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Against Explanatory Condemnation

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Cover Page Footnote

Thank you to Professors Jerry Piven and Douglas Husak for your critiques of earlier drafts.

Against Explanatory Condemnation

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Abstract

When we observe that a person holds what appear to be absurd beliefs, there is a temptation to correct them. These efforts are often condemnatory and fail to take into account the reasoning behind such beliefs. These ideas comprise each person's respective explanation for why it is that the world appears to them as it does. There are those whose lives are existentially painful and their explanations for their suffering are critical to their continued survival. I argue that condemning a existentially pained person for holding their particular explanation is morally impermissible. I aim to show that both Kant's categorical imperative and hedonistic utilitarianism support my claim that explanatory condemnation is impermissible. As a result of this discussion, I also argue that if the aim is to minimize the number of suicides amongst existentially pained persons, suicide should be regarded as permissible, regardless of the actual moral status of the act.

Keywords: Ethics, Existentialism, Kant, Suicide

Introduction

Whenever pain is present, so is the need for an explanation. Even when the pain is tame, the absence of an explanation does not go unnoticed. Though these relatively minor pains can be explained by their causes alone, the same cannot be said of existential anguish. For a person who feels their life to be permeated by pain, knowing the causes of their suffering is far from sufficient. Explanations of these existentially taxing pains (ETPs) do not require knowledge of

the actual causes; a successful explanation needs only to appear compelling to the individual. Although a person can observe the outward appearance of another's ETPs, there remains an irremovable chasm between viewing a person and feeling their anguish as they do. Even if a person chooses to vocalize their suffering, the privacy of their pain persists. Left alone, a life that is felt to be consumed by suffering can be truly unbearable and suicide often becomes all too tempting. For most people, however, dying is still a far less desirable result than finding a means of tolerating their ETPs. Accordingly, each person seeks out an explanation for their suffering that lessens the intensity of their ETPs, even if the chosen explanation does little to remove the source of the pain.

I will argue that even if an anguished person's explanation appears absurd to observers, the appearance does not imply anything substantial about the purpose or effects of the explanation for the person in pain. Moreover, to condemn another's explanation merely because it appears odd or untenable disrespects the authenticity of their experience. Thus, I argue that it is morally impermissible to condemn a person for holding the explanation that allows them to avoid suicide, even if the explanation appears absurd.

Existential Pain

I will first distinguish between finite and existential pain, as this distinction is critical to understanding the need for explanations. Both types of pain are inherently broad and therefore difficult to describe as complete lists of particular events, actions, or feelings. Nonetheless, finite pains can include physical injuries, rejection in love, being cheated, and other relatively brief events. Even if the pain felt is particularly intense, the source of the suffering is often known and the pain itself is strongly attached to its source. If the source of the pain is removed or made less noticeable, the degree of suffering felt by the individual decreases as well. Existential pains, on

the other hand, are not as well correlated to particular events. While a particular event, such as the loss of a loved one, may initiate or intensify an existential pain, the removal of the inciting event does not nullify the suffering for the individual. I will now delineate between two states of existential pain.

Existentially taxing pains (ETPs) are forms of suffering that threaten the existential health of a person but do not usually lessen the experienced quality of life. For example, a person who lost a loved one many years prior might feel that their life is presently unburdened by the loss, despite the death being permanent¹. The effects of an ETP are not especially painful but if the threat presented by an ETP comes to fruition, an existentially exhausting pain (EEP) can result. Unlike an ETP, an EEP is obvious and often agonizing to the individual who has it². Suppose a person loses many of their loved ones in a short period of time. Regardless of the actual reason for the rapid succession of losses, the person may feel that the world has selected them in particular to suffer more than others. Moreover, EEPs, unlike finite pains, are cumulative. A crippling injury to your knee does not worsen the pain felt by the loss of a parent, but it can worsen the existential pain that is experienced. Thus, EEPs demand ever increasingly large amounts of effort to contend with if handled in an undisguised form. Left alone for long enough, EEPs can drive a person beyond the existential pain threshold (EPT), which divides a life that is felt to be worth continuing from one that is not. To avoid this collapse into suicidal desires, people attempt to justify, explain, or give purpose to their suffering, employing all manners of explanations to do so.

