**Taking care of our emotions.**

**The education of Sophie and women’s right to passion**

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Through the image of Sophie (and Julie in *La Nouvelle Heloïse*) Rousseau built the model of modern female subjectivity: the woman, destined to become a wife and mother, must be educated to *take* *care of others* in the private sphere. As we know, it is a specular image to that of the autonomous male subject, sole protagonist of the public sphere.

It is true that, also in Rousseau, there is the idea of *care of the self* concerning women. Neverthless, this consists of cultivating those "feminine" qualities (shame, modesty, altruism) that bring out their alleged “nature” and are in fact aimed at caring for others.

From this vision derives the exclusion of women from the public realm and their confinement within the family sphere. But there is another aspect that has not been considered, in my opinion just as detrimental to women and damaging to their identity: namely, the negation of what I would define *the right to love, to love as passion*. Just think of the difference, in *La Nouvelle Heloïse*, between Saint-Preux and Julie.

Identifying it with the woman, Rousseau constructs a *new affective code*,destined to become dominant in modernity, placed at an equal distance from reason and passion. I propose to call this *sentiment*: a form of affectivity which is only positive and which, being free of the excesses and ambivalences of eros, can become the foundation of marriage and family. According to a topos that would be consolidated over the following centuries, for women to transgress this code was to betray their nature and incur moral stigma (from Hawthorne to Tolstoy to Flaubert etc.), or the stamp of mental illness (see psychoanalysis and hysteria).

How much of this image remains today?

Both the daily news and the secret scenes of psychoanalysis reveal that its internalization by women is still very strong: for example, a woman who has achieved prestigious positions in the professional and public sphere may at the same time be the silent victim of abuse and violence (stalking, femicide), or just a subtle hierarchy, in the private sphere.

This means that the emancipation of women enshrined in the legal, political and professional domain (undeniable, at least in the West) does not fully correspond to an *emotional emancipation*. In other words, the achievement of rights and the possibility of having access to the public sphere is not enough. It is also important for women to act on their inner life and the emotional sphere, to reintegrate aspects sacrificed to the image constructed by and for the other: that is to *take care of their own emotions*, to have the courage of their own emotions, even in their negative and ambivalent aspects.

*Care of the self* hence means regaining the *right to passion*. And at the same time it allows *care of the other*, as women’s precious legacy, to be released from its purely altruistic and sacrificial aspects in order to eventually be transformed into a conscious and autonomous choice.