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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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53 Those who like mustard and salt should take care to avoid the filthy habit of putting their fingers into them.

57 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.

65 A man who wants to talk and eat at the same time, and talks in his sleep, will never rest peacefully.

69 Do not be noisy at table, as some people are. Remember, my friends, that nothing is so ill-mannered.

81 I find it very bad manners whenever I see someone with food in his mouth and drinking at the same time, like an animal.

On v. 45, cf. *Ein spruch der ze tische kêrt*:

346 May refined people be preserved from those who gnaw their bones and put them back in the dish.

or

From *Quisquis es in mensa* (For those at table):⁴⁴

A morsel that has been tasted should not be returned to the dish.

On v. 65, cf. from *Stans puer in mensam* (The boy at table):⁴⁵

22 Numquam ridebis nec faberis
ore repleto.

Never laugh or talk with a full mouth.

On v. 81, cf. from *Quisquis es in mensa*:

15 Qui vult potare debet prius
os vacuare.

If you wish to drink, first empty your mouth.

or

From *The Babees Book*:

149 And withe fulle mouthe drinke in no wyse.

85 You should not blow into your drink, as some are fond of doing; this is an ill-mannered habit that should be avoided.

94 Before drinking, wipe your mouth so that you do not dirty the drink; this act of courtesy should be observed at all times.

105 It is bad manners to lean against the table while eating, as it is to keep your helmet on when serving the ladies.

109 Do not scrape your throat with your bare hand while eating; but if you have to, do it politely with your coat.

113 And it is more fitting to scratch with that than to soil your hand; onlookers notice people who behave like this.

117 You should not poke your teeth with your knife, as some do; it is a bad habit.

On v. 85, cf. *The Book of Curtesye*:⁴⁶

111 Ne blow not on thy drinke ne mete,
Nether for colde, nether for hete.

On v. 94, cf. *The Babees Book*:

155 Whanne ye shalle drynke,
your mouthe cence wi the a clothe.

or

From a *Contenance de table* (Guide to behavior at table):⁴⁷

Do not slobber while you drink, for this is a shameful habit.

On v. 105, cf. *The Babees Book*:

Nor on the borde lenynge be yee nat sene.

On v. 117, cf. *Stans puer in mensam*:⁴⁸

30 Mensa cultello, dentes mundare
caveto.

Avoid cleaning your teeth with a knife at table.

125 If anyone is accustomed to loosening his belt at table, take it from me that he is not a true courtier.

129 If a man wipes his nose on his hand at table because he knows no better, then he is a fool, believe me.

141 I hear that some eat unwashed (if it is true, it is a bad sign). May their fingers be palsied!

157 It is not decent to poke your fingers into your ears or eyes, as some people do, or to pick your nose while eating. These three habits are bad.

B

Fifteenth century?

From *S'ensuivent les contenance de la table* (These are good table manners):⁴⁹

I

Learn these rules.

II

Take care to cut and clean your nails; dirt under the nails is dangerous when scratching.

III

Wash your hands when you get up and before every meal.

On v. 141, cf. *Stans puer in mensam*:

11 Illotis manibus escas ne sumpseris
unquam.

Never pick up food with unwashed
hands.

On v. 157, cf. *Quisquis es in mensa*:

9 Non tngas aures nudis digitis
neque nares.

Touch neither your ears nor your nostrils
with your bare fingers.

This small selection of passages was compiled from a brief perusal of various guides to behavior at table and court. It is very far from exhaustive. It is intended only to give an impression of how similar in tone and content were the rules in different traditions and in different centuries of the Middle Ages. Originals may be found in Appendix II.

XII

Do not be the first to take from the dish.

XIII

Do not put back on your plate what has been in your mouth.

XIV

Do not offer anyone a piece of food you have bitten into.

XV

Do not chew anything you have to spit out again.

XVII

It is bad manners to dip food into the saltcellar.

XXIV

Be peaceable, quiet, and courteous at table.

XXVI

If you have crumbled bread into your wineglass, drink up the wine or throw it away.

XXXI

Do not stuff too much into yourself, or you will be obliged to commit a breach of good manners.

XXXIV

Do not scratch at table, with your hands or with the tablecloth.

C

1530

From *De civilitate morum puerilium* (On civility in boys), by Erasmus of Rotterdam, ch. 4:

If a serviette is given, lay it on your left shoulder or arm.

If you are seated with people of rank, take off your hat and see that your hair is well combed.

Your goblet and knife, duly cleansed, should be on the right, your bread on the left.

Some people put their hands in the dishes the moment they have sat down. Wolves do that. . . .

Do not be the first to touch the dish that has been brought in, not only because this shows you greedy, but also because it is dangerous. For

someone who puts something hot into his mouth unawares must either spit it out or, if he swallows it, burn his throat. In either case he is as ridiculous as he is pitiable.

It is a good thing to wait a short while before eating, so that the boy grows accustomed to tempering his affects.

To dip the fingers in the sauce is rustic. You should take what you want with your knife and fork; you should not search through the whole dish as epicures are wont to do, but take what happens to be in front of you.

What you cannot take with your fingers should be taken with the *quadra*.

If you are offered a piece of cake or pie on a spoon, hold out your plate or take the spoon that is held out to you, put the food on your plate, and return the spoon.

If you are offered something liquid, taste it and return the spoon, but first wipe it on your serviette.

To lick greasy fingers or to wipe them on your coat is impolite. It is better to use the tablecloth or the serviette.

D

1558

From *Galateo*, by Giovanni della Casa, Archbishop of Benevento, quoted from the five-language edition (Geneva, 1609), p. 68:

What do you think this Bishop and his noble company (*il Vescove e la sua nobile brigata*) would have said to those whom we sometimes see lying like swine with their snouts in the soup, not once lifting their heads and turning their eyes, still less their hands, from the food, puffing out both cheeks as if they were blowing a trumpet or trying to fan a fire, not eating but gorging themselves, dirtying their arms almost to the elbows and then reducing their serviettes to a state that would make a kitchen rag look clean.

Nonetheless, these hogs are not ashamed to use the serviettes thus sullied to wipe away their sweat (which, owing to their hasty and excessive feeding, often runs down their foreheads and faces to their necks), and even to blow their noses into them as often as they please.

