

NORMATIVE ORDERS

Research Centre of Goethe University Frankfurt am Main

Normative Orders Working Paper

02/2021

Solidarity: Concept, Conceptions, and Contexts

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SOLIDARITY: CONCEPT, CONCEPTIONS, AND CONTEXTS¹

I. A CONTESTED AND ELUSIVE CONCEPT

Solidarity is an elusive and contested concept, and debates about it abound:² Is it a moral value or a virtue, or can it also be found in groups of criminals, and can the solidarity of some violate the rights and standing of – and the solidarity with – others? Is solidarity a feeling, or can it be motivated by rational considerations of self-interest or moral reflection? Is solidarity necessarily of a particular communal nature, or can it also have universalist forms? Is it based on social relations and expectations of reciprocity, or does it have its place in relations of asymmetry, one-sided dependence and non-shared vulnerability? Can solidarity be combined with or even be based on demands of justice, or is it the “other” of justice, going beyond it in altruistic or supererogatory ways? Can it be institutionalized by law, or does it presuppose intrinsic motives and voluntary action to which one is not coerced? In short, the very nature of solidarity – its grounds, motives, content, scope, and form – is the subject of numerous disagreements, not just in light of the different histories and trajectories of the concept but also in light of the different uses we make of it in our normative vocabulary.³

If we want to make some headway in understanding the concept and overcome some of its elusiveness, we should avoid certain dead ends of analysis. It seems unwise to argue that there are different “concepts” of solidarity in play, since we would then no longer be able to explain what is supposed to qualify them all as concepts of *solidarity*.⁴

¹ Many thanks to the participants of the Florence Workshop “Solidarity: Its Nature and Value” at the European University Institute in May 2019 for helpful comments and questions, especially to the organizers and editors of the forthcoming volume with OUP, Andrea Sangiovanni and Juri Viehoff, and to Margaret Kohn and Tommie Shelby for their commentaries. Thanks also to Ciaran Cronin, Felix Kämper and Amadeus Ulrich for their help in preparing this text.

² See, for example, the various contributions to Kurt Bayertz, ed., *Solidarity* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999), and the important works by Larry May, *The Socially Responsive Self: Social Theory and Professional Ethics* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996), Avery Kolers, *A Moral Theory of Solidarity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), Sally J. Scholz, *Political Solidarity* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008), Steinar Stjernø, *Solidarity in Europe: The History of an Idea* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), Hauke Brunkhorst, *Solidarity: From Civic Friendship to a Global Legal Community* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), Tommie Shelby, *We Who Are Dark: The Philosophical Foundations of Black Solidarity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), Simon Derpmann, *Gründe der Solidarität* (Münster: Mentis, 2013), Andrea Sangiovanni, ‘Solidarity as Joint Action’, *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 32, no. 4 (November 2015): pp. 340-359, doi:10.1111/japp.12130, and Keith Banting and Will Kymlicka, eds., *The Strains of Commitment: The Political Sources of Solidarity in Diverse Societies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

³ For an illuminating analysis of the different trajectories of the concept, see Andrea Sangiovanni’s contribution in this volume. With respect to the dominant usages of the concept, Kurt Bayertz, ‘Four Uses of “Solidarity”’, in *Solidarity*, edited by Kurt Bayertz (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999), pp. 3-28, is very useful.

⁴ For an argument against employing different “concepts” with regard to liberty (commenting on Isaiah Berlin), see Rainer Forst, ‘Political Liberty: Integrating Five Conceptions of Autonomy’, in *Autonomy and the Challenges to Liberalism: New Essays*, edited by John Christman and Joel Anderson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 226-242 (also in my *The Right to Justification* (New York:

Similarly, we should avoid being “held captive”⁵ by one particular picture of solidarity, say the one associated with the socialist tradition or with social activism, and declare it to be the “true” or “authentic” form of solidarity.

