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Also by Norbert Elias

POWER AND CIVILITY  
THE COURT SOCIETY

# THE HISTORY OF MANNERS

THE CIVILIZING PROCESS:  
VOLUME I

BY  
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## 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.

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 puerilium* (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.<sup>2</sup> 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.

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.<sup>3</sup>

3. Here, as so often in the history of words, and as was to happen later in the evolution of the concept *civilité* into *civilisation*, an individual was the instigator. By his treatise, Erasmus gave new sharpness and impetus to the long-established and commonplace word *civilitas*. Wittingly or not, he obviously expressed in it something that met a social need of the time. The concept *civilitas* was henceforth fixed in the consciousness of people with the special sense it received from his treatise. And corresponding words were developed in the various popular languages: the French *civilité*, the English "civility," the Italian *civiltà*, and the German *Zivilität*, which, admittedly, was never so widely adopted as the corresponding words in the other great cultures.

The more or less sudden emergence of words within languages nearly always points to changes in the lives of people themselves, particularly when the new concepts are destined to become as central and long-lived as these.

Erasmus himself may not have attributed any particular importance to his short treatise *De civilitate morum puerilium* within his total *oeuvre*. He says in the introduction that the art of forming young people involves various disciplines, but that the *civilitas morum* is

only one of them, and he does not deny that it is *crassissima 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 equaled 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.<sup>4</sup>

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 suspiciosorum et insidias molentium. . . ." 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. Not by chance do the ancients say: the seat of the soul is in the eyes. "Animi sedem esse in oculis."

Bodily carriage, gestures, dress, facial expressions—this "outward" behavior with which the treatise concerns itself is the expres-

sion 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 something 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 cultellus escarius rite purgatus, ad laevam 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 *quadra* used by Erasmus can clearly mean either a metal plate or a slice of bread.

"Quidam ubi vix bene considerint mox manus in epulas conijciunt." 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 omnes patinae 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 *quadra*. If someone passes you a piece of cake or pastry with a spoon, either take it with your *quadra* or take the spoon offered to you, put the food on the *quadra*, 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 *quadrae*, 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 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.<sup>5</sup> 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 praelingere vel ad tunicam extergere . . . incivile 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 you 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 *quadra*. 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, quem natura fert, ineptorum est, qui plus tribuunt civilitati, quam saluti" (Fools who value civility more than health repress 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 subtlest questions of human intercourse. In the first chapter he treats "the seemly 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 amusement, 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.

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 *civilité*, 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 discontents" 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.

## II

### On Medieval Manners

1. In Erasmus of Rotterdam's *De civilitate morum puerilium* a particular kind of social behavior is discernible. Even here, the simple antithesis of "civilized" and "uncivilized" hardly applies.

What came before Erasmus? Was he the first to concern himself with such matters?

By no means. Similar questions occupied the men of the Middle Ages, of Greco-Roman antiquity, and doubtless also of the related, preceding "civilizations."

This process that has no beginning cannot here be traced back indefinitely. Wherever we start, there is movement, something that went before. Limits must necessarily be set to a retrospective inquiry, preferably corresponding to the phases of the process itself. Here the medieval standard must suffice as a starting point, without itself being closely examined, so that the movement, the developmental curve joining it to the modern age may be pursued.

The Middle Ages have left us an abundance of information on what was considered socially acceptable behavior. Here, too, precepts on conduct while eating had a special importance. Eating and drinking then occupied a far more central position in social life than today, when they provide—frequently, not always—rather the framework and introduction for conversation and conviviality.

Learned ecclesiastics sometimes set down, in Latin, precepts for behavior that testify to the standard of their society. Hugh of St. Victor (d. 1141), in his *De institutione novitiarum*, is concerned with these questions among others. The baptized Spanish Jew Petrus Alphonsi deals with them in his *Disciplina clericalis* of the early twelfth century; Johannes von Garland devotes to manners, and particularly to table manners, a number of the 662 Latin verses bearing the title *Morale scolarium* of 1241.

Besides these precepts on behavior from the Latin-speaking clerical society, there are, from about the thirteenth century on, corresponding documents in the various lay languages—above all, at first, from the courts of the warrior nobility.

The earliest records of the manners prevalent in the secular upper class are doubtless those from Provence and neighboring, culturally

related Italy. The earliest German work on *courtoisie* is also by an Italian, Thomasin von Zirklaria, and is called *The Italian Guest* (*Der wälsche Gast*, put into modern German by Rückert). Another such writing by Thomasin, in Italian, transmits to us in its German title an early form of the concept of "courtesy" (*Höflichkeit*). He refers to this book, which has been lost, as a "buoch von der hüf-scheit."

Originating from the same knightly-courtly circles are the fifty *Courtesies* by Bonvicino da Riva and the *Hofzucht* (Courtly manners) attributed to Tannhäuser. Such precepts are also occasionally found in the great epic poems of chivalrous society, e.g., the *Roman de la rose* of the fourteenth century. John Russell's *Book of Nurture*, written in English verse probably in the fifteenth century, already gives a complete compendium of behavior for the young nobleman in the service of a great lord, as does more briefly *The Babees Book*.

In addition there is, primarily in fourteenth- or fifteenth-century versions but probably, in part, older in substance, a whole series of poems designed as mnemonics to inculcate table manners, *Tischzuchten* of varying length and in the most diverse languages. Learning by heart as a means of educating or conditioning played a far greater part in medieval society, where books were comparatively rare and expensive, than it does today, and these rhymed precepts were one of the means used to try to impress on people's memories what they should and should not do in society, above all at table.

2. These *Tischzuchten*, or table disciplines, like medieval writings on manners of known authorship, are not individual products in the modern sense, records of the personal ideas of particular people within an extensively individualized society. What has come down to us in writing are fragments of a great oral tradition, reflections of what actually was customary in that society; these fragments are significant precisely because they transmit not the great or the extraordinary but the typical aspects of society. Even poems handed down under a specific name, like Tannhäuser's *Hofzucht* or John Russell's *Book of Nurture*, are nothing other than individual versions of one of the many strands of tradition corresponding to the structure of this society. Those who wrote them down were not the legislators or creators of these precepts but collectors, arrangers of the commands and taboos customary in society; for this reason, whether or not there is a literary connection, similar precepts recur in almost all these writings. They

are reflections of the same customs, testimonies to a particular handbook of behavior and emotions in the life of society itself.

