

PENGUIN CLASSICS

ÉMILE DURKHEIM

On Suicide

With an introduction by RICHARD SENNETT

DURKHEIM *On Suicide*



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ON SUICIDE

ÉMILE DURKHEIM was a pioneer of sociological method who played a leading role in the establishment of sociology as an academic discipline in France. He was born in 1858, in Lorraine, the son of a rabbi. He attended school in Épinal, then in 1879 gained admission to the prestigious École Normale Supérieure in Paris, where his fellow-students included the future socialist leader Jean Jaurès and the philosopher Henri Bergson. After graduating, he began his academic career as a teacher of philosophy, before joining the Faculty of Letters at the University of Bordeaux in 1887 to teach social science. It was here that he developed the scientific approach to the study of social phenomena that he was to formulate in his *Rules of Sociological Method* (1895) and to apply in his works on the division of labour (1893), on suicide (1897) and on religion (1912). He founded France's first journal of social science, *L'Année sociologique*, in 1898. Appointed to a post in the Sorbonne in 1902 and made professor at the university in 1906, he was recognized not only as the outstanding exponent of sociology in France, but also as a leading figure in the country's intellectual life, although his rigorous demonstration of the role played by social factors in determining the actions of individuals did not always gain easy acceptance, particularly from the Catholic Church and the political right. Devastated by the death in action of his son, André, in 1915, he died in 1917.

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Translated by ROBIN BUSS
With an Introduction by RICHARD SENNETT
and Notes by ALEXANDER RILEY

PENGUIN BOOKS

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Published by the Penguin Group
Penguin Books Ltd, 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England
Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, USA
Penguin Group (Canada), 90 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 700, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4P 2Y3
(a division of Pearson Penguin Canada Inc.)
Penguin Ireland, 25 St Stephen's Green, Dublin 2, Ireland (a division of Penguin Books Ltd)
Penguin Group (Australia), 250 Camberwell Road, Camberwell, Victoria 3124, Australia
(a division of Pearson Australia Group Pty Ltd)
Penguin Books India Pvt Ltd, 11 Community Centre, Panchsheel Park, New Delhi – 110 017, India
Penguin Group (NZ), cnr Airborne and Rosedale Roads, Albany, Auckland 1310,
New Zealand (a division of Pearson New Zealand Ltd)
Penguin Books (South Africa) (Pty) Ltd, 24 Sturdee Avenue,
Rosebank, Johannesburg 2196, South Africa

Penguin Books Ltd, Registered Offices: 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

www.penguin.com

First published in 1897
This translation first published in Penguin Classics 2006
009

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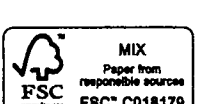
The moral right of the translator and the editors has been asserted

Set in 10.25/12.25 pt PostScript Adobe Sabon
Typeset by Rowland Phototypesetting Ltd, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk
Printed in England by Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

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ISBN-13: 978-0-140-44967-9
ISBN-10: 0-140-44967-1

www.greenpenguin.co.uk



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Chronology

1858 15 April: David Émile Durkheim born in Épinal (Lorraine) to Moïses and Melanie Durkheim. His is a conservative Jewish family that has been influential in the Jewish community there for several generations. His father is rabbi of the Vosges and Haute-Marne and the last of eight generations of rabbis in the family. The young Durkheim also plans to become a rabbi.

1870 Épinal occupied by Prussians. The legacy of the French defeat and associated anti-Semitism would play a significant part in the evolution of Durkheim's political ideas.

1874–5 Receives *baccalauréat* (secondary school diploma necessary for entry into the university system) in Letters (1874) and in Sciences (1875), then leaves for Paris and enters the *lycée* (secondary school) Louis-le-Grand to prepare for entrance examination for the prestigious École Normale Supérieure.

1879 After failure in his first two attempts in 1877 and 1878, achieves entry into the École Normale. Here he meets Jean Jaurès and Henri Bergson, who are both one year ahead of him. Partially as a result of these meetings, he loses his religious faith and renounces Judaism. Among his cohort are the philosopher Maurice Blondel, the psychologist Pierre Janet, the linguist Ferdinand Brunot and the historian Henri Berr. Durkheim would be nicknamed 'The Metaphysician' by colleagues for his avidity for philosophical debate.

1880 Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges, famed French historian (author of *The Ancient City*), becomes president of the École Normale. Durkheim would dedicate his Latin thesis to him.

1882 *Agrégation* (state teaching qualification) in philosophy. The following year, Durkheim takes his first academic post, teaching philosophy at a *lycée* in Sens.

1886 Victor Hommay, Durkheim's close friend from the École Normale, commits suicide. Durkheim's obituary for his friend is a kind of blueprint of his later account of egoistic suicide. Hommay, who had thrived at the École (calling it 'the true life, the only life that is worth the suffering one endures for it'), but later suffered from isolation, is described as separated from the 'cohesive and animated society' of the École, his life lacking 'an object transcending it'.

1885–6 Visits German universities on a year of research and meets the famed psychologist Wilhelm Wundt (1832–1920), whose practice of the 'positive science of morality' greatly influences Durkheim.

1887 Marries Louise Dreyfus (of Alsatian origin). In the words of Durkheim's nephew and one of the founders of French anthropology, Marcel Mauss, she 'kept every material care ... far from him' and thereby aided his work immensely. The couple would have two children, Marie and André.

1887 Named to University of Bordeaux as *chargé de cours* (lecturer) in 'social science and pedagogy'.

1890 Mauss joins Durkheim at Bordeaux, as a student pursuing a degree in philosophy and the protégé of his uncle. He will later work closely with his uncle on *On Suicide*, doing much of the literature review and compiling the statistical data.

1892 Durkheim presents his two doctoral theses in Paris. The first will be published the following year as his first book; the second is a Latin thesis on Montesquieu.

1893 Publication of *The Division of Labour in Society*, his doctoral dissertation, with the publishing house of Félix Alcan.

1895 Publication of *The Rules of Sociological Method* (Alcan).

1895 Title of Durkheim's course at Bordeaux changed to 'social science'.

1896 Appointed to a chair in social science, the first in France. Durkheim begins negotiations with Félix Alcan regarding a proposed review in sociology, to be titled *L'Année sociologique*.

1896 Deaths of Durkheim's father and of Durkheim's brother-in-law, Mauss's father.

1897 *Suicide* published (Alcan).

1898 First series of *L'Année sociologique* begins. Durkheim and Mauss are central figures, along with Mauss's colleague and close friend Henri Hubert. Twelve volumes of the journal would be published by 1913.

1898 January: 'J'accuse' letter of Émile Zola signals the beginning of public involvement in the Dreyfus Affair by intellectuals.

1898 February: Foundation of the League of the Rights of Man, which begins as narrowly Dreyfus-related but later branches into general liberal, republican and anti-clerical activism. Durkheim is the secretary of the Bordeaux section. In response to an anti-Semitic article about the Affair, Durkheim writes 'Individualism and the Intellectuals' for the *Revue bleue*. Here, he mounts a concerted defence of liberal individualism which he describes as 'our only possible collective end, which, far from dispersing us, is the only possible centre to rally around'.

1902 Durkheim named *chargé de cours* in Paris at the Sorbonne. He would become an extremely influential figure on the Parisian intellectual scene, both as lecturer and as administrator. His course on the history and sociology of pedagogy is a compulsory course for all students seeking to become teachers in the humanities. His arrival is celebrated by the secularist left, vigorously attacked by Catholics and conservatives.

1903 Publication of *Primitive Classification*, with Mauss as co-author, in *L'Année sociologique*.

1906 Durkheim elected to a chair in education at the Sorbonne. In 1913, the title of the chair will be changed to 'education and sociology'.

1912 Publication of *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (Alcan).

1914 On 31 July Jean Jaurès, the great French socialist leader and thinker, assassinated. The next day, order of general mobilization is given. Many members of Durkheim's *Année*

sociologique research team (including Mauss and Durkheim's son, André) eventually go to war.

1915 Durkheim publishes a number of works of propaganda to aid the French war cause (*Who Wanted War?: The Origin of the War according to Diplomatic Documents* and *'Germany Above All': German Mentality and the War* in 1915, and several contributions to *Lettres à tous les français* in 1916). Despite these efforts, he would be attacked at least twice in public as a representative of 'the German *Kriegsministerium*'.

1916 April, learns of André's death and enters period of deep depression. He writes a heart-broken obituary for his son in *L'Annuaire de l'Association des anciens élèves de l'École Normale Supérieure.*

1917 Around noon on 15 November, Durkheim dies, apparently of a heart attack. Mauss writes, 'the loss [of André], doubly felt, paternally and intellectually, was one of the causes of Durkheim's death'. A major work on morality remains unwritten, except for notes and the start of an introduction.

Introduction

Émile Durkheim taught the modern world how to think about suicide. Before him, suicide seemed a matter of purely individual despair. Durkheim saw that suicide has a social dimension. People from different religions, classes and religious backgrounds destroy themselves in different proportions. Durkheim asked why this should be. He observed that groups in which there is a good balance between individual initiative and communal solidarity have the lowest rates of suicide. That observation led him to argue that late nineteenth-century society was deeply out of balance, that it lacked a life-sustaining equilibrium between the personal and the collective.

On Suicide, published in 1897, became a classic as much for how it was written as for its argument. Even though *On Suicide* is long, it is economical, every detail contributing to the whole. This exemplary new translation by Robin Buss will particularly help readers in English to follow Durkheim, for now we have a prose text which mirrors his lucid, jargon-free French. In form, the author takes his reader on something akin to an archaeological dig, sifting through evidence from psychiatry, race, heredity, climate and geography to get at the social core buried beneath. The form reflects Durkheim's conviction that social bonds lie below the surface of people's everyday consciousness.

The word 'classic' misleads if it suggests a timeless revelation. Indeed, Durkheim differed from the two other great voices of sociology in his time, Karl Marx and Max Weber, in that he did not try to look forward into the future. Durkheim could not foresee the realm of the suicide bomber, killing himself and randomly destroying others in the name of a collective ideal.

Still, the book may help us make sense of 'aggressive suicide' by pointing to the kind of factual evidence we should seek about it.

At the time Durkheim wrote, European attitudes to suicide were shaped by three forces. The oldest was virtuous suicide, first practised by Socrates, cup of poisonous hemlock in hand, serving as his own judge for crimes he committed against the state; virtuous suicide took a later Roman form when aristocrats committed suicide rather than bring dishonour upon their houses. From its earliest days, Christianity had rejected the virtue in virtuous suicide. Christian theologians asserted that no human being had the right to dispose of life as he or she pleased – only God could decide for death. This belief was elaborated in Church law during the Renaissance, when moral horror at suicide joined prohibitions against infanticide, abortion and contraception; later, capital punishment joined the list. All came to seem the same crime, that of judging when life should end.

Closer to Durkheim's era, suicide took on a different complexion. A century before him, in the late eighteenth century, suicide seemed a thermometer of human subjectivity; the most fevered, sensitive souls appeared most likely to succumb to it. The ancient Roman's virtuous decision to destroy himself rested on family honour; Romantic suicide rested on personal feelings. Romantic suicide came to be associated particularly with artistic sensibility; this was how the late eighteenth century understood, for instance, the story of the young Thomas Chatterton (1752–70), the poet who committed suicide in his garret when his beautiful 'medieval' lyrics were discovered to be his own forgeries. Popular reports emphasized a boy dwelling in a fragile fairy-tale of his own making, rather than a crook found out.

Even more famously, Goethe's *Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774) was read by an immense public as a tale of a young man simply too sensitive to live, a tale inspiring a rash of real suicides by both young women and men. The story was loosely based on Goethe's friend Karl Wilhelm Jerusalem, in love with another man's wife, and who committed suicide in 1772, aged twenty-five. Goethe transformed Jerusalem's erotic passion into a more complicated fictional event. Morbidly introspective and

passive, Werther's artistic temperament yielded nothing concrete, his life was destroyed by *Sehnsucht*, by yearning for what could not be. In death, Werther acquired the allure of disappointed idealism.

It took Goethe's readers several generations to understand that the writer had also given his character a less appealing social dimension; Heinrich Heine, writing in 1828 in *Pariser Briefen*, observed that the greatest of young Werther's sufferings was exclusion from the aristocratic society he craved. Throughout the nineteenth century, newspapers noted the oddity of suicides among people doing well economically, or the greater proportion of widowers than widows who kill themselves – ordinary people, neither sinners nor sensitive souls.

This is where Durkheim picked up the issue in 1897. By using numbers rather than news stories he wanted to show how experiences such as migration or economic upheaval, or yet again certain kinds of institutions, could drive a person to suicide. To many of his readers Durkheim's statistics, charts and maps, his measurement of groups and indifference to individuals, indeed seemed inhumanly cold. Like Goethe's public, it has taken several generations to see him more in the round. The book does not deny feelings; rather, it announces a new understanding of human emotion which Durkheim called 'sociological'.

Émile Durkheim is not entirely absent as an individual from the story he has to tell in *On Suicide*. Born in 1858 into a Jewish family in Lorraine which had produced eight generations of rabbis, Durkheim originally planned to follow in the steps of his ancestors. His childhood, particularly his adolescence, was a time of ever-increasing anti-Semitism in France, the Jews being variously blamed for the French defeat at the hands of the Germans in 1870, the growth of urban capitalism, the diminishing hold of Catholicism on the population, and modern art – the cocktail as usual. These prejudices did not, however, drive the young Durkheim further into his own community. Thanks to his brilliance, he made his way to Paris, first to the elite secondary school Louis-le-Grand, originally a Jesuit

institution, and then to the even more elite École Normale Supérieure, which served all of France as a farm for breeding talent.

We do not quite know how life in these privileged institutions weakened his faith, but at age twenty-one Durkheim renounced Judaism. Like many Jews, however, he found that simply announcing that he had ceased to believe did not earn him acceptance and inclusion in the larger society. His uncertain identity was driven home by the anti-Semitic trauma of the Dreyfus Affair a score of years later; Durkheim now took an active role in defending Dreyfus as a good Jew as well as a good soldier. The ambiguities experienced by marginal men and women would constitute a major issue in *Suicide*, which appeared in the midst of this trauma.

A closer personal connection to suicide came through his youthful friendship with Victor Hommay, whose story somewhat resembles that of Goethe's friend Karl Jerusalem. Cyril Connolly once called schools like Eton or the École Normale 'enemies of promise', in that they provided so intense and interior a life for young people that everything later could seem stale and empty. Hommay was one of the victims of these closed communities, committing suicide a few years out of the École. He lurks in the pages of *Suicide* in two ways, as a figure for what Durkheim would call 'egoistic' suicide, and his school as an exemplum of communal bonds which smother.

When Durkheim left the École, by contrast, he opened out. He worked first as a teacher of philosophy in the French provinces, then spent a year in Germany where he came under the influence of the psychologist Wilhelm Wundt. Unusual among German social thinkers of his time, Wundt was a man of facts and things; when in doubt, he wanted more facts. Durkheim responded to Wundt's influence not by abandoning his own philosophical training, but rather by seeking to join numbers and ideas; he was thereby launched on the project of social science. He began elaborating this project when he moved to Bordeaux in 1887, as a young instructor; there he would draw around him a group of young researchers including his nephew Marcel Mauss (1872–1950), later to become an influential

anthropologist. At Bordeaux, Durkheim wrote *The Division of Labour in Society* (1893) and *The Rules of Sociological Method* (1895); and at Bordeaux he became the first professor of social science in France. These books and this post made his name among a rarefied scholarly circle; *Suicide* would shortly make his name among a larger, international public.

Durkheim became at this time an exemplary 'public intellectual'. In the late 1890s he stoutly defended Captain Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish officer in the French army falsely accused of treason; Durkheim quickly picked on the cultural equation which drove the authorities to persecute Dreyfus: this was 'Jew = Traitor'. Durkheim's writings on this cursed equation did not, however, drive him back to the religious beliefs of his forefathers; if anything, the Dreyfus Affair strengthened the sociologist in Durkheim, religious prejudice revealing to him the political uses to which faith could be put.

No other political event would rouse Durkheim in quite the same way, though he continued to contribute occasional essays to newspapers. Indeed, as his fame grew, he became ever more private, focused on his family and close acquaintances; like his wife, Durkheim was shy – a shyness sometimes mistaken by strangers for coldness. In his later years, Durkheim exemplified the bourgeois professor, secure and full of honours; he remained intellectually alive, though, because he remained intellectually restless and self-questioning. Those are the very virtues embodied in *Suicide*.

The work is divided into three long parts. The first examines all the facts of suicide which lie on the surface, that is, the facts we would first think about – individual madness, heredity, copy-cat suicides on the model of young Werther, geographical differences. The second part digs beneath, discovering three social forms of suicide: egoistical, altruistic and anomic. The final part is the deepest, relating suicide to the condition of society as a whole.

The reader may well be surprised that Durkheim treats individual psychology as part of the rubble on the surface. His aim at least is clear. He asserts that individual decisions to die are

so various that no general picture of suicide can be formed by assessing purely personal motives. Furthermore, suicide cannot be understood simply as a form of mental illness; a cancer patient who decides to end his or her life is not mentally ill. This is both a sensible and radical step, since in Durkheim's day such rational suicide fitted neither the Christian nor the Romantic mould. Still, the text seems – at least to me – not to come to grips with the sentence, 'I want to die.' We learn little from *Suicide* about the subjective pathways, the inner debates with oneself late at night, or the rational calculations made in a hospital bed, by which a human being arrives at the desire for death.

Women may be one reason there may be so little analysis of subjective life in this book. The nineteenth century feminized suicide in a very negative way: women kill themselves in operas, novels and popular newspaper accounts of the time out of feelings of guilt, following sexual transgression. I do not know if Durkheim ever read Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* or heard Wagner's *Tristan*, but their plots represent everything which seems to Durkheim wrong about understanding suicide: an assumed connection between sex and death lurking beneath the category 'woman'. Less psychology and more sociology is required to make any sense of why some groups more than others might kill themselves.

Durkheim tried to get a clearer sense of social groups in the second part of his study, which contains the heart of his argument. He is interested in facts about groups rather than about isolated individuals, but there is something more. He believes that groups have distinctive psychologies which cannot hark back to individual sentiments. Durkheim was hardly alone in drawing a line between social and personal psychologies; his contemporary Gustave le Bon argued in *La Foule* (1899) that in crowds people unbutton, willing to rampage or riot in the mass in ways they would be ashamed of as individuals. The division between the two psychologies made sense later: to Freud in his *Group Psychology*, to Elias Canetti in his *Crowds and Power* – and probably to anyone who has attended a British football match.

Of the three forms of social emotion Durkheim discusses, that which he calls 'egoistic' is the simplest. It is distress at not belonging to a group. Durkheim uses two big blocks of evidence to show how, at the extreme, egoistic distress leads to egoistic suicide. One concerns the family: he finds unmarried people more prone to suicide than married couples, and members of small families more prone than those in large families. He reasons that the denser a web of family associations, the more likely people are to be kept from egoistic despair. The data on female suicide which he uses here come from sources which were not entirely coherent; still, it seems better to him to explore solitude and family structure than to indulge in psychological rambles about why women might be more prone than men to feelings of sexual guilt.

If this seems sensible, the other block of evidence is strange. Durkheim seizes on the fact that Protestants are much more likely than Catholics or Jews to destroy themselves, and tries to fit this statistical fact into the frame of 'egoistic' despair. The solidity of the institution of the Catholic Church supposedly relieves its adherents of too much questioning about their place in the world, whereas Protestantism pushes its believers into a lonely quest for self-knowledge. While Judaism also privileges knowledge, the marginal status of Jews draws them together in solidarity, and so relieves the threat of egoistic despair.

Whatever value these generalizations have, an immense leap occurs from the data to the explanation of group psychology. We would need a great deal more knowledge about how Protestants live to understand how the group psychology is produced in practice, but the everyday anthropology of groups is missing in Durkheim's account of their psychology. The numbers establishing religious differences were correct when Durkheim wrote, and the divide remains, more than a century later; now they make for a contrast between Catholics and Protestant Pentecostals, the latter certainly a tight community. Numbers alone cannot explain why the difference existed and persists.

Durkheim faces a problem as well in the second group emotion, altruism. In general, altruism refers to self-sacrifice for the

sake of a group. The ultimate example of self-sacrifice occurs in war. Durkheim now has to confront the question of violence – suicide itself is usually a violent act. But do courageous soldiers commit suicide? Durkheim thinks this would be an abuse of this word. So he narrows down his quest to understanding which sorts of soldiers are most likely to commit suicide off the battleground in barracks, and finds that it is commissioned officers and their immediate juniors, especially in elite fighting units.

If he ducks the big issue of violence, Durkheim finds an ingenious explanation for a smaller problem. In peace-time these warriors experience a deep yearning for the intimacies of camp life, the thrill of co-operation in combat, even for the disciplinary rules which organize a soldier's every minute. When not making war, this yearning to give oneself to others is frustrated, and likely to drive dedicated professional soldiers to despair. At peace, in civilian life, their lives seem empty of meaning.

Again, there is nothing in the numbers themselves to justify this explanation, but the larger architecture of Durkheim's argument requires that he make it. He now has an example of the danger of too much solidarity, of that desire for group life which can lead a man to despair of his own life. The general theme of finding a balance between egoism and altruism thus begins to emerge in the book.

In reading Durkheim over the years, I've often wondered if this necessary step in his argument applies to other tightly knit groups – if, for instance, ex-priests and nuns suffer the pains of frustrated altruism to the same degree. I suspect that while they regret the loss of monastic life, their suicide rates are far lower than those of disengaged soldiers. If this is right, we would need to face the issue Durkheim avoids on the battlefield: is there something about group aggression which breeds a peculiar countervailing despair of oneself when disengaged? Altruistic violence is not an abstraction: not only war but assassination and suicide bombing are its lived reality.

A more intellectually adventurous possibility for Durkheim would have been to argue that the impulse to kill contains the

desire to die. This argument would have set him on a collision course with the Social Darwinists of his era, who believed that all life, in seeking to destroy other creatures, does so for the sake of self-survival – violence, as it were, without tears. Durkheim could have argued against that necessity of violence. Alternatively, he might have sought other evidence than suicide for altruistic bonds which smother people in groups. Instead, the need for symmetry in his argument pushed him into a peculiar corner.

Durkheim is on firmer general ground with his third social emotion: anomie. The term had already appeared in his writing in *The Division of Labour* (1893), and can be translated accurately if inelegantly into English as 'ruleless-ness'. In that earlier book, Durkheim treated anomie as a consequence of economic upheaval, people not knowing what rules apply across the business cycle of boom–bust–boom–bust. Now in *Suicide* he takes that confusion to a further personal extreme.

The statistics he assembles about anomic suicide are intriguing in themselves and add up logically. Durkheim's contemporaries thought that poverty bred suicide. While poverty certainly induces misery and despair, Durkheim showed that it did not induce despair pushed to the extreme of self-destruction; on the contrary, the permanently poor have lower rates of suicide than those above them. He explains this in two ways: the poor know what the economic rules are, and know the rules are stacked against them; in turn, the very clarity of their situation stiffens their will to struggle.

Durkheim found that, unsurprisingly, suicide rises among more prosperous people when the economy turns down; pushed off balance they don't know what to do. He further discovered that, surprisingly, suicide rates rise in boom times among people who are moving up. Or, rather, this statistic will surprise us only if we disconnect Durkheim's sociology from the literary culture of his time.

Stendhal's *The Red and the Black* (1830), Balzac's *Lost Illusions* (1837–43), and Flaubert's *Sentimental Education* (1869) are each a story about this kind of anomie. In each novel, as a young man rises in society, he loses his bearings. In Honoré de

Balzac's novel, the reason for confusion lies in the very nature of desire: the protagonist Lucien fantasizes endlessly about better clothes, beautiful rooms and the power over women that money brings; he wants only what he lacks. When his desires begin to be fulfilled, they turn to ashes; possession proves meaningless; he is the victim of perpetual longing, of Werther's *Sehnsucht*, set now in a materialist frame. Longing takes a more political cast in Gustave Flaubert's novel, which turns around revolutionary events in France, but the dynamic is the same: power, so ardently desired, disorients those who achieve it, they lose a compass to guide themselves. Stendhal's novel combines material and political yearning into a story of upward mobility which goes disastrously wrong.

The statistics about anomie Durkheim gathered are these stories pushed to an extreme. Durkheim himself, as we have seen, was an upwardly mobile man who cast aside a traditional religious compass; that experience may have strengthened the sociological insight he derived into anomie, which is that the sense of marginality can make itself felt within 'normal' society, not just among outcast groups. One may play by the rules yet still feel inauthentic, empty, drifting.

For Durkheim, those feelings are particularly the product of modern capitalism. The business cycle – in his time not well understood – disorients, but, in addition, capitalism makes use of impersonal and mutually indifferent relations at work which he had called in *The Division of Labour* mere 'mechanical solidarity'. Capitalism is a realm of temporary transactions rather than sustained human relations. Capitalism's rules for how to prosper tell nothing about how to connect with other human beings; the upwardly mobile individual is particularly likely to feel his or her contacts on this profitable journey to be hollow.

Durkheim's concept of anomie stands in sharp contrast to two other guiding sociological precepts of his age: Marx's understanding of alienation and Weber's idea of vocation.

'Alienation' is a term which Marx began to elaborate in his youthful manuscripts of 1844, and it remained a guiding idea in both his writings and politics: alienation implies an increasingly

bitter disengagement from the conditions of work, a disbelief in the claims of power. To Marx, alienation is not entirely a destructive experience; feeling alienated can breed thinking about what's wrong, about who is the enemy; this bitter clarification can stiffen in turn one's will to resist and revolt. By contrast, anomie, as Durkheim describes it, remains stuck in the realm of feeling; one's suffering sucks the energy out of one's understanding; knowing what's wrong does not strengthen one's will.

A 'vocation' to Max Weber is all about the will – the pursuit of a life project no matter the obstacles in one's path. Social rules and norms provide elements of the plot for a life-story; a vocation draws on the wilful assertion, 'I did this', rather than 'It happened to me.' Weber was a realist; he knew that most human beings are not in control of their own destinies. Still, he believed that most human beings need and want to transcend thinking of themselves as passive victims; in a vocation sustained throughout adulthood, the self remains constantly, purposefully, strategically engaged. The psychology of a vocation is precisely opposite that of anomie, the latter a loss of faith that social rules provide much personal orientation. Whereas the point of a vocation is to stretch life out in time, the anomic suicide aborts his or her story.

Unlike earlier writers such as Schopenhauer, Weber was convinced that an 'informed will' is stronger than a 'blind will', the more a person knows, the clearer and stronger the life project becomes. Weber was a believer in the positive social role of scientific knowledge, and indeed was a prophet of the knowledge-based society. Durkheim's reflections on Protestantism in *Suicide* led him in an opposite direction. The Protestant figures as a religious character who can be led to despair through free inquiry; scientific experiment combined with the uncertainties of capitalism seemed to Durkheim a more purely modern threat, producing those confusions which induce in turn apathy. Durkheim's response was not to look backward to a supposedly simpler age; rather, and rather amazingly, he hoped sociology would become a master discipline guiding the public.

Egoism, altruism and anomie form in sum a dangerous terrain

in which individuals can easily lose their way. Only a proper balance between individualized and collective experience can keep people from becoming fatally lost. And yet this is not quite the end of the story.

In the third and final part of his book Durkheim does two contrary things. On the one hand he returns to the surface of everyday life, making some quite practical suggestions about the decriminalization of suicide and the strengthening of those voluntary and professional groups which might combat anomie. Here is the sociologist as policy guide. On the other hand, Durkheim inflates the significance of his subject. Suicide becomes the very talisman of the 'moral affliction' of modern society. Here is the sociologist as seer.

The reader might take this moralizing in better part by understanding it as an argument Durkheim is having with himself. *Suicide* marks a transition in Durkheim's thinking. In his earlier writings he had developed the idea of a *conscience collective*, which in French means both a shared consciousness of how things are and a shared conscience, a moralizing, about how they ought to be. This duality raises its head at the end of *Suicide*. But for most of the book he works with another guiding concept, one which becomes ever more articulate in the writings which follow. This is the *représentation collective*. This concept stresses the ways people think together; it emphasizes how people represent social reality.

The big division in this book between surface and depth, between Books One and Two, is a good example of *représentation collective*. The facts about suicide about which people are immediately conscious are misleading. Beneath this layer, people feel and think in other channels: my family is small or absent [egoism]; I am not fighting beside my comrades [altruism]; my success feels empty [anomie]. I've put in brackets the tacit, unarticulated social concepts, the *représentations*, they use to peg what is wrong with themselves. These pegs could take less reflexive forms; anomie might appear as lack of interest in voting, or egoism could be expressed by shunning strangers on the street; in both cases behaviour alone would be the measure.

Very few suicides are likely to leave a note which explains, 'I

am putting a pistol to my head because of anomie.' Durkheim struggled with the basic problem of people doing things for reasons of which they are not aware – reasons formed by social institutions rather than by themselves. After *Suicide* was finished, Durkheim continued to struggle with this problem. Ultimately, in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912), he found a solution of sorts.

He concluded that the bodily gestures, visual images and words used in ritual mediate between how society works and what people understand about themselves. Society can translate its values into rituals which run the gamut from family occasions, courtesies on the street and greased wheels at work to religious prayer. A person engaged in ritual is involved in something outside him- or herself, though rituals bond people for reasons they cannot quite define; ritual is the 'elementary form' of social cohesion. Modern society is, however, in Durkheim's view, deeply suspicious of ritual; the capitalist economy in particular stresses formal, operational rules and slights the psychology of participation. *Suicide* thus seems a book which should have come after *The Elementary Forms*; the depressing consequences of egoism and anomie in particular become clearer, for in both the glue of ritual is absent.

Though Durkheim never meant to gaze into the future, he named a problem which has remained as socially determined even if its social form has changed. In the United States, for instance, the suicide rate of young people aged fifteen to twenty-four more than doubled in the last half of the twentieth century, and is now the fourth leading cause of death among ten- to fourteen-year-old children. Among American blacks, teenagers from middle-class families have become more likely to commit suicide than those living in poverty. *Suicide* asks us to focus on such matters as family size, nuclear family structure and upward mobility to explain why; it cautions us against looking for answers based on individual psychology.

About the kind of aggressive suicide embodied by suicide bombers, Durkheim is also an instructive guide, for all his own difficulties in dealing with violence in its various guises. He would, I am certain, discount discussions of Islamic ideology

as a direct cause of suicide bombing; these discussions are on the level of the *conscience collective*. He would want to dig below that surface to discover why people act for reasons about which they are not themselves aware. A more important social fact for Durkheim would be that the suicide bomber does not care whom he kills, so long as he kills someone. This indifference represents anomie in its most extreme, aggressive form. That is, if I am right, Durkheim would want to investigate not what these suicides believe but how they became mortally disconnected.

Suicide poses the same large conceptual challenge to readers today that it issued in the past. How good a guide is extreme behaviour to daily life? How much can we learn about the family or about the military from homes or barracks in which suicides occur? To Durkheim, extreme behaviour forces us to see what ordinarily we do not know about ourselves – that provocative assertion animates every page of this book.

Richard Sennett

Further Reading

Besnard, Philippe (ed.), *The Sociological Domain: The Durkheimians and the Founding of French Sociology* (London and Paris: Cambridge University Press/Éditions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1983). Provides authoritative account of Durkheim's effort to establish sociology in the French academic world.

Halbwachs, Maurice, *The Causes of Suicide* (London: Routledge, 1978). Further research on the topic by one of Durkheim's colleagues.

Lester, David (ed.), *Émile Durkheim, Le Suicide: One Hundred Years Later* (Philadelphia: Charles Press, 1994). Contemporary evaluation of the accuracy of many of the chief arguments in *Suicide*.

Lukes, Steven, *Emile Durkheim, His Life and Work: A Historical and Critical Study* (London: Allen Lane, 1973). Excellent intellectual biography.

Pickering, W. S. F. (ed.), *Émile Durkheim: Critical Assessments of Leading Sociologists*, vol. IV (London: Routledge, 2001). Fourth volume of series has large section on *Suicide*, with translations of several important recent critical articles in French.

Pickering, W. S. F. and Geoffrey Walford (eds.), *Durkheim's Suicide: A Century of Research and Debate* (London: Routledge, 2000). Useful volume of commentary from British Centre for Durkheimian Studies.

Pope, Whitney, *Durkheim's Suicide: A Classic Analyzed* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976). Clear and complete summary of the book with critical analysis.

Translator's Note

Le Suicide: étude de sociologie was published in Paris by Alcan in 1897 and has been regularly reprinted. The text used for this translation is that published by the Presses Universitaires de France in 1930, reprinted in 2002 in PUF's 'Quadrige' series. I have included Durkheim's detailed, chapter-by-chapter contents and summary of his argument (not included in the previous English translation by John A. Spaulding and George Simpson, published by Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1952); however, I have removed it from the end, where the *Table de matières* conventionally goes in French books, and followed the Anglo-Saxon convention of putting it at the beginning.

One small point: in French, as in other Latin languages, gender is a grammatical as well as a sexual matter. The form of the possessive pronoun (*son, sa, ses*), for example, varies in gender and number according to the object possessed, not the possessor; so, where in English we say 'his house', 'her house', etc., the French *sa maison* (where *sa* is feminine) could mean 'his house', 'her house' or even 'its house'. This means that it is not necessary to employ formulae such as 'his or her', or to use 'their', in order to avoid making it seem that the masculine is assumed to be the norm.

This does not apply, of course, to *il* ('he') and *elle* ('she'); and Durkheim, like other French and English writers in his day, uses the masculine form as general and the feminine one only when referring specifically to female subjects. Again, because of the grammatical nature of gender in French, this may be a less sensitive issue than in Anglo-Saxon writing: for example,

one word that Durkheim inevitably uses quite a lot in this book, *victime*, happens to be feminine regardless of whether the subject is male or female. In any case, I decided in making this translation that it would be inappropriate, as well as anachronistic and clumsy, to make it clear in every instance that Durkheim was subsuming female as well as male subjects under the pronoun 'he', when this was clear from the context.

In some cases there are inconsistencies in the figures and the tables, or between the tables and the text in the original edition of *Le Suicide*. Where there is an obvious minor error, this has been corrected, as has one footnote where the name of an author and the title of the work were misspelt. In one or two other cases anomalies have been left without comment, on the assumption that what will interest the modern reader in Durkheim's work is his method, not the detail of every statistic or percentage that he quotes.

People have often asked me, as I was making this translation, whether I found it depressing working on a book about suicide. My answer was always: 'Not at all.' In following Durkheim through his inquiry into the sociological aspects of this particular form of human behaviour, one observes an intellect engaging with the problem, devising a method for dealing with it and arguing his case, point by point, in a relentless search for the truth. Nothing could be less depressing, or more exhilarating, than this evidence of a mind at work. Far from depriving the reader of the will to live, *On Suicide* is more likely to restore one's faith in humanity. The statistics that form the raw material of Durkheim's study may now be long out of date, but as an example of sociological method and intellectual endeavour, it remains a classic.

Robin Buss

On Suicide

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INTRODUCTION

I

As the word 'suicide' is constantly being used in conversation, one might think that everybody knows its meaning and that it is unnecessary to define it. In reality, however, the terms of everyday language, like the concepts that they express, are always ambiguous and the scientist who employed them in the ordinary way without further explanation would lay himself open to the most serious confusion. Not only is the understanding of the word so vaguely defined that it varies from one instance to another according to the demands of the conversation, but it also results in categories of quite different things being brought vaguely together under the same heading or else realities of the same kind being called by different names, since the classification which produces them does not derive from any methodical analysis, but merely expresses the confused impressions of ordinary people. So, if one allows oneself to be guided by the received meaning, one is liable to distinguish things that should be confused and to confuse those that should be distinguished, thus misunderstanding the true relations between things and eventually being mistaken as to their nature. Only by comparing does one explain. Thus, a scientific investigation cannot achieve its ends unless it is concerned with facts that can be compared, and the more it is assured of having collected all those facts that can usefully be compared, the more likely it is to succeed. But these natural affinities of things cannot be attained with any certainty by means of a superficial examination, such as that from which vulgar terminology

derives; consequently, the scientist cannot take as the objects of his research groups of already constituted facts that correspond to the words of everyday speech. He is obliged himself to construct the groups that he wishes to study, in order to give them the homogeneity and specificity which are necessary for them to be treated scientifically. So it is that a botanist speaking of 'flowers' and 'fruit', and the zoologist speaking of 'fish' or 'insects', give meanings to these different terms that they have previously determined.

Thus our first task must be to decide the order of things that we propose to study under the heading of 'suicide'. To do so, we shall consider whether, among different kinds of death, there are some which have in common characteristics that are objective enough to be recognized by any observer of good faith and particular enough not to be met with elsewhere, but at the same time close enough to those that are commonly understood by the term of 'suicides' for us to be able to employ this same term without violence to everyday usage. If we come across them, we shall assemble under this denomination all the facts, without exception, that present these distinct characteristics, not concerning ourselves with whether the class so formed does or does not include all the instances that are ordinarily so termed or whether, on the contrary, it includes some that are usually described by some other word. What matters is not to express with some degree of precision the idea that the average mind has of 'suicide', but to constitute a category of objects that can be described under this heading without difficulty while at the same time being objectively based, that is to say corresponding to a definite state of things.

Among the various kinds of death, there are some that have the peculiar feature of being the responsibility of the victim: the result of an act of which the sufferer is the author; and, in addition to that, it is certain that this same feature is at the basis of the generally held notion of what constitutes 'suicide'. Moreover, the intrinsic nature of the acts that produce this outcome matters very little. Although, in general, suicide is seen as a positive and violent act implying a certain deployment of

muscular force, it may happen that a purely negative attitude or simple abstention achieves the same result. One can kill onself as much by refusing to eat as by destroying oneself with fire or steel. It is not even necessary for the act undertaken by the victim to have been the immediate antecedent of death for this to be regarded as its effect; the causal relationship may be indirect without the phenomenon changing in nature because of that. The iconoclast who commits a treasonable act in order to acquire a martyr's crown, knowing the act to be a capital offence, and who dies at the hands of an executioner, is none the less as much the author of his own end as if he had struck the mortal blow himself; at least, there is no reason to classify these two kinds of voluntary death under different headings, since the only difference between them is in the material details of execution. So we arrive at this first formula: 'Suicide' is the name given to any death that results indirectly or directly from a positive or negative act by the victim him or herself.

But this definition is incomplete. It does not distinguish between two very different kinds of death. We cannot classify under the same head or consider in the same manner the death of a man suffering from hallucinations who jumps from a high window because he thinks it to be level with the ground, and that of a man who, sound in mind, strikes a mortal blow against himself while knowing full well what he is doing. Indeed, in one sense, there are few fatalities that are not either the immediate or remote result of some activity on the part of the subject. The causes of death are far more often situated outside us than within us and only affect us if we venture within their sphere of activity.

Shall we say that 'suicide' is the case only if the act from which the death results was carried out by the victim in order to achieve this end? That only the person who wants to kill himself truly does so, and that 'suicide' is an intentional murder of oneself? First of all, though, this would mean defining suicide by a characteristic that, however interesting and important it may be, has at the very least the drawback of being difficult to recognize since it is not easy to observe. How can one know

what motive impelled the agent and whether, once he was resolved, it was death itself that he desired or some other outcome? Intention is too intimate a matter for it to be accessible from outside except by means of vague approximations. It even escapes internal observation. How often do we not ourselves mistake the true motives for our own acts! We continually explain what we do in terms of generous feelings or elevated intentions when they have in fact been motivated by petty impulses or blind habit.

In any case, an act cannot in general be defined by the end desired by the agent, since a single system of movements may, without changing in kind, be adapted to too many different ends. Indeed, if suicide only existed where there was an intention of killing oneself, the term would have to be denied to circumstances which, despite apparent dissimilarities, are fundamentally identical to those to which everyone applies the term and which cannot be named differently if one is not to deprive the word of its use. The soldier who advances to certain death in order to save his regiment does not wish to die; yet is he not the author of his own death as much as the industrialist or the tradesman who kills himself in order to escape the shame of bankruptcy? One might say the same of the martyr who dies for his faith, of the mother who sacrifices herself for her child, and so on. Whether death is simply accepted as a regrettable but inevitable condition of the goal which one seeks, or whether it is expressly desired and sought for its own sake, the subject in either event renounces life, and the various manners in which it is renounced can only be varieties of a single class. There are too many fundamental similarities between them for us not to subsume them under one generic heading, while afterwards distinguishing different species in the genus thus constituted. Of course, in common parlance, suicide is chiefly the despairing act of a man who no longer wishes to live. But in reality, because one is still attached to life at the moment when one leaves it, it is not any less abandoned for all that. There are common characteristics which are clearly essential among all the acts by which a living being thus gives up that of his possessions which is usually held to be most precious. On the contrary, the diver-

sity of motives which may have produced these resolves can only give rise to secondary differences. So when devotion is taken to the point of certain sacrifice of life, this is scientifically suicide; and we shall see later what kind of suicide it is.

What is common to all possible forms of this supreme sacrifice is that the act that accomplishes it is knowingly carried out: that the victim at the moment when he acts knows what will result from his act, regardless of the reason that may have driven him to act in this way. All death events that have this characteristic feature are clearly distinct from all others in which the sufferer is either not the agent of his own demise or else is only unknowingly the agent of it. They are distinguished from those by a characteristic that is easily recognized, since it is not an insoluble problem to know whether the individual did or did not know in advance the natural outcome of his act. Thus they form a distinct, homogeneous group, capable of being distinguished from all others and which, consequently, should be designated by a particular word. That of 'suicide' is appropriate to this group and there is no need for us to create another, because the vast majority of events that are so designated in everyday parlance belong to it. We shall therefore definitely state that: *'Suicide' is the term applied to any case of death resulting directly or indirectly from a positive or negative act, carried out by the victim himself, which he was aware would produce this result.* An attempted suicide is the act so defined, halted before death has occurred.

This definition is sufficient to exclude from our investigations whatever concerns suicides by animals. Indeed, what we know of animal intelligence does not permit us to attribute to such creatures any anticipatory notion of their own death and even less of the means capable of achieving it. It is true that some animals are seen to refuse to enter a place where others have been killed, as though they had a premonition of their fate; but in reality the smell of blood is enough to explain this instinctive recoil. All cases which have any credibility where suicide properly so called has been alleged can be explained in quite different ways. If the scorpion is really driven to pierce itself with its own sting (something that is, in any case, not certain), this is

probably because of an automatic and unconsidered reaction. The motive energy induced by the creature's state of irritation is discharged at random, at whatever it can; the animal itself happens to be the victim, without making it possible to state that it realized in advance the consequence of its action. Conversely, if there are dogs which refuse to eat when they have lost their masters, this is because the sadness which has overcome them mechanically suppresses their appetite: death results, without being predicted. Neither fasting, in the latter case, nor wounding in the former were used as means with a known effect, so the distinctive characteristics of suicide as we have defined it are absent. This is why in what follows we shall only have to consider human suicides.*

However, this definition does not only have the advantage of avoiding false comparisons and arbitrary exclusions; it also gives us at once a concept of the place occupied by suicides in moral life. It shows us, in fact, that these do not, as one might believe, constitute an entirely separate group, an isolated class of monstrous phenomena having no relation to other methods of conduct, but on the contrary that they are linked to these by a continuous series of intermediaries. Suicides are merely an exaggerated form of ordinary practices. Indeed, we state that suicide takes place when the victim, at the moment of committing the act of taking his own life, knows quite surely what should normally result from this. However, this certainty can be more or less strong. Introduce a few doubts and you have something new which is not suicide, but closely related to it, since there is only a difference of degree between them. A man who knowingly takes risks on behalf of others, without a fatal outcome being assured, is certainly not a suicide, even if he does die, any more than the careless man who gambles with

* There remains a very small number of cases which cannot be explained in this way, but which are highly suspect. Among them is the observation, reported by Aristotle, of a horse which, discovering that he had been made to mount his own mother without realizing it and after several times refusing, intentionally threw himself off a cliff (*Natural History*, IX, 47). Breeders assure us that horses are not at all averse to committing incest. On this matter, see Westcott, *Suicide*, pp. 174–79.

death while seeking to avoid it, or the apathetic man who is strongly attached to nothing at all and does not bother to take care of his health, so damaging it by negligence. Yet these different types of behaviour are not radically different from what we can properly call suicide. They arise from comparable states of mind, since they also carry mortal risks known to the person involved, who is not deterred by the prospect of these risks. The whole difference lies in the fact that there is less chance of death. So there is some truth in the everyday remark that a scholar who has exhausted himself in long nights of study, killed himself. All these circumstances constitute as it were embryonic suicides; and, while it would be methodologically incorrect to confuse them with complete, fully realized suicide, one should also not lose sight of their relationship with it, because suicide itself appears in a quite different light when one recognizes that it is linked, with no lapse in continuity, to acts of courage and devotion, on the one hand, and to acts of imprudence and mere negligence on the other. The instructive nature of these links will become clear in what follows.

II

But is the phenomenon that we have defined in this way of interest to the sociologist? Since suicide is the act of an individual that concerns only that individual, it appears that it should depend entirely on individual factors and consequently pertain solely to psychology. In short, is not the suicide's resolve normally explained by his temperament, his character, his antecedents and the events of his private history?

For the time being, it is not for us to consider to what extent and in what circumstances it is legitimate to study suicides in this way; what is certain, however, is that they can be viewed in an entirely different light. If instead of seeing here only particular events, isolated one from another, each of which ought to be considered separately, we consider all the suicides committed in a given society over a given period of time, we shall observe that the total we obtain is not a simple sum of

independent units, a collective whole, but that it consitutes a new fact, in itself and *sui generis*,[1] which has its own unity and individuality, and so its own nature; and that, moreover, this nature is eminently social. Indeed, for a given society, provided the period concerned is not too extensive, the figure is more or less invariable, as shown in Table 1. This means that from one year to the next, the circumstances in which the life of a people unfolds remain substantially the same. Certainly, there are sometimes larger variations, but they are quite exceptional; and one can see, moreover, that they always coincide with some crisis which temporarily affects the the state of society.* So it was that, in 1848, a sudden fall occurred in all European states.

If one observes over a longer period of time, one witnesses more serious changes. These now become chronic: they show simply that the constitutional characteristics of the society have, at the same time, undergone profound changes. It is interesting to note that these do not occur with the extreme slowness attributed to them by many observers; they are both sudden and progressive. All at once, after a series of years in which the figures have oscillated within quite narrow limits, a rise occurs and, after some tentative backsliding, is confirmed, accentuated and finally fixed. The reason for this is that any disruption of the social balance, if it occurs suddenly, always takes time to produce all its consequences. So the course of suicide is made up of distinct, successive waves which occur in bursts, develop for a while, then stop before resuming again. In Table 1 one can see that one of these waves formed almost throughout Europe following the events of 1848, that is to say around 1850–53, according to country. Another started in Germany after the war of 1866; in France a little earlier, around 1860, at a time which marks the apogee of the imperial government; and in England around 1868, that is to say after the trade revolution which had been determined by the trade treaties. Perhaps the new increase that is observed in our country around 1865 is owing to the same cause. Finally, after the war of 1870,

* We have put the figures relating to these exceptional years in parentheses.

TABLE I

Constancy of suicide rates in the main European countries, in absolute figures

Years	France	Prussia	England	Saxony	Bavaria	Denmark
1841	2,814	1,630		290		337
1842	2,866	1,598		318		317
1843	3,020	1,720		420		301
1844	2,973	1,575		335	244	285
1845	3,082	1,700		338	250	290
1846	3,102	1,707		373	220	376
1847	(3,647)	(1,852)		377	217	345
1848	(3,301)	(1,649)		398	215	(305)
1849	3,583	(1,527)		(328)	(189)	337
1850	3,596	1,736		390	250	340
1851	3,598	1,809		402	260	401
1852	3,676	2,073		530	226	426
1853	3,415	1,942		431	263	419
1854	3,700	2,198		547	318	363
1855	3,810	2,351		568	307	399
1856	4,189	2,377		550	318	426
1857	3,967	2,038	1,349	485	286	427
1858	3,903	2,126	1,275	491	329	457
1859	3,899	2,146	1,248	507	387	451
1860	4,050	2,105	1,365	548	339	468
1861	4,454	2,185	1,347	(643)		
1862	4,770	2,112	1,317	557		
1863	4,613	2,374	1,315	643		
1864	4,521	2,203	1,340	(545)		411
1865	4,946	2,361	1,392	619		451
1866	5,119	2,485	1,329	704	410	443
1867	5,011	3,625	1,316	752	471	469
1868	(5,547)	3,658	1,508	800	453	498
1869	5,114	3,544	1,588	710	425	462
1870		3,270	1,554			486
1871		3,135	1,495			
1872		3,467	1,514			

an upward surge began which is still lasting and is more or less general throughout Europe.*[2]

Consequently, each society has a particular disposition towards suicide at any moment in its history. The relative intensity of this disposition is measured by taking the relationship between the total number of voluntary deaths and the population of every age and both sexes. We call this numerical figure the *rate of suicide-mortality peculiar to the society in question.* It is generally calculated in terms of a million or a hundred thousand inhabitants.

Not only is this rate constant for long periods of time, but its invariability is even greater than that of the main demographic phenomena. General mortality, in particular, varies much more often from one year to the next and these variations are much larger. To confirm this, one only has to compare the way in which the two change over several periods of time. This is what we have done in Table 2. To make comparison easier, both for deaths in general and for suicides, we have expressed the rate of each year in relation to the mean rate for the period, expressed as 100. The deviations from the mean from one year to the next can thus be compared in the two columns. The result of these comparisons is to show that in any given period the extent of variation is much greater in the case of general mortality than in that of suicide; on average, it is twice as high. Only the *minimum* deviation between two consecutive years is appreciably of the same size in both cases during the last two periods. However, in the column of deaths this *minimum* is the exception, while on the contrary, the annual variation in the number of suicides only exceptionally deviates from it. This can be seen by comparing the mean deviations.†

It is true that if one compares, not the successive years of a given period, but the averages of different periods, the variations observed in the rate of mortality become almost insig-

* In the table, we have shown alternatively in normal and in italic type the figures that represent these different surges, so as to make visible the individual character of each of them.

† Wagner has already compared mortality and marriage in this way (see *Die Gesetzmässigkeit*, p. 87).

nificant. The changes in one direction or another that take place from one year to the next, due to the effect of temporary and accidental causes, are mutually cancelled out when one takes a more extended unit of time as the basis of the calculation, so they vanish from the mean figure which, because this effect has been removed, exhibits a fairly high degree of invariability. Thus in France from 1841 to 1870, it was for each period of ten

TABLE 2

Comparative variations of the rate of suicide-mortality and the rate of general mortality

Period 1841–46	Suicides per 100,000 inhabitants	Deaths per 1,000 inhabitants	Period 1849–55	Suicides per 100,000 inhabitants	Deaths per 1,000 inhabitants	Period 1856–60	Suicides per 100,000 inhabitants	Deaths per 1,000 inhabitants
			A. Absolute figures					
1841	8.2	23.2	1849	10.0	27.3	1856	11.6	23.1
1842	8.3	24.0	1850	10.1	21.4	1857	10.9	23.7
1843	8.7	23.1	1851	10.0	22.3	1858	10.7	24.1
1844	8.5	22.1	1852	10.5	22.5	1859	11.1	26.8
1845	8.8	21.2	1853	9.4	22.0	1860	11.9	21.4
1846	8.7	23.2	1854	10.2	27.4			
			1855	10.5	25.9			
Average:	8.5	22.8	Average	10.1	24.1	Average	11.2	23.8
			B. Rate for each year expressed in relation to the average as a percentage					
1841	96	101.7	1849	98.9	113.2	1856	103.5	97
1842	97	105.2	1850	100	88.7	1857	97.3	99.3
1843	102	101.3	1851	98.9	92.5	1858	95.5	101.2
1844	100	96.9	1852	103.8	93.3	1859	99.1	112.6
1845	103.5	92.9	1853	93	91.2	1860	106.0	89.9
1846	102.3	101.7	1854	100.9	113.6			
			1855	103	107.4			
Average	100	100	Average	100	100	Average	100	100

TABLE 2 *(cont.)*

C. Amount of difference

	Between two successive years			Above and below the average	
	Maximum difference	Minimum difference	Average difference	Maximum above	Maximum below
Period 1841–46:					
General mortality	8.8	2.5	4.9	7.1	4.0
Suicide rate	5.0	1	2.5	4	2.8
Period 1849–55:					
General mortality	24.5	0.8	10.6	13.6	11.3
Suicide rate	10.8	1.1	4.48	3.8	7.0
Period 1856–60:					
General mortality	22.7	1.9	9.57	12.6	10.1
Suicide rate	6.9	1.8	4.82	6.0	4.5

years, 23.18, 23.72 and 22.87. First of all, however, it is already remarkable that suicide from one year to the next should have a degree of consistency at least equal, if not superior, to that which general mortality only exhibits from one period to another. Moreover, the mean rate of mortality only achieves this regularity by becoming something general and impersonal which can only very imperfectly serve to characterize a given society. Indeed, it is substantially the same for all people who have reached more or less the same level of civilization; in any case, the differences are very slight. So, in France, as we have just seen, in the years 1841 to 1870 it hovers at around 23 deaths per 1,000 inhabitants. In Belgium over the same period it was successively 23.93, 22.5 and 24.04. In England, it was 22.32, 22.21 and 22.68; in Denmark, 22.65 (1845–49), 20.44 (1855–59) and 20.4 (1861–68). If one excepts Russia, which is still only geographically part of Europe, the only major countries in Europe where the death rate deviates at all significantly from the figures quoted are Italy, where it still stood at 30.6 between 1861 and 1867, and Austria where it was higher still (32.52).* By con-

* According to Bertillon, in his article *Mortalité* in the *Dictionnaire Encyclopédique des sciences médicales*, vol. LXI, p. 738.

TABLE 3
Suicide rate per million inhabitants in the different European countries

	Period			In number order		
	1866–70	1871–75	1874–78	1st period	2nd period	3rd period
Italy	30	35	38	1	1	1
Belgium	66	69	78	2	3	4
Britain	67	66	69	3	2	2
Norway	76	73	71	4	4	3
Austria	78	94	130	5	7	7
Sweden	85	81	91	6	5	5
Bavaria	90	91	100	7	6	6
France	135	150	160	8	9	9
Prussia	142	134	152	9	8	8
Denmark	277	258	255	10	10	10
Saxony	293	267	334	11	11	11

trast, the rate of suicide, while only showing slight annual variations, varies from society to society, being in some two, three, four or even more times what it is in others (see Table 3). It is thus, far more than mortality, specific to every social group and can be considered as a characteristic index for that society. It is even so closely linked to something fundamental in the constitution of each national temperament, that the order in which the different societies stand in this respect stays almost precisely the same at very different moments in time. This is proved by a study of the same table. During the three periods compared in the table, suicide has in some cases increased, but in the course of this rise, the various nations have retained their respective distances from one another. Each has a coefficient of acceleration proper to itself.

Hence the rate of suicide constitutes a unified, set order of things, as is shown both by its permanence and its variability. This permanence would be inexplicable if it were not dependent on a set of distinct, interdependent characteristics, which assert themselves simultaneously regardless of differences in the

circumstances around them. And this variability is evidence of the individual and concrete nature of these same characteristics, since they vary as the individuality of a society varies. In short, what is expressed by these statistical data is the tendency to suicide afflicting any given society. This is not the place to state what this tendency consists in, whether it is a state of the collective soul *sui generis*,* with its own reality, or if it represents only a sum of individual states. Although the preceding remarks would be hard to reconcile with the latter hypothesis, we shall set aside the matter for consideration later.† Whatever one may think about the subject, it is a fact that the tendency exists in one form or the other: every society is predisposed to supply a given number of voluntary deaths. This predisposition may consequently be the subject of a special study that comes within the orbit of sociology. This is the investigation that we are about to undertake.

Our intention is not therefore to draw up as complete a list as possible of all the conditions that may give rise to particular suicides, but simply to investigate those behind the discrete entity that we have called the social rate of suicide. It is clear that the two questions are quite distinct, whatever relationship may otherwise exist between them. Among individual conditions, there are surely many that are not general enough to affect the ratio of the total number of voluntary deaths to the population. These may perhaps lead this or that isolated individual to kill himself regardless of whether the society as a whole has a stronger or weaker tendency to suicide. Just as these do not relate to a particular state of social organization, so they do not have any social repercussions. As a result, they concern the psychologist, not the sociologist. What the latter investigates are causes through which one may act not on individuals in isolation, but on the group. Consequently, among the factors of suicide, the only ones that concern us are those which have an effect on the

* Of course, in using the phrase 'collective soul', we do not at all intend to imply the existence of a collective consciousness: we do not accept the existence of an actual soul in society any more than in the individual. We shall return to this subject.

† See Book Three, Chap. 1.

whole of society. The suicide rate is the product of these factors, which is why we must concern ourselves with them.

That is the aim of the present work, which will consist of three parts.

The phenomenon that we have to explain can only be due to very general extra-social causes, or to social ones, properly so-called. We shall ask first of all what is the influence of the first of these, and see that it is nil or very restricted.

After that, we shall determine the nature of the social causes, the way in which they produce their effects and their relationship with the individual states that accompany different kinds of suicide.

Having done that, we shall be better placed to define what constitutes the social element in suicide, that is to say, the collective tendency about which we have just spoken, how it is connected to the other social facts and the means by which it is possible to act upon it.*

* Where appropriate, a special bibliography will be found at the head of each chapter relating to the particular questions dealt with in it. Below are the references for the general bibliography of suicide.

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BOOK ONE

EXTRA-SOCIAL FACTORS

CHAPTER 1
SUICIDE AND PSYCHOPATHIC STATES*

There are two sorts of extra-social causes to which may be attributed, *a priori*, an effect on the suicide rate: these are organic-psychic tendencies and the nature of the physical environment. It may be the fact that there exists an inclination in the make-up of an individual, or at the very least of a significant class of individuals, which varies in intensity from one country to another and impels men directly to suicide; and, in the second case, climate, temperature, etc., might have indirectly the same effect by the way in which they act upon the organism. In any event, the hypothesis cannot be ruled out without being discussed, so we shall successively examine these two kinds of factor and seek to discover whether they do indeed have a role in the phenomenon which is the object of our inquiry and, if so, what it is.

* Bibliography: Falret, *De l'hypocondrie et du suicide*, Paris, 1822; Esquirol, *Des maladies mentales*, Paris, 1838 (vol. I, pp. 526–676) and his article Suicide, in *Dictionnaire de médecine*; Cazauvieilh, *Du suicide et de l'aliénation mentale*, Paris, 1840; Etoc-Demazy, De la folie dans la production du suicide, in *Annales médico-psych.*, 1844; Bourdin, *Du suicide considéré comme maladie*, Paris, 1845; Dechambre, De la monomanie homicide-suicide, in *Gazette médic.*, 1852; Jousset, *Du suicide et de la monomanie suicide*, 1858; Brierre de Boismont, op. cit.; Leroy, op. cit.; Art. 'Suicide', in *Dictionnaire de médecine et de chirurgie pratique*, vol. XXXIV, p. 117; Strahan, *Suicide and Insanity*, London, 1894.

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I

There are some illnesses for which the annual rate is relatively constant in a given society while, at the same time, varying from one nation to another. One of these is madness. So if there was some justification for seeing voluntary death as a manifestation of insanity, the problem that we have raised would be solved: suicide would be merely an individual disorder.*

This is the point of view adopted by quite a large number of psychiatrists. According to Esquirol:[1] 'Suicide presents all the characteristics of mental alienation.'† And: 'Man only takes his own life when in a state of delirium; suicides are mad.'‡ On this basis, he argues that suicide, being involuntary, should not be punished by law. Falret§[2] and Moreau de Tours state almost exactly the same, though it is true that the latter, in the very passage in which he sets out his views on this subject, makes one remark that undermines it, asking whether: 'Suicide should in every case be regarded as the result of mental alienation? Without wishing to give a definitive answer to this difficult question, let us say as a general rule that the more one has studied madness, the more experience one has and the more mentally ill people one has seen, the more one is instinctively inclined to answer in the affirmative.'¶ In 1845, Doctor Bourdin argued the same, but with still less moderation, in a monograph that caused something of a stir in the medical world when it appeared.

This theory can and has been defended in two different ways. Either one states that suicide, in itself, constitutes a morbid condition *sui generis*, a special kind of madness; or else, not making it a distinct type of madness, one may see it simply as an episode in one or several kinds of madness, but something not encountered in subjects who are in their right mind. The

* To the same extent as madness itself is purely individual; in reality, at least in part, it is a social phenomenon. This is something we shall discuss further.

† *Maladies mentales*, vol. I, p. 639.

‡ Ibid., vol. I, p. 665.

§ *Du suicide*, etc., p. 137.

¶ In *Annales médico-psych.*, vol. VII, p. 287.

first thesis is Bourdin's, while Esquirol is the most authoritative exponent of the other notion: 'From what precedes,' he tells us, 'one may already see that suicide is in our view only a phenomenon resulting from a great number of different causes and displaying very different characteristics; and that this phenomenon cannot constitute an illness. It is because suicide has been termed an illness *sui generis* that general propositions have been advanced about it that are contradicted by experience.'*

Of these two ways of showing that suicide is a form of madness, the second is the least rigorous and least convincing, given the principle that there can be no negative results. In fact, it is impossible to draw up a complete inventory of all the cases of suicide and to analyse the influence of mental alienation in each one of them. The best one can do is to quote particular examples and these, however many of them there may be, cannot provide the basis for a scientific generalization: even if no contrary examples are produced, it will always be possible that they might occur. But the other argument, if it could be proved, would be conclusive. If one were to establish that suicide is a kind of madness with its own characteristics and distinct development, the question has been settled: every suicide is mad.

But is there such a thing as suicidal insanity?

II

As the tendency to suicide is by its nature special and definite, if it does constitute a form of insanity, it can only be a partial insanity and one limited to a single act. For it to be able to be characterized as delirium, it must apply solely to this single object, because if there were many objects, then there would be no reason to define it by one rather than by any of the others. In the traditional terminology of mental illness, these restricted forms of delirium are called monomanias.[3] The monomaniac is a patient whose consciousness is perfectly healthy except on

* *Maladies mentales*, vol. I, p. 528.

one point: he exhibits only one flaw and this a sharply localized one. For example, he may at times have an irrational, absurd desire to drink or to steal or to insult, but all his other acts, like all his other thoughts, are rigorously orthodox. So, if there is a suicidal insanity, it can only be a form of monomania, and this is how it has most often been described.*

Conversely, one may understand why, if one accepts the existence of this particular type of illness called monomania, people have easily been led to include suicide under this head. Indeed, according to the very definition that we have just given, the characteristic of this sort of illness is that it does not involve any basic disturbance in intellectual function. In essence, the mental life of the monomaniac is the same as that of a healthy man, except that in the former case one psychic state stands out with particular sharpness against this shared background. In terms of tendency, monomania is in fact simply an exaggerated passion; and in terms of representation, an idea that is false, but so intense that the mind is obsessed by it and deprived of its freedom as a result. For example, ambition ceases to be normal and becomes pathological, turning into a *folie des grandeurs*[4] when it grows to such proportions that all other cerebral functions are, as it were, paralysed by it. A slight disturbance of the sensibility is enough to upset the balance of the mind and for monomania to occur. Now, it does appear that suicides are generally under the influence of some abnormal emotion and that this either exhausts its energy in a single event or only develops it over the long term; and one might even find some semblance of justification for believing that a force of this kind is always necessary to overcome the instinct of self-preservation, which is so fundamental. Moreover, many suicides, apart from the specific act by which they end their days, are not otherwise distinguished from other men, so there is consequently no reason to ascribe any general insanity to them. This is how, under the heading of monomania, suicide has been classed as a form of insanity.

But is there such a thing as monomania? For a long time the

* See Brierre de Boismont, p. 140.

existence of this was not questioned and alienists accepted without debate the theory of partial delirium. Not only did they think that this was demonstrated by clinical observation, but they gave it as a corollary to theories of psychology. At that time, we were taught that the human mind is formed of distinct faculties and separate forces which usually cooperate, but are capable of acting separately; so it was natural to believe that they might be individually affected by disease. Since mankind can exhibit intelligence without will and sensibility without intelligence, why should there not be diseases of the intelligence and the will, without any disturbance to the sensibility, and vice versa? Adopting the same principle with respect to the more special forms of these faculties, one was led to accept that a lesion might exclusively affect one tendency, one action or one single idea.

Today, however, this view has been entirely abandoned. It is true that one cannot directly prove by observation that monomania does not exist; what has been established is that it has not been possible to quote a single uncontested example. No pathological tendency of the mind has ever been found by clinical experiment in a state of genuine isolation: whenever one faculty is affected, so at the same time are the others, and if supporters of the theory of monomania did not observe these parallel lesions, then it is because their observations were improperly carried out. 'As an example,' Falret says, 'let us take a madman who is preoccupied with religious ideas and who would be classed as a religious monomaniac. He claims to be inspired by God. He is entrusted with a divine mission and is bringing a new religion into the world . . . You may say that this idea is pure madness, but that apart from this series of religious ideas, he reasons as other men do. Well, if you were to question him more closely, you would shortly discover that he had other pathological notions: parallel to his religious ideas, for example, you would discover a tendency to pride. He will not only believe that he has been called upon to reform religion, but to reform society. He might also believe that he is intended for the highest destiny . . . And even if, after looking for tendencies towards self-aggrandizement in this patient, you fail to find

any, then you will find notions of humility or timorousness. Obsessed with his religious ideas, the patient will consider himself lost, fated to perish, and so on.'* Of course, all these forms of delirium are not usually found together in a single subject, but these are the ones that are most often associated; or else, if they do not coexist at the same moment in the illness, they will be seen to follow in phases that are more or less closely adjacent to one another.

Finally, independent of these particular manifestations, there is always in presumed monomaniacs a general mental state which forms the background to the whole illness, and of which the pathological ideas are merely a superficial and temporary expression. This general state is composed of excessive excitement or extreme depression or some general perversion. Above all, there is a lack of balance and coordination in thought as in action. The sick person reasons, but his ideas are not consistently connected. He may not behave in an absurd fashion, but his behaviour is inconsequential. So it is not true to say that madness can affect a portion and a limited one: as soon as it takes hold of the understanding, it invades it entirely.

In any case, the scientific evidence contradicts the principle on which the hypothesis of the existence of monomania rests. No one any longer supports the old theory of faculties. The different modes of conscious activity are no longer seen as separate forces that only come together and achieve unity in the context of some metaphysical substance, but as functions that are interdependent, making it impossible for one of them to be damaged without the damage affecting the others. The interdependency is even more intimate in the life of the mind than in the rest of the organism, because psychological functions do not have organs so distinct from one another, making it possible for one to be damaged without the others also suffering. There is nothing clearly defined about their distribution among the different regions of the encephalon, as is proved by the ease with which the various parts of the brain replace one another if any of them should find itself unable to fulfil its task.

* *Maladies mentales*, p. 437.

They are consequently too closely meshed for it to be possible that madness can affect some while leaving the rest intact; and for that reason it is all the more impossible that it can impair a particular idea or feeling without impairing the mind at its root, because representations and tendencies do not have any existence of their own; they are not a collection of small substances or spiritual atoms that cluster together to form the mind. They merely provide an external manifestation of the general state of the conscious centres: they derive from these and express them. Consequently, they cannot have any morbid character without this state itself being impaired.

So, as long as it is impossible to localize mental disturbances, there is not and cannot be any such thing as monomania properly so called. The apparently local disturbances that have been given this name always result from a more extensive problem: they are not illnesses in themselves, but specific, secondary accidents resulting from more generalized states. So, if there is no such thing as monomania, there cannot be a suicidal monomania and, consequently, suicide is not a distinct form of mental illness.

III

However, it remains possible that it only takes place in a state of insanity. If it does not, in itself, constitute a special form of madness, there is no form of madness in which it may not appear. It is only an episodic syndrome, but a frequent one. May one conclude from this frequency that it never occurs in a state of mental health and that it is a definite indicator of mental illness?

This conclusion would be premature. For, while there are some actions of the insane that are peculiar to them and can serve to characterize madness, there are others which, on the contrary, they have in common with sane people, even though they appear under a particular guise in the mad. There is no reason, *a priori*, to put suicide into the first of these two categories. Of course, alienists proclaim that most suicides that they have known present all the signs of mental illness, but this

evidence is not sufficient to resolve the matter. Such records are far too brief. In any case, one cannot derive a general law from such narrowly specialized evidence. From those suicides that they have known – who were, naturally, mentally ill – one cannot conclude anything about those they have not observed – who are, moreover, far more numerous.

The only way to proceed methodically is to classify suicides committed by the insane according to their essential features, to set out in this way the main types of suicide among the mad and to discover whether all cases of voluntary death can be classed under these systematic heads. In other words, to find out if suicide is an act peculiar to the insane, one must first determine the forms that it takes in cases of mental illness and then see if these are the only forms that it adopts.

Specialists have on the whole not troubled very much to classify suicide by the insane. However, one may judge that the following four types include the most important varieties. The broad outlines of this classification have been borrowed from Jousset and Moreau de Tours:*

1. *Maniacal suicide.* This is due either to hallucinations or to delirious notions. The patient kills himself to escape from an imagined danger or shame, or in obedience to some mysterious order that he has received from above, etc.† But the motives for this suicide and its course of development reflect the general characteristics of the illness from which it derives, namely mania. The distinguishing character of this sickness is instability. The most varied and even contradictory ideas and feelings follow one another in extraordinarily quick succession in the patient's mind, which exists in a constant whirlwind. No sooner has one state of consciousness arisen than it is replaced by another. The same is true of the motives that caused maniacal suicide: they occur, vanish or are transformed with astonishing rapidity. Suddenly, the hallucination or delirium that makes

* See the article 'Suicide' in the *Dictionnaire de médecine et de chirurgie pratique.*

† These hallucinations must not be confused with those that might have the effect of confusing the patient about the risk he is running, for example, by making him mistake a window for a door. In such cases, there is no suicide as previously defined, but accidental death.

the subject want to destroy himself appears, the attempt at suicide results and then, in an instant, the scene changes and, if the attempt is unsuccessful, it is not resumed, at least for the time being. If it does recur later, it will have a different cause. The most insignificant incident can bring these sudden transformations about. A patient of this kind, wanting to kill himself, jumped into a generally rather shallow river. He was trying to find a spot where he could submerge himself when a customs officer, guessing his intention, took aim and threatened to fire on him with his gun if he did not come out of the water. The man at once quietly returned home, with no further thought of killing himself.*

2. *Melancholy suicide.* This is linked to a general state of extreme depression and such sadness that the patient can no longer sanely assess his relationship to the people and things around him. Pleasure no longer holds any attraction for him; he sees the dark side of everything. Life appears tedious and painful to him. As these attitudes are constant, so too are the thoughts of suicide. They are characterized by a great deal of consistency and the general motives behind them are always more or less the same. A girl, the daughter of parents who are mentally sound, has spent her childhood in the country, but is now obliged to leave it at the age of fourteen to continue her education. From this time on, she experiences an inexpressible sense of boredom and sadness, a marked preference for solitude, followed shortly by a death wish that nothing will dispel. 'For hours on end, she stays motionless, staring at the ground, feeling a weight on her chest and suffering like someone fearing some terrible misfortune. Firmly resolved to throw herself into the river, she seeks out the loneliest spots so that no one will come to her rescue.'† However, realizing that what she means to do is a crime, she gives up the idea for a while. But after a year the suicidal tendency returns still more strongly and her attempts are repeated in quick succession.

Hallucinations or delirious ideas that lead directly to suicide

* Bourdin, op. cit., p. 43.
† Falret, *Hypocondrie et suicide*, pp. 299–307.

are often grafted on to this general sense of despair. However, these are not unstable like those that we have just observed in maniacs. On the contrary, they are fixed, like the general state from which they derive. The fears that obsessed the victims, the reproaches that they direct against themselves and the sorrow that they feel are always the same. So, if this type of suicide is driven by imaginary reasons, just as the preceding one was, it is distinguished by its chronic nature. And it is very tenacious. People who suffer from this category of illness prepare the means for their own execution calmly, and even exhibit incredible perseverance and sometimes cunning in pursuit of their aim. Nothing is less like this consistency than the perpetual instability of the maniac. In the latter, one finds only brief outbursts with no lasting cause, while in the former there is a constant state, linked to the general character of the patient.

3. *Obsessive suicide.* In this case, suicide is not caused by any real or imaginary motive, but solely by a fixed idea of death which has gained an ascendancy over the mind of the patient for no apparent reason. He is obsessed by the idea of killing himself, even though he knows that there is no reasonable motive for doing so. He suffers from an instinctive need over which reflection and reasoning have no sway, like those needs to steal, kill or set fire which alienists have tried to describe as different forms of monomania. Since the patient realizes the absurdity of his wish, he at first tries to struggle against it. But for as long as this resistance lasts, he is sad and downcast, with an anxious feeling in the pit of his stomach that increases day by day, which is why this kind of suicide has sometimes been called 'anxious suicide'. The following is the confession made one day by a patient to Brierre de Boismont[5] which perfectly describes the condition: 'I am employed in a commercial firm where I carry out my professional duties adequately, but I act like an automaton and, when someone speaks to me, the words seem to echo in a void. My greatest worry comes from the thought of suicide, from which I cannot escape for a moment. I have suffered from this compulsion for a year now. At first, it was not very strong, but for about the past two months it has pursued me everywhere, *yet I have no reason for wishing to*

kill myself . . . My health is good. No one else in my family has suffered from any similar condition. I have not been bereaved in any way and my salary is enough to allow me to indulge the pleasures appropriate to my time in life.'* However, as soon as the patient decides to give up the struggle and as soon as he has resolved to kill himself, the anxiety ends and he becomes calm again. If he fails in the attempt, it is sometimes enough, even though it has failed, to appease his unhealthy urge. It is as though the patient's desire has been gratified.

4. *Impulsive or automatic suicide.* There is no more motive for this than for the preceding kind. It has no cause either in reality or in the patient's imagination. Yet, instead of being produced by a fixed idea that haunts the mind for a more or less long period of time and which only progressively takes over the will, it is nothing but the result of a sudden, immediately irresistible impulse. In a moment, it rises up fully formed and produces the act, or at least a first move towards carrying it out. This suddenness recalls what we observed earlier in mania, except that the maniacal suicide always has some motive, however unreasonable it may be, which derives from his delirious notions. Here, by contrast, the tendency towards suicide appears and produces its effects with real automatism, not being preceded by any intellectual antecedent. The sight of a knife, a walk along the edge of a cliff, and so on, instantly conjure up the idea of suicide and the act follows so quickly that the patients themselves often have no awareness of what has happened. 'A man is calmly chatting with his friends. Suddenly, he jumps up, leaps over a parapet and falls into the water. After he has been quickly pulled out, they ask him why he behaved as he did, but he has no idea. He merely gave way to a force that drove him on despite himself.'† '"The odd thing," another man says, "is that I cannot recall the way in which I got over the windowsill or what idea I had at the time, because I did not at all have the idea of killing myself; or, at least, I cannot now remember having such a thought." '‡ In less

* *Suicide et folie-suicide*, p. 397.
† Brierre, op. cit., p. 574.
‡ Ibid., p. 314.

acute cases, these patients feel the impulse arise and manage to escape the lure that the instrument of death exercises upon them by immediately running away from it.

To sum up: all suicides of the insane are motiveless or else inspired by purely imaginary motives. Now, a great number of voluntary deaths do not come into one or other of these categories; most of them have motives, and motives that are not without some basis in reality. So it is not possible without misusing the terms, to consider that every person who commits suicide is mad. Out of all the types of suicides that we have just described, the one that seems hardest to distinguish from those that may be observed in sane people is melancholic suicide, because very often the normal person who kills himself or herself is also in a state of dejection and depression, as the madman is. But there is always this essential difference between them that the state of the former and the act that results from it are not without an objective cause, while in the latter case these have no relation to external circumstances. In short, suicide of the insane is distinguished from other forms of suicide in the same way as illusions and hallucinations are from normal perception or automatic impulses from deliberate acts. It is true none the less that one can go from one to the other without a break in continuity, but if this was a reason for saying that they are the same, then one would also have generally to confuse health with illness, since the latter is only a variety of the former. Even if one were to establish that the average person never kills himself and that the only people who do so are those who exhibit some abnormality, one would still not be justified in considering madness as a necessary condition for suicide, because a mad person is not simply a man who thinks or acts a little differently from the average.

So it has only been possible to identify suicide so closely with madness by arbitrarily restricting the sense of the words. 'That person is not a self-murderer,' Esquirol exclaims, 'who, driven only by noble and generous motives, plunges into certain peril, exposes himself to inevitable death and willingly sacrifices his life in obedience to the law, to keep an oath of loyalty or for

the salvation of his country.'* And he quotes the examples of Decius, Assas and so on.[6] In the same way, Falret refuses to consider Curtius, Codrus or Aristodemus[7] as suicides.† Bourdin extends the same exception to all voluntary deaths where the victim is inspired, not only by religious faith or political beliefs, but even by feelings of extreme tenderness and love. But we know that the nature of the motives that are immediately responsible for the death cannot serve to define it or, consequently, to distinguish what it is not. All cases of death resulting from an act accomplished by the victim himself in full awareness of the necessary consequences offer too many basic points of similarity, whatever their aim, for it to be possible to divide them into different types. At all events, they can only constitute species of a single type; and even then, if one were to make such distinctions, one would need some other criterion apart from the aim sought by the victim, this being more or less problematic. Here, at least, is one group of suicides where madness is not present; and once one has opened the door to exceptions, it is hard to close it again, because there is no break in continuity between these deaths which are inspired by particularly generous feelings and those where the motives are less elevated. One goes from one to the other along a seamless path. So, if the first kind are suicides, there is no reason why the second should not be given the same label.

Thus there are suicides, and a great number of them, which are not the product of folly. They may be recognized by these two characteristics: they are deliberate and the concepts that enter into this deliberation are not purely hallucinatory. One may see that this question which has been so much debated is soluble without it being necessary to raise the question of freedom. In order to determine whether all suicides are mad, we have not asked ourselves whether or not they are acting freely; we have solely based our conclusion on the empirical characteristics that different kinds of voluntary death offer to the observer.

* *Maladies mentales*, vol. I, p. 529.
† *Hypocondrie et suicide*, p. 3.

IV

Since suicide of the insane is not the whole genre, but merely represents one variant of it, the psychopathic states that make up mental illness cannot account for the collective tendency to suicide in general. However, between mental illness proper and a perfect balance of the mind, there is a whole series of intermediate states: these are the various anomalies that are commonly grouped under the term 'neurasthenia'.[8] So we must investigate whether, in the absence of madness, these might not play an important role in the production of the phenomenon that we are examining.

The very existence of suicide of the insane is what prompts the question. Hence, if a deep perversion of the nervous system is enough to bring about a suicide on its own account, then a lesser perversion must exert the same influence to a lesser degree. Neurasthenia is a sort of rudimentary madness, so it must partially produce the same effects. It is a far more widespread state than madness proper; it is even becoming more and more common, so it may be that the various anomalies that we group under this heading are one factor according to which the rate of suicides varies.

In any event, it would be understandable if neurasthenia should predispose to suicide, since neurasthenics are temperamentally predestined, as it were, to suffering. We know that in general pain results from an excessive shock to the nervous sytem: an over-intense nervous wave is usually painful. But this maximal intensity beyond which pain starts varies from person to person: it is higher in those whose nerves are most resistant, and lower in the others, which means that the pain zone starts earlier in the latter. For a neuropath, every impression is a source of unease, every movement one of fatigue. He is, as it were, thin-skinned and his nerves jangle at the slightest touch. The carrying out of those physiological functions which are usually the least troublesome is, for him, a source of generally painful sensations. It is true that, conversely, the pleasure threshold is also lower and this excessive penetrability of a weakened nervous system makes it accessible to stimuli that

would not upset a normal organism. This is why, for such a person, insignificant events can be a source of excessive pleasure. Thus it would appear that he can recover on one side what he loses on the other and that, thanks to this compensation, he should be no worse armed in the struggle of life than anyone else. However, this is not at all the case, and he suffers from a real disadvantage, because ordinary impressions and the feelings that are experienced most frequently in the circumstances of everyday life are always of a particular intensity; consequently, for such a person, living is liable to be insufficiently moderate. No doubt when he can escape from it and create a special environment for himself in which the noise from outside is muted, then he may manage to survive without too much suffering. This is why we sometimes see such people flee the world in search of solitude. But if he is obliged to descend into the throng and cannot carefully protect his pathologically delicate nature from external shocks, he is quite likely to experience more pain than pleasure. Consequently, such organisms are fertile ground for the idea of suicide.

This reason is not the only one that makes life difficult for the neuropath. Because of the extreme sensitivity of his nervous system, his ideas and feelings are always in a situation of unstable balance. Because the faintest impressions have an abnormal effect on him, his mental organization is constantly in a state of upheaval and, as a result of these continual shocks, it cannot settle into a definite form. It is constantly in process of becoming. For it to be able to consolidate itself, past experiences would have to produce lasting effects, while in fact these are continually destroyed and swept away by sudden new ones that take their place. However, life in a settled and constant environment is only possible if the functions of the living being have an equally constant and settled character, since living means responding to external stimuli in an appropriate manner and this harmonious correspondence can only be established with the help of time and habit. It is the result of trial and error, sometimes repeated over generations, the results of which have partly become hereditary and which cannot be started afresh each time that an action has to be performed. If, on the contrary,

everything has to be done again, so to speak, at the moment of acting, it is impossible for it to be all that it should. Such stability is not only necessary for us in our relations with the physical environment, but also with the social environment. In a society with a defined organization, an individual can only maintain his position by having an equally defined moral and mental constitution; and this is precisely what the neuropath lacks. The state of upheaval in which he finds himself means that circumstances are constantly catching him unawares. Since he is not prepared to respond to them, he is forced to invent new, eccentric types of behaviour; hence his well-attested liking for novelty. But when it is a matter of adapting to traditional situations, improvised solutions cannot prevail against those sanctioned by experience, so most of the time they fail. So it is that the more rigid the social system, the more difficult it becomes for such an unstable person to live in it.

It seems very likely therefore that this psychological type is the one most generally met with among suicides. It remains to discover what part this entirely individual condition plays in the incidence of voluntary death. Is it sufficient in itself, provided circumstances are favourable, to produce suicide, or does it merely have the effect of making individuals more susceptible to the effects of external forces, the latter alone constituting the determining cause of the phenomenon?

To resolve this question directly, we should need to be able to compare the variations in suicide to those in neurasthenia. Unfortunately, the statistics for this are not available. However, an indirect approach will allow us to get round this problem. Since madness is only an exaggerated form of nervous degeneration, one may accept without too much risk of error that the rate of nervous degeneration varies in the same way as the rate of insanity, and consequently take the latter in place of the former. This will have the added advantage of allowing us in a general way to establish the relationship between the rate of suicide with that of mental abnormalities of every kind.

One preliminary fact might ascribe an influence to such abnormalities that they do not have, namely that suicide, like

madness, is more common in towns than in the countryside. So the one appears to increase and decrease with the other, which might make us believe that they are related. However, this parallel movement does not necessarily indicate a relationship of cause and effect; it could very well be the result of a simple coincidence. This hypothesis is all the more credible since, as we shall see, the social causes leading to suicide are themselves closely linked to urban civilization and more intense in large centres of population. In order to measure the effect that psychopathic states may have on suicide, we must therefore discount the cases in which they vary in the same way as the social conditions behind the same phenomenon, because when these two factors are having the same effect, it is impossible in the final result to determine the relative role played by each one. We must consider them only when they are represented in inverse ratio to one another; only then will a sort of conflict be set up between them which will allow us to decide which is the determining factor. If mental illness plays the essential role that is sometimes attributed to it, it must reveal its presence by characteristic effects, even when social conditions tend to neutralize it; and conversely, these effects should fail to appear when individual conditions act in the contrary sense. However, the following facts show that the opposite is the rule:

1. All statistics show that, in insane asylums, the number of women is slightly larger than the number of men. The ratio varies from country to country, but as the following table shows, it is in the order of 54 or 55 women per 46 or 45 men:

	Years	Number per 100 insane of: Men	Women		Years	Number per 100 insane of: Men	Women
Silesia	1858	49	51	New York	1855	44	56
Saxony	1861	48	52	Massachusetts	1854	46	54
Württemberg	1853	45	55	Maryland	1850	46	54
Denmark	1847	45	55	France	1890	47	53
Norway	1855	45	56	"	1891	48	52

Koch has published the results of the census in eleven different states over the whole of the population of the insane. Out of 166,675 mad people of both sexes, he numbered 78,584 men and 88,091 women, equal to 1.18 insane per 1,000 inhabitants of the male sex and 1.3 per 1,000 of the other sex.* Mayr also obtained similar results.

Admittedly, it has been asked whether this excess of women over men may not be due simply to the fact that the male death rate is higher than the female one among the mad. In France, it is true that out of 100 insane patients who die in asylums, there are around 55 men. The larger number of female patients to appear in the census at any given moment would not therefore prove that women have a greater tendency to madness, but that, in this as in other circumstances, they survive longer than men. It is none the less established that the existing population of the insane consists more of women than of men; so if we infer, as we seem entitled to do, the number of those suffering from nervous disorders from the number of the insane, we can assume that at any given moment there are more neurasthenic women than men. If consequently there were to be a relation of cause and effect between the rate of suicide and that of neurasthenia, women should kill themselves more often than men. Or, at least, they should kill themselves as often, because even if one were to take account of their lower death rate and to correct the census data accordingly, the most that one might conclude is that they have a propensity to madness more or less the same as that of men; their lower rate of death and the numerical superiority that they show in all censuses of the insane do, in fact, more or less cancel one another out. But far from their tendency towards voluntary death being greater or the same as that of men, in actuality it emerges that suicide is essentially a masculine phenomenon. On average, for every woman who kills herself, there are four male suicides (see Table 4). So each sex has a determined predisposition to suicide which is constant even for different social milieux. However, the intensity of this predisposition does not vary at all in parallel

* Koch, *Zur Statistik der Geisteskrankheiten*, Stuttgart, 1878, p. 73.

TABLE 4

Share of each sex in the total figure for suicide

		Absolute no. of suicides of:		Number per 100 suicides of:	
		Men	Women	Men	Women
Austria	1873–77	11,429	2,478	82.1	17.9
Prussia	1831–40	11,435	2,534	81.9	18.1
"	1871–76	16,425	3,724	81.5	18.5
Italy	1872–77	4,770	1,195	80	20
Saxony	1851–60	4,004	1,055	79.1	20.9
"	1871–76	3,625	870	80.7	19.3
France	1836–40	9,561	3,307	74.3	25.7
"	1851–55	13,596	4,601	74.8	25.2
"	1871–76	25,341	6,839	78.7	21.3
Denmark	1845–56	3,324	1,106	75.0	25.0
"	1870–76	2,485	748	76.9	23.1
England	1863–67	4,905	1,791	73.3	26.7

TABLE 5

Tendency to madness among different religious faiths

		No. of insane per 1,000 members of each faith		
		Protestants	Catholics	Jews
Silesia	1858	0.74	0.79	1.55
Mecklenburg	1862	1.36	2.0	5.33
Duchy of Baden	1863	1.34	1.41	2.24
"	1873	0.95	1.19	1.44
Bavaria	1871	0.92	0.96	2.86
Prussia	1871	0.80	0.87	1.42
Württemberg	1832	0.65	0.68	1.77
"	1853	1.06	1.06	1.49
"	1875	2.18	1.86	3.96
Hesse	1864	0.63	0.59	1.42
Oldenburg	1871	2.12	1.76	3.37
Canton of Berne	1871	2.64	1.82	

with the psychopathic factor, whether the latter is assessed according to the number of new cases registered every year or the number of people shown on the census at a given moment.

2. Table 5 allows us to compare the tendency to madness among different religious groups.

It can be seen that madness is much more common among Jews than among followers of other religions, so one may reasonably assume that other afflictions of the nervous system are also present in the same proportions. But, by contrast, the tendency to suicide is very weak among them. We shall even show later that Judaism is the religion in which it is least prevalent.* *Consequently, in this case, the rate of suicide varies inversely to the rate of psychopathic states*, instead of being an extension of it. Of course, we should not conclude from this that nervous and mental afflictions can ever act as preservatives against suicide, but they must have very little effect in determining it, since the suicide rate is capable of falling so low at the very point where the rate of such afflictions rises to its height.

If one compares only Catholics and Protestants, the inverse ratio is less general, though it is still very frequent. The tendency of Catholics to insanity is only one-third less than that of Protestants, and even then the gap between them is very slight. In fact, we shall see in Table 18† that everywhere, without exception, the former kill themselves a lot less frequently than the latter.

3. We shall demonstrate below‡ that, in every country, the tendency to suicide grows steadily from childhood to the most extreme old age. Though it does sometimes decline after the age of seventy or eighty years, the decline is very small. It still remains two to three times higher at this stage of life than in the years of maturity. Conversely, it is during maturity that madness most frequently occurs. The danger of this is greatest around the age of thirty. Beyond that, it declines and is, far and away, at its weakest in old age.§ Such a contrast would be

* See below, Book Two, Chap. 2, pp. 161–2.

† Below, p. 160.

‡ See Table 9, p. 89.

§ Koch, op. cit., pp. 139–146.

inexplicable if the reasons for the variation in suicide rates and those that affect mental illness were not different in nature.

If one compares the rate of suicide at every age, not with the relative frequency of new cases of insanity that occur in the same period, but with the proportional numbers of the population of the insane, the absence of any parallelism is just as clear. It is around the age of thirty-five that the insane are most numerous relative to the population as a whole. The proportion stays the same until approximately sixty years of age, beyond which it declines rapidly. So it is at its minimum when the rate of suicide is at its maximum and, beyond that, it is impossible to observe any regular relationship between the variations in one or the other.*

4. One finds no greater relation between the variation in the two phenomena if one compares different societies from the double point of view of suicide and madness. It is true that the statistics for mental illness are not established with enough precision for these international comparisons to be very precise. Yet it is significant that the two tables below, taken from different authors, give largely similar results.

