

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE

ESSAYS



Book 2 · Chapter 3

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A Custom of the Island of Cea

If to philosophize be, as 'tis defined, to doubt, much more to write at random and play the fool, as I do, ought to be reputed doubting, for it is for novices and freshmen to inquire and to dispute, and for the chairman to moderate and determine. My moderator is the authority of the divine will, that governs us without contradiction, and that is seated above these human and vain contestations.

Philip having forcibly entered into Peloponnesus, and some one saying to Damidas that the Lacedaemonians were likely very much to suffer if they did not in time reconcile themselves to his favor: "Why, you pitiful fellow," replied he, "what can they suffer who do not fear to die?" It being also asked of Agis, which way a man might live free? "Why," said he, "by despising death." These, and a thousand other sayings to the same purpose, distinctly sound of something more than the patient attending the stroke of death when it shall come; for there are several accidents in life far worse to suffer than death itself. Witness the Lacedaemonian boy taken by Antigonus, and sold for a slave, who being by his master commanded to some base employment: "Thou shalt see," says the boy, "whom thou hast bought; it would be a shame for me to serve, being so near the reach of liberty," and having so said, threw himself from the top of the house. Antipater severely threatening the Lacedaemonians, that he might the better incline them to acquiesce in a certain demand of his: "If thou threatenest us with more than death," replied they, "we shall the more willingly die"; and to Philip, having written them word that he would frustrate all their enterprises: "What, wilt thou also hinder us from dying?" This is the meaning of the sentence, "That the wise man lives as long as he ought, not so long as he can; and that the most obliging present Nature has made us, and which takes from us all color of complaint of our condition, is to have delivered into our own custody the keys of life; she has only ordered, one door into life, but a hundred thousand ways out. We may be straitened for earth to live upon, but earth sufficient to die upon can never be wanting, as Boiocalus answered the Romans." Why dost thou complain of this world? it detains thee not; thy own cowardice is the cause, if thou livest in pain. There needs no more to die but to will to die:

*Ubique mors est: optime hoc cavit deus.
Eripere vitam nemo non homini potest;
At nemo mortem; mille ad hanc aditus patent.*

Neither is it a recipe for one disease only; death is the infallible cure of all; 'tis a most assured port that is never to be feared, and very often to be sought. It comes all to one, whether a man give himself his end, or stays to receive it by some other means; whether he pays before his day, or stay till his day of payment come; from whencesoever it comes, it is still his; in what part soever the thread breaks, there's the end of the clue. The most voluntary death is the finest. Life depends upon the pleasure of others; death upon our own. We ought not to accommodate ourselves to our own humor in anything so much as in this. Reputation is not concerned in such an enterprise; 'tis folly to be concerned by any such apprehension. Living is slavery if the liberty of dying be wanting. The ordinary method of cure is carried on at the expense of life; they torment us with caustics, incisions, and amputations of limbs; they interdict aliment and exhaust our blood; one step farther and we are cured indeed and effectually. Why is not the jugular vein as much at our disposal as the median vein? For a desperate disease a desperate cure. Servius the grammarian, being tormented with the gout, could think of no better remedy than to apply poison to his legs, to deprive them of their sense; let them be gouty at their will, so they were insensible of pain. God gives us leave enough to go when He is pleased to reduce us to such a condition that to live is far worse than to die.

'Tis weakness to truckle under infirmities, but it's madness to nourish them.

The Stoics say, that it is living according to nature in a wise man to, take his leave of life, even in the height of prosperity, if he do it opportunely; and in a fool to prolong it, though he be miserable, provided he be not indigent of those things which they repute to be according to nature.

As I do not offend the law against thieves when I embezzle my own money and cut my own purse; nor that against incendiaries when I burn my own wood; so am I not under the lash of those made against murderers for having deprived myself of my own life.

Hegesias said, that as the condition of life did, so the condition of death ought to depend upon our own choice.

And Diogenes meeting the philosopher Speusippus, so blown up with an inveterate dropsy that he was fain to be carried in a litter, and by him saluted with the compliment, "I wish you good health." "No health to thee," replied the other, "who art content to live in such a condition."

