



# On the idea and limitations of solidarity with nonhuman animals

*Sobre a ideia e as limitações da solidariedade com os animais não humanos*

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## Abstract

As the concept of solidarity is receiving renewed attention in the face of global and domestic challenges in intra-human relations, it is also increasingly applied in the context of interspecies justice, where solidarity is sometimes declared a political goal. Given the arguments for the recognition of nonhuman animals as fully morally considerable beings, the longstanding view that solidarity can only obtain among humans is indeed due to be challenged. However, it is anything but obvious that those who care about the proper moral and political consideration of nonhuman animals should want to promote transspecies solidarity. In this paper, I examine the concept of solidarity for its fit with transspecies relations of support and consider the value of solidarity for the project of interspecies justice. I address some of the reasons for wanting to be able to apply the concept of solidarity to interspecies relations and reply to objections to the possibility of transspecies solidarity. I then discuss the shortcomings of solidarity. While the concept of solidarity has undeniable emotive appeal and solidaristic support for animals is an improvement not only over the absence of any support but also over support that “looks down” on animals, there are downsides to supporting animals in the mode of solidarity. The sense of identification that is at the core of solidarity fetishizes commonalities between the object of solidarity and the agent. A tendency to focus on commonalities cannot only make moral agents act in solidarity with animals, it can also set them up for moral failure – both when perceived commonalities encourage acts of support of lesser

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urgency and when perceived differences discourage support that would have been morally desirable. Consequently, it seems preferable that support for animals was based on considerations of justice alone rather than being extended in the mode of solidarity.<sup>2</sup>

**Keywords:** Solidarity. Interspecies Justice. Animals. Moral Relevance. Moral Motivation. Moral Worth.

## Resumo

*À medida que o conceito de solidariedade está a receber atenção renovada face aos desafios globais e nacionais nas relações intra-humanas, é também cada vez mais aplicado no contexto da justiça interespécies, onde a solidariedade é por vezes declarada um objectivo político. Dados os argumentos para o reconhecimento dos animais não humanos como seres moralmente consideráveis, a visão de longa data de que a solidariedade só pode existir entre os humanos deve, de facto, ser desafiada. No entanto, é tudo menos óbvio que aqueles que se preocupam com a devida consideração moral e política dos animais não humanos devam querer promover a solidariedade entre espécies. Neste artigo, examino o conceito de solidariedade quanto à sua adequação às relações de apoio transespécies e considero o valor da solidariedade para o projeto de justiça interespécies. Abordo algumas das razões para querer poder aplicar o conceito de solidariedade às relações interespécies e respondo às objeções à possibilidade de solidariedade transespécies. Em seguida, discuto as deficiências da solidariedade. Embora o conceito de solidariedade tenha um apelo emotivo inegável e o apoio solidário aos animais seja uma melhoria não só em relação à ausência de qualquer apoio, mas também em relação ao apoio que “despreza” os animais, há desvantagens em apoiar os animais no modo de solidariedade. O sentido de identificação que está no cerne da solidariedade fetichiza os pontos em comum entre o objeto da solidariedade e o agente. Uma tendência para se concentrar em pontos comuns não só pode fazer com que os agentes morais ajam em solidariedade com os animais, como também pode levá-los ao fracasso moral – tanto quando os pontos em comum percebidos encorajam actos de apoio de menor urgência, como quando as diferenças percebidas desencorajam o apoio que teria sido moralmente desejável. . Consequentemente, parece preferível que o apoio aos animais se baseie apenas em considerações de justiça, em vez de ser alargado na forma de solidariedade.*

**Palavras-chave:** Solidariedade. Justiça Interespécies. Animais. Relevância Moral. Motivação Moral. Valor Moral.

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## Introduction

The concept of solidarity is (re-)gaining currency not only in contexts of intra-human relations (e.g., BRUNKHORST, 2006; BANTING; KYMLICKA, 2015; PRAINSACK; BUYX, 2017; ALTHAMMER; NEUMÄRKER; NOTHELLE-WILDFEUER, 2019), but increasingly also in debates relating to interspecies justice, where transspecies solidarity is sometimes declared a political goal (e.g., ROCK; DEGELING, 2015; PEARCE, 2015; HARFELD, 2016; COULTER, 2016; COCHRANE, 2018). This comes after the recognition of nonhuman animals as fully morally considerable beings has prompted reconsiderations of many concepts and theories, such as *rights* and *justice* (REGAN, 2004), *citizenship* (DONALDSON; KYMLICKA, 2011), *discrimination* (HORTA, 2010), *cosmopolitanism* (COCHRANE, 2018) or *equity* (O’SULLIVAN, 2011). Reinterpretations of these concepts have aimed to correct for what is now seen as the undue exclusion (or oversight) of animals. A similar reconsideration should be given to solidarity. In this paper, I examine both the concept of solidarity for its fit with transspecies relations of support and the value of solidarity for the project of interspecies justice. Section 2 develops a working account of solidarity. Section 3 considers some of the reasons for wanting to be able to apply the concept of solidarity to interspecies relations and replies to some objections to the idea of transspecies solidarity. Section 4 then discusses the shortcomings of solidarity as a mode of support and shows how cultivating solidarity might have counterproductive effects for the pursuit of interspecies justice. Section 5 concludes by briefly contrasting the potential merits and risks of fostering transspecies solidarity.

