FRATERNITÉ AS CREATION AND SHARING OF RELATIONAL GOODS

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Abstract: Fraternity, understood as an interpersonal relationship between two or more subjects, is expressed and made concrete in a specific type of goods: relational goods. Relational goods are born on a micro level in the lifeworlds (primary relational goods), but then they can originate forms of civil associations and organizations at a meso level (secondary relational goods), thus contributing to giving a specific configuration to an entire community or society. This contribution aims to explain this important way of considering and making operational the meaning of fraternity. To understand the role of relational goods in creating a fraternal society, we must start from the observation that modern society, typically Western, was built on the basis of the principles of (individual) freedom and equality (between individuals), putting aside the principle of *fraternité*. But a society like this has limits that lead it to self-defeat. Freedom and equality require the «*third*», i.e. fraternity, otherwise they fall into *lib/lab* systems which generate inequalities and threaten fundamental human rights.

Keywords: Fraternity – relational goods – relational sociology – good life – social morality

Premise

Fraternity, understood as an interpersonal relationship between two or more subjects, is expressed and made concrete in a specific type of goods: relational goods. Relational goods are born on a micro level in the lifeworlds (primary relational goods), but then they can originate forms of civil associations and organizations at a meso level (secondary relational goods), thus contributing to giving a specific configuration to an entire community or society. This contribution aims to explain this important way of considering and making operational the meaning of fraternity.

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the principle of *fraternité*. But a society like this has limits that lead it to self-defeat. Freedom and equality require the «*third*», fraternity, otherwise they fall into *lib/lab* systems[1], full of inequalities and violations of fundamental human rights.

In this contribution I start by asking myself the following question: in which ways and why do hyper modernized societies change the concept and practices of the «good life»? What are the prospects for the next future? Human happiness is being redefined as the possibility of enjoying opportunities that present themselves in contingent situations. From a sociological viewpoint, it becomes a matter of analyzing who offers these opportunities, how they are used, and what effects they produce.

I argue that there are three main sources offering opportunities: the *lib/lab* systems, a global communication matrix of an impersonal nature, and new collective subjects of civil society organized in social networks. The opportunities afforded by these three sources are selected on the basis of a multiplicity of logics (individualistic, systemic, or relational). I claim that these different moralities of the good life are generated according to different ways of addressing the relation between «the social» and «the human», and, more generally according to the diverse ways of considering social relations as the decisive reality fostering human fulfillment. In the end, I argue that, in a society conceived as a field of opportunities, the discriminating factor of «living well» becomes the relational or non-relational nature of the good that is sought and realized by the acting subjects. This guiding idea is what supports a relational economy and relational social work in dealing with welfare and well-being issues. The good life becomes a matter of the modalities with which agents and social networks produce their relational goods or, vice versa, engender relational evils. The social economy, understood as a humanistic economy based on the political regulation of the market by the political-administrative system (as it has been understood so far[2]), has not worked due to the misunderstanding of the relational nature of social goods. The common good has often been conceived as a «total», holistic entity, basically an aggregative good, rather than as a relational good in the proper sense[3].

As Benedict XVI wrote in the encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, we need a new way of thinking that «requires a *deeper critical evaluation of the category of relation*» (≠ 53). Love is not just a beautiful feeling of affection, but *a real social relationship*: «love is not merely a sentiment. Sentiments come and go. A sentiment can be a marvellous first spark, but it is not the fullness of love» (≠ 17). Love is ignited by good feelings, but it needs to grow in a relationship and as a relationship to others: this is the relational good. It is in continuity with this perspective that we need to read the message of Pope Francis' *Fratres Omnes*: «No one can experience the true beauty of life without relating to others, without having real faces to love. This is part of the mystery of authentic human

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[1] Cf. P. Donati 2021, chapters 1 and 2.
[2] Cf. M.A. Lutz (edited by), 1990, 1999.
[3] Cf. P. Donati, 2021.

existence. Life exists where there is bonding, communion, fraternity; and life is stronger than death when it is built on true relationships and bonds of fidelity. On the contrary, there is no life when we claim to be selfsufficient and live as islands: in these attitudes, death prevails» (≠ 87) (…) «Nor can I reduce my life to relationships with a small group, even my own family; I cannot know myself apart from a broader network of relationships, including those that have preceded me and shaped my entire life. My relationship with those whom I respect has to take account of the fact that they do not live only for me, nor do I live only for them. Our relationships, if healthy and authentic, open us to others who expand and enrich us» (≠ 89) (…) «charity finds expression not only in close and intimate relationships but also in macrorelationships: social, economic and political» (≠ 181).

The thesis that I would like to argue here from the point of view of the social sciences, in the light of a sound relational theory, is that relational goods such as mutual trust, cooperation, solidarity, peace, social friendship, free giving are created through social relations inspired by the principle of reciprocity. With a warning: reciprocity is not a relationship of utility (it is not a *do ut des*), but it is the social rule that supports a symbolic mutual exchange of free goods, having a subsidiary and supportive character not only for dyadic relationships, but for wider circles of people[4]. Reciprocity makes the virtue of charity *social*, that is relational. The Good Samaritan makes a good personal action, but that action must be read and interpreted as part of a circuit of gifts extended by the I-You dyad to the relationship involving a *We*, from small communities, such as a family, to international relations. Fraternity, in order to be operative on a practical level, is a relationship that must lead the thrust given by personal charity to assume and realize in itself a principle of reciprocity extended to wider social networks, within and between them.

What is a «good life»?

My argument is that in a society conceived as a field of opportunities, the discriminating factor of «living well» becomes the relational or non-relational nature of the good that is sought and realized by the acting subjects. It is a matter of clarifying the modalities with which the good is generated and which effects follow from it. The proof of this argument consists in giving evidences that there exists a specific logic of opportunities that is capable of realizing a «society *of* the human», i.e. social forms in which, whatever the means used to realize social relations, the latter can be generated only by subjects who are actively oriented to each other according to a supra-functional sense[5]. This is a society in which, from the standpoint of relational realism, the good life

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[4] Cf. A. Caillé, 1996
[5] Cf. P. Donati and M.S. Archer, 2015.

coincides with the creation and enjoyment of relational goods. This is, in my opinion, the sense of the term «critical» for critical realism This is, in my opinion, the sense of the term «critical» for critical realism taking into account how it was clarified by Vandenberghe[6].

