Preface. Groups and Solidarity: Bridging a Gap in Contemporary Social Philosophy

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PREFACE. GROUPS AND SOLIDARITY: BRIDGING A GAP IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY[1]
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Introduction

Groups and solidarity are, *separately*, widely debated concepts in contemporary social philosophy, yet their *interplay* remains largely unexplored and undertheorized. In fact, when it comes to investigating one of these concepts, more often than not the other is at best vaguely mentioned as a background assumption, and vice versa. To be fair, this poor attention to the connections between groups and solidarity is not to be addressed to social philosophers only, for it is easily recognisable in other fields of social research, as an historically entrenched neglect. To name just a classic reference, on Allport's (1962) account, the 'master problem' of social psychology concerns the nature of the relationship between the individual and the group; accordingly, the definition of what kind of interpersonal relations or aggregates count as groups is core to social psychology. However, solidarity has been overall scarcely considered in this line of research (Speltini and Palmonari 1999), although some recent developments seem to foster an integration of solidarity in the social-psychological toolbox (Brown and Pehrson 2020).

This issue aims to foster a discussion of groups and solidarity as intimately related subjects, and this proposal is addressed to the domain of *social philosophy* – whose boundaries and distinctive identity remain a matter of debate, and need some additional remarks accordingly. With 'social philosophy', no

[1] The introduction of the preface is co-authored by Francesco Camboni, Raul Hakli, and Valeria Martino. Section 1 "Solidarity: From Roman Law to Contemporary Social Philosophy" is authored by Francesco Camboni, section 2 "Social Groups: Metaphysics with and without Social Concern" by Valeria Martino, and section 3 "Contents" by Raul Hakli.

substantive reference to a specific canon or historical tradition, e.g. classic social theory or critical theory, is intended here (see Ferrara 2002; Jaeggi and Celikates 2018 for an insightful discussion of this research field); on the contrary, we refer to this label as to a theoretical agenda, encompassing a number of problems variably related to the social world. On this broader and conceptual reading, social ontology and social philosophy are interestingly intertwined, or even nested, as long as the former addresses the ontological status of social entities, and in so doing unpacks the social world at an overtly theoretical level. To be sure, one could hesitate to consider, for instance, Axel Honneth and John R. Searle as social philosophers likewise, since they eminently represent philosophical traditions that are often contrasted. However, we insist that our reframing of social philosophy as a loose theoretical agenda could be understood as an attempt to contribute in bridging the so-called "analytic vs continental divide" (Andina 2014).

What is interestingly peculiar about groups and solidarity is that both cross diverse realms of normativity, as a short overview on contemporary literature can easily show. In fact, solidarity has been conceptualised as social or group solidarity (Tuomela 2013), civic (Scholz 2015) or redistributive solidarity (Banting and Kimlicka 2017), political solidarity (Scholz 2008) and universal, humanitarian or moral solidarity (Harvey 2007). This peculiar plasticity of the concept is to be handled carefully, so as to preserve its analytical usefulness. However, the point to be noticed here is that the normativity embedded by solidarity has been variously declined.

With regard to the definition of groups, they have been addressed by social ontology as one of the building blocks of social reality. Indeed, much of the debate concerned groups' (ir)reducibility to their members, around which individualism and holism revolve, both from an ontological and a methodological perspective. The ontological one deals with the assertion or the denial of groups as ontologically independent from their member, while the methodological one addresses the possibility to explain social phenomena through the reference to individuals or groups and, thus, has no ontological consequences referring just to our methods for social explanations (e.g., Lukes 1968 and 1973; Zahle and Collins 2014).