¹ A person could still feel bereaved long after the death, but this is more akin to an EEP.

² Both ETPs and EEPs are dangerous to the individual but only EEPs are experienced as actively painful. The move from ETP to EEP is a change in kind; EEPs permeate and strangle a person's life. This transition is not uniformly predictable; in fact, a person may be blindsided by a sudden emergence of an EEP.

Types of Explanations

Though the explanations used to contend with existential pains vary tremendously between persons, there are two elements that are common to all explanations. Most crucially, an explanation must appear obvious to the individual. Albert Camus recognized this condition, stating that “the mind’s deepest desire...is an insistence upon familiarity, an appetite for clarity” (2018, p.17). It is unfeasible to live while having to consider complex explanations at every moment³; the process of doing so would defeat the purpose of the explanation. By appearing obvious, an explanation can be inculcated and made a part of a person’s ordinary thinking. Obviousness makes an explanation usable by an individual, but it does little to shield the explanation from objections. To resist criticism from others, an explanation requires a degree of ambiguity.

Consider the following case: Sam is planning a gathering for friends and is deciding what food to order. Despite his best efforts, Sam is unable to recall the food preferences of all of his friends and so, he takes his best guess. Even if Sam is wrong, many people would be more forgiving of him making a mistake if they perceive it to be an innocent error rather than a deliberate choice to displease them. Sam’s process of selecting food is much akin to the development of an explanation, as both are aimed at minimizing unhappiness and are limited by the facts that are presently known to the individual. Thus, an explanation is unlikely to be flawless in its reasoning and claims, thereby exposing it to potentially crippling objections. Ambiguity, however, allows an explanation to avoid this worry, as it provides some leeway in interpreting its claims. A prominent example of this is an appeal to God’s⁴ supposed plan for the world in response to the existence of evil in the world. When a person objects that God must not

³ Joshua Greene notes a similar sentiment about moral calculus in utilitarianism in his book *Moral Tribes*.

⁴ By God, I refer to the Judeo-Christian notion of an omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient, and well-intended being.

exist because he would not allow evil to exist, a theist can maintain their explanation by saying that even if something appears evil to us, it is a part of a grander plan that is beyond human understanding. This type of move is not unique to theological explanations. A naturalist can similarly appeal to a currently unknown science or unproven theory. Arthur Schopenhauer suggested a similar notion, claiming that “the actual, positive solution to the riddle of the world must be something that the human intellect is wholly incapable of grasping and conceiving” (1966, p.185). He is right to say that explanations must contain some aspect that is inaccessible to humans, but he is overzealous in suggesting that a solution must be entirely outside of a person’s reach. Thus far, I have only given two necessary conditions for an explanation, namely obviousness and ambiguity. It is now appropriate to discuss the explanatory types that are most common.

Religion and naturalism are two of the more widespread types of explanations. Each places faith in its respective metaphysical assumptions and accepted forms of reasoning. For religion, the existence of gods, forces, or other entities that are not qualifiable in purely physical terms function as the central tenets, with modern science serving the same purpose for naturalism. What is crucial to recognize is that for an existentially exhausted person, a belief in either explanatory type is a matter of faith. Even if there are genuine reasons to favor one over the other, the only relevant factor to the success of an explanation is whether it is sufficiently compelling to an individual. The ability to develop or maintain faith in an explanation is certainly aided by the number of people who hold similar views, but commonality alone does not ensure an explanation achieves its purpose. To see this, consider Mika, who believes that the world exists as it does because Cerberus⁵ wills it so and whose EEPs are lessened by this belief. I

⁵ Cerberus (in Greek mythology) is a three-headed dog who guards the entrance to the underworld.

imagine that many people would regard this explanation as absurd but that does not imply that Mika's life is not made more tolerable by his belief in Cerberus. Mika can still accept modern science, be respectful to his neighbors, care for the disadvantaged, and be a well-meaning person. From Mika's point of view, the only difference is that he feels that Cerberus is a more comforting explanation than religion or naturalism. Still, if a lack of an explanation did not pose a threat, disputes between explanations would be trivial. Unfortunately, not only are there very real dangers for a person with EEPs associated with lacking an explanation, but the existence of these consequences is well known to those facing them.