It is perhaps possible on closer examination to discover certain differences of customs between individual national traditions, and variations in the social standards. Perhaps the material may also reveal certain changes within the same tradition. It appears, for example, that the tenor and perhaps also the customs of society underwent certain changes in the fourteenth or fifteenth century with the rise of guild and burgher elements, much as in modern times behavior-models originating in the court aristocracy here adopted in bourgeois circles.

A closer study of these modifications within medieval behavior remains to be carried out. It must suffice here to note them, bearing in mind that this medieval standard is not without inner movement and certainly is not a beginning or "bottom rung" of the process of civilization, nor does it represent, as has sometimes been asserted, the stage of "barbarism" or "primitiveness."

It was a different standard from our own—whether better or worse is not here at issue. And if, in our *recherche du temps perdu*, we have been led back step by step from the eighteenth to the sixteenth and from the sixteenth to the thirteenth and twelfth centuries, this does not imply that we are, as already stated, in anticipation of finding the "beginning" of the process of civilization. It is a sufficient task to present purposes, to take the short journey from the medieval to the early modern stage in an attempt to understand what actually happened to human beings in this transition.

3. The standard of "good behavior" in the Middle Ages is, like all later standards, represented by a quite definite concept. Through it the secular upper class of the Middle Ages, or at least some of its leading groups, gave expression to their self-image, to what, in their own estimation, made them exceptional. The concept epitomizing aristocratic self-consciousness and socially acceptable behavior appeared in French as *courtoisie*, in English "courtesy," in Italian *cortezia*, along with other related terms, often in divergent forms. In German it was, likewise in different versions, *hövescheit* or *hübescheit* and also *zuht*. All these concepts refer quite directly (and far more overtly than later ones with the same function) to a particular place in society. They say: That is how people behave at court. By these terms certain leading groups in the secular upper stratum, which does not mean the

knightly class as a whole, but primarily the courtly circles around the great feudal lords, designated what distinguished them in their own eyes, namely the specific code of behavior that has first formed at the great feudal courts, then spread to rather broader strata; this process of differentiation may, however, be disregarded here. Measured against later periods, the great uniformity in the good and bad manners referred to—what is called here a particular "standard"—is especially impressive.

What is this standard like? What emerges as typical behavior, as the pervasive character of its precepts?

Something, in the first place, that in comparison to later times might be called its simplicity, its naïveté. There are, as in all societies where the emotions are expressed more violently and directly, fewer psychological nuances and complexities in the general stock of ideas. There are friend and foe, desire and aversion, good and bad people.

You should follow honorable men and vent your wrath on the wicked.

We read this in a German translation of the *Disticha Catonis*,<sup>8</sup> the code of behavior encountered throughout the Middle Ages under the name of Cato. Or in another place:

When your companions anger you, my son, see that you are not so hot-tempered that you regret it afterward.<sup>9</sup>

In eating, too, everything is simpler, impulses and inclinations are less restrained:

A man of refinement should not slurp with his spoon when in company; this is the way people at court behave who often indulge in unrefined conduct.

This is from Tannhäuser's *Hofzucht*.<sup>10</sup> *Hübsche Leute* (fine people) are the nobles, the courtly people. The precepts of the *Hofzucht* are meant expressly for the upper class, the knights who lived at court. Noble, courteous behavior is constantly contrasted to "coarse manners," the conduct of peasants.

Some people bite a slice and then dunk it in the dish in a coarse way; refined people reject such bad manners.<sup>11</sup>



If you have taken a bite from the bread, do not dip it in the common dish again. Peasants may do that, not "fine people."

A number of people gnaw a bone and then put it back in the dish—this is a serious offense.<sup>12</sup>

Do not throw gnawed bones back into the communal dish. From other accounts we know that it was customary to drop them on the floor. Another precept reads:

A man who clears his throat when he eats and one who blows his nose in the tablecloth are both ill-bred, I assure you.<sup>13</sup>

Here is another:

If a man wipes his nose on his hand at table because he knows no better, then he is a fool, believe me.<sup>14</sup>

To use the hand to wipe one's nose was a matter of course. Handkerchiefs did not yet exist. But at table a certain care should be exercised; and one should on no account blow one's nose into the tablecloth. Avoid lip-smacking and snorting, eaters are further instructed:

If a man snorts like a seal when he eats, as some people do, and smacks his chops like a Bavarian yokel, he has given up all good breeding.<sup>15</sup>

If you have to scratch yourself, do not do so with your bare hand but use your coat:

Do not scrape your throat with your bare hand while eating; but if you have to, do it politely with your coat.<sup>16</sup>

Everyone used his hands to take food from the common dish. For this reason one was not to touch one's ears, nose, or eyes:

It is not decent to poke your fingers into your ears or eyes, as some people do, or to poke your nose while eating. These three habits are bad.<sup>17</sup>

Hands must be washed before meals:

I hear that some eat unwashed (if it is true, it is a bad sign). May their fingers be palsied!<sup>18</sup>

And in *Ein spruch der ze tische kêrt* (A word to those at table)<sup>19</sup> another *Tischzucht* of which Tannhäuser's *Hofzucht* has many echoes, it is demanded that one eat with only one hand, and if one is eating from the same plate or slice of bread as another, as often happened, with the outside hand:

You should always eat with the outside hand; if your companion sits on your right, eat with your left hand. Refrain from eating with both hands.<sup>20</sup>

If you have no towel, we read in the same work, do not wipe your hands on your coat but let the air dry them.<sup>21</sup> Or:

Take care that, whatever your need, you do not flush with embarrassment.<sup>22</sup>

Nor is it good manners to loosen one's belt at table.<sup>23</sup>

All this is said to adults, not only to children. To our minds these are very elementary precepts to be given to upper-class people, more elementary in many respects than what, at the present stage of behavior, is generally accepted as the norm in rural-peasant strata. And the same standard emerges with certain variations from the *courtois* writings of other linguistic areas.

