

# The governmentality of suicide: Peuchet, Marx, Durkheim, and Foucault

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## Abstract

This essay develops a remark Foucault made in passing at the end of the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* (1976), linking the emergence of bio-power and the nineteenth-century sociological fascination with suicide. Foucault traced the origins of bio-power in his Collège de France courses of 1977–1978 and 1978–1979, but never returned to the relationship between the sociological appropriation of suicide and this uniquely modern form of power. Using the recently published lectures from these courses, this essay interprets two nineteenth-century sociological treatises on suicide as historical examples of the development of ‘governmentality.’ The first text is a commentary on suicide from the *Mémoires* (1838) of Parisian police administrator Jacques Peuchet, which the young Marx translated and published in 1846. This proto-sociological text is interpreted as an early manifestation of governmentality, while the second text, Durkheim’s *Le Suicide* (1897), is presented as a classic of sociology and governmental rationality. Aside from the light it sheds on the historical relationship between sociology, governmentality, and suicide, this essay also illuminates some often-overlooked implications of the current ‘right to die’ movement.

## Keywords

bio-power, Durkheim, Foucault, governmentality, liberalism, Marx, pastoral techniques, *Polizeiwissenschaft* (police science), right to die, suicide

*It is not surprising that suicide – once a crime, since it was a way to usurp the power of death which the sovereign alone, whether the one here below or the Lord above, had the right to exercise – became, in the course of the nineteenth century, one of the first conducts to enter into the sphere of sociological analysis; it testified to the individual and private right to die, at the borders and in the interstices of power that was exercised over life. This determination to die, strange and yet so persistent and constant in its manifestations, and consequently so difficult to explain as being due to particular*

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*circumstances or individual accidents, was one of the first astonishments of a society in which political power had assigned itself the task of administering life.*

(Foucault, 1980: 138–139)

Foucault offered this fertile comment about suicide in 1976, when he introduced the concept of ‘bio-power’ in the final section of *La volonté de savoir* (Volume 1 of *The History of Sexuality*), titled ‘Right of Death and Power Over Life.’ By bio-power Foucault was referring to a modern form of power that does not rely on the traditional threat of punishment by a sovereign, but instead ‘exerts a positive influence on life, ... endeavors to administer, optimize, and multiply it, subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive regulations’ (1980: 137). In an interview conducted that same year, he described this form of power as ‘[a] sort of juridico-medical complex [that] is presently being constituted [as] the major form of power’ (1996b: 197). He traced the origins of this juridico-medical complex in his 1977–1978 and 1978–1979 courses at the Collège de France, which have recently been published, respectively, as *Securité, territoire, population* and *Naissance de la biopolitique*.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, Foucault did not develop this insight into sociology’s fascination with suicide as he explored the origins of ‘governmentality’ in the first of these courses, and the origins of biopolitics in the second.<sup>2</sup>

Since Foucault’s death in 1984, certain social facts have emerged which make it increasingly important to think through, more slowly and carefully than he had time to, the evolving status of suicide in modernity. In the last decade of the twentieth century there appeared throughout the medically developed world a growing ‘right to die,’ or ‘chosen death,’ movement, whose primary goal is to achieve legal and medical recognition of the practices of physician-assisted suicide (PAS) and/or medically administered euthanasia. In the 1990s there were unsuccessful attempts to legalize PAS and/or euthanasia in Australia, Canada, Columbia, England, France, Germany, Israel, Japan, New Zealand, the Philippines, South Africa, Sweden, and the United States. The movement has had some successes, the most significant of which occurred in 2001, when the Netherlands finally legalized euthanasia and PAS after allowing a legal exception for both practices for more than twenty-five years. In addition to the Netherlands, Belgium legalized euthanasia, but not PAS, in 2002, and Luxembourg legalized both practices in 2009. The movement has also made some progress below the national level. In 1996 the Northern Territory of Australia authorized both PAS and euthanasia, and four deaths occurred under the terms of this law before the Australian Senate overturned the policy in 1997. In the United States, voters in the state of Oregon legalized PAS by a narrow margin (51–49 percent) in 1994, through a ballot initiative known as the Death with Dignity Act. The law was immediately held up in the courts, but in 1996 voters soundly defeated a repeal measure (60–40 percent), and the law has been in effect since 1997. Washington recently became the second American state to legalize PAS, when voters passed a PAS ballot initiative in the 2008 election by the substantial margin of 59–41 percent.

It seems likely that the chosen death movement will continue to gain momentum in the twenty-first century, fostered by the global dispersion of medical techniques that have made it possible to maintain life in conditions that increasingly appear, from a variety of perspectives, irrational. The profound significance of the juridico-medical legitimation of a right to commit suicide is, however, barely intimated in the above quote from Foucault. To help reveal some of the more intriguing implications of this movement,

this essay develops Foucault's passing remark on the sociological fascination with suicide in light of his recently published course lectures from the late 1970s. In the first section I trace Foucault's account of the origins of governmentality from his 1977–1978 course, where he presented this uniquely modern political rationality as emerging out of a fertile tension that developed, in the late eighteenth century, between liberalism and the Germanic discipline of *Polizeiwissenschaft* (police science). In this section I only suggest that sociology also emerged out of this tension, as a human science that was crucial to the development of governmentality. In the second section I examine the historical status of suicide just prior to the emergence of governmentality and sociology, focusing on the impact that liberalism and the police had on the traditional stance toward suicide. Together these first two sections establish a Foucauldian perspective on the historical context in which suicide would become the focus of nineteenth-century sociology.

I examine two historical examples of the sociological preoccupation with suicide in the last two sections of this essay. The most influential sociological treatise on suicide was, of course, Durkheim's *Le Suicide* (1897), which I discuss in the final section, but as Catherine Edwards and Thomas Osborne recently remarked, Durkheim's book 'was, if anything, the culmination rather than the inauguration of the nineteenth-century fascination with the topic' (2005: 1; also see Cahn, 1998: 228–229, 241–244; Giddens, 1965; Lukes, 1973: 192). As an example of the pre-Durkheimian treatment of suicide, I examine an obscure, yet revealing, proto-sociological suicide treatise in the third section. In 1838, more than fifty years before *Le Suicide*, a short discussion of this issue appeared in the posthumously published memoirs of retired Parisian police administrator Jacques Peuchet (1758–1830). The young Marx was so intrigued by this section of Peuchet's memoirs, 'Du suicide et de ses causes' ('On Suicide and Its Causes'), that in 1846 he published his own translation of it in the journal *Gesellschaftsspiegel* (*Mirror of Society*), under the title 'Peuchet: von Selbstmord.'<sup>3</sup> While suicide was not a primary concern of Peuchet or Marx, I focus on this particular bit of Marxist marginalia because Peuchet's reflections on suicide emerged precisely out of that tension between the police and liberalism that Foucault identified as one of the primary sources of governmentality. A close examination of this police administrator's perspective, as well as Marx's attraction to it, will further illuminate the historical conditions that gave rise to Durkheim's masterpiece, allowing me to present *Le Suicide* in the final section as a classical text of governmentality, as well as sociology.

After developing this Foucauldian interpretation of classical sociology's governmental stance toward suicide, I will conclude by briefly pointing to some of the implications of the growing 'right to die' movement that are raised when approached from this reflexive sociological perspective. Viewed in this light, the claim that an individual ought to have the right to end his or her life with medical assistance appears less as a juridical issue requiring an affirmative or negative response, and more as an invitation for reflection on the sorts of selves we have become, and are becoming, in the juridico-medical complex of modernity.

### **Polizeiwissenschaft, liberalism, and governmentality**

In his 1977–1978 course, *Securité, territoire, population*, Foucault attempted to clarify what he had in 1976 'called, somewhat vaguely, bio-power' (2007: 1; also 24 n. 1). Toward

this end he concentrated on a particular form of political rationality that developed in eighteenth-century Europe, which he identified as governmentality; in fact, in the only lecture from this course published during his lifetime, Foucault claimed that a more accurate title for the course would have been ‘a history of “governmentality”’ (2007: 108; 2000b: 219; 1991: 102). According to this history, governmentality gradually emerged out of tensions that developed between mercantilism, the political rationality that ‘practically dominated Europe from the start of the seventeenth until the start of the eighteenth century’ (Foucault, 2007: 32), and liberalism. In a very Hegelian sense, governmentality was presented in this course as a synthesis of certain mercantilist ideas and practices with some competing concepts and techniques developed under liberalism.

One of the most important features of mercantilism that was taken up by governmentality was a political concern with the population that inhabited a particular territory. From a mercantilist perspective, states were considered political and economic rivals, and in this competition the population was treated as a crucial resource that had to be carefully administered and regulated by the state. Indeed, Foucault claimed that the political concentration on populations was ‘absolutely inseparable from’ the theory of mercantilism (2007: 337). This mercantilist conception of the population first appeared in England and France, where the centralized administrative systems of their strong monarchical traditions made it possible to monitor the state’s various resources, and eventually spread throughout Europe, even to those regions without centralized monarchical systems. Mercantilism developed its own particular discipline for regulating populations, the science of the police, which also spread throughout Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This mercantilist conception of the police figured prominently in Foucault’s courses on governmentality and biopolitics, as well as lectures he delivered later in his career.<sup>4</sup> The early modern police served Foucault as a transitional phenomenon that brought into relief the tensions between mercantilism and liberalism that gave rise to governmentality.

It is important to note that in contrast to the current conception of the police as a law enforcement entity linked to criminal justice, Foucault emphasized that the early modern police was ‘clearly distinguished from ... the power of justice, judicial power’ (2007: 339). Rather than enforcing laws of the sovereign with sanctions that were, ultimately, grounded in the sovereign’s right to death, the mercantilist conception of the police was an extensive administrative system that governed the myriad factors that impinged upon the lives of individuals throughout the sovereign’s territory. As such, the police was concerned with: maximizing the size of the state’s population in relation to its natural resources; ensuring that this population was productive and healthy; and promoting the circulation of both people and goods throughout this territory by creating and maintaining adequate roads, canals, and other public amenities (Foucault, 2007: 323–325). In his courses from the late 1970s, Foucault did not present this expansive, bureaucratic conception of the police from a criminological perspective, as a modern variant in the history of the more general social function of ‘policing,’ or as a form of ‘social control’ (for example, Reiner, 1994: 715–722). Rather, he presented this specific historical manifestation of the police as part of a very different tradition – that of the ‘pastorate.’

