part 1

Sociological Methodology

An Agenda for Sociology

Introduction

The extracts from *Suicide* that follow serve as a useful introduction to Durkheim's methodological agenda. They make the case that even the most seemingly private of acts – suicide – is a subject matter best treated not by individual psychology, but rather by a sociology concerned with the objectivistic study of social facts. Durkheim classifies and explains the different social types of suicide by the different social causes or "suicidogenic currents" that generate them; he contends that these currents, at least within certain limits, are phenomena of a "normal sociology"; and argues that in contemporary societies those limits have been exceeded, and that "the rising tide of suicide originates in a pathological state just now accompanying the march of civilization" (p. 48). Such conclusions lead to practical suggestions for social reform (see ch. 8). While these excerpts might easily be read alone, they are perhaps most profitably studied in tandem with another of Durkheim's major works – *The Rules of Sociological Method* – selections from which appear in the Appendix. (As Durkheim himself notes, *Suicide* treats in "concrete and specific form . . . the chief methodological problems" discussed "in greater detail" in that other work (p. 32).) *Suicide*, however, is not merely a work of applied sociological methodology. It is also a major theoretical study that introduces Durkheim's key categories of social integration and social regulation and, more specifically, his concepts of egoism, altruism, anomie, and fatalism. It also stands as one of his most important substantive contributions to the sociology of modernity, for while it is outwardly concerned with variations in suicide rates, at a much deeper level it investigates "the causes of the general contemporary maladjustment being undergone by European societies" (p. 32). The concluding selection from Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction* similarly spans methodological, theoretical, and substantive levels of analysis. It takes the most seemingly private of faculties – taste – and shows how its variations can also be explained sociologically; it also provides new theoretical perspectives upon class formation and opens up important new vistas upon the structuring and dynamics of modern societies.

From *Suicide*

Suicide has been chosen as [our] subject, among the various subjects that we have had occasion to study in our teaching career, because few are more accurately to be defined and because it seemed to us particularly timely; its limits have even required study in a preliminary work. On the other hand, by such concentration, real laws are discoverable which demonstrate the possibility of sociology better than any dialectical argument. The ones we hope to have demonstrated will appear. . . .

Moreover, by thus restricting the research, one is by no means deprived of broad views and general insights. On the contrary, we think we have established a certain number of propositions concerning marriage, widowhood, family life, religious society, etc., which, if we are not mistaken, are more instructive than the common theories of moralists as to the nature of these conditions or institutions. There will even emerge from our study some suggestions concerning the causes of the general contemporary maladjustment being undergone by European societies and concerning remedies which may relieve it. . . .

Finally, in the course of this work, but in a concrete and specific form, will appear the chief methodological problems elsewhere stated and examined by us in greater detail. [*Les règles de la Méthode sociologique*, Paris, F. Alcan, 1895. (Translated into English as *The Rules of Sociological Method*, and published by the Free Press, Glencoe, Illinois, 1950.)] Indeed, among these questions there is one to which the following work makes a contribution too important for us to fail to call it immediately to the attention of the reader.

Sociological method as we practice it rests wholly on the basic principle that social facts must be studied as things, that is, as realities external to the individual. There is no principle for which we have received more criticism; but none is more fundamental. Indubitably for sociology to be possible, it must above all have an object all its own. It must take

cognizance of a reality which is not in the domain of other sciences. But if no reality exists outside of individual consciousness, it wholly lacks any material of its own. In that case, the only possible subject of observation is the mental states of the individual, since nothing else exists. That, however, is the field of psychology. . . . On the pretext of giving the science a more solid foundation by establishing it upon the psychological constitution of the individual, it is thus robbed of the only object proper to it. *It is not realized that there can be no sociology unless societies exist, and that societies cannot exist if there are only individuals*. Moreover, this view is not the least of the causes which maintain the taste for vague generalities in sociology. How can it be important to define the concrete forms of social life, if they are thought to have only a borrowed existence?

But it seems hardly possible to us that there will not emerge, on the contrary, from every page of this book, so to speak, the impression that the individual is dominated by a moral reality greater than himself: namely, collective reality. . . . Thus it will appear more clearly why sociology can and must be objective, since it deals with realities as definite and substantial as those of the psychologist or the biologist. . . .

. . . Since suicide is an individual action affecting the individual only, it must seemingly depend exclusively on individual factors, thus belonging to psychology alone. Is not the suicide's resolve usually explained by his temperament, character, antecedents and private history?

The degree and conditions under which suicides may be legitimately studied in this way need not now be considered, but that they may be viewed in an entirely different light is certain. If, instead of seeing in them only separate occurrences, unrelated and to be separately studied, the suicides committed in a given society during a given period of time are taken as a whole, it appears that this total is not simply a sum of independent units, a collective total, but is itself a new fact *sui generis*, with its own unity, individuality and consequently its own nature – a nature, furthermore, dominantly social. Indeed, provided too long a period is not considered, the statistics for one and the same society are almost invariable, . . .

