


## Conjugality: A Reading According to Edith Stein's Notion of Community\*

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**ABSTRACT** – From the book *Contribuciones a la fundamentación filosófica de la psicología y de las ciencias del espíritu*, Edith Stein introduces intersubjectivity as a requirement for constituting the “I” and the “We”. Accordingly, her definition of *community* enables us to understand conjugality in its constitutive aspects, highlighting it as one of the spaces of subjectivity formation, reminding us of themes like: self-formation, creativity, ethics, otherness, openness and individual and collective responsibility. The Stein's analyses, from the concept of person, also clarify that the formation process, specifically correlated to identifying and repeating intra-family and social models, is governed by the laws of sense and not limited to the psychological sphere, showing the possibility of self-configuration and reconfiguration of “oneself” and of conjugality.

**KEYWORDS:** Edith Stein, marital relations, phenomenology, self-formation, creativity

## Conjugalidade: Uma Leitura a Partir da Noção de Comunidade em Edith Stein

**RESUMO** – A partir do livro *Contribuciones a la fundamentación filosófica de la psicología de las ciencias del espíritu*, Edith Stein apresenta a intersubjetividade como exigência para a constituição do *eu* e do *nós*. Destarte, sua definição de *comunidade* permite uma compreensão da conjugalidade em seus aspectos constitutivos, destacando-a como um dos espaços de formação de subjetividades, conduzindo a temas como: autoformação, criatividade, ética, alteridade, abertura e responsabilidade individual e coletiva. Suas análises, a partir do conceito de pessoa, também clarificam que o processo de formação, especificamente correlacionado à identificação e repetição dos modelos intrafamiliares e sociais, é regido pelas leis de sentido e não reduzido à esfera psíquica, exibindo a possibilidade de autoconfiguração e reconfiguração de “si mesmo” e da conjugalidade.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Edith Stein, relações conjugais, fenomenologia, autoformação, criatividade

The phenomenon of repetition of family and sociocultural heritage has been target of great worry and created a number of studies with psychical and/or social focus. The clinic of couples has given special attention to that problematic, mainly when conjugality presents unfavorable or even violent aspects that result from identifications with the relational dynamics of the parental couple and even of its ancestral (Almeida, 2016; Eigner, 1998, 2012a, 2012b). Those studies present conjugality as the source of psychic

live, seeking the meanings of the intra-family heritage that serve as reference for the identification process. The difficulty of dismantle the vicissitudes that result from those identifications that span across generations, reveal how it is difficult to deconstruct in the subjective reality the models that are taken in the first affective relationships and inscribed in the subjectivities. Besides, uncover the originality and authenticity in relation to oneself and even in the way of being a couple, differentiating from the models

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that refer to the sufferings many times uncompressible to the very couples, prove to be a hard task and a challenge within the clinic.

The praxis of working with couples bumps into aspects correlated the family of origin, which are drawn and reinforced by the sociocultural context. That articulation lead us to reflect upon the reais possibilities when the models inscribed in those horizons present unfavorable aspects concerning feasibility of a common live project and to the encounter between two otherness. The construction of conjugality points to constitutive questions of human being that are inseparable from that configuration in relation to the family of origin and to contemporaneity. It is put in the stage the very formation of the way of being of the subject, involving not only the sociocultural implications, but at the same time, the very qualities of human condition; interchange of the real possibilities and limits outlined in the encounter of the I with the world. In that plan we bump on the capacity of the subject to respond to the stimuli of the world. Responses that reveal characteristics of the complexity of the inner life of the subject, pointing out, at the same time, to a horizon of possibility by means of the ability of self-configuration (Stein, 1932/1933/2003a, 1930/2003b, 1916/2005a, 1918/2005b, 1923/2007a), that if, therefore, the university of self-creation.

In that context, we propose to think about conjugality from Edith Stein's concept of *community*, which reveals intersubjective life as a requirement for the constitutions of the I and of the We. For such we have studies the book *Contribuciones a la fundamentación filosófica de la psicología de das ciencias del espíritu* [Contributions to the philosophical foundation of the sciences of spirit], from 1918, seeking to track back the definition of the concept and to support theoretically that association. Using our experience with couples and our readings on the topic, we have analyzed the concept of community, exploring the possibilities of its use in the comprehension of conjugality. Thus, correlations were made to a comprehension of the complexity of conjugality, which can be understood in its constitutive aspects and as one of the fundamental spaces for the formation of subjectivities, leading to themes such as: self-formation, creativity, ethics, otherness, reciprocity, love and individual and collective responsibility with other people's life.

Edith Stein's contribution for the anthropological and philosophical foundation about human being presents, by means of phenomenological analysis, his tripartite conditions, evinced in the spiritual category – corresponding to the intellect and will – the possibility of self-configuration in the encounter of the I with the world. The author addresses the question of physical causality distinguishing it in qualitative terms and presenting it in its openness to the world and its possibility for plasticity. The fact of presenting the coexistence of those laws with the motivation laws cast light to comprehend the constitution phenomenon of

conjugality as community that forms subjectivities and the phenomenon of identification with the family and social heritage in a perspective non-reductionist to the psychic and/or sociocultural stratum. Those comprehensions become possible by means of works as *Introducción a la filosofía*, of 1916, *Sobre el problema de la empatía*, of 1917, *Ser finito y ser eterno*, of 1937, *Naturaleza, libertad y gracia*, of 1923, *Estructura de la persona humana*, of 1932/1933, among others.

