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DOMINION AND SUICIDE

Suicide according to many prospective and functions: the reasons of freedom.

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“There is only one truly philosophical problem: the suicide. Judge if life is worth or not to be lived, is the answer to the fundamental question of philosophy”. (A. Camus, the Myth of Sisyphus)

Many years have passed - more than a century - since the **existentialism** in its various features alimanted, with its rolling clamour and the novelty, typical of a radical change of thought, remarkable astonishment as well as an open challenge to the concepts that were “absorbed as reference”, inside **the idealism, positivism and the rationalism** representative of the 19th century.

This manifold surge of ideas concentrated, in different ways, on an argument that until then was limited and ostracized: the freedom of the person and of his choices concerning everything else. It has not to be a surprise, then, that one of the leader of this concept, that cannot be considered just as novelist, pointed an accusing finger at a problem still not solved nowadays, and after almost half century, a taboo which is hard to talk about: suicide.

Albert Camus, just as Hume and Schopenhauer did before him, accepted the suicide as rational and licit as a personal choice, and not connected with ideological motives and for this highly worth in an existence as senseless as the human one, of which Sisyphus is the most effective metaphor: “suicide is the **acceptance of its own limit**”. That is what affirmed the intellectual in matter of this choice, which was not the solution for the problems of existence. Therefore, resuming the script that has only an appearance of the pessimistic vein, the result is a “moral”: the person has to be in the middle of his own world, either in the choices of life and of death, that regarding the first, the last, is just one of many phases. Camus, indeed, does not talk of suicide in the romantic literature or in the Cristian – Jewish translation, and so that suicide in the name of an ideal or a religion, (such as Apollonian, sanctified even if suicide since it is “for God”) but as **absolute personal choice**. It is in the first place the freedom of individual choices and, consequently, of the person.

What I want to do here, in this article, is to observe and define briefly few examples in the story of law and not only of suicide; that is, try to establish how the law and other concepts observe and evaluate the suicide, contributing to make it more obscure and intricate in its vision and dimension. My intention is to analyse this distance that the law in eighteenth and nineteenth century presented concerning the concepts that after few years started to evolve in the existentialism, trying so to trace the motives.

Taking as a reference point the **English law of eighteenth century**, the suicide was guilty toward the King and toward God for his behaviour. The punishment given was to lose every good he had and the possibility of a Cristian burial. In 800, the tendency of the English courts to deny the loss of the goods caused by the suicide took to the predisposition for the attorneys to a system that avoided this punishment: mental illness. What was known as a legal tactic, a way out, tried to avoid the punishment foreseen. In relation to this loophole **W. Blackstone, English legal expert of eighteenth century**, invited to pay attention and to dissuade from the use. This punishment is measured with the English jurisprudence that would last until the last years of nineteenth century. Until the nineteenth century the person who tried to commit suicide and did not succeed, was seen as attempted homicide and therefore, punished with hanging and, until 1961, suicide was considered a serious crime from the English jurisprudence.

It is this dimension, “**suicide as an illness**”, that will be proposed again from the nineteenth century on in many ways especially from psychology and psychoanalysis, but also from sociology (often indicating the “outer” motives to the subject) until nowadays. The society still address the suicide subject as a bedridden according to various stages that works through them and instigate the act (depression, alcohol, psychoactive drug etc.) defining a relation almost of absolute cause and effect with the above-mentioned symptoms of this illness.

Making an analysis of the world system in relation to suicide, it emerges that it is still forbidden in many countries such as India and Islamic countries, **but also that** it was recently **decriminalized in many countries of USA and in Ireland**. Surprisingly, in some nations such as Japan, suicide was seen positively and accepted but only as a defence of the Japanese empire, in particular it is to remember Kamikaze’s and seppuku (hara-kiri) made also to run the enemies and a “**dishonourable**” death.

What I tried to accomplish with this kaleidoscopic (and certainly incomplete) analysis of suicide, of its punishment and vision? In my opinion the result is a **rather accentuated relativity** but, in some ways, according to the vision of suicide. To better explain. Paying attention to all the examples, what does comes out is **the will of dominium of the man on the man**, beyond the moral evaluations of the matter. Indeed, if for religious and civic motives the English man of 800 was forbidden or punished in committing suicide, the same act is efficient, but it is considered heroic when it is accomplished in the name of the Japanese empire(kamikaze) or religion (Apollonian case). Today we are all victims of a vision conditioned by this choice, since as we clearly can see it is historically dimensioned upon an aim chosen from the above and for this reason, defined and moralized according to the result.

For what concern sociologist and analysts, their repulsion toward this act is related to their activity. An analyst work is compromised when a patient suicides, as well as the sociologist has to defend the community from the actions that threat it; Durkheim, in its classification of the typologies of suicide, does not give the idea of observing an environmental illness that has to be divided and resumed into categories of symptoms and awareness of the facts.

In conclusion, I find it **impossible to give a moral judgement in an absolute way** of suicide: as one can see, the various point of view on this act, hide many secondary functions. That happens because we are lead to give a moral judgement according to our activity or our aims or vision of the world, not caring for the freedom of the person and of the reasons that everyone has; this a dominions according to everyone see things and that dominate us as well: we are not free in judgement. The only vision recognized as possible and desirable, as well as logically and rationally efficient, is that of **understanding the individual reasons and the freedom of the subjects**, even when they are in contrast with how ones act or think, especially because of others, in respect to the “existentialist ethics”.

Once has to try, according to its possibility, to limit and expose this dominion, in particular when it becomes norm (and therefore coercive).

In my opinion, it is still the weight and challenge more difficult of freedom: to understand when Sisyphus does not want to push the rock toward its peak.
