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Review Article

# The Role of Affectivity in Human Flourishing. The Internal Relation between Affectivity, Ethos, and Bonds

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## Abstract

In this article I will attempt to show the role of affectivity in human flourishing. For that it is necessary overcome a first impression: That there is no relation between affectivity, ethos, and bonds. This does not correspond to real experience, but rather to a dualistic prejudice that radically separates “happening” (affectivity) from “acting” and “relating” (ethos and bonds). In fact, “happening,” “acting” and “relating” are three dimensions of human existence which are never given separately, and therefore must be integrated in one’s life. Every “happening”, to be integrated, requires its transformation into “action,” and every “action” has at its basis a “happening”-at least as a motive to act. Far from enclosing the person in his subjectivity by isolating him from otherness, affectivity always opens him to the world and to others, so that the essential relationality of the person is manifested in it. These three components-affectivity, ethos, and bonds—are necessarily interrelated, and a good education consists in wisely linking what subjectivity feels with the other components to establish a meaningful connection with what or who one is relating to.

## Introduction

Establishing a relationship between affectivity, ethos, and bonds-husband and wife, parents and children, friend to friend-does not seem like an easy task. Indeed, affectivity seems to be something passive, linked to the bodily and psychic characteristics of subjectivity; ethos appears as personal self-determination and choice; and bonds are partly given, partly chosen. As will be seen, far from being contrary to ethos and relational bonds, affectivity constitutes their foundation. Indeed, without affectivity there would be no true ethos nor true bonds; or at least, these would not be lived intelligently, freely, and responsibly<sup>1</sup>. However, before addressing the issue of the relationships between affectivity, ethos, and bonds, we must examine affectivity phenomenologically and anthropologically.

## A Phenomenology and Anthropology of Affectivity

Perhaps the first prejudice that needs to be debunked is the passive nature of affectivity. Certainly, if we take our cue from its etymology, it will seem that the prejudice is confirmed, as the term affectivity comes from the Latin verb *afficior* ‘I am moved, affected’. Moreover, if we consider some of the affective phenomena<sup>2</sup> we experience-interoception and proprioception<sup>3</sup>, bodily feelings (discomfort, tiredness, energy, etc.) or emotions (traditional passions) such as anger and fear, it will seem that affectivity is basically feeling the influence of something or someone on us.

## Phenomenology of affectivity: Spontaneity and relationality

There are, however, other affective phenomena that are more difficult to interpret as passive, such as sentiments (aesthetic, moral, ontic, spiritual), and even more so those that refer to the self (possession, power, and self-esteem) or to the relationship with the other (sympathy, compassion, envy, jealousy, mercy, forgiveness). As the affective phenomena diminish in their connection with the body, they become less and less passive until they become love or hate-in which it is difficult, not to say impossible, to separate them completely from knowledge and will. In fact, although it is not voluntary, falling in love-to maintain itself-requires the performance of different human acts, something which may initially go unnoticed insofar as they are first motivated by passion. However, I think that even in the case of the most basic emotions (the classical passions), such as anger and fear, one should not speak of passivity, but rather of spontaneity and relationality. Concretely, in a passion one speaks of an initially spontaneous relationship between subjectivity and reality<sup>4</sup>; i.e., between a tendency of the subject that is intentional, and an intention that is tendential. Compassion, for example, implies spontaneously feeling the evil of the other as one’s own evil and, therefore, the tendency to help him. The affective phenomenon thus carries with it a motivation on the part of the entire subject to act in some way-both approaching good and escaping from one’s own and others’ evils are already actions of the totality of the subject and not mere responses of certain parts of the body or certain powers. Furthermore, affectivity always shows a spontaneous link with otherness: something or someone affects myself and I go towards it, so it is not always easy to know whether affection precedes or follows the subject’s encounter with the other. It is, however, always a relationship with otherness. It can be stated without any doubt that in an affective experience, subjectivity always finds itself in a given situation (dangerous, favorable, harmful, useful, pleasant), and in this there is a certain analogy with the animal’s emotion.

Perhaps what distinguishes human affectivity is its historical and relational character. Unlike the ‘here and now’ interaction that the animal has emotionally with the environment, human affectivity is located within a personal and sociocultural history

<sup>1</sup>As is well known, sufferers of ‘frontal syndrome’, characterised by alterations in the frontal lobe with involvement of a key area of the cortex that communicates with the limbic system, normally score excellently in intelligence tests, but manifest a strong inability to make the right decisions in interpersonal relationships due to a lack of emotionality. Thus, their social behaviour cannot be considered appropriate [1].



and a genetic and environmental one. This personal and sociocultural history binds people together, giving rise to good or bad relationships: Between parents and children, between educator and students, between man and woman, between friends, between work colleagues, etc. Thus, although it is proper to subjectivity, the affective experience of a person manifests his own ontological dimension: that of 'being in relationship'. Therefore, the person is not satisfied with the spontaneity of the subjective relationship with reality or of the subject's being in a given situation; he needs to transcend his own subjectivity, and he does so in three ways. First, insofar as in it the bond with reality as such appears (re-ligo); second, insofar as in it a bond with the world and with the other is given (re-fero); and lastly, insofar as it opens itself to the personal sense of the situation in which it finds itself (re-cipio)<sup>5</sup>. Talking about affectivity therefore means leaving behind a passive, individualistic and subjectivist vision, to place oneself in a perspective that cannot be exhausted in the instant of immediate exchanges with the environment-as happens when one judges affection based on immediate gratification or the utility one obtains from it. In other words, talking about affectivity requires considering the history of the individual's relations with the world and the other, and with the culture that can interpret them. Having carried out a phenomenology of affectivity in which its essential relationality appears, it is necessary to indicate what its anthropological foundations are. We have seen that affectivity shows the person as a being in relation, insofar as it has human tendencies as its foundation.

