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MONTAIGNE, CIVILISATION, AND SIXTEENTH-CENTURY

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Montaigne was the most civilised man of his age. Few would wish to dispute that statement, but let us avoid arguments about rival candidates for the title by saying, with Montaignian moderation, only that he was certainly *one* of the most civilised men in Europe in his time. In this paper I want to try, with the help of Norbert Elias's theory of civilising processes, to say more precisely what it means to describe Montaigne as a 'civilised' man, and to examine certain aspects of his views and personality in relation to some of the major social trends of sixteenth-century Europe.

Montaigne, the "Civilised" Man

Montaigne tells us so much about himself that many small and apparently insignificant details can be fitted into a broader pattern. Take, to begin with, his views on smells and on personal cleanliness. He recommends daily bathing:

(a) en général j'estime le baigner salubre, et croy que nous encourons nos legeres incommodités en nostre santé, pour avoir perdu cette coustume, qui estoit generalement observée au temps passé quasi en toutes les nations, et est encores en plusieurs, de se laver le corps tous les jours; et ne puis pas imaginer que nous ne vaillions beaucoup moins de tenir ainsi nos membres encroutés et nos pores estouppés de crasse (II,37,756).

This was written at a time when most people in all ranks of society washed rarely; Henri IV, for example, is said to have been far from unusual in smelling quite overpoweringly. Nor was Montaigne's preference for cleanliness grounded only in an insight into its benefits for health - he is conscious of how odours impinge on others:

(a) Il se dit d'aucuns, comme d'Alexandre le grand, que leur sueur espançoit une odeur souefre ... Mais la commune façon des corps est au contraire; et la meilleure condition qu'ils

ayent, c'est d'estre exempts de senteur. La douceur mesmes des halaines plus pures n'a rien de plus excellent que d'estre sans aucune odeur qui nous offense ... Voilà pourquoy ... la plus parfaicte senteur d'une femme, c'est ne sentir à rien ... (I,55,300-1)

More remarkable and more 'civilised' still are Montaigne's views on cruelty.

(b) Je hay, entre autres vices, cruellement la cruauté, et par nature et par jugement, comme l'extreme de tous les vices. Mais c'est jusques à telle mollesse que je ne voy pas égorger un poulet sans desplaisir, et ois impatientement gémir un lievre sous les dens de mes chiens, quoy que ce soit un plaisir violent que la chasse (II,11,408).

Montaigne expected to be mocked for the 'weakness' of his sympathy for animals (II,11,412), for this was an age when not only hunting but bear-baiting, cock-fighting and the like were popular pastimes, and an annual treat for the people of Paris on Midsummer's Day was the burning alive of a basketful of several dozen cats(1). Montaigne, however, saw the connection between cruelty to animals and cruelty to fellow humans:

(a) Les naturels sanguinaires à l'endroit des bestes tesmoignent une propension naturelle à la cruauté. (b) Après qu'on se fut apprivoisé à Rome aux spectacles des meurtres des animaux, on vint aux hommes et aux gladiateurs. Nature a, ce creins-je, elle mesme attaché à l'homme quelque instinct à l'inhumanité (II,11,412).

Montaigne was 'most tenderly sympathetic towards the affliction of others':

(a) Les sauvages ne m'offensent pas tant de rostir et manger les corps des trespassez que ceux qui les tourmentent et persecutent vivans. Les executions mesme de la justice, pour raisonnables qu'elles soyent, je ne les puis voir d'une veuë ferme. ... Quant à moy, en la justice mesme, tout ce qui est au delà de la mort simple me semble pure cruauté ... (II,11,409-10)

Again, this was written at a time when execution and torture were a popular entertainment. Consider, for example, the

gruesome ingenuity by which, eighteen years after Montaigne's death, the sufferings of Ravallac, the assassin of Henri IV, were protracted through a drawing and quartering with baroque refinements(2). Nothing shocked Montaigne more than the pleasure which people took in the suffering of others:

(a) A peine me pouvoy-je persuader, avant que je l'eusse veu, qu'il se fut trouvé des ames si monstrueuses, qui, pour les seul plaisir du meurtre, le voulussent commettre: hacher et détrencher les membres d'autrui; esguiser leur esprit à inventer des tourmens inusitez et des morts nouvelles, sans inimitié, sans profit, et pour cette seule fin de jouir du plaisant spectacle des gestes et mouvemens pitoyables, des gemissemens et voix lamentables d'un homme mourant en angoisse. Car voilà l'extreme point où la cruauté puisse atteindre (II,11,411-12).

