

SOCIAL CAPITAL: GOOD COMPANY'S PERSPECTIVE

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I. Introduction

“Friendship is unnecessary, like philosophy, like art... it has no survival value; rather, it is one of those things that give value to survival”, writes C.S.Lewis on amicable ties. Unlike friendship, though often associated with it, social capital, as it will be argued in this paper, does both: it has a survival value for a business organization and it gives an enterprise value to survival. While the first part of this statement is already commonly accepted, and instrumental benefits of social capital were numerous underlined in the literature, the idea that social capital itself may be among the *raison d'être* of a company or at least of a good one is not widely shared.

In the recent business rhetoric company's “goodness” is shaped by its engagement in the socially responsible behavior. It is interesting to note how much these two theoretical constructs - social capital (SC) and corporate social responsibility (CSR) - seem to have in common. They both have recently emerged and had a blooming development in business literature. In fact, today they are so popular among social sciences scholars that as some authors suggest they are at risk of becoming the ether that fills the universe (Robinson et al., 2002). Both of them present rather an umbrella term, a code word than a clearly defined concept. Their vague content and fuzzy borders are probably reasons why both of them, just like Byzantine contracts, admit of many readings. They both suffer from the lack of clarity and agreement concerning the moral underpinning of the concepts. But at the same moment, they emerge as paradigms capable of bringing new insights pregnant with a possibility to become a real breakthrough into the management field.

All these similarities permit us to suggest that these two concepts may be in a way attuned to each other. And here we need to make a brief premise on the possible images of an enterprise and respectively CSR model adopted. If an enterprise is viewed as “a piece of property” that must render the maximum profit to the owners, the CSR would be defined in terms of its capacity to maximize shareholder value by the wide spectrum of “decoys” for ethical conduct: from keeping regulators at bay to building customer loyalty, helping in recruiting and retaining employees, fostering goodwill towards the company, targeting responsible consumers – in short, everything that goes under the “reputation pull” tag. If instead the business is seen as “a nexus of contracts” between different groups of people: employees, customers, owners, managers, suppliers etc., a good company would be expected to be a place of negotiating and trade-offs between competing interests or, thanks to Freeman's initiative, stakes of these groups, and its final product would be a result of agreements between these groups. In practice, though, this model is often married to the utilitarian framework giving birth to the “enlightened stakeholder theory” where CSR obtains again exclusively instrumental value.

The Catholic Social Thought offers an alternative way of defining a good company, not so much as “a society of shares” or as “a society of interests” (Naughton, 2006) but rather as a “community of work” aimed at the common good where CSR would be of an “intrinsic” and not instrumental value, viewed as a right pursuit of different goals/goods where achievement of fundamental goods (profit, technological development etc.) has in view the attainment of excellent goods (human development) and not vice versa (Alford, Naughton, 2001; Alford et al., 2006). It is in this perspective that this paper seeks to define the social capital and its role in the organization and its development and maintenance in the business organizations that strives to be good.

The paper will first describe shortly anthropological visions underpinning social capital definitions in the sociological and political sciences that ended up in business literature as two different perspectives on SC: company utility and individual utility perspectives. It then introduces the third approach called “good company’s perspective” underpinned by the Christian personalist anthropology. Finally the paper outlines briefly how this approach can influence the way we think about and cultivate SC in business organizations.

II. Social Capital Anthropology: Between Undersocialized and Oversocialized Man

Since it is commonly accepted that social capital is about connections between people, it would be useful to focus our attention on its anthropology represented in two major disciplines - sociology and political sciences - where the SC idea was born.

In his article “Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness” Mark Granovetter (1985) argues that modern social sciences often make use of two unrealistically extreme anthropological accounts: *undersocialized* or atomized conception of man moved by self-interest and *oversocialized* conception of man overwhelmingly obedient to the dictate of norms and values systems, internalized through socialization. According to Granovetter, sociologists traditionally have made use of *the latter*, while economists are used to apply the former.

