

Suicide Isn't Selfish or Cowardly

Suicide is an interesting phenomenon. Do non-humans commit suicide? Wikipedia has an interesting entry for animal suicide.

Humans engage in suicidal behavior, certainly. Recently a well-known rock star, Chester Bennington, the lead singer of my favorite band, Linkin Park, killed himself.

I remember being told growing up that suicide was a selfish act. That to kill yourself, and leave all of your loved ones grieving, was a dastardly thing to do. How much of a prick must someone be to do that to people they love and who love them?

Later on, I thought of suicide not so much as a selfish act, but as an easy out. Sure people who are contemplating suicide have problems, and rather than dealing with those problems, they'd rather just push them all off the table in one fell swoop. Dead people don't have problems, right?

But that's weak and cowardly. Why should they get out so easy while the rest of us continue to experience and attempt to solve problems? Their easy out isn't fair to the rest of us.

However, I no longer consider suicide as either selfish or cowardly.

I'm not talking about behaviors like suicidal bombing, although much of what I'm talking about applies. As for suicidal behavior as the endgame of negative emotions like grief, sadness, and depression, what is happening is the same thing that happens when a person performs any other action.

Every purposeful action, according to praxeology, is an attempt to achieve an end by utilizing resources over a period of time. There are a billion ends chosen by people, but they all have one thing in common: the removal of felt uneasiness.

We chose to eat because hunger feels uneasy. We chose to browse Facebook because not knowing what our friends are up to feels uneasy. We chose to find a mate because being alone feels uneasy. We choose to fight an attacker because the pain he is inflicting feels uneasy. Uneasiness is an umbrella term for all sorts of other unwanted feelings. It's imprecise for that reason, but its removal is always the aim of every purposeful action.

Suicide is purposeful action. Therefore, to understand why people commit suicide we must understand what felt uneasiness they have decided is too much to continue tolerating. It may be many things, but this much is true as it concerns *suicide*: life itself has become intolerable, and the knowledge needed to make it tolerable is not currently known.

That's it, in my humble opinion. Life has become intolerable, for any number of reasons, and the person contemplating or committing suicide has run out of options to make life tolerable, to remove the felt uneasiness. Their only option becomes their final action.

It's a tragedy, for absolutely certain. But it's not a tragedy because it's selfish or cowardly. It's a tragedy because of everything that came before. The relationships, the choices, the coercions, the traumas, every single event that occurred in a person's life that brought them to this point. The tragedy is the cause of every one of those events and the people involved.

I don't care to point fingers or lay blame or induce guilt. Doing so is an ugly thing, it tends to bring out the worst in human nature. But I can't help but think that there's a shared responsibility in the event of a suicide. And maybe those decrying selfishness or cowardice are responding to a conscience pang.

I don't know. But what I do know is that I have come close to that point of life being intolerable. I hope every day that I can do what it takes to stay as far away from that as possible. I currently enjoy being alive. I love my wife and kids. They matter to me. And I want to see how our story evolves. I have little doubt that I can figure out what I need to figure out to keep that story going.