Introduction

> [T]he general is not thought about with passion but with a comfortable superficiality. The exception, on the other hand, thinks the general with intense passion.
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> Søren Kierkegaard, *Repetition*, 1843

> Sovereign is he who decides on the exception.
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> Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 1922

> [T]he "state of exception" in which we live is not the exception but the rule.
>
> Walter Benjamin, *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, 1940

Suicide is an exception. Only a small minority of people actively seek death. This fact renders suicide unusual and particular. Yet its particularity rests not on the numbers of such deaths. Throughout European history, self-killing has also been regarded as a special – and usually a terrible – way to die. It has formed not just a deviation from normalcy but also an assault upon it. Modern Western societies now tend to see suicide as the consequence of a mental illness or depression that has undermined the "natural instinct" to preserve life. While many suicides may indeed be related to illness, this approach renders the decision to die intrinsically pathological, even trivial, because it disputes the potential of ethical choice and reflexivity. Another feature of recent times, in contrast, is the contentious debate about the "right to die," a right that is typically circumscribed to those instances when disease or incapacity has already destroyed the "quality" of life. This exception (to the exception) confirms the tautological norm prevalent today: healthy people would not choose to take their own lives, unless they were not healthy. Life thereby becomes the ultimate value, the right to reject it denied. The historian Lisa Lieberman argues that modern, medical concepts take the defiance out of suicide by excluding the act from the bounds of the normal.[1]

To claim defiance as a quality of suicide is not to read all suicides as political or even willful acts. Only a small number are explicitly defiant. Among the most famous cases is that of Jan Palach, who, in January 1969, set himself

[1] Lisa Lieberman, *Leaving You: The Cultural Meaning of Suicide* (New York, 2003). Compare the different approach of psychiatrist Kay Redfield Jamison, *Night Falls Fast: Understanding Suicide* (New York, 1999).

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on fire in Prague's Wenceslas Square as a demonstration against the invasion of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact troops. Yet Palach was himself concerned that his act should be viewed not as a suicide but as a protest, an archetypical distinction predicated here upon the opposition of the personal and pathological to the political and conscious.[2] Agency and ethics were thereby excluded from the category of suicide but attributed to the heroic feat of political action. In contrast to Palach's case, the defiance in suicide is usually only implicit: to reject life is to challenge its meaning and its order. This challenge has historically demanded a response. In medieval and early-modern Christianity, roughly since the era of St. Augustine, both life and death were considered prerogatives of the sovereign, that is, of God who determined the duration of man's worldly existence. Within the sphere of earthly affairs, the divinely constituted sovereign power likewise claimed a monopoly upon the right to take or to give life: to declare war, to execute criminals, or to bestow the gift of clemency.[3] Intentional suicide was consequently conceived as a mortal sin and a heinous crime, an act of insubordination against God's dominion that was often linked to demonic forces. Its consequence was eternal perdition. In a noteworthy distinction to contemporary times, the defiance of self-murder was fully acknowledged, for this framed the rituals of exclusion. The bodies of suicides were not buried in the consecrated ground of the church cemetery but interred profanely, without commemoration, and sometimes desecrated. The symbolic erasure of these lives reaffirmed the rightful order and authority.[4]

On the eve of the modern era, attitudes first hardened, and the enforcement of the legal prohibitions grew more severe; but then they slowly softened, and these rituals began a long process of decline. Philosophers condemned superstition, writers penned sympathetic portraits of suicidal heroes and heroines, and newspapers reported incidents within the context of everyday social and economic life. By the mid-nineteenth century, criminal statutes across Europe had usually been liberalized and often eliminated altogether. Simultaneously, suicide was becoming the object of two new scientific disciplines, moral statistics and psychiatry, both of which disputed the agency of the act. By locating its causes in the social environment or human physiology (and later the psyche), they cast suicide as a social problem and a medical pathology, either way as an abnormality requiring expert intervention.

