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## THE HISTORY OF MENTALITIES: THE NEW MAP OF CULTURAL HISTORY

PATRICK H. HUTTON

A few years ago, French historians began using the expression “history of mentalities” to characterize their work in the field of intellectual history. While awkward in French and infelicitous in English translation, the phrase has survived; for it expresses a need to assign autonomy to a kind of historical inquiry which offers new perspectives on the civilizing process. Briefly stated, the history of mentalities considers the attitudes of ordinary people toward everyday life. Ideas concerning childhood, sexuality, family, and death, as they have developed in European civilization, are the stuff of this new kind of history. Work in the history of mentalities is closely identified with the long-standing investigations of the *Annales* school, which portrays the history of mentalities as but one dimension of the “total” history it is their ambition to write.<sup>1</sup> But the history of mentalities, even among its *Annales* practitioners, does have its own specific concerns. While *Annales* historians are most likely to address the material realities conditioning man through economic processes, social structures, and environmental influences, those historians investigating mentalities prefer to consider the psychological realities underpinning human conceptions of intimate relationships, basic habits of mind, and attitudes toward the elemental passages of life.

The history of mentalities, moreover, has obvious affinities with approaches to intellectual history developed before the arrival of the French school. In effect, “mentalities” is a code name for what used to be called culture. It takes up again themes pursued by idealist historians such as Burckhardt in the nineteenth century and Huizinga early in the twentieth. For these historians, problems of culture were essentially problems of world-views and their interpretation. They took pains to evaluate these in their social and political context. But the history of ideas served as their basic frame of reference. Culture in this historiographical tradition meant high culture, and for this reason these historians directed their attention toward the role of value-forming elites. Though they did not treat culture as the exclusive preserve of

1. Robert Mandrou, “L’histoire des mentalités,” *Encyclopaedia universalis* 8 (1968 ed.), 436-438.

this elite, they identified the guiding ideals of society closely with its great intellectuals, and hence concentrated upon the ways in which these ideals were propagated. Burckhardt understood this transmission in terms of the definition of styles, that is, specific ways of life which owed their origins to ideas about the world at large. The Renaissance prince, for example, embodied values in his lifestyle which gave cultural definition to Italian society as a whole in the fifteenth century.<sup>2</sup> For Huizinga, the power of an idea was grounded in the aesthetic images it could inspire. His study, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, was designed to show how a conception of the world could continue to influence the minds of men through its beauty and coherence long after the political and social realities it was supposed to explain had disappeared.<sup>3</sup> Although Huizinga wrote with great insight into the range and intensity of the emotions of medieval man, his impressions were based upon the culture of courtly society.<sup>4</sup> Largely ignored in the idealist approach to history was the common man, portrayed as the passive recipient of ideals forged elsewhere. But methods for establishing this correspondence between the culture of the elite and the culture of ordinary people were obviously wanting, as generalizations about the ethos of an age or a people dissolved under scrutiny. From the 1920s, the idealist tradition of cultural history, because of its methodological deficiencies, began to lose its appeal for professional historians.<sup>5</sup>

The history of mentalities thus attempts to remedy the limitations of the idealist tradition of cultural history by studying the domain of culture which seemed so remote from the work of the idealist historians: the culture of the common man. Decisive in this reformulation of the problem of culture is a shift of focus from world-views, the common currency of the idealist tradition, to the structures through which such conceptions are conveyed. By structures, the historian of mentalities refers to all of the forms which regularize mental activity, whether these be aesthetic images, linguistic codes, expressive gestures, religious rituals, or social customs. By describing these forms which shape the expression of ideas, the historian of mentalities maps the mental universe which furnishes a culture with its essential characteristics. His is not a history of ideas, but a history of mind. In this respect, his primary concern

2. Karl J. Weintraub, *Visions of Culture* (Chicago, 1966), 115-160.

3. Robert Anchor, "History and Play: Johan Huizinga and His Critics," *History and Theory* 17 (1978), 68-69.

4. Recent work in the history of mentalities has rekindled interest in the degree to which Huizinga explored new methodologies. Ilse N. Bulhof, "Johan Huizinga, Ethnographer of the Past: An Analysis of Johan Huizinga's Approach to History," *Clio* 4 (1975), 201-224, reinterprets his work in light of recent structuralist approaches to history.

5. Georg G. Iggers, "The Dissolution of German Historicism" in *Ideas in History: Essays Presented to Louis Gottschalk by His Former Students*, ed. Richard Herr and Harold T. Parker (Durham, N.C., 1965), 288-329.

is to show how the changing relationship between man's rational and emotional faculties reveals the changing shape of human nature. In this shift of emphasis from the ideas of an intellectual elite to the structure of the mind of everyman, the traditional distinction between high and popular culture tends to disappear.

This essay will plot some of the landmarks in the formulation of this new field of historical inquiry over the past fifty years. It will look at the work of Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch, founders of the *Annales* school, who first sketched guidelines for "mentalities" as a field of historical study. It will then proceed to an examination of three historians who, while standing outside the *Annales* group, have proved most adventurous in drawing the implications of Febvre's and Bloch's insights — Philippe Ariès, Norbert Elias, and Michel Foucault. With varying degrees of explicitness, all of them employ structuralist techniques to probe the history of Western cultures. I shall draw some comparisons and identify some common denominators among them; however, I shall explore not only these new methods, but also the theory of civilization which is predicated upon them. Each of the authors under consideration is preoccupied with the gathering complexity of the mental structures which accumulate through the civilizing process. Each explores the paradox that such mental structures are at once the essential mode of human creativity and the primary obstacle to it. Together, they converge upon a theory of civilization which emphasizes man's ongoing effort to establish an equilibrium between his need to give new forms of meaning to his experience and his desire to cling to the existing forms in which conventional wisdom lies. In the idealist tradition, theories of civilization were likely to be cast in clear-cut conceptions of progress or decline. But the new map of cultural history is drawn from a more ironical design. The common ground for historians of mentalities is the boundary between structured and unstructured domains of human experience in the civilizing process. Tracing the contours of that boundary will provide the substance of this essay.

As a field of study, the history of mentalities bears the pronounced imprint of *Annales* historiography. Passing through several generations of historians since the founding of the journal in the 1920s, the *Annales* circle still exists, although the label today is more broadly applied to those historians trained in the rigorous research techniques pioneered by the Sixième Section of the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes. *Annales* historians share a close sense of collegiality in pursuing an ambitious agenda of research which seeks to show the interrelationship of all spheres of human activity, optimally on a global scale.<sup>6</sup>

6. For a comprehensive analysis of *Annales* historical writing, see Traian Stoianovich, *French Historical Method: The Annales Paradigm* (Ithaca, 1976); also Georg G. Iggers, *New Directions in European Historiography* (Middletown, Conn., 1975), 43-79.

