

Solidarity

Summary

Solidarity is widely held to be an under-theorized, elusive, or vague notion, and there is no clear-cut canon of theories of solidarity, but there are some core intuitions on this subject that rival theories try to capture in different ways.

One such core intuition is that solidarity concerns people who share their lives and whose fates are tied together—social solidarity, civic solidarity, or group solidarity are related to the strength of ties of dependency and mutual support of people who are “in the same boat.”

Another core intuition is that solidarity can be extended even beyond one’s own society, community, or group—maximally to the whole of humankind. Nonexclusive human solidarity can play a vital role in sustaining moral standards and for example in the collective measures against climate change or a pandemic.

A third core intuition is that solidarity can be needed and expressed in struggles against injustice or wrongs of various sorts. If the first core idea of solidarity concerns the normal stages of society, the third concerns the even revolutionary struggles to change important aspects of the existing forms of life. The metaphor of “being in the same boat” may seem suspect and misleading when attention is paid to the injustices of current arrangements—instead, what is needed is political solidarity in the attempt to fight those injustices.

A fourth core intuition is that the dark side of solidarity raises suspicion: An internally solidary group may be repressive of the individuality of the members, it may be parochial and sometimes even lead to a dehumanization of outsiders, and it may be exercised in pursuit of unjustifiable ends.

These forms of solidarity are discussed in the introduction (“Solidarity: Toward More Detailed Conceptions”). Among the theoretical questions concerning solidarity are, first of all, what exactly is it? Is it a specific type of relationship one can have (like friendship), or

can any relationship, group, or way of acting be more or less solidary (like being friendly toward anyone, not just one's friends)? Is solidarity a certain kind of action or a motivational basis out of which one can act? What sorts of things can be solidary (acts, attitudes, relationships, groups, practices, etc.), and can solidarity be realized or expressed via coercively sanctioned institutions? When macro phenomena are explained by microfoundations, is solidarity something to be explained or something that explains? Is solidarity a descriptive or evaluative notion, or both? Can solidarity be something bad? ("The Nature of Solidarity"). Normative questions concerning solidarity include: What kind of reasons or duties are there for being solidary? What is their relation to universalistic modern morality? What is human solidarity? ("Moral Solidarity"). What does thicker societal or in-group solidarity add to the universal demands of human solidarity? What is the relationship of solidarity to justice, democracy, social freedom or welfare state institutions? ("Perspectives on Societal Solidarity"). What is solidarity in the context of political struggles and social movements for change? ("Political Solidarity"). In what sense can these forms of solidarity be global? ("Solidarities in Global Contexts").

Keywords

solidarity, social solidarity, group solidarity, human solidarity, moral solidarity, political solidarity, global solidarity

Solidarity: Toward More Detailed Conceptions

The word "solidarity" derives from the Roman law, where *obligatio in solidum* involved the group liability of joint debtors. This is still the sense of the French word *solidarité* in the *Encyclopédie* of 1765, and in Napoleon's Civil Code of 1802. Around the 1840s the term was also adopted in German and English, and was politicized, adopted to social sciences, and

came to be used in a broader meaning of emotionally and normatively motivated readiness for mutual support, even with high stakes, as in the slogan “one for all and all for one” (see e.g., [Bayertz, 1999a; Wildt, 1995; Liedman 2002](#)).

Solidarity is often said to be the glue of society ([Salmela, 2015](#)). It is often taken to include the desirable feature of communality, prosociality, social support, or “fraternity” or sisterhood in the context of everyday life. It is especially called for in emergencies, in political struggles, and in social movements fighting against injustice or for common goals such as mitigation of climate change, in more revolutionary phases of societal life. Modern forms of solidarity are arguably compatible with individual rights, liberty, autonomy, justice, equality, democracy, and diversity, and ideally support or even partly constitute them, but there may be (e.g., premodern, neo-Fascist) forms of solidarity which, however, suppress these. Growing individualization, atomization, hierarchization of power, marketization, and capitalist competition are in constant tensions with solidarity—and it is an open question what late modern solidarity should look like.

Arguably, solidarity (especially group or social solidarity) can be characterized by a kind of “we-perspective,” as opposed to purely egoist or purely altruist or charitable motivations—it concerns the common good, or our good, and questions of shared or collective responsibility are central to solidarity. Typically, the solidary group will have some defining aims or goals in its ethos, and success in these aims is partly defines what is good for the group, as opposed to its members ([Laitinen & Pessi, 2015](#)). In various sorts of communities of collective living, the collective aims typically centrally feature the social needs and well-being of the members—it is the interdependence of the members that may have given rise to the group, and which nourishes the solidarity between them. But groups such as charities or support groups typically aim at goals external to the well-being of their members; even then,

the intragroup solidarity may be central for their lives, and indeed the activity in the support group may be central to the meaningfulness of those lives; see e.g., [Laitinen & Pessi, 2015](#)).

Group solidarity, social solidarity, or “in-group solidarity” is always partial or exclusionary, but there can also be important forms of all-inclusive moral, human, global solidarity, and there may be supportive “out-group solidarity” by nonmembers toward a group.

Solidarity is widely held by political theorists and philosophers to be vague, elusive, and under-theorized, not only in comparison to other central concepts such as justice, freedom, democracy, or equality, but also as a result of the term’s widespread and varied usage during the last 180 years. The term “solidarity” has made its way into the European Union (EU) constitution, and been promoted by such rival movements as Marxism, social democracy, French solidarism, liberalism, feminism, Black nationalism, Roman Catholicism and neo-Fascism; understandably, it has come to mean very different things in these contexts ([Stjernø, 2005](#)).

Many are of the opinion that the concept is so ideologically loaded, so flexible, and has such a controversial history that it should be left for ceremonial speeches ([Luhmann, 1984](#)). On the other hand, many defend the idea that sufficiently accurate uses of the concept of solidarity exist, and that “parasitic,” loose, and misleading uses can be separated from them (see e.g., [Scholz, 2008, 2015](#)). In various normative debates (on issues from healthcare systems to migration), both sides can appeal to “solidarity” in some sense, and it may well be that those normative debates are logically prior to our understanding of what kinds of solidarity in detail is worth having.

On looking at the term in more detail, it can be seen that solidarity (like freedom or justice) can be attributed to many things: actions, motivational bases, individual characters, social relations, groups, social orders, social “fabric,” societies, and possibly institutions and

structures. One way to make the concept more precise is to analyze what it is a feature of, or whether it is a type of relationship in itself.

In what follows, in the next Section, the nature of solidarity is made more precise by analyzing whether solidarity is a type of relationship, or a feature that can characterize a variety of different things, from actions and motivations, to relationships, groups, or societies. Analogically, “friendship” is a type of relationship (one that must be entered knowingly, so that it is impossible to be someone’s friend without knowing it), but “friendliness” can be a feature of actions and attitudes toward anyone. The section also discusses the explanatory and descriptive functions of solidarity. The Section after that turns to reasons and duties, which arguably form the normative core of solidarity, and asks what “moral solidarity” might be. After that, in the next Section, three different perspectives on social or societal solidarity are taken. The Section following that then discusses another central usage of solidarity, namely “political solidarity” in social movements, both in-group solidarity and out-group solidarity, or “being in solidarity with” some group. The last main Section briefly discusses the prospects of moral, societal, and political solidarities in the global context.

The Nature of Solidarity

Action and Motivation

As a microlevel phenomenon, solidarity has been conceptualized first of all as prosocial *behavior* across five types of situations: helping and supporting in situations of need, doing one’s share in situations of cooperation, fairness in situations of distributing goods, avoiding a breach in situations of trust, and moral repair when violations have taken place. According to the Dutch sociologist Siegwart Lindenberg (in [Fetchenhauer et al., 2006a](#), p. 9), solidarity

in fact means only that in these situations the individual (referred to as the “Ego”) takes others (referred to as “Alter”) into consideration in his or her actions, although the pursuit of short-term pleasure or personal long-term benefits would seem to suggest a different course of action would be more advisable.

Cooperation refers to situations where *common good* is produced. Both Ego and Alter belong to a group whose common good is at stake. Ego acts in a solidary manner if it participates in the production of common good even if it is arduous and even if there is an opportunity for freeriding.