E

1560

From a *Civilité* by C. Calviac⁵⁰ (based heavily on Erasmus, but with some independent comments):

When the child is seated, if there is a serviette on the plate in front of him, he shall take it and place it on his left arm or shoulder; then he shall place

his bread on the left and the knife on the right, like the glass, if he wishes to leave it on the table, and if it can be conveniently left there without annoying anyone. For it might happen that the glass could not be left on the table or on his right without being in someone's way.

The child must have the discretion to understand the needs of the situation he is in.

When eating . . . he should take the first piece that comes to his hand on his cutting board.

If there are sauces, the child may dip into them decently, without turning his food over after having dipped one side. . . .

It is very necessary for a child to learn at an early age how to carve a leg of mutton, a partridge, a rabbit, and such things.

It is a far too dirty thing for a child to offer others something he has gnawed, or something he disdains to eat himself, *unless it be to his servant*. [Author's emphasis]

Nor is it decent to take from the mouth something he has already chewed, and put it on the cutting board, unless it be a small bone from which he has sucked the marrow to pass time while awaiting the dessert; for after sucking it he should put it on his plate, where he should also place the stones of cherries, plums, and suchlike, as it is not good either to swallow them or to drop them on the floor.

The child should not gnaw bones indecently, as dogs do.

When the child would like salt, he shall take it with the point of his knife and not with three fingers.

The child must cut his meat into very small pieces on his cutting board . . . and he must not lift the meat to his mouth now with one hand and now with the other, like little children who are learning to eat; he should always do so with his right hand, taking the bread or meat decently with three fingers only.

As for the manner of chewing, it varies according to the country. The Germans chew with the mouth closed, and find it ugly to do otherwise. The French, on the other hand, half open the mouth, and find the procedure of the Germans rather dirty. The Italians proceed in a very slack manner and the French more roundly, finding the Italian way too delicate and precious.

And so each nation has something of its own, different to the others. So that the child will proceed in accordance with the customs of the place where he is.

Further, the Germans use spoons when eating soup and everything liquid, and the Italians forks. The French use either, as they think fit and as is most convenient. The Italians generally prefer to have a knife for each person. But the Germans place special importance on this, to the extent that they are greatly displeased if one asks for or takes the knife in front of them. The French way is quite different: a whole table full of people will use two or three knives, without making difficulties in asking for or taking a knife,

or passing it if they have it. So that if someone asks the child for his knife, he should pass it after wiping it with his serviette, holding it by the point and offering the handle to the person requesting it: for it would not be polite to do otherwise.

F

Between 1640 and 1680

From a song by the Marquis de Coulanges:⁵¹

In times past, people ate from the common dish and dipped their bread and fingers in the sauce.

Today everyone eats with spoon and fork from his own plate, and a valet washes the cutlery from time to time at the buffet.

G

1672

From Antoine de Courtin, *Nouveau traité de civilité*, pp. 127, 273:

If everyone is eating from the same dish, you should take care not to put your hand into it *before those of higher rank have done so*, and to take food only from the part of the dish opposite you. Still less should you take the best pieces, even though you might be the last to help yourself.

It must also be pointed out that you should always wipe your spoon when, after using it, you want to take something from another dish, *there being people so delicate that they would not wish to eat soup into which you had dipped it after putting it into your mouth*. [Author's emphasis]

And even, if you are at the table of very refined people, it is not enough to wipe your spoon; you should not use it but ask for another. Also, in many places, spoons are brought in with the dishes, *and these serve only for taking soup and sauce*. [Author's emphasis]

You should not eat soup from the dish, but put it neatly on your plate; if it is too hot, it is impolite to blow on each spoonful; you should wait until it has cooled.

If you have the misfortune to burn your mouth, you should endure it patiently if you can, without showing it; but if the burn is unbearable, as sometimes happens, you should, before the others have noticed, take your plate promptly in one hand and lift it to your mouth and, while covering your mouth with the other hand, return to the plate what you have in your mouth, and quickly pass it to a footman behind you. Civility requires you to be polite, but it does not expect you to be homicidal toward yourself. It is very impolite to touch anything greasy, a sauce or syrup, etc., with your fingers, apart from the fact that it obliges you to commit two or three more

improper acts. One is to wipe your hand frequently on your serviette and to soil it like a kitchen cloth, so that those who see you wipe your mouth with it feel nauseated. Another is to wipe your fingers on your bread, which again is very improper. The third is to lick them, which is the height of impropriety.

... As there are many [customs] which have already changed, I do not doubt that several of these will likewise change in the future.

Formerly one was permitted ... to dip one's bread into the sauce, provided only that one had not already bitten it. Nowadays that would be a kind of rusticity.

Formerly one was allowed to take from one's mouth what one could not eat and drop it on the floor, provided it was done skillfully. Now that would be very disgusting. ...

H

1717

From François de Callières, *De la science du monde et des connoissances utiles à la conduite de la vie*, pp. 97, 101:

In Germany and the Northern Kingdoms it is civil and decent for a prince to drink first to the health of those he is entertaining, and then to offer them the same glass or goblet usually filled with the same wine; nor is it a lack of politeness in them to drink from the same glass, but a mark of candor and friendship. The women also drink first and then give their glass, or have it taken, to the person they are addressing, with the same wine from which they have drunk his health, *without this being taken as a special favor, as it is among us*. ... [Author's emphasis]

"I cannot approve," a lady answers "—without offense to the gentlemen from the north—this manner of drinking from the same glass, and still less of drinking what the ladies have left; it has an air of impropriety that makes me wish they might show other marks of their candor."

(b) Examples from books which either, like La Salle's *Les Règles de la bienséance et de la civilité chrétienne*, represent the spreading of courtly manners and models to broader bourgeois strata, or, like Example I, reflect fairly purely the bourgeois and probably the provincial standard of their time.

In Example I, from about 1714, people still eat from a communal dish. Nothing is said against touching the meat on one's own plate

with the hands. And the "bad manners" that are mentioned have largely disappeared from the upper class.