The *Annales* historians are well known for their refusal to accept politics as the foundation of historical study. A succinct statement of their viewpoint is contained in Fernand Braudel's preface to his study of the Mediterranean world in the sixteenth century. Braudel argues that there are three discontinuous levels of historical time, each corresponding to a distinct domain of historical reality. Traditionally, historians have made political time the basis of all historical chronology. But political history, Braudel contends, is by its very nature rapid and episodic, punctuated by frequent "turning points" and oriented toward problems of change. Beneath the flux of political events, he explains, lies a level of social time, modulated by the slower pace of everyday life. The evidence of continuity, far more than that of change, marks this historical landscape. Deeper still lies a pattern of geographical time, where change is barely perceptible yet nonetheless powerful in shaping the human condition.<sup>7</sup> It is the impact of these "timeless" strata of social and geographical history upon more visible and dramatic patterns of political events to which *Annales* historians call attention. Whereas conventional historians have long assumed that politics provides the chronological "backbone" of history, the *Annales* scholars counter that the study of political events merely skims the surface of the past, and thereby neglects the "deep structures" of historical reality which lie beneath.<sup>8</sup>

This interest in deep structures has prompted most *Annales* historians to abandon conventional narrative as a primary technique of historical writing. They criticize it for its teleological implications — that is, the narrative which gathers events into a coherent story employs a subjective judgment about the direction in which the historical process is tending. Narrative imposes a "plot line," which contains the historian's subjective assessment of the meaning of the past for the present. The *Annales* historians propose instead to describe structures as they were objectively used rather than events as they are subjectively perceived. Abandoning the concept of periodization as a contrivance of subjective interpretation, they survey the past as an unending continuum of long-term series of events, in which the structure of the series, rather than the events themselves, provides the pattern for analysis.<sup>9</sup> While conventional historians dramatize individual events as landmarks of significant change, the *Annales* historians redirect attention to those vast, anonymous, often unseen structures which shape events by retarding innovation.

The history of mentalities is usually characterized as a recent and derivative concern of the *Annales* school. For many years *Annales* scholars shunned the

7. Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, transl. Siân Reynolds (New York, 1972), I, 20-21.

8. Jacques Le Goff, "Is Politics Still the Backbone of History?" in *Historical Studies Today*, ed. Felix Gilbert and Stephen R. Graubard (New York, 1971), 337-355.

9. François Furet, "Quantitative History," in *Historical Studies Today*, 45-61.

study of culture in favor of economic and social history. *Annales* historians who have analyzed their own historiographical tradition claim that this was a necessary preparation for the study of culture, since it is the most difficult domain in which to do quantitative research.<sup>10</sup> But it should not be forgotten that “mentalities” was an early interest of the school’s founders, Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch. While studies of psychological realities were overshadowed by those of material ones in *Annales* historiography from the 1930s to the 1960s, the former was a field of interest that Febvre never abandoned and for which he made an impressive plea in one of his later essays.<sup>11</sup> Febvre’s classic work on “mentalities” is his study of Rabelais and the problem of unbelief in the sixteenth century. Febvre takes what was viewed as a radically new idea for the era — atheism — and proceeds to show the structural limitations upon its formulation in anything approaching a twentieth-century conception of the term. An idea, he argues, is not an abstract entity, born fully matured. An idea takes shape gradually and develops in a specific context. Febvre’s point of departure for his discussion of unbelief is an analysis of the “mental equipment” available to sixteenth-century man — those environmental, institutional, and linguistic forms which set conceptual limits upon his mental universe. His argument is that, given these modes of thought, unbelief was beyond the ken of sixteenth-century man, even an avant-garde skeptic such as Rabelais. His way of life, like his way of thought, was permeated with religious imagery. The limits upon new forms of thought had for Febvre a hermeneutic as well as a structuralist dimension. He argues that man has a need for coherence (vision) in, as well as forms (structure) for, his ideas. In their coherence, prevailing conceptions of the world provide fixed points of orientation against which original ideas must be measured. One reconceives in light of what one already knows. Even when man totally reconceives his world, he must reconcile what he previously believed with his new conceptions. Sixteenth-century man, Febvre contends, no matter how intellectually adventurous, could not totally abandon the religious scheme of thought which was his surest frame of reference. Hence, Febvre concludes, to present Rabelais as the first in a succession of freethinkers engaged in a long-term crusade to advance a timeless idea is untenable. The shaping of thought is caught up in the same process of creative improvisation which forms other aspects of human endeavors. The world that sixteenth-century man had created called for a certain kind of religious imagery through which he might understand

10. Pierre Chaunu, “Un nouveau champ pour l’histoire sérielle: le quantitatif au troisième niveau” in *Mélanges en l’honneur de Fernand Braudel; Methodologie de l’histoire et des sciences humaines* (Toulouse, 1973), 108-111; Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Le territoire de l’historien* (Paris, 1973), 15-37.

11. Lucien Febvre, “Psychologie et histoire,” *Encyclopédie Française* 8 (1938 ed.), 8·12/3-8·12/7.

that creation. Secular thought would become possible only as man created an autonomous secular world.<sup>12</sup>

Marc Bloch's contribution to "mentalities" also dealt with the problem of belief, although from the perspective of human credulity. In a study of the miraculous powers ascribed to medieval kings to cure the skin disease, scrofula, he probed the sacred mystique surrounding kingship in the Middle Ages. Bloch was curious about the naive readiness of medieval man to believe in miracles. He was struck by the fact that even the skeptics who questioned the king's power to heal accepted the truth of testimony about the healings, which was based on little or no evidence. One of Bloch's purposes was to show the power of a collective illusion. But another was to reveal the historical character of collective psychology by pointing out the differences between the medieval and the modern mind. The medieval world was one of "marvel," in which most phenomena were explained in terms of supernatural causes. The "sacred" (that which is explicable only in supernatural terms) had wide boundaries. Medieval man lacked the critical faculties with which to challenge the testimony of miracles. His less structured mind was free to speculate about the world in terms which had few critical limitations. Hence a rational critique of miracles (of the sort that David Hume would offer in the eighteenth century) would not have been heeded in the Middle Ages even if it had been presented. It was as if medieval man, living in the childhood of civilization, had childlike perspectives upon his activities. The "sacred" served as an emotional refuge from which he would emerge only with the gradual development of his critical faculties. Through the civilizing process, the human psyche took form.<sup>13</sup>

If Bloch and Febvre never fully formulated a theory of mentalities, their work did provide an agenda for further research. In his later writings on the subject, Febvre outlined the tasks under two headings. First, he called for an "inventory of the mental equipment" of Western man at various stages of his historical development. Here he is concerned with the building blocks from which ideas are formed. The problem, Febvre argues, is not only what people thought in the past, but how it was possible for them to think at all. The task, therefore, is to establish the mental horizons of an age — not only as these open upon the future, but also as they delimit the possibilities of thought in a given historical era. It is not that innovative ideas cannot have efficacy. But new ideas are borne in forms which must challenge old and often binding intellectual structures, which can thwart their acceptance or bend them into conformity with their own systems. The problem of culture centers not upon

12. Lucien Febvre, *Le Problème de l'incroyance au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1947), esp. 1-18, 491-501.

