

A Necessary Neologism: The Origin and Uses of *Suicide*

Brian Barraclough, DM, and
Daphne Shepherd, MA

In English-speaking societies today the word *suicide* is the preferred term for self-inflicted death. But it has not always been so. Evidence recounted here suggests that *suicide* was devised by Sir Thomas Browne and first published in his book *Religio Medici* in 1643. Although little used at first, *suicide* had become established as noun and verb by the mid-18th century and was recognized by inclusion in Johnson's Dictionary. The modern world has seen an enormous increase in words and expressions derived from *suicide*, some of which are discussed here.

"[T]he lexicographer can only hope to escape reproach. . . ."

—Dr. Johnson

Throughout recorded history people have taken their own lives and language has evolved to take account of this phenomenon. In some cultures this mode of dying has not been regarded as inherently different from death by natural causes. In others, particularly the Christian West, self-killing has been defined as unnatural and sometimes illegal, incurring penalties. Wherever self-killing attracted special interest, requiring a distinction from other forms of death, words appeared to express the difference. In English-speaking societies today the word *suicide* is the preferred term for self-inflicted death. But it has not always been so. *Suicide*, although formed from Latin roots, does not appear before the 17th century.

We describe here the origin of the word *suicide*, its precursors, and the development of its use in English. The table sum-

marizes the findings. We have confined the paper to etymology and made only cursory reference to the intellectual changes in England that determined the word's invention and subsequent use. The data come from word lists of the 17th century; dictionaries from the 17th century onward including the CD-ROM version of the *Oxford English Dictionary*; concordances and literature of the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries; and encyclopaedias. We located concordances in Lund (1980). Dating of a word's first appearance is from *The Oxford English Dictionary* (Simpson & Weiner, 1989).

THE ORIGIN OF *SUICIDE*

The Oxford English Dictionary (OED)—(Simpson & Weiner, 1989) cites the first published use of *suicide* as 1651 in *The Ephesian Matron* (Charleton, 1659). The correct date, however, is 1659. In his review *The Linguistics of Suicide*, Daube

B. M. Barraclough is Senior Lecturer (Psychiatry) at Southampton University. D. M. Shepherd is Senior Research Fellow at Southampton University. Address correspondence to B. M. Barraclough at Southampton University, Royal South Hants Hospital, SO9 4PE, England.

We are grateful to the Warden and Scholars of Winchester College for permission to reproduce pages from the 1642 and 1643 editions of *Religio Medici* in their library. Steve Shrimpton of Southampton University Teaching Media made the reproductions. We acknowledge the advice of Mr. R. F. Hunnisett, formerly Assistant Keeper of the Public Records, London, on the early use of *felo de se*, Ms. F. J. Thornton of the Oxford Dictionaries editorial staff on the early use of *suicide*, and of Dr. T. Walmsley on Browne's wordpower. Helen Barraclough and Clare Harris prepared the bibliography using Reference Manager.

(1972) asserts that Charleton, the author, coined the word. *The Ephesian Matron*, a short erotic melodrama based on a story from Petronius, concerns a soldier guarding a corpse on a gibbet and a young widow grieving at her husband's tomb nearby. While the soldier and the widow have a sexual encounter on the husband's tomb the corpse is stolen. The soldier, faced with discovery and execution for neglect of duty, says, "To vindicate ones self from extream, and otherwise inevitable Calamity, by *Sui-cide* is not (certainly) a crime: but an act of Heroique Fortitude." *Suicide* is printed in hyphenated italics, indicating an unusual word.

Suicide occurs, however, at an earlier date, in Sir Thomas Browne's *Religio Medici* (1643):

There be many excellent straines in that poet, where-with his Stoicall Genius hath liberally supplied him; and truly there are singular pieces in the Philosophy of Zeno, and doctrine of the Stoickes, which I perceive, delivered in a pulpit, Passe for currant Divinity: yet herein are they in extreames, that can allow a man to be his own Assassine and so highly extoll the end and suicide of Cato; this is indeed not to feare death, but yet to bee afraid of life.

Marcus Portius Cato [95–46 BC] was a statesman, stoic philosopher, and republican who, it is written, stabbed himself rather than submit to Caesar; an ideal of philosophical suicide in 17th and 18th century discussions of suicide, a rational man making a choice. *Religio Medici*, described by Margaret Drabble as "A self-directed stocktaking by Sir T Browne of his attitudes as a Christian and a doctor towards God and the Church, faith and reason, the classical tradition, private friendship, and national prejudice..." (1985), is believed to have been written in 1635 after the author's experiences in Ireland, France, Italy and Holland, and was circulated in manuscript versions. In 1642 Andrew Croke, a printer, published it twice unattributed to Browne and probably without Browne's agreement. Croke published it again, in 1643, with additions, corrections, and revisions by Browne, and properly attributed to him

on the frontispiece: "A true and full copy of that which was most imperfectly and surreptitiously printed before."

The manuscript versions of *Religio Medici* and the 1642 editions do not contain *suicide* (Browne, 1953); see Figure 1. *Suicide* appeared therefore, for the first time, in *Religio Medici*, in the 1643 edition; see Figure 2.

