CHAPTER I THE SOCIAL ELEMENT OF SUICIDE

Now that we know the factors in terms of which the social suicide-rate varies, we may define the reality to which this rate corresponds and which it expresses numerically.

I

The individual conditions on which suicide might, *a priori*, be supposed to depend, are of two sorts.

There is first the external situation of the agent. Sometimes men who kill themselves have had family sorrow or disappointments to their pride, sometimes they have had to suffer poverty or sickness, at others they have had some moral fault with which to reproach themselves, etc. But we have seen that these individual peculiarities could not explain the social suicide-rate; for the latter varies in considerable proportions, whereas the different combinations of circumstances which constitute the immediate antecedents of individual cases of suicide retain approximately the same relative frequency. They are therefore not the determining causes of the act which they precede. Their occasionally important role in the premeditation of suicide is no proof of being a causal one. Human deliberations, in fact, so far as reflective consciousness affects them are often only purely formal, with no object but confirmation of a resolve previously formed for reasons unknown to consciousness.

Besides, the circumstances are almost infinite in number which are supposed to cause suicide because they rather frequently accompany it. One man kills himself in the midst of affluence, another in

the lap of poverty; one was unhappy in his home, and another had just ended by divorce a marriage which was making him unhappy. In one case a soldier ends his life after having been punished for an offense he did not commit; in another, a criminal whose crime has remained unpunished kills himself. The most varied and even the most contradictory events of life may equally serve as pretexts for suicide. This suggests that none of them is the specific cause. Could we perhaps at least ascribe causality to those qualities known to be common to all? But are there any such? At best one might say that they usually consist of disappointments, of sorrows, without any possibility of deciding how intense the grief must be to have such tragic significance. Of no disappointment in life, no matter how insignificant, can we say in advance that it could not possibly make existence intolerable; and, on the other hand, there is none which must necessarily have this effect. We see some men resist horrible misfortune, while others kill themselves after slight troubles. Moreover, we have shown that those who suffer most are not those who kill themselves most. Rather it is too great comfort which turns a man against himself. Life is most readily renounced at the time and among the classes where it is least harsh. At least, if it really sometimes occurs that the victim's personal situation is the effective cause of his resolve, such cases are very rare indeed and accordingly cannot explain the social suicide-rate.

Accordingly, even those who have ascribed most influence to individual conditions have sought these conditions less in such external incidents than in the intrinsic nature of the person, that is, his biological constitution and the physical concomitants on which it depends. Thus, suicide has been represented as the product of a certain temperament, an episode of neurasthenia, subject to the effects of the same factors as neurasthenia. Yet we have found no immediate and regular relationship between neurasthenia and the social suicide-rate. The two facts even vary at times in inverse proportion to one another, one being at its minimum just when and where the other is at its height. We have not found, either, any definite relation between the variations of suicide and the conditions of physical environment supposed to have most effect on the nervous system, such as race, climate, temperature. Obviously, though the neuropath may show some inclination to suicide under certain conditions, he is not necessarily destined to kill himself; and the influence of cosmic factors is not enough to determine in just this sense the very general tendencies of his nature.

Wholly different are the results we obtained when we forgot the individual and sought the causes of the suicidal aptitude of each society in the nature of the societies themselves. The relations of suicide to certain states of social environment are as direct and constant as its relations to facts of a biological and physical character were seen to be uncertain and ambiguous. Here at last we are face to face with real laws, allowing us to attempt a methodical classification of types of suicide. The sociological causes thus determined by us have even explained these various concurrences often attributed to the influence of material causes, and in which a proof of this influence has been sought. If women kill themselves much less often than men, it is because they are much less involved than men in collective existence; thus they feel its influence—good or evil—less strongly. So it is with old persons and children, though for other reasons. Finally, if suicide increases from January to June but then decreases, it is because social activity shows similar seasonal fluctuations. It is therefore natural that the different effects of social activity should be subject to an identical rhythm, and consequently be more pronounced during the former of these two periods. Suicide is one of them.

The conclusion from all these facts is that the social suicide-rate can be explained only sociologically. At any given moment the moral constitution of society establishes the contingent of voluntary deaths. There is, therefore, for each people a collective force of a definite amount of energy, impelling men to self-destruction. The victim's acts which at first seem to express only his personal temperament are really the supplement and prolongation of a social condition which they express externally.

This answers the question posed at the beginning of this work. It is not mere metaphor to say of each human society that it has a greater or lesser aptitude for suicide; the expression is based on the nature of things. Each social group really has a collective inclination for the act, quite its own, and the source of all individual inclination, rather than their result. It is made up of the currents of egoism, altruism or anomy running through the society under consideration with the tendencies to languorous melancholy, active renunciation or

exasperated weariness derivative from these currents. These tendencies of the whole social body, by affecting individuals, cause them to commit suicide. The private experiences usually thought to be the proximate causes of suicide have only the influence borrowed from the victim's moral predisposition, itself an echo of the moral state of society. To explain his detachment from life the individual accuses his most immediately surrounding circumstances; life is sad to him because he is sad. Of course his sadness comes to him from without in one sense, however not from one or another incident of his career but rather from the group to which he belongs. This is why there is nothing which cannot serve as an occasion for suicide. It all depends on the intensity with which suicidogenetic causes have affected the individual.

II

Besides, the stability of the social suicide-rate would itself sufficiently show the truth of this conclusion. Though we have, for methodological reasons, delayed the problem until now, it will nevertheless admit of no other solution.

When Quételet drew to the attention of philosophers [1] the remarkable regularity with which certain social phenomena repeat themselves during identical periods of time, he thought he could account for it by his theory of the average man—a theory, moreover, which has remained the only systematic explanation of this remarkable fact. According to him, there is a definite type in each society more or less exactly reproduced by the majority, from which only the minority tends to deviate under the influence of disturbing causes. For example, there is a sum total of physical and moral characteristics represented by the majority of Frenchmen and not found in the same

[1] Especially in his two works *Sur l'homme et le développement de ses facultés ou Essai de physique sociale*, 2 vol., Paris, 1835, and *Du système social et des lois qui le régissent*, Paris 1848. If Quételet is the first to try to give a scientific explanation of this regularity, he is not the first to have observed it. The true founder of moral statistics is Pastor Süssmilch, in his work, *Die Göttliche Ordnung in den Veränderungen des menschlichen Geschlechts, aus der Geburt, dem Tode und der Fortpflanzung desselben erwiesen*, 3 vol., 1742.

