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The Relational Dimension of Identity— Theoretical and Empirical Exploration

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Abstract Identity has been recently introduced as a “legitimate” subject matter in economics. Whereas the social nature of identity is consensually acknowledged, its relational and moral dimensions are overlooked. We begin by clarifying the role of interpersonal relations in identity formation. Following Honneth (1995) we argue that the development of a positive identity, defined as a person’s relation-to-self, depends on the processes of mutual recognition in which a person takes part throughout her/his life. We then frame Honneth’s recognition processes in terms of the access to relational and moral goods. An empirical study is presented that illustrates the association between relational and moral goods and “relation-to-self.” Based on European Social Survey (ESS) data, we show that high levels of relational goods (e.g. experiencing intense and positive social relations) and moral goods (e.g. perceiving to be treated with justice and respect) are associated with a positive relation-to-self.

Keywords: identity, relational goods, moral goods, recognition

INTRODUCTION

Driven by their desire to make science, the most influential economists of the late nineteenth century restricted the domain of economics to the study of the relations between man and nature. The study of the relations between men was set apart from what would thereafter become the dominant economic theory. One century later, however, many mainstream economists began devoting attention to the economic outcomes yielded by certain aspects of

social interactions. Relations between men and identity are now being brought back into economic analysis together with the acknowledgment that they allow us “to account for phenomena that current economics cannot well explain” (Akerlof and Kranton 2000: 715).

Although Amartya Sen (1985, 1999) had pointed out the relevance of identity to economics since the 1980s, it was the paper by Akerlof and Kranton (2000) that triggered a surge of literature on the issue. One of the controversial matters involves the way in which the social and personal dimensions of identity are accounted for (Davis 2007, 2009, 2011; Teschl and Derobert 2008). Akerlof and Kranton favor a social identity approach in which individuals are described by characteristics that result from their participation in, or identification with, specific groups: “identity is bound to social categories” (Akerlof and Kranton 2000: 720). In their framework, almost no consideration is given to personal identity or the idea of “identity apart from others” (Davis 2007: 351). However, personal identity goes beyond social identity in that it considers not only *what* individuals are—for instance, woman vs. man, economist vs. psychologist, Catholic vs. Muslim—but also *who*—what kind of person—they are and would like to be (Teschl and Derobert 2008).

Our interest in this paper focuses on *how* identity is constituted rather than *what* or *who* a person is—although all three elements are obviously intimately related. The focus on *what* people are leads Akerlof and Kranton to acknowledging the *social* nature of identity but prevents them from capturing its *relational* as well as personal dimensions. In distinguishing between categorical social identities and relational social identities, Davis (2011) proposes a way to analytically acknowledge and integrate the social and personal dimensions of identity. His framework gives due recognition to the role that social interactions play in the shaping of one’s identity. Our analysis intends to further this examination of the identity-generating character of interpersonal relations. More precisely we aim to answer the following question: what makes a person have a positive rather than negative identity?

We define identity as the way in which a person sees him/herself—his/her “relation-to-self.” One’s relation-to-self involves the opinion of oneself, one’s dignity as a person and a sense of oneself as a unique and irreplaceable person (Honneth 1995). The hypothesis is that identity, or relation-to-self, is strongly influenced by the interpersonal relations the person enters into throughout her/his life. Our core theoretical reference is the Honneth (1995) theory of mutual recognition according to which a person’s identity is constitutionally made by the way (s)he relates with others, and, more specifically, by the processes of mutual recognition in which (s)he takes part. The notions of relational goods (Bruni 2008; Gui 2000; Gui and Sugden

2005) and moral goods (Lopes 2011; Lopes *et al.* 2009) are called upon to frame the mutual recognition processes from a new perspective, which gives us the opportunity to make a critical examination of Honneth and Akerlof and Kranton's accounts of identity.

It is not only the analytical contribution of this paper that is of interest but also its normative implications. The analytical foundations of the account of identity developed here create a strong normative agenda—at both the macro-policy and-micro governance levels.

Our analysis proceeds as follows. The second section begins by grounding our argument on a non-Hobbesian conception of the human condition. The relational nature of identity is then introduced: identity is shaped by mutual recognition processes. The third and fourth sections develop our main theoretical contribution. We present our conception of relational goods and moral goods and reinterpret Akerlof-Kranton's and Honneth's conceptions of identity accordingly. The fifth section presents the operationalization of the notions of relational goods, moral goods and relation-to-self and the methodology used in the empirical study. The empirical study is based on micro-data from the European Social Survey (ESS), and its results are presented in the sixth section. Although it should be regarded as illustrative, evidence is provided of the relation between the quality of a person's social interactions and her/his relation-to-self. The seventh discusses the results and draws normative considerations and the final section concludes.

IDENTITY AND THE RELATIONS WITH OTHER(S)

The Dialogical Nature of Human Life

In order to better understand the connection between identity and relations with others, a crucial feature of humanity must be introduced: the *dialogical* character of the human life. “We become full human agents, capable of understanding ourselves, and hence of defining our identity, through our acquisition of language” (Taylor 1994: 5). And language is learned through exchanges with others. The genesis of the human mind, hence of reason, is not *mono-logical*, something each person accomplishes on his/her own, but *dia-logical*. The other is a condition of the self. Before an agent is endowed with the ability to make choices—the core activity of the mainstream economic agent—a self has to be developed, and this cannot be done without the relationships made with other persons.

The dialogical nature of the human condition has been rendered almost invisible by the supremacy of the mainstream approaches in philosophy and

economics. The latter succeeded in imposing the atomistic, Hobbesian, view whereby men are essentially at war with each other. In this tradition, the struggle for self-preservation constitutes the basic condition of human beings, as epitomized in utility functions. *Homo economicus* is an atomistic being, able to survive and grow outside the world of social interaction.

