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What Does “Subsidiarity” Mean? The Relational Perspective

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The focus of this article will not be on either the historical or political debate surrounding the concept of subsidiarity, which are important topics in themselves. Instead I will discuss the semantics of the concept of subsidiarity from the viewpoint of its socio-anthropological implications. The rationale for this purpose is the following. The evidences of contrasting—and even contradictory—meanings of the word *subsidiarity* remind us that, in order to understand this principle, we must, first of all, clarify the socio-anthropological foundations that support the different semantics of the term. This is a task to be accomplished as a premise for the justification of the way we use this principle in our theory and practice and why we resort to one semantic instead of another.

The Issue: Which Semantics for “Subsidiarity”?

Subsidiarity is a slippery, multifaceted, and polysemic concept.

As it is well known, the term *subsidiarity* derives from the Latin verb *subsidior*. In the Latin vocabulary the word *subsidium* initially meant something in reserve or, more specifically, reserve troops: troops used in the case of necessity. The expression “subsidium ferre” means to stay behind and be prepared to help those who find themselves in trouble on the front line.

The term implied some form of social solidarity, although it was not equal to the latter. That is why in Latin countries such as Italy, the idea of subsidiarity is still very close to the idea of solidarity, rather than to the idea of liberty or equality.[1]

In principle, it has always maintained the meaning of bringing assistance or aid to other people, but, at the beginning of the modern era, it came to be used as a principle of autonomy in social organization. It referred to the distribution of power and authority in society, in contrast to the monopoly of the Leviathan State. From the sixteenth century, subsidiarity developed in opposition to sovereignty. In practice, it served as a key word to claim an articulated and plural distribution of powers *vis à vis* the political system.

Starting around the mid-twentieth century, it was launched again by the Catholic Church to refer not only to the internal order of a nation-state but also as a principle for coordinating the powers and competences in interstate relationships. In 1992, it was adopted by the European Union (EU) as a basic criterion of its polity and policies (article 3/B of the Maastricht Treaty). Since then, the definition of the idea of subsidiarity as the legal principle of the EU has proved quite controversial. It is not clear whether this principle is an integrationist or anti-integrationist principle of EU policy. As a matter of fact, the concept of subsidiarity wavers between two meanings: On the one side it means bringing assistance to somebody, on the other side it means preserving and even improving his autonomy. There are evidences that, due to this ambivalence, it can raise conflicts and contradictions.

Such an ambivalence is rooted in the modern history of the Western world. In the old times, it meant "assistance." In modern times, it has come to mean just the opposite, that is, "leaving people to act freely as they like and keep the political power off," or, "leaving the governance of social initiatives at the lower level."

The historical reasons for these changes are well known. Most scholars would observe that the latter meaning appeared with Abraham Lincoln[2] and other thinkers, such as John Stuart Mill and Jean-Pierre Proudhon, as the fruit of the emerging liberalism of the nineteenth century in its many different versions. Today, Hubert Haenel's 2007 Report to the European Affairs Committee states, "Member States and their citizens need to unite to become stronger and more efficient together. They do not need a nanny state supervising every aspect of their lives. As Abraham Lincoln stressed in a declaration to the United States Congress: '*You cannot help men permanently by doing for them what they could do for themselves.'*"[3]

In recent years, an abundant literature has clarified the historical roots of the different definitions of subsidiarity. That has been done especially with reference to the project of a Constitutional Treaty for the European Union.[4]

In the EU, the principle of subsidiarity regulates authority within a political order, placing the burden on argument with attempts to centralize authority. It

has come to recent political prominence through its inclusion in the Maastricht treaty on European Union, intended to quell fears of centralization. However, the principle increases and shapes such tensions due to disagreement about formulations and possible institutional roles. Andreas Føllesdal[5] rightly pinpoints that alternative accounts have strikingly different institutional implications regarding the objectives of the polity, the domain and role of subunits, and the allocation of authority to apply the principle of subsidiarity itself. He presents and assesses five alternative normative justifications of concepts of subsidiarity illustrated by reference to the European Union. According to him, few of the arguments constitute full theories addressing all issues of interpretation and application. Two arguments from liberty—Althusius and Confederalism—are addressed, one argument from efficiency (fiscal or economic federalism), and two arguments from justice: a Catholic argument based on personalism and liberal contractualism. The order of analysis used by Føllesdal roughly reflects the decreasing autonomy of subunits granted by each argument.

This article is not intended to intervene in this historical and political debate. I do not wish either to enter into the history of the concept (although I will refer, of course, to historical deeds) or to elaborate a taxonomy from the political science viewpoint. What I wish to do is to discuss the semantics of the concept of subsidiarity from the viewpoint of its socio-anthropological implications. The rationale for this purpose is the following. The evidences of contrasting—and even contradictory—meanings of the word *subsidiarity* remind us that, in order to understand this principle, we must, first of all, clarify the socio-anthropological foundations that support the different semantics of the term. This is a task to be accomplished as a premise for the justification of the way we use this principle in our theory and practice and why we resort to one semantic instead of another.

The basic issue is, therefore, to explain why and how the concept of subsidiarity can be distinguished from, and at the same time integrated with, similar but not identical concepts such as freedom, autonomy, devolution, social pluralism, solidarity, grassroots, and so forth. I will deal with this issue by referring primarily to the Catholic social teaching and then comparing this teaching to the other doctrines.

As it is widely recognized, the very term *principle of subsidiarity* appears in the Catholic social doctrine, first—in a substantive way—in the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891) by Leo XIII and subsequently—in clear and explicit terms—in the encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931) by Pius XI.

More recently, summing up the whole social doctrine, we read in the *Compendium* (CDS 2004) that the Catholic social teaching is based on four key principles: the dignity of the human person, the common good, subsidiarity, and

solidarity. These are principles of a general and fundamental character because they concern the reality of society in its entirety: from close and immediate relationships to those mediated by politics, economics, and law; from relationships among communities and groups to relationships among peoples and nations. Because of their permanence in time and their universality of meaning, the Church presents them as the primary and fundamental parameters of reference for interpreting and evaluating social phenomena, which is the necessary source for working out the criteria for the discernment and orientation of social interactions in every area.[6]

As we observe real social phenomena in contemporary societies, we see that these principles are largely unapplied and even misunderstood. Quite often they are interpreted in ways that are very far from the meaning and intentions proper to the social doctrine of the Catholic Church. As a matter of fact, reductionist and biased interpretations prevail almost everywhere. For instance: the common good is identified with mere material goods—water, a healthy environment, or similar things; solidarity is identified with feelings of love, philanthropy, or public charity; subsidiarity is defined as leaving decisions to the lower levels of the political system (see art. 3/B of the EU Maastricht Treaty).

These interpretations lead to serious consequences. Take, for example, the case of the family. The common good of the family is identified with its assets. Family solidarity is identified with sentiments of love. Subsidiarity is identified with leaving each actor to define the family as he or she likes. At the macro level of the national state, *solidarity* is defined in terms of political control over resources or the pursuit of equal opportunities or redistribution via the welfare state (labor or *lab* side); and *subsidiarity* is identified with devolution or privatization (liberal or *lib* side). These examples are only a few of the general misunderstandings surrounding the key concepts of common good—solidarity and subsidiarity—in respect to the Catholic social teaching.

That is why we must ask ourselves whether the Catholic understanding of subsidiarity has any real sense and any real chance to be meaningful for our times. In order to cope with this task, we have to pass through three main steps:

First, it is necessary to examine in depth the current uses of these concepts in order to clarify their correct meaning. Such a clarification should be undertaken with reference both to the historical aspects of the concepts and to the way they are put into practice today.

Second, it is particularly important to try to look at social reality and see if there are both theoretical developments and practical exemplars of the correct use of these principles, showing how subsidiarity and solidarity can work together in order to produce the common good in an effective way.

Third, if the above two aims are achieved, we can expect that new ideas and practical orientations will be put at our disposal in order to think of a new configuration of society, one that leaves behind the Hobbesian and Hegelian heritages that still impinge on contemporary societies and impede an overcoming of their socio-anthropological visions of society.

