

## Doing Justice to Solidarity: On the Moral Role of Mutual Support

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# DOING JUSTICE TO SOLIDARITY: ON THE MORAL ROLE OF MUTUAL SUPPORT

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## abstract

*The value of solidarity, which implies mutual concern and support, is often conveyed in our everyday moral and political language. But what is its conceptual relationship with justice? Influential positions in this debate may argue for the opposition between the two concepts: justice is impartial and universal, while solidarity is partial and limited. The present paper aims to shortly explore a range of theories that may exemplify possible answers to this position, from communitarian and realist views, which ultimately confirm the opposition, to political solidarities, which claim an instrumental need for solidarity as a reaction to injustices. Special attention will be paid to Habermas's compatibilist account of solidarity as the "reverse side" of justice. The paper contends that a compelling answer should preserve the difference between the two spheres and the essential features of solidarity by also sketching a concept of solidarity as a social duty arising from our moral interdependence.*

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## keywords

*solidarity, justice, intersubjectivity, social duty, Jürgen Habermas*

### 1. Justice or solidarity?

Solidarity is a re-emerging concept. The term appears as widespread as it is nebulous, and it is often perceived as worn out and evasive. Solidarity is a very broad and multifaceted notion with multiple semantic layers and practical implications. Its ordinary meaning can refer to the idea of social cohesion, human brotherhood, compassion, or political alliance. Its uncertain meaning is not surprising since it is not unusual in moral and political philosophy for other key concepts, such as justice, freedom, or equality, to be “essentially contested” (Gallie, 1955-56). However, unlike freedom or equality, the ambiguity of solidarity is not related to a variety of competing theories. On the contrary, despite its centrality as a social concept and its omnipresence in the current public arena, solidarity “has seldom been the object of an elaborated theory” (Bayertz, 1999, p. 3). Notably, in his *A Theory of Justice*, John Rawls wrote that “[i]n comparison with liberty and equality, the idea of fraternity has had a lesser place in democratic theory” (Rawls, 1999, p. 90).<sup>1</sup>

However, in the past decades, many successful efforts have been made by scholars of moral and political theory to undertake a conceptual refinement of the idea of solidarity. The notion has been compared and often defined in contrast to other similar ideas or practices, such as charity, care and loyalty. *Charity* seems to be essentially a unilateral and hierarchical relation, whereas solidarity requires a joint action with shared fate, risks and goals (Sangiovanni, 2015). The idea of *care* can refer to a set of human relationships, often only personal and face-to-face ones, which involve exclusivity and gratuity; this can be the case of affective bonds among family members, love among partners and friendship. Finally, the concept of *loyalty* may also overlap with the idea of solidarity; both seem to be based on identification with a common cause (e.g., a nation, an institution, an idea), yet traditional loyalty might require and sometimes impose unconditional dedication and self-denial, which can go hand in hand with subordination (Jaeggi, 2001).

Many steps forward have also been made in classifying solidarity’s various uses and types, most notably in describing the different applications and contexts of mutual support, namely as an integrative force, a mechanism of social protection and a transformative practice in political conflicts (Scholz, 2008). According to this classification, solidarity can be employed for strengthening a community, ensuring social services for vulnerable people or fighting against someone or something in the name of social change. The scholars Barbara Prainsack

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1 In Rawls’s terminology, “fraternity” stands also for “solidarity” (Kolers, 2016, p. 2).

and Alena Buyx (2017) have also identified different social levels of mutual support and concern: *personal*, regarding face-to-face relations; *group-based*, involving collective actions; and *institutional*, requiring formal codes and regulations. Based on these various comparisons and classifications, solidarity might be reasonably defined as a symmetrical relation of mutual support and shared risk based on the recognition of a common cause.