If a longer period of time is considered, more serious changes are observed. Then, however, they become chronic; they only prove that the structural characteristics of society have simultaneously suffered profound changes. It is interesting to note that they do not take place with the extreme slowness that quite a large number of observers has attributed to them, but are both abrupt and progressive. After a series of years, during which these figures have varied within very narrow limits, a rise suddenly appears which, after repeated vacillation, is confirmed, grows and is at last fixed. This is because every breach of social equilibrium, though

sudden in its appearance, takes time to produce all its consequences. Thus, the evolution of suicide is composed of undulating movements, distinct and successive, which occur spasmodically, develop for a time, and then stop only to begin again. . . .

At each moment of its history, therefore, each society has a definite aptitude for suicide. The relative intensity of this aptitude is measured by taking the proportion between the total number of voluntary deaths and the population of every age and sex. We will call this numerical datum *the rate of mortality through suicide, characteristic of the society under consideration*. It is generally calculated in proportion to a million or a hundred thousand inhabitants.

Not only is this rate constant for long periods, but its invariability is even greater than that of leading demographic data. General mortality, especially, varies much more often from year to year and the variations it undergoes are far greater. . . .

. . . The average rate of mortality, furthermore, achieves this regularity only by being general and impersonal, and can afford only a very imperfect description of a given society. It is in fact substantially the same for all peoples of approximately the same degree of civilization; at least, the differences are very slight. . . . On the contrary, the suicide-rate, while showing only slight annual changes, varies according to society by doubling, tripling, quadrupling, and even more. . . . Accordingly, to a much higher degree than the death-rate, it is peculiar to each social group where it can be considered as a characteristic index. It is even so closely related to what is most deeply constitutional in each national temperament that the order in which the different societies appear in this respect remains almost exactly the same at very different periods. . . .

The suicide-rate is therefore a factual order, unified and definite, as is shown by both its permanence and its variability. For this permanence would be inexplicable if it were not the result of a group of distinct characteristics, solidary one with another, and simultaneously effective in spite of different attendant circumstances; and this variability proves the concrete and individual quality of these same characteristics, since they vary with the individual character of society itself. In short, these statistical data express the suicidal tendency with which each society is collectively afflicted. . . .

. . .[I]t would seem to be best to inquire first whether the tendency [to suicide] is single and indestructible or whether it does not rather consist of several different tendencies, which may be isolated by analysis and which should be separately studied. If so, we should proceed as follows. As the tendency, single or not, is observable only in its individual manifestations, we should have to begin with the latter. . . .

Unfortunately, no classification of the suicides of sane persons can be made in terms of their morphological types or characteristics, from almost complete lack of the necessary data. . . .

But our aim may be achieved by another method. Let us reverse the order of study. Only in so far as the effective causes differ can there be different types of suicide. For each to have its own nature, it must also have special conditions of existence. The same antecedent or group of antecedents cannot sometimes produce one result and sometimes another, for, if so, the difference of the second from the first would itself be without cause, which would contradict the principle of causality. Every proved specific difference between causes therefore implies a similar difference between effects. Consequently, we shall be able to determine the social types of suicide by classifying them not directly by their preliminarily described characteristics, but by the causes which produce them. Without asking why they differ from one another, we will first seek the social conditions responsible for them; then group these conditions in a number of separate classes by their resemblances and differences, and we shall be sure that a specific type of suicide will correspond to each of these classes. In a word, instead of being morphological, our classification will from the start be aetiological. Nor is this a sign of inferiority, for the nature of a phenomenon is much more profoundly got at by knowing its cause than by knowing its characteristics only, even the essential ones. . . .

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. . . .

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. . . .

. . . [E]verywhere without exception, Protestants show far more suicides than the followers of other confessions. . . .

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. . . . [T]heir religion has the fewest suicides of all.

These facts established, what is their explanation?

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. . . .

 . . . 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. . . .

. . . [M]arriage has . . . a preservative effect of its own against suicide. But it is very limited and also benefits one sex only. . . . [T]he family is the essential factor in the immunity of married persons, that is, the family as the whole group of parents and children. Of course, since husband and wife are members, they too share in producing this result, however not as husband or wife but as father or mother, as functionaries of the family association. If the disappearance of one increases the chances that the other may commit suicide, it is not because the bonds uniting them personally are broken, but because a family disaster occurs, the shock of which the survivor undergoes. Reserving the special effect of marriage for later study, we shall say that domestic society, like religious society is a powerful counteragent against suicide.

This immunity even increases with the density of the family, that is with the increase in the number of its elements. . . .

. . . Why does family density have this effect upon suicide? . . . It is . . . because the functioning of the family varies with its greater or less density, that the number of its component elements affects the suicidal tendency.

That is, the density of a group cannot sink without its vitality diminishing. Where collective sentiments are strong, it is because the force with which they affect each individual conscience is echoed in all the others, and reciprocally. The intensity they attain therefore depends on the number of consciences which react to them in common. For the same reason, the larger a crowd, the more capable of violence the passions vented by it. Consequently, in a family of small numbers, common sentiments and memories cannot be very intense; for there are not enough consciences in which they can be represented and reenforced by sharing them. No such powerful traditions can be formed there as unite the members of a single group, even surviving it and attaching successive generations to one another. Small families are also inevitably short-lived; and without duration no society can be stable. Not only are collective states weak in such a group, but they cannot be numerous. . . .

