

SUICIDE AND MODERNITY: PHILOSOPHICAL SUICIDE AS A POTENTIAL
FORM OF RESISTANCE TO THE PRIMACY OF LIFE IN MODERN TIMES

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ABSTRACT

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The primary aim of this thesis is to analyze the consideration of suicide by modernity which imposes life as the most essential and unconditional affirmation and death as the absolute opposite of life. Herein, the mutual exclusiveness of life and death is considered under the guidance of Foucault's critique on modernity. Thus, the potential of suicide as a resistance to the primacy of life in modern times is discussed in a Foucauldian framework. From this point forth, with inspiration from existentialist thought, a hypothetical category of philosophical suicide is defined to emphasize a peculiar form which has a more radical potential to resist the pre-given and unconditional affirmation of life than any other form of suicide. Within this

framework, the peculiarity of this hypothetical category of philosophical suicide is discussed by focusing on its radical potential to resist the mode of existence dictated by modernity.

Keywords: Existentialist Thought, Modernity, Philosophical Suicide, Resistance, Suicide.

ÖZ

İNTİHAR VE MODERNİTE: HAYATIN MODERN ZAMANLARDAKİ ÖNCELİĞİNE KARŞI POTANSİYEL BİR DİRENİŞ FORMU OLARAK FELSEFİ İNTİHAR

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Bu tezin temel amacı intiharın, yaşamı en temel ve koşulsuz olumluluk; ölümü ise yaşamın mutlak karşıtı olarak empoze eden, modernite tarafından ele alınış biçimini analiz etmektir. Burada, hayat ve ölümün birbirini dışlaması Foucault'nun modernite eleştirisi rehberliğinde düşünülmüştür. Böylece, intiharın; hayatın modern zamanlardaki önceliğine bir direniş olma potansiyeli Foucaultcu bir çerçevede tartışılmıştır. Bu noktadan hareketle, hayatın önceden verili ve koşulsuz olumlamasına karşı direnmede, intiharın diğer formlarından daha radikal bir potansiyele sahip özgün bir formu vurgulamak için, felsefi intihar varsayımsal kategorisi varoluşçu felsefeden ilham alarak tanımlanmıştır. Bu çerçevede, felsefi intiharın varsayımsal bir kategori olarak özgünlüğü, modernite tarafından kabul

ettirmeye alıřılan varoluř biimine karřı direnmedeki radikal potansiyeline odaklanılarak tartıřılmıřtır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Varoluřcu Düşünce, Modernite, Felsefi İntihar, Direniř, İntihar.

To my mother and to the memory of my beloved father

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Theories and discussions on suicide have always had an appreciable place in the different fields of social sciences due to its almost absolute pathological predefinition. But, principally, the presence of this conspicuous interest in various branches of social sciences does not enable one to look at the issue from different perspectives, since most of these theories just try to define, stereotype, and govern such an ungovernable phenomenon in different ways. Such absence of an insightful look in most of the studies on the issue is one of the most important incentives to deal with the topic of suicide in this study.

However, suicide could not be handled as an easily-defined, single-formed phenomenon in any kind of study in social sciences. Thus, uniqueness of any and every suicide will be rather critical for this thesis and henceforth it will refer to suicides, not the suicide. However, this reconsideration of suicide with its uniqueness and elusiveness does not mean that there will be no categorization about the topic within this study. We will make a critical categorization that divides suicides into two major groups for the analytical aims of our study but the definition of this categorization and contextualization of possible debates over it will be the topic of Chapter 5. Still at least, it should be indicated at this point that the categorical type which will be defined as philosophical suicide will be the actual object at issue within this thesis.

Therefore, after this major categorization is clarified in Chapter 5, this thesis will refer specifically to the peculiar conception of philosophical suicide. But, this categorical focus is not adequate to draw the lines of this thesis. A peculiar and redefined form of philosophical suicide will be dealt with its relation to modernity within this study. So, the proper focus point of this thesis will be the locus of philosophical suicide in modern society.

The phenomenon that is defined as philosophical suicide is chosen to be handled in relation with modernity in our study, because modern society has carried the phenomenon of suicide itself to a radically different place from its former locations. Thus, without any exceptional categorizations, the phenomenon of suicide became marginalized in modern society more than ever before and this is one of the crucial points which render the topic of this thesis peculiar and worth to study.

On the other hand, the locus of philosophical suicide in modern society is chosen to be the subject of this thesis grounding on the grand potential of philosophical suicide to release and resist power mechanisms of modernity that are essentially designed to control the body of the modern subject. In this regard, ideas that will be constructed around the potentiality of philosophical suicide to become a rebellion and a resistance of the body in modern society will be the apex of the arguments of this thesis.

Hence, it could be fairly argued that main analysis of this thesis will be hold in a Foucauldian framework since the codes of modernity will be searched in abnormality and suicide will be the specific abnormality that will generate the subject of this study. Suicide is specifically chosen to constitute the subject of this study because as both Foucault and Baudrillard indicate that death stands on the limits of modern forms of power and control mechanisms that are imposed on every single part of the bodies of its subject and thus among the pathologies created by the modern society, suicide -voluntary death- is the one analysis of which will give us rather more critical perspective of all the truths that are created by modern mentality. In other words, going beyond the analyses of both Foucault and Baudrillard, we claim in this thesis, the abnormality that will give us the greatest opportunity to develop a critical perspective on the truths of modern reason is not any kind of abnormality, or is not any kind of death, it is suicide. Suicide has such a potential because it emerges as the most abnormal and unacceptable form of death in the modern, rationalized minds of today's society in which the most essential aim of power mechanisms is to make human bodies trained to subjugate and govern themselves to live first and then to be

docile and productive. What is more is that philosophical suicide in the sense of its redefinition in our thesis will be suggested as a more radical form of resistance than any other form of suicide depending on its emergence as a potency.

From this point forth, in this thesis, philosophical suicide will be handled in terms of its radical resistance to the whole mentality of modernity and its all pervading control mechanisms penetrating deeply through the body of modern subject. In this context, the following question makes the subject matter of this thesis worth to analyze and makes philosophical suicide unique among all the other forms of abnormality that emerges out of the modern society: How could one decide to kill herself/himself because of the existence of life itself while even death as an inevitability is taken something abnormal in the rationalized minds of modern subjects? The subject matter is critical to address because it not only speaks for abnormality, it also speaks for the body and it speaks for silence.

The content and organization of this thesis will continue in line with these considerations. After the introduction chapter in which the general framework of the thesis is introduced, the second chapter will start with a review of philosophical and moral arguments against suicide that have prevailed in pre-modern times. This part of the study will start with such a revision of these age-old moral and philosophical arguments against suicide because it is critical to revise them primarily to understand how suicide which was predominantly considered as a crime or as a sin against the State or God back in the days has started to be perceived as an intolerable pathology and thus as a sickness. The first section of this chapter will be dedicated to the arguments against suicide in ancient times and the second one will embrace the arguments that philosophically exclude and morally damn the phenomenon of suicide in Middle Ages. All of these arguments will indicate that suicide was exposed to really serious philosophical and moral damnations long before the coming of modern times which also have had serious practical outcomes but the point is that all of these arguments that have been manifested against suicide in pre-modern times have considered the phenomenon as a sin or as a crime, the emergence of suicide as a

medical problem is totally something that has come along with the advent of modernity.

In the third chapter, some alternative readings of suicide which have been manifested in ancient and early modern times will be presented to indicate that life has not been always regarded as better than death on any condition as it is accepted without questioning in modern times. Within the arguments that will be introduced in this chapter, at least the idea that sometimes living could be ill or unbearable and thus could be worse than death is suggested by some great philosophers. In addition, these arguments are critical in that they decriminalize and secularize the act, by arguing that suicide is a crime neither against society nor to God nor to the State.

In a sense, the second and the third chapters will be the introduction part of the literature review of this thesis and in contrast to following chapters which will be developed in an analytical framework these two chapters will be presented in a rather descriptive order.

Once this introductory literature review is completed in the second and third chapters, the fourth chapter will pave the way for a revision of the radical change that is seen in the perception of suicide which transforms it from sin and crime to pathology and sickness in modern times. In line with the analysis of this transformation, Chapter 4 will have three pivotal sections, the first one of which will be composed of a critical analysis of how abnormalities and normalities are constructed within the framework of modern society. Foucauldian analysis of modernity and its normalization processes will constitute the theoretical background of this first section. The reasons of the emergence of death as the greatest abnormality of modern times will be the very subject of the second section of this chapter and it could be stated that this section will take the first section of this chapter to a step further to come to the point. To that end, in this section the radical change in the perception of death, at the end of which death becomes the absolute other of life, will be analyzed in the light of all the detailed analyses that are covered in the first section of this chapter. Thus, the role of modern reason, and the modern

forms of power and the emergence of medicine as the principal carrier of the changing norms will be discussed in the context of their role in this radical transformation of the perception of death. And Baudrillard's analysis on death will constitute the main reference point of this section but still, Foucault's wisdom will also continue to guide us in our study. Finally, these first two sections will put together a solid ground for the third section of this chapter in which we will critically analyze the location of suicide in modern society. This final section of this chapter will include two sub-sections, in the first of which we will analyze the construction process of suicide as irrationality, as an abnormality and as pathology. As modern society's most pathological form of death, in this study suicide will be defined as a mode of resistance to control mechanisms of modern forms of power. Therefore, the ungovernability of suicide will be discussed in the second sub-section of this last part of the chapter. And the term ungovernability will be handled with reference to Foucault's definition of the conception of *governmentality*. At the end, this chapter will help us to reveal the resistance potential in the phenomenon of suicide which especially rises out of its peculiar locus in modern society.

After this critical analysis on the stance of suicide in modern society, as mentioned above the 5th chapter will be dedicated to specify the conception of philosophical suicide and to distinguish it from other kinds of the phenomenon. And in this chapter, to sustain the aim of specification, firstly, multiplicity of the phenomenon of suicide will be explained and then a number of critical breaking points between the categories of philosophical suicide and other kinds of suicide will be introduced. In addition, in the second section of this chapter Heidegger's conception of *Dasein* will be discussed in relation to subject matter of our thesis to present our redefinition of philosophical suicide more specifically. Lastly, in the third section of this chapter Schopenhauer's thought on suicide will be briefly introduced for the same aims of clarification of what we mean by the term philosophical suicide in that he is generally accepted as the one who makes the first extensive and critical philosophical reading of the phenomenon of suicide.

In the sixth chapter which will also include a specific literature review on the subject of this thesis, we will critically analyze some great existentialist considerations on the phenomenon of suicide developed by Sartre, Camus and Cioran. Although Camus's view will be specified with his absurdism and Cioran's with nihilism, the thoughts of these three great thinkers has their roots in existentialist thinking and thence they would be handled under the title existentialism in general. This chapter has a crucial importance to build-up an alternative view about the phenomenon of suicide and to reach the conclusion part of our thesis because the perspectives that are included in this chapter are radically different from the previously mentioned arguments on suicide in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3. Thus, this chapter will provide us the opportunity to reach a multi-directional perspective about suicide which will at the end help us to build a ground for the claims of this thesis about the redefined conception of philosophical suicide and its locus in modern society.

On the other hand, the existentialist readings of this chapter also will be handled in a critical manner and in comparison and contrast to each other because of the fact however our conclusions substantially feed on existentialist arguments on suicide, our main arguments in this study could not be defined as purely existential. Within this framework, the very precious thoughts of Sartre, Camus and Cioran on the subject matter will be analyzed in that they help us to develop the conclusion that philosophical suicide is meaningful in this meaningless universe only when it is seen as potency.

Finally, in the seventh chapter, keeping all the arguments on suicide that are presented in this study in mind, a more specific debate will be hold on the phenomenon of philosophical suicide's potential to be a resistance in Foucauldian sense. With this design, after a brief summary of the content of the study, the conclusion will be drawn in consideration of possible objections that might rise out of the wide range of arguments against suicide that are covered within the framework of this thesis.

CHAPTER 2

PHILOSOPHICAL AND MORAL ARGUMENTS AGAINST SUICIDE IN PRE-MODERN PERIODS

2.1. Arguments against Suicide in Ancient Times

In the ancient world there were basically four different approaches to suicide, two of which could be taken as arguments against suicide and thus could be included within this chapter of our study but the other two will be handled under the title of alternative readings of suicide in the following chapter. The first two approaches to suicide which will be included in this chapter comprise the ideas of two most known philosophers of the ancient Greece —Plato and Aristotle. We will start by looking at Plato's arguments and then continue with Aristotle's since Plato is the one who has manifested the first significant philosophical dissertations about suicide.

2.1.1. Plato on Suicide: A Crime against God and the State

Following Orphism and Pythagoreanism, Plato argues that in this life, “We are ‘doing time’ for a crime committed in a previous life, and since ultimately only the Gods can lift this guilt, ‘escape’ (suicide) from this prison (life, the body) will only increase our guilt.”¹ Thus, he defines suicide as a crime that hinders the Gods’ sacred plan and destructs Gods’ blessed property —that is man.² Furthermore, in *Phaedo* suicide is introduced as the sole crime which has no exception to make it reasonable or acceptable.

The following passage in which Plato returns Socrates’ words summarizes his adoption of an Orphic and Pythagorean-inspired view against suicide in *Phaedo*:

¹ Cahn, Zilla Gabrielle. *Suicide in French Thought from Montesquieu to Cioran*. New York: P.Lang, 1998, p.13.

² Ibid., p.14.

...it will seem strange to you that this alone of all laws is without exception, and it never happens to mankind, as in other matters, that only at some times and for some persons it is better to die than to live; and it will perhaps seem strange to you that these human beings for whom it is better to die cannot without impiety do good to themselves, but must wait for some other benefactor (...) 'but perhaps there is some reason in it. Now the doctrine that is taught in secret about this matter, that we men are in a kind of prison and must not set ourselves free or run away, seems to me be weighty and not easy to understand. But this at least, (...) I do believe is sound, that the gods are our guardians and that we men are one of the chattels of the gods' (...) 'if one of your chattels should kill itself when you had not indicated that you wished to die, would you be angry with it and punish it if you could?' (...) Then perhaps from this point of view it is not unreasonable to say that a man must not kill himself until god sends some necessity upon him, such as has now come upon me.³

Indeed, Plato's thought on suicide follows pretty much Socraterian line but he makes a *sui generis* attachment to his Socratic origins which make him to carry his thought on the subject a step further: he "adopts *dialogue* as the *indispensable* means to philosophical purification and atonement, and because suicide *ipso facto* spells the end of dialogue —which *is* philosophy— it represents, more than any other human act, the undermining of all that is held sacred."⁴

These are the initial bases of Plato's certain prohibition of suicide that are expressed in *Phaedo*. In the *Republic*, his growing emphasis on the significance of human responsibility to the State and to the community has transformed the initial form of his thought on suicide to a much more incriminating stance against the act.⁵ "Whereas the earlier suicide prohibition in *Phaedo* focused more on the individual and his gods, in the *Republic* suicides carry the double burden of having committed a crime against both God and the State, for Plato had made them one."⁶

On the other hand, in *Laws*, Plato modifies his thought on suicide and thus moderates his prohibition of the act: Suicide is still seen as a crime but some exceptional

³ Plato. *Euthyphro; Apology; Crito; Phaedo; Phaedrus*; with an English translation by Harold North Fowler and an introduction by W. R. M. Lamb. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001, pp.215, 217.

⁴ Cahn, Zilla Gabrielle. *Suicide in French Thought from Montesquieu to Cioran*. New York: P.Lang, 1998, p.14.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

justification grounds are defined for the act in this later consideration of the subject by Plato. He expresses that if the good of the State requires it or if intolerable life circumstances such as grief, dishonor, misfortune or poverty are at stake suicide can be exceptionally accepted as a solution.⁷ Within this redefined framework of his prohibition, the circumstances, under which suicide can be justified, are more specifically defined in *Laws* as follows:

(1) when one's mind is morally corrupted and one's character can therefore not be salvaged (*Laws* IX 854a3–5), (2) when the self-killing is done by judicial order, as in the case of Socrates, (3) when the self-killing is compelled by extreme and unavoidable personal misfortune, and (4) when the self-killing results from shame at having participated in grossly unjust actions. (*Laws* IX 873c-d)⁸

For Cahn, “These exceptions make Plato’s mature stance on suicide extremely liberal, harking back to Homeric values while at the same time anticipating the Stoics.”⁹ Though this later form of Plato’s thought on suicide seems more moderate and liberal, indeed it includes adoption of severe burial punishments that are practiced on the corpses of those who commit suicide. Plato proposes these burial punishments as follows in *Laws*: “...for those thus destroyed the tombs shall be, first, in an isolated position with not even one adjacent, and, secondly, they shall be buried in those borders of the twelve districts which are barren and nameless, without note, and with neither headstone nor name to indicate the tombs.”¹⁰ These burial practices that are deemed suitable by Plato for the corpses of those who commits suicide are not only severely fierce, but also open to manipulation and this opportunity has been and would be used over and over again by the opponents of suicide.

⁷ Cahn, Zilla Gabrielle. *Suicide in French Thought from Montesquieu to Cioran*. New York: P.Lang, 1998, p.15.

⁸ Cholbi, Michael. “Suicide”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Suicide (Fall 2009 Ed.), edited by Edward N. Zalta. Available at: <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2012/entries/suicide>; accessed 21 March, 2012.

⁹ Cahn, Zilla Gabrielle. *Suicide in French Thought from Montesquieu to Cioran*. New York: P.Lang, 1998, p.15.

¹⁰ Plato. *Laws*, Books VII-XII, translated by R.G. Bury. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999, p.267.

Christians have had a knack for this job and has used Plato's ideas for their anti-suicide positions and backed up their burial punishments. However, Minois reports that Christians has misused the ideas of Plato: For him, Plato's approach to suicide is rather smooth and indefinite, but Christians has transformed it to serve their own ends.¹¹ This is really debatable point because in its original form, Plato's ideas on suicide, especially his thoughts about the burial punishments are no way smooth that it is claimed by Minois and even if his thoughts were not sharp in its original form, they were at least suitable for the manipulative aims of Christianity and perfectly used by them for centuries.

Now, we will continue with looking at the ideas of Aristotle on suicide which is mostly under the effect of Plato but centers more on the citizen's responsibility to the State and takes a more absolutist stance than Plato on the prohibition of suicide.

2.1.2. Aristotle on Suicide: Injustice against the State

Although, Aristotle could be seen as a Platonist to a degree, his denial of Plato's transcendental world of unchanging and everlasting forms differentiates his philosophy from Plato's: In the Aristotealian world, forms become part of the physical universe and they become immanent to the concrete world. Thus, for Aristotle, soul—as the form of the body—and body die at the very same time. Cahn argues that this differentiation between Plato and Aristotle has made Aristotle to concentrate upon the material consequences of suicide in contrast to Plato.¹²

Indeed it is indeed slightly pretentious to makes such an argument since the subject of suicide does not take an extensive place in Aristotle's philosophy. He only reserves a passage to the subject in *Nicomachaen Ethics* and writes the following words:

¹¹ Minois, Georges. *İntiharın Tarihi: İstemli Ölüm Karşısında Batı Toplumunu*, translated by Nermin Acar. Ankara: Dost Kitabevi, 2008, p.58.

¹² Cahn, Zilla Gabrielle. *Suicide in French Thought from Montesquieu to Cioran*. New York: P.Lang, 1998, p.16.

Is it possible or not for a man to commit injustice against himself? (1) One class of actions consists of those acts, in accordance with any virtue, which are ordained by law. For instance, the law does not sanction suicide (and what it does not expressly sanction, it forbids). Further, when a man voluntarily (which means with knowledge of the person affected and the instrument employed) does an injury (not in retaliation) that is against the law, he commits injustice. But he who kills himself in a fit of passion, voluntarily does an injury (against the right principle) which the law does not allow. Therefore the suicide commits injustice; but against whom? It seems to be against the state rather than against himself; for he suffers voluntarily, and nobody suffers injustice voluntarily. This is why the state exacts a penalty; suicide is punished by certain marks of dishonour, as being an offence against the state.¹³

Alvarez reports that for Aristotle, suicide is an attack against the state because the act of suicide not only violates the *polis* from the spiritual side but also weakens it economically by annihilating a serviceable citizen. Therefore, Aristotle regards suicide as a social irresponsibility.¹⁴

On the other hand, Aristotle's absolute prohibition of suicide shares "the communitarian ideal" with Thomas Aquinas.¹⁵ They both "believed that suicide was wrong under all circumstances" though "for Aristotle this meant that it was an act contrary to the 'right rule of life,' while for Aquinas it represented the most immoral act, a mortal sin."¹⁶

To sum up, Plato's effect on Aristotle's view of suicide is undeniably clear: He shares the idea with Plato that self-killing is a wrong against the State. However, he defines this wrong as injustice instead of crime and unlike Plato he does not make any reference to the injustice of suicide against God. In addition, it could be argued that Aristotle's position on the damnation of suicide is a bit more inflexible than Plato's since he justifies State's punishment of suicide by certain marks of dishonor without attaching to this justification any exceptional circumstances.

¹³ Aristotle. *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Book V, translated by H. Rackham. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975, p.319.

¹⁴ Alvarez, A. (Alfred). *İntihar: Kan Dökücü Tanrı*, translated by Zuhale Çil Sarıkaya. Ankara: Öteki Yayinevi, 1999, p.66.

¹⁵ Cahn, Zilla Gabrielle. *Suicide in French Thought from Montesquieu to Cioran*. New York: P.Lang, 1998, p.17.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Now, we will continue with an overview of Christian arguments against suicide that has prevailed in Middle Ages which not only prohibit suicide but also justify really severe punishments that were practiced on the corpses of those who commit suicide.

