

Solidarity and Community

From the Politics of the Clan to Constituent Power*

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1. Introduction

Solidarity seems to be a concept with multiple meanings. While it is being invoked more and more often during the COVID-19 pandemic, the notion remains far from clear. This short article aims to make a contribution to the ongoing discussion on the meaning and value of solidarity. It is by no means my goal to give an extensive overview of the subject. The aim of this contribution is more modest. My guiding hypothesis is that solidarity is always and necessarily linked to the concept of community. A plea for solidarity will, in other words, directly lead one to the question: solidarity with whom? This relation between community and solidarity, giving way to the question regarding the ground of our living together, will be the angle taken in this article.

The argument unfolds in the following steps. First, I take a historical perspective, elucidating how solidarity has played a key role in a number of instances in the past. The concept of solidarity is usually traced back to the *obligatio in solidum* in Roman law, where it referred to a form of common liability. Later, solidarity was invoked, for example, during the French revolution under the banner of fraternity in the slogan *liberté, égalité et fraternité* – still the national motto of the republic of France and the republic of Haiti. I will also discuss how philosophers and social theorists have understood the concept. This brief historical overview already shows how solidarity and community are always interlaced.

In the remainder of the article, I will directly focus on this relationship between community and solidarity, in order to distinguish between different interpretations. On the one hand, solidarity may be understood as extending only to those who belong to the same community as us. In this reading, solidarity builds upon an already existing community and applies to members only, excluding those who do not belong to it. I will argue that such a reading is untenable for philosophical reasons and undesirable for political ones.

Therefore, I present an alternative interpretation. Invoked by those who aim to question the *status quo*, solidarity also plays a key role in practices of contestation. In these contexts, it focuses on collective action and the reimagination of political community. This interpretation has a history within the phenomenological tradition, more specifically in the work of Jan Patočka. Also, one can find it in political

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practice. The article ends by articulating how this alternative interpretation of solidarity might prove helpful in making sense of our current predicament of a global pandemic.

2. The concept of solidarity

When we take a look at the etymology of solidarity, we can find the following: ‘solidarity (n.); 1829, from French *solidarité* “communion of interests and responsibilities, mutual responsibility,” a coinage of the “Encyclopédie” (1765), from *solidaire* “interdependent, complete, entire,” from *solide* (see *solid* (adj.)).’ So,¹ the concept of solidarity seems to have French origins. This French link with solidarity also becomes apparent in the social struggles of the 1840s, where solidarity was invoked in order to claim social inclusion and political rights.²

Despite these French roots, the basic idea underlying solidarity is usually traced back to Roman law: the *obligatio in solidum* denoted a form of joint liability for a financial debt where ‘each person was individually responsible for the liability of the group; i.e. everybody was liable *in solidum* (= for the whole).’³ What transpires in the Latin *solidus* is a certain solidity: in being in solidarity with others, one is part of a solid whole.⁴ In other words, underlying the concept of solidarity we may find the notion of group or community. More than that, solidarity seems to point not just to any kind of community but to one based on a common ground or solid foundation.⁵ Theoretically, the key question of solidarity – also taken up in this article – is what to make of this ground or foundation.⁶

The notion of solidarity seems immediately linked to the fundamental question of humans living together. Hence, it will not come as a surprise that it is widely discussed in sociology and social theory. Émile Durkheim, one of the founding fathers of sociology, wrote extensively on solidarity.⁷ In his *The Division of Labour in Society* (1893), Durkheim distinguished between two types of solidarity: mechanical and organic solidarity. Speaking from a functionalist perspective, society appears as a set of sub-systems with specialized functions. In a traditional society, the division of labour is not yet fully developed. Solidarity in such a society may be called mechanical in the sense that tasks are passed on by one generation to the next, performed in an automatic way, with law playing mostly a repressive role. Within modern society, the division of labour evolves. As a consequence, the sub-systems within society will need to co-operate in order to attain coherence and order within

1 ‘Solidarity’, Online Etymology Dictionary, last accessed 30 August 2021, https://www.etymonline.com/word/solidarity#etymonline_v_23854.

2 Lawrence Wilde, ‘The Concept of Solidarity: Emerging from the Theoretical Shadows?’, *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 9 (2007): 173.

