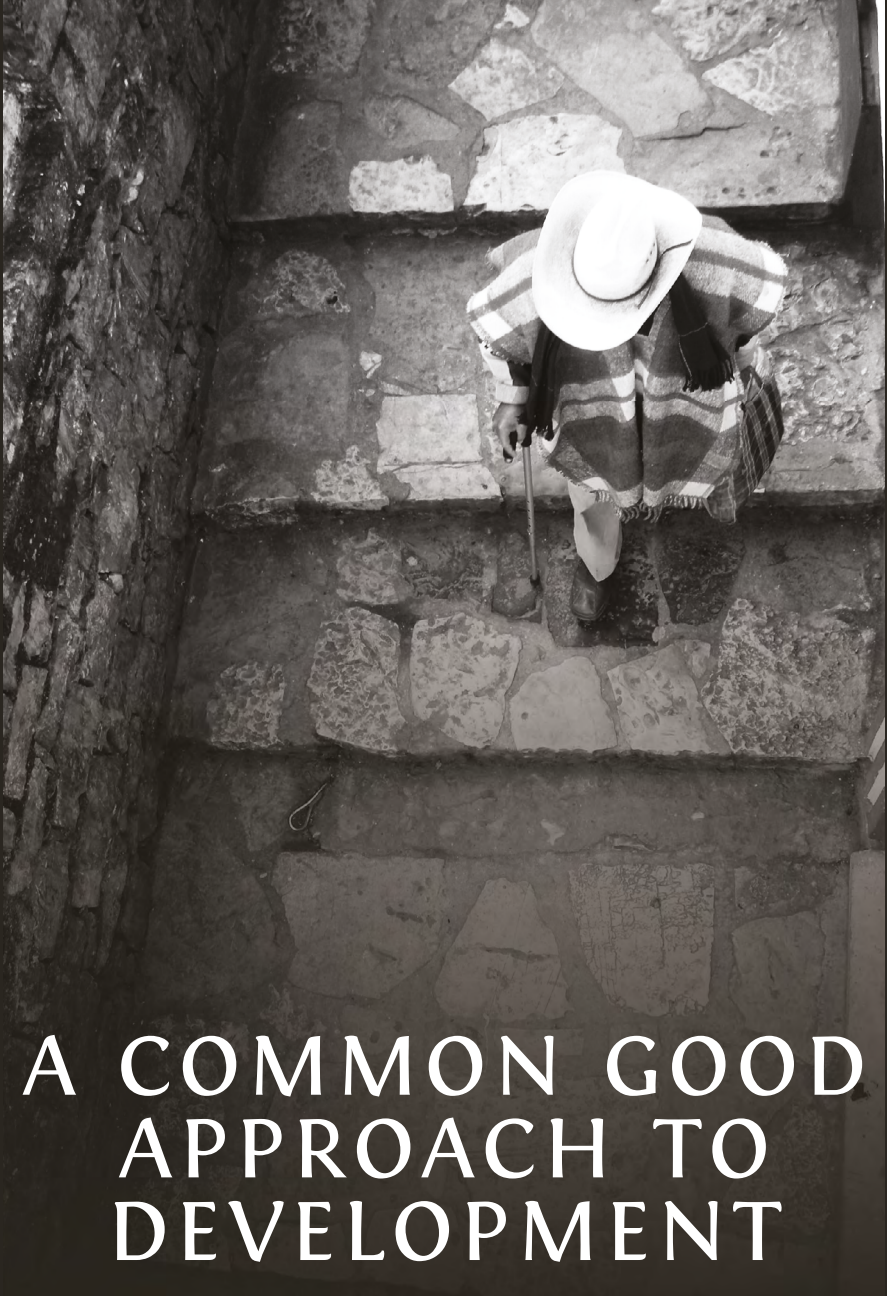


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A COMMON GOOD APPROACH TO DEVELOPMENT

Collective Dynamics of
Development Processes



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12. Assessing the Transformative Impact of Love-Based Microsocial Communities

From Existential Peripheries into the Nexus of the Common Good

Simona Beretta

This chapter draws a parallel between the macro-social dynamics of the nexus of the common good and the dynamics of personal agency within micro-social communities, where peripheral, vulnerable people experience stable relationships of personalised care. This parallel is plausible: authentic human and social development are both rooted in having experienced, at least embryonically, a possible answer to one's innermost aspirations—love, truth, beauty, justice...—and freely walk along that path.

This paper summarises our research on micro-social relations, discussing how they can contribute to understanding and measuring the nexus of the common good. Do transformative micro-social relations also generate a dynamic of the common good, and how? What can we learn about the inner dynamics of the common good at the macro level, by looking at the micro-dynamics of personalised relations of care involving vulnerable people? These are reasonable questions: one can argue that the good of peripheral people is also good for society (we find echoes of this idea in different visions—from Rawls to Christian social teaching); or even that peripheries are a privileged viewpoint for observing reality.

1. The Transformative Impact of Micro-Social Relationships

Care, human development and the common good are closely related. Human babies develop into creative youngsters and adults through personalised care. Accompanying marginalised or excluded persons along their path, with personalised care and support, can immediately better their human conditions, but can also empower them to become protagonists of their own lives, ‘dignified agents of their own development’ (Pope Francis 2015), and eventually active agents for the common good. The analogy may seem incautious, yet even caring for a baby is ultimately about enhancing, in due time and with due manners, the baby’s own agency. Over time, the initially one-directional care evolves into a well-rounded relationship, that promotes the common good of all involved.¹

The transformation of vulnerable people from passive dependence to dignified agency can be so deep, that we incontrovertibly speak of ‘success stories’. Here is one story: two young, Italian, formerly substance-addicted persons complete their rehab at Casa Famiglia Rosetta, a faith-based rehab community in Sicily, Italia. They get married, wishing their family to become a Casa for other people in need. They agree to move to Brazil, heeding a call for help from a local bishop, to serve as a ‘family-community’, and welcoming vulnerable people into their home. Another success story: an orphan child from Burundi, included in a schoolchildren’s sponsorship programme run by AVSI, successfully completes schooling in his country, and goes on to receive support from the Italian sponsoring family, until he completes a master’s degree at *Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore*.

Success stories can powerfully convey awareness of the potential transformative impact of human development initiatives that are based on relations of love and care; and narratives have a transformational power of their own.² Some questions, however, remain: can we provide

1 « Demandez à ce père si le meilleur moment /N’est pas quand ses fils commencent à l’aimer comme des hommes, / Lui-même comme un homme, / Librement, / Gratuitement. [...] Demandez à ce père s’il ne sait pas que rien ne vaut / Un regard d’homme qui se croise avec un regard d’homme. » Péguy 1911, p. 107.

