accident near Sens, in Le Grand Fossard in the small town of Villeblevin, on January 4, 1960, summoned Camus back to the infernal darkness.⁷⁷⁰

The broader implications of *The Myth of Sisyphus*

A self-preserving instinct protects both the non-human living organism and the human person from harm, as is characteristic of its species. Like non-human living beings, a human

least it gives me an opportunity to tell you what you have been and still are for me, and to assure you that your efforts, your work, and the generous heart you put into it still live in one of your little schoolboys who, despite the years, has never stopped being your grateful pupil. I embrace you with all my heart." Albert Camus, *The First Man*, Two Letters, 1 /4.

⁷⁶⁵ Albert Camus, *Personal Writings* (Penguin Books Ltd, August 27, 2020), Preface 8/11, Rakuten Kobo Inc.

⁷⁶⁶ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Preface 1/2.

⁷⁶⁷ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurd Freedom, 48/55.

⁷⁶⁸ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurd Freedom, 40/55.

⁷⁶⁹ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurd Freedom, 40/55.

⁷⁷⁰ William Bittner, "The Death of Camus," *The Atlantic*, February 1961 Issue, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1961/02/the-death-of-camus/658495/>.

person is mortal and is subject to suffering because of injury or illness during his or her limited lifetime as a human. Still, in the previous chapter, I argued that a human person stands out as different in an inhuman world, mainly because of the human mind's abilities, as is evident from the products of the mind in modern-day society. However, I argue that the dissimilarity of the human person also lies in the fact that his sense-seeking mind also explores the self and the worth of his or her life to the self. Camus shows that this ability, coupled with the mind's understanding of the power of death, often points to suicide as a possible possibility. That being so, he suggests that there are logical steps, or a pathway, that could potentially lead a human person to suicide.

Still, some unanswered questions remain. Camus concludes that an encounter with the Absurd is potentially deadly, but he chooses to revolt and not die by suicide. His decision raises the question of whether his revolt is the only way to avoid the clutches of suicide. Is it a "war" where one either survives because you revolt against it or dies? Are these a person's only options, or is there another way out?

Does the Absurd dictate death?

In the previous chapter, I argued that in existentialist thought, a human person is seen as choosing in each situation as he or she goes through life. Sartre writes,

When we say that man chooses himself, not only do we mean that each of us must choose himself, but also that in choosing himself, he is choosing for all men. In fact, in creating the man each of us wills ourselves to be, there is not a single one of our actions that does not at the same time *create an image of man as we think he ought to be*.⁷⁷¹

I argue that Camus, too, makes such a choice and, in so doing, presents the reader with a picture of a human person as he thinks he or she *ought to be*. He writes, "I don't know whether this world has a meaning that transcends it. But I know that I do not know that meaning and that it is impossible for me just now to know it."⁷⁷² At this point in his life, Camus sees belief and faith in a transcendent and divine reality as "illusions". Even though faith

⁷⁷¹ Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, 6/43.

⁷⁷² Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurd Freedom, 43/55.

can negate the absurd because the absurd only exists in this world,⁷⁷³ Camus chooses to discard faith as *an escape* from the painful limitations of reason. Camus writes that "In Italian museums are sometimes found little painted screens that the priest used to hold in front of the face of condemned men to hide the scaffold from them." He explains that, "The leap (faith) in all its forms, rushing into the divine or the eternal, surrendering to the illusions of the everyday or of the idea – all these screens hide the absurd."⁷⁷⁴ This implies that, because Camus rejects faith, he is left with only reason, which renders life absurd. Importantly, he does not claim that he knows for a fact that there is no God, or a transcendent reality, and meaning. He says that he cannot know this now, at this point in his life, and therefore, the only option for him is to stick with reason and see where it takes him.

He chooses to be "the man who lives on what he has without speculating on what he has not".⁷⁷⁵ In choosing, he decides who one ought to be: "who likewise knows how to live in harmony with a universe without future and without weakness. This absurd, godless world is then peopled with men who think clearly and who have ceased to hope."⁷⁷⁶ This ongoing revolt against the Absurd, takes place in this universe, the human one. Sartre writes, "The only universe that exists is the human one—the universe of human subjectivity."⁷⁷⁷ Camus confirms this belief when he writes, "Yes, man is his own end. And he is his only end. If he aims to be something, it is in this life."⁷⁷⁸

That being so, man finds himself abandoned in this universe. If God is dead, as Nietzsche declares, if "I have eliminated God the Father,"⁷⁷⁹ as Sartre claims, "there has to be someone to invent values."⁷⁸⁰ Logically, that leaves only the human person. In this scenario, it is up to the average Jo. It leaves only a human being who lives in the

⁷⁷³ In contrast, Camus says, "All I know is that I cannot know it now, and all I accept is the limits of my reason, which I see as my fate as a human being. But on this earth, accepting only this world I can feel and touch, reason is limited by an inhuman world. What can a meaning outside my condition mean to me? I can understand only in human terms. What I touch, what resists me – that is what I understand. And these two certainties – my appetite for the absolute and for unity and the impossibility of reducing this world to a rational and reasonable principle – I also know that I cannot reconcile them." Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurd Freedom, 38/55.

⁷⁷⁴ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Conquest, 22/23.

⁷⁷⁵ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Conquest, 21/23.

⁷⁷⁶ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Conquest, 23/23.

⁷⁷⁷ Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, 28/43.

⁷⁷⁸ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Conquest, 18/22.

⁷⁷⁹ Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, 26/43.

⁷⁸⁰ Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, 26/43.

situation. In every life situation, he or she has one instrument, one ability, one avenue to do so: reason, with which a person imposes his or her respective values into the situation. Sartre writes, "What is more, to say that we invent values means neither more nor less than this: life has no meaning a priori. Life itself is nothing until it is lived; it is we who give it meaning, and value is nothing more than the meaning that we give it."⁷⁸¹ But a human person's reason is the most significant limitation that a priori defines his or her fundamental situation in the universe. Camus's inability to bridge the irrational with reason leaves him not just abandoned but alienated and suicidal. It is this state of abandonment that Camus associates with suicide.

That being said, Camus acknowledges death as an 'attractive' way to end the feeling of absurdity, especially when suffering, because it allows for an immediate escape from the senselessness of daily life, agitation, and suffering. If one believes that one's life has no preordained meaning and that death is an inevitable end, one might be at the point of suicide. But does this mean that an awareness of *life's absurdity* causes people to die by suicide? Put another way, does the Absurd dictate suicide because life has no inherent meaning?

I argue that Camus's conclusion that life is Absurd results from his rejecting faith. For the person Camus thinks we ought to be, there is no escaping the Absurd, except through death, as we shall see. That leaves a human person with only two options: find a way to live with or despite the Absurd or self-inflicted death. The first option appears easier said than done.

How does one take on the Absurd? Camus argues that it is so that suicide offers a way out of the Absurd because death destroys a crucial characteristic that sustains the Absurd – the self. Still, Camus argues that suicide is no slam dunk. He theorises that even though one might logically sense life is pointless, it does not mean one finds it not worth living. He argues that there is a way for the self to exist, even though life is utterly meaningless and that the universe is irrational and thus indifferent to our plight. He follows this claim with the example of his own choice: he rebels against the Absurd and decides to live with it, facing it head-

⁷⁸¹ Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, 26/43.

on. Even though his rebellion might be associated with despair, he claims that it can also free him from the illusions of hope, and in doing so, he claims that he can experience existence fully. Camus asserts that one can like he did, revolt against the Absurd. He says that to do that; a human person accepts the limits of reason because he or she understands that it operates in an inhuman world. You acknowledge this fact. Then, you accept this limitation. In this way, you revolt against the Absurd. He writes, "Others, princes of the mind, abdicated likewise, but they initiated the suicide of their thought in its purest revolt."⁷⁸² Camus's revolt gets a particular message across, namely, that knowing life does not make any sense does not bother him in the least; as a matter of fact, he lives a better life for it. In the final instance, it shows that he considers living a life that has no meaning as his fate as a human being, and for as long as he has the "luck" of extra time.

