

Chapter 10

Sense of Belonging and Disillusionment: A Phenomenological Reading of Community Dynamics



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1 Introduction

The study of the social fabric of communities which is proper to sociology saw a blossoming of philosophical reflection, especially at the beginning of the twentieth century, with certain phenomenologists. Even though they were in the forefront of the analysis of the ego and therefore apparently only interested in the individual person to whom all reality could be traced, clear demands of a more social nature emerged even in the founder of the phenomenological school, Edmund Husserl. From Adolf Reinach to Max Scheler, Edith Stein, Gerda Walther and Dietrich von Hildebrand,¹ the analyses of the social dimensions of the human person and the consequent characterisation of the interrelational fabric of society and the relative differentiations between community, society, state and peoples still offer us an interesting and rich framework in which to observe and explain some of the dynamics of today's communities.

What is most open to reflection is the interconnection of the individual and his/her relational fabric with others, or rather, the analysis of this interrelationship,

¹These German thinkers, all of whom lived between the end of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, were in various ways inspired by the philosophical approach developed by Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), attending his lectures and the phenomenological circles in an intense and vital exchange, among themselves and with other colleagues. Husserl himself gave more space to the analysis of the subject and the gnoseological process at the basis of the sciences, first and foremost philosophy; however, his reflections on intersubjectivity – which run through a little of his entire production – have just recently been re-read highlighting a concept that is decidedly undeveloped in its scope, but clearly social, namely that of the *Gemeingeist* (common mind), as a key element of Husserlian social ontology (Caminada, 2019).

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starting from and in the light of the constitution of the person who is fully understandable precisely in virtue of the relational world that surrounds him/her and the person's experience of that world. For this reason, we will dwell on the reading of the social fabric of the community by following the analyses of the aforementioned phenomenologists, while constantly referring to the concept of the person that underpins them and the consequent relationship between the individual and the community. An initial distinction between community and society which takes up the sociological distinction made a few decades earlier by Tönnies² will allow us to clarify terms by differentiating the areas of inference to the sphere of the individual and, vice versa, of influence on them. In this sense, we will give space to emotions and feelings, trying not only to understand their origin and scope in intersubjective relations but also their possible autonomy and typicality as 'social and/or shared emotions'. The result will be a bond of dependence/belonging between the individual and the community, by virtue of which we can explain certain situations and dynamics that deeply innervate the living and political action of the individual and community and can lead to socio-political phenomena such as populism and so on.

2 Community and Society: A First Insight Between Sociology and Phenomenology

The theme of community and society in general has been central to sociological reflection since its inception, but it is undoubtedly from Ferdinand Tönnies' study of the functioning and the differentiation between community and society that the foundations were set for a wide-ranging sociological reflection on the social dynamics that constitute the nucleus of the socio-political actions of individuals taken as a whole. Also philosophy had always posed the social question as an expression of the human being and human ethical-political actions. The beginning of the twentieth century marked a moment of great development and diffusion of the academic disciplines as autonomous sciences aimed at the study of particular sectors of knowledge, generating great fragmentation and specialisation. In this context, certain philosophers returned to the central question – which is their task – about the 'what', or the essence of phenomena while never neglecting the precious data of the particular sciences and their descriptions of the 'how'.

The topic of society and inter-human relations examined through the lens of the common fabric of aggregates with their own identity and characteristics also receives a great deal of attention, beginning from a critical reading of the results proposed by Tönnies' sociological research. The distinction he proposes between types of human interrelationship considers community and society on the basis of

²This is the habilitation work developed and presented in 1881 at the Faculty of Philosophy in Kiel under the title *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*. It remained for many years as a text of discussion on the subject of community and the social fabric, especially in the light of the definition and distinction it proposes between community and society.

prevailing tendencies. The community would therefore constitute the fabric of relations within which there is a tendency

to abstain from (certain) hostilities and to perform (certain) services in the interests of certain lasting relationships which prevail among the wills of such persons, so as to ensure that such exercise and abstention always have the same direction. (Tönnies, 2012, 46)

Society, on the other hand, represents the interrelational fabric in which another tendency occurs: 'All human beings are ready to abstain from hostilities towards others insofar as they also abstain from the same; and to grant benefits to each individual on condition that they grant the relative counterparts' (Ibid.).

Within a community, the tendency to be assertive towards the community's demands is a matter of 'duty', that is, one feels obliged to do something for the community and to obey, a feeling that is driven both by fear and by the sheer habit that underlies it. Having said this, Tönnies also states that the community is not to be considered as

an organism or something that is alive in some way; (it is) primarily by nothing more than an enduring relationship between persons that results in certain facts; in this sense, the community to be described with an image, as the promotor of one will and in that sense as a person equal to other persons even if it lacks other essential characteristics of this word. Thus, communities, thought of as entities, can stand with each other in the same relationships as individual persons: hostile, social, communal and friendly. (Tönnies, 2012, 55)

In contrast, society is traversed by attitudes of indifference or hostility that are taken to be part of a preceding situation which can only be overcome by one specific action: that of the contract, in which two or more wills, absolutely different and autonomous from each other, agree on certain mutual provisions. Then it is habit and a sense of duty which characterise the community just as much as desire and fear the society. Thus, kinship, neighbourhood and friendship fall within the framework of community, the essential features of which are being together (*Zusammenwesen*), living together (*Zusammenwohnen*) and acting together (*Zusammenwirken*) (Tönnies, 2012, 226–227). For Tönnies, the first feature stresses the sense of belonging that marks any community; the second indicates the desire to occupy the same space and is therefore a sign of proximity, including physical proximity, which allows a whole series of interchanges; and finally, acting together makes explicit the common will or common desire that underlies the actions and activities of individuals or parts of a community.³

³ It is very interesting how Tönnies ascribes to these three characteristics of the community the meaning of an expression of the community's soul: being together would represent the vegetative soul – the common consciousness of belonging – living together would be the animal soul – the condition of a common action in the sign of pleasure and well-being, as well as of suffering – acting together would express, finally, the superior part of the rational soul – a superior consciousness of working together for the unity of the spirit and in the search for a common superior ideal (Tönnies, 2012, 226–227). This tripartition of the soul, of Aristotelian origin, then returns in various anthropological studies of the early twentieth century, such as in Stein, Conrad-Martius and Walther. See: Stein, 2000, 2004; Conrad-Martius, 1946; Walther, 1976.

On the basis of these distinctions, Reinach in *Die apriorischen Grundlagen des bürgerlichen Rechtes* (Reinach 1913) offers a first philosophical reading of society through a definition, taken up later by some colleagues, that of ‘social acts’⁴ that are at the basis of every form of community interaction. These are all those intentional acts, such as promises, orders, questions, concessions, announcements and so on, which have no meaning and therefore do not make sense and therefore fail to succeed if they do not have a subject to address, if they do not have a manifestation function and, finally, if they are not ‘received’. Acts understood in this way generate social entities: if I make a promise p, p will be a state of affairs (or fact) and not an object and will necessarily be linked to a future action of mine, that of realising the p content of the promise, and to a person to whom I address it⁵ (Reinach, 1913, 158).