The *Civilité* of 1780 (Example L) is a little book of forty-eight pages in bad *civilité* type, printed in Caen but undated. The British Museum catalogue has a question mark after the date. In any case, this book is an example of the multitude of cheap books or pamphlets on *civilité* that were disseminated throughout France in the eighteenth century. This one, to judge from its general attitude, was clearly intended for provincial town-dwellers. In no other eighteenth-century work on *civilité* quoted here are bodily functions discussed so openly. The standard the book points to recalls in many respects the one that Erasmus's *De civilitate* had marked for the upper class. It is still a matter of course to take food in the hands. This example seemed useful here to complement the other quotations, and particularly to remind the reader that the movement ought to be seen in its full multilayered polyphony, not as a line but as a kind of fugue with a succession of related movement-motifs on different levels.

Example M from 1786 shows the dissemination from above to below very directly. It is particularly characteristic because it contains a large number of customs that have subsequently been adopted by "civilized society" as a whole, but are here clearly visible as specific customs of the courtly upper class which still seem relatively alien to the bourgeoisie. Many customs have been arrested, as "civilized customs," in exactly the form they have here as courtly manners.

The quotation from 1859 (Example N) is meant to remind the reader that in the nineteenth century, as today, the whole movement had already been entirely forgotten, that the standard of "civilization" which in reality had been attained only quite recently was taken for granted, what preceded it being seen as "barbaric."

I

1714

From an anonymous *Civilité française* (Liège, 1714?), p. 48:

It is not . . . polite to drink your soup from the bowl unless you are in your own family, and only then if you have drunk the most part with your spoon.

If the soup is in a communal dish, take some with your spoon in your turn, without precipitation.

Do not keep your knife always in your hand, as village people do, but take it only when you need it.

When you are being served meat, it is not seemly to take it in your hand. You should hold out your plate in your left hand while holding your fork or knife in your right.

It is against propriety to give people meat to smell, and you should under no circumstances put meat back into the common dish if you have smelled it yourself. If you take meat from a common dish, do not choose the best pieces. Cut with the knife, holding still the piece of meat in the dish with the fork, which you will use to put on your plate the piece you have cut off; do not, therefore, take the meat with your hand [nothing is said here against touching the meat on one's own plate with the hand].

You should not throw bones or eggshells or the skin of any fruit onto the floor.

The same is true of fruit stones. It is more polite to remove them from the mouth with two fingers than to spit them into one's hand.

J

1729

From La Salle, *Les Règles de la bienséance et de la civilité chrétienne* (Rouen, 1729), p. 87:

On Things to Be Used at Table

At table you should use a serviette, a plate, a knife, a spoon, and a fork. It would be entirely contrary to propriety to be without any of these things while eating.

It is for the person of highest rank in the company to unfold his serviette first, and the others should wait until he has done so before unfolding theirs. When the people are approximately equal, all should unfold it together without ceremony. [N.B. With the "democratization" of society and the family, this becomes the rule. The social structure, here still of the hierarchical-aristocratic type, is mirrored in the most elementary human relationships.]

It is improper to use the serviette to wipe your face; it is far more so to rub your teeth with it, and it would be one of the grossest offenses against civility to use it to blow your nose. . . . The use you may and must make of the serviette when at table is for wiping your mouth, lips, and fingers when they are greasy, wiping the knife before cutting bread, and cleaning the spoon and fork after using them. [N.B. This is one of many examples of the extraordinary control of behavior embedded in our eating habits. The use of each utensil is limited and defined by a multiplicity of very precise rules. None of them is simply self-evident, as they appear to later generations. Their use is formed very gradually in conjunction with the structure and changes of human relationships.]

When the fingers are very greasy, wipe them first on a piece of bread,

which should then be left on the plate, before cleaning them on the serviette, in order not to soil it too much.

When the spoon, fork, and knife are dirty or greasy, it is very improper to lick them, and it is not at all decent to wipe them, or anything else, on the tablecloth. On these and similar occasions you should use the serviette, and regarding the tablecloth you should take care to keep it always very clean, and not to drop on it water, wine, or anything that might soil it.

When the plate is dirty, you should be sure not to scrape it with the spoon or fork to clean it, or to clean your plate or the bottom of any dish with your fingers: that is very impolite. Either they should not be touched or, if you have the opportunity of exchanging them, you should ask for another.

When at table you should not keep the knife always in your hand; it is sufficient to pick it up when you wish to use it.

It is also very impolite to put a piece of bread into your mouth while holding the knife in your hand; it is even more so to do this with the point of the knife. The same thing must be observed in eating apples, pears, or some other fruits. [N.B. Examples of taboos relating to knives.]

It is against propriety to hold the fork or spoon with the whole hand, like a stick; you should always hold them between your fingers.

You should not use your fork to lift liquids to the mouth . . . it is the spoon that is intended for such uses.

It is polite always to use the fork to put meat into your mouth, for propriety does not permit the touching of anything greasy with the fingers [Author's emphasis], neither sauces nor syrups; and if anyone did so, he could not escape subsequently committing several further incivilities, such as frequently wiping his fingers on his serviette, which would make it very dirty, or on his bread, which would be very impolite, or licking his fingers, which is not permitted to well-born, refined people.

This whole passage, like several others, is taken from A. de Courtin's *Nouveau traité* of 1672; cf. Example G, p. 00. It also reappears in other eighteenth-century works on *civilité*. The reason given for the prohibition on eating with the fingers is particularly instructive. In Courtin, too, it applies in the first place only to greasy foods, especially those in sauces, since this gives rise to actions that are "distasteful" to behold. In La Salle this is not entirely consistent with what he says in another place: "If your fingers are greasy . . ." etc. The prohibition is not remotely so self-evident as today. We see how gradually it becomes an internalized habit, a piece of "self-control."

In the critical period at the end of the reign of Louis XV—in which, as shown earlier, the urge for reform is intensified as an outward sign

of social changes, and in which the concept of "civilization" comes to the fore—La Salle's *Civilité*, which had previously passed through several editions largely unchanged, was revised. The changes in the standard are very instructive (Example K, below). They are in some respects very considerable. The difference is partly discernible in what no longer needs to be said. Many chapters are shorter. Many "bad manners" earlier discussed in detail are mentioned only briefly in passing. The same applies to many bodily functions originally dealt with at length and in great detail. The tone is generally less mild, and often incomparably harsher than in the first version.