I am interested in shedding light on practices that are inspired by a realist utopia that uses opportunities in order to realize a *modus vivendi* that allows people to enjoy relational goods in different social spheres. In short, I would like to highlight the social forms of the good life generated in social contexts that are capable of including new life opportunities within the social relations that orient our conducts of life toward an «agonistic sociability». This oxymoron alludes to the fact that, instead of encouraging citizens to bracket their moral and cultural disagreements, we have to cultivate oppositional yet respectful, i.e. relational, civic and political practices. In the field of social services, this means developing relational social work. In short, I argue that a flourishing civil society, on which a civil democracy is grounded, can be fostered by those social networks that are able to generate competing relational goods.

Old and New Visions of Human Happiness

There are two alternative views on what human happiness might be, which have prevailed over the centuries: a *hedonic* idea of happiness and a *eudemonic* one.

For the hedonic conception, happiness is the result of avoiding pain and seeking pleasure, the key concept of all utilitarian schools, in both its individual and aggregated forms. Social relations are considered as 'entities' that can bring pleasure or pain as other «objects» do.

On the other hand, we find the eudemonic view, which, apart from being more theoretical and holistic, takes a different view of human relationality. It considers happiness as a more complex concept, not strictly limited to attaining pleasure. Happiness is something like flourishing human living, a kind of living that is active, inclusive of all that has intrinsic value. It is the ultimate goal of human life and an indirect result of the practice of virtue.

I will focus on the latter conception, starting from Aristotle, who claims that pleasure is an *enérgeia* of the human body and mind, whereas happiness is the *enérgeia* of a human «being a human» (Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, Book X, chapters 1-5). Aristotle understood human happiness on two levels.

On the individual level, as the satisfaction of the human being's natural needs (physical, psychological, and sociocultural), with the purpose of enhancing the more elevated human qualities, however one defines them (rationality, contemplation, *otium*, spiritual virtues).

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[6] Cf. F. Vandenberghe, 2014.

On the social level, life consists in enjoying interpersonal friendship and in conducting a correlated active and peaceful life in the public sphere of the *polis*, with the intention of pursuing the common good. Aristotle does not examine in detail the relational nature of good life, limiting himself to making individual happiness dependent on the happiness of the political community, the latter having primacy over the former. Throughout history many other conceptions have been formulated on this basis, which certainly need not be summarized here. On the one hand, human needs have been discussed at great length, and, on the other, the relationship between individual happiness and collective happiness has been variously described.

What I wish to recall is the fact that in classical thought and until the beginning of modernity, good life is related to two basic conditions: (i) it refers to a naturalness of human needs and thus *presupposes a human nature*, however this is defined, and (ii) it implies that the political community is capable of pursuing the common good by resolving social conflicts and giving citizens the security necessary to enable their human potentialities to flourish. These potentialities are generally understood as virtues.

Virtue (in Latin, *virtus*, and in Greek, ἀρετή-*aretè*) is understood as a disposition of the spirit toward the good; in other words, it is a person's capacity to excel in something, to accomplish a certain act in an excellent way, to be virtuous as the «perfect way of being».

In premodern thought virtue has a stable disposition called *habitus* as its prerequisite. *Habitus* is a fundamental means for achieving the good life in that it regenerates a social order conceived as an ideal that is stable and immutable in its principles. From this comes the idea that a happy society, and a good life for its citizens, is achieved by a strict correspondence between personal virtues and social order, and that it is reproducible over time. The idea that individuals' happiness (as the realization of their virtues) projects itself onto the entire society prevails so that if individuals, as such, act for the good and are happy, the society will also be happy.

This vision lacks relationality. With modernity, this framework is progressively called into question. To the degree to which the individual is no longer incorporated (embedded) in a given community and becomes «casual» (formally free and available in the capitalist labor market), the distance between the individual and society grows increasingly greater. With the advance of the national state and the spread of capitalism, the two assumptions of premodern thought fall: the notion of human nature and that of the common good are radically changed, altered, overturned, and, with them, the meaning of good life as well.

With the progressive erosion of the metaphysical-religious roots of the past, the problem of how to sensibly conduct one's life becomes an increasingly fraught problem. In a society in which the values that guide life are no longer «founded» but simply chosen with subjective options, good life presents itself as an always problematic and somehow unreachable goal. The fact is that all of modern culture, from its beginnings to the

present day, is marked by the drama of defining «what is human» and consequently what is, or can be, human happiness.

With post-modernity, the process of change becomes ever faster and deeper. What is the conduct of life that leads to happiness and, even more to the point, what is the society that can foster it? These are questions that are increasingly debated along two main lines: on the one hand, there are those who hold that the good life consists in the emancipation and liberation of individuals' subjectivity from any system constraint (a new form of the hedonic ethos); on the other hand, there are those who believe that it consists in the possibility of building highly techno-functional impersonal social systems that can relieve individuals from their material needs, which is a technocratic reformulation of the eudemonic ethos. In reality, Western modernization mixes both the aforementioned tendencies: individualism and systemic functionalism mix and intermingle with one another. They support and feed off each other.

Social structures, once the possibilities of basing moral values in an objective reality are lost, now function as if the problem of living in a good society can be reduced to a question of individual preferences and tastes that are allowed or not allowed by the system. The happiness of individuals is relegated to the private sphere, where it is subjectified and becomes narcissistic[7] while public happiness (the well-being of social systems) is entrusted to the chance of creating «reflexive systems»[8] that are called reflexive only because they generate more problems than they can solve. To overcome the limits of modernity, new modes of exercising reflexivity are needed, in particular they require *relational reflexivity*[9].

Here it seems clear that the problem of human happiness is being posed in radically new terms, for at least two major orders of reasons.

a) Social and cultural systems no longer presuppose the existence of a human nature. On the contrary, they tend to alter existing reality to enter into the realm of the «post-human», the «transhuman»[10]. They create the humanoid and the cyborg. All prior forms of humanism become obsolete. In short, human happiness no longer consists in the realization of potentialities that are proper to human nature and only to it, but exists «elsewhere», an «elsewhere» that cannot be defined because it does not have either an identity or stable boundaries. It is said that society becomes liquid, and people must live on the edge of chaos.

b) The processes of social differentiation erode the concept of the common good and, with it, the idea that good life can be guaranteed by a political community. The common good is identified sometimes with public goods, sometimes with total goods, that is, with impersonal entities or entities created by a simple aggregation of individual goods. The idea that public happiness can avail itself of private vices, indeed, that it is the

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[7] Cf. C. Lasch, 1984.
[8] Cf. U. Beck, W. Bonss and C. Lau, 2003.
[9] Cf. P. Donati, 2011.
[10] Cf. N. Gane, 2005, 2006, 2014.

product, even if an unintentional one, of private vices becomes a social norm. The logic of the production of the goods in which happiness consists is left to the neo-liberalism of the market regulated by the state (*lib/lab* arrangement).