In fact, he tells us that when in the course of his judicial duties he was required to condemn criminals, 'j'ay plustost manqué a la justice' (III,12,1040). In the age of the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre (1572), of the atrocities of the war in the Netherlands, and of routine and everyday brutality, Montaigne must have had plenty of opportunity to become hardened to cruelty and suffering. But he did not, and indeed had feeling to spare for the lesser brutalities of the contemporary schoolroom (I,26,144ff). He was not typical of an age which has been authoritatively described as 'one of the most brutal and bigoted in the history of modern Europe ... unsurpassed for cruelty until our own day'(3).

Montaigne was also, of course, the opposite of bigoted. While, in France and much of the rest of Europe, people were busy butchering each other in the name of religion, Montaigne from his tower could write with great detachment and tolerance, in his essay on cannibals:

(a) Or je trouve, pour revenir à mon propos, qu'il n'y a rien de barbare et de sauvage en cette nation, à ce qu'on m'en a rapporté, sinon que chacun appelle barbarie ce qui n'est pas de son usage; comme de vray, il semble que nous n'avons autre mire de la verité et de la raison que l'exemple et idée des opinions et usances du pais où nous sommes. Là est tousjours la parfaicte religion, la parfaicte police, perfect et accomply usage de toutes choses (I,31,203)(4).

Such a view would not have found favour with many of the main parties to the conflicts of the sixteenth century. Certainly it is mistaken to see Protestantism at that time as a movement for intellectual liberty pure and simple. As G.R. Elton points out, in rejecting the authority of the Church and the popes, Protestantism in nearly all its forms

substituted some other authority and avoided the thoroughgoing individualism which has at times been associated with the movement. ... Movements of missionary passion are not given to tolerance and scepticism, nor do they provoke such reactions in those they attack(5).

Another example of Montaigne's level of detachment and tolerance in advance of his times is found in his essay on *De l'art de conférer*:

(b) Il me chaut peu de la matière, et me sont les opinions unes, et la victoire du subject à peu pres indifferente. Tout un jour je contesteray paisiblement, si la conduite du debat se suit avec ordre (III,8,903).

That attachment to rules of disputation might almost smack of medieval scholasticism. But that is scarcely the point. Montaigne's contemporaries were generally ready on the slightest pretext to pursue their arguments by violent means - Henry of Navarre said that 'We live ready nearly always to cut each others' throats. We carry daggers, wear mail jackets and often light armour under our capes' - and they were none too particular about the rules of combat(6).

Underlying Montaigne's tolerance, detachment, and distaste for cruelty is another theme, self-control, on which he places a high value. This is clear in his essay on drunkenness:

(a) Or l'yvrognerie, entre les autres, me semble un vice grossier et brutal. ... Les autres vices altèrent l'entendement; cettuy-cy le renverse, (b) et estonne le corps: ... (c) Le pire estat de l'homme, c'est quand il perd la connoissance et gouvernement de soy (II,2,322).

And it is still more explicit when he says, again in his essay on cruelty:

Celuy qui, d'une douceur et facilité naturelle, mespreroit les offenses receues, feroit chose très-belle et digne de louange; mais celuy qui, picqué et outré jusques au vif d'une offence, s'armeroit des armes de la raison contre ce furieux appetit de vengeance, et après un grand conflict s'en rendroit enfin maistre, feroit sans doute beaucoup plus. Celuy-là feroit bien, et cettuy-cy vertueusement (II,11,400-1).

This degree of self-control was not by any means a general characteristic of the times. Several historians have noted the freedom with which people in medieval and early modern Europe expressed emotions, and the rapidity with which they veered between the extremes of pity and anger, sorrow and joy. Huizinga saw this as a characteristic of the late Middle Ages(7). Mandrou, attempting to describe the same prominent trait in the 'group psychology' of the sixteenth century, uses the words 'hypersensitivity', 'emotivity' and 'emotional instability'. None of these is quite the *mot juste*, though Mandrou is right in considering this trait to be universal, so unusual were the individuals and groups who escaped it. Mandrou explains the trait in terms of the psychological effects of malnutrition and - nearer the mark - the general insecurity of life. One of the rare individuals who did escape the syndrome was Montaigne, but Mandrou is unabashedly puzzled as to how to explain his escape. He writes:

Montaigne and Descartes, both of whom took refuge in the safety of retirement, far from the passions of the world in general, would appear at first glimpse to escape through sheer willpower and lucidity. Yet even these exceptions would require further examination if one were to pursue the investigation from the point of view of the individual(8).

