Dedicated to the Memory of My Parents
Hermann Elias, d. Breslau 1940
Sophie Elias, d. Auschwitz 1941 (?)

Norbert Elias

THE CIVILIZING PROCESS

The History of Manners
and
State Formation and Civilization

Translated by Edmund Jephcott

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PART TWO

Civilization as a Specific Transformation of Human Behavior

I

The Development of the Concept of Civilité

1. The decisive antithesis expressing the self-image of the West during the Middle Ages is that between Christianity and paganism or, more exactly, between correct, Roman-Latin Christianity, on the one hand, and paganism and heresy, including Greek and Eastern Christianity, on the other.  

2. In the name of the Cross, and later in that of civilization, Western society wages, during the Middle Ages, its wars of colonization and expansion. And for all its secularization, the watchword "civilization" always retains an echo of Latin Christendom and the knightly-feudal crusade. The memory that chivalry and the Roman-Latin faith bear witness to a particular stage of Western society, a stage which all the major Western peoples have passed through, has certainly not disappeared.  

3. The concept of civilité acquired its meaning for Western society at a time when chivalrous society and the unity of the Catholic church were disintegrating. It is the incarnation of a society which, as a specific stage in the formation of Western manners or "civilization," was no less important than the feudal society before it. The concept of civilité, too, is an expression and symbol of a social formation embracing the most diverse nationalities, in which, as in the Church, a common language is spoken, first Italian and then increasingly French. These languages take over the function earlier performed by Latin. They manifest the unity of Europe, and at the same time the new social formation which forms its backbone, court society. The situation, the self-image, and the characteristics of this society find expression in the concept of civilité.

2. The concept of civilité received the specific stamp and function under discussion here in the second quarter of the sixteenth century. Its individual starting point can be exactly determined. It owes the specific meaning adopted by society to a short treatise by Erasmus of Rotterdam, De civilitate morum puellarum (On civility in children), which appeared in 1530. This work clearly treated a theme that was ripe for discussion. It immediately achieved an enormous circulation, going through edition after edition. Even within Erasmus's lifetime—that is, in the first six years after its publication—it was reprinted more than thirty times. In all, more than 130 editions may be counted, 13 of them as late as the eighteenth century. The multitude of translations, imitations, and sequels is almost without limit. Two years after the publication of the treatise the first English translation appeared. In 1534 it was published in catechism form, and at this time it was already being introduced as a schoolbook for the education of boys. German and Czech translations followed. In 1537, 1559, 1569, and 1613 it appeared in French, newly translated each time.

3. As early as the sixteenth century a particular French type face was given the name civilité, after a French work by Mathurin Cordier which combined doctrines from Erasmus's treatise with those of another humanist, Johannes Sulpicius. And a whole genre of books, directly or indirectly influenced by Erasmus's treatise, appeared under the title Civilité or Civilité puérile; these were printed up to the end of the eighteenth century in this civilité type.
crasisimma philosophiae pars (the grossest part of philosophy). This treatise has its special importance less as an individual phenomenon or work than as a symptom of change, an embodiment of social processes. Above all, it is the resonance, the elevation of the title word to a central expression of the self-interpretation of European society, which draws our attention to this treatise.

4. What is the treatise about? Its theme must explain to us for what purpose and in what sense the new concept was needed. It must contain indications of the social changes and processes which made the word fashionable.

Erasmus's book is about something very simple: the behavior of people in society—above all, but not solely, "outward bodily propriety." It is dedicated to a noble boy, a prince's son, and written for the instruction of boys. It contains simple thoughts delivered with great seriousness, yet at the same time with much mockery and irony, in clear, polished language and with enviable precision. It can be said that none of its successors ever equalled this treatise in force, clarity, and personal character. Looking more closely, one perceives beyond it a world and a pattern of life which in many respects, to be sure, are close to our own, yet in others still quite remote; the treatise points to attitudes that we have lost, that some among us would perhaps call "barbaric" or "uncivilized." It speaks of many things that have in the meantime become unspeakable, and of many others that are now taken for granted. 8

Erasmus speaks, for example, of the way people look. Though his comments are meant as instruction, they also bear witness to the direct and lively observation of people of which he was capable. "Sint oculi placidi, verecundi, compositi," he says, "non torvi, quod est truculentiae . . . non vagi ac volubiles, quod est insaniae, non limi quod est suspiciosorium et insidias molentiam. . . ." This can only with difficulty be translated without an appreciable alteration of tone: a wide-eyed look is a sign of stupidity, staring a sign of inertia; the looks of those prone to anger are too sharp; too lively and eloquent those of the immodest; if your look shows a calm mind and a respectful amiability, that is best. Nor by chance do the ancients say: the seat of the soul is in the eyes. "Animi sedem esses in oculis."

Bodily carriage, gestures, dress, facial expressions—this "outward" behavior with which the treatise concerns itself is the expression of the inner, the whole man. Erasmus knows this and on occasion states it explicitly: "Although this outward bodily propriety proceeds from a well-composed mind, nevertheless we sometimes find that, for want of instruction, such grace is lacking in excellent and learned men."

There should be no snot on the nostrils, he says somewhat later. A peasant wipes his nose on his cap and coat, a sausage maker on his arm and elbow. It does not show much more propriety to use one's hand and then wipe it on one's clothing. It is more decent to take up the snot in a cloth, preferably while turning away. If when blowing the nose with two fingers somethings falls to the ground, it must be immediately trodden away with the foot. The same applies to spittle.

With the same infinite care and matter-of-factness with which these things are said—the mere mention of which shocks the "civilized" man of a later stage with a different affective molding—we are told how one ought to sit or greet. Gestures are described that have become strange to us, e.g., standing on one leg. And we might reflect that many of the bizarre movements of walkers and dancers that we see in medieval paintings or statues not only represent the "manner" of the painter or sculptor but also preserve actual gestures and movements that have grown strange to us, embodiments of a different mental and emotional structure.

