

On Masaryk

Texts in English and German

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PHILOSOPHY AND SUICIDE-STATISTICS IN AUSTRIA- HUNGARY:

Variations on a Theme of Masaryk*

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In his book *The Austrian Mind* (1972) W. M. Johnston observes that between 1861 and 1938 a striking number of Austrian intellectuals committed suicide. He also remarks that prior to 1920 suicide was relatively rare among Hungarian intellectuals: and as a possible explanation he refers to their more intensive political activity. Johnston concentrates on suicide by intellectuals; one must, however, assume that such suicides are of anecdotal interest only, since it is with creations of the mind that the intellectual qua intellectual will respond to the difficulties surrounding him. By committing suicide he will, however, simply add one to the sum total of suicide deaths.

The present paper, accordingly, investigates relations between a society's intellectual life and its *general* suicidal tendencies. In so doing it takes up a central theme of T. G. Masaryk's *Suicide as a Social Mass Phenomenon of Modern Civilization*, published in Vienna in 1881, republished in an American translation in 1970, and reprinted in the original German in 1982 by Philosophia Verlag, Munich.

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By way of introduction, let me refer to some present-day Hungarian suicide-statistics. Since the beginning of the 1960s the suicide rate in Hungary has consistently exceeded that of every other nation. Moreover, while in the last three decades the rates of

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other countries remained virtually constant, that of Hungary rose from 26 per 100,000 of the population in 1960 to 41.1 in 1974. This phenomenon admits of no simple or obvious explanation. The present statistics do, however, reflect an increase over and above a rate already high, and obtain in a country where striking suicide figures are by no means a novelty. The average suicide rate in Hungary for the years 1931-35 was, for example, 32.9 per 100,000. The rate for Budapest was, in the 1880s and even more in the 1930s, higher than it was in 1974.

A fact which also deserves attention is that for a long time now, Austria and Czechoslovakia have recorded suicide rates exceeded only by that of Hungary. In the 1920s and 1930s, Austria and Hungary were first and second respectively. (Czechoslovakia did not, at that time, publish information regarding suicides.) The long-time prominence of the successor states of Austria-Hungary in suicide statistics (see Table 1), naturally suggest that in any

TABLE 1

NUMBER OF SUICIDES PER 100,000 OF THE POPULATION IN THE SUCCESSOR STATES OF AUSTRIA-HUN

	1921-30	1931-40	1960	1965	1968	1970	1971
Hungary	29.0	32.0	26.0	29.8	33.7	34.6	35.7
Austria	31.8	40.0	23.1	22.8	21.9	24.2	22.7
Czechoslovakia	-	-	20.6	21.5	24.5	25.3	24.2

explanation of the present Hungarian situation historical investigations concerning the dual monarchy might contribute significantly. These investigations would, however, produce no results if they merely considered patterns of, say, economic change or population

density. For although it must be obvious that changes in suicide rates are a function of certain social changes, it is just as obvious that there exists no necessary connection between suicide trends on the one hand and other manifest social trends and developments on the other.

There were two periods in nineteenth-century Austria during which the number of suicides increased rapidly: the first coincided, more or less, with the economic crisis of the seventies and the subsequent depression; the other occurred in the late nineties, during a time of moderate economic prosperity. Suicide rates cannot be correlated in any definite way either with poverty or with wealth. Of the Austrian provinces, Galicia was one of the poorest, Upper Austria relatively rich, but both had low suicide rates. It is known that men commit suicide more often than women, old people more often than the young, unmarried people more often than those having a family, those living in towns more often than those living in villages; yet the striking fact that in the southeastern counties of Hungary suicide is, and as far as records indicate always has been, two or three times as common as it is in the northwestern counties, resists any explanation in terms of differences in the sex and age distribution of the population, or in terms of differences in family structure or settlement patterns. It is known that those working in industry are, on the whole, more liable to commit suicide than those working in agriculture. Yet, when in Austria in the first decade of this century suicide rates were projected for each province on the basis of overall Austrian averages with regard to different professions and to the distribution of professions in the province in question, they did not coincide with the actual rates. In Bohemia the difference was, after Trieste, the greatest: there, the number of actually committed suicides exceeded the anticipated figure by 60 percent.

If we are thus unable to discern a generally valid connection between the level of and changes in suicide rates on the one hand, and other directly observable social phenomena on the other, we are confronted by a problem. If we assume, as we must, that it is indeed social factors which to a great extent determine suicide death rates, we must, obviously, search for such factors at a deeper level. Now such factors are, sometimes, clearly reflected by developments in a society's intellectual life. Of the constituents of

the latter, the changes in the role and intensity of *philosophical thinking* — as a mode of thinking especially directed to the problems of human existence — are quite likely to be bound up with those social processes which influence suicidal tendencies. That our understanding of the causes of high suicide rates will in fact be furthered by an investigation into the history of philosophy in Austria-Hungary, is the thesis of the present paper.

Philosophy and Suicide. Some Socio-Psychological Observations

The socio-psychological processes leading to philosophic construction are, obviously, very different from those leading to suicide. A closer analysis, however, reveals that the causes which on the one hand result in the intensification of philosophical reflection in a given society will on the other hand often bring about a rise in the rate of suicide. And since philosophy always provides clues as to the social-historical causes of its own formation, a history of philosophy with predominantly socio-psychological interests might, as it were, *narrate* what suicide statistics merely *show*.

Philosophy has many faces, and if we now try to describe a face of it which, it is hoped, only a few will regard as a mere mask, we can say that the task of philosophy is to *analyze* the categories around which the knowledge we have is built. The task of philosophy is to maintain some order and system within the network of those elementary distinctions through which our orientation in the world is made at all possible. The work of philosophers becomes urgent when orientation in the world is hampered by conceptual confusions. Such conceptual confusions, however — and here philosophy is already showing another of its faces — arise only in specific historical situations: in situations where a community has to choose between historical *alternatives*, neither of which it can wholeheartedly embrace. An example of the philosophical attitude was presented in the 1960s by Georg Lukács. Speaking of his so-called *Ontology* — a work in which he set out to prove that the concept of freedom and the concept of limitation do not actually contradict each other — Lukács, in 1969, said that “to-day, over the age of eighty, I have yet to write my really decisive works. This is not a biographical question but the ideological consequence of the world situation” — the “world situation” being characterized

by the simultaneous crisis of bureaucratic Marxism and the "American way of life." Lukács, incidentally, recognized much earlier that it is paradoxical historical situations that give birth to philosophy. Analyzing the emergence of German classical philosophy and pointing out that, when viewed from backward Germany, both the achievements and the dark sides of British capitalism were clearly discernible, in his *The Young Hegel* he wrote: "For Germany's great bourgeois humanists there arose the complicated and paradoxical necessity to accept on the one hand bourgeois society, to recognize it as the only possible and hence necessary society, as the progressive reality; on the other hand, they had openly and critically to expose and state its contradictions, not to capitulate apologetically before the inhumanity that is bound up with its essence."

