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Private Solidarity

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Abstract It's natural to think of acts of solidarity as being public acts that aim at good outcomes, particularly at social change. I argue that not all acts of solidarity fit this mold - acts of what I call 'private solidarity' are not public and do not aim at producing social change. After describing paradigmatic cases of private solidarity, I defend an account of why such acts are themselves morally virtuous and what role they can have in moral development.

Keywords Solidarity · Virtue · Virtuous · Private · Moral development · Simone Weil

Solidarity is, at its heart, about unity with others. In a context of discrimination, a member of the privileged group may, among other things, give up a benefit denied to others in solidarity with those who are oppressed ("If they can't get married, I won't either!"). It is natural to think of acts of solidarity as being both public and aimed at broad, social change. I will argue that there are ways of acting in solidarity with others that are morally virtuous, but do not fit this mold.

Paradigmatic acts of solidarity are public: We protest, strike, and boycott in solidarity with others. These acts are public in that they are *expressive* acts, acts performed for others. We take to the streets to raise awareness and let others know about the suffering that troubles us. It is central to the aim of public actions that others see (or at least hear about) them.

Acts of solidarity, then, are often taken to be valuable as a means to bringing about social change. Raising awareness, after all, is never *simply* about awareness – we want people to be aware of a harmful or unjust situation so that the situation will change for the better. The importance of acts of solidarity, then, can seem to be that they play a role in ending (or lessening) the hardships people face.

I do not wish to deny this description of solidarity and its value. Instead, I wish to highlight acts of solidarity that do not fit the paradigmatic description just offered – acts that involve unity with others, but are neither public nor aimed at social change. These acts of what I will

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call 'private solidarity' reflect well on one's moral character and so suggest that *all* acts of solidarity can be morally virtuous independently of their public character or social benefits.

1 Private Solidarity

During the First World War, at the age of five or six, Simone Weil gave up eating sugar. She did so in solidarity with French soldiers after learning that sugar had become unavailable to them. This was not to be the last of Simone's solidarity – during the Second World War, she is said to have reduced her own food intake to match a soldier's ration. But for now, I'd like to focus on this early act of giving up sugar.

This story is striking for a number of reasons. Perhaps most obviously, Simone's actions seem to reflect well on her moral character – such thoughts and actions display a remarkable moral sensitivity for anyone, let alone for someone so young. Her decision (and commitment) to recognizing and sharing in the suffering of others, especially others who are unknown to her and far away, is part of what has led many to see her as a particularly admirable person.

It is natural to describe what young Simone did as an act of solidarity; it is in fact explicitly described in this way by biographers.[1] Her actions do fit a general description of solidarity: She deliberately shares a hardship with others in a way that unites her with them in an important, though perhaps oblique, way. Her actions, however, lack some of the features of paradigmatic acts of solidarity. They are not public in the way that strikes and protests are. We can well imagine that she does not aim to start a movement to get sugar to the soldiers, to raise awareness of their plight, or to publicly display either a political view or a connection with the soldiers.[2]

Whether or not the flesh and blood Simone Weil had these aims is not essential – We can imagine a precocious, young French girl who simply does not want to have sugar if the soldiers cannot have any.[3] We can also imagine that she does not announce or flaunt her ascetic choice, but nevertheless privately shares in a small part of the hardship the soldiers undergo.

Simone's solidarity being private does not mean it is not social at all. Solidarity, of course, must involve others: We are in solidarity *with others* and develop a one-way fellowship with them. Being private simply means the act is not performed for others and does not aim to change the social world. Simone does not give up sugar to express something to others or so that others will see her and react in certain ways. This is consistent with private acts being directed towards others and being a response to conditions in the social world.[4]

[1] See Gray (2001, 8) and Yourgrau (2011, 114).

[2] The case may veer into fiction here. Though some accounts describe young Simone's solidarity this way, others suggest external aims. For example, Mario von der Ruhr says, "… she made a point of giving up all her sugar and chocolate, so that these could be sent to needy soldiers on the front." (2006, 5). A similar description can also be found in Perrin and Thibon (2003, 47). Such aims are not mentioned in other descriptions so it is difficult to tell what Simone's aims were. What is important for my purposes is that such actions *would* still reflect well on her *even if* she lacked such aims.

