

as they can effect it, a stable government is to be obtained in Afghanistan, which is to be left independent, and there seems to be no disposition to add to the territory and dangers of British India.

Some minor questions come up, such as our Fortune Bay fishery, but as the new ministry are free from the responsibility of their predecessors, the way is easy to an honorable and final settlement of a question more productive of bad blood and bitter feeling than of any substantial advantage to either party.

There are indications of healthy, honorable action on the part of the new administration, but it must do something promptly to rivet public confidence. The party is made up of incoherent elements, and a tendency to dissolution is already manifest.

Mr. Gladstone may retire and leave control to hands not committed so fully by past acts and deeds, and more free to shape a course; but if he holds his place, the ministry will go down with him.

SUICIDE, CONSIDERED IN ITS MORAL BEARINGS.

SUICIDES are of daily occurrence, as the columns of our newspapers plainly show. The *British Encyclopædia* contains the following statistics, whose data are furnished by Quetelet. In Russia the proportion of suicides is one to every 49,182 inhabitants; in Austria it is one to every 20,900; in France it is one to every 18,000; in the State of Pennsylvania it is one to every 15,875; in Prussia it is one to every 14,404; in the city of Baltimore the proportion is as one to every 13,656; in Boston there is one case for every 25,000 inhabitants, and in New York one for every 7797. These figures show that, in spite of the repugnance which man naturally has for death, a large number accept this unreasonable alternative, hoping thus to find "surcease from sorrow."

The frequent occurrence of this crime, so singular in its nature, has induced some persons to conclude—rather hastily it is true—that all such disorderly action springs from insanity, thereby eschewing moral accountability. Now, in this matter, as in all other moral affairs, it is hazardous to logic to deal in universal propositions; for instance, to affirm that every suicide is fully and entirely an insane act is manifestly untenable; on the other hand, to assert that all suicides proceed from a mind that is perfectly

aware of the moral character of such action, and from a will that is then and there free either to act or not to act, or, in other words, to maintain with sweeping universality that suicide, or self-murder, is never the result of disease, but is always the effect of a will that is morally perverse, is equally as untenable as the previous position. Our conclusion, then, is that the truth lies between these positions. We admit, on the one hand, that there are cases of self-destruction which spring from insanity; but we affirm, on the other, that self-killing is not unfrequently an action which is criminally responsible; and this is suicide properly so called.

The proportion of cases occurring in each of these classifications it is not our purpose here to determine. The scope of this paper includes those cases only which have a moral bearing; and it is in this sense, as coupled with responsibility, that we will use the term suicide.

Suicide we define thus: The unauthorized taking away of one's own life. The reason and explanation of this definition will shortly be given.

Before proceeding to consider the moral turpitude of the act, it is well to premise a remark, the truth of which—although enunciated in the language of Revelation—is, nevertheless, a proximate conclusion from natural law; it is this: "It has been appointed unto all men once to die." This proposition does not need the sanction of a special revelation to render it certain; it is immediately manifest to every one's natural reason, and it is expressed in trite sayings among the people in various ways; *v. g.*, a man wishing to present something very true to his dubious neighbor, tells him that two things are supremely certain: "death and taxes." It is also a platitude among the poets. Horace says:

"Pallida mors æquo pulsat pede, pauperum tabernas
Regumque turres."¹

Death, then, is a sentence which in the general providence of God has been pronounced upon every man. This being true we can now examine the nature and guilt of suicide. Is it something which is of itself evil, or is it evil because it is forbidden? To answer these questions comprehensively, we will place our views in the form of a proposition, *viz.*: Suicide, as before defined, is a grave violation of natural law. The same truth may be stated in a different manner when viewing the subject under another aspect; thus, self-killing, apart from circumstances or in the abstract, is

¹ "With equal pace impartial fate
Knocks at the palace as the cottage gate."—*Francis*.

not, of itself, evil, and it really becomes evil only when it is duly forbidden.¹

The definition we have given of suicide is, we think, so worded as to present the manner in which an intelligent mind naturally and truly conceives this action; for when attention is directed to the act of self-killing, the question at once occurs: Why is such action wrong? to which the true answer is, because it is a violation of a law imposed by one vested with authority, *i. e.*, because it is unauthorized. Hence, it is the unauthorization which determines its guilt.²

It remains now to be shown that suicide, as thus explained, is a grave violation of natural law, and that on no occasion is it justifiable.

To consider the subject more thoroughly we will view man under three aspects: first, as related to himself; second, as related to society; and third, as related to God. And first, of man as related to himself.