I suggest instead that we use the distinction developed by John Rawls between “concept” and “conceptions”⁶ – the concept contains the essential features of a term, whereas conceptions are thicker interpretations of these features – and situate the different conceptions of solidarity in the social and normative contexts where they play a particular role. Following this methodological approach, however, calls for particular care. For neither can one start from a quasi-Platonic conceptual *eidos* and deduce the criteria for every legitimate usage of the term from it, nor can one inductively examine all semantic usages of the word for common features which would then constitute the core concept. The former approach is dogmatic, the latter uncritical and in any case unrealistic. Rather, we should aim to achieve a “reflective equilibrium” (to use another Rawlsian term, although in a different sense than he did) by going back and forth between paradigmatic examples and forms of solidarity in certain contexts, historical and contemporary, on the one hand, and a determination of basic features they share, on the other. This process is in principle an open-ended one, as one can always go back and re-enter that circle: Was the concept defined too narrowly or broadly? Are the different conceptions appropriately defined? And so forth. The general aim is to provide the definition of a concept that reveals meaningful distinctions between different conceptions of solidarity. In that way, we might be able to answer some of the questions outlined above and, most of all, avoid declaring a particular conception of solidarity to be the “true” concept – a mistake occasionally made in corresponding debates, especially when it comes to politically charged concepts such as solidarity (or toleration, justice, liberty, and so on).

II. THE CONCEPT OF SOLIDARITY

The general concept of solidarity refers to a particular *practical attitude* of a person toward others. It involves a form of “standing by”⁷ each other (from the Latin *solidus*)⁸ based on a *particular normative bond* with others constituted by a *common cause* or *shared identity*. The two latter notions are not mutually exclusive, because a shared

Columbia University Press, 2012), ch. 5), and also, with respect to toleration, Rainer Forst, *Toleration in Conflict: Past and Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), §1.

⁵ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1968), §115, p. 48.

⁶ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 5.

⁷ In German “füreinander eintreten.”

⁸ In Roman law, the term referred to a particular kind of collective liability of a group for the costs generated by one member and vice versa. That meaning is still preserved in the term today. The history of the concept is reconstructed by Andreas Wildt, ‘Solidarität’, in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie online*, edited by Joachim Ritter, Karlfried Gründer, and Gottfried Gabriel (Basel: Schwabe Verlag), doi:10.24894/HWPh.3928, and in Andreas Wildt, ‘Solidarity: Its History and Contemporary Definition’, in *Solidarity*, edited by Kurt Bayertz (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999), pp. 209-220.

identity can be correlated with a common cause. Still, sometimes, such as in the case of working class solidarity, the common cause determines the commonality more than a particular social situation or identity marker (for example, you do not need to be a worker to be solidary with the cause of the working class).

Solidarity expresses a willingness to act with and for the sake of others based on the motive of affirming the collective bond, i.e. of furthering the common cause or the shared identity, when this is required, or both. Solidarity as a practical attitude exists as long as this bond is perceived to be important and binding, and it materializes when corresponding action is felt to be required, especially in the face of threats or particular challenges.⁹ Solidarity is not generally, on the basic conceptual level, a fighting creed, but it is required as a practice when “needed,” i.e. when called for to affirm or defend the common project. Solidary action is voluntary and based on inner conviction because it springs from the motive of the common bond as felt and perceived by those who act (which does not exclude motivational forces that in your view leave you with no alternative other than to be solidary, especially if connected with strong social expectations to act loyally).¹⁰

It is important to note that solidary action is expected of members of the collective precisely when it is costly, i.e. when narrow self-interest might actually deem it to be too costly. This is when reasons rooted in the “deeper” bond come into play as justifying and motivating forces. As far as the basic concept of solidarity is concerned, however, it is not justified to add to its defining features that its demands are always supererogatory,¹¹ since costly actions can also be demanded by duties of reciprocal solidarity. At the general conceptual level, it is difficult to determine the point at which the call for particular actions by some members overstrains the bonds of solidarity uniting the collective, especially given that people usually belong to various overlapping, but also possibly conflicting, contexts of solidarity (family, nation, and class, for example – in other words, the classical stuff of drama). The general concept of solidarity entails no particular metric of what solidarity requires in concrete contexts, which is determined by the various conceptions of the common bond that grounds particular contextual instances of solidarity.