See on the same question: Wagner, *Die Gesetzmässigkeit*, etc., first part; Drobisch, *Die Moralische Statistik und die menschliche Willensfreiheit*, Leipzig, 1867 (especially pp. 1-58); Mayr, *Die Gesetzmässigkeit im Gesellschaftsleben*, Munich, 1877; Oettingen, *Moralstatistik*, p. 90 and ff.

manner or degree among the Italians or the Germans, and vice versa. As these characteristics are by definition much the most widespread, the actions deriving from them are also much the most numerous; these constitute the great groups. Those, on the contrary, determined by divergent qualities are relatively rare, like these qualities themselves. Again, though not absolutely unchangeable, this general type varies much more slowly than an individual type; for it is much more difficult for a society to change en masse than for one or a few individuals, singly, to do so. This stability naturally recurs in the acts derived from the characteristic attributes of this type; the former remain the same in quantity and quality so long as the latter do not change, and as these same ways of behaviour are also the commonest, stability must necessarily be the general law of those manifestations of human activity described by statistics. The statistician, in fact, takes into account all events of an identical nature which occur within a given society. Therefore, since most of them remain invariable so long as the general type of the society is unchanged, and since, on the other hand, its changes are unusual, the results of statistical enumerations must necessarily remain the same for fairly long series of consecutive years. Facts derived from special qualities and individual occurrences are not, to be sure, subject to the same regularity; therefore, stability is never absolute. But they are the exception; this is why invariability is the rule, while change is exceptional.

Quételet gave the name *average type* to this general type, because it is obtained almost exactly by taking the arithmetic mean of the individual types. If, for example, after having determined the height of all persons in a given social group, one adds them and divides by the number of individuals measured, the result arrived at expresses with quite sufficient accuracy the most common height. For the differences of greater or less, the giants and dwarfs, probably are about equal in number. Thus they offset each other, annul each other mutually and accordingly have no effect on the quotient.

The theory seems very simple. But first, it can only be considered as an explanation if it shows how the average type is realized in the great majority of individuals. For the average type to remain constantly equal to itself while they change, it must be to some extent independent of them; and yet it must also have some way of insinuating itself into them. Of course, the question ceases to be signifi-

cant if the average type is admitted to be the same as the ethnic type. For the constituent elements of the race, having their origin outside the individual, are not subject to the same variations as he; and yet they are realized only in him. They can thus well be supposed to penetrate the truly individual elements and even act as their base. Only, for this explanation to apply to suicide, the tendency impelling a man to kill himself must depend strictly on race; but we know that the facts contradict this hypothesis. Shall we suppose that the general condition of the social environment, being the same for most individuals, affects nearly all in the same way and so partially bestows a common appearance on them. But the social environment is fundamentally one of common ideas, beliefs, customs and tendencies. For them to impart themselves thus to individuals, they must somehow exist independently of individuals; and this approaches the solution we suggested. For thus is implicitly acknowledged the existence of a collective inclination to suicide from which individual inclinations are derived, and our whole problem is to know of what it consists and how it acts.

But there are still other considerations. However the preponderance of the average man is explained, this conception could never account for the regularity of the reproduction of the social suicide-rate. Actually, by definition, the only possible characteristics this type involves are those found in the major part of the population. But suicide is the act of a minority. In the countries where it is most common, 300 or 400 cases per million inhabitants at most are found. It is radically excluded by the average man's instinct of self-preservation; the average man does not kill himself. But in that case, if the inclination to self-destruction is rare and anomalous, it is wholly foreign to the average type and so, even a profound knowledge of the latter could not even explain the source of suicides, still less help us understand the stability of the number of suicides in a given society. In short, Quételet's theory rests on an inaccurate observation. He thought it certain that stability occurs only in the most general manifestations of human activity; but it is equally found in the sporadic manifestations which occur only at rare and isolated points of the social field. He thought he had met all the requirements by showing how, as a last resort, one could explain the invariability of what is not exceptional; but the exception itself has its own invariability, inferior to none. Everyone dies; every living organism is so made up that it cannot escape dissolution. There are, on the contrary, very few people who kill themselves; the great majority of men have no inclination to suicide. Yet the suicide-rate is even more stable than that of general mortality. The close connection which Quételet sees between the commonness of a quality and its permanence therefore does not exist.

Besides, the results to which his own method leads confirm this conclusion. By his principle, in order to calculate the intensity of any quality belonging to the average type, one must divide the sum of the items displaying this quality within the society under consideration by the number of individuals capable of producing them. Thus, in a country like France, where for a long time there have not been more than 150 suicides per million inhabitants, the average intensity of the suicidal inclination would be expressed by the proportion 150/1,000,000 or 0.00015; and in England, where there are only 80 cases for an equal number, this proportion would be only 0.00008. There would therefore be an inclination to suicide, of this strength, in the average individual. But such figures practically amount to zero. So weak an inclination is so far from an act that it may be considered non-existent. It has not strength enough to occasion a single suicide unaided. It is not, therefore, the commonness of such an inclination which can explain why so many suicides are committed annually in one or the other of these two societies.

Even this estimate is infinitely exaggerated. Quételet reached it only by arbitrarily ascribing a certain affinity for suicide to men on the average, and by estimating the strength of this affinity according to manifestations not observed in the average man, but only among a small number of exceptional persons. Thus, the abnormal was used to determine the normal. To be sure, Quételet thought to escape this objection by noting that abnormal cases, which occur sometimes in one and sometimes in the other direction, mutually compensate and offset each other. But such compensation occurs only for qualities which are found in varying degrees in everybody, such as height. We may in fact assume that unusually tall and unusually short persons are about numerically equal to each other. The average of these exceptional heights may therefore practically be equal to the most usual height: so that only the latter appears at the end of the total calcu-

lation. The contrary actually takes place in regard to a naturally exceptional fact, such as the suicidal inclination. In this case Quételet's procedure can only artificially introduce into the average type an element which falls outside the average. To be sure, as we have just seen, it occurs there only in a very dilute state, precisely because the number of individuals among whom it is distributed is far greater than it should be. But if the mistake is of little practical importance, it none the less exists.

