

# Positive Feelings on the Border Between Phenomenology, Psychology, and Virtue Ethics

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*ABSTRACT.* The papers collected in this issue address different topics at play in the contemporary debate on positive feeling and emotion by virtue of both their primary function in everyday life and their embedded structure. Within this issue, specific attention has been given to the intertwining of positive feeling and ethical issues according to different approaches whose goals consist in providing a description and clarification of the phenomena in question. The contributions gathered here give us a clear idea of the variety and possible nuances that define positive feelings and, with them, of the complexity of our lives and reality. Specifically, they concretely show the degree to which the quality of an experience depends on the agent-environment relationship, the benefits we can derive from certain positive experiences, and the extent to which the valence of an emotion can affect our moral life.

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## 1. Positive Feelings on the Border Between Phenomenology, Psychology, and Virtue Ethics: Mapping the Field

This special issue, *Positive feelings on the border between phenomenology, psychology and virtue ethics*, is situated in the “flow” of the “tradition” of which *Metodo* is an expression, one open to different styles of thought, both philosophical and scientific, where the need for a theoretical approach to philosophy and attention to the contemporary debate on the topic, which is raised again from time to time, do not exclude a historical approach to the matters addressed. In this issue, contributions from the fields of phenomenology (classical and contemporary, descriptive-analytical or applied to psychology, psychopathology and psychiatry), ethics (axiological ethics and virtue ethics), and positive psychology and philosophy of mental health address the question of positive feelings. In particular, these currents of thought show on a theoretical or empirical level, according to the type of work, the ontological status of such feelings and their axiological constitution in different possible experiential contexts, i.e., in environments and worlds of the different types of those who bear them, in this case, people.

People can feel (both) *negative* and *positive* and even mixed feelings, relating to the objects in their environment if we accept the notion, used in studies on emotions, of (feeling) “valence”: the positive or negative character of feelings. People can feel negative and positive feelings if we also accept the notion of “object valence”: the positive or negative charge of the objects, as Colombetti defined “valence” in this sense.<sup>1</sup> The links between object valence and feeling valence are close in principle, in this issue, and are the (affective)-environmental objects related to corresponding affective acts.

The notion of “valence”, at the core of current debates about emotions, has been put into question on occasion.<sup>2</sup> It came into

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1 COLOMBETTI 2005.

2 See e.g., COLOMBETTI 2005; CHARLAND 2005; SOLOMON & STONE 2002.

psychology and philosophy of feelings at the beginning of the twentieth century through the works on affectivity by phenomenologists as well as epistemological-experimental works of Gestalt psychologists of the Berlin School.<sup>3</sup>

Not only can individuals feel positive or negative feelings, as noted, but they can also have more or less central feelings and more or less deep feelings, on a sensory-body level, for example, or even on a spiritual level. That there are different levels of depth of feeling that indicate the different rootedness in the affective life of the individuals who feel them is at the core of Scheler's theory of feelings. This idea indeed is widely shared, in different forms, by leading exponents of early phenomenology (such as Pfänder and Geiger), and it specifically underpins their wide-ranging investigations into affectivity. Their research concerns affective phenomena ranging from sensory states, positive and negative states and more peripheral ones (compared to the deepest, most central I), such as pleasure and displeasure, to more central and deeper, positive and negative sentiments, such as bliss and despair, in which the person's entire being manifests itself. Specifically, the idea in question arose, among these pioneers in the field of affective life, from direct observation and description of the eidetic traits of our experiences. This claim is also substantiated, more or less explicitly, in the refined analysis of multiple positive feelings and experiences presented in the contributions we have collected in this issue.

Bearing in mind the legacy and the extraordinary richness of the lexicon of the emotional life of the early phenomenologists, we chose to use the term "feelings", rather than "emotions", in the call for papers. "Feeling" covers a larger number of affective phenomena than "emotion", which, even at an intuitive level, seems to refer to a narrower group of affective phenomena: those relating to the strictly psycho-corporeal sphere. Although the term *emotions* is now most

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3 On the Berlin School of Gestalt psychology and, more generally, on philosophical reflection, scientific investigations and neo-romantic contexts in Germany in the early decades of the twentieth century see TOCCAFONDI 2019.

commonly used to indicate, in contemporary literature, feelings in general, *feelings* nevertheless manifest, on a specifically phenomenological level, particular essential features that allow us to identify different types of affective phenomena. The fact that they reveal, in terms of lived experience, a certain specificity does not imply their absolute independence from the body of the one having them, and such independence would not be very intuitive.

