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EXPRESSIONS OF “SOLIDARITY” IN FRENCH AND GERMAN SOCIAL THEORY

1. *Deciphering the signifier “solidarity”*

The word “solidarity” is frequently used to describe a sense of unity among people with shared or complementary goals or a common sense of belonging to a community of fate, implying a readiness to make sacrifices on behalf of specified others.¹ And yet, for many, such a definition is bereft of consequences and so broad as to encompass an undeterminable range of social and psychological realities. It is timely to analyze through the lens of conceptual history not just convergences in calls for “solidarity” but also divergencies in the use of the term, i.e. to present semantic de-solidarization surrounding the word. “Solidarity” is often used to express moral recognition for a cause without consequences for those doing the expressing. Such expressions can easily become a sort of occasion for virtue-signaling by occasionalists (Schmitt). For others, it only makes sense to evoke solidarity when people put their money where their mouth is given a choice: this was also the original meaning of the term. Its first use in French law implied contractual consequences and the readiness to stand in for partners in a specific undertaking.

Here, we look at the use of the term “solidarity” as a category in French and German social theory, culminating in Max Weber’s definition of the term in *Economy and Society*. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the term was being used in France with differing intentions: while some, like sociology’s founder, Auguste Comte, were using the term “solidarity” generally to describe social peace or the absence of strife in his

¹ These thoughts were developed for the Ravenna conference on the question “Does democracy need solidarity? Reflections across disciplines” on April 29, 2025; my thanks to Annalisa Furia for convening this meeting of minds.

praise of the technocratic progress that attenuated struggles for existence and reinforced solidarity, others, such as the French statesman and Nobel laureate, Léon Bourgeois deplored the *lack* of genuine solidarity notwithstanding Comte's and Durkheim's presentation of "solidarity" as characteristic of the forward march of society. While for Comte, solidarity corresponded to the *Is*, for Bourgeois the word corresponded to an unachieved *Ought*, a distinction made by David Hume (Hume 1878: 469). Comte, and to a greater extent Durkheim saw the co-functioning of individuals serving their own interests as the very foundation of solidarity; Bourgeois did not tire of denouncing the absence of genuine "solidarity" – a readiness to engage for one's fellows with no interest in achieving one's own aims. Social theorists in the wake of Durkheim – Marcel Mauss and Célestin Bouglé – developed their own discourses on morality in arguments that emphasized the value of in relationships of reciprocity and equality but did not really pull apart the nitty gritty of real social interactions. Max Weber shed more light on the circumstances and motivations of people acting in solidarity sometimes out of devotion to others, at other times out of self-interest.

The question of whether democracy needs solidarity is pertinent when the term "democracy" is conflated with capitalism and the market, after having been associated with socialism and the State for instance by opponents of democracy in the nineteenth century and proponents of "people's democracies" in the twentieth century. In a brief conclusion, I move from unpacking the word "solidarity" to commenting on the polysemic word "democracy" and arguing that "solidarity" is indeed desirable in a community of citizens as opposed to a marketplace of political lobbyists. Looking at the development of the term "solidarity" from its origins in law, I show how the word was used to describe a variety of forms of and motives for interactions among humans, how it became central to French sociology in the writings of Auguste Comte and Emile Durkheim, how in Germany Ferdinand Tönnies, while not using the term "solidarity", developed discerning terms to describe motives for peaceful and productive interaction, and how Max Weber clarified solidarity by outlining the circumstances and bases for humans

acting *as though* in unity in an empirical science while Durkheim's followers insistently led discussions of "solidarity" back to normative speculation.

2. Solidarity's place in semantic fields around the theme of sociability

One of the most insightful pieces of writing on solidarity is Andrea Sangiovanni's essay "Solidarity: Nature, Grounds and Value" (Sangiovanni 2021). In seeking out the difference between solidarity and «related ideas, such as altruism, justice, and fellow-feeling» (ivi: 3), when seen against other «members of the class of associational ethics» (larger social and economic collectivities, such as corporations and social movements, the ethics of family and friendship, and the classical concerns of political justice such as the state, human rights, and international relations), Sangiovanni acknowledges «that many feel the concept to be hopelessly vague and amorphous», bleeding into "other related notions – such as altruism, community, mutual concern, fellow-feeling, justice – and therefore quickly becoming indistinguishable from them» (ivi: 4). He points out that the social solidarity presented in Comte and Durkheim is «taken to be primarily descriptive and sociological in contrast to the other, more normatively oriented concepts» (ivi:5); this corroborates our observation that while Comte and Durkheim are struck with the extent of solidarity among humans who interrelate within society, contemporaries such as Bourgeois in France and Tönnies in Germany deplored the decline in genuine "solidarity" (in the case of Bourgeois) and "community" (in the case of Tönnies), clearly pointing to higher expectations of other human beings. Durkheim's followers in French social theory sought to revert to the normative status of the term. Max Weber believes that the signifier "solidarity" has its place in an apparatus of sociological categories, but only to describe the actions of people who feel bound to specific other individuals in contradistinction to others, whether out of affective or purposive-rational grounds, and who actually act on those feelings. Weber thus brings a lucidity to bear in using the term "solidarity" as descriptive not to describe society in general but to designate

specific relationships which were more compelling than mere juxtaposed anonymous individuals. What is essential for Weber is to use the term "solidarity" as a likely basis for action.