There is some reciprocity involved, since *each* member of a solidary communal context is expected to act in solidarity; however, this is far from a straightforward economic form of reciprocity in which one (ideally) receives an equivalent for one’s contribution or in which contributions have to be roughly equal. Let us call this *solidary reciprocity*: One’s contribution serves the general, common cause, and those who can contribute more or something special do it in order to further that cause, so that when they act in

⁹ This is stressed by Sangiovanni, ‘Solidarity as Joint Action’, pp. 343-345. It seems to me, however, that solidarity as a practical attitude, as a willingness to act if required, is essential, whether it finds expression in action or not.

¹⁰ The point of loyalty is stressed by Shelby, *We Who Are Dark*, pp. 69-70.

¹¹ As Wildt, ‘Solidarity: Its History and Contemporary Definition’, p. 213, does.

such ways, they feel neither superior nor exploited (and those who contribute less do not feel like second-class members). Such solidarity can reach so far that one feels bound to save the body or execute the last will of a deceased comrade or friend, assuming that he or she would have done the same. Solidary reciprocity can take imagined and yet real, highly asymmetrical forms. This also includes solidary support for people struggling for human rights in a way and as a cause by which I feel bound, even though I may not know them personally or they may be in a position where they could not possibly reciprocate what I do. Nevertheless, we share a cause for which we act for together, each doing their share.¹²

It is often said that solidarity is owed most to the weakest member of a collective, but this is only half of the truth: It is *owed* to the collective and its general cause and common good, but it may *materialize* in the shape of a particular concern for those who are weakest, depending on the specific nature of the common bond. There are lots of historical layers that need to be distinguished here, ranging from Catholic social doctrine to the communist movement or to visions of nationalism.

So these are the components of the general concept of solidarity, abstracted from concrete contexts and conceptions: a practical attitude which takes the form of a willingness to act based on a common bond that implies a common cause or shared identity that ought to be furthered. The bond itself is the motivating force, and it can call for particular actions beyond narrow self-interest. The reciprocity involved can take many forms, including asymmetrical ones, as long as the bond justifies what it means to do one's share. If these features appear in a certain practical context, we encounter a form of solidarity.

III. NORMATIVE DEPENDENCY

So far, solidarity sounds like a virtue, and with respect to its character of overcoming one's narrow self-interest to further a common cause it surely is. But that does not make it a *moral* virtue or something intrinsically good, since a Mafia family very much depends on the solidarity of its members. And nationalist movements have historically used the language of solidarity quite effectively for many purposes, including aggressive ones. Hence, in general, solidarity, like courage, is a morally neutral virtue, and it can be used for good or bad purposes.

The concept itself is thus a *normatively dependent* one, which means that normative conceptions of solidarity are in need of interpretive supplementation by other normative

¹² This notion of imagined reciprocity might exceed the notion of reciprocity and joint action that Sangiovanni, 'Solidarity as Joint Action', p. 350, thinks defines solidary action. For an argument about transnational solidarity, see Carol C. Gould, 'Transnational Solidarities', *Journal of Social Philosophy* 38, no. 1 (Spring 2007): pp. 148-164, doi:10.1111/j.1467-9833.2007.00371.x. I hesitate to call that kind of solidarity less "robust," as Ashley E. Taylor, 'Solidarity: Obligations and Expressions', *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 23, no. 2 (June 2015): pp. 128-145, doi:10.1111/jopp.12035, does.

principles (such as justice) or values (such as national welfare or serving God's honor). The concept of solidarity is contextually and normatively promiscuous – it can serve many ends and does not contain any particular ends in itself, whether moral or political. Such ends must be connected with the idea of solidarity – i.e. of standing in for others based on a particular shared bond and common cause – and the bond or cause in question must be spelled out independently as something worth caring about. Here the relevant justifying reasons can be specific and relative to particular social contexts, but they can also be of a universalist nature. Religious forms of solidarity often combine particularistic and universalistic claims because they are rooted in a particular faith, but may (and often do) regard the truths and imperatives of that faith as being universally valid.

