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## How civilizing processes continued: towards an informalization of manners and a third nature personality

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**Abstract:** Based on an analysis of manners books in four Western countries since 1890, this paper describes how ‘civilizing processes’ have continued in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The paper first focuses on three central functions of a ‘good society’ and its code of manners, and then describes how, in a long-term phase of formalizing manners and disciplining people, ‘dangerous’ emotions such as those related to physical (including sexual) violence came to be controlled in increasingly automatic ways. Thus, a second-nature or conscience-dominated type of personality became dominant. The twentieth century saw rising social constraints towards being unconstrained, and yet reflective, flexible, and alert. These pressures coincided with an informalization of manners and an *emancipation of emotions*: emotions that had been denied and repressed regained access to consciousness and wider acceptance in social codes. Yet it has been only since the ‘Expressive Revolution’ of the 1960s that standards of self-control have increasingly enabled people to admit, to themselves and others, to having ‘dangerous’ emotions without provoking shame, particularly the shame-fear of losing control and face. To the extent that it has become ‘natural’ to perceive the pulls and pushes of both ‘first nature’<sup>1</sup> and ‘second nature’, as well as the dangers and chances, short-term and long-term, of any particular situation or relation, a ‘third nature’ type of personality has been developing. Examples illustrating this trend also help us to understand it as a process of psychic integration triggered by continued social integration.

### Introduction

The major trends observed by Norbert Elias in his *The Civilizing Process* (2000[1939]) arguably continued until the end of the nineteenth century. They represent a long-term phase of formalizing manners and disciplining people, in which ‘dangerous’ emotions such as those related to physical (including sexual) violence came to be avoided, repressed and denied in increasingly automatic ways – that is, by the inner fears of a rather rigid and authoritarian conscience. Driven by the disciplinary forces of expanding interdependency networks, in particular by state formation and market expansion, a ‘second-nature’ – that<sup>[141]</sup> is, a conscience-dominated – type of personality was in the making, and became dominant. This process accelerated in the period in which bourgeois classes entered and came to dominate the centres of power and their ‘good society’. It was discontinued in the twentieth century, when long-term processes of informalization of manners and ‘emancipation of emotions’ became

dominant emotions that had been denied and repressed regained<sup>2</sup> access to consciousness and wider acceptance in social codes. The following examples will provide an initial glimpse of this process.

During the 1990–91 Gulf War, fighter pilots, interviewed for TV in their planes before taking off, admitted to being afraid. They did this in a matter-of-fact way. This would have been almost unthinkable in the Second World War, when such behaviour would have been equated almost automatically with being fear-ridden, a condition in which it was thought to be impossible to perform well. Admitting to being afraid was to step on a slippery slope: one automatically had to act upon the emotion. The dominant response at that time, in answer to the problem of how to prevent soldiers from giving in to fear, may be summarized in a quotation from a 1943 manual for American officers: it is the soldier's 'desire to retain the good opinion of his friends and associates . . . his pride smothers his fear' (Stearns and Haggerty, 1991). Precisely the same pride kept soldiers from admitting they were afraid, especially before an operation. At the time of the Gulf War, all this had obviously changed. Today, admitting that one is afraid no longer means that one has automatically to act upon the emotion.

In the process of informalization and emancipation of emotions it has become quite common to admit feeling this or that, hate or lust, anger or envy, and yet to act quite differently, in a playful and subtle way. This implies a rise in the level of demands on self-regulation, a change that can perhaps be most clearly seen in changes in the relationship between the dying and those who live on. Here, the traditional rule that dying patients were to be kept under the delusion that there was a fair chance of recovery – doctors conducting a regime of silence and sacred lies, hardly ever informing the dying of their terminal situation – has changed to the expectation and, for doctors even the judicial obligation, to be open and inform them (Wouters, 2002). The norms for divorced couples have also swung round by 180 degrees: the traditional expectation that they would stop seeing each other is gradually being replaced by the expectation of having a 'good after-marriage' relationship: the ex-couple maintain a friendship, or work towards being on friendly terms again (Veeninga, 2008).

Informalization processes have continued into the twenty-first century. My analysis of them in this paper is based upon a longer-term research project, the purpose of which was to find, compare and interpret changes in American, Dutch, English and German manners books published since the 1880s. The project has resulted in two books: the first, *Sex and Manners* was published in 2004 and the second, *Informalization* in 2007. In these books general trends are reported, as well as national variations. Among the overall trends reported were a declining social and psychic distance between social classes, sexes and generations; a mixing of codes and ideals; increasing interdependencies;<sup>[142]</sup> an informalization of manners; expanding mutual identifications; and an 'emancipation of emotions'. All in all, these interrelated trends amounted to an informalization of manners, rising demands on emotion regulation, and increasing social and national integration.

Here, I aim to show how overall trends in Western regimes of manners in the twentieth century, and in earlier centuries, have been connected with general trends in self-regulation. These trends are the outcome of answering the question of what overall changes in social

codes can be interpreted as involving specific changes in the balance of controls – that is, between external social controls and internal social controls or self-controls. I will first concentrate on continued social constraints towards self-constraints in the nineteenth century, particularly via an expanding entrepreneurial and professional bourgeoisie and an expanding market. Then I will focus on the last decades of that century, when the long-term phase of formalizing manners and disciplining people, as described by Elias, turned into a long-term phase of informalization of manners and an emancipation of emotions. I will try to interpret these changes by connecting them on the one hand to social integration processes that involved the successive ascent of larger and larger groups and their representation in national centres of power and their ‘good societies’, and on the other hand to changes in the balance of controls. The ‘slippery slope’ serves as a running example.