Discussions of sociability underlying notions of solidarity reach as far back as Greek antiquity, notably Aristotle's teleology – the development of organisms from undifferentiated material (or epigenesis). In book 8 of his *Nicomachean Ethics*, (VIII, 1. 1155a.), Aristotle advances the idea that friendship is more important than justice inasmuch it holds a city or polis together (Aristotle 2000). "Concord" is equated with the elimination of civil conflict: when people are friends, there is no need of justice; when they are just, they are still in need of friendship. A connection is drawn between *Nicomachean Ethics* 9.1159b25-27 and community, which involves "active participation" rather than "passive sharing". "Philia" can be based upon a variety of motives. Aristotle developed a typology of "desire-based", "utility-based" and "virtue-based" friendships. Starting from Aristotle's discussion of the concept of friendship or "*philia*", I argue that in his work *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, first published in 1887, the German social theorist Ferdinand Tönnies develops a logical distinction between relationships based upon friendship, kinship, desire or inclination, which he summed up as community or *Gemeinschaft*, relationships entered into out of utility or self-interest without the inclination to embrace others on their own merits, designated as society or *Gesellschaft*. Relationships based upon "trust and virtue" are of a radically different nature than those that are "utility-based", as emphasized in the second formulation of Immanuel Kant's categorical imperative – a universal moral law that applies to all rational beings unconditionally, regardless of desires or consequences: this second formulation, also called the formula of humanity, enjoins us to "act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of another, always at the same time as an end, and never merely as a means" (Kant 1785). One might question whether Aristotle's "utility-based friendships" really merit the term "friendship". Can relationships which appear to be concord on the surface be adequately described as relationships of "solidarity" when the actions underlying the relationships solely serve the self-interest

of those involved in them and evaporate as soon as the purpose has been fulfilled or is revealed to be unviable?

In the French social theory of Auguste Comte and Emile Durkheim, strictly self-serving actions are presented as “solidarity”, as the glue that holds the social fabric together, notwithstanding the fact that contemporaries such as Léon Bourgeois had been describing French society as lamentably lacking in solidarity (Bourgeois 1896), an observation with which Tönnies’ analysis of modern commercial society is concordant. Tönnies, who adopted various idiomatic expressions of Durkheim such as social fact (*fait social*, *soziale Tatsache*) in his defense of the legitimacy of sociology as a discipline, was somewhat dismissive of the work in which Durkheim introduced the notion of “organic solidarity”, *De la division du travail social*, writing that he had learned little from Durkheim (Tönnies 1929). Bourgeois and Tönnies would have concurred that with the advancement of the normative order of capitalism, the readiness of people to put themselves in the service of others was declining. Tönnies did not adopt the word Durkheimian term solidarity in the collocations “organic” and “mechanical solidarity” even after Tönnies read Durkheim’s *De la division du travail social*. Tönnies’ dismissiveness and defensiveness are understandable given that when founding sociology in France, Durkheim seems not to have assimilated the salient feature of *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* that was to become so foundational not just for Tönnies, but for later German social theory: that we value certain relationships on their own merits (or out of love for others) and others exclusively for the ulterior advantages they afford us. Having “ulterior motives” is a reproach that is so commonly made, that once it has been shown to be central in human interactions, it is striking when later theorists choose to omit to take account of it in later categories of social interactions.

3. *The origins of understandings of solidarity in law*

The word solidarity was originally derived from the Latin adjective *solidus* (dense, compact, cohesive) in private Roman *law*, particularly in the formula *in solidum*, designating a collective

obligation to honour a debt or repair damage.² The expression "*obligation solidaire*" was defined in the second edition of the Furetière dictionary of 1690 as "*commun à plusieurs de manière que chacun réponde du tout*". Where solidarity exists, every individual in the collectivity responds for the whole. Its juridical meaning is laid down in the 1694 Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française: «Etat de deux ou plusieurs personnes dont chacun est engagé pour toutes, et pour le tout, en cas de non-paiement de la part des autres», and a similar definition is found in the *Grande Encyclopédie* de Diderot et d'Alembert of 1765. Article 1202 of the Code Civil of 1804 states that solidarity has to be based upon mutual consent: «La solidarité ne se présume point ; il faut qu'elle soit expressément stipulée». This differs from later use by Comte and Durkheim, in which solidarity is understood to be universal or to suffuse entire societies. And yet in its original acceptation, solidarity is specific to relationships among individuals sharing specific commitments. The derivation of society from *socius* or partner presupposes voluntary participation; a later shift in meaning to encompass everyone, irrespective of any expression of their will, creates moral obligations for individuals derived from their mere existence and can be seen as a semantic sleight of hand. The use of the term solidarity by various authors to imply that there are moral consequences to be derived from our very existence is an instance of the illogic to which Hume was alluding when he insisted on the distinction between the Is and the Ought, between fact and value. Some authors, notably those inspired by Christianity, insinuated that our very existence imposes the moral duty to act in solidarity, entailing unspecified, imponderable and non sequitur moral injunctions. But when Comte and Durkheim argue that solidarity already forms the basis of social coexistence, this has the effect of lowering standards of what constitutes solidarity to a juxtaposition that may be one of mutual indifference. This problem notably in Durkheim's usage induced Durkheim's followers to draw solidarity back into the realm of the normative, while with contrary intent, Max Weber insisted upon the specificity of solidarity as a basis for united

² My thanks to the philologist Heinz Wismann for his explanations of the original use of the term.

action in his deliberately value-neutral dissection of the category.

