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Suicide is Neither Rational nor Irrational

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Abstract Richard Brandt, following Hume, famously argued that suicide could be rational. In this he was going against a common ‘absolutist’ view that suicide is irrational almost by definition. Arguments to the effect that suicide is morally permissible or prohibited tend to follow from one’s position on this first issue of rationality. I want to argue that the concept of rationality is not appropriately ascribed – or withheld – to the victim or the act or the desire to commit the act. To support this, I explore how the concept is ascribed and withheld in ordinary situations, and show that it is essentially future-oriented. Since the suicide victim has no future, it makes no sense to call his act rational or irrational. The more appropriate reaction to a declared desire for suicide, or to the news of a successful suicide, is horror and pity, and these are absent from Brandt’s account, as is a humble acknowledgement of the profound mystery at the heart of any suicide.

Key words suicide · rationality · Richard Brandt · despair · pity · internal reasons

Richard Brandt, following Hume, famously argued that suicide could be rational (Brandt, 1975). Brandt’s argument was a utilitarian one, according to which the rational agent could make a sufficiently informed comparison between the likely utility of two possible futures – one future with him surviving, almost certainly in his present or worse state, and one without him – and make a choice that would be intelligibly rational. Utility was broadly construed, able to allow for altruistic utility to others (‘not being a burden’) and self-interested utility for the agent himself; but the drive to promote either could be appreciated as rational. By ‘appreciated,’ Brandt would mean that *both* the agent *and* any observers could in principle agree in making sufficiently reliable estimations and comparisons about such utility. And if the decision can be appreciated as rational, certain moral positions

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would then follow: (a) the decision to commit suicide could and should be respected; (b) it would be ethically permissible to provide assistance.

Brandt was more interested in (a), although many in the debate surrounding physician-assisted suicide have argued for (b) on exactly this logic. Brandt and Hume were obviously responding to the widespread opposing belief, then and now, that suicide is *essentially* irrational and/or immoral: it was a desperate cry for help, a depraved act of revenge or attention-seeking, the outcome of debilitating drug addiction or depression (perhaps neurobiological in origin), or the possession by demons. Moreover it was sinful ingratitude to throw away God's precious gift of life; it was only meet that God be the one to take away the gift at the proper time.¹

In this paper I want to argue that Brandt has omitted three important moral elements from his account: first, the intuitive unease (which I will call horror) that even the most putatively rational suicides engender; second, an imaginative understanding of and pity for the victim in his despair; third, an irreducible element of mystery. It is not that Brandt is wrong about his assumptions or conclusions, I suggest, but just that he misses the point.

With respect to the first two elements, Brandt could of course reply that however much horror and pity were appropriate as *responses*, this was not relevant to the status of the *act* itself; there must surely be a discrete philosophical question of whether it is possible to rationally destroy oneself. I shall be arguing that he is wrong in believing our responses to be logically separate from our understanding of the act; rather, our reactions to suicide are internal to the full meaning of the act of suicide in our lives. Note that my argument against Brandt will *not* lead to a conclusion that all suicides are irrational, for I reject the exhaustive dichotomy between the rational and irrational. Instead, I shall try to show that there is something unique in the nature of suicide that makes any attempted ascription of the concepts of either rationality or irrationality *otiose*; the concepts do not provide the explanatory work they normally do and Brandt thinks they do.

To focus our intuitions, we may consider the example of Ken Harrison, the hero of Brian Clark's famous 1972 television play (and subsequently a film) *Whose Life Is It Anyway?* (Clark, 1989). Harrison was a sculptor before an accident left him a permanent tetraplegic. The play is about his efforts to prove himself sufficiently competent (i.e., rational, informed and free) to legally refuse all treatment (including nutrition and hydration) and thereby to be allowed to die.

1 Rationality as a Concept

First let me ask: when is the concept of rationality *normally* applied or withheld, to what sorts of ordinary actions and agents in what sorts of ordinary situations? In other words, when is its use not *otiose*? It would be hard to ask a larger question in philosophy, so I can only gesture toward an answer. But even this gesture, this direction of further enquiry, is enough to reveal the difficulties with then trying to apply the concept to suicide.