13. Marc Bloch, *Les Rois thaumaturges* (1924; reprinted Paris, 1961), esp. 15-24, 409-429.

the intellectual's visionary leap toward the future, but upon the ordinary individual's tenacious hold on the wisdom of the past. The culture of an age is to be grasped in the habits of mind common to all people, and these constitute a powerful force of inertia. To study the history of mentalities is to enter the arena of human experience most resistant to change.<sup>14</sup>

Second on Febvre's agenda was a history of human sentiment. Here he took issue with the intellectual historian's exclusive preoccupation with rational discourse as the privileged evidence of the history of thought. He charges that the intellectual historian, in limiting his analysis to the sphere of human reason, presupposes that human nature is unchanging. But the structure of the human psyche, no less than that of society, is transformed in time. While interested in the history of man's rational reflections upon the world, Febvre urged historians to probe the history of man's passionate response to his environmental surroundings, to the material conditions of his existence, and to the quality of his life. Febvre's premise is that emotions, too, shape the contours of thought, and that understanding the changes in the structure of human emotions through the ages is an essential factor in explaining the conditions under which rational discourse takes place. Febvre suggested that there is an "historical curve" in collective psychology, extending from primitive society, in which emotional life (organized through myth and ritual) stands at the center of culture, toward modern society, in which intellectual activity crowds emotional life toward the periphery.<sup>15</sup> In plotting that curve, the historian of mentalities has since found his essential endeavor.

Although slow to take up Febvre's call for work upon "mentalities," *Annales* historians have in recent years returned to his agenda in order to pursue research in this field.<sup>16</sup> Borrowing eclectically from ethnologists, linguists, and demographers, they have contributed sophisticated quantitative studies of attitudes toward family life, sexuality, and death.<sup>17</sup> The prestige of their work is derived from their ingenuity in retrieving data about popular culture hitherto inaccessible; yet their boldness in the realm of practice is matched by their caution in the realm of theory. None has attempted to move from Febvre's agenda to a model for a general theory of culture, and some question whether "mentalities" is not a subject matter so remote and complex that it

14. Lucien Febvre, "Psychologie et histoire," 8·12/7.

15. Febvre, "La Sensibilité et l'Histoire; Comment reconstituer la vie affective d'autrefois," *Annales d'histoire sociale* 3 (1941), 5-20.

16. Indeed, Robert Mandrou, one of the foremost students of mentalities among the *Annales* historians, followed an outline left among the unfinished writings of the late Febvre in composing his major study of French culture in the early modern period. Mandrou, *Introduction à la France moderne (1500-1640)* (1961; reprinted Paris, 1974), 13.

17. Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, "Recent Historical 'Discoveries,'" *Daedalus* 106 (1977), 141-155.



cannot provide a unified field of study.<sup>18</sup> Hence it is that historians outside the *Annales* circle have proved to be more ambitious in exploring the theoretical implications of Febvre's heuristic insights.

Prominent among them is Philippe Ariès, who has studied Western attitudes toward childhood and the family,<sup>19</sup> and, more recently, death.<sup>20</sup> Underpinning his work is a general theory of civilization which places great emphasis upon the elaboration of social and psychological structures. What Ariès offers is a developmental paradigm of the way in which Western man grasped the very idea of development. The notion of the life cycle as a developmental process, Ariès argues, emerged through the gradual elaboration of attitudes about the stages of life in the Western mind between the end of the Middle Ages and the eighteenth century. His conception of each of the stages of life was born historically, and each has undergone significant modification through the ages. In the Middle Ages, the attitudes of adulthood were accepted as normative for the human condition. In a society in which skills were rudimentary, and life precarious and short, preparation for adulthood was not an essential requirement. Children, therefore, were treated as little adults. It was not that medieval man had no conception of childhood. Rather he had no idea of a developmental link between the child's and the adult's mentality. The passage between the estates of life was conceived to be a matter of initiation, not formation. The stages of life were recognized, but subsumed under the general conception of life as a microcosm of the cosmic cycle of repetition. The recognition of childhood as a special time of life, separate from adulthood and a preparation for it, emerged gradually from the end of the Middle Ages to enter the consciousness of all strata of Western society only in the eighteenth century.<sup>21</sup>

Likewise the idea of the family came into being to serve the needs of a newly recognized childhood. The discovery of the child's personality as distinct from that of the adult's fostered a new sense of the parent's responsibility to promote the proper formation of the child. Sentimentality replaced severity as a familial bond, and in time the family became an affective as well as an economic unit. In the process, adults began to give up the sociability of public life for the intimacy of family life. The family became a refuge from the world at large, but one which served the needs of the civilizing process, with its demands for new skills and greater degrees of conformity. Thus the family

18. Jacques Le Goff, "Les Mentalités: une histoire ambiguë" in *Faire de l'histoire*, ed. Jacques Le Goff and Pierre Nora (Paris, 1974), III, 76-94.

19. Philippe Ariès, *Histoire des populations françaises et de leurs attitudes devant la vie depuis le XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (1948; reprinted Paris, 1971); and *L'Enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime* (Paris, 1960), transl. as *Centuries of Childhood* by Robert Baldick (New York, 1962).

20. Lawrence Stone, "Death and Its History," review of *L'Homme devant la mort*, by Philippe Ariès, *The New York Review of Books*, 12 October 1978, 22-32.

21. Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood*, 9-133.

served as the agency for propagating conceptions of life as a preparation, and eventually Western man came to think of his life in terms of more nuanced stages of "progress" toward maturity.<sup>22</sup> Youth, Ariès explains, was the discovery of the eighteenth century; adolescence that of the nineteenth.<sup>23</sup> Old age, presumably, will be that of our own.