The similar division may be applied to the SC anthropology with one unexpected precision: the sociological treatment of SC is underpinned by the *undersocialized* vision of man, while the political sciences tend to make appeal to the *oversocialized* accounts of SC. Let us turn, for example, to the seminal work of J. Coleman (1990) *Foundations of Social Theory*. Criticizing an old *homo sociologicus*, as a subject to the Procrustean bed of norms’ conformity or deviation, Coleman puts at the center of his analysis a purposive and responsible actor “enriched” by the notion of rationality. According to the American sociologist, the essence of rationality consists in the action directed at the utility maximization which converts an actor from *goal-seeking* into *utility-seeking* liberating him from the chains of norms. In this case relationality of such a “norm-free, self-interested person” is based either on the control over or on the interest in the resources (p. 28, 37). Social capital notion, then, is introduced as a merely technical term to underline that individuals not always work independently, and not all their goals may be pursuit in solitude. In other words, it is a term that embraces foundational relationships (such as of authority, trust and

allocation of rights) that shape the social system as a playground for transfers or exchanges of control power.

The similar anthropological approach was adapted by another authority in the social capital field - Nan Lin (2001). While Coleman's approach permits some further reflection of the social component of the term¹, Nan Lin's framework definitively turns towards individualistic reading of social capital:

...divorced from its roots in individual interactions and networking, social capital becomes merely another trendy term to employ or deploy in the broad context of improving or building social integration and solidarity. ... I will argue that social capital, as a relational asset, must be distinguished from collective assets and goods, such as culture, norms, trust, and so on (p. 26).

In Lin's framework all the actors whether individual or collective are moved exclusively by two main motives: maintenance of resources (which requires expressive actions) or research of the additional resources (which requires instrumental actions). Social capital, then, is reduced to the main resources (wealth, power and reputation) of others to which an ego has an access through the direct (dyadic) or indirect interaction with an alter.

Robert Burt who underlines the role of social capital in overcoming the information gap, leans on the similar idea of *homo oikonomicus* as an "ego" who meets an "alter" to exchange goods and ideas in pursuit of the proper interests (2000, p. 2-3). Wherever the full and complete information is not available to realize an exchange, a network of relationships or social capital enters the game. For Burt an alter is explicitly a source of competitive advantage in order to obtain the dominant position and implicitly a potential competitor. Here how he explains the erosive presence of peers in an organization:

The contingency prediction is that peers erode the value of social capital to the extent that disorganization among peers intensifies competition between the peers and elicits behavioral guidelines from higher authority (p. 53).

It is clear that authors as J. Coleman, R. Burt, N. Lin in their effort to "enrich" the idea of *homo sociologicus* by putting an accent on man's utility rationality end up adopting the reductive discourse of *homo oikonomicus*, a naively Machiavellian view of a human person.

The second major area of SC origins is political sciences where social capital is often seen as a one-way cultural outcome of history and traditions. It tends towards the *oversocialized* vision of man in its anthropological assumptions underlining the importance of societal norms and values to which people are obedient, often without even questioning them. Works of F. Fukuyama and R. Putnam (in less extent) may be placed to this category.

Putnam's focus on the institutional performance does not provide a clear and detailed anthropological vision as it does the sociological tradition. Some insights, though, may permit to reconstruct his anthropology of social capital. Putnam's point of departure lies in the collective action's problem underpinned by the rational and natural option of the humans to "*always defect*", in the language of the game theory. According to Putnam, it is possible to solve this

problem through the abundant accumulation of social capital, a collective good which refers to a certain set of social norms in which an individual is embedded, shapes his actions and his ability to be trusting and to trust. (1993, p. 177).

Francis Fukuyama's *Trust* (1995) and *The Great Disruption* (1999) offer a more elaborated and detailed perspective on social capital, for it is in the very human nature that the author finds the source of SC. Re-echoing Putnam, Fukuyama defines social capital as "the whole of values and unofficial norms shared by group's members that enable them to help each other"². The originality of Fukuyama's thought consists in suggesting that the norm of reciprocity which is at the heart of social capital idea is codified in the human nature understood in its biological materiality. Leaning on the modern sociobiology he sustains that the long primordial experience of necessity of others (as for example, in hunting) which forced men to make alliances and to realize common actions, was genetically codified in human cerebral tissues as a certain inclination to cooperate. Thus, having reciprocity codified in their genome, human beings are not social in Aristotelian sense but simply gregarious:

When it is affirmed that human beings are social animals, it does not mean at all that they are peaceful and inclined to collaboration or trustful, for often they are proved to be violent, aggressive and false. It rather means they have particular capacities to identify and treat false and lying persons as well as to gravitate towards those who collaborate and follow moral rules. As a result, they arrive to norms of cooperation easier than individualistic theories on human nature may presume.³

Such way of thinking permits the author to speculate on possible "social experimentation", as for example, introducing altruistic individuals capable to transmit their genes into "too egoistic" nations or grafting genes of cooperation in order to "correct" populations with a ferocious competition. It is clear that in this case we are a baby step from *oversocialized* anthropological vision.

In ultimate analysis the *oversocialized* account of social capital is paradoxically similar to the *undersocialized* one: once the level of civicness (Putnam) or hereditary disposition to trust and cooperation (Fukuyama) is defined, an individual person could be atomized as *homo oikonomicus* with, though, these specific societal rules to be integrated automatically in his behavior. Social capital, thus, seems to be another word for the old concept of culture. Both of these anthropological framework to social capital put excessive faith in individualism, instrumental rationality and what we call "atomic interactions" and neglect human person relationality. Instead of strengthening social capital construct, they contribute into its missing analytically.

III. Organizational social capital: individual utility and company utility perspectives

Sociological and political treatment of SC ended up in business literature as two different perspectives. From one hand, some business scholars insist on returning to the "traditional" level of analysis - an individual (Glaeser et al., 2001). Others, following post-Putnam literature, view

social capital as an organization-level attribute. Business literature has by and large adopted either of these frameworks (which we call individual utility and company utility perspectives) without further questioning on the nature of social capital, dragging along the burden of term's ambiguity and unrealistic anthropology.

The sociological articulation of social capital with its focus on the beneficial outcomes of networking for individual actors is at the heart of the *individual utility* perspective on SC which explores how employees mobilize their sets of relationships in order to realize their personal goals within a company: a job (Granovetter, 1973, 1983), achieving upward mobility (Burt, 1992) or a rise in salary (Belliveau M. et al., 1996). While bringing to the light the concrete tangible outcomes of human interaction in business organizations, this perspective presents basically three main problems:

(1) it produces terminological redundancy. "The Economic Approach to Social Capital" by Edward Glaeser, David Laibson and Bruce Sacerdote (2000) clearly illustrates this point. Arguing that an "economic approach" to social capital requires "optimization-based analysis of individuals" (p.4), authors define it as individual's social characteristics, and precisely, "social skills, charisma, and the size of his Rolodex" (ibid.). The question that arises instinctively is: in what, then, does the difference between human and social capital consist?! No wonder that the very authors conclude that social capital is merely "the social component of human capital" (ibid.), but they do not give any explanation on why we need two different terms to define the same reality. Such an approach simply makes social capital term redundant without bringing desirable clarity into its conceptualization;

(2) it gives no instrument to reconcile the potential conflict between the company and individual goals. In the same article quoted above, stating that aggregate social capital of community should be measured as an aggregation of individual social capital (p. 13 ff), the authors do not offer the satisfactory algorithm of such a complex aggregation.

It is clear that individual social capital will not always determine organizational social capital. As the authors themselves state, "Increases in individual status may not raise community levels of social capital" (p. 15). In fact, nepotism inside of the company is an emblematic example. Unjust promotion or ineffective recruit would be considered an outcome of social capital for an individual that enjoys achievement of his goal, but it would merely be a capital for a company that would have to bear an additional considerable cost! Individual utility perspective gives no key to explain the contradictory situations when there may be high levels of individual social capital and low or negative level of organizational social capital. Thus, social capital notion is often reduced to a mere exploitation of human relationships to achieve individual goals, and in final analysis it loses its social connotation becoming just another instrument in the hand of *homo oikonomicus*.