2 Powerful narratives of transformative experiences are widely used in the humanities and social sciences; narratives indeed have a power of their own to affect behaviour (Collier 2016).

empirical evidence on the ordinary transformative power of care and accompaniment, beyond narratives of extraordinary success stories? Can we reach a deeper understanding of the inner dynamism of microsocial relations triggering human development? And can this knowledge provide new insights on what drives societal change, and even lessons for improving policymaking?³

We started tackling these questions, that in some sense mirror the questions behind the research on the nexus of the common good, in 2012.⁴ We built our methodology out of elemental anthropological premises: we feel good when we are loved, and bad when we are mistreated, or lied to; we basically learn to love by being loved and taken care of; to trust, by being trusted. Hence, our overarching hypothesis is that the tangible experience of receiving love and care can transform both material and non-material dimensions of life. We studied different experiences of accompaniment and care, performing longitudinal studies (time matters!) on how being exposed to stable relations of love and care within a community (relations matter!) can transform the lives of vulnerable people, both in material and non-material outcomes (Beretta and Maggioni 2017). We studied decision and choices of real persons, not 'brains in a vat'; people acting 'here and now', whose decisions encompass emotions and passions, beliefs and narratives, aspirations and hopes; real persons, in other words, embedded in relations.⁵

As we developed our results, we found interesting connections with recent strands of behavioural economics literature, that explore

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- 3 These research questions underline a number of connected research projects at *Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore* that were developed in the last few years, including a number of ongoing research projects (for example, the one titled *Working Out of Poverty. Accompanying the poor to become dignified agents of their own development*, in collaboration with UPAEP).
 - 4 This research line was initiated in 2012, a risky and unusual endeavour for economists, by Mario A. Maggioni and myself. Our enthusiasm benefitted from generous financial support by the Fetzer Institute, Kalamazoo, directed at the time by Larry Sullivan, Professor Emeritus of Theology and Anthropology, University of Notre Dame, Indiana. The relationship with him was surely transformative for us, so it is only appropriate to name him here.
 - 5 We are indeed rational, but in a sense that largely exceeds typical economic models, often implying a procedural rationality so narrow that 'even rats can do it', and 'robots can do it better': Beretta Maggioni, libro e special issue. Even when we need to decide in conditions of dismal ignorance, our choices need to be reasonable in some sense, well beyond narrow procedural rationality. The typical reasonable background we resort to is embedded in relations, as important advances in decision theory highlight as in Schmeidler and Gilboa 2001, 2011.

various channels through which social groups shape individual preferences, influence individual choices, and change social group dynamics.⁶ Particularly interesting was Hoff and Stiglitz's (2016) distinction between two paradigms that depart from standard models of maximising individuals: quasi-rational individuals, as in traditional behavioural economics; and what they call 'enculturated' actors, whose preferences, perceptions and cognitions are not given—as normally assumed in economics—but shaped within society: 'exposure to a given social context shape who people are' (2016, p. 26).

Sound anthropology recognises that we are persons-in-relation: with ourselves, with others, and with reality—which always hints at realities beyond itself. Each person can tell who she is by referring to the narrative of her personal history of contingent, multifaceted encounters: from birth (her genealogy) through all subsequent encounters (with things and people), up to the 'here and now'. I owe to Angelo Scola (Scola and Rusconi 2006) my introduction to the dialogue between Christian anthropology and the social sciences, with the powerful suggestion of defining the acting person as an I-in-relation, building upon Romano Guardini's reflection on polar oppositions (Guardini 2019; Ghia 2019) as constitutive of one's inner self (Scola 2006; Borhesi 2017). No aggregation of details can fully account for the 'incandescent nucleus' of a person's inner self.

Two polar oppositions are clearly in action in transformative experiences: body/spirit, and I/we.

Body/spirit: we are inseparably bodily and spiritual beings, a duality that does not contradict our uniqueness; we experience living in a body which is subject to the laws of nature, and yet we experience spirit transcending the cosmos. We realise and appreciate the symbolic value of material exchanges; we know the power of non-material drivers of material actions. We know that shame, dependency, and humiliation are particularly negative features of being poor, so that poor people 'rarely speak of income, but focus instead on managing assets—physical,

6 This line of research about individual/community interplay portrays economic behaviour as a 'reflexive interplay between economics and social forces' (Snower 2016, p. 1, presenting JEBO 2016 special issue), where identities, norms, and narratives influence individual beliefs and, consequently, choices. Narratives, in particular, seem to represent the crucial link connecting individual decisions to social influences (Akerlof and Snower 2016).

human, social, and environmental — as a way to cope with their vulnerability’ (Narayan et al. 2000, pp. 4–5).

The I/we polarity refers to the constitutive tension between individual and community, which is especially relevant for the nexus of common good: as individuals, we are distinctly unique, yet we recognise our belonging to the human family. Personal good and common good matter to us: the two polarities, I and we, are in dynamic opposition, not in static contradiction. While evil and good contradict each other (evil is not opposed to good: it negates good) the I/we polar opposition is such that each polarity does not exclude but rather presupposes the other; each cannot exist without the other. The two are inextricably connected, in a tension which offers no static conciliation, but keeps the concrete dynamics of human life going.

Living in a community means finding a dynamic path where the I-we polar opposition is neither resolved by annihilating the person in the community, nor by affirming the individual against the community. The two opposing polarities are not enemies, but opportunities for a process of comparison and dialogue; the polarities are the concrete path people have to walk in life; they are the practical form of living together that does not cancel differences, and does not eliminate conflict.

Another tradition I owe something to, in this regard, comes from Oriental cultures (Kasulis 2008), where relations (among persons, including relations enabling the possibility to know all forms of reality) are not represented as external connections between two entities (two persons, or a person and an object), like an arrow connecting two autonomous, self-contained, ‘integral’ realities. In the Oriental perspective (*kokoro*), relations imply ‘intimacy’, that can be represented as an overlapping of two entities.

A simple graph can help. Figure 1 represents the relation between two entities as the arrow connecting them, along an ‘integrity’ perspective; Figure 2 shows the ‘intimacy’ perspective, typical of *kokoro*.

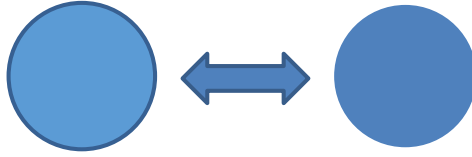


Figure 1. Relations: 'integrity' perspective as defined by Kasulis 2008.

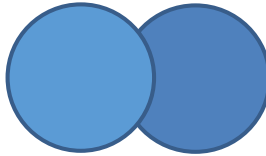


Figure 2. Relations: Kasulis 2008's 'intimacy' perspective.

When a relationship breaks up, the two entities are actually reshaped in the *kokoro* perspective, as in Figure 3.

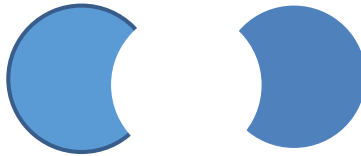


Figure 3. End of a relationship in the 'intimacy' perspective.

Not so in a 'Western technocratic' mentality, according to Kasulis. When a relationship is interrupted, only the arrow disappears from Figure 1, leaving the two entities apparently unscathed in their integrity. Thus, interpersonal relations tend to be conceived as if they can be built and dismantled at will, while relations with objects are a matter of control and instrumental use.

The Christian and the Oriental visions, where relations are constitutive for the human person, have curiously convergent implications for the process of knowledge, including scientific research. Both visions expose in different ways the limitations of the dominant (Western) technocratic paradigm, where knowledge is assumed to result from dispassionate (distant) observation of the object, which often needs to be fragmented

(dissected) to achieve a deeper knowledge (compare Western and Oriental medicine, as an example).

With some simplification, the dominant Western paradigm tends to be very effective in mastering details, and thus very efficient in solving particular problems (within the *ceteris paribus* assumption, as is normal in economics). But by methodologically and practically neglecting our interdependence, unexpected feedback is likely to end up spoiling even the smartest technocratic solutions—which happens all too often.⁷ The intrinsic limitations of a technocratic paradigm are especially applicable to human and social science, where overcoming individualistic perspectives is mandatory, as interdependence is the factual experience of everyday life.

A final caution: the distinction between an ‘integrity’ and ‘intimacy’ perspective is intriguing, but should not be taken as a matter of either/or, that is, as an exclusive choice. They *both* describe the relational dimension of humans, and will thus be more or less appropriate for understanding different situations. All relations are deeply ambivalent and a matter either for good or for bad; in particular, ‘intimacy’ relations can either accompany or frustrate human development; the closer relations are, the stronger the effects (think of care *versus* mobbing). In a sense, I would maintain that intimacy and integrity can be best approached as a polarity’s dynamic opposition.