Despite that, Camus reckons that the answer lies in celebrating life, irrespective of the limitations of the human condition. He says I want to feel with my senses on earth! He does not share Kierkegaard's sombre consideration of sense perception as deficient.⁷⁸³ On the contrary, he sees it as the instrument to take on the Absurd. He writes, "This heart within me I can feel, and I judge that it exists. This world I can touch, and I likewise judge that it exists. And here are trees, and I know their gnarled surface, water, and I feel its taste. These scents of grass and stars at night, certain evenings when the heart relaxes – how shall I negate this world whose power and strength I feel?"⁷⁸⁴ Because, like Sisyphus, Camus "had seen the face of this world, enjoyed water and sun, warm stones and the sea, he no longer wanted to go back to the infernal darkness."⁷⁸⁵

Still, he indicates that his way of living, keeping the Absurd in play, is brutal. It is not for everybody because it takes courage and pride to live with despair instead of escaping the Absurd, as he believes Kierkegaard is doing. He writes,

Kierkegaard may shout in warning: 'If man had no eternal consciousness, if, at the bottom of everything, there were merely a wild, seething force producing everything,

⁷⁸² Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurdity and Suicide, 3/55.

⁷⁸³ Kierkegaard writes, "The trustworthiness of sense perception is a deception. This has been sufficiently demonstrated by Greek scepticism and likewise by modern scepticism." Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 3. Actual, Ethical, Subjectivity: The Subjective Thinker, 18/78.

⁷⁸⁴ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurd Walls, 14//55.

⁷⁸⁵ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, The Myth of Sisyphus, 2/5.

both large and trifling, in the storm of dark passions, if the bottomless void that nothing can fill underlay all things, what would life be but despair?

This cry is not likely to stop the absurd man. Seeking what is true is not seeking what is desirable. If in order to elude the anxious question: 'What would life be?' one must, like the donkey, feed on the roses of illusion, then the absurd mind, rather than resigning itself to falsehood, prefers to adopt fearlessly Kierkegaard's reply: 'despair'. Everything considered, a determined soul will always manage.⁷⁸⁶

That being said, I argue that Camus' position may be easier said than done. The fact that a human person dies by suicide every 40 seconds somewhere in the world shows that a human person does not always "manage" "the bottomless void that nothing can fill" that Kierkegaard alludes to, as Camus would like to believe. I doubt if this is a case of "ain't no mountain high enough", and I suspect Camus does too. He quotes Jaspers saying, "This limitation leads me to myself, where I can no longer withdraw behind an objective point of view that I am merely representing, where neither I myself nor the existence of others can any longer become an object for me."⁷⁸⁷ He knows that at this point, "he is evoking after many others, those waterless deserts where thought reaches its confines,"⁷⁸⁸ and where many people are unable to manage and as a result, they die by suicide. He admits that it takes "real effort" to stay there, "*as far as it is possible*."⁷⁸⁹ He thus admits to another option, other than revolt or death by suicide.

Does the belief in a higher meaning safeguard against death?

In the previous section, I argue that Camus claims that the fact that a person finds life meaningless is not necessarily a death sentence. In other words, he argues that the Absurd is not the reason why some people die by suicide. This omission begs the opposite question: Does it mean that life is then tolerable because one understands it as meaningful? In other words, does faith provide a "haven" from suicide?

⁷⁸⁶ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurdity and Suicide, 3 /55.

⁷⁸⁷ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurdity and Suicide, 3 /55

⁷⁸⁸ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurdity and Suicide, 3 /55.

⁷⁸⁹ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurd Walls, 6//55.

For Camus, faith serves the purpose of "an escape" from the Absurd because it negates one component of the trinity: reason."⁷⁹⁰ Camus reasons that it is undoubtedly *possible* to escape the Absurd by believing that there is something beyond reason – faith. Making such a leap of faith abolishes reason altogether.⁷⁹¹ He cites Christian existentialists such as Kierkegaard, who believes in the existence of God and a transcended world. For example, Kierkegaard finds *his* existence meaningful and worth living because he believes wholeheartedly in an actual personal God.⁷⁹² For as long as a human person remains in faith and believes in the divine, he or she will escape the Absurd. The belief that God loves a human person, makes plans, and sets a purpose for individuals will keep a person away from an encounter with the Absurd. Because of his or her faith, such a person responds to the "familiar" onslaughts of suffering or illness from an understanding of God's ultimate love and care. The Absurd is, for example, abolished in the words of the author of Psalm 139 when he writes in verses 15-16:

My growing body was not hidden from You as I was formed in secret, as I was intricately put together in the depths of the earth.

You saw me as an embryo, and in Your book, all my days were written down – the days that were made for me before any of them existed.

Does this necessarily mean that when a human person has faith, he or she is protected from suicide?

I find that many religions question death's finality and believe that a part of a person remains and lives on in the afterlife, whether in a new form or body, returning to the same body or

⁷⁹⁰ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Philosophical Suicide, 28/55

⁷⁹¹ He says, "It is essential to know whether one can live with it or whether, on the other hand, logic commands one to die of it. I am not interested in philosophical suicide but rather in plain suicide. I merely wish to purge it of its emotional content and know its logic and its integrity. Any other position implies for the absurd mind deceit and the mind's retreat before what the mind itself has brought to light. Husserl claims to obey the desire to escape 'the inveterate habit of living and thinking in certain well-known and convenient conditions of existence', but the final leap restores in him the eternal and its comfort. The leap does not represent an extreme danger as Kierkegaard would like it to do. The danger, on the contrary, lies in the subtle instant that precedes the leap. Being able to remain on that dizzying crest – that is integrity, and the rest is subterfuge. I know also that never has helplessness inspired such striking harmonies as those of Kierkegaard. But if helplessness has its place in the indifferent landscapes of history, it has none in a reasoning whose exigence is now known." Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Philosophical Suicide, 37/55.

⁷⁹² Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurd Freedom, 38/55.

without the body.^{793 794 795} That being so, there are many instances where belief in an afterlife deters people from suicide because they believe a punishment awaits them after death. For example, Plato warns in *The Laws*, "Now death is not the worst that can happen to men; far worse are the punishments which are said to pursue them in the world below."⁷⁹⁶ He describes "the world below" as "all the terrible and appalling names which describe the world below – Cocytus and Styx,⁷⁹⁷ ghosts under the earth, and sapless shades." It is the destination of the violent,⁷⁹⁸ where they are punished in the Fields of Punishment or sent to Tartarus, the underworld region, a prison with no escape. There, the occupants, the enemies of the gods, are in chains.^{799 800}

That being so, faith often serves as a powerful deterrent for suicide because death is a big deal if one believes in an afterlife where specific acts, such as suicide, are considered unforgivable.^{801 802 803} Dante's *Divine Comedy*⁸⁰⁴ illustrates the deep-seated condemnation and persecution of suicide decedents into the 19th century. Those who died by suicide find themselves in the Wood of Self-murderers, in the second round of the seventh circle of hell.

⁷⁹³ Christianity, Judaism, and Islam describe people as immortal, with one birth, lifespan, and death, followed by a deathless continued existence. Roy W. Perrett, "Rebirth." *Religious Studies* 23, no. 1 (1987): 41-57. Accessed April 9, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/20006311.

⁷⁹⁴ In Buddhism, reincarnation or rebirth occurs in various potential realms, such as the animal world, the human world or in different hell or heavens. Keown, Damien. "Suicide, Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia: A Buddhist Perspective." *Journal of Law and Religion* 13, no. 2 (1998): 385-405. Accessed April 9, 2020. doi:10.2307/1051472.

⁷⁹⁵ In the Hindu religion, the 'atman', a "permanent self" continues after death, but the concept of the atman remained difficult to define "... beyond time and space and virtually beyond definition". Greg Bailey, "Atman and Its Transition to Worldly Existence." In *Universe and Inner Self in Early Indian and Early Greek Thought*, edited by Richard Seaford, 55–70. Edinburgh University Press, 2016. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt1bgzdmh.10>.

⁷⁹⁶ Plato, Tr. Jowett, *The Complete Works*, (Golden Deer Classics, June 7, 2018), *The Laws* Book IX: 55/57.

⁷⁹⁷ Cocytus or Kokytos is the river of wailing in the underworld in Greek mythology. Cocytus flows into the river Acheron, on the other side of which lies Hades, the underworld, the mythological abode of the dead. There are five rivers encircling Hades: the Styx, Phlegethon, Lethe, Acheron, and Cocytus.

⁷⁹⁸ He says, "Let this be said as a prelude concerning crimes of violence in general, ... such deeds will be punished in the world below." Plato, Tr. Jowett, *The Complete Works*, (Golden Deer Classics, June 7, 2018), *The Laws* Book IX: 35/57.

⁷⁹⁹ Joseph T. Antley, "Tartarus in Classical Greco-Roman Mythology, Apocalyptic Judaism, and Early Christianity," *Academia*, No Date, https://www.academia.edu/7135834/Tartarus_in_Classical_Greek_Apocalyptic_Jewish_and_Early_Christian_Mythologie

⁸⁰⁰ Plato, Tr. Jowett, *The Complete Works*, (Golden Deer Classics, June 7, 2018), *The Laws* Book III: 4/71.