3 Ludger Hagedorn, ‘Introduction. Solidarity beyond Exclusion’, *Baltic Worlds* 8 (2015): 87.

4 Gustav Strandberg, ‘The Solidarity of the Shaken’, *Baltic Worlds* 8 (2015): 101.

5 Strandberg, ‘The Solidarity of the Shaken’, 101.

6 Strandberg, ‘The Solidarity of the Shaken’, 101.

7 For my interpretation of the work of Durkheim, I rely on Anton Zijdeveld, ‘The Legal and Moral Dimensions of Solidarity’, *Netherlands Journal of Legal Philosophy* 35 (2006): 312-313.

society. Durkheim calls the solidarity within such societies organic, whereas law helps in facilitating cooperation.

Still in the field of social theory, Anton Zijderveld goes as far as to state that solidarity forms part of the human condition.⁸ Central to solidarity is, he argues, a 'sense of mutual dependence and responsibility' as it plays out in symbolic interaction.⁹ This kind of interaction hinges on trust as a moral phenomenon.¹⁰ The importance of trust may perhaps be fully recognized only from the negative, *i.e.* from the experience of losing trust. Jean Améry famously described his torture as the triple loss of trust in the world, home and dignity.¹¹ Taken in this fundamental sense, trust seems to refer to a common world of meanings, norms and values that is crucial for human interaction.¹² Without this common world solidarity is impossible. As Bernhard Waldenfels aptly observes: 'On the whole, the phenomenon of trust refers to the *bond*, the *nexus*, which holds together the members of a community, creating the requisite solidarity. Solidarity does not mean something like an affective fusion, a racial homogeneity or a fixed common good; it simply means that one does not separate one's well-being from that of the Others. What is at stake here is the *syn-*, the *con-*, or the *mit-*, without which there would be nothing like a *koinonia*, a community or society: in short, there would be no *living-together* (συζῆν), no *Mitsein*.'¹³

Given that solidarity seems to refer to the very basis of our living together, it is not surprising that one finds philosophers struggling to articulate the conceptual core of solidarity.¹⁴ Hans-Georg Gadamer, for instance, stresses the ambiguity of the concept of solidarity. He tries to connect solidarity to the much older notion of friendship, a concept with a rich philosophical history. The true meaning of solidarity remains elusive. On the one hand, the bonds between people in certain groups or communities lead to obligations of solidarity. On the other hand these bonds may turn into friendship that remains forever undefinable, as it may only be valued in lived experience.¹⁵ Sometimes, solidarity springs from a natural connection, such as a common homeland.¹⁶ This feeling of solidarity can also be experienced if one is hit by some kind of catastrophe, like a bombing in war.¹⁷ Certain events have the power to make strangers appear as members of the same community, *i.e.* people towards whom one feels obligations of solidarity. Real or, as Gadamer puts it,

8 Zijderveld, 'The Legal and Moral Dimensions of Solidarity', 306.

9 Zijderveld, 'The Legal and Moral Dimensions of Solidarity', 306.

10 Zijderveld, 'The Legal and Moral Dimensions of Solidarity', 309.

11 Jean Améry, *At the Mind's Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and its Realities*, trans. Sidney Rosenfeld and Stella P. Rosenfeld (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1980), 21-40.

12 Zijderveld, 'The Legal and Moral Dimensions of Solidarity', 307.

13 Bernhard Waldenfels, 'Responsive ethics', in *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Phenomenology*, ed. Dan Zahavi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 433.

14 Hans-Georg Gadamer, 'Friendship and Solidarity', trans. David Vessy, *Research in Phenomenology* 39 (2009): 11.

15 Gadamer, 'Friendship and Solidarity', 5.

16 Gadamer, 'Friendship and Solidarity', 7.

17 Gadamer, 'Friendship and Solidarity', 10.

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‘authentic’ solidarity depends on individuals who seriously affirm it and step up when the moment arrives.¹⁸ The Latin *solidum* at the core of solidarity points to payment in the sense of counting or receiving payment (*der Sold*). Gadamer thus emphasizes that solidarity is something one should be able to count upon, like real, not counterfeit, money.¹⁹ In that sense, solidarity seems to refer to some sort of reliability, loyalty or comradeship, indeed a social bond that is implicit but necessary in the life of a community.²⁰

Summarizing this short historical overview, one may say that solidarity is a concept with many meanings. Nevertheless, most conceptions have three characteristics in common.²¹ They, first, denote a kind of support. Second, they sustain that this support supposes some kind of group or community based on a common characteristic, or shared goal. The third and final point is that solidarity requires some sort of reciprocity, *i.e.* it forms part of the social fabric where institutions play an important role. Furthermore, solidarity manifests itself on different levels: between individuals, as accepted behaviour within a group, and on the formal level of norms and institutions.²²