This means that reasons of solidarity are not reasons of a normative kind categorically distinct from reasons of morality, justice, religion, friendship, etc.¹³ They are of a particular nature, however, insofar as reasons of political solidarity, for example, are reasons to promote the particular political cause of a concrete collective one feels bound to and identifies with, even though there may be other political collectives that are similar in nature. Still, the bond that justifies solidary actions is not binding simply in virtue of the fact of membership.¹⁴ Rather, it is binding for a person because she values the cause or identity of the collective for particular normative reasons. She sees certain values *embodied* by this community with which she identifies and not by others (though this may change); hence, reasons of solidarity *combine* independent evaluative considerations with a particular bond to a concrete collective one may belong to. This bipolar nature of solidarity can create a dynamic of critique of one's collective in light of the relevant evaluations and possibly of changing solidarities between collectives. At the level of basic conceptual analysis, it is not possible to define the proper ratio between particular combinations of the fact and history of membership, on the one hand, and independent evaluative components, on the other, as these vary with contexts and conceptions of solidarity.

Again, this analysis does not imply that the reasons to value the bond that grounds solidarity are good moral reasons; a one-sided and nationalist, perhaps even chauvinistic, affirmation of a national identity can be the basis for solidarity as much as a postconventional anti-nationalist solidarity with excluded groups.

Our normative vocabulary contains other, similar terms, such as toleration or legitimacy, that only express a personal or institutional moral virtue if they are associated with independently grounded good reasons and justifications. Unlike justice, for example, they do not stand for intrinsically justified virtues. To be sure, a particular interpretation of justice may not be well founded, but it can be criticized in terms of the core concept of justice *itself* as a matter of overcoming arbitrariness in

¹³ The opposite view is defended by Derpmann, *Gründe der Solidarität*.

¹⁴ A view held by Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989), ch. 9.

social relations (which is the core meaning of justice), whereas such a reflexive critique is not possible in the case of solidarity or toleration (although it has often been attempted).¹⁵ One can criticize a particular act of solidarity for not being sufficiently solidary, but that does not tell us anything about the value of the cause that was to be furthered. Whether an act or attitude of solidarity is well founded depends on such values.

The idea of normatively dependent concepts is different from that of “essentially contested concepts,”¹⁶ because the normative conceptions, but not the concept itself, are contested and conflict with each other. In fact, I doubt whether there really are any essentially contested concepts all the way down. For if there were, as argued above, it would not be clear whether a contest between normative interpretations of a concept really was a contest about the *same* concept.

IV. NORMATIVE CONTEXTS AND CONCEPTIONS OF SOLIDARITY

Various *conceptions* of solidarity can be distinguished depending on the values or principles that lend normative substance to the bond of solidarity in certain *practical contexts*. That does not make my account contextualist in a relativistic way, but it takes seriously the multiplicity of what can be meant by a “common bond,” “shared identity,” or “common cause.” As we saw above, it has to express something of value to all members of the solidary community; but what that value is and what exactly it entails depends on the context.

So “context” here is a complex notion involving the following aspects: It specifies the *normative nature* (or point) of the solidary bond and demarcates the *community* of solidarity. It is not just a context of action but a normative context of self-understanding, both individually and collectively. Most importantly, it is a *context of justification* that determines the relevant reasons for solidary action. At the same time, it is a context of normatively binding social relations of *mutual recognition*.¹⁷ Which actions in particular are required depends on a further step of contextual specification; for example, there is a conception of solidarity among friends, but what exactly a concrete friendship requires friends to do or not depends on the history and particular nature of their relation. The context of justification has to be spelled out at various levels, i.e. that of a general conception and that of a particular case.

¹⁵ See the discussions of toleration and legitimacy as normatively dependent concepts in Forst, *Toleration in Conflict*, §3, and Rainer Forst, *Normativity and Power: Analyzing Social Orders of Justification* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), ch. 8, respectively.

¹⁶ Walter B. Gallie, ‘Essentially Contested Concepts’, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 56, no. 1 (1955-1956), pp. 167-198, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4544562>.

¹⁷ See, in the context of a discussion of justice, my notion of contexts of recognition and of justification in Rainer Forst, *Contexts of Justice: Political Philosophy Beyond Liberalism and Communitarianism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), ch. 5.