2. Assessing Microsocial Transformative Experiences: Three Case-Studies

Our research on the transformative impact of care relationships on vulnerable individuals’ material and non-material outcomes is an ongoing, imperfect process of implementing a relational perspective.

7 Francis, *Laudato si'*, pp. 106–107 speaks of the globalisation of the technocratic paradigm: ‘... [H]umanity has taken up technology and its development *according to an undifferentiated and one-dimensional paradigm*. This paradigm exalts the concept of a subject who, using logical and rational procedures, progressively approaches and gains control over an external object. This subject makes every effort to establish the scientific and experimental method, which in itself is already a technique of possession, mastery and transformation. [...] [M]any problems of today’s world stem from the tendency, at times unconscious, to make the method and aims of science and technology an epistemological paradigm which shapes the lives of individuals and the workings of society.’

Studying experience and exposure of peripheral people experiencing community life requires actors to be observed in real life situations (lab-in-the-field approach), and in real time (longitudinal study). Which means that we could provide appropriate control groups only in some cases, and that randomisation was simply not a practical option. We especially aimed at capturing relevant non-material dimensions of personal experience; hence, besides collecting data on material situations and outcomes, we also collected behavioural economic choices, psychological data, and textual data. As observable behaviours (*a fortiori* experimentally observed behaviours) are only a proxy for real human actions, providing a very rudimentary tool for assessing subjective traits, attitudes, and motivations, we also asked people involved in experimental games to speak or write about their choices, providing comment and their motivations so that we could learn something about the *meaning* they give to their decisions.

The three case studies presented below appear, at first sight, to have very little in common. They refer to three continents (Europe, North America, Africa), three different forms of marginalisation (suffering from substance addiction, being in prison, being an orphan or vulnerable child), and consider three different forms of community support (small rehab communities for addicts in Italy, the GRIP offender accountability programme in Californian prisons, and the AVSI schoolchildren sponsorship programme in the Democratic Republic of Congo). All of these experiences, however, represent forms of community-based treatment; they are built on, and are aimed at fostering, personalised relations of love and care, where each person is so valuable as to be invaluable. Thus, they naturally resonate with the person-in-relation paradigm, where human flourishing and development occurs within personalised care relations, and where one feels the privilege of being uniquely loved. In each case, we applied modified versions of our multi-instrument, longitudinal methodology; our results, some preliminary and some already published, some very robust and some still tentative, support the relevance of the person-in-relation framework for understanding personal development.

Casa-Famiglia Rosetta and Community Rehab for Addicted Persons

Our encounter with the late Fr. Vincenzo Sorce was especially important in launching this line of research. A person of profound faith and culture and passionate humanity; a social innovator in the heart of Sicily, Fr. Sorce was immediately sympathetic to our project and trusted us to perform our pilot studies within two rehab communities belonging to the *Association Casa Famiglia Rosetta* (CFR), which he founded in the early 1980s.

CFR is both a powerful experience of love-based rehab,⁸ and a think-tank engaged in self-reflection, scientific research and dissemination concerning rehabilitation strategies and social policies⁹—which explains Fr. Sorce's support for our project. CFR is but a small network of rehab communities (a drop in the ocean of rehab needs). In the heart of Sicily, a story of micro-relations (Rosetta was the first guest to die in the home that Fr. Sorce opened for welcoming people with severe illnesses that lived alone) evolved into a socially and economically relevant network, a centre of innovative caring practices with an international reputation, and the first non-state employer in the Caltanissetta province—a Sicilian area with a stagnating economy and deep-seated mafia organisation. This is why CFR seems to me the perfect example to start with, in a chapter that aims at bridging micro-relations for human development and social innovation for the common good.

After completing the pilot study on CFR, we extended the study to other Italian love-based rehab communities; the full-fledged research project currently enrolls about thirty communities (Beretta and

8 We named as 'love-based rehab' those initiatives where personalised interaction in a small community is key, and where common rules are mainly meant to serve the purpose of living together. This is quite a different approach with respect to other rehab initiatives, which are centred on either individual treatment (typically pharmaceutical and psychological), or close peer control under strict rules ('rule-based' rehab).

9 See <https://www.casarosetta.it/>. The CFR network offers reception, care, rehabilitation and social inclusion programmes to people with physical and/or mental disabilities, people with alcohol, drug abuse and gambling dependence issues, at-risk minors or minors living in dysfunctional families, elderly people, people affected by AIDS, and women in need (housing, outpatient, home, extramural and daytime services). Since 2009 it is recognised as an Organization with Consultative Status with the United Nations ECOSOC.

Maggioni 2017). Treatment in love-based communities is quite simple. It consists in: (a) sharing daily life with other people in rehab, with the constant presence of community workers (both paid and voluntary workers); (b) following basic common rules (wake up time, common meals, time for rest) that provide an orderly space where relations can develop. Month after month, people in rehab learn back how to take care of relationships: first of all relationships with themselves (self-consciousness, self-forgiveness, self-esteem); then relations with the material reality (typically, agricultural work allows guests to see fruits, vegetables, and flowers grow as a result of their care).¹⁰ Later in the process, people in rehab learn to build relations outside the community, normally by providing service work and support to persons in need (for example, children with physical and mental disabilities). They also develop other social relations, especially through artistic expression or craftsmanship, and refine their previous job skills or acquire new ones in order to be able to reintegrate the society.

Persons in rehab can however always quit the community—and they frequently do so, because the rehab process is very hard work. Remaining in the community is in and of itself a factual indicator that something humanly convincing and attractive can be found there; strong enough to create stability and overcome the inevitable hardships of community life. The Italy-wide average rate of dropouts from rehab communities is over 70%; in our research, out of a batch of 195 valid questionnaires collected at the monument of entering rehab, only 73 valid questionnaires were collected in the second wave of interviews, nine months later. That is, 122 community members out of 195 interrupted their rehabilitation programme, with an attrition rate of 62.6% in nine months, which is lower than the national average but still very significant. Attrition is indeed a problem: despite clear qualitative evidence of rehab producing personal change in community members that remain in rehab, the statistical significance of our quantitative results is insufficient to support strong claims. For example, by longitudinally comparing the scores reported in the Dictator Game¹¹ (a proxy for generosity/altruism or for fairness/

10 *'Everything that receives love, grows'*, reads a stone set among the branches of a magnificent olive tree, in the orchard of Eremo del Falco, the community where Fr. Sorce lived.

11 In the Dictator Game, each agent is endowed with a given amount of a good (usually money; in our research concerning people in rehab, the good is cigarettes, as

inequity aversion), we see that the score increases over time, implying on average the emergence of a more generous attitude after treatment. The direction of change confirms our expectations (that rehab positively affects altruistic behaviours), but the coefficient attached to this variable is not statistically significant. We observe similar patterns (expected direction, non-significant parameters) in other behavioural indicators (trust, inequality aversion, gratitude, impulsivity) and psychological tests (self-esteem, self-forgiveness); but we need more robust empirical evidence. This is why the interview process is still ongoing.