Fairness refers to *situations of sharing*. The Ego responsible for distributing burdens and benefits acts in accordance with solidarity if they strive to give everyone a fair amount of both benefits and burdens instead of attempting to maximize their own benefits and minimize their own burdens. What justice demands in detail can be dependent on the accepted norms of the group.

Altruism refers to *needs and helping situations*. Ego acts in a solidary manner if they help the Alter in distress. What is regarded as needs and what is considered the minimum amount of assistance or support needed for the behavior to be solidary, again may depend on the shared interpretations within a group.

Trustworthiness refers to *situations of temptation* where breaching implicit or explicit contracts or norms would be tempting. Ego acts in a solidary manner if they avoid harming others and violating expectations even if it would mean increased costs for them.

Considerateness refers to situations where things go awry and promises or contracts cannot be fulfilled (or will not be fulfilled). Here Ego acts in a solidary

manner if she warns about this beforehand and strives to compensate for her breaches. (Fetchenhauer et al., 2006a, p. 9)

Lindenberg (2015) later adds a sixth situation, arguing there are three basic solidarity norms (sharing, helping, cooperation) and three additional ones (trustworthiness, considerateness, and efforts at understanding and being understood). Of these, the norm concerning mutual understanding is added to the previous five situations of solidarity. It highlights the epistemic aspects of solidarity. For methodological reasons, this focus on behavior, excluding emotional or motivational elements, is adopted in empirical research (e.g., by Hechter, 1987; Lindenberg, 1998).

Avery Kolars (2016, p. 71) has a very different definition of solidarity, but also one that sees it in terms of action: For him, solidarity is “reason-driven, consummated deferential political action” (2016, p. 71). In a later (2021) formulation, “an action constitutes solidarity iff it is (a) norm-grounded, (b) acknowledged (c) political (d) action (e) on others’ behalf.”

Andrea Sangiovanni (2015, p. 343) explicates solidary action principally in terms of *joint action*:

I act in solidarity with you when: 1. You and I each (a) share a goal (b) to overcome some significant adversity; 2. You and I each individually intend to do our part in achieving the shared goal in ways that mesh; 3. You and I are each individually committed (a) to the realisation of the shared goal and (b) to not bypassing each other’s will in the achievement of the goal; 4. You and I are disposed (a) to incur significant costs to realise our goal; and (b) to share one another’s fates in ways relevant to the shared goal. 5. Facts 1–4. need not be common knowledge.

Such focus on action is understandable: Mere attitudes and warm thoughts are not enough for genuine solidarity to occur (Kolers, 2016; Sangiovanni, 2015), and behavior is methodologically easier to observe and measure than underlying attitudes (Lindenberg, 2006).

To the extent that solidarity is defined by reference to a list of action types, it is straightforward to answer the question of what makes solidarity desirable or worthwhile: Solidarity is valuable because it consists of valuable kinds of action. Solidarity is valuable because it consists of the pursuit of fairness, trustworthiness, considerateness, and so on.

But arguably such deeds can be done for, say, egoist or long-term prudential reasons, and it seems that they are not really done *out of solidarity* in that case. If so, it seems that solidarity requires that the actions are done for the right reasons, or relevant reasons, or out of suitable motivations—and different theorists have provided rival characterizations of the motivational basis. Examples can be acting “for our sake,” out of identification with the group, or because one values the relationship or group membership, or out of a sense of belonging or togetherness, concern for the others’ well-being, or commitment to shared norms. Thalos (2012, p. 57) defines solidarity as a condition of action-readiness on behalf of a group or its interests, and Stjernø (2005, p. 2) as “preparedness to share resources with others by personal contribution to those in struggle or in need and through taxation and redistribution organized by the state.” As these dispositions and motivational patterns can also be studied, for example via interviews or other qualitative research, there is no strict methodological barrier to also taking such motivations and attitudes into account in empirical research on solidarity.

Like Thalos and Stjernø, Larry May (1996, p. 44) emphasizes the readiness to show moral support, as one of the key elements of solidarity, which include: (a) conscious

identification with the group, (b) bonds of sentiment, (c) common interest in the group's well-being, (d) shared values and beliefs, and (e) readiness to show moral support. According to May, identification with a group and the related thought that the group's well-being is tied to each member's well-being is central to and constitutive of solidarity. In this way, solidarity is, to some extent, built on similarity, uniformity with members; shared values and beliefs can be based on, for instance, a common history or the fact that the members live in the same area. Readiness to show support to others when they are faced with adversity is also essential: Solidarity is not only a matter of passive feeling but also of practical dispositions to act. In out-group solidarity, what is central is the readiness to show support to some group not only where there is no relevant similarity or uniformity between that group and one's own, nor any membership of the same group, but also even when that group's understanding of what is to be done differs from one's own—on [Kolars's \(2016\)](#) view, standing in solidarity includes deference, or acting on the other's terms. In both cases, however, the readiness to show support is a central motivational characterization.

Action which is motivated by especially *solidary motives* can further be analyzed with more specific criteria. According to the German social philosopher Andreas [Wildt \(1999\)](#), pp. 217–218), an action can be identified as one of solidarity when the actor (a) has feelings of sympathy with the recipient and a sense of belonging in common with them; (b) is partly motivated by altruism; (c) considers the act as a case of helping in a time of distress; (d) views the recipient's distress as a moral problem, an injustice, and a source of moral obligation; (e) views him- or herself as obligated to act to help; (f) does not believe the recipient has a legal or moral right to demand and receive help from him or her in particular; (g) assumes that the recipient evaluates the distress in a similar way to their view; (h) assumes that the recipient is motivated to alleviate his or her own distress and is actively attempting to do so; and (i) assumes at least the possibility of analogous situations in which

the *recipient* acts, has acted, or will act in analogous ways toward him or her. This rich definition by Wildt can arguably be broadened so as to include the other act and situation types, apart from helping in case of need (e.g., those mentioned by Lindenberg: cooperation and fair sharing; trustworthiness and considerateness).

As a distinct motivational pattern, solidarity can be seen to combine elements of (extended) egoism, and (restricted) altruism. It can be seen as a form of “we-thinking” based on collective intentionality, whose nature has been studied in social philosophy and social ontology (see e.g., [Gilbert, 2014](#); Schweikard & [Schmid, 2021](#); [Tuomela, 2013](#), 242-264). In that context, collective responsibility is important. Acting in we-mode, or “for *our* sake,” differs from acting in I-mode, or “for *my* sake,” or from acting benevolently, charitably, or altruistically “for *your* sake” (or for “second-personal reasons”; [Darwall, 2006](#)). Group members may deliberate, as a team, what is best for the group, which may naturally conflict with what is best for any individual member. As a motivational pattern, it differs also from acting for agent-neutral impersonal reasons, to promote value, or to do what morality requires—which may conflict with what is best for *us*.

While it may be prudent, in one’s long-term self-interest, to be solidary, acting out of solidarity seems to be different from acting out of prudence. Thus solidarity seems to be constituted by both actions and suitable motivations. Dispositional readiness to act is important, expressed in actions when situations arise.

Is Solidarity a Special Kind of Relationship?

Secondly and crucially, solidarity seems to be a matter of relationships. If solidarity is understood in terms of dispositions such as reciprocal readiness to engage in mutual aid, it is implicitly assumed that it takes place in the context of an existing relationship, where turns can be taken, and reciprocity realized. Each member is at one time the agent and at another

time the recipient of support, and in both roles can enjoy being in the relationship. As an agent, one supports the other, and as the recipient, one acknowledges the agent, is grateful to them, or holds them in esteem; both parties of the relationship can have either role in turn. This kind of understanding of solidarity thus presupposes particular relationships, where turns can be taken. So even if solidarity is defined in terms of actions or motivations, it seems that *relationships* can be more or less solidary, in virtue of such actions or motivations.

We can, however, ask whether solidarity is in this way a feature of (any) relationship, or whether it is a special *sui generis* type of one (perhaps one that one must knowingly enter into for it to count as that kind of relationship)? Both are possible approaches; but for clarity, it is good to distinguish them. The latter (“relations-first”) approach conceptualizes solidarity more in terms of a specific type of relationship, analogously to friendship. The former (“actions-first,” or actions-and-motivations-first) approaches view solidarity analogously to “friendliness,” which can be at stake even outside established friendships and, more generally, is a feature of relationships, not a form of relationship itself.