And in fact, not long after, Speusippus, weary of so languishing a state of life, found a means to die.

But this does not pass without admitting a dispute: for many are of opinion that we cannot quit this garrison of the world without the express command of Him who has placed us in it; and that it appertains to God who has placed us here, not for ourselves only but for His Glory and the service of others, to dismiss us when it shall best please Him, and

Death is everywhere: heaven has well provided for that. Any one may deprive us of life; no one can deprive us of death. To death there are a thousand avenues. • SEN.,
PHOEN., 1.1.151

not for us to depart without His licence: that we are not born for ourselves only, but for our country also, the laws of which require an account from us upon the score of their own interest, and have an action of manslaughter good against us; and if these fail to take cognizance of the fact, we are punished in the other world as deserters of our duty:

*Proxima deinde tenent mæsti loca, qui sibi lætum
Insontes peperere manu, lucémque perosi
Proiecere animas.*

There is more constancy in suffering the chain we are tied to than in breaking it, and more pregnant evidence of fortitude in Regulus than in Cato; 'tis indiscretion and impatience that push us on to these precipices: no accidents can make true virtue turn her back; she seeks and requires evils, pains, and grief, as the things by which she is nourished and supported; the menaces of tyrants, racks, and tortures serve only to animate and rouse her:

*Duris ut ilex tonsa bipennibus
Nigræ feraci frondis in Algido,
Per damma, per cœdes, ab ipso
Ducit opes, animúmque ferro.*

And as another says:

*Non est, ut putas, virtus, pater,
Timere vitam; Sed malis ingentibus
Obstare, nec se vertere, ac retro dare.*

*Rebus in adversis facile est contemnere mortem
Fortius ille facit, qui miser esse potest.*

'Tis cowardice, not virtue, to lie squat in a furrow, under a tomb, to evade the blows of fortune; virtue never stops nor goes out of her path, for the greatest storm that blows:

*Si fractus illabatur orbis,
Impavidum ferient ruinæ.*

For the most part, the flying from other inconveniences brings us to this; nay, endeavoring to evade death, we often run into its very mouth:

Hic, rogo, non furor est, ne moriari, mori?

like those who, from fear of a precipice, throw themselves headlong into it:

*multos in summa pericula misit
Venturi timor ipse mali: fortissimus ille est,
Qui promptus metuenda pati, si cominus instant,
Et differre potest.*

*Usque adeo, mortis formidine, vitæ
Percipit humanos odium, lucisque videndæ,*

Thence the sad ones occupy the next abodes, who, though free from guilt, were by their own hands slain, and, hating light, sought death. • VERG., AEN., 6.434

As in Mount Algidus, the sturdy oak even from the axe itself derives new vigor and life. • HOR., CARM., 4.4.57

Father, 'tis no virtue to fear life, but to withstand great misfortunes, nor turn back from them. • SEN., PHOEN., 1.190

It is easy in adversity to despise death; but he acts more bravely, who can live wretched. • MART., 11.56.15

Should the world's axis crack, the ruins will but crush a fearless head. • HOR., CARM., 3.3.7

Tell me, is it not madness, that one should die for fear of dying? • MART., 2.80.2

The fear of future ills often makes men run into extreme danger; he is truly brave who boldly dares withstand the mischiefs he apprehends, when they confront him and can be deferred. • LUC., 7.104

Death to that degree so frightens

*Ut sibi consciscant moerenti pectore lethum
Obliti fontem curarum hunc esse timorem.*

Plato, in his *Laws*, assigns an ignominious sepulture to him who has deprived his nearest and best friend, namely himself, of life and his destined course, being neither compelled so to do by public judgment, by any sad and inevitable accident of fortune, nor by any insupportable disgrace, but merely pushed on by cowardice and the imbecility of a timorous soul. And the opinion that makes so little of life, is ridiculous; for it is our being, 'tis all we have. Things of a nobler and more elevated being may, indeed, reproach ours; but it is against nature for us to condemn and make little account of ourselves; 'tis a disease particular to man, and not discerned in any other creatures, to hate and despise itself. And it is a vanity of the same stamp to desire to be something else than what we are; the effect of such a desire does not at all touch us, forasmuch as it is contradicted and hindered in itself. He that desires of a man to be made an angel, does nothing for himself; he would be never the better for it; for, being no more, who shall rejoice or be sensible of this benefit for him?