(3) The third problem with this approach is that as well as being profoundly instrumentalizing, it is simply not realistic. Let us just imagine a company where all the human networking is done between individual goals' optimizer who as "self-centered islands" solipsistically pursue individual "happiness." They communicate and support each other or they compete in charismatic attraction exclusively in view of their career upward mobility or salary promotion. While we cannot deny that sometimes such motivations may overweight in person's behavior within business environment, to make of it a general assumption for a social capital idea (or for any other business concept) creates an image of a phantasmagorical company the life of which would be definitely "nasty, brutish, and short" a la Hobbes.⁴

The *company utility perspective* shifts the focus of the attention to the benefits that business organizations draw from networks either of individual (employees) or collective (other firms) actors (Gabbay and Leenders, 1999; Cohen and Prusak, 2001), distinguishing two types of enterprise-related social capital: internal and external (Westlund, 2003). While there is a vast current of studies that explore inter-firm relationships (external social capital) such as, for example, joint marketing efforts, production and supplier networking (Gabbay and Leenders, 2002, p. 16, cfr. studies cited in Adler et al., 2002), we remain skeptical about the appropriateness of such an analysis under social capital umbrella. Once the source of social capital is recognized in the human interactions, we may speak only analogically about the social capital that flows from the inter-organizational networking. The view on social capital as a set of employees networking which facilitates the attainment of corporate goals seems more plausible. Cohen and Prusak arguing the advantages of social capital approach to organizational work over what they call individualistic theory of organization, gives the following definition of internal social capital:

Social capital consists of the stock of active connections among people: the trusts, mutual understanding, and shared values and behaviors that bind the members of human networks and communities and make cooperative action possible (p. 4).

In other words, this perspective views social capital as one of the factors that influence corporate performance: it facilitates inter-unit resource exchange, product innovation and knowledge sharing, enhances cross-functional team effectiveness, reduces turnover rate and transaction costs, improves cooperative accomplishment of complex tasks, decrease the learning curve of new employees (cfr. Bolino et al., 2002; Adler et al., 2002; Oh, 2004, 2006).

So what is wrong with this perspective? Thanks to the community elements inserted in its analysis, such an approach seems to go out of the individualism circle. Pointing to the importance of trust, cooperation, group creativity, sharing knowledge, storytelling etc., it overcomes the idea of independent “companies of one”. And still we find it unsatisfactory mainly because underpinned by the *oversocialized* anthropological vision, it paradoxically contains the same danger of instrumentalization of the human person, similar to the individual utility perspective. It contains the same potential contradicting divergence between individual, corporate, and social goals without giving it any satisfactory solution. The dissolution of the human person in the organizational goals potentially leads to the creation of collectivistic culture (Leane and Van Buren, 1999) where internal trust network, creativity and cooperation may be used to increase profit return, to improve the quality of the goods produced but at the same time to conspire violations of the legal accounting rules or employees working conditions. Company utility approach leaves an area for the same exploitation of human relationality as an individual utility perspective does, but at the more aggregated level. In other words, under company utility perspective Henry Ford’s worry “Why is it when I buy a pair of hands, I always get a human being as well?” would be easily reassured by saying that what he really acquires is a pair of hands with the technical capacity of interacting.

These two perspectives raise an important definitional question: *by calling this specific type of capital a social one do we want to underline its roots into the social nature of human beings (it is*

something that flows out “of sociability of individuals” but contributes to individual goals) or do we to point to the recipient of its final utility, a collectivity? (cfr. Cartocci, 2000, p. 435) While the individual utility approach affirms the first, and company utility perspective - the second proposition, both of them result in reducing the human person and her relationality to the cramped Procrustean bed of individualism and instrumentalization.

IV. Social Capital: Good Company’s Perspective

In the following part of the paper we will attempt to provide an alternative encompassing framework that will enable us to produce a holistic answer to this definitional question. This third approach to SC which we call a good company’s perspective operates from anthropological assumptions of the Christian personalist tradition.

