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The Social and Moral Dimension of the Relational Paradigm

The paper aims at showing the importance of Pierpaolo Donati's relational paradigm in order to understand two fundamental problems of contemporary sociology: 1) the relationship between individuals (as "relational subjects") and society; 2) the human/non-human distinction and the normativity inherent in social relations. With reference to the first point, the paper will try to show how, from a relational perspective, the "social" is not simply an aggregate of individuals or of structures, but rather of relations; the social is additionally a "synonym" of the relational, that is defined by its relations. Specific attention will also be given to the relation between Donati's relational paradigm and Niklas Luhmann's systemic one. One of the most sociologically relevant problems of modernity is actually represented by the difficulty of adequately posing the problem of the "human" in the social. The functionalism represented by this standpoint is a true and proper drastic reduction of complexity and, as such, the most significant challenge of our time. According to Donati, "we can say that a social form is human insofar as the social relations of which it consists are products of subjects that are reciprocally oriented on the basis of a super-functional sense". In my opinion this concise formula represents the substance of his relational approach, from which the second point of the paper will be developed, that is the normativity inherent in social relations. In a socio-cultural context that tends to proclaim "ethical neutrality" as the only criterion capable of ensuring the equal functioning of an increasingly pluralistic and individualized society, this insistence of Donati on the *human qualities of social relations* puts us before a *sui generis* normativity, which certainly is not compatible with the ethical neutrality and relativism that is prevalent today, but also with much of the ethics that are opposed to it.