The former approach can start from any existing relationship and ask how solidary it is (in virtue of the actions, dispositions, and motivations of the participants), rather than from a definition of solidarity as a special type of relationship. For any A and B to whom this actions-first approach applies, they have some relation(ship) or other, identified by who A and B are, and by default they have, at a minimum, certain moral duties and rights in regard to each other; a default mutual respect can be expected. Analyzing the degree of solidarity, then, can draw on the analysis of solidarity in actions and motivations. If they are members of the same group, their relationship can contain social solidarity, but even outside that they can express human solidarity or political out-group support.

Through a history of interactions (aid and gratitude, acting together, wronging, apologizing), the degree of solidarity can grow or deteriorate. The richest forms of solidarity,

or most glaring absences of solidarity where one would expect them, are to be found in forms of living together or dense interactions. The degree of solidarity in a relationship may share the structure of “friendship” and “mutual recognition” as analyzed by T. Scanlon (1998). It stresses enjoying the relationship on the one hand, and on the other, taking a range of other-regarding reasons and obligations as valid or binding.

If so, *the degree of solidarity* in a given relation varies with the emotional responses and motivational dispositions on the one hand (identification with, belonging, valuing, enjoying the relationship) and responsiveness to a range of reasons on the other hand. The degree presumably increases in cases of (a history of) actions-for-right motivations or a demonstrated readiness to support and acceptance of support, and decreases in cases of violations, neglect, and negative interactions in general. Interestingly, the history of interactions at the same time changes or transforms the range of reasons, duties, demands, or expectations that one faces. A history of a high degree of solidarity comes with higher normative expectations and higher trust—and makes possible graver betrayals. Further voluntary commitments, statuses, and institutional roles also affect the expectations and modify the relationships. The key point is that in the actions-first approach, one takes solidarity to be a feature that can be instantiated in different degrees (and rival theories of solidarity may focus on different variables).

In the second approach, solidarity is seen as a specific *type* of relationship, more analogous to friendship than friendliness. On this analysis, in-group solidarity between group members may be one type of relationship, and an out-group person’s “being in solidarity with” a group (despite not being one of its members) can be another type of relationship. These relationships can more directly be constituted as analogous to Scanlon’s definition of friendship, with certain types of emotional responses on the one hand and certain types of normative commitments or responses on the other. (Note that here, too, we can ask how

strong the solidarity relationship is and so, in the same sense, speak about that strength as existing in degrees: The degree of solidarity varies with the emotional responses and motivational dispositions on the one hand and responsiveness to a range of reasons on the other. Solidarity may come in degrees even when solidarity is understood as a specific type of a relationship.)

The two most important types of relationships of solidarity are those of in-group social solidarity and in-group or out-group political solidarity. So, firstly, the established in-group relationship of mutual support, with turn-taking built in, can be called a relationship of *social* solidarity or *group* solidarity, when the parties mutually recognize that they are in this kind of relationship, or the relationship is instituted in some way. Such relationships are typically, perhaps necessarily, entered into knowingly, with conscious commitments. These relationships can be argued to be of intrinsic value, a desirable form of human sociality, because they actualize some important aspects that enable human beings to flourish as social animals. They also typically come with heightened normative role expectations: Some of one's duties and reasons for action depend on one's standing in such relationships of in-group solidarity.

Second, *political* solidarity can be a matter of commitment to a movement on behalf of some oppressed group. According to [Scholz \(2008\)](#), there are no further membership conditions, and making such a personal commitment amounts to thereby joining the movement (e.g., the international feminist movement; see [Bartky, 2002](#); [Dean, 1996](#); [Scholz, 2008](#)). Note that there are several different relationships to be attended to: relations to the beneficiaries, other activists, opponents, and bystanders. For nonmembers, political solidarity may be a form of commitment to supporting an oppressed (out-)group, deferentially on that group's terms ([Kolers, 2016](#)).

So, concerning relation(ship)s, solidarity can be analyzed in twofold manner: As a general degree of “solidariousness” in any token relationship (by means of the “actions-first,” bottom-up approach to relations), and as specific types of relationships (the “relations-first,” top-down approach, which moves from the relationships to appropriate motivations and actions). The degree of solidariousness is perhaps analogous to a degree of “friendliness,” but solidarity as a type of relationship is more analogous to “friendship.” As the relationships can be of different strengths, the bottom-up “actions-first” analysis of solidariousness applies in that case as well, and so it looks like both approaches are needed. The top-down approach tells us whether the relationship is that of in-group social solidarity, out-group political solidarity, or another kind (with heightened normative role expectations), and the bottom-up approach helps in assessing how solidarious a given relationship is. Both approaches are needed.

Groups, Practices, Institutions, and Societies

Similar questions can be asked about solidarity in groups, practices, institutions, and societies. An “actions-first” (including actions-and-motivations-first) approach would see the degree of solidarity in a group, practice, institution, or society in terms of what kinds of actions (or motivations) are practiced within them. That would be a bottom-up approach to group-level solidarity. A “groups-first” (a category which includes “societies-first” and “societal-systems first”) approach would see solidarity as a feature of the group, practice, institution, or society in a more top-down manner that views it primarily as a group phenomenon, perhaps explanatory of the actions and motivations of the individual members (see e.g., [Tuomela, 2013](#), 242-264). Thus, solidarity can also be seen as primarily a group-level or community-level phenomenon, and only secondarily as a matter of the individual members’ actions, motivations, or relationships. It is common to assume that a group can

exhibit a greater or smaller degree of solidarity (rather than solidarity groups being a *kind* of group, such as [Tuomela's \(2013\)](#) “we-mode groups.” Indeed, different kinds of groups can be more or less solidary).

Three types of groups can be distinguished, whose normative bases for group solidarity are explained a bit differently in each case (even though the same concept of solidarity covers group solidarity for all of these groups). Mostly importantly and firstly, these groups include *cooperative* groups that are built on common goals and that actualize cooperation and shared responsibility according to these goals (for example a team in a workplace; the whole of society according to some conceptions, such as John Rawls's; [Rawls, 1971](#)). The second type of group or grouping is based especially on the *feeling* of togetherness or identifications with the others in the group (say, a group sharing the same dialect, history, beliefs, or values, and feeling closeness thanks to that; a patriotic “nation” according to some definitions, and perhaps some of Benedict [Anderson's \(1983\)](#) “imagined communities” may belong here; Anderson, [1983](#)). The third type of group is tied together by some normatively relevant *special relationship* (such as family ties, or state citizenship according to some views); its members may share feelings and goals, but independently of them are bound by valid special obligations such as parental duties.

Conceptually, these cases are quite different: In the first case, solidarity rests on common goals, which the group itself has adopted in the course of its history. John Rawls defines a whole society as a system of cooperation. His view of society has been criticized by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum, who think that that definition is unfair to people with disabilities. (For a debate, see [Brighouse & Robeyns, 2010](#)). One response would be to say that the system has aspects that overlap almost fully, but not quite. Some individuals in their current phase of life are not able to contribute via work, but they may contribute in other ways; some are more needy in terms of support, and some do not possess the capacities for self-

determined life. The second case is about identifications and emotional resonance with others. In these cases, the feelings, needs, and demands of others are criterial, and while it is less clear what normative implications such sense of belongingness will create, there is a clear connection to motivations. The third case is about a special relationship, for example of parenthood or family ties, which is conceptually independent of adopted goals and feeling of togetherness, but that is, or is thought to be, binding and not something that the participants freely choose. Family members are thought to have a responsibility to each other, as is the case with parents and their children, whether they like it or not.

Thus, it is possible to distinguish between *cooperative, emotional, and relationship-based* group formation. In successful cases, these different elements of group solidarity feed each other: special relationships (such as kinship or shared fate) generate cooperation and feeling of togetherness; cooperation generates further feeling of togetherness and generates or reinforces the special relationship; and feelings of togetherness, in turn, generate further cooperation. In happy cases, a positive cycle is possible. Thus, in different groups the normative foundation for duties may have various origins, but all the different dimensions of solidary “groupness” exist in all of them. In almost every group (as opposed to mere classificatory groupings imposed by external observers) there may exist some degree of mutual action and joint responsibility related to it. Second, the members of all groups may identify with a group, feel part of it, and appreciate this feeling of connection at least to a certain degree. Third, all groups may also generate special duties for their members. Having deficiencies in any of the dimensions may signal that the group in question is less than fully solidary.

