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Freshman Colloquium

Final paper, abstract

Live or die

To choose between life and death is a privilege both because the instances that require such choice are both uncommon (violation of THE WAY) and because the decision one made is a perfect reflection of one's true personhood.

(Explanatory text) According to my point of view, the definition of true self in an oversimplified way could be "a personality with least possible compromise with the environment". Since human beings are scientifically proved gregarious animal, compromising with the society is both reasonable and indispensable. However, death helps a person get rid of social constraints. A coward may die a hero, and a hero may die a coward-- when they are facing the threat of death, people will most likely be their true selves. With obvious possibility of annihilating one's foundation of personhood, i.e., physical body, one will be forced to think soberly and behave accordingly. Under the risk of death, it appears that many if not most social norms shamelessly get in the way of the last chances of one's interaction with his or her surroundings.

Why alive?

There are many reasons for being alive; there can also be only one reason in insisting keeping alive simply. Life meanings certainty, because being alive confirms one's minimum direct influence to his or her environment. For example, claiming to be ambitious in promoting his religious belief, the priest in *The Power and the Glory* tries to disguise, escape, and even violate his own moral code to keep alive. People also wish to be alive for the possibility of life. Consider McKibben's *Thinking Past Ourselves*, it seems that many of us are not willing to trade in our current assured enjoyment for our future generations, let alone to take the risk of death. In *Gilgamesh*, the protagonist's desire for immortality can be interpreted as a desire for the fabulous possibility of future life as a king with absolute power. Before invading the forest, his cowardice is, on the other hand, the fear of the loss of such possibility. The movie *Orlando* also exemplified the hope of optimal changes one can expect from simply being alive.

Sometimes, desire of life is a crude form of physicalist that is arguably carved in our human nature. As one's intelligence grows, other ideology may conceal this nature. This explains why that when it comes to the situation with solid life threat, many if not most will compromise for life.

Why die?

Our physical body is both unique (or *precious*, if “unique” is not too subjective) and fundamental. The reason to give up one’s life can be complex, but can also be concluded in short—that certain pursuit more important than life requests death. Rorschach, “never compromise”, died in response to his unapproachable ideal. In the comic *V for Vendetta*, created by the author of *Watchmen*, the protagonist sacrificed for his idea, and claims that “Beneath this mask there is an idea, and ideas are bulletproof”, a quote that shows great courage in facing one’s true desire, and a good reason for death.

In a more abstract way, death is also a choice of certainty. When a person is killed for an idea, his or her death will be sublimated into a symbol that keeps the idea alive in people’s memory. If the very same person chooses not to die, the idea she or he promotes may appear to be comparatively less persuasive, and this person has to face the future uncertainty in dealing his relationship with the idea, himself, and others.

Also, sacrifice one’s life is often a platonic dualistic choice with an underlying belief that a pure form of mind can subsist without intervened by flesh, as mind and body are of different classes.

Exploration and Transition:

One may better understand his or her perspective on death by experiencing it. For example, after a severe sickness, John Donne wrote Holy Sonnets to express his reflection on death. It is thus not impossible to unmask people’s persona and help them explore their own selves

Neither?

It seems that Laozi prefer to deprive people’s right to choose life or death. Is the situation that asks the choice of life or die a privilege, or a punishment? Will life be better by dying more naturally and less certainly?