K

1774

From La Salle, *Les Règles de la bienséance et de la civilité chrétienne* (1774 ed.), pp. 45ff.:

The serviette which is placed on the plate, being intended to preserve clothing from spots and other soiling inseparable from meals, should be spread over you so far that it covers the front of your body to the knees, going under the collar and not being passed inside it. The spoon, fork, and knife should always be placed on the right.

The spoon is intended for liquids, and the fork for solid meats.

When one or the other is dirty, they can be cleaned with the serviette, if another service cannot be procured. You should avoid wiping them with the tablecloth, which is an unpardonable impropriety.

When the plate is dirty you should ask for another; it would be revoltingly gross to clean spoon, fork, or knife with the fingers.

At good tables, attentive servants change plates without being called upon.

Nothing is more improper than to lick your fingers, to touch the meats and put them into your mouth with your hand, to stir sauce with your fingers, or to dip bread into it with your fork and then suck it.

You should never take salt with your fingers. It is very common for children to pile pieces one on top of the other, and even to take out of their mouths something they have chewed, and flick pieces with their fingers. [All these were mentioned earlier as general misdemeanors, but are here mentioned only as the "bad" manners of children. Grown-ups no longer do such things.] Nothing is more impolite [than] to lift meat to your nose to smell it; to let others smell it is a further impoliteness toward the master of the table; if you should happen to find dirt in the food, you should get rid of the food without showing it.

L

1780?

From an anonymous work, *La Civilité honete pour les enfants* (Caen, n.d.), p. 35:

Afterward, he shall place his serviette on him, his bread on the left and his knife on the right, to cut the meat without breaking it. [The sequence described here is found in many other documents. The most elementary procedure, earlier usual among the upper class as well, is to break up the meat with the hands. Here the next stage is described, when the meat is cut with the knife. The use of the fork is not mentioned. To break off pieces of meat is regarded here as a mark of the peasant, cutting it as clearly the manners of the town.] He will also take care not to put his knife into his mouth. He should not leave his hands on his plate . . . nor rest his elbow on it, for this is done only by the aged and infirm.

The well-behaved child will be the last to help himself if he is with his superiors.

. . . next, if it is meat, he will cut it politely with his knife and eat it with his bread.

It is a rustic, dirty habit to take chewed meat from your mouth and put it on your plate. Nor should you ever put back into the dish something you have taken from it.

M

1786

From a conversation between the poet Delille and Abbé Cosson:⁵²

A short while ago Abbé Cosson, Professor of Belles Lettres at the Collège Mazarin, told me about a dinner he had attended a few days previously with some *court people* . . . at Versailles.

"I'll wager," I told him, "that you perpetrated a hundred incongruities."

"What do you mean?" Abbé Cosson asked quickly, greatly perturbed. "I believe I did everything in the same way as everyone else."

"What presumption! I'll bet you did nothing in the same way as anyone else. But I'll limit myself to the dinner. First, what did you do with your serviette when you sat down?"

"With my serviette? I did the same as everyone else. I unfolded it, spread it out, and fixed it by a corner to my buttonhole."

"Well, my dear fellow, you are the only one who did that. One does not spread out one's serviette, one keeps it on one's knees. And how did you eat your soup?"

"Like everyone else, I think. I took my spoon in one hand and my fork in the other. . . ."

"Your fork? Good heavens! No one uses his fork to eat soup. . . . But tell me how you ate your bread."

"Certainly, like everyone else: I cut it neatly with my knife."

"Oh dear, you break bread, you do not cut it. . . . Let's go on. The coffee—how did you drink it?"

"Like everyone, to be sure. It was boiling hot, so I poured it little by little from my cup into my saucer."

"Well, you certainly did not drink it like anyone else. Everyone drinks coffee from the cup, never from the saucer. . . ."

N

1859

From *The Habits of Good Society* (London, 1859; 2d ed., verbatim, 1889), p. 257:

Forks were undoubtedly a later invention than fingers, but as we are not *cannibals* I am inclined to think they were a good one.

Part Two

Comments on the Quotations on Table Manners

Group 1:

A Brief Survey of the Societies to which the Texts were Addressed

1. The quotations have been assembled to illustrate a real process, a change in the behavior of people. In general, the examples have been so selected that they may stand as typical of at least certain social groups or strata. No single person, not even so pronounced an individual as Erasmus, invented the *savoir-vivre* of his time.

We hear people of different ages speaking on roughly the same subject. In this way, the changes become more distinct than if we had described them in our own words. From at least the sixteenth century

onward, the commands and prohibitions by which the individual is shaped (in conformity with the standard of society) are in continuous movement. This movement, certainly, is not perfectly rectilinear, but through all its fluctuations and individual curves a definite overall trend is nevertheless perceptible if these voices from past centuries are heard together in context.

Sixteenth-century writings on manners are embodiments of the new court aristocracy that is slowly coalescing from elements of diverse social origin. With it grows a different code of behavior.

De Courtin, in the second half of the seventeenth century, speaks from a court society which is consolidated to the highest degree—the court society of Louis XIV. And he speaks primarily to people of rank, people who do not live directly at court but who wish to familiarize themselves with the manners and customs of the court.

He says in his foreword: "This treatise is not intended for printing but only to satisfy a provincial gentleman who had requested the author, as a particular friend, to give some precepts on civility to his son, whom he intended to send to the court on completing his studies. . . . He [the author] undertook this work only for well-bred people; *it is only to them that it is addressed*; and particularly to youth, which might derive some utility from these small pieces of advice, as not everyone has the opportunity nor the means of coming to the court at Paris to learn the fine points of politeness."

People living in the example-setting circle do not need books in order to know how "one" behaves. This is obvious; it is therefore important to ascertain with what intentions and for which public these precepts are written and printed—precepts which are originally the distinguishing secret of the narrow circles of the court aristocracy.

