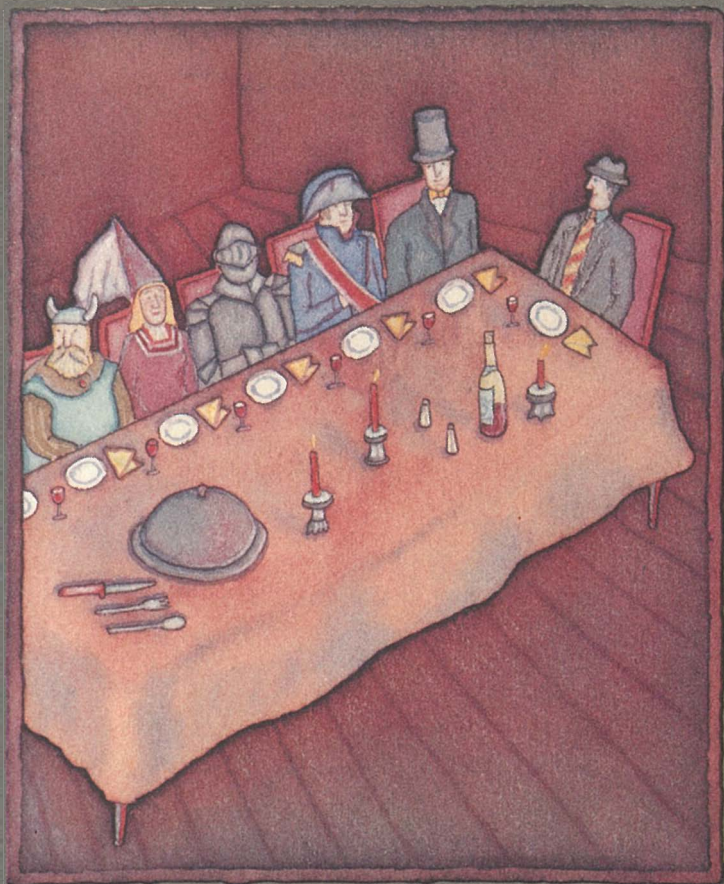


THE CIVILIZING PROCESS VOL 1

THE HISTORY OF MANNERS



NORBERT ELIAS

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

IV

On Behavior at Table

Part One

Examples

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

A

Thirteenth century

This is Tannhäuser's poem of courtly good manners:⁴¹

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

or

In the *Courtesies* of Bonvicino da Riva:

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

or

In *The Book of Nurture and School of Good Manners*:⁴³

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

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 clence withe 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 lenyng 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 contenances 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 tangas 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:²

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 Gedoyin, 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.²⁴ 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 sçavez, 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.”⁵⁵ 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 contraposition 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 clumbers, 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.

Reasons Given by People for Distinguishing Between "Good" and "Bad" Behavior

11. Language is one of the embodiments of social or mental life. Much that can be observed in the way language is molded is also evident in other embodiments of society. For example, the way people argue that this behavior or this custom at table is better than that, is scarcely distinguishable from the way they claim one linguistic expression to be preferable to another.

This does not entirely correspond to the expectation that a twentieth-century observer may have. For example, he expects to find the elimination of "eating with the hands," the introduction of the fork, individual cutlery and crockery, and all the other rituals of his own standard explained by "hygienic reasons." For that is the way in which he himself in general explains these customs. But as late as the second half of the eighteenth 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.

In the earliest stages the need for restraint was usually explained by saying: Do this and not that, for it is not *courtois*, not "courtly"; a "noble" man does not do such things. At most, the reason given is consideration for the embarrassment of others, as in Tannhäuser's *Hofzucht*, where he says, in effect, "Do not scratch yourself with your hand, with which you also hold the common dish; your table companions might notice it, so use your coat to scratch yourself" (Example A, v. 109ff.). And clearly here the threshold of embarrassment differs from that of the following period.

Later on, a similar argument is used for everything: Do not do that, for it is not *civil* or *bienséant*. Or such an argument is used to explain the respect due to those of higher social rank.

As in the molding of speech, so too in the molding of other aspects of behavior in society, social motivations, adaptations of behavior to the models of influential circles, are by far the most important. Even the expressions used in motivating "good behavior" at table are very frequently exactly the same as those used in motivating "good speech."

In Callières's *Du bon et du mauvais usage dans les manières de s'exprimer*, reference is made, for example, to this or that expression

“which civility has introduced among people who speak well” (p. 22).

Exactly the same concept of *civilité* is also used again and again by Courtin and La Salle to express what is good and bad in manners. And exactly as Callières here speaks simply of the people *qui parlent bien*, Courtin (at the end of Example G) says, in effect, “Formerly one was allowed to do this or that, but today one is no longer allowed to.” Callières says in 1694 that there are a great many people who are not sufficiently conversant with the *délicatesse* of the language: “C’est cette délicatesse qui n’est connue que d’une petite nombre de gens.” Courtin uses the same expression in 1672 when he says that it is necessary always to wipe one’s spoon before dipping it into the common dish if one has already used it, “there being people so *delicate* that they would not wish to eat soup in which you had dipped it after putting it into your mouth” (Example G).

This *délicatesse*, this sensibility and a highly developed feeling for the “embarrassing,” is at first all a distinguishing feature of small courtly circles, then of court society as a whole. This applies to language in exactly the same way as to eating habits. On what this delicacy is based, and why it demands that this be done and not that, is not said and not asked. What is observed is simply that “delicacy”—or, rather, the embarrassment threshold—is advancing. In conjunction with a very specific social situation, the feelings and affects are first transformed in the upper class, and the structure of society as a whole permits this changed affect standard to spread slowly throughout society. Nothing indicates that the affective condition, the degree of sensitivity, is changed for reasons that we describe as “clearly rational” from a demonstrable understanding of particular causal connections. Courtin does not say, as would be said later, that some people feel it to be “unhygienic” or “detrimental to health” to take soup from the same dish as others. Certainly, delicacy of feeling is heightened under the pressure of the courtly situation in a way which is later justified partly by scientific investigations, even though a major part of the taboos that people gradually impose on themselves in their dealings with each other, a far larger part than is usually thought, has not the slightest connection with “hygiene” but is concerned even today merely with “delicacy of feeling.” At any rate, the process moves in some respects in a way that is exactly opposite to what is commonly assumed today. First, over a long period and in conjunction with a specific change in human relationships, that is in society,

the embarrassment threshold is raised. The structure of emotions, the sensitivity, and the behavior of people change, despite fluctuations, in a quite definite direction. Then, at a certain point, this behavior is recognized as "hygienically correct," i.e., it is justified by clear insight into causal connections and taken further in the same direction or consolidated. The expansion of the threshold of embarrassment may be connected at some points with more or less indefinite and, at first, rationally inexplicable experiences of the way in which certain diseases are passed on or, more precisely, with indefinite and therefore rationally undefined fears and anxieties which point vaguely in the direction subsequently confirmed by clear understanding. But "rational understanding" is not the motor of the "civilizing" of eating or of other behavior.