Only in the final decades of the twentieth century did emotions – understood in their broadest sense as affective responses or reactions able to trigger behavior in response to significant events or objects<sup>4</sup> – receive due attention from scientists and philosophers of mind. Up until then, in that century, those who moved from solid empirical premises or focused mainly on the study of language had generally shown little interest in this kind of experience, namely emotions. In their many nuances and shadows, emotions appeared to constitute a challenge for any research project that aspired, with precise goals, to clarity and to avoid terminological confusion. Such researchers preferred an essentially scientific investigation of specific problems over the constructions of large philosophical systems and phenomena that are difficult to distinguish from each other in terms of their central features. However, ever since they did turn their attention and interest to emotions, this focus has continued to grow. Philosophers of mind made important contributions to the theories of emotions in the following years and to this day. There are also many studies on the relationship between emotions and the brain, in fields such as cognitive neurosciences. These include those from the Swiss Center for Research in the Affective Sciences in Geneva and the Emotional Brain Institute in New York, directed by J. LeDoux, whose goal is to study the neuroscience of emotions, such as the impact of emotions on behavior. This shift has done away with the mistrust that for much of the twentieth century had kept philosophers of mind away from “disturbing”, so to speak, extraordinarily varied “objects” of study, such as emotional ones, which they saw as not allowing for «tidy

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4 See, e.g., SCARANTINO, DE SOUSA 2018; DEONNA & TERONI 2012.

theorization».<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, analytical philosophers in particular held the deeply rooted belief that emotions were mere inner mental states, intersubjectively inaccessible. The works of R. Damasio and R. de Sousa<sup>6</sup>, for example, paved the way for new perspectives on emotions, which were certainly not foreign to classical philosophers but in the twentieth century often still considered full of pitfalls for theoretical or practical reasons.

In the early twentieth century, as mentioned, early phenomenologists started conducting extremely sophisticated and illuminating analyses of affective life<sup>7</sup>, which continue to lend themselves to interdisciplinary dialogue on emotions to this day and may arouse interest in many parts of the healthcare field. It is rather odd that the contribution they could make to affective science and studies is not always adequately made use of, beyond a phenomenological niche, and not taken into proper consideration – at least not explicitly – by contemporary theorists of emotions. In recent decades, phenomenologists who deal with emotions have been inclined to favor the topic of negative and pathological affective experiences, still extremely common today. Furthermore, the same kind of attention has not been accorded to positive feelings, as we noted in the call for papers, though they are equally important, including for a healthy mental life, as recent studies in positive psychology point out. With regard to positive emotional experiences, it has been mainly philosophers of mind or cognitive sciences and positive psychologists who have made recent contributions that have significantly advanced research in this direction. However, even considering only the great phenomenological classics of psychopathology and psychiatry, we cannot avoid mentioning Binswanger's monumental work on love, *Grundformen und Erkenntnis menschlichen Dasein*, from 1942, and Rümke's seminal essay on

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5 SCARANTINO, DE SOUSA 2018, SZANTO & LANDWEER 2020.

6 See, e.g., DAMASIO 1994 or DE SOUSA 1987.

7 On this point, see e.g., DE MONTICELLI 2003; CUSINATO, BRUTTOMESSO 2015. From an aesthetic point of view, see Scaramuzza's fundamental contributions on Geigerian aesthetics, for example, SCARAMUZZA 1973.

*Glückssyndrom*, from 1923.<sup>8</sup> Both significantly contributed to the debate on well-being/happiness, for example on the role of positive feelings within mental illness. More recently, within the context of Italian psychiatry, Borgna has investigated hope, a feeling that is much needed today, in times of extreme psycho-physical fragility<sup>9</sup>. In this scenario, Callieri has reflected, for instance, on the caress<sup>10</sup>. These are all works that enable psycho(pathological) phenomenology, including contemporary ones, to dialogue with or to meet contemporary positive psychology, even if only indirectly. This is the case for some contributions to this special issue.