The intended public is quite clear. It is stressed that the advice is only for *honnêtes gens*, i.e., by and large for upper-class people. Primarily the book meets the need of the provincial nobility to know about behavior at court, and in addition that of distinguished foreigners. But it may be assumed that the not inconsiderable success of this book resulted, among other things, from the interest of leading bourgeois strata. There is ample evidence to show that at this period customs, behavior, and fashions from the court are continuously penetrating the upper middle classes, where they are imitated and more or less altered in accordance with the different social situation. They thereby lose, to some extent, their character as means of distin-

guishing the upper class. They are somewhat devalued. This compels those above to further refinement and development of behavior. And from this mechanism—the development of courtly customs, their dissemination downward, their slight social deformation, their devaluation as marks of distinction—the constant movement in behavior patterns through the upper class receives part of its motivation. What is important is that in this change, in the inventions and fashions of courtly behavior, which are at first sight perhaps chaotic and accidental, over extended time spans certain directions or lines of development emerge. These include, for example, what may be described as an advance of the threshold of embarrassment and shame, as "refinement," or as "civilization." A particular social dynamism triggers a particular psychological one, which has its own regularities.

2. In the eighteenth century wealth increases, and with it the advance of the bourgeois classes. The court circle now includes, directly alongside aristocratic elements, a larger number of bourgeois elements than in the preceding century, without the differences in social rank ever being lost. Shortly before the French Revolution the tendency toward self-encapsulation of the socially weakening aristocracy is intensified once more.

Nevertheless, this extended court society, in which aristocratic and bourgeois elements intermingle, and which has no distinct boundaries barring entry from below must be envisaged as a whole. It comprises the hierarchically structured elite of the country. The compulsion to penetrate or at least imitate it constantly increases with the growing interdependence and prosperity of broad strata. Clerical circles, above all, become popularizers of the courtly customs. The moderated restraint of the emotions and the disciplined shaping of behavior as a whole, which under the name of *civilité* have been developed in the upper class as a purely secular and social phenomenon, a consequence of certain forms of social life, have affinities to particular tendencies in traditional ecclesiastical behavior. *Civilité* is given a new Christian religious foundation. The Church proves, as so often, one of the most important organs of the downward diffusion of behavioral models.

"It is a surprising thing," says the venerable Father La Salle at the beginning of the preface to his rules of Christian *civilité*, "that the majority of Christians regard decency and civility only as a *purely human and worldly quality* and, not thinking to elevate their minds more highly, do not consider it a virtue related to God, our neighbor,

and ourselves. This well shows how little Christianity there is in the world." And as a good deal of the education in France lay in the hands of ecclesiastical bodies, it was above all, if not exclusively, through their mediation that a growing flood of *civilité* tracts now inundated the country. They were used as manuals in the elementary education of children, and were often printed and distributed together with the first instructions on reading and writing.

Precisely thereby the concept of *civilité* is increasingly devalued for the social elite. It begins to undergo a process similar to that which earlier overtook the concept of *courtoisie*.

Excursus on the Rise and Decline of the Concepts of *Courtoisie* and *Civilité*

3. *Courtoisie* originally referred to the forms of behavior that developed at the courts of the great feudal lords. Even during the Middle Ages the meaning of the word clearly lost much of its original social restriction to the "court," coming into use in bourgeois circles as well. With the slow extinction of the knightly-feudal warrior nobility and the formation of a new absolute court aristocracy in the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the concept of *civilité* is slowly elevated as the expression of socially acceptable behavior. *Courtoisie* and *civilité* exist side by side during the French transitional society of the sixteenth century, with its half knightly-feudal, half absolute court character. In the course of the seventeenth century, however, the concept *courtoisie* gradually goes out of fashion in France.

"The words *courtois* and *courtoisie*," says a French writer in 1675,³ "are beginning to age and are no longer good usage. We say *civil*, *honneste*; *civilité*, *honnesteté*."

Indeed, the word *courtoisie* now actually appears as a bourgeois concept. "My neighbor, the bourgeois, . . . says in accordance with the language of the bourgeoisie of Paris 'affable' and 'courteous' (*courtois*) . . . he does not express himself politely because the words 'courteous' and 'affable' are scarcely in use among people of the world, and the words 'civil' and 'decent' (*honnête*) have taken their place, just as 'civility' and 'decency' have taken the place of 'courtesy' and 'affability.'" So we read in a conversation with the title *On*

Good and Bad Usage in Expressing Oneself: On Bourgeois Manners of Speaking, by F. de Callières (1694, pp. 110ff.).

In a very similar way, in the course of the eighteenth century, the concept of *civilité* slowly loses its hold among the upper class of court society. This class is now in its turn undergoing a very slow process of transformation, of bourgeoisification, which, at least up to 1750, is always combined with an inverse process assimilating bourgeois elements to the court. Something of the resultant problem is perceptible, for example, when in 1745 Abbé Gedoy, in an essay "De l'urbanité romaine" (*Oeuvres diverses*, p. 173), discusses the question of why, in his own society, the expression *urbanité*, though it refers to something very fine, has never come into use as much as *civilité*, *humanité*, *politesse*, or *galanterie*, and he replies: "*Urbanitas* signified that *politesse* of language, mind, and manners attached singularly to the city of Rome, which was called par excellence *Urbs*, the city, whereas among us, where this politeness is not the privilege of any city in particular, not even of the capital, but solely of the court, the term urbanity becomes a term . . . with which we may dispense."

If one realizes that "city" at this time refers more or less to "bourgeois good society" as against the narrower court society, one readily perceives the topical importance of the question raised here.

In most of the statements from this period, the use of *civilité* has receded, as here, in the face of *politesse*, and the identification of this whole complex of ideas with *humanité* emerges more sharply.

As early as 1733, Voltaire, in the dedication of his *Zaïre* to a bourgeois, A. M. Faulkner, an English merchant, expressed these tendencies very clearly: "Since the regency of Anne of Austria the French have been the most sociable and the most polite people in the world . . . and *this politeness is not in the least an arbitrary matter, like that which is called civilité, but is a law of nature which they have happily cultivated more than other peoples.*"

Like the concept of *courtoisie* earlier, *civilité* now is slowly beginning to sink. Shortly afterward, the content of this and related terms is taken up and extended in a new concept, the expression of a new form of self-consciousness, the concept of *civilisation*. *Courtoisie*, *civilité*, and *civilisation* mark three stages of a social development. They indicate which society is speaking and being addressed at a given time. However, the actual change in the behavior of the upper classes,

the development of the models of behavior which will henceforth be called "civilized," takes place—at least so far as it is visible in the areas discussed here—in the middle phase. The concept of *civilisation* indicates quite clearly in its nineteenth-century usage that the *process* of civilization—or, more strictly speaking, a phase of this process—has been completed and forgotten. People only want to accomplish this process for other nations, and also, for a period, for the lower classes of their own society. To the upper and middle classes of their own society, civilization appears as a firm possession. They wish above all to disseminate it, and at most to develop it within the framework of the standard already reached.

