

“Vom Recht auf den eigenen Tod”: Die Geschichte des Suizids vom 18. bis zum 20. Jahrhundert. By Ursula Baumann. Weimar: Hermann Böhlhaus Nachfolger. 2001. Pp. 407. €39.90. ISBN 3-7400-1180-7.

Suicide is a complicated subject. It elicits strong emotions (anxiety, fascination, revulsion), and because it poses weighty questions about the nature of life and death and about human control over each, it inevitably intersects with many central institutions, ranging from law to religion, from the family to civil society, and, among the professions, from medicine to social science. No single volume could do justice to this complexity. Ursula Baumann's study of suicide in the German lands from the eighteenth century to 1945 is good; it is wide-ranging and thoughtful, though inevitably partial. It proceeds from the assumption that suicide as a historical subject has three main dimensions: individual motivation, which can rarely be credibly deciphered; changing public discourse(s); and the interventions of state, religion, and civil society. Baumann's account focuses on the last two dimensions, but especially on discourse, which gives the study its shape (p. 9). Consequently, she uses mostly secondary sources that chart public debates (no *belles lettres*), supplemented at various points by primary material from the Berlin archives. She sketches a broad movement from the rejection of suicide as an immoral act condemned by Christian religious authorities to its gradual acceptance by a secularized state and public as a morally indifferent or even moral act. That movement was not linear. The Protestant and Catholic Churches persisted in discriminating against suicides by dishonoring burial practices until 1930 and 1983, respectively (p. 42). While the reform-enlightened and Napoleonic German states decriminalized suicide, the newly professionalized medical and psychiatric authorities of the nineteenth century (and later) stigmatized suicides as pathological, a kind of secular continuation of religious discrimination.

Not all epochs were equally fascinated by suicide. Baumann emphasizes the similarity of the Enlightenment and late nineteenth-century public debates. The former was prodded by conflicts between families of suicide victims and punitive church authorities, secular philosophy, and state reforms. The latter was propelled by a second wave of secularization, a larger, more active public sphere, the activity of social-science professionals and doctors, and the “social question” (p. 228). Baumann plausibly interprets changing public interest in suicide as a result of real social conflicts (over burials, for example) and especially as the ability of suicide to be a screen onto which other social concerns could be projected. She is excellent in spying how stereotypes skewed contemporaries' interpretation of female suicide. She argues that the 4:1 ratio of male to female suicides in the nineteenth century was mainly due to the greater violence and

reliability of male's methods; when municipal gasworks became common, the female suicide rate closed the gap (p. 347). This insight is a good example of Baumann's care in using statistics. She presents good evidence that statistical data became reliable only in the twentieth century (p. 204). Rather than rely on questionable data, Baumann makes her arguments qualitatively, using individual cases that she claims are representative (of increasing popular secularization) for the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Baumann devotes much attention to the philosophical debates of the Enlightenment and German idealism, which then ceded the stage to medical and later sociological claims. She offers two interesting, lengthy excursions: one exploring the relation of suicide to the rise of autopsy and anatomy courses and the other to euthanasia. The late nineteenth-century debate over euthanasia allows Baumann to articulate her major point, that it furnishes the historical proof "that accepting the right to dispose over one's own body must in principle lead to acceptance of voluntary help for those who wish to die" (*freiwillige Sterbehilfe*) (p. 322). Baumann thus uses history to advance a contemporary political position. Perhaps she is led to this use by her interesting assertion that suicide is an unusual sort of historical phenomenon because "its formal structure, an extreme and simultaneously last possibility of human freedom which in the moment of its realization cancels itself, remains constant over time" (p. 5). In any case, Baumann champions the "modern ethic of [individual] autonomy" (p. 248), which asserts the right to dispose over one's own life against religious, Kantian, sociological, or National Socialist claims that subordinate this right to God, secular morality, society, or race (pp. 15–17, 133–34, 248, 351).

Baumann's presentism comes at a price. On the one hand, it promotes critical reading of her famous sources; on the other, it tempts her to argue with them, rather than elucidating them. And it hinders her from offering a synthetic, historical conclusion to her various chapters, or to her book. There remains a fragmentary quality to much of the highly interesting material and insights that Baumann offers. A more rigorous discourse analysis might have helped overcome fragmentation, especially since discourse provides the book's main structure and materials. Michel Foucault's example would have enabled a firmer linkage between ideas and debates and the institutions of power wherein they were wielded. What was the relation between Enlightenment philosophical debates and state reform, especially legal reform? What constituted the "field of force relations" inside which discourse, according to Foucault, forms, and how did that shift as relations between state and society changed? How important to changing attitudes was the "plurality of values" characteristic of civil society, which Baumann mentions once (p. 159)? Was politics really as marginal to these shifts as Baumann's account seems to suggest? (And if that is true, what does it mean about the production of social norms?) What does it tell us about the operation of discourse that Hume felt it necessary to argue "theonomically"

(p. 129)? Or that practically all the early champions of the right to die elided voluntary with state-determined death (pp. 309–17)? How insulated or open was Germany to international debates on suicide (for example, it is remarkable that Durkheim's famous study was only tardily translated into German [p. 251])? These are typical questions that Baumann's ambitious study raises, but does not answer. Nevertheless, readers will find here a wealth of material and intelligent, provocative discussion.

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“Männlicher Muth und Teutsche Ehre”: Nation, Militär und Geschlecht zur Zeit der Antinapoleonischen Kriege Preussens.

By Karen Hagemann. Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh. 2002. Pp. 617.
€52.00. ISBN 3–506–74477–1.

Since the nineteenth century, history has concerned itself with the nation-state: its rise and fall, its distinctive political and social character, its victories and defeats. The focus on the state as historical personage has often obscured gender, class, religious, and other differences by submerging them in a monolithic concept of national identity. Recent research has denied the historical inevitability of the state and has pictured it (in the words of Benedict Anderson) as an “imaginary community” that is defined chiefly by the evanescent psychological needs and political projects of its promoters. “Germany,” a creation of the nineteenth century, provides a particularly clear example of the ways in which national identity is invented, popularized, and realized through a series of diverse and shifting political projects. In this study of the birth and early development of German nationalism during the anti-Napoleonic wars (1806–1815), Karen Hagemann argues that the new concept of German identity did not submerge gender difference, but on the contrary created a newly polarized gender order that survived throughout the long nineteenth century and — some would argue — even into the present.

The concept of the “gendered” state is not new, but it has most often been applied to the history of women and their status. Hagemann is to be congratulated for this creative approach to the much less studied history of masculinity. This massive study begins by describing the new forms of military organization through which the Prussian state avenged its defeats in 1806 by Napoleon's grand army. The brilliant and energetic officers who presided over this process of reorganization aimed to create a new definition of citizenship based on military service.

Hagemann demonstrates that this process also created a new definition of