So the countries where there is the least number of insane are those where there is the highest number of suicides. The case of Saxony is particularly striking. Already, in his very good study of the *département* of Seine-et-Marne, Dr Leroy made a similar observation: 'Most often,' he says, 'the localities where one encounters a significant proportion of the mentally ill also have a high proportion of suicides. However, the two *maxima* may be entirely separate. I am even inclined to believe that, as well as countries fortunate enough to have neither the mentally ill nor suicides . . ., there are some where only mental illness has appeared.' In other localities, the contrary has occurred.†

It is true that Morselli has arrived at somewhat different results,‡ but this is chiefly because he has grouped under the general heading of 'Mental Alienation' both the insane properly

* Koch, op. cit., p. 81.
† Op. cit., p. 238.
‡ Op. cit., p. 404.

TABLE 6*
Relation of suicide and madness in different European countries

A

	No. of insane per 100,000 inhabitants	No. of suicides per million inhabitants	Order of countries for: Madness	Suicide
Norway	180 (1855)	107 (1851–55)	1	4
Scotland	164 (1855)	34 (1856–60)	2	8
Denmark	125 (1847)	258 (1846–50)	3	1
Hanover	103 (1856)	13 (1856–60)	4	9
France	99 (1856)	100 (1851–55)	5	5
Belgium	92 (1858)	50 (1855–60)	6	7
Württemberg	92 (1853)	108 (1846–56)	7	3
Saxony	67 (1861)	245 (1856–60)	8	2
Bavaria	57 (1858)	72 (1846–56)	9	6

B

	No. of insane per 100,000 inhabitants	No. of suicides per million inhabitants	Average of suicides
Württemberg	215 (1875)	180 (1875)	107
Scotland	202 (1871)	35	
Norway	185 (1865)	85 (1866–70)	63
Ireland	180 (1871)	14	
Sweden	177 (1870)	85 (1866–70)	
England and Wales	175 (1871)	70 (1870)	
France	146 (1872)	150 (1871–75)	164
Denmark	137 (1870)	277 (1866–70)	
Belgium	134 (1868)	66 (1866–70)	
Bavaria	98 (1871)	86 (1871)	153
Austria	95 (1873)	122 (1873–77)	
Prussia	86 (1871)	133 (1871–75)	
Saxony	84 (1875)	272 (1875)	

* The first part of the Table is taken from the article 'Aliénation mentale' in Dechambre's *Dictionnaire* (vol. III, p. 34); the second is from Oettingen, *Moralstatistik*, appended table no. 97.

so called and congenital idiots.* But these two afflictions are very different, particularly from the point of view of the effect that they might be thought to have on suicide. Far from predisposing to this, idiocy seems rather to protect against it, since idiots are far more numerous in the country than in the town, while suicide is far less common there. So it is important to distinguish two such contrary states when one is trying to determine the part played by various neuropathic disturbances in the rate of voluntary deaths. But even when one confuses these two, one cannot establish a regular correspondence between the development of mental alienation and suicide. Indeed, if, accepting Morselli's figures unquestioningly, we classify the main countries of Europe into five groups according to the size of their population of the mentally alienated (idiots and the insane being grouped under the same head), and then look for the average of suicides in each group, we obtain the following table:

	No. of mentally alienated per 100,000 inhabitants	No. of suicides per million inhabitants
1st group (3 countries)	340–280	157
2nd group "	261–245	195
3rd group "	185–164	65
4th group "	150–116	61
5th group "	110–100	68

One may indeed say that, broadly speaking, where there are a lot of mad people and idiots, there are also a lot of suicides, and vice versa. But there is no consistent correlation between the two scales that shows the existence of any definitive causal link between these two kinds of phenomenon. The second group, which should count fewer suicides than the first, has more; the fifth group, which, from the same point of view,

* Morselli does not state this specifically, but it is clear from the figures that he gives. They are too high to represent only cases of insanity. See the table given in Dechambre's *Dictionnaire*, where the distinction is made. One can clearly see that Morselli has added together the insane and (congenital) idiots.

should be lower than all the others, is on the contrary higher than the fourth and even the third. Finally, if instead of Morselli's figures for the mentally alienated one substitutes those of Koch, which are far more complete and apparently more rigorous, the absence of correlation is even more evident. Here is what one discovers:*

	No. of insane and idiots per 100,000 inhabitants	No. of suicides per million inhabitants
1st group (3 countries)	422–305	76
2nd group "	305–291	123
3rd group "	268–244	130
4th group "	223–218	227
5th group (4 countries)	216–146	77

Another comparison that Morselli makes between the different provinces of Italy is, by his own admission, not conclusive.†

5. Finally, since insanity is considered to have been increasing regularly over the past century‡ and the same is true of suicide, one might be tempted to see proof of the relation between them in this fact. But what deprives it of all demonstrative value is that in inferior societies, where madness is very rare, suicide on the contrary is sometimes very frequent, as we shall show in due course.§

So the social rate of suicide bears no precise relation to the rate of insanity, or by inductive reasoning with the tendency to various forms of neurasthenia.

Indeed, though as we have shown neurasthenia may predispose to suicide, it does not necessarily have this consequence.

* Out of the countries in Europe about which Koch informs us, we have only omitted Holland: the information we have on the strength of the tendency to suicide in that country seems inadequate.

† Op. cit., p. 403.

‡ Admittedly, this has not been scientifically demonstrated in an altogether satisfactory manner. In any case, if there is a rise, we do not know the coefficient of acceleration.

§ See Book Two, Chap. 4.

Certainly, the neurasthenic who is too closely caught up in active life is almost inevitably condemned to suffer, but it is not impossible for him to retire from it to lead a more contemplative existence. And, while conflicts of interests and passion are too overwhelming and too violent for such a delicate organism, this kind of organism is, by contrast, designed to gain full enjoyment from the gentler pleasures of thought. The muscular debility and excessive sensibility that make it unfit for action, fit it on the contrary for intellectual functions (which also require the appropriate organs). Similarly, while an over-rigid social environment can only bruise his natural instincts, the more society itself is flexible and only able to survive by progressing, the more he has a useful part to play, because he is the instrument of progress *par excellence*. For the very reason that he is resistant to tradition and to the yoke of custom, he is a particularly rich source of new ideas. And since the most cultivated societies are also the ones in which representative functions are most necessary and most highly developed, while at the same time, because of their great complexity, almost incessant change is a condition of their existence, it is at the very moment when there is the greatest number of neurasthenics that they have the greatest number of reasons to exist. They are not essentially unsocial beings, who eliminate themselves because they are not born to live in the environment in which they find themselves. But other causes must be added to the organic state peculiar to them to give it this direction and develop it in this way. In itself, neurasthenia is a very general predisposition which does not necessarily lead to any definite action, but which can according to circumstances take the most varied forms. It is a soil in which very different tendencies can take root according to the manner in which it has been fertilized by social causes. Disgust with life and leaden melancholy, with all the dire consequences that that implies, will easily spread through an old and disoriented people, while in a young society, burning idealism, generous missionary zeal and active devotion will be more likely to develop. While the number of degenerates is observed to increase at times of decadence, it is through these same individuals that states are founded: all great innovators come from their

ranks. Such an ambiguous force* can therefore not be enough to account for a social fact as definite as the rate of suicide.

V

However, there is one particular psychopathic state to which it has been customary for some time now to attribute almost all the ills of our civilization. This is alcoholism. Already, rightly or wrongly, it is held responsible for the increase in insanity, for pauperism and for criminality. Could it have any influence on the rate of suicide? *A priori*, the hypothesis seems unlikely, since most victims of suicide belong to the most cultivated and leisured classes, while this is not the milieu in which we find most alcoholics. But nothing can contradict the facts. Let us examine them.

If one compares the map of suicides in France with that showing the number of prosecutions for alcohol abuse,† one observes almost no relationship between them. The main feature of the first is the existence of two principal centres of contamination, one situated in the Île-de-France and extending eastwards, the other occupying the Mediterranean coast from Marseille to Nice. The distribution of clear patches and dark patches on the map of alcoholism is quite different. Here, there are three main centres: one in Normandy and more especially in the Seine-Inférieure; the other in Finistère and the Breton

* There is an example of this ambiguity in the similarities and contrasts between French and Russian literature. The sympathetic reception given to the latter in France shows that it is not without affinities with our own. Indeed, one may sense in both nations an unhealthy delicacy of the nervous system, and a certain absence of mental and moral balance. But what different social consequences are produced by this same state, which is at once biological and psychological! While Russian literature is excessively idealistic, and the melancholy with which it is imbued arises from active compassion for human suffering, making it one of those healthy sorrows that inspire faith and rouse to action, our literature prides itself on only expressing feelings of grim despair and reflecting a disturbing state of depression. In this way, a single organic state can serve almost opposite social ends.

† After the *Compte général de l'administration de la justice criminelle*, 1887. See Map 1, pp. 60–61.

*départements** in general; and the third, finally, in the Rhône and the surrounding region. By contrast, where suicide is concerned, the Rhône is not above average, most of the Norman *départements* are below average and Britanny is almost entirely clear. The geography of the two phenomena is therefore too dissimilar for it to be possible to attribute a significant role to the one in the incidence of the other.

We find the same result if we compare suicide not to crimes of drunkenness, but to nervous or mental illnesses caused by alcoholism. After grouping the French *départements* into five classes according to the number of their suicides, we inquired into the average number of cases of alcoholic madness in each of them, according to the figures given by Dr Lunier,† achieving the following result:

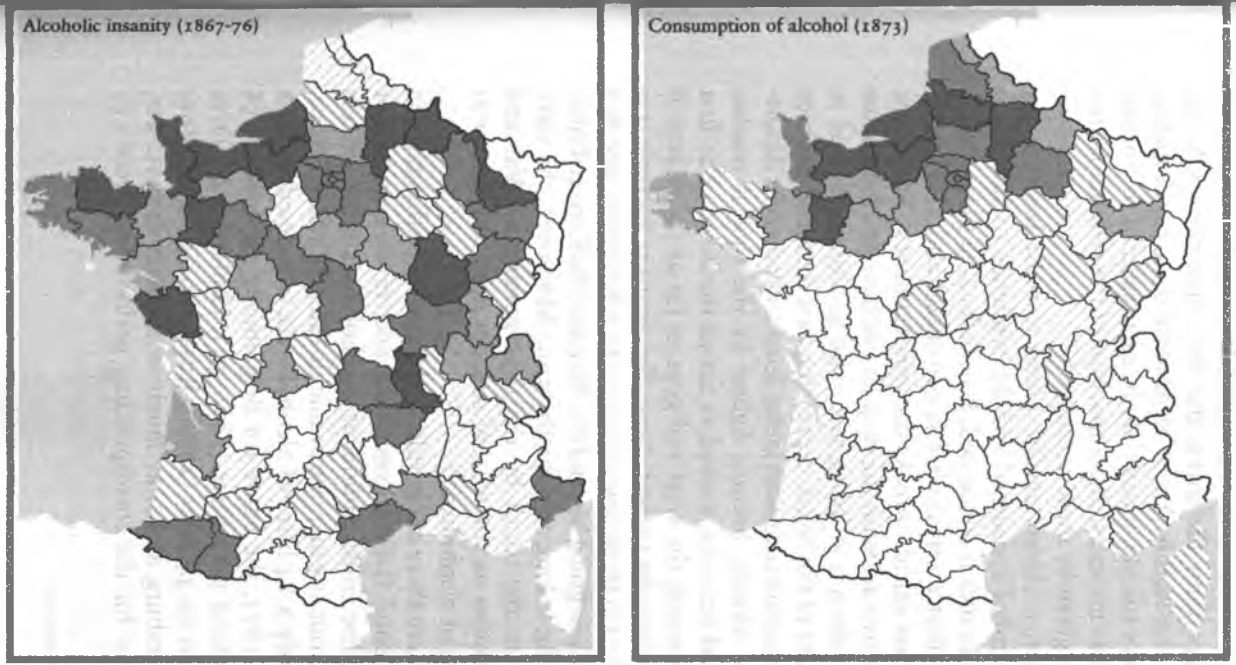
	Suicides per 100,000 inhabitants (1872–76)	Madness due to alcoholism per 100 admissions (1867–69 and 1874–76)
1st group (5 *départements*)	Under 50	11.45
2nd " (18 ")	51–75	12.07
3rd " (15 ")	76–100	11.92
4th " (20 ")	101–150	13.42
5th " (10 ")	151–200	14.57
6th " (9 ")	201–250	13.26
7th " (4 ")	251–300	16.32
8th " (5 ")	Above 300	13.47

There is no correlation between the two columns. While the number of suicides increases by a factor of six or more, the proportion of those suffering from alcoholic insanity barely

* [Translator's note] After the Revolution of 1789, France was divided into 83 administrative districts known as *départements*; there are now 95, forming the basic administrative units of the country.

† *De la production et de la consommation des boissons alcooliques en France*, pp. 174–75.

Suicides (1878–87)
Proportion per 100,000 inhabitants
31–48
24–30
18–23
13–17
8–12
3–7
Prosecutions for drunkenness (1878–87)
Proportion per 100,000 inhabitants
376–639
210–266
111–196
70–104
41–69
19–38
Average: 173



Map 1 Suicides and alcoholism

increases at all, and even then the rise is not regular: the second group is higher than the third, the fifth than the sixth, the seventh than the eighth. Yet if alcoholism as a psychopathic state does affect suicide, it can only be as a result of the mental disturbance that it causes. A comparison of the two maps confirms the data given by these averages.*

At first sight, a closer relation seems to exist between the quantity of alcohol consumed and the tendency to suicide, at least so far as France is concerned. It is, indeed, in the northern *départements* that most alcohol is consumed and also in this same region that suicide wreaks the greatest havoc. But, in the first place, the two areas on the map do not have at all the same shape. One of them is at its highest point in Normandy and in the *département* of the Nord, decreasing as it descends towards Paris, while the other is densest in the Seine and adjacent *départements*; it has already become lighter by the time it reaches Normandy and does not extend as far as the Nord. The first spreads out towards the west and goes as far as the shores of the Atlantic, while the second shows the opposite pattern: it is very soon halted in its westward march by a boundary which it does not cross, not going beyond the Eure and the Eure-et-Loire, while extending a long way to the east. Moreover, the dark mass formed in the south by the *départements* of Var and Bouches-du-Rhône on the map of suicides does not appear at all on the map of alcoholism.†

In short, where there are parallels, they prove nothing, being purely coincidental. If one leaves France and travels even further to the north, the consumption of alcohol rises more or less regularly, without any increase in suicide rates. While in France, on average, only 2.84 litres of alcohol were consumed by each inhabitant in 1873, the figure for Belgium for 1870 was 8.56 litres and England 9.07 litres (1870–71), Holland 4.00 litres (1870), Sweden 10.34 litres (1870), Russia 10.69 litres (1866) and in St Petersburg alone, as much as 20 litres (1855). Yet, while in France for the corresponding period there were 150

* See Map 1, pp. 60–61.
† Ibid.

suicides per million inhabitants, in Belgium there were only 68, in Great Britain 70, in Sweden 85 and very few in Russia. Even in St Petersburg, between 1864 and 1868, the annual rate was only 68.8. Denmark is the only country in northern Europe where there are both a large number of suicides and a high consumption of alcohol (16.51 litres in 1845).* So if the northern region of our country is remarkable both for its suicidal tendencies and its weakness for alcoholic liquors, this is not because the first is caused and explained by the second. The similarity is coincidental. In general, people drink a lot of alcohol in the north because wine is rare and expensive there,† and perhaps because a particular type of diet, designed to maintain a high temperature of the organism, is more necessary than elsewhere. In addition to that, it happens that the actual causes of suicide are peculiarly present in this same region of our country.

A comparison between different German *länder*[9] confirms this. If we classify them both from the point of view of suicide and from that of alcohol consumption‡ (see p. 64), we see that the group in which there are the most suicides (the third) is one of those in which the least amount of alcohol is consumed. The detailed picture shows even more marked contrasts: the province of Posnania is almost the least affected by suicide in the whole German empire (96.4 cases per million inhabitants), but also the one in which the alcohol consumption is highest (13 litres a head). In Saxony, they are four times more likely to kill themselves (348 suicides per million), but drink half as much. Finally, we can see that the fourth group, where the consumption of alcohol is lowest, is made up almost solely of southern states: if there is less suicide here than in the rest of

* According to Lunier, op. cit., pp. 180ff. Similar figures, for other years, are found in Prinzing, op. cit., p. 58.

† Where the consumption of wine is concerned, it tends rather to vary in inverse ratio to suicide. The most wine is drunk in the south of France, where suicide is least common. However, this does not mean that wine protects against suicide.

‡ After Prinzing, op. cit., p. 75.

Germany, this is because the population is Catholic or contains a large Catholic minority.*

Alcoholism and suicide in Germany

	Alcohol consumption (1884–86)	Average no. of suicides in the group	Country
1st group	13.0–10.8 litres per head	206.1 per million inhabitants	Posnania, Silesia, Brandenburg, Pomerania
2nd group	9.2–7.2 litres per head	208.4 per million inhabitants	E. and W. Prussia, Hanover, province of Saxony, Thuringia, Westphalia
3rd group	6.4–4.5 litres per head	234.1 per million inhabitants	Mecklenburg, Kingdom of Saxony, Schleswig-Holstein, Alsace, Hesse
4th group	4 litres or less per head	147.9 per million inhabitants	Rhine provinces, Baden, Bavaria, Württemberg.

Consequently, there is no psychopathic state that has a regular and incontrovertible relation to suicide. Because a society contains a greater or lesser number of sufferers from nervous

* Some people, trying to show the influence of alcohol, have quoted the example of Norway where the consumption of alcoholic drink and the rate of suicide have decreased similarly since 1830. But in Sweden, alcoholism has also declined and to the same degree, while suicide has constantly increased (115 cases per million in 1886–88, compared with 63 in 1821–30). The same applies to Russia.

So that the reader is aware of all elements of the question, we must add that the proportion of suicides attributed in French statistics to episodes of drunkenness or to habitual drunkenness has risen from 6.69 per cent in 1849 to 13.41 per cent in 1876. But first of all it is far from true that all these cases are attributable to alcoholism properly so called, which should not be confused with simple drunkenness or attendance in bars. Then, whatever the real significance of these figures, they do not prove that the abuse of alcoholic beverages plays a very large part in the suicide rate. Finally, we shall see later why it is unwise to put too much faith in information from statistics as to the presumed causes of suicide.

disorders or of alcoholics, this does not mean that it will have more or fewer suicides. Although degeneration, in all its different forms, does provide a highly fertile psychological ground for the working of those causes that may make a person decide to commit suicide, it is not in itself one of those causes. We may agree that, given identical circumstances, the degenerate is more likely to kill himself than a healthy, sane person, but he does not necessarily kill himself because of his condition. The potential within him can only be realized as a result of other factors which we must now examine.

CHAPTER 2
SUICIDE AND NORMAL PSYCHOLOGICAL STATES RACE. HEREDITY

It may be, however, that a tendency to suicide is rooted in the constitution of the individual, without particularly deriving from the abnormal states that we have just examined. It might consist of purely psychic phenomena, without necessarily being tied to any derangement of the nervous system. Why should there not be in mankind a tendency to quit life which is not linked to any monomania, or to some form of mental alienation, or to neurasthenia? The thesis might even be regarded as proven if, as several writers on suicide have said,* every race has a suicide rate peculiar to it. For one race is only defined and differentiated from others by organico-psychic characteristics. So if suicide really does vary between races, we shall have to accept that it is closely linked to some organic propensity.

But is there such a relationship?

I

And first of all, what is a race? It is all the more necessary to define this because not only ordinary people but even anthropologists themselves use the term to mean quite different things. However, in the various definitions that have been suggested, we generally find two fundamental ideas: that of similarity and that of filiation. One or other of these ideas is pre-eminent according to the school of thought that one belongs to.

At times, 'race' has been taken to mean a collection of indi-

* Notably Wagner, *Gesetzmässigkeit*, etc., pp. 165ff.; Morselli, p. 158; Oettingen, *Moralstatistik*, p. 760.

viduals who do indeed exhibit some common characteristics, but who, in addition to that, owe these shared characteristics to the fact that they all derive from the same stock. When under the influence of some cause or other, a variation arises in one or more subjects belonging to the same sexual generation, to distinguish them from the rest of the species, and when this variation, instead of disappearing in the following generation, becomes progressively fixed in the organism through the effect of heredity, it gives birth to a race. This is what allows M. de Quatrefages[1] to define race as 'the mass of similar individuals belonging to a single species who transmit characteristics of a primitive nature by means of sexual generation'.* Understood in this way, 'race' would be distinguished from 'species' in that the original couples from which the different races of a particular species derive would, in their turn, have arisen from a single couple. In this way, the concept would be clearly delimited and defined by the special process of filiation that gave rise to it.

Unfortunately, if we accept only this formulation, the existence and domain of a race can only be determined through historical and ethnographical research, the results of which are always doubtful, because one can only ever establish very uncertain probabilities in these questions of origin. Moreover, it is not certain that there are today any races that correspond to this definition since, as a result of cross-breeding in every direction, each of the existing varieties of our species derives from very varied origins. So if we accept no other criterion than that, it will be very hard to know what relationship may exist between the different races and suicide, because we cannot say precisely where they begin or end. In any case, M. de Quatrefages' idea makes the mistake of prejudging the answer to a problem that science is far from having resolved. It assumes that the characteristic qualities of race were formed in the course of evolution and that they have only been fixed in the organism under the effect of heredity. But this is challenged by a whole school of anthropologists, calling themselves 'polygenists', according to whom mankind, instead of all being descended from the same,

* *L'espèce humaine*, p. 28. Paris, Félix Alcan.

single couple, as biblical tradition would have it, appeared either simultaneously, or in succession, at different points on the globe. Since these original sources would then have been formed independently of one another and in different environments, they would have been distinguished from one another at the very start and, consequently, each of them would have been a race. So the main races would not have been established thanks to the gradual fixing of acquired variations, but all together, from the start.

Since this great debate is still not resolved, it would be unmethodical to bring the idea of filiation or kinship into our definition of race. It is better to define it by its immediate attributes, available directly to the observer, and leave aside any question of origin. In that case, there are only two remaining characteristics that define it. In the first place, we have a group of individuals who resemble one another; but the same is true of members of the same religion or the same profession. The thing that finally serves to characterize them is that these resemblances are hereditary, giving a type that, however it may have been formed originally, is nowadays transmissible by heredity. It is in this sense that Prichard[2] said: 'By the term "race" is understood any collection of individuals with a greater or less number of common characteristics transmissible by heredity, regardless of the origin of these characteristics.' M. Broca[3] states almost the same: 'As for the varieties of the human species,' he writes, 'these have been called "races", which suggests the idea of more or less direct filiation between individuals of the same variety, but does not resolve the question of kinship between individuals of different varieties, one way or the other.'*

Stated in this manner, the problem of the constitution of races becomes soluble, though it means understanding the word in such broad terms that it becomes indeterminate. It not only designates the most extended branches of the species, and the natural and relatively unchanging divisions of mankind, but every sort of variation. Indeed, from this point of view, each group of nations whose members, because of the intimate

* In the article 'Anthropologie' in Dechambre's *Dictionnaire*, vol. V.

relationships between them through the centuries, exhibit partly hereditary characteristics, would constitute a race. This is how we sometimes hear talk of the Latin race, the Anglo-Saxon race and so on. In fact, it is only in this form that races can still be regarded as concrete and vital in historical development. In the confusion of peoples, in the melting-pot of history, the great, original, fundamental races have eventually become so mixed up with one another that they have more or less lost any individual identity. If they have not entirely vanished, at most we can only discern the vague outlines and scattered characteristics that only imperfectly come together with one another and no longer make up any distinctive physiognomy. A human type that is formed solely with the aid of a few scraps of information, often imprecise, on height or skull shape, is not either consistent or determinate enough for one to ascribe any great influence to it in the development of social phenomena. Those more special and more restricted types that are called races in the broad sense of the term are more clearly delineated, and do inevitably play an historical role, since they are the product of history far more than of nature. But they are a long way from being objectively defined. For example, we are not very clear by what precise signs the Latin race is distinguished from the Saxon one. Everyone speaks about them in his or her own way, without any great scientific rigour.

These preliminary remarks are a warning that sociologists cannot be too careful in trying to determine the influence of race on a given social phenomenon; because, in order to resolve such questions, we must first know what are the different races and how they are distinguished from one another. This caution is all the more necessary since this anthropological uncertainty may be due to the fact that the word 'race' does not nowadays correspond to anything definite at all. On the one hand, the original races of mankind are no longer of any interest except to palaeontologists, while, on the other, those more restricted groups to which the name is nowadays applied, appear to be no more than nations or societies of peoples, sharing a kinship of civilization rather than of blood. Seen in this way, race eventually becomes almost the same thing as nationality.

II

None the less, we may accept that there are in Europe some broad human types whose most general characteristics can be roughly perceived and among which the nations are distributed; and we may agree to call them 'races'. Of these, Morselli distinguishes four: the *Germanic* type, which includes the German, Scandinavian, Anglo-Saxon and Flemish varieties; the *Celto-Roman* type (Belgians, French, Italians, Spanish); the *Slavic* type; and the *Uralo-Altaic* type. We only mention the last of these for reference, because it is too little represented in Europe for us to determine any relation it may have to suicide: there are only the Hungarians, the Finns and the inhabitants of a few Russian provinces who come under this head. The other three races would be classified as follows, according to their propensity for suicide: firstly, the Germanic peoples, then the Celto-Romans and finally the Slavs.*

But can these differences really be attributed to the effects of race?

The hypothesis might be credible if each group of nations brought together under the same heading had a more or less equally strong propensity to suicide. However, the widest divergences exist between nations of the same race. While, in general, the Slavs are not inclined to kill themselves, we must make exceptions of Bohemia and Moravia. The first has 158 suicides per million inhabitants and the second 136, while Carniola has only 46, Croatia 30 and Dalmatia 14. Similarly, among all the Celto-Roman peoples, France is remarkable for the size of its contribution (150 suicides per million), while Italy in the same period produced only around 30 and Spain even fewer. It is very hard to accept, as Morselli argues, that such a large divergence can be explained by the fact that Germanic elements are more numerous in France than in the other Latin countries. Above all, given that the nations which are distinguished from those of the same race in this way are also the most civilized,

* We are not speaking of the classifications suggested by Wagner and Oettingen, which Morselli himself has decisively repudiated (p. 160).

one may ask oneself what it is that differentiates so-called ethnic groups and societies, if not the unequal development of their civilization.

The diversity is still greater among the Germanic peoples. Of the four groups attached to that branch, three tend to commit suicide far less than the Slavs and the Latins. These are the Flemings, who have only 50 suicides per million, the Anglo-Saxons, who have only 70;* while, among the Scandinavians, though the Danes admittedly show the high figure of 268 suicides, Norway has only 74.5 and Sweden 84. Thus it is impossible to attribute the Danish suicide rate to race, because in the two countries where the race is at its purest it produces a contrary effect. Finally, of all the Germanic peoples, only the Germans are, in a general way, strongly drawn to suicide. So, if we understand the terms in their strict meaning, it cannot be a question here of race, but of nationality. However, since it has not been shown that there is not a German type which is partly hereditary, one might agree to extend the meaning of the word to its extreme and say that, among the peoples of German race, suicide is more prevalent than in most of the Celto-Roman, Slavic or even Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian peoples. But that is the only thing that can be derived from the preceding figures. In any event, this is the only case where we might, if pushed, suspect some influence from ethnic characteristics. However, we shall see that in reality race does not come into it.

In fact, if we are to attribute the German tendency to suicide to this cause, it is not enough to establish that suicide is widespread in Germany, because this could be due to the specific nature of German civilization. One would have to demonstrate that the tendency is connected with some hereditary feature of the German organism and that it is a permanent trait of this human type which continues even when the social environment is changed. Only under these conditions could we interpret it as a product of race. So let us see whether outside Germany, when he is associated with the life of other nations and acclimatized

* To explain these facts, Morselli assumes (without offering any proof of the assumption) that there are many Celts to be found in England; and, in the case of Flanders, he suggests an influence of the climate.

to different civilizations, the German retains his melancholy pre-eminence.

Austria provides us with a ready-made experiment for answering this question. Here, Germans have mixed, in very different proportions according to which province they inhabit, with a population of quite different ethnic origin. So, let us see if their presence has the effect of raising the suicide figures. Table 7 shows the size of the German element in each province, at the same time as the average rate of suicide over the five-year period 1872–77. The proportion of the different races has been established according to the dialects that they use and, though this criterion may not be absolutely precise, it is the most accurate one that we have at our disposal.

In this table, which we have taken from Morselli himself, it is impossible to see the slightest trace of German influence. Bohemia, Moravia and Bukovina, which have only between 37 and 9 per cent of Germans, have a suicide rate (140) which is above that of Styria, Carinthia and Silesia (125), where the Germans make up the majority of inhabitants. Moreover, in the matter of suicide, these three provinces, in which there is none the less a large minority of Slavs, exceed the only three provinces where the population is entirely German (Upper Austria, Salzburg and the Transalpine Tyrol). It is true that Lower Austria supplies many more suicides than the other areas, but its lead in this respect cannot be attributed to the presence of German elements, since there are more of those in Upper Austria, Salzburg and the Transalpine Tyrol, where the people are two or three times less likely to kill themselves. The true cause of the high figure is that the principal town of Lower Austria is Vienna, which, like all capital cities, has a huge annual number of suicides: in 1876, there were 320 for every million inhabitants. We must therefore be careful not to attribute to race something that is caused by the presence of a large city. Conversely, if the Littoral, Carniola and Dalmatia have so few suicides, this is not because of an absence of Germans, because in Cisalpine Tyrol and Galicia, where there is no greater proportion of Germans, there are two to five times as many voluntary deaths. Even if we calculate the average of suicides for all

TABLE 7

Comparison of the Austrian provinces from the point of view of suicide and race

	No. of Germans per 100 inhabitants	Suicide rate per million
Purely German provinces		
Lower Austria	95.90	254
Upper Austria	100.00	110
Salzburg	100.00	120
Transalpine Tyrol	100.00	88
		Average: 106
Mainly German provinces		
Carinthia	71.40	92
Styria	62.45	94
Silesia	53.37	190
		Average: 125
Large German minority		
Bohemia	37.64	158
Moravia	26.33	136
Bukovina	9.06	128
		Average: 140
Small German minority		
Galicia	2.72	82
Cisalpine Tyrol	1.90	88
Littoral	1.62	38
Carniola	6.20	46
Dalmatia		14
		Average of last two groups: 86

eight provinces with a German minority, we arrive at a figure of 86, which is as many as in the Transalpine Tyrol, where there are only Germans, and more than in Carinthia and Styria, where there is a very high proportion of them. So, when Germans and Slavs live in the same social environment, their

tendency to suicide is substantially the same. Consequently, the difference that we perceive between them when circumstances are different is not due to race.

The same applies to the difference between Germans and Latins. In Switzerland, both these races are present. Fifteen cantons are either wholly or partially German and here the number of suicides is 186 (for 1876). Five have French majorities (the Valais, Fribourg, Neufchâtel, Geneva and the Vaud); here the average of suicides is 255. The canton in which the fewest suicides are committed is the Valais (10 per million), which happens to be the very one in which there is the highest proportion of Germans (319 per 1,000 inhabitants). By contrast, Neufchâtel, Geneva and the Vaud, where the population is almost entirely Latin in origin, show 486, 321 and 371 suicides respectively.

In order to isolate as far as possible the influence of the ethnic factor, if it exists, we have tried to eliminate the religious factor which might mask it. To achieve this, we have compared German cantons to the French cantons of the same religion. The results of that calculation only serve to confirm the earlier ones:

Swiss cantons

German Catholics:	German Protestants:
87 suicides	293 suicides
French Catholics:	French Protestants:
83 suicides	456 suicides

On the one side, there is no noticeable divergence between the two races, while on the other, it is the French who are in the lead.

Thus the facts combine to show that, if the Germans do kill themselves more than other peoples, the cause is not the blood in their veins, but the civilization in which they were brought up. However, one of the proofs that Morselli offers to confirm the influence of race does at first sight appear more convincing. The French people result from the merging of two main races, the Celts and the Cymry,[4] who, at the start, were distinguished from one another by height. As early as the time of Julius Caesar, the Cymry were known for their tall stature, so Broca has been able

to determine by height the present geographical distribution of the two races in our country, finding that people of Celtic origin are in a majority south of the Loire and those of Cymric origin to the north. This ethnographic map bears some resemblance to that of suicides, because we know that these are more prevalent in the north of the country and, in contrast, at a minimum in the centre and south. But Morselli goes even further. He thinks that he can demonstrate that the rate of suicide in France varies in a regular manner according to the way that ethnic elements are distributed. To show this, he has divided the *départements* into six groups, calculating the average rate of suicides in each and also the number of conscripts exempted from military service on account of height – which is an indirect method of measuring the average height of the corresponding population, since this rises proportionately as the rate of exemptions falls. And it appears that these two series of averages vary in inverse ratio to one another: there are as many more suicides as there are fewer exemptions from military service on the grounds of height, i.e. when the average stature is higher.*

Such a precise relationship, if it were proven, could hardly be explained by anything except the effects of race. But the manner in which Morselli arrives at his result means that it cannot be considered as proven. He takes, as the basis of his comparison, the six ethnic groups distinguished by Broca† according to the supposed degree of purity of the two races, Celtic and Cymric. But however authoritative the scholar in question may be, these ethnographic questions are far too complex and still leave too much room for differing interpretations and contradictory hypotheses for us to be completely persuaded by the classification that he suggests. One has only to consider the number of more or less unverifiable historical conjectures that he has had to call upon to support it; and while this research clearly demonstrates that there are, in France, two very distinct ethnic types, the existence of the intermediate and variously shaded types that he thinks he can identify is much

* Morselli, op. cit., p. 189.
† *Mémoires d'anthropologie*, vol. I, p. 320.

more dubious.* So if, setting aside this systematic, but perhaps over-ingenious picture, we confine ourselves to classifying the *départements* according to the average height peculiar to each one of them (that is to say, according to the average number of conscripts exempt from military service on the grounds of insufficient height), and if opposite each of these averages we put those of suicides, we find the following results [Table 8] (which differ markedly from those obtained by Morselli).

The rate of suicide does not rise regularly in proportion to the relative number of what are, or are assumed to be, Cymric elements in the population; the first group, in which the average height is greatest, shows a lower rate of suicide than the second, and not noticeably greater than the third. Similarly, the last three are roughly at the same level,† however much they may

* The existence of two great regional masses, one formed of 15 northern *départements* in which the tall stature predominates (only 39 exempt out of 1,000 conscripts), the other made up of 24 *départements* of the centre and west, where the lower stature is widespread (between 98 and 130 exemptions per 1,000), seems undeniable. Is this difference the result of race? This is a much harder question to resolve. If we consider that in the past thirty years the average height in France has changed markedly and that the number of those exempt for this reason has fallen from 92.8 in 1831 to 59.4 per 1,000 in 1860, we may well ask if a characteristic that is so variable is a safe criterion by which to recognize the existence of those relatively immutable human types that we call races. But in any case, the way in which the intermediate groups which Broca inserts between these extreme types are constituted, denominated and linked either to the Cymric or to the other stock seems to us to leave even more room for doubt. Arguments from morphology are impossible here. Anthropology can indeed establish what is the average height in a particular region, but not the interbreeding that has produced this average. Intermediate heights may just as well be due to Celts breeding with races of higher stature, as to Cymry entering into unions with those smaller than they are. Nor can we draw on evidence from geographical distribution, since these mixed groups happen to be found all around the country, from the north-west (Normandy and Basse-Loire) to the south-west (Aquitaine), the south (the Roman province) and the east (Lorraine), etc. All that remains are historical arguments that can only be highly conjectural. History does not tell us precisely how, when, or in what conditions and proportions different invasions and influxes of peoples took place. It can help us even less when it comes to deciding the effect that they had on the organic make-up of nations.

† Especially if we discount the Seine, which, because of its exceptional circumstances, is not precisely comparable to the other *départements*.

TABLE 8

Départements with tall subjects	Exemptions	Mean suicide rates	*Départements* with short subjects	Exemptions	Mean suicide rates
Group 1 9 *dépt.*	Over 40 per 1,000 recruits	180	Group 1 22 *dépt.*	60–80 per 1,000 recruits	115 (101 without Seine)
Group 2 8 *dépt.*	40–50	249	Group 2 12 *dépt.*	80–100	88
Group 3 17 *dépt.*	50–60	170	Group 3 14 *dépt.*	Over 100	90
General average	Over 60	191	General average	Over 60	103 (with Seine), 93 (without)

vary in terms of height. All that emerges from these figures is that, from the point of view of suicide as from that of height, France is divided into two halves, one in the north where there are a lot of suicides and the people are tall, and the other in the centre where stature is lower and where people are less likely to kill themselves, without these two sets of figures being exactly parallel. In other words, the two great divisions that we find on the ethnographic map are also to be found on that of suicides, but the coincidence between them is only a broad, general similarity. It is not to be found in the detail of the variations presented by the two phenomena being compared.

Once we have reduced it in this way to its true proportions, it no longer offers any decisive proof of the influence of ethnic factors; it is merely a curious fact, not enough to demonstrate a law. It may very well be due merely to the operation of factors independent of one another. At the very least, for it to be attributable to the effect of race, this hypothesis would have to be confirmed and even required by other facts, while on the contrary it is challenged by the following.

Firstly, it would be unusual were a collective type such as that of the Germans, whose reality is uncontested and who have such a marked propensity for suicide, to cease to exhibit this propensity as soon as social circumstances changed, while a partially problematic type such as that of the Celts or the

ancient Belgae,[5] of which only rare traces remain, had a definite effect on the same tendency, lasting right up to the present. There is too great a separation between the extreme generality of the characteristics perpetuating the memory of this human type and the complexity of such a tendency.

Secondly, we shall see later that suicide was frequent among the ancient Celts.* So if, today, it is rare in the peoples who are assumed to be of Celtic origin, this cannot be by reason of a congenital tendency of the race, but from a change in external circumstances.

Thirdly, Celts and Cymry do not constitute pure, primitive races. They were 'affiliated by blood, as by language and beliefs'.† Both are merely varieties of that race of tall, blond men who, either by mass invasions or in successive waves, have gradually spread throughout Europe. The whole difference between them from the ethnographic point of view is that the Celts, by interbreeding with the small, brown races of the south, have diverged more from the original, common type. Consequently, if the greater propensity of the Cymry for suicide has any ethnic cause, it would come from the fact that in them the original race has been least altered. But in that case, even outside France, one ought to see suicide increase proportionately as the distinctive characteristics of that race are more marked. Yet this is not at all the case. It is in Norway that we find the greatest height in Europe (1.72 m); and, anyway, it is probably from the north, particularly the shores of the Baltic, that this type originated; it is also there that it seems to have been best preserved. However, the rate of suicide in the Scandinavian peninsula is not high. We are told that the same race has kept its purity better in Holland, Belgium and England than in France,‡ yet this last country produces many more suicides than the other three.

Besides which, this geographical distribution of French suicide can be explained without need for recourse to obscure explanations from race. We know that our country is divided, in spirit as well as in race, into two parts that have still not

* See below, Book Two, Chap. 4, pp. 235, 239.

† Broca, op. cit., vol. I, p. 394.

‡ See Topinard, *Anthropologie*, p. 464.

entirely merged. The peoples of the centre and the south have retained their character and the way of life peculiar to them and, for that reason, resist the ideas and manners of the north. But the heartland of French civilization is to be found in the north, so it has remained an essentially northern thing. Moreover, since it is this that carries the main causes that impel French people to kill themselves (as we shall see later), the geographical limits of its sphere of action are also those of the zone which produces most suicides. So, if people in the north kill themselves more than those in the south, this is not because they are more predisposed to do so by their ethnic make-up, but simply because the social causes of suicide are more particularly concentrated to the north of the Loire than to the south.

As to the reason why this essential duality of our country arose and has been maintained, this is an historical question that ethnographic considerations are not sufficient to explain. It is not – or, in any case, not only – a difference in race that has caused it, because very diverse races are quite capable of merging and being lost in one another. Nor is it that the northern and southern types have such antagonism towards one another that centuries of life together have been unable to overcome it. The Lorrain was no less different from the Norman than the Provençal from the inhabitant of the Île-de-France. But the fact is that for historical reasons, the Provençal spirit and local traditionalism have remained much stronger in the south, while in the north the need to confront common enemies, a greater solidarity of interests and more frequent contacts brought the peoples closer together and gave them a shared history. It is precisely this moral levelling which, by setting up a more active circulation of men, ideas and goods, made this region the site of an intense civilization.*

* The same applies to Italy. There, too, suicides are more numerous in the north than in the south, while on the other hand the average height of northern peoples is slightly above that in the southern regions. This is because the present civilization of Italy comes from Piedmont and, on the other hand, because the Piedmontese happen to be a little taller than the people of the south. The difference is slight, however. The maximum recorded in Tuscany and Venezia is 1.65 m; the minimum, in Calabria, 1.60 m, at least as far as continental Italy is concerned. In Sardinia, height falls to 1.58 m on average.

III

The theory that makes race an important factor in the tendency to suicide implicitly admits, however, that it is hereditary: it cannot otherwise constitute an ethnic characteristic. But has the hereditary nature of suicide been proven? The question is all the more worth examining since, apart from its relationship to the preceding one, it is of interest in itself. Indeed, if we can establish that a tendency to suicide is transmitted genetically, we would have to acknowledge that it is closely linked to some definite organic state.

However, we must first be clear about the meaning of the words. When one says of suicide that it is hereditary, does one mean simply that children of suicides, having inherited the temperament of their parents, are inclined to behave as they did in similar circumstances? Put in that way, the proposition is undeniable, but insignificant, because then it is not suicide that is hereditary; all that is transmitted is simply a certain general temperament which, in the event, may predispose an individual to it – though not necessarily so – meaning that this is not consequently a sufficient explanation of the decision. We have seen that the individual constitution that most favours its development, namely neurasthenia in its various forms, cannot in any way account for the variations that appear in the suicide rates. But psychologists have often spoken of heredity in a very different sense. This would imply a tendency to kill oneself that would be passed directly and entirely from the parents to the children and, once transmitted, would quite automatically give rise to suicide. In this way it would constitute a sort of psychological mechanism, enjoying a kind of autonomy, that would not be much different from a monomania and which would quite probably have a no less definite psychological mechanism corresponding to it. After that, it would depend essentially on individual causes.

Does observation demonstrate the existence of such a hereditary link? Certainly, we do sometimes see suicides repeated in the same family with deplorable regularity. One of the most striking examples is that quoted by Gall:[6] 'A certain Mr G. . . ,

landowner, left seven children, together with a fortune of two million francs. Six of the children remained in Paris or its surroundings and kept their share of their father's money; some of them even increased it. None of them experienced misfortune, and all enjoyed good health ... All seven brothers committed suicide within a period of forty years.'* Esquirol knew a merchant, father of six children, four of whom killed themselves; a fifth made repeated attempts.† In other cases, parents, children and grandchildren have succumbed to the same impulse. But the example of physiologists tells us that one should not jump to hasty conclusions in questions of heredity, which need to be treated with a great deal of caution. Thus, there are certalnly many cases where tuberculosis affects successive generations, yet scientists are still not willing to conclude that it is hereditary. In fact, the opposite conclusion seems to be gaining ground. A repetition of the illness in a single family could well be due not to the hereditary nature of tuberculosis itself, but to a general temperament which is apt to host the bacillus which causes the disease and, in the event, to propagate it. In that case what is transmitted is not the disease itself, but simply a ground which is liable to favour the development of the disease. And if we are conclusively to reject this hypothesis, we should have at least to establish that the Koch bacillus[7] is often met with in the foetus; and, until that has been shown, we must question any conclusion on the matter. The same reservations apply to the questions we are dealing with. To settle it, it is not enough to cite a number of facts that favour the thesis of heredity; these facts would also have to be sufficient in number for them not to be attributable to chance or accident, for them not to allow of any other explanation, for them not to be contradicted by any other facts. Do they satisfy these three conditions?

Admittedly, they are thought to be many. But it is not enough, if we are to conclude that it is in the nature of suicide to be hereditary, for the occurrences to be more or less frequent. We

* *Sur les fonctions du cerveau*, Paris, 1825.

† *Maladies mentales*, vol. I, p. 582.

must also be able to determine what proportion they represent of all voluntary deaths. If the existence of hereditary antecedents were to be demonstrated for a relatively high proportion of the total number of suicides, we would be entitled to agree that there was a causal relationship between the two facts and that suicide does have a tendency to be transmitted in an hereditary way. But until such proof exists, one may still wonder whether the cases that are alleged may not be due to chance combinations of different causes. The observations and comparisons which alone will allow us to settle the matter have never been carried out in a systematic way; people are almost always satisfied with passing on a number of interesting anecdotes. The small amount of information that we do have on this particular point is not conclusive either way; it is even somewhat contradictory. Out of thirty-nine mentally ill patients with a more or less marked inclination to suicide observed by Dr Luys[8] in his hospital, and on whom he was able to gather fairly comprehensive information, there was only one case in which the same tendency had already been found in the patient's family.* Out of 265 mental patients, Brierre de Boismont met only eleven, or 4 per cent, whose parents had committed suicide.† The proportion given by Cazauvieilh is much higher: he found hereditary antecedents in thirteen cases out of sixty, which would amount to 28 per cent.‡ According to Bavarian statistics, the only ones that record the influence of heredity, in the years 1857–66, it appeared around thirteen times out of one hundred.§

However inconclusive these facts were, if one could not account for them except by admitting the existence of a special heredity of suicide, the hypothesis would acquire some authority from our inability to offer any other explanation. However, there are at least two other causes which might produce the same effect, especially if taken together.

Firstly, almost all these observations were made by psych-

* *Suicide*, pp. 197.
† Quoted by Legoyt, p. 242.
‡ *Suicide*, pp. 17–19.
§ According to Morselli, p. 410.

iatrists and, therefore, on mentally ill patients. And, of all illnesses, mental illness may be the one that is most frequently passed down. So we might ask ourselves whether it is a tendency to commit suicide that is hereditary, or whether it is not rather mental illness, of which it is frequently a symptom, though coincidental. Our doubts are confirmed by the fact that, as all observers admit, it is chiefly if not exclusively among insane patients who commit suicide that we encounter cases favourable to the hypothesis of heredity.* No doubt, even in these circumstances, heredity plays an important part, but it is not suicide that is inherited; what is transmitted is mental illness in general, the nervous affliction of which killing oneself is a contingent result, though always to be feared. In this case, heredity is no more responsible for the tendency to suicide than haemoptysis in cases of hereditary tuberculosis. If an unfortunate man kills himself when he has cases in his family of madness and of suicide, this is not because his parents killed themselves, but because they were mad. Moreover, since mental disorders are transformed as they are transmitted – the melancholy of the parents becoming chronic delirium or instinctive madness in their descendants – it may be that several members of the same family commit suicide and that all these suicides, resulting from different types of mental illness, consequently belong to different categories.

However, this primary cause is not enough to explain all the facts. On the one hand, it is not proven that suicide never repeats itself except in the families of the mentally ill, while on the other there is still the remarkable phenomenon that in some such families suicide seems to be endemic, even though mental illness does not necessarily imply such a result. Not every madman is inclined to kill himself. So why is it that there are families of insane people who seem predestined to self-destruction? This combination of similar cases clearly suggests a factor other than the one mentioned. But it can be accounted for without recourse to heredity. The contagious power of example is enough to explain it.

* Brierre de Boismont, op. cit., p. 59; Cazauvieilh, op. cit., p. 19.

We shall see in a later chapter that suicide is eminently contagious. This contagion is chiefly observable among individuals whose constitution makes them more easily accessible in general to all kinds of suggestion and in particular to ideas of suicide, because they are not only led to reproduce everything that impresses them, but they are particularly liable to repeat an act for which they already have some inclination. And this double condition is realized in mentally ill or simply neurasthenic patients whose parents have committed suicide. Their nervous weakness makes them hypnotizable while at the same time predisposing them to accept easily the idea of killing themselves. Thus it is not surprising that the memory or the spectacle of the tragic end of those close to them should become a sort of obsession or irresistible impulse for these individuals.

Not only is this explanation quite as satisfying as that which relies on heredity, but there are facts which it alone can explain. It often happens that in families where we find repeated cases of suicide, they reproduce one another almost identically. Not only do they take place at the same age, but they are also carried out in the same manner. In some, hanging is the preferred method; in others, asphyxiation; and in others, falling from a high place. In one often-quoted case, the resemblance went even further: a single weapon served an entire family, several years apart.* People have tried to show these similarities as further proof of a hereditary cause. However, if there are good reasons for not making suicide a distinct psychological entity, how much more difficult it is to accept that there is a tendency to suicide by hanging or by shooting! Surely, these facts rather demonstrate the extent of the contagious influence exercised on the minds of survivors by suicides that have already stained the history of their family with blood. These memories must indeed obsess and persecute them, for them to be compelled to reproduce the act committed by their predecessors with such precise accuracy.

What makes this explanation even more likely is that many cases are of the same nature even though it cannot be a matter

* Ribot, *L'hérédité*, p. 145, Paris, Félix Alcan.

of heredity and when contagion is the sole cause of the evil. In those epidemics that we shall discuss below, it almost always happens that different suicides resemble one another with the most astonishing uniformity. It is as though they were copies of one another. Everyone knows the story of the fifteen patients who, in 1772, hanged themselves in quick succession from a single hook in a dark passage in the hospital. When the hook was removed, the epidemic ended. Similarly, in a camp in Boulogne, a soldier blew out his brains in a sentry box. Within a few days, others had done the same thing in the same box, but as soon as it was burned down the epidemic came to a halt. The overwhelming influence of the obsession is evident in all these cases, since they cease immediately the material object that suggested them to the mind has disappeared. So when suicides which clearly derive from one another all seem to follow the same pattern, we may legitimately attribute them to this same cause, all the more so since it should have its greatest effect in families where everything combines to increase its power.

Moreover, many suicides have the feeling that, in doing as their relatives have done, they are yielding to the force of example. This is the case of a family observed by Esquirol: 'The youngest (brother) became melancholic around the age of 26 or 27 and jumped from the roof of the house; a second brother, who had been caring for him, made several attempts at suicide and died a year later as a result of prolonged and repeated abstinence . . . A fourth brother, a doctor, who two years earlier had repeatedly told me with terrifying despair that he could not escape his fate, killed himself.'* Moreau cites the following case. A mental patient whose brother and paternal uncle had killed themselves was the victim of a tendency to suicide. A brother who came to see him in Charenton felt such despair at the dreadful ideas that he took away from this visit that he could not avoid feeling that he too would eventually succumb.† A patient made the following confession to Brierre de Boismont:

* Lisle, op. cit., p. 195.
† Brierre, op. cit., p. 57.

'Until the age of 53, I was in good health, I had no worries and my temperament was quite cheerful; then, three years ago, I started to have these black thoughts . . . I have had no rest from them during the past three months and constantly feel driven to suicide. I have to tell you that my brother committed suicide at the age of 60. I had never thought seriously about it, but when I reached my fifty-sixth year, the memory of this returned with greater clarity and now it is constantly in my mind.' But one of the most conclusive cases is that reported by Falret. A nineteen-year-old girl learned that 'an uncle on her father's side had committed suicide. The news caused her great anxiety: she had heard that madness was hereditary and the idea that she might one day lapse into this sad state soon preoccupied her entirely . . . She was in this sad predicament when her father chose to end his own life. From then on, she considered herself entirely condemned to a violent death. She no longer thought of anything except her coming end and repeated over and over to herself: "I am bound to die like my father and my uncle! So my blood must be corrupt!" She made an attempt on her own life. But the man whom she thought was her father, in reality was not. To relieve her of her fears, her mother confessed the truth and arranged for her to meet her true father. The physical resemblance was so great that the patient's doubts at once vanished. From then on, she gave up any idea of suicide, her happy disposition gradually returned and her health was restored.'*

So it is, on the one hand, that the cases that best support the idea of hereditary suicide are not enough to prove that it exists, while on the other hand they can easily be attributed to another explanation. But there is more. Certain statistical facts, the importance of which seems to have escaped psychologists, cannot be reconciled with the hypothesis of hereditary transmission, properly so called. These are as follows.

Firstly, if there is any organo-physical determinism of hereditary origin, predestining men to kill themselves, it should operate more or less equally on either sex. Since there is nothing

* Luys, op. cit., p. 201.

intrinsically sexual in suicide, there is no reason for it to afflict men rather than women. But we know that there are very few suicides by women and that they represent only a fraction of those by men. This would not be the case if heredity was as significant as it is supposed to be.

Can it be argued that women, like men, inherit a tendency to suicide, but that this is neutralized most of the time by the social conditions peculiar to the female sex? In that case, however, what are we to think of a heredity that in most cases remains latent or else consists in a very vague potential, the existence of which remains unproven?

Secondly, speaking about the hereditary nature of tuberculosis, Grancher states as follows: 'We have every reason to accept heredity in a case of this kind [referring to tuberculosis in a three-month-old child] . . . It is already less certain that the tuberculosis dates from intra-uterine life when it declares itself fifteen or twenty months after birth, when there was nothing to suggest the existence of a latent tuberculosis . . . Then, what are we to say of cases where the tuberculosis appears fifteen, twenty or thirty years after birth? Even supposing that a lesion existed at the start of life, would this lesion not have lost its virulence after such a long period of time? Is it natural to attribute all the blame to these fossil microbes rather than to the very live bacilli . . . to which a patient is exposed in the course of life?'* For us to claim that a condition is hereditary without the compelling evidence provided by the discovery of its origin in the foetus or the newborn child, one must at least establish that it frequently occurs in young children. This is why heredity has been seen as the cause of the special type of madness that appears in early childhood and which, for that reason, has been called hereditary madness. Koch has even shown that in cases where insanity, while not entirely caused by hereditary factors, must be influenced by them, it is much more likely to appear early than where there are no known antecedents.†

* *Dictionnaire encyclopédique des sciences méd.*, art. 'Phtisie', vol. LXXVI, p. 542.

† Op. cit., pp. 170–72.

Admittedly, instances are given of characteristics considered hereditary, but which only appear at a more or less advanced age, such as the beard, an animal's horns, etc. However, this delay can only be explained by the hypothesis of heredity if they depend on an organic state that cannot itself appear except in the course of individual development: for example, in everything concerned with sexual functions, heredity can clearly not produce visible effects until puberty. By contrast, if the quality transmitted is possible at any age, it should manifest itself straightaway. Consequently, the more time it takes to appear, the more readily one must admit that heredity is only playing a weak part in its existence. And there is no reason why a tendency to suicide should belong to one phase of organic development rather than any other. If it constitutes a precise mechanism that can be handed down in full working order, then it should come into play in the earliest years.

In reality, however, the opposite is the case. Suicide is extremely rare among children. According to Legoyt,[9] out of one million children aged below 16 years in France in the period 1861–75, there were 4.3 suicides by boys and 1.8 suicides by girls. According to Morselli, the figures for Italy are even lower, not rising above 1.25 for one sex and 0.33 for the other (in the period 1866–75). The proportion is substantially the same for all countries. The youngest cases of suicide occur at the age of five and these are extremely rare. Even then, there is no proof that these extraordinary events are to be attributed to heredity. We must not forget that the child, too, is subject to social forces and that these may be sufficient to drive him to suicide. What demonstrates the influence of such forces even in this case is that child suicides vary according to social environment. Nowhere are they as numerous as in large towns;* the reason is that nowhere else does social life begin so early for the child, as is demonstrated by the precocity of the young city-dweller. Initiated to the course of civilization earlier in life and more fully, he suffers correspondingly earlier and more deeply from its effects. There is also the fact that in developed countries the

* See Morselli, pp. 329ff.

number of child suicides is increasing with deplorable regularity.*

There is more. Not only is suicide very rare in childhood, but it is only with old age that it reaches its highest point and, between these two extremes, it rises steadily from age to age.

TABLE 9†

Suicides at different ages (per million inhabitants of each age)

	France 1835–44		Prussia 1873–75		Saxony 1847–58		Italy 1872–76		Denmark 1845–56
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M and F
Under 16	2.2	1.2	10.5	3.2	9.6	2.4	3.2	1.0	113
16–20 yrs	56.5	31.7	122.0	50.3	210	85	32.3	12.2	272
20–30	130.5	44.5	231.1	60.8	396	108	77.0	18.9	307
30–40	155.6	44.0	235.1	55.6	551	126	72.3	19.6	426
40–50	204.7	64.7	347.0	61.6			102.3	26.0	576
50–60	217.9	74.8	529.0	113.9	906	207	140.0	32.0	702
60–70	274.2	83.7					147.8	34.5	785
70–80	317.3	91.8			917	297	124.3	29.1	
Over 80	345.1	81.4					103.8	33.8	642

With a few slight variations, these relationships hold for all countries. Sweden is the only one where the maximum point falls between 40 and 50 years of age. Everywhere else, it comes only in the ultimate, or in the penultimate stage of life and, everywhere, with only a very few slight exceptions that may perhaps be due to mistakes in recording the data,‡ the rise up to this end point is continuous. The fall that can be seen beyond

* See Legoyt, pp. 158ff., Paris, Félix Alcan.

† The information in this table is taken from Morselli.

‡ In the case of men, we know of only one case, that of Italy, where there is a stabilization between 30 and 40. For women, there is a pause at the same age which is general and consequently must be genuine. It marks a stage in female life. As it is peculiar to unmarried women, it probably corresponds to the intermediate period in which the disappointments and strains caused by celibacy start to wear off and the loneliness which occurs at a more advanced age, if the old maid remains by herself, is not yet producing all its effects.

the age of 80 is not absolutely general and, in any case, is very slight. The number of suicides from this age group is a little smaller than those in the group of septuagenarians, but it is still higher than the rest, or most of the rest. So how can we ascribe this tendency to heredity, when it only appears in adults and, *when it does appear, gathers in strength as the individual advances in age*? How can one describe as 'congenital' a condition that is either non-existent or very weak in childhood, then develops constantly, only reaching its highest point among the old?

The law of homochronous heredity cannot be cited in this case. This states that in certain circumstances, the inherited characteristic appears in the descendants at around the same age as in the parents. But this is not so in the case of suicide, which, beyond the ages of 10 or 15, belongs to every age without distinction. The thing that is characteristic is not that it appears at a given moment in life, but that it increases progressively from age to age. This uninterrupted progression proves that the cause on which it depends itself develops as the individual ages. But heredity does not meet this condition, because it is by definition all that it must and can be as soon as fertilization is complete. Could it be argued that a tendency to suicide exists in a latent state from birth onwards, but that it only becomes apparent because of the action of other forces which appear later and develop progressively? However, this would be to accept that hereditary influence is nothing more than, at the most, a very general and indeterminate predisposition, for if the assistance of some other factor is so essential for it that it only operates when it has been given this assistance and to the extent that it is given, then this other factor is what should be considered the true cause.

Finally, the way in which suicide varies according to age proves that, in any case, its determining cause cannot be organico-psychic. Everything concerning the organism, being subject to the rhythm of life, passes successively through a phase of growth, then a stationary phase, then one of regression. There is no biological or psychological characteristic that progresses endlessly: all of them, having reached a peak, start to

decline. Suicide, on the contrary, only reaches its culminating point at the furthest point of human development. Even the drop that we quite often meet at the age of 80, apart from the fact that it is slight and not absolutely general, is only relative, since 90-year-olds still kill themselves as much or more than 60-year-olds, and, above all, more than men at full maturity. Does this not indicate that the cause of the variation in rates of suicide cannot consist in an immutable, congenital impulse, but in the progressive effects of social life? Just as it appears earlier or less so, according to the age at which men enter society, it increases to the extent that they are fully engaged in it.

We have now returned to the conclusion of the previous chapter. Of course, suicide is not possible unless the constitution of an individual does not rebel against it. But the individual state most favourable to it does not consist in a definite and automatic tendency (except in the case of the mentally ill), but in a vague, general capacity which may take various forms according to circumstances, which allows suicide to take place but does not necessarily imply that it will do so and, consequently, does not provide an explanation for it.

CHAPTER 3
SUICIDE AND COSMIC FACTORS*

However, if individual predisposition by itself is not a determining cause of suicide, it may perhaps have a greater effect when combined with certain cosmic factors. In the same way as the material environment sometimes causes an illness to develop that would otherwise remain in an embryonic state, it may also have the power to bring out general and merely potential predispositions in certain individuals who are naturally inclined to suicide. In that case, it would not be necessary to consider the suicide rate as a social phenomenon: thanks to the combination of certain physical causes and an organico-physical state, it would belong entirely or mainly to the domain of morbid psychology. It is true that, in these circumstances, one might find it hard to explain how it can be so closely linked to each social group, given that the cosmic environment does not vary very greatly from one country to another. Yet this would still mean that an important point had been established, namely that at least some of the variations in this phenomenon can be accounted for without having recourse to social factors.

Among cosmic causes, there are only two which are credited with any influence on suicide rates. These are: climate and seasonal variations in temperature.

* Bibliography: Lombroso, *Pensiero e Meteore*; Ferri, Variations thermométriques et criminalité, in *Archives d'Anth. criminelle*, 1887; Corre, Le délit et le suicide à Brest, in *Arch. d'Anth. crim.*, 1890, pp. 109ff., 259ff.; Idem, *Crime et suicide*, pp. 605–39; Morselli, pp. 103–57.

I

This is how suicides are distributed across the map of Europe, according to different latitudes:

From 36° to 43° of latitude:	21.1	suicides per	million	inhabitants
From 43° to 50°	" 93.3	"	"	
From 50° to 55°	" 172.5	"	"	
Beyond that	" 88.1	"	"	

So it is in the north and south of Europe that suicide is at its minimum, in the centre that it is most prevalent. More precisely, Morselli states that the area between the 47th and 57th degrees of latitude, on the one hand, and the 20th and 40th degrees of longitude, on the other, is the favourite region for suicide. This zone coincides with the most temperate area in Europe. Should we see this coincidence as an effect of climatic influences?

This is the argument put forward by Morselli, though not without some hesitation. Indeed, it is hard to see what relationship there can be between a temperate climate and a tendency to suicide. The facts would have to support such a hypothesis very strongly for us to accept it. And, far from there being any connection between suicide and this or that climate, it is established that it has flourished in every climate. Nowadays, Italy is relatively free of it, but it was very frequent at the time of the empire, when Rome was the capital of civilized Europe. Similarly, in the burning sunshine of India, there are times when it has been extremely common.*

The very configuration of this area shows clearly that climate is not the cause of the high suicide rate within it. Its shape on the map is not made up of a single, more or less equal and homogeneous band which includes all countries enjoying the same climate, but by two distinct shapes, one centred on the Île-de-France and the surrounding *départements*, the other on Saxony and Prussia. They consequently correspond, not to a clearly defined climatic region, but to the two main foci of

* See below, Book Two, Chap. 4, pp. 235, 240 and 241.

European civilization. So we must look at the nature of this civilization for whatever causes peoples to have differing inclinations towards suicide, at the way in which it is spread through the different countries, and not at the mysterious influence of the climate.

One may also explain another fact that Guerry[1] had already pointed out and that Morselli confirms by new observations – and one which, though not without exceptions, is fairly universal. In the countries that do not belong to the central area, the regions closest to it, both in the north and in the south, are also those most affected by suicide. So it is that in Italy it is most prevalent in the north, while in England and Belgium, it is found more in the south. But there is no reason to ascribe these facts to the temperate climate. Is it not more reasonable to accept that ideas, feelings and, in a word, the social currents that so powerfully urge the inhabitants of northern France and Germany towards suicide are to be found in the neighbouring countries which have very much the same way of life, but with less intensity? Actually, this demonstrates how great is the influence of social causes on the distribution of suicide. In Italy, up to 1870, it was the northern provinces that suffered most suicides, the centre coming next and the south in third place. But little by little the distance between the north and the centre decreased and their respective places were eventually changed (see Table 10); yet the climate in the different regions remained the same. What altered was that, after the conquest of Rome in 1870, the capital of Italy was removed to the centre of the country. The scientific, artistic and economic focus shifted in the same direction. Suicide followed.

Hence there is no further reason for us to spend any more time on a hypothesis that is not proved by any facts and disproved by so many.

II

The influence of seasonal temperature seems to be better established. The facts may be interpreted in various ways, but they do not vary in themselves.

TABLE 10

Regional distribution of suicide in Italy

	Suicides per million inhabitants			Rate of each region as a percentage of that in the north		
	1866–67	1864–76	1884–86	1866–67	1864–76	1884–86
North	33.8	43.6	63	100	100	100
Centre	25.6	40.8	88	75	93	139
South	8.3	16.5	21	24	37	33

If, instead of observing, one were to try to predict by reasoning which should be the season most favourable to suicide, one would imagine that it is the one in which the sky is darkest, the temperature lowest and the air most humid. The desolate appearance of nature at such a time must surely have the effect of inclining a person to reverie, awakening sad passions and inspiring melancholy thoughts. In any case, it is at this time that life is harshest, because we need richer food to make up for the inadequacy of natural warmth, just when this is hardest to obtain. This is why Montesquieu[2] considered foggy, cold countries as especially conducive to suicide and for a long time this was the received opinion. By applying it to the seasons, one would think that the suicide rate should reach a peak in autumn. Although Esquirol had already expressed doubt about the accuracy of this theory, Falret still accepted it in principle.* It has now been conclusively refuted by statistics. It is not in winter or in autumn that suicide rises to the maximum, but in the fine weather, when nature is at its most cheerful and the temperature at its mildest. Man chooses to leave life at the moment when it is easiest. Indeed, if one divides the year into two halves, one corresponding to the warmest six months (from March to August, inclusive) and the other to the coldest six months, the first is always the one in which the greater number of suicides occurs. *No country offers an exception to this rule.* The proportions, to within a few units, are the same everywhere: out

* *De l'hypocondrie*, etc., p. 28.

of 1,000 annual suicides, between 590 and 600 are committed in the fine weather and only 400 or so in the rest of the year.

The relationship between suicide and temperature variations can be decided with even greater precision.

If we agree to call 'winter' the three months from December to February inclusive, 'spring' the season between March and May, 'summer' that which starts in June and ends in August, and 'autumn' the three following months, and if we classify these four seasons according to their suicide mortality rate, we find that summer is in first place almost everywhere. Morselli compared 34 different periods from this point of view in 18 European states and observed that in 30 cases, that is to say in 88 per cent, the highest number of suicides fell in the summertime, in only three cases in spring and in only one in autumn. This last irregularity, occurring in the Grand Duchy of Baden alone and at one single moment in its history, is negligible, because it is the result of a calculation affecting too short a period of time; in any case, it did not recur in later periods. The three other exceptions are no more significant. They involve Holland, Ireland and Sweden. As far as the first two of these are concerned, the actual figures that served for drawing up the seasonal averages are too small for one to reach any certain conclusion: there are only 387 cases for Holland and 755 for Ireland. Moreover, the statistics for these two nations are not as reliable as one would wish. Finally, in the case of Sweden, the anomaly occurred only during the period 1835–51. If we confine ourselves to those countries about which we are genuinely informed, we can say that the rule is absolute and universal.

The period when we encounter the minimum is no less regular. In 30 cases out of 34, that is to say 88 per cent, it occurs in winter, and in the other four cases in autumn. The four countries that deviate from the rule are Ireland and Holland (as before), the canton of Berne and Norway. We know the significance of the first two anomalies, while the third is even less significant, because it was only recorded out of a total of 97 suicides. To sum up: 26 times out of 34, that is 76 per cent, the seasons occur in the following order: summer, spring, autumn, winter. This order applies without exception to Denmark, Bel-

TABLE II

Proportional share of each season in the annual total of suicides for each country

	Denmark (1858–65)	Belgium (1841–49)	France (1835–43)	Saxony (1847–58)	Bavaria (1858–65)	Austria (1858–59)	Prussia (1869–72)
Summer	312	301	306	307	308	315	290
Spring	284	275	283	281	282	281	284
Autumn	227	229	210	217	218	219	227
Winter	177	195	201	195	192	185	199
	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000

gium, France, Prussia, Saxony, Bavaria, Württemberg, Austria, Switzerland, Italy and Spain.

Not only do the seasons follow the same order, but the proportion represented by each of them hardly differs from one country to another. To show this lack of variation more clearly, we have shown the figure for each season in the main European states as a function of the annual total expressed as 1,000 (Table II). It can be seen that the same series of numbers recurs almost identically in each column.

Ferri and Morselli have concluded from these incontrovertible facts that temperature has a direct influence on the tendency to suicide and that heat, because of the mechanical action that it exerts on the functions of the brain, leads human beings to kill themselves. Ferri even tried to explain how this effect was produced. On the one hand, he says, heat increases the excitability of the nervous system, while on the other, since the organism in the hot season does not need to consume so much matter to maintain its temperature at the required level, the result is an accumulation of available forces that tend, naturally, to find a use for themselves. For this double reason there is an excess of activity during the summer, a plethora of life that demands expenditure and can only find an outlet in violent action. Suicide is one of these outlets, homicide is another, which is why voluntary death multiplies in this season, as well as violent crime. In any event, mental alienation in all its forms

is supposed to develop at this time, so it is natural, we are told, that suicide, because of its relationship to madness, should develop in the same way.

This seductively simple theory seems at first glance to accord with the facts. It even seems to be a direct expression of them. In reality, it is nowhere near to accounting for them.

III

In the first place, it implies a very questionable notion of suicide. It assumes that this always derives from a state of over-excitement, that it consists in an act of violence and that it is only possible with great expenditure of force. But, on the contrary, it very often derives from extreme depression. Though one does meet with suicide in a state of exaltation or exasperation, suicide arising from depression is no less frequent, as we shall have the opportunity to demonstrate. But it is not possible that heat should act in the same way on one kind of suicide as on another: if it stimulates the first, it should make the second rarer. The aggravating influence that it may have on some individuals would be neutralized and, as it were, cancelled out by its moderating action on others, so it could not show itself, especially in such a marked manner, in the statistical data. The variations in these according to the season must have a different cause. As for seeing it as a simple consequence of similar variations that may occur at the same time in mental alienation, to accept such an explanation we should need to ascribe a closer relationship between suicide and madness than actually exists. In any case, it is not even proven that the seasons operate in the same way on these two phenomena;* and even if the

* One cannot judge the way in which cases of madness are distributed through the seasons except by the number of admissions to asylums; and this criterion is very inadequate, because families do not have patients interned at the very moment when the illness declares itself, but later. Moreover, if we use what information we have, it is far from showing a perfect correlation between seasonal variations in madness and suicide. According to statistics given by Cazauvieilh, out of 1,000 annual admissions to Charenton, the following is the share of each season: winter, 222; spring, 283; summer, 261; autumn, 231. The same calculation for the number of insane in asylums of the Seine produces

coincidence between the two were undeniable, we should still need to know if it is changes of seasonal temperature that make the figures for mental alienation rise and fall. It is possible that quite different causes might produce or contribute to this result.

But, however one explains the influence attributed to heat, let us see if it is real.

Some observations do indeed seem to show that very high temperatures do incite men to kill themselves. During the expedition to Egypt,[3] it appears that the number of suicides in the French army increased and this increase was attributed to the high temperature. In the tropics, it is not unusual to see men throw themselves suddenly into the sea when the sun's rays are blazing down on them. Doctor Dietrich tells us that, in a round-the-world journey undertaken from 1844 to 1847 by Count Charles de Gortz, he noticed an irresistible impulse in the seamen of the crew, to which he gives the English name 'the horrors' and which he describes thus: 'The sickness generally declares itself in the winter season when, after a long voyage, the sailors come ashore, sit down around a blazing stove without taking any precautions and, as is customary, indulge in excesses of every kind. It is when they go back on board that the symptoms of the dreaded "horrors" appear. Those who are afflicted by this condition are driven by an irresistible urge to throw themselves into the sea, either because vertigo strikes them while they are working, at the top of the masts, or else it occurs in sleep, from which the affected person wakes violently, giving horrible cries.' It has also been remarked that the sirocco, which cannot blow without stifling heat, has a similar influence on suicide.*

However, this is not peculiar to heat; extreme cold acts in the same way. So it was that during the retreat from Moscow,[4] our army is said to have been afflicted by many suicides. So

similar results: winter, 234; spring, 266; summer, 249; autumn, 248. One can see that the maximum falls in spring, not in summer, and one still has to take account, firstly of the fact that, for the reasons stated above, the real maximum must be earlier; and secondly that the variations between the different seasons are very slight. They are much more clearly marked in the case of suicide.

* We have taken these facts from Brierre de Boismont, op. cit., pp. 60–62.

these facts cannot be quoted to explain why voluntary deaths are regularly more frequent in summer than in autumn, and in autumn than in winter, because all that one can adduce from them is that extreme temperatures, whatever they may be, favour suicide. In any case, it is understandable that extremes of any kind, sudden and violent changes in the physical surroundings, disturb the organism, upset the normal functions and so create the kind of delirium in which the idea of suicide can arise and be carried out, if nothing prevents it. But there is no analogy between these exceptional and abnormal disturbances and the graded variations through which the temperature passes in the course of every year. So the question remains unresolved. The solution must be sought in an analysis of the statistical data.

If temperature were to be the fundamental cause of the variations that we have observed, suicide should vary with the same regularity as temperature does. But this is not the case. People kill themselves much more in the spring than in the autumn, even though it is slightly colder in that period:

	France		Italy	
	Proportion of 1,000 annual suicides in each season	Average temp. of the seasons	Proportion of 1,000 annual suicides in each season	Average temp. of the seasons
Spring	284	10.2°	297	12.9°
Autumn	227	11.1°	196	13.1°

Thus, while the thermometer is rising by 0.9° in France and 0.2° in Italy, the suicide rate falls by 21 per cent in the first country and 35 per cent in the second. Similarly, the temperature in winter in Italy is much lower than that in autumn (2.3° instead of 13.1°), yet the rate of death from suicide is roughly the same in each season (196 cases on one side, 194 on the other). Everywhere, the difference between spring and summer is very slight for suicides, while it is very high in terms of temperature. In France, the gap is 78 per cent for one and only 8 per cent for the other, while in Prussia the figures are, respectively, 121 per cent and 4 per cent.

This lack of a relationship with temperature is still more noticeable if we look at the change in the suicide rate not by season, but month by month. In fact, these monthly variations are subject to the following law, which applies to all the countries of Europe: *From the start of January onwards, the rate of suicide rises regularly month by month until June and recedes steadily from then until the end of the year.* Most often, 62 times out of a hundred, the maximum falls in June, 25 times in May and 12 times in July. In 60 per cent of cases, the minimum occurs in December, in 22 per cent in January, in 15 per cent in November and in 3 per cent in October. Moreover, the most salient irregularities occur, in most instances, in series where the figures are too small to have much significance. Where suicide can be studied over a long period of time, as it can in France, we see it rise until June, then decrease until January, the distance between the two extremes being not less than 90 or 100 per cent on average. So suicide does not reach its peak in the hottest months, which are August and July. On the contrary, from August onwards, it starts to fall very markedly. In the same way, in most cases, it does not reach its lowest point in January, which is the coldest month, but in December. Table 12 (p. 102) shows how for each month there is nothing regular or constant in the relationship between the movements of temperature and variations in the suicide rate.

Within a single country, months where the temperature is more or less the same produce a very different corresponding number of suicides: for example, May and September, April and October in France, or June and September in Italy, and so on. The contrary is no less frequent: January and October, February and August in France give the same number of suicides despite huge differences in temperature; the same is true of April and July in Italy and Prussia. In addition to that, the proportional figures are almost exactly the same for each month in these different countries, although the monthly temperature is very uneven from one country to the other. Thus, May with a temperature of 10.47° in Prussia, 14.2° in France and 18° in Italy, results in 104 suicides in the first country, 105 in the

TABLE 12*

	France (1866–70)		Italy (1883–88)			Prussia (1876–78, 80–82, 85–89)	
	Mean temperature	Number of suicides each month out of 1,000 annual suicides	Mean temperature Rome	Mean temperature Naples	Number of suicides each month out of 1,000 annual suicides	Mean temperature (1848–77)	Number of suicides each month out of 1,000 annual suicides
January	2.4°	68	6.8°	8.4°	69	0.28°	61
February	4.0°	80	8.2°	9.3°	80	0.73°	67
March	6.4°	86	10.4°	10.7°	81	2.74°	78
April	10.1°	102	13.5°	14.0°	98	6.79°	99
May	14.2°	105	18.0°	17.9°	103	10.47°	104
June	17.2°	107	21.9°	21.5°	105	14.05°	105
July	18.9°	100	24.9°	24.3°	102	15.22°	99
August	18.5°	82	24.3°	24.2°	93	14.60°	90
September	15.7°	74	21.2°	21.5°	73	11.60°	83
October	11.3°	70	16.3°	17.1°	65	7.79°	78
November	6.5°	66	10.9°	12.2°	63	2.93°	70
December	3.7°	61	7.9°	9.5°	61	0.60°	61

second and 103 in the third.† One can observe the same thing for almost all the other months. The case of December is especially significant. Its share in the annual total of suicides is strictly the same for all three of the societies being compared (61 per thousand), yet at this period of the year the thermometer shows an average of 7.9° in Rome and 9.5° in Naples, while in Prussia it does not rise above 0.67°. Not only are the monthly temperatures not the same, but they develop differently in the different countries. Thus, in France, the thermometer rises more from

* All the months in this table have been evened out to thirty days. The figures for temperature have been taken, in the case of France, from the *Annuaire du bureau des longitudes* and, for Italy, from the *Annali dell' Ufficio centrale de Meteorologia*.

† We cannot stress too strongly the significance of these proportional figures, to which we shall return in Book Three, Chap. 1.

January to April than from April to June, while the opposite is the case in Italy. There is consequently no relationship between suicide and variations of temperature.

In any case, if temperature had the influence that it has been assumed to have, this influence should be felt equally in the geographical distribution of suicides: hot countries should be the most affected. This is such an obvious deduction that even the Italian school has recourse to it when it sets out to demonstrate that the tendency to homicide also increases with heat. Lombroso and Ferri[5] have tried to maintain that, since murders are more frequent in summer than in winter, they are more numerous in the south than in the north. Unfortunately, when we consider suicide, the evidence turns against the Italian criminologists, because it is in the southern European countries that suicide is at its lowest. The Italian rate is one-fifth that of France; Spain and Portugal are virtually untouched by it. On the French suicide map, the only blank patch of any extent is made up of the *départements* south of the Loire. Of course, we are not trying to say that this situation is in fact caused by temperature; but, whatever the reason, it remains a fact which is impossible to reconcile with the theory that says heat stimulates suicide.*

An awareness of these difficulties and these contradictions has led Lombroso and Ferri to modify the doctrine of their school a little, but without relinquishing the principle. According to Lombroso, whose views Morselli repeats, it is not so much the intensity of heat that causes suicide as the arrival of the first warm days, the contrast between the departing cold and the start of the hot season. This takes the organism by surprise at a time when it is not yet accustomed to this new

* It is true that, according to these writers, suicide is only a form of homicide, so the absence of suicides in the southern countries is therefore only apparent, because an excess of homicides makes up for it. We shall see later how this identification of the two should be viewed. But it must surely be evident straightaway that the argument refutes its own authors. If the excess of homicides that can be observed in hot countries makes up for the lack of suicides, why does this same system of compensation not also operate in the hot season? How is it that this time is both productive of self-homicides and of homicides of others?

temperature. But it is enough to cast a glance at Table 12 to convince oneself that this explanation is without any foundation. If it were correct, one should expect to see the curve representing the monthly changes in suicide remain horizontal during the autumn and winter, then suddenly rise at the very moment when these first warm days arrive, since they are the source of all the ill, and afterwards fall no less abruptly once the organism has had time to acclimatize itself. However, the contrary is true: the progress is perfectly regular, the rise, while it persists, being more or less the same from month to month. It goes up from December to January, from January to February, and from February to March, that is to say during the months when the first hot days are still far off; and it goes down again progressively from September to December, when they have been gone for so long that it is impossible to attribute this fall to their disappearance. In any case, when do they appear? People are generally agreed that it is in April. Indeed, from March to April, the thermometer rises from 6.4° to 10.1°; so the rise is 57 per cent, while it is no more than 40 per cent from April to May and 21 per cent from May to June. So we should observe an exceptionally strong rise in suicides in April. In reality, however, the increase that occurs then is not greater than the one seen from January to February (18 per cent). Finally, since this rise is not only sustained, but even increases, though more slowly until June or even July, it seems very hard to attribute it to the effect of spring, unless this season is prolonged through the summer, with the sole exception of the month of August.

In any case, if the first sign of heat was so fatal, the first cold spell should have the same effect. It, too, surprises the organism which has become unaccustomed to it, and disturbs the vital functions until they have managed to readapt. However, in autumn there is no rise that even faintly resembles that which we see in spring. So we cannot understand how Morselli, having accepted that according to his theory the passage from hot to cold should have the same effect as the contrary movement, can add: 'This effect of the first cold can be verified either on our statistical tables or, better still, in the second rise of all our

graphs in autumn, in the months of October and November, that is when the passage from the warm season to the cold season is most sharply felt by the human organism and, in particular, by the nervous system.'* One only has to look at Table 12 to see that this statement is completely contradicted by the facts. From the very figures given by Morselli, we can see that from October to November the number of suicides hardly rises in any country but, on the contrary, falls. The only exceptions are Denmark, Ireland and one period in Austria (1851–54), and the rise is very small in all three cases.† In Denmark, they go up from 68 per 1,000 to 71, in Ireland from 62 to 66 and in Austria from 65 to 68. In the same way, in October, there is an increase in only 8 cases out of 31 observed, namely during one period in Norway, one in Sweden, one in Saxony, one in Bavaria, Austria, the Duchy of Baden and two in Württemberg. Everywhere else the rate either falls or is stationary. In short, in 21 cases out of 31, or 67 per cent, there is a regular fall between September and December.

The perfect consistency of the curve, both in its rising phase and in the opposite, thus proves that the monthly variations in suicide cannot result from a passing crisis of the organism, occurring once or twice in the year, following a sudden and temporary loss of balance. They can only depend on causes that also vary with the same regularity.

IV

It is not impossible now to start seeing the nature of these causes.

If we compare the proportional share of each month in the total of annual suicides to the mean length of the day at the same time of the year, the two series of numbers that one obtains vary in exactly the same way (see Table 13).

* Op. cit., p. 148.

† We are leaving out the figures relating to Switzerland. These are only calculated for a single year (1876) and consequently no conclusion can be drawn from them. In any event, the rise from October to November is very slight, suicides rising from 83 per 1,000 to 90.

TABLE 13

Comparison of monthly variations in suicide with the average length of days in France

	Length of days (last day of month)	Rise and fall	No. of suicides per month out of 1,000 per year	Rise and fall
		Rise		*Rise*
January	9 h 19'		68	
February	10 h 56'	Jan.–April	80	Jan.–April
March	12 h 47'	55%	86	50%
April	14 h 29'		102	
May	15 h 48'	April–June	105	April–June
June	16 h 3'	10%	107	5%
		Fall		*Fall*
July	15 h 4'	June–Aug.	100	June–Aug.
August	13 h 25'	17%	82	24%
September	11 h 39'	Aug.–Oct.	74	Aug.–Oct.
October	9 h 51'	27%	70	27%
November	8 h 31'	Oct.–Dec.	66	Oct.–Dec.
December	8 h 11'	17%	61	13%

The parallel is perfect. On either side, the maximum is reached at the same moment, and the minimum likewise. In between these extremes, the two orders of facts proceed *pari passu*.[6] When the days are fast increasing in length, suicides increase considerably (January to April); when the increase in one factor slows down, the other does the same (April to June). The same correspondence can be found in the period of decrease. Even the different months when daylight lasts for approximately the same amount of time have roughly the same number of suicides (July and May, August and April).

Such a regular and precise correspondence cannot be accidental, so there must be a relationship between the length of daylight and the number of suicides. This hypothesis, as well as deriving directly from Table 13, explains a fact that we

pointed out earlier. We saw that, in the main European societies, suicides are distributed strictly in the same fashion between the different parts of the year, seasons or months.* The theories of Ferri and Lombroso were unable to give any explanation for this curious uniformity, because the temperature is very different in the different lands of Europe and develops in various ways in them. By contrast, the length of the day is more or less the same for all the European countries that we have compared.

However, what finally proves the reality of the relationship is the fact that in every season, most suicides take place in daylight. Brierre de Boismont managed to investigate the dossiers of 4,595 suicides committed in Paris between 1834 and 1843. In 3,518 cases where the time of death could be ascertained, 2,094 took place in daylight, 766 in the evening and 658 at night. The suicides by daylight and in the evening thus represent four-fifths of the total and the first of these, by themselves, three-fifths.

Prussian statistics are more complete on this point. They record 11,822 cases which occurred during the years 1869–72. These merely confirm the conclusions of Brierre de Boismont. For reasons of space, since the relationships are substantially the same from year to year, we only give those for 1871 and 1872.

It is clear from Table 14 that most suicides occur in daylight, so if daytime produces more suicides than night, it is normal for the number to increase as the days become longer.

But what causes this influence of daylight?

We can certainly not explain it by the effects of sunlight and temperature. Indeed, suicides committed in the middle of the day, that is to say at the moment of greatest heat, are much less numerous than those taking place in the afternoon or later morning. We shall even observe below that there is a marked

* This uniformity allows us to avoid complicating Table 13. It is not necessary to compare the monthly variations in daylight and the rate of suicide in countries other than France, since both are substantially the same everywhere, provided one does not compare countries with too widely differing latitudes.

TABLE 14

	No. of suicides at each time of day out of 1,000 daily suicides				
	1871			1872	
Early morning*	35.9			35.9	
Later morning	158.3			159.7	
Midday	73.1	375		71.5	391.9
Afternoon	143.6			160.7	
Evening	53.5			61.0	
Night	212.6			219.3	
Time not established	322.0			291.9	
	1,000			1,000	

decline around noon. Setting aside this explanation, there is only one possible, which is that daylight favours suicide because it is the time when business is most active, when human beings interact with one another and social life is at its most intense.

The few figures that we have showing how suicide is distributed between the various times of day or days of the week confirms this interpretation. On the basis of 1,993 cases observed by Brierre de Boismont in Paris and 548 cases covering the whole of France and collected by Guerry, the following are the main variations over the twenty-four hours:

Paris	No. of suicides per hour	France	No. of suicides per hour
From midnight to 6 a.m.	55	From midnight to 6 a.m.	30
From 6 a.m. to 11 a.m.	*108*	From 6 a.m. to noon	*61*
From 11 a.m. to noon	81	From noon to 2 p.m.	32
From noon to 4 p.m.	*105*	From 2 p.m. to 6 p.m.	47
From 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.	81	From 6 p.m. to midnight	38
From 8 p.m. to midnight	61		

* The time of day immediately following sunrise.

It can be seen that there are two moments when suicide reaches a peak, which are the times when business is most active, in the morning and afternoon. Between the two, there is a rest period when activity is temporarily suspended, when suicide stops for a while. It is around eleven in the morning in Paris and noon in the provinces that this pause occurs. It is more marked and longer in the *départements* than in the capital, for the sole reason that this is the time when provincials take their main meal of the day, which is why suicide halts for a longer and more definite period. The figures for Prussia, which we mentioned a little earlier, could attract the same comments.*

In addition to that, Guerry, after determining for 6,587 cases the day of the week on which they occurred, obtained the scale that we have reproduced as Table 15. From this it emerges that suicide gets rarer at the end of the week, from Friday onwards. We know that prejudices about Friday have the effect of slowing down public life. There is much less traffic on the railways on that day and people are reluctant to make contacts or do business on an ill-omened day. On Saturday, from afternoon onwards, there is a gradual slowing-down. In some countries, many people do not work at all and it may be that the prospect of the following day's rest has an advance calming effect on the mind. Finally, on Sunday, economic activity ceases altogether. If events of another kind do not then replace those that have vanished, if places of entertainment do not fill up at the time when workshops, offices and shops empty, one might imagine that the fall in suicide rates on Sunday would be even more marked. It will be noted that this day is the one when the female share is highest, and it is also on that day that women go out

* We have another proof of this rhythm of pause and activity through which social life passes at various times of the day in the way in which accidents vary according to time. Here, according to the Prussian statistical bureau, is how they are distributed:

From 6 a.m. to noon	1,011 accidents per hour, on average		
From noon to 2 p.m.	686	"	"
From 2 p.m. to 6 p.m.	1,191	"	"
From 6 p.m. to 7 p.m.	979	"	"

TABLE 15

	Share of each day out of 1,000 weekly suicides	Proportional share of each sex (%)	
		Men	Women
Monday	15.20	69	31
Tuesday	15.71	68	32
Wednesday	14.90	68	32
Thursday	15.68	67	33
Friday	13.74	67	33
Saturday	11.19	69	31
Sunday	13.57	64	36

most and mingle a little in public life from the home to which they retire for the rest of the week.*

So everything combines to demonstrate that while daylight is the time of day that most favours suicide, it is because it is also the time when social life is in full swing. But now we have a reason which explains why the number of suicides rises when the sun stays longer above the horizon. It is because the simple lengthening of the days in some sense opens a wider scope for collective life. Rest-time starts later and ends earlier, so this collective activity has more space to develop. It is therefore a necessary consequence that the effects implied in it should develop at the same time and, since suicide is one of these, that it should increase.

This first cause is not, however, the only one. If public activity

* It is remarkable that the contrast between the first and second halves of the week can be found in the month. Here, according to Brierre de Boismont, op. cit., p. 424, is the distribution of 4,595 Parisian suicides:

In the first ten days of the month	1,727
In the following ten days of the month	1,488
In the final ten days of the month	1,380

The numerical inferiority of the final decade is even greater than emerges from these figures: because of the 31st day, it sometimes includes eleven rather than ten days. It is as though the system of social life reproduces the divisions of the calendar, that there is, as it were, a renewal of activity every time that one moves into a new period and a sort of languor as it draws towards its end.

is more intense in summer than in spring, and in spring than in autumn or winter, this is not only because the exterior framework in which it takes places is extended as the year advances; it is because it is directly stimulated by other causes.

In the countryside, winter is a time of rest which almost reaches the point of stagnation. It is as though all life had ceased. Social intercourse is rare, both because of the weather and because the slowing-down of business removes one of its motives. The people lapse into a veritable state of hibernation. But as soon as spring comes, everything starts to revive: work resumes, relationships are made, exchanges multiply and there are actual movements of population to satisfy the needs of the agricultural economy. These particular conditions of rural life are bound to have a considerable influence on the monthly statistics for suicide, since the countryside supplies more than half the total figure of voluntary deaths: in France, between 1873 and 1878, it was responsible for 18,470 cases out of a total of 36,365. So it is only to be expected that these should become more numerous the further one moves away from the cold season. They reach a maximum in June or July, that is at the time when the countryside is at its most active. In August, everything starts to quieten down and suicides diminish. The fall only becomes sharp from October and, especially, from November onwards, which may be because several harvests only take place in the autumn.