If you and I disagree about the name of the capital city of the Czech Republic, we can jointly consult an atlas to discover that at least one of us was wrong. When we see the name 'Prague' with the cartographic symbol for 'capital city,' then there will be nothing else to think but that Prague is the capital city; to believe anything else would be irrational – *unless*, of course, there was greater reason to believe that the atlas was mistaken or falsified; in which case an explanation is owed to this effect. We might of course say, with Descartes, that outside deductive and mathematical reasoning there will always be some room for

¹ For a wide-ranging discussion of these arguments, together with discussions of rationality, see Battin 1996.

doubt, and the answer will always be a question of probabilities. But our society would never be able to function if people did not agree about the rationality of believing in a great number of propositions about the world on the basis of necessarily imperfect evidence or authority. Even something as narrowly specific as our criminal law relies on a widespread understanding of reasonableness in its definitions of, for example, recklessness, culpable ignorance and the duty of care. And proof of criminal conviction must be beyond reasonable doubt. In such a context, we can say that it is rationally, even if not logically, *necessary* for you to believe that Prague is the capital of the Czech Republic.²

Following Stanley Cavell (1979), we may say that it is only against the background of such widespread implicit *agreement* about correct, non-otiose ascriptions of the concept of rationality that there can be meaningful *disagreement* about whether a specific course of action is rational or not. When I accuse you of being irrational to go bungee-jumping (or smoke, or not wear a bicycle helmet), my accusation and my concern make sense to you, even if you disagree with the judgement. An essential part of being rational is to have sufficient knowledge of and concern for one's own interests, and to take relevant and sufficient action to protect and promote them (e.g., by avoiding risks of sufficient probability or severity). But there is enough leeway in all these above uses of the word 'sufficient' to allow for a constrained variety of attitudes to risk, all of which can still be intelligible. Importantly, the same can be said about attitudes to one's comfort, attitudes to one's appearance, and attitudes to one's health.

The constraints are important: someone who wants to go bungee-jumping without a bungee cord could be plausibly suspected of simply not understanding the risks involved or of being irrational to the point of pathology. This is similar to someone who insists that the atlas is incorrect, without offering further explanation of why he thinks that, or of why Prague is not the capital; such a person, as Cavell puts it, has forfeited his right to be taken seriously in the community of reason.

Importantly, none of this disagreement logically entails bloody-minded intransigence or cognitive impenetrability on the part of the unhelmeted cyclist and smoker. There are plenty of events that can make me change my attitude to risk, comfort, appearance etc., without such changes being whimsical; and such conversions may still be rationally intelligible despite falling well short of the philosophical ideal of argument-based persuasion (on this, see Diamond, 1991).

So it is important to contrast two kinds of accusation here: on the one hand, if you refuse to believe the atlas without further explanation, I am making a *deep* accusation of irrationality. If you insist on going bungee-jumping, I will make a *shallow* accusation, which reveals more about our differing attitudes to risk (comfort, appearance, etc.) than any truth about your greater or lesser degree of rationality.

1.1 Harrison and the Judge

With this all too brief outline of rationality in place, let me return to Ken Harrison in his hospital bed, pleading his case before the judge:

Judge: Alright. You tell me why it is a reasonable choice that you decide to die.

² There is a distinction to be made between the rationality of a belief (that Prague is the capital) on the basis of evidence, and the rationality (reasonableness) of an action (bungee-jumping) on the basis of reasons. However, any judgements about reasonableness will be partly based on some relevant beliefs. This paper, however, focuses mainly on the rationality of action.

Harrison: It is a question of dignity. Look at me here. I can do nothing, not even the most primitive functions. I cannot even urinate, I have a permanent catheter attached to me. Every few days my bowels are washed out. Every few hours two nurses have to turn me over or I would rot away from bedsores. Only my brain functions unimpaired but even that is futile because I can't act on any conclusions it comes to. [...]

Judge: But wouldn't you agree that many people with appalling physical handicaps have overcome them and lived essentially creative, dignified lives?

Harrison: Yes, I would, but the dignity starts with their choice. If I choose to live, it would be appalling if society killed me. If I choose to die, it is equally appalling if society keeps me alive. [*Whose Life?* pp. 73–74]

These arguments certainly seem intelligible, and in the play the judge is persuaded. I shall assume that Brandt would also consider Harrison's a rational decision. The argument here relies less on Brandt's utilitarianism than on a liberal respect for patient autonomy, combined with the idea of self-ownership: the patient's body is his to dispose of as he pleases.