But for a group to be said to have less common life than another means that it is less powerfully integrated; for the state of integration of a social aggregate can only reflect the intensity of the collective life circulating in

it. It is more unified and powerful the more active and constant is the intercourse among its members. Our previous conclusion may thus be completed to read: just as the family is a powerful safeguard against suicide, so the more strongly it is constituted the greater its protection.

If statistics had not developed so late, it would be easy to show by the same method that this law applies to political societies. History indeed teaches us that suicide, generally rare in young societies in process of evolution and concentration, increases as they disintegrate. . . .

Great political upheavals are sometimes said to increase the number of suicides. But Morselli has conclusively shown that facts contradict this view. All the revolutions which have occurred in France during this century reduced the number of suicides at the moment of their occurrence. . . .

Mild as they are, mere election crises sometimes have the same result. . . . Great national wars have the same effect as political disturbances. . . .

These facts are therefore susceptible of only one interpretation; namely, that great social disturbances and great popular wars rouse collective sentiments, stimulate partisan spirit and patriotism, political and national faith, alike, and concentrating activity toward a single end, at least temporarily cause a stronger integration of society. The salutary influence which we have just shown to exist is due not to the crisis but to the struggles it occasions. As they force men to close ranks and confront the common danger, the individual thinks less of himself and more of the common cause. Besides, it is comprehensible that this integration may not be purely momentary but may sometimes outlive its immediate causes, especially when it is intense.

We have thus successively set up the three following propositions:

Suicide varies inversely with the degree of integration of religious society.
Suicide varies inversely with the degree of integration of domestic society.
Suicide varies inversely with the degree of integration of political society.

This grouping shows that whereas these different societies have a moderating influence upon suicide, this is due not to special characteristics of each but to a characteristic common to all. . . . The cause can only be found in a single quality possessed by all these social groups, though perhaps to varying degrees. The only quality satisfying this condition is that they are all strongly integrated social groups. So we reach the general conclusion: suicide varies inversely with the degree of integration of the social groups of which the individual forms a part.

But society cannot disintegrate without the individual simultaneously detaching himself from social life, without his own goals becoming pre-

ponderant over those of the community, in a word without his person-
ality tending to surmount the collective personality. The more weakened
the groups to which he belongs, the less he depends on them, the more
he consequently depends only on himself and recognizes no other rules
of conduct than what are founded on his private interests. If we agree to
call this state egoism, in which the individual ego asserts itself to excess
in the face of the social ego and at its expense, we may call egoistic the
special type of suicide springing from excessive individualism. . . .

. . . What is there then in individualism that explains this result?

If, . . . as has often been said, man is double, that is because social man
superimposes himself upon physical man. Social man necessarily pre-
supposes a society which he expresses and serves. If this dissolves, if we
no longer feel it in existence and action about and above us, whatever is
social in us is deprived of all objective foundation. All that remains is an
artificial combination of illusory images, a phantasmagoria vanishing at
the least reflection; that is, nothing which can be a goal for our action.
Yet this social man is the essence of civilized man; he is the masterpiece
of existence. Thus we are bereft of reasons for existence; for the only life
to which we could cling no longer corresponds to anything actual; the
only existence still based upon reality no longer meets our needs.
Because we have been initiated into a higher existence, the one which
satisfies an animal or a child can satisfy us no more and the other itself
fades and leaves us helpless. So there is nothing more for our efforts to
lay hold of, and we feel them lose themselves in emptiness. . . .

But this is not all. This detachment occurs not only in single indi-
viduals. One of the constitutive elements of every national temper-
ament consists of a certain way of estimating the value of existence. There
is a collective as well as an individual humor inclining peoples to sadness
or cheerfulness, making them see things in bright or sombre lights. . . .
For individuals share too deeply in the life of society for it to be diseased
without their suffering infection. What it suffers they necessarily suffer.
Because it is the whole, its ills are communicated to its parts. Hence it
cannot disintegrate without awareness that the regular conditions of
general existence are equally disturbed. Because society is the end on which
our better selves depend, it cannot feel us escaping it without a simul-
taneous realization that our activity is purposeless. . . . As these currents
are collective, they have, by virtue of their origin, an authority which
they impose upon the individual and they drive him more vigorously
on the way to which he is already inclined by the state of moral distress
directly aroused in him by the disintegration of society. Thus, at the
very moment that, with excessive zeal, he frees himself from the social
environment, he still submits to its influence. However individualized
a man may be, there is always something collective remaining – the
very depression and melancholy resulting from this same exaggerated

individualism. He effects communion through sadness when he no longer has anything else with which to achieve it.

Hence this type of suicide well deserves the name we have given it. Egoism is not merely a contributing factor in it; it is its generating cause. In this case the bond attaching man to life relaxes because that attaching him to society is itself slack. The incidents of private life which seem the direct inspiration of suicide and are considered its determining causes are in reality only incidental causes. The individual yields to the slightest shock of circumstance because the state of society has made him a ready prey to suicide. . . .

