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Author

Phan, Allyson

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**A SINGLE-PARTY DISTINCTION OF THE KILLING AND LETTING DIE
ARGUMENT: DISCERNING A NOTION OF ACTIVE AND PASSIVE SUICIDE**

By

Allyson Phan

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APPROVED

Dr. Michael Nelson

Department of Philosophy

Dr. Begoña Echeverria, Howard H Hays, Jr. Chair

University Honors

ABSTRACT

In ethical philosophy, the “killing and letting die” argument discusses whether a moral distinction exists between killing someone and letting them die—an extension of the “doing and allowing” argument. There is some sense of intuition in which we understand that this distinction exists between *doing harm* and *allowing harm* to be done to another. However, this intuition disappears when shifting the discussion from *two parties* to *one party*—in other words, it is not intuitive whether there is a distinction between killing oneself and letting oneself die. This capstone project is concerned with determining whether a possible distinction between killing oneself and letting oneself die—or in synonymous terms, an “active” and “passive” suicide. In order to examine a possible distinction between the two, an intention-based account of suicide was created, under which suicide is defined using terminology such as want, means, end goal, and intention. Utilizing this new framework for suicide, we revisited our notions of active and passive suicide in order to determine if a distinctive nature between the two could possibly exist. Discussion highlights that, with the *want* and *end goal* being the same in both cases, a possibility for a distinctive nature of active and passive suicide exists on the basis of intention and action.

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Introduction

There is an important distinction to be made between killing someone and merely letting them die. This distinction has been invoked to explain the ethics of physician assisted suicide and to explain other moral problems, together with its related moral doctrine of double effect, which concerns the difference between intending an effect and merely foreseeing that it will be a consequence of one's more immediate actions. Regardless of whether or not these distinctions are morally significant and can actually do the ethical work to which they have been traditionally put, it seems intuitively clear that it is at least one thing to actively kill a person and another to merely let them die. Consider the following scenarios.

Scenario 1:

A person is standing on the train platform as their train approaches the station. A second person pushes them off the platform and onto the tracks, causing them to be run over and killed by the train.

Scenario 2:

A man is standing on the train tracks as a train is approaching, A bystander does nothing as the train arrives, watching as the person on the tracks gets run over and killed by the train .

While neither the pusher nor the bystander are morally innocent, let alone moral heroes, there is a clear legal difference between the parties. The person that intentionally pushes another onto the train tracks, thereby causing them to die, is guilty of murder, while the bystander in the second case has not violated the criminal code in most U.S. cities. Furthermore, the two parties have

very clearly *behaved* differently; they haven't "done the same thing," even though both played important roles in the victims being run over and killed by a train.

A central aspect of the familiar cases illustrating the distinction between killing and letting die is that two parties are involved, one the killer and the other the person killed by that other person. Through this two-party arrangement, the killing and letting die problem can be easily translated into real-world issues of medical euthanasia, murder, warfare, and the like.

I want to ask, however, whether or not the killing and letting die distinction can gain purchase in cases in which only a *single* agent is involved—in other words, does the killing and letting die distinction apply to the *first person*?

In order to conceptualize this, we will imagine a modified version of the aforementioned scenario, in which:

A person is standing on a platform waiting for their train to approach. As the train is pulling into the station, they jump in front of it—thereby ending their life.

And, alternatively:

A person is standing on the train tracks as a train approaches, and does not take themselves off as the train approaches—also, then, ending their life.

When the killing and letting die distinction is shifted to reflect the concept of death cast upon *oneself* (rather than upon others), the discussion becomes not of murder, but rather of suicide. Unlike the previously proposed set of scenarios reflecting the classical "killing versus letting die" argument, it is not quite intuitive to state that there is a distinction between a killing and letting die when referring to harm done to *oneself*. Rather, when it becomes a matter of

first-person self harm, previous arguments relating to killing and letting die seem to become nullified.