The developmental model, which served initially to form expectations about the growth of the individual, came eventually to serve as one for the development of the civilization as a whole. For Ariès, the historical development of the idea of the formative stages of life of the individual prepared the way for the idea of progress through civilization. This is Ariès's major contribution to a structuralist theory of civilization. The gathering complexity of perceptions of human growth parallels and makes possible a corresponding complexity of conceptions of periodization in the historical process. The genetic interpretation of the growth of the individual, transferred to the civilizing process as a whole, provides the basis for the emergence of the idea of social progress. Long before the ascendancy of the bourgeoisie or the *philosophes'* formulation of the idea of a heavenly city on earth, Western man was growing accustomed to developmental concepts in his attitudes toward everyday life.<sup>24</sup> This notion of the macrocosm in the microcosm provides Ariès's link with the structuralists. The historian understands a culture not by tracing the propagation of its guiding ideals, but by analyzing those institutions which simultaneously form attitudes toward the self and the society at large.<sup>25</sup>

In an important sense, the burden of Ariès's work is to show the impact of a new conception of linear time upon the age-old notion of the life cycle as a process of endless repetition. The history of the West since the Middle Ages, he argues, can be interpreted as a warring between two conceptions of historical time — one archaic, whose currency is the ceaseless repetition of life processes, the other modern, whose codes are derived from a paradigm of genetic growth. The passage from archaic to modern time (which triumphs by the eighteenth century) has, Ariès contends, transformed human expectations about life experience. The modern sense of historical development is based upon man's growing confidence about his capacity to control his environment. What had been left to chance in the Middle Ages becomes predictable in the modern age; what had seemed mysterious becomes explicable. The playful attributes of the primitive (eccentricity, spontaneity, gregariousness, and acceptance of fortune) are gradually displaced by the laborious demands of the civilized (conformity, discipline, loneliness, and anxiety about misfortune). The price of the elaboration of structured stages of life, both for the

22. *Ibid.*, 339-415.

23. *Ibid.*, 29-32.

24. *Ibid.*, 9-11, 128-133, 329-336, 411-415.

25. Philippe Ariès, *Le Temps de l'histoire* (Monaco, 1954), 305-311; *Histoire des populations*, 15.

individual and for the society, has been the imposition of the ever more demanding discipline which such a developmental conception implies.<sup>26</sup> It is for this reason that Ariès devotes so much attention to the transformation of the educational ideal in the early modern era. Whereas medieval man was content to repeat past experience anew, modern man is anxious to master its difficulties so that he may proceed to a new stage of development. The school, in the Middle Ages a forum for voluntary participation inspired by intellectual curiosity, eventually became a place for the enforced indoctrination of youth in the skills required to cope with the more exacting demands of an increasingly complex civilization.<sup>27</sup>

Although Ariès identifies the concept of development with the family, the family that he describes is not altogether on the side of progress. With the coming of the modern era, he explains, the role of the family has undergone still another transformation. While the family was for a time an agency in the transmission of the developmental paradigm, it has, paradoxically, since become a repository for the waning cultural heritage of the traditional world. It has over the past century and a half acted as a drag upon modernization and a refuge for values and customs which are passing. If Ariès writes of progress, he nonetheless possesses a sure sense of the values lost with the passing of the traditional world — the ready sociability of an era in which everyday life was public, the spontaneous wonder at a world whose mysteries outnumbered its certainties, an acceptance of the caprice of fortune. Ariès would not deny the benefits of progress. He posits no golden age in the past. Nor does he idealize the naive and sometimes cruel behavior of medieval man. But he likewise challenges the notion of a golden age in the future, and argues that much of Western man's thinking about "progress" has been inspired by just this motive. Linear, no less than archaic, time, he conjectures, projects its own mythology.<sup>28</sup>

If modern man has made life experience less mysterious by standardizing behavior in ever more elaborate structures, Ariès, who has traced the history of this process, is as yet unwilling to surrender the idea that life itself is a mystery to which the less structured past holds the key. The heritage of the traditional world is worth remembering not as an ideal to which to return, but as a point of reference with which to evaluate the developmental paradigm which so thoroughly saturates the modern mentality. His studies hark back to the seventeenth century, to the last era in which traditionalism was still powerfully present and modernization still struggling to prevail. It is there that he fixes his nostalgia upon an ideal of community he identifies with the sociability and personalism of the manor house, soon to be crowded out by

26. *Le Temps de l'histoire*, 313-325; *Histoire des populations*, 402-412.

27. *Centuries of Childhood*, 137-336.

28. *Ibid.*, 405-407; *Histoire des populations*, 403-404.

the demands of the industrial age. The progress in rational ideals and efficient institutions which historians have identified with the coming of the Enlightenment, Ariès decries as the first intrusion of the modern state into everyday life, an intrusion which has not only atomized the family but has also reduced that sphere of "free space" which man needs for his psychic well-being.<sup>29</sup> If few scholars share Ariès's sentimental view of the past, many sympathize with his critique of modern society. Indeed, Ariès ascribes the current interest in the history of mentalities to that critique. Some scholars, he observes, study the social history of the pre-industrial age for the origins of contemporary culture. But others do so less to uncover the sources of modernization than to discover alternatives to it. In Ariès's view, the distant rather than the near past holds the historian's interest today because it is richer in possibilities for fathoming a future in which Western man will have to contend with a scarcity of resources which he, living in the midst of plenty, has only recently begun to ponder.<sup>30</sup>

Not all of the pioneering work in the history of mentalities has been done by French historians. Norbert Elias, a German Jew, is a notable exception. His major study, *The Civilizing Process*, first published in Germany in 1939, was long ignored in historical circles. Only recently has it received the recognition it deserves.<sup>31</sup> While Elias claims no intellectual kinship with Ariès, his conclusions about the course that Western civilization has run bear important points of comparison. Like Ariès, he outlined a developmental theory of civilization which relies heavily upon structuralist methods. Elias traces the slow modification of the rules of social behavior — table manners, sexual etiquette, attitudes toward bodily functions, and the use of language. Elias presents such topics, once disregarded by historians as frivolous, as essential for understanding the civilizing process. He contends that there is a direct correspondence between social and psychological processes. He argues that man is a creator of forms, and that these forms lend structure to his feelings as well as to his social relationships. Such forms constitute a grid which meshes all of his psychological and social relationships. Psychological and social processes thus mirror one another, and interpretations of them are interchangeable. By studying the indicators of the transformation of human sensibility, the historian gains insight into the transformation of the civilization as a whole. It is the microcosm/macrocosm argument once more.<sup>32</sup>

29. Philippe Ariès, "Confessions d'un anarchiste de droite," *Contrepoint* 16 (1975), 87-99; André Burguière, "La singulière histoire de Philippe Ariès," *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 20 February 1978, 80-101.

30. Ariès, "Confessions d'un anarchiste," 95-99.

31. Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, transl. Edmund Jephcott (New York, 1978), has also appeared in a second German edition (1969) and in a popular French edition (1973).

32. *The Civilizing Process*, 221-263.