In contrast, the struggle for mutual recognition is substituted for that of self-preservation in Honneth's (1995) theory. For Charles Taylor, Axel Honneth and Paul Ricoeur, among others, the gregarious nature of humans and their desire for recognition constitute the pre-condition for self-realization. Rivalry, distrust, and glory, the three motives and psychological features with which Hobbes endows humans in the "state of nature" are replaced in the framework adopted here by the moral values of trust, respect, and social esteem. Instead of taking the atomistic, utility-maximizer individual as the unit of study, we examine individuals' interpersonal interactions. Explaining identity in terms of relationships between individuals means rejecting atomism in conceptualizing individuals.

The Constitution of Identity is Shaped by Recognition Processes

Honneth's theory of mutual recognition provides the grounds for Taylor's much quoted assertion that "Due recognition is not just a courtesy we owe people. It is a vital need" (Taylor 1994: 1). According to Honneth, the very possibility of identity-formation depends on the establishment of relationships of mutual recognition.¹ More specifically, the development of a positive identity—or as Honneth puts it a positive relation-to-self—depends on the development of (1) self-confidence, (2) self-respect and (3) self-esteem. Relating to oneself in these ways necessarily involves experiencing recognition from others whom one also views as deserving recognition. Conversely, misrecognition or nonrecognition on the part of others can inflict harm and cause people to adopt a negative self-image, with all the psychological suffering and behavioral drawbacks this entails.

According to Honneth, the three "relations-to-self" can only be obtained and sustained through three processes of mutual recognition. Emotional support is the mode of recognition that corresponds to self-confidence and is made available through parent-child relationships as well as through adult

¹ The claim that identity comes into existence in the course of personal interaction is obviously not new in philosophy. Honneth's argument builds on Hegel's Iena works as well as on George Mead (1934) and on established empirical results in psychology and sociology.

relations of love and friendship. Self-confidence, or “trust in oneself,” is hence obtained through affective interpersonal relations and social support. Self-respect, the second step in the constitution of the self and of identity, is acquired through the recognition of rights, i.e. institutionalized relations of universal respect for the autonomy and dignity of persons. Self-respect involves one’s sense of possessing the universal dignity of persons. Without self-respect, it is impossible to fully engage in collective or personal self-determination. Self-respect requires that our rights have been duly secured and that we have been formally recognized as equal to the others. The recognition of one person as distinct from others is achieved through the third mode of recognition, i.e. self-esteem. Self-esteem derives from one’s achievements or abilities being recognized as valuable by other members of the community. This mode of recognition requires networks of solidarity and shared values. “Whereas self-respect is a matter of viewing oneself as entitled to the same status as every other person, self-esteem involves a sense of what it is that makes one special, unique” (Honneth 1995: xvi).

The development of self-respect and self-esteem relies on the existence of a common evaluative framework, made of formal and informal norms. With regard to self-respect, the real opportunity to exercise the universal capacities constitutive of citizenship can only be secured through the existence of rights, that is, of formal norms. As for self-esteem, the evaluative framework endorsed by the community is the point of reference. The mutual esteem of the self and the other as individualized persons is only possible if they share common values and norms, or more precisely, recognize these values and norms as valuable. Hence, recognition processes introduce dyadic relations and the plurality of persons into the very constitution of the self.

Although implicitly present, the role of personal scrutiny in the formation of identity is not directly addressed by Honneth and is a serious shortcoming of the theory. Indeed, in our view, relationality cannot be assumed as being the sole producer of identity even though it is the relational dimension of identity that we want to emphasize here. Identity—who we are—is something *we* produce for ourselves as a result of our interactions with others. The processes of mutual recognition, of being recognized by others and simultaneously recognizing others, are necessarily paralleled by processes of *self-recognition*. The fact that *I* too have to recognize myself as a valuable and individuated person cannot be overlooked, even if it is the interactions with others that render self-recognition possible.

As forcefully emphasized by Sen (1985, 1999), human beings are endowed with a capacity for reflexive self-scrutiny and this must not be neglected in any account of identity (Davis 2004, 2007). Although the making and

sustaining of our identity remains dialogical throughout our lives, this does not mean that our identity is formed or determined *by* others. Rather it is formed *with* others. Identity is not made in isolation, but is negotiated through partly overt, partly internal dialogue with others. Identity is inwardly generated, although it crucially depends on the dialogical relations with others and on one's position in society. This means that the dialogical structure of individuals is incomplete without a reference to the structures of society (Ricoeur 1990).

The three modes of recognition elicited by Honneth can be captured at a less abstract level by the notions of relational and moral goods.

FRAMING THE RECOGNITION PROCESSES IN TERMS OF RELATIONAL GOODS AND MORAL GOODS

Honneth's account of identity demonstrates that social interactions and the recognition processes they embody are essential for human wellbeing and flourishing. It is hence legitimate to consider that relationships with others produce what may be regarded as "goods." This notion of goods differs from the conventional use in economics; it goes beyond the restricted meaning of goods as commodities to encompass entities of an affective and moral nature.

Relational goods² have been defined as the outputs of a relational (cognitive, communicative, and affective) nature created by interpersonal relations (Bruni 2008; Gui 2000; Gui and Sugden 2005; Lopes *et al.* 2009; Lopes 2011; Uhlener 1989). As acknowledged by Gui and Sugden (2005), they emerge from human interactions in which the identity of the participants as *particular* human beings has affective and/or cognitive significance. The formation of self-confidence depends on one's experiences of relational goods. If one's personal relations create high levels of relational goods, one's trust in oneself will be very positive. In contrast, if these personal relations happen to produce relational bads, that is, in the case of non- or misrecognition, we will suffer from a less positive or even a poor self-image.

Instances of relational goods include perceptions of care, social support, friendship, and solidarity. There is overwhelming evidence that interpersonal and social interactions play a crucial role in our wellbeing (House *et al.* 1988). It is also shown that they constitute a major determinant of happiness

² We use the term relational "goods" as a generic designation. We are obviously aware of the fact that the intangible entities we term relational goods may in fact be "bads" depending on the way the interpersonal interactions evolve and on the conditions in which they take place.

(Layard 2005). But their influence on people's relation-to-self is less documented. The empirical work presented below intends to provide exploratory evidence of the association between the quality of interpersonal relations and one's relation-to-self.

