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Gadamer and Scholz on Solidarity: Disclosing, Avowing, and Performing Solidaristic Ties with Human and Natural Others

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ABSTRACT

This essay is concerned with Gadamer's reflections on solidarity and practice as found in several of his later writings. While Gadamer offers a robust explanation of practice, practical reason, and how both are operative in solidarities, his investigations of solidarity are in no way systematic. He does, however, distinguish two aspects of solidarity, viz. what one might call "natural solidarity" and "avowed solidarity". In contrast to natural solidarities, avowed solidarities require an intentional decision and commitment to act with others for a common cause. Since Gadamer's writings on solidarity are more sketches than detailed treatises, we will bring his work into dialogue with feminist and political philosopher Sally Scholz. Scholz has devoted significant research to the concept of political solidarity. Like Gadamer, Scholz too is concerned with how we engage natural others and how our present practices harm and exploit them. By bringing Scholz's and Gadamer's work into dialogue, we gain a better understanding of different facets and types of solidarity, how they interrelate and influence one other, and how their interrelations might help to effect positive social and political changes for all who inhabit this world.

1. Introduction

In several of Gadamer's late writings one finds references to his growing concern regarding the ecological crisis, which he often links to a problematic way of being-in-the-world-with-others. That is, when technical rationality reigns and natural others¹ are viewed as having little or no integrity in themselves, one tends to see others as mere resources for one's own use or pleasure. This suggests that a transformation in the way we see the natural world is needed so that we might forge and strengthen our solidarity relations with natural others. In one of his later writings, "The Diversity of Europe", Gadamer speaks poignantly to such concerns.

We may perhaps survive as humanity if we would be able to learn that we may not simply exploit our means of power and effective possibilities, but must learn to stop and respect the other as an other, whether it is nature or the grown cultures of peoples and nations,

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¹ Throughout my essay the term "natural others" functions as an inclusive category, which includes non-human animals, forests, ecosystems, etc. In short, it refers to all natural others (including humans). The term "earth others" refers to all natural, non-human others.

and if we would be able to learn to experience the other and the others, as the other of our self, in order to participate with the other.²

Gadamer is calling us to a different kind of (ethical) relationship both with human and earth others, one that requires an openness and respect for others in their alterity and which leads to greater understanding of them, ourselves, and our shared world. This means that we must take the time to listen and learn the diverse languages, rhythms, and ways of being of those with whom we share the planet. In so doing, we put our present ways of thinking and living into question and open ourselves to a potentially transformative encounter.

This essay is concerned with Gadamer's reflections on solidarity and practice as found in several of his later writings. While Gadamer offers a robust explanation of practice, practical reason, and how both are operative in solidarities, his thoughts on solidarity, while insightful, are in no way systematic and even at times ambiguous. He does, however, distinguish two aspects of solidarity, viz. what one might call "natural solidarity" and "avowed solidarity". In contrast to natural solidarities, avowed solidarities require an intentional decision and commitment to act with others for a common cause.³

Since Gadamer's writings on solidarity are more thematic sketches than a detailed treatise, we will bring his work into dialogue with feminist and political philosopher Sally Scholz. Scholz has devoted significant research to the concept of political solidarity, offering not only a thorough account of it, but also how it differs from social and civic solidarity. Like Gadamer, Scholz too is concerned with how we engage natural others and how our present practices harm and exploit them. By bringing Scholz's and Gadamer's work into dialogue, we gain a better understanding of different facets and types of solidarity, how they interrelate and influence one other, and how their interrelations might help to effect positive social and political changes for all who inhabit this world.

2. Solidarity and Tradition: Some Similarities and Differences

Some recent commentators have claimed that Gadamer's focus on solidarity in his post *Truth and Method* writings signals both a departure of sorts from his earlier emphasis on tradition and a decisive move toward more expressly ethical and political topics.⁴ Others—and here I include myself—see Gadamer's early and late work as having always contained an ethical and political dimension.⁵ In Gadamer's writings, traditions and solidarities overlap and share many similarities, yet they also differ in important ways. Given the constraints of our present inquiry, a detailed account of Gadamer's notion of tradition is not possible. However, the following brief sketch serves as a launching point to distinguish central aspects of tradition from solidarity.

First, whether narrow or comprehensive in expression, tradition has something like an identity-defining quality about it. That is, one who belongs and actively contributes to a particular tradition turns to the tradition for guidance, inspiration, education, and self-understanding. To be disconnected or exiled from one's tradition would result in a sense of self-loss, identity crisis, and even a feeling of not fulfilling one's calling or

² Gadamer, 'The Diversity of Europe', 235–36.

³ As will become clear later when we discuss Gadamer's description of solidarity as a "promise of a payment of friendship," the commitment to act for a common cause is intertwined with a commitment to promote the other's flourishing.

⁴ See, for example, Lawn, *Gadamer*, esp. chapter 7.