## What is solidarity?

As a starting point for developing a working account of solidarity I shall use a proposal from recent bioethical literature. Based on a comprehensive review of references to the concept of solidarity in the field, Barbara Prainsack and Alexa Buyx have articulated an account of solidarity that seeks to render it well distinguished from neighboring concepts and do justice to shared views about the core features of solidarity, while blocking inflationary use. They distinguish between different levels of solidarity in terms of its individual and institutional bases, respectively. Generally, they define solidarity as “an enacted commitment to carry ‘costs’ (financial, social, emotional or otherwise) to assist others with whom a person or persons recognize similarity in a relevant respect” (PRAINSACK; BUYX, 2017, 52). They then differentiate between an inter-personal, a group and a legal level (PRAINSACK; BUYX, 2017, 55) and combine this with a procedural theory of solidarity, arguing that more institutionalized and codified levels or “tiers” of solidarity typically develop out of lower (individual) levels. The level on which institutions of solidarity are thus typically grounded is “interpersonal solidarity”: “At this level, solidarity comprises manifestations of the willingness to carry costs to assist others with whom a person recognizes similarity in at least one relevant respect,” as when someone offers a seat on the bus to a person who seems to experience back pain because the person giving up her seat remembers a past experience of pain (PRAINSACK; BUYX, 2017, 54). The next level of solidarity emerges when interpersonal solidarity becomes prevalent in a context so that it is regarded as “normal.” “Group solidarity” then “comprises manifestations of a shared commitment to carry costs to assist others with whom people consider themselves bound together through at least one similarity in a relevant respect (e.g. a shared situation, characteristic, or cause)” (PRAINSACK; BUYX, 2017, 55). A self-help group of people with a certain disease would be a case in point (56). Finally, when there is a process of institutionalization and codification of the principles governing group solidarity, solidarity morphs into “contractual, legal or administrative norms” (PRAINSACK; BUYX, 2017, 56). The welfare state would be the paradigm example of this kind of institutionalized solidarity.

According to Prainsack and Buyx’s general characterization of solidarity, it is ultimately based on a recognition of a relevant similarity, i.e., a *sense of identification*. Distinguishing solidarity from other forms of assistance, this characteristic appears to let the account line up well with the received view of solidarity as occurring in contexts of (perceived) group-membership. By requiring that solidarity be “enacted,” Prainsack and Buyx make sure that solidarity is not simply this very sense of identification, though. They deliberately deviate from accounts of solidarity that

identify it with a feeling rather than a mode of action (PRAINSACK; BUYX, 2017, 43), arguing that solidarity “requires some external manifestation that is apparent to others,” a feature without which the term “solidarity” would be open to “inflationary use” (PRAINSACK; BUYX, 2017, 45). Differentiating between the feeling of identification and solidarity is indeed reasonable simply because it is a worthwhile distinction between an underlying motivation and the act that is based on it.

The remaining features their account ascribes solidarity are more specific aspects of the *act* that it is: it is to be a somewhat *costly* act of *assistance* (or one that at least aims at assistance). Given the assistance condition, the definition does not account for a number of interesting cases of apparent solidarity, namely what Michael Zhao refers to as “self-depriving acts of solidarity” that do not aim to offer assistance, but rather embody a “commitment to fate-sharing” (Zhao 2019). In such cases, agents “voluntarily depriv[e] themselves of something that is available to them, but that the objects of their solidarity are deprived of” (ZHAO, 2019, 3), where this is based on a perceived connection with the objects of solidarity and “the thought that, in certain ways and to certain extents, what happens to part of the group should happen to the entire group,” as when family members cut off their own hair given that one member of the family is facing hair loss due to chemotherapy (ZHAO, 2019, 5). Zhao shares the view that solidarity is “motivated by a sense of identification with the other” (ZHAO, 2019, 6), but his argument draws attention to accordingly motivated acts that do not register as acts of assistance. The disagreement about the purpose, but not the motivation of a solidaristic act highlights that there are two relations involved in solidarity: one preexisting relation of group membership or similarity-relation as recognized by the agent, and one forged through the solidaristic act, which might not have to be one of assistance.

I will proceed on the assumption that acts based on a feeling of identification can be considered instances of solidarity, even if they are not strictly speaking acts of assistance. We might call the relevant relation – the one forged through the solidaristic act – one of “support,” if we make it clear that support is to be understood in very broad terms, including merely symbolic and simultaneously private acts of support. What “solidarity” is supposed to cover are not only effective supportive measures but also the creation of any outlet for a supportive attitude that remains idle with regard to the situation of the objects of solidarity (thus also giving up the condition that any manifestation of solidarity must be “apparent to others” PRAINSACK; BUYX, 2017, 45). Substituting “support” for “assistance” also helps to accommodate variety in the valence of situations that trigger solidarity. Examples for solidarity tend to focus on incidences of sticking together in view of some disvalue experienced by at least one party (such as an illness, a lack of legal protection or even simply acute minor discomfort). The notion of support accounts for this tendency in that it signals the presence of some disvalue, where support is apt in the protection against that disvalue. It seems possible, though, that solidarity emerges in a situation in which some positive value affects an individual or group. When an oppressed group’s efforts for legal reform to secure them greater freedom or security succeed, a person might join the ensuing celebration. Analyzing solidarity in terms of support rather than assistance allows for recognizing her co-celebration as an act of solidarity. Support can be signaled even when the immediate situation that elicits its expression is a positive one. It only requires there to be at the very least a risk (or even just a memory) of some adversity – against which to prepare or of which to remind those whom it concerns. Support can then take celebratory forms and be signaled at happy occasions. Still, its implication of a union against some shadow of disvalue works to distinguish solidarity from other sorts of relations that are based on a sense of identification.