3. Solidarity, fraternity, humanity

Coming back to the basis or ground of solidarity, one could interpret this foundation as a knowable, stable and pre-existing basis of community. In this respect, one may speak of ‘solidarity against’.²³ In this interpretation, solidarity seeks to protect those within the community against those outside of it by grounding itself on a firm basis. Through this solid basis, the group gains independence, excluding itself from an outside. This kind of solidarity is far from romantic, as it can also be found in criminal groups or religious sects.²⁴ It would be a mistake, therefore, to identify solidarity with justice.²⁵ ‘Solidarity against’ may be seen as part of a politics of the clan,²⁶ where the community exists solely and exclusively of those of one’s own kin.²⁷ When a group has established itself, it often takes a plea of solidarity. However, internal divisions may rise to the surface again when the group is confronted

18 Gadamer, ‘Friendship and Solidarity’, 11.

19 Gadamer, ‘Friendship and Solidarity’, 11.

20 Gadamer, ‘Friendship and Solidarity’, 11.

21 Barbara Prainsack, ‘Solidarity in Times of Pandemics’, *Democratic Theory* 7 (2020): 125.

22 Prainsack, ‘Solidarity in Times of Pandemics’, 126. Contemporary perspectives, as one may find them in the work of Habermas, Honneth and Brunkhorst amongst others, cast solidarity in terms of institutions and/or recognition. In this short article, I cannot discuss this literature. For a good overview, see Wilde, ‘The Concept of Solidarity: Emerging from the Theoretical Shadows?’, 174-176.

23 Leonard Neuger, ‘Some Thoughts on Solidarity’, *Baltic Worlds* 8 (2015): 91.

24 Neuger, ‘Some Thoughts on Solidarity’, 91.

25 For a disentanglement of solidarity and justice, especially in the context of EU policy, see: Bertjan Wolthuis, ‘The European Union between Solidarity and Justice’, *Acta Politica* 56 (2020): 261-275.

26 Hagedorn, ‘Introduction. Solidarity beyond Exclusion’, 89.

27 Neuger, ‘Some Thoughts on Solidarity’, 91-92.

with external threats.²⁸ A group may turn into a violent institution in its urge to constrain its members into subservience. This violence makes evident that the constitutive promise of solidarity also brings with it the threat of coercion when the obligations of solidarity are not taken seriously.²⁹ One may find this kind of rhetoric in the speeches of many right-wing populists who found their politics upon the (presumably) solid basis of a given community with an own place or *Heimat* and a firm identity.³⁰

In the history of the notion of solidarity, this interpretation comes close to that of fraternity, as it was invoked during the French revolution. This use of the term has led to a debate between French philosophers Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Nancy. In his reinterpretation of fraternity, Nancy speaks of a breach in the horizon of sense that accompanies every democracy.³¹ Nancy defends fraternity as pointing towards and reminding the legal order of this breach.³² In this way, he connects solidarity to a political openness: a democratic regime guarantees the conditions under which this breach in the horizon of sense is kept as a constant reminder of the impossibility of an ultimate closure of the question of sense. In other words, solidarity gestures towards an outside of the law of every legal order, an outside that cannot ever be recuperated by that legal order. As such, solidarity is a necessary but not a sufficient concept: it may be seen as the model of 'having to adjust to living together'.³³

Derrida has severely criticized the notion of fraternity in political contexts for its inherent exclusionary and gender-biased nature, even when it were to be taken symbolically rather than literally.³⁴ He points out that the concept is linked to a specific group of values, namely those 'of the neighbour (in the Christian sense), the like, and finally, in the last analysis, bringing together the values of the neighbour and the like, the values of man, of the rights of the humanity of man: the brother is always a human brother. Let us not forget this overwhelming and thus terribly blinding fact: the brother of which one speaks is always a man. (...) The humanity of man is born as fraternity'.³⁵

Derrida seems to refer to two major problems with the concept of fraternity. The first problem is its anthropocentrism: fraternity always refers to a *human* brother,

28 Lisa Guenther, 'A Critical Phenomenology of Solidarity and Resistance in the 2013 California Prison Hunger Strikes', in *Body/Self/Other: The Phenomenology of Social Encounters*, ed. Luna Dolezal and Danielle Petherbridge (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2017): 58.

29 Guenther, 'A Critical Phenomenology of Solidarity and Resistance', 58.

30 I develop this argument more fully in: Luigi Corrias, 'The Immediacy of Populism and the Unrest of Democracy: A Phenomenological Inquiry into the Public Sphere', in *Vox Populi: Populism as a Rhetorical and Democratic Challenge*, ed. I. van der Geest, H. Jansen and B. van Klink (Cheltenham: Edgar Elgar, 2020), 163-177.

