The Slippery Slope and the Emancipation of Emotions[1]

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**Introduction**

This chapter aims at showing how overall trends in Western regimes of manners within the twentieth century, and in earlier centuries, have been connected to general trends in self-regulation. After a preliminary section on my theoretical framework, focusing on three central functions of a 'good society' and its code of manners, I will first concentrate on a long-term trend that was dominant until the last quarter of the nineteenth century: the trend of formalizing manners and disciplining people. Driven by the disciplinary forces of state formation and market expansion, 'dangerous' emotions such as those related to physical violence came to be avoided in increasingly automatic ways, that is, increasingly regulated by the inner fears of a rather rigid and authoritarian conscience. A 'second-nature', that is, a conscience-dominated type of personality was in the making. This process accelerated in the period in which entrepreneurial and professional bourgeois classes entered and came to dominate the centres of power and their 'good society'.

Then, I will focus on the last decades of the nineteenth century, when the long-term phase of formalizing manners and disciplining people turned into a long-term phase of informalization of manners and 'emancipation of emotions': emotions that had been denied and repressed (re)gained access to consciousness and wider acceptance in social codes. This phase has continued throughout the twentieth century to the present. The following fairly recent examples will provide an initial visualisation of the long-term processes of informalization of manners and 'emancipation of emotions'.

During the 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 World War II, 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 be afraid was experienced as stepping 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, it has become quite common to admit feeling this or that, hate or lust, anger or envy, and yet to act quite different, playful and subtle. 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, effecting to 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). A last example concerns divorce. The traditional expectation that divorced couples would stop seeing each other has changed about 180 degrees into the present expectation to have a 'good after-marriage', that is, to maintain a friendly relationship or work towards developing one (Veeninga, 2008).

At the end of this chapter, 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' personality. The 'slippery slope' serves as a running example.

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

As Norbert Elias (2000) has shown, changes in manners open a window onto changes in the relations *between* people, as well as onto changes in people, that is, in their demands for emotion 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. As the maintenance and improvement of occupational and political positions of power depends on building trust, that is, on making friends and acquaintances in the field, all involved practice the custom of inviting each other to dinner and to other sociable occasions, such as parties. Thus, by participating in the circles and gatherings of good society, they continue to seek the protection and reinforcement of their occupational and political interests.

The codes of a good society have three functions: 1) a modelling function, 2) a representational function, and 3) a function to regulate social mobility and status competition. These three functions are also operative in layers of good society further down the social ladder, or in the country or provinces.

(1) As the codes of good society are 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 and court society 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 former had to show more respect for the ideals, sentiments, morals, and manners of the latter. 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 nineteenth-century good societies, 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, as 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-restraint. 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, p. 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 groups which have risen 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 – being a shorthand expression for the mentality, the whole distinctive emotional make-up of the people who are thus bonded together. The sediments 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 to 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, p. 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 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). 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, p. 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], p. 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.

**The moral solidity of nineteenth-century bourgeois men**

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 private 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 'nothing makes a man look more ridiculous in the eyes of the world than a socially helpless wife' (Klickman, 1902, p. 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 and politics.

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.[2] Therefore, the questions who was properly introduced or introducible, and who was not, were equally important. To spot undesirables and to keep one's distance from strangers was a matter of great concern. 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.

**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 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, p. 58).

Playing a single game of cards with strangers, for example, would 'always end in trouble, often in despair, and sometimes in suicide', an early nineteenth-century advice book warned. In her study of Dutch books of this genre, the author concluded that, by its nature, any careless

indulgence in pleasure would lead to 'a lethal fall' (Tilburg, 1998, p. 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, or by specific non-manual occupations 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, p. 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, p. 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. 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.

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. 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 called inner directed.

**The longing for total belonging and total 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 an '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' (Frykman and Löfgren, 1987, pp. 55, 52). These decades saw the genesis of sports as an important part of public life (Elias and Dunning, 1986). It seems likely that most of them became fashionable and popular, at least partly, because practicing 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 'an abhorrence for "natural ways" together with a longing and fascination for "the natural way of life"' (1987, p. 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. … 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, pp. 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.

**Rising social and psychic control over superiority feelings and displays**

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 nouveau riche 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 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 –, but rather, more 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, p. 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, p. 2) are examples of social avoidance internalized: from avoiding lower-class people, to avoiding layers of superiority feelings.

Display of such feelings 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 <u>between </u>people into tensions <u>within</u> 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.

**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, p. 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, p. 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 particularly 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.

**'To strive after nature': The constraint to be unconstrained**

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 an increasing constraint 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. 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, experienced previously 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 obvious a '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' behaviour 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, p. 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, p. 7). This means that traditional ways of behaving and regulating emotions have been losing part of their 'defence' 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 reflexivity.