Interpersonal relations do not produce goods of an affective nature only; they also give rise to goods of a moral nature. As referred above, the modes of recognition associated with the development of the two other components of identity-formation—self-respect and self-esteem—demand that a common evaluative framework be shared among the members of a given community. Indeed, it is the (formal and informal) shared norms and values that provide the standards of reference against which the persons' actions are assessed and recognized. Hence, actions and judgments that are in accordance with the commonly shared norms and values may be conceived as giving rise to “moral goods.” Moral goods are then defined as the outputs of a moral nature generated by the social interactions associated to the second and third modes of recognition.³ In other words, the notion of moral goods intends to capture the moral and ethical dimension of self-respect and self-esteem.

Self-respect and self-esteem have two distinct levels of analysis because there are two different objects—the norm and the person—that are subject to recognition (Ricoeur 2004). First, the norms and values that underlie people's judgments or guide their actions must be recognized as valuable by the members of the community. We are at the institutional level here. Norms and values are institutions, mutually held intangible entities that have an existence of their own, which transcend the particular individuals who endorse them. Second, the person and his/her actions and capacities are also subject to recognition. This is the intersubjective, interpersonal level. Recognition processes involve both instances that stand *beyond* or *above* individuals (the norms) and the interactions themselves, phenomena that stand *among* and *between* individuals. Social interactions hence give rise to moral goods—self-respect and self-esteem—which are enjoyed by the interacting individuals but which owe their existence to autonomous entities, the shared norms and values.

It is important to note that actions driven by moral norms and values very often demand reflexivity and self-scrutiny, and frequently result in actions that go against self-interest. Indeed, if moral behavior sometimes consists of complying with internalized prescriptions, in a rather automatic and non-deliberate way, striving to have our actions and judgments guided by moral

3 Here again, moral goods can actually be moral “bads.” Ricoeur (1990) relates self-respect to the deontological dimension of morality—moral norms, a sense of duty or obligation—while self-esteem is related to the teleological dimension of ethics—the desire to live a good life.

values often entails the exercise of reason and involves taking others' interests into account. As referred to above, both the processes of mutual and self-recognition require that the subject takes a stance toward him/herself. All recognition processes involve an autonomous and impartial evaluation of the rightness of the actions undertaken by oneself or others. This is in strict opposition with mainstream economics accounts of behavior as epitomized, for instance, in Bénabou and Tirole's (2002, 2003) conception of self-confidence/self-esteem.⁴ The production of self-confidence is framed by Bénabou and Tirole as the result of strategic actions aimed ultimately at maximizing one's utility. For example, in their models, individuals may boost the self-esteem of their co-workers or conversely downplay it in order to gain authority within the relationship. Although these phenomena no doubt frequently occur, that is, interpersonal relations are used in an instrumental or strategic way, our aim is to emphasize the fact that interpersonal relations are valuable in themselves—they are relational goods—and not mere means of obtaining a goal external to them. Interpersonal relations cannot be reduced to the economic logic of investment and returns. Neither can they be conceived primarily in competitive, non-cooperative and manipulative terms—the Hobbesian world. Rather, their affective as well as moral nature must be acknowledged and duly considered.

Finally, it must be noted that, although of a different nature, moral and relational goods are intrinsically related: no relational goods will ever be sustained without trust, reciprocity, and loyalty, i.e. morally driven behavior.

Instances of moral goods include: the perception that we are being treated with fairness and respect and treating others alike, having our rights secured, and feeling that our actions are valued. The studies that have documented the existence of a strong relation between affective relationships and wellbeing also examined the effect of being treated with respect and dignity (Diener and Seligman 2002; Ryan and Deci 2001). The association between the moral dimension of relationships and wellbeing is very strong and often stronger than the association with the affective dimension.

GOING BEYOND AKERLOF AND KRANTON'S CONCEPTION OF IDENTITY

Akerlof and Kranton's account of identity provides a guideline for the systematization of our perspective on identity. They view identity as a

⁴ Bénabou and Tirole use the two terms—self-confidence and self-esteem—interchangeably, with the same meaning.

motivator of individual behavior alongside the conventional economic motives. Identity is therefore treated as an argument in the standard utility function (Akerlof and Kranton 2000: 719):

$$U_j = U_j(\mathbf{a}_j, \mathbf{a}_{-j}, I_j),$$

where utility depends on j 's identity I_j and on j 's actions \mathbf{a}_j and others' actions \mathbf{a}_{-j} . \mathbf{a}_j and \mathbf{a}_{-j} determine j 's consumption of goods and services. Identity I_j itself is defined as:

$$I_j = I_j(\mathbf{a}_j, \mathbf{a}_{-j}; \mathbf{c}_j, \varepsilon_j, \mathbf{P})$$

A person j 's identity I_j depends, first of all, on j 's assigned social categories \mathbf{c}_j . The social status of a category is given by the function $I_j(\cdot)$, and a person assigned a category with higher social status may enjoy an enhanced self-image. Identity further depends on the extent to which j 's own given characteristics ε_j match the ideal of j 's assigned category, indicated by the prescriptions \mathbf{P} . Finally, identity depends on the extent to which j 's own and others' actions correspond to prescribed behavior indicated by \mathbf{P} . We call increases or decreases in utility that derive from I_j , *gains or losses in identity*. (Akerlof and Kranton 2000: 749, emphasis in original)

In this approach, the individual's assigned social categories \mathbf{c}_j constitute the core determinant of identity. Without denying the crucial relevance of social categories in influencing personal identity and self-image, we do not consider them the vital ingredients of identity-formation. While for Akerlof and Kranton identity emerges from the choice between exogenously given social categories and is sustained by the matching of one's characteristics and actions with the corresponding prescriptions, we conceive identity as emerging primarily from one's interactions with others and from self-scrutiny. As in Honneth's theory, we believe that one's actions and those of others \mathbf{a}_j and \mathbf{a}_{-j} , that is, interpersonal relations, are the most important ingredients of identity. In accordance with the perspective developed here, one's actions and those of others embody the modes of recognition bestowed on individuals, and hence the constitution of their identity.