4. *Solidarity as used by romantics and reactionaries, and the rise of the solidarisme movement*

French counterrevolutionaries related the term solidarity to the notion of collective debt and the notion of original sin as an obligation contracted by humanity towards God, bonding humans prior to and outside any social contract, as in Joseph de Maistre's *Considérations sur la France* of 1796 and his essay *Du Pape* of 1819. In his *Le génie du christianisme* of 1802, Chateaubriand argues that baptism is based upon the fact that «nos fautes rejaillissent sur nos fils, que nous sommes tous solidaires»: «sans décider ici si Dieu a tort ou raison de nous rendre solidaires, tout ce que nous savons et tout ce qu'il nous suffit de savoir à présent est que cette loi (i.e. d'une solidarité originnaire) existe» (Chateaubriand 1802 : 24ff.). Original solidarity, in this reasoning, is founded upon original sin. Sin as a debt towards God is passed down the generations and expressed in social institutions, starting with the family, which is the absolute model of other collective formations. Pierre Simon Ballanche, the theologian, denounced the idea of the social contract in his *Essai sur les institutions sociales* of 1818, in which he wrote that the human species in its entirety is bound in solidarity. Saint-Simon in his *Le nouveau christianisme* argued that there was a quasi-contract between all humans that preceded the stipulated contracts of individuals. While Saint-Simon assumed the universality of contract, Ballanche dismissed the notion of a social contract, asserting that the entirety of the human species was linked through a form of universal solidarity. These apparently normative arguments seem to lay bases for desiderata for human attitudes and behaviour, which however remain lacking in specific consequences. But the term "solidarity" was given a new twist when the founders of solidarity in France, first Comte and then far later Durkheim argued that solidarity could be shown to exist through the very existence of society. Human cooperation was perceived as a sort of miracle by Comte, while Durkheim argued that its modern form was derived from the

readiness of humans to adopt complementary functions, thus creating ties of interdependence, making individuals need one another and use one another.

The social philosopher Pierre Leroux (1797–1871) applied the notion of solidarity in debates on socialism and humanism, rejecting the technocratic tendencies of Saint-Simonianism that Comte would later embrace. Prefiguring Tönnies to a certain extent, Leroux used the notion of solidarity to countervail the individualism of liberal thought, while rejecting the mechanical collectivism of authoritarian socialism. In *De l'humanité, de son principe et de son avenir* (1840), Leroux suggested identifying solidarity with the French revolutionary ideal of "fraternity": solidarity was the bond uniting individuals in a moral community. While Leroux remained clearly in the realm of the normative, Comte would later interpret the notion of solidarity as a descriptive term to designate what factually served as the basis for cooperation among members of a society. The moralist idea that solidarity was based upon contractually validated debt flowed into the later arguments of Léon Bourgeois, the politician during the Third Republic and head of the radical-republican government from 1895 to 1896, in his book *Solidarité*, which founded the "*Solidarisme*" movement (Bourgeois 1896); human society is a system of natural dependence based upon reciprocal debt: «Il s'agit pour les hommes, associés solidaires, de reconnaître l'étendue de la dette que chacun contracte envers tous par l'échange de services» (ivi: 48), because «l'homme naît débiteur de l'association humaine» (ivi: 54). Both debts and benefits are accepted (p. 186); solidarity distributes both evil and good upon all of us (ivi:170). It is in the law of solidarity that we can seek the balance of moral and social things, i.e. justice (ivi: 191). Solidarity, in this tradition, comes from debt, expressed by the German word, *Schuld*, which also means guilt. Both the ideas of guilt and debt imply redemption. The romantic transformation of the notion of solidarity from a relationship that is entered into knowingly by two willing contractual parties (in the *Code civil*) to something that embraces the entirety of society and forces us to adopt an attitude to which we would not arrive if left freely to our own devices should

heighten our awareness of semantic shifts harnessed to artificially create moral obligations which we need not feel binding.

5. *The use of the term solidarité by Saint-Simon and Auguste Comte*

The term “solidarity” was used by Auguste Comte (1798-1857) after working as a secretary for Claude Henri de Saint-Simon (1760-1825), later described by Durkheim as the first sociologist. Both Saint-Simon and Comte were committed to channeling the potential of the French republic into social reform. Comte first used the term “*solidarité*” in the fifth volume of his *Cours de philosophie positive* to describe the interdependence and social cohesion that bound individuals in society (Comte 1837). Doctrines of social *progress* assume that the passage of time is accompanied by improvement, inter alia in relations among individuals interacting in society, and typify the movement to which Comte gave the name positivism. Saint-Simon and Comte shared a broadly optimistic vision of social development. In *Le système industriel*, Saint-Simon had pleaded for a vision of industrial society whose social harmony is based upon a solidarity founded upon expertise and productivity (Saint-Simon 1821). Auguste Comte presented a vision of transition from theological to metaphysical to positive stages of society intended inter alia as a self-fulfilling prophecy aiming at disempowering metaphysicians following their seizing of social power from the theologians to the benefit of more productive members of society with a technocratic legitimacy. The positivists’ technocratic faith in progress was focused upon material improvements but also sought to account for what was deemed an improvement in the interactions of individuals in society. For this, teachings of the division of labour and the rise of civility from the Scottish Enlightenment were useful. To describe the “wondrous” functioning of society, Comte adopted the term “solidarity”. While adopting this word to describe social interactions in their non-dysfunctionality, Comte did not foreground the motives of the individuals engaged in “society”, which appeared to work as though it had been concerted, even if “society” consisted of the discrete actions of individuals who may

have merely been selfishly pursuing their own aims. While the term "solidarity" expressed an admiration for those patterns that accompanied material betterment – an admiration that could underpin religion – a work of social theory published in Germany in 1887 by Ferdinand Tönnies led to a more discerning analysis of what transpired in the minds of humans in social relationships, inducing Tönnies to critique the purposive rationality increasingly foregrounded in human interactions notably in commerce. While Comte, like Smith or Adam Ferguson (1767) saw civility towering on the foundations of enlightened self-interest in polished society as a sort of marvel, Tönnies' more Rousseauesque vision was more circumspect, and he was convinced that calculation based upon self-interest represented a moral decline compared with the instinctive unity holding together the fabric of earlier communities.