The close parallel between the "civilizing" of eating and that of speech is highly instructive in this context. It makes clear that the change in behavior at table is part of a very extensive transformation of human feelings and attitudes. It also illustrates to what degree the motive forces of this development come from the social structure, from the way in which people are connected to each other. We see more clearly how relatively small circles first form the center of the movement and how the process then gradually passes to broader sections. But this diffusion presupposes very specific contacts, and therefore a quite definite structure of society. Moreover, it could certainly not have taken place had there not been established for larger classes, as well as for the model-forming circles, conditions of life—or, in other words, a social situation—that made both possible and necessary a gradual transformation of the emotions and behavior, an advance in the threshold of embarrassment.

The process that emerges resembles in form—though not in substance—chemical processes in which a liquid, the whole of which is subjected to conditions of chemical change (e.g., crystallization), first takes on crystalline form at a small nucleus, while the rest then gradually crystallizes around this core. Nothing would be more erroneous than to take the core of crystallization for the cause of the transformation.

The fact that a particular class in one or another phase of social development forms the center of a process and thus supplies models for other classes, and that these models are diffused to other classes and received by them, itself presupposes a social situation and a

special structure of society as a whole, by virtue of which one circle is allotted the function of creating models and the other that of spreading and assimilating them. What kinds of change in the integration of society set these behavioral changes in motion will be discussed in detail later.

Group 2:

On the Eating of Meat

1. Although human phenomena—whether attitudes, wishes, or products of human action may be looked at on their own, independently of their connections with the social life of men, they are by nature nothing but substantializations of human relations and of human behavior, embodiments of social and mental life. This is true of speech, which is nothing other than human relations turned into sound; it is true of art, science, economics, and politics; it is true both of phenomena which rank high on our scale of values and of others which seem trivial or worthless. Often it is precisely these latter, trivial phenomena that give us clear and simple insights into the structure and development of the psyche and its relations which are denied us by the former. The attitudes of men to meat-eating, for example, is highly illuminating with regard to the dynamics of human relationships and personality structures.

In the Middle Ages, people move between at least three different sets of behavior toward meat. Here, as with a hundred other phenomena, we see the extreme diversity of behavior characteristic of medieval society as compared with its modern counterpart. The medieval social structure is far less conducive to the permeation of models developed in a specific social center through the society as a whole. Certain modes of behavior often predominate in a particular social class throughout the Western world, while in a different class or estate behavior is very different. For this reason, the behavioral differences between different classes in the same region are often greater than those between regionally separate representatives of the same social class. And if modes of behavior pass from one class to another, which certainly happens, they change their face more radically in accordance with the greater isolation of the classes.

The relation to meat-eating moves in the medieval world between the following poles. On the one hand, in the secular upper class the consumption of meat is extraordinarily high, compared to the standard of our own times. A tendency prevails to devour quantities of meat that to us seem fantastic. On the other hand, in the monasteries an ascetic abstention from all meat-eating largely prevails, an abstention resulting from self-denial, not from shortage, and often accompanied by a radical depreciation or restriction of eating. From these circles come expressions of strong aversion to the "gluttony" among the upper-class laymen.

The meat consumption of the lowest class, the peasants, is also frequently extremely limited—not from a spiritual need, a voluntary renunciation with regard to God and the next world, but from shortage. Cattle are expensive and therefore destined, for a long period, essentially for the rulers' tables. "If the peasant reared cattle," it has been said,⁵⁶ "it was largely for the privileged, the nobility, and the burghers," not forgetting the clerics, who ranged in varying degrees from asceticism to approximately the behavior of the secular upper class. Exact data on the meat consumption of the upper classes in the Middle Ages and at the beginning of the modern age are sparse. There were, no doubt, considerable differences between the lesser, poorer knights and the great feudal lords. The standards of the knights will frequently have been scarcely removed from those of the peasants.

A calculation of the meat consumption of a north German court from relatively recent times, the seventeenth century, indicates a consumption of two pounds per head per day, in addition to large quantities of venison, birds, and fish.⁵⁷ Spices play a major, vegetables a relatively minor role. Other information points fairly unanimously in the same direction. The subject remains to be investigated in detail.

2. Another change can be documented more exactly. The manner in which meat is served changes considerably from the Middle Ages to modern times: The curve of this change is very instructive. In the upper class of medieval society, the dead animal or large parts of it are often brought whole to the table. Not only whole fish and whole birds (sometimes with their feathers) but also whole rabbits, lambs, and quarters of veal appear on the table, not to mention the larger venison or the pigs and oxen roasted on the spit.⁵⁸

The animal is carved on the table. This is why the books on manners

repeat, up to the seventeenth and sometimes even the eighteenth century, how important it is for a well-bred man to be good at carving meat. “Discenda a primis statim annis secandi ratio . . .” (The correct way to carve should be taught from the first years) says Erasmus in 1530.

“When serving,” says Courtin in 1672,

one must always give away the best portion and keep the smallest, and touch nothing except with the fork; this is why, if a person of rank asks you for something that is in front of you, it is important to know how to cut meat with propriety and method, and to know the best portions, in order to be able to serve them with civility. The way to cut them is not prescribed here, because it is a subject on which special books have been written, in which all the pieces are illustrated to show where the meat must first be held with a fork to cut it, for as we have just said, *the meat must never be touched . . . by hand, not even while eating*; then where the knife must be placed to cut it; what must be lifted first . . . what is the best piece, and the piece of honor that must be served to the person of highest rank. It is easy to learn how to carve when one has eaten three or four times at a good table, and for the same reason it is no disgrace to excuse oneself and leave to another what one cannot do oneself.

And the German parallel, the *New vermehrtes Trincier-Büchlein*: (New, enlarged carving manual), printed in Rintelen in 1650, says:

Because the office of carver at princely courts is not reckoned as the lowest but among the most honorable, the same must therefore be either of the nobility or other good origin, of straight and well-proportioned body, good straight arms and nimble hands. In all public cutting he should . . . abstain from large movements and useless and foolish ceremonies . . . and make quite sure that he is not nervous, *so that he does not bring dishonor through trembling of the body and hands* and because in any case this does not befit those at princely tables.

Both carving and distributing the meat are particular honors. It usually falls to the master of the house or to distinguished guests whom he requests to perform the office. “The young and those of lower rank should not interfere in serving, but only take for themselves in their turn,” says the anonymous *Civilité française* of 1714.

In the seventeenth century the carving of meat at table gradually ceases, in the French upper class, to be an indispensable accomplish-

ment of the man of the world, like hunting, fencing, and dancing. The passage quoted from Courtin points to this.

3. That the serving of large parts of the animal to be carved at table slowly goes out of use is connected with many factors. One of the most important may be the gradual reduction in the size of the household⁹⁹ as part of the movement from larger to smaller family units; then comes the removal of production and processing activities like weaving, spinning, and slaughtering from the household, and their gradual transference to specialists, craftsmen, merchants, and manufacturers, who practice them professionally while the household becomes essentially a consumption unit.

Here, too, the psychological tendency matches the large social process: today it would arouse rather uneasy feelings in many people if they or others had to carve half a calf or pig at table or cut meat from a pheasant still adorned with its feathers.

There are even *des gens si délicats*—to repeat the phrase of Courtin, which refers to a related process—to whom the sight of butchers' shops with the bodies of dead animals is distasteful, and others who from more or less rationally disguised feelings of disgust refuse to eat meat altogether. But these are forward thrusts in the threshold of repugnance that go beyond the standard of civilized society in the twentieth century, and are therefore considered "abnormal." Nevertheless, it cannot be ignored that it was advances of this kind (if they coincided with the direction of social development in general) that led in the past to changes of standards, and that this particular advance in the threshold of repugnance is proceeding in the same direction that has been followed thus far.