Self-confidence can only be developed by interacting with others affectively—and positively. Relational goods, defined above as the affective outputs of one's interactions with others, are just as important to determining one's identity as assigned social categories.

In Akerlof and Kranton's model, \mathbf{P} represents the norms and values that guide and constrain social interactions. As developed in the previous section, we agree entirely that norms and values are crucial for identity-building, but

Akerlof and Kranton solely evoke *social* norms, hence discarding the fact that individuals also commit to *moral* norms.⁵ As underlined above, endorsing and committing to moral norms often takes the form of a reasoned deliberation about their intrinsic value rather than uncritical conformity. The disregard of the moral dimension of identity amounts to overlooking the human ability for reflexivity and self-scrutiny. In Akerlof and Kranton's model, individuals do not take a stand toward themselves (Davis 2007) or seem to engage in any process of self-recognition or active identity-building. Their role is limited to that of choosing between a number of possible identities, that is, choosing which prescriptions to adhere to without scrutinizing them.

Furthermore, "*identity depends on the extent to which j's own and others' actions correspond to prescribed behavior indicated by P*" (see quotation above). Akerlof and Kranton essentially regard social norms as constraints on behavior—hence the use of the term "prescriptions" rather than norms or values. Yet individuals do not necessarily perceive behaving in accordance with moral norms as a constraint; on the contrary, morally driven behavior epitomizes the very expression and affirmation of one's identity. Moral commitments are a means of achieving individuation and identity: "If individuals fail to make commitments to others, they fail to create a sense of personal identity for themselves" (Davis 2004: 22).

The perspective on the dynamic of identity developed here diverges substantially from that of Akerlof and Kranton. By focusing on social categories and prescriptions, Akerlof and Kranton's model ends up depicting the agent as overly socially determined and hence fails to acknowledge the individualized forms of self-esteem and identity. It is the very individuation process that is therefore overlooked—which is a serious shortcoming for a reflection on identity. The individuation process results from our qualities and accomplishments being different from those of others—and from others recognizing and valuing them as such. Moreover, our personal commitments generate at least as much identity as the correspondence of one's behavior with social prescriptions. Individuals are indeed socially embedded but they are also capable of reasoning and critically appraising the values and people that influence(d) them.

To sum up, the identity-building process entails (1) affective "dependence"; (2) endorsement of shared norms; as well as (3) reasoned scrutiny—

⁵ The difference between moral and social norms—as well as its relevance—is a contested issue, not discussed here. We simply assume that, although related, moral and social norms drive behavior in very different ways and along very different internal mechanisms.

being morally autonomous. Within mainstream economics, Bénabou and Tirole's (2002, 2003) account of identity strives, in part, to address all three features. Bénabou and Tirole indeed assume that individuals are largely dependent on social interactions but this "dependence" comes from their having imperfect knowledge about their abilities and capacities rather than because of the affective component of identity. Due to this imperfect knowledge, in Bénabou and Tirole models, individuals infer their self-image from the behavior of others towards them and from their own past actions. Therefore, self-confidence is produced, on one hand, by social interactions and, on another hand, by self-regulation, through processes of selective memory, balanced expectations regarding future realizations and endorsement of internal commitments. As in our framework, Bénabou and Tirole's agents are autonomous and active beings capable of self-regulating their self-image.

Although this approach has much in common with the one developed here, some fundamental differences must be noted. A first difference has been referred to earlier: Bénabou and Tirole conceive self-confidence as a valuable economic asset that individuals try to manage as efficiently as possible, while we conceive it as the output of interpersonal relations that are valued and valuable per se. But the most fundamental divergence concerns the role assigned to social interactions in the conception of the human agent. While sociality is introduced by Bénabou and Tirole after the individual is complete (Davis 2011), we assume precisely the opposite. As mentioned at the start of the second section, a self has to be developed before the individual is able to make choices and take decisions. Relations with others cannot be analyzed entirely in terms of strategic, instrumental, decisions because they are themselves constitutive of the self and of decision-making abilities. While it is true that social interactions influence the level of self-confidence and this phenomenon may to some extent be strategically managed, social interactions provides the very ground for the constitution of the self, in communicative rather than strategic interactions.⁶

THE EMPIRICAL STUDY

A vast amount of evidence on the relation between interpersonal relations and wellbeing has now been gathered by social psychology and happiness economics. Despite the recent interest in identity in economics, the relation between interpersonal relations and identity has attracted little if any attention. We propose hereafter to document the influence of two types of

⁶ We use here Habermas's illuminating distinction between strategic and communicative action.

interpersonal interactions on people's relation-to-self. Our hypothesis is that high levels of relational and moral goods are associated with a positive relation-to-self.

The recognition processes that ground the formation of identity are made of feelings and evaluations. The "Wellbeing Module" of the ESS, designed to capture people's experience of their lives according to both a hedonic and eudaimonic view, provide some—although imperfect—data on both dimensions. The conceptual framework underlying ESS conceives social and personal wellbeing as a process rather than a state and emphasizes the feelings as well as the functioning of individuals. Round 3 (2006) included 43,000 respondents and covered 25 countries.

Operationalization of Relational Goods, Moral Goods, and Relation-to-self

Relational goods can be captured through people's perceptions of their interpersonal relations. Our hypothesis is that perceived positive relationships and social support elicit self-confidence and hence a positive relation-to-self.

Three types of items were selected in the ESS to operationalize the notion of relational goods. Two questions cover neighborhood relationships (*Feel close to the people in local area*, 1 = disagree strongly to 5 = agree strongly; *Feel people in local area help one another*, 0–6). Two other questions relate to the quality of family time (*How much of the time spent with immediate family is enjoyable?*, 0–6; *How much of the time spent with immediate family is stressful?*, 6–0). And, finally, four questions characterize social and friendship relations (*How often do you meet socially with friends, relatives, or colleagues?*, 1–7; *Take part in social activities compared to others of the same age*, 1–5; *There are people in my life who care about me*, 1–5; (Do you have) *Anyone to discuss intimate and personal matters with?*, 0–1). It was necessary to recode some of the items so that the higher the coding, the more intense and positive the relational goods.