### Anthropology of affectivity: Dynamization, actualization, human act

But what is a tendency and why does the relational character of the person manifest itself in it? I think these questions can be answered in this way: Tendency is a special kind of potentiality; in fact, it is not simply the potency of a faculty or set of faculties<sup>6</sup>, as sensation, reason, will, but the potentiality of the whole of subjectivity as capable of spontaneously relating to the world and to the other. Indeed, like the instinct of the animal, tendency is a potentiality of the whole subject. However, tendency is specifically human; unlike the animal instinct, human tendency is not necessarily determined by genetics nor by a concrete environment-nor does it lead to a more or less rigid behavior. Rather, tendency is flexible: Open to the world, to the other, to rational and free action and to interpersonal relationships<sup>7</sup>. Indeed, to arrive at the human act, the organic dynamization of the tendency is not enough, nor is its actualization, i.e., spontaneous affectivity<sup>8</sup>, there is also a need of reason and will, i.e., a personal act. Unlike acts of the faculties such as sensations, thoughts and volitions, the tendency admits between dynamization and act a particular situation that I call "actualization", because although it is more than a simple dynamization is not yet a human act. Actualization implies the encounter between the tendency and the tendential object, whereby it appears in consciousness not only as an inclination but also as spontaneous affectivity.

The distinction between dynamization, actualization, and act can clearly be observed already in primary needs such as nutrition, but it is certainly even more manifest in personal relationships. For instance: Hunger is simply the experience of the dynamization of the nutritive tendency, while craving or desire for a given object-such as ice cream-is of its actualization, and finally eating is the personal act by which the nutritive tendency or simple craving is satisfied. However, neither hunger nor desire for ice cream necessarily leads to the action of eating it. Culture-in this case, culinary culture-thus bridges the gap between the dynamization of the tendency, its actualization, and the human act; in fact, when, how, how much and with whom to eat is given neither by the tendency nor the desire, but by cultural customs, family traditions and education. Giving in to a mere compulsion to satisfy hunger makes the act automatic rather than human, and therefore eliminates the cultural and relational aspect. Similarly, cultural impoverishment causes

the act to regress to pure satisfaction. On the other hand, there can also be excessive cultural manipulation, which-in inserting itself between dynamization, actualization, and act-dynamizes and actualizes certain tendencies while frustrating their act. An example may be when children are bombarded with sexual stimuli such as they are unable to assimilate or integrate them personally, or when mass media audiences are subjected to scenes and reports of war and environmental disasters without indicating possible ways to put into practice the compassion aroused by these stimuli.

This distinction between dynamization, actualization, and act enables us to find a first link between affectivity and ethics: tendencies, as potentialities of the whole person that can lead to the act, already manifest personal freedom and therefore the possibility of educating affectivity and integrating it personally. Certainly, we can affirm that a particular desire, say to fame, participates in freedom through knowledge and appreciation of oneself and of the other or, as Aquinas argues through the cogitative sense<sup>9</sup>. But this should not make us lose sight of the fact that that desire is already the actualization of the tendency to esteem, that is, of an open, flexible, and moldable inclination to desire to be treated by others according to one's own dignity or to obtain what we consider to be in consonance with one's own talents and merits. Ultimately, we can say that man would not be free and therefore endowed with ethicality if, instead of tendencies, he possessed instincts, which means that tendencies and their affectivity are already an embryonic manifestation of freedom. Specifically, they can be understood as a negative freedom or freedom from: liberation from everything that is incompatible with the total openness of our subjectivity to the world, to others and to action, i.e., a beginning of relative autonomy<sup>10</sup>.

### Nature and Culture in Affectivity

From the beginning of philosophy to the present day, affectivity (especially emotions) has been regarded as something spontaneous, which would make it part of the genetic make-up of our species homo sapiens sapiens.

### Body map patterns

Recent research featuring a sample of seven hundred people in Sweden, Finland, and Taiwan showed that the physiological aspect of emotions is experienced by all people regardless of their ethnicity and culture. Whenever an emotion was induced in the participants, they had to color a photograph of the human body indicating those parts of the body which they felt 'switch on' or 'switch off' in response to the emotion aroused<sup>11</sup>. The result of the research indicates how different emotions were continuously associated by all people with specific body map patterns. It can therefore be said that our emotions speak to us and communicate physically, each giving rise to a sensation on a different part of the body; for example, feeling a great flow of blood in the chest, head and arms is equivalent to feeling anger, a body map pattern that seems like a preparation for a fight. Does this mean that culture does not influence affectivity at all? According to the researchers mentioned above, culture would play no role since emotion would be nothing more than the perception of bodily changes, which-as we have seen-are common to all people. After all, these authors defend the same thesis as William James, according to which emotions are the awareness of physiological changes. Thus, it is not that we cry because we are sad, but we are sad (conscious of these changes) because we cry<sup>12</sup>. Similarly, in the case of anger, we are not inflamed and ready to strike because we are angry, but vice versa. Certainly, James correctly rejects that the efficient cause of our emotions are bodily changes. He and the researchers of bodily maps of emotion are wrong, however, in accepting a kind of identification between bodily and psychic phenomena.