31 Jean-Luc Nancy, 'Fraternity', *Baltic Worlds* 8 (2015): 100.

32 Nancy, 'Fraternity', 100.

33 Nancy, 'Fraternity', 99.

34 Jacques Derrida, *Rogues. Two Essays on Reason*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2005), 56 and 58.

35 Derrida, *Rogues*, 60.

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thus excluding brotherhood between humans and non-human animals, or the environment. The second problem is its androcentrism: fraternity always refers to a human *brother*, thus excluding women and most members of the LHBTIQ+ community. The misogyny that can hide in claims to solidarity may even be found in groups that have been applauded for the involvement of women and their emancipatory potential, such as the Polish trade union *Solidarność*.³⁶

Both problems highlighted by Derrida refer to a decentring or violently marginalizing of what does not live up to the norm of the 'human brother'. Derrida, consequently, draws the problematic political consequences of a plea to fraternity: it 'might follow at least the temptation of genealogical descent back to autochthony, to the nation, if not actually to nature, in any case, to birth, to *naissance*'.³⁷ As soon as 'birth' obtains a political meaning, Derrida seems to say, such as in autochthony, popular sovereignty, or the link between nationality and *ius soli*, this leads to several problems.³⁸

'Solidarity against' must be rejected on both philosophical and political grounds. Philosophically, it wrongly assumes the availability and accessibility of the final ground or foundation of our community. Politically, 'solidarity against' uses this foundation as a means to exclude: 'solidarity against' may thus lead to violent forms of nationalism, xenophobia and other detrimental political consequences.³⁹ In the next section, I will present an alternative understanding of the relationship between solidarity and community.

4. Solidarity, ethnocentrism, finitude

In distinction to 'solidarity against', one can speak of 'solidarity for'. Understood in this way, solidarity comes into play at the moment 'that you jointly take responsibility for somebody or something, that you create a community of mutuality, where you as a member of the group act with consideration and without self-interest for the benefit of this group or its individuals'. Note that also here there is a reference to community, to the first-person plural of a 'We'. Yet, contrary to the given community that acts as the firm ground for 'solidarity against', the community of 'solidarity for' is *in statu nascendi*. It has the risky, explosive and anarchic character reminiscent of revolutions. Hannah Arendt famously characterized revolutions as the only phenomena that confront us with political beginnings,⁴⁰ and with beginning or natality as a quintessential political faculty.⁴¹ Anarchic should therefore also be understood literally as without an *arche*, without a (firm) ground. Hence, the risk involved, and the courage needed in those willing to take this risk. 'Solidar-

36 Ewa Majewska, 'Between Invisible Labor and Political Participation: Women in the *Solidarność* Movement and in Today's Politics in Poland', *Baltic Worlds* 8 (2015): 94-97.

37 Derrida, *Rogues*, 61.

38 Derrida, *Rogues*, 61.

39 Neuger, 'Some Thoughts on Solidarity', 92.

40 Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (London: Penguin Books, 1963), 21.

41 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), 9.

ity for' harbours the same risky endeavour of contesting the given order and opening up the possibility of a new community. In the remainder of this section, I will discuss two variations of 'solidarity for': one developed by Richard Rorty, the other by Jan Patočka. I will argue that Rorty's views, however interesting for as far as they go, need to be rejected. Jan Patočka's ideas on 'the solidarity of the shaken' are, I believe, a better starting point to make sense of our current predicament.

In conceptualizing solidarity, Rorty's starting point is the work of Wilfrid Sellars, who viewed moral obligations as 'We-intentions', delimiting them to a bounded whole, 'the communities with which we identify'.⁴² Accordingly, Rorty explicitly rejects an understanding of solidarity that casts it as a universal norm extending to all human beings, a kind of 'human solidarity' resonating with 'our essential humanity'.⁴³ Instead, Rorty argues that it presupposes a community of 'one of us', pointing to 'something smaller and more local than the human race'.⁴⁴ In this way, solidarity is not understood as an ahistorical foundation but rather as something historical and contingent, to be produced within concrete communities.⁴⁵ Within such concrete communities, feelings of solidarity are the strongest.⁴⁶ Rorty argues that solidarity, as he understands it, is 'necessarily' connected to a group that shares a 'historically contingent final vocabulary'.⁴⁷ The latter can be understood as the ultimate grounds people may give to express their deepest beliefs and convictions.⁴⁸