In this essay, I explore whether or not a similar distinction between a killing and letting die can be made in cases with a single act. That is, whether an analog distinction exists between killing oneself and merely letting oneself die.

Unlike iterations of the killing and letting die argument, our discussion of active and passive suicide will not focus on a possible *moral* distinction between the two, but rather whether a distinction exists at all. But first we have to ask *what is suicide?* I will first develop and defend an intention-based account of suicide. That is, I will develop an account according to which a case of self-killing counts as a case of suicide only when the person killed themselves with the appropriate intent to thereby die. Using the conditions by which we define suicide, we will ponder whether a distinctive nature between an active and passive suicide could exist amidst our understanding of suicide.

Revised intention-based account of suicide

In order to grasp the possible concepts of an “active” and “passive” suicide, we must turn to understand the nature of suicide as a whole. By developing a notion of suicide as a whole, we establish a framework for the comparison of active and passive suicide in later sections.

Condition 1: Suicide must be non-accidental

When is someone’s death a suicide? A quick definition is that suicide is “self-inflicted death” and so someone’s death is a suicide when they die at their own hands. However, we can see that this is inadequate by noticing cases of self-inflicted deaths that are intuitively not suicides.

Consider, for example, the following pair of scenarios:

Scene 1: *A man grabs a sharp knife and lodges it into his own chest, killing himself.*

Scene 2: *A man is cutting meat with a sharp knife and it slips out of his grip, lodging into his chest and killing him.*

Scene 1, properly fleshed out, is plausibly a suicide, but Scene 2 is not. Note that, in both cases, the death is resultant of a self-inflicted action (a knife being lodged into one's chest). However, the distinction, here, is in whether the man had *intended* to end their own life. If we suppose that, in the first case, the act of lodging the knife into one's chest followed directly from an intent to do so, then the case is clearly an act of suicide. In the second case, however, the man's death seems to have resulted independently of a prior formed intent—in other words, it was an accidental killing. For a self-inflicted death to count as a genuine case of suicide, then, it seems that the death needs to have not been an accident, in the sense that the person meant for their action to result in their death. This notion of intention is central to past accounts of suicide, and will be discussed via further conditions.

Through establishment of a “non-accidentality” clause for suicide, we clear the notion that a simple concept of “self-inflicted death” is not enough to constitute a suicide, and that a suicidal action must have some form of prior intent.

Condition 2: One's death must be their ultimate end goal, rather than a means to some further end

Under this condition, we distinguish between the concepts of death as an “end goal” versus a “means to an end.” Furthermore, we will hold that one's death, if merely an “end goal,” would constitute as a proper condition to suicide, while one's death, if simply a “means to an end,” would not.

In an intention-oriented viewpoint of practical action, the *end goal* of an action serves as the aim that one is motivated to achieve. On the other hand, the *means* consists of the method by which one attains their end goal. Suppose that, as I sit here writing this, I decide that I am hungry and want to eat a burger and fries. However, in order to get my burger and fries, I must get into my car and drive about 5 minutes to the fast food chain. In this case, my end goal (or aim) is to eat a burger and fries in order to satiate my appetite. The means whereby I achieve this end goal, in this case, is that I get into my car and drive. Driving my car to the fast food restaurant is the means by which my intended end goal is achieved. In cases of suicide, the means by which death is achieved often consists of deliberate drug overdose, hanging, self-inflicted gunshot, etc.

This means-end account of action works to distinguish cases of self-inflicted death that are indeed non-accidental, but are of a nature that we should be hesitant to label as a suicide.

Consider the following two examples of self-inflicted death, in which one's death acts as one's 1) primary end goal versus 2) merely a means to a further end:

- 1) *A soldier on the battlefield no longer wishes to live due to the nature of war, so he purposefully jumps on top of a grenade—which detonates and kills him.*
- 2) *A soldier sees an enemy grenade land near a group of his comrades. In order to protect his comrades, he utilizes his body as a shield and jumps on top of the grenade—which detonates and kills him.*

There are several aspects of the above examples that are of particular interest. In both cases, the death is resultant of the same action (jumping onto a grenade). Unlike the examples with the knife posed under Condition 1, both deaths seem to arise from a non-accidental action—with the awareness in both situations that, by jumping on the grenade, one's life would

end. However, while we are inclined to state that the first instance is one of suicide, this same connotation is not so intuitive in regards to the second instance.

