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Title: Suicide and Homicide: Symmetries and Asymmetries in Kant's Ethics

Abstract:

Kant formulated a secular argument against suicide's permissibility based on what he regarded as the intrinsic value of humanity. In this paper, I first show that Kant's moral framework entails that some types of suicide are morally permissible. Just as some homicides are morally permissible, according to Kant, so are suicides that are performed according to equivalent maxims. Intention, foreseeability, voluntariness, diminished responsibility, and mental capacity determine the moral characterization of the killing. I argue that a suicide taxonomy that differentiates types of suicide according to morally relevant criteria is compatible with Kantian ethics; it establishes that even where we hold a robust deontological sanctity of life position, we are not obligated to preserve the lives of people whose future life only offers profound suffering, and helping them to die may be justifiable if doing so honors their dignity and autonomy. Nevertheless, homicide and suicide are only weakly morally symmetrical in that even if a given suicide is morally impermissible, we do not normally have the right to prevent it forcibly, though this may be altered by juridical laws under some circumstances.

Section I: Introduction

If human life is truly priceless then ostensibly it seems that suicide is wrong. This is the basis of the 'sanctity of life' position. Kant formulated a secular argument against suicide's permissibility based on the intrinsic value of humanity. Proponents of the sanctity of life position often use this to claim that suicide is always immoral, regardless of the circumstances, and people are obligated not to kill themselves. Kant argues that what is intrinsically valuable about humans is our autonomy as rational and moral agents, and that when we kill ourselves we destroy something priceless. This raises the question, however, what is valuable about living if someone's autonomy and rational capacity is severely diminished? Is someone's life

intrinsically priceless if he merely has a body that pumps blood and breathes but has no other 'life?'

To address this problem of what constitutes valuable human existence, debates in medical ethics distinguish between merely living and living well. Even though human life has intrinsic value it does not follow that one must prolong life indefinitely under all circumstances, nor that we should never kill. Sometimes continuing to live may undermine our value, such as if we are kept alive despite unbearable pain or loss of dignity. This raises the additional question — is it worse for someone to kill herself rather than die, whereby submitting herself to a long period of profound suffering and degradation? In this paper, I show that on Kantian grounds even if we think human beings have intrinsic value, it does not follow that all suicides are wrong. Some suicides value humanity, just as some homicides do, such as those that are performed to protect oneself or others.

Kant's writings on suicide sometimes seem self-contradictory, at least cursorily. For example, Kant claims that suicide violates reason and the natural order of the universe created by God. (Kant 2012, 34-35 and 41-42) Dennis Cooley, however, claims that Kant's work poses the possibility that suicide may be permissible, or even obligatory, if someone poses a risk to others, such as in cases of *crimina carnis contra naturam* (Cooley 2006, based upon Kant 1997, 161) or if he is going mad from rabies. (Cooley 2007, based upon Kant 1996, 191; See also Cholbi 2015, that disputes Cooley's position.) (Note that throughout this paper, *permissible* means that an act is not morally wrong. However, if an act of suicide is morally wrong, there is a sense in which it may still be *permitted by others*, if their intervention is not morally justified.) In *Section II*, I outline Kant's position against suicide's permissibility, that one ought not to kill oneself merely out of 'self-love,' or because one's life promises more ill than pleasure. On Kant's view, the maxims that underlie actions, rather than the actions themselves, are fundamental to moral assessment. To determine whether a given act of suicide

is impermissible, we must consider the sorts of maxims that underlie that death.

In *Section III*, I assess the view that Kant's position implies that suicide is always wrong. Kant supported the idea that some homicides were permissible and some may be obligatory, as in warfare. According to Kant's framework, there is a moral symmetry between duties to others and duties to oneself; we are all obligated to honor human value, whether that is in our own person or another. This includes duties pertaining to homicide (killing another) and suicide (killing oneself). If it is permissible to kill someone else to protect others or oneself, then it seems that it ought to be permissible to kill *oneself* to do so, since one has as much intrinsic value as others. For example, it is plausible that on a Kantian framework it may be permissible for a secret service agent to kill herself to protect essential state secrets whose discovery would endanger others – conversely, it seems plausible a soldier would volunteer for a 'suicide mission' to preserve his own honor. This suggests that some suicides are morally permissible, others are not, and some may be obligatory under some circumstances, symmetrically with homicides.

In a recent paper, Dowie argues that there is a definitional symmetry and a weak moral symmetry between homicide and suicide, that suicides can be subclassified similarly to homicides, according to intention, foreseeability, voluntariness, diminished responsibility, and mental capacity. (Dowie 2020, 722) In *Section IV*, I show that this view is compatible with a Kantian moral framework, that the morally relevant criteria for establishing responsibility and culpability in homicide also apply to suicide. Applying this taxonomy provides a conceptual basis, rather than a merely pragmatic one, for determining permissible physician-assisted suicide, for example, even where we hold a robust deontological sanctity of life position. Kant's theory shows that the moral symmetry between homicides and suicides is broken, that they are only weakly symmetrical, because duties to oneself are manifested differently from those to others. Acting upon others is not exactly equivalent as acting upon ourselves; we have

a duty to respect others' autonomy, and this means that we do not act upon them as we do ourselves. It also supports the idea that even if a given suicide is wrong, others may not be permitted to forcibly prevent it, unlike with equivalent homicides, because duties to oneself are not enforceable where duties to others may be. An exception to this is where agents have diminished mental capacity. *Section V* is the conclusion.

Section II: Kant's Argument Against Suicide

Overview of Kant's Argument

At first glance, some of Kant's writing indicates that he was uniformly opposed to all suicides. He often writes harshly of it:

“...he [who] disposes over his life, he sets upon himself the value of a beast... [he] who fails to respect humanity, who turns himself into a thing, becomes for everyone an object of free choice for everyone; anyone, thereafter, may do as he pleases with him; he can be treated by others as an animal or a thing... and so cannot demand that others should respect the humanity in him.” (Kant 1997, 147)

According to him, if someone commits suicide he destroys his rational nature, the source of morality, and therefore acts contrary to that morality. Kant claims that because suicide transgresses reason, it violates the natural order of the universe created by God; he writes:

“Men are stationed here like sentries, and so we must not leave our posts until relieved by the beneficent hand of another. He is our proprietor, and we His property, and His providence ensure what is best for us: A bondsman who is under the care of a kindly master invites punishment if he defies the latter's intentions.” (Kant 1997, 149)

Yet, Kant is not opposed to all forms of killing, nor did he think that morality involved subordinating ourselves to anything external to us, but to reason only. He also opposed slavery, even if one has a 'kindly' master. Moreover, Kant elsewhere writes of seemingly heroic

suicides — his examples are of Cato impaling himself on his sword to avoid capture, and of Lucretia, who killed herself to avoid rape. Yet, while Kant expresses sympathy for Cato, he did not believe that he acted morally. He claims, “If Cato, under all the tortures that Caesar might have inflicted upon him, had still adhered to his resolve with a steadfast mind, that would have been noble; but not when he had laid hands upon himself.” (Kant 1997, 148) Likewise, he writes that Lucretia should have fought her assailant to the death rather than kill herself. (Kant 1997, 148)