Although significant progress can be detected in the study of the concept at the descriptive level, it is still unclear how to assess the practice of solidarity in normative terms. Morally speaking, solidarity may be perceived as a positive attitude that absorbs virtues such as co-responsibility, support, trust, and willingness to sacrifice. However, the history of the idea alone could suggest an original bond with inclusion, which is related to a constellation of modern principles, such as liberty, equality, and democracy (Stjernø, 2005). This historicist account, though, cannot entirely fulfil the task of justifying solidarity's intrinsic morality, as one would have to arbitrarily select empirical cases of "positive" solidarities and exclude others considered to be "negative." For instance, with regards to the period of the civil rights movement, one could arguably label as solidaristic only the union among black people and as non-soludaristic the actions of white supremacists. In reality, solidarity can also refer to attitudes and practices that are usually condemned, such as solidarity among terrorists or criminals and nationalist or particularistic alliances. A practice of solidarity among "peers" can also rely on morally unjust purposes, as forms of injustice can easily inform solidarity within a group against outsiders. Furthermore, risks and adversities do not necessarily imply that the most disadvantaged or oppressed groups are involved in solidarity; therefore, the adversity required by solidarity cannot be measured by an objective standard but by the real interest and intentions of the group (Blum, 2007, p. 69). It would also be circular for any argument to justify solidaristic relations in normative terms by referring to "human nature" or "human essence" if human nature has already been defined as solidaristic.<sup>2</sup> Hence, the value of solidarity has been described as a normatively dependent concept insofar as it is not inherently good (Forst, 2021). This means that notions of solidarity need to be integrated with other normative principles, such as justice, a notion of "good" or another substantive value.

Several scholars have pointed out how the relationship between solidarity and modern ethics is originally broken insofar as modern rationalist ethics has always looked at solidarity as an expression of supererogatory acts and particularistic obligations.<sup>3</sup> The undivided attention of rationalistic moral theories for universal principles recognizes only individuals, on one hand, and humanity as a whole, on the other (Bayertz, 1999). According to this reading, the obligations of solidarity exceed the requirements of morality insofar as they demand individuals to do certain things for others that they would not be required to do *for everyone*. However extensive and flexible, the boundaries of solidarity are limited (Heyd, 2007) as they involve a concrete "we," whereas universal justice, for instance, in a Kantian and deontological perspective, assumes as its criterion *the equal interest of all*. Thus, the oscillation between particularity and universality would not ensure a central role for solidarity in moral theory. In this regard, according to Kurt Bayertz (1999), as a moral and political idea, solidarity is "outmoded" in favour of contemporary theories of justice, and the concept of justice is preferred to that of solidarity even in the justification of social rights and fair distribution of

## 2. Morality and Solidarity

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2 Alternatively, there are those who, like David Wiggins (2009), argue that solidarity is a "proto-ethical virtue" – a modern name given to a phenomenon "as old as the hills" – which is present in all cultural contexts.

3 As Kurt Bayertz (1999, p. 26) has suggested: "Modern ethics has often underestimated the significance of this power of communities to form identities and shape corresponding obligations. One-sided concentration on universal rules and norms has forced 'solidarity' and the relevance of it and other group-specific obligations to take a back-seat."

goods and resources. Hence, its use might sound euphemistic or redundant as it would serve the same function in the just distribution of wealth (Reichlin, 2011). In Bayertz's (1999, p. 25) words:

Since there is no (longer?) reason to assume an existing perception of common ground, from which solidarity is known spontaneously to grow, it seems reasonable to deduce obligations to help from the principle of justice. Justice requires neither group-specific common ground nor emotional attachment, but is based instead on the distanced observation and the weighing up of competing claims from a neutral position.

Rawlsian theory of justice is the most prominent example of this move. Indeed, in his *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls (1999) does not justify the difference principle ("social and economic inequalities are to be to the greatest benefit of the least-advantaged members of society") based on the idea of "fraternity". Indeed, the role that Rawls assigns to fraternity is purely vicarious and symbolic – to ideally inspire and not ground the normative claims of the difference principle.<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, as Alessandro Ferrara (2008, p. ix) has claimed, "[e]fforts have been made, from time to time, to rescue fraternity as community or as solidarity but by and large the liberal-democratic pantheon only offers pride of place to the 'free and equal citizens,' and no one feels the need to add the adjective 'fraternal'."