Though the action resulting in death is shared between the two cases, the distinction lies in the *end goal* of the action, and the role that death plays in the means–end goal relation. In the first case, the soldier’s end goal was to die, while, in the second case, the soldier’s end goal was to save their comrades. Similarly, we find that, as the *end goal* of the soldiers’ actions differs, the *means* by which they achieve their end goal differs as well. Given that the first soldier’s end goal is his death, his jumping on the grenade is the means by which he achieves that goal. On the other hand, the means by which the second soldier saves his comrades is that he dies. Through this distinction, we see that one’s death can serve both as a final goal, and also merely as a means to attain a primary goal. We see, as well, that there is some intuitive understanding that death, as a final goal, is “suicide”, but death, as a means to some further primary goal, is not.

One might argue for a case in which one’s death serves *both* as a means to an end and as an end goal. Say, for example, that you wish to die simply on the basis that you think life is no longer worth living. Say, as well, that you happen to know that if you disguised your suicide, your family could get a hefty life insurance check out of your death. In this case, it seems that the means-end distinction becomes blurred. It seems that, in this example, your death acts both as an end goal (being that you simply wished to die), and as a means to a secondary goal (to give your family the life insurance money). However, this does not detract from the statement that death still acts as an ultimate goal. To explain such, imagine that we removed the “life insurance” aspect of the scenario—meaning that, in bringing about your own death, you would no longer receive life insurance money for your family. Because we are supposing that you are also suicidal, in that *part* of your original reason for ending your own life is that you think it is no

longer worth living, it would seem that you would still chose to end your life even on the condition that you will not thereby leave your family with money from your insurance policy. The life insurance money was not the sole or main motivator for your death, but rather a secondary benefit. In other terms, the existence of a “secondary end goal” to one’s dying does not detract from the primary end goal of dying. By contrast, our self-sacrificing soldier does not have his own death as his end goal in any sense, but is only aiming to save his comrades. We see then that a death being *both* one’s “end goal” and means for a secondary goal does not undermine our statement that death, in a suicide, must be one’s end goal.

Our discussion of the “end goal” to one’s death highlights the need to discuss the notion of the desire to die, as well as the necessity of an intentional state in suicide.

Condition 3: One must want to die, and one act with the intention to die

In a general understanding of it, *want* consists of a sense of desire—a mental state involving an end goal that we wish to bring into fruition. *Intention*, on the other hand, serves as an extension of “want” that directs our behavior towards our desired goal—bridging our *want* to do something to the *action* that will result in our intended goal. Consider a simple relationship between the three:

Want: “I want to achieve good grades in university”.

Intention: “I want to achieve good grades, so I will attend my lectures and office hours”.

Action/End goal: “I achieve good grades”.

We shall keep in mind the fact that “want” and “intention” are concepts that can be independent of each other in regards to action. Imagine someone watching TV on a couch when she suddenly starts wanting to bake a cake. However, no matter how much she thinks about

baking this cake and how she'd love to eat a cake, she does nothing to get off of the couch and start with the preparations for baking a cake. She merely sits there wanting a cake. (Perhaps she feels too lazy and decides it just isn't worth the effort, even though she wants some cake. In this sense, a *want* for an action (baking a cake), exists, but the *intention* to act does not—thereby demonstrating that *want* can exist without a corresponding intention.