At another locus, Kant poses the question of whether suicide could be permissible under some conditions. He writes that certain acts are so atrocious, such as with *crimina carnis contra naturam*, that if a human was to perform them he would be reduced to below the level of animals and suicide would be preferable. (Kant 1997, 161) Elsewhere, Kant describes a man bitten by a rabid dog; knowing that he shall go mad, the man could commit suicide, but Kant suggests that he ought to look for a cure or permanent restraint. (Kant 1997, 178) These remarks suggest to Dennis Cooley that suicide under such conditions may be not only permissible but obligatory. (Cooley, 2006; 2007; See also Cholbi 2015, who argues against Cooley's position and clarifies that some suicides could be permissible according to a Kantian framework, though on other grounds, as I discuss in *Section IV, The Homology Applied to Kantian Obligatory Suicides*.) Nevertheless, human value, Kant noted, is sometimes honored by dying, such as in warfare. (Kant 1997, 81 and 146) Such examples may be merely rhetorical, but it is possible that the wrongness of suicide is outweighed by other considerations. To assess how his cases correspond with his overall moral theory, I next discuss why Kant thought that suicide is immoral, based on that theory.

Duties and Maxims

Kant maintains that humans determine moral law through reason, as opposed to something more nebulous like religious revelation, making people self-governing and

autonomous. We must reason to determine what our duties are and what actions we may, must, and must not perform, and of course, this includes duties pertaining to suicide. According to Kant, to judge if an act is permissible, we should first propose a maxim, a description of our action that includes our motive, to see if acting from that maxim would create a contradiction if universalized.

Maxims should be tested for contradiction according to three steps: 1) Formulate the maxim; I propose to do x under y circumstances with z motive. 2) Imagine a world in which that maxim is universalized, one where everyone acted upon this maxim, assuming that it is common knowledge that everyone acts in this way under these circumstances. This second step is where contradictions in conception, or logical contradictions, arise. If a universalized maxim creates a logical contradiction, then any duty incurred is a perfect duty, as I discuss below. 3) Finally, see if one can will the universalized maxim. Contradictions in willing arise in this third step; it creates a practical contradiction and the duty is an imperfect one, as I discuss below.

A duty, as opposed to what is merely permissible, is an imperative. The command, "drink this tea" is an imperative, and although universalizing tea drinking does not create a contradiction, it is not clear yet if drinking tea is merely permissible or a duty. One establishes positive duties by forming a maxim in the negative to evaluate whether it creates a contradiction. If I propose that I will not drink tea, and universalize this maxim, no contradiction appears; therefore, drinking tea is permissible, not obligatory. If, by contrast, we create the negative maxim, "I will not help others" and it creates a contradiction, then we have a positive duty to help others.

A perfect duty involves actions that are strictly required (or forbidden, as in murder). These do not allow for any exceptions whatsoever. The test for perfect duties is whether a given maxim is a logical contradiction in conception. To illustrate this, Kant used the example

of lying — a lie only works when people believe it. If lies were universalized, then we would no longer believe what people say, undermining the very notion of a lie. This makes it a contradiction in conception. (See Allen Wood's discussion of logical and practical interpretations of Kant's test; Wood 1999, 84-90.) Therefore, we have a perfect duty never to lie, whatever the circumstances.

An imperfect duty, by contrast, is one whereby we act meritoriously when we perform it, but we are not required to execute imperfect duties in particular ways or at specific times. For example, not helping others creates a contradiction in willing because if we all carry out the maxim "I will not help others," none of us would be able to achieve our ends of having fruitful lives. This is not a concern about an inherent internal logical contradiction but rather it creates a practical contradiction. Therefore, helping others is an imperfect duty.

Kant applied his test to the maxim, "from self-love I make it my principle to shorten my life when by longer duration it threatens more ill than agreeableness." (Kant 2012, 34) To determine if this maxim can be performed morally, we apply the test to the universalized form of the maxim, saying, "from self-love anyone can shorten his life if a longer life will bring more ill than agreeableness." If this form of the maxim brings about a contradiction, then one cannot permissibly act in accordance with it. The motive of 'self-love' is important; Kant thought that when we act according to a maxim we ought to do so with a motive that has good will, meaning that we are motivated to act in accordance with moral principles.

Next, I address how Kant thought that this maxim produces a contraction in conception and is a violation of a perfect duty.

Suicide as it Relates to the Categorical Imperative

Kant argues that our duties are based on imperatives. Imperatives that have an if/then structure, or conditional statement, are hypothetical rather than categorical. Hypothetical imperatives are commanded relative to contingent ends. For example, if I want to stay healthy,

I ought not to smoke. Categorical imperatives, by contrast, do not have an if/then structure and are unconditional. For example, one should value human beings for their own sake, not for some other end, regardless of whether they are useful to us, and that includes valuing ourselves.

According to Kant's framework, the maxims that underlie actions, rather than the actions themselves, are fundamental to moral assessment. As such, to determine whether an act of self-killing is immoral, we must consider the sorts of maxims that could underlie that act. It may not be immediately obvious that universalizing the proposed maxim ("from self-love anyone can shorten his life if a longer life will bring more ill than agreeableness.") contradicts the original formulation of the categorical imperative, namely: "Act only according to that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law." (Kant 2012, 34) This principle requiring universalizability is very general; it is not clear that this would prohibit all such self-killings. It is not even clear that it would prohibit killing another person if his future looked sufficiently bleak. Kant thought the other formulations of the categorical imperative provide more specific guidance. He believed that two of these, the formula of the law of nature and the formula of humanity, showed suicide to be a contradiction in conception, and therefore a violation of a perfect duty.

From the original formulation, Kant developed the formula of the law of nature: "Act as if the maxim of your action were to become by your will a universal law of nature." (Kant 2012, 34) He believed that to will suicide contravenes the very concept of self-preservation; nature provides us an instinct to preserve our lives. On his view, the same impulse cannot make me both kill myself and preserve myself. This is not saying that we cannot have conflicting impulses, but rather this amounts to trying to universalize performing both P and $\sim P$. This is impossible, he claims, therefore it is a contradiction in conception.

Kant also regarded suicide as a contradiction in conception based upon humanity's value as rational beings. The formula of humanity tells us: "...act that you use humanity, in

your own person as well as in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means.” (Kant 2012, 41) This formulation underlines the symmetry between duties to oneself and others. Kant thought that suicide is treating oneself as something that does not have unconditional value; it is treating oneself merely as a source of pleasures and pains, rather like killing another person merely to gain pleasure or avoid pain for oneself. It is not giving highest value to our humanity — this means, for Kant, our rationality and morality. Kant thought that we should live to fulfil our purpose as moral agents, and destroying ourselves violates this purpose.

Since the formula of humanity does not stipulate anything about suicide specifically, according to Allen Wood, it needs to be introduced in a way that relates it to the formula of humanity: “The act of suicide always fails to respect humanity in one’s own person as an end in itself.” (Wood 1999, 152) From this intermediate step, we arrive at the conclusion: “Therefore, do not commit suicide.” (Wood 1999, 152) It may be, however, that suicide sometimes does respect someone as an end in himself. If true, a Kantian uniform condemnation of suicide is unwarranted and some cases of suicide may be morally permissible. Because it is possible that suicide sometimes respects human value, I next address this possibility within a Kantian framework.