4. In the case of one of these different strands of tradition, which leads from certain Latin forms primarily to French, but perhaps also to Italian and to a Provençal code of table manners, a compilation has been made of the rules recurring in most or all of the variants.<sup>24</sup> They are by and large the same as in the German *Tischzuchten*. First there is the instruction to say grace, which is also found in Tannhäuser. Again and again we find the injunctions to take one's allotted place and not to touch nose and ears at table. Do not put your elbow on the table, they often say. Show a cheerful countenance. Do not talk too much. There are very frequent reminders not to scratch oneself or fall greedily on the food. Nor should one put a piece that one has had in one's mouth back into the communal dish; this, too, is often repeated. Not less frequent is the instruction to wash one's hands before eating, or not to dip food into the saltcellar. Then it is repeated over and over again: do not clean your teeth with your knife. Do not spit on or over the table.

Do not ask for more from a dish that has already been taken away. Do not let yourself go at table is a frequent command. Wipe your lips before you drink. Say nothing disparaging about the meal nor anything that might irritate others. If you have dipped bread into the wine, drink it up or pour the rest away. Do not clean your teeth with the tablecloth. Do not offer others the remainder of your soup or the bread you have already bitten into. Do not blow your nose too noisily. Do not fall asleep at table. And so on.

Indications of the same code of good and bad manners are also found in other collections of related mnemonic verses on etiquette, in traditions not directly related to the French one just mentioned. All bear witness to a certain standard of relationships between people, to the structure of medieval society and of the medieval psyche. The similarities between these collections are sociogenetic and psychogenetic; there may but need not be a literary relationship between all these French, English, Italian, German, and Latin precepts. The differences between them are less significant than the common features, which correspond to the unity of actual behavior in the medieval upper class, measured against the modern period.

For example, the *Courtesies* of Bonvicino da Riva, one of the most personal and—in keeping with Italian development—most “advanced” of table guides, contains, apart from the precepts mentioned from the French collection, the instructions to turn round when coughing and sneezing, and not to lick one’s fingers. One should, he says, refrain from searching out the best pieces in the dish, and cut the bread decently. One should not touch the rim of the communal glass with one’s fingers, and one should hold the glass with both hands. But here, too, the tenor of *courtoisie*, the standard, the customs are by and large the same. And it is not uninteresting that when Bonvicino da Riva’s *Courtesies* were revised three centuries after him, of all the rules given by Da Riva only two not very important ones were altered: the editor advises not to touch the edge of the communal glass and to hold it with both hands, and if several are drinking from the same glass, one should refrain altogether from dipping bread into it (Da Riva only required that the wine thus used should be tipped away or drunk).<sup>25</sup>

A similar picture could be drawn from the German tradition. German *Tischzuchten*, of which we have copies from the fifteenth century, are perhaps somewhat coarser in tone than the *Italian Guest* of Thomasin von Zirklaria or Tannhäuser’s *Hofzucht* from the thir-

teenth century. But the standard of good and bad manners seems scarcely to have altered to any considerable extent. It has been pointed out that in one of the later codes which has much in common with the earlier ones already mentioned, the new injunction appears that one should spit not on the table but only under it or against the wall. And this has been interpreted as a symptom of a coarsening of manners. But it is more than questionable whether things were done very differently in the preceding centuries, particularly as similar precepts from earlier periods are transmitted by the French tradition, for example. And what is to be derived from literature in the broadest sense is confirmed by paintings. Here, too, more detailed studies are needed; but compared to the later age, pictures of people at table show, until well into the fifteenth century, very sparse table utensils, even if, in some details, certain changes are undoubtedly present. In the houses of the more wealthy, the platters are usually taken from the sideboard, frequently in no particular order. Everyone takes—or sends for—what he fancies at the moment. People help themselves from communal dishes. Solids (above all, meat) are taken by hand, liquids with ladles or spoons. But soups and sauces are still very frequently drunk. Plates and dishes are lifted to the mouth. For a long period, too, there are no special implements for different foods. The same knife or spoon is used. The same glasses are drunk from. Frequently two diners eat from the same board.

This is, if it may so be called, the standard eating technique during the Middle Ages, which corresponds to a very particular standard of human relationships and structure of feeling. Within this standard there is, as has been said, an abundance of modifications and nuances. If people of different rank are eating at the same time, the person of higher rank is given precedence when washing hands, for example, or when taking from the dish. The forms of utensils vary considerably in the course of centuries. There are fashions, but also a very definite trend that persists through the fluctuations of fashion. The secular upper class, for example, indulges in extraordinary luxury at table. It is not a poverty of utensils that maintains the standard, it is quite simply that nothing else is needed. To eat in this fashion is taken for granted. It suits these people. But it also suits them to make visible their wealth and rank by the opulence of their utensils and table decoration. At the rich tables of the thirteenth century the spoons are of gold, crystal, coral, ophite. It is occasionally mentioned that during

Lent knives with ebony handles are used, at Easter knives with ivory handles, and inlaid knives at Whitsun. The soup spoons are round and rather flat to begin with, so that one is forced when using them to open one's mouth wide. From the fourteenth century onward, soup spoons take on an oval form.

At the end of the Middle Ages the fork appears as an instrument for taking food from the common dish. A whole dozen forks are to be found among the valuables of Charles V. The inventory of Charles of Savoyen, which is very rich in opulent table utensils, counts only a single fork.<sup>26</sup>

5. It is sometimes said, "How far we have progressed beyond this standard," although it is not usually quite clear who is the "we" with whom the speaker identifies himself on such occasions, as if he deserved part of the credit.

The opposite judgment is also possible: "What has really changed? A few customs, no more." And some observers seem inclined to judge these customs in much the same way as one would today judge children: "If a man of sense had come and told these people that their practices were unappetizing and unhygienic, if they had been taught to eat with knives and forks, these bad manners would rapidly have disappeared."

But conduct while eating cannot be isolated. It is a segment—a very characteristic one—of the totality of socially instilled forms of conduct. Its standard corresponds to a quite definite social structure. It remains to be ascertained what this structure is. The behavior of medieval people was no less tightly bound to their total way of life, to the whole structure of their existence, than our own behavior and social code are bound to ours.

At times, some minor statement shows how firmly rooted these customs were, and makes it apparent that they must be understood not merely as something "negative," as a "lack of civilization" or of "knowledge" (as it is easy to suppose from our standpoint), but as something that fitted the needs of these people and that seemed meaningful and necessary to them in exactly this form.