Families and other small communities are perhaps the primary social context for socialization, but for adults the economy, work, and state citizenship are equally important loci of mutual interdependence (see Smith 2015). Society-level policies, practices, and

institutions can also be more or less solidary, supporting the lives of citizens in various ways. Similar to the distinctions made above, the social philosopher Nancy [Fraser \(2008\)](#), pp. 150–153) has distinguished three types of solidarity, albeit pertaining to global relationships. Fraser’s groups that correspond to cooperative and shared-goal-oriented groups are groups whose members participate in the same public communication sphere, and therefore in the same opinion- and will-formation processes. Of groups based on feelings, Fraser states that a subjective sense of solidarity may manifest itself, for example, as nationalism and exclusion of others. Comparable to independent special relationships, Fraser has identified objective reciprocal dependencies, an example of which could be environmental issues, or our shared dependence on the environment.

Once the societal arrangements or compulsory legal structures are at play, the question arises of whether what is at stake is really genuine solidarity, or mere “quasi-solidarity” ([Bayertz, 1999a](#), pp. 24–25). One can see a double-sided dynamic between the legal institutions, which can be more solidary or progressive as it were than people’s dispositions or the practices at the level of civil society. Certain types of institutional solutions may *produce* solidary dispositions, feelings of togetherness and cooperation ([Prainsack & Buyx, 2012](#); [Stjernø, 2005](#)). [Prainsack and Buyx \(2012\)](#), p. 343)

propose a new approach to defining solidarity, identifying it primarily as a practice enacted at the interpersonal, communal, and contractual/legal levels. Our three-tier model of solidarity can also help to explain the way in which crises of solidarity can occur, notably when formal solidaristic arrangements continue to exist despite “lower tiers” of solidarity practices at interpersonal and communal levels having “broken away.” Thus, their understanding of solidarity as a social practice combines interpersonal relations, group-level features, and the institutional (especially legal) level.

As mentioned, in its different usages, the term “solidarity” has been adopted by movements from Socialism to liberalism and Roman Catholicism (Stjernø, 2005; see also van Parijs 2021, Tischner 1981; Taylor 2007b). In addition to obvious differences in the normative contents they think solidarity carries, these differ in what they formally attribute solidarity to. As a generalization, the classical liberal and Catholic approaches stress interpersonal responsibility and solidarity as private or personal virtues, while Marxists and social democrats typically stress structural obstacles, institutional solutions, and shared responsibility, so that solidarity can also be a virtue that is exercised by institutional structures. One relatively moderate view is that institutional arrangements can promote and realize genuine group solidarity (e.g., via progressive taxation and social services), but if the institutional arrangements are obeyed for solely coercive or self-interested reasons, they fall short of genuine solidarity. In social policy research, European welfare states have been seen as realizing institutionally relatively high degrees of social (and “civic”) solidarity and distributive social justice (Stjernø, 2005). In social policy and public health research, solidarity is typically related to certain kinds of institutional, non-market-based solutions, promoting the common good. For example, Sunstein and Ullmann-Margalit (2001) speak of “solidarity goods,” whose value increases as the number of people enjoying them increases, and which are pursued because other people do so as well.

Group Cohesion and the Explanatory Perspective

In sociology and social psychology, solidarity has been conceived either as an irreducible macro-level phenomenon of group cohesion or order, or as microlevel behavior, emotions, and attitudes that explain such cohesion. The term may be used to describe and explain the normal order and normative social integration in societies or communities, as opposed to

chaos and conflict, and as opposed to social order based on coercion or maximization of self-interest (see e.g., [Doreian & Fararo, 1998](#); [Wrong, 1994](#)).

Macro-level cohesion, unity, or order can in principle be sustained for example by coercion, self-interest or, as in the case of social solidarity, a commitment to shared norms and valued social bonds. While solidarity is irreducible to self-interest, the degree to which these social norms and institutions are seen to benefit oneself (and one's kin) and the degree to which one's own fate depends on that of the whole group may nonetheless partly explain the strength of the individual's commitment to the norms and institutions ([Wrong, 1994](#); [Thome 1999](#)).

Siegwart [Lindenberg's \(2006, 2015\)](#) research group has sought to explain what makes people act in such a solidary manner, as opposed to hedonistic or gain-seeking ways, in some situations but not in others. In addition to the general formation of character or behavioral dispositions, situational cues have been shown to make a difference to behavior by increasing the salience of the solidarity frame in comparison to those of immediate gratification or long-term gain. Thus, solidarity is precarious and needs to be supported by factors that increase the salience of its frame.

Classical sociological theories stress the internalization of shared values and norms, but they sometimes fail to explain why socialized people ("homo sociologicus") would even want to act in a manner that is not solidary. On the other hand, theories of rational choice or classical economy, according to which an individual ("homo economicus") always acts according to their own interests, struggle to explain why individuals nevertheless sometimes behave in a sincerely solidary manner, and why it is rational to do so ([Hechter, 1987](#)).

[Lindenberg's \(2006\)](#) model attempts to explain the possibility of both solidary and unsolidary behavior and highlight the situational and fragile nature of both.

Descriptive, Evaluative, or Both?

Is solidarity a thick evaluative concept, always carrying a positive connotation? Aren't there also bad forms of solidarity, so that solidarity is sometimes good, but sometimes bad? Many authors have concluded that therefore solidarity is a purely neutral, descriptive phenomenon, whose contextual positive value must be explained by other factors. However, solidarity can also be evaluative, but merely *prima facie* or *pro tanto* good, instead of being invariably good: It can for example support impermissible purposes, but when not, it is good. If so, solidarity is analogous to such valuable aims as personal autonomy: Autonomy is a valuable, desirable thing, but when it is exercised in pursuing immoral goals, it does not make that pursuit any better—and by contrast can even aggravate the badness of the pursuit. (Or it could be because *all* evaluative concepts may change their polarity in special contexts, as moral particularism argues; [Dancy, 2004](#)). Here it can be assumed that solidarity is *prima facie* evaluatively positive, allowing for evaluatively negative exceptional cases (the defenders of a descriptive definition may agree with the cases, but think in each case that there must be an extra feature explaining the positive value of solidarity).

Avery Kolers makes a useful distinction between solidarity being of *auxiliary* or *freestanding* value, for example in bioethics.

for a theory of solidarity to be useful it must enable us to make statements of at least one of the following kinds:

Auxiliary: “In the interests of justice, beneficence or some other familiar bioethical value, we should practise solidarity or spur relationships of solidarity in healthcare institutions.”

Freestanding: “This practitioner acted in a way that was perfectly beneficent, just, etc., but still acted wrongly because their action failed to exemplify solidarity.” (Kolers, 2021, p. 123, italics added)

In the auxiliary role, solidarity helps the agents in realizing or actualizing the demands of justice or morality, which can be characterized without reference to solidarity. Solidarity is a feature of the *responsiveness* to these demands; it does not figure *in* the demands.

In the freestanding role, some of the normative demands that the agent faces are demands of solidarity which do not overlap with demands of justice or other principles. Solidarity is a value alongside other values, like justice, beneficence, and so on. (If solidarity is just a more general umbrella term, consisting of demands for fairness, trustworthiness, etc., as in Lindenberg’s 2006 characterization, solidarity does not have a freestanding role). In Kolers’s characterization, this is put in terms of acting *wrongly*, but given the complicated relations between value and wrongness, it may be good to note that evaluative features may be relevant in other ways that the following characterization, echoing Kolers, aims to capture:

Value-adding, but not freestanding: “This practitioner acted in a way that was perfectly beneficent, just, etc., and did not act wrongly, but things would have been even better (more desirable, admirable, valuable) if their action would have exemplified solidarity.”

Many virtues, from courage to kindness, may be such that exemplifying them would make a response better, even though it is not strictly speaking wrong or morally impermissible to fail to exemplify them and simply do one’s moral duty in a less exemplary way. Acting slightly disrespectfully may be morally permissible, while acting in a way that humiliates others is

not morally permissible—nonetheless it would be better to avoid even the slight disrespect. The sense in which doing the right thing for the right motive (out of unselfish concern or sense of duty) has more “moral worth” than doing it for another motive suggests that there are some evaluative features that can be exemplified only by responses to otherwise valid demands (see [Ross, 1930](#)). It may well be that acting out of solidarity—instead of from fear or self-interest—adds to that sort of “worth” of the responses. Auxiliary value may be genuine *value*, and genuinely *auxiliary*— it adds to the value of the response.