Rorty defends, in his own words, a type of ethnocentrism.⁴⁹ To understand what he means by this, it is important to know what he rejects. As a liberal speaking to a liberal audience, Rorty argues against the cultural relativism that makes us, liberal people, into so-called "'wet" liberals' who 'have become so open-minded that our brains have fallen out'.⁵⁰ In this sense, his view is rather an anti-anti-ethnocentrism pitted against the rejection of ethnocentrism on the basis of Enlightenment rhetoric.⁵¹ It comes with the task for liberals to recognize that their ideals developed at a specific time and place but are not less worth fighting for, since they are the best bet for the peaceful coexistence of different cultures, Rorty submits.⁵² So, Rorty's ethnocentrism is of a peculiar type where the 'we' refers to a 'we, liberals' always willing to extend the community.⁵³ He argues that 'we, liberals' are 'the peo-

42 Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 190.

43 Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, 189.

44 Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, 198.

45 Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, 194-195.

46 Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, 191.

47 Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, 192.

48 Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, 73.

49 Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, 198.

50 Richard Rorty, 'On Ethnocentrism: A Reply to Clifford Geertz', *Michigan Quarterly Review* 1 (1986): 526.

51 Rorty, 'On Ethnocentrism', 532.

52 Rorty, 'On Ethnocentrism', 532-533. For an incisive critique of Rorty's views on ethnocentrism and liberal solidarity in the context of a multicultural society, see Rudi Visser, *Truth and Singularity. Taking Foucault into Phenomenology* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999), 357-374.

53 Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, 198.

ple who have been brought up to distrust ethnocentrism' and the community of liberals is for that very reason 'dedicated to enlarging itself'.⁵⁴ In this process, the leading question ought to be: 'Are you suffering?'⁵⁵

There are a number of problems with Rorty's ideas on solidarity. The first problem is that he seems to be contradicting himself. On the one hand, he explicitly rejects a notion of universal solidarity, either secular or religious. On the other hand, he concludes with a plea to extend the community of 'we, liberals' on the basis of an acknowledgement of suffering. In this way, he seems to point to a human affect or feeling that may be extended to all, making human suffering into a universal category.⁵⁶ Another problematic aspect is that Rorty proposes that solidarity be based on the distrust of ethnocentrism. Yet, it remains unclear how solidarity can be built on distrust, since, as we have seen above, it actually presupposes trust.⁵⁷

Furthermore, by using the first-person plural of a 'We', Rorty is dependent on an act of representation.⁵⁸ However, this act always comes too early: since it is constitutive for community, it actually calls into being what it claims to represent. Representation is therefore a necessary but never a neutral act: in constituting the community it also draws its boundaries, thus excluding other potential understandings of the community. So, even a community of 'We, liberals' based on the susceptibility of another one's suffering will remain exclusive. As a consequence, Rorty's liberal ethnocentrism ultimately remains just that: a variety of ethnocentrism. His plea for a vulnerability to the suffering of others remains tied to the standard set by 'We, liberals'. Rorty seems unaware of the negative consequences of making liberalism the measure of all things. Indeed, he risks not really taking seriously the other, except for his or her suffering. This attitude is also present in the liberal idea of humanitarian aid. Hence, Rorty's understanding of solidarity, despite his explicit rejection of invoking a principle of humanity, takes the humanitarian 'shape of a caregiving operation'.⁵⁹ With Zijdeveld, one may also speak of a 'victimological solidarity' that is based on charity and moral gestures. The problem is that this is 'in the end an unintended perversion of solidarity as it deprives its

54 Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, 198.

55 Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, 198.

56 Wilde, 'The Concept of Solidarity: Emerging from the Theoretical Shadows?', 176.

57 Hagedorn, 'Introduction. Solidarity beyond Exclusion', 90.

58 I build here on the concept of representation as developed by Bert van Roermund and Hans Lindahl. See among many sources: Bert van Roermund, 'First-Person Plural Legislature: Political Reflexivity and Representation', *Philosophical Explorations. An International Journal for the Philosophy of Mind and Action* 6 (2003): 235-250 and Hans Lindahl, 'Intentionality, Representation, Recognition: Phenomenology and the Politics of A-Legality', in *Political Phenomenology: Experience, Ontology, Episteme*, ed. Thomas Bedorf and Steffen Herrmann (London: Routledge, 2020), 256-276. See also Luigi Corrias, 'Populism in a constitutional key: Constituent power, popular sovereignty and constitutional identity', *European Constitutional Law Review* 12 (2016): 6-26.