This direction is quite clear. From a standard of feeling by which the sight and carving of a dead animal on the table are actually pleasurable, or at least not at all unpleasant, the development leads to another standard by which reminders that the meat dish has something to do with the killing of an animal are avoided to the utmost. In many of our meat dishes the animal form is so concealed and changed by the art of its preparation and carving that while eating one is scarcely reminded of its origin.

It will be shown how people, in the course of the civilizing process, seek to suppress in themselves every characteristic that they feel to be "animal." They likewise suppress such characteristics in their food.

In this area, too, the development is certainly not uniform every-

where. In England, for example, where in many aspects of life older forms are more prominently preserved than on the Continent, the serving of large portions of meat (and with it the task, which falls to the master of the house, of carving and distributing it) survives in the form of the "joint" to a greater extent than in the urban society of Germany and France. However, quite apart from the fact that the present-day joint is itself a very reduced form of the serving of large pieces of meat, there has been no lack of reactions to it that mark the advance in the threshold of repugnance. The adoption of the "Russian system" of table manners in society about the middle of the last century acted in this direction. "Our chief thanks to the new system," says an English book on manners, *The Habits of Good Society* (1859), "are due for its ostracising that unwieldy barbarism—the joint. Nothing can make a joint look elegant, while it hides the master of the house, and condemns him to the misery of carving. . . . The truth is, *that unless our appetites are very keen, the sight of much meat reeking in its gravy is sufficient to destroy them entirely*, and a huge joint especially is calculated to disgust the epicure. If joints are eaten at all, they should be placed on the side-table, *where they will be out of sight*" (p. 314).

The increasingly strong tendency to remove the distasteful from the sight of society clearly applies, with few exceptions, to the carving of the whole animal.

This carving, as the examples show, was formerly a direct part of social life in the upper class. Then the spectacle is felt more and more to be distasteful. Carving itself does not disappear, since the animal must, of course, be cut when being eaten. But the distasteful is *removed behind the scenes of social life*. Specialists take care of it in the shop or the kitchen. It will be seen again and again how characteristic of the whole process that we call civilization is this movement of segregation, this hiding "behind the scenes" of what has become distasteful. The curve running from the carving of a large part of the animal or even the whole animal at table, through the advance in the threshold of repugnance at the sight of dead animals, to the removal of carving to specialized enclaves behind the scenes is a typical civilization-curve.

It remains to be investigated how far similar processes underlie similar phenomena in other societies. In earlier Chinese civilisation, above all, the concealment of carving behind the scenes was effected

much earlier and more radically than in the West. There the process is taken so far that the meat is carved and cut up entirely behind the scenes, and the knife is banished altogether from use at table.

Use of the Knife at Table

4. The knife, too, by the nature of its social use, reflects changes in the human personality with its changing drives and wishes. It is an embodiment of historical situations and structural regularities of society.

One thing above all is characteristic of its use as an eating implement in present-day Western society: the innumerable prohibitions and taboos surrounding it.

Certainly the knife is a dangerous instrument in what may be called a rational sense. It is a weapon of attack. It inflicts wounds and cuts up animals that have been killed.

But this obviously dangerous quality is beset with emotions. The knife becomes a symbol of the most diverse feelings, which are connected to its function and shape but are not deduced "logically" from its purpose. The fear it awakens goes beyond what is rational and is greater than the "calculable," probable danger. And the same is true of the pleasure its use and appearance arouse, even if this aspect is less evident today. In keeping with the structure of our society, the everyday ritual of its use is today determined more by the displeasure and fear than by the pleasure surrounding it. Therefore its use even while eating is restricted by a multitude of prohibitions. These, we have said, extend far beyond the "purely functional"; but for every one of them a rational explanation, usually vague and not easily proved, is in everyone's mouth. Only when these taboos are considered together does the supposition arise that the social attitude toward the knife and the rules governing its use while eating—and, above all, the taboos surrounding it—are primarily emotional in nature. Fear, distaste, guilt, associations and emotions of the most disparate kinds exaggerate the real danger. It is precisely this which anchors such prohibitions so firmly and deeply in the personality and which gives them their taboo character.

5. In the Middle Ages, with their upper class of warriors and the constant readiness of people to fight, and in keeping with the stage of

affect control and the relatively lenient regulations imposed on drives, the prohibitions concerning knives are quite few. "Do not clean your teeth with your knife" is a frequent demand. This is the chief prohibition, but it does indicate the direction of future restrictions on the implement. Moreover, the knife is by far the most important eating utensil. That it is lifted to the mouth is taken for granted.

But there are indications in the late Middle Ages, even more direct ones than in any later period, that the caution required in using a knife results not only from the rational consideration that one might cut or harm oneself, but above all from the emotion aroused by the sight or the idea of a knife pointed at one's own face.

Bere not your knyf to warde your visage
For therein is parelle and mykyl drede

we read in Caxton's *Book of Curtesye* (v. 28). Here, as everywhere later, an element of rationally calculable danger is indeed present, and the warning refers to this. But it is the general memory of and association with death and danger, it is the *symbolic* meaning of the instrument that leads, with the advancing internal pacification of society, to the preponderance of feelings of displeasure at the sight of it, and to the limitation and final exclusion of its use in society. The mere sight of a knife pointed at the face arouses fear: "Bear not your knife toward your face, for therein lies much dread." This is the emotional basis of the powerful taboo of a later phase, which forbids the lifting of the knife to the mouth.

The case is similar with the prohibition which in our series of examples was mentioned first by Calviac in 1560 (at the end of Example E): If you pass someone a knife, take the point in your hand and offer him the handle, "for it would not be polite to do otherwise."

Here, as so often until the later stage when the child is given a "rational" explanation for every prohibition, no reason is given for the social ritual except that "it would not be polite to do otherwise." But it is not difficult to see the emotional meaning of this command: one should not move the point of the knife toward someone as in an attack. The mere symbolic meaning of this act, the memory of the warlike threat, is unpleasant. Here, too, the knife ritual contains a rational element. Someone might use the passing of the knife in order suddenly to stab someone. But a social ritual is formed from this

danger because the dangerous gesture establishes itself on an emotional level as a general source of displeasure, a symbol of death and danger. Society, which is beginning at this time more and more to limit the real dangers threatening men, and consequently to remodel the affective life of the individual, increasingly places a barrier around the symbols as well, the gestures and instruments of danger. Thus the restrictions and prohibitions on the use of the knife increase, along with the restraints imposed on the individual.

6. If we leave aside the details of this development and only consider the result, the present form of the knife ritual, we find an astonishing abundance of taboos of varying severity. The imperative never to put a knife to one's mouth is one of the gravest and best known. That it greatly exaggerates the actual, probable danger scarcely needs to be said; for social groups accustomed to using knives and eating with them hardly ever injure their mouths with them. The prohibition has become a means of social distinction. In the uneasy feeling that comes over us at the mere sight of someone putting his knife into his mouth, all this is present at once: the general fear that the dangerous symbol arouses, and the more specific fear of social degradation which parents and educators have from early on linked to this practice with their admonitions that "it is not done."