The more one immerses oneself in the little treatise, the clearer becomes this picture of a society with modes of behavior in some respects related to ours, and in many ways remote. We see people seated at table: "A dextris sit poculum, et cutellius ecarius rite purgatus, ad lacvam panis," says Erasmus. The goblet and the well-cleaned knife on the right, on the left the bread. That is how the table is laid. Most people carry a knife, hence the precept to keep it clean. Forks scarcely exist, or at most for taking meat from the dish. Knives and spoons are very often used communally. There is not always a special implement for everyone: if you are offered something liquid, says Erasmus, taste it and return the spoon after you have wiped it.

When dishes of meat are brought in, usually everyone cuts himself a piece, takes it in his hand, and puts it on his plate if there are plates, otherwise on a thick slice of bread. The expression quadrus used by Erasmus can clearly mean either a metal plate or a slice of bread.

"Quidam ubi vix bene considerint mox manus in epulas conjicit." Some put their hands into the dishes when they are scarcely seated, says Erasmus. Wolves or gluttons do that. Do not be the first to take from a dish that is brought in. Leave dipping your fingers into the broth to the peasants. Do not poke around in the dish but take the first piece that presents itself. And just as it shows a want of forbearance to search the whole dish with one's hand—"in omnium patiue plagas manum mittere"—neither is it very polite to turn the dish round so that a better piece comes to you. What you cannot take with your hands, take on your quadrus. If someone passes you a piece of cake or pastry with a spoon, either take it with your quadrus or take the spoon offered to you, put the food on the quadrus, and return the spoon.

As has been mentioned, plates too are uncommon. Paintings of table scenes from this or earlier times always offer the same spectacle, unfamiliar to us, that is indicated by Erasmus's treatise. The table is sometimes covered with rich cloths, sometimes not, but always there is little on it: drinking vessels, saltcellar, knives, spoons, that is all. Sometimes we see the slices of bread, the quadrus, that in French are called tranchoir or tailloir. Everyone, from the king and queen to the peasant and his wife, eats with the hands. In the upper class there are more
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But precisely this is one of the problems to be considered here. In tracing the transformation of the concepts by which different societies have tried to express themselves, in following back the concept of civilization to its ancestor *civilitas*, one finds oneself suddenly on the track of the civilizing process itself, of the actual change in behavior that took place in the West. That it is embarrassing for us to speak or even hear of much that Erasmus discusses is one of the symptoms of this civilizing process. The greater or lesser discomfort we feel toward people who discuss or mention their bodily functions more openly, who conceal and restrain these functions less than we do, is one of the dominant feelings expressed in the judgment “barbaric” or “uncivilized.” Such, then, is the nature of “barbarism and its discontent” or, in more precise and less evaluative terms, the discontent with the different structure of affects, the different standard of repugnance which is still to be found today in many societies which we term “uncivilized,” the standard of repugnance which preceded our own and is its precondition. The question arises as to how and why Western society actually moved from one standard to the other, how it was “civilized.” In considering this process of civilization, we cannot avoid arousing feelings of discomfort and embarrassment. It is valuable to be aware of them. It is necessary, at least while considering this process, to attempt to suspend all the feelings of embarrassment and superiority, all the value judgments and criticism associated with the concepts “civilization” or “uncivilized.” Our kind of behavior has grown out of that which we call uncivilized. But these concepts grasp the actual change too statically and coarsely. In reality, our terms “civilized” and “uncivilized” do not constitute an antithesis of the kind that exists between “good” and “bad,” but represent stages in a development which, moreover, is still continuing. It might well happen that our stage of civilization, our behavior, will arouse in our descendants feelings of embarrassment similar to those we sometimes feel concerning the behavior of our ancestors. Social behavior and the expression of emotions passed from a form and a standard which was not a beginning, which could not in any absolute and undifferentiated sense be designated “uncivilized,” to our own, which we denote by the word “civilized.” And to understand the latter we must go back in time to that from which it emerged. The “civilization” which we are accustomed to regard as a possession that comes to us apparently ready-made, without our asking how we actually came to possess it, is a process or part of a process in which we are ourselves involved. Every particular characteristic that we attribute to it—machinery, scientific discovery, forms of state, or whatever else—bears witness to a particular structure of human relations, to a particular social structure, and to the corresponding forms of behavior. The question remains whether the change in behavior, in the social process of the “civilization” of man, can be understood, at least in isolated phases and in its elementary features, with any degree of precision.

refined forms of this. One ought to wash one’s hands before a meal, says Erasmus. But there is as yet no soap for this purpose. Usually the guest holds out his hands, and a page pours water over them. The water is sometimes slightly scented with chamomile or rosemary. In good society one does not put both hands into the dish. It is most refined to use only three fingers of the hand. This is one of the marks of distinction between the upper and lower classes.

The fingers become greasy. "Digitos unctos vel ore palae lingere vel ad lunam extergere . . . incive est," says Erasmus. It is not polite to lick them or wipe them on one’s coat. Often you offer others your glass, or all drink from a communal tankard. Erasmus admonishes: "Wipe your mouth beforehand." You may want to offer someone like some of the meat you are eating. "Refrain from that," says Erasmus, "it is not very decorous to offer something half-eaten to another." And he says further: "To dip bread you have bitten into the sauce is to behave like a peasant, and it shows little elegance to remove chewed food from the mouth and put it back on the *quaedra*. If you cannot swallow a piece of food, turn round discreetly and throw it somewhere."