[3] Of course, in the real case they are not just *any* soldiers but those fighting for a shared country. (After all, Simone did not give up sugar in solidarity with *German* soldiers or even *all* soldiers). We can, however, imagine a similar case where the connection is not one of nationality but a deeper, human connection.

[4] I thank Chelsea Rosenthal for helpful discussion on this point.

And yet, a common way in which solidarity is taken to be morally valuable is that it helps to bring about good social results.[5] A natural way to explain why acts of solidarity are morally relevant is by appeal to their effects – acting in solidarity with the oppressed, in general, helps to improve their situation. However, this does not seem to be the case with Simone. Her giving up sugar did not result in the kind of good outcomes often associated with public solidarity: It did not start a movement or spurn public discussion about the plight of soldiers. It does not even *aim* at producing such effects. (Of course, the fact that this story continues to be told is a social effect, but such acts of solidary would reflect well on Simone's moral character *even if* people did not repeat the story).

This can be described in more general consequentialist terms. Her solidarity, for example, did not increase utility; her not eating sugar did not provide the soldiers at the front with any extra sugar. If anything, it *decreased* utility by adding to the number of people whose lives lacked a small but important source of sweetness. If we think of virtues as traits that tend towards good effects, or at least think of tending towards good effects as a necessary condition, we will be at a loss to explain why Simone's private sacrifice strikes us as virtuous.[6]

Acts of private solidarity are often not easily captured in the language of obligation.[7] Simone was not under any *obligation* to give up sugar. In general, citizens are not under any obligation to share in many of the hardships of soldiers – though soldiers are often cold, homesick, and in danger, morality does not require that *all* citizens leave their families, sleep outside, and put themselves in danger. Even if citizens are obligated to share in these burdens in some ways, it would be excessive to require such things of a 6 year-old child, especially when such burdens are easily avoidable and do not reduce any harms. Her solidarity is naturally described as going "above and beyond" the sort of support that was required of her. (Though it is likely that *Simone herself* did not feel this way about her solidarity).

Private solidarity, then, involves unity with others in a way that is not a public expression or display and does not primarily aim to produce broad social or political change. It is unlike a protest or demonstration in that it does not aim at raising public awareness and is not performed in order to express something to a larger audience. The version of young Simone Weil's giving up sugar I have described is an example of this type of solidarity, but there are others. Here are two such cases:

> **Raj:** Raj and Sangita are recently married and Sangita is pregnant with their first child. In order to support his family, Raj has taken a more lucrative job in a far-away country. Since money is tight and Raj has a demanding work schedule, they hardly ever have a chance to communicate during this period. Nevertheless, Raj has chosen to give up alcohol and caffeine in solidarity with his pregnant wife who must do without on doctor's orders. He does not announce this to his co-workers or even to Sangita, but simply decides that if she cannot enjoy such things, he will not either.
>
> **Connie:** In Nepal, since there is not enough electricity to meet demand, there is a policy of rolling blackouts known locally as "load shedding". In the winter, these blackouts commonly total 14 or 15 hours per day. Connie is an American student living in Nepal on a scholarship. Because of her finances, Connie could afford a power inverter or generator

[5] Cureton (2012), for example, takes solidarity to be valuable in relation to the success of social groups and of democracy. Rippe calls solidarity "target-oriented" (1998, 357).

[6] See Driver (2001) for a well-developed theory defending virtues as states that tend to produce good effects.

[7] Derpmann (2009), for example, emphasizes the role of our obligations to particular groups in solidarity.

> to provide her with electricity during the blackouts. She decides, however, not to buy one of these devices in solidarity with her neighbors. She thinks to herself, "If all my neighbors sometimes lack electricity, so will I." Connie doesn't flaunt this decision. She does not often talk about it – she simply made up her mind on the subject and goes about her daily life.