. . . If, as we have just seen, excessive individuation leads to suicide, insufficient individuation has the same effects. When man has become detached from society, he encounters less resistance to suicide in himself, and he does so likewise when social integration is too strong.

It has sometimes been said that suicide was unknown among lower societies. Thus expressed, the assertion is inexact. To be sure, egoistic suicide, constituted as has just been shown, seems not to be frequent there. But another form exists among them in an endemic state. . . .

Suicide, . . . is surely very common among primitive peoples. But it displays peculiar characteristics. All the facts . . . fall into one of the following three categories:

1   Suicides of men on the threshold of old age or stricken with sickness.
2   Suicides of women on their husbands' death.
3   Suicides of followers or servants on the death of their chiefs.

Now, when a person kills himself, in all these cases, it is not because he assumes the right to do so but, on the contrary, *because it is his duty*. If he fails in this obligation, he is dishonored and also punished, usually, by religious sanctions. . . . The weight of society is thus brought to bear on him to lead him to destroy himself. To be sure, society intervenes in egoistic suicide, as well; but its intervention differs in the two cases. In one case, it speaks the sentence of death; in the other it forbids the choice of death. In the case of egoistic suicide it suggests or counsels at most; in the other case it compels and is the author of conditions and circumstances making this obligation coercive.

This sacrifice then is imposed by society for social ends. . . .

This description sufficiently defines the cause of these suicides. For society to be able thus to compel some of its members to kill themselves, the individual personality can have little value. For as soon as the latter begins to form, the right to existence is the first conceded it; or is at least

suspended only in such unusual circumstances as war. But there can be only one cause for this feeble individuation itself. For the individual to occupy so little place in collective life he must be almost completely absorbed in the group and the latter accordingly, very highly integrated. . . .

We thus confront a type of suicide differing by incisive qualities from the preceding one. Whereas the latter is due to excessive individuation, the former is caused by too rudimentary individuation. One occurs because society allows the individual to escape it, being insufficiently aggregated in some parts or even in the whole; the other, because society holds him in too strict tutelage. Having given the name of *egoism* to the state of the ego living its own life and obeying itself alone, that of *altruism* adequately expresses the opposite state, where the ego is not its own property, where it is blended with something not itself, where the goal of conduct is exterior to itself, that is, in one of the groups in which it participates. So we call the suicide caused by intense altruism *altruistic suicide*. . . .

. . . One is related to the crude morality which disregards everything relating solely to the individual; the other is closely associated with the refined ethics which sets human personality on so high a pedestal that it can no longer be subordinated to anything. Between the two there is, therefore, all the difference between primitive peoples and the most civilized nations.

However, if lower societies are the theatre par excellence of altruistic suicide, it is also found in more recent civilizations. Under this head may notably be classified the death of some of the Christian martyrs. . . .

In our contemporary societies, as individual personality becomes increasingly free from the collective personality, such suicides could not be widespread. Some may doubtless be said to have yielded to altruistic motives, such as soldiers who preferred death to the humiliation of defeat, like Commandant Beaurepaire and Admiral Villeneuve, or unhappy persons who kill themselves to prevent disgrace befalling their family. For when such persons renounce life, it is for something they love better than themselves. But they are isolated and exceptional cases. Yet even today there exists among us a special environment where altruistic suicide is chronic: namely, the army.

It is a general fact in all European countries that the suicidal aptitude of soldiers is much higher than that of the civilian population of the same age. The difference varies between 25 and 900 per cent. . . .

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. . . .

No living being can be happy or even exist unless his needs are sufficiently proportioned to his means. . . .

In the animal, at least in a normal condition, this equilibrium is established with automatic spontaneity because the animal depends on purely material conditions. . . .

This is not the case with man, because most of his needs are not dependent on his body or not to the same degree. . . . 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. . . .

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. . . . To pursue a goal which is by definition unattainable is to condemn oneself to a state of perpetual unhappiness. . . .

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. . . . 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. . . .

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. . . . 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. . . .

This explanation is confirmed by the remarkable immunity of poor countries. Poverty protects against suicide because it is a restraint in itself. . . .

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. . . .

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. . . . [I]ndustry, 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. . . .

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! . . .

Industrial and commercial functions are really among the occupations which furnish the greatest number of suicides. . . .

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. . . .

. . . [T]here is a type of suicide the opposite of anomic suicide, just as egoistic and altruistic suicides are opposites. It is the suicide deriving from excessive regulation, that of persons with futures pitilessly blocked and passions violently choked by oppressive discipline. It is the suicide of very young husbands, of the married woman who is childless. So, for completeness' sake, we should set up a fourth suicidal type. But it has so little contemporary importance and examples are so hard to find aside from the cases just mentioned that it seems useless to dwell upon it. However it might be said to have historical interest. Do not the suicides of slaves, said to be frequent under certain conditions, . . . belong to this type, or all suicides attributable to excessive physical or moral despotism? To bring out the ineluctable and inflexible nature of a rule against which there is no appeal, and in contrast with the expression "anomy" which has just been used, we might call it *fatalistic suicide*.

