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EGOISTIC SUICIDE

First let us see how the different religious confessions affect suicide.

If one casts a glance at the map of European suicide, it is at once clear that in purely Catholic countries like Spain, Portugal, Italy, suicide is very little developed, while it is at its maximum in Protestant countries, in Prussia, Saxony, Denmark. The following averages compiled by Morselli confirm this first conclusion:

	<i>Average of suicides per million inhabitants</i>
Protestant states	190
Mixed states (Protestant and Catholic)	96
Catholic states	58
Greek Catholic states	40

The low proportion of the Greek Catholics cannot be surely attributed to religion; for as their civilization is very different from that of the other European nations, this difference of culture may be the cause of their lesser aptitude. But this is not the case with most Catholic or Protestant societies. To be sure, they are not all on the same intellectual and moral level; yet the resemblances are sufficiently essential to make it possible to ascribe to confessional differences the marked contrast they offer in respect to suicide.

Nevertheless, this first comparison is still too summary. In spite of undeniable similarities, the social environments of the inhabitants of these different countries are not identical. The civilizations of Spain and Portugal are far below that of Germany and this inferiority may conceivably be the reason for the lesser development of suicide which we have just mentioned. If one wishes to avoid this source of error and determine more definitely the influence of Catholicism and Protestantism on the suicidal tendency, the two religions must be compared in the heart of a single society.

Of all the great states of Germany, Bavaria has by far the fewest suicides. There have been barely 90 per million inhabitants yearly since 1874, while Prussia has 133 (1871-75), the duchy of Baden 156, Wurttemberg 162, Saxony 300. Now, Bavaria also has most Catholics, 713.2 to 1,000 inhabitants. On the other hand, if one compares the different provinces of Bavaria, suicides are found to be in direct proportion to the number of Protestants and in inverse proportion to that of Catholics (See table below). Not only the proportions of averages to

<i>Bavarian provinces (1867-75)*</i>					
<i>Provinces w. Catholic minority (less than 50%)</i>	<i>Suicides per million inhabitants</i>	<i>Provinces w. Catholic majority (50 to 90%)</i>	<i>Suicides per million inhabitants</i>	<i>Provinces w. more than 90% Catholic</i>	<i>Suicides per million inhabitants</i>
Rhenish Palatinate	167	Lower Franconia	157	Upper Palatinate	64
Central Franconia	207	Swabia	118	Upper Bavaria	114
Upper Franconia	204			Lower Bavaria	19
Average	192	Average	135	Average	75

* The population below 15 years has been omitted.

one another confirm the law but all the numbers of the first column are higher than those of the second and those of the second higher than those of the third without exception.

It is the same with Prussia:

<i>Prussian provinces (1883-90)</i>			
<i>Provinces with more than 90% Protestant</i>	<i>Suicides per million inhabitants</i>	<i>Provinces with from 89 to 68% Protestant</i>	<i>Suicides per million inhabitants</i>
Saxony	309.4	Hanover	212.3
Schleswig	312.9	Hesse	200.3
Pomerania	171.5	Brandenburg and Berlin	296.3
		E. Prussia	171.3
Average	264.6	Average	220.0
<i>Provinces with from 40 to 50% Protestant</i>	<i>Suicides per million inhabitants</i>	<i>Provinces with from 32 to 28% Protestant</i>	<i>Suicides per million inhabitants</i>
W. Prussia	123.9	Posen	96.4
Silesia	260.2	Rhineland	100.3
Westphalia	107.5	Hohenzollern	90.1
Average	163.6	Average	95.6

There are only two slight irregularities among the 14 provinces thus compared, so far as detail is concerned; Silesia, which because of its relatively high number of suicides should be in the second category, is only in the third, while on the contrary Pomerania would be more in its place in the second than in the first column.

Switzerland forms an interesting study from this same point of view. For as both French and German populations exist there, the influence of the confession is observable separately on each race. Now, its

influence is the same on both. Catholic cantons show four and five times fewer suicides than Protestant, of whichever nationality.