Raj and Connie's acts of solidarity are not public – they are not staged for others to see. Others may find out, but the actions are not intended as a public display. In fact, Raj and Connie prefer to keep such acts to themselves. We can suppose that even Sangita is unaware that Raj has given up coffee and alcohol in solidarity with her (perhaps he has simply been too overworked to tell her or perhaps he thinks it would make her feel anxious or guilty). Similarly, we can imagine that Connie's neighbors simply assume that as an American student, she has purchased a power inverter so the topic never comes up in conversation; Connie need not *hide* the fact that she has chosen not to buy one in solidarity with them, but it simply never comes up.

These acts of solidarity also don't produce beneficial outcomes, personal or social. Raj not drinking coffee doesn't make Sangita able to drink it. And he doesn't aim to create a social movement of pregnancy solidarity (such a movement, even if successful wouldn't change the biological facts anyway). It might have some future benefit to their relationship, even if Sangita never finds out about Raj's solidarity. However, the actions seem to reflect well on Raj even if Sangita were to die before they could be reunited (and even if Raj *knew* that this would happen).

Similarly, Connie's own lack of electricity does not provide any extra electricity for others in her neighborhood. Her actions do not contribute to a social movement for electricity reform. She might explicitly *lack* such aims; say, if the terms of her scholarship bar her from any overtly public political action. Like Simone, Raj and Connie act in ways that connect them to others via sharing in their hardships, even though such acts are done privately and without aiming at social or political outcomes.

Though my examples have focused on sharing in the hardships of others, acts of private solidarity need not be a hardship for those that perform them. Just as unity with another individual involves sharing in both their joys and sorrows, solidarity with others, both public and private, can involve sharing in both their setbacks and their triumphs. We might publicly protest unjust working conditions in solidarity with those affected, but we can also celebrate in solidarity with them when their conditions improve. One might even enjoy protesting and fighting to help others get what they deserve.

The same can be true of private acts of solidarity. A sports fan watching an important game alone in her house might wear a replica of the team's jersey in solidarity with them.[8] Or in a more morally charged case, someone under a repressive government might privately celebrate upon learning that those in another repressive government have obtained new freedoms, say by having a drink in their honor. This person may well enjoy the private, celebratory drink and the sports fan may enjoy wearing her jersey on game day. These too can be understood as cases of private solidarity: They involve a unity with others, but are not publicly performed and do not aim at social change.

[8] I thank an anonymous reviewer for *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* both for raising this issue and for suggesting this example.

Even Raj's private solidarity, which involves sharing in a hardship, may be enjoyable *overall*. "Sure I hate to give up my daily cappuccino," he might say to himself, "but I really enjoy feeling closer to Sangita in this small way." This overall enjoyment is compatible with private solidarity, but is not essential to it. And, as we'll see, the value of private solidarity can be especially puzzling when it is *not* enjoyable overall.

2 What's So Virtuous About It?

If the private solidarity of Simone, Raj, and Connie really does reflect well on their moral character, it can be puzzling why. After all, they don't act in ways that make anybody else better off and, in many cases, make *themselves* worse off. They don't raise public awareness or contribute to a political movement. So, what is so good about these acts of private solidarity that makes them reflect well on the moral character of those that engage in them? In what follows, I will provide an answer to this question.

The key to understanding what is virtuous about acts of private solidarity is seeing that they are ways of *manifesting* concern for others and also of *developing* such concern. Let's start with the former. Caring about other people, taking their rights and well-being to be important, is at the heart of being a morally good person. An essential part of what makes a virtuous person virtuous is that other people *matter* to her; she *cares* about them. Private solidarity is one way that this caring can manifest.

As we have seen, caring about another person *can* often manifest in ways that involve foregoing a benefit or accepting a burden. You delay seeing a film you want to see until you can see it with a good friend or stay up when your significant other must pull an all-nighter to meet a critical deadline. In these cases, you share in a burden with someone because you care about them. Again, acts like these are not *obligated*; you don't *owe* it to your significant other to stay up with them. And failing to do such things doesn't always mean that you *don't* care about them – perhaps you're simply physically exhausted. But since these actions *can* manifest concern for others, they *can* reflect well on those who perform them.

