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The Politics of Suicide

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Abstract. This article suggests that many aspects of the political life can be brought to light through an analysis of suicide.

If the political is defined as pertaining to managing the disparity between the ideal and the real; between what one has and what one wishes to have; between what one is and what one wishes to be-- all within the context of a world wherein there are infinite needs but only finite resources--then life itself is political. When one chooses to end life and does end life through suicide, the politics of that life and of life in general does not end but becomes ever more apperceived among the survivors.

Suicide can be a vehicle of control. One's pain and hopelessness at mismanaging the disparity between the ideal and real can be controlled through suicide--for through suicide pain and hopelessness are eradicated. The lack of control one had over pain and hopelessness is eradicated by the new-found control of eradicating pain and hopelessness.

Through suicide one can posthumously effect control over others--especially others implicated in the unsuccessful management of the disparity between the ideal and the real. Paradoxically, one loses one's capacity to effect further control but gains the consequence of future control.

In so far as social control mechanisms are implicated in the pre-suicide lack of control, control through suicide effects an escape of control from these mechanisms. This escape from control may have been intended by the political authorities that effect these mechanisms--thus inducing an ersatz control by the suicidee--or may be an unintended consequence that momentarily subverts social control. In this last case, the disparity between the ideal and the real is supposed to be experienced by the target of social control (from the perspective of the social controllers) not managed by the target in any independent way.

Suicide also may be a behavioral consequence of false consciousness in so far as it is precipitated by erroneous notions of personal and social contingency that are fostered and reinforced by political authorities--for the purpose of developing, maintaining, increasing, and protecting the authorities' power. Here an individual's calculus leading to suicidal behavior has a phenomenological validity not an adaptive one.

Suicidal phenomena--threat and behavior--also may be the ultimate weapons against adversaries who seem superior in more conventional terms. Such phenomena can lead to a loss of human, materiel, and financial resources that the superior adversary needs to maintain power--e.g., the suicidee as destroyed commodity of the target. Such phenomena also can bring death to the superior adversary--e.g., the suicidal attack as the ultimate in terror management directed towards the adversary. In these two ways, the politics of suicide can lead to the suicide of politics.

Suicide is often described as an escape from life. It must also be viewed as a magnification of life's politics--an escape from a way of living life--that those who live through escaping life would rather not

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apperceive. (See Agnew, R. (1998). The approval of suicide: A social psychological model. Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior, 28, 205-225; Dooley, E. (1997). Prison suicide--politics and prevention: A view from Ireland. Crisis, 18, 185-190; Lester, D. (1997). The sexual politics of double suicide. Feminism and Psychology, 7, 148-154; Stack, S. (1998). The relationship between culture and suicide: An analysis of African Americans. Transcultural Psychiatry, 35, 253-269; Zhang, J. (1998). Suicide in the world: Toward a population increase theory of suicide. Death Studies, 22, 525-539.) (Keywords: Politics, Social Control, Suicide.)