In the context of the 1848 revolution, the term solidarity became a catchword in France to promote mutual responsibility and a stronger role of the State in redistributing social wealth. It was used mainly by thinkers in tension with economic liberalism. Hippolyte Renaud's work *Solidarité*, published in 1851 (Renaud 1851), was influenced by Comte and by Charles Fourier, for whom communities or phalansteries should be set up and based upon the passionate mutual attractions among humans which were foundational for cooperation (Fourier 1808). Fourier's utopia was a plea for mutual support and interdependence among individuals within capitalist and commercial society and a criticism of the individualistic tendencies of liberalism, emphasizing the need for collective responsibility and cooperation. Renaud saw solidarity as an Ought rather than an Is, i.e. a utopian ideal rather than existing reality, and offered a diagnosis foreshadowing Tönnies in the wake of Marx: liberal individualism eroded solidarity. The shared use by Renaud and Comte of terms should not obscure the differences: while Renaud presents solidarity as an unachieved state of affairs, Comte presents a vision of society in which solidarity already exists between individuals in the pursuit of their own interest under the scientific supervision of experts. The word "solidarity" was sometimes used by economic liberals such as Frédéric Bastiat but above all to insist upon the primacy of freedom

from State imposition of solidarity: «La solidarité consiste à aider le voisin dans la mesure où on le peut librement ; elle cesse d'être solidarité dès qu'elle devient contrainte» (Bastiat 1850: 371 ff) For him, the term solidarity can only be legitimately used when referring to voluntary redistribution and not forced distribution by the State (*ibid.*). The word, “solidarity” was used differently by Catholic conservatives, such as Juan Donoso Cortés, who, in his *Ensayo sobre el catolicismo, el liberalismo y el socialismo* of 1851, called solidarity «one of the most beautiful and sublime revelations of Catholic dogma»: man «is subject to a dual responsibility – that which is proper to him alone, and also that which belongs to him in common with the rest of men. This responsibility which man shares with others is what is called solidarity... Through solidarity man rises to a higher dignity and more elevated sphere and becomes something more than an atom in space and a moment in time» (Donoso Cortés 1851: 279). In this apotheosis of “solidarity”, Donoso Cortés was not thinking of individuals striking deals for their own individual betterment, but altruism.

While Comte's initial discussion of solidarity appears utilitarian, modern and functional, it evolves. In *Passé, présent et avenir social* of 1850, Comte gives the term “solidarity” a religious dimension intended to provide humanity with a moral compass based upon affects, or what he describes as our “three altruistic instincts – veneration, attachment and goodness” The “Great Being” (*Grand-Être*) maintains a direct and continuous culture of universal affection countervailing the distractions of “theoretical and practical tendencies”. Comte attributes this to the bond between the sexes:

Apart from the universal influence of every woman over every man to attach him to Humanity, the importance and difficulty of such an office requires that each of us be forever placed under the particular providence of one of these angels who answer to the Great Being. This moral guardian has three natural types – the mother, the spouse and the daughter... who together embrace the three elementary modes of solidarity – obedience, union and protection, just as they embrace the three orders of continuity, linking us to the past, the present and the future. According to my cerebral doctrine, each one specially corre-

sponds to one of our altruistic instincts – veneration, attachment and goodness (Comte 1850: 278).

In fact, Comte offers *two* sources of solidarity: self-interest (in the wake of the Scottish Enlightenment) and instinct, presented as more feminine, which he ties into a new religion he seeks to promote (*ibid.*).

6. *The Tönniessian distinction between community and society as two types of what Durkheim would later call “solidarity”: alternative bases for the social peace.*

In *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* of 1887, Tönnies sought out the basis for social peace, much as Comte had done previously: the underlying basis of social peace, (which approximates both Comte’s and Durkheim’s understanding of the term *solidarité*) can be either *gesellschaftlich*, which Tönnies associates with the calculation which for him is masculine, or *gemeinschaftlich*, the more feminine realm of instinct or motherly love (Tönnies 2019). Tönnies was asking a similar question to Comte and later Durkheim – that of the basis of peaceable co-existence among humans – but he had inherited it from Hobbes’ *Leviathan* rather than from Comte’s *Cours de philosophie positive*. The answer Tönnies derived from Hobbes was the individual pursuit of his own advantage tempered by rationality in society or *Gesellschaft*, and the answer Tönnies derived from the Romantics was the loving harmony of genuine community or *Gemeinschaft*. The use of the term *Solidarität* in German would have been unusual and did not seem pertinent to Tönnies. Durkheim published an insightful review of Tönnies’ work in 1889 (Durkheim 1889) but omitted to draw consequences from Tönnies’ typology in his own works, particularly the distinct bases of orientation that were to flow into Weber’s analysis of “social action”. In Durkheim’s *De la division du travail social* of 1893, Tönnies is not referenced, however we do find what seems to be a hidden polemic against Tönnies’ presentation of the evolution of coexistence from “organic” to “mechanical” aggregates. For Durkheim, society evolved, to the contrary, from “mechanical” to “organic” solidarity. With “*solidarité mécanique*” Durkheim meant mechanical in a homogenous social