There are mainly two reasons to explore this tradition. Firstly, if we say that social capital is about relationships between persons, it could be inspiring to turn our look to a tradition that puts the human person at the center of its interest⁵. However, since there are obviously other philosophical traditions (as for example, Kantian ethics) that may be claimed to be human person-centered, we needed another reason for choosing Christian personalism. We find it in the historical development of the term “person”. As John Zizioulas correctly notes, “historically as well as existentially the concept of the person is indissolubly bound up with [Christian] theology”. Therefore, the Christian tradition has a special place in the discussion when we talk about an ethics based on “personalism”, since it is from within the Christian tradition that the very concept of person was born.⁶

It is a widely accepted that the Trinitarian and Christological controversies from II to IV cc. were fundamental for the debate on “person”.⁷ Even if at that time debate was turning around *persona Dei*, and the term was applied exclusively to the mystery of Divine Trinity explaining how God could be one and triune at the same time, its further reflection on the *persona hominis* was inevitable. Taking as a mirror God, the Christian tradition finds the essence of the human person in her resembling the image of God. Thus, being an image of God, who is a “substantial relation”⁸, human person is essentially relational. To put it shortly, to be a person means to exist in relation, to be in relationships with the “other”.⁹

In his *Contra Eutychem et Nestorium* St. Thomas for whom the human person is the most perfect creature in all the nature¹⁰, recovers the classical definition given by the Latin translator of Aristotele – Severino Boezio (V-VI cc.): the human person is *rationalis naturae individua substantia* (“an individual substance of a rational nature”). As we see “relation” is not explicitly present in this definition, which makes assume that human relationality was seen as an accident and not ontological “substance” of the human being. It is not our aim to enter the debate on this particular question here. But there is a need for the historical re-insertion of this definition which would restore its authentic meaning and make it especially interesting for our argument.

In its first part - *rationalis naturae* - it says about the rational nature of the human person. Taking into the consideration the historical context of the Middle Ages, the human “rationality” is to be understood in a much wider perspective than of a pure calculus; it is to be seen in the horizon of

intellectuality and spirituality of the human person (Berti, 1992). The possession of the rational nature means that it is essential for a human person to perform activities proper to this nature (to think, to know, to speak, to love etc.) which require relationality. Thus, human “rationality” is intrinsically relational (open¹¹) to the world and to other human beings. The second part of the definition (*individua substantia*) identifies the human person in terms of independence as a concrete, individual substance that is subsistent in herself. And again its modern interpretation is torn from its historical context where world was seen basically as a stamp of God understood as a “substantial relation”, man - as an image of Trinity, and *relatio* - as a cultural glue. Thus, this second part of the scholastic definition was colonized and extremely radicalized by the dominant modern Western concept¹² under which a human person is reduced to a solitary unit and an absolute subjectivity, “a free conscience proud of its isolation of the anarchical and desperate atoms” (Sartori, 1992, p. 167).

To sum up: each human person, a universe in herself, holds enormous untapped potential that is to be realized through openness and interactions with others. But we do not simply have the capacity to relate to others. We are fulfilling ourselves, in a certain way we are becoming person through our relations with others. Our relationships are not just important but constitutive to whom we are. In this way, human relational openness constitutes an essential part of human nature. And since human relationality has such an intrinsic value, its exclusively instrumental use will automatically equal to the impoverishment, reduction and instrumentalization of the human person.

Such an anthropological perspective reveals the double-face nature of human relations: from one point, they are something that flow from the very nature of man and without which his fulfillment would not be possible, but from the other, serving as means to achieve our personal goals our relationships have undeniable instrumental aspect. The helplessness of a child cries out with an obvious material deficiency that needs and “uses” others as a means to be fed, protected and educated. Moreover, in our daily life we interact innumerable with others, and we are unlikely to see these often routine human interactions as sacred. We enter the grocery shop and relate to the grocer for the simple aim of buying some food, we may call our colleague for the useful information about the attractive openings at our organizations or we may ask our friend for a lift in a rainy day. All of these interactions serve as instruments to something else: satisfy our hunger, get a promotion and thus increase our income or escape unpleasant walk under the rain.

