

# A 'RADICAL HUMANIST' APPROACH TO THE CONCEPT OF SOLIDARITY

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## **ABSTRACT**

'Solidarity' conjures up positive images of the strength of togetherness and community, but in practice it is experienced by groups when confronted by real or perceived threat from other groups. The ideal of a universal human solidarity appears tenuous and flimsy. However, Richard Rorty and Axel Honneth have, in different ways, attempted to bring this ideal under philosophical consideration. This paper argues that their treatment of human solidarity is flawed by their *a priori* rejection of the normative idea of a common human nature. Such an idea, which I term 'radical humanism', is reconstructed from the work Erich Fromm, and one of its chief implications, the rejection of liberal nationalism, is proposed as part of a radical challenge to contemporary social and political theory.

The word 'solidarity' carries positive connotations of sympathy, cooperation and altruism, yet it is most frequently invoked and experienced in situations of bitter conflict. In protracted strikes or wars we witness heroic acts of sacrifice and commitment to the common cause, but the antagonistic framework in which actually existing solidarity operates seems only to remind us how far we are from making a reality of the ancient dream of *human solidarity*, a condition of universal respect for humans *qua* humans, irrespective of our differences. However, there have been attempts to rescue the broader ideal of human solidarity from neglect, and two important contributions will be considered here; Richard Rorty's liberal pragmatist argument in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, originally published in 1989, and Axel Honneth's inter-subjectivist account in *The Struggle for Recognition*, which first appeared in German in 1992. Both conceptions share an opposition to essentialism, that is to say they reject the idea that there is a common human essence which could serve as an ethical foundation for solidarity. In general such an ideal is treated with deep scepticism in modern social science, and this is reflected in Margaret Canovan's recent dismissal of the invocation of common humanity as the 'grandest but flimsiest of contemporary imagined communities' (Canovan, 2001, p. 212). Nevertheless, I will argue that both anti-foundationalist and inter-subjectivist conceptions of solidarity are flawed and that the concept of human solidarity becomes more robust when grounded in a normative conception of human nature which I will term 'radical humanism'. The term is borrowed from Erich Fromm, who uses it to denote the body of thought which developed as a protest against the dehumanising tendencies of capitalist society and which held out the promise of a new form of cooperative, international emancipation (Fromm, 2002, pp. 154- 167).

I will deal first with the attempts of Rorty and Honneth to theorise human solidarity without having recourse to a philosophical conception of human essence. In Rorty's case, I will argue, his appeal for solidarity implicitly relies on a suppressed essentialism, but his anti-foundationalist convictions

prevent him from giving proper consideration to the idea of human essence. In Honneth's case, the rejection of a normative view of what it is to be human leaves him without the means to evaluate which claims for recognition might move us closer to the overall goal of societal solidarity. The second section outlines the main features of radical humanism, drawing largely on Fromm's work, and argues that it provides a sound ethical basis for criticising existing social relations and for making positive appeals for solidarity on a global basis. It could also form a basis for the theoretical formulation of evaluative criteria with which to identify the ideas, practices and movements which carry the goal forward politically. The third section returns to the problem of the tension between the normative goal of human solidarity and particular expressions of solidarity at group or national level. The radical humanist perspective requires the strongest possible rejection of liberal nationalist claims that the nation or nation-state is the proper locus of political community. Finally I suggest that radical humanism offers a sound philosophical grounding for appeals to human solidarity without imposing an over-stipulative vision which might be insensitive to cultural diversity.

## **Rorty and Honneth**

Richard Rorty's commitment to human solidarity, allied to a traditional liberal attachment to tolerance and individual liberty, has exerted a strong attraction for those who share his scepticism towards the professed certainties of traditional metaphysics and epistemology. Not only is he openly in favour of progressing towards greater solidarity among the peoples of the world, but he argues that there is such a thing as moral progress and that it is 'in the direction of greater human solidarity' (Rorty, 1996, p. 192). However, he is at pains to point out that his conception does not involve an acceptance of some recognition of a core self, the human essence, in all human beings. Rather it is based on the development of an awareness that traditional differences between people are unimportant 'when concerned with similarities with

respect to pain and humiliation' (Rorty, 1996, p. 192). For Rorty, moral obligation to one's fellow human beings derives from the fact that they are considered to be 'one of us', the 'us' referring always to membership of a specific group. An appeal to 'one of us human beings' will never possess the same force as an appeal to the 'us' which refers to a smaller and more local group. As an example he selects the plight of young urban black men in the United States, stating that an appeal to help them will be both morally and politically more persuasive if they are described as fellow Americans rather than as fellow human-beings (Rorty, 1996, pp. 190 – 91). According to Rorty it is an illusion to conceive of solidarity as something pre-existing which can be realised once we shed our prejudices, but rather it is something that has to be created by imagination, the 'imaginative ability to see strange people as fellow sufferers' (Rorty, 1996, p. xvi). This can be achieved in democratic societies by learning more about others (description), through which we become more sensitive to the pain suffered by unfamiliar people, and by learning more about ourselves (redescription), through which we are obliged to reinvestigate ourselves. Although this can be accomplished through a variety of media, the novel is accorded particular significance (Rorty, 1996, p. xvi). So, through this combination of Nietzsche's rejection of all philosophical certainties and Dewey's commitment to democracy and self-improvement, Rorty advocates the realisation of a utopia such as human solidarity as an 'endless, proliferating realisation of Freedom, rather than a convergence towards an already existing truth' (Rorty, 1996, p. xvi).