Self-killing did not fully lose its defiance, however, despite these many transformations. In analogy with changing notions of political sovereignty, it was

[2] See the following website (consulted July 19, 2005) that likewise includes information on several other suicides inspired by Palach: http://archiv.radio.cz/palach99/eng/.
[3] See Michel Foucault's brief discussion of death, sovereignty, and bio-politics in his *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, trans. Robert Hurley (New York, 1990), 139–45.
[4] See the masterly studies by Alexander Murray, *Suicide in the Middle Ages*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1998, 2000).

no longer situated within the primary domain of divine authority but instead inserted into the space between individual (moral) autonomy and social duty. The public debates drew upon the categories of ancient philosophy, natural law, and the social contract to produce arguments both for and against suicide. When life becomes a burden due to illness or infirmity, it was claimed, for example, then we have the right to relinquish it. More recently, the political philosopher Giorgio Agamben has noted the parallel between suicide and the sovereign decision on the state of exception, that is, the most fundamental act of sovereignty that lies in the very suspension of law.[5] Such a notion of suicide as the decisive expression of man's autonomy has underpinned some of the greatest literary and philosophical works of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In his exploration of the consequences of a God-less world, Fedor Dostoevsky provided perhaps the paradigmatic account in his anti-hero, Kirillov, for whom shooting himself represented "the fullest point of his self-will," even his transfiguration into God.[6] Later existentialists would define suicide as a problem integral to human freedom and the assertion of meaning, a conceptual frame that has also shaped some well-known suicides among writers and artists.[7] The concepts governing suicide have thus changed dramatically over the last centuries.

The history of suicide now forms a large field in its own right. The first studies generally concentrated on intellectual debates, literary representations, and law.[8] More recent works have broadened their scope in an attempt to grapple with the complex character and dynamics of change itself. This narrative – so briefly and schematically sketched above – fits easily into the conventional periodization of European history, and it has often been told as the story of modernity. "From Sin to Insanity" is the title of a recent collection of articles on suicide in early-modern Europe, when "modern" suicide, "suicide as we know it – decriminalized, secularized, and medicalized – [took] hold among

5 Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller Roazen (Stanford, 1998), 136.

6 Dostoevsky frequently returned to the theme of suicide, especially in his novel, *The Demons*. The best analysis of his views is Irina Paperno, *Suicide as a Cultural Institution in Dostoevsky's Russia* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1997).

7 The now classic work is Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans. Justin O'Brien (London, 1955). See also the essays of Jean Améry, who conceived suicide as an act defining our humanity and who ultimately died by his own hand: *On Suicide: A Discourse on Voluntary Death*, trans. John D. Barlow (Bloomington, Ind., 1999).

8 Among the most important early works are A. Bayet, *Le Suicide et la morale* (Paris, 1922); Henry Romilly Fedden, *Suicide: A Social and Historical Study* (London, 1938); A. Alvarez, *The Savage God: A Study of Suicide* (London, 1971); and John McManners, *Death and the Enlightenment: Changing Attitudes toward Death among Christians and Unbelievers in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1981). For recent bibliographies (and discussions), see the following websites (consulted July 19, 2005): http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/suicide/#Bib and http://home.olemiss.edu/~hswatt/biblsuic.html.

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Europeans." [9] This general paradigm has also been called the "secularization of suicide," a term that seeks to describe the shift away from a primarily religious view of self-murder, the growing lenience in its judicial prosecution (leading ultimately to its decriminalization), and the development of social and medical explanations for the act. That suicide continued to be viewed as a sin was noted only in passing for the primary interest lay in conceptualizing the dynamic progression toward the secular and modern.[10] Among the many virtues of this approach has been its approach to suicide as culturally and historically variable. Attention has focused upon its meanings and representations, its religious and judicial regulation, and how these have evolved over time. Furthermore, it has placed suicide in the center of the historical process, shaped within the complex interplay of religious, political, legal, social, scientific, and cultural developments.

A second strand of historiography has focused more on the modern period, especially the nineteenth century. Many of these works have continued to follow – implicitly or explicitly – the narrative of secularization, examining, for example, the displacement of religious views with the rise of sociological and medical-psychiatric paradigms.[11] Other studies have instead applied the methods of statistical sociology, most importantly the theories of Emile Durkheim and his followers. These works have refined the sociological model, sometimes even undermining long-held assumptions.[12] But they also rely upon statistics, which are unreliable in light of variations in the compilation of data (including