In seeking to accomplish these aims, special attention will be given to the issue of the interdependence between the principle of subsidiarity and the other basic principles of solidarity, common good and human dignity, to which it should be linked if we want to understand it adequately. We must examine how these principles can and should work together. As a matter of fact, solidarity and subsidiarity are mutually reinforcing and necessary to realizing the common good. Ideally, this is the case. Indeed, its being the case is what makes for a robust civil society—one serving the common good and respecting the dignity of each and every person. However, the relationship between solidarity and subsidiarity is far from clear and easily understandable. Social circumstances have changed so radically that by the third millennium the desired relationship between solidarity and subsidiarity is badly out of alignment. Therefore, what we have to examine are the possibilities for aligning these two features of society in a newly transformed social context in which the common good has become more and more problematic.

First, it is necessary to acknowledge that the relationship between solidarity and subsidiarity can never be taken for granted because their relationships are not symmetrical. It is possible for solidarity to be high and for subsidiarity to be low. This was the case during early modernity. Throughout Europe, the solidarity of the working class community was at its peak. Yet, early capitalism was precisely where market control was at its (unrestrained) highest and commodification reduced the value of working people to a wage. Certainly, a thrust toward subsidiarity developed in the attempt to found trade unions, but it was deflected into wage bargaining and away from control over the work process, working conditions, and work relationships, let alone production and productivity. In short, unions were incorporated into market relations and into the government of the liberal state.

Equally, subsidiarity cannot work without solidarity. If such a combination is tried, then the organs of subsidiarity distance themselves still further from solidarity. These agencies are either commandeered from below by parties claiming to speak for their community, and/or they are invaded from above by the commanding powers of the state bureaucracy. For example, the relative autonomy of the academy in Europe has seen both autonomy and collegiality reduced by the imposition of government performance indicators and

accountability. Subsidiarity has been forfeited largely because there has been insufficient solidarity to defend it.

The conjunction between these two social forms—solidarity and subsidiarity—and thus their contribution to achieving the common good is therefore contingent and not axiomatic. This is the case despite their mutual reinforcement when they do happen to coexist. Moreover, it also seems indubitable that much contemporary social change militates against their coexistence. Specifically, what has changed that makes the conjunction between solidarity and subsidiarity ever more problematic?

There is a diminishing supply of community-based solidarity, of shared values, and, thus, of social cement. Everywhere, a variety of changes undermine the stable, geo-local and face-to-face community. Certainly, elective communities (and virtual communities and imagined communities) are on the increase, but without making any significant contribution to the overall social solidarity necessary to sustain subsidiarity, since, at best, it remains extremely restricted in kind (e.g., football and FIFA).

Conversely, the invasion of everyday life by market forces (advertising, commodification of welfare, and money as the sole currency) and by bureaucratic regulations (national and transnational) have jointly accentuated increased materialism within an enlarged iron cage of bureaucracy.

Can this infelicitous cycle be broken? Here we have to consider the role of reciprocity as the social norm that contains and links together subsidiarity and solidarity.

Relational Semantics: Subsidiarity in the Light of the Common Good as a Relational Good

In ordinary language, as well as in most empirical sciences, the common good generally refers to a something, an entity belonging to everyone by virtue of their being part of a community. The community can be big or small: a family, a local or national community, or the whole of humankind. In any case, the common good is seen and treated as an asset or an opportunity to be preserved and enhanced, if possible, for the benefit of the individuals involved.

That something, which the common good consists of, generally refers to a tangible reality, but it may also be an intangible good. Tangible goods are, for instance, the natural resources that must be at everyone's disposal (such as air and water), spaces usable by everyone (such as streets and squares, though today we would include the Web and the Internet as well), and artistic monuments

that must be maintained without being commercialized. Examples of intangible goods include peace, social cohesion, and international solidarity along with the appropriate institutions for safeguarding and promoting them.

Modern thought has increasingly identified the common good with a collective, materialistic, and utilitarian good, which must be available to all members of the community. The notions of affluence, development, and progress conform to the above when they are considered to be common goods. Thus, modern thought is always in danger of reducing the sense and value of the common good to a possession (literally, a property), whose holders are conceived of as shareholders or stakeholders. Hence, today we have the supremacy and prevalence of economic and/or political concepts that reduce the common good to a sum of individual goods.

Most current economic theories define the common good as “the greatest possible good for the greatest possible number of individuals.” In the best case scenario, the greatest possible number of individuals would include *all* sentient beings (animals as well as humans). This definition of the common good presents it as an entity that is convertible or reducible to the sum total of all the private interests of the individual members of a given society and interchangeable with them.

In the prevailing definitions given by the social, economic, and political sciences, the common good is “an allocation of resources such that everyone derives advantage from it.” Of course, that means that such an allocation can be also unequal and even unfair, and the common good is cut off from justice. Instead, what is relevant is that everyone may derive some benefit from the allocation of the resources.

Difficulties are not considered to relate so much to the definition of common good as to the rules for its implementation. Such implementation may take place on the basis of one of four criteria, ranging from consent to the use of force:

1. The first criterion is familiarity (within the family, the allocation of resources consists in giving something to each member, and the distribution is accepted by consent).
2. The second is merit or credit, as dictated by individual moral conscience (each accepts the allocation received because he or she believes that himself or herself deserves it).
3. The third is mutual benefit (the allocation is accepted because it is based on the expectation of cooperation that leaves everyone better off; if some do not cooperate in creating a common good, they will be punished by exclusion from the future cooperation because the principle of reciprocity is invoked).

4. In case any of the former criteria do not work, the common good is produced by a fourth criterion, namely enforcement (the use of force by a third party, generally the state).

Economists hold that the common good is produced only if there are sanctions against those who shirk their responsibilities. Such sanctions are different in the above four cases: the family takes one's consent for granted; individuals who did not deserve the benefits they received from the common good will experience inner guilt; the possibility of future cooperation is forfeited (someone can no longer draw upon common goods); sanctions take the form of external penalties (fines and/or sanctions of a different kind, as in the case of tax evasion).

From the point of view of political studies, the common good is defined as the central and essential aim of the state. It consists in granting fundamental rights to those entering society, especially the rights of all to have the opportunity to freely shape their own lives through acting responsibly and in accordance with the moral law. In that case, the common good is defined as the sum total of the conditions of social life that enable people more easily and readily to act in this manner. The object of state sovereignty is to provide the means for creating these conditions. Others, in particular John Rawls, make the distinction between the good, which actively creates a better world (however that may be defined), and the just, which creates a fair, liberal social infrastructure—one that allows the pursuit of virtue, without prescribing what the common good actually is.

Such ideas of the common good are institutionalized in contemporary lib-lab political structures, that is, in those social, economic, and political systems based on two complementary principles: on the one hand, the individuals' freedom in the market (the lib side), and on the other hand, the equality of individual opportunities brought about by the political power (the lab side).

Such structures appear to be limited and misleading regarding a deeper and more inclusive notion of the common good because, from the moral point of view, they obscure the social conditions, transforming an object into something common and also into a good. If the good is a common object, it is because the individuals who share it also have certain relationships among them. If it is a good (in a moral sense), this is because people relate in a certain way to such an object and also to one another.

Thus, a good is a common good because only together can it be recognized and acted upon (generated and regenerated) as such, by all those who have a concern about it. At the same time, it must be produced and enjoyed together by all those who have a stake in it. For this reason, the good resides within the relationships that connect the subjects. Ultimately, it is from such relationships

that the common good is generated. The single fruits that every single subject may obtain derive from each being in such a relationship.

The relational definition of the common good highlights those fundamental qualities that are obscured by proprietary definitions, as previously mentioned.

To understand such qualities, let us start from a basic consideration. If we state that the common good is an asset belonging to the whole community, we must also admit that the good we are talking about is such because those belonging to that community recognize it as something both preceding and outlasting them. It is a good of which they cannot freely dispose. They can and must use it, but only under particular conditions—ones excluding its divisibility and commodification. Should they divide or alienate it, they themselves would not be able to enjoy its fruits.