But there are other prohibitions surrounding the knife that have little or nothing to do with a direct danger to the body, and which seem to point to symbolic meanings of the knife other than the association with war. The fairly strict prohibition on eating fish with a knife—circumvented and modified today by the introduction of a special fish knife—seems at first sight rather obscure in its emotional meaning, though psychoanalytical theory points at least in the direction of an explanation. There is a well-known prohibition on holding cutlery, particularly knives, with the whole hand, "like a stick," as La Salle put it, though he was only at that time referring to fork and spoon (Example J). Then there is obviously a general tendency to eliminate or at least restrict the contact of the knife with round or egg-shaped objects. The best-known and one of the gravest of such prohibitions is on cutting potatoes with a knife. But the rather less strict prohibition on cutting dumplings with a knife or opening boiled eggs with one also point in the same direction, and occasionally, in especially sensitive circles, one finds a tendency to avoid cutting apples or even oranges with a knife. "I may hint that no epicure ever yet put knife to apple, and that

an orange should be peeled with a spoon,” says *The Habits of Good Society* of 1859 and 1889.

7. But these more or less strict particular prohibitions, the list of which could certainly be extended, are in a sense only examples of a general line of development in the use of the knife that is fairly distinct. There is a tendency that slowly permeates civilized society, from the top to the bottom, to restrict the use of the knife (within the framework of existing eating techniques) and wherever possible not to use the instrument at all.

This tendency makes its first appearance in a precept as apparently trivial and obvious as that quoted in Example I: “Do not keep your knife always in your hand, as village people do, but take it only when you need it.” It is clearly very strong in the middle of the last century, when the English book on manners just quoted, *The Habits of Good Society*, says: “Let me give you a rule—everything that can be cut without a knife, should be cut with fork alone.” And one need only observe present-day usage to find this tendency confirmed. This is one of the few distinct cases of a development which is beginning to go beyond the standard of eating technique and ritual attained by court society. But this is not, of course, to say that the “civilization” of the West will actually continue in this direction. It is a beginning, a possibility like many others that exist in any society. All the same, it is not inconceivable that the preparation of food in the kitchen will develop in a direction that restricts the use of the knife at table still further, displacing it even more than hitherto to specialized enclaves behind the scenes.

Strong retroactive movements are certainly not inconceivable. It is sufficiently known that the conditions of life in the World War I automatically enforced a breakdown of some of the taboos of peacetime civilization. In the trenches, officers and soldiers again ate when necessary with knives and hands. The threshold of delicacy shrank rather rapidly under the pressure of the inescapable situation.

Apart from such breaches, which are always possible and can also lead to new consolidations, the line of development in the use of the knife is quite clear.⁶⁰ The regulation and control of emotions intensifies. The commands and prohibitions surrounding the menacing instrument become ever more numerous and differentiated. Finally, the use of the threatening symbol is limited as far as possible.

One cannot avoid comparing the direction of this civilization-curve

with the custom long practiced in China. There, as has been said, the knife disappeared many centuries ago from use at table. To many Chinese the manner in which Europeans eat is quite uncivilized. "The Europeans are barbarians," people say there, "they eat with swords." One may surmise that this custom is connected with the fact that for a long time in China the model-making upper class has not been a warrior class but a class pacified to a particularly high degree, a society of scholarly officials.

On the Use of the Fork at Table

8. What is the real use of the fork? It serves to lift food that has been cut up to the mouth. Why do we need a fork for this? Why do we not use our fingers? Because it is "cannibal," as the "Man in the Club-Window," the anonymous author of *The Habits of Good Society* said in 1859. Why is it "cannibal" to eat with one's fingers? That is not a question; it is self-evidently cannibal, barbaric, uncivilized, or whatever else it is called.

But that is precisely the question. Why is it more civilized to eat with a fork?

"Because it is unhygienic to eat with one's fingers." That sounds convincing. To our sensibility it is unhygienic if different people put their fingers into the same dish, because there is a danger of contracting disease through contact with others. Each of us seems to fear that the others are diseased.

But this explanation is not entirely satisfactory. Nowadays we do not eat from common dishes. Everyone puts food into his mouth from his own plate. To pick it up from one's own plate with one's fingers cannot be more "unhygienic" than to put cake, bread, chocolate, or anything else into one's mouth with one's own fingers.

So why does one really need a fork? Why is it "barbaric" and "uncivilized" to put food into one's mouth by hand from one's own plate? Because it is distasteful to dirty one's fingers, or at least to be seen in society with dirty fingers. The suppression of eating by hand from one's own plate has very little to do with the danger of illness, the so-called "rational" explanation. In observing our feelings toward the fork ritual, we can see with particular clarity that the first authority in our decision between "civilized" and "uncivilized" behavior at

table is our feeling of distaste. The fork is nothing other than the embodiment of a specific standard of emotions and a specific level of revulsion. Behind the change in eating techniques between the Middle Ages and modern times appears the same process that emerged in the analysis of other incarnations of this kind: a change in the structure of drives and emotions:

Modes of behavior which in the Middle Ages were not felt to be in the least distasteful are increasingly surrounded by unpleasurable feelings. The standard of delicacy finds expression in corresponding social prohibitions. These taboos, so far as one can be ascertained, are nothing other than ritualized or institutionalized feelings of displeasure, distaste, disgust, fear, or shame, feelings which have been socially nurtured under quite specific conditions and which are constantly reproduced, not solely but mainly because they have become institutionally embedded in a particular ritual, in particular forms of conduct.

The examples show—certainly only in a narrow cross-section and in the relatively randomly selected statements of individuals—how, in a phase of development in which the use of the fork was not yet taken for granted, the feeling of distaste that first formed within a narrow circle is slowly extended. “It is very impolite,” says Courtin in 1672 (Example G), “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. [N.B. The French terms *propre* and *malpropre* used by Courtin and explained in one of his chapters coincide less with the German terms for clean and unclean (*sauber* and *unsauber*) than with the word frequently used earlier, *proper*.] The third is to lick them, which is the height of impropriety.”

The *Civilité* of 1729 by La Salle (Example J), which transmits the behavior of the upper class to broader circles, says on one page: “When the fingers are very greasy, wipe them first on a piece of bread.” This shows how far from general acceptance, even at this time, was the standard of delicacy that Courtin had already represented decades earlier. On the other hand, La Salle takes over fairly literally Courtin’s precept that “*Bienséance* does not permit anything

greasy, a sauce or a syrup, to be touched with the fingers." And, exactly like Courtin, he mentions among the ensuing *incivilités* wiping the hands on bread and licking the fingers, as well as soiling the napkin.

It can be seen that manners are here still in the process of formation. The new standard does not appear suddenly. Certain forms of behavior are placed under prohibition, not because they are unhealthy but because they lead to an offensive sight and disagreeable associations; shame at offering such a spectacle, originally absent, and fear of arousing such associations are gradually spread from the standard setting circles to larger circles by numerous authorities and institutions. However, once such feelings are aroused and firmly established in society by means of certain rituals like that involving the fork, they are constantly reproduced so long as the structure of human relations is not fundamentally altered. The older generation, for whom such a standard of conduct is accepted as a matter of course, urges the children, who do not come into the world already equipped with these feelings and this standard, to control themselves more or less rigorously in accordance with it, and to restrain their drives and inclinations. If a child tries to touch something sticky, wet, or greasy with his fingers, he is told, "You must not do that, people do not do things like that." And the displeasure toward such conduct which is thus aroused by the adult finally arises through habit, without being induced by another person.