Another relevant debated matter in social ontology is groups' coordination, and subsequently their agency. Indeed, a number of group-related issues unpacks the agenda of social ontology: which kinds of action can be considered collective, how individuals can coordinate themselves in order to achieve common goals, and then which features they can possess as group members, e.g., collective intentions or collective responsibility. In this sense, solidarity could be included among this cluster of irreducibly group-level features. As already said, the gap in the analysis of groups *and* solidarity mostly depends on the different philosophical fields in which the two are usually analysed. The focus on methodological and ontological or metaphysical issues led to ignore social and

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political aspects within social ontology – even if some noteworthy exceptions do exist (e.g Gilbert's account also addresses moral and political questions, and in so doing it broadens the usual social ontology's perspective). Indeed, it seems that only by focusing on peculiar aspects of sociality and coordinations of groups a normative concern can arise, i.e., the analysis of groups *per se* does not imply a focus on their normativity and could stop at the metaphysical level. It is only when it combines metaphysics with considerations on groups originated from other disciplines (e.g., social psychology and sociology) or other philosophical branches (as moral or social philosophy) that normativity becomes a noteworthy characteristic of groups.

However, the issue is not only meant to cover the gap, but also to highlight some peculiar features that both discussions own independently, which could be relevant as a preliminary phase or a groundwork for the proper bridging of the gap. Indeed, the two fields of philosophical investigation could end up looking closer than they have been so far, as long as a proper focus is obtained.

1. Solidarity: from Roman law to contemporary social philosophy

It is quite common to name Durkheim as the very first theoretician of solidarity, a term whose social currency entrenched in France in the second half of 19th century. However, as Stjerno (2004: 25) remarks, «historically speaking, the phenomenon of solidarity existed before the idea was formulated. The idea existed before the term became widespread, and the term was in general use before its modern meaning had developed». In fact, the term 'solidarité' was already in use among French lawyers in the 16th century, in accordance with the Roman legal-financial notion *obligatio in solidum*; along this line of currency, in 1804, the term was finally included in Napoleon's Civil Code in 1804. This legal pre-history of solidarity is broadly acknowledged by commentators (Wildt 1999; Stjerno 2004; Pensky 2008; Sangiovanni 2015). That being said, it is important to emphasise that the modern *social* meaning of solidarity only appeared later and, at least in part, as derivative on this legal-financial root. At first glance, some traits of the social understanding of solidarity are prefigured by the *obligatio in solidum*, which defines the status of joint liability of a financial debt; first, a sense of *interdependence* is embedded by this institution, as long as one cosignatory of the loan must extinguish the others' share of common debt, should the latter end up being unable to pay off on their own. Second, as Pensky (2008: 6) pointed out, solidarity generates bonds that do *not* have to rely on *ascriptive* features as blood or race: "neither genes nor love, but liability is the bonding force".

What is distinctive and peculiar of the social development of the concept of solidarity then? An exhaustive answer cannot be provided here, yet an inevitably shorter one can be at the very least attempted. For acute observers like Fourier,

Leroux, Comte, and Durkheim, the very social problem to address was how modern industrial societies could be held together, once it was clear that the traditional centripetal forces like family and religious practices were no longer reliable for this systemic function. Against this background, solidarity appeared as an appealing idea, both descriptive and normative at once, to capture a genuinely modern sort of fellow-feeling among strangers, that was required by the renewed social pattern. As Durkheim famously put it in the opening of *The Division of Labour in Society* (*DLS*), "how does it come about that the individual, whilst becoming more autonomous, depends ever more closely upon society?" (Durkheim 1893: 7). According to Durkheim, industrial societies were so much more differentiated than traditional ones, in both occupational and cultural terms, that they really constituted a genuinely new social type. If traditional societies were held together by common ideas and sentiments, and were in «mechanical solidarity» accordingly, industrial societies appeared to Durkheim being in the process of shaping a new kind of solidarity that he named 'organic' to make sense of the stronger functional interdependence among social units. In a nutshell, whereas mechanical solidarity is based on epistemic and moral consensus and similarity, organic solidarity feeds on interpersonal differences that are functionally complementary. However, whereas in the 1893 edition of *DLS* Durkheim was quite confident that organic solidarity was spontaneously opening its way through modern societies, in the preface to the 1902 edition he looked less optimistic on the outcome of this process. In fact, in this writing, he pleaded for the establishment of neo-corporations as a supplementary social glue among citizens and the State; as Thijssen (2012: 6) commented, this move can "clearly be interpreted as a mechanical rescue operation for a moribund organic solidarity". Moreover, and significantly, the concept of organic solidarity itself did not appear any longer in the later Durkheimian works. The problem of social integration in modern societies remained then open, although Durkheim set the agenda for the social theory to come.