The role of individual factors in the origin of suicide can now be more precisely put. If, in a given moral environment, for example, in the same religious faith or in the same body of troops or in the same occupation, certain individuals are affected and certain others not, this is undoubtedly, in great part, because the former's mental constitution, as elaborated by nature and events, offers less resistance to the suicidogenetic current. But though these conditions may share in determining the particular persons in whom this current becomes embodied, neither the special qualities nor the intensity of the current depend on these conditions. A given number of suicides is not found annually in a social group just because it contains a given number of neuropathic persons. Neuropathic conditions only cause the suicides to succumb with greater readiness to the current. Whence comes the great difference between the clinician's point of view and the sociologist's. The former confronts exclusively particular cases, isolated from one another. He establishes, very often, that the victim was either nervous or an alcoholic, and explains the act by one or the other of these psychopathic states. In a sense he is right; for if this person rather than his neighbors committed suicide, it is frequently for this reason. But in a general sense this motive does not cause people to kill themselves, *nor, especially, cause a definite number to kill themselves in each society in a definite period of time*. The productive cause of the phenomenon naturally escapes the observer of individuals only; for it lies outside individuals. To discover it, one must raise his point of view above individual suicides and perceive what gives them unity. . . .

. . . Should the present state of suicide among civilized peoples be considered as normal or abnormal? According to the solution one adopts, he will consider reforms necessary and possible with a view to restraining it, or, on the contrary, will agree, not without censure, to accept it as it is.

Some are perhaps astonished that this question could be raised.

It is true, we usually regard everything immoral as abnormal. Therefore, if suicide offends the public conscience, as has been established, it seems impossible not to see in it a phenomenon of social pathology. But we have shown elsewhere [see *Règles de la Méthode sociologique*, ch. III] that even the preeminent form of immorality, crime itself, need not necessarily be classed among morbid manifestations. . . .

Now there is no society known where a more or less developed criminality is not found under different forms. No people exists whose morality is not daily infringed upon. We must therefore call crime necessary and declare that it cannot be non-existent, that the fundamental conditions of social organization, as they are understood, logically imply it. Consequently it is normal. . . . And we have actually shown how crime

may be of service. But it serves only when reproved and repressed. The mere fact of cataloguing it among the phenomena of normal sociology has been wrongly thought to imply its absolution. If it is normal that there should be crimes, it is normal that they should be punished. Punishment and crime are two terms of an inseparable pair. One is as indispensable as the other. Every abnormal relaxation of the system of repression results in stimulating criminality and giving it an abnormal intensity.

Let us apply these ideas to suicide.

We have not sufficient data, it is true, to be sure that there is no society where suicide is not found. . . . At any rate, it is certain that suicidogenetic currents of different intensity, depending on the historical period, have always existed among the peoples of Europe; statistics prove it ever since the last century, and juridical monuments prove it for earlier periods. Suicide is therefore an element of their normal constitution, and even, probably, of any social constitution.

It is also possible to see their mutual connection.

This is especially true of altruistic suicide with respect to lower societies. Precisely because the strict subordination of the individual to the group is the principle on which they rest, altruistic suicide is there, so to speak, an indispensable procedure of their collective discipline. If men, there, did not set a low value on life, they would not be what they should be; and from the moment they value it so lightly, everything inevitably becomes a pretext for them to abandon it. So there is a close connection between the practice of this sort of suicide and the moral organization of this sort of society. It is the same today in those special settings where abnegation and impersonality are essential. Even now, military esprit can only be strong if the individual is self-detached, and such detachment necessarily throws the door open to suicide.

For opposite reasons, in societies and environments where the dignity of the person is the supreme end of conduct, where man is a God to mankind, the individual is readily inclined to consider the man in himself as a God and to regard himself as the object of his own cult. When morality consists primarily in giving one a very high idea of one's self, certain combinations of circumstances readily suffice to make man unable to perceive anything above himself. Individualism is of course not necessarily egoism, but it comes close to it; the one cannot be stimulated without the other being enlarged. Thus, egoistic suicide arises. Finally, among peoples where progress is and should be rapid, rules restraining individuals must be sufficiently pliable and malleable; if they preserved all the rigidity they possess in primitive societies, evolution thus impeded could not take place promptly enough. But then inevitably, under weaker restraint, desires and ambitions overflow impetuously at certain points. As soon as men are inoculated with the precept that their duty is to progress, it is harder to make them accept resignation; so the number

of the malcontent and disquieted is bound to increase. The entire moral-
ity of progress and perfection is thus inseparable from a certain amount
of anomy. Hence, a definite moral constitution corresponds to each type
of suicide and is interconnected with it. One cannot exist without the
other, for suicide is only the form inevitably assumed by each moral
constitution under certain conditions, particular, to be sure, but inescap-
ably arising.

We shall be answered that these varied currents cause suicide only if
exaggerated; and asked whether they might not have everywhere a
single, moderate intensity? This is wishing for the conditions of life to be
everywhere the same, which is neither possible nor desirable. There are
special environments in every society which are reached by collective states
only through the latter being modified; according to circumstances, they
are strengthened or weakened. For a current to have a certain strength
in most of the country, it therefore has to exceed or fail to reach this strength
at certain points.