Can Montaigne be seen only as a good man in bad times, a wholly exceptional personality? Or is he also perhaps a representative or harbinger of some broader social trend? In exploring these questions I want to draw on the work of Norbert Elias.

The Civilising Process

The essence of Elias's argument in *The Civilising Process*(9) is that gradual changes from the late Middle Ages onwards in patterns of individual behaviour and in personality structure were connected with the long-term

processes of social and political development which by degrees promoted the internal pacification of European societies. Very slowly, over the half-millennium before Montaigne's birth, kings and their administrations in western Europe had gradually established control over larger territories, acquiring the most powerful military forces and fiscal apparatuses to support them. Conflicts between groups within a given territory came increasingly to be resolved without violence, or, if violence were employed, conflicting parties had to contend with the use of the royal forces on one side or the other. The process of internal pacification fluctuated in speed, saw many reverses, and in Montaigne's time still had a long way to go. The Wars of Religion, which in France in the second half of the sixteenth century constituted one such reverse, should not, however, be allowed to obscure the longer term trend in social development. And Elias argues that this trend was reflected in changes at the level of people's personalities, feelings, and everyday behaviour.

Elias's principal sources of evidence for changing standards of behaviour are the numerous 'manners books' which throughout western Europe from the Middle Ages to the nineteenth century set out the demands of polite society. They include the thirteenth-century *Hofzucht* attributed to Tannhäuser, John Russell's *Book of Nurture* in the fifteenth century, Erasmus's *De civilitate morum puerilium*, Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano*, and Della Casa's *Galateo* in the sixteenth, to name only the most famous. Most of them went through numerous editions, and were extensively plagiarised or at least emulated, the genre persisting down to the 'etiquette' manuals of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Much the same trends are visible in French, Italian, German and English manners books. They were addressed at first to very small literate upper classes, and later to somewhat wider audiences. They tell their readers how to handle food and conduct themselves at table; how, when and when not to fart, burp or spit; how to blow their noses; how to behave when sharing a bed at an inn, and so on. In earlier centuries, such matters - to discuss which now causes embarrassment - were discussed openly and frankly, without shame, and apparently needed to be discussed. Montaigne talks fairly openly about these things, sometimes with a hint that he is not being quite proper. For, from the Renaissance, Elias identifies a long-term trend towards standards of greater restraint and more differentiated codes of behaviour. For example, the fork and the handkerchief slowly came into use at courts, and in time spread slowly to lower ranks of society. Montaigne tells us (III,13,1062) that he himself made little use either of fork or spoon.

One might argue that the adoption of forks and handkerchiefs is a matter only of changing fashion. Elias, however, sees such small details as part of a general process of the growth of pressures towards greater self-restraint. Both were originally expressions of the greater 'refinement' of upper classes, and of their social distance from lower social groups; but as part of an overall pattern of increasing demands of 'good manners', they can be seen as requiring greater restraint. The regulation of defecation is perhaps a more clear-cut illustration of the thesis. As late as the end of the sixteenth century, courts were making rules against the seemingly widespread practice of urinating and defecating in case of urgency in corridors and on staircases.

Elias does not of course argue that people in the medieval period or early modern Europe lacked all inhibition:

The expression of feeling by people in the Middle Ages was altogether freer and more spontaneous than in the subsequent period. But it certainly did not lack social patterning and control in any absolute sense. There is, in this sense, no zero-point. But the type, the strength and the elaboration of the taboos, controls and interdependencies can change in a hundred ways. And as these change, so does the tension and equilibrium of the emotions and, with it, the degree and kind of gratification which the individual seeks and finds(10).

The expression of aggression in particular has since the Middle Ages been subjected to greater pressures for self-control. Elias illustrates the point vividly(11). Travelling by road was dangerous in medieval and early modern Europe, as Montaigne found on occasion. It remains dangerous today, but the nature of the danger has changed. The medieval traveller had to have the ability - temperamental as well as physical - to defend himself violently from attack. Today, the chief danger is from road accidents, and the avoidance of these depends to a great extent on high capacity for self-control in the expression of aggression, whether in overt or in disguised form. (In other words, drivers who cannot control the feelings provoked by the behaviour of fellow road users often end up killing themselves as well as others.) Elias is thinking not just of modern motorists, but also of life at the absolutist courts of the two centuries after Montaigne, where so much depended on the courtiers' extreme

self-control and alertness to the niceties of courtly intrigue - mostly non-violent battles for status and power - depicted most memorably in the Duc de St Simon's memoirs of life at Versailles.