*Debet enim, misere cui forti, ægréque futurum est,
Ipse quoque esse in eo turn tempore, cum male possit
Accidere.*

Security, indolence, impassability, the privation of the evils of this life, which we pretend to purchase at the price of dying, are of no manner of advantage to us: that man evades war to very little purpose who can have no fruition of peace; and as little to the purpose does he avoid trouble who cannot enjoy repose.

Among those of the first of these two opinions, there has been great debate, what occasions are sufficient to justify the meditation of self-murder, which they call *ἐύλογον ἐξαγωγήν*. For though they say that men must often die for trivial causes, seeing those that detain us in life are of no very great weight, yet there is to be some limit. There are fantastic and senseless humors that have prompted not only individual men, but whole nations to destroy themselves, of which I have elsewhere given some examples; and we further read of the Milesian virgins, that by a frantic compact they hanged themselves one after another till the magistrate took order in it, enacting that the bodies of such as should be found so hanged should be drawn by the same halter stark naked through the city. When Therykion tried to persuade Cleomenes to despatch himself, by reason of the ill posture of his affairs, and, having missed a death of more honor in the battle he had lost, to accept of this the second in honor to it, and not to give the conquerors leisure to make him undergo either an ignominious death or an infamous life; Cleomenes, with a courage truly Stoic and Lacedaemonian, rejected his counsel as unmanly and mean; "that," said he, "is a remedy that can never be wanting, but which a man is never to make use of, whilst there is an inch of hope remaining:" telling him, "that it was sometimes constancy and valor to live; that he would that even his death should be of use to his country, and would make of it an act of honor and virtue." Therykion, notwithstanding, thought himself in the right, and did his own business; and Cleomenes afterward did the same, but not till he had first tried the utmost malevolence of fortune. All

some men, that causing them to hate both life and light, they kill themselves, miserably forgetting that this same fear is the fountain of their cares. • LUCR., 3.79

For he to whom misery and pain are to be in the future, must himself then exist, when these ills befall him. • LUCR., 3.862

a reasonable exit

the inconveniences in the world are not considerable enough that a man should die to evade them

And, besides, there being so many, so sudden and unexpected changes in human things, it is hard rightly to judge when we are at the end of our hope:

*Sperat et in saeva victus gladiator arena,
Sit licet infesto pollice turba minax.*

All things, says an old adage, are to be hoped for by a man whilst he lives; ay, but, replies Seneca, why should this rather be always running in a man's head that fortune can do all things for the living man, than this, that fortune has no power over him that knows how to die? Josephus, when engaged in so near and apparent danger, a whole people being violently bent against him, that there was no visible means of escape, nevertheless, being, as he himself says, in this extremity counselled by one of his friends to despatch himself, it was well for him that he yet maintained himself in hope, for fortune diverted the accident beyond all human expectation, so that he saw himself delivered without any manner of inconvenience. Whereas Brutus and Cassius, on the contrary, threw away the remains of the Roman liberty, of which they were the sole protectors, by the precipitation and temerity wherewith they killed themselves before the due time and a just occasion. Monsieur d'Anguien, at the battle of Serisolles, twice attempted to run himself through, despairing of the fortune of the day, which went indeed very untowardly on that side of the field where he was engaged, and by that precipitation was very near depriving himself of the enjoyment of so brave a victory. I have seen a hundred hares escape out of the very teeth of the greyhounds: *Aliquis carnifici suo superstes fuit.*

*Multa dies, variusque labor mutabilis ævi
Rettulit in melius; multos alterna revisens
Lusit, et in solido rursus fortuna locavit.*

Pliny says there are but three sorts of diseases, to escape which a man has good title to destroy himself; the worst of which is the stone in the bladder, when the urine is suppressed. Seneca says those only which for a long time are discomposing the functions of the soul.