Rorty sees the idea of an intrinsic nature as a remnant of the idea that the world is a divine creation, and he commends instead an attitude whereby nothing is worshipped or treated as a quasi-divinity, and everything is seen to be a product of time and chance (Rorty, 1996, pp. 21-2). This rejection of philosophical humanism, however, raises the question of whether there can be *any* reasons why individuals should regard greater human solidarity as a desirable goal. Rather than providing a reason, Rorty offers a 'feeling' common to us all, the fear of humiliation; recognition of our common susceptibility to humiliation is the only social bond that is needed to widen

human solidarity. He contrasts this favourably with the 'metaphysician's' reliance on a 'larger shared power' such as God, truth or rationality which has to be invoked in order to demonstrate that we all share something in common (Rorty, 1996, p. 91). For an avowed anti-foundationalist it is odd that Rorty concedes the need to invoke a common feeling to ground his commitment to solidarity. As Diane Rothleder points out, it is theoretically necessary in Rorty's account for the appeal to solidarity to be couched in negative terms in order to avoid the notion of a 'positive shared project' (Rothleder, 1999, p. 45). He avoids the risk of providing something that might inspire a quasi-religious sense of devotion, but we are obliged to question his selection of the susceptibility to humiliation as the crucial aspect of our humanity and to query why this doesn't amount to simply another form of essentialism. The choice of humiliation seems quite arbitrary. It is not even clear that the capacity to suffer humiliation is species-specific – anyone who has witnessed gorillas in a zoo being taunted by unthinking children will immediately recognise their response as one of indignation. However, setting aside the questionable choice of 'humiliation' as the central experience, it is surely the case that Rorty *is* offering an alternative essentialism. This has been convincingly argued by Norman Geras, who points out that Rorty is ultimately falling back on the fact that human beings have a nature, one which may be repressed or violated (Geras, 1995, pp. 89-90). He suggests that it is implausible to insist on the communal sources of strong solidarity, and at the same time insist on the irrelevance of the idea of a common humanity 'to the goal of more expansive solidaristic relations' (Geras, 1995, p. 90). Geras points out that in Rorty's Amnesty International lecture he supplies a number of examples of atrocities being justified by the perpetrators on the grounds that their victims were not properly human, and Rorty's acknowledgement of this need to de-humanise the victim undermines his claim that the appeal to common humanity is weak and unconvincing (Geras, 1995, p. 97). Rorty fails to see that his own position relies on what we share in common as human beings, and he fails to consider what an openly essentialist argument for solidarity might look like.

Honneth offers a more sophisticated attempt to elucidate the theoretical preconditions for the achievement of human solidarity in *The Struggle for Recognition*. Honneth sets out to meet a challenge posed by the young Hegel, to present a philosophical reconstruction of an ethical community as the culmination of a sequence of stages involving the struggle for recognition of various groups (Honneth, 1996, p. 67). He argues that Hegel abandoned this project sometime after writing *The System of Ethical Life* in 1802, moving on to a philosophy of self-consciousness. Honneth notes that the early work operates within an Aristotelian frame of reference (Honneth, 1996, p. 25), but instead of Aristotle's reliance on the nature of humanity as the foundation for the good life, Hegel looks to ground his ethical community in the real relationships between individuals and groups (Honneth, 1996, p. 17). Honneth deploys the work of the social psychologist George Herbert Mead to provide a materialistic and naturalistic demonstration of the crucial role of inter-subjective recognition in the formation of identity (Honneth, 1996, chapter 4). Honneth argues that for both Mead and the early Hegel the reproduction of social life is governed by the imperative of mutual recognition, because 'one can develop a practical relation-to-self only when one has learned to view oneself from the normative perspective of one's partners in interaction' (Honneth, 1996, pp. 92-3). This imperative produces the normative pressure to remove constraints on the meaning of mutual recognition, so that, as individualisation develops historically, so too should the relations of mutual recognition. Honneth considers that what is lacking in Hegel and Mead is an explanation of the social experiences that would generate the pressure through which the demands for recognition are transformed into social movements, and to do this he suggests that we need to study the specific forms of disrespect through which actors realise their oppression (Honneth, 1996, p. 93).

Honneth identifies three levels or patterns of recognition. First there is the love and friendship developed in intimate relations, which gives us self-confidence. Then there is the recognition which we achieve through the acquisition of rights, a form of recognition which, he contends, produces self-

respect. In respect of the development of rights-claims he endorses T. H. Marshall's broad description of the widening of civil rights as belonging to the eighteenth century, political rights in the nineteenth, and social rights in the twentieth century (Honneth, 1996, p. 116). Finally, solidarity occurs in groups when each individual understands that she or he is 'esteemed' by all citizens to the same degree. Solidarity is understood as 'an interactive relationship in which subjects mutually sympathise with their various different ways of life because, among themselves, they esteem each other symmetrically,' while societal solidarity is achieved when 'every member of a society is in a position to esteem himself or herself' (Honneth, 1996, pp. 128-9). He thus describes a trajectory in which self-confidence flows from love, self-respect from the acquisition of rights, and self-esteem from the development of solidarity. When speaking of people esteeming each other 'symmetrically' Honneth refers to a situation in which we view each other in the light of values that allow the abilities and traits of the other to appear significant for shared practice, thereby inspiring a genuine concern for the other person rather than simply exercising a passive tolerance. The essential point here is every subject is free from being collectively denigrated, and competition for social esteem acquires a form free from pain, or 'not marred by experiences of disrespect' (Honneth, 1996, p. 130). The significance of this is that unlike some messianic or utopian constructions of human solidarity there are still significant differences between people, as well as competing claims.