## Solidarity

Solidarity is the enacted commitment to establishing, maintaining or reinforcing a relation of support for the individual or group, where this commitment is partly based on the recognition of a commonality between the agent and the targeted individual(s).

What does it mean that solidarity is “based on” the recognition of a commonality? Two different readings are available. On a *non-moral reading*, an act of solidarity is based on a sense of identification in that the latter makes a

purely (non-moral) motivational contribution to the occurrence of the act. On this view, the person acting in solidarity might recognize that it is the need for support on the part of the object of solidarity that makes her act morally desirable, but she draws on the recognition that she herself has something in common with that person in order to be moved to act. In this case, the agent does not think that the commonality itself is actually morally relevant, but requires it as a motivational resource.

On the *moral reading*, the agent attaches moral relevance to the fact that the other person's need for support is linked to some commonality with herself that she deems materially relevant. In this case, the agent sees the need itself as something that can only be a necessary, but not a sufficient contribution to a moral reason for action. Not only does she require the commonality as an additional source of motivation in a situation where she fails to be sufficiently motivated by her moral motivation. She does not see the other person's need as providing her, *by itself*, with a moral reason to begin with. Only the need plus the commonality with herself taken together generate that reason for her. I take it that both readings are possible and each point us to a type of solidarity; in one case, solidarity that takes the base of identification with the object of support as a source of motivation, in the other case, solidarity that moralizes the base of identification, regarding it as co-generating a moral reason. The common denominator between the two is that the recognition of the commonality makes *some* motivational contribution.

The working account does not cover every act of support that commonly goes by "solidarity." When one animal rights group (A) joins another group's (B) protest against a form of animal exploitation (x), there are at least three possible scenarios that, on a pretheoretical level, might look like cases of solidarity. In scenario 1, group A acts out of a sense of identification. Their rationale is: "We stand in solidarity with group B, because like us, they act in defense of animals." In scenario 2, group A is acting out of a recognition of the worthiness of group B's cause, but also conceives of joining B's efforts as establishing a relation of solidarity. Members of group A are declaring: "We too find x abhorrent and we stand in solidarity with members of group B, who are working to abolish it." In scenario 3, group A acts out of a recognition of the worthiness of group B's cause. They are thinking: "We too find x abhorrent. Let's join the effort to abolish it."

Relying on the working account, we can identify scenario 1 as a straightforward case of solidarity, because group A is acting on a recognition of a relevant commonality that group B shares with them ("like us, they act in defense of animals"). In scenario 3, there is no solidarity at all. There is a joint effort to abolish a practice, motivated purely by the consideration that this practice constitutes an injustice. Scenario 2 seems to present us with a borderline case between acting out of considerations of justice (or duty) and acting in solidarity. The agents themselves declare that they are standing in solidarity with other agents. Yet, the working account does not accommodate this as a case of solidarity, even though, in a way, members of group A do *identify* with group B. They make the goals of group B their own. But basing what one does on considerations of justice alone is different from solidaristic thinking where perceived commonalities select the cause for which one takes action. In scenario 2, the "sense of identification" with the cause is an *ex post* kind of identification, it is identification with a cause that one has selected as being worthy irrespective of what commonalities it has with one's own (past, actual or hypothesized) situation. While "solidarity" maybe the light in which they see their action, no preconceived commonality is part of group A's rationale for acting. Intuitions will vary regarding whether this kind of "standing in solidarity" is a species of solidarity, after all, or whether the declaration "we stand in solidarity with group B" is just an emphatic way to declare support for a cause selected solely based on justice-considerations. For some, this is a special – and yet still paradigmatic – type of solidarity. It corresponds to what Sally Scholz calls "political solidarity," something she originally denied (SCHOLZ, 2008, 220) and then acknowledged can occur in relation to nonhuman animals (SCHOLZ, 2013; cf. COCHRANE; COJOCARU, 2023, 61). For the reasons just given I will not modify the working account so as to integrate such *ex post solidarity* (common though as viewing it as the paradigmatic form of solidarity may be) and disregard this type of support for the purposes of this paper.

## Solidarity and nonhuman animals

There are as many reasons to care about the applicability of the concept of solidarity to human-animal relations as there are already existing forms of support for animals that could be forms of solidarity as well as calls to extend solidarity to nonhuman animals in animal advocacy and in scholarship.