In the eleventh century a Venetian doge married a Greek princess. In her Byzantine circle the fork was clearly in use. At any rate, we hear that she lifted food to her mouth "by means of little golden forks with two prongs."<sup>27</sup>

This gave rise in Venice to a dreadful scandal: "This novelty was

regarded as so excessive a sign of refinement that the dogressa was severely rebuked by the ecclesiastics who called down divine wrath upon her. Shortly afterward she was afflicted by a repulsive illness and St. Bonaventure did not hesitate to declare that this was a punishment of God."

Five more centuries were to pass before the structure of human relations had so changed that the use of this instrument met a more general need. From the sixteenth century on, at least among the upper classes, the fork comes into use as an eating instrument, arriving by way of Italy first in France and then in England and Germany, after having served for a time only for taking solid foods from the dish. Henri III brought it to France, probably from Venice. His courtiers were not a little derided for this "affected" manner of eating, and at first they were not very adept in the use of the instrument: at least it was said that half the food fell off the fork as it traveled from plate to mouth. As late as the seventeenth century the fork was still essentially a luxury article of the upper class, usually made of gold or silver. What we take entirely for granted, because we have been adapted and conditioned to this social standard from earliest childhood, had first to be slowly and laboriously acquired and developed by society as a whole. This applies to such a small and seemingly insignificant thing as a fork no less than to forms of behavior that appear to us larger and more important.<sup>28</sup>

However, the attitude that has just been described toward the "innovation" of the fork shows one thing with special clarity. People who ate together in the way customary in the Middle Ages, taking meat with their fingers from the same dish, wine from the same goblet, soup from the same pot or the same plate, with all the other peculiarities of which examples have been and will further be given—such people stood in a different relationship to one another than we do. And this involves not only the level of clear, rational consciousness; their emotional life also had a different structure and character. Their affects were conditioned to forms of relationship and conduct which, by today's standard of conditioning, are embarrassing or at least unattractive. What was lacking in this *courtois* world, or at least had not been developed to the same degree, was the invisible wall of affects which seems now to rise between one human body and another, repelling and separating, the wall which is often perceptible today at the mere approach of something that has been in contact with

the mouth or hands of someone else, and which manifests itself as embarrassment at the mere sight of many bodily functions of others, and often at their mere mention, or as a feeling of shame when one's own functions are exposed to the gaze of others, and by no means only then.

### III

#### The Problem of the Change in Behavior during the Renaissance

1. Were the thresholds of embarrassment and shame raised at the time of Erasmus? Does his treatise contain indications that the frontiers of sensibility and the reserve which they expected of each other were increasing? There are good reasons for supposing so. The humanists' works on manners form a kind of bridge between those of the Middle Ages and modern times. Erasmus's treatise, the high point in the succession of humanist writings on manners, also has this double face. In many respects it stands entirely within medieval tradition. A good part of the rules and precepts from the *courtois* writings recur in his treatise. But at the same time, it clearly contains the beginnings of something new. In it a concept is gradually developing which was to force the knightly-feudal concept of courtesy into the background. In the course of the sixteenth century the use of the concept of *courtoisie* slowly recedes in the upper class, while *civilité* grows more common and finally gains the upper hand, at least in France, in the seventeenth century.

This is a sign of a behavioral change of considerable proportions. It did not take place, of course, in such a way that one ideal of good behavior was suddenly opposed by another radically different to it. The *De civilitate morum puerilium* of Erasmus—to confine the discussion to this work for the time being—stands in many respects, as we have said, entirely within medieval tradition. Almost all the rules of *courtois* society reappear in it. Meat is still eaten with the hand, even if Erasmus stresses that it should be picked up with three fingers, not the whole hand. The precept not to fall upon the meal like a glutton is also repeated, as are the directions to wash one's hands before dining and the strictures on spitting, blowing the nose, the use of the knife, and many others. It may be that Erasmus knew one or another of the

rhymed *Tischzuchten* or the clerical writings in which such questions were treated. Many of these writings were no doubt in wide circulation; it is unlikely that they escaped Erasmus. More precisely demonstrable is his relation to the heritage of antiquity. In the case of this treatise, it was partly shown by the commentaries of his contemporaries. Its place in the rich humanist discussion of these problems of education and propriety remains to be examined in more detail.<sup>29</sup> But whatever the literary interconnections may be, of primary interest in this context are the sociogenetic ones. Erasmus certainly did not merely compile this treatise from other books; like anyone who reflects on such questions, he had a particular social code, a particular standard of manners directly before his eyes. This treatise on manners is a collection of observations from the life of his society. It is, as someone said later, "a little the work of everyone." And if nothing else, its success, its rapid dissemination, and its use as an educational manual for boys show how much it met a social need, and how it recorded the models of behavior for which the time was ripe, which society—or, more exactly, the upper class first of all—demanded.

2. Society was "in transition." So, too, were works on manners. Even in the tone, the manner of seeing, we feel that despite all their attachment to the Middle Ages something new is on the way. "Simplicity" as we experience it, the simple opposition of "good" and "bad," "pious" and "wicked," has been lost. People see things with more differentiation, i.e., with a stronger restraint of their emotions.

It is not so much, or at least not exclusively, the rules themselves or the manners to which they refer that distinguish a part of the humanistic writings—above all, the treatise of Erasmus—from the *courtois* codes. It is first of all their tone, their way of seeing. The same social rules which in the Middle Ages were passed impersonally from mouth to mouth are now spoken in the manner and with the emphasis of someone who is not merely passing on tradition, no matter how many medieval and, above all, ancient writings he may have absorbed, but who has observed all this personally, who is recording experience.

Even if this were not seen in *De civilitate morum puerilium* itself, we should know it from Erasmus's earlier writings, in which the permeation of medieval and ancient tradition with his own experience is expressed perhaps more clearly and directly. In his *Colloquies*, which in part certainly draw on ancient models (above all, Lucian), and particularly in the dialogue *Diversoria* (Basel, 1523), Eras-

mus describes directly experiences elaborated in the later treatise.