Is it true that man can owe to himself a duty properly so called? Can he be the person both by whom and to whom a debt is owed? To this the answer would seem to be that man's duties towards himself are, like his duties towards his fellow-men, founded on a primary duty to God. But if—*per impossibile*—man owed no

¹ Observe that we distinguish between self-killing and self-murder or suicide; we regard the former (self-killing) as an action that is indifferent in its species or in the abstract, and hence requires the addition of circumstances to determine its moral nature; but self-murder or suicide is something already determined morally, and is used by the best English writers to convey the idea of a grave moral evil.

² This definition is, we think, the one to which the teaching of the best metaphysicians reduces. Layman (lib. iii., De Just., trac. iii., par. iii., cap. i.) says that it is never lawful to take one's own life, "*nisi Deus ita jubeat*," which is tantamount to saying that it is unlawful except when duly authorized. Sporer (tom. ii., trac. v., in V. Præcep. Decal., § ii.) says that it is wrong to take one's own life even indirectly, "*nisi justa causa ita agendi excuset*." And Lacroix (Theol. Mor., tom. i., lib. iii., trac. iv., par. i.) states that taking one's own life is unlawful, "*absque divina auctoritate*."

The words of St. Thomas on this subject are given farther on in this article.

Although Blackstone afterwards pronounces a *felo de se* one "that deliberately puts an end to his own existence," yet his reasoning shows, and in reality he admits, the point in question; for he says (vol. ii., book iv., p. 189), "that no man hath a power to destroy life but by commission from God." To place the quality of premeditation or deliberation as an essential constituent of the definition of suicide would not seem to meet the issue so exactly as to make the specific note consist in unauthorization, since we might suppose as intrinsically possible a case of self-killing which would be deliberate or premeditated, and yet guiltless. The same reasoning holds true of murder, since the guilt consequent upon the taking of another's life depends in the last analysis and absolutely upon the answer which we give to the following question: Was the taking of life duly authorized or not?

The killing we may even suppose to be premeditated or deliberate, and still the action will not necessarily be evil.

duty to God, then he would absolutely owe no duty to himself, at least none properly so called; for that is no duty strictly which can be disregarded with impunity. However, as things are actually constituted, man can owe a real duty to himself, though, as we saw, its fundamental reason is extrinsic to himself, and rests in God. The essential difference between a right and a wrong would not, *cæteris paribus*, be destroyed even in the absurd case supposed above, because it is from the very nature of things; and in no just sense is it dependent on a will,¹ the notion of which arises only when we are considering the sanction set upon the observance of the line discriminating between the right and the wrong, *i. e.*, when we are considering the return due to the good and the evil, or the reward for the one and the punishment for the other. The practical importance of the moral order is, however, chiefly dependent upon its sanction. In brief, then, it may be said that if man, under the absurd supposition made above, were absolute master of himself, then we could with no propriety of language admit that he owed a duty; there might be an abstract norma of right and wrong, but it would be *vox et præterea nihil*.

The conclusion to be drawn from the foregoing is this: Man owes duties to himself, strictly such, not absolutely, but conditionally, *i. e.*, dependently on his primary duty to God; and if the latter were removed, the *raison d'être* of the former would likewise vanish.² Suicide would not, even in the rationally unwarrantable case previously stated, commend itself to reason, since it would be an action not in conformity with that standard of morals which we might conceive as still remaining in the human mind; for even in such extreme case, other things remaining the same, man would still feel a repugnance to death, would cling to existence as a precious boon, and, finally, he would still be a member of society, and, as such, would not be permitted ruthlessly to withdraw himself from those having a claim upon his existence. This consideration brings us to the second aspect of suicide, which has much weight in exhibiting its wrongfulness.

Viewing the individual as placed by nature within the pale of society, with his personal wellbeing so dependent upon his fellow-men, his best interests so closely interwoven with those of the persons around him, and, in fact, encompassed by such a network of

¹ For then we might conceive an interchange as inherently possible between the right and the wrong.

² Observe in this connection the application of the metaphysical principle: Justice regards another person. *Quia sicut justitia semper est ad alterum ita et injustitia.* St. Thom., 2. 2æ, quæst. lix., art. iii. ad 2.

We must introduce the notion of God to give vitality and strength to our idea of man's duty to himself.

relations; viewing man as thus situated, as the correlated term of so many rights and duties, we must fail to see the justice and the propriety of a course that would arbitrarily sever these manifold ties. If the individual were free thus arbitrarily to separate himself from the social body, the destruction of society would be a mere question of time, since it would be cherishing in its bosom the principles of dissolution and certain decay.