In reality, the meaning of the relation calculated by Quételet is simply the probability that a single man belonging to a definite social group will kill himself during the year. If there are 15 suicides annually in a population of 100,000 souls, we may well conclude that there are 15 chances in 100,000 that some person will commit suicide during this same unit of time. But this probability in no sense gives us a measure of the average inclination to suicide, or helps prove the existence of such an inclination. The fact that so many individuals out of 100 kill themselves does not imply that the others are exposed to any degree and can teach us nothing concerning the nature and intensity of the causes leading to suicide.[2]

Thus the theory of the average man does not solve the problem. Let us take the problem up again, then, and see how it presents itself. Victims of suicide are in an infinite minority, which is widely dispersed; each one of them performs his act separately, without knowing that others are doing the same; and yet, so long as society remains unchanged the number of suicides remains the same. Therefore, all these individual manifestations, however independent of one another they seem, must surely actually result from a single cause or a single group of causes, which dominate individuals. Otherwise how could we explain that all these individual wills, ignorant of one another's existence, annually achieve the same end in the same numbers? At least for the most part they have no effect upon one another; they are in no way conjoined; yet everything takes place as if they were obeying a single order. There must then be some force in their common environment inclining them all in the same direction, whose greater or lesser strength causes the greater or less number of individual suicides. Now the effects revealing this force vary not according to organic and cosmic environments but solely according to the state of the social environment. This force must then be collective. In other words, each people has collectively an inclination of its own to suicide, on which the size of its contribution to voluntary death depends.

[2] These considerations are one more proof that race cannot account for the social suicide-rate. The ethnic type, indeed, is itself also a generic type; it includes only characteristics common to a considerable mass of individuals. Suicide, on the contrary, is an exceptional occurrence. Race therefore contains nothing which could determine suicide; otherwise it would be more general than it actually is. Shall it be said that though none of the elements constituting race could be regarded as a sufficient cause of suicide, race according to its nature may nevertheless make men more or less accessible to the causes giving rise to suicide? But then, even if facts verified this hypothesis, which is not the case, one would at least have to recognize that the ethnic type is a factor of very mediocre efficacy, since its supposed influence could not manifest itself in the vast majority of cases and would appear only very exceptionally. In brief, race cannot explain how out of a million persons all of whom belong to the same race, only 100 or 200 at most kill themselves annually.

From this point of view there is no longer anything mysterious about the stability of the suicide-rate, any more than about its individual manifestations. For since each society has its own temperament, unchangeable within brief periods, and since this inclination to suicide has its source in the moral constitution of groups, it must differ from group to group and in each of them remain for long periods practically the same. It is one of the essential elements of social coenaesthesia. Now this coenaesthetic state, among collective existences as well as among individuals, is their most personal and unchangeable quality, because nothing is more fundamental. But then the effects springing from it must have both the same personality and the same stability. It is even natural for them to possess a higher stability than that of general mortality. For temperature, climatic and geological influences, in a word the various conditions on which public health depends, change much more readily from year to year than the temperament of peoples.

There is however another hypothesis, apparently different from the above, which might be tempting to some minds. To solve the difficulty, might we not suppose that the various incidents of private life considered to be preeminently the causes determining suicide, regularly recur annually in the same proportions? Let us suppose[3] that every year there are roughly the same number of unhappy marriages, bankruptcies, disappointed ambitions, cases of poverty, etc. Numerically the same and analogously situated, individuals would

[3] This is fundamentally Drobisch's opinion in his work cited above.

then naturally form the resolve suggested by their situation, in the same numbers. One need not assume that they yield to a superior influence; but merely that they reason generally in the same way when confronted by the same circumstances.

But we know that these individual events, though preceding suicides with fair regularity, are not their real causes. To repeat, no unhappiness in life necessarily causes a man to kill himself unless he is otherwise so inclined. The regularity of possible recurrence of these various circumstances thus cannot explain the regularity of suicide. Whatever influence is ascribed to them, moreover, such a solution would at best change the problem without solving it. For it remains to be understood why these desperate situations are identically repeated annually, pursuant to a law peculiar to each country. How does it happen that a given, supposedly stable society always has the same number of disunited families, of economic catastrophies, etc.? This regular recurrence of identical events in proportions constant within the same population but very inconstant from one population to another would be inexplicable had not each society definite currents impelling its inhabitants with a definite force to commercial and industrial ventures, to behaviour of every sort likely to involve families in trouble, etc. This is to return under a very slightly different form to the same hypothesis which had been thought refuted.[4]

III

Let us make an effort to grasp the meaning and import of the terms just employed.

[4] This line of argument holds true not only of suicide, though more striking in that than in any other case. It is identically applicable to crime in its different forms. The criminal indeed is an exceptional being like the suicide, and thus the nature of the average type cannot explain the trends of criminality. But this is no less true of marriage, although the tendency to marry is more general than that to kill or to kill one's self. At each period of life the number of people who marry is only a small minority with reference to the unmarried population of the same age. Thus in France, from 25 to 30 years of age or when the marriage rate is at its highest, only 176 men and 135 women per year marry per 1,000 unmarried of each sex (period 1877–81). If, therefore, the tendency to marriage, which must not be confused with the taste for sexual intercourse, has sufficient strength to find satisfaction among only a few, the marriage rate at a given moment cannot be explained by the strength of this tendency in the average type. In truth, here as in the case of suicide, statistical figures express not the mean intensity of individual dispositions but that of the collective impulse to marriage.

Usually when collective tendencies or passions are spoken of, we tend to regard these expressions as mere metaphors and manners of speech with no real signification but a sort of average among a certain number of individual states. They are not considered as things, forces *sui generis* which dominate the consciousness of single individuals. None the less this is their nature, as is brilliantly [5] shown by statistics of suicide. The individuals making up a society change from year to year, yet the number of suicides is the same so long as the society itself does not change. The population of Paris renews itself very rapidly; yet the share of Paris in the total of French suicides remains practically the same. Although only a few years suffice to change completely the personnel of the army, the rate of military suicides varies only very slowly in a given nation. In all countries the evolution of collective life follows a given rhythm throughout the year; it grows from January to about July and then diminishes. Thus, though the members of the several European societies spring from widely different average types, the seasonal and even monthly variations of suicide take place in accordance with the same law. Likewise, regardless of the diversity of individual temperaments, the relation between the aptitude for suicide of married persons and that of widowers and widows is identically the same in widely differing social groups, from the simple fact that the moral condition of widowhood everywhere bears the same relation to the moral constitution characteristic of marriage. The causes which thus fix the contingent of voluntary deaths for a given society or one part of it must then be independent of individuals, since they retain the same intensity no matter what particular persons they operate on. One would think that an unchanging manner of life would produce unchanging effects. This is true; but a way of life is something, and its unchanging character requires explanation. If a way of life is unchanged while changes occur constantly among those who practise it, it cannot derive its entire reality from them.