The *Diversoria* is concerned with the difference between manners at German and French inns. He describes, for example, the interior of a German inn: some eighty or ninety people are sitting together, and it is stressed that they are not only common people but also rich men and nobles, men, women, and children, all mixed together. And each is doing what he considers necessary. One washes his clothes and hangs the soaking articles on the stove. Another washes his hands. But the bowl is so clean, says the speaker, that one needs a second one to cleanse oneself of the water. Garlic smells and other bad odors rise. People spit everywhere. Someone is cleaning his boots on the table. Then the meal is brought in. Everyone dips his bread into the general dish, bites the bread, and dips it in again. The place is dirty, the wine bad. And if one asks for a better wine the innkeeper replies: I have put up enough nobles and counts. If it does not suit you, look for other quarters.

The stranger to the country has a particularly difficult time. The others stare at him fixedly as if he were a fabulous animal from Africa. Moreover, these people acknowledge as human beings only the nobles of their own country.

The room is overheated; everyone is sweating and steaming and wiping himself. There are doubtless many among them who have some hidden disease. "Probably," says the speaker, "most of them have the Spanish disease, and are thus no less to be feared than lepers."

"Brave people," says the other, "they jest and care nothing for it."

"But this bravery has already cost many lives."

"What are they to do? They are used to it, and a stouthearted man does not break with his habits."

3. It can be seen that Erasmus, like others who wrote before or after him about conduct, is in the first place a collector of good and bad manners that he finds present in social life itself. It is primarily this that explains both the agreement and the differences between such writers. That their writings do not contain as much as others to which we habitually give more attention, the extraordinary ideas of an outstanding individual, that they are forced by their subject itself to adhere closely to social reality, gives them their special significance as a source of information on social processes.

But the observations of Erasmus on this subject are nevertheless to be numbered, along with a few by other authors from the same phase, among the exceptions in the tradition of writing on manners. For in them the presentation of partly very ancient precepts and commands is permeated by a very individual temperament. And precisely that is, in its turn, a "sign of the times," an expression of a transformation of society, a symptom of what is somewhat misleadingly called "individualization." It also points to something else: the problem of behavior in society had obviously taken on such importance in this period that even people of extraordinary talent and renown did not disdain to concern themselves with it. Later this task falls back in general to minds of the second and third rank, who imitate, continue, extend, thus giving rise once more, even if not so strongly as in the Middle Ages, to a more impersonal tradition of books on manners.

The social transitions connected with the changes in conduct, manners, and feelings of embarrassment will be studied separately later. However, an indication of them is needed here for an understanding of Erasmus's own position, and therefore of his way of speaking about manners.

Erasmus's treatise comes at a time of social regrouping. It is the expression of the fruitful transitional period after the loosening of the medieval social hierarchy and before the stabilizing of the modern one. It belongs to the phase in which the old, feudal knights nobility was still in decline, while the new aristocracy of the absolutist courts was still in the process of formation. This situation gave, among others, the representatives of a small, secular-bourgeois intellectual class, the humanists, and thus Erasmus, not only an opportunity to rise in social station, to gain renown and authority, but also a possibility of candor and detachment that was not present to the same degree either before or afterward. This chance of distancing themselves, which permitted individual representatives of the intellectual class to identify totally and unconditionally with none of the social groups of their world—though, of course, they always stood closer to one of them, that of the princes and of the courts, than to the others—also finds expression in *De civilitate morum puerilium*. Erasmus in no way overlooks or conceals social differences. He sees very exactly that the real nurseries of what is regarded as good manners in his time are the princely courts. He says, for example, to the young prince to whom he dedicates his treatise: "I shall address your youth on the manners

fitting to a boy not because you are so greatly in need of these precepts; from childhood you have been educated among courtly people and you early had an excellent instructor . . . or because all that is said in this treatise applies to you; for you are of princely blood and are born to rule."

But Erasmus also manifests, in a particularly pronounced form, the characteristic self-confidence of the intellectual who has ascended through knowledge and writing, who is legitimized by books, the self-assurance of a member of the humanistic intellectual class who is able to keep his distance even from ruling strata and their opinions, however bound to them he may be. "Modesty, above all, befits a boy," he says at the close of the dedication to the young prince, "and particularly a noble boy." And he also says: "Let others paint lions, eagles, and other creatures on their coats of arms. More true nobility is possessed by those who can inscribe on their shields all that they have achieved through the cultivation of the arts and sciences."

This is the language, the typical self-image of the intellectual in this phase of social development. The sociogenetic and psychogenetic kinship of such ideas with those of the German intellectual class of the eighteenth century, who were epitomized to themselves by concepts such as *Kultur* and *Bildung*, is immediately visible. But in the period immediately after Erasmus's time, few people would have had the assurance or even the social opportunity to express such thoughts openly in a dedication to a noble. With the increasing stabilization of the social hierarchy, such an utterance would have been increasingly seen as an error of tact, perhaps even as an attack. The most exact observance of differences of rank in behavior becomes from now on the essence of courtesy, the basic requirement of *civilité*, at least in France. The aristocracy and the bourgeois intelligentsia mix socially, but it is an imperative of tact to observe social differences and to give them unambiguous expression in social conduct. In Germany, by contrast, there is always, from the time of the humanists onward, a bourgeois intelligentsia whose members, with few exceptions, live more or less in isolation from aristocratic court society, an intellectual class of specifically middle-class character.

4. The development of German writings on manners and the way these writings differ from the French give numerous clear illustrations of this. It would lead too far to pursue this in detail, but one need only think of a work like Dedekind's *Grobianus*<sup>30</sup> and its widely dis-

seminated and influential German translation by Kaspar Scheidt to be aware of the difference. The whole German *grobianisch* (boorish) literature in which, spiced with mockery and scorn, a very serious need for a "softening of manners" finds expression, shows unambiguously and more purely than any of the corresponding traditions of other nationalities the specifically middle-class character of its writers, who include Protestant clergymen and teachers. And the case is similar with most of what was written in the ensuing period about manners and etiquette in Germany. Certainly, manners here too are stamped primarily at the courts; but since the social walls between the bourgeoisie and court nobility are relatively high, the later bourgeois authors of books on manners usually speak of them as something alien that has to be learned because that is the way things are done at court. However familiar with the subject these authors may be, they speak of it as outsiders, very often with noticeable clumsiness. It is a relatively constricted, regional, and penurious intellectual stratum which writes in Germany in the following period, and particularly after the Thirty Years War. And only in the second half of the eighteenth century, when the German bourgeois intelligentsia, as a kind of vanguard of the commercial bourgeoisie, attains new opportunities for social advance and rather more freedom of movement, do we again hear the language and expression of a self-image related to that of the humanists, especially Erasmus. Even now, however, the nobles are hardly ever told so openly that all their coats of arms are worth less than the cultivation of the *artes liberales*, even if this is often enough what is really meant.

