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THE HOME: PLACES, RELATIONSHIPS AND CARE
Antonio Argandoña

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Home means different things to different people, societies and cultures, and even to the same person over time. But we can define some basic features common to all these interpretations. The purpose of this article is to find those distinctive features of what we usually understand as home[1]. It is neither descriptive nor historical; it is, in a way, normative: the household is a social institution which fulfils - or should fulfil - certain functions, and which has its own significance for the people who are part of it.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines *home* as "a dwelling place; the house or domicile of a person; the fixed residence of a family; the seat of domestic life and interests; the dwelling in which one habitually lives, or which one regards as one's own domicile..."[2]. It is thus a physical place or space.

But it is also much more than that. It is the place for the intimacy of the person, to which the person withdraws to keep his or her life in order and regain control over it; "the open space for the silent flowering of the human"[3]; "the most hidden, private, safe and comfortable place for the self, where it takes shelter from the natural world, to which it belongs as its most intimate refuge, and where it turns to the world and the 'other', opening itself to transcendence"[4]. It is "within but open"[5]. It has a particularly powerful symbolic and psychological meaning.... It is more than a place where an individual resides; rather, it is a unique place where a person's past, present and future

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[1] In this paper I develop and extend ideas contained in Argandoña (2018) and Abdelmonem and Argandoña (2020), among other works.
[2] Cf. Abdelmonem and Argandoña (2020), 5.
[3] Marcos and Bertolaso (2018), 53.
[4] Patrão Neves (2018).
[5] Marcos and Bertolaso (2018), 53.

self is reflected and brought to life"[6] . "Home is where the heart is"[7] . It is "the place to which one returns", not only physically, but also in the memory, imagination and emotions[8] .

The home is a space in which a community of people (not necessarily linked by kinship or affinity), a social group or family develops its private life. It is the place where these people relate to each other and to the outside world, giving rise to diverse links; the place where one learns to live with others and to share resources and capacities, and where service activities are carried out. It is not a voluntary organisation, to which one chooses to belong; it is necessary and "natural", although it is also the result of the decisions and actions of the people who form it.
Why does a home exist? Because we have needs for food, physical protection, shelter when we are sick or tired, and something to remind us of who we are; these needs can be met in other spaces, but the household comes first. Why does a household exist? To fulfil a function or purpose for the people in that home and for society; that is what gives the home its unity[9] .

All of the above is not a description of a real home, but shows its important social function, which it may or may not fulfil. Indeed, like any human creation, the home can and does have flaws: it can be an arena of violence and abuse of power, of loneliness and suffering, of hostility and oppression, often ignored[10] . But we humans have not been able to 'invent' an institution that fulfils this function better than the home.

Space

Home is a place or space, a physical and material realm: house, dwelling, room, flat, dwelling, with its accompanying furniture, installations, technology[11] and ornaments..., but also hut, tent, boat, trailer, corner of a refugee camp, as the case may be. An enclosed, isolated, separate space, with walls that offer security and protect the privacy of those inside; without walls there is no interiority. But it is also an open place: it has doors and windows that are not mere holes, but filters that allow the selective entry and

6 Graham et al. (2015), 346.
7 Fox O'Mahoney (2013), 164.
8 Cf. Alvira (2010).
9 Cf. Abdelmonem and Argandoña (2020), 6.
10 Cf. Douglas (1991), 303.
11 On the role of technology in the household, see Argandoña et al. (2021).

exit of objects, people, ideas...; without doors and windows the house would be a prison12 .