The notion of moral goods was operationalized using the following items: *Feel people treat you with respect* (0–6); *Feel people treat you unfairly* (6–0); and *Feel you get the recognition you deserve for what you do* (0–6). As before, some items were given an inverted coding in order to ensure that high values correspond to higher levels of moral goods.

A positive relation-to-self involves feeling efficient, effective, and confident of our ability to achieve our goals. Given the information available in the survey, six items were chosen as proxies for the relation-to-self dimension:

In general I feel very positive about myself (1–5); At times I feel I am a failure (5–1); I love learning new things (1–5); I feel accomplishment from what I do (1–5); When things go wrong in my life it takes a long time to get back to normal (5–1); and I feel what I do in life is valuable and worthwhile (1–5), with suitable recoding of the inverted items.

The Data Analysis

The data analysis consisted of two steps. The aim of the first step was to build indicators of our three notions so that the association between relational and moral goods and relation-to-self could be studied in a second step.

As most of the items are in ordinal scale, a nonlinear categorical principal component analysis (CATPCA) seemed particularly appropriate. CATPCA is an extension of the well-known reducing technique of principal components analysis (PCA) that can deal with variables in several measurement scales. While PCA assumes that the variables used are metric, and proceeds to the spectral decomposition of the (Pearson) correlation matrix, CATPCA relies on an alternating least squares scheme (Tenenhaus and Young 1985), iterating between a quantification and decomposition phase. Whereas the former phase seeks transformations of the original values that simultaneously satisfy the measurement level of each variable and best represent the relationship between variables given the current space decomposition, the latter linearly decomposes the space given the current quantifications. A Cronbach's alpha coefficient is calculated for each retained dimension, which is the largest one possible for the current configuration (Meulman *et al.* 2004: 55).

In a first step, CATPCA was applied on each of the three sets of variables, namely the moral goods proxies (set1), the relational goods proxies (set2) and the relation-to-self proxies (set3). As relational and moral goods are theoretically intertwined variables, we decided to separately build the respective indicators before making a correlational analysis. For the relational goods proxies, optimal quantifications were recorded on the data file and used as input for a linear PCA with varimax rotation in order to improve substantive interpretation.

The second step of the analysis focused on the association between relational and moral goods and relation-to-self. Our hypothesis is that high levels of relational and moral goods have a positive impact on relation-to-self. A multivariate regression model was estimated with relation-to-self as the dependent variable and moral and relational goods as independent variables. Standard regressors were also included (age, gender, marital, and

employment status and education). Countries dummies were subsequently introduced to control for cultural and societal differences.

RESULTS

First Step: Obtaining Indicators for Our Three Notions

The three items selected to operationalize the notion of moral goods were subjected to a nonlinear PCA and a single dimension solution was retained, displaying a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.704.⁷ The object scores thus obtained can be used as a satisfactory measure of the intensity of moral goods. As can be seen in Figure 1, the highest intensity of moral goods is found when someone simultaneously reports that she/he is treated with respect, gets the recognition he/she deserves and does not feel unfairly treated.

We can see from Figure 1 that the average profile lies around category 5, somewhat above the scale middle-point (3.5). Respondents with responses up to four (on a 0–6 scale) on all three items, for instance, receive a negative score on the moral goods dimension, whereas those with 5 or more on all three responses receive a positive score—which means that their enjoyed level of moral goods is above average.

All three items correlate strongly with the moral goods dimension, which means that the moral goods dimension reliably represents all the three items.

The eight relational goods items cover three different types of relationships: family, social, and neighborhood relationships. The eight items were first subjected to a nonlinear PCA in order to obtain the optimal quantifications

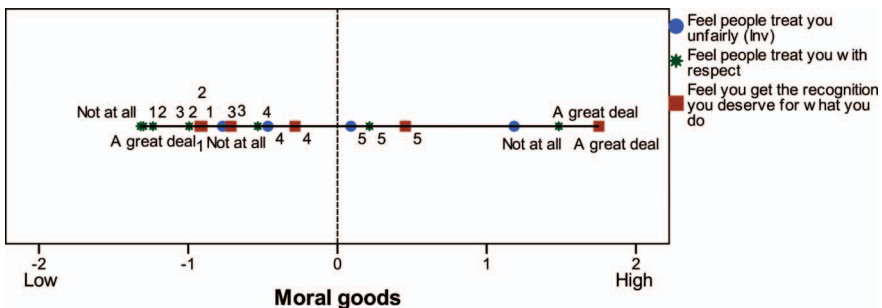


Figure 1: Structure for the Moral Goods Dimension

⁷ Cronbach’s alpha is a measure of reliability associated with the variation accounted for by the true score of the underlying factor. A threshold of 0.7 is commonly referred to as an adequate lower bound.

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for every category, and a three-dimensional solution was retained. Subsequently, both scores and loadings were rotated to clearly identify and interpret the structuring dimensions of the relational goods items.

In the rotated solution, the first dimension emerged as a measure of the intensity of social relations; the second dimension concerns the quality of family relations; and the third dimension concerns neighborhood relations (Table 1). It should be remembered that as individual scores on any of these dimensions are standardized, positive values are to be interpreted as above average, whereas negative values are to be understood to be below average. Subsequently, Cronbach's alphas for each dimension were computed using the items that structure each one most strongly. The consistency measures thus obtained are acceptable, though not very high.

