

REVIEW FEATURE ESSAY

SOCIOGENESIS VERSUS PSYCHOGENESIS: THE UNIQUE SOCIOLOGY OF NORBERT ELIAS*

Alan Sica
University of Kansas

One wonders, as Elias must, what form sociology and its theories would have taken, in Europe and the U.S., had his precocious masterpiece, *Ueber den Prozess der Zivilisation*, not been lost in the bustle of WWII, but had come into English in 1939 along with the original. A lot of nonsense and wasted effort, particularly that engendered by *The Structure of Social Action* (1937) and *The Social System* (1951), might have been mitigated, or at least refined. Elias certainly thinks so, as he explains at length in the 1968 preface to the second German edition (appended to this translation). If Parsons, on the right, could well have been instructed by Elias' data and theorizing concerning the high bourgeoisie, its evolution into mannered prominence, so too could have Marcuse's special application of leftist analysis. Elias does not figure in *Eros and Civilization* (1955), nor *One-Dimensional Man* (1964), which is puzzling given Marcuse's aim, to assess the cost modernity has wrought from its subject peoples. Elias' "epistemological politics" hardly agree with either Parsons or Marcuse. But he gave social science an indispensable, unimproved portrait of how, decade by decade, European money and power changed itself, both in outward behavior and internal emotional decor—aspects of the sociological province that have assumed increasing importance in the field since his book was published. Not to read him, especially for theorists of grand scale, or comparativists, is sheer negligence.

Rod Aya, a member of the Dutch Elias school, gathered as much biographical information as we are likely to get about this unusual sociologist, from the man himself as well as other sources. Without repeating it all (Aya, 1978:220ff), several points are worth remembering when evaluating *The Civilizing Process*. Just as *History and Class Consciousness* or *Ideology and Utopia* (in some ways elder sisters to

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this work) may initially seem flashes of isolated genius, when set within the vortex of Budapest or Frankfurt in the 1920s (Gabel, 1975; Kettler, 1971:38-54), they begin to harmonize with a definable context. Unlike so many of the time, Elias did not tremble in the shadow of Max Weber. This independence of mind was probably due to a remarkable education. He took a medical degree at Breslau (1922), but only after attending lectures by Rickert, Jaspers, Husserl, and a Kantian mentor, Richard Hoenigswald, who convinced him to study broadly. To this end Elias formally took up philosophy, psychology, chemistry, and art history, a liberal education unimaginable today. This breadth of sheer factual knowledge, the outcome of a Kantian respect for phenomena over noumena, led Elias to undertake highly specific socio-historical studies (e.g., royal power in court societies, eventually expanded into *Die höfische Gesellschaft*, 1969, trans. by E. Jephcott as *The Court Society*, NY: Pantheon Books, 1983). He began these under Alfred Weber, then continued them as Mannheim's assistant in Frankfurt until the diaspora. Upon leaving Germany in 1933, he tried making toys in France—his second dose of business life—but failed. Beginning in 1935 with Jewish refugee backing, he used the British Museum to assess 19th century French liberalism. This took him, via the historical etymology of *civilité* versus *civilisation*, to old etiquette books and beyond, so by fall, 1936, he had finished *Ueber den Prozess der Zivilisation* in two volumes. This comes close to an unparalleled achievement in the social sciences, especially given the circumstances of his labor. When his Polish publisher could not bind the loose sheets, his father paid to have them sent to Basel, and the book finally appeared in 1939 when Elias was forty-two.

Aya supplies other useful explanations for the book's uniqueness. He correctly argues that part of the reason Elias worked in obscurity for so long was because his major project did not fit conventional categories; part history, part social-psychology, plus philosophy of culture, it defied reductionism into this or that specialty. (However, this did not prevent Reinhard Bendix, Eric Wolf, and Goffman from *noting* the book's existence over the years.) Also according to Aya, "the mission" of the book was to operationalize and "test" Freud, especially his ideas in the more speculative texts, e.g., *The Future of an Illusion*, where he wrote: "It is in keeping with the course of human development that external coercion gradually becomes internalized; for a special mental agency, man's super-ego, takes it over and includes it among its commandments" (Aya, 1978:226, n. 19). This bias, even if somewhat

overstated here as I think it is, would not have promoted the book's acceptance among many social theorists after WWII, since Freud, even as Parsons' unlikely ally, had not then joined the pantheon with Durkheim and Marx. Marcuse, Philip Rieff, and others had not yet legitimated Freud for social theory. Yet this purported link is in itself disturbing, with Elias being viewed as under Freud's influence, first, because other theoretical material comes into play within his work, and second, because he is primarily a social historian, not a psychoanalyst of culture, as Marcuse later became. For instance, in an interview from 1974, he made this summary statement of his work: "In societies where inequality between groups is diminishing, greater self-control becomes necessary" (Fontaine, 1978:252), an hypothesis which could hardly be more Weberian.

Not everyone agrees with me when I insist that theorists must take Elias into account, but few refuse to see the documentary, "empirical" value of his magnum opus. Objections arise for the most part because of Elias' theoretical claims (especially vis-a-vis Marx and Freud), and the way he structured his explanation for the uneven phenomenon of de-barbarization across Europe. Urizen Books, before its untimely end, brought the first volume out in English in 1978, the edition under review including a reprint of that translation. Therefore many reviews are available,¹ among them several longer ones reaching varying verdicts on Elias' main ideas (and, less so, his data), which I want to contrast with my own opinion.

George Mosse (1978:180), the noted historian of ideology and Nazi Germany, was among the few reviewers to comment upon the book's "outmoded" data, especially regarding the severity of knightly violence as Elias described it. Mosse lists a number of works published since 1939 which deal with the descriptive transformation of barbarism into "civility," particularly with reference to our understanding of bodies, their emissions and display (e.g., Nicholson, 1956; Kern, 1975). But as useful as these "updatings" are, they do not render Elias antique, nor does Mosse claim they do. Perhaps more importantly, Elias slighted Christianity's work in abetting the move from *Fremdzwang* (external control) to *Selbstzwang* (self-control) among the European courtier class. Likewise Pietism was ignored in his explanation (Mosse, 1978: 181). In avoiding both an Hegelian version of history, operated by an invisible motor, or a Marxist account highlighting class struggle and the primacy of economic relations, Elias left himself with fewer theoretical allies than other historians with similar interests. Mosse wonders if this

self-imposed isolation, this unusual version of “empiricism,” did not lead Elias down a path less fruitful than might otherwise have been the case.

Susan Buck-Morss (1978) has no doubts that Elias’ repudiation of Marx, his special borrowing from Freud, and his explicit refusal to join ranks with Weber, Lukács, or even his own mentor, Mannheim, unnecessarily lessened his impact. She compares his overall achievement unfavorably with Adorno’s (with whom he once taught, and about whom he said kind but vacuous words upon receiving the first Adorno Prize in 1977). Yet neither man made use of the other, another peculiar arrangement given that both made it their premier scholarly task to evaluate the West’s attempted suicide in this century. Elias’ answer, *The Civilizing Process*, could hardly have less to do theoretically or more to do historically with Adorno’s response to the same crisis, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Buck-Morss, because of her strong identification with the latter, naturally finds Elias’ approach to history, his studied atheoreticism, as self-defeating, and a particularly wasteful posture given his ready access to the thick intellectual culture of Europe prior to the 1930s diaspora.