As a consequence of all of the above, happiness becomes a mysterious object, a dream, a passion, a conduct of life without a symbolic and normative «center». It is no longer a project. It is abandoned to the intrinsic ambivalence of a Western morality that puts everything into doubt and is thought of as being purely «liquid», while, in fact, it is not, due to the existence of tough structures of social inequality, in particular in accessing social service and in organizing alternatives to the *lib/lab* arrangements.

In reality, this society does not see that the liquid life and the risks that hinder the possibility of achieving the good life depend on precise social and cultural structures. We can ask: where can such a society, which appears to limit itself to being aware of its own inability to solve the problems that it generates, find happiness? Where is the «good society»? Certainly not in material well-being. Various scholars have evidenced the «paradox of happiness», which states that in the dynamic of advanced societies, beyond a certain threshold of material well-being, increases in income and material goods do not, in fact, lead to increased happiness but generate its opposite, that is, unhappiness and a whole set of connected individual and social pathologies.

The economists and psychologists of the so-called «economics of happiness» are still far from giving a convincing answer. In my opinion, the reason for this shortfall, as I will explain below, lies in the fact of not having really understood the role that social relations play in fostering human flourishing. The human being is a *sui generis* potentiality that can be actualized only through the relationality with other human beings. The central point becomes that of understanding how the logic of opportunities, which is supported by the morphogenetic society[11], puts social relations into a state of fluctuation and what consequences this has on the good life.

Three moralities of the good life

In the modern conceptions of the good life, goods are of an either individual or collective nature. This is the same thing as saying that good life is the product of a combination between the freedoms of the economic market (the *lib* side) and the social equality assured by the state through the redistribution of resources (the *lab* side). The differences between the various moralities consist in the norms that regulate the ways of generating and using opportunities supplied by the economic market for the individuals under the umbrella of state redistribution for the whole collectivity. In a nutshell, we can say that there exist two moralities of the good life that drive social changes, and a third

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[11] Cf. M.S. Archer (edited by), 2013.

morality that is generally considered auxiliary, complementary, and, in any case, residual compared to the other two.

Said in short, he two driving moralities are those of the capitalist market and the state (or political system). The morality of the economic market extols the ideal virtues of honest and efficient competition in producing a never-ending supply of new goods that are supposed to improve the well-being of individuals and society. As a matter of fact, these virtues are not actually practiced. What is really at work is the idea that a good society should allow agents to engage in their free and private activities by means of which they are expected to enrich themselves and the social body (liberal morality). For this morality, opportunities are created by the capitalist market. Of course, there are other kinds of markets, with different moralities, based on different norms of exchange. But it is well known that capitalism marginalizes these different civil economies[12].

Collective morality, instead, extols the civic virtues of agents' participation in and responsibility toward the public good, which is identified in the total good of the redistributive state that guarantees the rights of citizenship and equality of material starting conditions (socialist morality). For this morality, opportunities are created by the state or the political-administrative systems existing at the different territorial levels.

The third morality, the most marginal one, is that of the social spheres in which the virtues are neither those of the market nor of political citizenship, but make reference to relations of trust, cooperation, and reciprocity in lifeworlds. Opportunities are created in and by the primary and secondary social networks of civil society whose morality is based neither on profit exchange nor on redistributive norms, but on criteria of reciprocity (peer-to-peer production, coproduction, open coordination, partnership, etc.). The marginality of this third morality is attested to by the fact that its guiding-value (*fraternité* or solidarity) is not institutionalized in the cultural system (includign the legal system) as, instead, the other two guiding-values are (*liberté* and *égalité*).

These three moralities refer to different logics of opportunity, which are opportunities in liberal, socialist, and «associational» terms. All three have their own specific conception of what we call «life opportunity». The opportunities offered by the market, those offered by the state, and those offered by the networks of lifeworlds respond to different relational logics intrinsic to the three aforementioned moralities, respectively, of economic exchanges, political safeguards of citizenship, and associative relations. Each logic of opportunities reflects a different morality of social relations.

It then becomes a matter of analyzing who offers the opportunities, how the opportunities are selected and utilized, and what their effects on the good life are.

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[12] Cf. S. Zamagni and L. Bruni, 2003.

The Good Life in the Process of Globalization

We have to ask ourselves: which logic of opportunities dominates the globalized world? This logic is driven by an «aesthetic energy» that makes individuals choose favorable opportunities on the basis of a type of utility that is instrumental to goals that are the «interests of the moment», with no constraining finalities responding to a long-term project – and, thus, without norms that potentially make the choices stable so that individuals end up aggregating and disaggregating with a growing variability that no longer responds to any social order except that of expressing a diffuse spontaneity. Family structures and «family moralities» offer numerous examples of the variety of ways in which individuals aggregate and disaggregate.

These new situational logics of opportunity seem to correspond to an underlying impulse that we could call «*collective addiction*», favored by the medium of an «anonymous communication matrix»[13]. It is a logic of the search for happiness through an unchecked availability of all possible innovations, which makes people addicted to continual change as if they were addicted to a drug. The process of societal morphogenesis takes the features of an «*addictive society*»[14].

Now the question becomes: to what extent is the good life pursued in a rational and reflexive manner, by whom and in which contexts? And where are new conceptions of the good life emerging in a non-normative way? What supports social integration? What produces social disintegration? In other words: is it possible that, passing through a phase of unbound and anormative morphogenesis, new conceptions or effective social practices of the good life can be generated in which agents/actors find a stable consensus among themselves and build something in common?

It seems to me that on this issue two main opposing arguments are advanced. One argument holds that the new prevalent moralities of the good life are the product of agents who are basically unconscious, driven by weak or fractured or impeded forms of reflexivity, i.e. modalities of action that characterize a passive attitude or a more *laissez-faire* outlook of «wait and see», without any ability to anticipate the outcomes of their actions and life course. The other argument claims that, nonetheless, the new conceptions and practices of the good life are the product of «conscious» and «free» agents who make «rational decisions».