The Dangers of Insufficient Explanations

Ernest Becker best described the state of an existentially anguished person when he noted that “nature seems unconcerned, even viciously antagonistic to human meanings; and we fight by trying to bring our own dependable meanings into the world” (1973, p.120). Whether one attributes nature's uncaring appearance to a conflict between a person's subjective experience and the world itself, as Camus does,⁶ or as “the collision between the seriousness with which we take our lives and the perpetual possibility of regarding everything about which we are serious as arbitrary, or open to doubt” (Nagel, 1979, p.13), it remains uncontested that each person has to address this irremovable conflict between profound meaning and utter meaninglessness. If a person is not imperiled by ETPs or EEPs, this conflict may be quite tame and even unconsciously addressed. For those with ETPs and even more so for those with EEPs, however, failure to resolve the conflict risks reaching and possibly exceeding their respective EPT. An insufficient explanation leads to “the discovery that [a person's life] is totally inessential”

⁶ Camus repeats this idea several times in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, but it most clearly stated as “The Absurd is not in man...nor in the world, but in their presence together them” (2018, p.30).

(Nagel, 1986, p.212) and exposes “human meanings [as] fragile, ephemeral” (Becker, 1973, p.120). Were explanations easily replaced, any worry about the quality of an explanation could be averted by swapping to a new explanation when the present one begins to fail. Unfortunately, they are not. Once an explanation has been integrated into a person’s experiences as a complete ideology, altering the foundational elements is perilous (Schopenhauer, 1966, p.166). Miguel Unamuno’s story *Saint Manuel Bueno, Martyr* puts these concerns on full display and so, I will now discuss it.

Though the other characters are intriguing in their own right, it is the titular character who is most relevant. As a priest in the fictional town of Valverde de Lucerna, Saint Bueno provides guidance for his community, supports those enduring hardship, and is beloved by all. From any perspective other than his own, Saint Bueno appears content, if not happy, valued, and by many accounts, has a wonderful life. But as he confesses to his disciple Lazaro, his “life...is a kind of continual suicide, or a struggle against suicide, which is the same thing...just so long as our people go on living” (Unamuno, 2004, p.280). Saint Bueno is a paradigmatic example of a person afflicted with EEPs. Despite earning the love of his community and appearing to have a life that many might envy, he is intensely aware that his actions are fundamentally designed to stave off the worst of his thoughts. When asked by his other student Angela why it was that he became a priest, he replies that were he alone, “the solitude would crush my soul...I was not meant to live alone, or die alone. I was meant to live for my village, and die for it, too” (Unamuno, 2004, p.267). So, what is to be made of Saint Bueno? If nothing else, this gives reason to doubt appearances as being accurate indicators of a person’s existential health. A person’s pain is private and made no less authentic by lacking external signs of suffering. As will be discussed in the next section, Saint Bueno’s reasons for disguising his EEPs are, in fact,

compassionate and morally admirable, even if they are essentially illusions. Still, more can be learned from Saint Bueno, particularly the difference between *a* truth and *the* truth.