<i>French cantons</i>		<i>German cantons</i>		<i>Total of cantons of all nationalities</i>	
Catholics	83 suicides per million inhabitants	Catholics	87 suicides	Catholics	86.7 suicides
Protestants	453 suicides per million inhabitants	Protestants	293 suicides	Mixed	212.0 suicides
		Protestants		Protestants	326.3 suicides

Confessional influence is therefore so great as to dominate all others. Besides, in a fairly large number of cases the number of suicides per million inhabitants of the population of each confession has been directly determined. The following figures were obtained by various observers:

Table XVIII Suicides in different countries per million persons of each confession

		<i>Protestants</i>	<i>Catholics</i>	<i>Jews</i>	<i>Names of observers</i>
Austria	(1852-59)	79.5	51.3	20.7	Wagner
Prussia	(1849-55)	159.9	49.6	46.4	Id.
Prussia	(1869-72)	187	69	96	Morselli
Prussia	(1890)	240	100	180	Prinzing
Baden	(1852-62)	139	117	87	Legayt
Baden	(1870-74)	171	136.7	124	Morselli
Baden	(1878-88)	242	170	210	Prinzing
Bavaria	(1844-56)	135.4	49.1	105.9	Morselli
Bavaria	(1884-91)	224	94	193	Prinzing
Wurttemberg	(1846-60)	113.5	77.9	65.6	Wagner
Wurttemberg	(1873-76)	190	120	60	Durkheim
Wurttemberg	(1881-90)	170	119	142	Id.

Thus, everywhere without exception,¹ Protestants show far more suicides than the followers of other confessions. The difference varies between a minimum of 20 to 30 per cent and a maximum of 300 per cent. It is useless to invoke with Mayr² against such a unanimous agreement of facts, the isolated case of Norway and Sweden which, though Protestant, have only an average number of suicides. First, as we noted at the beginning of this chapter, these international comparisons are not significant unless bearing on a considerable number of countries, and even in this case are not conclusive. There are sufficiently great differences between the peoples of the Scandinavian peninsula and those of Central Europe for it to be reasonable that Protestantism does not produce exactly the same effects on both. But furthermore, if the suicide-rate is not in itself very high in these two countries, it seems relatively so if one considers their modest rank among the civilized peoples of Europe. There is no reason to suppose that they have reached an intellectual level above Italy, to say the least, yet self-destruction occurs from twice to three times as often (90 to 100 suicides per million inhabitants as against 40). May Protestantism not be the cause of this relatively higher figure? Thus the fact not only does not tell against the law just established on the basis of so many observations, but rather tends to confirm it.³

The aptitude of Jews for suicide is always less than that of Protestants; in a very general way it is also, though to a lesser degree, lower than that of Catholics. Occasionally however, the latter relation is reversed; such cases occur especially in recent times. Up to the middle of the century, Jews killed themselves less frequently than Catholics in all countries but Bavaria;⁴ only towards 1870 do they begin to lose their ancient immunity. They still very rarely greatly exceed the rate for

¹ We have no data on confessional influence in France, Leroy, however, tells us the following in his study on Seine-et-Marne: in the communes of Quincy, Nanteuil-les-Meaux, Mareuil, Protestants show one suicide to 310 inhabitants, Catholics 1 to 678 (*op. cit.*, p. 203).

² *Handwörterbuch der Staatswissenschaften*, Supplement, Vol. I, p. 702.

³ The case of England is exceptional, a non-Catholic country where suicide is infrequent. It will be explained below.

⁴ Bavaria is still the only exception: Jews there kill themselves twice as often as Catholics. Is there something exceptional about the position of Judaism in this country? We do not know.

Catholics. Besides, it must be remembered that Jews live more exclusively than other confessional groups in cities and are in intellectual occupations. On this account they are more inclined to suicide than the members of other confessions, for reasons other than their religion. If therefore the rate for Judaism is so low, in spite of this aggravating circumstance, it may be assumed that other things being equal, their religion has the fewest suicides of all.

These facts established, what is their explanation?

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If we consider that the Jews are everywhere in a very small minority and that in most societies where the foregoing observations were made, Catholics are in the minority, we are tempted to find in these facts the cause explaining the relative rarity of voluntary deaths in these two confessions.⁵ Obviously, the less numerous confessions, facing the hostility of the surrounding populations, in order to maintain themselves are obliged to exercise severe control over themselves and subject themselves to an especially rigorous discipline. To justify the always precarious tolerance granted them, they have to practice greater morality. Besides these considerations, certain facts seem really to imply that this special factor has some influence. In Prussia, the minority status of Catholics is very pronounced, since they are only a third of the whole population. They kill themselves only one third as often as the Protestants. The difference decreases in Bavaria where two thirds of the inhabitants are Catholics; the voluntary deaths of the latter are here only in the proportion of 100 to 275 of those of Protestants or else of 100 to 238, according to the period. Finally, in the almost entirely Catholic Empire of Austria, only 155 Protestant to 100 Catholic suicides are found. It would seem then that where Protestantism becomes a minority its tendency to suicide decreases.