Defining conjugality means to think about the demands for the encounter between alterities, as well as to think about the qualities that are essentially human and that become indispensable for the construction a shared life project. From the notion of community, we can define conjugality as a life project that includes a *unity* of experiences that constitute the *we* and that the same time keep the personal experiences that preserve the *personal identity*. Constructing a life project that results in a *we* and at the same time in a *I* implies an ethic bound and also an openness to the other that is characterized as a love movement. Those reflections also corroborate the comprehension of the challenges of life together from the instauration of individualism in modernity: the exercise of meeting the demands of common space and simultaneously the individual demands (Almeida & Stengel, 2012).

Conjugality has proven to be a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, and the experts that deal with the treatment of couples bump into questions that refer to the characteristics of contemporaneity, in which the subject deals with the coexistence of two distinct value systems, one of them concerning traditionalism, and to the other related to individualism, a principle that have been set up in modern times. However, nowadays, the excessive emphasis on the pleasing sensations, the overestimation and the worship of self-image, the exaggeration of self-care, the overestimation of independence and the consequent scape from intimacy, freedom and the disproportional and absolute centrality of I, the disposable relationships, the loosening of alterity and solidarity, the lack of responsibility and compromise with other people's life, are some of the marks of the new configuration of contemporaneity that allow for consideration narcissism as a new modality of individualism (Almeida, 2016; Almeida & Stengel, 2012; Bauman, 2004; Lasch, 1983; Lipovetsky, 2005).

Thus, the present time seems to extract from love only the part that "matters", reducing the love experience to eroticism, pleasure, immediacy and utilitarianism, as a kind of fragmentation of its purpose that impact on the possibility of shared lives. On that context, the experience of acknowledgement, reciprocity, care and responsibility of the other is easily discarded, thus conjugality has become even more impractical or hard to construct. Those positions, considered essential for the constructions of a common project, or more precisely, the constitutions of *we*, in the terms of Stein (198/2005b), are little cultivated among the values contemplated by our time. When one scape from the

consciousness of alterity and from responsibility, it is very unlike to meet the basic demands to form an association that can be acknowledged as *we*, since the other does not exist as a subject, what implies, under the Steinian perspective, the impossibility of building an unity that allows for a life in common. Whereas extreme individualism associated to narcissism leads to the subject to attitude only in favor of himself, love as openness and as a social act, as Stein (1918/2005b) puts, is able to vivify the other's life and to working upon the construction of shared lives by longing the welfare of the other and to lead him to find himself. Actually, the concept of conjuality as an expression of a kind of community, whose correlation we present on that paper, appears as a response to the a time overly traversed, as Giovanetti (2010) puts, by the loosening of alterity, solidarity, love, friendship and grant. Those affections and attitudes

considered transitive, in the sense of casting the subject to an openness to one another and to more transcendent positions, seems to lose its meaning in the intersubjective space due to the contradictory values of the present time (Giovanetti, 2010).

We will exam initially the fundamental aspects of the notion of person, whose formation comprehend the laws of the spirit, what allow us to elevate the process of identification and constitution of *we* and *oneself* beyond the psychic life. Then, we will reflect upon the questions of community in its fundamental characteristics to transpose them to the context of conjuality. That way allow us to apprehend the identification process with the formation space, from the motivation laws, enunciating, in the singularity of the responses to the world's defiance, the person's ability to auto-creation.

## THE LIFE OF THE I: THE PSYCHIC AND SPIRITUAL LIFE

The philosophical anthropology of Edith Stein explains the human phenomenon by means of experiments, defining the different kinds of order that traverse it in the categories that reveal it in its tripartite condition: body, psyche and spirit in unity and interactivity ((Stein, 1932/1933/2003a, 1916/2005a, 1918/2005b, 1923/2007a, 1937/2007b). The analysis of the experiments allows for reaching a definition of *person* and the acts enclosed in it express what is proper of each of those categories, revealing an experiential structure in common to all human subjects and whose spheres, in function of being modeled by cultural and social dispositions, expose its character of openness and plasticity.

In this context, the body belongs to a subject feels through it and by means of which he is inserted in an exterior material world. Stein (1932/1933/2003a) affirms that for each body there is a subject, and its bounding of the physical body to an individual consciousness characterizes it as a living body. The distinction between psyche and consciousness is fundamental to avoid reducing the inner life to the psychical phenomena, to reach other constitutive realities that traverse it and to apprehend its implications on subjectivity (Stein, 1916/2005a). Consciousness is what allow the subject to be conscious of what he is living and to simultaneously to record the acts that are effected in his experience, making it possible both the manifestation of any reality to the subject and the act of knowing it. It is by means of the experience that the subject perceives and get to know himself and the external reality. Psyche is qualified as a being inserted in the categories of reality and, therefore, causality (Stein, 1916/2005a). However, as Stein (1918/2005b), it is not about that causality defined by the sciences of nature of exact or *quantitative* way, ensuring a non-determinism to the psychic life. The psychic stated are real ones, but also experimented states of the I, for they suffer the influence of space that receives the individual. Hence, the actual psychic

life is constituted in the bound with reality, dependent of the exterior world. The inner state provoked by the motivational encounter between the subject and its world constitutes the spiritual aspect inserted in the real life of psyche.

As the body and the psyche, the spirit is also given to us, however it is not determined, but is the core of decision and will, and therefore, of freedom (Ales Bello, 2004). The spiritual sphere presents itself as an instance constituted by the intellectual and willed aspects, for "the spirit is at one time understanding and ill: getting to know and willing that find themselves reciprocally conditioned" (Stein, 1932/1933/2003a, p. 651)<sup>1</sup>. From that results that man receives the world as intellect and configures it by means of will (Stein, 1923/2007a). Intellect, will, freedom, volition and decision are properties inherent to the spiritual sphere, indispensable aspects in the process of knowing and self-formation, that exposes both that which is common to all individuals, and that which is expressed on the singular. Whereas psychic life is something that happens and is presented as a passive sphere – for it depends on the individual to choose to have or not to have psychic reactions -, simultaneously emerges an I that is different and endowed with characteristics that allow him to act. That is the active sphere of human being, which, even though it finds limits ordered by the psychic sphere, by the living body and by sociocultural surrounds, it can and shall act upon those realities, for the act of positioning itself can indicate a direction, a demand for its very human condition.

