TARGET

Intelligence Report

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MAN AND HIS OYSTERS

Homo Sapiens And Suicide

Of all the creatures that roam this world, swim in its waters or fly above the celestial sphere, called earth, it appears that only the species, Homo Sapiens, has the unique ability, with forethought as well as being imbued with extraordinary prescience that is employed with élan, to determine to commit suicide.

Man has the ability to destroy his world in one fell swoop: And his world, of his own creation, vanishes, forever.

All other life forms, living on the earth, swimming in its waters or flying in the atmosphere, surrounding the earth, kill in order to obtain sustenance, to defend their offspring, to safeguard their territory, in which they hunt for prey, or to maintain the sanctity of their mating rights.

Man, on the other hand, kills for the sake of killing.

By and large, man obtains a certain amount of satisfaction from the act of taking a life, be it a Homo Sapiens or any other life form that takes his fancy.

He tends, more often than not, to enjoy the taking of a life.

He perfects his skills by taking the lives of wild animals, bringing his trophies, their skins or their heads from his killing sprees, in order to hang them on the walls of his home or used as carpets on the floor.

But man, throughout the history of great civilisations, also indulges in the taking of his own life.

Men and women, many endowed with what is considered a very high degree of intelligence, make claims in respect of explaining the reason for the propensity of man to take his own life.

Try as they might, nobody has yet published a comprehensive, plausible and persuasive treatise that explains the ruinatious predisposition in man that causes him to resort to committing suicide.

Acts of suicide, might be explained a posteriori – at least in part – with regard to specific cases, but the common, uncontrolled division of abnormal cells in the minds of the actors at the time of his/her act(s) are, all too often, swept under the convenient carpet of the intelligentsia because, inter alia, they just might not fit the accepted patterns of behaviour in respect of the known; that results in false pathos.

Give Me Liberty, Or Give Me Death!

When Mr Patrick Henry uttered, on March 23, 1775, at the Second Virginia Convention at St. John's Church in Richmond, Virginia, *'Give Me Liberty, Or Give Me Death!'*, his words fast became the rallying call to other members of the assembly.

His famous utterance convinced the Convention to agree to pass a Resolution, delivering the Virginian troops for that which came to be known as The Revolutionary War.

Throughout history, words of pith and moment have tended to be amongst the strongest of weapons to cause

the multitudes to act in a certain way.

With regard to Mr Patrick Henry's affirmation to the Second Virginia Convention, after the delivery of his now famous utterance, the Convention's delegates, for the most part, sat in silence, digesting the meaning of Mr Patrick Henry's words.

Mr Thomas Marshall, one of the Delegates, present at the Convention, on listening to the words of Mr Patrick Henry, was said to have turned to his son, John, and told him that the speech had been '*one of the boldest, vehement and animated pieces of eloquence that had ever been delivered.*'

The almost immediate result of this historic utterance was the passing of a Resolution, declaring the 13 American United Colonies to declare a state of independent from Great Britain.

Not all the inhabitants of the American colonies, however, in the latter half of the 18th Century, were in favour of engaging in fighting the very well-equipped and highly disciplined British soldiers, stationed in the Americas, as it was, then, called.

History has recorded that about one million American colonists – mostly of British descent – ran to the safety of Canada rather than stay to fight in The Revolutionary War that following in the wake of Mr Patrick Henry's fiery speech in Virginia.

Two questions could have been asked of Mr Patrick Henry in 1775:

'*Did he really mean that which he uttered?*

('***Give Me Liberty, Or Give Me Death!***')

or,

'*Was it just for the sake of listening, once more,*

to the sound of his inspiring rhetoric that the orator had come to appreciate?'

Be that as it may, the Virginians of his day rallied to the innuendo of his call for action; and, independence for the 13 (once) British colonies followed.

To the wildly unreasonable or illogical mind, rational thinking might be considered useless lest it be a product of a wildly unreasonable or illogical mind.

The Wildly Unreasonable Or Illogical Mind

Paradoxically, to agree to die for what is, at the time of the threat to one's own life with regard to that which is illusionary or, simply, an idea, in most cases, is the workings of a wildly unreasonable or illogical mind.

Since the definition of a paradox is, simply put, a contradictory statement or proposition that, when scrutinised, might well prove to be well founded or true, there is a good and valid reason to shun death in favour of life.

Conversely, that which might well be a good and valid reason for life could, also, be a good and valid reason for death – by one's own hand.

It might, indeed, be considered difficult to understand that the lucid and rational individual would select suicide over life after due reflection of his/her situation.

Yet, only too often, suicide is considered preferable to life in times of extreme strife when one is faced with multitudinous problems, the solutions to which appear to be insolvable.

In order to cope with the many pressures of life is often not easy, but to select suicide as the '*antidote*' to counteract or to counterpoise extremely unpleasant feelings or situations that come to the fore from time to time, is akin to the driver of a motor car, being the seemingly hapless victim of a traffic accident, willingly accepting guilt when, in fact, he/she is the innocent, injured person of the accident.