What is the relevance of this case study in light of the nexus of the common good? After all, we do not get strong statistics, and there is no obvious control group. First, the case seems to me a paradigmatic example of how a common good dynamic can flourish: a personal *élan of freedom (agency freedom)* starts and continues building *durable relations (stability)*; this produces social innovation (*governance*), which becomes a durable reality only out of systematic critical reflection on the *how* and the *why* of everyday actions¹² (*justice; humanity*). Second, because it provides clear evidence that all dynamics of the common begin and rest upon the collective *élan* of freedom of a 'we', including the free decisions of addicts to remain, to do their part, and to reach the point at which they can reenter society as I-in-relation, as 'dignified agents of their own development'. This confirms the importance given to agency freedom in the normative model provided by the IPBC (see Chapter 2).

community members are not allowed to use money). The agent (Dictator) is asked to freely decide whether, and how much of, the endowed good is to be sent to the anonymous partner, who is known to have received none. Standard self-interested behaviour would be to give nothing; the Dictator Game investigates whether this occurs in real choices.

- 12 Open-questions interviews with directors, staff members, and people who have completed rehab in different communities allowed us to better understand their treatment. The variety of non-trivial words used in answering simple descriptive questions (about practical organisation, daily activities, and so on) signals the powerful emotional experience of community life, and offers nuanced descriptions of each community's identity. The remarkable prevalence of words such as 'love (*amore*)', 'respect' (*rispetto*), 'forgiveness' (*perdono*), 'communion' (*comunione*), in answering very practical descriptive questions highlights the key role of non-material dimensions in the rehab communities under study.

II. 'Leaving the Prison before You Get Out': The GRIP Program

The Guiding Rage Into Power (GRIP) Program is an offender accountability programme run by the NGO *Insight-Out*, active in San Quentin for two decades and currently operating in different Californian prisons. GRIP works as a peer education model, providing prisoners with tools that enable them to learn how to stop violence, to become emotionally intelligent, to cultivate mindfulness, and to come to understand victim impact. In the words of the NGO founder Jacques Verduin, GRIP enables prisoners to 'turn the stigma of being a violent offender into a badge of being a non-violent peacekeeper', 'becoming agents of change', that is, 'people with skills to defuse conflicts around them', thus 'leaving the prison before you get out.'¹³ The programme originates from the founder's vision that violence and unlawful behaviour are often connected to a previous lack of close relationships, or experience of violent ones. The core idea is to address each prisoner as a person, rather than merely as a problem; and to make them feel loved and respected within a community, without neglecting the gravity of the offence. Experience and anecdotal evidence about reduction in recidivism reveals that the GRIP programme has a considerable effect in helping prisoners to get a second chance in life, and to build sound and long-lasting relationships.

The programme usually spans an 'academic year,' and develops through fortnightly lessons, focused on specific topics, with four macro-objectives: stopping violent behaviour; cultivating mindfulness; activating emotional intelligence; understanding victim impact. Classes include formal lessons, group work, and participation of external guests. The key point of classwork is creating friendly relationships and a strong group identification: classmates, of different ethnicities and backgrounds, work together as a 'tribe'—the positive version of a gang. New interpersonal bonds within the (multi-ethnic) 'tribe' create a common culture of accountability and peace—a radical alternative to normal prison culture. The GRIP programme, by helping prisoners reflect on their lives, enables them to effectively experience the possibility of a different daily life in their externally unchanged, and quite hard,

13 See the website or the NGO: <https://grip-traininginstitute.org/>.

prison environment. Personal narratives and evidence available on the *Insight-Out* website provide impressive evidence of the transformative impact of the programme. GRIP ‘graduates’ *have* so much in common because they have deep experience of *being* in common (see the impressive videos of their meetings on the GRIP website). Moreover, informal and self-reported evidence suggests that GRIP graduates who return to society on parole (a small number, as most GRIP graduates are life-sentenced) tend not to come back to prison—or they come back as GRIP tutors. Reducing recidivism is quite an accomplishment from a ‘common good’ perspective, but we found it virtually impossible to access formal data on recidivism in order to provide hard empirical evidence, including for privacy reasons.

For our research, we interviewed both GRIP participants and a control group of inmates not attending GRIP, using a simplified, paper version of our questionnaire (Beretta and Maggioni 2017). Individual responses collected in two waves of interviews were analysed with a Difference-in-Differences technique, a statistical method which measures the effects of a treatment over a variable by comparing the average change over time in that variable for GRIP participants and for the control group. In particular, with a Trust game¹⁴ played using dehydrated soups¹⁵ as payoff, we showed that generalised trust significantly increased in GRIP participants, compared to the control group: unexpectedly, we found ‘trust behind bars’ (Maggioni et al. 2018). The results are robust for alternative estimation techniques, and for the inclusion of an endogenous behavioural measure of altruism (Dictator Game). Thus, in addition to its primary aim, exposure to an offender accountability programme build on strong community bonds also enhances inmates’ prosocial preferences: this result underlines the importance of community relationships.

14 We use a version of the Trust Game, also known as the Investment Game (Berg et al. 1995, Camerer and Weigelt 1988). A Proponent is provided with an exogenous endowment, and he/she is matched with an anonymous partner who has received no endowment. The Proponent’s decision concerns whether and how much of his/her endowment to send to the anonymous partner, knowing that the experimenter will multiply (triple) any amount sent. The Respondent, once they have received the amount sent by the Proponent, duly multiplied, will choose whether, and how much of the total amount received, to send back to the Proponent. The final payoff of the Proponent will thus be equal to the initial endowment, less the amount sent to the Respondent, plus the amount the Respondent sends back.

15 Dehydrated soups are both a consumption good and a sort of ‘currency’ in Californian prisons, where money cannot be used.

We also asked inmates to provide written comments on their behavioural choices. The linguistic profile of the answers is quite simple but highly informative, providing vividly different interpretations of inmates' behavioural choices. For example, inmates faced with a Dictator Game provide comments on their decision, clearly showing that the same observable behavioural choice may accompany very different narratives, such as fairness, generosity, reciprocity, and 'me-first' motivations.¹⁶ The longitudinal comparison of keyword incidence across GRIP and non-GRIP inmates shows different (at times, opposed) trends, once their comments are grouped according to their content: we observe equality and generosity increasing among GRIP participants, but decreasing for members of the control group; *vice versa*, reciprocity and me-first attitudes decline among GRIP participants and increase for members of the control group.

One can reasonably ask: do actions speak louder than words? This is an intriguing question, especially relevant when empirical studies collect self-declared information on behaviours and attitudes. On the one side, we know that talk can be cheap; but this is no reason to believe that quantitative behavioural parameters are the solution. The texts we collected severely warn us against assuming that behavioural choice can be mechanically interpreted, and tell us the full story about the dynamism of action.

16 Here are some examples: "I personally brought four soups, popcorn and a cookie for lunch today. I have plenty for myself and to share with others. I don't need the soup. So, without knowing the other person's situation I feel he can have these, and hopefully share them with others" (inmate AV006, who decided to give all ten soups). "I feel I am generous so I gave half" (inmate MC010, giving 5 soups). "Fifty-fifty seem the fairest" (inmate MC036, giving 5 soups). "Since I have ten soup for myself giving half to the other person would help him, would be fair plus I still have five for myself. Just how I would treat a celly or friend without anything to eat" (inmate MC011, giving 5 soups). "I really don't know the person. That is why I gave him four soup. If I knew him, I would maybe give him half of the soup or more" (inmate AV044, giving four soups). "Ten percent of everything I own I give to the Father. Ten percent of everything I own go to savings and eighty percent of everything I own is to splurge spend" (MC013, giving two soups)

Distance Support for African Schoolchildren: Does ‘Feeling’ Supported Improve Learning Outcomes?

The third case study focuses on sponsorship of international schoolchildren, which represents a widely used form of durable, personalised support from a donor (a person, a family, a school-class), to a child (and indirectly to his/her family) living in a low-income country and facing special challenges in attending school. While very little studied, this form of international support involves a significant number of donors and schoolchildren (9.14 million sponsored children in the world in 2017) (Wydick et al. 2017, pp. 434–458); tentative estimations suggest private financial flows to internationally sponsored children exceeding US\$3 billion annually (Wydick et al. 2013, pp. 393–436).