Stemming from the relationality of the human nature (in philosophical and not sociobiological terms *a la* Fukuyama) social capital inherits this complex duality. Following the distinction between foundational and excellent goods offered by H. Alford and M. Naughton (2001) we may say that its instrumental aspect, especially visible at workplace, corresponds to the foundational good without which no common action is possible and a the mere company’s survival is under danger, while its intrinsic value place social capital among the excellent goods to be pursuit by a company for their own sake. Being unable to treat this tension between intrinsic and instrumental sides of human relationality, the current articulations of social capital overemphasizes the latter and totally neglects the former. In other words, they resolve it by canceling the important truth about the human nature, permitting its distortion and exploitation.

How would a good company deal with this seeming tension inherent to social capital? The key answer would be the proper order of goods/ends oriented by the common good of an enterprise. We use common good term here in its Christian personalist connotation meaning the whole of goods “pro-sumed”¹³ together by the members of the work community which permit the fulfillment of the human person and her potencies or as Maritain (1947) put it, “provides access of persons to their liberty of expansion”. The optics of the common good permit not only to view social capital as both owned by a company and its members, and thus to order harmonically its individual and organizational benefits, but also to “purify” SC of its dark sides (Portes, Landolt, 1996) distinguishing between its authentic and “distorted” forms (mafia “social capital”, work nepotism etc.) when relationality that flows from the human person nature is paradoxically channeled to the aims that obstacle human flourishing.

Put it differently, we may speak of the two elements of SC: descriptive (human relationality) and normative (common good). These two elements enable to better articulate the social capital term giving an answer to the definitional question raised above: is it the social nature of human beings or the recipient of capital’s benefits – society – that the term “social capital” means to underline? In good company’s perspective, only the capital that takes its roots in the relationality of the human person and is aimed at the contributing to the common good of the collectivity (business organization in our case) could be called social. In other words, social capital of an enterprise is the sum of employment relations’ contributing to norms, values and understandings that facilitate cooperation for the common good.

There is even more profound interconnectedness between social capital and common good. Common good cannot be established and maintained by one person. It requires the cooperative efforts of many in its construction, and communication and participation in its consumption. In other words, it requires the invisible fabric of interpersonal relationships without which neither its “goodness” nor its “commonness” would be complete. Moreover, as Calvez and Perrin (1961) assert common good is not just “goods” put together, it is “sociability itself”. It is in the words of Hollenbach the “realization of the human capacity for intrinsically valuable relationships” (p. 81). In a way, social capital is at the heart of common good attainment.

V. By way of conclusion

Social capital has a survival value for any company that requires at least some of its minimum level to ensure that the organization is able to continue as a shared enterprise. For a good company it gives an additional value to survival for good business views social capital as an essential part of the common good created by the organization. This gives us an important key of viewing, treating and shaping social capital of business organization: the ontological relationality of the person united to its unique value, does not permit to view it just as a simple factor of the company goals unless these later do not include social capital promotion among its final ends. Such a perspective permits to resolve the tension between unethical instrumentalization and useless sanctifying of human relationality into the “unity of order”, according to the expression of Aquinas, under which the “honest use” of social capital is guaranteed by the encompassing end of the common good that sets its sight both on the person itself and on the business

organization as a whole. In this optics the investment and maintenance of social capital is to be guided rather by its possible contribution to the common good than by the cost-benefits analysis.

Writing on the public-good aspect of social capital J. Coleman rightly notes that “it is in a fundamentally different position with respect to purposive action than are most other forms of capital”, for most of its forms “are created or destroyed as a by-product of other activities” (p. 317) It reminds us the paradox of happiness noted already by Aristotle in his *Etica Nicomachea* when he speaks of a paradoxical nature of *eudaimonia*: happiness by definition cannot be reached in a direct instrumental manner, it is an indirect result of virtuous actions.¹⁴ Similarly, social capital is rather an externality of company’s policies and practices than a result of evident actions favoring direct connection between employees (such as face-to-face meetings, kickoff meetings or brown bag lunches). In ultimate analysis, SC is a result of virtuous human interactions. Thus, a good company has no instrument to *oblige* its members to create social capital but it does have responsibility to create conditions for its creation to take place. This responsibility will include a continuous process of shaping and development its policies, especially in the crucial for SC creation and maintenance areas (such as employment, human resources practices, job design, organizational structure) in terms of the effects on organizational social capital.