Therefore, how should we conceive of the link between solidarity and justice to find a significant place for solidarity in a deontic moral theory? As Bayertz himself concludes, "the concept of solidarity is thus indispensable for a philosophy of morality and politics, if this is to pay justice to the true complexity of the moral conscience" (1999, p. 26). In this regard, in the following paragraphs, I aim to briefly compare some theoretical accounts that may offer various models for understanding the role of solidarity in relation to justice. What I intend to do here is draw on them as paradigmatic instances of what is a much more varied field of possibilities.<sup>5</sup> This way of proceeding is justified by the essay's aim, which is philosophical rather than historical. Based on this critical analysis, the thesis I intend to defend is that doing justice to solidarity means finding a place for it in moral theory without erasing its conceptual peculiarity or absolutizing its normative role.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the paper's characterization of solidarity as an eminently reciprocal relation makes the discussion of its moral nature slightly distinct from the debate on the morality of beneficence/benevolence intended as the individual's duty of assistance, i.e. the obligation to be helpful to others according to one's means without hoping for personal gain (Kant, 1797/1991, pp. 196-197 (393-394); Beauchamp, 2019).

2.1. *The Priority of Solidarity Over Justice: Communitarianism and Realist Theories*

First, it is possible to identify arguments that ultimately confirm the opposition between solidarity and justice.

According to communitarian theories, the very idea of justice is replaced by solidarity

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4 As Rawls (1999, p. 91) writes: "Once we accept it, we can associate the traditional ideas of liberty, equality, and fraternity with the democratic interpretation of the two principles of justice as follows: liberty corresponds to the first principle, equality to the idea of equality in the first principle together with equality of fair opportunity, and fraternity to the difference principle. [...] The other aspects of fraternity should not be forgotten, but the difference principle expresses its fundamental meaning from the standpoint of social justice."

5 For a more extensive analysis on these paradigms, although in Italian, see Volpe (2023a), chapters 3 and 4.

6 Indeed, it is necessary to refer here to the Rawlsian distinction between *concept* and *conception*, following which the *concept* of solidarity indicates the essential features of the term, while a *conception* is the moral interpretation of its role and features (Rawls, 1999, p. 5).

and by the role of communities in shaping loyalty among individuals. Communitarianism generally criticize individualism, according to which individuals should be interested only in pursuing their atomistic claims and interests and should not feel any responsibility for the needs of others. Notably, communitarians privilege aspects of the good life and “ethical” ties, drawing on Aristotle and Hegel. To recall the categories of Ferdinand Tönnies, the strong social cohesion of *Gemeinschaft* (community) is opposed to individualistic modern *Gesellschaft* (society) to which liberal models of justice refer. In this view, solidarity, rather than justice, comes “first and foremost” (Rippe, 1998, p. 360). Charles Taylor (1985), for example, defended the idea of an “obligation to belong” for those who are members of the same historical, cultural and linguistic community. Drawing on Ronald Dworkin’s (1989) critical examination of the forms of legitimacy of the community, we can identify at least four arguments in favour of a communitarian type of solidarity. The first one relates the community with the ethical choice of the majority, which is to be defended and preserved at the expense of the fair recognition of the choices of individuals. The second argument is the paternalistic one, according to which each citizen in a political community is responsible for the well-being of others and should therefore take steps to review the behaviour of those who are in some way “deviant.” The third argument condemns atomism, i.e. the idea of the complete self-sufficiency of individuals, and stresses how people need the community’s help on a material, intellectual and ethical level. The fourth argument of integration maintains that there is no real difference between the well-being of individuals in the community and that of the community itself.<sup>7</sup>

In short, communitarian approaches dwell on shared identity and co-belonging, thus rejecting a positive reference to the concept of justice.

