

Civility: A Cultural History

Contents

Acknowledgments

1 Introduction

Part I: The Genealogy of Western Civility

2 From Barbarism to Courtly Manners

3 Secular Civility in the Renaissance

4 Shifts in Identity and Awareness: Protestantism and the Enlightenment

5 French Court Society, the French Revolution, and the Paradoxes of French Civility

6 England and the Victorian Ethic

7 The American Experience: Democracy and Informal Civility

Part II: The Rise of the Late-Modern American Self

8 Conformity, Opposition, and Identity

Part III: The Multifaceted Anatomy of Civility

9 Towards a Cultural Sociology of Civility

Part IV: Contemporary French, American, and English Civility and Interaction

10 A Comparative Field Study of France, America, and England

Part V: Summing Up

11 Civilizing and Recivilizing Processes

Bibliography

Index

Acknowledgments

This work would not have been possible without the patient hospitality of citizens of the United States, England, and France. Over a period of many years, they gave of their time, their kindness, and their insights. I apologize to them for any statements that reveal any lack of understanding on my part.

I am also very grateful to two funding organizations that generously supported my research and made possible a project that would otherwise have been financially forbidding. I thank the British Commonwealth Association of Universities Fellowship Committee for their award (1998–2002) and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for their fellowships (1998 to 2004). Additionally, I am grateful to the Canadian Centre for Ethics in Public Affairs (CCEPA) for a grant enabling me to study civility in the educational system (2007–8).

Many people contributed to the preparation of this work by offering insights and advice. Principal among these was Professor William Outhwaite of the University of Sussex. His many patient readings of the manuscript left me grateful as well as enlightened. Many thanks also to Dr Anthony Synnott, who encouraged me during the later stages of the manuscript and kindly arranged for a pleasant and productive two-year stay at Concordia University in Montreal subsequent to my field research in Europe. I had some very good luck writing in some of the fine cafés and bistros of this wonderful cosmopolitan and multicultural world city.

No book can make it to market without the support and understanding of the administration of the university in which one teaches. Without course releases and other courtesies, an academic would be hard-pressed to complete a major manuscript in a timely way. I have been fortunate to have this support and am very grateful to the University of Prince Edward Island, Canada, a university located in one of the most civil regions of North America. I thank U.P.E.I. President H. Wade MacLauchlan; Dr Richard Kurial, Dean of Arts; Dr Vianne Timmons, Vice-President Academic; Katherine Schultz, Research and Development; and the librarians at the university for their unreserved

support and encouragement. Thanks are also due to the National Libraries of America, France, and England.

Nor can a book ever make it into the hands of the reader without the help of a compassionate and wise editor. This particular book owes its 'coming out' to Virgil Duff, Executive Editor of the University of Toronto Press. I am grateful to him for recognizing the work as worthy of publication and for his patience during the final revisions.

Needless to say, I am also grateful to the anonymous referee-readers of the manuscript without whose input and critique this book would not have been what it is. I thank them for their time and contributions. And many thanks to James Leahy for his patient and expert copy editing.

Next, but certainly not any lesser, I owe fond gratitude to various individuals who have encouraged me to pursue my sociological themes. In random order they include Kurt Johansson, John Drysdale, John A. Hall, Charles Taylor, Stephen Turner, Susan Hoecker-Drysdale, Peter Wagner, Clara Khudaverdian, Arthur Janov, William Reimer, Frederick Lowey, Ronald B. Hatch, David Howes, Tom Trenton, Jean Mitchell, Udo Krautwurst, Judy-Lynn Richards, Henry Bissell, Linda Ghan, Matthew Keeping, William Weintraub, Neil Bissondath, Mamdouh ElGharib, Pearl Crichton, Joseph Kopachevsky, Henry Lustiger-Thaller, and the late Mordecai Richler. And special gratitude is owed to the late, great French-Canadian sociologist Professor Hubert Guindon, who so generously dispensed to us the valuable lessons he had learned while working with C. Wright Mills. Those of us who were fortunate enough to study with Guindon during our undergraduate years know for a fact that we would not have been able to accomplish what we did later on had it not been for the manner in which he inspired us with his devastating insights and mischievous humour.

Finally, the preparation of a work such as this takes a few years; that friends and family members continue to remember and love one, even though they have to put up with one's frequent hermetic withdrawals, is a great gift. I am thinking of a series of friends who are each very important to me. You know who you are, so I will not impose on you by mentioning your names. I thank you for your tolerant civility and loving friendship.

1

Introduction

I am sure that no traveler seeing things through author's spectacles can see them as they are.