It seems to me that the Aristotelian thesis of *De Anima* explains the emotions-passions, in the terminology of the Stagirite-more adequately, since in addition to physiological changes and their consciousness, he proposes a kind of natural or

<sup>5</sup>I use the term 'affectivity' or 'affective phenomenon' in the broadest possible sense. Thus, I include in it both bodily feelings and emotions, as well as proper feelings and states of mind. For a classification and distinction of affective phenomena I recommend reading my work [2].

<sup>6</sup>These affective phenomena constitute what Damasio calls background feelings. «I conceptualise the essence of feelings as something you and I can see through a window that opens directly onto a continuously updated image of the structure and state of our body... By and large, a feeling is the momentary "view" of a part of that body landscape» [3].

<sup>7</sup>This thesis partly corresponds to Magda Arnold's thesis of appraisal, i.e. emotional evaluation, according to which appraisal is also initially spontaneous [4].

<sup>8</sup>See Pierpaolo Donati, *Teoria sociologica della relazione* (Milan: Fanco Angelli, 1991): chap. 5. Here refero is not understood in a symbolic sense, but in an intentional sense. Moreover, to re-ligo and re-fero, I add the category recipio, to speak of the personal sense that affectivity has [5].



spontaneous judgement in the passions<sup>13</sup>. Indeed, anger, for example, is everything that James and the above-mentioned researchers say it is, but it is also feeling something that happens as unjust. The judgement of injustice, however, requires someone to consider that some other has said or done something bad, undeserved, against him. This does not mean, however, that physiological changes and judgement are two elements with nothing in common, nor even that they are the same thing, but rather that they are two inseparable aspects of the same bodily reality, which-according to Aristotelian hylomorphism-is always made up of a matter (bodily movements) and a form (judgement). Thus, for example, the passion of anger can be defined in two ways: As an inflow of blood to the heart (the matter), or as 'a painful desire for revenge caused by a perceived undeserved slight'<sup>14</sup> (the form). Emotion thus requires an interpretation of something as unjust, which is not the same thing as the rush of blood towards the chest, head and arms or the consciousness of this rush. And as we shall see, it is precisely this interpretation that enables the education and personal integration of our emotions.

### Interpretation of affectivity

Where does the interpretation of emotions come from? Initially, it comes from the relationship with the reason of others since the infant cannot interpret them by himself. Let us consider the first time an infant feels fear: he is unable to understand what that generalized feeling of unease is. He only experiences danger, but he is not aware of it, he does not know the object that causes it, e.g., darkness. Human fear, therefore, is not only something physiological, but also something psychic: the experience of danger. In being communicated-for example, through crying-to someone who can understand it, the experience of danger ceases to be a dark unease and turns into fear. Hence the importance of the relationship with the reason of others, through gestures and words, to make sense of the dynamization and actualization of tendencies. Thus, the father, who realizes the emotional experience of the little one, can encourage him with these or similar words: 'you need not be afraid, the dark is not dangerous'. The term 'fear' already expresses the rational interpretation and linguistic designation of the dynamization of the child's tendency towards survival. Being afraid and 'realizing you are afraid' are, therefore, two different phenomena of consciousness. In fact, in the first case it is a spontaneous experience, i.e., an immediate reflexive consciousness, which some call 'reflectivity' to consider it a simple reflex, in the second case a rational reflexive consciousness<sup>15</sup>. The difference between these two types of consciousness depends on the fact that in the first type there is no separation between the subject and what he feels; therefore, one cannot ask someone not to be afraid while experiencing fear; the second type, on the other hand, is able to separate the subject from the fear he experiences. It follows that only this type of consciousness allows fear to be overcome. The father's reason and his encouragement make it possible for the child to modify his feeling of a dangerous situation.

However, it is not fundamentally what the father says to the child that educates him, but above all the (affective) relationship he establishes with him. Thanks to this relationship, in addition to knowing that one is or is not in danger, one learns to have the confidence to face it. The affective relationship with the other, therefore, in addition to *religo* and *refero* considers the "sense" or *recipio* of the relationship itself. In fact, in order to be personally integrated, dynamization and actualization require communication and interpretation, knowledge of its object (e.g., what is dangerous for us in this situation), and a naming and evaluation by both singular and collective human reason-which one may eventually find in cultural reason but is first and foremost in the relationship of trust with the other. In sum, the connection between the 'moved, affected' subjectivity, the action, and the relationship is not automatic for two reasons: First because it must be managed by the person (with his or her reason and will), and second because it is mediated (forged) by the culture in which he or she has been socialized and in which he

or she lives. Indeed, the person is both external and internal to the relationship.