[9]   The articles in this collection range widely over the European continent (though not Russia). See the editor's introduction, Jeffrey R. Watt, ed., *From Sin to Insanity: Suicide in Early Modern Europe* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2004), 8. See also Jeffrey R. Watt, *Choosing Death: Suicide and Calvinism in Early Modern Geneva* (Kirksville, Miss., 2001). For other works on the early-modern period, see: Markus Schär, *Seelennöte der Untertanen: Selbstmord, Melancholie und Religion in Alten Zürich* (Geneva, 1975); George Minois, *Histoire du suicide: La Société occidentale face à la mort volontaire* (Paris, 1995); Gabriela Signori, ed., *Trauer, Verzweiflung, und Anfechtung: Selbstmord und Selbstmordversuche in mittelalterlichen und frühneuzeitlichen Gesellschaften* (Tübingen, 1994); Vera Lind, *Selbstmord in der Frühen Neuzeit: Diskurs, Lebenswelt und kultureller Wandel am Beispiel der Herzogtümer Schleswig und Holstein* (Göttingen, 1999); and Julia Schreiner, *Jenseits vom Glück: Suizid, Melancholie und Hypochondrie in deutschsprachigen Texten des späten 18. Jahrhunderts* (Munich, 2003).

[10]   The "secularization of suicide" was the thesis of a widely praised and debated book, that has justifiably become a model in the field, including for this study. See Michael MacDonald and Terence Murphy, *Sleepless Souls: Suicide in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1990), 6. For critical discussion, see Thomas Kselman, "Funeral Conflicts in Nineteenth-Century France," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 30 (1988), 314, 319–20, 328–30; and "Debate: The Secularization of Suicide in England 1660–1800," *Past and Present* 119 (May 1988).

[11]   For a literary and cultural approach, see Barbara T. Gates, *Victorian Suicide: Mad Crimes and Sad Histories* (Princeton 1988). For a study of discourses, see Ursula Baumann, *Vom Recht auf den eigenen Tod: Geschichte des Suizids vom 18. bis zum 20. Jahrhundert* (Weimar, 2001).

[12]   In an influential study, Olive Anderson analyzed contemporary statistics (despite acknowledging their shortcomings) and rejected, for example, the long-accepted tenet that suicide was more frequent in large industrial cities. See her *Suicide in Victorian and Edwardian England* (Oxford, 1987).

the identification of suicide) as well as a tendency to cover up incidents due to both the legal consequences and the social stigma.[13] More fundamentally, the social explanation of suicide occurred within the idiom of modernity: Durkheim's *Le Suicide* (1897) was itself a founding manifesto of sociology, an eloquent assertion of the primacy of society in shaping the human being. The point is not to reject the relevance of social factors to suicide but to recognize that this approach is part and parcel of a specific historical configuration. A cultural history of suicide in the twentieth century has not been written, which is a striking lacuna. The making of modern suicide has apparently presented a more straightforward historical problem than the ambiguous faces of modern suicide itself, which have been shaped by the paradigms advanced by Durkheim, Freud, Camus, and others.[14]

Whilst acknowledging many debts to the existing historiography, this book will not tell the well-known story from the perspective of yet another geographical entity. Though focused on the Russian case, it seeks to rethink the grand narrative, which first requires a closer examination of its key terms. In its most basic sense, secularization describes the fundamental shift in the social and political status of religion that has occurred in Western societies over the last three centuries. From the center of politics, culture, and selfhood, religion was pushed to the margins and became a matter of personal choice. This model has been justifiably criticized on numerous grounds, from its top-down model of historical change to its institutional definition of religion that neglects the more nebulous issue of belief.[15] Most problematic is its definition of a (secular, rational) modernity in opposition to (religious) tradition. While organized religion has lost its once leading role in most Western societies, such normative narratives impose a model of displacement upon historical developments. The religious and the secular are not opposing, however, but mutually complicit and highly political categories. Modern states continue to delimit the public domain of religion in a variety of ways; and secular powers have sacralized

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[13] For the now standard critique of statistics, see Jack D. Douglas, *The Social Meanings of Suicide* (Princeton, 1967). Victor Bailey has instead argued that the study of suicide must be grounded in a complete and informative source lest it suffer from impressionistic and speculative arguments. Unfortunately, his method is hardly adaptable to other times and places. Recognizing the problems in official statistics, he analyzed some 700 suicides culled from a complete run of coroners' papers in Kingston-upon-Hull – a source base that has apparently not been duplicated in England, much less in other countries that lack the institution of the coroner's court. On this basis, Bailey concludes that social isolation provides the best explanation for suicide. See his *This Rash Act: Suicide across the Life Cycle in the Victorian City* (Stanford, 1998).

[14] Studies have tended to focus more on the prominent cases of well-known public and cultural figures. One scholar who is confronting this issue has fruitfully combined an analysis of discourse, statistics, and case studies. See Christian Goeschel, "Suicide at the End of the Third Reich," *Journal of Contemporary History* (Jan. 2006); and "Suicides of German Jews in the Third Reich," *German History* (forthcoming).