Section III: Implications of Kant's Moral Theory on Suicide

Allen Wood points out that Kant empirically derives the impermissibility of suicide from a law of nature, thereby undermining Kant's claim that morality is *a priori*, and its content is not empirically determined. (Wood 1999, 85) It is also not clearly true that the impulse for self-preservation is contradicted when a soldier kills himself to preserve his honor, for example, or when someone suffering from a debilitating terminal illness kills herself rather than endure long-standing pain. Our instinct for self-preservation gives us apparently conflicting impulses

and these can throw doubt on whether we violate a universal law of nature, that of self-preservation, when we kill ourselves. Self-preservation may give us an impulse to cease suffering by killing ourselves, just as it drives us to extend our lives.

Even if these impulses can be shown to be inherently self-conflicting, the formula of natural law has an absurd consequence; namely, that we have a perfect duty never to risk our lives. One could formulate the maxim, "I will risk my own life to save the lives of others." This would create a contradiction if it is a law of nature that I will do whatever is necessary for self-preservation. This implies that it is wrong to be a fire fighter or an army medical officer, but this is clearly absurd. Another way to put this is: if it is wrong to commit suicide, then it is wrong to risk my life. It is not wrong to risk my life. Therefore, it is not wrong to commit suicide. A maxim that is universalizable and does not create a contradiction may be something along the lines of, "I will risk my life or even kill myself when doing so preserves humanity." This suggests that suicide is sometimes morally permissible.

In terms of the formula of humanity, Kant thought that we should continue to live to fulfil our purpose as moral agents, and destroying ourselves violates this purpose. Here, Paul Edwards points out that Kant confuses two statements: 1) I ought to do my duty as long as I am alive; and 2) It is my duty to go on living as long as possible. Edwards argues that we must perform our duty while we are alive, but it does not follow that we must stay alive for as long as possible or that we are forfeiting our duty if we are not in suitable circumstances for doing so. (Edwards 2007, 27) For example, while it may be one's duty to save lives, we cannot be expected to save every life, all the time; we cannot be everywhere at once. Therefore, according to Edwards, suicide does not necessarily violate our purpose as moral agents. (Edwards 2007, 27)

Even if one accepts the formula of humanity as true, we can arrive at opposite conclusions from Kant's through the intermediate premises necessary for relating it to suicide.

We could formulate a maxim that says, "I will commit suicide if my value as a rational, moral being is irreparably destroyed," and this does not create a contradiction, making it morally permissible. If one has a degenerative mental disorder, for example, suicide ought to be a reasonable option, according to Kant's view, because it respects our humanity and rationality.

To illustrate this, we can show, on Kant's own terms, that we can value something as an end in itself rather than as a means and yet be rational and doing our duty by destroying it, such as when people ceremonially destroy flags rather than let them get tattered or defaced. Similarly, Tibetan sand paintings are symbolic of impermanence; their value depends upon their intentional destruction. While these things are not equivalent to the value of humanity, in terms of suicide the underlying principle applies: we can imagine circumstances in which humanity is respected when someone kills himself. For instance, if someone knows that she is losing her autonomy and rationality by Alzheimer's disease, then killing herself would not be treating her humanity merely as a means to another end and would be permissible. Kant's formula of humanity ascribes dignity as an integral part of morality that is compatible with this reasoning and the conclusion that there are times that suicide is rational and moral. As such, Kant's procedural universalizability fails to yield the conclusion that suicide is always wrong. Yet, there are also suicides that we would want to categorize as immoral on Kantian grounds, such as those motivated by revenge. This means that a Kantian framework ought to distinguish types of suicides, those that are morally permissible and those that are not.

Permissible Prudential Suicides

While it seems possible that, from a Kantian perspective, suicide may sometimes honor humanity, this does not seem to be the case in Kant's maxim, "from self-love I make it my principle to shorten my life when by longer duration it threatens more ill than agreeableness." (Kant 2012, 34) A Kantian would say that committing suicide merely to avoid ill (or pain) is morally unacceptable since it subordinates our pricelessness as moral agents to the merely

instrumental value or “price” of something like well-being that comes in degrees. If this is the case, it may seem that no cases of prudential suicide would be permissible on Kantian grounds, since the relative well-being of the agent would be irrelevant compared with the objective value of living as a moral being. Yet, this raises the question, if it is permissible for a soldier to kill herself for other people's sakes, then is it ever permissible to kill herself for her own sake? It would seem so intuitively, since she has as much intrinsic value as other people.

David Velleman suggests that unbearable suffering can become the sole focus of a person's life. If so, it reduces the agent to “the psychological hedonist's image of a person... which is undignified indeed.” (Velleman 1999, 618) This, he maintains, supports the idea that someone may kill himself for the sake of his dignity (in the Kantian sense, in his value as a moral agent). He seems to imply (though does not state this explicitly) that unbearable pain dramatically reduces the scope of our choices, to only one — the relief of suffering, undermining autonomy. Michael Cholbi responds to Velleman's position by saying that if it were the case that having very limited reasons for action undermines dignity, “then moral zealots, who presumably are strongly motivated by considerations of duty, would also betray a lack of dignity.” (Cholbi 2010, 497) Cholbi implies that such zealots, like people undergoing profound suffering, only have a narrow range of acceptable options open to them, as Velleman suggests, yet we would not say that they are coerced or lack dignity. Cholbi acknowledges that some pain may compromise reason in terms of drawing appropriate inferences, *etc.*, but he argues that while one's decision to relieve pain may be immediate or automatic, it is still based on a maxim and is therefore rational.

Cholbi, alternatively, suggests modifications to Kant's argument to allow for permissible prudential suicides. He claims that these changes are limited and do not demand that the “distinctive commitments of Kant's ethics be jettisoned.” (Cholbi 2010, 490) While Cholbi acknowledges that, for Kant, dignity is not a condition of the body, he notes that Kantian

dignity is regarded in two ways: "There is the dignity rooted in our *humanity*, our capacity to set ends according to reason, and there is the dignity of *personality*, our capacity to give ourselves moral principles and act upon them." (Cholbi 2010, 502-503; See also Kant 1996, 186-187, Kant 2012, 48-49, and Wood 1999, 118-119.) Cholbi argues that when people are in a state of profound suffering, their dignity of humanity is compromised to the point that they can no longer fashion a conception of their own happiness. This renders their lives no longer priceless, even though they still may be able to formulate maxims and act in accordance with them, maintaining their dignity of personality.

Maria von Herbert, for example, wrote to Kant that she could conform to the demands of morality and reason, but doing so meant nothing to her due to long-standing depression. Cholbi suggests that people in such a position would be permissible, but not obligatory, prudential suicides, consistently with Kant's moral framework. It is not because such a person sees her future life as bad, but that its value is badly compromised. He says that such agents are cut off from the sorts of choices that constitute Kantian agentive unity and constitute prudential suicides since their deaths are self-referring (performed upon themselves and for their own sakes rather than for other people's benefit) and gauged by objective standards. (Cholbi 2010, 512-513)

Importantly, on Cholbi's account, we could not claim that all suicides are morally permissible; someone may have duties to others not to kill themselves. Cholbi also notes that the agent would still have perfect duties to himself and others since he maintains his dignity in personality. Other people would have equivalent duties to this person; they would not be obligated to preserve this person's body or prevent her from dying, but they would have perfect duties to her, such as not to lie to her, and to treat her not merely as a means to some end. (Cholbi 2010, 508) According to his proposal, while we are not obligated to preserve such people's lives, we are not allowed to kill them for our convenience, for example.