1. ETHICAL CONTEXTS

In *ethical* contexts of family and intimate partnerships, friendships, or other forms of community, solidarity is based on particular communal bonds centered on a notion of the shared and mutually enjoyed good, and these bonds ground what it means to be solidary or to lack solidarity. I call such contexts “ethical” because the communally affirmed notion of the good relevant here is (at least in part) constitutive of one’s ethical-personal identity, one’s special form of life or *ethos*. So in acting in solidarity, you are affirming your own identity, you recognize who and what you are, and the common project is part of yourself – and that motivates you to do what is required. The personal investment in this form of solidarity can be very high, depending on the level of identity involvement.

The nature of the commitment and of the actions that are required and justifiable, as well as the scope of the community of solidarity, depend on these particular identity contexts. In this realm, one is usually a member of multiple ethical contexts, which may lead to priority issues or conflicts, for example between loyalty to and solidarity with your family and to your religious community or to a friend who needs your support. None of these contexts of solidarity is self-justifying or takes natural precedence; it is all a question of ethical justification, where the question of who you are and what you owe to others with whom you share a strong communal bond is essential. Such a practice of justification, searching for what you “really care about,”¹⁸ will also determine what exactly acting in solidarity means, including whether it requires you to sacrifice something important or to take risks. The main “currency” of justification here is the “ethical identity investment” (as we may call it) you share with particular others.¹⁹

2. LEGAL CONTEXTS

It may sound surprising to list the legal domain as a context of solidarity, since this does not seem to cohere with the notions of “common bond” or “solidary reciprocity” and the idea that solidarity is a voluntary, non-coerced act. And indeed, many people think that solidarity must be located outside the bonds of legal duties and obligations or, for that matter, of what justice demands.²⁰ However, as we know since Hegel and Durkheim, modern social systems presuppose certain forms of institutionally mediated solidarity, where one contributes one’s share without expecting a narrow *quid pro quo*.²¹ Social insurance schemes are an example of such systems, which is why in

¹⁸ Harry Frankfurt, *The Importance of What We Care About* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

¹⁹ Cf. Taylor, ‘Solidarity: Obligations and Expressions’.

²⁰ Wildt, ‘Solidarity: Its History and Contemporary Definition’, and Erhard Denninger, ‘Constitutional Law and Solidarity’, in *Solidarity*, edited by Kurt Bayertz (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999), pp. 223-242.

²¹ Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labour in Society* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1984), and Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1995).

German they are called *Solidargemeinschaften* or communities of solidarity.²² Leibniz can be seen as a pioneer of such solidary schemes of “institutionalized solidarity,”²³ because he argued for an insurance scheme (in cases of fire and flooding) – *assecurazione contra casus fortuitos* – in which society as a whole should stand in for those affected by such disasters.²⁴ He compared society to a ship whose welfare is the responsibility of all, so that we have to help each other in case of need for the sake of the general context of cooperation – adding that the need in question should not be the result of one’s own blameworthy behavior.

Many social insurance schemes are built on such ideas, including social welfare and health care schemes, and it remained a matter of dispute whether carelessness and other vices disqualify one from the scheme of solidarity or not. These are issues that are still relevant today, in practice as well as in theory, if you think of luck egalitarianism, for example.²⁵ In any case, whether it is a private insurance scheme (e.g. car or home insurance) to which one contributes without ever necessarily receiving an equivalent, while others are bailed out from emergencies based on bad behavior or bad luck, or whether it is a socially obligatory scheme, say of general public health insurance, some form of solidary reciprocity is involved here, since it is generally accepted that those in need will receive more benefits than those who are not in need. Furthermore, although free riding is not explicitly accepted, it is for the most part tacitly tolerated for the sake of maintaining the overall integrity of the scheme.