The examples quoted clearly express the movement toward this standard in the preceding stage of the absolute courts.

A Review of the Curve Marking the "Civilization" of Eating Habits

4. At the end of the eighteenth century, shortly before the revolution, the French upper class attained approximately the standard of eating manners, and certainly not only of eating manners, that was gradually to be taken for granted in the whole of civilized society. Example M from the year 1786 is instructive enough: it shows as still a decidedly courtly custom exactly the same use of the serviette which in the meantime has become customary in the whole of civilized bourgeois society. It shows the exclusion of the fork from the eating of soup, the necessity of which, to be sure, is only understood if we recall that soup often used to contain, and still contains in France, more solid content than it does now. It further shows the requirement not to cut but to break one's bread at table, a requirement that has in the meantime been democratized, as a courtly demand. And the same applies to the way in which one drinks coffee.

These are a few examples of how our everyday ritual was formed. If this series were continued up to the present day, further changes of detail would be seen: new imperatives are added, old ones are relaxed; a wealth of national and social variations on table manners emerges; the penetration of the middle classes, the working class, the peasantry by the uniform ritual of civilization, and by the regulation of drives that its acquisition requires, is of varying strength. But the essential basis of what is required and what is forbidden in civilized society—the standard eating technique, the manner of using knife, fork, spoon,

plate, serviette, and other eating utensils—these remain in their essential features unchanged. Even the development of technology in all areas—even that of cooking—by the introduction of new sources of energy has left the techniques of eating and other forms of behavior essentially unchanged. Only on very close inspection does one observe traces of a trend that is continuing to develop.

What is still changing now is, above all, the technology of production. The technology of consumption was developed and kept in motion by social formations which were, to a degree never since equaled, consumption classes. With their social decline, the rapid and intensive elaboration of consumption techniques ceases and is delegated into what now becomes the private (in contrast to the occupational) sphere of life. Correspondingly, the tempo of movement and change in these spheres which during the stage of the absolute courts was relatively fast, slows down once again.

Even the shapes of eating utensils—plates, dishes, knives, forks, and spoons—are from now on no more than variations on themes of the *dix-huitième* and preceding centuries. Certainly there are still very many changes of detail. One example is the differentiation of utensils. On many occasions, not only the plates are changed after each course but the eating utensils, too. It does not suffice to eat simply with knife, fork, and spoon instead of with one's hands. More and more in the upper class a special implement is used for each kind of food. Soup-spoons, fish knives, and meat knives are on one side of the plate. Forks for the hors d'oeuvre, fish, and meat on the other. Above the plate are fork, spoon, or knife—according to the custom of the country—for sweet foods. And for the dessert and fruit yet another implement is brought in. All these utensils are differently shaped and equipped. They are now larger, now smaller, now more round, now more pointed. But on closer consideration they do not represent anything actually new. They, too, are variations on the same theme, differentiations within the same standard. And only on a few points—above all, in the use of the knife—do slow movements begin to show themselves that lead beyond the standard already attained. Later there will be more to say on this.

5. In a sense, something similar is true of the period up to the fifteenth century. Up to then—for very different reasons—the standard eating technique, the basic stock of what is socially prohibited and permitted, like the behavior of people toward one another and

toward themselves (of which these prohibitions and commands are expressions), remains fairly constant in its essential features, even if here too fashions, fluctuations, regional and social variations, and a slow movement in a particular direction are by no means entirely absent.

Nor are the transitions from one phase to another to be ascertained with complete exactness. The more rapid movement begins later here, earlier there, and everywhere one finds slight preparatory shifts. Nevertheless, the overall shape of the curve is everywhere broadly the same: first the medieval phase, with a certain climax in the flowering of knightly-courtly society, marked by eating with the hands. Then a phase of relatively rapid movement and change, embracing roughly the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, in which the compulsions to elaborate eating behavior press constantly in one direction, toward a new standard of table manners.

From then on, one again observes a phase which remains within the framework of the standard already reached, though with a very slow movement in a certain direction. The elaboration of everyday conduct never entirely loses, in this period either, its importance as an instrument of social distinction. But from now on, it no longer plays the same role as in the preceding phase. More exclusively than before, money becomes the basis of social differences. And what people actually achieve and produce becomes more important than their manners.

6. Taken together, the examples show very clearly how this movement progresses. The prohibitions of medieval society, even at the feudal courts do not yet impose any very great restraint on the play of emotions. Compared to later eras, social control is mild. Manners, measured against later ones, are relaxed in all senses of the word. One ought not to snort or smack one's lips while eating. One ought not to spit across the table or blow one's nose on the tablecloth (for this is used for wiping greasy fingers) or into the fingers (with which one holds the common dish). Eating from the same dish or plate as others is taken for granted. One must only refrain from falling on the dish like a pig, and from dipping bitten food into the communal sauce.

Many of these customs are still mentioned in Erasmus's treatise and in its adaptation by Calviac. More clearly than by inspecting particular accounts of contemporary manners, by surveying the whole movement one sees how it progresses. Table utensils are still limited; on the

left the bread, on the right the glass and knife. That is all. The fork is already mentioned, although with a limited function as an instrument for lifting food from the common dish. And, like the handkerchief, the napkin also appears already, both still—a symbol of transition—as optional rather than necessary implements: if you have a handkerchief, the precepts say, use it rather than your fingers. If a napkin is provided, lay it over your left shoulder. One hundred and fifty years later both napkin and handkerchief are, like the fork, more or less indispensable utensils in the courtly class.