2.2. Christian Arguments against Suicide in Middle Ages

Despite the differentiations in their thoughts suicide is defined as a crime or as an injustice by both Plato and Aristotle but it is fairly true that their satire against suicide includes moral damnations of the act. However, the manifestation of suicide as a sin arises out of the advent of institutional Christianity and St. Augustine is the first Christian philosopher who proposes this manifestation and on this ground he justifies the prohibition of suicide. Therefore, we will start this chapter by looking at St. Augustine's thought on suicide and later continue with St. Thomas Aquinas whose thoughts could be seen in a sense as a reinforcement of Augustinian damnation and prohibition of suicide.

2.2.1. St. Augustine on Suicide: A Mortal Sin

In the first book of *City of God*, St. Augustine exhibits a strict condemnation of suicide through which he determines the act as “a mortal sin greater than any other that could be committed between baptism and a divinely ordained death.”¹⁷ Thus, he takes an absolutist stance on the prohibition of the act, the mainstay of which is the commandment:

Not for nothing is it that in the holy canonical books no divinely inspired order or permission can be found authorizing us to inflict death upon ourselves, neither in order to acquire immortality nor in order to avert or divert some evil. For we must certainly understand the commandment as forbidding this when it says: ‘Thou shalt not kill,’ particularly since it does not add ‘thy neighbor,’ as it does when it forbids false witnessing (...) in the commandment, ‘Thou shalt not kill,’ there is no more added to

¹⁷ Cahn, Zilla Gabrielle. *Suicide in French Thought from Montesquieu to Cioran*. New York: P.Lang, 1998, p.24.

this, and hence no one is understood to be expected, certainly not the very man to whom the order is addressed!¹⁸

However, Alvarez argues that Augustine's thought on suicide roots in unchristian resources: His definition of suicide as a mortal sin initially against God but also against justice and against compassion totally refers back to Plato and Aristotle.¹⁹

Alvarez's argument is true to a certain extent but Augustine resists "any strong tendency to devalue the corporeal body in anticipation of eternal life."²⁰ For Augustine, the corporal life is so valuable that he does not accept even human indignity as a justifiable reason for suicide.²¹ Therefore, he does not accept suicide as a respectable choice even when one commits the act to avoid falling into a sin because he thinks "That a sin should not be avoided by a sin."²²

On the other hand, in the 4th century a new attitude toward suffering has risen and transformed Augustine's thought on the subject to a degree and has become an important principle in Christian prohibition of suicide: In the early Christian thought, the view of suffering was consonant with the ancients —that suffering is not an intrinsic good but with the new attitude towards suffering that has risen out of the 4th century Christian thought, has made martyrs' suicides an exception both to the prohibition of suicide and to the acceptance of suffering as evil.²³ Thus, Augustinian prohibition of suicide has taken its final shape as follows:

¹⁸ Augustine, Saint. *The City of God against the Pagans*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972, pp.91, 93.

¹⁹ Alvarez, A. (Alfred). *İntihar: Kan Dökücü Tanrı*, translated by Zuhul Çil Sarıkaya. Ankara: Öteki Yayınevi, 1999, pp.76, 77.

²⁰ Paterson, Craig. *A History of Ideas Concerning the Morality of Suicide, Assisted Suicide and Voluntary Euthanasia* (2005). Available at: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1029229>; accessed 17 July, 2012.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Augustine, Saint. *The City of God against the Pagans*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972, p.107.

²³ Cahn, Zilla Gabrielle. *Suicide in French Thought from Montesquieu to Cioran*. New York: P.Lang, 1998, p.24.

1) no private individual may kill a guilty person (himself included); indeed the more innocent his life, the more criminal his act of killing himself. The condemnation of murderers rests with Church and State; 2) The suicide who takes his own life has killed a man and is thus a murderer, for 'he who kills himself still kills nothing else than man'; 3) [the stoic idea that] the truly noble soul will bear all suffering; and 4) suicide is a sin greater than any one could avoid by its commission. The only exceptions allowed were for those who took their lives based on Divine inspiration, that is, those who had been made saints of the Church. (*City of God* Bk.I.16-27)²⁴

Even though, it is claimed that Augustine's thought has its roots in ancient thought by Alvarez and he could be right to a certain degree, it is obvious that the rise of Christian doctrine on suicide the first reference point of which has manifested by Augustine has caused a critical shift in the perception of suicide: It is no more discussed in the context of criminality neither against State nor against God. It started to be defined as a sin with reference to the commandment and by this change the discussions on the act have been carried to the field of religion almost completely. Now, we will continue with St. Thomas Aquinas who was also an important figure in this critical shift of the discussions on suicide.

2.2.2. St. Thomas Aquinas on Suicide: A Wicked Sin

Following Stoics, Aquinas regards preservation of life as the most essential implication of right reason that is required to act upon. Therefore, for him intentionally acting against the preservation of human life is equal to disordering "moral goodness communicated to us by our capacity for practical reason."²⁵ Moreover, under the influence his Stoic origins, he uses natural law as a reference point to declare the decision on the time of death solely belongs to God.²⁶ Aquinas

²⁴ Cahn, Zilla Gabrielle. *Suicide in French Thought from Montesquieu to Cioran*. New York: P.Lang, 1998, pp.24, 25.

²⁵ Paterson, Craig. *A History of Ideas Concerning the Morality of Suicide, Assisted Suicide and Voluntary Euthanasia (2005)*. Available at: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1029229>; accessed 17 July, 2012.

²⁶ Cahn, Zilla Gabrielle. *Suicide in French Thought from Montesquieu to Cioran*. New York: P.Lang, 1998, p.26.

also preserves communitarian ideal of Aristotle “that a man has no right to deprive society of one of its citizens through suicide.”²⁷

However, in spite of all the above mentioned ancient origins of his thought, Aquinas uses Augustine as the principle reference point of his arguments against suicide and inspiring from him, he refers to the commandment as the basic source for his condemnation of suicide.

In the light of all these wide-ranging origins of his thought, Aquinas sums up three basic reasons for the prohibition and damnation of suicide: Firstly, “everything naturally loves itself, the result being that everything naturally keeps itself in being, and resists corruptions so far as it can. Wherefore suicide is contrary to the inclination of nature, and to charity whereby every man should love himself. Hence suicide is always a mortal sin, as being contrary to the natural law and to charity.”²⁸ Secondly, “every part, as such, belongs to the whole. Now every man is part of the community, and so, as such, he belongs to the community. Hence by killing himself he injures the community, as the Philosopher declares...”²⁹ Thirdly, “life is God's gift to man, (...) Hence whoever takes his own life, sins against God, even as he who kills another's slave, sins against that slave's master, and as he who usurps to himself judgment of a matter not entrusted to him. For it belongs to God alone to pronounce sentence of death and life...”³⁰ Lastly, in addition to all these Christian based arguments, Aquinas makes an emphasis on the importance of the moment of death and in line with this emphasis he manifests suicide as the most wicked sin among others since once you commit it then there will be no time left to swear off.³¹

²⁷ Cahn, Zilla Gabrielle. *Suicide in French Thought from Montesquieu to Cioran*. New York: P.Lang, 1998, p.26.

²⁸ Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologica*, translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province. Westminster: Christian Classics, 1981, p.1463.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Cahn, Zilla Gabrielle. *Suicide in French Thought from Montesquieu to Cioran*. New York: P.Lang, 1998, p.27.

In sum, After St. Augustine, Aquinas has taken a step further and carried the Christian damnation of suicide to a harder degree by manifesting it as the most wicked sin of all and thus absolutized the Christian prohibition of suicide by denying to accept any exceptional case in which suicide could be justified. However, despite the nuance in their arguments, the manifestation of suicide as a mortal/wicked sin by both Augustine and Aquinas has prevailed for centuries and become the principal reference point of hard punishments that were suggested on suicide.

CHAPTER 3

ALTERNATIVE VIEWPOINTS ON SUICIDE IN PRE-MODERN AND EARLY MODERN PERIODS

The thoughts that criminalize suicide in ancient times and morally damns the act in Middle Ages have not comprised the one and only approach to the phenomenon in their times. Even though, these thoughts which were clearly against suicide has almost always been the dominant ones, some alternative viewpoints on the subject matter have been manifested by some great philosophers in ancient times and in the early modern period that starts right after the Middle Ages. In this chapter, we will look at these alternative viewpoints on suicide since they are critical to understand the transformations in the perception of the phenomenon and to present a multi-dimensional perspective on the subject.

3.1. Alternative Viewpoints on Suicide in Ancient Times

3.1.1. Epicureanism on Suicide: Just a Means for Ending a Painful Existence

As Paterson argues, it is an overstatement to suggest that suicide is affirmed on any ground by the Epicureans.³² It is also fair enough to argue that Epicureanism does not exhibit an enthusiastic stance towards suicide as much as Stoicism does. But still the emphasis of the Epicureanism on the good of the individual rather than the good of the state originates a critical divergence from communitarian ideals of Plato and Aristotle.³³ However, it is argued by Cahn that this divergence does not have any

³² Paterson, Craig. *A History of Ideas Concerning the Morality of Suicide, Assisted Suicide and Voluntary Euthanasia* (2005). Available at: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1029229>; accessed 17 July, 2012.

³³ Cahn, Zilla Gabrielle. *Suicide in French Thought from Montesquieu to Cioran*. New York: P.Lang, 1998, p.17.

remarkable effect on Epicurus' thought on suicide, his ideas are indeed are not that similar to Plato's and Aristotle's.³⁴

For Paterson, to understand Epicurus' stance on suicide, initially it should be understood that he adopts a more provident attitude towards suicide than Stoic thinkers do.³⁵ "He taught, for example, that an important part of the goal of meeting our desires was to overcome fear of death (death representing annihilation or extinction) and to resist the physical impulses of pain in order to achieve the 'higher pleasure' of overcoming this fear of death."³⁶

However, death as the utmost fear of men is regarded as 'nothing to us' by Epicurus and this has a central place in his philosophy, Cahn claims that "Epicurus opposed suicide, even in, or perhaps especially in, misfortune, for '...we must heal by the grateful recollection of what has been and by the recognition that it is impossible to make undone what has been done.' Here we observe his scrupulous reasoning devolving, when all is said and done, into quietist philosophy."³⁷ But, indeed, Paterson makes a truer reading of Epicureanism's stance on suicide and chooses fairer words to describe this stance than Cahn does and writes the following lines:

Rather than being heavily permissive towards the practice of self-killing, their attitude can be better described as more one of toleration for those who were not able to demonstrate the necessary degree of control. It was far from being regarded as an ideal or model to follow. In Epicureanism, therefore, there was no widespread enthusiasm for the practice of suicide, an enthusiasm present amongst many of the Stoic writers. The boldest statement permitting certain suicides was made by Hegesias who taught the desirability of suicide as a means of ending painful existence that could no longer be endured. Yet, even this endorsement was significantly more restrained than the general

³⁴ Cahn, Zilla Gabrielle. *Suicide in French Thought from Montesquieu to Cioran*. New York: P.Lang, 1998, p.17.

³⁵ Paterson, Craig. *A History of Ideas Concerning the Morality of Suicide, Assisted Suicide and Voluntary Euthanasia* (2005). Available at: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1029229>; accessed 17 July, 2012.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Cahn, Zilla Gabrielle. *Suicide in French Thought from Montesquieu to Cioran*. New York: P.Lang, 1998, p.17.

impression current amongst popular conceptions as to what Epicureanism actually entailed.³⁸

Minois' definition of Epicurean stance on suicide supports Paterson on the point that Epicureans do not strictly oppose suicide just as they do not approve it in all circumstances but they just take a cautious stance on the issue. And they declare that when the life becomes unbearable, wisdom recommends us to kill ourselves silently. They only make a great emphasis on the importance of the lateral thinking in the contemplation process of suicide.³⁹

3.1.2. Stoicism on Suicide: A Perfect Remedy for Ending Humiliation

The two substantial beliefs of Stoicism in “natural law and ethical living are based on the assumption of man’s reasoning ability, which is considered in harmony with nature, and, as man’s natural endowment, its full use will guarantee an ethical, virtuous, and serene, life.”⁴⁰ Thus, “decisions relating to matters of life and death are not only permitted, but must necessarily be entrusted to the individual as the honor and dignity due the reasoning man. The human being must not be compelled to live a life he has determined to be degrading and useless.”⁴¹ From this point forth, Stoic doctrine declares that when one’s life becomes dishonorable, suicide could be seen as a perfect remedy for ending this humiliation. Furthermore, because of the fact that the emergence of humiliating circumstances in one’s life is accepted as a result of abuse of his reason denial of “this remedy would be to deny the rightness of nature thereby subverting Stoic doctrine (...) Therefore, although the Stoics admired above

³⁸ Paterson, Craig. *A History of Ideas Concerning the Morality of Suicide, Assisted Suicide and Voluntary Euthanasia* (2005). Available at: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1029229>; accessed 17 July, 2012.

³⁹ Minois, Georges. *İntiharın Tarihi: İstemli Ölüm Karşısında Batı Toplumunu*, translated by Nermin Acar. Ankara: Dost Kitabevi, pp. 57, 58.

⁴⁰ Cahn, Zilla Gabrielle. *Suicide in French Thought from Montesquieu to Cioran*. New York: P.Lang, 1998, p.19.

⁴¹ Ibid.

all a dignified countenance toward suffering, suicide as a consequence of humiliation, of lost honor (...) was not only accepted, but indeed expected.”⁴²

In this chapter, we will deal with three important figures of Stoicism whose ideas have developed the framework of above mentioned arguments on suicide and Seneca will be the first to deal with since his ideas on the issue has an appreciable effect on his followers, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius.

3.1.2.1. Seneca on Suicide: An Option to Reach Freedom

Seneca’s thought on suicide which is also significantly influential on both Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius is grounded on his ideas about death, the fear of death, the value of “living well” and the dirt of “living ill.”⁴³ That is to say, Seneca thinks that living has no value when it becomes a torture and an illness since it has no value in its pureness. For him, only “living well” includes a value.⁴⁴ From this point forth, Seneca declares that when the danger of “living ill” is at stake, killing oneself means at least “dying well” and when this is the case, one should rather see death as an expedience, not as a punishment, and then the fear of death also would fade away.⁴⁵ Indeed, the following passage in *Epistle LXX* summarizes the improvement of Seneca’s ideas on suicide more clearly:

...life has carried some men with the greatest rapidity to the harbor, the harbor they were bound to reach even if they tarried on the way, while others it has fretted and harassed. To such a life, as you are aware, one should not always cling. For mere living is not a good, but living well. Accordingly, the wise man will live as long as he ought, not as long as he can (...) As soon as there are many events in his life that give him trouble and disturb his peace of mind, he sets himself free. And this privilege is his, not only when the crisis is upon him, but as soon as Fortune seems to be playing him false; then he looks about carefully and sees whether he ought, or ought not, to end his life on that account. He holds that it makes no difference to him whether his taking-off be

⁴² Cahn, Zilla Gabrielle. *Suicide in French Thought from Montesquieu to Cioran*. New York: P.Lang, 1998, p.19.

⁴³ Seneca, Lucius Annaeus. *Epistles 1-65*, translated by Richard M. Gummere. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

natural or self-inflicted, whether it comes later or earlier. He does not regard it with fear, as if it were great loss; for no man can lose very much when but a dribble remains. It is not a question of dying earlier or later, but of dying well or ill. And dying well means escape from the danger of living ill.⁴⁶

In accordance with Stoic doctrine, Seneca grounds these arguments about suicide on natural law and declares that “When a man desires to burst forth and take his departure, nothing stands in his way. It is open space in which Nature guards us.”⁴⁷ Seneca also makes it clear that his belief and glorification of human reason which also comes from his Stoic stance supports his arguments on suicide and reports that “It is reason which teaches us that fate has various ways of approach, but the same end, and that it makes no difference at what point the inevitable event begins. Reason, too, advises us to die, if we may, according to our taste; if this cannot be, she advises us to die according to our ability, and to seize upon whatever means shall offer itself for doing violence to ourselves.”⁴⁸

On the other hand, Seneca combines his Stoic stance to a degree with Platonic belief on the eternity of the soul. But this combination does not totally depart Seneca from his Stoic materialism since in the end he adheres to Stoic belief on the supremacy of human reason.⁴⁹ “Seneca’s final statement, then, combines a mitigated Platonic hope of an afterlife with the Stoic release to death: ‘The day which you dread as the end is your birth into eternity (...) there is no reason to delay departure.’”⁵⁰

It should be recalled, however, that he did not mean this literally, for he listed circumstances which might prohibit suicide.⁵¹ Indeed, the prohibition of suicide is a must for Seneca, when necessity for suffering is at stake because his Stoic origins

⁴⁶ Seneca, Lucius Annaeus. *Epistles 1-65*, translated by Richard M. Gummere. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970, pp.57, 59.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.69, 71.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.71, 73.

⁴⁹ Cahn, Zilla Gabrielle. *Suicide in French Thought from Montesquieu to Cioran*. New York: P.Lang, 1998, p.22.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

make him also adhere to the notion of “honorable death.”⁵² Hence, if suffering is made a must for one especially by the State, then in accordance with his Stoic beliefs Seneca declares that s/he “should not attempt to escape the executioner’s sword by committing suicide.”⁵³

Seneca regards suicide as an option to reach freedom—even if it is not the best option—when life becomes captivity.⁵⁴ He does not see any problem with this choice because he thinks that unlike life death should be eligible only for everybody’s own self, not for anybody else but he also emphasizes that “when contemplating suicide, the individual should consider his duty and responsibility towards others, such as parents or spouse.”⁵⁵

These ideas of Seneca on the subject also has made him commit to suicide without batting an eyelid when it is forced upon him by the reign of Nero who had been his former master and student but more importantly, this line of thought that is built by Seneca on suicide has “become a thread in Stoic thought all the way through Marcus Aurelius and still evident in Montaigne, who vacillated between Stoic and Christian attitudes towards suicide.”⁵⁶

3.1.2.2. Epictetus on Suicide: Leaving a Smoky Room

As a follower of Seneca, “Epictetus argues that not only is death no evil, but it *can* be a gain; when continuing to live would merely prolong one's suffering to no purpose, it is

⁵² Cahn, Zilla Gabrielle. *Suicide in French Thought from Montesquieu to Cioran*. New York: P.Lang, 1998, p.22.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.20.

⁵⁴ Seneca, Lucius Annaeus. *Epistles 66-92*, translated by Richard M. Gummere. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970, p.71.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.63.

⁵⁶ Cahn, Zilla Gabrielle. *Suicide in French Thought from Montesquieu to Cioran*. New York: P.Lang, 1998, pp.20, 21.

preferable to escape from life by suicide.”⁵⁷ However, his stance on suicide is less liberal than Seneca’s because he thinks that suicide is unacceptable when it grounds on trivial reasons.⁵⁸ For him, the decision to depart from this life must be made depending on the level of harmony between one’s life circumstances and nature. That is to say, if the circumstances of one’s life are not in accordance with nature, there is no disobedience to God in desertion from life because Epictetus regards emergence of such circumstances as signals of God that is sent to one to depart from this life.⁵⁹ However, he does not make it clear that “what *kinds* of circumstances render a life in accordance with nature impossible.”⁶⁰

Epictetus uses different metaphors in *Discourses* to illustrate this restrictive but still Stoic position that is held by him on the subject of suicide. The most well-known and the most frequently used one is the metaphor of smoky room: “Has someone made a smoke in the house? If he has made a moderate amount of smoke I shall stay; if too much, I go outside. For one ought to remember and hold fast to this, that the door stands open.”⁶¹ He makes his point clear in the further volumes of *Discourses* and writes that “If I am so badly off as all that, death is my harbour. And this is the harbour of all men, even death, and this is their refuge. That is why no one of the things that befall us in our life is difficult. Whenever you wish, you walk out of the house, and are no longer bothered by the smoke.”⁶² He also uses the game metaphor to declare that when one

⁵⁷ Stephens, William O. *Epictetus on the Irrationality of Fearing Death and Reasons for Suicide* (2002). Available at: <http://puffin.creighton.edu/phil/Stephens/Epictetus%20on%20Death%20and%20Suicide.htm>; accessed 18 July, 2012.

⁵⁸ Cahn, Zilla Gabrielle. *Suicide in French Thought from Montesquieu to Cioran*. New York: P.Lang, 1998, p.21.

⁵⁹ Epictetus. *Discourses*. vol.II, translated by W.A. Oldfather. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000, p.217.

⁶⁰ Stephens, William O. *Epictetus on the Irrationality of Fearing Death and Reasons for Suicide* (2002). Available at: <http://puffin.creighton.edu/phil/Stephens/Epictetus%20on%20Death%20and%20Suicide.htm>; accessed 18 July, 2012.

⁶¹ Epictetus. *Discourses*. vol.I, translated by W.A. Oldfather. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000, p.159.

⁶² Epictetus. *Discourses*. vol.II, translated by W.A. Oldfather. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000, p.405.

wants to leave this life, the door that leads to this departure is always open, there is no point in complaining: "...remember that the door has been thrown open. Do not become a greater coward than the children, but just as they say, 'I won't play any longer,' when the thing does not please them, so do you also, when things seem to you to have reached that stage, merely say, 'I won't play any longer,' and take your departure; but if you stay, stop lamenting."⁶³

Under these thoughts of Epictetus on suicide there lies the idea that not death but the fear of death is the great evil to which we shouldn't resign ourselves because there is nothing in death to be afraid of. Furthermore, Epictetus declares that death is needed for the continuance of cosmic order in nature.⁶⁴ When the circumstances of life become insufferable "where men have no means of living in accordance with nature" suicide always stands as a reasonable choice.⁶⁵ Thus, Epictetus reports that "this is but reasonable, for *you* came into being, not when you wanted, but when the universe had need of you."⁶⁶ Therefore, "the good and the excellent man, bearing in mind who he is, and whence he has come, and by whom he was created, centres his attention on this and this only, how he may fill his place in an orderly fashion, and with due obedience to God."⁶⁷

Nevertheless, he asserts that if one finds herself/himself in a place where s/he couldn't find any means to live in accordance with nature, then it means that universe no more needs him, and it is her/his time to depart from this life and this departure would be also an indication of the obedience to God, not the disobedience. Because, "Just as choosing

⁶³ Epictetus. *Discourses*. vol.I, translated by W.A. Oldfather. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000, pp.153, 155.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p.213.