Next, I address two possible objections to Cholbi's position:

1) One may claim that if moral zealots, who are strongly motivated by moral considerations but do not concern themselves with fashioning their own happiness and may be unable to do so, cannot be said to lack dignity, then neither can someone like Maria von Herbert who is chronically depressed. Therefore, one may conclude, pricelessness is not undermined when our dignity in humanity is diminished, so Cholbi's assessment is flawed. I maintain, however, that this objection is not robust because at least some moral zealots lack dignity, such as those who are brainwashed. For example, Pol Pot conditioned young people into the police of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. As a result, many of them became moral zealots, serving Pol Pot's own ends, and were not acting autonomously, but rather nonvoluntarily. They, like Maria von Herbert, were no longer able to fashion their own ends, undermining their autonomy and pricelessness.

Therefore, while not all moral zealots lack the ability to fashion the ends of their own happiness, or lack dignity in humanity, some may, and their pricelessness would be impaired. As such, then so long as we stipulate that at least some moral zealots lack dignity in humanity and would be permissible prudential suicides, Cholbi's argument is internally consistent and this objection does not hold up. I suggest, further, that Cholbi's assessment of two dignities accounts for nonvoluntary behavior; suffering, for example, compromises our autonomy because it severely curtails our reasonable choices, rendering them nonvoluntary to the point that we are incapable of setting our ends. The notion of nonvoluntary behavior and diminished responsibility does not conflict with a Kantian moral framework. (I discuss this more in *Section IV, Intention and Foreseeability, Self-murder and Self-manslaughter.*)

2) One may also object that it is doubtful that both types of dignity are needed for value, as Cholbi suggests. For instance, entities such as angels and God (that Kant would have believed exist) may have intrinsic value as moral agents, but it is dubious that they have dignity

in humanity, that they fashion their own ends. The same could be said for the Christian idea of the saints; whilst they formulate maxims and act upon them, it is not clear that they require dignity in humanity — they simply enact God's will. They are nonetheless regarded as priceless. This would imply that both types of dignities are not needed for value and that Cholbi's assessment of Kantian permissible prudential suicides places too much importance on happiness. Therefore, one might object, the claim that pricelessness is debased when we lack dignity in humanity is untenable.

I maintain that this objection does not undermine the plausibility of Cholbi's proposal because, as Kant himself noted, happiness is necessary for human beings, who have different properties from God and angels. Kant distinguished between dignity in the person that grounds one's moral law through reason (Kant 2012, 48-49 and Wood 1999, 118) and dignity of humanity that is the capacity to set one's own ends (Kant 2012, 48-49 and Wood 1999, 119).

Kant writes:

“... there is one end that can be presupposed as actual in all rational beings (in so far as imperatives suit them, namely as dependent beings), and thus one purpose that they not merely can have, but that one can safely presume they one and all actually do have according to a natural necessity, and that is the purpose of happiness. The hypothetical imperative that represents the practical necessity of an action as a means to the advancement of happiness is assertoric... that one can presuppose safely and a priori in every human being, because it belongs to his essence. Now, the skill in the choice of the means to one's own greatest happiness is called prudence...” (Kant 2012, 29)

Unlike ‘independent’ rational beings, like God and angels, humans are corporeal, mortal, and fallible, not all-knowing — this is what makes them dependent. Kant thought that it is assertoric, or necessarily and self-evidently true, that human beings are ‘suited to imperatives’ that require that they pursue happiness; this is an essential property of humans. As such, Kant

also argues that securing one's own happiness is an imperfect duty to oneself that requires prudence, and that helping other people secure theirs is an imperfect duty to others. (Kant 2012, 12 and Kant 2012, 36) Universalizing humans not pursuing happiness would make the world unfit for humans. By contrast, God and angels are 'independent' rational beings and dignity of humanity does not apply. God is omniscient and angels have their ends set for them simply to carry out God's command; this is not something that they need to discover. Furthermore, angels and God cannot be damaged or deficient in the same way as humans.

Kant also acknowledged that bodily well-being and happiness are integral to moral considerations, even if such concerns are secondary to those of rationality and morality; or, to put it another way, the duties of promoting well-being are imperfect duties that are means to honoring the perfect duties, such as the duty to respect moral creatures. In short, if others suffer from diminished dignity in humanity, then we do not have the imperfect duty to promote their happiness since they are incapable of happiness. Human pricelessness is compromised in such cases, but that is not the case for angels or God. One exception to this may be saints, but they, like angels, do not need to set their ends since they are given these through divine revelation. Therefore, I maintain that this objection does not undermine Cholbi's position.

Cholbi notes that "Kant did not address [assisted suicide], but he would likely condemn assisted suicide for reasons that [are] apparent once his arguments against suicide are laid out." (Cholbi 2010, 491) He suggests that his defense for a Kantian prudential suicide applies to both suicide and assisted suicide (Cholbi 2010, 491), that some assisted suicides would be permissible, those where non-assisted suicide would be. He says that "From a Kantian perspective... homicide and suicide are morally symmetrical. The very same considerations that make killing another agent wrong will generally apply to self-killing, and vice versa." (Cholbi 2016, 186) He says that justifying prudential suicide requires breaking this symmetry. Otherwise, if it is permissible to kill ourselves when doing so is beneficial for us, then the same

would be true for homicides, that it would be “morally permissible to kill another person whenever doing so would be beneficial to the killer.” (Cholbi 2016, 187)

Next, I argue that Kant's framework shows that suicide and homicide are weakly morally symmetrical, that as some homicides are morally permissible, so also are homologous suicides.

Section IV: My Proposal for Symmetries and Asymmetries between Suicides and Homicides in Kant's Ethics

Introduction to My Proposal

Kant's moral theory shows that there is a definitional symmetry between homicide and suicide since both involve killing humans and moral laws require universalization. In Kant's framework, it is the maxim that one acts upon that determines the moral characterization of a given act. This means that, as with homicide, we can distinguish types of suicide, permissible and not, according to intention, foreseeability, diminished responsibility, and mental capacity. Homologously with homicides, some suicides are morally permissible, others are not, and some may be morally obligatory, as with soldiers in warfare.

I argue that the symmetry between homicides and suicides is broken, that they are only weakly symmetrical, by appealing to Kant's distinction between duties to oneself and duties to others. Acting upon others is not exactly equivalent to acting upon ourselves; we have a duty to respect others' autonomy, and this means that we do not act upon them as we do ourselves. This does not imply that all suicides are morally permissible. One may, for example, have duties to one's children that preclude permissibly killing oneself, or one may risk harming others in one's method of killing oneself. Even if a given suicide is wrong because one has bad motives, for example, others may not be permitted to forcibly prevent it, unlike with equivalent homicides, because duties to oneself are not enforceable where duties to others may be.

