Norbert Elias & Empirical Research

Edited by Tatiana Savoia Landini
& François Dépelteau

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NORBERT ELIAS AND EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2014

First published in 2014 by PALGRAVE MACMILLAN® in the United States—a division of St. Martin's Press LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

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ISBN: 978-1-137-31213-6

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Norbert Elias and empirical research / edited by François Dépelteau and Tatiana Savoia Landini.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-137-31213-6 (hardcover : alk. paper)

1. Elias, Norbert, 1897–1990. 2. Sociology—Europe—Philosophy. 3. Civilization—Philosophy. I. Dépelteau, François, 1963– II. Landini, Tatiana Savoia.

HM479.E38N653 2014

301.072—dc23 2014003483

A catalogue record of the book is available from the British Library.

Design by Amnet.

First edition: July 2014

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

ISBN 978-1-349-45718-2 ISBN 978-1-137-31214-3 (eBook)

DOI 10.1057/9781137312143

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Introduction

François Dépelteau and Tatiana Savoia Landini

In 2013, we published the book *Norbert Elias and Social Theory* (Dépelteau and Landini 2013), where some aspects of the sociology of Norbert Elias were summarized, criticized, and compared to the works of other significant thinkers, such as Hannah Arendt, Zygmunt Bauman, Pierre Bourdieu, and Sigmund Freud. We believe this type of work can reinforce the understanding and the evaluation of the sociological contribution of an author. Moreover, this critical work is essential in a discipline like sociology since its various theories are more or less compatible angles one can adopt to analyze fluid social processes. As J. M. Domingues explains:

> Sociology is in this regard indispensable. It is the discipline which developed, emerging from secular thought, a direct heir to the Enlightenment and has leant over the most general questions of social organization, seeking to make out, in particular, the characteristics and the meaning of modernity. Its importance is today restated: only by escaping common sense can we pierce through some crucial aspects of our world which remain otherwise inaccessible and thereby devise some possible paths to follow. Social theories, with Marxism on the one hand, and Liberalism, on the other, had their presuppositions of absolute truth and unstoppable progress challenged. We need thus to think of the world and modernity in a more open-ended way and from new angles; in addition, it is necessary that we creatively face-up to the new riddles society poses for us. (2000, vii)

Thus, we coedited both books with this goal in mind: evaluating the relevance of Elias's work as one alternative angle. One important challenge when we evaluate the relevance of any important theory is to understand the meaning of a good "scientific theory" in sociology and how social theories and empirical research are related in "good" research. As is usually the case in the human sciences, there is no established "paradigm"—or no consensus—to guide us. There are different views about what social theories are or should be, and how to assess them. If we agree that social theories are—or should be—more than stories about society or social relations, there are at least two important approaches in the social sciences to explain what good social theories should be. These two

conceptions of social theories refer to incompatible social ontologies and very different ways of viewing the relations between theoretical work and empirical observation.

In short, positivistic sociologists defend one form of dualism: the theory and the empirical world are viewed as separate phenomena that have their own function in sociological research. N. Smelser clearly expressed this idea with his notion of a "model" (synonymous with *theory* for him) when he wrote: "The notion of a model is based on a distinction commonly made in science: that between empirical phenomena (the 'real' world) and the concepts we use to think about empirical phenomena (the 'world of ideas')" (2011, 5).

This positivistic approach is also founded on the principle of causality. In this logic, the main goal of sociologists is to discover social regularities with causal powers, such as social laws, social structures, or social mechanisms. Social theory refers to causal generalizations about social behaviors that take the form of relations between independent variables and dependent variables usually expressed through words or mathematical formulas. In other words, a scientific sociological theory is "a construction of concepts, on the basis of which we make conditional predictions about what we expect to happen in the real world" (Smelser 2011, 5). The main function of empirical observation is to test the validity of a theory through the principle of correspondence: the "world of ideas" has to correspond to the "real world." In K. Popper's terms, empirical tests corroborate or refute social theories.

Two ideas—that concepts could correspond to empirical phenomena and that the social universe can be based on social laws, causal social structures, or social mechanisms—have been contested since the beginning of sociology. For instance, M. Weber explained that concepts are heuristic tools that can help us to have a better understanding of the world, but they should not be mistaken as representations of the "real" world. Of course, Weber said sociologists produce generalizations when they explain social phenomena by comparing them or through the construction of ideal types, but these generalizations should not be seen as real social "things," like when a pattern of relations is presented as a social structure. According to Weber and many others, the object of sociology is the study of social relations between actors and not of causal relations between social things and human beings. The uniformity, the solidity, and the causal powers of social phenomena on actors have been contested also by many non-Weberian sociologists, such as some symbolic interactionists, postmodernists, and relational sociologists. For instance, many of them insist on the importance of human reflexivity as a source of unpredictability in terms of human behaviors and social relations. As a result, social actions and relations are more "liquid" than solid and predictable, as Z. Bauman would say. The existence of social regularities is not denied, and sociological explanations are not necessarily reduced to methodological individualism in these different sociologies. However, so-called social structures are seen as social effects rather than causes; or they are nothing more and nothing less than temporary (and more or less similar) reproduced social relations. If we restrict sociology

to the study of human relations, only people have power over other people, as R. Harré (2002) has explained. The reasoning is the same if we open sociology to the study of nonhuman entities: associations are effects and not causes of human behaviors, as B. Latour would say. It is not so easy to provide a clear definition of a good social theory with these types of sociologies. It might be more accurate to talk about approaches as toolboxes of principles and heuristic concepts that help us to visualize some key characteristics of social processes, networks, figurations, or social fields. As L. de Gusmão has explained, these representations of the social, based on some forms of sociological reflexivity and methods, can be compared to figurative art, where the artist tries to represent one reality even if the painting or sculpture cannot be confused with the represented object: "We have comprehensive descriptions of more or less notable characteristics of specific social worlds, descriptions in which these characteristics are brought together in a coherent and significant frame, whose descriptive richness will depend on the erudition and the level of generality to which the author puts himself. The researcher is like a figurative painter busy in portraying as accurately as possible a given social landscape" (2012, 19, our translation).

As Gusmão has also said, these representations of smaller or larger social processes possess a cognitive value that is independent of the causal explanations they might include. At the end of the day, the readers do, or do not, recognize themselves, their contemporaries, and their social worlds in these social theories.