The openness for the inside and the outside is the existential condition afford the man to know himself and things exterior to him, receiving in himself the other and the world. From the impressions of reality are manifested

<sup>1</sup> "el espíritu es entendimiento y voluntad simultáneamente: conocer y querer se hallan recíprocamente condicionados" (Stein, 1932/1933/2003a, p. 651).

the psychic reactions, as horror or surprise, as well as activities that surpass that domain, as willing is the acting, proper of the active dimension (Stein, 1918/2005b). From the encounter between the inside and the outside the being appears thus and not like that, for each response from the subject to the stimuli that comes from outside constitutes his action upon the world in the sense of configuring it, but simultaneously expresses one act towards oneself that results in self-configuration.

Stein (1932/1933/2003a) notes that in the core of human structure there is a *free I* that is different from the *real I* correspondent to the psychic sphere, therefore, it does not identify itself with the laws of causality. It is by means of the *personal I* or the *personal core* that the whole of the person is shaped and the psychophysical unity is held together, for it expresses as the molding principle that prescribes a singular way to the development of the constitutive instances of humane. Everything the personal life expresses, creates and configures corresponds to the exercise of the capabilities correspondent to the personality. Thus, the creative act results from the action of will and that, by its turns, is guided *for* and *to* the individual note that only the *personal I* can confer (Stein, 1932/1933/2003a, 1916/2005a).

For Stein (1916/2005a, 1923/2007c) it is impossible to exist one I without freedom, inasmuch as it is a constitutive part of human being and corresponds to the person as a subject endowed with will. Being constitutive of the I, freedom lives in an immanent way in the freedom activities, constituting what allows the I being a *person* and being *himself*, its self-formation and transformation. Movements which we can observe an unbelievable demand of a *free I* located in the core and that can act for himself freely, for, as Stein (1932/1933/2003a), affirms, can have the command on his hands, in order that whether using them or not is an expression of freedom. According to Stein (1916/2005a), becoming aware that freedom is also *power* to take decisions, and of a free generation of actions, the subject realizes his duty in the formation of its own character, in his development towards becoming himself. However, we cannot affirm that every human being is totally free, but we can assure that there are possibilities of freedom, since he does not have the full control upon himself due to the natural dispositions, the psychic devices and the limits imposed by the external world.

According to Stein (1916/2005a), the psychic states, as experiences, do not explain themselves solely by means of causal laws, for they involve other aspects of the life of the I that reveal the intentional character of living, the fundamental way of psychic life. That movement that comes from the openness of the man to the outside, in the act of open his eyes to the world of values, returns to its innerness by means of that same fissure, but does not come back empty, but rather charged with *meanings*. Is man finds himself existentially open to the experiences of the world he lives in, all the constitutive spheres have some openness, or would be impossible to print upon them that particularity that

emanates *from the personal I*. the *meanings* constituted on the encounter between the subject with the world penetrate the psychic reality fulfilling it and tuning it. Therefore, all the psychic states are not different from what returns to the inside of the man charged with *meaningful content*. Other important aspect regarding that return to innerness – specially in relation to the filling it with the values available in the human world – is the fact that this movement contains in itself the demand for a positioning in front of the world the personal I finds. We emphasize yet another movement that comes from the inside and that heads again towards the external world, but now anchored and inbuilt of the memory of that experience full of meaning, which has fulfilled the psychic and spiritual reality, and that, from then on, expresses itself in a given action upon the world and upon itself given them some form. This is the sphere of the acts of the I, which can only be understood in a different logic.

As the psychic sphere has its laws, the spiritual dimension also has its own laws. The life of the psyche is rooted in the sensible stratum of natural inner life and in the spiritual stratum originated in the exteriority, in order that those two laws coexist in their reality and possesses a given connection and cooperation. The fundamental law of spiritual life is translated by philosophy as the law of *meaning* or *motivation*. Laws that do not obey a given causality relation, for there is not in them the *need* that rules the laws of nature. What those laws express, in universal terms, is that there is an *essential possibility*. Stein (1918/2005b) affirms that in *motivation* an action is bounded to another and that means that it is realized in virtue and due to the other.

*Motivation*, in its most general sense, is related to the bound that connects one act to the other, referring to the fact that one act wants to be actualized based on another, that is, that this movement has some meaning for the subject that does it. Hence, there is not *motivation* without some *meaning* that wakes and moves it. As the connection between the acts if immersed in meanings, *motivation* can be understood as the movement from the I “due to”, and that “to” as the *meaning* that indicates a direction, since motivation, as the philosopher explains, is and *engendering of meanings* (Stein, 1918/2005b). Thus, no act is empty, but is impregnated with meaning, inasmuch as its direction is moved by motivations and full of *meaning*, since the subject heads towards an object by the fact of existing in him some *meaningful content* that stimulates him somehow. That movement is characteristic of the intentional and presents two fundamental aspects: one related to the movement of the I towards one object and the other related to the singular way of *apprehension* of the world that is revealed to the I. The essence of that relation depends on how those experiences are processed and signified, for such acts emanate from the I and the *motivations* that move and connect them are supported continuously on the I.