Then he says again: "It is good if conversation interrupts the meal from time to time. Some people eat and drink without stopping, not because they are hungry or thirsty, but because they can control their movements in no other way. They have to scratch their heads, poke their teeth, gesticulate with their hands, or play with a knife, or they can’t help coughing, snorting, and spitting. All this really comes from a rustic embarrassment and looks like a form of madness."

But it is also necessary, and possible, for Erasmus to say: Do not expose without necessity "the parts to which Nature has attached modesty." Some prescribe, he says, that boys should "retain the wind by compressing the belly." But you can contract an illness that way. And in another place: "Reprimere sonitum, quern natura ferit, inceptum est, qui plus tribuunt civilitati, quam saluti" (Fools who value civility more than health express natural sounds.) Do not be afraid of vomiting if you must; "for it is not vomiting but holding the vomit in your throat that is foul."

5. With great care Erasmus marks out in his treatise the whole range of human conduct, the chief situations of social and convivial life. He speaks with the same matter-of-factness of the most elementary as of the subtler questions of human intercourse. In the first chapter he treats "the seemingly and unseemly condition of the whole body," in the second "bodily culture," in the third "manners at holy places," in the fourth banquets, in the fifth meetings, in the sixth amusements, and in the seventh the bedchamber. This is the range of questions in the discussion of which Erasmus gave new impetus to the concept of *civilitas*.

Not always is our consciousness able to recall this other stage of our own history without hesitation. The unconcerned frankness with which Erasmus and his time could discuss all areas of human conduct is lost to us. Much of what he says oversteps our threshold of delicacy.
regulated social ritual and by certain concealing formulas that preserve the
standard of shame. In other words, with the advance of civilization the lives of
human beings are increasingly split between an intimate and a public sphere,
between secret and public behavior. And this split is taken so much for granted,
becomes so compulsive a habit, that it is hardly perceived in consciousness.

In conjunction with this growing division of behavior into what is and what is
not publicly permitted, the personality structure is also transformed. The
prohibitions supported by social sanctions are reproduced in the individual as
self-controls. The pressure to restrain his impulses and the sociogenetic shame
surrounding them—these are turned so completely into habits that we cannot
resist them even when alone, in the intimate sphere. Pleasure promising drives
and pleasure denying taboos and prohibitions, socially generated feelings of
shame and repugnance, come to battle within him. This, as has been mentioned,
is clearly the state of affairs which Freud tries to express by concepts such as the
"superego" and the "unconscious" or, as it is not unfruitfully called in everyday
speech, the "subconscious." But however it is expressed, the social code of
conduct so imprints itself in one form or another on the human being that it
becomes a constituent element of his individual self. And this element, the
superego, like the personality structure of the individual as a whole, necessarily
changes constantly with the social code of behavior and the structure of society.
The pronounced division in the "ego" or consciousness characteristic of man in
our phase of civilization, which finds expression in such terms as "superego" and
"unconscious," corresponds to the specific split in behavior which civilized
society demands of its members. It matches the degree of regulation and restraint:
imposed on the expression of drives and impulses. Tendencies in this direction
may develop in any form of human society, even in those which we call
"primitive." But the strength attained in societies such as ours by this
differentiation and the form in which it appears are reflections of a particular
historical development, the results of a civilizing process.

This is what is meant when we refer here to the continuous correspondence
between the social structure and the structure of the personality, of the individual
self.

X

On Changes in
Aggressiveness

The affect structure of man is a whole. We may call particular instincts by
different names according to their different directions and functions, we may
speak of hunger and the need to spit, of the sexual drive and of aggressive
impulses, but in life these different instincts are no more separable than the heart
from the stomach or the blood in the brain from the blood in the genitalia. They
complement and in part supersede each other, transform themselves within
certain limits and compensate for each other; a disturbance here manifests itself
there. In short, they form a kind of circuit in the human being, a partial system
within the total system of the organism. Their structure is still opaque in many
respects, but their socially imprinted form is of decisive importance for the
functioning of a society as of the individuals within it.

The manner in which impulses or emotional manifestations are spoken of today
sometimes leads one to surmise that we have within us a whole bundle of different
drives. A "death instinct" or a "self-assertive drive" are referred to as if they were
different chemical substances. This is not to deny that observations of these
different instincts in the individual may be extremely fruitful and instructive.
But the categories by which these observations are classified must remain
powerless in the face of their living objects if they fail to express the unity and
totality of instinctual life, and the connection of each particular instinctual
tendency to this totality. Accordingly, aggressiveness, which will be the subject
of this chapter, is not a separable species of instinct. At most, one may speak of
the "aggressive impulse" only if one remains aware that it refers to a particular
instinctual function within the totality of an organism, and that changes in this
function indicate changes in the personality structure as a whole.

1. The standard of aggressiveness, its tone and intensity, is not at present
exactly uniform among the different nations of the West. But these differences,
which from close up often appear quite considerable, disappear if the
aggressiveness of the "civilized" nations is compared to that of societies at a
different stage of affect control. Compared to the battle fury of Abyssinian
warriors—admittedly powerless against the technical apparatus of the civilized
army—or to the frenzy of the different tribes at the time of the Great Migrations,
the aggressiveness of even the most warlike nations of the civilized world appears
subdued. Like all other instincts, it is bound, even in indirectly warlike actions, by
the advanced state of the division of functions, and by the resulting greater
dependence of individuals on each other and on the technical apparatus. It is
confined and tamed by innumerable rules and prohibitions that have become self-
constraints. It is as much transformed, "refined," "civilized," as all the other
forms of pleasure, and its immediate and uncontrolled violence appears only in
dreams or in isolated outbursts that we account for as pathological.