On the other hand, we are not so quick to state that one can intend to do something without, in some sense of it, wanting to do so. Say that the woman in the given example decided, after all, to get up and bake the cake. It seems quite clear, here, that the woman's intent to bake the cake arose from her desire to bake and eat a cake. Conversely, there seem to be cases in which we intend to do an action although we seem to not want it; for example, a visit to the doctor's office. Though one may not want to get examined and be stuck by needles, they fully intend to go to their appointment and see it through. Although we can state, in this example, that the person fully intended to visit the doctor, whether we can say that the person truly did not *want* to go is somewhat unclear.

In a perhaps clearer explanation of this contradiction, we will turn to the notion of want as an "end", versus as a "means". In our given example of the woman baking the cake, her want to eat a cake served as an end goal to which she executed her intent to bake a cake. To put in simpler terms, the woman baked a cake because she wanted, ultimately, to eat cake. Conversely, it is hard to say that a person afraid of needles attended their doctor's appointment because they simply wanted to go. However, what we could state with greater certainty would be that the person afraid of needles wanted, above all, to maintain their health. There is some sense, then, in which the person wanted to visit the doctor's office—not as a desire to visit the doctor's office in

itself, but as a means to maintain good health. In this case, a want to go to the doctor's office exists—not as a want in itself, but as a means for a greater end goal.

In the case of suicide, it seems clear to that someone who *wants* to die and who understands the actions that will cause their death *intends* to die. Given our prior example of a man who accidentally slips a knife into his chest, we can see that the man had no existing desire to end his life. Thus, the *intention* to slip the knife into his chest didn't exist—nullifying his death as a suicide, and classifying it as an accidental self-inflicted death. Therefore, we establish that *want* and *intention* are necessary conditions for a death to be a suicide.

Condition 4: One's death must follow directly from their intent to die

Under this condition, we will outline that simply wanting to die and having the intention to die are not sufficient to wholly constitute a suicide. In order to demonstrate this, consider the following case:

A man wants to die simply because he believes that life is no longer worth living. He decides that he wants to kill himself via hanging, and would like to hang himself in the neck of the woods across the train tracks. As he is walking across the tracks to get to the tree, he is struck by a train (that comes outside of his awareness) and is thereby killed.

We can note here that two of the aforementioned conditions seem to be fulfilled in this situation. It seems evident that death, in this case, serves as the man's ultimate end goal (rather than a means to a secondary goal), fulfilling the 2nd proposed condition. Alongside such, it is quite clear that the man had both *wanted* to die and *intended* to die—meaning that he had formed the intention to kill himself via hanging as a result of his motivation to end his own life, thus fulfilling the 3rd condition. We can take into account, as well, that getting hit by a train was not a foreseen consequence of the man's intention to die, but rather an event that occurred

independently of the man's original intention to kill himself. As a result of such, although the man seemingly *intended* to die, the action that resulted in his death was done *non-intentionally*, or, in other terms, *accidentally*.

Donald Davidson, in his essay *Actions, Reasons, and Causes*, proposes a similar scenario through his discussion of deviant causation. He invites his readers to imagine a case in which two men are rock climbing, with each person aiding in supporting the rope of the other. He proposes that one of the men suddenly obtains the desire to let go of the rope supporting their partner. This thought, then, rattles the man so much that he loses his grip on the rope—resulting in the death of their climbing partner. His dropping his partner was an accident, even though it was caused, in some sense, by his desire to drop him.

Both cases share similarity in the fact that a want to do 'X' was formed, and that the wanted 'X' occurred (in this case, the desire to die and to kill another). However, there is a disconnect between that want and the resultant action. In the instance of the man who wanted to hang himself, his death by train occurred outside of his planned intention to do so, although a want to die had existed. On the other hand, in Davidson's example regarding the rock climbers, the desired end goal occurred not as a direct result of his intention, but rather in an indirect manner.

The given cases show that one's desired end goal can be attained *without* the intended manner of doing so; however, it is the *direct association* of intention and action that causes a self-inflicted death to be a suicide. Let us look at the given case with the man who intends to hang himself, but reimagine the outcome.