– Harriet Martineau, *How to Observe Manners and Morals*

The origins of this book are rooted in my childhood. My father worked for the United Nations, so we moved from one country to another every three or four years. I came to be fascinated by the manner in which people differed from one place to another. In the British school, we were sent to the principal if we were caught using a ballpoint instead of a fountain pen. In the American school, we were forbidden from using fountain pens. In the French school, we could use anything we wanted to just as long as we didn't forget to stand up when the teacher walked in. In England, we always had to leave a little food on the plate in order not to appear greedy. In France, we had to clean up our plate or face an ashen-faced hostess or host.

Early on, my father and mother admonished me to be extremely polite in all circumstances, even when the fault lay with the other. They both admired the English. But, that wasn't all of it. I came to discover that what was considered polite in one place differed from what was considered polite in another. Being polite in the manner of one country could get one in trouble in another one. I somehow managed to get along by imitating the mannerisms of the people who inhabited the country in which we were posted. Through such imitation I came to understand that while certain practices were universal, others were regional and local. Sometimes I felt embarrassed towards myself for being such a chameleon. I also wondered why it was that the way in which I moved and walked on the street differed as I went from London to Paris to New York to Salt Lake City to Montreal to Cairo. What was it about these places and people that made them so distinct? Why did my experience of others and myself change as I went from one culture to another?

Looking back, I'm grateful for this multinational, multicultural childhood. Being rootless, you learn to walk on the razor-sharp line that divides cultures. It's a tricky walk.

You're part of it all, but you're also looking at it a little from the side. You begin noticing things that you might not were you fully colonized by the sacrosanct customs of your own folk.

A more recent origin for this book is located in another book I wrote, *The Seventh Circle* (1996). This work of documentary fiction, written with sociological rigour, focused on acts of ethnic rivalry, vengeance, genocide, and civil war. While I was pleased with the manner in which I managed to realistically describe the occurrence of these acts and the resentment and tension that were their root causes, I remained with two questions which I now realize are central to the development of an effective sociology of culture: 'Can a rigorous understanding of the anatomy of civility and incivility help prevent social cruelty? And, what roles do pride and shame play in social organization and minor and major conflicts?' As the reader will notice, these two questions form an integral part of this present work.

But 'why?' asks a colleague. 'Why are you writing a book on "civility"? Isn't it a tame topic?' Yes, it might sound tame at first glance ... a little like turning to the audience and saying, 'Gee folks, let's all get along. Peace and politeness to all.' That is, more or less, what journalists have been calling for over the past decade. Just an hour ago, I checked on google.com again to see how many entries contained the word 'incivility' or the word 'rudeness.' The count goes up every week. This time, over 3,500,000 in English and 150,000 in French. A lot of people seem concerned about the state of our face-to-face and group-to-group relations. As I write this, two national TV networks are in the middle of producing big-budget documentaries on rudeness. One of the networks interviewed me last week to ask me if I agreed that our civilization was disintegrating. I replied in the negative, and I hope that the reader will understand why I gave this response by the time he or she reaches the conclusion of this book.

My own motivations are different from those of journalists who warn that our ability to be civil with one another may be degenerating beyond easy repair. Although it goes without saying that I believe in the practice of civility and fairness and am saddened by the fact that financial and political double binds complicate the maintenance of an altruistic outlook, this book is not a preacher's manifesto. In fact, I am not at all sure that

we can become a truly civil society unless we develop an in-depth understanding of civility *as well as* incivility. Our understanding of *civilizing processes* is not yet complete. Since the beginning of human history philosophers and priests have done their utmost to convince human beings to respect and get along with one another. P.M. Forni's (2002) eloquent and sensible book, *Choosing Civility*, is one of the more recent and inspiring additions to the literature. Yet, the fact that we still need convincing may be connected either to a stubborn and truculent human nature or, as I believe, to our lack of understanding of the 'anatomy of civility.' By this I mean the many ways in which a variety of interrelated factors and dimensions influence and shape the interaction rules and quirks of a given culture.

I undertook the research that went into the preparation of this work not because I wanted to convert readers, but because I was intrigued with a variety of issues. At the existential level, I wondered if we are continuing to build some sort of civil society that is at least as worthy as the one envisioned by our forefathers and foremothers or if we are becoming content to remain in a fragmented and disoriented society, not much aware anymore of our authentic possibilities. It is perhaps a question that many are asking, especially those who teach in universities where incoming students seem to have little knowledge of the peoples who lived in eras prior to their own.