And some there have been who, to avoid a worse death, have chosen one to their own liking. Democritus, general of the Aetolians, being brought prisoner to Rome, found means to make his escape by night: but close pursued by his keepers, rather than suffer himself to be retaken, he fell upon his own sword and died.

Antinous and Theodotus, their city of Epirus being reduced by the Romans to the last extremity, gave the people counsel universally to kill themselves; but, these preferring to give themselves up to the enemy, the two chiefs went to seek the death they desired, rushing furiously upon the enemy, with intention to strike home but not to ward a blow. The Island of Gozzo being taken some years ago by the Turks, a Sicilian, who had two beautiful daughters marriageable, killed them both with his own hand, and their mother, running in to save them, to boot, which having done, sallying out of the house with a cross-bow and harquebus, with two

The gladiator conquered in the lists hopes on, though the menacing spectators, turning their thumb, order him to die. • SEN., EPIGR., 25

Some have survived their executioners. • SEN., EP., 13

Length of days, and the various labor of changeable time, have brought things to a better state; fortune turning, shews a reverse face, and again restores men to prosperity. • VERG., AEN., 11.425

shots he killed two of the Turks nearest to his door, and drawing his sword, charged furiously in among the rest, where he was suddenly enclosed and cut to pieces, by that means delivering his family and himself from slavery and dishonor.

The Jewish women, after having circumcised their children, threw them and themselves down a precipice to avoid the cruelty of Antigonus. I have been told of a person of condition in one of our prisons, that his friends, being informed that he would certainly be condemned, to avoid the ignominy of such a death suborned a priest to tell him that the only means of his deliverance was to recommend himself to such a saint, under such and such vows, and to fast eight days together without taking any manner of nourishment, what weakness or faintness soever he might find in himself during the time; he followed their advice, and by that means destroyed himself before he was aware, not dreaming of death or any danger in the experiment. Scribonia advising her nephew Libo to kill himself rather than await the stroke of justice, told him that it was to do other people's business to preserve his life to put it after into the hands of those who within three or four days would fetch him to execution, and that it was to serve his enemies to keep his blood to gratify their malice.

We read in the Bible that Nicanor, the persecutor of the law of God, having sent his soldiers to seize upon the good old man Razis, surnamed in honor of his virtue the father of the Jews: the good man, seeing no other remedy, his gates burned down, and the enemies ready to seize him, choosing rather to die nobly than to fall into the hands of his wicked adversaries and suffer himself to be cruelly butchered by them, contrary to the honor of his rank and quality, stabbed himself with his own sword, but the blow, for haste, not having been given home, he ran and threw himself from the top of a wall headlong among them, who separating themselves and making room, he pitched directly upon his head; notwithstanding which, feeling yet in himself some remains of life, he renewed his courage, and starting up upon his feet all bloody and wounded as he was, and making his way through the crowd to a precipitous rock, there, through one of his wounds, drew out his bowels, which, tearing and pulling to pieces with both his hands, he threw among his pursuers, all the while attesting and invoking the Divine vengeance upon them for their cruelty and injustice.

Of violences offered to the conscience, that against the chastity of woman is, in my opinion, most to be avoided, forasmuch as there is a certain pleasure naturally mixed with it, and for that reason the dissent therein cannot be sufficiently perfect and entire, so that the violence seems to be mixed with a little consent of the forced party. The ecclesiastical history has several examples of devout persons who have embraced death to secure them from the outrages prepared by tyrants against their religion and honor. Pelagia and Sophronia, both canonized, the first of these precipitated herself with her mother and sisters into the river to avoid being forced by some soldiers, and the last also killed herself to avoid being ravished by the Emperor Maxentius.

It may, peradventure, be an honor to us in future ages, that a learned author of this present time, and a Parisian, takes a great deal of pains to persuade the ladies of our age rather to take any other course than to

enter into the horrid meditation of such a despair. I am sorry he had never heard, that he might have inserted it among his other stories, the saying of a woman, which was told me at Toulouse, who had passed through the handling of some soldiers: "God be praised," said she, "that once at least in my life I have had my fill without sin."