What makes the common good indivisible and noncommodificable? Is it perhaps an inner quality or power of that object (be it tangible as is water or intangible as are social cohesion and peace)?

In general, the answer is no. The object in itself is always potentially divisible and marketable. For instance, both water and social peace, although common goods, are susceptible of being divided and marketed.[7] The reason why the common good cannot and must not be divided and marketed lies in the fact that, if it is divided or commodified, the relations among the members of that community would become estranged or even broken. The common good is, before and above anything else, the guarantee of their social link.

The quality that makes an entity a common good lies neither in that thing as an indivisible and inalienable whole in itself, nor in the will of the members of a community. It does not depend on their opinions, tastes, preferences, or individual and aggregate choices. People generate and regenerate it, but the good has its own (emergent) reality that does not depend on people’s desiring or benefiting from it. They contribute toward generating it, but they do not create it by themselves. Rather, they can destroy it by themselves. If they do so, they break the social links connecting them to the other people in question.

We realize that the common good has its own inalienable nature, resting upon the relationships that exist among those sharing it because it preserves the foundations of the social bond. The *sharing*, however, must be, and indeed is, voluntary. It has not, and cannot have, a character reliant upon force. Precisely because the common good has a relational character, it resides in the mutual actions of those who contribute to generating and regenerating it.

Should the social link break, there would be a collapse of the qualities of the people sharing it because human qualities depend on the link itself. Only if we

see the common good as a relational good can we understand its inner connection with the human person.

As a matter of fact, a socio-anthropological foundation of the principle of subsidiarity needs to refer to a concept of the common good that is quite different from the pure economic and political versions of it. A vision of the common good is outlined, according to which:

1. The common good is the social link joining people together, on which both the material and nonmaterial goods of individuals depend. The human person cannot find fulfillment in himself, that is, apart from the fact that he exists "with" others and "for" others. This truth does not simply require that he live with others at various levels of social life, but that he seek unceasingly—in actual practice and not merely at the level of ideas—the good, that is, the meaning and truth, found in existing forms of social life. No expression of social life—from the family to intermediate social groups, associations, enterprises of an economic nature, cities, regions, states, and the community of peoples and nations—can escape the issue of its own common good, in that this is a constitutive element of its significance and the authentic reason for its very existence.
2. The common good does not consist either in a state of things, or in a sum of single goods, or in a prearranged reality, but it is "the whole *conditions* of social life that allow groups, as well as the single members, to completely and quickly reach their own perfection" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 26); in particular, it consists in the conditions and exercise of natural liberties, which are essential for the full development of the human potential of people (e.g., the right to act according to the promptings of one's conscience, the right to the freedom of religion, and so forth).
3. In brief, the common good represents the social and community dimension of the moral good; the common good is the moral good of any social or community relationships. The common good does not consist in the simple sum of the particular goods of each subject of a social entity. Belonging to everyone and to each person, it is and remains common because it is indivisible and because only together is it possible to attain it, increase it, and safeguard its effectiveness with regard to the future. Just as the moral actions of an individual are accomplished in doing what is good, so, too, the actions of a society attain their full stature when they bring about the common

> good. The common good, in fact, can be understood as the social and community dimension of the moral good.

Therefore, a socio-anthropological vision must be necessarily critical toward any materialist, positivist, and utilitarian objectifications (reifications) of the common good. A humanistic picture of the common good must oppose any proprietary and utilitarian concept of it. It should appeal to reasons based on the fundamental sociability of human beings.

From this sociability, it draws conclusions that mean the common good cannot be confused with concepts whose similarity is only apparent, such as concepts of the collective good, the aggregate good, the good of the totality, vested interests, general interest, and so forth. Only such a vision can preserve a potential for critique and for the advancement of human emancipation that modern and postmodern thought seem to have lost or relegated to the fringe of society.

Nonetheless, the concrete application of this humanistic perspective does not yet appear to be living up to its potential.

In fact, the concept of the common good—rather than being developed in a relational way—is often, in practice, traced back to an organic and vertically stratified picture of the society. This image is based on two mainstays: (1) the assertion of the primacy of politics as synthesis of the common good. “Each human community possesses a common good which permits it to be recognized as such; it is in the *political community* that its most complete realization is found” (CCC 2005, n. 1910); and (2) the consequent granting to the state of the privileged role of being the apex of society, which protects, rules, and creates its civil society: “It is the role of the state to defend and promote the common good of civil society, its citizens and intermediate bodies” (CCC 2005, n. 1910).

I wish to argue here that the social doctrine under discussion can and must enlarge its horizons on the common good through an adequate widening of its relational vision. That is, it can develop its potential for illuminating and supporting new politics and social practices only insofar as it widens the relational basis of the common good and derives the necessary consequences from it in terms of applications and operative principles in the new context of globalization.

In fact, this context underlines certain problems that can no longer be bound by the political configuration to which the social doctrine still refers when it claims:

> *The responsibility for attaining the common good, besides falling to individual persons, belongs also to the State, since the common good is the reason that political authority exists.* The State, in fact, must guarantee the coherency,

> unity and organization of the civil society of which it is its expression, in order that the common good may be attained with the contribution of every citizen. The individual person, the family or intermediate groups are not able to achieve their full development by themselves for living a truly human life. Hence the necessity of political institutions, the purpose of which is to make available to persons the necessary material, cultural, moral and spiritual goods. (CDS § 168)

Certainly, this is true, but the state is not the exclusive bearer of such a task. The task of ensuring participation, social inclusion, security, and justice is certainly what justifies the existence and the action of the state, but the state must accomplish those tasks in a subsidiary way as regarding the civil society—local, national, and international. In any case, it is not the one and only and supremely responsible body involved.

A development of the social doctrine is required that takes into account globalized society's great differentiation into spheres, which are more and more distinct and articulated among themselves, both at an infra-state and at a supra-state level. The common good becomes a responsibility not only of individuals and of the state, but also—in a completely new way—of the intermediate social bodies (which I prefer to call *civil societarian* networks)[8] now playing a fundamental role in mediating the processes by which the common good is created. These are no longer solely bottom-up (realization of the common good though movements that come from below) and top-down (the creation of the common good by the state and spreading downward to the grassroots) but are also horizontal and lateral processes that depend neither on the state nor on the market.

Because the common good is not the result or the sum of the individuals' actions, we need a conceptual framework in order to understand properly the very fact that it is a reality that exceeds individuals and their products. Contrarily, it is not an already given whole, possessing inner properties and powers, making it indivisible and not commodifiable. It has an ontological status by virtue of its fruits because, without the common good, those fruits could not exist. People, however, can always make it divisible and commodifiable. When they do so, they destroy the common good, and, consequently, the community ceases to exist.

The common good belongs to a reality that is relational in character: "life in its true sense … is a relationship."[9] Social dynamics continuously both create and destroy common goods. Within modernity, those processes, which have become detached from social relations, have made the destructive forces more powerful than the creative ones. However, at the end of Western modernity, in what I call an *after*-modern society (or "relational society,"[10] which other scholars would

prefer to call “reflexive modernization”[11] or “morphogenetic society,”)[12] the opposite may occur: Society can make inalienable what was actually divisible and marketable, namely it can generate a new and novel common good.

Empirical processes are always reversible, at least in principle if not as a matter of fact (this is what sociology means when it says that society is becoming more and more complex along with higher-order cybernetic processes). In any case and in concrete terms (i.e., ones not restricted to a metaphysical notion of common good), it can be seen that in human society there are a variety of common goods: There are nonnegotiable common goods and others that, under some circumstances, may be subject to considerations of utility or convenience.

How is it possible to trace these distinctions? To trace the distinction between the common goods that can be made negotiable (e.g., some natural resources) and those that are not negotiable in any way (e.g., human dignity and peace) is the task of a relational vision of the common good.

