

Human Feelings

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ABSTRACT: The aim of this paper is to show the different levels of human feelings and their description. It also explains the different levels of human feelings according to transcendental anthropology. Feelings give notice of each active dimension of the human being. There are three anthropological levels of feelings: 1) passions of the human nature, 2) emotions of the human essence and 3) affections of the human person.

KEYWORDS: Feelings, affections, emotions, passions, person, freedom, Hume.

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The most important question of human life is knowing which criteria one uses to direct themselves to their proper end, to their destiny. Therefore, the dynamic instances of man that are capable of attaining objectives, as well as the obstacles that arise or the difficulties, have to be examined. Human conduct must be rational, that is, guided by reason. It must also follow the dictates of the virtues of the will. But this, so to say, has to do with feelings. Nevertheless, what place the feelings occupy is not known, that is, how they relate to the intelligence and the will, is not exactly known.

According to some psychologists, feelings, especially deep feelings, are like those dispositions that favor activity if they are positive or inhibit it, if they are negative. On the other hand, there are two types of feelings: deep and lasting ones, or ones that are superficial or variable or interchangeable with other feelings. Others hold that feelings mark out the link of the spiritual faculties with the human subject, but the issue is more complicated. Feelings are like precedents of certain directions of thought, or of certain behavioral traits, which they often accompany. On the assumption that we accept this opinion which is somewhat vague or amorphous, according to which there is a certain alternation among the feelings, the acts of the intelligence and of the will, it should be added that there are feelings that are deeper than others that depend on the state of health, on bodily circumstances or on the events of life.

The importance of feelings lies mainly in their relationship with the intelligence and with the will, and not simply as their precedents, but as derived from the active dimensions of the human being. Today, however, in our days the spiritual faculties of man, the intelligence and the will, are discredited. For this reason, there has been an increase in relativism, that is, in the opinion that denies the universality of truth, as well as the control of the will. For this reason, today greater credit is given to feelings; recourse is made to them by considering that they are what remain in the wake of doubt regarding the reach of the intelligence and of the will.

In this situation, the difference between deep feelings and superficial ones becomes blurred. By doubting the intellectual capacity of man and by rejecting the direction of the will towards higher goods, the existence of realities higher than man are also put into doubt, and one falls into religious agnosticism. This anguished discrediting of the meaning of life leads to taking the most immediate lived experiences,

which are the feelings, as the criterion for action.

THE HISTORY OF THE RISE OF FEELINGS

It is necessary to refer to a doctrine that appeared in England, especially in Scotland, throughout the 18th century, and which lasted until the first part of the 19th century, which is called moral sentiment. We mention this doctrine because the Scottish thinkers noted that feelings cannot be replaced, and on the other hand they realized that feelings tend downward even though they are deep. They are dominant in the sense that they direct man according to a dynamic that is not positive.

The feeling that these authors highlight because they understand that it has moral relevance is philanthropy. Philanthropy is the feeling that inclines one to think of others, to treat them with kindness, to be nice to them; since this is all positive, it seems that philanthropy leads man correctly. However, a pessimistic assessment of this feeling can be found among the Scottish authors. After affirming the importance of philanthropy, they realized that it is not possible to trust it, because in human relationships philanthropy is not maintained, but instead quickly gives way to negative feelings that disfigure it and are directed downward, as previously stated.

Among the Scottish moral sentimentalists there is David Hume, a very well known and influential thinker, and Adam Smith, who is also very important because of his contribution to the science of economics. They hold that philanthropy tends to be replaced by another feeling, which they call vanity. The benevolent philosopher has a sense of his own vanity, and since others respect him he falls into vainglory. Philanthropy leads to vanity and vanity to an even more negative feeling, that is, envy. The vain person ends up being envious.

According to this, by basing human relationships on philanthropy, the attempt is frustrated by the appearance of vainglory, that is, because the desire to appear good is fed by having kindness shown to oneself. Also, from envy, there arise comparisons between human subjects, something that makes living together impossible. Envy is a feeling that is so negative that it leads to murder. This is the case of Cain and Abel. Cain's envy toward Abel led him to commit the first murder recorded in the Bible. When God directs himself to Cain and asks him about Abel, Cain answers him: "Am I my brother's keeper?"

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What is notable in this reaction is that the affection between brothers, an elevated form of philanthropy, has been replaced in Cain by another completely different feeling.

If this is so, then the aspiration to lead life in an elevated and honest way, with positive feelings, is not capable of withstanding human plurality. If all men aspire to be philanthropic, then the social outcome would be completely negative. Consequently, the moral outcome of positive feelings is null, and, moreover, contradictory: it is turned into its contrary. From this it can be concluded that one's feelings cannot be trusted, since the deeper they are, the more they are modified by a dialectical dynamic. For this reason Adam Smith, in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, declares that philanthropy can be lived only in a very qualified sense; for example, if the father of someone a person knows dies, the proper thing for a philanthropic friend is that he offers his condolences, with the intention of sharing his feelings. However, as is obvious, his feeling of grief is weaker than that of the orphan, for which reason Smith concludes, that the one whose father died should be very sparing in his manifestations of pain, because he cannot expect that his friend experience it with the same intensity that he does.

In short, in order to live philanthropically one must manifest one's pain in a moderate manner, and whoever directly suffers it cannot vent his deep pain, but rather has to manifest his proper manifestation of pain in the presence of the person who shows his philanthropic sympathy. Thus, philanthropy becomes (aside from it turning into vanity and envy) sentimental coldness. If the friend does not feel too much pain for the death of someone else's father, the latter must also realize that the former's feeling is weak, for which reason he must also show himself sparing in his manifestation of grief.