If it should finally be asked what value, philosophically, can we, as against those who might uphold suicide, place upon the arguments drawn from a consideration of man as having duties both to himself and to society, we will be forced to answer that the logical cogency of such reasoning depends, in the last analysis, on man's duty to God, which is primary and is the basis of all his other duties. God alone has the right primarily and *par excellence* to exact duty at our hands, since He alone gave us that which has the sufficient reason and foundation of a first duty, viz., being, personal existence. Society confers on us no such boon as this. Though in the order of second causes it has done much for us, yet its favors are but supplementary and conservative of our first gift by creation.¹ God alone, as the absolute master of each individual, has the supreme right over life and death; and this right, as is plain from natural reason, is reserved, not delegated even to the individual himself. Herein is to be found the final reason why suicide bears the impress of guilt, since it is a grave and unjustifiable usurpation of another's right; it is an act of injustice in violation of the established order of relations between creature and Creator.² Hence we formulate this grave evil as an action done in violation of the natural law. As there is no reason ulterior to the one just adduced, so there is no reason short of it by which the mind is satisfied that it has fathomed the subject to its lowest depth; here we have the metaphysical and final, not the scientific and proximate, cause why self-murder is wrong.

¹ Observe that a duty is of its nature a debt, and implies a previous value received—a right,—which is the cause and foundation of the duty. It would be illogical to attempt a philosophical explanation of man's duties, or debts, without first considering his rights, or the value received, which is the measure of his obligations, and to which they must be directly proportioned.

² However, since the relation referred to is not essential and necessary in its nature, but is, in the last analysis, contingent and voluntary, we cannot, in a univocal sense, apply the terms "intrinsically evil" to suicide and, *v. g.*, to blasphemy, which is at variance with an essential and immutable relation. The moral nature of the criminal act—suicide—is determined by the contingent circumstance of authorization; but blasphemy is so directly opposed to the natural law, that we can add no circumstances to it—considered objectively—which would change its moral character. Suicide is not of this class of evil actions, and does not possess the same necessity, since its nature is, in a true sense of the term, contingent.

We might notice here by way of a short digression, that some minds are too prone to think all attempts to view a subject in a metaphysical light are trivial and useless; but this is surely not the more intelligent mode of thought to adopt, since the human intellect was created to have truth for its object; and truth of the highest and most perfect kind is that in which the human understanding acquiesces with most satisfaction. Now, genuine metaphysics is nothing else than the highest and noblest truths, ordered and systematized; it is their complexus or synthesis, as informing the mind, that furnishes wisdom most properly such. For those who would consign metaphysics to the regions of erratic thought there seems to be no consistent answer possible when asked, for instance, by the man who, realizing the inadequacy of earthly things to satisfy the end of an intelligent being, sincerely and earnestly puts the question: "Is life really worth living?" If we are unable, in such case, to grapple mentally with the exact issue, and to show the person the real "prize of life," the only true reason why life is worth living, the inevitable consequence of this sheer insufficiency of the present life to fill up the natural capacity of a reasonable being for happiness, will be a disgust and aversion for life, will eventually be suicide. To this extreme pass, logically at least, would the doctrines of the present school of positivists reduce their consistent upholders. Indeed the whole attitude of positivism towards the problems of life is that of doubt and solution unsuccessfully attempted. Prescinding absolutely from a hereafter, life is of no great value; it is, indeed,—as Mr. Mallock ably shows in his lately published work,—not worth living. In considering what is great in dramatic art he has the following sentences: "The grand relation of man is not first to his brother men, but to something else that is beyond humanity, that is at once without and also beyond himself. To this first, and to his brother men through this. We are not our own, we are bought with a price."

Without recurring to a hereafter, wherein is the adequate sanction of the present moral world, our lives would—to use a trite metaphor—be like a ship without anchor adrift in a storm. Unless the moral bearing of suicide be thoroughly examined in a genuine metaphysical light, the impediment which we could place to such a step might be characterized as "impediens," but certainly not as "dirimens."

Self-destruction was countenanced by some of the ancient philosophers, though the wisest amongst them regarded the action in its true light. The Stoics held that the only course left for the morally courageous man to escape wretchedness and ignominy was to take his own life; a theory which Seneca and his nephew Lucan the Poet, at the command of the Emperor Nero, reduced to prac-

tice. Nero would seem to have been influenced in regard to the termination of his life by the views of the Stoics, although the manner in which he compassed his own destruction was as infelicitous as his previous life was iniquitous. The wisest of the ancient philosophers, however, did not, as was just remarked, view self-murder in the light of a final remedy left to the brave man for "all the ills that flesh is heir to." Aristotle, the great light of antiquity, teaches plainly that although "the infliction of death upon one's self to avoid misery presents an appearance of fortitude, on which account some have taken their own lives thinking they were acting courageously, yet it is not true fortitude, but rather a species of cowardice in a mind unwilling to bear up under oppressing ills."¹

Although Socrates died by his own hand, yet the act was not performed in virtue of a conclusion drawn from premises which he by any means admitted; and his death was not properly suicide, since it would appear to be wanting in that essential note of self-murder, unauthorization, which is indispensable to its character of guilt.² Cicero with his usual eloquence and depth of philosophy has the following passage: "Tibi, Publii, et piis omnibus retinendus est animus in custodia corporis; nec injussu ejus a quo ille est vobis datus ex hominum vita migrandum est."³ Virgil gracefully embodies the opinions current in his day to the effect that those who,

"Repining at their wretched state,
And loathing anxious life suborned their fate,"

would occupy in the regions of Tartarus a place appropriate to the peculiar character of their guilt:

"Proxima deinde tenent mæsti loca qui sibi letum
Insontes peperere manu; lucemque perosi
Projecere animas. Quam vellent æthere in alto
Nunc et pauperiem et duros perferre labores."