It has been thought that this conclusion might be avoided through the observation that this very continuity was the work of individuals and that, consequently, to account for it there was no need to ascribe to social phenomena a sort of transcendency in relation to individual

[5] However, such statistics are not the only ones to do so. All the facts of moral statistics imply this conclusion, as the preceding note suggests.

life. Actually, it has been said, "anything social, whether a word of a language, a religious rite, an artisan's skill, an artistic method, a legal statute or a moral maxim is transmitted and passes from an individual parent, teacher, friend, neighbor, or comrade to another individual."[6]

Doubtless if we had only to explain the general way in which an idea or sentiment passes from one generation to another, how it is that the memory of it is not lost, this explanation might as a last resort be considered satisfactory.[7] But the transmission of facts such as suicide and, more broadly speaking, such as the various acts reported by moral statistics, has a very special nature not to be so readily accounted for. It relates, in fact, not merely in general to a certain way of acting, *but to the number of cases in which this way of acting is employed*. Not merely are there suicides every year, but there are as a general rule as many each year as in the year preceding. The state of mind which causes men to kill themselves is not purely and simply transmitted, but—something much more remarkable—transmitted to an equal number of persons, all in such situations as to make the state of mind become an act. How can this be if only individuals are concerned? The number as such cannot be directly transmitted. Today's population has not learned from yesterday's the size of the contribution it must make to suicide; nevertheless, it will make one of identical size with that of the past, unless circumstances change.

Are we then to imagine that, in some way, each suicide had as his initiator and teacher one of the victims of the year before and that he is something like his moral heir? Only thus can one conceive the possibility that the social suicide-rate is perpetuated by way of inter-individual traditions. For if the total figure cannot be transmitted as a whole, the units composing it must be transmitted singly. According to this idea, each suicide would have received his tendency from some one of his predecessors and each act of suicide would be something like the echo of a preceding one. But not a fact exists to permit the assumption of such a personal filiation between each of these moral occurrences statistically registered this year, for example, and a similar event of the year before. As has been shown above, it is quite exceptional for an act to be inspired in this way by another of like nature. Besides, why should these ricochets occur regularly from year to year? Why should the generating act require a year to produce its counterpart? Finally, why should it inspire a single copy only? For surely each model must be reproduced only once on the average, or the total would not be constant. Such an hypothesis, as arbitrary as it is difficult to conceive, we need discuss no longer. But if it is dropped, if the numerical equality of annual contingents does not result from each particular case producing its counterpart in the ensuing period, it can only be due to the permanent action of some impersonal cause which transcends all individual cases.

[6] Tarde, *La sociologie élémentaire*, in *Annales de l'Institut international de sociologie*, p. 213.

[7] We say "as a last resort" for the essence of the problem could not be solved in this way. The really important thing if this continuity is to be explained is to show not merely how customary practices of a certain period are not forgotten in a subsequent one, but how they preserve their authority and continue to function. The mere fact that new generations may know by way of transmissions solely between individuals, what their ancestors did, does not mean that they have to do the same. What does oblige them, then? The respect for custom, the authority of past generations? In that case the cause of the continuity is no longer individuals serving as vehicles for ideas or practices, but the highly collective state of mind which causes ancestors to be regarded with an especial respect among a certain people. And this state of mind is imposed on individuals. Like the tendency to suicide, this state of mind in a given society even has a definite intensity, depending on the greater or lesser degree with which individuals conform to tradition.

The terms therefore must be strictly understood. Collective tendencies have an existence of their own; they are forces as real as cosmic forces, though of another sort; they, likewise, affect the individual from without, though through other channels. The proof that the reality of collective tendencies is no less than that of cosmic forces is that this reality is demonstrated in the same way, by the uniformity of effects. When we find that the number of deaths varies little from year to year, we explain this regularity by saying that mortality depends on the climate, the temperature, the nature of the soil, in brief on a certain number of material forces which remain constant through changing generations because independent of individuals. Since, therefore, moral acts such as suicide are reproduced not merely with an equal but with a greater uniformity, we must likewise admit that they depend on forces external to individuals. Only, since these forces must be of a moral order and since, except for individual men, there is no other moral order of existence in the world but society, they must be social. But whatever they are called, the important thing is to recognize their reality and conceive of them as a totality of

forces which cause us to act from without, like the physico-chemical forces to which we react. So truly are they things *sui generis* and not mere verbal entities that they may be measured, their relative sizes compared, as is done with the intensity of electric currents or luminous foci. Thus, the basic proposition that social facts are objective, a proposition we have had the opportunity to prove in another work [8] and which we consider the fundamental principle of the sociological method, finds a new and especially conclusive proof in moral statistics and above all in the statistics of suicide. Of course, it offends common sense. But science has encountered incredulity whenever it has revealed to men the existence of a force that has been overlooked. Since the system of accepted ideas must be modified to make room for the new order of things and to establish new concepts, men's minds resist through mere inertia. Yet this understanding must be reached. If there is such a science as sociology, it can only be the study of a world hitherto unknown, different from those explored by the other sciences. This world is nothing if not a system of realities.

But just because it encounters traditional prejudices this conception has aroused objections to which we must reply.

First, it implies that collective tendencies and thoughts are of a different nature from individual tendencies and thoughts, that the former have characteristics which the latter lack. How can this be, it is objected, since there are only individuals in society? But, reasoning thus, we should have to say that there is nothing more in animate nature than inorganic matter, since the cell is made exclusively of inanimate atoms. To be sure, it is likewise true that society has no other active forces than individuals; but individuals by combining form a psychical existence of a new species, which consequently has its own manner of thinking and feeling. Of course the elementary qualities of which the social fact consists are present in germ in individual minds. But the social fact emerges from them only when they have been transformed by association since it is only then that it appears. Association itself is also an active factor productive of special effects. In itself it is therefore something new. When the consciousness of individuals, instead of remaining isolated, becomes grouped and combined, something in the world has been altered. Naturally

[8] See *Règles de la méthode sociologique*, ch. II.

this change produces others, this novelty engenders other novelties, phenomena appear whose characteristic qualities are not found in the elements composing them.