In this area of the affects, the theater of the hostile collisions between men, the
same historical transformations has taken place as in all others. No matter at what
point the Middle Ages stand in this transformation, it will again suffice here to
take the standard of their secular ruling class, the warriors, as a starting point, to
illustrate the overall pattern of this development. The release of the affects in
battle in the Middle Ages was no longer, perhaps, quite so uninhibited as in the
early period of the Great Migrations. But it was open and uninhabited enough compared to the standard of modern times. In the latter, cruelty and joy in the destruction and torment of others, like the proof of physical superiority, are placed under an increasingly strong social control anchored in the state organization. All these forms of pleasure, limited by threats of displeasure, gradually come to express themselves only indirectly, in a "refined" form. And only at times of social upheaval or where social control is looser (e.g., in colonial regions) do they break out more directly, uninhibitedly, less impeded by shame and repugnance.

2. Life in medieval society tended in the opposite direction. Rape, battle, hunting of men and animals—all these were vital necessities which, in accordance with the structure of society, were visible to all. And thus, for the mighty and strong, they formed part of the pleasures of life.

"I tell you," says a war hymn attributed to the minstrel Bertran de Born, "that neither eating, drinking, nor sleep has as much savour for me as to hear the cry 'Forward!' from both sides, and horses without riders shying and whinnying, and the cry 'Help! Help!', and to see the small and the great fall to the grass at the ditches and the dead pierced by the wood of the lances decked with banners."

Even the literary formulation gives an impression of the original savagery of feeling. In another place Bertran de Born sings: "The pleasant season is drawing nigh when our hosts shall stand, when King Richard shall come, merry and proud as he never was before. Now we shall see gold and silver spent; the newly built stonework will crack to the heart's desire, walls crumble, towers topple and collapse, our enemies taste prison and chains. I live the melee of blue and vermilion shields, the many-colored ensigns and the banners, the tents and rich pavilions spread out on the plain, the breaking lances, the pierced shields, the gleaming helmets that are split, the blows given and received."

War, one of the "chansons de gste" declares, is to descend as the stronger on the enemy, to hack down his vines, uproot his trees, lay waste his land, take his castles by storm, fill in his wells, and kill his people.

A particular pleasure is taken in mutilating prisoners: "By my troth," says the king in the same chanson, "I laugh at what you say, I care not a fig for your threats, I shall shame every knight I have taken, cut off his nose or his ears. If he is a serjeant or a merchant he will lose a foot or an arm."

Such things are not only said in song. These epics are an integral part of social life. And they express the feelings of the listeners for whom they are intended far more directly than most of our literature. They may exaggerate in detail. Even in the age of chivalry money already had, on occasions, some power to subdue and transform the affects. Usually only the poor and lowly, for whom no considerable ransom could be expected, were mutilated, and the knights who commanded ransoms were spared. The chronicles which directly document social life bear ample witness to these attitudes.

They were mostly written by clerics. The value judgments they contain are therefore often those of the weaker group threatened by the warrior class. Nevertheless, the picture they transmit to us is quite genuine. "He spends his life," we read of a knight, "in plundering, destroying churches, falling upon pilgrims, oppressing widows and orphans. He takes particular pleasure in mutilating the innocent. In a single monastery, that of the black monks of Sarlat, there are 150 men and women whose hands he has cut off or whose eyes he has put out. And his wife is just as cruel. She helps him with his executions. It even gives her pleasure to torture the poor women. She had their breasts hacked off or their nails torn off so that they were incapable of work."102

Such affective outbursts may still occur as exceptional phenomena, as a "pathological" degeneration, in later phases of social development. But here no punitive social power existed. The only threat, the only danger that could instill fear was that of being overpowered in battle by a stronger opponent. Leaving aside a small elite, rapine, pillage, and murder were standard practice in the warrior society of this time, as is noted by Luchaire, the historian of thirteenth-century French society. There is little evidence that things were different in other countries or in the centuries that followed. Outbursts of cruelty did not exclude one from social life. They were not outlawed. The pleasure in killing and torturing others was great, and it was a socially permitted pleasure. To a certain extent, the social structure even pushed its members in this direction, making it seem necessary and practically advantageous to behave in this way.

What, for example, ought to be done with prisoners? There was little money in this society. With regard to prisoners who could pay and who, moreover, were members of one's own class, one exercised some degree of restraint. But the others? To keep them meant to feed them. To return them meant to enhance the wealth and fighting power of the enemy. For subjects (i.e., working, serving, and fighting hands) were a part of the wealth of the ruling class of that time. So prisoners were killed or sent back so mutilated that they were unfit for war service and work. The same applied to destroying fields, filling in wells, and cutting down trees. In a predominantly agrarian society, in which immobile possessions represented the major part of property, this too served to weaken the enemy. The stronger affectivity of behavior was to a certain degree socially necessary. People behaved in a socially useful way and took pleasure in doing so. And it is entirely in keeping with the lesser degree of social control and constraint of instinctual life that this joy in destruction could sometimes give way, through a sudden identification with the victim, and doubtless also as an expression of the fear and guilt produced by the permanent precariousness of this life; to extremes of pity. The victor of today was defeated tomorrow by some accident, captured, and imperiled. In the midst of this perpetual rising and falling, this alternation of the human hunts of wartime with the animal hunts or tournaments that were the diversions of "peacetime," little could be predicted. The future was relatively
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uncertain even for those who had fled the "world"; only God and the loyalty of a few people who held together had any permanence. Fear reigned everywhere; one had to be on one's guard all the time. And just as people's fate could change abruptly, so their joy could turn into fear and this fear, in its turn, could give way, equally abruptly, to submission to some new pleasure.