Let us make this claim clearer by introducing a basic argument. The first common good is the dignity of the human person, which is—at the same time—also the basis of any further common good. In this apparent circularity lies the solution of self-paradoxes of the postmodern thought (for instance, J. Derrida, N. Luhmann),[13] according to which the common good is a paradox based on unsolvable paradoxes. It is a fact that the human dignity of a single person cannot be violated without all the surrounding community suffering because of this. To violate human dignity means to wound the possibility of pursuing the common good from the start.

What is human dignity? What can be or cannot be negotiated within it? Human dignity is not a quality that individuals may individually own and upon which they can individually decide. On the other hand, neither is it the sum (the aggregate) of a quality pertaining to all members of a community. It is something coming before them and going beyond them. It is something that they enjoy without being able either to divide or to alienate it.

The dignity of the human person, if considered as a common good, shows us that such a quality is not an individual one, but it is connected and inherent in the relationships of the person with the whole creation.

Prior to all else, the good is common thanks to its dignity. Dignity is a quality that cannot be circumscribed and limited to a single individual (isolated monad), but spreads to the relationships in which individuals express himself or herself, where it is preserved and where it flourishes. The family, for instance, is a common good if and because it is seen as a specific relationship that realizes the dignity of the human person.

Thus, we come to see the moral dimensions of the common good, ones that trespass beyond its concretely expressible dimensions (material and nonmaterial). The moral dimensions signal that the common good is a relational good, which is legitimated by the foundational criterion of human dignity.

In brief, the common good is neither a collective heritage that may be expressed concretely in an entity separate from the human person, nor an aggregate of individual goods (in that case, we call it the collective good or the good of the totality). It is something that belongs, at the same time, to all the members of a community and to each of them, as it resides in the quality of relations amongst them.

Regarding the social sciences, it is here that the principles of subsidiarity and solidarity come into their own. In fact, only a relational theory can represent the common good as an emergent consequence of the combined actions of subsidiarity and solidarity on the part of subjects (individuals or social groups) as conceived of from within the framework of a relational anthropology. From such a relational vision, it is possible to differentiate the negotiable from the nonnegotiable common goods. The task of discovering and understanding the relational character of the common good has just started and must be further and more thoroughly analyzed in the future.

Consequences for the Definition of Subsidiarity and Solidarity

In current debates, a variety of definitions of subsidiarity, as well as of solidarity, are used. The list is very long and there is no need to itemize it fully now.

For example, subsidiarity has been defined as follows: as entailing proximity to the subjects concerned or, according to the organizational dimension, as devolution, privatization, articulation of citizenship rights, multilevel governance, and so forth. Many different types of subsidiarity have also been delineated: vertical and horizontal, defensive and promotional, relational and reflexive, circular and strengthened, and so on. Solidarity, in its turn, has been conceived of as redistribution, beneficence, charity, social welfare benefit, social interdependency, and so forth.

What I want to point out here is that to conceptualize these two terms (subsidiarity and solidarity) properly, we need not only employ them together but also define them in relation to one another. That is exactly what the relational approach does. It claims that, considered in their social phenomenology, “common goods are the products of those action systems that have human dignity as their

value model (referring not only to the individual as such but also to his or her social relations) and which operate through social forms that are both solidarity and subsidiary among the subjects concerned."

The relational definition of the common good leads to a relational vision of the principles of subsidiarity and solidarity; meaning that subsidiarity and solidarity are seen as two ways of relating to others, both of which acknowledge the dignity of the other.

Solidarity is a relation of Ego with Alter, in which both do what they can in relation to the responsibility that everyone has toward the common good. Solidarity means that all play their own part according to their capabilities. Subsidiarity means to relate to the other in a manner that assists the other to do what he or she should according to a relational guidance system of action.[14]

These two principles should generally operate together because, if they do not, no common good will be generated. At the same time, it is clear how one is defined in terms of its relationship with the other. If Ego wants to help Alter without oppressing him or her, then subsidiarity and solidarity must coexist between them. Subsidiarity (the very fact that Ego wishes to help Alter do what Alter has to do) requires an act of solidarity. In this case, solidarity is neither (unilateral) beneficence nor charity but the assumption and practice of the joint responsibility that both Ego and Alter must have toward the common good. (This is also the meaning of solidarity as interdependence, which is still valid when one party cannot give anything material to the other party.)

The common good is therefore the fruit (the emergent effect) of reciprocity between solidarity and subsidiarity, as implemented by ego and alter in their mutual interaction.

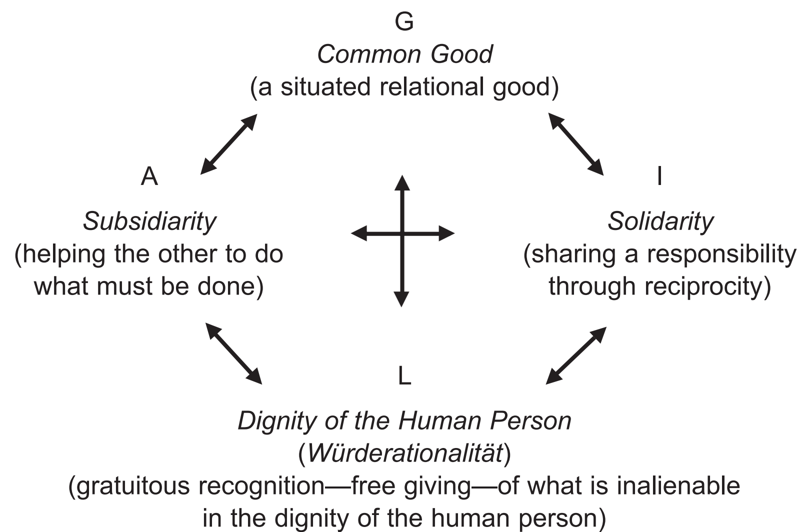
At this point, one can now appreciate the importance of the claim that the common good is the fruit of reciprocity understood as the rule of action, which stems from the spirit of free giving. Reciprocity exists in society as an irreducible phenomenon. It is neither a sharing of utilities (*do ut des*: such a form is appropriate to contracts and the sharing of equivalents, as Alvin Gouldner maintains) nor a sharing for sharing's sake (as Mark Anspach argues), namely reciprocal giving or serving to underline the sense of belonging to a common tribal entity (the *Hau* as interpreted by Marcel Mauss). Instead, reciprocity is a mutual helping, performed in a certain way. In other words, reciprocity is help concretely given by ego to alter in a context of solidarity (that is, one of common responsibility and recognized interdependency). Ego is aware (recognizes) that alter would do the same when required; namely, alter would assume his or her responsibility within the limits he or she can afford when ego needs it.

Reciprocity is upheld and is effective as long as it is firmly grounded upon a recognition of the dignity of the other. The common good takes root in the human person precisely because it exists and derives its meaning from serving the other person in his or her dignity.

Upon these premises, we can understand the specific configuration of the action system generating a common good (Figure 1). The relationship between the human person and the common good is the referential axis, which is needed to link that which has an inalienable dignity in itself with the situated (i.e., particular) relational good in a given context (the axis L-G). To become operative, an action system oriented toward the common good also needs means and rules (the adaptive axis A-I), which must complement the value of human dignity. Only such an action system can avoid both holism and individualism. What enables the action system for the *situated* common good (namely a concrete common good that must be produced here and now, context after context, situation after situation) to work in this way are the two principles of subsidiarity and solidarity. They have the task of specifying the means and rules of the acting "system." Without them, the common good could not actually be generated.

Figure 1

The Configuration of an Action System for the Common Good



Thus, it may be stated that the common good is the emergent effect of an action system operating under the "combined provisions" of subsidiarity and solidarity to increase the value of the dignity of the human person (Figure 1).

The principle of subsidiarity is an operating instrument. It is not to be confused with the principle of competence attribution (the distribution of *munera*—as is

clearly stated by Russell Hittinger). The distribution of tasks lies on the axis that connects the dignity of the human person to the common good.

Subsidiarity is a way to supply the means; it is a way to move resources to support and help the other without making him or her passive. Subsidiarity allows the other to accomplish his or her tasks, namely to do what he or she should do, what is up to him or her and not to others (*munus proprium*). Instead, solidarity is a sharing of responsibility, operating according to the rule of reciprocity.