As Becker, Nagel, and Camus all point out, the truth of our existence can be deeply unsettling. Nagel rightly comments that our lives can appear absurd because even if we recognize the objective insignificance of our existence, we cannot abandon our feeling that our lives do matter (1979, p.14). Moreover, Becker noted that “with the truth, one cannot live. To be able to live one needs illusions, not only outer illusions such as art, religion, philosophy, science, and love afford, but inner illusions which first condition the outer” (1973, p.188). This is seen with Saint Bueno. He has the outer illusions of religion and love but lacks the inner illusions that would allow these sensations to relieve his EEPs. This helps to account for the gap between observations and experiences of existential pain, as only the outer illusions are visible. No one but the existentially anguished person can know of their inner illusions. It may even be the case that the EEP-stricken person does not know the exact nature of the inner illusions. Regardless of whether a person has this knowledge, however, those with EEPs are fully aware of when their illusions fail.⁷ So, *the* truth incites the development of illusions, both inner and outer, but once these illusions take shape, a person carries and experiences their life under *a* truth. These highly personalized truths are felt to be wholly authentic and need not be particularly complex. Camus was correct in saying that “a single truth, if it is obvious, is enough to guide an existence” (2018, p.84). I suspect that for those with EEPs who are not suicidal, what has already been said accounts for their experiences. There are, however, those for whom suicide, whether acted on or by the mere availability of it, plays a vital role in their explanations being sufficiently powerful.

⁷ If an inner illusion is successful in working with the other illusions, a person with EEPs likely feels as though they are only experiencing ETPs.

In the latter parts of *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus discusses Fyodor Dostoyevsky's character Kirilov, a man who has decided to kill himself to disprove the existence of God. Just as with Saint Bueno, Kirilov possesses EEPs but unlike Saint Bueno, Kirilov's explanation does not entail his continued existence. To the contrary, he resolves to commit suicide since "he feels that God is necessary and that he must exist. But he knows that he does not and cannot exist" (Camus, 2018, p.106). What is vital to note is that Kirilov's decision to kill himself is based on a seemingly valid argument, which goes roughly as follows:

- P1. The Bible expressly forbids the killing of oneself.
- P2. The Bible consists of the words and will of God.
- P3. The will of God cannot be disobeyed or otherwise opposed by a human.
- P4. Killing oneself disobeys God's will.
- C1. If Kirilov can kill himself, then God must not exist.
- C2. If Kirilov cannot kill himself, then God may still exist.⁸

Obviously enough, people are capable of killing themselves and so, Kirilov is faced with the conclusion that God must not exist. It is tempting to say that if Kirilov does not want to die, he should seek out a new explanation but as noted earlier, that is not a trivial task. His efforts, were he to attempt such a change, might yield little, if any, benefit and the attempt would certainly worsen his EEPs. Thus, even if people with EEPs do not presently intend to kill themselves, the ability to do so offers an obvious escape from suffering. This availability is significant, as our willingness to take risks is affected by our knowing whether we can nullify the consequences of our actions, should they prove unbearable. It is now appropriate to consider the moral status of condemning a person for holding their particular explanation.

⁸ Strictly speaking, it is possible that if Kirilov can kill himself, it is not that God does not exist. It could be that the Bible does not represent God's will but Kirilov does take the Bible to indicative of God's will in the novel *Demons*.

Against Explanatory Condemnation

In this section, I will argue that both Kant's categorical imperative and utilitarianism will conclude that condemning an EEP-stricken person for holding their respective explanation is morally impermissible, even if the explanation appears absurd to others. In doing so, I will also defend the claim that, ironically enough, if a person aims to minimize the number of suicides, it is better to treat suicide as morally permissible. Throughout this section, I shall make use of the earlier example of Mika and his belief in Cerberus, on the basis that if an explanation that is as unusual as his can be shown to be permissible, most other explanations are also acceptable. I will now begin by considering Kant's categorical imperative.