Beyond this rather existential question I was interested in locating some of the innovations that might be necessary if we are to have a viable sociology of culture that is capable of explaining society at the micrological as well as macrological levels. Early on during my study I realized that only a multivariate analysis could protect me from losing my way and sliding into simplistic explanations. My chosen topic required a comparative and longitudinal study of political, economic, moral/religious, and psychological conditions during a variety of epochs. If I was to be able to somewhat coherently explain how civility was founded, how its philosophical and practical meanings were transformed over time, and how it came to form an integral part of our social and personal psychology, I would have to study a variety of topics, including emotions and communicative bonds and trust networks, religious beliefs and moral habituations, sexual norms, socialization customs, courtship and family organization, educational ideals, media, and, quite significantly, political practices and economic organization. I came to

understand that these factors collectively form a ‘process’ that enfolds how people conceive of their personal identities, how they treat each other, and how they maintain and change their personal and communal ideals. Needless to say, I became convinced that every area in the social sciences would benefit from a historical and contemporary understanding of the complex factors that go into the formation of civility traditions. Certainly, this book now attempts to heal the long-standing rift between sociology and social psychology.

The complications (and opportunities) increase when we consider the fact that civility ideals and practices vary from one culture to the next. The development of a theoretically and empirically reliable definition of civility requires considerable cross-cultural knowledge and insight, for we need to select workable criteria of definitions that are not stunted by geocentric preferences. It is for this reason that this book is based on a substantial comparative study of civility in three nations that share common stages of economic and technological development: France, America, and England. I hope to demonstrate that there is an important connection between the habituations of the past and present preferences, while showing how new ideals entirely unconnected to historical habituations can additionally emerge when cultures arrive at points of ‘critical shifts.’ So, I have not only examined the civic history of these three nations (from 1200 till the present), but additionally studied them in a comparative contemporary context to more proficiently test my hypothesis that globalization of media and trade are not having a substantial levelling effect on cultures, not even on ones that share common economic capacities and political alliances.

In addition to the question ‘Why is it that different cultures develop different standards and styles of civility?’ I have addressed a more universal question: ‘What is the anatomy of civility? What must we study and understand if we are to achieve a fairly scientific understanding of civility (and incivility) that is capable of reliably informing all social research?’ This question is not inconsequential. It is my intention to demonstrate that a ‘sociology of culture’ that is historically as well as emotionally informed can provide substantially more reliable explanations of social organization and action than a sociology that is content to study social behaviour at the exclusion of the emotions and ‘emotivations’ that energize populations (Davetian 2005).

In brief, I have taken history into careful consideration before going on to discuss the various aspects of civility and how a comprehensive sociology of culture can arrive at a proficient understanding of how ‘cultural mentalities’ and ‘cultural emotionalities’ affect the civility habits of a culture. Thus, my work sets out to reveal the tripartite nature of civility and the civilizing process: their historical foundations; their dependence on moral, educational, and political values; and their very deep connection with human emotion.

Being a work on civility, this present volume is indebted to the seminal work produced by Norbert Elias in *The Civilizing Process* ([1939] 1978, 1982). Although my own work is not intended to provide a detailed presentation of Elias’s body of work – as does Stephen Mennell’s erudite account, *Norbert Elias – Civilization and the Human Self-Image* (1989) – I have included a fair amount of commentary on Elias’s theory of social development and, in particular, his definition of the ‘civilizing process’ as a story of ever-increasing ‘restraints.’ I have also tried to broaden his theory in context of late-modern society in order to demonstrate why contemporary conditions now require more comprehensive explanations of civil society.

One major difference between this present work and the one produced by Elias is that my own study of the development of civility is not meant to argue for the benefits of what Elias termed *configurational sociology*. I take his argument for granted. The proposition that social organization and human agency are intimately linked has been adequately demonstrated by many contemporary sociological studies. What remains to be revealed is the dynamic emotional processes that connect these two spheres. This present work attempts to do that. It also aims to accomplish something that was not present in Elias’s excellent treatment of the topic – it provides a thorough understanding of civility in cross-cultural perspective. Elias’s conclusions were substantially influenced by his studies of the absolutist French monarchy. My own study not only includes a discussion of French society, but, additionally, extends the discussion to America and England; and it does so by taking all eras, including and following the medieval period, into consideration. I feel that this broader analysis of the anatomy of civility was somewhat absent in Elias’s work. Elias’s first concern was to show how civility and the monopolization of violence by the state were correlated. His first intention was not to produce a multi-dimensional and longitudinal account of civility. This limitation may

have been due to the fact that he felt obliged to make a parallel statement regarding the art of social theorizing, for he wrote at a time when sociology offered not much more than two major theoretical alternatives: the structuralism of Parsonian sociology and the doctrinal certainty of classical Marxist theory. Elias had his hands full searching for a more unified conception of social organization and action, one that would accord interactive power to both society and individuals. So his work was meant not only to test his theory of civilizational development, but to also share his views regarding sociological perspective. This may have prevented him from going into further depth regarding his conception of *restraint* and *shame* and offering a theory and typology of civility that could serve for further research. I have attempted to provide these additional insights in this present work.