unit under a repressive order, and with “*organique*” he meant cooperation among individuals in society pursuing their own interests (Durkheim 1893). When adopting the organic-mechanical dichotomy, Durkheim was responding to Tönnies’ organicist riposte (inspired by Herder) to the Hobbesian idea that man and the institutions which he engendered were machines: in nature, they are not machines but organisms. In either of Durkheim’s hypotheses of mechanical or organic solidarity, there is an element of self-interest: humans interact first to escape the punishment of a heavy-handed repressive order and later to draw the greatest benefits of cooperation within a functionalist mercantile society based upon the division of labour. Durkheim does not present sociability as instinct at any point in his philosophy of history. The founding work of Durkheimian sociology seems indifferent to motives of devotion to other individuals or tradition and habit or social values that transcend self-promotion, foregrounded by Tönnies in his theory of community and Weber in his typology of social action. Durkheim defended this narrowing of the sociological vision by declaring that rationality was characteristic of French society and making it a prism of sociological reflection in France, while German sociology focused on critiques of purposive rationality and ensuing exploitation, pointing to alternative bases of social adhesion such as affects and shared values.

Tönnies drew from Hobbes, Schopenhauer and the Romantics, but also from Comte, notably when he declared his work to be *inter alia* sociological; his sociological distinction between community and society reposed upon what he referred to as types of will – essential will, rooted in emotion, which founded community, and arbitrary will, the will of free choice, based upon calculation and deliberation – the will of self-interest and the calculation of profit. These two forms of volition underlie moral orders of sharing or giving and moral orders of taking and giving as little as possible in return. They were respectively prefigured in moral thought by Kant’s principle of humanity, the injunction never to consider others only as means to an end, but always as an end in themselves, and in economic thought by Adam Smith’s injunction never to appeal to the humanity of others, but always to their own self-interest. Hobbes had fa-

mously formulated the question as to the basis of peace in any given society and had concluded that it was fear of the Leviathan or God on earth or a punishing, repressive society which left individuals the freedom to pursue activities that were not harmful and punishable (Hobbes 1651). From this assumption, which prefigured classical economic thought but also utilitarian philosophy, classical economics, and the Durkheimian philosophy of history were derived (Bond 2025). This strict rationalism ignored other bases for social peace, such as simple habit, a readiness to comply with tradition or traditional authorities, or devotion to a charismatic ruler (Weber 1913). Tönnies and later Weber with his vast erudition presented a more comprehensive understanding of the basis of the social peace than Durkheim, leaving a lasting mutual incomprehension between French- and German-language social theorists in their wake.

*7. Tönnies' philosophy of history in *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* of 1887*

Tönnies posited a unilinear rise in rationalism and the reciprocal using by humans of one another, an inexorable supplanting of *Gemeinschaft* (community) by *Gesellschaft* (society). Although he had read Comte, he made no use of the word "solidarity". His concepts were inscribed in the tradition of natural law as developed in the wake of Thomas Hobbes, and he pleaded for a natural law that would take account of the love in which the most essential human relations and the politics of the past were deemed to have been founded: those of community. When Durkheim reviewed Tönnies' work, he had no problem with Tönnies' depiction of community as based upon homogeneity; however, he declared Tönnies' presentation of society, influenced by Marx, to be «ideological» (Durkheim 1889: 420). In the same vein, Weber could not have subscribed to Durkheim's philosophy of history because of his neo-Kantian rejection of speculative readings of the sense of history, but founded upon a different ideology from Tönnies'. But what are the underlying differences between Tönnies' critique of rationality and Durkheim's celebration of it? In Tönnies' intellectual universe, there is a mutual affirmation among humans that springs instinctive-

ly from the breast, engendering self-sacrifice or *caritas* or risk-taking for others which are not dependent on calculations of pain or gain. Durkheim's generalization of purposive rationalism in organic solidarity leaves no room for sacrifice *per se*. Tönnies presents the transformation of relationships of sacrifice to others or altruism into relationships in which individuals pursue their own interest as ubiquitous in the development not just of societies following on the heels of communities but also within individual relationships, subject to processes of "cooling off". This is an aspect of Tönnies' thought which I would suggest revising.

8. *Durkheim's Division of Social Labour as a response to Tönnies following his review in 1889*

Durkheim responds to the challenge Tönnies presents with his community-society dichotomy in a review Durkheim published in 1889 (Durkheim 1889). While Durkheim accepts the "general outline of the analysis and description of *Gemeinschaft*", he differs on the theory of *Gesellschaft*, offering a far more conciliatory understanding of the capitalist order (ivi: 416). While Durkheim understands Tönnies as suggesting that the characteristic of *Gesellschaft* is the progressive development of individualism, which can only be checked by the State temporarily and artificially, leading to a mechanical aggregate of which the collective element is not the result of internal spontaneity but the external drive of the State – the society as imagined by Bentham, Durkheim asserts that he believes that:

the life of major social agglomerations is as natural as that of small aggregates. It is no less organic, nor less internal. Apart from purely individual movements, there is a properly collective activity in our contemporary societies which is as natural as that of less extensive societies of the past. It is provided for differently; it constitutes a different type; however, between the two species of the same genus, as diverse as they are, there is no difference in nature. To prove it, it would take a book; I can only formulate the proposition. Moreover, is it probable that the evolution of the same being, society, could start as something organic and end up as a pure mechanism? There is such a solution of continuity between these two modes of being that one cannot conceive of how they might be part of the same development. This way of recon-

ciling the theory of Aristotle with that of Bentham is simply a juxtaposition of opposites. One has to choose: if society is a natural phenomenon at its origins, it will remain such until the end of its career (Durkheim 1889: 421f.).

In Tönnies' review of *De la division du travail social*, he responded to Durkheim's reproach that Tönnies had placed organic and mechanical social life in an illogical order.