⁶⁵ Epictetus. *Discourses*. vol.II, translated by W.A. Oldfather. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000, p.217.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.215.

to die for no good reason is shameful, so too is choosing to live in a cowardly way. Each is a vicious choice, and thus a true evil.”⁶⁸

3.1.2.3. Marcus Aurelius on Suicide: Leaving a Disgraceful and Unvaluable Life

Marcus Aurelius’ “vacillation on suicide reflects the ambivalence of his predecessors, who seemed concerned to balance each affirmation of suicide with several negations, or vice versa. Aurelius both condemned and tolerated suicide.”⁶⁹ That is to say, in a similar fashion to Epictetus’ attitude on the issue, Aurelius holds that suicide is only acceptable when non-trivial reasons are at stakes and if there is no such reasons, he condemns the act depending on the Stoic duty to suffer and await death. The following words that he writes in *Mediations X* reflects the stance that is taken by him about the time to depart from life:

Assuming for thyself the appellations, a good man, a modest man, a truth-teller, wise of heart, sympathetic of heart, great of heart, take heed thou be not new-named. And if thou shouldst forfeit these titles, e’en make haste to get back to them...Take ship then on these few attributions, and if thou canst abide therein, so abide as one who has migrated to some Isles of the Blest. But if thou feelest thyself adrift, and canst not win thy way, betake thyself with a good heart to some nook where thou shalt prevail, or even depart altogether from life, not in wrath but in simplicity, independence, and modesty, having at least done this one thing well in life, that thou hast quitted it thus. Howbeit, to keep these attributions in mind it will assist thee greatly if thou bear the Gods in mind, and that it is not flattery they crave but for all rational things to be conformed to their likeness, and that man should do a man’s work, as the fig tree does the work of a fig-tree, the dog of a dog, and the bee of a bee.⁷⁰

For Aurelius, the appellations that are mentioned in this passage imply adoption of some values to which one should be adhere once s/he has taken them proper for herself/himself. From this point forth, Aurelius reports that even if some circumstances make one deprived of these values, s/he should always try to readopt

⁶⁸ Stephens, William O. *Epictetus on the Irrationality of Fearing Death and Reasons for Suicide* (2002). Available at: <http://puffin.creighton.edu/phil/Stephens/Epictetus%20on%20Death%20and%20Suicide.htm>; accessed 18 July, 2012.

⁶⁹ Cahn, Zilla Gabrielle. *Suicide in French Thought from Montesquieu to Cioran*. New York: P.Lang, 1998, p.21.

⁷⁰ Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, edited and translated by C.R. Haines, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999, p.269.

and hold on to them but if it is impossible to readopt and adhere to these values, then Aurelius regards suicide as a virtuous departure because continuing to live with being unable to abide by the values once you have seen suitable for yourself makes your life disgraceful and unvaluable. In another passage in *Meditations*, Aurelius writes that “For who is there to hinder thee from being good and sincere? Resolve then to live no longer if thou be not such. For neither doth Reason in that case insist that thou shouldest.”⁷¹ Thus he “asserts that reason does not demand that a man remain alive if he can no longer be good and sincere. Suicide was therefore determined to be appropriate according to a combination of the formal criterion of opportuneness and the material one of following nature.”⁷²

As can be clearly seen, the ideas of Seneca, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius on suicide are mostly overlapping. They all think that death is not something to be afraid of but also it is not reasonable to choose it depending on trivial reasons. They all share the belief in Stoic duty to await death if the circumstances of life are reasonable and in accordance with nature. However, if one decides as a rational being that it is impossible to find a place to continue his life in accordance with nature, then he not only could but also should depart from this life. In this matter, Marcus Aurelius revisits Epictetus’ famous metaphor of smoky room and writes that:

Thou canst live on earth as thou dost purpose to live departed. But if men will not have it so, then is it time for thee to go out of life, yet not as one who is treated ill. *’This smoky and I go away.* Why think it a great matter? But while no such cause drives me forth, I remain a free man, and none shall prevent me from doing what I will, and I will what is in accordance with the nature of a rational and social creature.⁷³

The point is that indefiniteness of the right time to depart from life and of the circumstances under which it is a rational and virtuous decision to commit suicide is

⁷¹ Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, edited and translated by C.R. Haines, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999, p.285.

⁷² Seidler, Michael J. “Kant and the Stoics on Suicide”, *Journal of The History of Ideas*, vol.44, no.3: 429-453. University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983, p.432.

⁷³ Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, edited and translated by C.R. Haines, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999, p.123.

the most problematical part of the Stoic thought and its leading figures —Seneca, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius.

Now, we will continue this chapter by looking at some alternative viewpoints on suicide that have risen out in the early modern period since only after the Middle Ages that is mostly dominated by the Christian thought, considerable viewpoints on suicide which do not blindly condemn the act have started to come to the fore again.

3.2. Alternative Viewpoints on Suicide in Early Modern Period

3.2.1. Montaigne on Suicide: A Ridiculous but not an Immoral Departure

As Cahn reports that while Montaigne's sceptic stance reveals no contradictory views with Christianity in general, his arguments in his essay *A Custom of the Island of Cea* generates "the first significant post-Thomistic discussion of suicide to depart decisively from the Church's blanket prohibition."⁷⁴ The influence of Stoicism in Montaigne's stance on the subject of suicide is apparent: For Montaigne, just like it is for Stoics, "death is not a remedy for just one malady, but the remedy for all ills. It is a very sure haven, which is never to be feared, and often to be sought. It all comes to the same thing whether man gives himself his death or suffers it, whether he runs to meet his day or awaits it; wherever it comes from, it is still his."⁷⁵ Following this Stoic line of thought he writes that "God gives us leave enough when he puts us in such a state that it is worse to live than to die. It is weakness to yield to ills, but it is madness to foster them."⁷⁶

On the other hand, "in his piece *Apologie de Raimond Sebond*, Montaigne would berate the Stoics and other ancients, even his beloved Socrates, for their pretensions

⁷⁴ Cahn, Zilla Gabrielle. *Suicide in French Thought from Montesquieu to Cioran*. New York: P.Lang, 1998, p.31.

⁷⁵ Montaigne, Michel de. *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, translated by Donald M. Frame. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958, p.252.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

to having transcend their natural weaknesses”.⁷⁷ However, his disapproval never turns into a prohibition against suicide. He thinks that suicide offers no advantage to one who suffers from the troubles of life and it is not really easy to make a decision about the point in which there is no more hope.⁷⁸ Thus, for Montaigne, suicide is an act that should be avoided to the point that it is really impossible to hope for anything. In other words, suicide would always be a ridiculous act for Montaigne depending on the elusiveness of the decision about the point that hope ends for someone but he never regards the voluntary departure from life as something immoral.

The ambivalence in Montaigne’s thought on suicide is indeed pervasive in his essay *A custom of the Island of Cea* where most of his thoughts on the subject are expressed and after all this ambivalent expression of thoughts, he unsurprisingly makes an unsharp conclusion and reports that “Unendurable pain and fear of a worse death seem to me the most excusable motives for suicide.”⁷⁹

According to Cahn, this unsharp and ambivalent discussion of Montaigne on suicide also includes the idea that the difficult decision about to continue to live or not must be made by the individual not by the State and this reflects the rise of the individualism in the discussions on suicide in Montaigne’s time.⁸⁰

3.2.2. Hume on Suicide: Neither a Sin nor a Crime

For Hume, traditional attitudes on suicide are obscure because they are all built on superstitious thoughts. Thus, none of them, indeed, make a strong and clear argument against suicide while they are considering the act as a crime or as a sin. Indeed,

⁷⁷ Cahn, Zilla Gabrielle. *Suicide in French Thought from Montesquieu to Cioran*. New York: P.Lang, 1998, p.31.

⁷⁸ Montaigne, Michel de. *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, translated by Donald M. Frame. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958, pp.254, 255.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p.262.

⁸⁰ Cahn, Zilla Gabrielle. *Suicide in French Thought from Montesquieu to Cioran*. New York: P.Lang, 1998, p.32.

Hume develops his essay on suicide on the refutation of these superstitious thoughts that considers suicide as a transgression of one's duties either towards God, or society or oneself. Although he mostly focuses on the refutation of acceptance of suicide as a sin that is committed against God, he also touches upon the point that suicide is not a crime or a sin that is committed against society or against oneself.

According to Hume, "human life depends upon the general laws of matter and motion and *that* it is no encroachment on the office of providence to disturb or alter these general laws."⁸¹ Depending on these antecedents, he initially asks the following questions in relation to the subject of suicide: "has not every one of consequence the free disposal of his own life? And may he not lawfully employ that power with which nature has endowed him?"⁸² For Hume, "In order to destroy the evidence of this conclusion, we must show a reason why this particular case is excepted. Is it because human life is of such great importance, that it is a presumption for human prudence to dispose of it? But the life of a man is of no greater importance to the universe than that of an oyster."⁸³ Besides, he touches upon the point that "Were the disposal of human life so much reserved as the peculiar province of the Almighty, that it were an encroachment on his right for men to dispose of their own lives, it would be equally criminal to act for the preservation of life as for its destruction."⁸⁴

Hume also strongly opposes the idea that suicide is a complaint against the act of God with the following words:

I am only convinced of a matter of fact which you yourself acknowledge possible, that human life may be unhappy; and that my existence, if further prolonged, would become ineligible: but I thank providence, both for the good which I have already enjoyed, and for the power with which I am endowed of escaping the ills that threaten me. To you it belongs to repine at providence, who foolishly imagine that you have no such power; and who must still prolong a hated life, though loaded with pain and sickness, with

⁸¹ Hume, David. *Selected Essays/ David Hume*, edited with an introduction and notes by Stephen Copley and Andrew Edgar. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, p.319.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

shame and poverty. Do not you teach, that when any ill befalls me, though by the malice of my enemies, I ought to be resigned to providence; and that the actions of men are the operations of the Almighty, as much as the actions of inanimate beings? When I fall upon my own sword, therefore, I receive my death equally from the hands of the deity as if it had proceeded from a lion, a precipice, or a fever.⁸⁵

In this first oppositional point, he touches upon that “It is a kind of blasphemy to imagine that any created being can disturb the order of the world, or invade the business of providence! It supposes, that that being possesses powers and faculties which it received not from its creator, and which are not subordinate to his government and authority.”⁸⁶

On the other hand, Hume also argues that “A man who retires from life does no harm to society: he only ceases to do good; which, if it is an injury, is of the lowest kind.”⁸⁷ Thus, suicide by ceasing to do good to society only breaks the reciprocity principle in one’s relation to the society. This principle asserts that one who does no more good to society should not take advantages of it anymore but Hume asks the following question at this point: How could one who depart from this life be bounded by this principle any more? Furthermore he also asks that why should one continue to live a pathetic life only for the sake of his duties towards society at the end of which public may or may not get a little insignificant benefit from him? For Hume, there is no such moral obligation to continue to live under miserable circumstances for the sake of such reciprocal relations between the individual and the society.⁸⁸ “In more extreme situations, we are actually burdens to others, in which case our deaths are not only ‘innocent, but laudable.’”⁸⁹

⁸⁵ Hume, David. *Selected Essays/ David Hume*, edited with an introduction and notes by Stephen Copley and Andrew Edgar. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, p.320.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p.322.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid., pp.322, 323.

⁸⁹ Cholbi, Michael. “Suicide”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Suicide (Fall 2009 Ed.), edited by Edward N. Zalta. Available at: <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2012/entries/suicide/>; accessed 21 March, 2012.

Finally, Hume sees no transgression in suicide either in terms of one's duty to himself depending on the fact that "age, sickness, or misfortune, may render life a burden, and make it worse even than annihilation."⁹⁰ In this regard, as an answer to the "worries that people are likely to attempt to take their life capriciously", Hume asserts that "our natural fear of death ensures that only after careful deliberation and assessment of our future prospects" we would contemplate suicide.⁹¹

By all these refutations, Hume criticizes the arbitrary damnations of suicide that are made in reference to natural law. The following words that he writes in the last note to his essay on suicide summarize this attack:

It would be easy to prove that Suicide is as lawful under the *Christian* dispensation as it was to the *heathens*. There is not a single text of scripture which prohibits it (...) Resignation to providence is indeed recommended in scripture; but that implies only submission to ills that are unavoidable, not to such as may be remedied by prudence or courage. *Thou shall not kill* is evidently meant to exclude only the killing of others over whose life we have no authority (...) For all the law of *Moses* is abolished, except so far as it is established by the law of Nature; and we have already endeavoured to prove, that Suicide is not prohibited by that law. In all cases *Christians* and *Heathens* are precisely upon the same footing; *Cato* and *Brutus*, *Arria* and *Portia* acted heroically; those who now imitate their example ought to receive the same praises from posterity. The power of committing Suicide is regarded by *Pliny* as an advantage which men possess even above the deity himself. *Deus non sibi potest mortem consciscere, si velit, quod homini dedit optimum in tantis vitae poenis.* ['God cannot, even if he wishes, commit suicide, the supreme boon that he has bestowed on man among all the penalties of life.' *Pliny, Natural History, 2.5.27.*]⁹²

Within the framework of all the arguments that are introduced in this chapter suicide is presented being rid of its moral and criminal damnations. Thus, it could be argued that these alternative viewpoints on suicide that are manifested both in ancient and early modern times has tried to decriminalize and secularize the act at least to a degree but the actual point that should be emphasized here is that the arguments

⁹⁰ Hume, David. *Selected Essays/ David Hume*, edited with an introduction and notes by Stephen Copley and Andrew Edgar. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, p.323.

⁹¹ Cholbi, Michael. "Suicide", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Suicide (Fall 2009 Ed.), edited by Edward N. Zalta. Available at: <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2012/entries/suicide>; accessed 21 March, 2012.

⁹² Hume, David, *Selected Essays/ David Hume*, edited with an introduction and notes by Stephen Copley and Andrew Edgar, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, pp. 394, 395.

especially manifested by the Stoics proves us that life has not been always regarded as better than death on any condition by all the ruling thoughts of an era just as it is accepted without questioning in modern times. As Stoics suggests that sometimes living could be really ill and thus could be worse than death but this viewpoint makes no sense for a modern mind that is totally constructed upon the omission of human mortality. Now, we will continue with analyzing the emergence and the development of social and political forms that enable the construction of modern mind and its discursive truths in relation to the construction of suicide as an abnormality and as a sickness.

CHAPTER 4

A FOUCAULDIAN PERSPECTIVE ON SUICIDE AND MODERNITY: TRANSITION FROM SIN TO SICKNESS

Initially, it should be indicated that in this chapter, the mental transformation through which suicide has started to be seen as an abnormality and as a sickness and no more regarded as a sin or as an immoral act will be analyzed with a Foucauldian perspective since the aforementioned mental transformation is totally a product of the modernity and its discursively constructed truths. It is through this radical mental transformation, —that normalities and abnormalities have started to be defined and have become the perfect tools to control the every single part of our lives. However this is a complicated process to summarize with a few words and under one title, thus we will briefly analyze the process one by one under different titles in this chapter.

4.1. Modernity and Abnormality

In this chapter, firstly we will analyze the development process of the specific mentality of modern era that grounds on a great obsession with reason to understand the complex relation between modernity and the construction of the categories of normality and abnormality. Secondly, we will focus on the crucial role that is played by the rising field of medicine in the development of these constructions. In this part, we will specifically touch upon the point that how moral and ethical judgments are replaced with medical ones with this rising role of medicine through the different transformation processes. And lastly, we will look over how modern forms of power are developed through and depended on the continuous construction of these categories of normality and abnormality. Within this framework, we will analyze the development of normalization processes that are built on these complex constructions and emphasize the significance of these processes as social control mechanisms within the context of modern society.

4.1.1. Modernity, Reason and Abnormality

It could be claimed that the obsession with reason is the ultimate carrier of the new mentality that is born out of the rise of modern era since through this obsession with reason not only rationality has been empowered as an almighty power but also inevitably irrationality has been constructed as its other to make this almighty power stand upon a solid ground. Thus, traditional society which is based upon mythical thought and religion is radically replaced with modern secular society that is based upon rational thought.

This transition is critical because it indicates a radical change in the understanding of human beings about themselves, about the world and about all the forms of existence through which they are related with this world. And the most central base of all these transformations is developed with the construction of the modern subject whose sole reliance point is her/his rational faculty. By this construction, modern human being who is also made an individual now is condemned to her/his reason and through this condemnation, complex mechanisms of power and social control are knitted all around her/him in all the parts of modern society.

As Foucault and other post-structuralist theorists emphasize, modernity is indeed a distinct way of thinking simultaneously creating a certain intellect and a certain individual that is peculiar to this mode of thinking. This peculiar mode of thinking is highly capable to hide itself and its supportive constructions and thus presents modern reason-centered mind and modern rational subject as if they were existent before the advent of modernity and as if they were just freed from their chains with the rise of the Enlightenment. However, as the word construction suggests the modern rational subject is nothing but the intentional creation of modernity to support the developing control mechanisms of modern society.

According to Foucault, the construction of modern subject is realized through different but interrelated modes of objectification one of which is the objectification

of the subject through ‘dividing practices’ that at the end creates the categories of normality and abnormality.⁹³ And through these practices of division, the modern subject “is either divided himself or divided from others.”⁹⁴ Thus, the categories of “the mad and the sane, the sick and the healthy” and alike are constructed in the form of the opposite poles.⁹⁵ This is the most common way through which ‘disciplinary systems’ constitute themselves in modern society since only by these classifications they “hierarchize, supervise, and so on, come up against those who cannot be classified, those who escape supervision, those who cannot enter the system of distribution, in short, the residual, the irreducible, the unclassifiable, the inassimilable”⁹⁶ just as rationality has become an almighty power by rising upon the construction of irrationality as its other. Hence, the notion of the norm is created within the context of modern society to serve as “the principle of division and normalization”⁹⁷ and domination has begun to show itself through the notion of normality by constructing abnormality as its other. Therefore, it could be argued that “right from the very start (...) the individual is a normal subject”⁹⁸ because the assumption that there is the individual, the subject and the norm before their discursive construction is totally an illusion that is created by the modernity and its peculiar systems.

It means that there is no emancipation for human beings that comes with the rise of reason as it is presented by the age of Enlightenment and its supporters and there is no “pre-given, unified subject or an unchanging human essence that precedes all social operations”⁹⁹ as it is presented by the theories of this age of reason. Thus,

⁹³ Foucault, Michel. “The Subject and Power”, *Critical Inquiry*, vol.8, no.4: 777-795. The University of Chicago Press, 1982, p.777.

⁹⁴ Ibid. pp.777, 778.

⁹⁵ Ibid. p.778.

⁹⁶ Foucault, Michel. *Psychiatric Power: Lectures at the College de France, 1973-1974*, translated by Graham Burchell and edited by Jacques Lagrange. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, p.53.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p.55.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p.57.

⁹⁹ Best, Steven and Kellner, Douglas. “Foucault and The Critique of Modernity.” In *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations*. Houndmills: Macmillan, 1991, p.51.

within this framework, “destruction of the subject”¹⁰⁰ rises as the initial way to resist modern and postmodern forms of control mechanisms. Besides as Foucault suggests “denormalization necessarily entail the destruction of the individual as such.”¹⁰¹ However, initially the ways through which norms and the categories of normality and abnormality are constructed in modern society should be analyzed to understand how modern or postmodern forms of social control mechanisms work and to search for the ways of resistance within the framework they constitute.

Now, because of the fact that medicine is now the main field that determines norms in modern society, the next section of this chapter will be focused on the relationship between modernity, medicine and the construction of categories of normality and abnormality.

4.1.2. Modernity, Medicine and Abnormality

There is a close relationship between the construction of the above mentioned notions of modernity and the transformation of medicine into an institutional system which works through nothing but the principle of rationality. With this transformation, the notions of sickness and health have emerged as social constructions to define what is normal and deviant today and thus, while healthiness has been identified with normality, sickness has started to be seen as deviance. This is a critical transformation because the identification of sickness with deviance has become the reference point for the identification of every form of deviance in society with sickness hereupon. Hence, while in traditional, non-secular society rightness and wrongness of one’s acts was determined by religion and morality; in modern secular society, normality has become the reference point to say what is wrong and

¹⁰⁰ Best, Steven and Kellner, Douglas. “Foucault and The Critique of Modernity.” In *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations*. Houndmills: Macmillan, 1991, p.51.

¹⁰¹ Foucault, Michel. *Psychiatric Power: Lectures at the College de France, 1973-1974*, translated by Graham Burchell and edited by Jacques Lagrange. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, p.57.

what is right to do and the criteria that differentiate normal and abnormal has started to be determined under the dominance of medicine.¹⁰²

Medicine occupies such a critical place in modern society because it is the most steady reference point of modern subject's rupture from nature and its constitution as an autonomous being. By being the most reliable supporter of modern subject's arrogance against nature, medicine has gained such a huge power and thus, the practices which were socially excluded by their acceptance as a sin at one time has started to be excluded from both the social and individual body of the modern subject through their acceptance as sickness in modern society. In other words, because of the very fact that sickness has been equalized with abnormality with the rise of modernity, modern society has started to exclude the practices which were used to be the object of social exclusion through their consideration as sin, through their acceptance as abnormality.¹⁰³ However, this does not mean that there is no more sin and immorality in modern society, no wonder some practices are still seen as transgression by different religions and different moral systems but the point is that religious and moral categories and their exclusions do not rely upon themselves anymore because within the context of modern society even they have medicine as their main reference point.