Just as we did in the first book, in the present work we include texts written by a wide range of researchers coming from many different countries and specializations, and defending—consciously or not—various fundamental views on social theories and the social sciences. It is our belief that this diversity is an important strength of this book. However, we do not think any of the collaborators adopts a positivistic posture; none of them have really tried to *test* Elias's theories. It seems to us that most of the texts, if not all of them, use Elias's concepts as heuristic tools rather than as parts of a system of concepts representing our social universe founded totally, or even mostly, on determining social laws or social structures. Maybe some of the authors would argue that the Eliasian approach leads to the discovery of partially determining social mechanisms, but the classical positivistic relation between theoretical work and the empirical (or "real") world does not really characterize the texts we received for this book.

The many different understandings of Elias's approach one can find here, and the different ways they can be used to discuss various topics, give a nice picture of the possibilities opened by his work in the social sciences. Maybe we can identify two types of texts. Some of the texts might be considered more "orthodox" by focusing, for example, on some aspects of *The Civilizing Process*. Others might be called more "heterodox," or, to quote an expression used by Jurandir Malerba in one of our conversations, some researchers are "freely inspired" by Elias in their respective research.

One last remark before we briefly present the texts. This book is called *Norbert Elias and Empirical Research*, but, like Elias, the two coeditors do not

believe in the classical dualism between the "world of ideas" and the "real world." Norbert Elias always defended the importance of two-way traffic between theoretical work and empirical observation, where one cannot be separated from the other (Elias 1978). As we explained in the introduction to *Norbert Elias and Social Theory*, the decision to publish two separate books was an editorial one. The number of texts being published could hardly fit into one book of a reasonable size. This is one reason we like to view *Norbert Elias and Empirical Research* as a continuation of *Norbert Elias and Social Theory*, not as a separate enterprise.

We present 13 chapters in this book. All these texts refer to concepts and ideas one can find in the work of Norbert Elias, such as the notion of habitus, the directions of the civilizing process, the state formation, and relations of power involving multiple actors. As we will see, the influence of *The Civilizing Process* is predominant, even if some collaborators have also been influenced by other texts from Elias, like *The Established and the Outsiders*, *The Court Society*, *What is Sociology?*, *An Essay on Time*, and *The Loneliness of the Dying*.

The first two chapters are inspired by the first part of *The Civilizing Process* and, more specifically, the methodological idea that we can analyze bestsellers to understand some key social and psychological dimensions of human behaviors in a given time frame.

In the first chapter, H. Béjar analyzes the bestsellers of Bernabé Tierno, a Spanish author who, in her view, represents the popularization of positive psychology. Béjar's understanding is that self-help literature is a functional equivalent and has a similar cultural meaning to the manners books studied by Elias in *The Civilizing Process*. Her argument is that "late modernity is witnessing today a new stage in the civilizing process—that is, *individualization*, which has its own conduct manuals. In these guides interdependence, which constitutes the backbone of sociability, is replaced by the values of independence and self-sufficiency. This transformation of values is part of the progress of therapeutic culture, a manifestation of which can be found in the popularity of self-help books."

In the second chapter, Andréa Borges Leão focuses on travel literature about Brazil. More precisely, she discusses two French books of the mid-nineteenth century with the theory of the civilizing process as a source of inspiration. Her conclusions are that the "interpretations of Brazil emerged amid social, cultural, and psychological transformations of French society. Tighter control of the written word in relation to the New World meant that 'barbarians' and 'savages' were increasingly represented as 'tropical alterities.' This altered perception emerged along with exports of books as France conquered new markets around the world from the mid-nineteenth century onward. Cultural shifts accompanied growing demand and circulation for books."

Three chapters on violence follow. E. Taïeb proposes an analysis of the "civilization of capital punishment in France." At first sight, this chapter might look like the closest attempt made in this book to test the theories of Norbert Elias. Indeed, Taïeb asks whether the theory of the civilizing process is "the most relevant way to think about capital punishment"—a topic that was barely addressed

by Elias in his book. However, Taïeb does more than simply testing Elias's theory by addressing the two following issues: "to restore the possible uses of Elias's approach and the alternate proposals that deviate from it, regarding the issue of capital punishment as well as its publicity . . . (and above all) to show what can be said of the civilizing process in the light of the evolutions of this particular political violence."

J. Pratt writes on the "civilizing and decivilizing characteristics of the contemporary penal field" in English-speaking societies. In this respect, he shows the decline of punishments to the human body, followed by the decline of the death penalty in peacetime, the disappearance of prisons from public sight, and changes in the understanding of punishment. The author uses this empirical research to show that decivilizing processes do not necessarily replace or simply stop civilizing processes, as many would expect. In effect, these two processes can be interdependent "forces" or "tendencies," "both competing with each other and simultaneously shaping and reshaping each other, taking each other into tangential, new, and uncertain directions and territories."

The third chapter on violence is from T. S. Landini. She writes on the subject of sexual violence against children and adolescents in twentieth-century Brazil. Inspired by Norbert Elias's discussion on *Zivilisation* and *Kultur*, Landini studies conceptual changes of the notion of sexual violence, as well as changes in the types of violence that were deemed unacceptable. In other words, Landini studies "not violence in itself but the sensibility that defines it as violence." The discussion, as posed by key experts and social groups, is examined in order to chart the direction of the process that brought sexual violence against children and adolescents from a "minor" problem to the center of public debate in contemporary Brazil.

We have three more chapters influenced in various ways by *The Civilizing Process*. D. Memmi's chapter focuses on the civilizing of life and death in France. This chapter is founded on previous extensive empirical observations on common practices related to birth and death. In other words, D. Memmi's research is on biopolitics, "taken as the *public administration* of humankind as living beings." The author evaluates the relevance of Elias's approach to understanding these social processes. In short, she concludes that the work of M. Foucault can provide "a useful and complementary contribution."

J. Malerba presents a sociohistorical overview of the contribution of the arrival of the Portuguese crown in Rio de Janeiro from 1808 to 1821. The author shows how the new contacts between the arriving Portuguese members of the court and the Brazilian upper class (especially wealthy capitalists) irrevocably changed their respective habitus.

Following, İ. Ö. Kınlı focuses on some important dimensions of the state formation of the Ottoman Empire. She puts the emphasis on the politicoeconomic system and the class formation of this large figuration. She also questions whether two central aspects of *The Civilizing Process*—namely, the "monopoly mechanism" and the "transformation of private into public monopolies"—can be found in the Ottoman Empire.