Duties to Oneself and Others Regarding Suicide

According to Kant's framework, duties to oneself roughly correspond with duties to others. We are all obligated to honor human dignity and morality, whether that is in our own person or another. (Kant 2012, 41) For example, as one ought not lie to others, one ought not lie to oneself (or self-deceive). On a Kantian framework, there is at least some symmetry between acting upon others and acting upon oneself since all humans are equally priceless. Nevertheless, while Kant would acknowledge that homicide is generally wrong, as suicide is (though there may be exceptions to each), he also argued that doing something to someone else is different from doing it to oneself, as I discuss more below. This means that there is a structural symmetry, a homology, and at least a weak moral symmetry between homicide and suicide. (Dowie 2020.)

To make sense of how we can have duties to ourselves, such as not kill ourselves, Kant distinguishes the part of ourselves that is the rational moral legislator with the part of ourselves that is subject to that legislature — namely, our bodies. (Kant 2016, 175) Allen Wood says:

“...what is distinctive about the concept of an imperfectly rational and self-governing being (a being with “personality” in the Kantian sense) is that this concept involves that of a relation between two persons who are combined in one and the same being. I contain in myself both the person of the rational legislator, whose law is necessary, objective and binding on all rational beings, and the person of the finite, imperfect being who has the capacity to obey this law, but also the possibility of failing to obey it.”

(Wood 2009, 12)

Kant acknowledges that “We have no other concept of our existence save that mediated by our body, and since the use of our freedom is possible only through the body, we see that the body constitutes a part of our self.” (Kant 1997, 144) We are autonomous with respect to ourselves and we are *self*-reflexive insofar as one's legislating self relates to one's body. This is where

an asymmetry between duties to oneself and others arises; we are not autonomous with respect to others, but only to oneself. Kant thought that external coercion, in the form of juridical laws, protect people's rights generally and "constrains everyone" so that they can "coexist with the freedom of everyone..." (Kant 1996, 26) Hence, while it may be permissible and praiseworthy for a soldier to throw herself into the line of fire to save others, it would be impermissible and blameworthy for her to throw her comrade into the line of fire to save others, marking the asymmetry between homicide and suicide.

Kant thought that duties to oneself are manifested differently from those to others, though they are equally rooted in valuing humanity. (Kant 2012, 13-15) Duties to oneself involve self-perfection. (Kant 1996, 150, 154-155, 175; See also Wood 2009, 12) Duties to others are subdivided according to duties of respect and love. Duties to oneself are subdivided according to perfect and imperfect duties. Perfect duties again subdivide according to one's animal nature and one's moral nature. (Kant 2012, 41-43 and Kant 2016, 175); Wood 1999, 324; Cholbi 2016, 60) One's duty to help others pursue their ends of happiness, for instance, is not equivalent to pursuing one's own happiness, since Kant thinks that humans will naturally pursue their own, but we help others insofar as it is our duty. Our equivalent duty to ourselves in this regard is perfecting ourselves. (Kant 1996, 151; Wood 1999, 21; Cholbi 2016, 59) One's duty to oneself to not kill oneself is not generally enforceable as it may be with a homologous homicide, a duty to not kill others. This means that even if a suicide is wrong (it is done with a bad motive) we cannot forcibly prevent it unless we have sufficient juridical grounds for doing so, such as if the agent suffers from sufficiently diminished mental capacity or when such an act interferes with others' rights to freedom, for example. (Kant 1996, 25)

Next, I apply Kant's assessment of juridical duties to suicide to show how they impact agents' obligations.

Juridical and Moral Duties in Suicide

Kantian juridical duties are coercively enforced from outside the agent, as by the civil or criminal laws, or other social pressures. (Kant 1996, 78-79, 89; See also Wood 2009, 2.) Some juridical duties are based upon practical considerations that include how to maintain organizational hierarchies, *etc.* Juridical laws specify how we discharge antecedent moral obligations that, for social and pragmatic reasons, ought to be externally enforced, or we violate freedom generally, since society cannot simply allow people to murder when they are not inclined to obey moral laws, for example. While killing is normally wrong, under juridical law it is sometimes excusable or even obligatory, such as in self-defense or in warfare. (Kant 1997, 81) The converse is sometimes true, as well; juridical laws establish rules of warfare, that while soldiers killing during a time of war is not normally wrong, for Kant, the juridical laws may make exceptions. For instance, Kant says that while a soldier killing a fellow soldier in a duel of honor is worthy of punishment, “the categorical imperative of penal justice remains (unlawful killing of another must be punished by death); but the legislation itself (and consequently also the civil constitution)... is responsible for the discrepancy between the incentives of honor... and the measures that are (objectively) suitable for its purpose.” (Kant 1996, 109)

By contrast to enforceable juridical duties, moral duties of respect and love cannot be externally enforced. Duties to oneself are also not enforceable on Kant's framework. The point of juridical duties is to promote free will among morally responsible equals. This requires allowing them not to act according to their duty, except insofar as they violate others' freedom. However, we have juridical laws in place to protect vulnerable people, such as children and people with certain types of mental incapacities. In such cases, we may forcibly prevent their suicide. This is justifiable because such people are unable to act according to properly reasoned moral duties; they are not acting autonomously.

Michael Cholbi notes that on a Kantian framework, “interference with an individual's

liberty is permissible only if, by interfering, we stand a reasonable chance of preventing that agent from performing actions she chose due to distorted reasoning and which would result in that agent's rationally chosen ends not being as fully realized as they would have been had she so acted." (Cholbi 2013, 118) In other words, a degree of paternalism is justifiable on Kantian grounds; intervening in cases where someone's mental capacity is diminished due to such things as lack of knowledge, mental impairment, or false information is acceptable because it helps that person in pursuing what they would want for themselves given their own distinctive conception of the good.

Cholbi acknowledges that on Kantian grounds permissible suicide intervention would not apply in cases where the agent does not have such an impairment, but rather acts suicidally because she has a flaw in reason, that she thinks her act will bring about her conception of the good. (Cholbi 2013, 127-128) He writes, "It is only by relinquishing [Kantian paternalism's] neutrality about the value of a person's ends that we could justify paternalistic interference in nihilistic suicides, since the requirement... that paternalistic interference is justified only in order to advance agents' own good as they understand it is not satisfied in these cases." (Cholbi 2013, 132-133) He notes, however, "In the end, the problems raised by nihilistic suicide are likely to confound not only [Kantian paternalism], but any attempt to justify paternalism." (Cholbi 2013, 133) This emphasises the idea that suicides are only weakly symmetrical with homicides on a Kantian framework, that duties to oneself are not enforceable where duties to others may be; an equivalent nihilistic homicide would justify enforcing preventative measures. Since suicide is weakly symmetrical with homicide, it would seem that what constitutes an act of suicide ought to relate to what constitutes an act of homicide. I address this next.