What has been shown in the introductory chapter on the movement of the late eighteenth century goes back to a far older tradition, to a pervasive structural characteristic of German society following the particularly vigorous development of the German cities and burgher class toward the end of the Middle Ages. In France, and periodically in England and Italy also, a proportion of the bourgeois writers feel themselves to belong to the circles of the court aristocracies; in Germany this is far less the case. In the other countries, bourgeois writers not only write largely for circles of the court aristocracies but also identify extensively with their manners, customs, and views. In Germany this identification of members of the intelligentsia with the courtly upper class is much weaker, less taken for granted and far more rare. Their dubious position (along with a certain mistrust of

those who legitimize themselves primarily by their manners, courtesy, and ease of behavior) is part of a long tradition, particularly as the values of the German court aristocracy—which is split up into numerous greater or lesser circles, not unified in a large, central “society,” and moreover is bureaucratized at an early stage—cannot be developed as fully as in the Western countries. Instead, there emerges here more sharply than in the Western countries a split between the university-based cultural-bureaucratic tradition of “Kultur” of the middle-class, on the one hand, and the no less bureaucrat-military tradition of the nobility, on the other.

5. Erasmus’s treatise on manners has an influence both on Germany and on England, France, and Italy. What links his attitude with that of the later German intelligentsia is the lack of identification with the courtly upper class; and his observation that the treatment of “civility” is without doubt *crassissima philosophiae pars* points to a scale of values which was not without a certain kinship to the later evaluation of *Zivilisation* and *Kultur* in the German tradition.

Accordingly, Erasmus does not see his precepts as intended for a particular class. He places no particular emphasis on social distinctions, if we disregard occasional criticism of peasants and small tradesmen. It is precisely this lack of a specific social orientation in the precepts, their presentation as general human rules, that distinguishes his treatise from its successors in the Italian and especially the French traditions.)

Erasmus simply says, for example, “*Incessus nec fractus sit, nec praeceps*” (The step should be neither too slow nor too quick). Shortly afterward, in his *Galateo*, the Italian Giovanni della Casa says the same thing (ch. VI, 5, pt. III). But for him the same precept has a direct and obvious function as a means of social distinction: “*Non dee l’huomo nobile correre per via, ne troppo affrettarsi, che cio conviene a palafreniere e non a gentilhuomo. Ne percio si dee andare sì lento, ne sì conregnoso come femmina o come sposa.*” (The noblemen ought not to run like a lackey, or walk as slowly as women or brides.) It is characteristic, and in agreement with all our other observations, that a German translation of *Galateo*—in a five-language edition of 1609 (Geneva)—regularly seeks, like the Latin translation and unlike all the others, to efface the social differentiations in the original. The passage quoted, for example, is translated as follows: “Therefore a noble, or any other *honorable man*, should not run in the street or hurry too

much, since this befits a lackey and not a gentleman. . . . Nor should one walk unduly slowly like a stately matron or a young bride” (p. 562).

The words “honorable man” are inserted here, possibly referring to burgher councillors, and similar changes are found in many other places; when the Italian says simply *gentilhuomo* and the French *gentilhomme*, the German speaks of the “virtuous, honorable man” and the Latin of “*homo honestus et bene moratus.*” These examples could be multiplied.

Erasmus proceeds similarly. As a result, the precepts that he gives without any social characteristics appear again and again in the Italian and French traditions with a sharper limitation to the upper class, while in Germany the tendency to obliterate the social characteristics remains, even if for a long period hardly a single writer achieves the degree of social detachment possessed by Erasmus. In this respect he occupies a unique position among all those who write on the subject. It stems from his personal character. But at the same time, it points beyond his personal character to this relatively brief phase of relaxation between two great epochs characterized by more inflexible social hierarchies.

The fertility of this loosening transitional situation is perceptible again and again in Erasmus’s way of observing people. It enables him to criticize “rustic,” “vulgar,” or “coarse” qualities without accepting unconditionally (as did most who came later) the behavior of the great courtly lords, whose circle was finally, as he himself puts it, the nursery of refined conduct. He sees very exactly the exaggerated, forced nature of many courtly practices, and is not afraid to say so. Speaking of how to hold the lips, for example, he says: “It is still less becoming to purse the lips from time to time as if whistling to oneself. This can be left to the great lords when they stroll among the crowd.” Or he says: “You should leave to a few courtiers the pleasure of squeezing bread in the hand and then breaking it off with the fingertips. You should cut it decently with a knife.”

6. But here again we see very clearly the difference between this and the medieval manner of giving directions on behavior. Earlier, people were simply told, to give one example, “The bread cut fayre and do not breake.”<sup>31</sup> Such rules are embedded by Erasmus directly in his experience and observation of people. The traditional precepts, mirrors of ever-recurring customs, awaken in his observation from a

kind of petrification. An old rule ran: "Do not fall greedily upon the food."

Do not eat bread before the meat is served, for this would appear greedy.

Remember to empty and wipe your mouth before drinking.<sup>32</sup>

Erasmus gives the same advice, but in so doing he sees people directly before him: some, he says, devour rather than eat, as if they were about to be carried off to prison, or were thieves wolfing down their booty. Others push so much into their mouths that their cheeks bulge like bellows. Others pull their lips apart while eating, so that they make a noise like pigs. And then follows the general rule that was, and obviously had to be, repeated over and over again: "Ore pleno vel bibere vel loqui, nec honestum, nec tutum." (To eat or drink with a full mouth is neither becoming nor safe.)

In all this, besides the medieval tradition, there is certainly much from antiquity. But reading has sharpened seeing, and seeing has enriched reading and writing.

Clothing, he says in one place, is in a sense the body of the body. From it we can deduce the attitude of the soul. And then Erasmus gives examples of what manner of dress corresponds to this or that spiritual condition. This is the beginning of the mode of observation that will at a later stage be termed "psychological." The new stage of courtesy and its representation, summed up in the concept of *civilité*, is very closely bound up with this manner of seeing, and gradually becomes more so. In order to be really "courteous" by the standards of *civilité*, one is to some extent obliged to observe, to look about oneself and pay attention to people and their motives. In this, too, a new relationship of man to man, a new form of integration is announced.