In addition, I will explore connections between social integration and psychic integration. In order to capture the observed changes in demands on self-regulation and in personality structure, the sensitizing concept of a ‘third nature’ is introduced: there was a change from a ‘second nature’ to a ‘third nature’. The history of the corset is presented as a didactic example. The final sections of this contribution focus on how social integration and the development of a third nature personality are connected to changes in the experience and control of feelings of superiority and inferiority. The latter will be illuminated by focusing on how changes in the social and individual regulation of these feelings can be specified for changes in the meaning and experience of guilt and shame. I start with a few remarks, stepping stones to sketch an empirical–theoretical framework.

### **On good societies and regimes of manners and emotions**

As Elias has shown, changes in manners open a window on to changes in the relations *between* people, as well as onto changes *in* people, that is, in their demands for emotional regulation. Therefore the study of any regime of manners can reveal a corresponding regime of emotions. As a rule, within each society, the dominant code of manners and emotion regulation is derived from sociability within the centres of power and their ‘good society’ – that is, the circles of social acquaintance among people of families who belong to the centres of power, and who take part in their sociable gatherings. These codes of a good society have three functions: 1) a modelling function, 2) a representational function, and 3)<sup>[143]</sup> a function of regulating social mobility and status competition. These three functions are also operative in good societies further down the social ladder, or in the country or provinces.

1) As the codes of good society were decisive in making acquaintances and friends, for winning a desirable spouse, and for gaining influence and recognition, they serve as an example or model for all socially aspiring people – they have a *modelling function*. Until the nineteenth century, courts had this function. In comparison with court circles, later circles of good society were larger, and sociability in them was more *private*, which made the modelling function of good society less visible. However, the dominant social definition of proper ways to establish and maintain relations was constructed in these circles.

2) At any time, the manners prevalent in good society will reflect the balance of power and dependence between established groups and outsider groups in society as a whole. As

increasing layers of society became emancipated and more socially integrated, the social codes of good societies came to represent these layers – they have a *representational function*. In order to avoid social conflict and maintain their elevated position, the people in the centres of power and good society had increasingly to take the presence of rising groups into account. As part of this, the established had to show more respect for the ideals, sentiments, morals, and manners of the rising groups. Therefore the code of a good society tends to spare the sensibilities of all groups represented in them; it reflects *and* represents the power balance between all those groups and strata that are integrated in society at large.

3) In the nineteenth century, an elaborate and increasingly formalized regime of manners emerged. It consisted of a complicated system of introductions, invitations, calls, leaving calling cards, ‘at homes’, receptions, dinners, and so on. Entrance into good society (or its functional equivalent among other social strata) was impossible without an introduction, and, particularly in England, any introduction required the previous permission of both parties. This regime of manners not only regulated sociability, but also functioned as a relatively refined system of inclusion and exclusion, an instrument to screen newcomers seeking entry into social circles, thus helping to identify and exclude undesirables and ensuring that the newly introduced would assimilate to the prevailing regime of manners and self-regulation. Thus the codes of good society also *function to regulate social mobility and status competition*.

The modelling function of good society operates only partly through the medium of social codes or rational individual choice, because differences in manners and sensibilities become ingrained into the personality of individuals – their *habitus* – as they grow up. The same goes for many external social constraints as they are transformed into habitual self-restraints. In this context, Norbert Elias described important connections between the formation of good societies, status motives, and the transformation of constraints by others into self-restraints: ‘fear of loss or reduction of social prestige is one of the most powerful motive forces in the transformation of constraints by others into self-restraints’ (Elias, 2000 [1939]: 395–6). Once these external social constraints have been transformed into habitual, second-nature self-restraints, the social constraints from which they originated and which continue to back them up, are no longer experienced or perceived as such, nor are the powerful status motivations involved in their transformation. In contrast to individual social ascent, the ascent of an entire social group involves some form of mixing of the codes and ideals of the rising group with those of the previously superior groups. In the twentieth century, the successive social ascent of larger and larger groups has been reflected in the dominant codes and *habitus* (a shorthand expression for the mentality, the whole distinctive emotional make-up of the people who are thus bonded together). The sediment of this mixing process can be found in manners books: the patterns of self-regulation of increasingly wider social groups come to be reflected in the codes of manners. They can be perceived in such changes as in the ways in which authors of manners books address their readers, how they draw social dividing lines such as between public and private, formal and informal, and what they have written about social introductions and forms of address.

As a rule, any regime of manners and emotions symbolizes and reinforces ranking hierarchy and other social dividing lines, while the same rule has it that changes in these regimes reflect changes in social dividing lines and in balances of power. This helps one to understand why the nineteenth century witnessed an *aristocratization* of the bourgeoisie alongside an *embourgeoisement* of nobility, to be partly succeeded and partly supplemented in the twentieth century by an *embourgeoisement* of the working classes and a *proletarianization* of the bourgeoisie: *informalization*.

### **The disciplinary forces of state formation and market expansion**

The life and career of the bourgeois classes both in business and in the professions depended heavily on keeping promises, and on the rather punctual and minute regulation of social traffic and behaviour. Accordingly, nineteenth-century manners books placed great emphasis on acquiring the self-discipline necessary for living a 'rational life'; they emphasized time-keeping and ordering activities routinely in a fixed sequence, and at a set pace. Thomas Haskell has pointed to the significance of the 'disciplinary force of the market' in connection with the rising norm of promise keeping and the ascendancy of conscience. This 'force of the market provided the intricate blend of ceaseless change, on the one hand, and predictability, on the other, in which a preoccupation with remote consequences paid off most handsomely' (Haskell, 1985: 561). An overall change in sensibility occurred via the expansion of the market, the intensification of market discipline, and the penetration of that discipline into spheres of life previously untouched by it. The expectation that everyone would live up to<sup>[145]</sup> promises – as comprised in contracts made on 'the market' – became a mutually expected self-restraint, which eventually became taken for granted to the extent that it came to function as part of people's conscience.