But the home as a physical space also has a psychological, cultural or emotional dimension. The home manifests the inner world of the people who live there. "While the idea of home can be seen as a universal, the experience of home is socially and culturally determined"13 . "Spatial configurations of homes are not limited to the physical characteristics of domestic space; rather, people reconstruct domestic spheres based on socio-cultural and temporal needs that transcend the constraints of physical space"14 . "Home is a material object, but it is also an emotional and meaningful (...) relationship between the inhabitants and the spaces of the dwelling"15 . It is "awareness of a fixed point in space, a firm position from which we 'proceed'... and to which we 'return' in due course. To 'go home' is to return to that firm position which we know, to which we are accustomed, in which we feel secure, and in which our emotional relationships are most intense"16. In a way, home is like the extension of the 'I', its expression, identification, belonging or appropriation. Logically, this emotional dimension of spaces is not given, but is shaped and changed over time.

Functionally, the home is a kitchen, restaurant, bedroom, hospital, storage, place of leisure, rest and work, and much more. The use of domestic space is developed through social norms and cultural customs. The names of the rooms - bedroom, kitchen, dining room, living room, bathroom, study, playroom... - describe the relationships between the practices carried out in the home and the physical spaces.

At all times there are displaced people (migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, temporary workers) who do not have a home as such, but retain the memory of the home they left, have found some current transitional solution, and the hope and desire to create a new home, or to return to their old one. For them home will not be a physical presence, but mediated between what they had and what they hope to have in the future17 .

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12 Cf. Marías (1979), 130-131; Marcos and Bertolaso (2018), 41.
13 Fox O'Mahoney (2013), 165.
14 Abdelmonem (2021), 56.
15 Karjalainen (1993), 71.
16 Heller (1984), 239.
17 Cf. Barrueco and Ryan (2022), Georgiou (2022), Ilcan (2022).

Persons

Home cannot be understood without the people who make it up: not abstract entities, but real people, with a 'face and a name'. Feeling at home is a fundamental, primary, existential need, which is based on familiarity, which internalises and consolidates the home as something that is part of the person who lives in it. This leads to the intimacy, the protection, the trust that a familiar and safe space inspires[18].

The person is body and spirit. The presence of the body in the home is obvious, but the body exists because of its subjectivity: it is an 'I' (self) that inhabits the body[19]. The spirit also manifests itself in the home: the mother tongue builds the thinking and identity of the person; in the home we are recognised as persons for the first time and are accepted for what we are, not for what we have, do or give; in the home we build our self-understanding, our self-esteem and our identity; there we receive our first moral instruction, there we come into contact with culture and traditions; there we open up to transcendence, at least in many cases.
Home is where inwardness is cultivated; it is where one explores oneself; it is where the most intimate relationships are established; it is where one can shed one's limitations and reveal one's vulnerability. Home provides shelter for the suffering, the possibility of starting over and the resources to cope with crises.

Logically, when people act in the home, they are motivated by different motives: extrinsic, seeking results that others give to oneself (from food and small services to recognition and love); intrinsic, results that one generates in oneself (in the form, for example, of learning knowledge and developing skills and virtues - or vices); and transcendent or prosocial, results that others receive as a result of one's actions[20].

Extrinsic and intrinsic motives are not necessarily selfish: the home is the ideal place for the satisfaction of many of one's own needs (food, rest, order, good atmosphere...); prosocial motives, positive or negative, are always oriented towards others. All kinds of motives are present in every action: the person who has prepared the meal does so for transcendental reasons, to attend to the needs of others, but also to satisfy his appetite, to show and grow his culinary skills and to receive the thanks of all; the common objective does not imply renouncing personal objectives. What is important in the household is that the transcendent or prosocial motives are present, in one way or another, in all the actions of its members.

18 Cf. Brancati (2011).
19 Cfr. Malagrinò (2023).
20 Cf. Pérez López (1991); Argandoña (2020).

Relations and community

Talking about people in the home brings us to relationships. The home is relationship - or rather, the home builds relationships which, as we have just seen, are often other- oriented and guided by love. They are not market relationships, in which the giver asks for something equivalent in return and takes account of what each owes the other; in the home nothing is asked for in return, but much is given, everyone gives much, often without giving a thought to it. Relationships in the home are governed by gratuitousness and gift, among other reasons because they are often planned over a very long period of time. Parents, for example, may reasonably expect that their children will take care of them when they are old, but this is not what drives them in the continuous details of generosity they have with their children over many years. There is no accounting of the services each gives and receives: there is a time to receive and always a time to give.

