Many Worlds/Minds Ethics and Argument against Suicide: For Emergencies and Evaluation in Long Term Suicide Prevention and Mental Health Outcome

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Abstract: According to many worlds/minds (MW/M) descriptions, a painful survival may be almost certain for the first person observer who attempts suicide. This argument increases the fear of a painful outcome due to the suicide attempt failing. Increasingly, partially supported by the correlation of depression with time spend online,[1,2] suicides are committed by intelligent and educated people. They reject common arguments against suicide. We recommend that suicide hotlines and first responders then try our MW/M argument. MW/M based considerations can be generally benevolent with many such public health issues and may facilitate smoking and gambling cessation and increase care when driving. As a somewhat Zen like worldview, mindfulness (meditation) belongs to it, and these have shown to be helpful with issues such as depression in many studies. However, the long term effect of MW/M philosophy is unknown. We should evaluate the effect of MW/M on suicide rates and rates of mental illness such as depression, also because rather immature versions of MW/M are increasingly popular. We suggest long term follow-up observations of students after lectures on MW/M.

Keywords: Suicide Epidemic, Suicide Prevention, Rationalizing Thought, Philosophy of Suicide, Ethics and effects of Many World Theories

1 Introduction

Measures of well-being and positive affect are no longer naïve about people's maintaining happy façades. Nevertheless, suicides rates *in*crease along with such measures (Daly 2011)[3]. The *ad hoc* conclusion that depression is especially distressing when surrounded by happy people is rather too convenient. A modern person is distinguished by moral relativism and neo-enlightenment about human irrationality. A crisis of the concept of 'responsible agency' is enhanced with the cold utilitarianism that is exercised by functioning in a technologically demanding and socially fluid environment which asks for constant adaptation and re-identification. Modernization is therefore accompanied by isolation, individualization, and a lack of belonging. The try to gain control by yet more rationality can drive a positive feedback loop as such rumination decreases happiness (Killingsworth 2010).[4] Especially ruminating about the future makes unhappy. The usual suggestion is staying focused on the present. However, thinking *differently* about future may help best because long term goals enrich life with meaning. Many worlds/minds (MW/M)

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thinking refers here mainly to considering that "all possible futures are". Three remarks are immediately necessary:

1) Conceivable does not equal possible: Not all conceivable decisions, for example whether I do or do not commit suicide, are equally physically possible and therefore inevitable. MW/M does not claim that "all the physically possible (as known by our current physical theories) happens anyway" regardless of my decision. Only futures consistent with my present decisions are possible, so decisions matter.

2) Parallel worlds versus multiple futures: The idea of many possible alternative copies of our world may be as old as Eleatic philosophy. Pierre Fermat suggested considering parallel worlds to Blaise Pascal in 1654 (Devlin 2008).[5] It was essential in the development of probability theory and again later for statistical mechanics in the nineteenth century, for example in the work of Boltzmann (Cohen 1997)[6] and Ehrenfest (Ehrenfest 1912).[7] However, traditional approaches usually thought that each world is a deterministic universe. "Parallel worlds" with differences that are so small as to have been unobservable in the past lead to different futures but the observer cannot know in which world she is (the problem of self-location). If identifying more with being a (certain) physical body than with the uncertain mind, an observer still feels that the present can only lead to a single future history. In MW/M theories such as the quantum physical relative state description (Everett 1957),[8] any given present *branches* into multiple futures.

3) MW/M is not quantum mechanics: MW/M is more general than the "Many Worlds Interpretation" (MWI) (DeWitt 1973; Deutsch 1997)[9, 10] of quantum mechanics or the many minds interpretations (Albert 1988; Lockwood 1996).[11,12] Many world models with universes that branch into multiple futures can be non-quantum. They are quantum only if the statistics of entangled observers' futures violates the Bell inequality (Vongehr 2013).[13] Our suggestions here must not be confused with the so-called "quantum suicide" or 'quantum immortality' (Lewis 2001).[14] They are not grounded on a questionable interpretation of provisional theory. MW/M becomes popular through strong support from a hugely successful theory of empirical science, but it does not depend on it. If quantum mechanics obtained non-linear corrections from general relativistic gravity for example, fundamental MW/M would be even better confirmed.