⁸⁰¹ C. A. F. Rhys. Davids, "The Soul-Theory in Buddhism." *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, 1903, 587-91. Accessed April 9, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/25208558.

⁸⁰² For Niebuhr, the resurrection of the body is a unity of body and soul. Reinhold Niebuhr, *Faith and History* (Read Books Ltd, April 18, 2023) IX: 17-18/19.

⁸⁰³ Herbert, in support of Niebuhr, refutes what he called the Greco-Oriental dualism of body and soul "In the Platonic figure, the body is the 'prison-house of the soul', as a result of its confinement in its carnal dungeon, the soul is confused and stupefied and dragged down into the mire of immortality. Death, which releases the immortal soul, is liberation." Will Herbert, *Judaism and the Modern Man* (The Jewish Publication Society, New York City, May, 1951, United States) 49-50, Archive.org.

⁸⁰⁴ Dante Alighieri Tr. Northon, *The Devine Comedy*. (e-artnow, 2018), Hell, Canto X111 (1891) 4.

A frightening lot awaits these souls who "threw away their bodies." They grow into awful trees, "Not green leaves but of dusky colour, not smooth boughs but knotty and gnarled, not fruit was there but thorns with poison."⁸⁰⁵ The Harpies, birds with broad wings, human faces and necks, feet with claws and a tremendous, feathered belly, eat the trees' leaves, giving them great pain. Even though the spirits in the wood of self-murderers reclaim their forsaken bodies at the Last Judgement, their immortal souls remain forever trapped in the wood of self-murderers.⁸⁰⁶

Still, it turns out that the opposite is also true. Faith is often cited as a reason to die by suicide because death holds a reward. In Philippians 1:21, Paul and Timothy write to the congregation at Philippi, "For to me, to live is Christ [He is my source of joy, my reason to live] and to die is gain [for I will be with Him in eternity]." For example, for the early church, rape was an accepted reason to die by suicide,⁸⁰⁷ and virtuous, a form of martyrdom,⁸⁰⁸ and a way to escape slavery and possible torture by the Roman army.⁸¹⁰ This belief still exists in present-day society. To illustrate this point, as recently as in 2009, a teenager who ended his life left a note for his parents the night of his suicide. In the message, he explained that he was too tired to continue life and his choice: to continue being unhappy on earth in this life or to be happy forever in heaven. He said that he is now, after his death, forever with his Redeemer.⁸¹¹

⁸⁰⁵ Dante Alighieri *The Divine Comedy*, Hell, Canto X111, 1.

⁸⁰⁶ Dante Alighieri *The Divine Comedy* Hell, Canto X111, 4.

⁸⁰⁷ In a letter to the martyrs, church father Tertullian praises Lucretia's suicide. He says, "A victim of violence, she stabbed herself in the presence of her kinsfolk to gain glory for her innocence. A stain upon chastity is reckoned among us as more dreadful than any punishment and death." Tertullian, "*To the Martyrs*," chapters. 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, in [Disciplinary, Moral, and Ascetical Works](#), Translated by Rudolph Arbesmann, Emily Daly, and Edwin Quain, in *The Fathers of the Church*, ed. Roy Defarrari. (New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1959): pp. 17-29.

⁸⁰⁸ The account of the drowning suicide, of a woman of Antioch, St. Pelagia, and her two daughters, to avoid sexual violation by the Roman soldiers guarding them, is listed among reports of other martyrs who endured extraordinary suffering without resorting to suicide.

⁸⁰⁹ Luther asks, "...was she responsible for her death? Doctor Luther said: No: she felt that this step formed her only chance of safety, it being not her life she sought to save, but her chastity." Luther, Martin, Table Talk entries DLXXXIX, DCCXXXVIII, in [The Table Talk or Familiar Discourse of Martin Luther](#), tr. William Hazlitt, London: David Bogue, 1848, pp. 254, 303; entry 222 (April 7, 1532).

⁸¹⁰ After the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., the fortress became one of the last outposts for the Jewish nationalists known as the Zealots. On May 2, 73, during a major offensive by the Roman army, 960 Zealot revolutionaries under the command of Eleazar chose to die by mass suicide rather than surrender to the Roman army. Eleazar believed that voluntary death guarantees liberty to the soul, and preserves honour and protects the pride of the Jewish nation; it spares one's family and oneself from slavery and torture if captured. Incited by Eleazar, each husband killed his wife and children and was then killed by the next man in line; the last man willingly killed himself. Only two women and five children, hiding in the underground aqueducts, survived to tell the tale.

⁸¹¹ Heleen Page, "Emile Page, March 9 1992 to September 19 2009, *Survivors of Suicide*. In Memoriam. Accessed May 19, 2018. <https://survivorsofsuicide.org.za/SOS%20WoM%20Emile%20Page.pdf>

The examples show that whether or not one perceives life as having meaning is not why people end their lives. In the same way, the fact that you find life pointless does not mandate suicide either. Far from it, I make the case that a human person exists inward, as a self, a Cartesian, I think - a self that is nothing if not possible possibilities, and suicide is one likely outcome. That being so, irrespective of belief and who one chooses to be, some continue on their way, and some do not. Sartre writes,

I am playing with my possibles. My eyes, scanning the abyss from top to bottom, rehearse my possible fall and symbolically actualise it; at the same time, the act of suicide, due to its becoming 'my' possible 'possible', reveals in its turn some possible reasons for adopting it (suicide would bring my anguish to an end).

Fortunately these reasons, in their turn — by virtue simply of their being reasons for a possible — are presented as inefficacious, and not as determining: they can no more produce my suicide than my horror of falling can determine me to avoid it. It is this counter-anguish that, in general, brings anguish to an end, by transmuting it into indecision. That indecision, in its turn, calls for a decision; suddenly, we move away from the edge of the chasm and continue on our way.⁸¹²

In closing, I argue that the meaning of life is not the determining factor, and Camus' example shows that one can choose life if the self considers life pointless. But it is also true that some people believe life is meaningless and end their lives. In the same way, the death of many who were convinced of the meaning of his or her own life underlines that many die despite seeing their lives as profoundly meaningful. If the meaning of life is not the definitive act, what is? I argue that the key to understanding suicide as the definitive act lies not in how a human person sees life. It is about whether or not you need death.

The allure of the end of consciousness

Camus stubbornly insists that a human person must die unreconciled and *not* of his or her own free will. He says, "Drain yourself to the bitter end, and deplete yourself,"⁸¹³ if you

⁸¹² Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, (Routledge, New York, 2018) V. The Origin of Nothingness, 44/64

⁸¹³ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurd Freedom, 47/55.

must. I argue that this implies that protecting oneself from suicidal thoughts and acts is hardly effortless. Instead, to stay alive, one must be able to continue living. I argue that Camus would likely agree with the Teacher of Ecclesiastes, who writes, "Perfectly pointless, says the teacher, perfectly pointless. Everything is pointless." He considers one's labour, wealth, wisdom, knowledge, and even life itself pointless.⁸¹⁴ Therefore, to stay alive, one often has to defy reason but also faith because, from both perspectives, life is short and futile.

I argue that once a person's mind acquires this unfortunate insight into the human condition, it may be impossible to continue living now if the situation demands it or later when faced with such a situation. Suicide prevention ideals, or mantras about the sanctity of human life, seem to have little effect on the mind's inward-facing assessment. And what the 'command centre' understands, it acts upon. Camus says, "It is a matter of living in that state of the absurd. I know on what it is founded, this mind and this world straining against each other without being able to embrace each other."⁸¹⁵ It is about this living Camus refers to when he says, "Living is not easy,"⁸¹⁶ and of which the teacher would comfort one that God has put eternity in ourselves so that nothing but such an eternity with God will ever be enough.

In the previous chapter, I explained that a human is aware of death, not only as an inevitable outcome of life. More so, a person attains extrication and freedom from life through death. I argue that the fact that a person does so every 40 seconds somewhere in the world shows that suicide is an alluring option. Suicide offers a way out of needless agony, pain and suffering, and the hardships of daily life when a person faces the Absurd or longs to be with God in the hereafter. I cannot agree more with Marx when he writes, "If they are religious, they may be thinking about a better world: if they believe in nothing, they may be seeking the peace of nothingness."⁸¹⁷

⁸¹⁴ Ecclesiastes 1-6

⁸¹⁵ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Philosophical Suicide, 21/55

⁸¹⁶ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurdity and Suicide, 4/55.