But not only are these excesses in one or the other direction necessary;
they have their uses. For if the most general state is also the one best adapted
to the most general circumstances of social life, it cannot be so related
with unusual circumstances; yet society must be capable of being
adapted to both. A man in whom the taste for activity never surpassed
the average could not maintain himself in situations requiring an
unusual effort. Likewise, a society in which intellectual individualism could
not be exaggerated would be unable to shake off the yoke of tradition
and renew its faiths, even when this became necessary. Inversely, where
this same spiritual state could not on occasion be reduced enough to allow
the opposite current to develop, what would happen in time of war, when
passive obedience is the highest duty? But, for these forms of activity
to be produced when they are needed, society must not have totally for-
gotten them. Thus, it is indispensable that they have a place in the common
existence; there must be circles where an unrelenting spirit of criticism
and free examination is maintained, others, like the army, where the old
religion of authority is preserved almost intact. . . .

The different currents of collective sadness which derive from these three
moral states have their own reasons for existence so long as they are not
excessive. Indeed, it is wrong to believe that unmixed joy is the normal
state of sensibility. Man could not live if he were entirely impervious to
sadness. Many sorrows can be endured only be being embraced, and the
pleasure taken in them naturally has a somewhat melancholy character.
So, melancholy is morbid only when it occupies too much place in life;
but it is equally morbid for it to be wholly excluded from life. . . . This
certainly does not mean that the current of pessimism is eventually to sub-
merge the other, but it proves that it does not lose ground and that it does
not seem destined to disappear. Now, for it to exist and maintain itself,

there must be a special organ in society to serve as its substratum. There must be groups of individuals who more especially represent this aspect of the collective mood. But the part of the population which plays this role is necessarily that where ideas of suicide easily take root.

But it does not follow from the fact that a suicidogenetic current of a certain strength must be considered as a phenomenon of normal sociology, that every current of the same sort is necessarily of the same character. If the spirit of renunciation, the love of progress, the taste for individuation have their place in every kind of society, and cannot exist without becoming generators of suicide at certain points, it is further necessary for them to have this property only in a certain measure, varying with various peoples. It is only justified if it does not pass certain limits. Likewise, the collective penchant for sadness is only wholesome as long as it is not preponderant. So the above remarks have not settled the question whether the present status of suicide among civilized nations is or is not normal. We need further to consider whether its tremendous aggravation during the past century is not pathological in origin. . . .

. . . [T]his aggravation springs not from the intrinsic nature of progress but from the special conditions under which it occurs in our day, and nothing assures us that these conditions are normal. For we must not be dazzled by the brilliant development of sciences, the arts and industry of which we are the witnesses; this development is altogether certainly taking place in the midst of a morbid effervescence, the grievous repercussions of which each one of us feels. It is then very possible and even probable that the rising tide of suicide originates in a pathological state just now accompanying the march of civilization without being its necessary condition.

The rapidity of the growth of suicides really permits no other hypothesis. Actually, in less than fifty years, they have tripled, quadrupled, and even quintupled, depending on the country. On the other hand, we know their connection with the most ineradicable element in the constitution of societies, since they express the mood of societies, and since the mood of peoples, like that of individuals, reflects the state of the most fundamental part of the organism. Our social organization, then, must have changed profoundly in the course of this century, to have been able to cause such a growth in the suicide-rate. So grave and rapid an alteration as this must be morbid; for a society cannot change its structure so suddenly. Only by a succession of slow, almost imperceptible modifications does it achieve different characteristics. The possible changes, even then, are limited. Once a social type is fixed it is no longer infinitely plastic; a limit is soon reached which cannot be passed. Thus the changes presupposed by the statistics of contemporary suicides cannot be normal. . . .

In resume, just as suicide does not proceed from man's difficulties in maintaining his existence, so the means of arresting its progress is not to make the struggle less difficult and life easier. If more suicides occur today than formerly, this is not because, to maintain ourselves, we have to make more painful efforts, nor that our legitimate needs are less satisfied, but because we no longer know the limits of legitimate needs nor perceive the direction of our efforts. Competition is of course becoming keener every day, because the greater ease of communication sets a constantly increasing number of competitors at loggerheads. On the other hand, a more perfected division of labor and its accompanying more complex cooperation, by multiplying and infinitely varying the occupations by which men can make themselves useful to other men, multiplies the means of existence and places them within reach of a greater variety of persons. The most inferior aptitudes may find a place here. At the same time, the more intense production resulting from this subtler cooperation, by increasing humanity's total resources, assures each worker an ampler pay and so achieves a balance between the greater wear on vital strength and its recuperation. Indeed, it is certain that average comfort has increased on all levels of the social hierarchy, although perhaps not always in equal proportions. The maladjustment from which we suffer does not exist because the objective causes of suffering have increased in number or intensity; it bears witness not to greater economic poverty, but to an alarming poverty of morality. . . .