Suicides are an increasing problem with many facets such as the poor state of suicide attempt survivors and the associated costs for medical care. The number of suicides increases along with our increasing rationalization and ability for relativizing in this (post)modern, throughout technological world. It is no longer mostly the desperately poor or sick who attempt suicide but rather intelligent and educated people, often secular and critical, used to and proud of linear thought as an advanced, progressive, and for the modern work-world necessary rational attitude. A rationalizing mental disposition can lead or contribute to depression and suicidal

ideation. In growing sub-populations of our modern information technological world, this all correlates positively with loneliness, with isolation from real (rather than virtual) social interaction. Many emotionally from family and co-workers isolated office workers satisfy their social urges with online interactions. Temporarily, this can feel superior to real social interaction, but the need for real social interaction stays unsatisfied and the ability for satisfying social interaction further diminishes. Rational disposition can facilitate emotional decline, and a rational approach to suicide can increase the suicide success rate. The suicidal person then simply wants life to end as quickly and painless as possible, switching all suffering off. There is no motivation for attempting recovery instead, because life is seen as meaningless – the denial of absolute meaning is after all also promoted as rational and even progressive, relativistic, (post)modern. Such "suicidal rationalizers" are immune against many arguments that might be brought forth to them when they are literally "standing on the ledge" about to jump. They might know that most people who are rescued during a suicide attempt will be thankful for having been rescued. However, people who think that they are rational also easily think that all those thankful people were not as rational, that their own situation would not improve.

Of course, in case a rather rational person decided to end their life and prepared their suicide well, there is little that can or should be done to prevent their free-death. More usually however, a sudden occurrence such as a divorce was the proverbial "last straw" resulting in that a rather rational person is suddenly about to jump out of an window. Arguments against suicide that we may now want to put forth must be honest, also scientifically, or it may further insult the intelligence of a scientifically educated person who considers suicide in part because of her perception of a dishonest world. On the other hand, such 'suicidal rationalizers' merely believe themselves to be scientific and rational and far above average intelligence. A person of only average intelligence and education must still be able to comprehend the argument, and in a stressed, highly emotional state. The argument must be concise and be delivered quickly. Nevertheless, it should draw the patient into a communication where he is taken seriously and respected as a rational person, lifting the underlying loneliness and thus already the suicidal state of mind. Another aspect led to the argument in its present form and the expectation that it may be very effective: The strongest fears of those who consider suicide is a failure leading to lifelong disability or a horribly painful and drawn out death.

2 The Emergency Argument

In order to give a specific example, we formulate the argument as if addressing somebody who is about to jump from the roof of a tall building onto the hard concrete ground or who is about to aim a gun at the roof of the mouth. These are suicide methods that exploit the time delay between sense receptor activation and the onset of our being conscious of the sensation (Libet 1979, 1987),[15,16] such as the 200 ms between the eyes receiving light and the occurrence of the neural correlates of

consciousness (Reesl 2002)[17] of the *experiencing* of the seen situation. This 'Libet delay' allows not experiencing dying even without the help of drugs. Falling from 60 meters height, the velocity six meters above the ground is larger than 31m/s, so one falls *more* than six meters during the Libet delay; in other words, the jumper will not experience approaching the ground to closer than six or more meters above it (Vongehr 2006).[18] The misunderstandings about the involved science have been well countered (Libet 1981, 1989)[19,20] and laid to rest (at least in as far as single-world reasoning can go). These methods have therefore been discussed as rational ways of committing suicide (Vongehr 2006).[21] MW/M can be held against these methods. We present it now as one could present it in an actual emergency, because the argument must work like that, not in a journal article to be downloaded and studied first:

"Please let me read to you what some physicists would like to tell you at this moment. We all remember only a single past history, and so we feel as if at any point in time, only a single future is somehow chosen. However, that is an illusion. There are many different futures, and in each one of them it feels like as if all the alternative ones do not exist, but they all go on. Do you understand that? …

If you now try committing suicide, you will die in most of the futures in which I find myself, but none of those futures will exist for you. You will find yourself only in those futures that are possible for you. In all those futures, something unexpected will have happened and you survived. In some futures, it will turn out that *there was a soft spot under the ground right* where you landed or that your legs still cushioned your impact. If you try to kill yourself, you will find yourself only in those futures where you survive and are badly disabled and in pain for the rest of your life. If you jump now, you must expect horrible pains. Do you understand this?"