Elias's paradigm of the development of European civilization is also akin to that of Ariès in the long-range trend it discerns. What develops in the civilizing process, Elias contends, is the growing complexity of its structures, that is, of its rules governing acceptable social behavior. The making of civilization, therefore, is a taming process, in which the relatively spontaneous behavior of medieval man is gradually displaced by the socially disciplined and emotionally constrained behavior of his modern counterpart. As he molds his human nature through the construction of an ever more elaborate affect structure, the emotional life of Western man is domesticated. The general trend is from the mood swings between emotional extremes which characterized the personality of medieval man toward the evenness of temper of man in the modern world. Elias traces the pattern along parallel topical tracks: the slovenly manners of medieval man are replaced by the refined decorum of modern man; frank discussion of sexuality is disguised in prudish euphemisms; the performance of bodily functions is sequestered; poetic verbal forms are given prosaic grammatical precision.<sup>33</sup>

Elias's basic reference for plotting these changing cultural attitudes is his concept of the "threshold of shame." The threshold of shame measures tolerable social behavior in a given historical era. It represents, in effect, the widening boundary of the affect structure. As more and more life experience is subjected to rules of behavior, human feelings undergo a corresponding refinement. The civilizing process is therefore also a sensitizing process, as the unexpected or spontaneous behavior man is willing to tolerate continually diminishes.<sup>34</sup> Behavior in which medieval man freely indulged leaves modern man embarrassed; acts considered normal come to be considered deviant or perverse. The notion of sanity itself, Elias contends, is one which develops historically, measuring with increasing precision the limits of permissible behavior.<sup>35</sup> By charting the changes in the threshold of shame from one era to the next, the emerging contours of the structure of the personality of Western man are defined.

Personality structures, like structures generally, are for Elias indices to the workings of the civilizing process. They are like landmarks on a journey, which signify the direction of change without propelling the traveler along his way. What makes the journey possible are the realities of power. Power for Elias is human creativity socialized, and the structural configurations through which it is expressed demarcate its distribution.<sup>36</sup> Here Elias takes issue with the traditional method of the intellectual historian, which locates the cause of cultural change in the force of ideas themselves. Ideas governing

33. *Ibid.*, 53-217.

34. *Ibid.*, xiii, 59, 101, 114-116, 120, 128, 130, 134-136, 167-168, 179-181.

35. *Ibid.*, 141-142, 150.

36. Elias, *What is Sociology?*, transl. Stephen Menell and Grace Morrissey (New York, 1978), 74, 92, 116.

civilized behavior, Elias argues, are invariably invoked first by value-forming elites, but the wider application of these ideas stems from a dynamic interaction of social classes, not from the innate appeal of the ideas themselves. To illustrate his point, Elias draws an analogy with the chemical process of crystallization. The crystalline nucleus at the center of a solution provides evidence of a transformation in the making, but it should not be misinterpreted as its cause.<sup>37</sup>

In this respect, Elias relies heavily upon Marxian categories of social classification. He identifies the development of the cultural traits of Western civilization with a succession of social elites which displace one another as legislators of the codes of social behavior: the feudal nobility of the thirteenth century; the court aristocracy of the seventeenth century; and the bourgeoisie of the eighteenth century. In this way he retraces the steady attrition of the power of the nobility before the rising force of the bourgeoisie. But he also argues that the civilizing process in Europe reaches fruition by the eighteenth century and that the advent of bourgeois hegemony does little to change its outward cultural forms. Although he employs Marxian terminology, his is less a model of social conflict than it is of social integration. The history of Western civilization in Elias's view is a vast process of democratization, in which civilized behavior, originally the privileged preserve of the social elite, is adopted by society as a whole.<sup>38</sup>

What does change in the shift of power from the aristocracy to the bourgeoisie is a trend toward the internalization of the civilizing process. Rules of behavior once enforced by a social elite are in time imposed by the human psyche. The process proceeds in overlapping steps. With the dispersion of social power from the aristocratic salons to the bourgeois marketplace, the family becomes the forum for learning "civilized" behavior, and the parent assumes a legislative authority formerly dictated by court etiquette. The process of initiation into socially acceptable behavior, previously a public transaction between noble and middle-class adults, becomes a private one between the middle-class parent and child.<sup>39</sup> But this retreat from a public toward a private sanctioning of behavior does not end there. All the while this function is being appropriated by the psyche itself. In this way, Elias links the descending threshold of shame with the historical emergence of the superego, which mediates psychogenetic and sociogenetic processes. Medieval man was an extrovert; his frame of reference for the formation of values was the standard of society at large. Modern man is an introvert; he judges the ethics of his acts by internal standards.<sup>40</sup>

37. *The Civilizing Process*, 116-117.

38. *Ibid.*, 93, 100-101, 103, 110, 116, 151-152, 185-186. See also his remarks on Marx in *What is Sociology?*, 139-145.

39. *The Civilizing Process*, 128, 134, 168, 188-189.

40. *Ibid.*, xvi, 82, 96, 129, 139, 152, 182-191, 202-203.

As the superego replaces the social elite as the censor of acceptable behavior, increasingly heavy burdens of self-discipline are imposed upon the psyche. In a fully developed civilization, each individual must recapitulate within a few years the learned behavior of his ancestors over several centuries.<sup>41</sup> As a means of ensuring the enforcement of civilization's more exacting demands, new reasons are proposed to justify the observance of the old rules. What the seventeenth-century aristocracy demanded in the name of delicacy, the eighteenth-century bourgeoisie enjoined in the name of morality. By the nineteenth century, society as a whole enforced the same rules in the name of hygiene.<sup>42</sup> The codes of civilization remain essentially the same. But in a situation in which public standards are weakening, the rationale for applying rules obliges the individual to monitor his own behavior. As the locus of authority moves inward, first to the family and then to the self, so too does the justification offered for it.

The burden of self-discipline for modern man, Elias contends, is further accentuated by his loss of memory about how his civilization, with all of its systems and regulations, came into being.<sup>43</sup> As the civilizing process is internalized, there are fewer visible landmarks which recall that it is one which developed historically. With fewer opportunities to witness the public performance of the rituals of everyday life, modern man finds himself with fewer models for patterning his social behavior. Moreover, the process which works toward internalization also promotes reticence.<sup>44</sup> As the threshold of shame declines, more and more forbidden behavior passes from the realm of discourse into the realm of silence. Only those injunctions upon behavior which stand at the threshold are openly discussed. Elias points out that manuals of etiquette, a prime source for locating the threshold of shame in a given historical era, offer commentary only upon new sanctions or upon those recently imposed. The older rules are no longer discussed because they are presumed to be tacitly understood as common knowledge.<sup>45</sup> The codes do not disappear; nor do the instinctual needs they were designed to tame. But the conflict between them is joined in the deep structures of the psyche, from which they surface only in dreams.<sup>46</sup> The price of civilization, Elias contends, is not only higher barriers of social constraint, but deeper degrees of psychological stress. The rise of civilization, in effect, is matched by a descent into self. This argument, of course, recalls Ariès's concern about the loss of sociability in contemporary civilization. Increasingly drawn into himself, modern man finds few outlets for the gregariousness which was so much

41. *Ibid.*, xiii, 140-143.

42. *Ibid.*, 115, 134-135, 150, 171.

43. *Ibid.*, 94, 176, 186.

44. *Ibid.*, 94, 175-176, 181-182, 186.