Perhaps the most significant aspects of Honneth's account is his stress on the moral force inherent in the expectation of recognition, at least in relation to the struggle for recognition on the levels of rights and societal solidarity. For here it is moral feelings of indignation against various forms of disrespect that acts as an important motive force for members of movements in struggle. Honneth rightly complains that social science has tended to reduce motives for rebellion, protest and resistance to categories of 'interest', with the interests emerging out of objective inequalities in the distribution of opportunities (Honneth, 1996, p. 161). He is not suggesting that this basically utilitarian model is wrong, but that the 'fixation on the dimension of interests'

has obscured the significance of moral feelings (Honneth, 1996, p. 166). This raises the key question of what sort of moral claims may be justified. Honneth accepts that the significance of particular struggles has to be measured in terms of the positive or negative contribution that each makes to the realisation of 'undistorted forms of recognition' (Honneth, 1996, p. 170), which points to a strong link with Habermas's discourse ethics. In a short final chapter Honneth takes some tentative steps towards fleshing out the goal of a solidaristic society, while taking care to avoid a particular vision of the good life. The chapter opens by accepting that if the struggle for recognition is to be viewed as a critical framework for interpreting the processes by which societies develop, in order to complete the model there needs to be a 'theoretical justification for the normative point of view from which these processes can be guided' (Honneth, 1996, p. 171). However, what follows does not meet this promise.

He reiterates the point that unless one presupposes a certain degree of self-confidence and legally guaranteed autonomy, it is impossible to imagine successful self-realisation, and the freedom to acquire this self-realisation can be acquired only in interaction with others (Honneth, 1996, p. 174). However, despite the emphasis on inter-subjectivity, the conditions for recognition outlined here clearly give priority to the individual over the community, as Andreas Kalyvas has pointed out (Kalyvas, 1999, p. 104). Indeed, there is remarkably little said about the social end-state, and the analysis remains abstract and formal. On the one hand this abstract and formal nature of the patterns of recognition is justified precisely because it avoids falling into the utopian trap of specifying particular forms. On the other it is claimed that the explication of the conditions for recognition offers more detail about the structures of a successful life than a more general appeal to individual self-determination (Honneth, 1996, p. 174). Honneth comments that Hegel and Mead had failed to achieve their goal of defining a horizon of ethical values that would admit to a plurality of life-goals without losing the collective identity through which solidarity is generated (Honneth, 1996, p. 179). This is true, but does the recognition of moral claims inherent in some (unspecified)



struggles bring us any closer to resolving that problem? Honneth claims that only a transformation of culture can meet those demands in expanded relations of solidarity, but he is reluctant to specify what forms this might take. As possible candidates he mentions political republicanism, ecologically-based asceticism, and collective existentialism, but he is unwilling to say whether human solidarity is compatible with capitalism, for questions of that sort are 'no longer a matter for theory but rather for the future of social struggles' (Honneth, 1996, p. 176). This strict separation of theory from practice evades the tricky question of the extent to which the demands of certain social movements are consonant with the broader goal of human solidarity. As Kalyvas has argued, Honneth's concept of recognition does not provide the means to distinguish between progressive and reactionary movements or identities (Kalyvas, 1999, p. 103). In response Honneth denies that he had intended to provide such an evaluative criteria for the judgement of recognition demands, and also denies trying to provide a 'social-theoretical sketch which is able to grasp the social reality of recognition relations'. What Honneth claims the book is really about is no more and no less than highlighting 'the type of morality which in the social lifeworld already operates in the form of expectations of recognition' (Honneth, 1999, p. 252). The severe limitations of the inter-subjective approach here become apparent, for despite the fact that Honneth acknowledges the need to appeal hypothetically to a provisional end-state and agrees that social solidarity can grow only out of collectively shared goals (Honneth, 1996, p. 171 and p. 178), he is unable to say anything about these substantive issues.

## **Radical Humanism**

Both Rorty and Honneth reject out of hand, and without much discussion, the option of adopting a normative view of what is to be human which could serve as the basis for an appeal for human solidarity and a guide to the practices and rhetoric which might promote its development. They are, of

course, not alone in recoiling from conceptions of the human essence and its telos which largely went out of fashion with the advent of the Enlightenment. Nevertheless, since the publication of Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* in 1981 there has been a renewed interest in the validity of Aristotelian approaches to human essence and human *telos* within philosophy, if not within political philosophy. MacIntyre argued that the Enlightenment attempt to justify morality was bound to fail because it had jettisoned the central element on which all moral thought up to that time had been based, namely, the idea of an essential human nature and a human *telos* (MacIntyre, 1995, pp. 54-5). The abandonment of this idea leaves conventional moral philosophy the impossible task of deriving moral precepts from a view of 'untutored' human nature. Of course there are obvious dangers in operating from a conception of human nature which is both descriptive and normative.<sup>1</sup> Rosalind Hursthouse, a recent exponent of a naturalistic virtue ethics, concedes that there is a worry that naturalism of this sort will produce exclusive and excluding prescriptions because it 'will yield far too determinate a specification of what it is to be a good human being' (Hursthouse, 1999, p. 211).<sup>2</sup> Indeed there appears to be a consensus on this point among modern emancipatory theorists, for whom the idea of adopting a 'thick' conception of human nature is fraught with totalitarian dangers (e.g., Young, 1990, p. 36; Benhabib, 1986, pp. 32-3; Laclau, 1996, pp. 10-13). However, this shibboleth needs to be challenged.