The intellectual situation thus characterized by Lukács can, so to speak, be regarded as a paradigm of the manner in which philosophy comes into being. The multinational Habsburg Empire certainly produced, in the process of retarded bourgeois transformation, many such situations. The more effectively representatives of bourgeois liberalism in Austria fought the conservative establishment, the more threatened they became by the socialism, nationalism, and antisemitism that were gaining strength under liberal conditions. The more successful German nationalists were in awakening the national consciousness of Austrian Germans, the more irrevocably they undermined the foundations of the multi-national state in which they enjoyed considerable advantages. And the more successfully Czech nationalists loosened the ties between Bohemia and German Austria, the more defenseless they became in the face of Pan-German and Pan-Slav imperialism.

Hungarian nationalism, too, representing the Hungarian minority within the Kingdom of Hungary, found itself in a situation where, the more extreme its program was, the less it could strive for Hungary's independence, since only within the framework of an Austro-Hungarian Empire supported by Vienna was it possible to maintain Hungarian predominance in Hungary. Hungarian nationalism was, however, in power; its dilemma was of a political, not of a conceptual, nature. This dilemma was solved politically again and again; and while it resulted in moral disillusionment and

created a poetry of loneliness and melancholy, it did not, before the political crisis of 1905-06, find expression in philosophical form. The poet János Vajda recognized in the seventies that there was no Hungarian party which he could join with real conviction: a party whose program could somehow give meaning to his life. On the other hand, the young Lukács in the 1910s had to choose not between parties, but between world-historical alternatives; between socialism and the bourgeois world, between East and West. He attempted to search, philosophically, for a *third way*.

As for Czech nationalism, toward the end of the century it too constituted an effective political power, in need of an articulate political philosophy as a guide to action. Such a philosophy was elaborated at the turn of the century by T. G. Masaryk. In his book *The Czech Question* (1895), Masaryk wrote that in a humanitarian spirit and in accord with the facts of history, "we must, in agreement with our fellow-countrymen, strive towards independence within the framework of the Austrian Empire." In 1881, Masaryk, then still a *Privatdozent* of philosophy at Vienna, provided a rather more sublimated formulation of the dilemma of dependence and independence in his philosophical-anthropological work on *suicide*. In search of a religion that would constitute a defence against suicide, and in search of ethical perfection at the same time, Masaryk hoped for a unification of the Catholic *belief in authority* and Protestant *individualism* — a religious third way. And it was for a third way that Ernst Mach, the rector in Prague, was looking, caught as he was between Czech and German nationalist controversies. Only the establishment of an independent Czech university could prevent the originally German institution from becoming predominantly Czech; and Mach, in 1882, succeeded in having the hitherto unified university separated and an independent Czech university established. Philosophically, however, he could regard the Czech-German national strife as actually non-existent. In his work *The Analysis of Sensations* (1886), he declared the concept of a "nation", like that of the "Ego", to be *empty*.

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Philosophical constructions come into being through, and are

formed by, historical-political tensions; the disposition to suicide, however, seems to be essentially independent of political conditions. It was an early discovery of the sociology of suicide that not political, but geographical, borders separate areas having high suicide rates from those having low ones. In Hungary there certainly have occurred, since the last century, fundamental political changes: but the uneven territorial distribution of suicide death rates has not thereby been affected and evidences very much the same pattern as that of a hundred years ago. It has already been mentioned that the suicide rates for the southeastern counties of Hungary have been, for many decades now, two or three times as high as those for the northwestern counties. One can not, from a sociological point of view, explain these constant differences, sociologically they have to be accepted as given, i.e. as being linked with psychosocial characteristics that are, somehow, originally different in different areas.

That the psychosocial characteristics of a community do indeed to a great extent determine the suicidal disposition of its members, must certainly be assumed. Suicidal behavior is the kind for which people are, as it were, *trained* by society, in particular by their family and their immediate social environment. Those seemingly innocent communications and behavioral patterns through which one first makes one's acquaintance with the notion of suicide, or out of which the idea of suicide arises, do not receive the same emphasis, are not uttered or displayed with the same frequency and in the same form in different areas, different cultural groups, different sub-cultures. Of the psychosocial characteristics having an influence upon suicidal dispositions, the most important, however, are not those which directly take part in forming the idea of suicide. Recent investigations into the psychic forces behind suicide clearly indicate that suicide should not be conceived of as a here and now act of a single person, but should, on the contrary, be seen as the limiting point of a longer social process, in which process the immediate as well as the broader environment of the person in question played a decisive role. Before committing suicide, a person will, somehow, always attempt, through a specific act called the *cry for help* — indeed through a series of such acts — to call attention to himself. Even attempted suicide should be regarded as a special form of cry for help. A fatal suicidal act will,

generally, only ensue if the cry for help has not elicited any positive response — indeed has, perhaps, elicited a negative response, an encouragement to suicide. This is why there exists a strong disposition to suicide among people who are single or who are living alone, among deviants rejected by society, or among those who are living in a foreign environment, e.g., in emigration. The suicide rate is high for those subcultures in which the cry for help will not be heard; where people living together are strangers to each other, where the cohesive force of the community is weak. This force becomes weak if the social regulation of individual behavior, and, in natural interconnection with it, the system of common convictions, is disturbed.

As an explanation for the fact that Catholicism provides, generally, a stronger defence against suicide than does Protestantism, sociologists pointed, even in the last century, not so much to differences between specific beliefs, but rather to the differences between the organization of the respective churches. "The *Roman hierarchy* with the *Pope* at its top" — wrote Masaryk in his *Suicide* — "became, in the course of a few centuries, a once and for all articulated whole, an organism with strict discipline and order... By this organization the Church succeeded in chaining the souls... Of course the favorable effect of Catholicism ceases where it has lost and is losing its power over souls, e.g., in *France* and *Austria*, where the disposition to suicide is very strong." Catholicism lost its power over souls in Austria because, according to Masaryk, it had actually to be re-erected on shaken foundations — over a forcibly suppressed Reformation. Moreover, the edifice of the Church was further weakened by the politics of Joseph II. Masaryk's reflections suggest, and this renders them especially interesting, that a social structure which permits a high suicide rate is, although independent of momentary political effects, a result of definite historical and political developments.