I understand both forms of structures in altogether different ways from Dürkheim, Barth and all other sociologists of my acquaintance: I understand them first as an *esse objectivum* ... and trace the ensuing progressive rationalization and alienation of these relationships which peaked in the conceptions of the universal society and universal State. My doctrine is by essence indifferent to the theory that the *esse formale* of social life or 'society' is 'organic'. I have never questioned that reciprocal effects in a developed national economy can be compared to organic reciprocal effects; the idea that governing and other corporations or individuals both in a great nation and in a village or municipal community relate to the whole as do organs to an organism is not ruled out by my concepts. However, I find Mr. Durkheim's presentation of the social types and their relationships to one another hardly instructive. His writings on the division of labour are scholastic and bereft of any of the critical analysis so remarkable in Bücher (Tönnies 1929: 216).

Tönnies concludes his review of *De la division du travail social* with the observation that «Durkheim's entire sociology is a modification of Spencer's» (ivi: 216f.). Tönnies is not impressed by the originality or relevance of Durkheim's contribution to the discipline of sociology and as though through a Freudian slip repeatedly misspells Durkheim's name. Durkheim showed no understanding of the point behind the analogy or metaphor of the organic-mechanical dichotomy, which Herder had promoted to prominence among Germany intellectuals. While Durkheim argues that it is logical that the mechanical lead to the organic, an organic relationship can yield to a mechanical relationship when an adolescent comes to regard their mother as an automated teller machine: the mother-child relationship is initially purely organic, one of unquestioning mutual affirmation, while later, when applying purposive rationality, the mother or child

can regard the other “mechanically” as a means to an end. This is in Tönnies’ world set the point of no return for the transition from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*, although I disagree with Tönnies that such transitions are necessarily unilinear: anyone who enters a bakery to buy a loaf of bread and falls in love with the vendor and successfully woos them can show that a relationship of self-interest can be transformed into communion.

9. Durkheim’s less pessimistic vision of modernity

Conflicts and disorder characterize modern life, absorbed by economic considerations, while societies disintegrate against the background of the disappearance of former principles of structure and order. So Durkheim advocates social reintegration. “It is impossible for people to live with others without developing a feeling for the whole that they form with their association, without binding themselves to it, taking care of their interests and integrating it in their behaviour. And yet this binding to something that goes beyond the individual and the subordination of individual interests to the overall interest is the actual source of moral activity”. Solidarity is the source of this bond. Mechanical solidarity, based predominantly upon homogeneity and fear of repression, is transfigured into organic solidarity through differentiation and increasingly complex interactions between human subjects. Without specifying what transforms purposive rational self-interest into the realization of “overall interest”, Durkheim declares such transformation to be the «actual source of moral activity» (Durkheim 1893: v-vii). Without mentioning Tönnies in *The Division of Social Labour*, Durkheim incorporates Tönnies’ understanding of community, the subordination of individual interests to those of the whole, Kant’s understanding of the principle of humanity and Rousseau’s idea of the general will into a moral doctrine, declaring that the source of these bonds was *solidarity*.

Durkheim understood Tönnies, but chose to base his own functionalist theory of progressively differentiated societies more on Herbert Spencer – moving from the simple and homogeneous to the complex and heterogeneous: initially based upon homogeneity, a mechanical solidarity of interlocking images of a

common model ("a replica of the collective type") expressed in the constraints that guaranteed the unity that Spencer saw as characterizing "militant societies", solidarity was increasingly based upon the functional interdependence of heterogeneous elements. Thus, while Tönnies saw the history of human living together as progressing from the organic to the mechanical, Durkheim described a movement from mechanical to organic solidarity. In contrast to Spencer, Durkheim sees constraint or repressive force not so much as the basis of solidarity, than as an external manifestation of mechanical solidarity. Progress towards organic solidarity is marked by the decline of constraint and parallel ascension of interdependence. While Tönnies' moral imperative is not to regard other human beings as mere means to an end in community, (which is what humans become for one another in society), Durkheim's moral explicitly categorical imperative is for each individual bound to one another in organic solidarity to adopt a useful function (which will allow them to become means to others' ends). While for Tönnies, the term "organic" evokes an inclination rootedness in nature determined by the passage of time, and "mechanical" implied a machine invented by upon human calculation, Durkheim defined mechanical solidarity as based upon homogeneity and repression (as in Spencer's "militant society") and organic solidarity as being based upon the more complex law of cooperation among differentiated individuals with complementary functions (as in Spencer's "industrial society"). While Tönnies opposed sociability based on love and coexistence based on instrumentalization, the Durkheimian distinction between mechanical and organic solidarity is based upon homogeneity in a repressive order and complementary/heterogeneity. Durkheim's distinction was intended to be a descriptive analysis of how human sociability had developed from the beginning of time.

10. The return from the Is to the Ought in French social theory

Durkheim's reflections on solidarity were furthered by two of his followers, Marcel Mauss, who was Durkheim's sister's son, and Célestin Bouglé. Yet they both resituated the term "solidarity" in the term's trajectory that meandered between social the-