To a large extent, however, the conduct and instinctual life of the child are forced even without words into the same mold and in the same direction by the fact that a particular use of knife and fork, for example, is completely established in the adult world—that is, by the example of the environment. Since the pressure or coercion of individual adults is allied to the pressure and example of the whole surrounding world, most children, as they grow up, forget or repress relatively early the fact that their feelings of shame and embarrassment, of pleasure and displeasure, are molded into conformity with a certain standard by external pressure and compulsion. All this appears to them as highly personal, something "inward," implanted in them by nature. While it is still directly visible in the writings of Courtin and La Salle that adults, too, were at first dissuaded from eating with their fingers by consideration for each other, by "politeness," to spare others a distasteful spectacle and themselves the shame of being seen

with soiled hands, later it becomes more and more an inner automatism, the imprint of society on the inner self, the superego, that forbids the individual to eat in any other way than with a fork. The social standard to which the individual was first made to conform by external restraint is finally reproduced more or less smoothly within him, through a self-restraint which may operate even against his conscious wishes.

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.

V

Changes in Attitude Toward the Natural Functions

Examples

Fifteenth century?

A

From *S'ensuivent les contenance de la table*:

VIII

Before you sit down, make sure your seat has not been fouled.

B

From *Ein spruch der ze tische kêrt*:⁶¹

329 Do not touch yourself under your clothes with your bare hands.

C

1530

From *De civilitate morum puerilium*, by Erasmus. The glosses are taken from a Cologne edition of 1530 which was probably already intended for educational purposes. Under the title is the following note: "Recognized by the author, and elucidated with new scholia by Gisbertus Longolius Ultrairaiectinus, Cologne, in the year XXX." The fact that these questions were discussed in such a way in school-books makes the difference from later attitudes particularly clear:

On Behavior at Table (p. 84)

A.

Thirteenth century

Daz ist des tanhausers getiht und ist guod hofzuht.

- 1 Er diünket mich ein zühtic man,
der alle zuht erkennen kan,
der keine unzuht nie gewan
und im der zühte nie zeran.
- 2 Der zühte der ist also vil
und sint ze manegen dingen guot;
nu wizzent, der in volgen wil,
daz er vil selten missetuot.
.....
- 25 Swenne ir ezzt, so sit gemant,
daz ir vergeztt der armen niht;
so wert ir gote vil wol erkant,
ist daz den wol von iu geschiht.

On v. 25 c.f. the first rule of Bonvicino da Riva:

La primiera è questa:
che quando tu è a mensa,
del povero bexognoxo
imprimamenté inpensa.

From *Ein spruch der ze tische kêrt*:

- 313 Mit der schüzzel man niht süfen sol,
mit einem lefel, daz stât wol.
- 315 Swer sich über die schüzzel habt,
und unsüberlicben snabt
mit dem munde, als ein swin,
der sol bi anderm vihe sîn.
- 33 Kein edeler man selbander sol
mit einem leffel sufén niht;
daz zimet hübschen liuten wol,
den dicke unedellich geschiht.
- 37 Mit schüzzeln sufén niemen zimt,
swie des unfuor doch maneger lobe,
der si frevellichen nimt
und in sich giuzet, als er tobe.

41 Und der sich über die schüzzel habet,
so er izzet, als ein swin,
und gar unuberliche snabet,
und smatzet mit dem munde sin . . .

45 Sümliche bizen ab der sniten
und stozen in die schüzzel wider

319 swer sniubet als ein lahs,
unde smatzet als ein dahs,
und rüset sô er ezzen sol,
diu driu dinc ziment niemor wol.

In the *Curtesien* of Bonvicino da Riva:

La sedexena apresso con veritae:
No sorbilar dra bocha quando tu mangi con cugial;
Quello fa sicom bestia, chi con cugial sorbilia
Chi doncha à questa usanza, ben fa s'el se dispolia.

or

In *The Book of nurture and school of good manners*:

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

On v. 45 c.f. *Ein spruch der ze tische kêrt*:

346 Swer diu bein benagen hât,
und wider in die schüzzel tuot,
dâ sin die höveschen vor behuot.

or

From *Quisquis es in mensa*:

In disco racta non sit bucella redacta.

nach geburischen siten;
sülh unzuht legent die hübschen nider.

49 Etlicher ist also gemuot,
swenn er daz bein genagen hat,
daz erz wider in die schüzzel tuot;
daz habet gar für missetat.

53 Die senf und salsen ezzen gern,
die sulen des vil flizic sin,
daz si den unflat verbern
und stozen niht die vinger drin.

57 Der riuspet, swenne er ezzen sol,
und in daz tischlach sniuzet sich,
diu beide ziment niht gar wol,
als ich des kan versehen mich.

- 65 Der beide reden und ezzen wil,
diu zwei werc mit einander tuon,
und in dem slaf wil reden vil,
der kan vil selten wol geruon.
- 69 Ob dem tische lat daz brehten sin,
so ir ezzet, daz sümliche tuont,
dar an gedenkent, friunde min,
daz nie kein site so übele stuont.
.....
- 81 Ez dünket mich groz missetat,
an sweme ich die unzuht sihe,
der daz ezzen in dem munde hat
und die wile trinket als ein vihe.
- 85 Ir sült niht blāsen in den tranc,
des spulgent sümliche gern;
daz ist ein ungewizzen danc,
der unzuht solte man enbern.
- 94 E daz ir trinkt, so wischt den munt,
daz ir besmalzet niht den tranc;
diu hovezuht wol zimt alle stunt
und ist ein hovelich gedanc.
- 105 Und die sich uf den tisch legent,
so si ezzent, daz enstet niht wol;
wie selten die die helme wegent,
da man frouwen dienen sol.
- 109 Ir sült die kel ouch jucken niht,
so ir ezzt, mit blozer hant;
ob ez aber also geschiht,
so nemet hovelich daz gewant.
- 113 Und jucket da mit, daz zimt baz,
denn iu diu hant unsuber wirt;
die zuokapher merkent daz,
swer sülhe unzuht niht verbirt.
- 117 Ir sült die zēnde stüren niht
mit mezzern, als etlicher tuot,
und als mit manegem noch geschiht;
swer des phliget, daz ist niht guot.
- 125 Swer ob dem tisch des wenet sich,
daz er die gürtel witer lat,
so wartent sicherliche uf mich,
er ist niht visch biz an den grat.

- 129 Swer ob dem tische sniuzet sich,
ob er ez ribet an die hant,
der ist ein gouch, versihe ich mich,
dem ist niht bezzer zuht bekant.
- 141 Ich hoere von sümlichen sagen
(ist daz war, daz zimet übel),
daz si ezzen ungetwagen;
den selben müezen erlamen die knübel!
- 157 In diu oren grifen niht enzimt
und ougen, als etlicher tuot,
swer den unflat von der nasen nimt,
so er izzet, diu driu sint niht guot.

B.

Fifteenth century

From *S'ensuivent les contenance de la table*:

Enfant qui veult estre courtoys
Et à toutes gens agreable,
Et principalement à table,
Garde ces rigles en François.

II

Enfant soit de copper soigneux
Ses ongles, et oster l'ordure,
Car se l'ordure il y endure,
Quant ilz se grate yert roingneux.