45. *Ibid.*, 136, 150, 176.

46. *Ibid.*, 142, 149, 159.

a part of his experience in a simpler age. Elias's definition of sentimentality as a longing for lost opportunities for expression is close to Ariès's conception of nostalgia for "free space," and both, in turn, bear some resemblance to Bloch's notion of the "sacred."<sup>47</sup> In this sense, the interest among historians of mentalities in cultural lag represents not simply an interest in the inertia of long-standing habits of mind, but an interest in the way in which spontaneity is stifled by the civilizing process.

Elias's discussion of psychogenetic processes draws heavily upon Freud's theory of culture. Indeed, one of his major contributions has been to explain the historical context in which Freudian psychology became possible. For Freud's model of the development of the psyche in childhood makes sense only for modern man's more structured mind, and Elias criticizes Freud for having been insufficiently attuned to the structural nature of the psychological phenomena he investigated.<sup>48</sup> Elias's long-range view of psychological development also provides insight into the contemporary vogue of ego psychology, in which Freud's model of childhood development is lengthened to include lifelong stages of growth. For this further differentiation of the psyche represents the logical following step in the civilizing process. As the realm of free space for spontaneous behavior grows smaller, more elaborate patterns of development ease the required adaptation. Whereas Freud noted but one identity crisis, his student, Erik Erikson, cites several in a lifelong process of self-discovery.<sup>49</sup> One could argue that Erikson's expansion of the concept of psychological growth to encompass the life cycle matches modern man's need to find new mechanisms with which to cope with the added stress of conformity and self-discipline.

Most thoroughgoing in his application of structuralist methods to the history of mentalities is the French philosopher Michel Foucault.<sup>50</sup> Foucault studies not attitudes toward everyday life but rather their mirror image — attitudes toward the asylums to which were consigned those people who could not or would not conform to everyday routines. His is a history of the "great confinement," of the vast process dating from the Middle Ages in which non-conformists were bent into line with society's norms through ever more elaborate systems of segregation. Foucault seeks to show how the principle of segregation itself generated a variety of institutions and routines which superficially appear to deal with separate problems. Madhouses, prisons, and hos-

47. *Ibid.*, 165.

48. Elias, "Sociology and Psychiatry" in *Psychiatry in a Changing Society*, ed. S. H. Foulkes and G. Stewart Prince (London, 1969), 137-138.

49. Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, 2nd ed. (1950; reprinted New York, 1963), 247-274.

50. For a discussion of Foucault's theory of history in its relationship to French structuralist philosophy, see Allan Megill, "Foucault, Structuralism, and the Ends of History," *Journal of Modern History* 51 (1979), 451-503.



pitals all derive their origins from a common process through which, in successive historical stages, society's misfits are sorted out, labeled, and channeled into well-defined routines.<sup>51</sup> In these formulas for constraint, Foucault finds the essential element of the civilizing process: the creation of forms which bind human activity. It is as if the asylum's inmates perform a ritual witness of the codes of behavior expected of the society at large. In this respect, Foucault's work parallels that of Ariès and Elias in plotting Western society's entry into increasingly refined systems of discipline.

Equally significant are the methodological similarities between Foucault and these historians. Like them, he finds his search for common attitudes not in world-views but in common codes of knowledge through which the world is perceived. These codes he labels "discourses." They are the verbal expression of the mental structures (the "words and things") through which man organizes his activities and classifies his perceptions of the world.<sup>52</sup> Foucault's concept of discourse bears some resemblance to what Febvre calls "mental equipment." Both seek to locate and describe the essential units of the mental vocabulary of Western man in successive stages of his history. Febvre, however, inventories "mental equipment" to ascertain the limits and possibilities of intellectual speculation in a given historical era, whereas Foucault investigates "discourse" for the myriad configuration which its forms may generate.<sup>53</sup> Here Foucault departs from the methods of the historians of mentalities discussed thus far. All of them believe that there is a transparent correspondence between verbal formulations and the meanings they convey. They assume that knowing and making are integral aspects of the same process. Man makes statements about his life activities in order to gain knowledge of the human condition. The civilizing process, therefore, is one through which man discovers his "humanity" by assigning meaning to the objects of his creation. The interpretation of a discourse changes in time, as man assigns new meaning to his past activities in order to explain his present condition. But all of these meanings are derived from the expansion and elaboration of a mental vocabulary which issues from a common matrix. For these historians, discourse is of interest because it provides an index to meaning. In plotting how the meanings assigned to a discourse succeed one another, the historian of mentalities is able to trace the direction in which civilization is tending. It is upon this basis that Febvre, Ariès, and Elias all treat the making of civi-

51. Foucault's major works on asylums include: *Folie et déraison: Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique* (Paris, 1961), transl. as *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* by Richard Howard (New York, 1973); *Naissance de la clinique* (Paris, 1963), transl. as *The Birth of the Clinic* by A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York, 1975); *Surveiller et Punir: Naissance de la prison* (Paris, 1975), transl. as *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* by Alan Sheridan (New York, 1979).

52. Foucault, *Les Mots et les choses* (Paris, 1966), transl. anon. as *The Order of Things* (New York, 1973), xiv, xx-xxi.

53. Foucault, "Orders of Discourse," *Social Science Information* 10 (1971), 7-30.

lization as a developmental process. In the elaboration of his mental structures, man widens his intellectual vision from a common point of origin.

Foucault, in contrast, contends that there is no necessary connection between discourse and meaning. Like Elias, he portrays man as a form-maker. But he argues that once created, these forms acquire an autonomy of their own. A discourse drained of its original meaning can be imbued with a new and unrelated one, and it can be put to a totally new use. Foucault's point is that meaning is not transparent in the "words and things" which man has created. Nor is there any continuity in the process through which meanings are modified, as Febvre and Elias believed. It is futile, therefore, to study a discourse for the meaning it signifies. An idea, statement, custom, or institution is of interest rather for the way in which it fits into larger systems of discourse. "Words and things" should be examined not for what they represent but for what they are in and of themselves. The discourse for Foucault is an irreducible datum. Rather than interpreting its meaning he describes its multiple uses. The task, he argues, is not to interpret the meaning of statements made in the past in terms of present perspectives, but to explain how such statements become an objective resource for future discourse.<sup>54</sup> Foucault's discourses are not documents to be read, but "monuments" to be mapped upon the historical landscape.<sup>55</sup> For this reason, he labels his inquiry not history but archaeology.<sup>56</sup>

Two examples drawn from Foucault's work will illustrate this aspect of his method. The first is the rise of the asylum as a place of segregation. Foucault seeks to show how the medieval lazar houses, to which lepers were confined, became a model for future use with an unrelated problem. With the disappearance of leprosy in Western society at the end of the Middle Ages, the lazar houses lost their original purpose, yet remained available as a model for the segregation of other social outcasts who had come to arouse society's fears. By the sixteenth century, the lazar house had become the madhouse, confining a completely different type of inmate but performing the same function of exclusion. In time, the uses of the asylum became more diversified still, as madmen, vagabonds, and criminals, originally incarcerated together, were parcelled out among more specialized institutions. In tracing this process in detail, Foucault's purpose is to show that through all of its forms the asylum remains that space where discourse about segregation takes place, and that these forms proliferate with a compelling logic through all the varied, unconnected, and often contradictory discussion of them.<sup>57</sup> A second intriguing example is that of the confessional mode of discourse about human sexuality.

