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Why Do People Kill?

Death is an inevitable part of our lives; at some point we all must face it. How that end comes varies greatly; many live a long life and die of natural causes, while others face dreaded diseases such as cancer and AIDS. Death is already a devastating event; however when it comes by the hand of another person or the victim himself, it only adds to the grief and leaves many people asking the question "What makes a person capable of killing?"

Murder and suicide have been a part of our society since the creation of human life. The first murder was recorded in the Bible: "Later Cain suggested to his brother Abel, "Let us go out into the fields." And while they were there, Cain attacked, and killed his brother (Genesis 4:8). Cain, being angry with God for refusing his sacrifice, decided to take his anger out on his brother. Not much has changed since Cain killed his brother; people are killing each other at an alarming rate and for some of the same reasons. In 1999, 15,533 homicides were committed in this country alone (FBI 13). Even though this is an eight

percent decrease from the previous year, these numbers are still staggering when we consider in comparison the population of Kokomo in 1990 was 44,962 people (Census Bureau). The homicides recorded in 1999 would be equal to murdering one third of the city's inhabitants.

People kill for many different reasons, one of which is mentioned in the opening paragraph of Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado." "The thousand injuries of Fortunato I had borne as best I could, but when he ventured upon insult, I vowed revenge" (101). Fortunato had in some way gone too far; perhaps he belittled Montressor one too many times or it was Fortunato's arrogance that caused Montressor to be consumed with so much anger and hatred. Whatever the reason, Montressor felt insulted to the point that he vowed to seek revenge. Revenge is a powerful reason for murder. Just as in Poe's story, people today kill because they have been hurt or insulted. Most people can take only so much pain before they strike back; fortunately, for the majority of the population, murder is not an option.

Greed and selfishness are even more powerful reasons for murder, both of which are portrayed in Faulkner's, "A Rose For Emily." Miss Emily was a lonely southern lady who never had a chance to know true love. When she was a young girl, her father had driven away all the boys whom she had

brought home. It was not until after his death that she began her first real relationship. At first it appeared Miss Emily had overcome many years of loneliness. Nobody knows for sure what really went wrong; perhaps it was the thought of losing her first true love that drove her to murder or possibly she discovered he loved someone else and she decided if she could not have him, then no one could. Whatever the reason, one day Miss Emily approached the druggist and said, "I want some poison" (556). Some people would look at this story and say that she did this in the name of love. Others may say she was a very sick and delusional woman. But the fact remains that real people commit real murder because of greed and selfishness.

Although murder is a disturbing form of death, perhaps even more devastating is the thought of suicide. Daily newscasts in every major metropolitan city throughout this country carry stories of murder, but very seldom mentioned are the countless suicides that are occurring. Larry Berman, the Executive Director of the American Association of Suicidology, says the following about school shooting and suicide:

We've made a lot out of this, and rightly so, because these incidents are terrifying, but the reality is, we've got roughly twenty of them over

a decade with less than a hundred deaths... so if we're talking about fifty thousand dead teenagers by suicide relative to a hundred dead teenagers by homicide, where is the emphasis?" (Levinsky 49)

What causes a person to take his or her own life? Is it out of desperation? Perhaps it is to escape from the world that he/she lives in, or is it a feeling of loneliness? Whatever the reason, thousands of teenagers and adults feel they can no longer go on. Willa Cather shows just how desperate a person can become in her short story, "Paul's Case." Paul is a teenage boy who feels trapped by his life style. Living in what he perceives as substandard conditions, he is looking for a way to escape from his reality. Feeling trapped in his environment, Paul tries to escape his pain by stealing from his employer and living out his fantasy in New York; however he soon finds his dream was temporary. Realizing he must not only face the embarrassment of his crime but also return to his tormenting life style, Paul decides to end it all. After jumping in front of the train, Paul realizes his mistake. "As he fell, the folly of his haste occurred to him with merciless clearness" (Cather 422).

Revenge, insult, greed, selfishness, escape from reality, and loneliness are all reasons why people kill,

but what separates the person who kills from the rest of society? Has the killer become so desensitized to the value of human life by what he/she has read and watched on television, or is there some genetic flaw that causes one person to kill while another cannot? Although, there are many variables that lead a person down the pathway to murder or suicide, ultimately it is the evil within our world that causes a person to take action.

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