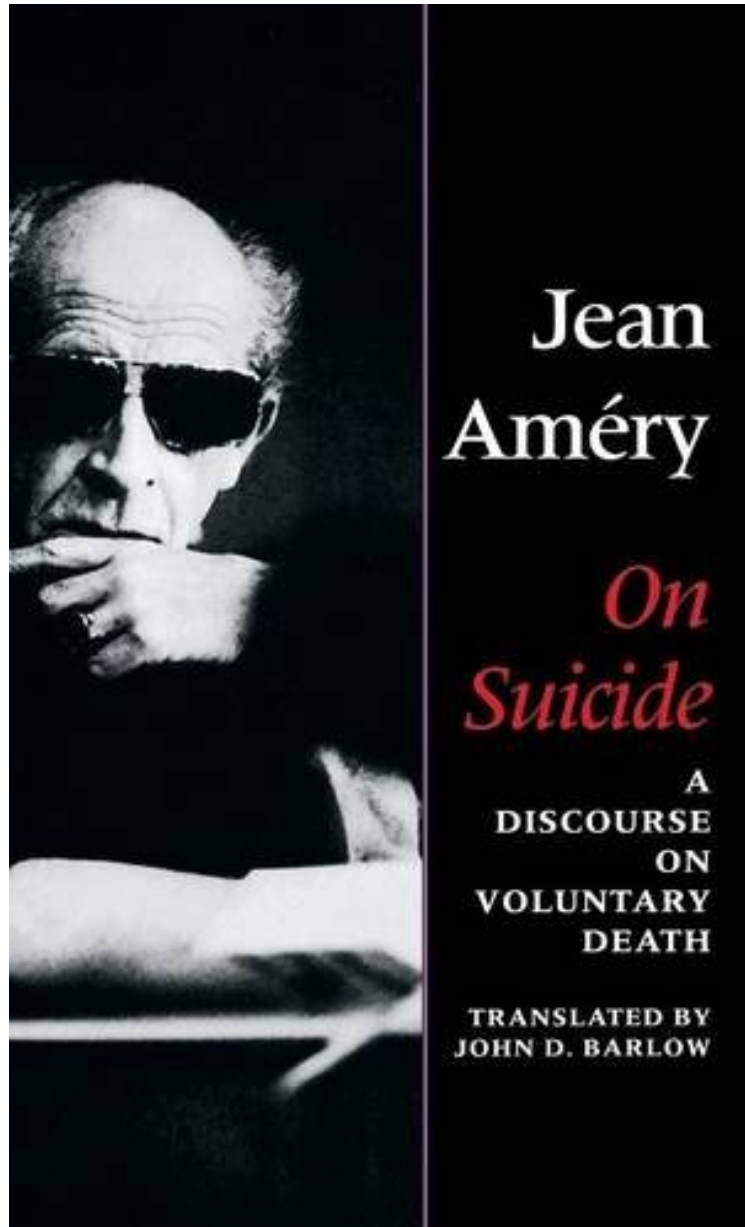


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On Suicide: A Discourse on Voluntary Death

Jean Améry

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... a moving, deep series of insights into the suicide's world... " Kirkus Reviews Jean Amry (Auschwitz survivor and author of *At the Mind's Limits*) thought of *On Suicide* as a continuation of the kind of reflections on mortality he had laid down in *On Aging*. But here he probes further and more deeply into the meaning of death and into the human capacity for suicide or voluntary death.

From Kirkus sFive personal and philosophical essays that are highly insightful, poetic, if sometimes murky stylistically, metaphysically challenging, yet ultimately unsatisfying. Amry (n Hans Maier) was an Austrian-born Jew who migrated to Belgium and who joined the anti-Nazi resistance. He wrote an account of torture, *Beyond the Mind's Limits*, as well as *On Aging* (1994). The present book was written during the late 1970s between an unsuccessful and a successful suicide attempt. His interest is on the taking of one's own life not so much as an act, but rather as a "project" of individual thought and will that defies sociological and psychological truisms. Borrowing a concept from Jean-Paul Sartre, Amry helps us understand the sensibility of the suicide as someone who feels compelled to take his or her life in response to an *checc*, or irreversible personal disaster. The person with a "suicidal constitution," Amry notes in a typically intense passage, is moved by "disgust with the world, claustrophobia from the four walls closing in on each other as one hammers one's head against them. Serious problems arise, however, when Amry attempts to go beyond understanding the suicidal mentality to justifying the suicidal act. In his introduction, translator Barlow notes that Amry's approach is revealed by the very German word he uses for suicide, not the customary *Selbstmord* (literally, "self-murder") but rather *Freitod* ("voluntary death"). In approaching suicide as an act of liberation, he sometimes writes in downright romantic terms about the ultimate act of self-destruction we only arrive at ourselves in a freely chosen death." Simultaneously, Amry is dismissive, even contemptuous, of what he calls "ridiculously everyday life and its alienation." More disturbing yet, he writes of suicide almost as if the act took place in an interpersonal vacuum. In short, Amry's legacy in this, his last work, is to provide us with a moving, deep series of insights into the suicide's world, but an unconvincing attempt to normalize the suicide's leap of despair. -- Copyright 1999, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved. "On Suicide seeks to explore the state of mind those who are suicidal. It moves beyond the science to plumb the depths and explore the contradictions of the person facing such angst... The closed and dark is seen from within and for that it is immensely moving and fascinating."--The Expository Times, May, 2000 "On Suicide seeks to explore the state of mind those who are suicidal. It moves beyond the science to plumb the depths and explore the contradictions of the person facing such angst... The closed and dark is seen from within and for that it is immensely moving and fascinating."--The Expository Times, May, 2000 Language Notes Text: English (translation) Original Language: German