A processual analysis by F. Dépelteau and R. Hervouet of the metamorphoses of the dacha in Russia and Belarus follows. This analysis shows the dynamic nature of figurations. The perpetuation of the word *dacha* is related, sociologically and historically speaking, to major transformations in daily social practices related to other processes, such as class distinction and class appropriation, a Bolshevik revolution, and the collapse of the Soviet Union and its consequences. Figurations are interdependent. This analysis also reveals that so-called ordinary people are more creative than we might think when social practices are diffused from one elite group to a larger figuration, such as a society.

The last part of the book is comprised of texts referring to the German political context of Norbert Elias, the carnivals during the middle ages, and the notion of time in relation to the civilizing process.

Matt Clement writes on the German political context in which Elias lived, focusing on the period that followed the Weimar years. His main goal is to explain how this context influenced Elias's work. "These short-term events were related to how states were formed, divided, and reformed over longer periods under their specific national conditions. This idea underpinned his magnum opus *The Civilizing Process* in 1938 and was still being reinforced in his later work, where he once again returned to the antinomies of his homeland in *The Germans* (1989)." By "putting German history back into our analysis of Elias," Clement's aim is both to have a better understanding of Elias's writings as well as to raise some questions regarding the twenty-first-century peculiarities of European society "currently mired in crisis and austerity."

J. Šubrt presents Norbert Elias's theory about time, placing it in the large framework of the civilizing process. Elias's book *An Essay on Time* is not so well known as many of his other books, like *The Civilizing Process*, *The Germans*, or *The Established and the Outsiders*. This contributes to the importance of Šubrt's essay. By comparing Elias's approach to that of Durkheim and, moreover, by bringing to the debate other key thinkers on this subject (such as Andrew Abbott and Patrick Baert), Šubrt criticizes Elias for leaving us with an incomplete "interpretation of the phenomenon of time" in his processual sociology.

Through a comparison between Norbert Elias and Mikhail Bakhtin, T. M. Shore provides a short history of laughter and the civilizing process. Shore shows "the evident similarities between Bakhtin's focus upon the 'suspension' of 'established orders' and the 'temporary liberation' of 'truths' during carnival" and Elias's theory of the informalization process. Shore notably insists on "the need to recognize the release of emotions evident over the *long term.*"

The texts presented here, therefore, broach some subjects that were studied by Norbert Elias and others that he never approached. Sociologically speaking, we can say that a theory is still fruitful when the theoretical framework can be used to understand contemporary issues, when the author's discussion can be *continued*—which is very different from *repeated*. We hope the texts presented here will give good material to the reader to reach his or her own conclusion about Norbert Elias's relevance, and its strengths and limitations.

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CHAPTER 1

Therapeutic Culture and Self-Help Literature: The "Positive Psychology Code"

Helena Béjar

1.

The present chapter is on the sociology of culture. In it, I make use of the theoretical framework of Norbert Elias's *The Civilizing Process.* In the first part of *The Civilizing Process*, Elias analyzed the major European manner books. These were meant to teach courtly behavior to an aristocracy that was leaving war behind as a way of life and becoming a part of the court configuration. Throughout this massive political, social, and cultural change, the new aristocracy was required to tame its impulses and to reduce its violent behavior. (In the second part of Elias's work, and of secondary interest for my analysis, he elaborated a theory of the formation of the modern state.) One of Elias's theses was that the civilizing process entails the development and differentiation of ties of interdependence between people. The development of this interdependence marks the civilization direction from *heterocontrol* (in which people control their behavior through the presence of others) to *self-control* (in which people internalize their social constraints).

I argue that late modernity is witnessing today a new stage in the civilizing process—that is, *individualization*, which has its own conduct manuals. In these guides interdependence, which constitutes the backbone of sociability, is replaced by the values of independence and self-sufficiency. This transformation of values is part of the progress of therapeutic culture, a manifestation of which can be found in the popularity of self-help books. I also argue that advice literature, and especially the self-help genre, constitutes the functional equivalent and has a similar cultural meaning to the literature that Elias studied (Wouters 1995; 1998; 2007). European manuals were designed to dictate behavior in the

domestic and the private sphere, such as at the table and in bed (i.e, the code of *civilité*), and in the public domain of the court, i.e., the code of *politesse*). Likewise, what I call the "psychological code" is meant to prevail within the inner domain of identity (Béjar 1992).

Every code of conduct has an argument that provides justification for why people have to change public behavior in the new social configuration of the court. On the one hand, the codes of *civilité* and that of *politesse* had a social argument that explained the necessity of self-control in the presence of others. By contrast, the psychological code replaces the social argument by a self-referential narrative that teaches one how to build a strong personal identity. The psychological code stresses introspection and brackets the social world. Both the ideal and the practice of a good life are not any longer moral but psychological (Rose, 1990). Psychology is defining the new ethical fabric of late modernity. This is connected with the cultural spreading of emotivism (MacIntyre 1982), which should be understood not so much as an ethical theory but as a worldview that puts feelings and wishes at the center of individual action and moral reasoning. An emotivistic culture has a thin and contingent perspective of morality. I also argue that the rules of the psychological code are creating a new form of cultural conformism. Those rules imply a *psychological governmentality* that dictates how we must feel, how we must relate to others, how we must perceive ourselves in order to comply with the narrative of a healthy and balanced self.

This chapter has two parts. The first one is primarily descriptive, and presents critically and briefly the most important sociological works on etiquette and advice books. My aim is mainly to review the theoretical frame of therapeutic culture in order to claim that it is a legitimate object of sociological research. I review four authors: firstly, Cas Wouters and his analysis of etiquette books; secondly, Arlie Russell Hochschild and her perspective on self-help books as texts that deal with norms of caring; thirdly, Nikolas Rose and his disciplinary approach for which both scientific and popular psychology shape a new *techne*; and lastly, Eva Illouz and her pragmatist interest in how advice literature may be a cultural resource for individuals in late modernity.