On the other hand, as medicine has begun to determine the borders of normality, another oppositional construction has come to the fore between sickness and naturality and unsurprisingly has been used to equalize normality with naturality and thus, the categories of abnormality has also started to be defined by their incomppliance with nature. But again as the word construction suggests, this is nothing but another creation of modernity to make its control mechanisms work more efficiently.

¹⁰² Turner, Bryan S. *Medical Power and Social Knowledge*. London: Sage Publications, 1995.

¹⁰³ Akçay, Adnan. Lecture presented in *Medical Sociology*. Middle East Technical University, Ankara, 2009.

Hence, it could be fairly claimed that the carrier of social exclusion is no more sinfulness or amorality but abnormality and sickness which are equalized with unnaturality in today's modern world. Even if it is an indirect dominance, medicine has the power to determine what is moral and immoral within this context. As an illustration, the reference points that are used for social exclusion of homosexuality in modern society perfectly reflect this transformation. That is to say, even religion in modern society excludes homosexuals through their acceptance as abnormality, deviance and thus through their acceptance as unhealthiness and sickness. Besides, all these excluding constructions about homosexuality that are used even by religions appeal to the reference point of its unnaturality.

Furthermore, under the dominance of all these constructions, even law began to use medicine as its reference point to identify the criminal. Going back to our example, it could be fairly argued that the divestment of homosexuals from certain legal rights also uses unnaturality, sickness and thus abnormality of homoeroticism to deprive these people from certain legal rights.

To sum up, sickness emerges as nothing but the potential state of social deviance within the context of modern society.¹⁰⁴ However, this is nothing but a complex construction of modernity which is built to operate its social control mechanisms, and to develop a resistance to these constructions is always possible on the point that it turns into a power. Therefore, we will look at how modern forms of power manipulate this ability of medicine to determine sickness and thus abnormality.

4.1.3. Modernity, Power and Abnormality

Societies manipulate notions in coding differentiations between people and to construct their own discourse. That is to say, by continuing redefinition of these

¹⁰⁴ Turner, Bryan S. *Medical Power and Social Knowledge*. London: Sage Publications, 1995.

notions, societies determine who belongs to them and who does not.¹⁰⁵ Thus, power creates different discourses in different times due to the fact that its continuance relies on this manipulation. From this point forth, it could be claimed power constructs its discourse through medicine in modern society because the notions that determine who is and what is either normal or abnormal are started to be constructed by medicine within the framework of modern society.

The new form of power that rises with the advent of modernity is radically different from the earlier ones because while the earlier forms of power has created discourses that are dependent on the administration of death and its absolutist authorizations with sovereignty, the modern form of power which is called as bio-power by Foucault “exerts a positive influence on life, that endeavors to administer, optimize, and multiply it, subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive regulations.”¹⁰⁶ However, to understand the political rationality of bio-power and how it constitutes its mechanisms on the administration of life, not on the authorization of death, and how it creates normalities and abnormalities with the help of medicine, we should make a genealogical look to its roots within the framework of Foucauldian perspective. Therefore, to comprehend the political rationality of bio-power, first “one must contrast the position that emerged during the Classical Age with earlier theories of politics and knowledge.”¹⁰⁷

In this regard, the initial point that should be indicated is that “in Western culture, political thinking was concerned with the just and good life”¹⁰⁸ conventionally and this tradition was preserved for a long period of time until a second type of political rationality which is identified with Machiavelli has risen in the Renaissance era. The

¹⁰⁵ Kılıçbay, Mehmet Ali. “Sunuş.” In Foucault, Michel. *Akıl ve Akıl Bozukluğu Klasik Çağda Deliliğin Tarihi*, translated and introduction by Mehmet Ali Kılıçbay. Ankara: İmge Kitabevi, 2006, pp.7-15.

¹⁰⁶ Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1: An Introduction*, translated by Robert Hurley. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978, p.137.

¹⁰⁷ Dreyfus, Hubert L. and Rainbow, Paul. *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982, p.136.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

emergence of this second type of political rationality which is composed of “the doctrine of the prince and the juridical theory of sovereignty”¹⁰⁹ has constituted the first major break from the traditional Western political thought. However, the later form of political rationality which is known with the name of “*raison d’état*” and the political theory that has developed around this new conception has more radically broken off the bonds with the earlier tradition of political thought in Western culture.¹¹⁰ Although the names of the earliest theorists of *raison d’état* are heaped together with Machiavelli, Foucault argues that their stance in Western political thought is rather different than him because “these men (...) elaborated precise techniques for ordering and disciplining individuals, while still using the mainstream Western tradition of political thought to mask their particular tactics.”¹¹¹ Moreover, as Foucault reports, the emergence of these tactics of theorists of *raison d’état* refers to a radical change in political thought since by these very tactics the state has been purified “from a larger ethical order *and* from the fate of particular princes.”¹¹² Thus, as the concept of *raison d’état* speaks for itself, the state has become “an end in itself”¹¹³ within the context of the theory that has developed around this specific conception. “Their aim, Foucault argues, was the most radical and modern of all. For them, political rationality no longer sought to achieve the good life nor merely to aid the prince, but to increase the scope of power for its own sake by bringing the bodies of the state’s subjects under tighter discipline.”¹¹⁴ Within the context of this radically new form of political thought “bio-power emerged as a coherent political technology”¹¹⁵ however; it has not become the dominant form of power at the dawn

¹⁰⁹ Foucault, Michel. “Governmentality.” In *The Foucault Effect: Studies In Governmentality*, edited by Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991, p.91.

¹¹⁰ Dreyfus, Hubert L. and Rainbow, Paul. *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.137.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.133.

of the Classical Age. The construction of bio-power's dominance would be developed only through the nineteenth century when the combination process of its essential mechanisms which are located at two different poles was completed because only with this combination they began to "form the technologies of power which still recognizably characterize our current situation."¹¹⁶ Thus, only as these two main poles have been combined, bio-power has become the dominant form of power in modern society. Hence, to understand this dominance, initially one should take a closer look at these two different poles of bio-power and their operation mechanisms.

Referring how these two poles are exactly defined by Foucault who comes up with the theory of bio-power will be an appropriate first step at this point and the following words that he wrote in *The History of Sexuality* define these two different poles of bio-power clearly:

One of these poles—the first to be formed, it seems—centered on the body as a machine: its disciplining, the optimization of its capabilities, the extortion of its forces, the parallel increase of its usefulness and its docility, its integration into systems of efficient and economic controls, all this was ensured by the procedures of power that characterized the *disciplines: an anatomo-politics of the human body*. The second, formed somewhat later, focused on the species body, the body imbued with the mechanics of life and serving as the basis of the biological processes: propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity, with all the conditions that can cause these to vary. Their supervision was effected through an entire series of interventions and *regulatory controls: a biopolitics of the population*.¹¹⁷

On the other hand, even though these two poles are defined separately from each other by Foucault, to make it easier for us to understand how bio-power has penetrated into both our individual and social bodies, from the very beginning, these two poles are organized to serve the same aim to construct the society of control which is the form of society that prevails today. Besides, although just the power mechanism that operates at the second one of these poles is seemed to be concerned

¹¹⁶ Dreyfus, Hubert L. and Rainbow, Paul. *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982, p.134.

¹¹⁷ Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, translated by Robert Hurley. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978, p. 139.

with the political structure of the society and thus with the state, indeed ‘disciplinary power’ that operates at the first pole is also a *sine qua non* for the continuance of the state in modern society because human body should be atomized by the mechanisms of its first pole and then it becomes ready for the totalizing practices of the state control. In other words, the atomization of the human body is a *sine qua non* for the operation of the whole system since to be able to totalize human beings, one initially has to make them subjects and the subjugation of the human body could only be possible through their atomization. Therefore, state’s power is and has to be both individualizing and totalizing in today’s society as Foucault suggests.¹¹⁸

This argument of Foucault still has a critical importance for the analysis of political structures because even though today’s society is no more disciplinary but rather a control society the macro-political structures of which are now identified with biopolitics, disciplinary power is still a critical part of the state’s power. Disciplinary power still has such a critical place in today’s society of control because the mechanisms through which the human being turns into a totally docile and productive body still work through discipline. And disciplinary power creates normalized, docile and productive bodies of today’s society primarily through individualization of the human body because it “fastens the subject-function to the somatic singularity (...) by a system of pangraphic panopticism, which behind the somatic singularity projects, as its extension or as its beginning, a core of virtualities, a psyche, and which further establishes the norm as the principle of division and normalization”¹¹⁹

Norm has such a critical place on the operation of disciplinary power since its discourse grounds on a rule which is radically different from the juridical rule of the sovereignty. The discourse of discipline grounds on norm which appears to be a

¹¹⁸ Foucault, Michel. “The Subject and Power”, *Critical Inquiry*, vol.8, no.4: 777-795. The University of Chicago Press, 1982, p.782.

¹¹⁹ Foucault, Michel. *Psychiatric Power: Lectures at the College de France, 1973-1974*, edited by Jacques Lagrange; general editors, Francois Ewald and Alessandro Fontana; translated by Graham Burchell. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, p.55.

natural rule within the systems of disciplinary power.¹²⁰ Thus, “the subject function of disciplinary power is applied and brought to bear on the body, on its actions, place, movements, strength, the moments of its life, and its discourses, on all of this.”¹²¹ Therefore, thinking within the framework of Foucauldian theory of power, one initially should understand “how norms in general establish in individuals a sense of *deviancy* or *abnormality*.”¹²²

As regards to the second pole of bio-power, it is identified rather with the population-oriented political strategies of governments which constitute the most important part of modern society’s macro-political structure. That is to say, with playing such an important role in modern politics, governments have started to discern that “they were not dealing simply with subjects, or even with a ‘people,’ but with a ‘population,’ with its specific phenomena and its peculiar variables.”¹²³ This critical emergence of the concept of population and the mechanisms of control that has developed around it has rendered knowledge a *sine qua non* for modern forms of power. Through the knowledge that is gained from the population and its imposition as truth in modern society, the human body which has turned out to be the subject of modern society has been totalized and through the bio-politics of population. Within this way, initially atomized and subjugated bodies of modern society are reduced into some signs in the different kinds of population analyses and the ones that are few in number are accepted as pathologies with the help of the human sciences and the medicine.

¹²⁰ Foucault, Michel. *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976*, edited by Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana ; general editors, Francois Ewald and Alessandro Fontana ; translated by David Macey. New York: Picador, 2003, p.38.

¹²¹ Foucault, Michel. *Psychiatric Power: Lectures at the College de France, 1973-1974*, edited by Jacques Lagrange; general editors, Francois Ewald and Alessandro Fontana; translated by Graham Burchell. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, p.55.

¹²² Gyllenhammer, Paul. “Normality in Husserl and Foucault”, *Research in Phenomenology* 39: 52-68. 2009, p.53.

¹²³ Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, translated by Robert Hurley. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978, p.25.

Just as the first pole does, the second pole of bio-power also works through the reason-obsessed discourse of modern society. The construction of the modern subject as a rational, conscious being, the unshakeable trust to scientific knowledge and its truth effect, and all the other constructions of modern bio-politics depend on the obsessed glorification of reason by the men of the Enlightenment. While the human sciences in general constructs the human being as a subject who is “normally” rational and conscious, the medicine in modern society dominantly determines the borders of this normality and constructs the scientific knowledge that creates a truth effect within all the parts of modern human subjects’ lives. All of these constructions that are mostly built by the medicine and their penetration into the almost every single part of human life makes politics bio-politics in modern society because the scientific knowledge that is created by medicine is accepted as truth. Thus, it prevails as a rule and the social norms which are the most powerful tools of power within the context of modern society are determined by medicine in this way and medicine uses this power to anomize some groups under certain categories of illness.

This peculiar structure of bio-politics has been constructed as a result of the replacement of the “power of death that symbolized sovereign power” with “the administration of bodies and the calculated management of life.”¹²⁴ With this change, power has become multiple and more extensive and start to administer every single part of the modern individual’s life by turning her/his into some simple numbers in statistical population analyses. “Once the politics of life was in place, then the life of these populations, and their destruction as well, became political choices.”¹²⁵

Within this context, it could be stated that “lives, deaths, activities, work, miseries, and joys of individuals were important to the extent that these everyday concerns became politically useful. Sometimes what the individual had to do, from the state’s point of view, was to live, work, and produce in certain ways; and sometimes he had

¹²⁴ Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, translated by Robert Hurley. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978, pp.139, 140.

¹²⁵ Dreyfus, Hubert L. and Rainbow, Paul. *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982, p.138.

to die in order to enforce the strength of the state.”¹²⁶ However, the first and the most important order of modern society directs human subjects to live because this first order is essential for the modern form of power to maintain its normalizing mechanisms. Thus, death constitutes the power’s limit in modern society. Therefore, we will now analyze this challenging stance of death within the context of modern society.

4.2. Modernity and Death

The perception of death had undergone a radical transformation throughout the time that elapsed between the beginnings of the Middle Ages and the midst of the nineteenth century.¹²⁷ This transformation that is seen in the perception of death is critical in terms of our study since as Ariès states, the phenomenon of death which was “so omnipresent in the past that it was familiar, would be effaced, would disappear”¹²⁸ at the end of this upheaval. Thus, death would be something that is “shameful and forbidden.”¹²⁹ This is a radical turning point because at the end of this process, the phenomenon of death would be thrown out of society almost totally.

Foucault in *The Birth of the Clinic* touches upon the significant effect of medicine in this radical transformation that is seen in the perception of death which culminates in its almost complete exclusion from social domain. According to him, during the period between the eighteenth and the nineteenth century medical knowledge has undergone a serious transmutation process and this is the ground on which the radical change in the perception of death is constructed upon.¹³⁰ That is to say,

¹²⁶ Dreyfus, Hubert L. and Rainbow, Paul. *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982, p.139.

¹²⁷ Ariès, Philippe. *Western Attitudes toward Death: from the Middle Ages to the Present*, translated by Patricia M. Ranum. London: Marion Boyars, 1976, p.85.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Foucault, Michel. *The Birth Of The Clinic*, translated by A. M. Sheridan. London: Routledge, 2003.

In eighteenth-century medical thought death was both the absolute fact and the most relative of phenomena. It was the end of life and, if it was in its nature to be fatal, it was also the end of the disease; (...) Death was that absolute beyond which there was neither life nor disease, but its disorganizations were like all morbid phenomena. In its original form, clinical experience did not call into question this ambiguous concept of death.¹³¹

But as pathology has replaced nosology in medicine towards the end of eighteenth century, the notion of death has given “a more rigorous, that is, a more instrumental status.”¹³² Thus, gradually morbidity has become the most critical focus point of bio-politics to operate its mechanisms of control in modern society.¹³³ From now on in modern society, politics which is now bio-politics first disciplines and then regularize death “by means of forecasts, statistical estimates, and overall measures taken within the institutional frameworks of medicine, epidemiology, and insurance.”¹³⁴ By these means, death has become one of the ultimate categories of abnormality around which the very first forms of social exclusion are constructed.

Indeed, this transformation of medicine is critical in terms of any analysis of modernity since the field itself has turned into an ideology and gone beyond being simply the science of healing by this process of transmutation. This newly emerged form of medicine has become the initial reference point of modern mind that is obsessed with reason and thus it has become the ultimate determiner of normality within the context of modern society. In other words, the criteria of normality in modern society have started to be determined by the criteria of healthiness. Thus, medicine has become the most powerful tool of bio-power in the construction of the categories of reason and unreason, normal and abnormal which are *sine quibus non* of this new form of power to reproduce itself again and again. Death has gradually become one of the initial fields of abnormality within this radical process of change in the nature of power and society because the modern reason-obsessed mind could not deal with anything beyond the end of the body. Its roots are deeply dependent on

¹³¹ Foucault, Michel. *The Birth Of The Clinic*, translated by A. M. Sheridan. London: Routledge, 2003, pp.172,173.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p.173.

¹³³ Foucault, Michel. *The Birth Of The Clinic*, translated by A. M. Sheridan. London: Routledge, 2003.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.13.

the glorification and fetishization of the body and the total end of this great fetish is an ungovernable phenomenon for such unique form of power that builds itself on the administration of life and uncontrollable for its regulatory mechanisms that works through the identification of abnormalities and the determination of certain cures for these illnesses. The critical question that has to be asked at this point is that: What makes the abnormalization of death different and important than the construction of all the other categories of abnormality that has been imposed with a certain truth effect from the very beginnings of modern era? Abnormalization of death and the concomitant exclusion of the phenomenon from society have a critical place in terms of the construction process of modern mind because it is the most original form of exclusion that constitutes the basis for culture of rationality.¹³⁵

Indeed, as Baudrillard argues that whole modern culture could be thought as “just one huge effort to dissociate life and death”¹³⁶ And the greatest dream of modern individual is nothing but the elimination of one side of this bipolar dissociation: It is nothing but getting rid of death totally. This fantasy of modern individual “ramifies in every direction: for religion, the afterlife and immortality; for science, truth; and for economics, productivity and accumulation.”¹³⁷ It is fair enough to claim that this fantasy is peculiar to modern individual of rational culture because “No other culture had this distinctive opposition of life and death in the interests of life as positivity: life as accumulation, death as due payment.”¹³⁸ For Baudrillard, this radical exclusion of death that is peculiar to modern society is rooted in the evolutionism that is deeply penetrated in all the parts of today’s cultural environment because the evolutionist frame of mind has made life a kind of journey ending with death.¹³⁹ The

¹³⁵ Baudrillard, Jean. *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, translated by Iain Hamilton Grant and with an introduction by Mike Gane. London: Sage Publications, 1993, p.126.

¹³⁶ Ibid. p.147

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

evolutionism has created an illusion of the modern subject who dies in a certain moment and this illusion has been supported by both biology and metaphysics.¹⁴⁰

For all these reasons, from the very beginning modern form of power has started to situate itself on the distinction between life and death. From this point forth, directing the modern subject to live has become the initial and the most essential rule of this new form of power since its domination only could be established on life.¹⁴¹ Moreover, it could be argued that death has always become the most ungovernable phenomenon for the control mechanisms of this modern form of power that is defined as bio-power by Foucault. Death has such a radical ungovernability because construction of the absolute distinction between life and death and the glorification of life against death within this distinction have rendered the whole mentality of modernity totally helpless over against anything beyond the end of the body.

On the face of this helplessness, the only thing that bio-power could do is trying to deal with the phenomenon of death with its own way. Therefore, it tries to control it by gathering every single data from it and by degrading the phenomenon totally into some detailed statistics because today “Power is possible only if death is no longer free, only if the dead are put under surveillance, in anticipation of the future confinement of life in its entirety. This is the fundamental Law, and power is the guardian at the gates of this Law.”¹⁴² Thus, in our times, death has become a phenomenon that is related only with the medicine and it has lost even its totality with its division into processes such as brain death and the death of organs.

¹⁴⁰ Baudrillard, Jean. *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, translated by Iain Hamilton Grant and with an introduction by Mike Gane. London: Sage Publications, 1993, p.147.

¹⁴¹ Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, translated by Robert Hurley. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.

¹⁴² Baudrillard, Jean. *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, translated by Iain Hamilton Grant and with an introduction by Mike Gane. London: Sage Publications, 1993, pp. 129, 130.

For all these reasons, modern subject who shows up as a supposedly rational being to the core is totally forgetful when it comes to acceptance of the reality of death. S/he is aware of the limits of her/his body, limits of her/his life and s/he accepts the fact that s/he will die some day but in daily life s/he does not have any patience even to the thought of death, especially to the death of her/his own self because indeed the whole construction of modern mind is grounded on the hidden omission of death. Therefore, modern society has distanced cemeteries from living spaces day by day, and has confined patients of terminal illness in ultra sterilized hospital rooms. Moreover, within such a social culture that excludes death out of the society, modern subject deals serious problems even with the aging of her/his body since her/his aging reminds her/him that s/he is a mortal being. These are serious indications of how modern subject both as an individual and a social body avoids confronting the death of her/his body which in the modern secularized society means the end of everything.

To sum up, modern subject who is supposed to be capable of dealing with anything that life brings with his faculty of reason is paradoxically unable to deal with the most inevitable fact of life —which is death. The source of this inability of modern subject to deal with the inevitability of death is rooted in the becoming of the medicine the principal determiner of social norms and normality. That is to say, by the rise of medicine as the determiner of social norms, death has initially become something to be postponed as much as it is possible to be and thus eventually it has become something that is hardly tried to be eliminated. Therefore, death has eventually become medicalized and by this transformation it has lost its totality and its engagement with life. The medicalization of death is a process that goes hand in hand with the fetishization of the body and both of these transformations are indeed radical results of the shift in the form of power that has started to rise up at the beginnings of seventeenth century. These critical changes that has seen in the form of power and thus in the determination of the social norms and the rising role of the medicine in this determination have also radically changed the perception of suicide. In the following section, this change in the perception of suicide will be analyzed in

detail to understand the features that are extracted from and added to the concept within the context of modern society more clearly.