The people who make up a household are not abstract entities, but real ones. They form the social group or household community, which can take many different forms: nuclear family, extended family, single parent, separated parent, composite family and other variants, between the one-person family and the extended family of the tribe, of an old people's home or of a portion of a refugee camp. Not surprisingly, each of these forms will have different characters, problems and opportunities. In the household there is a formal organisation (rules, hierarchy, authority...), but the informal organisation, based on the free provision of services, on trust and on the sense of responsibility of its members, is usually more important. There is a common purpose, project or mission in the household, although it is probably never explicitly formulated; there are immediate objectives (to meet a set of needs of its members: food, rest, health, training, care...) and other long-term ones (such as the development of knowledge, attitudes, skills, values and virtues of the children, to achieve the flourishing of all and, therefore, of the society in which they will move in the future).

Vulnerability, dependency, autonomy

People are vulnerable beings, always in need of physical, cognitive and spiritual
protection. This vulnerability is related to our bodily being, and its coverage has to do with the physical dimension of the home. This vulnerability is at its greatest at the beginning of life, is reduced later, but never disappears completely, and is accentuated again at the end of life or in situations of serious illness or loss of capacity. The condition of being vulnerable does not diminish the humanity or dignity of the person, which is based on the very condition of being a person, for what he or

she is, not for what he or she does or can do, for what he or she possesses or for what he or she gives.

The vulnerable person is dependent on others, who help him/her; dependence gives rise to relationships of complementarity and reciprocity, first within the household, but also in external relationships. Dependency has to do with the social nature of the person.

The growth, maturation and flourishing of the person leads to his or her autonomy, his or her capacity for self-development, linked to his or her spiritual condition, and is placed at the service of others. This call to the service of the vulnerable and dependent and the effective response to that call constitutes care.

Care, work

The home, in fact, is the paradigm of care, which occurs spontaneously in the family or home community, where it is exercised by all, each in their own way21 . The market is important, because it makes many more or less specialised services available to carers22 but it is incomplete, because it lacks the human dimension of care in the family - with the help, of course, of those external services. Care requires a safe and pleasant environment (the home), a community to carry it out (the family) and the services of the neighbourhood and society at large23 . In care we can identify four stages: attention (awareness of another person's need, which in the home is immediate), responsibility (responding to that need with timely action), competence (which often requires the help of external caregivers or services) and response of the cared-for person (which is not always possible, but which, in any case, usually takes place in the home)24 . "Only a civilisation focused on care can promote human flourishing and, consequently, happiness and care must be the most important things learned at home"25 .

Ultimately, what characterises care is openness to the other and their needs as a person, not just as a sick or weak body. Care is always a physical task, but it is rooted in the caregiver's spirit of service and sense of responsibility, and goes beyond the performance of a task, because it involves cooperation in a shared purpose, a common action in which

21 Cf. Argandoña (2020).
22 On care as a task of professionals outside the household, see González and Iffland (2014).
23 Cf. Zárate et al (2020).
24 Cf. Tronto (1994), 126-136.
25 Chirinos (2023), 27.

everyone feels involved - as opposed to a collective action, where everyone feels responsible only for his or her part in the task.

Care can be seen as a form of work in the home - and, vice versa, work in the home also becomes a form of care. Both meet people's needs[26].

Work meets them indirectly, in that it focuses on the object, which is a physical activity: for example, cleaning the house or preparing the food, whether it is done by a family member or an external employee. Care directly meets the needs of the vulnerable and dependent person through a subjective relationship between caregiver and cared-for. Work and care are social actions of service, which generate in those who practice them attitudes, virtues and values that create mature personalities and deep relationships[27]. The practice of domestic life is the best school of care, which strengthens relationships in the home; it is more a question of quality than quantity. Caring in the family generates more spontaneous trust and more natural intimacy[28].