In the call for papers, we invited authors to draw on what we might call the great phenomenological “work in progress”. This has allowed them to illustrate, both in the more analytical-descriptive texts and in the ethical ones, the diurnal side of life rather than the shadow one, although the former can still escape us like a lost letter right under our nose. In this revaluation of the aesthetic-practical-pathic-emotional-contemplative realm, we are ideally accompanied by several leading figures of early phenomenology. However, they do not drown all the authoritative, independent voices of the authors who have shared our project on positive feelings. We are referring to Husserl, the founder of phenomenology, Geiger, von Hildebrand, Pfänder and Scheler – to name but a few –, who moved across the entire range of “social ontology” in its vastness and aired the great realms of the modern philosophical and psychological tradition of English empiricism (e.g. Shaftesbury, Hume, Spencer, Smith), which encompass the first studies on sympathy. Occasionally, we find inspiring sources for contributors such as Binswanger and Csikszentmihalyi (clinical phenomenology and cognitive-*positive* psychology can be integrated in

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8 BINSWANGER 1942; RÜMKE 1924. On Rümke see, e.g., GUCCINELLI 2020a. On happiness from a Schelerian point of view, see also GUCCINELLI 2020b.

9 BORGNA 2018; BORGNA 2020. On hope, see also BRENCIO, BIZZARI, ANDOLFI, 2020. On hope and passions from a historical and theoretical point of view, it is worth mentioning the important contribution of BODEI, *Geometria delle passioni*, the first edition of which was published in 1991. On hope from an Aristotelian perspective, see FUSSI 2016.

10 BERNEGGER 2007.

a very constructive way, taking a holistic approach to the person) and Wittgenstein, who was also capable of “showing us” how wonderful “a” life can be.

Each contribution addresses, in its own specific language, the not always easy task of shedding light on positive feelings, which may still conceal ambiguities, or luminous feelings that even in their clarity and transparency may appear impenetrable, precisely due to excessive clarity.

When it comes to the advances in the above-mentioned research on positive emotions in analytic philosophy and positive psychology, we should mention in particular at least a couple of issues at the core of the contemporary debate on this topic.

- (a) One issue, which we have mentioned, relates to the *valence of emotions*, i.e. concerning the positive or negative character of emotions.
- (b) The other relates to *well-being/happiness*, its nature, the benefits of positive experiences for the individuals who experience them, and “the good life.”

We can thereby delineate a specific context within which we can read the contributions in this special issue. First, let us consider the question of the valence of emotions.

#### (a) *Emotion Valence*

How we answer the question of whether it still makes sense to address positive or negative emotions or positive or negative aspects of emotions and whether it is still useful to employ the notion of valence in emotion theory and in ethics has several implications. This is true not only for research on emotions and emotion theory, but also for understanding our lives from a phenomenological perspective. It seems completely natural to require that, in our emotional lives and our moral or practical lives, we are able to rely, as far as possible, on definite criteria that allow us to distinguish positive from negative feelings. When we talk about our feelings or when we try to grasp the feelings of others, we do not abstract from their positive or negative

character. When we judge the behavior of someone who has humiliated us, for example, or made us proud, we do not abstract from the positive or negative character of the feelings we feel for them. And if we do not simply fall prey to our feelings, we do not disregard what motivates the feeling we feel. The contributions to this special issue offer a concrete positive answer to this question.

Terminologically speaking, “valence,” a term borrowed from chemistry, was introduced in psychology at the beginning of the 1930s, as emotion theorists and historians of contemporary philosophy often note. “Valence” is one of the words used to translate into English the well-known German term *Aufforderungscharakter*, used by Gestalt psychologist Kurt Lewin. We find more than an echo of it in the ecological approach to visual perception of psychologist James Gibson. *Aufforderungscharakter* is an “invitation character,” according to a more literal earlier translation of the same term. According to Adams, the translator who opted for “valence” (as E.C. Tolman did), it should perhaps have been translated as «compulsive character» if “compulsive character” had not been «cumbrous and a shade too strong».<sup>11</sup> This would ascribe to *Aufforderungscharakter* the capacity to impose itself, and it would be something undeniable, irresistible, as well as something that sets things in motion. The character of “invitation” (*Einladung*), however, in the sense that things that surround us invite us to do something about them, to allow ourselves to be guided in our behavior, seems more in keeping with this phenomenon. If it cannot be understood in a merely physical fashion, it also cannot resolve itself in a tidy order or *injunction* that does not express itself in a dynamic process in which environmental properties or forces and tensions are organized. The character of invitation or being positively attractive describes specifically the attraction and the repulsion (in its opposite, negative *Aufforderungscharakter*) that an object of the environment or an activity exerts on the organism.<sup>12</sup> Lewin speaks of a “correlation” between environmental objects and

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<sup>11</sup> LEWIN 1935, 77.