The research on solidarity in social philosophy had a poor development until the end of the 20th century, when thanks to the reappraisal of the concept by Habermas (1986) first, and Honneth (1992) later, it increasingly regained consideration. Over the last two decades, more valuable edited volumes on solidarity appeared (Bayertz 1999; Laitinen and Pessi 2014; Banting and Kymlicka 2017). More importantly for our purposes, some tenuous signs of interest in solidarity also arose in the field of social ontology (Tuomela 2013: ch. 9), and it is worth wondering why it took so long for a genuinely social concept like solidarity to be accepted as part of the toolbox of this philosophical field of research. In fact, social ontology is traditionally engaged with subjects like the individual/group dichotomy, the ontological status of social entities (i.e. groups, concerts, money), and the problem of social action; that this agenda will include solidarity in the decades to come is a wish that this special issue of *Rivista di Estetica* aims to foster.

2. Social groups: metaphysics with and without social concern

The reason for this gap is quite clear, however, if we look at the way social groups are usually analysed from the perspective of social ontology. As already said, the first concern here is the analysis of groups as one of the building blocks of the social realm. As a consequence, groups are first and foremost analysed with regard to their constitution, so that the essential question to address is "what are they?" (Epstein 2019). The answers could be of very different kinds: for instance, fusions (Copp 1984; Sheehy 2006), sets (Effingham 2010), structures (Ritchie 2013). Each proposal implies different considerations on which groups should be meant as proper objects of analysis – teams, classes, organisations, and so on and so forth – and which features they possess, consequently. Accordingly, we can wonder if groups are identical to their members, completely independent from them, or different from yet constituted by individuals (Epstein 2015). As a consequence, we can also investigate what kind of metaphysical relationship groups and their members maintain: identity (according to a reduction of groups to the sum of individuals. Mellor 1982), local or global supervenience (Currie 1984), or emergence, just to mention the most relevant ones. For the sake of completeness, criticisms against the explanatory usefulness of emergence with regard to social reality and groups have been expressed too (Ylikoski 2014). Moreover, this specific way to conceive of groups usually leads to the analysis of metaphysical paradoxes arising from one account or the other, such as material constitution (Thomson 1998; Jansen 2009), transitivity and part-whole relation (Uzquiano 2004; Hawley 2018), and the change of groups' members leading to a group-related reframing of the Theseus's ship paradox (Sharvy 1968).

As long as the questions raised above are genuinely metaphysical or ontological (to maintain the distinction between metaphysics and ontology, Varzi 2007), they do not need the concept of solidarity. Nor is the latter needed when such questions are reframed in methodological terms, i.e. when they are debated with the aim of understanding society and its building blocks and focusing on the relationship that exists between the two levels. Indeed, from this perspective their existence is not relevant, but the ways in which we can understand and, especially, explain them in our scientific theories are the proper objective of analysis.

However, this is not the only way to approach social groups. The second standard way of conceiving them within social ontology is by focusing on their agency. Indeed, once it is accepted that groups exist – even if they could do it in different ways, according to different accounts – we can wonder what they can do as agents: can they believe, intend, or have reasons (Hakli 2006)? Do they have a mind, consequently (List and Pettit 2011)? Are they responsible for what they do (Miller 2006; Gilbert 2015)? As it is well known, these questions are pivotal ones and vastly addressed in literature. As a consequence, we do not

strive to reconstruct the entire debate here. Rather, we would recall a different way of understanding social groups in social ontology, i.e., focusing on what they can or cannot do, using a very broad meaning for the verb 'do'.