Both work in the household and the care of children, the elderly or the sick may be carried out by members of the household or by outside helpers. What has been said above about such work and care applies to both. External workers are paid, which may be the main reason for their presence in the household, but they too must be motivated by pro-social motives, make strong commitments, be generous in their work, grow as people, and create sources of personal flourishing for themselves and for the people they care for.

The household is also a source of working relationships outside the home - or physically in the home, but in the service of external employers. It derives resources for the household, mainly financial, but also skills, attitudes, values and virtues that shape people's character, while those people contribute to creating an environment of efficiency in enterprises and new skills and values that are then manifested in the household.

26 Cf. Schwartzenbach (2009), 126.
27 Cf. Bernacchio and Knight (2020); MacIntyre (1999).
28 Cf. Redgrave (2014), 75.

External environment

We said that the household is open to its physical and social environment, so that numerous relationships take place between its members and the rest of the world. Obviously, many of these relationships take place with the immediate environment, mainly neighbours in the village, neighbourhood or city, with whom there are relationships in geographical terms (physical proximity), social and cultural (sharing social space, symbols and norms) or psychological-affective (through friendship and affinity, mutual acceptance and identification)29 . Many of these relationships are mediated by institutions and organisations (markets, businesses, schools, universities, churches, social and cultural entities, authorities, etc.) and governed by normative frameworks (laws, regulations, social and ethical norms, customs, etc.). As an African saying goes, "it takes a village to raise a child".

These relations of proximity are also derived from the functions of the household, sometimes not expressly sought: reproduction, bodily care, care of children, the sick and the elderly, construction of identities, education and development of new generations, etc. Life in the home conditions the character of its members and their harmony with society, but also the customs, institutions and norms of communities condition life in the family. Healthy households generate virtuous and responsible citizens who, in turn, create healthy communities. And healthy communities provide social and material structures and educational resources that support families in their efforts to create healthy homes.

The household is thus a fundamental part of describing and understanding social life in a broad sense: it is true that there is a great variety of cultures, but the household always retains its primary function of serving and protecting the unity of society. It is therefore important for society to protect households and for households to be active in solving their problems, with real, albeit limited, autonomy.

Weather

The home unfolds over time and is essentially dynamic, that is, it is in continuous change. It begins in the mother's womb, the child's first 'home'; it continues in the parental home, where the child 'learns to live' and to relate to others, develops knowledge and skills, and continually adapts to life in the home and, through it, to the society in which he or she grows up.

29 Cf. Thunder and Serrano (2023).

Later, he or she will achieve autonomy, leave the parental home and create his or her own, repeating his or her own experience in his or her children, but always in a different way, because internal and external circumstances are constantly changing. In the end, people are likely to 'return' to their home, physically or psychologically.

The home, then, is the place where the stages of people's lives take place and, therefore, it is also the place where generations live together, each with its own characteristics, but with an intergenerational link that maintains the unity of the home. The home is permanent, because each member lives fully the present in it, but 'only for now', because it is also transitory. Each present brings to the surface the pasts, different for each member, and the projects for the future, also different for each one. And these changes take time: the evolution of the home takes a long time, much longer than that of other human realities, such as the company, the school or the hospital.

The household changes from the inside, because people change, and from the outside, because society, culture, economy, technology and many other variables that influence family life change. Over time, its members will try to reach a stable balance, which will be influenced by the changing environment, influenced by all actors: governments, civil society, churches, schools, businesses... So it is important that changes in these external circumstances take into account the impact they will have on all dimensions of the household, with a long-term vision, and that the cooperation of internal actors in these changes is encouraged.

Household dimensions

The household is not an economic organisation, although it uses economic instruments and makes economic decisions. Economic science often considers the abstract person as the main agent of economic decisions: it is 'the' person who collaborates in production, makes decisions about his work, decides on his consumption, buys his housing and plans his future. But when the household is introduced, it is observed that a large number of these decisions are made within the household. The wealth and income of the household are shared by all its members; housing is a durable consumption good and an investment that generates economic returns and security for all; income is also shared, and serves to meet the different needs of all household members, and hence consumption and savings decisions are derived from it....