This type of conscience-formation presupposes state formation in the sense that the monopolization of the use of violence by the state, and ensuing pacification of larger territories, provided a necessary condition for the expectation of promise-keeping and living up to contracts to become taken for granted, and engrained in the personality as conscience (Elias, 2000 [1939]).

Taking the development of these conditions into consideration helps us to understand why it was not until the eighteenth century, in Western Europe, England, and North America, that societies first appeared whose economic systems 'depended on the expectation that most people, most of the time, were sufficiently conscience-ridden (and certain of retribution) that they could be trusted to keep their promises. In other words, only then did promise keeping become so widespread that it could be elevated into a general social norm' (Haskell, 1985: 353).

This argument adds to the one put forward by Durkheim in his writing about the order behind the contract: 'For everything in the contract is not contractual'. The order behind the contract, 'in current parlance, is designated by the name, state' (1964 [1893]: 211, 219). It was in the process of state formation that the commitment to live up to a contract came to be increasingly taken for granted and internalized. This internalization ran in tandem with, and depended upon, rising levels of mutually expected protection of people and their property.

The entrepreneurial bourgeoisie largely took this protection by the state, the order behind the contract, for granted. It was their point of departure. Their whole social existence heavily depended upon contracts, contracts regulating the conditions of such activities as buying, producing, transporting and selling.

In turn, the making of these contracts, as well as the conditions stipulated in them, depended upon an individual's reputation for being financially solvent and morally solid. To a large extent this reputation was formed in the gossip channels of good society.

### **Building trust and moral solidity in nineteenth-century bourgeois circles**

A reputation for moral solidity referred to the self-discipline of orderliness, thrift, and responsibility, as the qualities needed for a firm grip on the proceedings of business transactions. Moral solidity also pertained to the social and sexual sphere: without demonstrable control over their wives and families, working bourgeois men would fail to create a solid impression of reliability, and ability to live up to the terms of their contracts. Therefore, bourgeois means of controlling potentially dangerous social and sexual competition depended to a substantial degree on the support of a wife for her husband. Her support and social charm could make a crucial difference, as is implied in the opinion that [146] 'nothing makes a man look more ridiculous in the eyes of the world than a socially helpless wife' (Klickmann, 1902: 25). At the same time, these pressures offered specific opportunities for women.

Whereas men dominated the eighteenth-century courtesy genre of manners books, in the nineteenth-century etiquette genre women gained a prominent position, both as authors and as readers (Curtin, 1987). As the social weight of the bourgeoisie increased, middle-class women enjoyed a widening sphere of opportunities. Although confined to the domain of their home and good society, upper- and middle-class women came, more or less, to run and organize the social sphere of good society. The workings of this social formation took place, in large part, in women's private drawing rooms. To some extent, women came to function as the gatekeepers of good society.

In developing the level of trust and respect within a relationship necessary for signing a contract, an invitation into the world of sociability was (and remains) an appreciated strategy. In their relations with friends and acquaintances, with women in general, and with their own wife in particular, men could demonstrate and prove their respectability and trustworthiness. They could show this to a potential client by inviting him and his wife into their home and into the rest of their secluded good society world. Hence, to be introduced, accepted and entertained in the drawing rooms and parlours of the respectable or, in other words, to be successful in the good society, was an important and sometimes even a necessary condition for success in business.

A basic rule of manners among those acknowledged as belonging to the circle was to treat each other on the basis of equality. Quite often this was expressed in what became known as the Golden Rule of manners: do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Some were treated with relative intimacy. Others were treated with reserve, and were thus kept at a social distance. The questions who was properly introduced or introducible, and who was not,

were therefore equally important. To spot undesirables and to keep one's distance from strangers was a matter of great concern (Curtin, 1987). The prototypical stranger was someone who might have the manners of the respectable, but not the morals. Strangers personified the bad company that would endanger the self-control of the respectable, prompting loss of composure in response to repulsive behaviour or, worse, the succumbing to temptation (Lofland, 1973; Wouters, 2007).

### **The fear of the slippery slope: the rise of a second-nature type of personality**

In the nineteenth century, authors of advisory books came to describe the fall of innocent young men as being instructive of lessons in moral virtue and vigilance. Their repeated warnings against strangers expressed a strong moral appeal, revealing a fear of the slippery slope towards giving in to immoral pleasures. As women were guarded by chaperones, these warnings were directed<sup>[147]</sup> at young men. A study of a number of such American stories reports that 'these anecdotal dramas encompass many pitfalls – from seemingly harmless pleasures like dancing to the mortal dangers posed by alcohol – for conduct writers see young men's mistakes not just as individual dangers, but as part of a web of dangerous activity: one slip inevitably leads to the next' (Newton, 1994: 58). Playing a single game of cards with strangers, for example, would 'always end in trouble, often in despair, and sometimes in suicide' (Loosjes, 1809: 98), a nearly nineteenth-century advice book warned. Van Tilburg, in her study of Dutch books of this genre, concluded that, by its nature, any careless indulgence in pleasure would lead to 'a lethal fall' (van Tilburg, 1998: 67). Stuart Blumin also reports on a whole genre of

purportedly true stories of individual drunkards, nearly all of whom were identified as wealthy, educated, or respectable before they took to drink. Moderate drinking invariably led to heavy drinking and drunkenness, and drunkenness to financial ruin and the destruction of family life. Often it led to the death of the drinker, his impoverished wife (the drunkard in these tales was almost always male), or his children. The loss of respectability, of the ability to pursue a respectable occupation, of wealth, and of family life in a well-appointed home (the forced sale of furniture is a common motif) was crucial to these tales, and spoke clearly and powerfully to the major preoccupations of the upper and middle classes. (1989: 200)