We decided to study schoolchildren sponsorship programmes activated by AVSI Foundation, an international NGO founded in Italy in 1972. We implemented a research project on the longitudinal outcomes and the possible transformative impacts of the AVSI Distance Support Program (DSP), which sponsors vulnerable schoolchildren worldwide (over 23,000 children have been sponsored through this initiative so far).¹⁷ DSP provides predictable money flows and allows for personalised relations between one specific child or adolescent, and one specific donor who can exchange mail and photos, and receives regular information about the child. Local AVSI officers in the destination countries design individualised intervention plans for the sponsored child, their family and community, and provide material support and accompaniment within a stable network of relations that are easily accessible to local families and communities.

During the 2015–2016 schoolyear, AVSI-DRC activated their DSP for the first time in Goma (Democratic Republic of Congo, in the Kivu region). This involved a significant group of new children, all of whom entered DSP at the same time, and attended school in a number of local educational institutions. This event posed a very favourable opportunity for our research: in Goma, we were able to collect longitudinal data for a sample of 309 children, 121 treated and 188 control, all attending ten local

17 AVSI's mission is to promote the dignity of the person through development cooperation activities, with special attention to education, in accordance with the social teachings of the Catholic Church. <https://www.avsi.org/en/>.

schools. More recently, starting in the 2017–2018 schoolyear, a similar ‘mass’ activation of DSP was applied in Rwanda, so we could replicate the longitudinal research in two schools (Munyinya and Nyinawimana) in the Kigali district. At present, the results for Goma have been both collected and thoroughly elaborated; we are still working on those for Rwanda.

In both Goma and Kigali, we formed control groups of schoolmates not accessing DSP on a ‘matching-pairs’ basis (matching in terms of school, class, sex, and age). In practice, for each schoolchild accessing DSP, we identified two other children as members of the control group. The longitudinal study collects individual surveys and personal information from the children (both DSP and control group) at the very beginning of the DSP ‘treatment’; we then collect them again after the completion of two schoolyears. School staff in both research situations agreed on providing (coded) information on school attendance and school performance, with the approval of children’s parents or legal guardians.

We used the same survey in the two studies, with minor adjustments in translating from French into the locally spoken language. The behavioural situations and games included in the survey are the Dictator Game, the Sincerity Test,¹⁸ and other simple experimental situations meant to assess the prosocial attitudes and preferences of children. Payoffs were delivered to children in the form of locally available packets of cookies. We also collected textual information, i.e., children’s own explanations of the reasons for their decisions to give (or not to give) packets of cookies to the other (anonymous) child in the Dictator Game. At the end of individual surveys, we also administered a ‘cookie’ version

18 The Dice Rolling Game measures sincerity/truthfulness in self-reporting. The agent is asked to report the results of a series of single die-throwing tasks. Before every throw, the agent is asked to choose, in his/her mind, either the up or down side of the die, and to memorise this decision without revealing it. With African schoolchildren, we opted for using two dice, one red and one blue, to make the test more straightforward to understand. After completing the throw, the agent gains the points corresponding to the side he/she declares. That is, the agent can gain by cheating in reporting the outcome, strategically declaring his/her non-observable choice after the throw in order to maximise the value of his/her rewards. Observing the average reported scores provides (stochastic) information about the attitudes of a given group or population to truthfully reporting a series of favourable/unfavourable events. The results are thoroughly analysed in Mario A. Maggioni, Domenico Rossignoli (2020).

of the so-called Marshmallow Test,¹⁹ observing children's behaviour with respect to self-control and delayed gratification. School principals were very collaborative: they introduced the group of external interviewers to the children, reassured the children that the interviewers were adults that could be trusted, and that the cookies were tasty, healthy, and safe. The bilingual (French and Swahili) interviewers were familiar with the environment of the children, and were thus well-suited to interact with them. They showed the children the alternative choices in a clear, visual manner, and transcribed the children's choices and verbal expressions in Swahili with French translation on a coded individual questionnaire.²⁰

Using microdata for the sample of 309 children in Goma, we applied Difference-in-Differences techniques to measure if, and how, schoolchildren sponsorship (DSP) impacts the children in question's learning outcomes, behaviours, and narratives over time. Thanks to the active support of school officers and local AVSI staff, we succeeded in collecting a broad set of alternative educational outcomes: performance scores (grand total, and four different subjects); failure rates; and school drop-out rates. The most striking comparison between the DSP children and the control group concerned learning outcomes: we found that sponsored children reported significantly lower drop-out rates,²¹ and

19 This test allows us to observe children's behaviour with respect to self-control and delayed gratification. Basically, children are provided with a packet of cookies; they will receive two if they do not open it while the interviewer goes away for a while (ten minutes). The 'Cookie' Test is a variant of the more famous Marshmallow Test, as described in <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2009/05/18/dont-2>.

20 The comments children provided for explaining their decisions for the Dictator Game are, as in the case of Californian inmates, quite illuminating. Children received five packets of cookies, and explained their decision, clearly pointing to the concreteness of relationships for them. The anonymous partner allocated in the behavioural game tended to make little sense to them. In some cases, they justified keeping the cookies in order to give them to other people than the anonymous partner: « *Je lui donne deux parce que je vais donner le reste à mes petits-frères* »; « *je donne un paquet pour que je puisse partager avec les autres enfants chez nous à la maison* »; « *Je lui donne un paquet parce que je ne peux pas priver mes petits frères et ces quatre paquets nous suffisent* »; « *je veux donner un paquet de biscuits parce que les autres enfants [schoolchildren that were not interviewed] me demanderont et je veux leurs donner* ». In other cases they clearly stated: « *je lui donne un paquet parce qu'on ne se connaît pas* »; « *je lui donne deux paquets de biscuits parce que je ne le connais pas* ». In other cases, they identified with the anonymous partner, who became a real person in their mind: « *je lui donne deux paquets parce que je l'aime, il est élève comme moi* »; « *Parce que l'autre aussi a faim* ».

21 Out of the initial 134 DSP children interviewed in the first wave (2015/16), only 8 dropped out from the sample in the second wave of data collection (corresponding

lower failure rates,²² with respect to their peers. As to grades, while lagging behind in terms of grades at the moment in which they entered the sponsorship programme, DSP children managed to catch up with their peers in all subjects over the two-year period that we monitored. These results are robust to the introduction of control variables,²³ as well as alternative forms of robustness check.²⁴

The differential improvement in performance of DSP schoolchildren deserves some discussion. What can we infer from this information about the relational dimension of children's experiences, and about the dynamic of the common good? By removing *external* constraints, in particular by guaranteeing paid school fees, school sponsorship after all simply provides 'equal' access to schooling; yet, despite attending the same school, with the same teachers, in the same environment, and for the same number of days (all of these variables were controlled), we observed a remarkable catch-up by AVSI DSP children. This evidence was indeed observed across all grades and subjects; it can be explained in terms of the alleviation of the socio-economic and sanitary constraints faced before sponsorship, but also in terms of the reduced uncertainty for DSP children about how they perceive their future ability to regularly attend school. Convergence in learning outcomes corroborates the idea that being supported (in material terms) and perhaps also 'feeling' supported (in non-material terms) makes the difference for them.