⁸¹⁷ Karl Marx, from "Peuchet on Suicide," in Battin, *The Ethics of Suicide*, <https://ethicsofsuicide.lib.utah.edu/selections/karl-marx/>.

What keeps a human person here?

In the first chapter of Camus's essay, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, he states the central problem he wishes to address. He writes, "The important thing is to find out how people get away in the first case and why people stay in the second case." To answer this question, I agree with Camus that it is one thing to look at suicide from the outside, uninvolved and far removed, perhaps as a subject of science and research. In this instance, you look at the human condition coldly⁸¹⁸ and judge suicide as an observer, as Camus accuses Heidegger of doing.

The situation is quite different when you, the self, face imminent, certain death or intolerable suffering, and you stare down the abyss of the Absurd or have the hope of an eternity with God that awaits. For example, in life, Charlotte Perkins Gilman was an opponent of suicide. She saw human life as service. She writes, "No grief, pain, misfortunate, or "broken heart" is an excuse for cutting off one's life while any power of service remains."⁸¹⁹ Still, after receiving a terminal breast cancer diagnosis, she ended her life on Saturday, August 17 1935.⁸²⁰ This example shows that a suicide death conveys a personal message: *your* reason for living or dying. Nowhere is it more evident than with the torture death of Christian martyrs, as described by Father Antonio Gallonio in *Torture of the Christian Martyrs*.⁸²¹ From an onlooker's perspective, it would make sense if the martyrs died by suicide instead of facing unthinkable torture. For instance, who would choose death, being sown into the belly of an animal carcass, only to be ripped apart by wild animals? Why would a woman refuse suicide and instead see how her torturers hand her over to a brothel to be raped and then murdered? Despite these atrocities, the martyrs declined suicide, even though their reasons differ significantly from those of Camus. Where he finds life meaningless and futile and death the end of existence, they revolt against suicide because they see their lives as profoundly meaningful and their deaths at the hand of the torturer as commencing an eternity

⁸¹⁸ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurd Walls 20/55.

⁸¹⁹ Cynthia Davis, *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: A Biography*, (Stanford, California, Stanford University Press, 2010): 14, 32/33, Rakuten Kobo Inc.

⁸²⁰ Davis, *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: A Biography*, 14, 32-33/33.

⁸²¹ Gallonio, *Torture of the Christian Martyrs* (2006).

with God.⁸²² Therefore, in ancient societies to the present day, what served as a reason to live can also be a reason to die.

All this implies that *the outcome* of one's assessment shows that a human person comes to a unique conclusion, a confession about his or her reason to live or to die. Therefore, one faces one final, crucial question, which will determine if one stays alive or dies. *Do I have a reason to live?* Being able or unable to find a reason "to live and to create", irrespective of whether one accepts the limits of one's intellect, like Camus, or instead turns to faith, like Kierkegaard, determines the definitive act. Camus says a person stays alive *because he or she has a reason to live*. Similarly, a person ends his or her life because *there is a reason to die*. Camus writes,

I see many people die because they judge that life is not worth living. I see others paradoxically getting killed for the ideas or illusions that give them a reason for living (what is called a reason for living is also an excellent reason for dying).⁸²³

In closing, Camus's self-assessment of the worth of his life clearly shows how he elects beliefs, values and ideals, which play a cardinal role in this assessment. Surrounded by death and destruction, he gravitates towards Nietzsche and away from Kierkegaard, who offers faith as a solution. He elects an absurd and godless world and ceases to hope.⁸²⁴ This means that the mind is not just a questioning Sherlock Holmes who operates on the principles of rationality and logic, but the mind also considers the beliefs and ideals it elects to hold dear. Therefore, the message the act of suicide communicates is also about the deceased. Herein, I think, lies the complexity of suicide. The act points to the complexity of the human person who carries out the act, all that he or she is as a self, experienced and holds dear.

⁸²² Circa 160-220, Tertullian encouraged the Christian martyrs to be true to their faith and endure prosecution "...your Master Christ Jesus, Who hath given you the Spirit, and hath brought you forth unto this wrestling-ground, hath willed, before the day of the contest, to set you apart from a free manner of living unto a severer training, that your powers might be strengthened within you. For the wrestlers also are set apart for a stricter discipline, that they may have time for building up their strength". In order to endure these and countless other horrors, Tertullian promises, "Ye are about to undergo a *good fight*, wherein the President is the living God; the Trainer the Holy Spirit; the crown, Eternity; the prize, of angelic being, the *citizenship of the Heavens*; the glory for ever and ever," Tertullian *To the Martyrs* http://www.sophiaproject.org/uploads/1/3/9/5/13955288/ter tullian_martyrs.pdf

⁸²³ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurdity and Suicide, 2/55.

⁸²⁴ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Conquest, 21/21.

Suicidal behaviour is a truly serious philosophical problem

In his essay, Camus claims that it is up to philosophy to examine the matter of suicide because it causes people to die. He is adamant that the subject of suicide cannot be left to public health, medicine, and the helping professions because the root of the problem lies beyond a mere failure of a human person's self-protection instinct. He throws the existing state of affairs into disarray by claiming *all people* consider suicide. Not only that, but he also further qualifies that all *healthy* people consider suicide. In other words, people generally think about it. With this critical claim, he implies that people are generally at risk because he describes suicidal behaviour as one's reply to a cognitive assessment that we can all make. For this reason, suicidal behaviour is unremarkable, regular, normal and typical. It's what many people do.

Camus describes a suicidal encounter as legitimate and necessary. This implies that he considers his personal assessment at this time in his life critical. Unavoidable even. Still, the implication is clear. What happened to Camus is not an isolated experience. Even though the outcome might differ from Camus's, it happens to many people.

Earlier in the chapter, I mentioned that Chodoff implicates aspects of our fate as human beings in suicidal behaviour. Aligned with this thinking, one expects Camus to broaden the existing understanding of suicidal behaviour. One assumes that he assesses suicidal behaviour to account for the aspects of being human that lie outside the scope of medicine. In other words, these philosophical aspects, which Sartre describes as the limitations of a priori being situated in the universe, would stand next to and complement, for example, the medical or social aspects. In doing so, it provides a broader understanding of suicide. This line of thought would complement the thinking that a singular biological, sociological, or medical perspective is insufficient to explain how self-preservation fails. This is, for example, the position Shneidman⁸²⁵ takes when he argues that the physical, cultural, sociological, psychological, and philosophical aspects that contribute to the failing of self-protection

⁸²⁵ He says, "Suicide is a multifaceted event, and that biological, cultural, sociological, interpersonal, intrapsychic, logical, conscious and unconscious, and philosophical elements are present, in various degrees, in each suicidal event." Shneidman, *Definition of Suicide, Part Four, Cognitive Aspects of Suicide*, 3/9.

should be assessed side-by-side to obtain an undistorted picture. But it turns out that this is not what Camus has in mind.

Camus realised how far his thinking was removed from the ill repute ascribed to suicide by Plato, Aristotle, and many scholars afterwards. Camus reflects on what philosophy contributes to understanding his experience with the Absurd and finds no solace. Camus reflects that we know more and more about the world, as the sciences attest to, to the point where the human race can bring about utter devastation and death through weapons of destruction. This destruction would cost Camus his beliefs and hopes and cause him to face suicide. Yet, he can find no answers about himself, the subjective self.

Even though humans all share the same situation, the human condition philosophy seems to have little to offer. For instance, even though Descartes concludes that he can be sure he exists because he is the one thinking, he only describes a subjective self that exists as a thinking being but nothing much else. Kant and Hegel offer no solace to the desperate man either. How can Camus make any sense of the *feeling* of the Absurd when the fact that he exists is all there is? Is there no information about existence that can offer him some understanding? Who am I? Camus realises that this is the question that philosophy neglected and with dire consequences. Of all the questions philosophy bears responsibility for, this is *the* critical question, for people are dying. Kierkegaard goes to the heart of the problem, and I repeat his assessment. He writes,

That the cognising spirit (the self) is one that exists and that every human being is one such who exists for himself is something I cannot repeat often enough since the fanciful neglect of this is responsible for much confusion.⁸²⁶

What does it matter that humankind authors centuries of impressive technology, moon landings, invented automobiles, the plane and the computer, and life-saving vaccines and missions to Mars, but one million people die by suicide every year, and we can't quite say why? Renowned suicidologist Professor Matthew Nock acknowledges that the rate of suicide has been virtually unchanged in the past century. He writes, "If you look at other

⁸²⁶ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, B. The Subjective Truth; Inwardness; Truth is Subjectivity, 1/78.

causes of death, like heart disease or HIV, as we've invested in those problems, death rates have dropped enormously. But for suicide, the rate 100 years ago is virtually identical to the rate today."⁸²⁷ Camus, in his suicidal crises, must have pondered this question when he witnessed the ultimate destruction of the atomic bomb but could not understand himself, to the point where he considered bringing about his own end.