Despite being far from communitarian views, political realist theories are also critical of a positive link between solidarity and justice. Realists may justify relations of mutual support, particularly in the face of emergencies and crises, based on strategic reasons and enlightened self-interest. These theories address a core element of solidarity, that is social cohesion and its role as a “stabilizing mechanism” of cooperation and problem-solving (Burelli, 2018). Risk sharing is oriented not to moral purposes but to strategic solutions for common difficulties and threats. Michael Hechter, for example, has offered a conception of social solidarity based on rational choice, arguing that solidarity is nothing more than a function of the dependence of individual members on the group: “[Solidarity] can be indicated by the proportion of private resources that each member is expected to contribute to collectively determined ends” (Hechter, 1987, pp. 17-18). Furthermore, instrumental views interpret mutual aid as a rational investment in the future, according to broad predictive rationality. These arguments can also be applied to the justification of solidarity as social protection against vulnerabilities, i.e. the idea of the welfare state. As Maurizio Ferrera (2005, p. 50) pointed out, “[t]he institutionalization of solidarity through social rights has effectively combated the disintegrative tendency of the nineteenth century’s greatest social utopia: that of a market entirely capable of self-regulation.” The expedient of state-organized solidarity is only to avoid massive imbalances and inequalities, which would threaten social and economic stability. This account of solidarity may accord with a result-oriented legitimacy, whereby institutions’ legitimacy may increase or decrease depending on their ability to build ties of solidarity with its subordinates and foster so-called “togetherness”.

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7 Although the communitarian perspective insists on the priority of ethical ties, it does not necessarily lead to authoritarian or conservative outcomes; on the contrary, it can derive the resources for a progressive social critique from shared norms and values (Walzer, 1987).

Hence, realists rely on solidarity's integrative and problem-solving function without any reference to justice.

2.2. *A Joint Reaction to Injustice: Political Solidarities*

For other authors, the meaning of solidarity leads immediately to the experience of perceived *injustice* (Tava, 2023). Hannah Arendt, in her work *On Revolution* (1963), argued that solidarity does not derive from any positive or higher principle but from the experience of human suffering and how people, regardless of their identity or similarity, react to this experience by establishing “communities of interest.” Similarly, in his book *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (1989), Richard Rorty started from the aid given to Jews during the Second World War to sketch a theory of solidarity as a contingent act in response to human suffering. According to him, those who stood in solidarity with the persecuted did not do so because they saw Jews as fellow human beings; instead, they recognized their pain and humiliation. According to Rorty, the recognition of the shared pain and suffering of others precedes any positive conception of justice. On the contrary, as Rorty suggests, “our sense of solidarity is strongest when those with whom solidarity is expressed are thought of as ‘one of us,’ where ‘us’ means something smaller and more local than the human race” (1989, p. 191).

A more contemporary approach to political solidarity is proposed by Tommie Shelby (2005) in his book *We Who Are Dark: The Philosophical Foundations of Black Solidarity*. Shelby distinguishes two strands of black nationalism: “classic black nationalism” and “pragmatic black nationalism.” The first strand refers to cohesion among people of colour based on a “thick” notion of *blackness*, whereby African Americans must unite in solidarity because they identify as black. Shelby rejects the classic variety in favour of pragmatic black nationalism, which is driven by reasons that transcend a shared “natural” identity and is only enacted in the name of justice. While essentialist approaches justify solidarity and racial pride on a common biological basis, the political solidarity promoted by Shelby is based on a common interest in opposing unjust treatment that *happens to be* due to a common “racial” trait.

Another recent variant is that of Avery Kolers, for whom solidarity is “the attitude that characterizes those who are engaged in collective political action” (2014, p. 425). For Kolers, solidarity should be based on the idea of *deference* to oppressed groups. The emphasis here is not on the common goal, as in the teleological approaches, but on the duty to aid those who suffer unfair situations. In this perspective, the duty of solidarity as equity, which arises from the need for fair treatment, is prioritized over justice, which is arguably understood only as distributive justice (for a criticism of this reductionism, see Forst, 2014).