Kantian Arguments Against Condemnation

As a general note, I am only borrowing the overarching structure of Kant's categorical imperative. Kant quite explicitly regarded suicide as impermissible and would likely find many of the explanations held by those with EEPs to be counter to a good will. Still, he does state that "to preserve one's own happiness is one's duty" (Kant, 2012, p.14), though this is stronger than I am committed to saying. It is consistent with what I have already said for a person to choose to act against their own happiness, but for the purposes of this paper, I am assuming that EEP-stricken people do want to feel happier.⁹

Kant claimed that "I ought never to proceed except in a way that I could also will that my maxim should become a universal law" (2012, p.17). Suppose toward a contradiction that it is morally permissible to condemn a person with EEPs for their explanation. Consider Mika, who does have EEPs and believes in Cerberus as the origin of the world. Recall that Mika is, save his belief in Cerberus, an ordinary person. He believes in helping those in need, is polite, loves his

⁹ As with the explanations, what exactly feeling happy consists of depends on the individual.

family, believes in modern science, and lives a life that is unobtrusive to others. Now, suppose Mika's neighbor John hears of Mika's Cerberus explanation and thinks that it is an absurd thought. Accordingly, John asks Mika why he believes what he does, and Mika explains himself while remaining unwavering in his belief. At this point, John has merely asked a question and so, no condemnation has occurred. If John is still unsatisfied, however, he is morally permitted to condemn Mika for his belief. If he does, Mika's EEPs are forcefully made more salient to him and he suffers significantly, but John has acted in accordance with his moral right to condemn.

What is the problem with John condemning Mika? Kant directly supplied one objection when he said that people cannot be treated as merely means to an end, but as ends in themselves (2012, p.40). To see why this is so, consider John's motivation for condemning Mika. John initially found the Cerberus explanation odd and after questioning Mika, deemed it untenable. Presumably, John holds his own views, whatever they may be, to be true and so, he believed himself right to condemn what was obviously the wrong view. Were there objective facts about reality that were experienced identically between all people who do not deliberately confuse themselves and were John's view aligned with these objective points, he could arguably be treating Mika as an end. By correcting Mika, albeit harshly, he would be moving Mika towards *the* truth. This is not the case. Both Mika and John hold *a* truth that is authentically experienced by each of them. Moreover, John is taking Mika's outer illusion, i.e. Cerberus, to be the whole of Mika's purpose in believing what he does. So, John's condemnation serves only to satisfy his desire to vindicate his own explanation and Mika is treated as a means to that end. Thus, John violates a tenet of Kant's categorical imperative and so, explanatory condemnation as a maxim cannot be universalized.

It does seem possible to rephrase the example to have John treat Mika as an end and so, I will supply another argument against condemnation. As before, assume that condemnation is permissible but now John does treat Mika as an end. It is important to note that the right to condemn Mika is not limited to John; everyone has that right so long as they treat Mika as an end. Consider what this might do to Mika's ability to handle his EEPs. By being repeatedly condemned, he suffers considerably and after enough condemnation, will need to seek a new explanation. Recall that altering or swapping explanations is arduous to attempt and unpredictable in its results. It is a very real possibility that Mika's EEPs will intensify, making him increasingly unable to bear his life. Pain seldom leads to improved rationality and often provokes emotional responses. Thus, not only is Mika worse off personally, he is also less capable of recognizing and following the duties that Kant values. Moreover, if Mika passes his EPT, he may choose to kill himself. What is more troubling is that morality, by allowing condemnation, would have allowed people to condemn Mika even if it became obvious that continued provocation might well lead to his suicide. Since Kant held that "the moral worth of the action does not lie in the effect that is expected from it" (2004, p.16), any warning sign from Mika would be deemed morally irrelevant. As mentioned before, Kant opposes suicide and would seem to have to reject condemnation as permissible. Hence, under a Kantian view, explanatory condemnation is morally impermissible.

A Utilitarian Argument Against Condemnation

Since existential pain is highly related to the happiness of a person, I will first show that hedonistic utilitarianism¹⁰ opposes explanatory condemnation. So, the relevant question is

¹⁰ Hedonistic utilitarianism, as understood here, is the view that the morally righteous choice is whatever would cause the greatest increase in happiness. It is sometimes tied to the number of people affected or to the intensity of the happiness induced.

whether condemning EEP-stricken people gives more happiness to the condemners than is gained by the EEP-stricken people when they are not being targeted. To answer this, consider what is gained and lost by each group when condemnation happens. If those with EEPs are condemned, they are forced to directly address their EEPs and as a result, may run the risk of surpassing their EPTs. On the other hand, the condemners get whatever pleasure they personally derive from showing their own explanations to be superior. While it seems possible that some condemners would feel truly substantial pleasure, it seems that the forceful threat of suicide and increased anguish outweighs the pleasure gained by condemnation. Thus, in general, hedonistic utilitarianism will oppose explanatory condemnation. That said, a stronger conclusion can be drawn from the utilitarian viewpoint.

