Weared by the struggle of life, how many close their eyes, fold their arms, stop short, powerless and discouraged. How many, and they among the best, abandon life as unworthy of continuance. With the assistance of some fashionable theories, and of a prevalent neurasthenia, some men have come to regard death as the supreme liberation.

To those who hold this view, society replies with the usual clichés.

It speaks of the “moral” purpose of life; argues that one has no right to kill himself, that “moral” sorrows must be borne courageously, that a man has duties, that the suicide is a coward or an “egoist”, etc. etc. All of these phrases are religious in tone; and none of them are of genuine significance in rational discussion.

What after all is suicide?

Suicide is the final act in a series of actions that we all tend to carry out, which arise from our reaction against our environment, or from that environment’s reaction against us.

Every day we commit suicide partially. I commit suicide when I consent to inhabit a dwelling where the sun never shines, a room
where the ventilation is so inadequate that I feel like I am suffocated when I wake up.

I commit suicide when I spend hours on work that absorbs an amount of energy which I am not able to recapture, or when I engage in activity which I know to be useless.

I commit suicide whenever I enter into the barracks to obey men and laws that oppress me.

I commit suicide whenever I grant the right to govern me for four years to another individual through the act of voting.

I commit suicide when I ask a magistrate or a priest for permission to love.

I commit suicide when I do not reclaim my liberty as a lover, as soon as the time of love is past.

Complete suicide is nothing but the final act of total inability to react against the environment.

These acts, which I have called partial suicides, are no less truly suicidal.

It is because I lack the strength to react against society, that I inhabit a place without sun and air, that I do not eat in accordance with my hunger or my taste, that I am a soldier or a voter, that I subject my love to laws or compulsion.

Workers daily commit mental suicide by leaving the mind inactive, by not letting it live, as they kill within themselves their enjoyment of the arts of painting, sculpture, music, which offer some relief from the cacophony which surrounds them.

There can be no question of right or duty, of cowardice or of courage in relation to suicide; it is purely a material problem, of power or lack of power. One hears it said, “Suicide is a human right when it constitutes a necessity ...” Or again, “one cannot take the right of life and death away from the proletariat.”

Right? Necessity?

Shall one debate his right to breathe poorly, i.e., to kill most of the health-giving molecules to the advantage of the unhealthy ones? His right not to eat in accordance with his hunger, i.e., to kill his
“Then,” they say, “we do not go except at our hour — and our
hour is now.” Yes. But since, resigned, they envisage their defeat in
advance; since they have not developed their tissues with a view
to resistance; they have not made due effort to react against the
regimentation of the environment. Unaware of their own beauty,
of their own force, they add to the objectives of the obstacle all the
subjective weight of their own acceptance.

Like those resigned to partial suicides, they surrender them-
selves to the great suicide. They are devoured by an environment
avid for their flesh, eager to crush all energy that appears.

Their error lies in the belief that the dissolution is by their own
will, that they choose their hour, while actually they die crushed
inevitably by the wickedness of some and by the of others.

In a locality by the maleficient of typhus, of tuberculosis, I do not
think of absenting myself to avoid the malady, rather, I proceed im-
mediately to disseminate disinfectant’s, without any fear of killing
millions of microbes.

In present society, made foul by the conventional defecations of
property, of patriotism, of religion, of family, of ignorance, crushed
by the power of government and the inertia of the governed; I wish
not to disappear, but to throw upon the scene the light of truth, to
provide a disinfectant, to it by any means at my command.

Even with death approaching, I shall have still the desire to chair
my body by means of phenol or acid, for the sake of humanity’s
health.

And if I am destroyed in this effort, I shall not be totally effaced.
I shall have reacted against the environment, I shall have lived
briefly but intensely; I shall perhaps have opened a breach for the
passage of energies similar to my own.

No, it is not life that is bad, but the conditions in which we live.
Therefore we shall address ourselves not to life, but to these condi-
tions: let us change them.

One must live, one must desire to live still more abundantly. Let
us accept not even the partial suicides.
understand its usefulness, can they not take part each according to his own temperament?

The second is too inexact. Such words as “society”, “knowledge”, “responsibility” are too often repeated and too little explained.

The barrier that obstructs the road, the biting serpent, the tuberculosis microbe are unaware and without responsibility, yet we defend ourselves against them. Still more irresponsible (in the relative sense) are the cornfields which we reap, the ox that we kill, the beehive that we rob. Nevertheless we attack them all.

I know nothing of “responsible” nor of “irresponsible”. I see the causes of my suffering, of the cramping of my personality; and my efforts are bent to suppress or to conquer them by every possible means.

According to my power of resistance I assimilate or I reject, I am assimilated or rejected. That is all.

Even stranger objections are advanced, in a form neurotically scientific: “Study astronomy, and you will realize the negligible duration of human life as compared to the infinite ... Death, is a transformation and not termination.”

For myself, being finite, I have no conception of the infinite; but I know that duration consists of centuries, centuries of years, years of days, days of hours, hours of minutes, etc. I know that time is made up of nothing but the accumulation of seconds, that great immensity formed from the in-finitely small. Short as our life may be, it has its dimensional importance from the point of view of the whole. Life, seen from my own point of view, with my own eyes, cannot be of little importance to me; and all seems to me to have had no purpose but to prepare for us — for myself and for that which surrounds me.

The stone which caresses the head when dropped from a meter above, will break it open if it falls twenty meters. Arrested on the way, seen from the point of view of the whole, it differs in no particular; but it lacks the energy which makes it a power.

I disregard all that I cannot conceive, and look primarily to myself; and a dissolution or rather a non-absorption of strength that acts to my detriment occurs in either a partial or a definitive suicide.

Death is the end of a human energy, as the dissociation of elements of a battery is the end of the electricity which it releases, as the dissolution of threads of a tissue is the end of that tissue’s strength. Death, as the end of my “I”, is more than a transformation.

There are those who say to one, “The goal of life is happiness,” and who profess to be unable to attain it. It seems to me simpler to say that life is life. Life is happiness. Happiness is life.

All the acts of life are a joy to me. Breathing pure air, I know happiness; my lungs are expanded, an impression of power makes me glow. The hour of work and that of rest afford me equal pleasure. The hour which brings the meal-time; the meal itself with its labor of mastication; the hour which follows with its interior activity — all give me joy of varying sorts.

Shall I evoke the delicious attention of love, the sense of power in the sexual encounter, the succeeding hours of voluptuous relaxation?

Shall I speak of the joy of the eyes, of hearing, of odor, of touching, of all the senses, of the delights of conversation and of thought? Life is a happiness.

Life has not a goal. It is. Why wish for a goal, a beginning, an end?

Let us recapitulate. Whenever, hurled on the stones by an earthquake, avid for air, we bow our head against the rock, whenever seized by the regimentation of society as it is, avid for the ideal (to make this vague term exact: avid for the integral development of one’s self and one’s loved ones) we arrest our life we obey, not a necessity nor a right, but as obsession of force, of the obstacle. We do no voluntary act, as the partisans of death profess; we obey the power of the environment which crushes, and we depart precisely at the hour the weight is too heavy for our shoulders.