Aen., lib. vi., ver. 435 *et seq.*

It is evident, even to an ordinary observer of the views of the

¹ Arist. apud Sanct. Thom., 2.2æ quæst. lxiv., art. v., ad quint.

² It would seem more correct to view the death of Socrates as happening under some authorization, since, as a fact, the civil government, without entering into the question of its right to condemn him, empowered him to be his own executioner. This procedure, however, would not now be tolerated in a Christian community, the moral sense of which would be shocked by making even the capitally sentenced criminal perform the acts proximate to his own execution.

³ "You, Publius, and all upright men must keep the soul in watch over the body; and you must not depart this life except at the behest of Him who gave it."

Observe the use of the term "injussu," which we might render almost literally by the word unauthorized; and in fact the essence of the definition of suicide given in this article is contained in this passage from the gifted Cicero.

representative characters of antiquity, that at least the wisest of the ancients looked upon self-murder as contrary to right reason and deserving of reprobation.

We shall next consider briefly those cases in which persons have, without incurring the guilt of suicide, been the authors of their own destruction; and here it will be well to call attention again to the fact that we are not defending the proposition that all self-killing is wrong, but that it is wrong only when the quality of unauthorization enters into the nature of the action.¹

If the example of Samson be adduced to show that suicide may in certain cases be allowed, we would reply that the term used to characterize this act is ill chosen; and that Samson's conduct on this occasion can be justified only on the supposition that he was authorized from above, or was acting under supernatural inspiration.²

Instances are known in which a person from noble motives sacrifices his own life to save that of another; in which, *v. g.*, parental affection, proving more powerful than the instinct of self-preservation, impelled the mother to give up her own life rather than see her child perish. If it be asked, on what principle this and similar cases can be justified, we would answer by stating briefly what we believe to be the doctrine of the best authorities in this matter.

An action may have two effects, only one of which is in the intention, and the other beside the intention and accidental;³ to per-

¹ When it is said that a human or moral action is authorized, it is meant that the authorization must in the last analysis come from God; ordinarily it comes proximately from right reason; *v. g.*, homicide is authorized, and hence is not murder, in the case of the person who kills his aggressor "*cum moderamine inculpatæ tutelæ.*" The person is then authorized proximately from upright reason, but ultimately from God.

² This reasoning is not a violation of Horace's precept.

"Nec Deus intersit nisi dignus vindice nodus
Inciderit."

For here is a difficulty which can be explained only by introducing supernatural agency. Hence St. Thomas has the following: "*Ad quartum dicendum quod sicut Augustinus dicit in primo de Civit. Dei, 'Nec Samson aliter excusatur quod seipsum cum hostibus ruina domus oppressit, nisi quod latenter Spiritus Sanctus hoc jusserat qui per illum miracula faciebat,' et eandem rationem assignat de quibusdam sanctis feminis quæ tempore persecutionis seipsas occiderunt, quarum memoria in Ecclesia celebratur.*"—2.2^æ quæst. lxiv., art. v.

"In the fourth place we must say with St. August. de Civ. Dei that 'Samson is not otherwise excused for destroying himself together with his enemies by the overthrow of the temple, unless it was thus commanded by the Holy Ghost, who wrought a miracle in the case;' and he reasons in the same manner regarding certain holy women who killed themselves in time of persecution, and whose memory is celebrated in the Church."

³ "*Nihil prohibet unius actus esse duos effectus, quorum alter solum sit in intentione, alius vero, præter intentionem. Morales autem actus recipiunt speciem secundum id quod intenditur. Potest tamen aliquis actus ex bona intentione proveniens, illicitus reddi, si non sit proportionatus fini.*"—2.2^æ quæst. 64, art. 7.

form such an action is lawful, provided the secondary or accidental effect be not intrinsically evil. The action may be legitimately done even then when the unintentional effect is wrong, if its wrongfulness be on account of a prohibition, *i. e.*, a "malum quia prohibitum," not a "malum in se."¹

In the case above alluded to, wherein the mother prefers her child's life to her own, is the accidental effect of her action, *viz.*, the loss of her own life, something that is intrinsically wrong? It surely is not, since then not even God himself would be allowed to take life. We may justly infer then, that the mother may act in the manner previously described without the guilt of suicide inhering in her action, which certainly would be the case if the accidental and merely permitted effect of her act was intrinsically and unconditionally evil.²