Our findings are in fact compatible with the suggestion that personalised sponsorship programmes (each child having a one-to-one

to 6%), due to their families' moving to other places, as we confirmed with AVSI. Once we looked at the drop-out rate in the control group, we found an impressively higher value, of 76 out of 264 children (about 29%). Even excluding the 22 control group children that are known to have moved to another school (and can potentially complete their primary education elsewhere), the drop-out rate for the control group children remains significant, at 21%. See Rossignoli et al. (2019).

- 22 The failure rate of the control group remains constant across the two observed schoolyears, whereas DSP children experience a notable decrease in their failure rate during the same period. While the share of children failing in 2015–2016 was significantly larger for the DSP children than for the control group, this difference becomes statistically insignificant by the end of the 2016–17 schoolyear.
- 23 DSP children and the control group are substantially balanced in terms of pre-treatment background features, with only the exceptions of likelihood of being orphaned, and of housing precariousness or inadequacy. For this reason, we included the corresponding controls in the analysis.
- 24 The results are robust after implementing a sound matching technique (Coarsened Exact Matching) that exploits the structure of the data to produce unbiased estimates and perfect ex-post balancing.

relationship with the sponsor, and stable relations with the local AVSI staff) may also alleviate *internal* constraints to learning, such as the lack of aspirations/hope that can be associated with the experience of uncertainty. Without the DSP, children may attend school at some point in time, but are uncertain about their future ability to continue attending, and can thus become demotivated. School sponsorship, then, can be seen as a way to support children's emotional development and agency, through the reasonable hope that they are not abandoned, and that they also have a future. 'Feeling' supported may play for children a sustaining role that is as significant as the material fact of 'being' sponsored: a less hostile anticipated future can reinforce self-esteem, aspirations, and self-expectations. The success story of the Burundi child (now adult) who I mentioned in the early pages of this chapter is an example of this process; our study shows that a similar dynamism can be observed as a statistically significant feature of DSP, and that this is observable even over the short timespan of two years.

In sum, I am suggesting that the combined effect of DSP (a stable relationship, encompassing monetary transfers and actual interaction) consisting in the removal of *external* as well as *internal* constraints,²⁵ can be a driver of differential impact on even short-term school performance, as we found over two years in our comparison of DSP children with their peers. Aspirations and hopes are indeed receiving increased attention as important drivers of personal development, and of development *tout court*. That is, non-material drivers of actual observable outcomes are key elements in the dynamic of human flourishing, possibly contributing to the common good of families, local communities, and society at large.

25 Our results resonate with one of the few research studies on school sponsorship (Wydick and Glewwe 2013; 2017), which finds large, statistically significant impacts of school sponsorship on life outcomes in terms of years of schooling; primary, secondary, and tertiary school completion; and the probability and quality of employment. This study also maintains that evidence suggests that these impacts are due, in part, to increases in children's aspirations.

3. Micro-Social Relations: The Incandescent Nucleus of Human Experience and the Nexus of the Common Good

The relational, dynamic perspective of our research on the transformational impact of microsocial accompaniment experiences quite naturally resonates with the perspective of this volume on the common good. In this section I would like to reconsider the methodological framework and the empirical results of the three micro-social case studies in light of the macro-social, more exquisitely political perspective of the research on the common good.

Here, I will highlight similarities and complementarities between the two research streams. They have been independently developed and pursue different aims; in many ways, however, they converge in contributing to a practical, dynamic, relation-based understanding of human and social development. As in the research on the nexus of the common good, we try to go beyond individualised, static measures, in order to appraise the dynamic process through which personal development occurs. In one case, we find compelling evidence of changes in personal traits and attitudes (GRIP); in another, we observe different trends in learning outcomes (DSP schoolchildren); in the third case, we are still in the learning process. In all cases, however, we seek to understand, within a relational perspective, *how* and *why* transformational outcomes are generated.²⁶ We are also interested in exploring the micro-social relational processes that are likely to produce *persistent* effects, rather than the one-off effects that are typical of top-down aid. The perspective of the nexus of the common good focuses on the *quality of interconnections*, and we also highlight the transformative potential of interconnections in order to understand human development dynamics.

Actions (rather than accomplishments) are indeed our focus: we are interested in the transformation processes that occur within factual constraints, uncertainties, and ambivalences, and are embedded in a

²⁶ Take the evidence of improving school performance (dropout rate, failure rates, school grades): this improvement could potentially occur for a number of different reasons—including exasperated competitive pressure and individualistic incentives. Same outcome, quite different driver!

story of relationships—with things, with others, and with the ultimate inner drivers of human decisions: the needs, evidence, aspirations, and motivations that encompass and yet transcend material conditions. I think that learning about human actions with reference to the micro-social, practical experience of vulnerable, peripheral people permits simplicity as opposed to complexity;²⁷ this can also be useful for tracing process in a common good perspective. Sure, the tools we have at our disposal for capturing the person-in-action (behavioural parameters, textual materials, psychological tests) are far from perfect; but even learning about how they connect, and about their shortcomings, is a worthwhile effort.

I found the normative dimensions of the pentagram very helpful in revisiting the micro-social processes we studied. At the core of both micro-social transformation and common good dynamics, there is indeed *agency freedom*—not in any abstract sense, but in the concreteness of life. The freedom of people in the nexus, or more precisely their personal and collective freedom to act, is set as one of the five normative dimensions of the matrix, and is described as the engine of the common good dynamic. From the micro-social perspective, the incandescent nucleus of the human heart drives human actions towards a ‘more’ human life, contributing to the inner dynamism of the nexus of the common good. In the love-based communities we consider, agency freedom (on the side of care-givers, as well as on the side of the people being cared for) is indeed the engine of both personal and social change; durability and *stability* of community relationships is key in the care itself; and *humanity* is a very appropriate name for what protagonists (again, both care-givers and the people being cared for) achieve by living their story together. Each of the five elements of the pentagram is discussed below.

27 ‘The complexity of the experience of man is dominated by this intrinsic simplicity. [...] The whole experience, and consequently the cognition of man, is composed of both the experience that everyone has concerning himself and the experience of other men [...] All this tends to compose a whole in cognition rather than to cause complexity.’ Wojtyła 1979, p. 8.

I. Agency Freedom, and the I-We Dynamism

There is a very interesting passage in the foundational paper, identifying agency freedom in the nexus as a collective achievement and duty (See Chapter 2). That is, in the nexus, we are free together because we all value that freedom (this is a powerful vision, quite different from social contract theories, where the collective dimension amounts to the aggregation of individual freedoms—which may, or may not, converge into common agency). As a consequence, ‘individual and collective agency freedom are considered as concomitant, it is pointless to disentangle the two... we are born in social relationships that shape the acquisition of our own personal freedom’ (Nebel and Medina in Chapter 2; see also Chapter 4).

We are indeed social beings; however, some disentanglement and discussion of how personal and collective freedoms relate to each other may be appropriate. In fact, harmony between individual and collective dimensions is a possibility, not a necessity; and relationships are ambivalent—they are desired, but also feared, the more so the closer they are. In my view, the I-we polarity can usefully complement, clarify and dynamise the relation between personal good and social good: the two are not contradictory, but they do remain in dynamic tension with each other, as long as our life in common is preserved.

I also have some comments on the observation that external constraints, including those connected with social and political institutions, can condition or even coerce human actions. In a society of slaves, no dynamic of the common good can exist (see Chapter 4). This remark about slavery is obviously more than justified, at a time where human trafficking, child labour and forced labour are booming once again. Slavery is taking new forms, but produces the same devastating impact on agency and human rights as the slave-ships of old.