4.3. Modernity and Suicide

To be, or not to be, that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them. To die: to sleep;
No more; and by a sleep to say we end
The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to; 'tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep;
To sleep; perchance to dream. Ay, there's the rub;
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come,
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause — there's the respect
That makes calamity of so long life.
For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
The pangs of disprized love, the law's delay,
The insolence of office, and the spurns
That patient merit of the unworthy takes,
When he himself might his quietus make
With a bare bodkin? Who would fardels bear,
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
But that the dread of something after death,
The undiscover'd country from whose bourn
No traveller returns, puzzles the will,
And makes us rather bear those ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of?
Thus conscience does make cowards of us all,
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprises of great pitch and moment,
With this regard their currents turn awry
And lose the name of action¹⁴³

This harangue of Hamlet manifests not only a perfect illustration of one's questioning of her/his own being which gives birth to the idea of suicide but also accounts for why it is always so hard to choose to end one's own life whatever the conditions that directs her/his to think about it. Conscience says Hamlet is the reason that blocks the idea of suicide to turn into act. And he attributes this block to the

¹⁴³ Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*. London: Dover Publications, 1992, pp.53, 54.

obscurity of death that overgrows in the conscience and brings about a great anxiety that falls into the heart.¹⁴⁴

On the other hand, beyond these essential questionings on “to be or not to be”¹⁴⁵ that could indeed potentially be immanent to anybody, suicide as a socially constructed conceptualization has undergone serious transformations through the history. Even though, the greater part of the ideas that are developed on suicide have always been on the against side all through the history, a critical shift has risen in the transformation process of the phenomenon after the coming of modern era and its *ratiōnis*-centered thought and this shift has radically changed the nature of ideas that excludes suicide out of the society.

As mentioned in detail in Chapter II, in pre-modern periods, according to moral and philosophical arguments that are against suicide, the act was “a transgression —a challenge to the authority of God and sovereign— one that required punishment that at the same time was visible (...), had material consequences (as a form of redress), and was also in some ways symbolically excluding (profane burial in unconsecrated ground).”¹⁴⁶ Therefore, the act of suicide was generally accepted as a sin and as a crime within these periods. However, with the rise of modern era suicide has started to be perceived no more as a sin or as a crime, it has started to be seen as just an indication some failure in a certain body.

Though this transformation seems so naive and even emancipatory, indeed it is certainly not. The rising way of thought within modern era has exposed the phenomenon of suicide to other forms of exclusion which are in some ways harsher than earlier ones. In other words, while decriminalizing the act and challenging the idea that it is a sin against the authority of God; modernity has exposed the phenomenon of suicide to harder forms of control within the framework of its

¹⁴⁴ Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*. London: Dover Publications, 1992, pp.53, 54.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Marsh, Ian. *Suicide: Foucault, History and Truth*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, p.88.

medicalization. Thus, suicide has started to be seen as an indication of irrationality, as a result of a certain sickness. Therefore, it has started to be constructed as an abnormality and pathology. Moreover, it could be fairly argued that suicide has become the greatest pathology of modern society because of the challenge that it brings upon the very first order of modern form of power –that is to live.

The point is that this greatest pathology that is created by modern social norms indeed stands in a paradoxical position since it has the greatest potential to break the chains that control the body through normalization processes within the framework of modern society. In other words, this great potential that lies in suicide has its very grounds on its own (almost absolute) pathologization within the context of modern society.

Now, we will initially look at the abnormalization process of suicide within modern society and then in the second part, we will focus on the ungovernable origin of this pathology and discuss the potential that comes along with this ungovernability.

4.3.1. Construction of Suicide as an Irrationality/Abnormality/Pathology

Towards the end of seventeenth century, in the context of rising age of Enlightenment, suicide is started to be seen as a physiological malfunction or as a state of madness by the greater part of the intelligentsia of the era. Therefore, they more and more started to think that the question of suicide belongs to the field of medicine much more than it belongs to the field of morality. By this way, suicide has been decriminalized and to a large extent has relieved from its moral damnations by these changing thoughts of the intelligentsia on the subject and the rapidly developing scientific studies of the era.¹⁴⁷ However, this does not mean that suicide has become a socially accepted phenomenon within the context of rising modern era. On the contrary, modernity has exposed the phenomenon of suicide to harder forms of exclusion step by step through its medicalization.

¹⁴⁷ Minois, Georges. *İntiharın Tarihi: İstemli Ölüm Karşısında Batı Toplumunu*, translated by Nermin Acar. Ankara: Dost Kitabevi, 2008, p.276.

As no rational being will voluntarily give himself pain, or deprive himself of life, which certainly, while human beings preserve their senses, must be acknowledged as evils; it follows, that everyone who commits suicide is indubitably *non compos mentis*, not able to reason justly; but is under the influence of false images of the mind, and therefore suicide should ever be considered an act of insanity.¹⁴⁸

According to Minois, these words of Rowley symbolize the critical call that has been made for putting an end to the eighteenth century debates on the subject of suicide and it is actually a clear proof of a process of evolution that is seen in the perception of the phenomenon which would be completed at the end of the century.¹⁴⁹

This is a critical turning point since within this evolution process the perception of suicide has radically changed and it has started to be seen as a kind of madness. By this way, it has freed from its moral and criminal damnations and the severe punishment practices that comes along with them. However, for the medicalization process of suicide, the initial acception of the phenomenon as a form of madness was just a starting point, this process would continue in high speed within the climate of changing social norms in the nineteenth century. But before continuing to analyze this process, firstly we should explain why and how suicide has started to be identified with madness and why this is so critical for our analysis.

That is to say, newly rising age of Enlightenment has situated its solid ground on a grand trust on the rational faculty of human being in the eighteenth century and thus anything that could be identified with irrationality has started to be seen as a threat to society and thus defined as a form of anti-sociality. Besides, the major category of irrationality has been identified with madness within the context of this new age of reason and thus madness has begun to be seen as a serious threat to the social and political constructions of this new era. Therefore, the most urgent maneuver for the

¹⁴⁸ Rowley, William. *A Treatise on Female, Nervous, Hysterical, Hypochondriacal, Biliious, Convulsive Diseases; Apoplexy and Palsy; With Thoughts on Madness, Suicide, etc.* London: C. Nourse, 1788, p.343.

¹⁴⁹ Minois, Georges. *İntiharın Tarihi: İstemli Ölüm Karşısında Batı Toplumunu*, translated by Nermin Acar. Ankara: Dost Kitabevi, 2008, p.281.

continuance of new form of power which defines itself with the rationality within this age has become the confinement of madman in isolated asylums.

On the other hand, with rapidly developed confinement practices that have been used on madman, the notion of madness has entered another critical process of transformation and madman has begun to be defined as mental patient at the end of this transformation. The status of patient has attached to madman since he has started to be seen as a reformable, reverse being that could be brought into the society again. This is a critical attachment because in this way the conception of mental illness is constructed as the other of reason.

Indeed, the whole mentality of modernity, the seeds of which are sowed in the age of Enlightenment is actually constructed upon the production of binary oppositions. And within this framework, rationality which is the most essential principle of this mentality could only define itself as the other of irrationality. Moreover, to continue and strengthen this mentality, it has to be imposed that anything that is defined as irrationality could always turn into rationality by the help of some certain cures which are also indeed nothing but the constructions of this new mentality. In other words, not only the construction of irrationality but also the imposition of its curability has become *sine qua non* for the continuity of social order with the advent of modernity. For the very reason, definition of mental illness as the major category of irrationality and manifestation of its curability has also become *sine qua non* for rationality to preserve its reign.

Within this transformation process, psychology has emerged as a discipline that determines the categories of newly rising notion of mental illness and with this power “psychological autopsy studies have sought to correlate acts of self-destruction with categories of mental illness.”¹⁵⁰ On the other hand, developing construction of the confinement process in lunatic asylums has given way to the

¹⁵⁰ Marsh, Ian. *Suicide: Foucault, History and Truth*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, p.65.

science of epidemiology to impose some scientific/medical information as truth on all the defined forms of mental illness including suicide and thus it has started to “establish the truth of suicide in terms of quantifiable factors such as age, sex, and means.”¹⁵¹

The creation and development of asylums has a critical place in terms of the construction of medical truths about suicide because asylums have become the places within which madmen has turned into subjects of mental illness.

Within the space of asylum it became possible to observe, classify and control large groups of people, to subject individuals to disciplinary measures aimed at managing the ‘unruly’ but also to ‘reform’ those deemed to have become alienated from their true, rational and calm, natures. Such measures were not wholly repressive, but rather can be read as constituent elements of a power-knowledge network essentially productive in its effects. Through techniques of hierarchical surveillance, normalizing judgement and the examination, extensive detailed knowledge could be produced of the suicidal subject that in turn, in a circular relation, acted to justify disciplinary practices.¹⁵²

By means of such practices, medical data that is produced on suicide within the space of asylum has started to be imposed as truth at the very beginnings of the nineteenth century and since then the approach to madness and thus to suicide has radically changed. As Foucault argues, “since the mid-nineteenth century, the threshold of sensitivity to madness has considerably lowered in our society; the existence of psychoanalysis is evidence of this lowering in that it is an effect as well as a cause of it.”¹⁵³ This lowering threshold of sensitivity has severed the exclusion practices that have imposed on madness which has started to be conceptualized as mental illness and thus suicide which has also started to be seen as an outcome of some kind of mental illness has been subject to those severed practices of exclusion.

Lately in twentieth and twenty-first centuries, “studies into the biology and genetics of suicide risk have looked to find evidence of neuro-chemical, neuro-anatomical or

¹⁵¹ Marsh, Ian. *Suicide: Foucault, History and Truth*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, p.65.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p.95.

¹⁵³ Foucault, Michel. *Mental Illness and Psychology*, translated by Alan Sheridan, foreword by Hubert Dreyfus. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987, p.78.

genetic abnormalities that could explain why people kill themselves. It is this meeting of science and medicine that dominates the field of suicide studies.”¹⁵⁴ In this way, the phenomenon of suicide on which the essential questions of philosophy are manifested is tried to be totally purified from its philosophical bases and turned into a number in some statistical data analyses.

Through this meeting of scientific study and medical/psychiatric practice the truths of suicide have come to be (and continue to be) formed. Such ways of thinking and acting come together to produce and reproduce a form of suicide that could be characterized as individual, pathological and medical. Suicide is taken as arising as a consequence of mental illness, a form of pathology or abnormality situated within the individual, and thus a matter of medical/psychiatric concern. It is now difficult to talk of suicide without recourse to some notion of mental illness, usually depression, or reference to the ‘mental state’ of the person involved.¹⁵⁵

The medicalization and scientification of suicide is indeed a perfect indicator of the radical change in the form of power the evolution process of which has started in the seventeenth century and still continues today. As mentioned in previous sections of this chapter, “sovereign power was essentially a ‘right of seizure: of things, time, bodies, and ultimately life itself. The punishment of suicides deemed *felo de se* by means of the confiscation of goods and the denial of a Christian burial thus could be read as an expression of such a form of power”¹⁵⁶

However, bio-power which has started to take the place of sovereign power in the seventeenth century has totally changed the perception of suicide because politics has become the politics of life by this radical shift of the form of power and this has made suicide a problem of “governmentality.”¹⁵⁷ This change has made it so hard to govern suicide because the challenge that lies in the core of the phenomenon is against the most essential imposition of bio-political society: life is better than death

¹⁵⁴ Marsh, Ian. *Suicide: Foucault, History and Truth*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, p.65.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p.97.

¹⁵⁷ For an extensive explanation of the term, see Foucault, Michel. “Governmentality.” In *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, edited by Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.

on any ground. Thus, within this context, suicide emerges as a single-formed phenomenon which only could be seen as pathology. Such an absolute pathologization of suicide indeed results from the ungovernable challenge that is executed by suicide which will at the same time give the enormous potential to the phenomenon to resist but before getting this point first we should explain how suicide emerges as an ungovernable phenomenon within the context of modern society and the bio-power that governs all the parts of the modern subject in one way or another.

4.3.2. Ungovernability of Suicide

Construction of modern mentality that makes even death something should be forgotten has rendered suicide something completely unreasonable and irrational. Therefore, suicide has been pathologized to the bitter end by the help of medicine that emerges as an ideology in modern society and tried to deal with this extremum point of irrationality by producing countable data from the phenomenon as much as possible. But any endeavor that tries to deal with suicide by producing data from it is indeed vain, since the challenge that is immanent to the phenomenon is against the basic principles of the age of reason that condemns the modern subject to her/his reason and prioritizes life over death. Kay Redfield Jamison's *Night Falls Fast* (1999), a *New York Times* bestseller, which tries to deal suicide with statistical datum that are produced on the subject by the help of many different well-known and developing fields of medicine, is a perfect illustration of such a vain endeavor.¹⁵⁸

In this regard, "Foucault enlists us to see what happens when we re-consider and destabilize the avowedly incontrovertible employment of demographic statistics in the study of suicide"¹⁵⁹ Foucault argues that the science of demography is nothing but a means for the control of the body in accordance with the principles of

¹⁵⁸ For a critical analyses of Jamison's book, see Akçay, Adnan. "Eleştiri ve Özeleştirim En Nazik Biçimi: İntihar!", *Virgöl*, no:83, 2005.

¹⁵⁹ Marsh, Ian. *Suicide: Foucault, History and Truth*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, p.6.

panopticism and he asserts that the emergence of suicide as an intolerable problem within the context of modern society is mostly processed by the development of this new technology of bio-power —that is demography. And he explains the inevitability of this intolerance against suicide within the context of capitalist modern society with the great need of all the economical, political and social structures of modern society for tamed and rationalized human bodies. He hits the right notes with this explanation since the preservation of human body is inevitably the most initial aim of the modern society in which human beings are considered as work force capitalist economy and subjects of analyses to produce political-sociological knowledge. Hence, it could be fairly argued that human body's preservation is important only in the context of its involvement into production processes of capitalist economy and the constitution of its very being the subject of analyses for any kind of sociological analyses. But this is indeed enough for State to take any measure to preserve the lives of every human body ironically including the lives of marginalized groups who has situated on the margins of society by the practices of normalization that are imposed upon those groups by the very bio-political tactics of the State. As a matter of fact, this is the only way of bio-power to deal with voluntary death since death constitutes its limits and therefore it has to postponed as much as possible and thus for bio-power every suicide is untimely and unacceptable. As the title of Jamison's book suggests, suicide is a *Night Falls Fast*¹⁶⁰ for the modern mind since it radically challenges the primacy of life over death and in this way it challenges the most essential and unconditional affirmation of modern society. Therefore, it could be argued that ungovernability of suicide is indeed both the cause and result of the astonishment of modern society on the face of suicide.

Suicide could not be controlled by the help of the demographical technology since it transcends the political and social truths of modern age all of which are constructed depending on principle assignment of human rationality as an almighty power and designed to provide the government of life by bio-political techniques. This

¹⁶⁰ Jamison, Kay Redfield. *Night Falls Fast: Understanding Suicide*. New York: Vintage Books, 1999.

transcendence of suicide stems from the fact that it could not be administered by the techniques and tactics of governmentality all of which are grounded upon the demographical analyses of social and political phenomenon and designed to provide flawless exercise of bio-power.

This inability of bio-power to govern suicide results with the extreme pathologization of the phenomenon because the only way to deal with an ungovernable phenomenon is to expose it to complex forms of exclusion within the context of modern form of power that could only create and maintain its existence by negating its other. Besides, within the context of modern society and the tactics that operates in its every single part, the body of the modern subject has become fetishized and confined within regulations that come with its extreme glorification. The phenomenon of suicide is a rebel against this fetishization of body since it brings the end to all the regulations that surround it. However, because of the fact that the end of the body means the end of everything in modern society, suicide has become pathologized more than ever before.

The point is that this ungovernability has given suicide an incomparable potential to resist within the context of modern society in which every sphere of life is surrounded by the relationships of power. That is to say, the whole mentality of the modern society and bio-power is grounded on the affirmation of life in opposition to death and this has made suicide the most ungovernable phenomenon of modern society and thus this mentality has condemned suicide to the most extreme forms of social exclusion. Therefore, it is possible to argue that suicide is the point where bio-power operates its most intense strategies and thus it makes suicide the most pathological abnormality of today's society of control. Indeed, it is no surprise that such a mentality that is built upon the administration of life conceptualizes suicide as the most irrational act of the human body because it is the most uncontrollable part of the life of modern individual who has been made the subject of this peculiar mentality and has been motivated to subjugate herself/himself with her/his own reason. But, as resistance emerges where there is power, the most unique form of

resistance emerges at the point where voluntary death challenges the most initial construction of bio-power —priority of life over death— at the point where the modern subject individual chooses not to choose life. In this regard, Marsh states that “within a bio-political economy of power suicide represents something of a challenge to those techniques and strategies that aim to foster health and vitality (in short, life itself) in the face of disease and decay (and ultimately death).”¹⁶¹

¹⁶¹ Marsh, Ian. *Suicide: Foucault, History and Truth*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp.98, 99.

CHAPTER 5

(RE)DEFINITION OF PHILOSOPHICAL SUICIDE

5.1. Redefinition of Philosophical Suicide

Choose life. Choose a job. Choose a career. Choose a family. Choose a fucking big television. Choose washing machines, cars, compact disc players, and electrical tin openers. Choose good health, low cholesterol and dental insurance. Choose fixed-interest mortgage repayments. Choose a starter home. Choose your friends. Choose leisure wear and matching luggage. Choose a three piece suite on hire purchase in a range of fucking fabrics. Choose DIY and wondering who the fuck you are on a Sunday morning. Choose sitting on that couch watching mind-numbing spirit-crushing game shows, stuffing fucking junk food into your mouth. Choose rotting away at the end of it all, pissing your last in a miserable home, nothing more than an embarrassment to the selfish, fucked-up brats you have spawned to replace yourself. Choose your future. Choose life (...) But why would I want to do a thing like that? I chose not to choose life. I chose something else. And the reasons? There are no reasons.¹⁶²

In this chapter, we will make a redefinition of a dichotomous separation between two major categories of suicide and this separation which has a critical importance for the aims of the study will refer primarily the categorical type which is defined as philosophical suicide. Once, this term of philosophical suicide is clearly redefined within our study it will determine our specific framework and keep out the other categories of suicide from the discussions that will be operated on the issue of philosophical suicide. The whole of these other types which do not belong to the category of philosophical suicide for different reasons will be defined under the same general title of practical suicide to keep the specificity of the subject. As might be expected, drawing the line between these two categories of suicide will be both the most critical and the most difficult point of such a dimidiation. On the other hand, to draw such a line, the redefinition of philosophical suicide within our study should also be clearly separated from its earlier definitions. But making a general redefinition of philosophical suicide and its distinctive features will be the initial point of the study at this juncture.

¹⁶² Trainspotting, directed by Danny Boyle, written by Irvine Welsh and John Hodge, performed by Ewan McGregor, DVD, Figment Films, 1996.

Philosophical suicide is in the simplest term, choosing death because of the very existence of life itself, it is choosing not to choose life not because of anything, any pain that is brought by life to somebody but because of the burden and the weight of life that is independent from personal matters. More specifically, within this study, philosophical suicide refers an existentialist denial of life that sees nothingness in being and being in nothingness at the same time. There is no individual reasoning of not choosing life in our peculiar definition of philosophical suicide. Philosophical suicide is choosing not to choose life not because of any specific reasons as the character of Renton in *Trainspotting* indicates.¹⁶³ It simply refers unworthiness of life to be chosen for somebody and it is independent from any reason other than life itself.

Most of the texts that refers the conception of philosophical suicide explains the phenomenon as choosing death when life becomes insufferable for somebody for some philosophical questionings of his/her own life but within the framework of our redefinition, philosophical suicide neither refer refusing life when it brings misery more than satisfaction nor it depends on individual reasons even if these reasons could be regarded as philosophical more than practical ones. Within our thesis, philosophical suicide refers a denial of life because of the weight of life on anybody and everybody who is convicted to be born.

On the other hand, earlier studies which define the conception of philosophical suicide mostly refer the place of suicide in philosophy or in other words they talk about some general philosophy of suicide, but in our thesis, we indicate an immanent philosophy that lies within the specific kind of suicide at issue. The immanent philosophy of this specific kind of suicide is rather critical to deal with because indeed this is the point from which all the other philosophical questionings has risen. Camus touches upon this vital point by stating that “There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth

¹⁶³ *Trainspotting*, directed by Danny Boyle, written by Irvine Welsh and John Hodge, performed by Ewan McGregor, DVD, Figment Films, 1996.

living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy.”¹⁶⁴ However, at this juncture, it should be cleared that even though he fairly mentions about the importance of the phenomenon, Camus also indicates a general stance of suicide in philosophy, not the philosophy that lies within any specific kind of suicide.

Philosophical suicide has a peculiar *potentia(l)* that could not be seen in any other kind of suicide and this *potentia(l)* makes it a power and a resistance at the same time in Foucauldian terms. Indeed, it is this *potentia(l)* that creates the peculiar philosophy that lies within only one kind of suicide which is defined as philosophical within the framework of our thesis. Besides, this immanent *potentia(l)* has a critical importance in terms of invalidating the harsh criticisms that were directed to the philosophers who manifest defending or insightful thoughts about the phenomenon of philosophical suicide because as Minois indicates that most of these criticisms accuse these philosophers with only speaking about the suicide and being not really disposed to commit to the act.¹⁶⁵ But philosophical suicide should be seen as a potency which could only be killed by itself and thus the following fact should not be ignored: The moment when the potency in philosophical suicide is turned into an act will be the moment when it is turned into an impotency. Still, this does not mean that philosophical suicide as an act does not say anything but as soon as it turns into an act, philosophical suicide will lose all the power it has and it will finish all the possible words that it could say. Thus, accusations on the philosophers who talk about the rightfulness of philosophical suicide but who do not commit to the act himself/herself should be reconsidered by paying regard to this *potentia(l)* in suicide which is the killer of itself.

The potency in philosophical suicide is the most important feature that is absent in all the other kinds of suicide since this is the feature that turns suicide into something creative, and something that frees not only our minds but also our bodies, and

¹⁶⁴ Camus, Albert. *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, translated by Justin O’Brien. New York: Vintage Books, 1955, p.3.