### The Ethos of Affectivity: From Freedom from to Freedom for

It is precisely in communicating and interpreting the emotions where the relationship between affectivity and ethos becomes most fruitful. Indeed, during affective development, interpretation leads to naming, i.e., applying a term to what is going on in us, to rational evaluation or judgement, to the acceptance or rejection of affective reasons for behaving in a particular way, and to good or bad relations.

### Neural basis of interpretation and judgment

This affective development, as well as at the ethical and relational level, can be traced at the neural level in the three systems deputed to the processing of emotions:

- a. The subcortical regions that are involved in emotional experience, i.e., in what we have called its spontaneity ('I feel endangered', 'unfairly treated', 'in love', 'loved', 'hated');
- b. Parts of the medial prefrontal cortex that are involved in the consciousness of understanding and evaluating emotion, thus contributing to describing it (the objectivity or otherwise of what I feel);
- c. A part of the lateral prefrontal cortex, which facilitates the choice of the best words according to the characteristics of the emotion and what I can and decide to do ('decision to take revenge', 'to forget about it', 'to let it go', 'to forgive'<sup>16</sup>). In short, the interpretation of affectivity (to know what is happening) opens emotion to personal freedom, enabling us to grasp its object (to judge the situation as just or unjust) and to limit its desire, which in itself is infinite (as can be seen in the desire for revenge).

However, judgement and acceptance or rejection of the desire for revenge does not simply depend on the development of these brain structures, which are only a material condition of freedom, but on the use of reason and personal volition and, above all, on its relational significance. The use of reason is necessary to distinguish between the meaning of the affect in itself and the meaning for the person, since in every affective phenomenon there is always a natural judgement of reality, which corresponds to a spontaneous way of referring to it. Under emotion or feeling, subjectivity always appears in each situation of danger, adversity, desire, compassion, forgiveness, etc. The impossibility of separating subjectivity from affective phenomena means that they always imply a certain compulsion to consider what is felt as real. Therefore, it is necessary to discover the tendency that leads one to judge reality as positive or negative, attainable, or unattainable, adequate, or inadequate, and then to understand whether this spontaneous judgement can be accepted. Evaluation therefore has a dual function: It makes it possible to separate ourselves from emotion, which is the first step so that emotions can adapt to the real situation in which we find ourselves<sup>17</sup>, and it makes it possible to examine whether it is correct to act according to this emotional conviction.

### Influence of affectivity on the will

Therefore, if the reflection of reason is lacking, either there is no evaluation, or it is a false rational evaluation. This can happen when passion completely occupies the consciousness so as to prevent any kind of reflection; in this case the emotion, often because of its intensity or because the person is not used to reflecting or does not want to do so, completely invades the consciousness, giving rise to the so-called emotionalization of consciousness<sup>18</sup>. Emotionalization causes the person to completely adhere to the dynamization of tendency, affective judgement and, therefore, action that in this case springs from emotion and not from free choice. Emotionalization is generated in so-called violent passions. Under normal conditions, emotion does not prevent reflection, but it can have a great influence on the will and thus on judgement, through the great

<sup>13</sup>Cf. Aristotle, *On the Soul*. The Complete Works of Aristotle [6].

<sup>14</sup>For an analysis of this opening I refer the reader to my essay *Antropología de la Afectividad*, especially chap. 4 [2].

<sup>15</sup>The traditional passions (anger, fear, desire) correspond to what I have called 'actualisation'. An in-depth explanation of these three stages (dynamisation, actualisation, and act) can be found in *Antropología de la afectividad*, chap. 4.

<sup>16</sup>In man's perception of values, Aquinas hypothesises, following Avicenna, the existence of a new sense: the estimative in the animal and the cogitative in man. In the cogitative there would be the union of sensibility and rationality. Indeed, in practical reasoning, - according to St. Thomas - intelligence provides the major premise while the cogitative provides the minor premise; the conclusion is an action (cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones Disputatae de Veritate*, trans [7].

<sup>17</sup>As is well known, the distinction between negative and positive freedom is due to Isaiah Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 118-172. From a relational perspective, 'freedom from' is the other side of the same coin as 'freedom for', rather like the right about one's duty [8].

<sup>18</sup>See Lauri Nummenmaa et al. [9].



persuasive force of the pleasure or motives presented by emotion. In fact, the greater the pleasure experienced, the more our attention is absorbed in it, thus disturbing the judgement of reason to the point of preventing it completely<sup>19</sup>; this is what is observed, for example, in the dialogue between king David and Nathan, the prophet, in the Bible, when the latter makes the king discover the grave sins he has committed: Adultery and murder. Although David's moral conscience remained unaffected and, therefore, could judge as unjust the behavior of the rich owner of Nathan's tale, he was unable to correctly judge his own crimes. However, apart from pathological cases, affectivity influences the will not as an extrinsic cause (and even less as an efficient cause) that cancels or diminishes personal responsibility, but in the form of a motivation to will or not to will (one such motivation is undoubtedly the pleasure or pain, joy and sadness contained, for example, in friendship). Thus, according to Ricoeur, a circular relationship is established between the involuntary-the body, inclinations, personal tastes, and affectivity-and the voluntary, the personal life project. Thus, «my hunger, my thirst, my fear of pain, my desire for music, or my sympathy all refer to my willing in the form of motives. The circular relation of motive to project demands that I recognize my body as body-for-my-willing, and my willing as project-based-(in part)-on my body. The involuntary is for the will and the will is by reason of the involuntary»<sup>20</sup>.