Interesting in this respect are the observations of Milan Machovec, the author of an excellent book on Masaryk. "After the battle of the White Mountain," according to Machovec, "the Czech people became, externally, and in the end internally, Catholic — most of them sincerely so. But here a basis was laid for certain far-reaching traumatic stereotypes, especially that of a profound conflict between the personal and the social 'Ego', skepti-

cism concerning honesty, openness and conviction..." And Machovec points out that Czech society experienced a moral crisis subsequent to the political events of the 1870s when attempts to reach an Austrian-Czech compromise similar to the Austrian-Hungarian *Ausgleich* (1867) eventually failed. Of the Czech community of Prague, with which Masaryk came to be acquainted in the 1880s and 1890s, the following characterization is given by Machovec: "Suspicion, libel, man-hunt; indifference and mistrust in mutual relations; an almost pathological envy; opposition to anyone more gifted than the rest..." This is indeed a description of a socio-psychological state in which a person's cry for help would not elicit a positive response. Masaryk's formulations in *The Czech Question* — when, for instance, he says that Czechs have "a definite inclination to martyrdom," an "inclination to passivity" — amount almost to a description of the suicidal personality. "We still have a preference," he wrote, "for false martyrdom; many of us point to our own little injuries and demand admiration... But if someone will observe our public life more closely, he will see not only this weak-kneed begging, but also a special kind of intriguer."

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries nationalism took over some of the socio-psychological functions of religious belief. Membership in a nation — to use a formula from K.W. Deutsch's excellent book on nationalism — consists essentially in the ability to communicate more effectively, and over a wider range of subjects, with members of the same nation than with foreigners. In Bohemia however, and even more in German Austria, an inner split characterized not only religious, but also national feelings. Depicting Czech nationalism, Palacký spoke of a duality of the Czech's resistance to and affinity for the Germans; this nationalism, however, existed all the same and became, toward the end of the century, rather more unequivocal. Of Austrian nationalism, of course, one cannot speak. No one has given a better description of the socio-psychological situation of the German Austrian than Robert Musil, in his novel *The Man Without Qualities*:

Nowadays people talk as if nationalism were exclusively the invention of armaments manufacturers. But it would be worth looking for a rather broader explanation, and to this [Austria-Hungary] made an important contribution. The inhabitants of this Imperial and Royal

Imperial-Royal Dual Monarchy found themselves confronted with a difficult problem. They were supposed to feel themselves to be Imperial and Royal Austro-Hungarian patriots, but at the same time also as Royal Hungarian or Imperial-Royal Austrian ones. Their not incomprehensible slogan, in the face of such difficulties, was "United we stand!" ... But for this the Austrians needed to make a far stronger stand than the Hungarians. For the Hungarians were first and last only Hungarians, and counted only incidentally, among people who did not understand their language, as also Austro-Hungarians. The Austrians, on the other hand, were primarily nothing at all, and in the view of those in power were supposed to feel themselves equally Austro-Hungarians and Austrian-Hungarians — for there was not even a proper word for it.

As a result of a political schizophrenia reaching back several centuries, then, the inner cohesive forces of German Austrian and Bohemian society loosened; and it seems that in the high suicide rates in contemporary Austria and Czechoslovakia depressing experiences of the past continue to make themselves felt. The high Hungarian suicide rate, too, will appear less perplexing if one assumes that the present situation was influenced not only by contemporary social processes, but also by processes and events of more remote times. The problem of suicide in Hungary is constituted, above all, by the high rates for the southern-southeastern areas. The five counties which for many decades now have had the highest rates — Csongrád, Bács-Kiskun, Szolnok, Hajdú-Bihar and Békés — form, together with those counties (Pest, Tolna, Baranya, Fehér and Heves) which, according to the statistics for 1950-65, come next, a continuous area, of which only the eastern margin is heir to Calvinist traditions: the counties Hajdú-Bihar and Békés. Except for the territory of Hajdú-Bihar, this area is almost identical with that marked off by the treaties of 1606 — a part of the country which, for the greater part, was repopulated only after the Turkish wars, in the eighteenth century. It is quite possible that the historical experiences of the population in the devastated areas under Turkish occupation, combined with the original weakness in the inner cohesive forces of a society constituted by immigrants, contributed to the relative emotional poverty and coldness in the subculture of the southeastern plainlands which, as the outstanding Hungarian psychiatrist Béla Buda has pointed out, one so often encounters in the stories and novels of

Móricz, Móra, or Tömörkény, and which might easily be one of the constant factors behind the high suicide rate.

Now if it is true that the high number of suicide deaths in a society is not independent of the weakness of cohesive forces between its members, and if it is true that these forces will become weak if in a given society there do not operate clear, effective ideals unequivocally regulating the thoughts of its members, it is quite likely that there is a relationship between intensive philosophical reflection and strong suicidal dispositions. Those very historical-social problems which are instrumental in bringing about a high suicide rate will, in abstract form, be dealt with by emerging philosophies. Philosophy-creating tensions, as forces which affect uniformities in social behavior and thought, will lead, in a few years or decades, to a loosening of the interconnective bonds in society, and thereby to a stronger suicidal disposition.

In order to defend this thesis — that an investigation into the history of philosophy in Austria-Hungary could, to some degree, contribute to an understanding of the causes of the rather high suicide rates and thereby also of the present Hungarian situation — we will have to turn to suicide statistics. We will have to show that in Austria-Hungary the years of intensive philosophical thinking were in fact followed, in most cases, by a rise in suicide rates.

