

## Kant's Categorical Imperative and the Dilemma of Suicide in the Society

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### Abstract

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The worth of human life is considered to be the most invaluable asset in all human societies. However, the act of a deliberate attempt to terminate one's life, which is known as suicide, raises some questions which have to do with morality. While different theories have been advanced to explain the reasons why some people decide to attempt or terminate their lives, the justification of such actions demands some philosophical examination. This paper is to critically analyze the impasse relating to suicide in human society and examine some ethical theories which tend to justify this action. The paper adopts Immanuel Kant Categorical Imperative, which comprises the basic ethical principle such as the concept of goodwill, duty, rationality and freedom. These maxims, as a moral theory would be examined with the view to condemn in totality the act of suicide in human society. The paper adopts expository, analytic and critical methods of Philosophy to sustain its argument.

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**Keywords:** suicide, morality, society, life, imperative

### Introduction

There are many problems facing human beings in the world, some of which eventually lead many people to prefer death to life. However, one of the common way by which people terminate their lives in the society is called suicide. Suicide is an act of deliberate attempt to kill oneself or to terminate one's own life. Whereas, life is considered to be good in itself, the question that now readily comes to mind is what are the possible causes of suicide? Different reasons, no doubt are documented in the literature, which ranges from individual perspectives to the broad view of the society at large. Philosophers, both in the ancient and the contemporary time have contributed greatly to this discussion. Some by their ideological leaning do not condemn suicide in its entirety, citing the instance of the existentialists, who are of the opinion that since there are no criteria in judging the action of human being, and no general ethics or omen to guide anyone in the world, thus man is free to make choice. The Utilitarian, who subscribe to the principle of utility as a yardstick for good actions, may also not consider suicide as a negative action if it will give the greatest good over evil to such people in distress and frustration. Given the views of these schools of thought, this paper is to defend the sanctity of human life by using Immanuel Kant Categorical Imperative, which centers on goodwill that is, good intention; the concept of duty for duty sake, which must prevail over inclination, and also the concept of rationality, which permits men to be used as an ends in itself and not as a means. These maxims and many others shall be adopted as a theoretical framework to refute any justification of suicide in human society. In doing this, the paper employed expository, analytic and critical methods of philosophy to argue against suicide in its entirety. The concluding part of the paper examines the implications of suicide in the society and thus advocates for a regular public enlightenment and moral education for all category of people in the society. This is assumed, would go a long way to prevent people from the act of a deliberate attempt to end their lives.

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## The Meaning, Types and Causes of Suicide

This section of the paper attempts to examine some definitions of suicide and also to analyze its meaning. In addition, it discusses the major causes of suicide in the society and highlights the various types of suicide. That is, the different kinds of suicidal act.

According to *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1974), the term suicide means:

The act or instance of taking one's own life voluntarily and intentionally but the term can also be applied to any person who attempts to take, or has a tendency to take, his own life. It also refers to the behavior of individuals and groups, even of nation, that may bring about their own self-destruction.

In the same vein, the *New Age Encyclopedia* (1980) views suicide as:

The act of voluntarily taking one's own life. This includes failure to avoid death when possible to do so, and also self-initiated action which directly results in death. These definitions stated above emphasize more on the voluntariness and intentionality of the person involved. That is, suicide is seen as a deliberate attempt to terminate one's own life. Similarly, Emile Durkheim a renowned Sociologist also in an attempt to define suicide avers that "the term suicide is applied to all cases of death resulting directly or indirectly from a positive or negative act of the victim himself, which he knows will produce this result" (Baechler, 1979). Following the above statement "the victim himself" as used in this definition, eliminates the cases where the person who committed suicide dies by the hand of another. It prevents those who by example goes to war searching for death, or one who avoids facing a great disappointment by agreeing to die in a surgical procedure that he knows will be fatal (Baechler, 1979). Such instances are equally cases of suicide which a comprehensive definition should capture. Also, another statement in the definition "which he knows will produce this result" reveals an entirely rationalist conception, where the behavior of everyman is perfectly transparent to himself. It should be noted that there are suicides that are in a way automatic, this occurs where a part of one's consciousness and one's will is nullified. Above all, there are other instances of suicide which result in death and are open to a whole series of interpretation and quite different representations. In another dimension, Halbwachs define suicide as "every case of death that results from an act undertaken by the victim himself with the intention, or with a view to, killing himself, and which is not a sacrifice" (Baechler, 1979). The opening part of this definition follows that of Durkheim and is open to the same criticism. The distinction introduced between "with the intention, or with a view to seem to" indicate that Halbwachs nourished some doubts about the deliberate nature of the suicidal act. The concluding part, however, marks an intentional break with Durkheim; the idea of getting rid of sacrifice put an end to any form of altruistic suicide as well.