Newton concludes:

Self-control, self-government, self-denial, self-restraint, and discipline of the will are all terms used repeatedly in the conduct book lexicon to reinforce the social construction of masculinity. The true man, then, is he who can discipline himself into qualities of character that lead to material and personal success. This discipline also extends to controlling and subjugating the passions as well. Control of anger, of sexual appetite, of impatience, even of emotion are instilled in the American male psyche as essential to the manly character. (1994: 58–9)

This strong moral advice was intended to teach young men the responsibilities needed not only for a successful career but also, because marriages were no longer arranged by parents, for choosing a marriage partner. The advice betrayed the fear that such choices would be determined mainly by sexual attraction.

Social censorship verged on psychic censorship: warnings expanded to the 'treacherous effects' of fantasy, itself a demonstration of the prevailing conviction that dangerous thoughts would almost automatically lead to dangerous action. The rigorous and violent censorship in stricter and more authoritarian regimes demonstrates the extent to which authorities and others believed in the danger of thoughts, imagination or fantasy. Because of this direct connection between thoughts and actions, warnings against having dangerous thoughts were formulated as powerfully as possible. This kind of high-pitched moral pressure signalled the development of rather rigid ways of avoiding anything defined as dangerous or unacceptable via the formation of a rigorous conscience. It stimulated the rise of conflict-avoiding persons, obsessed with self-discipline, punctuality, orderliness, and the importance of living a rational life. For them, the view of emotions came to be associated predominantly with dangers and weaknesses. Giving in to emotions and impulses would lead either to the dangers of physical and/or sexual violence, or to the weaknesses of devastating addictions and afflictions. Thus the successive ascent of large middle-class groups and their increasing status and power relative to other groups was reflected in the regimes of manners and emotions. From the pressures of these growing interdependencies and intensified status competition, a particular type of self-regulation originated (for details, see Wouters, 2007).

This type of personality was characterized by an 'inner compass' of reflexes and rather fixed habits (Riesman, 1950). Impulses and emotions came to be controlled increasingly via the more or less automatically functioning counter-impulses of a rigorous conscience with a strong penchant for order and regularity, cleanliness and neatness. Negligence in these matters indicated an inclination towards dissoluteness. Such inclinations were to be nipped in the bud, particularly in children. Without rigorous control, 'first nature' might run wild.<sup>3</sup> This old conviction expresses a fear of the slippery slope that is typical of rather authoritarian relations and social controls, as well as a relatively authoritarian conscience.

The long-term trend of formalization reached its peak in the Victorian era, from the mid-nineteenth century to its last decade; the metaphor of the stiff upper lip indicated ritualistic manners and a kind of ritualistic self-control, heavily based on a scrupulous conscience, and functioning more or less automatically as a 'second nature', that second-nature type of personality which Riesman (1950) called inner directed.

### **The longing for total belonging and control**

It was particularly in the last decades of the nineteenth century, in the wake of expanding industrialization, that many new groups with new money demanded representation in the centres of power and their good societies. Facing mounting pressures arising from the necessities of social mixing, from increased interdependencies and its intensified competition and cooperation, the advantages of the stiff upper lip diminished. In that *fin de siècle* period, the 'domestication of nature', including one's own (first) nature, increasingly came to trigger both the experience of 'alienation from nature' (one's own nature included) and a new romanticized longing for nature. The more nature was exploited and controlled, the more the image of an unexploited nature was valued. There was a new interest in mountains and seaside



scenery, satisfying many of the new emotional longings: ‘The absolute stillness, the dying of the day, the open landscape, all gave a feeling of total belonging, of a quiet ecstasy’. The connection with the rise of a second-nature type of personality seems obvious, for ‘the man who endures hardship and deprivations to conquer a mountain single-handed . . . masters both an inner and an outer nature’<sup>[149]</sup>(Frykman and Löfgren, 1987: 55, 52). These decades saw the genesis of sports as an important part of public life (Elias and Dunning, 2008 [1986]). It seems likely that most of them became fashionable and popular, at least partly, because practising them could bring this feeling of total belonging and control. The same feeling was also projected through the romanticizing of a past, with an old harmonious peasant society, where each person knew his or her station in life.

Sociologists Frykman and Löfgren describe a comparable development regarding ‘our animal friends’: when middle-class people ‘had mastered the animal within’ and had developed a moral superiority to ‘the more bestial lower classes’, they felt a growing intimacy with animals and at the same time distanced themselves from them. They developed abhorrence for “natural ways” together with a longing and fascination for “the natural way of life” ’ (1987:85–6). There was a quest for spontaneous, authentic, relaxed and informal conduct, which carried the spread of informalizing processes.

Throughout the twentieth century, however, that typical second-nature domestication of ‘first nature’ survived, despite increasingly losing adherents and vitality, particularly since the 1960s. An early twentieth-century example may show how the fear of the slippery slope mirrors the dream of total control:

Each lie breeds new lies; there is no end to it. Let no one begin to lie to members of the household or to cheat with customers, for no escape is possible: one has to continue! . . .