This concern can have a personal character, as when you stay up in solidarity with your significant other or as when Raj gives up coffee. It can also have a less personal character. Connie's actions manifest concern for everyone in her neighborhood; Simone's actions manifested a concern for all of the French soldiers. Unless you think all morally relevant concerns are *always* impersonal, both types of concern will be relevant to virtuous private solidarity.

As with *all* solidarity, motives matter. Someone's attendance at a protest doesn't reflect well on their political engagement if they attend only because of their romantic interest in the protest organizer. Raj's solidarity is not virtuous, it doesn't show good character, if he simply wants to save money or if he plans to use his lack of coffee for later emotional barter with his wife. Acts of solidarity, both public and private, reflect well on character because they manifest our concern for others, as in cases where we give up a certain benefit if it is denied to others *because* we care about them. This commitment results in, even in just a very small way, being "in it together" with them (more on the relevance and dangers of this smallness later).

Why not think that this concern or commitment to others is only valuable because it has a general connection to good outcomes? After all, what is so good about the, often genuine, concern expressed when hundreds of thousands of Internet users click on a link "in solidarity"

with those who experience injustice, but do nothing to change the situation in real life? I do *not* wish to deny that concern for others is often valuable because of its role in helping to reduce suffering and injustice. I do, however, wish to claim that this is not the *only* way that such concern is valuable.

Failure to at least attempt to help alleviate suffering usually betrays a lack of true concern. Genuinely caring for others typically involves, among other things, *actually trying* to help them when they are in need. When an allegedly "concerned" friend does not come to help you when your car has broken down or when you are desperate for a ride to the airport, even though they could very easily do so, isn't really all that concerned about you. Similarly, the concern expressed by an Internet user clicking a "thumbs up" button or sharing a link to a story about injustice is not that deep if they are also in a position to say, donate their money or time to actually help those who are suffering and they do not. In most cases, a lack of action betrays a lack of concern.

This is not to say that clicking a link to show support for a fight against injustice counts for *nothing*. In a situation where one cannot do anything to help, clicking the link is certainly *better* than not clicking it. Imagine two astronauts browsing the Internet from a base on Mars. Both see a story about a fight against injustice. One cares very much about what has happened, is troubled that she can't do anything to help and vows to keep those who have suffered in her thoughts, while the other thinks to herself, "It's nothing to me – There's nothing to do so I don't care." Even though neither can do anything to help, the former person's concern seems to reflect well on her, especially compared to the callousness of the latter. If the former clicks a link in support because she cares about justice, she is more virtuous than the one who does not click because injustice doesn't matter to her.[9]

An important feature of the cases I've described is that the concerned *would* help if they could, but for various reasons they cannot. The local laws and terms of her scholarship may prevent Connie from participating publicly in any political displays, though if she could, she would. As a 5 year-old of limited means, Simone may be unable to do anything to improve the situation for soldiers on the front lines – though again, if she could, she would. Most clearly, Raj cannot do anything to change the biological facts of pregnancy and, being far away, is unable to do anything to ease the burdens that Sangita experiences. If he were with her, he would also take steps to actually ease her suffering. Even though their concern cannot manifest as attempts to change the unfortunate situation, it *can* manifest as private solidarity. When it does, such concern reflects well on them – it is a way their concern for others is realized in their lives.

It is important to keep in mind that just because private solidarity can be virtuous, *failing* to engage in private solidarity is not always morally vicious. Private solidarity is not a matter of obligation, but a way to embody one's concern for others. Acts of private solidarity are *one way* in which someone's concern can manifest, but is certainly not the only way. Simply knowing is that Raj has given up coffee and alcohol in solidarity with his wife and that his coworker in a similar situation has not, is insufficient to be sure that Raj cares about his wife more than his coworker. Perhaps Raj's coworker shows his concern in other ways – through

[9] Thanks to Neil Williams for suggesting this example to me. See also Hill (1979), which argues that the value of symbolic protest lies in disassociating oneself from evil.

writing a heartfelt poem or other private acts like prayer. Private solidarity is *a* way of showing concern, but it need not be the *only* way.[10]

An important aspect of private solidarity is that it directs our conscious attention in certain ways. Attention can be a way of valuing and appreciating things, even if it does not directly benefit its object. If someone is in prison, it can matter a great deal to him if his family regularly thinks about him. Not because their thoughts will produce any day-to-day benefits, but because their thoughts show that he is important to them. Many of us want our loved ones to remember us after we die; not because we think that *we* will get any benefit, but because it shows that we will have mattered to them. Similarly, private solidarity can be a way of directing our attention towards others and, in doing so, a way of valuing them.