But first, suicide is too little an object of public condemnation for the slight measure of blame attaching to it to have such influence, even on minorities obliged by their situation to pay special heed to public opinion. As it is an act without offense to others, it involves no great

⁵ Legoyt, *op. cit.*, p. 205; Oettingen, *Monatstatistik*, p. 654.

reproach to the groups more inclined to it than others, and is not apt to increase greatly their relative ostracism as would certainly be the case with a greater frequency of crime and misdemeanor. Besides, when religious intolerance is very pronounced, it often produces an opposite effect. Instead of exciting the dissenters to respect opinion more, it accustoms them to disregard it. When one feels himself an object of inescapable hostility, one abandons the idea of conciliating it and is the more resolute in his most unpopular observances. This has frequently happened to the Jews and thus their exceptional immunity probably has another cause.

Anyway, this explanation would not account for the respective situation of Protestants and Catholics. For though the protective influence of Catholicism is less in Austria and Bavaria, where it is in the majority, it is still considerable. Catholicism does not therefore owe this solely to its minority status. More generally, whatever the proportional share of these two confessions in the total population, wherever their comparison has been possible from the point of view of suicide, Protestants are found to kill themselves much more often than Catholics. There are even countries like the Upper Palatinate and Upper Bavaria, where the population is almost wholly Catholic (92 and 96 per cent) and where there are nevertheless 300 and 423 Protestant suicides to 100 Catholic suicides. The proportion even rises to 528 per cent in Lower Bavaria where the reformed religion has not quite one follower to 100 inhabitants. Therefore, even if the prudence incumbent on minorities were a partial cause of the great difference between the two religions, the greatest share is certainly due to other causes.

We shall find these other causes in the nature of these two religious systems. Yet they both prohibit suicide with equal emphasis; not only do they penalize it morally with great severity, but both teach that a new life begins beyond the tomb where men are punished for their evil actions, and Protestantism just as well as Catholicism numbers suicide among them. Finally, in both cults these prohibitions are of divine origin; they are represented not as the logical conclusion of correct reason, but God Himself is their authority. Therefore, if Protestantism is less unfavorable to the development of suicide, it is not because of a different attitude from that of Catholicism. Thus, if both religions have the same precepts with respect to this particular matter, their dissimilar

influence on suicide must proceed from one of the more general characteristics differentiating them.

The only essential difference between Catholicism and Protestantism is that the second permits free inquiry to a far greater degree than the first. Of course, Catholicism by the very fact that it is an idealistic religion concedes a far greater place to thought and reflection than Greco-Latin polytheism or Hebrew monotheism. It is not restricted to mechanical ceremonies but seeks the control of the conscience. So it appeals to conscience, and even when demanding blind submission of reason, does so by employing the language of reason. None the less, the Catholic accepts his faith ready made, without scrutiny. He may not even submit it to historical examination since the original texts that serve as its basis are proscribed. A whole hierarchical system of authority is devised, with marvelous ingenuity, to render tradition invariable. All variation is abhorrent to Catholic thought. The Protestant is far more the author of his faith. The Bible is put in his hands and no interpretation is imposed upon him. The very structure of the reformed cult stresses this state of religious individualism. Nowhere but in England is the Protestant clergy a hierarchy; like the worshippers, the priest has no other source but himself and his conscience. He is a more instructed guide than the run of worshippers but with no special authority for fixing dogma. But what best proves that this freedom of inquiry proclaimed by the founders of the Reformation has not remained a Platonic affirmation is the increasing multiplicity of all sorts of sects so strikingly in contrast with the indivisible unity of the Catholic Church.

We thus reach our first conclusion, that the proclivity of Protestantism for suicide must relate to the spirit of free inquiry that animates this religion. Let us understand this relationship correctly. Free inquiry itself is only the effect of another cause. When it appears, when men, after having long received their ready made faith from tradition, claim the right to shape it for themselves, this is not because of the intrinsic desirability of free inquiry, for the latter involves as much sorrow as happiness. But it is because men henceforth need this liberty. This very need can have only one cause: the overthrow of traditional beliefs. If they still asserted themselves with equal energy, it would never occur to men to criticize them. If they still had the same authority, men would not demand the right to verify the source of this authority.