In fact, providing means, resources, aid, and benefits to Alter could have the consequence of making him dependent on Ego, or of exploiting him for some other purpose. That is why subsidiarity cannot work without the principle of solidarity. Through it, Ego recognizes that, when helping Alter, there is a responsibility (shared with Alter), that is, Ego and Alter are linked by their interdependence on one another—and interdependency is viewed as a moral category according to the encyclical *Centesimus Annus*.

The above framework serves to explain why the common good does not coincide with justice.

Certainly, the common good is a "just" good. Justice is a means to reach the common good (being its aim). However, by itself, justice runs the risk of being purely legal. What makes it "substantial" (or rather "fully adequate") is that its constitutive criterion (*suum cuique tribuere*) works through the connection between subsidiarity and solidarity. For instance, the person committing a crime must be sanctioned because he or she has violated the common responsibility (solidarity), but the sanction must not have a merely punitive or revengeful aim. Its objective should be to assist the guilty person to do what he or she has to, namely, to reestablish the circuit of reciprocity.

If an act of solidarity toward those who commit a crime is not subsidiary to them (in order to have them reenter the circuits of social reciprocity), it would not be a right action. Solidarity by itself does not produce the common good: Quite often, it becomes pure charity or the kind of egalitarianism that does not take real differences and diversities into account, not to speak of cases where solidarity can lead to real "bads" or evils.

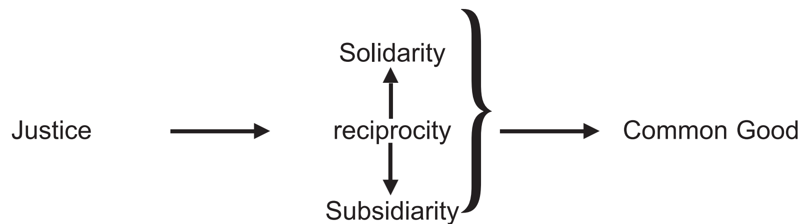
On the other hand, neither does subsidiarity alone produce the common good. In itself, subsidiarity may easily be interpreted in a reductive way as *devolution*, as a system of balancing powers (*check-power-check*) or, at worst, as *laissez-faire*.

Justice generates the common good only if it works through an active complementarity between solidarity and subsidiarity (Figure 2). We must remember that, in keeping with the social nature of man, the good of each individual is necessarily related to the common good, which in turn can be defined only in reference to the human person. This is the reflexive imperative inherent to human life: "Do

not live entirely isolated, having retreated into yourselves, as if you were already justified, but gather instead to seek the common good together."

Figure 2

Justice produces common good only if it passes through the combined work of solidarity and subsidiarity.



In short: The common good is that relational good stemming from the fact that Ego freely recognizes the dignity of what is human in Alter, and he or she moves through actions that jointly invoke solidarity and subsidiarity toward Alter. The common good of a plurality of subjects is generated on the assumption of the equal moral dignity of persons as an emergent effect of actions combining reciprocity (incident to the principle of solidarity) with the empowerment of the other (incident to the principle of subsidiarity).

Important consequences follow from all that for the configuration of society.

Implications for the Relationships Between State and Civil Society

The relational understanding of common good leads to various implications for society's organization, beyond the lib-lab configuration typical of the twentieth century.

First, we see that the common good coincides neither with the state, nor with the state-market compromise, but it is the product of a system of social action, involving a plurality of subjects orientating themselves on the basis of reciprocal solidarity and subsidiarity.

Second, we see that subsidiarity does not concern only the vertical relationships existing in a society, conceived of as a pyramid sloping downward from the supranational to the national level (state, regions, municipalities), to the family, and to the human person. Such a version of subsidiarity is quite limited and is fit only for the internal hierarchic relationships of the political-administrative system (that is why it is called "*vertical* subsidiarity").

When we affirm that subsidiarity means that responsibility is taken closer to the citizens (subsidiarity means having responsibility at the actual level of actions), generally we refer to that kind of subsidiarity defined by Pius XI in *Quadragesimo Anno* n. 80. All instances are not of this kind because the idea of closeness to citizens implies other ways in which subsidiarity may operate: (1) there is a principle of subsidiarity between state and organizations of civil society (for instance municipalities and voluntary organizations) termed "*horizontal* subsidiarity," and (2) there is a principle of subsidiarity among the subjects of civil society (for instance, family and school; between an enterprise and the employees' and clients' families, and so forth), that may be called "*lateral* subsidiarity."

Only by having a generalized idea of subsidiarity is it possible to differentiate its different modalities (vertical, horizontal, and lateral). This general concept is that of *relational* subsidiarity, which consists in helping the other to do what he or she should. Such a generalized concept is then developed vertically, horizontally, and laterally, according to the nature of problems and subjects at issue.

Third, as was the case with subsidiarity, solidarity, too, can take various shapes. There is solidarity that is generated through redistribution but also through free giving, through solidarity contracts or through reciprocity. Solidarity as a sharing of responsibility within interdependency is its more generalized meaning, namely, one that is always effective as a value model but defined in different ways according to subjects and circumstances.

In brief, the relational approach leads to an understanding of what is meant by saying that global society can and must extend and enlarge the concepts of subsidiarity and solidarity.

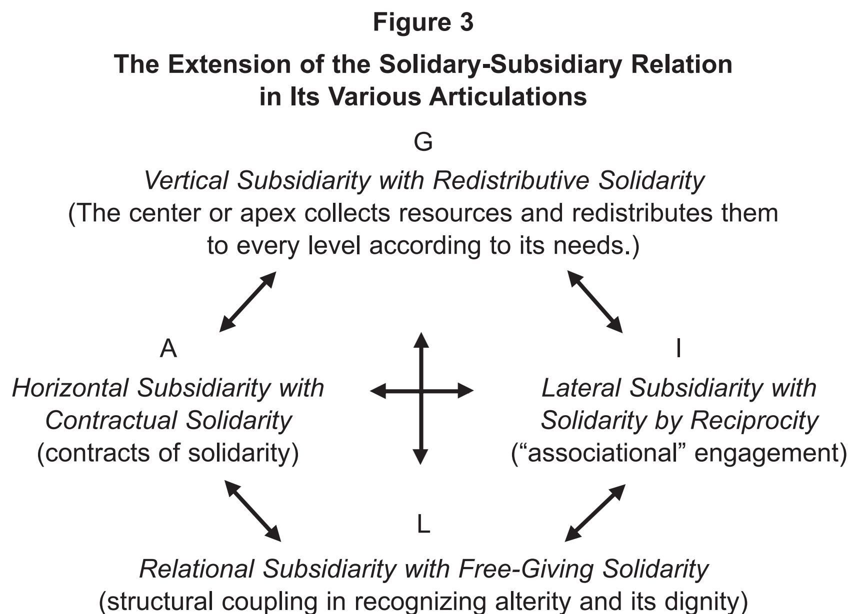
To extend those two principles of social action means to be able to generalize and differentiate them at the same time, though always treating them in combination. Hence, for instance, to extend subsidiarity means having a generalized concept (relational subsidiarity) structured in its different modalities (vertical, horizontal, and lateral) and applied at different times and places, according to the performative exigencies of the various social spheres involved and of their actors. Exactly the same goes for solidarity. Thus, we can conceptualize a generalized system for the creation of common good through the extension of the solidarity-subsidiarity relationship (Figure 3).[15]

The norm of reciprocity nourishes recourse to the subsidiarity-solidarity relationship (complementarity between subsidiarity and solidarity) among distinct, varied and differentiated spheres, such as an enterprise and the employees' families, the local political-administrative institutions, or a volunteers' organization and the beneficiaries of the voluntary work.