<sup>12</sup> See LEWIN 1935, 77.

the needs of the individual involved.<sup>13</sup>

It is exactly the centrality that Lewin partly attributed to the organism's need that would seem to legitimate a true "shift" that, as Toccafondi<sup>14</sup> observes, Gibson himself would make in taking up the term through Koffka, regarding the entire Gestalt movement, in reducing environmental characteristics to needs of the organism. Thus for a hungry child, the positive valence of an object, we could say its pleasantness, would be positive only inasmuch as it is capable of satisfying his hunger and would appear differently if he were full.<sup>15</sup> This interpretation of Gibson does not seem justified and seems rather ungenerous. The original nature of the term, in its request and dynamic "effect", belies it. While it is true that in some passages of *Environmental Forces*, Lewin's statements could support such an overturning, it is equally true that Gestalt psychologists share the basic idea that environmental objects have structural invariants or essential properties which, as such, are not projected onto them by the individual involved. Scheler would speak of similar intrinsic features in terms of "value qualities". Indeed, what we perceive is not only a mere object but rather a meaningful structure. It gives certain experiential contents such as colors, for example, or shapes. As Lewin puts it: «Many things attract the child to eating, others to climbing, to grasping, to manipulation, to sucking, to raging at them, etc. These imperative environmental facts – we shall call them valences – *Aufforderungscharaktere* – determine the direction of the behavior».<sup>16</sup>

Bearing in mind these intricate aspects of the English translation of the term, Colombetti demonstrates further ambiguities in Lewin's use of the notion of valence. In her opinion, they could also be partly transferred to the use made of "valence" by those theorists of emotions who firmly associate a term with emotions that was originally mostly related to the (positive or negative) charge of objects and behavior triggered by them (approach or withdrawal). In any

13 LEWIN 1935, 78.

14 TOCCAFONDI 2019, 109-112.

15 See, e.g., LEWIN 1935, 78.

16 LEWIN 1935, 77.

case, she recognizes in Lewin's use of valence an *object valence* approach. It is indeed the environmental objects that are attracting or repelling, positive or negative.<sup>17</sup> Colombetti includes Lewin's theory in a detailed list of different valence theories, whose limits and ambiguities are also brought into focus. We mention here only the hedonic approach to emotions (hedonic tone of emotions, affect valence), fundamentally intertwined with their pleasant or unpleasant feeling: their valence reduces itself to affective states, i.e., to how good or bad emotions feel or are experienced.<sup>18</sup> This is an unsatisfactory theory, not only because it suffers from a circular explanation in the analysis of hedonic states<sup>19</sup> but also because it abandons emotions to themselves, in a sense throwing them back into an intersubjectively inaccessible box and thereby condemning them to silence.

After a careful analysis of the various theories of valence, Colombetti points at what she considers the fundamental conceptual problem for the notion of valence in emotion theory – in agreement with other scholars who doubt it strongly (e.g., Solomon & Stone): it arises from the idea that an emotion can be split into mutually exclusive opposites. Such an emotion would never, in substance, account for the complexity of our daily lived emotions, and so, from her point of view, would seriously call into question the now classic dichotomous notion of valence.

Should we therefore abandon the notion of valence, i.e. of emotional (positive-negative) polarity, together with that of emotional opposites in emotion theory?

The contributions gathered here, without explicitly formulating this question, give us a clear idea of the variety and possible nuances that define positive feelings and, with them, the complexity of our lives and reality. They let us understand, for example, what makes an experience positive and what distinguishes it from other experiences, even from experiences that are apparently similar to it. By the same

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17 COLOMBETTI 2005, 107.

18 On this point, see COLOMBETTI 2005, 108.; DEONNA & TERONI 2012.

19 TERONI 2013, 4.

token they concretely show the degree to which the quality of an experience depends on the agent-environment relationship, the benefits we can derive from certain positive experiences, and the extent to which the valence of an emotion can affect our moral life. Moreover, they describe, for example, how, in certain clinical and therapeutic contexts, it is possible to shift from negative emotions to positive emotions, and how a positive transformation of the people involved can happen. As such, it seems entirely plausible, from this point of view, or that of our experiences, that the notion of valence still makes sense and is still useful – not only for the purpose of understanding our affective life and the affective lives of others but also for the purpose of understanding our environment and our world.