Walther would make this explicit by stating that the members of a community are moved by a higher leitmotif or melody that

runs through the psycho-spiritual life of the community among all the members, even when they play different variations and with different instruments. Each must play in his and her own way so that ultimately, despite any slippage, the overall piece does not disturb the overall harmony but rather make it grow and be realised together with the other players. (Walther, 1923, 28)

Like Tönnies, this young phenomenologist⁶ also stresses that it is only the inner feeling of mutual belonging, the intimate bond that makes any social group of human beings become a community. When this occurs, one can also speak of common experiences, actions, wills and desires; otherwise, all forms of social groupings – such as associations and institutions – remain social groups or represent society in general.

Now, reflecting on the social acts that bind individuals in a community, Walther makes a distinction that seems to overcome the difficulties that the Reinachian one would encounter (Salice & Uemura, 2018), where, for example, one finds oneself acting in a certain way for the common sense of the community, without being

⁴The theme of social acts or social action was taken up a few years later by a phenomenologically oriented sociologist, Alfred Schütz, who reinterpreted Weber’s sociological proposal in the light of Husserlian phenomenology. He describes and distinguishes social behaviours and social acts, precisely on the basis of the concept of intentionality used here by Reinach (Schütz, 1960).

⁵In a very similar way, Schütz also uses examples of this kind, such as asking: “When I ask you a question, I do not only have the final motive of making myself understood, but also of obtaining from you the answer to the question. Your answer is the ‘what in view of which’ of my question” (Schütz, 2018, 203).

⁶The work *Ein Beitrag zur Ontologie der sozialen Gemeinschaften* is the doctoral research Walther completed under the guidance of Pfänder in 1921 in Munich. This work was published two years later in the *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung*, edited by Husserl.

personally fully convinced or even agreeing with it⁷. Walther distinguishes⁸ between the ‘public’ and the ‘private’ persons, while emphasising the profound unity and intertwining within the individual: this means that a member of a community may find himself/herself obliged to act in a certain way because of his/her role in the community, even though he/she thinks that personally he/she would act differently. And this does not cause any kind of schizophrenia in the individual, precisely because these two ‘souls’ are in fact profoundly united; they simply do not have to always move in unison. However, it is precisely because of this distinction that it is possible to differentiate between ‘authentic’ and ‘inauthentic’ experiences both for the individual and for the community – where authenticity does not lie in the behaviour or action itself but in the full correspondence between the self and the gaze of the community (Walther, 1923, 107ff), which may mean that the individual has not yet fully taken on board the community’s visions or perhaps believes that he/she is embodying them, even though time is still needed.

On the other hand, those who are the proper organs of the community perform those acts that Walther defines as social acts in a meaningful sense,

through the empathic awareness of these acts, ways of behaving and general attitudes, the subject who perceives them is referred, above the individual subject who experiences, acts, etc., to the community ‘in whose sense and name’ all this is done. (Walther, 1923, 111)

Clearly, the social acts we have been talking about so far – following both Reinach and Walther – strongly recall the inter-subjective dimension and the fact that there is a basis of understanding and sharing between human beings, such that one can not only intentionally address others but also be able to perceive what is intended by others in its external content, the gesture or the word by means of which one intends something, as well as in its internal content, that is, what is not immediately evident from the gesture or the simple word, if not for a previous understanding. A profound understanding of the community fabric therefore requires one to look at the human person in his singular and intrinsically interpersonal constitution.

⁷As Salice and Uemura point out, the Reinachian definition of social acts could run the risk of internalism: i.e. describing acts that, in fact, could also be performed by a ‘brain’ outside of a body, but which has all the elements to express a social act as it is ‘addressed to’. If then such an act does not in fact reach the other person, it does not matter (Salice & Uemura, 2018, 31–32).

⁸Walther’s study does not only inspire and refer to Reinach, but also to Husserl, specifically to the lectures on *Natur und Geist* (Husserl, 2002) which she was able to attend in person and in which the teacher developed certain aspects of his social phenomenology. One of these is that for Husserl – as well as for Walther – social acts are constitutive of sociality and specifically give rise to community. See Salice & Uemura, 2018.

3 The Individual as the Basis of a Community Subject

Walther posits as a basic element or foundation of community⁹ a certain sociality in human beings who would have a real social instinct (*sozialer Trieb*) that moves them to seek a relationship with other human beings (Mühl, 2018, 73–74). Using different terms, but with the same intention, Stein also devotes her first works to the question of interpersonal relations and thus to the relational phenomenon that results in community. Starting with a careful and deep analysis of empathic experience, in her doctoral thesis, *On the Problem of Empathy* (Stein, 1964), she moves on to a double work in which the uncovering of interrelational dynamics moves from the explication of causality and motivation as the two ‘laws’ of the psychic and the spiritual sphere, to the development of the community fabric *qua analogon of the person* (Stein, 2000). Finally, in *An Investigation Concerning the State* (Stein, 2006), the communitarian discourse is expanded into a further differentiation between community, society, association, mass and state. Stein sees within the subject a matrix of experiences that leads to the outside and that is intimately part of the subject itself, to the point, I would say, that it almost constitutes the most characterising element: it is in community living, in fact, that the individual expresses more of his psychic and spiritual dimension – not in solitude. This is understandable if we reflect on one human ability that enables us to access and in some way know what others feel and experience and thus ourselves: empathy.¹⁰ This capacity to recognise what the other person is experiencing at a given moment, starting from what I can perceive externally and interiorly by putting myself in their place in an ideal way, is in fact what restores us to ourselves in our own completeness as psycho-physical and spiritual beings. For if I were completely alone, I could only constitute myself as a body that occupies a certain space that has a point of orientation from which the

⁹It should be emphasised that Walther’s anthropological analysis is subsequent to her sociological one, i.e. her movement of reflection leads her from the observation of the existence of communities and societies to the explication of the anthropological structure of the individual as naturally social. This analysis, in fact, was developed only many years after her first doctoral work on the ontological structure of the community (Walther, 1976). Walther, therefore, arrives at results very close to those of her colleague Stein, even though she follows a practically opposite itinerary. While she could be said to take the community phenomenon for granted and from it wants to arrive at an explanation of the individual, Stein starts from the individual and his structure in order to be able to explain his/her relationship with others and thus develop the community phenomenon at various levels. See in this regard: Calcagno, 2019; Mühl, 2018; Pezzella, 2018.

¹⁰The empathy of which Stein, and before her Husserl, as well as other phenomenologists, speaks is neither a volitional nor an emotional act, but a theoretical one; that is, it is a conscious act that induces the individual to identify with the other’s experience and thought in order to understand its content and with it acquire an additional element in the constitution of the self as psychic-spiritual. In the empathic act, in fact, what happens is precisely the perception of the distance and distinction between oneself and others, since the empathising act is proper to the one who empathises, while the content that is empathised is other people’s. (Stein, 1964). However, not all phenomenologists are in complete agreement on this; Scheler is criticised by Stein for his confusion of empathy, and Walther, for example, believes that a state of fusion occurs through empathy – something Stein does not accept at all. See: Hackermeier, 2008; Calcagno, 2019.

spatial-sensory perceptions of the world are received (Stein 1916, 35–50). But it is only in the encounter with another human being that our interiority – made of feelings, emotions, values – opens us, allowing us to recognise in the movement of others something deeper and something not visible to the eyes or perceptible through sensory levels alone.