Moreover, Achille-Delmas in his own view avers that:

"suicide is the act by which a fully competent man kills himself, he is able to live but he chooses, without any moral obligation, to die" (Baechler, 1979). On this note, suicide is considered as a conscious phenomenon, the afore stated definition reveals that the victim decides to "kill himself" thus eliminates anything accidental. The author strongly holds the opinion that it is easier to distinguish all fake attempts undertaken for reasons of concern, sympathy, or blackmail, which are nothing but phony suicide-attempts revealing vain glorious, perverse, or covetous mythomania. "Fully competent" as used in the definition excludes suicidal person who are demented, who kill themselves for unconscious motives, and accidental suicides that result from errors. "Able to live but chooses to die" allows one to ignore both coerced suicides (where the choice between life and death does not exist) and euthanasia (by which one seeks to escape a more terrible death). "Without any ethical obligation" intends that we should eliminate "ethical suicides" (where one dies in order to fulfill a heroic or sacred duty). Given the above, all these qualifications which amount to exclusions are arbitrary, not to say inconsistent because discrimination among these various forms of death is only in the author's passion for classification. To have wished fondly to distinguish pseudo-suicides, Achille-Delmas produced a definition that is, quite simply, absurd, even from his own point of view. One would like to know the degree of competence of a manic-depressive or a person with hypertension at a moment of crisis. One would like to encounter a suicide that, at the moment of his suicidal action, has the genuine (that is, for him and not for the external observer) choice between living and dying: if life were really a possible outcome, no one would ever die! There is no suicide except when death appears as the only outcome. The point here is that in Delmas's view, there is a distinction between a deliberate attempt to commit suicide and a fake attempt.

## 1:2 Types of Suicide

Mainly, there are three types of suicide as popularly classified by scholars in most literature. These are altruistic, egoistic, and anomic suicide. To start with, altruistic suicide is committed when an individual sacrifices his or her life for the goal and benefits of the group. According to Stengel (1964), "people over whom society had too strict a hold and who had too little individualism could be driven to self-destruction by excessive altruism and sense of duty". This kind of suicide was more common in primitive than in highly developed societies. In this category belonged the old and sick who wanted to relieve society of themselves. Examples of altruistic suicide may include, the women who followed their husband into death. The old custom (suttee), long since banned, in Indian which require a Hindu widow to sacrifice herself on the funeral pyre of her dead husband. Indian society had no place for widow. Also to those followers or servant who killed themselves on the death of their chief, reports have shown that Danish warriors considered it a disgrace to die in bed of old age or sickness, and kill themselves to escape this ignominy (Durkheim, 1962). The self sacrifice of martyrs as well as the hara-kiri of Japanese officers was suicides of this type. This type of suicide raises a lot of questions that attract the attention of philosophers and interested scholars. If one may ask, is there any general interest in any society that worth dying for? Even if social integration is at the highest level, by giving my life for the goal of others, would that be morally justified, since I have the right to live as others do? Is it encouraging for someone to commit suicide in a society for any reason at all? Especially in the society where social integration is at the highest level, bearing in mind that the social integration is meant to prevent suicide as Durkheim argued. These are questions that revolve round the issue relating to suicide which this paper would critically examine.