Equally irritating for leftists, even those subtle enough to embrace the Frankfurt modification, is Elias’ organizing image of social life, of interdependencies and “interconnectedness.” Buck-Morss likens this to an aristocratic zone of ballroom dancing: the politeness, the formality, the glitter, and most of all, the invisible lower orders, peering in at the windows (1978:196). The dramatic edginess of reading history as filled with overt, persistent conflict is lost to Elias. In its place are subtle, long-term changes in civil behavior. In this Elias seems much more in touch with Mannheim’s historical precision than with Lukács’ eschatology of class war. In short, some on the left see *The Civilizing Process* as an attempt to answer *History and Class Consciousness* with a depoliticized analytic, a story of changing courtly behaviors and little else. But this is unfair to both books and their authors. If Elias was not the theoretical gymnast Lukács proved to be for 60 years, he more deftly made his way through what Marxists call “concrete grounding,” through historical fact, than his rival felt was necessary. He never claimed that “good manners” carry more historical weight than relations of production, but he insisted that understanding their refinement since the middle ages explains much about the dynamics of modernization, in a lane that runs parallel to changing modes of production. It is this sort of emphasis and expert documentation that made Elias’ book

known to a select few outside his field, such as Ernst Gombrich, the art historian, Arnold Toynbee, and our own Charles Beard.

Buck-Morss accuses Elias of “spiriting away” the material basis of culture on the one hand (1978:193), of hypostatizing Freud’s analysis of the self, as if it were not a product of history, on the other (186). She sees in this (and in his ignoring Weber’s style of thought, specifying what personality types most eagerly accumulate capital) a debilitating iconoclasm, taking Elias finally into reluctant functionalist analysis. But if so, it is a form, emphasizing genuine social interdependencies, that contradicts Parsons’ version completely. If critics like Buck-Morss see more continuity than rupture between the two theories, this is part of the price Elias paid for cutting himself free of the two theoretical lineages other researchers naturally enlisted for aid when carrying out “intercivilizational analysis” (as Benjamin Nelson called it), i.e., Marxism and Freudianism.

Partly owing to this choice, Elias’ book joined those of his teachers and friends, Mannheim and Alfred Weber, on a short shelf of works one might call “brilliant and unattached.” William James claimed that the “sentiment of rationality” is that feeling of release, of comfort, derived from subsuming a bothersome fact under some familiar rubric, and the tension of being unable to do so is what we call “irrationality.” Put this way, Elias was more comfortable with tension than other writers, since for him the data came first and theory followed; he did not strain for all-inclusive, rationalizing theory. As Reinhard Bendix—that rare sociologist who referred to Elias in two of his books—once advised a student, “A little theory goes a long way” (Stinchcombe, 1968:v).

Wolf Lepenies is full of praise for Elias, pointing to his incisive critique of Parsons’ “situational sociology” and its “wax museum” qualities (1978:62). In place of such an undialectical snapshot of history, Elias offers an “historical psychology”—a project Europeans have warmed to for some time, e.g., van den Berg (1964, who cites Elias [241, n. 17]). Lepenies makes the interesting comparison, in contrast to everything Buck-Morss wrote, that Elias took social analysis into a realm Adorno knew about but did not explore. He cites a passage in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* concerning a “subterranean” history of the body, of passions, and so on, and the need for their analysis (63). But another European, Andreas Wehowsky (1978), is less complimentary. He chides the “resignative character of the theory,” its relatively uncritical flavor (68). He wonders where genuine subjectivity fits in, since

volition seems to be lost both to Elias' ideas about socialization and its resultant, the grand "ballroom dance" of personal interdependence. He also perceives exaggerated historical continuity in the bourgeoisie's control of its libidinal pressures to fit evolving forms of civility. This argument is seconded by several other reviewers who are more historian than social theorist.

But another of Wehowsky's charges is unusual and intriguing, that Elias' failure to take up squarely the role of religion in diminishing barbarism proves especially detrimental when one considers Calvinism, as Weber did. Calvin's doctrine "excludes an aesthetic interpretation of individual egoism" (72), which, in a sense, serves as the invisible undercarriage to Elias' engine of historical change. In order for folkways to become critical to the self-concept, the ego must enjoy the status of prized object or construct, something of beauty and elegance, the preservation and enlarging of which becomes an aesthetic project. Such a notion works much better when considering *The Courtier*, Castiglione's portrait of Italian high renaissance chic in 1516, than the dour events in Zurich fifty years later (72-76).

The longest review of the "Elias phenomenon" in a sociology journal was Bauman's (1979). His remarks are less politically charged than Buck-Morss' and not so historically technical as Mosse's. But he does treat several items important for the social theorist, while summarizing Elias' approach to his craft in his books other than *The Civilizing Process*. Bauman acknowledges Elias' magnum opus as "sociology at its rarely reached peak" (120), though he objects to its "revolutionary conservatism" in method. Without using this phraseology, he is accusing Elias of ignoring what Bauman's teacher, Anthony Giddens, has called the "double hermeneutic" of social science, meaning that the "object" of inquiry is making its own knowledge through its own "agency," while sociologists scurry along behind evaluating this pre-formed information as skillfully as they can (Giddens, 1976:162; also 1984). Bauman correctly fixes on Elias' conception of "figuration" as his major innovation, in theory *and* method, which, when used properly, creates a sociology of "totality, concreteness, and flexibility" (119). This innovation, like many others in the history of change, was abetted by Elias' ignorance "of the books which are now declared the standard books of a sociologist's ancestors" (Gleichmann, et al., 1977:78; Elias' words). For Bauman "figurational sociology" is non-normative, resists "pseudo-distinctions" (individual versus society, stability versus change, et cetera), and is much better attuned to change as such, even subtle or

long-term in nature, than other theories. "Concrete" features of social life, of particular interest to Marxists, Elias describes this way: "If the term 'concrete' means anything at all, we can say that the figuration formed by the players [of a game] is as concrete as the players themselves" (Elias, 1978:130).

Bauman's reservations about figurational sociology and its prospects detract only a little from his encomia. He wonders if Elias is not too much on the side of the data, as it were, such that we might lose courage to "theorize as such" (121), or to venture forth with methods more abrasive to the data than Elias'. Put most simply, will the historian who helped create *The History of Manners* pull too hard on the reins when his sociologist partner wants to brutalize pristine fact a bit, to fit them inside some prized mold; an old, perhaps irresolvable worry. Bauman also wonders about Elias' preference for Freud over Weber; in my reading of the book, however, this choice is less clear-cut. It is true that "'removing out of sight,' concealment [was] the major method of the civilizing process" (122), and that "Rational explanations of behavioral norms, if used, were kept well in the background" (123), though how far in the background varied over time and place. But Bauman's summary of Elias' aims is useful. After pointing out the silliness of seeing the book as "an amusing and enlightening history of customs and standards of *comme il faut* and *comme il ne faut pas*," he says:

While the true cultural and scientific importance of the study is embodied exactly in the organic unity of the two volumes; in demonstrating, with merciless logic and overwhelming empirical evidence, that long term changes in what is normally classified as "personality structure" and in what is normally considered under a separate heading of "socio-political structure," were aspects of the same historical process; not only intertwined but mutually instrumental in each other's occurrence. (121)

True, his sentence overlooks syntax, but the sentiment is worth remembering.