Suicide Statistics and Philosophy in Austria-Hungary

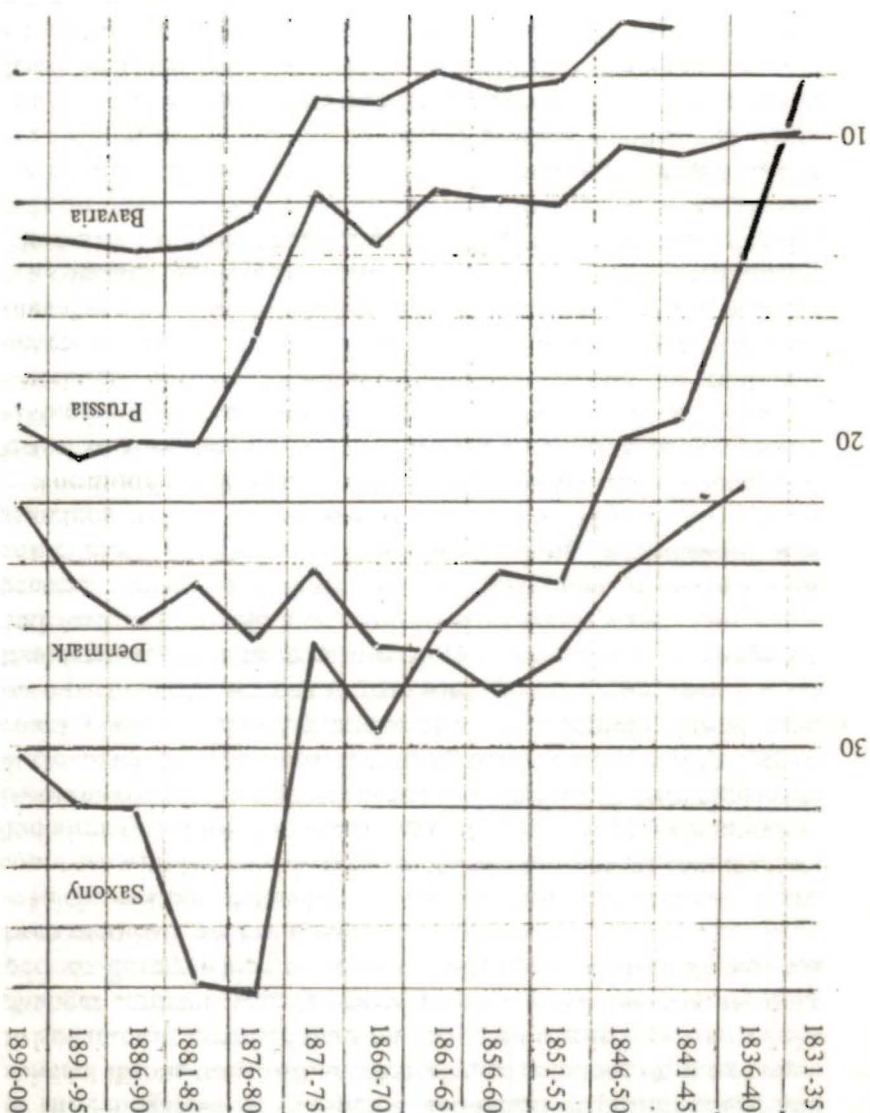
That there is a connection between suicide rates and philosophy is not an entirely new hypothesis: Masaryk suggested it. In his *Suicide as a Social Mass Phenomenon of Modern Civilization* he declared that philosophy and literature are just as much manifestations of the pathological state of society as is the increased disposition to mental illness and suicide. By "philosophy," Masaryk has in mind not the academic babble of his colleagues in Prague or in Vienna, but the passionate theoretical investigation of human existence and co-existence. In fact when searching for parallels between turning-points in the history of philosophy on the one hand, and striking changes in suicide rates on the other, one must to a great extent disregard *school philosophy*, a discipline difficult to define but easy to recognize. Called by Schopenhauer the professorial philosophy of philosophy professors, such philosophy

was represented in Austria-Hungary by, for instance, the Herbartians Durdík and Zimmermann or by Anton Marty. One must, however, observe philosophical tensions, even when they appear in a form-creating, symbolic guise, rather than in an abstract-conceptual one, i.e. one must observe phenomena in the history of *poetry* as well. And what particularly has to be taken into consideration is the history of the *influence* certain philosophies have; for while the emergence of a creative philosopher, or the time at which a major philosophical work was written, is very much affected by individual and contingent factors, social developments determine to a great extent the circumstances under which a work of philosophy will be *noticed* or will become *popular*.

As for the other side of the comparison, *suicide statistics* are not always reliable. Since suicide is very much condemned by Western religions, and since in most countries legal consequences ensue that will affect the family of the person who has committed suicide, there is obviously a strong tendency to suppress, in as far as possible, the fact of suicide. In Catholic areas, for instance, or in villages and small towns, the number of suicides that are disguised as accidents might be much greater than that in Protestant areas or large cities. Another problem is that in different countries the modes of investigation into the cause of death may differ greatly; moreover, the systems of collecting statistical data are by no means uniform. Since statistics, however, can generally be complemented by the necessary critical analyses, the usefulness of statistical data is evident. It is known, for example, that in the Alpine provinces of Austria, where a particularly low suicide rate was recorded, the number of accidental deaths was strikingly high, and one might thus conclude that the difference between the actual suicide rates of, say, Tirol and Lower Austria must have been smaller than the statistically-represented difference. If one, however, considers that of the numerous accidents many were in fact Alpine, i.e. mountain accidents; and if one further takes into consideration that in a rural community where the disposition to conceal suicides is very strong, the social tendency to prevent suicide cannot be weak either, i.e. the number of suicides is presumably low — then one recognizes that there is no serious reason to question the difference in statistical figures. It is known, for example, that the data collecting systems of contemporary Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Aus-

tria are rather reliable, i.e., the statistically represented differences are real; and although the low suicide rate of, say, the USA (11.1 per 100,000 for 1971) does not at all reflect the actual situation, calculations show that even the corrected rate could not be as high as the Hungarian. A synoptic examination of philosophical and suicidal dispositions will, incidentally, concentrate on the *changes* in suicide rates, rather than on the rates themselves: and of the changes statistics will of course provide a reliable picture, once periods during which the data collecting or ordering system has been modified, are excluded.