The second type of suicide is egoistic suicide. This usually occurs when an individual is detached or weakly attached to the society. According to Stengel (1964), it is an abnormal individualism resulted in a weakening of society's control and reduced the person's immunity against the collective suicidal inclination. This type of suicide happens due to individual's lack of concern for the community, and inadequate involvement in it. It should be noted that the place of mutual relationship that exist between an individual and other people in the community is very important, it shape individual values and enable such to be prioritized. This category is the least satisfactory of the three. It includes most suicides due to physical and mental illness as well as the suicides of the deprived and the bereaved. The main point here is that "the greater the integration of individuals within social groups, the less likely they were to commit suicide" (Haralambos and Heald, 1980). Social integration is measured by the number and strength of a person's social relationships with others.

Durkheim established various statistical correlations between suicide rates and the social situations of individuals. He found, for example, that Protestants had a higher rate of suicide than Catholics, city dwellers than rural dwellers, the unmarried than the married and older adult than younger adults. In each instance he claimed that the former have a lower level of social integration than the latter. Following this, Omoregbe (1976) observe that... "man has by nature the potentiality to both selfishness and altruism because he is by nature both individual and social". The point here is that the potentiality one develops has a lot to do with ones disposition to life. The third type is anomic suicide. This type of suicide is committed when people live short of their established attainable goals and they are subject to emotional distress. If society failed to control and to regulate the behavior of individuals, a state which Durkheim called anomie, would make suicide to become more frequent. The decline of religious beliefs, the excessive relaxation of professional and marital codes is manifestations of anomie. They resulted in disturbances of the collective organization which in turn reduced the individual's immunity against suicidal tendencies. This explained the high incidence of suicide among the divorced. This type of suicide is common during the economic boom when those who cannot make an end meet or achieve their goals usually commit suicide. The question still remains that when one is frustrated or in distress and cannot achieve his goals, is suicide the solution? Can it lead to making ends meet or remove frustration?

### Causes of Suicide

A number of theories have been advanced to explain the causes of suicide. Psychological theories emphasize personality and cognitive factors, while sociological theories stress the influence of social and cultural pressures on the individual. The strongly the individual is integrated with social group; the smaller would be the likelihood of suicide. Therefore suicide was relatively rare among members of big families and of closely knit religious or other social groups (Stengel, 1964).

Furthermore, Durkheim pointed out that lack of a secure relationship to a parent right from the childhood may have lasting consequences for a person's ability to establish relationships with other people, and such individuals are likely to find themselves socially isolated in adult life, and social isolation is one of the most important factors in the causation of suicidal acts. The point here is that lack of good relationship with parents and other related family members have been responsible for most suicide cases in the society. The lists of causes of suicide appear endless, but we shall not dwell much on this since the main focus of the paper is on how to ensure that in respective of situation and circumstances anyone may be facing in life, suicide should never be an option. It is against this background we shall proceed to consider Kant moral theory.

### **Kant Categorical Imperative**

When defining an imperative, Kant makes a distinction between command and imperative. According to him, "the conception of an objective principle, in so far as it necessitates for a will, is called a command (of reason) and the formula of the command is called an imperative (Copleston, 1960). All imperatives are expressed by an "ought" and exhibit thereby the relation of an objective law of reason to a will which, by reason of its subjective constitution, is not necessarily determined by it. By speaking of the objective principle as being "necessitating" for a will and does not mean, of course that the human will cannot help obeying the law. The point is rather that the will does not necessarily follow the dictate of reason. Kant proceeds further by explaining some numbers of principles which when summarized will lead to categorical imperative. The first according to him is the concept of goodwill, this connotes that "it is impossible to conceive of anything in the world or indeed without qualification save only a good will" (Copleston, 1960). In his view, a good will is the only good without qualification, this means that in the ordinary moral knowledge there is something that can be misused such as wealth, and hence they are not good without qualification. Mental talents, such as quickness of understanding can be misused if possessed by a criminal. The natural traits of character, such as courage also can be employed or be put to use in pursuing an evil end, but a good will cannot be bad or evil in any circumstances. It is good without qualification. The question one may now ask is: what is good-will? Simply put, it is good intention and it being good in itself, it is a virtue with its intrinsic value, and not simply in relation to the production of some end. Hence it is not a byproduct of inclination or desires. Kant succinctly put it thus:

The goodwill is not good of what it affects or accomplishes or because of its adequacy to achieve some purposeful ends: it is good only because of its willing that it is good in itself (Beck, 1978). An action can only be good as Kant wants us to believe if only it comes from good intentions. The actual consequences of an action is not what we will use when passing moral judgment but rather it is the motive and such must come from good intention. Now, going by Kant theory of "good will" that is, good intention which is required in passing any moral judgment, it is the motive that has to be morally judged. Assuming a wife who out of frustration wants to correct the bad behavior of her husband and in the process commit suicide and died. Another wife who equally wishes to die but was rescued, judging between these two instances, the one who will be morally praise worthy by Kant theory was the one who had the intention of correcting her husband even though she eventually died, unlike the other that intended to kill herself.

On this note, Lewis Beck (1978) points out that:

whether the action succeeds in its purpose or not, if it is done with a "good will" it is morally acceptable; the consequence which we consider in passing moral judgment is intended consequence implicated in the motive of the action not the actual consequence which no man can wholly foresee and control. Given the above, Kant places high premium on good intention in whatsoever one intends to do. Another principle is on the concept of duty, this to him means acting out of reverence for law, and that law is essentially universal. Kant makes a distinction between actions which are in accordance with duty and acts which are done for sake of duty. To Kant, only those actions which are performed for the sake of duty have moral worth. He takes the example of preserving one's life "to preserve one's life is a duty", and further, everyone has an immediate inclination to do so. These are the two presuppositions. Now if I preserve my life simply because I have an inclination to do so, my action does not, in Kant's view, possess moral worth. To possess such worth my action must be performed because it is my duty to preserve my life; that is, out of a sense of moral obligation. Kant does not explicitly say that it is morally wrong to preserve my life because I desire to do so. For my action would be at least in accordance with duty and not incompatible with it, as suicide would be, but it has no moral value.

On the one hand, it is not a moral action, but on the other it can hardly be called immoral action in the sense in which suicide is immoral. Kant's impression in his concept of duty is that duty must prevail over our inclination. He maintains that, "the less inclination we have to do our duty, the greater is the moral value of our action if we actually perform our duty to do" (Copleston, 1960). Now, taking the example of altruistic suicide, that is, a case whereby someone is driven to self-destruction by excessive altruism and sense of duty as the case of some terrorist group who are religious fanatics. Kant's concept of duty for duty sake would first differentiate such an action, either from duty sake or from one's inclination, if it is from inclination the action is morally wrong. The question that may confront us here is; where does the moral worth of action lie? For Kant "it can lie nowhere else than in the principle of will irrespective of the end which can be realized by such action" (Copleston, 1960). Kant sees duty as not only good in itself but its worth transcends everything. Kant's rule is that the good will, the only good without qualification, is manifested in acting for the sake of duty that duty means action out of reverence for law; and that law is essentially universal (Copleston, 1960). This is now to say that, there remains nothing but the universal conformity of action to law in general, which should serve the will as a principal. That is to say "I am never to act otherwise than so that I can also will that my maxim should become a universal law" There is, therefore, only one categorical imperative, and it is this: "act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law; he also reformulated it thus; "act as if the maxim of your action were to become through your will universal law of nature"(Copleston, 1960). To Kant all imperatives must derive from this one, this is a means of testing whether the maxim of our action is morally right or not.

Kant's general notion, therefore, is that the practical or moral law as such is strictly universal; universality is its form. Hence all concrete principles of conduct must partake in this universality if they are to qualify for being called moral. Here Kant seems to refer to cases in which a maxim could be given the formulation of a universal law without logical contradiction. A series of examples were given by Kant to buttress his point. In the first instance, a man enjoys great prosperity but sees that others are in misery and that he could help them, but he adopts the maxim of not concerning himself with their distress. For Kant, if the maxim of this action is universalized, it will surely contradict itself since by the basic law of nature everyone also required himself need help from others if he should ever be in a state of misery. The second one is when a man is forced to borrow money knowing fully well that he will be unable to pay it. Reflections show that he cannot turn the maxim (when I am in need of money, I will borrow it and promise to repay it, though I know that I shall not be able to do so) into a universal law without contradiction. One could see that the maxim of this action cannot be universalized since a law that allows people to borrow money with the intention of not repaying it will surely contradict itself.