I argue that it is because Camus now understands the neglect of this life-or-death matter that he trivialises everything else. Nothing, he claims, supersedes the importance of suicide. Irrespective of what it might be – insights about the world or human beings– it is just fun and games.⁸²⁸ It comes later and is of a lower priority. He reminds the reader that Galileo rescinds his theory that the world is round, a conviction dear to him and his life's work. He recanted this belief in a heartbeat when his life was at stake. Camus claims that such is the status of all other philosophical questions compared to the seriousness of suicide.⁸²⁹ The priority he gives to the topic at hand cues one in that it is more than a *philosophical problem*,⁸³⁰ it is a *critical* priority, and as such, he elevates the importance of the discussion and raises the matter of suicide to philosophy's top concern. It asks for urgent and immediate attention.⁸³¹ He tasks *philosophy* with this all-important task when he writes, "The fundamental subject of *The Myth of Sisyphus* is this: it is legitimate and necessary to wonder whether life has a meaning; therefore it is legitimate to meet the problem of suicide face to face."⁸³²

Conclusion

Camus never judges suicide. He describes behaviour. Still, he does think suicide is tragic. He has empathy for such a death. He scolds Schopenhauer, who he writes "is often cited,

⁸²⁷ Matthew Nock "What do we know about suicide? Not nearly enough". Peter Reuell, *The Harvard Gazette*. November 17, 2016.

⁸²⁸ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurdity and Suicide, 2/55.

⁸²⁹ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurdity and Suicide, 2/55.

⁸³⁰ Data released by the CDC in February 2022 shows that suicide is now the 2nd leading cause of death for Americans in the first half of life. The data shows deaths by motor vehicle fatalities, suicide, or homicides *exceed deaths by heart disease, cancer, HIV, or the flu*. Suicides continue to rise, regardless of age, race, or economic status. "Top Ten Leading Causes of Death in the U.S. for ages 1-44 from 1981-2022," *Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, Injury Prevention and Control*, February 11, 2022, <https://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/animated-leading-causes.html>.

⁸³¹ Camus says, "On the other hand, I see many people die because they judge that life is not worth living." Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurdity and Suicide, 2/55.

⁸³² Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Preface, 1/2.

as a fit subject for laughter, because he praised suicide while seated at a well-set table."⁸³³ Far from it, Camus refers to suicide as "the crisis" and the suicide decedent as "the desperate man."⁸³⁴ He understands that one cannot fault the mind's logic when it is up against intolerable suffering because he was that desperate man. From these experiences, he understands that one has the 'presence of mind' to know how to end one's consciousness. Camus knows many will.⁸³⁵ One senses his empathy when he says, "At that last crossroad where thought hesitates, many men have arrived and even some of the humblest. They then abdicated what was most precious to them, their life."⁸³⁶

His empathy also follows from the fact that he leaves behind the association with abnormality. He would likely frown at how the media popularly relate suicide deaths to mental illness. For example, an interviewer attributed Bennington's death to his "troubled state of mind" to "the darkness he wrestled with" from his depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and sexual abuse.⁸³⁷ Camus would likely argue that this erroneous association with dysfunction persists because of the psychology that one can always introduce an 'objective' mind into all problems. On the other hand, Camus clearly states that such an approach has no place in this pursuit and this passion.⁸³⁸ One cannot judge suicide from the outside, looking 'coldly' at the human condition. The observer is not present in the individual life to walk in his or her shoes and is, in fact, a lousy and irrelevant witness in the case of the worth of one's life. Camus considers such thinking ineffective in understanding suicidal behaviour.

In its place, Camus looks at suicidal thoughts and acts as the product of a curious and logical mind. Exhibiting careful planning, it shows that the mind bases its assessment on facts and reasoning about oneself as being human in the world. Camus describes suicidal behaviour as a first-person experience playing out in the individual mind. Herein lies the complexity of suicide: the mind's only concern is the inner world of the particular mind: ideas, values,

⁸³³ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* Absurdity and Suicide, 4/55.

⁸³⁴ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* Absurdity and Suicide, 3/55.

⁸³⁵ "One of the only coherent philosophical positions is thus revolt. It is a constant confrontation between man and his own obscurity." Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurdity and Suicide, 6/55.

⁸³⁶ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurdity and Suicide, 3/55.

⁸³⁷ Bennington, Chester. "I Have A Hard Time With Life." February 2017 interview by JoJo Wright of iHeartRadio's 102.7 KIIS-FM. Blabbermouth, July 22, 2017. <https://blabbermouth.net/news/chester-bennington-in-february-2017-interview-i-have-a-hard-time-with-life-video>.

⁸³⁸ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurdity and Suicide, 6 /49.

wishes, hopes, and conclusions. Through lived experience, the individual mind is the sole assessor of the futility of their daily habit and the depth and tolerability of their suffering. Therefore, there is nothing mysterious about suicidal behaviour. It is not a failing of sorts or an illness hard to describe. It is but an assessment playing out in the heart and mind of a human person who fully understands the benefits of death.

With this in mind, I will summarise my findings and conclusions and suggest areas for further research.

7. Decision

The dissertation has aimed to reflect on the question: “Why do people die by suicide?” I wanted to determine how philosophy contributed to the historical suicide debate and how this contributes to how modern-day society understands suicidal behaviour. I tried to show that, for the most part, academia thinks suicidal behaviour is abnormal and, more often than not, from a mental illness. Therefore, searching for something that brings the powerful self-preservation instinct to its knees continues to captivate the scientific community. With that being said, I have tried to argue that Plato and Aristotle described a human person as a simple, instinctual being, but that since then, existentialist philosophers such as Kierkegaard, Sartre, and, in particular, Camus found that aspects prevalent in the human condition have prominence, and as such, that there may be more to suicidality than meets the eye.

The surprise many may feel about assessing suicidal behaviour outside of medicine and psychiatry arises from a deep-seated association of suicide with abnormality. Despite that, I have touched on how science continually challenges beliefs about suicidal behaviour. Specifically, we know that studies cite a diagnosed psychiatric disorder in an estimated 54% of suicide decedents, far less than 90% or more, as was historically reported.⁸³⁹ Studies further cite that relationship, financial, legal, and other life problems account for these deaths.⁸⁴⁰ Also, even if suicidal behaviour is mostly thought symptomatic of mood disorders, i.e. depression, it arcs across many behaviours, such as substance and sexual abuse and personality- and psychiatric disorders.^{841 842 843} Therefore, many clinicians nowadays advocate for an independent diagnosis of suicidal behaviour disorder.⁸⁴⁴

⁸³⁹ Milner, Allison et al. “Suicide in the absence of mental disorder? A review of psychological autopsy studies across countries.” *The International Journal of Social Psychiatry*, vol. 59,6 (2013): 545-54. doi:10.1177/0020764012444259.

⁸⁴⁰ Centres for Disease Control and Prevention. (2018). *Suicide rising across the US: More than a mental health concern*. Vital signs. Retrieved from <https://www-cdc-gov.ez.sun.ac.za/vitalsigns/pdf/vs-0618-suicide-H.pdf> [Google Scholar]

⁸⁴¹ Harmer, Bonnie, et al. “Suicidal Ideation.” *StatPearls*, StatPearls Publishing, May 18 2022.

⁸⁴² Oquendo, Maria A, and Enrique Baca-Garcia, “Suicidal behaviour disorder as a diagnostic entity in the DSM-5 classification system: advantages outweigh limitations.” *World Psychiatry: Official Journal of the World Psychiatric Association (WPA)* vol. 13,2 (2014): 128-30. doi:10.1002/wps.20116.

⁸⁴³ “Suicide occurs in the presence of any psychiatric diagnosis, but studies repeatedly show that suicide is most common in mood disorders, major depressive disorder, and bipolar disorder. “Fawcett J. Diagnosis, Traits, States, and Comorbidity in Suicide. In: Dwivedi Y, editor. *The Neurobiological Basis of Suicide*. (Boca Raton (FL): CRC Press/Taylor & Francis; 2012): Chapter 1. Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK107213/>.