From *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*
Pierre Bourdieu

Neutralization and the universe of possibles   Unlike non-specific perception, the specifically aesthetic perception of a work of art (in which there are of course degrees of accomplishment) is armed with a pertinence principle which is socially constituted and acquired. This principle of selection enables it to pick out and retain, from among the elements offered to the eye (e.g., leaves or clouds considered merely as indices or signals invested with a denotative function – "It's a poplar", "There's going to be a storm"), all the stylistic traits – and only those – which, when relocated in the universe of stylistic possibilities, distinguish a particular manner of treating the elements selected, whether clouds or leaves, that is, a style as a mode of representation expressing the mode of perception and thought that is proper to a period, a class or class fraction, a group of artists or a particular artist. No stylistic characterization of a work of art is possible without presupposing at least implicit reference to the compossible alternatives, whether simultaneous – to distinguish it from its contemporaries – or successive – to contrast it with earlier or later works by the same or a different artist. . . .

   The aesthetic disposition, understood as the aptitude for perceiving and deciphering specifically stylistic characteristics, is thus inseparable from specifically artistic competence. The latter may be acquired by explicit learning or simply by regular contact with works of art, especially those assembled in museums and galleries, where the diversity of their original functions is neutralized by their being displayed in a place consecrated to art, so that they invite pure interest in form. This practical mastery enables its possessor to situate each element of a universe of artistic representations in a class defined in relation to the class composed of all the artistic representations consciously or unconsciously excluded. . . .

In short, a grasp of the resemblances presupposes implicit or explicit reference to the differences, and vice versa. Attribution is always implicitly based on reference to "typical works", consciously or unconsciously selected because they present to a particularly high degree the qualities more or less explicitly recognized as pertinent in a given system of classification. Everything suggests that, even among specialists, the criteria of pertinence which define the stylistic properties of "typical works" generally remain implicit and that the aesthetic taxonomies implicitly mobilized to distinguish, classify and order works of art never have the rigour which aesthetic theories sometimes try to lend them. . . .

But the celebrant's or devotee's intention is not that or understanding, and, in the ordinary routine of the cult of the work of art, the play of academic or urbane references has no other function than to bring the work into an interminable circuit of inter-legitimation, . . .

Analogy, functioning as a circular mode of thought, makes it possible to tour the whole area of art and luxury *without ever leaving it*. . . .

Distance from necessity To explain the correlation between educational capital and the propensity or at least the aspiration to appreciate a work "independently of its content", as the culturally most ambitious respondents put it, and more generally the propensity to make the "gratuitous" and "disinterested" investments demanded by legitimate works, it is not sufficient to point to the fact that schooling provides the linguistic tools and the references which enable aesthetic experience to be expressed and to be constituted by being expressed. What is in fact affirmed in this relationship is the dependence of the aesthetic disposition on the past and present material conditions of existence which are the precondition of both its constitution and its application and also of the accumulation of a cultural capital (whether or not educationally sanctioned) which can only be acquired by means of a sort of withdrawal from economic necessity. The aesthetic disposition which tends to bracket off the nature and function of the object represented and to exclude any "naive" reaction – horror at the horrible, desire for the desirable, pious reverence for the sacred – along with all purely ethical responses, in order to concentrate solely upon the mode of representation, the style, perceived and appreciated by comparison with other styles, is one dimension of a total relation to the world and to others, a life-style, in which the effects of particular conditions of existence are expressed in a "misrecognizable" form. These conditions of existence, which are the precondition for all learning of legitimate culture, whether implicit and diffuse, as domestic cultural training generally is, or explicit and specific, as in scholastic training, are characterized by the suspension and removal of economic necessity and by objective and subjective distance from practical urgencies, which is the basis of objective and subjective distance from groups subjected to those determinisms.

   To be able to play the games of culture with the playful seriousness
which Plato demanded, a seriousness without the "spirit of seriousness",
one has to belong to the ranks of those who have been able, not neces-
sarily to make their whole existence a sort of children's game, as artists
do, but at least to maintain for a long time, sometimes a whole lifetime,
a child's relation to the world. (All children start life as baby bourgeois,
in a relation of magical power over others and, through them, over the
world, but they grow out of it sooner or later.) This is clearly seen when,
by an accident of social genetics, into the well-policed world of intellec-
tual games there comes one of those people (one thinks of Rousseau or
Chernyshevsky) who bring inappropriate stakes and interests into the
games of culture; who get so involved in the game that they abandon the
margin of neutralizing distance that the *illusio* (belief in the game)
demands; who treat intellectual struggles, the object of so many pathetic
manifestos, as a simple question of right and wrong, life and death. This
is why the logic of the game has already assigned them rôles – eccentric
or boor – which they will *play* despite themselves in the eyes of those who
know how to stay within the bounds of the intellectual illusion and who
cannot see them any other way.
   The aesthetic disposition, a generalized capacity to neutralize ordinary
urgencies and to bracket off practical ends, a durable inclination and apti-
tude for practice without a practical function, can only be constituted within
an experience of the world freed from urgency and through the practice
of activities which are an end in themselves, such as scholastic exercises
or the contemplation of works of art. In other words, it presupposes the
distance from the world . . . which is the basis of the bourgeois experience
of the world. Contrary to what certain mechanistic theories would sug-
gest, even in its most specifically artistic dimension the pedagogic action
of the family and the school operates at least as much through the eco-
nomic and social conditions which are the precondition of its operation
as through the contents which it inculcates. . . .
   Economic power is first and foremost a power to keep economic neces-
sity at arm's length. This is why it universally asserts itself by the
destruction of riches, conspicuous consumption, squandering, and every
form of *gratuitous* luxury. . . .
   Material or symbolic consumption of works of art constitutes one of
the supreme manifestations of *ease*, in the sense both of objective leisure
and subjective facility. The detachment of the pure gaze cannot be separ-
ated from a general disposition towards the "gratuitous" and the "dis-
interested", the paradoxical product of a negative economic conditioning
which, through facility and freedom, engenders distance vis-à-vis neces-
sity. At the same time, the aesthetic disposition is defined, objectively
and subjectively, in relation to other dispositions. Objective distance from
necessity and from those trapped within it combines with a conscious