Even if there is this circularity between the affective phenomena and the will, it does not take place directly-as Ricoeur seems to suggest-but through rational judgement, which interprets, evaluates, accepts, or rejects the spontaneous judgement contained in every affect and also in its perception. At the same time, the motivations arising from affects-even though they may be considered reasons for wanting or acting or explanations of our evaluations and actions-do not by themselves correspond to rational judgement. This is because rational judgement considers not only the dynamism and operativity of subjectivity, but above all the person and his existential project, i.e., his wanting to be in each relationship. The connection of affect with the person through the evaluation of reason presupposes first that the affect is internalized and integrated: It ceases to be a mere occurrence and becomes an event with a relational meaning (recipio). Without this step, affectivity would be a purely momentary happening devoid of meaning, like the continuous succession of disconnected and existentially indifferent images such as those of the commercials that urge us to acquire so many new products. The person would not, then, be able to ask questions such as: "what is happening to me?", "why is this happening to me?", "what sense does it make?", which manifest the internalization of the affective phenomenon, that is, the intimate relationship of the happening with the person in whom it happens and with the situation in which it finds itself.

On the other hand, for affectivity to be able to influence the will, there needs to be a determined cerebral basis that allows the immediate link between affection and action to be broken. Indeed, neuroscientific research confirms the distinction between emotional judgement that can lead to action without any kind of choice and responsible action that always depends on rational judgement. According to some neuroscientists<sup>21</sup>, fear, for example, has as its material basis a very ancient (subcortical) brain circuit, to react quickly in the face of possible danger<sup>22</sup>. The rapidity of the response has, however, the disadvantage that it prevents an objective assessment of the situation, so it is only useful in cases of immediate danger: A fire or a traffic accident. To be able to modulate anger or fear, the limbic system (that involved with the emotions) is connected to the neocortex in more evolved animals such as primates; in the case of humans, these circuits linking the limbic system to the prefrontal cortex play a fundamental role in making decisions concerning emotional states. This second, more recent fear brain circuit is related to rational consciousness<sup>23</sup>.

An important aspect of the ethos of affectivity consists, therefore, in detaching oneself to grasp what the person's real situation is and what its affective resonance should be; for example, if the situation is sad, such as the death of a beloved one, one should be saddened. When one cannot perceive the real situation, there is the risk of the 'hypertrophy' of affection to the detriment of reality and the values therein. Affection thus becomes separated from ethos and from any perspective of meaning, since, reduced to 'what one feels' or experiences, the person eventually loses any purpose that transcends pure feeling.

### Affectivity as the basis of virtues

Finally, affectivity and the actions and habits motivated by it are not only influenced by the dimension of the past-an influence that has been emphasized in different ways by psychoanalysis, behaviorism, and cognitivism. Affectivity is also highly influenced by the present and the future-by the former through the integration of levels (including perception and the tendential-affective sphere), and by the latter since it forms part of a human flourishing project which is more or less conscious. This interplay between integration and project little by little perfects one's character. Affectivity is, therefore, the basis of the virtues: virtue is nothing other than this 'golden mean' which allows us to experience the appropriate affect, at the appropriate time, and in relation to an appropriate reality. This is why one can use the term of an emotion to refer to a virtue as is the case with courage. The affective phenomenon, however, does not know this 'golden mean' because it is not rational, which does not mean that it is irrational but only that in its origin it does not depend on reason. This is why we need the virtues to introduce this 'golden mean' into affective life. In short, even if it is spontaneous initially, human affectivity becomes responsible through the development of its relationality: The rational judgement and acceptance of this judgement that concerns the real, and not merely subjective, situation in which the person finds himself. Of course, initially rational judgement and its acceptance are hetero directed, that is, guided by parents and educators. However, once the child has arrived at the use of reason, he or she is able to make the judgement for himself/herself and accept or reject it. Hence the importance of educating children affectively and not just cognitively, so that they are able to use their emotions and feelings as motives to act, without being driven by them. Temporality is also part of affective education. Not all affective phenomena are punctual or immediate, as some refer to important relationships and bonds that are meant to last a long time and, therefore, need time to grow and mature. In a society where the patience to cultivate ties has been lost, it is not surprising, for instance, that love has been emptied of relational meaning: exchanged for falling in love or, simply, reduced to a "pure relationship"<sup>24</sup>.

### The Existential Meaning of Affectivity

The analysis of affectivity thus speaks to us of the need not to separate affectivity from ethos, neither from motives to act nor from relational bonds. This is why the profound truth of the affects does not lie in them per se, but in the recognition of their existential, ethical, and relational value.