In fact, Foucault spent a full third of the lectures in the course on governmentality examining the extensive ‘history of the pastorate [which] involves ... the entire history of

human individualization in the West' (2007: 184; see 123–237). For our purposes, all that needs to be said of this history is that the pastorate first emerged as an Eastern Mediterranean image of a shepherd who cared not only for the flock, but for each individual member as well. This conception of the shepherd was eventually taken up by Judaism, but Foucault claimed that 'the real history of the pastorate as the source of a specific type of power over men, as a model and matrix of procedures for the government of men, really only begins with Christianity' (2007: 147–148). The Christian pastorate was particularly effective in governing the behavior of individuals owing to its potent combination of three basic techniques: a concern for the salvation of each individual; the requirement of complete obedience to the will of a superior; and the production of hidden truths about each individual through his or her communicative interaction with the pastor (Foucault, 2007: 165–185).

Although this Christian 'art of "governing men"' (2007: 165) prevailed from the second or third century through the sixteenth, the pastorate was continually challenged throughout its history by various alternative visions of how people ought to be governed, such as Gnosticism and mysticism (2007: 148–149, 195, 205–215). Foucault described these challenges as 'counter-conducts,' and noted that there was a spate of them in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which ultimately produced a 'crisis of the pastorate.' At this point 'the pastorate burst open, broke up,' and a range of competing visions for the proper conduct of individuals flourished (2007: 193). As examples of such early modern counter-conducts he cited the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, as well as Jansenism (2007: 150–153, 196–197, 228). But around the turn of the eighteenth century there was a shift in these challenges to the traditional pastorate, and 'we see revolts of conduct arising less from the religious institution and much more from political institutions' (2007: 197–198, also 154). On Foucault's reading, the mercantilist institution of the police was a particularly influential, if short-lived, form of such a political counter-conduct.

While Foucault traced the lineage of the police back to the Christian pastorate, he also examined the evolution of the terms used to characterize the broad concerns of the police, revealing a trajectory that linked this mercantilist institution with the later discipline of sociology. In the seventeenth century the police was concerned with what 'was called men's convenience (*commodité*), their amenity, or even felicity' (2007: 327), while in '[t]he eighteenth century theorists will say ...[p]olice is basically concerned with society' or 'sociality (*socialité*)' (2007: 326). But, Foucault insisted, the most appropriate word for describing the aim of the early modern police was 'well-being (*bien-être*)' (2007: 328); for the police encompassed 'an immense domain that we could say goes from living to more than just living,' 'from being to well-being' (2007: 326, 328).<sup>5</sup> However, it is important to note that under mercantilism the police did not treat the well-being of the population as an end in itself. Rather, the police was only concerned with 'everything that may produce this well-being beyond being, ... in such a way that the well-being of individuals is the state's strength' (2007: 328). The concern with the population in its own right would emerge later, at the end of the eighteenth century, when governmentality 'put the notion of population and the mechanisms for ensuring its regulation at the center of its concerns' (2007: 363; alternate translation, 1997: 67). The early modern police did, however, develop two important techniques for governing populations in order to augment the power of the state, one of which would be taken up by the political rationality of governmentality, while the other would be abandoned.

The first technique was the science of statistics, which provided a quantitative view of the population as something whose well-being could actually be measured and therefore improved. While statistics was crucial for Durkheim's grounding of sociology in the late nineteenth century, Foucault emphasized that statistics first emerged in a complementary relationship with the police:

Police makes statistics necessary, but police also makes statistics possible. For it is precisely the whole set of procedures set up to increase, combine, and develop forces, it is this whole administrative assemblage that makes it possible to identify what each state's forces comprise and their possibilities of development. Police and statistics mutually condition each other.

(2007: 315)

The second important technique developed by the police involved conducting individuals in a manner that would maintain a healthy, productive population that served the interests of the state. Neither the traditional Christian confessional techniques, nor the laws of the sovereign were effective in promoting the worldly well-being of individuals, so the police developed and deployed a pastoral technique of its own – the bureaucratic regulation. Such regulations were grounded not in the will of a sovereign, worldly or divine, but rather in the knowledge of populations that was provided by statistics. Neither prohibitory nor punitive, these regulations were positive interventions in a very broad range of individual behavior. In the next section I will discuss the regulatory approach that the police took to the problem of suicide, but here need only reiterate Foucault's point that with the police '[w]e are in a world of indefinite regulation, of permanent, continually renewed, and increasingly detailed regulation, but always regulation' (2007: 340; also see Foucault, 2000d: 415).

Although mercantilism appeared out of the strong monarchical traditions of England and France, the regulatory program of the police did not reach the height of its development in these countries. While the police did become well established in France, where Peuchet rose to a position of authority, Foucault emphasized that the French 'conceived of [the police] within administrative practice, but without theory, system, or concepts' (2007: 318). Rather, it was in Germany that the police developed most fully into a theoretically coherent regulatory system. Unlike England and France, the various German states had no centralized administrative system, and had to create one (Foucault, 2000a: 137–142). Consequently, a particularly state-centered form of mercantilism developed in Germany, known as 'cameralism,' which helped create the bureaucracy necessary for governing the populations of modern states. The term 'cameral' refers to the chambers where princes had traditionally received information from advisors, but by the early eighteenth century Prussian universities were teaching 'cameralistics,' the science of finance and administration, to future government functionaries (Foucault, 2007: 25–26 n. 25; also see Rosen, 1974: 122). It was in this cameralistic environment, Foucault claimed, that the police reached its most theoretically sophisticated form:

... you see the development in German universities of something with practically no equivalent in Europe: the *Polizeiwissenschaft*, the science of police, which from the middle or end of the seventeenth century to the end of the eighteenth century is an absolutely German specialty that spreads throughout Europe and exerts a crucial influence. Theories of police, books on police,



and manuals for administrators will produce an enormous bibliography of *Polizeiwissenschaft* in the eighteenth century.

(2007: 318)

Despite their well-developed administrative systems, England and France were not as receptive to the science of the police as were the German states. On Foucault's account, it was the liberalism that flourished in eighteenth-century England and France that tempered the development of the police. He discussed liberalism at length in his 1977–1978 and 1978–1979 courses; in fact, in the latter course he claimed 'only when we understand what is at stake in this regime of liberalism ... will we be able to grasp what biopolitics is' (2008: 22). He presented liberalism primarily as a counter-conduct to the police in these courses, and crystallized this fertile tension in the summary of the 1978–1979 course. The '*Polizeiwissenschaft* developed by the Germans ... ,' he explained, 'always followed the principle: Not enough attention is being given to things, too much escapes control, too many domains lack rules and regulation, order and administration are lacking. In short, there is too little government.' In contrast, liberalism 'is imbued with the principle: "One always governs too much" – or at least, one should always suspect that one governs too much' (2008: 318–319; compare 1997: 74). According to Foucault, this suspicion of regulation was based not on the concept of individual liberty touted in liberal political theory; rather, it was the economic theory of *laissez-faire*, and the attendant concept of civil society, that checked the development of the police in England and France.

When Foucault first took up liberalism in one of the early lectures from his course on governmentality, he introduced it as a form of resistance to mercantilist policies concerning the grain supply. To prevent food shortages, mercantilist policies regulated the cultivation, sale, and circulation of grain, with the aim of 'lowering the selling price of grain, peasant profit, the purchase cost for the people, and wages.' According to Foucault, this 'is the great political principle that was developed, organized, and systematized throughout what we can call the mercantilist period' (2007: 32). However, in late seventeenth-century England an alternative approach to the problem of famine appeared. Rather than regulating the price and circulation of grain, the 1689 Parliament adopted a policy based on the liberal assumption that 'the free circulation of grain was not only a better source of profit, but also a much better mechanism of security against the scourge of scarcity' (2007: 34). In contrast to the mercantilist vision of the population as a resource that could serve the interests of the state, liberal political economy developed a statistical view of the population as having its own rates and regularities, 'a naturalness that basically did not exist until then and which, if not named as such, at least begins to be thought of and analyzed as the naturalness of society' (2007: 349; also 104, 352).

For Foucault, it was this quantitative view of society as something distinct from the state, rather than the ideal of individual autonomy, that grounded the liberal policy of 'curbing scarcity by a sort of "*laissez-faire*," a certain "freedom of movement (*laisser-passer*)," a sort "[*laisser*]-*aller*," in the sense of "letting things take their course"' (2007: 41, brackets in original). This *laissez-faire* policy spread from England to France, where it was taken up by the physiocrats, and became 'the great hobby-horse of theorists of the economy, but also of those [like Peuchet] who, in one way or another, had an administrative, political, or economic responsibility in eighteenth-century France' (2007: 34–35; also see 328,

and 341–354). Although born in opposition to the mercantilist regulation of grain, the *laissez-faire* stance toward civil society was, ultimately, crucial to the development of governmentality. As Foucault put it, ‘Civil society is what governmental thought, the new form of governmentality born in the eighteenth century, reveals as the necessary correlate of the state’ (2007: 350; also 1997: 75).

As this liberal/governmental conception of civil society expanded throughout Europe, ‘[p]olice regulation’ came to be seen as ‘not only harmful, even worse it [was] pointless’ (Foucault, 2007: 344). Eventually, the ‘great over-regulatory police,’ like the Christian pastorate before it, began to ‘break up,’ resulting in the familiar division in techniques for governing individual conduct that remains with us to this day (2007: 353). On the one hand, the police was reduced to the ‘simple negative functions’ that we have come to associate with ‘the institution of police in the modern sense of the term, which will simply be the instrument by which one prevents the occurrence of certain disorders’ (2007: 353–354). But on the other hand, positive new disciplines appeared, such as political economy, psychology, and, of course, sociology, which sought to provide scientific knowledge whereby civil society could be managed and administered. These human sciences developed their own pastoral techniques for governing the ‘natural’ conduct of individuals in civil society, techniques that Foucault described as ‘the great mechanisms of incentive regulation’ (2007: 354). The positive ‘interventions’ accomplished by these new sciences ‘will not necessarily, or not as a general rule, and very often not at all take the form of rules and regulations,’ Foucault explained. ‘It will be necessary to arouse, to facilitate, and to *laissez faire*, in other words to manage and no longer to control through rules and regulations’ (2007: 352–353).