The majority of the secular ruling class of the Middle Ages led the life of leaders of armed bands. This formed the taste and habits of individuals. Reports left to us by that society yield, by and large, a picture similar to those of feudal societies in our own times; and they show a comparable standard of behavior. Only a small elite, of which more will be said later, stood out to some extent from this norm.

The warrior of the Middle Ages not only loved battle, he lived in it. He spent his youth preparing for battle. When he came of age he was knighted, and waged war as long as his strength permitted, into old age. His life had no other function. His dwelling place was a watchtower, a fortress, at once a weapon of attack and defense. If by accident, by exception, he lived in peace, he needed at least the illusion of war. He fought in tournaments, and these tournaments often differed little from real battles.

"For the society of that time war was the normal state," says Luchaire of the thirteenth century. And Huizinga says of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries: "The chronic form which war was wont to take, the continuous disruption of town and country by every kind of dangerous rabble, the permanent threat of harsh and unreliable law enforcement . . . nourished a feeling of universal uncertainty."103

In the fifteenth century, as in the ninth or thirteenth, the knight still gives expression to his joy in war, even if it is no longer so open and intact as earlier.

"War is a joyous thing."105 It is Jean de Bueil who says this. He has fallen into disfavor with the king. And now he dictates to his servant his life story. This is in the year 1465. It is no longer the completely free, independent knight who speaks, the little king in his domain. It is someone who is himself in service: "War is a joyous thing. We love each other so much in war. If we see that our cause is just and our kinsmen fight boldly, tears come to our eyes. A sweet joy rises in our hearts, in the feeling of our honest loyalty to each other; and seeing our friend so bravely exposing his body to danger in order to keep and fulfill the commandment of our Creator, we resolve to go forward and die or live with him and never leave him on account of love. This brings such delight that anyone who has not felt it cannot say how wonderful it is. Do you think that someone who feels this is afraid of death? Not in the least! He is so strengthened, so delighted, that he does not know where he is. Truly he fears nothing in the world!"

This is the joy of battle, certainly, but it is no longer the direct pleasure in the human hunt, in the flashing of swords, in the neighing of steeds, in the fear and death of the enemy—how fine it is to hear them cry "Help, help!" or see them lying with their bodies torn open!106 Now the pleasure lies in the closeness to one's friends, the enthusiasm for a just cause, and more than earlier we find the joy of battle serving as an intoxicant to overcome fear.

Very simple and powerful feelings speak here. One kills, gives oneself up wholly to the fight, sees one's friend fight. One fights at his side. One forgets where one is. One forgets death itself. It is splendid. What more?

3. There is abundant evidence that the attitude toward life and death in the secular upper class of the Middle Ages by no means always accords with the attitude prevalent in the books of the ecclesiastical upper class, which we usually consider "typical" of the Middle Ages. For the clerical upper class, or at least for its spokesmen, the conduct of life is determined by the thought of death and of what comes after, the next world.

In the secular upper class this is by no means so exclusively the case. However frequent moods and phases of this kind may be in the life of every knight, there is recurrent evidence of a quite different attitude. Again and again we hear an admonition that does not quite accord with the standard picture of the Middle Ages today: do not let your fate be governed by the thought of death. Love the joys of this life.

"Nul courtrois ne doit blâmer joie, mais toujours joie aimer." (No courtier man should revile joy, he should love joy.)107 This is a command of cortoisie from a romance of the early thirteenth century. Or from a rather later period. "A young man should be gay and lead a joyous life. It does not befit a young man to be mournful and pensive."108 In these statements the chivalrous people, who certainly did not need to be "mournful," clearly contrast themselves to the clerics, who no doubt were frequently "mournful and pensive."

This far from life-denying attitude is expressed particularly earnestly and explicitly with regard to death in some verses in the Distiches Catonis, which were passed from generation to generation throughout the Middle Ages. That life is uncertain is one of the fundamental themes which recur in these verses:

To us all a hard uncertain life is given.

But this does not lead to the conclusion that one should think of death and what comes afterward, but rather:

If you fear death you will live in misery.

Or in another place, expressed with particular clarity and beauty:110

We well know that death shall come
and our future is unknown:
stealthy as a thief he comes,
and body and soul he does part.
So be of trust and confidence:
be not too much afraid of death,
for if you fear him overmuch
joy you nevermore shall touch.

Nothing of the next life. He who allows his life to be determined by thoughts of death no longer has joy in life. Certainly, the knights felt themselves strongly to be Christians, and their lives were permeated by the traditional ideas and rituals of the Christian faith; but Christianity was linked in their minds, in accordance with their different social and psychological situation, with an entirely different scale of values from that existing in the minds of the clerics who wrote and read books. Their faith had a markedly different tenor and tone. It did not prevent them from savoring to the full the joys of the world; it did not hinder them from killing and plundering. This was part of their social function, an attribute of their class, a source of pride. Not to fear death was a vital necessity for the knight. He had to fight. The structure and tensions of this society made this an inescapable condition for the individual.

4. But in medieval society this permanent readiness to fight, weapon in hand, was a vital necessity not only for the warriors, the knightly upper class. The life of the burgheers in the towns was characterized by greater and lesser feuds to a far higher degree than in later times; here, too, belligerence, hatred, and joy in tormenting others were more uninhibited than in the subsequent phase.

With the slow rise of a Third Estate, the tensions in medieval society were increased. And it was not only the weapon of money that carried the burgher upward. Robbery, fighting, pillage, family feuds—all this played a hardly less important role in the life of the town population than in that of the warrior class itself.