So far, the cases of private solidarity involving shared hardships have all involved relatively trivial sufferings: Giving up minor pleasures like sugar or coffee and convenient, but non-essential luxuries like constant electricity. The sort of things that make you comfortable, but aren't really *that* important. For example, suppose one were inspired by Simone Weil and not only gave up sugar in solidarity with soldiers, but also slept outside on the ground, walked twenty miles a day in ill-fitting shoes, and encouraged lice infestations. Like Simone, one would not undergo these sufferings as a means of public protest, but would do so in private solidarity. Once the sufferings are made more serious, the private solidarity no longer seems quite so virtuous.[11]

If we understand the moral importance of private solidarity in the way I've argued, as manifesting moral concern, we can see why larger sufferings do not seem as virtuous. A morally good person cares about others, about their rights and their well-being. If you really care about others, taking on very large suffering will get in the way of your ability to change the situation or be in a position to do so in the future. This is something that will also matter to someone who truly cares about others. A virtuous person inspired by Simone Weil would still change her boots because being ravaged by trench foot will make one less able to help, not only soldiers in the future, but also those currently nearby. A person who doesn't eat sugar can do many things to help those around her that a person with trench foot cannot – and this fact will matter to someone who really does care about others.

A more sympathetic way to see those who do undertake great sufferings in this way is that they are morally virtuous, but lack the non-moral virtue of prudence. It's worth noting that Simone Weil's practice of reducing her intake of food in solidarity with those going hungry is commonly said to have contributed to her untimely death. This is often described in moralized terms: Mario von der Ruhr writes that she decided "… to renounce her own well-being *out of solidarity* with her starving fellow-countrymen." (2006, 59). Palle Yourgrau offers a similar description, "In gradually withdrawing nourishment from her body, *always in sympathy and solidarity with the poor*, Weil was using up her physical self in order to fulfill her life's work –

[10] One might wonder here what is so important about this particular way of manifesting concern for others. The answer, I think, is nothing; acts of private solidarity are virtuous by embodying one's concern for others but are not more virtuous than other ways of embodying such concern. Though I'll discuss ways in which private solidarity can help to develop and strengthen such concern, such benefits can also be cultivated in other ways. It is, I think, important in theorizing about virtues to allow space for different people to have different ways of being virtuous.

[11] Thanks to Julia Driver for raising this objection.

making her body fuel and substance of a spiritual fire" (2011, 115).[12] We may see her solidarity in this case *both* as manifesting an extraordinary moral concern *and* as highly impractical.[13]

3 Private Solidarity and Moral Development

So far, I've argued that private solidarity can be virtuous independently of its good effects. Cases of private solidarity that involve voluntarily taking on hardships in particular can seem like David Hume's infamous "monkish virtues" – that is, not *really* a virtuous at all. According to Hume, these vices masquerading as virtue "… neither advance a man's fortune in the world, nor render him a more valuable member of society; neither qualify him for the entertainment of company, nor increase his power of self-enjoyment."[14] One may well wonder, as Hume did, what's so virtuous about a trait that is neither useful nor agreeable?[15]

I've argued that private solidarity is virtuous because it is a manifestation of concern for others, even when such concern cannot produce beneficial outcomes. It can, however, *also* be part of a practice that cultivates and sustains such concern in various ways. It can be an important tool for developing various psychological habits relevant to virtue. It is not only a way of *being* virtuous, but can also be a way of *developing* virtue.