The same causes affect the whole of the country, though to a lesser degree. Town life, too, is more active in the fine weather: because communication at this time is easier, people are more willing to go out and intersocial relations become more frequent. Here are the seasonal takings for the mainline railways, express trains only, for 1887:*

Winter	71.9 million francs
Spring	86.7 million francs
Summer	105.1 million francs
Autumn	98.1 million francs

* Taken from the *Bulletin du ministère des Travaux publics.*

Movement inside each town goes through the same phases. In the same year of 1887, the number of passengers transported from one point in Paris to another rose regularly from January (655,791 passengers) to June (848,831), falling from then onwards until December (659,960) with the same regularity.*

One final experiment will confirm this interpretation of the facts. If, for the reasons given above, town life may be more active in summer and spring than in the rest of the year, the variation between the two seasons should, even so, be less evident than in the country. Commercial and industrial business, artistic and scientific work, and social interactions are not suspended in winter to the same extent as agricultural work. Townspeople's business can be carried on more or less equally throughout the year. The greater or lesser length of the day should in particular have less effect in large centres of population, because artificial lighting limits the period of darkness more than elsewhere. So if the monthly and seasonal variations in the suicide rate depend on the varying intensity of collective life, they should be less pronounced in large towns than in the country as a whole; and the facts conform strictly to this deduction. Table 16 shows that while, in France, Prussia, Austria and Denmark, there is a separation between the maximum and the minimum of 52, 45 or even 68 per cent, in Paris, Berlin,

* Ibid. The following may be added to all these facts attesting to the growth of social activity during the summer, namely that accidents are more frequent in the fine weather than at other times of the year. Here is the breakdown for Italy:

	1886	*1887*	*1888*
Spring	1,370	2,582	2,457
Summer	1,823	3,290	3,085
Autumn	1,474	2,560	2,780
Winter	1,190	2,748	3,032

If, here, the winter sometimes comes next after summer, this is solely because falls are more numerous because of the ice, and that cold, by itself, produces particular types of accident. If we deduct those having this kind of cause, the seasons appear in the same order as for suicide.

TABLE 16

Seasonal variations in suicide in some large cities compared to those of the country as a whole

Proportional figures for 1,000 annual suicides

	Winter	Spring	Summer	Autumn
Paris (1888–92)	218	262	277	241
Berlin (1882–85–87–89–90)	231	287	248	232
Hamburg (1887–91)	239	289	232	258
Vienna (1871–72)	234	302	211	253
Frankfurt (1867–75)	239	245	278	238
Geneva (1838–47) (1852–54)	232	288	253	227
France (1835–43)	201	283	306	210
Prussia (1869–72)	199	284	290	227
Austria (1858–59)	185	281	315	219

Proportional figures for each season expressed as a percentage of those for the winter

	Winter	Spring	Summer	Autumn
Paris	100	120	127	100
Berlin	100	124	107	100.3
Hamburg	100	120	107	103
Vienna	100	129	90	108
Frankfurt	100	102	112	99
Geneva	100	124	109	97
France	100	140	152	104
Prussia	100	142	145	114
Austria	100	151	168	118

Hamburg, etc., the gap is on average only 20–25 per cent and even goes down to 12 per cent in Frankfurt.

One can also see that in large towns, contrary to what we observe in the rest of a society, the maximum is usually reached in spring. Even when spring is overtaken by summer (as in Paris and Frankfurt), the lead taken by this latter season is slight. This is because in major centres of population, the hot season brings a veritable exodus of the main agents of public life,

which, consequently, exhibits a slight tendency to slow down.*

To sum up: we began by establishing that the direct action of cosmic factors cannot explain the monthly or seasonal variations in the rate of suicide. We now see the nature of the true causes and where we should search for them, this positive result confirming the conclusion drawn from our critical study. If voluntary deaths rise from January to July, this is not because the heat exercises a disturbing effect on organisms, but because social life is more intense. Of course, if it reaches this pitch of intensity, this is because the position of the sun on the ecliptic, the state of the atmosphere, etc., allow it to develop more freely than in winter. But it is not the physical environment that stimulates it directly. Above all, this is not what affects the rate of suicide. That depends on social conditions.

It is true that we are still not sure how collective life can exercise this effect. But we already realize that, if it is this that embodies the causes that make the rate of suicide vary, it must rise or fall according to whether this collective life is more or less active. As for deciding precisely what are the causes, this will be the subject of the next book.

* It will be noted in addition that the proportional figures for the different seasons are substantially the same in the large cities being compared, while being different from those relative to the countries in which these cities are situated. So it is that we find everywhere the same constancy of suicide rates in identical social milieux. The suicidal tendency varies in the same way at different times of the year in Berlin, Vienna, Geneva, Paris, and so on, from which one can already sense how real it is.

CHAPTER 4
IMITATION*

However, before we look into the social causes of suicide, we must determine the influence of one last psychological factor, because of the extreme importance that it has assumed as an originator of social facts in general and suicide in particular. This is imitation.

That imitation is a purely psychological phenomenon is demonstrated by the fact that it can occur among individuals who have no social connection between them. A man can imitate another without their being linked to one another or coming from a single group on which they are equally dependent, and the imitative propagation does not in itself have the power to link them. A sneeze, a rhythmical movement or a homicidal impulse can be transferred from one individual to another without there being anything except a chance, momentary association between them. They do not need to have any intellectual or moral communion, or to exchange services, or to speak the same language, and they are no more linked after this transfer than they were before. In short, the procedure by which we imitate our fellows is the same that allows us to reproduce natural sounds, shapes of things and movements of creatures. Since there is nothing social in the latter case, the same is true of the former. It takes its origin in certain properties of our representational life, which do not derive from any collective

* Bibliography: Lucas, *De l'imitation contagieuse*, Paris, 1833; Despine, *De la contagion morale*, 1870; *De l'imitation*, 1871; Moreau de Tours (Paul), *De la contagion du suicide*, Paris, 1875; Aubry, *Contagion du meurtre*, Paris, 1888; Tarde, *Les lois de l'imitation (passim). Philosophie pénale*, pp. 319ff., Paris, F. Alcan; Corre, *Crime et suicide*, pp. 207ff.

influence. So if we could establish that it contributes to the suicide rate, we should have to conclude that this depends directly, either in whole or in part, on individual causes.

I

But before we examine the facts, we must clarify the meaning of the word. Sociologists are so much in the habit of using terms without defining them, that is to say, without determining or methodically restricting the order of things that they intend to discuss, that they constantly and unwittingly allow a single expression to extend from the concept that it originally designated or was meant to designate to other more or less similar notions. In such circumstances, the idea ends by achieving a degree of ambiguity that makes it impossible to discuss, because, having no defined limits, it can be transformed almost at will according to the needs of the debate, and without criticism being able to anticipate all the various aspects that it might assume. This is particularly the case with what has been called the imitative instinct.

The word is commonly used to designate the following three groups of facts simultaneously:

1. It may happen that, inside a single social group all of whose elements are subject to the action of a single cause or a range of similar causes, there is a kind of levelling between the different consciousnesses, as a result of which everyone thinks or feels alike. The name 'imitation' has very often been given to the set of operations which result in this agreement. In that event, the word designates the property, experienced simultaneously by a certain number of different individuals, which certain states of consciousness have of acting on each other and combining together to give rise to a new state. Using the word in this sense, we mean to say that the combination is due to reciprocal imitation of each by all and all by each.* It has been said[1] that it is 'in the tumultuous assemblies in our towns

* Bordier, *Vie des sociétés*, Paris, 1887, p. 77; Tarde, *Philosophie pénale*, p. 321.

and in the great scenes of our revolutions'* that the nature of imitation in this sense is most clearly manifested. This is where we can best see how men gathered together can be mutually transformed by the effect that they have on each other.

2. The name has been given to the need that drives us to harmonize ourselves with the society to which we belong and, with this end, to adopt the ways of thinking and behaving that are common around us. This is how we follow fashions and customs, and since juridical and moral practices are only precise and particularly inveterate customs, this is how we usually act when we act morally. Whenever we cannot see the reasons for the moral precept that we are obeying, we do so solely because it has social authority behind it. In this sense, imitation of fashion has been distinguished from imitation of customs or manners, according to whether we are modelling ourselves on our contemporaries or on our ancestors.

3. It may be that we reproduce an act that has taken place in front of us or to our knowledge, solely because it has happened in front of us or because we have heard it spoken about. In itself, it does not have any intrinsic character that gives us a reason to repeat it. We do not copy it because we judge it to be useful or to harmonize ourselves with our model, but simply for the sake of copying it. The representation that we give of it automatically determines the movements that carry it out afresh. So it is that we yawn, laugh or cry because we see someone else yawning, laughing or crying. This is also how the idea of homicide is transferred from one consciousness to another. It is aping an action for its own sake.

However, these three orders of things are very different from one another.

Chief of all, *the first of these should not be confused with the other two, because it does not include any case of reproduction properly so called*, but syntheses *sui generis* of different states or, at least, of different origins. So the word 'imitation' should not serve to designate it, unless it is to lose all clear meaning.

Let us analyse the phenomenon. A certain number of men

* Tarde, ibid., pp. 319–20.

gather and are affected in the same way by the same event; they notice this, at least partial, unanimity by the identical signs through which each feeling is demonstrated. So what happens then? Each individual has a vague idea of the state in which those around him find themselves. Images arise in the minds of each individual expressing the various manifestations emerging from different points in the crowd with their various nuances. So far, nothing has occurred that could be described by the term 'imitation'; there have merely been perceptible impressions, then sensations, identical in every respect to those in us that are determined by external bodies.* Then what happens? Once they are aroused in my consciousness, these varied representations combine with one another and with those which make up my own feelings. In this way, a new state is formed which is no longer mine to the same extent as the previous one, and is less marked by individuality, so that a series of repeated developments, each comparable to the previous one, will increasingly remove from it anything that may still be too peculiar to it. Such combinations, too, cannot be described as instances of imitation any more than the previous one, unless we agree to give that name to every intellectual operation through which two or more similar states of consciousness appeal to one another through their likeness to one another, then fuse and mingle in a product that absorbs them and differs from them. Of course, a word can mean anything. But we must agree that this would be a particularly arbitrary definition which, consequently, could only be a source of confusion, because it leaves the word with none of its usually accepted meaning. Instead of 'imitation', we should here be talking about 'creation', since something new has emerged from this com-

* By attributing these images to a process of imitation, do people mean that they are simple copies of the states that they express? First of all, this would be a singularly crude metaphor, taken from the old and unreliable theory of perceptible types. Moreover, if we understand the term 'imitation' in this sense, we should have to extend it generally to all our sensations and ideas, because there are none of these of which it cannot be said, by virtue of the same metaphor, that they reproduce the object to which they refer. If this is to be the case, then all intellectual life is a product of imitation.

pounding of forces. The process is indeed the only one by virtue of which the mind has the power to create.

It may be said that this creation consists merely in increasing the intensity of the original state. But, first of all, a quantitative change is still a novelty. Moreover, the quantity of things cannot be altered without changing the quality; a feeling, when it becomes two or three times as violent, completely changes its nature. Indeed, it is a constant that the way in which men assembled together affect one another can transform a meeting of mild bourgeois gentlemen into a fearsome monster. It is an odd kind of imitation that produces such changes! If some people have tried to use such an inappropriate term to describe this phenomenon, it is no doubt because they vaguely imagined every individual feeling, as it were, modelling itself on those of other people. But in reality it is not a matter of models or copies. What we have is penetration and fusion of a certain number of states at the heart of another, different one: that is the collective state.

Admittedly, there would be nothing wrong in describing as 'imitation' the cause from which this state arises, if one were to accept that it was always inspired in the crowd by a leader. But, apart from the fact that there has never been the slightest proof of this assertion, which is contradicted by a host of facts showing that the head is the product of the crowd instead of its informative cause, in any case, to the extent that this directional action is real, it has no relation to what has been called mutual imitation, since it is unilateral. Consequently, we do not need to speak of it at the moment. Above all, we must be careful to avoid the confusion that has so greatly obscured the matter. In the same way, if one were to state that there are individuals in the crowd who accede to the general opinion, not spontaneously, but because it imposes itself on them, this would be an undeniable truth. We even consider that there is never, in such cases, an individual consciousness that does not more or less suffer this effect of constraint. But since this originates in the force *sui generis* with which shared practices and beliefs are endowed when they are constituted, it belongs to the second category of facts that we defined above. So let us examine this

category and see how far it deserves the name of 'imitation'.

At the very least it differs from the preceding one in that it implies reproduction. When one follows a fashion or observes a custom, one does what other people have done and are doing every day. Yet this repetition is not, by definition, due to what has been called the imitative instinct, but on the one hand to the sympathy that urges us to avoid upsetting our companions the better to enjoy our exchanges with them, and on the other to the respect inspired in us by collective ways of acting and thinking, and by the direct or indirect pressure that the collective exercises on us in order to prevent disputes and maintain this feeling of respect in us. The action is not reproduced because it took place in our presence and to our knowledge, and because we like reproduction in itself and for itself, but because it appears to us as obligatory and, to some extent, as useful. We perform it not purely and simply because it has previously been performed, but because it bears the stamp of society and because we accord deference to that, a deference in which moreover we could not fail without serious consequences. In a word, *acting out of respect or from fear of criticism is not acting by imitation.* Such actions are not essentially different from those that we agree to every time that we innovate: they take place by virtue of some characteristic inherent in them which makes us consider that they ought to be carried out. But when we rebel against custom instead of following it, our action is determined in no other way: if we adopt a new idea or an original form of behaviour, this is because it has some intrinsic qualities that make it appear necessary to adopt it. Certainly, the motives that impel us are not the same in both cases, but the psychological mechanism is identical. In both cases, an intellectual process intervenes between the representation of the action and its execution which consists in an awareness – clear or confused, fast or slow – of the determining characteristic, whatever it may be. So there is nothing in common* between the way in which we conform to the customs

* Certainly, it may occur in particular cases that a custom, fashion or tradition is reproduced by simple mimicry, but then it is not reproduced as a custom, fashion or tradition.

or manners of our country and the mechanical mimicry that incites us to copy the movements that we observe. Between these two kinds of behaviour, there is all the distance that separates reasonable and considered behaviour from an automatic reflex. The first has its reasons even when these are not expressed in the form of explicit judgements; the second has none, but results directly from the simple witnessing of the action, without any other intervening mental process.

We can now see the mistakes that might be made by combining two such different orders of things under one and the same name. We must beware, indeed: when one speaks of imitation, one implies a phenomenon of contagion and, not unreasonably, we may pass very easily from the first of these ideas to the other. But is there anything contagious about carrying out a moral precept, or deferring to the authority of tradition or of public opinion? So it is that, just as we think we have reduced two realities to a single entity, what we have in fact done is to confuse two quite distinct notions. In pathological biology, we say that a disease is contagious when it is entirely or almost entirely due to the development of a germ that has introduced itself from outside into the organism. But conversely, to the extent that this germ could only develop thanks to the active cooperation of the environment in which it has settled, the term 'contagion' ceases to be appropriate. In the same way, for an action to be attributed to moral contagion, it is not enough for the idea to have been inspired in us by a similar action. It is also necessary that once it has entered the mind, it should automatically and of itself be transformed into movement. In that case, we have a genuine contagion, since it is the external action that, entering us in the form of representation, reproduces itself. There is also imitation, since the new action is everything that it is by virtue of the model that it is copying. But if the impression that the latter creates in us can only produce its effects because of our consent and with our participation, it can then only be called 'contagion' figuratively, and the metaphor is inexact, because the determining causes of our action are the reasons that made us consent, and not the example before our eyes. We ourselves are the authors of the

action, even though we have not invented it.* Consequently, all those expressions that are so often used, to do with imitative propagation and contagious spread, are not appropriate and should be discarded. They distort the facts instead of describing them and obscure the matter instead of elucidating it.

To sum up: if we wish to understand what we mean, we cannot use a single term to express the *process* through which a collective feeling is developed in a gathering of people, the one which determines our adherence to general or traditional rules of conduct and, finally, the one that impels Panurge's sheep[2] to jump in the water because one of them has previously done so. *Shared feelings, bowing to the authority of opinion* and, finally, *automatic repetition of what others have done* are quite different things. In the first order of events, there is no reproduction; in the second, it is only the consequence of logical processes,† judgements and reasoning, either implicit or formal, which are the essential element in the phenomenon, so this is not something it can serve to define. It only becomes the whole explanation in the third case. Here it extends to everything: the new action is only an echo of the original action. Not only does it repeat that action, but the repetition has no reason to exist outside itself or any cause apart from the totality of qualities that, in certain circumstances, make us imitative beings. So the name 'imitation' must be reserved exclusively for events of that category, if we wish to give the term a precise meaning, and we shall say: *imitation occurs when an action has as its* immediate

* It is true that the term 'imitation' has sometimes been applied to everything that is not an original invention. In this sense, it is clear that almost all human acts are acts of imitation, because inventions properly so called are rare. But for the very reason that, in this case, the term 'imitation' designates almost everything, it ceases to designate anything precise. Such terminology can only be a source of confusion.

† It is true that people speak about logical imitation (see Tarde, *Lois de l'imitation*, 1st edition, p. 158); this means the kind that consists in reproducing an action because it serves a definite end. But such imitation clearly has nothing in common with the imitative tendency, so the events that are consequent on one must be carefully distinguished from those caused by the other. They cannot be explained at all in the same way. On the other hand, as we have just shown, fashion-imitation and custom-imitation are as logical as other kinds, even though in certain respects they do obey their own logic.

antecedent *the representation of a similar action previously accomplished by another person, without any explicit or implicit intellectual process with a bearing on the intrinsic characteristics of the action reproduced intervening between the representation and the execution of the action.*

So when we ask ourselves about the influence of imitation on the suicide rate, this is the sense in which we must use the word.* If we do not determine the meaning in this way, then we are likely to mistake a purely verbal expression for an explanation. So when we say of a manner of acting or thinking that it is an example of imitation, we imply that imitation explains it, which is why we think that we have said all that is necessary when we have pronounced this impressive word. Yet it only has this property in the case of automatic reproduction of an action. In that case, it can in itself provide a satisfactory explanation,† because everything that happens in this event is a product of imitative contagion. But when we follow a custom or conform to some moral precept, the reason for our obedience is to be found in the nature of the precept or the intrinsic character of the custom and the feelings that they inspire in us. So when people speak of imitation with regard to this kind of action, they in reality explain nothing: they merely tell us that whatever we are reproducing is not new, that is to say, that it is reproduced, but without explaining in any way why it took place or why we are reproducing it. The term is even less able to replace an analysis of the very complex *process* that leads to collective feelings, something that we were only able to describe

* Actions, whether individual or collective, that are imitated because of the moral or intellectual prestige of a particular person tend to fall into the second category, since there is nothing automatic in the imitation. It implies reasoning: one acts like the person in whom one has placed one's trust, because the superiority that one accords to him guarantees the appropriateness of his actions. The reasons that one has for following this person are the same that one has for respecting him, so one has not contributed at all to explaining such actions by merely saying that they were imitated. The important thing is to know the causes of the confidence or respect that led to this obedience to them.

† And even then, as we shall see, imitation in itself is only rarely a sufficient explanation.

earlier in a conjectural and approximate manner.* This is why the inexact use of the term may lead us to think that we have answered the questions in advance when all we have done is, in fact, to hide them from ourselves.

Moreover, it is only on condition that we define imitation in this way that we may eventually have the right to consider it as a psychological factor in suicide. What has been called reciprocal imitation is an eminently social phenomenon, because it is the common development of a common feeling. In the same way, the reproduction of customs and traditions is an effect of social causes, because it is due to the obligatory character and the special prestige with which collective practices and beliefs are endowed for no other reason than that they are collective. Consequently, to the extent that one might agree that suicide spreads through one or other of these means, it will be found to depend on social causes and not individual circumstances.

Having thus defined the terms of the problem, let us examine the facts.

II

It is not to be doubted that the idea of suicide is spread by contagion. We have already mentioned the corridor in which fifteen patients hanged themselves in succession and the famous sentrybox in the army camp at Boulogne which was the scene of several suicides in a short period of time. Events of this kind have often been recorded in the army: in 1862 in the 4th

* It has to be admitted that we only vaguely know what it is. How, indeed, do we get the combinations that result in a collective state, what are the elements that enter into it and how does the dominant state arise? All these questions are far too complex to be answered by introspection alone: we need a host of different experiments and observations, and these have not been carried out. We still have only a slight idea of the laws that govern the combination of mental states in the individual, and we are that much further from understanding the far more complex mechanism of combinations which result from collective life. All too often, our explanations are only metaphors. So we do not consider what we have said above as a precise description of the phenomenon; all we have set out to do is to demonstrate that it is something quite different from imitation.

Chasseurs in Provins; in 1864 in the 15th Regiment of the Line; in the 41st, firstly in Montpellier, then in Nîmes, in 1868; and so on. In 1813, in the little village of Saint-Pierre-Monjau, a woman hanged herself from a tree, and shortly afterwards several others did the same. Pinel[3] records that a priest hanged himself in the area around Étampes; a few days later, two others killed themselves and several lay people did likewise.* When Lord Castlereagh[4] threw himself into Vesuvius, several of his companions followed his example. The tree of Timon the Misanthropist[5] is proverbial. The frequency of such cases of contagion in asylums and prisons is attested by several writers.†

However, it is customary to relate to this subject and ascribe to imitation a certain number of events that appear to us to originate in something quite different. This is the case, in particular, of what has sometimes been referred to as obsidional [or siege] suicide. In his *History of the Jewish Wars*,‡ Josephus relates that during the siege of Jerusalem a certain number of those inside the city killed themselves.[6] In one particular case, forty Jews who had taken refuge in an underground tunnel all decided to die and killed one another. The Xanthians, according to Montaigne, when besieged by Brutus,[7] 'hurried about pell-mell, men, women and children, with such a raging thirst for death that there is nothing people do to flee death that these did not do to flee life, in such manner that Brutus was barely able to save a very small number of them'.§[8] It does not seem to me that these *mass suicides* originate in one or two individual cases of which they are merely the repetition. They appear to result from a collective resolve, a veritable social consensus rather than a simple contagious spread. The idea does not arise in one individual in particular, then spread among the others, but is developed by the whole of the group which, placed jointly in a desperate situation, collectively consigns itself to death. This is just what happens every time that a social group, whatever it may

* See the details of the events in Legoyt, op. cit., pp. 227ff.

† See similar records in Ebrard, op. cit., p. 376.

‡ III, 26.

§ *Essais*, II, 3.

be, reacts in concert under pressure from similar circumstances. The accord does not change in nature because it is reached in a surge of passion; it would not in essence be different if it were more methodical and the outcome of greater reflection. So it is incorrect to speak of imitation.

We might say the same of several other instances of the same kind, for example that recorded by Esquirol, who says: 'Historians assure us that the Peruvians and the Mexicans, in despair at the destruction of their religion . . ., killed themselves in such great numbers that more perished by their own hands than by the sword and the fire of their barbarous conquerors.' More generally, if imitation is to be blamed, it is not enough to ascertain that rather a large number of suicides occur at the same time and in the same place, because they might be due to a general state of the social environment producing a collective tendency in the group which expresses itself in the form of multiple suicides. In brief, in order to define the terminology, it might be a good idea to distinguish moral epidemics from moral contagions: these two words which are used indiscriminately in place of each other in fact designate two very different kinds of thing. An epidemic is a social event, produced by social causes, while contagion never involves anything other than the rebounding of individual events, repeated more or less often.*

Once this distinction has been established, it will certainly have the effect of reducing the list of suicides attributable to imitation; however, there is no denying that there are a large number of them. Perhaps there is no phenomenon that so easily becomes contagious. The homicidal urge itself is not so likely to spread. Cases in which it propagates itself automatically are less frequent and, above all, the role of imitation is in general less dominant in these. One would say that, contrary to popular belief, the instinct of self-preservation is less deeply embedded

* We shall see later that in every society there is at every time and normally a collective disposition that is expressed in the form of suicides. This disposition differs from what we intend to call 'epidemic' in that it is chronic, and constitutes a normal element of the moral temperament of the society. An epidemic is also a collective disposition, but one that appears exceptionally, resulting from abnormal and, most often, temporary causes.

in the mind than the fundamental ideas of morality, since it is less resistant to the effect of the same causes. But, once we have accepted that, the question that we asked at the start of the chapter remains unanswered. It does not follow *a priori* from the fact that suicide can be communicated from one individual to another, that this contagion produces social effects, that is to say that it affects the social rate of suicide, the only phenomenon that we are studying. However undeniable it may be, it may very well happen that it has only sporadic, individual consequences. The preceding remarks do not therefore solve the problem, though they do give a better idea of its significance. If imitation is, indeed, as has been claimed, a primary and particularly rich source of social phenomena, it is chiefly in the realm of suicide that it should demonstrate its power, since there is no event on which it has more influence. In this way, suicide will provide us with the means to verify, through a decisive experiment, the reality of these remarkable properties that are attributed to imitation.

III

If this influence does exist, it should chiefly be evident in the geographical distribution of suicides. We should see, in certain cases, the characteristic suicide rate of a country or locality communicating itself, as it were, to neighbouring localities. So we must look at the map, but we must do so methodically.

Whenever two or more adjacent *départements* show a similarly pronounced tendency to suicide, some writers have seen fit to ascribe this to imitation. However, this spread within a single region could very well derive from the fact that certain causes favouring suicide are equally prevalent there and the social environment is the same. To be sure that a tendency or an idea is spread through imitation, we should have to see it leave the places where it originated and extend to others which, in themselves, were not liable to produce it. For, as we have shown, imitative spread only occurs to the extent that the thing imitated, and it alone, without the intervention of other factors, automatically determines the events that reproduce it. Thus, in

order to decide the role of imitation in the phenomenon that concerns us, we must have a less simple criterion than the one that is so often considered sufficient.

Above all, there can be no imitation unless there is a model to be imitated. There is no contagion without a source from which it emerges and where it consequently reaches its greatest intensity. Similarly, one would be wrong to assume that a tendency to suicide spreads from one part of society to another unless observation reveals the existence of certain centres from which it spreads. But how could these be recognized?

Firstly, they must differ from all the surrounding points by their greater tendency to suicide: they should be seen to emerge on the map with a darker shade than the neighbouring areas. Indeed, since, naturally, imitation also operates there, at the same time as the causes that do genuinely produce suicide, cases there must certainly be more numerous. In the second place, for these centres to play the part that is ascribed to them, and consequently for us to be able to attribute the events that occur around them to their influence, each of them must to some extent be the focus of attention of the other areas. It is clear that something cannot be imitated unless it is in view. If people are looking elsewhere, however numerous suicides were, it would be as though they did not exist, because they would be ignored; as a result, they would not be imitated. And people can only have their eyes fixed in this way on a point that occupies an important place in regional life. In other words, the phenomena of contagion should be most evident around capitals and large towns. One might all the more expect to see this, given that in this case the spreading effect of imitation would be helped and reinforced by other factors, namely the moral authority of large centres which sometimes ensures such a great power of expansion to their lifestyle and customs. So it is here, if anywhere, that imitation must have social effects. Finally, since everyone admits that the influence of example, other things being equal, diminishes with distance, the adjacent regions should be increasingly spared the further they are from the main source, and vice versa. These are the three conditions

that the map of suicides must satisfy, at the very least, if one is to attribute the evidence that it presents even partially to imitation. After that we shall still have to consider whether this geographical distribution is not due to the parallel distribution of the conditions of life on which suicide depends.

Having outlined these rules, let us apply them.

Existing maps, on which for France the suicide rate is only shown by *départements*, are not adequate for our purposes, because they do not allow us to study the possible effects of imitation in the very place where they should be most noticeable, that is between the different parts of a single *département*. Moreover, the presence of a district which is very productive of suicides, or the contrary, can artificially raise, or lower, the average for the *département* and so create an apparent discontinuity between the other districts and districts within neighbouring *départements*, or else, on the contrary, disguise an actual continuity. Finally, the effect of large towns is too much extenuated to be easily seen. So we have made a map by districts (*arrondissements*)* especially to study this question. It refers to the five-year period 1887–91. Examining it, we find the most unexpected results.†

What strikes us first of all is the existence in the north of a very large dark area, the main part of which covers the region of the former Île-de-France, but which extends quite deeply into Champagne and spreads as far as Lorraine. If this were due to imitation, the centre should be in Paris, which is the only conspicuous conurbation in this whole area. Indeed, the influence of Paris is usually blamed for this spread: Guerry even said that if one were to start from any point on the periphery of the country with the exception of Marseille and make one's way towards the capital, one would see the number of suicides increase the closer one got to it. But while the map by *départements*

* [Translator's note] The *arrondissement* is the sub-division of a *département* (as well as being the administrative district into which large towns, such as Paris, are divided). The smallest administrative unit is the *commune*, of which there are some 36,000 in France.

† See Map 2, pp. 132–33.

might give plausibility to this interpretation, the map by *arrondissements* shows it to be without foundation. It emerges that the Seine has a lesser rate of suicide than all the surrounding *arrondissements*: it numbers only 471 per million inhabitants, while Coulommiers has 500, Versailles 514, Melun 518, Meaux 525, Corbeil 559, Pontoise 561 and Provins 562. Even the *arrondissements* in Champagne are well ahead of those closest to the Seine: Reims has 501 suicides, Épernay 537, Arcis-sur-Aube 548, Château-Thierry 623. In his study of suicide in Seine-et-Marne, Dr Leroy remarked with amazement the fact that the *arrondissement* of Meaux had relatively more suicides than the Seine.* Here are the figures that he gives us:

	1851–63	1865–66
Arrondissement of Meaux	1 suicide per 2,418 inhabitants	1 suicide per 2,547 inhabitants
Seine	1 per 2,750	1 per 2,822

And the *arrondissement* of Meaux was not alone in this. *The same writer gives us the names of 166 communes of the same département in which, at the time, there were more suicides than in Paris.* It is an odd source of contagion that in this respect falls so far below the secondary centres that it is supposed to feed. However, leaving aside the Seine, it is impossible to see another focal point, because it is even harder to make Paris subordinate to Corbeil or Pontoise.

A little further north, we find another spot, less even, but also very dark; this corresponds to Normandy. So, if it were due to a contagious spread, it should start from Rouen, the capital of the province and a notable town. But the two points in this region where suicide is highest are the *arrondissement* of Neufchâtel (509 suicides) and that of Pont-Audemar (537 per million inhabitants), and these do not even border on one

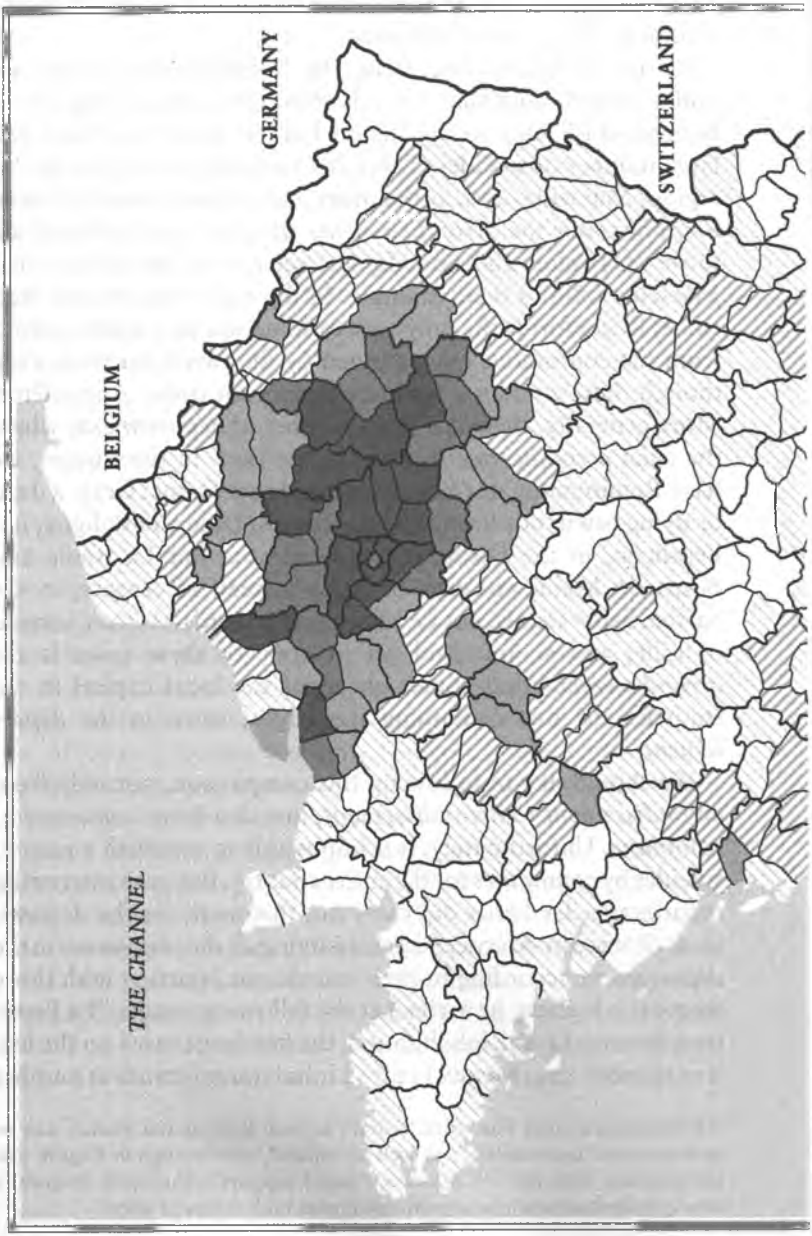
* Op. cit., p. 213. According to the same writer, even the whole *départements* of Marne and Seine-et-Marne appeared to have overtaken the Seine in 1865–66. At the time, the Marne reportedly had one suicide for every 2,791 inhabitants, Seine-et-Marne one for every 2,768 and Seine one for every 2,822.

another. In any case, the moral* composition of the province cannot be due to their influence.

In the far south-east, along the Mediterranean coast, we find a strip of land that extends from the furthest edge of the Bouches-du-Rhône to the Italian border; here, too, there is a large number of suicides. There is a veritable metropolis in this region, Marseille, and, at the other end, a great centre of social life, Nice. But the *arrondissements* that are most affected are those of Toulon and Forcalquier, yet no one would say that Marseille follows their example. In the same way, on the west coast, Rochefort is the only part to stand out in a darker colour from the continuous mass formed by the two Charentes, even though these contain a far more significant town, Angoulême. More generally, there is a large number of *départements* where the chief *arrondissement* is not in the lead. In the Vosges, we have Remiremont, not Épinal; in the Haute-Saône, Gray, a dead or dying town, not Vesoul; in the Doubs, Dôle and Poligny, not Besançon; in the Gironde, not Bordeaux, but La Réole and Bazas; in Maine-et-Loire, Saumur, instead of Angers; in the Sarthe, Saint-Calais, not Le Mans; in the Nord, Avesnes, instead of Lille, and so on. And yet in none of these cases is the *arrondissement* that comes ahead of the local capital in the statistics the one containing the largest town in the *département*.

We should like to follow up this comparison, not only from *arrondissement* to *arrondissement*, but also from *commune* to *commune*. Unfortunately, it is impossible to establish a map of suicides by *communes* for the entire country. But in an interesting monograph, Dr Leroy did carry out this work for the *département* of Seine-et-Marne. After classifying all the *communes* in the *département* according to their suicide rate, starting with those where it is highest, he arrived at the following results: 'La Ferté-sous-Jouarre (4,482 inhabitants), the first large town on the list, is at number 124; Meaux (10,762 inhabitants) comes at number

* [Translator's note] The word 'moral', in both English and French, can be used to mean 'non-material', as well as 'ethical', even though in English it is less common with the first meaning ('moral support'). Durkheim frequently uses it, in both senses (and sometimes implies both senses at once).


GERMANY
SWITZERLAND
BELGIUM
THE CHANNEL



Map 2 Suicides in France per Arrondissement *(1887–91)*

130; Provins (7,547 inhabitants) is at number 135; Coulommiers (4,628 inhabitants) at number 138. The closeness of these towns in the order is curious in that it suggests an influence that affects them all in the same way.* Lagny (3,468 inhabitants), which is so close to Paris, only comes at number 219; Montereau-Faut-Yonne (6,217 inhabitants) at number 245; Fontainebleau (11,939 inhabitants) at number 247 ... And finally Melun (11,170 inhabitants), capital of the *département*, only comes in 279th place. By contrast, if one looks at the 25 *communes* at the head of the list, one sees that with the exception of number 2, they are *communes* with a fairly small population.'†

If we go outside France, we can observe almost exactly the same. The part of Europe in which there are the most suicides is that which includes Denmark and central Germany. In this huge area, the country that has far and away the highest suicide

* Of course, it is not a matter of any contagious influence. These are three main towns in *arrondissements* of more or less equal size, separated by a host of *communes* showing very different rates. All that this closeness proves, on the contrary, is that social groups of the same size, placed in sufficiently similar conditions of life, have the same suicide rate, without this necessarily meaning that they are influencing one another.

† Op. cit., pp. 193–94. The very small *commune* in first place (Lesche) has one suicide for 630 inhabitants, or 1,587 suicides per million, a rate four to five times as large as Paris. And such cases are not peculiar to Seine-et-Marne. We are obliged to Dr Legoupils, of Trouville, for information on three tiny *communes* in the *arrondissement* of Pont-l'Evêque: Villerville (978 inhabitants), Cricqueboeuf (150 inhabitants) and Pennedepie (333 inhabitants). The suicide rate for periods varying between fourteen and twenty-five years is respectively 429, 800 and 1,081 per million inhabitants.

Of course, it is true in general that large towns have more suicides than small ones or rural areas. But the statement is only broadly true and there are many exceptions. Moreover, there is a way of reconciling it with the preceding facts which appear to contradict it. It is enough to accept that large towns arise and develop through the influence of the same causes that determine the development of suicide more than towns contribute to determining this themselves. In such circumstances, it is natural that there should be a lot of cities in regions that produce a lot of suicides, though this does not give them a monopoly on voluntary deaths; and that there should be few of them, by contrast, in places where people do not kill themselves, without this small number of suicides being due to their absence. In this way, their average rate would in general be above that of the rural areas, while in certain cases still being below it.

rate is the Kingdom of Saxony, with 311 suicides for every million inhabitants. The Duchy of Saxe-Altenburg comes next with 303 suicides per million, while Brandenburg has only 204. However, it is far from being the case that Germany looks up to these last two little states: it is not Dresden or Altenburg that set the tone for Hamburg and Berlin. Similarly, out of all the Italian provinces, the ones with proportionately the largest number of suicides are Bologna and Livorno (88 and 84); Milan, Genoa, Turin and Rome, according to the averages calculated by Morselli for the years 1864–76, come far behind.

In short, what all the maps show us is that suicide, far from occurring more or less concentrically around certain focal points from which it would radiate outwards, diminishing progressively as it went, is in fact found in large clumps, more or less (but, even so, only roughly) homogeneous, without any central core. Therefore, this is a configuration that shows no evidence of influence. It merely indicates that suicide does not depend on local circumstances, which may vary from one town to another, but that the conditions that affect it are always to some extent general. There are neither imitators nor imitated in this, but a relative identity in effects due to a relative identity in causes. And one may easily explain why this is the case if, as everything that precedes this has tended to suggest, suicide depends essentially on certain conditions in the social environment, because this is something that is usually composed of the same factors over quite large expanses of territory. So it is natural that, wherever it is the same, it should have the same consequences without any kind of contagion being involved. This is why it is most often the case that, in a single region, the suicide rate remains at around the same level. But on the other hand, since the causes that produce it can never be distributed in a perfectly homogeneous manner, it is inevitable that, from one point to another and from one *arrondissement* to another, it should sometimes reveal more or less important variations, such as the ones we have observed.

What proves that this is the correct explanation is that one sees the rate change abruptly and completely whenever the social environment changes suddenly. Its influence never extends

beyond its natural limits. Never does a country that is particularly disposed to suicide because of particular conditions impose this tendency on its neighbours through the sole force of example, if those same conditions or other similar ones are not found there to the same extent. Thus, suicide is endemic in Germany and we have already seen how the country is ravaged by it; we shall show later that Protestantism is the chief cause of this exceptional predisposition. However, three regions are exceptions to the general rule: these are the Rhine provinces, with Westphalia; Bavaria and, above all, Bavarian Swabia; and Posnania. These are the only provinces in all Germany that number fewer than a hundred suicides per million inhabitants. On the map,* these appear as three isolated shapes, the clear patches representing them contrasting with the deeper shades beside them. This is because all of them are Catholic. So the suicidal impulse seething around them, powerful as it is, does not manage to affect them; it stops on their borders for the sole reason that it does not find favourable conditions for spreading across them. In the same way, all the south of Switzerland is Catholic, while all the Protestant elements are in the north. And, seeing how these two regions are contrasted with one another on the map of suicides,† one might think that they belong to different societies. Although they are contiguous and in constant communication, each keeps its individuality from the point of view of suicide. The average is as low on one side as it is high on the other. Similarly, inside northern Switzerland, the cantons of Lucerne, Uri, Unterwalden, Schwyz and Zug, which are Catholic, number not more than 100 suicides per million, even though they are surrounded by Protestant cantons which have much higher rates.

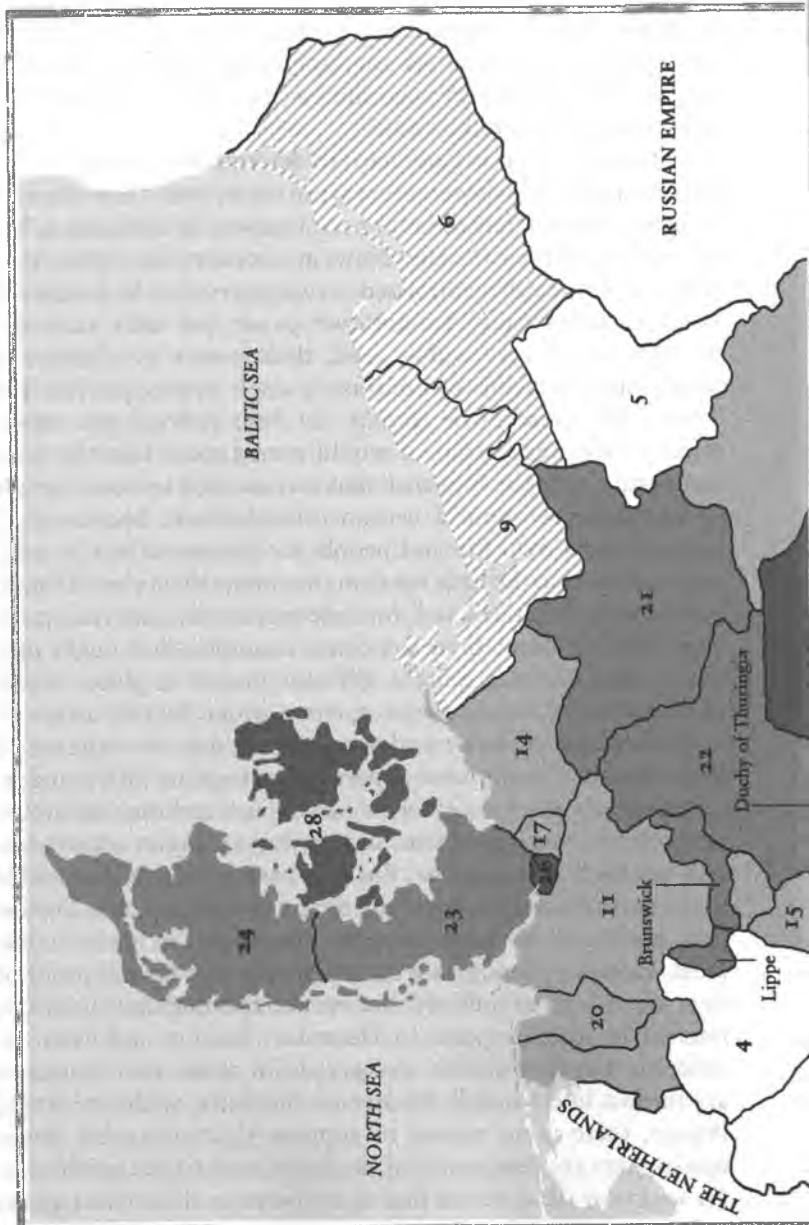
Another experiment could be tried that would, in our opinion, confirm what we have just shown. There are only two ways in which a phenomenon such as 'moral contagion' can arise: either the event that serves as a model spreads through what is called public word of mouth, or it is spread through

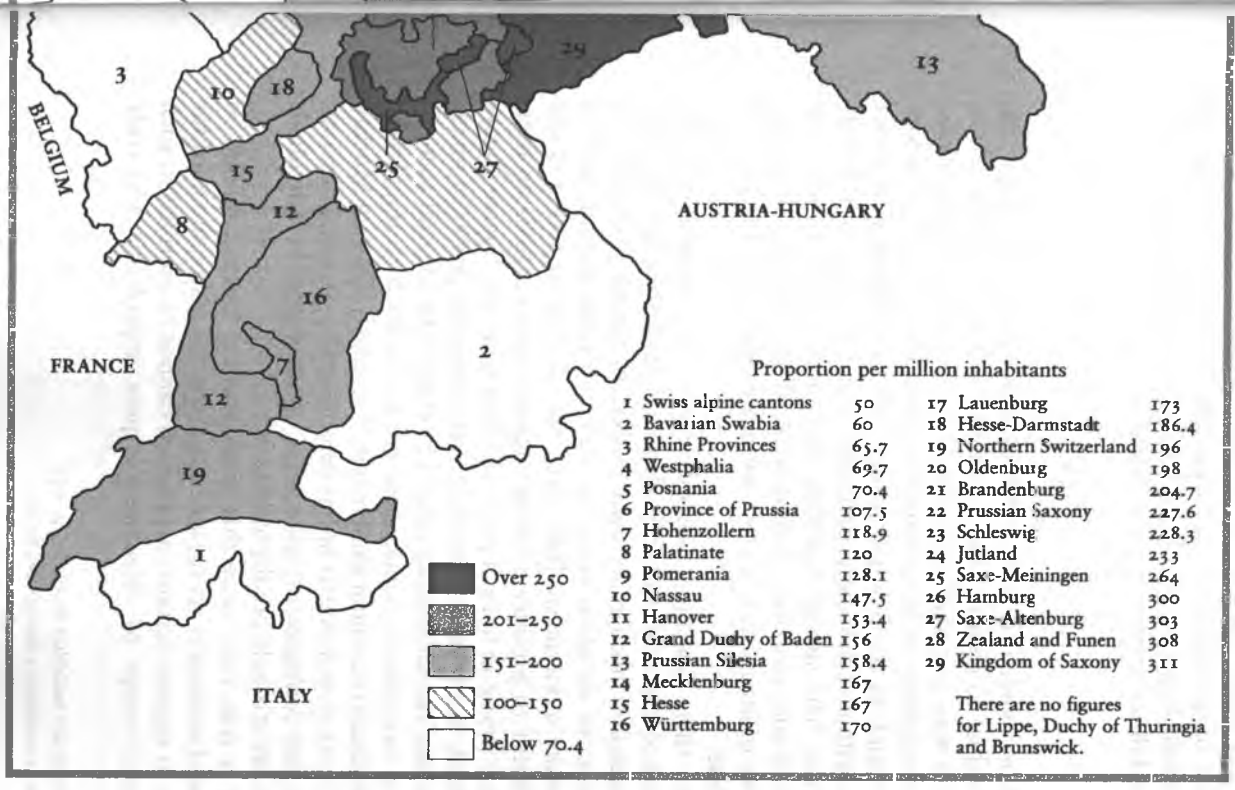
* See Map 3, pp. 138–39.

† See the same map and, for detailed figures for each canton, Book Two, Chap. 5, Table 26.

the press. In general, the newspapers are blamed, and there is no doubt that they represent a powerful medium for dissemination. So if imitation has anything to do with the spread of suicide, this should vary according to the place occupied by the newspapers in the public mind.

Unfortunately, it is quite hard to determine what this is. The only means by which we can measure the extent of the influence of newspapers is not the number of papers in themselves, but the number of their readers. Now, in a country like Switzerland which is not highly centralized, newspapers may be numerous because each locality has its own paper, yet since each one of them is not very widely read, their power as a means of propagation is slight. By contrast, a single newspaper like *The Times*, *The New York Herald*, *Le Petit Journal* and others affect a huge readership. It would even appear that the press can hardly have the influence that it is accused by some people of exercising, without a certain centralization, because each region has its own life and people are interested less in what happens beyond the little horizon that limits their view. Distant events are less noticed and, for that very reason, are read more superficially. Hence there are fewer examples that might provoke imitation. It is quite a different matter in places where the levelling of local milieux opens a wider field of action to sympathy and curiosity and where every day, in response to these demands, major newspapers gather together all the important events in the locality or its neighbours and then distribute this news in every direction. In this way examples accumulate and reinforce one another. But it is clearly almost impossible to compare the readership of the different newspapers in Europe and, above all, to assess whether their news is more or less local. However, though we cannot supply any formal proof of this, it seems to us unlikely that France and England should be inferior in these respects to Denmark, Saxony and even the different German *länder*, yet people in those two countries are far less likely to kill themselves. Similarly, without leaving France, there is no reason to suppose that noticeably fewer newspapers are read south of the Loire than to the north of it, yet we know the contrast that exists between these two regions


BALTIC SEA
NORTH SEA
RUSSIAN EMPIRE
THE NETHERLANDS
Brunswick
Lippe
Duchy of Thuringia
4
5
6
9
11
14
15
16
17
20
21
22
23
24
28



Map 3 Suicides in Central Europe (after Morselli)

when it comes to suicide. Without attaching an unjustified degree of importance to an argument that we cannot support on a firm basis, we still believe that it rests on strong enough probabilities to deserve some attention.

IV

In short, while it is certain that suicide is contagious from one individual to another, one never sees this imitation spread in such a way as to affect the social rate of suicide. It may give rise to a greater or lesser number of individual cases, but it does not weigh in the unequal tendency driving different societies and, within each society, particular social groups, towards self-murder. The spread resulting from imitation is always very limited and, moreover, intermittent. When it reaches a certain degree of intensity, it is never for more than a very brief period of time.

But there is a more general reason that explains why the effects of imitation are not evident in the statistical figures. This is because, through its own power, imitation cannot affect suicide. In an adult, except in very rare cases of more or less absolute monoideism [*idée fixe*], the idea of an action is not sufficient to produce a similar action, unless it finds an individual who is in himself particularly drawn to it. 'I have always noticed,' Morel says, 'that however strong the power of imitation, and the impression caused by the written or oral account of an exceptional crime, these are not enough to impel sane individuals to commit similar acts.'* Similarly, Dr Paul Moreau de Tours considers that he has determined by personal observation that contagious suicide never occurs except in individuals who are strongly predisposed to it.†

It is true that, since this predisposition seemed to him to depend essentially on organic causes, it was also quite hard for him to explain certain cases which cannot be ascribed to such causes, except by reference to quite improbable and truly

* *Traité des maladies mentales*, p. 243.
† *De la contagion du suicide*, p. 42.

miraculous combinations of them. How can one believe that the fifteen patients we mentioned earlier should all be affected by nervous degeneracy? The same can also be said of the cases of contagion so often observed in the army or in prison. But such facts are easily explained once one accepts that a tendency to suicide can be created by the social environment, because then these cases can be attributed to the effect of the shared environment in which they lived, rather than to some inexplicable chance that brought together in the same barracks or in the same penitentiary, from the most diverse points of the compass, a relatively large number of individuals suffering from the same mental infirmity. Indeed, we shall see that in prisons and in the armed forces, there is a collective state which draws soldiers and prisoners towards suicide as directly as the most violent neurosis could do. The example is an occasional cause that makes the impulse break out, but it does not create the impulse and, if the impulse did not exist, it would have no effect.

So we may say that, except in very rare cases, imitation is not a factor in the origin of suicide. It only makes apparent a state which is the true generator of the act and which, in all likelihood, would always have found the means to produce its natural effect, even if no imitation had been involved, because the predisposition must be especially strong if something so slight is to inspire it to action. So it is not surprising if the facts do not show the mark of imitation, since it has no effect in itself and the effect that it does have is very limited.

One practical observation may be offered as a corollary to this conclusion.

Certain writers, attributing a power to imitation that it does not possess, have asked for reports of suicides and crimes to be withheld from the press.* It is possible that such a ban would reduce the annual figures for such acts by a few units, but it is very doubtful if it could change the social rates for them. The strength of the collective tendency would remain the same, because the ban would not change the moral state of the social

* See in particular Aubry, *Contagion du meurtre*, 1st edn., p. 87.

group. So if we balance the dubious and very slight advantages that this measure might bring against the serious disadvantages of banning all judicial reports, we can see why legislators are reluctant to follow this specialized advice. In reality, what may contribute to a rise in suicide or murder is not the fact of mentioning them, but the way in which one speaks about them. Where such practices are abhorred, the feelings that they arouse are reflected in the accounts given of them and, consequently, neutralize rather than incite an individual predisposition. Conversely, when society has lost its moral compass, its own uncertainty inspires in it a kind of indulgence of immoral acts which is involuntarily expressed whenever they are mentioned and which makes their immorality less appreciable. In this event, an example becomes really dangerous, not because it is an example, but because society's tolerance or indifference diminishes the repugnance that it ought to inspire.

However, what this chapter mainly shows is how ill-founded is the theory that makes imitation the prime source of all collective life. There is no act as easily transmissible by means of contagion than suicide, yet we have just seen that this communicability does not produce any social effects. If, in this case, imitation is so lacking in social influence, it cannot have any greater influence in other circumstances, so the power attributed to it is imaginary. It may, certainly, in a restricted environment, be decisive in the reproduction of a single thought or action, but it never has such extensive or profound repercussions as to affect or modify the soul of society. Collective states, being the object of more or less unanimous and generally age-old attachment, are far too enduring for some private innovation to abolish them. How could an individual, who is nothing more than an individual,* have sufficient strength to mould

* By this, we mean the individual, regardless of whatever power he may acquire from collective confidence or admiration. It is clear that an official or a popular personality, apart from the individual powers that they possess at birth, are the incarnation of social forces that they owe to the collective feelings of which they are the object and which allow them to have an influence on the course of society. But they possess this influence only to the extent that they are something other than individual men or women.

society in his image? If we were not still at a stage where we conceive the social world almost as crudely as the primitive human conceives the physical one and if, contrary to all the teachings of science, we did not still believe, at least tacitly and unwittingly, that social phenomena are not proportional to their causes, then we should not even pause to consider an idea which, while it may have biblical simplicity, is at the same time flagrantly contradicted by the fundamental principles of reason. We no longer believe today that zoological species are only individual variations propagated by heredity;* and it is no longer acceptable to believe that a social fact is merely an individual fact generalized. But what is most unacceptable of all is the idea that this generalization might be due to some blind contagion. One may even be surprised that it is still necessary to discuss a hypothesis that, apart from the serious objections to it, has never acquired even the beginnings of any experimental justification. No one has ever shown, in relation to a definite order of social facts, that these could be explained by imitation and, less still, that imitation alone could account for them. It has been enough to state the idea in the form of an aphorism, resting on vaguely metaphysical notions. Yet sociology cannot claim to be considered a science until those who practise it are no longer allowed to propagate this sort of dogma while so manifestly evading the normal obligation to provide proof of what they say.

* See Delage, *La structure du protoplasme et les théories de l'hérédité*, Paris, 1895, pp. 813ff.

BOOK TWO

SOCIAL CAUSES AND SOCIAL TYPES

CHAPTER 1
METHOD OF DETERMINING THEM

What we have established in the previous book is not purely negative. In fact, we have shown that for every social group there is a specific tendency towards suicide which cannot be explained either by the physical and mental make-up of individuals, or by the nature of the physical environment. By elimination, we see from this that it must necessarily depend on social causes and constitute a collective phenomenon in itself. Certain facts that we have examined, in particular geographical and seasonal variations in suicide, have directly pointed towards this conclusion. This is the tendency that we must now examine more closely.

I

To achieve this, it seems that the best thing would be to investigate first of all whether it is single and indivisible, or whether it rather consists in a number of different tendencies which can be isolated by analysis and might be studied separately. In that case, this is how we should proceed. Since, whether it is single or not, this tendency is only observable through the individual suicides that exhibit it, then we must start with them. To do so, we would therefore observe as many as possible (apart from those involving mental illness, of course) and describe them. If they were all found to have the same essential characteristics, they would be grouped in one single class; in the event of the opposite being the case (which is far more likely, because they are too diverse not to include several varieties), one would establish a certain number of kinds according to the

resemblances and differences between them. One would accept that there were as many suicidal currents as there were distinct types of suicide, and then seek to determine their respective causes and sizes. This is more or less the method we have followed in our brief study of suicide among the insane.

Unfortunately, it is impossible to classify suicide among the sane according to its morphological characteristics or types, because the necessary documentation is almost entirely non-existent. In order to attempt this, one would need to have good descriptions of a large number of individual cases. We should have to know about the state of mind of the suicides at the moment when they resolved on the act, how they prepared to carry it out, how they eventually did accomplish it, whether they were agitated or depressed, calm or exultant, anxious or irritated, and so on. But we have hardly any information of this kind except in the case of suicide among the insane, and it is precisely because of the observations and descriptions made by alienists that we are able to define the main types of suicide in which madness is the determining cause. For the rest, we are more or less entirely without any information. Brierre de Boismont was the only one who tried to undertake this descriptive work, looking at 1,328 cases in which the suicide left letters or notes, which the author summarized in his book. But, first of all, this summary is much too brief; and then the information that the subject himself supplies on his state of mind is usually insufficient, even when not suspect – the suicide being only too inclined to be mistaken about himself and his motives. For example, he may imagine that he is acting cool-headedly, when in reality he is at the height of over-excitement. Finally, apart from the fact that they are not objective enough, these observations involve too few cases for us to be able to draw any precise conclusions from them. We do, certainly, perceive a few, very vague lines of demarcation and will be able to benefit from the trends that they indicate; but they are too imprecise to serve as the basis for any regular classification. Moreover, given the way in which most suicides are carried out, the observations that we would need to have are more or less impossible to obtain.

However, we can reach our goal from another direction,

simply by reversing the order of our research. There can only be as many different types of suicide as there are differences in the causes from which they derive. For each one to have a nature peculiar to it, it must also have its own conditions of existence. One antecedent or a single group of antecedents cannot produce one result at one time, and at other times another, because in that case the difference distinguishing the second from the first would be without a cause and that in turn would negate the principle of causality. Every specific distinction that we note between causes therefore implies a similar distinction between effects. Hence we can draw up a list of social types of suicide, not classifying them directly according to characteristics that we have previously described, but by classifying the causes that produce them. Without concerning ourselves with knowing why they are differentiated from one another, we shall look directly for the social conditions on which they depend, and then group these conditions, according to their similarities and differences, in a certain number of separate classes. And we can be sure that a definite type of suicide corresponds to each of these classes. In a word, instead of being morphological, our classification will from the outset be aetiological. In fact, this is not a drawback, because one gets much further into the nature of a phenomenon when one knows its cause than when one merely knows its characteristics, however essential these may be.

Admittedly, this method has the drawback of postulating a diversity of types without touching on them directly: it can establish their existence and describe how many they are, but not their distinctive characteristics. But it is possible to eliminate this disadvantage, at least to some extent. Once the nature of the causes is known, we can try to deduce the nature of the effects, which will then be characterized and classified by the sole fact of being attached to their respective roots. It is true that if this deduction were not in any way guided by the facts, it would risk getting lost in purely imaginary constructs. But we can throw light on it with the help of some information that we do possess on the morphology of suicide. This information, in itself, is too incomplete and too indefinite to give us the basis

for a classification, but it may be used once the framework of such a classification has been drawn up. This will show us where the deduction should be directed and, by the examples that it supplies, will assure us that the types so constituted by deduction are not imaginary. In this way, we shall get back again from the effects to the causes and our aetiological classification will be complemented by a morphological classification which can serve to verify the former, and vice versa.

In every respect, this reversed method is the only one that is appropriate for the special problem that we have set ourselves. We must not lose sight of the fact that what we are studying is the social rate of suicide. The only kinds of suicide that should interest us are therefore those that contribute to this and those according to which this rate varies. And it is not proven that all individual varieties of voluntary death have that quality. There are some that, while possessing a certain degree of generality, are not – or not sufficiently – linked to the moral temper of society to be included as characteristic elements in the special physiognomy that each nation offers in the matter of suicide. In this way, we have seen that alcoholism is not a factor on which the particular tendency of each society depends; yet there are clearly alcoholic suicides, and quite a few of them. So no description of particular cases, however well done, can ever tell us which are the ones that have a sociological character. If one wishes to know the various components that result in suicide considered as a collective phenomenon, one must first of all consider it in its collective form, that is to say through the statistical data. The social rate is the one that we must directly take as the object of our analysis: we must proceed from the whole to the parts. But it is clear that this cannot be analysed except in relation to the different causes behind it, because in themselves the units which compose it when added together are homogeneous and not qualitatively distinct. So we must at once proceed to a determination of causes, only later on trying to discover what the repercussions are at an individual level.

II

But how are we to discover these causes?

In the legal procedures that take place whenever a suicide is committed, note is taken of the motive (family worries, physical or other pain, remorse or drunkenness, etc.) which appears to have been the decisive cause and, in the statistical data for almost every country, we find a special table in which the results of these inquiries are summarized under the title: 'Apparent motives for suicide'. It would therefore seem normal to take advantage of this ready-made material and start our research by comparing these documents. Apparently, they indicate the circumstances immediately leading up to the various suicides, so would it not be sound, as a method for understanding the phenomenon that interests us, to go back firstly to the nearest causes, then afterwards inquire further into the series of phenomena, if this is deemed necessary?

But as Wagner said a long time ago, what is known as statistics on the motives of suicides is in reality a statistic of the opinions on these motives formed by the (often subordinate) agents who are charged with gathering this information. Unfortunately, we know that official reporting is all too often defective, even when it concerns conspicuous material facts that any conscientious observer could grasp and which leave no room for evaluation. So how much more suspect is it when it involves not simply registering a fact, but interpreting and explaining it! It is always a difficult matter to determine the cause of a phenomenon; a scientist needs all kinds of observations and experiments to solve any such problem; and the most complex of all such questions is that of human motivation. Given this, we can imagine what these improvised assessments are worth when, on the basis of a few hastily gathered scraps of information, they claim to assign a precise cause to each particular case. As soon as the inquirer thinks he has found a few of those facts in the victim's antecedents that are commonly held to lead to despair, he thinks it pointless to inquire further and, according to whether the dead person is said to have recently suffered financial loss, or to have experienced family problems,

or to have a liking for drink, then his drunkenness, or domestic affairs, or economic losses are blamed. It would be hard to find any more suspect basis on which to explain suicide.

More than that: even if they were more trustworthy, they would not be of much use to us, because the motives which, rightly or wrongly, are attributed to suicides are not the true causes of them. This is proved by the fact that the proportional number of cases attributed by the statistics to each of these presumed motives stays almost identical, while, on the contrary, the absolute figures show the widest variations. In France, from 1856 to 1878, suicide increased by around 40 per cent, and in Saxony, over the period 1854–80, by more than 100 per cent (1,171 cases, compared with 547). Meanwhile, in both countries, each category of motives remained at the same respective size, as we can see from Table 17.

If we think that the figures shown here are and can only be crude approximations and if, consequently, we do not attach too much importance to slight differences, we will see that they remain relatively constant. But, for the contributory role played by each of these assumed reasons to stay proportionately the same while suicide itself has increased two times, we should have to accept that each reason has become twice as effective. And it would only be as the result of some accident that they could all have become twice as deadly at the same time. From that we must necessarily conclude that they are all dependent on some more general state which they more or less faithfully reflect. It is this that makes them more or less productive of suicides and this, consequently, which is the true determining cause of the latter. What we must therefore examine is this state of things, without poring over the distant repercussions that it may have in individual consciousnesses.

Another fact, which we borrow from Legoyt,* shows even more clearly what the causal effect of these different motives really amounts to. There are no callings more different from one another than the liberal professions and agriculture. The life of an artist, a scientist, a lawyer, an officer or a judge is not

* Op. cit., p. 358.

TABLE 17

Share of each category of motive per 100 annual suicides of each sex

	Men		Women	
	1856–60	1874–78	1856–60	1874–78
	*France**			
Poverty, financial worries	13.30	11.79	5.38	5.77
Family worries	11.68	12.53	12.79	16.00
Love, jealousy, debauchery, misconduct	15.48	16.98	13.16	12.20
Various emotional problems	23.70	23.43	17.16	20.22
Mental illness	25.67	27.09	45.75	41.81
Remorse, fear of punishment for crime	0.84	–	0.19	–
Other, and unknown causes	9.33	8.18	5.51	4.00
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

	Men		Women	
	1854–78	1880	1854–78	1880
	Saxony†			
Physical pain	5.64	5.86	7.43	7.98
Family worries	2.39	3.30	3.18	1.72
Financial worries, poverty	9.52	11.28	2.80	4.42
Debauchery, gambling	11.15	10.74	1.59	0.44
Remorse, fear of punishment	10.41	8.51	10.44	6.21
Disappointment in love	1.79	1.50	3.74	6.20
Mental illness, religious mania	27.94	30.27	50.64	54.43
Anger	2.00	3.29	3.04	3.09
Disgust with life	9.58	6.67	5.37	5.76
Unknown causes	19.58	18.58	11.77	9.75
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

* From Legoyt, p. 342.

† From Oettingen, *Moralstatistik*, appendix of tables, p. 110.

at all like that of a farmer. We can therefore consider it certain that the social causes of suicide are not the same for one group as for the other. Yet not only are suicides of these two kinds of people attributed to the same reasons, but the respective importance of the different reasons is almost exactly the same in one as in the other. Here are the percentage figures for the chief motives of suicide in these two walks of life in France during the period 1874–78:

	Agriculture	Liberal professions
Job loss, financial worries, poverty	8.15	8.87
Family worries	14.45	13.14
Disappointment in love, jealousy	1.48	2.01
Intoxication and habitual drunkenness	13.23	6.41
Suicide by perpetrators of crimes or misdemeanours	4.09	4.73
Physical suffering	15.91	19.89
Mental illness	35.80	34.04
Disgust with life, various ills	2.93	4.94
Unknown causes	3.96	5.97
Total	100.00	100.00

Except for intoxication and habitual drunkenness, the figures (especially those that are numerically largest) vary little from one column to the other; so, if we restrict ourselves to a consideration of motives, we might think that the causes of suicide are, if not of the same intensity, at least of the same nature in both cases. Yet, in reality, the forces that drive a ploughman and a refined city-dweller to suicide are very different. The fact is that the reasons given for suicide or those that the suicide himself gives to explain his action are, most often, only the apparent causes. Not only are they merely the individual repercussions of a general state, but they express it very inaccurately, since they remain the same while it changes. One might say that they indicate the individual's weak points, those through which the current, which comes from outside inviting him to

destroy himself, can most easily enter. But they are not part of this current themselves and, consequently, cannot help us to understand it.

It is therefore without regret that we see some countries, such as England and Austria, giving up the collection of these so-called causes of suicide. The efforts of statisticians should be directed in quite a different direction. Instead of trying to resolve these insoluble problems of moral casuistry, they should take greater care in recording the social concomitants of suicide. For our part, in any case, we make it a rule not to use in our research information that is as dubious as it is uninformative; and, indeed, writers on suicide have never managed to derive any interesting general rules from these figures. Hence, we shall only have recourse to them on rare occasions when they seem to have some particular significance and to be supported in some particular manner. Though we shall not concern ourselves with learning the particular forms that the causes producing suicide may take in individual cases, we shall try to determine these causes directly. To this end, leaving aside so to speak the individual as individual, with his motives and his ideas, we shall ask directly what are the states of the different social milieux (religious faiths, family, political and professional groups, etc.) according to which suicide varies. Only then, coming back to individuals, shall we seek to know how these general causes are individualized to produce the homicidal effects involved.

CHAPTER 2
EGOTISTICAL SUICIDE

Let us first of all consider how the various religious faiths affect suicide.

I

Anyone who glances at the map of suicides in Europe will notice at once that in purely Catholic countries such as Spain, Portugal and Italy, the rate of suicide is low, while it reaches its maximum in Protestant countries such as Prussia, Saxony and Denmark. This first impression is confirmed by the following averages, calculated by Morselli:

	Average number of suicides per million inhabitants
Protestant states	190
Mixed (Protestant and Catholic) states	96
Catholic states	58
Greek orthodox states	40

However, the low rate among Greek Orthodox Christians cannot definitely be attributed to religion, since their civilization is very different from that of other European nations and this variation in culture may be the cause of a lesser disposition to suicide. But the same is not true of most Catholic and Protestant societies. Of course, not all of these are at the same intellectual and moral level, yet the resemblances are important enough for

*Bavarian provinces (1867–75)**

Provinces with Catholic minority (under 50%)	Suicides per million inhabitants	Provinces with Catholic majority (50–90%)	Suicides per million inhabitants	Provinces with more than 90% Catholics	Suicides per million inhabitants
Rhine Palatinate	167	Lower Franconia	157	Upper Palatinate	64
Central Franconia	207	Swabia	118	Upper Bavaria	114
Upper Franconia	204			Lower Bavaria	49
Average	192	Average	135	Average	75

Prussian provinces (1883–90)

Provinces with more than 90% Protestants	Suicides per million inhabitants	Provinces with 89–68% Protestants	Suicides per million inhabitants	Provinces with 40–50% Protestants	Suicides per million inhabitants	Provinces with 32–28% Protestants	Suicides per million inhabitants
Saxony	309.4	Hanover	212.3	W. Prussia	123.9	Posen	96.4
Schleswig	312.9	Hesse	200.3	Silesia	260.2	Rhineland	100.3
Pomerania	171.5	Brandenburg & Berlin	296.3	Westphalia	107.5	Hohenzollern	90.1
		E. Prussia	171.3				
Average	264.6	Average	220.0	Average	163.6	Average	95.6

* The population below 15 years of age has been excluded.

it to be legitimate to attribute this marked contrast between them, where suicide is concerned, to a difference in religion.

None the less, this preliminary comparison is still too cursory. Despite undeniable similarities, the social environments in which the inhabitants of these various countries live are not identical. The civilizations of Spain and Portugal are well below that of Germany, so it may be that this inferiority is the reason for the difference that we find in the suicide rate. If one wishes to overcome this source of error and determine the influence of Catholicism and that of Protestantism on the suicide rate with greater precision, one must compare the two religions within a single society.

Of all the major *länder* in Germany, Bavaria is easily the one with the lowest rate of suicide. Annually, since 1874, there have been hardly more than 90 suicides per million inhabitants, while in Prussia the rate is 133 (1871–75), in the Duchy of Baden 156, in Württemberg 162, and in Saxony 300; and Bavaria is also where there is the greatest number of Catholics, with 713.2 per 1,000 inhabitants. If we compare the different provinces of the kingdom, we find that suicides are directly proportionate to the number of Protestants and inversely proportionate to the number of Catholics [see table, p. 157]. Not only do the averages confirm the rule, but all the figures in the first column are higher than those in the second and those in the second higher than those in the third, without exception.

The same is true of Prussia. Looking at this in detail, out of the fourteen provinces compared, there are only two slight irregularities: Silesia, which, according to its rather high rate of suicide, should belong to the second category, but only falls in the third; and Pomerania, which, on the contrary, would be better placed in the second column than in the first.

Switzerland is interesting from this same point of view, because it contains French and German populations, so one can study the influence of religious denominations on each of these two ethnic groups separately. And it is the same in each case. The Catholic cantons have four or five times fewer suicides than the Protestant ones, regardless of nationality.

	Suicides per million inhabitants		
	French cantons	German cantons	Total of all cantons
Catholics	83	87	86.7
Mixed			212.0
Protestants	453	293	326.3

The effect of religion is therefore so great that it overrides all others.

Moreover, it has been possible in quite a large number of cases to determine the number of suicides per million inhabitants directly for the members of each religious group. Here are the figures given by different commentators:

So, everywhere and without exception,* Protestants provide

TABLE 18

Suicides in various countries per million inhabitants of each faith

		Protestants	Catholics	Jews	Names of commentators
Austria	(1852–59)	79.5	51.3	20.7	Wagner
Prussia	(1849–55)	159.9	49.6	46.4	"
	(1869–72)	187.0	69.0	96.0	Morselli
	(1890)	240.0	100.0	180.0	Prinzing
Baden	(1852–62)	139.0	117.0	87.0	Legoyt
	(1870–74)	171.0	136.7	124.0	Morselli
	(1878–88)	242.0	170.0	210.0	Prinzing
Bavaria	(1844–56)	135.4	49.1	105.9	Morselli
	(1884–91)	224.0	94.0	193.0	Prinzing
Württemberg	(1846–60)	113.5	77.9	65.6	Wagner
	(1873–76)	190.0	120.0	60.0	Ourselves
	(1881–90)	170.0	119.0	142.0	"

* We do not have any information on the influence of religion in France. However, this is what Leroy says in his study of Seine-et-Marne: in the *communes* of Quincy, Nanteuil-les-Meaux and Mareuil, Protestants have a rate of suicide of one in 310 inhabitants, while the figure for Catholics is one in 678 (op. cit., p. 203).

far more suicides than the followers of other religions. The difference ranges from a minimum of 20 to 30 per cent and a maximum of 300 per cent. Given this unanimity in the statistics, there is no point in citing (as Mayr does)* the sole case of Norway and Sweden, which, though Protestant, have only an average rate of suicide. Firstly, as we have noted at the start of this chapter, such international comparisons have no demonstrative value unless they involve a fairly large number of countries, and even in such cases they are not conclusive. There are wide enough differences between the populations of the Scandinavian peninsula and those of central Europe for it to be understandable if Protestantism were not to produce exactly the same effects on both. But, in addition to that, if in itself the suicide rate is not very high in those two countries, it seems relatively high if one takes into account the modest status of these countries among the civilized peoples of Europe. There is no reason to believe that they have reached a higher intellectual level than that of Italy, far from it; yet the suicide rate is two or three times higher (90 to 100 suicides per million, as opposed to 40). Could Protestantism not be the cause of this relative difference? So, not only does the fact not disprove the rule which has been established on such a large number of figures, but rather tends to prove it.†

As far as the Jews are concerned, their tendency to suicide is less than that of Protestants; and, generally speaking, it is also below that of Catholics, though less markedly so. However, sometimes the latter relationship is reversed, and this has particularly been the case in recent times. Until the middle of the century, Jews killed themselves less often than Catholics in all countries except Bavaria.‡ Only around 1870 did they begin to lose their long-standing advantage. Even now, it is very rare for them to exceed the Catholic rate by much. Moreover, one

* *Handwoerterbuch der Staatswissenschaften*, supplement, vol. I, p. 702.

† The remaining case is that of England, a non-Catholic country in which the suicide rate is low. This will be explained later (see pp. 166–68).

‡ Bavaria remains the only exception: Jews kill themselves here twice as often as Catholics. Is there something exceptional about the situation of Judaism in this country? We cannot say.

should not lose sight of the fact that Jews, more than other religious groups, are likely to inhabit towns and to belong to the intellectual professions. In this respect, they are more inclined to suicide than members of other religions, for reasons which have nothing to do with the religion that they practise. So if, despite this aggravating cause, the rate for Judaism is so low, one might assume that, other things being equal, this is the religion whose followers are of all believers least likely to kill themselves.

Having thus established the facts, how are we to explain them?

II

If one considers that the Jews are in very small numbers everywhere and that, in most of the societies in which the preceding observations were made, Catholics are in the minority, one might be tempted to see this fact as the cause of the relative rarity of voluntary deaths in these two religions.* Indeed, it may be imagined that the religious groups with the smallest numbers, since they have to contend with the hostility of the surrounding population, would have to exercise strict control over themselves, in order to survive, and to subject themselves to particularly rigorous discipline. In order to justify the (ever precarious) tolerance that is extended to them, they are obliged to greater morality. Apart from these considerations, certain facts seem indeed to imply that this special factor is not without its influence. In Prussia, the minority status of the Catholics is very marked, because they represent only a third of the total population; and they kill themselves three times less frequently than do Protestants. The gap narrows in Bavaria, where two-thirds of the inhabitants are Catholic; voluntary deaths among them are only in the ratio of 100 to 275 compared with Protestants, or even 100 to 238, according to the period. Finally, in the Austrian empire, which is almost entirely Catholic, there are only 155 Protestant suicides for 100 Catholic ones. So it

* Legoyt, op. cit., p. 205; Oettingen, *Moralstatistik*, p. 654.

would appear that, when Protestantism becomes a minority religion, its tendency to suicide diminishes.

However, to begin with, suicide attracts too much indulgence for the fear of the censure, light as it is, directed against it to have such force as this, even among minorities whose situation obliges them to pay particular attention to public opinion. Since this is an act that does not harm anyone, it does not cause much resentment against groups who may be more inclined than others to it and it does not risk greatly increasing any aversion towards them, as a greater tendency to commit crimes and misdemeanours surely would. Moreover, religious intolerance, when very strong, often produces the opposite effect. Instead of inciting dissidents to pay greater respect to opinion, it accustoms them to take no interest in it. When one feels oneself to be the object of irreversible hostility, one gives up trying to disarm it and adopts the most heavily criticized habits even more strongly. This has frequently happened with the Jews and, consequently, it is likely that their exceptional immunity to suicide has some other cause.

In any case, however, this explanation cannot be enough to account for the respective situations of Protestants and Catholics, because in Austria and Bavaria, where Catholicism is the religion of the majority, its preservative effect, though less, is still very considerable, so it does not owe this only to its minority status. More generally, whatever may be a proportional share of these two faiths in the population as a whole, wherever it has been possible to compare them with respect to suicide, it has emerged that Protestants kill themselves far more than Catholics do. There are even some countries, such as the Upper Palatinate or Upper Bavaria, where the population is almost entirely Catholic (92 and 96 per cent), yet where there are, respectively, 300 and 423 Protestant suicides for 100 Catholic ones. The ratio even rises to 528 per cent in Lower Bavaria, where the reformed faith accounts for less than 1 per cent of the inhabitants. So, even in cases where the caution imposed on minorities might play a part in the considerable gap between these two religions, the greater part is certainly due to other causes.

It is to be found in the nature of these two religious systems.

Yet they are both equally clear in their prohibition on suicide. Not only do they apply extremely strict moral sanctions against it, but both of these religions also teach that a new life begins beyond the grave in which men will be punished for their misdeeds, and Protestantism includes suicide among these just as much as Catholicism does. Finally, in both religions, these prohibitions are divine in character: they are not presented as the logical outcome of a well-constructed argument, but as having the authority of God himself. So if Protestantism encourages a rise in the suicide rate, it is not because it considers it in a different light from Catholicism. Yet if the two religions offer the same teaching in this particular sphere, then their unequal effect on suicide must lie in one of the more general characteristics that differentiate them.

Now, if there is one essential difference between Catholicism and Protestantism, it is that the latter allows a great deal more freedom of inquiry than the former does. Of course, Catholicism, by the very fact that it is an idealistic religion, gives a much larger place to thought and reflection than did Graeco-Roman polytheism or Judaic monotheism. It is no longer satisfied with mechanical observances, but aspires to reign over the understanding and the conscience. It therefore addresses itself to these and, even when it demands blind submission from reason, it speaks to it in the language of reason. Yet it is also true that the Catholic receives his faith ready-made, without inquiry. He cannot even submit it to historical verification, because he is barred from reading the original texts on which it is founded. A whole hierarchical system of authorities is organized with wonderful ingenuity so as to make tradition unchanging. The Protestant is more the author of his own belief. The Bible is put into his hands and no interpretation imposed on him. The very structure of the reformed faith gives expression to this religious individualism. Nowhere except in England is the Protestant clergy organized in a hierarchy. The priest, like the ordinary believer, depends only on himself and on his conscience. He is a more learned guide than most believers, but he has no particular authority to impose dogma. But what most clearly demonstrates that this freedom of inquiry proclaimed

by the founders of the Reformation has not remained at the level of some Platonic assertion is the growing number of sects of every kind, in such vigorous contrast with the indivisible unity of the Catholic Church.

We are now reaching our first conclusion, which is that the tendency towards suicide among Protestants must be related to the spirit of free inquiry that informs that religion. Let us try to understand that relationship correctly. Free inquiry is itself only the effect of another cause. When it makes its appearance and when mankind, after taking its faith ready-made from tradition, demands the right to make this faith for itself, it is not because of the intrinsic appeal of free inquiry – because this brings with it as many sorrows as it does joys – but because mankind now needs this freedom. And the need itself can only have one cause, which is the collapse of traditional beliefs. If they still asserted themselves with the same force, one would not even think to criticize them. If they still had the same authority, one would not ask for justification of the source of that authority. Reflection only develops when it becomes necessary for it to develop; that is to say, if a certain number of unconsidered ideas and feelings which, until then, had sufficed to govern behaviour, have become ineffectual. At such times, reflection intervenes to fill the void that has been created – but which has not been made by it. Just as it fades to the extent that thought and action take on the form of automatic habits, so it only emerges as and when established habits are falling apart. It only asserts its rights against general opinion when the latter no longer has the same strength, that is to say if it is no longer general to the same extent as before. So if these demands do not occur only for a time and in the form of a temporary crisis, if instead they become chronic and if individual understandings and consciences relentlessly assert their autonomy, this is because they are constantly being pulled here and there by divergent impulses and no new opinion has been formed to replace the one that no longer exists. If a new system of beliefs had formed which appeared to everyone as indisputable as the old, no one would then think of disputing it. It would not even be permissible to discuss it, because ideas that are shared and assented to by a

whole society acquire an authority from this assent which makes them sacrosanct and above argument. For them to exhibit greater tolerance, they must already have become the object of less general and less complete acceptance and to have been weakened by previous controversy.

Thus, while it is true to say that free inquiry, once proclaimed, leads to more schisms, we should add that it both assumes and derives from these schisms, because it is only demanded and instituted as a principle in order to permit latent or half-declared schism to develop more freely. Consequently, if Protestantism gives a greater place to individual thought than Catholicism, this is because it involves fewer common beliefs and practices. A religious society does not exist without a collective *credo* and it is more or less strong and united according to whether this *credo* is more widely held. Such a society does not draw men together through an exchange and reciprocity of services, a temporal link that involves and even assumes differences, for a religious society is not able to form such a bond. It socializes them only by attaching all to a single body of doctrine and to the extent to which this body of doctrine is wider and more solidly constructed. The more ways there are to act and think that are marked by their religious character and consequently removed from free inquiry, the more the idea of God will be present in every aspect of life and make individual wills converge towards a single, identical end. Conversely, the greater the area of inquiry that a religious group abandons to the judgement of individuals, the more it will be absent from their lives, and the less cohesion and vitality it will possess. We therefore arrive at the conclusion that Protestantism's numerical superiority in suicide derives from the fact that it is a less firmly integrated Church than the Catholic one.

At the same time, we have an explanation for the situation of Judaism. The long-standing hostility of Christianity towards the Jews has created unusally strong feelings of solidarity among them. The need to struggle against general animosity, and even the impossibility of communicating freely with the rest of the population, obliged them to clasp one another tightly. As a result, each Jewish community became a little society in

itself, compact and cohesive, which had a very strong feeling of its own identity and unity. Everyone within it thought and lived in the same way; individual divergences were made more or less impossible because of the communality of existence and the unceasing, tight surveillance exercised by all over each. Thus the Jewish Church found itself to be more strongly concentrated than any other, being driven back into itself by the intolerance directed against it. So, by analogy with what we have just observed on the subject of Protestantism, the disinclination of Jews to commit suicide is attributable to the same cause, despite circumstances of every kind that should, on the contrary, incline them towards it. No doubt, in a sense, they owe this privilege to the hostility that surrounds them. But, while it may have this effect, it is not because it imposes a higher morality on them; rather, that it obliges them to live side by side. They are protected to this extent because the religious society to which they belong is solidly bound together. Moreover, the ostracism to which they are subject is only one of the causes which produce this result; the very nature of Jewish beliefs must also contribute to it to a great extent. Indeed, like all inferior religions, Judaism consists essentially in a body of practices which minutely control every detail of life and leave only a little room for individual judgement.

III

Several facts confirm this explanation.

In the first place, of all the major Protestant countries, England is the one in which suicide is least prevalent. There, the figures show only about 80 suicides per million inhabitants, while the reformed (Protestant) societies of Germany have between 140 and 400. Yet the general movement of ideas and affairs does not seem to be less intense in England than elsewhere.* But at the same time it happens that the Anglican

* Admittedly, the statistics for English suicides are not very accurate. Because of the penalties attached to suicide, many cases are recorded as accidental deaths. However, these inaccuracies are not sufficient to explain the wide gap between this country and Germany.

Church is much more strongly integrated than the other Protestant Churches. True, people have become accustomed to see England as the classic case of individual liberty, but in reality there is a good deal to show that the number of beliefs and practices which are common and obligatory, and consequently taken outside the realm of individual inquiry, is greater there than in Germany. To begin with, the law still sanctions many religious obligations, such as the law on the observation of Sunday, the law that prohibits the representation of characters from Holy Scripture on stage, and the law that until recently demanded that every member of parliament should make a sort of profession of religious faith, etc. In addition to that, we know how strong and widespread respect for tradition is in England, and this must extend to matters of religion as to others. And when traditionalism is very highly developed, it always more or less excludes individual initiatives. Finally, among all Protestant clergy, those of the Anglican Church are the only ones to be organized in a hierarchy, and this external organization clearly expresses an internal unity which is not compatible with very marked religious individualism.

Moreover, England is also the Protestant country with the largest number of clergy. In 1876, the country had, on average, 908 churchgoers for each minister of religion, compared with 932 in Hungary, 1,100 in Holland, 1,300 in Denmark, 1,440 in Switzerland and 1,600 in Germany.* The number of priests is not a minor detail or an unimportant feature, unrelated to the intrinsic nature of a religion. The proof of this lies in the fact that the Catholic clergy is everywhere much more numerous than that of the reformed Churches. In Italy, there is one priest for every 267 Catholics, while the ratio is one to 419 in Spain, 536 in Portugal, 540 in Switzerland, 823 in France and 1,050 in Belgium. The priest is the natural organ of faith and tradition, and, here as elsewhere, the organ inevitably develops to the same extent as the function. The more intense the religious life, the more men are needed to direct it. The more dogmas and precepts there are which are not left up to indi-

* Oettingen, *Moralstatistik*, p. 626.

vidual conscience, the more competent authorities are needed to explain them; and, similarly, the more numerous these authorities, the more closely they surround the individual and contain him. So the case of England, far from disproving our theory, actually verifies it. If Protestantism does not produce the same effects here as on the Continent, this is because the country's religious society is more firmly built and, in that respect, closer to the Catholic Church.

Here is more general confirmation.

A thirst for free inquiry cannot arise without being accompanied by a thirst for learning. Indeed, knowledge is the only means that free reflection possesses to achieve its ends. When irrational beliefs or practices have lost their authority, the only way to discover others is by appealing to the enlightened understanding, of which knowledge is the highest form. At bottom, these two urges are only one, resulting from the same cause. In general, men only aspire to learn to the extent that they are liberated from the yoke of tradition, because as long as that is in command of their minds, it is sufficient for everything and does not easily tolerate any rival power. Conversely, people seek for enlightenment as soon as an obscure custom no longer suffices for new needs. This is why philosophy – that first, synthetic form of science – appears as soon as religion has lost its dominion, but only at that time; and afterwards philosophy can be seen to give rise to a host of particular sciences, as the need from which it originally sprang continues to develop. So, if we are not mistaken, and it is indeed the progressive weakening of collective and habitual prejudices that leads to a tendency towards suicide – and if it is from this that the particular predisposition of Protestantism towards suicide derives – we should observe the following two facts: firstly, a thirst for learning should be greater among Protestants than among Catholics; and secondly, to the extent that it indicates a collapse of common beliefs, it should broadly vary as suicide does. Is this double hypothesis confirmed by the facts?

If we look just at the top groups in Catholic France and Protestant Germany, that is to say if we compare only the highest classes in the two countries, it seems that we are able

to sustain the comparison. In the main centres of our country, science and learning are no less honoured and widespread than they are among our neighbours. Indeed, it is certain that, in this respect, we are ahead of several Protestant countries. But while, in the upper classes of these two societies, there is an equal desire for instruction, the same is not true lower down the scale and while, in both countries, it reaches more or less the same maximal intensity, the mean intensity is less in France. The same is true of all Catholic nations in comparison with all Protestant ones. Even in cases where, at the highest cultural level, the former are not inferior to the latter, the situation is quite different when it comes to popular education. Whereas, among Protestant peoples (Saxony, Norway, Sweden, Baden, Denmark and Prussia), on average 957 children of school age (that is, from 6 to 12 years) out of a 1,000 were attending school in the years 1877–78, among Catholic peoples (France, Austria-Hungary, Spain and Italy), there were only 667, or 31 per cent fewer. The relationship is the same for the periods 1874–75 and 1860–61.* The Protestant country in which this figure is lowest, namely Prussia, is still well above France, the leader among the Catholic countries, the first having 897 pupils out of 1,000, the second only 766.† Out of all Germany, Bavaria has the greatest number of Catholics; it also has the greatest number of illiterates. Out of all the provinces of Bavaria, the Upper Palatinate is one of the most radically Catholic, and also the one in which there is the largest proportion of conscripts who can neither read nor write (15 per cent in 1871). The same applies in Prussia to the Duchy of Posen and the province of Prussia.‡ Finally, in the whole of the kingdom in 1871, there were 66 illiterates out of every 1,000 Protestants and 152 for every 1,000 Catholics. The ratio is the same for women in the two faiths.§

It may be objected that primary education cannot serve to

* Oettingen, *Moralstatistik*, p. 586.

† In one of these periods (1877–78), Bavaria did slightly overtake Prussia, but this occurred only that one time.

‡ Oettingen, ibid., p. 582.