The OED date and attribution for the first use of *suicide* is therefore incorrect. The OED editorial archives have no record of the published use of *suicide* earlier than the 1643 edition of *Religio Medici* (F. J. Thornton, personal communication, 1988). It is therefore likely that the 1643 edition contains the first printed use of *suicide* in English, a priority noted by Alvarez (1971). If so, Browne, the author, may have devised *suicide*, rather than anyone else who worked on the 1643 edition of the book. Browne invented many attractive and useful new words using classical sources. The title *Religio Medici* was novel. Seventy-four subsequent works have used the *religio*-device (Keynes, 1968), including *Religio Psycho-Medici* (W. A. F. Browne, 1877). Browne probably coined *antediluvian*, *electricity*, *hallucination*, *incontrovertible*, *insecurity*, *literary*, *medical*, and *precarious* (Browne, 1981; Madan, 1981; Simpson & Weiner, 1989). However, he did not use *suicide* elsewhere in *Religio Medici*, nor in his other works: *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* [1646], *Christian Morals* [1716], *Cyrus Garden* [1658], *Hydriotaphia* [1658]. *Religio Medici* for instance refers to Aristotle's death: "did ever drown himself" and Judas: "perished by hanging himself." In *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* he writes again of Aristotle: "drowned himself"; Judas: "hanged himself"; and Cleopatra: "she killed herself." In *Christian Morals*, again on Cato's death, he uses "to kill himself"; and in *Hydriotaphia*, "kill themselves" and "destroy themselves." Browne appears to have used *suicide* once only, which is surprising if he did invent it.

Whoever devised *suicide* probably derived it by analogy with homicide, in classical Latin *homicida*. "Self-homicide" ap-



Figure 1. Title page and page 102 from *Religio Medici* [1642], Wing number B5167, number 1 in Keynes' bibliography of Browne's works (1968). *Suicide* absent. Reproduced by permission of the Warden and Scholars of Winchester College.

peared for the first time in John Donne's book, *Biathanatos*, written in the early 17th century and circulated in manuscript before publication in 1646 (Donne, 1646). Other Latin words formed on *-cida* and used as models for English neologisms of this period are *parricida*, *patricida*, *matri-cida*, *sororicida*, *fratricida*, and *tyrrannicida*. *Regicide* [1548] and *regnicide* [1607] English neologisms much earlier than *suicide* are, like *suicide*, without classical Latin homologues and may have been models for it. Appendix 1 has, for interest, some "cide = kill" words, selected from the 123 in the OED.

By 1685 eight editions of *Religio Medici* had been published, all containing *suicide* (Browne, 1953). *Religio Medici* was read by the educated and commented upon in print (Digby, 1712). Browne was attacked

102 *Religio Medici.*
ble not onely as we doe at Schoole, to
constitue, but understand it :

*Victurosque Dei celant ut vivere durent,
Felix esse mori.*
So are we all deluded, vainly searching
wayes,
To make us happy by the length of dayes,
For cunningly it makes protract the breath
The Gods conceal the happines of Death.

There be many excellent straines
in that Poet, wherewith his Stoicall
Genius hath liberally supplied him,
and truly there are fingular pieces of
the Philosophy of *Zeno*, and doctrine
of the Stoickes, which I perceive, deli-
vered in a Pulpit, passe for currant
Divinity, yet herein are they extream
that can allow a man to be his owne
Assassine, and so highly extoll the
end of *Cato*, this is indeed not to feare
death, but yet to be afraid of life. It
is a brave act of valour to contemne
death, but where life is more terrible
then

as an atheist and *Religio Medici* was placed on the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* in 1645 (Keynes, 1968). In the 17th-century translations—Latin (Browne, 1644), Dutch (Browne, 1665), and French (Brown, 1668), neither *suicide* nor a development of it appear, a point of interest for the transmission of *suicide* to European languages.

BEFORE SUICIDE

Latin

Suicide had no classical Latin homologue. *Mors voluntaria* or *mortem (sibi) consciscere* were used. Cicero used both (Oxford Latin Dictionary, 1968).

The English medieval Latin term for



A true and full copy of that which was most imperfectly and surreptitiously printed before under the name of *Religio Medici*.
Printed for Andrew Crooke 1643.

98 *Religio Medici.*
 We're all deluded, vainly searching wayes,
 To make us happy by the length of dayes;
 For cunningly to make's protract this breath,
 The Gods conceal the happiness of Death.
 There be many excellent straines in that
 Poet, wherewith his Stoicall Genius
 hath liberally supplied him; and truly
 there are singular pieces in the Philoso-
 phy of *Zeno*, and doctrine of the Sto-
 icks, which I perceive, delivered in a
 Pulpit, passe or currant Divinity: yet
 herein are they in extreames, that can al-
 low a man to be his owne *Assassine*, and
 so highly extoll the end and suicide of
Cato; this is indeed not to feare death,
 but yet to bee afraid of life. It is a brave
 act of of valour to contemne death,
 but where life is more terrible than
 death, it is then the truest valour to
 dare to live, and herein Religion hath
 taught us a noble example: For all the
 valiant acts of *Curtius*, *Scorvola* or *Ca-
 drus*, do not parallel or match that one
 of *Job*; and sure there is no torture to
 the racke of a disease, nor any Poy-
 yards in death it selfe like those in the
 way or prologue unto it. *Emori nolo, sed
 die,*

Figure 2. Title page and page 98 from *Religio Medici* [1643], Wing number 5169, number 3 in Keynes (1968). *Suicide* present. Reproduced by permission of the Warden and Scholars of Winchester College.

suicide, *felonia de se*, felon (felo) of himself (de se), became *felo de se*. *Felo de se* was used for "one who deliberately puts an end to his own existence or commits any unlawful act which results in his own death" (Simpson & Weiner, 1989), and for the act and the coroner's verdict. The term classified acts now called suicide, and also criminal acts during which wrongdoers unintentionally killed themselves and which today would be classed accidental death. Death from self-procured (criminal) abortion could receive a *felo de se* verdict until 1938 (Home Office, 1971).

An early written use of *felonia de se* or *felonia de se ipso* for the coroner's verdict is 1235 although the term probably arose in the early or mid-12th century when the concept of felony developed (R. F. Hunnissett, personal communication 1988). *Felo*

de se continued as a coroner's verdict until 1938 (Home Office, 1971) and is still used occasionally by older people and in literature.