Therefore, beware of beginning.

Do not take that first step.

And if you have already turned into the wrong path, possibly have walked it a long way already – then turn around at once, avert yourself . . . It is better to die than to be false! (Oort, 1904: 10, 14)

A similar rigidity in dividing the world into black and white, right and wrong, is captured in a popular (USA) song of the 1940s: ‘you’ve got to accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative, . . . don’t mess with Mister In-Between.’ Mister In-Between is the personification of the slippery slope, of course. The first step on his path of vice is the point of no return: the slippery slope is an omnipresent bogey of the second-nature type of personality.

### **Social mixing and the rise of social and psychic control over superiority feelings**

At the end of the nineteenth century and in the first decades of the twentieth, old ways of keeping a distance had to be abandoned as many groups of *nouveauriche* were allowed into the centres of power and their good societies. Further industrialization, including new forms of public transport, demanded more social mixing, at work as well as in trams and trains.

Growing interdependency<sup>[150]</sup> implied that social and psychic dividing lines were opening up, and the new levels of social mixing made it more necessary to achieve greater mastery over the

fear of being provoked, pulled down by losing one's self-control, and degraded. Social mixing obliged increasing numbers of people to accelerate, steadily, 'down the slippery slope'. Thus, the fear of degrading contact with lower classes and/or with lower impulses had to be brought under more flexible social and psychic control. This was a major incentive to control expressions of superiority.

In the 1930s, some etiquette books, mainly Dutch and German, still contained separate sections on 'good behaviour' towards social superiors and inferiors. Later, these sections disappeared. Ideals of good manners became dissociated from superior and inferior social position or rank. The trend tended towards drawing social dividing lines, less on the basis of people's belonging to certain groups – class, race, age, sex, or ethnicity – than on the basis of individual behaviour. An example of this process is the waning of references to 'the best people', 'best Society' or 'best sets'. An English manners book of the 1950s declared 'the old criterion of all etiquette writers . . . the best people' to be one of the casualties of a new and gentler code of manners (Edwards and Beyfus, 1956: x). In American manners books, these references had not been exceptional until the late 1930s. In the new edition of 1937, however, Emily Post had changed the title of her first chapter from 'What is Best Society?' to 'The True Meaning of Etiquette'. By formulating the latter mostly in terms of individual qualification – that is, in terms of personal qualities such as charm, tranquillity, taste, beauty, and so on – Mrs Post had turned the perspective away from the social level to the psychic, or even the biological level. Formulations such as 'the code of a thoroughbred . . . is the code of instinctive decency, ethical integrity, self-respect and loyalty' (1937: 2) are examples of social avoidance internalized: from avoiding lower-class people, to avoiding layers of superiority feelings.

These examples also indicate why displaying feelings of superiority would not only humiliate and provoke social inferiors, but also grate on the senses of anyone in good society. Superiority feelings had come to be considered as a lower class of feelings, and to display them as betraying a flaw of the personality. As subordinate social groups were emancipated, references to hierarchical group differences, and to 'better' and 'inferior' kinds of people, were increasingly tabooed. Whereas at one time people of inferior status were avoided, later in the twentieth century behaviour that betrayed feelings of superiority and inferiority came to be avoided: avoidance behaviour was internalized, turning tensions *between* people into tensions *within* people. In the process, the once automatic equation that superiority in power equals superiority as a human being declined to the point of inviting embarrassment. As many types of 'lofty grandeur' came to be viewed as insulting stiffness, a different pattern of self-control came to be demanded: a stronger and yet more flexible self-regulation in which these feelings of superiority were expected to be kept under control. This was a motor in the process of informalization.<sup>[151]</sup>

### **The slippery slope rejuvenated**

This process of informalization was observed by many authors of manners books. In 1899, for example, a German author wrote that 'social relations have gradually become much more informal – that is, more natural' and added that 'to strive after nature' was 'a general trend in

art, science, and living' (quoted in Krumrey, 1984: 413). The trend was generally welcomed, until early in the twentieth century, when an English author also expressed a concern:

The boy of early Victorian days was a ceremonious little creature. He called his parents 'Sir' and 'Madam', and would never have dreamed of starting a conversation at table, and scarcely in joining in it . . . One would not wish to see the ceremoniousness of those times revived, but it is possible that we . . . err in the opposite direction. (Armstrong, 1908: 187–8)

In this question 'Do we err in the wrong direction?', the old fear of the slippery slope was rejuvenated and has accompanied the whole twentieth-century process of informalization. No longer was it that first step which needed to be avoided, but where *did* solid ground and confidence stop, and the slippery slope become unstoppable? These questions became pressing each time young people had escaped further from under the wings of their parents, revived in particular by each flow of emancipation of young women and their sexuality.

### **Rising constraints to be unconstrained, and yet reflective, flexible, and alert**

As interdependency networks expanded, status competition intensified, and the art of obliging and being obliged became more important as a power resource, demonstrations of being intimately trustworthy while perfectly at ease also gained importance. In this sense, processes of democratization, social integration, and informalization have run parallel with increasing constraints towards developing 'smooth manners'. The expression 'a constraint to be unconstrained' seems to capture this paradoxical development.