### Affectivity and human flourishing

By existential value I mean the so-called affective maturity, which is part of an even broader maturity-human flourishing. It consists of the development of the ability to resonate appropriately according to the situation in which the person finds himself. Intellectual and cultural growth, i.e., a cognitively evolved personality, is not enough; it is also required to overcome the infantile stage of a primordial and uncontrolled affectivity, often a source of suffering, to achieve the capacity for good relationships with the world, with oneself and, above all, with others. Another value is the ethical value, which from an early age should be inseparable from affective development, since it is only through

<sup>12</sup>Cf. William James [10].

<sup>13</sup>The hylomorphic theory serves Aristotle to account not only for the emotions, but also for the vast majority of affections of the soul - sensations, memories, imaginations, etc. These affections indicate in one way or another that the soul is bound to the body, like the straight line to the bronze sphere when it is tangent. Certainly, it is above all the passions (pathé) that show their inseparability from the body, which is why they are called by Aristotle forms in matter (logoi enhylloi); the term enhylloi («en-hylé 'in matter'») is a neologism coined by the Stagiraite himself to express this inseparability through its very grammatical construction (cf. Aristotle, *On the Soul*, 403a 15-25) [6].

<sup>14</sup>Aristotle R (1984) *The Complete Works of Aristotle*. Jonathan Barnes (Ed.), Princeton University Press, USA, 1378C: 30-32 [6].

<sup>15</sup>See Pierpaolo Donati, *Sociologia della riflessività. Come si entra nel dopo-moderno* (Bologna: Il Mulino 2011): 299-317.

<sup>16</sup>Giacomo R, Leonardo F, Vittorio G (2001) Physiological mechanisms underlying the understanding and imitation of action. *Nature Reviews Neuroscience* 2(9): 661-670 [11].

<sup>17</sup>Daniel G (1995) *Emotional intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ*. 10th (Edn.), Bantam Books, USA, pp. 1-352 [12].



action, virtues, and good relationships that the integration of affectivity in the person is achieved. Consent or dissent from affective motivations to act constitutes the beginning of this integration, which has as its aim the acts that are adequate, that is, in conformity with the truth of the person and, therefore, also capable of making them experience joy. In this way, the affectivity that was previously spontaneous and subjective-but not subjectivistic-becomes maximally personal. Here we can clearly see that the happening in the person is not mere passivity because it always calls into question the use of one's own freedom. Through the act appropriate to the person's relationship with reality, affectivity also becomes a stable disposition to resonate affectively with truth, in whatever situation the person finds himself. Perhaps the most essential characteristic of this virtuous affectivity is personal balance or maturity. This is not a psychic equilibrium or euthymia between the different levels of the personality (unconscious, tendential-affective and rational-volitional), but rather a summit between two equally damaging extremes. This summit consists, therefore, in feeling those affects 'when one should, in what one should, towards whom one should, for the purpose and in the way one should'<sup>25</sup>.

The third value of affectivity is relationship. Affectivity is also necessary to build good relationships. In fact, the inclination towards the other, the perception of the other and his or her evaluation have an important affective component, so that if it is adequate it brings with it a good interpretative and evaluative internalization of the other's gestures and actions in a habitual way and, consequently, the foundations are laid for a good relationship or it is improved, reinforcing the positive aspects and eliminating the negative ones. In this sense, as an original and originating relationship, the family is ideally the place par excellence to learn the relational value of affectivity and its use to build adequate relationships and relational goods, such as compassion, service, forgiveness, sharing, and belonging. In the family, the person should learn to give and receive love, to recognize the gift of the other without exchanging it for a right, nor use it as a tool in the service of one's own pleasure or utility. In short, in the family, one should discover how to personalize one's affectivity, since rejoicing in the good of others, hating evil, being outraged at injustice, repenting for injustice committed, asking for forgiveness, and forgiving, as well as humanizing people, always admit a personal way of doing it.

Unfortunately, the family does not always allow this humanization and personalization of affectivity. Destructured or dysfunctional families do not help in this task. How then to educate affectivity when there is an initial lack in its formation?

To answer this question, we must return to the basic anthropological structure: Dependence, autonomy, and relationship. We will see that every relationship is able to give rise to relational goods, such as the education of affectivity, when these three aspects are given. Otherwise, the lack of one of them prevents good relationships and, consequently, a good affective education.

### The relational dimension of affectivity

The union between affectivity and relationship does not end in the child's first relationships with parents, siblings, and other relatives since the person is always in relationship with the other. In my opinion, here lies the deepest relational dimension of affectivity, which one could call the apprenticeship of love, which is always possible to the extent that one begins to experience the other as a gift. Before addressing this last point, I would like to briefly address the inseparable relationship between affectivity and bonds, for if-as we have examined-mature affectivity is the basis of good bonds, it must also be said that good bonds are necessary for healthy affectivity, its development and maturity. There is thus a virtuous circle between affective maturity (ethical and personal), good bonds and self-giving. In fact, affectivity, ethos, and bonds act intertwining, supporting, and strengthening each other by favoring the gift of self, both in horizontal-symmetrical

relationships (conjugal, fraternal, friendship) and in vertical-asymmetrical ones (parental, transgenerational, and social) and in the different stages that each relationship goes through<sup>26</sup>. Therefore, in each of these relationships, there are affective, ethical, and bonding aspects that need to be taken care of to ensure that the degenerative processes to which relationships are subject, such as misunderstandings, obsessions, envy, jealousy, hatred, and indifference do not prevail over the generative ones, such as benignity, patience, healthy concern for the other, mercy, forgiveness, and love. The affective aspect refers to trust-hope in the bond, while the ethical aspect refers to justice-fidelity. And both hold relationships together making them generative, when these ethical-affective codes are respected, or degenerative, otherwise.