From the exposed, the actualization of an act presupposes the existence of some *meaning* that motivates and moves

it and of a position and a purpose that support it, what implies experiences that precedes it, around which the subject organizes himself in a personal way: thus, it is not an empty movement, as something that comes from nothing and goes to nothing, or that happens in a contingent way. It is as if every act of the subject had in itself a particular story grounded intimately on the experiences that precede it, in the meanings attributed to all lived that supported it as conducting cables that move aiming at its realization. That means the *motivation* as a bounding between the experiences and its acts plays a fundamental role in the process of molding of the subject, allowing for the comprehension

of certain acts of the individual in his world and in his interpersonal relationships. The motivations for an specific act can influence the choice of a person, but they do not determine its action, for the personal I can have reasonable arguments, acknowledging them, and yet, omit an specific action. In fact the motivations by themselves cannot determine the action, for it is necessary that something more enters the scene: the *will*. The will is indispensable for the comprehension of the self-configuration process in the constitution of being *oneself* and being *us* in a non-determinist perspective.

## INTERSUBJECTIVITY: FROM THE EMPHATIC ACT TO A LIFE IN COMMON

As we observed, there is in human being a fundamental need that is translated as *openness* to the inside and to the outside and that allows him to head towards himself and the external world configured by his creative spirit and full of cultural goods. A world in which is actualized the experience of oneself and of the other, finally, an intersubjective world. Intersubjectivity is expressed as the need for the other for the formation and as a very demand to get to know, for all experience of the individual also involves someone's experience (Stein, 1916/2005a; 1917/2005c). The act that afford the knowledge between two alterities is translated by philosophy as empathy. The empathic experience is, therefore, the thirst, the vital principal of life shared among the subject, what implies, by its turn, values, ethics and self-formation (Ales Bello, 2000, 2006, 2007a, 2015; Barreira, 2014; Stein, 1918/2005b, 1917/2005c).

It is by means of the empathic experience that occurs the knowledge and the interchange between the I and the you. A conscious experience, that refers to perception and to the notion of oneself as *I am* – not only to the consciousness of a way of being – and, at the same time, the consciousness of the existence of an *alter ego*, therefore the knowledge of the other reaches depths that allow for capturing it in its singularity (Ales Bello, 2004, 2006, 2007a; Mahfoud, 2007). That dynamism exposes the encounter of one *I* with other *I*, translating the field of subjectivity as a *foundational* relation for self-formation, a field in which the awareness of being noted and evaluated refers to questionings of the very way of being in the world. In that clash, the *personal I* takes the stimuli that are set up in one way or another, putting into play the self-formation, or towards becoming oneself or in the contrary direction, far away from the authentic being (Mahfoud, 2007).

By means of empathy it is possible to enter in contact with the other, feeling or capturing what passes in its inside, putting himself into relation to comprehend what he experiments, inasmuch it possesses the same human structure, even though the content lived are distinct and despite other people's interiority not being fully transparent

and reachable. The act of gathering the other's experience, that can keep on the border of the superficial or enter the innermost spheres, is an essential possibility for the intersubjective phenomenon, though it has some restrictions (Ales Bello, 2007a; Barreira, 2014; Savian Filho, 2014). Empathy cannot be reduced to a mere identification of the other, but also expresses the possibility of capturing and experimenting the object or the content of his experiences, put himself in the place of the other and understanding it, as well as of shared lives. In that sense, it is possible to apprehend what the other is living and stablishing relationships of reciprocal comprehension, but we would never live other people's experience, since it is originally particular and in fact non-transferable (Stein, 1917/2005c).

Empathy is expressed as a fundamental act for the acknowledgement of alterity. As empathy if understood as an act that allows for the intersubjective contact, and intersubjectivity refers to the conduction of the inter-human relationships, we observe that there is an empathic foundation of the ethic field since the first steps of its manifestation, in the acknowledgement of the other as equally human, as in the consciousness of his difference, respecting it, as well as in the care with the experience and the needs of the other (Ales Bello, 2004, 2007b; Barreira, 2014). "In the relation with the other the ethical conduct is put inherently, whether we think about it or not" (Barreira, 2014, p. 55-56).

It is true that we can deny the other acknowledgement, due to his difference, as another I equally human. That denial, as Ales Bello (2004) warns, appears from the insecurity that the difference causes in the sphere of psyche, in which we observe the first reaction of putting away the different, as it was a threaten to our world. That means that in that level empathy can be denied. However, such reactions in the sphere of psyche can be overcome by the spiritual activity, that is, an intellectual and voluntary action that is put above and question that actions. "Alterity is acknowledged by means of entropathy,<sup>2</sup> but then it is needed to make a spiritual

<sup>2</sup> Ales Bello (2004) adopts the term *entropathy* justifying its preference

decision; ...I find myself in front of another human being, whether it pleases me or not, whether I want it or not, that troubles me” (Ales Bello, 2004, p. 193).

There are different intersubjective spaces in which are unrolled the formative process of the subject, however the kind of association given as the environment of self-realization and self-formation more adequate for the growth of the person is the community (Ales Bello, 2000, 2007b, 2015; Mahfoud, 2007; Stein, 1918/2005b). There is an unmistakable kind of association with communitarian life: *mass*, a kind of association in which the development and the actualization of the other is not in the agenda, in which prevails the selfish goals. The mass is characterized by the psychic contagion and in that case the spiritual activity – related to reflection and discernment – finds itself discouraged by its action, in order that the subject let themselves be ruled by instinctive reactions. Other kind of organization that stands out is *society*; an aggregation qualified by a goal of intellectual or ethical order, in which prevail the interests and dispositions around of which the subjects congregate, however, without personal bounds.