Finally, there is a third way, still underexplored, according to which it is possible to integrate standard social ontology's analysis with social concerns of larger breadth. In this sense, we do not recognise two people walking together or helping each other to move an armchair as the main instances of social groups. Rather, the relationship between groups and society as well as the ways in which being in a group can affect individuals are of interest here. In this sense, it seems interesting to focus one's own attention to human attitudes usually analysed by other social sciences or fields of inquiry, such as intergroup dynamics. In this case, 'social group' obtains a specific meaning, closer to the sociological one in which sharp features should be owned by a group to call it as such. Perhaps, this could be the way to combine the literature focusing on solidarity with that revolving around social groups, joining the respective theoretical tools.

3. Contents

Sally J. Scholz's article *Trust in Solidarity* takes as its starting point the observation that relations of solidarity and relations of trust often occur simultaneously: solidarity typically emerges in social wholes in which members have a high level of trust on each other, and solidarity often induces further trust. However, she notes that trust and solidarity are different in many respects, even if they often build on each other. In the paper, she examines the relations between trust and solidarity, with a focus on political solidarity which she distinguishes from social and civic ones. Political solidarity, according to her, is a collective moral relation that involves a normative commitment to a cause against injustice, oppression, or tyranny. Such commitment affects their decisions and actions, leading them to contribute to collective action with other participants and to share in the social risk involved in acknowledging and taking part in a social conflict that potentially threatens some members of the collective. In political solidarity, the collective need not be a pre-existing group as in social or civic solidarity, but a collective that is formed through the individuals' commitment to the cause.

Political solidarity relies on social trust, and Scholz distinguishes between different trusting relations that are involved in solidarity. She discusses various accounts of trust and finds that they take trust to be a trustor's attitude that is based on belief or expectation that the trusted other can and will act in certain ways that validate or verify the attitude of trust. This implies certain vulnerability and risk on the part of the trustor, and also suggests that trust is highly dependent on various situational and contextual factors. Nevertheless, political solidarity not only relies on social trust, but it also generates social trust through the collective practices of solidarity that allow participants to move from trusting

in another's commitment to a cause to trusting in each other more generally. Political solidarity has a transformative effect on both individuals and collectives; it transforms the unjust conditions that support distrust and allows for collective creation of trust in groups and societies.

Carlo Burelli' and Francesco Camboni's paper *La solidarietà come funzione sociale* aims to combine the literature concerning the definition of solidarity and that related to its normative value. The paper advocates a conception of solidarity according to which the latter can be understood as that function of societies which ensures societal cohesion. In this way, solidarity gets a proper conceptual meaning, and can be normatively employed accordingly. In order to achieve its objective, the paper starts from defining a function in etiological terms, that is, as selective, naturalistic, and objective. The etiological account is particularly promising, for it allows us to understand concepts by referring to their past history, and to distinguish between proper functions and mere accidental properties, still in accordance with our best explanations in science. The etiological understanding of solidarity, and the discussion of its normative implications, is then undertaken as inspired by Durkheim's early functionalist account - to be aptly updated and revisited. The final, yet crucial claim upheld by Burelli and Camboni is that an etiological account can make sense of the normative core of solidarity, i. e., that it is a desirable feature for societies to possess and one that they may lack. Just as pumping blood is an activity that all hearts should do, in light of their previous history, the authors suggest that a similar reasoning may be applied to solidarity, once the latter is conceived as a function. In other words, just as a heart that fails to pumping blood is a functionally bad heart, a solidaristic mechanism (i.e. welfare state in modern western societies) that fails to foster societal cohesion is a functionally bad solidaristic mechanism.