The household is the place of joint production of the family, including the unpaid work of its members, and is also the place of shared consumption. The welfare state (pensions, unemployment insurance and

benefits, transfers for needy groups, etc.) is oriented towards the household as a whole, to guarantee a sufficient standard of living, and complements intergenerational transfers between its members. For traditional economics, the household does not add value to gross domestic product, although it is recognised as the main centre for the generation of human and social capital, which makes much of labour productivity possible.

It is thus understood that many economic decisions are based on the household, even if the household does not appear in their treatment. This implies that the analysis of these decisions must take into account, in some way, their impact on the household. But this is not reflected in a large number of economic decisions, in which the "agent" is always an isolated person, acting independently of the family community, on issues such as the work-family relationship, decisions on house purchase, education, poverty relief, tax policy and public spending and many others, probably because it is reasoned that what creates economic value is paid work outside the household, "the cult of paid employment"30 .

There are many other dimensions to the household that also need to be considered: legal (rights and duties of citizens, protection), cultural (the household as creator and receiver of the culture of society, or rather, of the different cultures in society), political (as political agent and as object of policies), philosophical, ethical, sociological, religious, etc.

Among them, there is one dimension that should always be taken into account: what we can call the geographical-historical dimension. There have been households on earth since the first family or tribal community, and there are households at all latitudes and in all corners of the globe. When we speak of 'the' household we can generalise our assumptions, but when we refer to the households of a locality or nation at a given moment in history, we cannot forget their peculiarities. For example, when experts discuss compulsory minimum income as a solution to a problem of inequality in a country's living standards, they may leave out many details, but when policymakers consider its application to a given community, they must go down to those details.

30 Davies and Aguirre (2021), 124ff.; cf. Aguirre (2001).

How the household is analysed

The household is a complex, multidimensional reality that can be analysed from many points of view; in the previous pages we have presented some of them31. Poverty is an example of this multidimensionality: it is the lack of material resources, such as food, housing, sanitation and clean water, but it is also the lack of access to health and education services, to a piece of land or a job that allows the family to earn a living, to the services of financial or information institutions; it is, above all, the exclusion of opportunities, the threat of severe situations of insecurity or of the ability to control personal and family life, that is, the lack of capabilities and autonomy32 . In the same way, school failure is often not only a problem of the school, but has much to do with the psychological, social and economic conditions of the household.

There is no specialised science of the household, no complete and determined unitary approach; each discipline studies it from its own points of view and with its own assumptions, methods and techniques. But it is desirable that, as far as possible, such studies should be carried out with an interdisciplinary, or rather multidisciplinary, approach: it is not enough for the sociologist to present his view of the household, the social psychologist and the economist to add theirs, and the political scientist and the philosopher to then offer their views. The danger of specialised approaches is that their conclusions are misinterpreted from the point of view of other disciplines, that their results are not comparable, and that their language is not always comprehensible to other researchers. It is desirable for each specialist to broaden his or her assumptions with those of other disciplines, in order to have a more complete view of the phenomenon to be studied. In other words, experts must be open to different approaches, including those with an ideological basis, so that solutions can be found that better respond to the complex and multidimensional reality of the household. And finally, it is necessary to combine the global, generic vision of 'the' home with the local vision. "The home is perceived... as a reality that is not alien to human nature and therefore... not merely as a convenient artificial construct"33 .

Whatever the definition of a 'good' home, there is no single version of it; there is no single stereotype or model. As Leon Tolstoy said at the beginning of his novel Anna Karenina, "all happy families resemble one another, but every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way".

31 Cf. Argandoña (2018).
32 Cf. Nussbaum (2000).
33 d'Entremont (2018), 164.

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