§ Morselli, op. cit., p. 223.

measure the state of general education. It has often been said that the fact that a nation contains a greater or smaller number of illiterates does not mean that it is more or less educated. Let us accept this reservation, even though it must be said that the various degrees of education are perhaps more closely connected than it appears and it is hard for one of them to advance without the rest doing so at the same time.* In any event, if the level of primary education only imperfectly reflects that of scientific culture, it does indicate with some precision the extent to which a people, as a whole, experiences a need for knowledge. It must feel this need to the greatest possible extent if it is to make an effort to promote the elements of knowledge into the very lowest classes. If a people is to put the means of instruction within reach of everyone and even go so far as to proscribe ignorance by law, it must find it essential for its own existence to expand and enlighten minds. Indeed, if the Protestant nations have attached such importance to elementary education, it is because they considered it necessary for every individual to be able to interpret the Bible. What we wish to discover at the moment, is the mean intensity of this need and the price that each people attaches to learning, not the value of its scientists and their discoveries. From this particular point of view, the state of higher education and of true scientific production would be a poor criterion, because it would only reveal to us what is happening in a limited section of society. Popular and general education is a surer indication.

Having shown our first proposition to be correct, it now remains to prove the second. Is it true that the need for education, to the extent that it corresponds to a weakening of faith in general, develops in the same way as suicide? We already have a first assumption in favour of this in the fact that Protestants are more educated than Catholics and more likely to kill themselves. But the rule is not only verified when we compare one of these faiths to the other; it can also be seen at work within each religious group.

* In any case, we shall see later (p. 172) that secondary and higher education are also more developed among Protestants than among Catholics.

Italy is entirely Catholic; and popular education and suicide are distributed in exactly the same way in this country (see Table 19).

TABLE 19*

Italian provinces compared in relation to suicide and education

1st group of provinces	No. of marriage contracts where both parties are literate (%)	Suicides per million inhabitants	2nd group	Literate spouses	Suicides	3rd group	Literate spouses	Suicides
Piedmont	53.09	35.6	Venice	19.56	32.0	Sicily	8.98	18.5
Lombardy	44.29	40.4	Emilia	19.31	62.9	Abruzzi	6.35	15.7
Liguria	41.15	47.3	Umbria	15.46	30.7	Puglia	6.81	16.3
Rome	32.61	41.7	Marche	14.46	34.6	Calabria	4.67	8.1
Tuscany	24.33	40.6	Campania	12.45	21.6	Basilicata	4.35	15.0
			Sardinia	10.14	13.3			
Average	39.09	41.1	Average	15.23	32.5	Average	6.23	14.7

Not only do the averages precisely reflect one another, but the correspondence between them even extends to details. There is only one exception: Emilia, where, because of local factors, suicides are not related to the degree of education. The same observations may be made in France. The *départements* in which there is the highest number of illiterate spouses (above 20 per cent) are Corrèze, Corsica, Côtes-du-Nord, Dordogne, Finistère, Landes, Morbihan and Haute-Vienne; all of these are relatively immune to suicide. More generally, among *départements* where more than 10 per cent of spouses cannot read or write, not a single one falls in the region of the north-east which is the classical site of suicide in France.*

If we compare the Protestant countries among themselves, we find the same relationship. There are more suicides in Saxony than in Prussia; Prussia has more illiterates than Saxony

* See the *Annuaire statistique de la France*, 1892–94, pp. 50 and 51.

(5.52 per cent as opposed to 1.3 per cent, in 1865). Saxony even has this peculiarity that the figure for those at school is above the level of obligatory attendance under the law. For every 1,000 children of school age in 1877–78, there were 1,031 who were attending school: in other words, many of them continued their studies beyond the legal limit. This phenomenon does not occur in any other country.† Finally, among all the Protestant countries, England is as we know the one where the suicide rate is lowest; it is also the one which, in the educational sphere, is closest to the Catholic countries. In 1865, there were still 23 per cent of sailors in the Royal Navy who did not know how to read, and 27 per cent who could not write.

Other facts can be compared with the preceding ones and tend to confirm them.

The liberal professions and, more generally, the affluent classes are certainly those for whom knowledge has the greatest appeal and where intellectual life is lived most intensely. Although the statistics for suicide by profession and class cannot always be determined with sufficient accuracy, it cannot be denied that it is exceptionally common in the highest classes of society. In France, between 1826 and 1880, the liberal professions are in the lead, giving 550 suicides per million inhabitants in the same professional group, while domestic servants, who come immediately after, only have 290.‡ In Italy, Morselli has managed to isolate careers exclusively devoted to study and found that they are well ahead of all others in their suicide rate. Indeed, for the period 1868–76, he assesses the figure at 482.6 per million in the same professional category; the army comes afterwards with 404.1 and the general average for the country is only 32. In Prussia, for the years 1883–90, the corps of civil servants, a body recruited with great care and constituting an intellectual elite, is ahead of all other professions with 832 suicides; the health services and education, though much further

* The figures for literate couples are taken from Oettingen, *Moralstatistik*, appendices, Table 85; they refer to the years 1872–78, and suicides to the period 1864–76.

† Oettingen, *Moralstatistik*, p. 586.

‡ General report on criminal justice for 1882, p. cxv.

down, still have very high figures (439 and 301). The same is true in Bavaria. If one leaves aside the army (which is in an exceptional situation where suicide is concerned, for reasons that will be explained later), civil servants are in second place with 454 suicides, very close to the leading group, being not far behind trade, which has a rate of 465; the arts, literature and the press come close behind these, with 416.* It is true that in Belgium and Württemberg the educated classes seem to be less particularly affected, but the classification of the professions is too vague for us to attach a great deal of importance to these two exceptions.

Secondly, we have seen that, in every country in the world, women commit suicide much less than men; and they are also a lot less educated. Essentially a traditionalist, a woman moulds her conduct according to established beliefs and does not have great intellectual needs. In Italy, in the period 1878–79, out of 10,000 bridegrooms, 4,808 could not sign their marriage contracts, while out of 10,000 brides, the number was 7,029.† In France, the ratio in 1879 was 199 bridegrooms to 310 brides out of 1,000 marriages. In Prussia, there is the same difference between the two sexes, among both Protestants and Catholics.‡ In England, the gap is much less wide than in other European countries: in 1879, there were 138 bridegrooms per 1,000 compared with 185 brides, and the ratio has remained substantially the same since 1851.§ But England is also the country in which the suicide rate among women is closest to that among men. For every 1,000 suicides of women, there were 2,546 male suicides in 1858–60, 2,745 in 1863–67, and 2,861 in 1872–76, while everywhere else¶ women are four, five or six times less likely to kill themselves than men. Finally, in the United States, the conditions for the experiment are almost reversed, which makes it a particularly instructive example. It appears

* See Prinzing, op. cit., pp. 28–31. It is odd that in Prussia, the press and the arts have a quite unremarkable figure (279 suicides).

† Oettingen, *Moralstatistik*, appendices, Table 83.

‡ Morselli, p. 223.

§ Oettingen, op. cit., p. 577.

¶ With the exception of Spain. But, quite apart from the doubts we may have about the accuracy of Spanish statistics, Spain is not comparable to the great nations of central and northern Europe.

that black women have a level of education that is equal or even superior to that of their husbands. And, as several observers have reported,* they also have a very strong tendency to suicide, even above that of white women, in certain places by as much as 350 per cent.

However, there is one case where our law might not seem to apply.

Of all religions, Judaism is the one whose believers are least likely to kill themselves, yet in no other religion is education so widespread. When it comes to elementary education, Jews reach at the least the same standard as Protestants. Indeed, in Prussia (1871) out of 1,000 Jews of both sexes, there were 66 illiterate men and 125 women; among Protestants, the figures are almost identical (66 men and 114 women). But it is at the level of secondary and higher education in particular that Jews participate proportionately more than the members of other faiths, as we can see from the following statistics, taken from Prussian records for the years 1875–76.†

	Catholics	Protestants	Jews
Share of each religion per 100 of population	33.8	64.9	1.3
Share of each religion per 100 secondary pupils	17.3	73.1	9.6

Allowing for differences in population, Jews attend *lycées*, *Realschulen*,‡ etc., around 14 times more than Catholics and 7 times more than Protestants. The same is the case in higher education. Out of 1,000 young Catholics in schools at every level, only 1.3 go to university; out of 1,000 Protestants, 2.5; and out of 1,000 Jews, the proportion rises to 16.§

* Baly and Boudin. We quote these figures from Morselli, p. 225.

† From Alwin Petersilie, Zur Statistik der höheren Lehranstalten in Preussen, in *Zeitschr. d. preus. stat. Bureau*, 1877, pp. 109ff.

‡ [Translator's note] *Lycées* and *Realschulen*: secondary schools in French- and German-speaking countries, attendance at which would represent a level of schooling above the compulsory elementary level.

§ *Zeitschr. d. pr. stat. Bureau*, 1889, p. xx.

However, if Jews manage to be at the same time highly educated and very little inclined to suicide, this is because their thirst for learning derives from a very special source. It is a general rule that religious minorities, in order to protect themselves more effectively from the hatred directed against them, or simply from a desire for emulation, try to acquire greater learning than the population around them. So it is that Protestants themselves display a greater or lesser taste for knowledge according to their status among the general population.* Jews seek an education not in order to replace their collective prejudices by rational ideas, but simply to be better armed for the struggle. For them, this is a means of compensating for the inferior position they are accorded by public opinion and, sometimes, by the law. And since in itself knowledge is powerless against a tradition that remains in full force, the educated Jew superposes his intellectual life upon his ritual observances without the first interfering with the second. Hence the complexity of his make-up: primitive in certain respects, he is in others a refined and cultured person. He thus combines the advantages of the strong discipline that was characteristic of the small groups of earlier times with the benefits of the intense culture enjoyed by the widely based societies of the contemporary world. He has all the intelligence of modern people without sharing their despair.

* Here is the very uneven pattern of attendance at secondary schools among Protestants in the different provinces of Prussia:

	(1) Percentage of Protestants in the general population	(2) Percentage of Protestant pupils in total no. of pupils	Difference between (1) and (2)
1st group	98.7–87.2: average 94.6	90.8	– 3.8
2nd "	80–50: average 70.3	75.3	+ 5.0
3rd "	50–40: average 46.4	56.0	+ 10.4
4th "	Below 40: average 29.2	61.0	+ 31.8

So, when Protestants are well in the majority, their school population does not accord with their place in the general population. But when the Catholic minority increases, the difference between the two groups ceases to be negative and becomes positive, and this positive difference increases as the Protestant population becomes proportionately smaller. Catholics, too, show a greater degree of intellectual curiosity when they are in a minority (see Oettingen, *Moralstatistik*, p. 650).

If, in this case, intellectual development is not related to the number of voluntary deaths, this is because it does not have the same origin or the same significance as usual. Hence, the exception is only apparent; in fact, it even confirms the rule, proving that while among the educated there is an increased tendency to suicide, this tendency is, as we have said, due to the weakening of traditional beliefs and to the state of moral individualism that derives from it. It disappears when education has another cause and responds to other needs.

IV

Two important conclusions emerge from this chapter.

In the first case, we can see why in general suicide increases with knowledge. It is not knowledge that determines this increase – knowledge is innocent and nothing is more unjust than to accuse it. The example of the Jews is indicative of this. But these two facts are the simultaneous products of a single general state which they reflect in different ways. Man seeks learning and kills himself because the religious society to which he belongs has lost some of its cohesion, but he does not kill himself because he is being educated. It is not even the education he receives that undermines religion – though it is because religion is falling apart that the need for education is awakened. Learning is not sought as a means to destroy accepted ideas, but because they have already started to collapse. Of course, once the knowledge is there, it can struggle in its own name and for its own sake against traditional sentiments, and set itself up as an antagonist to them. But its attacks would be ineffectual if those sentiments were still vigorous; or, rather, they could not even arise. It is not dialectical proofs that uproot faith; faith must have been profoundly shaken by other causes for it not to withstand the shock of argument.

Far from being the source of the problem, knowledge is the remedy for it and the only one that we have. Once established beliefs have been swept away by the course of things, they cannot be re-established artificially; only thought can help us to conduct our lives. Once the social instinct is blunted, intelli-

gence is the only guide that we have left and it must serve us to remake our consciences. However perilous the undertaking, we cannot hesitate, because there is no other choice. So let those who look with anxiety and sadness on the collapse of old beliefs, and who realize all the difficulties of these critical times, refrain from accusing knowledge and science of an evil which they have not caused, but which on the contrary they are seeking to cure! Beware of treating them as the enemy! Knowledge does not have the destructive power with which it is credited, but it is the only weapon that allows us to struggle against the dissolution from which it itself results. It is not by gagging science that one may restore authority to vanished traditions; we shall only make ourselves more powerless to replace them. It is true that we must be equally careful not to see education as an end in itself, when it is only the means to an end. While one cannot unlearn a taste for independence by artificially imprisoning the mind, it is not enough to liberate it for its balance to be restored. It must use this freedom in the proper way.

Secondly, we can see why, in a general manner, religion has a preventive action on suicide. This is not, as has sometimes been said, because it forbids suicide more emphatically than non-religious morality; nor because the idea of God accords exceptional authority to his precepts which bends the will to itself; nor because the prospect of a future life and the dreadful torments that await the guilty endow the prohibitions of religion with a more effective sanction than those available to human legislation. Protestants believe in God and in the immortality of the soul no less than Catholics. Moreover, the religion whose followers have the least tendency to commit suicide, namely Judaism, is the only one that does not formally condemn it and also the one in which this idea of immortality plays the least part. Indeed, the Old Testament does not contain any stipulation forbidding men to kill themselves,* and in it, in

* The only penal prohibition that we know of is the one mentioned by Flavius Josephus in his *Jewish Wars* (III, 25), which simply states that 'the bodies of those who voluntarily kill themselves shall remain unburied until after the setting of the sun, although it is permitted to bury before sunset those killed in war'. One may even wonder whether this is, in fact, a penalty.

addition, beliefs about a future life are very vague. Of course, rabbinical teaching on both points has gradually filled in the gaps in holy scripture, but they do not possess the same authority as it does. So it is not the particular nature of religious beliefs that explains the beneficial influence of religion. If religion does protect man from the desire to kill himself, it is not because it preaches to him respect for his person in itself, but because it is a community. What makes up this community is the existence of a certain number of traditional and, consequently, obligatory beliefs and practices that are common to all the faithful. The more numerous and strong these collective states are, the more the religious community is strongly integrated; and the greater, too, is its protective value. Detail of rituals and dogmas is secondary. The essential is that these rituals and dogmas should be of a kind that nourishes a sufficiently intense collective life. It is because the Protestant Church does not have the same degree of consistency as the others that it does not exercise the same moderating influence on suicide.

CHAPTER 3
EGOTISTICAL SUICIDE (cont.)

But if religion only protects against suicide because it is – and to the extent that it is – a community, it is probable that other communities produce the same effect. Let us therefore examine the family and political society from this point of view.

I

If one considers only the absolute figures, the unmarried seem to commit suicide less than married people. Thus, in France, in the period 1873–78, there were 16,264 suicides of married people, but only 11,709 of unmarried ones. These figures stand in a ratio of 132 to 100. Since other periods and other countries exhibit the same proportions, some writers formerly taught that marriage and family life increased the chances of suicide. It is certain that if, as is commonly held, suicide is to be seen chiefly as an act of despair to which its victims are driven by the difficulties of life, there is apparently every reason to accept this view. The unmarried man does, indeed, have an easier life than the married one. Does not marriage bring with it every kind of burden and responsibility? In order to ensure the present and future of a family, does one not have to make more sacrifices and accept more discomforts than are necessary to supply the needs of a single man?* Yet, however obvious it may seem, this *a priori* argument is utterly wrong and the facts give it an appearance of common sense only because they have been poorly analysed, as Bertillon *père*[1] was the first to demon-

* See Wagner, *Die Gesetzmässigkeit*, etc., p. 177.

strate by an ingenious calculation that we shall repeat here.*

Indeed, to appreciate fully the figures we cited earlier, one must remember that a very large number of unmarried persons are under 16, while all married people are older than that. And up to the age of 16, suicidal tendencies are very rare, simply by reason of age. In France, there are only one or two suicides per million inhabitants at this time of life; in the following period, this has already increased twentyfold. The presence of a very large number of children under 16 among the unmarried thus inordinately reduces the average tendency to suicide of this group, because the reduction is attributable to age, not to celibacy. So if the unmarried apparently provide a lower number of suicides, it is not by reason of their being unmarried, but because many of them have not yet emerged from childhood. Hence, if we want to compare these two groups so as to discover the influence of marital status, and that alone, we must dispose of that intrusive element and only put next to married people those who are unmarried and aged over 16 years, discarding the rest. Having done so, we find that for the years 1863–68 there were, on average, for every million unmarried people over 16, 173 suicides, and for every million married people, 154.5 – a ratio of 112 to 100.

There is consequently an increase attributable to celibacy, but it is much greater than the previous figures indicate, because we have argued as though all the unmarried over 16 years and all married people had the same average age. But this is not the case. In France, the majority of bachelors, to be precise 58 per cent, are aged between 15 and 20, while the majority of spinsters (precisely 57 per cent) are under 25. The average age of the first is 26.8 and that of the second, 28.4. On the other hand, the average age of married people is found between 40 and 45 years. On the other side, this is how suicide increases with age for both sexes:

* See the article 'Mariage' in *Dictionnaire encylopédique des sciences médicales*, 2nd series, pp. 5off. See, too, J. Bertillon *fils*, 'Les célibataires, les veufs et les divorcés au point de vue du mariage', in *Revue scientifique*, February 1879; the same author's article in the *Bulletin de la Société d'Anthropologie*, 1880, pp. 28off.; and Durkheim, 'Suicide et natalité', in *Revue philosophique*, November 1888.

From 16 to 21	45.9 suicides per million inhabitants
From 21 to 30	97.9 suicides per million inhabitants
From 31 to 40	114.5 suicides per million inhabitants
From 41 to 50	164.4 suicides per million inhabitants

These figures relate to the years 1848–57. So, if age alone were responsible, the tendency of the unmarried to commit suicide could not be above 97.9 and that of married people would fall between 114.5 and 164.4, that is to say around 140. Suicides of married people would be to those of the unmarried in a ratio of 100 to 69, the second representing only two-thirds of the first. Yet we know that, in reality, there are more of them, so family life has the effect of reversing the ratio. Without the influence of the family environment, married people should, by virtue of their age, kill themselves half as much again as the unmarried; yet they do so considerably less. Consequently, we can say that the state of marriage reduces the risk of suicide by about half, or, to be more precise, the unmarried state produces an aggravation of risk that may be expressed in terms of $\frac{112}{69} = 1{\cdot}6$. So if the figure 1 is said to represent the tendency to suicide of the married, that of the unmarried of the same average age could be expressed by the figure 1.6.

The ratios are more or less the same in Italy. In view of their age, married people (in the years 1873–77) should account for 102 suicides per million and unmarried people over 16 for only 77. The first of these numbers is to the second in the ratio of 100 to 75.* But in fact it is married people who are less likely to kill themselves; they account for only 71 cases compared with 86 of unmarried people, that is to say 100 to 121. The tendency of the unmarried compared with that of the married is thus 121 to 75, or 1.6, as in France. Similar data could be obtained from other countries. Everywhere, the rate among married people is more or less below that of the unmarried,† when by reason of age it ought to be higher. In Württemberg, between 1846 and

* We assume that the average age of groups is the same as in France. Any error that might result from this assumption is very slight.

† Provided one takes both sexes together – the importance of this will be seen later (Book Two, Chap. 5, § 3).

1860, the two figures stood in a ratio of 100 to 143 and in Prussia, from 1873 to 1875, the ratio was 100 to 111.

However, while in the present state of our knowledge this method of calculation is in almost every case the only one applicable, and if consequently it is necessary to use it to establish the general situation, the results that it gives can only be very broadly approximate. It is certainly sufficient to show that celibacy aggravates the tendency to suicide, but it gives only a very inaccurate idea of the extent of this aggravation. In order to separate the influence of age and that of marital status, we have taken as our reference the relation between the suicide rate of 30-year-olds and that of 45-year-olds. Unfortunately, the influence of marital status has already set its stamp on this ratio, because the groups representing each of these two ages include unmarried and married people. Of course, if the proportion of husbands and bachelors was the same in the two periods, as well as that of wives and spinsters, one would compensate for the other and the effect of age alone would be seen. But the reality is quite different. While, at 30, bachelors are slightly more numerous than husbands (746,111 compared with 714,278, according to the statistics for 1891), at 45, on the contrary, they have become only a small minority (333,033 bachelors against 1,864,401 married men); it is the same for the other sex. As a result of this unequal distribution, the greater tendency of the unmarried to commit suicide does not produce the same effect in each case, raising the first rate much more than the second. The latter is therefore too small and the extent to which it ought to exceed the other figure, if it were a question of age alone, is artificially reduced. In other words, the gap that exists between the population aged 25–30 and that aged 40–45, where suicide is concerned, *and due solely to the effects of age*, is certainly greater than appears from this manner of calculating it. Yet it is this gap that constitutes almost all the immunity from which married people benefit, so the immunity appears less than it is in reality.

This method has given rise to even more serious errors. So, in order to determine the influence of widowhood on suicide, it has sometimes been considered sufficient merely to compare

the rate for the widowed to that of all people with the same average age, that is around 65 years. In 1863–68, a million widowers produced 628 suicides, while a million men of 65, regardless of marital status, gave around 461. From these figures, one might conclude that, at the same age, widowers kill themselves considerably more than any other group. In this way, the prejudice has been confirmed that makes widowhood the most pernicious of all conditions from the point of view of suicide.* In reality, if the population of 65-year-olds does not provide a greater number of suicides, this is because it is almost entirely composed of married people (997,198 against 134,238 unmarried). Hence, if the comparison tends to show that widowers kill themselves more than married men of the same age, nothing can be inferred from it about their tendency to suicide compared with that of unmarried men.

Finally, if we compare only the averages, the facts and their relationships appear in the broadest terms. Thus it could very well happen that in general married people kill themselves less than the unmarried, yet at certain ages this relationship could, exceptionally, be reversed (and we shall indeed see that there are such cases). These exceptions, which can be very instructive in explaining the phenomenon, would not be brought out by the preceding method. There can also be changes, from one age to another, that, though they do not completely invert the figures, are significant and which it is consequently useful to highlight.

The only way to overcome these drawbacks is to decide the rate of each group separately for each stage of life. In that way, we could compare, for example, unmarried people between the ages of 25 and 30 with married and widowed ones of the same age, and so on for the other ages. The influence of marital status would thus be isolated from all the rest and the variations of all kinds to which it may give rise will be apparent. This is, in fact, the method that Bertillon was the first to apply to mortality and marriage. Unfortunately, official publications do not supply us with the necessary information to make such a

* See Bertillon, art. 'Mariage', in *Dict. encycl.*, 2nd series, see p. 52; Morselli, p. 348; Corre, *Crime et suicide*, p. 472.

comparison.* They tell us the age of suicides, but not their marital status. As far as we know, the only one to adopt a different procedure is that of the Grand Duchy of Oldenburg (including the principalities of Lübeck and Birkenfeld).† For

* Yet the task of collecting this information, which is considerable for an individual, could without too much difficulty be carried out by national statistical offices. We are given all sorts of trivial information and not supplied with the one thing that would allow us (as we shall see later) to assess the present state of the family in the various European societies.

† There is also a set of Swedish statistics, reproduced in the *Bulletin de démographie internationale*, 1878, p. 195, which supplies the same information. But it cannot be used. Firstly, widowers are mixed in with unmarried men, which makes the comparison of little significance, because these different conditions should be distinguished. And then we consider the table to be incorrect. Here are the figures given in it:

Suicides per 100,000 inhabitants of either sex, having the same marital status and age

	16–25 years	26–35 years	36–45 years	46–55 years	56–65 years	66–75 years	over 75 years
Men:							
Married	10.51	10.58	18.77	24.08	26.29	20.76	9.48
Unmarried (incl. widowed)	5.69	25.73	66.95	90.72	150.08	229.27	333.35
Women:							
Married	2.63	2.76	4.15	5.55	7.09	4.67	7.64
Unmarried	2.99	6.14	13.23	17.05	25.98	51.93	34.69

How much more do the unmarried kill themselves compared to the married of the same age and sex?

Men	0.5	2.4	3.5	3.7	5.7	11.0	37.0
Women	1.13	2.22	3.18	3.04	3.66	11.12	4.5

From the first, these results seemed suspect with regard to the great degree of preservation that the married of advanced years seemed to enjoy, because they were so inconsistent with all the facts that we knew. In order to carry out a check which we felt was essential, we researched the absolute numbers of suicides committed by each age group in the same country during the same period. The following are the figures for males:

	16–25 years	26–35 years	36–45 years	46–55 years	56–65 years	66–75 years	over 75 years
Married	16	220	567	640	383	140	15
Unmarried	283	519	410	269	217	156	56

the years 1871–85, it gives us the distribution of suicides by age for each category of marital status considered separately. But this small state had only 1,369 suicides in those fifteen years. As we cannot conclude anything with certainty from such a small number, we have undertaken the work ourselves for our own country with the help of unpublished documents held by the Ministry of Justice. Our research covered the years 1889, 1890 and 1891. In this way, we classified 25,000 suicides. Apart from the fact that this figure in itself is large enough to serve as a basis from which to draw a conclusion, we were convinced that it was not necessary to extend our observations over a longer period because, from one year to the next, each age group remains very much the same in each social group. There is therefore no need to take averages for a greater number of years.

Tables 20 and 21 (see pp. 187 and 188) contain the various results. In order to bring out their meaning more clearly, we have put, next to the figure representing the rate of the widowed and of the married, what we call the *preservation coefficient*,

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When we compare these figures with the proportions given above, we can see clearly that there is some error. From the ages of 66 to 75, married and unmarried people show almost the same absolute number of suicides, while out of every 100,000 inhabitants, the former apparently kill themselves eleven times less than the latter. For this to be the case, there would have to be around ten times (or precisely 9.2 times) more married than unmarried (that is, widowed and celibates together) in this age group. For the same reason, over 75, the married population would have to be exactly ten times larger than the other group, which is impossible. At such advanced ages, the number of widowed is very high and, taken together with the celibate, they are equal in number, or even superior in number, to married people. We can guess how this mistake probably came to be made. The number of suicides of celibates and widowed must have been added together and the total thus obtained divided by the figure for the unmarried population alone, while the suicides of the married were divided by a figure representing the number of the widowed and the married together. What makes us feel that this was probably how it happened is that the degree of preservation enjoyed by the married is only exceptional at the later ages, that is to say when the number of widowed becomes large enough seriously to distort the results of the calculation. And the improbability is at its highest after 75, that is when there are a large number of widowed people.

either of the latter compared with the former, or of one or other group compared with the unmarried. We use the term to indicate the number that shows how many fewer times people kill themselves in one group compared with another at the same age. So when we say that the preservation coefficient of married men of 25 compared with bachelors is 3, we mean that if the number 1 were to represent the tendency to suicide of married men at that stage of life, then we should have to use 3 to represent the tendency of bachelors to do so at the same age. Naturally, when the preservation coefficient falls below 1, it becomes in reality an aggravation coefficient.

The rules that emerge from these tables may be formulated as follows:

1. *Getting married too early has an aggravating influence on suicide, especially where men are concerned.* It is true that the result, calculated on the basis of a very small number of cases, needs to be confirmed. In France, between the ages of 15 and 20, there is only one suicide in an average year by a married person (to be exact 1.33). However, since the same thing is to be seen in the Grand Duchy of Oldenburg, even among women, it is unlikely to be accidental. Even the Swedish statistics which we mentioned earlier* show the same aggravation, at least for males. And while, for reasons that we have just described, we consider this statistic incorrect where older age groups are concerned, we have no reason to cast doubt on it for the earlier periods of life, in which there are so far no widows or widowers. What is more, we also know that mortality is considerably higher among husbands and wives who married too young, compared with unmarried men and women of the same age. Every year, for 1,000 bachelors aged between 15 and 20 there are 8.9 deaths, while for 1,000 married men of the same age there are 51, or 473 per cent more. The gap is smaller for the other sex: 9.9 for wives, 8.3 for unmarried girls. The ratio of

* See above, p. 184. It is true that one might believe this unfavourable result for married people aged between 15 and 20 is due to the fact that their average age is above that of unmarried people in the same age group. But what proves that the aggravation exists is that the suicide rate of married people in the following age group (20–25 years) is five times less.

TABLE 20
GRAND DUCHY OF OLDENBURG

Suicides committed by each sex per 10,000 inhabitants of each age group and marital status for the whole of the period 1871–85 *

Ages	Unmarried	Married	Widowed	Preservation coefficients of Married: In relation to unmarried	Preservation coefficients of Married: In relation to widowed	Preservation coefficients of Widowed: In relation to unmarried
			Men			
0–20	7.2	769.2		0.09		
20–30	70.6	49.0	285.7	1.40	5.80	0.24
30–40	130.4	73.6	76.9	1.77	1.04	1.69
40–50	188.8	95.0	285.7	1.97	3.01	0.66
50–60	263.6	137.8	271.4	1.90	1.90	0.97
60–70	242.8	148.3	304.7	1.63	2.05	0.79
Above 70	266.6	114.2	259.0	2.30	2.26	1.02
			Women			
0–20	3.9	95.2		0.04		
20–30	39.0	17.4		2.24		
30–40	32.3	16.8	30.0	1.92	1.78	1.07
40–50	52.9	18.6	68.1	2.85	3.66	0.77
50–60	66.6	31.1	50.0	2.14	1.60	1.33
60–70	62.5	37.2	55.8	1.68	1.50	1.12
Above 70		120.0	91.4		1.31	

the first of these numbers to the second is 119 to 100.† This greater mortality among young couples is obviously due to social causes, because if it was mainly caused by the insufficient maturity of the organism, it would be more marked in the female sex because of the dangers inherent in childbearing.

* The figures therefore refer not to an average year, but to the total of suicides committed in these fifteen years

† See Bertillon, art. 'Mariage', pp. 43ff.

TABLE 21
FRANCE (1889–91)

Suicides per million inhabitants of each age group and marital status in an average year

Ages	Unmarried	Married	Widowed	Preservation coefficients of Married In relation to unmarried	Preservation coefficients of Married In relation to widowed	Preservation coefficients of Widowed In relation to unmarried
			Men			
15–20	113	500		0.22		
20–25	237	97	142	2.40	1.45	1.66
25–30	394	122	412	3.20	3.37	0.95
30–40	627	226	560	2.77	2.47	1.12
40–50	975	340	721	2.86	2.12	1.35
50–60	1,434	520	979	2.75	1.88	1.46
60–70	1,768	635	1,166	2.78	1.83	1.51
70–80	1,983	704	1,288	2.81	1.82	1.54
Above 80	1,571	770	1,154	2.04	1.49	1.36
			Women			
15–20	79.4	33	333	2.39	10.00	0.23
20–25	106	53	66	2.00	1.05	1.60
25–30	151	68	178	2.22	2.61	0.84
30–40	126	82	205	1.53	2.50	0.61
40–50	171	106	168	1.61	1.58	1.01
50–60	204	151	199	1.35	1.31	1.02
60–70	189	158	257	1.19	1.62	0.77
70–80	206	209	248	0.98	1.18	0.83
Above 80	176	110	240	1.60	2.18	0.79

Hence, everything tends to demonstrate that premature marriage leads to a moral state which has a harmful influence, especially on men.

2. *From the age of 20, married people of both sexes enjoy a preservation coefficient compared with the unmarried.* It is

higher than calculated by Bertillon: the figure that he shows, 1.6, is a minimum rather than an average.*

This coefficient changes according to age. It quickly reaches its maximum between 25 and 30 in France, or 30 to 40 in Oldenburg. From that age, it declines until the final period of life where there is sometimes a slight recovery.

3. *The preservation coefficient for married people in relation to the unmarried varies according to sex.* In France, it is men who are favoured and the gap between the two sexes is considerable: for husbands, the average is 2.73, while for wives it is only 1.56, or 43 per cent less. But in Oldenburg, the opposite is the case: the average for women is 2.16 and for men only 1.83. We should note that, at the same time, the disproportion is less, the second of these numbers being only 16 per cent below the first. So we shall say that *the sex most favoured by the state of marriage varies according to the society concerned, and the gap between the rates for the two sexes also varies according to whichever sex is most favoured.* As we go along, we shall find facts to confirm this rule.

4. *Widowhood lowers the coefficient of married people of either sex, but it does not usually eliminate it entirely.* Widowed men and women kill themselves more than married people do, but in general less than the unmarried. Their coefficient even rises in certain cases as high as 1.60 or 1.66. Like that for married people, it changes with age, but irregularly, so that it is impossible to deduce any rule from this.

As for married people, *the preservation coefficient of widowed people compared with the unmarried varies according to sex.* In France, men are favoured, their average coefficient being 1.32 while for widows it falls below one, to 0.84, or 37 per cent less. But in Oldenburg, women have the advantage as they do in marriage: they have a mean coefficient of 1.07, while that of widowers is below one, at 0.89, or a difference of 17

* There is only one exception: women aged between 70 and 80, whose coefficient falls slightly below one. This drop is dependent on the figures for the *département* of Seine. In the other *départements* (see Table 22, p. 207), the coefficient for women of that age is above one, though we should note that, even in the provinces, it is lower than the coefficient for other ages.

per cent. As for marriage, when the woman is best preserved by this, the gap between the sexes is smaller than when men have the advantage. So we can state in the same terms that *the sex most favoured in the state of widowhood varies according to the society involved, and the extent of the gap between the rates of the two sexes also varies according to the nature of the more favoured sex.*

Having thus established the facts, we must now try to explain them.

II

The immunity enjoyed by married people can only be attributed to one of the following two causes.

Either it is due to the influence of the domestic environment. In that case, it would be the influence of the family which neutralized the tendency to suicide or prevented it from coming to fruition.

Or else it is due to what one might call matrimonial selection. Marriage does indeed exercise a kind of mechanical selection process in the population as a whole. Not everyone who wishes to do so gets married. One has few chances of succeeding in founding a family if one does not possess certain qualities of health, fortune and morality. Those who do not, except in the event of an exceptional combination of favourable circumstances, are therefore – whether they like it or not – rejected, to join the class of the unmarried, which consequently contains all the human waste of the country. There it is that we find the disabled, the incurably sick and those who are too poor or clearly disfigured. Given that this section of the population is to that extent inferior to the rest, it is natural that it should express its inferiority by greater mortality, greater criminality and an increased tendency to suicide. So, according to this hypothesis, it is not the family that protects from suicide, crime and illness. The privilege enjoyed by those who are married derives from the fact that only those who possess a fair degree of physical and moral health are able to enjoy family life.

Bertillon seems to have hesitated between these two expla-

nations and to have accepted both at once. Since then, M. Letourneau,[2] in his *Évolution du mariage et de la famille*,* came down firmly in favour of the second. He is unwilling to see the undeniable superiority of the married population as a consequence and a proof of the superiority of the married state. He would have been less hasty in his rush to judgement if he had not glanced so superficially at the facts.

Of course, it is conceivable that married people do, in general, have a physical and mental constitution that is rather better than that of the unmarried. However, it is not the case that matrimonial selection allows only the elite of the population to achieve marriage. Most of all, it is doubtful whether those without money or position get married significantly less than others. As has been noted,† they generally have more children than the better off. So if foresight does not discourage them from rashly increasing their families, why should it prevent them from starting one in the first place? In any case, a number of facts will subsequently prove that poverty is not one of the factors on which the suicide rate depends. And as far as the infirm are concerned, apart from the fact that their infirmities may, for a variety of reasons, be overlooked, there is no proof that their number contains more suicides. The organico-psychic temperament that most predisposes a person to kill himself is neurasthenia in all its forms; but nowadays neurasthenia is considered more a mark of distinction than a flaw. In our refined societies, with their passion for intellectual matters, the hypersensitive are almost an aristocracy. Only obvious idiots are liable to be refused access to marriage and this limited form of selection is not enough to explain the immunity of married people.‡

* Paris, 1888, p. 436.

† J. Bertillon *fils*, in the article already cited from the *Revue scientifique*.

‡ In order to counter the hypothesis that the privileged situation of married people has to do with matrimonial selection, writers have sometimes cited the alleged aggravation that comes from widowhood. But we have just seen that this aggravation does not exist in the case of those who have never been married. Widowers kill themselves somewhat less than the unmarried, so the argument does not hold water.

Apart from these somewhat *a priori* considerations, numerous factors prove that the situation of the married vis-à-vis the unmarried is due to quite different causes.

If it was indeed an effect of matrimonial selection, we should see it becoming more evident as this selection starts to operate, that is to say from the age when young men and women begin to get married. From then on, we should witness a gap which would widen steadily as the selection came into operation, namely as and when marriageable people get married and thus cease to be mixed in with the remnant that is predestined by its nature to form the hard core of the unmarried. Finally, the peak should be reached at the age when the good seed is completely separated from the chaff, when the whole of the population that is eligible for marriage has in fact achieved it and when the class of the unmarried consists purely in those who are irredeemably destined for this condition by their moral or physical inferiority. This moment should be reached between the ages of 30 and 40; after that hardly anyone gets married.

In reality, the preservation coefficient obeys a quite different rule. At the start, it is very often replaced by an aggravation coefficient. Very young married people are more inclined to suicide than the unmarried, which would not be the case if they carried immunity in themselves and from birth. In the second place, the peak is reached almost at once. From the first age at which the privileged status of married people starts to assert itself (between 20 and 25 years), the coefficient reaches a figure above which it hardly rises later. And at this time there are only 148,000 husbands compared with 1,430,000 bachelors and 626,000 wives compared with 1,049,000 spinsters (in round numbers).* This means that the unmarried contain among them the greater part of the elite that is said ultimately to be destined by its congenital qualities to form the aristocracy of the married, so the gap between the two groups from the point of view of suicide ought to be very slight, yet it is already considerable. Similarly, at the following age (25 to 30 years) out of the two million married people who are to appear between the ages of

* These figures refer to France in the 1891 census.

30 and 40, more than a million are not yet married, but, far from the unmarried state benefiting from their presence in its ranks, this is the time when it seems to offer the least protection. At no time, so far as suicide is concerned, are the two sections of the population so far apart. By contrast, between the ages of 30 and 40, when the separation has taken place and the group of the married is almost complete, the preservation coefficient, instead of reaching its peak and indicating by this that conjugal selection has also come to an end, suffers a sudden, large drop. For men it falls from 3.20 to 2.77, while for women the fall is even more marked: 1.53 instead of 2.22, a drop of 32 per cent.

In addition to that, the choice, however it takes place, should affect unmarried women as much as unmarried men, because wives are not chosen differently from husbands. So if the moral superiority of married people is simply a result of selection, it should be equal for both sexes and subsequently the same should apply to immunity to suicide. But in reality husbands in France are noticeably better protected than wives. For the first, the preservation coefficient reaches as high as 3.20, only once falls below 2.04 and generally hovers around 2.80; while for the second, the *maximum* does not exceed 2.22 (or, at most, 2.39)* and the minimum is less than one (0.98). So it is that, here in France, marriage brings the figures for women closer to those of men where suicide is concerned. The table below shows the share of each sex in suicides of each age group during the years 1887–91.

	Share of each sex			
	Per 100 suicides of the unmarried in each age group		Per 100 suicides of the married in each age group	
Age	*Men*	*Women*	*Men*	*Women*
20 to 25	70	30	65	35
25 to 30	73	27	65	35
30 to 40	84	16	74	26

* We make this reservation because this coefficient of 2.39 refers to the period between 15 and 20 years in age, and since suicides by wives are very rare at this age, the small number of cases used as a basis for the calculation casts some doubt on its accuracy.

Age	*Men*	*Women*	*Men*	*Women*
40 to 50	86	14	77	23
50 to 60	88	12	78	22
60 to 70	91	9	81	19
70 to 80	91	9	78	22
Above 80	90	10	88	12

Thus at every age,* the share of wives in the rate of suicide among the married is well above that of spinsters in the rate of suicide among the unmarried. This is certainly not because a wife is in greater danger than a spinster; Tables 20 and 21 proved the opposite. It is simply that, while she does not lose by marrying, she gains less than the husband. However, if immunity is so unequal, this means that family life has a different effect on the moral constitution of the two sexes. What clearly proves that this inequality has no other origin is that we can see it arise and grow in the domestic environment. Indeed, Table 21 shows that at the start the preservation coefficient hardly differs for the two sexes (2.39 or 2.00 on the one side, 2.40 on the other). Then, little by little, the difference is accentuated, firstly because the coefficient of wives grows less than that of husbands up to the age at which it peaks, and then because

* Usually, when comparing the respective situations of the sexes in two different marital states, care is not taken to eliminate the influence of age, but this leads to incorrect results. So, by the ordinary method, one would find that in 1887–91 there were 21 suicides of married women for 79 by married men, and 19 suicides by spinsters against 100 by bachelors of every age. These figures would give an incorrect idea of the situation. The table above shows that the difference between the share of married and unmarried women is much greater at every age. The reason for this is that the gap between the sexes varies with age in the two states: between 70 and 80, it is around double what it was at 20. And the unmarried population is almost entirely composed of subjects aged below 30. So, if one does not take account of age, the gap that appears is in reality the one that separates bachelors and spinsters of around 30. But then, if we compared it to the gap separating married people without taking account of age, as the average age of the married is around 50, this is the age group with which the comparison is being made. In this way, the results are falsified and the mistake is compounded by the fact that the gap between the sexes does not vary in the same way in the two groups through the effect of age. It increases more among the unmarried than the married.

the decrease in it is faster and greater.* So, if it develops in this way as the influence of the family lengthens, this means that it depends on it.

Still more persuasive is the fact that the relative situation of the two sexes when it comes to the degree of immunity enjoyed by married people is not the same in every country. In the Grand Duchy of Oldenburg, women are favoured, and later we shall see another example of the same reversal. However, on the whole, conjugal selection always operates in the same manner, so it is not possible that this can be the essential factor in matrimonial immunity, because in that case how could it produce opposite results in different countries? On the contrary, it is quite possible that the family is constituted in such a way as to act differently on the sexes in two different societies. This is why the main cause of the phenomenon that we are studying is to be sought in the constitution of the family group.

However, this result, interesting though it may be, needs to be qualified, because the domestic environment is made up of different elements. For every married person, the family consists in his or her partner and his or her children. Is it to the former or the latter that we owe its salutary influence on the tendency to suicide? In other words, it is made up of two different associations: on the one hand, the conjugal group and, on the other, the family group proper. These two social groups do not have the same origin or the same nature; nor, consequently, are they likely to have the same effects. One derives from a contract and elective affinities, the other from a natural phenomenon, consanguinity. The first of these unites two members of the same generation, the second joins one generation to the next. The latter is as old as humanity, the former a relatively late invention. Since they differ to such an extent, it is not certain *a priori* that they both combine to produce the phenomenon that we are seeking to understand. In any case, if one or the other

* In the same way, we can see from the preceding table that the proportional shares of wives in suicide by married people exceeds that of spinsters in suicides by the unmarried, as we advance in age.

does contribute to it, this will not be in the same way or, probably, to the same extent. So it is important to examine whether both of them are involved and, if so, what is the role of each.

We already have proof of the limited effect of marriage in the fact that nuptiality has changed little since the start of the century, while suicide has tripled. From 1821 to 1830, there were 7.8 marriages a year per 1,000 inhabitants, 8.0 from 1831 to 1850, 7.9 in the years 1851–60, 7.8 from 1861 to 1870, and 8.0 from 1871 to 1880. During the same period, the rate of suicide per million inhabitants rose from 58 to 180. From 1880 to 1888, nuptiality fell slightly (7.4 instead of 8.0), but this decline is nothing beside the huge rise in suicides, which, from 1880 to 1887, increased by more than 16 per cent.* Moreover, in the period 1865–88, the mean rate of marriage in France (7.7) is almost equal to that of Denmark (7.8) and Italy (7.6), while these two countries are as dissimilar to it as possible from the point of view of suicide.†

Meanwhile, we have a far more effective way of precisely measuring the actual influence of a conjugal union on suicide, which is to observe it in a state where it is reduced to its own action alone, that is in families without children.

In the years 1887–91, a million men in childless couples

* Legoyt (op. cit., p. 175) and Corre (*Crime et suicide*, p. 475) did, however, try to establish a relationship between the level of suicides and that of nuptiality. But their mistake derives firstly from the fact that they considered too short a period, and then from the fact that they compared the most recent years to an abnormal one, 1872, in which the marriage rate in France soared to an exceptionally high level, not reached since 1813, because there was a need to fill the gaps caused by the war of 1870 in the ranks of the married population. It is not possible to measure the changes in nuptiality against such a measure. The same observation applies to Germany and indeed to almost all countries in Europe; it is as though nuptiality experienced a sudden forward leap at that moment. We can observe a sudden, large rise, which sometimes continues until 1873, in Italy, Switzerland, Belgium, England and Holland. It is as though the whole of Europe had combined to repair the losses of the two countries that had been at war. Of course, the result was that after a certain time there was a huge fall, which does not have the significance that has been attached to it (see Oettingen, *Moralstatistik*, appendices, Tables 1, 2 and 3).

† According to Levasseur, *Population française*, vol. II, p. 208.

produced 644 suicides a year.* To understand the extent to which the married state, by itself and aside from the family, preserves from suicide, we only have to compare this figure with that of unmarried men of the same average age. This is the comparison that our Table 21 allows us to make (and that is not the least of the services that it will render us). The average age of married men at that time, as today, was 46 years 8 and one-third months. A million unmarried men of that age produce around 975 suicides. Now, 644 is to 975 as 100 is to 150, which means that childless men have a preservation coefficient of only 1.5 – they kill themselves only a third less than unmarried men of the same age. When there are children, the picture is quite different. A million married men with children produced only 336 suicides in this same period per year. This number is to 975 as 100 is to 290, which means that when the marriage is productive of children, the preservation coefficient is almost doubled (2.90 against 1.5).

Marriage itself is therefore only slightly involved in the immunity of married men. Indeed, in our calculations, we have made its role a little greater than it really is, by assuming that childless men have the same average age as men in general, when in fact their average age is certainly younger: they include in their ranks the youngest married men, who have no children, not because they are definitely infertile but because they have been married too recently for them to have had time to produce children. On average, a man has his first child only at the age of 34,† yet he gets married at around 28 or 29. The section of the married population aged between 28 and 34 is thus almost entirely included in the category of childless men, which lowers the average age of the latter; so, in calculating it at 46, we have certainly exaggerated. But in that case, the group of unmarried men to whom they should have been compared is not that of 46 years old, but of much younger men and women, who consequently kill themselves at a lower rate than the previous

* According to the 1886 census, p. 123 of the *Dénombrement*.

† See *Annuaire statistique de la France*, vol. 15, p. 43.

one. The coefficient of 1.5 must therefore be a little high. If we knew precisely the average age of husbands without children, we should see that their tendency to suicide is even closer to that of unmarried men than the preceding figures suggest.

In any case, the thing that clearly shows the limited influence of marriage is that widowers with children are still in a better situation than husbands without children. The former supply 937 suicides per million. Now, they have an average age of 61 years 8 and one-third months. The rate of bachelors of the same age (see Table 21) is somewhere between 1,434 and 1,768, or around 1,504. This number is to 937 as 160 is to 100. Widowers with children therefore have a preservation coefficient of 1.6, above that of husbands without children. Moreover, by calculating in this way, we have tended to diminish rather than exaggerate the effect, because widowers with families are surely older than widowers in general. In fact, this last group includes all those whose marriages remained childless only because they were interrupted prematurely, that is to say the youngest. So, in fact, widowers with children should rightly be compared with bachelors of over 62 (who because of their age have a more marked tendency to suicide). It is clear that their immunity can only be reinforced by this comparison.*

It is true that the coefficient of 1.6 is considerably below that of men with children (2.9), the difference being just below 45 per cent. So one might think that, in itself, matrimony has a greater effect than we have attributed to it since, when it ends, the immunity of the surviving spouse is diminished to such an extent. But this loss is only slightly attributable to the end of the marriage. The proof of this is that, where there are no children, widowhood produces far less marked effects. A million widowers without children produce 1,258 suicides, a number which is to 1,504 (representing bachelors of 62 years) as 100 is to 119. The preservation coefficient is therefore around

* For the same reason, the age of married men with children is above that of married men in general and, consequently, the preservation coefficient of 2.9 should be considered as, if anything, below the correct figure.

1.2, or little less than that of husbands who also do not have children (1.5). The first of these numbers is only 20 per cent below the second. Thus when the death of a spouse has no other effect than the breaking of the conjugal bond, it does not have very great effects on the tendency of the surviving partner to commit suicide. We must therefore conclude that marriage, while it exists, only slightly contributes to reducing this tendency, since the latter does not increase greatly when marriage ceases.

As for the reason why widowhood is relatively more pernicious when the marriage was fertile, we must seek that in the presence of the children. Naturally, in one sense, children are an attachment holding a widowed father to life, but at the same time they make the crisis he suffers more acute. It is not only the conjugal relationship that is broken, but the functioning of the domestic society is impaired, precisely because such a society exists in such cases. An essential cog is missing and the whole mechanism is thrown out as a result. In order to re-establish the balance that has been disturbed, the man has to play a double role and carry out functions for which he is not suited. This is why he loses the advantages that he enjoyed while the marriage lasted. It is not because he is no longer married, but because the family of which he is the head has been disrupted; it is not the disappearance of the wife, but of the mother, that causes this upset.

However, it is chiefly in relation to women that the slight effects of marriage are most evident when it does not have its natural complement in children. A million married women without children account for 221 suicides, and a million unmarried women of the same age (between 42 and 43 years) only 150. The first of these numbers is to the second as 100 to 67, so the preservation coefficient is less than one (equal to 0.67), so in reality there is an aggravation. *This means that in France married women without children kill themselves half as much again as spinsters of the same age.* We have already established that, in general terms, the woman gains less from family life than the man. We can now see the cause of this, which is that,

in itself, the conjugal bond is harmful to woman and aggravates her tendency to suicide.

If, however, wives in general appear to us to enjoy a preservation coefficient, this is because infertile marriages are the exception and consequently in the majority of cases the presence of children compensates for and weakens the bad effects of marriage. Even so, these are only attenuated. A million women with children produce 79 suicides. If we compare this figure with the one representing the rate of unmarried women aged 42, which is 150, we find that a wife, even if she is also a mother, only enjoys a preservation coefficient of 1.89, which is thus 35 per cent below that of husbands in the same situation.* Consequently, we cannot accept Bertillon's idea where suicide is concerned that 'when the wife enters into the state of matrimony, she gains more than the husband does from this union, but she inevitably suffers more than he does by leaving it'.†

III

Thus the immunity that married people enjoy in general is attributable – altogether for one sex and largely for the other – to the effects, not of the married state, but of the family bond. However, we have seen that, even if there are no children, men at least are protected in the ratio of 1 to 1.5. A saving of 50 suicides out of 150, or 33 per cent, while well below that which occurs when the family is complete, is not a negligible amount even so, and it is important to know the reason for it. Is it due to the special benefits conferred by marriage on the male sex or is it not rather an effect of matrimonial selection? Because, though we have managed to show that the latter does not play

* A comparable gap exists between the coefficient of husbands without children and that of wives without children, though it is a lot larger. The second (0.67) is 66 per cent below the first (1.5), so the presence of children allows the wife to regain half of the ground that she loses by marrying. This means that though she benefits less than the man from marriage, she does by contrast benefit more from the family, that is to say from having children: she is more susceptible than he is to their positive influence.

† Article 'Mariage', *Dict. Encycl.*, 2nd series, vol. V, p. 36.

the crucial role that has been ascribed to it, this does not mean that it has no influence at all.

At first sight, one fact indeed seems to confirm the hypothesis. We know that the preservation coefficient for husbands without children to some extent survives marriage, only falling from 1.5 to 1.2. Yet this immunity of widowers without children can surely not be attributed to widowhood, which, in itself, is not liable to diminish the tendency to suicide but can, on the contrary, only increase it. It must therefore derive from some earlier cause, which does not, however, seem likely to be marriage, since it continues to operate even when the marriage has been dissolved by the death of the wife. In that case, may it not consist in some inborn quality of husbands which conjugal selection brings out, but does not create? Since it appears to exist before marriage and to be independent of marriage, it would be quite normal for it to last longer than marriage. If the population of married men is an elite, the same must necessarily apply to widowers. It is true that this congenital superiority has lesser effects among the latter, because they are to a lesser extent protected against suicide; but one might accept that the devastating effects of losing a wife might partly neutralize that preventive influence and hinder it from achieving all its results.

But for this explanation to be accepted, it would have to be applicable to both sexes. We should therefore have to find at least some traces in married women of this natural predisposition that, other things being equal, would preserve them against suicide to a greater extent than spinsters. Yet, the fact we already know, that in the absence of children they kill themselves more than unmarried women of the same age, is hardly reconcilable with the notion that would make them possessed from birth of a personal preservation coefficient. However, we might still agree that this coefficient does exist for women as for men, but that it is totally erased in the course of the marriage by the baneful influence of the married state on the moral constitution of the wife. However, if these effects were only contained and masked by the sort of moral or psychological decline that a woman undergoes on entering into the married state, they ought to reappear when that state is dis-

solved, in this case by widowhood. So we ought then to see the wife, released from the matrimonial yoke which was weighing down on her, recover all her advantages and finally assert her native superiority over those of her sex who had been unable to achieve the married state. In other words, the widow without children ought, in comparison with unmarried women, to enjoy a preservation coefficient which at least approaches that of the widower without children. But this is not at all the case. A million widows without children provide an annual number of 322 suicides, while a million spinsters of age 60 (the mean age of widows) produce a number between 189 and 204, or around 196. The first of these numbers is to the second in the ratio of 100 to 60. Widows without children therefore have a coefficient below 1, that is to say an aggravation coefficient. This is equal to 0.60, slightly below that of wives without children (0.67). Consequently, it is not marriage that prevents the latter from demonstrating the natural lack of a propensity for suicide that is attributed to them.

It may perhaps be claimed that what prevents the recovery of those fortunate qualities, the evidence of which has been suspended by marriage, is that widowhood is a still worse state for a woman. It is, indeed, a widely held notion that a widow is in a more critical situation than her male counterpart. People emphasize the mental and economic problems with which she has to deal when she is obliged to support herself, and more so still when she has to provide for a family. It has even been felt that this opinion was proven by the facts. According to Morselli,* statistics demonstrate that a woman in a state of widowhood is less distant from a man in the tendency to suicide than when she is married; and since, when married, she is already closer to the male sex than when she is a spinster, it must be concluded that there is no more disadvantageous state for her than widowhood. In support of this hypothesis, Morselli quotes the following figures that only apply to France, but which with slight variations could be observed among all the nations of Europe:

* Op. cit., p. 342.

Year	Share of each sex per 100 suicides of married people (%)		Share of each sex per 100 suicides of widowed people (%)	
	Men	*Women*	*Men*	*Women*
1871	79	21	71	29
1872	78	22	68	32
1873	79	21	69	31
1874	74	26	57	43
1875	81	19	77	23
1876	82	18	78	22

The proportion of women in suicides committed by both sexes in the widowed state does indeed seem to be much larger than their proportion in suicides among the married. Does this not prove that widowhood is much harder for her to bear than marriage was? This being so, there is nothing surprising in the fact that, even when she is a widow, the good effects of her nature are to a yet greater extent prevented from appearing?

Unfortunately, this alleged rule is based on a factual error. Morselli has forgotten that there are twice as many widows everywhere as widowers. In France, in round numbers, there are two million of the former for only a million of the latter. In Prussia, according to the census of 1890, we find 450,000 widowers and 1,319,000 widows; in Italy, the figures are 571,000 for one group and 1,322,000 for the other. Given this, it is quite natural for the contribution of widows to be higher than that of wives, who are obviously equal in number to husbands. If we want the comparison to illustrate anything, we must reduce the two populations to equal numbers; and if we do so, we find a result which is the opposite of that revealed by Morselli. At the average age of widowed people, that is 60 years, one million wives give 154 suicides and a million husbands 577. The women's share is therefore 21 per cent. It is noticeably reduced in widowhood, when a million widows give 210 cases of suicide and a million widowers 1,017, the result of which is to show that, out of 100 suicides by widowed people of both sexes, women account for only 17 while, by contrast, the men's share rises from 79 to 83 per cent. Thus in going

from marriage to widowhood, the man loses more than the woman, since he does not retain certain advantages which he derived from the conjugal state. There is therefore no reason to suppose that this change in situation is any less burdensome or disturbing for him than for her; in fact, the contrary is the case. Moreover, we know that mortality among widowers is far greater than among widows; so is the remarriage rate: that of the former is, at every age, three or four times that of bachelors, while that of widows is only a little greater than that of spinsters. So women are as reluctant to enter into a second marriage as men are keen to do so.* It would be quite different if his condition as a widower were as easy for him to bear and if his female counterpart found hers as difficult as some people say.†

But if there is nothing in widowhood that particularly stifles the natural gifts of women as especially destined for marriage and if they do not manifest themselves by any appreciable sign, there is no reason to suppose that they exist. Hence the hypothesis of matrimonial selection does not at all apply to the female sex. Nothing justifies us in thinking that a woman with a vocation for marriage has a privileged constitution which to some extent forearms her against suicide. Consequently, the same supposition is no less ill-founded where men are concerned. The coefficient of 1.5 which married men without children enjoy does not come from the fact that they are recruited among the healthier sections of the population, so it can only be an effect of marriage. We must admit that the conjugal bond, which is so disastrous for women, is on the contrary, and even in the absence of children, beneficial to men. Those who enter into it do not constitute an aristocracy of birth; they do not bring into marriage a ready-made temperament that discourages them from suicide, but acquire this temperament through

* See Bertillon, 'Les célibataires, les veufs, etc.', *Rev. scient.*, 1879.

† Morselli also quotes in support of his thesis the fact that in the period immediately following a war, suicide among widows rises much more sharply than among wives or unmarried women. But this is simply because at such a time the population of widows experiences an exceptional rise, so it is natural that it should produce more suicides and that the rise in numbers should persist until the balance is restored and the different population groups have returned to their normal levels.

living in the married state. At least, if they do have any natural prerogatives, these can only be very vague and indeterminate, since they remain ineffectual until certain other conditions are fulfilled. And this shows the truth of the fact that suicide does not depend on the congenital qualities of individuals, but on causes external to them which dominate them!

However, there remains one final difficulty to be resolved. If this coefficient of 1.5, independent of the family, is due to marriage, how can it be that it survives in the childless widower, who exhibits it at least in an attenuated form (1.2)? If one rejects the theory of matrimonial selection to explain this survival, what is there to replace that theory?

It is enough to assume that the habits, tastes and tendencies acquired during marriage do not disappear once the marriage is dissolved; and nothing is more natural than to suppose this. So if the married man, even when he is childless, feels a relative disinclination for suicide, it is inevitable that he should retain something of this feeling when he becomes a widower. Yet, since widowhood cannot occur without causing a certain degree of mental turmoil, and since, as we shall show later, any disruption of balance inclines towards suicide, this disinclination survives only in a weakened form. Conversely, but for the same reason, since an infertile wife is more likely to kill herself than if she had remained unmarried, once widowed she retains this stronger inclination, which is, moreover, slightly reinforced because of the upset and disruption of balance that widowhood always brings with it. However, since the adverse effects that marriage had on her make this change in state easier to bear, the aggravation is very mild. The coefficient is only lowered by a few hundredths (0.60 instead of 0.67).*

* When there are children, the fall experienced by both sexes through widowhood is almost the same. The coefficient of husbands with children is 2.9; it becomes 1.6. That of wives in the same situation falls from 1.89 to 1.06. The fall is 45 per cent for the first group, 44 per cent for the second. This is because, as we have already said, widowhood produces two kinds of effect: it disturbs, firstly, the conjugal bond and, secondly, the family group. The first upset is much more easily borne by the wife than by the husband, precisely because she gains less from marriage. But, by contrast, she suffers more from the second of these, because it is often harder for her to take the place of the husband in

This explanation is confirmed by the fact that it is only a particular instance of a more general proposition that might be formulated as follows: *In a given society, the tendency to suicide in the widowed state is, for either sex, a function of the tendency to suicide that the same sex has in the married state.* If the husband is strongly protected, then the widower will be also, though of course to a lesser extent. If the former is only slightly protected against suicide, then the latter is not, or only very little. To confirm the accuracy of this theorem, one has only to look at Tables 20 and 21, and the conclusions previously drawn from them. We have seen that one sex is more favoured than the other in marriage as in widowhood; and that the one who is privileged over the other in the first of these states retains that privilege in the second. In France, husbands have a greater preservation coefficient than wives, and that of widowers is also higher than that of widows. In Oldenburg, the opposite is the case among married people, the wife enjoying greater immunity than the husband. The same is true of widows and widowers.

However, as these two cases alone might justifiably be seen as insufficient proof and as, additionally, statistical publications do not give us the necessary elements to verify our proposition in other countries, we have made use of the following procedure to extend the range of comparison: we have separately calculated the suicide rate for each age group and marital status, firstly in the *département* of the Seine and secondly in the remaining *départements*, taken as a whole. The two social groups, thus isolated from one another, are different enough for us to expect that the comparison will be instructive; and family life there does indeed affect suicide very differently (see Table 22).

In the *départements*, the husband is much better preserved than the wife. The coefficient of the first falls below 3 only four

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the management of the family than for him to replace her in her domestic duties. So when there are children, a sort of compensation occurs, meaning that the tendency to suicide in both sexes varies, through the effect of widowhood, in the same proportions. Consequently, it is chiefly when there are no children that the widow regains some of the ground that she had lost through entering the married state.

TABLE 22

Comparison of suicide rates per million inhabitants in each age group and marital status in the département of the Seine and in the provinces (1889–91)

Ages	Men			Preservation coefficients of unmarried in relation to		Women			Preservation coefficients of unmarried in relation to	
	Unmarried	Married	Widowed	Married	Widowed	Unmarried	Married	Widowed	Married	Widowed
					Provinces					
15–20	100	400		0.25		67	36	375	1.86	0.17
20–25	214	95	153	2.25	1.39	95	52	76	1.82	1.25
25–30	365	103	373	3.54	0.97	122	64	156	1.90	0.78
30–40	590	202	511	2.92	1.15	101	74	174	1.36	0.58
40–50	976	295	633	3.30	1.54	147	95	149	1.54	0.98
50–60	1,445	470	852	3.07	1.69	178	136	174	1.30	1.02
60–70	1,790	582	1,047	3.07	1.70	163	142	221	1.14	0.73
70–80	2,000	664	1,252	3.01	1.59	200	191	233	1.04	0.85
Above 80	1,458	762	1,129	1.91	1.29	160	108	221	1.48	0.72
Average preservation coefficients				2.88	1.45				1.49	0.78
					Seine					
15–20	280	2,000		0.14		224				
20–25	487	128		3.80		196	64		3.06	
25–30	599	298	714	2.01	0.83	328	103	296	3.18	1.10
30–40	869	436	912	1.99	0.95	281	156	373	1.80	0.75
40–50	985	808	1,459	1.21	0.67	357	217	289	1.64	1.23
50–60	1,367	1,152	2,321	1.18	0.58	456	353	410	1.29	1.11
60–70	1,500	1,559	2,902	0.96	0.51	515	471	637	1.09	0.80
70–80	1,783	1,741	2,082	1.02	0.85	326	677	464	0.48	0.70
Above 80	1,923	1,111	2,089	1.73	0.92	508	277	591	1.83	0.85
Average preservation coefficients				1.56	0.75				1.79	0.93

times,* while that of the wife never rises as high as 2. The average is in one case 2.88, and in the other 1.49. In the Seine, the opposite is the case. On average, the coefficient for husbands is only 1.56, while it is 1.79 for wives.† And we find exactly the same inversion between widowers and widows. In the provinces, the mean coefficient for widowers is high (1.45), while that for widows is well below that figure (0.78). In the Seine, on the contrary, the second is higher, rising to 0.93 (almost one), while the other falls to 0.75. *Thus, whichever sex is favoured, widowhood comes behind marriage.*

There is more: if one seeks to find the relation by which the coefficient of husbands varies from one social group to another and if one then undertakes the same research for widowers, one obtains the following, surprising results:

$$\frac{\text{Coefficient of husbands in the provinces}}{\text{Coefficient of husbands in the Seine}} = \frac{2.88}{1.56} = 1.84$$

$$\frac{\text{Coefficient of widowers in the provinces}}{\text{Coefficient of widowers in the Seine}} = \frac{1.45}{0.75} = 1.93$$

And for women:

$$\frac{\text{Coefficient of wives in the Seine}}{\text{Coefficient of wives in the provinces}} = \frac{1.79}{1.49} = 1.20$$

$$\frac{\text{Coefficient of widows in the Seine}}{\text{Coefficient of widows in the provinces}} = \frac{0.93}{0.78} = 1.19$$

The numerical relations for each sex are equal to within a few hundredths of a unit; for women, there is almost absolute equality. So when the coefficient of husbands rises or falls, not only does that for widowers follow suit, but it also grows or

* On Table 22, it can be seen that in Paris, as in the provinces, the coefficient of husbands aged below 20 is below 1, meaning that they suffer an aggravation of risk. This confirms the rule stated earlier.

† It can be seen that when the female sex is the one most favoured by marriage, the disproportion between the two sexes is much less than when the husband has the advantage – a further confirmation of an observation made earlier.

decreases to exactly the same extent. These relationships can even be expressed in a form that demonstrates still more clearly the rule that we formulated earlier. Indeed, they imply that everywhere, whatever the sex, widowhood diminishes the immunity of spouses in a constant measure:

$$\frac{\text{Provincial husbands}}{\text{Provincial widowers}} = \frac{2.88}{1.45} = 1.98 \qquad \frac{\text{Husbands in Seine}}{\text{Widowers in Seine}} = \frac{1.56}{0.75} = 2.00$$

$$\frac{\text{Provincial wives}}{\text{Provincial widows}} = \frac{1.49}{0.78} = 1.91 \qquad \frac{\text{Wives in Seine}}{\text{Widows in Seine}} = \frac{1.79}{0.93} = 1.92$$

The coefficient of widowed men is around half that of husbands. It is therefore not an exaggeration to say that the tendency of widowers to commit suicide is a function of the corresponding tendency among married men: in other words, that the first is, in part, a consequence of the second. But then, since marriage, even in the absence of children, preserves the husband, it is not surprising that the widower should retain some of this benefit.

While resolving the question that we raised, the results at the same time throw light on the nature of widowhood. They show us that being widowed is not in itself an irrecoverably bad situation. It is often better than not having been married at all. The truth is that there is nothing specific about the mentality of widowers and widows, but that it depends on that of married people of the same sex living in the same country. The first is merely an extension of the second. Tell me how marriage and family life in a given society affect men and women and I will tell you what widowhood means for one sex or the other. It turns out, by a fortunate measure of compensation, that where marriage and domestic relations are healthy, and the crisis produced by widowhood the more painful, people are better armed to cope with it; conversely, the crisis is less serious when the make-up of the marriage and family leave more to be desired, but by contrast they are less well-prepared to resist it. Hence, in societies where the man benefits more than the woman from family life, he suffers more than she does when

he is left alone; but at the same time, he is in a better state to bear this suffering because the salutary influence that he has undergone has made him less susceptible to desperate measures.

IV

The following table summarizes the facts that we have just established.*

Influence of family on suicide in each sex

	Men			Women	
	Suicide rate	Preservation coefficient in relation to unmarried		Suicide rate	Preservation coefficient in relation to unmarried
Unmarried, aged 45	975		Unmarried, aged 42	150	
Married, with children	336	2.9	Married, with children	79	1.89
Married, without children	644	1.5	Married, without children	221	0.67
Unmarried, aged 60	1,504		Unmarried, aged 60	196	
Widowed, with children	937	1.6	Widowed, with children	186	1.06
Widowed, without children	1,258	1.2	Widowed, without children	322	0.60

* M. Bertillon (in the article we quoted above from the *Revue scientifique*) had already given the rate of suicide for different social groups according to whether there were children or not. Here are the results he obtained (per million):

Husbands with children	205 suicides	Widowers with children	526
Husbands without children	478 "	Widowers without children	1,004
Wives with children	45 "	Widows with children	104
Wives without children	158 "	Widows without children	238

These figures refer to the years 1861–68. Given the general growth in the number of suicides, they confirm our findings. But since the absence of a table such as our Table 21 did not allow a comparison of husbands and widowers with bachelors of the same age, no precise conclusion could be drawn as to the preservation coefficients. We also wonder whether the figures refer to the whole country: the Bureau de la Statistique de France assures us that the distinction between married couples with children and those without was never made in censuses before 1886, apart from 1855 for all *départements* except the Seine.

We can see from this table and from the preceding observations that marriage does have a preservative effect with regard to suicide, and one peculiar to it. But it is very limited and, moreover, benefits only one sex. However useful it may have been to establish its existence – and we shall understand why in a later chapter* – the fact remains that the essential element in the immunity of married people is the family, that is to say the complete group formed by parents and children. No doubt, since the husbands and wives are members of this group, they also contribute to this outcome, but they do so not as husband or wife, but as father or mother, as operatives within the family group. If the disappearance of one of them increases the chance that the other will kill himself or herself, this is not because the links that unite them personally to one another have been broken, but because this results in an upheaval in the family and the surviving partner has to bear the brunt of it. While reserving for later a study of the special effect of marriage, we shall therefore state that domestic society, just like religious society, is a powerful preservative against suicide.

The preservation is in fact even greater when the density of the family is greater, that is to say when it includes a larger number of members.

We have already stated and demonstrated this proposition in an article for the *Revue philosophique*,[3] published in November 1888. But the insufficiency of the statistics then available to us did not allow us to prove the point with all the rigour we would have liked. We did not know the average number of persons in a family, in France generally or in each *département*. We therefore had to assume that the family density depended solely on the number of children and, moreover, since this number was not shown in the census, we had to estimate it indirectly, by means of what in demography is termed the physiological increase, that is to say, the annual excess of births over every thousand deaths. Of course, using these figures in substitution was not irrational, since when the increase is high, families in general can hardly fail to be dense. However, the consequence is

* See Book Two, Chap. 5, § 3.

not inevitable and often does not occur. In cases where children are accustomed to leave their parents early in life, either to emigrate, or to found families of their own, or for whatever other cause, the family density does not reflect their number. Indeed, the house can be empty, even though the marriage has been very productive. This is what happens in cultured circles, where the child is sent very young out of the family to gain or complete an education, and in poor regions, where the hardships of life make early dispersal a necessity. Conversely, despite a low birth-rate, the family can contain a sufficient or even high number of individuals if unmarried adults and even married children continue to live with their parents, forming one single domestic group. For all these reasons, one cannot measure with any precision the relative density of family groups unless one knows how they are in fact made up.

The 1886 census, the results of which were published only at the end of 1888, gave us this information. If, according to the data which we find in it, we seek to establish the relationship between suicide and the average number of persons in families in the various French *départements*, we arrive at the following results:

		Suicides per million inhabitants (1878–87)	Mean membership of families per 100 households (1886)
1st group	(11 *départements*)	430–380	347
2nd "	(6 ")	300–240	360
3rd "	(15 ")	230–180	376
4th "	(18 ")	170–130	393
5th "	(26 ")	120–80	418
6th "	(10 ")	70–30	434

Family density increases regularly in proportion to the fall in the number of suicides.

If instead of comparing averages, we analyse the content of each group, we find nothing to contradict this conclusion. For the whole of France, the average membership is 39 individuals

for every 10 families. So if we then look to see how many *départements* are above or below the average in each of these six classes, we find the following:

	In each group, how many *départements* are	
	Below average (percentage)	Above average (percentage)
1st group	100	0
2nd "	84	16
3rd "	60	30
4th "	33	63
5th "	19	81
6th "	0	100

The group with the greatest number of suicides only includes those *départements* where family membership is below the average. Bit by bit, in the most regular fashion, the ratio is reversed until the inversion is total. In the last group, where suicides are rare, all the *départements* have an above-average family density.

The two maps (see page 215) demonstrate the same general configuration. The regions in which families are least dense in numbers have broadly the same outlines as the zones where suicides are highest. The latter also occupy the north and east, extending as far as Brittany in one direction and to the Loire in the other. In the west and south, by contrast, where suicides are rare, families generally have a larger number of members. This relationship is even to be found in certain details. In the north, two *départements* stand out because of their lower inclination to suicide: these are the Nord and the Pas-de-Calais. The fact is all the more surprising since the *département* of the Nord is heavily industrialized and heavy industry favours suicide. And the same pecularity is to be found on the other map. In these two *départements*, family density is high, while it is very low in all the neighbouring *départements*. In the south, we find on both maps the same dark patch formed by Bouches-du-Rhône, Var and Alpes-Maritimes, and in the west the same clear patch of Brittany. The irregularities that do exist are exceptions and never very marked. Given the multitude of

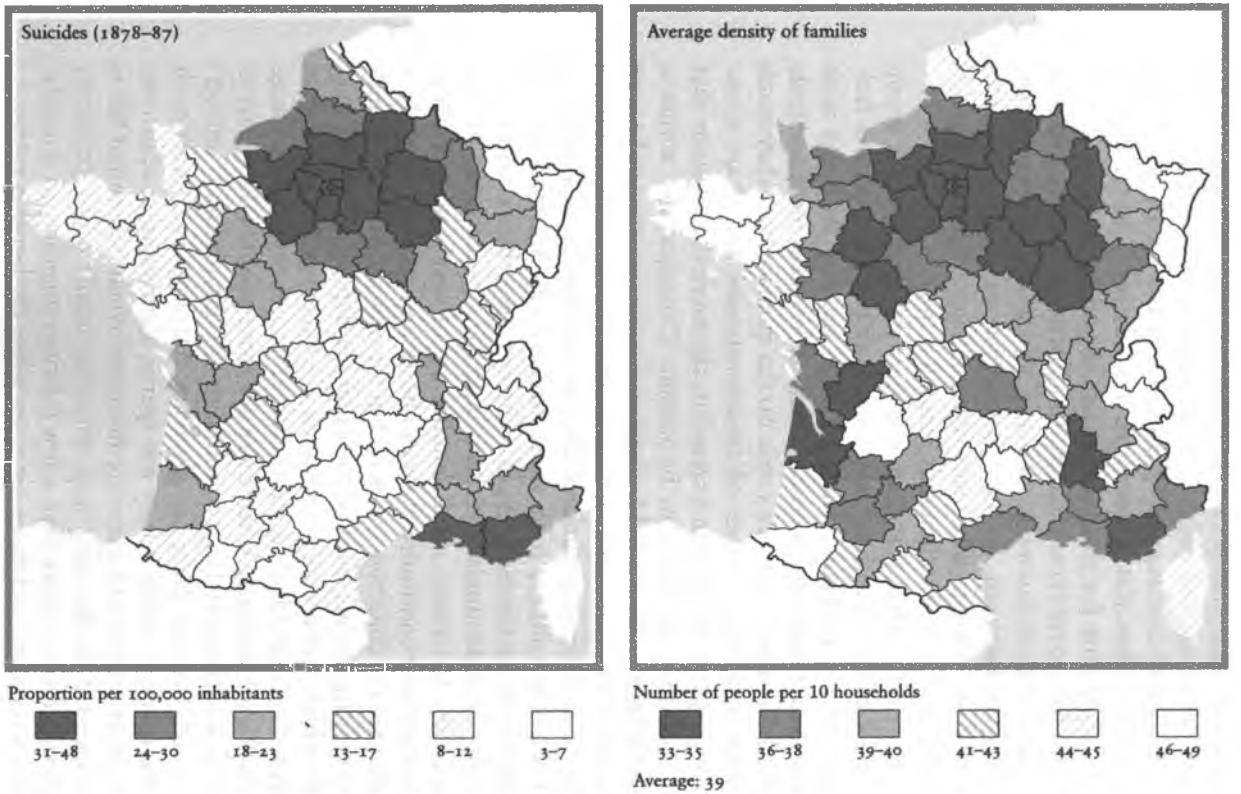
factors that might affect such a complex phenomenon, this broad coincidence is significant.

The same inverse relationship is found in the manner in which these two phenomena have developed in time. Since 1826, suicide has constantly grown and the birth-rate has fallen. From 1821 to 1830, it remained at 308 births per 10,000 inhabitants; it fell to 240 during the period 1881–88, and in the intervening period the decline was continuous. At the same time, we observe a tendency for the family to break up and increasingly divide into smaller units. From 1856 to 1886, the number of households grew by around two million: it rose progressively and continuously from 8,796,276 to 10,662,423. However, during the same period, the population increased by only two million. The result is that every family consists of a smaller number of members.*

Thus the facts are far from confirming the popular idea that suicide is chiefly caused by the burdens of life, since we find on the contrary that it decreases when these burdens become heavier. This is a consequence of Malthusianism[4] that was not foreseen by its inventor. When he recommended that the density of families should be contained, it was with the idea that this restriction was in some cases necessary to the general well-being. But in reality it is so much a source of discomfort that it reduces a man's desire for life. Far from large families being a sort of luxury that one can do without and which only the rich should enjoy, they are on the contrary the daily bread without which one cannot survive. However poor one is, and even considering the matter solely from the personal point of view, the worst of investments is to transform a part of one's progeny into capital.

This result agrees with the one that we reached earlier. How is it that family density has such an influence on suicide? To reply to this question, we cannot look for organic factors, because while absolute sterility is chiefly a product of physiological causes, the same does not apply to inadequate fecundity, which is usually voluntary and the outcome of a certain state of mind. Family density, as we have assessed it, is not solely a matter of birth-rate; we have seen that when there are few

* See *Dénombrement de 1886*, p. 106.



Map 4 Suicides and family density

children, other individuals can take their place and, conversely, that the number of children may be immaterial if they do not actively and continuously participate in the life of the group. So neither does this preservative force derive from the feelings of the parents for their immediate descendants in their own right. Moreover these feelings, to achieve this effect, assume a certain state of domestic society. They cannot be strong if the family is dispersed. So, because the way in which it operates varies according to its density, the tendency to suicide depends on the number of individuals making it up.

In reality, what this means is that the density of a group cannot diminish without lessening its vitality. If collective feelings have a particular energy, this is because the force with which each individual consciousness experiences them resounds in all the others and vice versa. So the intensity that they reach depends on the number of consciousnesses that share them. This is why, the greater a crowd is, the more the passions that it unleashes are likely to be violent. Consequently, within a small family, the shared feelings and memories cannot be very intense, because there are not enough consciousnesses to visualize them and reinforce them by sharing. In such a family, it is not possible to form those strong traditions that serve as links between the members of a single group, which even survive them as individuals and join successive generations to one another. Moreover, small families are of necessity ephemeral, and without continuity there can be no unified collectivity. Not only are the collective states within them weak, but they cannot be very numerous, because their number depends on the activity by which views and impressions are exchanged and circulate from one individual to another; and, moreover, this exchange itself is all the faster when there are more people taking part in it. In a sufficiently large community, this circulation is uninterrupted, because there are always social units in contact with one another, while if they are sparse, their relations can only be intermittent and there are moments when communal life is suspended. In the same way, when the family is not extensive, there are never more than a few relatives together, so domestic life is stagnant and there are times when the home is empty.

However, to say of a group that it has less communal life than another is also to say that it is less strongly integrated, because the state of integration of a social aggregate merely reflects the intensity of the collective life within it. It is all the more united and all the more resistant when the intercourse between its members is more active and more continuous. We can therefore add the following to the conclusion that we reached earlier: just as the family is a powerful preservative against suicide, its action is more effective the stronger its composition.*[5]

V

If the statistics were not so recent, it would be easy, using the same method, to show that this law also applies to political communities. Indeed, history tells us that suicide, which is generally rare in young societies,† which are in progress of development and concentration, increases by contrast as they disintegrate. In Greece and Rome, suicide appears as soon as the old organization of the city is disrupted and the rise in its rate marks the successive stages of decadence. The same fact may be observed in the Ottoman empire. In France, on the eve of the Revolution, the underlying disturbances in society as a result of the decay of the old social system were translated into a sharp rise in suicides, which was noted by the writers of the time.‡[6]

* We have used the word 'density' in a sense slightly different from the one usually given to it in sociology. Generally, we define the density of a group not in relation to the absolute number of individuals associated in it (which is rather what we would call its 'volume'), but the number of individuals who, for a given volume, are effectively related (see *Règles de la Méth. sociol.*, p. 139). But in the case of the family, the distinction between volume and density is not interesting, because, given the small size of the group, all the individuals involved are effectively related.

† We should not confuse young societies, destined to develop, with inferior societies; in the latter, on the contrary, suicide is very frequent, as we shall find in the following chapter.

‡ This is what Helvétius wrote in 1781: 'the disorder of finances and the change in the constitution of the State gave rise to general consternation. Many suicides in the capital bear witness to this.' We quote from Legoyt, p. 30. Mercier, in his *Tableau de Paris* (1782), says that the number of suicides in Paris tripled in twenty-five years.

But beyond this historical information, statistics for suicide, though they do not go back further than the last seventy years, do supply some proofs of this proposition, proofs which have the advantage over preceding ones of greater precision.

It has sometimes been said that major political upheavals lead to an increase in suicides. But Morselli has shown that the facts contradict this view. All the revolutions that have taken place in France during the past century have reduced the number of suicides almost instantaneously. In 1830, the total number falls from 1,904 in 1829 to 1,756 – in other words, a sudden decrease of nearly ten per cent. In 1848, the decline is no less significant, the annual amount falling from 3,647 to 3,301. Then, in the years 1848–49, the crisis that had taken place in France spread around Europe, and everywhere the suicide rate fell, the fall being all the more marked where the crisis was more serious and more prolonged, as we can see from the following table:

	Denmark	Prussia	Bavaria	Kingdom of Saxony	Austria
1847	345	1,852	217		611 (in 1846)
1848	305	1,649	215	398	
1849	337	1,527	189	328	452

In Germany, feelings ran much higher than in Denmark and the struggle was longer even than in France, where a new government was set up at once. Thus the decline in the German states continued until 1849. In relation to that last year, it reached 13 per cent in Bavaria and 18 per cent in Prussia; in Saxony, in a single year (from 1848 to 1849) it was also 18 per cent.

In 1851, the same phenomenon did not occur in France, any more than in 1852. Suicide rates neither rose nor fell. But in Paris, the *coup d'état*[7] had its customary effect. Although it occurred in December, the figure for suicides fell from 483 in 1851 to 446 in 1852 (a fall of 8 per cent) and in 1853 it was still only 463.* This fact tends to prove that Paris was far more

* According to Legoyt, p. 252.

affected by this change in government than the provinces, which appear to have been left more or less untouched by it. In any case, generally speaking, the influence of such crises is always felt more strongly in the capital than in the provinces. In 1830, in Paris, the fall in suicides was 13 per cent (269 cases instead of 307 in the previous year and 359 in the following one). In 1848, it was 32 per cent (481 cases instead of 698).*

Simple electoral crises, provided they have some intensity, may have the same result. This is why in France the suicide calendar clearly shows the parliamentary *coup d'état* of 16 May 1877 and the ferment that resulted from it, as well as the elections which in 1889 brought an end to Boulangist agitation.[8] To demonstrate this we only have to compare the monthly spread of suicides during those two years to that of the adjacent years:

	1876	1877	1878	1888	1889	1890
May	604	649	717	924	919	819
June	662	692	682	851	829	822
July	625	540	693	825	818	888
August	482	496	547	786	694	734
September	394	378	512	673	597	720
October	464	423	468	603	648	675
November	400	413	415	589	618	571
December	389	386	335	574	482	475

During the first months of 1877, suicides were above those in 1876 (1,945 cases from January to April, instead of 1,784) and the rise continued into May and June. It was only at the end of the latter month that parliament was dissolved and the electoral period began in fact, if not in law. It could even be argued that this was the time when political passions were at their height, because they had to cool a little later on as a result of time and fatigue. So, in July, far from continuing to rise by comparison with the previous year, the rate declined by 14 per cent. Apart from a slight levelling-out in August, the

* According to Masaryck, *Der Selbstmord*, p. 137.

fall continued, although to a lesser degree, right through until October, which is when the crisis ended. As soon as it had done so, the rise that had been momentarily halted, resumed. In 1889, the phenomenon was still more evident. It was at the start of August that parliament was dissolved; electoral fever began at once and continued until the end of September, which is when the elections took place. And in August, compared with the same month in 1888, there was a sudden drop of 12 per cent which continued through September but ceased no less suddenly in October, which is when the electoral battle ended.

Great national wars have the same effect as political upheavals. In 1866, war broke out beween Austria and Italy; suicides fell by 14 per cent in both countries:

	1865	1866	1867
Italy	678	588	657
Austria	1,464	1,265	1,407

In 1864, it was the turn of Denmark and Saxony. In the latter state, suicides were 643 in 1863, but fell to 545 in 1864 (a drop of 16 per cent), returning to 619 in 1865. As far as Denmark is concerned, since we do not have the number of suicides in 1863, we cannot compare it to that for 1864, but we do know that the amount for that year (411) was the lowest since 1852. And since it had risen by 1865 to 451, it is quite probable that the figure of 411 represents a considerable drop.

The war of 1870–71 had the same results in France and Germany:

	1869	1870	1871	1872
Prussia	3,186	2,963	2,723	2,950
Saxony	710	657	653	687
France	5,114	4,157	4,490	5,275

It might be thought that this decrease is due to the fact that in wartime part of the civilian population has been called up and, in an army at war, it is very hard to keep track of suicides.

However, women contribute to the decrease as well as men. In Italy, female suicides fell from 130 in 1864 to 117 in 1866; in Saxony, from 133 in 1863 to 120 in 1864 and 114 in 1865 (a fall of 15 per cent). In the same country, in 1870, there was an equally marked decrease: from 130 in 1869, the number declined to 114 in 1870 and stayed at the same level in 1871, the fall being 13 per cent, or greater than that for male suicides in the same period. In Prussia, while 616 women killed themselves in 1869, there were no more than 540 in 1871 (down 13 per cent). Moreover, we know that young men liable for call-up only contributed a small number to the total of suicides. Only six months of 1870 were taken up with war. In the same period of time, in peacetime, a million Frenchmen aged between 25 and 30 would have given at the most 100 suicides,* while between 1870 and 1869 there is a reduction of 1,057 cases.†

People have also wondered whether this temporary fall in times of crisis might not have occurred because – the activities of the administrative authority being hampered – reports of suicides were made with less precision. But numerous facts show that this accidental cause is not sufficient to explain the phenomenon. In the first place, there is the fact that the phenomenon is so widespread. It occurs among the victors and the defeated, the invaders and the invaded. Moreover, when the upheaval has been very considerable, the effects are felt for some time even after it has passed. Suicides only slowly rise and a few years go by before they return to their point of departure. This is the case even in countries where in normal times they increase regularly year by year. Although partial omissions are possible, or even probable at these times of crisis, the fall shown in the statistics is too consistent for it to be attributed, as its chief cause, to a momentary failure of the civil service.

But the best proof that what we find here is not an account-

* In reality, in 1889–91, the annual rate at this age was only 396 and the six-monthly total around 200. But, between 1870 and 1890, the number of suicides at every age doubled.

† [Translator's note] As John Spaulding and George Simpson point out in their translation (1952), Durkheim's figures show a reduction from 5,114 (1869) to 4,157 (1870), which amounts to only 957.

ancy error, but a phenomenon of social psychology, is that not all political or national crises exert this influence. Only those that excite the emotions have this outcome. We have already mentioned that our revolutions have always had more effect on Parisian suicides than on those in the rest of the country; yet the interruption to the administration was the same in the provinces as in the capital. However, these kinds of events have always interested provincials less than they do Parisians, who are more closely and directly involved in them. Similarly, while great national wars such as those of 1870–71 had a strong effect on the rate of suicides, purely dynastic wars like those in the Crimea or Italy, which did not excite much feeling in the masses, had no appreciable effect. In 1854 there was even a significant rise (3,700 cases against 3,415 in 1853). The same fact is to be observed in Prussia at the time of the wars of 1864 and 1866.[9] The figures remained stationary in 1864 and rose a little in 1866. This is because these wars were due entirely to the initiative of politicians and did not rouse popular feeling in the same way as did the war of 1870.

From the same point of view, it is interesting to note that in Bavaria the year 1870 did not produce the same effect as in the other regions of Germany, especially the northern part of the country. In Bavaria there were more suicides in 1870 than in 1869 (452 instead of 425). It was only in 1871 that a slight fall occurred, which was a little accentuated in 1872, when there were only 412 cases – a fall of only 9 per cent from 1869 and 4 per cent from 1870. However, Bavaria played the same material role in military events as did Prussia: it also mobilized its whole army and there is no reason why the administrative chaos there should have been any less. Yet events did not have the same psychological impact in both places. We know, for example, that Catholic Bavaria is the country in the whole of Germany which has always lived its own life and been most jealous of its autonomy. It took part in the war by the wish of its king, but without enthusiasm. As a result, it was less affected than the other allied nations by the great social movement that swept through Germany at the time. This is why the repercussions were felt only later and more weakly. Enthusiasm was

slower to come, and in a moderate form. It took the wind of glory that blew through Germany after the successes of 1870 to rouse Bavaria a little, when up to then it had been cool about joining in.*

This fact can be compared with the following one which has the same implications. In France, during the years 1870–71, it was only in towns that suicide rates fell:

	Suicides per million inhabitants in:	
	the urban population	the rural population
1866–69	202	104
1870–72	161	110

But collecting the data ought to be more difficult in the country than in town. The real reason for this difference must therefore lie elsewhere. It is because the psychological effect of war was only fully felt by the urban population, which is more sensitive and more impressionable than the rural population, as well as being better informed of events.

So there can only be one explanation for these facts, which is that great upheavals in society, like great popular wars, sharpen collective feelings, stimulate the party spirit and the national one and, by concentrating activities towards a single end, achieve, at least for a time, a greater integration of society. The salutary influence whose existence we have just established is not due to the crisis, but to the struggles that are caused by the crisis. Since these oblige men to cling together in order to confront a common danger, the individual thinks less of himself

* And it is still not certain that the drop in suicides in 1872 was caused by the events of 1870. Indeed, apart from Prussia, the fall in suicides was only experienced in the period of the war itself. In Saxony, the fall of 1870, in any case only 8 per cent, was not followed up in 1871 and had almost completely halted in 1872. In the Duchy of Baden, the decrease was limited to 1870. With 244 cases, 1871 actually exceeded 1869 by 10 per cent. So it seems that only Prussia was caught up in some kind of collective euphoria after the victory. The other states were less affected by the increase in glory and power resulting from the war and, once the great national anxiety had passed, social passions fell dormant again.

and more of the community. Moreover, one can see that this integration may not be just temporary, but sometimes outlast the immediate causes that brought it about, especially when it is intense.

VI

We have thus successively established the following three propositions:

Suicide varies inversely with the degree of integration of religious society.
Suicide varies inversely with the degree of integration of domestic society.
Suicide varies inversely with the degree of integration of political society.