(b) *Well-Being/Happiness*

The notion of emotional polarity designates a phenomenon that is intuitively difficult to ignore. It constitutes, among other things, a kind of qualitative index of “wealth” (a plus) or “poverty” (a minus), not only of the reality in which we are situated, but also of our own reality. The valence of a feeling renders plainly, but effectively, as if giving it a “concentrate” level (+/-), the repulsion or the pleasantness of an object. It also gives us a rapid guide to orient our movements and our actions in a milieu, and to verify the (primary) appropriateness or inappropriateness of the emotional experience that we feel in correlation – regardless of whether we can really experience a positive emotion if the object, for example, has a positive valence or whether the quality of the experience must necessarily encounter a certain reality. Valence already expresses this, revealing how our life is going. In other words, we are in a sense invited to ask ourselves whether our life is going *well* at that precise moment or in a certain context: whether it is rich and full or empty and unsatisfied, in danger, etc. It introduces a broader question in its own way. This is specifically the question of the (good) course of a person’s life, certainly more complex and less linked to an episodic occurrence. It is knowing what

is in that person's interest and, basically, what benefits them – whether to dedicate themselves body and soul for years to a grueling job, for example, or to devote one's entire life to sensory pleasures. We might say that this is a question of “well-being” or “prudential value,” or, in certain psychological contexts, of “optimal functioning”<sup>20</sup>. This is the language of the contemporary philosophers of well-being and positive emotions and of the positive psychologists, such as M. Seligman and B. Fredrickson.

In the broadest sense and in an essentially philosophical formulation, the notion of well-being is how a person's life is going for him or her. In what sense is “well-being” meant here?

If the question of well-being, from a historical-philosophical perspective, refers to the Aristotelian tradition and to *eudaimonia*, that is, a virtuous life and action, qualitatively good, or to non-instrumentally «living to one's best advantage»<sup>21</sup> and the full *flowering* of the human being, from a strictly conceptual point of view, what do we mean by “well-being”? It is not, for example, given that it is equivalent to “happiness.” And if “happiness” doesn't equal “well-being”, what role should happiness play in a theory of well-being? Depending on the theory of well-being that one supports, and/or from the point of view of the philosophy of health and/or positive psychology, one may wonder in what sense and to what extent positive feelings can contribute to well-being, and whether they can be considered, for example, *markers* of optimal well-being – just as happiness could be a marker of well-being.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, happiness<sup>23</sup> (and other positive feelings) may not be a simple marker of well-being and may actually be *central* to well-being and an entire personal existence, i.e. not only in terms of the human species. The conclusions one reaches will also, of course, depend on the theory that

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20 See, e.g., RODOGNO 2016; CRISP 2017; DECI & RYAN 2008; SELIGMAN 2011; FREDRICKSON & JOINER 2002.

21 KRAUT 2015, 27.

22 On these points, see e.g., RODOGNO 2016; HAYBRON 2019; HAYBRON 2008; FREDRICKSON 2001.

23 On happiness, see BORTOLOTTI 2013.

one proposes about happiness (and other positive feelings).

On closer inspection one possible way to classify theories of well-being or happiness is by separating them into two kinds, namely *substantive* (or enumerative) theories and *formal* (or explanatory) theories. In the first case, the question to ask, in Crispian terms, is: "In what does well-being consist"? In other words, what kinds of things (friendship, activity, aesthetic enjoyment, knowledge, etc.) make a person's life go well for them? In the second case, the question to ask is: "What makes something (pleasure, love, beauty, etc.) good (or bad) for someone"? In other words, what makes something good (or bad) for someone? This is a matter of establishing the "properties" that decide the goodness (or badness) of something. Specifically, we are discussing here *good-for value-makers*. As we can see, the notion of "property" or "quality" is important both for the question of *emotion valence* and for the question of *well-being/happiness*.

A crucial aspect of the question of well-being relates to the type of value in which well-being is to consist, generally characterized in analytic philosophy in terms of "good for." Other philosophical currents, such as phenomenology, may distinguish between "well-being" as a vital feeling and "good" as an axiological content that arouses the sense of well-being in those who experience it. The question that comes first would be: "What is a 'value'?"