This expression resembles that used by Norbert Elias: 'the social constraint towards self-constraint' (2000 [1939]: 365–79). Indeed, in the process of informalization the two constraints have become hardly distinguishable: the constraint towards becoming accustomed to self-constraint is at the same time a constraint to be unconstrained, to be confident and at ease. Almost every etiquette book contains passages that emphasize the importance of tactful behaviour, rather than demonstrative deference, and of 'natural' rather than mannered behaviour. However, in processes of emancipation and informalization, some ways of behaving that had previously been experienced as tactful deference came to be seen as too hierarchical and demonstrative, in the same way that what had once been defined and recommended as natural came to be experienced as more or less stiff and phony, and branded as mannered. It then became so obviously a cliché-ridden 'role', in which so many traces of constraint could be 'discovered', that 'playing' this role would provoke embarrassment. People who stuck to these old ways of relating were running the risk of being seen as bores, as lacking any talent for 'the jazz of human exchange' (Hochschild, 1983). Hence, new forms of relaxed, 'loose', and 'natural' behaviours were developed.

All of this also helps one to understand changes in the practices and ideals in raising children. In the old and new middle classes, parents who themselves had learned to behave in a rather reserved, inhibited and indirect manner, and to conceal their 'innermost feelings behind a restrained observance of conventional forms' (Goudsblom, 1968: 30), became charmed and fascinated by the more outright, spontaneous, straightforward and direct behaviour of children. This attractiveness of the (more) 'natural' functioned as a catalyst to the emancipation of emotions.

As 'ease' and 'naturalness' gained importance, and demands for individual authenticity and a socially more meaningful personal identity rose, to behave according to a set of fixed rules of manners increasingly came to be experienced as rigid and stiff, and their performance as too obvious and predictable, as 'insincere', even as 'fraudulent' or as 'deceit'. In its wake, for example, the mourning ritual was minimized (Wouters, 2002: 7). This means that traditional ways of behaving and regulating emotions have been losing part of their 'defensive' or 'protective' function. The former formal codes had functioned as a defence against dangers and fears which were now diminished, or could be avoided or controlled in more varied and subtle ways – ways in which both social superiority and inferiority were less explicitly and less extremely expressed. Increasing numbers of people pressured each other to develop more differentiated and flexible patterns of self-regulation, triggering a further impetus towards higher levels of social knowledge, self-knowledge and reflectivity.

### **Emancipation of emotions – rise of a 'third-nature' personality**

As most social codes have been becoming more flexible and differentiated, manners and emotion regulation have also been becoming more decisive criteria for status or reputation. People have been pressurizing each other to become less stiff but more cautious, that is, more conscious of social and individual options and restrictions, and this has been putting social and self-knowledge in greater demand. The same goes for the ability to empathize and to take on others' roles. Respect and respectable behaviour have been becoming more dependent upon self-regulation.

Between the 1950s and 1980s, these processes of social and psychic emancipation and integration accelerated dramatically. Together with the old conviction that being open to such 'dangerous' emotions would almost irrevocably be followed by acting upon them, many varieties of the fear of the slippery slope were destroyed. The dominant mode of self-regulation had<sup>[153]</sup> reached a strength and scope that increasingly enabled people to admit to themselves and to others to having 'dangerous' emotions, without provoking shame, particularly the shame-fear of losing control, and having to 'give in to' and act upon these feelings. This kind of self-regulation implies that emotions, even those which could provoke physical and sexual violence, have become more easily accessible, while their control is less strongly based upon a commanding conscience, functioning more or less automatically as a 'second nature'.

In the course of the integration of 'lower' social groups within Western societies and the subsequent emancipation and integration of 'lower' impulses and emotions in personality, both psychic and social censorship declined. The fear and awe of fantasy or dissident imagination diminished together with the fear and awe of the authorities of state and conscience. There was a significant spread of more and more unconcealed expressions of insubordination, sex and violence, particularly in the realms of imagination and amusement. Ego functions came to dominate conscience or superego functions, and a more ego-dominated pattern of self-regulation spread. To the extent that it has become 'natural' to perceive the pulls and pushes both of 'first nature' and 'second nature', as well as the dangers and chances, short-term and long-term, of any particular situation or relation, a 'third

nature' has been developing. Increasing numbers of people have become aware of emotions and temptations in circumstances where shame-fears and dangers had been dominant before.

Obviously, this emancipation of emotion involves an attempt at reaching back to 'first nature' without losing any of the control that was provided by 'second nature'. Thus, the rise of a 'third-nature personality' demands and depends on an emancipation of 'first nature' as well as 'second nature'. Of this development, the history of the corset may serve as a didactic example.

Wearing a corset spread from Spanish aristocratic women in the sixteenth century to other strata and other countries, and it flourished in the nineteenth century. The spread of the corset symbolizes the spread of increasing control over the body – loose clothes came to indicate loose morals. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, as for instance in the movement for reform of clothing, ideals of naturalness amalgamated with ideals of beauty. From that time onwards until the 1960s, the boned corset came to be used only as an orthopaedic gadget for female bodies gone out of control, ones that burst the bounds of the prevailing standard of beauty. This standard increasingly contained ideals of naturalness, but not without control: much female flesh that was not quantitatively excessive remained controlled by corset-like underwear, girdles, straps, corselets, and bras. Only at the end of the 1960s did women succeed in liberating their bodies from this kind of control. However, it was not a full liberation. It was clearly a controlled decontrolling, while the control of the corset over the body was continued as self-control: women turned heavily to diets, sports, aerobics, fitness, home trainers, and other forms of 'working the body' such as plastic surgery (Steele, 2001). Since the 1980s, a stylized visible corset has reappeared as a playfully provocative form of erotic display, but as<sup>[154]</sup>it is taken for granted that the women who wear one do not need such a corset for controlling their bodies, the visible corset can also be taken as a symbol of how ideals of beauty, naturalness, and self-control have merged with each other – another indication of the spread of a third-nature personality.