In brief, I have set out to produce a comprehensive account of civility from historical, sociological, and psychological points of view, while also providing a template for proficient field studies of civility and cultural ideology across ethnic and national boundaries. I have done so by addressing and hopefully achieving the following goals: (1) to describe how the Western civility and courtesy tradition was born at a time when the Western world was overwhelmed by violence and in sore need of communal reconstruction and cooperative restraint; (2) to explain how developments in civility practices were affected not only by the political, economic, and religious developments that led to the formation of civil institutions, but, just as importantly, by shifts in human awareness, knowledge, and sensibility; (3) to examine civility and courtesy in a cross-cultural context by grounding the study in historical as well as contemporary comparisons of the English, French, and American civility traditions; (4) to present a workable framework of analysis for civility research and a civility theory and topology that contributes to the design and implementation of further study; (5) to demonstrate how the political and economic habituations of a nation are mutually interactive with its emotional and motivational habituations; and (6) to propose, in my conclusion, that a useful, globally relevant theory of civility will have to go beyond our conception of manners, etiquette, and politeness and remain compatible with the emerging realization that civility and ethics may be mutually compatible within a system of interaction that posits no contradiction between loyalty to the well-being of the self and loyalty to the well-being of

other selves. This process of interaction will require a thorough understanding of the social psychology of pride and shame. For want of a better term I call this process *eco-civility*.

In order to achieve the above goals without causing undue confusion on the reader's part, I have divided the book into five interconnected parts. The purpose and structure of those parts are explained below under the heading 'How This Book Is Organized.'

What do we mean when we speak of civility? Few of us living in contemporary cultures in which 'personal rights' are at the forefront of cultural politics stop to think of the roots of the words 'civility' and 'politeness.' The etymology of these words indicates that, at their inception, they were used to signify good 'citi-zenship.' 'Civility' derives from the Latin *civis*, 'the city,' and politeness derives from the Greek *polis*, also 'the city.' So, in the classical sense, civility and politeness are not just acts of friendliness, but also indications of how life is to be best lived in cities in which citizens are dependent on one another and the state for functional relations within complex social networks. As for manners, they are more than an indication of how one is to eat at table and greet others; they additionally serve as symbols of ideal character and social status.

For the purposes of this book, I have chosen a fairly universal definition that takes social order as well as personal sentiments into account. I have defined courtesy and civility as *the extent to which citizens of a given culture speak and act in ways that demonstrate a caring for the welfare of others as well as the welfare of the culture they share in common*. Such a definition permits us to study civility at both the private and public levels, in micro as well as macro contexts, and from the perspective of personal honour as well as public citizenship. At the international level, I have defined civility as *the degree to which states value each other's welfare and the preservation of world order enough to take the necessary steps to avoid misunderstanding, humiliation, injustice, and other acts that set in motion the need for acts of retribution*. Certainly the study of civility is also the study of cultural ideology, for different peoples continue to possess cultural mentalities and habituations that are distinct enough to cause misunderstandings and tensions.

Since certain chapters in this book include an analysis of conduct books from each of the cultures studied, it should be mentioned that the study of conduct books as indicators

of cultural ideals is a nascent area in the sociology of culture. And, indeed, one does tread on delicate ground when trying to understand a nation from the behavioural models contained in the books of its philosophers, moralists, and trendsetters. There is always a variation between what is preached and what is eventually practised (just as there is between what actually happens in history and what is said to have happened). Even so, the writers of conduct books exert considerable short- and long-term influence on a culture's ideologies and practices. Moreover, conduct books are reliable historical records because they help reveal what is already being practised, since their writers are often given to complaining about those ongoing behaviours which they find unacceptable. For example, a Renaissance conduct book advising its adult readers not to spit at table is providing us with clear indication that some were indeed spitting at table; if they were not, it would not have been necessary to dispense the advice.

Methodological and Theoretical Implications

While this work has somewhat of an encyclopedic nature, it also contains viewpoints and arguments regarding description, methodology, and theory.