¹⁶⁵ Minois, Georges. *İntiharın Tarihi: İstemli Ölüm Karşısında Batı Toplumunu*, translated by Nermin Acar. Ankara: Dost Kitabevi, 2008.

something rebellious and resistant. By considering this *potentia(l)* that lies in philosophical suicide, one could understand why all the great philosophers who write and speak about suicide directly or indirectly speak about the insignificance of life with an insightful view do not commit the act nevermore or wait until their older ages or at least be in need of writing thousands of pages or speaking millions of words about the issue before they kill themselves while any other actor of practical suicide generally writes a short note or does not say anything at all when s/he decides to kill herself/himself. This *potentia(l)* in philosophical suicide is the thing that makes Cioran to write quite a lengthy book about *Trouble With Being Born* and not to kill himself instead.¹⁶⁶

On the other hand, speaking of suicide, making theories, writing thesis or books on the issue is something problematical in its essence because suicide itself speaks with silence and absence. In this regard, generating so many words on suicide could easily be meaningless or inconsistent with this silent essence of the issue. But if one does not speak of suicide with an aim of dealing with it and choose to understand the potency within it, s/he could elude vainness and contradictoriness of the attempt and in this regard, philosophical suicide could be defined as the sole form of the phenomenon that could create such an escapology from the almost inevitable vainness and contradictoriness of the studies on suicide. Thus, only a study on philosophical suicide could let the *potentia(l)* of suicide that resists, rebels, and that liberates our minds and bodies. Besides, philosophical suicide is the perfect form of suicide for such a study as being the unique form of suicide that makes its actor or thinker to write or speak of thousands of words on the issue or sometimes makes him/her to express this rebellion against life by means of a kind of art but in any case it is the unique form of suicide that pushes its actor to create something that represents this denial of life because the silence in philosophical suicide tells countless words about life that could not be easily found in any other silence in any other form of practical suicide.

¹⁶⁶ Cioran, Emil Michel. *The Trouble With Being Born*, translated by Richard Howard. New York: Seaver Books, 1976.

As regards to the relation between philosophical suicide and society, initially, it should be indicated that however, it seems to be intrinsic to its actor, every suicide is certainly a sociological phenomenon. Though, it should also be cleared that we do not refer to a Durkheimian approach in our study of suicide while attributing it as a sociological phenomenon. Every kind of suicide is sociological in one way or another and it is not because of some statistical and typological framework that we could put suicides into but because of the power of society to lead or to restrain the body towards or from its own end. Artaud has a point in saying he has “*been suicided*”¹⁶⁷ but these words should be considered with reference to this power of the society. On the other hand, the way in which different kinds of suicide are related to the society changes substantially. While almost all kinds of practical suicide are related to an outbreak of an individual over against a certain situation that the society in which s/he lives has put her/him into, some suicides rebel against a situation that affects more than a certain body, or they are directly political acts just as suicide bombing, but still the way in which all of these different kinds of suicide are related to the society is radically different than the way in which philosophical suicide is.

There is a great paradox in the way that philosophical suicide is related to the society since on one side, it is deeply and widely attached to it but on the other side it is almost completely independent from it. Philosophical suicide is related to the society in the widest sense amongst all the other kinds of suicide because in a sense, it is a radical rebel against all the framework that is drawn by even the possibility of the society but on the other hand it is independent from it since any change in social norms or in certain social situations in any scale could not have any significant effect on the rise of philosophical suicide inside a certain body. Indeed, contingency of philosophical suicide is a seriously problematic issue because it grounds on no specific reason but also on all possible reasons at the same time. This also makes philosophical suicide is the most radical form of suicide for the modern mind that is obsessed with the reason.

¹⁶⁷ Artaud, Antonin. *Artaud Anthology*, translated by Jack Hirschman. San Francisco: City Light Books, 1965, p.60.

On the other hand, developing a possible debate over the political essence in philosophical suicide would not be any simpler than the debate over the relation between philosophical suicide and society but inclusion of such a discussion is also critical to clarify what we refer with the term of philosophical suicide in our study. This discussion will be operated through focusing upon the differences between the political essence in philosophical suicide and the other political or apolitical characteristics of other kinds of suicide and in this regard, the *potentia(l)* in philosophical suicide will play a major role also within this discussion because the *potentia(l)* in philosophical suicide is the thing that makes it something political. The initial point that could be mentioned about the political essence in philosophical suicide is that it is not something ideological. Thus, political essence in philosophical suicide has nothing to do with directly political acts just as the practices of suicide bombers which reduce the act to an instrument of reaching the paradise at once. Moreover, suicide bombing situates further away from philosophical suicide than any other forms of practical suicide when they are linked together according to political essence that lies within the *potentia(l)* of philosophical suicide because as the political essence in our conception of philosophical suicide liberates the body, so the political character of suicide bombing confines it to a simple tool for ideological aims. On the other hand, the kinds of suicide that could be named as practical suicide which are not directly political or ideological could share the political essence in philosophical suicide to a degree because they are also a form of rebel which at least does not reduce the body to a simple instrument. Even if, these forms of practical suicide are against very personal matters, this rebellious character makes them political somehow.

But as philosophical suicide is a perfect way to indicate a denial of life as imposed as a confection and all the things that it brings out, as mentioned in previous parts of the chapter, it stands for a refusal of the first and the most essential order of the modern society which says live, or even if you have to die, die normally. Thus, the political *potentia(l)* in philosophical suicide is more radical and meaningful in contrast to any other political character in any other form of suicide within the context of modern

politics because it neither speaks through direct ideological means nor rebels partially against personal and practical matters. In today's society, politics operates through social norms and human beings as subjects of this society are governed with continuously changing standards of normality that are constructed and reconstructed again in everyday in every field of modern life. The fact that these social norms are continuously changing is critical at this point since this is what renders suicide radical among other resistance mechanisms of modern society. That is to say, there is only one single constant order of modern society as mentioned above, it says live or even if you have to die, die normally. Suicide challenges this one single constant order of modern society and resists against the administration of life but in the instances of practical suicide, it is hard to speak about a political potential, because in practical suicide there is no clear intention for the destruction of the modern imposition that prioritize life over death. On the other hand, in philosophical suicide there is an apparent call for an end —an end of everything. This will to destruct in philosophical suicide that is unapparent in any other forms of practical suicide differentiates the political potential of this radical form of suicide from others because, as Bakunin states “the passion for destruction is also a creative passion”¹⁶⁸ and such a passion is peculiar to this specific kind of suicide that is redefined as philosophical suicide within our study.

5.2. A Reconsideration of Heidegger's *Dasein* in Relation to Philosophical Suicide

Before going into the following chapter in which we reconsider existentialist readings of suicide in the context of philosophical suicide, we should also pay attention to Heidegger's theory on being and its finitude since taking human being as *Dasein* in Heidegger's terms could bring a new perspective to our study. Heidegger's theory is critical for our thesis because it brings a new perspective to the definition of being. As the term speaks for itself, *Da-sein* indicates being as “*being-there*”, as

¹⁶⁸ Bakunin, Mikhail. *Statism and Anarchy*, translated and edited by Marshall S. Shatz. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990, p.224.

“*being-in-the-world*” which refers an awareness of being of oneself that is considered to be existent only in human beings among all the other things by Heidegger because according to him only human beings reflect on their being, on the question of “what is to be.”¹⁶⁹

The rather important point of Heidegger’s theory on *Dasein* for our thesis is that such an awareness of being of oneself makes *Dasein* is the only being that could also be aware of its finitude and its end/its death. However, death or more precisely *dying* in Heideggerian terms should be considered existentially since it does not refer to a biological death which is an event. This existential understanding of death in Heidegger makes *Dasein* dying in every moment of his/her life. Thus, *Dasein*’s “*being-toward*” do not only indicates a “*being-in-the-world*” but also a “*being-toward-death*”. In other words, *Dasein* is not only a being who is aware of his/her “*being-in-the-world*” but also aware of his/her “*being-toward-death*”. This awareness of “*being-toward-death*” is critical for Heidegger’s theory because this is the thing that gives *Dasein* the chance to be an authentic “*being-in-the-world*” yet the issue of authenticity and its relation to death is a rather problematic point of Heideggerian theory on being. From a Heideggerian perspective, *Dasein*, by being aware of its death, its “*being-toward-death*” has a potential to be a more authentic being and this makes Heidegger to consider death as a possibility. But the question should be asked at this point: How could this consideration of death as a possibility and the relation of the awareness of *Dasein*’s “*being-toward-death*” with authenticity in Heidegger’s theory help us to bring a new perspective to our study on philosophical suicide?¹⁷⁰

Initially, Heidegger, himself, does not tell much about suicide directly but at least, it is clear that Heidegger regards suicide as an inauthentic attitude just as “denying,

¹⁶⁹ Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*, translated by Joan Stambaugh. New York: State University of New York Press, 1996.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

forgetting, fearing, dwelling on it.”¹⁷¹ But, the following question should be asked at this point: How while he considers death as a possibility and while he assumes a close relationship between the awareness of *Dasein*’s “*being-toward-death*” and authenticity, he locates suicide together with other inauthentic attitudes of *Dasein*? This consideration of suicide as an inauthentic attitude by Heidegger grounds on his differentiation between death and demise since for Heidegger, committing suicide means opening up the possibility to choose the time of our demise but it has nothing to do with using the potential (to develop an authentic attitude) in *Dasein*’s awareness of “*being-toward-death*”. Thus, it could be argued that suicide is an inauthentic attitude for Heidegger because it means that *Dasein* who kills herself/himself is not aware of her/his *being-toward-death*, in other words, s/he is not aware of that s/he is dying in every moment of her/his life.¹⁷²

These Heideggerian thoughts on suicide, indeed, has a point when we think about the practical forms of suicide since we could talk about an absence of *Dasein*’s awareness of “*being-toward-death*” in practical suicide which is, in a sense, desire for a demise. But we could not talk about absence of such an awareness in philosophical suicide because the source of philosophical suicide is life itself and as the death lies within life in Heideggerian theory, it could also be stated that philosophical suicide, actually, dying because of death, it is dying because of an awareness of *Dasein*’s dying all the time. In Heideggerian terms, it might be stated that philosophical suicide is dying because of authenticity. Heidegger neglects this potential of suicide to open up the possibility of death but it lies at the very heart of philosophical suicide. Indeed, this neglect of Heidegger is based on his early assumption of suicide as a single-formed phenomenon. But as mentioned at the very beginning of our study, there is no single form of suicide, there are suicides and taking the phenomenon as an easily defined, single-formed issue makes any analysis problematic from the very beginning.

¹⁷¹ Inwood, Michael. *A Heidegger Dictionary*. Maiden: Blackwell Publishers, 1999, p.45.

¹⁷² Inwood, Michael. *Heidegger: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

5.3. A Reconsideration of Schopenhauer's Philosophy in Relation to Philosophical Suicide

Lastly, making a reference to Schopenhauer's thoughts on suicide will be substantially in point because he could be fairly considered as the one who makes the first extensive and critical philosophical reading of the phenomenon, following early arguments of Hume against the common acceptance of suicide as a sin or as a crime. In addition, dealing with Schopenhauer's thoughts on suicide at this point will be also punctual since they neither can be dealt with under the title of pre-modern or early-modern alternative readings of suicide nor they are directly related with existentialist thought to locate them under the title of next chapter.

To understand Schopenhauer's arguments on the subject of suicide more clearly, initially, the distinction that he makes between "representation (*Vorstellung*)" and "Will (*Wille*)" has to be introduced because his whole theory develops on the ground of this distinction. These two concepts are this much crucial and essential to understand Schopenhauer's thought since they correspond to two different states of human consciousness for him. With the term representation, he refers a kind of ordinary consciousness by which one understands the reality as it appears to him/her. Whereas the concept of Will in Schopenhauer's thought refers a really complicated idea that could not be defined easily. However, in the simplest term, Will refers "a mindless, aimless, non-rational urge at the foundation of our instinctual drives, and at the foundational being of everything."¹⁷³ On the other hand, this differentiation of Schopenhauer between the two different states of consciousness corresponds to the two different sides of the world: the world as will and representation. "The world as Will ('for us', as he sometimes qualifies it) is the world as it is in itself, and the world as representation is the world of appearances, of our ideas, or of objects."¹⁷⁴ These differentiations have critical importance to understand both Schopenhauer's

¹⁷³ Cholbi, Michael. "Suicide", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Suicide (Fall 2009 Ed.), edited by Edward N. Zalta. Available at: <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2012/entries/suicide>; accessed 21 March, 2012.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

general philosophy and his specific arguments on the issue of suicide because through these differentiations he reflects his “violence-filled vision of the daily world”¹⁷⁵ and he searches for escapes from this daily world towards more peaceful states of consciousness. He “pursues this by retracing the path through which Will objectifies itself.”¹⁷⁶ He discovers more peaceful states of mind by directing his everyday, practically-oriented consciousness towards more extraordinary, universal and less-individuated states of mind”¹⁷⁷ And at the end of this search Schopenhauer visions a few ways to reach such a peaceful and transcendent state of consciousness, one of which is aesthetic perception and the other one is moral awareness. But for Schopenhauer “aesthetic perception offers only a short-lived transcendence from the daily world. Neither is moral awareness, despite its comparative tranquillity in contrast to the daily world of violence, the ultimate state of mind.”¹⁷⁸ But he thinks that

a person who experiences the truth of human nature from a moral perspective will be so repulsed by the human condition, and by the pointlessly striving Will of which it is a manifestation, that he or she will lose the desire to affirm the objectified human situation in any of its manifestations. The result is an attitude of the denial towards our will-to-live, which Schopenhauer identifies with an ascetic attitude of renunciation, resignation, and willessness, but also with composure and tranquillity.¹⁷⁹

This is the respect within which Schopenhauer considers the possibility of thinking suicide as an alternative ascetic attitude of willessness, however, he reaches the conclusion that because of the fact that suicide indeed doesn't deny will-to-live, but on the contrary, most suicides can be thought as an act of will, it is an illusion to consider it as an alternative way of ascetic renunciation of will. That is to say, for Schopenhauer, denial of the will to live arises from a flight from the pleasures, not from the sufferings of life. For this very reason, suicide which is considered as an

¹⁷⁵ Cholbi, Michael. “Suicide”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Suicide (Fall 2009 Ed.), edited by Edward N. Zalta. Available at: <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2012/entries/suicide>; accessed 21 March, 2012.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

escape from the sufferings of life is a long way off from being a denial; on the contrary it is a substantial affirmation of this will.¹⁸⁰ To be more precise, for Schopenhauer, suicide arises from the dissatisfaction with the conditions, under which life presents itself to its individual actor; otherwise it has nothing to do with the denial of the will to live.¹⁸¹ “Just because the suicide cannot give up willing, he gives up living. The will asserts itself here even in putting in an end to its own manifestation, because it can no longer assert itself otherwise.”¹⁸² Thus, however, Schopenhauer is strongly opposed to the ethical damnation and exclusion of suicide by the most philosophers and religions, he thinks that “suicide thwarts the attainment of the highest moral aim by the fact that, for a real release from this world of misery, it substitutes one that is merely apparent.”¹⁸³ Therefore, for Schopenhauer, “suicide, the wilful destruction of the single phenomenal existence, is a vain and foolish act; for the thing-in-itself remains unaffected by it.”¹⁸⁴ However, he is certainly against the criminalization of the act and thus states that “from a *mistake* to a *crime* is a far cry; and it is as a crime that the clergy of Christendom wish us to regard suicide.”¹⁸⁵

As it is clearly seen, these considerations of Schopenhauer on suicide depend on the initial differentiation that he makes between the Will and representation and the impossibility of the exact disposal of Will. Moreover, on this ground, Schopenhauer develops his asceticism as a sole way for the denial of the will-to-live and on this ground, he locates suicide far from reaching this willlessness. He considers suicide only as a disposal of an individual manifestation of Will. For Schopenhauer when one commits suicide, s/he destroys only his individuality which is only an

¹⁸⁰ Schopenhauer, Arthur. *Studies in Pessimism*. Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, 2004.

¹⁸¹ Schopenhauer, Arthur. *The World as Will and Idea*, translated by R.B. Haldane and J. Kemp. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1896, p.515.

¹⁸² *Ibid.* p.516.

¹⁸³ Schopenhauer, Arthur. *Studies in Pessimism*. Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, 2004, p.29.

¹⁸⁴ Schopenhauer, Arthur. *The World as Will and Idea*, translated by R.B. Haldane and J. Kemp. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1896, p.515.

¹⁸⁵ Schopenhauer, Arthur. *Studies in Pessimism*. Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, 2004, p.29.

unsubstantial part of Will. Besides, far from desroying Will, for Schopenhauer, suicide does not even cause a significant weakening of Will since by rejecting life's pains, not its pleasures, it contrarily strengthens Will. Thus, for Schopenhauer who especially deals with the ethical side of suicide, it is not a crime or not a sin but it is a vain and illusory act to answer the question about to be or not to be. For him, only by his ascetic lifestyle through which one denies life's pleasures, one could weakens the Will.

The most problematical point of Schopenhauer's thought on the issue is that he deals with suicide as if it has to be a denial of life's pains. Indeed, this presumption of Schopenhauer has a more rightful point when we consider the practical forms of the phenomenon, but suicide could not be considered necessarily as a denial of life's pains. Especially, philosophical suicide in its unique meaning that is defined within this study does not fit into this incapacious presumption about the phenomenon. Furthermore not only philosophical suicide has a potential to be a denial of everything and every feeling that life brings, but also some instances of practical suicide could be a denial of both life's pleasures and pains.

The actual problem of this approach results from the acceptance of suicide as a single-formed violent act. As we emphasize in this study, this is a really illusory presumption to start with any study about suicide since it renders the rest of the study mistaken in one way or another since such a presumption leads one to make overgeneralizations about the phenomenon. In this regard, it could be fairly claimed that taking suicide simply as denial of life's pains is one of the major instances of these kind of overgeneralizations. By making such an overgeneralized assumption, Schopenhauer fails to understand the potential in suicide to be a denial of anything and everything. This is indeed a big mistake to make since this potential to deny anything in life and everything that it brings to us is the actual reason of why there are suicides, not the suicide and this is the reason of why suicide has a potential to go beyond boundaries. Moreover, this definition of suicide as denial of life's pains is specifically unsuitable for our peculiar and redefined form because philosophical

suicide denies everything that life includes, not only its pains. Indeed, this is the feature that makes philosophical suicide radically different than other forms of the phenomenon.

The second point of Schopenhauer's thoughts on suicide that should be discussed especially within the scope of philosophical suicide is about the potential to deny the will-to-live. Indeed, Schopenhauer determines a good point to focus on by indicating the importance of denial of the will-to live but he deals with this focus point from a slightly different perspective than ours. Initially, he deals with suicide from an ethical perspective and in this regard, however he strongly refuses that suicide is immoral, because of the fact he conceptualizes the phenomenon as denial of life's pains, he considers suicide as a strong affirmation of Will. And because of the fact that "The Will is the great evil that accounts for the misery of all beings"¹⁸⁶ for Schopenhauer, suicide is a foolish act that strengthens this great evil. Truly, defining Will as the unconscious struggle in ever being in the world to rather be than not to be, as the will-to-live in being and determining this Will as the source of the misery of all beings is in a sense closer to the motive in philosophical suicide since the misery of philosophical suicide or its problem with the world and with the life is sourced from to be existent, to be convicted to be born, and to be filled with all the instincts of survival. Thus, it could be argued that life and will-to-live this life in any way is evil for philosophical suicide, too. But, denial of will-to-live is not an ethical issue for our study as it is for Schopenhauer; we rather deal with this denial as potency. On the other hand, due to the fact that for Schopenhauer freedom of the will in conventional sense is inexistent and ultimate disposal Will in his conception is impossible and suicide is nothing but the strong affirmation of the Will, he promotes a tolerable life in which one denies pleasures and desires of life and in this way weakens the Will by his asceticism.

In short, Schopenhauer touches upon a really good point about the issue but his extreme focus on Will and his unique definition of it causes him to make some

¹⁸⁶ Krishnananda, Swami. *Studies in Comparative Philosophy*. Divine Life Society, 1999, p.110.

misconceptualizations. That is to say, even if we take Will in Schopenhauer's terms as mentioned before we could not reduce suicide simply to the denial of life's pains, especially our philosophical suicide does not fit into this definition. On the other hand, even if we take Will in Schopenhauer's sense and think it as nondisposable, unconscious urge that transcends individual wills, why one should only deny life's pleasures but not pains to weaken it? Indeed, it could be argued that philosophical suicide in its unique form fits into denial of Will in Schopenhauer's terms more than his ascetic lifestyle because denying both pains and pleasures of life could have a more significant potential to weaken the will-to-live that is supposed to be existent in all beings and that is supposed to be a part of a great evil Will by Schopenhauer.

CHAPTER 6

EXISTENTIALIST READINGS OF SUICIDE AND A RECONSIDERATION IN THE CONTEXT OF PHILOSOPHICAL SUICIDE

6.1. Existentialism of Sartre on Suicide

After making a reconsideration of Heidegger's theory on being in previous chapter starting this chapter with reference to Sartre's thoughts on being and death will be relevant, because Sartre's thoughts not only assist us to develop our critical stance about Heideggerian understanding of being and death, but also directly improve our thoughts concerning the subject of our study. But to realize both of these aims, we should principally go into the details of Sartre's thought on death in general before coming to his specific points on the subject of suicide.