Regardless, in the contemporary debate on well-being/happiness, especially in its Anglo-American sense, the notion of "good for" is widely discussed from a more specifically ethical perspective. What is "good for" an individual is not necessarily "morally good"<sup>24</sup>, with the inevitable consequences that derive from it in terms of an ethics that wants neither to be resigned, nor to offer a subjectivistic image of itself, nor to return to an ancient absolute and static objectivity, i.e. an ethics of self-founded goods as objects, or rather (value-)things. In the latter case, the problem would become the search for "final end" that one would try to reach in conative-voluntary terms in order to achieve

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24 SCHELER 2009, for example, also reflected extensively on this problem, arriving at some interesting conclusions.

a *good life*. In this case, however, the possible answers to the question will differ depending on the ethical approach to well-being taken. Typically, in the respective scientific literature, three approaches to well-being are differentiated. Among the subjective theories, there are the “hedonistic” theories and the “desires” theories. In the latter, well-being consists in the satisfaction of the current desire. Among the objective theories, often eudaimonic in character, is the “objective list” theory of well-being.

#### *Hedonistic Theories*

Here, as in the case of Bentham or Mill’s Utilitarianism, the principle is applied according to which well-being consists in the greatest balance of pleasure over pain. What must be emphasized here for our purposes is that «it is the positive or negative valence of mental states themselves which determine how well someone’s life goes for them»<sup>25</sup>. In other words, it is pleasure from a substantive point of view, and from a formal point of view, pleasantness.

#### *Objective List Theories*

In this group of theories, well-being consists of certain items such as friendship or knowledge and infinite others. In the “perfectionist” version, which has a specifically Aristotelian foundation, it consists of the things that perfect human nature, for example in exercising reason well. Formally speaking, it consists of a series of epistemic properties such as comprehensibility and clarity.

Remaining in the ethical sphere, the relationship between the well-being/happiness (or other positive feelings) of a person, on the one hand, and the moral character and behavior of that person takes on particular interest. What, for example, is the nature of this relationship? Is there a relationship between an individual’s happiness (or other positive feelings), for example, and their goodness?

These are just a few issues at the core of the contemporary debate on

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<sup>25</sup> TAYLOR 2015, 3.

well-being and happiness. In their predominantly value-background, in the attention they pay to the individual-environment/world relationship and to the intersubjective and interpersonal relationship, the contributions we have collected in this issue also allow us to reflect again, including from a phenomenological and interdisciplinary perspective, on the issues we have mentioned here.

## **2. The Contributions to this Issue**

The papers collected in this issue address different topics at play in the contemporary debate on positive feeling and emotion by virtue of both their primary function in everyday life and their embedded structure. It is noteworthy that positive-affective experience has become a disputed topic in a heterogeneous scenario which ranges from positive psychology to virtue ethics as well as phenomenology, psychopathology and aesthetics. Methodologically speaking, a mere descriptive approach seems to be incapable of fully grasping the complexity of the phenomena in question: there is a need to investigate these experiences through an interjective method aimed at clarifying their embedded nature.

Within this issue, specific attention has been given to the intertwining of positive feeling and ethical issues according to different approaches that aim to provide a description and clarification of the phenomena in question. However, the various approaches used by the authors in their papers share interesting points of intersection. Generally speaking, many of the positive emotions discussed here – trust, gratitude, solitude, compassion, care – show a specific intentional structure: though these acts are directed toward an object, they take the form of attitudes or moods because of their enduring nature. Specifically, this intrinsic feature lets us grasp a meaningful characteristic of positive emotions and their theoretical proximity to attitudes and dispositions. Another fascinating aspect that comes to light in the investigations collected in this issue consists in the fact that

the positive feelings analyzed here assume social engagement and, therefore, a relation with others – even if we consider a specific emotion such as solitude, to the extent that it is the result of a deliberative act.

In the footsteps of some contemporary interpretations of Husserl's ethics that seek to point out certain similarities between Aristotle and Husserl's accounts of moral experience, Irene Breuer shows the extent to which feeling plays a key role in Husserl's genetic phenomenology, in an article entitled *Aristotle and Husserl on Feelings in Moral Sense: Philia and Love*. Outlining the distinction between affective and reflective sense attribution of axiological meaning, she highlights how Husserl seeks to overcome the limits of a mere formalistic approach to emphasize the cognitive function of affective experience. Accordingly, the cognitive nature of positive feeling is due to the intertwinement of personal-affective functions and the rational process through which the rightness or wrongness of an action may be properly evaluated. On the basis of the cognitive function of feeling, Husserl effectively substantiates his criticism of naturalism, which involves the ethical field as well.