From the standpoint of the relational theory of society[15], which is neither relationalist nor formalist, we see acting subjects faced with the need to confer a normativity on social relations that is adequate to successfully achieving the promise of a good life. This need can only be met with a minimum of adequate reflexivity leading to an

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[13] Cf. G.Teubner, 2006.
[14] Cf. G. Teubner, 2011.
[15] Cf. P. Donati, 2021.

agonistic understanding of normativity[16]. In other words, so that interactions between social agents can produce social cohesion that respects the rights of human persons, it is necessary for acting subjects to acquire the characteristics of contesting «relational subjects»[17].

People create social cohesion to the extent that they act as subjects who reflect *on* social relations as emergents and, without necessarily sharing the same tastes and opinions, are nonetheless able to build a *we-relation*. This entails understanding the meaning and practical implications of how a relational subject is constituted, whether this is a single person or a set of people who act as a collective entity or as social network.

Going Beyond the Lib/Lab Logic of Opportunities: Towards a Relational Logic

The morality of the *lib/lab* configuration of society is based on an injunction: «you must be free» to seek opportunities that fulfill you. This injunction is configured as a «double bind» that consists in one's being at the mercy of a paradoxical message: if you obey this injunction, you show that you are not free because you do it out of obligation; if you do not obey this injunction, then this means that you renounce being free. Apparently, there is no way to escape this paradox, which is notoriously at the origin of so many psychic and social pathologies and was elucidated as «the trap of postmodernity» by Michel Foucault[18].

The relational paradigm argues that a way out exists. In order to see it, it is necessary to escape the paradoxes of modernity with a process of cultural breakthrough. This process consists in semantisizing the injunction, turning its meaning upside down, that is, by resorting to a *counter*-paradox: «you must be free» comes to mean that *you must choose whom to depend on* because freedom consists in having the possibility of choosing the relation to which to belong, the bond that, through your choice, is the foundation of your identity.

To solve the paradoxical message of late modernity, one needs to look at the enigma of the social relation and be able to manage it[19] because this enigma is inscribed in the social and cultural structures that impose on individuals the norm of having to realize themselves by making themselves independent of every social bond. From this systemic injunction derives a clear deception that consists in attributing to lone individuals the responsibility for everything that happens to them in life. Theirs is the fault, theirs the shame. From this comes the repressive sense of human and social relations in present-day society. This social norm is not saying, as some think, that the human person has the moral obligation to enhance his/her capacities: on the contrary, individuals are

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[16] Cf. L. Maxwell, 2012.
[17] Cf. P. Donati and M.S. Archer, 2015.
[18] Cf. M. Foucault, 1966.
[19] Cf. P. Donati, 2021, 167.

commanded to transcend themselves, to go beyond their capacities and potential to take on qualities and properties that the human does not have. This is the post-human, the hyper-human, the trans-human, the cyborg.

In the private sphere, interpersonal bonds are replaced by technologies: for example, procreative relations are replaced by reproductive technologies; primary relations are replaced by virtual communication on the internet; in the public sphere, collective bonds are replaced by systemic bureaucracies and mechanisms; in large organizations, the bonds between people are replaced by technological tools; in public debate, dialogue between face-to-face participants is replaced by mass media and new *apps*. In all of these cases, social bonds become increasingly virtual. What was considered the «natural» quality of the bond between human beings loses its meaning, is rendered artificial, and, as a result, the bond can be constructed and altered at pleasure.

The fact is that, when talking about good life, we have to reconsider what we mean by «human nature» and, correspondingly, what the demands that social and cultural structures impose on people's action are, especially with respect to the social bond. We have to understand the complexity of the morphogenesis of the human in order to grasp the novelty of the human wherever it is regenerating rather than destroying itself.

My thesis is that *the regeneration of the human,* wherever it is not being lost but is instead flourishing, *emerges as the product of a qualified morphogenesis of the social bond*. I would like to explain this statement by analyzing the causes that make the transition from *lib/lab* morality to a *relational* morality necessary.

This transition starts when interacting actors take a distance from the system of opportunistic logics supported by the *lib/lab* arrangement. The sequence is the following: (a) first of all, variability increases within the *lib/lab* framework; (b) the opening of new, purely contingent opportunities creates a space-time in which the search for new rules for the selection of alternatives takes place; these rules refer to relations that must be generated; (c) if choices are enacted that, in a targeted way, guide the creation and use of opportunities according to new relational logics, stabilized social innovations emerge in which the goal of humanizing these same social relations prevails.

We can delineate the discontinuity between *lib/lab* ethics and relational ethics with respect to their creation and use of opportunities as follows.

In the *lib/lab* paradigm: a) the ethics of good life is a private choice and becomes public only as an external constraint on action; b) the social quality of objectives and products is independent of inter-human relations because it makes reference to the achievement of the maximum of individual opportunities. The «advantageous» new forms of «variety» are necessarily appropriated by those who, even if they start from supposedly equal positions, have the capacities and means for appropriating them.

In the relational paradigm: a) the ethics of good life pertains to the social relation in that it is a bond between humans, i.e., inter-human; b) the social quality is that which derives from the respect for and fostering of values and norms that give priority to caring

for the relations between the acting subjects. In this case, the appropriation of «advantageous» new forms of «variety» by some to the detriment of others is hindered or very limited because here the moral norm of reciprocity, understood as symbolic exchange, is in force.

The aim of a symbolic exchange is to generate, maintain, or change a meaningful relationship with significant others. The easiest example of a symbolic exchange is «doing someone a favor, giving a gift, or offering assistance». It can be a move to start a relationship of reciprocity, wherein reciprocity does not mean an exchange of utility (*do ut des*), or an act that simply regenerates an existing relationship. When the act is based on an already established relation, the favor, gift, or assistance maintains a circuit of reciprocal favors, gifts, or assistance. The circle can be restricted to two persons or enlarged to include many people. In any case, the exchange is not calculated in monetary terms but is part of a series of acts that maintain and keep up a relationship. The difference from monetary exchanges is marked by the rejection of any form of monetary payment for such favors, gifts, or assistance. In a way, the «payment» is intrinsic to the relation itself, i.e., the relational good enjoyed by those participating in the relation, and the «money» (not the «currency») is the symbolic medium inherent in the action producing that good (i.e., the reference to the bond). It is in the spheres of society where reciprocity is the foundational norm that good life resides. The implications are significant for institutional economics and anthropology alike, particularly for researchers examining multiple overlapping practices such as market and gift exchange.