In truth, these cruelties are very unworthy the French good nature, and also, God be thanked, our air is very well purged of them since this good advice: 'tis enough that they say "no" in doing it, according to the rule of the good Marot.

History is everywhere full of those who by a thousand ways have exchanged a painful and irksome life for death.

Lucius Aruntius killed himself, to fly, he said, both the future and the past.

Granius Silvanus and Statius Proximus, after having been pardoned by Nero, killed themselves; either disdaining to live by the favor of so wicked a man, or that they might not be troubled, at some other time, to obtain a second pardon, considering the proclivity of his nature to suspect and credit accusations against worthy men.

Spargapises, son of Queen Tomyris, being a prisoner of war to Cyrus, made use of the first favor Cyrus shewed him, in commanding him to be unbound, to kill himself, having pretended to no other benefit of liberty, but only to be revenged of himself for the disgrace of being taken.

Boges, governor in Eion for King Xerxes, being besieged by the Athenian army under the conduct of Cimon, refused the conditions offered, that he might safe return into Asia with all his wealth, impatient to survive the loss of a place his master had given him to keep; wherefore, having defended the city to the last extremity, nothing being left to eat, he first threw all the gold and whatever else the enemy could make booty of into the river Strymon, and then causing a great pile to be set on fire, and the throats of all the women, children, concubines, and servants to be cut, he threw their bodies into the fire, and at last leaped into it himself.

Ninachetuen, an Indian lord, so soon as he heard the first whisper of the Portuguese Viceroy's determination to dispossess him, without any apparent cause, of his command in Malacca, to transfer it to the King of Campar, he took this resolution with himself: he caused a scaffold, more long than broad, to be erected, supported by columns royally adorned with tapestry and strewed with flowers and abundance of perfumes; all which being prepared, in a robe of cloth of gold, set full of jewels of great value, he came out into the street, and mounted the steps to the scaffold, at one corner of which he had a pile lighted of aromatic wood. Everybody ran to see to what end these unusual preparations were made; when Ninachetuen, with a manly but displeased countenance, set forth how much he had obliged the Portuguese nation, and with how unspotted fidelity he had carried himself in his charge; that having so often, sword in hand, manifested in the behalf of others, that honor was much more dear to him than life, he was not to abandon the concern of it for himself: that fortune denying him all means of opposing the affront designed to be put upon him, his courage at least enjoined him to free himself from

the sense of it, and not to serve for a fable to the people, nor for a triumph to men less deserving than himself; which having said he leaped into the fire.

Sextilia, wife of Scaurus, and Paxaea, wife of Labeo, to encourage their husbands to avoid the dangers that pressed upon them, wherein they had no other share than conjugal affection, voluntarily sacrificed their own lives to serve them in this extreme necessity for company and example. What they did for their husbands, Cocceius Nerva did for his country, with less utility though with equal affection: this great lawyer, flourishing in health, riches, reputation, and favor with the Emperor, had no other cause to kill himself but the sole compassion of the miserable state of the Roman Republic. Nothing can be added to the beauty of the death of the wife of Fulvius, a familiar favorite of Augustus: Augustus having discovered that he had vented an important secret he had entrusted him withal, one morning that he came to make his court, received him very coldly and looked frowningly upon him. He returned home, full of despair, where he sorrowfully told his wife that, having fallen into this misfortune, he was resolved to kill himself: to which she roundly replied, "tis but reason you should, seeing that having so often experienced the incontinence of my tongue, you could not take warning: but let me kill myself first," and without any more saying ran herself through the body with a sword.

