Introduction to *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*

Suicide (1897) is both a theoretical and methodological exemplar. In this famous study, Durkheim examines a phenomenon that most people think of as an intensely individual act—suicide—and demonstrates its *social* (as opposed to psychological) roots. His method for doing this is to analyze *rates* of suicide between societies and historical periods and between different social groups within the same society. By linking the different suicide rates of particular societies and social groups to specific characteristics of that society or social group, Durkheim not only demonstrates that individual pathologies are rooted in *social* conditions but, in addition, shows how sociologists can scientifically study social behavior. His innovative examination of suicide rates lent credibility to his conviction that sociology is a viable scientific discipline.

Most important, Durkheim argues that the places with the highest rates of alcoholism and mental illness are not the areas with the highest suicide rates (thereby undermining the notion that it is pathological psychological states that are solely determinative of the individual act of suicide). Rather, Durkheim maintains that suicide rates are highest in moments when and in places where individuals lack social and moral regulation or integration. In addition, as in his first book, *The Division of Labor in Society*, in *Suicide*, Durkheim was particularly interested in delineating the fundamental differences between traditional and modern societies. Durkheim sought to explain why suicide is rare in small, simple societies while comparatively more frequent in modern, industrial ones. Parallel to his argument in *The Division of Labor* (in which Durkheim argued that traditional societies are characterized by mechanical solidarity, while modern societies are characterized by organic solidarity), Durkheim argues that traditional and modern societies differ not only in their rates of suicide but in the *types* of suicide that are prevalent as well.

Specifically, Durkheim saw two main characteristics of modern, industrial society: (1) weakened social ties, within the social group, and (2) weakened moral regulation. Durkheim used the term "egoism" to refer to the individual's lack of integration into the social group and "anomie" to refer to the absence of moral regulation. Durkheim argued that both of these conditions—egoism and anomie—are "chronic" in modern, industrial society and that in extreme, pathological form, both egoism and anomie can result in suicide. Let's look at these two different, albeit intimately interrelated, conditions in turn.

For Durkheim, egoistic suicide results from a pathological weakening of the bonds between the individual and the social group. The detrimental effects of this lack of social integration are evident statistically, in that there are higher rates of suicide among single, divorced, and widowed persons than among married persons and that there are higher rates of suicide among married persons without children than there are among married persons with children. Additionally, Durkheim argued that egoism helps explain why suicide rates are higher among Protestants than among Catholics or Jews: Protestantism emphasizes an *individual* relationship with God, which means that the individual is less bound to the religious clergy and members of the congregation. Interestingly, then, Durkheim maintains that it is not Catholic doctrine that inhibits the act of suicide; rather, it is Catholics' *social bonds*—their association with the priests, nuns, and other lay members of the congregation—that deter them from this act. Protestant rates of suicide are higher because Protestants are more socially and spiritually isolated than the more communally oriented Jews and Catholics.

Durkheim saw an increase in egoistic suicide as a "natural" outgrowth of the individuation characteristic of modern, industrial societies. For instance, today it is quite common for individuals to move far away from their family members, and it is also not uncommon for people to live alone. By contrast, in many traditional societies, it is very unusual for anyone to move away and virtually unheard of for anyone to live alone. Children live with parents until they get married; parents move in with children (or vice versa) if a spouse dies; unmarried siblings live with either parents or other siblings. As we noted previously, Durkheim argued that in its extreme form, the type of social isolation found in modern societies can be—literally—fatal.

Intertwined with weakening social integration in modern industrial societies is a decline in moral integration. Recall that in *The Division of Labor in Society*, Durkheim (1893/1984) used the term "anomie"

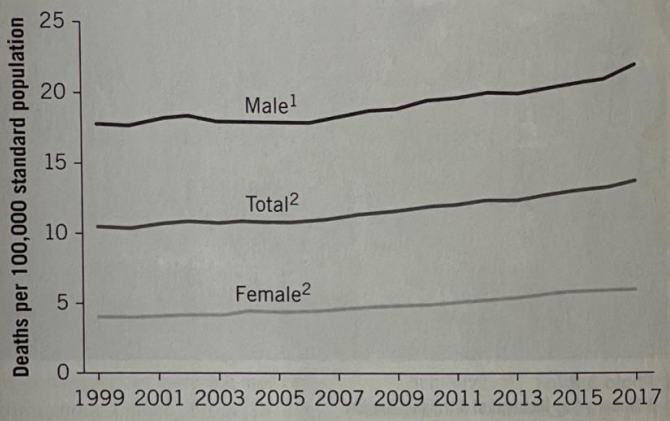
to refer to the isolation caused by overspecialization—when, rather than an individual's feeling like he is "serving something," his actions seem to have no "aim beyond themselves" (p. 373). Similarly, in *Suicide*, Durkheim maintains that modern societies are "chronically" anomic, or characterized by a lack of moral regulation of the individual by the collective. Anomic suicide is the pathological consequence of this normal, chronic state of anomie. This type of suicide is characterized by an extraordinary lack of moral direction that leaves the individual cast adrift in an endless sea of possibilities, none of which give her a sense of meaning, identity, or purpose.