The so-called arguments by which the advocates of suicide defend their position are found methodically stated in the book called *Le Système de la Nature*, which was published near the middle of last century under the fictitious name of Mirabaud. The author of this book³ was so bitter an assailant of Christianity that even Voltaire thought himself called upon to reply to certain of its tenets. The reasoning employed by Holbach in his attack upon Christianity is substantially as follows:

"Suicide is at variance with no obligation; it does not clash with the duty to one's

¹ Sporer has the following on this subject: "Quandocumque aliquod opus directe facere illicitum est, etiam per se illicitum erit illud indirecte facere scilicet aliquid agendo vel omittendo voluntarie, unde illud sequatur, nisi justa causa ita agendi vel omittendi excuset ac morale voluntarium ad illud opus tollet."—Tom. ii., trac. v., in *V. Præcep. Decal.*

This is the major premise of his argument; and he lays down in the minor that since it is unlawful to take one's own life directly, it is, *per se*, unlawful to take it also indirectly. The unlawfulness of the action is, of course, qualified by the limiting conditions expressed in the major premise.

"Life is given only for a good end, and it follows from the preceding arguments that no case can arise under the natural law in which man is authorized directly to terminate his own life; consequently man can never intend his own death as an end directly to be sought by him."—Hill, *Ethics*, p. 205.

² St. Thomas thus states the principle bearing on this matter: . . . "Si aliquis det operam rei licitæ debitam diligentiam adhibens, et ex hoc homicidium sequatur, non incurrit homicidii reatum; si vero det operam rei illicitæ, vel etiam det operam rei licitæ non adhibens diligentiam debitam, non evadit homicidii reatum si ex ejus opere mors hominis sequatur."

"If any one do something which is lawful, using due diligence to accomplish the result, and if from this act homicide ensue, the person does not incur the guilt of homicide; but if one do that which is unlawful, or do even that which is lawful without using due diligence, he does not escape the guilt of homicide if the death of a man results from his action."

³ Paul Henri Thiry d'Holbach, baron, a French philosopher, who died in Paris in 1789. His book was entitled "Le Système de la Nature, ou des lois du monde physique et moral."

self, since 'volenti non fit injuria,' and besides a man may be so 'overwhelmed with clouds of distress' that life is really a burden instead of a boon; and as we are physically enabled to take life there is strong indication that nature intended us to have recourse to the remedy, at our option. Conduct, then, in conformity with these principles does not surely violate the law of nature. We have, moreover, been invested with authority and dominion over matter, and it is really no more than an exercise of such power when death comes by our own hand. Again, the liberty to decline acceptance is the peculiarity or characteristic of a gift, and such life is admitted to be; and this the more so when we consider that in the origin of things our consent was not given. Finally, the *felo de se* need not necessarily aim a blow at the rights of society; since, on the one hand, he may have become an unprofitable and useless member, or, on the other, society may not extend to the individual that protection and safety which it should afford. To sum the matter up, suicide is rather an advantage than a disadvantage to society, since it promotes the virtue of fortitude by affording an example of unequalled courage evinced in contempt for death."

As opposing the last remark, however, we might, after the manner of St. Thomas, before formally replying to objections, refer again to the words of Aristotle previously given, viz.: "Although the infliction of death upon one's self . . . presents an appearance of fortitude, . . . yet it is not true fortitude, but rather a species of cowardice in a mind unwilling to bear up under oppressing ills." The real solution of these objections, however, becomes an easy task in the light of the principles we have already laid down. To affirm that suicide interferes with no duty is surely the reverse of the truth, since man's life is not his own, but belongs absolutely to another; and, hence, in disposing of it as if it were simply his own, he is violating his duty duly to regard the eminent right of his Creator. This is the demonstrative reason why self-murder is wrong; the other arguments used in defence of the truth may be, and are, in their character, highly suasive of the wrongfulness of the action in question, but apart from the main proof they would fail to furnish convincing certainty. The axiom "volenti non fit injuria" is not true if wrested into a wrong sense. The meaning is "*rationabilites* volenti non fit injuria,"¹ or, no injury is done in the case of a person who is *rationally* willing to sustain what otherwise would be an injury.