In the middle of the last century Austria and Hungary were countries with low suicide rates; in the last third of the century they had already advanced to the group of countries with medium rates. Until the sixties, the highest suicide rates in Europe were registered in Denmark. It is, perhaps, surprising that the citizens of this small country with a relatively undisturbed development should have been particularly inclined to part with the world; but then it is no less surprising that nineteenth-century Danes, such as Kierkegaard and Andersen, should have evolved ideas which seem to possess a general human significance and are very much in accord with contemporary ways of feeling and thinking. Kierkegaard was searching for the preconditions of belief, in fact for the ethical preconditions of human bonds — he deplored the absence, and strove to find the possibility, of a religion capable of completely taking hold of man. Andersen's fairy tales were written for people who hungered for emotion in a world characterized by emotional poverty; in these tales objects possess human feelings, at the same time that men are particularly devoid of emotions. The idea of dying is a constant motif; death appears as a life of emotional fulfilment. The fearless tin soldier and the lady of his heart, the paper dancer, become one in the flame of the oven annihilating them both; the old street lamp dreams of being melted down and formed into a beautiful iron candlestick in which a white candle will burn. Andersen's first tales were published in 1835; the major works of Kierkegaard in 1843 and 1844 — by no means during the period in which the maximum in suicide rates was registered (see Table 2). It is, however, significant that at the time that Andersen and Kierkegaard first appeared on the scene, the Danish suicide rate was constantly increasing. The greatest rises occurred, however, not in



NUMBER OF SUICIDES PER 100,000 OF THE POPULATION FOR SOME EUROPEAN STATES DURING THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

TABLE 2

the 1830s and 1840s, but at the beginning of the 1850s. The great awakening of Danish philosophical thought thus preceded, by one or two decades, the period of the greatest increases in suicide rates.

In the 1860s, Saxony succeeded Denmark as the leader in suicide statistics. The suicide rate in Saxony exhibited a continuous and striking rise from the 1830s, 1831-35 being the years during which the rate for Prussia for the last time exceeded that of Saxony. In 1866-70 the Prussian rate was the eighth highest in the world; between Denmark and Prussia small German states — having, except for Baden, Protestant majorities — occupied places third to seventh. Catholic France was ninth, Switzerland tenth, Bavaria — again a state with a Catholic majority — eleventh, followed by two Protestant countries — Sweden and Norway. Austria, with a rate of 7.1, was fourteenth. In 1896-1900 small German states occupied the first eight places, the Duchy of Sachsen-Coburg-Gotha leading the chart with 42 per 100,000. Saxony ranked ninth (if only larger countries are considered, *first*) with a rate of 30.5, followed — disregarding, again, minor states — by France, Switzerland, Denmark, Prussia and Baden. Of the greater European states, Hungary occupied, with a rate of about 17 per 100,000, seventh place, Austria was eighth, followed by Sweden and — with a rate of 13.4 — Bavaria.

The high suicide rate in the German states for the last third of the nineteenth century certainly suggests that an investigation of possible parallels with the history of philosophy could be rather instructive, even from the point of view of our present subject, i.e. Austria-Hungary. The difficulties of such an investigation would, however, be quite formidable. The substantial differences between the suicide rates of different German states would demand a minute analysis of the life and intellectual biography of some major philosophers, as well as of the way certain philosophical works became popular. The present writer has no sufficient knowledge for such an analysis. Some connections, however, meet the eye.

Schopenhauer's major work, *The World as Will and Representation*, was written in Dresden between 1814 and 1818. The first Saxon suicide statistics were collected some ten or fifteen years later. Between 1831-35 and 1836-40 the suicide rate increased by 70 percent; between 1836-40 and 1841-45 by another 40 percent. At that time, few read Schopenhauer; indeed in 1835 the philosopher

was informed by his Leipzig publisher, Brockhaus, that it planned to sell most of the copies of his magnum opus just as old paper. Only in the 1850s, after the publication of the reflections collected under the title *Parerga und Paralipomena*, did Schopenhauer begin to achieve popularity. During these years suicide rates were increasing markedly throughout Germany. Schopenhauer's popularity reached its peak in the 1870s — his collected works were, in that decade, published more than once; but this very decade also witnessed the most tragic years of German suicide statistics. The rate for Saxony was 38.3 per 100,000 in 1876-1880; the rate for Leipzig, on the average for 1876-78, was 48. During the period in question only the Prussians modified the data collecting system; an analysis of the relevant trends, however, demonstrates that for the rise statistical modifications were responsible only to a limited degree. It thus seems that the high German suicide rate in general, and the strikingly high Saxon rate in particular, can be correlated with a well-defined philosophical phenomenon: the emergence and the dissemination of Schopenhauerian philosophy. We find that the emergence of this particular philosophy definitely preceded a marked rise in the relevant suicide rates, while its ascendance to popularity partly coincided with the latter event. Some other philosophical history could also be included in this picture — e.g., the publication and extraordinary success of Eduard von Hartmann's *Philosophy of the Unconscious* (1869), a work propagating a cosmic, collective suicide, and, in particular, the emergence of Nietzsche's critical essays on the imperial-national German attitude, written between 1873 and 1876 in Basel, but first conceived of during the 1860s in Leipzig, where Nietzsche became acquainted with Schopenhauer's philosophy.

Until the late 1860s, the Austrian suicide rate did not exhibit a substantial increase. The rate for Vienna was higher than the Austrian average (see Table 3); it tended, however, to decrease during the second half of the 1850s. This was a period when interest in philosophy was definitely declining in Austria. In 1852, for example, Robert Zimmermann published a text-book entitled *Philosophische Propädeutik* in which he employed the categories of his teacher, the Bohemian philosopher Bolzano, categories speaking of harmony and value, but at the same time suggesting tension between the harmonious world of values and the empirical world; in

the second edition (1860) of his book, Zimmermann abandoned the conceptual framework of Bolzano and introduced Herbartian categories instead, suggestive of a harmony actual and real. Zimmermann, of course, declared that the modifications were only terminological and did not affect the substance of the matter; and it is true that the German professor of philosophy Herbart, who died in 1841, was at this time regarded as the official philosopher of Austria. The changes in Zimmermann's book thus had external rather than immanent philosophical reasons; but what the predominance of external considerations in contemporary works of philosophy really signaled was that philosophical thought had an untimely character.

