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Relational Care: Rethinking Altruism

Sociology grew out of the *sciences morales*, in which the issue of social order was linked with the issue of moral order. Hence the central role of the concept of good as the goal of individual and collective action. We find the problem of altruism earlier in reflections on good will (benevolence), understood as the desire to do good. Moral philosophy and social philosophy used to be closely intertwined, and sociology, although striving to free itself from normativity, also took up reflections upon the relationship between the individual's and society's good.

Altruism was among the key concepts of sociology at its beginnings, as well as in the works of almost all the authors belonging to the pantheon of the classics. The present decline of the postmodern formation coincides with re-emergence of the notion of altruism as one of the key concepts in social theory. Unlike theories of morality, where altruism is considered on the level of moral dispositions focusing on the good of Others, sociological studies focus on altruism in social relations and rely on observable activities that are an expression of concern for Others. An altruistic action is defined as one in which at least one of the motives pertains to the good of the Other.

Altruism is articulated as a relational phenomenon: relational care. In search of a relational understanding of concern for the Other, a good guide is Paul Ricoeur, who depicts care as an ethical pursuit. Of key importance and significant from a relational sociological perspective is the non-normative understanding of ethics broader than the concept of morality. This allows us to see altruism in a new light: as relational care.