Political solidarities are very diversified; ultimately, though, they share a common understanding of solidarity as a reaction to injustices and stress its conflictual and transformative dimension.<sup>8</sup> This antagonistic and political interpretation can thus be based on an infrastructural idea of solidarity as a powerful moral enabler, which is similar to other notions, such as trust, transparency or privacy – solidarity as a tool capable of mobilizing collective action and activating the perception of risks (Tava, 2021).

2.3. *The Reverse Side of Justice: Habermas's Account of Moral Complementarity*

Jürgen Habermas (1990) elaborated the thesis of the moral complementarity of justice and solidarity in an essay entitled *Justice and Solidarity: On the Discussion Concerning “Stage 6.”* In it, Habermas discussed Lawrence Kohlberg's attempt to provide a place for others' welfare within the framework of ethical universalism and rationalism, in light of criticism from care ethics (Gilligan, 1982) and communitarians of the abstractness and individualism of

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<sup>8</sup> Unsurprisingly, Neo-Schmittian-leftist-populist tendencies also share this understanding; Chantal Mouffe (1995) described solidarity as “agonistic” based on “we-identity.”

neo-Kantian ethics. For these critics, deontic views are atomistic and fail to appreciate the importance of communities, traditions, and relationships among concrete others. Kohlberg regards the development of individuals' moral consciousness as a learning process that happens through three levels and six stages of development, from a pre-conventional to a post-conventional stage. The sixth stage – the highest one – is characterized by universal principles of justice, the equality of human rights and respect for the dignity of human beings as individuals. Here, Kohlberg sees the concept of benevolence, which is deduced from equal respect, as the complement of universal justice for considering the welfare of concrete others (Kohlberg *et al.*, 1990). According to Habermas, however, the mistake of Kohlberg's theory is to consider the idea of benevolence as only referring to the well-being of individuals and not that of collectives. In other words, the perspective of benevolence is limited to describing a sympathetic relationship and, according to Habermas, should be replaced by solidarity as a co-original moral principle alongside justice:

Justice concerns the equal freedoms of unique and self-determining individuals, while solidarity concerns the welfare of consociates who are intimately linked in an intersubjectively shared form of life and thus also to the maintenance of the integrity of this form of life itself. Moral norms cannot protect one without the other: they cannot protect the equal rights and freedoms of the individual without protecting the welfare of one's fellow man and of the community to which the individuals belong. (Habermas, 1990, p. 244)

While preserving the difference between the two concepts, Habermas aims to think of the two spheres as “two aspects of the same thing” (Habermas, 1990, p. 244). Habermas's point is that morality should satisfy “two tasks” simultaneously in what we can call a division of moral labour. On one hand, morality ensures the dignity of individuals; on the other, it protects the welfare of community members. In other words, whereas justice safeguards the inviolability of each individual and the equal freedoms of irreplaceable autonomous individuals, solidarity protects the web of intersubjective relationships on which everyone depends. Consequently, according to Habermas's reading, solidarity is the “other side” or the “reverse side” of justice. In this way, he claims to avoid the one-sidedness of an account of justice as separate from social ties and that of conservative solidarity, which is exclusive and reduced to the unconditional protection of the community or to loyalty to authoritarian leadership (Habermas experienced this in his youth with the motto “Command us, Führer; we will follow you”). Of course, Habermas has also in mind the importance of solidarity as the “glue” holding together the bricks that compose the architecture of political institutions, since “the promotion of the universal rights of every human being cannot be dissociated from the protection of that peculiar way of living together that is the modern form of a democratic society” (Reichlin, 2011, p. 267).

The four accounts presented above describe different ways (positive or negative) of conceiving the link between solidarity and justice. Therefore, each of them emphasizes different facets of solidarity as a social practice: communitarian approaches dwell on shared identity and co-belonging; realists rely on solidarity's integrative and problem-solving function; the “reverse side” theory is based on the role of intersubjective welfare; and political theories underline solidarity's conflictual and transformative character.