The judge's point about the other people with handicaps is important, however, for it means that Harrison's decision lies within the limits of rational variability. A reader can still be sympathetic with Harrison's plight, while not personally endorsing his decision. It is not accidental that Harrison was a sculptor, and therefore partly identified with the work of his hands, work that is no longer available to him: perhaps a reader who identified more with mental work might find Harrison's situation more bearable (e.g., Stephen Hawking). On this 'liberal' conception of the disagreement, the decision would ultimately be a personal one; any accusation of irrationality against Harrison would be shallow, and his choice therefore ought to be respected.

Against this liberal understanding of Harrison's situation would be two rival conceptions, both of which would involve an accusation of deep irrationality, an irrationality not to be properly engaged with (i.e., one human being to another) but only *treated* (the competent doctor treats the incompetent patient). The first conception, to which Brandt and Hume were reacting, we might call absolutist, whereby *any* declared desire for suicide would be necessarily irrational. For rationality is all about protecting and promoting one's needs and interests: and how could it then be rational to destroy the very bearer of those needs and interests, and to destroy the possibility of protecting and promoting them in the future? Any life is always better than no life at all. I shall not be taking this absolutist position as a serious rival to Brandt's. It is similar to saying that no smoker can *truly* understand what cigarettes do to human lungs, for "otherwise they surely wouldn't do it." But this sets the bar too high, and is easily disproved by the number of rational doctors who smoke. However, there are two important kernels of truth in the absolutist position, to which I shall return.

The second rival position is that taken up by another character in the play, the consultant Michael Emerson. He implicitly acknowledges that *some* desires for suicide can be rational, but that Harrison is not in fact competent to know his needs and interests because his cognition is distorted by clinical depression. To prevent this argument collapsing into the absolutist position ('if he desires suicide, this is necessary evidence of cognitively distorting depression'), Emerson's position requires antecedent criteria to distinguish the depressed from the non-depressed in non-question-begging terms. As far as the play is concerned, this conception is rejected by another character, the psychiatrist Dr Barr:

Barr: Depression is not necessarily an illness. I would say that Mr Harrison's depression is reactive rather than endogenous. That is to say, he is reacting in a perfectly rational way to a very bad situation. [*Whose Life?* p. 70]

With the above thoughts about rationality in place, let us turn to the first of the three elements that Brandt disregards in his account.

2 Horror

It is hard to describe the great unease associated with hearing news of another's suicide; perhaps I can only appeal to the reader's shared experience. Some might think the dominant emotional response, when there is one, is deep sadness rather than unease.³ This might be true in certain cases, especially where the victim is well known to the respondent, i.e., where enough is known about the unhappy antecedent circumstances to 'focus' the respondent's sadness, as it were. But upon hearing the news of a *stranger's* suicide, I would suggest that alongside any response of sadness is also this particular kind of unease. Indeed, I want to suggest that it is a kind of horror. Consider the grim curiosity with which we enquire about the manner of suicide, as if were the final revelation of the victim's character, the last chance to get to know him. This curiosity is similar as that which inclines some of us to watch horror films, or to pick at a particularly ragged scab. But there is a stronger reason to call this response one of horror.

By the end of the play, Ken Harrison is no longer a stranger to us. We have come to appreciate the circumstances driving him to suicide, and we certainly feel sadness at his plight. But there is room for horror as well: in the last scene he is not dead or dying as in a standard dramatic tragedy, *he is very much alive*; indeed, given the central question of the play ('whose life is it anyway?'), it could be said that he has never been more alive, more aware of who he is and of what he stands for, more articulate and passionate in his arguments before the judge. He is fascinating to behold. And yet this clear-eyed rationality, this sheer defiant force of will, is what is ultimately so unsettling, so horrifying, because as we leave the theatre we know which way it's headed. It is in the face of this horror that *our* discussions about the putative rationality or irrationality of Harrison's act *run out*; any ascribed rationality does not reassure us, for we know that his rationality will not get him anywhere, will not expand his possibilities in the future.

To illustrate this last point about the future, let us consider another ordinary case of rationality, and an ordinary response to someone else's rationality. The neighbours sold their house (at t_1) just before the local market collapsed (at t_2), and they moved to France. Perhaps I am happy for their good fortune or financial acumen; perhaps I am envious, and hope they discover rising damp and rats in their new house. Either way, I implicitly acknowledge that what they did was rational and that they have more money now than if they had waited longer. Part of the meaning of rationality, of having acted rationally, is that the neighbours will be better off *for the future*. Rationality – or at least this prudential aspect of rationality – is essentially future-oriented. I can admire their future activity or envy the range of their future choices. The rationality of their act, therefore, presupposes a future in which to enjoy the benefits of the act. Contrariwise, an irrational act derives its disvalue from the suffering that will most likely result in future: I can admonish my other neighbours for sentimentally clinging onto their car despite the ever-increasing cost and frequency of repairs. My admonition is implicitly about their future, and the opportunity costs incurred by their irrational choice today.