Old and Middle English

The earliest language spoken in England was British, one of the Celtic family of languages. No written records remains. British survived in Wales and modified into Welsh at approximately the same time as Germanic invaders—Angles, Jutes, and Saxons—settled in England. In their language, Old English, the ancestor of modern English, the word for self-killing was *self-cwalu* (self-slaughter) (Bosworth, 1898). The Welsh is *hunan caddiad* and the Gaelic *fein mhortar*. In Middle English spoken from the Norman Conquest

until the 14th century, this appears as *seolf-cwale* (Lewis, 1987). These were the vernacular and *felonia de se* the legal terms.

Modern English Before 1643

Philosophical Writings on Suicide. Whether suicide could be a correct act was discussed for the first time in England in books and pamphlets published during the 17th century (Spratt, 1961). Donne's [1572-1631] *Biathanatos* (1646), the first defence of suicide in English, written at an unknown date said to be between 1610 and 1620 but published posthumously, uses "self-homicide," "self killed," and "homicide of himself." Sym [1581?-1637] in *Life's Preservative Against Self-Killing* (1637), an examination of suicide from the Christian point of view, condemning it, uses "self-murder" and "self-killing."

Burton [1577-1640] in *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), in the section Prognosticks of Melancholy, where he considers the outcome of melancholic states, writes "they precipitate or make away themselves," "to be their own butchers, and execute themselves," "voluntary death," "to bereave themselves of life," and "kill his own body" (Burton, 1923). Person in *Varieties* (1635) uses "autocide" and "such autocides and selfe murderers," a word near in its conception and date to *suicide* but not taken up.

Literature. Concordances allow statements to be made with confidence about a writer's use of words, but not all have had them published. Concordances for the following pre-1643 writers do not record *suicide* having been used:

Spenser [1552-1599] uses "self-murdring," of a thought; and "herselfe did stoutly kill," of Cleopatra (Osgood, 1915). Sidney [1554-1586] refers to "self-destruction" (Donow, 1975). Kyd [1558-1594] uses "murderer of myselfe" (Crawford, 1910), and Marlowe [1564-1593] also uses "murderer of myselfe" (Crawford,

1931). Shakespeare [1564-1616] uses "self-slaughter" in *Hamlet* and *Cymbeline*, "self-slaughtered" in *The Rape of Lucrece*, and "self-killed" of beauty, in a sonnet (Spevack, 1970). Donne [1571-1631], in his poetry, used "selfe murder" (Combs & Sullens, 1940). Herbert [1593-1633] does not refer to self-inflicted death in his poetry (Di Cesare & Mignani, 1977). Nor does *suicide* appear in the Shakespeare apocrypha (Ule, 1987).

The King James Bible [1611] contains accounts of suicide (Barraclough, 1992) but does not use a generic term, describing methods of self-inflicted death: "Therefore Saul took a sword, and fell upon it," "and he [Judas Iscariot] went away and hanged himself."

Dictionaries. The precursors of the English dictionary, lists of "hard" words with definitions, first appeared at the turn of the 16th century and some ran to many editions. Most editions are in the British Library, where we read them. *Suicide* is not in Cawdrey's *Table* (1604, 1616), the first English Dictionary [1604], Bullokar (1616), Cockram (1626), or Holyoke, an English-Latin dictionary (1633).

DEVELOPMENT OF *SUICIDE* AFTER 1643

Philosophical Writings on Suicide

Books and pamphlets that discussed the morality of suicide in the 17th and early 18th centuries varied in their use of *suicide*. Those writers favoring a free choice in the decision to commit suicide tended to use *suicide*; and those against, the "self-" forms, which emphasize criminality: -murder, -homicide, -killing. The quotations in the text illustrate points in the development of the use of *suicide* or points of significance to the subject of suicide. Quotations showing the context in which *suicide* was used and its synonyms are given in Appendix 2.

Pelicanicidium (Denny, 1653), often referred to with Donne (1646) and Sym (1637)

as an early and interesting work on the subject of suicide, uses "self murder," "self homicide," and "self killing" but not *suicide* in its condemnation of suicide.

The first use of *suicide* as a noun for the person occurs in the preface to *A Discourse of Self-Murder* (Pierce, 1692): "But for a man to be a Suicide, for that Royal Creature to be the Regicide of himself. . . ." The first instance of *suicide* being used more than once in the same work, suggesting a greater acceptance, is in the preface to Blount's *Miscellaneous Works* (Gildon, 1695): "Against Suicide the most substantial argument they bring is from the first law of Nature, Self-Preservation" and "There remains one objection more against Suicide. . . ."

The preface to *The Deist's Manual* (Gildon, 1705), a work of importance to those arguing for a free choice, contains "I thought myself oblig'd not only to declare, that I am perfectly convinc'd, that Suicide is not lawful, but also"; "Suicide is unlawful"; "that the enemies of Suicide should stint, and declare these motives, is no hard task"; "But if we pass from our Reason to Religion . . . we have no Portence at all for Suicide. . . ."

In *Self-Murder Asserted to Be a Very Heinous Crime* (1709) Prince, apparently the only anti-suicide sermon writer to use *suicide*, writes: "Because the abominable Practice of Suicide, or Self-Murder, is become so very common in this Nation of late years . . ." and "For however desirable the Joys and Glories of Heaven are, by all good Men, yet none ought, by Suicide, or Self-Murder, to make too much haste unto 'em, lest they lose them in the End." Prince accompanies *suicide* with a synonym, suggesting obscurity. The freedom with which Watts uses *suicide* in his *A Defense Against the Temptation to Self-Murder* (1726) suggests the word was accepted. In the Preface he writes, "Suicide is often owing to the shameful neglect of all Religion even by those who pretend to believe it . . ."; and in the text, "Suicide or Self-Destruction is prohibited by the Divine Law" — also: "I am of a very different Opinion concerning the Suicides

in our Day" and "Well, if Suicide cannot be justified by the examples of scripture. . . ."