[15] For an overview, see Steve Bruce, ed., *Religion and Modernization: Sociologists and Historians Debate the Secularization Thesis* (Oxford, 1992).

certain principles, such as the nation and the inviolable rights of the individual.[16] Historians have also returned religion to modern history, including the Enlightenment, not just as the object of reason's ridicule, but as an integral part of its intellectual, social, and political world. But its intellectual integration into the conceptualization of the modern era remains ambiguous.[17]

Just as secularism shadows modernity, so too does its veiled counterpart. A different expression of secularization theory has been to read modern institutions and ideas – the revolution, the work ethic, progress, nationalism – as secularized theological concepts. Hidden within the modern and secular, it is argued, is a religious core.[18] Such assertions have become common, if often too literal, and their explanatory value remains unclear. Is secularization a description of a process or an actual argument about its motive forces or trajectory?[19] What does the "unveiling" of the religious within the secular accomplish? If religion should be read as a cultural system, how does religion differ from culture?[20] Has modernity disenchanted the world or spun new forms of enchantment? Despite such enduring questions, these approaches allow a distinction to be drawn between religion and the habitus. Concepts initially delimited within religion can continue to shape cognition, behaviors, and institutions, though they also acquire new meanings, roles, and functions. Indeed, the modern world has not lost its interest in questions of redemption, transcendence, or immortality. Despite (or perhaps because of) its frequent reduction to physiological processes, death often retains a kind of supernatural mystery, which makes suicide even more of an enigma.

To discard the term secularization is impossible. Not only does the history of religion, belief, and theology still need to be further explored. The term itself forms an integral part of the historical landscape.[21] By the late nineteenth century, many Europeans believed that secularization – however defined – was a very real part of their lives. They also considered it a primary cause of suicide, which was often understood to be a socio-medical problem of unprecedented magnitude produced by both the declining authority of tradition and

[16] See especially the two books by Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore, 1993); and his *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford, 2003).

[17] My analysis has been influenced by the review article by Jonathan Sheehan, "Enlightenment, Religion, and the Enigma of Secularization," *American Historical Review* no. 4 (2003). Among the most influential works on the nineteenth century was David Blackbourn, *Marpingen: Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in Bismarkian Germany* (Oxford, 1993).

[18] The classic examples are Max Weber's theory of the Protestant work ethic and Karl Löwith's analysis of progress in his *Meaning in History: The Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History* (Chicago, 1949).

[19] See Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, Mass., 1985).

[20] Cf. Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," in his *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, 1973).

[21] This point is emphasized by Sheehan, "Enlightenment."

the concomitant rise of egoistic individualism and anomie. Its terrain was the metropolis.[22] Yet ideas about the causes and nature of suicide have been closely intertwined with ideas about secularization and modernity since at least the eighteenth century.[23] To write the history of suicide as either an exemplar or a result of secularization is consequently to inscribe normative frameworks upon it.

Rather than reading the grand narrative, therefore, this study probes its history and historical functions, investigates its omissions and ambiguities, and explores alternative narrations. The point is not to argue that the religious status of suicide remained unchanged. In both Russia and the West, the condemnation of self-killing as a terrible sin has faded (though not disappeared),[24] a process shaped in part by new cultural and scientific paradigms, which, in turn, created new contexts for suicide. But metaphors of sequence and displacement fail to capture the shifting configurations of the secular and the religious, the political and the personal, the social and the individual. Organized churches continued to regulate (and condemn) suicide in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, though their aspirations and practices also changed as they were forced to grapple with the competing claims of other authorities. Especially important to the modern history of suicide were also qualities once defined and regulated within a broadly spiritual sphere. Despite the influence of sociological and psychiatric models, the act of suicide continued to raise issues of both governance and morality, including virtue and vice, character and conduct. But these issues interacted, in turn, with various medical, social, and political regimes to produce new systems of moral regulation for both individuals and populations. The modern era has thus been characterized by the conflict and dialogue between competing authorities and paradigms.[25] One result has been the creation of hybrid meanings for suicide with new regulatory practices. At the turn of the twentieth century, for example, it was defined as a conjoined vice and disease of the social body (a population), which then allowed for the elaboration of a range of therapeutic and prophylactic measures, from the religious, moral, and physical education of youth to the prohibition of alcohol. A different confluence of factors informed the contemporaneous phenomenon of political suicide, which combined sacred narratives with modern ideologies. Such processes – the migration of concepts between the spheres of religion, medicine, and sociology, between theology

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[22] Cf. Emile Durkheim, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*, trans. John A. Spaulding and George Simpson (New York, 1951). The original was published in 1897.

