



The civilized body: Aspects and Problems of a socio-cultural Phenomenon

Michael Martin

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Studienarbeit aus dem Jahr 2010 im Fachbereich Anglistik - Kultur und Landeskunde, Universität Potsdam, Sprache: Deutsch, Abstract: When talking about “civilized behavior”, a whole set of associations opens up immediately. We can talk, eat, walk, act and even dress ourselves in a “civilized” manner. But what does civilization actually mean? Are human beings (who, according to a natural- scientific worldview, are actually nothing but mammals) really capable of civilized behavior? An average citizen from a western “civilization” would probably approve of a general distinction between “civilized” and “uncivilized”. The concept of civilization has undergone a massive change. It is now more than just an artificial concept, constructed by sociologists and philosophers. In the modern world of today, being or acting “civilized” does not only entail social norms inside a certain group of people. The concept of civilization has also become a powerful weapon on the political and cultural battlefields of the 21st century.

Most of the time, the self-control of bodily behavior and spontaneous bodily expressions is one of the most important challenges of a human being living in the modern age. It is so important that it has become a central characteristic of humanity – in contrast to other animals, that usually do not control their behavior for constructed social reasons. On the other hand, the processes that are involved in controlling and interpreting the actions of the body are barely noticed – they have become so internalized that we don’t even recognize them anymore. Especially in the western world, meaning is often transported through separation: “I am civilized, because you are not civilized” and so forth. Interestingly, the control of certain modes of behavior (like in the case of eating, personal hygiene or social manners in general) has not always been a natural course of action.

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