The 'radical humanist' approach which I propose draws primarily on the work of the social psychologist Erich Fromm, who is, as Raymond Plant has pointed out, one of the few communitarian theorists to employ a philosophical anthropology in order to 'objectively' ground a conception of human solidarity (Plant, 2001, p. 294). His theory is humanist in the sense that it operates from an explicitly humanistic ethic, and radical in the sense that it requires a wholesale transformation in social relations. Strongly influenced by Marx's work on human essence and its alienation, he considers that Marx had provided the most significant definition of the species characteristic of 'man' (Fromm, 1968, p. 58; Fromm, 1992, chapter 4). In *The*

*Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* Marx, operating from an Aristotelian philosophical framework, contrasts the grim reality of the workers' existence with the rich promise of their potential as human beings. The worker is de-humanised, largely reduced to feeling freely active only in his animal functions such as eating, drinking and procreating. Marx considers the difference between humans and animals and fixes on 'conscious life activity' as the essentially human capability. Whereas animals are 'one' with their life activity, humans make their life activity the object of their will and consciousness. This emphasis on 'activity' is followed by a sharper focus on production, the ability which people have to create products for each other in a consciously planned way (Marx, 1975: 276). Truly human production, then, transcends the instinctive response to immediate physical needs, and we are able to create things in accordance with the standards of other species and imbue our products with aesthetic qualities. Marx's insistence that we are essentially social beings (Marx, 1986, pp. 17-18), combined with our unique ability to produce according to reason, amounts to a view of human essence as *social creativity* (Wilde, 1998, chapters 2, 3). Human freedom can be achieved only when all human beings express their social creativity by taking full control over their social lives. Communism is seen by the young Marx as the 'real appropriation of the human essence by and for man' and as fully developed naturalism *and* humanism (Marx, 1975, p. 296).

Despite the objections of some commentators that Marx's distinction between human and animal capacities is exaggerated (e.g. Benton, 1993, chapter 2; Elster, 1985, pp. 62-8), the empirical evidence is firmly on Marx's side. Furthermore, focusing on production is more tangible than other obvious candidates such as abstract rationality or speech. This is not to deny the biological closeness between humans and our closest species-relatives, for there is a 98 per cent similarity in the chromosomal structures of humans and chimpanzees, with no discernible difference in 13 of our chromosomes, as the popular scientific writer Matt Ridley points out. However, when comparing humans to other species Ridley focuses precisely on the co-operative division of labour as the factor which demonstrates the uniqueness of our species and the

key to our ecological success (Ridley, 2000, chapter 2). What humans have achieved in developing our productive potential, using our much larger brains, is qualitatively different than the achievements of our closest species. Marx's distinction is robust, but it is also important to recognise that despite Benton's accusations that Marx is guilty of speciesism (Benton, 1993, pp. 41-2), there is no implication that other animals are somehow defective or inferior in Marx's work.<sup>3</sup> Although this may appear to be a somewhat arcane exegetical point, it is important for the radical humanist project. A humanist project must by definition be anthropocentric, but that tells us nothing about human attitudes towards non-human nature. Radical humanism strives for the progressive realisation of human potential and the transformation of relations between human nature and non-human nature in which respect for the latter is a sign of the maturity of the former (Wilde, 1998, chapter 7).

However, even if we accept the view that what makes us distinctively human *is* our social creativity, does it follow that we *ought* therefore to take control over our own productive lives, collectively and individually? Marx did not pursue this question, eschewing moral discourse for fear that it would detract from the scientific study of social development. Not until the publication of his early writings in the late 1920s and early 1930s did his humanism stir the interest of theorists like Bloch, Lefebvre, Marcuse, and Fromm. As a social psychologist Fromm initially strove to fuse historical materialism with Freudian psychoanalytical categories in order to analyse the social character of various social classes as they responded to socio-economic change. However, he eventually rejected Freud's instinctual framework and, on the basis of a revised classification of character types, went on to develop a humanistic ethics. The ethics in *Man For Himself* (1947) are very much in the spirit of Aristotle and Spinoza, stressing the proper purpose of human life as the fulfilment of our essential human potential, with the emphasis on the virtuous character and the nature of the good society. The task of ethics is to work out how the human essence can achieve its *telos* or purpose through the exercise of the virtues. Fromm is concerned with the kind of society in which well-being and integrity can be realised by all people,

through the exercise of the potentials which are innate to us as human beings. Fromm explicitly criticises all versions of what he terms authoritarian ethics, whether in the theological form in the idea of the unworthy sinner in Augustine, Luther and Calvin, or even in the apparently more enlightened moral system of Kant, which, in his view, harbours a deep suspicion of human nature (Fromm, 1990, pp. 12-3 and pp. 211-2). For Fromm, loving one's self and loving one's neighbour are natural, inherent attributes of being human, and love is the power by which we relate to the world and appropriate it, finding fulfilment and happiness only in 'relatedness and solidarity' with our fellows (Fromm, 1990, p. 14). This version of humanistic ethics is based on the principle that what is 'good' for us is the affirmation of life through the unfolding of our powers, provided that this empowerment is not at the expense of others, for this would be tantamount to 'evil', which he equates with the crippling of our power (Fromm, 1990, p. 20).

