



Purpose

The media have purposes of their own; helping us grasp the significance of violent events does not seem to be one of them—much less helping us find our role in eliminating such events.

That is why when they run out of superficial answers for one act of violence or another, they have taken to saying that there isn't any answer. But there is.

It's that we, collectively, have created such a climate of violence and negativity that life doesn't seem terribly worth hanging onto—ours or anyone else's.

At the same time, violence begins to seem an intriguing, pseudomeaningful, “exciting,” and normal alternative. Suicide fits into this picture as a kind of inverted violence directed against oneself.

Life has a purpose. Animals can live without discovering this, but people can't. In the course of historical time, civilizations can get off on a tangent, get fascinated by some sidetrack, and lose sight of why they are alive.

When this happens—and it seems to happen periodically—a whole culture can no longer see where it's going. That's when life loses its purpose (or seems to), and individuals, in the grip of a gnawing despair they may not be able to articulate, start to give up on life itself.

Then we see teenagers committing suicide as though it were a fad, we see doctors who help people die instead of helping them live, we see the return of the death penalty—all symptoms of a “death-oriented” civilization. It's not really death-oriented per se; it's death-oriented by default.

When life doesn't seem to offer us a goal to live for, then, by default, repellent things can actually look attractive, because they're the only things that are at least “exciting.” Death and violence take on a lurid appeal.

Yet, as an ancient Indian classic puts it, “Those who get drawn to the shadow side of life go to blinding darkness.” To play with the dark side of human nature is to end up in a crisis of violence and not understand why.

I would argue that the crisis of meaning belongs center stage. If people don't know where the journey of life is leading them, why should they be enthusiastic about continuing?

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