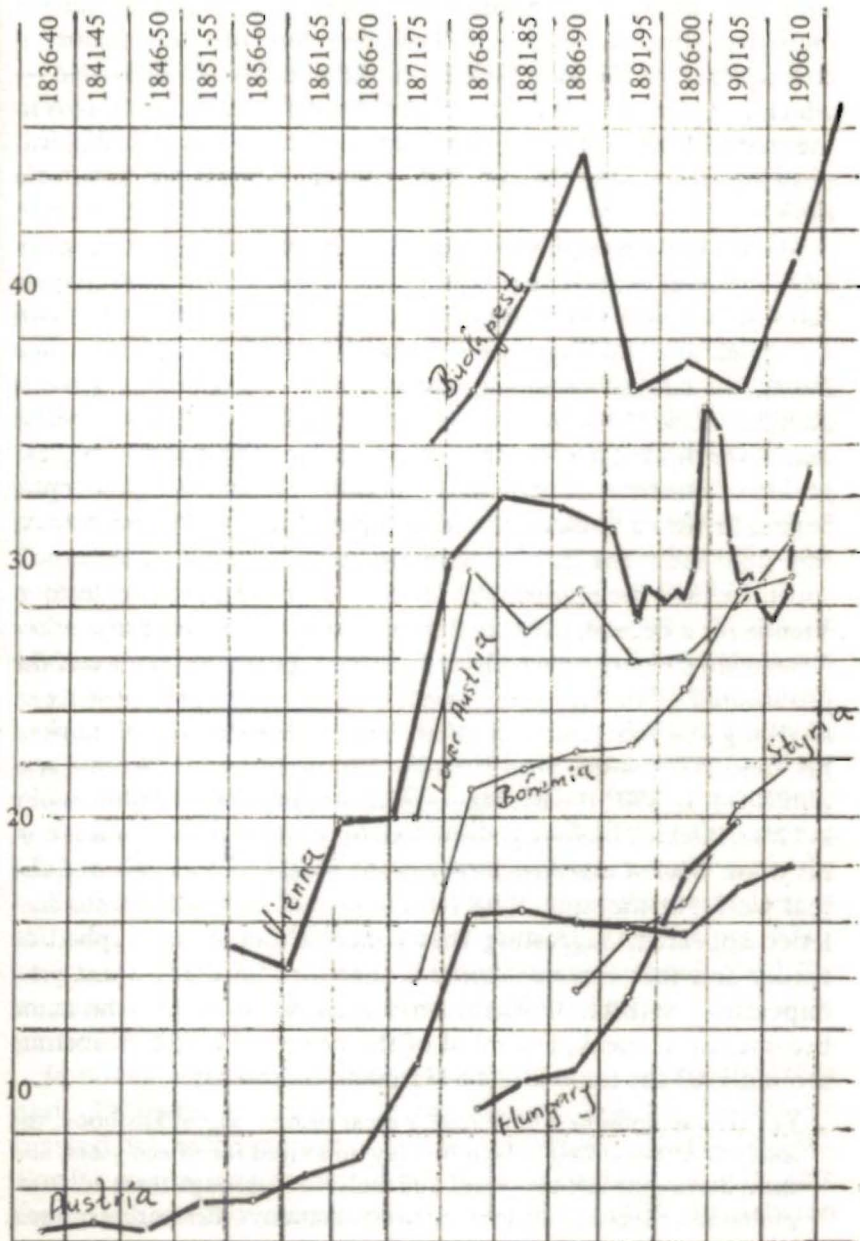
After 1854, in which year the music critic and aesthete Eduard Hanslick, obviously a philosophical disciple of Bolzano, published his penetrating *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen*, no philosophical event of interest occurred in Austria for a decade and a half. But in 1871 Carl Menger's *Grundsätze der Volkswirtschaftslehre* was published, an economico-philosophical work expressing, in an abstract conceptual form, the contradictions inherent in Austria's retarded economical development as well as those in the political situation of the Austrian liberals. In 1872 the *Leseverein der Deutschen Studenten Wiens* was founded — a society giving spiritual expression to the German nationalist attitude among university students and constituting a focal point for the Viennese cult of Wagner and Nietzsche. In 1874 the South German Franz Brentano, author of a pre-phenomenological work that aroused attention and has since become a classic, was invited by the University of Vienna to occupy one of the chairs of philosophy. In 1875 Kraków-born Ludwig Gumplowicz won, for his dissertation *Rasse und Staat* — in fact a treatise in the philosophy of history — the title of professor at Graz. In 1878, the first version of Masaryk's philosophical-anthropological *Suicide* was completed. During the following years the intensity of philosophical thinking once more diminished in Austria — not, however, in Bohemia. It was in 1884 that Ernst Mach, in Prague, started to write his *The Analysis of Sensations*, in which the *Ego* became dissolved into a complex of neutral elements. "The Ego cannot be saved," wrote Mach, and: "if I die, the elements will not occur any more in that usual, well-known pattern. This is all there is to say."

The philosophical upswing of the 1870s in Austria more or less coincided with the intensification of suicidal dispositions. The suicide rate for Vienna showed, subsequent to the decline in the second half of the 1850s, a marked rise at the beginning of the 1860s. The Austrian average did not increase rapidly until the end of that decade. Between 1866-70 and 1871-75, however, the increase amounted to 49 percent (between 72 and 73 to 47 percent). The figure is 63 percent if the 1869-73 and 1874-78 averages serve as the basis of comparison. During the same time, i.e. between 1869-73 and 1874-78, the rate for Vienna rose by 48 percent, and reached 29.5 per 100,000. These dramatic increases cannot be attributed solely to the economic crash of 1873, since in the following years, too, a high level and a rising tendency were still observed. It is, rather, the effects of a statistical modification that one encounters here, the effects of a change, in 1872, in the data collecting system. While until 1872 only church authorities provided data, from 1873 on medical authorities, too, compiled statistics. In other words, the increase observed for Austria and Vienna in the first half of the 1870s was not, in its entirety, an actual one.

In the second half of the decade, however, one faces an unambiguously real and considerable rise. The 1880s brought for Vienna a gradual fall in the suicide rate; the Austrian average, too, decreased somewhat from the second half of the 1880s. Bohemia was an exception. There, for the rest of the century, a continuous and marked increase was registered. If we now consider the years during which the Bohemian suicide rate for the first time displayed a tendency contrary to that of Austria — i.e. the first and even more the second period of the 1880s — we find that the emergence of Mach's philosophy partly coincides with and partly precedes those years. The value of these observations is, however, diminished by the fact that the suicide rate for *Prague* during this period does not seem to be available, and one should of course not expect that its tendency necessarily coincided with that of the Bohemian average rate. The marked rise of the suicide rate for Vienna in the early 1860s preceded by several years the great upswing of Austrian philosophical thinking; while the beginnings of the latter more or less coincided with (in Menger's case indeed preceded) the increase in the suicide rates for Austria and Vienna in the early seventies, its final chapter occurring during the years when the increase in the

TABLE 3

NUMBER OF SUICIDES PER 100,000 IN AUSTRIA-HUNGARY



rates slowed down or even stopped. A question one cannot answer is whether the extraordinary rise observed for the early 1870s was actual or merely apparent. Should it have been mostly real, that would mean that the disposition to philosophy and to suicide increased simultaneously. If, however, this rise was mainly a consequence of the modification in the data collecting system — which would mean that the rates actually increased more strongly in the second than in the first half of the decade — the philosophical upswing would seem largely to have preceded the rise in suicide rates.