European Society in the Sixteenth Century

How is this long-term civilising process to be explained, and what stage had it reached in the age of Montaigne? Elias's explanation is complex, and it involves an elaborate theory of state-formation(12). Put briefly, however, his explanation is that pressures towards greater restraint, self-control and more 'civilised' behaviour stemmed from the more and more extensive webs of social interdependence woven by the related processes of state-formation, urbanisation, the development of markets, and the division of labour. It is pointless to try to assign causal primacy to any one of these various aspects of what is essentially a single complex of interrelated developmental processes: the growth of towns and trade was facilitated by the gradual internal pacification of larger and larger political units, but state-formation was also dependent on economic development.

To speak of the growth of bonds of interdependence is to be concerned with changing balances of power between groups and classes, for social interdependence is always a matter of more or less unequal, more or less stable or changing power-balances. Europe in the sixteenth century was passing through a rapid and confusing period of social transition. How confusing can be judged from Elton's attempt to summarise some of the more prominent ascents and descents:

Social changes include the full assertion of the English gentry, at the expense of the strata above and below them, if one may be permitted so to summarise a problem which is now bogged down in controversy ... They include the increasing power of the nobility of office (*de la robe*) in France, the decline of an independent bourgeoisie in Germany and Italy, as well as the increasing strength of this element in northern Burgundy, in Holland and Zeeland. They include the growing importance of the greater nobility and the decline of the lesser in central and eastern Europe, and the decline of all elements independent of the monarchy in Spain(13).

To confuse things even more we may add that what is called the 'provincial nobility' in France is really the counter-

part of the gentry in England, but the former are usually depicted as being in decline when the latter were in the ascendant.

It is, of course, difficult to generalise about the whole of Europe. But there were some common factors underlying this diversity of experience in the various countries. One of these was the growth of capitalist agriculture at the expense of subsistence farming: the growth of trade and markets had since the later Middle Ages been weaving webs of interdependence and changing balances of power between social groups in complicated ways. Its impact was very different in Western and Eastern Europe. In the west, the feudal bonds upon the agricultural producer were undermined by the development of a monetary economy. (In France, however, the spread of *métayage* left many peasants less prosperous in the sixteenth than in the preceeding century.) In eastern Europe, including Germany east of the Elbe, a process of refeudalisation was replacing a free peasant agriculture with giant *latifundia* and serfdom. Yet these opposite social trends were both linked to the development of continent-wide trade(14).

A second general process observable in most parts of Europe was the growth of the state and, despite the interspersal of relatively weak kings with relatively strong ones, increasing monarchical power. During the sixteenth century the foundations were being laid for the age of absolutism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This is most apparent in Spain, where royal power grew very rapidly from the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella, in England where the process had begun earlier, and in France. In Germany and Italy the monopoly mechanism(15) did not act for the benefit of the Emperor and the Pope. In Italy, in fact, the process is partially obscured by the repeated intervention of foreign powers, but in Germany a number of regional magnates were consolidating their power over successive generations. In France, however, the growth of royal power was clearly discernible, especially under François I and Henri II; as the royal administration expanded, royal civil servants were planted in provinces hitherto largely the preserves of regional nobility, and power centred increasingly on the royal court.

In France, both of these general trends - to capitalist farming and the growth of the state apparatus - affected the position of the traditional *noblesse d'épée*. Much of France's internal history in the two centuries preceeding the reign of Louis XIV is the story of royal efforts to draw the teeth of the old nobility. But this was not just a

matter of the astute policies of individual kings. The power of the nobility was being undermined by economic developments and the decline of their traditional social functions. While *roturiers* made fortunes in trade, the nobility were in most parts of France forbidden to emulate their Italian counterparts by involvement in commerce and, in any case, few showed much inclination to do so(16). The members of the *noblesse* continued to wield their *épées* as officers in the royal army, but that was no longer a feudal levy in which they held rank by right and by duty. Now their commands were obtained through patronage, which they increasingly had to share with able soldiers of humbler birth. The link between land and military service was severed(17). So, progressively, was the link between land and the holding of office in the royal administration. During the sixteenth century at least, however, the nobility retained an administrative rôle on their own domains, and as Salmon argues,

While there can be no doubt about the beginnings of a massive urban investment in rural property in the early sixteenth century, sweeping assertions about the ruin of the old seigneurial class and their replacement in this period by a new group of "bourgeois" entrepreneurs are unfounded(18).