⁸⁴⁴ The DSM 5 task force does not allow for the use of the diagnosis in a clinical setting, but clinicians can nevertheless indicate the conditions' possible presence by using the “Other Specified” designation. American Psychiatric Association,

Having said that, I have substantiated how suicide was not always considered a subject of science and medicine. To argue this point, I showed that it was commonplace in earlier societies and for logical and common-sense reasons. Many people escaped from untenable situations, such as the threat of being sexually assaulted or tortured. Some wanted to save others' lives. Many people following beliefs and values essential to their lives died by suicide to uphold these beliefs and ideals. These deaths are not indicative of abnormality or illness. They instead point to how people made sense of who they were and what they considered important.

It was not until Plato and Aristotle arrived on the scene that people started questioning the moral desirability and justifiability of the act. Since that time, unthinkable as it may be today, suicide has been chiefly of ethical concern. I argued the point that how we think about suicide is fluid and transitory, as shown by the shift from ethics to illness. To illustrate this point, I have tried to describe how Plato and Aristotle gave suicide a bad reputation as an offence against the gods and the state. I have elaborated on how these deep-seated beliefs, which the Stoic and Roman philosophers preserved and built upon, found their way into medieval philosophy, theology, and law. I found that the inhuman prosecution of suicide and the desecration of the deceased after their death by suicide shows how immensely powerful the associations of suicide with evil and self-murder are, especially in law and religion.

The argument I presented is that philosophy was once foundational to the debate but nowadays retains a say about the role a person should play in their own death only. In other words, philosophy, for the most part, passed on the baton to medicine, particularly psychiatry. This belief creates the impression that it has little say in suicidal behaviour other than assessing the moral desirability of the behaviour. Just the opposite, I have suggested that Plato and Aristotle's association of suicide with internal personal deficiencies remains compelling and instrumental in why suicide became a subject of medicine and research.

DSM V Section III, 2013, https://www.psychiatry.org/File%20Library/Psychiatrists/Practice/DSM/APA_DSM-5-Section-III.pdf.

Be that as it may, a lot has been said about the shortcomings of the new diagnosis, namely suicidal behaviour disorder. To illustrate this point, I tried to show that sociologists argue that the medical definition does not account for the impact of systemic societal issues on the individual, for instance, bullying. For this reason, theorists suggest expanding the description to capture all there is to know about the subject. More so, I attempted to show that psychiatrist Paul Chodoff questions if suicide is only a medical problem. He suggests that it might be worthwhile to look into aspects of being human that lie outside of medicine, particularly in psychiatry.⁸⁴⁵ With this in mind, I questioned whether the issue requires philosophical consideration. Would philosophy not add to the complex description of suicidal behaviour as an illness, a problem of living, a systemic problem, and a public health concern? Should philosophers not just focus on the ethics of suicide and trust that medicine takes care of the matter?⁸⁴⁶

Curiously, even though we no longer openly associate suicidality with evil or murder, the association with abnormality and mental illness remains. I believe the quest to pinpoint the precise anomaly of suicidality will continue because, from the inception of Plato and Aristotle, theorists held onto the belief that self-preservation, to act in such a way as to protect yourself from harm and death, is the standard of normal functioning. After all, instinctually, humans fear death and protect themselves. In light of this instinctual fear of death, I elaborated on how theorists assume that to [want to] kill oneself shows something is wrong with you.

I argued earlier in the dissertation that animals are likely unaware that they act instinctually. In contrast, human persons experience and are conscious of the fact that they are self-preserving. People who survived life-or-death situations can reflect upon and describe their ordeal. They can analyze and vividly recall the events and their responses, such as “what was going through their mind” and how they would do anything to live. Therefore, I concluded that, to a human person, these experiences are not only instinctual but conscious. Because we are aware that we have this instinct, we are often baffled by suicidal behaviour.

⁸⁴⁵ Paul Chodoff, “The medicalization of the human condition.” *Psychiatric Services (Washington, D.C.)* 53, no.5 (2002): 627-8. doi:10.1176/appi.ps.53.5.627.

⁸⁴⁶ Etienne Esquirol, *Mental Maladies; a Treatise on Insanity* (Philadelphia, Lea, and Blanchard, 1845): 254, Rakuten Kobo Inc.

I elaborated that it is sometimes so unthinkable that Joiner says one probably learns to end one's life through repeat exposure to violence and self-harm. I ask, though: Are we the proverbial Pavlovian dog that can learn the tricks of harming oneself?

I tried to argue that it is apparent that this instinct always acts under its mandate to protect the sentient being against a perceived threat, human or animal. Given this, I theorize that it should be absolved from playing a role in suicidal behaviour. For this reason, Camus never speculates about how self-preserving fails because he understands that a human person naturally and instinctively shrinks from death and annihilation.⁸⁴⁷ From this understanding, I had to inquire how else we can make sense of suicidal behaviour.

Why does this belief that behaviour contrary to self-preservation is abnormal persist? I tried to argue that we should set aside the idea that a human person is only self-protecting. I wanted to say that unless theorists rethink who we are as human beings, perceptions of suicidality will likely remain unchallenged. I realized that any attempt to make sense of suicidality presupposes an assumption about who we are as human persons. Only once these fundamental assumptions about our kind are challenged would one ask: Is suicidal behaviour a problem on an ever-expanding spectrum of abnormality? If not, does it imply that suicidal behaviour might be unremarkable?

Is there a different way to understand a human person, which will likely change how we think about suicidality? To answer this question, I tried to show that, since Plato and Aristotle, scholars have seen the mind as guiding the instincts. I have explained that they thought of reason as godlike, shared among all the members of humanity. I rationalized that this view of reason shows that it is untouchable and that suicide is highly likely the result of a failing instinct. On the contrary, I demonstrated that at this juncture, Camus deviates from the way scholars, since Plato and Aristotle, consider the operation of the mind. I elaborated on how he rejects the theory that a human person's reasoning powers are a saviour. The implication is that since Plato and Aristotle, we have it wrong. They might have been eager to award

⁸⁴⁷ "For who is there, what percentage of mankind, whose 'Blood does not ebb with horror, and face turn pale with fear,' at the approach of death? That practically everybody has this feeling proves that nature shrinks from annihilation." Cicero, *The Complete Works of Cicero*, V: 23-24/36.

the mind the role of shepherd, but the rational faculties show that it is not, in the first instance, a guardian.

Camus's view of human reason raises the question, "If the mind does not oversee the instincts and protect them, what is the mind relating to instinct? Does the self-preservation instinct interact with the mind? I consider the subject of a potential link between mind and instinct outside the scope of this dissertation. Having said this, it is my supposition that the instincts do not perceive the mind as an external and mortal threat. For example, one's survival instinct does not prevent one from sky-diving, even though the action is potentially lethal. Similarly, firefighters knowingly risk death due to fire, explosion, vehicle accidents, and exposure, leading to chronic illnesses like cancer, heart disease, and behavioural health issues.⁸⁴⁸ Despite understanding these risks, their self-preservation instinct does not prevent them from performing these duties. Therefore, I consider the possibility that instinctual self-preservation is not as central to human behaviour as envisaged by Plato and Aristotle. As a result, I say that our behaviour is not exclusively instinctual and thus sets us apart from other sentient beings.

I have argued that in his quest to clarify the urgent matter of suicide, Camus gains from being part of a wider circle of existentialist thinkers, which allows for an exciting description of the human condition beyond Plato and Aristotle's simple, instinctual being. Sartre makes a critical correction when he argues that we now know that a human person does not have a fixed human nature, nor does he or she simply live out an "armchair" and pre-set essence or destiny. He points this out as a misjudgement. He writes,

Eighteenth-century atheistic philosophers suppressed the idea of God, but not, for all that, the idea that essence precedes existence. We encounter this idea nearly everywhere: in the works of Diderot, Voltaire, and even Kant. Man possesses a human nature; this "human nature," which is the concept of that which is human, is found in all men, which means that each man is a particular example of a universal concept—man. In Kant's works, this universality extends so far as to encompass

⁸⁴⁸ Richard Campbell, and Jay T. Petrillo, "Fatal Firefighter Injuries in the United States," June 2023, <https://www.nfpa.org/News-and-Research/Data-research-and-tools/Emergency-Responders/Firefighter-fatalities-in-the-United-States>.

forest dwellers—man in a state of nature—and the bourgeois, meaning that they all possess the same basic qualities. Here again, the essence of man precedes his historically primitive existence in nature.”⁸⁴⁹

I find that it is somewhat surprising that this notion continues to dominate contemporary suicide theories if one considers that Sartre addressed the oversight in the previous century. On 29 October 1945, in his lecture at the Club Maintenant in Paris. Sartre said,

It states that if God does not exist, there is at least one being in whom existence precedes essence—a being whose existence comes before its essence, a being who exists before he can be defined by any concept of it. That being is man, or, as Heidegger put it, the human reality.”⁸⁵⁰

Placed in the care of Sartre, the human reality, or the self, soars to new heights. It is the human person, the subjective self, as we’ve never understood him or her. I make the case that this depiction of the human self transforms our understanding of the human person, far surpassing that simple, unconvincing Platonist being. This particular description of the human self, one can relate to, and this is a description of the “I” one can attest to. Sartre writes that this self “exists subjectively,”⁸⁵¹ and he or she is “a project.”⁸⁵² The self is unlike “a patch of moss, a spreading fungus or a growing cauliflower, or even a stone or a table.”⁸⁵³ In contrast, the self is a designer who creates him or herself from nothing.^{854 855}

From this understanding, I make the argument that the mind is centre-stage in the task a human person sets for him or herself. I concluded that the reason does not oversee or play second fiddle to the instincts. If protecting the sentient being is the job of the instincts, I next looked into what the mind does. I have tried to argue that the human mind is curious: it wanders, explores, and learns as it assesses one subject after another. One observes this when little children explore the world in wonder with little regard for their own well-being. Importantly, I tried to show that the mind’s role lies in its compulsion to

⁸⁴⁹ Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, 4/47.