As referenced earlier, Saint Bueno vocalizes a specific reason for why he chooses to continue living despite feeling his life to be a protracted suicide. In his role as a priest, he confers the ideas of the Church to the townspeople and they benefit greatly from his service. Following a utilitarian thought, he notes that “the important thing is that they live undisturbed, in concord with one another-and with the truth, [but] with my truth, they could not live at all. Let them live. That is what the Church does, it lets them live” (Unamuno, 2004, p.276). Saint Bueno recognizes the role he and his teachings play in the happiness of the people and so, he chooses to sacrifice his own existential health for the greater good.¹¹ Just as it was Mika’s right not to be condemned, it is Saint Bueno’s right to choose to bear his EEPs longer than necessary. By continuing on, Saint Bueno’s “people can come to feel, when they are part of something bigger, that it is a part

¹¹ Friedrich Nietzsche’s famous passage 125 from *The Gay Science* might serve as a contrasting example to Saint Bueno. The madman comes into town bemoaning the figurative death of God and the diminishing influence it had on people’s lives. As a result, he worries that people will be unable to contend with their lives now that God is no longer an unshakeable option to turn to in times of distress. His question of “how shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers?” (1974, p.181) mirrors the question of how it is each person can handle their EEPs.

of them too. They worry less about what is peculiar to themselves” (Nagel, 1979, p.16). In effect, each of the townspeople gains an explanation that may aid them should they themselves develop EEPs. As Saint Bueno tells Angela, “it’s better for them to believe everything, even things that contradict one another, than to believe nothing” (Unamuno, 2004, p.281) which is, in no uncertain terms, aligned with the opposition of explanatory condemnation. Hence, by regarding explanatory condemnation as impermissible, it is possible to have the few preemptively minimize any existential burdens of the many.

The Importance of Allowing Suicide

When discussing Kirilov, I claimed that the availability of suicide can be an important part of a person’s ability to handle their EEPs. Additionally, I noted that when we have to make choices with uncertain consequences, we tend to feel more comfortable doing so if we know that we can counteract the consequences should they prove terrible. Presumably, most people do not want to die, especially when the alternate is an enjoyable life, and EEP-stricken people are no exception. There are certainly people who have far surpassed their EPTs and have rationally decided to kill themselves.¹² For them, being told that suicide is morally (im)permissible seems irrelevant; merely asserting a moral claim is unlikely to encourage or dissuade a person in such an exhausted state. On the other hand, those who have EEPs but have not yet passed their EPTs might be affected if they are condemned for considering suicide. In this section, I shall argue that if the goal is to lessen the likelihood of a person committing suicide, it is better to regard suicide as morally permissible and not condemn a person for being suicidal.

¹² Shelly Kagan’s *Death* (chapter 15) and Margaret Battin’s *Ethical Issues in Suicide* (chapter 4) provide strong arguments supporting the claim that a person can be rational and suicidal. Since, however, a full defense of suicide being morally permissible is not the focus of this paper, I have chosen to exclude it here.

