

standard of living for the poorest segments of society, contributed to 1970s inflation and recession in the United States.)

There are other elements of Drescher's case with which one might argue, but *Economic* has persuasively and provocatively re-opened a "closed" question. In addition, Mr. Drescher has an unostentatious flair with word and phrase that makes reading his prose a pleasure.

Emma LAPSANSKY,  
Temple University.

\* \* \*

RICHARD COBB. — *Death in Paris, 1795-1801*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978. Pp. 134.

The historical study of death has achieved a certain popularity recently: in France alone one thinks of the work of Ariès, Lebrun and Vovelle. It is perhaps to be expected that Richard Cobb's contribution to this historiography should concentrate not on the common social aspects of this universal human experience, but on the atypical, on the statistically aberrant. Turning from his earlier work on *la vie en marge*, Cobb here presents *la mort en marge*, a study of suicides and sudden and violent deaths in Paris in the last years of the eighteenth century.

The source for this work is some 404 *procès-verbaux* of violent deaths from the Basse-Geôle de la Seine. Two-thirds of the corpses represented by these dossiers were recovered from the Seine, and 274 of the 404 were judged to be suicides. Thus the source does not (it does not claim to) represent a comprehensive survey of violent death or even suicides for Paris; the figures cited by Tulard (p. 6, n. 2) suggest that the six years covered by this study would have seen about 900 suicides in the capital. Moreover, the bodies which Cobb has vicariously examined are those of the very poor, their families claiming to be unable to afford burial expenses.

From the information collected by the *concierges* of the Basse-Geôle — statements of witnesses to acts of suicides, testimony of family and friends, descriptions of clothing and the contents of pockets — Cobb has established a context of suicides (for they are his main interest). There is a calendar, first of all: a preference for spring and summer. There is a daily breakdown: Fridays, Sundays and Mondays were most popular. And there is a clock: a preference for the morning, between nine o'clock and noon (as distinct from violent deaths such as murders, which were more common in the late evening). These conclusions are sometimes presented in a frustrating, imprecise way, but the general outlines are clear enough.

Where Cobb comes into his own is in the re-creation of the social context of the suicides. He peers over the shoulders of the *concierges* and examines with them the clothing on the bodies, the bits of string, snuff-boxes, keys, and other odds and ends found in their pockets. He listens to the evidence of their friends and relatives. From the mass of evidence he draws a convincing impressionistic picture of the family circumstances and personal relationships which might have contributed to the decision to end it all: loneliness, physical pain, feelings of failure, lost love. This reconstitution of personal life is the strength of the study, and only a historian with Richard Cobb's intimate knowledge of, and sensitivity for, eighteenth-century France, could have done it. He is able to elicit signifi-

cance out of items of clothing, occupations, networks of provincial workers, and days of the week as no other historian can.

This is not to say that the study is without weaknesses, for it is bound to raise a number of questions. It is not clear, for example, how the *concierges* of the Basse-Geôle decided whether a body fished from the Seine resulted from a suicide or an accident. To be sure, there were witnesses in some cases, but not in others, and given the social class of Cobb's cadavers, the lack of suicide notes is not surprising (although he does cite one suicide note left by a *cuisinière* in Liège).

What is perhaps the most unsatisfying aspect of the work is the line that is drawn between personal life and social life. There is a suggestion that male suicide in particular might have related to public events — economic conditions, underemployment, war-weariness, and the like — but the suggestion is not followed through, and we are often left with the feeling of personal experiences too starkly insulated from the general. What, for example, of the religious factor in these suicides? It might well be, of course, that the documentation does not allow the historian to see beyond the most personal experiences of the subjects of this study, but the broader social influences on the rate of suicide, and the proportion of women and men among them, are surely compelling questions among others. This study does not answer them, but it is nonetheless a fascinating insight into personal lives and puts life into the statistics of death.

Roderick G. PHILLIPS,  
*University of Auckland.*

\* \* \*

PETER BAILEY. — *Leisure and Class in Victorian England: Rational recreation and the contest for control, 1830-1885*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978, Pp. x, 260.

Peter Bailey's interesting and provocative work is one of a number of recent contributions to the rapidly-expanding historiography of recreation and leisure in nineteenth century England. His concern with the inter-relationship of leisure, class and respectability reflects the similar preoccupation of Brian Harrison, Gareth Stedman Jones, Trygve Tholfsen and Helen Meller, in their various explorations of Victorian and Edwardian recreation.

Two themes underlie Bailey's well documented study of the transformation of urban culture: the gradual assumption of control, by the working classes, of the direction of their own leisure from the mid- to late-nineteenth century, consequent upon the failure of middle-class recreation schemes to gain wide acceptance; and a reinterpretation of the concept of respectability itself.

Recent historians, notably Geoffrey Best and Brian Harrison, have replaced a framework of class with one of "respectability" in attempting to explain the apparent cohesion of mid-Victorian society. Vertical attachment to a powerful ethic of respectability generated by a newly-established middle-class hegemony, they have argued, became more important as a behavioural determinant than horizontal class allegiances. As a result of this approach, Bailey maintains, the class perspective has been unduly neglected.

Trygve Tholfsen began the work of rehabilitation by contending that attachment to respectability became an integral part of, rather than a deterrent to, class consciousness. Bailey suggests further that respectability is better understood as a mode of behaviour, capable even of being assumed or discarded if occasion demanded, rather than an enclosed