It is impossible to refer to the term *person* and to its molding process without mentioning communitarian life as its constitutive space. In it are implied a profound connection among its members, for their bound are marked by the predominance of personal bounds, being marked by reciprocal responsibility and, thus, each member is considered irreplaceable. In that sense, it is a life in common that leads to the structural characteristic of openness of the human subject to the sphere of the world of values and ethics, aiming at the growth of the tripartite totality. In community the subject is implied, interests, occupies himself and is responsible for the other’s life, judging the values upon which he proposes to live a life in common, being able to freely connect or disconnect from it.

The formative process of the person begins in a family community that needs to respond to the physical, psychic and spiritual needs, creating conditions for its development, and continues in other communitarian spaces, that can or cannot awake other potentialities, enhance those that are fully bloomed and, besides, provoke new positioning that culminate in creative acts (Ales Bello, 2007b; Coelho Júnior & Mahfoud, 2006; Stein, 1918/2005b, 1923/2007c).

Life in community is a life in common notably marked by social acts, it is an invitation for living with one another and perform properly human acts. Being and living together with other(s) means to see them acting and at the same time act with them, helping to form and to be formed by them, thus, it is possible to affirm that human life is a cultural life (Stein, 1932/1933/2003a). In fact, community is evaluated as an organic structure and a formative space, being perceptible a relation of interdependency among its

members, in which some affect the others according to the positions taken. Each community has a history marked by aesthetic, ethic, religious and personal values, expressing dimensions of prescription of behaviors and aspects that vivify and strengthen the life in common (Ales Bello, 1998, 2000, 2015; Coelho Júnior & Mahfoud, 2006; Stein, 1918/2005b). The particular communities are founded by association, aiming at productive acts, based upon ways of thinking that bring the individuals together, in conditions and ways of life in common or an a common origin, as it is the case of one people of family (Stein, 1932/1933/2003a). The vital force of the community is considered subjective by the fact of coming from its members and depending of the way each person positions himself and is implied in its formation and maintenance, but also has objective sources that can be identified in the values that are shared, as in the territorial characteristics in the cultural works of communitarian life (Ales Bello, 2000; Coelho Júnior & Mahfoud, 2006; Stein, 1916/2005a, 1918/2005b). In order to form an *unity of communitarian experience* first it is need a flow of intense collective experiences whose bound among its members are founded by reciprocity (Stein, 1918/2005b).

The spiritual life of the community expresses an openness to the objective world and, at the same time, the existence of a flow of communitarian experiences contemporary to its members, which are added to those that are transmitted from generation to generation, composing a story full of meaning, that ensures its continuity. That means that there is a *qualitative unity* within that kind of association, which is constituted from the core to a centrality, expressing a more vivid and profound connection between its members, that proportionate the feeling of belonging and the free engaging and personal commitment. The way by which the members are connected expresses the quality of the insertion and the relationship that each one establishes with the whole, and that means that one community is different from another in function of the personal positioning. According to the author, the higher form of community correspond to the union of totally free people, for the acceptance and the conviction that move them to bound their lives are grounded by the spiritual activity in an authentic way, and therefore, are not the effect of a psychic contagion that drag and cluster them impulsively, without reflection and autonomy, as in the case of the mass.

The content of communitarian experience is translated as a *nucleus of common sense* its members move towards, but the way of experimenting it is always personal. In fact, “as the content of meaning is covered with a living coloration, also the experience, on the other hand, is determined by the meaning of the content” (Stein, 1918/2005b, p. 352)<sup>3</sup>. As a result each member lives as a person and as a community and that means that his singularity is not suppressed by the

by that translation. However, she is referring to the empathic process described by Edith Stein in her doctorate thesis.

<sup>3</sup> “Así como el contenido de sentido está revestido de una coloración vivencial, así también el vivenciar, por otra parte, está determinado por lo sentido del contenido” (Stein, 1918/2005b, p. 352).

whole, for it continues always as a personal I, living in a particular way that which is lived in the communitarian life (Ales Bello, 2015; Stein, 1918/2005b).

For the philosopher, it is only by means of an openness from one individual to another that *reciprocity* occurs, a principle considered fundamental for the constitution of a community. Without reciprocity there is not an ethic commitment of responsabilization with the life of the other and neither solidarity and care, essential elements in its composition. As Stein (1918/2005b, p. 423)<sup>4</sup> notes, where there is openness between the people and their attitude penetrate, irradiate and stimulate the life of the other, it is possible to generate a unity, in a way that “there exists a communitarian life, there both are members of a totality”. When the other is taken and treated only as an object that meets certain personal interests, rather than being acknowledged and valorized as a person, the *unity of life* is broken – that which constitutes the essence of the community – and it is extinguished the possibility of a world of and an energy in common. The attitudes that express openness are not only fundamental for the constitution of a given community, but needed for the quality of its bounds, its continuity and vitality.

Every positioning towards something or to someone is about the values that are bounded to the being of the person and also refers to the life in common. The community need values in order to exist and to have continuity; they determine the engaging of its members and the effort to cultivate them. Both the objective values and the personal ones can trigger specific attitudes and their contents can produce an energy capable of vivifying the individual and communitarian spiritual life. When the values are lived with consciousness, discernment and responsibility, they become the expression of communitarian life.