The Homology between Homicide and Suicide

Kant grounds morality at least in part on universalizability; there is at least some symmetry between acting upon others and acting upon oneself, though duties to others are not

exactly equivalent, as established above. Dowie argues that there is a homology, a structural agreement, between suicide and homicide; as we have broadly universalizable laws that govern homicides, similar laws govern suicide, since both homicides and suicides involve humans killing humans. Whilst suicide and homicide are definitionally equivalent, they are only weakly morally equivalent; some suicides may be permissible even if definitionally equivalent homicides are not. (Dowie 2020, 722 and 731) Kant did not regard suicide in this way, but here I argue that this approach is consistent with Kantian ethics, where Kant's own treatment of suicide is not internally consistent and ought to consider that there are permissible suicides, as established in *Section III*. Here, I argue that his overall framework supports subcategorizing suicides similarly to homicides. As with homicides, some suicides are morally permissible, others are not.

Kant did not elucidate specifically what he considered suicide and why. His examples, however, involve people who clearly intend to kill themselves when they act, such as Cato and Lucretia, and are active self-killings. Kant did not think that people who passively kill themselves through such things as gluttony and alcoholism are suicides. Rather, he claims that these things are not as bad as suicide. His grounds are that gluttony is a violation of an imperfect duty and suicide is, he claims, a violation of a perfect one. As seen from Paul Edwards's analysis, however, it would seem as likely that not committing suicide would be an imperfect duty that relates to our duty to preserve our lives insofar as circumstances allow. Even if suicide violates a perfect duty, it would do so definitionally symmetrically to homicides, as it generally fails to honor human value. This means that since both acts and omissions are relevant to homicides, both are also relevant to suicides. If a parent neglects to feed her baby and the child starves to death, it is a negligent homicide; if she neglects to feed herself and dies as a result, then the death is a negligent suicide. The first instance violates an enforceable juridical duty, and the second does not, but they are both based on equivalent acts

and intentions. Therefore, the concept of suicide, to be in keeping with a Kantian moral framework, should not be limited to active self-killing, just as homicides are not limited to active, intended killings but can involve negligence.

Kant also suggests that the innocent man condemned to enslavement chooses that someone else kill him, therefore this man does not kill himself. He also claims that Cato or Lucretia ought to have done the same — to be killed by someone else rather than kill themselves. This suggests that Kant thought that there may be a moral difference between killing oneself and getting someone else to kill oneself. Kant also claims that soldiers in battle do not constitute suicides:

“He who runs away to save his life from the enemy, and leaves all his comrades in the lurch, is a coward; but if he defends himself and his fellows to the death, that is no suicide, but is held to be noble and gallant; ...I should seek to preserve my life only insofar as I am worthy to live.” (Kant 1997, 146)

Kant's position on these examples seems rhetorical because he gives no account of how he defines suicide and some of his assessment seems to conflict with his own moral framework, as discussed in *Section III*. Enslaving Cato or raping Lucretia would be wrong, but instigating someone into wrongful killing could be regarded as worse than rape or enslavement. Elsewhere, Kant suggests that capital punishment may be appropriate if one soldier kills another in a duel. (Kant 1996, 108-109) If we amend this slightly, that a fellow soldier intentionally provokes a duel so that he can get himself killed because he is suicidal and at the same time wishes to exact revenge on his fellow soldier, such an act may be doubly wrong, since the fellow soldier is at least partially responsible not only for his own death, but arguably also for instigating an act that results in another's capital punishment. Since it would be wrong, on Kant's framework, to provoke another to murder someone else, it seems that it would be wrong to provoke another to murder oneself.

There are maxims whereby getting someone else to kill oneself may be universalizable, however. For example, a secret service agent protecting state secrets in a time of war may provoke the enemy to fire upon her rather than to give up those secrets, or a soldier may provoke the enemy to fire upon him to save his comrades. While Kant claims, seemingly rhetorically, that a soldier who defends himself and others to the death is not suicide (Kant 1997, 146), he would have acknowledged that one can perform an act on another and an equivalent act upon oneself. If one shoots a gun at one's neighbor and that results in his death, he has killed him; likewise, if he shoots a gun at himself and that results in his own death, he has killed himself. Therefore, Kant ought to have acknowledged that some soldiers act suicidally while performing their duty if performing an equivalent act on another would constitute homicide (albeit permissible), though their actions may be, nevertheless, heroic.

While the statutes pertaining to homicide would have been somewhat different in Kant's historical context, his understanding of acts of homicide is indexed to juridical laws that understood that to be responsible for a death (either excusable or culpable), one must have caused that death in some way. Applying Kant's symmetry between duties to others and duties to oneself to suicide, we see that where we can say that we have killed another, performing an equivalent act upon ourselves is a self-killing, that suicides are definitionally symmetrical to homicides. This does not, however, entail a strong moral equivalency between homicide and suicide. If, for example, a soldier throws her comrade into the line of fire to save others, and that is homicide (killing another), then a causally symmetrical act on oneself would constitute killing oneself, a suicide, though killing another in this manner is not morally symmetrical to killing oneself.

Applying our understanding of legal proximate cause of death in a homicide to suicide means that it is self-killing in the following sense:

“A human being is the proximate cause of her own death; there must be a causal link

between her act or omission and her death, it must be a substantial cause of death, but need not be the sole cause... it is generally deemed that the death would not have happened but for her act or omission. In cases of omissions, it is necessary to prove to that but for the omission the deceased would not have died when she did..." (Dowie 2020, 726) (See also Coroners and Justice Act 2009 and West's Encyclopedia of American Law 2008 for proximate cause of death in homicide.)

If we think there is a homology between homicide and suicide, then we can cause a self-killing, a suicide, and it does not require a particular intention, but could involve any of a number. Furthermore, the homology entails that suicides can be due to negligence, symmetrically with homicide. For example, someone who smokes is diagnosed with emphysema. He refuses to quit or get treatment and dies a year later as a result; his death is a suicide because his acts and omissions are the proximate cause of his death. An equivalent homicide may be a negligent poisoning.

Justifiable homicides are those where the death is either commanded or excusable by juridical law. (West's Encyclopedia of American Law, 2008) This includes soldiers killing according to the rules of warfare, and police are sometimes justified in killing under some circumstances. In U.S. law, killing is excusable if "the person reasonably believes that the killing is absolutely necessary in order to prevent serious harm or death to himself or herself or to others." (West's Encyclopedia of American Law, 2008) Where a homicide is not justifiable, there are degrees of culpability that depend upon such things as the level of intention and motive in a killing. This corresponds to a Kantian framework of juridical and moral laws pertaining to killings. As we have justifiable homicide, we have definitionally equivalent suicide; those that are commanded or excusable by juridical law. Symmetrically with homicides, the moral characterization of suicides would depend upon such things as intention, foreseeability, and diminished responsibility, as I discuss next.

Intention and Foreseeability, Self-Murder and Self-Manslaughter

On a Kantian framework, the maxims that underlie actions, rather than the actions themselves, are fundamental to moral assessment. To establish if killing someone is wrong, we must look to the maxim that the killer acted upon. Kant himself says that killing in self-defense is permissible, such as when soldiers permissibly kill to defend themselves and their countrymen. (Kant 1996, 117) This is consistent with homicide taxonomies that distinguish between unjustifiable and justifiable killings. An equivalent act on oneself ought to be permissible, then, and possibly even praiseworthy, if one's motive is to defend one's own dignity. For example, Saint Pelagia the Virgin is considered a suicide, but still canonised, because she was defending not only herself and her intrinsic value but also the Christian faith; she would not participate in the Romans' pagan sacrifice so she threw herself from a roof into the sea. Since the Roman Catholic Church considered Saint Pelagia a praiseworthy suicide, a self-defense while defending others, Kant ought to consider Cato the same since his motives were likewise to defend human dignity. By contrast, the poet Edward Thomas was suicidal, and since he could not bring himself to perform an active suicide, he volunteered for to fight in the First World War since he saw that his death was a foreseeable, even likely, consequence, and he died shortly thereafter. On Kant's framework, volunteering from such motives may be wrong if this was not performed according to a good will.