distance which doubles freedom by exhibiting it. As the objective distance from necessity grows, life-style increasingly becomes the product of what Weber calls a "stylization of life", a systematic commitment which orients and organizes the most diverse practices – the choice of a vintage or a cheese or the decoration of a holiday home in the country. This affirmation of power over a dominated necessity always implies a claim to a legitimate superiority over those who, because they cannot assert the same contempt for contingencies in gratuitous luxury and conspicuous consumption, remain dominated by ordinary interests and urgencies. The tastes of freedom can only assert themselves as such in relation to the tastes of necessity, which are thereby brought to the level of the aesthetic and so defined as vulgar. This claim to aristocracy is less likely to be contested than any other, because the relation of the "pure", "disinterested" disposition to the conditions which make it possible, i.e., the material conditions of existence which are rarest because most freed from economic necessity, has every chance of passing unnoticed. The most "classifying" privilege thus has the privilege of appearing to be the most natural one.

The aesthetic sense as the sense of distinction   Thus, the aesthetic disposition is one dimension of a distant, self-assured relation to the world and to others which presupposes objective assurance and distance. It is one manifestation of the system of dispositions produced by the social conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence when they take the paradoxical form of the greatest freedom conceivable, at a given moment, with respect to the constraints of economic necessity. But it is also a distinctive expression of a privileged position in social space whose distinctive value is objectively established in its relationship to expressions generated from different conditions. Like every sort of taste, it unites and separates. Being the product of the conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence, it unites all those who are the product of similar conditions while distinguishing them from all others. And it distinguishes in an essential way, since taste is the basis of all that one has – people and things – and all that one is for others, whereby one classifies oneself and is classified by others.

Tastes (i.e., manifested preferences) are the practical affirmation of an inevitable difference. It is no accident that, when they have to be justified, they are asserted purely negatively, by the refusal of other tastes. In matters of taste, more than anywhere else, all determination is negation; and tastes are perhaps first and foremost distastes, disgust provoked by horror or visceral intolerance ("sick-making") of the tastes of others. . . . Aversion to different life-styles is perhaps one of the strongest barriers between the classes; class endogamy is evidence of this. . . . At stake in every struggle over art there is also the imposition of an art of

living, that is, the transmutation of an arbitrary way of living into the legit-
imate way of life which casts every other way of living into arbitrariness. . . .

Objectively and subjectively aesthetic stances adopted in matters like
cosmetics, clothing or home decoration are opportunities to experience
or assert one's position in social space, as a rank to be upheld or a dis-
tance to be kept. It goes without saying that the social classes are not equally
inclined and prepared to enter this game of refusal and counter-refusal;
and that the strategies aimed at transforming the basic dispositions of
a life-style into a system of aesthetic principles, objective differences
into elective distinctions, passive options (constituted externally by the
logic of the distinctive relationships) into conscious, elective choices are
in fact reserved for members of the dominant class, indeed the very top
bourgeoisie, and for artists, who as the inventors and professionals of the
"stylization of life" are alone able to make their art of living one of the
fine arts. By contrast, the entry of the petite bourgeoisie into the game of
distinction is marked, inter alia, by the anxiety of exposing oneself to
classification by offering to the taste of others such infallible indices of
personal taste as clothes or furniture, even a simple pair of armchairs, as
in one of Nathalie Sarraute's novels. As for the working classes, perhaps
their sole function in the system of aesthetic positions is to serve as a foil,
a negative reference point, in relation to which all aesthetics define them-
selves, by successive negations. Ignoring or ignorant of manner and
style, the "aesthetic" (in itself) of the working classes and culturally most
deprived fractions of the middle classes defines as "nice", "pretty",
"lovely" (rather than "beautiful") things that are already defined as such
in the "aesthetic" of calendars and postcards: a sunset, a little girl play-
ing with a cat, a folk dance, an old master, a first communion, a children's
procession. The striving towards distinction comes in with petit-bourgeois
aestheticism, which delights in all the cheap substitutes for chic objects
and practices – driftwood and painted pebbles, cane and raffia, "art" handi-
crafts and art photography. . . .