Reflection develops only if its development becomes imperative, that is, if certain ideas and instinctive sentiments which have hitherto adequately guided conduct are found to have lost their efficacy. Then reflection intervenes to fill the gap that has appeared, but which it has not created. Just as reflection disappears to the extent that thought and action take the form of automatic habits, it awakes only when accepted habits become disorganized. It asserts its rights against public opinion only when the latter loses strength, that is, when it is no longer prevalent to the same extent. If these assertions occur not merely occasionally and as passing crises, but become chronic; if individual consciences keep reaffirming their autonomy, it is because they are constantly subject to conflicting impulses, because a new opinion has not been formed to replace the one no longer existing. If a new system of beliefs were constituted which seemed as indisputable to everyone as the old, no one would think of discussing it any longer. Its discussion would no longer even be permitted; for ideas shared by an entire society draw from this consensus an authority that makes them sacrosanct and raises them above dispute. For them to have become more tolerant, they must first already have become the object of less general and complete assent and been weakened by preliminary controversy.

Thus, if it is correct to say that free inquiry once proclaimed, multiplies schisms, it must be added that it presupposes them and derives from them, for it is claimed and instituted as a principle only in order to permit latent or half-declared schisms to develop more freely. So if Protestantism concedes a greater freedom to individual thought than Catholicism, it is because it has fewer common beliefs and practices. Now, a religious society cannot exist without a collective *credo* and the more extensive the *credo* the more unified and strong is the society. For it does not unite men by an exchange and reciprocity of services, a temporal bond of union which permits and even presupposes differences, but which a religious society cannot form. It socializes men only by attaching them completely to an identical body of doctrine and socializes them in proportion as this body of doctrine is extensive and firm. The more numerous the manners of action and thought of a religious character are, which are accordingly removed from free inquiry, the more the idea of God presents itself in all details of existence, and makes individual wills converge to one identical goal.

Inversely, the greater concessions a confessional group makes to individual judgment, the less it dominates lives, the less its cohesion and vitality. We thus reach the conclusion that the superiority of Protestantism with respect to suicide results from its being a less strongly integrated church than the Catholic church.

This also explains the situation of Judaism. Indeed, the reproach to which the Jews have for so long been exposed by Christianity has created feelings of unusual solidarity among them. Their need of resisting a general hostility, the very impossibility of free communication with the rest of the population, has forced them to, strict union among themselves. Consequently, each community became a small, compact and coherent society with a strong feeling of self-consciousness and unity. Everyone thought and lived alike; individual divergences were made almost impossible by the community of existence and the close and constant surveillance of all over each. The Jewish church has thus been more strongly united than any other, from its dependence on itself because of being the object of intolerance. By analogy with what has just been observed apropos of Protestantism, the same cause must therefore be assumed for the slight tendency of the Jews to suicide in spite of all sorts of circumstances which might on the contrary incline them to it. Doubtless they owe this immunity in a sense to the hostility surrounding them. But if this is its influence, it is not because it imposes a higher morality but because it obliges them to live in greater union. They are immune to this degree because their religious society is of such solidarity. Besides, the ostracism to which they are subject is only one of the causes producing this result; the very nature of Jewish beliefs must contribute largely to it. Judaism, in fact, like all early religions, consists basically of a body of practices minutely governing all the details of life and leaving little free room to individual judgment.

III

Several facts confirm this explanation.

First, of all great Protestant countries, England is the one where suicide is least developed. In fact, only about 80 suicides per million inhabitants are found there, whereas the reformed societies of Germany have from 140 to 400; and yet the general activity of ideas and

business seems no less great there than elsewhere.⁶ Now, it happens at the same time that the Anglican church is far more powerfully integrated than other Protestant churches. To be sure, England has been customarily regarded as the classic land of individual freedom; but actually many facts indicate that the number of common, obligatory beliefs and practices, which are thus withdrawn from free inquiry by individuals, is greater than in Germany. First, the law still sanctions many religious requirements: such as the law of the observance of Sunday, that forbidding stage representations of any character from Holy Scripture; the one until recently requiring some profession of faith from every member of political representative bodies, etc. Next, respect for tradition is known to be general and powerful in England: it must extend to matters of religion as well as others. But a highly developed traditionalism always more or less restricts activity of the individual. Finally, the Anglican clergy is the only Protestant clergy organized in a hierarchy. This external organization clearly shows an inner unity incompatible with a pronounced religious individualism.