The second part is more interpretive. I analyze some of the books of Bernabé Tierno, a psychologist from Spain who claims to be a representative of what I call the "positive psychology code" which has been very influential in recent years, not only in the self-help genre but also in the most important popular psychology journals, *Psychology Today* (in the United States) and *Psychologies* (in France and Spain).[1] I have chosen Bernabé Tierno because his works, all of them bestsellers in the self-help genre, are openly evaluative. Tierno makes possible a rich analysis of the idea both of the canon of the self and the personal ties in contemporary therapeutic culture. He presents his works explicitly as advice books that contain guides of conduct, both for the care of the self and for personal relationships. His openly normative tone is not often found among the authors of self-help literature, who claim generally to be scientific and therefore try to avoid explicit advice and moral judgments. (This is the case with Castanyer

2004 and Alava Reyes 2007, in the production of this genre in Spain.) On the contrary, Tierno expresses a very transparent and extreme version of what I call the "positive psychology code." Thus, Bernabé Tierno's texts are a case in point of an advice literature that highlights the current perspective of the psychological worldview.

2.

The civilizing process runs parallel both to the building of the modern state and to individualization. Individualization is seen as a late-modern development, and it engenders a subject characterized by hyperrationality. Anthony Giddens depicts this subject in his analysis of a type of intimacy made up of "pure relationships" and "confluent love" (Giddens 1995, 1997). According to him, individuals in late modernity are autonomous electors who choose, from a "menu of options," how to manage their lives. A democratic intimacy that is continually negotiated and challenging is a crucial part of this view of life, which brings with it a reflexive and belabored self. From a less optimistic perspective, individualization may be understood as the cultural frame of personal anomic relationships that increase moral chaos and uncertainty (Beck and Gernstein 2004; 2001). Finally individualization is the core of what Bauman calls "liquid modernity" (Bauman 2001; 2002; 2005). (I mention only the most important works on intimacy in contemporary sociology.) In liquid modernity, men and women are forced to become aware of the uncertainty of their futures in all fields, mainly in the spheres of love and work. They are also compelled to accept that this contingency is inevitable. In contrast to Giddens's optimism, Bauman claims that rationality and reflexivity are impotent tools for the contemporary individual. Whereas solid modernity anchored men and women in durable institutions that helped define personal goals, liquid modernity creates individuals disembedded from institutions and alone with their worries. At the same time, liquid society dictates that they ought to be able to control their future and "to surf" the present. From different theoretical perspectives, all these authors point to the cultural imperative of an individual as a rational decision maker who has to design his or her life by choosing from a menu of options among a variety of lifestyles.

In the context of individualization, therapeutic culture thrives, both in its scientific and in its popular versions. Self-help literature deals with the ideal of the self and the private domain, and it shapes rules regarding feelings and appropriate conduct. Thus, they elaborate on the emotional management of worry, loss, and grief, as well as on correct behavior in the private and the public arenas. This is why such texts constitute a key source to study the affective economy of our times.

There are four main authors who have studied manuals of conduct. Cas Wouters analyzes etiquette books within "the informalization process" (Wouters 1995; 2001; 2007)—that is, the constraint to become informalized in interactions. The decreasing of rigidity in manners in everyday life—such as introductions,

the use of first names, and the "social kiss"—is intimately tied with the ongoing process of democratization. Wouters stresses the tendency in the etiquette books genre to skip the social markers, especially the status of the reader. This is a feature that is common to the self-help genre. Advice literature is directed to all social classes, and Wouters stresses the diminishing of social and psychic distance between individuals. He analyzes how the manuals teach how to be "natural." In the same vein, informalization demands that one has to be natural and at ease, a mandate that is now considered a social skill. Self-help literature commands, also, the reader to become authentic and positive. Authenticity and optimism are also understood as social abilities, being part of the right psychological capital.

Informalization not only runs parallel to democratization, but also to the contemporary psychologization of behavior. There has been a shift from *command* as the core of conduct in gender ties and in family relations—between parents and children—to *negotiation*. The change from command to negotiation in the private sphere shows how the superego, the nucleus of social obedience and guilt, has been replaced by the ego (Kilminster 2008). The progress of the "psychomorphic view" of reality (Sennett 1977) extends the cultural obligation of the presentation of the self, not as much after Goffman but as after Goleman's indictments of emotional and social intelligences (Goleman 1995; 2006). This psychologization of reality leads to an increasing self-awareness and to a continual reflexivity and self-monitorization.

Wouters argues that emotion management may be a source of personal power and that it shapes the present sense of *self-respect*. I want to stress that in our times self-respect has changed its nature entirely. The therapeutic culture has translated *self-respect* into *self-esteem*, a self-referential concept detached from moral and social anchors.

The second approach to analyzing self-help books is from Arlie Russell Hochschild. Her assumption is that every culture has its own emotional bible, containing a dictionary of the most important terms that define what one should and should not feel. The elements of these frames (Goffman 1974) indicate how we use emotional expression. Hochschild distances herself from an organicistic approach (such as Freud, Darwin, and James adopted) in which emotion is, above all, a biological process ruled by instincts, impulses, and drives and that is notable for a deterministic vision that the past plays over emotional life. Opposed to the organicistic approach, Hochschild embraces the interactional approach (which includes the works of Dewey and Goffman), focusing on the situation and "emotion management."

From a critical perspective, Hochschild analyzes self-help books representing the current power of psychological experts (Hochschild 2003), who are self-appointed authorities on how modern men and women should feel. Self-help literature belongs to popular psychology. It offers rules on how to feel and act conveniently that work as emotional advisers and "cultural intermediaries" for current norms in everyday life. In this sense, self-help books urge the application of emotional practice and guidelines and invite a person to feel a specific

emotion, for example self-confidence. Hochschild theorizes about the construction of "deep acting" (Hochschild 1983), which is intended to generate feelings that become real through controlling an individual's performance and the ensuing change of feelings. In this regard, self-help books teach us how to create a distant self that controls specific social situations.

Accordingly, in her analyses, she determines whether a text is "warm" (in other words, if it legitimizes a high level of involvement in the needs of others) or "cold" (that is, if it proclaims values such as caution and detachment). Hochschild studies how self-help manuals have gone from valuing trust and care (from parents, from children, from partners) to emphasizing a self-sufficiency that stresses the fact that individuals must make do with limited support. Therefore, advice literature shows the advancement of self-control in new ways. The most important emotional work demands to know how to control fear and vulnerability, as well as the desire to receive comfort (Hochschild 2008; 2012). The chilly tone of texts that teach us how to behave and how to feel proposes a self that must define itself without needs and relate to other selves with similar characteristics—selves without dependencies that are interpreted as baggage and burdens to be done away with. This expresses a survivalist emotional strategy (Lasch 1984), which has an elective affinity to flexible capitalism (Sennett 1999; Boltanski 1999), which itself creates people who must endure instability and uncertainty theorized as inevitable.