Vibius Virrius, despairing of the safety of his city besieged by the Romans and of their mercy, in the last deliberation of his city's senate, after many arguments conducing to that end, concluded that the most noble means to escape fortune was by their own hands: telling them that the enemy would have them in honor, and Hannibal would be sensible how many faithful friends he had abandoned; inviting those who approved of his advice to come to a good supper he had ready at home, where after they had eaten well, they would drink together of what he had prepared; a beverage, said he, that will deliver our bodies from torments, our souls from insult, and our eyes and ears from the sense of so many hateful mischiefs, as the conquered suffer from cruel and implacable conquerors. I have, said he, taken order for fit persons to throw our bodies into a funeral pile before my door so soon as we are dead. Many enough approved this high resolution, but few imitated it; seven-and-twenty senators followed him, who, after having tried to drown the thought of this fatal determination in wine, ended the feast with the mortal mess; and embracing one another, after they had jointly deplored the misfortune of their country, some retired home to their own houses, others stayed to be burned with Vibius in his funeral pyre; and were all of them so long in dying, the vapor of the wine having prepossessed the veins, and by that means deferred the effect of poison, that some of them were within an hour of seeing the enemy inside the walls of Capua, which was taken the next morning, and of undergoing the miseries they had at so dear a rate endeavored to avoid. Jubellius Taurea, another citizen of the same country, the Consul Fulvius returning from the shameful butchery he had made of two hundred and twenty-five senators, called him back fiercely by name, and having made him stop: "Give the word," said he, "that somebody may dispatch me after the massacre of so many others, that thou mayest boast to have killed a much more valiant man than thyself." Fulvius, disdaining him as a man out of his wits, and also

having received letters from Rome censuring the inhumanity of his execution which tied his hands, Jubellius proceeded: "Since my country has been taken, my friends dead, and having with my own hands slain my wife and children to rescue them from the desolation of this ruin, I am denied to die the death of my fellow-citizens, let me borrow from virtue vengeance on this hated life," and therewithal drawing a short sword he carried concealed about him, he ran it through his own bosom, falling down backward, and expiring at the consul's feet.

Alexander, laying siege to a city of the Indies, those within, finding themselves very hardly set, put on a vigorous resolution to deprive him of the pleasure of his victory, and accordingly burned themselves in general, together with their city, in despite of his humanity: a new kind of war, where the enemies sought to save them, and they to destroy themselves, doing to make themselves sure of death, all that men do to secure life.

Astapa, a city of Spain, finding itself weak in walls and defense to withstand the Romans, the inhabitants made a heap of all their riches and furniture in the public place; and, having ranged upon this heap all the women and children, and piled them round with wood and other combustible matter to take sudden fire, and left fifty of their young men for the execution of that whereon they had resolved, they made a desperate sally, where for want of power to overcome, they caused themselves to be every man slain. The fifty, after having massacred every living soul throughout the whole city, and put fire to this pile, threw themselves lastly into it, finishing their generous liberty, rather after an insensible, than after a sorrowful and disgraceful manner, giving the enemy to understand, that if fortune had been so pleased, they had as well the courage to snatch from them victory as they had to frustrate and render it dreadful, and even mortal to those who, allured by the splendor of the gold melting in this flame, having approached it, a great number were there suffocated and burned, being kept from retiring by the crowd that followed after. The Abydeans, being pressed by King Philip, put on the same resolution; but, not having time, they could not put it in effect. The king, who was struck with horror at the rash precipitation of this execution (the treasure and movables that they had condemned to the flames being first seized), drawing off his soldiers, granted them three days' time to kill themselves in, that they might do it with more order and at greater ease: which time they filled with blood and slaughter beyond the utmost excess of all hostile cruelty, so that not so much as any one soul was left alive that had power to destroy itself. There are infinite examples of like popular resolutions which seem the more fierce and cruel in proportion as the effect is more universal, and yet are really less so than when singly executed; what arguments and persuasion cannot do with individual men, they can do with all, the ardor of society ravishing particular judgments.

The condemned who would live to be executed in the reign of Tiberius, forfeited their goods and were denied the rites of sepulture; those who, by killing themselves, anticipated it, were interred, and had liberty to dispose of their estates by will.

But men sometimes covet death out of hope of a greater good. "I desire," says St. Paul, "to be with Christ," and "who shall rid me of these bands?"