This proposition could only be opposed by agreeing that a whole is qualitatively identical with the sum of its parts, that an effect is qualitatively reducible to the sum of its productive causes; which amounts to denying all change or to making it inexplicable. Someone has, however, gone so far as to sustain this extreme thesis, but only two truly extraordinary reasons have been found for its defense. First, it has been said that "in sociology we have through a rare privilege intimate knowledge both of that element which is our individual consciousness and of the compound which is the sum of consciousness in individuals"; secondly, that through this two fold introspection "we clearly ascertain that if the individual is subtracted nothing remains of the social." [9]

The first assertion is a bold denial of all contemporary psychology. Today it is generally recognized that psychical life, far from being directly cognizable, has on the contrary profound depths inaccessible to ordinary perception, to which we attain only gradually by devious and complicated paths like those employed by the sciences of the external world. The nature of consciousness is therefore far from lacking in mystery for the future. The second proposition is purely arbitrary. The author may of course state that in his personal opinion nothing real exists in society but what is individual, but proofs supporting this statement are lacking and discussion is therefore impossible. It would be only too easy to oppose to this the contrary feeling of a great many persons, who conceive of society not as the form spontaneously assumed by individual nature on expanding outwardly, but as an antagonistic force restricting individual natures and resisted by them! What a remarkable intuition it is, by the way, that lets us know directly and without intermediary both the element—the individual—and the compound, society? If we had really only to open our eyes and take a good look to perceive at once the laws of the social world, sociology would be useless or, at least very simple. Unfortunately, facts show only too clearly the incompetence of consciousness in this matter. Never would consciousness have dreamt, of its own accord, of the necessity which annually reproduces demo-

[9] Tarde, *op. cit.*, in *Annales de l'Institut de sociol.*, p. 222.

graphic phenomena in equal numbers, had it not received a suggestion from without. Still less can it discover their causes, if left to its own devices.

But by separating social from individual life in this manner, we do not mean that there is nothing psychical about the former. On the contrary, it is clear that essentially social life is made up of representations. Only these collective representations are of quite another character from those of the individual. We see no objection to calling sociology a variety of psychology, if we carefully add that social psychology has its own laws which are not those of individual psychology. An example will make the thought perfectly clear. Usually the origin of religion is ascribed to feelings of fear or reverence inspired in conscious persons by mysterious and dreaded beings; from this point of view, religion seems merely like the development of individual states of mind and private feelings. But this over-simplified explanation has no relation to facts. It is enough to note that the institution of religion is unknown to the animal kingdom, where social life is always very rudimentary, that it is never found except where a collective organization exists, that it varies with the nature of societies, in order to conclude justifiably that exclusively men in groups think along religious lines. The individual would never have risen to the conception of forces which so immeasurably surpass him and all his surroundings, had he known nothing but himself and the physical universe. Not even the great natural forces to which he has relations could have suggested such a notion to him; for he was originally far from having his present knowledge of the extent of their dominance; on the contrary, he then believed that he could control them under certain conditions.[10] Science taught him how much he was their inferior. The power thus imposed on his respect and become the object of his adoration is society, of which the gods were only the hypostatic form. Religion is in a word the system of symbols by means of which society becomes conscious of itself; it is the characteristic way of thinking of collective existence. Here then is a great group of states of mind which would not have originated if individual states of consciousness had not combined, and which result from this union and are superadded to those which derive from individual natures. In spite of the minutest possible analysis of the

[10] See Frazer, *Golden Bough*, p. 9 ff.

latter, they will never serve to explain the foundation and development of the strange beliefs and practices from which sprang totemism, the origin of naturism from it and how naturism itself became on the one hand the abstract religion of Jahwe, on the other, the polytheism of the Greeks and Romans, etc. All we mean by affirming the distinction between the social and the individual is that the above observations apply not only to religion, but to law, morals, customs, political institutions, pedagogical practices, etc., in a word to all forms of collective life.[11]

Another objection has been made, at first glance apparently more serious. Not only have we admitted that the social states of mind are qualitatively different from individual ones, but that they are in a sense exterior to individuals. We have not even hesitated to compare this quality of being external with that of physical forces. But, it is objected, since there is nothing in society except individuals, how could there be anything external to them?

If the objection were well founded we should face an antinomy. For we must not lose sight of what has been proved already. Since the handful of people who kill themselves annually do not form a natural group, and are not in communication with one another, the stable number of suicides can only be due to the influence of a common cause which dominates and survives the individual persons involved. The force uniting the conglomerate multitude of individual cases, scattered over the face of the earth, must necessarily be external to each of them. If it were really impossible for it to be so, the problem would be insoluble. But the impossibility is only apparent.

First, it is not true that society is made up only of individuals: it also includes material things, which play an essential role in the common life. The social fact is sometimes so far materialized as to become an element of the external world. For instance, a definite type of architecture is a social phenomenon; but it is partially em-

[11] Let us add, to avoid any misunderstanding, that despite all the above we do not admit that there is a precise point at which the individual comes to an end and the social realm commences. Association is not established and does not produce its effects all at once; it requires time and there are consequently moments at which the reality is indeterminate. Thus we pass without interval from one order of facts to the other; but this is no reason for not distinguishing them. Otherwise nothing in the world would be distinct, since there are no distinct genera and evolution is continuous.

bodied in houses and buildings of all sorts which, once constructed, become autonomous realities, independent of individuals. It is the same with the avenues of communication and transportation, with instruments and machines used in industry or private life which express the state of technology at any moment in history, of written language, etc. Social life, which is thus crystallized, as it were, and fixed on material supports, is by just so much externalized, and acts upon us from without. Avenues of communication which have been constructed before our time give a definite direction to our activities, depending on whether they connect us with one or another country. A child's taste is formed as he comes into contact with the monuments of national taste bequeathed by previous generations. At times such monuments even disappear and are forgotten for centuries, then, one day when the nations which reared them are long since extinct, reappear and begin a new existence in the midst of new societies. This is the character of those very social phenomena called Renaissances. A Renaissance is a portion of social life which, after being, so to speak, deposited in material things and remained long latent there, suddenly reawakens and alters the intellectual and moral orientation of peoples who had had no share in its construction. Doubtless it could not be reanimated if living centers of consciousness did not exist to receive its influence; but these individual conscious centers would have thought and felt quite differently if this influence were not present.