Besides, England has the largest number of clergymen of any Protestant country. In 1876 there averaged 908 church-goers for every minister, compared with 932 in Hungary, 1,100 in Holland, 1,300 in Denmark, 1,440 in Switzerland and 1,600 in Germany.⁷ The number of priests is not an insignificant detail nor a superficial characteristic but one related to the intrinsic nature of religion. The proof of this is that the Catholic clergy is everywhere much more numerous than the Protestant. In Italy there is a priest for every 267 Catholics, in Spain for 419, in Portugal for 536, in Switzerland for 540, in France for 823, in Belgium for 1,050. This is because the priest is the natural organ of faith and tradition and because here as elsewhere the organ inevitably develops in exact proportion to its function. The more intense religious life, the more men are needed to direct it. The greater the number of dogmas and precepts the interpretation of which is not left to individual consciences, the more authorities are required to tell their

⁶ To be sure, the statistics of English suicides are not very exact. Because of the penalties attached to suicide, many cases are reported as accidental death. However, this inexactitude is not enough to explain the extent of the difference between this country and Germany.

⁷ Oettingen, *Moralstatistik*, p. 626.

meaning; moreover, the more numerous these authorities, the more closely they surround and the better they restrain the individual. Thus, far from weakening our theory, the case of England verifies it. If Protestantism there does not produce the same results as on the continent, it is because religious society there is much more strongly constituted and to this extent resembles the Catholic church.

Here, however, is a more general proof in confirmation of our thesis.

The taste for free inquiry can be aroused only if accompanied by that for learning. Knowledge is free thought's only means of achieving its purposes. When irrational beliefs or practices have lost their hold, appeal must be made, in the search for others, to the enlightened consciousness of which knowledge is only the highest form. Fundamentally, these two tendencies are one and spring from the same source. Men generally have the desire for self-instruction only in so far as they are freed from the yoke of tradition; for as long as the latter governs intelligence it is all-sufficient and jealous of any rival. On the other hand, light is sought as soon as customs whose origins are lost in obscurity no longer correspond to new necessities. This is why philosophy, the first, synthetic form of knowledge, appears as soon as religion has lost its sway, and only then; and is then followed progressively by the many single sciences with the further development of the very need which produced philosophy. Unless we are mistaken, if the progressive weakening of collective and customary prejudices produces a trend to suicide and if Protestantism derives thence its special pre-disposition to it, the two following facts should be noted: 1, the desire for learning must be stronger among Protestants than among Catholics; 2, in so far as this denotes a weakening of common beliefs it should vary with suicide, fairly generally. Do facts confirm this twofold hypothesis?

If Catholic France is compared with Protestant Germany merely at their highest levels, that is, if only the upper classes of both are compared, it seems that France may bear the comparison. In the great centers of our country, knowledge is no less honored or widespread than among our neighbors; we even decidedly outdistance several Protestant countries in this respect. But if the desire for learning is equally felt in the upper reaches of the two societies, it is not so on their lower levels; and whereas the maximal intensity is approximately

the same in both, the average intensity is less among us. The same is true of the aggregate of Catholic nations compared with Protestant nations. Even assuming that the highest culture of the former is about the same as the latter's, the situation is quite otherwise as regards popular education. Whereas among the Protestant peoples of Saxony, Norway, Sweden, Baden, Denmark and Prussia, from 1877-1878 among 1,000 children of school age, that is, from 6 to 12 years, an average of 957 attended school, the Catholic peoples, France, Austria-Hungary, Spain and Italy, had only 667, or 31 per cent less. Proportions are the same for the periods of 1874-75 and 1860-61.⁸ Prussia, the Protestant country having the lowest figure here, is yet far above France at the head of the Catholic countries; the former has 897 pupils per 1,000 children, the latter only 766.⁹ In all of Germany, Bavaria has most Catholics and also most illiterates. Of all Bavarian provinces, the Upper Palatinate is one of the most profoundly Catholic and has also the most conscripted men who do not know how to read or write (15 per cent in 1871). In Prussia the same is true for the duchy of Posen and the province of Prussia.¹⁰ Finally, in the whole kingdom there numbered in 1871, 66 illiterates to every 1,000 Protestants and 152 to 1,000 Catholics. The relation is the same for the women of both faiths.¹¹

Perhaps it will be objected that primary instruction can be no measure of general education. The degree of a people's education, it is often said, does not depend on the greater or smaller number of illiterates. Let us agree to this qualification, though the various degrees of education are perhaps more closely interrelated than seems to be the case and the development of one is difficult without the simultaneous growth of the others.¹² In any case, although the level of primary instruction may only imperfectly reflect that of scientific culture, it has a certain reference to the extent of the desire for knowledge of a people as a whole. A people must feel this need very keenly to try to spread its elements even

⁸ Oettingen, *Monatstatistik*, p. 586.

⁹ Bavaria slightly exceeds Prussia in one of these periods (1877-78); but only this once.

¹⁰ Oettingen, *ibid.*, p. 582.

¹¹ Morselli, *op. cit.*, p. 223.