Normatively speaking, while the communitarian and realist approaches reject a positive reference to the concept of justice (for quite different reasons), the theories of political solidarity look at perceived *injustices* as the fundamental justification for acting in solidarity.

**3. Doing Justice to Solidarity:  
Do Not Prioritize,  
Do Not Downsize**



In this way, political solidarity theories adopt either a teleological-instrumental or a negativist approach. However, if the former approach does not fully succeed in establishing a real balance between solidarity and justice, the latter requires the support of a theory of justice to assess whether the perceived injustices of the actors *are such*.<sup>9</sup> In contrast, Habermas's "reverse side" theory is more ambitious in attempting to grasp an immanent connection between justice and solidarity. It does not consider solidarity as a mere motivational resource nor as a reaction to perceived injustices but rather as a part of a "wider moral framework" (Held, 2006, p. 71) in which justice and solidarity perform different but complementary tasks. However, I recognize at least two weak spots in Habermas's argument.

First, although Habermas clarifies on a meta-ethical level why the concepts of justice and solidarity are complementary, it is not entirely clear based on which actual motives and practical principle the actors should act in solidarity. Indeed, the consistency that Habermas identifies between the universality of rights and the protection of the shared life form does not seem to go along with an explanation of *the actual moral phenomenon* that drives actors towards solidarity.

Second, the perspective of the "reverse side of justice" does not seem to include the variety of solidarity's forms and contexts. Habermas assigns to solidarity the exclusive function of protecting and fostering cohesion within society as a precondition for justice. But, as the other perspectives presented here suggest, solidarity indicates not only cohesion and social protection but also the transformation of social reality.<sup>10</sup>

Therefore, how is it possible to describe the concrete dynamic of solidarity as complementary to the idea of justice in plural social contexts?

**4. Toward a  
Development of  
the "Reverse Side"  
Theory:  
Mutual Support  
as a Social Duty**

Critical theory scholars, such as Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, have also engaged with Habermas's argument. They have attempted to elaborate conceptions of solidarity related to a broader framework of justice intended as an equal relationship between distribution and social recognition.

In particular, Fraser (1986) has developed a "discourse ethic of solidarity," whereby to challenge dominant discourses or interpretations, members of subordinate social groups unite in solidarity and recognize each other as preconditions of their ability to "participate on a par with members of other groups in moral and political deliberation" (p. 428). Fraser insists on the idea that compared to the concept of "care," which pertains to the individual concrete other, solidarity is best suited to a theory of justice that accounts for "the standpoint of the collective concrete other" (p. 428). In contrast, Honneth (1992), whose point of departure is a progressive and emancipatory interpretation of the Hegelian *Sittlichkeit* (ethical life), initially conceived of solidarity as a form of social recognition based on admiration and esteem. Later, he (2017) linked reciprocal support to the idea of "social freedom"; that is, a conception of freedom in which *Ego* sees *Alter* neither as an obstacle, according to negative freedom, nor as an abstract object of her impartial judgement, according to positive freedom, but rather as a precondition of her freedom – in terms of *intersubjective freedom* – in various social spheres.<sup>11</sup>

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9 As Kolers (2016, p. 174) ironically puts it, "not every downtrodden activist is Martin Luther King."

10 It is not by chance that Habermas has progressively abandoned his morally-based conception of solidarity to embrace a more realistic and political understanding (Habermas, 2013; Carrabregu, 2016; Volpe, 2023b). I argue that this conceptual redefinition is due to the difficulty of the "reverse side" theory in accounting for the concrete and multifaceted character of solidarity.

11 Notably, recalling Hegel and his peculiar idea of ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*), Honneth (2014) deduces social freedom from a very modern notion of social reality; that is, the spheres of affective relationships, markets and democratic institutions.