Instead of "*there was a soft spot under the ground right*", the given example could be "*the gun did not function properly*" in case of a shooter. After perhaps repeating sentences in case the first responder sees that need, the argument may be continued:

"Your mind is more than the calculation of a brain in one single non-quantum world. Fundamentally, your mind is intimately correlated with the physics of how all possible worlds correlate with each other. We do not know precisely which conceivable futures actually exist for any given mind such as yours right now. This may depend on how many different kinds there are. If you do not jump, there are many more kinds of futures conceivable. Yes, there are then also futures conceivable where you have a bad accident, but there are far more conceivable futures where you will be fine. Scientists do not know the precise probabilities, but very unlikely futures are not just unlikely but may actually be impossible. If the number of good futures is far greater than the number of bad ones, the bad ones may not be at all. However, if you attempt suicide, you make almost all good futures impossible. Terrible futures will be the vast majority of all your conceivable futures. There will no longer be many good conceivable outcomes to avoid unlikely, terribly painful outcomes for you. Do

you understand that?

Let me say it differently: If you attempt suicide, you will be unconscious in most of my futures. But your mind must find itself observing a future that seems unlikely. You will find yourself in one of those terrible futures, and you will also find me being still there. So, by attempting suicide, you create those terrible futures, even for me. You ensure that in a few of my futures, I witness that you survive in terrible pains, but that is the only futures would have. So let me repeat: You will stay conscious or become conscious again in all possible future worlds where you somehow survived. You will not die, but instead be badly disabled and likely in horrible pains for a long time."

Note well that some established physicists insist on that every microstate allowed by today's standard linear quantum physics is a "real" world. Their so-called "quantum suicide" discussions imply that staying alive has far more horrible futures than suicide, namely all possible accidents, however unlikely, at every moment that we stay alive. Our argument *crucially*(!) states that "Scientists do not know the precise probabilities, but very unlikely futures are not just unlikely but may actually be impossible." Promoters of "quantum suicide" deny this. If the suicidal patient should similarly deny this, one may add that "Considering conceivable minds, very strange conceivable situations vastly outnumber commonly expected situations. Therefore, a world apparently ordered according to physical laws could not be observed at all if very strange conceivable situations were not somehow suppressed; this is precisely what makes them physically unlikely. Progress in physics shows how what was previously thought to be possible can actually be impossible, for example on grounds of quantum entanglement. Please do not judge according to today's unfinished theories of physics. Progress will likely reveal scenarios with a very small probability actually having zero probability. Therefore, please do not increase the otherwise very small probability of very terrible futures by trying to commit suicide."

3 MW/M Ethics, Dangers and Testing

The use of the suggested argument is justified in emergency situations, certainly as a last ditch effort. If the counselor from the suicide hotline feels that even after quite some time of talking, the case will come to an undesired outcome soon if not a new approach is taken, there should be an alternative approach especially if the person seems too rationally set on ending their life. However, MW/M can conceivably increase suicide rates in the long term. What does it do to different personalities, thinking about parallel future copies of oneself, about worlds that have small probabilities but are nevertheless physically possible and therefore, according to standard linear quantum mechanics, equally "real" and unavoidable, no matter how terrifying the scenarios? Although MW/M has entered serious academic discussions, it is underappreciated, and we find nonchalant dismissals such as

"Rejection of parallel universes. To the individual who decides whether to purchase a ticket in the lottery, it is irrelevant how he may fare in a parallel universe." (Peters 2011)[22]

On the contrary, MW/M theory may impact especially the willingness to gamble. Without it, we simply lost if we lost, but under MW/M, we can be happy for our parallel copies that won. My parallel copies can be highly relevant, and the main or average effect of MW/M thinking is unknown. MW/M can be beneficial for many important public health issues. For example, smokers know that they may cause cancer, but the probability is easily thought to be small and in turn dismissed. It is quite natural and reasonable to focus our attention on those scenarios that are to be expected rather than unlikely scenarios. This psychology is one main obstacle hindering smoking cessation. MW/M improves this, because the futures of mine that suffer harsh consequences can no longer be dismissed as unlikely, even if they are few compared to the total of all my futures. Instead, my smoking creates them with certainty. Lucky smokers who do not yet suffer cancer do not feel much guilt under traditional ethics. However, under MW/M ethics, I will always feel guilty for smoking, because I cannot dismiss the copies of mine who will suffer and who already suffer. Dismissing their suffering on the grounds of that they are relatively few is a bad case of discriminating against minorities. People are more motivated to stop smoking if in addition to the likely cancer in their future there is the realization of that smoking creates such futures with certainty. "They *will* suffer if I light this cigarette", and "there *already are* parallel copies of mine suffering right now for every of my cigarettes before".