The expression ‘slavery’, however, brings to my mind other forms of (inner) slavery that may exist with no externally apparent constraints to one’s agency—indeed, they may resemble free choices. For example, slavery of addictive behaviours, old and new, is in seeming expansion today. The same can be said for slavery born out of different forms of idolatry: pursuing one limited goal, say money, at whatever cost.²⁸ In

28 See the opening images of Salgado’s movie, *The Salt of the Earth*: are those persons slaves? Are they ‘free’ slaves, living in self-imposed slavery?

the Western world, we often worship exasperated individualism and freedom of choice (the kind of static freedom that applies better to supermarket choices, than to interpersonal relations). As with all idolatries, individualism also risks falling into its own trap, albeit at different stages: initial euphoria at being master of one's life; freely choosing to experience short-lived, instrumental relations with others; at some point, incapacity to admit to one's need for help; finally, utter loneliness. 'Single, not sorry' is indeed a widely popular, but very short-run slogan.²⁹ Static freedom of choice, nevertheless, is not the only kind of freedom we can experience. When we recognise the fact that structurally we are persons-in-relation (with our innermost being, with nature, with others, with ultimate meanings), self-determined forms of slavery may not be the ultimate word. Dynamic freedom, the kind of freedom that does not fear living the I-we polar tension, can always regenerate the possibility of human agency. After all, we have ascertained that this regeneration is possible, as people can sustainably exit addiction, and 'leave prison before getting out'.

What about situations where people experience external conditions that severely limit personal and collective agency? Freedom of choice and expression might be brutally restricted; yet, external slavery cannot quench the incandescent nucleus of the persons-in-relation. We know, for example, that the Gulag and Auschwitz did witness extreme forms of cruelty and suffering, but also luminous experiences of humanity. One may recall some of Solzhenitsyn's characters in action; or Maximillian Kolbe's free decision to give up his life for saving a neighbour: this is the kind of freedom that is borne out of love. In addition, we can observe that sparks of humanity tend to be contagious: in recent years, Vietnamese prison authorities were forced to frequently change Card Van Thuận's custody agents, because his hope and serenity—amidst cruel treatment—kept transforming custody agents' attitudes, from harshness into kindness.

Using the words of a self-declared non-believer, Vaclav Havel, all that is needed for the incandescent nucleus to change reality is 'living

29 In the UK, the Minister for Loneliness Tracey Crouch speaks of loneliness as a generational challenge, affecting people of all ages and backgrounds. See the 2020 report at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/loneliness-annual-report-the-first-year/loneliness-annual-report-january-2020--2>.

in truth' (1989). In his essay 'The Power of the Powerless', Vaclav Havel (1985) tells the tale of a greengrocer—a fictional character, quite impressive in his realism—to explain what it is to resist a totalitarian power: as totalitarianism and post-totalitarianism thrive by manipulating all expressions of life, any free expression of life can indirectly threaten the system. Here is the greengrocer's story:³⁰ the manager of a fruit-and-vegetable shop routinely places in his window, among the onions and carrots, the slogan: '*Workers of the world, unite!*' He has been doing this for years, as one of the thousand details that guarantee him a relatively tranquil life 'in harmony with society'. Then, one day something in our greengrocer snaps. He rejects the ritual and breaks the rules of the game. He discovers once more his suppressed identity and dignity. He gives his freedom a concrete significance. His revolt is an attempt to live within the truth. Now, the greengrocer has not committed a simple, individual offense, isolated in its own uniqueness; but something incomparably more serious. By breaking the rules of the game, he has exposed it as a mere game. Havel concludes the essay with a quite serious political statement: 'One thing, however, seems clear: the attempt at political reform was not the cause of society's reawakening, but rather the final outcome of that reawakening' (Havel 1985, p. 43).

This story has a powerful message: the greengrocer's incandescent nucleus, rooted in the elemental sense of one's true self within a community, can be stronger than totalitarianism—especially the sneaky version of it, which leads people to be content with passive conformism. There is indeed an ultimate point of reawakening of humanity that we can call upon, at the micro and macro levels, in any circumstance, even in the soft kind of conformism masked as freedom of choice that we live in, especially in Western countries. Individual creativity (the person-in-action) embedded in a story of meaningful relations (the person-in-relation) can transform reality. Lasting relationships are especially important: individual persons choosing to act as a 'we' (creative minorities, community agencies, development partnerships, cooperatives, etc.) can generate sustained social innovation from the local to the global level. As they create communities of care, they can also engage in conflict management and peacebuilding; as they care

30 What follows is a summary that tries to use Havel's own expression as much as possible.

for their immediate environment, they can also contribute to global sustainability.

II. Justice and Love

Chapter 2 recalls that justice as participation, solidarity, and inclusion cannot be proclaimed by law: rather, collective habits of justice and solidarity are the true books where justice is safeguarded. Books and habits, law and love, however, are not simple opposites of each other: they are also polarities in dynamic tension. The reawakening of society, participation, solidarity, and inclusion may require a vital process of learning in order to become collective habits, and to eventually find their way into books. Each generation must do its part in building just and inclusive institutions, in learning from the wisdom, and the failures, of previous generations; however, when habits are not transmitted (Bellamy 2014), books (formal rules) may even come handy.

In the case of rehab communities, we register the (successful) existence of both rule-based, and love-based communities. Now, both caring attitudes and rules are necessary in any form of coexistence, be it a family or a rehab community. On the one hand, rehab can work by trusting formerly addicted persons to act appropriately, persuading them by loving oversight to respect the basic rules of the community, including their daily schedule (when they wake up, work and eat); prohibited activities (drugs); limited activities (maximum number of cigarettes per day), and so on. On the other hand, rehab can also work when participants have to obey the strict rules of the community, with zero tolerance; rules that may include wearing uniforms, having no personal belongings, spending the closely structured day within a predetermined group of peers (that share a common room, common work, and must agree on common use of their free time). We have discovered that both of these paths can lead to personal rehabilitation.

When we initially thought to assess the transformative impact of experiencing love-based treatment, we imagined that real rehab communities could be located, along a hypothetical line, on a continuum from rule-based to love-based communities; for our empirical work, we would have liked to compare the transformative impact of the two kinds. Rethinking our research today in light of common good dynamics, I see

that both love-based care and respect for rules (the former resembling a collective habit, the latter being more similar to ‘justice by the book’) are indeed polarities in the dynamism of rehab practices, and not simple alternatives. Love and rules are and remain in reciprocal tension: they are both necessary, and neither side can be overcome by the other.³¹ Their tension, as polar oppositions, can only be solved at a higher level (one might name this higher level ‘gratuitousness’, or ‘generative attitudes’).

In the case of Californian prisons, the link with the issue of justice is very evident. A prison is indeed a community, and its own common good has unique features. Rules are very strict—both legal rules and deep-seated informal rules, especially those concerning inter-ethnic and peer relations. What we learnt about the GRIP experience can exemplify what a broad notion of justice in prison, based on upholding the dignity of each person, implies. A ‘just’ prison should not be about society’s revenge, and punishment; it should stand for offenders’ rehabilitation: self-awareness, and awareness of victim impact; and for restoration, including re-entry into society. Restorative justice has been gaining growing attention in peace-building, post-conflict and post-dictatorial situations—thus, it is key for thinking about the common good in society. Restorative justice belongs to both traditional reflection—including notable illuminists such as Cesare Beccaria—and ideal practice—for example, ‘*Vigilando redimere*’ is the motto of Italian custody agents (despite the well-known lamentable state of many Italian prisons). Safeguarding restorative justice, and similarly safeguarding justice as participation, solidarity and inclusion, requires us to address the micro-social foundations (education, accompaniment) that can practically regenerate institutions from within.