I said above that the 'absolutist' position – that suicide was essentially irrational – had two kernels of truth, and this is one of them. My reactions to the two sets of neighbours is

³ This point was made by one of the anonymous referees of this paper.

informed by my awareness that all of us are in the middle of our lives. The very way I bid farewell to the house-selling neighbours is informed by the fact that I could, if ever I wanted, look them up again, and be looked up again myself. They could even re-purchase their old house back again. For in principle there is always 'plenty of time' in which to make amends, apologise, carry out vengeance, go broke, or have 20 children. Saying goodbye to Ken Harrison, on the other hand, would be very different.

Let us assume Harrison's request is granted. His decision, however rational, does not provoke anything like these responses. There is no admiration or envy in the way I admired or envied my neighbours, simply because Harrison does not stand to enjoy the fruits of his rational decision. He is a man quite literally without a future. The sort of rationality that Brandt wants to attribute to Harrison's request is a hollow or formal rationality. It might bear all the hallmarks of a rational decision, but without the full resonances.

But if I am right about this, is it not a more general point about our last conversations with the terminally ill? In part, perhaps. But there is a very real difference in the fact that the terminally ill patient is *struck down* by capricious fate; were it not for the illness, he would very much like to be alive, and for as long as possible – that is the very source of his regret. There is still unease in the response to the terminally ill, but I suggest that, interestingly, there is no horror. There is unease born from the advent of grief in response to a beloved being taken away, and perhaps to a renewed awareness of one's own mortality; but this is not the same as the response to someone *leaving*. Compare the difference between one's spouse dying and one's spouse leaving. The former is certainly traumatic, but there is perhaps comfort in the knowledge that the spouse is going to 'a better place,' a place where I may one day rejoin her. The spouse leaving, on the other hand, is an expression of will, of preference, of defiance, an unambiguous statement that I and my world are no longer good enough for her, and that our special union has turned out to be no more than a failed experiment. Certainly I may long for her return; but even if she does I will know that she 'has it in her' to leave, and may do so again. It is this defiance, together with the irreversibility, that is the root of the horrified response to suicide.

To repeat, this is not merely a contingent response to suicide, as Brandt might be happy to concede; I claim that the horrified response is essential to the *meaning* of the act of suicide within our language and culture. So much of our language and culture, so many of the routine assessments we make every day about the degree of rationality of ordinary acts and decisions, presupposes an open future. In that open future lie further explanation, reparation, regret, discovery, as well as expanded or contracted possibilities. When *Whose Life?* ends, my horrified response involves a sudden awareness that Harrison is planning to deliberately close off any further avenues for potential interaction in the future. That awareness is not incidental to the suicide, it is part of it.

3 Pity

Horror was the first element that Brandt's account neglected. Pity is the second. As before, I want to argue that pity is not an accidental response, but is essential to our understanding of the full meaning of suicide. Pity is more than sadness. One can be sad about lots of things, from the end of summer to one's football team losing. Pity is a response of sadness to another's suffering, true, but crucially it involves some understanding of the sufferer's point of view, an understanding of what it is like for this particular person to suffer in these circumstances.

In discussing the victim's rationality, Brandt is talking *about* the victim, as it were behind his back, rather than *to* or *with* the victim. Brandt maintains a clinical detachment,

presumably in order to make what he considers a more objective assessment. Once again, I am not claiming that Brandt is incorrect in his discussion, but that he is missing the point because he does not make much of an effort to understand Harrison's point of view on his own situation. Instead, Harrison is looking for what it would be rational for *any* agent to do in Harrison's *type* of situation.