MW/M collides with traditional religious thought such as my single continuous "soul" that can be held responsible and judged for its actions. MW/M supposedly brings complacency with it, that people will over-emphasize that no action changes totality, that all possible evils exist anyway, that suicide cannot subtract from it, nor can the decision to stay alive add the impossible, for example a future that remembers a successful suicide. How does it matter what I do? Why safeguard humanity's future? The philosopher can counter this (Vongehr 2013)[23]: A waiter has likely mistaken my order; I do not think "well, modal totality is what it is and I eat everything possible in all worlds anyway". Instead I think "that future me who remembers having not clarified once more will be consistent with getting undesired food, which would not arrive unexpectedly", thus I clarify once more to the waiter.

But philosophers are not suicidal lab technicians, and the MW/M description, especially in the depressed mind, can be spun into interpretations that emphasize the feeling of having no control, that all the merely conceivable also is and that I can do nothing about it; that my actions are meaningless and I may as well end it all. Philosophies that are related to the MW/M interpretations, such as Eleatic ancient philosophy, do facilitate a more relaxed attitude toward death. MW/M leads to the philosophy of personal identity (Parfit 1976; Lewis 1976).[24,25] Nozick promoted the

"closest successor/predecessor" (Nozick 1981)[26] as being the proper "me" inside the totality of all possibilities of conscious states. All these philosophies make it obvious that "we die every moment anyway". You are presently not the same person that read the previous sentence. That person is dead in this present and will never go to heaven, because she is the one who is squarely on earth a moment ago reading the previous sentence. Therefore, MW/M may increase rational suicides in the long term. We suggest two ways of testing our MW/M argument against suicide:

1) Emergency Use Trials: Several versions of our MW/M argument should be distributed to select suicide hotlines and first responders near suicide hot spots in order to gather those experts' input, their experiences with the argument's versions.

2) Long Term Suicide Prevention: We suggest teaching our MW/M argument in select schools to about one million students. The argument should be packed into a general discussion of the benefits of MW/M, including how smoking creates suffering futures with certainty and more – such lectures are already being prepared and reformulate concepts such as 'responsible agency' and 'causality/evolution' so that they do no longer reject fundamental, "timeless" science (Vongehr 2020). [27] Follow-up interviews of these students should continue for 5 to 10 years. Suicide rates are commonly one per ten thousand people-years, for example a little less than half of this for Cornell university students (Jeffreys 2000)[28] and at the high end a little more than double for high school students in China. A significant effect of MW/M on suicide rates would then be obvious in comparison to the future suicide rate of similar students that were not exposed to MW/M. The students should be interviewed on how the lesson has influenced them, whether they fell ill with depression, whether MW/M may have prevented them from attempting suicide generally or just certain methods, and whether MW/M has any other impact on their thinking, including their feelings of being in control and attitude about their own status as responsible actors.

4 Discussion

The argument should work well in emergencies, mainly because of 1) the great fear of pain during suicide and 2) the way the argument respects and talks to the rational part of the patient's mind, thus gaining access to the otherwise emotionally closed mind and buying time, lifting the person out of the emotional isolation via involving in an interesting argument, a novel, interesting way to see the world even. The MW/M argument should have a positive effect long term on the suppression of suicides that are not carefully planned but mere over-reactions, sudden mental breakdowns, say for example in response to a break-up. For truly rational, planned suicides, the argument may increase stress levels. Take for example oxygen deprivation by breathing pure nitrogen or "balloon time" helium (Humphry 1992). [29] The hypercapnic alarm response due to carbon dioxide blood levels is completely avoided. The patient loses consciousness already after 12 seconds. The body dies after a few minutes. Unlikely

failure of such suicide, say due to an earthquake disrupting the setup, may result in brain damage and a life constrained in a wheel chair. However, this starts to be concerned with whether MW/M has something to say about natural death and religion, whether there is a fundamental difference between virtual reality and "real reality". These are topics beyond the scope of this article and suicide prevention. Such has been discussed under the label "quantum suicide", the claim that one always survives Russian roulette and has eternal life because of quantum physics. Our argument is not based on such! For one, only the empirically proven necessity of MW/M in Einstein-Podolsky-Rosen experiments necessitates quantum physics. MW/M is more fundamental than quantum physics and applies to classical (non-quantum) MW-models. It is a widely held misunderstanding that a splitting into multiple futures is a quantum aspect. Actually, in MW/M description (rather than non-local quantum theory), the actual quantum physics, namely the violation of the Bell inequality, depends on how parallel futures re-combine (not split) into 'compound observations'. Only particular MW/M geometries are quantum. "Quantum suicide" usually assigns consciousness to classical physical bodies and holds that physics is a "realism" philosophically prior to consciousness. It confuses "multiverse" with MW/M and is ethically dubious. Our argument should not be confused with any such sadly increasingly popular naivety.

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