Thus, for instance, modern industrial societies are religiously pluralistic, whereby people are more able to freely choose among a variety of religious faiths—or to choose not to believe at all. Similarly, today many people choose to identify—or not—with a specific part of their ethnic heritage. That we spend much time and energy searching for identity—"I'm a punk!" or "I'm Irish!"—reflects a chronic lack of moral regulation. To be sure, there are many wonderful benefits from this increasing individuation, which contrasts significantly with small, traditional, homogeneous societies in which "who" you are is taken for granted. In small, closed, indigenous societies without so many (or any) options, where there is one religion and one ethnic group, your place in that society is a cultural given—a "place" that may be quite oppressive. Not surprisingly, then, Durkheim asserts that suppressing individuation also can produce pathological consequences. (This point is discussed further later.) The lack of moral regulation in modern societies is especially prevalent in times of intense social and personal change. During such periods, the authority of the family, the church, and the community may be challenged or questioned; without moral guidance and authority, individuals may feel like they have no moral anchor. The pursuit of individual desires and goals can overtake moral concerns. Thus, for instance, researchers recently compared unemployment rates and suicide data in 54 countries in the world and found that the 2008 global recession contributed to an uptick in the suicide rate for men (but not for women). According to the survey, in 2009, the year after the Great Recession hit, a 37 percent higher unemployment rate was linked to a 3.3 percent increase in men's global suicide rate (Chang, Stuckler, Yip, and Gunnell 2013; Culp-Ressler 2013). These findings accord with other research. For instance, another study found that the suicide rate in the United States increased four times faster between 2008 and 2010, right after the housing bubble burst, than it did in the eight years before the recession (Carey 2012). Specifically, as shown in Figure 3.4, from 1999 through 2017, suicide rates in the United States increased for both males and females, with greater annual percentage increases occurring after 2006. For males, the rate increased 26 percent, from 17.8 percent in 1999 to 22.4 percent in 2017. The rate did not significantly change from 1999 to 2006, then increased on average by about 2 percent per year from 2006 through 2017. For females, the rate increased 53 percent, from 4.0 percent in 1999 to 6.1 percent in 2017. The rate increased on average by 2 percent per year from 1999 through 2007 and by 3 percent per year from 2007 through 2017 (Hedegaard, Curtin, and Warner 2018). Sadly, social isolation and lack of purpose and identity might also explain the high rates of suicide among older Americans today. The suicide rates for American females were highest for those ages 45 to 64 in both 1999 (6.0 per 100,000) and 2017 (9.7), while the suicide rates for American males were highest for those ages 75 and over in both 1999 (42.4 per 100,000) and 2017 (39.7; ibid.).

However, Durkheim maintains that anomie can result not only from "bad" social change, such as losing one's job or a political crisis, but from "positive" social change as well. Consider, for instance, what happens when someone wins the lottery. Most people think that if they were to win the lottery, they would experience only happiness. Indeed, some people buy lottery tickets thinking, "If I win the 'big one,' all my problems will be solved!" However, Durkheim contends that sudden life-changing events can bring on a battery of social and personal issues that one might not expect.

First, after winning the lottery, you might suddenly find yourself confronted with weighty existential issues. Before the lottery, you may have simply worked—and worked hard—because you needed to earn a living. But now that you've won the lottery, you don't know what to do. By not having to work, you might start thinking about things, such as the meaning of life, that you had never thought about before. This feeling that you don't know "what to do" and "how to act" is a state of anomie.

Figure 3.4 Age-Adjusted Suicide Rates, by Sex: United States, 1999–2017



Source: Hedegaard H, Curtin SC, Warner M. "Suicide Mortality in the United States, 1999–2017." NCHS Data Brief, no 330. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics. 2018.

Notes: Suicides are identified using *International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision* underlying cause-of-death codes U03, X60–X84, and Y87.0. Age-adjusted death rates were calculated using the direct method and the 2000 U.S. standard population.

[1] Stable trend from 1999 through 2006; significant increasing trend from 2006 through 2017, $p < 0.001$.

[2] Significant increasing trend from 1999 through 2017 with different rates of change over time, $p < 0.001$.

In addition, you might start to wonder how much friends and family should get from your winnings. You might begin to feel like everyone just wants your money and that it is hard to tell who likes *you* and who just likes your newfound fame and fortune. You might feel like you can't talk to your friends about your dilemma, that no one in your previous social circle really understands you anymore. You may begin to find that you can't relate to the people from your old socioeconomic class—but that you can't relate to anyone in your new class, either. Thus, the sudden change brought about by winning the lottery can lead not only to feeling morally anchorless (anomie) but also to feeling socially alone (egoism). A most extreme outcome of feeling this moral and social isolation would be suicide.

As we noted previously, Durkheim argued that traditional and modern societies are rooted in different social conditions. Compared to modern societies, social regulation is intensive in traditional societies, thus limiting the development of individuality. In extreme form, such restrictions can lead to altruistic suicide, where an individual gives his life for the social group. According to Durkheim, this is the primary type of suicide that occurs in small, traditional societies where individuation is minimal. The classic type of altruistic suicide was the Aztecs' practice of human sacrifice, in which a person was sacrificed for the moral or spiritual benefit of the group.[1]

However, even though Durkheim saw altruistic suicide as more prevalent in primitive societies, it is far from absent in modern societies. Not unlike the altruistic suicides in primitive societies, modern-day wars and suicide bombings are carried out on the premise that sacrificing one's life is necessary

[1] Durkheim briefly mentioned another type of suicide prevalent in "primitive" societies: "fatalistic suicide." For Durkheim, fatalistic suicide was rooted in *hopelessness*—the hopelessness of oppressed people, such as slaves, who had not the slightest chance of changing their personal situations.



AP Photo/Malcolm Browne; used by permission

Photo 3.3
A Modern-Day Incident of Altruistic Suicide

A number of South Vietnamese Buddhist monks used self-immolation to protest the persecution of the country's majority Buddhist population at the hands of the Catholic president, Ngô Đình Diệme. Here, Thích Quảng Đức burns himself to death on a Saigon street, June 11, 1963.

for the fight to preserve or attain a sacred way of life for the group as a whole. Nowhere are the similarities between these expressions of altruistic suicide (soldiers, suicide bombers, and "primitive" human sacrifice) more readily apparent than in the tragic case of the Japanese kamikaze (suicide) pilots of World War II. Shockingly, kamikaze flights were a principal tactic of Japan in the last year of the war.[2]

From *Suicide: A Study in Sociology* (1897)

Émile Durkheim

Anomic Suicide

But society is not only something attracting the sentiments and activities of individuals with unequal force. It is also a power controlling them. There is a relation between the way this regulative action is performed and the social suicide-rate.

I

It is a well-known fact that economic crises have an aggravating effect on the suicidal tendency.