Hochschild's work is very brave because it ridicules feminism that, by insisting on equality, has opened the door to the "commercialization of intimate life." In other words, the modern woman prepares herself for the calling of having it all (a job, a family, prestige, influence, and emotional support), and by doing so she contributes to the "cold-modern" contents of self-help literature that demands a strong and self-reliant subject. In this critique Hochschild advances Illouz's theory and is consistent with Beck's conclusion regarding the pitfalls of modern love.

The third author I am going to highlight is Nikolas Rose, a follower of Michel Foucault and his "disciplinary" approach. Rose takes a position of what he calls an "ethical approach," following Foucault (Foucault 1987; 1988). In other words, he analyzes the types of relationships people have with themselves and strategies for managing the self. These include epistemological knowledge ("know yourself"), "despotic" knowledge (which Foucault finds in the Christian mandate of "control yourself"), and "*le souci de soi*" ("care of the self," such as diet, exercise, stress control, etc.). This "care of the self" contains practical advice for suitable "governing of the self," as well as complex language for speaking about subjectivity (see also Sloterdijk 2012).

Nowadays, psychology has become a way of perceiving reality that not only produces "power effects" but also "truth effects." In other words, it is a way of life and a way of thinking, a *techné*. Rose analyzes the various *psy* disciplines (psychology, psychotherapy, psychoanalysis) as social languages that address subjectivity models and that have become an expert system: "A particular kind of social *authority*, characteristically deployed around *problems*, exercising a certain

diagnostic gaze, grounded in a claim of *truth,* asserting technical *efficacy*, and avowing *human* ethical virtues" (Rose 1998, 86). Psychology has created a new expertise in subjectivity, which considers the self not as a given but rather as a goal containing certain norms. In this sense, what must be analyzed are the "effects of power," the study of words, explanations, and techniques surrounding the self, which involve, in turn, a specific way of understanding and relating to others. This analysis lets us discover a common normativity, a similarity that extends socially into regulatory ideals regarding people. This includes a critical study of the vocabulary, the explanations, and the techniques of the self as well as the appropriate rules for social relationships that can be found in self-help literature.

"Our thought worlds have been reconstructed, our ways of thinking about our personal feelings, our secret hopes, our ambitions and disappointments. Our techniques for managing our emotions have been reshaped. Our very sense of ourselves has been revolutionized. We have become intensely subjective beings" (Rose 1990, 3). And at the center of this conceptual change and practice of individualization, we find psychotherapy, an illustration of the current "truth regime." Psychotherapy (which Rose, like many other English-speaking authors, calls "therapy") is the most widespread example in modernity of what Foucault views as "technologies of the self." These contain ways to reveal the self, to speak to others—as well as to evaluate oneself—to gauge their beliefs and shortcomings. It also contains healing techniques—namely, ways to organize subjective practices to bring about certain behavioral consequences. Psychotherapy simultaneously promotes efficiency, healing, and virtue—especially efficiency. It has become the new truth-and-virtue regime that has replaced the theological and moral regimes. It is the new *government*: "The perspective of *government* draws our attention to all those multitudinous programs, proposals and policies that have attempted to shape the conduct of individuals—not just control, subdue, discipline, normalize, or reform them, but also to make them more intelligent, wise, happy, virtuous, healthy, productive, docile, enterprising, fulfilled, self-esteeming, empowered or whatever" (Rose 1998,12).

Rose is the first author, following in the footsteps of Foucault's late and best work, who discusses the extent of psychological configuration in a critical manner. His use of terms such as "power effects" and "governmentality," among others, frames his arguments within suspicion theory. This is obvious when he embraces the concept of omnipresent power, also in the psychological *techné,* the coercive dimension of which is often overstated. However, his analysis of psychology and psychotherapy contains a viewpoint that is very pertinent and incisive to the study of advice literature.

Psychology, and its practical version, psychotherapy, is the most widespread form of self-inspection in late modernity. This self-inspection is carried out, for example, in cognitive-behavioral psychotherapy by means of daily thought and behavior records, among other self-monitoring methods. These tasks are some of what Rose calls "practices," following Foucault. In addition to self-problematizing, self-monitoring seeks to be regarded as an enriching activity.

According to Rose, psychology establishes an educational model of human problems, which upholds the idea that we are all candidates for intervention. In turn, psychotherapy contains an "educational" pattern of subjectivity that urges the reeducation of the self. This reeducation of the psyche, behavior, or beliefs—according to different schools in psychology—helps manage emotional problems. Psychotherapy and its popular forms create a "pastoral" relationship between a new spiritual guide and flock members who, if they learn the correct techniques, shall achieve a cure (in the psychodynamic version of psychotherapy) or a change in beliefs (in the cognitive behavioral version) that will improve personality and private relationships. By problematizing daily life, everything becomes a matter of introspection. This belief is functional, of course, in extending psychotherapy and the triumph of its professionals (Furedi 2004).

The popular versions of psychotherapy, self-help manuals, promise inner perfection and happiness. Perfection, or at least mood improvement, is achieved through vigilance and ongoing self-control of subjectivity. To achieve happiness, understood as a goal for whoever follows this "regime of truth" and virtue, the dramas of life have to be redefined. What Giddens calls the "fateful moments" are therefore reduced to issues that one must know how to manage correctly. Loneliness, illness, and death are trivialized through the idea that they are opportunities for learning and acquiring inner growth. The psychologization of finitude is another step in the process of a culture that cannot accept suffering (Neiman 2002).

The expert system of psychology offers the "disciple" more than the promise of knowledge, which was the subject of classical philosophy, especially in Stoicism, where Foucault centered his attention. Psychotherapy offers the promise of psychological transformation and with it control over life. The new therapeutics of finitude teaches the patient that suffering has not to be endured. It has been converted into a challenge to a powerful self. In this alchemy of the emotions, the self is restored by believing that it is the master of its own life (Rose 1998).