In general, it is easy for us to be overly concerned with our own situations. It is easy to get wrapped up in our own problems and successes, or on better days, in the problems and successes of those in our immediate social world. Acting in ways that direct our attention towards others can help expand our concern: Helping us to become less focused on our own hardships and more concerned about difficulties that others face. Helping us to come to be less thoroughly wrapped up in our own successes and more able to celebrate the achievements of others. Private solidarity is one way of doing this. It is easy for Connie to focus on the obstacles involves in revising her dissertation chapter yet again or for Raj to focus on dealing with the manager he doesn't get along with at work, but their private solidarity can help them to counterbalance this tendency, even if only in a small way.

Private solidarity helps them to do this by getting them to regularly reflect upon the hardships of other people. Every time Connie flips a light switch and nothing happens and every time Raj smells his co-worker's coffee, their attention is directed to the difficulties that *other people* face. Over time, this can help them to become less wrapped up in their own troubles – a very agreeable trait. Like tying a string between ourselves and others, this small connection can serve as a constant reminder that there is another person who also has

[12] Emphasis is mine in both cases.

[13] My comments here are in tension with Aristotelian views of virtue, which take practical rationality to be at the heart of the very concept of virtue (see *Nicomachean Ethics* II.7). I will not argue against this conception of virtue here, but merely point out that it is natural to think that a person's poor time-management or planning skills do not automatically make her *morally* worse. It is far from obvious that calling someone foolish or imprudent is *always* a moral criticism. Those sympathetic with Aristotle can read my comments as claiming that Simone Weil's solidarity can be virtuous, though she falls short of being *fully* virtuous, all things considered.

[14] *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* IX.1. For more on Hume's (1751/2003) monkish virtues, see Davie (1999).

[15] It is important to note here that being useful or agreeable is not *itself* enough to make a moral virtue. Being able to add large numbers in one's head or discuss the intricacies of classic novels or internal combustion engines can be very useful, and often are also very agreeable. Such things, however, do not make one a *morally* better person.

difficulties and hardships. Sharing in a small part of these hardships can serve as a reminder of this and improve our concern for others.

This improvement can take a variety of forms: It can sharpen, sustain, strengthen, and clarify our concern for others. It may sharpen our concern by directing an abstract or general concern towards real, particular people. Simone's private solidarity can help her to transform a nebulous, general concern for the well-being of others into a particular concern for French soldiers and their current lack of sugar. It helps her to apply a broad concern for everyone to a particular group and their particular hardships.

Acts of private solidarity can also help to sustain and strengthen our concern, making it more intense and more central in our lives. Raj's private solidarity helps prevent his concern for his wife's well-being from fading away; it can help to keep his concern for her a central part of his life. Connie would still care about her neighbors even if she always had power, but her private solidarity helps to strengthen this concern by reminding her of a small part of the many difficulties they must endure in their day-to-day lives. These reminders, over time, can help her to be more invested in them and care more deeply about them.

Private solidarity can also help to clarify our understanding of what others are going through, enabling us to better empathize with them. There are, to be sure, many many aspects of pregnancy that Raj can never experience. But by sharing in this small aspect of what Sangita is going through, he can at least empathize with a small part of Sangita's experience. His private solidarity can enable him to understand better than he could before some of the realities that Sangita faces. He can come to see many subtle aspects of being without coffee and alcohol: For example, the social aspects ("Friends always seem uneasy if I'm not drinking with them!"), the physical results ("I can't believe how long it took for the headaches to go away!"), and psychological obstacles ("I'm so used to having coffee in the morning, I wake up and don't know what to do with myself"). By providing a more detailed understanding of what she is going through, private solidarity can help Raj to better empathize with Sangita.[16]

To have some of these functions, private solidarity cannot be a one-off action but must be a practice through time. If private solidarity is to help *sustain* one's concern, for example, it must be a regular activity. A one-time avoidance of coffee and alcohol may reflect well on Raj if he genuinely does so out of concern for Sangita's hardship, but it will be unlikely to help him to cultivate different mental habits unless he engages in a sustained practice.[17] Other functions, however, can result from a one-off action: Such actions may have a transformative effect, creating a sudden and lasting change in one's concern and its place in their life. For some people, spending a single night sleeping on a park bench in winter would be enough to produce lasting and powerful concern for the homeless.