In Vienna, in 1873 a financial crisis occurred which reached its height in 1874; the number of suicides immediately rose. From 141 in 1872,

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[2]In October 1944, some 1,200 kamikaze (which translates from Japanese as "god wind") plunged to their deaths in an attack on a U.S. naval fleet in the Leyte Gulf in the Philippines. Six months later, some 1,900 kamikaze dove to their deaths in the battle of Okinawa, resulting in the death of more than 5,000 American sailors. Most of the kamikaze pilots involved were men in their teens or early twenties. They were said to have gone to their deaths "joyfully," having followed specific rituals of cleanliness and equipped with books with uplifting thoughts to "transcend life and death" and "be always pure-hearted and cheerful" (Ford 2002).

they rose to 153 in 1873 and 216 in 1874. The increase in 1874 is 53 per cent[i] above 1872 and 41 per cent above 1873. What proves this catastrophe to have been the sole cause of the increase is the special prominence of the increase when the crisis was acute, or during the first four months of 1874. From January 1 to April 30 there had been 48 suicides in 1871, 44 in 1872, 43 in 1873; there were 73 in 1874. The increase is 70 per cent.[ii] The same crisis occurring at the same time in Frankfurt-on-Main produced the same effects there. In the years before 1874, 22 suicides were committed annually on the average; in 1874 there were 32, or 45 per cent more.

The famous crash is unforgotten which took place on the Paris Bourse during the winter of 1882. Its consequences were felt not only in Paris but throughout France. From 1874 to 1886 the average annual increase was only 2 per cent; in 1882 it was 7 per cent. Moreover, it was unequally distributed among the different times of year, occurring principally during the first three months or at the very time of the crash. Within these three months alone 59 per cent of the total rise occurred. So distinctly is the rise the result of unusual circumstances that it not only is not encountered in 1881 but has disappeared in 1883, although on the whole the latter year had a few more suicides than the preceding one:

	1881	1882	1883
Annual total	6,741	7,213 (plus 7%)	7,267
First three months	1,589	1,770 (plus 11%)	1,604

This relation is found not only in some exceptional cases, but is the rule. The number of bankruptcies is a barometer of adequate sensitivity, reflecting the variations of economic life. When they increase abruptly from year to year, some serious disturbance has certainly occurred. From 1845 to 1869 there were sudden rises, symptomatic of crises, on three occasions. While the annual increase in the number of bankruptcies during this period is 3.2 per cent, it is 26 per cent in 1847, 37 per cent in 1854 and 20 per cent in 1861. At these three moments, there is also to be observed an unusually rapid rise in the number of suicides. While the average annual increase during these 24 years was only 2 per cent, it was 17 per cent in 1847, 8 per cent in 1854 and 9 per cent in 1861.

But to what do these crises owe their influence? Is it because they increase poverty by causing public wealth to fluctuate? Is life more readily renounced as it becomes more difficult? The explanation is seductively simple; and it agrees with the popular idea of suicide. But it is contradicted by facts.

Actually, if voluntary deaths increased because life was becoming more difficult, they should diminish perceptibly as comfort increases. Now, although when the price of the most necessary foods rises excessively, suicides generally do the same, they are not found to fall below the average in the opposite case. In Prussia, in 1850 wheat was quoted at the lowest point it reached during the entire period of 1848–81; it was at 6.91 marks per 50 kilograms; yet at this very time suicides rose from 1,527 where they were in 1849 to 1,736, or an increase of 13 per cent, and continued to increase during the years 1851, 1852 and 1853 although the cheap market held. In 1858–59 a new fall took place; yet suicides rose from 2,038 in 1857 to 2,126 in 1858, and to 2,146 in 1859. From 1863 to 1866 prices which had reached 11.04 marks in 1861 fell progressively to 7.95 marks in 1864 and remained very reasonable for the whole period; suicides during the same time increased 17 per cent (2,112 in 1862, 2,485 in 1866).[iii] Similar facts are observed in Bavaria. According to a curve constructed by Mayr[iv] for the period 1835–61, the price of rye was lowest during the years 1857–58 and 1858–59; now suicides, which in 1857 numbered only 286, rose to 329 in 1858, to 387 in 1859. The same phenomenon had already occurred

[i] Durkheim incorrectly gives this figure as 51 percent.—Ed.

[ii] In 1874 over 1873.—Ed.

[iii] See Starck, *Verbrechen und Vergehen in Preussen*, Berlin, 1884, p. 55.

[iv] *Die Gesetzmässigkeit im Gesellschaftsleben*, p. 345.

during the years 1848–50; at that time wheat had been very cheap in Bavaria as well as throughout Europe. Yet, in spite of a slight temporary drop due to political events, which we have mentioned, suicides remained at the same level. There were 217 in 1847, there were still 215 in 1848, and if they dropped for a moment to 189 in 1849, they rose again in 1850 and reached 250.

So far is the increase in poverty from causing the increase in suicide that even fortunate crises, the effect of which is abruptly to enhance a country's prosperity, affect suicide like economic disasters.

The conquest of Rome by Victor-Emmanuel in 1870, by definitely forming the basis of Italian unity, was the starting point for the country of a process of growth which is making it one of the great powers of Europe. Trade and industry received a sharp stimulus from it and surprisingly rapid changes took place. Whereas in 1876, 4,459 steam boilers with a total of 54,000 horse-power were enough for industrial needs, the number of machines in 1887 was 9,983 and their horse-power of 167,000 was threefold more. Of course the amount of production rose proportionately during the same time.[v] Trade followed the same rising course; not only did the merchant marine, communications and transportation develop, but the number of persons and things transported doubled.[vi] As this generally heightened activity caused an increase in salaries (an increase of 35 per cent is estimated to have taken place from 1873 to 1889), the material comfort of workers rose, especially since the price of bread was falling at the same time.[vii] Finally, according to calculations by Bodio, private wealth rose from 45 and a half billions on the average during the period 1875–80 to 51 billions during the years 1880–85 and 54 billions and a half in 1885–90.[viii]

Now, an unusual increase in the number of suicides is observed parallel with this collective renaissance. From 1866 to 1870 they were roughly stable; from 1871 to 1877 they increased 36 per cent. There were in

1864–70	29 suicides per million
1871	31 suicides per million
1872	33 suicides per million
1873	36 suicides per million
1874	37 suicides per million
1875	34 suicides per million
1876	36.5 suicides per million
1877	40.6 suicides per million

And since then the movement has continued. The total figure, 1,139 in 1877, was 1,463 in 1889, a new increase of 28 per cent.