Kant claims that there is a class of deaths considered intentional self-murder, indicating that, like homicides, he acknowledged that there are types of suicides. Kant writes that "willfully killing oneself can be called murdering oneself (*homocidium dolosum*) only if it can be proved that it is in general a crime committed either against one's own person or also, though one's killing oneself, against another (as when a pregnant person takes her life)." (Kant 1996, 176) He also says that to remove an organ to give it away or sell it, for example, is partial self-murder, but says that there are circumstances where removing an organ is not wrong, such as

if that organ is diseased. He goes on to ask, "Is it murdering oneself to hurl oneself to certain death (like Curtius) in order to save one's country?" (Kant 1996, 177) He does not answer this rhetorical question, but his discussion suggests that, as there are cases where it is not wrong to remove an organ, there may be circumstances where self-killing is not equivalent to self-murder. This implies that not all self-killings are equivalent to self-murders, as not all killings are murders.

Kant acknowledges that killing someone in a fit of temper is not as bad as killing someone in cold blood with malicious forethought. (Kant 1997, 81) He suggests that there are degrees of culpability in deaths generally. (Kant 1997, 81 and Kant 1996, 28) Specifically, he discusses voluntary manslaughter: "If a person kills somebody in a fit of passion and wrath, he has not incurred so much evil as one who deals another a fatal thrust in cold blood, though the factum of the first is greater." (Kant 1997, 84) He thought that acting in accordance with blind passions made a difference morally when we assess homicides. An equivalent suicide to this homicide example might be someone who commits suicide in a fit of self-directed rage and despair, where the act is not considered or planned. On Kant's framework, such a death may be blameworthy because the agent did not formulate a universalizable maxim, but acted merely according to thoughtless passions.

An agent may have killed accidentally, mistakenly, or negligently. While Kant did not consider expected outcomes as relevant to an act's permissibility, one might argue on Kantian grounds that if we create a maxim that fails to consider others adequately, then we are blameworthy. We have a duty to consider whether death is a foreseeable consequence of an action. For example, a drunk driver is culpable for his actions because he could reasonably foresee that driving while intoxicated could kill someone. If he were to kill himself due to drunk driving, this could be regarded as a type of involuntary self-manslaughter. A Kantian would agree that not driving while intoxicated is an enforceable duty since there are juridical

laws governing negligence and negligent homicides. A Kantian, therefore, ought to say that we can also kill ourselves through negligence and this would be an impermissible suicide — and in this case, preventing it could be enforceable because by risking our own lives in this manner we also risk others' lives. If, however, one kills oneself negligently through gluttony and drink, while this would be morally impermissible on a Kantian view, this may nonetheless constitute a wrong to oneself, the prevention of which is not enforceable so long as one does not harm others.

The juridical laws, Kant suggests, make allowances for circumstances. He notes, for example, that after a shipwreck, when one man shoves another off of a plank that he is on, to save his own life, such an act would not be punishable though he is responsible for the man's death. (Kant 1996, 31) In such a case, we could say that the man in the shipwreck had no reasonable alternative other than to act as he did, or he behaved nonvoluntarily. In nonvoluntarily acts people choose to act as they do, but because there is no reasonable alternative than to act otherwise, at least not by an objective standard whereby their basic needs would be met. (Olsaretti 2004, 139-140) This may be the case with some moral zealots, as with Pol Pot's conditioned policemen; when young they are brainwashed under threat that if they do not believe and act as they do then they will be killed. If they never gain the ability to set their own ends, rather than to serve their leaders, then we may say that their suicide is nonvoluntary in much the same way that Maria von Herbert's is; their options are limited to the point that they cannot fashion their own happiness.

While Kant did not explain adequately how diminished rational capacity and diminished responsibility impact the ethics of suicide, this is nonetheless relevant on Kantian grounds, since whether the agent has rational capacity or not will affect not only her motives, but also her status as a rational being with autonomy. Kant did suggest that there are degrees of responsibility, however. He writes, "Degrees of imputation depend on the degree of

freedom. The subjective conditions of freedom are the ability to act, and further, that we know what pertains thereto, that we are aware of the motivating ground and the object of the action. In the absence of these subjective grounds there is no imputation... one can, indeed, impute actions in a certain degree..." (Kant 1997, 83) Therefore, he claims, a child cannot be held responsible for destroying something useful. (Kant 1997, 83) Clearly, this would also apply to destroying something priceless, such as oneself. While children can act with intention and voluntariness, they are nonetheless only morally responsible incrementally, by degree.

Since a child is not fully responsible, then someone with severely diminished mental capacity also is not fully responsible. Kant acknowledged that people who have gone mad are not responsible in the same way as people with rational capacity intact. (Kant 1996, 177) This does not imply that the suicide is permissible; permissibility requires a sufficient level of reason to formulate a maxim that does not create a contradiction when universalized and is performed with the motive to act in accordance with one's duty to oneself and others. Someone in a psychotic episode can throw himself from a window to kill himself, but his suicide is not culpable; it would be a type of voluntary self-manslaughter due to diminished responsibility. (Dowie 2020, 729)

Next, I apply my proposal of a homology between homicide and suicide to Kantian obligatory suicide.

The Homology Applied to Kantian Obligatory Suicides

If suicide is weakly morally symmetrical to homicides, this suggests that some suicides may be obligatory since there are at least some obligatory homicides on a Kantian framework. Dennis Cooley argues for obligatory suicide on Kantian grounds, since Kant himself suggests that in cases of *crimina carnis* and where someone is losing his rational capacity suicide would be preferable. (Kant 1997, 161). In such cases of *crimina carnis*, Cooley thinks, the agents are obligated to kill themselves because they perform acts so heinous that they lose their "moral

life.” (Cooley 2006, 343) However, I reject Cooley's notion that child molesters are “internally coerced.” Rather, we can classify compulsive child molesters as compelled in the way that a smoker is compelled; a smoker prefers to avoid the discomfort of not smoking, but he has the ability to quit. While Kant says that it would be *better* to kill oneself if one is compelled to act sufficiently dishonorably, his moral theory does not entail that such suicides are obligatory. Moreover, classifying compulsive child molesters as lacking agency incorrectly classes them with Alzheimer's patients who do not have rational abilities; Cooley's position conflates people without agency with those who misuse it, as Cholbi also notes. (Cholbi 2015, 610)

In Alzheimer's cases, Cooley says that dementia causes irreversible loss of personhood and people who shall lose their moral agency have a duty to die rather than allow their autonomy and rationality to be degraded. (Cooley 2007, 41) Cholbi notes that not having a duty to preserve *X* is not equivalent with a duty to destroy *X*. He points out that Cooley's position, that implausibly proposes that people with Alzheimer's disease would be obligated to commit suicide, confuses these two things, and while such people may be permissible suicides, they would not be obligatory. (Cholbi 2015, 609.)