The same remark applies to the definite formulae into which the dogmas of faith are precipitated, or legal precepts when they become fixed externally in a consecrated form. However well digested, they would of course remain dead letters if there were no one to conceive their significance and put them into practice. But though they are not self-sufficient, they are none the less in their own way factors of social activity. They have a manner of action of their own. Juridical relations are widely different depending on whether or not the law is written. Where there is a constituted code, jurisprudence is more regular but less flexible, legislation more uniform but also more rigid. Legislation adapts itself less readily to a variety of individual cases, and resists innovations more strongly. The material forms it assumes are thus not merely ineffective verbal combinations but active realities, since they produce effects which would not occur without

their existence. They are not only external to individual consciousness, but this very externality establishes their specific qualities. Because these forms are less at the disposal of individuals, individuals cannot readily adjust them to circumstances, and this very situation makes them more resistant to change.

Of course it is true that not all social consciousness achieves such externalization and materialization. Not all the aesthetic spirit of a nation is embodied in the works it inspires; not all of morality is formulated in clear precepts. The greater part is diffused. There is a large collective life which is at liberty; all sorts of currents come, go, circulate everywhere, cross and mingle in a thousand different ways, and just because they are constantly mobile are never crystalized in an objective form. Today, a breath of sadness and discouragement descends on society; tomorrow, one of joyous confidence will uplift all hearts. For a while the whole group is swayed towards individualism; a new period begins and social and philanthropic aims become paramount. Yesterday cosmopolitanism was the rage, today patriotism has the floor. And all these eddies, all these fluxes and refluxes occur without a single modification of the main legal and moral precepts, immobilized in their sacrosanct forms. Besides, these very precepts merely express a whole sub-jacent life of which they partake; they spring from it but do not supplant it. Beneath all these maxims are actual, living sentiments, summed up by these formulae but only as in a superficial envelope. The formulae would awake no echo if they did not correspond to definite emotions and impressions scattered through society. If, then, we ascribe a kind of reality to them, we do not dream of supposing them to be the whole of moral reality. That would be to take the sign for the thing signified. A sign is certainly something; it is not a kind of supererogatory epiphenomenon; its role in intellectual development is known today. But after all it is only a sign.[12]

But because this part of collective life has not enough consistency to become fixed, it none the less has the same character as the formu-

[12] We do not expect to be reproached further, after this explanation, with wishing to substitute the exterior for the interior in sociology. We start from the exterior because it alone is immediately given, but only to reach the interior. Doubtless the procedure is complicated; but there is no other unless one would risk having his research apply to his personal feeling concerning the order of facts under investigation, instead of to this factual order itself.

lated precepts of which we were just speaking. *It is external to each average individual taken singly.* Suppose some great public danger arouses a gust of patriotic feeling. A collective impulse follows, by virtue of which society as a whole assumes axiomatically that private interests, even those usually regarded most highly, must be wholly effaced before the common interest. And the principle is not merely uttered as an *ideal;* if need be it is literally applied. Meanwhile, take a careful look at the average body of individuals. Among very many of them you will recapture something of this moral state of mind, though infinitely attenuated. The men who are ready to make freely so complete a self-abnegation are rare, even in time of war. *Therefore there is not one of all the single centers of consciousness who make up the great body of the nation, to whom the collective current is not almost wholly exterior, since each contains only a spark of it.*

The same thing is observable in respect to even the stablest, most fundamental moral sentiments. Every society, for example, has a respect for the life of man in general, the intensity of which is determined by and commensurate with, the relative[13] weight of the penalties attached to homicide. The average man, on the other hand, certainly feels something of the same sort, but far less and in a quite different way from society. To appreciate this difference, we need only compare the emotion one may individually feel at sight of the murderer or even of the murder, and that which seizes assembled crowds under the same circumstances. We know how far they may be carried if unchecked. It is because, in this case, anger is collective. The same difference constantly appears between the manner in which society resents these crimes and the way in which they affect individuals; that is, between the individual and the social form of the sentiment offended. Social indignation is so strong that it is very often satisfied only by supreme expiation. The private person, however, provided that the victim is unknown or of no interest to him,

[13] To discover whether this sentiment of respect is stronger in one society or another, not only the intrinsic violence of the repressive measures should be considered, but the position of the penalty in the penal scale. Premeditated murder is punished solely by death, today as in past centuries. But today unadorned punishment by death has a greater relative significance; for it is the supreme punishment, whereas heretofore it could be aggravated. And since these aggravations were not then applied to ordinary murder, it follows that the latter was the object of lesser reprobation.

that the criminal does not live near and thus constitute a personal threat to him, though thinking it proper for the crime to be punished, is not strongly enough stirred to feel a real need for vengeance. He will not take a step to discover the guilty one; he will even hesitate to give him up. Only when public opinion is aroused, as the saying goes, does the matter take on a different aspect. Then we become more active and demanding. But it is opinion speaking through us; we act under the pressure of the collectivity, not as individuals.

Indeed, the distance between the social state and its individual repercussions is usually even greater. In the above case, the collective sentiment, in becoming individualized, retained, at least among most people, strength enough to resist acts by which it is offended; horror at the shedding of human blood is sufficiently deeply enrooted in most consciences today to prevent the outburst of homicidal thoughts. But mere misappropriation, quiet, non-violent fraud, are far from inspiring us with equal aversion. Not many have enough respect for another's rights to stifle in the germ every wish to enrich themselves fraudulently. Not that education does not develop a certain distaste for all unjust actions. But what a difference between this vague, hesitant feeling, ever ready for compromise, and the categorical, unreserved and open stigma with which society punishes theft in all shapes! And what of so many other duties still less rooted in the ordinary man, such as the one that bids us contribute our just share to public expense, not to defraud the public treasury, not to try to avoid military service, to execute contracts faithfully, etc.? If morality in all these respects were only guaranteed by the uncertain feelings of the average conscience, it would be extremely unprotected.