In Prussia the same phenomenon occurred on two occasions. In 1866 the kingdom received a first enlargement. It annexed several important provinces, while becoming the head of the Confederation of the North. Immediately this growth in glory and power was accompanied by a sudden rise in the number of suicides. There had been 123 suicides per million during the period 1856–60 per average year and only 122 during the years 1861–65. In the five years, 1866–70, in spite of the drop in 1870, the average rose to 133. The year 1867, which immediately followed victory, was that in which suicide achieved the highest point it had reached since 1816 (1 suicide per 5,432 inhabitants, while in 1864 there was only one case per 8,739).

On the morrow of the war of 1870 a new accession of good fortune took place. Germany was unified and placed entirely under Prussian hegemony. An enormous war indemnity added to the public wealth; commerce and industry made great strides. The development of suicide was never so rapid. From 1875 to 1886 it increased 90 per cent, from 3,278 cases to 6,212.

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[v] See Fornasari di Verce, *La criminalita e le vicende economiche d'Italia*, Turin 1894, pp. 7783.

[vi] Ibid., pp. 108–117.

[vii] Ibid., pp. 86–104.

[viii] The increase is less during the period 1885–90 because of a financial crisis.

World expositions, when successful, are considered favorable events in the existence of a society. They stimulate business, bring more money into the country and are thought to increase public prosperity, especially in the city where they take place. Yet, quite possibly, they ultimately take their toll in a considerably higher number of suicides. Especially does this seem to have been true of the Exposition of 1878. The rise that year was the highest occurring between 1874 and 1886. It was 8 per cent, that is, higher than the one caused by the crash of 1882. And what almost proves the Exposition to have been the cause of this increase is that 86 per cent of it took place precisely during the six months of the Exposition.

Departments Where Suicides Were Committed (1878–1887; per 100,000 Inhabitants)		Average Number of Persons of Independent Means per 1,000 Inhabitants in Each Group of Department (1886)
Suicides	Number of Departments	
From 48 to 43	5	127
From 38 to 31	6	73
From 30 to 24	6	69
From 23 to 18	15	59
From 17 to 13	18	49
From 12 to 8	26	49
From 7 to 3	10	42

In 1889 things were not identical all over France. But quite possibly the Boulanger crisis neutralized the contrary effects of the Exposition by its depressive influence on the growth of suicides. Certainly at Paris, although the political feeling aroused must have had the same effect as in the rest of the country, things happened as in 1878. For the 7 months of the Exposition, suicides increased almost 10 per cent, 9.66 to be exact, while through the remainder of the year they were below what they had been in 1888 and what they afterwards were in 1890.

	1888	1889	1890
The seven months of the Exposition	517	567	540
The five other months	319	311	356

It may well be that but for the Boulanger influence the rise would have been greater.

What proves still more conclusively that economic distress does not have the aggravating influence often attributed to it, is that it tends rather to produce the opposite effect. There is very little suicide in Ireland, where the peasantry leads so wretched a life. Poverty-stricken Calabria has almost no suicides; Spain has a tenth as many as France. Poverty may even be considered a protection. In the various French departments the more people there are who have independent means, the more numerous are suicides. . . .

If therefore industrial or financial crises increase suicides, this is not because they cause poverty, since crises of prosperity have the same result; it is because they are crises, that is, disturbances of the collective order.[ix] Every disturbance of equilibrium, even though it achieves greater comfort and a heightening of general vitality, is an impulse to voluntary death. Whenever serious readjustments take place in the social order, whether or not due to a sudden growth or to an unexpected catastrophe, men are more inclined to self-destruction. How is this possible? How can something considered generally to improve existence serve to detach men from it?

For the answer, some preliminary considerations are required.

[ix] To prove that an increase in prosperity diminishes suicides, the attempt has been made to show that they become less when emigration, the escape-valve of poverty, is widely practiced (See Legoyt, pp. 257–59). But cases are numerous where parallelism instead of inverse proportions exist between the two. In Italy from 1876 to 1890 the number of emigrants rose from 76 per 100,000 inhabitants to 335, a figure itself exceeded between 1887 and 1889. At the same time suicides did not cease to grow in numbers.

II

No living being can be happy or even exist unless his needs are sufficiently proportioned to his means. In other words, if his needs require more than can be granted, or even merely something of a different sort, they will be under continual friction and can only function painfully. Movements incapable of production without pain tend not to be reproduced. Unsatisfied tendencies atrophy, and as the impulse to live is merely the result of all the rest, it is bound to weaken as the others relax.

In the animal, at least in a normal condition, this equilibrium is established with automatic spontaneity because the animal depends on purely material conditions. All the organism needs is that the supplies of substance and energy constantly employed in the vital process should be periodically renewed by equivalent quantities; that replacement be equivalent to use. When the void created by existence in its own resources is filled, the animal, satisfied, asks nothing further. Its power of reflection is not sufficiently developed to imagine other ends than those implicit in its physical nature. On the other hand, as the work demanded of each organ itself depends on the general state of vital energy and the needs of organic equilibrium, use is regulated in turn by replacement and the balance is automatic. The limits of one are those of the other; both are fundamental to the constitution of the existence in question, which cannot exceed them.