In the course of the political turn in animal ethics, the debate of what is owed to animals has been enriched by a focus on animals' entitlement to being considered as members of political communities. Demands have been articulated to recognize (certain) animals as co-citizens with claims to the benefits of social cooperation, to representation and consideration in the forming and pursuit of the common good (DONALDSON; KYMLICKA, 2011; GARNER; O'SULLIVAN, 2016; COCHRANE, 2018). In effect, these amount to proposals to include animals in schemes of solidarity – after all, this is what institutions of the (welfare) state, such as the health care system, are commonly perceived to be (cf. HARFELD, 2016).

Unsurprisingly, then, there are some explicit references to and calls for solidarity in the political turn literature. For instance, Alasdair Cochrane argues that for the creation and maintenance of the cosmopolitan sentientist political order that he proposes, “it is vital that it is underpinned by a civil society with ‘sentientist solidarity.’” By that he means “a citizenry with feelings of shared affiliation with sentient non-human animals, as well as a commitment to the institutions designed for their protection” (COCHRANE, 2018, 120). His view of solidarity fits with that of the working account, if “feelings of shared affiliation” are a form of a *sense of identification* and in case the “commitment” to institutions is to be thought of as enacted. Promoting a more specific form of solidarity, Kendra Coulter has called for mobilizing solidarity with animals qua workers (COULTER, 2016), and Jason Hribal has argued that some historical achievements on behalf of animals have indeed been borne by such solidarity (HRIBAL, 2007).

On the practical level, existing forms of support for animals are recognizable as potential manifestations of solidarity. Animal advocacy may often be grounded in the recognition that animals are “just like us.” Also, cases of assistance in emergencies can be instances of identification-based support. While the working account of solidarity allows of all this, there has long been a presumption that solidarity is an exclusively intrahuman phenomenon. In this section, I argue against this anthropocentric presumption.

The idea of solidarity with nonhumans might be rejected, for instance, on account of the assumption that solidarity necessarily requires the capacity to reciprocate on the part of the supported party and that nonhuman animals do not have this capacity (*objection from lacking reciprocity*). A related objection would presuppose that solidarity, unlike charity, required an overall symmetrical relationship and that the relationship between humans and animals was characterized by a (justified) social hierarchy and/ or a hierarchy in terms of some form of excellence (*objection from asymmetry*). Transspecies solidarity might further be rejected based on the denial that humans and animals share relevant commonalities to which a sense of identification could attach (*objection from contingent differences*) or based on the idea that humans are not in a position to identify relevant commonalities between themselves and the experiences of nonhuman animals (*objection from epistemic anthropocentrism*). Finally, one might argue that solidarity is support only for those who can also act on their own behalf and that animals lack the kind of agency that solidarity seeks to support (*objection from a lack of agency*).

The objections relating to *reciprocity* and *asymmetry* can be seen as interconnected. Kurt Bayertz explains that solidarity involves at least “latent” expectations of mutuality because it is distinguished from charity by occurring in an overall symmetrical relationship in which all involved are seen as able and, should the need arise, required to support one another (BAYERTZ, 1998, 43). One might think that reciprocity excludes animals because they are unable to extend (the relevant sort of) support to humans. However, even assuming for the sake of the argument that this is correct, reciprocity still does not seem to be a good further condition for acts of support to count as solidarity. Reciprocity should be viewed as at best a “secondary feature” of solidarity (KNEUER et al., 2022, 372), not something that defines what solidarity is at its core. Paradigm cases of schemes of solidarity, e.g., health care systems, are put in

place to support not only those who contribute to these schemes, but precisely also those who can never contribute in the same currency that keeps these schemes going. A requirement of reciprocity is basically a misunderstanding of the sense of identification that motivates solidarity. It adds a restricting further thought to the solidaristic motivation: on this view, the solidary agent is not just supporting someone “because she shares feature F with me,” but “because she shares feature F with me and (therefore) would/ should do the same for me, if I was the one in need.” This unnecessarily limits the grounds on which agents would count as acting in solidarity, rendering unaccounted for all those acts of support that are based on a sense of identification but not on an expectation of reciprocity. When speaking of solidarity with animals, I am speaking of “transspecies” rather than “interspecies solidarity” precisely so as not to imply that solidarity requires support to be mutual.

Even when reciprocity is given up as a condition of solidarity, the idea of solidarity with nonhuman animals could be rejected based on the view that solidarity occurs within “an overall symmetrical relationship,” unlike charity, which is a “top-down interaction” (PRAINSACK; BUYX, 2012, 338, 341). It is a widespread view that humans are not in an overall symmetrical relationship with animals but are more powerful, more excellent or competent in important respects and (rightfully) in control of resources. On this view, assistance to animals would always be (mere) charity because it would always flow from the top down. One problem with the asymmetry objection to transspecies solidarity is just this view of the human-animal-relationship. It construes animals as fundamentally inferior to humans, ignoring the different capacities and competencies of animals as much as humans’ incapacities, failures and limitations. More fundamentally, the asymmetry-requirement burdens the concept of solidarity with yet another condition that is not required to distinguish solidarity from other modes of support. Actual overall symmetry is *not* a *further* requirement concerning the social standing or perfectionist excellence of the agent and the recipient of solidaristic support. Symmetry – even if just in one respect – rather is something the agent undertaking an act of solidarity chooses to focus on. By identifying with someone, the agent zeros in on a symmetrical relationship. The kind of symmetry that one might think is required for support to be solidarity is located in the agent’s perception – it resides in the commonality that motivates a solidaristic act.