As presented in Foucault’s courses from the late 1970s, the political rationality of governmentality emerged out of the tension that developed in the eighteenth century between mercantilism and the police, on the one hand, and *laissez-faire* liberalism, on the other. Governmentality continued the statistical analysis of populations that the police developed under mercantilism, but rather than relying on regulations to govern individuals within those populations, instead it developed the human sciences as a governmental form of the pastorate. However, Foucault never discussed the issue of suicide as he developed this history of governmentality, nor did he mention Peuchet, who we will later see stood abreast this tension between the police and liberalism. In the next section I will briefly trace the impact that liberalism and the police had on the shifting status of suicide in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in order to establish the broader context in which Peuchet’s unique perspective on suicide, as well as Durkheim’s *Le Suicide*, appeared.

## Liberalism, the police, and the early modern suicide debate

To appreciate the significance of the nineteenth century’s sociological/governmental treatment of suicide, it is important to keep in mind that suicide had been a troubling form of death throughout European history, and that its status was particularly unsettled from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries. In the early modern debates about the morality of suicide, ancient authorities were frequently invoked on both sides. On the one hand, Plato and Aristotle were generally critical of suicide, and saw it as an



abandonment of one's obligations to the gods, society, or oneself. The Stoics and Epicureans, on the other hand, viewed suicide much more favorably, and recognized it as a reasonable choice in circumstances where life had become unavoidably burdensome. This ancient dispute was largely settled in the fifth century, when Augustine condemned the taking of one's own life as a violation of the biblical injunction against murder. Thereafter, suicide was described in various languages throughout Europe as 'self-murder' (Augustine, 1948: 27–34; also 474–478; and see Murray, 2000: II, 101–121).

Beginning in the sixth century, canon law punished self-murderers by denying them the rites of Christian burial, and in the thirteenth century they could no longer be buried on sacred ground (Williams, 1966: 257–258; also see Alvarez, 1990: 89; Fedden, 1972: 133–134; Murray, 2000: II, 181–188). Along with these religious sanctions, legal penalties were also traditionally inflicted on suicides. While Roman civil law initially reflected the Stoic indifference toward suicide, and did not usually punish such deaths, in the Late Empire the civil law was modified to allow the Emperor to seize the property of self-murderers as part of the imperial *fisc* (Murray, 2000: II, 156–169, and 174–176). This practice of confiscation spread throughout Europe during the Middle Ages, as lords of various regions in England, France, and Germany claimed the property of suicides as their own (Bosman, 2004: 11; Murray, 2000: II, 63–77). These confiscatory practices were eventually centralized as monarchies became more firmly established in the late medieval period.

In addition to these religious and legal punishments, a range of ignominious burial practices also developed throughout Europe during the medieval period. Derived from pre-Christian folklore, these degrading customs varied from region to region, but they usually focused on the liminal status of self-murderers as individuals who had abandoned the living, but were denied entry into the realm of the dead. In England, France, and many German principalities, the bodies of suicides were often dragged through the streets to a place of execution, where they were hung on gibbets to rot. In England and Germany, suicides were occasionally buried in graves dug along a roadway, or at a crossroads, with a wooden stake pinning the body to that spot. In some parts of France and Germany, the bodies were tossed on public refuse heaps or into carrion pits, or were burned. In river cities, the bodies were frequently sealed in marked barrels and set adrift (Alvarez, 1990: 64–65; Crocker, 1952: 50; Fedden, 1972: 139–141; Koslofsky, 2004: 52–53; MacDonald and Murphy, 1990: 15–19; Murray, 2000: II, 37–41; Noon, 1978: 372; Williams, 1966: 257–261).

Although all of these punishments for suicide were available in the late medieval period, they were not rigorously employed, but then in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries they were codified under sovereign law. In 1487, Henry VII required coroners in England to convene a jury in all cases of suspected suicide, to determine whether the dead suspect was guilty of *felo de se* (felony of oneself), or was *non compos mentis* (not of sound mind), and therefore not subject to punishment. In cases of *felo de se* the body was denied a Christian burial, and that person's property was confiscated directly by the sovereign or his designees in particular regions (MacDonald and Murphy, 1990: 15–18, 22–24, 82–83; also see Fedden, 1972: 137–139; Williams, 1966: 261–264). In France, the punishments of confiscation and profane burial were codified in the *Ordonnance criminelle de 1670* (Crocker, 1952: 50; also see Alvarez, 1990: 65–66;

Fedden, 1972: 190–192; Murray, 2000: II, 73–76). And in Germany, the legal codes of many of the states created by the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) also punished suicide with ‘silent’ burials and confiscation (Healy, 2006: 913; Lind, 1998: 298; Murray, 2000: II, 65, 72–73.).

The traditional punishments of suicide were not only codified in the first centuries of modernity; they were also much more rigorously enforced. In their influential study of suicide in early modern England, *Sleepless Souls*, Michael MacDonald and Terence R. Murphy identify the period between 1500–1660 as the ‘era of severity,’ claiming that ‘[t]he rigour with which the law against suicide was enforced in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries distinguishes this period from the centuries before and afterwards’ (1990: 16; also Healy, 2006: 907–908, 912, 918). For support, they note that British coroner records reveal a dramatic rise in the number of suicide inquests from the 1580s through the 1650s, and that juries returned verdicts of *felo de se* in 90 percent of these cases (MacDonald and Murphy, 1990: 290 Table 1.1). While MacDonald and Murphy’s study focuses on England, this pattern of aggressive punishment of suicide prevailed throughout Europe. As Lester Crocker remarked: ‘... seventeenth-century France, in the totality of its attitude, severely condemned suicide’ (1952: 50), and the punishments of suicide were rigorously enforced in the German states as well (Healy, 2006: 910; Lind, 1998: 298, 300).

Challenges to this punitive stance toward suicide appeared as early as the sixteenth century, and then increased over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The earliest opponents of the punitive attitude frequently invoked ancient Stoic and Epicurean perspectives to challenge the Platonic and Aristotelian arguments that were used to bolster the Augustinian condemnation of self-murder. But gradually the rational individualism of liberalism, a facet Foucault glossed over in his account of governmentality, came to shape the suicide debate, and the hostility toward self-murder generally waned as liberalism spread throughout Europe. One of the earliest, and most prescient, liberal challenges to the punishment of suicide was offered by Hobbes, who, despite his notoriously punitive conception of sovereignty, rejected the very thought of holding a person culpable for self-murder. In *A Dialogue Between a Philosopher and a Student of the Common Laws of England* (written between 1662 and 1675 and published posthumously in 1681), Hobbes’ philosopher responds to the student’s description of suicide as *felo de se* by claiming,

I conceive not how any Man can bear *Animum felleum*, or so much Malice towards himself, as to hurt himself voluntarily, much less to kill himself; ... therefore, methinks, if he kill himself, it is to be presumed that he is not *compos mentis*, but by some inward torment or Apprehension of somewhat worse than Death, Distracted.

(1971: 116–17)<sup>6</sup>

Nearly a century after Hobbes tentatively suggested that suicides might not meet the level of rationality required for culpability, Hume leveled the most radical attack on the traditional foundations for the punitive stance. In his posthumously published essay ‘On Suicide’ (written in 1755, published anonymously in 1777), he dismantled the classic Platonic and Aristotelian arguments that condemned suicide as a violation of the obligations individuals have to the gods, society, and/or themselves, and argued instead that the

ability to end one's life was a great gift given uniquely to humanity. Displaying Stoicism's influence on the early modern suicide debate, Hume wrote:

But I thank providence, both for the good which I have already enjoyed, and for the power with which I am endowed of escaping the ill that threatens me. To you it belongs to repine at providence, who foolishly imagine that you have no such power, and who must still prolong a hated being, tho' loaded with pain and sickness, with shame and poverty.

(1980: 101)

Far from Hobbes' view of suicide as a form of madness, Hume instead claimed that the decision to end one's life could be courageous, and even suggested that in some circumstances society might benefit from the suicide of a burdensome individual (1980: 98–104).

Numerous French voices were also raised against the punishment of suicide during the eighteenth century, including Montesquieu's ([1721] 1901: 151–153) and Rousseau's ([1761] 1997: 311–323), but 'Voltaire's voice was perhaps the loudest and clearest' (Crocker, 1952: 53). He presented suicide favorably in his plays *Orphelin de la Chine*, *Alzire*, *Merope*, and *Candide*, as well as in entries on suicide in the second edition of his *Dictionnaire philosophique* (1770) (Crocker, 1952: 53–54, inc. nn. 3 and 24). In 1777 he submitted 'Prix de la justice et de l'humanité' ('The Price of Justice and Humanity') for an essay contest on the reform of the criminal law, which was sponsored by the *Gazette de Berne*. In this essay Voltaire followed Hume in presenting a Stoic-inflected view of suicide as a form of release, and also employed the Epicurean image of suicide as taking leave of one's house. But Voltaire went beyond Hume in directly and harshly condemning those who would punish suicide:

The republic will do very well without me after my death, as it had done very well before my birth. I am discontented with my house, I leave it on the chance of not finding a better one. But you! What madmen you are to hang me by the feet when I am no longer alive! And what thieves you are to rob my children!

(Quoted in Gay, 1965: 290; see Voltaire, 1882: xxx, 543)

These various liberal arguments against the punishment of suicide, in combination with the ameliorating influence of neo-Stoicism and Epicureanism, gradually undermined the earlier severity against suicide, and by the end of the eighteenth century suicide was rarely punished in England or France (Crocker, 1952: 50; Fedden, 1972: 224–230; MacDonald and Murphy, 1990: 109, 119, 123, 133; Sprott, 1961: 120–121).<sup>7</sup> To some extent, the Hobbesian view prevailed in England, and suicide ultimately came to be 'regarded as a secular calamity – the consequence of mental disease – rather than a diabolical crime' (MacDonald and Murphy, 1990: 133). Indeed, the pattern established in the era of severity was inverted by the end of the eighteenth century, when English juries almost always found suspected suicides to be *non compos mentis* (MacDonald and Murphy, 1990: 290 Table 1.1). Although the punishments of suicide had fallen into abeyance, the British laws nevertheless remained in place until the nineteenth century – ignominious burials were abolished in 1823, and the confiscation law was repealed in 1870 (Alvarez, 1990: 64–66; Fedden, 1972: 141, 192–193; Healy, 2006: 913; Sprott,

1961: 156–158; Williams, 1966: 259–262). Legal reforms were accomplished more quickly in France, where the criminal ordinance allowing the degradation of the suicide's body was repealed in 1770, and the confiscation law lapsed with the Revolution in 1789 (Fedden, 1972: 223; compare Healy 2006: 913).