Without meaning to do so, given simple chronology, Elias' "unearthing of carefully forgotten recent and non-rational origins of the way of life on which the 'civilized' world wants to found its claim to universal supremacy" (124) upended the "majestic stability" of Parsons' fantasies. It is for this achievement, and also in motivating

other researchers (e.g., Koenigsberger, 1978), that Elias deserves much more credit than he has received. And even if one agrees with Dunning and Mennell (1979) that Bauman's reading of Elias bears strong traces of his own debt to conventional sociological reasoning (498); that Durkheim's theory of societal cohesion is more important to Elias than Simmel's pursuit of formal types, as Bauman claimed; that Elias' "processual method" undercuts all standard modes of social analysis, his method having fruitfully developed within "an empirical idiom of discourse" (Thompson, 1978:193-94); this is all the more reason to give Elias a reading delayed forty years.

If one measure of the book's importance is the passion it excites, *The History of Manners* is as central now to interpreting Western civilization as it was irrelevant for the first 30 years of its existence. But, to repeat, this prominence today seems more a function of having brought to light astonishing details of past lives—can one say "curiosities"?—which theorists never confront, than because Elias has dismantled competing theories outright. More than one reviewer slyly noted that the book's new dedication, to parents lost in Nazi camps, undermines the entire argument: that we are more civilized than we once were. Even as a cheap shot, such a remark urges one to compare individual violence, libidinal overflow, and viciousness with collectively organized brutality of the type we take as given. Yet with his ear for irony, this could not have escaped Elias, who still believes we are babes in arms compared with our medieval ancestors (Fontaine, 1978).

With the first volume of the set in English for five years now (even if the translation is "marred by a distressing number of mistakes and inapposite renderings" [Aya, 1978:225, n. 2]), and with all the extant reviews, I will consider certain points of theoretical or substantive interest rather than trying, vainly, to summarize everything. Elias strangely divided the first volume into two chapters, the first only 50 pages long, in two parts, the second 164 pages in length. His 45-page attack on Parsons (1968) and other non-figurational sociologies is appended. Many readers have fixated on the specifics of nose-blowing, spitting, or bedroom activities, and other processes Elias describes in the second chapter, but the book begins on a different note entirely.

Like many other historians of German thought, Elias wondered why *Kultur* had become superior to "mere" *Zivilisation*, a contrast firmly anchored in Kant and more generally accepted as an article of faith by the German bourgeoisie. *Kultur* entailed *Bildung*, self-cultivation, the strenuous, life-long pursuit of enlightenment and answers to

the biggest questions. *Civilisation* for the French meant courtly manners; for Germans it connoted simpering acceptance of folkways without regard for the "deeper" truths one must discover alone, presumably because of Luther, and defend against demands of ordinary propriety. Elias penetrates simple etymology and gets to the socio-linguistic level of analysis, by showing how the French bourgeoisie, pulled into court life by omnipotent rulers, caved in to the ritual of *courtoisie*, courtly behavior. German *Burghers* maintained a life of their own—epitomized by Kant in *Ideas on a Universal History* and elsewhere—because the Prussian aristocracy kept them out of court to protect their own inherited privilege. The French bourgeois fop at court or in aristocratic circles "feels right" as an historical and literary stereotype, but not so an imagined *Burgher* joshing with the elite at castle. This stolid, inner-directed *Mensch* could no more dance and bow than the fop could handle his money. And from this distinction, set in social structure by the 1770s, elemental hatreds between the rival middle classes formed that erupted in 1870, then finalized at Verdun. These ideas are simple enough, so easy to handle in fact that Elias dances around his own dichotomization here and there, as when he shows that morally-inspired *Kultur* (inner-direction) moved toward fusion with externally oriented *Zivilisation* at points in German history when its international political strength rivalled that of the French (289, n. 2).

Elias' ability to find neglected sources² and use them is what justifies his rage at Parsons' limp neo-Spencerianism of the late 1960s, where vacuous notions float high above fact. Elias *qua* historian (perhaps following the stylistic lead of Mannheim's "Historicism" or "Conservative Thought") works hard at unearthing the misplaced detail, one after another, until the entire puzzle begins to look like one he could believe in. Is this "mere" antiquarianism? When a scholar cannot read foreign tongues and fears the smell of dusty tomes—why "tomes" always instead of "books"?—the escape is to charge the enemy with a love for the antique in itself. This motivation for research in forgivable, even necessary, in a medievalist, but Elias' goal was otherwise, and did not waver: to specify the sociogenesis of changing behaviors and ideologies associated with them during the entire modern period, and his archaeology serves that goal.

If Elias presents his readers with a problem, it is how to deal with his discoveries and re-discoveries without trivialization. He elegantly illustrates the careers of *Kultur*, *Zivilisation*, *Civilité*, *Courtoisie*, and so on, the dialectic between language and social structure, and in detail.

But how to bring his results into today's parley? Here are no pattern-variables to apply with abandon. If this first chapter need be summarized, awkwardly to be sure, one could argue that becoming mannered—in both senses—occurred to the French bourgeoisie because they sought and gained a measure of political influence within the government, but only after aping their betters, even outdoing them, in public settings. The German counterparts failed to gain admission to court, so they tended to their economic knitting, amassing the money that Bismarck would one day tap in creating the Reich. But they amassed something else perhaps more important. French intellectuals, even today, write without footnotes. They appeal to all ranks of society in a fluid expression of ideas unmarked by specialist jargon or precision. This is because, as Elias brilliantly shows (35ff), French thought at its finest had become accessible by the 18th century to all literate people, middle-class and aristocracy alike, constituting in fact a “national character.” Because German thinkers were excluded from court, they talked only among themselves, never hoping for the audience Voltaire could expect. The Germans, then, fastened on this difference, evaluating it in their favor.³

One is tempted to go on in reproducing, however weakly, Elias' etymology-cum-history, particularly the “sociogenesis of physiocratism” (40-51). (One learns, for example, that “civilisation” was probably coined in 1774, and why this is worth knowing; 46f). But the point of the two volumes comprising his “sociogenetic and psychogenetic investigation” is “to reveal the *order* underlying historical *changes*, their mechanics and their concrete mechanisms; and it seems that in this way a large number of questions that appear complicated or even beyond understanding today can be given fairly simple and precise answers” (xv). Elias' *modus operandi* in conveying this simplicity and precision is to offer examples by the hundreds, of normatively suggested behavior or actually practiced schemes of interaction between and among social classes or class fractions, all of which, as explained above, takes up the second, extensive chapter of the book. As he put it in 1968, “. . . I was laying the foundation of an undogmatic, empirically based sociological theory of social processes in general and of social development in particular” (224).

Thus far I have spoken theoretically about the value and drawbacks of his undertaking, mostly by allowing earlier reviewers their say. But it is as important—in fact, a good deal more important for many readers—to sample Elias' “empirical” discoveries in some judicious

manner, rather than contenting ourselves with more general argument. Certainly Elias felt that the proof of the pudding lay exactly in his archival excavations, this loamy basis of his theoretical advances, and we should accede to this feeling in order to read *The History of Manners* competently. But the merely difficult in handling other complex books synoptically becomes treacherous with this one, due simply to its rich detail; so selection—something other reviewers have not troubled with—takes on even more than usual importance.