Psychotherapy as a "technology of the self" also promises a life free of moral judgment by the others. The self is only accountable to itself, and it acquires validation only through self-approval. It also offers the possibility of achieving autonomy through a regime of rational existence devoid of extreme feelings. I argue that this autonomy referred to by Rose has nothing to do with the Kantian requirement of placing moral guidelines on oneself and following universalizable actions. Therapeutic culture and self-help literature stress self-sufficiency as a survivalist value over autonomy. Self-sufficiency is also unrelated to self-mastery as declared in the Stoicism recreated by Foucault. The technology of the self has been released from moral demands, not only because it establishes an asymmetrical relationship with others, but also because it eliminates all social and political understanding of the world. (Along these lines one must care first and foremost for oneself.) In this suspension of the public world, the modern version of the enterprising self is a being that is mainly subjective—a subject who, as a follower of preferences marked by self-interest, understands the market as the center of their social imaginary (Taylor 2004).

Far from this suspicion epistemology, Eva Illouz follows Ann Swidler and her Weberian approach regarding cultural norms (Illouz 2008). Illouz uses the Swidler metaphor of culture as a toolkit for life guidance. From this perspective, culture provides a cognitive map that helps us navigate the social realm. Therefore, Illouz does not consider psychotherapy culture as a new method of coercion, like the Foucauldian approach. Rather, she considers it as a matrix of meanings shaping a new lingua franca, along with liberalism and the language of economic efficiency that is gaining a high level of cultural legitimacy in developed societies.

Illouz offers a "pragmatist approach" to culture and advice literature in particular. She is interested in analyzing how therapeutic culture, in both the scientific version (psychology) and the most popular version (self-help books), is functional and useful to modern men and women. Therapeutic thought has become a cultural resource contributing to making life more bearable. Illouz considers therapeutic culture not as a "biopower"—like Rose—which contributes to self-subjugation. It is rather a new ideology with a set of meanings regarding the self and selfhood that contains the cultural rules of social interaction and sociability. This ideology has cultural repertoires and cultural pegs that change with trends. In this sense, we can remember the imperative of communication (in style during the sixties and seventies), the disapproval of dependency, or the growing value of self-esteem and assertiveness (in fashion since the nineties). These repertoires are internalized and become part of common sense. Psychotherapy is, therefore, a form (in the Simmelian sense), a frame (in the Goffmanian sense), a mode of knowledge that guides interaction. It constitutes a cultural schema, a way to deal with problems that emphasizes techniques, understood as skills to resolve conflicts.

Therapy culture has created its own style of thinking and relating, which Illouz calls "emotional capitalism," that includes metaphors expressing current forms of the self and shapes autobiographical narratives. This style creates what is known as "emotional competence," which may become a useful resource to be used in the private sphere. Illouz claims that the therapeutic model is functional in managing instability in the individual personality and social relationships. In this sense it can be useful for "divergent biographies" because it may help people to tolerate tension, contradictions, and uncertainty in late modernity.

The reference to divergent biographies seems to indicate, in my opinion, an acceptance of the Giddensian model of modern humans as decision makers who seem to be in their element amid uncertainty and unpredictability. These are unlikely subjects who accept instability—at work and in love relationships (the most significant spheres) as something inevitable. Illouz's pragmatist perspective accepts also that emotional competence acts as a substitute for a moral viewpoint regarding personal relationships. In other words, modern cultural legitimacy in the private sphere is no longer moral but rather psychological. In this respect I should highlight that the value of skills (part of emotional competence) in managing privacy and navigating the ups and downs of modern reflexivity has unseated a strong moral perspective (containing values such as commitment,

renunciation, and sacrifice) that used to guide traditional relationships (Bellah 1985). Likewise, emphasis on emotional skill is a symptom of the triumph of the pragmatic repertoire of love over the romantic repertoire, just as Swidler critically concluded.

Illouz is essentially ambivalent about therapeutic culture. On the one hand, she doesn't fully develop her "pragmatist" position because she addresses too many issues, from the development of psychoanalysis in America to the contribution of feminism to emotional capitalism. This broad array of topics weakens her arguments. At the same time, her pragmatic view prevents her from expanding on neoindividualism critiques by Rieff, Sennett, and Bauman (to name but a few of the most important critics) on the condemnation of the new "truth regime" (as considered by Foucault and Rose) and on the commercialization of private life (as Hochschild theorized). Illouz thinks thattherapeutic culture is an intrinsic part of cultural change and must be studied accordingly. However, the alleged functionality of the psychotherapeutic frame is not explained by simply affirming, as Illouz does, that it is a tool offering us guidance in an uncertain world, nor by affirming that "communication" (which, in my opinion, is a value that is now obsolete) is a tool for weathering emotional conflicts. Part of the problem is the scattered empirical material she uses (self-help books, women's magazines, television shows, etc.), which distracts from the main focus—self-help literature.

Illouz admits that emotional capitalism has a dark side. Therapeutic thought winds up reifying personality, turning privacy into a solipsistic obsession and giving rise to a new cultural conformity. In this same vein, her analysis moves closer to critiques of neoindividualism. In fact, in her latest book Illouz takes a clear critical perspective on the therapeutic cultural schema that has colonized the experience and ideal of contemporary love (Illouz 2012). Moreover, Illouz embraces a strong ethical perspective, and she leaves aside the pragmatist view and the ambivalence of her previous work.

In order to analyze the elements of therapeutic culture, and of what I refer to as the "positive psychological code," I analyze some self-help manuals in the next section. Just as Elias studied manner books to explain sociohistoric change, a thorough reading of certain books in the genre self-help literature gives insight into certain changes in cultural norms.

3.

I will now clarify the main elements of some of the behavior manuals written by Bernabé Tierno, a Spanish author whose books are bestsellers and who represents the popularization of positive psychology.

"I hope, dear reader, that this complete manual of positive psychology becomes your inseparable friend forever" (Tierno 2007, 26). These words try to establish a bond of empathy between the reader and the author, who means to present the book as a "friend" throughout the long journey of inner transformation. The general assumption of the positive code is that optimism and pessimism depend

on us and our attitude: "the problems I have created are the result of incorrect thinking, and any problem, real or imaginary, is within myself." (Tierno 2009, 30). According to this code, given that a perception of the world depends on the self, disposition can be changed at will. "Positive" or "negative" attitude may be built anew regardless of outside circumstances that, as is stated by different authors, do not factor any more than 15 or 20 percent in our mood (Seligman 2002; Lyubomirsky 2007; Tierno 2007, 27). This is based on the assertion that "the mind is like a piece of clay that can be molded to fit your heart's desire." (Tierno 2009, 28). The metaphor of the blank slate implies that psychological change, as radical as it may be, is possible. The core promise these manuals offer is salvation through inner change.