At the descriptive level, I am trying to provide a more comprehensive representation of civility by going beyond Elias's theory of 'violence restraint.' I see civility as more than the absence of an undesired quality such as violence or corrosive behaviour. I hope to show through the combination of historical data, literary analysis, and insights from the fields of psychology and social psychology that civility is the endpoint of a series of emotional needs and traits that must be taken into consideration on their own merit if we are to understand both civility and incivility as interdependent as well as independent states of mind and heart. Here, I try to transcend binary thinking and affirm that civility is much more than the 'absence' of rudeness or the 'presence' of its polar opposite, politeness.

Very importantly, I am arguing at the methodological level that the duration of the period of time over which a given social practice is observed plays a very large role in the kind of explanations that emerge. In view of this, I have purposefully traced the story of civility as far back as the medieval age in order to allow myself to view the longest

period of time possible for this particular Western tradition. The civility standards of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries would not be as understandable if one were not to be privy to the manner in which the civility tradition passed from the medieval theological ideal of 'virtue' to the later Renaissance secular ideal of 'consideration' for the comfort of others. Nor would we understand the moralizing of the Victorians in proper context were we not at once aware of the libertinism that preceded their era. I think that both Elias and Foucault approached social history with a similar preference for longitudinal insight (Spierenburg 2004).

Understandably, as Charles Tilly has eloquently argued in his book *Why?* (2006), the search for 'reasons' should be accompanied by an honest admission that the mere act of observing a process over a long historical time frame can easily turn into a form of storytelling. So, the realistic social scientist proceeds with her reasoning realizing that the story she is writing could be written differently. In the end, the degree to which a set of explanations are plausible depends on whether they follow a reasonable train of thought while leaving the reader with the impression that the explanations have engaged with what ordinary people were actually experiencing in the eras and locations included in the narrative. For Tilly, and also myself, a fairly workable answer to the question 'why' is found within a historical account that readily subjects itself to scrutiny from a variety of points of view: the political, the economic, the philosophical, and the psychological. It is only then that one succeeds in some measure, as Tilly points out, in 'rearranging the existing evidence in a new interpretation of mentalities and calculations that appears to be more consistent, economical, and/or plausible than the available interpretations' (1981:23). Such a narrative becomes even more credible when it is read in a long-range comparative mode. Too many social studies focus on one country and then make universal statements that collapse into inaccuracy when other cultures are introduced as controls. Thus, by asking 'why' a certain thing occurs and changes in one way rather than another *in a variety of countries*, despite the passing of centuries, we come that much closer to understanding the peculiarities of various geographic locations and cultural hubs in our own era.

Longitudinal studies provide us with an additional important advantage. They give us the opportunity of acquiring a more multi-dimensional understanding of the complex

relationships between independent, intervening, and dependent variables. The long-range study allows us to notice far-reaching occurrences that emerge between supposed causes and supposed effects. Sometimes these ‘interventions’ surprise us and require us to rethink our understanding of the development of a given practice. This increases the depth and reliability of our analysis as well its theoretical outcomes. What is telescopic then becomes kaleidoscopic, revealing much that may have otherwise remained hidden. As A.R. Gillis (2004, 1996, 1989) has demonstrated, in a series of assiduous longitudinal studies of crime and deterrence, theoretical explanations can be too readily rejected or too readily accepted when the empirical evidence is drawn from a short or wrong period of time:

Inability to find factual support for an argument may indicate that it is indeed unsupported by the data from a particular sample. At the very least this would clearly disprove the idea that the proposition will hold for *all* populations. It may even mean that the hypothesis will not hold in *any* population. However, failure to find supporting evidence can also occur when arguments are actually valid. For example, there may indeed be a relationship between the *concepts* in a proposition, but if there is weak correspondence between indicators and the concepts they are supposed to measure, there may be no observable association between the *variables* in the hypothesis. Thus, invalid measurement can nullify accurate propositions. (1996:75)

Gillis is arguing for studies of the longitudinal sort that not only take long stretches of history into consideration but also take careful note of how the initial and subsequent progression of a social development varies as one proceeds through time frames that are closely connected but characteristically and symbolically distinct from one another. Such variations can transform our understanding of the empirical evidence and lead us to a more profound understanding of the genesis and development of a social practice. As Gillis points out, ‘Depending on the processes involved, the interval of time between cause and effect could range between nanoseconds and generations’ (1996:76). And, indeed, an effect observed in the short range can become its polar opposite when observed further along the continuum of time. For example, the restraint of emotion in an emotionally violent culture may be considered a welcomed relief, while that same restraint might be considered a curse in an overly rational culture in which emotional

expression has become stunted. Similarly, what is considered civil and uncivil can change depending on the historical era. Sometimes incivility becomes necessary as a defence against exclusionary civility rituals. Here, the incivility becomes, ironically enough, an affirmation of the civility of democratic equality. So what may seem incongruent in the short run may become credible when viewed in the long term; in fact, a given effect may dissipate and be replaced by an opposite effect if granted enough time.