So it is a profound mistake to confuse the collective type of a society, as is so often done, with the average type of its individual members. The morality of the average man is of only moderate intensity. He possesses only the most indispensable ethical principles to any decided degree, and even they are far from being as precise and authoritative as in the collective type, that is, in society as a whole. This, which is the very mistake committed by Quételet, makes the origin of morality an insoluble problem. For since the individual is in general not outstanding, how has a morality so far surpassing him

succeeded in establishing itself, if it expresses only the average of individual temperaments? Barring a miracle, the greater cannot arise from the lesser. If the common conscience is nothing but the most general conscience, it cannot rise above the vulgar level. But then whence come the lofty, clearly imperative precepts which society undertakes to teach its children, and respect for which it enforces upon its members? With good reason, religions and many philosophies with them have regarded morality as deriving its total reality only from God. For the pallid, inadequate sketch of it contained in individual consciences cannot be regarded as the original type. This sketch seems rather the result of a crude, unfaithful reproduction, the model for which must therefore exist somewhere outside individuals. This is why the popular imagination, with its customary over-simplicitly assigns it to God. Science certainly could waste no time over this conception, of which it does not even take cognizance.[14] Only, without it no alternative exists but to leave morality hanging unexplained in the air or make it a system of collective states of conscience. Morality either springs from nothing given in the world of experience, or it springs from society. It can only exist in a conscience; therefore, if it is not in the individual conscience it is in that of the group. But then it must be admitted that the latter, far from being confused with the average conscience, everywhere surpasses it.

Observation thus confirms our hypothesis. The regularity of statistical data, on the one hand, implies the existence of collective tendencies exterior to the individual, and on the other, we can directly establish this exterior character in a considerable number of important cases. Besides, this exteriority is not in the least surprising for anyone who knows the difference between individual and social states of consciousness. By definition, indeed, the latter can reach none of us except from without, since they do not flow from our personal predispositions. Since they consist of elements foreign to us [15] they express something other than ourselves. To be sure in so far as

[14] Just as the science of physics involves no discussion of the belief in God, the creator of the physical world, so the science of morals involves no concern with the doctrine which beholds the creator of morality in God. The question is not of our competence; we are not bound to espouse any solution. Secondary causes alone need occupy our attention.

[15] See above, p. 39 and p. 310.

we are solidary with the group and share its life, we are exposed to their influence; but so far as we have a distinct personality of our own we rebel against and try to escape them. Since everyone leads this sort of double existence simultaneously, each of us has a double impulse. We are drawn in a social direction and tend to follow the inclinations of our own natures. So the rest of society weighs upon us as a restraint to our centrifugal tendencies, and we for our part share in this weight upon others for the purpose of neutralizing theirs. We ourselves undergo the pressure we help to exert upon others. Two antagonistic forces confront each other. One, the collective force, tries to take possession of the individual; the other, the individual force, repulses it. To be sure, the former is much stronger than the latter, since it is made of a combination of all the individual forces; but as it also encounters as many resistances as there are separate persons, it is partially exhausted in these multifarious contests and reaches us disfigured and enfeebled. When it is very strong, when the circumstances activating it are of frequent recurrence, it may still leave a deep impression on individuals; it arouses in them mental states of some vivacity which, once formed, function with the spontaneity of instinct; this happens in the case of the most essential moral ideas. But most social currents are either too weak or too intermittently in contact with us to strike deep roots in us; their action is superficial. Consequently, they remain almost completely external. Hence, the proper way to measure any element of a collective type is not to measure its magnitude within individual consciences and to take the average of them all. Rather, it is their sum that must be taken. Even this method of evaluation would be much below reality, for this would give us only the social sentiment reduced by all its losses through individuation.

So there is some superficiality about attacking our conception as scholasticism and reproaching it for assigning to social phenomena a foundation in some vital principle or other of a new sort. We refuse to accept that these phenomena have as a substratum the conscience of the individual, we assign them another; that formed by all the individual consciences in union and combination. There is nothing substantival or ontological about this substratum, since it is merely a whole composed of parts. But it is just as real, nevertheless, as the elements that make it up; for they are constituted in this very way.

They are compounds, too. It is known today that the ego is the resultant of a multitude of conscious states outside the ego; that each of these elementary states, in turn, is the product of unconscious vital units, just as each vital unit is itself due to an association of inanimate particles. Therefore if the psychologist and the biologist correctly regard the phenomena of their study as well founded, merely through the fact of their connection with a combination of elements of the next lower order, why should it not be the same in sociology? Only those have the right to consider such a basis inadequate who have not renounced the hypothesis of a vital force and of a substantive soul. Nothing is more reasonable, then, than this proposition at which such offense has been taken; [16] that a belief or social practice may exist independently of its individual expressions. We clearly did not imply by this that society can exist without individuals, an obvious absurdity we might have been spared having attributed to us. But we did mean: 1. that the group formed by associated individuals has a reality of a different sort from each individual considered singly; 2. that collective states exist in the group from whose nature they spring, before they affect the individual as such and establish in him in a new form a purely inner existence.

Such a way of considering the individual's relations to society also recalls the idea assigned the individual's relations with the species or the race by contemporary zoologists. The very simple theory has been increasingly abandoned that the species is only an individual perpetuated chronologically and generalized spacially. Indeed it conflicts with the fact that the variations produced in a single instance become specific only in very rare and possibly doubtful cases.[17] The distinctive characteristics of the race change in the individual only as they change in the race in general. The latter has therefore some reality whence come the various shapes it assumes among individual beings, far from its consisting simply of a generalization of these beings. We naturally cannot regard these doctrines as finally demonstrated. But it is enough for us to show that our sociological conceptions, without being borrowed from another order of research, are indeed not without analogies to the most positive sciences.

[16] See Tarde, *op. cit.*, p. 212.

[17] See Delage, *Structure du protoplasme, passim;* Weissmann, *L'hérédité* and all the theories akin to Weissmann's.

IV

Let us apply these ideas to the question of suicide; the solution we gave at the beginning of this chapter will become more precise if we do so.

No moral idea exists which does not combine in proportions varying with the society involved, egoism, altruism and a certain anomy. For social life assumes both that the individual has a certain personality, that he is ready to surrender it if the community requires, and finally, that he is to a certain degree sensitive to ideas of progress. This is why there is no people among whom these three currents of opinion do not co-exist, bending men's inclinations in three different and even opposing directions. Where they offset one another, the moral agent is in a state of equilibrium which shelters him against any thought of suicide. But let one of them exceed a certain strength to the detriment of the others, and as it becomes individualized, it also becomes suicidogenetic, for the reasons assigned.