Ultimately, the social manifestation of feeling has to be very slight, which corresponds to a change of the English character, by which Scottish moral sentiment was replaced with what could be called emotional coldness. If one takes a look at the history of England, one realizes that in the 16th and 17th centuries the English were passionate. But the idea that morality is based on sentiments ultimately leads to coldness. Therefore, there is also a kind of conflict between the way of behaving and inner feelings. It is well-known that in 19th century England, Victorian morals implied sparseness in the manifestation of feelings.

This conflict between the state of internal feelings and the way of behaving implies that deep feelings cannot be guides of human behavior. To this conclusion Adam Smith adds another. Indeed, if philanthropy is the basis, neither of human living together nor of human conduct, it must be immediately replaced so as to also put a limit on envy. This means that human conduct must be guided solely by self-interest. From this arises the theory of the free market, a notion already developed by Adam Smith. It is fitting that social life must be organized by eliminating feelings and replacing them with laws of the market; only in this way can there be hope for achieving social harmony. To conclude, the theory of the free market is part of Smith's conviction that it is impossible to base social life on feelings. Smith's famous "invisible hand" can only be understood if this hand is in no way sentiment.

Today, however, appeal is made to feelings because they are considered to be what is most vital, most interior, in man. If man must be guided by feelings, this is due to its being the only way that remains after the crisis of the intelligence and of the will. Now, to be guided by feelings is the same as letting oneself be led by that the onset of which we are not capable of directing; for this reason, moral sentiment was followed by contemporary Victorian morality with the emotional coldness of the business bourgeoisie, and after this, present day sentimentalism entails that man looks to what he likes and avoids what is displeasing to him. This is hedonistic morality that is guided by the search for what is pleasing. This type of morality brings with it a reduction of objectives, because the merely pleasurable goods are not the highest ones. If philanthropy ended in sentimental coldness and in the calculation of interests, in the end the morality of pleasure is the lowest intensity formula for behavior. This answers the initial question.

Hedonistic morality incapacitates man with regard to his highest, most intimate form of life, which is giving of himself. Allowing oneself to be guided by feelings leads to a superficial life that disregards the high goals. The consequence of this is the consumer society, which focuses on the most sensitive feelings, that is, those that have to do with eating or with sexual pleasures. Ancient philosophy calls these feelings the passions of the soul, events of human life that are superficial, to the point that being guided solely by them eliminates *ethos*. Ethics comes from *ethos*, just as morality comes from *mos* (*mos* and *ethos* mean practically the same thing in Greek and in Lat-

in).

Television ads especially show what is pleasant and what is unpleasant. A good car, a good beer is advertised. Now, if what is most important in life are the volatile emotions that involve beer or choosing between whiskey and gin, then vital depth is lost, and it is impossible for man to guide himself.

After this brief history of feelings in the modern era, and of the conclusion of this history in consumer society, in which all the industrial countries are immersed and which seems to be the aspiration for the others, the only possible consequence is that we cannot be conformed to it. We cannot share the ideal of quickly making money, precisely in order to retire as soon as possible and stop working and thus to dedicate ourselves simply to the *dolce vita*, as the Italians would say. But this disconformity can only be real if it restores the strength of the spirit. Man has to learn how to think and how to exercise his will. To the extent that he grows in this, unexpected feelings arise that come from love for the truth and the good. Love for the truth is proper to the intelligence and is accompanied by deep feelings with which it increases and is confirmed. He who does not love the truth is ignorant of these feelings which never befall him. He only experiences feelings that have to do with the sensibility, the abuse of which leads to drugs, the last resort of hedonistic morality.

When hedonism senses its vital insufficiency, it resorts to exaggeration. Thus a dynamic described by St. Augustine appears. Hedonic excess, by which it is acknowledged that sensual pleasures do not suffice for man, and at the same time that the exercise of the will or of the intelligence is not within his reach, has a very clear side-effect. This is experienced, for example, when one drinks too much: the following day strong headaches appear. When one eats too much, one also feels bad. The same happens with sexual relationships, which, when exaggerated, lead to spite and objectification. To treat a person like an object of pleasure is the same as considering her just like a thing. The negative consequence of exaggerating sensible pleasures is called ruin. The sensation of ruin affects the spirit and the body and becomes more intense when mixed-in with drugs. In the case of the drug addict, ruin means that the nervous system is completely destroyed.

In sum, seeking to be guided by feelings is not valid. Neither philanthropy, nor coldness that replaces it, nor hedonism that focuses on

superficial feelings is acceptable. It is necessary to have recourse to love for the truth and for the highest goods, to make the capacity for good and for truth grow with positive habits. Thus appear what can be called affections, which are movements that are more spiritual than feelings, which are rather more psychosomatic. Affections have a clear spiritual overtone because they are awoken by the truth and by admiration. Love for the truth carries with it a feeling that is unknown to the hedonist. Admiration unites truth and beauty. When truth shines we capture beauty. We admire, and admiration spurs us on to continue deepening in the truth. A positive affection is superior to psychosomatic feelings.

Admiration advantageously replaces philanthropy. The true dignity of the human being is her character as person. A person is loved with a love that carries joy with it. Joy is a spiritual affection that is unknown to the hedonist, who feels pleasure but cannot rejoice with a beer. Love is an act of the will that rejoices in the truth of the other, which is radical because it consists in her personal reality. Joy is accompanied by a positive feeling that is certainly one of the most important, namely respect. Respect escapes from that degradation of philanthropy into vanity and envy that the Scottish moralists spoke about. Moral conduct is moral insofar as it is guided by the intelligence and the will. Admiration ultimately leads to a feeling that accompanies adoration. One cannot adore beer. In adoration the intelligence and the will that is directed to the Supreme Good, which is what is most admirable, intervene. It is important to recover the experience of adoration.