As rightly pointed by Leana and Van Buren (1999), commitment to the stability and job security in employment may significantly increase organizational social capital, while such practices like downsizing or a regular use of temporary employees may sanction individualistic behavior and undermine the ability of company members to form meaningful relationships at work. An exclusive appreciation of individual human capital and failure to take into consideration the social embeddedness of individual contribution by company’s compensation and promotion policies may also substantially erode social capital by sending signals about the kind of practices that do not encourage shared knowledge habits or group performance. Just as a disproportionate compensation of a few company’s members, a widely spread trend in the American business context, undermines the perception of equity and cooperative behavior that support collective action. The refinement of these and other adequate policies in view of the social capital will add depth as well as breadth to the ongoing conversation about what makes a company good.

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¹ See Coleman’s discussion of the public-good aspects of social capital (pp. 315-317).

² My translation from an Italian edition (“un insieme di valori o norme non ufficiali, condiviso dai membri di un gruppo, che consente loro di aiutarsi a vicenda” (1999, p. 34)).

³ My translation from an Italian edition: “Quando si afferma, quindi, che gli esseri umani sono animali sociali, non si vuol dire che siano del tutto pacifici e inclini alla collaborazione, o degni di fiducia, dato che spesso dimostrano di essere violenti, aggressivi e falsi. Significa piuttosto che hanno delle capacità particolari per individuare e trattare le persone false e menzognere, nonché per gravitare verso coloro che collaborano e altri che seguono regole morali. Di conseguenza, arrivano a norme di collaborazione più facilmente di quanto teorie più individualistiche sulla natura umana potrebbero presumere”. (1999, p. 243)

⁴ In fact, game theory shows that the interacting individuals cannot produce the collective good of organization because of the inherent antagonism in the pursuit of egoistic objectives: thus, no business organization where people work together could exist if we accept this assumption. Individualistic, rational economic agents find it excessively difficult to generate a workable market system, not to mention the optimal system required by the pure economic theory.

⁵ As Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis*, 14 states, “...*man* is the primary route that the Church must travel in fulfilling her mission”

⁶ As Wilhelm Windelband points out in his *History of Philosophy*, “Hellenism sees in personality ... a restriction and a characteristic of the finite, which it would never apply to the Supreme Being but only to the particular gods. Christianity, as a living religion, demands a personal relation of *man to the ground of the world conceived as supreme personality*, and it expresses this demand in the thought of *the divine sonship of man*.... It is the essential feature of the Christian concept of the world that it regards the person and the relation of persons to one another as the essence of reality...” (Italics in original).

⁷ For detailed description of the theological genesis of the term “person” see Milano A., 1987, Berti E., 1992.

⁸ We due this expression to St. Thomas: “*persona significata relationem non per modum relations, sed per modum substantiae*”.

⁹ We may put it in explicitly Christian terms by card. Cottier, “To be a person means: to tend to the self-fulfillment, which cannot be completed if not “through the sincere gift of self” according to the divine model of the Trinity” (1992, p. 123).

¹⁰ A man “*significat id quod est perfectissimum in tota natura, scilicet subsistens in rationali natura*” (S. Th., I, q. 29, a. 3),

¹¹ R. Guardini is another name in Christian personalism who in his *Person and the World* elaborated the concept of “the world openness of the human person” understood as the ability of the human intellect not only to grasp but also to hunger for the eternal and absolute.

¹² The formulation of the modern Western concept of a person embraces the period that goes from Descartes through Kant. The influence of the latter is hard to overestimate. But his efforts are not satisfying since he revalue the human person not from the ontological point of view but merely moral or juridical. In other words, Kant frames the concept of the human person not in terms of “to be” but rather in terms of “to have” (rights, dignity etc.) (cfr. Berti, p. 55)

¹³ “Pro-sumed” is a sum of “produced” and “consumed”, an expression coined by an Italian economist B. Gui.

¹⁴ In our times this old truth was addressed by Viktor Frankl, the author of logotherapy, in his *Man’s Search for Meaning* where he argues that anyone who tries to pursue happiness directly will fail and be unhappy. Happiness cannot be pursued; it ensues from the pursuit of worthwhile meaningful activities.