59 Alain Finkielkraut, *In the Name of Humanity: Reflections on the Twentieth Century*, trans. Judith Friedlander (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 91.

subjects of their most relevant human asset, namely the ability to establish one's life according to one's plans, initiatives and practical engagements'.⁶⁰

Instead of the liberal idea of solidarity as it was introduced by Rorty, I will now turn to Jan Patočka's 'solidarity of the shaken' in order to find a better way to make sense of our current predicament. Interestingly, the 'solidarity of the shaken' unlocks the community-building promise of solidarity. As we have seen, the concept of solidarity refers, on the one hand, to a solid ground or constituted community. On the other hand, however, solidarity may be understood as a process of founding a community. Understood in this way, solidarity builds upon the sociality of humans, as it is studied in the social sciences. Yet, this inherent sociality of the human condition is not some kind of frozen essence. Rather, it points to the human capacity to build a community, even under difficult circumstances.⁶¹ For this community building capacity of human beings, which is the constituent potential of solidarity, one may also use the notion of solidarization, referring to a process rather than to a fixed state.⁶² In the vocabulary of constitutional theory, one may refer to the doctrine of constituent power to grasp this founding potential of solidarity.

Patočka bases himself on the front experiences of the soldiers of WW I:

"The front is not simply a flaming line where the accumulated energies of hostile masses are released and mutually neutralized. It is also the locus of a distinctive Life shared only by those who dare step right up to it and only for as long as they dare remain there. It seems to me that one could show the front is not simply a line of fire, the interface of people attacking each other, but it is also in some way the "crest of a wave" that bears the world of humans toward its new destiny."⁶³

Patočka analyzes the experience of the frontline as one that leads to the loss of all meaning.⁶⁴ War is both the highest point of technological civilization, its triumph over the mythical world, and, at the same time, the boundary of this civilization,

- 60 Zijderfeld, 'The Legal and Moral Dimensions of Solidarity', 326. One could even argue that the addressees of this perverted kind of solidarity are no longer taken seriously as subjects, since this conceptualization of solidarity seems to be based on an asymmetrical relationship between generous benefactors on the one hand and suffering victims on the other hand. For a similar argument regarding the downsides of the increasing role of victims in Dutch criminal trials, see Wouter Ver-aart, 'De vervaging van het rechtssubject; de opmars van het slachtoffer', *Aers Aequi* 54 (2005): 246-251.
- 61 Agustín Fuentes, 'A (Bio)anthropological View of the COVID-19 Era Midstream: Beyond the Infection', *Anthropology Now* 12 (2020): 28-29.
- 62 For this notion, albeit used in slightly different meaning and context, see: Bettina Ahrens, 'The Solidarisation of International Society: The EU in the Global Climate Change Regime', *GLOBUS Research Papers* 5/2017 – October 2017.
- 63 Jan Patočka, *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, trans. Erazim Kohák (Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court 1999), 125.
- 64 Hans Rainer Sepp, 'Die Grenze der Solidarität. Der Erste Weltkrieg und die Phänomenologie', *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie* 76 (2014): 784.

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showing its utter meaninglessness.⁶⁵ The whole becomes meaningless, since a fundamental discontinuity has come to the surface, breaking the meaningful unity.⁶⁶ It is a social 'zero point' and exactly because of that it opens the door for solidarity, understood as this common experience of meaninglessness.⁶⁷ Solidarity is thus intertwined with a bodily experience of being affected that coincides with the disintegration of a meaningful world.⁶⁸

As Patočka puts it:

"The solidarity of the shaken is built up in persecution and uncertainty: that is its front line, quiet, without fanfare or sensation even there where this ruling Force seeks to seize it. It does not fear being unpopular but seeks it out and calls out wordlessly. Humankind will not attain peace by devoting and surrendering itself to the criteria of everydayness and its promises."⁶⁹

The 'solidarity of the shaken', one of the central concepts of his *Heretical Essays in the History of Philosophy*, is a boundary experience.⁷⁰ When the weight of our finitude is felt and we experience a loss of meaning, a community is shaken in its entirety.⁷¹ This experience is both one of sheer meaninglessness and the opening of new possibilities for meaning.⁷² It is, in short, 'the common loss of a common ground'.⁷³ The 'solidarity of the shaken' is a solidarity after and as a response to this loss, acknowledging its wound as a shared experience.⁷⁴ The 'solidarity of the shaken' does not so much take us 'beyond' political values and economic order.⁷⁵ Rather, it situates us below. In this dimension, solidarity is born in the smallest actions that slowly but steadily build an atmosphere of trust. Understood in this way, solidarity may well be a key term to describe what has been happening in Central and Eastern Europe during the 1970s and 1980s.⁷⁶ The name of the famous Polish labour union – *Solidarność* – is a case in point. It signifies a movement from below: the building of civil society against an authoritarian state, the focus on micro-politics against macro-politics.⁷⁷ Whereas an authoritarian system thrives on fear, suspicion and distrust, the roots of solidarity lie in openness, trust and love.⁷⁸ Patočka's reflections are important to our predicament because they point to this