There is—to take one example—the fate of Mathieu d’Escoucy. He is a Picard, and one of the numerous men of the fifteenth century who wrote a “Chronicle.” From this “Chronicle” we would suppose him to be a modest man of letters who devoted his time to meticulous historical work. But if we try to find out something of his life from the documents, a totally different picture emerges. Mathieu d’Escourcy begins his career as magistrate as a councillor, juror, and mayor (prévôt) of the town of Péronne between 1440 and 1450. From the beginning we find him in a kind of feud with the family of the procurator of the town, Jean Froment, a feud that is fought out in lawsuits. First it is the procurator who accuses d’Escourcy of forgery and murder, or of “œxels et attempaz.” The mayor for his part threatens the widow of his enemy with investigation for magical practices. The woman obtains a mandate compelling d’Escourcy to place the investigation in the hands of the judiciary. The affair comes before the parliament in Paris, and d’Escourcy goes to prison for the first time. We find him under arrest six times subsequently, partly as defendant and once as a prisoner of war. Each time there is a serious criminal case, and more than once he sits in heavy chains. The contest of reciprocal accusations between the Froment and d’Escourcy families is interrupted by a violent clash in which Froment’s son wounds d’Escourcy. Both engage cutthroat to take each other’s lives. When this lengthy feud passes from our view, it is replaced by new attacks. This time the mayor is wounded by a monk. New accusations, then in 1461 d’Escourcy’s removal to Neale, apparently under suspicion of criminal acts. Yet this does not prevent him from having a successful career. He becomes a bailiff, mayor of Ribemont, procurator to the king at Saint-Quentin, and is raised to the nobility. After new woundings, incarcerations, and expiation we find him in war service. He is made a prisoner of war; from a later campaign he returns home crippled. Then he marries, but this does not mean the beginning of a quiet life. We find him transported as a prisoner to Paris “like a criminal and murderer,” accused of forging seals, again in feud with a magistrate in Compiegne, brought to an admission of his guilt by torture and denied promotion, condemned, rehabilitated, condemned once again, until the trace of his existence vanishes from the documents.

This is one of innumerable examples. The well-known miniatures from the “book of hours” of the Duc de Berry are another. “People long believed,” says its editor, “and some are still convinced today, that the miniatures of the fifteenth century are the work of earnest monks or pious nuns working in the peace of their monasteries. That is possible in certain cases. But, generally speaking, the situation was quite different. It was worldly people, master craftsmen, who executed these beautiful works, and the life of these secular artists was far from being edifying.” We hear repeatedly of actions which by the present standards of society would be branded as criminal and made socially “impossible.” For example, the painters accuse each other of theft; then one of them, with his kinsmen, stabs the other to death in the street. And the Duc de Berry, who needs the murderer, must request an amnesty, a lettre de rémission for him. Yet another abducts an eight-year-old girl in order to marry her, naturally against the will of her parents. These lettres de rémission show us such bloody feuds taking place everywhere, often lasting for many years, and sometimes leading to regular battles in public places. And this applies to knights as much to merchants or craftsmen. As in all other countries with related social forms—for example, Ethiopia or Afghanistan today—the noble has bands of followers who are ready for anything. . . During the day he is constantly accompanied by servants and arms bearers in pursuit of his ‘feuds.’ . . . The roturiers, the citizens, cannot afford this luxury, but they have their ‘relatives and friends’ who come to their help, often in great numbers, equipped with every kind of awesome weapon that the local custom, the civic ordinances, prohibit in vain. And these burgheers, too, when they have to avenge themselves, are de guerre, in a state of feud.”

The civic authorities sought in vain to pacify these family feuds. The
magistrates call people before them, order a cessation of strife, issue commands and decrees. For a time, all is well; then a new feud breaks out, an old one is rekindled. Two associés fall out over business; they quarrel, the conflict grows violent; one day they meet in a public place and one of them strikes the other dead. An innkeeper accuses another of stealing his clients; they become mortal enemies. Someone says a few malicious words about another; a family war develops.

Not only among the nobility were there family vengeance, private feuds, vendettas. The fifteenth-century towns are no less rife with wars between families and cliques. The little people, too—the hatters, the tailors, the shepherds—were all quick to draw their knives. "It is well known how violent manners were in the fifteenth century, with what brutality passions were assuaged, despite the fear of hell, despite the restraints of class distinctions and the chivalrous sentiment of honor, despite the bonneuse and gaiety of social relations."\(^{116}\)

Not that people were always going around with fierce looks, drawn brows, and martial countenances as the clearly visible symbols of their warlike prowess. On the contrary, a moment ago they were joking, now they mock each other, one word leads to another, and suddenly from the midst of laughter they find themselves in the fiercest feud. Much of what appears contradictory to us—the intensity of their piety, the violence of their fear of hell, their guilt feelings, their penitence, the immense outbursts of joy and gaiety, the sudden flaring and the uncontrollable force of their hatred and belligerence—all these, like the rapid changes of mood, are in reality symptoms of the same social and personality structure. The instincts, the emotions were vented more freely, more directly, more openly than later. It is only to us, in whom everything is more subdued, moderated, and calculated, and in whom social taboos are built much more deeply into the fabric of instincual life as self-restraints, that this unveiled intensity of piety, belligerence, or cruelty appears as contradictory. Religion, the belief in the punishing or rewarding omnipotence of God, never has in itself a "civilizing" or effect-subduing effect. On the contrary, religion is always exactly as "civilized" as the society or class which upholds it. And because emotions are here expressed in a manner that in our own world is generally observed only in children, we call these expressions and forms of behavior "childish."

Wherever one opens the documents of this time, one finds the same: a life where the structure of affects was different from our own, an existence without security, with only minimal thought for the future. Whoever did not love or hate to the utmost in this society, whoever could not stand his ground in the play of passions, could go into a monastery; in worldly life he was just as lost as was, conversely, in later society, and particularly at court, the man who could not curb his passions, could not conceal and "civilize" his affects.