54. *The Order of Things*, 29, 34-42, 50, 232-236, 252, 295-296, 304, 312, 338-339, 368.

55. Foucault, *L'Archéologie du savoir* (Paris, 1969), transl. as *The Archeology of Knowledge* by A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York, 1976), 7, 106-117, 138-139.

56. *Ibid.*, 7, 131, 138-140, 147; *The Order of Things*, xxii-xxiii, 217-221.

57. *Madness and Civilization*, 3-7, 38-64, 202-206, 243, 269-272.

Foucault argues that the extension of auricular confession in the Catholic Church in the seventeenth century provided the basic form for the widening discussion of sexuality. Subsequent discourse about sex was thus shaped by the confessional mode. The confessional as a forum for the discussion of sex eventually became a resource appropriated by modern psychiatry, which employs its forms in the name of new and unrelated conceptions.<sup>58</sup> In the making of civilization, Foucault claims, the forms of classification provide imperatives for action which are more important than the explanation offered for them. By concentrating upon the structure of a discourse, rather than upon the subjective interpretation of its meaning, the historian unearths hidden and unsuspected perspectives upon the past.

Foucault's interest in the re-use of created forms relates as well to the pre-occupation of historians of mentalities with the power of extant cultural forms to retard social and political improvisation. Febvre, Ariès, and Elias all discussed cultural lag in terms of the inertial power of traditional ways of acting and speaking. Much of that power resided in the values which these forms conveyed. But the power of the past in their arguments was identified with the nostalgia of modern man for the simplicity and coherence lost amidst the growing complexity of civilization's proliferating forms. New cultural forms did not simply displace old ones; they co-existed, thereby diversifying and complicating the interpretative task of reconciling new forms with old conceptions. The appeal of man in the past to man in the present was in the apparent unity of his conceptions of the world, even if these were no longer efficacious. Foucault, in contrast, denies the significance of values in the civilizing process, and finds his argument for cultural lag entirely upon the forms themselves. The inertial power of the past in Foucault's view is not derived from old conceptions, but rather from the clutter of discarded linguistic and institutional forms, which remain available for new uses. For Elias, old cultural forms could be turned to new ends, but they continued to convey vestiges of their original meaning. His discussion of the appropriation by the bourgeoisie of table etiquette conceived by the aristocracy provides a good example. For Foucault, however, it is not a question of meanings being modified but of forms being rearranged. "Words and things" are re-formed to conform to changing constellations of power, much as a magnet bends iron filings to its field of force.<sup>59</sup>

Foucault's denial of the continuity of meaning in the making of Western civilization serves as the basis for his critique of the notion of progress generally. His thesis is that there are radical breaks in the conceptual schemes ("epistemes") employed in Western thought. Each historical epoch, therefore,

58. Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité* (Paris, 1976), transl. as *The History of Sexuality* by Robert Hurley (New York, 1978), I, 18-24, 58-68.

59. *Ibid.*, I, 33-34, 53, 97-102.

is self-contained, and bears no relationship (progressive or regressive) to any other.<sup>60</sup> Like other historians of mentalities, Foucault is interested in long-range trends. Febvre, Ariès, and Elias studied these as a means of plotting the gradual modification of the structure of the psyche. Only by scanning long periods of time could change in the Western mentality be measured. Foucault, however, argues that if changes in mentality develop gradually, they are nonetheless dramatically revealed. The process may be likened to the creation of a geological fault. Pressure builds until the rocks slide and the patterns of stratification on either side are definitively sundered. Foucault denies that the meaning of cultural forms can be plotted across these faults. What was fact for one age becomes mere artifact for the next. With this emphasis upon the discontinuity among historical epochs, all of Foucault's studies converge upon what he calls the "classical age," an era which extends roughly from the mid-seventeenth to the early nineteenth century, and which is bounded by abrupt transformations in Western systems of thought. It is at this juncture that old cultural forms are redesigned to fit new conceptual schemes.<sup>61</sup> Foucault's most dramatic illustration of this point is provided by his work on punishment. The classical age provides the setting for a rapid switch from punishment as a manifestation of political sovereignty (public torture and execution) to punishment as a ritual reenactment of industrial discipline (the regimen of prison). Foucault seeks to show how the prison as a form of punishment was born suddenly and spread rapidly to reshape the activity of punishing to the new distribution of power in bourgeois-dominated industrial society. The "carceral mode," identified originally with the madman, was thereby redeployed to make manifest the codes of discipline and efficiency which marked the coming of the industrial age.<sup>62</sup>

Despite Foucault's efforts to show how the "words and things" of Western culture have been broken up and scattered into so many discontinuous spatial patterns and temporal series, his work, divorced from his own explanation of it, reveals the same operative trend as that sketched by Ariès and Elias: the taming of human behavior through the regular procedures imposed by the civilizing process. Foucault's discussion of Western culture does in fact reveal a pattern which transcends his individual historical epochs. Indeed, its stages are essentially the same as those noted by Elias: the toleration of spontaneous behavior in the Middle Ages, succeeded by increasingly sophisticated systems of external restraint upon behavior imposed in the name of morality in the early modern period, followed finally by internal restraints enjoined in the name of therapy in the modern era. Both identify the shaping of social behavior with the shaping of the human mind. Like Elias, Foucault perceives

60. *The Order of Things*, xxii, 206-207, 250, 367.

61. *Ibid.*, x; *Madness and Civilization*, 35, 38, 63-64, 221-224.

62. *Madness and Civilization*, 46-64; *Discipline and Punish*, 3-14.

that insanity is a conception of behavior which has developed historically out of civilization's demand for conformity. In the Middle Ages, eccentric behavior was tolerated. Madmen were integrated into the social intercourse of everyday life. Later they would be expelled to sail the rivers of Europe as pilgrims in search of their reason. Eventually, they would be consigned to fixed places, to the "great houses of confinement" out of which the modern asylum took form. The insane asylum, in turn, gave birth to the hospital and to the prison at the end of the "classical age." Foucault discusses the various reasons invoked to justify exclusion and confinement as its forms multiplied. But he argues that these "rationalizations" follow one another in no intelligible pattern. From an historical perspective, he implies, the reasons offered for segregating unreason are unreasonable.<sup>63</sup> The logic of incarceration is to be found rather in the succession of its forms.