Not quite 150 years later, when *civilité* has become a firm and stable form of behavior in the courtly upper class of France, in the *monde*, one of its members begins his exposition of the *science du monde* with these words: "It seems to me that to acquire what is called the science of the world one must first apply oneself to knowing men as they are in general, and then gain particular knowledge of those with whom we have to live, that is to say, knowledge of their inclinations and their good and bad opinions, of their virtues and their faults."<sup>33</sup>

What is here said with great precision and lucidity was anticipated by Erasmus. But this increased tendency of society and therefore of writers to observe, to connect the particular with the general, seeing with reading, is found not only in Erasmus but also in the other Renaissance books on manners, and certainly not only in these.

7. If one is asked, therefore, about the new tendencies<sup>34</sup> that make their appearance in Erasmus's way of observing the behavior of people—this is one of them. In the process of transformation and innovation that we designate by the term "Renaissance," what was regarded as "fitting" and "unfitting" in human intercourse no doubt changed to a certain degree. But the rupture is not marked by a sudden demand for new modes of behavior opposed to the old. The tradition of *courtoisie* is continued in many respects by the society which adopts the concept of *civilitas*, as in *Civilitas morum puerilium*, to designate social "good behavior."

The increased tendency of people to observe themselves and others is one sign of how the whole question of behavior is now taking on a different character: people mold themselves and others more deliberately than in the Middle Ages.

Then they were told, do this and not that; but by and large a great deal was let pass. For centuries roughly the same rules, elementary by our standards, were repeated, obviously without producing fully established habits. This now changes. The coercion exerted by people on one another increases, the demand for "good behavior" is raised more emphatically. All problems concerned with behavior take on new importance. The fact that Erasmus brought together in a prose work rules of conduct that had previously been uttered chiefly in mnemonic verses or scattered in treatises on other subjects, and for the first time devoted a separate book to the whole question of behavior in society, not only at table, is a clear sign of the growing importance of the question, as is the book's success.<sup>35</sup> And the emergence of related writings, like the *Courtier* of Castiglione or the *Galateo* of Della Casa, to name only the most well-known, points in the same direction. The underlying social processes have already been indicated and will be discussed in more detail later: the old social ties are, if not broken, extensively loosened and are in a process of transformation. Individuals of different social origins are thrown together. The social circulation of ascending and descending groups and individuals speeds up.

Then, slowly, in the course of the sixteenth century, earlier here



and later there and almost everywhere with numerous reverses until well into the seventeenth century, a more rigid social hierarchy begins to establish itself once more, and from elements of diverse social origins a new upper class, a new aristocracy forms. For this very reason the question of uniform good behavior becomes increasingly acute, particularly as the changed structure of the new upper class exposes each individual member to an unprecedented extent to the pressure of others and of social control. It is in this context that the writings on manners of Erasmus, Castiglione, Della Casa, and others are produced. People, forced to live with one another in a new way, become more sensitive to the impulses of others. Not abruptly but very gradually the code of behavior becomes stricter and the degree of consideration expected of others becomes greater. The sense of what to do and what not to do in order not to offend or shock others becomes subtler, and in conjunction with the new power relationships the social imperative not to offend others becomes more binding, as compared to the preceding phase.

The rules of *courtoisie* also prescribed, "Say nothing that can arouse conflict, or anger others":

Non dicas verbum  
cuiquam quod ei sit acerbum.<sup>36</sup>

"Be a good table companion":

Awayte my chylde, ye be have you manerly  
When at your mete ye sitte at the table  
In every prees and in every company  
Dispose you to be so compenable  
That men may of you reporte for commendable  
For thrusteth wel upon your berynge  
Men wil you blame or gyue preysynge. . . .

So we read in an English *Book of Curtesye*.<sup>37</sup> In purely factual terms, much of what Erasmus says has a similar tendency. But the change of tone, the increased sensitivity, the heightened human observation, and the sharper understanding of what is going on in others are unmistakable. They are particularly clear in a remark at the end of his treatise. There he breaks through the fixed pattern of "good behavior," together with the arrogance that usually accompanies it, and

relates conduct back to a more comprehensive humanity: "Be lenient toward the offenses of others. This is the chief virtue of *civilitas*, of courtesy. A companion ought not to be less dear to you because he has worse manners. There are people who make up for the awkwardness of their behavior by other gifts." And further on he says: "If one of your comrades unknowingly gives offense . . . tell him so alone and say it kindly. That is civility."

But this attitude only expresses again how little Erasmus, for all his closeness to the courtly upper class of his time, identifies with it, keeping his distance from its code, too.

*Galateo* takes its name from an account in which Erasmus's precept "Tell him alone and say it kindly" applies in reality; an offense is corrected in that very way. But here the courtly character of such customs is emphasized as far more self-evident than in Erasmus.

The Bishop of Verona, the Italian work relates,<sup>38</sup> one day receives a visit from a Duke Richard. He appears to the Bishop and his court as "gentilissime cavaliere e di bellissime maniere." The host notes in his guest a single fault. But he says nothing. On the Duke's departure the Bishop sends a man of his court, Galateo, to accompany him. Galateo has particularly good manners, acquired at the courts of the great: "molto havea de' suoi di usato alle corti de' gran Signori." This is explicitly emphasized.

This Galateo therefore accompanies Duke Richard part of the way, and says the following to him before taking his leave: His master, the Bishop, would like to make the Duke a parting gift. The Bishop has never in his life seen a nobleman with better manners than the Duke. He has discovered in him only a single fault—he smacks his lips too loudly while eating, so making a noise that is unpleasant for others to hear. To inform him of this is the Bishop's parting gift, which he begs will not be ill-received.

The precept not to smack the lips while eating is also found frequently in medieval instructions. But its occurrence at the beginning of *Galateo* shows clearly what has changed. It not only demonstrates how much importance is now attached to "good behavior." It shows, above all, how the pressure people now exert on one another in this direction has increased. It is immediately apparent that this polite, extremely gentle, and comparatively considerate way of correcting is, particularly when exercised by a social superior, much more compelling as a means of social control, much more effective in inculcating

lasting habits, than insults, mockery, or any threat of outward physical violence.