Nonetheless, reciprocity needs a reason to be activated (who gives first?). In fact, the "structural coupling" of the various spheres being distant and different from one another, and probably scarcely disposed to create subsidiarity-solidarity relationships with each other (i.e., a local government and an organization for mutual aid, an enterprise and the employees' families, and so forth), means that there is a need for a free act of recognition (a "gift") to kick-start the mobilization of solidarity and to direct it toward subsidiarity. A symbolic, though rare, case is that of an enterprise not only activating family friendly services for employees but conceiving more widely of professional work as being subsidiary to the family rather than the contrary (it is called "corporate family responsibility").

A society that, because of its organization, is inspired by the common good must extend its subsidiarity-solidarity relationships throughout all spheres of life—inside them and between them.

Figure 3
The Extension of the Solidary-Subsidiary Relation in Its Various Articulations



It is clear how such a configuration differs from all those theorized in the modern age, starting from Hobbes to Hegel to Marx and the great theorists of the welfare state of the twentieth century to the current lib-lab structures. The lib-lab welfare systems do not take their inspiration from the model of systems oriented toward the production of common good through the principle of subsidiarity combined with that of solidarity. Instead, they are based on the compromise between market and state (profit and political power), that is, they stand on two legs: the one, individual liberties to compete in the market, the other, state interventions to ensure equality of opportunities for all.

It should be underlined that the relational model of common good is necessary today not only to solve the failures of the combination of state plus market. It is not a model simply understandable in terms of better evolutionary adaptation. It stems from a new relational anthropology of civil society, that is, from a new way to practice human reflexivity in civil relations (those that are not political because they do not refer to the political-administrative system, though not excluding it, but even less are they reacting against it).

After these considerations, we may be in a better position to point out the implications of the relational theory of the common good for configuring the relationships between state and civil society in a new way.

The discontinuity with the past does not imply any need to revise the key-concepts (person, subsidiarity, solidarity, and the common good). Instead, the discontinuity affects the interpretation and implementation of such concepts, which is no longer functionalist in kind.

In the context of the functionalist approach, the common good is a state of affairs that, other things being equal, improves the position of at least one participant. It does not require solidarity, not to mention reciprocity. It says nothing about human dignity. Subsidiarity is used to refer to a kind of smooth functioning. Solidarity is understood as resulting from social compensation (redistribution, charity), necessary in order to make the system work.

In the context of the relational interpretation, everything is very different. The common good is a quality of relationships on which the concrete goods (in the plural) of the participants in a given situation depend, that is, the goods of everyone and of all those belonging to a community, according to their different needs.

In short: the state (or the political-administrative system, from the supranational to the local) has four ways to relate to the civil society (Figure 3):

G—a vertical modality, maintaining solidarity through redistributional measures;

A—a horizontal modality, supporting the organizations of civil society through a type of relational contract, called "contracts of social solidarity," not dependent on political command and not oriented to mere profit but operating on the basis of mutual subsidiarity;

I—a lateral modality, generating subsidiarity among subjects of civil society, without any intervention (or only a residual one) by the state, so that the basic social norm followed by actors is reciprocity (reciprocal subsidiarity) instead of (political, legal) command or monetary equivalence (for profit);

L—a generalized relational modality simply recognizing the dignity of the Other and giving him or her the gift of such recognition, thus establishing the free credit that sets reciprocity in motion.

Such a configuration seems to be able to produce common goods far beyond that of current configurations, where the state relates to civil society as an absolute power (Hobbes' Leviathan) or as an ethical state (Hegel) or as an expression of the hegemonic forces of civil society (Gramsci) or as the political representation of the market (Dahl).

In such a relational configuration, the third sector and the fourth sector (constituted by informal networks and families) play a central role, precisely because they are moved by free giving and reciprocity. These two sectors are put in a position from which to express their potentialities (namely to develop their own *munera*) precisely because they are not treated as residual subjects, as if they needed only aid, rules, and control by the complex of the state plus market.

Third-sector organizations and family associations become social actors with their own powers, independent from state and market. Concrete instances are the community foundations widespread in many countries; the *charter schools* in the United States; and the forums of family associations in Italy, Spain, and other countries.

A New Sociocultural Order Suited to Globalized Society

Is it possible that these new actors, generating common good through the conjoint work of subsidiarity and solidarity, can indicate a generalized model of action for the governance of globalizing society?

On the whole, this seems to be the case. In fact, in the twenty-first century, society is no longer pyramidal or hierarchical but reticular and self-poietic in its structures and in its morphogenetic processes. Given such structures and processes, common goods are produced more effectively, efficiently, and fairly through modalities based on subsidiarity and solidarity, rather than all outcomes depending upon the primacy of command and/or profit (as in *lib-lab* systems). Concrete instances are: fair trade, NGOs for health assistance in developing countries, and the novel "epistemic communities" that transfer knowledge and learning outside commercial circuits.

The main problem is represented by the political system, which is now incapable of representing and governing civil society. The latter enhances its devel-

opmental potentials far beyond the ruling and controlling abilities of political systems, be they local, national, or supranational ones. In some cases, in fact, political systems are seen as perverting civil society because they introduce ideological and interest divisions characteristic of the political parties rather than directing civil actors toward the promotion of the common good.

So far, the principles of the common good, subsidiarity, and solidarity have been expressed in the context of the *political constitutions* of nation-states, with supranational political systems—such as the EU—on the horizon. However, the age dominated by the political constitutions of nation-states is disappearing (it survives only in those areas that have yet to pass through it, such as the former Yugoslavia, the Balkans, and some geopolitical areas of Africa and Asia). Nation-states cannot govern the global social context. Nor can the United Nations Organization (UNO) be thought of as a supranational state, as some seem to do. To cope with globalization, new political configurations are necessary on a supranational and infranational level, and it can be useful to draw on the principles of subsidiarity and solidarity in order to envisage them. These principles must be interpreted from a new perspective—no longer that of nation states but rather of an emergent global civil society, which is not limited or bound to the frontiers of the nation-states any longer.

The idea is growing that these principles can form the basis of action systems able to generate common goods and elaborate and promote the rights and duties of persons through the networks of civil society, which are now emerging from the processes summarized as globalization. This is the theme of civil constitutions. It has to do with charters or statutes drawn up by civil bodies, rather than by the political apparatuses of nation-states, ones that regulate the actions of the civil subjects who operate in a certain sector. These activities may be economic, social, and cultural, including the mass media. Some examples are found in the statutes of the International Labor Organizations (ILO) and World Trade Organization (WTO), internationally proscribing child labor, or in the charters of international organizations approved by journalists that forbid the exploitation of children in television advertising.

Civil constitutions are normatively binding and have the following features:

1. They are constitutional because they concern the fundamental rights of the human person (e.g., bioethics, labor, and consumption).
2. They are civil because the social subjects, to whom these constitutions are addressed in order to define a complex of rights and duties, have a civil, rather than a political character (they are not the

expression of political parties or political coalitions but of the associational world in the economy and in the nonprofit sectors, e.g., WTO, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and so forth).

3. They give shape to deliberative, rather than representative, forms of democracy, because the social subjects to whom civil constitutions are addressed (and applied) are, at the same time, the subjects that have to promote them through forms of societal governance, rather than political government. In other words, the subjects of such constitutions are at the same time the bearers (*träger*) of rights and duties and the actors responsible for their implementation.

These civil constitutions are quite independent from territorial boundaries because they are elaborated and implemented by global networks, often international ones, made up of civil subjects. Thus, they place themselves alongside (not against) the classical political relationship of citizenship (namely the relationship between the individual citizen and the nation-state) by assuming certain functions, particularly those concerning the advocacy and empowerment of the rights and duties of persons and of social bodies.

This is the new scenario that renders obsolete the old lib-lab configuration of society. Social sciences have coined several terms to capture this new reality. They talk of “connectivity,” of a “society of networks” or “network society” (Manuel Castells); of “project-cities” (Luc Boltansky and Eve Chiapello); and of “atopia” (that which does exist anywhere geo-locally), instead of utopia (that which exists nowhere) (Helmut Willke). We talk of a “relational society.”

All those expressions point to the advent of a society that is a plural whole made up of different spheres, which are all now deterritorialized, where different criteria of justice (and ultimately of justification) are valid.

