

As far as I can see, it is only the followers of monotheistic, that is of Jewish, religions that regard suicide as a crime. This is the more striking as there is no forbiddance of it, or even positive disapproval of it, to be found either in the New Testament or the Old; so that teachers of religion have to base their disapprobation of suicide on their own philosophical grounds; these, however, are so bad that they try to compensate for the weakness of their arguments by strongly expressing their abhorrence of the act--that is to say, by abusing it. We are told that suicide is an act of the greatest cowardice, that it is only possible to a madman, and other absurdities of a similar nature; or they make use of the perfectly senseless expression that it is "wrong," while it is perfectly clear that no one has such indisputable right over anything in the world as over his own person and life. Suicide, as has been said, is computed a crime, rendering inevitable--especially in vulgar, bigoted England--an ignominious burial and the confiscation of the property; this is why the jury almost always bring in the verdict of insanity. Let one's own moral feelings decide the matter for one. Compare the impression made upon one by the news that a friend has committed a crime, say a murder, an act of cruelty or deception, or theft, with the news that he has died a voluntary death. Whilst news of the first kind will incite intense indignation, the greatest displeasure, and a desire for punishment or revenge, news of the second will move us to sorrow and compassion; moreover, we will frequently have a feeling of admiration for his courage rather than one of moral disapproval, which accompanies a wicked act. Who has not had acquaintances, friends, relatives, who have

voluntarily left this world? And are we to think of them with horror as criminals? _Nego ac pernego_! I am rather of the opinion that the clergy should be challenged to state their authority for stamping--from the pulpit or in their writings--as a _crime_ an act which has been committed by many people honoured and loved by us, and refusing an honourable burial to those who have of their own free will left the world. They cannot produce any kind of Biblical authority, nay, they have no philosophical arguments that are at all valid; and it is _reasons_ that we want; mere empty phrases or words of abuse we cannot accept. If the criminal law forbids suicide, that is not a reason that holds good in the church; moreover, it is extremely ridiculous, for what punishment can frighten those who seek death? When a man is punished for trying to commit suicide, it is his clumsy failure that is punished.