

Summaries

J. Goudsblom

The Theory of the Civilizing Process: Criticism and Perspective

According to some recurring criticisms, Norbert Elias's theory of the civilizing process a) is teleological, b) reflects a Eurocentric view, c) misrepresents the development in Europe itself, and d) is incompatible with contemporary trends which appear to disprove the very idea of continuing 'civilization'. In this paper these objections are examined critically. It is pointed out that Elias's book *The Civilizing Process* may either be viewed as a study of a particular episode of the civilizing process in Western Europe, or as a fundamental contribution to a general theory of social processes. In either case the crux of the theory lies in the observed relationship between changes in individual discipline ('behaviour') and changes in social organization ('power'), resulting in changes in personality structure ('habitus'). When reviewed in this light, objection a) is understandable but wrong, while criticisms b), c) and d) point to limitations which can be overcome by further empirical research. By way of conclusion, it is suggested that Elias's theory be linked with other themes from sociology and social psychology, such as the Milgram experiments.

Jonathan Fletcher

Towards a Theory of Decivilizing Processes

This paper attempts to sketch the framework of a theory of decivilizing processes. This involves specifying civilizing and decivilizing processes, including the probable characteristics of decivilizing processes and the conditions under which they would be likely to occur. Firstly, the meaning of civilization and civilizing processes in the work of Norbert Elias is discussed in order to clarify the theory of civilizing processes before specifying what might constitute decivilizing. Criteria of civilizing and decivilizing are then presented and three main criteria for determining such processes are highlighted. Finally, various dimensions of decivilizing are distinguished. Each dimension may have its own particular dynamics. In conclusion the empirical application of the concepts is encouraged.

Fred Spier

Norbert Elias's Theory of Civilizing Processes Again Under Discussion; An Exploration of the Emerging Sociology of Regimes

In *The Civilizing Process*, Norbert Elias employed the term 'civilization' in a particular yet general way. This has caused a great deal of controversy among scholars. In the early 1990s, major societal upheavals including the breakdown of Yugoslavia rekindled such doubts. In the same period, from the early 1980s until today, figurational sociologists have increasingly employed the term 'regime'. The controversy surrounding Elias's use of the term civilization is first examined by focusing on civilized behaviour in stateless societies. A short overview of the rise of the term 'regime' is followed by an exploration of the sociology of 'regimes', most notably ecological regimes. The hypothesis is put forward that the constraints inherent in ecological regimes contribute to civilizing pressures, and thus to forms of civilized behaviour also in stateless societies. The breakdown and disappearance of regimes can be viewed as decivilizing tendencies or processes. It is suggested that both civilizing and decivilizing tendencies and processes usually, if not always, occur together. Since clear criteria are lacking, it can be very difficult to decide whether the societal developments as a whole should be viewed as either civilizing or decivilizing tendencies or processes. The emerging sociology of regimes may contribute to attaining a more refined, balanced and detached view of social developments.

Bram Kempers

Civilization: the Question of Scope and Interdependence

As the civilization process comprises more, has a much broader scope than state formation the connection between these processes becomes too loose. To save Elias' conclusions the civilizing process requires a specification which could be: 'cultivation', while the second process calls for a more general concept: 'collectivization'. To do justice to economic aspects of social processes as well, I propose that a third pair of concepts be applied: 'specialization' and 'professionalisation'. Both are linked to the most general concept which refers to social relations, namely interdependence. The crucial historical transformation took place at a late stage in the development of agricultural society when developments of cultivation, stateformation and professionalisation - that indeed have a zero point - began as specific events within the general cultural, political and economic processes: civilization, collectivization, and specialization.

Civilization and Culture Reconsidered

Although 'civilization' and 'culture' can be regarded as overlapping and even almost identical concepts (civilization being the dynamic equivalent of culture), a fairly sharp distinction between the two concepts may be helpful in clarifying problems of explanation in Norbert Elias' theory of the civilizing process. In this theory, 'civilization' refers to the control of emotional impulses. 'Culture' (which does not have a place in Elias' original theory as a scientific concept) may be defined as symbolic knowledge in the widest sense. The question then is how civilizing processes and cultural processes are interconnected. Contrary to Elias' explanation, which emphasizes processes of state formation and market formation as the 'base' of civilizing processes, it is argued that relatively autonomous cultural processes (e.g. the invention and spread of literacy, systematization of religious ideas, the growth of technical and scientific knowledge) do have a place in the explanation of civilizing processes. Particularly since the 19th century, the spread of systematic, abstract, decontextualized, scientific knowledge through formal education has become an important disciplinary, civilizing force.

Cas Wouters

The Lustbalance of Sex and Love: developments since the sexual revolution

The longing for an enduring intimate relationship and the longing for sex are connected, but there is also a tension between the two types of longing, especially as time goes by. Throughout this century, processes of emancipation and informalization ran parallel to a 'sexualization of love' and an 'erotization of sex', but since the Sexual Revolution the traditional lust balance of a lust dominated sexuality for men and a complementary (romantic) love- or relationship dominated sexuality for women has come under attack. Many people tried to find a new balance between the extremes of desexualised love (sexual longing subordinated to the continuation of the relationship) and depersonalised sexual contact. They wished to find varied answers to the question: when or within what kind of relationship(s) are (what kind of) eroticism and sexuality allowed *and* desired? This paper describes and interprets these developments. It centres on the (difficulties accompanying) relational and psychological processes that accompanied changes in the dominant perceptions of both genders (although the main focus is on women) as to what constitutes a (more) satisfying lust balance. Using empirical evidence from the Netherlands (changes in a popular feminist monthly and relevant research reports), the paper argues that the emancipation of women and their sexuality (complement of the accommodation of men and their sexuality) has intensified both erotic and sexual awareness as well as both types of longings. Therefore, feelings of ambivalence have increased and the lust balance is increasingly experienced as a tension-balance.