A man wants to die simply because he believes that life is no longer worth living. He decides that he wants to kill himself via hanging, and would like to hang himself in the

neck of the woods across the train tracks. As he is walking across the tracks to get to the tree, he notices that a train is hurling in his direction. He decides, then, that he would rather die via getting hit by the train than hanging himself—letting himself get hit by the train.

When restructuring the scenario to make it that the man is cognizant of the incoming train, we find that it is now intuitive to state that the man had committed a suicide. Unlike the earlier variant of the case, the man was made aware of the incoming train, and was able to determine his course of action. His dying by train was the realization of his intention that, by getting hit by the train, he would meet his death. In other words, death followed from the execution of his intention into action, even though he changed his mind about the means by which he would bring that end about. In this case, unlike the original variant of the case, his decision to be run over by the train is productive in bringing about his death.

This distinction seems to connect our understanding of intention and end goal, underlining that the extension of one's intent results in their desired action.

Want, Intention, and End Goal

Given our discussion of terminology such as *want*, *intention*, and *end goal*, it seems appropriate to provide a concise definition of all the aforementioned terms, and discuss their interplay in the execution of action. Shown below are, as of our prior discussion, our notion of the following terms so far:

Want: Our desire to obtain a specific end goal.

Intention: The specific “action plan” that is driven by want.

End goal: The aim of your desire.

In a more applicable understanding of the terminology, consider the following:

Want: “I want to eat a cake”

Intention: “I will bake a cake in order to eat it”

End goal: “I eat a cake”

As per our previous discussions, we note that want can exist without intention, but intention cannot exist without some form of want (either as a final goal, or as a means to a goal). On top of such, we held that one’s end goal can be achieved independently of their original intent; however, that the association of the intention–action pair that results in death is necessary for a death to constitute a suicide.

Given our understanding of the want–intention–action interplay, we will look at the distinction in their relation in the classic “killing” and “letting die” scenario. Aside from the concept of a moral distinction, the key difference between a *killing* and *letting die* seems to lie in the *intention* that both hold. As mentioned earlier, it is possible to have the same final *end goal* (stemming from the same desire) without having the same *intention*, as the intentional state involves a more definite idea of the “action plan” required to reach the end goal. In a case of killing, the “intention” involves direct *action*, being that one must *act upon* a certain chain of events in order to end another’s life (for example, taking the steps to push the person off the platform). In a case of letting die, however, the fulfillment of the intentional state does not involve an action at all, but rather requires one’s *inaction*—being that one *refraining from acting* results in their desired end goal.

Discerning an Active/Passive Suicide Distinction

With our prior discussion of notions such as accidentality, end goal, means, and intention, we outline a revised intention-based account of suicide, such that:

1. *One’s death is non-accidental*

2. *Death is one's ultimate end goal, rather than merely a means to some further primary end*
3. *One must want to die, and have the intention to die*
4. *One's death must follow directly from their intent to die*

Given this newfound definition of suicide, we turn our attention to our original topic of interest: the notions of an “active” and “passive” suicides. Let us revisit an originally proposed scenario:

A person is standing on a platform waiting for their train to approach. As the train is pulling into the station, they jump in front of it—thereby ending their life.

And, alternatively:

A person is standing on the train tracks as a train approaches, and does not take themselves off as the train approaches—also, then, ending their life.

Let us, as well, view these scenarios under our proposed understanding of “active” and “passive” suicide:

Active suicide: You actively jump in front of the train. (analogous to “doing” something).

Passive suicide: You let the train hit you, doing nothing to prevent it (analogous to “allowing” something).

In order to further characterize our “active” and “passive” definition of suicide, we will imagine a case in which the train suddenly breaks before hitting the people in both scenarios. We can imagine that, should this happen, that someone who is “actively” suicidal might simply move to the next platform, waiting for the next train to come around to jump in front of. Conversely, should this happen to someone who simply wanted to allow themselves to die, we might not

imagine that they would go about and find another means to bring about their death. We could think, rather, that they simply lost the chance to let death embrace them.