The original sin of the *lib/lab* arrangement lies in the fact that, by ignoring the value and intrinsic norms of social relations inspired by the symbolic exchange, it generates relational evils. The passage from a *lib/lab* arrangement to a societal arrangement in which morphogenesis is «guided» (steered) requires positive norms (e.g. voluntary work on the part of the healthy, environmental concern) and negative norms (e.g. discouraging prostitution and exploitative uses of labor) that follow a logic of opportunities in which the common good is redefined as a relational good. The reason for this assertion is the fact that a common good without relationality between those who produce it and those who use it renders the ethics of the good life sterile and indifferent.

Some Examples

The relational vision of society reveals that social problems arise from specific contexts that generate relational evils and that the morality for combating these must be inspired by relational work on these networks.

Let us take the case of social interventions that aim to make young people desist from committing crimes and to reintegrate them into a good society. Various studies demonstrate that friendship groups, intimate relationships, families of formation,

employment, and religious communities play a central role in changing the life course of young delinquents. As Weaver and McNeill[20] suggest, we have to explore «the ethical implications of these findings, suggesting that work to support desistance should extend far beyond the typically individualized concerns of correctional practice and into a deeper and inescapably moral engagement with the reconnection of the individual to social networks that are restorative and allow people to fulfill the reciprocal obligations on which networks and communities depend».

Let us take the case of poverty. As very many studies demonstrate, poverty is not only the product of individual characteristics, but above all of differences in access to opportunities. Social networks are the factor that conditions access to goods and services that can be obtained in markets[21]. Social inequalities have often been analyzed from the point of view of characteristics of individuals or the workings of large opportunity structures such as the job market or the offer of direct income transference policies. In reality, the best solutions to poverty are those inspired by the paradigm of relational work. It is necessary, however, to distinguish between how relational work has been adopted in the U.S. and how it arose and has been practiced in European countries.

In the U.S. relational work is taken to be assistance toward pursuing a life plan in which material help is given to poor or indigent people within a long-term relation that valorizes the individual capacities of the poor and unemployed. This way of intervening has some value, but it does not alter the structures that generate social inequality because the goal of escaping poverty is pursued through a personal life plan within the framework of unchanging social structures that correspond to the compromise between the capitalist market and the welfare state (*lib/lab*), even though welfare measures are performed by third sector agencies[22]. Relational work, theorized and practiced as the modification of social, cultural, and economic structures, is very different[23]. It aims at helping people who experience life difficulties and vulnerabilities to remodel their relational contexts in a meta-reflexive manner (not directive) so to support their willingness to get a good life through a relational steering[24]. A recent example concerning relational social work in foster care has been provided by Calcaterra (2017).

As Lynch, Kalaitzake and Crean[25] argue, much political egalitarian theory has contributed to a disregard for the care-relational dimensions of social injustice within the social sciences. The lack of in-depth engagement with affective relations of love, care and solidarity has contributed to an underestimation of their pivotal role in generating injustices in the production of people in their humanity. While humans are political, economic and cultural beings, they are also *homines curans*. Yet, care, in its multiple

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[20] B. Weaver and F. McNeill, 2015, 95.
[21] Cf. E. Marques, 2012.
[22] Cf. M. Jindra and Ines W. Jindra, 2015.
[23] Cf. F. Folgheraiter, 2004, 2013; F. Folgheraiter and M.L. Raineri, 2012.
[24] Cf. P. Donati, 2013.
[25] Cf. K. Linch, M. Kalaitzake and M. Crean, 2020.

manifestations, is treated as a kind of «cultural residual», an area of human life that the dominant culture neglects, represses and cannot even recognize for its political salience. If sociology takes the issue of relational justice as seriously as it takes issues of redistribution, recognition and political representation, this would provide an intellectual avenue for advancing scholarship that recognizes that much of life is lived, and injustices are generated, outside the market, formal politics and public culture. A new sociology of affective care relations could enhance a normatively-led sociology of inequality, that is distinguishable from, but intersecting with, a sociology of inequality based on class (redistribution), status (recognition) and power (representation). It would also help change public discourse about politics by making affective in/justices visible intellectually and politically, and in so doing, identifying ways in which they could be a site of resistance to capitalist values and processes.

The problem concerns the increasingly widespread hybrid economies that mix activities for profit and non-profit. Recent consumer research has examined contexts where market-based exchange, gift-giving, sharing, and other modes of exchange occur simultaneously and obey several intersecting logics, but consumer research has not conceptualized these so-called hybrid economic forms nor explained how these hybrids are shaped and sustained. Using ethnographic and netnographic data from the collaborative network of geocaching, Scaraboto[26] explains the emergence of hybrid economies is constantly under threat of destabilization by the struggle between competing performativities of market and nonmarket modes of exchange. Despite latent tension between competing performativities, the hybrid economy is sustained through consumer–producer engagements in collaborative consumption and production, the creation of zones of indeterminacy, and the enactment of tournaments of value that dissipate controversies around hybrid transactions.

My question is: can we assess the morality of social networks, that is, whether and how a network produces moral values such as justice, solidarity, subsidiarity, etc. or, vice versa, injustice, oppression, marginalization, exploitation, etc.?

The answer can be affirmative, but a relational framework is necessary to understanding this because it involves giving an assessment about relations and the networks of relations, and it is not enough to consider only individuals' intentions (or their «altruism»)[27], or only the morality of the social structures that condition individuals[28].

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[26] Cf. D. Scaraboto, 2015.

[27] This is the limitation of several sociological investigations such as those of C. Smith and H. Davidson (2014) and C. Smith (2015).

[28] This is the limitation of several sociological views of the classical welfare state (from R. Titmuss to T. Parsons).

The Morality of Social Relations

In my view, the morality of a social relation (or network of relations) consists in the fact that it can produce relational goods or relational evils for those who take part in it, independently of agents' intentions.

For instance: i) the freedom to dismiss an employee can be intentionally good in order to save a company or increase its competitiveness, but it can produce poverty or social inequities (not as a simple «fact», but as a *relational* evil); ii) redistributive state policies can have good intentions aimed at assisting the poor, but they can generate a «poverty trap» or other social traps (relational evils). When, how, and why can we say that a social relation is good or bad?