A further observation is that “perfect beneficence” in Kolers’s characterization may set the bar too high for wrongness. What can be expected from strangers is that they meet their positive duties of beneficence, whereas anything on top of that is supererogatory—so that not exemplifying *perfect* beneficence toward strangers is presumably not wrong. But in a relationship of mutual support, it may well be that legitimate expectations are higher—thanks to the history of past solidarity. And it may be downright wrong to betray those expectations. Therefore, the characterization can also be altered slightly:

*Freestanding**: “This practitioner acted in a way that satisfied the duties of beneficence, justice, etc., but still acted wrongly because their action failed to meet the heightened expectations, based on the history of solidarity.”

Despite its being generally seen as a positive quality, various forms of solidarity have been criticized for their tendency to lead to the exclusion of outsiders, perhaps represented as enemies, or for the internal repression of individuality, autonomy, privacy, or personal responsibility that they entail. Typical criticisms see as the risks of solidarity such things as suppression of members’ autonomy (i.e., violating the valid claims of members); unfairness or moral wrongs toward nonmembers (i.e., violating universal morality for the benefit of the

group); and perhaps also the pursuit of worthless or bad goals for the sake of enjoying acting together, like St. Augustine's pear thieves or presumably various mobs (i.e., not even acting under the guise of the good, or being mistaken about the value of the goals; [Bayertz, 1999a](#); [Schmid, 2020](#)). These criticisms suggest that valuable, choiceworthy, morally permissible forms of solidarity would be compatible with universalistic moral demands both toward the members and outsiders.

The bad forms of solidarity can be genuine cases of solidarity, if we allow that solidarity is only prima facie good—there is conceptual room for solidarity that is not morally valuable. There is also conceptual room for the claim that (otherwise) genuine forms of solidarity that are morally biased, or downright disrespectful of outsiders, or respond to merely apparent reasons or values, are valuable in some way—perhaps they contribute to someone's living a good life but do so in morally impermissible ways. To grant that they may have some value is not to grant that they are thereby justified. Solidarity need not be perfect to be genuine. The togetherness can be genuine and can genuinely contribute to the quality of the life of the agents. (That is perhaps to be expected: moral rightness and value are not perfectly aligned, there can be immoral ways to pursue valuable ends, and reaching the end could be valuable even if the pursuit were immoral). But it is also possible to argue they are not valuable and that they fail to contribute to the good life of the participants. Further, wrongs done by solidary, mutually supportive gangs can be even worse, morally speaking, than those done without such patterns of mutual support. This distinction between good and bad forms of solidarity emphasizes the importance of discussing universal moral principles in the context of solidarity.

Moral Solidarity

The term “solidarity” is sometimes used very broadly to refer to the basic ethical concern for others, as in the work of Philippa Foot (1985), Richard Rorty (1989), and David Wiggins (2009) (See also Derpmann 2015). In this context, it is often called moral or human solidarity.

We can approach the idea of moral solidarity first in terms of the “form” or structure of morality, and then in terms of moral contents: moral demands and responsiveness to them.

For one thing, “moral solidarity” is more appropriate when morality is approached not monadically or dyadically but communally. Mainstream moral theory is often “monadic,” focusing on a sole agent in a situation of choice, where some options are morally wrong and some morally permissible (the other agents are not in focus, but counts as aspects of the circumstance). Moral theories like consequentialism and deontology try to capture what makes some options impermissible and others permissible. The high moral status of persons, as possessors of human dignity and human rights, can also be theorized monadically: What features of the human animal justify stringent moral rights, or its status as an “end in itself” (Kant, 1996)?

Some moral notions are implicitly or explicitly “dyadic,” so that the other agent does not merely figure in the circumstance of choice. A may have duties toward B, B may have rights in relation to A, A may wrong B, and A may respect B as an end itself (see e.g., Thomson, 1990). In Thomas Scanlon’s (1998) theory, core morality is about “what we owe to each other”; what A owes to B and what B owes to A.

But morality can be approached also in terms of a moral *community*, of “a party of humankind” (Hume, cf. Wiggins, 2009), or “kingdom of ends” (Kant), where all persons are both legislative members and subjects to the moral law. If A wrongs B, C may have a duty to sanction or criticize A, as a member of the moral community. In so doing, C may act in the name of the whole of that community. In such a community, everyone can, in turn, be the

moral agent, moral recipient or patient, or a bystander, onlooker, or third party. There is arguably a collective moral responsibility not only to act morally oneself, but to *sustain the moral community*. The third-personal duties to sanction wrongdoers show that a larger community than a dyad is at stake—each moral agent can act in the name of the whole moral community, in the spirit of the slogan “one for all and all for one.” Each moral agent takes part in the *collective* responsibility to defend everyone’s moral standing (what is done to one, is done to all), and in the collective responsibility to keep violations at bay (our team, albeit a universal team, does not engage in impermissible actions: The perpetrator is one of us, and we should do better). From this perspective, both the potential victims and potential perpetrators belong to the same universal group, so each moral violation is an in-group violation. (Cf. [Tuomela, 2013](#), drawing on W. Sellars, for the idea that even morality is a matter of “we-intentions.”)

This communal form may raise the worry of moral relativism—that there are moral communities in plural, with different moral rules in force (analogously to there being different legislatures in different political communities). This need not follow; the moral community can equally well be a universal one, including all moral agents, and not identical to any partial community, all of which may fall short of an ideal moral community. Indeed, it is a promising combination of “solidarities” to think that there is a universal moral community of the whole of humankind (or of all rational creatures), and additionally more exclusive societal solidarities, which face the normative pressure to be compatible with the universal moral community.

While typical members of moral community are at the same time patients, agents, and judges (sanctioning others), and on some views also “moral legislators” (e.g., [Kant, 1996](#)), there is room for the idea that other animals are also moral patients and beneficiaries—protected by human morality even though they are not moral agents, judges, or legislators

themselves. The well-being of other animals does of course matter, whether or not they are moral agents themselves.

Does approaching morality in terms of moral solidarity alter the contents of universal morality?

Universal morality is more often described in terms of moral duties, or respect for the dignity of persons, than in terms of moral “solidarity.” Indeed, in all likelihood, solidarity is not a necessary concept in analyzing the content of what morality *requires*: The relationship of solidarity to the demands of universal morality seems auxiliary, rather than freestanding.

The demands of morality can be grounded in human dignity, human vulnerability, or human interdependence, among other factors. These standard moral requirements include not only (a) perfect negative duties not to harm others, but also (b) imperfect positive duties to help (sufficiently many to a sufficient degree, in the “latitudinarian” understanding of positive duties; see [Richardson, 1994](#)), and also (c) duties of reparation, prevention, gratitude, and reciprocity, and (d) special, partial duties based on special dependence (e.g., parents and children; see e.g., [Ross, 1930](#)). The latter three typically feature in analyses of solidarity, but compatibility with universal respect is the hallmark of specifically *modern* solidarity (cf. Durkheim and Hegel, Section 4.1).

Responsiveness to these demands, reasons, or duties is arguably the core of moral solidarity. For example, the requirement or duty to help is there independently, but moral solidarity consists in a kind of responsiveness to the call, demand, or requirement. So, while we may not need the notion of “solidarity” to make sense of the negative and positive duties that moral agents owe to each other, moral solidarity is a meaningful characterization which is compatible with standard moral theories but broadens the picture from monadic agents to moral relationships and moral community.

Does past solidarity raise legitimate expectations? If A and B have supported each other in the past, does that create a legitimate expectation of reliance on one another (even when no explicit promises or contracts are at stake), so that it would be wrong to one-sidedly betray these expectations? Consider a situation where A has an imperfect duty to help one recipient, either B, C, or D, and in principle it is morally permissible to help any one of them, but the past interactions between A and B have created the expectation that A will again help B. Here, it may well be that A morally should either help B or give a fair warning in advance that they will help someone else this time. This is so especially if B has also helped A, or for example given such gifts that create an expectation of a gift in return. (For the sense in which gifts create normative expectations, see [Komter, 2005](#).) The way in which such past good deeds alter duties is often discussed in terms of duties of gratitude and reciprocity.