It is not surprising, therefore, that in his historical writings Foucault concentrates upon society's nonconformists. He is interested in those aspects of our "humanity" which are most resistant to discipline. Foucault studies discourse on the boundary of that inner sanctum of human behavior where discourse about exclusion is being generated. It is the same boundary that Febvre urged his colleagues to mark. But for modern man, Foucault points out, it is more likely to be discovered within the psyche than in the society at large. In this respect, the civilizing process which Foucault traces parallels that sketched by Elias in demarcating a shift from external to internal codes of behavior. The criminal, whose spectacular punishment was an expiation of public witness in the seventeenth century, must bear silent witness to his own rehabilitation by the nineteenth.<sup>64</sup> The keeper of the insane asylum, who physically restrained unreasonable behavior in the eighteenth century, is displaced by the psychiatrist, who in the twentieth century enjoins the madman to assume responsibility for his own self-control.<sup>65</sup> Foucault's conception of the internalization of cultural imperatives also suggests the link between his early work on asylums and his current work on sexuality. For sexuality is a kind of behavior which can only be effectively disciplined by internalized controls. His argument is that human sexuality, far from being liberated, has in recent centuries become imprisoned in discourse. Sexual expression, once spontaneous and mysterious, is now bounded by minute, confessional analysis. Like Elias, Foucault believes that the relaxation of standards of sexual conduct in contemporary civilization is more apparent than real. Underpinning outward forms of behavior are complex and nuanced

63. *Madness and Civilization*, 24-35, 117-158, 279-289; Hayden V. White, "Foucault Decoded: Notes from Underground," *History and Theory* 12 (1975), 38.

64. *Discipline and Punish*, 101.

65. *Madness and Civilization*, 182-198, 243-251, 276-278.

psychological mechanisms which keep behavior within precisely defined bounds.<sup>66</sup>

Foucault writes upon topics which invert his beliefs rather than upon those which express them directly. He believes that creativity is the ultimate ground of forms but that creativity cannot be discussed directly. Only the monuments of human creation are available for scrutiny. He studies these forms when his real interest is their energetic source. The themes he investigates dwell upon constraint when his commitment is to liberation. This inversion lends to his writings a prophetic cast.<sup>67</sup> The intent of his "archaeology" is to reveal a secret side to history.<sup>68</sup> On the surface, his message seems to be that contemporary civilization threatens to become a vast asylum in which codes of behavior are enforced upon all aspects of life. The asylum, which from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries segregated only the disorderly, is an emblem for the network of codes of self-discipline which pervade contemporary society. Yet the secret side of history for Foucault is the message that human creativity cannot be contained. Man moves on to new forms. Foucault's deepest irony is his suggestion that it is in these very exercises in discipline that madness ultimately resides.

The historians of mentalities have traced new routes upon the map of cultural history. They have visited subjects hitherto unexplored, or never before treated seriously. Yet "mentalities" is a field distinguished by more than its subject matter. As a field of study, it cannot be relegated to a remote corner of historical research, as it has been by some *Annales* historians. The history of mentalities provides not merely an element of "total" history, but a perspective on the civilizing process. The stature of the historians under discussion in this essay rests upon the guidelines they set for a general theory of civilization. Dealing with different subject matter, they nonetheless converge upon a common theoretical model of the genesis and growth of psychosocial structures in the making of civilization.

The formulation of that model emerges out of a critique of the model of linear progress, so familiar in discussions of the nature of Western civilization. Though the historians of mentalities would accept the proposition that the development of civilization proceeds in a particular direction, they question whether it makes sense to speak of progress in one-dimensional terms. For what is called progress might as easily be labeled control. Those achievements ordinarily identified with progress in the West, such as political liberty and industrial development, have been won at the price of pronounced psycho-

66. *History of Sexuality*, I, 7, 9-13, 58-67; Elias, *Civilizing Process*, 140, 187.

67. *The Order of Things*, 384-386; *Madness and Civilization*, 7-37, 212-220, 285-289.

68. Cf. White, "Foucault Decoded," 49-54.

social discipline. Their argument is founded upon the paradox that man, as creator, creates structures which limit his capacity for spontaneous expression. The elaboration of such structures — as language, customary procedures, codes of behavior, and social institutions — marks the advance of civilization, yet ironically acts as a drag upon further development. In the civilizing process, new structures may be superimposed upon old ones. But each tends to establish its own patterns of social intercourse and its own temporal series. In this view, historical change has many unrelated dimensions. It is their sensitivity to differences among the layers of culture created in the structuring process which has rendered historians of mentalities skeptical about a unified, linear conception of history. Hence they describe civilization's development not only in terms of its direction but also in terms of its antinomies: Bloch's sacred and profane; Febvre's belief and unbelief; Ariès's cyclical and developmental conceptions of the stages of life; Elias's spontaneity and propriety; Foucault's madness and reason. The task which unifies their work as historians is one of marking boundaries on the edge of that sphere of human activity where the structuring process is about to intrude. Each of the historians under discussion has characterized that boundary in a different way. For Bloch, it is a line between sacred and profane. Febvre describes it as an "historical curve" separating the emotional from the intellectual in the shaping of the psyche. Ariès thinks of it in terms of developmental patterns of life's stages crowding in upon man's "undefined space." Elias speaks of it as a "threshold of shame." For Foucault, it is the expanding space of the asylum itself. However that boundary is characterized, each of these historians uses it to reveal the simultaneous presence of repetitive and dynamic elements in historical change.

It is a boundary, moreover, which shifts as the civilizing process proceeds. Not only do structures become more complex, they become increasingly internalized. Herein the historians under discussion point to the integral yet temporal relationship between social and psychological processes. It is in the social sphere that the structuring process begins. But as man's capacity for self-expression in that sphere contracts, he seeks asylum for that kind of activity in his own psyche. With the advance of civilization, the psyche itself serves as the frontier for the structuring process. This model of an increasingly organized civilization suggests why the historians of mentalities devote so much attention to the problem of cultural lag. Western man has become so accustomed to psychosocial discipline that he has come to identify it with progress. From the perspective of an increasingly organized world, however, the distant past was the time when man was most free to be inventive. In revealing the reverse images of linear progress (spontaneity, resistance to conformity, the ready acceptance of fortune), the historians of mentalities point out the paradox of the civilizing process.

In evaluating their work, one might say that if they have redrawn the map

of cultural history, they have done so not by redesigning its topography, but by fathoming its substrata. Each stratum along the way possesses its own structure and its own sedimentary elements. So conceived, the history of Western civilization is full of discontinuous developments. In probing its deep structures, the historians of mentalities underscore Western man's need to gain historical perspective upon those pressing contemporary concerns which the linear paradigm cannot adequately explain: the pressures of conformity in everyday life, the sense of accelerating time, and the psychological preoccupation with self.

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