The *objections from contingent differences* and *epistemic anthropocentrism* are closely related, too, and they are more specifically directed against the idea of solidarity *with nonhuman animals* than the objections from reciprocity and asymmetry. In fact, the contingent differences-objection is the result of a problem that the objection from epistemic anthropocentrism rightly points to: humans sometimes fail to notice commonalities with animals. While this is an actual problem, it is neither an insurmountable anthropological obstacle to transspecies solidarity nor evidence of the absence of relevant commonalities. Notice how Prainsack and Buyx clarify that they, too, acknowledge that there can be human solidarity with nonhuman animals. In response to Melanie Rock and Chris Degeling (2015), who have criticized their account for arbitrarily excluding the notion of solidarity with nonhuman animals, they say:

if we accept a risk to our health as a ‘cost’ of comforting a horse suffering from an infectious disease, this can be an instance of practising solidarity if we do this because we recognise our own vulnerability in the suffering of the horse (‘similarity in a relevant respect’). (PRAINSACK; BUYX, 2017, 65-6)

The example they provide here is noteworthy because when it comes to solidarity with animals, they turn to the rather abstract notion of vulnerability in order to pinpoint a relevant similarity. This might be seen as speaking to a limited vision of commonalities with nonhuman animals, but we do not have to attribute this to a version of “epistemic” (KREBS, 1997, 343) or “perspectival” (FERRÉ, 1994, 72) anthropocentrism, i.e., an anthropological limitation to our understanding of the perspectives of other animals. When commonalities with animals more specific than vulnerability are missed, this could simply be due to acute disregard, not an *incapacity* that would block for us many occasions for connecting to animals in the mode of solidarity. A lack of attention to the more specific commonalities with animals is overcome by many humans who engage with their fellow animals and inquire into the ranges of their capacities and needs. And while animals certainly face many harms that only they face (such as being

bred and being raised to be slaughtered), there are certainly commonalities with the situations that humans do face from time to time (specific experiences that come with feeling powerless, hurting, being exploited) as well as occasions for imagining oneself as being vulnerable to the same sorts of harms (violations of bodily integrity, life and liberty).

Finally, on the grounds that “solidarity with other persons and their goals is possible only if they themselves try to attain them,” Andreas Wildt has argued that “[a]nimals, the newly born, and fetuses may [...] be the object of sympathy, moral obligations, and even supererogatory acts, but not of solidarity” (WILDT, 1999, 218). One thing to say about this *objection from a lack of agency* on the part of animals is that it is premised on a striking denial of animals’ capacities and actions. Pursuing goals is part of animals’ nature – it is their mode of securing their needs (cf. KORSGAARD, 2018, 38-9, on the nature of animals as intelligent agents). They search for food, build nests and dens, attract mates, foster their social relations – sustaining family bonds and building friendships –, seek shelter as well as opportunities to enjoy themselves, they run, swim or fly for their lives, they communicate, deceive and help one another. It is impossible to adequately describe animals’ behavior without relying on achievement verbs, because animals are intelligent agents who pursue goals. They also actively resist coercion, confinement and violence in many different ways (HRIBAL, 2011). If animals did not resist, it would not be necessary for those who use animals to invent and deploy all sorts of instruments to incapacitate them, especially some which turn their agency against them, such as nose rings and choke collars and many more drastic inventions of this sort (cf. WADIWEL, 2015). In all the myriad ways in which animals pursue goals, humans can support them in their efforts. Also, the very idea that solidarity can be based on the perception of a common *vulnerability* contrasts with the notion that solidarity’s only possible mode is that of “struggle solidarity” (German: “Kampfsolidarität”; BAYERTZ, 1998, 49), whereby agents join existing efforts to overcome some adversity. Vulnerability is the condition of being at risk of harm, not the disposition to oppose harm. Connecting on the level of vulnerability can be a form of identification and does not require the one who is acutely harmed or at risk to fend off that harm or risk. An agent might identify with an individual precisely because she is incapacitated.

In summary, solidarity does not invite an anthropocentric interpretation. Humans can support animals in the mode of solidarity and it is not even clear that it cannot be the other way around. Whether either humans or animals support others (including members of other species) based on a sense of identification is ultimately an empirical question the answer to which should not be inscribed into a concept of solidarity (by defining solidarity, e.g., as a *human* effort). However, in the next section, I will turn to some of the reasons for seeing solidarity as a somewhat problematic way of relating to others, having to do with its inherently egocentric structure. This structure *may*, after all, make it less likely that this somewhat twisted mode of moral action is prevalent in nonhuman animals.

## Solidarity’s limitations

Even if a plausible definition of solidarity will be able to capture transspecies solidarity, that still does not mean that solidarity is something that those concerned with the proper moral consideration of animals should want to promote. Solidarity is at best a morally ambivalent phenomenon. Whatever fits the descriptive application conditions of solidarity is not necessarily a morally valuable act and even if it is, it may still lack moral worth.