When two human beings look at each other, one ego stands before another. It can be an encounter that takes place on the threshold or in the interior. When it is an encounter in the interior, then the other ego is a you. The gaze of the human being speaks (Stein, 2004, 78)

Empathic experience allows us, therefore, to recognise us as structurally inter-related and capable of building spaces of exchange, sharing and coexistence based on a common understanding. It is based on the human structure which, according to Stein, lives of a profound unity among several levels: the purely physical one of a material body traversed by life and sensations (*Leib*), the psychic one of feelings (*Psyche*) and the spiritual one of intelligence and openness to values¹¹ (*Geist*) whose centre is, finally, the soul (*Seele*), which constitutes the dimension of absolute openness to transcendence, the place of spiritual interiority and the ‘seat’ of the ego. This structure becomes the interpretive grid on which the more sociological analysis of individual and community and an investigation on the state are developed. In fact, Stein warns:

It is quite extraordinary how this ego, notwithstanding its solitariness and inalienable aloneness, can enter into a community of life with other subjects, how the individual subject becomes a member of a super-individual subject, and also how a super-individual current of experience is constituted in the active living of such a community-subject or community’s subject. (Stein, 2000, 133)

There is, therefore, a parallel between the human person and the community and between the individual subject and what she calls the ‘supra-individual’. The community, too, has vital experiences that are rooted in the individual, but there are some whose scope is such that they can only be experienced in the community. What we recognise within any group of people is the living out of certain situations as a group or the living for specific ideals: Stein gives the example of a troop experiencing the death of its leader (a situation), which also live and work for the defence of peace (ideal). However, at the basis of every community, there are always experiences and the world of values to which the individuals making up the group are attached. It is in their being people that they find each other and intentionally

¹¹Taking up Reinach’s and Scheler’s analyses on values, as well as Husserl’s, Stein considers a complete understanding of the human person impossible without a world of values. As Mette Lebech succinctly points out, Reinach develops the question of the apriority of values, Scheler their order and Husserl the act of valuing by linking it to the fact that values are grounded in things (Lebech, 2015, 27–28). For Stein, values are linked to the sphere of motivation that represents the legality of the world of the spirit – otherwise not explicable in terms of causality alone, which characterises the sphere of the psychical (Stein, 2000, First Part). Values constitute the background that moves us to act in a certain way, to prefer or avoid certain situations and/or experiences; they allow us to recognise that we are persons, that is, capable of values and moved in our living and acting by motives.

exchange experiences and visions, and it is therefore in a common search for meaning that they flourish in community, in whatever form and expression.¹²

A community will be traversed and sustained in the same way as the individual, by that energy or 'life power'¹³ emerging from the sum of the life power of the individuals, and will 'live' certain experiences by virtue of the individual experiences of its members whose object or value is the same. Taking the example of the troop, it is made up of a number of soldiers, each of whom has his/her own life and experiences but lives together with the others what affects them all, such as the death of one of them. In that case, the object of the personal experience is common to every member of the troop, so that it as a community experiences grief. The relationship between the individual and the community already emerges here. The more the individual grows in his/her life power, the more the community grows, and vice versa, the more they weaken, the more the community suffers, along with how similarity is not the identification of the two entities, which always remain distinct¹⁴ on pain of the loss of the individual and with it the community as such. We will return to these dynamics later.

At the same time, Walther argues that the human person whom she also sees as a living body, soul and spirit experiences his/her own self and the self of others by virtue of the close link between these planes, that is, by virtue of the fact that his/her body is always permeated by soul and spirit. This makes him/her capable of being aware of his/her own experiences, of accepting and freely directing them and therefore of experiencing something in a more peripheral way or in depth. It is because

¹²Stein, in dialogue with Scheler, points out how different formations can occur in a community: "We regard as the highest mode of community the union of purely free persons who are united with their innermost 'personal' life, or the life of soul, and each of whom feels responsible for himself or herself and for the community. Beside them stand the communities in which only a portion of their members are free and self-supporting persons, determine the mind of the community, and bear responsibility for it. In the third place would be named the communities where although there's a common living out of a unitary mind" (Stein, 2000, 278).

¹³The concept of life power is developed in the first part of the book *Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities*, where Stein deepens the study of the individual in its psychic and spiritual dimensions. In the stream of consciousness, there is a real and concrete experience of the individual who lives certain experiences, is aware of them and through them acquires strength or is consumed. The life power is the vital source of psychic and spiritual life, through which certain experiences can be sustained, but which is also consumed by some. It is an 'enduring real property' of the ego (Stein, 2000, 22). For more, see: Betschart, 2009, 2010; Hagengruber, 2004.

¹⁴In the in-depth analysis that Stein carries out, and which she has not posited here, it becomes clear that "We won't be allowed to talk about any 'consciousness' of the community in the strict sense" as for the individuals (Stein, 2000, 140). The intensity and type of experiences also differ, since the community experience, although resulting from the individual experiences, is not simply a sum of them, but the unity of meaning of them, which, as such, would not be experienced by the individual. Again using the example of the troop: one thing is my personal mourning for a person dear to me, to whom I am particularly attached, quite another is the mourning that I share with my troop mates for one of them. And even in this shared mourning, the personal intensity of each person's suffering will remain distinct and unique, because it is the result of a personal fabric with its own history and character, as well as of a link with the deceased, which is not in itself interchangeable.

of this interweaving that for Walther as for Stein there is openness to others and the condition of sociability, which also consists in the sharing of experiences of meaning and not simply of physical spaces, common external features or blood ties (Walther, 1923, 18–30). The transition from I to We takes place precisely within the communal fabric where one becomes part of a We or of a supra-individual subject because of the social instincts that drive one to share experiences with others that are similar to itself and because of the need of a non-I in order to fully develop as a person.

4 How Community Works: Feelings and Intersubjective Relationships

In order to give a framework to the functioning of the social fabric of communities and differentiate communities, it is necessary, following Stein and Walther as well as their colleagues Scheler and Hildebrand,¹⁵ to bring into focus another aspect of the human person, namely, the whole realm of feeling and the emotions. In virtue of the above, we come to understand that the human being is characterised by his/her psycho-physical and spiritual structure and thus by a dual ‘sentient’ capacity (Stein 1916, 45–47) insofar as it is linked to the external world by means of its body, it is crisscrossed by sensations, psycho-physical experiences that demonstrate human sensitivity as the enduring characteristic of one’s living soul – and also by feelings – which are subdivided into vital feelings (feelings of pain or pleasure), feelings in general or moods (that which in some way ‘colours’ present mood) and finally the actual feelings (everything that is produced by other people and things, such as love, hate, gratitude, nostalgia and so on).¹⁶

Scheler delved even further into the sphere of the feelings, developing a genuine theory of emotional intentionality; for him, it is precisely social and emotional acts that constitute the basis of community life. Similar to what Stein says, feelings and their life are stratifications with different depths. We experience a different range of values at each level since they are perceived by us through a specific feeling

¹⁵A common aspect shared by these phenomenologists is the personalistic view of the human being and the link with the world of values. For reasons of space, we have privileged here the anthropological analysis of Stein and partly Walther, but Hildebrand and Scheler are animated by a personal vision of the human being too. Hildebrand always speaks about it within the ethical discourse on values and love, therefore in a more indirect way; nevertheless, his vision of the person in the balance, properly Steinian, between individuality and substantial completeness (*Welt für sich*) and belonging and openness to the community fabric is very clear. (For a brief discussion of this, see: P. Premoli de Marchi, 1998; Gaudio, 2013/Gaudio, 2020.) In Scheler’s sense, the human person is a free being, a creator and bearer of values, capable of loving, to the point that he even proposes a reinterpretation, apostrophising Descartes, in terms of *ens amans* (Scheler, 2004, 127).