Mach's book was published in 1886. It did not, at first, produce any particular echo. The philosophical sensitivity of the Austrians certainly seems to have lessened in the 1880s. In 1893 however, with the appearance of Hugo von Hofmannsthal's drama *The Fool and Death*, the subject of which, just like that of Leopold Andrian's poetical work *The Garden of Knowledge* (1895), is man's hopeless search for himself and death as the outcome of that search, a great period of Austrian thought and especially of Austrian philosophy began. In 1894 a book by Brentano's pupil Kasimierz Twardowski was published: the author re-interpreted Brentano in Bolzano's spirit. In 1899 the Englishman H.St. Chamberlain, having lived in Vienna for a decade, published his ill-famed *The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, in which he declared "the predominance of the provisional, of the transitory stage, the almost complete absence of anything that is definite, complete, balanced" to be the hallmark of his time. This same year Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* was published. In 1902 the Brentano-pupil and professor of philosophy in Graz, Alexius Meinong, drew a sharp philosophical contrast, in his book *Über Annahmen*, between the world of concepts and the real world; at the same time Hofmannsthal's so-called Chandos-letter appeared, suggesting that concepts cannot be applied to reality and that *communication* is therefore, in the last analysis, impossible. At this time Mach, too, was already popular — his name became, so to speak, a symbol of the new world-view. Sometime around 1903 the famous critic Hermann Bahr wrote:

For the last months I have read a great deal of Mach. His book, the *Analysis of Sensations*, which first lay unnoticed for fifteen years, and then, during the last two years, suddenly went through three editions, probably is the book which, more clearly than any other work, expresses

our feeling of the world, the *Lebensstimmung* of the new generation. Every distinction is abolished here, physical and psychical flow together, element and sensation become one, the Ego is dissolved and everything becomes one eternal stream... For years I have not read anything that so immediately commanded my assent, with a sigh of relief and the feeling that here something is made obvious that all of us have for a long time now dimly sensed.

In 1903 great enthusiasm greeted Otto Weininger's *Sex and Character*, which was, however, certainly equalled in philosophical depth by his posthumously (1906) published fragments *On the Last Things*. In 1903, Weininger committed suicide at the age of twenty-three. This act occurred at a time when the suicide rate for Vienna was on the decline. After the decrease of the 1880s the suicide rate there oscillated in the 1890s around 28 per 100,000. There was a sudden rise at the end of the century. The rate was 29 for 1899 and 35.4 for 1900. Subsequently there was a decrease, the trend changing in 1906. The average Austrian rate was, since the 1880s, slowly decreasing. Between 1896-1900 and 1901-05 there was, however, an increase of 17 percent, the rise holding firm in the following years. In Lower Austria in the mid-nineties there was a gradual increase, becoming more pronounced towards the end of the century.

In Styria, as in Bohemia, the suicide death rate was, during the last third of the century, continuously on the rise. The increase was relatively slow between 1891-95 and 1896-1900, relatively quick between 1896-1900 and 1901-05. Comparing the changes in suicide rate with changes in philosophical sensitivity, one could say that the philosophical low-ebb of the 1880s coincided with the decline of the Austrian average suicide rate, as well as with that of the rate for Vienna. The beginnings of the philosophical upswing towards the end and at the turn of the century clearly preceded the marked rise in the suicide rates for Austria, Lower Austria, and Vienna, while Meinong's philosophical self-realization roughly coincided with the most pronounced increases in suicide rates for Austria including, in particular, Styria.

In Bohemia the slow increase in the suicide rates during the 1880s and 1890s was, at the turn of the century, followed by a more marked rise. In the average of 1901-05 the rate was 28.2 per 100,000. For Prague the data are rather incomplete. The increase in the rate for Prague was 22 percent between 1891-1900 and 1901-10. Between

1900 and 1909 the rates for each year are also available, and their analysis suggests that the rise was a sudden one, occurring actually at the turn of the century. The suicide rate for Prague was an extraordinarily high one: 61 per 100,000 in 1891-1900, 75 in 1901-1910, and 93.3 in 1905. These figures are, however, not valid. Persons committing suicide in a suburb of Prague were mostly brought to the central public hospital and were buried from there, their case being registered in the statistics for Prague. In 1906-09 the average suicide rate for Prague was 67, the average for Prague including the suburbs was 35. This latter figure, too, is higher than the corresponding figure for Vienna; and of course the suicide rate could not possibly have an even distribution for the area constituted by Prague and the suburbs, i.e. the actual rate for Prague must have been above 35 in 1906-09, and above the proportionate figure of 50 in 1905.

In 1900 about nine tenths of the population of Prague was Czech and one tenth German. We do not know what the distribution of the suicide rates was between the Czech and the German population. It does not, however, seem probable that there should have been a great difference between the two rates, since on the one hand a low Czech rate would imply an absurdly high German rate, while on the other hand one cannot believe that among those Germans and German-speaking Jews living a Kafkaesque existence the suicide rate should have been low. The hero of Kafka's short story "The Judgment," written in 1912, commits suicide; the main character of the fragment "Wedding Preparations in the Country" is, all the time, thinking about one problem: how he could withdraw from any human relationships he has. Kafka's first works were, in any case, written in a town with a very high suicide rate, simultaneous to, and immediately after, the suicide peak in 1905. The substantial increase in the Bohemian rate at the end of the century, and the rise in Prague which probably occurred during the same time, were preceded by the publication of Masaryk's political-philosophical work, *The Czech Question* in 1895.

The average suicide rate for Hungary was, until about 1896, the year of the millenium, lower than that for Austria. The fragmentary data for the 1850s report a rate of about 3-4 per 100,000. From the end of the 1870s onwards, more or less systematic data are available. The Hungarian rate, if Croatia is not included, was about 9 per

opher who died young but who exerted a great influence in particular on Károly Mannheim and Arnold Hauser. One finds that in Budapest the strengthening of suicidal dispositions was in fact accompanied, indeed preceded, by an intensification of philosophical thinking.