The curve followed by other habits and customs is similar. First the soup is often drunk, whether from the common dish or from ladles used by several people. In the *courtois* writings the use of the spoon is prescribed. It, too, will first of all serve several together. A further step is shown by the quotation from Calviac of 1560. He mentions that it was customary among Germans to allow each guest his own spoon. The next step is shown by Courtin's text from the year 1672. Now one no longer eats the soup directly from the common dish, but pours some into one's own plate, first of all using one's own spoon; but there are even people, we read here, who are so *delicate* that they do not wish to eat from a dish into which others have dipped a spoon already used. It is therefore necessary to wipe one's spoon with the serviette before dipping it into the dish. And some people are not satisfied even with this. For them, one is not allowed to dip a used spoon back into the common dish at all; instead, one must ask for a clean one for this purpose.

Statements like these show not only how the whole ritual of living together is in flux, but also how people themselves are aware of this change.

Here, step by step, the now accepted way of taking soup is being established: everyone has his own plate and his own spoon, and the soup is distributed with a specialized implement. Eating has acquired a new style corresponding to the new necessities of social life.

Nothing in table manners is self-evident or the product, as it were, of a "natural" feeling of delicacy. The spoon, fork, and napkin are not invented by individuals as technical implements with obvious purposes and clear directions for use. Over centuries, in direct social intercourse and use, their functions are gradually defined, their forms sought and consolidated. Each custom in the changing ritual, however minute, establishes itself infinitely slowly, even forms of behavior

that to us seem quite elementary or simply "reasonable," such as the custom of taking liquid only with the spoon. Every movement of the hand—for example, the way in which one holds and moves knife, spoon, or fork—is standardized only step by step. And the social mechanism of standardization is itself seen in outline if the series of images is surveyed as a whole. There is a more or less limited courtly circle which first stamps the models only for the needs of its own social situation and in conformity with the psychological condition corresponding to it. But clearly the structure and development of French society as a whole gradually makes ever broader strata willing and anxious to adopt the models developed above them: they spread, also very gradually, throughout the whole of society, certainly not without undergoing some modification in the process.

The passage of models from one social unit to another, now from the centers of a society to its outposts (e.g., from the Parisian court to other courts), now within the same political-social unit (e.g., within France or Saxony, from above to below or from below to above), is to be counted, in the whole civilizing process, among the most important individual movements. What the examples show is only a limited segment of these. Not only the eating manners but also forms of thinking or speaking, in short, of behavior in general, are molded in a similar way throughout France, even if there are significant differences in the timing and structure of their patterns of development. The elaboration of a particular ritual of human relations in the course of social and psychological development cannot be isolated, even if here, as a first attempt, it has only been possible to follow a single strand. A short example from the process of the "civilization" of speech may serve as a reminder that the observation of manners and their transformation exposes to view only a very simple and easily accessible segment of a much more far-reaching process of social change.

Excursus on the Modeling of Speech at Court

7. For speech, too, a limited circle first develops certain standards.

As in Germany, though to a far lesser extent, the language spoken in court society was different from the language spoken by the bourgeoisie.

"You know," we read in a little work which in its time was much read, *Mots à la mode* by Callières, in the edition of 1693 (p. 46), "that the bourgeois speak very differently from us."

If we examine more closely what is termed "bourgeois" speech, and what is referred to as the expression of the courtly upper class, we encounter the same phenomenon that can be observed in eating-customs and manners in general: much of what in the seventeenth and to some extent the eighteenth century was the distinguishing form of expression and language of court society gradually becomes the French national language.

The young son of bourgeois parents, M. Thibault, is presented to us visiting a small aristocratic society. The lady of the house asks after his father. "He is your very humble servant, Madame," Thibault answers, "and he is still poorly, as you well know, since you have graciously sent oftentimes to inquire about the state of his health."

The situation is clear. A certain social contact exists between the aristocratic circle and the bourgeois family. The lady of the house has mentioned it previously. She also says that the elder Thibault is a very nice man, not without adding that such acquaintances are sometimes quite useful to the aristocracy because these people, after all, have money.⁴ And at this point one recalls the very different structure of German society.

But social contacts at this time are clearly not close enough, leaving aside the bourgeois intelligentsia, to have effaced the linguistic differences between the classes. Every other word the young Thibault says is, by the standards of court society, awkward and gross, smelling bourgeois—as the courtiers put it, "from the mouth." In court society one does not say "as you well know" or "oftentimes" or "poorly" (*comme bien savez, souventes fois, maladif*).

One does not say, like M. Thibault in the ensuing conversation, "Je vous demande excuse" (I beg to be excused). In courtly society one says, as today in bourgeois society, "Je vous demande pardon" (I beg your pardon).

M. Thibault says: "Un mien ami, un mien parent, un mien cousin" (A friend of mine, etc.), instead of the courtly "un de mes amis, un de mes parents" (p. 20). He says "deffunct mon père, le pauvre deffunct" (deceased). And he is instructed that that too is not one of the expressions "which civility has introduced among well-spoken people. People of the world do not say that a man is deceased when they mean that he is dead" (p. 22). The word can be used at most when

saying "we must pray to God for the soul of the deceased . . . but those who speak well say rather: my late father, the late Duke, etc." (*feu mon père*, etc.). And it is pointed out that "for the poor deceased" is "a very bourgeois turn of phrase."

8. Here, too, as with manners, there is a kind of double movement: the bourgeois are, as it were, "courtified," and the aristocracy, "bourgeoisified." Or, more precisely: bourgeois people are influenced by the behavior of courtly people, and vice versa. The influence from below to above is certainly very much weaker in the seventeenth century in France than in the eighteenth. But it is not entirely absent: the château Vaux-le Vicomte of the bourgeois intendant of finances, Nicolas Fouquet, antedates the royal Versailles, and is in many ways its model. That is a clear example. The wealth of leading bourgeois strata compels those above to compete. And the incessant influx of bourgeois people to the circle of the court also produces a specific movement in speech: with the new human substance it brings new linguistic substance, the slang of the bourgeoisie, into the circle of the court. Elements of it are constantly being assimilated into courtly language, polished, refined, transformed; they are made, in a word, "courtly," i.e., adapted to the standard of sensibility of the court circles. They are thereby turned into means of distinguishing the *gens de la cour* from the bourgeoisie, and then perhaps, after some time, penetrate the bourgeoisie once more, thus refined and modified, to become "specifically bourgeois."