Gillis (2004, 1989) demonstrates the viability of such sophisticated analysis in two further groundbreaking articles regarding state institutions and crime in nineteenth-century France. He shows that educational *as well as* policing institutions had a salient influence on crime rates. In 'Crime and State Surveillance in Nineteenth-Century France' (1989), Gillis uses time-series analysis to show that the long-range effect of France's establishment of two national police forces was indeed a decrease in major crimes between 1865 and 1913. Controlling for the fact that the sudden increase in police does correlate with increased reporting of crime, Gillis concedes that, despite increases in reporting of lesser crimes (a natural outcome of the presence of a large police force possessing the necessary manpower to survey the population and process complaints), major crimes decreased as a direct result of increased state surveillance. Yet, by extending his study to a host of other variables, he provides the additional and important insight that it was not the crime rate that led to increased policing but the broader interest of the state to repress 'dangerous classes' and limit political challenges to the state. The surveillance and reporting of crime was, therefore, a secondary outcome, preceded by a very salient intervening variable: the desire to control behaviour according to political standards.

Gillis has also discovered, in 'Institutional Dynamics and Dangerous Classes: Reading, Writing, and Arrest in Nineteenth-Century France' (2004), that the establishment of educational institutions given the mandate to produce conformity through a moral curriculum had a salient influence on crime rates. Yet, he specifies that the defining factor in change in crime rates was limited not to moral education in schools but to a by-product of education: the acquisition of 'literacy.' Not content to limit his research to the overall short-term crime rate, he investigates the literacy variable and discovers that as crime rates decreased in the literate population they increased in those

portions of the population that remained illiterate. He suggests that public education and, importantly, literacy contributed to the creation of an educated literate class that came to believe that society was being threatened by a dangerous criminal underclass. This insight would not have been available had the study been limited to the time frame immediately following the establishment of a comprehensive police force, for it took time for educational institutions to dispense enough literacy for reliable data to emerge that showed a strong correlation between literacy and crime rates.

The reader will notice a similar ‘constructive suspicion’ in my own work. While I am not attempting to ‘deconstruct’ the historical and moral evidence, I am trying to show that first causes and intervening causes do differ from each other and are both worthy of being studied with a sharp eye for surprising contradictions and changes in outcome. The reader will notice this distinction in my re-evaluation of Weber’s thesis regarding capitalism and my discussion of the manner in which the intervening movement of Romanticism facilitated capitalist consumption practices, thereby providing a counterbalance to the original Protestant ethic of self-denial and causing a reformation of our views on ‘duty.’

Finally, at the theoretical level, I hope to argue that Norbert Elias’s equating of civility with emotional restraint is problematic when applied to contemporary culture. It is very much based on the Freudian notion that the human being is in the grips of potentially destructive desires which, if not restrained, can lead to social chaos. Elias focused successfully on those eras in which the human body was being disciplined and restrained (repressed) for the purpose of facilitating central rule and the hegemony of a ruling class. Yet, had he extended his study to nations and eras in which a different, more expressive mode of interaction was favoured (despite the existence of a strong centralized state that exercised considerable authority and surveillance over its population) he might have revised his theory or, at least, refined and broadened it. In my own case, I have taken into account that there might have occurred a corresponding increase in human awareness and discernment, enough of an increase to require us to now update the classical conception of the human being as a potentially self-serving and other-destructive agent.

I have, in fact, discovered in my own study that both self-restraint and self-

expression have opportunity costs. The nature and degree of these costs depend very much on location and historical situation. So, remaining aware of the dangers of favouring ‘this or that,’ I will be arguing that the study of civility (and incivility) is at once a study of the ‘social bond’ or, if you prefer, ‘trust networks.’ By consequence, the style of civil interaction (or the degree of politeness) is not sufficient indication of the stability and integration of a culture. Style is a time-specific reality. What is just as important is whether a given civility style is helping or hindering the culture from maintaining *a state of trust* between private and public practices as well as between ideological dialogues and actual practices. Thus, I will be arguing that the manner in which trust, distrust, pride, and embarrassment/shame are managed are the ultimate measures of a culture’s civility ethos and an important variable in the construction of a locally and cross-culturally valid theory of contemporary civility.