It took a bit longer for the liberal leniency toward suicide to catch on in Germany, even though Prussia led the way in establishing legal reforms (Healy, 2006: 910; Lind, 1998: 306). In 1751, years before the suicide laws were repealed in England or France, suicide was decriminalized by the Enlightened Prussian monarch Frederick II, who happened to be entertaining his long-time correspondent, Voltaire, during this very period (Lind, 1998: 299; also see Healy, 2006: 913; Maestro, 1942: 28). This legal reform was not popular among the Prussian clergy, however, and local communities continued to defiantly bury the bodies of suicides in disgrace. Indeed, as late as 1794 the Prussian state found it necessary to ban such burials in the General Law Code (*Allgemeines Landrecht*), but this policy, in turn, sparked popular protests (Healy, 2006: 913). In contrast to England and France, where prominent liberal voices condemned the punishment of suicide, most philosophers in eighteenth-century Germany supported the punitive stance (Lind, 1998: 306). This is true even of the leading lights of German liberalism, such as Kant.

Though awakened from his intellectual slumber by Hume, Kant nevertheless remained unmoved by liberal arguments against the punishment of suicide, and condemned it in nearly hysterical terms in his *Lectures on Ethics* (1775–1780). 'We shrink in horror from suicide because all nature seeks its own preservation,' he shrieked; 'an injured tree, a living body, an animal does so; how then could man make of his freedom, which is the acme of life and constitutes its worth, a principle for his own destruction? Nothing more terrible can be imagined ...' (Kant, 1963: 150–151). In contrast to the broad-minded Frederick, Kant even went so far as to claim that anyone who would take his own life

... has no respect for human nature and makes a thing of himself, becomes for everyone an Object of freewill. We are free to treat him as a beast, as a thing, and to use him for our sport as we do a horse or a dog, for he is no longer a human being; he has made a thing of himself, and, having himself discarded his humanity, he cannot expect that others should respect humanity in him.

(1963: 151)

While Kant ultimately backed away from this harsh judgment, and conceded that even those who would destroy themselves deserved the respect due to each individual (1963: 151), his punitive rhetoric reflected, rather than restrained, the popular hostility toward suicide that still prevailed in late eighteenth-century Germany.

A less hostile stance toward suicide did eventually emerge in Germany, but among those administrators who studied cameralistics and *Polizeiwissenschaft* at Prussian universities, rather than among the philosophers. One can get a sense of this non-liberal leniency from the work of Johann Peter Frank (1745–1821), whom Foucault identified as the leading theorist of *medizinische Polizei* (medical police), a late eighteenth-century offshoot of *Polizeiwissenschaft* (2000d: 404). Frank held numerous bureaucratic positions, serving as a public health administrator under the Prince-Bishop of Speyer (1775–1784), the Austrian Emperor Joseph II (1785–1804), and, for a brief

period, Czar Alexander I of Russia (1805–1808) (Frank, 1976: x–xiii, 380–381). On the basis of this vast experience he ‘outlined a complete system of public and private hygiene from the cradle to the grave’ (LaBerge, 1992: 13), which he published between 1779 and 1819 as the six-volume treatise, *A System of Complete Medical Police*. Although Foucault mentioned the medical police in general in his course on governmentality (2007: 58–59, 367), and discussed Frank’s *System* in particular in several public lectures from the mid-1970s to the end of his career ([1974] 2000a: 140–142; [1976] 2000e: 94–95; [1982] 2000d: 404), he never mentioned Frank’s thoughts about suicide. Nevertheless, this medical policeman’s perspective on suicide perfectly illustrates the regulatory approach of *Polizeiwissenschaft* that Foucault sketched in his course on governmentality.

Like Hobbes, Frank thought it was ‘insane to endeavor to end one’s days by force,’ and it therefore made no sense to punish anyone in whom ‘the natural love of life’ had grown so weak. ‘It is only right,’ he wrote, ‘... that the police desist from such indecent punishment for these unfortunate beings who already paid dearly enough for their madness.’ However, Frank did not go as far as his liberal contemporaries, Hume and Voltaire, who treated suicide as a personal, and potentially courageous, decision. On the contrary, he insisted that suicide was ‘an act that is very detrimental to the community,’ and noted with concern the increase in suicides in England and France. ‘Germany, too,’ he lamented, ‘has its Werthers, and unfortunately in our time suicide has become much more widespread.’ But rather than using the law to punish the bodies and families of suicides, Frank instead claimed that ‘[t]he authorities should take all the more care, as far as it depends on them, to counter the causes of suicide’ (1976: 238–240).

In identifying these causes, Frank displayed a severe, but nevertheless pastoral, concern for those who might take their own lives. One of the primary causes he cited was the ‘cesspool of masturbation,’ to which he ascribed the high rate of suicide among celibates, as well as ‘a large part of the blame for the unbridled dissoluteness of youth and the increasing number of suicides’ (1976: 241). Among other contributing factors, Frank listed ‘[i]rreligiousness, debauchery, and idleness, lavishness and its attendant unaccustomed misery, but especially the reading of poisonous novels’ (1976: 241), such as Goethe’s *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774), which presented suicide as a heroic display of contempt for earthly affairs (see Healy, 2006: 911–912). These novels, along with positive theatrical presentations of suicide, served as a stimulus to ‘the mass of weak people,’ who upon becoming accustomed to such positive presentations of suicide, ‘search for a similarity of their own suffering, and even at the slightest provocation, their sick souls easily fall prey to a quiet insanity which may cause in the most cowardly weakening a paroxysm of convulsive determination’ (1976: 241).

While traditional punishments were of no avail in preventing the sort of behavior that leads to suicide, Frank nevertheless thought that the state could help steer individuals away from suicidal vices toward more virtuous behavior. But rather than relying on the prohibitory, punitive model of the law, Frank instead suggested that

... the community should ensure better education and better morals; debauchery should be curbed; ruinous gambling, which leads to desperation, should be restricted; the praise of suicide should be banned from the stage, and novels praising suicide also should be banned; the state of celibacy, and monasteries, where desperation and insanity are bred, should be

reduced; gymnastic games and other popular amusements that keep the body healthy should be promoted; the misery of the poorest class should be alleviated; finally, care should be taken that melancholic persons and persons suspect of quiet insanity obtain help from their relatives in time and are brought to safe places, etc.

(1976: 242–243)

All of these proposed regulations, with the exception of the bans on suicide-praising novels and plays, aimed not to prohibit behavior, but rather to shift the conduct of individuals away from activities that lead to the quiet insanity of suicide, toward healthier alternatives. ‘By combating the accidental causes,’ Frank claimed, ‘more will be done than the strictest laws can achieve, which anyway cannot ever catch up with the deceased’ (1976: 243).

Despite the disinclination to punish suicide that developed among German bureaucrats and administrators, the suicide laws remained in effect in many German states during the nineteenth century, and there was public opposition to any attempt to evade these laws. So while late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century English juries routinely returned verdicts of *non compos mentis*, there was open resistance when administrators in some parts of Germany tried a similar strategy for excusing many suicides from punishment (Lind, 1998: 302). In fact, the practice of ignominious burial continued even after the unification of the various German states in 1871, so much so that in 1873 the Prussian government was compelled to criminalize such burials of suicides throughout Germany (Healy, 2006: 913).

Suicide was, then, a very divisive public issue in nineteenth-century Germany, and the young Marx was particularly well suited to participate in this discussion. In the late 1830s he studied classical philosophy in Berlin, and became quite familiar with those ancient authorities that were traditionally invoked in the suicide debate; in fact, the doctoral dissertation he submitted in 1841, on ‘The Difference Between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature,’ was ‘originally intended as part of a comprehensive exposition of Epicurean, Stoic, and Sceptic philosophy.’<sup>8</sup> In the early 1840s he studied the French Revolution, as well as English political economists, and was likely exposed to liberal perspectives on suicide. But when Marx finally entered the discussion of suicide, five years after submitting his dissertation, he did so not by engaging the ancient Epicureans or Stoics, much less modern philosophers like Hume or Voltaire. Instead, he was drawn to the issue through the perspective of the retired police administrator Peuchet, whose writing he praised as an outstanding example of the ‘French critique of society,’ which was characterized by ‘a direct warmth of feeling, a richness of intuition, a worldly sensitivity and insightful originality for which one searches in vain in all other nations’ (Marx, 1999: 45).

### Marx’s fascination with Peuchet’s Police *Mémoires*

Peuchet spent nearly four decades, off and on, in public administration, and is actually credited with coining the term ‘bureaucracy’ (Anderson, 1999: 11). He first worked as an economist, contributing to a trade dictionary in 1785, and during the early years of the



Revolution served as a police administrator. He also edited the official *Gazette de France* in 1789–1790, but his sympathies lay more with the monarchy than the Revolution, and he soon joined the royalists. In 1790 he became editor of the anti-revolutionary literary journal *Mercur de France*, and served in this position until he was arrested in 1792. He was released shortly thereafter, but eventually returned to public administration by, as Marx put it, '[c]leverly wending his way through the French Revolution' (1999: 46). In 1800 he published the five-volume *Geographie commercante*, which greatly impressed First Consul Bonaparte, and led to his appointment to high economic and police positions in Napoleon's administration. Displaying that close relation between the police and statistics that Foucault emphasized, in 1805 Peuchet published *Statistique elementaire de la France (Elementary Statistics of France)*, which, in addition to providing data on the population and territory of the French Empire, also sought to articulate the principles of the science of statistics. After the Restoration he was appointed archivist for the Paris Police Prefecture, and held this position from 1815 until 1825, when he was dismissed because his 1824 book on Mirabeau was judged too sympathetic to the Revolution (Anderson, 1999: 11; Marx, 1999: 45–46, and 71–72 nn. 4, 5, 6, and 7).