There really can be no injury inflicted so far forth precisely as

¹ "Actio de sui ratione procedit ab agente, passio, autem, secundum propriam rationem, est ab alio. Unde non potest esse idem secundum idem agens et patiens. Principium autem proprium agendi in hominibus est voluntas, et ideo illud proprie et per se homo facit quod volens facit. Et, e contrario illud proprie homo patitur quod præter voluntatem suam patitur, quia in quantum est volens, principium est ex seipso. Et ideo in quantum est hujusmodi magis est agens quam patiens. Dicendum est ergo quod injustum per se et formaliter loquendo nullus potest facere nisi nolens, nec pati nisi nolens. Per accidens autem, e quasi materialiter loquendo, potest aliquis id quod est de se injustum vel facere nolens (sicut cum quis præter intentionem operatur), vel pati volens, sicut cum aliquis plus alteri dat sua voluntate, quam debeat."—2.2æ qu. 59, art. 2.

the term of the action is one who is willing; or conversely, no injury can be sustained except under the respect in which the recipient of the injury is unwilling.

We can illustrate this matter by a simple example borrowed from the civil law. Suppose that a trustee named in a deed of trust should be willing to dispose of his charge in a manner different from that contemplated in the deed. It is plain that the axiom "*volenti non fit injuria*" would afford but slender justification to the trustee to apply the axiom for the purpose of vindicating his conduct in the contingency mentioned, would be inept, and an evasion of the question; since the issue at stake is not whether he is willing thus to dispose of his trust, but whether he has a right to make such disposal. The position of man with reference to his existence and its preservation is analogous to that of the trustee. His life has been given to him in trust for certain purposes, and to sanction any other disposal of the charge in his keeping would violate his trust and defeat the end intended by Him who is principal and proprietary.

To conclude, with Holbach, that since we are enabled physically to put an end to our existence, we therefore have the moral right to do so, is invalid illation; the conclusion has greater logical extension than the premises. If this reasoning were true, we might infer that since we are physically capable of killing an innocent person we may lawfully do so when desirable. To affirm therefore as a consequence that action consistent with the above stated premises is not contrary to the law of nature, is a predication unfounded in fact, and contradicted by the first experience of mankind; since all have naturally a repugnance and horror for death.

That we have been invested with authority and dominion over matter is true; but the authority and dominion must be regulated by right reason. As a fact, man's dominion over anything is not absolute but relative, and consequently his conditional tenure of things is subject at all times to the unconditioned proprietorship of his Creator. That exercise of authority over matter, then, which conflicts with the eminent domain of the Supreme Being is a usurpation and a wrong. That the liberty to decline acceptance is the peculiarity of a gift may be admitted, with some restriction: if the one who gives and the one who receives are both equal and independent, the proposition is simply true; but if the one who gives is the Creator of the one who receives, and if, as a consequence, the recipient is inferior and absolutely dependent upon the Giver, then the previous enunciation would require much qualification to be interpreted in a true sense. As the Maker has the right duly to exercise his efficiency in producing an effect, and also to impose upon his production conditions which its subsequent action

must verify, so the first and purely efficient cause possesses pre-eminently the right externally to actualize his efficiency, and to impose upon his creatures conditions which they must realize in their ulterior state. To state the issue briefly, if life were *merely* a gift the position assumed in *Le Système de la Nature* might be tenable; but there is another aspect under which life must be viewed: it is indeed the best gift, but inseparably connected with it is the obligation to possess it agreeably to the conditions imposed by the Giver,¹ and these conditions are the offspring of the truth that we are not simply our own, but are unconditionally in the hands of our Creator.

Finally, it is urged that an individual may become an unprofitable member of society, and hence it cannot be said that he does an injury to the community by withdrawing himself from its pale.

Were it to be granted that an individual may become an unprofitable member of society, it still would not follow that he could arbitrarily separate himself from the community. He would not then be the minister authorized of society to define the individual's attitude towards the community. To society itself, or its representatives, belongs the right to take cognizance of the relation of the individual to the common good, and, this ascertained, to sanction the decision pronounced by the execution of just law. The other alternative of the argument put forth to show that the rights of society are not invaded, does not determine the point which it was introduced to establish; for, conceding still that society in extreme cases is unable to afford in the ordinary manner due protection to the individual, it does not follow that self-murder is either a right or a remedy. In such rare instances the right of self-preservation still remains to the individual, and he is empowered by the natural law to protect himself, even at the cost of an unjust aggressor's life. The conclusion, then, drawn by the French philosopher, viz., that instances of suicide rather promote the good of society by setting an example of courage, must fail to convince.

There is another aspect in which we may regard the argument built by Dr. Holbach upon the supposition that an individual may

¹ "Tertio quia vita est quoddam donum divinitus homini attributum, et ejus potestati subjectum qui occidet et vivere facit. Et ideo qui seipsum vita privat, in Deum peccat, sicut qui alienum servum interficit peccat in dominum cujus est servus. Et sic peccat ille qui usurpat sibi judicium de re sibi non commissa."—2.2æ quæst 59, art. 5, Conclus.