This is not the case with man, because most of his needs are not dependent on his body or not to the same degree. Strictly speaking, we may consider that the quantity of material supplies necessary to the physical maintenance of a human life is subject to computation, though this be less exact than in the preceding case and a wider margin left for the free combinations of the will; for beyond the indispensable minimum which satisfies nature when instinctive, a more awakened reflection suggests better conditions, seemingly desirable ends craving fulfillment. Such appetites, however, admittedly sooner or later reach a limit which they cannot pass. But how determine the quantity of well-being, comfort or luxury legitimately to be craved by a human being? Nothing appears in man's organic nor in his psychological constitution which sets a limit to such tendencies. The functioning of individual life does not require them to cease at one point rather than at another; the proof being that they have constantly increased since the beginnings of history, receiving more and more complete satisfaction, yet with no weakening of average health. Above all, how establish their proper variation with different conditions of life, occupations, relative importance of services, etc.? In no society are they equally satisfied in the different stages of the social hierarchy. Yet human nature is substantially the same among all men, in its essential qualities. It is not human nature which can assign the variable limits necessary to our needs. They are thus unlimited so far as they depend on the individual alone. Irrespective of any external regulatory force, our capacity for feeling is in itself an insatiable and bottomless abyss.

But if nothing external can restrain this capacity, it can only be a source of torment to itself. Unlimited desires are insatiable by definition and insatiability is rightly considered a sign of morbidity. Being unlimited, they constantly and infinitely surpass the means at their command; they cannot be quenched. Inextinguishable thirst is constantly renewed torture. It has been claimed, indeed, that human activity naturally aspires beyond assignable limits and sets itself unattainable goals. But how can such an undetermined state be any more reconciled with the conditions of mental life than with the demands of physical life? All man's pleasure in acting, moving and exerting himself implies the sense that his efforts are not in vain and that by walking he has advanced. However, one does not advance when one walks toward no goal, or—which is the same thing—when his goal is infinity. Since the distance between us and it is always the same, whatever road we take, we might as well have made the motions without progress from the spot. Even our glances behind and our feeling of pride at the distance covered can cause only deceptive satisfaction, since the remaining distance is not proportionately reduced. To pursue a goal which is by definition unattainable is to condemn oneself to a state of perpetual unhappiness. Of course, man may hope contrary to all reason, and hope has its pleasures even when unreasonable. It may sustain him for a time; but it cannot survive the repeated disappointments of experience indefinitely. What more can the future offer him than the past, since he can never

reach a tenable condition nor even approach the glimpsed ideal? Thus, the more one has, the more one wants, since satisfactions received only stimulate instead of filling needs. Shall action as such be considered agreeable? First, only on condition of blindness to its uselessness. Secondly, for this pleasure to be felt and to temper and half veil the accompanying painful unrest, such unending motion must at least always be easy and unhampered. If it is interfered with only restlessness is left, with the lack of ease which it, itself, entails. But it would be a miracle if no insurmountable obstacle were never encountered. Our thread of life on these conditions is pretty thin, breakable at any instant.

To achieve any other result, the passions first must be limited. Only then can they be harmonized with the faculties and satisfied. But since the individual has no way of limiting them, this must be done by some force exterior to him. A regulative force must play the same role for moral needs which the organism plays for physical needs. This means that the force can only be moral. The awakening of conscience interrupted the state of equilibrium of the animal's dormant existence; only conscience, therefore, can furnish the means to re-establish it. Physical restraint would be ineffective; hearts cannot be touched by physio-chemical forces. So far as the appetites are not automatically restrained by physiological mechanisms, they can be halted only by a limit that they recognize as just. Men would never consent to restrict their desires if they felt justified in passing the assigned limit. But, for reasons given above, they cannot assign themselves this law of justice. So they must receive it from an authority which they respect, to which they yield spontaneously. Either directly and as a whole or through the agency of one of its organs, society alone can play this moderating role; for it is the only moral power superior to the individual, the authority of which he accepts. It alone has the power necessary to stipulate law and to set the point beyond which the passions must not go. Finally, it alone can estimate the reward to be prospectively offered to every class of human functionary, in the name of the common interest.

As a matter of fact, at every moment of history there is a dim perception, in the moral consciousness of societies, of the respective value of different social services, the relative reward due to each, and the consequent degree of comfort appropriate on the average to workers in each occupation. The different functions are graded in public opinion and a certain coefficient of well-being assigned to each, according to its place in the hierarchy. According to accepted ideas, for example, a certain way of living is considered the upper limit to which a workman may aspire in his efforts to improve his existence, and there is another limit below which he is not willingly permitted to fall unless he has seriously bemeaned himself. Both differ for city and country workers, for the domestic servant and the day-laborer, for the business clerk and the official, etc. Likewise the man of wealth is reproved if he lives the life of a poor man, but also if he seeks the refinements of luxury overmuch. Economists may protest in vain; public feeling will always be scandalized if an individual spends too much wealth for wholly superfluous use, and it even seems that this severity relaxes only in times of moral disturbance.* A genuine regimen exists, therefore, although not always legally formulated, which fixes with relative precision the maximum degree of ease of living to which each social class may legitimately aspire. However, there is nothing immutable about such a scale. It changes with the increase or decrease of collective revenue and the changes occurring in the moral ideas of society. Thus what appears luxury to one period no longer does so to another; and the well-being which for long periods was granted to a class only by exception and supererogation, finally appears strictly necessary and equitable.

Under this pressure, each in his sphere vaguely realizes the extreme limit set to his ambitions and aspires to nothing beyond. At least if he respects regulations and is docile to collective authority, that is, has a wholesome moral constitution, he feels that it is not well to ask more. Thus, an end and goal are set to the passions. Truly, there is nothing rigid nor absolute about such determination. The economic ideal assigned

*Actually, this is a purely moral reprobation and can hardly be judicially implemented. We do not consider any reestablishment of sumptuary laws desirable or even possible.

each class of citizens is itself confined to certain limits, within which the desires have free range. But it is not infinite. This relative limitation and the moderation it involves, make men contented with their lot while stimulating them moderately to improve it; and this average contentment causes the feeling of calm, active happiness, the pleasure in existing and living which characterizes health for societies as well as for individuals. Each person is then at least, generally speaking, in harmony with his condition, and desires only what he may legitimately hope for as the normal reward of his activity. Besides, this does not condemn man to a sort of immobility. He may seek to give beauty to his life; but his attempts in this direction may fail without causing him to despair. For, loving what he has and not fixing his desire solely on what he lacks, his wishes and hopes may fail of what he has happened to aspire to, without his being wholly destitute. He has the essentials. The equilibrium of his happiness is secure because it is defined, and a few mishaps cannot disconcert him.