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

The period after World War II was characterized by decolonization, global emancipation, and democratization. These national, continental, and global integration processes have exerted pressure towards increasingly differentiated regimes of manners, expanding behavioural and emotional alternatives, and also towards increasingly reflexive and flexible regimes of self-regulation. This was a period of rapidly expanding interdependencies and rising levels of mutual identification, in which ideals of equality and mutual consent spread and gained strength. On this basis, avoidance behaviour came to be less and less rigidly directed at 'lower-class' people and 'lower' emotions, and the emancipation of emotions was accompanied by a shift from conscience to consciousness (to use this shorthand expression).

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. But also the politics and policies concerning the beginning and the end of life (sexuality, abortion, euthanasia) and concerning soft and hard drugs have been demanding rising degrees of mastering the fear of the slippery slope from both citizens and politicians. At the same time, provoking the established and protesting against the establishment has not only become

emotionally gratifying but has also become politically and economically rewarding. In many countries, political parties have come to thrive on this sentiment and populist politicians pluck the heart strings of the common people by presenting themselves as very different from these worthy gentlemen of the old political establishment, as counter-politicians so to speak. And the economic viability of provocative clothing brands like 'porn star' (US), 'FCUK' (UK) and 'CCCP' (Dutch) indicate that many people have come to take provocative pleasure in wearing T-shirts and caps with PORN STAR on them, and shirts and sweaters with a great FCUK or, in addition to a small emblem with the hammer and sickle symbol, a huge CCCP on them. A daring competition in provocation has indeed been a motor of the informalization process.

The emancipation of emotions could become dominant only at a moment when social/national differentiation and integration had expanded to a level on which its inherent motor – status competition – increasingly came to demand the 'personality capital' needed for a *controlled decontrolling of emotional controls* and rising mastery of the fear of the slippery slope. Indeed, as most social codes were becoming more flexible and differentiated, manners and emotion regulation were also becoming more decisive criteria for status or reputation. Under this pressure of social competition, people have urged 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 disappeared. The dominant mode of self-regulation had 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. 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'. 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 of both '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 emotions 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' and increasing control over the fear of the slippery slope.

The term 'third nature' refers to a level of consciousness and calculation in which all types of constraints and possibilities are taken into account. In this way, social processes in which relations and manners between social groups have become less rigid and hierarchical, are connected with psychic processes in which relations between the psychic functions of people's emotions and impulses have become more open and fluent. A self-regulation via the rather automatically functioning counter-emotions and counter-impulses of conscience has lost 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'!

**Feelings of superiority and inferiority: a counter-trend?**

Several emotions that counted as 'dangerous' have come to be recognised as normal aspects of emotional life. 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. From the 1960s onward, the fear of being tempted increasingly concerns feeling superior or inferior. 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.

The fear of displaying these feelings surfaces in all media training, whether for managers or politicians. The need to be informal and down-home friendly, to avoid any impression of superiority, intellectual or otherwise, to avoid jargon and convey inclusiveness to all groups concerned – this all enters into the basic symbolism of contemporary political and managerial processes. It signifies that feelings of superiority and inferiority are excluded from the emancipation of emotions and that the taboo on displaying these emotions is rather increasing than decreasing.

Through psychoanalysis and other forms of psychotherapy, a rich tradition of recalling and interpreting sexual impulses and emotions has come into existence and spilled over into all walks of life. By contrast, there is hardly any tradition of analysing and interpreting emotions and impulses connected with the struggle for power and status, particularly feelings

14

of inferiority and superiority. And yet, again and again, from the suicide bomber to the 'president of war', these feelings appear to be directly and highly significant for understanding why social and psychic conflicts erupt in violence.

From this perspective, a question of major importance concerns whether processes of emancipation of emotions and *controlled decontrolling of emotional controls* will 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.

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**Notes**

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[1] This chapter is based upon a study of changes in manners books from the end of the nineteenth to the beginning of the twenty-first century. It is one of the results from a research project of many years, the purpose of which was to find, compare and interpret changes in American, Dutch, English and German manners books. The project has resulted in two books, *Sex and Manners* (2004) and *Informalization* (2007). A different version of this chapter will appear in the Sociological Review Monograph: *Norbert Elias and Figurational Research: Processual Thinking in Sociology* (Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford 2011).

[2] Domestic servants are an exception, yet preferably treated as if they were equals by asking as a favour something that cannot be refused. In his novel *Snobs*, Julian Fellowes explains 'It is all part of the aristocracy's consciously created image. They like to pride themselves on being "marvellous with servants"' (2005, p. 309).