¹⁶A thorough analysis of this, also with a view to the individual-community relationship and the current of experience generated in it, can be found in *Individual and Community* (Stein, 2000, 145–167).

comparable to the sensitive perception of things but distinct from the levels of feeling (Scheler, 1973, 330). The levels of feeling are thus stratified into emotional reaction to an intentional feeling (*Gefühl*) and the act of grasping a value in an intentional feeling (*fühlen*). Feelings, in turn, are stratified into four levels: sense feelings, vital feelings, psychological feelings and feelings of personality. The former correspond to feelings in the Steinian sense and, as such, are not directed towards a specific object nor open to a range of values. The latter, which are closer to moods, are feelings such as tiredness, freshness and so on, which do not correspond to a specific area of the body but affect it in its totality and open it to a whole sphere of vital values. Psychological feelings are intentional since they are explicitly addressed to a specific object. They do not have a particular allocation in the body even though they affect it, and they are related to the values of beautiful/ugly, true/false and honest/dishonest. Finally, along the line of actual Steinian feelings, there are what Scheler calls spiritual feelings that are related to the sphere of values, of the sacred and of the profane.

Vital, psychological and spiritual feelings are responses to values that are felt through the act of axiological perception¹⁷ (*Wertnehmung*). In its most elementary form, feeling characterises the openness to the world of the individual belonging to a primary social context in which implicit forms of recognition prevail, based on the automatism of vital processes. This is immediately followed by the phenomenon that Scheler defines as unipathy¹⁸ or that process of mutual affective fusion in which two selves are constituted. The ways of feeling with others (*mitfühlen*), which Scheler describes in a precise sequence, in order to clarify the experience of authentic sympathy (*Mitgefühl*), indicate the differentiation in the various animal species of this basic disposition, reaching as far as love – the only source of real mutual knowledge between people.

In this view – which stands out as a fundamental anthropological dimension and for Scheler clearly autonomous in its ‘legality’ – love is the original act through which the human being puts into action his/her ability to transcend itself to participate in the life of another human being. This vision is common to both the Steinian and the Hildebrandian because they also come – although in a different way, in

¹⁷As Vendrell-Ferran points out, this distinction made by Scheler, which restores to value perception its own autonomy with respect to individual and possible responses to perceived values, seems to avoid the problems that, instead, remain in the Steinian proposal, since it allows us to explain how, for example, it is possible to perceive a certain value, but not to respond to it emotionally (Vendrell Ferran, 2016, 222–223).

¹⁸An extensive survey of this not exclusively human phenomenon can be found in *The Nature of Sympathy* (Scheler, 2008, in particular *The Sympathy*, 49–224). Here Scheler discusses it in order to differentiate between the various forms of feeling and to specify the typical character of sympathy, starting from Lipps’s concept of *Einsfühlung* (unipathy), which Stein also discusses, criticising it in the same way as Scheler’s approach (Stein, 1964).

terms of form and intensity¹⁹ – to consider love as the real engine of community coexistence and development.

In the light of what has been said thus far, a key has emerged for interpreting the interpersonal relationships that are the basis for all forms of community. The human person lives by values, recognises them and realises them in his/her own life by responding to them through feelings, so that everything he/she prefers, is interested in and concerns him/her, constitutes his/her world of values: it is on the basis of this that every interpersonal interrelationship and exchange takes place – from simple contact to meeting and entering into a real relationship (von Hildebrand, 1955, 121–128) – but it is also by virtue of the constant relationship with others that a human being's world of values expands and/or changes.

Clearly, it is not the same thing to talk about communities such as families, marriages or friendships and community phenomena such as a political party, a religious or an academic community or sport association. The distinctions between types of communities and between community and society are not completely overlapping. Walther, for example, distinguishes intentional communities from non-intentional communities (Walther, 1923), linked or not clearly linked to an external object of reference for all the members of the community. In this sense, for her, it is possible to experience an us that is not completely intentional because the love between the members is such that a possible common object of reference is implicit. In a marriage or in a family services to each other, providing assistance, sharing moments together and so on are natural without the need to be explicit about the reason for it or having to explain why they do it or what they expect to achieve together. In other communities, on the other hand, it is necessary to make explicit the object to which everyone is intentionally directed in order for the community to exist as a community. The intensity of life and participation and even active participation in the common experience may vary from one person to the next and depend on different factors, but there will be a unique common sense that will be clearly shared.

Hildebrand starts primarily from the distinction between I-Thou-relations and We-relations (von Hildebrand, 1955) to clarify how one can speak of community in both the strict and in the broad sense (meaning any human aggregation) as well as – in terms more clearly consonant with Walther's – formal and material community where the former represents the model of group relations in which a social act with its formal institution is required, while material communities are all those in which love and mutual recognition/acceptance are at the base. For Hildebrand, love holds a central place in the discussion about community with what he defines as the process of union (*Vereinigung*) between two or more persons that leads to the

¹⁹Hildebrand dedicates an entire work to the theme of love, *The Nature of Love*, and also in his *Metaphysik der Gemeinschaft* love plays a central role, with respect to Stein's references in the analyses dedicated to the community, to such an extent that it is not only the element that makes a simple contact a true relationship, but it comes to be the general distinguisher for an authentic community of several people (von Hildebrand, 1955, 2009).

constitution of a ‘body’, of something that is no longer just a single person next to or together with another single person, but a dual us:

Wherever becoming one in the true sense is not yet realised, but a human being ‘identifies’ his own life to such an extent with that of another, so that events are generally directed no longer only to the ‘I’, but to a ‘we’ – which must not only happen uniquely, but bi-univocally – a characteristic level of bonding is created that leads in itself to the formation of a body. (von Hildebrand, 1955, 152)

Of course, one cannot imagine that every multi-personal community can reach such a level. Indeed, in certain communities such as the state, the association and the political party, there may not even be a mutual knowledge of all the members, let alone love among everybody! These communities require the formal social acts that give life to them in a shared manner, as well as the unitive virtue, or the deep desire for union. Although they appear to be very far removed from communities in which love and unification are at a high level, here also we experience a *sui generis* unifying process.²⁰

Ultimately, following this analysis, we can conclude that in the relationship between the experience of the individual person and the community, experience is constitutive and not summative, because from the mere sum of the individual experiences, we do not obtain the experience of the community, which requires the unity of meaning of these individual experiences. Community experience therefore has its own ‘colouring of experience’, to put it in Steinian terms, which contains a nucleus of meaning and is determined by the particularity of the individual contents of individual experience. It does not, however, have its own consciousness because only the constituent flow is originally accompanied by consciousness – that of each individual member of the community. The relationships that exist between individuals and from the basis of the community network are of different kinds, from social acts to feelings such as love.

