



## *The Relational Subject*

More and more social theorists are now calling themselves ‘Relational Sociologists’, but they mean entirely different things by this term. It can cover anything from reductionist methodological individualism to a form of holistic sociological imperialism that deems all our relations to be exclusively ‘social’. The majority, however, endorse a ‘flat ontology’, dealing exclusively with dyadic relations. Consequently, they cannot explain the context in which relationships occur despite there being no such thing as context-less action. It also means that the outcomes of relationality can be explained only as the result of an endless series of ‘transactions’, whose aggregation would somehow account for social stability and change. The approach of this book is quite different, in regarding ‘the relation’ itself as an emergent property, with internal causal effects upon its participants and external ones on others. A second difference is that many of these ‘Relationists’ appear unaware that analytical philosophers, such as John Searle, Margaret Gilbert, and Raimo Tuomela, have spent twenty years trying to vindicate a concept of the ‘We’ that gives rise to commitment, cooperation, and collective action; one that also generates deontic rights: obligations, rights, and duties. Uniformly, they have worked on different versions of shared intentionality. In this book, however, ‘We-ness’ is held to derive from subjects’ reflexive orientations towards the emergent relational ‘goods’ and ‘evils’ they themselves generate – then affecting their actions in a couple, a work group, sport’s team, orchestra, voluntary association or social movement. Both authors could be called ‘Relational Realists’, but we have something to offer to Realism too, which, despite its humanism, has failed to explore the ‘Relational Subject’.

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*To all those who by pursuing mutual concern and  
reciprocity, generate relational goods for the  
flourishing of a new civil society*

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