It is repeated ad nauseam that optimism and pessimism depend on our attitudes, which are understood as stable predispositions and ways of thinking, feeling, and working in harmony with our values (Tierno 2007, 37). Attitudes are, the author insists, enduring and chosen. Therefore "unhappiness is made." In other words, pessimism is learned: "Unhappy people learned how to be unhappy because that was their decision and, furthermore, because in their own homes they certainly only were taught how to be unhappy" (Tierno 2008, 228). Those who "decided" to be miserable should, therefore, start reeducating themselves to have a positive outlook. The book promises control over fortune by changing subjectivity. This implies, obviously, letting go of the past, of family influences and their lessons of pessimism, hopelessness, and failure. The family is the only institution that Tierno acknowledges, and the references to it are mainly critical. Far from being the core of shaping the self, as in the psychoanalytic tradition, the family is, in the positive code, a hindrance to healthy development.

The positive code is based on the idea that thought—specifically, the attitudes that make up a personal worldview—determine emotions and actions. This assumption is related to the theoretical matrix of cognitive psychology: "What you think about most often determines what you are, the life you lead, your levels of happiness or misery and what you have become or shall become" (Tierno 2009, 273). Therefore, reality will change if thoughts change: "The good life, happiness, inner harmony, *desirable circumstances* . . . are achieved through the right thinking, creating positive feelings and attitudes" (Tierno 2009, 155, emphasis added). This statement would be in agreement with common sense and folkways. (And, if we look back to the history of thought, the link between thought and mood was deeply ingrained in Stoicism.) However, it is one thing to defend the assumption that the way we perceive the world affects our experience. It is another very different thing to jump to the conclusion that we can change our thinking at will: "Open yourself to a world of infinite possibilities" (Tierno 2009, 119). This leap in argument takes place going from an elemental psychological observation (that our attitude affects our feelings) to an expression of magical thought, that people could change themselves if they so desired and, with this inner change, transform external reality (the "desirable circumstances"). According to the positive psychology code, inner change

carries with it liberation from the past. One's past, especially one's childhood, constitutes an unavoidable burden for the psychodynamic approach in general and for psychoanalysis in particular. The weight of the past is carried by us throughout life. This is why psychoanalysis implies a time perspective set in the past. Conversely, the necessary liberation from the past in order to start a new self requires the present to be the time horizon. This is the case of the positive code (Zimbardo 2004).

Tierno insists on the mandate that we must be "architects of our destiny" (Tierno 2007, 31) and undertake a "new route," (Tierno 2007, 27), also that "our lives are no longer led arbitrarily, we are in control" (Tierno 2009, 71). These are some examples of constructionist metaphors that are commonly used in modern self-help literature and in the positive psychology code.[2] The self-control Elias referred to has a social nature because it takes place in social contexts, mainly the court. On the contrary, the individual now appears disembedded from all social contexts and situations. Self-control in the presence of others relies on the positive psychology code of "the ability to determine one's own destiny, one's own fortune and luck, one's own life" (Tierno 2007, 27). In order to create this peculiar *virtú*, one's way of thinking must be drastically changed: "The task for me has always been to demonstrate to patients that they have been *the cause of the problem* because, without noticing, they have negatively programmed their minds" (Tierno 2009, 28, emphasis added). This is a science-based metaphor and a demonstration of an inherent characteristic of this code: once the family influence is eliminated, the patient or the reader is blamed for his or her "negativity," as well as for the difficulty or inability to change to a positive attitude. This is deduced from a psychological idealism that makes thinking the key to reality and its transformation: the self creates its own problems with incorrect thinking because all problems "are within."

The "architect" of one's own destiny must deprogram his or her mind in order to achieve happiness and well-being. Nothing and nobody are responsible for the present and what is to come. Only the self is responsible for its mood. The main mandate of this code is inner change. Therefore, since change—both internal and external—is the result of a frame of mind, the chief goal is to train the self relentlessly in the positive attitude. The positive psychology code contributes to what I call "reflexive responsibility" (Béjar 2007), a sense of responsibility that has become fully psychological because it is morally thin and self-referential. Responsibility is understood as a duty to oneself and not to the others, who have become mere means to one´s inner project. I am following here Bauman's argument when he states that modern individuals face life burdened with the task of forging existence as a destiny that only each individual is responsible for (Bauman 2001). This insistence on inner change is the result of forgetting the cultural, social, and political levels. The positive code participates in this particular psychomorphic vision of reality (Sennett 1979) that blames people for their own misfortune while ignoring causal exterior conditions and imprisoning individuals in their anguished subjectivity.

What is the right path toward change? Adopting "positive emotions" such as enthusiasm, happiness, excitement, acceptance, hope, and resilience (in other words, resistance to frustration)—, in a nutshell, "inner strength" likewise, abandoning "negative emotions" such as disappointment, melancholy, irritability, tedium, and disgust. Within this amalgam of feelings (such as enthusiasm), virtues (such as hope), and emotions (such as disgust), sadness is notable as something that is "not very useful": "I can find almost nothing in this feeling that does me any good, perhaps it is because I am an optimist" (Tierno 2007, 68). Along with sadness, guilt must be eliminated. Tierno makes the distinction between positive guilt, which is used to recognize that we have made a mistake or behaved badly, and negative guilt, which is an ongoing burden that makes it impossible to find "a solution" to a bad situation or interaction. This "solution" is supposedly always present. It is viewed as a skill that must be practiced within an outlook on life that considers diminishing guilt as part of feeling management. "Drained of physical and psychic energy (because of negative guilt) a person becomes anchored down in a stupid negative attitude of complaining and regret" (Tierno 2007, 69). Guilt is the core of a moral individual under psychoanalysis and the result of awareness of the other in a social context. In the positive psychological code, guilt is reduced to a senseless burden.

How are others perceived within this code? Using a medical metaphor, one's fellow human beings are distinguished as: "medicinal people" or "tonic" and "toxic people." These are cliché categories that make reader self-identification easier. If the reader recognizes him- or herself as a "toxic person," the implicit intention is to bring about a change. Tonic people "recharge our batteries"; they are "healthy and constructive." Toxic people "are destructive, oppressive and generate conflicts that drain us of energy while contaminating us with their negativity" (Tierno 2007, 44). Another medical metaphor is used: "negativity" is contagious; you should distance yourself from this plague.