This similarity shows that while these different communities have a moderating influence on suicide, this is not because of characteristics peculiar to each one of them, but by reason of some cause which is common to all. Religion does not owe its effectiveness to the special nature of religious feelings, since domestic and political groups, when strongly integrated, produce the same effects; this is, in any case, what we have already proved by studying directly the way in which different religions affect rates of suicide.* Conversely, it is not the features that are specific to domestic or political ties that explain the immunity that they confer, because religious communities enjoy the same privilege. The cause must lie in a single property shared by all these groups, though perhaps in different degrees. And the only quality that satisfies this condition is that they are all strongly integrated social groups. So we arrive at this general conclusion: suicide rates vary inversely with the degree of integration of the social groups to which the individual belongs.

But society cannot disintegrate without the individual being

* See above, pp. 177–78.

disengaged from social life to the same extent, without his individual goals taking precedence over those of the community and, in a word, without his personality tending to set itself above the collective personality of the group. The more the groups to which he belongs are weakened, the less he depends on them and the more he consequently comes to depend on himself and recognize no other rules of conduct except those based on his own private interests. So if we agree to describe as egotism this state in which the individual ego affirms itself excessively over the social ego and at the expense of the latter, we might give the name egotistical to the particular type of suicide that results from excessive individualism.

But how can suicide originate in this?

First of all, we might observe that since the strength of the collective is one of the obstacles that best limits suicide, this cannot weaken without suicide rising. When society is strongly integrated, it keeps individuals in a state of dependency, holding them to be in its service and consequently not permitting them to dispose of themselves as they wish. Society is thus opposed to their escaping from their obligations towards it through death. But when they refuse to accept this subordination as legitimate, how can it impose itself? It no longer has the necessary authority to keep them at their posts, if they should wish to desert; and, aware of its own weakness, it even goes so far as to acknowledge their right to do freely what it can no longer prevent. To the extent that it is accepted that they are the masters of their own destinies, it is up to them to fix the limit to these. For their part, they no longer have a reason to put up patiently with the miseries of existence; because, when they are in solidarity with a group that they love, they are more obstinate about living so as not to fail interests to which they are accustomed to sacrifice their own. The bond that attaches them to their common purpose attaches them to life; and, in any case, the high goal towards which their gaze is turned alleviates the suffering that they feel from life's troubles. Finally, in a coherent and vital community, there is a continual exchange of ideas and feelings from all to each and from each to all which is like

mutual moral support, so that the individual, instead of being reduced to his resources only, participates in the collective energy and draws on it when his own is exhausted.

But these reasons are only secondary. Excessive individualism does not only have the outcome of increasing the effects of the causes of suicide, but is in itself a cause of this kind. Not only does it remove a useful obstacle to the tendency that drives men to kill themselves, but it creates this tendency completely and so gives birth to a special suicide with a character of its own. This has to be well understood, because it is this that constitutes the peculiar nature of the type of suicide that we have just defined and that justifies the name we have given it. So what is there in individualism that can justify this outcome?

It is sometimes said that, by virtue of his psychological make-up, man cannot live unless he attaches himself to an object that is greater than himself and outlives him, and this necessity has been attributed to a supposedly common need not to perish entirely. Life, they say, is only tolerable if one can see some purpose in it, if it has a goal and one that is worth pursuing. But the individual in himself is not sufficient as an end for himself. He is too small a thing. Not only is he confined in space, he is also narrowly limited in time. So when we have no other objective than ourselves, we cannot escape from the feeling that our efforts are finally destined to vanish into nothing, since that is where we must return. But we recoil from the idea of annihilation. In such a state, we should not have the strength to live, that is to say to act and struggle, since nothing is to remain of all the trouble that we take. In a word, the state of egotism is in contradiction with human nature and hence too precarious to endure.

However, in this absolute form, the proposition is very debatable. If the idea that our being must finish were really so detestable to us, we could only agree to live on condition that we blinded ourselves deliberately to the value of life. For while it is possible to some extent to hide the spectacle of nothingness from ourselves, we cannot prevent it from existing; whatever we do, it is inevitable. We can certainly push the limit back by a few generations and make sure that our name will endure a

few years or a few centuries longer than our bodies, but a moment will always come, very quickly for the generality of mankind, when nothing of us will remain. For even the groups to which we attach ourselves in this way, so as to prolong our existence through them, are themselves mortal. They, too, are destined to dissolve, carrying off with them all that we have put in them of ourselves. Those whose memory is so closely bound up with the history of humanity itself that they will be assured of surviving as long as it does are infinitely rare. So if we were truly to have such a thirst for immortality, no such short prospects could ever serve to slake it. In any event, what is it of ourselves that survives in this way? A word, a sound, an imperceptible and, most usually, anonymous trace* – nothing, in short, at all commensurate with the intensity of our efforts or which could justify them in our eyes. In reality, though the child is naturally egotistical, not feeling the least desire to outlive his time, and the old man, in this respect as in many others, is very often a child, both cling to life as much and even more than the adult: we have seen that suicide is very rare in the first fifteen years and that it tends to decrease at the other extreme of life. The same is true of the animal, whose physical constitution is not different from that of mankind except in degree. It is consequently not true that life is never possible unless one has a *raison d'être* outside oneself.

Indeed, there is a whole order of functions that only interests the individual; these are the ones necessary to the maintenance of physical life. Since they are designed solely for that end, they are everything that they ought to be when it is achieved. Consequently, in everything concerning them, a man can act reasonably without having to supply himself with ends that go beyond them. They serve some purpose for the very reason that they serve him. This is why, to the extent that he has no other

* We are not speaking here of the ideal prolongation of existence that a belief in the immortality of the soul carries with it, because in the first place this is not something that can explain why family or an attachment to a political community can preserve us from suicide, and secondly because it is not even this belief that accounts for the preservative influence of religion (as we showed earlier).

needs, he is self-sufficient and can live happily without having any other objective than that of living. However, this is not the case with the civilized person who has reached adulthood: he has a multitude of ideas, feelings and practices which bear no relation to the demands of the organism. Art, morality, religion, political beliefs, even science itself, do not have the role of repairing wear on our organs or ensuring their proper functioning. It is not in response to the cosmic environment that all this supra-physical life has been created and developed, but to that of the social environment. It is the effect of society that arouses in us these feelings of sympathy and solidarity that incline us towards our fellows; it is this that, fashioning us in its image, has imbued us with the religious, political and moral beliefs that govern our conduct; and it is in order to play our part in society that we have struggled to extend our understanding – and it is society, once more, that, by handing down to us the knowledge that is entrusted to it, has supplied us with the instruments of that development.

For the very reason that these superior forms of human activity have a collective origin, they have an aim of the same kind. Since it is from society that they derive, it is to society that they refer; or, rather, they are society itself, incarnate and individualized in each of us. But then, for them to have a *raison d'être* in our eyes, the end towards which they are directed must not be one that is indifferent to us. So we cannot be attached to them other than to the extent that we are attached to the other, that is to society. On the contrary, the more we feel detached from the latter, the more we also detach ourselves from this life of which it is at once the source and the goal. Why these rules of morality, the precepts of law that oblige us to all kinds of sacrifice, the dogmas that impede us, if there is not outside us some being whom they serve and to whom we belong? Why science itself? If it has no other use except to increase our chances of survival, then it is not worth the trouble. Instinct is more effective in that role: animals prove that. What need was there to substitute for instinct reflection, which is more uncertain and more subject to error? Above all, why do we suffer? A positive evil for the individual, if he is to estimate

the value of things in relation to himself alone, suffering has no compensation and becomes incomprehensible. For the believer, firmly attached to his faith, or for the man who is deeply engaged in the bonds of family or political society, the problem does not exist. By themselves and without reflection, they relate what they are and what they do, in the one case to the Church and to God, a living symbol of that same Church, and in the other to the family, or else to the fatherland and party. Even in their suffering, they see only the means to serve the greater glory of the group to which they belong, and they do homage to it. So it is that the Christian may even come to love and seek out pain as a way of showing his contempt for the flesh and of coming closer to his divine model. But, to the extent that the believer has doubts, that is to say feels less in solidarity with the religious faith to which he belongs, and frees himself from it, or to the extent that the individual becomes estranged from the family and the political community, he becomes a mystery to himself and then he cannot escape the annoying and agonizing question: what is the point of it all?

In other words if, as is often said, humans have a dual nature, it is because a social man is superimposed on the physical one. And the former inevitably assumes the existence of a society that he expresses and serves. If, on the contrary, it happens to fall apart and we no longer feel it living and acting around us and above us, then whatever in us is social is deprived of any objective basis. It is no longer anything except an artificial combination of illusory images, a phantasmagoria that can be dispelled by the slightest reflection, in short nothing that can serve as a goal for our actions. Yet this social man is everything for the civilized human being; it is this that gives value to our existence. The result is that we have no reason for living, because the only life to which we can be attached no longer corresponds to anything in reality and the only one that is still anchored in the real no longer answers our needs. Since we have been initiated into a higher form of existence, that which contents the child and the animal can no longer satisfy us, and now even the other kind escapes us, leaving us without resource. So there is nothing remaining to which our efforts can attach

themselves and we have the feeling that they are vanishing into the void. This is the sense in which we may say that our actions require an object outside themselves. It is not because we need to sustain the illusion of some impossible immortality; it is because it is implicit in our moral being and it cannot be lost, even partially, without that moral being losing its reason for existence. There is no need to demonstrate that in such a state of collapse the slightest cause for depression can easily give rise to desperate acts. When life is not worth living, everything becomes a pretext for ridding ourselves of it.

However, this is not all. This detachment does not arise only in isolated individuals. One of the constitutive elements in any national character consists in a certain way of conceiving the value of life. There is a collective mood, as there is an individual mood, that inclines nations to sadness or merriment and makes them see things in cheerful or sombre colours. Indeed, society alone is able to pass a general judgement on the value of human life, something that the individual is not competent to do. He knows only himself and his narrow horizon, so his experience is too limited to serve as the basis for a general assessment. Certainly, he may judge that his own life has no point, but he cannot say anything that applies to others. Society on the other hand can generalize the feeling that it has about itself, its state of health or sickness, without sophistry. For individuals are too closely involved in the life of society for it to be sick without their being affected. Its suffering inevitably becomes theirs. Because it is the whole, the harm that it feels is communicated to the parts of which it is made. But then it cannot disintegrate without being aware that the regular conditions of general life are disturbed to the same extent. Because it is the end to which the best part of us is attached, society cannot feel that we are escaping from it without realizing at the same time that our activity is aimless. Since we are its work, it cannot have a sense of its own decline without feeling that from henceforth this work no longer serves any purpose. This is how currents of depression and disillusion are created that do not arise from any individual in particular but which express the state of disintegration of the society as a whole. What they demonstrate

is the loosening of social bonds, a sort of collective asthenia, a social ill, like individual depression, which, when it is chronic, expresses in its own way the poor organic state of the individual. This is when we see the appearance of those metaphysical and religious systems that, by reducing these vague feelings to formulae, set out to prove to mankind that life has no meaning and that one is deceiving oneself by giving it one. This is when new moralities arise which, making a law out of the fact, recommend suicide or, at least, tend in that direction by advising that one should live as short a time as possible. At the moment when these appear, it seems that they have been conjured up from nothing by their creators and the latter are sometimes blamed for the discouragement that they preach. In reality, they are an effect rather than the cause, merely symbolizing the physiological deprivation of the social body in abstract language or in a systematic form.* And since these currents are collective, they derive an authority from that which allows them to impose themselves on the individual and to drive him still more forcibly in the direction towards which he has already been tending as a result of the state of moral disorientation brought about in him by the disintegration of society. Thus at the very moment when he is breaking away from the social environment, he is still subject to its influence. However individualized a person may be, there is always something collective that remains, which is the feeling of depression and melancholy that arises from this exaggerated individualism. When one has nothing else to share, one participates through sadness.

So this type of suicide deserves the name we have given it. Egotism is not simply an auxiliary factor, it is the productive cause. If in this case the link that attaches man to life is loosened, it is because the link that attaches him to society has itself been relaxed. As for the incidents of private life that appear to be the immediate motive for the suicide and which are presumed to be its determining conditions, they are in reality only incidental causes. If the individual gives way to the slightest adversity, it

* This is why it is unfair to accuse those who theorize about sadness of generalizing personal impressions: they are echoing a general state.

is because the state of society has made him a easy prey for suicide.

Several facts confirm this explanation. We know that suicide is exceptional in children and that it decreases in old people as they reach the ultimate term of existence; this is because in each case the physical man tends once more to become the whole man. Society is not yet present in the former and has not had time to shape him in its image, and it is starting to recede from the old man, or else (which amounts to the same thing) he is retiring from it. Consequently, they are more self-sufficient. Since they have less need to be completed by something apart from themselves, they are also less liable to lack what is essential for life. The immunity of the animal derives from the same causes. In the same way, we shall see in the following chapter that, if inferior societies practise a form of suicide peculiar to them, the one that we have just described is almost completely unknown there. This is because social life there being very simple, the social tendencies of individuals have the same character and consequently they need very little to satisfy them. They easily find an external objective to which to attach themselves. Everywhere he goes, primitive man has all that his social nature demands if he can take his gods and his family with him.

Finally, this is why a woman can live in isolation more easily than a man. When you see the widow enduring her situation far better than the widower and showing less eagerness to remarry, you are inclined to think that this ability to do without the family is a mark of superiority. They say that the affective faculties of a woman are very intense and so easily find employment outside the domestic circle, while her devotion is essential to help us to endure life. In reality, if she does have this privilege, it is because her sensibility is rudimentary more than very developed. Since she lives more than a man outside community life, this life affects her less: society is less necessary to her because she is less impregnated with sociability. She has few needs that are directed towards that, and satisfies them easily. With a few devotional practices and a few animals to look after, an old spinster has a full life. If she remains so devotedly attached to religious tradition and if, consequently, she finds a

useful protection in it against suicide, this is because these very simple social forms are enough for all her demands. Man on the other hand nowadays feels constrained by them. His thoughts and his actions, as they develop, increasingly expand beyond these archaic frameworks. But this means that he must have others. Because he is a more complex social being, he cannot maintain his balance unless he finds more anchorage points outside himself and, because his moral equilibrium is dependent on a greater number of conditions, so it is also more easily disturbed.

CHAPTER 4
ALTRUISTIC SUICIDE*

In the order of life, nothing is an unmitigated good. A biological characteristic cannot achieve the ends which it should serve unless it remains within certain limits; the same is true of social phenomena. If, as we have just seen, excessive individuation leads to suicide, a lack of it has the same effect. When a man is detached from society, he is liable to kill himself, but he may also kill himself when he is too firmly integrated in society.

I

It has sometimes been said† that suicide is unknown in inferior societies. Put like that, the statement is untrue. It is true that egotistical suicide, as we have just defined it, does not seem to be very frequent in such societies, but there is another kind which appears to be endemic in them.

Bartholin, in his book *De causis contemptae mortis a Danis*,[1] recounts that Danish warriors would consider it a cause of

* Bibliography: Steinmetz, 'Suicide among primitive peoples', in *American Anthropologist*, January, 1894; Waitz, *Anthropologie der Naturvoelker, passim*; 'Suicides dans les armées', in *Journal de la société de statistique*, 1874, p. 250; Millar, 'Statistic of military suicide', in *Journal of the Statistical Society*, London, June 1874; Mesnier, *Du suicide dans l'armée*, Paris, 1881; Bournet, *Criminalité en France et en Italie*, pp. 83ff.; Roth, 'Die Selbstmorde in der K. u. K. Armee, in den Jahren 1873–80', in *Statistische Monatschrift*, 1892; Rosenfeld, 'Die Selbstmorde in der Preussischen Armee', in *Militarwochenblatt*, 1894, 3es Beiheft; idem, 'Die Selbstmord in der K. u. K. oesterreischischen Heere', in *Deutsche Worte*, 1893; Antony, 'Suicide dans l'armée allemande', in *Arch. de méd. et de phar. militaire*, Paris, 1895.

† Oettingen, *Moralstatistik*, p. 762.

shame to die in their beds from old age or sickness, and that they would commit suicide to escape this infamy. The Goths[2] similarly believed that those who died natural deaths were condemned to rot for ever in caverns full of venomous creatures.* At the outskirts of the territory of the Visigoths there was a high rock, called the Rock of Ancestors, from which old men would throw themselves when they were tired of life. The same custom is found among the Thracians, the Heruli[3] and others. Silvius Italicus[4] writes of the Spanish Celts: 'This is a people prodigal of its own blood and very inclined to hasten death. As soon as the Celt has passed beyond the fullness of manhood, he grows impatient at the passing years and scorns the experience of old age; the term of his existence lies in his own hands.'† So they believed that paradise awaited those who took their own lives and a frightful subterranean hell those who died of illness or decrepitude. The same custom was for a long time observed in India. This condoning of suicide may not be in the Vedas,[5] but it is certainly very ancient. On the suicide of the Brahman Calanus,[6] Plutarch says: 'He sacrificed himself, as was the tradition among the wise men of this country.'‡ And Quintus Curtius:[7] 'There is among them a species of savage, uncouth men to whom they have given the name of sages. In their eyes, it is a glorious thing to anticipate the day of one's death and they have themselves burned alive as soon as the weight of years or sickness starts to afflict them. According to them, death, when you wait for it, is the dishonour of life. The fire would be polluted if it did not receive a still-breathing man.'§ Similar facts are attested in Fiji,¶ in the New Hebrides, in Manga, etc.‖ In Ceos, men who had passed a certain age gathered for a solemn festival where, with their heads crowned with flowers, they joyfully drank hemlock.** The same practice

* Taken from Brierre de Boismont, p. 23.
† *Punica*, I, 225ff.
‡ *Life of Alexander*, CXIII.
§ VIII, 9.
¶ See Wyatt Gill, *Myths and Songs of the South Pacific*, p. 163.
‖ Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, vol. I, pp. 216ff.
** Strabo, § 486; Aelian, V. H., 337.

is found among the Troglodytes*[8] and the Seri,[9] even though they were famous for their moral conduct.†

Apart from old men, we know that among these same peoples, widows are often expected to kill themselves on the death of their husbands. This barbarous practice is so embedded in the customs of the Hindus that it persists despite the efforts of the English to eradicate it. In 1817, 706 widows committed suicide in the single province of Bengal and in 1821 there were 2,366 in the whole of India. Elsewhere, when a prince or a chief dies, his servants are required not to survive him; this was the case in Gaul. The funerals of chiefs, according to Henri Martin,[10] were bloody hecatombs: their clothes, their weapons, their horses and their favourite slaves were solemnly burned, and those of their devoted followers who had not died in the final battle joined in.‡ A warrior should never outlive his chief. Among the Ashanti,[11] when the king died, it was an obligation for his officers to do the same.§ Observers have met with the same custom in Hawaii.¶

So suicide is certainly very frequent among primitive peoples, but it has very particular characteristics. All the facts we have just noted fall, in fact, into one of the following three categories:

1. Suicides of men who have reached the threshold of old age or who are suffering from disease.
2. Suicides of women on the death of their husbands.
3. Suicides of clients or servants on the death of their chiefs.

And in all these cases, if a person commits suicide, it is not because he assumes the right to do so, but because he has a duty to do so. If he fails in this obligation, he is punished with dishonour and also, usually, with religious sanctions. Of course, when we hear of old men killing themselves, we are at first inclined to believe that the cause lies in weariness or the suffer-

* Diodorus Siculus, III, 33, §§ 5 and 6.

† Pomponius Mela, III, 7.

‡ *Histoire de France*, 1, 81. Cf. Caesar, *De Bello Gallico*, VI, 19.

§ See Spencer, *Sociologie*, vol. II, p. 146.

¶ See Jarves, *History of the Sandwich Islands*, 1843, p. 108.

ings common at that age. But if these suicides really had no other cause, and if the individual killed himself solely for the sake of relief from an intolerable existence, he would not be obliged to do it: one is never under an obligation to enjoy a privilege. Yet we have seen that if he continues to live, he loses the esteem of his fellows: in some cases, the ordinary funerary rites are refused him, and in others a dreadful fate is supposed to await him beyond the grave. So society puts pressure on him to persuade him to kill himself. Of course, society also plays a part in egotistical suicide, but its role is not the same in each case. In the latter, it merely speaks to the individual in a manner that detaches him from existence, while in the other it formally demands that he should leave it. In one, at the most, it suggests and advises, while in the other it obliges and it is through society that the conditions and circumstances that constitute this obligation are determined.

Thus it is for social ends that it imposes this sacrifice. If the warrior must not survive his chief or the servant his prince, this is because the constitution of the society implies such a close dependency between followers and leaders or officers and the king that it leaves no room for the notion of separation. The destiny of the one must be that of the others. The subjects must follow their master wherever he goes, even beyond the grave, just like his clothing or his weapons. If it were possible to conceive otherwise, then social subordination would not be everything that it should.* The same applies to the wife in relation to the husband. As far as old people are concerned, if they are obliged to anticipate death, this is probably, at least in many cases, for religious reasons. The spirit that protects the family is supposed to reside in its head. Moreover, it is accepted that a god who lives in another's body shares that individual's life, going through the same stages of health and sickness and

* It is probable that there is also behind these practices a desire to prevent the dead man's spirit from returning to earth to look for the things and people that belonged to him. But this very idea implies that servants and followers are closely subordinate to the master, that they are inseparable from him and that, moreover, to avoid the misfortunes that would result from the lingering of his spirit on this earth, they must sacrifice themselves for the common good.

getting old at the same time. So age cannot diminish the strength of one without weakening the other at the same time and without consequently threatening the existence of the group since it is henceforth only protected by a weakened deity. This is why, for the general good, the father is expected not to wait for the extreme limit of his life before transmitting the precious gift entrusted to his keeping to his successors.*

This description is enough to settle the question of where these suicides originate. If a society is able thus to oblige certain of its members to kill themselves, the individual personality must count for very little in it, because as soon as this begins to be established the right to life is its first acknowledged right; or, at least, it is only suspended in very exceptional circumstances, such as war. But this slight importance attached to the individual can itself have only one cause: if the individual plays so small a part in collective life, he must be almost entirely absorbed into the group and the latter must consequently be very strongly integrated. For the parts to have so little life of their own, the whole must form a compact and integrated mass. And we have shown elsewhere that this massive cohesion is indeed the character of societies in which the previously mentioned customs are observed.† Since they contain only a small number of elements, everybody in them lives the same life, everything is common to all: ideas, feelings, occupations. At the same time, also because the group is small, it is close to each of its members and so cannot lose sight of anyone. The result of this is that collective supervision is continuous, it extends to everything and more easily prevents divergence. Hence, the individual lacks the means to create a special milieu for himself in which he can shape his own character and acquire a personality that belongs to him alone. Being, as it were, indistinguishable from his fellows, he is merely an aliquot part of the whole, one that is without value in itself. His being has so little worth that attacks on him by other individuals attract only relatively mild punishments. Hence it is still more natural

* See Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, loc. cit. and *passim*.

† See *Division du travail social*, *passim*.

that he should be even less protected against collective demands and that society will ask him, for the slightest reason, to put an end to a life which it holds so cheap.

So we are confronted with a type of suicide that is very clearly distinguished from the previous one. While the latter was due to an excess of individuation, the former is caused by individuation at too rudimentary a level. The one comes from the fact that society, because it is in some respects or even wholly falling apart, allows the individual to escape from it; the other from the fact that it keeps him too tightly dependent. Since we have described as 'egotism' the state in which the individual finds himself when he lives a personal life obedient only to himself, the word 'altruism' adequately describes the opposite situation, in which the individual does not belong to himself, or else is merged with something other than himself, and where the pole star that guides his behaviour is situated outside himself, that is to say in one of the groups to which he belongs. This is why we shall call suicide resulting from intense altruism, 'altruistic suicide'. But since it additionally possesses the characteristic of being carried out as a duty, the terminology that we use must express this feature, so we shall give the name 'obligatory altruistic suicide' to this particular type.

The combination of these two adjectives is necessary to define it because not every altruistic suicide is necessarily obligatory. There are some that are not so expressly required by society, but which have a more optional character. In other words, altruistic suicide is a species that contains several varieties. We have just isolated one, so let us go on to look at the others.

In these same societies about which we were just speaking or in others of the same kind, one often observes suicides where the immediate and apparent motive is quite trivial. Livy, Caesar and Valerius Maximus[12] mention, with astonishment mixed with admiration, how calmly the barbarians of Gaul and Germania would kill themselves.* There were Celts who would agree to be killed over wine or money.† Others made a point

* Caesar, *Gallic War*, VI, 14; Valerius Maximus, VI, 11 and 12; Pliny, *Natural History*, IV, 12.

† Posidonius, XXIII, in Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae*, IV, 154.

of not being driven back by the flames of a fire or the waves of the sea.* Modern travellers have observed similar practices in a host of inferior societies. In Polynesia, the merest slight is very often enough to drive a man to suicide.† The same is found among the Indians of North America: a marital dispute or an attack of jealousy are enough for a man or woman to commit suicide.‡ Among the Dakota and the Creek,[13] the slightest disappointment often drives a person to desperate measures.§ We know how readily the Japanese slit their bellies for the most trivial reasons. It is even said that they practise a strange duel in which the opponents vie, not over their skill at hitting one another, but their dexterity in opening their own bellies.¶ Similar things are reported from China, Cochinchina, Tibet and the Kingdom of Siam.

In all these cases, the man kills himself without being expressly required to do so. However, these suicides are not different in nature from obligatory suicide. While public opinion does not formally insist on them, it is still in favour. Since it is therefore a virtue – and even the supreme virtue – not to cling to life, praise attaches to the person who gives it up whenever circumstances demand, or even out of simple bravado. Thus a social cachet is attached to suicide which is encouraged by that very fact, and the refusal of that reward has (though to a lesser degree) the same effects as an actual punishment. What in one case is done to avoid blame is done in the other to acquire esteem. When one has been accustomed since childhood to attach little price to life and to despise those who are excessively attached to it, it is inevitable that one should release oneself from it at the slightest pretext. There is no great difficulty in choosing a sacrifice that costs so little. So these practices are concerned, like obligatory suicide, with what is most fundamental in the morality of inferior societies. Because they cannot

* Aelian, XII, 23.

† Waitz, *Anthropologie der Naturvoelker*, vol. VI, p. 115.

‡ Ibid., vol. III, 1 Hoelfte, p. 102.

§ Mary Eastman, *Dacotah*, pp. 89, 169; Lombroso, *L'uomo delinquente*, 1884, p. 51.

¶ Lisle, op. cit., p. 333.

survive unless the individual has no personal interests, he must be trained to self-denial and unquestioning self-sacrifice; hence these suicides which are in part spontaneous. Just like those that society more explicitly imposes, they derive from that state of impersonality or, as we said, of 'altruism', which may be regarded as the moral characteristic of the primitive. This is why we will call them 'altruistic' as well, and if, in order to highlight what is special about them, we should add that they are 'optional', all we should understand by that word is that they are less expressly demanded by society than when they are, strictly speaking, obligatory. These two types are in fact so closely linked that it is impossible to draw a line at the point where one begins and the other ends.

Finally, there are other cases where altruism leads to suicide more directly and with more violence. In the preceding examples, it only provoked a man to kill himself when circumstances conspired to that end. Death had to be imposed by society as a duty, or some point of honour had to be at stake or, at the very least, some unpleasant event had to make life worthless in the eyes of the victim. But it may even happen that an individual sacrifices himself solely for the pleasure of sacrifice, because renunciation, in itself and for no particular reason, is considered praiseworthy.

India is the classic land for this kind of suicide. Hindus were already freely killing themselves under the influence of Brahmanism. Admittedly, the laws of Manu[14] only advised suicide with reservations: the man must have reached a certain age and be leaving at least one son. But once these conditions are fulfilled, he has no further need for life. 'The Brahman who has released himself from the body by one of the practices developed by the great saints, free from fear and sorrow, is admitted with honour into the abode of Brahma.'* Though it is often Buddhism that is accused of taking this principle to its most extreme limits and elevating suicide to the status of a religious practice, it has rather tended, in reality, to condemn it. Certainly, it did teach that the highest good was to annihilate

* *Lois de Manou*, VI, 32 ([French] translation by Loiseleur].

oneself in Nirvana, but this suspension of the being can and should be obtained in this life and there is no need for violent acts to realize it. However, the idea that man should flee from existence is so firmly in the spirit of the doctrine and so compatible with the aspirations of the Hindu spirit that it is found in different forms in the main sects which derived from Buddhism, or which grew up at the same time as it did. This is true of Jainism.[15] Though one of the canonical books of the Jain religion frowns on suicide, on the grounds that it in fact increases life, inscriptions found in a very large number of sanctuaries show that, especially among the Jain of the south, religious suicide has been a very frequent practice.* The believer would allow himself to die of hunger.† Among the Hindu, the custom of seeking death in the waters of the Ganges and other sacred rivers was very widespread. Inscriptions show us kings and ministers getting ready to end their days in this way,‡ and we are assured that at the start of the century these superstitions had not entirely disappeared.§ In the territory of the Bhil, there was a rock from the top of which people, out of piety, would throw themselves in order to dedicate themselves to Shiva;¶[16] an officer witnessed one of these sacrifices as recently as 1822. As for the story of the fanatics who rushed as a crowd to be crushed under the wheels of the Juggernaut,[17] this is now a classic.|| Charlevoix[18] had already observed similar rituals in Japan: 'Nothing is more common,' he says, 'than to see along the sea coasts ships filled with these fanatics who throw themselves into the water, weighed down with stones, or who scuttle their ships and allow themselves to be pulled under gradually while singing the praise of their idols. A great number of spectators watch them, lauding their valour to the heavens and

* Barth, *The Religions of India*, London, 1891, p. 146.

† Bühler, *Über die Indische Secte der Jaïna*, Vienna, 1887, pp. 10, 19 and 37.

‡ Barth, op. cit., p. 279.

§ Heber, *Narrative of a Journey through the Upper Provinces of India*, 1824–25, Chapter XII.

¶ Forsyth, *The Highlands of Central India*, London, 1871, pp. 172–75.

|| See Burnell, *Glossary*, 1866, under the word, *Jagarnnath*. The practice has more or less vanished; however, isolated cases are still witnessed in our own time. See Stirling, *Asiat. Resch.*, vol. XV, p. 324.

asking to be blessed by them before they vanish. Members of the Amida sect[19] have themselves shut up or walled into caves where they have barely enough space to remain sitting down and where they can only breathe through an air vent. There, they calmly allow themselves to die of hunger. Others climb to the top of very high rocks, at the top of which are sulphur mines with flames sporadically bursting out of them. They continually invoke their gods, begging them to accept the sacrifice of their lives and asking for these flames to emerge. When one does appear, they take it as a sign of consent from the gods and throw themselves head first to the bottom of the abyss . . . The memory of these so-called martyrs is highly venerated.'*

There are no suicides with a more markedly altruistic character. In all these cases, we see the individual aspiring to cast off his personal being in order to be swallowed up by this other thing that he considers his true essence. No matter what he calls it, it is in this and this alone that he believes himself to exist, and if he attempts so ardently to merge with it, it is in order to be. So he considers himself to have no individual existence. Impersonality is here taken to the limit, altruism is at its most extreme point. But, one may ask, do not these suicides derive from the fact that the victim finds life sad? It is clear that when a person kills himself so spontaneously, he is not much attached to life and consequently has a more or less melancholy conception of it. But in this respect, all suicides are alike. However, it would be a serious mistake to make no distinction between them, for this conception does not always have the same origin and so, despite appearances, it is not the same in the various different cases. While the egotist is sad because he can see nothing real in the world except the individual, the sadness of the unrestrained altruist comes on the contrary from the fact that the individual seems to him devoid of any reality. One is detached from life because, seeing no goal to which he can attach himself, he feels useless and devoid of any *raison d'être*, the other because he has a goal, but one that is situated outside this life, which consequently appears to him

* *Histoire du Japon*, vol. II.

as an obstacle. So the difference of causes is found in the effects and the melancholy of one is quite different in nature from that of the other. In the former case, it is composed of a feeling of incurable lassitude and dreary depression; it expresses a complete breakdown of activity, which, unable to find useful employment, collapses in on itself. In the second case, on the contrary, it is derived from hope, because it comes from the fact that more beautiful prospects are glimpsed beyond this life. It even expresses the enthusiasm and the elation of a faith eager for satisfaction, which asserts itself through acts of great energy.

In any case, in itself, the more or less gloomy attitude of a people towards life is not enough to explain the intensity of its urge to suicide. The Christian does not have a jollier outlook with regard to his time on earth than the member of the sect of Jina.[20] He sees it only as a time of painful trials; and he, too, considers that his true home is not in this world. Yet we know the aversion that Christianity expresses and inspires with regard to suicide. This is because Christian societies accord a much greater role to the individual than their predecessors did. They give him personal duties to fulfil which he is not allowed to evade, and it is only according to the manner in which he carries out the tasks that fall to him here below that he is to be admitted or not to the joys of the hereafter, these joys themselves being as personal as the works by which they are earned. Consequently the moderate individualism which is part of the spirit of Christianity has prevented it from favouring suicide, despite its theories on mankind and his destiny.

The metaphysical and religious systems that serve as a logical framework for these moral practices prove, finally, that this is their origin and their meaning. For a long time it has been observed that they generally coexist with pantheistic beliefs. Of course, Jainism, like Buddhism, is atheistic; but pantheism is not necessarily theistic. What essentially characterizes it is the idea that what is real in the individual is foreign to his nature, that the soul animating him is not his soul and that consequently there is no such thing as personal existence. This dogma is the basis of Hindu doctrines and it is already to be found in Brahmanism. On the other hand, where the principle of being is not confused with

them but is conceived itself in an individual form, that is to say among monotheistic peoples such as the Jews, the Christians, the Muslims, or polytheists such as the Greeks and Romans, this form of suicide is exceptional. It is never met with as a ritual practice. This means that there is apparently a relationship between it and pantheism. What is this relationship?

One cannot accept that pantheism has produced suicide. It is not abstract ideas that guide mankind, and one cannot explain the development of history by the interaction of pure metaphysical concepts. Among nations, as with individuals, these concepts have chiefly the function of expressing a reality that they have not created; but from which on the contrary they derive, and, if they may afterwards serve to modify it, do so only to a limited extent. Religious ideas are the products of the social environment far more than they create that environment; and if, once formed, they react on the causes that have engendered them, this reaction cannot be very profound. So if what constitutes pantheism is a more or less radical denial of all individuality, such a religion can only arise in the heart of a society in which the individual does indeed count for nothing, that is to say, is totally indistinguishable from the group. Humans can only visualize the world on the model of the little social world in which they live. So religious pantheism is only a consequence and, as it were, a reflection of the pantheistic organization of society. Therefore, it is in the latter that we will find the cause of that particular form of suicide that is everywhere found in connection with pantheism.

So we have a second type of suicide that itself includes three varieties: obligatory altruistic suicide, voluntary altruistic suicide and acute altruistic suicide, of which mystical suicide is the perfect example. In these different forms altruistic suicide is strikingly different from egotistical suicide. The former is linked to that crude morality that considers worthless whatever interests only the individual, while the latter derives from the refined ethical code that sets the human personality so high that it is no longer to be subordinated to anything. So, between the two is the distance separating primitive peoples from the most cultivated of nations.

However, while inferior societies are the site, *par excellence*, of altruistic suicide, it is also to be found in more recent civilizations. One might in particular classify under this heading the death of a certain number of Christian martyrs. All those neophytes who, while they did not kill themselves, voluntarily allowed themselves to be killed were indeed suicides. Even though they did not strike the fatal blow, they sought for death with all their strength and behaved in a way that made it inevitable. And for there to be suicide, it is sufficient that the act from which death must necessarily result has been accomplished by the victim in full knowledge of the outcome. Moreover, the passionate enthusiasm with which the adherents of the new religion went to meet their executions shows that at that moment they had completely renounced their personalities for the benefit of the idea that they had chosen to serve. It is probable that the epidemics of suicide which, on various occasions, struck monasteries in the Middle Ages and which seem to have been caused by excesses of religious fervour, were of the same kind.*

In contemporary societies, where the individual personality is increasingly freed from the collective one, such suicides will not be very common. It can no doubt be said both of soldiers who prefer death to the humiliation of defeat, like Commandant Beaurepaire and Admiral Villeneuve,[21] and of those unfortunates who kill themselves to spare their families from shame, that they are obeying altruistic motives. If in both cases they give up life, it is because there is something that they love more than themselves. But these are isolated cases that occur on only rare occasions.† However, even today, there is one special

* The state of mind that led to these suicides has been called *acedia*. See Bourquelot, *Recherches sur les opinions et la législation en matière de mort volontaire pendant le Moyen Age*.

† It is probable that the frequency of suicide among the men of the Revolution was, at least in part, due to an altruistic state of mind. In such times of internal struggle and collective enthusiasm, the individual personality lost its value. The interests of the fatherland or of the party took precedence over all. No doubt, the multiplicity of capital executions derived from the same cause. People killed others as readily as they killed themselves.

milieu in which altruistic suicide reaches chronic proportions: the army.

II

It is a general fact in all the countries of Europe that the likelihood of soldiers committing suicide is much above that of the civilian population of the same age. The difference varies between 25 per cent and 900 per cent (see Table 23).

Denmark is the only country where the figures for the two populations is substantially the same: 388 per million civilians and 382 per million soldiers in the years 1845–56. Suicides of officers are not included in these figures.*

This is all the more surprising since at first sight many factors would seem to protect members of the army from suicide. Firstly, from the physical point of view, the men who make it up are the flower of their country's youth. They are carefully selected on the basis that they have no serious organic flaws.† Moreover, the *esprit de corps* and communal life should have the protective influence that they exercise elsewhere. So what is the cause of this considerable aggravation?

As private soldiers are never married, celibacy has been blamed. But first of all, celibacy should not have such dire consequences in the army as it does in civilian life, because, as we have just said, the soldier is not an isolated individual. He is a member of a very strongly constituted society and one which is partly of a nature to replace the family. But whatever the truth or otherwise of this hypothesis, there is a means by which we can isolate this factor. It is enough to compare suicides of soldiers with those of unmarried men of the same age: Table 21, which once again reveals its significance, allows us

* The figures for military suicides are taken either from official documents or from Wagner (op. cit., pp. 229ff.), the figures for civilian suicides from official documents or from data given by Wagner and Morselli. For the United States of America, we have assumed that the average army age, as in Europe, was between 20 and 30 years.

† A further proof of the inefficacy of the organic factor in general, and matrimonial selection in particular.

TABLE 23

Comparison of military suicides and civilian suicides in the principal countries of Europe

		Suicides per: Million soldiers	Million civilians of the same age	Coefficient of aggravation for soldiers over civilians
Austria	1876–90	1,253	122	10
USA	1870–84	680	80	8.5
Italy	1876–90	407	77	5.2
England	1876–90	209	79	2.6
Württemberg	1846–58	320	170	1.92
Saxony	1847–58	640	369	1.77
Prussia	1876–90	607	394	1.50
France	1876–90	333	265	1.25

that comparison. In France in the period 1888–91, there were *380* suicides for every million enlisted men, while at the same time bachelors of 20 to 25 produced only 237 suicides. So for every 100 civilian suicides there were 160 military ones, which gives an aggravation coefficient of 1.6, quite apart from the celibacy factor.

If one takes only suicides by NCOs, this coefficient is still higher. In the period 1867–74, a million NCOs gave an annual average of *993* suicides. According to a census taken in 1866, their average age was a little over 31. Admittedly, we do not know the figure for suicides at that time of unmarried men of 30 years old: the tables we have drawn up relate to a much more recent period (1889–91) and these are the only figures that we have. But if we take those figures as a reference, the only error that they can cause us to make must have the effect of lowering the aggravation coefficient of NCOs below the true figure, because, since the number of suicides has almost doubled from one period to another, the rate of unmarried men in the relevant age group has certainly risen. Consequently, by comparing suicides of NCOs from 1867–74 with those of

bachelors of 1889–91, we might perhaps moderate, but not exaggerate the bad influence of the military profession. So if despite this error we find an aggravation coefficient, we can be sure not only that it is real, but that it is in reality much greater than appears from this calculation. So, in 1889–91, a million bachelors of 31 gave a figure for suicides between 394 and 627, in other words around *510*. This number is to 993 as 100 is to 194, which implies an aggravation coefficient of 1.94; and this can almost be brought up to 4 without fear of exaggeration.*

Finally, the officer corps gave an average between 1862 and 1878, of *430* suicides per million. Their average age (which cannot have varied greatly) was 37 years 9 months in 1866. As many of them are married, we should not compare them to bachelors of that age, but to the whole of the male population, married and unmarried. And at the age of 37, in the period 1863–68, a million men of every category produced only a little over *200* suicides. This number is to 430 in the same ratio as 100 is to 215, giving an aggravation coefficient of 2.15, independently of both marriage and family life.

This coefficient which, according to the various military ranks, varies between 1.6 and nearly 4, can clearly not be explained except by causes peculiar to the military state. It is true that we have only established it with reference to France; where other countries are concerned, we do not have the necessary data to isolate the influence of celibacy. But since the French army happens to be the one in Europe with the lowest rate of suicide (with the single exception of Denmark), we can be certain that this result is general and even that it may be more extreme in other European states. What is the cause of it?

One suggestion has been alcoholism, which is said to be more prevalent in the army than among civilians. But firstly, as we

* In the years 1867–74, the suicide rate was around 140; in 1889–91 it was 210–20, or an increase of almost 60 per cent. If the rate for bachelors rose at the same rate, and there is no reason to suppose otherwise, and there is no reason to suppose otherwise, there would only have been 319 in the first of these periods, which would bring the aggravation coefficient for NCOs up to 3.11. If we do not talk about NCOs after 1874, this is because from then on there were fewer and fewer career NCOs.

have shown, since alcoholism does not have a definite influence on the general suicide rate, it cannot have any greater influence on military suicides in particular. Then, the small number of years of military service (three years in France, two and a half in Prussia) are not sufficient to produce a large enough number of confirmed alcoholics for this to explain the army's huge contribution to the number of suicides. Finally, even according to observers who attribute the greatest influence to alcoholism, only one-tenth of cases can be attributed to this cause. Consequently, even if alcoholic suicides were to be two or three times as numerous among soldiers as among civilians of the same age, which is far from proven, there would still be a considerable excess of military suicides, and for these one would have to look for another explanation.

The reason most commonly put forward is a loathing of military service. This explanation agrees with the common idea that suicide is to be attributed to the hardships of life: because of the rigours of discipline, the absence of freedom and the deprivation of all comfort, people are inclined to consider barrack life as particularly unendurable. In reality, it would seem that there are many other walks of life which are tougher and which do not, however, increase the tendency to suicide. The soldier is at least always assured of somewhere to sleep and enough to eat. But whatever the importance of those considerations, the following facts demonstrate the inadequacy of this simplistic explanation.

1. It is logical to accept that a loathing of army life must be much stronger in the first years of service and begin to diminish as the soldier becomes used to it. After a time, there must be some acclimatization, either by the effect of habit, or else by the fact that the most refractory individuals have either deserted or killed themselves; and this acclimatization must become increasingly complete as the period of service proceeds. So if it were a change in habits and the individual finding if impossible to get used to his new life that determined the peculiar liability of soldiers to commit suicide, one should see the aggravation coefficient diminish the longer they are in uniform; but this is not the case, as the following table shows:

French Army		British Army		
Service	NCOs and privates: Annual suicides per 100,000 (1862–69)	Age	Suicides per 100,000	
			England	India
Less than a year	28	20–25 years	20	13
1–3 years	27	25–30 "	39	39
3–5 "	40	30–35 "	51	84
5–7 "	48	35–40 "	71	103
7–10 "	76			

In France, in under ten years' service, the suicide rate has almost tripled, while for civilian unmarried men it rises in the same period only from 237 to 394. In the British army in India, it becomes, in twenty years, eight times higher. The civilian rate never advances at such a speed. This demonstrates that the aggravation peculiar to the army is not localized in the early years.

The same appears to be true in Italy. Admittedly, we do not have the proportional figures related to the soldiers of each contingent, but the raw data are substantially the same for each of the three years of service: 15.1 for the first, 14.8 for the second and 14.3 for the third. It is certainly true that the numbers diminish from year to year, as a result of death, discharges, leaves, etc., so the absolute figures can only have remained at the same level if the proportional figures have considerably increased. However, it is not implausible to believe that in some countries there are a certain number of suicides at the start of military service which are indeed due to the change in lifestyle. In Prussia, in fact, we are told that the number of suicides is particularly high in the first six months. In Austria, too, out of 1,000 suicides, 156 are committed in the three first months,* which is indeed a very high figure. But there is nothing in these figures that contradicts what we said previously, because it is very possible that, apart from the temporary aggravation occurring in this period of disturbance, there is another that has entirely different causes and that increases according to a law similar to the one we have noted in France and in

* See Roth's article in *Stat. Monatschrift*, 1892, p. 200.

England. Moreover, even in France, the rate for the second and third years is slightly below that of the first, though this does not, however, prevent its later growth.*

2. Military life is much less disagreeable and discipline less harsh for officers and NCOs than for ordinary private soldiers, so the aggravation coefficient for the first two categories should be less than for the third. But the contrary is the case, as we have already shown for France; the same is to be found in other countries. In Italy, officers had an annual average of 565 cases per million in the years 1871–75, while their men only produced 230 (Morselli). For NCOs, the rate is higher still: it is over 1,000 per million. In Prussia, while private soldiers give a figure of only 560 suicides per million, NCOs provide 1,140. In Austria, there is one officer's suicide for every nine by private soldiers, even though there are evidently many more than nine men for every officer. Similarly, though there is not one NCO for every two soldiers, there is one suicide for the first for every 2.5 in the second group.

3. Distaste for military life should be lower among those who have chosen it freely, as a vocation, so volunteers and re-enlisted men should be less liable to suicide. Yet, on the contrary, their rate is exceptionally high.

Years 1875–78	Rate of suicide per million	Probable average age	Rate of civilian bachelors of the same age (1889–91)	Aggravation coefficient
Volunteers	670	25	237–394, i.e. 315	2.12
Re-enlisted men	1,300	30	394–627, i.e. 510	2.54

For the reasons already given, these coefficients, calculated in relation to bachelors of 1889–91, are certainly below the

* For Prussia and Austria, we do not have the numbers per year of service, and this prevents us from calculating the proportional figures. In France, it has been claimed that, if the number of military suicides fell in the aftermath of the war, this is because service had been reduced from seven years to five. But the fall was not sustained and, from 1882 onwards, the figures rose markedly. Between 1882 and 1889 they returned to their prewar numbers, varying between 322 and 424 per million, and this despite the fact that the period of service had been further reduced, to three years instead of five.

true figures. The strength of the tendency among re-enlisted men is particularly striking since they are those who remain in the army after having experienced military life.

Hence, the members of the armed forces who are most likely to be victims of suicide are also those who have the greatest vocation for this career, who have been most moulded to its demands and who are best protected from the trials and tribulations that it may involve. This means that the aggravation coefficient which is peculiar to the profession has as its cause not the repugnance that the army inspires, but, on the contrary, the totality of states, acquired habits or natural predispositions that make up the military ethos. The first quality of the soldier is a kind of impersonality that is not met with to the same extent anywhere in civilian life. He must be trained to attach little value to his own being, since he must be ready to sacrifice it whenever he is ordered to do so. Even outside these exceptional circumstances, in peacetime and in the everyday exercise of the profession, military discipline demands that he should obey without question and even, sometimes, without understanding. This demands a degree of intellectual self-denial that is not compatible with individualism. One must be only very weakly attached to one's individuality if one is to obey exterior stimuli with such docility. In a word, the soldier keeps the principle of his conduct outside himself, which is characteristic of the state of altruism. As it happens, of all the parts that go to make up our modern societies, the army is the one that most recalls the structure of inferior societies. It, too, consists in a massive and compact group that offers a strong framework for the individual and prevents him from acting on his own initiative. So, as this moral constitution is the natural site of altruistic suicide, there is every reason to suppose that military suicide has the same character and derives from the same origin.

This would explain why the aggravation coefficient rises with the length of service: it is because this tendency to renunciation and liking for impersonality increase the longer the man is conditioned to them. In the same way, since the military ethos is inevitably stronger among those who re-enlist and officers than in private soldiers, it is natural that the former should be

more particularly inclined towards suicide than the latter. This hypothesis even allows us to understand the peculiar superiority of NCOs in this respect over officers. If they tend to kill themselves more often, this is because there is no rank which so demands the habit of submission and passivity. However disciplined an officer may be, he must also to some extent be capable of initiative; he has a wider field of action and hence a more developed individuality. The conditions for altruistic suicide are therefore less completely met for him than for the NCO: because he has a clearer notion of his life's worth, he is less inclined to dispose of it.

Not only do these reasons explain the facts that we cited earlier, but they are additionally confirmed by those that follow.

1. Table 23 shows that the military aggravation coefficient is all the higher when the whole of the civilian population has a lesser tendency to suicide, and vice versa. Denmark is the classic terrain for suicide, and soldiers there do not kill themselves any more than the rest of the population. After that, the states most prolific in suicide are Saxony, Prussia and France, where the army is not very much affected, the aggravation coefficient varying between 1.25 and 1.77. By contrast, it is very great for Austria, Italy, the United States and England, countries whose civilians are unlikely to kill themselves. Rosenfeld, in the article already quoted, classified the main countries of Europe from the point of view of military suicide (though without thinking to draw any theoretical conclusions from this classification) and arrived at the same results. Here is the order that he gives to the different states with the coefficients calculated by him:

	Aggravation coefficient for soldiers compared with civilians aged 20–30	Rate for the civilian population per million
France	1.3	150 (1871–75)
Prussia	1.8	133 (1871–75)
England	2.2	73 (1876)
Italy	between 3 and 4	37 (1874–77)
Austria	8.0	72 (1864–72)

Except for the fact that Austria should come in front of Italy, the inversion is quite regular.*

It is seen in a still more striking way inside the Austro-Hungarian empire. The army regiments with the highest aggravation coefficient are those garrisoned in regions where civilians enjoy the greatest level of immunity and vice versa:

Military region	Aggravation coefficient for soldiers over the civilian population (over 20 years)		Suicide by civilians (over 20 years) per million	
Vienna (Lower and Upper Austria, Salzburg)	1.42		660	
Brunn (Moravia and Silesia)	2.41		580	
Prague (Bohemia)	2.58	Average 2.46	620	Average 480
Innsbruck (Tyrol, Vorarlberg)	2.41		240	
Zara (Dalmatia)	3.48		250	
Graz (Steiermark, Carinthia, Carniole)	3.58	Average 3.82	290	Average 283
Cracow (Galicia and Bukowina)	4.41		310	

There is only one exception, which is the region of Innsbruck, where the rate of civilians is low and the aggravation coefficient only average.

In the same way, in Italy, out of all the military districts Bologna is the one where the soldiers are least likely to kill themselves (180 suicides per million); it is also the one where civilians are most likely to kill themselves (89.5). Puglia and the Abruzzi, on the contrary, have a high rate of military suicide (370 and 400 per million), but only 15 or 16 civilian suicides. Similar figures could be given for France. The military government of Paris, with 260 suicides per million, is well below the Brittany army corps, which has 440. In Paris, the aggravation coefficient must be insignificant because, in the *département* of

* One might ask oneself if the huge size of the military aggravation coefficient in Austria is not due to the fact that suicides in the army are more precisely accounted than in the civilian population.

the Seine, a million unmarried men between the ages of 20 and 25 produce 214 suicides.

These facts prove that the causes of military suicide are not only different to, but the opposite of, those that most contribute to the rate of civilian suicide. The latter, in the major European societies, is chiefly due to the excessive individuation that is part of civilization. Military suicides must therefore be related to the opposite phenomenon: weak individuation or what we have called a state of altruism. In fact, the nations in which the army is most inclined to suicide are also those which are the least developed and where manners and customs are closest to those seen in inferior societies. Traditionalism, that arch-enemy of the individualist spirit, is much more extensive in Italy, Austria and even in England than in Saxony, Prussia and France. It is stronger in Zara and in Cracow than in Graz and Vienna, stronger in Puglia than in Rome or Bologna, and stronger in Brittany than in the Seine. As it preserves one from egotistical suicide, it will easily be understood that where it is still strong the civilian population has few suicides. However, it only has this preservative influence if it remains moderate. When it exceeds a certain degree of intensity, it becomes in itself a primary source of suicide. The army, as we know, inevitably tends to exaggerate it, being increasingly inclined to exceed these bounds the more its influence is supported and reinforced by the surrounding environment. The education that it gives has violent effects that are all the greater when it happens to be in accord with the ideas and feelings of the civilian population, because then there is nothing to contain it. On the contrary, where the military spirit is constantly and energetically contradicted by public morality, it cannot be as strong as when everything combines to pull the young soldier in the same direction. So we can understand that, in countries where the state of altruism is sufficient to protect the whole of the population to some extent, the army can easily take it to such a point of exaggeration as to cause significant aggravation.*

* We should note that a state of altruism is inherent in a region. The army corps in Brittany is not only made up of Bretons, but it is influenced by the surrounding moral climate.

2. In every army, the elite forces are the ones in which the aggravation coefficient is highest:

	Real or probable average age	Suicides per million	Aggravation coefficient	
Special corps of Paris	30–35	570 (1862–78)	2.45	Compared with the male civilian pop. aged 35, both married and unmarried *
Gendarmerie	30–35	570 (1873)	2.45	
Veterans (abolished 1872)	45–55	2,860	2.37	Compared with unmarried men of the same age (1889–91)

This last figure, since it was calculated in relation to unmarried men of 1889–91, is much too weak, yet it is well above that for ordinary troops. Similarly, in the army in Algeria, which is supposed to have the highest standards of military spirit, suicides over the period 1872–78 were twice the rate among troops stationed in France at the same time (570 suicides per million instead of 280). By contrast, the army corps which are least affected are bridge-builders, engineers, ambulancemen and administrative workers, that is to say those whose military nature is least evident. Similarly in Italy, while the army in general in the years 1878–81 produced only 430 cases per million, the *bersaglieri* had 580, the *carabinieri*[22] 800, and military schools and training battalions 1,010.

What distinguishes the elite corps is the intensity of the spirit of self-denial and military abnegation. Thus suicide in the army varies in proportion to this ethos.

3. A final proof of this law is that military suicide is everywhere in decline. In France, there were 630 cases per million in 1862, but in 1890 there were only 280. It has been claimed that this decline is due to the legal reduction of length of service.

* Because gendarmes and municipal guards are often married.

But the decline easily predates the new laws on recruitment. It has been continuous since 1862, apart from quite a marked rise in the period 1882–1888.* And this is to be found everywhere. In Prussia, military suicides fell from 716 per million in 1877 to 457 in 1893. In the whole of Germany, the fall was from 707 in 1877 to 550 in 1890. In Belgium, from 391 in 1885 to 185 in 1891; in Italy, from 431 in 1876 to 389 in 1892. In Austria and England the decline has not been very marked, but there has been no growth (1,209 in 1892 for the first of these countries and 210 in the second in 1890, instead of 1,277 and 217 in 1876).

If our explanation is correct, this is what ought to happen; and it is a constant fact that during the same period there was a reduction of the traditional military spirit in all these countries. Rightly or wrongly, the habits of passive obedience, or absolute submission, in a word of 'impersonalism', if we may coin the term, were found to be increasingly contradicted by the demands of public conscience. As a result, they lost ground. In order to meet new aspirations, discipline became less rigid and less constricting on the individual.† In fact, it is notable that, in these same societies in the same period of time, civilian suicides continued to rise. This is further proof that the cause on which they depend is contrary in nature to that which usually makes soldiers peculiarly liable.

Everything goes to prove that military suicide is only a form of altruistic suicide. Certainly, we do not mean that every particular case that occurs in the armed forces has this character and origin. When a soldier puts on his uniform, he does not become an entirely new man; the effects of the education he has received and the life that he has lived up to then do not vanish as though by magic, and in any case he is not so far

* This rise is too large to be accidental. When one notes that it coincides precisely with the start of the period of colonial expansion, one may justifiably wonder whether the wars caused by this did not cause a revival of military spirit.

† We do not mean that individuals suffered from constraints and killed themselves because they were suffering. They killed themselves in greater numbers because they had a less distinct sense of individuality.

separated from the rest of society for him not to take part in communal life. It may very well be that the suicide he commits is sometimes a civilian one in its causes and nature. But once one has discarded these particular, unrelated cases, there is a compact and homogeneous group which includes most of the suicides that occur in the army and derive from that state of altruism without which there can be no martial spirit. This is the suicide of inferior societies that survives among us because the military mind is itself in certain respects a survival of primitive morality.* Under the influence of this predisposition, the soldier kills himself at the slightest disappointment, for the most trivial reasons, for a refusal to grant leave, for a reprimand, for an unjust punishment, for a hitch in promotion, for a matter of honour, for a passing fit of jealousy or even, quite simply, because other suicides have taken place before his eyes or to his knowledge. This, indeed, is the origin of those phenomena of contagion that have often been observed in the army and of which we gave examples earlier. These are inexplicable if suicide were to depend solely on individual causes. One cannot accept that chance happens to have brought together in a single regiment at this particular spot such a large number of individuals inclined to do away with themselves by some feature of their organic make-up. Moreover, it is still more impossible to accept that such an imitative spread should occur without there being some predisposing factor. But everything is easy to explain when one accepts that the military career develops a psychological make-up that strongly inclines a man to relieve himself of life, because it is natural that this make-up should be found, in differing degrees, among most of those who are serving, or who have served, the flag. And since this provides such a favourable terrain for suicide, not much is needed to move the tendency towards suicide latent in such a make-up from potentiality to action. Example is enough. This is why suicide spreads like wildfire among men who have thus been prepared to receive it.

* This does not mean that it will soon disappear. These survivals have a purpose and it is natural that an element of the past should survive in the heart of the present. Life is made of such contradictions.

III

We can now better understand why it was important to give an objective definition of suicide and to stick to it.

Because altruistic suicide, while presenting characteristics of suicide, is similar (especially in its most striking manifestations) to certain categories of action that we are accustomed to honour with esteem and even with admiration, people have often refused to consider it as self-murder. Remember, for Esquirol and Falret, the death of Cato and that of the Girondins[23] was not suicide. But then, if suicides which have the spirit of renunciation and self-denial as their evident and immediate cause do not deserve this description, it is no more appropriate for those that result from the same mental outlook, even though in a less obvious manner, because the latter are different from the former only in a few details. If the inhabitant of the Canary Islands who leaps into the abyss to honour his God is not a suicide, how can we apply the term to the member of the Jain sect who kills himself in order to return to nothingness; or to the primitive man who under the influence of the same mental state renounces life because of a slight that he has suffered, or simply to demonstrate his contempt for life; or to the bankrupt who prefers not to survive his dishonour; or finally to the many soldiers who enrol annually in the contingent of the voluntary dead? Because all these cases are caused, at bottom, by the same state of altruism which is also the cause of what one might call heroic suicide. Are they to be placed among the suicides, and only those whose motive is especially pure excluded? But, to begin with, by what criterion are we to make the distinction? When does a motive become laudable enough for us not to qualify the action that results from it as suicide? Furthermore, by making this radical distinction between two categories of event, we necessarily misunderstand their nature, because it is in obligatory altruistic suicide that the characteristics of the type are most easily observed. The other varieties are only derivatives of the type. So we must either consider as inadmissible a sizeable group of instructive phenomena, or else, if not all are rejected – apart from the fact that we shall only be able

to make an arbitrary distinction between them – we shall find ourselves unable to determine the common root linking the ones that we have picked out. These are the dangers that we run when we make our definition of suicide depend on the subjective feelings that it inspires.

Moreover, even the sentimental reasons by which people think they are justifying this exclusion are ill-founded. They rest on the fact that the motives behind certain altruistic suicides are also to be found, in a scarcely different form, underlying certain actions that everyone considers to be moral. But is not the same true of egotistical suicide? Does not the feeling of individual autonomy have its own morality, just as much as the opposite feeling? While the latter is the cause of a particular form of courage, if it strengthens the heart and even hardens it, the other softens it and opens it to pity. While in conditions where altruistic suicide is dominant a man is always ready to give his own life, he does not on the other hand attach any greater importance to that of others. But, on the contrary, when he raises individual personality so high that he can no longer see any goal that surpasses it, then he respects it in others. The cult that he devotes to it means that he suffers from whatever may diminish it, even in his fellow men. The fanatical devotion of primitive times is replaced by greater sympathy for human suffering. So every kind of suicide is only the exaggerated or deviated form of a virtue. However, in that case, the way in which they affect the moral conscience does not differentiate them enough to permit us to divide them into two distinct categories.

CHAPTER 5
ANOMIC SUICIDE

Society, however, is not only an object that draws towards itself the feelings and the actions of individuals, with more or less intensity. It is also a force that directs them. There is a relationship between the way in which this regulatory action operates and the social rate of suicide.

I

It is a known fact that economic crises have an aggravating influence on suicide.

In Vienna a financial crisis broke out in 1873[1] and reached its peak in the following year; the number of suicides immediately increased. From 141 in 1872, they went up to 153 in 1873 and to 216 in 1874, rising by 51 per cent above the number for 1872 and 41 per cent over 1873. The proof that the catastrophe was the sole cause of the increase is that this was particularly noticeable at the time when the crisis was in its most acute phase, that is to say in the first four months of 1874. From 1 January to 30 April, there were 48 suicides in 1871, 44 in 1872, 43 in 1873 and 73 in 1874 – an increase of 70 per cent. The same crisis occurred at the same time in Frankfurt am Main and had the same effect. In the years before 1874, there were on average 22 suicides a year there, but in 1874 this number rose to 32, or 45 per cent more.

No one has forgotten the famous crash on the Paris Bourse in the winter of 1882. The consequences were felt not only in Paris but throughout France. From 1874 to 1886, the mean annual increase was only 2 per cent, but in 1882 it was 7 per

cent. Moreover, it is not equally distributed between different times of year, but is found chiefly during the first three months, that is to say at the very moment when the crash occurred. These three months alone account for 59 per cent of the total increase. This rise is so clearly the result of exceptional circumstances that not only does one not find it in 1881, but it has disappeared in 1883, although in the main this last year saw a few more suicides than the one before:

	1881	1882	1883
Whole year	6,741	7,213 (+7%)	7,267
First quarter	1,589	1,770 (+11%)	1,604

This correlation is not only to be observed in a few exceptional cases; it is a law. The figure for bankruptcies is a barometer which reflects variations in the economic climate with a fair degree of accuracy. When, from one year to the next, these suddenly become more frequent, one can be sure that some serious disturbance has taken place. From 1845 to 1869, there were three occasions when these sudden rises occurred, indicating a crisis. While, over this whole period, the annual growth in the number of bankruptcies was 3.2 per cent, it was 26 per cent in 1847, 37 per cent in 1854 and 20 per cent in 1861. And, at these three moments, one also observes a very sharp rise in the number of suicides. While over the 24-year period the mean annual increase was only 2 per cent, it was 17 per cent in 1847, 8 per cent in 1854 and 9 per cent in 1861.

But why do these crises have this effect? Is it because, by affecting the public wealth, they increase poverty? Is it because life becomes harder that people are more willing to give it up? That explanation is tempting in its simplicity and, moreover, it fits the common notion of suicide; but it is contradicted by the facts.

Indeed, if voluntary deaths increase because life becomes harder, then they should show a marked decrease when the contrary occurs. But while, when the price of basic foodstuffs rises excessively, suicides generally follow suit, we do not observe them fall in number below the mean in the opposite

circumstances. In Prussia, in 1850, the price of wheat fell to its lowest point in the whole period from 1848 to 1881: it was at 6 marks 91 per 50 kilos; yet at this same time suicides went from their 1849 level of 1,527, to 1,736, or an increase of 13 per cent. And they continued to rise through the years 1851, 1852 and 1853, even though prices remained low. In 1858–59, there was a further fall, yet suicides rose from 2,038 in 1857 to 2,126 in 1858 and 2,146 in 1859. From 1863 to 1866, prices, having risen to 11 marks 04 in 1861, fell progressively to 7 marks 95 in 1864 and remained very moderate throughout the period. During this same time, suicides rose by 17 per cent (2,112 in 1862, 2485 in 1866).* Similar observations can be made in Bavaria. According to a graph drawn up by Mayr† for the period 1835–61, it was in the years 1857–58 and 1858–59 that the price of rye was at its lowest, yet suicides which in 1857 had only numbered 286 rose to 329 in 1858, then to 387 in 1859. The same phenomenon had already occurred in the years 1848–50: wheat was then very cheap, as everywhere in Europe. Yet, despite a slight, temporary decrease, due to the political events we have already mentioned, suicides remained at the same level: there were 217 in 1847, and still 215 in 1848; and while they momentarily fell in 1849 to 189, the numbers recovered in 1850, rising to 250.

So little is it the case that a rise in poverty leads to a rise in suicide that even fortunate crises, the effect of which is rapidly to increase a country's prosperity, act on suicide in the same way as economic disasters.

Victor Emmanuel's conquest of Rome in 1870,[2] which finally established the unity of Italy, was the starting point of a revival that is making the country one of the great powers in Europe. Trade and industry were stimulated as a result and transformations took place in these areas with extraordinary speed. While in 1876 industrial needs were met by 4,459 steam boilers with a total output of 54,000 horsepower, in 1887 the number of these machines had risen to 9,983 and their power, at 167,000

* See Starke, *Verbrechen und Verb. in Preussen*, Berlin, 1884, p. 55.

† *Die Gesetzmässigkeit in Gesellschaftsleben*, p. 345.

horsepower, was tripled. Naturally, the quantity of goods produced grew in the same period by the same ratio.* Economic exchanges followed the trend: not only were the merchant navy and means of communication and transport extended, but the number of people and goods transported doubled.† As this general increase in activity led to an increase in salaries (the rise is estimated at 35 per cent from 1873 to 1889), the material situation of workers improved, all the more so since at the same time the price of bread was falling.‡ Finally, according to calculations made by Bodio, private wealth increased from 45½ billion on average over the period 1875–80, to 51 billion in the years 1880–85 and to 54½ billion in 1885–90.§

Yet, in parallel with this collective rebirth, we find an exceptional growth in the number of suicides. Between 1866 and 1870, they remained more or less constant, while from 1871 to 1877 they grew by 36 per cent. There were in:

1864–70	29 suicides per million	1874	37.0 suicides per million
1871	31 " " "	1875	34.0 " " "
1872	33 " " "	1876	36.5 " " "
1873	36 " " "	1877	40.6 " " "

And, since this time, the rate has continued to grow. The total figure, which was 1,139 in 1877 increased to 1,463 in 1889, or a new rise of 28 per cent.

In Prussia, the same phenomenon occurred on two occasions. In 1866, the kingdom experienced a first expansion, annexing several important provinces while at the same time becoming the head of the Northern Confederation. This increase in glory and power was at once accompanied by a sudden rise in suicides. In the period 1856–60, there were in an average year 123 suicides per million, and only 122 during the years 1861–65. In the five-year period from 1866 to 1870, despite a fall in

* See Fornasari di Verce, *La criminalita e le ricende economiche d'Italia*, Turin, 1894, pp. 77–83.

† Ibid., pp. 108–17.

‡ Ibid., pp. 86–104.

§ Growth was less in 1885–90 because of a financial crisis.

1870, the average rose to 133. The year 1867, the one immediately following the victory, was the one in which suicide reached the highest point recorded since 1816 (one suicide per 5,432 inhabitants, while in 1864, there had been only one in 8,739).

Following the war of 1870, a new, favourable transformation took place: Germany was unified and entirely placed under the hegemony of Prussia. Huge war indemnities filled the public purse, while commerce and industry flourished. Never had the increase in suicide been so fast: between 1875 and 1886, it rose by 90 per cent, going from 3,278 cases to 6,212.

Universal exhibitions, when they are a success, are considered a joyful event in the life of a society. They stimulate business, they attract more money into the country and they are supposed to increase public prosperity, especially in the town where they take place. Yet it seems quite possible that, in the end, they lead to a considerable increase in the number of suicides. This seems to have occurred for the Exposition of 1878 in particular.[3] The increase that year was the highest of any between 1874 and 1886: it was 8 per cent, that is to say even higher than the one produced by the crash of 1882. And what makes it hard to imagine that this growth had any cause other than the Exposition was that 86 per cent of the growth took place precisely in the six months that the exhibition lasted.

In 1889, the same did not happen throughout France, but it is possible that the Boulangist crisis, because of its depressive effect on the suicide rate, neutralized the opposite tendency of the Exposition. Certainly in Paris, even though the political passions aroused by the crisis should have had the same effect as in the rest of the country, events took the same course as in 1878. For the seven months of the Exposition, suicides rose by nearly 10 per cent (to be precise, by 9.66 per cent), while in the rest of the year they stayed below the figure for 1888, and what would eventually be the figure for 1890.

	1888	1889	1890
The seven months of the Exposition	517	567	540
The five other months	319	311	356

One may wonder if, without Boulangism, the rise would not have been sharper.

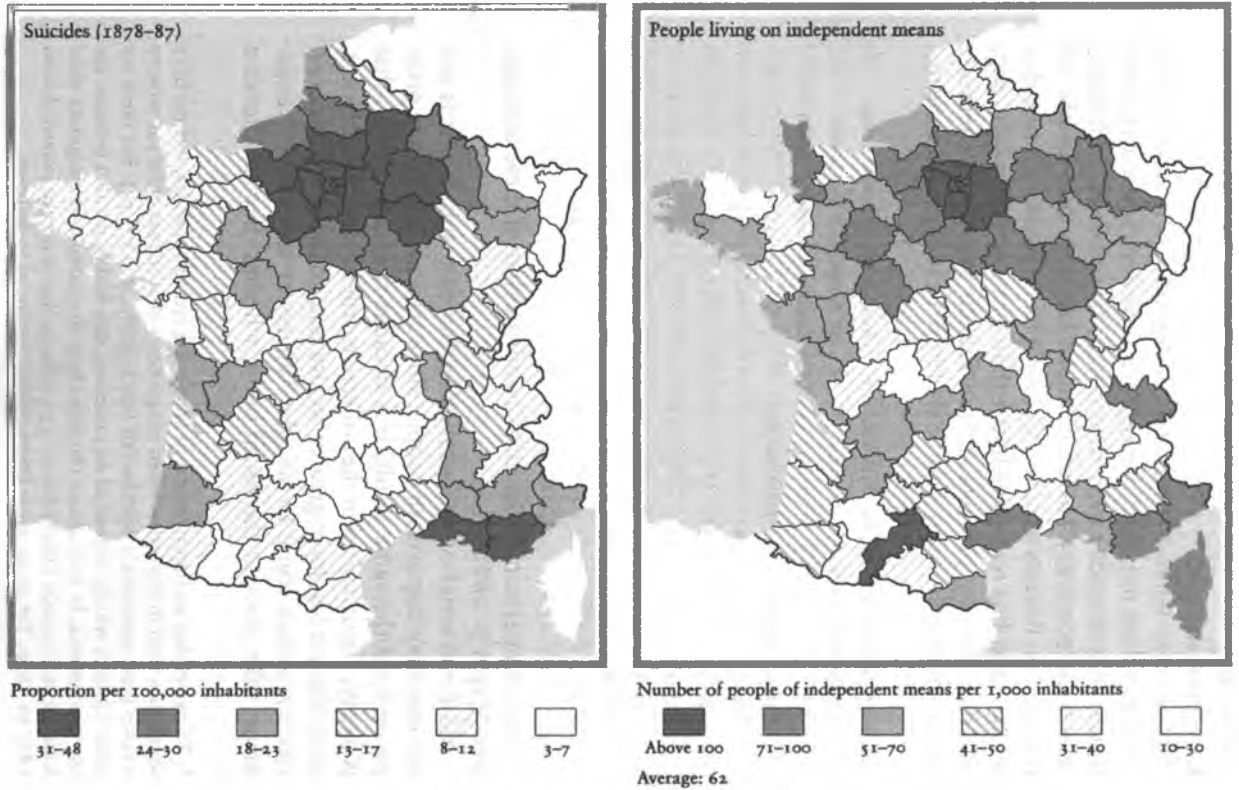
However, what even better demonstrates that economic hardship does not have the aggravating effect often attributed to it is that it tends rather to produce the opposite. In Ireland, where the peasantry has such a hard life, very few people kill themselves. Poverty-stricken Calabria has virtually no suicides, while Spain has ten times fewer than France. One might even say that poverty protects. In the French provinces, there are more suicides the more people there are of independent means.

Départements where, for every 100,000 inhabitants (1878–87), there are:		Average no. of people living on independent means per 1,000 in each group (1886)
48–43 suicides	(5 *départements*)	127
38–31 "	(6 ")	73
30–24 "	(6 ")	69
23–18 "	(15 ")	59
17–13 "	(18 ")	49
12–8 "	(26 ")	49
7–3 "	(10 ")	42

The comparison of the maps confirms that of these averages (see Map 5 p. 268).

So if industrial or financial crises increase suicides, it is not because they impoverish people, since critical increases in prosperity have the same result; it is because they are critical, that is to say, disturbances in the collective order.* Any disturbance, even when it results in greater wealth and an increase in general vitality, drives some to suicide. Whenever serious rearrangements take place in the social body, whether they are due to a

* To prove that an improvement in well-being reduces suicides, writers have sometimes tried to show that when emigration – that release valve for poverty – takes place extensively suicides fall (see Legoyt, pp. 257–59). But there are many cases in which, instead of an inversion, one finds a parallel between the two phenomena. In Italy, from 1876 to 1890, the number of emigrants went from 76 per 100,000 inhabitants to 335, a figure that was even exceeded from 1887 to 1889. Yet at the same time suicides continued to increase.



Map 5 Suicides and wealth

sudden growth or to an unexpected disaster, men are more inclined to kill themselves. How can this be? How is it that what is generally considered to improve life can detach one from it?

A few preliminary considerations are needed before we can reply to this question.

II

No living person can be happy or even live at all unless his needs are sufficiently well adjusted to his means. In other words, if he demands more than can be provided for him, or even something other than can be provided, he will be constantly irritated and unable to function without suffering. And an action that cannot be accomplished without suffering tends not to be repeated. Aptitudes that are not satisfied atrophy and, since the aptitude for life is only the result of all the rest, it is bound to weaken if the others also slacken.

In an animal, at least in a normal state, this balance occurs with automatic spontaneity, because it depends on purely material conditions. All that the organism requires is that the amounts of matter and energy which it is constantly expending in order to live should be periodically replaced with equivalent amounts, in other words that replacement should be equivalent to wear. When the hole that life has dug out of its own resources is filled, the animal is satisfied and asks for nothing more. Its reflective abilities are not sufficiently developed to imagine any ends except those that are contingent upon its physical nature. On the other hand, as the work demanded by each organ itself depends on the general state of the vital forces and the needs of organic equilibrium, wear in its turn is calculated on replacement and the balance achieved automatically. The limits of one are those of the other; they are both equally laid down in the very constitution of the living creature, which does not have the means to exceed them.

However, the same is not true of man, most of whose needs are not (or at least not to the same degree) dependent on his body. At the most, one might be able to determine the quantity

of material foodstuffs necessary to maintain the physical activity of a human life, even though this is already less easily determined than in the previous case and the margin more widely open to the free play of desire, since beyond the necessary minimum with which nature is satisfied when it proceeds by instinct, human intelligence is more aware and can suggest better conditions which appear as desirable ends and inspire activity. None the less, one may accept that appetites of this kind will sooner or later encounter a limit that they cannot pass. But how can one assess the amount of well-being, comfort and luxury that a human being can legitimately seek? Neither in the organic make-up nor in the psychological make-up of the human being is there anything that marks the limit of such desires. The functioning of individual life does not demand that it should stop here rather than there, and the proof is that these desires have been constantly developing since the beginning of human history, that ever more complete satisfactions have appeared to meet them and that, despite this, the average state of human health has not declined. Above all, how can we establish how they should vary according to social status, the professions and the relative importance of services, etc.? There is no society in which they have been satisfied to an equal extent in the different degrees of the social hierarchy. However, in its essentials, human nature is very much the same in all citizens. So it is not human nature that can set the variable limit to these needs that they demand. Consequently, to the extent that they depend solely on the individual, they are limitless. In itself, setting aside any external power that governs it, our sensibility is a bottomless abyss that nothing can fill.

In that case, however, if nothing comes from outside to restrict it, it can only be a source of torment for itself. Unlimited desires are, by definition, impossible to satisfy and it is with good reason that insatiability is considered a sign of morbidity. Since nothing limits them, they always exceed the means at their disposal by an infinite amount. An unslakable thirst is a perpetually renewed source of suffering. True, it has been said that it is in the nature of human activity to advance endlessly and to seek goals that it can never attain. But it is impossible

to conceive how such an indeterminate state can be reconciled with the conditions of mental life any more than with the demands of physical life. Whatever pleasure a man takes in acting, moving or making some effort, he must still feel that these efforts are not in vain and that he is advancing as he walks. Yet one does not advance if one is not walking towards a goal or, which is the same thing, when the goal towards which one is proceeding is infinitely far away. As the distance still to cover always remains the same however far one has gone, the result is exactly as if one had pointlessly stayed on the same spot. Even a rearward glance and the feeling of pride that one may experience on seeing how far one has already progressed can only procure a very illusory satisfaction, since the distance yet to travel has not been diminished by it. So to pursue a goal that is hypothetically unattainable is to condemn oneself to a perpetual sense of dissatisfaction. Of course, a man does sometimes hope against all reason and, even if it is unreasonable, hope has its joys. So it may be that this sustains him for a time, but it cannot indefinitely survive the repeated disappointments of experience. So what can the future give more than the past, since it is always impossible to reach a state where one can remain, and since one cannot even get close to the desired ideal? So the more one has, the more one wants to have, the satisfactions one receives only serving to stimulate needs instead of fulfilling them. Can it be said that action is pleasant in itself? But then one must first of all be blind enough not to realize its futility. Then, for this pleasure to be felt and to moderate and partly conceal the painful anxiety that accompanies it, this endless movement must at the very least always be accomplished at one's ease and without anything impeding it. As soon as it is disrupted, only the anxiety remains, with all the accompanying discomforts. And it would be a miracle if no insuperable obstacle were ever to arise. In such conditions, one clings to life only by a very slender thread and one that can, at any moment, be broken.

For things to be otherwise, it is above all necessary that passions should be limited. Only then can they be harmonized with the faculties and then satisfied. But since there is nothing

in the individual that can set a limit to them, this must necessarily come from some source outside the individual: a regulatory force must play the same role for non-physical needs as the organism does for physical ones; which means that this force can only be moral. It was the awakening of conscience that disrupted the state of equilibrium in which the animal slumbered, so only conscience can supply the means to re-establish it. Material constraints would be ineffective here: it is not with physico-chemical forces that one can change the heart of man. To the extent that appetities are not automatically contained by physiological mechanisms, they can only be halted by a boundary that they recognize as just. Men would not agree to limit their desires if they felt themselves justified in exceeding the boundaries that have been set for them. However, they cannot lay down this law of justice themselves, for the reasons that we have already stated, so they must receive it from an authority that they respect and before which they spontaneously bow. Only society, either directly and as a whole, or through the intermediary of one of its organs, can play this moderating role, because it is the only moral power superior to the individual whose superiority the individual accepts. It alone has the necessary authority to state the law and to set the point beyond which the passions may not go. And it alone can assess what prospect of reward should be offered to every kind of official in the common interest.

So, indeed, at every moment in history, there is a vague feeling in the moral conscience of societies about what is the respective worth of the different social services, the relative remuneration due to each of them and consequently what is the degree of comfort appropriate to the average worker in every profession. The different functions are, as it were, hierarchized in public opinion and a certain coefficient of well-being attributed to each of them according to the place that it occupies in the hierarchy. For example, in the common view, there is a certain manner of life that is regarded as the upper limit to which a labourer can aspire in his efforts to improve his lot and a lower limit below which it is considered he should not be allowed to fall, unless he has seriously failed in his responsibili-

ties. Each of these is different for a labourer in the town and in the country, for a domestic servant or for a day worker, for an employee in trade or for a clerk, etc. In the same way, people reprove the rich man who lives in poverty, but he is also reproached if he seeks excessive refinement of luxury. Economists protest in vain: it will always be an outrage to public opinion that any individual can devote too great a quantity of wealth to completely superfluous consumption, and indeed it seems that this intolerance is only relaxed in time of moral disturbance.* So there is a veritable regulation which, though it does not always have a juridical form, none the less fixes with relative precision the maximum of ease that every class of society can legitimately aspire to achieve. Moreover, once this scale has been established, there is nothing immutable about it. It changes according to whether the collective income rises or falls and according to changes in the moral notions of society. So it is that what appears to one time as a luxury is not so for another, and that the well-being which was for a long time only accorded to a class in exceptional circumstances and as a supererogation eventually comes to seem essential and entirely just.

Under this pressure, everyone, in his particular sphere, has a vague idea of the limit towards which his ambition may reach, and does not aspire to anything beyond. If at least he respects the rules and submits to the collective authority, that is to say if he has a healthy moral constitution, he feels that it is not right to demand any more than this. A goal and a limit are thus set for desires. Of course, this definition has nothing rigid or absolute about it. The economic ideal assigned to each category of citizens is itself fixed between certain limits within which the passions can freely roam. But it is not limitless. This relative limitation and the moderation that results are what make men content with their lot, while at the same time giving them moderate encouragement to improve it; and it is this average contentment that gives rise to feelings of calm, active happiness, to the pleasure at being and living which, for societies as for

* This reproach is nowadays entirely moral and seems unlikely to be subject to any judicial sanction. We do not think that any revival of the sumptuary laws is either desirable or even possible.

individuals, is a sign of health. Each person, at least in general, is then in harmony with his condition and wants only what he can legitimately wish for as the normal reward for his activity. Moreover, a man is not for that reason condemned to a kind of immobility. He can seek to embellish his existence, though the efforts that he makes in this direction can fail without making him desperate. For, since he likes what he has and does not invest all his passions in the quest for what he does not have, any novelty that he may happen to wish for may fail his desires and his hopes without everything else failing him as well. What is essential remains. The balance of his happiness is stable because it is defined, and a few disappointments are not enough to upset it.

However, there would be no benefit in everyone considering the hierarchy of functions as fair, in the form in which it is established by opinion, if at the same time one did not consider the way in which these functions are allocated as equally fair. The working man is not in harmony with his social position if he is not convinced that this position is the one that he deserves. If he considers that he deserves another, then the one that he has cannot satisfy him. So it is not enough for the mean level of needs to be adjusted to public opinion for each social condition, but another, more precise set of rules must settle the way in which different social conditions are open to individuals. Indeed, there is no society in which this does not exist, though it varies with time and place. Formerly, it made birth the almost exclusive principle of social classification, while today it maintains no original inequality except that which results from inherited wealth and from merit. But in all its various forms it has the same aim everywhere, and everywhere it is only possible if it is imposed on individuals by an authority that is greater than they are, namely collective authority, for it can only be installed if it demands from one side or the other – or, more usually, one side and the other – sacrifices and concessions, in the name of the welfare of all.

Some people, it is true, have considered that this moral pressure will become unnecessary when economic status ceases to be passed on by heredity. If inheritance were abolished, they

say, each person would enter life with the same resources, and if the struggle between competitors were to be joined on conditions of perfect equality, no one could consider the results to be unfair. Everyone would feel spontaneously that things are as they should be.

There is certainly no doubt that, the more we approach this ideal of equality, the less social constraint will be needed. But it is only a matter of degree, because there is always something inherited that will persist, namely natural gifts. Intelligence, taste, scientific, artistic, literary and industrial worth, courage and manual dexterity are qualities that each of us receives at birth, as the hereditary owner receives his capital and as the nobleman used to receive his title and his role. So we should still need a moral discipline to make those whom nature has least favoured accept the more lowly position that they owe to the chance of their birth. Would anyone go so far as to demand that shares should be equal for all and that no advantage be accorded to the most useful and most deserving? In that case, we should need a very energetic regime to make the latter accept treatment that made them simply equal to the mediocre and the incapable.

Yet this regime, just like the previous one, can only be useful if it is considered fair by the people subjected to it. When it is no longer maintained except by custom and by force, peace and harmony survive only in appearance. A spirit of anxiety and discontent is latent, and appetites which are only superficially contained soon break out. This is what happened in Rome and in Greece with the undermining of the beliefs on which the former organization of patricians and plebs had been founded, and in our modern societies when aristocratic prejudices started to lose their old ascendancy. But such a state of disruption is exceptional and only takes place when society is passing through some unhealthy crisis. Normally, the collective order is recognized as equitable by the great majority of subjects. So when we say that an authority is necessary in order to impose it on individuals, we do not at all intend to imply that violence is the only means by which it may be established. Because this regulation is designed to contain individual passions, it must

emanate from a power that dominates individuals, but this power must also be obeyed out of respect and not from fear.

So it is not true that human activity can be freed from all restraints. There is nothing in the world that can enjoy such a privilege, since every creature, being part of the universe, is relative to the rest of the universe. Its nature and the way in which it manifests this depend not only on itself, but on other creatures, who, consequently, contain and rule it. In this respect, there are only differences of degree and form between a mineral and a thinking subject. What is peculiar to mankind is that the restraint to which we are subjected is not physical, but moral, which is to say social. Man receives his laws not from a material environment which is brutally imposed on him, but from a conscience which is greater than his and whose superiority he feels. Because the greater and the best part of his life goes beyond the body, he escapes from the yoke of the body, but bows beneath that of society.

However, when society is disturbed, either by a painful crisis or by fortunate, but too sudden transformations, it becomes provisionally incapable of exercising its function; hence those sharp rises in the figures for suicide which we observed earlier.

Indeed, in the event of economic disaster, there is something like a 'declassification' which suddenly casts certain individuals into a situation below that which they previously occupied. They consequently have to lower their demands, to restrict their needs and learn to restrain themselves more. As far as they are concerned, all the fruits of social action are lost and their moral education has to be redone. But it is not possible for society to subject them to this new life instantaneously, and teach them to exercise this additional retraint on themselves when they are not accustomed to it. The outcome is that they are not adjusted to the condition that they occupy and the very prospect of it is intolerable to them. Hence the sufferings that detach them from a diminished form of life even before they have experienced it.

But things are no different if the crisis originates in a sudden increase in power and wealth. Then, since the conditions of life have changed, the scale by which one assesses one's needs cannot remain fixed, because it varies as social resources vary,

being what generally determines the share that should belong to each category of producer. The measure has been disrupted but, on the other hand, a new one cannot be improvised. It takes time for people and things to be classified once more by the public conscience. As long as the forces of society which have thus been released have not regained their balance, their respective value remains indeterminate, and consequently for a time there is no regulation. No one then knows what is possible and what is impossible, what is just and what unjust, what constitute legitimate demands and hopes, and which are those that exceed the boundaries. Consequently, there is no limit to people's ambitions. If this disturbance is profound, it even attacks the principles that regulate the distribution of citizens between various jobs; since the relationships between the various parts of society are inevitably modified, the ideas that express these relationships can no longer remain the same. One class, which has been especially favoured by the crisis, will no longer be inclined to the same attitude of resignation and, as a consequence, the spectacle of its greater fortune awakes all kinds of longings around and below it. Opinion is disoriented and no longer curbs appetites, while these in turn no longer know the bounds at which they should stop. In any event, they are at that same moment in a state of natural erethism for the sole reason that the general vitality is more intense. Because prosperity has grown, desires are higher. The richer prey that is offered to them stimulates them and makes them more demanding, at the very moment when traditional rules have lost some of their authority. The state of disorganization, or *anomie*, is thus reinforced by the fact that passions are less disciplined at the very time when they need a stronger discipline.

However, their demands themselves mean that it is impossible to satisfy them. Over-excited ambitions always exceed the results that they achieve, whatever these may be, because they have not been made aware that they should not go any further. Consequently, nothing satisfies them and all this agitation perpetually sustains itself without reaching any form of satiety. Above all, as this race towards an unattainable goal can give no satisfaction but the race itself (if that can be called satisfaction),

should anything chance to get in its way, then one is left empty-handed. Now, it so happens that at this time the struggle becomes more violent and more painful, both because it is less regulated and because competition is fiercer. All classes are caught up in it because there is no longer any established classification. So the effort is all the greater at the moment when it becomes more unproductive. How can the will to live not be weakened in these conditions?

This explanation is confirmed by the unusual immunity enjoyed by poor countries. If poverty protects against suicide, it is because it is in itself a brake. Whatever one does, desires are to some extent bound to take account of means; what one has serves as a benchmark by which to decide what one would like to have. As a result, the less one has, the less one is inclined endlessly to extend the limit of one's needs. Powerlessness, by forcing us to moderation, accustoms us to it; apart from which, if mediocrity is all around us, nothing excites envy. Wealth, on the contrary, by the powers that it confers, gives us the illusion that we depend only on ourselves. By lessening the resistance that things put in our way, it persuades us that they can be constantly overcome. And, the less one feels limited, the more intolerable any limitation becomes. It is not for nothing that so many religions have celebrated the benefits and the moral value of poverty. This is because, of all schools, it is the one that best teaches man to restrain himself. By obliging us to exercise constant discipline over ourselves, it prepares us to accept collective discipline with docility, while wealth, by exalting the individual, constantly risks awakening the spirit of rebellion that is the very fount of immorality. Of course, this is not a reason for preventing mankind from improving its material state. But, while there may be some remedy for the moral danger that follows any increase in wealth, we should still not lose sight of this danger.

III

If, as in the preceding cases, anomie were to occur only in occasional bursts and in the form of acute crises, it might from time to time vary the social rate of suicide, but it would not be a regular, constant factor in this. But there is a sphere of social life in which it is currently in a chronic state, which is the world of trade and industry.

For a century, economic progress has chiefly consisted in freeing industrial relations from any regulation. Until recent times, a whole system of moral powers was in place to discipline them. First of all, there was religion, the influence of which was felt both by the workers and by their masters, by the poor and by the rich. It consoled the former by instructing them to be contented with their lot and teaching them that the social order is ordained by Providence, and that the share of each class has been settled by God Himself, as well as by offering them hope in a world to come of just compensation for the inequalities of the world that is. It had a moderating influence on the masters by recalling that terrestrial interests are not the whole of man, that they should be subordinated to other, higher interests, and consequently that they do not deserve to be pursued without rule or measure. The temporal power, for its part, by the supremacy that it exercised over economic life and by the relatively subordinate position that it accorded to this, limited its scope. Finally, at the very heart of the business world, the craft guilds, by regulating salaries, the price of products and production itself, indirectly set the mean level of incomes against which, inevitably, needs are in part adjusted. In describing this organization, we do not of course mean to suggest it as a model. It is clear that it could not be adapted without profound transformation to suit modern societies. All that we say is that it did exist, that it had useful consequences and that nothing today takes its place.