5. In both cases it is the structure of society that demands and generates a specific standard of emotional control. "We," says Luchaire, "with our peaceful manners and habits, with the care and protection that the modern state lavishes on the property and person of each individual," can scarcely form an idea of this other society.

At that time the country had disintegrated into provinces, and the inhabitants of each province formed a kind of little nation that abhorred all the others. The provinces were in turn divided into a multitude of feudal estates whose owners fought each other incessantly. Not only the great lords, the barons, but also the smaller lords of the manor lived in desolate isolation and were uninterruptedly occupied in waging war against their "sovereigns," their equals, or their subjects. In addition, there was constant rivalry between town and town, village and village, valley and valley, and constant wars between neighbors that seemed to arise from the very multiplicity of these territorial units.\(^{117}\)

This description helps to see more precisely something which so far has been stated mainly in general terms, namely, the connection between social structure and personality structure. In this society there is no central power strong enough to compel people to restraint. But if in this or that region the power of a central authority grows, if over a larger or smaller area the people are forced to live in peace with each other, the molding of affects and the standards of the economy of instincts are very gradually changed as well. As will be discussed in more detail later, the reserve and "mutual consideration" of people increase, first in normal everyday social life. And the discharge of affects in physical attack is limited to certain temporal and spatial enclaves. Once the monopoly of physical power has passed to central authorities, not every strong man can afford the pleasure of physical attack. This is now limited to those few legitimized by the central authority (e.g., the police against the criminal), and to larger numbers only in exceptional times of war or revolution, in the socially legitimized struggle against internal or external enemies.

But even these temporal or spatial enclaves within civilized society in which belligerence is allowed freer play—above all, wars between nations—have become more impersonal, and lead less and less to an affective discharge having the immediacy and intensity of the medieval phase. The necessary restrain and transformation of aggression cultivated in the everyday life of civilized society cannot be simply reversed, even in these enclaves. All the same, this could happen more quickly than we might suppose, had not the direct physical combat between a man and his hated adversary given way to a mechanized struggle demanding a strict control of the affects. Even in war in the civilized world, the individual can no longer give free rein to his pleasure, spurred on by the sight of the enemy, but must fight, no matter how he may feel, according to the commands of invisible or only indirectly visible leaders, against a frequently invisible or only indirectly visible enemy. And immense social upheaval and
urgency, heightened by carefully concerted propaganda, are needed to reawaken and legitimize in large masses of people the socially outlawed instincts, the joy in killing and destruction that have been repressed from everyday civilized life.

6. Admittedly, these affects do have, in a "refined," rationalized form, their legitimate and exactly defined place in the everyday life of civilized society. And this is very characteristic of the kind of transformation through which the civilization of the affects takes place. For example, belligerence and aggression find socially permitted expression in sporting contests. And they are expressed especially in "spectating" (e.g., at boxing matches), in the imaginary identification with a small number of combatants to whom moderate and precisely regulated scope is granted for the release of such affects. And this living-out of affects in spectating or even in merely listening (e.g., to a radio commentary) is a particularly characteristic feature of civilized society. It partly determines the development of books and the theater, and decisively influences the role of the cinema in our world. This transformation of what manifested itself originally as an active, often aggressive expression of pleasure, into the passive, more ordered pleasure of spectating (i.e., a mere pleasure of the eye) is already initiated in education, in conditioning precepts for young people.

In the 1774 edition of La Salle's *Civilié*, for example, we read (p. 23): "Children like to touch clothes and other things that please them with their hands. This urge must be corrected, and they must be taught to touch all they see only with their eyes."

It is highly characteristic of civilized man that he is denied by socially instilled self-control from spontaneously touching what he desires, loves, or hates. The whole molding of his gestures—no matter how its pattern may differ among Western nations with regard to particulars—is decisively influenced by this necessity. It has been shown elsewhere how the use of the sense of smell, the tendency to sniff at food or other things, comes to be restricted as something animal-like. Here we see one of the interconnections through which a different sense organ, the eye, takes on a very specific significance in civilized society. In a similar way to the ear, and perhaps even more so, it becomes a mediator of pleasure, precisely because the direct satisfaction of the desire for pleasure has been hemmed in by a multitude of barriers and prohibitions.

But even within this transfer of emotions from direct action to spectating, there is a distinct curve of moderation and "humanization" in the transformation of affects. The boxing match, to mention only one example, represents a strongly tempered form of the impulses of aggressiveness and cruelty, compared with the visual pleasures of earlier stages.

An example from the sixteenth century may serve as an illustration. It has been chosen from a multitude of others because it shows an institution in which the visual satisfaction of the urge to cruelty, the joy in watching pain inflicted, emerges particularly purely, without any rational justification and disguise as punishment or means of discipline.

In Paris during the sixteenth century it was one of the festive pleasures of Midsummer Day to burn alive one or two dozen cats. This ceremony was very famous. The populace assembled. Solemn music was played. Under a kind of scaffold an enormous pyre was erected. Then a sack or basket containing the cats was hung from the scaffold. The sack or basket began to smolder. The cats fell into the fire and were burned to death, while the crowd reviled in their caterwauling. Usually the king and queen were present. Sometimes the king or the dauphin was given the honor of lighting the pyre. And we hear that once, at the special request of King Charles IX, a fox was caught and burned as well. 118