When he left this last governmental post Peuchet took with him extensive materials that served as the foundation for his six-volume *Mémoires tirés des archives de la police de Paris (Memoirs from the Police Archives of Paris)*, including files on suicides, which were part of his responsibilities (Anderson, 1999: 11; Marx, 1999: 50, 45–46). Marx was so impressed by this bureaucrat's thoughts on suicide that he translated and published the entire section, with a few interesting additions and omissions. In contrast to those "premature" socialists and communists who ... lack so totally the wonderful thoroughness and the all-encompassing knowledge of the vast majority of our writers, officials, and practical citizens,' Marx claimed that Peuchet instead wrote '[a]n *old man*, ... partly from materials from the Paris Police Archives, partly from his long practical experience in police work and administration' (1999: 46). While Marx was intrigued by Peuchet's combination of bureaucratic experience and his French critique of society, from a Foucauldian perspective this combination represents an early stage in the development of governmentality. For Peuchet's perspective on suicide emerged at that point where the tension between liberalism and the police generated new pastoral techniques, or counter-conducts, that would be further developed as human sciences under governmentality.

As a turn-of-the-century police administrator, Peuchet would quite likely have been exposed to the German theory of police science. Foucault noted that 'several Frenchmen, especially in Napoleon's entourage, knew the teaching of this *Polizeiwissenschaft*' (2000d: 414; also see Foucault, 2000a: 149); indeed, at one point Napoleon offered Frank a position as his personal physician, but he declined the offer (Frank, 1976: x– xiii, 380–381). But whatever the extent to which Peuchet was familiar with *Polizeiwissenschaft* and *medizinische Polizei*, he did follow the police practice of employing statistics to study social problems. Given his sense that suicide was on the rise in Paris, he 'undertook a comprehensive study of this subject,' and, in a remark omitted by Marx, claimed: 'Without dwelling on theories, I will try to present facts' (Marx, 1999: 50, including note). Toward this end, Peuchet developed a rudimentary statistical methodology, the description of which Marx also omitted:

In order to get reliable data on suicide, I formed the plan for a big task. I first made an analytic and synthetic summary of police reports on suicide, then all data were input on tables with several columns on which were entered all peculiar characteristics as follows:

1. date of the event
2. person's name
3. his sex
4. civil status or profession
5. if the victim was married, with or without children
6. type of death or technique used to kill himself

In the seventh column, I put down various observations which could be drawn from the details in other columns (Marx, 1999: note on p. 69).

The fruits of this statistical research were seven tables that presented a range of data about suicide for some of the years between 1811 and 1824. Marx included only one of these tables in his translation – a detailed account of suicides in 1824, broken down by sex, marital status, method, and motive (1999: 69–70; for the other tables, see 142–147; and 75 n. 16).

Although Marx did not seem particularly interested in them, Peuchet's suicide tables reflect a shift in the use of statistics that was crucial to the development of governmentality. Under mercantilism and *Polizeiwissenschaft*, Foucault explained, 'statistics ... functioned within administrative frameworks, and so in terms of the functioning of sovereignty,' while under liberalism statistics 'discovers and gradually reveals that the population possesses its own regularities: its death rate, its incidence of disease, its regularities of accidents' (2007: 104; compare 2000b: 215–216; and 1991: 99). One can glimpse this shift in statistical concern from the state to civil society in the evolution of Peuchet's perspective. In his earlier work of 1805, *Statistique élémentaire*, he took a stance close to that of the police, and claimed that when the 'masters of public power, the legislators and the generals began to calculate the force, the resources and the power of the state, by the extent of its territory, by its population, by its riches: thus statistics was born' (Peuchet, 1805: 18). In contrast, the discussion of suicide in his *Mémoires*, written between 1825 and 1830, nearly seven decades prior to Durkheim's seminal work on suicide rates, began with the declaration: 'The *yearly toll* of suicides, which is to some extent *normal and periodic*, has to be viewed as a symptom of the deficient organization of our society' (Marx, 1999: 47, emphasis added). By the end of his career, then, Peuchet was using statistics no longer to enhance the power of the state, but instead to correct imbalances and disharmonies within civil society itself.

From this fundamentally social perspective, Peuchet identified 'penury' as the chief cause of suicide, and, again prefiguring Durkheim, pointed out that suicides increased during periods of economic turmoil (Marx, 1999: 47). But Peuchet's social vision encompassed more than just the economy; he blamed the entire culture for what he thought was the exceptionally high suicide rate of early nineteenth-century France. 'It lies ... *in the nature of our society* to cause so many suicides,' he charged, and for support pointed to the 'large numbers of prisons, physical punishments, and instruments of death' employed

by ‘civilized justice,’ ‘the shocking number of classes left in misery by all concerned,’ and the way ‘social pariahs are dealt brutal, preventive, contemptuous blows, perhaps so one does not have to take the trouble to pull them out of their dirt’ (Marx, 1999: 48–49). Peuchet even paraphrased Rousseau at one point in his explanation of the high suicide rate, claiming ‘[t]his society is no society, ... but a desert populated by wild animals’ (Marx, 1999: 50).

Though Marx undoubtedly appreciated Peuchet’s socio-economic critique of bourgeois culture, if not so much the statistical work that supported it, he was even more drawn to an individualistic dimension of his analysis. ‘With Jacques Peuchet,’ Marx wrote,

as with many older French practitioners (now mostly deceased) who lived through the numerous upheavals since 1789 – the numerous deceptions, enthusiasms, constitutions, rulers, defeats, and victories – there appeared a critique of the existing property, family, and other private relationships (in a word, of private life) as the necessary consequence of their political experiences.

(1999: 45)

Indeed, in another sentence Marx omitted, Peuchet claimed that the ‘miseries of private life’ were his ‘favorite thesis’ (Marx, 1999: 120). To bring these hidden dimensions of suicide to light, Peuchet employed a new pastoral technique that went beyond the regulatory approach of the police, in a manner that at once intrigued and troubled the young Marx. For along with the seven statistical tables, Peuchet also included in his *Memoires* six lengthy case studies of suicides drawn from the police files. In a section of the *Memoires* more widely known than the one on suicide, Peuchet himself described such case studies in pastoral terms:

The police files are an abyss where everything gets buried. They are darker and more instructional than a confessional because the penitents never come out of the police files. These files hold a registry of everything: vices, crimes, evil acts, infamies, heroism, kindness, generosity, and glaring mistakes. The number of things they know is immense.

(Peuchet, 2004: 3)<sup>9</sup>

Beyond noting the technical resemblance between the police files and the confessional, the primary lesson Peuchet drew from these files was the very one stressed in the traditional Christian pastorate: that is, that the shepherd has a responsibility for the most vulnerable members of the flock. While poverty was the main *social* factor that influenced the suicide rate, the primary cause of suicide in that *private realm* revealed by Peuchet’s case studies was, in effect, bad shepherding. ‘Among the sources for the despair that leads easily excitable people, passionate beings with deep feelings, to seek death,’ Peuchet wrote, ‘the primary cause was the bad treatment, the injustices, the secret punishments that these people received at the hands of harsh parents and superiors, upon whom they were dependent’ (Marx, 1999: 50). In fact, only one of Peuchet’s suicide cases was directly related to economic circumstances, and the other five all involved young women who were driven to suicide by the mistreatment inflicted upon them by their parents, spouses, or guardians. Marx included four of the

six case studies in his translation, and three of them revealed what Peuchet described, and Marx emphasized, as '*[the evil which ... exists in families]*' (Marx, 1999: 51). A brief discussion of these three cases will reveal the pastoral sentiment that Marx seemed to share with Peuchet.

The first case involved a young woman who, just prior to her wedding, was publicly humiliated and denounced by her family after she innocently spent the night at her fiancé's house. When the neighbors joined in the condemnation, the young woman was so ashamed that 'she rushed down to the Seine and, with a crazed look in her eyes, threw herself into the river. The boat people pulled out her dead body still adorned with wedding jewelry.' When the girl's parents tried to claim their daughter's possessions, Peuchet stubbornly refused to honor their request out of contempt for their treatment of the daughter, as well as their greed. In fact, the parents were only able to recover the jewelry after Peuchet left the police. Marx himself heaped even more scorn on the parents and society in this case, by adding:

Those who are most cowardly, who are least capable of resistance themselves, become unyielding as soon as they *can exert absolute parental authority*. The abuse of *that authority* also serves as a *cruel substitute* for all the submissiveness and dependency people in bourgeois society acquiesce in, willingly or unwillingly.

(1999: 53–54)

The second case was that of a young woman who was emotionally abused by her husband, a handsome socialite who suddenly became disfigured by 'a possibly hereditary blood defect.' Embarrassed by his appearance, the husband moved to a remote location and kept jealous watch over his wife, continually tormenting her with accusations and suspicions. His younger brother witnessed this mistreatment during a visit, and tried in vain to free the sister-in-law from his brother's abuse. When she eventually drowned herself, the younger brother wanted to salvage the reputation of his sister-in-law by publicly denouncing his brother, but Peuchet convinced him to maintain his silence (Marx, 1999: 55–62). Marx added his own economic commentary on this sad case:

The unfortunate woman was condemned to unbearable slavery and M. de M. exercised his slaveholding rights, supported by the civil code and the right of property. These were based on social conditions which deem love to be unrelated to the spontaneous feelings of the lovers, but which permit the jealous husband to fetter his wife in chains, like a miser with his hoard of gold, for she is but a part of his inventory.

(1999: 57–58)

The last of the three private cases involved a young woman who was unable to obtain an abortion. Peuchet learned of this case in a particularly pastoral fashion, through a doctor who made a confession, of sorts, concerning his role in the suicide. After the death of her mother, this young girl was raised by her aunt and uncle, the mother's sister and brother-in-law. When she became pregnant by the uncle, she thought suicide was the only way to prevent the scandal and shame this betrayal would cast upon her aunt. The uncle advised her to instead pursue an abortion, but when she approached the doctor he refused,

even though he had performed abortions to save the life of a mother. He instead suggested that the young woman go abroad, but she was unable to do so, and a few days later the doctor read of the young woman's 'accidental drowning' on her aunt's estate (Marx, 1999: 65–67). Deeply troubled by his insensitivity, the doctor confessed to Peuchet: 'I accused myself of barbarity, for I shrank in dread from being an accessory to murder' (Marx, 1999: 66). Then he added, in a comment omitted by Marx: 'But I, I had killed the mother, while trying to save the child' (Marx, 1999: 67 n.). In this case, Peuchet claimed, suicide was 'the most extreme refuge from the evils of private life' (Marx, 1999: 67).