Besides the need to conceive of a “third” type of freedom beyond the twofold description famously offered by Isaiah Berlin (1969), both Fraser and Honneth stress the importance of concrete and objective social practices, either discursive or institutional, to permeate and complete the demands of justice and mutual recognition. Regarding the practices of solidarity, I would rather speak of a relational-interactive model of autonomy in which the individual is co-responsible and co-essential for the other’s dignity and autonomy. Most importantly, such a relational-interactive model of autonomy might suggest us a way of thinking about mutual support as based on a moral interdependence, according to this (tentative) general principle: *You and I recognize each other as practical preconditions of our autonomy, and we therefore ought to support each other, even by incurring significant costs.*

If the reciprocity of support is, descriptively, how the interests of others are intertwined with one’s own interests (Mason, 2000, p. 27), the principle of solidarity could normatively describe and assess relations of mutual aid and risk sharing informed by moral recognition. Thus understood, solidarity loses its character as a supererogatory action or a subsidiary relation within a theory of justice; instead, it becomes a social duty that arises from our moral interdependence. Here, the difference and co-originality of justice and solidarity are preserved, since normative integration does not mean conceptual assimilation (Ter Meulen, 2017, p. 107). Justice concerns equal respect and dignity grounded on one’s autonomy, while solidarity, in this view, concerns the necessary social practice of mutual support and concern that arises from the recognition of our moral interconnection, which in modern society profoundly depends on social interdependence (Durkheim, 1893/2013).<sup>12</sup> In the case of fundamental rights, for instance, it is one thing to normatively justify rights, including social rights (a justification that belongs to justice), and quite another to implement them, guarantee them and obtain them, even in situations of conflict, which is something that would pertain to solidarity. To recall Kant’s famous proverb, justice without solidarity and other forms of social coordination is blind and ineffective, while solidarity without justice is void and ends up being either a harmless “resilience” or an authoritarian/ethnocentric relation.

This tentative theoretical proposal, still to be properly developed, is to deepen the “reverse side” theory and expand it to the plurality of contexts and social purposes traditionally linked to solidarity, which the four accounts presented above have highlighted: a) The safeguarding and protection of the social environment as the precondition of the respect for personal and political rights; b) The implementation of welfare services and infrastructures designed to ensure social protection rights. This occurs when solidarity “solidifies” in institutional arrangements, as the expectation of reciprocity is realized through intermediary public institutions; c) The collective mobilization aimed at transforming and reforming institutions and, more generally, all those states of affairs where rights are threatened, i.e. arbitrary regimes. In all these various contexts, solidarity depends on the awareness of the moral interdependence that binds us to others. In this regard, the COVID-19 pandemic has been a powerful example of how the insight into solidarity as the “reverse side” of justice grasps the intimate connection and complementarity between mutual concern and respect for rights, including the rights to health and life. As Barbara Prainsack (2020, p. 130) has suggested:

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic it has become abundantly clear that in countries where social security instruments and collective bargaining exists, more people are buffered from the worst effects of the crisis, and more will get through the crisis without

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<sup>12</sup> Such an understanding might shed light on the inner normative consistency of the French revolutionary credo: liberty and equality (justice), *plus* fraternity (solidarity).

losing their homes, incomes, and trust in government. [...] What the COVID-19 crisis has taught us so far is that the most resilient societies are not those that have the best technologies or most obedient citizens. It is those that have solidaristic institutions.

This emphasis on social coordination and mutual support is well suited not only to the discussion of the global measures taken against the pandemic, in which solidarity stood precariously in the middle of the conflict between security and freedom, but also to the current debates on the environmental and energy crises affecting Europe and the world.<sup>13</sup> The major challenge here is to keep together an effective response to these epochal issues and a reference to social justice. Therein lies the importance of the moral nature of solidarity.

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<sup>13</sup> Of course, much more theoretical development is needed in this direction, including on the geographical boundaries of solidaristic relations (Heyd, 2007). For reasons of space, I shall refer to Carol Gould’s (2007) idea of human solidarity as “limit notions” and “overlapping solidarity networks.”

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