The legal form does not preclude solidarity properly speaking even in a mandatory scheme. For, as Durkheim argued, one is asked to accept it not only and not primarily because of the sanctioning force of the system but based on its justification, its *raison d’être*, and how it functions – and not to free ride personally or change it politically even if one could do so with majority support. Both as a subject of the law who could cheat but does not do so and, more importantly, as a lawgiver in a democratic legal state, one accepts the solidary scheme as justified and expressing a common civic bond. Otherwise, we would run into the paradox that the social struggles of solidary workers and others for such social insurance schemes throughout the 19th and 20th centuries were really struggles to overcome “true” solidarity based on voluntary action by

²² Karl H. Metz, ‘Solidarity and History: Institutions and Social Concepts of Solidarity in 19th Century Western Europe’, in *Solidarity*, edited by Kurt Bayertz (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999), pp. 191-207, and Ulrich K. Preuss, ‘National, Supranational, and International Solidarity’, in *Solidarity*, edited by Kurt Bayertz (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999), pp. 281-289.

²³ Frank Nullmeier, ‘Eigenverantwortung, Gerechtigkeit und Solidarität – Konkurrierende Prinzipien der Konstruktion moderner Wohlfahrtsstaaten?’, in *WSI Mitteilungen* 4 (2006), pp. 175-180, and Gøsta Esping-Andersen, *Social Foundations of Postindustrial Economies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

²⁴ Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, ‘Öffentliche Assekuranzen’, in *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe* IV/3 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1986), pp. 421-432. See also Cornel Zwierlein, *Prometheus Tamed: Fire, Security and Modernities, 1400-1900* (Leiden: Brill, 2021).

²⁵ Rainer Forst, ‘The Point of Justice: On the Paradigmatic Incompatibility between Rawlsian “Justice as Fairness” and Luck Egalitarianism’, in *John Rawls: Debating the Major Questions*, edited by John Mandle and Sarah Roberts-Cady (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 148-160.

institutionalizing social rights. Solidarity means seeing and accepting the point of such schemes.²⁶

It is true that those libertarians, for example, who would rather abolish such schemes are forced to act according to norms of solidarity without really being in solidarity, and here we should recognize that certain external actions conforming to solidarity can be enforced, although the attitude cannot be. But one cannot infer from the fact that the law is coercive that all those who are subject to it follow it *because* it is coercive. Some do, some don't. Similarly, one cannot infer from acts of solidarity in ethical contexts that they were really motivated by the right reasons; maybe group pressure was the cause. As far as legal contexts are concerned, if the laws were only followed out of fear of being caught when violating them, functioning legal states would have to take the form of repressive police states. And from a political perspective, the assumption that "the state" as a separate agent installs legal systems of obligations independently from the political will of majorities and forces its subjects to comply with them is a remnant of a pre-democratic notion of law. Institutionalizing a system of social solidarity can therefore be seen as an act of solidarity, and upholding it, too; dismantling it in a neoliberal spirit can rightly be criticized as an act of de-solidarization.²⁷

3. POLITICAL CONTEXTS

In *political* contexts, we encounter various forms or conceptions of solidarity:

An *ethical-political* form of solidarity refers to national bonds and a shared history, or perhaps even an ethnic-historical identity interpreted as a political identity and as a project to be pursued and continued, for example, through national independence. The fact that such communities, their histories, and meanings are often "imagined"²⁸ or fabricated does not mean that the motivating force of such ideas or communities is any less powerful. Nationalism, whether it assumes more benign or more malicious forms, remains a major normative source of solidary practical motivation.

A *political-social* form of solidarity exists where there is less ethical investment in a particular communal form of life that is regarded as valuable, but where a common cause and project motivates people to act in solidarity, such as the creation of a new form of life or a new society. In most cases these are fighting creeds, as in the struggles for class liberation, democracy, or ecological revolution. The nature of the project can be moral or self-interested; interpretations of class struggle, for example, can come in Marxist-Hegelian or in Nietzschean guises.

Political-social solidarity often aims at establishing a *just* society, as in movements for gender and racial equality or for overcoming class and caste exploitation as grave

²⁶ Cf. T.H. Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950).

²⁷ Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

²⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2016).

forms of injustice – *Unrecht schlechthin*, in Marx's words.²⁹ Such movements share certain components with ethical-political collectives, since they involve a positive valuation of certain marginalized or exploited forms of life; yet the thrust of these communal struggles is to establish a new, just society. That is what calls for solidarity; it is grounded in justice as a general principle to be realized in a particular social context. *Justice-based* conceptions of solidarity come in two forms, those that demand solidarity in order to *establish* a just political and social order and those that require solidarity in order to *preserve* it – although preserving justice usually also means furthering and improving on it.