In each of these cases that resulted from the miseries of private life, Peuchet displayed the traditional pastoral concern to protect the most vulnerable members of the flock from the ruthless behavior of less sensitive, more aggressive members. He clearly rejected the traditional judgment of suicides as sinners, criminals, or, at best, lunatics, and instead presented them as sympathetic figures in tragic circumstances, where death seemed the most reasonable choice. Like many of the liberal perspectives we examined earlier, he thought that the punishment of suicide was not only futile, but unfair as well. To those who sought to reduce the suicide rate 'by abusive punishments and by branding with infamy the memory of the guilty one,' Peuchet simply replied, 'What can one say about the indignity of such branding, hurled at people who are no longer there to plead their case? The unfortunate rarely bother themselves with all this' (Marx, 1999: 49–50). Far from condemning the suicides, Peuchet in fact turned his contempt on the parents and husbands who created the unbearable situations described in the cases. He was even critical of those who failed to intervene, such as the guilt-ridden doctor, because they were insensitive to the desperation of the suicidal individual (Marx, 1999: 49–50). If anyone was to stand accused in a case of suicide, Peuchet insisted, it was 'usually those remaining behind, because in this crowd there was not one person for whom it was worth staying alive' (Marx, 1999: 50).

Besides reversing the traditional moral focus from the suicides to those who caused them, Peuchet also went beyond earlier commentators, such as Hume and Voltaire, in praising the courage and passion of many who took their own lives. In the most effusive display of that French warmth and sensitivity that Marx found so appealing, Peuchet remarked:

One could compile a strange collection of quotations from famous authors and poets which the despairing have written, preparing for their death with a certain splendor. During the moment of wonderful cold-bloodedness that comes with the decision to die, breathes a kind of contagious inspiration that flows from these souls onto these pages, even among those classes who were deprived of education. As they gather themselves together before the sacrifice, whose depths they have plumbed, they summon up all their powers and, with characteristic, warm expression, bleed to death.

(Marx, 1999: 62–63)

Indeed, he even found a form of nobility in the most common form of suicide, among the desperately poor, who, rather than inflicting violence on members of the wealthier classes, instead decided to kill themselves. 'Above all,' he claimed, 'there must exist a kind of greatness of soul in these beggars who, fixed on death as they are, destroy

themselves rather than choosing the detour of the scaffold on the way to suicide' (Marx, 1999: 63).

While Peuchet's perspective broke in many ways from the traditional punitive stance toward suicide, he nevertheless considered his position as grounded in the traditional Christian pastorate, and at several points explicitly relied on religious authority for support. And though Marx seemed to genuinely appreciate Peuchet's concern for the most vulnerable members of society, he could not abide these few religious references, and in each instance tried to sever that link. Sometimes he omitted the religious reference altogether, as with the following invocation by Peuchet of the most famous pastoral figure:

... until now everything that has been said or done to conquer this blind [suicidal] drive has remained powerless and ... our legislators' and moralists' attempts have also failed. The understanding of the human heart can only be achieved if one possesses the quality of mercy and the compassion of Jesus.

(Marx, 1999: 49 n.)

In other cases Marx not only omitted the religious reference, but also substituted his own more materialist comment for Peuchet's spiritual remark (for example, Marx, 1999: 63; also notes on 48, 50, and 69). Nevertheless, Marx ultimately shared Peuchet's moral sentiments about the evils of private life, even as he rejected their religious foundation.

Those very features of Peuchet's bureaucratic perspective that appealed to Marx – the pastoral concern for vulnerable individuals displayed in the case studies, and the socio-economic critique of bourgeois society in general – are also interesting from a Foucauldian perspective. For Peuchet's career marked the convergence of the traditional Christian pastorate, the police, and liberalism, and stood on the cusp of a governmental perspective on suicide that no longer condemned the act itself, and was also disinclined to regulate the behavior of individuals through policies such as those recommended by Frank. From a governmental perspective, the only sound response to the rising suicide rate was a reform of civil society itself. While Marx was clearly drawn toward this governmental approach to suicide, he seems to have written nothing more about the topic once he devoted himself to a fundamental critique of liberal political economy. It was left to Durkheim to pick up Peuchet's thread, and carry the moral reevaluation of suicide to its social scientific conclusion.

## Durkheim and governmentality

By the time Peuchet offered his proto-sociological remarks about suicide, the early modern severity had already given way, at least in England and France, to a more lenient stance. Nevertheless, suicide remained an important concern for the governmental rationality that was emerging at the end of the eighteenth century. As Anthony Giddens remarked, well before Foucault, 'In terms of sheer bulk of material, suicide was probably one of the most discussed social problems of the nineteenth century' (Giddens, 1965: 4). Durkheim himself had been working on this problem for years before publishing *Le Suicide* in 1897, beginning with an 1888 article on the relation between suicide and birth rates. He devoted his third public sociology course at Bordeaux to suicide,



in 1888–1889, and then worked for the next seven years on suicide data that others had collected in various European nations. With the help of his nephew, Marcel Mauss, he organized this mass of information into the foundation of the discipline of sociology in his classic treatise (Durkheim, 1951: 39; Lukes, 1973: 191).

Of course, sociology was not the only human science concerned with this still troubling form of death. As the sin and crime of self-killing were transformed into a pitiable form of insanity, those disciplines that dealt with mental illness – psychiatry and psychology – displaced the traditional religious and moral discourse about suicide with medical claims. Indeed, one of the main objectives of Durkheim's study was to establish sociology's own unique knowledge about suicide, thereby elevating the discipline's status among the many other sciences that were crucial for the governmental administration of life. Here we must keep in mind that Durkheim's research on suicide was funded by the Third Republic in an attempt to recover from the disastrous Franco-Prussian War (1870–1871) (Cahn, 1998: 227; Healy, 2006: 914), and that he 'tended to argue as if the role of psychology in the explanation of suicide would be a subordinate one' (Giddens, 1965: 5). But before he could stake sociology's superior claim to this crucial issue he first had to challenge the prevalent view of suicide as mental illness, which he did by asserting a rather radical 'scientific' definition of suicide at the outset.

In the 'Introduction,' Durkheim argued that the term 'suicide' ought to encompass any death that was the result of an act, or omission to act, chosen by an individual with full knowledge that death would follow. For Durkheim it made no difference whether death was the primary intent or a secondary effect of the choice, nor did the motives for the choice matter. From his governmental concern with the interests of society, rather than the state, any renunciation of life was an injury that ought to be included within the definition of suicide:

Whether death is accepted merely as an unfortunate consequence, but inevitable given the purpose, or is actually itself sought and desired, in either case the person renounces existence, and the various methods of doing so can be only varieties of a single class. ...life is none the less abandoned because one desires it at the moment of renouncing it: and there are common traits clearly essential to all acts by which a living being thus renounces the possession presumably most precious of all. ... Thus, when resolution entails certain sacrifice of life, scientifically this is suicide.

(1951: 43–44)

The simple term 'scientifically' does not, however, adequately capture just how radically this definition broke with the traditional discourse on suicide. For Durkheim included as suicide certain forms of chosen death that, far from being condemned as punishable, had instead been traditionally lauded as the epitome of virtuous behavior: '... the soldier facing certain death to save his regiment does not wish to die, and yet,' Durkheim argued, 'is he not as much the author of his own death as the manufacturer or merchant who kills himself to avoid bankruptcy? This holds true for the martyr dying for his faith, the mother sacrificing herself for her child, etc.' (1951: 43).

While Hume, Voltaire, and Peuchet had already pointed out the heroic aspects of some suicides in order to challenge the traditional hostility toward the act, Durkheim went

much farther, and actually emphasized the suicidal dimension of heroism and martyrdom. In doing so he was not trying to elevate the status of suicide by linking it with heroism, as those liberal predecessors had, nor, of course, was he trying to disparage heroes and martyrs by associating them with suicide. Rather, he was trying to level the traditional moral difference between self-sacrifice and self-murder,<sup>10</sup> in order to present this broad conception of suicide as a normal feature of civil society that was particularly amenable to sociological analysis. For one of the primary benefits he claimed for his scientific definition was that it

... gives us at once an idea of the place of suicide in moral life as a whole. It shows indeed that suicides do not form, as might be thought, a wholly distinct group, an isolated class of monstrous phenomena, unrelated to other forms of conduct, but rather are related to them by a continuous series of intermediate cases. They are merely the exaggerated form of common practices.

(1951: 45)

Durkheim used this novel definition in the first chapter, 'Suicide and Psychopathic States,' to criticize the prevailing (Hobbesian) view of suicide as insanity. He focused his criticism on the nineteenth-century psychiatrists C.E. Bourdin and Jean-Étienne Esquirol, who claimed, respectively, that suicide was the result of a specific form of monomania, or could be the result of various forms of mental illness (1951: 57–81). While the mental health professions invoked the standard of scientific objectivity to support their claims, Durkheim argued that

... suicide has been so closely associated with insanity, only by arbitrarily restricting the meaning of the words. 'That man does not kill himself,' Esquirol exclaims, 'who, obeying only noble and generous sentiments, throws himself into certain peril, exposes himself to inevitable death, and willingly sacrifices his life in obedience to the laws, to keep pledged faith, for his country's safety'.

(1951: 66)

Similarly, 'Bourdin excepts in this manner all voluntary deaths inspired not only by religious faith or political conviction but even by lofty affection' (1951: 67). These arbitrary exclusions revealed to Durkheim that even though the mental health disciplines challenged the view of suicide as sinful or criminal, they nevertheless continued to treat it as a form of death that was different from all others. But from a purely scientific perspective, Durkheim claimed, there is 'only a gradual shading ... [a]n imperceptible gradation,' between those who choose death for reasonable, laudable motives, such as duty, and those who do so as a result of insanity (1951: 67).