The pluralization of spheres of justice spreads without solving the problem of how to put the more and more differentiated spheres of justice in relationship to one another (a problem actually left unsolved by Michael Walzer).[16] To confront that problem requires a “relational reason”[17] that is capable of exercising “metareflexivity.”[18]

From that point of view, the principles of the social doctrine that would configure a social system, capable of generating the common good, appear to be exactly what is needed in order to meet the new demands of a society that is relational in new ways.

The mix of subsidiarity and solidarity (the axis A-I of Figure 1) may lead to building up social practices that, on the one hand, are sensitive to basic human

rights and, on the other, are able to generate those common goods that neither political command nor the economic profit motive can realize.

There are many examples of social practices reflecting or acting as pointers to such a new spirit of the new millennium: the *économie solidaire*, the economy of communion, the local alliances for the family (*Lokale Bündnisse für die Familie*), the food bank, electronic giving and sharing, NGOs such as Médecins sans Frontières, microcredit run by nonprofit entrepreneurs, ethical banks, and so forth.

It is essential to initiate a new process of reflection to examine whether how far and in what ways those initiatives are sensitive to human rights and foster the emergence of new common goods through the conjoint operation of solidarity and subsidiarity—each of these operating within its proper sphere of justice.

The task remains of analyzing the concrete examples, mentioned above, in the light of the theory summarized here (Figures 1, 2, 3). Such an analysis should show under which conditions these instances of seemingly good practice actually do produce new common goods or not. At the moment, it seems that good practices need a more precise and shared theoretical-practical framework that underlines how subsidiarity and solidarity cannot currently produce common goods if they do not operate as forms of recognition of the dignity and rights-duties (*munera*) of the human person in the respective social spheres in which they work.

To pursue the common good in a generalized way, we need to widen the scope of reason, namely human thinking has to be able to embrace and to handle the properties of those action systems generating the common good.

In such systems, the subsidiarity-solidarity relationship certainly has to play a central role. Nonetheless, there is no doubt that the most delicate and critical dimension concerns the recognition of human rights because there is the ever-present risk of ideological or reductive distortions of human dignity.

Contemporary Western culture urgently needs to elaborate a theory of the recognition of human rights, one that does not lose, forfeit, or sacrifice the peculiar quality of the human being. Certainly, modernity expressed strong ethical tensions when elaborating the different forms of recognition based on love (friendship), rights (legal relations), and solidarity (community normativity). Nevertheless, current exemplifications of dehumanization go far beyond the expectations of modernity. There is talk of the coming of a post-human, trans-human, in-human, cyber-human era. There is also talk of the hybridization and metamorphosis of humankind. Those phenomena present such radical challenges as to need a new vision: We have to reconfigure human rights from the point of view of the common good, that is, to conceive of human rights as common goods.

A society that wants to pursue the common good in a progressive rather than a regressive (not to say ideological) way must reformulate the criteria of what is human through good practices, that is, practices that can be called good insofar as they combine four elements: the gift of dignity conferred upon the human person, interdependency among people, acting so as to empower the Other, and caring for the relationships among persons as goods in themselves (the common good as a relational good). These elements are relational in themselves and relational to one another.

Each element is a relationship endowed with its own "value"[19] and, at the same time, has to realize itself in relationships with others. Each has value in relation to the others, not according to a sequence of dialectic overcoming between a thesis and an antithesis that should unite them while preserving their inner truth without any contradiction with each other in a utopian synthesis (*Aufhebung*). The common good is not like this. Rather, it is constituted by and constitutes relationships (reciprocal actions!) combining to generate the common good in the various social spheres—which now endorse more and more differentiated and plural criteria of justice and worth.

Conclusions and Prospects

Our globalizing societies need to point to some process whose workings amplify solidarity and subsidiarity simultaneously, thus enabling the common good to be augmented. I suggest finding the key linking the two in the concept and practice of reciprocity.

Reciprocity comes into its own as a starting mechanism. In so doing, it solves a problem encountered in studies of participation in voluntary associations. It is regularly found that membership of them increases trust, of fellow members and in general, and trust is the common denominator of solidarity. Yet, where does the impetus come from to develop voluntary associations in the first place?

The role of *reciprocity* as a starter motor has long been recognized. Cicero wrote that "there is no duty more indispensable than that of returning a kindness," and added that "all men distrust one forgetful of a benefit." However, *homo reciprocus* has often been and often is subject to a one-sided accentuation (actually a distortion) of his contributions and their consequences.

For example, Marcel Mauss saw reciprocal gifts as underwriting exchange relationships and, thus, inexorably leading to the market and its ahuman principles. Conversely, Alvin Gouldner viewed reciprocity as a generalized social norm, stabilized by a mutuality of gratifications (a *do ut des* relationship) and

socially stabilizing in its turn. However, such mutuality was always at the mercy of force which, in turn, undermined reciprocity and replaced it by relationships of coercion. Note that neither view can sustain an active view of justice (law working for the common good), for in the two cases law would serve respectively to reinforce market relations and power relations.

Some notions, seemingly cognate to or substituting for reciprocity, actually break away in the same two directions—toward market relationships or toward power relationships. Thus, many reductionists' interpretation of social capital (mostly economic and political theories) tend to assume that even the most *Gemeinschaft*-like groups are based on interest, whose advancement (or defense) involves exchanges with other forms of capital and thus entails a commodification of persons that is antithetic to solidarity and subsidiarity alike. Conversely, strict communitarianism, as its liberal critics suggest, seeks to combine the virtues of fraternity with the vices of intolerance.

Reciprocity is linked to free-giving. Reciprocity can only be the key link between solidarity and subsidiarity provided that it retains its own linkage to free-giving—based upon affect, concern, and involvement in the lives and well-being of others.

There appears to be sufficient impetus toward free-giving in our populations (e.g., organ donors or blood donors) that fuels reciprocity as a process that is independent of a norm and expansionary rather than degenerative. Crucially, for our times, the free-giving, without search for material benefit or control, evidenced on the Internet—a neutral medium, also exploited for both other purposes—is a practical exemplification of (virtual) solidarity and effective subsidiarity that works because of reciprocity and could not work without it.

It is reciprocity that also results in an upward spiral, which reinforces solidarity because more and more of the human person, rather than just their labor power and intellectual skills is invested in such agencies as voluntary associations—rendering their contributions as ones that cannot be commodified or commandeered (e.g., dedicated child care, care of the aged, or living in an eco-friendly manner). It is an upward spiral because (1) there is a development of mutual obligations and practices of mutual support, (2) there is an extension of friendship (in the Aristotelian sense), and (3) there is a tendency for social identity increasingly to be invested in such associations.

Hence, the seeming paradox of the third millennium that *Gemeinschaft* can develop from *Gesellschaft*—as the solution to the problem modernity could never solve—"the problem of solidarity" (Donati 2006).

Justice should promote the common good. Subsidiarity requires both legal protection and mechanisms for just correction. Otherwise, and regardless of

being buttressed by internal solidarity, it can be taken over by other forms of control and guiding principles or fragment through the crystallization of sectional interests.

Thus, on the one hand, there is a need for protection by a form of justice differentiated for different spheres of society, according to criteria appropriate to them. Most obviously, the third sector requires protection from incursions from the state, beyond those measures ensuring probity in the conduct of their affairs.

On the other hand, subsidiarity entails allocation, but of itself neither the third sector nor classical definitions of justice give sufficient guidance about what is due to each social subject or human group. Without the articulation of such a theory, grievances can accumulate and hierarchies with distinct material interests become differentiated, such that no common good can really be achieved.

Notes

1. Two surveys on the Italian population reveal that the concept of subsidiarity is understood first in terms of solidarity (about 58% of the national sample), second in terms of equality (around 26%), and third in terms of liberty (around 10–15%). See the statistical data published in the two reports: Fondazione per la sussidiarietà (2006, 118; 2008, 81).