⁸⁵⁰ Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, 5/47.

⁸⁵¹ Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, 6/47.

⁸⁵² Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, 6/47.

⁸⁵³ Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, 6/47.

⁸⁵⁴ Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, 5/47.

⁸⁵⁵ Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, 5/47.

understand. Therefore, one's rational faculty is more of an investigator. As one reflects on how ancient philosophers laid the foundations of knowledge and science, one has to agree with Camus on this point. I elaborated on how a person has a deep-seated need to make sense of living on earth and oneself. I contend that encountering uncomfortable questions will not deter such a curious mind.

Still, I have suggested that herein lies an essential limitation of a human person's fundamental situation in the universe. I have elaborated on how the mind's compulsion to find some meaning, truth and purpose is doomed to failure, and precisely for the reason that it finds itself alone in a universe of irrationals, be it other living forms or objects, be it the antelope, the lion, the cat, even the table, stone or growing fungus. Therefore, it is precisely a human person's compulsion to want to know and understand, despite the discomfort some questions might elicit, that brings him or her face to face with the answer: I am the poor fit. Therefore, there is no reply to my question, "Is my life worth the effort to me?"

For this reason, I have suggested that this understanding of the human person implies that suicidal behaviour can no longer be perceived on a spectrum of abnormality. In chapter two, I explained that suicide of the old, suicide as a sacrifice for others, and assisted suicides are excluded from suicides that are studied and researched and of little interest to clinical medicine because it is not associated with mental illness. In this regard, on page 17, I referenced Obegi, who excludes historical-, religious and morally motivated types of suicide as being of concern to clinicians, even though he describes these suicides as purposeful and self-inflicted. He also excludes medically assisted suicide that is practised in some countries, as well as in a handful of states in the USA.⁸⁵⁶ The discussion in chapters 5 and 6 of the existentialist explanation referring to the absurd makes the point that suicidality is a human capability that stems from what it means to a human person living in the world, even when a mental illness coincides with suicidality in a person. Therefore, I reckon it is time to take suicidal behaviour out of the dungeons of abnormality. A psychiatric disorder does not cause suicidal behaviour. It is not an illness that affects a minority around the world. It is in the DNA of the human person, the self, and it is generic. Suicidal behaviour does not act

⁸⁵⁶ Joseph H. Obegi, "Is suicidality a mental disorder? Applying DSM-5 guidelines for new diagnoses," *Death Studies*, 45, no. 8, (2021): 638-650, DOI: [10.1080/07481187.2019.1671546](https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2019.1671546).

like a virus picking its victims randomly, such as COVID-19. I make the case that suicidal thoughts originate from regular cognition, that people widely think about suicide, and that assessing one's reasons for living is common.⁸⁵⁷ I indicated that this claim implies that people, in general, are potentially at risk of suicidal behaviour, which means that people can comprehend bringing about their own death and plan and execute these thoughts. I showed that every human person understands the benefit of death because it brings an end to his or her awareness or consciousness of one's situation, past experiences, and life. With this understanding that suicidal behaviour is a generic function of the mind, how does one understand the process when the reason assesses life's worth? I ask, is there an identifiable pathway leading to suicide?

To clarify this point, I explained that theorists nowadays consider suicide a response to everyday life, following a person's mistakes, or from a loss or trauma. I have explained that theorists often think that, when this happens, the person's mind tricks one into believing specific lies that keep flooding the mind, such as feeling unlovable, feeling ashamed of one's mistakes, or feeling utterly alone and like no one cares about what one goes through. Importantly, theorists do not see these thoughts and feelings as regular but describe them as collapsed or distorted cognitions and emotions on a spectrum of abnormality.

I suggested by way of an alternative that there is nothing untoward or bizarre about these feelings because they stem from people's experiences of how they are human, in other words, the characteristics and limitations of how one is a human person in the universe. I have suggested that there is much to be optimistic about regarding a human person. In this way, he or she is often a Sartrean phoenix rising from the ashes of past decisions or regrets, accepting full responsibility for oneself and who one is. Sartre tells of such a man, a Jesuit he met in a German labour camp, who, after everything goes wrong in his life, chooses to accept it as a sign of God that he should find his chosen purpose in religion, sanctity, and faith instead.⁸⁵⁸ In his book *Waking Up Alive*, Heckler writes about people who survived a suicide attempt and responded to their attempt by radically changing their lives by walking

⁸⁵⁷ Camus says, "The fundamental subject of *The Myth of Sisyphus* is this: it is legitimate and necessary to wonder whether life has a meaning; therefore, it is legitimate to meet the problem of suicide face to face." Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Preface 1 / 2.

⁸⁵⁸ Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, 5/47.

away and starting over as a means to survive.⁸⁵⁹ Considering these examples, I also emphasized that a human person is conscious of this ongoing responsibility and effort of becoming and the anguish and despair this effort brings about. Kierkegaard writes, “The continual becoming is the uncertainty of earthly life, in which everything is uncertain. Every human being grasps this.”⁸⁶⁰ Like the tragic hero, Sisyphus, a person is aware of “the whole extent of his or her wretched condition,”⁸⁶¹ which comes with great anxiety and anguish. It is clear from Camus’s self-assessment that such feelings complement his thoughts. Therefore, a human person’s thinking comes with feelings proportionate to those cognitions that stem from the characteristics of how he or she is human.

Furthermore, I have tried to explain how Sartre makes us attentive to the fact that a person, such as Camus, experiences these characteristics and limitations of being a human person in the world subjectively. However, he also emphasized that these aspects or limitations have an objective dimension because they affect everyone and are evident everywhere.⁸⁶² As such, they are commonplace and characteristic of everyone; therefore, we all share the same fate. The desire to end consciousness comes from an awareness that we live in a non-sensical milieu, which our mind cannot make sense of. For this reason, our efforts, trauma or suffering are pointless, particularly when we face our mortality. With this understanding of who we are as a human person, Camus writes, “When the images of earth cling too tightly to memory when the call of happiness becomes too insistent, it happens that melancholy rises in man’s heart: this is the rock’s victory, this is the rock itself. The boundless grief is too heavy to bear. These are our nights of Gethsemane.”⁸⁶³ I have argued that for the mind to contemplate, suicide is understandable and intelligible. I believe that debating suicidality as a regular function of the curious mind could take a step towards understanding why some people stay and why many go.

⁸⁵⁹ Richard A. Heckler, *Waking Up Alive*, (New York, Putnam, 1994), Kobo Books Inc.

⁸⁶⁰ Kierkegaard refers to Socrates and writes, “The infinite merit of Socrates is precisely to be an existing thinker, not a speculator who forgets what it is to exist.” Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific*, 2. Possible and Actual Theses of Lessing, 18/81.

⁸⁶¹ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, The Myth of Sisyphus, 3/5.

⁸⁶² Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, 22/47.

⁸⁶³ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, The Myth of Sisyphus, 1/5.