There is, says the Duke in one of the conversations quoted from Callières (*Du bon et du mauvais usage*, p. 98), a manner of speaking "most common among the bourgeois of Paris and even among some courtiers raised among the bourgeoisie. It is to say 'Let us go and see' (*voyons voir*), instead of saying 'Let us see' (*voyons*), and avoiding the word 'go,' which is perfectly useless and disagreeable in this place."

But there has recently come into use, the Duke continues, "another bad turn of phrase, which began among the lowest people and made its fortune at the court, like those favorites without merit who got themselves elevated there in the old days. It is 'il en sçait bien long,' meaning that someone is subtle and clever. The ladies of the court are beginning to use it, too."

So it goes on. The bourgeois and even some court people say "il faut que nous faisons cela" instead of "il faut que nous fassions

cela." Some say "l'on za" and "l'on zest" instead of the courtly "l'on a" and "l'on est." They say "Je le l'ai" instead of "Je l'ai."

In almost all these cases the linguistic form which here appears as courtly has indeed become the national usage. But there are also examples of courtly linguistic formations being gradually discarded as "too refined," "too affected."

9. All this elucidates at the same time what was said earlier about the sociogenetic differences between the German and French national characters. Language is one of the most accessible manifestations of what we perceive as national character. Here it can be seen from a single concrete example how this peculiar and typical character is elaborated in conjunction with certain social formations. The French language was decisively stamped by the court and court society. For the German language the Imperial Chamber and Chancellery for a time played a similar role, even if they did not have remotely the same influence as the French court. As late as 1643, someone claims his language to be exemplary "because it is modeled on writings from the Chamber at Speyer."⁵ Then it was the universities that attained almost the same importance for German culture and language as the court in France. But these two socially closely related entities, Chancellery and university, influenced speech less than writing; they formed the German written language not through conversation but through documents, letters, and books. And if Nietzsche observes that even the German drinking song is erudite, or if he contrasts the elimination of specialist terms by the courtly Voltaire to the practice of the Germans, he sees very clearly the results of these different historical developments.

10. If in France the *gens de la cour* say "This is spoken well and this badly," a large question is raised that must be at least touched on in passing: "By what standards are they actually judging what is good and bad in language? What are their criteria for selecting, polishing, and modifying expressions?"

Sometimes they reflect on this themselves. What they say on the subject is at first sight rather surprising, and at any rate significant beyond the area of language. Phrases, words, and nuances are good *because* they, the members of the social elite, use them; and they are bad *because* social inferiors speak in this way.

M. Thibault sometimes defends himself when he is told that this or that turn of phrase is bad. "I am much obliged to you, Madame," he

says (*Du bon et du mauvais usage*, p. 23), "for the trouble you are taking to instruct me, yet it seems to me that the term 'deceased' is a well-established word used by a great many well-bred people (*honnêtes gens*)."

"It is very possible," the lady answers, "that there are many well-bred people who are insufficiently familiar with the delicacy of our language . . . a delicacy which is known to only a small number of well-spoken people and causes them not to say that a man is deceased in order to say that he is dead."

A small circle of people is versed in this delicacy of language; to speak as they do is to speak correctly. What the others say does not count. The judgments are apodictic. A reason other than that "We, the elite, speak thus, and only we have sensitivity to language" is neither needed nor known. "With regard to errors committed against good usage," it is expressly stated in another place, "as there are no definite rules it depends only on the consent of a certain number of polite people whose ears are accustomed to certain ways of speaking and to preferring them to others" (p. 98). And then the words are listed that should be avoided.

Antiquated words are unsuited to ordinary, serious speech. Very new words must arouse suspicion of affectation—we might perhaps say, of snobbery. Learned words that smack of Latin and Greek must be suspect to all *gens du monde*. They surround anyone using them with an atmosphere of pedantry, if other words are known that express the same thing simply.

Low words used by the common people must be carefully avoided, for those who use them show that they have had a "low education." "And it is of these words, that is, low words," says the courtly speaker, "that we speak in this connection"—he means in the con-traposition of courtly and bourgeois language.

The reason given for the expurgation of "bad" words from language is the refinement of feeling that plays no small role in the whole civilizing process. But this refinement is the possession of a relatively small group. Either one has this sensitivity or one has not—that, roughly, is the speaker's attitude. The people who possess this delicacy, a small circle, determine by their consensus what is held to be good or bad.

In other words, of all the rational arguments that might be put forward for the selection of expressions, the social argument, that

something is better because it is the usage of the upper class, or even of only an elite within the upper class, is by far the most prominent.

"Antiquated words," words that have gone out of fashion, are used by the older generation or by those who are not permanently involved directly in court life, the *déclassé*. "Too new words" are used by the clique of young people who have yet to be accepted, who speak their special "slang," a part of which will perhaps be tomorrow's fashion. "Learned words" are used, as in Germany, by those educated at the universities, especially lawyers and the higher administrators, i.e., in France, the *noblesse de robe*. "Low expressions" are all the words used by the bourgeoisie down to the populace. The linguistic polemic corresponds to a quite definite, very characteristic social stratification. It shows and delimits the group which at a given moment exerts control over language: in a broader sense the *gens de la cour*, but in a narrower sense a smaller, particularly aristocratic circle of people who temporarily have influence at court, and who carefully distinguish themselves from the social climbers, the courtiers from bourgeois nurseries, from the "antiquated," from the "young people," the "snobbish" competitors of the rising generation, and last but not least, from the specialized officials emanating from the university. This circle is the predominant influence on language formation at this time. How the members of these narrower and broader court circles speak is "how to speak," to speak *comme il faut*. Here the models of speech are formed that subsequently spread out in longer or shorter waves. The manner in which language develops and is stamped corresponds to a certain social structure. Accordingly, from the mid-eighteenth century onward, bourgeois influence on the French language slowly gains in strength. But this long passage through a stage dominated by the court aristocracy remains perceptible in the French language today, as does the passage of German through a stage of dominance by a learned middle-class intelligentsia. And wherever elites or pseudo-elites form within French bourgeois society, they attach themselves to these older, distinguishing tendencies in their language.