Literature of the Later 17th and Early 18th Centuries

Suicide had probably not become accepted by great writers since none of the following used it:

Milton [1608–1674] wrote of "self destruction" in *Paradise Lost* [1667], and of "self violence" and "self killed" in *Samson Agonistes* [1671] (Ingram & Swaim, 1972; Le Comte, 1961). Milton's notes on suicide in Latin in his commonplace book are headed *mors spontanea*. Neither *suicide* nor a latinized form appear (Milton, *Uncollected Writings*, 1938). Dryden [1631–1700] in his poetry uses "self murder" (Montgomery, 1957). Pepys [1633–1703] in his diary uses "self murder" (Pepys, 1976). Swift's [1667–1745] poetry does not contain *suicide* (Shinagel, 1972). Congreve [1670–1729] uses "self-murder" only, in his plays (Mann, 1973). Addison [1672–1719] in *Cato* (1713) does not use *suicide*, interestingly. Pope [1688–1744] uses "self-murder'd": "The wife self-murder'd from a beam depends" (Bedford & Dilligan, 1974). Johnson's [1709–1784] poetry does not contain *suicide* nor synonyms for it (Naugle, 1973).

Dictionaries

Glossographia (T. Blount, 1656), the first dictionary to recognize *suicide*, defined it as "the slaying or murdering of himself." But other dictionaries did not include *suicide*. *The New World of Words*, an upmarket competitor to *Glossographia*, deliberately omitted it (Phillips, 1658). The preface to the first edition [1658] explains why: "but I have also met with some forged, as I shrewdly suspect, by such as undertook to explain them; so monstrously barbarous, and insufferable, that they are not worthy to be mentioned, nor once thought on, yet that ye may guesse at Hercules by his foot, one of them I shall produce, which is Suicide, a word which I

had rather should be derived from *Sus*, a Sow, than from the Pronoun *Sui*, unless there be some mystery in it; as if it were a Swinish part for a man to kill himself." Phillips, who was Milton's nephew and educated by him, may have known the 9th century French Medieval Latin *suicidium*, meaning *abbatage des porcs* (Von Wartburg, 1966).

Blount's reply to Phillips, *A World of Errors Discovered in the New World of Words* (1673), does not contain *suicide* nor a reply to Phillips' criticism. Nor does Blount use *suicide* in *Nomo-Lexicon*, his law dictionary (1670). *Felo de se* occurs, which suggests that *suicide* had not entered legal use. Blount's inconsistent use implies that *suicide* was not established.

Medical dictionaries appear to have been late including *suicide* as a medical term. Neither Blancard's *Physical Dictionary* (1693), Quincy's *Lexicon Physico-Medicum* (1719), nor Robert James *Medical Dictionary* (1743) cite the word.

The first instance of *suicide* being given a Latin origin occurs in Coles' *English Dictionary* (1676): "Suicide L[atini] self-murder." In contrast, a Latin dictionary with Latin definitions, *The Lexicon Universale* (Hofmann, 1677) does not contain *suicide*. Similarly the Latin version of *The Ephesian Matron*, *Matrona Ephesia* (Charletono, 1665), does not latinize *suicide*, using instead *mortem sibi consciscendo*. The Latin origin is again emphasized in the *Lexicon Technicon* (Harris, 1704): "Suicide [suicidium] self-killing, self-murder."

The introduction of *suicide* into the 10th edition of Bullokar's *An English Expositus* (1707), defined as "self murder," signifies increased acceptance of *suicide* as part of the standard vocabulary. The editions of this enduring dictionary from the 1st [1616] to the 9th [1698] had not listed the word. However, neither Kersey's *New English Dictionary* (1702) nor his *Dictionarium Anglo-Britannicum* (1708) contain *suicide*. Kersey edited an edition of *The New World of Words* [1706], so perhaps took Phillips' view on the illegitimacy of *suicide*. The *Universal Etymo-*

logical English Dictionary (Bailey, 1730) includes "Suicide [suicidium L] self-killing, self-murder."

Chambers' important and influential *Cyclopaedia* (1728) has no entry for *suicide*. However, one must have been intended. Under "Murther" occurs "Self-Murther is otherwise called suicide—see Suicide"; under *Felo-de-se*, "Felo-de-se is he that commits Felony by willingly killing himself. The Saxons called him Self-bane. See Suicide"; and under *Felony*, "Felony includes several Species of crimes, whose punishment is the same, viz Death: such as . . . Suicide." The second edition [1738] is identical.

Suicide may have entered French via Chambers for the *Cyclopaedia* was known and admired in France being influential in the design of the *Encyclopédie*. The *Cyclopaedia*'s originality and scope also made it influential with Johnson's [1709–1784] *Dictionary* (1755). The first edition of Johnson includes *suicide*.

SUICIDE n s. [suicidium, Latin.] Self-murder; the horrid crime of destroying one's self.

Child of despair and *suicide* my name. *Savage*

To be cut off by the sword of injured friendship is the most dreadful of all deaths, next to *suicide*.
Clarissa

"Suicidium" does not appear in dictionaries of English medieval or classical Latin (Daube, 1972) and so is a modern Latin formation on an English neologism. The examples Johnson gives to illustrate the use of *suicide* are from his contemporaries, Richardson [1689–1761] and *Savage* [1697–1743], although Johnson in the Preface to his *Dictionary* wrote that he aimed to exclude examples from writers after 1660 and had presumably read Browne, having published a short life in 1756. The OED states "not in Johnson 1755."