### *Solidarity – the good, the bad, and the unfair*

The working account renders solidarity a nonmoralized concept which therefore captures a wide range of acts. Since it does not say that solidarity covers only morally good, justified or required acts, it allows that, depending on the specifics of their respective motivations, agents such as mobsters, hate groups and fascist putschists act in solidarity when going about their business. Given a nonmoralized concept, it is a trivial conceptual truth that solidarity need not be a morally good thing. However, the underlying problem motivating the conceptual choice is not trivial and it would not go away if we were to opt for a moralized concept of solidarity instead. When using a moralized



concept of solidarity (that rendered solidarity *morally valuable* support based on a sense of identification), we could make the almost exact same claim as in the case of the nonmoralized concept. We would simply need to say that whatever counts as solidarity is not morally good in virtue of the features of the act that the *descriptive content* of the concept of solidarity picks out: being based on the recognition of a commonality between the agent and the targeted individual(s) is not something in virtue of which an act becomes morally valuable or worthy.

Based on a *nonmoralized* concept, we can recognize that solidarity could come in varying degrees of moral (dis)value. We could distinguish three main categories. First, there are acts of solidarity that are *good* in that it is all-things-considered morally desirable that they be done. They realize some value that is morally good to realize. The person who offers her seat on the bus to someone carrying heavy-looking grocery bags based on her memory of how badly she would have needed a seat yesterday, when she was carrying a heavy bag, does something that looks like a good act of solidarity. Second, there are acts of solidarity that are *bad* in that they realize some disvalue that it is morally bad to bring about. Alternatively, we could couch this in deontological terms and say that these acts of solidarity belong to the class of morally wrong types of acts. The mobster who kills a snitch based on his sense of identification with the mob commits a bad act of solidarity. Third, solidarity can sometimes realize some value that it is *pro tanto* good or at least not bad to realize, but realize it at an undue cost because it involves foregoing the opportunity to realize another, more important value. In this case, solidarity is a problem of distributive justice. Solidarity is *unfair*, then, if it is an enactment of undue partiality for a cause. Obviously, given the multitude of potentially morally valuable causes that any agent could further, hardly any act of solidarity is safe from the suspicion of being unfair.

There is nothing about support for an individual or group that is based on a recognition of a commonality between the agent and the targeted individual(s) in itself that would let us know that and why an act of solidarity is all-things-considered good. While there could be cases where some commonality is morally relevant, the definition of solidarity does not provide the description under which this relevance can be identified.

### ***When good solidarity lacks moral worth***

Even when solidarity is all-things-considered good (i.e., morally valuable), it is, at least often, lacking in moral worth. Since it is definitive of solidaristic acts that they are motivated by a recognition of a commonality with the agent, the general form of a rationale that could be constructed for solidaristic acts would not be fully universalizable. This makes for a crucial difference to support that comes with *ex post identification*. The rationale of an agent who undertakes a solidaristic act includes an indexical reference to the agent, not merely as the acting party, but also in giving the grounds for the action. “I am going to  $\varphi$  in order to support  $B$ , given that  $B$  shares feature  $F$  with me.” Depending on whether we are dealing with solidarity that treats the grounds of the sense of identification as a source of non-moral or of moral motivation (see section “What is solidarity?”), there are different things to say about this. In the non-moral case, the least we can note is that solidaristic action is a self-involved way of relating morally to others. The agent fails to muster enough motivation by simply looking at the morally relevant facts and the source of further motivation that she finds is a similarity with herself – a similarity that will be all the more contingent the more specific it is. In a world of moral agents acting on solidarity alone, anyone in need would, in order to receive support, depend on encountering someone who can draw on a similar experience or who can think of a more general commonality with the person in need. Finding someone who simply sees her need for what it is will not be enough to find support.

In effect, the same is true for the case of solidarity that is based on moral motivation stemming from the sense of identification with the object of support, but the problem runs even deeper, at the very least in many cases.

Many believe that there are ways of identifying with others that do in fact regularly play a role in generating moral reasons to give support to some, but not others. Those who hold that relations such as family or community membership, belonging to a profession or citizenship in a nation state are morally relevant relations will

insist that treating the grounds of identification with others as morally relevant is often entirely apt. For instance, in Donaldson and Kymlicka's relational account of duties to (human and nonhuman) animals, it makes a difference for the reasons to extend or not extend the support of health care systems whether or not the potential beneficiary is part of the political community. On a view such as this one, there are many cases where A's need for support must be accompanied by a particular relation among A and B (membership in some group) in order to generate a moral reason (or at least a conclusive one) for B to assist A. Having a sense of identification – which is just the appreciation of that reason co-generating relation – and regarding it as morally relevant is simply apt in those situations. In other words, such situations, according to relational accounts of certain duties, indeed call for support in the mode of solidarity. The problem with solidarity is that *unless* some such relational account is justifiable and applicable to the situation at hand *and unless* the social relation that is deemed relevant by that account is indeed what the solidaristic agent is drawing her sense of identification from, acting in the mode of solidarity is a way of failing to act for the right reasons. Such a failure occurs whenever the condition creating the need for support (or the more general capacity to be affected by that condition) is what the agent acting in solidarity identifies with. Consider an act of assistance to, say, a starving hedgehog. It would count as an act of solidarity if it was based on a recognition of a commonality between the human agent and the hedgehog. The commonality could be something as general as vulnerability, but also the human agent's own prior suffering from hunger. However, irrespective of whether the agent finds the relevant similarity on a more general or more specific level: if there is anything that makes the act morally desirable at all, it is not the *similarity* between the human and the hedgehog. If assisting the hedgehog is morally desirable, the reasons for this are grounded in her acute suffering and, on a more general level, her ability to suffer – her sentience. The reason in favor of an act of assistance is not the fact that there is another being, separate from the hedgehog, that has in the past suffered from hunger or that is also capable of starving. This other being – the agent undertaking an act of assistance – has nothing to do with what gives rise to the hedgehog's need for assistance.