Why does the agent's point of view matter so much? Surely his behaviour, as captured in a third-personal description, is enough. Normally it would be, but that is because there is an implicit assumption in using the concept of rationality that the putatively rational person will himself be striving, on the basis of his beliefs (which may of course be mistaken) for the most rational outcome (the protection and promotion of his needs and interests), and so the two uses – the first-personal and the third-personal – coincide. If I tell my neighbour that the most rational thing to do would be to sell their house, then this will support their own judgement to the same conclusion. There is a most rational thing (or several equally rational things) to do in a given situation by *anyone* who finds themselves in that situation, and you and I can in principle converge upon it, and help one another to discover it. Even if my neighbours' house-selling decision goes disastrously wrong (and the house prices leap just after they sell), I can still reassure them that they did the most rational thing, given the evidence available at the time (i.e., real estate market trends). This is the point: it is normally *reassuring* to be told that one's behaviour is rational, and one is grateful to be told.

In contrast, if Ken Harrison wavered before his decision to commit suicide, would Brandt try to reassure him that it was the most rational decision? Would Brandt tell him that he would do the same in his shoes? It is no accident that this starts to sound like criminal bullying, and that suicide is perhaps the only thing that one person cannot advise another to commit. Would Brandt try to reassure Harrison's *parents* that their son's suicide was rational, that everything had turned out for the best? And if so, should they feel, what – relieved? It is not clear what sort of response is appropriate to either Harrison or his parents, but it would have to be one informed by pity rather than by a concern for rationality. There is no most rational or best outcome in *Whose Life?*, there is an awful situation resolved in an awful way. However strong Harrison's arguments for committing suicide, they are not logically compelling; there are still plenty of other reasons for Harrison to go on living. That he chooses not to means that he himself can see no other option, even though we can: and this is to be pitied. This lack of a 'right' answer, the search for which is presupposed by any discussions of rationality, is the second kernel of truth in the Absolutist position.

My point here is more than merely to distinguish between the metaphysical status of the act and its pragmatic significance in human relations (i.e., the sort of things one would *say* about the act or say to the victim); there is no reason to think that Brandt would not acknowledge common norms of tact and decency. My point is somewhat stronger. With a rationally susceptible act like selling a house, the importance of the rationality or irrationality of the act is revealed by my legitimate use of the term in efforts to reassure or console. The fact that the concept of rationality 'runs out' (a) when I consider my own horrified reactions to the news of someone's suicide, and (b) when I consider the sort of things that I am inclined to say to the victim or his family about the act, means that the concept was not important in the first place; it cannot do the philosophical work expected of it.

To clarify, there are two things I am *not* saying. First, that the concept of rationality is inapplicable to suicide *tout court*; Brandt's discussion certainly makes sense. Second, in claiming that the concept of rationality does not get us very far in trying to understand another's suicide, I am not thereby implicitly calling the act irrational: both concepts, of rationality and irrationality, run out when trying to make sense of one's own reactions and of the things one feels inclined to say.

3.1 A Second Example: Michael Furey

Let us look at it from the other side of the coin, so to speak, by taking another suicide that I assume Brandt would regard as irrational: that of Michael Furey, the character from James Joyce's short story 'The Dead' (Joyce, 1996). We are told of his sad fate by the story's heroine, Gretta, many years later. The teenage liaison between them was to end because of Gretta's family moving away. On the night before the departure, Furey appears behind Gretta's house to say goodbye. Already quite ill from some unknown ailment (probably tuberculosis), he was out on a winter's night without a coat. Despite Gretta's imploring him to return home, he declared that he no longer wished to live. Several days later she receives word that he died of exposure soon after.

Despite Joyce's moving account, it is possible to view Furey with some impatience. Unlike Harrison there is a very real prospect of his life improving if he can just get over this phase – most of us have known something of what he is going through. So we might remind him that Gretta will probably return, that there are other fish in the sea, that he should count his blessings, that he has a loving family, that he has succeeded in other areas such as school or sport etc.; or we might just shout at him to 'snap out of it,' or to stop being so self-indulgent and to finish his supper. All these approaches assume that this is an irrational phase to be endured.

But is this enough? What does it *achieve*, philosophically, for Brandt to call his wish, and then his act, irrational? As before, we have to look at the sort of contexts where there is a point to calling someone irrational, and those contexts will involve blame of some sort, and an expectation that the person will himself see the error of his ways *in order to profit in the future*. "Listen, don't buy the car just because you liked the salesman. It would be more rational to do some homework, to talk to my mate Bloggs who knows about cars." Here I am inviting the other to see the situation as I do, to see how my recommendation would better serve his needs and interests, or satisfy his desires. I am also hoping to bring him to a position whence he can later look back on his past self and agree that he was being irrational: "what got into me? Why didn't I see that the salesman was too smooth a talker." To sum up: the concept of irrationality can always be unpacked in terms of a threat (or at least a risk of sub-optimal outcome) to the agent's needs and interests, or at the very least in terms of counter-productivity in the agent's search to satisfy a specific desire.