What about immoral forms of solidarity? It seems that all sorts of ugly and dark forms of solidarity are possible. It is understandable how groups that are cruel to outsiders might exhibit strong in-group solidarity, and it is understandable how groups with strong communal ties of support would repress inner minorities or individuals' autonomy and privacy. Such social groups fail to exhibit universal *moral* solidarity to the extent that they dehumanize outsiders or strip them of their moral standing, and they exhibit moral solidarity at most partially toward insiders if they do not respect their subjective rights, autonomy, or privacy. Such failures are of course wrong from a moral viewpoint.

Perspectives on Societal Solidarity

Concerning limited groups or societies, we can ask a similar question: Does solidarity pose additional normative demands in addition to demands of justice, democracy, or freedom, or do valuable forms of solidarity play a role in motivating responsiveness to these demands?

Institutional arrangements are crucial for society-wide solidarity. They can be more or less in accordance with principles of solidarity, and can leave room for, promote, and directly “express” informal, communal, interpersonal solidarity. The institutional arrangements and prevailing social spirit or ethos may correspond to each other more or less, and one or the other may be more “progressive” (Baldwin, 1990; Stjernø, 2005). Societal solidarity indubitably requires effective institutionalization, and successful institutions will in turn promote the favorable attitudes constitutive of solidary relationships.

Solidarity in Modern Nation States and Beyond

One approach to societal solidarity is historical: Have we entered a historical stage where new kinds of global solidarities are needed, to solve similar problems that nationwide solidarities were successful in solving earlier?

The term “solidarity” was introduced to sociology by Auguste Comte, but the classic treatment is Émile Durkheim’s (1893/1947) distinction between the “mechanic” solidarity of traditional communities and the “organic” solidarity of modern societies. Mechanic solidarity is based on the similarity of the members and the dominance of collective consciousness over individuality. Organic solidarity is based on the interdependence of very different individuals, and on the social division of labor. The Durkheimian distinction makes it possible both to acknowledge that traditional social ties are eroding (while not fully disappearing) thanks to industrialization, urbanization, individualization, or democratization, and to simultaneously see a different basis for social life emerging, consistent with these processes, leaving room for individual differences without forced commonality.

The premodern solidarities may include what Charles Taylor (2007a) calls “complementary hierarchies.” The notion suggests that, say, farmers, soldiers, and priests each have their place; their roles complement one another, but it is also agreed that the roles

are hierarchically ordered. This kind of unequal solidarity can be a normatively structured social bond; there just happens to be a prevailing norm stating that people's lots in life differ hierarchically. The norm of equal respect is incompatible with such unequal forms of solidarity.

There is a similar pattern in [Hegel's \(1821/1991\)](#) distinction between premodern and modern ethical life, *Sittlichkeit*, and in Durkheim's distinction between premodern mechanic solidarity and modern organic solidarity. What Durkheim calls the "cult of the individual" can be found at the heart of modern *Sittlichkeit*, as Hegel conceives it. Modern *Sittlichkeit* embodies the importance of subjective autonomy, moral self-consciousness, and the universal dignity of individual persons within its social practices and institutional structures. The ideal typical harmonious *Sittlichkeit* of the Ancients had to break down as it could not embody the equal freedom of all individuals.

Hauke [Brunkhorst \(2005, 2007\)](#), a German social theorist, has argued that the nation-state system succeeded in meeting three central historical challenges that are re-emerging at the global level. First, the nation-state system offered a way to avoid religious conflicts. After the Wars of Religion, in the Peace of Westphalia of 1648 religions had been defined as each state's own affair, and inside states increasingly each individual's personal affair. Second, the nation state offered a way to avoid political revolutions and turmoil by implementing fundamental political rights. After the French Revolution, the implementation of democracy and political rights became a part of national state autonomy; for instance, guaranteeing voting rights for women continued the implementation of the same idea. Third, states have controlled the dissatisfactions caused by socioeconomic uncertainty and injustice. The role of the state as a regulator of the market economy and at the same time as a type of a protector of justice has proved central. Nation states have been able to adapt to the challenges of both capitalism and socialism. One can further mention that the homogeneity of nations and the

sharedness of cultures have presumably furthered cohesion on a societal level. The idea of “when in Rome, do as the Romans do” justified assimilative practices in, among other things, the treatment of immigrants.

The global economy, religion, the media, and environmental problems may have made some of these achievements of the nation-state system obsolete. Will they give birth to new ways of organizing social relations? On the one hand, intolerance is on the rise and the decline in societal solidarity may support the birth of more exclusive communalities, where the circles of solidarity may be quite tightly defined. On the other hand, some of these concerns are genuinely global and may call for global solidarities.

The solidarities based on nation states seemed to have receded: The challenges that the nation-state system was able to respond to have returned on a global level. In the 21st century, the roles of capitalist economy (and the excessive global economic inequalities associated with it) and religion have only strengthened on a global level. Further, the assimilatory approach to cultural differences has come under critical scrutiny with the debates on multiculturalism, although populist movements have created a backlash on those issues. The ideals of global democracy and global solidarity appear more pressing than ever—as an analogous response to the socioeconomic, political, religious, and cultural challenges that the nation states successfully provided in the latter half of the second millennium. On the other hand, for example, the political sociologist Michael [Mann \(1997\)](#) argued that nation states had sustained their relevance (e.g., as monopolies of legitimated violence), and the global Covid-19 pandemic has certainly strengthened that view. The early responses to Covid-19, from closed borders, and lockdowns to vaccinations were structured primarily by nation states.

The looming climate catastrophes and biodiversity loss raise the stakes for governments: Costly climate action is required, but the temptation to free-ride, or to secure national interest, is high. Global solidarity would be beneficial for all, but in the short run it may be costly.

Solidarity and Justice

As a societal evaluative or normative notion, solidarity corresponds closest to the principle of *fraternité*, which in the slogan of French Revolution complements equality and liberty.

Contemporary theories of justice typically cover issues of basic liberties and social equality, so it is illuminating to approach the evaluative and normative nature of solidarity in comparison to the ideal of justice.

Theories of justice come in many varieties, but debates on justice are much more mature than debates on solidarity: There is agreement on different sides on what the central questions are, and relatively stable maps of the pros and cons of the various answers. What is to be distributed fairly (rights, opportunities, resources, capabilities?) and what are the principles of that distribution (prioritarianism, sufficientarianism, egalitarianism; merits, needs, equal shares, free exchange)? The more demanding the distributive claims, the more solidarity is needed.

Strong solidarity is by no means a perfect guarantee of justice. Strong solidarity within a group can easily be accompanied by nonsolidarity and injustice toward outsiders. Further, arrangements that are *considered* to be just by the members of a group (such as those based on hereditary hierarchy) can be highly inconsistent with more enlightened principles of justice, which members of the group might accept after some reflection. However, solidarity arguably erodes if members of the group do not experience or consider its basic structures to be sufficiently just. A solidary social order is not one based on pure coercion or a calculated

pursuit of self-interest. Instead, motivation based on normative acceptance is more in line with solidarity.

John Rawls states at the beginning of his *Theory of Justice* (1971) that justice is the most important virtue in the basic structure of societies, and that this is a widely accepted idea. According to Rawls, proponents of different *ideas* or detailed *conceptions* of justice can agree that the *concept* of justice refers to a quality of the highest importance. As justice is given primacy in terms of social qualities, solidarity is considered at most the second most important quality, for example as a practical requirement, for justice to be actualized.

Solidarity is connected to justice in at least two different ways. First, solidarity may be a factor pertaining to the functionality (rather than the content) of the principles of justice—solidarity may be auxiliary. To work in practice, the principles require people who follow them, so that they are not mere utopian ideals, but become concrete social reality. Some commentators of Rawls, communitarians such as Michael Sandel (2020) and Charles Taylor (1989, 1995, 2009), posit that it is precisely the Rawlsian difference principle that requires strong solidarity (see Smith & Laitinen, 2009).