Certainly, this is not really a worse spectacle than the burning of heretics, or the torturings and public executions of every kind. It only appears worse because the joy in torturing living creatures shows itself so nakedly and purposelessly, without any excuse before reason. The revulsion aroused in us by the mere report of the institution, a reaction which must be taken as "normal" for the present-day standard of affect control, demonstrates once again the long term change of personality structure. At the same time, it enables us to see one aspect of this change particularly clearly: much of what earlier aroused pleasure arouses displeasure today. Now, as then, it is not merely individual feelings that are involved. The cat-burning on Midsummer Day was a social institution, like boxing or horse-racing in present-day society. And in both cases the amusements created by society for itself, are embodiments of a social standard of affects within the framework of which all individual patterns of affect regulation, however varied they may be, are contained; anyone who steps outside the bounds of this social standard is considered "abnormal." Thus, someone who wished to gratify his pleasure in the manner of the sixteenth century by burning cats would be seen today as "abnormal," simply because normal conditioning in our stage of civilization restrains the expression of pleasure in such actions through anxiety instilled in the form of self-control. Here, obviously, the same psychological mechanism is at work on the basis of which the long term change of personality structure has taken place: socially undesirable expressions of instinct and pleasure are threatened and punished with measures that generate and reinforce displeasure and anxiety. In the constant recurrence of displeasure aroused by threats, and in the habituation to this rhythm, the dominant displeasure is compulsorily associated even with behavior which at root may be pleasurable. In this manner, socially aroused displeasure and anxiety—nowadays represented, though by no means always and by no means solely, by the parents—fight with hidden desires. What has been shown here from different angles as an advance in the frontiers of shame, in the threshold of repugnance, in the standards of affect, has probably been set in motion by mechanisms such as these.

It remains to be considered in more detail what change in the social structure
XI
Scenes from the Life of a Knight

The question why men's behavior and emotions change is really the same as the question why their forms of life change. In medieval society certain forms of life had been developed, and the individual was bound to live within them, as knight, craftsman, or bondsman. In more recent society different opportunities, different forms of life were prescribed, to which the individual had to adapt. If he was of the nobility he could lead the life of a courtier. But he could no longer, even if he so desired (and many did), lead the less constrained life of a knight. From a particular time on, this function, this way of life was no longer present in the structure of society. Other functions, such as those of the guild craftsmen and the priest, which played an extraordinary part in the medieval phase, largely lost their significance in the total structure of social relations. Why do these functions and forms of life, to which the individual must adapt himself as to more or less fixed molds, change in the course of history? As has been mentioned, this is really the same question as why feelings and emotions, the structure of drives and impulses, and everything connected with them change.

A good deal has been said here on the emotional standards of the medieval upper class. To complement this, and at the same time to provide a link with the question of the causes of the change these standards underwent, we shall now add a short impression of the way in which knights lived, and thus of "social space" which society opened to individuals of noble birth, and within which it also confined them. The picture of this "social space," the image of the knight in general, became clouded in obscurity quite soon after what is called their "decline." Whether the medieval warrior was seen as the "noble knight" (only the grand, beautiful, adventuous, and moving aspects of his life being remembered) or as the "feudal lord," the oppressor of peasants (only the savage, cruel, barbaric aspects of his life being emphasized), the simple picture of the actual life of this class was usually distorted by values and nostalgia from the period of the observer. A few drawings, or at least descriptions of them, may help to restore this picture. Apart from a few writings, the works of sculptors and painters of the period convey particularly strongly the special quality of its atmosphere or, as we may call it, its emotional character, and the way it differs from our own, though only a few works reflect the life of a knight in its real context. One of the few picture books of this kind, admittedly from a relatively late period, between 1475 and 1480, is the sequence of drawings that became known under the not very appropriate title Medieval House-Book. The name of the artist who drew them is unknown, but he must have been very familiar with the knightly life of his time; moreover, unlike many of his fellow craftsmen, he must have seen the world with the eyes of a knight and largely identified with their social values. A not insignificant indication of this is his depiction on one sheet of a man of his own craft as the only craftsmen in courtly dress, as is the girl behind him, who places her arm on his shoulder and for whom he clearly expresses his sentiments. Perhaps it is a self-portrait. 119

These drawings are from the late period of chivalry, the time of Charles the Bold and Maximilian, the last knight. We may conclude from the coats of arms that these two, or knights close to them, are themselves represented in one or another of the pictures. "There is no doubt," it has been said, "that we have . . . Charles the Bold himself or a Burgundian knight from his entourage before us." 120 Perhaps a number of the pictures of tournaments directly depict the jousting following the Feud of Neuss (1475), at the betrachal of Maximilian to Charles the Bold's daughter, Marie of Burgundy. At any rate, those we see before us are already people of the transitional age in which the knightly aristocracy is being gradually replaced by a courtly one. And a good deal that is reminiscent of the courtier is also present in these pictures. Nevertheless, they give, on the whole, a very good idea of the social space of a knight, of how he fills his days, of what he saw around him and how he saw it.

What do we see? Nearly always open country, hardly anything recalling the town. Small villages, fields, trees, meadows, hills, short stretches of river and, frequently, the castle. But there is nothing in these pictures of the nostalgic mood, the "sentimental" attitude to "nature" that slowly becomes perceptible not very long afterward, as the leading nobles have to forgo more and more frequently the relatively unbridled life at their ancestral seats, and are bound increasingly tightly to the semurban court and to dependence on kings or princes. This is one of the most important differences in emotional tone these pictures convey. In later periods the artist's consciousness sifts the material available to him in a very strict and specific way which directly expresses his taste or, more precisely, his affective structure. "Nature," the open country, shown first of all as merely a background to human figures, takes on a nostalgic glow, as the confinement of the upper class to the towns and courts increases and the rift between town and country life grows more perceptible. Or nature takes on, like the human figures it surrounds in the picture, a sublime, representative character. At any rate, there is a change in the selection by feeling, in what appeals to feeling in the representation of nature, and in what is felt as unpleasant or painful. And the same is true of the people depicted. For the public in the absolute court, much that really exists in the country, in "nature," is no longer portrayed. The hill is shown, but not the gallowss on it, nor the corpse hanging