Cleombrotus of Ambracia, having read Plato's *Phaedo*, entered into so great a desire of the life to come that, without any other occasion, he threw himself into the sea. By which it appears how improperly we call this voluntary dissolution, despair, to which the eagerness of hope often inclines us, and, often, a calm and temperate desire proceeding from a mature and deliberate judgment. Jacques du Chastel, bishop of Soissons, in St. Louis's foreign expedition, seeing the king and whole army upon the point of returning into France, leaving the affairs of religion imperfect, took a resolution rather to go into Paradise; wherefore, having taken solemn leave of his friends, he charged alone, in the sight of every one, into the enemy's army, where he was presently cut to pieces.

In a certain kingdom of the new discovered world, upon a day of solemn procession, when the idol they adore is drawn about in public upon a chariot of marvellous greatness; besides that many are then seen cutting off pieces of their flesh to offer to him, there are a number of others who prostrate themselves upon the place, causing themselves to be crushed and broken to pieces under the weighty wheels, to obtain the veneration of sanctity after death, which is accordingly paid them.

The death of the bishop, sword in hand, has more of magnanimity in it, and less of sentiment, the ardor of combat taking away part of the latter.

There are some governments who have taken upon them to regulate the justice and opportunity of voluntary death. In former times there was kept in our city of Marseillea poison prepared out of hemlock, at the public charge, for those who had a mind to hasten their end, having first, before the six hundred, who were their senate, given account of the reasons and motives of their design, and it was not otherwise lawful, than by leave from the magistrate and upon just occasion to do violence to themselves. The same law was also in use in other places.

Sextus Pompeius, in his expedition into Asia, touched at the isle of Cea in Negropont: it happened whilst he was there, as we have it from one that was with him, that a woman of great quality, having given an account to her citizens why she was resolved to put an end to her life, invited Pompeius to her death, to render it the more honorable, an invitation that he accepted; and having long tried in vain by the power of his eloquence, which was very great, and persuasion, to divert her from that design, he acquiesced in the end in her own will. She had passed the age of four score and ten in a very happy state, both of body and mind; being then laid upon her bed, better dressed than ordinary and leaning upon her elbow, "The gods," said she, "O Sextus Pompeius, and rather those I leave than those I go to seek, reward thee, for that thou hast not disdained to be both the counsellor of my life and the witness of my death. For my part, having always experienced the smiles of fortune, for fear lest the desire of living too long may make me see a contrary face, I am going, by a happy end, to dismiss the remains of my soul, leaving behind two daughters of my body and a legion of nephews;" which having said, with some exhortations to her family to live in peace, she divided among them her goods, and recommending her domestic gods to her eldest daughter, she boldly took the bowl that contained the poison, and having made her vows and prayers to Mercury to conduct her to some happy abode in the other world, she roundly swallowed the mortal

poison. This being done, she entertained the company with the progress of its operation, and how the cold by degrees seized the several parts of her body one after another, till having in the end told them it began to seize upon her heart and bowels, she called her daughters to do the last office and close her eyes.

Pliny tells us of a certain Hyperborean nation where, by reason of the sweet temperature of the air, lives rarely ended but by the voluntary surrender of the inhabitants, who, being weary of and satiated with living, had the custom, at a very old age, after having made good cheer, to precipitate themselves into the sea from the top of a certain rock, assigned for that service.

Pain and the fear of a worse death seem to me the most excusable incitements.

MONTAIGNE'S SOURCES

Diog. Laert.	Diogenes Laërtius, <i>Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers</i>
Hor., Carm.	Horace, <i>Odes</i>
Luc.	Lucan, <i>Civil War</i>
Lucr.	Lucretius, <i>On the Nature of Things</i>
Mart.	Martial, <i>Epigrams</i>
Sen., Ep.	Seneca, <i>Epistles</i>
Sen., Epigr.	Seneca *, <i>Epigrammata</i>
Sen., Phoen.	Seneca, <i>Phoenician Women</i>
Verg., Aen.	Virgil, <i>Æneid</i>