How This Book Is Organized

In order to maintain coherence in a work covering three countries over an 800-year period, I have organized the contents of this book in five parts. While the text is longer than it might have been had I covered only one nation, I have in every chapter attempted to write in a manner that will prove coherent to academics as well as to members of the general public. Instructors who select this text as part of a one-semester course can count on it not taking much longer to read than some 250-page texts.

Cited text in this book has been selected to be part of the narrative. The reader who skims through these quoted passages and statements without considering them important parts of the continuous narrative will miss some salient points and be short-changed of the empirical foundations for some of my explanations. A complete reading, therefore, is the optimum method for using this particular book.

Throughout the narrative I have used the masculine form of the generic pronoun signifying otherness, although I remain conscious that it does not adequately represent the global human that transcends genders. I look forward to the day when all academics can agree on a substitute word and universalize its use. Sometimes, when grammatically

appropriate, I have used the word ‘they.’ Users of languages that do not have masculine and feminine pronouns are very fortunate.

I have also tried to step out of the way and avoid irritating the reader through excessive uses of ‘I.’ I have instead used the word ‘we,’ trusting that the reader will not take it for the pretentious royal ‘we.’ I, of course, take full responsibility for all the material in the book since behind the ‘we’ is a single researcher. I revert to the ‘I’ in the concluding chapter of the book.

As mentioned above, the book is divided into five parts that are meant to be read consecutively. They are listed and explained below.

Part I: The Genealogy of Western Courtesy and Civility (Chapters 2–7)

In this first part, I have reviewed the development of Western civility by studying key courtesy and conduct books as well as important historical developments that occurred between the years 1200 and the close of the nineteenth century. I have started the narrative in the Middle Ages and examined how the Christian ethics of restraint and the Aristotelian virtue ethics were enlisted to legitimize the newly formed courts and create a certain communal cooperation between violent warriors who were threatening the stability of Europe (chapter 2). From there, I have proceeded to the Renaissance (chapter 3) and discussed its considerable effects on the development of a person-centred civility ethos that was not as dependent on theological dogma as were the courtesy ideals of the Middle Ages. I have supplemented this review with a section on the Protestant Reformation and the Enlightenment (chapter 4), watershed occurrences in Western history that substantially transformed morality and personal identity, facilitating the transformation of etiquette into civic ethics (civility). If there is a genesis to modern ‘individualism’ it is to be found in the Renaissance, the Protestant Reformation, and the Enlightenment.

From there I have moved to separate studies of the development of civility in France, England, and America prior to the twentieth century (chapters 5–7). I have used historical records, conduct books, literature, and a variety of artifacts that help us piece together the norms and practices of these three countries as they made their way from the thirteenth to

the end of the nineteenth century. I attempt to show how the absolutist French monarchy followed by the French Revolution (chapter 5), the parliamentary system of England paralleled by the seminal influence of the Victorian movement (chapter 6), and the democratic communalism of the American federation of states (chapter 7) led to the formation of distinct national civility standards that are still observable today. During this narrative, I take particular note of how emotions were restrained and expressed in these three different cultures and how the consequences of such differences in emotional constitutions may be continuing to have a salient effect on the present civility practices of these countries.

Part II: The Rise of the Late-Modern American Self (Chapter 8)

In this second part, I have tried to further our understanding of the socio-psychology of present civility practices by making sense of the changes that have occurred in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries and the manner in which they have impacted our standing conceptions of civility. During this era, many of the meanings and practices that were considered ‘moral’ were questioned as part of a broad cultural movement that revised social values in the interests of personal identity and social equity. These revisions have had an important effect not only on social relations and identity but also on the manner in which we theorize the social. In this chapter I have concentrated particularly on America because it has been at the forefront of the ‘identity movement.’ I have taken into account the rise of an ‘oppositional self’ in the 1960s and 1970s and the manner in which this has contributed to considerable moral permissiveness and informality in civil interactions; I have also described the rise of a subsequent ‘therapeutic mentality’ that has had considerable effects on private and public discourses. This focus on the American experience accomplishes two things: first, it helps us understand some of the contemporary American worry over incivility; second, it allows us to question why French and English civility practices were less affected by the ‘cultural revolutions’ that occurred in France and England during that same period. These insights contribute to the achievement of one of the core goals of this book: to shed light

on what aspects maintain the civility tradition of a culture and what aspects perturb, weaken, and transform it.