III

Enfant d'honneur, lave tes mains
A ton lever, à ton disner,
Et puis au supper sans finer;
Ce sont trois foyz à tous le moins.

XII

Enfant, se tu es bien sçavant,
Ne mès pas ta main le premier
Au plat, mais laisse y toucher
Le maistre de l'hostel avant.

XIII

Enfant, gardez que le morseau
Que tu auras mis en ta bouche
Par une fois, jamais n'atouche,
Ne soit remise en ton vaisseau.

XIV

Enfant, ayes en toy remors
De t'en garder, se y as failly,

Et ne presentes à nulluy
Le morseau que tu auras mors.

XV

Enfant, garde toy de maschier
En ta bouche pain ou viande,
Oultre que ton cuer ne demande,
Et puis apres le recrascher.

XVII

Enfant, garde qu'en la saliere
Tu ne mettes point tes morseaulx
Pour les saler, ou tu deffaulx,
Car c'est deshonneste maniere.

XXIV

Enfant, soyes tousjours paisible,
Doux, courtois, bening, amiable,
Entre ceulx qui sierront à table
Et te gardes d'estre noysibles.

XXVI

Enfant, se tu faiz en ton verre
Souppes de vin aucunement,
Boy tout le vin entierement,
ou autrement le gecte à terre.

XXXI

Enfant se tu veulx en ta pence
Trop excessivement bouter
Tu seras contraint à rupter
Et perdre toute contenance.

XXXIV

Enfant garde toy de frotter
Ensamble tes mains, ne tes bras
Ne à la nappe, ne aux draps
A table on ne se doit grater.

C.

1530

From *De civilitate morum puerilium*, by Erasmus of Rotterdam:

Mantile si datur, aut humero sinistro aut brachio laevo imponito.
Cum honoratoribus accubiturus, capite prexo, pileum relinquito.
A dextris sit poculum et cultellus escarius rite purgatus, ad laevam panis.
Quidam ubi vix bene conseriderint, mox manus in epulas conjiunt. Id luporum est . . .
Primus cibum appositum ne attingito, non tantum ob id quod arguit avidum, sed quod interdum cum periculo conjunctum est, dum qui fervidum inexploratum recipit in os, aut expuere cogitur, aut si deglutiatur, adurere gulam, utroque ridiculus aequae ac miser.
Aliquantisper morandum, ut puer assuescat affectui temperare.
Digitos in jusculeta immergere, agrestium est: sed cultello fuscinae tollat quod vult, nec id ex toto eligit disco, quod solent liguritores, sed quod forte ante ipsum jacet, sumat.
Quod digitis excipi non potest, quadra excipiendum est.

Si quis e placenta vel artorcaea porrexit aliquid, cochleari aut quadra excipe, aut cochleare porrectum accipe, et inverso in quadram cibo, cochleare reddito.

Si liquidius est quod datur, gustandum sumito et cochleare reddito, sed ad mantile extersum.

Digitos unctos vel ore praelingere, vel ad tunicam, extergere, pariter incivile est: id mappa potius aut mantili faciendum.

D.

1558

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

Was meynstu würde dieser Bischof und seine edle Gesellschaft (il Vescove e la sua nobile brigata) denen gesagt haben, die wir bisweilen sehen wie die Säwe mit dem rüssel in der suppen ligen und ihr gesicht nit einmal auffheben und ihre augen, viel weniger die hände nimmermehr von der speise abwenden, die alle beyde backen auffblasen gleich als ob sie in die Trommete bliesen oder ein fewer auffblasen wolten, die nicht essen sondern fressen und die kost einschlingen, die ihre Hände bey nahe bis an den Elbogen beschmutzen und demnach die servieten also zu richten, dass unflätige küchen oder wischlumpen viel reiner sein möchten.

Dennoch schämen sich diese unfläter nit mit solchen besudelten servieten ohn unterlass den schweiss abzuwischen (der dann von wegen ihrs eilenden und ubermessigen fressens von irem häupt über die stirn und das angesicht bis auff den hals häufig herunter trüpfet) ja auch wol die Nase so oft es inen gelicht darin zu schneutzen.

E.

1560

From a *Civilté* by C. Calviac:

L'enfant estant assis, s'il ha une serviette devant luy sur son assiette, il la prendra et la mettra sur son bras ou espaule gauche, puis il mettra son pain de costé gauche, le cousteau du costé droit, comme le verre aussi, s'il le veut laisser sur la table, et qu'il ait la commodité de l'y tenir sans offenser personne. Car il pourra advenir qu'on ne sçaurait tenir le verre à table ou du costé droit sans empescher par ce moyen quelqu'un.

Il fault que l'enfant ait la discrétion de cognoistre les circonstances du lieu où il sera.

En mangeant . . . il doit prendre le premier qui luy viendra en main de son tranchoir.

Que s'il y a des sauces, l'enfant y pourra . . . tremper honnestement et sans tourner de l'autre costé après qu'il l'aura tremper de l'un . . .

Il est bien nécessaire à l'enfant qu'il apprenne dès sa jeunesse à despécer un gigot, une perdrix, un lapin et choses semblables.

C'est une chose par trop ords que l'enfant présente une chose après l'avoir rongée, ou celle qu'il ne daigneroit manger, si ce n'est à son serviteur.

Il n'est non plus honneste de tirer par la bouche quelque chose qu'on aura jà mâchée, et la mettre sur le tranchoir; si ce n'est qu'il advienne que quelquefois il succe la moelle de quelque petit os, comme par manière de passe temps en attendant la desserte, car après l'avoir succé il le doit mettre sur son assiette, comme aussi les os des cerises et des prunes et semblables, pour ce qu'il n'est point bon de les avaler ny de les jecter à terre.

L'enfant ne doit point ronger indécemment les os, comme font les chiens.

Quant l'enfant voudra du sel, il en prendra avec la poincte de son cousteau et non point avec les trois doigts;

Il faut que l'enfant coupe sa chair en menus morceaux sur son tranchoir . . . et ne faut point qu'il porte la viande à la bouche tantost d'une main, tantost de l'autre, comme les petits qui commencent à manger; mais que tousjours il le face, avec la main droite, en prenant honnestement le pain ou la chair avec troys doigts seulement.

Quant à la manière de mâcher, elle est diverse selon les lieux ou pays où on est. Car les Allemans mâchent la bouche close, et trouvent laid de faire autrement. Les François au contraire ouvrent à demy la bouche, et trouvent la procédure des Allemans peu ord. Les Italiens y procèdent fort mollement, et les François plus rondement et en sorte qu'ils trouvent la procédure des Italiens trop délicate et précieuse.

Et ainsi chacune nation ha quelque chose de propre et différent des autres. Pourquoy l'enfant y pourra procéder selon les lieux et coustumes d'iceux où il sera.

Davantage les Allemans usent de culières en mangeant leur potage et toutes les choses liquides, et les Italiens des fourchettes. Et les François de l'un et de l'autre, selon que bon leur semble et qu'ilz en ont la commodité. Les Italiens se plaisent aucunement à avoir chacun son cousteau. Mais les Allemans ont cela en singulière recommandation, et tellement qu'on leur fait grand desplaisir de le prendre devant eux ou de leur demander. Les François au contraire: toute une pleine table de personnes se servent de deux ou trois cousteaux, sans faire difficulté de le demander, ou prendre, ou le bailler s'ilz l'ont. Par quoy, s'il advient que quelqu'un demande son cousteau à l'enfant, il luy doit bailler après l'avoir nettoyé à sa serviette, en tenant la poincte en sa main et présentant le manche à celui qui le demande: car il seroit deshonneste de la faire autrement.