Arto Laitinen's article *Solidarity and 'Us' in Three Contexts: Human, Societal, Political* distinguishes between three different forms of solidarity and studies their differences and similarities. They all involve an idea of 'us', a group in which one belongs and with which one identifies, and which defines the scope of solidarity. The common core of the three different forms of solidarity, namely moral, political, and social solidarity, is that solidary action is acting for the sake of this group, 'for our good', and in various ways it is constitutive of human flourishing. Laitinen considers motivations to solidary action and discusses various interdependences between the good of the group and the goods of the individual members.

The three forms of solidarity are differentiated on the basis of the coverage of who that 'us' consists of: in universal moral solidarity, or human solidarity, the 'us' refers to the whole human kind, or the moral community. Moral solidarity then consists in responsiveness to the moral demands, and, according to Laitinen, moral solidarity is primary to the other forms of solidarity in the sense that it limits other forms of solidarity (acceptable social or political formations must conform to the demands of morality) and it may provide positive aims

for political solidarity (like struggle against injustices and wrongs). In political solidarity, the reference of 'us' may be less clear, because (as in the case of Scholz's article) it may consist of those who are committed to promoting social change, and, as Laitinen notes, it is not even necessary that all the activists are beneficiaries themselves. Laitinen goes further by discussing different types of legitimate political struggles in which political solidarity can manifest.

Finally, social or societal solidarity is characterised by a fixed group of 'us', consisting of a limited social group or collective, such as a particular community, society, or nation. Social solidarity is a relationship between the members that is characterised by mutual dependence and mutual benefit. Each member contributes to the group and benefits from the contributions of others, and each member is also both a judge and subject of the laws and policies that apply to all. Laitinen elaborates upon the dynamics of social solidarity and considers ways in which some members may fail to contribute and participate in the social ties and relationships, and suggests ways to avoid such situations that may weaken social solidarity.

Marco di Feo's paper *Che cosa sono i gruppi sociali? Risposta ontologico-metafisica nella prospettiva dell'intero e delle parti* tackles the question of social groups from a metaphysical perspective. The paper starts from the assumption that the metaphysical question about groups implies the ontological one. It aims at understanding unity as a key feature of groups by demonstrating the irreducibility of groups to their individual members. The analysis is led by a phenomenological perspective which moves from the observation of social reality. Thus, it refers to different kinds of groups, namely pile, aggregate, and whole as three distinct ways to name groups. Once listed several features necessary to define them, the author explores the way in which an individual can enter into a group, in particular addressing key issues such as collective intentionality and responsibility, as well as collective freedom. Indeed, according to the author a proper social unity (and consequently a proper group) is possible only if it exhibits a normative component. The latter follows precisely from collective agency and intentionality which bind together people being members of a proper group.

Moreover, as far as groups are irreducible wholes, they show two peculiar features: typological identity and emergence. Dealing with the first, the author states that groups are tokens of specific types and, as a consequence, they are unique and irreplaceable, showing their *haecceitas*. Concerning emergence, it can be used to explain features owned by groups as distinct from their members, and can be realised by new properties as well as new causal powers. As a consequence, emergence is here conceived as both qualitative and causal emergence.

Valeria Martino's article *Attaching Value to Membership: A Criterion?* studies the existing categorisations of groups. According to the author, sociological analyses focus on externally observable features such as the group size and the shared features of the members, thereby allowing empirical research like comparative studies on families in different cultures. On the other hand, in philosophy, especially social ontology, groups are typically divided into two classes that can be called aggregates

and collectives, where the former can be defined in terms of shared properties of members, e.g. people with blue eyes or people walking on the streets of Manhattan at a particular time. The latter can be defined in terms of their relations and interactions (e.g. as in Margaret Gilbert's (2013) theory which emphasises joint commitments between group members) that allow the group to act together by coordinating their actions toward shared goals.