"In the third place because life is a gift divinely bestowed upon man and subject to the power of him who gives life and who takes it; and hence he who deprives himself of life sins against God, as the one who kills the servant of another sins against the master to whom the servant belongs; thus sins the person who usurps unto himself judicial authority in a matter not committed to his charge."

become a useless member of society. Paley treats the matter under consideration thus :

“ For shall we say that we are then only at liberty to commit suicide when we find our continuance in life becomes useless to mankind ? Any one who pleases may make himself useless, and melancholy minds are prone to think themselves useless when they really are not so. Suppose a law were promulgated, allowing each private person to destroy every man he met whose longer continuance in the world he judged to be *useless*. Who would not condemn the latitude of such a rule ? Who does not perceive that it amounts to a permission to commit murder at pleasure ? A similar rule regulating the right over our own lives would be capable of the same extension. Besides which, no one is *useless* for the purpose of this plea, but he who has lost every capacity and opportunity of being useful, together with the possibility of recovering any degree of either, which is a state of such complete destitution and despair as cannot, I believe, be predicted of any man living.”—Bk. 4th, chap. iii., Suicide.

Were the individual the judge of his usefulness to society, it is manifest that the permanence of this institution would be imaginary rather than real ; and since the matter weighed “ in so corrupt a balance as the parties' own distempered imagination ” is fraught with consequences of such a nature, the conclusion must be that the principle from which they flow cannot be founded in justice or truth.

Some writers have proposed a system called Euthanasia, in which a man is instructed to supplement the natural and oftentimes painful mode of death by resort to artificial and painless methods productive of dissolution. Such theory is identical in principle with that of the Stoics of old, and it differs in merely unimportant particulars from the other systems that have been put forth to defend self-murder.¹ The arguments advanced in support of this theory are answered in the refutation of those systems which we have already considered. The characteristic fallacy underlying this set of notions, rather fanciful than philosophical, consists in assuming that man has the right to dispose of his life as something, the absolute tenure of which is vested in himself alone. If this were really the case, if man's existence, its preservation, and extinction were simply in his own hands, then a proper adjustment of his final issue would be both lawful and important. But as a fact this is not so ; the truth is, indeed, so evident that we should be safe in affirming no sane man ever entertained a doubt (1), first, that a natural death awaited him, and (2), second, that in the present order of providence, he must not abridge the term of his natural life.

That mankind have always regarded self-murder as wrong is a fact that admits of no dispute. If the teaching of the Stoics be alleged as at variance with this view, the answer is that even the

¹ “ This conception of suicide as a euthanasia, an abridgment of the pangs of disease, and a guarantee against the dotage of age, was not confined to philosophical treatises. We have considerable evidence of its being frequently put into practice.”—Lecky, *Hist. of Europ. Morals*, vol. i, chap. ii., *Stoicism*.

Stoics admitted the general truth that self-murder was wrong; but they erred in the application of the general principle to particular matter. They cannot be censured for maintaining that there can be cases of duly authorized self-killing; their error consisted in holding that self-killing was legitimate, even when unduly authorized, *v. g.*, when miseries oppress one.

The course of reasoning by which they endeavored to make evident the lawfulness of taking one's own life in adverse circumstances only serves to show that they recognized a superior law, whose prohibition they were attempting to prove inapplicable to the matter in question. They knew that their theory was an exception to the general opinion, "*hinc illæ lachrymæ.*" An example from history will serve to explain the foregoing. Cleopatra, according to Rollin, "not doubting that Cæsar intended to make her serve as an ornament to his triumph, . . . had no other thoughts than to avoid that shame by dying." Her death is thus narrated by the historian: She "asked for a basket of figs, which a peasant had lately brought. She placed it by her, and a moment after lay down, as if she had fallen asleep; but that was the effect of the aspic, which was concealed among the fruit, and had stung her in the arm which she held to it. The poison immediately communicated itself to the heart, and killed her without pain, or being perceived by anybody." The motive which prompted this action is described thus:

"That princess was too haughty and too much above the vulgar to suffer herself to be led in triumph at the wheels of the victor's chariot. Determined to die, and thence having become capable of the fiercest resolutions, she saw with firmness and indifference the mortal venom of the aspic glide into her veins."—*History of Egypt.*

This is an example of self-killing on account of motives which render it difficult to see any reason why guilt should not attach to the deed. To avoid shame and ignominy is a good motive to inspire an action; but even a good end may not be subserved by unlawful means,—"*non sunt facienda mala ut eveniant bona,*"—and directly to take life to escape ignominious exposure is a means that is not duly proportioned to its end, and is, in the present order of providence, always wrong. It surely does not accord with right reason to avoid one evil by choosing another which is the greatest that can befall us. Cicero, for reasons which seem to have no foundation in the actual facts, vindicates the conduct of Cato in terminating his own existence, for "he says that the occasion was such as to constitute a divine call to leave life."¹ "Cæsar, Ovid,²

¹ Lecky, *Hist. of Europ. Morals.* These words show that Cicero entertained a just conception of suicide, since he has recourse to the only plea which in the nature of things could justify this act.