In order to produce relational goods, a dyadic social relation (or the relationality of a network of social relations) should meet the following requisites: (a) a necessary requisite, but not a sufficient one, is that *the social relation be good in itself*, i.e., in its own structure or «molecule» and, therefore, in its own elements, which are its goal, means, guiding norm and value pattern), and not only in the feelings, aspirations, or intentions of the subjects/agents; (b) the social relation *should generate an emergent phenomenon that brings a good to each participant*; and (c) *the good enjoyed by each participant could not be obtained «otherwise»*, i.e., in a way that is lacking the we-relation.

For instance, a «mafia relation» does not meet the first requisite, since its structure is morally bad, although it can meet the other two requisites. On the contrary, a measure of redistribution pursued by public (state) policies can be morally good in itself, but generate relational evils because it does not meet the second and/or the third requisite.

The fact is that social networks are highly ambivalent. They offer opportunities and resources, but also constraints and obstacles to access to and use of opportunities. This can be seen in the research on structural holes and on the brokers that occupy positions of intermediation of information and exchanges between the nodes on networks. According to some authors, brokers play a positive role in offering opportunities[29]. It is argued that the wealth of a society's information depends on the informational potentialities of social circles (structural holes) that social entrepreneurs (bridges) are able to put into contact with one another. According to others, brokers play a decidedly ambivalent role; for instance, Ahuja[30] claims that structural holes have both positive and negative influences on subsequent innovation. According to still others, they have different functions; for example, the results of the research done by Fleming, Mingo, and Chen[31] illustrate how collaborative brokerage can aid in the generation of an idea but then hamper its diffusion and use by others.

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[29] Cf. R.S. Burt, 1992.
[30] Cf. G. Ahuja, 2000.
[31] Cf. L. Fleming, S. Mingo and D. Chen, 2007.

Certainly, social networks are «assets»[32], but we must draw distinctions between the characteristics of each network because the fact of producing relational goods or evils is correlated with the morality of the good life that each network supports. It is important to reiterate that relational goods are goods that consist of relations: they are not material entities, they are not performances, they are not ideas – they are none of these things. They are relations. Let us take two examples, one negative and the other positive.

The negative example is when relational goods are lacking. A very common case, whether in families or in universities and work places, is the presence of *structural holes* in the networks of relations among people who are managed by brokers who hinder rather than foster communication among all the nodes in the network. The brokers are mediators who prevent people from being able to relate to one another and thus hinder the creation of a relational good. Recent investigations demonstrate how important the attributes of nodes are in configuring the characteristics of social networks[33].

The positive example is friendship. Friendship is a social relation that goes beyond individual dispositions. Certainly, friendship flows from people, and only people can be friends and create friendship, which is a virtue for them as persons. But it cannot be an individual undertaking. Ego and Alter are not friends as individuals. Friendship is the acknowledgement of something that does not belong to either of the two, although it is of both of them. This is the relational good[34]. It is the good that exists in common between people; only they can create it, but it does not belong to either of the two people, even if it is of both of them. Likewise, friendship cannot be the product of a social structure; it cannot become an institution, a structure to which people must conform. To be friends, there have to be at least two people who must share and exchange something on an interpersonal level. As Lazega and Pattison[35] have shown, friendship mitigates the competition in social networks and fosters the creation of social capital. It is the sharing, that is, the reciprocal action that generates the *we-relation*, the relation as the reciprocal action within a *We* which gives sense and form and content to friendship. Sharing cannot be an explainable fact in individual terms, even if it is not a collective reality: it is not imposed by anyone, it cannot be dictated by any authority, and no one can experience it as something constrictive or external. To understand this, it is necessary to move beyond both methodological individualism and methodological holism, which are the two great currents of thought that still dominate the social sciences today. They do not seem to have understood the new realities that are emerging in the worlds of the economy, as well as in those of the production and consumption of goods and services, including the worlds of welfare and the internet.

In these worlds we see the spread of productive practices that operate on the basis of a «relational logic» so that the value of goods and services references the quality of the

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[32] Cf. E. Lazega, 2007, 2009; R. Gulati, 2007.
[33] Cf. P. Wang, G. Robins, P. Pattison and E. Lazega, 2015.
[34] Cf. P. Donati, 2019.
[35] Cf. E. Lazega and P. Pattison, 2001.

social relations, and not the quantity of the time of the work that was employed to produce them. Social capital is «good» if personal relations are good. In this way, the validity of all the classical economic theories is overturned, theories which, from Ricardo to Marx, computed the value of a good or service in terms of the time necessary to produce it, as *lib/lab* logic still does to a great extent. This «relational logic» is intrinsically a form of social morality because it involves the fact that a criterion of value is introduced (the quality of the relation) in place of ethically neutral quantitative parameters.

«Ethical labour (the economy in which the social relation is a "value") comes to define a new (ethical) economy» (…) «we look at things through the lens of relationships rather than just the lens of money. The reason we do that, is that behind every financial transaction there is a relationship. And it is the relationship that determines the long-term success and impact of what goes on in terms of finance and money. So if you really want a successful economy you've got to get behind the financial transactions, the sheer money, to the relationships that are underneath it»[36].

Which eudemonic morality emerges through these phenomena?

Certainly, the idea of happiness, the good life of individuals as well as of society, depends on the creation of common goods. But, as I have already said, in a complex and globalized society, common goods must be interpreted as relational goods within particular networks that have positive externalities for the surrounding community.

In this regard, it is necessary to consider how the new media (ICTs) are revolutionizing «real» (interpersonal and structural) social relations through virtual relations. Clearly, we must distinguish between the different types of media, the different ways of using them, and their specific outcomes. There are media that allow for the production of relational goods and others that generate relational evils. This is what the morphogenetic approach proposes to explain concerning the morphogenesis of the human person, agency, as well as social and cultural structures, in relation to a possible «good life».