With the appearance of *suicide* in Johnson's great dictionary the word can be said to have arrived, which permits moving from its early history to a consideration of modern usage. (Table 1 summarizes the

Table 1
English Use of the Word *Suicide* from the 16th to the Mid-18th Century

Yes	No
	Spenser, Sidney, Kyd, Marlowe, Shakespeare, Burton, King James Bible, Milton, Dryden, Swift, Pope, Congreve
	1604-1617 Cawdrey, <i>Table Alphabetical</i>
	1616-1698 Bullokar, <i>English Dictionary</i>
	1626-1650 Cockram, <i>English Dictionary</i>
	1633 Holyoke, <i>Dictionarium Etymologicum</i>
	1637 Sym, <i>Life's Preservative . . .</i>
	1642 Browne, <i>Religio Medici</i>
1643	Browne, <i>Religio Medici</i>
	1644 <i>Religio Medici</i> (Latin)
	1646 Donne, <i>Biathanatos</i>
	1653 Denny, <i>Pelicanicidium</i>
1656	Blount, <i>Glossographia</i>
	1656 Charleton, <i>Epicurus' Morals</i>
1659	Charleton, <i>Ephesian Matron</i>
	1665 <i>Religio Medici</i> (Dutch)
	1665 Charletono, <i>Matrono Ephesia</i>
	1668 <i>Religio Medici</i> (French)
1670	Coles, <i>Dictionary</i>
	1670 Blount, <i>Nomo-Lexicon</i>
	1673 Blount, <i>A World of Errors</i>
	1674 Philipot, <i>Self-Homicide</i>
	1677 Hofmann, <i>Lexicon Universale</i>
	1680 Blount, <i>Philostratus</i>
1692	Pierce, <i>Self-Murder</i>
1695	Gildon, <i>Preface to Blount</i>
	1693 Blancard, <i>Physical Dictionary</i>
	1700 Adams, <i>Essay Concerning Self-Murther</i>
	1702 Kersey, <i>New English Dictionary</i>
	1704 Harris, <i>Lexicon Technicon</i>
1705	Gildon, <i>Deist's Manual</i>
	1705 Fleetwood, <i>Three Sermons</i>
	1708 Knaggs, <i>Sermon against Self-Murder</i>
1707	Bullokar, <i>English Expositor</i>
	1708 Kersey, <i>Dictionarium Anglo-Britannicum</i>
1709	Prince, <i>Self-Murder a Very Heinous Crime</i>
	1712 Digby, <i>Epicurus' Morals</i>
	1713 Addison, <i>Cato</i>
	1719 Quincy, <i>Lexicon Physico-Medicum</i>
1721	Bailey, <i>Etymological English Dictionary</i> (1st ed.)
1726	Watts, <i>Defense against Temptation to Self-Murther</i>
1728	Chambers, <i>Cyclopaedia</i> (1st ed.)
1738	Chambers, <i>Cyclopaedia</i> (2nd ed.)
1729	Savage, <i>The Wanderer</i>
	1736 Pearce, <i>Sermon on Self-Murder</i>
	1743 James, <i>Medicinal Dictionary</i>
1747	Richardson, <i>Clarissa</i>
1755	Johnson, <i>Dictionary</i>

use of the word from the 16th to the mid-18th century.)

TODAY'S USE OF *SUICIDE*

Suicide is a noun for the person who commits the act, or attempts it, or has a tendency to suicide. Present usage favors *suicide* only for the person who has killed him/herself, the so-called successful or completed suicide. *Suicide* is also used as a noun for the act of committing suicide. The word applies to a person but has been used figuratively as Ruskin did: "the suicide of Greece."

The OED [1989] gives the verb "to suicide," not much used today. From the verb come "suicides, suicided, suiciding," now little used; adjectives "suicidal" and "suicidal"; and adverbs "suicidally" and "suicidal-wise." From the adjective comes "suicidalism." Nineteenth-century interest in suicide gave rise to "suicidism" [1807], the doctrine or practice of suicide; and "suicidist" [1880], one who commits suicide. The OED also gives "suicism" [1751], "suicism for the action of self murder and suicide for the self murderer." Suicidality, a recent invention and not in the OED, is a noun for the strength of suicidal inclinations.

The study of suicide has produced a body of knowledge, suicidology, and those who study and apply it, the suicidologist. The OED cites W. A. Bonger [1929] for the first use of *suicidologie* in *Psychiatriesich-Juridisch Geselschap*: "De wetenschap van de zelfmoord, the *suicidologie* (cursivering van mij) zou men haar kunnen noemen, is ruim een eeuw oud" [The science of suicide, *suicidologie* it could be called [the italics are mine], is about a century old.] E. S. Shneidman (1964) is cited for the first American use, referring to Louis Dublin as "the Grand Old Man of Suicidology," in his review of Dublin's famous book in *Contemporary Psychology*; and also for *suicidologist* in his description of a suicide prevention program in the *Bulletin of Suicidology* [1967]: "whose successful development depends on the active interest, support and activities of suicidologists."

Since the mid-19th century, compound nouns have extended the word's uses. Risky conduct may cause career, commercial, electoral, financial, literary, logical, moral, political, professional, social suicide. Simulated or supposed suicide can conceal a disappearance, and faked suicide a murder. The World Wars produced suicide aircraft, attack, battalion, bomber, charge, club, corner, mission, party, pilot, plane, squad, and tactics; and modern war has been called mutual suicide. Sport gives rise to suicide squeeze in baseball, squad in American football, brigade in cricket. Working life has suicide box (the bunk in the long-distance truck driver's cab), suicide suit (diving suit), suicide connection (reversing a large electric motor in 3 seconds), suicide jockey (a nitroglycerine hauler), suicide season (November, for bankrupts), suicide sale (bargains from the hard pressed shopkeeper). Cult suicide is sometimes applied to an apocalyptic religious group. Biology has suicide gene and cell suicide (apoptosis or programmed cell death). Addictions cause slow or slow-motion suicide (the cigarette) and chronic or incipient suicide (alcohol). Fiction has coined suicide note, letter, pact, pill, seat (the one next to the driver). Chess has produced sui-mate, a forced self-mate. Slang has meant driving four horses in line, the sui-cide as opposed to the passing-side when driving a car (in Australasia), the suicide-blond, who dyes by her own hand.