Yet, though land was still the most coveted of possessions, cash was an increasingly essential resource. The nobility's income from feudal dues was falling in relation to the costs of maintaining its style of life, and especially the price of goods made in the towns(19). One reason for their falling income was that, though they themselves were exempt from most royal taxation, the increasing burden of taxation made their tenants less able to meet their obligations to their seigneurs. That gave the provincial nobility a sympathetic interest in the peasantry's resistance to royal taxation(20). A minority of the nobility, on the other hand, now had a contrary interest, because it derived a substantial part of its income from the king's favour, royal pensions, and offices at court. Increasingly, aristocratic life centred on the royal court:

Pensions, commands, offices flowed from the king; to be near the fountain of honour put a magnate in a favourable position for helping his clients in their ambition, in return for their support, material and moral(21).

Of course, this swing in the balance of power from

nobles to king should not be exaggerated. The apogee of absolutist monarchy was a long way off, and we cannot simply ignore the civil wars between factions of the nobility dignified by the name of the Wars of Religion. Nevertheless, princes in western Europe were now, by and large and most of the time, strong enough to maintain order within their own territories. That, rather than any principle of religious toleration, is what was recognised in the formula of the Peace of Augsburg, *cuius regio, eius religio*. In France, even the prolonged period of bellicosity in the second half of the sixteenth century can be interpreted in the longer perspective as a stage in the process of pacification. The gradual subjugation of the nobility's fighting capacity to royal control did not proceed in a straight line, but through a series of violent contests, of which the Wars of Religion were one of the greatest. Already before they had broken out, 'the crown had interposed itself as an authority before which all noblemen were in some sense equal'(22). When royal authority declined, that relative equality was reflected in the shifting alliances among noble factions which so prolonged the wars. But the final outcome of the contest was a further and decisive shift in the balance of power towards the king.

So, after the Wars of Religion, Henri IV, excluding the old nobility from his council and administration, was able to reassert crown control in piecemeal fashion but with increasing momentum. That momentum, in spite of episodes like Montmorency's rebellion and the Fronde, was largely maintained until Louis XIV established an absolute domination over the nobility: *L'état, c'est moi*. The process which culminated in Versailles was, however, already quite evident in the sixteenth century:

The less useful nobility became, the more ornamental it waxed; the more its teeth were drawn, the greater the display to which it would be treated, with which it was encouraged to express itself. The functional reality of yore now turned into a game. Display and make-believe became the great business of the noble life and of the courts where it could best be led(23).

Display, which ostensibly expressed the old nobility's bonds with the king and the nuances of gradation within its own ranks, was also the means of expressing its social distance from those encroaching social groups whose functions and power, unlike its own, were growing.

As is well-known, the 'curialisation' of the *noblesse d'épée* was accompanied by the rise of the *noblesse de robe*, the class of legal and administrative civil servants to which Montaigne belonged. If there were reasons of *Realpolitik* for excluding the old nobility from high royal offices, no longer was it acceptable in the late sixteenth century - any more in Catholic France than in Protestant England - for administrative posts to be monopolised by churchmen (and paid for by the Church)(24). But, since the growth of the royal administration was not accompanied by the establishment of a fiscal system adequate to support it - this contradiction endured to be a major cause of the French Revolution two centuries later - the inadequacy of royal salaries meant that widespread opportunities for corruption were one of the principal attractions of office-holding. Increasingly offices were sold, and the venality of offices was formally recognised by Henri IV in 1604. At any rate, the *noblesse de robe* was on to a lucrative thing, and it was the ambition of many members of the bourgeoisie to join its ranks.

The bourgeoisie itself, in the age of Montaigne, is difficult to define. The word still at that time retained its medieval meaning of townsman, but was also coming to be used to distinguish from the ordinary artisan those who had become rich through commerce and finance. Even the latter remained a very diverse category. The main reason for this, Mandrou writes,

lies in the variety of ways of growing rich in this century. Finance, trade, royal or urban offices, or even land-holdings, were all avenues to success which could take a man into the ranks of the bourgeoisie ...(25)

This class was therefore highly fragmented, with very divergent interests; this remained true right up to the Revolution, as Tocqueville was to show in a classic passage(26). What the bourgeoisie principally had in common was a certain measure of security in face of the hazards of life.