65 Sepp, 'Die Grenze der Solidarität', 785-786.

66 Sepp, 'Die Grenze der Solidarität', 787.

67 Sepp, 'Die Grenze der Solidarität', 788-789.

68 Sepp, 'Die Grenze der Solidarität', 791.

69 Patočka, *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, 135.

70 Strandberg, 'The Solidarity of the Shaken', 102.

71 Strandberg, 'The Solidarity of the Shaken', 101-102.

72 Strandberg, 'The Solidarity of the Shaken', 102.

73 Strandberg, 'The Solidarity of the Shaken', 102.

74 Ludger Hagedorn, 'Final Remarks', *Baltic Worlds* 8 (2015): 104.

75 Contra: Hagedorn, 'Final Remarks', 105.

76 Jacek Kołtan, 'Between anti-politics and post-politics. A history of the idea of solidarity', in *Understanding Central Europe*, ed. Marcin Moskalewicz and Wojciech Przybylski (London: Routledge, 2018), 468-474.

77 Kołtan, 'Between anti-politics and post-politics', 468-474.

78 Kołtan, 'Between anti-politics and post-politics', 468-474.

constitutive potential of ‘the shaken’: once we have experienced an existential shock, this may also form the beginning of a new and responsible type of community.

Contrary to Rorty’s extension of the community of ‘We, liberals’ to the whole of humanity by the recognition of the suffering of ‘others’, Patočka’s ideas situate us in a common experience of meaninglessness, an experience that renders us humble and urges us to reimagine the meaning of community. The ‘solidarity of the shaken’ reminds us to live responsibly: ‘responsible for ourselves, and for others, and for the world, because life is not about living in the sacrifice of others, nor of consuming finite resources.’⁷⁹ In the next section, I will briefly consider what this might mean for our condition under the current global pandemic, focussing on three interrelated themes: the relation between solidarity, liberty and the state; the interconnectedness of humans with each other and with non-human animals; and the relation between the local and the global.

5. Solidarity and COVID-19

What seems to transpire in the COVID-19 pandemic is a certain tension between liberty and solidarity. The measures taken to combat the coronavirus are often defended with an implicit or explicit reference to solidarity. The slogan of the Dutch government is a case in point: ‘Only together we will get the coronavirus under control’.⁸⁰ Notice the explicit use of the first person-plural. Demonstrations against the measures are often voiced in terms of individual liberties. This tension is not so surprising when one realizes that the human rights of *individuals* were suspended for measures taken for the sake of the *collective* goal of public health. Yet, the relationship between solidarity and individual liberty during the pandemic is more complicated than that. As Steven Lukes comments:

‘Under the dire circumstances of the covid crisis social solidarity takes the unanticipated, paradoxical form of “self-isolation” and what is called “social distancing,” exhibiting fear of contact with friends, neighbors and strangers. The distancing is actually physical with a social goal: it is practiced in collective self-defense to restore the social solidarity that renders individuality possible, providing the social framework, social norms and social bonds that will enable people to live their normal individual lives, as before.’⁸¹

Acting in solidarity with others actually takes the form of an extreme act of individuality: self-isolation. Furthermore, by collectively pursuing self-isolation we may once again attain a society where individual liberty is possible. Solidarity and

79 Daniel Brennan, ‘Vaclav Havel, Jan Patočka: The powerless and the shaken’, *Symposium: Canadian Journal of Continental Philosophy / Revue Canadienne de Philosophie Continentale* 18 (2014): 156.

80 ‘Alleen samen krijgen we corona onder controle.’

81 Steven Lukes, ‘Social Solidarity’, *IWMpost Magazine of the Institut für die Wissenschaften vom Menschen/Institute for Human Sciences*, no. 125, spring/summer (2020): 10.

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liberty stand in a relationship to one another where we can only achieve the one by pursuing the other.

From the perspective of solidarity, the social nature of the human being is emphasized: the way in which the human environment is always and deeply interrelated politically, economically etc. It is, ironically, exactly from this interrelatedness that the rise of the COVID-19 pandemic should be understood.⁸² Empirical studies have shown that while acts of solidarity increased at the beginning of the COVID-19-crisis, at a later point, interpersonal solidarity actually decreased.⁸³ At the same time, the crisis has exacerbated already existing inequalities within societies.⁸⁴ Hence, the pandemic has underlined the crucial need for institutionalized forms of solidarity as key to resilient societies.⁸⁵ Furthermore, in the buying and distributing of the vaccines, there has been little solidarity, with countries often blatantly pursuing their self-interest and greedily making the availability of vaccines into a symbol of political superiority.