Having said that, I have tried to make the point that understanding how we find ourselves in the world is not trickery of the mind. Instead, it points to how difficult living is. In ancient times, the Teacher of Ecclesiastes elaborates at length about the futility of one's labour, wealth, wisdom, and knowledge, even life itself.⁸⁶⁴ The fact that he, the wisest and wealthiest of his time, experienced this senselessness shows that this is a condition nobody can escape. Many centuries later, Camus explains who we are, stripped of the pretence of daily life and the apparent protection of fame and fortune. More so, he describes this experience of the difficulty with life as a thinking and feeling entity. To illustrate this point, I elaborated on how Camus becomes aware of the futility of his quest to understand a meaningless world and the inevitability of his death. He cognitively understands the absurdity of his life, but a feeling of absurdity accompanies this understanding. One would expect these emotions to accompany cognitions of this nature because they express his thoughts as he comes to terms with being human. I argue that it is clear from Camus's self-assessment that one cannot set aside feelings from logic and that they are inseparable emotive cognitions.⁸⁶⁵ Camus does not demonize the emotions that he feels. Quite the opposite, he acknowledges every feeling. He analyses these feelings to the point where he can describe them fully. He celebrates his feelings to the point where they become his reason for living. He is living proof that the experience of absurdity is tolerable because Sisyphus keeps taking the rock up the hill repeatedly! To feel on this earth and to create. He dethrones Descartes's supposition that we are but our reason. Instead, Camus claims we are so much more than cognition: we think, and we feel, and therefore, we are. On account of his describing his feelings as inseparable from his thoughts, I see this as a subject deserving of further inquiry.

In this dissertation, I tried to argue that the association of suicidality with abnormality ends with Camus. He brings a modernist theory of the human condition as curious and investigative. We are fully capable of acting on the conclusions we come to. Therefore, suicidality is rather typical as a function of the mind, from a quest to make sense of ourselves in the world. We are a species that can comprehend ending our lives if we cannot find a

⁸⁶⁴ Ecclesiastes 1-6.

⁸⁶⁵ Shari Jager-Hyman, Amy, Cunningham, Amy Wenzel, Stephanie Mattei, Gregory K., Brown, and Aaron T. Beck. "Cognitive Distortions and Suicide Attempts." *Cognitive therapy and research* 38, no. 4 (2014): 369. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10608-014-9613-0>.

reason to live. Still, an inquisitive mind does not define all we are as human beings. I suggest that our difficulty in comprehending suicidal behaviour points us in the direction of further inquiry into who we are as human persons.

I have suggested that, historically, the light of reason gave primacy to the sciences. In comparison, until the existentialists asked about the human subject in the previous century, the human self remained mainly in the dark. I have suggested that Camus' suicidal crisis, in particular, shows that questions about how we live in the world and how we respond to the worth of our individual existence point back to the question of who and what is the human self. In response, I stated that a human person is not a basic, docile, instinctual being but a conscious and self-reflective self. The human self is tasked with creating oneself and has a compulsion to make sense of oneself despite being tragically entrapped in an irrational, inhuman universe. All things considered, the human person is a being who understands the ability of death and the avenues open to him or her when weighing up the reasons to live or die.

In closing, I tried to suggest that we are only scratching the surface of how we are human. I theorize that we do not fully understand the self with its existing capabilities but sobering limitations. In this dissertation, I have tried to argue that theorists in philosophy and the human sciences should be encouraged to question existing assumptions about the human person to progress the subject of suicide. Any such claims about the self in the human sciences lie outside the scope of this study. However, Stein, from his unique perspective as a clinical neuroscientist and philosopher, says that "it has become difficult in the age of neurophilosophy and neuropsychiatry to think about the big questions and hard problems without some reference to what science in general, and the cognitive-affective sciences in particular, have to say about the brain and the mind."⁸⁶⁶ On the other hand, as I elaborated on in Chapter 5, Camus' remarkable understanding of the role of cognition in suicidal behaviour shows that philosophy often anticipates what is later falsified by science and research. For instance, studies falsify Esquirol and Pritchard's belief that suicide almost

⁸⁶⁶ Dan J. Stein, *Problems of Living*, (Elsevier Science, Academic Press, May 11, 2021): Preface, 3/7, Kobo Books Inc.

exclusively implicates mood disorders.^{867 868 869} Quite the opposite, these studies show that suicidal behaviour occurs across many conditions and behaviours and when a mental illness is absent. Stein also cites philosophical positions taken by Aristotle, Spinoza, Hume, Dewey, and Jaspers that are supported by recent research in cognitive-affective science.⁸⁷⁰ In this way, philosophy, in tandem with scientific research, keeps shifting the boundaries of what we think we know about suicide and suicidal behaviour.

Concluding the discussion, I stated earlier that the subject's moral desirability lies outside this dissertation's scope. I did not intend to "take sides" and condemn or praise suicide. Ethicists already participate and play a vital role in the long-standing discussion about a person's role⁸⁷¹ in their own death, and this debate contributes today to, for example, critical conversations about euthanasia and physician-assisted death. I earlier cited the example of philosopher Margaret Pabst Battin's contribution to the 2017 statement of The American Association of Suicidology, "*Suicide*" *Is Not The Same As "Physician Aid In Dying."*⁸⁷² I believe that what is now required is a focus on the question, "What is suicide," to understand who is the human person, the self, and how his or her credentials and limitations are both implicated in suicidal behaviour, and to do so in tandem with ethics, in philosophy, and, as stated earlier, with the human sciences.

None of this suggests that we should disregard the immeasurable pain and suffering of suicide survivors or the clinician's mandate to prevent death. In this regard, I emphasized Camus's empathy with a suicidal person he describes as desperate. He scolds Schopenhauer for making light of the subject, showing great empathy with those in their quest to stay alive. I believe that his compassion would undoubtedly extend to anyone who lost a loved one to suicide. His compassion is evident from the fact that, when scholars,

⁸⁶⁷ J. Fawcett, 'Diagnosis, Traits, States, and Comorbidity in Suicide,' In *The Neurobiological Basis of Suicide*, ed. Y. Dwivedi Y. (Boca Raton (FL): CRC Press/Taylor & Francis; 2012). <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK107213/>.

⁸⁶⁸ EC. Harris and B Barraclough, "Suicide as an outcome for mental disorders. A meta-analysis," *Br J Psychiatry*, Mar;170 (1997): 205-28, doi: 10.1192/bjp.170.3.205. PMID: 9229027.

⁸⁶⁹ JL. Gradus et al, "Acute stress reaction and completed suicide," *Int J Epidemiol*. 39, no, 6, (Dec 2010):1478-84, doi: 10.1093/ije/dyq112. Epub 2010 Jul 12. PMID: 20624822.

⁸⁷⁰ Dan J. Stein, Philosophy and psychiatry: problems of clinicians and problems of life." *Revista brasileira de psiquiatria* (Sao Paulo, Brazil : 1999) vol. 44,3 (2022): 227-228. doi:10.1590/1516-4446-2021-0033.

⁸⁷¹ Augustine said that "... many have killed themselves But we are not inquiring whether it has been done, but whether it ought to have been done." Augustine, *The City of God*, I (22): 2/3.

⁸⁷² American Association of Suicidology, Statement, "Suicide" *Is Not The Same As "Physician Aid In Dying,"* October 30, 2017, <https://suicidology.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/AAS-PAD-Statement-Approved-10.30.17-ed-10-30-17.pdf>.

such as Wittgenstein, reacted with shame and embarrassment about their suicidal ideation, Camus writes about it with great transparency. He understands that “all healthy people have thought of suicide”, and he envisages that many people will be affected by the death of someone close to them because Camus keenly observes, “I see many people die because they judge that life is not worth living”.⁸⁷³ He wants people to stay and to find a reason to live and create. He writes about what it is like to have a present, a here and now, followed by many consecutive present moments so that one has life.

Having said that, as I elaborated on earlier in the dissertation, on many occasions, this is a world many people don’t want to remain alive in. Though we instinctually sustain life, like a plant growing towards the sun, members of our kind often cannot find a reason to live. Heartbreak, disappointment, hardship, and trauma. Sometimes terrible and senseless things happen to us. Sometimes, people want to live up to ideals greater than life, or they choose to protect those they serve alongside. Throughout all time, those who died by suicide, from the old world to today, bear witness to this fact – Lucretia, Socrates, Cicero, the Christian martyrs, Miss Chao, Charlotte Perkins Gillman, Master-At-Arms Second Class (SEAL) Michael A. Monsoor (Mikey) and Chester Bennington.⁸⁷⁴ Facing the random brutality of the world, they all had a reason to die. Many more will likely follow in their footsteps. Consequently, I argue that Camus convincingly brings ‘home’ the subject of suicide as being of central importance to modern-day philosophy because people die of it.

⁸⁷³ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Absurdity and Suicide, 1/55.

⁸⁷⁴ *Alliance of Hope*, for suicide loss survivors, copyright 2023, <https://allianceofhope.org/memorial-wall/>.

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