At this juncture, for Sartre the initial point that has to be taken into account about the phenomenon of death is the necessity to think the phenomenon as a boundary because this character of death is the feature that makes it Janus-faced just as any other boundary is.¹⁸⁷ This point is crucial because Sartre makes reference to a critical change that is seen in the apprehension of death and he explains this change which transforms the phenomenon from "pre-eminently non-human" to "an event of life" with this Janus-faced character.¹⁸⁸ This change is critical for Sartre because he thinks that it indicates the humanization of death which also brings about the interiorization of the phenomenon. For Sartre, in the wake of this change "death is no longer the great unknowable which limits the human; it is the phenomenon of my personal life."¹⁸⁹ But what is more important at this point is that according to Sartre, this

¹⁸⁷ Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, translated and with an introduction by Hazel E. Barnes. New York: Philosophical Library, 1956, p.531.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., p.532.

humanization and interiorization of death realizes through the individualization of the phenomenon.

For Sartre, Heidegger is the one who gives a philosophical ground for this critical change at the end of which the phenomenon of death becomes humanized.¹⁹⁰ He thinks that Heidegger starts the humanization of the phenomenon of death with its individualization because he uses the *Dasein*.¹⁹¹ That is to say, he firstly gives an incomparable individuality to the phenomenon of death by attributing it the only thing which cannot be done by anybody else on behalf of nobody and by attributing death as “the peculiar possibility of the *Dasein*”¹⁹² Heidegger individualizes both the phenomenon of death and the peculiarly defined authentic existence of *Dasein* simultaneously because in Heidegger’s thought, only by projecting itself towards death, *Dasein* could attain authentic existence. Hence, for Heidegger, “If the meaning of our life becomes the expectation of death, then when death occurs, it can only put its seal upon life.”¹⁹³ But these peculiar thoughts of Heidegger on death are clearly improper for Sartre even if it is crucial to take them into account while considering any theory on life and death. Sartre confutes these critical but improper thoughts of Heidegger on death by focusing on two specific points: Firstly, there is no incomparable individuality of death for Sartre because even if we consider death as a possibility, we have to admit that none of our possibilities can be done by anyone else. So, there is no peculiar individuality of death that originates in its untransferability.¹⁹⁴ Secondly, death is not a phenomenon that could be expected for Sartre, because one could not know whether it is coming closer to him/her or moving away from her/him.¹⁹⁵ For Sartre, one could only wait for a particular death but elusiveness in the nature of death infects even the particular kind of expected death.

¹⁹⁰ Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, translated and with an introduction by Hazel E. Barnes. New York: Philosophical Library, 1956, pp.533, 534.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p.534.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, pp.533, 534.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, p.533.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.534.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.536.

To this respect, according to Sartre, death could not be claimed even to be as one of the possibilities of a person since “perpetual appearance of chance at the heart of my projects cannot be apprehended as my possibility but, on the contrary, as the nihilation of all my possibilities a nihilation which *itself is no longer a part of my possibilities.*”¹⁹⁶ Therefore, for Sartre, “death is never that which gives life its meanings; it is, on the contrary, that which on principle removes all meaning from life. If we must die, then our life has no meaning because its problems receive no solution and because the very meaning of the problems remains undetermined.”¹⁹⁷ This is the point from which Sartre goes into the subject of suicide and accepts it as an escape and negates it but also this is the point from which Sartre negates life through death because for him the very existence of death makes life meaningless. That is to say, for Sartre we must “consider our life as being made up not only of waitings but of waitings which themselves wait for waitings (...) These waitings evidently all include a reference to a final term which would be waited for without waiting for anything more.”¹⁹⁸ And because of the very fact that the death itself lacks any future to give meaning to it, it does not only make our lives absurd and meaningless but also dooms itself to be stuck in the absurdity. But the following passage summarizes Sartre’s point more specifically on the subject of suicide:

Suicide can not be considered as an end of life for which I should be the unique foundation. Since it is an act of my life, indeed, it itself requires a meaning which only the future can give to it; but as it is the last act of my life, it is denied this future. Thus it remains totally undetermined. If I escape death, or if I "misfire," shall I not judge later that my suicide was cowardice? Will the outcome not show me that other solutions were possible? But since these solutions can be only my own projects, they can appear only if I live. Suicide is an absurdity which causes my life to be submerged in the absurd.¹⁹⁹

However, the uniqueness of philosophical suicide among other forms of suicide makes us reconsider these precious thoughts of Sartre on death and suicide which builds up the origins of existentialism. This is especially crucial for our study

¹⁹⁶ Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, translated and with an introduction by Hazel E. Barnes. New York: Philosophical Library, 1956, p.537.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.539, 540.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.538.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.540.

because it is the existentialist thought that gives us the basic incentives to deal with the topic of philosophical suicide within the framework of this thesis. It is the existentialist thought that makes us redefine the concept of philosophical suicide and attribute it a unique character depending on the peculiar *potentia(l)* that lies in the phenomenon. Thus, expectedly, the points that are touched upon by Sartre on the subject of suicide are not in complete contradiction with our view points on the subject matter of this thesis but they have to be rehandled by taking into consideration the peculiarity of philosophical suicide.

In this regard, the initial point to make is that when we consider practical forms of suicide, Sartre is quite right to speak of the absurdity of the phenomenon because just as Sartre argues as an act of one's life, practical forms of suicide destroys all the future possibilities that could give a meaning to the act. But on the other hand, philosophical suicide in its specific meaning that is defined in our study is not doomed to be stuck in absurdity because philosophical suicide is redefined within this thesis as a potency which is the killer of itself and as emphasized in its redefinition, the moment when it is turned into an act will be the moment of its dissolution as a *potentia(l)*. Thus, when we think in the light of existentialist thought and speak in Sartre's terms, the moment when philosophical suicide is turned into an act will be the moment that it is stuck in absurdity because dissolution of philosophical suicide as a possibility will relieve it of all the potency it has and thus will make the suicide of its actor wasted away in absurdity. Hence, Sartre is quite right to touch upon the fact that since the act denies any future, the act of suicide is kind failed in any attempt to render its actor's death meaningful but the point that is ignored or could not be seen by Sartre is that suicide in its unique form that is defined as philosophical in our study, could be thought as a potency, as a freedom to challenge the meaninglessness and the absurdity of life.

On the other hand, from a different viewpoint, it could be considered that Sartre's existentialist thought strengthens our claims about the phenomenon of philosophical suicide. That is to say, philosophical suicide is a unique form which critically differs

from the other forms of the phenomenon by being existent as a *potentia(l)*, not as an act. Indeed, this is the point that enables this unique form of suicide to open the ways for resistance, rebellion and freedom. This pivotal point of our study could be considered as in accord with Sartre's thought because unless it is turned into an act as a practice of suicide, at least under the definition of having some sort of awareness about the meaninglessness of life, an attitude that is similar to our philosophical suicide is not only appreciated but also glorified by Sartre. But still, as Camus points that despite the fact that Sartre's existentialism glorifies the awareness about the absurdity of life, it unfortunately fails to develop a rebellious stance towards it. Though, philosophical suicide in our terms is a *potentia(l)* that opens up a possibility to rebel and to reach some sort of freedom on the face of the absurdity of life. Thus, however, Sartre's existentialism indirectly feeds and supports us on the point that when it turns into an act, suicide is convicted to exhaust all the possibilities of one's life and death, the awareness about the meaninglessness of life does not make existentialist thought see the *potentia(l)* in philosophical suicide because it fails to see the phenomenon of suicide as potency. Furthermore, this awareness in existentialism unfortunately could not prevent Sartre to collect all the forms of the phenomenon under the same heading and accept all of them as cowardice.

On the other hand, Camus criticizes Sartre's thoughts on the basis of his rejection of despair that is developed on the face of the meaninglessness of life and he develops his own thoughts on the phenomenon of suicide on this basis. But the significant and critical thoughts of Camus on the phenomenon of suicide which include deep criticisms of Sartrean existentialism have also seriously problematical points in itself. Even so, at this point continuing with these deeply detailed thoughts of Camus on the phenomenon of suicide and on existentialist thinking and reconsidering them in relation to our peculiarly redefined form of philosophical suicide will be very helpful to improve our study.

6.2. Absurdism of Camus on Suicide

Before going into details of Camus's thoughts on suicide, it should be cleared that what he means by the term 'absurd' because even though the term has its origins in the works of Kierkegaard and is also used by Sartre and other existentialist thinkers, Camus is the one who has developed absurdism as a separate school of philosophical thought that differs from existentialist thinking in very critical points.

The conception of the absurd is used by Camus to refer "the gap between human needs and expectations, and an indifferent universe. Thus, for Camus, the absurd does not reside in man alone or in the universe alone, but in the dissonance between them, and learning to live with this dissonance requires first understanding, then acceptance, and, finally, defiance."²⁰⁰ He clarifies his thought on the absurd by the help of *The Myth of Sisyphus*. "The myth outlines the plight of Sisyphus, a figure of Greek mythology, who has angered the gods through his defiance of death and his scorn of the gods' powers."²⁰¹ Camus makes an analogy between the impasse of Sisyphus in the face of the punishment that is given to him by gods as a result of his disobedience and the absurdity of life. In such a way that, "The gods had condemned Sisyphus to ceaselessly rolling a rock to the top of a mountain, whence the stone would fall back of its own weight. They had thought with some reason that there is no more dreadful punishment than futile and hopeless labor."²⁰² For Camus, Sisyphus's punishment perfectly illustrates the repetitious burdens of our modern lives. Hence "the imaginative power of the myth lies in its potential to conjure up the tragic-comic nature of everyday existence."²⁰³ After the clarification of how the absurd is defined by Camus and why the myth of Sisyphus is chosen to illustrate this

²⁰⁰ Cahn, Zilla Gabrielle. *Suicide in French Thought from Montesquieu to Cioran*. New York: P.Lang, 1998, p.365.

²⁰¹ O'Dwyer, Kathleen. "Camus's Challenge: The Question of Suicide", *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 52(2): 165-177. Sage Publications, 2012, p.171.

²⁰² Camus, Albert. *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, translated by Justin O'Brien. New York: Vintage Books, 1955, p.88.

²⁰³ O'Dwyer, Kathleen. "Camus's Challenge: The Question of Suicide", *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 52(2): 165-177. Sage Publications, 2012, p.172.

absurdity, now it is certainly easier for us to analyze how he discusses the relationship between the idea of suicide and the absurdity of life.

In the preface of *The Myth of Sisyphus*, which is essentially designated for the subject of suicide, Camus explains why he discusses this subject broadly in this book by the following words: “it is legitimate and necessary to wonder whether life has a meaning; therefore it is legitimate to meet the problem of suicide face to face.”²⁰⁴ Therefore, all along the book he tries to analyze “the exact degree to which suicide is a solution to the absurd.”²⁰⁵

O’Dwyer argues that about his detailed analysis of the subject which is developed in a certainly critical manner, the initial point that should be emphasized is that “his reflections and explorations are not based on any moral evaluation of the rights or wrongs of suicide”²⁰⁶ Thus, Camus’ “analysis is radically different from many other philosophical discourses, classical and contemporary, which address the ethical complexities and moral ambiguities of suicide from diverse perspectives.”²⁰⁷

With respect to Camus, the consciousness of the absurdity of life arises in us from time to time and once this consciousness arises in us, it makes us forever bound to the serious questionings on the meaning of our own existence.²⁰⁸ And he argues that these moments of consciousness arises in us at the moments of weariness because he

²⁰⁴ Camus, Albert. *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, translated by Justin O’Brien. New York: Vintage Books, 1955.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., p.5

²⁰⁶ O’Dwyer, Kathleen. “Camus’s Challenge: The Question of Suicide”, *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 52(2): 165-177. Sage Publications, 2012, p.169.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Camus, Albert. *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, translated by Justin O’Brien. New York: Vintage Books, 1955, p.24.

thinks that “the stage sets collapse” whence “weariness tinged with amazement” and this collapse “inaugurates the impulse of consciousness.”²⁰⁹

On the other hand, however for Camus life is absurd in that it is meaningless, this meaninglessness does not mean that life is not worth living. According to his perspective, “there is no necessary common measure between these two judgments.”²¹⁰ In other words, for him “the absurdity or the meaninglessness of life does not translate into the conviction that life is worthless” and he illustrates this argument strongly “by the mythical and imaginative reconstruction of the fate of Sisyphus.”²¹¹ Moreover, he thinks that “even amid the absurdity and meaninglessness of the human condition it is possible to approach life positively.”²¹² For the very reason, he states that “one must imagine Sisyphus happy.”²¹³

On these bases, Camus not only rejects suicide as a legitimate response to the absurd but also regards suicide as an escape and cowardice since it is nothing but a result of an ultimate compliance to despair and nihilism. From this point forth, Camus also criticizes Sartrean existentialism and he reports that existentialism takes a very good first step by acknowledging the absurd, yet the second step that is taken by existentialism results with the glorification of despair and this is harshly criticized by Camus.²¹⁴ However, this critique of Camus does not depend on any counter glorification of hope that is raised by him as a result of the acknowledgment of the absurd. He rebuffs hope as an answer to the absurd just as he rejects despair. For Camus, “to despair is to refuse to acknowledge the human condition. It is in a strange

²⁰⁹ Camus, Albert. *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, translated by Justin O’Brien. New York: Vintage Books, 1955, p.10.

²¹⁰ Ibid., p.7.

²¹¹ O’Dwyer, Kathleen. “Camus’s Challenge: The Question of Suicide”, *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 52(2): 165-177. Sage Publications, 2012, p.173.

²¹² Ibid., p.175.

²¹³ Camus, Albert. *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, translated by Justin O’Brien. New York: Vintage Books, 1955, p.91.

²¹⁴ Cahn, Zilla Gabrielle. *Suicide in French Thought from Montesquieu to Cioran*. New York: P.Lang, 1998.

way to rebel because things are not as one might wish them to be. It is a waiting for something better. Hope, claims Camus, serves the same end.”²¹⁵ For him, “the desire for unity and meaning, for sense and purpose, is an understandable aspect of the human condition; however, the individual is confronted by a universe that is indifferent and irrational and that fails to respond to this human demand.”²¹⁶ Therefore, he claims that “to be in hope is to be suspended in the unreal, to await what will never materialize.”²¹⁷

He thinks that this rejection of both despair and hope as an attitude towards the absurd is only way to find an inner freedom. And from this point of view, Camus creates his “absurd hero” in the illustration of Sisyphus which is an ideal type of man who neither sinks into despair on the face of the ‘absurd’ nor has any hope for a better future but only “lives in truth” and just “keeps living the absurd life.”²¹⁸ For Camus, living with the awareness of the absurd is only way to take a defiant stance towards the absurd and to challenge fate and only through this way, one could reach some sort of inner freedom but existentialism by falling into a despairing acceptance in the presence of the absurd, fails to turn the awareness of the absurd to such a rebellious and challenging manner.

Certainly, Camus touches upon very critical points and raises very important questions about the phenomenon of suicide and existentialist thought’s stance about the issue, but Camus’s absurdism itself which stands on a creation of radical absurd hero suggests a lot of critical questions and leaves many of them unanswered just as: How having a kind of awareness and consciousness of the absurd, of the meaninglessness in the world and the incapability of human beings to change this

²¹⁵ Cahn, Zilla Gabrielle. *Suicide in French Thought from Montesquieu to Cioran*. New York: P.Lang, 1998, p.366.

²¹⁶ O’Dwyer, Kathleen. “Camus’s Challenge: The Question of Suicide”, *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 52(2): 165-177. Sage Publications, 2012, p.170.

²¹⁷ Cahn, Zilla Gabrielle. *Suicide in French Thought from Montesquieu to Cioran*. New York: P.Lang, 1998, p.366.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

meaninglessness can be thought as a rebellion on its own? Does not a rebellion, a challenge necessarily mean a sort of taken stance following the development of any kind of awareness? Moreover, how is it possible for one not to think about choosing death once the awareness of the impassable meaninglessness of life is gained by her/him? How choosing death, but not life simply could be regarded as an escape, cowardice or as an ultimate compliance to despair and nihilism? Is not attributing all the chance of developing a sort of defiance that comes after the acquirement of the awareness of the absurd, to simply holding onto this absurd life, not to leave it anyway, some sort of compliance itself? Is not defining a proper way to hold onto the absurd and creating a hero who is an ideal man to hold onto the absurd in this proper way, an indicator of having some sort of hope to find some sort of meaning in life anyway? All of these questions are noticeable indicators of the serious contradictions in Camus's claims on the subject matter but the very partially defined concept of defiance is the most problematical part of his thought because this is the point that makes all of his thought prejudiced against death and in favor of life and with this partial understanding of defiance Camus's absurdism could be denounced for taking a problematical second step just like he criticized Sartrean existentialism to do so. But, at this point, dealing with the contradictions in Camus's arguments one by one will be very helpful to make our point.

To begin with, Camus claims that he denies both hope and despair as a legitimate response to the accepted existence of the absurd. But this denial makes his claims about the issue seriously contradictory initially because, even though he claims that he denies hope as well as despair as a proper response to the absurd life, he develops some sort of hope by the creation of his absurd hero. Moreover, he even mentions about the necessity for development of some values which are supposed to be gained by one to take a defiant stance on the face of the absurd life. Indeed, it could be claimed that the creation of his absurd hero *ab initio* is an attempt to develop some values to hold on to life even if it is defined as absurd by him. In short, however he claims that he denies hope, all the extensive descriptions on the way of becoming an

ideal absurd hero are obvious indicators of the hidden existence of hope in Camus's thought on the subject matter.

On the other hand, this hidden development of hope in Camus's thought does not only make his claims contradictory, but also develops a ground for a discrimination against death and against people who choose to kill themselves because on the ground of his thoughts that are built around his ideal absurd hero and the identified unique way to live the absurd life, the phenomenon of suicide without any specification is accepted as cowardice. This makes Camus's whole theory on the phenomenon of suicide prejudiced even if it takes a significant place in literature because this way of thinking excludes any possibility for a defiance to be born out of the ultimate denial of life. Besides, while this line of thought degrades the idea of suicide on the ground of a consideration that regards the phenomenon simply as compliance to despair and nihilism, its counter proposal fails to develop an idea that properly fits to the idea of defiance and rebel. For Camus, "man must consent to live within truth of his condition" since it is the only way within which "human integrity" could be found.²¹⁹ Thus, he simply suggests keep living the 'absurd life' without developing any hope and any despair and he accepts this stance as the unique way of developing defiance on the face of the 'absurd'. This is nothing but a self-deception since far from being unique way of defiance; it is even hard to accept such a way as an option for taking a defiant stance. Besides, denigration of all the positions of denial that comes after the awareness of the 'absurd', especially denigration of suicide and acceptance of them as escape, as cowardice is indeed a cover for the hidden hope that develops within this prejudiced theory of Camus.

As a matter of fact, this prejudiced view of Camus is based on his treatment of the subject of suicide since he tries to deal with suicide as a problem that should be resolved but as we especially emphasize within this thesis, only a study that does not aim to deal with suicide as a problem but tries to explore the *potentia(l)* that could be

²¹⁹ Cahn, Zilla Gabrielle. *Suicide in French Thought from Montesquieu to Cioran*. New York: P.Lang, 1998.

found within it, could be meaningful. However, Camus importunately claims that suicide is an escape that turns into the consciousness of the absurd into a denial and for this very reason, he charges existentialism with developing a ground for suicide since he thinks that “by escaping into despairing acceptance”²²⁰ existentialism raises such a denial. In very deed, this criticism about existentialist thought reveals another contradiction and misreading in Camus’s theory. That is to say, the perspective of existentialism that is defined as despair by Camus is not an attitude that necessarily leads up to an acceptance. On the contrary, existentialist despair is the epitome of the consciousness that is regarded as *sine qua non* by Camus to realize and to understand the absurd. Furthermore, the existentialist despair is backed up by a viewpoint that finds suicide as meaningless as life itself because of the fact that the act lacks any future and thus any meaning.

In addition, Camus makes the same mistake in his denial of despair just as he does in his denial of hope and he tries to oppose the attitude that exists in his own stance. That is to say, he claims that he denies despair as a legitimate response to the absurd, but indeed, the whole process of taking the first step of becoming an ideal absurd hero depends on to the development of an awareness which could only be attained by the perspective of despair. In other words, Camus’s identification of despair with a sort of denial that certainly results in acceptance makes him not only misread existentialism but also renders him unaware of despair that exists in very own stance of his thought.

In fact, Camus’s prejudiced attitude against death and suicide feeds on his misidentification of despair since this misidentification finally causes him to develop a blurred and contradictory concept of defiance. And by precisely this improper concept of defiance, Camus defines suicide as an escape, as cowardice and by handling the phenomenon of suicide as a single-formed act —most of the great philosophers whose thoughts on suicide is covered within this thesis also do the same

²²⁰ Cahn, Zilla Gabrielle. *Suicide in French Thought from Montesquieu to Cioran*. New York: P.Lang, 1998, p.365.

mistake— he misses the *potentia(l)* in philosophical suicide that could be actually seen as the boldest form of defiance. Though, as Cioran claims that the most heroic stance that is awakened by the consciousness of the meaninglessness in the world, is ultimate denial and such kind of denial could only be found in the *potentia(l)* of the phenomenon that is defined as philosophical suicide within the framework of this thesis. In a sense, both existentialism and absurdism of Camus takes a proper first step by developing an awareness of the meaninglessness of life but they both fail in the second step. For this very reason, continuing with Cioran's thoughts about the meaninglessness of life and about suicide will be suitable at this point since Cioran is more likely to take aforementioned second step properly than Sartre and Camus.

6.3. Nihilism of Cioran on Suicide

For Cioran, life which has no foundation and no meaning could only be challenged by suicide. The reference point of this nihilist view of Cioran on suicide is the awareness about the meaninglessness in the universe just as it is for other existentialist thinkers. However, the same reference point that is used by both Sartre and Camus makes Cioran to develop a considerably different perception of defiance within the meaninglessness of life which at the end makes him to regard suicide as the boldest way to challenge this absurdity.