¹² Moreover it will appear below that both secondary and higher education are more developed among Protestants than among Catholics.

among the lowest classes. Thus to place the means of learning within everyone's reach, and even legally to forbid ignorance, shows a national awareness of the indispensability of broadened and enlightened intelligence of the individual for the nation's own existence. Actually, Protestant nations have so stressed primary instruction because they held that each individual must be able to understand the Bible. Our present search is for the average intensity of this need, the value attached by each people to knowledge, not the standing of its scholars and their discoveries. From this special point of view, the state of advanced learning and truly scientific production would be a poor criterion; for it would show only what goes on in a limited sector of society. Popular and general education is a more accurate index.

Having thus proved our first proposition, let us attack the second. Does the craving for knowledge to the degree that it corresponds to a weakening of common faith really develop as does suicide? The very facts that Protestants are better educated and commit suicide more than Catholics is a first presumption for this. But the law can not only be verified by comparison of one faith with the other but also be observed within each religious confession.

Italy is wholly Catholic. Public instruction and suicide are identically distributed (See Table XIX).

Not only do the averages correspond exactly, but the agreement extends to details. There is a single exception; Emilia, where under the influence of local causes suicides have no relation to the extent of literacy. Similar observations may be made in France. The departments containing most illiterate couples (above 20 per cent) are Corrèze, Corsica, Côtes-du-Nord, Dordogne, Finisterre, Landes, Morbihan, Haute-Vienne; all relatively free from suicides. More generally, among departments with more than 10 per cent of couples unable either to read or write, not one belongs to the northeastern region which is classical territory for French suicides.¹³

If Protestant countries are compared with one another, the same parallelism will be found. More suicides occur in Saxony than in Prussia; Prussia has more illiterates than Saxony (5.52 per cent compared with 1.3 in 1865). Saxony is even peculiar in that the school

¹³ See *Annuaire statistique de la France*, 1892-94, p. 50 and 51.

Table XIX* Comparison of Italian provinces with reference to suicide and education

First group of provinces	Per cent of marriages with both husband and wife literate	Suicides per million inhabitants
Piedmont	53.09	35.6
Lombardy	44.29	40.4
Liguria	41.15	47.3
Rome	32.61	41.7
Tuscany	24.33	40.6
Averages	39.09	41.1
<i>Second group of provinces</i>		
Venice	19.56	32.0
Emilia	19.31	62.9
Umbria	15.46	30.7
Marches	14.46	34.6
Campania	12.45	21.6
Sardinia	10.14	13.3
Averages	15.23	32.5
<i>Third group of provinces</i>		
Sicily	8.98	18.5
Abruzzi	6.35	15.7
Apulia	6.81	16.3
Calabria	4.67	8.1
Basilicata	4.35	15.0
Averages	6.23	14.7

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

population is above the legal requirement. For 1,000 children of school age in 1877-78, 1,031 attended school: that is, many children continued their studies after the required time. The fact is not met with in any other country.¹⁴ Finally England, as we know, is the one Protestant country with the fewest suicides; it also most resembles Catholic countries with respect to education. In 1865 there were still 23 per cent of naval seamen who could not read and 27 per cent unable to write.

Still other facts may be compared with the foregoing and confirm them.

The liberal professions and in a wider sense the well-to-do classes are certainly those with the liveliest taste for knowledge and the most active intellectual life. Now, although the statistics of suicide by occupations and classes cannot always be obtained with sufficient accuracy, it is undeniably exceptionally frequent in the highest classes of society. In France from 1826 to 1880 the liberal professions lead, with 550 suicides per million of the professional group, while servants, immediately following, have only 290.¹⁵ In Italy, Morselli succeeded in computing the groups exclusively devoted to letters and found that they far surpass all others in their relative contribution. Indeed, for 1868-76, he estimates it as 482.6 per million members of this profession; the army follows with only 404.1 and the general average of the country is only 32. In Prussia (1883-90) the corps of public officials, which is most carefully recruited and forms an intellectual elite, surpasses all other professions with 832 suicides; the health services and public instruction, though much lower, still have very high figures (439 and 301). Bavaria shows the same picture. Omitting the army, the position of which is exceptional from the point of view of suicide for reasons to be given below, public officials hold second place with 454 suicides and almost achieve first place, for they are barely exceeded by business, with the rate of 465; the arts, literature and the press follow closely with 416.¹⁶ To be sure, the educated classes in Belgium and Wurttemberg seem less gravely afflicted; but professional

¹⁴ Oettingen, *Moralstatistik*, p. 586.