ory, moralism and religion. My hunch is that they were both nonplussed by the purposive rational implications of Durkheim's functionalism and wanted to create a form of "solidarity" with a human face – Mauss through the notion of reciprocity (and gift-giving?) and Bouglé through the notion of equality. They both sought to bring back the notion of solidarity as a descriptor of an objective condition of social cohesion to anchor it in a more explicitly normative philosophy. In his *Essai sur le don* of 1925, Marcel Mauss insisted upon the aspect of reciprocity: «the gift must be given, received and reciprocated» (Mauss 1925: 88f.). While gifts are not enforced through legal constraint, they do not depend altogether upon individuals' freedom inasmuch as they entail moral obligations of mutual recognition and gratitude: solidarity shifts from interdependence to moral reciprocity. Bouglé, on the other hand, agreed that solidarity is based upon interdependence, but finding Durkheim's theory too descriptive, instead proposed an explicitly ethical principle to moralize interdependence. In the course of writing four works between 1899 and 1912, Bouglé shifted solidarity from its Durkheimian roots in functional cooperation to ethical reciprocity among the equal. In his *Les idées égalitaires: étude sociologique* (1899) he writes that solidarity ceases to be a physical necessity when it becomes a moral law based upon awareness of mutual dependence ("*conscience de l'interdépendance*") and capacity and willingness to reciprocate (ivi: 79). Moral solidarity is based upon the reciprocal recognition of worth and mutual respect among differentiated individuals who regard others' differences as useful and legitimate. At a time at which German social theory is debating the importance of value neutrality, Bouglé transforms French sociology into a moral doctrine on values in his *Leçons de sociologie sur l'évolution des valeurs* (1908) and *Qu'est-ce que la sociologie ?* (1909). Equality is a key point: in his *Essais sur le régime des castes* (1908), Bouglé argues that hierarchical societies lack moral reciprocity. But while seeking to remedy the universalizing of purposive rationalism in Durkheim's functionalism, he succumbs to it, arguing that reciprocity in the recognition of value (rather than e.g. uncalculating devotion to others) should be the basis for human moral solidarity, steering science from

the Is to the Ought, but remaining anchored in self-serving rationality.

When we retrace the concept of solidarity in French sociology and compare it with German social theory, one may be struck not just by the absence of common language references, but the growing gulf between understandings of science per se. A trend in French theory to use the concept of solidarity as an ought linked to emotion and generosity (Mauss) or (debatable) equality (Bouglé) in a society fraught by inequalities generated a corpus of moral teachings in which the phenomena of domination that had been described with such insight by Marx in his economic analysis and such penetration by Nietzsche in his psychosocial analysis remain beyond the grasp of the reader, and which ignores the distinction between love and the pursuit of ulterior motives. French social theory ignored the discussion of value neutrality that marked contemporary German sociology. Max Weber was the most powerful driving force for adopting a position of value neutrality in developing an apparatus of concepts that would eschew both philosophies of history and moral agendas in describing social action (as meaningful action oriented around other humans) as it really played out. This is evident in Weber's discussion of the concept of "solidarity" in his opus magnus, *Economy and Society*.

11. *Max Weber's lexical tidying up*

Max Weber's general habit in using the concepts of social discourse of his day was to do did some semantic tidying up with his characteristic "pedantry", (as he himself referred to it with a hint of self-irony), and the rigor and common sense he applied in defining terms for expedient use. In introducing his categories, he writes

The method of this introductory definition of terms, which is indispensable but inevitably abstract and unrealistic, does not claim to be new in any way. On the contrary, it merely seeks to formulate in a more appropriate and somewhat more correct (and therefore perhaps

pedantic) manner what empirical sociology actually means when it speaks of the same things.³

Weber shows that solidarity need not exist where people peaceably coexist, going on to argue that solidarity, or the readiness to act in the interests of others, can be based upon affects and self-interest and presenting a typology of various instances in which people act out of solidarity (although potentially for very different reasons in actions that appear to be actions of solidarity). Max Weber rarely referenced French social theory, not because of his nationalism, but because he assumed that his readers would understand his allusions. In Weber's methodological essays, he wrote that «Comte's positivism was an attempt to create a comprehensive law of history, but it remained an ideological construction lacking empirical foundation» (Weber 1988: 57). Weber, whose methodological individualism cannot be clarified in this space, would have rejected the holism of Durkheim's approach. Weber's major contribution to social theory is summed up in the posthumous work *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft, Economy and Society* (Weber 1980), the culmination of his thought as a "Sozialökonom" – a social economist, a term that reconciled his position as professor of economics in the Historical School's tradition and his vocation as a sociologist, an observer of regularities in the meaningful actions of individuals oriented around others. His devotion to guaranteeing himself and others the freedom to evaluate led him more than others to draw radical Nietzschean consequences from epistemological issues that came to a head in the debate over value judgments. His passion for disentangling strains of arguments that imposed values as facts makes his discussion of "solidarity" all the more pertinent. Weber appears to me to be

³ «Die Methode dieser einleitenden, nicht gut zu entbehrenden, aber unvermeidlich abstrakt und wirklichkeitsfremd wirkenden Begriffsdefinition beansprucht in keiner Art: neu zu sein. Im Gegenteil wünscht sie nur in – wie gehofft wird – zweckmäßigerer und etwas korrekterer (eben deshalb freilich vielleicht pedantisch wirkender) Ausdrucksweise zu formulieren, was jede empirische Soziologie tatsächlich meint, wenn sie von den gleichen Dingen spricht» (Weber 1980: 2).

the most lucid analyst of social action, which is why I read his discussion of the concept of solidarity with particular interest.

