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# XIV.12 On laws against people who kill themselves

- The Spirit of Law - Book XIV. On the laws in their relation to the nature of the climate -

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We do not find in the histories that the Romans were willing to die for no cause, but the English kill themselves without any imaginable reason that compels them to do it ; they kill themselves in the very bosom of happiness. This act for the Romans was the effect of education : it derived from their manners of thinking and their customs ; for the English it is the effect of an illness [1] ; it comes from the physical state of the machine, and is independent of any other cause.

There is good reason for thinking it is a flaw in the filtration of the nervous humor ; the machine, the motor forces of which are at every moment inactive, is weary of itself ; the mind is aware of no pain, but of a certain difficulty of existing. Pain is a local affliction that makes us desire to see that pain cease ; the weight of life is an affliction that has no particular location, and makes us desire to see this life end.

It is clear that the civil laws of some countries may have had reasons to stigmatize self-homicide, but in England one can no more punish it than one punishes the effects of madness.

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[1] It could well be complicated by scurvy, which, especially in some countries, makes a man strange and unbearable to himself (*Voyages de François Pyrard*, part II, ch. xxi).