F.

Between 1640 and 1680

From *Chanson des Marquis de Coulanges*⁵¹:

Jadis le potage on mangeoit
Dans le plat, sans cérémonie,
Et sa cuillier on essuyoit
Souvent sur la poule bouillie.
Dans la fricassée autrefois
On saussait son pain et ses doigts.

Chacun mange présentement
Son potage sur son assiette;
Il faut se servir poliment
Et de cuillier et de fourchette,
Et de temps en temps qu'un valet
Les aille laver au buffet.

G.

1672

From Antoine de Courtin, *Nouveau traité de civilité*:

P. 127. Si chacun prend au plat, il faut bien se garder d'y mettre la main, que les plus qualifiez ne l'y ayent mise les premiers; n'y de prendre ailleurs qu'à l'endroit du plat, qui est vis à vis de nous: moins encore doit-on prendre les meilleurs morceaux, quand même on seroit le dernier à prendre.

Il est necessaire aussi d'observer qu'il faut toujours essuyer vostre cuillere quand, après vous en estre servy, vous voulez prendre quelque chose dans un autre plat, y ayant des gens

si délicats qu'ils ne voudroient pas manger du potage où vous l'auriez mise, après l'avoir portée à la bouche.

Et même si on est à la table de gens bien propres, il ne suffit pas d'essuyer sa cuillère; il ne faut plus s'en servir, mais en demander une autre. Aussi sert—on à present en bien des lieux des cuillères dans des plats, qui ne servent que pour prendre du potage et de la sauce.

Il ne faut pas manger le potage au plat, mais en mettre proprement sur son assiette; et s'il estoit trop chaud, il est indecent de souffler à chaque cuillerée; il faut attendre qu'il soit refroidi.

Que si par malheur on s'estoit brûlé, il faut le souffrir si l'on peut patiemment et sans le faire paroître: mais si la brûlure estoit insupportable comme il arrive quelquefois, il faut promptement et avant que les autres s'en aperçoivent, prendre son assiette d'une main, et la porter contre sa bouche, et se couvrant de l'autre main remettre sur l'assiette ce que l'on a dans la bouche, et le donner vistement par derrière à un laquais. La civilité veut que l'on ait de la politesse, mais elle ne pretend pas que l'on soit homicide de soy-même. Il est tres indecent de toucher à quelque chose de gras, à quelque sauce, à quelque syrop etc. avec les doigts, outre que cela en même—temps vous oblige à deux ou trois autres indecences, l'une est d'essuyer frequemment vos mains à vostre serviette, et de la salir comme un torchon de cuisine; en sorte qu'elle fait mal au coeur à ceux qui la voyent porter à la bouche, pour vous essuyer. L'autre est de les essuyer à vostre pain, ce qui est encore tres—malpropre; et la troisième de vous lécher les doigts, ce qui est le comble de l'impropreté.

P. 273 . . . comme il y en a beaucoup (sc. usages) qui ont déjà changé, je ne doute pas qu'il n'y en ait plusieurs de celles-cy, qui changeront tout de même à l'avenir.

Autrefois on pouvoit . . . tremper son pain dans la sausse, et il suffisoit pourvu que l'on n'y eût pas encore mordu; maintenant ce seroit une espece de rusticité.

Autrefois on pouvoit tirer de sa bouche ce qu'on ne pouvoit pas manger, et le jeter à terre, pourvu que cela se fist adroitement; et maintenant ce seroit une grande saleté . . .

H.

1717

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

P. 97. En Allemagne et dans les Royaumes du Nord, c'est une civilité et une bienséance pour un Prince de boire le premier à la santé de celui ou de ceux qu'il traite, et de leur faire presenter ensuite le même verre, ou le même gobelet, rempli d'ordinaire de même vin; et ce n'est point parmi eux un manque de politesse de boire dans le même verre, mais une marque de franchise et d'amitié; les femmes boivent aussi les premières, et donnent ensuite, ou font porter leur verre avec le même vin, dont elles ont bû à la santé de celui à qui elles se sont adressées, sans que cela passe pour une faveur particulière comme parmi nous . . .

Je ne sçaurois approuver (p. 101)—n'en déplaise à Messieurs les Gens du Nort—cette maniere de boire dans le même verre, et moins encore sur le reste des Dames, cela a un air de malpropreté, qui me feroit souhaiter qu'ils témoignassent leur franchise par d'autres marques.

I.

1714

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

P. 48. Il n'est pas . . . honnête d'humer sa soupe quand on se serviroit d'écuëlle si ce n'étoit que ce fut dans la famille après en avoir pris la plus grande partie avec la cuillère.

Si le potage est dans un plat portez-y la cuilliére à votre tour sans vous précipiter.
Ne tenez-pas toujours votre couteau à la main comme font les gens de village; il suffit de le prendre lorsque vous voulez vous en servir.

Quand on vous sert de la viande, il n'est pas séant de la prendre avec la main; mais il faut présenter votre assiette de la main gauche en tenant votre fourchette ou votre couteau de la droite.

Il est contre la bienséance de donner à flairer les viandes et il faut se donner bien de garde de les remettre dans le plat après les avoir flairées. Si vous prenez dans un plat commun ne choisissez pas les meilleurs morceaux. Coupez avec le couteau après que vous aurez arrêté la viande qui est dans le plat avec la fourchette de laquelle vous vous servirez pour porter sur votre assiette ce que vous aurez coupé, ne prenez donc pas la viande avec la main . . .

Il ne faut pas jeter par terre ni os ni coque d'oeuf ni pelure d'aucun fruit.

Il en est de même des noyaux que l'on tire plus honnêtement de la bouche avec les deux doigts qu'on ne les crache dans la main.

J.

1729

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

Des choses dont on doit se servir lorsqu'on est à Table (p. 87).

On doit se servir à Table d'une serviette, d'une assiette, d'un couteau, d'une cuillier, et d'une fourchette: il serait tout à fait contre l'honnêteté, de se passer de quelqu'une de toutes ces choses en mangeant.

C'est à la personne la plus qualifiée de la compagnie à déplier sa serviette la première, et les autres doivent attendre qu'elle ait déplié la sienne, pour déplier la leur. Lorsque les personnes sont à peu près égales, tous la dépliant ensemble sans cérémonie.

Il est malhonnête de se servir de sa serviette pour s'essuyer le visage; il l'est encore bien plus de s'en frotter les dents et ce serait une faute des plus grossières contre la Civilité de s'en servir pour se moucher . . . L'usage qu'on peut et qu'on doit faire de sa serviette lorsqu'on est à Table, est de s'en servir pour nettoier sa bouche, ses lèvres et ses doigts quand ils sont gras, pour dégraisser le couteau avant que de couper du Pain, et pour nettoier la cuillier, et la fourchette après qu'on s'en est servi.

Lorsque les doigts sont fort gras, il est à propos de les dégraisser d'abord avec un morceau de pain, qu'il faut ensuite laisser sur l'assiette avant que de les essuyer à sa serviette, afin de ne la pas beaucoup graisser, et de ne la pas rendre malpropre.