What is it that makes us essentially human? Like Aristotle and Marx, Fromm asks what distinguishes us from other animals. In his view, humans have a relatively weak instinctual equipment for survival compared with most other animals, but this is compensated by the development of specifically human qualities, and 'self-awareness, reason and imagination' disrupt the harmony which characterises animal nature. The human being is at once part of nature and yet transcends the rest of nature; reason drives us to endless striving for new solutions to the problems which ever-developing needs confront (Fromm, 1990, chapter 3). The human life is essentially one of 'unavoidable disequilibrium', an existential dilemma in which we constantly confront new contradictions and strive to resolve them. The response can be progressive or regressive, and this is reflected in Fromm's typology of social character, which refers to the traits which comprise the essential nucleus of the character structure of a group. The social character develops as the result of the basic life experiences and mode of life common to that group (Fromm, 1997a, p. 239), and reflects the dynamic adaptation of needs to socio-economic reality. It conditions the thinking, feeling, and acting of individuals, but the process is by no means wholly deterministic, and resistance and alternatives to the

various non-productive character orientations are always possible. The non-productive orientations are identified as the receptive, hoarding, exploitative, and marketing types. The first three mirror Freudian categories but the marketing type is Fromm's own, denoting the readiness of widespread social groups in affluent societies to adjust to the requirements of the market in all aspects of life, thereby sacrificing their authentic selves (Fromm, 1990, pp. 62-82). The productive orientation constitutes the progressive response to the challenge of life, and the productive character serves as an ideal type. In recognising that the only meaning to life is that which is given by humans through productive living, we open up the possibility of achieving happiness through the full realisation of the faculties which are peculiarly human - reason, love, and productive work. Furthermore, only through the development of a feeling of solidarity with fellow human beings can we attain happiness (Fromm, 1990, p. 43). This is the normative basis of his humanism.

Fromm's conception of the unavoidable disequilibrium of human nature sets him apart from Marx, who, in Fromm's view, never overcame the problem of holding to the idea that humanity has a general nature while at the same time insisting that human nature developed in accordance with historical structures (Fromm, 1964, p. 116n). Fromm insists that it makes sense to talk about essential human qualities only within the framework of a more general view of human essence, that singular form of life which is aware of itself:

Man is confronted with the frightening conflict of being the prisoner of nature, yet being free in his thoughts; being a part of nature, and yet to be as it were a freak of nature: being neither here nor there. Human self-awareness has made man a stranger in the world, separate, lonely, and frightened (Fromm, 1964, p. 117)

The working through of the contradiction leads either to the final goal of human solidarity or, if the regressive path is taken, 'complete dehumanisation which is the equivalent of madness' (Fromm, 1964, p. 121). The progressive solution involves the development of authentically human qualities towards the goal of human solidarity, a condition in which all human beings feel sympathy for each

other and are determined to resolve problems peacefully through cooperation. Of those authentic human qualities, his identification of rationality and productiveness echoes the views of Aristotle and Marx, while 'love' reflects the importance accorded to the nurturing process in character development and the significance of close relationships in securing esteem. 'Love' is therefore at the heart of our sociality, although Fromm is under no illusions about the difficulty of expressing it in inauspicious times, as he makes clear in *The Art of Loving* (Fromm, 1995, pp. 65–83).<sup>4</sup>

In his final book, *To Have or To Be?*, Fromm argues that the capitalist ideology of unlimited production, absolute freedom and unrestricted happiness amount to a new religion of Progress, 'The Great Promise', based on the psychological premises that radical hedonism and egotism will lead to harmony and peace. The promise, of course, can never be met, for it is premised on *not* delivering general satisfaction but encouraging acquisitiveness, and the individual can never be satisfied because, as Fromm says, 'there is no end to my wishes' (Fromm, 2002, p. 6). Indeed the logic of accumulation also encourages a constant fear of losing what we have gained. He argues that the pursuit of money, prestige and power prevents us from recognising the interests of our real self, and he bemoans the fact that we bow down to the 'anonymous power of the market' and 'of the machine whose servants we have become' (Fromm, 1990, p. 248). However, unlike his erstwhile colleagues in the Frankfurt School, Fromm's jeremiads are counterbalanced by a sense of hope, and he argues that despite these structural pressures the human race has retained and developed 'such qualities of dignity, courage, decency and kindness as we find them throughout history and in countless individuals today' (Fromm, 1997a, p. 232).

Fromm keeps open the possibility that, on the basis of what we share as human beings, we are capable of creating a society in which relationships of domination and submission are replaced by a condition of solidarity (Fromm, 1997a, p. 228). This involves replacing processes which reduce most individuals to insignificance by active and intelligent cooperation through the

extension of the democratic principle into the economic sphere (Fromm, 1997a, p. 235).

What does the emancipated individual in the free society look like? The emphasis is on a productive disposition and social relations infused with solidarity and love. Productiveness is the full realisation of creative human powers without the imposition of power *over* our fellow human beings, as well as the development of loving relationships based on care, responsibility, respect, and knowledge, culminating in solidarity on the basis of an ideal (Fromm, 2002, chapter 5). In listing the qualities of the character structure of the 'new', emancipated person, the emphasis is on the need to take full responsibility for our lives, to develop love and respect for life, to reduce greed and hate, and to exercise our imagination in the struggle to remove intolerable circumstances (Fromm, 2002 pp. 170-2). Fromm speaks of the ideal of inner activity whereby individuals give expression to their faculties and talents and to the wealth of human gifts with which we are all, in varying degrees, endowed (Fromm, 2002, p. 88). Ideally, the productive character would live life in the 'being mode', a situation in which our activities are productive in the sense of being consciously directed towards the enrichment of human existence, as opposed to the having mode in which activity is directed to acquiring wealth and power over others (Fromm, 2002, pp. 22-6). If an individual is unable to exercise productiveness Fromm concludes that this will result in 'dysfunction and unhappiness' and if productiveness is denied across society the result is a 'socially patterned defect' (Fromm, 1990, pp. 219-21).