[23] See Howard I. Kushner, "Suicide, Gender, and the Fear of Modernity in Nineteenth-Century Medical and Social Thought," *Journal of Social History* (Spring 1993).

[24] Despite the authority of social and medical explanations, killing oneself has remained a shameful act in the Western world; it is a painful topic often addressed only with silence. This stigma can be dismissed as some sort of meaningless vestige of sin, but it is nonetheless present.

[25] Heidi Rimke and Alan Hunt, "From Sinners to Degenerates: The Medicalization of Morality in the 19th Century," *History of the Human Sciences* no. 1 (2002).

and politics – require metaphors of conversion and translation, metaphors that evoke affinities within transformations.[26]

In taking the perspective of the *longue durée*, this study does not present a comprehensive review of all suicide in Russia, and some famous cases will be passed over in silence. It seeks neither to elucidate suicide's objective causes nor, following Durkheim, to compile statistics in order to read their social significance. The goal, in sum, is not to establish why particular individuals took their own lives or which social groups were more or less prone to killing themselves. Instead, this study tells a specific story of suicide that centers upon its complex nexus with sovereignty. At its core, therefore, are questions about the making of modern subjectivity. The affirmation of the rational, autonomous subject, who possesses innate human dignity, has been central to modern ideas about citizenship and rights, including the right to choose death.[27] Yet this liberal self has also been challenged and fragmented by other notions of the personality: physiological man determined by biology or heredity; psychological man driven by irrational drives and desires; and alienated man cut off from his essential self by capitalism (or some other external source). Politics is also integral to this story. Indeed, this study contends that suicide itself – the act, the physical and symbolic body, the life story, the final words, the burial, the social and medical problem – formed the site on which diverse authorities were established and contested, not just the priest or the doctor, but also the sovereign, the public, the nation, the individual. The term "body politic" is used in this sense: not as a direct analogy between the human body and the polity, but as a metaphor for the simultaneously political and material character of suicide, its fusion of symbolic representation into social action. A worldly yet transcendent act, suicide embodies both the profane and the sacred, a quality potentially so disturbing that most cultures have attempted to divide the two, to distinguish self-murder from martyrdom. The history of suicide over the last centuries helps to map the contested terrain upon which the modern self and the modern world were erected.

Suicide in imperial Russia

Russia, too, forms a kind of exception. Located on the fringes of Europe, it possesses a distinctive faith (Russian Orthodoxy), large religious and ethnic minorities, a different legal tradition (untouched by Roman law and the Napoleonic Codes), and different historical epochs (the "Mongol yoke," the absence of a Renaissance and Reformation). Only under Peter the Great at the turn of the

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[26] Cf. the concept of "secondary conversion" in Dan Diner, "Editorial," *Jahrbuch des Simon-Dubnow-Instituts* III (Göttingen, 2004).
[27] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, 1989).

eighteenth century did Russia self-consciously turn its face to Europe and sub-sequently become a full and active participant in its political, cultural, and social life. Yet the view from the margins can be illuminating. Despite the specificity of Russia's historical development, the history of suicide there reveals numerous parallels and intriguing differences. One reason may be a kind of cultural reflexivity. Often convinced of their own backwardness, Russians constantly looked to Europe in order to interpret past and present experiences and to anticipate future developments. Another reason may be the particular trajectory in Russia of pan-European currents in politics, culture, and science. Both make the Russian case historically relevant to scholars of Europe, and both benefit from the perspective of the *longue durée*.[28]

The history of suicide in imperial Russia has largely been the domain of literary scholars.[29] The most important work to date is Irina Paperno's study of suicide in Dostoevsky's Russia. Although she provides an overview of law, folklore, science, and public opinion, her book is fundamentally concerned with illuminating Dostoevsky's influential approach to the problem. Paperno employs an interpretative method that privileges the play of metaphor and representation. She thus argues that suicide is a practice associated with patterns of symbolic meaning that are specific to particular societies and cultures yet that also draw upon meta-historical paradigms (such as the deaths of Socrates and Christ). This definition usefully highlights the contextualized meaningfulness of the act, but Paperno privileges the cultural construction of meaning as a sphere autonomous from either actual suicides or regulatory systems. This focus on meaning detached from practice fails to account for historical change and effectively renders suicide a discourse, divorced from both its physical violence and its everyday world.[30]

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[28]   Most historians of Russia have preferred to work within established periods, whether the long eighteenth century or the late imperial era (1856 to 1917). Important exceptions to this generalization include Richard Wortman, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy*, 2 vols. (Princeton, 1995, 2000); Catriona Kelly, *Refining Russia: Advice Literature, Polite Culture, and Gender from Catherine to Yeltsin* (Oxford, 2002); and Stephen Lovell, *Summerfolk: A History of the Dacha, 1710–2000* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2003).