Though Elias exploits dozens of books and pamphlets that specified changing rules of sociality over the centuries, most written by men now quite obscure, the touchstone of the long second chapter is the codification and innovation of Erasmus. In 1522 he published *Familiarum colloquiorum formulae non tantum ad linguam . . .*, known today as the *Colloquies*, and eight years later *De civilitate morum puerilium* (*On the Civility of Children*). The latter gives Elias his point of departure because it deals more with the socialization of acceptable behavior than the former.⁴ These are not simply precursors of today's etiquette manuals, but rather treatises explaining how one might produce adults whose outward behavior would evidence an inner being epitomizing the ideals of renaissance humanism. Erasmus called this “book”⁵ *crassissima philosophiae pars* (the grossest part of philosophy), and Elias sees it “less as an individual phenomenon or work than as a symptom of change, and embodiment of social processes” (55). Youth is instructed on what to do with handkerchiefs and nasal mucus, how to walk and stand, how not to look about with a stupid expression since “*Animi sedem esse in oculis*” (The seat of the soul is in the eyes), what to do with greasy fingers at the table and what utensils to use, of which there were few.

But more than “outward bodily propriety” was at stake. That may have been sufficient prior to the renaissance, but for Erasmus and the thousands who were trained by his book, these observable manners bespoke a sensitivity toward the self and others which became the hallmark of *civilité*. In fact, according to Elias, 1530 might plausibly be adopted as the very origin of civility, or at least its public codification through Erasmus' efforts. Up to that time a much less coherent understanding of propriety obtained throughout Europe, and it is to this period, before the renaissance, that Elias gives much of his attention. He believes that with an insubstantial exception here or there, we can read Erasmus today and feel kinship of a moral or aesthetic character. In an earlier period, however, behavior was something else indeed.

Interspersed throughout Elias' catalogue of maxims, aphorisms, and homilies, are theoretical syntheses. They adopt a familiar form in the course of the book, this being typical: "the standard eating technique during the Middle Ages . . . corresponds to a very particular standard of human relationship and structure of feeling [within which exists] an abundance of modifications and nuances" (67). Having read the "abundance of information on what was considered socially acceptable behavior" (60) that the Middle Ages bequeathed us, Elias searches for the thematizable element, and labels it with a special vocabulary unique to his "figurational" sociology.

This summary paragraph includes many of the key terms and concepts in a form that varies incidentally throughout his work:

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 on the same plate, with all the other peculiarities . . . 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 standards of conditioning, are embarrassing or at least unattractive. What was lacking in this *courtois* world, or at least had not developed to the same degree, was the invisible wall of affect which seems now to rise between one human body and another, repelling and separating. (69)

Surely it is possible to take from studying the *Tischzuchten* (table disciplines) of the time a different theoretical lesson. And Elias' assumption, that "the penetration of the middle classes, the working class, the peasantry by the uniform ritual of civilization" (104), "the passage of models from one social unit to another, now from the centers of a society to its outposts" (108), might seem much too smooth on the "civilizational curve" (121), particularly for leftists who resent the idea—even the data—that the lower orders dutifully took up the courtier's ways as time passed. But still, Elias' argument—*pace* Mosse and Buck-Morss—holds together wonderfully as a cohesive, consistent package of notions and theoretical counter-thrusts to alternative explanations. Rather than deconstructing Elias' private lexicon—just from the paragraph quoted above, the phrases "structure of feeling," "rational consciousness," and "wall of affect" leap out for probing—it

may be promising to sample some of the data which provoked this unusual terminology, then to consider more critically specifics of usage and conceptualization *en passant*.

Elias finds much medieval "naiveté" (the result of "emotions . . . expressed more violently and directly, fewer psychological nuances and complexities" [63]) within the absolutist precepts prevalent at the time. From around 1200, one learns: "A man of refinement should not slurp his soup when in company"; "Some people bite a slice and then dunk it in the dish in a coarse way; refined people reject such bad manners" (63); "A man who clears his throat when he eats and one who blows his nose in the table-cloth are both ill-bred"; "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" (64); "Take care that, whatever you need, you do not flush with embarrassment" (65). Hands were also to be washed, but eating had to be carried out using only one of them. A Greek princess was scorned by Venetian clerics in the eleventh century for eating with a golden fork; her death by "a repulsive disease" was celebrated as just punishment for such over-refinement (68-9).

Clearly, these were times given to rigid rights and wrongs, as abrupt psychologically as behaviorally. Yet upon reading these sorts of dicta, perhaps because today we grow impatient with unctuous handbooks on the niceties of propriety, one cannot help wondering if all of this is trivial, if perhaps Elias has gone astray in his fascination for the data by downplaying the sorts more common to social research on medieval life. After the initial tittering and sheer fun at learning what Elias has uncovered—much like viewing small children at play in a lab during the first moments, before "serious" observation begins—the stunning, even sweeping generalizations he makes take on unexpected credibility. For instance, after quoting Erasmus' rule-book, he summarizes:

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 painting 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. (65)

Notice the words "shocks," "strange," "bizarre," "different," and all the related terms of disorientation that grab the modern intellectual, refined perhaps beyond what is healthy, now forced into recognizing that these people were not merely, even mainly, somewhat different versions of ourselves, but qualitatively, massively Other in their emotional and intellectual make-up.

They have indeed "grown strange to us," but we maintain a fragile kinship with them through a social version of the ontogeny/phylogeny dialectic long known to naturalists, and renamed by Elias:

Thus the sociohistorical process of centuries, in the course of which the standard of what is felt to be shameful and offensive is slowly raised, is reenacted in abbreviated form in the life of the individual human being. If one wished to express recurrent processes of this kind in the form of laws, one could speak, as a parallel to the laws of biogenesis, of a fundamental law of sociogenesis and psychogenesis. (129)

Even in this unspecified form, particularly regarding the extent to which this civilizing process is replayed in every generation of children, Elias' idea is interesting. And if he did not work out this "fundamental law" completely, perhaps it is enough that he stated it in bare form and forced its message back into theoretical discussion a generation after it had lapsed. But I think this theoretical interjection, whether or not it qualifies as either "fundamental" or law-like, holds portentous meaning far beyond whatever absolute, predictable regularities it might uncover. For it forces social theory to confront directly all that humanness which since Spencer has been sanitized and forgotten, despite this century's memorable events of truly "medieval" quality. One need not revel in humankind's baseness and cruelty in order to consider it theoretically, and this slow, sometimes reversed emancipation from the grotesque, in gesture and inclination, is what Elias has begun recording.

For instance, toward the end of the book—and one wonders why not earlier—Elias enlists the help of the great medievalist Luchaire to document "changes in aggressiveness." He wants to register the fact

that "pleasure in killing and torturing others was great, and it was a socially permitted pleasure" (194). He cites one example, of a minor knight who spent time plundering churches, victimizing pilgrims, widows, and orphans, and "multilating the innocent."