Kant further in his categorical imperative postulates that man, and indeed any rational being, is an end in itself. The concept of a rational being as an end in itself can therefore serve as the ground for a supreme practical principle or law. The practical imperative will thus be as follows: "so act as to treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of any other, always at the same time as an end, and never merely as a means" (Copleston, 1960). Kant sees man (a rational being) as an end in himself. Therefore any action that treats humanity as means to an end only has no moral worth. The question of human rationality is central to Kant's moral theory, rationality is the necessary condition and source of all moral value; without it, Kant maintains we are unable to deliberate over actions and apply the categorical imperative. Rationality as a unique feature of humanity is what gives human dignity and makes them invaluable (Vong; 2008). According to Kant, we cannot establish the possibility of a categorical imperative by referring to anything in the causal series of phenomena, but this can only be found in "freedom". Hence it is perhaps more accurate to say that the condition of the possibility of a categorical imperative is to be found "in the idea of freedom". In fact, there cannot be any room for reason to play its role if freedom is denied on the part of any individual.

To support this, Kant maintains that:

"...practical reason or the will of a rational being 'must regard itself as free', that is, the will of such a being cannot be a will of its own except under the idea of freedom. The idea of freedom is thus practically necessary it is a necessary condition for morality" (Copleston, 1960). From the quotation above, it is obvious that if one has freedom of will, he will surely know that anytime he performs his duty, he is not under the control of other or under any compulsion since any law he obeys emanates from his will. The idea of freedom as put forward by Kant therefore negates or condemns an altruistic type of suicide. For instance the old custom (Suttee) long since banned in India requires a Hindu widow to sacrifice herself at the death of her husband. The Yoruba custom of burying slaves alive at the death of the king also is condemned by Kant's idea of freedom.

The people concerned (victims) who are rational beings are not permitted to exercise their freedom of will and such denied them of being part of the intelligible world. Whereas it is the notion of freedom that makes one to feel that one is part and parcel of the intelligible world. In this case an individual is not dominated by other's will. Kant maintains that categorical imperatives are possible because the idea of freedom makes me a member of an intelligible world. Finally, for categorical imperative to be morally compelling one must be a member of the law makers. As a member of the legislature one must act as if one is obeying the laws he make for himself.

Kant proofs this by saying that:

A rational being belongs to the realm of ends as a member when he gives universal law in it while also himself subject to these laws. He belongs to it as sovereign when he as legislating is subject to the will of no other. The rational being must regard himself always as legislature in a realm of ends possible through the freedom of the will whether he belongs, to it as members of sovereign" (Beck, 1978). Kant believes that if one is part and parcel of the legislation he would not want to break the law and as well seeing himself as bound by the law. If one has made a law that suicide is immoral, one cannot go ahead to commit it because it is bound by the law he had made that it is immoral to commit suicide.

### **A Philosophical Justification of Kant's Position on Suicide**

At this juncture, this paper attempt to examine the views of some schools of thought whose theory may tends towards the justification of the morality of suicide. This is necessary in order to have an extensive overview upon which the position of this paper would receive its justification. The two schools of thought which we shall consider are existentialism and utilitarianism. The theme of freedom is at the heart of existentialism. The existentialists do not talk of the "freedom of the will" as we find in classical philosophy. Freedom, to them is not a property of the will but the very structure of the being of man (Omogrege, 1991). They do not make any attempt to prove the reality of human freedom; rather they see human freedom as the structure of man's being and a basic condition for human existence. To Satre, the ethical man has achieved a freedom by his authentic choice, he knows himself and he is the master of his actions (Lescoe, 1974). Furthermore, Satre is of the view that freedom is the human capacity of negating, nihilating and withdrawing from material things and situations. It is the permanent capacity of self-determination, self orientation, and self detachment. Hence man can never be identified with anything or any way of life since he possessed this capacity (freedom) of self withdrawer and he can always say "no" to any way of life. The foundation of this freedom is nothingness, nothingness provides the foundation for freedom, and hence freedom is bounded by nothing. This means that no limit to my freedom can be found except freedom itself (Omogrege, 1991).