### Affectivity as the basis of generative or degenerative relationships

In this way, it is observed that the affective dimension of the person is found in the generativity of the relationship, understanding this term in a broad sense, that is, as the origin not only of people, but also of their good relationships and their relational goods, which enable people to grow in identity, that is, to be more themselves. Within horizontal relationships-which could be characterized as generative bonds in which the subjects place themselves on an equal footing in terms not only of value but also of power, service, and responsibility-the affective dimension is substantially translated into trust in the other, into human warmth and intimacy between people. The ethical pole, on the other hand, is translated into respect for the other for his or her individual unrepeatability and dignity, into mutual care of the relationship or what Donati calls relational reflexivity, and into personal commitment to the maintenance and strengthening of the bond. Only on condition that both aspects (affective and ethical) are present is it possible to give life to an authentic interpersonal bond, in which the feeling, far from being pure satisfaction of one's own desires, makes one discover the value of the other and of the relationship with him, transcending mere individual needs and thus testifying to the surplus of every relationship as a gift-that is, as a reality worthy of recognition, thanks, protection and promotion. All horizontal relationships, such as brotherhood, conjugal love, and friendship, despite their specificity, share the generative value of the human bond and the origin of relational goods.

In fact, despite the diversity of their nature (by blood the former, by election the latter), they are very similar ties from the point of view of the generation and regeneration of personal identities. Relationships between siblings, between spouses and between friends constitute a precious opportunity for the growth of people's identity in what they have in common (the same filiation, the same humanity with a different sexed condition, or the ability to share activities, thoughts, and emotions with each other). This is also possible because of their mutual dependence and autonomy, starting from a basic equality, which in spouses and friends is complete insofar as it is chosen and not merely given, and which in the family fraternity, because it is shared-at a broad level-with all human persons, becomes a preparation for entry into society, insofar as one learns to deal with one's peers. In fact, since the structure of freedom is made up of dependence, autonomy and self-gift, these relationships are necessary for the person to interpret, evaluate and act according to equality and difference, starting with that between man and woman, as well as according to the relationship between power and service, which should characterize every relationship, since power should be for service.

In a relationship, the presence and interaction of equality and difference, of power and service, and of autonomy, dependence and self-giving, vary according to the different horizontal and vertical relationships. In fraternity, as also in paternity/maternity and filiation, these are normally given in a common family history with the same genetic, cultural and affective matrix; but at the same time siblings, parents and children recognize

<sup>18</sup>A kind of borderline phenomenon here is the emotionalisation of consciousness, where the excess of emotion seems to destroy consciousness and its associated capacity for normal lived experience. «The emotionalisation of consciousness starts when, in the mirroring, the meaning of particular affective facts vanishes, when sensations in a sense grow beyond actual comprehension by man. Properly speaking, this is a collapse of self-knowledge. [...] The collapse of the objective relation of consciousness into sensations and affections that "happen" in man originates from the fact that self-knowledge ceases to objectivize. It does not establish meanings and thereby does not keep emotions in intellectual dependence» [13].

<sup>19</sup> (2017) *The summa theologica*. Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Canton (OH): Pinnacle Press, USA [14].

<sup>20</sup>Paul R (1966) *Freedom and nature: The voluntary and the involuntary*. Translated by Kohak EV Evanston (Ill). Northwestern University Press, USA, pp. 1-544 [15].

<sup>21</sup>On the evolution of emotion-related brain areas see Joseph LeDoux, *The Emotional Brain: The Mysterious Underpinnings of Emotional Life* (New York-London-Toronto-Sydney: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 1998): 179-225 [16].

<sup>22</sup>Certainly, as LeDoux himself explains, this circuit has its precise function, since «from the point of view of survival, it is better to respond to potentially dangerous events as if they were in fact the real thing than to fail to respond. The cost of treating a stick as a snake is less, in the long run, than the cost of treating a snake as a stick» (*The Emotional Brain*, 171).



themselves as different from the point of view of autonomy, individual characteristics, tastes and interests, different personal experiences, age, and in the ways in which they have grown into-affectively and ethically-the common family membership and their love of one another. In friendship, both parties often do not belong to the same family, but share autonomy and dependence, tastes, interests, and experiences, since unlike siblings who are given, friends are often chosen for similarity (in fact, to have friends one already needs a certain identity, which is not necessary with siblings). In married love, the other is chosen because one is in love; through affectivity one has discovered in her or him values as a feminine or masculine person that leads to the desire to share one's existence forever. Even friends and spouses, despite their differences, are called upon to maintain the binomial equality/difference, dependence/autonomy by not denying the differences to the point of being a bad copy of the other, nor exasperating them to the point of not recognizing some aspect of oneself that is also easily identifiable in the other, such as character traits, defects, and virtues. When we think of fraternal, paternal, filial, spousal and friendship relationships, we oscillate between positive affective and ethical aspects, such as intimacy, care, loyalty, solidarity, trust, and fidelity, and negative aspects such as slavish imitation, rivalry, resentment, jealousy, domination, emotional dependence, and conflict. This ambiguity mirrors the ambivalent character of every relationship: alongside generative processes there are always degenerative one's lurking; in fact, alongside love and self-giving, there are hatred, egoism, and indifference.