Lawyers have pointed out that the measures intended to fight the pandemic may have been necessary, but were also severe infringements of fundamental rights of individuals, often taken for granted without the normal constitutional guarantees of a democracy under the rule of law. At the same time, states with a robust medical infrastructure in place have had more opportunities to save the lives of their citizens. What we witness is, however, not simply 'the return of the state'. More importantly, given the fact that those already more vulnerable have been hit the hardest by COVID-19, this pandemic raises the question what role the state ought to play in providing general healthcare. This question urges us to rethink the responsibility for care and health in times that the neoliberal philosophy all too eagerly has presented these issues chiefly as a private matter of individual citizens, with each person getting what they deserve according to their personal choices and efforts. This meritocratic ideal has surely gone bankrupt.

Since our global interconnectedness was one of the conditions for the spread of COVID-19, we need to rethink what this interconnectedness actually entails. Rethinking our relation to non-human animals and to ecosystems is an important step in this regard.⁸⁶ Just as is the case with climate change provoked by human action, the COVID-19 pandemic dissolves the strict separation between human and natural history – which is central to humanist thinking.⁸⁷ Climate change forces us, humans, to understand ourselves as a true geological force with a real impact on the planet and its living conditions.⁸⁸ This has led to emphasizing the interconnectedness between human and non-human animals and the climate. In short, this

82 Fuentes, 'A (Bio)anthropological View of the COVID-19 Era Midstream', 25.

83 Prainsack, 'Solidarity in Times of Pandemics', 128.

84 Prainsack, 'Solidarity in Times of Pandemics', 129.

85 Prainsack, 'Solidarity in Times of Pandemics', 130.

86 Fuentes, 'A (Bio)anthropological View of the COVID-19 Era Midstream', 29.

87 Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'The Climate of History: Four Theses', *Critical Inquiry* 35 (2009): 201.

88 Chakrabarty, 'The Climate of History', 206-207.

has led to humans being seen as a species.⁸⁹ More accurately, humanity is a species always in relation to other species.⁹⁰ The pandemic teaches a similar lesson. Our interconnectedness with other species was (most probably) the origin of the pandemic. Also, the lockdowns that were announced around the globe had remarkable positive effects on the environment: from cleaner air in Delhi to the return of wildlife to the canals of Venice.⁹¹

At the level of international relations, the pandemic may urge us to rethink the relationship between the local and the global. While, as has been pointed out, the pandemic and the speed and intensity of the spread of the coronavirus was a result of globalization, the closing of borders halted huge parts of global interaction. People started questioning the benefits of outsourcing production to countries with low wages and little social protection, when it turned out that essential medical items were not fabricated within the EU. This very same EU, despite attempts to the contrary, did not manage to unite in a common action plan to fight the pandemic or buy vaccines. More sadly, while many countries in the Global North have convinced their populations to get vaccinated and are even considering whether a third dose is needed, a lot of countries in the Global South struggle to buy enough vaccines. In that sense, one can say that international solidarity is still found wanting.

The new appreciation of the local can, however, also be put to use for more positive purposes. As people may be more eager to defend their 'own land' than to take action against global warming, the rhetoric of the local may be a better strategy within debates on climate change.⁹² This brings us back to Rorty's plea to start from our specific time and place, albeit without the arrogant presumption that bourgeois liberalism offers the best recipe to grasp, let alone escape, our current predicament. Rather, with Patočka, we may come to understand this moment as the time that responsibility needs to be taken and solidarity needs to be assumed for societies and environments, human and non-human animals, existing communities and communities to come.

89 Chakrabarty, 'The Climate of History', 213.

90 Fuentes, 'A (Bio)anthropological View of the COVID-19 Era Midstream', 25.

91 John Brunton, "'Nature is taking back Venice": wildlife returns to tourist-free city', *The Guardian*, 20 March 2020, last accessed 30 August 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/mar/20/nature-is-taking-back-venice-wildlife-returns-to-tourist-free-city>; Mark Kinver, 'Then and now: Pandemic clears the air', *BBC News*, 1 June 2021, accessed 30 August 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-57149747>.

92 Bruno Latour, *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime*, trans. Catharine Porter (Cambridge and Medford, MA: Polity Press, 2018), 8.