Part III: The Multifaceted Anatomy of Civility (Chapter 9)

In this part of the book I have attempted to provide a comprehensive discussion of the various factors that need to be considered in the construction of a comprehensive and useful theory of civility. I have begun with a discussion of the important role played by human emotion in all situations involving social interaction and presented some cutting-edge research suggesting that a culture's civility and incivility are connected not only to its values and ideologies but also to the personal emotional biographies of its citizens. I have then reviewed and critiqued Norbert Elias's theory of *The Civilizing Process* ([1939] 1978, [1939] 1982, [1969] 1983) in light of some of the evidence that has emerged from my own comparative study. As part of my effort to provide as complete a picture as possible of the various dimensions that are involved in civility practices, I have reviewed our present understanding of the socialization process and how the 'presentation of self' involves complex processes very much affected by the emotions of pride, embarrassment, and shame. Following this, I have discussed how interactions and habituations vary as we cross over from one culture to another. I have specifically provided evidence demonstrating that cultures that value 'independence' differ markedly in their interaction habituations from cultures that value 'interdependence.' As part of my cross-cultural discussion, I have shown how a culture's relation to 'time, context, and space' has a salient influence on its cultural ideology and interaction preferences. Having shown that cultural ideologies and behaviour are intimately linked, I have then provided a comprehensive 'politeness theory' that reveals how different types of politeness are tied to a culture's preference for 'mutual association' or 'mutual distancing' between citizens. These preferences produce different face-saving and civility practices. Finally, I have provided a synthesis of the above knowledge through a discussion of how an understanding of the emotional nature of embarrassment and shame can help in the development of an emotionally informed sociology that is capable of explaining seminal transformations occurring in human relations at the personal, local, and global levels. I

have concluded with a discussion of ‘social bonds’ and their seminal influence on private and public relations.

Part IV: Contemporary French, American, and English Civility and Interaction (Chapter 10)

This final part of the book is based on the previous parts as well as a comprehensive long-term field study carried out in the three countries of this study. I have begun by applying the historical, socio-psychological, and theoretical insights of preceding chapters and created a template for civility research. This template was used in my own comparative study of contemporary France, America, and England, discussed in this portion of the book. The field observations are organized around the following interconnected dimensions: civility styles and civil relations, state systems, family and childrearing, conceptions of self-esteem, education, media, conversation, courtship, work ethic, bureaucracy, and citizenship.

Part V – Summing Up

The final part of the book is a summary in which the various insights from previous chapters are brought together within a discussion of civility that is at once descriptive, analytical, and normative. Its chapter is, appropriately, entitled ‘Civilizing and Recivilizing Processes.’

Here, I discuss the important role played by emotions in human interaction and suggest that the classical conception of the civilizing process – the notion that civilization and anger restraint are synonymous – no longer serves to explain human interaction in an era when emotional expression and economic and technological proficiency need to somehow make peace with each other. Drawing upon the various strengths of the American, French, and English civility traditions, I suggest that cultures do not homogenize in late modernity but go through cycles of ‘recivilizing’ during which they may even borrow from and exchange the traits of one another. I hope to argue that the fact that civility practices are always in formation and reformation requires a sociology of

culture that is capable of anticipating and observing change, certainly a sociology that is capable of being historically informed while remaining timely and immune to observational fatigue. During this argument I attempt to show that while the civility codes of England, America, and France can be summarized quite neatly, there are already ongoing changes in the most recent generations of these nations that require us to have frequent descriptive, analytical, and theoretical updates.

In this section, I also discuss the important roles played by embarrassment, shame, and national solidarity in civility and provide a comparative topology of American, French, and English civility/interaction practices.

At the normative level, I offer some thoughts on civility and its relationship with ethics in plural democracies. I discuss a civility standard that may be capable of transcending cultural habituations and cultural tensions. Drawing on what is known about the social psychology of human interaction, I propose that self-interested civility and other-interested civility can be mutually compatible if they are governed by a simple formula of ethics which I term *eco-civility*.

On a final note, it is regrettable that a systematic discussion of civility is still required after the passing of countless prophets, religions, and political systems. Something has prevented us from realizing an ideal social contract that substantially minimizes the discounting and demeaning of others. Despite the efforts of countless philosophers, social theorists, and scientists, the discussion of human sentiment and civility needs to continue in the hope that it will act as a sort of vaccine against the triumph of that which is mean-spirited. In this regard, one feels instructed by a quote from Amy Vanderbilt, who said, ‘Good manners have much to do with emotions. To make them ring true, one must feel them, not merely exhibit them.’ One also remains aware of the political uses of civility and the sobering observation of E.V. Lucas that ‘there can be no defense like elaborate courtesy.’ It is with such realistic foreknowledge of the uneasy tensions between true sentiment and ritual, between individual desire and communal mandates, that I share this work with you.