Active/Passive Suicide and Accidentality

Under our first condition for suicide, we hold that a suicide must be non-accidental. In this section, I will explore whether we can describe a case of passive suicide that is “nonaccidental.”

Regardless of whether or not someone jumps in front of the train tracks versus allowing the train to hit them, there, intuitively, seems to be no sense of accidentality. In both our proposed active and passive suicide cases, we can surely state that the act of being hit by the train was the result of an intentional thought. There was some sense of certainty that, by doing ‘A’ (in these cases, by jumping in front of the train or by staying on the tracks), ‘B’ would occur (one’s death would be met).

Reimagine the same scenarios, but as an accident: suppose that you are walking alongside train tracks, but accidentally stumble and fall right as a train arrives—resulting in your death. This is an accidental death, as the death is brought about independently of a prior intent—you did not intend that, by merely taking a stroll along the train tracks, you would meet your death.

Due to the existing *intention* to die in both our active and passive cases of suicide, it is clear to us that there exists *no distinction* between an active and passive suicide in the case of accidentality.

Active/Passive Suicide and End Goal/Mean

In our second proposed condition for suicide, we hold that one’s death must act as their ultimate end goal in order to constitute a suicide, rather than being a means for a secondary goal.

This section will discuss whether a difference in end goal and means exists between someone who, by our definition, “kills themselves” versus “lets themselves die”.

Given our examples of an “active” versus a “passive” suicide, it seems pretty intuitive to state that both someone who *kills themselves* as well as someone who merely *lets themselves die* has the ultimate end goal of dying. Furthermore, unless otherwise specified, death, in both cases, does not act as a *means* to another goal—being that the end goal consists of dying in and of itself.

One may argue, however, that in the active case, the end goal is to die *via direct action*, while, in the passive case, the end goal is to die *via passive inaction*. However, this becomes not a matter of *end goal*, but rather of the *intention* bridging one’s desire to die to their ultimate end goal of dying.

Active/Passive Suicide and Want/Intention

Under our third condition for a suicide, we hold that one must both *want* to die and *intend* to die in order to label their death as a suicide. In order to examine whether a distinction exists between active and passive suicide, we will look at the want-intention relationship in both cases.

As previously described in our “baking a cake” scenario, we hold that, while it is possible for *want* to exist without *intention*, it is not possible for *intention* to exist without some form of *want*. In our outlined cases where one 1) kills themselves and 2) lets themselves die, it seems quite clear to reason that, in both instances, the person *wanted* to die.

Perhaps one might hold that, in the passive suicide case, the person did *not want* to die. However, to assert such would be to essentially say that there is no connection between the person’s positive desire towards their death and the action resulting in their death. In other words, this is essentially stating that the action resulting in the person’s death (getting hit by the

train) was entirely independent of the person's desire to die—though it seems quite logical, in this case, to say otherwise.

We can surely say that both someone who is actively and passively suicidal *intends* to die, as they both have the *want* to die, and that it is by some extension of this desire that they meet the same end goal (being that they are struck by the train and killed). Our question, then, lies in whether or not both the actively and passively suicidal person *have the same intention* to die. While both cases share a unifying intent to die (driven by a shared desire to end one's life), the manner in which this intention—action relation is extended to result in their end goal differs, being that, in the “active” case, death occurs by *doing* an action that will result in death, while the “passive” case seems to *allow* an action that will result in death to occur. This distinction between intention, action, and inaction will be discussed in the subsequent section.

Active/Passive Suicide and Acting Upon Intention

All previous conditions, up to this point, are fulfilled by both the active/passive suicide cases, in the fact that in both cases contain a *want* to die, an *end goal* of dying, and a similar intent to die. Our final condition for suicide is such that one's death must be a direct result of their intent to die.