The positioning of each member in relation to one another is differentiated by its positive or negative character and can intervene directly in its interior life; for thus one can affirm or deny the other as a person, respectively (Stein, 1918/2005b). According to Stein (1932/1933/2003a), positioning as love, respect or admiration are achieved as social acts, since they compose a response to personal values and, therefore, are considered essential for a shared life project. Love becomes a spiritual fact when it indicates openness to the other, meaning that the other occupies a capital place in the communitarian association; its value is translated by the desire of well-being, by the acceptance of his singular being and the elevation of his personal abilities (Ales Bello, 2007b; Stein, 1932/1933/2003a, 1918/2005b). All the actions towards the other are passable of reaching him, influencing him and provoking some kind of positioning, since the person experiment them deep inside (Stein, 1918/2005b). We consider that, for that reason – from

the principle a human being possess freedom and is capable of performing free acts and that, due to this, he is called to a personal responsibility in relation to himself, concerning his self-formation and equally to other, for his actions affect other people’s lives-, love translated as openness and not only as a feeling implies reciprocity, in wishing the other well, and also in responsabilization.

The postures adopted in front the other in particular and in relation to the set reflect the question of ethics in the inter-human relationships. An ethic that refers to the life in common and plays a fundamental role that guides the positions for the life of *we*. Once that ethic is broken, devastating effects appears, both individually and collectively. The ethic question is present in all the expositions of Steinian anthropology and is expressed in the a peculiar way in each detail explicit in the relationship between the person and the community. Not only the community as a whole must adopt an ethic posture in relation to the new member that will gather it, but also the person in her particular attitudes must assume it in relation to herself.

We conclude that the fundamental principle concerning ethics is expressed in the empathic act, initially in the movement allow the individual to acknowledge that there is one other in front of him, equally human due to the similarity of its constitutive structure. Next that this acknowledgement must deal the difference that makes him singular and, in that sense, its valorization surpasses the first level of “realizing” other human being, in order to apprehend that diversity does not disqualify him as such, but increases its value. In fact, the personal value refers to the respect to its freedom of expression concerning himself, in thinking and being different, that relates to his *personal I*, unique and non-repeatable. In this level, it is not enough to realize the alterity, but it is needed to create spaces and conditions for the other to be himself.

Seeking the common good is taking into consideration the person and the community, a not very easy task, since it demands judgements, reflection and positioning that are guided by an ethic. Acknowledgement, respect to the difference, valorization of the other as a person and responsibility with his life express openness and ethic. Acts that originate in the empathy and that are subject to freedom, and which can be denied to the extremes and to lead to less favorable directions to the growth and achievement of the other.

Belonging to a community is a value that is judged and incorporated, is ethic adopted as conducting cable that guides the positioning between its members and also in relation to the other communities that compose humanity. An ethic that is developed in an intersubjective context and that results from the intellective capacity of reflection, of a judgement upon the questions correlated to the inter-human relationships, which implies freedom of choice and desire for achievement.

<sup>4</sup> “allí existe una vida comunitaria, allí ambos son miembros de la totalidad” (Stein, 1918/2005b, p. 423).

For Stein (1923/2007c), the communities, in general, have the responsibility for the training of the individual. In that sense, the family community is the first space of formation of the human person, there the values of the parents as made available and each son in particular is recognized as an independent way and can position himself freely, in the sense of being able to take them and assume them as theirs. For that reason, there is a responsabilization with the material offered for the formation of one person, but that does not extinguish the individual responsibility that is expressed by the personal way she is positioned.

The consciousness of belonging to a community awakes the consciousness of personal and collective responsibility in relation to the totality and, at the same time, triggers an attitude of self-evaluation in each member about the personal behaviors in relation to the whole; and we consider that the ability of realizing and reflecting upon the individual and communitarian acts allows for the development, maturing and enhancement of ethic life (Ales Bello, 2007b; Mahfoud,

2007; Sberga, 2014; Stein, 1932/1933/2003a, 1918/2005b, 1923/2007c).

From the exposed we consider that love, defined by the author as openness and as a social act, is expressed as an activity of the spiritual life that favors the intersubjectivity in the sense of construction of a *we*. A construction that results in an exercise of will and of freedom, for one cannot obligated the other to love, as well as one cannot impose them an openness or a kind of life in common. According to the Steinian observations, love as a spiritual act seeks the common good, creates conditions for the other to become what he is, besides, does not impose him anything, but respect him and allow him to be free. In view of the above, we believe that love is intimately bound to ethic, since the openness and the position in relation to each other, in the terms discussed, imply love and ethic. Under that perspective, could love, as a social act, also be the ethic in the inter-human relationships?

## CONJUGALITY: CONSTRUCTION THE LIFE OF THE “I “AND OF THE “WE”

There are lots of kinds of organizations that mirror bounds of communitarian kind, and the family is one of them, and for us, conjugality can also be translated in that sense – a kind of association related to the construction of “*we*” and that expresses fundamental characteristics for its constitution and continuity. Taken as a communitarian association, conjugality is translated as a bound founded in an ethic commitment that will support a shared life project in common. However, different from other kinds of community, conjugality also has a sexual bound (Saint-Arnaud, 1984). In the terms discussed in relation to ethics, we consider that the conjugal bound also has an axis in the empathic act and, therefore, its constitution demands the acknowledgement of alterity and the consciousness that the singularity of the other is a sacred place. Under the communitarian perspective, conjugal life can be considered as an intersubjective space marked by profound personal bounds, which demands openness and reciprocity as acts that guide the couple for the mutual responsibility and for the care with the life of the other. But, as we observed, openness is not an imposition, but rather the effect of an act of freedom and will, and only in those conditions the bound between the pair and its continuity can be understood as authentic, in virtue of being founded in a personal positioning resulting from a spiritual activity and not only as a consequence of psychic contagion, though it can occur in certain kinds of bound.