So once again there is an essential temporality to our use of the concept of rationality and irrationality. When talking to Furey before his death, it is revealing that we do not stop at saying 'don't be irrational' once we see how deadly is his earnest; instead, our immediate aim is surely to keep him alive by reminding him what he has to live *for*. But there is nothing rational in simply staying alive for these things. There is nothing rational in longing for Gretta's return, in contemplating other fish in the sea, in trying to forget Gretta by absorbing oneself in work; it's simply what many of us do, what many of us find pleasure and meaning in. If he doesn't find pleasure and meaning in them, then in a very brutal sense those are the limits of his world. We can try to keep him alive by telling him that we were once in his situation, but why on earth should he care? After all, he will say scornfully, *we* don't understand the depth of his passion for Gretta, *we* have never felt quite like that with anyone else.⁴ All our efforts are so hit-and-miss that it would be ludicrous to describe them as bringing someone to a more rational view of the situation; all that is then left is pity. In

⁴ The short story turns on Gabriel's (Gretta's husband) sudden realisation that he had never felt that degree of passion for any woman.

its charming Enlightenment optimism, analytic philosophy has never really been able to make sense of real despair.

4 Internal Reasons

In this final section I want to pick up an earlier reference to the victim's point of view. Understanding something of that point of view is essential for pity. I shall take a position in a famous debate, but do not have time to defend that side. It should be obvious from the last section that I have been assuming the truth of Bernard Williams's 'reasons-internalism' (Williams, 1981). Williams argues, persuasively in my view, that there are no external reasons, that is, no reasons that would be a reason *for* a given agent to Φ whether or not he (a) knows about the reason or (b) accepts the reason. Instead, a putative reason can only function *as* a reason if it finds purchase in the agent's 'subjective motivational set.' Our attempts to save Michael Furey involve launching optimistic reasons in Furey's direction in the hope that one of them will find some sort of purchase and thereby become internal. But the sheer strength of the reason for Furey's suicide (the departure of his beloved) will be just as mysterious as the terrible act itself.

Williams's point is that no such purchase can ever be guaranteed, and in this sense the practice of reason-giving must remain irreducibly mysterious, ungrounded on the external practical reasons that the cognitivist would say *must* be there, and *ought* to be accepted. Brandt assumes that there is a singular situation, which generates a singular set of viable options (possible alternate futures) to be compared, and a singular set of practical reasons to be weighed against one another, and a singular best or most rational option (or set of options), all things considered. This threefold singularity is important, for it presupposes a single object of enquiry, and the possibility that one individual may perceive the singular situation better than another. The implication behind Brandt ascribing the concept of rationality to Harrison and withholding it from Furey is that he (Brandt) has some privileged access to this singular realm. Here is Brandt, describing the effects of depression on one's cognitive access to the singular set of reasons in a situation.

Depression, like any severe emotional experience, tends to primitivize one's intellectual processes. It restricts the range of one's survey of the possibilities. One thing that a rational person will do is compare the [future] world-course containing his suicide with his best alternative. But his best alternative is precisely a possibility he may overlook if, in a depressed mood, he thinks only of how badly off he is and does not contemplate plans of action which he has not at all considered. (Brandt, 1975, p. 380)

The reasons to go on living are *there*, in the situation, for Furey to behold if... if what? If he would only concentrate on them, look for them? The 'best alternative,' the future with Furey in it, is again there, stretching out from the situation, for him to behold, appreciate and grasp: so why can't he see it? Perhaps Brandt believes he only needs some happy-pills to eliminate the distorting depression and to make him see the situation aright? This *may* apply for some kinds of endogenous depression, and for depression based on incorrect information. If Furey's belief that Greta is leaving is in fact false, his depression will disappear along with the false belief. But Greta *is* leaving, and there is no further relevant information of which Furey is ignorant.

And this is the point: Brandt cannot get inside Michael Furey's perspective on the world, to borrow a metaphor from Peter Winch (Winch, 1972). The problem and its solution is

Furey's and only Furey's because the problem will not be solved until *Furey* solves it. Any attempt to understand Furey's final hours has to begin with an understanding of the world from within his perspective; and within that perspective the world is very bleak indeed. More than likely our imaginations may not be up to the task, and all we are left with is pity.

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