It is important to distinguish the forms of solidarity involved in struggles for justice from more institutionalized forms of solidarity which presuppose that a certain level of justice has already been realized (rare as this is). For the former, solidarity is required to combat injustice, and it is difficult to determine to what extent that struggle should be bound by principles of justice (as I think it should). The second form of solidarity is clearly guided by principles of justice, for example, when it is a question of realizing a demanding form of social justice, say one that accords with Rawls's difference principle. This calls for an ethos of justice that gives people reasons not to act or vote on their short-term self-interests, an ethos that cannot be fully realized in the form of legal duties.³⁰ It also implies a form of solidary reciprocity which is based on an understanding that social justice involves a reciprocal relation between contributions and benefits that does not conform to the optimization of one's self-interest, narrowly understood.³¹

In contemporary societies, solidarity is often required in a form that combines the motives of establishing and preserving justice, because our institutions realize justice at best in part and undermine it at the same time. Justice properly understood – a notion for which I cannot argue here³² – means using existing institutions (such as nation states) to overcome the existing obstacles to establishing transnational institutions of democratic justice, given existing transnational realities of global injustice. The community of solidarity with respect to social and political justice must be broader than the nation state, because states are part of transnational schemes of cooperation and, most importantly, of enforced and asymmetrical cooperation that include relations of political, social and economic exploitation which ought to be overcome by institutions of transnational justice. From a comprehensive perspective

²⁹ Karl Marx, 'Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie. Einleitung' in *Marx-Engels-Werke* I (Berlin: Dietz, 1976), p. 390.

³⁰ G. A. Cohen, Jürgen Habermas and John Rawls agree on this point. See, for example, Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, § 79, G.A. Cohen, *Why Not Socialism?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), J. Habermas, *Im Sog der Technokratie* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2013), ch. 5.

³¹ Sangiovanni, 'Solidarity as Joint Action'.

³² See my work on transnational justice in Forst, *The Right to Justification*, pt. 3, Forst, *Normativity and Power*, pt. V, and Rainer Forst, 'A Critical Theory of Transnational (In-)Justice: Realistic in the Right Way', in *The Oxford Handbook of Global Justice*, edited by Thom Brooks (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 451-472.

of justice, national solidarity must not be realized at the price of a lack of solidarity with others who are exploited and dominated.³³

In this context, the argument for drawing the line around a justification community or a community of solidarity is different from that which applies in ethical contexts. There, the basis for solidarity is the ethical investment in a communal context; in the case of justice, the basis is a moral-political conception of what one owes to others as part of a shared normative order, and such orders transcend national ones. This implies a normative notion of solidarity that is grounded in the principle that no one ought to be subjected to a normative order (say, of the global economy) of which they cannot be a co-author with equal standing. Bound by justice, we owe solidarity to those who are denied such standing and should not accord our fellow-nationals normative priority in a way that is detrimental to this duty.

Solidarity in contexts of (in-)justice is a duty based on the basic right of persons to be respected as equal normative authorities in normative orders to which they are subjected. In cases where we share such orders with them – whether it is a state or a broader, global economic scheme – we have duties of justice as participants in such orders, and duties of solidarity defined by justice. In those (unlikely) cases where we are not implicated (however indirectly) in such orders in which persons are being denied equal standing as justificatory agents, we nevertheless have a natural duty of justice (and solidarity) to help them overcome that injustice. Existing injustice and shared projects of justice ground duties of solidarity in both cases, but in different ways depending on the context.

A special case of duties of solidarity based on considerations of justice is ensuring that refugees are treated respectfully in the normative orders they reach.³⁴ They are fellow human beings who are fleeing from injustice or from living conditions that are unbearable given the existing global possibilities for redistributing resources, and members of better-off countries owe them standing as agents of justice who have claims upon them as cosmopolitan compatriots and participants in a transnational normative order of resource distribution. Here, as elsewhere, it is important to be clear whether we are speaking of general moral, legal, or moral-political duties of solidarity. All of these categories are involved here.