5 A Specific Form of Interdependence Among People in a Community

One phenomenon that we notice in community life, which Stein’s analysis particularly dwells on, is the influence of the individual or of the entire community on a single individual, that is, the situation in which one has a certain experience or a particular emotional state because one is grasped by that of others without necessarily being aware of this influence (Stein, 2000, 187ff.). For this to occur, one has to receive a certain impression from someone else, and in that sense, the physical presence is relevant. If I have someone in front of me, I grasp their vitality, energy, state as they are conveyed to me through the gaze, the voice or the gestures the other

²⁰Hildebrand defines this with a typical and in its own way unique expression, namely the ‘looking into each other’ (*Ineinanderblick*) of lovers (von Hildebrand, 1955, 2009).

persons make and the way they make them, their stance and their movements. These external perceptions, as Stein teaches us, provide us with the basis for empathising with the corresponding inner state and, by 'living' it in its place, understanding it.

However, the physical presence of another is not a necessary condition for being influenced, because it can also happen in other ways and according to the further modalities of the spiritual life of the other and of oneself. This is the case of reading an article or a book whose words can motivate me to act, to the extent that I am able to follow the reasoning of the writer and grasp the writer's state of mind, to feel the author's spiritual energy, and this can arouse new strength and spiritual vigour in me or drain my strength.²¹ In the same way, it can be influenced by the actions of a character in a play or film, by the lyrics of a song or a work of art, even a visual one. These kinds of influences are mostly one-sided in character, since there is no direct interaction between people, but by interacting, we can influence each other:²² at which point we are faced with a form of co-operation that is established between different individuals, and only on this basis is a supra-individual unity of experience possible. Thus, if a multiplicity of subjects is united by the same will, then, a single communal, voluntary position and a single action to carry it out will result, and this is irrespective of whether they all do the same thing or not. In the unity of voluntary action, there is the moment in which my voluntary intention is filled with the doing of the other, and the other experiences his/her doing as fulfilling my intention, even though he/she may not know its ultimate meaning. The common action then becomes our common issue, and we feel like members operating within a community.

In the community, there is a relationship of mutual dependence between the individuals, and the community is like an organic whole, in that its character depends in part on the individual particularity of its members, and these are comprehensible from the community to which they belong. We realise then that the community is not a free subject in the way that the individual is and is therefore not in the same way absolutely responsible: it is they who have the ultimate responsibility for what they do in the name of and for the community (Stein, 2000, 194–195).

When these individuals arrive at a union of mind and action that touches the deepest interiority of their being, one can also speak of a community soul, and the community, as it acts and bears the imprint of this interiority. Such a community has members who are persons in the full sense of the word, who take part in community life with their souls and who are conscious of their personal responsibility in and for the community but at the same time autonomous in leading their own personal lives without being completely absorbed by the community. Perhaps there will be

²¹ Stein clearly reports how love and all positive value stances (esteem, sympathy, acceptance, etc.) have a doubly constructive effect: they generate new and positive energies for both those who experience them and those who receive them. In contrast, hatred with all its negative range of stances (sadness, dislike, contempt) consumes both (Stein, 2000, 210–216).

²² Evidently, the typical phenomena of imitation present not only in humans, particularly in their developmental years, but also among some species of higher mammals, can also be understood here. Scheler discusses imitation as a stage of feeling in his study of empathy and in ethics (Scheler, 1973, 2008).

individuals who give themselves to the community in a particular way as its supporters and give it solidity and durability. These can then agree to create a society – in which individuals stand in front of each other considering each other as objects for which certain actions are valid – transforming the community of people into a state, that is, into a system of rigid rules, in which sovereignty is expressed (Stein, 2006, 66–82).

Let us now turn to the sense of belonging to the community, which for Stein, as for Walther and Hildebrand, is based on a certain unification of its members. As Calcagno points out, both Stein and Walther have spoken of a unity of sense that must be achieved in order for it to be realised; however,

Walther claims that community is marked by a profound unity, a becoming one, even a melting into a oneness, a fusion (*Verschmelzung*) of individuals. In the grasping of the unity of the sense of the collective we, Stein says there is a solidarity, but individuals remain individuals while grasping the we of the experience of collectivity. Walther goes further and claims not only is there grasping of the sense of the collectivity, but there is also a fusion or a becoming one of the members. (Calcagno, 2018, 11)

In fact, for Walther the deepest sense of community is oneness (*Einigung*) (Walther, 1923, 34–36) experienced in two ways, through the feeling of unification and through a habit: in the first sense, we mean a feeling of union with a certain object – which can be the intentional pole of a community of people or a person in itself – that one’s soul is directly and consciously or even unconsciously, through a process of growth over time, although this leads to an appropriate union only in the moment when it then becomes conscious and does not remain passive (Walther, 1923, 36–38). The actual momentary feeling of union brings with it not only a being intentionally directed towards the object with which one wishes to achieve such union but also a being oriented and directed towards it; this also means that one can turn away from the object of union, move away from it and turn towards other objects, without this leading to the loss of the feeling of union. In fact, when one is attracted to something and moves towards it intentionally, ‘investing’ it with one’s spiritual ray in a relationship of union, it is accepted and remains in the ego even when it is no longer present and/or one simply turns to something else, perhaps sinking into a sort of conscious background and becoming habitual²³ (Walther, 1923, 40).

The feeling of habitual union, however, has a communitarian scope when it is lived not by an I with other I’s but by a We or rather by an ‘I along with others’. It is a matter of all those situations in which one lives a certain experience and union with a certain object (Walther gives the example of God) which can be of two types:

²³ Hildebrand speaks in these terms of love and the unitive intention with the object of love: when one loves someone, one invests them through one’s own response of love and the desire for union, which becomes union achieved at the moment in which this love is communicated and reciprocated, subsists and persists in the lover, even when he/she is not in the constant presence of the beloved (von Hildebrand, 2009). Walther, for her part, explicitly asks the question whether feelings of union are the same as attitudes of love, friendship, affection in general and answers, in line with Hildebrand, that love cannot be confused with the feeling of union.

either ignoring the rest of the people and living only from one's own relationship with the object of union – in the case of God, living one's own relationship in mystical union with God without this involving and affecting other people – or by turning one's gaze and co-involving in such an experience all those people who also live a relationship with God or who are created/loved by God; in this sense, one can speak of the religious community or of believers, which does not imply knowing and having present to one's inner eye all the believers or people loved by God.

The lived experience of belonging to the oneness of a community, which is intentionally grasped when one understands that a person is one with and in others, is constituted in the grasping of a certain sense of a social objectivity. To feel the oneness of a community, we need four elements: a subject and an object of unity; a widening of the feeling of oneness; the complete and full experience of oneness of the subject and the object must be anchored in subjects (Walther, 1923, 64).