Within countries, pacified societies are formed. The old code of behavior is transformed only step by step. But social control becomes more binding. And above all, the nature and mechanism of affect-molding by society are slowly changed. In the course of the Middle Ages the standard of good and bad manners, for all the regional and social differences, clearly did not undergo any decisive change. Over and again, down the centuries, the same good and bad manners are mentioned. The social code hardened into lasting habits only to a limited extent in people themselves. Now, with the structural transformation of society, with the new pattern of human relationships, a change slowly comes about: the compulsion to check one's own behavior increases. In conjunction with this the standard of behavior is set in motion.

Caxton's *Book of Curtesye*, probably of the late fifteenth century, already gives unambiguous expression to this feeling that habits, customs, and rules of conduct are in flux:<sup>39</sup>

Thingis whilom used ben now leyd a syde  
And newe feetis, dayly ben contreuide  
Mennys actes can in no plyte abyde  
They be changeable ande ofte meuide  
Thingis somtyme alowed is now repreuid  
And after this shal thines up aryse  
That men set now but at lytyl pryse.

This sounds, indeed, like a motto for the whole movement that is now coming: "Thingis somtyme alowed is now repreuid." The sixteenth century is still wholly within the transition. Erasmus and his contemporaries are still permitted to speak about things, functions, and ways of behaving that one or two centuries later are overlaid with feelings of shame and embarrassment, and whose public exposure or mention are proscribed in society. With the same simplicity and clarity with which he and Della Casa discuss questions of the greatest tact and propriety, Erasmus also says: Do not move back and forth on your chair. Whoever does that "speciem habet subinde ventris flatum emittentis ant emittere conantis" (gives the impression of constantly breaking or trying to break wind). This still shows the old unconcern

in referring to bodily functions that was characteristic of medieval people, but enriched by observation, by consideration of "what others *might* think." Comments of this kind occur frequently.

Consideration of the behavior of people in the sixteenth century, and of their code of behavior, casts the observer back and forth between the impressions "That's still utterly medieval" and "That's exactly the way we feel today." And precisely this apparent contradiction clearly corresponds to reality. The people of this time have a double face. They stand on a bridge. Behavior and the code of behavior are in motion, but the movement is quite slow. And above all, in observing a single stage, we lack a sure measure. What is accidental fluctuation? When and where is something advancing? When is something falling behind? Are we really concerned with a change in a definite direction? Is European society really, under the watchword *civilité*, slowly moving toward that kind of refined behavior, that standard of conduct, habits, and affect formation, which is characteristic in our minds of "civilized" society, of Western "civilization"?

8. It is not very easy to make this movement clearly visible precisely because it takes place so slowly—in very small steps, as it were—and because it also shows manifold fluctuations, following smaller and larger curves. It clearly does not suffice to consider in isolation each single stage to which this or that statement on customs and manners bears witness. We must attempt to see the movement itself, or at least a large segment of it, as a whole, as if speeded up. Images must be placed together in a series to give an overall view, from one particular aspect, of the process: the gradual transformation of behavior and the emotions, the expanding threshold of aversion.

The books on manners offer an opportunity for this. On individual aspects of human behavior, particularly eating habits, they give us detailed information—always on the same feature of social life—which extends relatively unbroken, even if at rather fortuitous intervals, from at least the thirteenth to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Here images can be seen in a series, and segments of the total process can be made visible. And it is perhaps an advantage, rather than a disadvantage, that modes of behavior of a relatively simple and elementary kind are observed, in which scope for individual variation within the social standard is relatively small.

These *Tischzuchten* and books on manners are a literary genre in

their own right. If the written heritage of the past is examined primarily from the point of view of what we are accustomed to call "literary significance," then most of them have no great value. But if we examine the modes of behavior which in every age a particular society has expected of its members, attempting to condition individuals to them; if we wish to observe changes in habits, social rules and taboos; then these instructions on correct behavior, though perhaps worthless as literature, take on a special significance. They throw some light on elements in the social process on which we possess, at least from the past, very little direct information. They show precisely what we are seeking—namely, the standard of habits and behavior to which society at a given time sought to accustom the individual. These poems and treatises are themselves direct instruments of "conditioning" or "fashioning,"<sup>40</sup> of the adaptation of the individual to those modes of behavior which the structure and situation of his society make necessary. And they show at the same time, through what they censure and what they praise, the divergence between what was regarded at different times as good and bad manners.

#### IV

### On Behavior at Table

#### Part One

#### Examples

(a) Examples representing upper-class behavior in a fairly pure form:

##### A

#### Thirteenth century

This is Tannhäuser's poem of courtly good manners:<sup>41</sup>

1 I consider a well-bred man to be one who always recognizes good manners and is never ill-mannered.

2 There are many forms of good manners, and they serve many good purposes. The man who adopts them will never err.

25 When you eat do not forget the poor. God will reward you if you treat them kindly.

33 A man of refinement should not slurp with his spoon when in company; that is the way people at court behave who often indulge in unrefined conduct.

37 It is not polite to drink from the dish, although some who approve of this rude habit insolently pick up the dish and pour it down as if they were mad.

41 Those who fall upon the dishes like swine while eating, snorting disgustingly and smacking their lips . . .

45 Some people bite a slice and then dunk it in the dish in a coarse way; refined people reject such bad manners.

49 A number of people gnaw a bone and then put it back in the dish—this is a serious offense.

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On v. 25, cf. the first rule of Bonvicino da Riva:

The first is this: when at table, think first of the poor and needy.

From *Ein spruch der ze tische kêrt* (A word to those at table):<sup>42</sup>

313 You should not drink from the dish, but with a spoon as is proper.

315 Those who stand up and snort disgustingly over the dishes like swine belong with other farmyard beasts.

319 To snort like a salmon, gobble like a badger, and complain while eating—these three things are quite improper.

OR

In the *Courtesies* of Bonvicino da Riva:

Do not slurp with your mouth when eating from a spoon. This is a bestial habit.

OR

In *The Book of Nurture and School of Good Manners*:<sup>43</sup>

201 And suppe not lowde of thy Pottage  
no tyme in all thy lyfe.

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