Thus, suicide could well be appraised, in times of spontaneity, as being the acceptance of a situation to which there appears to be no immediate remedy.

In desperation, the wildly unreasonable or illogical mind may turn to the blotting out of the sun.

Yet, paradoxically, man, by his very nature, is engaged, strongly, throughout his relatively short life, in the struggle to live … not to die.

What, then, is the one indefatigable root cause in man that perpetuates him to resort to walk along the path, leading to the suicidal cul-de-sac?

Does the wildly unreasonable or illogical mind demand death of him, the one, singular person who holds the keys to the kingdom of the mind?

Is there any logic to suicide?

Is suicide the acceptance of blame or of responsibility that, to the taker of one's own life, is an abdication from this life to another: '*The undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveller returns …*'. (Act Three, Scene One, The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark)

The Suicide of Socrates

Socrates (470 B.C. – 399 B.C.), at the age of about 70 years, a philosopher who knew no peer, during his lifetime, was accused of corrupting the youth of Athens and refusing to accept the existence of the gods that were recognised by the State.

It has been recorded that he stood before a jury of 500 of his fellow Athenians at his trial.

Upon hearing the arguments of both Socrates and his accusers, the jury found the philosopher guilty by the vote of 280 to 220.

On determining the penalty for Socrates's crimes, the accusers of Socrates argued for the death penalty.

Socrates was, then, given the opportunity to suggest his own punishment.

At this point, it was quite possible for Socrates to avoid the death penalty by recommending exile from Athens.

But the philosopher suggested, instead, that he be rewarded for his actions.

When pressed for a realistic punishment, Socrates proposed that he be fined a modest sum of money – only.

The jury of Socrates, then, determined the death of the philosopher as being the only realistic punishment in accordance with Athenian law.

At Athenian law, in 399 B.C., it was prescribed that a felon of a Capital Crime drink a cup of poison hemlock.

As such, Socrates would become his own executioner.

Plato, the most-famous of all the students of Socrates, although not having been present at the trial of teacher, described the scene of the death of Socrates through the narrative voice of the fictional character, named Phaedo.

It has been recorded that Plato had been able to obtain the following narrative after acquiring facts from various sources that were present at the trial and had been at attendance at the prison to which Socrates had been taken in order to receive the penalty for his crimes.

The following is copied, verbatim, from the annals of Phaedo:

> ‘*When Crito heard, he signalled to the slave who was standing by. The boy went out, and returned after a few moments with the man who was to administer the poison which he brought ready mixed in a cup. When Socrates saw him, he said,*
>
> *“Now, good Sir, you understand these things. What must I do?”*
>
> *“Just drink it and walk around until your legs begin to feel heavy, then lie down. It will soon act.”*
>
> *‘With that he offered Socrates the cup.*
>
> ‘*The latter took it quite cheerfully without a tremor, with no change of colour or expression. He just gave the man his stolid look, and asked,*
>
> *“How say you, is it permissible to pledge this drink to anyone? May I?”*
>
> *‘The answer came, “We allow reasonable time in which to drink it.*”
>
> *“I understand”, he said, “we can and must pray to the gods that our sojourn on earth*

will continue happy beyond the grave. This is my prayer, and may it come to pass."

'With these words, he stoically drank the potion, quite readily and cheerfully.

'Up till this moment, most of us were able with some decency to hold back our tears, but when we saw him drinking the poison to the last drop, we could restrain ourselves no longer.

'In spite of myself, the tears came in floods, so that I covered my face and wept - not for him, but at my own misfortune at losing such a man as my friend.

'Crito, even before me, rose and went out when he could check his tears no longer.

'Apollodorus was already steadily weeping, and by drying his eyes, crying again and sobbing, he affected everyone present except for Socrates himself.

'*He said, "You are strange fellows; what is wrong with you? I sent the women away for this very purpose, to stop their creating such a scene. I have heard that one should die in silence. So please be quiet and keep control of yourselves."*

'These words made us ashamed, and we stopped crying.

'*Socrates walked around until he said that his legs were becoming heavy, when he lay on his back, as the attendant instructed.*

'This fellow felt him, and then a moment later examined his feet and legs again.

'*Squeezing a foot hard, he asked him if he felt anything. Socrates said that he did not. He did the same to his calves and, going higher, showed us that he was becoming cold and stiff. Then he felt him a last time and said that when the poison reached the heart he would be gone.*

'As the chill sensation got to his waist, Socrates uncovered his head (he had put something over it) and said his last words: "Crito, we owe a cock to Asclepius. Do pay it. Don't forget."

"Of course", said Crito. "Do you want to say anything else?"

'There was no reply to this question, but after a while he gave a slight stir, and the attendant uncovered him and examined his eyes.

'Then Crito saw that he was dead, he closed his mouth and eyelids.

'This was the end of our friend, the best, wisest and most upright man of any that I have ever known.'

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