Paola Premoli-De Marchi focuses her article – *La fiducia come sentimento positivo e come risposta della persona dotata di rilevanza etica* – on questioning the moral relevance of a positive feeling such as *trust* from a phenomenological point of view, discussing von Hildebrand's research on positive experiences. According to von Hildebrand, a person has the capacity to take a stance toward what he/she understands as being endowed with value, developing inner responses and, hence, certain attitudes: trust has to be considered one of the more meaningful attitudes since it allows for the construction of social relations. Phenomenologically speaking, *trust-feeling* is a positive-affective experience whenever it gives rise to a positive attitude toward those considered trust worthy. After showing the substance of trust-feeling, Premoli De Marchi considers the relationship that trust has with other positive emotions, such as care, hope and gratitude.

*Gratitude* is the subject matter of Claude Romano's paper, the title of which is a question: *La gratitude peut-elle être une Stimmung?* Like trust, gratitude is also an affective-positive response triggered by certain actions or people. The author questions the phenomenological nature of this affective experience: gratitude is not specifically 'intentional' because it seems to be a *Stimmung* instead to the extent that it does not have a limited duration but becomes an enduring attitude. Romano suggests that, among the various forms of gratitude, only gratitude directed at life itself can be properly considered a mood because, as Epicureanism claims, this kind of gratitude positively accepts the finite nature of life. Given its existential potential, it comes as no surprise that gratitude turns out to be an uplifting virtue.

Against the backdrop of this positive assessment of an Epicurean view, Motta and Bortolotti's paper, *Solitude as a positive experience: Empowerment and agency*, is focused on the question of whether solitude may be considered a positive emotion. As we know, one of the most basic claims of Epicureanism is in the idea that only a solitary life can preserve human "ataraxia." After delineating the general differences between loneliness and solitude and highlighting the important role played by the interaction between agent and environment in determining the axiological quality of solitude, they argue that under certain circumstances, solitude can contribute to a sense of empowerment that allows an agent to achieve the goals he or she finds valuable.

While Motta and Bortolotti clearly show how a private emotion such as solitude may be considered positive, John Drummond – *Empathy, Sympathy, Compassion* – focuses instead on the phenomenological analysis of an intersubjective positive experience, such as sympathy, starting from the assumption that this positive emotion is grounded *in the similarity and communalization of the empathically perceived subject* and is a genuine fellow-feeling. More specifically, he seeks to investigate the relationship between sympathy and compassion: while the former involves an affective response to the person for whom it is felt, the latter involves a *degree of sameness in the affective states of the one who*

*experiences compassion and the one for whom it is felt.* Drummond's paper helps to shed light on one of the most widespread misunderstandings within the current debate on empathy, i.e. the confusion between empathy and sympathy.

The intersubjective nature of certain positive emotions is discussed in depth in a clinical and therapeutic context as well, especially if using a phenomenological approach. As is well known, many phenomenologists agree in considering phenomenology a method that can mark out human existence in non-dichotomous terms. It is noteworthy that phenomenological psychopathology gives particular attention to the possibility of applying certain basic claims of phenomenological research for therapeutic purposes. The possibility of a such interaction is demonstrated by Di Petta and Tittarelli's paper, *La via pativa della cura: la noità-degli-amanti*, whose main concern is to point out the pathic character of care, arguing that well-being is a mood endowed with a complex phenomenological structure garnered from its specific relationship with the environment.

Lastly, the paper *On Liking and Enjoyment: Reassessing Geiger's Account of Aesthetic Pleasure*, by Ingrid Vendrell Ferran, clearly shows why positive feelings cannot be confined within the ethical field. This is because they have clear relationships with other research areas, such as the aesthetic, to the extent that both fields pay specific attention to the evaluative process. Specifically, among the different types of evaluation, aesthetic experiences assume the role of having the greatest importance. In spite of the unreal nature of the object of ethical evaluation, aesthetic judgment refers to real objects and value, and referring to a concrete object gives the aesthetic experience a paradigmatic function that helps us better to understand the particular character of these phenomena. In this context, Vendrell Ferran's paper offers an analysis of aesthetic pleasure within the framework of an aesthetics of value, providing arguments in favor of Geiger's distinction between liking and enjoyment and calling into question the claim that liking reveals aesthetic values.

Although the sets of problems that come to the fore when

attempting to understand phenomena as complex as positive feeling cannot be comprehensively developed within the limited overview we have given, we hope that this issue may offer a valid contribution to the reassessment of affective experience.

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