In a single monastery, that of the black monks of Sarlat, there are 150 men and women whose hands he has cut off or whose eyes he has put out. And his wife is just as cruel. She helps him with his executions. It even gives her pleasure to torture the poor women. She had their breasts hacked off or their nails torn off so that they were incapable of work. (194)

An author with a thesis is often tempted to choose the exception that proves the rule, only to bolster his point. But Luchaire—who assumed Fustel de Coulanges' chair at the Sorbonne in 1890—gives Elias a surfeit of instances where brutality knew no limit: "Imagine a social state in which security for property and person did not exist; no police, and little justice, especially outside of the larger cities; each one defends his purse and his life as best he can. Robbers operate in broad day and on all roads" (Luchaire, 1912:8).⁶ Bernard of Cahuzac and his wife, in Perigord, were the couple (as Elias noted) whose pastime included removing women's breasts and men's arms, but Luchaire identifies many others, quoting contemporary accounts:

Foucaud, a knight and comrade of Simon de Montfort, angered even the warriors by his cruelties. Every prisoner who did not have the means of paying one hundred sous as ransom was condemned to death. He inclosed his prisoners in subterranean dungeons and let them die of starvation: sometimes he had them brought forth half dead and thrown into cesspools before his own eyes. It was said that on one of his last expeditions, he returned with two captives, a father and son, and he forced the father to hang his own son. (Luchaire, 256)

No news to medievalists, this nauseating, literally repulsive picture of humankind is as alien to contemporary social thought as much of what Elias took in and rendered systematic. His major point, then, is that between 1200, this time of unsurpassed viciousness (matching a complement of natural disasters: floods, earthquakes, tornadoes, plague) and 1530 or so, a change slowly took place that simultaneously

liberated Europe from its autogenetic terror and sowed seeds of discontent that would take altogether different, much less "naive" forms. These more "sophisticated" cultural abreactions (not Elias' term) have proved far more lethal, of course, but this is due to technology, and does not take in the socio-psychological conditions of today's perpetrators. If 13th century throat-slitters had to go into therapeutic, absolving sessions with their priests, we do not know of it, but we do know of the mental disturbances endemic to SS personnel during and after the Third Reich.

Elias is well aware that periodizing changes in behavior (the "very extensive transformation of human feelings and attitudes [called] 'crystallization'" [116]), showing conclusively that "*courtoisie*, *civilité*, and *civilisation* mark three stages of a social development" (103), is a theoretical and empirical claim most likely to arouse debate. Sociologists are forever discovering trends, ruptures (*coupure*), turning-points which historians rush to nullify with copious anomalous data (e.g., Elton, 1984). With this in mind, Elias admits that pinpointing the change from medieval to renaissance "affect-molding" is indeed a "problem" (70-84), but he believes a fairly clear demarcation can be made in the record. Naturally there is no "rupture" per se between one period and the next, but "the increased tendency of people to observe themselves and others," to "mold themselves and others more deliberately than in the Middle Ages" (79) becomes palpable, especially in codifications like those of Erasmus, Giovanni della Casa, Dedekind, of course Castiglione, among many. The *laissez faire* moral ambience of 1300, where rules existed but were transmitted orally through rhymes, songs, and tales, became perceptibly more rigid, and "The coercion exerted by people on one another increases, the demand for 'good behavior' is raised more emphatically" (79).

Here Elias forsakes psychological description for social theory proper (anticipating his second volume), by describing the relevant "underlying social processes":

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 16th century, earlier here and later there and almost everywhere with numerous reverses until well into the 17th 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 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. . . . 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. (79-80)

As documented by Caxton's *Book of Curtesye* (1479), "the change of tone, the increased sensitivity, the heightened human observation, and the sharper understanding of what is going on in others are unmistakable" (79-80). Among other things, one finds an "expanding threshold of aversion" (83), a conscious, terribly important struggle on the part of the elite to avoid the "*grobianisch*" (boorish) at any cost (74-75), not due so much, Elias maintains, to an unthinking conformist tendency, but more because perception and its mate, apperception, begin to flourish and allow people—under the constraints of political circumstances, to be sure—to begin what Dilthey later systematized as *Verstehen*. The consequences of this empathizing tendency cannot be exaggerated, not only because it helped rid Europe of barbarity-as-life, but because over time it completely rearranged status and power relationships from the top of late medieval social structure to the bottom. And as a side-effect, it gave rise to the literature which ever since has defined the Western aesthetic sense, from Dante and Shakespeare to the Lisle letters (1984) and Donne's love-poems for his wife. Even the roots of an extraordinary extension, a super-refinement of all these tendencies that took merciless hold in the 19th century (recently examined, again, by Peter Gay [1984]), lay precisely here at the turn of the 16th century.

The History of Manners approaches the inexhaustible, both in its facts and interpretations, but as Elias pursues the development of *délicatesse* (115, *passim*), he repeatedly summons up certain phrases and concepts that might now serve as shorthand for the project at large. One of these is his adamancy concerning "rational consciousness" or "rational explanation" as unsuitable keys in tracing the "advancing embarrassment threshold." Under the baroque heading "Reasons Given by People for Distinguishing Between 'Good' and 'Bad' Behavior"

(114-117), he overtly broaches this topic for the first time. Without hesitation, we ascribe the development of improved hygiene (washing hands, for example) or use of individual instead of collective eating utensils to people's wish to avoid disease. But Elias retorts: "as late as the second half of the 18th century, hardly anything of this kind is found to motivate the greater restraint that people impose upon themselves. At any rate, the so-called 'rational explanations' are very far in the background compared to others" (114). Though over time, more recently than we ordinarily think, social practices and health are understood to be causally related, long before those connections develop, "rationally inexplicable experiences" prevail; in sum, "rational understanding" is not the motor of the 'civilizing' of eating or of other behavior" (116).

This is a contentious point, but one which does much to help us push through the curtain of reason that the Enlightenment lowered between us and what came before it. A dominant motif through the book (e.g., pp. 158, 181, 189, 305), it helps explain why today parents have difficulty "rationally" socializing children to adopt certain words for bodily functions—if discussed at all—while pointedly avoiding others. It is probably as rare for authority figures of any kind, trying to enforce any standard, to confess that folkways and mores simply evolve, helter-skelter, that "rationality" does *not* sustain much usage, as it was rare for a courtier to recognize that spittle and health were related. Making this point a dozen ways, most of them convincingly, is one of Elias' proudest achievements.

Through a forceful rhetoric, Elias skillfully coaxes the reader into agreement that "trivial phenomena" can indeed "give us clear and simple insights into the structure and development of the psyche" (117). Meat-eating, for example, in all its stylistic changes over time—German courtiers in the 17th century consumed two pounds of red meat per day, plus fish and poultry (118)—"is highly illuminating with regard to the dynamics of human relationships and personality structures" (117). Similarly, "Clothing [Erasmus] says in one place, is in a sense the body of the body. From it we can deduce the attitude of the soul. . . . This is the beginning of the mode of observation that will at a later stage be termed 'psychological' " (78). This presages Merleau-Ponty's unsurpassed phenomenology of the body, and, as Elias hints, even the philosophical foundation which made possible his style of thought. The lexicon Elias devised as part of this new rhetoric of discovery includes many items, some vaguely familiar from other contexts,

some mysterious until studied *in loco*. Among them are: "drive control" vis-a-vis the bourgeois family (137); the invention of shame related to social structural change (138); "revulsion levels" (140); "affect formation" (141); "affect control" (152); "threshold of delicacy" (160); "the 'civilized' psyche" (160; cf. Marcuse's ideas); "spheres of intimacy" regarding public and private nudity (166); "sociogenetic repressions" and the significance of decent and indecent language (182); "emotional economy" and bourgeois capital accumulation (186; cf. Weber's Protestantism thesis); "the curve of moderation" and aggressiveness (202); "figurational change," more fully developed in volume two (224); "Eleatic theorizing" in opposition to Parsons (232); *homo clausus*, the quintessence of alienated humankind (258); and "reified self-control," which increasingly makes external social control superfluous (260). This selective list of theory-tropes gives some sense of Elias' vibrant imagination and sociological daring.