The intersubjective relationships, in those terms, becomes a favorable space where each one can develop himself, discover himself and give continuity to his formative process which began in its family of origin; for the family is the first space of self-formation, but it is not the only one, finding itself in interconnection with other formative communities

(Almeida, 2016). Under that perspective, constructing a favorable space for the *we* means to allow for the bloom of the *authentic I* of each person that constitute the couple and, in this case, the other is evaluated as someone *irreplaceable*: a positioning considered essential in the constitution of the communitarian bound (Ales Bello, 2007b; Mahfoud, 2007; Stein, 1932/1933/2003a, 1918/2005b).

The conjugal bound also implies solidarity and love as acts of reciprocity in the search for the well-being of the other, in the will for its good, in the acceptance of his singular being and in the elevation of its personal capacities. Living conjugality as a community means to welcome the other in a way that he can feel that he belongs to the whole. Shelter the other is translated in the acknowledgement and valorization of his singularity, in the consciousness that belonging to a *we* involves a reciprocal responsibility. For such, the conjugal life can considered communitarian for, as Mahfoud (2007) puts, living something in common is what turns a relationship into an expression of a community and, as Ales Bello (2000) affirms, what characterizes it fundamentally is the existence of an objective and a goal in common, what allows to say that it comprises a strictly personal character.

The intersubjective field is a constitutional need that fills the human souls and gives meaning to its existence. In favorable conditions, it allows the subject to become himself and to belong; among other demands proper of its condition, it make possible love and being love. Under that perspective, if the “family is presented as the most complete way of community”, as Ales Bello (2007b, p. 99) explains, conjugality, as one of the starting points for its emergence and composition, is expressed as one of the spaces of self-



configuration of the human subject that can constitute and cultivate the conditions needed to form the *we* and the *I* in the most authentic way possible.

Love as openness allow for the configuration of *oneself* and of the *we* (Almeida, 2016; Almeida & Stengel, 2012; Stein, 1918/2005b) towards an ethic that implies the acknowledgement of alterity. The construction of the *we* requires an act that surpass the borders of superficiality, as a movement of scape from oneself that seeks to enter the interiority of the other and get to know him, transforming him in someone in fact valorized in its singularity. Thus, we consider that what is the most highlighted in the ethic of that configuration is founded in the questions of alterity positioning within the relationship, a question that is intimately bound to love as openness. An ethic that presupposes that both the partners will seek to meet their fundamental needs for love, of becoming themselves and equally to the remnants proper of the sociocultural environment in which the subject performs its self-training, acknowledging the other as a singular one in the construction of *we* (Almeida, 2016; Almeida & Stengel, 2012; Stein, 1918/2005b). Under that logic, the *we* cannot be misunderstood as a fusion in which the partners lose their individual identity, but rather considering it as the shared good that offers openness for each one to become a couple and, at the same time, oneself; it does not erase the individualities, but rather, lights them when it is constituted as a space that foster the personal growth and achievement.

Ales Bello (2015) affirms that the assurance of personal identity is only made possible if a community works well. However, we need to consider that in all kinds of communities, and conjuality would not be an exception, not all individuals that compose them will develop in their lives the transcendent openness and posture so necessary for the environment in which they live be adequate for the formation of the *we* and of the *oneself*. Contrary positioning to the constitution of conjuality in both directions are

possible in all times, but they are supported especially in the contemporaneity. Attitudes of psychological violence are stroke in the conjugal space when one puts himself above the other and tries to undermine the other's existence, impeding her singularity to shine (Almeida, 2016; Almeida & Stengel, 2012). Besides, there is a coexistence of closeness attitudes upon oneself – feed by the exacerbation of individualist and narcissist value – and of openness to the other (Almeida, 2012). In order that the life as “we” be favorable to the couple, it is needed a constant self-evaluation, negotiation and development of one ethic that allow the other to be open to the experiences that lead him to be himself. When the conjugal space in which the subject finds himself offers conditions for being himself and develop himself in that direction, it express the higher form of community, according to the Steinian reflections, for there each one can freely position himself and be valorized as an unique and irreplaceable person.

As the tripartite reality is fulfilled with the cultural production that inhabit the territory the subject develop himself (Stein, 1932/1933/2003a), we conclude that the conjugal bound is the construction of the *we* interwoven according to a horizon of meanings of the sociocultural context. The experience of conjuality takes the form of a contract which presupposes that both people will define their bases in rules, values, demands, expectations, duties and responsibilities according to the cultural environment in which they are inserted. As Almeida (2012) puts, in terms of expectations – even in front of the heterogeneity of love configurations that are present nowadays and the fluidity and transience of moral rules and values-, emphasizes a few aspects that seem to be the most relevant for the shared life project: the freedom to choose the partner, the maintenance of the relation based on the present of love, sexual attraction, respect of the individuality, freedom and autonomy and the commitment to exclusivity or fidelity.

## CONJUALITY AS A SPACE OF SELF-FORMATION FOR THE CHILDREN

Being defined as community, conjuality borders the sociocultural environment and is expressed as one of the spaces that works for the training of the person. The self-training process is designed within the cultural universe with which the person is faced when she is cast in the world, being therefore determined, to a certain extent, by the most diverse contents of meaning configured in it (Stein, 1923/2007a). Determined, for her being if fulfilled by the context of that reality, and to a certain extent, for her way to respond to them, in the sense of signify them, is person and, therefore, we bump onto the most different possible responses from a subject to another.