Turning now to relation-to-self, CATPCA identified a single dimension solution with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.688. We can see from Figure 2 that the

Table 1: Correlations between the Relational Goods Items and the Relational Goods Dimensions (Rotated Loadings)

	Relational Goods		
	Social	Family	Neighborhood
How often socially meet with friends, relatives, or colleagues?	0.752	0.003	-0.023
Take part in social activities compared to others of same age	0.718	-0.070	0.063
How much of the time spent with immediate family is enjoyable?	0.059	0.819	0.094
How much of the time spent with immediate family is stressful?	-0.046	0.820	0.008
There are people in my life who care about me	0.398	0.349	0.170
Feel close to the people in local area	0.019	0.093	0.836
Feel people in local area help one another	0.095	0.044	0.830
Anyone discuss intimate and personal matters with	0.592	0.074	0.045
Cronbach's alpha	0.507	0.593	0.600

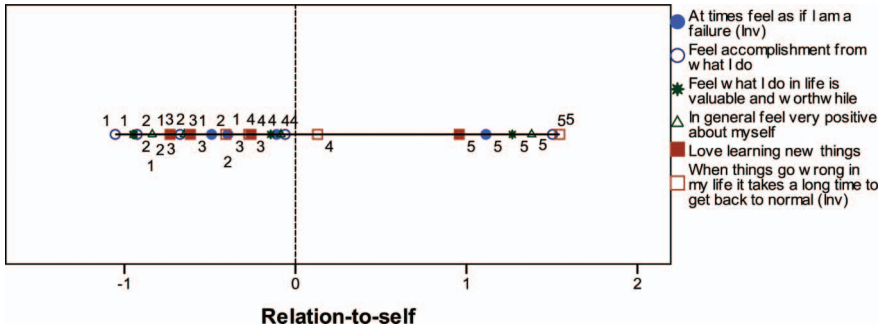


Figure 2: Structure for the Relation-to-self Dimension

average profile lies around category 4, above the scale’s middle-point (2.5). Respondents with responses up to three (on a 1–5 scale) on all six items, for instance, receive a negative score on the relation-to-self dimension, and their relation-to-self profile can be considered below average. Conversely, those with a positive score have an above average relation-to-self profile. All items correlate quite strongly with the relation-to-self dimension.

Second Step: Studying the Association between Relational and Moral Goods and Relation-to-self

The first regression model (Model 1) includes moral goods and the three types of relational goods as independent variables and also eight socio-demographic variables: age (metric); gender: male (dummy); marital status (three dummy variables: divorced/separated, widowed/partner died, and never married nor in civil partnership, base case category: married/in a civil partnership); employment status: currently in paid work of any type (dummy) and education (two dummy variables: low education level, ISCED 0–2 and high education level, ISCED 5–6, base case: medium education level, ISCED 3–4).

In Model 2, 21 dummy variables were included (base case: Germany), so as to control for unobserved heterogeneity due to country-level differences.

Table 2 presents OLS estimation results (standardized coefficients) for both models. The estimates are based on observations for about 41,000 individuals.

In both models, the (adjusted) coefficient of determination (R^2) is significant, although rather low: 0.213 for Model 1 and 0.251 for Model 2.

RELATIONAL DIMENSION OF IDENTITY

Table 2: Multiple Regression Models (Dependent Variable: Relation-to-self)

	Model 1		Model 2	
	Coeff	t	Coeff	t
Moral goods	0.298	58.639**	0.303	59.937**
Relational goods—social	0.131	28.342**	0.117	25.264**
Relational goods—family	0.168	35.400**	0.181	38.294**
Relational goods— neighborhood	0.050	10.559**	0.047	10.032**
Age of respondent, calculated	−0.102	−16.300**	−0.104	−16.724**
Male	0.053	11.731**	0.055	12.458**
Low educational level	−0.043	−8.709**	−0.050	−9.603**
High educational level	0.044	8.963**	0.050	10.349**
Divorced/separated	0.002	0.500	0.006	1.306
Widowed/partner died	−0.025	−5.007**	−0.018	−3.841**
Never married nor in civil partnership	−0.025	−4.490**	−0.019	−3.440**
Currently in paid work of any kind	0.052	10.532**	0.056	11.389**
Austria			0.056	9.794**
Belgium			−0.020	−3.643**
Bulgaria			0.013	2.546*
Switzerland			−0.007	−1.337
Denmark			−0.015	−2.939**
Estonia			−0.084	−16.008**
Spain			−0.069	−12.529**
Finland			−0.033	−6.159**
France			0.043	7.758**
United Kingdom			−0.056	−9.886**
Hungary			−0.038	−7.180**
Ireland			−0.041	−7.747**
Netherlands			−0.079	−14.635**
Norway			−0.079	−14.832**
Poland			−0.076	−14.098**

(continued)

Table 2: (Continued)

	Model 1		Model 2	
	Coeff	t	Coeff	t
Portugal			-0.033	-5.686**
Russian Federation			-0.055	-9.745**
Sweden			-0.083	-15.266**
Slovenia			-0.044	-8.471**
Slovakia			-0.081	-15.242**
Ukraine			0.000	-0.087
Adjusted R ²		0.213		0.251
F		928.57**		417.87**

Notes: **significant at the 0.01 level. *significant at the 0.05 level.

This suggests that relation-to-self is indeed associated to moral and relational goods but is also determined by factors not considered in the analysis (for instance, income, not provided in the ESS).

Table 2 shows that across individuals from a wide range of countries, there is a significant association between higher levels of moral and relational goods, and a higher level of relation-to-self. In terms of coefficient magnitude, the weight of moral goods is almost double that of the “family” relational goods, which emerges as the second most important variable. Moral goods hence appear to be strongly related to relation-to-self. As for the relational goods indicators, the quality of family relationships is significantly associated to relation-to-self, as is the quality of “social” relationships though to a lesser extent. The standardized coefficients for “neighborhood” relational goods are at most 0.05.

The influence of socio-demographic variables on relation-to-self is in general significant and comes as no surprise. Age is negatively related to relation-to-self as is being single (never married or been in a civil partnership) or a widow. The low education dummy displays a significant negative coefficient whereas that of high education is significant and positive. This suggests that relation-to-self increases with education. Having any kind of paid work—the proxy used for employment status—also has a significant positive impact on relation-to-self. Men seem to enjoy a more positive relation-to-self than women.