But it would be of little use for everyone to recognize the justice of the hierarchy of functions established by public opinion, if he did not also consider the distribution of these functions just. The workman is not in harmony with his social position if he is not convinced that he has his deserts. If he feels justified in occupying another, what he has would not satisfy him. So it is not enough for the average level of needs for each social condition to be regulated by public opinion, but another, more precise rule, must fix the way in which these conditions are open to individuals. There is no society in which such regulation does not exist. It varies with times and places. Once it regarded birth as the almost exclusive principle of social classification; today it recognizes no other inherent inequality than hereditary fortune and merit. But in all these various forms its object is unchanged. It is also only possible, everywhere, as a restriction upon individuals imposed by superior authority, that is, by collective authority. For it can be established only by requiring of one or another group of men, usually of all, sacrifices and concessions in the name of the public interest.

Some, to be sure, have thought that this moral pressure would become unnecessary if men's economic circumstances were only no longer determined by heredity. If inheritance were abolished, the argument runs, if everyone began life with equal resources and if the competitive struggle were fought out on a basis of perfect equality, no one could think its results unjust. Each would instinctively feel that things are as they should be.

Truly, the nearer this ideal equality were approached, the less social restraint will be necessary. But it is only a matter of degree. One sort of heredity will always exist, that of natural talent. Intelligence, taste, scientific, artistic, literary or industrial ability, courage and manual dexterity are gifts received by each of us at birth, as the heir to wealth receives his capital or as the nobleman formerly received his title and function. A moral discipline will therefore still be required to make those less favored by nature accept the lesser advantages which they owe to the chance of birth. Shall it be demanded that all have an equal share and that no advantage be given those more useful and deserving? But then there would have to be a discipline far stronger to make these accept a treatment merely equal to that of the mediocre and incapable.

But like the one first mentioned, this discipline can be useful only if considered just by the peoples subject to it. When it is maintained only by custom and force, peace and harmony are illusory; the spirit of unrest and discontent are latent; appetites superficially restrained are ready to revolt. This happened in Rome and Greece when the faiths underlying the old organization of the patricians and plebeians were shaken, and in our modern societies when aristocratic prejudices began to lose their old ascendancy. But this state of upheaval is exceptional; it occurs only when society is passing through some abnormal crisis. In normal conditions the collective order is regarded as just by the great majority of persons. Therefore, when we say that an authority is necessary to impose this order on individuals, we certainly do not mean that violence is the only means of establishing it. Since this regulation is meant to restrain individual passions, it must come from a power which dominates individuals; but this power must also be obeyed through respect, not fear.

It is not true, that human activity can be released from all restraint. Nothing in the world can enjoy such a privilege. All existence being a part of the universe is relative to the remainder; its

nature and method of manifestation accordingly depend not only on itself but on other beings, who consequently restrain and regulate it. Here there are only differences of degree and form between the mineral realm and the thinking person. Man's characteristic privilege is that the bond he accepts is not physical but moral; that is, social. He is governed not by a material environment brutally imposed on him, but by a conscience superior to his own, the superiority of which he feels. Because the greater, better part of his existence transcends the body, he escapes the body's yoke, but is subject to that of society.

But when society is disturbed by some painful crisis or by beneficent but abrupt transitions, it is momentarily incapable of exercising this influence; thence come the sudden rises in the curve of suicides which we have pointed out above.

In the case of economic disasters, indeed, something like a declassification occurs which suddenly casts certain individuals into a lower state than their previous one. Then they must reduce their requirements, restrain their needs, learn greater self-control. All the advantages of social influence are lost so far as they are concerned; their moral education has to be recommenced. But society cannot adjust them instantaneously to this new life and teach them to practice the increased self-repression to which they are unaccustomed. So they are not adjusted to the condition forced on them, and its very prospect is intolerable; hence the suffering which detaches them from a reduced existence even before they have made trial of it.

It is the same if the source of the crisis is an abrupt growth of power and wealth. Then, truly, as the conditions of life are changed, the standard according to which needs were regulated can no longer remain the same; for it varies with social resources, since it largely determines the share of each class of producers. The scale is upset; but a new scale cannot be immediately improvised. Time is required for the public conscience to reclassify men and things. So long as the social forces thus freed have not regained equilibrium, their respective values are unknown and so all regulation is lacking for a time. The limits are unknown between the possible and the impossible, what is just and what is unjust, legitimate claims and hopes and those which are immoderate. Consequently, there is no restraint upon aspirations. If the disturbance is profound, it affects even the principles controlling the distribution of men among various occupations. Since the relations between various parts of society are necessarily modified, the ideas expressing these relations must change. Some particular class especially favored by the crisis is no longer resigned to its former lot, and, on the other hand, the example of its greater good fortune arouses all sorts of jealousy below and about it. Appetites, not being controlled by a public opinion become disoriented, no longer recognize the limits proper to them. Besides, they are at the same time seized by a sort of natural erethism simply by the greater intensity of public life. With increased prosperity desires increase. At the very moment when traditional rules have lost their authority, the richer prize offered these appetites stimulates them and makes them more exigent and impatient of control. The state of deregulation or anomy is thus further heightened by passions being less disciplined, precisely when they need more disciplining.

But then their very demands make fulfillment impossible. Overweening ambition always exceeds the results obtained, great as they may be, since there is no warning to pause here. Nothing gives satisfaction and all this agitation is uninterruptedly maintained without appeasement. Above all, since this race for an unattainable goal can give no other pleasure but that of the race itself, if it is one, once it is interrupted the participants are left empty-handed. At the same time the struggle grows more violent and painful, both from being less controlled and because competition is greater. All classes contend among themselves because no established classification any longer exists. Effort grows, just when it becomes less productive. How could the desire to live not be weakened under such conditions?