### **Sociogenesis and psychogenesis of a third-nature personality**

The spread of 'third nature' was embedded in national, continental, and global integration processes, exerting pressure towards increasingly differentiated regimes of manners, and also towards increasingly reflective and flexible regimes of self-regulation. These trends accelerated in the period after the Second World War in processes of global emancipation (including decolonization) and diminishing power differences. Expanding networks of interdependence incited rising levels of mutual identification: ideals of equality and mutual consent spread and gained strength. It was on this basis that in the 1950s and 1960s avoidance behaviour came to be less and less rigidly directed at 'lower-class' people and 'lower' emotions, that behavioural and emotional alternatives expanded, and that there was a spurt in the emancipation of emotions, accompanied by a shift from conscience to consciousness (to use this shorthand expression). In this way, the social processes in which relations and manners between social groups became less rigid and hierarchical are connected with psychic processes in which relations between the psychic functions of people's emotions and impulses became more open and fluent. A self-regulation via the rather automatically functioning

counter-emotions and counter-impulses of conscience was losing out to a regulation via consciousness. As social and psychic dividing lines opened up, social groups as well as psychic functions became more integrated – that is, the communications and connections between both social groups and psychic functions have become more flowing and flexible. Lo and behold: the sociogenesis and psychogenesis of a third-nature personality!

There was, however, one important exception to the expansion of behavioural and emotional alternatives: the social codes increasingly came to dictate that overt expression of inferiority and superiority feelings be avoided. The avoidance of these feelings and of behaviour that expressed them was a confirmation of social equalization and a necessary condition for informalization to occur. Thus, there was a further curbing of emotions in relation to the display of arrogance or self-aggrandizement, and ‘self-humiliation’. These displays were either banished to the realm of imagination, games and sports, or compartmentalized behind the social and psychic scenes. The latter leads to hiding superiority and inferiority feelings, and this process can be interpreted as a counter-trend or, at least partly, as a reversal of the direction of the main process.

From this perspective arises a question of major social and psychic importance: will processes of an *emancipation of emotions* and *controlled decontrolling of* <sup>[155]</sup> *emotional controls* continue and eventually come to include more feelings of superiority and inferiority? Will feelings of inferiority and superiority be further admitted into consciousness, while, at the same time, they come under a stronger, a more comprehensive, more stable and subtle internal (ego) control, one that is sharply scrutinized and thus backed up by external social controls? The answer to these questions strongly depends, of course, on the future of integration processes and their inherent integration conflicts. Will these integration conflicts remain sufficiently controlled and contained? The opposite, however, is true also: the control and containment of social integration conflicts depends to a large extent on the degree of control over superiority feelings in the societies of the established: on their degree of informalization.

Again and again, from the suicide bomber to the ‘war president’, superiority and inferiority feelings appear to be directly and highly significant for understanding why social and psychic conflicts erupt in violence. From this perspective, it seems highly relevant to analyse and interpret the emotions connected with longings and triumphs, humiliations and defeats, and focus on the regulation of emotions and impulses connected with the struggle for power, status and human value, particularly feelings of inferiority and superiority.

Within the sociology of emotions, few sociologists study these feelings and hardly any psychologist takes this type of study to the level of power and status competition between groups and societies. At this point, nearing the end of this contribution, it must suffice to sketch a few significant changes in the social and individual regulation of a specific type of inferiority feelings: shame and guilt. The focus is on broad changes in the meaning and experience of guilt and shame, and in the practice of shaming.

### **A shift from guilt to shame and shaming**

In the 1960s and 1970s, the acceleration in the shift from a second-nature towards a third-nature personality involved a different function for, and appreciation of guilt. In comparing the three types of persons that he distinguished— tradition-directed, inner-directed, and other-directed – Riesman wrote about the inner-directed type: ‘He goes through life less independent than he seems, obeying his inner piloting. Getting off course, whether in response to inner impulses or to the fluctuating voices of contemporaries, may lead to the feeling of guilt.’ In contrast, ‘the other-directed person must be able to receive signals from far and near; the sources are many, the changes rapid. . . . As against guilt-and-shame controls, though of course these survive, one prime psychological lever of the other-directed person is a diffuse anxiety’ (1950: 24–5). These words can be read as a harbinger of the widespread attack on guilt and guilt feelings in the 1960s and 1970s, expressed through the widely used words ‘guilt trip’ in exclamations like ‘Don’t lay that guilt trip on me!’. Ralph Turner observed that ‘guilt becomes an evil thing. It becomes the impediment to individual autonomy and to an individual sense of worth. Guilt is the invasion of the self by arbitrary<sup>[156]</sup> and external standards’ (1969: 402). This social movement was mirrored in changing opinions about guilt in criminal law and punishment, as well as in a critique of the attribution of blame as a means of orientation (van Benthem vanden Bergh, 1986), and in the ‘self psychology’ of Kohut (1977).

Guilt feelings came to be experienced more strongly as indicative of a conscience-ridden personality make-up and, therefore, as an anxiety to be mastered. They came to be seen as a symbol and a symptom of a commanding and rather automatically functioning conscience. Thus, in fact, guilt was rejected for being an internalized form of shame that functions as a form of rigid self-constraint.

In comparison, shame feelings that have been less internalized and which, therefore, function less rigidly and automatically than do guilt feelings, are more strongly experienced as external constraints. They refer more directly to other people and also, of course, to the fact that one’s conscience is at least partly in agreement with these others. This perspective opens a window on to the reasons why the shift from a superego-dominated personality in the direction of an ego-dominated personality has coincided with a decline in the status of guilt, both as a feeling and as a concept.