² "*Rebus in adversis facile est contemnere vitam Fortiter ille facit qui miser esse potest.*"—*Ovid.*

and others," according to Mr. Lecky in his *History of European Morals*, "urged that in extreme distress it is easy to despise life, and that true courage is shown in enduring it." The following passage from the same careful writer contains much historical information respecting the view taken of suicide by some of the Greeks and Romans :

"It is indeed true that the ancients were by no means unanimous in their approval of the act. Pythagoras, to whom so many of the wisest sayings of antiquity are ascribed, is stated to have forbidden men 'to depart from their guard or station in life without the order of their Commander, that is, of God.' Plato adopted similar language, though he permitted suicide where the law required it, and also when men had been struck down by intolerable calamity, or had sunk to the lowest depths of poverty. Aristotle condemned it on civic grounds as being an injury to the state. The roll of Greek suicides is not long, though it contains some illustrious names, among others those of Zeno and Cleanthes. In Rome, too, where suicide acquired a greater prominence, its lawfulness was by no means accepted as an axiom. The story of Regulus, whether it be a history or a legend, shows that the patient endurance of suffering was once the Roman ideal. Virgil painted in the darkest colors the condition of suicides in the future world. Cicero strongly asserted the doctrine of Pythagoras, though he praised the suicide of Cato. Apuleius, expounding the philosophy of Plato, taught that the wise man never throws off his body except by the will of God."—*Ibid.*

The main feature noticeable in the aphorisms current among the ancients, and in the classical extracts which fall oftenest under observation, is the truth that self-murder is a crime against nature. The ancients, as has been remarked, were not in error as to the general principle that self-murder was wrong; their mistake lay in the application of the universal truth to particular matter. The exact statement of the attitude of antiquity in regard to criminal self-destruction may, we think, be adequately summed up in the following propositions :

(1.) The universal judgment of mankind has declared suicide or self-murder to be wrong.

(2.) Coextensive with this judgment is another to the effect that self-killing was not then an evil action when it was duly authorized.

(3.) The error into which some of the ancient philosophers fell in regard to suicide was not owing to ignorance of its criminal nature in general, but to indeterminateness of thought respecting those cases in which one is authorized to take his own life.

These propositions, it appears to us, place the position of the ancients respecting suicide in a true light; and if this statement be correct, it becomes manifest that the view taken by the ancients of this crime against nature does not differ essentially from that taken by Christian nations. The same arguments now used by the Christian teacher to make manifest the illicit nature of self-murder were employed centuries ago by the pagan philosopher to demonstrate the same truth; and the reason why such is the case is manifest,

since the truth that self-murder is wrong is one of those evident dictates of natural law which affirms itself to the upright reason of every man. Such truths do not change, and the voice of mankind is unanimous in their recognition. There may be different views taken in different ages concerning the more remote conclusions from these truths, and the definitive settlement of matter that is more concrete and particular in its character; but unless we wish to suppose gratuitously that there is a flaw in the nature of things, that the supreme and wisest of lawgivers has enacted for his creatures' observance a law the due promulgation of which He has failed to effect, we shall be compelled to acknowledge that the *principles* of natural law are engraven upon the human heart.

If the reasoning developed in this article be true, it becomes evident that the definition which we have given of suicide is such as to include on the one hand every case of self-killing which is criminal, and to exclude on the other hand those guiltless acts the result of which, whether direct or indirect, is the loss of one's own life. To urge that this definition is vague and indeterminate, that it would, *mutatis mutandis*, apply to almost every crime in the decalogue, since, *v. g.*, we might say that even blasphemy was wrong because it is an unauthorized action; to argue thus in dispute of the position herein assumed will, upon reflection, appear inconclusive. The solution of such argumentation is found in the following considerations:

(1.) There are some evil actions, and some only, the wrongfulness of which is entirely dependent upon the circumstances of authorization, and in defining such action due regard must be paid to this fact.

(2.) There are other actions which are intrinsically and absolutely wrong, and which no authorization can render legitimate; *v. g.*, we might suppose, *per impossibile*, blasphemy to be authorized by the same source which permits self-killing; the peculiarity then is that the one action is still wrong while the other is not.

If we have understood aright the words of those whose opinions are of greatest weight in this matter, the definition proposed of the crime under consideration is a logical deduction from the teaching, not only of the wisest philosophers of pagan antiquity, but also of the mediæval scholastics, who are, at least upon this and kindred subjects, the writers whose thought has been most profound, and whose expression most accurate.

With truth as the object of our investigation, we cannot upon the whole conceive of any other definition which is philosophical and absolute.