Nouns with technical uses have developed. Suicide rate and "true" suicide rate in mortality statistics; suicide wave for a sharp increase in the suicide rate; suicide clause in life insurance; suicide pact or double suicide when two or more people decide to commit suicide together; murder-suicide when the murderer kills himself; mass suicide when large numbers kill themselves together; race-suicide, the failure of a people to maintain their number; and suicide prevention, the study and practice of stopping the potential suicide from succeeding. Extended suicide is used sometimes when the murderer of his family then commits suicide; and suicide equivalent where abnormal behavior, even

though not life threatening, is interpreted as a wish, possibly unconscious, for death.

Parasuicide (para [Gk] = simulation, as in parody), is deliberate self-harm without the intention to commit suicide although evoking the sympathy expected for the failed suicide. Invented by Kreitman et al. (Kreitman, Philip, Greer, and Bagley, 1969) the word has flourished despite criticism for combining Greek and Latin and because, in Romance languages, parasuicide could mean suicide prevention because the Latin root para- can mean "to ward off" (Walk, 1972). Parasuicide is used as a noun for the act, less often for the person, and rarely in verbal or adverbial forms. Pseudocide, a less sympathetic word than parasuicide (Lennard-Jones & Asher, 1959), did not catch on.

These extensions of use, principally in the late 19th and the 20th centuries, reflect the drama of the word's associations and a lessening of the horror and stigma once attached. The daring, even shocking, original use of these extensions has probably in turn contributed to a reduction of the emotional impact of the word. "Completed suicide," now used to make clear that death occurred, reflects a weakening of meaning through overuse. Just as *suicide* entered writing, possibly as an euphemism for *felo de se* and *self-murder*, so euphemisms have been found to replace it; some of these are: do the Dutch (act), do oneself in, take a Brodie, take the easy way out, gorge out (leap from a high cliff), bump oneself off, put out one's light, take a powder, top oneself, turn off one's lights, wipe oneself out, take the pipe (domestic gas), press the self-destruct button, fall on one's sword, die Roman fashion, have a fatal accident.

Words for special kinds of suicide have entered English from the East: *suttee*, the Hindu practice of the suicide of the widow and sometimes the retainers at a dead man's funeral; the juggernaut car under the wheels of which Hindu pilgrims are said to have thrown themselves in the expectation of going straight to heaven; *hara-kiri* or *seppuku*, sometimes suicide, sometimes voluntary self-execution on

the command of the Japanese authorities, a self-disembowelling followed with beheading by a friend (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* [1911]). Because of the intention to kill others, although dying in the attempt, *kamikaze*, the Japanese bomber which dived pilot and all into the target; *kaitens*, the submarine equivalent of *kamikaze*; and *banzai*, the suicide charge of Japanese soldiers, are not strictly suicide.

MODERN USAGE

The uses of suicide can be grouped broadly as lay, medical, and legal.

The lay uses are those already described, encompassing deliberate self-inflicted death and fatal or potentially fatal risk taking with figurative and technical extensions.

In medicine *suicide* is used for self-inflicted death when evidence is consistent with the dead person's intention to die by his/her actions. This results in doctors classifying deaths to suicide that the coroner could not so classify.

In English law *suicide* has a technical meaning derived from the Common Law. A recent legal definition states, "Suicide is voluntarily doing an act for the purpose of destroying one's own life while one is conscious of what one is doing, and in order to arrive at a verdict of suicide there must be evidence that the deceased intended the consequences of his act" (Burton, Chambers, & Gill, 1985). Appeals to quash coroners' verdicts result in the reiteration of the need for proof of intent and prevent any drift to loosen the definition. These appeals occur when the appellant, usually a relative, believes the coroner has incorrectly returned a stigmatizing suicide verdict, or an insurance company has a financial interest in altering a verdict of accident to suicide. A consequence of a strict or even overstrict definition, out of line with medical opinion, is the aggregation of suicide, undetermined (open verdict), and accidental poisoning deaths on the assumption that the combined statistic gives the "true" suicide rate.

CONCLUSION

English is a hybrid of words from Latin, French, and the Germanic languages, with contributions from other tongues, especially those of countries formerly governed from London. *Suicide*, of which no trace exists in classical or English medieval Latin nor Early or Middle English, replaced compound nouns of Germanic form. The use of Latin declined in England from the 16th century but many newly devised English words used Latin roots and forms. *Suicide*, apparently invented by Browne, is one of this class of neologisms and emerged when debate about the morality of suicide questioned the Church's teaching and the State's prohibition. *Suicide* appears to have been used first by those arguing for the right to commit suicide, placed in some dictionaries and word lists, and used in minor literary work, but probably not by the preeminent writers of the 17th and early 18th centuries. Phillips, a prescriptive lexicographer, criticized *suicide* because of the absence of a classical Latin homologue and the alternative meaning of pig slaughter. By the early 18th century *suicide* had become an accepted term, confirmed by inclusion in Bullock's long-running *Dictionary*, Chambers' authoritative *Cyclopaedia*, and Johnson's *Dictionary*.

With the development of the modern world the usefulness of *suicide* increased as shown by the variety of words and terms derived from it. These would have been possible but clumsy if based on self-murder or its homologues. Consider self-destructionology.

Suicide probably succeeded because it was short and easy to say and write compared with the alternatives. Also *suicide*, at first, was neutral and the alternatives stigmatizing, implying crime. *Suicide* had obvious Latin roots but sounded English so could substitute for the medieval Latin *felo de se* used by the law and the educated. It could be built on easily by changing the ending or adding qualifying words to form compound nouns in ways unsuited to the "self" forms and *felo de se*.