I have purposely minimized reference to Freudian theory because it does not make or break the book. But inasmuch as Elias said much later that it did play a part, a few passages might be highlighted—and also because they are theoretically intriguing. In discussing sex roles through history, Elias refers approvingly to Morris Ginsberg's notion (from his *Sociology*, 1934) that innate tendencies display remarkable "plasticity," then says:

The present study gives rise to very similar ideas. It attempts . . . to show that the molding of instinctual life, including its compulsive features, is a function of social interdependencies that persist throughout life. These dependencies of the individual vary in structure according to the structure of the society. To the variations in this structure correspond the differences in personality structure that can be observed in history. (301, n. 81)

The psychoanalytic concept of "compulsion" is bound up with "anxiety," something Elias does not often bring up but which nevertheless suffuses the book. As he notes, by about 1558:

Society is gradually beginning to suppress the positive pleasure component in certain functions more and more strongly by the arousal of anxiety, or, more exactly, it is rendering this pleasure "private" or "secret" (i.e., suppressing it within the individual) while fostering the negatively charged affects—displeasure, revulsion, distaste—as the

only feelings customary to society . . . the distance between the personality structure and behavior of adults and children is necessarily increased. (142-143)

This obviously anticipates any number of theorists and cultural historians who have written since 1939, including most recently Richard Sennett, Christopher Lasch, and, as noted above, Peter Gay. Like those writers, Elias is sensible enough to use a quasi-psychoanalytic view of the psyche-society dialectic, while sacrificing very little in terms of his historical/cultural data.

Whether or not one is convinced by the compulsion-anxiety thesis, we can take from *The History of Manners* dozens of confidently documented "facts." We learn that children were less privy to adult matters during the Middle Ages than afterwards; nudity in public was thoroughly unproblematic until the rise of Puritanism; prostitutes were respected members of the working class, organized in guilds, and used as official welcoming officers in German cities; marriage ceremonies were overtly and joyously sexual; bastardy was common and accepted; and virtually all 19th century historians of these matters—from whom at least until Elias' time most students took their information—could not contend with the frankness of Erasmus and his peers, who wrote about all matters of life, for young readers, without the smallest embarrassment (e.g., his *Colloquies*, which features a long discussion between an adolescent and a prostitute on the nature of love and sex).⁷

Finally, regarding this first volume of Elias' masterpiece, I must point out a missed opportunity on the part of the publisher. Apparently as a brilliant afterthought, Elias ends the book with a chapter called "Scenes from the Life of a Knight" (205-217). It is unlike anything else in the volume, or in any by a sociologist known to me, which analyzes a fabulous series of sketches by an anonymous German artist from around 1475. These were collected and published by Helmuth Bossert and Willy Storck in what is now a rare book, *Das mittelalterliche Hausbuch* (1912). Not only are the drawings technically excellent in showing daily life of the time, but their frankness is quite consistent with Erasmus'; yet because they render truth graphically and not verbally, the impact is even stronger. One sees defecating serfs, mutilated criminals and prisoners of war, happily cavorting knights and their ladies, and some sitting in bathtubs-built-for-two with a board between the bathers for food, a pig sniffing the posterior of a peasant, all of it in the most straightforward style. There is absolutely no hint that these

sketches were designed for titillation. They simply offer a precise account of the everyday. Had the publisher managed to reprint only a few of the 74 drawings, the book would have gained instant readership among those otherwise immune to social theory of any kind. Though difficult to come by, they form an essential complement to Elias' artful interpretation.

Nowdays authors, even "serious" ones, fall over themselves and their agents trying to grab the spotlight from rivals, doing everything to ease the reader's labor short of sending a human interpreter with each copy of their text. By contrast, Elias' study dates itself, the product of an era when scholarship did little to advance its own cause among those without patience and endurance. As explained above, Volume I is oddly divided between summary theoretical reflections and skeins of historical data, with a chapter of art criticism tacked on, then a substantial rebuttal of structural-functionalism added in 1968. *Power & Civility*, the second volume of the set, aims to please readers of our day even less. The translation surfaced four years after *The History of Manners* had already become dear to many, was brought out by a different publisher than the first, and in some ways shows only distant kinship with its companion volume. Though much longer, it has been judged by some reviewers (e.g., Barraclough, 1982) as decidedly the weaker partner. Though mostly historical in nature and intention, it lacks the documentary apparatus that popularized the first book, and though fluidly readable (in English), it risks obsessive redundancy here and there. It could have used a heavy editorial hand to cut away restatements of slightly reworded conceptualization, as well as sheer repetition. Finally, the entire theory Elias proposes for consideration is restated and expanded in a "synopsis" that takes up the last hundred pages. Though Barraclough's review, worthlessly unsympathetic, shows only how poorly he read the volume (Goudsblom, 1983), other reviewers (e.g., Sampson, 1984), in their enthusiasm, did not cheer those aspects of Elias' work which I believe justified publishing *Power & Civility* unrevised, this voice from another era. Goudsblom's claim, that the work is as vital to intellectual and political interests now as it was in 1939, is correct I think, mostly because so much of historical and sociological debate during the forty years of its absence has now been shelved, and Elias' point of view, aloof from all that, converges with certain other theories that have more recently gained the upper hand. It is an odd voice in the chamber of theorizing, quite by intention, but it has its uses.

“Dynamics of Feudalization” (13-90) and “On the Sociogenesis of the State” (91-225) make up Part One, with “Synopsis: Towards a Theory of Civilizing Processes” (229-333) filling Part Two. The temptation to skip the bulk of the book—at places a dutifully plodding account of French political history—and read only the Synopsis, especially for students of theory rather than history proper, must be avoided. (Barraclough apparently took this easy path into error.) Though Elias indulges himself in leisurely chronicling of court history between about 1000 and 1500, he throws in, as if explained by his data, general ideas all along the way which, when put together, make up his theory. I say “as if” because neither the quality of the data themselves, nor the consistency with which he applies them as proofs of his ideas are quite in tune with today’s prejudices. Still, whether or not one accepts his selection of supporting material or agrees with his decision to reprint the book as it stood, he tells a good story for the social scientist at the margin of medieval specialism. And like all good stories, his is quite simple—as he enjoys pointing out.

In the 9th and 10th centuries, western Europe was not the vacation spot it has since become. Life was as short, brutal, and “irrational” (in Weber’s sense) as Hobbes said it would be without government. But by the 11th century, and certainly during the 12th century “renaissance,” much had changed. For reasons too complex to unravel with certainty, (Weber’s *General Economic History* hints at the problem of causal attribution), population increased, certain warrior families beat out or co-opted local competitors, court life began slowly to emerge as a special activity of the nobility, and behavior in public changed definitively—as Volume I details. And on the macro side, the state was also being formed, mostly through the combined vectors of moneyed bourgeoisie, inflation-ridden nobility, and warring monarchy, all vying for supremacy, each having momentary glory depending upon the country or period, but all pulled inexorably into a world of polite society that Charlemagne could not have imagined. Even the peasantry and urban proletariat occasionally took the upper hand, but in the end—until 1789 at least—the “royal mechanism” won out, determining power relations, social behavior, and the very mindsets of its subjects.