Weber was less involved than Tönnies in the French-German exchanges over establishing sociology as a discipline, and in Weber's *Economy and Society*, while referring to the substantive value of Tönnies' «lastingly significant beautiful work *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*» (Weber 1980: 5), there is no reference to Durkheim, whose absorption with "social facts" were not conducive to the perception that social interactions are based upon the subjective meaning of social actors. Yet unlike Tönnies, Weber refers to the term "solidarity". In Weber's writings, all of Comte's and Durkheim's weaknesses are laid bare. Max Weber makes a point of stressing that solidarity is neither a necessary or a probable consequence of human coexistence and cannot be concluded from the mere existence of a social relationship. For a social relationship can afford participants the satisfaction of internal or external interests, either in purpose or according to the result "either through an action of solidarity or through the settlement of interests". Solidarity can be regarded as a means to pursuing interests and instrumentalized. It can be extended for a variety of motives and the motives need not be clear to all participants interacting. Above all, "solidarity" is not a perpetual characteristic of relationships: the meaning of a social relationship may shift, transforming a political relationship of solidarity into a collision of interest.

It is only a question of terminological expedience and the measure of continuity in transformation whether in such a case one says that "a new" relationship has been formed or that the continuing old relationship has been given a new meaning. The meaning can continue to persist, while at the same time remaining open to transformation (Weber 1980: 11).

Depending on the extent to which a social relationship is open or closed, Weber distinguishes it as being relationships of representation and relationships of "solidarity". In the former, the actions of participants or "representatives" are attributed to the other participants (the "represented"); in relationships of solidarity, on the other hand, everyone in the relationship (referred to by Weber as "*Solidaritätsgenosse*") is deemed to act,

whether actively or passively, within the meaning of solidarity. «For the action of the participants, everyone is deemed to be as responsible as oneself, and through their action all participants can make use of the chances secured through the action» (Weber 1980: 25, 23). Weber revitalizes Tönnies' distinction of relationships based upon affect or self-interest by positing two distinct types of solidarity. Depending upon the degree to which the relationship is "closed", and consequently the level of legitimacy and liability, the phenomenon of solidarity can be both the product and the producer of social action that produces or is produced by community-like or society-like relationships, i.e. relationships or social structures based alternatively upon affects, i.e. a feeling of belonging, or the individual perception of self-interest. "Solidarity", in *Economy and Society*, is on the one hand the basis of a community – the domestic communism of the family, comradeship in the army, and the *Liebeskommunismus* of religious communities (ivi: 88). At the same time, a solidarity of interest ("*Interessensolidarität*") (ivi:154) may be based upon the material or ideal interests of a group of people such as an administrative staff whose compliance and role in maintaining an existing order is ensured through material remuneration and social honour (ivi: 823); such a basis for ensuring the loyalty of participants in the social relationship strengthens the ruler with regard to the members as individuals, but weakens the ruler with regard to the participants as a whole (*ibid.*). A solidarity of interest thus stabilizes organisations, systems and structures because it contributes to docility and discipline, but it is the test of a ruler to correctly assess the interests of his or her enablers. Weber's comments on "solidarity" in *Economy and Society* make it clear that Weber was prepared to accept that the term "solidarity" could be useful, but only in such relationships and collectivities in which it found expression in action or words. He found the concept of genuine interest, but we can see that while Durkheim assumes solidarity to be so universal as to render the term meaningless, Weber gives the term a meaning to grasp the attitudes and predict the actions of individuals in their configurations.

12. Implications for democracy

I can only briefly touch upon the implication of the term "solidarity" for conceptions of democracy thematized in this special issue. It would be futile to attempt an overview of the axiological operator democracy so comprehensively and beautifully presented by Pierre Rosanvallon (see Rosanvallon 1985). One model of democracy that is perhaps most explicitly indifferent to solidarity is the "competitive elitist" model that presents voters as self-interested consumers, laid out in Joseph Schumpeter's *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (1942). Here, democracy is conflated with the market in which each actor is out after his own interest. The "*républicain*" model of democracy rooted in France's political tradition, to which Durkheim as a Dreyfusard was incidentally attached, emphasized the rights and duties of citizenship and civic virtue, solidarity and shared republican values rather than consumer choice. This is the model that Bouglé sought to promote. Its legitimacy is derived from universal participation and the common good rather than enlightened hedonism. Deliberation is collective among equals and promotes a sense of belonging typical of a community rather than the self-seeking attitude of agents in the marketplace. While solidarity, as Weber has shown, can be based upon self-interest, an emotional fusion of collective belonging resumed in Tönnies' word *Gemeinschaft* and Weber's derivative *Vergemeinschaftung*, or simple subscription to the values of a Republic, democracy in the Schumpeter understanding is at its purist when people look out strictly for themselves and are indifferent to "solidarity" in any meaning and for any reason. Yet the human condition is one of interdependence in which compassion resurges. This compassion, the awareness that we are all sentient creatures with a potential for grasping the notion of duty to other sentient creatures, is one of the sources of solidarity in inclusive democracies. Our understanding of democracy has been deepened by our grasping that the suffix "*cracy*" lies in a sovereignty over the selves of individuals that is afforded not just by formal rights and duties, but also by

the realization of material conditions that are not alienating through vast disparities of wealth and hence power, while “demo” involves the consideration of all individuals constitutive of humanity, including those who had been previously marginalized and erased. It is with a view to the realization of such a democracy that solidarity is relevant and necessary.

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Abstract

EXPRESSIONS OF “SOLIDARITY” IN FRENCH AND GERMAN SOCIAL THEORY

Keywords: solidarity, mechanical, organic, normative, descriptive

The present article offers a survey of the history of the term “solidarity” from its origins in law. The word is applied normatively to evoke a utopian desideratum or descriptively to designate the mere absence of strife in classical French sociology. Evocations of solidarity are founded upon self-interest in modern “society” or an instinctive sense of common belonging in “community”. While social theorists in the wake of Durkheim attempted to lead social theory towards normative philosophy and speculation on what “solidarity” *should be*, taking an empirical approach, Max Weber pragmatically asks what leads people to behave as though united, uncovering a range of motivations.

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