When people become aware of all of this, social change begins. New processes emerge that are aimed at reassessing relations with others. One discovers that working as a team, cooperating with others rather than acting individually, is more effective and satisfying, on condition, obviously, that the task has not been imposed and that teamwork is not a tool used by those in charge to make higher profits. Family bonds are rediscovered as relations that, while being constraints, give a meaning to one's life that other relations cannot give. A growing number of people realize that they can achieve their goals only through new forms of association and new social movements. New demands for justice and social solidarity arise requiring a vision capable of putting the needs and rights of all of a community's members into relation with one another. Indeed, many discover that we are all deeply connected to one another. Each person's decisions, choices, and actions are not purely individual matters, but are enacted in relation to

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[36] Cf. A. Arvidsson, 2010.

others. It is irrational to think of them as simple expressions of the autonomous Self. One comes to realize that, in reality, each person lives in dependence and interdependence on so many others, without whom one could not be the person one is, and could not become the person one desires to become.

It becomes apparent that each individual's history resides in relations with significant others. The human person is not a self-sufficient entity: he/she is an «*individual-in-relation*», where the relation is *constitutive* of the person. We are all in the same boat, in the sense that we depend on one another. And so the question becomes: what kind of boat is this? I think that we can call it: «We-relation». But what kind of relation is this? In other words: how should the relationality between us be so that individuals fulfill their own humanity and do not become alienated from themselves to become another individual or something else?

Traditional collective movements – called mass movements – no longer offer adequate answers in that the identity they confer is of an aggregate type and is not relational. The identity acquired by the individual from the fact of belonging to a collective movement based on identification with a symbol (for example, ecological, anti-global, civil rights (etc.) movements) can become significant only on two conditions: (a) if it is mediated by an adequate inner (personal) reflexivity and (b) if the personal reflexivity is capable of realizing a relational (social) reflexivity with others. Both of these conditions are hardly ever met by collective movements if they are purely aggregative. They can be present, instead, in collective movements in which people have real relations, and not only virtual ones, with one another, and these relations cause a social form (instituted form) to emerge that is capable of stability and its own action. The social networks on the web (run through information and communication technologies) can do this on the condition – which is by no means a given – that the virtual relations are only a tool, and not a replacement, for inter-subjective relations.

In the society of the human, well-being is constituted by the good of the social relation as the path toward obtaining individual goods. The relational good consists in all those relations that can be generated and enjoyed together with others and on which individuals must rely in order to obtain everything that they could not have without such a relation. Examples are all of those immaterial, yet real, goods such as cooperation, friendship, recognition, cooperation, solidarity, mutual help, enjoying a positive climate in a firm, classroom, or social street, and so on, which meet most human needs.

The relationality of the moral good

In my opinion, we have to be clear about what we mean by the relational character of the (moral) good and the good society. Many authors speak of the relational character of the good, but, in reality, they are referring to individual agency. I offer two examples.

Christine Korsgaard[37] observes that the (human) good is, above all, an affirmation that something is normative for me, for my condition, as an act of sympathy with myself[38]. She claims the relational nature of the good, but she does it from an individualistic and, in the end, constructivist point of view.

In adhering to Kant's philosophy, she maintains that the good has a relational character in as much as a certain entity becomes held in common, that is, it is 'constructed' as being shared by rational subjects who are capable of having sympathy with themselves and living this sympathy through empathy with others. The good is relational in that it is constructed with ends that are «shared among all of us» («*Good, then, is the schematic name for the solution to the problem of shared ends*. This, then, is my answer to the question of why we operate with the concept of the good: *because as rational creatures who are capable of seeing the world through the eyes of others*, we are faced with the task of constructing a state of affairs that is, as far as possible, good -- for us all»[39]).

For Korsgaard, then, the good is relational, not because it consists of «good» relations, but because it is shared by individuals who use their relations to make something good held in common. She does not see the relational constituion of these common goods., because the goods do not consist of relations properly. In short, relations have no substantive reality in themselves. The good life does not require a reality endowed with certain relational qualities and properties in itself, but is good in that it is constructed as being good for each of the participants.

Ana Marta Gonzáles[40], reflecting on these issues, identifies some paradoxes and internal contradictions in the thought of Kant that can be traced to a lack of a relational vision. First, while Kant takes the educational process to be a radically moral enterprise all the way through – and hence, placed in a relational context – he also aspires to constitute education as a science, to be improved through experiments, thereby paving the way for a systemic approach to education; in spite of its moral inspiration, his systemic approach not only could enter into conflict with the moral demand of taking each individual subject as an end, but is also marked by an intrinsic paradox, already involved in the ambiguity of the term «humanity», which might mean a) humanity as a moral disposition present in each individual human being, or b) humanity as a whole, as the «human species»[41]. Secondly, Gonzáles finds that the Kantian conception, «leaving aside the mechanism of education to focus on its relational dimension», leads to the affirmation that «the attainment of a moral culture depends on teaching children to act upon principles, and

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[37] Cf. C. Korsgaard, 2013.

[38] «For to say that something is *good-for* me is to describe *something's relation to my condition as having normative implications*, and that in turn is to *endorse* the view of myself that, simply as a conscious being — as a being who is in her own keeping — I necessarily take of my own condition. One might see the endorsement of that view as *an act of sympathy with myself*». (C. Korsgaard, 2013, 24, *italics mine*).

[39] Ivi, 24-5, *italics mine*.

[40] Cf. A. M. Gonzáles, 2011.

[41] Ivi, 433.

hence autonomously», with the paradoxical consequence that «in order to educate autonomous human agents, we have to engage in a process marked by heteronomy»[42].

Gonzáles' critique of Kant's philosophical conception regarding education, claiming a relational approach, is enlightening and correct. «While improving education may become the object of a systemic action, education is always the object of a moral relationship»[43]; «… moral education, as something directly linked to personality, is always beyond the reach of those techniques, and dependent on a relational approach to education»[44]. This relational approach, however, remains focused on the advancement of an individual human being.

Gonzáles recognizes that educating means performing a relational activity, but education is not yet investigated as a *sui generis* social relation, as a dynamic structure in itself, situated in a relational context. Education seems to remain the object of individual agents' morality, not a moral entity in itself. Interpersonal relations are considered as «conductors» of individual morality, not yet as moral goods (or evils) in themselves. That is why the structure of education as a social relation is basically referred back to the moral quality of individual people: «autonomy is prepared in the context of personal relationships, interested not so much in the cold development of potentialities as in the real good of the person»[45]. To become truly relational the moral good requires the adoption of the second person perspective on the part of the agents, i.e. a dialogue (a dialogical self), and not only a first person perspective (but not a third person perspective). The latter, of course, is asolutely necessary but it is not sufficient in order to get «good relations», which is however what Gonzáles is looking for.