What Elias calls the “civilizational curve” or “spiral” could not be described with even the most elaborate equations: it is neither linear, predictable, nor stochastic. But over half a millenium and many reversals, “chains” of interdependencies did lengthen, “compulsions” (internal and external) strengthened, and the thresholds of shame and

repugnance fell, first for the courtiers, then for their imitators, the wealthy bourgeoisie. Lower orders more or less followed suit. All of this occurs together, is reversed at times, then readvances, not (as Elias emphasizes) because of rational planning, and not because “rationalization” fits teleologically in human evolution, but simply because structural properties of life at given moments benefitted some types of behavior and undermined others. Thus, what might appear as a social-psychological theory—the first attempt at an “historical social psychology” (282)—turns out to serve Elias’ broader macro-theory, which is structural, even ecological, to its core.

Without suffocating in the miasma of medieval economic history, several points need to be considered in evaluating these ideas, even barely sketched in as they are here. Elias’ version of the “courtization of warriors” begins with the monetarization of medieval barter commerce, the inevitable inflation that follows this due to counterfeiting and devaluing of coins in the anarchy of mintage, and the resulting impoverishment of the landed nobility and all those without inflation-resistant incomes. But where did the money come from that set off this process, from about 1000, and culminating in the fiscally disastrous 16th century? Some historians point to the Church as the major source of funds, not so much through coins as through loans, for war and expansion. In itself this is not terribly relevant to Elias’ work, except that he does not say so himself. He resists bringing the medieval Church into his treatment of the triumph of money over barter, and all the changes that followed. For some historians this is equivalent to discussing the American West without mentioning the Winchester.

The problem is that Elias wants to discredit several theories of modernization, those which put gifted individuals, religious or military ideologies, teleology, or economic determinism at the forefront of explanation. Therefore he works only with the data and ideas congenial to his theoretical purpose. He grants that specific historical characters (Louis XIV, for instance) with unusual capabilities made a difference, and he never argues that historical change is any more the slave of ideas than of infrastructural relations. In place of this he puts to use an explanatory scheme silently indebted to Durkheim, which revolves around societal “multi-polar tensions” (175, 191) and the anxieties they register in the lonely citizen. As nobles and the bourgeoisie are forced, mostly through military power or economic need, often joined with desire for advanced or preserved prestige, to take up courtly ways,

they find themselves in a social setting of increased “density”—Durkheim’s very word—and the need to “regulate impulses” (sexual, aggressive, possessive, and so on) escalates.

The “tension-ridden structure” (167) of such existence, the repressive “second nature” (235) that everyone in the upper echelons must embrace and force upon their children, brings about pacification among warriors, but at astonishing personal psychic cost. Yet general harmony does not reign since the site of aggressiveness simply shifts to the state, with its “monopoly of violence.” The “figurational destiny of the individual” (285) becomes filled with “fundamental ambivalence” (173) that mirrors the fate of the nation-state to which he has become subservient. The reward for this discomfort is the daily safety of life under a central authority, but one which brooks very little disobedience, either from within its borders or, if it is strong enough, from without. The casual terror that surrounded living in the 10th century has moved indoors by the 16th, and the beginnings of modern neuroses and psychoses—consider Hamlet—make themselves known. Modernity had invented the tortured soul, even as the body moved peacefully about.

From this crude description of Elias’ ideas, it may seem that he shares the company of Ellul, Marcuse, and other critics of alienated life, all of whom seem affected by Schiller’s dreamy fantasies of harmonious social being. Only in the last few pages of his long study does he bring his theory into contagion with the disasters of the 1930s that soon would shake the British Museum where he read. He does not for a moment romanticize the past, nor advance the blanket critique of technology just then launched by Husserl and Heidegger. He is a dialectician of historical events, forever finding the data to illustrate first one swing on the curve, then the countering forces. He sees in our time monopolies of force, production, and government making good the extraordinary control and centralization for which medieval kings longed, but hardly began to achieve. And he seems to believe that there is a chance—recall he wrote before Hiroshima—for global civilizing if enough violence and aggression can be brought within a widespread code of tempered social behavior. But he did not write hopefully:

our epoch is anything but a final point or pinnacle . . . it is full of unresolved tensions, of unconcluded processes of integration the duration and exact course of which are not predictable and whose direction alone is clear: the tendency of free competition or, which

means the same thing, the unorganized ownership of monopolies, to be reduced and abolished; the change in human relationships by which control of opportunities gradually ceases to be the hereditary and private preserve of an established upper class and becomes a function under social and public control. And here, too, beneath the veil of the present tensions, those of the next stage are becoming visible, the tensions between the upper and middle functionaries of the monopoly administration, between the “bureaucracy” on the one hand and the rest of society on the other.

Only when these tensions between and within states have been mastered can we expect to become more truly civilized. (332)

Though referring specifically here to economic arrangements of the 1930s, the direction of his analysis and its rhetoric fit social change at large. The tone is familiar to us from the last works of the Weber brothers, that sound of sardonic resignation to our state.

As important to Elias himself and many of his critics as his macro-theory may be, and the historical message it delivers, there are other aspects of *Power & Civility* that may prove more durable and instructive in the realm of social theory. It is perhaps unfair to surmise that Elias came upon his notion of state formation incidental to unearthing a social-psychology of the courtier, that his Hobbesian speculations about political order were a majestic afterthought to examining manners and their transformation over time. But even so, the thread which runs through both volumes, signalled by the words “tension” and “reason” cropping up hundreds of times, is a rudimentary personality theory which belongs beside those of Freud, Mead, Sullivan, and others unafraid to mix the social with the psyche. Yet if this were his only contribution, to offer in outline an historicized theory of the self, and insufficiently specified at that, *The Civilizing Process* would not be the distinctive achievement I think it is.

Unlike William James, Jung, Horney, Marcuse or the other major protagonists in this century’s campaign to relieve the confused self, Elias is an historian, as sensitive to the interpretable fact as were his peers, Alfred Weber, Mannheim, and Alfred’s inescapable older brother. He pushes data into discourse with a confidence of their centrality that matches Marc Bloch’s mighty school, but with more delicate theorizing. He reminds us that European population in 1300 was almost as large as in 1700 (37); that the new urban proletariat successfully revolted against feudal demands of the ruling class in Cremona (1030), Milan

(1057), Le Mans (1069), Cambrai (1077), Sant-Quentin (1080), Beauvois (1099), and so on (46); that when Philip Augustus, the mightiest French medieval king, levied a tax to pay for Crusades in 1188, the opposition he met so overwhelmed him that he declared no such taxation would again burden the people, a promise that held for 79 years (202-203); but by 1328, due to the Hundred Years War, taxation had become thoroughly institutionalized and accepted, "this transformation of the extraordinary into regular duties" was complete, and monarchy was set on its triumphal road, balancing the tension between aristocracy and bourgeoisie which gave it its power (206ff). Even though at points in the second volume facts and chronology seem to pile into mountains undisturbed or organized by theory, Elias always manages to find in them a telling tendency on the way to the main drift; for example:

In seeking the social traditions which provide the common basis and deeper unity of the various national traditions in the West, we should think not only of the Christian Church, the common Roman-Latin heritage, but also of this last great pre-national social formation which, already partly in the shadow of the national divergencies within Western society, rose above the lower and middle strata in different linguistic areas. Here were created the models of more pacified social intercourse which more or less all classes needed, following the transformation of European society at the end of the middle ages; here the coarser habits, the wilder, more uninhibited customs of medieval society with its warrior upper class, the corollaries of an uncertain, constantly threatened life, were "softened," "polished" and "civilized." The pressure of court life, the vying for the favor of the prince or the "great"; then, more generally, the necessity to distinguish oneself from others and to fight for opportunities with relatively peaceful means, through intrigue and diplomacy, enforced a constraint on the affects, a self-discipline and self-control, a peculiarly courtly rationality, which at first made the courtier appear to the opposing bourgeoisie of the 18th century, above all in Germany but also in England, as the epitome of the man of reason. (7)

It is here, in wondering aloud about our reasoning heritage, about the "courtly rationality" that started all the others, that Elias stands alone, even today, among social theorists. The challenge will be to surpass him, but only after taking in and understanding his genuine originality for what it is and what it means.