¹⁵ General report of criminal justice for 1882, p. CXV.

¹⁶ See Prinzing, *op. cit.*, pp. 28-31. It is noteworthy that in Prussia journalism and the arts show a rather ordinary figure (279 suicides).

nomenclature in these countries is too imprecise to permit much importance being attributed to the two irregularities.

Further, we have seen that in all the countries of the world women commit suicide much less than men. They are also much less educated. Fundamentally traditionalist by nature, they govern their conduct by fixed beliefs and have no great intellectual needs. In Italy, between 1878-79, there were 4,808 married men out of 10,000 who could not sign their marriage contract; of 10,000 married women, 7,029 could not.¹⁷ In France, the proportion in 1879 was 199 husbands and 310 wives per 1,000 couples. In Prussia the same difference is found between the sexes, among Protestants as well as among Catholics.¹⁸ In England it is much less than in other European countries. In 1879, 138 illiterate husbands were found per thousand to 185 wives, and since 1851 the proportion has been practically the same.¹⁹ But England is also the country where women come closer to men with respect to suicide. To 1,000 suicides of women there were 2,546 of men in 1858-60, 2,745 in 1863-67, 2,861 in 1872-76, while everywhere else²⁰ suicides of women are four, five or six times less frequent than those of men. Finally, circumstances are almost reversed in the United States, which makes them particularly instructive. Negro women, it seems, are equally or more highly educated than their husbands. Several observers report²¹ that they are also very strongly predisposed to suicide, at times even surpassing white women. The proportion in certain places is said to be 350 per cent.

There is one case, however, in which our law might seem not to be verified.

Of all religions, Judaism counts the fewest suicides, yet in none other is education so general. Even in elementary education the Jews are at least on a level with the Protestants. In fact, in Prussia (1871), to 1,000 Jews of each sex there were 66 illiterate men and 125 women; for the Protestants the numbers were practically the same, 66 and 114.

¹⁷ Oettingen, *Moralstatistik*, supplement, Table 83.

¹⁸ Morselli, p. 123.

¹⁹ Oettingen, *ibid.*, p. 577.

²⁰ Except Spain. But not only is the accuracy of Spanish statistics open to doubt, but Spain cannot compare with the great nations of Central and Northern Europe.

²¹ Baly and Baudin. We quote from Morselli, p. 225.

But the Jews participate proportionally more, particularly in secondary and higher learning, than the members of other religions, as the following figures taken from Prussian statistics (years 1875-76)²² show:

	Catholics	Protestants	Jews
Share of each religion in 100 inhabitants of all sorts	33.8	64.9	1.3
Share of each religion in 100 secondary school pupils	17.3	73.1	9.6

Taking into account differences of population, Jews attend Gymnasia, Realschulen, etc., about 14 times as often as Catholics and 7 times as often as Protestants. It is the same with higher education. Among 1,000 young Catholics attending institutions of learning of every sort, there are only 1.3 at a university; among 1,000 Protestants, 2.5; for the Jews the proportion increases to 16.²³

But if the Jew manages to be both well instructed and very disinclined to suicide, it is because of the special origin of his desire for knowledge. It is a general law that religious minorities, in order to protect themselves better against the hate to which they are exposed or merely through a sort of emulation, try to surpass in knowledge the populations surrounding them. Thus Protestants themselves show more desire for knowledge when they are a minority of the general population.²⁴ The Jew, therefore, seeks to learn, not in order to replace

²² According to Alwin Petersilie, *Zur Statistik der höheren Lehranstalten in Preussen*. In *Zeitschr. d. preus. stat. Bureau*, 1887, p. 109 ff.

²³ *Zeitschr. d. pr. stat. Bureau*, 1889, p. XX.

²⁴ In fact, the following shows the variation of Protestant enrollment in secondary schools in the different provinces of Prussia:

Proportion of Protestant population to total	Average proportion of Protestant pupils to total no. of pupils	Difference between first and second
1st group 98.7-87.2%	Average 94.6	90.8
2nd group 80-50%	Average 70.3	75.3
3rd group 50-40%	Average 46.4	56.0
4th group Below 40%	Average 29.2	61.0

his collective prejudices by reflective thought, but merely to be better armed for the struggle. For him it is a means of offsetting the unfavorable position imposed on him by opinion and sometimes by law. And since knowledge by itself has no influence upon a tradition in full vigor, he superimposes this intellectual life upon his habitual routine with no effect of the former upon the latter. This is the reason for the complexity he presents. Primitive in certain respects, in others he is an intellectual and man of culture. He thus combines the advantages of the severe discipline characteristic of small and ancient groups with the benefits of the intense culture enjoyed by our great societies. He has all the intelligence of modern man without sharing his despair.