The point that I want to emphasize is that the relational paradigm redefines the concept of the human basing itself on the relational distinction with the non-human. In traditional societies the human is simply assumed as a natural given according to a principle of identity [A = A]. In modernity the human is defined by negation with respect to what appears to be non-human: the principle of the definition of the human is dialectical, consisting in a double negation, which is the logic of the creation of opportunities without finalism [A = not(not-A].

In the present historical phase, which, to my mind, is leading us toward what I call the *after-modern* (or *trans-modern*) society, *the human is defined by what we include in it and by what we exclude from it through specific relations, which are activity-dependent and context dependent*.

I translate this concept into the formula: [A = R (A, non-A)]; the human is defined through a relation to what is outside the human realm. The human is no longer *a priori* a normative concept. We can include in the human an infinite number of things such as

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[42] Ivi, 442.
[43] Ivi, 437.
[44] Ivi, 438.
[45] Ivi, 452.

piety and empathy or utility and egotism. It becomes essential to understand the selection mechanism for what we include in (or exclude from) the human.

Modern semantics is based on binary oppositions (the slash in the formula of modernity [A = non(non-A)]) so that the good side of the human should emerge from the conflict that cancels out the negative side of the human. The human becomes a battleground. And today this is true particularly on the level of communication, images, and the signs conveyed by the mass media[46]. At the same time, however, it becomes increasingly evident that these mechanisms, that is, those of binary negation and mediatic constructivism, produce large existential vacuums, life failures, processes of alienation. People are forced to ask themselves: what is human in me? Which means: what is good for me? What is the good life in which *the-human-that-is-in-me* can flourish? In other works, how can I be happy?

To answer these questions, individuals have to reflect, take distance from themselves, and appeal to the social morality of certain relations instead of others. Their happiness or unhappiness lies in the choices they make.

To conclude: fraternity from the viewpoint of relational sociology

Ethical neutrality in social theorization is basically a myth. Certainly, sociology distinguishes itself from social theory because, in analyzing social matters, it does not have to take sides on this or that value. It is inevitable, however, that it, too, always presupposes value choices[47], which obviously cannot be those of direct ethical or political engagement; otherwise, sociology is transformed into an ethical or political doctrine. The moral burden of explicitly declaring the value choices in play is incumbent on the sociologist when entering the arena of social theory, where such choices can obviously be diverse and plural.

As for my relational sociology, it makes reference to a social theory that does not make *a priori* value choices, but points to the good or the bad in the effects produced by the societal dynamic. It juxtaposes the ways in which acting subjects generate different social consequences, which can contradict not only their situational expectations, but also the values of the collective morality that they support.

Relational analysis leads one to conclude that postmodern morality erodes the common good because, consciously or, more often, unconsciously, it erodes social relations. There are obviously good reasons for assessing social relations negatively when they are used to exploit people (such as in human trafficking or prostitution), to organize social groups for the purposes of common criminality or corruption, or for other morally negative ends. On this basis, however, the postmodern morphogenetic society has

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[46] Cf. L. Chouliaraki, 2013.
[47] Cf. V. Lidz, 1981.

elaborated a social morality according to which the good life consists in an indefinite increase in life opportunities, on the assumption that human identity can continuously change, endlessly altering its social relations. Today's moral norm dictates the celebration of «relationalism» as the path toward the individualization of the individual. In the postmodern cultural system, it is assumed that happiness consists in this process.

Reality ends up debunking this morality. The idea that in order to achieve a good life the logic of opportunities must be untied from the value and norms of social relations leads to continual failures. The reason lies in a precise sociological reality. In fact, happiness is sought in the *creation of ever new social relations; it becomes possible to enjoy all possible opportunities only on condition of immunizing oneself from the relations themselves*, that is, on condition of not rendering any particular relation (any opportunity) necessary: thus, on condition of not binding oneself to anything or anyone, if not for the opportunities of the moment (this is the «pure relation» theorized by A. Giddens).

The moral norm celebrated by the unbound morphogenesis emerging from the crisis of the *lib/lab* system makes the maximum contingentism and relationalism imperative. It celebrates relationality while negating it at the same time. But negating the identity of the relation means also negating the identity of the subject: hence, the impossibility for the individual of achieving authenticity in his/her identity. Such is the paradoxical outcome of this conception of the good life. Living in relations without tying oneself to them. In this way, the individual can increase his/her life opportunities always on condition of not privileging any one social relation over others, which – according to this collective morality – would involve limitations and discriminations. It is a morality of non-distinction because the moral norm dictates that one not distinguishes, as every distinction is discrimination. But in this way, a «reverse discrimination» operates because one chooses to not choose (one decides not to distinguish). This is a moral norm that leads to cultural and moral regression because human civilization requires the continuously renewed and creative use of distinctions.

Considering every thing and every human action within the relation in which we find it and looking at it from this point of view is essential to giving meaning to things and actions. Human life in pursuit of happiness – in a couple, in a working relation, or in the search for a job that isn't there – does not mean alienating people within the limits of the relational situation in which they find themselves, but the complete opposite. It means fraternity. It means giving them a perspective for managing their human condition in a horizon of openness to meaning – openness to other relational worlds, that is. This is the sense of the interventions that we call networking and interventions of relational observation-assessment-guidance[48] aimed at humanizing people.

The logic of opportunities necessarily requires a morality of action because when opportunities are not infinite, but limited, a competition arises. However, competition

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[48] Cf. P. Donati 1991, 346-356.

can be of various types. There is the «excluding competition» that allows only some to obtain resources and facilitations, excluding others, and there is the «including competition», that is, «agonistic sociability» – another name for social friendship – which consists in competing with others to create new opportunities that, subsequently, will be shared with others in a circuit of reciprocal thrusts. In other words, agonistic sociability is a mechanism that creates opportunities for everyone without generating unwarranted structural inequalities. Competing, not in order to appropriate a good for oneself, but to achieve better solutions to share with others who will do the same thing according to the reciprocity rule, a *win-win* solution, without winners and losers).

We must acknowledge that still today we lack a proper reflexivity on the relational nature of fraternity as the good life, if we understand this expression in the sense that the good is constituted by certain social relations instead of others. These are the relational goods that bring truly human happiness going well beyond material welfare because they stimulate fraternity and social friendship.

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