* * *

The present survey shows that, between the history of philosophy in Austria-Hungary and the turning-points in its suicide statistics, striking chronological correspondances are by no means rare. These correspondances seem, in most cases, to display the very pattern that was, in the present paper, initially suggested, i.e. a chronological precedence of the intensification of philosophical reflection in relation to increases in the suicide rates. Statistics thus render probable the thesis that in Austria-Hungary the tensions abstractly expressed in philosophy were indeed identical to those tensions which led to high suicide rates. If the suicide rate is to-day high in Hungary, this fact is not independent of both the remote and the more recent turning-points and dilemmas of Hungarian history. And it seems that Hungarian philosophy, past and present, provides useful insights as to what these turning-points and dilemmas were, or indeed are.

Note:

The source of the statistical data here presented was, first of all, the Austrian *Statistische Monatschriften*, in particular the material provided by the volumes published in 1895 and 1912. Further sources were: H.A. Krose, *Der Selbstmord im 19. Jahrhundert nach seiner Verteilung auf Staaten und Verwaltungsbezirke* (Freiburg i.Br.: Herdersche Verlagshandlung, 1906); T.G. Masaryk, *Der Selbstmord als sociale Massenerscheinung der modernen Civilisation* (Wien: Verlag von Carl Konegen, 1881); G. Mayr, *Statistik und Gesellschaftslehre*, Vol. 3 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1909). Sources for Hungarian data were: *Budapest Székesfőváros Statisztikai Közleményei*, Vol. 51; *Magyar Statisztikai Évkönyv* (1895); various publications of József Körösi; the volume *A deviáns viselkedés szociológiája* (Budapest: Közgazdasági és Jogi Könyvkiadó, 1974) ed. by Rudolf Andorka, Béla Buda, and László Cseh-Szombathy; and an article written by Andorka,

Cseh-Szombathy, and Vavró: "Társadalmi elitelés alá eső magatartások előfordulásának területi különbségei," *Statisztikai Szemle* (1968). Recent figures for Hungary are given and analyzed in studies of the Central Statistical Bureau (Központi Statisztikai Hivatal): "Az öngyilkosságok alakulása Magyarországon 1968-70," and "Az öngyilkosságok alakulása Magyarországon 1973-74." By "Austria" I generally mean *Cis-Leithania*, i.e., Austria-Hungary without Hungary; in contradistinction I sometimes speak of German Austria. A more consistent terminology is rendered impossible by the historical facts. Regarding the periods of economic prosperity or decline in Austria, I followed E. März, *Österreichische Industrie- und Bankpolitik in der Zeit Franz Josefs I.* (Wien: Europa Verlag, 1968), and D.F. Good, "Stagnation and 'Take-Off' in Austria, 1873-1913," *The Economic History Review*, No. 1 (1974). The uneven territorial distribution of suicide rates in Hungary is described in the paper by Andorka, Cseh-Szombathy, and Vavró. In this paper the authors refer to the fact that there is a connection between the distribution of religious confessions and the distribution of suicide rates, but do not indicate the negative correlations. That the distribution of religious confessions does not, in the last analysis, provide a sufficient explanation for the problem is pointed out by Béla Buda, in his article "Az öngyilkosság," *Orvosi Hetilap* (1971), Nos. 22, 29, 33, 39. To this paper, as well as to another paper by the same author ("Durkheim után. Az öngyilkosság szociológiai és szociálpszichológiai kutatásának eredményei és feladatai," in: *A deviáns viselkedés szociológiája*), the present study is fundamentally indebted, especially in connection with the interpretation of suicidal dispositions as a constant factor characterizing different subcultures, and in connection with the interpretation of the concept "cry for help." In respect to philosophy as a conceptual analysis I followed closely a formulation given by Hermann Lübbe, "Vollendung der Säkularisierung — Ende der Religion?," in O. Schatz, ed., *Was wird aus dem Menschen?* (Graz: Styria, 1974). For Lukács' characterization of his own situation in the 1960s, see the first volume of his *Utam Marxhoz* (Budapest: Magvető, 1971), p. 30. In characterizing the dilemma of Czech nationalism, I made use of J.F. Zacek's paper "Nationalism in Czechoslovakia," in P.F. Sugar and I.J. Lederer, eds., *Nationalism in Eastern Europe* (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 1969). In indicating some of the necessarily paradoxical aspects of Hungarian nationalism at the time of the *Ausgleich*, I profited from insights of Gyula Szekfű (Hóman and Szekfű, *Magyar Történet VII*, Budapest: Egyetemi Nyomda, n.d., p. 308) and Péter Hanák (*Magyarország a Monarchiában*, Budapest: Gondolat, 1975, pp. 445f.). For the young Lukács' dilemma with regard to East and West, see, e.g., Ferenc L. Lendvai, "The Young Lukács' Philosophy of History," *The New*

Hungarian Quarterly, 18, No. 67 (Autumn 1977). Regarding Masaryk, I made use of Milan Machovec's *Thomas G. Masaryk* (Graz: Styria, 1969) — the quotations from *The Czech Question* are based on the German translation given in the appendix of Machovec's book. Attempted suicide is interpreted as a cry for help by E. Stengel, in his *Suicide and Attempted Suicide* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1972). The formulation by K.W. Deutsch is taken from his *Nationalism and Social Communication* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT-Press; New York: John Wiley, 1953), p. 71. My suggestion that the long-lasting effects of the Turkish occupation might, to a certain extent, be responsible for the uneven distribution of suicide rates in Hungary, is partly derived from the contrast drawn by Gyula Szekfü between two types of Hungarian, the western (*dunai*), and the eastern (*tiszai*) type. The difference between the two characters, according to Szekfü, "might stem from the difference in racial mixture... but also from higher education, or — and here our historico-psychological means will hardly prove sufficient — simply from custom," from patterns of behavior "inherited through the generations." "The Transdanubian (western) Hungarian had at least *something* to lose during the centuries, something for which it was worth his while to think, to look for a *modus vivendi* between the Turks and the Germans." (*Három nemzedék*, Budapest: 'Elet' Irodalmi és Nyomda R.T., 1920, p. 128.) As regards Andersen I found useful suggestions in H. Hendin, *Suicide and Scandinavia. A Psychoanalytic Study of Culture and Character* (New York: Doubleday, 1965), p. 44, a book to which I am indebted in more than one way. The student *Leseverein* at Vienna is described in W.J. McGrath's dissertation "Wagnerianism in Austria," 1965, and more recently in his book *Dionysian Art and Populist Politics in Austria* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press. 1974).