Of course, the stronger it is, the more agents it contaminates deeply enough to influence them to suicide, and inversely. But this very strength can depend only on the three following sorts of causes: 1. the nature of the individuals composing the society; 2. the manner of their association, that is, the nature of the social organization; 3. the transitory occurrences which disturb the functioning of the collective life without changing its anatomical constitution, such as national crises, economic crises, etc. As for the individual qualities, they can play a role only if they exist in all persons. For strictly personal ones or those of only small minorities are lost in the mass of the others; besides, from their differences from one another they neutralize one another and are mutually eradicated during the elaboration resulting in the collective phenomenon. Only general human characteristics, accordingly, can have any effect. Now these are practically immutable; at least, their change would require more centuries than the life of one nation can occupy. So the social conditions on which the number of suicides depends are the only ones in terms of which it can vary; for they are the only variable conditions. This is why the number of suicides remains stable as long as society does not change. This stability does not exist because the state of mind which generates suicide is found through some chance in a definite number

of individuals who transmit it, for no recognizable reason, to an equal number who will imitate the act. It exists because the impersonal causes which gave it birth and which sustain it are the same. It is because nothing has occurred to modify either the grouping of the social units or the nature of their concurrence. The actions and reactions interchanged among them therefore remain the same; and so the ideas and feelings springing from them cannot vary.

To be sure, it is very rare, if not impossible, for one of these currents to succeed in exerting such preponderant influence over all points of the society. It always reaches this degree of energy in the midst of restricted surroundings containing conditions specially favorable to its development. One or another social condition, occupation, or religious faith stimulates it more especially. This explains suicide's twofold character. When considered in its outer manifestations, it seems as though these were just a series of disconnected events; for it occurs at separated places without visible interrelations. Yet the sum of all these individual cases has its own unity and its own individuality, since the social suicide-rate is a distinctive trait of each collective personality. That is, though these particular environments where suicide occurs most frequently are separate from one another, dispersed in thousands of ways over the entire territory, they are nevertheless closely related; for they are parts of a single whole, organs of a single organism, as it were. The condition in which each is found therefore depends on the general condition of society. There is a close solidarity between the virulence achieved by one or another of its tendencies and the intensity of the tendency in the whole social body. Altruism is more or less a force in the army depending on its role among the civilian population,[18] intellectual individualism is more developed and richer in suicides in Protestant environments the more pronounced it is in the rest of the nation, etc. Everything is tied together.

But though there is no individual state except insanity which may be considered a determining factor of suicide, it seems certain that no collective sentiment can affect individuals when they are absolutely indisposed to it. The above explanation might be thought inadequate for this reason, until we have shown how the currents giving rise to suicide find at the very moment and in the very environments in

[18] See above, Book II, Ch. 4.

which they develop a sufficient number of persons accessible to their influence.

If we suppose, however, that this conjunction is really always necessary and that a collective tendency cannot impose itself by brute force on individuals with no preliminary predisposition, then this harmony must be automatically achieved; for the causes determining the social currents affect individuals simultaneously and predispose them to receive the collective influence. Between these two sorts of factors there is a natural affinity, from the very fact that they are dependent on, and expressive of the same cause: this makes them combine and become mutually adapted. The hypercivilization which breeds the anomic tendency and the egoistic tendency also refines nervous systems, making them excessively delicate; through this very fact they are less capable of firm attachment to a definite object, more impatient of any sort of discipline, more accessible both to violent irritation and to exaggerated depression. Inversely, the crude, rough culture implicit in the excessive altruism of primitive man develops a lack of sensitivity which favors renunciation. In short, just as society largely forms the individual, it forms him to the same extent in its own image. Society, therefore, cannot lack the material for its needs, for it has, so to speak, kneaded it with its own hands.

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 formers' 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 these 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. It will be objected that if enough neurasthenics did not exist, social causes would not produce all their effects. But no society exists in which the various forms of nervous degeneration do not provide suicide with more than the necessary number of candidates. Only certain ones are called, if this manner of speech is permitted. These are the ones who through circumstances have been nearer the pessimistic currents and who consequently have felt their influence more completely.

But a final question remains. Since each year has an equal number of suicides, the current does not strike simultaneously all those within its reach. The persons it will attack next year already exist; already, also, most of them are enmeshed in the collective life and therefore come under its influence. Why are they provisionally spared? It may indeed be understood why a year is needed to produce the current's full action; for since the conditions of social activity are not the same according to season, the current too changes in both intensity and direction at different times of the year. Only after the annual cycle is complete have all the combinations of circumstances occurred, in terms of which it tends to vary. But since, by hypothesis, the next year only repeats the last and causes the same combinations, why was not the first enough? Why, to use the familiar expression, does society pay its bill only in installments?

What we think explains this delay is the way time affects the suicidal tendency. It is an auxiliary but important factor in it. Indeed, we know that the tendency grows incessantly from youth to maturity,[19] and that it is often ten times as great at the close of life as at its beginning. The collective force impelling men to kill themselves therefore only gradually penetrates them. All things being equal, they become more accessible to it as they become older, probably because repeated experiences are needed to reveal the complete emptiness of an egoistic life or the total vanity of limitless ambition. Thus, victims of suicide complete their destiny only in successive layers of generations.[20]

[19] Let us note, to be sure, that this progression has been proved only for European societies, where altruistic suicide is relatively rare. Perhaps it does not apply to the altruistic type. Altruistic suicide may attain its height towards the period of maturity, when a man is most zealously involved in social life. The relations of this form of suicide to homicide, to be mentioned in the following chapter, confirm this hypothesis.

[20] Without wishing to raise a question of metaphysics outside our province, we must note that this theory of statistics does not deny men every sort of freedom. On the contrary, it leaves the question of free will much more untouched than if one made the individual the source of social phenomena. Actually, whatever the causes of the regularity of collective manifestations, they are forced to produce their effects wherever they occur; because otherwise these effects would vary at random, whereas they are uniform. If they are inherent in individuals, they must therefore inevitably determine their possessors. Consequently, on this hypothesis, no way is found to avoid the strictest determinism. But it is not so if the stability of demographic data results from a force external to the individual. Such a force does not determine one individual rather than another. It exacts a definite number of certain kinds of actions, but not that they should be performed by this or that person. It may be granted that some people resist the force and that it has its way with others. Actually, our conception merely adds to physical, chemical, biological and psychological forces, social forces which like these act upon men from without. If the former do not preclude human freedom, the latter need not. The question assumes the same terms for both. When an epidemic center appears, its intensity predetermines the rate of mortality it will cause, but those who will be infected are not designated by that fact. Such is the situation of victims of suicide with reference to suicidogenetic currents.