The existentialist argument against freedom through self realization rests primarily upon the belief that man has no ready-made or pre human nature, no divine essence which is to be automatically realized. This idea emanates from Satre view that "existence precede essence". In Leibniz's view, says Satre, "Adams's essence is for Adam himself a given; Adam has not chosen it: he could not choose to be Adam. Consequently he does not support the responsibility for his being... for us, on the contrary, Adam is not defined by an essence since for human reality essences comes after existence" (Olson, 1962). Satre went further to say that, man is a self-creating being who makes himself as he pleases and freely creates his own essence. Hence man cannot be defined a priori. He said: "this means that man first of all exists, encounters himself, emerges in the world, and defines himself afterwards... Man such as the existentialist conceive him, if he is indefinable, it is because he is first of all nothing. He will be nothing until later on, and he will be what he will make himself" (Omogrege, 1991). Now, going by the theory of existentialists as put forward, can suicide be justified? Following Satre argument that man is free, freedom to him is not of will but the structure of the being of man, that is, the extent of the freedom man possessed is not limited to his will but rather it is part of his being. The question we may now ask is can the freedom of man's being lead him to commit suicide? Will there be no limit to the freedom man possesses as rational being? The existentialist's argument would further mean that man attains his freedom by choice and he is the master of his action. When it comes to suicide, they will argue we do not have to apply specific rule to guide us, but such act is particular to a particular situation. The question now is, can suicide be justified and remain as part and parcel of us on the basis of existentialist beliefs? The answer is no, in some cases, Satre argue that man is free and that anytime one acts, he is not only committing himself but humanity as a whole, if one should commit suicide (Castel and Borchet, 1976). This amounts to inconsistency on his (Satre) part, if one is really free to commit suicide, why will he be hindered by society or societal norms.

Thus, this shows that there is no way one will commit suicide without looking at the effects it will have on humanity as a whole therefore suicide cannot be justified on the basis of existentialist theory. Kant on the other way round also stresses freedom as earlier discussed, but Kant's view on freedom is the freedom of will that enable one to do the right thing without any external force compelling him to do that which is not right. The ordinary man tries to ignore the unpleasant facts of life, and if he is exposed to an "impossible situation" where no choice could conceivably be a choice of happiness, he is without recourse. Whereas, the existentialist refuses to ignore the unpleasant facts of life, and he spends most of his time trying to find some technique by which to triumph over them. Going by this, it means that, if suicide is the next available way to triumph over unpleasant facts of life the existentialist would justified that (suicide) is good. Suppose, I am frustrated or distress as the case may be, can I go and commit suicide, will that remove my frustration, in case of anomic suicide where some commit suicide because he cannot achieve his goal, will suicide help him to achieve the set goal? All these are not sufficient to justify suicide as Kant insists that this will amount to treating humanity as a means to an end. The second school of thought is the Utilitarian, this group following John Stuart Mill, holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. Happiness are intended pleasure and the absence of pain, by unhappiness, pain and the privation of pleasure (Barrow, 1982).

This theory is such that estimates right and wrong by the principle of utility. Despite the common use of the word utility as a synonym for useful, sometimes with overtones of economic usefulness, the principle of utility is solely concerned with happiness, pleasure, pain and unhappiness. What ought to be done is whatever is most conducive to happiness in the world. A very obvious problem arises with the key term happiness. What exactly is happiness? Is it a sensation or a state of mind? Should it be identified with something similar to ecstasy or contentment, or neither? Can we accept Mill's succinct identification of it with pleasure and the absence of pain, and are those terms not also more problematic than either Mill or Bentham here seem to allow? Now, going by the theory of the utilitarian, if suicide will give me the greatest good over all these evils (distress and frustrations) then I can go ahead and commit suicide since utility is the yardstick for good action. But this type of argument becomes problematic since after committing this act, there is no means of verifying whatever it produces either greatest good or bad, either happiness or pain. The dead man (suicide victim) cannot express his feeling anymore, and the issue of afterlife cannot be proved or scientifically tested, thus there is a problem. On the other way round, if it can produce the greatest good for the society in general, then it is right and can be permitted. But another problem will arise, how we can get a reliable statistical data to show this in the society since this would amount to a fruitless research. Suicide thus cannot be justified by the theory of the utilitarian. It must be noted also that, all Utilitarian theories are consequentialist, and this shows that intentions or motive of any action is neglected. And Kant would argue that for any action to be morally praise worthy, it must come from right will or good intention. Problem thus arise, if the consequence alone is to be considered, the implication is that in a society where the interest of the majority is to reduce population, then suicide will be justified since utility is the yard-stick for any action. The concern here again is that how the victim's intention would be known using the example of anomic suicide where people cannot cope with the standard of living.