While his expansive definition of suicide undermined any exclusive claim to authority by the mental health disciplines, Durkheim still had to make the positive case that sociology could provide knowledge about suicide that was valuable for the administration of life. To do this he turned to the suicide data that he and others had been collecting throughout the nineteenth century. Although these data were based on the traditional, rather than his scientific, definition of suicide, Durkheim nevertheless relied quite heavily upon them to

establish sociology as a crucial discipline for governmental rationality. 'Indubitably for sociology to be possible,' he famously wrote in the Preface, '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' (1951: 38). This uniquely sociological object was, of course, the suicide rate of a given population. After studying data from various nations, Durkheim went well beyond Peuchet's tentative claim about the normalcy of the annual number of suicides in Paris, and concluded that each society had its own particular suicide rate. 'If ... the suicides committed in a given society during a given period of time are taken as a whole,' he explained, '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' (1951: 46).

Durkheim visually represented this new social fact in the first table of *Le Suicide*, which compared the annual suicide rates of France, Prussia, England, Saxony, Bavaria, and Denmark for the years between 1841 and 1872. As one might expect, only Prussia, the home of *Polizeiwissenschaft*, had records for all of these years (Durkheim, 1951: 47 Table 1). In constructing this table he treated these societies as distinct organisms that developed over time according to observable patterns. During those periods in which there was a 'breach of social equilibrium,' in the form of political or economic crises, there was usually a marked increase in suicide; Durkheim highlighted these crisis years by placing them in parentheses. After these sudden increases the suicide rate tended to fluctuate, but ultimately remained higher than before the crisis, revealing a gradual increase in the rate of suicide over the long period presented in the table. 'Thus, the evolution of suicide is composed of undulating movements,' he concluded, 'distinct and successive, which occur spasmodically, develop for a time, and then stop only to begin again' (1951: 47). In the table he tried to visualize 'these different waves of movement' by using heavy type for those years in which the suicide rate was on the rise (1951: 48 n. 3). This statistical image of national populations that Durkheim presented in this table, each with its own undulating suicide rate, contributed to that governmental sense of civil society as a discrete entity, distinct from the state. And in his discussion of the suicide rates displayed in the table he established sociology's special claim to knowledge of this particular social, or better, governmental problem:

In short, these statistical data express the suicidal tendency with which each society is collectively afflicted. ... Each society is predisposed to contribute a definite quota of voluntary deaths. This predisposition may therefore be the subject of a special study belonging to sociology. This is the study we are going to undertake.

(1951: 51)

As he analyzed the data, Durkheim found that suicide rates varied not only among societies, but among specific populations within each society as well. He developed statistical techniques for studying 'directly the states of the various social environments (religious confessions, family, political society, occupational groups, etc.), in terms of which the variations of suicide occur' (1951: 151). The results of his labor were the thirty-one major tables, and numerous smaller ones, that he used to support his claims, as well as the appendices attached to the study. The most influential result of this statistical

analysis was, of course, his famous four-fold typology of suicide: egoistic, altruistic, fatalistic, and anomic. Much has been written about these types of suicide, and they remain an important, if contested, element in the discussion of the subject. Our concern here, however, is with the significance of Durkheim's analysis for the historical development of governmentality, not with the details of this famous typology. All that needs to be said, therefore, is that Durkheim's study showed a rise of egoistic suicides, owing primarily to the low level of integration of individuals in modern societies, and anomic suicides, owing primarily to the weakening regulation of desires and appetites that occurred as traditional institutions and values were eroded by the individualism of modernity. Altruistic and fatalistic suicides were no longer very significant, according to Durkheim.

Like Peuchet, Durkheim saw the overall rise in suicide as a symptom of serious maladjustments in modern societies. Indeed, he declared at the outset that suicide was 'precisely one of the forms through which the collective affection from which we suffer is transmitted' (1951: 37), and claimed that his scientific study would render sociology 'better able to state precisely ... the means that can be used to counteract it' (1951: 52). Conspicuously absent among the means identified by Durkheim, however, was that pastoral technique employed by Peuchet and admired by Marx – the case study. In fact, Durkheim conducted his analysis by explicitly '[d]isregarding the individual as such, his motives and his ideas,' and focusing exclusively on social factors that impinged on the suicide rate (1951: 151). Individual cases of suicide are difficult to analyze, he claimed, because '[i]ntent is too intimate a thing to be more than approximately interpreted by another. It even escapes self-observation' (1951: 43). The analysis of individual suicides was, therefore, the province of psychology, not sociology (Durkheim, 1951: 38; Giddens, 1965: 14). But though he abandoned the case study to psychology, Durkheim nevertheless developed an alternative pastoral approach to suicide that was, at least theoretically, better suited for governmental rationality than case studies or bureaucratic regulations.

Durkheim presented his pastoral response in the last two chapters of the *Le Suicide*, where he examined means for counteracting the rising suicide rate. At first glance he seems to have contradicted his earlier assertion that suicides were not 'monstrous phenomena,' by claiming in the book's penultimate chapter, 'suicide must be classed among immoral acts' (1951: 337). Indeed, he even appears to have reverted to the traditional moral stance by endorsing the punishment of suicide in the book's final chapter, on 'Practical Consequences,' claiming 'this reprobation should be expressed by definite external signs, that is penalties.' But he also recognized that the 'somewhat severe punishments' of the past 'would not be tolerated by the public conscience,' and therefore only advocated 'moral punishments,' which 'would be to refuse the suicide the honors of a regular burial, to deprive the author of the attempt of certain civic, political or family rights, such as certain attributes of the paternal power and eligibility to public office' (1951: 371). When one looks closely at the reasons Durkheim offered to support this surprisingly punitive stance toward suicide, however, it becomes clear that his perspective was actually quite distinct from the traditional pastoral position.

Suicide was immoral for Durkheim not because it violated a biblical injunction against murder, nor because it usurped the prerogative of a sovereign, either of this world or another; rather, suicide was wrong because it violated the *fundamental principle* upon

which *liberal* societies were grounded – the sacredness of the individual. ‘As societies become greater in volume and density,’ he explained, ‘they increase in complexity, work is divided, individual differences multiply, and the moment approaches when the only remaining bond among the members of a single human group will be that they are all men.’ Once society reaches this stage of development the ‘human personality’ becomes an object of reverence, acquiring a ‘religious nature’ (1951: 336). For Durkheim, then, suicide was immoral because ‘in its main principle it denies this religion of humanity’ (1951: 337). Although Marx would have had as much trouble with this secular religion of humanity as he had with Peuchet’s vestigial Christianity, and would likely have seen it as an ideological support for bourgeois individualism, Durkheim actually used the sacred status of individuals to place a social check on the individualistic claims of liberals like Hume and Voltaire:

A man who kills himself, the saying goes, does wrong only to himself and there is no occasion for the intervention of society. ... This is an error. ... From the moment that the human person is and must be considered something sacred, over which neither the individual nor the group has free disposal, any attack upon it must be forbidden. No matter that the guilty person and the victim are one and the same; the social evil springing from the act is not affected merely by the author being the one who suffers.

(1951: 337)

Though he endorsed some of the traditional punishments of suicide, albeit for non-traditional reasons, Durkheim conceded that even those legitimate moral punishments ‘could never have more than a very secondary influence; it is childish to suppose that they could check so violent a current’ (1951: 371). Following Peuchet, Durkheim claimed that the only viable way to curb the growing suicide rate was to reform society, and he offered suggestions for such reforms in the final chapter. His primary concern there was egoistic suicide, which had increased

... because society, weak and disturbed, lets too many persons escape too completely from its influence. Thus, the only remedy for the ill is to restore enough consistency to social groups for them to obtain a firmer grip on the individual, and for him to feel himself bound to them.

(1951: 373)

However, the social groups that had traditionally offered some ‘protection’ against suicide – religion and the family – had been transformed in modernity to the point where they could no longer be counted on to serve this preventive function (1951: 375–377). Even the modern religion of humanity would not have much of an impact on the suicide rate.

As the integrating and regulating functions of both religion and the family waned, ‘political society’ loomed larger as the primary form of social organization. Indeed, Durkheim claimed that ‘the whole of our historical development’ has led to this point where ‘individuals are no longer subject to any other collective control but the State’s, since it is the sole organized collectivity’ (1951: 389). But he was just as pessimistic about the state’s potential for checking the rise in suicide as he was about the ability of

religion or the family to do so. ‘Especially today, in our great modern States,’ he wrote, political society ‘is too far removed from the individual to effect him uninterruptedly and with sufficient force’ to serve this function (1951: 374). However, it was not just its distance from individuals that led him to dismiss any significant role for the state. Displaying that liberal suspicion Foucault identified as an important source of governmentality, Durkheim also claimed that any attempt by the state to unite individuals into a meaningful social life was bound to fail, because this would require the state ‘to assume functions for which it was unfitted and which it has not been able to discharge satisfactorily. It has often been said that the state is as intrusive as it is impotent,’ he quipped. ‘It makes a sickly attempt to extend itself over all sorts of things which do not belong to it, or which it grasps only by doing them violence’ (1951: 389). As an example of such a heavy-handed approach, one need only consider Frank’s suggestion that suicides could be reduced by police regulations concerning the reading of novels, gambling, and, one must suppose, masturbation.

As an alternative to such intrusive regulations, Durkheim instead recommended that the rising suicide rate would be best curbed by ‘set[ting] up a cluster of collective forces outside the State, though subject to its action, whose regulative influence can be exerted with greater variety’ (1951: 380). What he suggested, in other words, was a rebuilding of civil society, that statistically grasped entity that governmental rationality revealed ‘as the necessary correlate of the state’ (Foucault, 2007: 350). Since the family and religion were no longer able to effectively bind individuals in a deeply shared social life, Durkheim instead focused on the one area of civil society ‘of which no mention has yet been made; that of all workers of the same sort, in association, all who cooperate in the same function, that is, the occupational group or corporation’ (1951: 378). What Durkheim had in mind was not a return to medieval guilds, of course, nor did he think that existing corporations, which represented private interests, could fulfill this social function. Rather, he envisioned quasi-public corporations that would integrate workers in particular occupations into a ‘form of collective personality,’ and regulate their desires and appetites by providing ‘a moral environment’ that would ‘draw [the individual] out of his state of moral isolation’ (1951: 378–379). For Durkheim, such corporations were far better suited than religion, the family, or the state for addressing the egoism and anomie of modern societies. ‘[N]o soil is better calculated to bear social ideas and sentiments’ than ‘occupational activity,’ he claimed; it provides ‘the richest sort of material for a common life’ (1951: 378).