[29]   See N. N. Schneidman, *Dostoevsky and Suicide* (Oakville, Ont., 1984); and Grigorii Chkhartishvili, *Pisatel' i samoubiistvo* (Moscow, 1999). For the history of death more generally, see Thomas Trice, "The 'Body Politic': Russian Funerals and the Politics of Representations, 1841–1921" (Ph. D. Dissertation, University of Illinois, 1998); and Catherine Merridale, *Night of Stone: Death and Memory in Russia* (London, 2000). On suicide in the Soviet period, see Kenneth Pinnow, "Making Suicide Soviet: Medicine, Moral Statistics, and the Politics of Social Science in Bolshevik Russia, 1920–1930" (Ph. D. Dissertation, Columbia University, 1998).

[30]   By tracing "conversions" and "transferences" of meaning through various texts (scientific treatises, newspaper articles, literary works), Paperno emphasizes the hermeneutic paradoxes of suicide. While her analysis is often inspired, aspects of her arguments are not convincing, as I will occasionally point out below. The themes, arguments, and sources found in this book differ considerably from those found in hers, in part because I have engaged in extensive archival research. I have also deliberately neglected the ideas of Dostoevsky in light of her concentration on them. See Paperno, *Suicide*, 2–3, 11, 17, 204–5.

Suicide is, therefore, a meaningful act that is constituted at the intersection between power and subjectivity. Its history occurs in the mutual interplay of ideologies with practices, disciplining strategies with individual tactical appropriations.[31] This dynamic is exemplified in the peculiar dialogue that often surrounds cases of self-killing. The individual act can form an attempt to author a death and thereby to finalize a life's meaning. Authorial control passes with death, however, when external authorities – priests, judges, doctors, communities – pass judgment and thereby inscribe their own meanings, often literally, upon the body. Yet the last word is not the final word.[32] Although both sides of this dialogue are delimited within the existing discursive categories and practices of the culture, both can also be productive of new meanings and practices. This small dialogue around the individual case thereby contributes to a much larger dialogue across time and space, history and culture.

The book has been organized into three roughly chronological sections. These three periods do not reflect "the sensibility of an age" (Philippe Ariès), nor are they propelled by epistemic breaks. Rather, they constitute distinctive contexts in which particular meanings for suicide were negotiated and within which particular practices and forms of intervention predominated. The shifts in these representations and practices depended upon both broader social and political conditions as well as internal dynamics within the phenomenon of suicide. The first section, "Public Order and its Malcontents," covers the longest period and comprises six chapters. It opens with a chapter on suicide in Muscovite Orthodoxy that concludes with its conversion into criminal law and a secular jurisdiction under Peter the Great. The dawn of the modern era in Russia during the seventeenth century proved a formative moment for the phenomenon of suicide. Defined within a conjoined religious and political idiom, the act of self-killing dwelled in the interstices between submission and willfulness, martyrdom and treason, faith and unbelief. The subsequent five chapters then cover the years until about 1860, when the meanings and regulation of suicide continued to develop in tandem with notions of public order and disorder.

Since the early eighteenth century, Russia's rulers had aspired not only to establish and maintain Russia as a European power but also to organize and shape her population. The myriad prescriptive regulations enacted by Peter the Great are well known: they ranged from the shaving of beards and instructions on dress to the mandatory use of new technologies in manufacture and industry. While the overt coercion and brutality of Peter's reign distinguished

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[31] One inspiration for this study has been Michel de Certeau, who endeavored to create a space for individual interventions with his theory of cultural consumption. See his *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley, 1984).

[32] A second inspiration has been the work of Mikhail Bakhtin on utterance, genre, and dialogue, though I include an analysis of practices as well as texts. See especially his "Discourse in the Novel," in *The Dialogical Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin, Tex., 1981).