When discussing the difference in intention between the original “killing” and “letting die” argument, I concluded that intention, in regards to *killing someone*, is realized into one's end goal via one's *action*. On the other hand, intention in regards to *letting someone die* is realized via one's *inaction*. In a similar manner, this description applies, as well, to our notion of “killing oneself” and “letting oneself die”, whereas one's end goal of bringing about their own death is achieved by their action/inaction, respectively. Under the “active suicide” distinction, it is one's

decision to *act upon* a chain of events that results in death; while in the “passive suicide” distinction, it is one’s *refraining from* a chain of events that results in the same outcome of death.

As given by our established fourth condition for suicide, one’s death must come directly from their intent to die. However, this notion of intention directly causing one’s end goal does not distinguish between whether the end goal is instigated via an *action* or an *inaction*—simply that, by some extension of one’s intention, the resultant end goal is achieved. In other words, our definition of suicide is not affected by the *specific chain of events* that carry out one’s intention, so long as it results in the end goal of death. With this knowledge, it remains possible to distinguish active and passive suicide on the basis of concepts such as “doing an action” and “refraining from acting”.

With this, we can discern between cases in which the active/passive distinction seems to be vague. Say, for example, that a person walks over to the train tracks with the intention of ending their life and sits on the tracks, waiting for a train to arrive to run them over. Though seemingly of the same structure as our original “letting oneself die” scenario, there is a sense in which the situation is of an active nature—being that the person’s intent to die guides them to *act upon their desire to die*. In other words, their intention motivates a sequence of *active* events that results in one’s death. Contrast this, however, in our original “letting die” scenario—in which a person on train tracks happens to realize that a train is coming in their direction—and, knowing this, chooses to stay on the tracks. Unlike the previous scenario, their intention to die did *not* lead them to step onto the train tracks (unlike in the previous scenario); however, their intention to die led them to *refrain* from removing themselves off of the train tracks and refrain from an action that would save their life. This second sort of example, in which a person simply finds themselves in a situation in which they realize there is a chain of events unfolding that will lead

to their death (the train heading down the track where they are standing) and decide to refrain from taking action to prevent that chain of events from unfolding to their death (i.e., they decide to not jump out of the way of the train), but they did not put themselves in such a situation through their action, is, I claim, best characterized as a genuine case of passive suicide.

Given this, we have established a framework for our understanding of someone who is “passively suicidal”, in which someone who might be described as passively suicidal would not *initiate* a sequence of events that brings about their death, but would *refrain* from a sequence of events that would preserve their life, if given the opportunity.

Conclusion

In the first half of this essay, we establish a grounds for defining suicide, in which a suicide is an action in which 1) there is no sense of accidentality 2) death serves as one’s end goal 3) one wants and intends to die, and 4) one’s death follows directly from their intention to die. Our discussion holds that while it is possible to want something but not intended for such, it is not quite possible to state that you intend something, yet don’t want it—whether as a desire in itself, or as an end goal. Following our discussion of intent, we find that one’s end goal can be achieved independently of your intent to do so, and that, in cases, different intentions can result in the same end goal.

In the latter half of the essay, we determined that both active and passive suicide have no distinctions in their non-accidentality, want/desire, and end goal. However, a distinction exists in the intention-action pair between the two, being that someone who is “actively suicidal” will *initiate* a sequence of events that result in death, whereas someone who is “passively suicidal” will *refrain* from doing a sequence of events that will allow them to live. Outlined below is, then, our account of active and passive suicide, given what we have discussed in this essay.

Active suicide:

Want: “I want to die”

Intention: “I will bring about my death by *initiating* a chain of actions”

End goal: “I will die”

Passive suicide:

Want: “I want to die”

Intention: “I will bring about death by *refraining* from preventing a chain of events”

End goal: “I will die”

Our discussion of this active and passive suicide notion allows for the interconnection of the philosophical literature on suicide to discussions of the killing and letting die notion. Though this essay focused primarily on discerning a general distinction between active and passive suicide, a further expansion of this work could be inclusive of discerning a moral distinction between active and passive suicide, in a similar manner to the original killing and letting die discussion.

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