Robin Barrow (1982) said that utilitarian ignores entirely the question of motive and intention, whereas, generally speaking people think of these as rather important in assessing moral conduct. And of course they are important, if what we are concerned with is attributing praise or blame, and determining whether somebody is behaving as a moral agent. Certainly, doing what happens to be right, because you think it will bring you a handsome profit is not to deserve moral acclaims. Furthermore, there is something essentially unfair, which is inherent in utilitarianism, and that is, this principle lead to the sacrifice of innocent minorities for the sake of the happiness of the majority, or certain unjust institutional arrangements, against the interests of majority happiness. Looking at the case that has to do with altruistic type of suicide, whereby people commit suicide as a sense of duty or when people sacrifice their life for the goal and benefits of the group or society. The question is, can this be morally justified? The Utilitarian would agree to its justification so far it produces happiness for the majority of the traditional people in the society. But Kant's position is still very much in force, this cannot be morally justified in as much as it cannot be universalized and as well it amount to the treatment of humanity as a mere means and not an end in itself. One of the main reason why Kant wants people to treat others as an end is that personhood to him, "gives a creature a dignity that is beyond price" (Vong: 2008). The other groups, which are equally relevant to this discussion, are the religious group. The Judeo/Christian faith through the Bible reveals that some Biblical heroes committed suicide such examples are King Saul, King Abimelech and Judas Iscariot among others. These men either killed themselves or request for death from the hand of their armor bearers.

But the fact still remains that murder of self or others is condemned by God and the consequence of such action is mainly about punishment from God in the other side of this world believed to be eternity. The Islamic religion also condemns suicide through her Holy Quran. The implication of such action is also hinged on the believed that the fellow will suffer the same fate in afterlife. On this note, Seidler (1983) points out that Kant contends that "as soon as we examine suicide from the standpoint of religion we immediately see it in its true light. We have been placed in this world under certain conditions and for specific purposes. But a suicide opposes the purpose of his creator; he arrives in the world as one who has deserted his post; he must be looked upon as a rebel against God. In a similar view, the African Traditional Religion does not approve suicide and it is morally wrong for anyone to commit suicide in the society. It is the belief of the Africans that suicide is a bad death, and the corpse of anyone who commits suicide will not be accorded a formal burial rite. Awolalu and Dopamu (1979) elaborate more on this by saying ... "not only that the person who commits suicide will not be given formal burial but they will not be remembered and have no ancestral shrine". It is believed that anybody who lead a perfect life on earth and die a normal death shall be admitted to the cults of the ancestors, but he that committed suicide is not allowed and such is forgotten and counted as loss in the family. The implication of this is that suicide is seen as a bad death and it is morally wrong.