Rawls's egalitarian difference principle, which involves treating the endowment of each as part of the jointly held resources for the benefit of society as a whole, presupposes a high degree of solidarity among the participants. This sense of mutual commitment could be sustained only by encumbered selves who share a strong sense of community. (Taylor, 1995, p. 184)

The last part of the *Theory of Justice* treats this question in the same spirit, so Rawls himself is in broad agreement here. Demanding principles of justice require strong forms of

solidarity. (On whether diversity makes achieving solidarity more difficult, see van Parijs, ed. 2004; [Banting & Kymlicka, 2017](#)).

Second, the ideal of solidarity can in principle affect the *contents* of the principles of justice. According to [Rawls \(1971\)](#), societal justice requires, in addition to maximal balance between freedom and opportunities, stringently limiting economic and social inequalities to cases where the materialized arrangement is the best possible for the most disadvantaged (*the difference principle*). According to [Rawls \(1971\)](#), pp. 90–91), the difference principle aspires for the ideal of “fraternity,” with its focus on the relative position of the worst off.

According to Andreas [Wildt \(2007\)](#), the Rawlsian difference principle is roughly the principle of distribution that solidarity requires. This principle of solidarity requires not only solidarity from the rich toward the poor but interestingly also solidarity with the rich on the part of the poor: Their support is needed for the normative principle that inequalities are justified under some conditions, most importantly when equality of opportunity has been realized. Arguably the requirement of equality of opportunity has not been realized in the real world particularly well. In its absence, a demand for solidarity toward the better off may sound audacious, but in principle the idea of solidarity from the worse off to the better off dignifies the worse off as *agents* of solidarity and not mere recipients or beneficiaries, and that is of course how things ought to be.

David [Miller \(1999\)](#) links solidarity to concern for the needy, distinguishing it from two other principles of distributive justice (equality and competitive merit- or desert-based distribution). Axel [Honneth \(1995, 2012\)](#), by contrast, distinguishes three distributive principles (equality, need-based care, merit-based esteem) and thinks that solidarity is related to the contributions to common good and the social esteem that are based on them. Combining these insights, one can defend the view (closer to [Habermas's 1989](#)) view that solidarity is the other side of justice) that solidarity is best seen in terms of mutual aid and

support, combining the elements stressed by Honneth and Miller, so that one is in turn the recipient and the agent of support (see [Laitinen, 2015](#)). The parties to solidary ties ideally take turns giving and receiving support, in turn caring and supporting and in turn gratefully acknowledging or esteeming the contributions of the other. According to Jürgen [Habermas](#) ([1989](#), p. 47), the requirements of justice can be formally justified without appealing to the well-being of others or the common good, but the principle of solidarity combines concern for the well-being of others and the entire group. For him, solidarity is based on the insight that all individuals should take responsibility for each other because as members of the same society they all have a similar interest in keeping their own life contexts intact. Deontologically conceptualized justice requires solidarity as its flipside. Similarly, the thin universal relations of *mutual respect* and universal concern are the skeleton, abstracting from any particular features, whereas the thicker and more particularistic phenomena of *mutual aid and support* are the flesh of *social solidarity* around it. (Cf. [Kolers, 2021](#); and [Prainsack & Buyx, 2012](#) on solidarity as the “putty” of justice).

Such a view, stressing the turn-taking in mutual aid, makes visible how social justice and solidarity combine distributive aspects (each benefiting fairly from the fruits of cooperation) and contributory aspects (getting to contribute and contributing to the shared good). In addition to distributive justice, then, solidarity is closely related to contributive justice.

Democracy, Social Freedom, and Collective Responsibility

Three other central concepts related to social solidarity are democracy, social freedom, and collective responsibility.

Solidarity and democracy are intertwined in multiple ways—so that Hauke [Brunkhorst](#) ([2005](#)) has even identified modern solidarity with democracy. In societal solidarity, democracy is indeed indispensable in relation to modern commitments to freedom and

equality, that everyone has an equal say over the public norms of solidarity: citizens are meant to be coauthors of the collectively accepted norms. Anything else would challenge their standing as equals (not having an equal say but being subordinated to others' wills) and as free in the sense of political freedom (being forced to obey norms and law one has no influence over). In political solidarity it has been suggested that things are different: perhaps, when standing in solidarity with an oppressed group that one is not a member of, one should not follow one's own judgments but defer to the oppressed group (Kolers, 2016).

Democratic citizenship, effective collective self-rule, requires strong solidarity (willingness to bear burdens, take responsibility and make efforts) just as the societal goal of socioeconomic justice, with its redistributive measures, requires strong solidarity. In both of these aspects, a relationship between citizens has the structure of recognition of the other as both a contributor and a recipient to collective self-rule: There is collective cooperation and distribution of the benefits. Such interpersonal relationships can be both normatively demanding and motivationally inspiring, and the motivational element need not be merely instrumental—it is intrinsically tied to the experience of being recognized as someone, a member of a democratic community, deserving just treatment.

Solidarity is related to the freedom of individuals in three important ways. First of all, negative liberties (institutionalized in legal rights) do not presuppose much solidarity and can be an important modern individualistic limit to solidarities; as a sphere of private liberty, private property is “insured” against interventions, solidaristic or otherwise. One of the main sources of tension and fragilities in modern solidarity is the importance of negative liberties and rights. But it can be argued that the main negative rights include a “right to solidarity.” Scholz argues that the right to solidarity may be understood as the negative right not to be hindered in the exercise of citizen rights by vulnerabilities that result from social structures. “As a negative right, the right to solidarity shifts attention away from what is necessary for

basic flourishing, and toward what is social structures that hinder full participation in other civic or political obligations and rights” (Scholz, 2018, p. 67).

Secondly, personal autonomy may lead to solidary forms of life or less solidary forms of life. Such autonomy arguably benefits from social relationships through which one can lead an autonomous life, but there can be a tension between autonomy and solidarity (cf. Fainzang, 2016). Thirdly, so called “social freedom” (*à la* Honneth, 2011), drawing on Hegel’s (1821/1991) and democratic political freedom as one aspect of such social freedom see solidarity and freedom as constitutively intertwined. Social freedom consists in self-realization through social roles, and the role obligations typically include contributing to the common good: Contributory justice and social freedom are closely related concepts. The notion of social freedom shows that solidarity and freedom can go together. Democratic political freedom is one aspect of such social freedom.

Collective or shared responsibility has been theorized in many ways. Shared responsibility can be seen as the opposite of personal responsibility in relation to the question of who covers the costs of meeting needs. A solidary community or society can take responsibility for various aspects of citizens’ well-being via provision of public goods, in non-market-based arrangements. This is the sense in which welfare states are more solidary than more minimal “nightwatchmen” societies (Baldwin, 1990; Stjernø, 2005). The debate on collective responsibility in its forward-looking and backward-looking senses has focused on the question of whether collectives are bearers of responsibility or whether the bearers of responsibility are ultimately individuals. The kinds of collectives capable of joint action are presumably also capable of joint responsibility (Sangiovanni, 2015; Tuomela, 2013).

Political Solidarity

Neither societal solidarity nor moral solidarity suffice for capturing “out-group solidarity”: There is no out-group in the moral context, and societal solidarity holds between members only. Out-group solidarity can be captured by a third main form of solidarity, *political solidarity*, which includes both in-group and out-group aspects, as well as constitutive relations to beneficiaries and opponents. The beneficiaries are typically a larger group than the inner circle of activists. The conflictual setting of political solidarity challenges the metaphor of everyone “being in the same boat” and more or less harmoniously pursuing such ideals of shared living as justice and democracy. It starts from prevailing injustices, wrongs, or patterns of oppression, and typically involves a conflict between those who stand to benefit from the status quo, and those who unite in a struggle against it.

This third main context for solidarity can be found, for example, in the international workers’ movement, the Polish *Solidarnosc*, and various new social movements. The word solidarity may indeed, to many, conjure images of the Polish labor union, solidarity strikes, or perhaps a united labor front against oppression. In such *political solidarity*, activists and members of the movement join to oppose the injustice or oppression inflicted by some group on another, and possibly to seek support from outside (out-group solidarity). Political solidarity in the in-group sense may be very tight and exhibit typical features of group or societal solidarity, such as requiring internal cohesion and mutual support and exhibiting the spirit of “all for one, and one for all.” . At the other end of the spectrum, it may be a matter of looser movements for social change with not much more in common than a shared aim of ending some injustice (see [Scholz, 2008](#)). The struggling group does not necessarily, or even typically, solely promote its own interests, but through its actions expresses solidarity with the group whose unjust treatment is the cause for the struggle. These groups often partly overlap. Solidarity can also be targeted toward groups on the other side of the world.

