

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 com-

CHAPTER 2  
EGOISTIC SUICIDE

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

I

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:

	Average of Suicides per Million Inhabitants
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

Bavarian Provinces (1867-75) \*

	Provinces w. Catholic Minority (less than 50%)	Suicides per Million Inhabitants	Provinces w. Catholic Majority (50 to 90%)	Suicides Per Million Inhabitants	Provinces w. More Than 90% Catholic	Suicides Per Million Inhabitants
Rhenish Central		167	Lower Franconia	157	Upper Palatinate	64
Franconia Upper		207	Swabia	118	Upper Bavaria	114
Franconia Lower		204			Lower Bavaria	19
Average		192	Average	135	Average	75

\* The population below 15 years has been omitted.

pares 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 above). Not only the portions of averages to 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:

Prussian Provinces (1883-90)

	Provinces with More Than 90% Protestant	Suicides per Million Inhabitants	Provinces with from 89 to 68% Protestant	Suicides per Million Inhabitants
Saxony		309.4	Hanover	212.3
Schleswig Pomerania		312.9	Hesse	200.3
		171.5	Brandenburg and Berlin E. Prussia	296.3
Average		264.6	Average	220.0
	Provinces with from 40 to 50% Protestant	Suicides per Million Inhabitants	Provinces with from 32 to 28% Protestant	Suicides per Million Inhabitants
W. Prussia		133.9	Posen	96.4
Silesia		260.2	Rhinland	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.

Catholic	French Cantons		German Cantons		Total of Cantons of All Nationalities	
	83 suicides per million inhabitants	87 suicides	Catholics	Protestants	Catholics	Mixed
Protestants	453 suicides per million	293 suicides	Protestants	326.3 suicides	86.7 suicides	212.0 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

	Protestants		Catholics		Jews		Names of Observers
Austria	(1852-59)	79.5	51.3	20.7	Wegner		
Prussia	(1849-55)	159.9	49.5	46.4	Id.		
Prussia	(1869-72)	187	69	96	Morselli		
Prussia	(1890)	240	100	180	Priesting		
Baden	(1852-62)	139	117	87	Legoyll		
Baden	(1870-74)	171	136.7	174	Morselli		
Baden	(1878-88)	242	170	210	Priesting		
Bavaria	(1844-56)	135.4	49.1	105.9	Morselli		
Bavaria	(1884-91)	224	94	193	Priesting		
Württemberg	(1846-60)	113.5	77.9	65.6	Wagner		
Württemberg	(1873-76)	180	120	60	Id.		
Württemberg	(1881-90)	170	119	142	Burtheim		

Thus, everywhere without exception,<sup>1</sup> Protestants show far more suicides than the followers of other confessions. The difference varies

<sup>1</sup> 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).

between a minimum of 20 to 30 per cent and a maximum of 300 per cent. It is useless to invoke with Mayr<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

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; <sup>4</sup> only towards 1870 do they begin to lose their ancient immunity. They still very rarely greatly exceed the rate for 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

<sup>2</sup> *Handwörterbuch der Staatswissenschaften*, Supplement, Vol. 1, p. 702.

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

<sup>4</sup> 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.

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?

## II

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.<sup>5</sup> 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 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 con-

<sup>5</sup> Legoyt, *op. cit.*, p. 203; Oettingen, *Moralitätstheorie*, p. 654.

ciliating 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

population.<sup>24</sup> The Jew, therefore, seeks to learn, not in order to replace 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

<sup>24</sup> 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 98.7-97.2%	Average 94.6	- 3.8
2nd group 80 -50 %	Average 70.3	+ 5
3rd group 50 -40 %	Average 46.4	+ 10.4
4th group Below 40%	Average 29.2	+ 31.8

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).

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 not the learning he acquires that disorganizes religion; but the desire for knowledge awakens 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 himself<sup>25</sup> 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 *in genere*; 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.

<sup>25</sup> 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.

### CHAPTER 3 EGOISTIC SUICIDE (continued)

**B**UT if religion preserves men from suicide only because and in so far as it is a society, other societies probably have the same effect. From this point of view let us consider the family and political society.

#### I

If one consults only the absolute figures, unmarried persons seem to commit suicide less than married ones. Thus in France, during the period 1873-78, there were 16,264 suicides of married persons while unmarried persons had only 11,709. The former number is to the second as 132 to 100.<sup>1</sup> As the same proportion appears at other periods and in other countries, certain authors had once taught that marriage and family life multiply the chances of suicide. Certainly, if in accordance with current opinion one regards suicide primarily as an act of despair caused by the difficulties of existence, this opinion has all the appearance of probability. An unmarried person has in fact an easier life than a married one. Does not marriage entail all sorts of burdens and responsibilities? To assure the present and future of a family, are not more privations and sufferings required than to meet the needs of a single person?<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, clear as it seems, this a priori reasoning is quite false and the facts only seem to support it because of being poorly analyzed. The elder Bertillon

<sup>1</sup> Durkheim's figure of 132 appears to be a misprint. The figure works out to 139.—Ed.

<sup>2</sup> See Wagner, *Die Gesetzmäßigkeiten*, etc., p. 177.