To this end, by way of evaluation, an ethical relativist may reply to all these above mentioned points that the fact that suicide is wrong in one society does not mean that it will be wrong in another society. After-all among the Eskimos suicide may be considered as being morally right. Record has it that when they reach the age of sixty five years and above they can easily terminate their life since as from this age onward life begins to be boring to them. Given this instance, should suicide be justified on this basis? Would that not amount to saying that there can be no toleration and that ethical universality is impossible in the whole world? Given the position of this paper, the point remains that on no ground would suicide be justified. Kant views remains that man is free as the existentialist wants us to believe, but the freedom Kant postulated is the freedom of will, the freedom to exercise one's will in the absence of force and this will be able to allow one to reason properly and act. The existentialist freedom may lead to an individual to prefer to die than to live which may eventually lead such person to commit suicide. But Kant declares that freedom should go along with rationality, and if a human being is rational, suicide cannot be the only alternative for man's survival no matter the situation he/she may find him/herself. The existentialists are often accused of exaggerating "freedom". Kant position as opposed to the postulation of utilitarian's principle of utility as a yardstick for measuring good or bad will also condemn suicide in its totality. If whatever produces the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people is the yardstick for moral action, suicide will not fit in here. This is because Kant's ethical theory states that this will amount to treating humanity as a means to an end and not as an end in itself. The slaves that are buried with their master's shows that man (humanity) are being used as a mere means to achieve an end (societal happiness). So also, the theory of universalization will also condemn suicide in this regard. If altruistic suicide is to be permitted, would everyone in the society wished that such action be universalized? Would that without doubt not amount to destroying the whole mankind on the surface of the earth?

Another aspect of categorical imperative that can condemn suicide in the society is the idea of being a member of the legislature. Just like Thomas Hobbes postulated in his theory of "State of Nature", man is being egoistic and as a result he can kill himself through his selfishness, but at a time, all surrendered their power and right to the state (Leviathan) and henceforth bound to obey the law because it is assumed that all men have agreed to obey the law of the state made by themselves. Following this, Kant asserts that if the law of the society condemns suicide and people are made to realize that they are member of the legislation they would not go ahead and commit suicide because it will amount to violating the law they had made themselves which is highly contradictory in terms. For anyone to commit suicide in this context it is seen as injustice against others, including one's parents, spouse, children, friends, and fellow citizens. (Seidler: 1983).

## **Conclusion**

This paper begins by looking at what suicide means, it examines the various definitions put up by different scholars and attempt to critically analyze their views. The three major types of suicide were discussed and none was found to be adequate enough for people to deliberately terminate their lives. Various causes of suicide were brought to the fore, and these were examined from individual perspective and the society at large.

The paper proceeds to extensively analyze Immanuel Kant's categorical Imperatives. The four major principles which form the basis of Kant moral theory were itemized. The concept of goodwill that is, good intention was discussed and central to this is the question of motive which has to be put into consideration when making a moral judgment. There is also the concept of duty for duty sake, which must prevail over inclination; it is only those actions which are performed for the sake of duty that have moral worth. Equally, the concept of rationality, which permits men to be used as an ends and not as a mere means was substantially discussed. To establish a philosophical background against which Kant categorical imperative would receive its justification, efforts were made to discuss the existentialist and the utilitarian's theories in line with the concept of suicide. On this premise the paper maintains that the concept of human freedom which the existentialist advocates should at no time be a necessary and sufficient condition to justify suicide. Kant's view that freedom of the will would only enable one to do the right thing without any external force can not be undermined. The utilitarian's theory which estimates right and wrong by the principle of utility were faulted by Kant's principle; this would amount to using man as a means and not an end in itself.

The position of this paper is thus to advocate that suicide should be condemned in the society. In doing this, attention should be given to the causes of suicide and plausible solutions should be proffered to it. Various reasons why people commit suicide which include joblessness, isolated lives, and all sorts of frustration and so on should be adequately taken care of in the society. The Government should provide employment opportunity, such that will cater for the needs of the people and this will reduce the number of people in distress in the society. There is also the need to enlighten the citizenry through formal and informal educational institutions by using such ethical theory of Immanuel Kant categorical imperative to condemn suicide in its entirety. The religious institutions also have their role to play so that suicide may be condemned as an act in the society, the fact remains that the sanctity of human life is central to the tenet of faith of almost all the religious group. The need to promote social integration should be reconsidered; efforts should be made to promote mutual relationship among people in respect of race, color and gender. When all of these are put in place the rate of suicide would definitely be reduced to the barest minimum if not be totally eradicated. It is against this background that this paper is advocating for the total condemnation of all forms of suicidal act in all human society regardless of their norms and cultural orientation. Its consequences results to destruction of life and this may eventually jeopardize the future development of all human society.

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