This suggests that solidarity that is based on the identification with a being's condition (i.e., the kind of solidarity that some argue is the paradigm case of solidarity; cf., ARNSPERGER; VAROUFAKIS, 2003) lacks moral worth in as much as the agent *fails* to identify the feature of a situation that makes her support morally desirable. This is the case even if it is true that the presence or absence of a social relation is relevant for one's moral reasons for supporting someone. If it were true that one would not have a (conclusive) reason to assist the hedgehog unless she was a member of one's political community, the agent who did not identify this common group-membership but the hedgehog's vulnerability or hunger as the relevant commonality with herself would still be missing the morally relevant characteristics of the situation. In order for solidarity to be morally worthy, it must be focused on an actually morally relevant commonality. Whether some social relations sometimes amount to such morally relevant commonalities is a matter of debate. The preceding considerations do not tell conclusively against solidarity ever being a morally apt way of responding to occasions for supporting others. However, it seems that at the very least, solidarity that is based on identification with the condition that creates the need for support is a mode of assistance wherein the agent fails to act for the right reasons. Of course, in order to recognize the morally irrelevant commonality, the agent must at least have registered the morally relevant feature – the hedgehog's suffering. However, insofar as the act of assistance to the starving hedgehog is one of (condition-focused) solidarity, the agent passes over this relevant feature, arriving at the motivating reason for action only once attention is directed to the similarity between this feature and a fact about the agent herself. The agent may be praiseworthy for registering the relevant feature, but as far as the evaluation of her moral motivation is concerned, she then squanders her praiseworthiness by failing to be moved by this insight and redirecting her attention to the commonality with herself. She fetishizes the similarity with herself – her moral evaluation tracks this similarity rather than the feature with respect to which there is a similarity.

Some proponents of furthering solidarity as a morally valuable *and* worthy way of relating to others are aware of this unsettling characteristic of solidarity. In her promotion of the idea of transspecies solidarity, Kendra Coulter writes:

I propose transspecies solidarity as an idea, a goal, a process, an ethical commitment, and a political project. The concept of solidarity is underscored by ideas of empathy. In contrast to sympathy or pity, empathy is about understanding and legitimizing the experiences of others. Solidarity, thus involves support despite differences. Yet it does not mean connectivity or commonality are prohibited. [...] Solidarity should be promoted not simply because animals are like us/we are like animals, but because it is the ethical thing to do. Others, whether human or animal, should not have to be like us for us to care about their wellbeing. (Coulter 2016, 150)

Rather than clarifying the notion of solidarity, this passage seems to make it clear why solidarity is a problematic mode of moral action. What moral agents should care about is what morally considerable beings are like, what affects them and how they themselves ought to respond. They should not be occupied with finding in themselves a corresponding capacity for being affected in the same way.

From a consequentialist point of view, the promotion of solidarity with nonhumans animals might still appear to be desirable: solidaristic motivation could simply be one more mode of action in support of nonhuman animals. As such, it could increase the chances that action benefitting nonhuman animals will occur. In fact, bringing humans to see that other animals are “like us” in important respects is a key objective both of animal studies and animal advocacy. In one realm it concerns the identification of similarities for the sake of understanding reality and constructing fitting conceptual and theoretical frameworks, in the other realm it is about laying the groundwork for mobilizing support for animals. Nonetheless, in both realms, the identification of *similarities with humans* is slightly, but importantly, beside the point. What matters, in either domain, is not that a feature is *shared with humans*, but that feature itself and its *relevance* for the question at hand.

As a result, the consequentialist case for solidarity is not so straightforward, after all. At least it is not a case for furthering and cultivating solidarity (in contrast to just welcoming morally good acts of support that happen to have been done out of a sense of identification). The downside of cultivating a disposition for solidarity is that it makes the agent susceptible to being *deterred* by morally irrelevant aspects. When attention to commonalities is exploited to encourage morally desirable action, the downside is that the so-motivated agent will be all the more likely to be discouraged from such action when she recognizes *differences* between herself and the individual requiring support.<sup>3</sup> The history of the exclusion of animals based on (supposed) differences makes this effect of solidarity especially concerning. Also, when an agent is prone to be motivated only by rather specific solidaristic identification she can easily fail to be moved to act. If she has never experienced real hunger, she will fail to be moved to assist the starving hedgehog. Solidarity is thus an unreliable force for moral action.

### ***Deontic dubiousness***

Solidarity has sometimes been contraposed to positive duties (BAYERTZ, 1998, 14) and it has been argued that if it were obligatory, duties of solidarity would collapse into duties of justice (STEINVORTH, 1998). In contrast, when solidarity is presented as the very precondition of sociality, it appears to be as much morally required as sociality is. If “solidarity” refers to the existence of and the individual’s commitment to norms of transferring resources to individuals or a community (TRANOW, 2012), then it certainly names something that is indispensable for securing collective goods (BAURMANN, 1998) and maintaining a society that allocates these goods.