Religion has lost the greater part of its supremacy. Government power, instead of being the regulator of economic life, has become its instrument and its servant. The most widely opposing schools, orthodox economists and extreme socialists,

are agreed in reducing government to its role as a more or less passive intermediary between the various social factions. The first want to make it simply the guardian of individual contracts, while the second entrust it with the task of collective accountancy, that is to say registering the demands of consumers, transmitting them to producers, making an inventory of the total income and distributing it according to an established formula. But both sides deny government any ability to subordinate the other organs of society and to make them converge towards an end that is higher than they are. Both sides declare that nations should have as their only or main objective that of prospering industrially: this is what is implied in the doctrine of economic materialism which serves as a basis for both these systems, despite their apparent contradictions. And since these theories only express the state of public opinion, industry, no longer considered as a means towards an end which is higher than itself, has become the supreme end of individuals and societies. What has then happened is that the appetites that it arouses have been freed from any authority that might restrain them. By as it were sanctifying these appetites, the apotheosis of well-being has elevated them above any human law. It seems that there is a kind of sacrilege in curbing them. This is why even the purely utilitarian control that industry itself used to exercise over them through the intermediary of the corporations did not manage to survive. Finally, this unleashing of desires was further aggravated by the very development of industry and the almost endless extension of the market. When the producer could dispose of his products only in his immediate neighbourhood, the moderate profit to be made could not greatly over-excite his ambition. But now that he can almost claim to have the whole world as his customer, how could it be that, faced with this endless prospect, his passions could continue to accept being restrained as they once were?

This explains the excitement pertaining in that part of society, but which from there has extended to all the rest. The state of crisis and anomie is constant in it and, as it were, normal. From top to bottom of the ladder, desires are aroused but have no definite idea on what to settle. Nothing can appease them,

since the aim towards which they aspire is infinitely far beyond anything that they might attain. The real seems worthless beside what is seen as possible by feverish imaginations, so they detach themselves from it, only later to detach themselves from the possible when that becomes real in its turn. One thirsts for novelty, for unknown indulgences and sensations that are as yet unnamed, but which lose all their appeal as soon as they have been experienced. And then, when the slightest difficulty arises, one is deprived of any means to withstand it. All the fever vanishes and one perceives how futile the commotion was and how all these new sensations, constantly accumulated, did not provide solid capital in the form of happiness on which to live through times of trial. The wise man who knows how to enjoy the results that he obtains without continually feeling the need to replace them with others, finds in them the wherewithal to hold on to life when the difficult times come. But the man who has always expected everything from the future and lived with his eyes fixed on things to come has nothing in his past to comfort him against the disappointments of the present, because for him the past has only been a series of stages to be got through impatiently. He has become blind to himself because he always thought that he would find later the happiness that he had not met up to then. But now he is stopped in his tracks, so he has nothing to contemplate either before him or behind. Fatigue, moreover, is enough in itself to produce disillusionment because in the long run it is hard not to feel the senselessness of such an endless pursuit.

One might even speculate as to whether it is not chiefly this moral state that makes economic catastrophes so productive of suicides nowadays. In societies where he is subjected to healthy discipline, man also submits more easily to the buffeting of fate. Used to discomfort and self-restraint, he finds that the effort to submit to a little more discomfort is relatively small. But when every limitation is hateful in itself, is not any narrower limit bound to seem unbearable? The feverish impatience in which people live hardly inclines them to resignation. When one has no aim other than constantly going beyond the point that one has reached, how painful it is to be driven back! And this same

disorganization that is characteristic of our economic state opens the gates to every kind of adventure. Since people's imaginations are thirsting for novelty and governed by nothing, they grope around blindly. Inevitably, failures grow with risks, and also crises increase at the very moment when they become more deadly.

However, these circumstances are so well established that society has got used to them and is accustomed to consider them as normal. People constantly say that it is part of human nature to be constantly discontented, to keep pressing forward without pause or rest, towards an indeterminate goal. A passion for the infinite is daily presented as a sign of moral distinction, when in fact it can only occur in disturbed minds which accord the status of a norm to the very disturbance from which they are suffering. The doctrine of progress despite all and as fast as possible has become an article of faith. And also, in parallel with these theories which celebrate the benefits of instability, we see others appear that generalize the situation that gives rise to them, declare that life is bad, accuse it of producing more sorrow than pleasure and only offering man false delights. Since it is in the economic world that this disorder is at its height, this is also where it makes most victims.

Industrial and commercial professions are, in fact, among those that produce the most suicides (see Table 24). They are almost at the same level as the liberal professions and sometimes even ahead of them. They are, in particular, markedly more affected than agriculture. This is because the agricultural industry is the one where the old regulatory powers still exercise the greatest influence and where the fever of business has made the least advances. It is here that we can best see what was once the general make-up of the economic order. Indeed, the gap would be still more noticeable if in the records of industrial suicides one were to distinguish bosses from workers, because it is probably the first group which is the most affected by the state of anomie. The huge rate found among the population of those with independent means (720 per million) shows that it is the most fortunate who suffer most. This is because everything that obliges a person to subordinate himself attenuates the effects of this state. The lower classes do at least have their

TABLE 24

Suicides per million of persons of various professions

	Trade	Transport	Industry	Agriculture	Liberal Professions*
France† (1878–87)	440		340	240	300
Switzerland (1876)	664	1,514	577	304	558
Italy (1866–76)	277	152.6	80.4	26.7	618‡
Prussia (1883–90)	754		456	315	832
Bavaria (1884–91)	465		369	153	454
Belgium (1876–90)	421		160	160	100
Württemberg (1873–78)	273		190	206	
Saxony (1878)		341.59		71.17	

horizons bounded by those limits that are imposed on them, and for that very reason their desires are more defined. But those who have only a void above them are almost obliged to lose themselves in it, if there is no force holding them down.

Anomie is therefore a regular and specific factor in suicide in our modern societies; it is one of the sources that supply the annual total. We are consequently faced with a new type of suicide that should be distinguished from the rest. It differs from them in that it depends not on the way in which individuals are attached to the society but on the way in which it controls them. Egotistical suicide derives from the fact that men no longer see any sense in living; altruistic suicide from the fact that this sense appears to them to be situated beyond life itself; and the third kind of suicide, the existence of which we have just established, from their activity being disrupted and from their suffering as a result. Because of its origin, we shall call this last kind *anomic suicide.*

* When the statistics distinguish various different liberal professions, we take as a reference the one in which the suicide rate is highest.

† From 1826–1880, economic professions seem to have been less affected (see *Compte rendu* for 1880). But were the statistics for the professions very precise?

‡ This figure represents only men of letters.

Certainly, this suicide is not unrelated to egotistical suicide.[4] Both come from the fact that society is not sufficiently present for individuals. But the sphere from which it is absent is not the same in each case. In egotistical suicide, it is lacking from collective activity properly so called, leaving it deprived of object and meaning. In anomic suicide, it is absent from strictly individual passions, which it thus leaves without any brake to control them. As a result, though they are related, the two kinds are independent of one another. We can bring to society everything in us that is social and yet not know how to limit our desires; without being an egotist, one can live in a state of anomie, and conversely. So these two kinds of suicide do not recruit their victims from the same social milieux: for the first, its chosen field is that of intellectual careers, the world of thinking people; the second affects the industrial and commercial field.

IV

However, economic anomie is not the only kind that can produce suicide.

Suicides which take place when the crisis of widowhood looms, which we have already discussed,* are in fact due to the domestic anomie resulting from the death of a spouse. This creates a disruption in the family which affects the survivor. He is not adapted to the new situation which has been created and that is why he is more likely to kill himself.

However, there is another type of anomic suicide which should be looked at more carefully, both because it is more chronic and because it will serve to clarify the nature and functions of marriage.

In the *Annales de démographie internationale* (September 1882), M. Bertillon published a remarkable monograph on divorce in which he established the following proposition: that in all Europe, the number of suicides varies along with the number of divorces and separations.

* See above, p. 199.

TABLE 25

Comparison of European states from the d—— viewpoint of divorce and suicide

	Annual divorces per 1,000 marriages	Suicides per million inhabitants
I Countries where divorce and separation are rare		
Norway	0.54 (1875–80)	73.0
Russia	1.6 (1871–77)	30.0
England and Wales	1.3 (1871–79)	68.0
Scotland	2.1 (1871–81)	
Italy	3.05 (1871–73)	31.0
Finland	3.9 (1875–79)	30.8
Averages	2.07	46.5
II Countries where divorce and separation are quite frequent		
Bavaria	5.0 (1881)	90.5
Belgium	5.1 (1871–80)	68.5
Netherlands	6.0 (1871–80)	35.5
Sweden	6.4 (1871–80)	81.0
Baden	6.5 (1874–79)	156.6
France	7.5 (1871–79)	150.0
Württemberg	8.4 (1876–78)	162.4
Prussia		133.0
Averages	6.4	109.6
III Countries where divorce and separation are frequent		
Kingdom of Saxony	26.9 (1876–80)	299.0
Denmark	38.0 (1871–80)	258.0
Switzerland	47.0 (1876–80)	216.0
Averages	37.3	257.0

If we compare the different countries from this dual point of view, we can observe this correlation (see Table 25). Not only is the relationship between the averages evident, but the only slight irregularity in detail is that of the Netherlands, where rates of suicide are not at the level of divorces.

The rule is confirmed even more strongly if we compare, not

different countries, but different provinces in the same country. In Switzerland, in particular, the relationship between the two orders of phenomena is striking (see Table 26). The Protestant cantons are the ones with the highest rate of divorce and also with the highest rate of suicide. The mixed cantons come after them, in respect of both, and only finally the Catholic cantons. Inside each group, we see the same correlations. Among the Catholic cantons, Solothurn and Inner Appenzell are marked out by the high number of divorces; they also stand out in the figures for suicides. Fribourg, although French and Catholic, has a fair number of divorces and the same of suicides. Among the German Protestant cantons, there is none with as many divorces as Schaffhausen, and Schaffhausen also leads for suicides. Finally, the mixed cantons, with the single exception of Aargau, are classified in exactly the same way in both respects.

Making the same comparison between the French *départements* gives the same results. Having classified them into eight categories according to the importance of their suicide rates, we observe that the groups so formed order themselves in the same way with respect to divorces and separations.

	Suicides per million	Average of divorces and separations per 1,000 marriages	
1st group	(5 *départements*)	Under 50	2.6
2nd group	(18 ")	51–75	2.9
3rd group	(15 ")	76–100	5.0
4th group	(19 ")	101–150	5.4
5th group	(10 ")	151–200	7.5
6th group	(9 ")	201–250	8.2
7th group	(4 ")	251–300	10.0
8th group	(5 ")	Over 300	12.4

Now that we have established a relationship, let us try to explain it.

We shall only mention for the sake of information the

TABLE 26

Comparison of Swiss cantons with respect to divorce and suicide

	Divorces and separation per 1,000 marriages	Suicides per million		Divorces and separation per 1,000 marriages	Suicides per million
			I Catholic Cantons		
			French and Italian		
Tessin	7.6	57	Fribourg	15.9	119
Valais	4.0	47			
Average	5.8	50	Average	15.9	119
			German		
Uri		60	Solothurn	37.7	205
Upper Unterwalden	4.9	20	Inner Appenzell	18.9	158
Lower Unterwalden	5.2	1	Zug	14.8	87
Schwyz	5.6	70	Lucerne	13.0	100
Average	3.9	37.7	Average	21.1	137.5
			II Protestant Cantons		
			French		
Neuchâtel	42.4	560	Vaud	43.5	352
			German		
Berne	47.2	229	Schaffhausen	106.0	602
Basel (town)	34.5	323	Outer Appenzell	100.7	213
Basel (country)	33.0	288	Glaris	83.1	127
			Zurich	80.0	288
Average	38.2	280	Average	92.4	307
			III Religiously mixed cantons		
Aargau	40.0	195	Geneva	70.5	360
Grisons	30.9	116	Saint-Gall	57.6	179
Average	36.9	155	Average	64.0	269

explanation briefly suggested by M. Bertillon. According to him, the numbers of suicides and of divorces vary in parallel because both depend on a single factor: the greater or lesser number of unbalanced people. According to him, there are more divorces in countries where there is a higher number of incompatible couples. And the latter come mainly from the number of eccentrics, individuals of weak character and low intellect, whose temperament also predisposes them to suicide. So the relationship does not, according to him, come from the fact that the institution of divorce in itself has an influence on suicide, but is due, rather, to these two orders of things deriving from a single cause which they express in a different way. But this association of divorce with certain psychopathic weaknesses is quite arbitrary and unproven. There is no reason to suppose that, in Switzerland, there are fifteen times as many unbalanced individuals as in Italy, and six or seven times more than in France; yet in the first of these countries divorce is fifteen times more frequent than in the second and around seven times more than in the third. Moreover, as far as suicide is concerned, we know how little it can be explained by purely individual circumstances. In addition to which, everything that follows will bring additional proof of the inadequacy of that theory.

It is not in the organic nature of the subjects but in the intrinsic nature of divorce that we should look for the cause of this remarkable association. On this point, we can establish one primary proposition: in all the countries about which we have the necessary information, suicides of divorced people are much higher in number than among other sections of the population [see table opposite].

Thus, divorcees of both sexes kill themselves between three and four times as often as married people, although they are younger (40 years old in France, instead of 46) and considerably more than widowed people despite the aggravation resulting from the greater age of the latter. Why is this?

There is no doubt that the change in the moral and material regime which results from divorce must play a part in this. But it is not sufficient to explain it. For example, widowhood is no less a complete disturbance in a person's life, and even, in

	Suicides per million of:							
	Unmarried, over 15 years		Married		Widowed		Divorced	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Prussia (1887–89)	360	120	430	90	1,471	215	1,875	290
Prussia (1883–90)	388	129	498	100	1,552	194	1,952	328
Baden (1885–93)	458	93	460	85	1,172	171	1,328	
Saxony (1847–58)	555.18		481	120	1,242	240	3,102	312
Saxony (1876)			821	146			3,252	389
Württemberg (1846–60)			226	52	530	97	1,298	281
Württemberg (1873–92)	251		218		405		796	

general, has far more painful effects since it was not desired by the married couple, while divorce is usually a deliverance for them. Yet divorcees who, by reason of their age, should kill themselves only half as often as widowed people, kill themselves more often everywhere and in some countries up to twice as much. This aggravation, which can be represented by a coefficient between 2.5 and 4, does not at all depend on their change of condition.

To discover the causes, we must go back to one of the propositions that we previously established. In Chapter 3 of this book, we saw that in any given society the tendency of the widowed to commit suicide was a function of the same tendency in married people. If the latter were strongly protected, then the former enjoyed an immunity that was, no doubt, smaller but none the less considerable, and the sex that is best preserved by marriage is also the one best preserved by the state of widowhood. In a word, when the conjugal union is dissolved by the death of a spouse, the effects that it had with regard to suicide continue to be felt in part by the surviving partner.* But then, is it not legitimate to suppose that the same phenomenon is produced when the marriage is broken, not by death, but by a juridical act and that the aggravation from which divorcees suffer is not a consequence of divorce, but of the marriage which it brings to an end? It must be associated with a certain

* See above, p. 206.

TABLE 27

Influence of divorce on the immunity of husbands

Countries	Suicides per million		Preservation coefficient for husbands compared with bachelors
	Unmarried men aged over 15	Married men	
Where there is no divorce:			
Italy (1884–88)	145	88.0	1.64
France (1863–68) *	273	245.7	1.11
Where divorce is widespread:			
Baden (1885–93)	458	460	0.99
Prussia (1883–90)	388	498	0.77
Prussia (1887–89)	364	431	0.83
Where divorce is very frequent:†			
Saxony (1879–80):			
Per 100 suicides (every marital status)	27.5	52.50	0.63
Per 100 males (every marital status)	42.10	52.47	

matrimonial constitution that continues to influence the former partners even after they have been separated. If they have such a violent tendency to suicide, this is because they were already very much inclined to it when they were living together, through the very fact of their common life.

* We have chosen this distant period because it was one when divorce did not exist at all. The 1884 law that re-established it does not yet seem to have produced marked effects on suicides by married men. Their preservation coefficient did not vary noticeably in 1888–92; an institution does not produce its effects in so short a time.

† For Saxony, we only have the relative numbers quoted, taken from Oettingen; they are enough for our purpose. In Legoyt (p. 171) we find other documents that also prove that in Saxony husbands have a higher rate than bachelors. Legoyt himself noted the fact with surprise.

Once this proposition is accepted, it becomes possible to explain the correspondence between divorce and suicide. Among nations where divorce is frequent, this particular nature of marriage which also belongs to divorce must be very widespread, for it is not only peculiar to marriages which are predestined to legal dissolution. If it reaches its maximum intensity among these people, it must also be found among the rest, or most of the rest, though in a lesser degree. Just as in the places where there are a lot of suicides there are also a lot of attempted suicides, and mortality can only increase if morbidity also does, so, wherever there are a lot of actual divorces, there must be a lot of families who are more or less close to divorce. The number of the former cannot thus rise unless that state of the family which predisposes to suicide develops and spreads to the same extent; and, consequently, it is normal for the two phenomena to vary in the same direction.

As well as agreeing with everything which has previously been demonstrated, this hypothesis is capable of direct proof. Indeed, if it is well-founded, then married couples in countries where the number of divorces is high must be less immune to suicide than in those where marriage is indissoluble. And this is indeed what emerges from the facts, at least *as far as husbands are concerned*, as we can see from Table 27. Italy, a Catholic country where divorce is unknown, is also the one where the preservation coefficient husbands is highest. It is lower in France, where separations have always been more frequent, and it can be seen to decrease as one goes to societies where divorce is more widely practised.*

* If we compare only these few countries from this point of view, it is because in the rest statistics on suicides of husbands are combined with those for wives; we shall see later how important it is to distinguish them.

However, we must not conclude from this table that in Prussia, Baden and Saxony husbands really kill themselves more often than bachelors. We must not lose sight of the fact that these coefficients were calculated without reference to age and its influence on suicide. Since men of 25–30, the average age of bachelors, kill themselves some two times less than men of 40–45, the average age of husbands, the latter enjoy immunity even in countries where divorce is frequent, though it is less marked than elsewhere. For us to be able to say that it was nil, it would be necessary for the rate of husbands to be twice as high as that for bachelors, regardless of age, which is not the case. As it happens, this

We have not been able to obtain the figure for divorces in the Grand Duchy of Oldenburg. However, since it is a Protestant country, one may assume that they are frequent, though not excessively so, since there is quite a large Catholic minority. So from this point of view it must be more or less at the same level as Baden and Prussia. And it is also at the same level where the immunity of husbands is concerned: 100,000 bachelors above the age of 15 produce an annual toll of 52 suicides, while 100,000 husbands commit 66. The preservation coefficient for the latter is thus 0.79, and consequently very different from what we observe in Catholic countries where divorce is rare or unknown.

France gives us an opportunity to make an observation that confirms the preceding ones, and all the more since it is more rigorous. Divorces are far more frequent in the *département* of Seine than in the rest of the country. In 1885, the number of divorces granted there was 23.99 for every 10,000 regular households, while in France as a whole the average was only 5.65. We need only to turn back to Table 22 to observe that the preservation coefficient for husbands is significantly less in the Seine than in the provinces. Indeed, it only once reached 3, for the age group of 20 to 25 years; and even then the accuracy of this figure is doubtful because it has been calculated on the basis of too small a number of cases, given that there is barely one suicide per year of a husband at that age. From 30 years onwards, the coefficient does not exceed 2 (most of the time it is below that), and it even falls below 1 between the ages of 60

omission does not at all affect the conclusion that we reached, because the average age of husbands varies little from one country to another (only two or three years); and, in addition, the law by which age affects suicide is everywhere the same. Consequently, by ignoring the effect of this factor, we have certainly reduced the absolute value of the preservation coefficients, but since we have reduced them everywhere by the same proportion, we have not changed their relative value, which is the only one that matters to us. We are not trying to give an absolute figure for the immunity of married men in every country, but to classify the different countries from the point of view of such immunity. As for the reasons that made us settle for this simplification, it was first of all in order to avoid complicating the problem unnecessarily, and also because we do not in every case have the necessary information to make an exact calculation of the effect of age.

and 70. On average, it is 1.73. In the provinces, by contrast, it is above 3 five times out of eight, the mean being 2.88, that is to say, 1.66 times higher than in the Seine.

This is further proof that the high number of suicides in the countries where divorce is widespread is not due to some organic predisposition, in particular the prevalence of mental disturbance. If this were the true cause, its effects would be felt as much on unmarried as on married men, while in reality it is the latter who are most affected. This is because the origin of the ill does indeed lie, as we suggested, in some peculiarity of marriage or of the family. All that remains is to choose between these two final hypotheses. Is the lower immunity of husbands due to the condition of domestic society or to that of matrimonial society? Is it the family spirit which is less good, or the conjugal bond that is not all that it should be?

One fact, to begin with, that makes the first explanation unlikely is that in countries where divorce is more frequent the birth-rate is good and consequently the density of the domestic group is very high. And we know that where the family is large, family spirit is usually strong, so there is every reason to believe that the cause of the phenomenon is to be found in the nature of marriage.

Moreover, if it were the constitution of the family that was to blame, wives should also be less well preserved from suicide in countries where divorce is commonplace than in those where it is little practised, because they are affected as much as husbands by a poor state of domestic relations. Yet exactly the opposite is the case. The preservation coefficient of married women rises while that of husbands falls, that is to say to the extent that divorces are more frequent, and conversely. The more often and easily the family tie is broken, the more the wife is favoured in comparison with her husband (see Table 28).

The inversion of the two series of coefficients is remarkable. In countries where there is no divorce, the woman is less well protected than her husband, but her inferiority is greater in Italy than in France, where the matrimonial bond has always been more fragile. On the contrary, when divorce is introduced

TABLE 28

*Influence of divorce on the immunity of wives**

	Suicides per million		Preservation factor for:		How much is the coefficient of husbands over that for wives?	How much is the coefficient of wives over that for husbands?
	Unmarried women over 16	Wives	Wives	Husbands		
Italy	21	22	0.95	1.64	1.72	
France	59	62.5	0.96	1.11	1.15	
Baden	93	85	1.09	0.99		1.10
Prussia	129	100	1.29	0.77		1.67
" (1887–89)	120	90	1.33	0.83		1.60
Saxony:						
Per 100 suicides (every marital status)	35.3	42.6				
Per 100 females (every marital status)	37.97	49.74	1.19	0.63		1.73

(Baden), the husband is less well protected than the wife and her advantage increases regularly as divorces develop.

As previously, the Grand Duchy of Oldenburg behaves in this respect like the other parts of Germany where divorce is at an average level. A million unmarried women give 203 suicides, a million married women 156, so the latter have a preservation coefficient equal to 1.3, well above that of husbands, which was only 0.79. The first is 1.64 times larger than the second, almost the same as in Prussia.

Comparing the Seine with the other *départements* of France confirms this law in a particularly striking way. In the provinces, where people divorce less, the average coefficient of married women is no more than 1.49, so it represents only half the average coefficient for husbands, which is 2.88. In the Seine, the relationship is reversed: male immunity is only 1.56, or even

* The periods are the same as in Table 27.

1.44 if we leave aside the dubious figures concerning 20- to 25-year-olds. Female immunity is 1.79. The wife's situation compared with that of the husband is therefore twice as good in the Seine as in the other *départements*.

We can observe the same thing if we compare the different provinces of Prussia.

Provinces containing, per 100,000 married persons:

From 810 to 405 divorcees	Preservation coefficient of wives	From 371 to 324 divorcees	Preservation coefficient of wives	From 229 to 116 divorcees	Preservation coefficient of wives
Berlin	1.72	Pomerania	1.0	Posen	1.00
Brandenburg	1.75	Silesia	1.18	Hesse	1.44
East Prussia	1.50	West Prussia	1.0	Hanover	0.90
Saxony	2.08	Schleswig	1.20	Rhineland	1.25
				Westphalia	0.80

All the coefficients in the first group are significantly above those in the second, and it is in the third that we find the smallest values. The only anomaly is that of Hesse, where, for reasons unknown to us, married women enjoy quite high immunity, even though divorced couples are not very numerous there.*

Though we have these proofs that corroborate one another, let us subject the law to one final check. Instead of comparing the immunity of husbands with that of wives, let us see how marriage in various countries changes the respective situation of the sexes with regard to suicide. This comparison is the subject of Table 29. Here, we can see that in countries where divorce does not exist, or has only recently been introduced, women play a larger part in suicides among the married than they do in suicides among the unmarried. This means that marriage here favours the husband rather than the wife, and the unfavourable situation of the latter is more marked in Italy than in France. The mean excess of the proportional share of

* We have had to classify these provinces according to the number of divorces recorded in the census, not having been able to find the annual numbers of divorces.

married women over spinsters is, in fact, twice as high in the first of these countries as in the second. When we turn to nations where the institution of divorce is widespread, the contrary phenomenon occurs. It is the woman who gains ground through marriage and the man who loses; and the advantage that she enjoys is greater in Prussia than in Baden, and in Saxony than in Prussia. It reaches its maximum in the country where divorces also reach their highest levels.

We may therefore consider the following law as undeniable: *Marriage favours the wife in respect of suicide to the extent that divorce is more common, and vice versa.*

Two consequences derive from this proposition.

The first is that husbands alone contribute to the rise in the suicide rate in societies where divorce is frequent, wives on the contrary killing themselves less in these societies than elsewhere. So, if divorce cannot be introduced without improving the woman's moral situation, then it cannot be connected with a bad state of domestic society liable to aggravate the tendency to suicide, because the same aggravation should occur for the wife as for the husband. A weakening of the family spirit cannot have such opposite effects on each sex: it cannot favour the mother and so adversely affect the father. Consequently, the cause of the phenomenon that we are studying must lie in the state of marriage and not in the constitution of the family. And it is indeed very possible that marriage acts in opposite ways on the husband and on the wife, because while, as parents, they have the same objective, as partners their interests are different and often opposed. It could therefore very easily happen that in some societies such and such a peculiarity of the institution of marriage should favour one partner and harm the other. All the preceding tends to prove that this is exactly what happens with divorce.

Secondly, the same reason compels us to reject the hypothesis that this poor state of marriage, with which divorces and suicides are connected, simply consists in a greater frequency of domestic arguments, because such a cause would not result in increasing the woman's immunity, any more than would the

TABLE 29

Proportional share of each sex in suicide for each category of marital status in the various European countries.

	Out of every 100 suicides by the unmarried, there are:		Out of every 100 suicides by the married, there are:		Average excess per country of: Wives over spinsters	Spinsters over wives
Italy	*Men*	*Women*	*Husbands*	*Wives*		
1871	87	13	79	21		
1872	82	18	78	22		
1873	86	14	79	21	6.2	
1884–8	85	15	79	21		
France						
1863–66	84	16	78	22		
1867–71	84	16	79	21	3.6	
1888–91	81	19	81	19		
Baden						
1869–73	84	16	85	15		
1885–93	84	16	85	15		1
Prussia						
1873–75	78	22	83	17		
1887–89	77	23	83	17		5
Saxony						
1866–70	77	23	84	16		
1879–90	80	22	86	14		7

loosening of the family bond. If the figure for suicides, where divorce is common, was really connected to the number of marital disputes, the wife would suffer as much from it as the husband. There is nothing in that of a kind to give her

exceptional protection. The hypothesis is all the less sustainable since, most usually, divorce is requested by the wife against the husband (in France, 60 per cent for divorces and 83 per cent for separations).* This is because men are, in most cases, responsible for domestic upheavals. But then it does not make sense to say that, in countries where there is a lot of divorce, men kill themselves because they cause more suffering to their wives, and that women, by contrast, kill themselves less because their husbands make them suffer more. In any case, there is no proof that the number of marital disputes increases in parallel with the number of divorces.†

Having discarded this hypothesis, we are left with only one possible answer. It must be that the very institution of divorce, by the way in which it affects marriage, drives one to suicide.

After all, what is marriage? A regulation of sexual relations which extends beyond the physical instincts involved in such intercourse, to involve the feelings of every sort that civilization has gradually grafted on to the base of physical appetite; because love, in our society, is far more a mental than an organic affair. What a man seeks in a woman is not simply the satisfaction of sexual desire. Though this natural urge may have been the germ of all sexual evolution, it has been progressively complicated by many varied aesthetic and moral feelings and is now only the least element in the complete and densely woven process to which it has given rise. On contact with these intellectual elements, it was itself partly freed from the body and, as it were, intellectualized. Moral causes arouse it as much as physical stimuli. Consequently, it no longer has the regular and automatic periodicity that we find in animals. It can be aroused at any time by a psychological stimulus, so it belongs to every season. But precisely because these various desires have been transformed and are no longer determined directly by organic necessities, it is essential that they be regulated in some social manner. Since there is nothing to restrict them in the organism,

* Levasseur, *Population française*, vol. II, p. 92. Cf. Bertillon, *Annales de Dem. inter.*, 1880, p. 460. In Saxony, divorces initiated by husbands are almost as many as those initiated by wives.

† Bertillon, *Annales*, etc., 1882, pp. 175ff.

society must do so. This is the function of marriage. It regulates all this life of the passions, and monogamous marriage more strictly than any other. By obliging the man to attach himself to only one woman, and always the same, it supplies a rigorously defined object for the need to love, and closes its horizon.

It is this determination that creates the state of moral equilibrium from which the husband benefits. Because he cannot seek other satisfactions than those which are permitted to him, unless he is to fail in his duty, he therefore limits his desires. The salutary discipline to which he is subjected makes it a duty for him to find his happiness in his situation and by that very fact supplies him with the means to do so. Moreover, while his passion is required not to vary, the object on which it is fixed is required not to fail him, the obligation being mutual. So though his pleasures are circumscribed, they are also assured and this certainty constitutes his mental bedrock. The bachelor's situation is quite different. As he can legitimately attach himself to whatever he wants, he aspires to everything and nothing satisfies him. This disease of the infinite which anomie always brings with it can just as well attack that part of our consciousness as any other: it often takes the sexual form that Musset has described.*[5] As soon as there is nothing to stop us, we cannot stop ourselves. Beyond the pleasures that we have experienced, we imagine and yearn for others, and if one should happen to have more or less exhausted the realm of the possible, one dreams of the impossible – one thirsts for what is not.†[6] How can the sensibility do otherwise than drive itself to desperation in this unending quest? To reach this point, one does not need to have enjoyed an infinity of amorous experiences or lived as a Don Juan. The humdrum existence of the ordinary bachelor is enough, with its endless new experiments raising hopes that are dashed and leaving behind them a feeling of weariness and disenchantment. In any case, how could desire settle on something when it is not sure that it will be able to keep what attracts it? For anomie is twofold. Just as the subject

* See *Rolla* and the portrait of Don Juan in *Namouna*.

† See Faust's monologue in Goethe's play.

never gives himself definitely, so he possesses nothing definitely. Uncertainty about the future, together with his own indecisiveness, thus condemns him to perpetual motion. Hence a state of unease, agitation and discontent that inevitably increases the possibility of suicide.

However, divorce implies a weakening of the matrimonial rule. Where it is common, and especially where laws and customs make it excessively easy to obtain, marriage is only an enfeebled form of itself. It is a lesser marriage and can therefore not produce its beneficial effects to the same extent. The limit that it once set to desire no longer has the same stability: since it can be more easily overturned and moved, it less forcefully contains the passions which, consequently, are more likely to spread beyond it. They resign themselves less easily to the conditions placed on them. The moral calm and tranquillity that made the husband strong are thus reduced, giving way, to some extent, to a state of anxiety that prevents the man from restricting himself to what he has. In addition to which he is all the less inclined to attach himself to the present when the enjoyment of it is not completely assured: there is less guarantee as to the future. One cannot be strongly attached by a bond that may, at any moment, be broken on one side or the other. One cannot avoid looking outside the place where one is when one no longer feels the ground to be solid beneath one's feet. For these reasons, in countries where marriage is strongly affected by divorce, it is inevitable that the married man's immunity should be weaker. As in such circumstances he is closer to the unmarried man, he cannot help losing some of his advantages. Consequently, the total number of suicides rises.*

However, this consequence of divorce is peculiar to the male; it does not affect the wife. In fact, the sexual needs of the

* But, some will say, when divorce does not moderate marriage, is there not a risk that a strict obligation to monogamy will lead to disgust? No doubt this will inevitably be so if the moral character of the obligation is not felt. Indeed, what matters is not only that the regulation should exist, but that it should be accepted in conscience. Otherwise, if it no longer has any moral authority, and is kept in place only by inertia, it ceases to play any useful role. It is an annoyance that has very little purpose.

woman are less intellectual in character, because, in general, her intellectual life is less developed. They are more immediately related to the demands of the organism, they follow it rather than leading it and consequently find an effective brake in it. Because the woman is a more instinctive creature than the man,[7] she has only to follow her instincts to find peace and quiet; so a social regulation as strict as that of marriage, and above all of monogamous marriage, is not necessary for her. And such a discipline, even when it is useful, also has drawbacks. By establishing the conjugal condition once and for all, it prevents any escape from it whatever happens. By limiting the horizons, it also closes the exits and forbids any hope of escape, however legitimate. The man himself also suffers from this immutability, but the disadvantages are in his case mainly compensated for by the advantages that he otherwise obtains. And custom does grant him certain privileges that allow him to some extent to attenuate the rigours of the conjugal regime. For the wife, on the other hand, there is no compensation or attenuation. For her, monogamy is a strict obligation, without any kind of relaxation, while on the other hand marriage does not serve, at least to the same extent, to circumscribe her desires since they are already limited by nature, nor does it teach her to be contented in her lot – while it does prevent her from changing it, should it become intolerable. So for her the rule is a hindrance without great advantages. As a result, anything that makes it less burdensome and more liberal can only improve the wife's situation. This is why divorce protects her and why she readily has recourse to it.

So it is the state of conjugal anomie, produced by the institution of divorce, that explains the parallel development of divorce and suicide. This means that suicides by husbands in countries where there is a lot of divorce raise the number of voluntary deaths and constitute a variety of anomic suicide. It does not mean that in these societies there are more bad husbands or bad wives, in other words, more unhappy households. They result from a moral constitution *sui generis* which is itself caused by a weakening of the matrimonial regime; and it is this constitution, acquired in marriage, that, if it should survive it,

produces the exceptional tendency to suicide shown by [male] divorcees. Moreover, we do not mean to imply that this weakening of the rule is created wholly by the legal institution of divorce. Divorce is never introduced except to recognize an already existing state of affairs. If public consciousness had not gradually come to believe that there was no sense in the indissolubility of the marriage bond, the legislature would never of its own accord have considered weakening it. Matrimonial anomie can thus exist in public opinion without yet being inscribed in the law. But, on the other hand, it is only when it has adopted a legal form that it can produce all its consequences. Until matrimonial law has been changed, it does at least serve to set a material limit to passions. Above all, it works against a taste for anomie gaining ground for the sole reason that it condemns it. This is why it does not have any precise and easily observed effects except in places where it has become a judicial institution.

At the same time as accounting both for the relationship that has been noted between divorce and suicide,* and for the inverse variations in the immunity of husbands and that of wives, this explanation is also confirmed by several other facts.

1. True marital instability can only exist when there is divorce, because it alone breaks the marriage completely, while separation only partly suspends some of its effects, without giving the spouses back their freedom. So if this special anomie really aggravates the tendency to suicide, divorcees should have a far higher incidence than separated partners. And this is, indeed, what emerges from the only document we have on the subject. According to Legoyt's calculations,† in Saxony in the period 1847–56, a million divorcees gave on average 1,400 suicides and a million separated partners only 176. This last rate is even below that for married people (318).

* Since, where the immunity of the husband is less, that of the wife is higher, one might perhaps wonder why there is no compensation effect. This is because, since the share of women in the total number of suicides is very small, the decrease in female suicides is not noticeable in the whole and does not make up for the increase in male suicides. This is why divorce is, in the end, accompanied by a rise in the general figure for suicide.

† Op. cit., p. 171.

2. If the marked vulnerability of unmarried men is partly due to the chronic state of sexual anomie in which they live, it is chiefly at the time when sexual feelings are most powerful that the aggravation of the suicidal tendency among them should be most noticeable. And, indeed, between 20 and 45 years of age, the rate of suicide among unmarried men rises much faster than it does later: in this period it quadruples, while from 45 to the maximum age (80 plus), it only doubles. But we do not find the same acceleration among women: between 20 and 45, the rate for spinsters does not even double; it merely increases from 106 to 171 (see Table 21); so the sexual period does not affect the rate of suicide for women. This is what we should expect if, as we said, women are not very sensitive to this kind of anomie.

3. Several of the facts established in Chapter 3 of this same book are explained by the theory which we have just set out and, for that reason, may serve to verify it.

We saw then that, in itself and independently of marriage, in France, marriage gives a man a preservation coefficient of 1.5. We now know what this coefficient represents. It corresponds to the advantages that a man derives from the regulatory influence that marriage exercises on him, from the moderation that it imposes on his urges and the moral well-being which results. But at the same time we have established that, in the same country, the condition of a married woman is, on the contrary, made worse unless the presence of children counterbalances the bad effects that marriage has on her. We have just described the reason for this. It is not that a man is by nature a wicked and egotistical being whose role in marriage is to make his spouse suffer. The reason is that in France, until recently, marriage was not weakened by divorce, so the inflexible regime that it imposes on the wife was a heavy and profitless burden for her. More generally, this is why we have the antagonism of the sexes which means that marriage cannot favour both of them equally:* this is because their interests are opposed, one needing constraints and the other freedom.

However, it appears that the man at a particular moment in

* See above, p. 197.

his life is affected by marriage in the same way as the woman, though for different reasons. If, as we have shown, those men who marry too young kill themselves much more than unmarried men of the same age, this is no doubt because their passions are too tumultuous and self-confident to submit to such a severe regime. Consequently, it appears to them as an unbearable obstacle against which their desires crash and are broken. This is why it is probable that marriage only produces all its beneficial effects when the man has been somewhat calmed by age and come to feel the need for discipline.*

Finally, we saw in the same Chapter 3 that, where marriage favours the wife over the husband, the gap between the sexes is always less than when the opposite is the case.† This proves that, even in societies where the matrimonial state is entirely to the advantage of the woman, it is less beneficial to her than it is to the husband when it is he who profits most from it. She can suffer from it, if it is hostile to her, more than she can benefit from it when it suits her interests; this is because she has less need for it. And this is what is assumed in the theory we have just described. The results that we obtained previously and those which arise from the present chapter therefore come together and verify one another.

In this way we reach a conclusion that is at odds with the

* It is even probable that marriage, in itself, does not begin to produce its prophylactic effects until later, after the age of 30. Until then, married men without children annually produce in absolute terms as many suicides as those with children, namely 6.6 from 20–25 years of age for both, 33 on one side and 34 on the other from 25–30. However, it is clear that fruitful marriages are, even in this period, much more numerous than infertile ones, so the tendency to suicide of the latter must be many times larger than that of husbands with children; it must consequently be close to that of unmarried men in intensity. Unfortunately, we can only offer hypotheses on this point, since the statistics do not distinguish, for each age group, the population of husbands without children from that with children, making it impossible for us to calculate the rates of one and the other separately for each period of life. We can only give the absolute figures which we have taken from the statistics of the Ministry of Justice for the years 1889–91. We reproduce these in a special table [Table 33] to be found at the end of Book Three, Chapter 2 [p. 401]. This gap in the census is very regrettable.

† See above, pp. 189 and 208.

commonly held idea of marriage and its role. It is thought to have been instituted for the benefit of the wife, in order to protect her weakness against the caprices of men. Monogamy, in particular, is very often presented as a sacrifice that the man makes of his polygamous instincts in order to raise and improve the condition of woman through marriage. In reality, whatever the historical causes that made him decide to impose this restriction on himself, he is the one who benefits most from it. The freedom which he has given up could only be a source of torment for him. The woman did not have the same reasons to renounce it and, in this respect, one can say that, by submitting herself to the same regime, she is the one who makes the sacrifice.*

* We can see by the preceding that there is a type of suicide which is opposite to anomic suicide, just as egotistical suicide and altruistic suicide are opposed. This is the one that results from an excess of regulation, the one committed by those whose future is pitilessly confined and whose passions are violently constrained by oppressive discipline. This is the suicide of married men who are too young and of married women without children. For the sake of completeness, we must therefore establish a fourth type of suicide. But it affects so few people today and, apart from the cases that we have just mentioned, it is so hard to find examples of it, that it seems unnecessary for it to detain us further. However, it could be that it has some historical interest. Is this not the kind of suicide of slaves that is said to be common in certain circumstances (see Corre, *Le crime en pays créoles*, p. 48)? In short, all those suicides which could be attributed to an excess of physical or moral despotism? To indicate the inescapable and inflexible character of the rule over which one has no power, and in contrast to the term 'anomie' which we have just used, we might call it 'fatalistic suicide'.

CHAPTER 6
INDIVIDUAL FORMS OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF SUICIDE

One result emerges at once from our research, which is that there is not one suicide, but many suicides. Of course, suicide is always the fact of a person preferring death to life; but the causes that determine this are not of the same nature in all cases; they are even, sometimes, opposite to one another. And it is impossible for different causes not to produce different effects, so we can be sure that there are several kinds of suicide which are qualitatively different from each other. However, it is not enough to have shown that these differences must exist; we should like to grasp them directly through observation and to know what they consist of. We should like to see the characters of particular suicides group themselves into distinct classes corresponding to the types that we have just distinguished. In this way, we should follow the diversity of the suicide-generating currents from their social sources to their manifestations in individuals.

This morphological classification, which was not really possible at the start of this study, can be attempted now that we have an aetiological classification on which to base it. We have only to take as our reference points the three kinds of factors that we have just assigned to suicide and try to discover whether the distinctive characteristics that it takes on when manifesting itself in individuals can be derived from them and, if so, how. Of course, we cannot in this way deduce all the peculiarities that it might present: there must be some suicides that depend on the particular nature of the subject. Each person who commits suicide gives his act a personal imprint that expresses his temperament and the special situation in which he finds himself

and that, consequently, cannot be explained by the general, social causes of the phenomenon. But these, in their turn, must give a peculiar tone to the suicides in which they result, a special mark that expresses them. It is this collective feature that we are looking for.

However, it is certain that this operation can only be carried out with approximate accuracy. We are not in a position to make a methodical description of all the suicides carried out day by day, or which have been committed in the course of history. We can only bring out the most general and striking characteristics without even having an objective criterion for selecting them. Moreover, in order to assign them to the respective causes from which they seem to derive, we can only proceed by deduction. All that will be possible is for us to show that they are logically implicated, without this reasoning always being able to be confirmed by experiment. We make no secret of the fact that a deduction is always suspect when it is not verified by experiment. However, even with these reservations, this research is far from being valueless. Even if it were seen only as a means to illustrate the preceding results with examples, it would still have the advantage of giving them a more concrete character by linking them more closely to the data of sense perception and details of everyday experience. In addition to that, it will allow us to introduce some distinctions into the mass of facts that are commonly confused, as though only slight nuances separated them, when in fact there are clear differences between them. Suicide is like madness: for the average person, the latter is a single state, always the same, which can only vary externally with circumstances, while for the psychiatrist, on the contrary, the word indicates a number of different nosological types. In the same way, most people see the person who commits suicide as a melancholic type for whom life is a burden. In reality, the actions by which a man gives up living cover a range of different kinds whose moral and social implications are not at all the same.

I

There is one main form of suicide that was certainly known in antiquity but which has particularly developed in our own time: Lamartine's *Raphaël*[1] offers us a typical example. It is characterized by a state of melancholy languor which slackens the springs of action. Business, public affairs, useful work and even domestic duties inspire only indifference and aversion in the subject. He is loath to emerge from himself. On the other hand, the mind and the inner being gain everything that is lost to active life. By turning away from what is around it, the consciousness folds in on itself, and makes itself its own unique object, adopting as its chief employment the observation and analysis of itself. But through this extreme concentration, it only widens the gulf that separates it from the rest of the universe. As soon as the individual becomes bound up in himself to this extent, he can only further detach himself from everything else and, by reinforcing the isolation in which he lives, sanction it. It is not in looking at ourselves that we can find reasons to attach ourselves to whatever is outside us. In a sense, every movement is altruistic, since it is centrifugal and drives the being away from himself. By contrast, there is something personal and egotistical in reflection, because it is only possible to the extent that the subject disconnects himself from the object and removes himself from it in order to return into himself; and it is all the more intense, the more complete this return into the self. One can only act by mingling oneself with the world; to think about it, on the other hand, one must cease to be mixed in with it, so that one can contemplate it from the outside; and this is all the more necessary if one is to think about oneself. So the person whose whole activity involves inner contemplation becomes insensitive to everything around him. If he loves, it is not in order to give himself, uniting himself in a productive union with another being, but to meditate about his love. His passions are only apparent, because they are sterile. They exhaust themselves in vain combinations of images, producing nothing outside themselves.

But, on the other hand, every inner life draws its raw

materials from outside. We can only think of objects or of how we think about them. We cannot reflect on our consciousness in a state of pure indeterminacy; in that form, it is 'unthinkable'. And it is only determinate when it is affected by something other than itself. So if it is individualized beyond a certain point, if it is too radically separated from other beings, people or things, it finds it can no longer communicate with the very sources from which it should normally derive its nourishment and it no longer has anything to rest on. By creating a void around itself, it has made a void within itself, and there is nothing left for it to reflect upon except its own deprivation. Its only subject of contemplation is the nothingness within it and the sadness that results. So it wallows in this and abandons itself to it with the sort of unhealthy joy that Lamartine, who had experienced this, wonderfully describes in the words of his hero: 'The weariness of everything around me,' he says, 'was in marvellous harmony with my own feeling of languor. Its charm increased it. I plunged into an abyss of sadness; but it was a living sadness, and full enough of thoughts, impressions, communication with the infinite and chiaroscuro in my soul for me not to want to escape from it. A human sickness, but one the very feeling of which was an attraction rather than a pain, and in which death seemed like a voluptuous melting into infinity. I had resolved henceforth to abandon myself to it entirely, to shut myself away from any company that might distract me from it, and to envelop myself in silence, solitude and coldness in the midst of the world that I should encounter there. My spiritual isolation was a shroud through which I no longer wished to see mankind, but only Nature and God.'*

But one cannot stay thus, contemplating the void, without being progressively sucked into it. Even if you embellish it with the name of 'infinity', its nature remains the same. When a person feels so much pleasure in not being, he cannot completely satisfy his urge except by altogether renouncing existence. This is the element of truth behind Hartmann's belief in a parallel between the development of awareness and the

* *Raphaël*, published by Hachette, p. 6.

weakening of the will to live.[2] It is because ideas and action are in fact two antagonistic forces which proceed in opposite directions, and action is life. Thinking, it has been said, is avoiding action; and it is, by the same token, avoiding life. This is why the absolute hegemony of ideas cannot be established and, even less, maintained, because it is death. But this does not mean, as Hartmann believes, that reality itself is intolerable unless veiled by illusion. Sadness is not inherent in things; it does not come to us from the world and from merely contemplating the world. It is the product of our own minds. We create it out of nothing, and that we do so means that our thought must be abnormal. If consciousness is sometimes a misfortune for mankind, this is only when it has reached an unhealthy stage of development and when, rebelling against its own nature, it sets itself up as an absolute and seeks its own ends in itself. This is so far from being a recent discovery – one of the latest achievements of science – that we could have taken the chief elements in our description from the philosophy of the Stoics. The Stoic, too, teaches that man must detach himself from everything outside him,[3] and live of himself and by himself. However, as life is then devoid of reason, the doctrine ends in suicide.

The same characteristics are to be found in the final act that is the logical consequence of this moral state. There is nothing violent or hurried about the outcome. The victim chooses his hour and considers his plan well in advance. He is not even repelled by a slow means of death. A calm, sometimes almost sweet melancholy fills his final moments. He analyses himself to the last. This is the case of the businessman mentioned by Falret* who went off into a deserted forest and allowed himself to starve to death. In an agony lasting almost three weeks, he kept a regular diary of his feelings, which was found and preserved. Another man asphyxiated himself and, in the course of blowing on the charcoal he was preparing for his death, wrote down his observations: 'I do not claim to have great courage or cowardice. I wish simply to devote the few moments that I have left to live,

* *Hypocondrie et suicide*, p. 316.

to describing the sensations that a person feels as he suffocates and the extent of his suffering.'* Another, before abandoning himself to what he calls 'the intoxicating prospect of rest', constructs a complicated device which is intended to bring about his death without the blood being spilt on the floor.†

One can easily see how these various peculiarities are connected with egotistical suicide. It is hardly to be doubted that they are the consequence and the individual expression of it. This indolence in action and melancholy detachment are the result of that state of exaggerated individuation by which we defined that type of suicide. If the individual isolates himself, this is because the bonds that attached him to others are loosened or broken, and because society, at those points where he is in contact with it, is not strongly integrated enough. These voids that separate consciousnesses and make them foreign to each other come precisely from this loosening of the social fabric. Finally, the intellectual, meditative character of this kind of suicide is easily explained if one recalls that egotistical suicide is necessarily accompanied by a great development in science and intellectual reflection. It is indeed evident that in a society where the mind is normally required to extend its field of action, it is also much more in danger of crossing these normal limits that it cannot exceed without destroying itself. A mind that questions everything, if it is not strong enough to bear the weight of its own ignorance, risks questioning itself and being swallowed up in doubt. Because, if it does not manage to discover the claim on existence of the objects that it questions – and it would be miraculous were it to find the means to penetrate so many mysteries so rapidly – it will deny them any reality; even the very fact of stating the problem means that it is already tending towards a negative solution. But at the same time it will empty itself of any positive content and, finding nothing resistant in its path, it has nothing left but to lose itself in the emptiness of inner reveries.

But this high-minded form of egotistic suicide is not the

* Brierre de Boismont, *Du suicide*, p. 198.
† Ibid., p. 194.

only one; there is another, more common variety. The subject, instead of meditating sadly on his state, makes his decision cheerfully. He is aware of his egotism and of the consequences that logically derive from it, but he accepts these in advance and accepts living like a child or an animal – with the sole difference that he knows what he is doing. So he sets himself as his only task to satisfy his personal needs and even simplifies them in order to make them more easily satisfiable. Knowing that he can hope for nothing more, he asks for nothing and is fully prepared, if he is prevented from achieving this single aim, to liberate himself from a life that is henceforth without purpose. This is epicurean suicide. Epicurus[4] did not order his disciples to hasten their own deaths; on the contrary, he told them to live as long as they had some interest in doing so. However, since he realized full well that if one has no other aim one is constantly in danger of finding oneself with none at all, and that sensual pleasure is a very fragile bond to attach a man to life, he advised them to remain constantly prepared to leave it whenever circumstances should require. So here, philosophic, meditative melancholy is replaced by a sceptical and disenchanted common sense that is particularly felt at the final moment. The victim strikes himself without hatred or anger, but also without that morbid satisfaction with which the intellectual savours his suicide. Even more than the latter, he is dispassionate and not surprised at the point at which he has arrived: it is an event that he always considered more or less imminent. So he does not spend time on lengthy preparation; in accord with his earlier way of life, he seeks only to minimize his own suffering. This is particularly the case of those sybarites who, when the inevitable moment arrives when they can no longer continue their superficial way of life, kill themselves with ironic calm and a sort of simplicity in the act.*

When we defined altruistic suicide, we gave enough examples for there to be no further need to describe the psychological forms characteristic of it. They are the opposite of those typical

* Examples are to be found in Brierre de Boismont, pp. 494 and 506.

of egotistical suicide, just as altruism itself has its opposite. What distinguishes the egotist who kills himself is a general depression that appears either as melancholy languor or epicurean indifference. Altruistic suicide, on the contrary, because it has its origin in a violent feeling, is not committed without some expression of energy. In the case of obligatory suicide, this energy is put to the service of reason and will. The victim kills himself because his conscience demands it; he submits to an imperative. Thus his action has as its dominant feature the calm strength that accompanies the carrying out of a duty: the death of Cato and that of Commandant Beaurepaire* are the historical examples. Otherwise, when altruism is in its chronic state, there is something more passionate and unreflective about the action. The man is hurled into death in a burst of faith and enthusiasm. The enthusiasm itself is sometimes happy and sometimes sad, depending on whether the death is considered as a means to unite oneself with a well-loved divinity or as an expiatory sacrifice, intended to placate a powerful force that is considered hostile. The religious fervour of the fanatic who blissfully allows himself to be crushed beneath the cart of his idol is not like that of the monk suffering from *acedia*[5] or the criminal who puts an end to his days in order to expiate his crime. But beneath these various nuances, the essential outline of the phenomenon remains the same. This is an active suicide, which consequently contrasts with the depressed suicide we discussed earlier.

This characteristic is even to be found in those simpler suicides of the primitive man or the soldiers who kill themselves because a slight has tarnished their honour or in order to prove their courage. The ease with which the acts are performed should not mean confusing them with the cynical dispassion of the epicurean. A tendency to make the sacrifice of one's life continues to be an active one even when it is so profoundly entrenched that the action is carried out with the ease and spontaneity of an instinct. One case which could be a model of

* [Translator's note] For the deaths of Beaurepaire and Cato, see Book Two, Chap. 4, notes 21 and 23 (p. 445).

this type is recorded by Leroy. It is that of an officer who, after a first, unsuccessful attempt to hang himself, is preparing to start again but makes a point, before doing so, of writing down his last impressions: 'What a peculiar destiny mine is!' he writes. 'I have just hanged myself, I lost consciousness, but the rope broke and I fell on my left arm . . . My new preparations are now complete and I am soon going to try again, but I am about to smoke a last pipe. It will be the last, I hope. I did not struggle against myself the first time: it all went quite well and I hope the same will be true of the second. I am as calm as if I were taking some medicine at breakfast. I agree, this is quite extraordinary, but that is how it is. All this is true. I am going to die a second time with an easy mind.'* Beneath this calm there is no irony or scepticism, nor is there that kind of involuntary nervous tension that the sybarite never quite manages to hide entirely if he commits suicide. There is perfect calm and the act proceeds straightforwardly because all the active inclinations of the victim are preparing for it.

Finally, there is a third kind of suicide victim, who is unlike both the first of these because his action is essentially passionate, and the second since the passion that inspires it and which dominates the final scene is of an entirely different nature. It is not fanaticism, religious, moral or political faith, or any of the military virtues, but anger and everything that normally accompanies disappointment. Brierre de Boismont, who has analysed the notes left by 1,507 suicides, discovered that a very large number expressed above all a state of irritation and exasperated weariness. There are sometimes curses and violent recriminations against life in general and sometimes threats and complaints against one person in particular whom the subject blames for his misfortunes. Clearly, this group also includes suicides which are, as it were, the completion of a previous murder: the man kills himself after having killed the person whom he accuses of poisoning his life. Nowhere is the suicide's exasperation more evident, since it is expressed not only in

* Leroy, op. cit., p. 241.

words, but in actions. The egotist who kills himself never gives way to such violence. Of course, he too may complain about life, but he does so in a regretful way. Life oppresses him, but it does not irritate him with sharp blows; he considers it empty rather than painful. It does not interest him, but neither does it inflict positive suffering on him. His state of depression does not even permit him to be carried away by emotions. As for the feelings of the altruist, these have a quite different meaning. In a sense, he is by definition making a sacrifice of himself, not of his fellow men. So what we have here is a psychological type which is different from the previous ones.

However, it does seem to derive something from the nature of anomic suicide. Movements that are not regulated are not adjusted either to one another or to the conditions around them, so they cannot do otherwise than collide painfully. Anomie, whether progressive or regressive, opens the way to illusions and consequently to disappointments. A man who is suddenly cast down below the condition to which he was accustomed cannot avoid exasperation as he feels a situation escaping from him when he thought that he was in control of it; and his exasperation naturally turns against the cause, whether this is real or imaginary, to which he attributes his downfall. If he acknowledges himself as the author of the catastrophe, then he will feel resentment towards himself; otherwise, towards someone else. In the first case, there will just be a suicide, while in the second, the suicide may be preceded by homicide or some other violent action. The feeling, though, is the same in each case; only the point of application varies. The victim always strikes himself in a fit of rage, whether or not he has previously struck someone else. This upheaval in his normal behaviour produces a state of acute over-excitement in him and this necessarily tends to relieve itself through destructive acts. The object on which the passionate energy which has thus been aroused discharges itself is, in the end, secondary. Circumstances decide the direction in which it proceeds.

The same happens every time that, far from falling beneath himself, the individual is, on the contrary, led perpetually to surpass himself, but without rule or measure. Sometimes he

fails to reach the goal that he thought himself capable of attaining, but which in reality exceeded his strength: this is the suicide of the misunderstood, very frequent at times when there is no recognized social order. Sometimes, having succeeded for a time in satisfying all his desires and his thirst for change, he suddenly comes up against a resistance that he cannot overcome and impatiently quits a life which now seems to him too confining. This is the case of Werther,[6] that 'turbulent heart' as he calls himself, longing for the infinite, who kills himself for a disappointed love; and all those artists who, after being showered with success, commit suicide because they happen to hear a whistle from the audience or to read a slightly hostile criticism or because they seem to be falling out of fashion.*

There are still others who, though they have no complaint against men or circumstances, of their own accord tire of a quest with no possible end, in which their desires are irritated rather than quenched. They consequently turn against life in general, accusing it of having deceived them. Yet the empty agitation in which they indulged leaves behind it a sort of exhaustion which prevents the disappointed passions from expressing themselves with the same violence as in the earlier cases. It is as though in the long run they had worn themselves out and become less able to react energetically. The victim thus lapses into a sort of melancholy which, in some respects, recalls that of the intellectual egotist, but without his languorous charm. What predominates in it is a more or less agitated disgust with existence. This is the state of mind that Seneca[7] described among his contemporaries (as well as the resulting suicides): 'The sickness that assails us,' he says, 'lies not in the places where we reside, but in ourselves. We have no strength to bear anything, we are unable to feel pain, powerless to enjoy pleasure and impatient with everything. How many people call on death when, after having tried every kind of change, they find themselves returning to the same sensations, unable to experience anything new!'† Nowadays, one of those who best

* See the cases quoted by Brierre de Boismont, pp. 187–89.

† *De tranquillitate animi*, II, *sub fine*. Cf. Letter XXIV.

embodied this cast of mind was Chateaubriand's René.[8] While Raphaël is a meditator who turns back into himself, René is the eternally unsatisfied. 'People accuse me,' he exclaims sorrowfully, 'of being inconstant in my tastes, or being unable to enjoy the same illusion for long and being a prey to an imagination which hastens to reach the ultimate end of my pleasures as though finding them too long and burdensome; I am accused of always missing the goal that I can reach. Alas! I am merely seeking some unknown good, the instinctive knowledge of which pursues me. *Is it my fault if I find restrictions wherever I go and if what is finished has no value for me?*'*

This description illustrates both the similarities and differences between egotistical suicide and anomic suicide which our sociological analysis has already demonstrated.† Suicides of each type suffer from what has been called a 'yearning for infinity', but this condition does not take the same form in both cases. In one, the reflective intelligence is affected and becomes excessively hypertrophied, while in the other the sensibility is excited and becomes unhinged. In the first, thought, turning too much in on itself, finds itself without any object, while in the second, passion, no longer acknowledging any limits, is deprived of its goal. The first loses himself in the infinity of dreams and the second in the infinity of desire.

So even the psychological pattern of the suicide is not as simple as is commonly supposed. It is not enough to define him to say that he is weary of existence, that he is disgusted with life, and so on. In reality, there are very different kinds of suicides and these differences are discernible in the way in which the suicide is carried out. So we can classify acts and agents under a certain number of heads and the types correspond, in their essential character, to the types of suicide that we previously outlined according to the social causes behind them. They are, as it were, the prolongation of these causes inside the individual.

However, it should be pointed out that they do not always

* *René*, published by Vialat, Paris, 1849, p. 112.

† See above, p. 284.

in reality present themselves in a pure, isolated state. It does very often occur that they combine in such a way as to give rise to composite types: characteristics belonging to several of them are found together in the same suicide. The reason is that the different social causes of suicide can themselves act simultaneously on a single individual and have combined effects on him. So it is that sick people can be victims of deliria of different kinds which are linked to one another but which, all converging in a single direction despite their various sources, tend to incite to a single action. They reinforce one another. Again, in the same way, one sees very different kinds of fever in a single patient which each in its own way contributes to raising the body temperature.

There are two factors of suicide that have a particular affinity for one another: these are egotism and anomie. We know that they are generally only two different aspects of a single social state, so it is not surprising that they are met with in a single individual. It is indeed almost inevitable that the egotist should have some tendency to irregularity and derangement because, since he is detached from society, it does not have enough hold over him to control him. However, if his desires are not normally over-excited, this is because his passionate life is atrophied, because he is entirely turned in on himself and the external world does not attract him. But it may happen that he is not a pure egotist or a pure manic type; in which case, he will partake of both personalities at the same time. In order to fill the void within himself, he searches for new sensations, though admittedly with less enthusiasm than the passionate type in its pure form; but he also tires more quickly and the resulting weariness throws him back on himself and reinforces his original melancholy. Conversely, derangement is not without an element of egotism, because one would not rebel against every social restraint if one were strongly socialized. However, where the effect of anomie is preponderant, this element cannot flourish, because, in taking the victim outside himself, it prevents him from being isolated within himself. Yet, even though it is less intense, it can still leave room for egotism to produce some of its effects. For example, when the unsatisfied man

comes up against a barrier, this can drive him back into himself and incite him to seek an outlet for his disappointed desires in his inner life. But as it finds nothing there to which it can attach itself, the sadness that this spectacle causes him can only make him decide to flee once more, consequently intensifying his anxiety and discontent. This is how those mixed suicides occur in which we find depression alternating with agitation, dreams with action and the transports of desire with the meditations of melancholy.

Anomie can also be associated with altruism. A single crisis can disrupt an individual's life, upsetting the balance between him and his environment, while at the same time putting his altruistic impulses in a state that incites him to suicide. This is particularly the case in what we have called 'obsidional'[9] suicides. For example, if the Jews committed mass suicide at the time of the capture of Jerusalem,[10] this was both because the Roman victory, by making them into subjects and tributaries of Rome, threatened to change utterly the way of life to which they had become accustomed, and because they loved their city and their religion too much to survive the probable annihilation of both. Similarly, it often happens that a man who has been ruined kills himself as much because he does not want to live in reduced circumstances as to spare his name and his family the shame of bankruptcy. Officers and NCOs often find it easy to commit suicide as they are about to retire: this is as much because of the sudden change that is looming in their way of life as because of their general readiness to hold their lives cheap. The two causes pull in the same direction. The result is suicides in which either passionate exaltation or the courageous strength of altruistic suicide is allied to the exasperated panic produced by anomie.

Finally, egotism and altruism themselves, though opposites, can combine. At certain times, when social breakdown means that society can no longer serve as an objective for individual activities, one still comes across individuals and groups of individuals who, while affected by this general climate of egotism, aspire to something else. Feeling that to proceed endlessly from one egotistic pleasure to another is a poor way to get out of oneself, and that ephemeral joys, even if they are constantly

repeated, can never appease their anxiety, they look for some durable object to which they can attach themselves and which gives sense to their lives. However, since there is nothing real to which they are attached, they can only be satisfied if they invent an ideal reality which can take its place. So in their thoughts they create an imaginary being to which they subject themselves, and to which they abandon themselves all the more exclusively since they are detached from everything else, even from themselves. In him they invest all the meaning that they give to their lives, since nothing else has any value in their eyes. In this way, they live a double, contradictory existence: individualists in everything that concerns the real world, they exhibit excessive altruism in all that involves this ideal object. And both tendencies lead to suicide.

These are the origins and the nature of Stoic suicide. We shall shortly show how it reproduces certain essential characteristics of egotistical suicide, but it can be considered from a quite different point of view. If the Stoic professes absolute indifference towards everything that extends beyond the boundary of the individual personality, and if he exhorts the individual to self-sufficiency, at the same time he places him in a state of strict dependency with regard to universal reason and even reduces him to being merely the instrument through which this reason is realized. So he combines these two contradictory ideas: the most radical moral individualism and an immoderate pantheism. Thus, the suicide that he commits is at the same time apathetic, like that of the egotist, and carried out as a duty, like that of the altruist.* There is in it both the melancholy of one and the active energy of the other; egotism is combined with mysticism. This is, moreover, an alloy distinct from the mysticism associated with periods of decadence, which is so different, despite appearances, from that observed in young nations as they come to birth. The latter results from the collective enthusiasm that carries the individual will forward with it and the self-denial in which citizens forget themselves in order

* Seneca praises the suicide of Cato as the triumph of human will over matter (see *De Prov.*, 2, 9 and *Ep.*, 71, 16).

to collaborate in some common task; the former is only an egotism, conscious of itself and its own emptiness, which tries to surpass itself but only succeeds in doing so in appearance, and artificially.

II

A priori, one might think that there is some relation between the nature of suicide and the kind of death chosen by the victim. It seems quite natural that the means that he uses to carry out his resolve should depend on the feelings by which he is driven and consequently express them. As a result, one might be tempted to use the information supplied on this point by statistics to characterize different kinds of suicide more precisely, according to their external forms. But the research that we have undertaken on this point has only given us negative results.

Yet there are certainly social causes determining these choices, because the relative frequency of different methods of suicide stays unchanged for a very long time in any given society, while varying markedly from one society to another, as Table 30 (p. 322) shows.

Thus, each nation has its favourite form of death and it is very hard to change the order of its preferences. This is even more constant than the total figure for suicides; events which may sometimes alter the latter for a time do not always affect the former. Moreover, the social causes are so preponderant that there seems to be no noticeable influence of cosmic factors. So it is that suicide by drowning, against all supposition, does not vary from one season to another according to some particular law. This is the distribution of this form of suicide in France over the period 1872–78, with monthly totals compared to those for suicides in general:

Share each month per 1,000 annual suicides:

	J	*F*	*M*	*A*	*M*	*J*	*J*	*A*	*S*	*O*	*N*	*D*
All	75.8	66.5	84.8	97.3	103.1	109.9	103.5	86.3	74.3	74.1	65.2	59.2
Drowning	73.5	67.0	81.9	94.4	106.4	117.3	107.7	91.2	71.0	74.3	61.0	54.2

TABLE 30

Proportion of different types of death per 1,000 suicides (both sexes)

Countries and Years		Strangulation and Hanging	Drowning	Firearms	Falling from a high place	Poison	Asphyxi
France	(1872)	426	269	103	28	20	69
	(1873)	430	298	106	30	21	67
	(1874)	440	269	122	28	23	72
	(1875)	446	294	107	31	19	63
Prussia	(1872)	610	197	102	6.9	25	3
	(1873)	597	217	95	8.4	25	4.6
	(1874)	610	162	126	9.1	28	6.5
	(1875)	615	170	105	9.5	35	7.7
England	(1872)	374	221	38	30	91	
	(1873)	366	218	44	20	97	
	(1874)	374	176	58	20	94	
	(1875)	362	208	45		97	
Italy	(1874)	174	305	236	106	60	13.7
	(1875)	173	273	251	104	62	31.4
	(1876)	125	246	285	113	69	29
	(1877)	176	299	238	111	55	22

In the fine weather, suicides by drowning hardly increase at all over the rest: the difference is negligible. Yet the summer should be particularly favourable to this method. True, it has been said that drowning was less used in the north than in the south and this fact has been attributed to climate.* But in Copenhagen, over the period 1845–56, this method of suicide was no less common than in Italy (281 cases per 1,000, compared with 300). In Saint Petersburg, in the years 1873–74, no method was more frequently adopted, so temperature is not an obstacle to this kind of death.

However, the social causes on which suicides in general depend are different from those that decide the method by

* Morselli, pp. 445–46.

which they are carried out, because we cannot establish any relation between the kinds of suicide that we have identified and the most common methods. Italy is an essentially Catholic country where, until recently, scientific culture was not greatly developed. It is therefore quite probable that altruistic suicide is more frequent there than in France or Germany, since this kind of suicide is more or less inversely proportional to intellectual development. Several reasons given later in this book will confirm that hypothesis. Consequently, since suicide by firearms is much more common here than in central European countries, one might think that it had something to do with the condition of altruism. One might also note, in support of the suggestion, that this is also the method usually preferred by soldiers. Unfortunately, it turns out that in France it is the most intellectual classes – writers, artists and civil servants – who most often kill themselves in this way.* Similarly, it might be thought that hanging was the most natural form of expression for melancholy suicide, yet in reality this method is most often adopted in the countryside, while melancholy is a peculiarly urban state of mind.

Thus, the causes that drive a man to kill himself are not those that make him decide to kill himself in one way rather than another. The motives that incline him to one method in particular are of a quite different kind. First of all, there is the whole gamut of customs and arrangements of every kind that put this or that instrument rather than any other within his reach. Always following the line of least resistance unless some contrary factor intervenes, he will tend to use the means of destruction closest to hand, made familiar to him by daily acquaintance. This is why people in large towns are more likely than those in the country to kill themselves by jumping from a high place: houses in towns are higher. In the same way, as the ground is covered by railway tracks, it is becoming more common for people to seek death by throwing themselves under a train. The table showing the relative share of different methods of suicide in the totality of voluntary deaths therefore

* See Lisle, op. cit., p. 94.

in part shows the state of industrial technology, the most widespread kind of architecture, the state of scientific knowledge, etc. As the use of electricity spreads, so suicides through electrocution will become more frequent.

But the most effective cause is the relative dignity that each nation – and, within each nation, each social group – attaches to different types of death. They are far from all being equal in this respect. Some are considered more noble, others dismissed as vulgar and debasing. And the way in which they are classified by public opinion changes from one community to another. In the army, decapitation is considered a shameful death; elsewhere, the same applies to hanging. So it is that suicide by strangulation is much more common in the country than in towns, and in small towns than in large ones. It is because there is something violent and crude in it that offends urban manners and the worship by the cultivated classes of the human body. It may also be that this repulsion is connected with the dishonourable character that has historically been attached to this form of death, which the more sophisticated inhabitant of the town feels more strongly than does the simpler sensibility of the countryman.

The form of death chosen by the suicide is thus a phenomenon quite foreign to the nature of suicide itself. However closely these two elements of the same act may seem to be linked, they are in reality independent of one another; or, at least, there are only external relations of juxtaposition; because, while both depend on social causes, the social states that they express are very different. The first has nothing to teach us about the second; it belongs to a quite different area of research. This is why, although it is usual to discuss this at length in relation to suicide, we shall not let it detain us any longer. It can add nothing to the results that we have obtained through our previous work, which is summed up in the following table:

Aetiological and morphological classification of social types of suicide

	Individual forms that they adopt		
	Fundamental character		*Secondary varieties*
Elementary types	Egotistic suicide	Apathy	Idle melancholy with self-complacency
			Disillusioned coolness of the sceptic
	Altruistic suicide	Passionate or wilful energy	With calm feeling of duty
			With mystic enthusiasm
			With calm courage
	Anomic suicide	Irritation, disgust	Violent recriminations against life in general
			Violent recriminations against one person in particular (homicide-suicide)
Mixed types	Ego-anomic suicide		Mixture of agitation and apathy, action and reverie
	Anomic-altruistic suicide		Exasperated effervescence
	Ego-altruistic suicide		Melancholy tempered by a degree of moral strength

These are the general characteristics of suicide, that is to say those that result directly from social causes. As they are individualized in particular cases, so they are complicated with various nuances according to the personal temperament of the victim and the particular circumstances in which he is placed. However, underneath the diverse combinations so produced, one can always find these basic forms.

BOOK THREE

ON SUICIDE AS A SOCIAL PHENOMENON IN GENERAL

CHAPTER 1
THE SOCIAL ELEMENT OF SUICIDE

Now that we know the factors according to which the social rate of suicide varies, we can clarify the nature of the reality to which it corresponds, and which it expresses in numerical terms.

I

There are two sorts of individual conditions on which one might, *a priori*, assume that suicide depends.

First of all, there is the external situation in which the agent is placed. Sometimes, men who kill themselves have suffered family mishaps or personal disappointments, sometimes they have had to put up with poverty or illness, and sometimes they have some moral fault with which to reproach themselves, and so on. But we have seen that these individual peculiarities cannot explain the social rate of suicide, because it varies to a considerable degree, while the various combinations of circumstances that thus serve as immediate antecedents to any particular suicide remain relatively stable in frequency. This means that they are not the determining causes of the act that they precede. The important role that they may sometimes play in premeditation of the act is not proof of their effectively causing it. We know that human deliberations when they reach the reflective consciousness are often just purely formal and have no other object except to corroborate a decision that has already been taken for reasons unknown to the conscious mind.

In any case, the circumstances which are supposed to cause suicide because they quite frequently accompany it are almost

infinite in number. One person kills himself in comfortable circumstances, another in poverty; one was unhappily married, the other had just ended, by divorce, a marriage that made him unhappy. Here, we have a soldier who ends his life after being punished for a crime that he did not commit; here, a criminal who kills himself even though his crime has gone unpunished. The most varied and even the most contradictory events of life can all equally serve as a pretext for suicide. Can we at least attribute this causality to the characteristics common to them all? But are there any such characteristics? At the very most, we can say that they generally consist in disappointments or sorrows, but without being able to determine what degree of intensity the pain needs to reach to have this tragic outcome. There is no frustration in life, however insignificant, of which one can say in advance that in no case will it make existence intolerable; and, at the same time, there is none that inevitably has that effect. We see some men stand up to appalling misfortunes, while others commit suicide after suffering slight annoyances. Moreover, we have shown that the victims who suffer the most are not the ones who kill themselves most. Rather, it is too great comfort and well-being that arms a man against himself. It is at times and among classes where life is less harsh that people most easily cast life aside. At least, while it does really happen that the personal situation of the victim is sometimes the actual cause of his decision, these cases are certainly very rare and consequently cannot be used to explain the social rate of suicide.

Moreover, even those who have attributed the greatest influence to individual circumstances have looked for these circumstances less in external incidents than in the intrinsic nature of the subject, that is to say his biological constitution and some of the physical concomitants on which it depends. Thus, suicide has been presented as the product of a certain temperament, as an episode in neurasthenia, reacting to the same factors as it does. But we found no direct, regular relation between neurasthenia and the social rate of suicide. It can even happen that the two facts vary inversely with one another, and that one falls to its lowest level at the same time and in the same place as the

other reaches its apogee. Nor did we find any relation between the fluctuations in suicide and the conditions in the physical environment that are supposed to have most effect on the nervous system, such as race, climate and temperature. This is because, while the neuropath can in certain conditions show a tendency to suicide, he is not necessarily predestined to kill himself; and the action of cosmic factors is not enough to direct the very general inclinations of his nature in this precise direction.

We found quite different results when, leaving aside the individual, we looked into the nature of societies themselves to discover the propensity of each one for suicide. Just as the relationship of suicide to physical and biological facts was dubious and ambiguous, so it was direct and constant with certain states of the social environment. Now, finally, we found ourselves confronted with genuine laws that allowed us to suggest a methodical classification of types of suicide. The sociological causes that we determined in this way even explain those various concurrences that are often attributed to the influence of material causes, and in which people have sought proof of this influence. If a woman is much less likely than a man to kill herself, it is because she is much less involved than he is in collective life, so she feels its positive or negative effects less strongly. The same applies to old people and children, though for other reasons. Finally, if suicide increases between January and June, then declines, this is because social activity experiences the same seasonal variations. It is therefore natural that the various effects it produces should submit to the same rhythm, and consequently be more marked in the first of the two periods; suicide is one of these effects.

The outcome of all these facts is that the social rate of suicide can only be explained sociologically. It is the moral constitution of society that determines at any moment the number of voluntary deaths. Thus for every nation there is a collective force, of a definite level of energy, which drives men to kill themselves. The movements that the victim carries out – which, at first sight, seem to express only his personal temperament – are in reality the outcome and extension of a social state to which they give external form.

Thus we have answered the question that we set ourselves at the start of this work. When we said of every human society that it has a more or less pronounced inclination for suicide, this was not intended to be taken metaphorically: the statement was based on things as they are. Each social group really does have a collective tendency towards this act which is peculiar to it and from which individual tendencies derive (instead of its deriving from them). This tendency is made up of the currents of egotism, altruism and anomie which operate in the society in question, together with the trends towards languid melancholy, active renunciation or exasperated lassitude which are the consequences of these currents. It is these tendencies of the collective group which, penetrating the minds of individuals, make them decide to kill themselves. As for the private events that are generally taken to be the immediate causes of suicide, these have no other effect than whatever the moral leanings of the victim endow them with, which leanings in turn reflect the moral state of society. In order to explain his rejection of life, the victim blames the circumstances that are nearest to him: he considers life to be sad because he is sad. Of course, in a sense, his sadness comes from outside, not, however, from this or that incident in his life, but from the group to which he belongs. This is why there is nothing that cannot serve on occasion as the cause of suicide: it all depends on the intensity with which the suicidogenic causes have acted upon the individual.

II

In any event, the constancy of the social rate of suicide would, in and by itself, be enough to demonstrate the correctness of this conclusion. If for reasons of method we have felt it necessary to delay the problem until now, it does in reality have no other solution.

When Quételet[1] directed the attention of philosophers* to

* Notably in his two works *Sur l'homme et le développement de ses facultés ou Essai de physique sociale*, 2 vols, Paris, 1835, and *Du système social et des lois qui le régissent*, Paris, 1848. While Quételet was the first to try to explain

the surprising regularity with which certain social phenomena are repeated in identical periods of time, he thought that he could explain it by his theory of the 'ordinary man', which has in fact remained the only systematic explanation of this remarkable feature of societies. According to him, there is a definite type in each society which the majority of individuals reproduce more or less exactly, with only a minority deviating from it under the influence of disruptive causes. For example, there is an aggregation of physical and moral characteristics which the majority of French people present, but which is not to be found to the same extent or in the same manner among the Italians and Germans (and vice versa). Since by definition these characteristics are easily the most widespread, the actions deriving from them are also much more numerous: these are what make up the main groups. Those on the other hand that are determined by deviant properties are relatively rare, like the properties themselves. Moreover, while not absolutely immutable, this general type varies far more slowly than any individual type, because it is much more difficult for a society to change as a whole than for one or a few particular individuals to do so. This constancy is naturally passed on to the acts which result from the characteristic features of the type: the acts remain the same in number and quality for as long as the attributes do not change; and since these same kinds of behaviour are also the most common, it is inevitable that constancy should be the general law of those manifestations of human behaviour recorded in statistics. The statistician records all the facts of the same kind that occur in a given society, so since the major part of these remain invariable as long as the general type characteristic of the society does not change, and since moreover it only changes slowly, the results of statistical records

this regularity in a scientific manner, he was not the first to observe it. The real founder of moral statistics was Pastor Süssmilch, in his work *Die Göttliche Ordnung in den Veränderungen des menschlichen Geschlechts, aus der Geburt, dem Tode und der Fortpflanzung desselben erwiesen*, 3 vols, 1742.

On this same question, see: Wagner, *Die Gesetzmässigkeit*, etc., first part; Drobisch, *Die Moralische Statistik und die menschliche Willensfreiheit*, Leipzig, 1867 (especially pp. 1–58); Mayr, *Die Gesetzmässigkeit im Gesellschaftsleben*, Munich, 1877; Oettingen, *Moralstatistik*, pp. 90ff.

must necessarily remain the same for quite long series of consecutive years. As for events that derive from particular characteristics and individual accidents, it is true that these do not exhibit the same regularity, and this is why the constancy is never absolute. But they are the exception: invariability is the rule, variation the exception.

Quételet gives the name 'average type' to this general type, because one obtains it almost exactly by taking the arithmetical average of the individual types. For example, if after having determined all the heights of people in a given society, one were to add them together and then divide them by the number of individuals assessed, the result would tell you, with a very satisfactory degree of approximation, the most general height. One can accept that the variations upwards and downwards, that is to say giants and dwarfs, are more or less equal in number, so they compensate for one another, each cancelling the other out. Consequently they do not affect the quotient.

The theory seems very simple. But first of all it cannot be considered as an explanation unless it allows us to understand how it is that this average type is reflected in the generality of individuals. For it to remain identical to itself while they change, it must, in a sense, be independent of them; and yet there must also be some means by which it insinuates itself into them. Admittedly, the question ceases to be one if one accepts that the average type is the same as the ethnic type, because the constituent elements of race, having their origins outside the individual, are not subject to the same variations as he is; and yet it is in him, and in him alone, that they are realized. So one can very well imagine that they permeate the elements that are proper to the individual and even serve as a basis for these. Yet, for this explanation to be applicable to suicide, the tendency that leads a man to kill himself would have to be closely dependent on race, and we know that the facts do not support this hypothesis. Can it be said that the general state of the social environment, being the same for most individuals, affects almost all of them in the same way and, consequently, imprints in part the same physiognomy on them? But the social environment is essentially made up of ideas, beliefs, habits, customs

and common tendencies. For these to impregnate individuals in this way they must exist in some manner independently of them, and that brings us close to the solution that we have suggested, because it implicitly admits that there is a collective tendency to suicide from which individual tendencies proceed, so that the whole problem lies in knowing what this tendency consists of and how it operates.

But there is more: however one explains the generality of the average man, this notion cannot in any event account for the regularity with which the social rate of suicides is reproduced. By definition, the only characteristics which this type can include are those which are to be found in the greater part of the population. And suicide is something that affects only a minority. In the countries where the rate is highest, there are at most 300 to 400 cases for every million inhabitants. The force of the instinct for self-preservation in the average person is fundamentally opposed to it; the average man does not kill himself. But in that case, if the inclination to kill oneself is a rarity and an anomaly, it is completely alien to the average type, and consequently even a deep understanding of this type, far from helping us to understand why it is that the suicide rate remains constant for a given society, cannot even explain to us how it comes about that there are any suicides at all. Quételet's theory rests, when it comes down to it, on an inaccurate observation. He considered it as an established fact that constancy is only to be found in the most general manifestations of human activity, while in fact it is found to the same degree in those sporadic occurrences that take place at isolated and rare points in the social field. He thought that he had fulfilled every requirement by showing how, in the last resort, one could make intelligible the invariability of that which is not exceptional; but exceptions themselves have their invariability which is not inferior to any other. Everyone dies: every living organism is so constituted that it cannot avoid dissolution. By contrast, very few people kill themselves; for the great majority of mankind there is nothing that inclines them to suicide; yet the rate of suicide is more constant than that of general mortality. This means that there is not the close connection that Quételet

supposes between the incidence of a characteristic and its persistence.

Moreover, the results achieved by his own method confirm this conclusion. Using his principle, in order to calculate the intensity of a particular characteristic of the average type, one would have to divide the sum of the facts manifesting it inside the society in question by the number of individuals liable to exhibit it. Thus, in a country such as France, where for a long time there were not more than 150 suicides per million inhabitants, the mean intensity of the tendency to suicide could be expressed by the ratio 150/1,000,000; and in England, where there were only 80 cases for the same number in the population, this proportion would be only 0.00008. The average person would thus have a tendency of this amount towards suicide. But such figures are almost equal to zero. Such a weak tendency is so distant from the action that it might be regarded as nil. It does not have sufficient strength to be able, by itself, to determine even one suicide. So it is not the generality of such a tendency that can tell us why so many suicides are annually committed in one or other of these nations.

Even then, this assessment is incredibly exaggerated. Quételet only reached it by arbitrarily attributing a certain affinity for suicide to the average person and calculating the force of this affinity according to its appearance, not as observed in the average person, but only in a small number of exceptional people. The abnormal has thus been used to assess the normal. Admittedly, Quételet thought that he could get round this objection by remarking that abnormal cases, which occur sometimes in one direction and sometimes in the opposite, compensate and cancel each other out. But this compensation is only effective for characteristics which, in different degrees, are to be found in everybody, such as height, for example. It is indeed possible to believe that exceptionally tall and exceptionally short individuals are as numerous, more or less, as one another. The average of these exceptions with respect to height should therefore be more or less equal to the most ordinary height: as a result, only this last will emerge from the calculation. But the opposite occurs in the case of a fact that is exceptional by its

nature, such as the tendency to suicide: here, Quételet's method can only artificially introduce an element foreign to the average into the average type. Of course, as we have just seen, it is only to be found there in a state of extreme dilution, precisely because the number of individuals between whom it is divided is much greater than it should be. And while the error is in practical terms trifling, it is none the less there.

In reality, what the relationship calculated by Quételet shows is simply the probability of a man belonging to a particular social group killing himself in the course of a year. If out of a population of 100,000 souls, there are annually 15 suicides, one can easily work out from this that there are 15 chances in 100,000 that any particular individual will commit suicide in the same period of time. But this probability does not give us any measure of the average tendency to suicide nor can it serve to prove that this tendency exists. The fact that such or such a percentage of individuals kill themselves does not imply that the rest are liable to do so to a given extent, nor can it tell us anything about the nature and intensity of the causes of suicide.*

Thus, the theory of the average man does not solve the problem. So let us return to it and see just what it involves. Suicides are an infinitely small minority spread across the world; each one carries out the act separately, without knowing that others are doing the same; and yet, for as long as society does not change, the number of suicides is the same; so all these individual occurrences, however independent they may seem to

* These considerations provide further proof that race cannot account for the social rate of suicide. Indeed, an ethnic type is also a generic type; it only includes characteristics common to a considerable mass of individuals. Suicide, on the contrary, is an exception, so there is nothing in race that can sufficiently account for suicide, otherwise it would have a general character which in fact it does not. Are you saying that, while none of the elements that constitute race can be considered a sufficient cause of suicide, it can, however, according to what it is, make men more or less vulnerable to the action of suicidogenic causes? But even if the facts were to confirm this hypothesis (which they do not), one would still have to recognize that ethnic type is a very feeble factor, since its supposed influence is prevented from appearing in almost all cases and can only be witnessed in very exceptional ones. In a word, race cannot explain how, out of a million individuals all of whom belong to the same race, only one or two hundred at most kill themselves in a year.

be from each other, must in reality be the product of a single cause or a group of causes that dominate the individuals. Otherwise, how is one to explain that every year the same number of all these individual wills, unknown to one another, should reach the same goal? In general, they do not act upon one another, there is no coordination between them, and yet it all happens as though they were carrying out a single command. This means that, in the common environment all around them, there must be some force that bends all of them in the same direction, the greater or lesser intensity of which accounts for the higher or lower number of individual suicides. The effects through which this force reveals itself do not vary according to the organic or cosmic environment, but solely according to the state of the social environment. This means that it is collective. In other words, each nation collectively possesses a suicidal tendency peculiar to it, on which depends the size of the tribute that it pays to voluntary death.

From this point of view, the invariability in the suicide rate no longer holds any mystery, any more than its individuality. Since each society has its temperament which it cannot change from one day to the next, and since this tendency to suicide derives from the moral constitution of groups, it is inevitable that it should differ from one group to another and that in each of them it should remain for many years more or less equal to itself. It is one of the essential elements of social coenaesthesia and, among collective beings as among individuals, the coenaesthetic state is what is most personal and most unchanging, since there is nothing more fundamental. But then the effects that result from it must have the same personality and the same stability. It is even natural that they should have a greater consistency than that of general mortality, because temperature, and climatic and geological influences – in short the various conditions on which public health depends – change far more easily from one year to the next than the mood of nations.

However, there is a hypothesis, apparently different from the preceding one, which might tempt some people. In order to resolve the difficulty, is it not enough to assume that the various incidents of private life which are, above all, considered as the

determining causes of suicide return regularly every year in the same proportions? Every year, it will be said,* there are more or less the same number of unhappy marriages, bankruptcies, disappointed ambitions, cases of poverty, and so on. So it is natural that when an identical number of individuals are placed in a similar situation, an identical number should reach a similar resolve as a result of this situation. It is not therefore necessary for them to give way to a force that is dominating them; all that is needed is to assume that, faced with the same circumstances, they generally come to the same conclusions.

But we know that these individual events, though they do often enough precede suicides, are not really the cause. Once again: there are no misfortunes in life that necessarily make a man decide to kill himself, if he is not otherwise so inclined. So the regularity with which these various circumstances can repeat themselves cannot explain the regularity of suicide. Moreover, whatever influence is attributed to them, such a solution would merely shift the problem, not answer it. We should still have to understand why these desperate situations are repeated identically year after year according to a law peculiar to every country. How is it that, in a given society, which one supposes to be stationary, there are always the same number of divided families, economic failures, etc.? This regular recurrence of the same events in constant proportions for a single people, while varying widely from one people to another, would be inexplicable were there not in every country definite currents that lead the inhabitants with a certain degree of force to engage in commercial and industrial adventures, to practices of every kind that are liable to disturb family life and so on. All this does is to return in a scarcely different form to the very hypothesis that it was supposed to set aside.†

* This is basically the opinion of Drobisch in his book mentioned earlier.

† This argument is not only true of suicide, though it is more striking in this instance than in any other. It can also be applied identically to crime in its various forms. The criminal is an exceptional being, like the suicide, and consequently the increase or decrease in criminality cannot be explained by the nature of the average type. And the same is also true of marriage, though the tendency to enter into a marriage is more general than the tendency to kill others or to kill oneself. At any given period of life, the number of people who

III

However, let us concentrate on understanding the meaning and significance of the terms that have just been used.

Normally, when one speaks about tendencies or collective passions, one is inclined to see these expressions as merely metaphors and ways of speaking which refer to nothing real except a kind of mean point between a certain number of individual states. One does not consider them as things, as forces in their own right which act on individual consciousnesses. Yet this is their nature and this is what the figures for suicide strikingly indicate.* The individuals who make up a society change from year to year, yet the number of suicides is the same provided that society itself remains the same. The population of Paris has an extremely rapid turnover rate, yet the share of Paris in the total of French suicides remains very largely constant. Although a few years are enough for the manpower of the army to be entirely replaced, the rate of military suicide only varies for any given nation with extreme slowness. In every country, collective life alters according to the same rhythm through the year, increasing from January to around July, and decreasing thereafter. So, although the members of various European societies belong to very different average types from one another, the seasonal and even monthly variations in suicide rates follow the same law everywhere. In the same way, whatever the diversity of individual temperaments, the relationship between the liability of married people to com-

get married represents only a small minority in relation to the unmarried population of the same age. So, in France, from the ages of 25 to 30, that is to say the period in life when nuptiality reaches its maximum, only 176 men and 135 women get married out of 1,000 spinsters and bachelors (figures for 1877–81). So if the tendency to marriage (which should not be confused with a liking for sexual relations) only has enough force to be satisfied in a small number of subjects, then it is not the strength that it exhibits in the average type that will explain the state of nuptiality at any given moment. The truth is that, here, as in the case of suicide, the statistics do not express the average intensity of individual inclinations, but that of the collective force that drives people to marriage.