Cooley's reasoning is also intuitively implausible when we consider that it leads to the conclusion that locked-in syndrome patients would not be allowed to commit suicide (let us say by assisted suicide) but Alzheimer's patients would be obligated to do so. People with locked-in syndrome retain the mental features that people with Alzheimer's disease lack; they can formulate maxims, reason, and recollect. According to Cooley's reasoning, since their mental faculties have not deteriorated, their moral lives are still intact and their lives are still priceless. Therefore, they would be obligated not to kill themselves where Alzheimer's patients would be. However, we regard locked-in syndrome patients and Alzheimer's patients similarly in terms of rights; for example, the same rules apply in terms of medical consent, though medical treatment and the ways we communicate with them would differ; it is not *merely* their

ability to reason that determines rights and obligations. Many, perhaps most of us, face the possibility of losing our rationality at some point. Certainly, we would not say that most of us have the obligation to kill ourselves, regardless of whether that obligation is enforceable.

Nevertheless, as we are sometimes obligated to kill others, according to Kant, we may sometimes be obligated to kill ourselves. There may be cases where human value is violated if someone fails to commit suicide: let us imagine that a secret service agent has knowledge of nuclear weapons and the enemy has highly effective drugs that alters people's mental states, acting as a truth serum. The enemy intends to extract this knowledge and use it to destroy people who oppose them. Since the secret service agent promises that she will kill herself to avoid capture, if she fails to do this and thus gives away secrets, her failure to act on her promise has devalued humanity. Her suicide may be enforceable, as some other deaths on Kant's view are; her superiors would have the right to expect her to commit suicide, may be justified in shooting her before she is captured, and if they are not able to prevent her capture, would be justified in punishing her if they were able to retrieve her. While we would not normally consider the failure to break a promise as warranting obligatory suicide on a Kantian view, it would seem that this is plausibly an obligatory suicide because the circumstances are exceptional.

If we compare this to the example of a slave who can be used as a tool to enslave others or promote slavery, this raises the question: is a slave who is forced to devalue others obligated to commit suicide instead? Intuitively, we may find this possibility troubling. However, there also may be something in the secret service agent's promise that makes her suicide obligatory where perhaps the slave's is not, since he has made no such promise; otherwise, we may have to accept that Kant's position obligates the slave to suicide, or else we may have to reject Kant's framework. It may be in the nature a promise under such dire conditions that obligates one to suicide. Determining at what point the circumstances are exceptional enough that obligatory,

or indeed permissible, suicide is warranted, however, requires additional considerations, as I discuss next.

Is a Kantian Framework Sufficient for the Ethics of Suicide?

It seems that in cases where agents suffer from long-term profound depression, or those where pain causes profound suffering, the agent's well-being matters morally in terms of whether his suicide is morally permissible. Gauging the point at which future ills outweigh any future pleasures sufficiently that life will no longer have value requires that we consider consequences and well-being. Likewise, determining obligatory or enforceable suicide requires considering consequences to society as a whole. A suitable ethical framework would also have to establish a way to weigh the conflicting harms done to a child when a parent commits suicide to those done to the parent who must live with intractable suffering, for example. Since Kant's framework denies this and claims that *a priori* universalizable rules derived from reason alone determines morality, it is not sufficient for determining permissible suicides.

William Frankena also argues that Kant's moral framework does not adequately address the problem of conflicts between duties. For example, keeping a promise could prevent someone from helping another person who is in trouble. If breaking that promise does not cause a harm but failing to help does cause a harm, then we ought to be able to universalize a maxim that allows promise-breaking in such situations. (Frankena 1973, 32) While it may be that the point, to Kant, is that one should not make deceitful promises, it may be necessary to make a deceitful promise to appease a would-be murderer in order to save someone's life, for example. The specific rule about promise-keeping, like truth-telling, is supposed to be a perfect duty on Kant's view, and helping others an imperfect duty. Yet, here we must acknowledge that the imperfect duty must take precedence over the perfect one. We must consider the consequences, in other words, of telling the truth and keeping our promise and weigh that

against the more important task of helping someone. This means that imperfect duties can outweigh perfect ones, but that should not be the case on a Kantian model, showing it to be problematic.

Beauchamp and Childress agree with Frankena's position, claiming that "no clear way exists for Kant or for any theory with truly categorical or absolutist rules." (Beauchamp and Childress 2009, 348) They claim that "Kant's theory seems defective... The goodness of the action seems intimately connected, in many cases, with the feelings of the actor." (Beauchamp and Childress 2009, 349) It is not enough, they think, to act according to obligation, but one also needs to approach at least some actions from a position of caring and feeling. A father, for example, would be deficient if he acted towards his children according to obligation, rather than from feelings of affection, or if he treated his children impartially, the same as he would other people's children. A Kantian framework, while necessary for establishing universalizable laws relating to such things as rights, is insufficient for a complete ethical framework relating to suicide because it fails to consider adequately the consequences or impact of suicide, conflicting obligations, and affective ties.

Nevertheless, a Kantian approach establishes that even according to a robust sanctity of life position, it may not be wrong to commit suicide where someone's life is no longer priceless. In such cases, we must determine the point where duties have been sufficiently discharged that a suicide that would be permissible on Kantian terms is also otherwise permissible.

Section V: Conclusion

Some prudential suicides would be impermissible on Kantian grounds, such as the man who acts according to the maxim "from self-love I make it my principle to shorten my life when by longer duration it threatens more ill than agreeableness." If suffering is such that it

undermines human value, however, suicide ought to be permissible. There is a definitional symmetry and a weak moral symmetry between homicide and suicide since both involve killing humans and human dignity is priceless. This is compatible with a suicide taxonomy that subcategorizes suicides similarly to homicides, according to morally relevant criteria. This typology is not simply an abstract theoretical device, but has real-world application and is relevant, for example, to recent debates on proposed changes to the law regarding physician-assisted suicides. This includes clarifying such things as what the intentions of the agent(s) are, the degree to which the agents involved have mental capacity at the time the decision is made, whether the agent acts voluntarily or is coerced or manipulated into suicide. It can also differentiate cases where a patient wishes to kill herself because she has just been diagnosed with a debilitating disease from those where a patient's behavior will lead to her death if not addressed, such as in some cases of anorexia, for example.

This typology establishes that what makes some suicides wrong also makes some assisted suicides wrong; equally, in justifiable suicides we are justified in providing physician-assistance, "whereby our duty to care may involve helping the patient bring about her own death in the most humane way possible." (Dowie 2020, 732). One must still address conflicting obligations to others, such as one's family, and while this is beyond the scope of this paper, this may be done according to our existing social and legal framework. Even so, applying this taxonomy of suicides provides a conceptual rather than a merely pragmatic one for distinguishing types of suicides, those that justify physician assisted suicide from those that justify enforceable prevention, for instance. It also has advantages in applications in healthcare, law, and public policy. While we are not obligated to preserve the lives of suicidal agents, this does not entail that we are allowed to kill them for our convenience, for example, but rather the opposite, that helping them to die is only justifiable if doing so honors their dignity and autonomy.

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