It may be objected that Fromm's view of what constitutes the fully lived or truly human life is arbitrary and unreasonably optimistic, but he insists that his normative principles are 'objectively valid' and strongly rejects the argument that objectively valid statements can be made only about facts and not about values (Fromm, 1990, pp. 16-17). He points to the arts and also to applied sciences such as medicine and engineering, where it is common to construct objectively valid norms by which to judge the success of a project, and where failure to comply with them is penalised by poor results.



In his own sphere, he insists that living is an art and that humanistic ethics is 'the applied science of the "art of living" based upon the theoretical "science of man" (Fromm, 1990, p. 18). Fromm accepts that despite a wealth of data from anthropology and psychology we have only a very tentative picture of human nature, but he insists that 'objectively valid' does not mean 'absolute', and that all scientific progress is based on provisional truths (Fromm, 1990, p. 16). He repeatedly stresses the empirical and scientific nature of his psychology. This is based largely on decades of practice as a psychoanalyst, and he claims that 'there is not a single theoretical conclusion about man's psyche...which is not based on a critical observation of human behaviour carried out in the course of this psychoanalytical work' (Fromm, 1962, p. 10). However, how does Fromm's theoretical 'science of man' stand up in the light of the immense advance in the empirical science of humanity which we have seen in recent years? The first draft of the complete human genome was published in February 2001, opening the way for a far deeper understanding of the species. However, while bioinformatics may reveal the genetic origins of various temperaments, there is no indication that it will tell us more about character, and Fromm makes a clear distinction between the two when stating that 'temperament refers to the mode of reaction and is constitutional and not changeable; character is essentially formed by a person's experiences... and changeable, to some extent, by insights and new kinds of experience' (Fromm, 1990, p. 52). In respect of social character, the relevant science is that of social or political psychology.

Although radical humanism places a normative stress on the realisation of natural positive potentials, Fromm is well aware that humans also have a powerful negative potential for destructiveness. However, he considers destructiveness to be a 'secondary potentiality', something which, although it possesses all the power and intensity of any passion, is essentially an alternative to creativeness that arises when the will to create cannot be satisfied (Fromm, 1990, p. 218 cf. Fromm, 1991, pp. 37-8). His most sustained work, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*, refutes the arguments of instinctivists and behaviourists who view aggression *per se* to

be natural and inevitable, arguing instead that 'malignant aggression' is essentially a manifestation of the breakdown of creativeness (Fromm, 1997b, p. 24). Potentially serious destructive tendencies such as greed and envy are certainly strong, not, however, because of their inherent intensity but because of the difficulty of resisting the 'public pressure to be a wolf with the wolves' (Fromm, 1996, p. 194). In other words it is the social consequences of the accumulation system, with its ultra-competitiveness and indifference to human suffering, which produces destructive behaviour. A radical challenge to the antagonistic structures of social existence would be required in order to nullify malignant aggression. For Fromm, the anthropological evidence points to a preponderance of cooperation and sharing among prehistoric humans, with large-scale destructiveness following on from the development of organised state power (Fromm, 1997b, p. 575). But the point is that such destructiveness is not the norm but the exception to it, for society could not have survived and developed if the destructive urges were dominant and irresistible aspects of our human nature. The permanent war of each against all would have led to extinction a long time ago. Nevertheless, the threat of extinction is still present and therefore the need for a fundamental change of heart is vital. There is no false optimism here, but rather a plea that 'a new ethic, a new attitude towards nature, human solidarity and cooperation are necessary if the Western world is not to be wiped out' (Fromm, 2002, p. 198).<sup>5</sup>

How can such an ethic develop from and in the reality of an alienated world? For Fromm alienation is neither total nor irredeemable. Ultimately he is convinced that the goal of human solidarity can be achieved only through some form of humanistic socialism, but he is very critical of all forms of socialism which proved to be as authoritarian and anti-human as the capitalist social system they set out to oppose. He pleads for democratic socialism to return to the human aspects of the social problem, criticising capitalism from the standpoint of 'what it does to the human qualities of man, to his soul and his spirit', and addressing the specific forms through which we can build a society which points to the end of alienation and 'the idolatry of economy and

of the state' (Fromm, 1991, p. 269 and pp. 362-3). The emphasis is on subordinating the economic and political spheres of society to human development. In modern society, a healthy economy is possible only at the price of unhealthy human beings, and the task is to construct a healthy economy for healthy people (Fromm, 2002, p. 176). Fromm was a political activist who campaigned for a number of causes which he considered might contribute to the change of direction that he considered so imperative. He was not, however, a political theorist, and there is no systematic relationship between his humanistic ethics and the various proposals and movements which he supported. However, radical humanism could serve as a basis for the development of such a theory of human solidarity. One interesting feature of Fromm's interventions is the different 'levels' of social activity which they cover, from campaigns for nuclear disarmament and justice for the less developed world at the global level, through appeals for democratic renewal at the state level, and arguments for radical consumer power, women's emancipation, humanistic work relations, and basic guaranteed income at the level of everyday life.<sup>6</sup>