From this point forth, Cioran argues that the possibility of committing suicide gives us an incomparable power. In this regard he states that “No autocrat wields a power comparable to that enjoyed by a poor devil planning to kill himself.”²²¹ He presents this power as the only one that can never be taken from us within this meaningless universe: “This world can take everything from us, can forbid us everything, but no one has the power to keep us from wiping ourselves out.”²²²

²²¹ Cioran, Emil Michel, *The Trouble With Being Born*, translated by Richard Howard. New York: Seaver Books, 1976, p.104.

²²² Cioran, Emil Michel. *A Short History of Decay*. New York: The Viking Press, 1975, p.37.

This nihilist line of thought that is presented by Cioran roots in his denial of sacredness of existence: For him, acceptance of existence as the most indisputable sacredness is nothing but “the most inexplicable of misunderstandings” since “not only is it no such thing, but it is worth something only insofar as we undertake to keep it from being so.”²²³ This conspicuous resistance of Cioran against the sacredness of existence results in his admiration of sickness and the following words of him explain how he praises morbidity in line with this admiration: “All illnesses are heroic, but with a heroism of resistance, not of conquest. The heroism of illness defends life’s lost redoubts.”²²⁴

In other words, for Cioran “lucidity came only in sickness (...) when one is thrown out of the ordinary.”²²⁵ Therefore, for him “An existence which does not hide a great madness has no value.”²²⁶ Besides, he asserts that once lucidity comes with this great madness, one could not continue to live anymore since s/he becomes “unsuited for life.”²²⁷ From this point forth, he states that “I admire only two types of people: the potentially mad and the potential suicide. Only they inspire me with awe, because only they are capable of great passions and great spiritual transfigurations.”²²⁸

On the other hand, he states that even though “every abyss invites us in” to suicide “all our instincts oppose the act.”²²⁹ For the very reason, Cioran refers suicide as an

²²³ Cioran, Emil Michel. *The New Gods*, translated by Richard Howard. Quadrangle/New York Times Book Company, 1974, p.60.

²²⁴ Cioran, Emil Michel. *On The Heights of Despair*, translated and with an introduction by Ilincaarifopol-Johnston. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992, p.25.

²²⁵ Cahn, Zilla Gabrielle. *Suicide in French Thought from Montesquieu to Cioran*. New York: P.Lang, 1998, p.374.

²²⁶ Cioran, Emil Michel. *On The Heights of Despair*, translated and with an introduction by Ilincaarifopol-Johnston. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992, pp.10, 11.

²²⁷ Cioran, Emil Michel. *The Trouble With Being Born*, translated by Richard Howard. New York: Seaver Books, 1976, p.175.

²²⁸ Cioran, Emil Michel. *On The Heights of Despair*, translated and with an introduction by Ilincaarifopol-Johnston. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992, p.56.

²²⁹ Cioran, Emil Michel. *A Short History of Decay*. New York: The Viking Press, 1975, p.37.

“act for heroes.”²³⁰ For him, all these instincts in us which somehow fight for our survival make the act of suicide seriously hard to dare.

However, Cioran indeed regards freedom to commit suicide, not suicide itself as an indestructible form of power to liberate ourselves from the “irons and the unbreathable air of this world.”²³¹ Thus, it could be argued that for Cioran the possibility of suicide could be taken as the one and only power of us to challenge the meaninglessness of life only when it is seen as a potency because not our suicide but our potential to commit suicide will give us the freedom “and this freedom grants us a strength and a pride to triumph over the loads which overwhelm us.”²³²

On one hand, this approach of Cioran makes his stance on the absurdity of life closer to Camus’s in the sense that he asserts that “The fact that life has no meaning is a reason to live —moreover, the only one.”²³³ On the other hand, unlike Camus, Cioran does not degrade despair and thus intention of suicide as a valid answer to the absurdity of life. On the contrary, he glorifies the courage to accomplish the act. For him, we stay alive only because of the meaninglessness of living and because deciding to die is too logical.²³⁴

Among all the existentialist thought on suicide that is covered in this chapter, this glorification of suicidal inclination by Cioran which indirectly makes him define a form of suicide that emerges as a potential is the most critical one for our study in that we also redefine the conception of philosophical suicide as a potential. And however, Cioran does not make such a definition directly neither he makes any differentiation between any kinds of suicide, his repeating reference to the freedom to kill ourselves or to the freedom to commit suicide emerges as potency. Indeed, the

²³⁰ Cahn, Zilla Gabrielle. *Suicide in French Thought from Montesquieu to Cioran*. New York: P.Lang, 1998, p.378.

²³¹ Cioran, Emil Michel, *A Short History of Decay*. New York: The Viking Press, 1975, p.36.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Cioran, Emil Michel. *Anathemas and Admirations*, translated by Richard Howard. New York: Arcade Pub, 1991.

²³⁴ Cioran, Emil Michel. *A Short History of Decay*. New York: The Viking Press, 1975.

following words of Cioran emphasize this point perfectly: “I live only because it is in my power to die whenever I want; without the idea of suicide I would have killed myself long time ago.”²³⁵ Therefore, our differentiation between philosophical suicide and practical suicide would be really problematical for Cioran even if it is hypothetically made for the analytical aims of this thesis since for Cioran, once the suicidal inclination rise in anybody, the reason that lies behind this inclination does not matter in any sense. He just admires the suicidal attitude towards life.

²³⁵ Cioran, Emil Michel. *All Gall is Divided: Gnomes and Apothegms*, translated by Richard Howard. New York: Arcade Pub, 1999.

CHAPTER 7

PHILOSOPHICAL SUICIDE AS A POTENTIAL FORM OF RESISTANCE TO THE PRIMACY OF LIFE IN MODERN TIMES

By the help of the discussions that are made in the previous chapters we have analyzed initially the transformation of suicide from sin to sickness and the complex mechanisms of modernity that lie behind this transformation and then secondly we have made a peculiar redefinition of the category of philosophical suicide to refer a *potentia(l)* that is rather different from the other categories of suicide which are defined under the title of practical suicide within the framework of this thesis, and lastly we have discussed the critical approach of existentialist thought to the subject of suicide both to clarify what we mean by the term of philosophical suicide and not to lose our critical stance on the subject matter.

Now, to discuss the peculiar potential of philosophical suicide as a form of resistance that rises up within the context of modernity, it is time to return to our main research question that has given us the incentive to write this thesis at the very beginning: How could one decide to kill herself/himself because of the existence of life itself while even death as an inevitability is taken something abnormal in the rationalized minds of modern subjects? Now, we will take a step further and ask the following question: Could choosing to kill your own body to end your existence as a response to the mentality that makes your death the greatest meaninglessness within this totally meaningless universe be thought as a freedom and as a resistance in Foucauldian sense?

This thesis has a clear inclination to give this question a positive answer; however, this answer certainly could not be a simple yes. To give this question a satisfactory answer the peculiar locus of philosophical suicide in modern society should be critically discussed at this juncture. The *potentia(l)* in philosophical suicide has risen up within the context of modern society because modern obsession with the reason

not only has empowered the rationality as an almighty power but also inevitably empowered any kind of irrationality as its other. More specifically, modern mind by rendering any kind of suicide unreasonable, by making even death something should be forgotten has given the philosophical suicide the potency to liberate the body because within the context of modern society, the body become fetishized and confined within a discourse that regulates and glorifies it with the help of the medical field and its transformation into an ideology. Philosophical suicide rebels against this fetishized stance of the body and against all of the regulations that surrounds it. Within this transformational process through modern society, without any exceptional categorizations, the phenomenon of suicide has become marginalized more than ever before and indeed this is one of the crucial points which render the topic of this thesis peculiar and worth to study. The *potentia(l)* of philosophical suicide to resist is especially grand in modern society since as Foucault indicates power has penetrated into in every single part of our lives and it has penetrated into our bodies with the rise of the modernity and as the power has become more intense with this penetration, the *potentia(l)* to resist has also penetrated into our bodies deeply.²³⁶ As a matter of fact, in this regard it could be argued that our study on philosophical suicide clearly indicates the truthfulness of the following words of Foucault: “Where there is power, there is resistance.”²³⁷

On the other hand taking human beings in modern society as subjects in Foucauldian sense suggests the following question: Is freedom of the individual in modern society possible? However, freedom of the individual in society is a lot more complicated issue than giving an answer to this question with a yes or no. Thus, instead of taking such an absolutist stance, one should ask the following question: To what degree and in which ways one could talk about the freedom of individual in modern society? Discussing on the answer of this question is a wide-reaching work to deal within the limits of this study but at least the following question should be discussed for the

²³⁶ Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, translated by Robert Hurley. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.95.

sake of clarity: How does being a subject in modern society affect the possibility of freedom of the individual?

Looking from a Foucauldian perspective, there is always a *potentia(l)* for resistance wherever and in which scale these power mechanisms emerge. Thus, the modern *subject* could not be thought under an absolute form of control and completely devoid of any possibility for any kind of freedom but there is also no possibility for an absolute freedom in modern society of power relations. That is to say, as Foucault indicates power no more shows itself with domination in modern society, it is something relational and within this context, power and freedom could not be thought as the opposites of each other anymore. Moreover, freedom is now the precondition of power because construction of power relations is possible only on the free *subjects* of modern society. Thus, the ambiguity in the word *subject* is properly indicates this janus-faced condition of modern individual because s/he is both a body who is free to choose in accordance with his/her own identity but both the process of construction of this identity and also living and making choices by being tied to this identity is made up of power relations. Concordantly, freedom or resistance in Foucauldian sense could only be thought as a *potentia(l)* in modern society. One could not think of any kind of absolute resistance or any kind of absolute freedom just as the power mechanisms of modern society are no more absolute. This nesting of power and resistance and their extension through micro mechanisms penetrate into both the individual and the social body of modern subject in every sphere of life through both “anatomy-politics of the human body” and “biopolitics of the population” but the following question arises finally at this point: What renders philosophical suicide peculiar and makes it different than other forms of resistance within this context of modern society of “bio-politics”?²³⁸

Above all, suicide is exceptional since it is against the first and the most important regulation of the modern society which directs modern individual to *live*. To direct

²³⁸ Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, translated by Robert Hurley. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.

the individual to live is the initial and essential rule for modern society to maintain its normalizing mechanisms because “it is over life, throughout its unfolding, that power establishes its dominion; death is power's limit, the moment that escapes it; death becomes the most secret aspect of existence, the most ‘private’”²³⁹ and on this limit of power where death begins suicide gains its peculiarity. Indeed, suicide, “strange and yet so persistent and constant in its manifestations, and consequently so difficult to explain as being due to particular circumstances or individual accidents, was one of the first astonishments of a society in which political power had assigned itself the task of administering life.”²⁴⁰ In a society which is under the reign of biopower, the point in question is no more to put forward death in the domain of sovereignty but to deliver life in the domain of capability and value because today's society of normalization is an outcome of a technology of power that centers life.²⁴¹ Within this context of modern society that grounds its mechanisms of power on the administration of life; choosing death remains exceptionally an ungovernable issue. This ungovernability of suicide makes it a perfect instance of resistance in this normalizing society which tries control through measuring, explaining and getting information from every social phenomenon.

Philosophical suicide is a more radical form of resistance than any other form of suicide is because philosophical suicide is not simply escaping from life and from the specific things it brings to somebody, it is choosing death, it is a denial of the very first order of modern normalizing society. It is not choosing death at the expense of being abnormal but it is choosing death because of its abnormality. It is choosing death as a resistance to normality. In this regard, it should be reminded that now within the context of modern society, indeed “normality is death” and when one

²³⁹ Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, translated by Robert Hurley. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978, p.138

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.139

²⁴¹ Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, translated by Robert Hurley. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.

thinks over these words of wisdom that are written by Adorno, it could be stated that philosophical suicide is dying to be alive.²⁴²

On the other hand, while all the other instances of resistance mechanisms of modern society are doomed to lose its abnormality at some point and to turn into another new category of normality within the process of changing social norms and in this way they are doomed to turn into a new social control mechanism, philosophical suicide has a *potentia(l)* to escape this fatal end. Philosophical suicide has such a chance because it has a chance to challenge the condemnation of modern individual to being a subject in one way or another since philosophical suicide has a *potentia(l)* to enable one to be a body who is subject to neither an outsider power mechanism nor a so called self-identity which is indeed nothing short of a product of self-controlling power mechanisms of modern society. Philosophical suicide has such a *potentia(l)* because only when somebody makes a decision, a choice not only with his/her mind but also with his/her body and only when somebody says no to the very first and most essential order of the modern society because of nothing else but the “tragic sense of life”²⁴³, this fatal end could be challenged. Only on the border that separates life and death where all forms of modern power sets its ground, the modern body could pull away from all the subjections/subjugations that are build on her/him. But the ironical point in this challenge is that the possibility to develop such a radical resistance also grounds on a specific identity of a certain body which also somehow has his/her share from the subjugation mechanisms of modern society.

Indeed, a great number of criticism which object to conceptualize philosophical suicide as a peculiar potency and to attribute it such a radical potential of freedom or a potential of resistance could certainly arise out of the discussion we have made above; however, the most important ones that could be possibly developed on our discussion on philosophical suicide and modernity would be the ones that are risen

²⁴² Adorno, Theodor W. *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, translated by E. F. N. Jephcott. London: Verso, 2005, p.56.

²⁴³ Unamuno, Miguel de. *Tragic Sense of Life*, translated by J.E. Cramford Fritch. New York: Dover Publications, 2005.

within the framework of existentialist thought to which our thesis devotes a great place. The possible existentialist critiques that could be made on our thesis are also critical to point because at the very beginning we make a redefinition of philosophical suicide being inspired from existentialist thought. Therefore, we should consider some major existentialist critiques that could probably made on our thesis before we say the final words.

From Sartre's and Camus's front both of which does not accept suicide as a meaningful answer to a meaningless universe, philosophical suicide might not be considered neither as a form of freedom that escapes from the meaninglessness of life neither as a resistance to it. That is to say, for Sartre, there is no escape from this meaninglessness, the only thing that the awareness of this absurdity gives us is despair. Choosing death on the face of the absurdity of life could give any meaning neither to our life nor to our death because for Sartre just as the any kind of death, suicide lacks any future to give meaning to itself. On the other hand, for Camus, the awareness of the absurd which refers the awareness of "the gap between human needs and expectations and an indifferent universe" does not make life unworthy to live.²⁴⁴ For him, living with the awareness of the meaninglessness of human condition without falling into despair is only way to take a defiant stance towards the absurd and only through this way, one could reach some sort of inner freedom. For Camus just like despair, any kind of suicide is an illegitimate response to the absurd moreover it is nothing but an escape that is doomed to be stuck in absurdity. Therefore, however we define philosophical suicide as potency, for Camus there might be no way to see it as a freedom since he even see despair on the face of the absurd illegitimate.

On the other hand, Cioran's approach to suicide which is also discussed under the title of existentialism in our study is a lot closer to our stance than Sartre's and Camus's since his glorification of suicidal inclination makes him indirectly support

²⁴⁴ Cahn, Zilla Gabrielle. *Suicide in French Thought from Montesquieu to Cioran*. New York: P.Lang, 1998, p.365.

our redefinition of philosophical suicide as a potential. His repeating reference to the power of freedom to kill ourselves is highly similar to our acceptance of philosophical suicide as a *potentia(l)* which is the killer of itself as a resistance. Nevertheless, Cioran denies making any differentiation between any kinds of suicide, he just admires to be potential suicide and find it heroic to have courage to turn this potential into an act. Even though, we only make a hypothetical differentiation between philosophical suicide and practical suicide, for Cioran even making such an analytical categorization could be problematic because we in a sense attribute a greater resistance potential to philosophical suicide than practical forms of it and for Cioran suicide in itself “is sufficiently impressive to forestall any petty hunt for motives.”²⁴⁵

²⁴⁵ Cioran, Emil Michel. *On The Heights of Despair*, translated and with an introduction by Ilincaarifopol-Johnston. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992, p.56.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

Even only in consideration of the multiplicity of the arguments on suicide that are rehandled in this study, it could be argued that suicide has always had a significant place in the history of philosophical thought but it is also fair enough to claim that the majority of the ideas that have been manifested on the subject of suicide have always revealed an injurious attitude against the phenomenon. Besides, it is not pretentious to say that this determination is more or less valid for both pre-modern and modern periods because even though the nature of denigration of suicide has radically changed with the advent of modernity, suicide has always had been pushed out of the society all through the conventional history.

On the other hand, even if they have always become a minority, some alternative viewpoints on the subject of suicide which do not blindly condemn the phenomenon have been manifested by some great philosophers. Within this thesis, we have presented some of these alternative viewpoints which were critical both for our analysis to have a multi-perspective approach towards the subject of suicide in general and to develop our refutation of the modern imposition that suggests life as a given affirmation in opposition to death.

However, to put forth this refutation which at the end helps us to develop the main argument of this thesis, a mere review of the cornerstone approaches to suicide was not enough for sure. Therefore, we have made a critical analysis on modern mentality, modern forms of power and modern society in which the conceptions of abnormality and pathology have been constructed by the help of medicine. This analysis was crucial for our study since only after making such a critique, we could understand that how suicide once considered as a sin or as a crime is started to be seen as an abnormality and as a sickness and this is critical to understand the peculiar potential of suicide to be a rebellion and a resistance within the context of modern

society. That is to say, because of the fact that suicide emerges as the most ungovernable phenomenon of modern society since it resists its most basic and the initial order that directs individual to live, it has an incomparable potential to resist all the constructions of modern discourse. We have emphasized this point first because before discussing the locus of philosophical suicide in modern society, a discussion on the general stance of suicide within this context was indeed a *sine qua non* to make our main arguments on the subject matter more evident. All these discussions in relation to modernity have been made in the Foucauldian line of vision in this study because the main argument of this thesis is also Foucauldian to a great extent. Nevertheless, the help of Baudrillard's arguments in the development of our discussion on the modern exclusion of death is truly conspicuous. His analysis of modern culture, simply defined as a great endeavor to separate life and death, supports our argument that life's prioritization over against death is something peculiar to modern society. Making an analysis of this polarization between life and death that has been constructed by the peculiar mentality of modernity is critical for our thesis since it says us a lot about death's becoming the greatest absurdity/meaninglessness of modern life and helps us to understand why and how the whole construction of modern mind is grounded on the hidden omission of death. From this point forth, it becomes possible to develop our arguments on the locus of suicide in modern society in that only within the context of modern mentality that makes even death something should be forgotten, suicide turns into something completely unreasonable and irrational.

On the other hand, our analysis on suicide and modernity would be certainly inadequate without a discussion on the multiplicity of suicide(s) since addressing suicide as a single-formed phenomenon is a mistake that is commonly made by every field of social sciences today and the criticism of this faulty approach constitutes one of the major discussion points of this thesis. However, even though we make such an emphasis on the singularity of every suicide and take the phenomenon with its uniqueness and elusiveness, we made a differentiation between the hypothetical categories of philosophical suicide and practical suicide that are nothing but the types

created just for analytical aims of this thesis. In addition to this, we made a peculiar redefinition of philosophical suicide because earlier texts/studies that refers the conception defines the phenomenon as choosing death when life becomes insufferable for somebody for some philosophical questionings of her/his own existence or just refer generally the place of suicide in philosophy while in this thesis we refer suicide that is presented as an answer to the meaninglessness of life with the conception of philosophical suicide.

Even though the manifestation of such a redefinition of philosophical suicide is specific to our thesis, development of this redefinition has substantially fed on the arguments of existentialist philosophy on the subject of suicide. Therefore, after clarifying our peculiar redefinition of philosophical suicide we made an overview of some critical thoughts on the phenomenon of suicide that have been introduced by some well-known philosophers of existentialism. However, we initially made a reference to Heidegger's analysis of *Dasein* and Schopenhauer's thought in relation to the conception of philosophical suicide to clarify our redefinition before discussing the subject matter within the framework of existentialist thought. Then we made a rather extensive discussion on the phenomenon of suicide within the framework of Sartre's existentialism, Camus's absurdism and Cioran's nihilism all of which were taken under the title of existentialism in general. Thus, by the help of these existentialist discussions, we placed our argument that philosophical suicide is meaningful within the meaninglessness of the universe only when it is seen as potency on a solid theoretical background.

Lastly, we got to the part in which we discussed the peculiarity of philosophical suicide in modernity and put forth the main argument of this thesis. In this part, initially we came back to our main research question in the light of which we indicate the radical abnormality of suicide in modernity and emphasize the grand resistance that lies in every suicide that comes true in modern society. Then, we discussed the peculiarity of our redefined form of philosophical suicide in that its emergence as a radical form of resistance to the most essential order of modernity.

At the end of this compact summary of our analysis and arguments revisited, as conclusion we will end up with some words that would be always open to discussion: As a peculiarly redefined form of the phenomenon, philosophical suicide which should be seen as a potency that is in a sense could be killed only by itself has an immanent potential to be a radical form of resistance in modern society in Foucauldian terms. Although, its turning into an act makes it an impotency and thus problematical for both in terms of Foucauldian perspective and in terms of existentialist thought which gave us the incentive to define such a peculiar form of suicide, philosophical suicide which is an existentialist denial that sees nothingness in being and being in nothingness is almost a perfect way to resist and rebel in a society that gives life a noncontestable affirmation in opposition to death. And we have made our discussions mostly on philosophical bases within this thesis since most of the sociological analyses on the subject matter are inclined to deal with the phenomenon with some statistical data which is nothing but a sisyphian challenge to understand such an act that is “prepared within the silence of the heart.”²⁴⁶

²⁴⁶ Camus, Albert. *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, translated by Justin O’Brien. New York: Vintage Books, 1955, p.4.

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