III. Forgiveness: Regenerating Social Bonds

Dysfunctional individuals, dysfunctional families, and dysfunctional communities exist. Even more dramatically, their existence tends to exhibit self-reinforcing features, leading to vicious cycles. Addiction is an all too obvious example. Think of corrupt or violent communities:

31 Being a parent provides a very vivid representation of what it means for love and rules to be in a generative tension with each other in practical daily life, and shows that no ‘middle of the road’ can provide a theoretical, perfect solution to that tension.

their inner dynamics are equally likely to perpetuate corruption and violence. It is very difficult to break with common habits and distance oneself from behaviours that are so widespread as to be perceived as 'normal'; and it is very easy for a member of a corrupt community to slip back into common habits, even when trying to change.

What about the common good in these situations? For these persons and communities, only a complete change of path, a full U-turn, will work. How can vicious spirals that perpetuate violence, corruption, and addiction be interrupted and reversed?

In studying community accompaniment for addicts and for inmates, we soon learnt about the key role of forgiveness: forgiving and being forgiven. When we initially spoke with founders of rehab communities, they underlined the importance that, first of all, people in rehab could forgive themselves; and also, forgive those they felt had had a role in their fall into addiction.

We later learnt that self-forgiveness, and asking for forgiveness, is also key in GRIP. Mindfulness in GRIP starts in fact with measuring time, and answering two questions: how much time it took me to commit the violent crime for which I am in prison (a few minutes, maybe?); and how much time I have already spent in prison (years, or decades). Each GRIP 'tribe' is named after a number, equal to the total number of years (often hundreds!) that its members have spent in prison. Through this exercise, the tribe members recognise, as individuals and as a community, that 'they are not their crime'. Concretely experiencing that this does happen in the 'tribe' is quite a U-turn for inmates.

We also learnt that the word 'forgiveness' cannot be taken lightly. We cannot expect acts of forgiveness to happen just because we rationally 'see' that they are necessary. In Italian, the word '*per-dono*' means the highest form of gift (*dono*). One can even say that forgiveness is the single act that can only happen in the most incandescent part of our inner nucleus—where our heart most deeply yearns for infinite love, truth and beauty. We also learnt that forgiveness does indeed have the power to transform, and to heal, both the forgiven and the forgiver. This transformation is especially necessary when we encounter dysfunctional persons, families, and communities.

The metric of the common good, as developed in the pentagram, is about measuring, but also supporting, functional local communities

in their collective discernment, and their common action. Should it be applied to dysfunctional communities, I think that the role of forgiveness could be made more explicit in the metric.

IV. Stability, Resilience and Care

The foundational chapters (Chapter 1 and 2), very appropriately, underline the need for relational stability, referring to those relations that bring about human flourishing. Our research quite naturally resonates with this point, and with the repeated emphasis on the need to transmit a common narrative about what it is to be human. As mentioned above, we need the living transmission of community culture. Here, the key word seems to me to be the adjective 'living': transmission of a living memory is in fact an act that changes both those who hand down the memory, and those who receive it. Once again, the I-we polar tension is at work.

Living transmission of memory can favour innovation in continuity, and this is very important. However, individual people and communities that are trapped in addiction, violence, vulnerability, marginalisation, or exclusion, definitely need to experience discontinuity in their life, so as to move from abandonment into care and accompaniment. They need to encounter once again someone who can vividly communicate what it is to be human. In less extreme situations, the transmission of a community culture about the sense of humanity may be fading because words keep being repeated, but their inner fire is too pale: once again, some sort of discontinuity is once again necessary. A living minority that simply upholds what it is to be human can become an agent of regeneration through discontinuity, like Havel's greengrocer.

Offenders in Californian prisons tend to be the product of gang violence, and gangs are known to develop their own culture, which is often trapped in an 'us-them' confrontation. People in Italian rehab communities are often former inmates, with different national and religious backgrounds. Yet, we observe that encounters with and experiences of durable care in love-based communities can be transformative for them. How can this happen? What common narrative about being human can be transmitted? Especially for dysfunctional individuals, and possibly for dysfunctional communities, we need to

turn to the deepest layer we have in common, to the inner, incandescent nucleus of humanity. The fundamental common *enracinement* is the elemental experience of being human—an experience that is both totally singular, and truly universal, common to all.

Transmitting the common memory of what it is to be human within living experience of personalised care can be both the source and the fulfilment of transformative experiences. Speaking of care, what we learn at the micro-social level may also be relevant at macro-social levels. We can draw a parallel between caring for each other, and caring for the nexus of the common good. We know that the nexus of the common good of a given community can be disrupted, for instance by carelessness in preserving a living memory of its origin (I cannot help but think of the European Union). Politics is indeed about care: citizens need to both avail themselves of the existing nexus of the common good, and take care of it.³² Once again, let me use the example of Charta 77: caring that the existing Helsinki Declaration be respected in Czechoslovakia, and making it possible for people to avail themselves of the declaration's provisions, can bring about an epochal, and bloodless, revolution.

V. Humanity and Listing the Goods that Provide the Common Good

In Chapter 4, humanity is defined as the overarching good resulting from the common good dynamics, the good that is immanent to the interactions within the nexus. Movement towards the universal common good, such as an achievement, is also a return to the original common good we share by being members of the human family: the elemental experience of humanity. The living experience of our own incandescent nucleus is the most precious 'given' reality that the all-of-us has in common. This given common provides the basis for the I-we polar opposition that drives agency freedom.

In discussing humanity, Chapter 2 also provides a list of the core set of common goods that structure personal rationality and freedom, and a list of basic common goods conducive to a good life, which

32 'To take a stand for the common good is on the one hand to be solicitous for, and on the other hand to avail oneself of, that complex of institutions that give structure to the life of society, juridically, civilly, politically and culturally, making it the *polis*.' Benedict XVI, *Caritas in veritate*, 2009, n. 7.

captures human values and expresses human aspirations whose concrete practice signals the humanising features of the nexus. Lists are obviously necessary, but they deserve careful drafting; they need to be well-thought-out, and at the same time considered with sound humility: no list can truly encompass all that we need to experience the fullness of humanity.

In the current consensus on goals and targets for the international community, and in view of sustainable development (a very ambitious overarching aim, yet not as much as a 'global common good'), I see the practical risk of short-circuiting, where pursuing any of the 169 targets is by definition good enough for building the global common good. It is true that refined theoretical discourses about sustainable development specify that the SDGs should not be understood as a list, because sustainable development should be pursued from a holistic perspective, since individual targets are clearly disparate from one another. Yet, a realistic description of operational steps, based on decisive processes as they practically unfold, leads us back to the short-circuit: any policymaker—just like any non-state actor—will select actions out of the list of SDGs.³³ Thus, some targets will inevitably be more likely to be pursued: because they are more politically attractive, either domestically or internationally; or easier to fund; or for other reasons entirely. Obviously, it's better to build actions upon an agreed list than to openly disagree. But a list, at the end of the day, remains a list—not a nexus.

Conclusion

The common good of a micro-social community and of society at large cannot be captured in a set of external conditions to be met, as if the *how* and the *why* did not matter. It is the process of pursuing the actual good of the all-of-us living together in families, neighbourhoods, associations, political communities, from small to large, to the family of nations. It is a good generated by concrete human interactions (which are always imperfect), and embedded in the most elemental common good we all share to start with: our existence as human beings.

33 Even the outcomes of academic research tend to be classified with reference to one or more SDGs—meaning that the seventeen SDGs are indeed a list!

Human and common development are indeed in reciprocal dynamism, and they both share in the same paradox, in the same polar opposition: already, and not yet. We have not yet reached, and we strive to reach in fullness, that with which we have already been endowed: the incandescent nucleus of our own humanity.

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