That security was what the remaining components of French society, the peasants and urban lower classes, conspicuously lacked in Montaigne's time and for centuries afterwards. The upper strata referred to them as the 'dangerous classes' - indeed as late as the nineteenth century they were frequently viewed as savages(27). In the countryside there was a long tradition of *Jacqueries*, abrupt and usually brief but brutal attacks upon the seigneurie.

Brigands were a more regular threat to order in the countryside, their members drawn from and re-merging with the peasantry. Soldiers were another threat to the security of life, often differing little for most practical purposes from brigands. In the towns, too, there were periodically savage riots, savagely suppressed, against royal officials and royal justice. As a counterpart to rural brigands, most towns had large populations of outlaws too.

Even the lower orders were not, however, entirely without power in sixteenth-century France. The Wars of Religion were not fought by feudal armies of the old kind, and it is highly significant that the aristocratic factions which led the Huguenot and Catholic League parties were at pains to recruit supporters among the lower ranks of society, and the entanglement in the 'Wars of Religion' of peasant uprisings such as that of the *Croquants* complicated the struggles for power. For, contrary to superficial appearances, the shifts in power balances within society associated with economic changes and incipient royal absolutism were not simply shifts towards greater inequality. What was happening was that the various classes of society were being woven into denser webs of interdependence, so that balances of power between them - though still highly unequal - were less unequal and much more complex than hitherto.

Montaigne as Witness of the Civilising Process

Many of these social trends are clearly depicted in Montaigne's writings. He is most amusing on life at court and the changing fashions and affectations there which, as we have argued, were symptomatic of far from trivial developments. '(a) Toute affectation, nommément en la gayeté et liberté françoise,' he comments ironically,

est mésadvenante au cortisan. Et en une monarchie, tout Gentil'homme doit estre dressé à la façon d'un cortisan. Parquoy nous faisons bien de gauchir un peu sur le naïf et mesprisant (I,26,171).

He returns to the theme of the affectation and display characteristic of the developing court-society in his essay on sumptuary laws:

(b) Le reste de la France prend pour regle la regle de la court. Qu'ils se desplaissent de cette vilaine chaussure qui montre si à descouvert nos membres occultes; ce lourd

grossissement de pourpains, qui nous faict tous autres que nous ne sommes, si incommode à s'armer; ces longues tresses de poil effeminées; cet usage de baiser ce que nous presentons à nos compaignons et nos mains en les saluant, ceremonie deuë autresfois aux seuls Princes; ... tant nous avons de tiercelets et quartelets de Roys; et ainsi d'autres pareilles introductions nouvelles et vitieuses: elles se verront incontinent esvanouyes et descriées. Ce sont erreurs superficielles, mais pourtant de mauvais prognostique (I,43,261).

Montaigne was an acute and ironic observer of the civilising process, and clearly depicted the rising thresholds of shame and embarrassment. Mockingly he remarks,

(a) Nous ne sommes que ceremonie; la ceremonie nous emporte, et laissons la substance des choses; nous nous tenons aux branches et abandonnons le tronc et le corps. Nous avons appris aux Dames de rougir oyant seulement nommer ce qu'elles ne craignent aucunement à faire; nous n'osons appeler à droit nos membres, et ne craignons pas de les employer à toute sorte de desbauche. La ceremonie nous défend d'exprimer par parolles les choses licites et naturelles, et nous l'en croyons; la raison nous defend de n'en faire point d'illicites et mauvaises, et personne ne l'en croit (II,17,615).

Montaigne likes to present himself as the bluff, unaffected provincial in talking openly about things which were not so openly spoken of in courtly circles as once they were. He tells us how much pleasure it gives him to scratch. And, with even less delicacy:

(b) Et les Roys et les philosophes fientent, et les dames aussi. Les vies publiques se doivent à la ceremonie; la mienne, obscure et privée, jouit de toute dispense naturelle; soldat et Gascon sont qualitez aussi un peu subjettes à l'indiscretion. Parquoy je diray cecy de cette action; qu'il est besoing de la renvoyer à certaines heures prescriptes et nocturnes, et s'y forcer par coustume et assubjettir, comme j'ay faict ... Toutesfois aux plus sales services, est-il pas autrement excusable de requerir plus de soing et de netteté? (III,13,1063)

An ambivalence is obvious here: while Montaigne directs gentle mockery at what he sees as affectation and excessive delicacy, he is himself an advocate and an embodiment of the civilising process. He sees the absurdity of the bodily functions becoming unmentionable, but nonetheless favours their subjection to self-control. He pokes fun at the fashionable display of the court, but in the end he does not question that that is the centre on which Frenchmen will model themselves.