The results for Model 2 show that the country effect is also significant. The inclusion of the country dummies confirms the previous results as it does not alter the relative importance of the moral and the three relational goods indicators, and slightly improves R^2 .

DISCUSSION AND NORMATIVE CONSIDERATIONS

The aim of the empirical study was not to exhaustively identify the determinants of relation-to-self. Our objective was solely to illustrate our theoretical proposals by showing that relation-to-self is associated with the quality of interpersonal relations. The low values of the coefficients were to be expected. Indeed, as referred in our theoretical argument, one's relation-to-self is constituted over a person's lifetime, with childhood having a decisive influence on self-confidence. It seems legitimate to assume, as we did, that the level of relational and moral goods enjoyed at a particular point in time reflects the quality of the relational and moral goods enjoyed through life. Nevertheless, what can be captured today might be but a shadow of the outcomes of the mutual recognition processes experienced in the past.

However, the results undeniably point to a statistically significant relation between relational/moral goods and relation-to-self. One of the most interesting results is that moral goods is the most relevant variable, which suggests that the second and third modes of recognition, i.e. self-respect and self-esteem, are in fact most associated with relation-to-self. On the other hand, these may also be the dimensions best captured by our indicators. According to the results, family and social relationships have a weaker effect on relation-to-self.⁸

Despite the consistency of the reported results, the empirical analysis has several clear limitations. First, our analysis suffers from the conventional problems of endogeneity and possible inverse causality. We cannot rule out the possibility that the quality of one's interpersonal relationships is determined by one's relation-to-self. This problem could only be solved by working with panel data. Second, our measures of relational goods, moral goods and relation-to-self are very much constrained by the information collected in the ESS. More suitable data collected through a specifically designed survey should be used for further confirmation of the empirical findings. Ideally, the measures of relational and moral goods and

⁸ In effect, unlike most of the other questions used here, the questions related to the family relationships (namely E33 and E34 in the Wellbeing Module) showed evidence of poor data quality.

relation-to-self should come from psychometrically tested and validated scales.

However, the sample size is very large and covers a broad range of countries. Although low, the correlation coefficients are significant in all countries. Moreover, contrary to the common practice in economics whereby happiness or subjective wellbeing are measured by the responses to single-item questions, i.e. the happiness or satisfaction with life questions, our indicators were based on the responses to several questions that were subject to statistical treatment ensuring the reliability of the underlying construct.

Our main original contributions are (1) the distinction between different types of interpersonal relationships— affective and moral—and (2) relating interpersonal relationships with relation-to-self rather than happiness or wellbeing. In effect, many studies have documented the association between social relations and wellbeing, e.g. Bruni and Stanca (2008) provide evidence of a positive effect of relationality on life satisfaction; Becchetti *et al.* (2008, 2009) show that relational activity generates significant and positive effects on self-declared happiness; Helliwell *et al.* (2010) show that “having friends to count on” has a large and significant effect on wellbeing in all regions of the world;⁹ however, we know of none that relates relationality with self-image or any other proxy of identity. In order to verify whether our empirical findings are consistent with those reported in the literature we carried out other regression analyses where happiness replaces relation-to-self as the dependent variable (see Table 3 in the Appendix).

In both the “happiness” and “relation-to-self” models, the results for the control variables are consistent with what is reported in the literature. Likewise, our results repeat the findings of the above mentioned studies by showing that moral and relational goods, which are a measure of the quality of interpersonal relationships, are positively and significantly related with self-reported happiness. Two particularly interesting findings emerge. First, whereas social relational goods have the greatest influence on happiness, moral goods relate most strongly to relation-to-self. This suggests that relation-to-self is more cognitive than happiness, which is commonly associated with affect. Second, the inclusion of country dummies increases the adjusted coefficient of correlation in the “happiness” models (from 0.207 to 0.314) more than in the “relation-to-self” models. This suggests that the country effect is greater for happiness than it is for relation-to-self.

⁹ It must be noted that some of these studies have controlled for endogeneity and reverse causality. The use of panel data and of appropriate econometrical techniques allowed the direction of causality to be identified as going from relational goods or relationality to happiness/satisfaction with life.

Our theoretical argument focused mostly on the intersubjective dimension of the formation of identity. But interpersonal relations are obviously influenced by the social structures and the institutional arrangements in which they take place. We have argued that self-respect depends on the establishment of relations of equality and that self-esteem depends on the social valuation of personal skills and aptitudes. But the peer status in social interactions and the valuation of skills cannot be granted solely by one person to another: they are also conferred by the institutionalized models that regulate the social interactions. A normative agenda follows directly.

When pursuing the goal of advancing social welfare most economists devote considerable attention to the materialistic conflicts of interests that characterize our societies. In contrast, the relational consequences of economic policies are largely neglected. While it is obvious that the state cannot directly produce relational goods, it may promote the activities that are known to be intense in relational goods, such as volunteerism and other forms of social engagement.¹⁰ Economists have been discovering that *giving* money and time may yield as much or more happiness, life satisfaction and self-esteem as *getting* money (Konow and Earley 2008). Policies that encourage charity, volunteerism and community involvement should hence be strongly promoted. Personal interactions can also be fostered in many different ways, for instance by providing meeting places in the city centers, by regulating working hours and promoting work–life balance, by urban planning aimed at reducing commuting time, etc.

In addition, the recognition processes associated with self-respect can be promoted through appropriate legal and social rights—universal access to good quality education, health services, and social security—and through monitoring their effective provision.