* It is not the only thing to do so: as the previous note shows, all the facts of moral statistics lead to the same conclusion.

mit suicide and that of widowers or widows is identical in the most various social groups, for the sole reason that the moral state of widowhood has the same relationship everywhere with the moral constitution peculiar to marriage. So the causes that decide the annual contingent of voluntary deaths for a given society or part of society must be independent of individuals, since they possess the same intensity whatever the particular individuals on whom their effects operate. People will say that it is the lifestyle which is always the same and always produces the same outcomes. Of course, this is so, but a lifestyle is itself something the constancy of which needs to be explained. If it remains invariable while continual change is taking place in the ranks of those who practise it, it is impossible that it should derive all its reality from them.

Others have felt that they could escape this conclusion by pointing out that the continuity itself was the work of individuals and that consequently it was not necessary, in order to account for this, to attribute some sort of trancendency to social phenomena in relation to individual life. Indeed, it has been said, 'a particular social fact, a word in a language, a religious ritual, a professional secret, a craft process, an article of the law or a maxim of morality are transmitted and pass from one individual – parent, master, friend, neighbour or comrade – to another individual.'*

Of course, if it were merely a matter of understanding how, in a general way, an idea or a feeling passes from one generation to another, and how its memory is not lost, this explanation could, as a last resort, be considered satisfactory.† But the

* Tarde, 'La sociologie élémentaire', in *Annales de l'Institut international de Sociologie*, p. 213.

† We say 'as a last resort', because the core of the problem would not be resolved in this way. What is important if we are to explain this continuity is not just to explain how the practices employed in one period are not forgotten in the following one, but how they retain their authority and continue to operate. Nothing in what the new generations learn from transmission that is purely between individuals about what their elders did implies that they are under any obligation to do the same. So what does oblige them? Respect for custom? The authority of the ancestors? But in that case the cause of the continuity is not the individuals who serve as vehicles for the ideas or practices,

transmission of facts such as suicide, and more generally of any kind of acts that come within the province of moral statistics, possesses a very particular character that cannot be so easily accounted for. Indeed, it involves not only a certain way of behaving, *but the number of cases in which this way of doing things is adopted.* Not only are there suicides every year, but as a general rule there are as many in any year as there were in the previous one. The state of mind which makes people decide to kill themselves is not purely and simply handed on, but – something much more remarkable – it is handed on to an equal number of subjects, all of whom are placed in the necessary situation for it to be put into effect. How is this possible if we are only dealing with individuals? In itself, the number cannot be the object of any direct transmission. Today's population has not learned from yesterday's the sum total of the tax that it must pay to suicide; and yet it will hand over precisely the same amount if there is no change in circumstances.

So are we to imagine that each suicide in some way has as his instigator and master one of the victims from the previous year, becoming the other's moral heir, so to speak? Only in these circumstances is it possible to imagine that the social rate of suicide can be carried on by means of inter-individual tradition. Because if the total figure cannot be transmitted as a whole, the units of which it is formed must be transmitted one by one. So every suicide must have acquired the tendency from one of his predecessors and every suicide would thus be, as it were, the echo of some previous suicide. But there are no facts that allow us to accept this kind of personal affiliation between each of the events that are recorded in the statistics for a certain year, for example, and a similar event in the previous one. As we mentioned earlier, it is quite exceptional for an act to be inspired in this way by some earlier act of the same kind. In any case, why should these repercussions occur regularly from

but that supremely collective state of mind which means that in any people ancestors become the object of peculiar veneration. This state of mind is imposed on individuals. But just like the suicidal tendency, it has a precise intensity for any given society according to the degree to which individuals are more or less inclined to conform with tradition.

one year to the next? Why should the causal event take a year to produce a similar one? Finally, why should it only be responsible for one single copy? Yet the fact is that, on the average, each model should only be reproduced once, or else the total would not be constant. There is no need for us to spend any longer discussing a hypothesis that is both arbitrary and unimaginable. But if we reject it and if the numerical equality of annual suicides does not result from each individual case creating another in the following period, it can only be due to the permanent action of some impersonal cause which transcends all individual cases.

So the terms must be taken literally. Collective tendencies have their own life; they are forces as real as cosmic forces, even though they are different in nature; they, too, influence the individual from outside, though by other means. The thing that allows us to state that the reality of these collective forces is no less than that of cosmic forces is that it is proved in the same manner, which is from the constancy of their effects. When we state that the number of deaths varies very little from one year to another, we explain this regularity by saying that mortality depends on the climate, the temperature, the nature of the soil – in short, on a certain number of material forces which, being independent of individuals, remain constant while generations change. Consequently, since moral acts such as suicide are reproduced with equal if not greater uniformity, we must similarly accept that they depend on forces outside the individual. However, since these forces can only be non-material ones and since, apart from individuals, there is no moral being except society, they must be social forces. But whatever we call them, the important thing is to recognize their reality and to understand them as a totality of energies that determine us from outside to act, in the same way as do the physico-chemical energies that operate on us. So much are they things in their own right and not mere verbal entities that we can measure them and compare their relative size, as one does for the intensity of electric currents or light sources. Hence the fundamental proposition that social facts are objective – a proposition that we have had occasion to establish in another

book* and which we consider to be the principle of sociological method – obtains new and particularly convincing proof from moral statistics and particularly from those relating to suicide. Admittedly, it goes against common sense. But whenever science has revealed the existence of an unknown force, it has been met with incredulity. Since one must alter the system of commonly accepted ideas to give way to a new order of things and construct new concepts, lazy minds resist. However, we must agree on this. If sociology exists, it can only be the study of an as yet unknown world, different from those explored by other sciences; and this world is nothing if it is not a system of realities.

However, for the very reason that it goes against traditional prejudices, this notion has raised objections to which we must reply.

In the first place, it implies that collective tendencies like collective thoughts are different from individual tendencies and thoughts, with characteristics not to be found in the latter. So, you may ask, how is this possible since there are only individuals in society? But in that case, we should have to say that there is nothing more in living nature than in inanimate matter, since the cell is made up exclusively of atoms that are not alive. Similarly, it is quite true that society does not contain other active forces except those of individuals, but individuals when they unite form a psychic being of a new kind, which consequently has its own way of thinking and feeling. Of course, the germs of the elementary properties from which the social fact derives are contained in individual minds. But the social fact only emerges when these properties have been transformed by association, since it is only at that moment that it appears. Association is also an active factor that produces special effects: it is in itself something new. When consciousness, instead of remaining isolated from other consciousnesses, combines with them in a group, something in the world has changed. As a result, it is natural that this change should produce others, that this new thing creates other new things and phenomena appear

* See *Règles de la méthode sociologique*, Chapter II.

with characteristic properties not to be found in the elements of which they are composed.

The only way in which this proposition might be challenged would be by admitting that everything is qualitatively identical to the sum of its parts, and that an effect is qualitatively reducible to the sum of the causes that produced it, which would be to deny all change, or else render it inexplicable. Yet this extreme thesis has been advanced, though all that could be found to defend it were two quite extraordinary arguments. It was said, firstly, that 'in sociology, we are singularly privileged to have an intimate knowledge of the element that is our individual consciousness as well as the composite that is the assemblage of consciousnesses'; and secondly that, through this double introspection, 'we clearly observe that, once you remove the individual, the social is nothing'.*

The first of these assertions boldly negates all contemporary psychology. Nowadays, it is generally acknowledged that psychic life, far from being immediately knowable, has on the contrary profound depths which cannot be penetrated by ordinary perception and which we can only reach gradually by complex, roundabout procedures, comparable to those used by the sciences of the external world. The nature of consciousness is thus far from being an open book. As for the second statement, it is purely arbitrary. The author is quite free to assert that, as he personally sees it, there is nothing real in society except what comes from the individual, but nothing is cited in proof of this and debate is consequently impossible. It would be quite easy to counter this statement with the opposite one: that there are a great number of people for whom society does not appear to be the form that individual nature spontaneously adopts when it extends outside itself, but is seen as an antagonistic force that restricts them and against which they have to struggle! What are we to say, in any case, about that intuition through which we can know, directly and with no intermediary, not only the element, that is the indvidual, but also the compound, that is society? If it were really enough just to open

* Tarde, op. cit., in *Annales de l'Institut de Sociol.*, p. 222.

one's eyes and look closely to perceive at once the laws of the social world, sociology would be unnecessary or, at the least, very simple. Unfortunately, the facts show all too clearly how incompetent the mind is in this matter. Never would it have come to suspect, by itself, the necessity that annually brings back demographic phenomena in the same number as before, if this had not been drawn to its attention from outside. And it is even more unable, left with nothing but its own devices, to discover the causes of this.

However, by separating social from individual life in this way, we are not implying that it is devoid of anything non-material. On the contrary, it is clear that social life is essentially made up of representations, with this difference: that collective representations are quite different in nature from individual ones. We see no objection to sociology being described as a form of psychology, provided one is careful to add that social psychology has its own laws, which are not those of individual psychology. One example will be enough to make our meaning clear: generally, the origin of religion is said to be those feelings of fear and deference that conscious subjects feel in the presence of mysterious and awe-inspiring beings; and from this point of view it seems like a simple development of individual states and private feelings. However, this simplistic explanation bears no relation to the facts. One has only to point out that in the animal kingdom, where social life is only ever very rudimentary, religion as an institution is unknown, that it is never seen anywhere except where there is a collective organization, and that it changes according to the nature of the society, to be justified in concluding that only men in groups think religiously. Never would an individual have risen to the idea of forces that are so infinitely beyond him and everything around him, if all he had ever known was himself and his physical universe. Even the great natural forces with which he comes into contact would not have been able to suggest the idea to him, because at the start he was a long way from realizing, as we do today, how much they dominate him. On the contrary, in some circumstances, he believes that he can control them as he

wishes.* It was science that taught him how small he was in comparison to them. The power that imposed respect on him and became the object of his adoration was society, of which the Gods were only the hypostatic form. When it comes down to it, religion is the system of symbols through which society becomes conscious of itself; it is the way of thinking peculiar to the collective being. Here then is a huge mass of mental states that would not have arisen if individual consciousnesses had not come together, states that result from this union and are superadded to those that derive from individual natures. However much and however minutely we analyse the latter, we shall never discover anything to explain how those beliefs and singular practices that resulted in totemism were established and developed, and how nature worship emerged from that, and how nature worship itself became, in some places, the abstract religion of Yahweh, in others the polytheism of the Greeks and Romans, etc. All that we mean when we state that the social and the individual are two different things is that the preceding observations apply not only to religion, but to law, morality, customs, political institutions, pedagogical practices and so on; in a word, to all forms of collective life.†

However, an objection has been made to us which might seem more serious at first sight. We not only accepted that social states differ qualitatively from individual states, but also that they are, in some sense, external to individuals. We even went so far as to compare this exteriority to that of physical forces. But, it has been objected, if society is composed solely of individuals, how can there be something outside them?

If this objection is well-founded, we shall be faced with a

* See Frazer, *Golden Bough*, pp. 9ff.

† Let us add, to avoid any misunderstanding, that we do not believe that there is a precise point where the individual ends and the social begins. The association is not established at once and does not at once produce its effects; it needs time to do so and there are consequently moments at which the reality is imprecise. So we pass without interrruption from one order of facts to the other; but this is not a reason for refusing to distinguish them. Otherwise, there would be nothing distinct in the world, at least if one considers that there are no distinct genera and that evolution is continuous.

paradox, because we must not lose sight of what has already been established. Since the handful of people who kill themselves every year does not form a natural group, the constant number of suicides can only be due to the action of a single cause that dominates individuals and survives them. The force behind the unity of the cluster formed by the multitude of individual cases, distributed across the country, must necessarily be outside each of them. So if it were really impossible for it to be external to them, the problem would be insoluble. But this impossibility is only apparent.

Firstly, it is not true that society is made up only of individuals; it also includes material objects, which play an essential role in communal life. The social fact is sometimes materialized to the extent of becoming an element of the outside world. For example, a particular type of architecture is a social phenomenon, and it is incarnate in part in houses and buildings of every kind which, once built, become autonomous realities, independent of individuals. The same applies to routes of communication and transport, to the instruments and machinery used in industry or in private life which express the state of technology at a given moment in history, to the written language, and so on. Social life, having as it were crystallized itself in this way and fixed itself on material props, is by that very fact exteriorized and acts upon us from outside. The communication routes that were constructed before us imprint a definite direction on the development of our business, according to whether they put us in relation with this or that country. The child acquires his taste by coming into contact with monuments of the national taste which are the legacy of previous generations. Sometimes, one even sees these monuments disappear for centuries into oblivion, then one day, after the nations that raised them have long since gone, they re-emerge into the light and start a fresh existence in new societies. This is the characteristic of that very peculiar phenomenon called the Renaissance. A Renaissance is social life which, after having been as it were deposited in objects and remaining latent there for a long time, suddenly awakes and alters the intellectual and moral outlook of people who had no part in its creation. Of course, it could

not revive if there were no living consciousnesses there to receive its action, but on the other hand these consciousnesses would have thought and felt quite differently if this effect had not been produced.

The same can apply to those precise formulae in which the dogmas of faith or the precepts of the law are condensed when they are enshrined externally in a hallowed form. However well stated they may be, they would surely remain a dead letter if there was no one to represent them and put them into practice. But, while they are not sufficient in themselves, they are still factors *sui generis* of social activity. They have a mode of action that is peculiar to them. Juridical relations are not at all the same when the law is written down as when it is not. Wherever a code has been drawn up, jurisprudence is more regular, but less flexible; legislation is more uniform, but also more immutable. It is less able to be applied to the variety of particular cases and it offers more resistance to the efforts of innovators. The material forms that it adopts are thus not mere verbal forms with no power, but active realities, since they result in effects that would not take place if they did not exist. Yet not only are they external to individual consciousnesses, but it is this exteriority that gives them their specific character. It is because they are less within the power of individuals that they are harder to adapt to circumstances, and it is for the same reason that they are more resistant to change.

None the less, it is undeniable that not all social consciousness manages to exteriorize itself in this way. The whole national aesthetic is not in the works that it inspires; all of morality is not formulated in definite precepts. The greater part remains vague. There is a whole collective life that is free and untrammelled; all sorts of currents come and go, circulating in every direction, crossing and intermingling in a thousand different ways; and precisely because they are in this state of perpetual motion they do not manage to settle in an objective form. Today, a wave of sadness and discouragement has swept over society; tomorrow, on the contrary, a breath of joyful confidence will raise our spirits. For a time, the whole group is pulled in the direction of individualism, then another period arrives

and philanthropic social aspirations take over. Yesterday, we were all cosmopolitans, but today patriotism has the upper hand. And all these tides, these ebbs and flows take place without the slightest change to the cardinal precepts of law and morality, immobilized in their hieratic forms. Moreover, these precepts themselves are only the expression of an underlying life to which they belong; they derive from it but do not suppress it. At the basis of all these maxims, there are present and living feelings that these formulae encapsulate, while serving only as a superficial covering for them. They would awake no response if they did not correspond to concrete emotions and impressions spread out through society. So if we attribute a reality to them, we do not imagine that they make up the whole of moral reality: this would be mistaking the sign for the thing signified. A sign is undoubtedly something, it is not some kind of supererogatory epiphenomenon, and we know nowadays what part it plays in intellectual development – but, in the end, it is only a sign.*

But because this life does not have a sufficient degree of consistency to become fixed, this does not mean that it does not have the same character as the formulated precepts which we mentioned earlier. *It is external to every average individual taken separately.* Imagine, for example, that some great public danger causes a wave of patriotic feeling. The result is a collective impulse by which society, as a whole, accepts as axiomatic that individual interests, even those that are generally considered the most respectable, must be completely subjected to the common good. And the principle is not only stated as a sort of *desideratum*; if need be, it is applied to the letter. Just look at the average of individuals at that same moment! Certainly, you will find this same moral state among a large number of them, but in an attenuated form. Rare are those who, even in wartime, are ready spontaneously to make such a complete

* We hope that after this explanation people will not continue to accuse sociologists of trying to substitute the outside for the inside. We talk about the outside, because it alone is directly attainable, but this is in order to reach what is inside. Of course, the method is complicated, but there is no other, unless we want to risk our research bearing not on the order of things that we wish to study, but on the personal feeling we have about them.

abnegation of themselves. *Thus, of all the individual consciousnesses that make up the great mass of the nation, there is none with regard to which the collective current is not almost entirely external, since each of them only contains a fragment of it.*

One may make the same observation even about the most stable and fundamental moral sentiments. For example, every society has a respect for human life, and this in general is of a definite intensity which can be measured according to the relative gravity of the punishments attached to homicide.* On the one hand, the average man does have something of this same sentiment in himself, but to a much lesser degree and in a quite different way from society. To assess the difference, one has only to compare the emotion that each one of us individually would feel at the sight of the murderer or even the spectacle of the murder itself, and that which in the same circumstances takes hold of an assembled crowd. We know the extremities to which they will resort if nothing prevents them. It is because in such cases the anger is collective. And the same difference is found constantly between the way in which society experiences these attacks and the way in which they affect individuals; that is, between the individual and social form of the feeling which they offend. Social indignation has such force that it is often satisfied only by the supreme punishment. For us, if the victim is a stranger or someone about whom we do not care, if the author of the crime does not live in our vicinity and so does not represent any personal threat to us, though we may consider it just that the act should be punished, we are not moved enough by it to feel any real need to exact vengeance. We should not take a step to discover the guilty party, we might even be reluctant to hand him over. Things only appear in a different

* To know whether this sentiment is stronger in one society than in another, one does not need to consider only the intrinsic violence of the measures that are designed to repress it, but the place occupied by the penalty in the scale of punishments. Murder today is punished only by death, as in previous centuries, but the simple death penalty today has a relatively greater gravity, because it is the supreme punishment, while in earlier times it could be aggravated. And since those aggravations did not then apply to ordinary murder, the effect was to make this the object of a lesser punishment. [Translator's note: see below (p. 380n.) for a comment on the distinction between different kinds of murder.]

light if public opinion, as they call it, takes an interest in the matter. Then, we become more demanding and more active. But what speaks through us is public opinion: we act under pressure from the collective, not as individuals.

Most often, in fact, the distance between the social state and its individual repercussions is still greater. In the previous case, collective sentiment when it was individualized at least retained enough force among most people to resist actions which offended it. A horror of shedding blood is nowadays deeply enough rooted in most consciences to prevent the development of homicidal ideas. But simple embezzlement or quiet, non-violent fraud does not inspire anything like the same repugnance in us. There are not many people who have such a respect for the rights of others as to stifle at birth any desire to become unjustly rich. Not that education does not encourage a certain distaste for any injustice, but what a distance there is between this vague, hesitant feeling, always ready for compromise, and the definite stigma, unreserved and unrestrained, that society attaches to theft in any form! And what about those other duties which are still less solidly rooted in the ordinary man, such as the one requiring us to contribute our fair share to public expenditure, not to defraud the tax office, not to attempt to evade military service, to carry out our contracts faithfully, and so on? If on all these points morality was ensured only by the wavering feelings in the average conscience, then it would be precarious indeed.

So it is a fundamental error to confuse, as is so often done, the collective type of a society with the average type of the individuals who compose it. The average man is very average when it comes to morality. Only the most essential principles of ethics are at all strongly embedded in him and even then they are far from having the precision and the authority that they enjoy in the collective type, that is to say in society as a whole. This confusion, exactly the one made by Quételet, makes the genesis of morality an incomprehensible problem. Since the individual is in general so unremarkable in matters of morality, how can a morality have established itself that transcends him to such an extent if it only expresses the average of individual

temperaments? Only a miracle can allow more to derive from less. If the common conscience is no other except the most general conscience, it cannot rise above the level of the mass. But then, where do we get those high and quite imperative precepts that society tries to inculcate in its children, imposing respect for them on its members? It is understandable that religions and, following them, so many philosophies consider that morality can only be completely realized in God. This is because the pale and very incomplete version of it contained in individual consciences cannot be regarded as the original model; instead, it seems more like a crude and approximate reproduction of a model that must consequently exist somewhere outside individuals. This is why, in its usual, simplistic way, popular imagination embodies it in God. Science, of course, cannot be content with this explanation, which does not even come into its domain.* However, if one leaves this aside, there is no alternative except to leave morality in the air, unexplained, or else to see it as a system of collective states. Either it derives from nothing that involves data from the world of experience, or else it derives from society. It can only exist in a conscience, and if this is not the conscience of the individual, it must be that of the group. But in that case one must accept that the second, far from being the same as the average conscience, exceeds it in every direction.

So the observation confirms the hypothesis. On the one hand, the regular nature of the statistical data implies that there are collective tendencies, external to individuals, while on the other, in a considerable number of important cases, we can directly affirm this exteriority. In any case, there is nothing surprising in it for anyone who has recognized the difference between individual states and social states. By definition, the latter can only reach us from outside, since they do not derive from our personal predisposition; being composed of elements that are

* Just as it is not appropriate for physics to discuss belief in God as creator of the physical world, so the science of morality does not have to take account of the doctrine that sees God as the creator of morality. The question is not one that concerns us; we do not have to pronounce on it one way or the other. Secondary causes are the only ones with which we need be concerned.

foreign to us,* they must express something other than ourselves. Of course, to the extent that we are part of the group and share its life, we are open to their influence, but conversely, to the extent that we have personalities separate from it, we rebel against them and try to escape them. And since there is no one who does not simultaneously lead this double existence, each of us is driven at once in two directions: we are pulled in a social direction and we tend to follow the inclinations of our own nature. Thus the rest of society weighs on us to contain our centrifugal tendencies and we, for our part, combine to lean on others so as to neutralize theirs. We ourselves suffer the pressure that we help to exercise on others. Two antagonistic forces are operating. The first comes from the collective and seeks to take hold of the individual, the second comes from the individual and repels the other. The first, admittedly, is much stronger than the second, since it derives from a combination of all individual forces, but since it encounters as much resistance as there are individual persons, it partly exhausts itself in these multiple conflicts and only enters us in a weakened and disfigured form. When it is very intense, and when the circumstances that make it act recur frequently, it can still have quite a strong influence on individual constitutions, arousing states of a certain energy that, once organized, operate with the spontaneity of instinct: this is what happens with the most basic moral notions. But most social currents are either too weak or too intermittently in contact with us for them to take deep root inside us: their action is superficial. Consequently, they remain almost entirely external. So the means of calculating a given element of the collective type is not to measure its size in individual consciences and to take an average of all these measurements; what we should rather do is add them all up. Even then, this means of evaluation will be far below the reality, because in this way we shall only obtain the social sentiment reduced by all that it has lost in individualizing itself.

So it is quite superficial to accuse our idea of being pedantic

* See above, p. 344.

and to reproach it with setting up some vital principle or other of a new variety as the basis for social phenomena. If we refuse to accept that they have as their substratum the individual conscience, we are giving them another, which is the conscience formed by the union and combination of all individual consciences. There is nothing substantial or ontological about this substratum, since it is nothing but a whole made up of parts. But it is no less real than the elements that compose it, because they themselves are not constituted in any other way. They, too, are composite. We know today that the ego is the product of a multitude of consciousnesses without ego and that each of these elementary consciousnesses is in its turn the product of vital units without consciousness, just as each vital unit is itself due to an association of inanimate particles. So if the psychologist and the biologist rightly consider that the phenomena they study are solidly founded, for the sole reason that they are connected to a combination of elements of the order immediately below them, why should it be different in sociology? The only people who could consider such a base as insufficient are those who have not given up the hypothesis of a vital force and substantial soul. So nothing is less strange than this proposition which some have seen as a cause of outrage:* a belief or social practice is capable of existing independently of its individual expressions. Obviously, we are not implying in this that a society can exist without individuals, which is so clearly absurd that we might be spared the suspicion. What we do mean is that (i) the group formed by the individuals together is a reality of a different kind from each individual taken separately; and (ii) that collective states exist in the group from whose nature they derive, before affecting the individual as such and organizing a purely internal existence for themselves in him, in a new form.

Moreover, this way of understanding the relations of the individual with society is comparable with the idea that modern zoologists tend to have of the relations of the individual with the species or the race. The very simple theory which sees the

* See Tarde, op. cit., p. 212.

species as only an individual perpetuated in time and generalized in space is being increasingly abandoned. It comes up against the fact that variations in an isolated individual only become specific in very rare and, perhaps, dubious cases.* The distinctive characteristics of the race only change in the individual if they change in the race as a whole. So this last has some reality out of which would proceed the various forms that it takes among individuals, far from being a generalization from them. Admittedly, we cannot consider these theories as finally proven, but it is enough for us to see that our sociological concepts, while not derived from any other branch of research, do have some analogies in the most positive sciences.

IV

Let us apply these ideas to the question of suicide, and the solution that we gave at the start of this chapter will become more precise.

There is no moral ideal that does not combine egotism, altruism and a degree of anomie, in proportions that vary from one society to another: social life assumes both that the individual has a certain personality, that he is ready to give it up if the community so demands, and finally that he is to some extent open to ideas of progress. This is why there is no people in which these three currents of opinion do not coexist, though they incline humankind in three different or even contradictory directions. Where they act to moderate one another, the moral agent is in a state of equilibrium which protects him from any idea of suicide. But when one of them goes beyond a certain degree of intensity to the detriment of the others, for the reasons we have set out, it becomes liable to generate suicide when it is individualized.

Naturally, the stronger it is, the more people it will contaminate sufficiently to drive them to suicide, and vice versa. But the intensity itself can only depend on three kinds of cause: (i)

* See Delage, *Structure du protoplasme, passim*; Weissmann, *L'hérédité* and all the theories similar to Weissmann's.

the nature of the individuals who make up the society; (ii) the manner in which they are associated, that is, the nature of the social organization; and (iii) chance events which disturb the operation of collective life without altering its anatomical constitution, such as national or economic crises, etc. So far as individual qualities are concerned, only those that are to be found in everyone can play a role, because those that are strictly personal or which only belong to small minorities are swamped by the mass of the others; and, moreover, since they differ among themselves, they neutralize each other or mutually abolish each other in the course of the operation out of which the collective phenomenon emerges. So only the general characteristics of humankind can have any effect. And these are more or less immutable; or, at least, the few centuries that a nation lasts are not enough for them to change. Consequently, the social conditions on which the number of suicides depends are the only ones according to which it can vary, because they are the only variables. This is why it remains constant as long as society does not change. This constancy is not due to the fact that the state of mind that produces suicide happens, by some incomprehensible chance, to reside in a definite number of individuals who transmit it (again, we cannot tell why) to the same number of imitators. Rather, it is because the impersonal forces which produced it and sustain it are the same; nothing has come to modify either the way in which social units are grouped or the nature of their 'consensus'. So the actions and reactions that they exchange remain identical. Hence the ideas and the feelings that emanate from them cannot alter.

However, it is very rare, if not impossible, for one of these currents to exercise such a preponderance on all points of society. When it attains this degree of energy, it is always within restricted sections of society where conditions are especially favourable to its development: a particular social status, a profession, a religious group particularly stimulates it. This is what explains the double character of suicide. When it is considered in its external manifestations, one is tempted to see it as a succession of events, independent of one another, because it occurs at separate points, not visibly connected to one another.

Yet the sum total of all these particular cases together has its own unity and individuality, since the social rate of suicide is a distinctive feature of every collective personality. This is because, although the particular environments in which it occurs are distinct from one another and broken up in a thousand different ways across the country, yet they are tightly connected to one another, because they are the parts of a single whole, like the organs of a single organism. So the state in which each of them is to be found depends on the general state of society: there is a close connection between the degree of virulence that such and such a tendency reaches here, and its intensity in the whole of the social body. Altruism is more or less violent in the army depending on how it is in the civilian population;* intellectual individualism is all the more developed and all the more productive of suicides in Protestant circles than in the rest of the nation, etc. Everything is connected.

But while, apart from insanity, there is no individual state that can be considered as a determining factor in suicide, it does however seem that a collective feeling cannot penetrate individuals when they are absolutely hostile to it. One might thus consider that the preceding explanation is insufficient until we have shown how it is that, at the moment and in the precise environments in which suicidal currents develop, they find before them a sufficient number of subjects susceptible to their influence.

However, even supposing that this conjunction is always necessary and that a collective tendency cannot impose itself on individuals by main force independently of any existing predisposition, this harmony creates itself, because the causes which determine the social current act at the same time on individuals and create appropriate dispositions in them to support the collective action. There is a natural relationship between these two kinds of factor for the very reason that they depend on a single cause, which they express: this is why they combine and adapt to one another. The hypercivilization that

* See above, pp. 254–56.

gives birth to the anomic tendency and to the egotistical tendency also has the effect of refining nervous systems and making them excessively delicate; and for this very reason they are less capable of attaching themselves consistently to a defined objective, more impatient of any discipline and more accessible to violent irritation and to exaggerated depression. Conversely, the crude, rough culture implied by the excessive altruism of primitive peoples develops an insensibility that makes renunciation easier. In a word, since society to a large extent makes the individual, it makes him to the same degree in its own image. So the material that it needs will not fail it, because it has, so to speak, prepared it with its own hands.

We can now understand more precisely what is the role of the individual factors in the genesis of suicide. If some individuals in a single moral milieu – for example, in a single Church or body of troops or in a single profession – are affected and others not, this must, at least in general, be because the mental constitution of the former, such as nature and events have made it, offers less resistance to the suicidal current. But while these conditions can contribute to determining the particular individuals in whom this current is embodied, neither its distinctive characteristics nor its intensity depends on them. It is not because there are a certain number of neurotics in a social group that there will be a given number of suicides every year. Neurosis only means that some will succumb rather than others. This is what creates the great difference separating the viewpoint of the general practitioner from that of the sociologist. The first always finds himself confronted with individual cases, isolated from one another, and he establishes that very often the victim was either a nervous person or an alcoholic, and explains the act committed by the person by one or other of these psychopathic states. In a sense, he is right: if the person committed suicide when his neighbours did not, this is often why. But it is not for this reason that, in general terms, there are people who kill themselves or, above all, *why in every society a definite number of people commit suicide in any given period.* The cause that results in this phenomenon inevitably escapes the person who only looks at individuals, because it is outside individuals. To

find it, we must rise above particular cases of suicide and see what they have in common. It will be objected that if there were not a sufficient number of neurasthenics, the social causes could not produce their effects, but there is no society in which the different forms of nervous degeneracy do not supply suicide with more candidates than it needs. Few are chosen, if we may say so. It is those who through circumstances found themselves closer to the currents of pessimism and consequently were more completely affected by them.

But one last question remains to be resolved. Since every year produces an equal number of suicides, this means that the current does not with one blow attack all those whom it can and must strike down. The people who are to be affected next year already exist now; now, too, for the most part, they are involved in social life and consequently subject to its influence. Why does it provisionally spare them? Of course, a year may be necessary for it to produce all its effects, since, as the conditions for social activity are not the same in every season, it also changes at the different times of the year, both in intensity and in direction. It is only when the year has turned full cycle that all the combinations of circumstances according to which it is liable to vary have occurred. But since the following year, we presume, only repeats the one before it and brings the same combinations, why was the first year not enough? Why, to use an accepted metaphor, does society only pay its debt in successive instalments?

The explanation for this, we think, is to be found in the way that time acts upon the tendency to suicide. It is an auxiliary factor, but an important one. We know, in fact, that this tendency grows from youth to maturity,* and that it is often ten times stronger towards the end of life than at its start. This is because the collective force that drives a man to kill himself

* We should, however, note that this progression has only been established for European societies where altruistic suicide is relatively rare. Perhaps it does not apply to this type of suicide. It is possible that it reaches its apogee rather towards maturity, at a time when a man is most actively and ardently engaged in social life. The relationships between suicide and homicide, which will be discussed in the following chapter, confirm this hypothesis.

only penetrates him little by little. Other things being equal, it is as he gets older that he becomes more vulnerable, no doubt because repeated experiments are needed to make him feel the full emptiness of an egotistical existence or the utter vanity of boundless ambition. This is why suicides only fulfil their destiny in successive generational batches.*

* Without wanting to raise a metaphysical question which is not appropriate for us to deal with, we should like to point out that this theory of statistics does not mean that we must deprive mankind of any form of freedom. On the contrary, it leaves the question of free will much more open than if we make the individual the cause of social phenomena. Whatever may be the causes which account for the regularity of collective manifestations, it is not possible for them not to produce their effects where they exist, because otherwise we should see these effects vary in a haphazard manner, while in fact they are uniform. So if they are inherent in individuals, they cannot fail to determine those in whom they reside. Consequently, according to this hypothesis, there is no way of escape from the most rigid determinism. But it is not at all the same if this constancy of the demographic data derives from a force external to individuals, because then it does not determine some subjects rather than others. It demands certain acts in a particular number, but not that these acts come from one person rather than another. We may accept that some resist, and that it fulfils itself in others. In short, our conception has no other effect than to add to physical, chemical, biological and psychological forces social forces which act on men from outside, just as the rest do. So, if these others do not exclude human freedom, there is no reason why social forces should do so. The question is the same for one as for the rest. When the site of an epidemic appears, its intensity predetermines the size of the mortality that it will occasion, but those who are to be affected are not designated for death. The situation of suicides is the same in relation to suicidal currents.

CHAPTER 2
RELATIONSHIP OF SUICIDE TO OTHER SOCIAL PHENOMENA

Since suicide is, in essence, a social phenomenon, we must inquire into the place that it occupies among other social phenomena.

The first and most important question that we must answer on this subject is whether it could be classified among actions that are allowed by morality or not. Should we see it as, to some extent, a criminal matter? We know how much the question has been debated through the ages. In general, in order to resolve it, writers have begun by formulating a certain concept of the moral ideal, then considered whether suicide fits this or whether it is logically contrary to it. For reasons that we have stated elsewhere,* this is not the method that we can adopt. An unregulated deduction is always suspect and, apart from that, in this case it starts from a pure postulate of individual feeling, because everyone has his own conception of this moral ideal which is stated as axiomatic. So instead of proceeding in that way, we shall first of all examine how peoples through history have considered the morality of suicide; we shall then try to determine what were the reasons for these judgements. After that, we shall only have to see if and to what extent the same reasons are founded in the nature of our modern society.†

* See *Division du travail social*, Introduction.

† A relevant bibliography: Appiano Buonafede, *Histoire critique et philosophique du suicide*, 1762, French translation, Paris, 1843; Bourquelot, 'Recherches sur les opinions de la législation en matière de morts volontaires', in *Bibliothèque de l'École des Chartes*, 1842 and 1843; Guernesey, *Suicide, History of the Penal Laws*, New York, 1883; Garrison, *Le suicide en droit romain et en droit français*, Toulouse, 1883; Wynn Wescott, *Suicide*, London, 1885, pp. 43–58; Geiger, *Der Selbstmord im klassischen Altertum*, Augsburg, 1888.

I

As soon as Christian societies were established, suicide was formally banned in them. As early as AD 452, the Council of Arles declared that suicide was a crime and could only be the result of some diabolical fury. But it was only in the following century, in 563, at the Council of Prague,[1] that a penal sanction was added to this ban. It was decided that suicides would not be 'honoured by any commemoration in the holy sacrifice of the mass, and that the singing of psalms would not accompany their bodies to the grave'. Civil law took its inspiration from canon law and added material punishments to the religious ones. A chapter in the Institutions of Saint Louis[2] is specifically concerned with the question: the body of the suicide was tried before the authorities that would have been competent in the event of homicide, and the possessions of the deceased did not go to the ordinary heirs, but to the baron. A great number of customs went beyond confiscation and in addition laid down various physical punishments. 'In Bordeaux, the body was hanged by its feet, in Abbeville it was dragged through the streets on a hurdle, in Lille, in the case of a man, the body was hauled to the crossroads and hanged, while if it was a woman it was burned.'* Even madness was not always considered an excuse. The criminal ordinance published by Louis XIV[3] in 1670 codified these customs without greatly moderating them. A condemnation in regular form was pronounced *ad perpetuam rei memoriam*, and the body, pulled along on a hurdle, face down, through the streets and crossroads, was afterwards hanged or thrown into the refuse pit. The victim's goods were confiscated. Aristocrats were punished with demotion and were declared commoners: their woods were cut down, their châteaux demolished and their coats of arms broken. We still have a sentence of the Parlement de Paris, passed on 31 January 1749, in accordance with this legislation.

In a sudden about-turn, the Revolution of 1789 abolished all these repressive measures and removed suicide from the list of

* Garrison, op. cit., p. 77.

legal crimes. But all the religions practised in France continued to prohibit and to punish it, and the morality of the average person condemned it. It still inspires in the popular conscience a repulsion that extends to the places where the person carried out his decision and to all those who are closely associated or related to him. It is seen as a moral defect, even though public opinion appears to be tending towards greater indulgence on this than before. In fact, it does still retain some of its criminal character. According to the most widespread legal practice, a suicide's accomplice is liable to prosecution for homicide. This would not be the case if suicide were considered a morally neutral act.

This same legislation is found among all Christian peoples and has remained almost everywhere more strict than in France. In England, as early as the tenth century, King Edgar,[4] in one of the laws passed by him, compared suicides to thieves, murderers and criminals of every kind. Until 1823, it was customary to drag the body of the person who had committed suicide through the streets with a stake driven through it, and to bury it on the highway with no ceremony. Even today, the burial is in a separate place. The suicide was declared a felon (*felo de se*)[5] and his goods were forfeit to the Crown. It was only in 1870 that this provision was abolished, together with all confiscation for felony. It is true that the exaggerated nature of the punishment had made it inapplicable for some time before: the jury would usually get round the law by declaring that the suicide had acted while the balance of his mind was momentarily disturbed and that he was consequently not responsible for his action. But the act itself continues to be classified as a crime, and each time it is committed it is the object of a trial and verdict; and attempted suicide is, in principle, punished too. According to Ferri,* in 1889 there were still 106 proceedings for this misdemeanour and 84 verdicts of guilty, in England alone – and even more so when there is complicity.

In Zurich, according to Michelet,[6] the body used to be subjected to appalling treatment. If the man had stabbed himself,

* *Omicidio-suicidio*, pp. 61–62.

a piece of wood in which the knife was stuck was buried close to the body; if he drowned himself, he was buried five feet from the water, in the sand.* In Prussia, until the Penal Code of 1871, burial had to take place with no ceremonial or religious service. The new German penal code still punishes complicity with three years' imprisonment (Article 216). In Austria, the old canonical penalties have been retained almost unchanged.

Russian law is more severe. If the suicide does not appear to have acted under the influence of some mental disorder, whether chronic or temporary, his will is considered nul and void, together with any other provision he may have made in the event of his death. He has no right to Christian burial. A mere attempt at suicide is punished with a fine which the ecclesiastical authority is asked to determine. Finally, any person who incites another to kill himself or who helps him in any way to carry out his resolve, for example by supplying him with the necessary instruments, is treated in the same way as an accomplice to premeditated murder.† The Spanish penal code, apart from the religious and moral penalties, demands the confiscation of possessions and punishes any form of complicity.‡

Finally, the penal code of the State of New York, though it is very recent in date (1881), treats suicide as a crime. Admittedly, for practical reasons, the crime goes unpunished despite this, because the punishment cannot effectively be applied to the guilty party. But an attempted suicide can result in a prison sentence of up to two years, or a fine of as much as $200, or both. The mere fact of encouraging suicide or assisting in its accomplishment is treated as complicity to murder.§

Muslim societies are no less vigorous in their condemnation of suicide. According to Mohammed, 'man dies only by the will of God according to the book that fixes the term of his life'.¶ 'When the end has come, they may not either delay nor hasten

* *Origines du droit français*, p. 371.
† Ferri, op. cit., p. 62.
‡ Garrison, op. cit., pp. 144, 145.
§ Ferri, op. cit., pp. 63, 64.
¶ Koran, III, verse 139.

it by a single instant.'* 'We have decreed that death shall strike you each in turn and none shall go ahead of us.'† Indeed, nothing is more contrary than suicide to the general spirit of Muslim civilization, because the virtue that is set above all others is absolute submission to the divine will and docile resignation that makes us 'bear everything with patience'.‡ As an act of insubordination or rebellion, suicide could thus only be regarded as a serious breach of a fundamental duty.

If we go from modern societies to those that preceded them historically, that is to say the Graeco-Roman city-states, we find that they too had laws about suicide, but ones founded on quite different principles. Suicide was only considered illegal if it was not authorized by the state. Thus, in Athens, a man who killed himself was stricken with ἀτιμία [*atimia*],[7] as one who had committed an injustice towards the city.§ He was refused the honours of ordinary burial and, moreover, the hand of the corpse was cut off and buried separately.¶ With variations in detail, the same was true in Thebes and Cyprus.‖ In Sparta, the rule was so strict that Aristodemus was subjected to it for the way in which he sought death and was killed in the battle of Plataea. But these penalties were only applied if the person killed himself without previously asking permission from the competent authorities. In Athens if, before killing himself, a man asked the Senate to permit it, giving the reasons why life had become intolerable for him, and if the request was properly authorized, his suicide was considered as a legitimate act. Libanius**[8] mentions some of these rules, without dating them, though they were really in force in Athens; and he praises these laws highly, assuring us that they had the most beneficial effect. They were expressed in the following terms: 'Let whoever does not wish to live any longer explain his reasons to the Senate

* Ibid., XVI, verse 63.
† Ibid., LVI, verse 60.
‡ Ibid., XXXIII, verse 33.
§ Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.*, V, 11, 3.
¶ Aeschines, *Against Ctesiphon*, p. 244; Plato, *Laws*, IX, 12, p. 873.
‖ Dion Chrysostom, *Or.*, 4, 14 (ed. Teubner, V, 2, p. 207).
** *Melet*, ed. Reiske, Altenburg, 1797, pp. 198ff.

and, after gaining permission, let him give up life. If you find existence hateful, then die. If luck is against you, drink the hemlock. If you are bent with pain, leave life. Let the unfortunate describe his misfortune, let the magistrate supply the remedy and his misery will end.' The same law is to be found in Keos.* It was brought to Marseille by the Greek colonists who founded the town. The magistrates kept some poison in reserve and supplied the necessary amount to all those who, after bringing their reasons for wishing to kill themselves before the Six Hundred, obtained the requisite authorization.†

We are less well informed about the provisions of early Roman law: the fragments of the Law of the XII Tables[9] which have survived do not mention suicide. However, as this legal code was strongly influenced by Greek legislation, it is likely that it contained comparable rulings. In any case, Servius, in his commentary on the *Aeneid*,‡ informs us that according to the books of the Pontiffs, anyone who had hanged himself was denied a tomb. The statutes of a religious confraternity of Lanuvium laid down the same penalty.§ According to the annalist Cassius Hermina, quoted by Servius, Tarquin the Proud, in order to deal with an epidemic of suicide, ordered the bodies of the victims to be hung on crosses and left as prey to birds and wild animals.¶ The custom of not giving funerals to suicides seems to have continued, at least in principle, because we read in the Digest: *Non solent autem lugeri suspendiosi nec qui manus sibi intulerunt, non tædio vitæ, sed mala conscientia.*‖[10]

But according to the writings of Quintilian,**[11] until quite a late date Rome had an arrangement comparable to that which we have just observed in Greece, intended to moderate the rigours of previous legislation. A citizen who wished to kill

* Valerius Maximus, 2, 6, 8.

† Ibid., 2, 6, 7.

‡ XII, 603.

§ See Lasaulx, 'Ueber die Bücher des Koenigs Numa', in his *Études d'antiquité classique*. We quote from Geiger, p. 63.

¶ Servius, loc. cit.; Pliny, *Natural History*, XXXVI, 24.

‖ III, Title II, Book II, § 3.

** *Inst. orat.*, VII, 4, 39. *Declam.*, 337.

himself had to submit his reasons to the Senate, which decided whether they were acceptable and even decided the kind of death. What makes it probable that such a practice really existed in Rome is that, even under the emperors, something of it survived in the army. A soldier who tried to kill himself in order to escape military service was punished by death, but if he could prove that he had been impelled by some excusable motive, he was simply dismissed from the army.* Finally, if his action was due to remorse caused by some military error, his will was annulled and his property reverted to the exchequer.† Moreover, there is no doubt that in Rome, in every period, consideration of the motives behind the suicide played a dominant role in the moral or judicial assessment. Hence the precept: *Et merito, si sine causa sibi manus intulit, puniendus est: qui enim sibi non pepercit, multo minus aliis parcet.*‡[12] The public conscience, while as a general rule condemning it, reserved the right to authorize it in certain circumstances. This principle is very close to the one that serves as a basis for the institution mentioned by Quintilian, and it is so basic a part of Roman law on suicide that it was maintained even under the emperors. However, with time, the list of legitimate excuses grew longer. In the end there was only one single *causa injusta*: the desire to escape the consequences of a criminal sentence. And even then there was a time when the law that excluded this from the benefit of tolerance seems not to have been applied.§

If we leave the town and go among those primitive peoples where altruistic suicide flourishes, it is hard to say anything precise about the legislation that may be customary. However, the tolerance with which suicide is usually considered suggests that it is not formally prohibited, though it may not be entirely accepted in every case. However, the fact remains that in all societies that have advanced beyond this inferior stage, there is none that we know of in which an individual is unreservedly accorded the right to kill himself. It is true that in Greece, as in

* Digest, Book XLIX, Title XVI, law 6, § 7.
† Ibid., Book XXVIII, Title III, law 6, § 7.
‡ Ibid., Book XLVIII, Title XXI, law 3, § 6.
§ Towards the end of the Republic and the start of the Empire. See Geiger, p. 69.

Italy, there was a period in which the ancient laws relating to suicide fell almost entirely into disuse, but this was only at a time when the city-state itself had begun to decline, so this late tolerance cannot be held up as an example to imitate: it is clearly connected with the serious upheavals that these societies were undergoing. It was the symptom of an illness.

If we except these cases of regression, such general disapproval is in itself an instructive fact and one that should give pause to those moralists who are over-inclined to indulgence. An author must have exceptional confidence in his powers of argument to dare, in the name of a theory, to oppose the conscience of humanity on this point; or else, if, judging that the prohibition was based in the past, he demands its abrogation only for the immediate present, he must, before doing so, prove that some profound transformation has taken place in recent times in the basic conditions of collective life.

A more significant conclusion, which more or less rules out the possibility of such proof, emerges from this account. If one leaves aside the differences of detail in the repressive measures adopted by various nations, we can see that legislation on suicide went through two main phases. In the first, the individual was prohibited from destroying himself on his own authority, but the state could authorize him to do so. The act was only immoral when it was entirely an individual matter and the organs of collective life played no part in it. In certain defined situations, society allowed itself, so to speak, to be disarmed, agreeing to absolve what in principle it condemned. In the second period, this condemnation becomes absolute and without any exception. The ability to dispose of a human life, except when death is the punishment for a crime,* is taken away not only from the interested party, but even from society itself. Henceforth the right has been removed from collective as well as individual arbitration. Suicide is regarded as immoral, in itself and for itself, whoever takes part in it. So, the further we advance through history, the prohibition, far from being relaxed, merely becomes more radical. So if, today, public

* And even society's right in this case is starting to be questioned.

opinion seems less strict in its judgement in the matter, this state of vacillation must be the result of accidental and temporary causes, because it is most unlikely that morality, having developed in the same direction for centuries, should change tack on this point.

The ideas that gave it this direction are still valid. It is sometimes said that, if suicide is prohibited and deserves to be so, this is because, by killing himself, a man evades his obligations to society. But if this were the only consideration, we should, as in Greece, leave society free to lift a prohibition that was in any case only set up for its benefit. So if we deny it this facility, this is because we do not see the suicide merely as someone who dies owing a bad debt to society: a creditor can always wipe out the debt that is owed to him. In any case, if the disapproval shown towards suicides had no other origin than this, it should be all the stricter when the individual is more subordinate to the State, so it is in inferior societies that it would reach its zenith. But we find that, on the contrary, it gains in force as the rights of the individual become greater compared with those of the State. So, if the rule has become so formal and strict in Christian societies, the cause of this change must be sought, not in the idea that these people have of the State, but in the new concept that they have of the human person. In their eyes, this has become a sacred thing – even *the* sacred thing *par excellence*, against which no one may raise his hand. Of course, in the city-state, the individual was not of as little significance as in primitive tribes. He was granted a social value, but it was felt that this value belonged entirely to the State, so the city could freely dispose of his without his having the same rights over himself. But today, he has acquired a kind of dignity which sets him above himself and society. As long as he has not forfeited his human rights by his conduct, he seems to us in some manner to participate in the nature that every religion attributes to its gods, which puts them beyond the reach of all that is mortal. He is imbued with religiosity: man has become a god for men. This is why any attack against him appears to us sacrilegious; and suicide is one such attack. It hardly matters from whose hands the blow comes: it outrages

us for the sole reason that it violates the sacrosanct character that is in us and which we must respect in ourselves as in others.

So suicide is subject to disapproval because it is contrary to this cult of the human person on which all our morality rests. The thing that confirms this explanation is that we consider it in an entirely different way from the peoples of antiquity. Formerly, it was considered as a simple civil wrong committed against the State; religion was more or less indifferent to the matter.* Now, on the contrary, it has become an essentially religious act. The Councils condemned it and the lay powers, by punishing it, only followed and imitated the ecclesiastical authority. It is because we have in us an immortal soul, a fragment of the divinity, that we must be sacred to ourselves. It is because we are something of God that we do not belong entirely to any temporal being.

But if this is the reason why suicide is classified among illicit acts, should we not conclude that this condemnation is now without foundation? It seems, indeed, that scientific criticism should not accord the slightest value to these mystical concepts or accept that there is anything superhuman in man. It was with this argument that Ferri, in his *Omicidio-suicidio*, thought he could show that all prohibition of suicide is a survival of the past, destined to disappear. Considering as absurd from the rationalist point of view that an individual could have an end and purpose outside himself, he deduced that we always remain free to give up the benefits of communal life by giving up life itself. To him, the right to live logically implied the right to die.

But this argument moves prematurely from form to substance, from the verbal formulae through which we give expression to our feelings, to those feelings themselves. Of course, taken in themselves and in the abstract, the religious symbols through which we express the respect that the human person inspires in us are not adequate to reality, and this is easy to prove; but it does not follow that this respect itself is unjustified. The fact that it plays a preponderant role in our legal system and in our morality should, on the contrary, warn us against

* See Geiger, op. cit., pp. 58–59.

such an interpretation. So instead of fixing on the letter of this idea, let us examine it in itself and see how it arose; and we shall see that, while the common formulation is crude, this does not mean that it has no objective value.

Indeed, the sort of transcendence that we give to the human person is not a characteristic peculiar to this. It is found elsewhere. It is simply the mark left by all collective feelings of some intensity on the objects to which they relate. Precisely because they emanate from the collectivity, the goals towards which they direct our activities can only be collective ones. Society has needs that are not the same as our own. The actions that they inspire are not therefore in tune with our individual inclinations: their aim is not our personal interest, but rather consists in sacrifices and privations. When I fast, mortifying my flesh to please the Divinity or when, out of respect for a tradition the meanings and implications of which I usually do not know, I cause myself some discomfort, when I pay my taxes, and when I devote my efforts or even my life to the State, I give up some part of myself; and, from the resistance that our egotism sets up against these acts of self-denial, we can clearly see that they are demanded of us by a power to which we are subject. Even when we happily give way to its demands, we are aware that our conduct is governed by a feeling of deference towards something larger than ourselves. However spontaneously we obey the voice that dictates this sacrifice to us, we feel that it is speaking to us in imperative tones that are not those of instinct. This is why, although it is to be heard inside our consciences, it would be contradictory for us to think of it as our own. But we alienate it, as we do our sensations; we project it outside and refer it to a being which we conceive of as exterior and superior to us, since it orders us and we obey its injunctions. Of course, everything that comes to us from the same source partakes of the same character. This is why we have been driven to imagine a higher world than this one and to people it with realities of a different nature.

Such is the origin of all those ideas of transcendence that are at the base of religions and moralities: moral obligation cannot be explained otherwise. Of course, the concrete form with

which we usually endow these ideas is scientifically valueless. Whether we give them a foundation in a personal being of a special nature or in some abstract force which we vaguely hypostasize under the name of moral ideal, these are always metaphorical representations that do not adequately express the facts. But the *processus* that they symbolize is none the less real. It remains true that in all these cases we are incited to act by an authority greater than ourselves, namely society, and that the ends to which it thus commits us enjoy real moral supremacy. If this is the case, all the objections that might be made to the usual concepts through which men tried to represent this felt supremacy could not diminish its reality. This criticism is superficial and does not touch on the fundamentals. If one could establish that the worship of the human person is one of the goals that modern societies do and must pursue, then all the moral rules that derive from this principle will automatically be justified, whatever the value of the method by which it is usually justified. If the reasons that satisfy the common man may be criticized, they have only to be translated into another form of speech for them to acquire all their force.

Indeed, not only is this goal one that modern societies pursue, but it is a law of history that peoples tend increasingly to relinquish all other goals. At the start, society is all, the individual nothing. Consequently, the most intense social feelings are those that attach the individual to the collective: the latter is its own end. Man is only considered an instrument in its hands; from it, he appears to derive all his rights and he has no prerogative against it, because there is no superior power. But, little by little, things change. As societies become larger and denser, they become more complex: there is division of labour and individual differences increase,* and the time comes when there will soon be nothing in common between all the members of the same human group except that they are all human. In such conditions, it is inevitable that the collective sensibility should attach itself with all its strength to this sole object remaining for it and that it should, for this reason alone, attach

* See our *Division du travail social*, Book II.

an incomparable value to it. Since the human person is the only thing that touches all hearts and since its glorification is the only end that can be collectively pursued, it is bound to acquire exceptional importance for everyone. In this way it rises above all human aims and acquires a religious character.

This cult of mankind is thus something quite different from the egotistical individualism which we spoke of earlier and which leads to suicide. Far from detaching individuals from society and from every goal beyond themselves, it unites them in a single thought and makes them servants of a single task. The man who is thus offered for collective love and respect is not the feeling, empirical individual who is each one of us; it is mankind in general, idealized humanity, as each people imagines it at every moment in its history. No one of us embodies it entirely, though none of us is entirely a stranger to it. So it is a matter not of concentrating each particular subject on himself and his own interests, but of subordinating him to the general interests of the human race. Such a goal takes him out of himself; impersonal and disinterested, it soars above all individual personalities and, like any ideal, it can only be conceived as superior to reality and dominating it. It even dominates societies, since it is the goal to which all social activity is pegged. This is why these societies no longer have the power to dispose of it freely. They recognize that they, too, take their *raison d'être* from it, that they depend on it and have lost the right to fail it – even less to authorize men to do so themselves. Our dignity as moral beings is no longer the affair of the city-state, yet it has not as a result become anything else and we have not acquired the right to dispose of it as we wish. Whence should we derive it, indeed, if society itself, this being superior to us, does not possess it?

In such circumstances, it is necessary for suicide to be classified among immoral acts, because it rejects, in its core principle, this religion of humanity. It is said that the man who kills himself injures only himself and that society has no cause to intervene, by virtue of the old axiom: *Volenti non fit injuria.*[13] This is not so. Society is harmed, because the feeling on which its most respected moral principles rest today, and which serves

as an almost unique link between its members, is violated and it would be upset if this violation could be committed quite freely. How could it maintain the slightest authority if, when it is offended, the moral conscience did not protest? As soon as the human being is and must be considered as a sacred thing which neither the individual nor the group can dispose of freely, any attack on it must be forbidden. It is irrelevant that the guilty party and the victim are one and the same: the social ill that results from the act does not go away just because the author of it also suffers. If in ourselves and in general we are repelled by the fact of the violent destruction of a man's life and see it as a sacrilege, then we cannot tolerate it in any circumstances. A collective sentiment that relaxed to that extent would soon be powerless.

However, this does not mean that we must return to the savage penalties inflicted on suicides in previous centuries. These were instituted at a time when, under the influence of passing circumstances, the whole repressive system was imposed with excessive severity. But the principle must be upheld, namely that the homicide of oneself should meet with disapproval. It remains to be seen how this disapproval should manifest itself externally. Are moral sanctions enough, or do we need juridical ones; and if so, which? This is a matter of practical policy that will be discussed in the following chapter.

II

But first, in order to determine more precisely what is the extent of immorality of suicide, let us consider how it relates to other immoral acts, particularly to crimes and misdemeanours.

According to M. Lacassagne,[14] there is a regular inverse relation between the rate of suicide and that of crimes against property (theft, arson, fraudulent bankruptcy, etc.). This thesis was upheld in his name by one of his pupils, Dr Chaussinand, in his *Contribution à l'étude de la statistique criminelle.** But

* Lyon, 1881. At the Congress on Criminology held in Rome in 1887, M. Lacassagne claimed to be the author of this theory.

there is absolutely nothing to prove this. According to this author, one has only to compare the two curves to see that they rise and fall in contrary directions, but in reality it is impossible to see any kind of relationship between them, whether direct or inverse. Admittedly, from 1854 onwards, crimes against property fell while suicide rose; but the fall was in part imaginary: it came simply from the fact that, around this time, the courts began habitually to refer certain crimes to a magistrates' court, taking them away from the jurisdiction of the court of assizes which had previously judged them. In this way, from that time on, a certain number of offences vanished from the statistics for crimes, only to reappear in those for misdemeanours, and it was crimes against property that were most affected by this judicial change, now established. So if the statistics show smaller figures in this area, it is unfortunately probable that this is entirely due to an accounting contrivance.

However, even were the fall to be real, one could not draw any conclusion from it, because, while from 1854 onwards the two curves move in opposite directions, between 1826 and 1854 the figure for crimes against property rose at the same time as that for suicides, though less rapidly, or else remained stationary. From 1831 to 1835, there were on average 5,095 accused annually, a number that rose to 5,732 in the following period. It still stood at 4,918 in 1841–45, and at 4,992 from 1846 to 1850, only 2 per cent down on 1830. In any case, the general shape of the two curves does not allow any idea of comparison. That of crimes against property rises and falls considerably, making sudden leaps from one year to the next; the changes, apparently random, obviously depend on a host of accidental circumstances. The curve for suicides, on the other hand, rises regularly and uniformly; apart from a few rare exceptions, there are no sudden leaps or drops. The increase is continuous and progressive. There can be no sort of link between two phenomena when there is so little comparison between their course of development.

In any case, M. Lacassagne seems to have remained alone in his opinion. But the same is not true of another theory, which states that there is a correlation between suicide and crimes

against the person, particularly homicide. This has several advocates and deserves serious examination.*

As early as 1833, Guerry pointed out that crimes against the person were twice as numerous in the *départements* of the south than in those of the north of France, while the opposite is true of suicide. Later, Despine calculated that, in the 14 *départements* where violent crime was most frequent, there were only 30 suicides per million inhabitants, while there were 82 in 14 other *départements* where these same crimes were a lot rarer. The same author added that in the Seine, for every 100 indictments, only 17 were for crimes against the person, as against an average of 427 suicides per million, while in Corsica the proportion of the first was 83 per cent and the rate of the second was only 18 per million inhabitants.

However, these observations remained isolated until the Italian school of criminology took hold of them. Ferri and Morselli, in particular, made them the basis of an entire theory.

According to them, the antagonism of suicide and homicide is an absolutely general law: whether in geographical distribution or in development over time, they proceed everywhere in contrary directions from one another. But, if we accept this antagonism, it can be explained in two ways. Either homicide and suicide are two contrary currents, so opposed to one another that one cannot gain ground without the other losing it, or else they are two different channels of one single current which is fed from the same source and which, consequently, cannot go in one direction without subtracting to the same extent from the other. Given these two explanations, the Italian criminologists opted for the second. They saw in suicide and homicide two manifestations of a single act and two effects of

* Bibliography: Guerry, *Essai sur la statistique morale de la France*; Cazauvieilh, *Du suicide, de l'aliénation mentale et des crimes contre les personnes, comparés dans leurs rapports réciproques*, 2 vols, 1840; Despine, *Psychologie natur.*, p. 111; Maury, 'Du mouvement moral des sociétés', in *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 1860; Morselli, *Il suicidio*, pp. 243ff.; *Actes du Premier Congrès international d'Anthropologie criminelle*, Turin, 1886–87, pp. 202ff.; Tarde, *Criminalité comparée*, pp. 152ff.; Ferri, *Omicidio-suicidio*, 4th edn, Turin, 1895, pp. 253ff.

a single cause expressing itself sometimes in one form, sometimes in the other, without being able to appear in both guises at once.

What made them decide to choose this interpretation is that, according to them, the inversion exhibited by the two phenomena does not exclude some parallelism. While there are some conditions according to which they vary inversely, there are others which affect them in the same way. Thus, according to Morselli, temperature has the same effect on each: they reach their maximum at the same point in the year, as the warm weather approaches; both are more frequent among men than women; and, finally, according to Ferri, both increase with age. So it is that, while they are opposite in some respects, their nature is partly the same. And the factors that influence them to act in the same way are all individual, because they either consist directly in certain organic states (age, sex), or else they belong to the cosmic environment, which can only act on the individual psyche through the intermediary of the physical person. So it is in their individual conditions that suicide and homicide are alike. The psychological make-up that predisposes to one or the other would, according to this, be the same and the two tendencies would unite. Following Lombroso, Ferri and Morselli even tried to define this temperament, saying that it was characterized by a decline in the organism, putting the person at a disadvantage in the daily struggle. The murderer and the suicide are both degenerates and impotent, equally incapable of playing a useful role in society and consequently destined to defeat.

However, this single predisposition which, by itself, does not tend in one direction rather than the other, supposedly prefers to take the form of homicide or suicide according to the nature of the social environment; and thus these contrasting phenomena are produced which, real though they are, still conceal something fundamentally the same. In situations where general behaviour is mild and peaceful, and where bloodshed arouses feelings of horror, the defeated person will be resigned, confess his powerlessness and, anticipating the effects of natural selection, withdraw from the struggle by withdrawing from life. But

in places where, on the contrary, average morality is rougher and less value is attached to human life, he will rebel, declare war on society and kill others instead of himself. In a word, murder and self-murder are both violent acts; but in some cases, the violence from which they derive, finding no resistance in the social environment, expands into it and so becomes homicide, while in others, prevented from expressing itself outside because of the pressure that public opinion exercises on it, it returns to its source, and the subject in which it originates is itself the victim.

In this case, suicide is homicide transformed and attenuated. In this sense, it seems almost beneficial, because while not a good in itself, it is at least a lesser evil, sparing us a worse one. It even seems that we should not seek to contain its spread by prohibitive measures, because in so doing we should give free rein to homicide. Suicide is a safety valve which ought to be left open. In short, suicide is supposed to have the great advantage of getting rid of a certain number of useless or harmful citizens without any intervention by society, and consequently in the simplest and most economic way. Surely it is better to let them quietly eliminate themselves rather than forcing society to expel them violently from its breast?

Is this ingenious thesis well-founded? This is a twofold question, each part of which should be treated separately. Are the psychological conditions for crime and suicide identical? Is there any conflict between the social conditions on which they depend?

III

Three facts were advanced to prove the psychological unity of the two phenomena.

Firstly, there was the similar influence of sex on suicide and homicide. To be precise, this influence of gender is much more an effect of social than of organic causes. It is not because woman is physiologically different from man that she is less liable to kill herself or others; it is because she does not participate in the same way in collective life. But apart from that it is

not true that women have the same antipathy to these two forms of immorality. We must not forget that there are varieties of murder in which they have the monopoly: infanticides, abortions and poisonings. Whenever homicide is within her reach, a woman commits it as often or more often than a man. According to Oettingen,* half of domestic murders are committed by women. So nothing leads us to assume that a woman has any greater respect for the life of others by virtue of her congenital make-up. All that she lacks are opportunities, because she is less strongly caught up in the fray of life. The causes that drive people to commit crimes of violence act less on her than they do on a man, because she remains further outside their sphere of influence. It is for the same reason that women are less exposed to accidental death: out of a hundred deaths of that kind, only twenty are female.

Moreover, even if one includes all intentional homicides – killings, premeditated murders, parricides, infanticides and poisonings – under a single head,† the share of women in the total is still very high. In France, out of every 100 such crimes, 38 or 39 are committed by women (and as many as 42 if one includes abortions). The proportion is 51 per cent in Germany and 52 per cent in Austria. It is true that this means leaving aside involuntary homicide, but homicide is only truly itself when it is voluntary. And those killings which are peculiar to women – infanticides, abortions and domestic murders – are by their very nature hard to discover. A great number of these are committed which escape justice and consequently the statisticians. If one also considers that women very probably enjoy

* *Moralstatistik*, p. 526.

† [Translator's note] Durkheim makes a clear distinction (which exists in French law, though many ordinary people would not recognize it) between different terms for murder. The general word is *homicide*, which can be either intentional (murder) or not (manslaughter). Under the umbrella of this general term, the law makes a clear distinction between *coups et blessures mortels* (manslaughter), *meurtre* (murder without premeditation) and *assassinat* (premeditated murder), the severity of the crime increasing with each term. For the purposes of this translation, I have translated *homicide* as 'homicide', *coups et blessures mortels* as 'manslaughter', *meurtre* as 'murder' and *assassinat* as 'premeditated murder'.

the same indulgence during the police investigation that they certainly receive in court, where they are much more often acquitted than men are, we shall see that in the end the tendency to homicide may not be very different from one sex to the other. Yet we do know, by contrast, how great is women's immunity to suicide.

The influence of age on both phenomena exhibits equal differences. According to Ferri, homicide becomes more frequent, as does suicide, as a man progresses through life. It is true that Morselli stated the opposite.* The truth is that the figures follow neither the same nor opposite paths. While suicide increases regularly until old age, murder and premediated murder reach a peak in maturity, around 30 or 35 years, then decline. This is illustrated in Table 31. It is impossible in this to see the slightest proof that suicide and violent crime are either the same in nature or opposite.

What remains is the effect of temperature. If we combine all crimes against the person, the curve that is obtained seems to confirm the theory of the Italian school: it rises until June and then descends steadily until December, as does that for suicide. But this result derives from the fact that indecent assaults and rapes, as well as homicides, are included under this general heading of crimes against the person. Since the two former crimes reach a maximum in June and are much more frequent than assaults against life, it is they that determine the shape of the curve. But they bear no relation to homicide, so if we want to know how this varies at different times of the year, we have to isolate it from the other sets of figures. And if we do this, taking particular care to distinguish particular forms of homicide from one another, we find no trace of the alleged parallelism (see Table 32).

In fact, while the growth in suicide is continuous and regular from January to around June, as is its decrease through the other half of the year, murder, premeditated murder and infanticide vary from one month to the next in the most capricious

* Op. cit., p. 333. However, in the *Actes du Congrès de Rome*, p. 205, the same author expresses doubts about the reality of this antagonism.

TABLE 31

Comparative development of murders, premeditated murders and suicides at different ages in France (1887)

Age	Per 100,000 inhabitants, number of: Murders	Premeditated murders	Suicides per 100,000 inhabitants of each sex: Men	Women
16–21*	6.2	8.0	14	9
21–25	9.7	14.9	23	9
25–30	15.4	15.4	30	9
30–40	11.0	15.9	33	9
40–50	6.9	11.0	50	12
50–60	2.0	6.5	69	17
Over 60	2.3	2.5	91	20

way. Not only is the general trend not the same, but the maxima and minima do not coincide. Murders have two maximum points, one in February, the other in August. Premeditated murder also has two, but partly different: one in February, the other in November. As far as infanticide is concerned, the peak is in May, and for manslaughter in August and September. If we calculate, not the monthly variations, but the seasonal ones, the divergences are no less striking. Autumn has almost as many murders as summer (1,968 compared with 1,974) and winter has more than spring. In the case of premeditated murder, winter is in the lead (2,621), followed by autumn (2,596), then summer (2,478) and finally spring (2,287). For infanticide, spring leads (2,111), followed by winter (1,939). In the case of manslaughter, summer and autumn are on a par (2,854 for one and 2,845 for the other), with spring next (2,690) and winter

* The figures for the first two periods are not strictly accurate when it comes to homicide because in criminal statistics the first period is from 16 to 21 while the census gives the total figure for the population between the ages of 15 and 20. But this slight inaccuracy does not affect the general results that emerge from the table. For infanticide, the maximum is reached earlier, around 25 years, and the decrease is then much faster (one can easily see why).

TABLE 32
*Monthly variations in different forms of homicide** (1827–1870)

	Murder	Premeditated murder	Infanticide	Manslaughter
January	560	829	647	830
February	664	926	750	937
March	600	766	783	840
April	574	712	662	867
May	587	809	666	983
June	644	853	552	938
July	614	776	491	919
August	716	849	501	997
September	665	839	495	993
October	653	815	478	892
November	650	942	497	960
December	591	866	542	886

not far behind (2,653). The spread of suicide, as we have already seen, is quite different.

In any event, if the tendency to suicide were merely a repressed tendency to murder, we ought to see murderers, once they have been arrested and their violent instinct prevented from expressing itself outside, become themselves the victims of it: a homicidal tendency ought, as a result of imprisonment, to be transformed into a suicidal one. However, the evidence of many observers is that major criminals rarely kill themselves. Cazauvieilh questioned the doctors at our various penal colonies about the extent of suicide among the convicts.† In Rochefort in thirty years only a single case was recorded, and none in Toulon, where the population was commonly between 3,000 and 4,000 inmates (1818–1834). In Brest, the results were somewhat different: in seventeen years, out of an average population of around 3,000 inmates, there were 13 suicides,

* Taken from Chaussinand.

† Op. cit., pp. 310ff.

giving an annual rate of 21 per 100,000. Although this figure is higher than the previous ones, it is not exceptional, since it relates mainly to a population of adult males. According to Dr Lisle, 'of 9,320 deaths recorded in the penal colonies between 1816 and 1837 inclusive, only 6 were suicides'.* It emerges from an investigation by Dr Ferrus[15] that there were only 30 suicides in seven years in the various state penitentiaries out of an average population of 15,111 prisoners. But the proportion was still smaller in the penal colonies, where only 5 suicides were recorded from 1838 to 1845 out of an average population of 7,041 convicts.† Brierre de Boismont confirms this and adds: 'Professional killers and the authors of major crimes resort to this violent method of escaping from punishment less frequently than do prisoners whose crimes were not so heinous.'‡ Dr Leroy also notes that 'professional rogues and habitual jailbirds' rarely take their own lives.§

Two sets of statistics, one quoted by Morselli,¶ the other by Lombroso,‖ do admittedly tend to show that prisoners in general are unusually prone to suicide. But since these documents do not distinguish killers and murderers from other criminals, we cannot draw any conclusion from them about the matter that concerns us. They do even seem to confirm the previous observations, by proving that detention in itself produces a very strong inclination to suicide. Even if we do not take into account those individuals who kill themselves as soon as they are arrested and before being sentenced, there is a large number of suicides which can only be attributed to the influence of prison life.** But in that

* Op. cit., p. 67.

† *Des prisonniers, de l'emprisonnement et des prisons*, Paris, 1850, p. 133.

‡ Op. cit., p. 95.

§ *Le suicide dans le département de Seine-et-Marne.*

¶ Op. cit., p. 377.

‖ *L'homme criminel*, French translation, p. 338.

** What does this influence consist of? It appears that some of it must be attributed to the cell system; but we should not be surprised if the communal life of the prison was such as to produce the same effects. We know that the society of wrongdoers and prisoners is very cohesive: the individual is completely effaced and prison discipline has the same tendency. So something similar could occur to what we observed in the army. What confirms this hypothesis is that epidemics of suicide are common in prisons as they are in barracks.

case, the imprisoned murderer ought to have an extremely strong urge to commit suicide, if the aggravation resulting from his imprisonment is still further reinforced by the congenital predisposition attributed to him. The fact that he is, in this respect, rather below the average than above it does not support the hypothesis that, by virtue of his temperament alone, he has a natural affinity for suicide which is ready to exhibit itself as soon as circumstances favour its emergence. In any case, we are not claiming that he enjoys some kind of genuine immunity; the information at our disposal is not enough to settle the matter. It is possible that, in certain conditions, major criminals hold their own lives cheap and give them up without too much struggle. But at the very least this is not as general or as inevitable as the Italian thesis implies. This was all that we needed to establish.*

IV

However, we still have to discuss the second proposition of the Italian school. Given that homicide and suicide do not derive from a single psychological state, we have to look into the question of whether there is real antagonism between the social conditions on which they depend.

The question is more complex than the Italian writers and some of their opponents have realized. It is certain that, in a number of cases, the law of inversion is not proven. Quite often the two phenomena, instead of repelling or excluding one another, progress in parallel. Thus in France since the end of the war of 1870 there has been a tendency for murders to increase. In an average year in the period 1861–65, there were only 105, but this figure rose to 163 from 1871 to 1876 and

* One set of figures quoted by Ferri (*Omicidio*, p. 373) is no more convincing. From 1866 to 1876, he tells us, there were 17 suicides committed in Italian penal establishments by convicts sentenced for crimes against the person, compared with only 5 committed by perpetrators of property crimes. But in penal colonies, the former are far more numerous than the latter, so there is nothing conclusive about these figures. In any case, we do not know the source from which the author of this information took the figures on which it is based.

premeditated murders rose during the same period from 175 to 201. And at the same time, the number of suicides increased considerably. The same phenomenon occurred in the years 1840–50. In Prussia, while suicides in the period 1865 to 1870 remained at 3,658 or below, they rose to 4,459 in 1876 and 5,042 in 1878, an increase of 36 per cent. The various kinds of murder followed the same course: from 151 in 1869, they rose successively to 166 in 1874, 221 in 1875 and 253 in 1878, an increase of 67 per cent.* The same occurred in Saxony: before 1870, suicides hovered between 600 and 700; only once, in 1868, did they reach 800. From 1876 onwards they rose to 981, then to 1,114, to 1,126 and finally, in 1880, reached 1,171.† In the same way, attacks on the lives of other people rose from 637 in 1873 to 2,232 in 1878.‡ In Ireland, between 1865 and 1880, suicides rose by 29 per cent and homicides at almost the same rate (23 per cent).§

In Belgium from 1841 to 1885, homicides rose from 47 to 139 and suicides from 240 to 670, that is, an increase of 195 per cent for the first and 178 per cent for the second. These figures accord so ill with his theory that Ferri is reduced to doubting the accuracy of the Belgian statistics. But even if one confines oneself to the most recent years, those on which the data are least suspect, one arrives at the same result. From 1874 to 1885, the increase for homicide was 51 per cent (139 cases instead of 92) and for suicide 79 per cent (670 cases instead of 374).

The geographical distribution of the two phenomena suggests similar observations. The French *départements* where the suicide rate is highest are the Seine, the Seine-et-Marne, the Seine-et-Oise and the Marne; and while these are not also in the top rank for homicide, they do figure quite prominently: the Seine is 26th for murders and 17th for premeditated murders; the Seine-et-Marne 33rd and 14th, respectively; the Seine-et-Oise, 15th and 24th; the Marne, 27th and 21st. The Var, which is in 10th place for suicides, is 5th for murders and 6th for premedi-

* According to Oettingen, *Moralstatistik*, appendices, Table 61.
† Ibid., Table 109.
‡ Ibid., Table 65.
§ According to the tables drawn up by Ferri himself.

tated murders. In the Bouches-du-Rhône, where suicide rates are high, homicide is also rife: it is 5th for murders and 6th for premeditated murders.* On the map of suicide, as on that of homicide, the Île-de-France is marked by a dark patch, like the band formed by the *départements* on the Mediterranean, with the sole difference that the first region is less dark on the homicide map than on that for suicide, and the opposite is true for the second. Similarly, in Italy, Rome is the third judicial district for voluntary death and fourth for aggravated homicide. Finally, we saw that in inferior societies where life is not greatly respected, suicide is often very frequent.

But, however undeniable these facts may be and whatever the importance of not losing sight of them, there are contrary facts that are no less constant and a lot more numerous. While in some cases, the two phenomena coincide, at least partially, in others they are clearly opposed to one another.

1. While at certain times in the century they do develop in the same way, the two curves, taken as a whole, diverge very clearly, at least when they can be followed for quite a long period. In France, from 1826 to 1880, suicide (as we have seen) grew regularly, while on the contrary homicide tended to fall, though less rapidly. In 1826–30 there were on average 279 people accused of murder every year, while in 1876–80 there were only 160 – and, in the period between these dates, the number even fell to 121 in 1861–65 and to 119 in 1856–60. Twice, around 1845 and following the war, there was a tendency for the figure to rise, but if we overlook these secondary oscillations, the general downward movement is clear. The decrease is 43 per cent, a figure that is all the more striking since the population in the same period rose by 16 per cent.

The regression is less marked with premeditated murder. While there were 258 people accused of this crime in 1826–30, there were still 239 in 1876–80. The decline is only significant if we take account of the increase in population. There is nothing surprising about this difference: this is a mixed crime which has

* The classification of the *départements* is taken from Bournet, *De la criminalité en France et en Italie*, Paris, 1884, pp. 41 and 51.

features in common with simple murder, but also differences: it derives partly from other causes. Sometimes, it is merely a more premeditated and deliberate murder, while at others it accompanies a crime against property. In the latter case, it is determined by different factors from homicide, its cause not being the totality of the tendencies of every kind that incite to bloodletting, but the very different motives that lie behind theft. The duality of the two crimes is evident in the table of their monthly and seasonal variations. Premeditated murder reaches its peak in winter and particularly in November, as do attacks on property. So its variations do not provide the best means to study the trend in homicide: the curve for murder gives a better idea of its general direction.

The same thing is found in Prussia. In 1834, there were 368 investigations opened into cases of murder or manslaughter, or one for every 29,000 inhabitants; in 1851, there were only 257, which is one for every 53,000 inhabitants. The decline has continued since then, though more slowly. In 1852, there was still one investigation per 76,000, and in 1873 only one per 109,000.* In Italy, from 1875 to 1890, the decline in the number of simple and aggravated homicides was 18 per cent (2,660 instead of 3,280), while suicides increased by 80 per cent.† And where homicide is not in decline, it at least remains stationary. In England, between 1860 and 1865, there were 359 cases a year, and still only 329 in 1881–85; in Austria, there were 528 in 1866–70, which had fallen to 510 in 1881–85,‡ and it is probable that if one were to distinguish between murder and premeditated murder in these countries, the fall would have been more marked. In the same periods, suicide rose in all these states.

Despite this, M. Tarde set out to demonstrate that this reduction in homicide in France was only apparent.§ According to him, it is solely due to the fact that the statistics fail to add to the cases actually judged at the assizes others which were

* Starke, *Verbrechen und Verbrecher in Preussen*, Berlin, 1884, pp. 144ff.

† According to the tables drawn up by Ferri.

‡ See Bosco, *Gli Omicidii in alcuni Stati d'Europa*, Rome, 1889.

§ *Philosophie pénale*, pp. 347–48.

thrown out of lower courts or declared nul because of insufficient evidence. He says that the number of such murders which remain unprosecuted and consequently are not taken into account by the legal statistics has been growing steadily, so if they were to be added to crimes of the same kind that did come to court, there would be a steady increase, instead of the actual regression. Unfortunately, the proof that he offers of this assertion is the result of too ingenious an arrangement of the figures. He restricts himself to comparing the number of murders and premeditated murders that were not referred to the court of assizes in the period 1861–65 with those for the years 1876–80 and 1880–85, to show that the second, and still more the third, are higher than the first. But it so happens that the period 1861–65 was easily the one that in the whole of the century shows the smallest number of cases thrown out before being judged: the number is exceptionally low, though we do not know why. In any case, it offered the most misleading basis one could have for the comparison – and one cannot deduce a law merely by comparing two or three figures. If M. Tarde, instead of choosing that yardstick, had observed the variations in the number of such cases over a longer period of time, he would have reached a quite different conclusion. Here is the result that he would have found:

*Number of cases not prosecuted**

	1835–38	1839–40	1846–50	1861–65	1876–80	1880–85
Murders	442	503	408	223	322	322
Premeditated murders	313	320	333	217	231	252

The figures do not vary in any very regular manner, but from 1835 to 1885 they decreased noticeably, despite the rise that

* Some of these cases were not prosecuted because they did not constitute either crimes or misdemeanours. These should therefore not have been included. However, we did not do this in order to keep our figures on the same basis as those of M. Tarde. In any case, this deduction, we can be sure, would not at all alter the result shown by the above figures.

occurred around 1876. This decrease was 37 per cent for murder and 24 per cent for premeditated murder, so there is nothing that allows us to point to any increase in the rate of these crimes.*

2. While there are countries that show growths in both suicides and homicides, these are always in unequal proportions: never do the two reach their pitch of intensity at the same moment. But it is a general rule that *where homicide is at a high level, it confers a sort of immunity against suicide.*

Spain, Ireland and Italy are the three European countries where people are least likely to kill themselves: the first has 17 cases per million inhabitants, the second 21 and the third 37. Conversely, there are no countries where so many people are killed by others. *These are the only countries where the number of murders exceeds the number of voluntary deaths.* Spain has three times as many of the former over the latter (1,484 homicides on average in the years 1885–89 and only 514 suicides), Ireland twice as many (225 on one side, 116 on the other), and Italy one-and-a-half times as many (2,322 against 1,437). By contrast, France and Prussia are very productive of

* A secondary consideration, presented by the same author in support of his thesis, is no more convincing. According to him, we should also take account of homicides mistakenly classified among voluntary or accidental deaths. Since the number of both these has grown since the start of the century, he concludes that the figure for homicide under one or other of these heads must also have grown. This is another serious increase, he tells us, and we must take account of it if we wish to make an exact assessment of the increase in homicide. But this reasoning rests on a confusion. Because the figure for accidental and voluntary deaths has risen, it does not follow that the same is true of the homicides wrongly classified under these headings. Because there are more suicides and more accidents, this does not mean that there are more false suicides and false accidents. For there to be any plausibility in such a hypothesis, we should have to establish that administrative and judicial inquiries in doubtful cases were being carried out less efficiently than previously, and we can see no basis for such a supposition. M. Tarde, admittedly, is surprised that there are more deaths by drowning than before and is inclined to see an increase in homicide behind this increase in drownings. But the number of deaths from being struck by lightning has also risen considerably: it has doubled; yet criminal intention can have nothing to do with that. The honest truth is that statistics are not always accurate and that an increase in sea-bathing, more activity in ports and the growth in the number of river boats is the cause of an increase in accidents.

suicides (160 and 260 cases per million), but homicide is one-tenth as prevalent: France had only 734 cases and Prussia 459, in an average year over the period 1882–88.

The same relations are to be observed within each country. In Italy, the whole of the north is dark on the suicide map and all the south absolutely clear; precisely the opposite is the case on the map of homicides. And if we divide the Italian provinces into two groups according to the rate of suicide and look at the average homicide rates in each of them, the contrast could not be more striking:

First group:
From 4.1 to 30 suicides per million and 271.9 homicides per million

Second group:
From 30 to 88 suicides per million and 95.2 homicides per million

The province where most murders are committed is Calabria, with 69 aggravated homicides per million inhabitants, but there is no province where suicide is less common.

In France, the *départements* where most murders are committed are Corsica, Pyrénées-Orientales, Lozère and Ardèche, while in the table of suicides Corsica falls from first place to 85th, Pyrénées-Orientales to 63rd, Lozère to 83rd and Ardèche to 68th.*

In Austria, suicide is at its maximum in Lower Austria, Bohemia and Moravia, while it is low in Carniola and Dalmatia. On the contrary, Dalmatia has 79 homicides per million inhabitants and Carniola 57.4, while Lower Austria has only 14, Bohemia 11 and Moravia 15.

3. We have already established that war has a depressive effect on the suicide rate. It has the same on theft, swindles, confidence tricks, etc. But one crime is an exception to this: homicide. In France, in 1870, murders, which had been running at an average rate of 119 in the years 1866–69, suddenly rose

* In premeditated murder, the inversion is less evident, which confirms what was said above about the mixed character of this crime.

to 133 then to 224 in 1871, an increase of 88 per cent,* before falling back to 162 in 1872. The increase seems all the more significant, if we consider that the age at which one is most likely to kill is around 30 years, and all the young men of the country were serving in the armed forces. The crimes that they would have committed in time of peace consequently did not come into the statistics. Moreover, there is no doubt that the chaos in the judicial system must have prevented more than one crime from being known and more than one investigation from ending in prosecution. If, despite these two factors tending to diminish the number of killings, they in fact rose, we can imagine how great the real increase must have been.

Similarly, in Prussia, when war was declared against Denmark in 1864, the number of homicides rose from 137 to 169, their highest level since 1854. In 1865, they fell to 153, but they went up again in 1866 (159), even though the Prussian army had been mobilized. In 1870, there was a slight fall compared to 1869 (151 cases instead of 185), which was even more pronounced in 1871 (136 cases), but how much less was it for other crimes! At the same time, thefts qualified as criminal fell by half: 4,599 in 1870 against 8,676 in 1869. Moreover, the figures include different kinds of murder, though we know that murders and premeditated murders do not have the same significance and that in France only the first rise in wartime. So if the total fall in the number of homicides of all kinds is not larger, one can only imagine that murders, if counted separately from premeditated murders, would show a large rise. In any event, if one could also reinstate all the cases which must have been omitted for the two reasons indicated above, the apparent fall would itself be reduced to very little. Finally, it is very noticeable that involuntary murders rose very considerably, from 268 in 1869 to 303 in 1870 and 310 in 1871.† Does this not prove that in such times less value is placed on human life than in time of peace?

Political crises have the same effect. In France, while from

* Premeditated murder, on the other hand, of which there had been 200 cases in 1869, and 215 in 1868, fell to 162 in 1870. This only underlines the need to distinguish between these two sorts of crime.

† According to Starke, op. cit., p. 133.

1840 to 1846 the number of murders remained static, in 1848 the curve rose suddenly, reaching its maximum in 1849, at 240.* The same phenomenon had already occurred in the first years of the reign of Louis-Philippe.[16] At that time, conflict between the various political parties was very violent; and it was at this time that murders reached their highest point for the whole of the century. From 204 in 1830, they rose to 264 in 1831, a figure that was never exceeded. They were still at 253 in 1832 and 257 in 1833. A sudden fall occurred in 1834 and became more pronounced: by 1838, there were only 145 cases, a fall of 44 per cent. Meanwhile, suicide was following the opposite course. In 1833 it was at the same level as in 1829 (1,973 cases for the first year, 1,904 for the second). Then in 1834 began a very rapid upward movement. In 1838, the increase was 30 per cent.

4. Suicide is far more urban than rural, while the opposite is the case with homicide. By adding together murders, parricides and infanticides we find that in 1887 in the countryside 11.1 such crimes were committed, compared with only 8.6 in towns. In 1880, the figures were more or less the same, standing respectively at 11.0 and 9.3.

5. We have seen that Catholicism reduces the tendency to suicide, while Protestantism increases it. Conversely, homicide is much more frequent in Catholic than in Protestant countries:

Catholic countries	Simple homicides per million inhabitants	Premeditated murders per million inhabitants	Protestant countries	Simple homicides per million inhabitants	Premeditat murders per millio inhabitan
Italy	70.0	23.1	Germany	3.4	3.3
Spain	64.9	8.2	England	3.9	1.7
Hungary	56.2	11.9	Denmark	4.6	3.7
Austria	10.2	8.7	Holland	3.1	2.5
Ireland	8.1	2.3	Scotland	4.4	0.7
Belgium	8.5	4.2			
France	6.4	5.6			
Averages	32.1	9.1	Averages	3.8	2.3

* Premeditated murders remained more or less stationary.

Where simple homicides in particular are concerned, the contrast between the two groups of societies is striking.

The same contrast is to be found inside Germany. The districts that are highest above the average are all Catholic: Posen (18.2 murders of all kinds per million inhabitants), Donau (16.7), Bromberg (14.8), Upper and Lower Bavaria (13.0). Similarly, within Bavaria, the provinces are more productive of homicides the fewer Protestants they have:

Provinces

Catholic minority	Murders and premeditated murders per million inhabitants	Catholic majority	Murders and premeditated murders per million inhabitants	More than 90% Catholic	Murders and premeditated murders per million inhabitants
Rhine Palatinate	2.8	Lower Franconia	9.0	Upper Palatinate	4.3
Central Franconia	6.9	Swabia	9.2	Upper Bavaria	13.0
Upper Franconia	6.9			Lower Bavaria	13.0
Average	5.5	Average	9.1	Average	10.1

Only the Upper Palatinate is an exception to the rule. And, in any case, one has only to compare the previous table with that on page 157 for the inversion between the distribution of suicide and homicide to be clearly apparent.

6. While family life has a moderating action on suicide, it tends to incite to murder. During the years 1884–87, a million married men produced, on average, 5.07 murders per year, while a million unmarried men above the age of 15 gave 12.7. The former thus seem to enjoy a preservation coefficient of around 2.3 over the latter. However, we must take account of the fact that the two categories of men are not the same age and that the intensity of an urge to commit homicide varies at different stages in life. On average, unmarried men are aged between 25 and 30, and married ones around 45. And it is

between the ages of 25 and 30 that the tendency to murder reaches its peak: a million individuals of that age produce an annual total of 15.4 murders, while by 45 years the rate is only 6.9. The relation between the first and second of these figures is 2.2. Thus, by the sole fact of their greater age, married men ought to commit half as many murders as unmarried ones. So their situation, which appears privileged, does not derive from the fact that they are married, but from the fact that they are older. Domestic life does not confer any immunity on them.

Not only does it not protect against homicide, but one is inclined to think that it actually increases the likelihood. It is quite probable that the married population, in principle, enjoys a higher standard of morality than the unmarried. It owes this superiority not so much in our view to matrimonial selection (though the effects of that are not negligible), as to the action of the family on each of its members. There is no doubt that a person is less morally strengthened when isolated and left to his own devices than when he is constantly subject to the beneficent discipline of the family. So if, where homicide is concerned, the married are no better off than the unmarried, this is because the moral influence that they enjoy, which ought to discourage them from all sorts of crimes, is partially neutralized by an aggravating factor that incites them to murder, which must have to do with family life.*

In short, then, suicide sometimes coexists with homicide, and sometimes the two are mutually exclusive; sometimes they react in the same way under the influence of the same conditions, and sometimes they react in contrary ways – the cases of antagonism being more numerous. How can we explain these apparently contradictory facts?

The only way to reconcile them is to accept that there are different kinds of suicide, some of which have a certain affinity with homicide, while others are antagonistic to it; because it is not possible for one single phenomenon to behave so differently in the same circumstances. The suicide that varies as murder

* These observations are intended to raise the question rather than to resolve it. That can only be achieved when one has isolated the effects of age and marital status, as we did for suicide.

does and the suicide that varies in opposition to it cannot be of the same kind.