Lorsque la cuillier, la fourchette ou le couteau sont sales, ou qu'ils sont gras, il est très mal honnête de les lecher, et il n'est nullement séant de les essuyer, ou quelque autre chose que ce soit, avec la nape, on doit dans ces occasions, et autres semblables, se servir de la serviette et pour ce qui est de la nape, il faut avoir égard de la tenir toujours fort propre, et de n'y laisser tomber, ni eau, ni vin, ni rien qui la puisse salir.

Lorsque l'assiette est sale, on doit bien se garder de la ratisser avec la cuillier, ou la fourchette, pour la rendre nette, ou de nettoier avec ses doigts son assiette, ou le fond de quelque plat: cela est très indécent, il faut, ou n'y pas toucher, ou si on a la commodité d'en changer, se la faire déservir, et s'en faire apporter une autre.

Il ne faut pas lorsqu'on est à Table tenir toujours le couteau à la main, il suffit de le prendre lorsqu'on veut s'en servir.

Il est aussi très incivil de porter un morceau de pain à la bouche aiant le couteau à la main; il l'est encore plus de l'y porter avec la pointe du couteau. Il faut observer la même chose en mangeant des pommes, des poires ou quelques autres fruits.

Il est contre la Bienséance de tenir la fourchette ou la cuillier à plaine main, comme si on tenoit un bâton; mais on doit toujours les tenir entre ses doigts.

On ne doit pas se servir de la fourchette pour porter à sa bouche des choses liquides . . . c'est la cuiller qui est destinée pour prendre ces sortes de choses.

Il est de l'honnêteté de se servir toujours de la fourchette pour porter de la viande à sa bouche, car la Bien-séance ne permet pas de toucher avec les doigts à quelque chose de gras, à quelque sauce, ou à quelque sirop; et si quelqu'un le faisoit, il ne pouoit se dispenser de commettre ensuite plusieurs autres incivilités: comme seroit d'essuier souvent ses doigts à sa serviette, ce qui la rendroit fort sale et fort malpropre, ou de les essuier à son pain, ce qui seroit très incivil, ou de lécher ses doigts, ce qui ne peut être permis à une personne bien née et bien élevée.

K.

1774

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

La serviette qui est posée sur l'assiette, étant destinée à préserver les habits des taches ou autres malpropretés inséparables des repas, il faut tellement l'étendre sur soi qu'elle couvre les devants du corps jusques sur les genoux, en allant au-dessous du col et non la passant en dedans du même col. La cuiller, la fourchette et le couteau doivent toujours être placée à la droite.

La cuiller est destinée pour les choses liquides, et la fourchette pour les viandes de consistance.

Lorsque l'une ou l'autre est sale, on peut les nettoyer avec sa serviette, s'il n'est pas possible de se procurer un autre service; il faut éviter de les assuyer avec la nappe, c'est un malpropreté impardonnable.

Quand l'assiette est sale, il faut en demander une autre; ce seroit une grossièreté révoltante de la nettoyer avec les doigts avec la cuiller, la fourchette et le couteau.

Dans les bonnes tables, les domestiques attentifs changent les assiettes sans qu'on les en avertissent.

Rien n'est plus mal-propre que de se lécher les doigts, de toucher les viandes, et de les porter à la bouche avec la main, de remuer les sauces avec le doigt, ou d'y tremper le pain avec la fourchette pour la sucer.

On ne doit jamais prendre du sel avec les doigts. Il est très ordinaire aux enfants d'entasser morceaux sur morceaux, de retirer même de la bouche ce qu'ils y ont mis et qui est maché, de pousser les morceaux avec les doigts. Rien n'est plus mal honnête. . . . porter les viandes au nez, les flairer, ou les donner à flairer est une autre impolitesse qui attaque le Maître de la table; et s'il arrive que l'on trouve quelque malpropreté dans les aliments, il faut les retirer sans les montrer.

L.

1780?

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

. . . Après, il mettra sa serviette sur lui, son pain à gauche et son couteau à droite, pour couper la viande sans le rompre. Il se donnera aussi de garde de porter son couteau à sa bouche. Il ne doit point avoir ses mains sur son assiette. . . . il ne doit point non plus s'accouder dessus, car cela n'appartient qu'à des gens malades ou vieux.

Le sage Enfant s'il est avec des Supérieurs mettra le dernier la main au plat . . .

. . . après si c'est de la viande, la coupera proprement avec son couteau et la mangera avec son pain.

C'est une chose rustique et sale de tirer de sa bouche la viande qu'on a déjà machée et la mettre sur son assiette. Aussi ne faut-il jamias remettre dans le plat ce qu'on en a osté.

M.

1786

From a conversation between the poet Delille and Abbé Cosson:

Dernièrement, l'abbé Cosson, professeur de belles lettres au collège Mazarin, me parla d'un dîner où il s'étoit trouvé quelques jours auparavant avec des gens de la cour . . . à Versailles.

Je parie, lui dis-je, que vous avez fait cent incongruités.

—Comment donc, reprit vivement l'abbé Cosson, fort inquiet. Il me semble que j'ai fait la même chose que tout le monde.

—Quelle présomption! Je gage que vous n'avez rien fait comme personne. Mais voyons, je me bomerai au dîner. Et d'abord que fites-vous de votre serviette en vous mettant à table?

—De ma serviette? Je fis comme tout le monde; je la déployai, je l'étendis sur moi et l'attachai par un coin à ma boutonnière.

—Eh bien mon cher, vous êtes le seul qui ayez fait cela; on n'étaie point sa serviette, on la laisse sur ses genoux. Et comment fites-vous pour manger votre soupe?

—Comme tout le monde, je pense. Je pris ma cuiller d'une main et ma fourchette de l'autre . . .

—Votre fourchette, bon Dieu! Personne ne prend de fourchette pour manger sa soupe . . . Mais dites-mois quelque chose de la manière dont vous mangeâtes votre pain.

—Certainement à la manière de tout le monde: je la coupai proprement avec mon couteau.

—Eh, on rompt son pain, on ne le coupe pas . . . Avançons. Le café, comment le prîtes-vous?

—Eh, pour le coup, comme tout le monde; il était brûlant, je le versai par petites parties de ma tasse dans ma soucoupe.

—Eh bien, vous fites comme ne fit sûrement personne: tout le monde boit son café dans sa tasse, et jamais dans sa soucoupe . . .

Changes in Attitude Toward the Natural Functions
(p. 129)

A.

Fifteenth Century

From *S'ensuivent les contenance de la table*:

VIII.

Enfant, prens de regarder peine
Sur le siege où tu te sierras
Se aucune chose y verra
Qui soit deshonnete ou vilaine

B.

From *Ein spruch der ze tische kêrn*:

329 Grif ouch niht mit blôzer hant
Dir selben under dîn gewant.

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Publishers Weekly

This classic, pioneering examination of the links between the social graces and social control provides surprising and thought-provoking answers to questions such as: How have our ways of blowing our noses, eating with a knife and fork, making love, and making war changed over the last few hundred years, and what do these changes imply for the individual and for society? In this entertaining, fascinating, and amazingly accessible masterpiece, Swiss sociologist Norbert Elias draws from a dazzling array of sources, including medieval etiquette and manners books, eighteenth-century novels, travel accounts, poems, paintings, and song lyrics, combining a sharp eye for social detail with breathtaking intellectual virtuosity.

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