This trend seems to be a reversal of the direction of development from a shame-culture to a guilt-culture, as it has been represented in an extensive body of literature, especially in the ‘culture and personality’ school of anthropology, of which Ruth Benedict’s *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1946) is a classic example. In the informalization process of the twentieth century, this development from a shame-culture to a guilt-culture seems to have been reversed: from a guilt-culture to a shame-culture. It would be absurd, however, to equate the pattern of shame in what has been described as shame-cultures with the pattern of shame in informalized societies. Obviously, a distinction between two types of shame mechanisms – or better, shaming mechanisms – corresponding to (at least) two types of external constraints is needed (see Schröter, 1997: 102–4), just as much as is a distinction between two types of shame-culture.

**Traditional shame-cultures, inner-directed guilt-cultures, other-directed shame-cultures**

In traditional shame-cultures, shaming is a form of external social control exercised mainly to prevent people from engaging with opportunities to go against the codes. If they had done so anyway, shaming techniques such as the pillory functioned to punish them. Continued shaming processes fuelled these external social controls to become transformed into habitual self-controls, resulting in the making of a guilt-ridden second-nature type of personality. In people with this inner-directed type of personality, the shame-fear of being unable to control affects in accordance with the prevailing regimes of manners and emotions was internalized, placed under the authority of a rigorous conscience, and experienced as guilt. Johan Goudsblom has argued that the<sup>[157]</sup> authorities of state and church were at the cradle of this process. Seen from a developmental sociological perspective, he writes, a process of differentiation has taken place, in the course of which a number of causes for shame were gradually brought under the control of more centralized institutions, the state and the church. Part of the burden of shame was converted into guilt by virtue of those institutions which developed special branches for meting out punishment. Other institutions, especially the family, adjusted to this penal pattern.

In society at large, it was the state and the church that created guilt-generating forms of punishment. In doing so, both state and church have strengthened the processes of conscience formation. The confessional and the courtroom were the material reflections of the effort to replace shaming rituals by more rational forms of accusation, allowing the victims (be they 'culprits' or 'sinners') the possibility of appeal according to written rules. (2007: 15)

From this perspective, in which guilt appears mainly as the product of new forms of shaming, to conceptualize more recent changes as a transformation from a guilt-culture to a new shame-culture may not seem very illuminating.

Yet doing so might add to the meaningfulness of Riesman's concept 'other-directedness'. It draws attention to a change in the pattern of self-regulation in the direction of less inner-directedness – in the sense of bowing to the rules of a rigorous conscience – and greater awareness of others and of the pressures they exercise, or have exercised in the past. For the *emancipation of emotions* also implied that more and more people increasingly became conscious of emotions that, as a rule in the past, had been either ignored or concealed for fear of parents and others on whom they were dependent. In the informalization spurt of the 1960s and 1970s, many people discovered that self-restraints of all kinds were in fact constraints by others, or at least based upon such external constraints (Wouters, 1990: 53). Thus, processes of psychologization and sociologization were tightly interwoven.

As the range of behavioural and emotional alternatives expanded in processes of informalization, avoiding shame and shaming became increasingly dependent upon the ways in which individuals control and regulate their manners and emotions. Self-regulation increasingly became both the focus *and* the locus of external social controls. The implied reading of the two shame cultures shows a markedly different balance of controls. The same goes for balances of power and also for two other balances. Whereas the regime of emotions in the old shame-culture was characterized by a we-I balance (Elias, 2010 [1987]) that is strongly tilted to the side of the we, the we-I balance in the regime of the recent shame-culture is strongly tilted to the I. Likewise there is a commensurably strong tilting in the balance of



involvement and detachment: emotion regulation in the old shame-culture was characterized by relatively low levels of detachment, while the new shame-culture has relatively high levels. Yet, no matter how the controlling of shame-fears in new shame-cultures of other-directed persons may differ from that of the old shame-culture of tradition-directed persons, their concern has remained the same: status degradation, loss of human value, respect<sup>[158]</sup> and self-respect. The comparison of old and new forms of shaming and shame-cultures reveals a trend towards developing increasingly reflexive and flexible regimes of self-regulation, demonstrating a rising level of reflexive ‘civilizing’ of social and psychic authorities. This development has triggered and strengthened informalization processes and the rise of a ‘third-nature’ type of personality. If continued, feelings of inferiority and superiority will be further admitted into consciousness, while, at the same time, they come under a stronger, a more comprehensive, more stable and subtle internal (self-)control, one that is sharply scrutinised and thus backed up by external social controls. From a perspective on a lower level of reflexive ‘civilizing’ of social and psychic authorities, this may seem like dancing on a slippery slope.

### Notes

- 1 The term ‘first nature’ refers to the needs and affects that stem from the ‘animalic nature’ that human beings share with many other animals. Human ‘first nature’ has a very high degree of plasticity and is always subjected to external and internal controls. It is ‘nature’, yet never without regulation.
- 2 The word ‘regained’ cannot be taken literally, of course, as emotions that find more or less direct expression in behaviour differ from emotions that find access into a type of consciousness that allows for processing them into a large variety of ways of expressing and/or repressing them.
- 3 In this example, reaching back to ‘first nature’ refers to regulating the naked body – which clearly demonstrates that I do not believe we can ever get to ‘first nature’. But I do believe we shall continue with attempts at authenticity – that perfect balance of first, second and third nature.

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