The radical humanist perspective then, accords broadly with the sort of Red-Green politics which has developed since Fromm's death in 1980, but it identifies progressive possibilities in a wide range of struggle, including, for example, the work of trades unions in asserting the dignity of labour. The emerging global anti-capitalist movement, embracing activists from social movements old and new, expresses its concerns about global injustice in an ethical language which contains an implicit appeal to self realisation as something that is due naturally to all human beings. Theoretically, the radical humanist perspective on human solidarity complements the substantive concerns of those theorists who stress the need to develop some form of global community or cosmopolitan citizenship (e.g. Linklater, 1998; Touraine, 2000; Harvey, 2000; Held, 1995). However, this brings us back to the crucial question of potential conflict between the ideal of human solidarity on a global scale and solidarity generated within particular communities, perhaps as a defensive response to the depredations of globalisation.

## Human Solidarity versus National Community

We noted earlier that the expression of particular solidarities normally takes place in opposition to other groups. Yet can the universal goal of human solidarity somehow be inscribed in the day to day struggles of particular groups? This, of course, was part of the original socialist project, but socialist internationalism proved somewhat chimerical. Fromm's radical humanism is extremely hostile to political nationalism. It is uncompromising on this issue and is therefore incompatible with those communitarian theorists who argue for inclusive political community from a liberal nationalist perspective (e.g. Miler, 1990; Mason, 2000). This has important implications when considering the ubiquity of patriotism, routinely adopted in political rhetoric and embedded in cultural practices. Fromm, who grew up in Germany during the First World War, was appalled at the 'crazy pattern of hate and national self-glorification' (Fromm, 1962, p. 7). His abhorrence of tribalism and nationalism is an expression of a deep 'universalism' which is a prerequisite for a commitment to human solidarity. 'Nationalism', he writes, 'is our form of incest, is our idolatry, is our insanity', and 'patriotism is its cult' (Fromm, 1991, pp. 58-9). To be sure he recognises the validity of an emotional attachment to the culture and tradition of one's community, for if we did not have that feeling for the particular forms in which we celebrate our living together it would be difficult to develop the active interest in other cultures which is necessary if human solidarity is to be developed. In a lecture delivered in 1962 entitled "A New Humanism as a Condition for the One World", Fromm predicted the imminent emergence of global society and posed the stark choice which would face humanity as the One World became a reality. On the one hand, we could regress to nationalisms and tribalisms that would destroy the world, on the other we could work for a new humanism through which we could 'get in touch with that which we share

with all humanity' (Fromm, 1998, p. 78). In this section I want to flag up radical humanism's firm rejection of liberal nationalism.

David Miller has argued that the collective identities 'possessed' by people are predominantly national identities, and that therefore the sphere of the nation is where 'the promise of overall community must be redeemed' (Miller, 1990, p. 238). Although he opposes nationalism as a cult of nationhood and a badge of aggression towards outsiders, he sees nationality as a predominant form of collective identity which can be used as a basis for developing self-determination and distributive justice, and he sees the nation as 'the only possible form in which overall community can be realised in modern societies' (Miller, 1990, p. 245). The problem here is that these national identities are historically constructed for the benefit of the socio-economic elites of each nation-state, and that they normally rest on myths which have no rational basis. Given the virtually uncontested inculcation of these myths in the areas of education, information and entertainment, and in their symbolic ubiquity through flags, anthems and honours, what is surprising is that so many people in fact identify themselves in other ways than by nationality, despite Miller's assertion to the contrary. Many people see their collective identities in terms of their local community, religion, ethnic background, gender, political ideology, occupation, in a variety of combinations. It must, of course, be acknowledged that decisive political progress towards greater solidarity within societies and on a global scale must take place within established political entities, but are those entities so closely tied to nationality as they were in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? We see states with multiple nationalities, and, most significantly, a European Union embracing many states and regions. Nor can nationality be detached from nationalism or patriotism as easily as Miller would like. The political groups of the extreme right display an aggressive nationalism which is not an aberration from a more tolerant and benign patriotic political culture. Rather it feeds on a deeply embedded ideology of patriotism which has been propagandised in all the major liberal-constitutional states for the past two hundred years.

Nevertheless, it is impossible to sustain a coherent humanist perspective on human solidarity which completely disregards the fact of nationality. It is quite clear that groups of people have been and continue to be systematically oppressed and express a legitimate demand for self-determination, however difficult this may be to ascertain. This desire for statehood necessarily involves nationalistic expressions of solidarity, but it still runs the risk of oppressing other minorities either in the course of the struggle or in the newly formed state. It is preferable and perfectly possible to make a non-nationalist case to support a goal which is normally formulated in nationalist terms, as Terry Eagleton (1999) has done in the case of Ireland. In those states which are not subject to national oppression, it is difficult to imagine that even a moderate form of nationalism could advance the cause of human solidarity. Stephen Nathanson has argued for just such a moderate nationalism, whereby a commitment to a particular nation is combined with a recognition of duties to treat all people decently. He argues that with this universalist component nationalism is 'a morally legitimate pursuit of group goals and group well-being' (Nathanson, 1997, p. 185), but this is still much further than what he terms 'global humanism' will find acceptable. It is in line with Rorty's commitment to patriotism, for he argues that without an emotional attachment to one's country it would be impossible to feel shame when unjust social practices are exposed (Rorty, 1999, pp. 252-4). The problem here is that the cult of patriotism is far more likely to serve to mask the faults in a society rather than to expose them, and far more likely to encourage bellicosity and hatred of the outsider. Ideally a democratic polity would strive for the well-being of its citizens without recourse to nationalist rhetoric. People within such a polity could relate to each other in solidaristic ways without the illusion of national homogeneity and the divisiveness which must always be associated with it.