I will once again make use of the Cerberus-believing Mika and his neighbor John. In this case, John overhears Mika saying that being able to commit suicide helps him handle his EEPs. Note that Mika is not necessarily suicidal; it is the fact alone that he can kill himself that is comforting. As before, John asks Mika why he feels this way and Mika again gives a polite answer. Dissatisfied with Mika's answer, John condemns Mika, accusing him of being irrational, unappreciative of the value of life, and selfish.¹³ From John's point of view, Mika's life appears quite pleasant and so, Mika killing himself seems like an overly dramatic thought and hardly rational. John believes himself to be acting righteously and perhaps even compassionately, but once again, John is mistaking Mika's outer illusions for the totality of his being. Mika does, in fact, want to live a happier life and he has tried to bring that about. Not for a lack of trying, however, his efforts have failed, and he finds himself worse off than ever before. So, what is Mika to do? He can, of course, choose to go on and risk trying to find a new explanation once again, but that has painful consequences. What's more is that Mika has a history of bad luck with his attempts to make his EEPs more bearable and so, he is not unreasonably pessimistic about his odds of future success. Under these conditions, the possibility of suicide has become a part of Mika's explanation. Now, the question is whether John should be allowed to condemn Mika.

Unsurprisingly, I think the answer is no. Consider what happens when John condemns Mika. As was argued earlier, condemnation of an EEP-stricken person's explanation damages the explanation's ability to obscure the full weight of the individual's pain. Remember that Mika wants to live but his current explanation is not powerful enough to sufficiently reduce his EEPs. To go on living, Mika needs to risk looking for a new explanation, but he is being told that suicide is impermissible by John. Now, Mika finds himself less certain of his ability to handle

¹³ John could make any number of accusations but irrationality, not being appreciative of life's supposed values, and being selfish (for causing other's pain) are the most common forms of attack.

the consequences of looking for a new explanation, especially if his EEPs intensify as a result. This greater uncertainty discourages Mika from wanting to take the risk but if he does not, he can only wait for his EEPs to overtake his EPT. If he is sufficiently dissuaded from trying, his alternate is suicide. This is doubly unpleasant; neither John nor Mika want an outcome where Mika kills himself. Consider what would happen if John was not permitted to condemn Mika.¹⁴ Mika still has to find a new explanation but now, he feels that he has an escape from his EEPs should he need it. Thus, he is more likely to seek out a new explanation if he is not condemned for regarding suicide as a viable option. So, it follows that if John wants to lower the likelihood of Mika killing himself, he should not condemn Mika.¹⁵

Before concluding, there are three caveats that must be said. Firstly, I am not arguing that suicide is necessarily morally permissible. As has been the case throughout this paper, I am only concerned with the implications of condemnation in a practical sense. Whether suicide is actually morally permissible is not relevant here. Regardless of the answer, I maintain that it is better to treat suicide as permissible if a person wants to lower the chances of EEP-stricken people killing themselves. Secondly, I have also not claimed that a person is permitted to encourage or push an EEP-stricken person to commit suicide. Just as I have argued that a person has the right to not have their explanations condemned, a person also has the right to go on in spite of their pain. Finally, I do not regard suicide as any less tragic than anyone else just because I believe it should be treated as permissible. With few exceptions, suicide harms a person's loved ones, their peers, and sometimes their community. As Schopenhauer poignantly pointed out, "if our lives were without end and free from pain, it would possibly not occur to anyone to ask why the world

¹⁴ John can still talk to Mika and ask him about his reasons for feeling suicidal. A conversation, so long as John respects Mika's right to only say what he wants to say, is not condemnation.

¹⁵ Since there is nothing special about John, I take this to apply in general.

exists” (1966, p.161), but for some, their lives are desperately far from being free of pain. Suicide is tragic because some people, despite their best efforts, cannot find satisfactory explanations that would make their lives tolerable. Camus likened this to “confessing that [your] life is too much for you” (2018, p.5) and I have now argued that condemnation for acknowledging such is morally impermissible.

Conclusion

It has now been argued that some people face incredible pain when trying to explain why their world appears as it does. Furthermore, the judgements of others, especially when they are condemnatory, can have a substantial impact on those with EEPs. Accordingly, I argued that it is morally impermissible to condemn an EEP-stricken person for holding their particular explanation, even when the explanation appears strange or untenable to observers. Finally, I defended the claim that suicide should be treated as morally permissible since it can play a crucial role in the explanations of those close to their EPTs. If people are to have the right to pursue happiness and preserve their lives, explanatory condemnation cannot be allowed.

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