4. MORAL CONTEXTS

In *moral* contexts, finally, solidarity is based on our common humanity and calls for forms of action that range from morally obligatory assistance in cases of need to

³³ Stephan Lessenich, 'Doppelmoral hält besser: Die Politik mit der Solidarität in der Externalisierungsgesellschaft', *Berliner Journal für Soziologie* 30 (2020), pp. 113-130, doi:10.1007/s11609-020-00410-w.

³⁴ David Owen, *What Do We Owe to Refugees?* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2020).

supererogatory actions beyond any reasonable assumption of reciprocity – apart from the hope that, were we ever in a similar position, others would also do something similar for us. Solidarity covers all cases, from “normal” help to extremely costly forms of assistance, although supererogatory action is an especially praiseworthy service of solidarity. So the realm of solidarity allows for an additional space for extremely solidary and laudable actions and efforts; and I should add that this is generally the case, also in other contexts.

Moral solidarity, traditionally called *Brüderlichkeit*³⁵ by idealists like Schiller or Beethoven (either ignoring women or including them as “brothers”), is not the “other” of morality in the sense of an opposite, even if morality is understood along Kantian lines; rather, it is an *aspect* of morality that recognizes others as vulnerable beings one must “stand with,” given their finitude and frailty and the fact that we all share a human form of life, as Habermas argues.³⁶ Morality, after all, is a form of caring for and about others, even if one does not share a more particular form of life or identity with them. Respecting the uniqueness and vulnerability of the “concrete other”³⁷ while also respecting and treating him or her as an equal is what morality demands.³⁸ Acts of solidarity are always concrete acts, but that does not mean that the reason for performing them cannot be of a universalist nature. From a moral standpoint, we have no justifying reason not to show solidarity with others in need.

V. CONCLUSION

The foregoing analysis can help to clarify not only the different meanings of the term “solidarity” (and the different normative conceptions of solidarity) but also some of its pitfalls. The latter stem especially from mistaking a particular conception of solidarity for the whole concept, assuming, for example, that solidarity must always be of an ethical or nationalist nature, that it is categorically different from justice or that it is always supererogatory. Solidarity comes in many forms and with many justifications and grounds. One must not reduce this plurality, but instead describe it properly.

As indicated, this opens up the possibility of conflicts between these contexts and dimensions of solidarity – among friends, comrades, citizens, or all those suffering from injustice. My main point here is that the normatively dependent concept of solidarity does *not* tell us to which form we ought to accord priority. This is where we reach bedrock in a dispute between, for example, a Humean and a Kantian account. For a

³⁵ Véronique Munoz-Dardé, ‘Fraternity and Justice’, in *Solidarity*, edited by Kurt Bayertz (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999), pp. 81-97.

³⁶ Jürgen Habermas, ‘Justice and Solidarity: On the Discussion Concerning “Stage 6”’, in *Philosophical Forum* 21/1 (1989): 32–52. He retracts this in his *Im Sog der Technokratie*, p. 104.

³⁷ Seyla Benhabib, *The Rights of Others: Aliens, Residents, and Citizens* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

³⁸ Lutz Wingert, *Gemeinsinn und Moral: Grundzüge einer intersubjektivistischen Moralkonzeption* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1993).

Humean might argue that those forms in which the identity investment is greatest, thus possibly the ethical ones, should be accorded priority.³⁹ Or he or she might construct a moral theory of the worst evils to be avoided, thereby according priority to the moral (depending, however, on the ethical identification with such priorities).⁴⁰ Kantians understand the emotional and social pull of ethical forms of solidarity, but believe that normative priority should be accorded to forms of solidarity connected with categorical imperatives of equal respect.⁴¹ The reason for this is that, for Kantians, solidarity is a virtue only if founded on practical reason, based on the best justification among equal human beings. In this sense, the question of solidarity points to larger questions about who we are as moral beings.

³⁹ Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*.

⁴⁰ Andrea Sangiovanni, *Humanity Without Dignity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2017).

⁴¹ Barbara Herman, *Moral Literacy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008). Forst, *The Right to Justification*, part I.