The working environments are responsible for creating extensive (mis)-recognition processes. The conditions for the formation of a positive relation-to-self, i.e. conditions that allow individuals to be autonomous, treated with fairness, and have their skills recognized, can and should be created through proper legal and institutional provisions. With the possible exception of the Scandinavian countries, workers almost everywhere increasingly report that they feel disrespected, neglected, and even humiliated. The new management criteria actually lead to workers' interests being disregarded in favor of those of shareholders and clients. At the same time, interactions with others (peers, supervisors, clients) have acquired a

¹⁰ Volunteer work and participation in social activities are recognized by economists as being so intensive in relational goods that they are actually used as indicators of relational goods in many economic models (see, among others, Bruni and Stanca 2008, and Becchetti et al. 2008).

predominant role in almost all occupations. Put together, these phenomena suggest that the quality of the relational dimension of work has deteriorated significantly (Lopes 2011). Both public and collective actions are necessary to reverse the observed steady decline in the quality of working conditions. Indeed, it must not be forgotten that collective action and conflicts are important factors of social cohesion. Relational goods may emerge from cooperation as well as from conflicts, which have long since been recognized by sociologists as playing a crucial role in the nurturing of social links. It is through social conflicts that most of social norms and rules are reshaped and brought into being. One of the main goals of Honneth's (1995) book is precisely to draw attention to the fact that social conflicts throughout history have been triggered by collective feelings of misrecognition. Social struggles are often the only way to recover the denied recognition.

Economic analysis and policy have concentrated primarily on issues of efficiency so that material needs and desires can be met. We now know that this can be at odds with man's needs for relatedness and recognition. In fact, it has been argued that much consumption is driven precisely by unsatisfied belongingness and identity needs (Jackson and Marks 1999). Happiness economics has now robustly shown that growth policies may ultimately undermine life satisfaction. Higher income levels are associated with a tendency to overconsume material goods and underconsume relational goods. The time devoted to interpersonal relations is "crowded-out by the extension of markets to domains covered in the past by non-market institutions such as family, church and civil society" (Bruni and Stanca 2008: 525). Individuals may underinvest in relational activities and overinvest in income-producing activities for several different reasons: because the former are more demanding in terms of time and effort; because the relative price of contributing to the production of relationality is increasing; because individuals tend to underestimate their relational needs and overestimate the utility derived by consumption. Material growth has been overvalued and the negative side-effects that accompany it have been largely overlooked—and economists probably bear the greatest responsibility for this state of affairs. As Gui and Sugden (2005: 270) put it: "in the relational field, just as in the environmental, disasters have been and are being provoked by inadvertent or careless economic decision making."

CONCLUSION

To account for phenomena as yet unexplained by conventional models, in the last two decades some economists have taken increasing interest in the study of relationships with others and identity. Whereas the social nature of

identity is acknowledged by all scholars, its relational and moral dimensions remain largely overlooked. This observation led us to focus on *how* people come to form their identity rather than on examining *what* identity is or what/who people identify with. Two distinct strands of literature—the relational goods and identity literature—were called upon and cross-fertilized to give an account of the relational dimension of identity.

We define identity as how an individual relates with him- or herself—his/her relation-to-self. Our theoretical argument builds on Honneth’s theory of mutual recognition in which relationships with others powerfully influence one’s relation-to-self. Honneth’s notions of self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem—the three constitutive dimensions of one’s relation-to-self—are framed here in terms of having access to relational and moral goods. The latter are defined as the outputs of an affective and moral nature respectively, generated by one’s relationships and interactions with others. Relational goods and identity must be regarded as more than mere sources of pleasure—as assumed in Akerlof and Kranton’s (2000) model and in the “identity as utility” literature generally. They determine not only our wellbeing, measured in hedonic terms, but also our capabilities in a eudaimonic sense. It is therefore crucial to create the necessary conditions for the building of positive identities.

Based on data collected by the ESS, the aim of the empirical analysis was to illustrate the association between the quality of interpersonal relations and relation-to-self. Despite the many shortcomings of the information analyzed, the empirical findings confirm our hypothesis that high levels of relational and moral goods are associated with a positive relation-to-self.

In emphasizing the maximization of utility as individuals’ ultimate goal, standard economics contributed to dismissing the role of interpersonal relations in bringing about wellbeing and promoted the individualistic and materialistic spirit that characterizes our age. People everywhere are devoting less time to interpersonal relations in favor of the consumption and production of material goods. Economists should not limit themselves to “making science,” but should transmit messages that are sorely needed nowadays. Highlighting—and documenting—the relevance of interpersonal relations is no doubt one such message.

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APPENDIX

Table 3: Multiple Regression models (Dependent variable: How happy are you)

	Model 1		Model 2	
	Coeff	t	Coeff	t
Moral goods	0.198	38.685**	0.170	34.936**
Relational goods—social	0.254	54.740**	0.205	45.948**
Relational goods—family	0.142	29.504**	0.179	39.463**
Relational goods—neighborhood	0.063	13.180**	0.075	16.524**
Age of respondent, calculated	-0.062	-9.866**	-0.119	-19.824**
Male	-0.004	-0.832	-0.013	-3.115**
Low educational level	0.007	1.401	-0.017	-3.312**
High educational level	0.049	9.924**	0.020	4.444**
Divorced/separated	-0.073	-16.113**	-0.086	-20.166**
Widowed/Partner died	-0.107	-21.555**	-0.086	-18.669**
Never married nor in civil partnership	-0.017	-2.998**	-0.061	-11.274**
Currently in paid work of any kind	0.034	6.822**	0.000	-0.046
Austria			0.036	6.578**
Belgium			0.050	9.743**
Bulgaria			-0.171	-34.653**
Switzerland			0.068	13.287**
Denmark			0.071	14.264**
Estonia			-0.028	-5.517**
Spain			0.011	2.093 *
Finland			0.088	16.874**
France			-0.002	-0.394
United Kingdom			0.043	7.900**
Hungary			-0.071	-13.949**
Ireland			0.033	6.410**
Netherlands			0.040	7.669**
Norway			0.043	8.389**
Poland			-0.019	-3.638**

(continued)

RELATIONAL DIMENSION OF IDENTITY

Table 3: (Continued)

	Model 1		Model 2	
	Coeff	t	Coeff	t
Portugal			-0.093	-16.981**
Russian Federation			-0.120	-22.079**
Sweden			0.056	10.671**
Slovenia			0.011	2.113*
Slovakia			-0.047	-9.249**
Ukraine			-0.138	-26.434**
Adjusted R ²		0.207		0.314
F		888.417**		566.921**

**significant at the 0.01 level.

*significant at the 0.05 level.