For Walther, as for Stein, empathy is the means to achieve this, although Walther believes that the empathic process enables us to grasp a similar experience between several people intentionally directed towards the same object and with it the experience of union with each other:²⁴ when A empathises with B, B also empathises with A, but at the same time, they are also given, again through empathy, the union of each with his intentional object, which is then the same for both (Walther, 1923, 85). The basis of this is the recognition of a common humanity, through which each one then experiences his/her own selfhood and on the basis of which it is possible to share and live the same experiences,²⁵ to influence each other and act in the name of the community.

²⁴On the question of unity between persons, Stein states in a contribution on education that “the human being is at the same time an individual and a member of the community, but not in perfect unity”; a reference model for this is, in fact, for the Carmelite saint, the Trinity, whose divine persons are individuals in community, but who experience full unity because God: “God is one in three persons. An indivisible nature, completely simple and unique – therefore individual in the fullest sense of the word. But a nature that is three persons together and unites them in unity; unity of being and unity of life in knowledge, love and action – hence community in the fullest sense of the word” (Stein, 2001, 18). In us, on the other hand, individual characterisation stands alongside community belonging. For community belonging we have the same way of feeling, thinking, wanting and doing – the one human nature that unites all human beings – or expressing a certain social type; individuality, on the other hand, puts a brake on this belonging in preserving that unique and totally our own trait that cannot be in full unity with that of others.

²⁵In this sense, Walther comes close to the Schelerian position of the common humanity, also understood as a community subject in a broader sense (Calcagno, 2018). Scheler even speaks of a *Gesamtperson* (Scheler, 1973), a unique subject of the community, explicitly criticised by Stein for the confusion it may engender (Stein, 2000, 276–278).

6 The Contagion Phenomena: Mass Versus the Community?

Even if we cannot claim that through empathy, we achieve union and/or fusion with the experiences of others, the fact remains that Stein also points to similar phenomena, more psychic in character, involving individuals within communities. This phenomenon can simply provoke in a person a decision or an attitude that he/she would not have had without the example and influence of others, or

a change in the behaviour of one individual under the influence of another, a regularity in the relations of a series of individuals who influence each other and finally an interweaving of the activities of different individuals that objectively serves a purpose. (Stein, 2000, 209)

This in itself is neutral and may even allow for a broadening of horizons, when it moves on positive attitudes and positions that are based on values. It is also possible, however, that, by virtue of our psychic life and our ability to perceive others with their psychic states, if we leave too much space to psychic emotionality alone, we can suffer a genuine ‘psychic contagion’. This happens when we react to the doing or feeling of the other by virtue of his/her expression/action or when we are seized by his/her psychic state. In the absence of spiritual activity, there can be no reciprocal stance, no understanding and therefore no cooperation with real and true community action.

This happens and is typical of a group of people called the mass, where individuals do not compare themselves with each other and do not perform acts on the basis of a possible understanding of others but are simply bound together by a spatial commonality and by the uniformity of behaviour that is based on the excitability of the individual psyche through extraneous psychic life. By virtue of this, one of the most typical phenomena of the masses is contagion through suggestion²⁶ in which someone becomes awoken of the conviction of the existence of a certain state of affairs that may, however, not be so or may not exist at all. The belief, then, may be unfounded, in the case of uncertain things; or it may arise from one’s own desire – then it is a lie and an autosuggestion. What happens in psychic contagion is that such an accepted belief is then propagated further to other individuals and there follows a possible recourse to force through excitations that leads to a putting in brackets of spiritual capacities – specifically the critical intellect, which makes one further disposed to be convinced: a group of people is created who have no inner commonality (Stein, 2000, 241–255).

It is clear, as Stein states, that a mass of individuals, who are and remain spiritual by nature, needs a guide, a leader who cannot be part of the masses, since he/she is the spiritual element that produces what infects and generates conviction. If this guide, who must be linked to the mass by a mutual understanding, is coherent and

²⁶Walther also mentions a distinction between community and mass, where the members of the mass are precisely individuals who do not recognise each other in a condition of sharing and unity, but who are only together because of a common suggestion; they do not then live certain experiences intentionally, but only because they are driven by others (Walther, 1923, 98).

decisive, the mass can behave as a community; but if this person is not a real guide,²⁷ the behaviour of the mass becomes disconnected (Stein, 2000, 270ff.).

In this sense, the masses can be guided to actions that are morally just, or not just, depending on who activates the contagion. But it remains a low-level human whole and, in itself, more dangerous than a community, because the spiritual sphere is somehow deactivated, something that happens in all political and social contexts in which emotions are leveraged, activating processes of uniformity of common feeling and flattening of cultural production in a single direction, and where the level of suggestion is such that one has the illusion of activating vital force through a certain action. In fact, this only concerns the sensory life power and not the spiritual one,²⁸ which, instead, is weakened. When in *Communités* such as an entire population – the premise of which is human life that grows like an organism, extinguishing itself only when all its members cease to exist because they are extinct,²⁹ – personalities emerge who become, or are made, leaders of the people through processes of suggestion that focus on the values of self-maintenance and absoluteness of identity, these communities lose, according to Stein, its communitarian character and become a mass (Stein, 2004, 152; Stein, 2006, 3).

7 Belonging and Disillusionment in Community Dynamics and Actual Situations

Communities, in fact, are different in terms of the types, purposes and experiences that generate the bonds of belonging. They can arise involuntarily or on the basis of a common life or of styles – the religious community, an artistic community. They can arise from original bonds – such as the family, the lineage, the people – or through free acts – think of friendship, marriage – or they can arise in mixed forms. In virtue of this, it happens, according to Stein, that the people who become part of a certain community become bearers of that given personal type that characterises the members of the community. There is, therefore, in addition to a common object of intention, also a common denominator of certain communities, which is the type

²⁷“A single strong leader can suffice to hold a community together and impress upon it his stamp. But if he alone is the soul of the whole thing, then it falls apart with his elimination; or, it barely holds together externally like any accidental formation, to be shattered by the first difficulty that threatens it” (Stein, 2000, 281). Scheler explicitly analysed the figure of the *Führer* (the guide) in community and societal contexts in the short text *Vorbilder und Führer (1911–1921)* (2004). Walther also expresses herself regarding the figure of the guide, without a specific elaboration like Scheler, but within her analysis of the community (Walther, 1923, 106–107).

²⁸Stein, speaking of the life power, makes it clear that there are two forms of it, the sensitive form, which corresponds to psycho-physical energy, and the spiritual form, which is more directly linked to the spirit and its activities (Stein, 2000, 9–128).

²⁹Stein considers the community distinctly from society and this leads her to consider the former as an absolutely natural fact, indeed, almost prior to man’s very individuality; we find, therefore, positions similar to hers in political thought, but which refer only to society.

of its members:³⁰ social types united by a certain quality or characteristic that distinguishes them from others.