The view that solidarity is a prerequisite to justice resurfaces in the debate on interspecies justice. We have already seen that Cochrane thinks of solidarity as comprising “feelings of shared affiliation” and a commitment to institutions and that he regards the presence of this phenomenon as a “crucial prerequisite of a sentientist political system” (COCHRANE, 2018, 119). And if having a sentientist political system is a moral requirement, as Cochrane argues, then so is the development of the type of solidarity by which that system is to be “underpinned.”

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<sup>3</sup> Thanks to Alexander Christian for a helpful conversation regarding this issue.

But why must *solidarity* be the grounds on which humans commit to maintaining the institutions protecting sentient beings? Why must moral agents tap into “feelings of shared affiliation” in order to commit to supporting these institutions? It does seem that a *cosmopolitan* sentientist society as proposed by Cochrane would be morally better if it were not dependent on solidarity, but built on a recognition of sentient beings’ sheer moral considerability. When support for protective institutions depends on a perception of commonalities, it hinges on agents having “one thought too many,” to borrow Bernard Williams’ phrase (WILLIAMS, 1981, 18). Recognizing a need for support is not enough for them, instead they require the additional thought that “it’s the need of someone with whom I have a shared affiliation.” If there really is a need to stir up thoughts like these in order to get moral agents to muster the motivation to support the institutions designed to protect sentient beings, this would make solidarity a regrettable practical necessity – and maybe this is the sense in which Cochrane deems it a “prerequisite” for interspecies justice. Solidarity, as the base of sociality, would then be a theme for non-ideal theory and not a moral requirement per se. Instead of bringing moral agents to *identify with* the other it might be better to focus on bringing them to *identify the other as morally considerable*.

### ***The motivation-justification gap***

When practices of solidarity “manifest themselves in contractual or other legal norms” (PRAINSACK; BUYX, 2012, 337), the contract turns ‘practices of solidarity’ into ‘duties of solidarity’. Kurt Bayertz has remarked that “solidarity” may be a *euphemism* for public measures funded by non-voluntary contributions and argued that institutionalization generates the need for a different kind of justification: arguments relating to justice instead of an appeal to solidarity (BAYERTZ, 1998, 37-9). But what is needed here is not just a *different* justification – but rather some justification in the first place. Institutionalization does not create, but merely reveal the need for justification. A sense of identification provides a motivation, but despite what individual moral agents acting on this identification might assume, it does not provide a justification. Individual acts of support can always be morally bad (when the supported cause is itself bad) or at least unfair (if the agent should rather support an even worthier cause). Letting a sense of identification determine which individuals, groups or causes one will support is not plausibly in itself a valid guide to making just allocations. This problem might become more obvious on the group and especially on the contractual level, but it is already present for individual acts of solidarity. One might hope that if the identification base is general enough, the tendency to undue partiality will not play out. However, if the commonality on which the agent focuses simply coincides with the condition for being morally considerable – the vulnerability that comes with sentience –, she will still not be guided in *selecting* among the causes of the multitude of considerable beings. A propensity for solidarity will therefore either guide moral choices in ways that do not, by themselves, contribute anything to justifying the choice or fail to guide moral action at all.

### **Conclusion**

The concept of solidarity has undeniable emotive appeal and solidaristic support for animals is an improvement not only over the absence of any support but also over support that “looks down” on animals. Fostering transspecies solidarity can therefore be helpful in overcoming denial and disregard of meaningful commonalities among humans and nonhuman animals. It stands to reason that this potential will be harnessed for moral and political mobilization.

While a full examination of the potential merits and limits of solidarity with nonhuman animals – in actual, non-ideal situations – would require a more detailed analysis, this paper has provided reasons for skepticism about the idea of transspecies solidarity as a vehicle of interspecies justice. The sense of identification that is at the core of solidarity mobilizes moral agents at a cost, because solidarity can fetishize similarities with the agent. Animal advocates tap into this fetish when they are promoting the idea that “animals are like us.” But the tendency to look for commonalities cannot only make moral agents act in solidarity with animals, it can also set them up for moral

failure – both when perceived commonalities encourage acts of support of lesser urgency and when perceived differences discourage support that would have been morally desirable.

A further problem is that even if reciprocity is not a definitional feature of solidarity, it is a likely misconception of the relevant symmetry between agents and objects of solidarity, which can play out to animals' disadvantage. While some will emphasize that nonhuman animals are also capable of making contributions to social goods, it is unlikely that a wider public will perceive them as making the right kinds of contributions. If the observation about the motivational role of expectations of reciprocity on the contractual level of solidarity is correct, then claims to include animals as beneficiaries of this level of solidarity will trigger demands for a demonstration of what animals bring to the table. A good deal of the debate about animals' moral considerability has been about showing that this is the wrong way to approach the inclusion of animals to begin with.

It would seem that the best sort of solidarity with animals would be the one that this paper has not even recognized as a form of solidarity: the kind of support that comes with an *ex post* sense of identification, where the desire to "stand with" someone is based not on an awareness of any given commonality, but on considerations of justice.

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