Martino notes that the sociological analyses that are based on externally observable features fails to take into account the group members' internal perspective and hence makes it difficult to integrate a phenomenological perspective that would allow for a more careful analysis of collective action and of the effects that group membership has on us: every one of us belongs to several different groups and we attach different importance to the membership of these groups and the effect they have on our actions varies accordingly. However, the philosophical distinction that is based on whether the group members have formed a joint commitment is not sufficiently fine-grained either: it is not only the existence of a joint commitment that affects our actions, but also the externally attributed group membership, of which we are aware, is something we may take into account in choosing our actions. I may belong, e.g., to a social class or an ethnic group that is recognised both by group members and outsiders, even if that class or group is not organised in any way and there is no joint commitment that would bind our actions, and still the expectations and actions of the others may shape my own actions in various ways, depending on how much importance I give to belonging to the group and to the reactions of others. Hence, Martino suggests a category of a peer group as something in between of aggregates and collectives, and illustrates the usefulness of that category in analysis of collective actions by examples.

Raul Hakli's article *Solidarity and We-Reasoning* studies the concept of solidarity by examining what kind of patterns of practical reasoning could lead to actions that would be classified as solidary. Hakli argues that such investigation suggests that solidarity arises via we-reasoning in which the targets of solidary action are seen as group members, as part of a 'we'. This does not necessarily mean that they would be members of a pre-existing social group, but it means that the agent must see them as similar in certain respect, such as sharing an aim or interest, or being in a similar situation as oneself. This distinguishes solidarity from other related concepts like charity and morality that do not presuppose such group membership or sharedness of interests. Solidary action can even be contradictory to moral action, and there can be strong solidarity, e.g., among the members of mafia families even though their aims might be criminal and immoral. In spite of this, solidarity is often seen as something good and recommended, and Hakli suggests that this may be explained by the close relation of solidarity to we-reasoning and team reasoning which has certain normative appeal: Unlike typical forms of practical reasoning that aim to satisfy the desires or goals of the individual agent, they aim at the good of a group.

Sara Rachel Chant's article *Solidarity and Theories of Collective Action* studies the connections between the concept of solidarity and philosophical theories of collective action. She notes that the concept of solidarity is important for the political sense of collective action but the concept is rarely employed in philosophical analyses of collective action. Chant is interested in finding out why this is the case and she also suggests a way in which solidarity could play a role in these accounts. She analyses the methodological principles of analytic theories of collective action and notes that these principles have prevented the theorists from seeing the importance of solidarity to collective action. The principles she mentions are (1) granularity, by which she means that the theories don't analyse the broad concept of collective action but only special cases in which questions of solidarity might not rise, (2) strong epistemic requirements, by which she means that they typically impose requirements like common knowledge that are typically missing from large political movements that might be characterised as solidary, and (3) the individual action model, by which she means that the theories of collective action are built based on an analogy with accounts of action of a single individual agent, where the concept of solidarity plays no role.

Chant notes that of the theorists of collective action, Raimo Tuomela is an exception in that he has considered solidarity and built an account of it (Tuomela 2013), but even he doesn't give the concept a role in his account of collective action. Chant then characterises solidarity as action that incurs costs to the actor but may not incur benefits, and that takes place among individuals who are similar in certain respects. She gives two examples of solidary action, one in which an individual is motivated to help another person who is in a similar situation as herself, and another in which a collection of people, namely workers at a factory, coordinate their actions by walking off their jobs at a specific time as a protest against poor working conditions, thereby risking their jobs for the recognised shared interest with others. The latter case exemplifies collective action as analysed in the collective action literature, however, a slight variation of it does not, as Chant notes: if the protest takes place spontaneously as a reaction to an event like a dramatic safety violation witnessed by the workers, it is excluded by most of the theories that emphasise prior planning and strong epistemic conditions. Chant argues that there is no good reason to exclude spontaneous collective actions *a priori*, and the theories of collective action should be amended to take such cases into account: the main difference to traditionally analysed cases is that in them the coordination of individual action is a result of previous planning and information sharing, whereas in the case of spontaneous solidary collective action coordination comes about by a shared perception of commonality of interest and shared willingness to incur a cost that make particular actions salient.

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