Perhaps one of the greatest risks for the development of the relationship between affectivity, ethos and bonds is affective dependence<sup>27</sup>. It appears in the family, in a romance or in a friendship, when the affective relationship becomes a bond that takes away freedom or, even worse, an obsession in which that necessary balance proper to every relationship between dependence and autonomy, 'giving' and 'receiving', is permanently altered. Affective dependence always gives rise to a dysfunctional and problematic bond, which brings with it the degeneration of people and their relationship, especially as far as the dependent person is concerned. This manifests itself in feelings of prostration and self-evaluation to the point of total loss of the value of the dependent person's life. Often the affectively dependent person had a difficult childhood: when he was a child, he received constant messages from his parents that he was not worthy of their love or attention, or he was only worthy when he could perform certain tasks well or behave well-or he received messages with a contradictory double demand<sup>28</sup>, such as getting close to and away from his beloved ones at the same time. In short, he had to learn in his own skin that the only way to get the other's love is to submit to the other.

Conversely, affective dependency helps us to better understand the positive affective and ethical effects of a healthy relationship between dependency, autonomy, and self-giving: positive evaluation of oneself and others, trust in them and in the future of the relationship, inner freedom, sincerity, and loyalty. In short, the condition for human flourishing is the recognition of the affective and ethical value of the bonds established. This recognition manifests itself in a series of attitudes on the part of the persons in the relationship: to give trust to the other by accepting that he or she can put the bonds to the test, which is tantamount to accepting the freedom of the other; to commit oneself to the care and promotion of the bond beyond the pleasure, affection or utility that can be derived, which is tantamount to loving that same relationship with the other as a good, that is, as a relational good; to find the balance between giving and receiving, between loving and being loved, which means being perceptive of the situation of the other, in terms of difficulties, crises, or periods of growth and maturity. In my opinion, these are some of the relational attitudes that foster affective and ethical maturity and, consequently, human flourishing.

## Conclusion

Affectivity requires that it be formed, and so to speak, 'refined' by educational and ethical work-no less long and demanding than that required for the formation of technical or scientific knowledge and skills. This task initially corresponds to the rationality of others-especially that of parents-who must interpret, evaluate, and confirm or rectify the adjustment between affection and the actual situation in which the person finds himself. For example, not feeling sadness or joy when the relationship with the other is bad or good respectively implies without doubt a lack of affective resonance and, therefore, a manifestation of affective and personal immaturity. The interpretation and education of affectivity-and of desire in particular-constitutes, therefore, the first area of the personalization of affectivity, i.e. of the experience of a freedom that is fundamentally negative or freedom from: Something which is necessary to establish an adequate relationship with the world and with others, and which knows how to expand desire and lead it to a mature relationship from a natural and cultural point of view.

Later, through the motives to act, the person can integrate affectivity consciously and voluntarily. In this way, the interpretation, acceptance, or rejection-which in the child is external-becomes internal and responsible in the person with use of reason and capacity to will, such that it is the origin of virtue, affective maturity, and adequate bonds. This, then, would be the second dimension of freedom, which is above all positive or freedom for. In any case, the maximum manifestation of ethicality in the affective sphere and affectivity in the ethical sphere is found in interpersonal relationships in which there is an interweaving of dependence, autonomy, and self-gift; of power and service, of choice and belonging, of giving and receiving love [19-22]. The positive freedom to give and receive the other as a gift challenges the meaninglessness to which interpersonal relationships are reduced in many cases today and shows how generative relationships are still possible and are the basis of human flourishing.

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<sup>23</sup>LeDoux JE (1994) Emotion, memory and the brain. *Scientific American* 270(6): 50-57 [17].

<sup>24</sup> According to Giddens - one of the sociologists who attempted to identify the type of structure of the modern family - what characterises today's couple life consists of a "pure relationship" (cf. Anthony Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy. Sexuality, love, eroticism in modern societies* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995): 75). The purity of which Giddens speaks refers to the fact that this relationship needs only one condition to exist: the "parity of the accounts of giving and receiving" between two subjects. In fact, insofar as it is founded on the benefits that each party can derive from the continued relationship with the other, the 'pure relationship' would be born and extinguished to the extent that this basis, i.e. pleasure or utility, is lacking.

<sup>25</sup>Cf. Aristotle (1984) *Nicomachean Ethics. The Complete Works of Aristotle*. Jonathan Barnes (Ed.), Princeton University Press, USA, 6, 1106a 30; 1106b.

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<sup>28</sup>Gregory Bateson in his studies on the genesis of schizophrenia developed the double bind theory (see G Gregory Bateson, Don D. Jackson, Jay Haley, and John Weakland, "Toward a theory of schizophrenia", *Behavioral Science* 1, no. 4 (1956): 251-254) [18].