The sort of private solidarity that involves sharing in another's hardship is special in this respect. This kind of private solidarity does more than simply *remind* us of the suffering of others – it *connects* us with them in a more visceral way. It is not quite the same if Raj thinks to himself, while enjoying a fresh-made latte, "Poor Sangita! She can't have any delicious coffee like this!" It's not that there is anything wrong

[16] See Harvey (2007) for an insightful discussion of the relationship between solidarity and empathy.
[17] For more on how one-off actions can still be virtuous, see Hurka (2006).

with the thought; it's in fact a very nice one. But actually giving up the pleasure of the coffee (or electricity or sugar) not only connects us with others more deeply, but also does a better job of jogging us out of the habit of privileging our own hardships.[18] It does so by using this psychological tendency on itself. The fact that we feel our own hardships more acutely means that adopting an extra one out of concern for others can help us to feel more viscerally the hardships of others.

Like other practices, this type of private solidarity must be done in the right way and with the right motivation. And like other virtuous actions, it can be spoiled if one's attention is drawn not to the hardships of others, but to *one's own act of solidarity*. Giving up coffee doesn't help Raj to focus more on the well-being of Sangita if he thinks to himself, "What a great husband *I* am for doing this for my wife" every time he forgoes coffee. In this case what Raj attends to is not the difficulties Sangita faces, but *his own solidarity*. It is a case of what Bernard Williams called moral self-indulgence – acts where one's focus is not on the goodness of the action, but on *one's own performance of the good action*.[19] Though it may involve a genuinely admirable concern for Sangita and so be partially virtuous, it also betrays a less-than-admirable moral vanity. This latter concern can make private solidarity a less useful and more dangerous tool for moral development.

Aside from moral vanity, there are other dangers of private solidarity (and also some types of public solidarity). It can, for example, foster contempt or resentment towards those we are in solidarity with; giving up coffee and alcohol will not help in Raj's moral development if it leads him to resent Sangita and their unborn child. If he is unable to engage in private solidarity in a way that keeps the shared hardship in view, then it can prove to be toxic.

There is also a danger of private solidarity leading to an overblown sense of the level of understanding or depth of connection that one develops. Even though having experienced hunger can connect one to those going hungry and help one to take their hardships more seriously, skipping lunch does not allow one to understand what it is like to endure famine. Giving up coffee does not allow Raj to fully understand what it is like to be pregnant, nor did giving up sugar allow Simone to fully understand all of the hardships that French soldiers faced. Someone like Raj or Simone can be in danger of thinking that they understand the hardships of others better than they really do and of thinking that they have developed a stronger connection than they really have.

Keeping a sense of scale is key to avoiding these dangers. One needs to be careful to remember that one is sharing in a *very small part* of the hardships of others – engaging in the practice can be beneficial, but not if it trivializes real suffering. Having to give up coffee is difficult, but not as difficult as dealing with all of the changes and complications involved in pregnancy. Being without sugar is hard, but not nearly as hard as being cold, exhausted, scared, and shot at. Raj and Simone must keep this in mind to maintain a sense of perspective on their solidarity.

Despite the dangers, private solidarity can be beneficial as a practice that combats psychological tendencies that stand in the way of developing our concern for others. Our tendencies to

[18] One can draw a comparison here with the Catholic practice of giving things up for Lent – This practice is often explained as having the dual benefit of connecting the practitioner with God and of turning one away from worldly things and towards spiritual ones. In secular cases, a similar practice would connect one with others and turn one away from focusing on their own problems.

[19] See Williams (1981).

ignore the hardships and triumphs of others, or at least to take them less seriously than our own, can be lessened by private solidarity.

4 Conclusion

Understanding private solidarity as manifesting moral concern best explains why acts of private solidarity reflect well on the moral character of those who perform them and also highlights the way in which *all* acts of solidarity can be virtuous independently of their effects. Solidarity not only manifests our care and concern for others, but also helps to connect us to them even when they are unaware of our actions. As a practice that directs our conscious attention, private solidarity can be an important means of developing a less self-centered outlook.

This explanation is, of course, compatible with acts of solidarity being morally valuable in other ways too – for their effects or their role in social and political change. Such explanations, however, are not the whole story.

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