This last point is highly significant. Elias argues that from the Renaissance onwards, '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' (28). This was in marked contrast to the medieval period, when the social structure was less conducive to the permeation of models of behaviour through society as a whole. A code of behaviour like knightly chivalry might apply to one estate throughout Christendom, without much affecting the quite different behaviour of other social strata. By the late sixteenth century, as we have seen the ties of interdependence between the various strata of society were much more dense and multiplex, and power-balances between them therefore less unequal than they had been. Increasingly, individuals and social strata could aspire to social mobility, and this meant that they increasingly compared their own virtues and rewards with those of other strata. As Mandrou observes,

The medieval social pattern - in any case a rather idealised form - of entirely self-contained estates, hierarchically juxtaposed, whereby the peasant did not compare himself to the lord nor the artisan to the knight, but each remained where God had placed him 'invested with the dignity of his estate', was no longer of any great significance. Assuredly, it took a long time for both individuals and groups to become aware of their common interests and of their solidarity in the face of other individuals or groups (29).

This growth of class-consciousness and of the concomitant habit of tracing and comparing changes in the power and ways of life of different classes was in Montaigne's day a process with a great future ahead of it. But it had already proceeded far enough for Montaigne to be able to see cruelty and lack of restraint as not merely reprehensible but as socially inferior traits. For example,

(a) Les meurtres des victoires s'exercent ordinairement par le peuple et par les officiers du bagage; et ce qui fait voir tant de cruauté inouïes aux guerres populaires, c'est que cette canaille de vulgaire s'aguerrit et se gendarme à s'ensanglanter jusques aux coudes et à deschiqueter un corps à ses pieds, n'ayant ressentiment d'autre vaillance (II,27,671-2).

Montaigne is of course right that finer feelings and self-restraint, just like the use of the fork or handkerchief, on the whole spread very slowly down through the social scale from the higher ranks.

Nevertheless, Montaigne's distaste for the cruelty and lack of self-control exhibited by the lower orders implies that it is relevant to judge their behaviour by the standards he himself advocates. Therefore, even this distaste is quite consistent with the sympathy for the feelings and sufferings of his fellow men of all ranks which is such a prominent theme in Montaigne's writings. His own explanation of his sympathy with the ordinary people is simple. He tells how his father entrusted him as an infant to a nurse in the nearby village, thus accustoming him to frugality and austerity. He adds:

(b) Son humeur visoit encore à une autre fin, de me rallier avec le peuple et cette condition d'hommes qui a besoin de nostre ayde, et estimoit que je fusse tenu de regarder plutost vers celui qui me tend les bras que vers celui qui me tourne le dos. Et fut cete raison pourquoy aussi il me donna à tenir sur les fons à des personnes de la plus abjecte fortune, pour m'y obliger et attacher (III,13,1079).

This experience, one might think, could have happened to a child at any period of history, and the compassion Montaigne felt could have been felt by at least some individuals in any age. That is of course true. But Montaigne is wrong to regard his compassion as 'natural'; where it exists as a trait of culture of individual personality, it is the product of social experience. Sixteenth-century society did not widely produce that experience, and Montaigne was far from being the typical personality of his times. Even a hundred years later, Mme de Sévigné was able to write with jocularly about the quarterings and breakings on the wheel which followed the savage suppression of the Brittany tax riots of 1675. As de Tocqueville was to point out, Mme de Sévigné was a kindly mother to her family and mistress to

her servants, but she 'had no clear notion of suffering in anyone who was not a person of quality'. And, as de Tocqueville argued, Mme de Sévigné's attitudes were the characteristic product of what he called 'aristocratic society' (30). By that he meant a society in which the ties of interdependence between classes and strata remained highly unequal - though the processes tending towards less unequal balances of power had proceeded a little further in the hundred years between Montaigne and Mme de Sévigné. Much less unequal interdependence and balances of power within society were to be necessary before the compassion which Montaigne felt to be 'natural' in himself could be seen as socially 'normal' - and the experiences of the twentieth century must remind us that such compassion can never be accepted simply as automatic and secure.