2. In commenting on the American Constitution, Abraham Lincoln defined subsidiarity as a principle of noninterference: "The legitimate object of government is to do for a community of people whatever they need to have done but cannot do for themselves in their separate and individual capacities. In all that people can individually do as well for themselves, government ought not to interfere." See "Subsidiarity," *Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology*, ed. Karl Rahner (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), 6:115, s.v. "subsidiarity."

3. Cf. Hubert Haenel, *Dialogue with the European Commission on Subsidiarity*, Report no. 88 (2007–2008), European Affairs Committee, November 2007.

4. The text of the Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe (2005), which has been abandoned after France and the Netherlands did not approve of it, defined subsidiarity as follows: "The Union is established reflecting the will of the citizens and States of Europe to build a common future. For this purpose the Member States confer competences on the European Union. The Union shall coordinate the common policy" (Title I. Article 1.1).

   > "The limits of Union competences are governed by the principle of conferral. The use of Union competences is governed by the principle of subsidiarity and proportionality." (Title III. Article 9.1)

> "Under the principle of subsidiarity, in areas which do not fall within its exclusive competence the Union shall act only if and insofar as the objectives of the intended action cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Member States, either at central level or at regional and local level, but can rather, by reason of the scale or effects of the proposed action, be better achieved at Union level." (Title III Article 9.3)
>
> "The Union's institutions shall apply the principle of subsidiarity as laid down in the Protocol. The Protocol emphasised the necessity of the cooperation between the Commission and the national Parliaments. The Parliaments of the Member States could decide the compliance of the Commission's decision with the principle of subsidiarity."

5. Cf. Andreas Føllesdal, *Subsidiarity* (paper online at: folk.uio.no/andreasf/ms/subsid.rtf).

6. The Compendium goes on by clarifying that:

> *The principles of the Church's social doctrine must be appreciated in their unity, interrelatedness and articulation*. This requirement is rooted in the meaning that the Church herself attributes to its social doctrine, as a unified doctrinal corpus that interprets modern social realities in a systematic manner. Examining each of these principles individually must not lead to using them only in part or in an erroneous manner, which would be the case if they were to be invoked in a disjointed and unconnected way with respect to each of the others. A deep theoretical understanding and the actual application of even just one of these social principles clearly shows the reciprocity, complementarities, and interconnectedness that is part of their structure. These fundamental principles of the Church's social doctrine, moreover, represent much more than a permanent legacy of reflection, which is also an essential part of the Christian message, because they indicate the paths possible for building a good, authentic, and renewed social life. *The principles of the social doctrine, in their entirety, constitute that primary articulation of the truth of society by which every conscience is challenged and invited to interact with every other conscience in truth, in responsibility shared fully with all people and also regarding all people*. In fact, man cannot avoid the *question of freedom and of the meaning of life in society*, since society is a reality that is neither external nor foreign to his being. *These principles have a profoundly moral significance because they refer to the ultimate and organizational foundations of life in society*. To understand them completely it is necessary to act in accordance with them, following the path of development that they indicate for a life worthy of man. The ethical requirement inherent in these pre-eminent social principles concerns both the personal behaviour of individuals—in that they are the first and indispensable responsible subjects of social life at every level—and at the same time institutions represented by laws, customary norms and civil constructs, because of their capacity to influence and condition the choices of many people over a long period of time. In fact, these principles remind us that the origins of a society existing in history are found in the interconnectedness of the freedoms

of all the persons who interact within it, contributing by means of their choices either to build it up or to impoverish it. (CDS § 162–63)

7. It may seem strange to think of "marketing peace," but this is precisely what occurs when "good industrial relations" are advanced as a reason for the location of a factory or a "safe and secure environment" is given as the reason for higher house prices.

8. I must point out that a social body or a social network, *per se*, is not necessarily civil and relational. In the relational approach (see Donati 1991), networks are always intended to be networks of relations (and not networks of material objects or simply "nodes") and, therefore, since a social relation implies a reciprocal action, what I call networks are to be understood as "relational networks" (for instance, from the sociological point of view, "a gift" must be understood not as "a (material or non-material) thing" freely given to somebody that links two or more persons, but as a social relation inscribed within a network of free giving-receiving-reciprocating actions that relate a complex chain of actors to each other). That is what distinguishes my critical (and relational) realism from others (viz. Elder-Vass 2007), to whom social relations are understood as "real" structures (as in the relation between two atoms of hydrogen and one of oxygen in a molecule of water). Social reality is ontologically different from material (physical, chemical, biological) reality. Therefore, relations are made up of a different stuff (which implies a different concept of "structure"). The term *civil societarian* can be explained in the following way. A civil societarian strongly supports the institutions of civil society. These include families, corporations, religious groups, private schools, charities, trade associations, and the other peaceful, voluntary collective organizations that promote our individual and collective well-being insofar as they are relational networks. These are the civil societarian networks to which I am referring. The stereotypical libertarian might cite Ayn Rand and exalt the independent individual. Instead, a civil societarian would cite Alexis de Tocqueville, and his observation that democracy is based upon people who, whatever their age, social conditions, and personal beliefs, constantly form associations. These voluntary associations are what a civil societarian sees as the key to civilization. Government may contribute to civil society, but it also intrudes on it. The means of avoiding colonization is precisely to appeal to the principle of subsidiarity. Jean-Jacques Rousseau's theory of the general will serves as a good contrast to the civil societarian's view.

9. Cf. Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Spe Salvi*, n. 27.

10. I have introduced the term *relational society* since 1986 (Donati 1986).

11. See U. Beck, A. Giddens, S. Lash (1994).

12. See M. S. Archer (2009).

13. See G. Teubner (2001).

14. A relational guidance system of action is needed in order to avoid the fallacy that subsidiarity presupposes a “normative approach” governing the giving of assistance. When I say that subsidiarity means that Ego helps the Other to do what she or he has to (or must) do as a *suum munus*, I do not imply that Ego dictates the norms of conduct to Alter, by providing him or her with a sort of Decalogue. In that case, Alter’s internal and external reflexivity would be impeded. On the contrary, relational guidance means that Ego acts as a stimulus to the internal and external reflexivity of the Alter, since all the needs, desires, and projects of Alter should be met by supporting him or her to develop their own capabilities, aspirations, concerns, and so forth through an evolving relational setting in which Ego is charged with the task of ensuring that the goals selected are ethically good and that the means chosen are adequate to the pursuit of these goals. The goals themselves are primarily defined by Alter, or, when Alter is a child or a handicapped person, jointly by Alter and her or his helper (see the relational guidance scheme discussed in P. Donati 1991, chap. 5). In parent-child situations, relational guidance is not a directive command or impulse (it is not directly normative) but is a prompt to activate those relationships that lead the child toward the good things he desires. Ego is helping insofar as she or he assesses the goodness of the goals adopted by the child and makes sure that appropriate reflexive relationships are activated and established in order for those goals to be attained.

15. One might query if this is a typology of subsidiarity rather than an action system. From a theoretical point of view, this question goes back to the meaning of the Parsonian AGIL scheme, whose formulation was intended to be both in a very ambiguous and misleading way. In the relational version, the AGIL scheme is never a pure typology but is a compass to orient observations of the structure and dynamic of an action that is supposed to be reciprocal (in the sense of being an action in response to another action). This is where reflexivity comes in. Archer’s analysis in *Education, Subsidiarity and Solidarity: Past, Present and Future* (2008) is a fine example of how the scheme can work when applied to the field of education. The four dimensions of subsidiarity must, and in fact do interact and work together if we want to get out of the modern system, which is now producing a deficit, instead of an increase, of common goods (as relational goods) in education (for an empirical investigation see: P. Donati, and I. Colozzi (eds.) (2006). The same holds true of health care and many kinds of social services (particularly family services: P. Donati, R. Prandini (eds.) (2006).

16. See M. Walzer (1983).

17. On the concept of relational reason see P. Donati (2008).

18. On the concept of meta-reflexivity see M. S. Archer (2007).

19. Value here means its own criterion of assessment according to its own directive distinction, which is contained in the latency (L) dimension of the social relation (in my relational version of AGIL): see Donati (1991, chap. 4).

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