As Craig Calhoun has argued, the force of nationalist rhetoric is so strong and pervasive that most academic discussions of 'society' operate from an unstated assumption that societies are bounded and discrete and that the nation-state is the natural model (Calhoun 1999, pp. 217-31). In the case of

Honneth, for example, there is no discussion of whether 'societal solidarity' applies to state society or global society or the problems of moving from one to the other. Calhoun also notes that even when the need to accommodate diversity is recognised, as with multi-culturalism, the cultures too are normally taken to be homogeneous, rather than in constant development:

The idea that people need 'naturally' to feel at home in a taken-for-granted and internally homogenous community contends with the creation of polities and cultural fields too large and differentiated to be organised as communities. Within such larger settings, it is not an adequate response to human differences to allow each person to find the group within which they feel at home (Calhoun, 1999, p. 228).

Calhoun concludes that it is crucial to create a public space in which people are free to engage with each other in making decisions, developing culture and re-creating identities. Vague though this may seem, it presents a serious challenge for politicians, academics, writers, and indeed all those with the opportunity to contribute to the discourse about the development of a greater level of understanding within and between cultures. It points to the need for the further development of new forms of political engagement which reach beyond the formal institutions of the nation state and seek to link the particular with the universal. The World Social Forum at Porto Allegre in 2001 offers an example.

## **Conclusion**

A radical humanist perspective offers a philosophical grounding for an appeal for human solidarity, a theoretical strategy shunned by alternative approaches. It provides a basis for sympathy and compassion for victims of oppression and exploitation, and a warning of the unsustainability of persisting with a global neo-liberalism which is blind to its social consequences. The normative goals of the fulfilment of productiveness,

rationality, love and solidarity among all people offer broad evaluative criteria which could be employed to identify the policies, practices and movements which carry forward the struggle for human solidarity at the levels of everyday life, state-centred politics and global politics; this is a project which has still to be developed. In its substantive concerns the radical humanist approach to human solidarity works for the subordination of economic and technological rationality to the essential human needs of people everywhere and supports a radical political 'catch up' to remedy the democratic deficit created by economic globalisation.

Finally, let us return to the widely-stated suspicion that a normative view of human essence and its fulfilment necessarily invites authoritarian or exclusionary views of the good life. In the radical humanist perspective on human solidarity outlined above the ethical goal of the universal development of the productive character living in the being mode is not only compatible with cultural diversity but requires it. Fromm envisions the creation of social conditions which develop the peculiarities of persons, sexes, and national groups, making for a 'richer and broader' human culture (Fromm, 1997c, p. 115). In the multiculturalism which has developed with globalisation there are signs that this may be developing, and, as Honneth points out, there is already a strong moral component implicit in the claims to recognition of a wide variety of social groups. And yet, in the absence of a radical humanist transformation of social conditions we are also witnessing the entrenchment of numerous fundamentalisms which constitute the greatest obstacle to the ideal of human solidarity. The expression of cultural diversity is not always rich and progressive. There are no easy remedies to this, but the radical humanist approach to human solidarity makes a strong case that these crippling ideological divisions require an *explicitly* ethical response.



## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> The standard objection that such a formulation commits the 'naturalistic fallacy' of deriving values from facts, or the 'ought' from the 'is', is overcome by acknowledging that some facts are permeated by values (e.g. MacIntyre, 1985, pp. 56-9; Kain, 1991, pp. 30-2), and that 'ought' is built in to what it is to be human.

<sup>2</sup> Hursthouse nevertheless presents a convincing account of how a viable naturalistic virtue ethics can operate. Her book is breath of fresh air in a fatalistic intellectually climate, and it is refreshing to read her concluding sentence, in which she conjoins us to 'Keep hope alive' (Hursthouse, 1999, p. 265).

<sup>3</sup> I argue this at length in Wilde (2000b). In the passages referred to Benton imputes that Marx denigrates animal production by speaking of 'merely' animal production or need on no less than nine occasions, but Marx never uses this word or any other expressions which imply the inferiority of animals. Difference does not necessarily imply superiority or inferiority.

<sup>4</sup> This raises a question about how, ideally, we might envisage social relationships in a condition of human solidarity, since we cannot love strangers or consider them our friends. Although space does not permit a full answer to this question I find it difficult to use 'friendship' as a model for solidarity, as Diane Rothleder (1999) has attempted to do explicitly and Jacques Derrida (1997) more circumspectly. The closeness of the bond of friendship militates against its extension to a wider compass. However, the development of our self-consciousness as loving beings can lead to a wider predisposition to welcome and learn from the stranger. Iseult Honohan's (2001) suggestion that 'colleague' or 'work-mate' can be used to evoke a commonality neither as close as friend nor as distant as stranger is a step in the right direction, although I favour the image of 'actor', with all its entailed ambivalence.

<sup>5</sup> A similar conclusion, based on an analysis of species potential, is expressed by David Harvey in *Spaces of Hope* (Harvey, 2000, pp. 206-12).

<sup>6</sup> For a review of Erich Fromm's political positions see Wilde (2000a). Fromm's social and political interventions are found mainly in Fromm (1968), Fromm (1991) and Fromm (2002, chapter 9).

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