The appearance of *suicide* in French in the early 18th century (Von Wartburg, 1966), Italian in the late 18th century (Battisti & Alessio, 1975), and Spanish in the early 19th century (Moliner, 1979) show its attractiveness. Other Romance languages have adopted *suicide* but not the Germanic (Appendix 3). A French dictionary claims a French origin for *suicide* (Robert & Rey, 1985) but the word appeared in English 91 years before 1734, the date given for the first appearance in French (Von Wartburg, 1966). The Italian and Spanish dictionaries say *suicide* is English.

The use of *suicide* in World Health Organization publications by two official languages, English and French, and the predominance of English in the scientific, psychiatric, and suicide literature (Barraclough & Noyes, 1989), make the penetration of non-Romance languages by *suicide* likely.

We have given an account of an obscure 17th-century neologism that over three centuries achieved wide currency. Because language is a living and evolving medium, we may expect further developments in the words used to describe the phenomena of concern to this journal.

REFERENCES

- Adams, J. (1700). *Essay concerning self-murder*. London: T. Bennett.
- Addison, J. (1713). *Cato*. London: J. Tonson.
- Alvarez, A. (1971). *The savage god: A study of suicide*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.
- Bailey, N. (1730). *Etymological English Dictionary* (2nd ed.). London: Cox.
- Barraclough, B. M. (1992). The Bible suicides. *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica*, 86, 64-69.
- Barraclough, B. M., & Noyes, R. (1989). Language of publication of journal articles on suicide and mental disorders. *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica*, 79, 245-247.
- Battisti, C., & Alessio, G. (1975). *Dizionario etimologico Italiano vol quinto*. Firenze: Universta Degli Studi.
- Bedford, E. G., & Dilligan, R. J. (1974). *A concordance to the poems of Alexander Pope*. Detroit: Gale.
- Blancard, S. (1693). *Lexicon: The physical dictionary*. London.
- Blount, C. (1680). *Philostratus*. London.
- Blount, T. (1656). *Glossographia*. London: Thomas

- Newcomb. [Editions 1-5, 1656, 1661, 1670, 1674, and 1681, were searched].
- Blount, T. (1670). *Nomo-lexicon, a law dictionary*. London: Thomas Newcomb for J. Morton & H. Herringman.
- Blount, T. (1673). *A world of errors discovered in the New World of Words*. London: Thomas Newcomb for A. Roper.
- Bosworth, J. (1898). *An Anglo-Saxon dictionary*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Brown, Thomas, Sir. (1668). *La religion du medicin*.
- Browne, Thomas, Sir. (1642, 1643). *Religio Medici*. London: A. Crooke.
- Browne, Thomas, Sir. (1644). *Religio Medici: Latin* (J. Merryweather, Trans.). Lugd. Batavorum: Franciscum Hackium.
- Browne, Thomas, Sir. (1665). *Religio Medici: Dutch* (A. Van Berckel, Trans.). Leyden: Laege-duyen.
- Browne, Thomas, Sir. (1953). *Religio Medici*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Browne, Thomas, Sir. (1981). *Pseudodoxia epidemica (1646)*. London: Clarendon Press.
- Browne, W. A. F. (1877). *Religio psycho-medici. Journal of Psychological Medicine*, 3, 17-31.
- Bullokar, J. I. B. (1616). *An English expositor*. London. [Editions 1-9, 1616-1698, were searched]
- Bullokar, J. I. B. (1707). *The English expositor improved* (10th ed.). London.
- Burton, J. D. K., Chambers, D. R., & Gill, P. S. (1985). *Coroners' enquiries*. London: Kluwer Law.
- Burton, R. (1923). *The anatomy of melancholy* (A. H. Bullen, Ed.). (Vol. 1, pp. 495-503). London: Bell.
- Cawdrey, R. (1604 & 1617). *A table alphabetical* (1st and 4th eds.). London.
- Chambers, E. 1st (1728 & 1738). *Cyclopaedia* (1st and 2nd eds.). London.
- Charleton, G. (1659). *The Ephesian matron*. London: H. Herringman.
- Charletono, G. (1665). *Matrona Ephesia sive lusus serius de amore*. Londini: A. M. Harrisio.
- Cockram. (1626). *English Dictionary* (2nd ed.). London. [Editions 2-9, 1626-1650, were searched].
- Coles, E. (1676). *English dictionary*. London: Samuel Crouch.
- Combs, H. C., & Sullens, Z. R. (1940). *Concordance to the English poems of John Donne*. Chicago: Packard.
- Crawford, C. (1910). *A concordance to the works of Thomas Kyd*. Louvain: Uystspruyt.
- Crawford, C. (1931). *The Marlowe concordance*. Louvain: Uystspruyt.
- Daube, D. (1972). The linguistics of suicide. *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 1, 387-437.
- Denny, W., Sir, (1653). *Pelicanicidium: Or the Christian adviser against self-murder*. London: T. Hucklescott.
- Di Cesare, M. A., & Mignani, R. (1977). *Concordance to the complete writings of George Herbert*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Digby, J. (1712). *Epicurus' Morals. A Translation*. London.
- Donne, J. (1646). *Biathanatos*. London.
- Donow, H. S. (1975). *A concordance to the poems of Sir Philip Sidney*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Drabble, M. (1985). *Oxford companion to English literature* (5th ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Fleetwood, W. (1705). *Three sermons upon the case of self-murder*. London.
- Gildon, C. (1695). *Preface to Blount*. London.
- Gildon, C. (1705). *The deist's manual*. London: A. Roper.
- Harris, J. (1704). *Lexicon technicon or an universal English dictionary of the arts and sciences*. London.
- Hofmann, J. J. (1677). *Lexicon universale*. Basileae.
- Holyoke, F. (1633). *Dictionarium etymologicum latinum* (4th ed.). London: A. Islip & F. Kingston.
- Home Office. (1971). *Report of the committee on death certification and coroners* (Brodrick Committee). London: HMSO.
- Ingram, W., & Swaim, K. (1972). *A concordance to Milton's English poetry*. London: Oxford University Press.
- James, R. (1743). *Medicinal dictionary*. London: T. Osborne. [This was published in 1743-1745]
- Johnson, S. (1755). *A dictionary of the English language MDCCLV* (Facsimile ed., 1979). London: Times Books.
- Kersey, J. (1702). *New English dictionary*. London.
- Kersey, J. (1708). *Dictionarium Anglo-Britanicum*. London.
- Keynes, G. (1968). *Bibliography of Sir Thomas Browne* (2nd ed.). London: Oxford University Press.
- Kreitman, N., Philip, A., Greer, S., & Bagley, C. (1969). Parasuicide. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 115, 746-747.
- Le Comte, E. S. (1961). *Milton's dictionary*. London: Peter Owen.
- Lennard-Jones, J., & Asher, R. (1959). Why do they do it? *Lancet*, i, 1138.
- Lewis, R. E. (1987). *A Middle English dictionary*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Lund, R. (1980). *Restoration and early eighteenth century English literature: 1660-1740*. New York: Modern Language Association.
- Madan, G. (1981). *Geoffrey Madan's notebooks*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Mann, D. (1973). *A concordance to the plays of William Congreve*. New York: Cornell University Press.
- Milton, J. (1938). *The Uncollected Writings*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Moliner, M. (1979). *Diccionario de uso del Espanol*. Madrid: Gredos.
- Montgomery, G. (1957). *A concordance to the poetical works of John Dryden*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Naugle, H. H. (1973). *Concordance to the poems of Samuel Johnson*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Osgood, C. G. (1915). *A concordance to the poems of Edmund Spenser*. Washington, DC: Carnegie Institution.
- Oxford Latin Dictionary*. (1968). London: Oxford University Press.
- Pepys, S. (1976). *The diary of Samuel Pepys* (Vol. IX, 1668-1669). London: Bell.
- Person, D. (1635). *Varieties*. London: T. Alchorn.
- Philipot, T. (1674). *Self-homicide-murder*. London.