This bond among individuals forming communities is neither obvious nor automatic. Merely belonging to a particular community, being aware of it as well as being aware of its other members does not mean that each member feels naturally and always part of that community or in full harmony with its ideals and convictions. It is possible, therefore, as both Stein and Walther point out, that there are people who, finding themselves within a community, do not feel completely at home, even though they respond in some way to its type, nor can it be said that a type that expresses a community in the purest way can be completely exhausted in this, by virtue of his individual nucleus. Walther gives the example of a religious community, taking the extreme case of Luther who, despite being a member of the Christian community, at a certain point found no longer correspondence between what the community was supposed to embody and what actually was lived, to the point of experiencing a condition of disillusionment and detachment from the community (Walther, 1923, 102). But it can also be a question of smaller communities – such as family units that come together through marriage, thus leading some individuals from one family community to expand into a new community by joining or welcoming another community. Even in these situations, it may happen that one still finds oneself part of an extended family unit that does not fully correspond to one's vision and needs, even if only in one of its members or a few. Finally, such situations of not fully adhering and sharing the experiences of the community can affect people within a political party or an association, as well as within larger entities such as a people or a state.³¹

In this sense, it may be helpful to recall with Walther that it is one thing to 'know' that I belong to certain communities but another to feel united with the members of each of these and in tune with their specific lifestyles and ideals. To exemplify this, my belonging to the family comes from the fact that I was born into it without being able to choose its members. But it is my family I feel that I belong to it even though I may not always agree with certain attitudes and ways of doing things of each of its members and the family as a whole. However, the blood bond and the habit of living together that is generated in the individual are very strong and easily lead to a sense of unity with that community. One willingly acts and even of one's own choice in

³⁰ Human types are determined not only by external traits, manners, clothes and customs, but above all by internal traits, i.e. beliefs, attitudes that mature over time due to influences from the outside world.

³¹ In this regard, Hildebrand underlines how the belonging of individuals to a community also depends on the general type of the same and introduces a distinction between material and formal community, where the first represents the general-generic for friendship between two or more persons, humanity, the nation, the family – even if this, like marriage and the church, turns out to be hybrids that have in themselves the characteristics of both community expressions – and the second that of association, of the State. Whereas purely material communities are bound by love, mutual choice and a certain degree of closure to the entry of others as members, formal communities arise exclusively from specific social acts that establish them, and in them the members are not necessarily bound by love, nor is there closure, but other members can join (von Hildebrand, 1955).

the name of one's family; and what an individual member does, he/she often does also for and in the name of others, without everyone having to follow it all the way and be aware of it.

The condition of larger community complexes, such as a religious group or even a political party, is quite different. Here it will obviously take social acts of a certain kind to allow individuals to achieve a sense of belonging, such as to share the community's action and experience. Even when one is not completely convinced, because of the trust in the community and in an action, it will at least in its deepest intentions be the expression of all and sustain the community itself.

Community dynamics – as was mentioned above – are necessarily linked to a reciprocal subsistence and relationality between the individual and the group or between I and We; that is, there is such a bond of interdependence or co-belonging between the individual and the community that it is impossible to fully understand the human being by separating him/her from the community nor can the community be understood except in relation to its individual members. This means that the absolute uniqueness of the individual, beyond any common character he/she may share with humanity as such and then with the different communities and social groups to which he/she belongs, remains fundamental and inviolable, that is, it cannot be coerced by the community as a body superior to the individual. The latter, as a 'private person', cannot and must not necessarily spend energy and time on the communities to which they belong and, above all, cannot be forced to identify himself or herself always and in everything with them, let alone to act in their name where his/her conscience prevents them from doing so. One may, however, do so of one's own free will, because one feels that he/she is one with the community and, therefore, wants/needs to act for and with the community, over and above any internal conflicts. In this case, the private person comes to correspond completely with the 'social or public person' (Walther, 1923, 106), that is, with the 'social type', it represents within the fabric of society.³²

The identity of each human being is profoundly marked by relationships of belonging, and a human being's life, we could say, is played out on the threshold between what determines and defines that person in a unique and unrepeatable way, distinguishing him/her and in some way also distancing him/her from others, and what he/she belongs to and cannot escape, on pain of losing himself or herself. Indeed, the individual person, as Stein goes on to say, 'isn't surrendered to external impacts in a totally powerless way, but rather has the freedom, within certain limits, either to consent to their influence upon her development or to withdraw herself from it' (Stein, 2000, 284). On the other hand, the community also has its own identity to safeguard and as such gives its individual members an imprint, characterising

³²We refer here to Stein's definitions of 'types' from a more strictly philosophical point of view, and to Schütz's more clearly sociological definitions (Stein, 2000, 2001; Schütz, 1960).

them and distinguishing them from other people belonging to other communities of a different fabric.³³

At this point, the question becomes when and how does the disconnection between the individual and the community occur? When, that is, starting from a situation of initial conscious belonging to a community, situations of disillusionment are generated in one or more of its members such as to give rise to discontent and disorientation, which are sources of destabilisation of the community fabric since, as Stein well points out and we have had the opportunity to explain, the life power of each community depends completely on that of its members and on how much they are willing to share it.

A possible answer to this and therefore a key to interpreting certain socio-political events that are affecting several national communities worldwide can only emerge from what has been said so far and by putting into focus those aspects and elements that are essential for individuals and groups who are aware of being communities, to develop a sense of belonging to the community fabric such as to live with awareness and responsibility every event and situation as if it were their own, that is, in good times and in bad.

In this sense, it is clear that if there is not the mutual openness of individuals, that is, the willingness to meet and welcome others in their specificity even if it is annoying or incomprehensible, one cannot feel fully a member of a community and consequently live and act for and with it. Nevertheless, one can also be open and welcome but not feel that one is part of a whole. Openness and welcome are a necessary but not sufficient condition for triggering the organic wholeness that is a community. If within a community some of its members turn towards others exclusively with negative stances (distrust, antipathy, suspicion, hatred), this can only lead to situations of malaise that may also lead the people affected not to feel fully recognised as part of the community, withdrawing from it spiritually – reducing their contribution to it and consequently weakening the whole community – or starting to respond with the same stances. This generates an internal struggle within the community (i.e. family feuds, social wars) which, in turn, leads to a weakening or even dispersal of the community.

Obviously, stances are much more incisive on the internal dynamics of a community. But even these do not seem to us to be sufficient, since it could also happen that the community succeeds in any case in persevering because the thing affects a very small number of its members, while the others are and remain clearly at a level

³³The insistence on the relationship between the individual and the community (*Gemeinschaft*) and not on the social relationship between the individual and the society (*Gesellschaft*) is dictated by our intention to deal with the dynamics of the community since these are also the ones that determine social action in the most eminent sense. We are given to a common world that is first and foremost a community – not only biologically because we are born into a family, the first community nucleus of non-chosen belonging, but also at the level of people and nation by virtue of blood ties as well as a shared history. The social level, the expression of formal action based on roles and regulations, builds on the community levels. Undoubtedly there are differences, but in the terms of this research it is not possible for us to extend the range to this aspect as well, wishing precisely to support the original foundation from which to read the social and state dynamics.