This explanation is confirmed by the remarkable immunity of poor countries. Poverty protects against suicide because it is a restraint in itself. No matter how one acts, desires have to depend upon resources to some extent; actual possessions are partly the criterion of those aspired to. So the less one has the less he is tempted to extend the range of his needs indefinitely. Lack of power, compelling moderation, accustoms men to it, while nothing

excites envy if no one has superfluity. Wealth, on the other hand, by the power it bestows, deceives us into believing that we depend on ourselves only. Reducing the resistance we encounter from objects, it suggests the possibility of unlimited success against them. The less limited one feels, the more intolerable all limitation appears. Not without reason, therefore, have so many religions dwelt on the advantages and moral value of poverty. It is actually the best school for teaching self-restraint. Forcing us to constant self-discipline, it prepares us to accept collective discipline with equanimity, while wealth, exalting the individual, may always arouse the spirit of rebellion which is the very source of immorality. This, of course, is no reason why humanity should not improve its material condition. But though the moral danger involved in every growth of prosperity is not irremediable, it should not be forgotten.

III

If anomy never appeared except, as in the above instances, in intermittent spurts and acute crisis, it might cause the social suicide-rate to vary from time to time, but it would not be a regular, constant factor. In one sphere of social life, however—the sphere of trade and industry—it is actually in a chronic state.

For a whole century, economic progress has mainly consisted in freeing industrial relations from all regulation. Until very recently, it was the function of a whole system of moral forces to exert this discipline. First, the influence of religion was felt alike by workers and masters, the poor and the rich. It consoled the former and taught them contentment with their lot by informing them of the providential nature of the social order, that the share of each class was assigned by God himself, and by holding out the hope for just compensation in a world to come in return for the inequalities of this world. It governed the latter, recalling that worldly interests are not man's entire lot, that they must be subordinate to other and higher interests, and that they should therefore not be pursued without rule or measure. Temporal power, in turn, restrained the scope of economic functions by its supremacy over them and by the relatively subordinate role it assigned them. Finally, within the business world proper, the occupational groups by regulating salaries, the price of products and production itself, indirectly fixed the average level of income on which needs are partially based by the very force of circumstances. However, we do not mean to propose this organization as a model. Clearly it would be inadequate to existing societies without great changes. What we stress is its existence, the fact of its useful influence, and that nothing today has come to take its place.

Actually, religion has lost most of its power. And government, instead of regulating economic life, has become its tool and servant. The most opposite schools, orthodox economists and extreme socialists, unite to reduce government to the role of a more or less passive intermediary among the various social functions. The former wish to make it simply the guardian of individual contracts; the latter leave it the task of doing the collective bookkeeping, that is, of recording the demands of consumers, transmitting them to producers, inventorying the total revenue and distributing it according to a fixed formula. But both refuse it any power to subordinate other social organs to itself and to make them converge toward one dominant aim. On both sides nations are declared to have the single or chief purpose of achieving industrial prosperity; such is the implication of the dogma of economic materialism, the basis of both apparently opposed systems. And as these theories merely express the state of opinion, industry, instead of being still regarded as a means to an end transcending itself, has become the supreme end of individuals and societies alike. Thereupon the appetites thus excited have become freed of any limiting authority. By sanctifying them, so to speak, this apotheosis of well-being has placed them above all human law. Their restraint seems like a sort of sacrilege. For this reason, even the purely utilitarian regulation of them exercised by the industrial world itself through the medium of occupational groups has been unable to persist. Ultimately, this liberation of desires has been made worse by the very development of industry and the almost infinite extension of the market. So long as the producer could gain his profits only in his immediate neighborhood, the restricted amount of possible gain could not much overexcite ambition. Now that he may assume to have almost the

entire world as his customer, how could passions accept their former confinement in the face of such limitless prospects?

Such is the source of the excitement predominating in this part of society, and which has thence extended to the other parts. There, the state of crisis and anomy is constant and, so to speak, normal. From top to bottom of the ladder, greed is aroused without knowing where to find ultimate foothold. Nothing can calm it, since its goal is far beyond all it can attain. Reality seems valueless by comparison with the dreams of fevered imaginations; reality is therefore abandoned, but so too is possibility abandoned when it in turn becomes reality. A thirst arises for novelties, unfamiliar pleasures, nameless sensations, all of which lose their savor once known. Henceforth one has no strength to endure the least reverse. The whole fever subsides and the sterility of all the tumult is apparent, and it is seen that all these new sensations in their infinite quantity cannot form a solid foundation of happiness to support one during days of trial. The wise man, knowing how to enjoy achieved results without having constantly to replace them with others, finds in them an attachment to life in the hour of difficulty. But the man who has always pinned all his hopes on the future and lived with his eyes fixed upon it, has nothing in the past as a comfort against the present's afflictions, for the past was nothing to him but a series of hastily experienced stages. What blinded him to himself was his expectation always to find further on the happiness he had so far missed. Now he is stopped in his tracks; from now on nothing remains behind or ahead of him to fix his gaze upon. Weariness alone, moreover, is enough to bring disillusionment, for he cannot in the end escape the futility of an endless pursuit.

We may even wonder if this moral state is not principally what makes economic catastrophes of our day so fertile in suicides. In societies where a man is subjected to a healthy discipline, he submits more readily to the blows of chance. The necessary effort for sustaining a little more discomfort costs him relatively little, since he is used to discomfort and constraint. But when every constraint is hateful in itself, how can closer constraint not seem intolerable? There is no tendency to resignation in the feverish impatience of men's lives. When there is no other aim but to outstrip constantly the point arrived at, how painful to be thrown back! Now this very lack of organization characterizing our economic condition throws the door wide to every sort of adventure. Since imagination is hungry for novelty, and ungoverned, it gropes at random. Setbacks necessarily increase with risks and thus crises multiply, just when they are becoming more destructive.