- Phillips, E. (1658). *The new world of words or universal English dictionary*. London: R. Tyler. [Editions 1-5, 1658, 1662, 1678, 1706, and 1720, were also searched].
- Pierce, E. (1692). *Discourse of self-murder*. London: R. Baldwin.
- Prince, J. (1709). *Self-murder asserted to be a very heinous crime*. London: B. Bragge.
- Quincy, J. (1719). *Lexicon physico-medicum*. London.
- Robert, P., & Rey, A. (1985). *Le grand robert de la Langue Français: dictionnaire et analogique de la Langue Français* (2nd ed.). Paris: Le Robert.
- Shinagel, M. (1972). *Concordance to the poems of Jonathan Swift*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Simpson, J. A., & Weiner, E. S. C. (1989). *The Oxford English dictionary* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Spevack, M. (1970). *A complete and systematic concordance to the works of Shakespeare*. Hildesheim: Georg Olms.
- Sprott, S. E. (1961). *The English debate on suicide*. La Salle, IL: Open Court.
- Sym, J. (1637). *Life's preservative against self killing or an useful treatise concerning life and self-murder*. London: R. Dawlman & L. Fawne.
- Ule, L. (1987). *A concordance to the Shakespeare apocrypha*. Hildesheim: Olms.
- Von Wartburg, W. (1966). *Französischer etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Band 12). Basel: Zbinden Druck.
- Walk, A. (1972). An objection to parasuicide. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 120, 128.
- Watts, I. (1726). *Defense against temptation to self-murder*. London.
- Wood, A. (1691-1692). *Athenae oxonienses*. London: T. Bennet.

Appendix 1

English Words with "cide = to kill" Suffixes

Regicide (1548)	Gregicide (1796)	Menticide (1950)
Deicide (1611)	Feticide (1844)	Ecocide (1969)
Filicide (1665)	Insecticide (1865)	Medicide (1990)
Selfcide (1692)	Senicide (1889)	Eliticide (1992)
Hereticide (1702)	Viricide (1924)	Linguicide (1992)
Leporicide (1788)	Phytocide (1936)	

Also nonsense words:

Apprenticide	Ceticide (whales)	Talpodice (moles)
Birdicide	Perdricide (partridges)	Vaticide (prophets)
Bovocide (cows)	Suitorcide	

Appendix 2

Synonyms for Suicide in the Late 17th and Early 18th Centuries

Self-Homicide-Murther (Philipot, 1674): self-killing, self-murder, self-homicide, and self-assasination

Philostratus (C. Blount, 1680) (a life of Apollonius Tyaneus that defends suicide as a rational act): dispatch himself, kill himself, self-murder, and self-homicide

Athenae Oxonienses (Wood, 1691-1692): selfcide, a word similar to autocide and suicide in its conception but which did not develop

An Essay Concerning Self-Murther (Adams, 1700): self-murther, destroying oneself, self-killing, self-homicide, and self-destruction

Three Sermons upon the Case of Self-Murther (Fleetwood, 1705): self-Murther and self-Destruction

Epicurus' Morals. A Translation (Digby, 1712): stabbed himself mortally, self-murther, kills himself, hang'd himself

Appendix 3

Romanic and Germanic Words for *Suicide*

Catalan	suicidi	Afrikaans	Selfmoord
French	suicide	Danish	Selvmoord
Italian	suicida	Dutch	Zelfmoord
Occitan	suicidi	German	Selbstmord
Portuguese	suicidio	Icelandic	Sjalfsmord
Romanian	sinucidere	Norwegian	Selvmo
Spanish	suicidio	Swedish	Sjalvmord