Accordingly, if in this case intellectual development bears no relation to the number of voluntary deaths, it is because its origin and significance are not the usual ones. So the exception is only apparent; it even confirms the law. Indeed, it proves that if the suicidal tendency is great in educated circles, this is due, as we have said, to the weakening of traditional beliefs and to the state of moral individualism resulting from this; for it disappears when education has another cause and responds to other needs.

IV

Two important conclusions derive from this chapter.

First, we see why as a rule suicide increases with knowledge. Knowledge does not determine this progress. It is innocent; nothing is more unjust than to accuse it, and the example of the Jews proves this conclusively. But these two facts result simultaneously from a single general state which they translate into different forms. Man seeks to learn and man kills himself because of the loss of cohesion in his religious society; he does not kill himself because of his learning. It is certainly

Thus, where Protestantism is in a great majority, its scholastic population is not in proportion to its total population. With the increase of the Catholic minority, the difference between the two populations, from being negative, becomes positive, and this positive difference becomes larger in proportion as the Protestants become fewer. The Catholic faith also shows more intellectual curiosity when in the minority. (See Oettingen, *Moralstatistik*, p. 650).

not the learning he acquires that disorganizes religion; but the desire for knowledge wakens because religion becomes disorganized. Knowledge is not sought as a means to destroy accepted opinions but because their destruction has commenced. To be sure, once knowledge exists, it may battle in its own name and in its own cause, and set up as an antagonist to traditional sentiments. But its attacks would be ineffective if these sentiments still possessed vitality; or rather, would not even take place. Faith is not uprooted by dialectic proof; it must already be deeply shaken by other causes to be unable to withstand the shock of argument.

Far from knowledge being the source of the evil, it is its remedy, the only remedy we have. Once established beliefs have been carried away by the current of affairs, they cannot be artificially reestablished; only reflection can guide us in life, after this. Once the social instinct is blunted, intelligence is the only guide left us and we have to reconstruct a conscience by its means. Dangerous as is the undertaking there can be no hesitation, for we have no choice. Let those who view anxiously and sadly the ruins of ancient beliefs, who feel all the difficulties of these critical times, not ascribe to science an evil it has not caused but rather which it tries to cure! Beware of treating it as an enemy! It has not the dissolvent effect ascribed to it, but is the only weapon for our battle against the dissolution which gives birth to science itself. It is no answer to denounce it. The authority of vanished traditions will never be restored by silencing it; we shall be only more powerless to replace them. We must, to be sure, be equally careful to avoid seeing a self-sufficient end in education, whereas it is only a means. If minds cannot be made to lose the desire for freedom by artificially enslaving them, neither can they recover their equilibrium by mere freedom. They must use this freedom fittingly.

Secondly, we see why, generally speaking, religion has a prophylactic effect upon suicide. It is not, as has sometimes been said, because it condemns it more unhesitatingly than secular morality, nor because the idea of God gives its precepts exceptional authority which subdues the will, nor because the prospect of a future life and the terrible punishments there awaiting the guilty give its proscriptions a greater sanction than that of human laws. The Protestant believes in God and the immortality of the soul no less than the Catholic. More than this,

the religion with least inclination to suicide, Judaism, is the very one not formally proscribing it and also the one in which the idea of immortality plays the least role. Indeed, the Bible contains no law forbidding man to kill himself²⁵ and, on the other hand, its beliefs in a future life are most vague. Doubtless, in both matters, rabbinical teaching has gradually supplied the omissions of the sacred book; but they have not its authority. The beneficent influence of religion is therefore not due to the special nature of religious conceptions. If religion protects man against the desire for self-destruction, it is not that it preaches the respect for his own person to him with arguments *sui generis*; but because it is a society. What constitutes this society is the existence of a certain number of beliefs and practices common to all the faithful, traditional and thus obligatory. The more numerous and strong these collective states of mind are, the stronger the integration of the religious community, and also the greater its preservative value. The details of dogmas and rites are secondary. The essential thing is that they be capable of supporting a sufficiently intense collective life. And because the Protestant church has less consistency than the others it has less moderating effect upon suicide.

²⁵ The only penal proscription known to us is that mentioned by Flavius Josephus in his *History of the War of the Jews against the Romans* (III, 25), which says simply that "the bodies of those who kill themselves voluntarily remain unburied until after sunset, although those who have been killed in battle may be buried earlier." This is not even definitely a penal measure.