

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE

ESSAYS



Book 1 • Chapter 21

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That the Profit of One Man Is the Damage of Another

DEMADES the *Athenian*, condemn'd one of his City, whose Trade it was to sell the Necessaries for Funeral Ceremonies, upon Pretence that he demanded unreasonable Profit, and that that Profit could not accrue to him, but by the Death of a great Number of People. A Judgment that appears to be ill grounded, for as much as no Profit whatever can possibly be made but at the Expence of another, and that by the same Rule he should condemn all manner of Gain of what kind soever. The Merchant only thrives, and grows rich, by the Pride, Wantonness, and Debauchery of Youth; the Husbandman by the Price and Scarcity of Grain; the Architect by the Ruine of Buildings; Lawyers, and Officers of Justice, by the Suits and Contentions of Men; nay, even the Honour and Office of Divines are deriv'd from our Death and Vices. A Physician takes no Pleasure in the Health even of his Friends, says the ancient Comical *Greek*, nor a Souldier in the Peace of his Country, and so of the rest. And, which is yet worse, let every one but dive into his own Bosome, and he will find his private Wishes spring, and his secret Hopes grow up at anothers Expence. Upon which Consideration it comes into my Head, that Nature does not in this swerve from her general Polity; for Physicians hold, that the Birth, Nourishment, and Encrease of every thing, is the Corruption and Dissolution of another.

*Nam quodcumque suis mutatum finibus exit,
Continuo hoc mors est illius, quod fuit ante.*

*For what from its own Confines charg'd doth pass,
Is straight the Death of what before it was.*