Indeed, we have shown already that there are different kinds of suicide, the characteristics of which are not at all the same. The conclusion of the previous book is thus confirmed, while it serves at the same time to explain the facts that we have just described. In themselves they would have been enough to suggest the internal diversity of suicide to us, but the hypothesis ceases to be one when we put it together with the results we obtained earlier, quite apart from the fact that this association gives supplementary proof of these results. In fact, now that we know the different kinds of suicide and what they consist of, we can easily see which are the ones incompatible with homicide and those that, on the contrary, derive in part from the same causes, as well as the reason why incompatibility is the more general rule.

The kind of suicide that is currently the most widespread and which most contributes to raising the annual figure of voluntary deaths is egotistical suicide. This is characterized by a state of depression and apathy produced by exaggerated individuation. The individual no longer wishes to live, because he is no longer attached to the only intermediary between himself and reality, which is society. Having too powerful a feeling of himself and his own worth, he wants to be an end in and for himself and, since such an aim cannot be enough for him, he wearily endures a boring existence that henceforth appears to him devoid of meaning. Homicide depends on the opposite conditions. It is a violent act that is not carried out without passion. And, when society is integrated in such a way that it leaves little room for individuation of its component parts, the intensity of collective states raises the general level of passionate life; indeed, nowhere is there ground so favourable to the development of specifically homicidal passions. Where the domestic spirit has retained its old strength, offences against the family are considered sacrileges that cannot be too cruelly avenged, and the avenging of which cannot be left to third parties. Hence the practice of *vendetta* which still stains our Corsica with blood as it does

some southern countries. Where religious faith is very strong, it often inspires murder; the same is true of political belief.

Moreover, and above all, the homicidal tendency in a general way is all the more violent the less it is restrained by the public conscience, that is to say when attacks on life are more easily excused; and since they are judged less serious the lower the price public morality attaches to the individual and what concerns him, weak individuation or – to use our own term – a state of excessive altruism encourages homicide. This is why, in inferior societies, killing is more frequent and less seriously punished. This frequency and the relative indulgence it enjoys derive from one and the same cause. The lesser degree of respect accorded to individual personalities lays them more open to violence, while at the same time making such violence appear less criminal. Egotistical suicide and homicide thus derive from antagonistic causes, and consequently it is impossible for one to flourish where the other does. When social passions are rife, a man is a lot less inclined to indulge in sterile reveries or the cold calculation of the epicurean. When he is used to holding the fate of individuals cheap, he is not inclined to indulge in worries about his own fate. And when he attaches little importance to human suffering, he will find the burden of his own suffering is lighter.

By contrast, for the same reasons, altruistic suicide and homicide can very well progress in parallel, because they depend on conditions that differ only in degree. When one has been brought up to despise one's own existence, one cannot attach much value to that of others. This is why homicide and voluntary death are both endemic among certain primitive peoples. But it is improbable that the cases of parallelism that we have encountered among civilized nations can be attributed to the same origin. It is not a state of exaggerated altruism that can have produced those suicides that we have sometimes seen in the most cultivated milieux coexist in great numbers with murder. Altruism, if it is to drive to suicide, must be exceptionally intense, even more intense than to drive to homicide. Indeed, however small the value I attach to the life of the individual in

general, that of the individual I am will always have more worth in my eyes than that of others. Other things being equal, the average man is more inclined to respect the human person in himself than in his fellows, and consequently he needs a more powerful cause to abolish this feeling of respect in the first case than in the second. Today, apart from a few special and relatively small environments such as the army, the taste for impersonality and renunciation is too little marked and the contrary feelings too general and too strong to make self-sacrifice so easy. There must therefore be another, more modern form of suicide, equally liable to be combined with homicide.

This is anomic suicide. Anomie does in fact give rise to a state of exasperation and irritated lassitude which can, according to circumstances, turn against the individual himself or against others; in the first case, we have suicide, in the second, homicide. As for the causes determining in which direction the forces that have thus been over-excited will turn, they probably depend on the moral constitution of the agent, which will bend one way or the other depending on its greater or lesser resistance. A man of average morality kills others rather than himself. We have even seen that sometimes the two manifestations occur one after the other, being simply the two aspects of a single action (which shows how close is the affinity between them). The state of exacerbation in which the individual then finds himself is such that, to relieve himself of it, he needs two victims.

This is why nowadays we encounter a certain parallelism in the development of homicide and suicide chiefly in large towns and in regions of intense civilization. This is because anomie is at an acute stage in such places. The same cause prevents murders from declining as quickly as suicides increase. Indeed, while the progress of individualism withers one of the roots of homicide, anomie, which accompanies economic development, fertilizes another. In particular, we can believe that if in France, and above all in Prussia, killing of oneself and killing of others have increased simultaneously since the war, the reason lies in the moral instability which has become more widespread in the two countries, for different reasons. Finally, this explains why, despite these partial correlations, antagonism is the more gen-

eral rule. This is because anomic suicide only takes place in large numbers at special points, where industrial and commercial activity is highly developed. Egotistical suicide is probably the most common, and it excludes crimes of blood.

We thus arrive at the following conclusion. While suicide and homicide frequently vary inversely to one another, this is not because they are two different aspects of one and the same phenomenon. It is because, in some respects, they constitute two contrary social trends. They thus exclude one another as day excludes night or as the diseases of extreme dryness are not found with those of extreme humidity. Yet, if this general opposition does not prevent some harmony, this is because certain types of suicide, instead of depending on causes opposed to those which cause homicide, on the contrary express the same social state and evolve in the same moral environment. Moreover, we can assume that the homicides that coexist with anomic suicide and those that coexist with altruistic suicide will not be of the same kind; and that homicide, consequently, like suicide, is not a single, indivisible criminological entity, but must involve a number of varieties that are very different from one another. But this is not the place to go further into this important question of criminology.

Therefore, it is not true that suicide has fortunate repercussions that make it less immoral or that, consequently, there may be good reason not to interfere with its development. It is not a derivative of homicide. Certainly, the moral constitution on which egotistical suicide depends and the one that reduces murder among civilized peoples are connected with one another. But the suicide victim in this category, far from being an aborted murderer, has nothing in common with murderers. He is a sad, depressed being. As a result, we can condemn his action without transforming those on the same path as him into killers. Does one suggest that disapproving of suicide means at the same time disapproving of and eventually weakening the state of mind from which it derives, namely that sort of hyperaesthesia in everything that concerns the individual? And that, in this way, we risk reinforcing the taste for impersonality and the homicide that derives from it? But individualism, if it is to

contain the tendency to murder, does not need to reach that excessive degree of intensity which makes it a cause of suicide. For an individual to be loath to shed the blood of his fellow men, it is not necessary for him to be attached only to himself. It is enough for him to love and respect the human person in general. So the tendency to individuation can be kept within reasonable limits without consequently reinforcing the tendency to homicide.

As for anomie, since it produces both homicide and suicide, anything that can hold it back has an effect on both of these. We do not even need to fear that, once it has been prevented from manifesting itself in the form of suicide, it will emerge in a higher rate of murder, because a man who has enough sensitivity to moral discipline to give up the idea of killing himself out of respect for the public conscience and its prohibitions, will be even more impervious to homicide, which is more strongly condemned and punished. In any event, we have seen that it is the best who kill themselves in such cases, so there is no reason to favour a selection that would be retrogressive.

This chapter can serve to throw light on a much debated problem.

We know how much discussion there has been over the matter of whether the feelings that we have for our fellow human beings are only an extension of egotistical feelings or whether, on the contrary, they are independent. We have just seen that neither of these hypotheses is well-founded. Certainly, pity for others and self-pity are not alien to one another, since they increase or decrease in parallel, but one does not derive from the other. If there is any affinity between them, this is because they both derive from a single state of the collective conscience and are only different aspects of it. What they express is the way in which public opinion assesses the moral value of the individual in general. If he counts for a good deal in the public mind, we apply this social judgement to others at the same time as to ourselves: their person, like our own, acquires greater worth in our eyes and we become more sensitive to that which individually affects each one of them as well as to what particularly affects us. Their sorrows, like our own,

are less bearable to us. The sympathy that we feel for them is not therefore just an extension of that which we have for ourselves; yet both are the effects of a single cause: they are conditioned by the same moral state. Of course, it varies according to whether it is applied to ourselves or to others; in the first case, our egotistical instincts reinforce it, while in the second they weaken it; but it is present and active in one as in the other. Thus it is that even the feelings which seem to be most attached to the personal make-up of the individual depend on causes beyond and outside him! Our egotism itself is, to a large extent, a product of society.

TABLE 33*

Suicides by age of married and widowed people according to whether they do or do not have children *(French départements excluding the Seine)*

Absolute figures for the years 1889–91.

Age	Married		Widowed	
	Childless	With children	Childless	With children
		Men		
0–15	1.3	0.3	0.3	
15–20	0.3	0.6		
20–25	6.6	6.6	0.6	
25–30	33.0	34.0	2.6	3.0
30–40	109.0	246.0	11.6	20.6
40–50	137.0	367.0	28.0	48.0
50–60	190.0	457.0	48.0	108.0
60–70	164.0	385.0	90.0	173.0
70–80	74.0	187.0	86.0	212.0
Over 80	9.0	36.0	25.0	71.0
		Women		
0–15				
15–20	2.3	0.3	0.3	
20–25	15.0	15.0	0.6	0.3
25–30	23.0	31.0	2.6	2.3
30–40	46.0	84.0	9.0	12.6
40–50	55.0	98.0	17.0	19.0
50–60	57.0	106.0	26.0	40.0
60–70	35.0	67.0	47.0	65.0
70–80	15.0	32.0	30.0	68.0
Over 80	1.3	2.6	12.0	19.0

* This table was drawn up with unpublished documents from the Ministry of Justice. We were not able to make much use of it, because the census did not show, at each age, the number of married people and widowed ones without children. However, we are publishing the results of our work in the hope that it will be useful later when this gap in the census figures has been filled.

CHAPTER 3
PRACTICAL CONSEQUENCES

Now that we know what suicide is, and what are its main types and laws, we have to examine the attitude that present-day society should adopt towards it.

However, this question in itself presupposes another. Can the current state of suicide in the civilized nations be considered normal or abnormal? How one answers this question will depend on whether one considers reform necessary and possible in order to reduce it, or else, on the contrary, feels that it is best to accept it as it is, much as one may deplore it.

I

Readers may be surprised that the question can be asked.

Indeed, we are accustomed to consider everything immoral as abnormal. So if, as we have demonstrated, suicide offends the moral conscience, it seems impossible not to see it as a socially pathological phenomenon. But we showed elsewhere* that even the pre-eminent form of immorality, namely crime, should not necessarily be classified among the morbid manifestations of society. Admittedly, this statement upset some people and it even appeared, on superficial examination, to undermine the foundations of morality. Yet there is nothing subversive about it. To convince oneself of its truth one has only to go back to the argument on which it rests, which can be summed up as follows.

Either the term 'sickness' means nothing, or it means some-

* See *Règles de la méthode sociologique*, Chapter III.

thing avoidable. Of course, everything that is avoidable is not morbid, but everything that is morbid can be avoided, at least by the general run of individuals. Unless we want to do away with all distinction between ideas and terminology, it is impossible to apply the word to a state or characteristic that the beings of a particular species cannot *not* have, that is, something necessarily implied in their constitution. On the other hand, we have only one objective sign, empirically determinable and capable of being verified by others, by which we can recognize the existence of this necessity, and this is universality. When, everywhere and at all times, two facts are met with in conjunction, without a single exception being noted, it is contrary to all notions of methodology to imagine that they can be separated. It is not that one is always the cause of the other; the link between them may be mediate,* but it is no less there and no less necessary.

There is no known society in which we cannot see, in different forms, some kind of more or less advanced criminal activity. There is no people whose moral code is not daily violated. We must therefore conclude that crime is necessary, that it cannot not exist and that the fundamental conditions of social organization, as far as we know them, logically imply it. Hence it is normal. It would be pointless to mention the inevitable imperfections of human nature and to claim that evil, though it cannot be prevented, does not cease to be evil: this is the language of the priest, not the scientist. A necessary imperfection is not a sickness; otherwise, we should have to find sickness everywhere, because imperfection is everywhere. There is no function of the organism, no anatomical form for which it is impossible to imagine some improvement. It is sometimes said that an optician would blush to have manufactured an optical instrument as crude as the human eye. But no one has suggested, or could suggest, that for this reason the structure of the organ is abnormal. There is more: it is impossible that what is necessary should not have in it some perfection, to use the somewhat

* For that matter, is not every logical link mediate? However close the two terms that it connects, they are always distinct and consequently there is always a gap between them, a logical interval.

theological language of our opponents. *Whatever is an essential condition of life cannot fail to be useful, unless life itself is not useful.* From this, there is no escape. And we have indeed shown how crime can serve a purpose, though it does so only if it is censured and repressed. It has wrongly been believed that the simple fact of cataloguing it among the phenomena of normal sociology implied forgiving it. While it is normal that there should be crimes, it is normal that they should be punished: crime and punishment are the two facets of an inseparable duality. We cannot do without one any more than the other. Any abnormal relaxation in the system of repression has the effect of stimulating criminality and giving it an abnormal degree of intensity.

Let us apply these ideas to suicide.

Admittedly, we do not have enough information to be able to state categorically that there is no society in which suicide does not occur. There is only a small number of peoples about whom we are informed in this respect by statistics. For the rest, the existence of chronic suicide can only be demonstrated through the traces that it leaves in the law; and we do not know for certain that suicide has been the object of legislation everywhere. However, we can state that this is the most general case. Sometimes it is forbidden, sometimes it is censured; sometimes there is a formal prohibition of it, sometimes this involves reservations and exceptions. But all analogies lead us to believe that this has never been a matter of indifference for law and morals; that is to say, that it has always been important enough to attract attention from the public conscience. In any case, it is certain that suicidal trends have always existed, with greater or lesser intensity from one period to another, among the peoples of Europe: we have statistical proof of this since the last century and juridical records for previous times. Suicide is therefore an element in their normal make-up and even, quite probably, in the make-up of any society.

Moreover, it is not impossible to see how it is connected to society.

This is chiefly evident in the case of altruistic suicide in inferior societies. For the very reason that the strict subordination of the

individual to the group is the principle on which they rest, altruistic suicide is, so to speak, a necessary element in collective discipline. If a man did not then consider his life cheap, he would not be what he should; and, as soon as he attaches little importance to his life, it is inevitable that everything will become an excuse for escaping from it. So there is a close link between the practice of this suicide and the moral organization of such societies. The same is true today in those special environments where self-denial and impersonality are imposed. Even now, the military spirit can only be strong if the individual is detached from himself, and such detachment necessarily opens the way to suicide.

For the opposite reason, in societies and milieux where the dignity of the person is the ultimate goal of conduct, and where man is a God for man, the individual is easily tempted to take the man in himself as a God and set himself up as the object of his own worship. When morality is chiefly attached to giving him a very high idea of himself, certain combinations of circumstances are enough to make him incapable of perceiving anything above himself. Of course, individualism is not necessarily egotism, but the two are close; one cannot stimulate the one without making the other more widespread. This is how egotistical suicide is produced. Finally, among peoples where progress is and must be rapid, the rules that confine individuals must be sufficiently flexible and malleable, because if they keep the stiff rigidity that they have in primitive societies, the development that has been impeded in this way will not be accomplished fast enough. But in such cases it is inevitable that desires and ambitions, being less strongly repressed, will burst out violently at certain points. As soon as men are given the excuse that it is a duty for them to progress, it is more difficult to make them resign themselves and, as a result, the number of discontented and worried people will certainly increase. So any morality of progress and perfection is inseparable from a degree of anomie. In this way, a particular moral constitution corresponds to each type of suicide and is implicated in it. One cannot be without the other, because suicide is simply the form necessarily taken

by each constitution in certain definite circumstances, but which cannot not occur.

However, it will be said that these various trends only determine suicide if they exaggerate it; so isn't it possible that they have everywhere the same moderate intensity? To say this is to want the conditions of life to be everywhere the same, which is neither possible nor desirable. In every society there are particular milieux into which collective states only penetrate by modifying themselves: in different cases, they are either reinforced or weakened. For a trend to have a particular intensity throughout the country, it must therefore in certain respects exceed this or not attain it.

But these excesses, either above or below, are not only inevitable; they have their uses. If the most general state is also the one that is most appropriate in the most general circumstances of social life, it cannot be related to the other circumstances; yet society must be able to adapt to both. A man whose aptitude for activity will never exceed the average cannot survive in situations that demand an exceptional effort. In the same way, a society in which intellectual individualism cannot be exaggerated would be incapable of shaking off the yoke of tradition and renewing its beliefs even when this is necessary. Conversely, where this same state of mind is unable, when required, to be reduced enough to allow the opposite trend to develop, what would happen in time of war, when passive obedience is the chief duty? But for all these forms of activity to be able to arise when they are useful, society must not have entirely unlearned them. It is therefore essential that they should have a place in communal life, that there should be spheres where an uncompromising spirit of criticism and free inquiry is upheld, and others, like the army, where the old religion of authority is kept more or less intact. Of course, in normal times, the effects of these special sites must not extend beyond certain limits: since the feelings that are developed there correspond to peculiar circumstances, it is essential that they should not become general. But while it is important that they should be localized, it is equally important that they should exist. This need will seem

still more evident if we consider that societies are not only obliged to confront different situations in the course of the same period of time, but that they can also not survive without transforming themselves. The normal proportions of individualism and altruism which are appropriate to modern nations will no longer be the same a century from now – and the future would not be possible unless its seeds already existed in the present. For a collective tendency to be able to weaken or intensify as it develops, it is necessary for it not to fix itself once and for all in a single form which it cannot later discard; it could not vary in time if it offered no variety in space.*

The different currents of collective sadness that derive from these three moral states are not themselves without *raisons d'être*, provided they are not excessive. It is a mistake to think that unmitigated joy is the normal condition of sensibility. Man could not live if he were entirely immune to sadness. There are many sorrows to which one could not adapt except by loving them, and the pleasure that one finds in these is necessarily imbued with some melancholy. So there is nothing morbid about melancholy except when it occupies too large a place in life; but life is no less morbid when melancholy is totally excluded from it. A taste for joyful expansiveness must be moderated by the contrary feeling. It is only on this condition that one can keep a balance and remain in harmony with things. It is with societies as with individuals. A morality that is too cheerful is a loose morality, only appropriate to nations in decadence and only found in such nations. Life is often harsh, and often disappointing or empty. The collective sensibility must therefore reflect this side of existence. This is why, beside the optimistic trend that urges men to look on the world with

* The thing that has helped to confuse this question is that people are not ready enough to notice how relative these ideas of health and sickness are. What is normal today will no longer be so tomorrow, and vice versa. The copious intestines of primitive man were normal in relation to his environment, but would not be so today. What is morbid for individuals may be normal for society. Neurasthenia is an illness from the point of view of individual physiology, but what would a society be without its neurasthenics? They have a social role to play in present times. When one says that a state is normal or abnormal, one should add in relation to what; if not, we shall not be understood.

confidence, there must be an opposite trend, naturally less intense and less general than the other – yet able partially to contain it, because a tendency does not limit itself, it can only ever be limited by another tendency. Indeed it seems, according to some indicators, that the leaning towards a particular kind of melancholy increases as one moves up the scale of social types. As we said in another work,*[1] it is a remarkable fact that the great religions of the most civilized peoples should be more profoundly imbued with sadness than the simpler beliefs of earlier societies. It is assuredly not that the pessimistic trend is destined finally and entirely to submerge the other, but it is a proof that it is not losing ground and does not seem liable to disappear. For it to exist and survive, there must be a special organ in society that serves as a substratum for it. There must be groups of individuals who more particularly represent this disposition of the collective mood. But the part of the population that plays this role is inevitably the one in which ideas of suicide easily take root.

But it does not follow from the fact that a suicidogenic trend of a particular intensity should be considered as a phenomenon of normal sociology, that every trend of the same kind necessarily has the same character. While a spirit of self-denial, a love of progress and a liking for individuation have a place in every kind of society and cannot exist without becoming at certain points generators of suicide, they also necessarily have this property only to a particular degree, which varies from nation to nation. It is only justified if it does not exceed certain limits. In the same way, the collective tendency for sadness is only healthy if it is not overwhelming. Consequently, what we have said earlier does not settle the question of whether the present state of suicide among civilized peoples is normal or not. We still have to look into the matter of whether the huge increase that has taken place over the past century is not pathological in origin.

Suicide has been described as the ransom of civilization. It is certain that the rise is general throughout Europe and more

* See *Division du travail social*, p. 266.

marked in nations which have reached a higher point of culture. It was 411 per cent in Prussia from 1826 to 1890, 385 per cent in France from 1826 to 1888, 318 per cent in German Austria from 1841–45 to 1877, 238 per cent in Saxony from 1841 to 1875, 212 per cent in Belgium from 1841 to 1889, but only 72 per cent in Sweden from 1841 to 1871–75 and 35 per cent in Denmark during the same period. Since 1870, that is to say the time when it became a participant in European civilization, Italy has seen the number of its suicides rise from 788 cases to 1,653, or an increase of 109 per cent in twenty years. In addition, suicide is most frequent throughout the most developed regions. It has therefore been thought that there was a link between the progress of enlightenment and the increase in suicide: that one cannot happen without the other.* This thesis is like that of the Italian criminologist who think that an increase in offences is caused and compensated for by a parallel increase in economic transactions.† If this was accepted, we would have to conclude that the peculiar constitution of superior societies implies an exceptional stimulation of suicidogenic trends, and that consequently the extreme violence of these at the moment, being necessary, is normal, and there would be no special measures taken against it, unless one at the same time condemns civilization itself.‡

One thing, to start with, should warn us against this argument. In Rome, at the time when the empire was reaching its zenith, there was also a veritable hecatomb of voluntary deaths. People then might have claimed, as they do now, that this was the price of the state of intellectual development that they had reached and that it was a law for cultivated peoples to sacrifice

* Oettingen, *Ueber acuten und chronischen Selbstmord*, pp. 28–32, and *Moralstatistik*, p. 761.

† M. Poletti; though we only know his theory through the account of it given by Tarde in his *Criminalité comparée*, p. 72.

‡ True, it has been said (Oettingen), in order to avoid this conclusion, that suicide is only one of the bad sides of civilization (*Schattenseite*) and that it is possible to reduce the one without combating the other. But this is playing with words. If it derives from the very causes on which culture depends, one cannot reduce one without diminishing the other, because the only effective way to influence it is to act on its causes.

a greater number of victims to suicide. But later history shows how unfounded this deduction would have been, because the epidemic of suicide only lasted for a short time, while Roman culture has survived. Not only did Christian societies assimilate its finest fruits, but since the sixteenth century, with the discovery of printing, and following the Renaissance and the Reformation, they easily surpassed (and by a long way) the highest level ever achieved by societies in antiquity. And yet, until the eighteenth century, the suicide rate was quite low. So it was not necessary for progress to shed so much blood, since it was possible to preserve its achievements, and even to transcend them, without this continuing to have the same deadly effect. But then is it not probable that the same is true today and that there is no logical connection between the progress of civilization and that of suicide, so that the latter may be eliminated without at the same time halting the former? Moreover, as we have seen, suicide is present from the earliest stages of development and may even sometimes be extremely virulent at that point. So if it exists among the rudest of peoples, there is no reason to think that it must be linked by any necessary connection to the greatest refinement of manners. Of course, the human types seen in those distant periods have largely vanished, but their disappearance should lighten our annual tribute slightly, so it is all the more surprising that we should see a continual increase.

So there is reason to believe that this aggravation is not due to the intrinsic nature of progress, but to the particular conditions surrounding it in our time, and nothing suggests that these are normal. We must not be blinded by the brilliant progress in science, arts and industry that we see about us; it is very clear that this is taking place in the midst of a morbid state of excitement, the painful shocks of which are felt by each one of us. It is thus very possible and even likely that the upward trend in suicide originates in a pathological state that is currently affecting the progress of civilization, without being a necessary condition for it.

Indeed, the rapidity of the increase in numbers leaves us with no other hypothesis. In fewer than fifty years, they have

increased by three times, four times or five times, depending on the country. In addition to which, we know that the numbers reflect what is most inveterate in the make-up of societies, since they express the underlying humour or mood of a people and this, like the humour of individuals, reflects what is most fundamental in the state of the organism. So it must be that our social organization has been profoundly altered in the course of this century for it to have brought about such a growth in the rate of suicide. Now, it is impossible for so serious and so rapid a change not to be morbid; a society cannot alter its structure with such speed. It is only after a series of slow, almost imperceptible alterations that it succeeds in adopting new characteristics; and even then the transformations that this makes possible are limited. Once a social type is fixed, it is no longer indefinitely malleable: a limit is soon reached that cannot be exceeded. So the changes suggested by contemporary suicide statistics cannot be normal. Even without knowing precisely what these changes consist of, we can state in advance that they are the result, not of any regular evolution, but of an unhealthy disturbance which has uprooted the institutions of the past, but without putting anything in their place, because the work of centuries cannot be remade in a few years. But then, if the cause is abnormal, the effect must be the same. Consequently, what we see in the rising tide of voluntary deaths is not the growing brilliance of our civilization, but a state of crisis and upheaval which cannot continue without danger.

We can add a final reason to these. If it is true that, normally, collective sadness has a role to play in the life of societies, it is not usually so general or so intense that it penetrates the higher reaches of the social body. It retains the status of a subcurrent which the collective body feels vaguely and which consequently affects it, but without it clearly realizing this. At the very least, if these vague tendencies manage to affect the common consciousness, it is only in partial and intermittent bursts. And, generally, they are expressed only in the form of fragmentary judgements or isolated maxims that are not linked to one another, and which, despite their absolute appearance, only aim to express one aspect of reality, with contrary maxims to correct

and complement them. Hence, those melancholy aphorisms and proverbial quips against life in which at times the wisdom of nations delights, but which are no more in number than their contrary sayings. They clearly translate transient impressions which merely passed across the public consciousness without entirely occupying it. It is only when these sentiments acquire exceptional force that they attract public attention enough to become evident as a whole, coordinated and systematic, and then become the basis of complete doctrines of life. In Rome and Greece, it was when society felt itself seriously affected that the depressing theories of Epicurus and Zeno[2] emerged. The forming of these great systems is thus a sign that the pessimistic current has reached an abnormal degree of intensity, because of some disturbance in the social organism. And we know how such ideas have spread in our own time. To gain a correct idea of their number and size, it is not enough to consider the philosophies that are officially described in this way, such as those of Schopenhauer, Hartmann[3] and others. We must also take account of all those which, under different names, proceed from the same state of mind. The anarchist, the aesthete, the mystic and the revolutionary socialist, though they may not despair of the future, at least share the pessimist's feeling of hatred or disgust for what exists and feel a similar need to destroy reality or to escape from it. Collective melancholy would not have invaded the public mind to this extent if it had not begun to develop in a morbid way, so the increase in suicide which results from it is consequently of the same kind.*

So we have all the proof that we need to view the huge growth that has taken place over the past century in the number of voluntary deaths as a pathological phenomenon which is becoming daily more threatening. What can we do to dispel it?

* There is one objection to this argument. Buddhism and Jainism are systematically pessimistic doctrines of life. Should we see in this a sign of the morbid state of the peoples who have practised them? We know too little of them to decide on this matter. Our reasoning should be considered as applicable only to the peoples of Europe and even only to societies of the urban type. Within these limits, we consider it difficult to contest. It is still possible, however, that the spirit of renunciation proper to certain other societies may, without any anomaly, be formulated into a system.

II

Some writers have proposed reinstating the punitive measures that used to be in force.*

We are happy to concede that our present indulgent attitude towards suicide is excessive. Since it offends morality, it ought to be rejected with greater energy and precision, and this disapproval should be expressed in external, well-defined signs, namely by punishment. The relaxation of our punitive system in this respect is in itself an abnormal phenomenon. However, any somewhat severe penalty is unthinkable: the public conscience would not allow it, because suicide, as we have seen, is closely related to genuine good qualities which it merely exaggerates. So public opinion is easily divided in its judgement on this question. As suicide does, to some extent, derive from sentiments that it admires, it does not unreservedly and unhesitatingly condemn it. This is why theoreticians are always arguing about whether or not it is contrary to notions of morality. As it is linked by a continuous series of graduated steps to actions which are morally approved or tolerated, it is not surprising that people have sometimes considered it to be of the same nature as them and wished to extend the same tolerance to it. Such doubt is very seldom applied to homicide or theft, because the demarcation line is more clearly defined.† Moreover, the simple fact that the victim has caused his own death excites, despite everything, too much pity for there to be unmitigated condemnation.

For all these reasons, the only punishments that can be imposed are moral ones. All that is possible is to deny the suicide the honour of a proper burial place, and to deny an attempted suicide certain civil, political or family rights, for

* Among them Lisle, op. cit., pp. 437ff.

† Though even in this case the distinction between moral and immoral actions is not absolute. The opposition between good and evil is not as clear-cut as the popular conscience believes. One always moves from one to the other by imperceptible degrees and the borderlines are often blurred. However, when we are dealing with what are undeniably crimes, the distance is great and the relation between the extremes is less apparent than with suicide.

example certain attributes of paternal authority or eligibility for public office. We feel that public opinion would readily accept that anyone who has tried to evade his fundamental duties should be deprived of the corresponding rights. But however legitimate these measures may be, they could never have more than a very secondary effect; it is childish to imagine that they could be enough to reverse such a powerful trend.

In any event, by themselves, they would not reach the evil at its source. The reason that we have given up any legal prohibition of suicide is that we are not sufficiently persuaded of its immorality. We allow it to progress freely because it does not disgust us to the same extent as it once did. But it is not through legislation that we shall reawaken our moral sensibility. It is not the legislator who will make us perceive a fact as morally detestable. When the law represses actions that public feeling considers harmless, it is the law that arouses our indignation, not the action that it is punishing. Our excessive toleration of suicide derives from the fact that, since the state of mind that produces it has become general, we cannot condemn it without condemning ourselves; we are too impregnated with it not to partially excuse it. But in that case, the only way to make us stricter is to act directly on the pessimistic trend, to return it to its normal limits and contain it there, removing the majority of minds from its sphere of influence and strengthening them. Once they have returned to their normal course, they will react appropriately to whatever offends them. It will no longer be necessary to invent a repressive system: it will be put in place by itself under pressure of need. Until then, it would be artificial and of little use.

Would not education be the most certain way to achieve this result? Since it allows one to act upon characters, would it not be enough to form them in such a way as to make them more intrepid and so less indulgent towards those whose determination fails? This was Morselli's view. For him, preventive treatment of suicide consists entirely in the following precept:* 'To develop in man the power to coordinate his ideas and

* Op. cit., p. 499.

feelings, so that he is in a position to pursue a definite aim in life; in a word to give moral strength and energy to the character.' A thinker from a quite different school reaches the same conclusion: 'How can we attack the cause of suicide?' asks M. Franck.[4] 'By improving the great work of education, making an effort to develop not only intelligence, but character, not only ideas, but also beliefs.'*

However, this is to attribute a power to education that it does not possess. It is only the image and reflection of society. It imitates it and reproduces it in microcosm, it does not create it. Education is healthy when nations themselves are healthy, but it is corrupted when they are, without the power to change itself. If the moral environment is undermined, since the teachers themselves inhabit it they cannot fail to be penetrated by its effects; so how can they give to those they are educating a direction different from the one that they themselves have received? Every new generation is raised by its predecessor, so the latter must be corrected if one is to correct the following one. It is a vicious circle. It may well happen that, from time to time, someone will arise whose ideas and aspirations transcend those of his contemporaries, but it is not through isolated individuals that one can renew the moral constitution of nations. Of course, we like to think that an eloquent voice may be enough to transform the matter of society, as though by magic, but in this, as elsewhere, nothing comes of nothing. The most energetic will cannot extract out of nothing forces that do not exist, and the failures of experience always dispel these facile illusions. In any case, were a pedagogical system to succeed, by some incomprehensible miracle, in setting itself up against the social system, it would be ineffective because of this very antagonism. The moral state that one wishes to combat emerges from a collective organization and, if this persists, the child is bound to feel its influence as soon as he comes into contact with it. The artificial environment of the school can only protect him for a time and then only weakly. The more that real life captures him, the more it will undermine the work of the educator. So

* In the article 'Suicide', in *Diction. philos.*

education can only be reformed if society itself is reformed; and for that we must attack the causes of the sickness from which it is suffering.

We know these causes. We defined them when we examined the sources from which the main suicidogenic trends derive. However, there is one which certainly plays no part in the current increase in suicide: this is the altruistic current. In fact, it is losing ground today far more than gaining it; it is chiefly to be found in inferior societies. If it persists in the army, it does not seem to do so with any abnormal intensity, because it is necessary to some extent for the maintenance of the military spirit. And even there it is in decline. Therefore, the increases in egotistical suicide and anomic suicide are the only ones that can be regarded as unhealthy, and consequently these are the only ones that need concern us.

Egotistical suicide derives from the fact that society is not in every respect sufficiently integrated to keep all its members dependent on it. So if it develops to excess, this is because the state on which it depends has itself expanded to excess: society is weakened and disturbed, allowing too many of its subjects to escape too completely from its influence. Hence, the only way to remedy the evil is to give social groups sufficient cohesion for them to hold the individual more firmly and for him to be attached to them. He must feel more a part of a collective body that has preceded him in time, that will survive him and that is greater than him in every way. When this is the case, he will cease to look within himself for the sole aim of his conduct and, realizing himself to be the instrument of a goal that transcends him, he will understand that he has some purpose. Life will once more acquire some sense in his eyes because it will regain its natural goal and orientation. But what are the most appropriate groups for constantly reminding a man of this salutary feeling of solidarity?

Not political society. Nowadays, especially in our great modern states, this is too far removed from the individual to have a sufficiently effective and continuous influence upon him. Whatever links may exist between our daily lives and the whole

of public life, they are too indirect for us to have a strong, uninterrupted feeling of them. It is only when serious interests are at stake that we feel acutely our dependence on the body politic. Of course, among those individuals who make up the moral elite of the population, it is rare for the idea of fatherland to be entirely absent, but in normal times it is in the background, in a state of vague awareness, and it may disappear entirely. It takes exceptional circumstances, such as a great national or political crisis, for it to emerge into the foreground, to enter people's consciousness and to become a guiding motive of behaviour. Such an intermittent effect cannot restrain the urge to suicide in a regular way. It is necessary for the individual to realize that what he does has a goal, and to be aware of it not only on rare occasions, but at every moment in life. If his existence is not to seem worthless, he must constantly see it as serving a purpose that affects him directly. However, this is only possible if a simpler and narrower social milieu envelops him closely and offers a more immediate aim for his activity.

Religious society is no less inappropriate for this purpose. It is not that in certain conditions it could not exercise a beneficial influence, but the necessary conditions for this influence are not currently in force. It only protects from suicide if it is powerfully enough established to contain the individual tightly. It is because the Catholic religion imposes a vast system of dogma and practices on its adherents, so infiltrating every detail of their existence, including their temporal lives, that it attaches them to it more strongly than Protestantism does. The Catholic is much less at risk of losing sight of the ties that bind him to the religious group to which he belongs, because this group reminds him of itself at every moment through imperative demands that are applied to the different circumstances of life. He has no need to ask himself anxiously where his activities are leading: he refers them all to God because they are, for the most part, regulated by God, that is to say by the Church, which is the visible body of God. But also, since these commandments are supposed to emanate from a superhuman authority, the human mind does not have the right to apply its own considerations to them. It would be quite contradictory to

attribute such an origin to them and then to allow them to be criticized freely. Religion does not moderate the tendency to suicide except to the extent that it prevents men from thinking freely. However, this control of individual understanding is already difficult and will continue to become more and more so. It offends our deepest feelings. We are increasingly inclined to refuse to admit any limits to reason or to tell it: 'You may go no further.' And this tendency is not a recent one: the history of the human spirit is the very history of the progress of free-thinking. It is therefore childish to attempt to dam a current that everything proves to be irresistible. Unless the great societies of today fall into irreversible decline and we return to the little social groupings of former times,* that is to say, unless humanity returns to its point of departure, religions will not be able in future to exercise any very extensive or profound control of consciences. This is not to say that new religions will not be created; but the only viable ones will be those that give yet more room than even the most liberal sects of Protestantism now do to freedom of conscience and individual initiative. So they will not be able to exert the strong influence on their members that will be essential to prevent suicide.

Quite a few writers have seen religion as the sole cure for the ill, but this is because they have misunderstood the source of its power. They attribute this entirely to a certain number of high thoughts and noble maxims which rationalism could actually accept and which (or so they think) it is enough to fix in people's hearts and minds to protect against failings. But this is to mistake both the essence of religion and, more still, the causes of the immunity that it has sometimes conferred against suicide. This privilege did not derive from the fact that it encouraged in men some vague notion or other of a more or less mysterious 'beyond', but because of the strong and minute

* We do not wish anyone to misunderstand us. Of course, the day will come when present societies die, so they will divide into smaller groupings. However, if one derives the future from the past, this state will only be provisional: partial groups will become the material of new societies, much larger than those of today. We can also foresee that they will themselves be much larger than the ones that combined to make our present societies.

discipline by which it regulated behaviour and thought. When it is reduced to symbolic idealism and to a traditional philosophy which is debatable and more or less alien to our everyday activities, it is unlikely to have very much influence over us. A God relegated by his majesty to beyond the universe and beyond everything temporal cannot serve as a goal for our temporal activity, with the result that this is left without aim. There is, in that case, too much that is unrelated to him for religion to give sufficient meaning to life. By abandoning the world to us, as unworthy of him, he leaves us at the same time abandoned to our own devices in all that concerns the life of the world. It is not by meditating on the mysteries around us or even believing in a being who is all-powerful but infinitely far away from us, and to whom we shall only have to account for our actions in some indeterminate future, that we can prevent men from discarding life. In a word, we are protected from egotistical suicide only to the extent that we are socialized, and religions can only socialize us to the extent that they deprive us of the right to think for ourselves. And they no longer have – and, in all likelihood, never again will have – enough authority over us to obtain such a sacrifice. So it is not through religion that we can count on holding back the tide. Moreover, if those who see a religious revival as the only way to cure us were to be consistent in their reasoning, they should be demanding the re-establishment of the most archaic religions, because Judaism protects better against suicide than Catholicism, and Catholicism than Protestantism. Yet it is the Protestant religion that is most free of material practices and consequently the most idealistic. Judaism, by contrast, despite its great historical role, is still in many ways attached to the most primitive religious observances. This shows how true it is that the moral and intellectual superiority of dogma plays no part in its potential effects on suicide!

There remains the family, which has an undoubted prophylactic benefit; but it would be a mistake to suppose that it is enough for us to reduce the number of the unmarried, to halt the rise in suicide. While married people do in fact have a lesser tendency to kill themselves, this tendency itself increases with the

same regularity and in the same proportion as that of unmarried people. From 1880 to 1887, suicides by married people rose by 35 per cent (3,706 cases compared with 2,735), while suicides by the unmarried rose by only 13 per cent (2,894 cases, compared with 2,554). In 1863–68, according to Bertillon's calculations, the rate of the first was 154 per million; it was 242 in 1887, an increase of 57 per cent. Over the same period, the rate of unmarried people did not rise much more: it went from 173 to 289, an increase of 67 per cent. *The aggravation that has occurred in the course of the century is thus unconnected with marital status.*

The reason is that there have been changes in the constitution of the family which prevent it from having the same preservative effect as before. While in the past it retained most of its members in its sphere from birth to death and formed a compact, indivisible mass, endowed with a kind of perenniality, it nowadays has only an ephemeral existence. Hardly has it been constituted than it is dispersed. As soon as the children have been raised, they very often go to continue their education outside the home and, above all, when they are adults it is almost the rule for them to set up at a distance from their parents, so that the parental home is emptied. It can thus be said that for most of the time the family is now reduced to the married couple alone, and we know that this has little effect on suicide. So, occupying a smaller place in life, the family is no longer sufficient as an aim in itself. This certainly does not mean that we love our children any less, but they are engaged in our lives in a way that is less close and less continuous, so that we need some other reason for living. Since we have to live without them, we must also attach our thoughts and actions to other objects.

But above all it is the family as a collective being that this periodical dispersal reduces to nothing. Formerly, domestic society was not only a collection of individuals, united by ties of mutual affection, it was also the group itself, in its abstract, impersonal unity. It was the hereditary name with all the memories that it brought back, the family house, the ancestral field, the family's traditional situation and reputation, and so on. All that is tending to disappear. A society that dissolves at every

moment and re-forms elsewhere, in quite new conditions and with quite different elements, does not have sufficient continuity to construct a personal physiognomy, a history that is peculiar to it and to which its members can attach themselves. So if men do not replace this former goal of their activity while it is escaping them, it is impossible to avoid a huge void opening up in life.

This cause not only increases suicides by married people, but also those by the unmarried, because this family situation forces young men to leave their native family before they are ready to found one themselves; this is partly why households of only one person are becoming ever more numerous, and we have seen that this isolation strengthens the tendency to suicide. Yet there is no way of halting this trend. Formerly, when every local milieu was more or less closed to others by customs, traditions and the scarcity of means of communication, every generation was necessarily restricted to its place of origin or, at least, could not move far away from it. But as these barriers are overcome, these individual milieux are levelled and absorbed into one another, so it is inevitable that individuals will spread out, according to their ambitions and their best interests, to fill the wider spaces opened up to them. So there is no device that can prevent this necessary dispersion and restore to the family the indivisibility that was its strength.

III

So, is the sickness incurable? At first, one might think so, since none of the social groups whose beneficial influence we have previously demonstrated seems to us able to find a genuine remedy for it. But we have shown that, while religion, the family and the homeland protect from egotistical suicide, the cause of this is not to be found in the special nature of the feelings that each of them arouses. They all owe their influence to the general fact that they are social groups and they only exercise it to the extent that they are well-integrated groups, that is to say without excess in one direction or the other. A quite different group could therefore have the same effect, as long as it had the same cohesion. And there is one other such

outside the faiths, the family and political parties which we have not mentioned before: this is the one formed by the association of all workers of the same kind, all those who cooperate in the same function – the professional group or corporation.

It is implied in the definition of this group that it is appropriate for this role. Since it is made up of individuals who are occupied in the same work and whose interests are held in common or even combined, there is no field more fertile for the creation of social ideas and feelings. Identity of origin, culture and occupation make professional activity the richest material for a shared existence. Moreover, the corporation showed in the past that it was capable of being a collective person, one that was even excessively jealous of its autonomy and its authority over its members, so there is no doubt that it can act as a moral environment for them. There is no reason why corporate interest should not, in the eyes of the workers, acquire the respectable character and supremacy that social interest always possesses in relation to private interests in a well-constituted society. In addition to that, the professional group has the triple advantage over others that it belongs to every time and place, and that its empire extends to the greater part of life. It does not act on individuals in an intermittent fashion, like political society, but is always in touch with them, for the sole reason that the function it exercises, in which they collaborate, is always operational. It follows the workers wherever they go, something that the family cannot do. Wherever they are, they find it around them, reminding them of their duties and, on occasion, supporting them. Finally, since professional life is almost the whole of life, corporate action is felt in every detail of our occupations, which are thus directed to social ends. So the corporation has everything necessary to give a framework to the life of the individual, to remove him from his state of moral isolation; and, given the present inadequacy of other groups, it alone can fill this essential role.

But if it is to have this influence, it must be organized on quite different bases than the present ones. First of all, it is essential that, instead of remaining a private group that the law allows but the State overlooks, it should become a definite,

recognized organ of our public life. By this, we do not necessarily mean that it has to be made obligatory; what matters is that it should be constituted in such a way as to play a social role, instead of expressing only various combinations of individual interests. This is not all. So that the frame does not remain empty, we must place in it all the seeds of life that are of a kind to develop there. If this group is not to remain a mere formality, we must give it precise functions, and there are some which it is better suited to carry out than any other.

At present, European societies are faced with an alternative: either they leave professional life unregulated, or else they regulate it through the intermediary of the State, because there is no other body that can play this moderating role. But the State is too far from these complex situations to find the particular form appropriate to each of them. It is a clumsy machine, designed only for general and simple tasks; its activity is always uniform and cannot bend or adjust to the infinite diversity of particular circumstances. The result is that it always, inevitably, has a compressive and levelling effect in what it does. On the other hand, however, we feel that it is impossible to leave all the life that is thus unattached in a state of disorganization. So it is that, by a series of endless swings backwards and forwards, we go in turn from authoritarian regulation, made powerless by its excessive rigidity, to systematic abstention, which cannot last because of the anarchy it creates. Whether it is a matter of the length of the working day or of hygiene, of wages or of provision for accidents and social assurance, good intentions always come up against the same problems. As soon as one tries to impose rules, they turn out to be inapplicable in practice because they are not flexible enough, or at least they can only be applied to the matter for which they were designed by doing violence to it.

The only way to resolve this contradiction is to set up a number of collective forces outside the State, though subject to it, whose regulatory influence can be exercised more flexibly. Not only would reconstituted corporations meet this requirement, but it is hard to see what other group could do so.[5] They are close enough to the facts, and directly and constantly

enough in contact with them to grasp every nuance, and should be autonomous enough to respect diversity. So it is these that should manage those insurance, mutual aid and retirement funds for which so many good persons have seen the need, but which one hesitates, quite properly, to put into the already so powerful and clumsy hands of the State. They should rule on the conflicts that are continually arising between branches of the same profession, set the conditions that contracts should obey if they are to be fair (though these will be different according to the different kinds of enterprise) and, in the name of the common interest, prevent the strong from exploiting the weak. As labour is divided, so law and morality take a different form in each particular function, while of course still being based everywhere on the same general principles. Apart from the rights and duties that are common to all men, there are some that depend on the peculiar characteristics of each profession and the number of these increases, as does their extent, when professional activity becomes ever greater and more diversified. Each of these specialized disciplines requires an equally specialized body to apply and support it. What can this consist in, if not of workers who are employed in the same field?

This, very broadly, is what corporations should become if they are to give the service that we have a right to expect of them. Of course, if we consider the state in which they are at present, it is not easy to imagine that they can ever be raised to the level of moral powers. They are made up of individuals who have no ties between them, who have only superficial and intermittent relations with one another, and who are indeed inclined to consider themselves as rivals and enemies rather than collaborators. But as soon as they have so many things in common, when the relations between them and the group to which they belong are this close and continuous, feelings of solidarity, virtually unknown today, will appear and the moral temperature of these professional groups, which is now so cold and external to their members, will inevitably rise. And these changes will not occur only among agents of economic life, as the preceding examples might suggest; there is no profession in society which does not need this organization and which is

incapable of enjoying it. In this way, the whole length of the social fabric, the threads of which have become so loose, will be drawn together and strengthened.

This restoration, universally needed, unfortunately suffers from the bad reputation that the corporations of the *ancien régime* have left behind them. Yet the fact that they have survived, not only since the Middle Ages, but since Graeco-Roman antiquity,* surely has more force as an argument for their indispensability, than their recent abrogation can have as proof of their uselessness. Apart from one century, wherever professional activity has been at all developed, it has been organized corporately; so is it not highly probable that such organization is necessary and that if, a century ago, it was found not to be adequate for its role, then surely the answer was to restore and improve it, not to suppress it entirely? It is undeniable that it had become an obstacle to the most urgently needed improvements. The old corporation, narrowly local, closed to every influence from outside, had become a nonsense in a nation that was politically and morally united. Its excessive autonomy made it a State within the State, while the government, extending its roots in every direction, was increasingly bringing all secondary social bodies under its control. What was needed was to widen the base on which the institution of the corporation rested and to bring it back into the orbit of national life. But if, instead of remaining isolated, similar corporations in different places had been linked to one another in such a way as to form a single system, and all these systems had been subjected to the general supervision of the State, and thus given a lasting sense of solidarity, the despotism of routine and professional selfishness would have been kept within reasonable limits. Indeed, tradition is not so easily maintained unaltered in a large association extending over a wide area as it is in a little coterie which is confined within the limits of one town.†[6] At the same time, each individual group is less inclined to see

* The first colleges of craft workers go back to Rome under the monarchy. See Marquardt, *Privat Leben der Roemer*, II, p. 4.

† See the reasons for this in our *Division du travail social*, Book II, Chapter III, particularly pp. 335ff.

and pursue only its own interest, once it is in regular relations with the centre that manages public life. In fact, it is only on this condition that the idea of commonwealth can be sustained with enough continuity in people's minds. For, as communications would then be uninterrupted between each particular body and the authority charged with representing the general interest, society would not only be recalled to the minds of individuals in a vague and intermittent way; we should feel its presence in the whole of our daily life. By contrast, reversing all that previously existed and putting nothing in its place means that all we have done is to replace corporate egotism with individual egotism, which is still more corrosive. Hence, of all the things that were destroyed at that time, this is the only one we should regret. By abolishing the only groups that might consistently bring individual wills together, we have with our own hands broken the appointed instrument of our moral reorganization.

But it is not only egotistical suicide that would be discouraged in this way; its close relative, anomic suicide, would also be affected by the same treatment, because anomie comes from the fact that, at certain points in society, there is a lack of collective forces, that is to say of groups set up to regulate social life. So anomic suicide is partly the outcome of the same state of dispersal from which egotistical suicide also derives. However, this cause produces different effects depending on where it occurs, according to whether it is affecting active and practical functions or representative ones. The first are inflamed and exasperated by it, the second disoriented and disconcerted. The cure is thus the same in each case. And we have seen that the main role of corporations, in the future as in the past, would be to govern social functions and more particularly economic ones, thus lifting them out of the state of non-organization in which they now find themselves. Whenever excited appetites tended to exceed the limits, it would be the responsibility of the corporation to determine the share that should justly go to each group of collaborators. Being superior to its members, it would have the necessary authority to demand essential sacrifices and concessions from them, and to impose the rules. By obliging

the strong only to use their strength with discretion and preventing the weak from making endless demands, reminding both sides of their mutual duties and of the general interest, and, in some events, managing production to prevent it from degenerating into an unhealthy fever, it would moderate passions, each by each, and allow them to cool by setting limits to them. The result would be the establishment of a new kind of moral discipline without which all the discoveries of science and all improvements in well-being can only produce discontent.

One cannot see in what other milieu this law of distributive justice, which is so urgent, might develop or by what other body it might be applied. Religion, which formerly took on this role, would not now be appropriate for it, because the necessary principle of the only governance to which it might submit economic life is a contempt for riches. If it exhorts its followers to be content with their lot, it is because of the notion that our earthly condition has nothing to do with salvation. If it teaches that our duty is to accept our fate with docility as it is shaped by circumstances, it is in order to direct us entirely towards goals that are more worthy of our efforts; and it is for the same reason that it generally recommends moderation in our desires. But this passive resignation is incompatible with the place that temporal interests have now taken in collective life. The discipline that they need must have as its object not to relegate them to the background and reduce them as much as possible, but to give them a form of organization in keeping with their importance. The problem has become more complex and, while it is not a remedy to give free rein to appetites, it is no longer enough to repress them in order to contain them. If the last defenders of the old economic theories are wrong to deny that regulation is necessary today as it was previously, apologists of the religious institution are wrong to believe that yesterday's rules can be applied effectively today. In fact, the cause of the problem is the present ineffectiveness of religion.

These facile solutions have no bearing on the difficulties of the situation. Of course, only a moral power can dictate its laws to mankind, but it must still be sufficiently engaged with the things of this world to estimate them at their true value.

The professional group has this double character. Because it is a group, it is high enough above individuals to set limits to their desires, but it lives too much through their lives not to sympathize with their needs. It is still also true that the State has an important role to play as well. It alone can appeal to the feeling of general utility and the need for organic balance against the particularism of each corporation. But we know that its action cannot be usefully exercised unless there is a whole system of secondary bodies that diversify it. Consequently, it is these that we must concentrate on nurturing.

There is, however, one kind of suicide that cannot be halted by this means: that which results from conjugal anomie. Here it seems that the contradiction facing us is insurmountable.

Its cause, we said, was the institution of divorce, together with the totality of ideas and manners from which this institution derives and which it merely sanctions. Does this mean that we should repeal it where it exists? This is too complex a question to be dealt with here; it could only be properly considered at the end of a study of marriage and its development. For the time being, we only have to consider the relations of divorce and suicide. From this point of view, we say that the only way to reduce the number of suicides due to conjugal anomie is to make marriage more indissoluble.

However, what makes the problem especially disturbing and gives it almost a dramatic interest is that one cannot reduce the number of suicides by husbands in this way without increasing that of wives. So does one or other of the two sexes necessarily have to be sacrificed? Is the solution a matter of choosing the lesser of two evils? We cannot see any other as long as the interests of the spouses in marriage remain so evidently opposed. As long as the one will chiefly need freedom and the other discipline, the institution of matrimony will be unable to profit both of them equally. But this antagonism, which currently makes a solution impossible, is not beyond remedy and one may hope that it is destined to disappear.

It comes from the fact that the two sexes do not participate equally in social life: man is actively engaged in it, while woman

only observes from a distance. As a result, he is socialized to a much higher degree than she is. His tastes, his aspirations and his outlook derive very largely from collective origins while those of his spouse are more directly subject to the influence of the organism. He consequently has quite different needs from her, so it is not possible for an institution which is designed to regulate their common life to be fair and simultaneously satisfy such contrary demands. It cannot at the same time suit two beings, one of whom is almost entirely a product of society, while the other has remained much more what nature made her. But there is no certainty that this opposition is necessarily destined to endure. In one sense, no doubt, it was less marked in the beginning than it is now, but we should not conclude from this that it is destined to be endlessly intensified. The most primitive social states are often reproduced at the highest stages of evolution, but in different forms, opposite almost to those that they had at the start. There is certainly no need to suppose that women will ever be capable of carrying out the same functions in society as men, but they might have a role that, while being peculiarly their own, is none the less more active and wider in scope than it is today. The female sex will not become more like the male sex – on the contrary, we might envisage it becoming more distinct – but, more than in the past, these differences will be used socially. For example, with men being increasingly engaged in utilitarian functions and obliged to abandon aesthetic ones, why should these not revert to women? The two sexes would thus be brought closer together, while remaining differentiated; they would be equally socialized, but in different ways.* And this is the direction that evolution seems to be taking. Women differ much more from men in the town than in the country, yet it is here that their intellectual and moral constitution is most affected by social life.

* One may foresee that this differentiation would not have the strictly regulated character that it has nowadays. Women would not be formally excluded from certain functions and relegated to others. They could choose freely, but the choice, being determined by aptitude, would generally lead them to the same kind of occupation. The division would be largely uniform, but without compulsion.

In any event, this is the only way to moderate the sad moral conflict that currently divides the sexes, the statistics for suicide providing us with definite proof of it. It is only when the gap between the spouses is reduced that marriage will not have, as it were, to favour one necessarily to the detriment of the other. As for those who demand that women should at once be accorded equal rights with men, they are too inclined to forget that the work of centuries cannot be abolished in an instant; and that, in any case, such legal equality cannot be legitimate as long as there is such flagrant psychological inequality. Our efforts must therefore be directed to reducing the latter. For men and women to be equally protected by the same institution, it is above all necessary for them to be creatures of the same kind. Only then will the indissolubility of the conjugal bond not be liable to the accusation that it serves only one of the parties involved.

IV

In short, just as suicide does not derive from any difficulty that a man may have in life, the means to halt its rise is not to make the struggle any less harsh and life more comfortable. If people kill themselves more today than they used to, this is not because we need to make more painful efforts to survive than previously or that our legitimate needs are less satisfied; what it does mean is that we no longer know where legitimate needs end, and that we can no longer perceive the goal of our efforts. Of course, competition becomes daily more intense, because greater facility in communications puts a constantly increasing number of competitors into conflict with each other. But on the other hand, a more perfect division of labour and the more complex cooperation that goes with it, by increasing and varying infinitely the jobs in which man can be of use to man, increase the means of existence or put them within reach of a greater variety of people. Even the most humble aptitudes can find a place here. At the same time the more intense production resulting from this more scientific cooperation, by increasing the capital in resources at the disposal of humankind, ensures greater

remuneration to each worker and thus maintains the balance between the greater wear on vital forces and their repair. It is certain that, at all levels in the social hierarchy, average well-being has increased, though this may not always have been apportioned in the most equitable manner. So the unease that plagues us does not derive from the fact that the objective causes of suffering have increased in number or in intensity; it bears witness, not to greater economic poverty, but to an alarming moral destitution.

However, we must understand the meaning of the word. When we say of an individual or social ill that it is entirely moral, we generally mean that it does not respond to any effective treatment, but can only be cured by repeated exhortation, systematic castigation and, in a word, by verbal action. We reason as though a system of ideas had no connection with the rest of the universe and as though, consequently, in order to undo it or redo it, it was sufficient to pronounce certain definite formulae in a certain way. We do not realize that this means applying the same beliefs and methods to the things of the spirit as the primitive man applies to the things of the physical world. Just as he believes in the existence of magic words that have the power to transmute one being into another, so we explicitly accept, without perceiving the crudeness of the idea, that with the appropriate words we can transform intellects and characters. Like the savage who, forcefully proclaiming his desire to see such or such a phenomenon occur, imagines that he is determining its appearance by virtue of sympathetic magic, we think that if we fervently express our desire to see such or such a revolution take place, it will do so of its own accord. But in reality, the mental system of a people is a system of definite forces that cannot be disturbed or rearranged by simple exhortation. It depends on the manner in which social elements are grouped and organized. Given a nation formed of a certain number of individuals arranged in a certain manner, what results is a definite whole of collective ideas and practices which remain constant as long as the conditions on which they depend also remain the same. Indeed, the nature of the collective being – and, consequently, its ways of thinking and acting –

necessarily varies according to whether the parts of which it is composed are more or less numerous and arranged in this manner or that; but you cannot modify the ways of thinking and acting without alteration in the society itself, and this cannot occur without a change to its anatomical make-up. So when we describe the sickness, of which the abnormal increase in suicide is the symptom, as a 'moral' one, we certainly do not mean to reduce it to some superficial ailment, which might be cured by soft words. On the contrary, the change in the moral temperament which this reveals to us is evidence of a profound change in our social structure. And to cure one, we must reform the other.

We have said what in our view this reform should entail. But the thing that finally demonstrates its urgency is that it is made necessary not only by the present state of suicide, but by the whole of our historical development.

In fact, the characteristic feature of this is to have successively cleared away all the former frameworks of society. They were carried off one after another, either by the slow erosion of time, or by great upheavals, but without anything coming to replace them. Originally, society was organized around the family; it was formed by the union of a certain number of smaller societies, the clans, whose members were related, or considered themselves so. This organization does not seem to have survived long in its pure state. Soon, the family ceased to be a political division and became the centre of private life. At this point, a territorial grouping was put in place of the former domestic one. Individuals who occupy the same territory come, in the long term and independently of any blood relationship, to have ideas and customs in common, but which are not, to the same extent, those of their more distant neighbours. This leads to the constitution of small groupings which have no other material basis apart from proximity and the relationships resulting from that, but each with its distinct physiognomy: this is the village, and still more the city with its dependencies. Of course, they do not usually shut themselves up in savage isolation. They form confederations, combining in various ways, and so create more complex societies, though only joining them while keeping their

own personality. They remain the basic segment which the society as a whole only reproduces on a larger scale. But little by little, as these confederations become tighter, the territorial districts are merged into each other and lose their former moral individuality. From one town to another and from one district to another, the differences decrease.* The great change brought about by the French Revolution was precisely to take this levelling to a point that was hitherto unknown. This does not mean that it was improvising; it was prepared for over a long time by the progressive centralization undertaken by the *ancien régime*. But the legal suppression of the old provinces, and the creation of new divisions that were purely artificial and nominal, gave it a permanent character. Since then, the development of means of communication have mixed up groups of peoples and wiped out almost every trace of the former state of things. And since, at the same time, what professional organization did exist was violently destroyed, all secondary organs of social life were obliterated.

A single collective force survived the whirlwind: this is the State. It consequently tended, by the force of things, to take upon itself all forms of activity that might exhibit any social character, and all that was left to counterbalance it was a disaggregated swarm of individuals. But by this same token it had to overload itself with functions to which it was not suited, and which it could not usefully carry out. The remark is often made that it is as invasive as it is impotent. It makes an unhealthy effort to extend into all kinds of things that are not its province, or that it can only grasp by doing violence to them. Hence the waste of effort with which people reproach it and which is, indeed, unrelated to the results it obtains. On the other hand, individuals are subject to no other collective action except that of the State, since it is the only organized collective. It is only through its intermediacy that they appreciate society and their state of dependence towards it. But since the State is far from them, it can only have a distant and intermittent action

* Of course, we can only outline the broad stages of this development. We are not suggesting that modern societies took over from the city-states; we have left out the intervening stages.

upon them, which means that their feeling of dependency is not actual for them with the necessary continuity and force. For the greater part of their existence, there is nothing around them to take them out of themselves and impose a brake on them. In these circumstances, it is inevitable that they should lapse into egotism or anarchy. Man cannot attach himself to ends that transcend him, and submit to a set of rules, if he sees nothing above him to which he belongs. To free him from all social pressure is to abandon him to himself and to demoralize him. And such are the two characteristics of our moral situation. While the State expands and inflates in order to keep a firm enough grip on individuals (though without success), they, having no links between them, roll around on one another like so many liquid molecules, without encountering any force that can restrain, settle and organize them.

From time to time, in order to remedy the ill, it has been proposed that some of their former autonomy should be given back to local associations; this is what is known as 'decentralizing'. But the only truly useful decentralization is the one that would at the same time produce a greater concentration of social forces. What is needed, without relaxing the links that bind each part of society to the State, is to create moral powers that will have an effect on the great multitude of individuals that the State cannot have. And today, neither the *commune*, nor the *département*, nor the province has enough ascendancy over us to exercise this influence; we see in them only conventional titles, deprived of any significance. Naturally, other things being equal, we usually prefer to live in the place where we were born or brought up. But there is no more local patriotism, nor can there be. The general life of the country, which has been definitively unified, is hostile to any such dispersion. We may regret what no longer exists, but this regret is idle. It is impossible artificially to revive a local spirit that no longer has any foundation. Given that, we may by means of some ingenious devices do something to lighten the workings of the government machine, but this is not the way to change the moral basis of society. What we might do by this means is to reduce the load of overburdened ministries and supply a little

more matter for the activities of regional authorities, but this will not be enough to make the different regions into so many moral centres. Apart from the fact that administrative measures would not be sufficient to achieve such a result, taken in itself this result is neither attainable nor desirable.

The only decentralization that, without breaking national unity, would allow an increase in centres of communal life is what we might call 'professional decentralization'. As each centre would then only be the home of a particular, limited activity, they would be inseparable from each other and the individual might consequently attach himself to them without becoming less attached to the whole. Social life cannot be divided up and remain whole unless each of the divisions represents a function: this is something understood by the growing number of writers and statesmen* who want to make the professional group the basis for our political organization, that is to say to divide the electoral college not by territorial constituencies but by corporations. The electoral college must be more than an assembly of individuals who meet on polling day, having nothing in common with one another. It can only fulfil its destined role if, instead of remaining a conventional body, it becomes a definite institution, a collective personality, with its customs and traditions, its rights and responsibilities, its own unity. The great difficulty is not to decide by decree that representatives should be chosen according to profession, and how many of them there should be, but to arrange for every corporation to become a moral being. Otherwise, all we shall do is to add an artificial, external framework to those that already exist, which we wish to replace.

In this way, a monograph on suicide has implications and a scope that extend beyond the particular order of facts with which it is particularly concerned. The questions it raises are connected with the most serious practical problems affecting us at the present time. The abnormal rise in rates of suicide and the general malaise that affects contemporary societies derive

* See on this topic Benoist, 'L'organisation du suffrage universel', in *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 1886.

from the same causes. What this exceptional number of voluntary deaths proves is that civilized societies are suffering from a condition of profound unrest, while at the same time giving evidence of how serious this is. One might even say that the rate of suicide is the yardstick of it. When these sufferings are described in the words of a theoretician, one may judge them exaggerated or inaccurately explained. But here, in the statistics of suicide, they come, as it were, to register themselves, without leaving room for personal interpretation. So we cannot stem this flood of collective depression except, at the very least, by moderating the collective sickness of which it is both the result and the symptom. We have shown that, in order to attain this end, it is not necessary either artificially to restore outdated social forms (to which one could, in any case, impart only a semblance of life), or to invent from scratch forms that are entirely new and without analogy in history. What is needed is to search in the past for the seeds of new life that it contains and to hasten its development.

As for how to determine more precisely in what way these seeds are destined to develop in future, that is to say, a detailed description of the professional organization that we need, this is something that we cannot attempt in this work. Only after a special study of the corporate regime and the laws of its development will it be possible to give more precision to the conclusions that we have drawn. Even then, one should not attach too much importance to the over-precise programmes in which political philosophers have generally indulged. These are mind games and always too far removed from the complexities of reality to have very much practical use: social reality is not simple enough and it is still too little understood for anyone to anticipate it in detail. Only a direct contact with the facts can give the teachings of science the certainty that they require. Once we have established the existence of the problem, what it consists of and what it depends on, and when consequently we know the general nature of the remedy and the point to which it should be applied, then the main thing is not to draw up in advance a plan that anticipates everything. It is to set oneself resolutely to work.

Notes

INTRODUCTION

1. *a new fact, in itself and sui generis*: Literally, a new fact constituting a class of its own. Durkheim had argued in his *Rules of Sociological Method* (1895) that the proper object of sociology should be *social facts*, which he defined there as 'any way of acting . . . which is general over the whole of a given society whilst having an existence of its own, independent of its individual manifestations' (*The Rules of Sociological Method and Selected Texts on Sociology and its Method*, ed. Steven Lukes, trans. W. D. Halls (New York: Free Press, 1982), p. 59).
2. *the events of 1848 . . . throughout Europe*: The events referred to are, in order, the liberal and nationalist revolutions that occurred throughout continental Europe in 1848, the Austro-Prussian war of 1866, the decline of the imperial French government of Napoleon III (1808–73) which would begin shortly after the acquisition of Savoy and the French Riviera in 1860, the series of trade liberalization treaties England negotiated with, among others, France, Italy, Belgium, Switzerland, Spain, Portugal, Sweden and Norway between 1862 and 1866, and the Franco-Prussian war of 1870.

BOOK ONE

Chapter 1

1. *Esquirol*: Jean Étienne Dominique Esquirol (1772–1840) was one of France's most celebrated alienists (a psychiatrist specializing in mental illness). The asylums at Rouen, Nantes and Montpellier were designed according to his plans and he eventually became chief physician of the asylum at Charenton.

2. *Falret*: Jean Pierre Falret (1794–1870), French psychiatrist known for the syndrome that bears his name. Falret's discovery of 'circular insanity' that veers from periods of depression to periods of elation is the foundation of our contemporary understanding of manic-depressive or bipolar affective disorder.
3. *monomanias*: A pathological obsession with a single subject or idea.
4. *folie des grandeurs*: Delusion of grandeur.
5. *Brierre de Boismont*: Alexandre Brierre de Boismont (1797–1881), French alienist, student of Esquirol. In his *Du suicide et de la folie-suicide* (1856), he separates 'suicides of the mad' from 'suicides of the rational' in a manner not unlike that of Durkheim.
6. *the examples of Decius, Assas and so on*: Gaius Messius Quintus Trajanas Decius (201–251), Roman emperor from 249 until he met his demise during a military defeat in the marshes of the Dobrudscha. Louis, Chevalier d'Assas (1733–60), legendary French captain. Surprised by enemy troops in the woods near Clostercamp during the Seven Years War and told that any noise would mean his death, he alerted his regiment to the danger with the famous cry of 'À moi, Auvergne, ce sont les ennemis!' ('Help, Auvergne, it's the enemy!').
7. *Curtius, Codrus or Aristodemus*: Marcus Curtius, legendary hero of ancient Rome who is said to have leapt to his death into a gulf in the forum in 362 BC. Seers had declared that the gulf would close only when Rome's most valuable possession was thrown in and Curtius interpreted this to mean a brave citizen had to offer himself. Codrus was the legendary last king of Athens. In 1068 BC, during the Dorian invasion of Peloponnesus, it was prophesied that Athenian victory would only be assured with the death of the Athenian king at enemy hands and Codrus responded by disguising himself as a peasant and provoking a fight with Dorian soldiers, who killed him. Aristodemus was a semi-legendary ruler of Messenia from the eighth century BC who committed suicide on his daughter's tomb. He had earlier taken his daughter's life with his own hands to prove false a claim that she was not a virgin, after he had suggested her as a virgin sacrifice to the Delphic oracle.
8. *neurasthenia*: A generalized nervous malaise allegedly brought on by the conditions of life in modern civilization. Popularized in the American neurologist George M. Beard's *American Nervousness* (1881). The term is now largely abandoned.
9. *German länder*: Countries, states or provinces.

Chapter 2

1. *M. de Quatrefages*: Jean Louis Armand de Quatrefages de Bréau (1810–92), French naturalist and occupier of a chair in anthropology and ethnography at the Musée d'histoire naturelle.
2. *Prichard*: James Cowles Pritchard (1786–1848), English ethnologist who was one of the founding figures in British anthropology. He believed humankind to consist of five distinct races: the Caucasian, the Mongolian, the Malayan, the Negro and the American.
3. *M. Broca*: Paul Broca (1824–80), French surgeon and anthropologist, a pioneer in physical anthropology and craniometry.
4. *the Cymry*: The Welsh.
5. *the ancient Belgae*: A Celtic people who formed the third part of ancient Gaul (the Celtae and the Aquitani making up the others), separated from the Celtae by the Seine and the Marne.
6. *Gall*: Franz Joseph Gall (1758–1828), founder of phrenology, which posited an absolute relation between the shape of one's skull and the state of one's faculties and talents.
7. *the Koch bacillus*: Also known as *mycrobacterium tuberculosis*, the bacillus that is the causative agent of tuberculosis in human beings, named for the German bacteriologist who discovered it, Robert Koch (1843–1910).
8. *Dr Luys*: Jules Bernard Luys (1828–97), French alienist whose name is eponymically attached to the subthalamic nucleus and the centre median nucleus, two structures in the brain that are important in current thinking about the functional changes in the brain that accompany Parkinson's disease.
9. *Legoyt*: Alfred Legoyt (1815–85), French economist and statistician, director of the Bureau of General Statistics in France.

Chapter 3

1. *Guerry*: André Michel Guerry (1802–66), French statistician.
2. *Montesquieu*: Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de la Brède et de Montesquieu (1689–1775), first of the great *philosophes* of the eighteenth century and author of *De l'esprit des lois* (1748). Durkheim wrote his Latin thesis on Montesquieu (1892).
3. *the expedition to Egypt*: Napoleon's failed attempt to challenge British colonial power in that part of the world, beginning in May 1798 and ending in August 1801.

4. *the retreat from Moscow*: During the winter of 1812, following Napoleon's ill-fated invasion of Russia.
5. *Lombroso and Ferri*: Cesare Lombroso (1836–1909), Italian criminologist who argued that the criminal population should be considered a special type of the human race displaying physical, nervous, and mental anomalies due partly to degeneration, partly to atavism. Lombroso's work would later become an important intellectual support for eugenicist and scientific racism. Enrico Ferri (1856–1929), Italian criminologist and politician. Long-time editor of a socialist daily, *Avanti*, he became a fascist with the coming to power of Mussolini.
6. *pari passu*: At an equal pace or rate.

Chapter 4

1. *It has been said*: The reference here is to Gabriel Tarde (1843–1904), author of *Les Lois de l'imitation* (1890) and *Les Lois sociales* (1898), among others. In Durkheim's lifetime, Tarde was one of the chief sociological competitors of the Durkheimian school. *On Suicide* has in fact been described by Philippe Besnard as 'an anti-Tarde book' ('Durkheim critique de Tarde: des *Règles* au *Suicide*', in *La Sociologie et sa méthode: Les Règles de Durkheim un siècle après*, ed. by Massimo Borlandi and Laurent Mucchielli (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000), pp. 221–43) and it is certain that this section on imitation targets Tarde's ideas on the same subject.
2. *Panurge's sheep*: In the *Quart Livre* (1552) of the exploits of Gargantua and Pantagruel by François Rabelais (*c.* 1483–1553), Panurge is called a cuckold by a group of sheep merchants and retaliates by buying a sheep and throwing it into the sea, whereupon not only the other sheep but the merchants themselves follow it, to their own deaths.
3. *Pinel*: Philippe Pinel (1745–1826), French physician and psychiatrist, chief physician at the Salpêtrière from 1795, led the revolution in treatment of the insane from chains and brutality to a more humane regime.
4. *Lord Castlereagh*: Henry Robert Stewart Castlereagh (1769–1822), 2nd Marquis of Londonderry, Anglo-Irish politician famously despised in prose and poem by the likes of Shelley and Byron. He committed suicide by slitting his throat with a letter-opener. It is unclear to what historical episode Durkheim is referring here.

5. *tree of Timon the Misanthropist*: Timon of Athens, the protagonist of Shakespeare's play of the same name, lived during the Peloponnesian War (431–404 BC) and was alluded to by Aristophanes and other ancient Greek writers. In Shakespeare's account (1607), Timon is approached by two Athenian senators seeking a monetary contribution to help defend the city against an invading army. Timon promises them a 'kindness', but they realize that what he has in mind is an invitation for the Athenians to come and hang themselves from one of his trees.
6. *Josephus . . . killed themselves*: Flavius Josephus (AD 37–*c.* 101), Jewish historian. The episode noted is the Roman siege under Titus in AD 70.
7. *Xanthians . . . besieged by Brutus*: When Brutus seized this Lycian city in 42 BC, the residents killed their families and set themselves aflame on funeral pyres.
8. *according to Montaigne . . . small number of them*: Michel Eyquem de Montaigne (1533–92), famed French essayist. Durkheim's citation is incorrect; the Xanthian episode is discussed in Book I, Chapter XL of the *Essais*.

BOOK TWO

Chapter 3

1. *Bertillon père*: Louis Adolphe Bertillon (1821–83), French physician and statistician, one of the founders of the École d'anthropologie and the Société d'anthropologie. The work of his son, Jacques Bertillon (1851–1922), a statistician and the author of a number of important early works in French demography, is also cited in Durkheim's footnote on this page and elsewhere in *On Suicide*.
2. *M. Letourneau*: Charles Letourneau (1831–1902), French anthropologist, professor of the history of civilizations at the École d'anthropologie.
3. *article for the Revue philosophique*: This article, written early in Durkheim's career, is titled 'Suicide et natalité: étude de statistique morale' ('Suicide and the birth rate: a study of moral statistics').
4. *Malthusianism*: Theory of English economist Thomas Robert Malthus (1766–1834) that the tendency of a population is to increase faster than the means of subsistence.

5. *its action is more effective the stronger its composition*: The discussion of volume and density Durkheim indicates in the footnote on this page takes place on pages 136–37 of the W. D. Halls translation of Durkheim's work on method (*The Rules of Sociological Method and Selected Texts on Sociology and its Method* (New York: Free Press, 1982)).
6. *the writers of the time*: Claude-Adrien Helvétius (1715–71), French philosopher and *littérateur*, is cited in the footnote.
7. *the coup d'état*: Napoleon III's dissolution of the National Assembly in 1851 and declaration of himself as emperor a year later.
8. *the parliamentary coup d'état of 16 May 1877 . . . as well as the elections which in 1889 brought an end to Boulangist agitation*: In 1877, French President Patrice MacMahon (1808–93), a monarchist, dismissed the prime minister and later dissolved the National Assembly in an effort to replace republicans with monarchists. His effort failed, but the Third Republic remained unstable at least partially as a result of the populist demagoguery of General Georges Boulanger (1837–91), who might have effected a coup in early 1889 but was thwarted when the government issued a warrant for his arrest, forcing him to leave the country in April and effectively ending the crisis. He committed suicide in 1891.
9. *purely dynastic wars like those in the Crimea or Italy . . . in Prussia at the time of the wars of 1864 and 1866*: The wars alluded to are, in order, the Crimean war of 1853–56, the second and third wars of Italian unification in 1859 and 1866–67, the German–Danish war of 1864 and the Austro-Prussian war of 1866.

Chapter 4

1. *Bartholin . . . Danis*: Thomas Bartholin (1659–90), Danish physician and anatomist. The full title of the work Durkheim cites is *Antiquitatum danicarum de causis contemptae a danis adhuc gentilibus mortis* (1689).
2. *Goths*: A Germanic people who in the first century of the modern era appear to have inhabited the middle part of the basin of the Vistula. Subdivisions begin to appear around the end of the third century; the Visigoths were the group that occupied southern Gaul and Spain in the fifth century and sacked Rome in 410.
3. *among the Thracians, the Heruli*: The Thracians were the

indigenous Indo-European people of the Roman province of south-east Europe spanning modern southern Bulgaria, north-eastern Greece and European Turkey. The Heruli were a Germanic tribe originating in Scandinavia.

4. *Silvius Italicus*: Titus Catius Silius Italicus (*c.* AD 25–101), Latin epic poet.
5. *Vedas*: Religious scriptures making up part of the core of the Brahmanical and Vedic traditions in Hinduism, the oldest of which perhaps dates from *c.*1500 BC.
6. *the suicide of the Brahman Calanus*: According to Plutarch (*c.* AD 45–125), Calanus, who had recently been suffering from some intestinal disorder, set himself ablaze on a funeral pyre.
7. *Quintus Curtius*: Quintus Curtius Rufus, a Roman historical writer of the first or second century AD, whose only surviving work is a biography of Alexander the Great.
8. *Troglodytes*: Literally, 'cave-dwellers', a name applied by ancient writers to different peoples in various parts of the world. Diodorus Siculus, a Greek historian who lived in the first century BC, refers to a people living on the coast of the Red Sea.
9. *the Seri*: Pomponius Mela, a Roman geographer who was active *c.* AD 50, wrote of the Seres or Silk People (the Chinese) as 'full of justice', but there is no allusion in his work to their practice of suicide.
10. *Henri Martin*: Henri Martin (1810–83), French historian and politician, known for his fifteen-volume *Histoire de France* (1836).
11. *the Ashanti*: A West African kingdom of modern southern Ghana.
12. *Livy, Caesar and Valerius Maximus*: Titus Livius (59 BC–AD 17), Roman historian whose life work was his History of Rome; Gaius Julius Caesar (100–44 BC) wrote a lengthy series of commentaries on the Roman campaigns he led in Gaul from 58 to 49 BC; Valerius Maximus (*c.*20 BC–*c.*AD 50) was the Roman author of a book of historical anecdotes for the teaching of rhetoric. Durkheim cites not Livy but Pliny the Elder (AD 23–79) in the footnote, but we could find no reference in Book IV of his *Natural History* to suicidal practices among the tribes of Gaul and Germania, though there is a discussion there of the Hyperboreans (a people living in the far north of continental Europe) and their practice of leaping into the sea to commit suicide at the onset of old age.
13. *the Dakota and the Creek*: The Dakota (Lakota, or, formerly,

Sioux) and the Creek (or Muskogee) are indigenous peoples of North America.

14. *the laws of Manu*: The Manava Dharma Shastra is a collection of Sanskrit verses dealing with norms of domestic, social and religious life in ancient India *c.* 500 BC. The reputed author is Manu, the mythical survivor of the Flood and father of the human race.
15. *Jainism*: Indian religion dating from approximately the same period as the origin of Buddhism, emphasizing renunciation and non-violence (*ahimsa*).
16. *Shiva*: One of the deities of the Hindu trinity.
17. *the wheels of the Juggernaut*: The word is a corruption of the Sanskrit term for one of the incarnations of the god Vishnu, worshipped in Puri in the eastern Indian state of Orissa. One of the festivals associated with the god (Jagganath Rathyatra) involves moving very large idols from the temple on huge chariots. It is now believed that deaths associated with the festival were probably accidental rather than a deliberate mass suicidal element of the ritual itself.
18. *Charlevoix*: Pierre François Xavier de Charlevoix (1682–1761), Jesuit missionary and historian, journeyed throughout the New World from 1720 to 1722.
19. *the Amida sect*: Amida or Pure Land Buddhism was the most important of the various democratic and inclusive forms of Buddhism that challenged traditional medieval Japanese religion.
20. *the sect of Jina*: Jainism.
21. *Commandant Beaurepaire and Admiral Villeneuve*: Nicolas Joseph de Beaurepaire (1740–92) was a French officer who shot himself in the head during the negotiation of surrender of the French to the Prussians at Verdun. Pierre Charles Jean Baptiste Silvestre de Villeneuve (1763–1806), vice-admiral in the French navy, was defeated by the British at Cape Trafalgar, south of Cadiz, and committed suicide on return to Paris, fearful of Napoleon's reaction to his defeat.
22. *the bersaglieri . . . the carabinieri*: Respectively, the light infantry and the military police.
23. *the death of Cato and that of the Girondins*: Marcus Porcius Cato (95–46 BC), also known as Cato the Younger and Cato of Utica, Roman statesman, fatally stabbed himself after Julius Caesar defeated the conservative Republican forces with which he was allied at Thapsus in contemporary Tunisia. The Girondins or Girondists were one of the revolutionary parties during the

French Revolution. Most of its members were executed or committed suicide in the autumn of 1793 when the tenor of the Revolution turned more radical.

Chapter 5

1. *In Vienna a financial crisis broke out in 1873*: The 'Big Crash' of 1873 was brought on largely by speculation related to the 1873 world fair that failed to live up to expectations. The Paris Bourse (Stock Market) crash of 1882 was provoked by the collapse of the investment bank Société de l'Union Générale.
2. *Victor Emmanuel's conquest of Rome in 1870*: Victor Emmanuel II (1820–78) completed the unification of Italy by seizing Rome after French troops, which had been guarding the Papal States, withdrew to defend France from Prussia.
3. *the Exposition of 1878 in particular*: The Exposition Universelle, or Paris World's Fair, at that time the largest of its kind in the world. More than 13 million people attended and the Trocadero Palace was erected to help house the exhibits.
4. *Certainly, this suicide is not unrelated to egotistical suicide*: It has been suggested by Whitney Pope (*Durkheim's Suicide: A Classic Analyzed* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976)) that in fact there is no substantive distinction between anomic and egotistical suicide, nor hence between the concepts of regulation and integration which are the two major independent variables in the study. Philippe Besnard ('L'anomie dans la biographie intellectuelle de Durkheim', *Sociologie et sociétés*, 14:2 (1982), pp. 45–53) suggests that the concept of anomie only concerned Durkheim for a brief period of time late in the writing of *Suicide*, at a point when he was experiencing the phenomenon himself as a result of events in his own life in late 1896 and early 1897. In this reading, egotistic suicide and integration are far more important concepts than anomic suicide and regulation.
5. *the sexual form that Musset has described*: Louis Charles Alfred de Musset (1810–57), French poet, playwright and novelist. The Don Juan figure of his *Namouna* (1833) is Hassan, who every month buys two slave girls to satisfy his desires and then discards them. Rolla is the subject of a poem from the same year who bankrupts himself in order to spend one night with an expensive courtesan.
6. *one thirsts for what is not*: Though Faust has many monologues in the work by Goethe (1749–1832), Durkheim is most likely

referring to the one in the 'Forest and Cave' scene of Part I where he despairs: 'Thus reel I from desire to fulfillment, / And in fulfillment languish for desire' (Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust*, Part I, lines 3249–50, trans. Walter Arndt (W. W. Norton: New York and London, 2001)).

7. *Because the woman is a more instinctive creature than the man*: Durkheim's discussion of women is here and elsewhere marked by recourse to a non-sociological and biological discourse on gender difference that was widespread in the mid-nineteenth century French, German, British, Italian and American medical communities. In an earlier work, *The Division of Labour in Society* (1893), he had argued that one of the effects of the historically gendered division of labour was to create differences in brain size (and therefore in intelligence) between the sexes. Some readers of *On Suicide* have noted that this preconception may have led him to an unwarranted dismissal of the contemporary utility of the fourth and final type of suicide that emerges from his analysis, which he calls 'fatalistic' and discusses only briefly in the footnote at the end of this chapter.

Chapter 6

1. *Lamartine's Raphaël*: Title character in the prose work (1849) by Alphonse de Lamartine (1790–1869) who commits suicide as a result of a doomed love affair.
2. *Hartmann's belief in a parallel between the development of awareness and the weakening of the will to live*: Karl Robert Eduard von Hartmann (1842–1906), German philosopher, author of *The Philosophy of the Unconscious* (1869) and a pessimist who believed the will to live was not aided by reason.
3. *The Stoic, too, teaches that man must detach himself from everything outside him*: Stoicism was a philosophical movement that originated in the third century BC, emphasizing acceptance of the inevitability of natural events over which one has little or no control and freedom from the passions.
4. *Epicurus*: Greek philosopher (341–271 BC) who advocated physical pleasure and freedom from pain as the proper goals of a human life.
5. *acedia*: Apathy and inactivity in the practice of virtue.
6. *the case of Werther*: Title character of the novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774) by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe.
7. *Seneca*: Lucius Annaeus Seneca (*c.* 4 BC–AD 65), Roman philos-

opher and counsellor to Nero, affiliated with the school of Stoicism.

8. *Chateaubriand's René*: The novels *Atala* (1801) and *René* (1802) of François-René, vicomte de Chateaubriand (1768–1848) introduced characters who in their sombre and melancholy dispositions were precursors of Romanticism.
9. *'obsidional'*: Of or pertaining to a siege.
10. *the capture of Jerusalem*: In 63 BC, Pompey took Jerusalem for the Romans.

BOOK THREE

Chapter 1

1. *Quételet*: Adolphe Quételet (1796–1874), Belgian astronomer and social statistician, his application of statistical reasoning to the world of human affairs proved highly influential on the early social sciences. Pastor Johann Peter Süssmilch (1707–67), Prussian pastor and natural law statistician to whom Durkheim refers in his footnote, was referenced extensively by Malthus.

Chapter 2

1. *the Council of Arles ... the Council of Prague*: The synod at Arles in 452 declared suicide an act of self-murder, and therefore criminal. The later synod in 563 (which was held not in Prague, but in Braga, Portugal) prevented the suicide from receiving any Church rites, but also provided for a number of exceptional suicides that did not bear the penalties, including voluntary martyrdom, a self-inflicted death resulting from an act of religious asceticism, and the suicide of a woman to protect her virtue.
2. *the Institutions of Saint Louis*: This collection of medieval French customary law was, despite the name, not the work of Louis IX (1215–70), King of France (1226–70). It was probably compiled by a lawyer sometime shortly after the death of Louis IX and consisted of legal customs from the Orléans and Touraine-Anjou regions and a number of ordinances from Louis IX on procedure for the court of the Châtelet in Paris.
3. *Louis XIV*: Louis the Great (1638–1715), the Sun King, was King of France and Navarre from the age of 4 until his death.
4. *King Edgar*: First ruler of a united England (944–975).

5. *felo de se*: Literally, a self-felon, one who commits a felony against himself or herself.
6. *according to Michelet*: Jules Michelet (1798–1874), French historian, author of a monumental *Histoire de France* (1833–67).
7. *atimia*: Loss of *tīmé*, honour. In archaic Athens, it seems to have meant a deprivation of all rights.
8. *Libanius*: Greek sophist and rhetorician (314–393).
9. *the Law of the XII Tables*: The earliest Roman code of law, dating from *c.* 450 BC.
10. *Servius . . . sed mala conscientia*: Maurus or Marius Honoratus Servius, Roman grammarian and commentator on Virgil, active at the end of the fourth century AD. The College of Pontiffs was the high council of priests in ancient Rome. Cassius Hemina, one of the most ancient Roman historians, lived around 150 BC. Tarquin the Proud, or Lucius Tarquinius Superbus, according to legend the seventh and last Etruscan king of Rome, expelled in 510 BC for cruelty. He is the villain in the legend of the Rape of Lucretia. The cited Latin phrase from the Digest in fact omits parts of the original without acknowledgement. The translated phrase with ellipses reads as follows: '. . . it is not customary to mourn . . . those who have hanged themselves, or men who have committed suicide not out of weariness with life but through a guilty conscience' (*The Digest of Justinian*, vol. 1, trans. Alan Watson (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998)).
11. *Quintilian*: Marcus Fabius Quintilianus (*c.* AD 35–95), Roman rhetorician.
12. *Et merito . . . aliis parcet*: 'And deservedly, if without reason he has brought his hand against himself, he must be punished; for he who has not spared himself, much less will he spare another.'
13. *Volenti non fit injuria*: No injury is done to a consenting party.
14. *M. Lacassagne*: Jean Alexandre Eugène Lacassagne (1843–1924), one of the founders of criminal anthropology.
15. *Dr Ferrus*: Guillaume Marie André Ferrus (1784–1861), French physician and specialist in mental illness, Pinel's assistant at the Salpêtrière.
16. *the first years of the reign of Louis-Philippe*: The Bourgeois Monarchy of Louis-Philippe (1773–1850) lasted from the July Revolution of 1830 until the coming of the Second Republic in 1848.

Chapter 3

1. *As we said in another work*: In the W. D. Halls translation of *The Division of Labor in Society* (New York: Free Press, 1984), this discussion takes place on pp. 187–88.
2. *the depressing theories of Epicurus and Zeno*: Epicurus (341–271 BC) and Zeno of Citium (*c.* 333–264 BC), the philosophers of Epicureanism and Stoicism, offered a pessimistic view of human life and advised resignation to the inevitable, combined with a search for pleasure (Epicurus) or moral conduct (the Stoics) as the key to the good life.
3. *Schopenhauer, Hartmann*: Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860), German philosopher and author of *The World as Will and Representation* (1819), one of the most important philosophical works of the nineteenth century. Schopenhauer advocated an ascetic retreat from the world and resignation to pessimism. For Hartmann, see note 2, Book Two, Chap. 6.
4. *M. Franck*: Adolphe Franck (1809–93), French philosopher, known chiefly for his *Dictionnaire des sciences philosophiques* (1875).
5. *Not only would reconstituted corporations meet this requirement, but it is hard to see what other group could do so*: In 1902, for the second edition of *The Division of Labor*, Durkheim wrote a lengthy preface spelling out in fuller detail his vision for the moral 'role that professional groups [or corporations] are called upon to fulfill at the present time in the social organization of peoples' (*The Division of Labor*, trans. W. D. Halls, p. xxxi).
6. *tradition is not so easily maintained . . . confined within the limits of one town*: The discussion in *The Division of Labor* indicated in Durkheim's footnote can be found on p. 233 in the Halls translation.

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ISBN 978-0-14-044967-9

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