We have returned to where we began, with Montaigne the 'civilised' man. Though he was far from being a representative product of sixteenth-century society, he was in certain ways a representative of the civilising process which was gaining momentum in his time. And that civilising process can be understood as the outcome of developments in the structure of society which began before Montaigne's birth and were to continue long after his death.

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VI

CIVILISATION, METHODS AND MOTIVES

1. Norbert Elias, *The Civilising Process*, Vol. I, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1978, pp.203-4. (In my own current research on the history of culinary taste, I have found other evidence of how relatively recent is people's identification with animals: feelings of repugnance about eating, for example, sheep's or calves' eyes seem to date no further back than the nineteenth century.)

2. Michel Foucault, in *Discipline and Punish* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1979), pp.3-6, gives a detailed account of the execution in 1757 of Damians, the would-be assassin of Louis XV, which was copied exactly from that of Ravalliac. In the eighteenth century it remained a popular spectacle, though by then it seems to have shocked those of finer feeling about the French court; all the same, according to Nancy Mitford, even some of the courtiers went along for the fun, (*Madame de Pompadour*, London, Hamish Hamilton, 1954, pp.218-19).

3. R.B. Wernham, in his Introduction to *The New Cambridge Modern History*, Vol. III, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1957, p.1.

4. This trait in Montaigne's thought has led Johan Goudsblom to give Montaigne a place in the history of nihilism in European culture. See his *Nihilism and Culture*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1980.

5. G.R. Elton, in *The New Cambridge Modern History*, Vol. II, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1958, p.41.

6. Eugen Weber, *A Modern History of Europe*, London, Robert Hale, 1973, p.217.

7. J. Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1955 [orig. 1924], chapter 1.

8. Robert Mandrou, *Introduction to Modern France, 1500-1640*, London, Edward Arnold, 1975 [orig. Paris, 1961], p.236. Mandrou's last sentence here is very vague, and it is not clear whether he expects further examination to reveal that Montaigne and Descartes were not after all so different from their fellows, or that they too, though quite exceptional, can be explained as the products of social trends of the time.

9. Elias, *op. cit.*, and Vol. II, forthcoming [both volumes orig. Basel, 1939]. A somewhat fuller discussion of Elias's thinking can be found in Stephen Mennell, *Sociological Theory: Uses and Unities*, 2nd ed., London, Nelson, 1980, pp.57-60, or 'Time and Taboo, Civilisation and Science', *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford*, 11, 2, 1980, pp.83-95.

10. Elias, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p.215.

11. In the forthcoming second volume of *The Civilising Process*.

12. *Loc. cit.*

13. G.R. Elton, *op. cit.*, p.15.

14. See Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-System in the Sixteenth Century*, New York, Academic Press, 1974.

15. See Elias, Vol. II, *op. cit.*

16. J.H.M. Salmon, *Society in Crisis: France in the Sixteenth Century*, London, Ernest Benn, 1975, pp.94-95.

17. *ibid.*, p.93.

18. *ibid.*, p.43.

19. Mandrou, *op. cit.*, p.104.

20. Salmon, *op. cit.*, p.35
 21. Denys Hay, in *The New Cambridge Modern History*, Vol. I, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1957, p.8.
 22. Salmon, *op. cit.*, p.16.
 23. Weber, *op. cit.*, p.119.
 24. See Joel Hurstfield's account in *The New Cambridge Modern History*, Vol. III, *op. cit.*, p.140ff.
 25. Mandrou, *op. cit.*, p.109.
 26. Alexis de Tocqueville, *L'Ancien Régime et la Revolution*, Part II, chapter 9.
 27. Mandrou, *op. cit.*, p.114; Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen*, London, Chatto and Windus, 1977. Using a wealth of evidence, Weber argues that the effective incorporation of the provincial peasantry into the French national community did not take place until the late nineteenth century. For example, in chapter 6 Weber shows how the multitude of mutually incomprehensible dialects which, as Montaigne (II, 17, 622) reminds us, were spoken by the subjects of the French king, persisted to the turn of the present century.
 28. Elias, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p.115.
 29. Mandrou, *op. cit.*, p.103.
 30. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Part II, Book III, chapter 1. (Cf. John Stone and Stephen Mennell, eds., *Alexis de Tocqueville on Democracy, Revolution and Society*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1980, pp.36, 102-106.).
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