FOOTNOTES

1. Reviews in English include: R.M. Adams, *Times Literary Supplement*, Sept. 15, 1978, p. 1015; Z. Bauman, "The Phenomenon of Norbert Elias," *Sociology* 13 (January 1979):117-125, and a response to it by E. Dunning and S. Mennell (the latter an Elias translator), 13 (Sept. 1979):497-501; Susan Buck-Morss, *Telos* No. 37 (Fall 1978):181-198; V.L. Bullough, *American Historical Review* 84 (April 1979):444; T. Burns, *British Journal of Sociology* 30 (Sept. 1979):373-375; A.R.H. Copely, *History* 65 (Feb. 1980):66-67; L. Coser, *Contemporary Sociology* 7 (Sept. 1978):563-566; G. Ellard, *Commonweal* 106 (March 16, 1979):154; P.N. Furbank, *Listener* (July 13, 1978):58; N.B. Harte, *Economic History Review* 32 (November 1979):601-602; D.G. MacRae, *New Statesman* 95 (June 30, 1978):884-885; George Mosse, *New German Critique* No. 15 (Fall 1978):178-183; J. Seigel, *Journal of Modern History* 51 (March 1979):123-126; R. Sennett, *New York Times Book Review* (March 12, 1978):12+; K. Thomas, *New York Review of Books* (March 9, 1978):28-31. Other useful sources are Rod Aya, "Norbert Elias and 'The Civilizing Process,'" *Theory and Society* 5:2 (March 1978):219-228; Stanislaus Fontaine, "The Civilizing Process Revisited: An Interview with Norbert Elias," *Theory and Society* 5:2 (March 1978):243-253; Wolf Lepenies, "Norbert Elias: An Outsider Full of Unprejudiced Insight," *New German Critique* No. 15 (Fall 1978):57-65; and Andreas Wehowsky, "Reflections on Norbert Elias," same issue of *New German Critique*, 65-80.
2. Perhaps Elias opened the book this way in order to live up to the conditions of his grant, to study French liberalism. The reason it is a worthy introduction to the book is not, it seems to me, due to close thematic unity, but because from it we learn about *Grosses volstaendiges Universal-Lexikon aller Wissenschaften und Kuenste* (Leipzig, 1736), E. de Mauvillon's *Lettres francoises et germaniques* (London, 1740), and Sophie de la Roche's *Geschichte des Frauelein von Sternheim* (1771). It is vitally important to sociology of this scope to be reminded that our intellectual ruminations are often forgetful icings on heavy cakes prepared skillfully enough by sharp-eyed thinkers at the dawn of modernity.
3. Nietzsche (*Beyond Good and Evil*, Aphorism 101) distinguished "courtly language" from "all technical expressions" that "smack of specialization," the latter disallowed at court for their prissy, earnest, bourgeois character. "Cool" was as important then as now within some circles; the sweltering, heavy effort of *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* amounts for such folks to a monumental *faux pas*.
4. Both books went through scores of printings in many languages (as Elias details, 54; 169; 292, n. 2), and were widely esteemed—even by authorities who objected to certain sexually oriented passages. In his *Erasmus*, the master historian Huizinga maintained that "What Erasmus really demanded of the

world of mankind, how he pictured to himself that passionately desired, purified Christian society of good morals, fervent faith, simplicity and moderation, kindness, moderation and peace—this we can nowhere else find so clearly and well expressed as in the *Colloquia*" (302, n. 83).

5. The National Union Catalogue shows five entries for *De Civilitate* published almost simultaneously in different cities. They vary in length from 37 to 53 pages, and are 16 cm in size, making this a very small and short "book."
6. In 1183 the *capuciati* ("white hoods"), an odd proletarian, bourgeois-inspired army of vigilantes working against brigands, killed 3,000 of their enemy in one town, marched to another, exterminated 10,000 more through methodical butchery—not actual combat—hung 500 more 20 days later, and elaborately cut the throat of another leader. Within a year the established order became nervous about the populist tendencies of this "army," and began having its members exterminated—often by those brigands who had survived—along with their families and towns. By 1184 thousands were dead, often by mutilation, burning, the purest butchery, and once again France was under control of thieves.
7. Tucked away in an endnote is the following information, hardly unique within the book, but indicative of Elias' willingness to comb any source on behalf of his ideas:

A study of 150 girls made by [Iva Peters] in 1916/17 [in Knight, Peters, and Blanchard, 1921] showed a taboo on thought and discussion among well-bred girls of the following subjects, which they characterize as "indelicate," "polluting," and "things completely outside the knowledge of a lady."

1. Things contrary to custom, often called "wicked" and "immoral."
2. Things "disgusting" such as bodily functions, normal as well as pathological, and all the implications of uncleanness.
3. Things uncanny, that "make your flesh creep," and things suspicious.
4. Many forms of animal life, which it is a commonplace that girls will fear or which are considered unclean.
5. Sex differences.
6. Age differences.
7. All matters relating to the double standard of morality.
8. All matters connected with marriage, pregnancy, and childbirth.
9. Allusions to any part of the body except head and hands.
10. Politics.
11. Religion.

The "girls" were apparently British, since on examining the book in which her study is reported, I could find no evidence to the contrary, and I assume that she and her two co-authors were all British judging from most of her sources.

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NOTES AND COMMENTS

PEER GROUP INFLUENCES UPON ADOLESCENT DRINKING PRACTICES*

Kirk Alan Johnson

University of North Alabama

Utilizing longitudinal data on 345 high school students, this study investigates the impact that peer identification, sociability, activity, and perceptions of peer attitudes governing the use of alcohol have upon adolescent alcohol use, and the likelihood of experiencing personal problems as a consequence of drinking. The major findings are that adolescent orientations toward alcohol are responsive to all but peer identification, and that the predictors generally exert their strongest influences upon youthful drinking in and around the junior year. Similarly, alcohol use and personal problems associated with drinking each exert varying degrees of influence upon the predictors within and across time, though these effects generally cluster around the junior year as well.

Over the past twenty years, social scientists have become increasingly interested in the origins and consequences of adolescent alcohol use and abuse. Perhaps the most consistent theme to be found in these investigations is that while many children are initiated into the use of alcohol by parents and relatives within the home, the majority of youthful drinking occurs in social isolation free from adult regulation and control (Kandel et al., 1978; Kandel et al., 1976; Globetti, 1973, 1972; Kane and Patterson, 1972; Maddox, 1971; Stacey and Davies, 1970; Maddox and McCall, 1964). Despite wide-ranging concerns on the part of the lay public, however, these studies have also shown that the most common pattern of adolescent drinking is one of minimal usage (in terms of both quantity and frequency). On the basis of previous research, then, it would appear that only a small minority of youth engage in what might be termed the "excessive" or "problem" use of alcohol.

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