Among "toxic" people we can include those who are "intentionally playing the weakling . . . parasites who will never learn how to build their own lives and who become a heavy and unbearable burden for stronger people and society" (Tierno 2007, 60). Here is an unequivocal expression of stigmatizing the weak as "parasites" to be eliminated because they are a "burden" to positive people. There is also a condemnation of "sickness people," who are destructive and harmful, "people who are lead weights that drag us down" and who "contaminate us with their high toxicity" as opposed to "people who are life rafts that help us float." Pessimism pollutes, contaminates, and makes whoever is nearby ill. One must flee from these "nervous Nellies," from the "weepers and wailers," because "by letting ourselves be moved by their crocodile tears and accepting responsibility for their problems we prevent them from learning to be strong and take responsibility for themselves" (Tierno 2007, 153). These statements indicate a selective and instrumental sociability that recommends distancing oneself from and rejecting the problems of fellow human beings if they obstruct optimism and do not practice a "positive attitude." Cultural condemnation of sadness in the positive code is a cultural advancement of the civilizing process,

which contributes to isolating modern men and women (Elias 1987). Likewise, it is a feature of an emotional culture that requires suppression of intensity (Stearns 2007).

The condemnation of sadness in the positive psychological code can be seen through the rejection of toxic people. On the contrary, "medicinal" people are constructive and exercise a rational egoism: "They practice an 'I-win-you-win' attitude . . . They always bet on the winning horse and know that it is smart to, first and foremost, take care of themselves." The idea of responsibility in this code is self-referential, outside of social interaction and interwoven with the idea of self-sufficiency: "Being in charge of one's own existence, taking the initiative and responding skillfully (responsibly) and wisely for one's own actions" (Tierno 2007, 135). The author, therefore, advocates a strategic self that hinges on a sociability based on the "skill" to overcome one's environment and others. Defeatism is considered toxic. One must learn to "be unavailable" to those who hinder the positive project because of their "emotional instability, people who are depressed, frustrated and ruminant" (Tierno 2007, 126). These people are recommended to seek expert help in order to change their attitudes.

Having a "tonic" or "toxic" personality is described as "All about wanting it! Making the firm decision to adopt, starting now and from now on, a consciously constructive and positive attitude that will create miracles" (Tierno 2007, 109). Using the religious metaphor of drastic change as a miracle, the centrality of willpower is taken as the basis of inner change, hence the notion of freedom, considered as the decision to have the right attitude. Freedom is understood as a measure of willpower and the ongoing exercise of "positive thinking" through routines such as self-examining beliefs, sensations, and actions. These exercises are essential to a cognitivist approach in psychology. Tierno proclaims also the beneficence of "mantras" that will "change the neural circuits" (Tierno 2009, 79). The fatalism in psychoanalysis that burdens one with the weight of the past is substituted with the radical optimism of positive psychology, which believes that attitude can modify both the present and the past: "Medicinal people are perfectly aware that we are products of our history, but at the same time they know that we are completely free to change" (Tierno 2007, 130). Therefore, we can go from being "toxic" to being "tonic" through exercises that change one's attitude. This voluntaristic approach that asserts that people can change their attitude, and with it their circumstances (if they only try), is the core of this code of conduct.

The idea of others—divided between tonic and toxic beings—leads to the issue of altruism, a subject for which the author advises to take an attitude of "live and let live" and not to lose too much time in the problems of other: "People must face up to their own worries." At the same time, he recommends adopting a "happy medium" that provides for an unexcessive generosity that does not let us "forget about ourselves." This hodgepodge of basic tolerance and calculating egoism is topped off by a popular version of an emotivistic self that considers moral judgments as derived from feelings or preferences and that

understands will as the center of action. "The sole reality of distinctively moral discourse is the attempt of one will to align the attitudes, feelings, preferences and choices of another with its own. Others are always means, never ends" (MacIntyre, 1982, 23). The following assertion may be considered in this vein: "Wanting to be good is being good. Goodness is a question of willingness" (Tierno 2007, 222).

Regarding values, the positive code highlights self-sufficiency, which appears under various names: autonomy, independence, and self-determination. Based on these ideals, a person may "feel like master and creator of his own destiny" because this person is "constantly developing." Here there is again the mixture of a constructionist and an organicistic metaphor. In this code the value of self-sufficiency has a survivalist hue: "People have to learn to take care of themselves, to be their own best friend and prevent others from hurting them" (Tierno 2008, 235). "When you have yourself you have everything." Therefore individuals must constitute their own center in order to prevent themselves from falling prey to anxiety.

The second value that is highlighted is self-esteem, akin to "competence" and the feeling of "being capable." (This is what nowadays is called "empowerment" in current sociological terminology and "internal locus of control" in psychology.) Self-esteem is closely related to self-acceptance, a notion that minimizes its moral content through the psychological and self-referential concepts of "self-encouragement" and self-confidence. The emphasis on self-acceptance has an elective affinity with embracing the present-time perspective, whereby one lets go of the past and rises above the uncertainties of the future. This is connected to the critique of guilt and responsibility over others. The value of self-acceptance is linked to the construction of a strong self that must be rebuilt, if necessary against those who call oneself into question. Self-acceptance is connected to the psychological vogue of the value of self-esteem. People must accept themselves "unconditionally" in order to assert themselves to others and the world. All this on the one hand. But on the other hand, the conformism preached by the psychological code leads Tierno to say that one has to take "the life one was meant to live." In this sense self-acceptance is a contradictory value: it is the core of a new self and at the same time is the condition to accept life as it is. Besides, there is a deep tension between the imperative of self-acceptance and that of inner change.

The third value emphasized in the positive code is willpower. This is a noteworthy element with its emphasis on: "first, triumph over yourself." The fourth is resilience, or resistance and the "ability to endure whatever may happen," nothing more than the courage or temperance referred to in classical ethics, currently disguised as optimistic willingness: "Never make the mistake of succumbing to dejection" (Tierno 2008, 246). Therefore, it is recommended to "not take oneself too seriously" and to be a spectator of the self. The fifth value is self-control, which is understood as the ability to self-distance—that is, the power of observing our reactions in order to detect negative associations. Self-control is also understood as mastery when facing others and outside reality. Self-sufficiency,