Stein (1932/1933/2003a, 1916/2005a) affirms that the personal *I* is free and possess a consciousness on the

possibilities and demands in front of which he will make his decisions in the process of self-configuration. However, that consciousness do not realize a general idea of that which the subject must be and, for that very reason, seeks a model for the way of action. Thus, the child is not born with the typical characteristics of one group, but develop them inasmuch she seeks in her world models she can identify with and to the extent that she allows herself to be influenced by her reality (Stein, 1932/1933/2003a). According to the philosopher, take a model means getting to know a person and to receive from her the impression that she could be the same way. In fact, whether or not to take a person as a model and her respective thought of way of thinking the world is a question of decision, therefore, it is a free act. The act of deciding

results from an *evaluative activity* and an *act of will* that are triggered in a *motivational context* intimately connected to the world in which one lives. For one person to see herself motivated in one direction and not in the other, she needs to active her personal core, judge and position herself.

Conjugality, as community, possesses a *unity* full of *meanings* that refers to the experiences in common and to the dynamics proper of the couple, and which can become a reference for the rearing of the children. To that we add the fact that the acts performed in the communitarian space affect all its members and, in that case, the attitudes between the couple become a material that can nurture the life of the children. Stein (1918/2005b) affirms that it needs to occur a conviction in relation to that which is presented to a person, in order that *something* be absorbed and become part of her inner life. Thus, she can identify with the content of meanings of parental conjugality and transform it in a beginning for her way of thinking, which once admitted, affirmed and transformed in habit, will become so solid that later it will be complex to be accept another perception. In fact, the question of mutual responsabilization is fundamental, for it is no more centered only in the direct relation of the parents with the children and refers also to cultivation of the quality of the relationship between the couple, whether they live together or not.

In Edith Stein we realized that identification is one of the possibilities in the self-configuration process, since human being possesses a creative dimension that emanates from the personal I. The process of take the models from the world we live in a micro and macrosocial perspective is presented as a need proper from the humane, that needs to be fulfilled by the surrounds we live in order to gain life and meaning, what we understand, refers to the questions of identification, repetition and creation act (Almeida & Romagnoli, 2016). The phenomenon of identification and repetition is taken as a spiritual activity rather than being reduced to the life of the psyche and its laws, therefore, can be considered, to a certain extent, as free acts, ruled by the laws of meaning

or motivation (Almeida, 2016; Almeida & Romagnoli, 2016). Identification exposes two important questions: one regarding the quality of that which is available in the space in which the subject is formed, and the other to the fact of undermining or lighting her singularity. The big question is if that we take from the intersubjective relationships is added to what we are without taken from us our singularity or if, on the contrary, what we elect in identification is superimposed to our individuality, that is, push us away from what would mean *to be ourselves*, holding us off from what we should be to assume something, often, inversely of what we are. That means that in the intersubjective relationships we can awake that which we are in fact added to the treasure of the other's experiences and, in that case, identification would be an enrichment, a free act of willing to become, as the philosopher puts, as that model we evaluate as desirable, but without it stealing from us our singularity in the sense of authenticity. If the conjugality of the parents, for example, reaches ethic attitudes, it can be a reference of a good the children might want to identify with.

Creativity is born from the unity between body, psyche and spirit in intercommunication with the cultural milieu, but is by means of the active sphere that it reveals the vestiges of spontaneity in the movements of the hand that is orchestrated by the personal I; here it gains unique light, form and expressivity. Spontaneity is the higher essence that expresses a creative act, for it manifests that there is something the subject put from himself and that scape to the universe of his socialization. The capacity of creating and configuring is part of the formative process and, to avoid training of deformation of the person, "the formation that comes from the outside must count on the formation from the inside" (Stein, 1930/2003b, p. 178)<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> "la formación desde fuera tiene que contar con la formación desde dentro, si no hay adiestramiento y no formación, o deformación" (Stein, 1930/2003b, p. 178).

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

If the community is considered the most favorable environment for self-configuration, we can consider that the constitution of the *we* can be a process of growth, maturing and transformation that is realized as each person finds space to become herself. The contact with alterity applied to the conjugal bound cast the subject to the difference of the other that can move him to look inside himself. In that clash, the *personal I* takes the stimuli that are set, putting in play the self-formation, or towards becoming himself, on in the contrary direction.

The laws of motivation and the notion of person allow us to think that the experience of alterity and the events that challenge the existence of the couple can potentialize the reconfiguration of the lived around the parental conjuality. Thus, conjuality cannot be taken only as a place in which is expressed the mean attributed to that experimented in the family of origin, but as a space that can offer conditions for the present to rework, reconfiguring the past experiences, allow for equally to the partners to recreate their way of being individuals and a couple. Being a couple can be a continuous process of self-creation that refers to the unpredictable. The creative act regarding self-configuration is manifested very early, when the child takes the world for herself in a

singular and unpredictable way, when she reconfigures the experience from a perspective different from the past, when her answers are surprising and different from the expected, her way of being surpasses the models available in the world she inhabits (Almeida & Romagnoli, 2016). Even in front of the limits imposed by the natural condition and the society the child is born in, the unpredictability is found there, saying that the human subject if determined in an absolute way and is not reduced to the life of *psyche*.

If nowadays we found values lead the man to close upon himself and very often to stop seeing the other as a person to treat him as an object, they seem to strike exactly the ethic principle of inter-human relationships, the empathic act that puts the other in a situation of equality in his difference. In the case of conjuality, such attitudes weaken alterity, care, respect and the responsibility with the life of the other. Without those qualities, one cannot affirm that life as a couple will move towards the self-achievement of the pair and without the conflicts that result from those positions. As Stein (1923/2007a) puts, not all that fulfills the man is capable of conducting him to himself, a questions that points to the responsibility in front of what circulates in the world that forges him, and at the same time, is forged by him.

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