of psycho-physical and spiritual involvement. This is the third aspect I wish to emphasise here: When we spoke of the phenomena of influence and psychic contagion, we pointed out that they occur as a result of a natural human predisposition but that they are extreme and have negative consequences only where they generate a mass, that is, where people cease to live spiritually and follow only the wave of feelings and emotions that come from the outside. In concrete terms, it means deciding on a lifestyle that gives little importance to the development of one's own capacity for reasoning and constructive criticism, as well as to the enhancement of the collective memory of one's own community and ancestors, but aims only at productive efficiency and the material well-being of the moment. Such a situation arises because of previous conditions that have not been sufficiently met and which lead some to an attitude of disillusionment with their community and consequently to a loss of meaning and commitment. It can also occur the intervention of some or even just one member inside or outside the community who, moved by their own vision of the right and best way of life, are capable of such a level of suggestion from others, as to move a mass of people to think or act in their 'appropriate' way, extinguishing the spiritual activity of individuals and consequently the level of critical capacity and ethical responsibility towards others, as well as towards themselves. In fact, a healthy and fulfilled community develops from individuals who freely adhere to it, who are, therefore, capable and spiritually awake, to be able not only to follow a current and adhere to a community due to objective facts or conditions preceding or superior to themselves but are always moved by what Stein calls the *fiat*, meaning that entirely individual and private moment in which one adheres with one's own will to something superior. No one can intervene in another person's conscience in order to move him/her by physical or psychological force to do what he/she does not feel able or willing to do because it is contrary to his/her own conscience, provided that the conscience has not been previously extinguished – but then we will no longer be faced with a free and responsible person, that is, spiritually awake, but with a mannequin in the hands of others.³⁴

Social cases that exemplify what we are expounding here are those of today's multimedia communities in which a few know-it-alls convey knowledge and information without effort or difficulty, let alone careful verification of the truthfulness and ethicality of the content, but rather the easy ability to convince and influence the psyche of others. This is not necessarily a case of bad intentions but only of economic or lobbying intentions, and it is based on the dependence generated by being

³⁴The clear reference here is to every form of individual or mass coercion that underlies totalitarianism of all kinds. The socio-historical study of totalitarianism has, in fact, shown how in such contexts real organised systems of contrast to the spiritual formation of individuals are triggered through the adoption of self-suggestion mechanisms, which generate needs and necessities that did not exist before and which are satisfied in only one way – that of the totalising system – up to the adoption of systematic violence for all those who go off the track or recognise its perversion and do not want to adhere to it. On this, we refer to the extraordinary analyses of Arendt (1976).

online or not:³⁵ ‘a few minds’ generously put themselves at the service of the multitude, relieving it of burdens. Another example is the various forms of fanaticism or populism and sovereignty, which, on the other hand, take advantage of and exploit the Internet to appeal to certain religious, ideological, ethnic, cultural, linguistic and other values of identity and belonging, demonising or simply discrediting everything ‘other’ as foreign in the sense of strange and therefore dangerous.

Paradoxically, therefore, an aspect that turns out to be fundamental and necessary in order to have a community in the full sense of the word – the sense of cohesion and belonging that stems from common values and shared ideals – is precisely what can turn into poison and a deterrent of the community itself. If, in fact, in order to feel part of a whole, it is necessary to have a level of sharing that cannot be limited only to blood or only to shared physical space (Walther, 1923) but that an intimate cohesion is necessary that stems from convictions and ideals to be followed and put into practice in order to feel fully realised, it is equally evident that fixing oneself only on certain ideals and values to be referenced can freeze the community and, perhaps in time and in a slow process, lead to not accepting new or old members who try to develop, expand and perhaps question their styles and ideals of life, which naturally tend to lose colour and vigour over time, not to mention their structure which as such are transient and destined to be rethought or replaced. This requires a continuous exercise of openness and spiritual cultivation of the individual as well as of the community. If one does not inwardly live the values and ideals of reference of his/her community, does not feel them to be his/her own and at the same time does not develop his/her own identity in autonomy, without conforming to the mainstream, but having the courage and the possibility to be completely oneself.³⁶ Even when one may be ‘out of tune’ or out of place, one ends up either by capitulating – becoming a sacrificial victim of the collectivity – or by homologating and, therefore, no longer existing as a person, but only as part of a collectivity to which one adheres without and ifs, buts, etc.

If we bring all these dimensions and aspects of communities back to the fabric of the state, which is a specific community form in which the decision to converge into a we is the basis, together with the law as its maintenance tool and the mutual acquaintance of the members is neither attainable nor necessary in and of itself. Differences are evident not only with those communities that Hildebrand calls material but also with formal but numerically smaller ones. Above all, it has perhaps become explicit that the maintenance of a healthy state community is very fragile and complex, since it is closely linked to that of the individual communities that are

³⁵ In this regard, Floridi has coined the term *On-life* to indicate the lifestyle of today’s generations, especially in countries and contexts where the level of connection is so widespread/accessible that it has created a generalised condition of network dependence (Floridi, 2014).

³⁶ On this aspect, Stein is perhaps the thinker, among those considered, who much more and tirelessly does not give in to the defence of individuality for the best and fullest success of every community, strongly calling into question the pedagogical aspect of education, which should not be a guide towards a pre-established model and therefore the same for all, but towards a model of ideals to be embodied individually, each one developing what is already placed in their own interiority (Stein, 2001).

its foundation (families, groups of friends, associations of all kinds, religious communities, parties, schools, academies and so on) and to their harmonious coexistence and intertwining. We could therefore interpret the dynamics analysed so far between the community and the individual, in terms of the relationship between the state and the individual communities that comprise it. If the individual communities that make up a state have the space and capacity to develop and act in full autonomy and freedom, in full recognition of each one's dignity and identity while respecting shared rules and laws, as well as a body of values and ideals recognised by tradition and conviction, these communities will naturally contribute to the life of the state that welcomes them, even when some of them do not feel full adherence to a line of action or to certain intentions reached at a state level. In such cases, free expression may lead to a request for reflection or rethinking of what has been decided or is planned.

However, when certain situations occur, the already fragile and, shall we say, mysterious sense of belonging of individuals and communities to the state is undermined and leaves room out of complaint and discontent. Situations that can lead to this are the following:

1. The individual communities of a state begin to drift away from its intentions because they no longer find room to flourish and contribute nor are they actively involved in building and supporting the supra-community fabric (through genuine communication of decisions and steps to be taken, as well as requests for proposals and visions that meet their needs).
2. The attention and support given to education are reduced to the detriment of other aspects of the state's economic life, so that the level of education and upbringing is flattened to a single reference model in which the life of the spirit is little or poorly cultivated.
3. The state representatives, elected by the citizens, stop acting 'in the name of' but exclusively seek fame and their own benefit. Such contexts can easily feed sellers of hidden hopes and desires, who appeal to a cultural archetype, that of the people, which is abused through the illusion that it can really be a sovereign political subject by virtue of its identity traits alone (which in an absolutely univocal and homogeneous way do not exist because of the biodiversity that characterises us, as well as the natural and historical movements of displacement and mixing) and direct participation in the economic and political governance of the whole by the individual communities of people, getting rid of the so-called intermediate bodies typical of democracies, which is objectively unfeasible due to the large number of citizens that make up the state communities.

One could, therefore, conclude that the movements and motivations that lead to the emergence of disillusion and with it of forms of populism or other phenomena as such are manifold but that they certainly emerge from a latent disconnection between individual communities and the state or, put another way, when a state assumes exclusively the form of a corporation and its members no longer feel that they are members of a large community with shared organisations, rules, customs, etc., but rather a structure imposed for the sole purpose of coexistence and whose governance is alien or distant from the community fabric of the citizens.

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