Such solidarity in political movements may manifest itself in the form of responses to unjust and oppressive situations. As was mentioned in Section “Descriptive, Evaluative, or Both,” communal and societal solidarity require a certain type of *exclusion*, which has been seen as one of the main “dark aspects” of solidarity. Political solidarity seems even starker: It requires *an opponent, or perhaps an enemy*—an oppressor perhaps. The core of fighting solidarity is the idea of fighting together *against* injustices; for example, by such means as going on strike. Intragroup solidarity is essential in fighting solidarity, but another important characteristic is the moral support from outsiders, out-group solidarity. Sally [Scholz (2008)], Carol [Gould (2007, 2014)], Andrea [Sangiovanni (2015)], and Avery [Kolers (2016)] have analyzed in detail this relationship of solidarity with some group. One expression for this is in the case of a strike, when other groups or unions may go on strike to show support.

Critical social theorists may want to point out *the relevance of social movements and political solidarity* in the struggles against injustice and misrecognition. ([Fraser & Honneth, 2003; [Honneth, 1995,] 2011, 2012; Juul 2013; Laitinen 2014; Pensky 2011; Zürcher 1998]).

Political, revolutionary solidarity can largely be understood as a response to injustices and moral wrongs. Some of these responses are our strict duties, some latitudinarian duties, some merely supererogatory from the moral viewpoint. But they can be constitutive of our practical identity, nonetheless. Participation in social movements can be a way of being in solidarity with the oppressed groups ([Scholz, 2008]). Political struggles can be motivated in various ways, and political *solidarity* can be an evaluative ideal (of political struggles that not only have a morally acceptable aim, but which embody moral virtues in their pursuit—constituting a significant aspect of the meaningful life of the participants). Further, not all political solidarity is good—the dignity of persons, mutual respect, and moral solidarity provide a critical standard which some forms of political solidarity may fail to meet. In the agonistic situation, it may be easy to lose sight of the dignity of the other ([Benhabib, 2011]).

Much of political solidarity *is* nonetheless good in resisting injustice: Political struggles may also acquire further meaning thanks to being forms of solidarity, of embodying forms of mutual support and aid.

Of course, the goals of social movements and political solidarity vary a lot, and the goals of universal morality and justice are only a (significant) subset. There are all sorts of struggles for more particular goals. But in many significant cases, the goals are those of mutual respect. In these struggles, mutual recognition can take the shape or guise of political solidarity. It is not a separate thing; the unity between persons can simply take that form. Social solidarity is arguably typically created via struggles, within various power relations or relations of domination. Readiness to engage in political struggles forms a dimension of social solidarity—where the willingness to engage in political struggles in solidarity with the oppressed parties is a crucial element of the readiness to mutual support.

In political solidarity, there is typically a smaller network of agents who constitute the movement (whose internal solidarity is an important motivational matter), and typically a larger class of agents whose claims and interests the network represents and stands in solidarity with (Scholz, 2008). But if considered from the viewpoint of universal respect, in political struggles against moral injustices the whole moral community is involved, as the guardian and a stakeholder of the (ideal) moral norms in question.

For political solidarity, it is typical that some powerful groups (say, capitalists, polluting oil industrialists, racists) are targeted as enemies or adversaries of the struggle. One important lesson from mutual respect is that although one need not tolerate the practices of these people, the goal is to restore relations of mutual respect with them as well, after the—hopefully successful—resolution of the conflict. The (revolutionary) aim, if legitimate, is to actualize worthwhile goals, and perhaps ultimately institutionalize them into (normal) social

and institutional reality, sustained by bonds of societal solidarity. Political solidarity is called for in climbing a ladder that can hopefully later be thrown away.

Solidarities in Global Contexts

Sally Scholz (2008) has made the helpful suggestion that all the different forms of solidarity (e.g., moral, societal, political) can in principle be applied to the global context. Any of kind of solidarity may be extended to the whole of humanity, so there are equally many kinds of global solidarities. In principle, it may be a matter of societal solidarity applied to a global society, or it may be a matter of political solidarity in global scope of a global movement; but most plausibly, it may be a matter of moral, humanitarian, universalistic solidarity.

It is clear that moral solidarity can be applied globally to the whole of humankind—as moral solidarity includes the idea of local moralities being enacted in the name of the whole “party of humankind” or “kingdom of ends.” Arguments have been made that the contemporary world system is one of systematic oppression and exploitation and of systematic violations of *negative* duties: The global winners actually violate negative duties continuously. The very minimum that global morality would require would be an end to such violations. In global justice, the next step would be *sufficientarianism*: the aim of providing everyone globally with the decent minimum consistent with the ability to live life with human dignity (see Scholz, 2018).

Many pressing political concerns are overwhelmingly global, and thereby the most visible movements of political solidarity may address such worldwide concerns: environmental concerns with climate and biodiversity, humanitarian concerns with hunger and diseases, concerns with global capitalism or with tax havens, global feminist and critical race movements, postcolonial movements, and movements for peace and disarmament.

As we have seen, such movements typically have their opponents. What about connecting all humanity into political solidarity; is it even conceptually possible? Can the entirety of humankind unite into a political movement to battle, say, epidemics or climate change? For instance, ecological issues have garnered support from an ever-growing mass of individuals around the globe. The fact that the ecological movement still has its opponents (as well as those who treat the issue with indifference) does not as such diminish its global nature any more than the existence of crime in a society diminishes the “societal” nature of the laws or solidarity of that society.

And in principle, one could ask similar questions about global society—global taxation, for example, could be a way of institutionalizing worldwide societal solidarity. All of humanity might one day form one comprehensive global state; one global society where national solidarity would cover all individuals. It is not clear whether humanity at its present size could constitute a “concrete society” in the proper meaning of the term (but the conceptual possibility of a global state can be more easily seen when imagining humankind at a smaller size).

Primary Sources

One reason why solidarity has remained an elusive concept is that there is no fixed canon of must-read texts. [Durkheim \(1893/1947\)](#) is a classic discussion of solidarity in sociology, but similar classics do not exist for political theory or philosophy. In the absence of a clearly defined canon, early-21st-century discussions owe a lot to Kurt [Bayertz's \(1999b\)](#) introduction, which distinguishes four key conceptions. Sally [Scholz's \(2008\)](#) single-authored monograph analyzes in particular the political solidarity of social movements as distinguished from social and civic solidarity. Tommie [Shelby \(2005\)](#) addresses political

solidarity from the viewpoint of racial oppression, Jodi [Dean \(1996\)](#) views it from a feminist perspective, and Richard [Rorty \(1989\)](#) approaches it from an antitheoretical perspective on ethics. Good, analytical monographs include [Kolers \(2016\)](#) and [Sangiovanni \(in press\)](#). [Brunkhorst \(2005\)](#) examines whether solidary solutions that have worked for nation states could work at global level, and stresses the relevance of democracy.

Further Reading

Essays in [Banting and Kymlicka \(2017\)](#) and van Parijs (ed. 2004), discuss the tension between diversity and solidarity. [Wildt \(1999\)](#) is an invaluable text on the history of the concept (or [Wildt, 1995](#) in German). [Doreian and Fararo \(1998\)](#) is a collection on questions of how to model and explain solidarity; [Hechter \(1987\)](#) caustically suggests the rational-choice approach, and [Lindenberg \(2006\)](#) presents the framing approach, which aims to explain why people sometimes act in a solidary manner and sometimes selfishly. [Tuomela \(2013\)](#) analyzes both solidary “we-mode” and individualistic “I-mode” action. [Laitinen and Pessi \(2015\)](#) contains philosophical and social scientific contributions by many of these authors. [Baldwin \(1990\)](#) and [Stjernø \(2005\)](#) analyze solidarity as it has been referred to in justifications for policies in European welfare states. [Gould \(2014\)](#) addresses solidarity in the context of global justice, and [Miller \(1999\)](#) and [Mason \(2000\)](#) do so from the perspective of domestic justice. [Prainsack and Buyx \(2012\)](#) discuss solidarity in the context of bioethics. [Wiggins \(2009\)](#) analyzes it as the root attitude underlying all ethics.

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