Yet these dispositions are so inbred that society has grown to accept them and is accustomed to think them normal. It is everlastingly repeated that it is man's nature to be eternally dissatisfied, constantly to advance, without relief or rest, toward an indefinite goal. The longing for infinity is daily represented as a mark of moral distinction, whereas it can only appear within unregulated consciences which elevate to a rule the lack of rule from which they suffer. The doctrine of the most ruthless and swift progress has become an article of faith. But other theories appear parallel with those praising the advantages of instability, which, generalizing the situation that gives them birth, declare life evil, claim that it is richer in grief than in pleasure and that it attracts men only by false claims. Since this disorder is greatest in the economic world, it has most victims there.

Industrial and commercial functions are really among the occupations which furnish the greatest number of suicides (see table). Almost on a level with the liberal professions, they sometimes surpass them; they are especially more afflicted than agriculture, where the old regulative forces still make their appearance felt most and where the fever of business has least penetrated. Here is best called what was once the general constitution of the economic order. And the divergence would be yet greater if, among the suicides of industry, employers were distinguished from workmen, for the former are probably most stricken by the state of anomy. The enormous rate of those with independent means (720 per million) sufficiently shows that the possessors of most comfort suffer most. Everything that enforces subordination attenuates the effects of this state. At least the horizon of the lower classes is limited by those above them, and for this same reason their desires are more modest. Those who have only empty space above them are almost inevitably lost in it, if no force restrains them.

Suicides per Million Persons of Different Occupations

	Trade	Transportation	Industry	Agriculture	Liberal* Professions
France (1878–1887)†	440	—	340	240	300
Switzerland (1876)	664	1,514	577	304	558
Italy (1866–1876)	277	152.6	80.4	26.7	618‡
Prussia (1883–1890)	754	—	456	315	832
Bavaria (1884–1891)	465	—	369	153	454
Belgium (1886–1890)	421	—	160	160	100
Wurttemberg (1873–1878)	273	—	190	206	—
Saxony (1878)		341.59§		71.17	—

*When statistics distinguish several different sorts of liberal occupation, we show as a specimen the one in which the suicide-rate is highest.

†From 1826 to 1880 economic functions seem less affected (see Compte-rendu of 1880); but were occupational statistics very accurate?

‡This figure is reached only by men of letters.

§Figure represents Trade, Transportation, and Industry combined for Saxony. —Ed.

Anomy, therefore, is a regular and specific factor in suicide in our modern societies; one of the springs from which the annual contingent feeds. So we have here a new type to distinguish from the others. It differs from them in its dependence, not on the way in which individuals are attached to society, but on how it regulates them. Egoistic suicide results from man's no longer finding a basis for existence in life; altruistic suicide, because this basis for existence appears to man situated beyond life itself. The third sort of suicide, the existence of which has just been shown, results from man's activity's lacking regulation and his consequent sufferings. By virtue of its origin we shall assign this last variety the name of *anomic suicide*.

Certainly, this and egoistic suicide have kindred ties. Both spring from society's insufficient presence in individuals. But the sphere of its absence is not the same in both cases. In egoistic suicide it is deficient in truly collective activity, thus depriving the latter of object and meaning. In anomic suicide, society's influence is lacking in the basically individual passions, thus leaving them without a check-rein. In spite of their relationship, therefore, the two types are independent of each other. We may offer society everything social in us, and still be unable to control our desires; one may live in an anomic state without being egoistic, and vice versa. These two sorts of suicide therefore do not draw their chief recruits from the same social environments; one has its principal field among intellectual careers, the world of thought—the other, the industrial or commercial world. . . .

Individual Forms of the Different Types of Suicide

One result now stands out prominently from our investigation: namely, that there are not one but various forms of suicide. Of course, suicide is always the act of a man who prefers death to life. But the causes determining him are not of the same sort in all cases: they are even sometimes mutually opposed. Now, such difference in causes must reappear in their effects. We may therefore be sure that there are several sorts of suicide which

are distinct in quality from one another. But the certainty that these differences exist is not enough; we need to observe them directly and know of what they consist. We need to see the characteristics of special suicides grouped in distinct classes corresponding to the types just distinguished. Thus we would follow the various currents which generate suicide from their social origins to their individual manifestations.

This morphological classification, which was hardly possible at the commencement of this study, may be undertaken now that an aetiological classification forms its basis. Indeed, we only need to start with the three kinds of factors which we have just assigned to suicide and discover whether the distinctive properties it assumes in manifesting itself among individual persons may be derived from them, and if so, how. Of course, not all the peculiarities which suicide may present can be deduced in this fashion; for some may exist which depend solely on the person's own nature. Each victim of suicide gives his act a personal stamp which expresses his temperament, the special conditions in which he is involved, and which, consequently, cannot be explained by the social and general causes of the phenomenon. But these causes in turn must stamp the suicides they determine with a shade all their own, a special mark expressive of them. This collective mark we must find.

To be sure, this can be done only approximately. We are not in a position to describe methodically all the suicides daily committed by men or committed in the course of history. We can only emphasize the most general and striking characteristics without even having an objective criterion for making the selection. Moreover, we can only proceed deductively in relating them to the respective causes from which they seem to spring. All that we can do is to show their logical implication, though the reasoning may not always be able to receive experimental confirmation. We do not forget that a deduction uncontrolled by experiment is always questionable. Yet this research is far from being useless, even with these reservations. Even though it may be considered only a method of illustrating the preceding results by examples, it would still have the worth of giving them a more concrete character by connecting them more closely with the data of sense-perception and with the details of daily experience. It will also introduce some little distinctiveness into this mass of facts usually lumped together as though varying only by shades, though there are striking differences among them. Suicide is like mental alienation. For the popular mind the latter consists in a single state, always identical, capable only of superficial differentiation according to circumstances. For the alienist, on the contrary, the word denotes many nosological types. Every suicide is, likewise, ordinarily considered a victim of melancholy whose life has become a burden to him. Actually, the acts by which a man renounces life belong to different species, of wholly different moral and social significance.