While these occupational corporations never developed as Durkheim expected, the role he foresaw for them rivaled the traditional Christian pastorate in its embrace of the sacred individual. Compare the three features of the Christian pastorate emphasized by Foucault (see p. 5), with the following description Durkheim offered of the advantages of his corporatist approach to governing the conduct of individuals:

... the occupational group has the three-fold advantage over all others [in] that it is omnipresent, ubiquitous and that its control extends to the greatest part of life. Its influence on individuals is not intermittent, like that of political society, but it is always in contact with them by the constant exercise of the function of which it is the organ and in which they collaborate. It follows the workers wherever they go; which the family cannot do. ... Finally, since



occupational life is almost the whole of life, corporative action makes itself felt in every detail of our occupations, which are thus given a collective orientation.

(1951: 379)

The Christian pastorate, of course, had the otherworldly aim of saving souls, while Durkheim's occupational strategy was aimed at saving corporeal lives in this world. Nevertheless, Durkheim's governmental vision for administering life through occupational corporations seemed to envelop individuals just as thoroughly as did traditional confessional techniques.

Beside the difference in their otherworldly and worldly aims, perhaps the most significant difference between the Christian approach to saving souls and Durkheim's corporatist strategy for saving lives was the latter's willingness to sacrifice a few sheep. Whereas the Christian pastorate aimed at saving every member of the flock, Durkheim's scientific understanding of suicide acknowledged that a certain number of suicides was a normal 'element ... , probably, of any social constitution' (1951: 363). Indeed, the approach to suicide taken by the police and the mental health professionals was, in this regard, closer to the traditional pastorate than was Durkheim's sociological approach. Frank's police regulations, as well as the strategies developed by psychologists and psychiatrists, sought to prevent as many suicides as possible. Durkheim's reforms, in contrast, aimed at maintaining the appropriate suicide rate in any given nation.

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.

(1951: 366)

From Durkheim's perspective, these natural limits would, of course, be determined by the new science of sociology, not the police or the mental health disciplines, to say nothing of religion.

## Conclusion

When viewed from the reflexive sociological perspective developed in this essay, the return of the troubling issue of suicide at the turn of the twenty-first century is just as sociologically significant as the issue was in the nineteenth century, when it first caught the attention of Peuchet, Marx, and Durkheim. In the context of the history of governmentality that Foucault presented in his courses from the late 1970s, the nineteenth-century sociological fascination with suicide appears as part of the establishment of a new form of political rationality that governs the conduct of individuals based upon the patterns and regularities revealed by statistical analyses of the population. As we have seen, this governmental rationality emerged out of a fertile tension between the state-centered

mercantilist perspective, which gave rise to the police, and the liberal perspective on civil society, which produced the human sciences. Mercantilism and liberalism also contributed to the waning of the traditional hostility toward self-murder, and the rise of a more lenient view of suicide as a form of mental illness (Hobbes, Frank), or even a potentially laudable act (Hume, Voltaire). Peuchet stood on the cusp of these tensions, as a police bureaucrat whom Marx admired for his critical stance toward modern society, as well as his pastoral concern for ameliorating the conditions that led to suicide, rather than a punitive stance toward the suicides themselves. From this Foucauldian perspective, Durkheim's *Le Suicide* appears as the culmination of these tensions and trends. His scientific definition presented suicide as an often reasonable act, and included martyrs and heroes along with the desperate and the insane. And his combination of statistical analysis of suicide rates with pastoral corporations appears as an outstanding theoretical example of what Foucault described in 1982 as governmentality's 'tricky combination in the same political structures of individualization techniques, and of totalization procedures' (2000f: 332).

This expanded Foucauldian examination of classical sociology's fascination with suicide is of more than mere historical interest; it can also shed some light on the implications of the social fact that the most biopolitically advanced societies appear to be on the verge of recognizing a juridico-medical right to die. Much of the current discussion of the right to die still seems largely mired in that old tension between the police and liberalism: that is, the issue is usually framed in terms of an individual's right to determine the time and manner of his or her death versus the state's interest in prohibiting or regulating this right (for example, Dworkin et al., 1997; compare Tierney, 1997, 2006). The Foucauldian/Durkheimian perspective developed here, however, moves beyond that liberal dichotomy and focuses attention on the extent to which late modernity's incredible efficacy in administering life, especially through advanced medical techniques, has transformed the experience of death. In biopolitically developed societies, death is increasingly the result of a decision about the termination of medical care. Indeed, such societies appear to have already accepted medicalized suicide in the form of the right to refuse, or demand the withdrawal of, life-sustaining medical treatment. According to Durkheim's seemingly radical definition, the choice of death over a medically administered life is clearly a form of suicide, and its widespread acceptance has contributed to the growing expectation of a right to PAS and medically administered euthanasia.

To the extent that the choice of PAS and/or euthanasia does, ultimately, become accepted as a juridico-medical right, Durkheim's once radical definition of suicide will then seem prescient, as suicide will have indeed become a normal feature of civil society. There are clear signs that late modern societies are heading in this direction. For one of the common criteria of legally sanctioned, medically assisted suicide – either in the passive forms of refusing and withdrawing treatment, or the more active forms of PAS and euthanasia – is that the 'patient's' choice of death be rational. Mental health professionals, rather than sociologists, make this determination, of course, but it is ironic that psychologists and psychiatrists seem to be coming around to Durkheim's view that suicide is often quite reasonable. For instance, surveys of American mental health professionals and counselors conducted in the 1990s – that very decade in which, nearly a century after

*Le Suicide*, the right to die was first asserted in many nations – found that over 80 percent thought suicide could be a rational choice in certain circumstances (Rogers et al., 2001: 369; Werth and Cobia, 1995; Werth and Liddle, 1994: 440–448).

From a Foucauldian/Durkheimian perspective this expanding normalization, or rationalization, of suicide raises a host of intriguing questions about the various human sciences and disciplines that will be involved in the legitimation of this juridico-medical right to die. Beyond the establishment of criteria for ‘rational suicide’ in the mental health disciplines, the recognition of the right to end one’s life will likely lead to modifications in medical education and practice (for example, hospice rotations as a mandatory facet of medical training), the proliferation of bioethical principles and concepts concerning ‘end of life’ issues (for example, ‘futile care’ protocols), as well as changes in both health and life insurance practices regarding suicide. But the most interesting issues raised by the normalization of suicide involve the sorts of techniques, pastoral or otherwise, that will be developed for conducting the behavior of individuals around this newly legitimated choice of death over life. Put succinctly, perhaps the most intriguing sociological question raised by the growing ‘right to die’ movement is: how will we become the sorts of subjects who can exercise such a right?

## Notes

1. *Securité, territoire, population* and *Naissance de la biopolitique* appeared together in French in 2004. In explaining his decision to publish both sets of lectures simultaneously, the editor of the French editions, Michel Sennelart, pointed out that Foucault developed the courses ‘in order to give consistency, through historical analysis, to a hypothesis previously expressed in very general terms’ (Foucault, 2007: 369). The two volumes were recently published separately in English as *Security, Territory, Population* (Foucault, 2007) and *The Birth of Biopolitics* (Foucault, 2008), respectively.
2. Foucault did discuss suicide in a very different context in a short 1979 essay, ‘The Simplest of Pleasures.’ Here he responded to the ‘ludicrous account’ of the suicidal proclivity of homosexuals, in which ‘suicide and homosexuals are portrayed so as to make each other look bad,’ by examining ‘what there is to say in favor of suicide’ (1996a: 295). Foucault also briefly mentioned a right to suicide in a 1983 interview, ‘Social Security’ (1988b: 176). I discuss these few explicit remarks of Foucault on suicide in Tierney, 2006: 625–630.
3. Peuchet’s original French text, Marx’s German translation, and an English translation of Marx’s article have been published together as *Marx on Suicide* (Marx, 1999).
4. Foucault discussed the police at length in two public lectures: the second of the two Tanner Lectures, *Omnes et Singulatim*, delivered at Stanford University in 1979 (2000c: 312–325); and ‘The Political Technology of Individuals,’ delivered in 1982 as part of a University of Vermont seminar on ‘Technologies of the Self’ (2000d: 403–417; and 1988a).
5. This sense of ‘well-being’ clearly encompassed much more than what Giorgio Agamben has identified as ‘bare life.’ In *Homo Sacer*, Agamben interprets Foucault’s concept of biopolitics as being primarily concerned with what the Greeks called *zoē*, ‘the simple fact of living common to all living beings (animals, men, or gods)’ (Agamben, 1998: 1). Explaining the importance of Foucault’s work from the second half of the 1970s, Agamben writes: ‘... the entry of *zoē* into the sphere of the *polis* – the politicization of bare life as such – constitutes the decisive event of modernity and signals a radical transformation of the political-philosophical categories of

classical thought' (Agamben, 1998: 4). Without diminishing the significance of Agamben's very fruitful engagement with Foucault (and Arendt), it must nevertheless be noted that Foucault himself stressed the way in which biopolitics encompassed much more than bare life.

6. For a fuller discussion of Hobbes, see Tierney (2006: 617–625).
7. The punitive stance toward suicide lapsed even earlier in Italy and the Netherlands, although this was primarily due to the renewed influence of the Roman civil law, with its Stoic indifference toward suicide, rather than liberalism (Bosman, 2004: 11, 15; Murray, 2000: II, 66–67).
8. This quote is from Marx's 'Draft of a New Preface' for his dissertation, which was written in 1841–1842, when he was considering publishing the manuscript (Marx, 2000).
9. Alexandre Dumas's *The Count of Monte Cristo* (1844) was inspired by a section of Peuchet's *Mémoires* titled 'The Diamond and the Vengeance.' This quote is from a translation of Peuchet's introduction to this section (Peuchet, 2004).
10. In *The Causes of Suicide* (1930), which Marcel Mauss introduced as 'the successor to Durkheim's book, *Suicide*,' Maurice Halbwachs criticized Durkheim's expansive definition, and argued for the retention of the distinction between self-sacrifice and suicide (Halbwachs, 1978: I, 291–309; also see Giddens, 1965: 16 n. 35; Giddens, 1972: 49 n. 53, Lukes, 1973: 200 n. 43).

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