⁵ See, for example, Warnke, 'Solidarity and Tradition in Gadamer's Hermeneutics'.

purpose in life. Second, traditions involve shared practices and serious engagement with common “texts” (broadly construed). For example, a jazz musician participates in specific practices that we identify as representing a jazz rather than a classical musical tradition. Such practices include the ability to improvise and to perform complex, syncopated rhythms, the ability to imitate the styles of jazz masters, and the ability to perform a set of recognized jazz standards. These standards can be understood as common “texts” that one must study, internalize, and perform communally with other members of the tradition. Similarly, in the realm of religious traditions, a Protestant Christian understands him or herself as belonging to a specific expression of Christianity, one whose beliefs, central texts, and liturgical practices are in important ways defined over and against Roman Catholicism. While traditions are always open and allow for movement and play, their shared practices and common texts facilitate a staying power or permanence that endures for decades and even centuries. Some traditions (for example, religious traditions) are comprehensive in character and thus inform every aspect of one’s life—from whom one will marry (or whether one can or should marry) to how one is laid to rest. In short, they cultivate something like a worldview. Others (for example, jazz) are more specialized in focus; nonetheless, through participating in shared practices and undergoing some form of initiation into the group via ritual practices, training, and teaching, engaged members of traditions have a sense of belonging and contributing to something that transcends them. Traditions thus constitute and shape subjectivities in profound ways.

However—and this constitutes a third point—traditions are not fixed; as complex human artifacts, traditions are always in flux. New practices can emerge that call old ones into question and help to bring about needed change. Likewise, internal disagreements on various issues can and often do give rise to dialogue not only within a tradition, but also across traditions. In this way new life is infused into the tradition, allowing it to continue to grow and be equipped to deal with the pressing questions and concerns of its day. By way of its shared beliefs and practices, a tradition maintains its identity over time; however, its identity remains open and requires difference in order to stay vibrant and relevant. As Gadamer himself explains,

tradition means transmission [*Übertragung*] rather than conservation [*Konservierung*]. This transmission does not imply that we simply leave things unchanged [*unverändert*] and merely conserve them. It means learning how to grasp and express the past anew. It is in this sense that we can say that transmission [*Übertragung*] is equivalent to translation [*Übersetzung*].⁶

Last, not only are traditions internally diverse and open-ended, but also an individual may belong simultaneously to several traditions. For example, one may identify as an Anglican and a jazz musician, or a Muslim and an American military veteran. The degree to which one embraces a tradition and “lives out” its practices will impact how intensely one understands one’s identity in relation to that tradition. Much more could be said about Gadamer’s conception of tradition; however, given our primary focus on solidarity, we turn now to discuss it.

⁶ Gadamer, ‘The Relevance of the Beautiful’, 49; hereafter RB. Gadamer, ‘Die Aktualität des Schönen’, 139; hereafter, *GW8*.

As James Risser and Georgia Warnke observe, Gadamer's use of the term solidarity is at times ambiguous. For example, sometimes he speaks of "natural solidarity" [*natürlicher Solidarität*] without defining it or explaining how it might differ from other types of solidarity, such as political solidarity.⁷ Although he typically describes solidarity as something already present and merely in need of uncovering or rediscovering,⁸ he also speaks of developing and strengthening the shared beliefs that constitute some solidarities. For example, in his essay, "From Word to Concept", he asserts that "human solidarity must be the basic presupposition under which we can work together to develop, even if only slowly, a set of common convictions [*gemeinsame Überzeugungen*]" in order to address global problems such as the environmental crisis.⁹ In his 1999 essay, "Friendship and Solidarity", Gadamer asserts that "natural solidarity" is lacking in contemporary mass society and thus finds Jaspers's characterization of the early twentieth century as "the age of anonymous responsibility" [*das Zeitalter der anonymen Verantwortlichkeit*] even more fitting for the later twentieth century.¹⁰ In such an "age of anonymous responsibility", Gadamer states that "we have to ask ourselves what solidarity requires of us and what a so-called 'avowed' [*erklärte*] solidarity should be."¹¹ That solidarity requires something of us and consequently involves obligations to one another is a constant refrain in this essay. In the same paragraph as the previous quote, Gadamer writes: "We must recognize how in life our groupings of association lead to solidarity and, in the process, to obligations to one another."¹² Although Gadamer does not here elaborate what kinds of associations he has in mind, presumably we could include associations in which we find ourselves thrown such as the ties of nationality and familial ties, as well as associations that we enter voluntarily such as the bonds among coworkers or teammates. In fact, a few pages later, he gives the example of one's homeland as "a solidarity of a genuine kind [*echter Art*]", which "does not require that one first avow one's solidarity."¹³ By virtue of one's birth, one is categorized as Kenyan, Estonian, or Venezuelan. Of course, an individual may come to reject her association with her nation of origin or decide to become a citizen of another country, but the point still holds. Even though solidarities of this sort are based on shared characteristics, they do not imply unanimity of beliefs, experiences, or practices among their members. That one is Czech, female, or an alumnus of a particular university will have different meanings for those inside and outside the respective solidarities.

As is true with traditions, one can also belong to and participate in multiple solidarities simultaneously. Furthermore, the sociopolitical factors that contribute to solidaristic groups can, and do, have both positive and negative effects on its members and the group as a whole. For example, in a racialized or xenophobic context, members of certain ethnic solidarities whose categorization is based largely on phenotypic and other physical markers, often find themselves the targets of physical and psychological abuse. In fact, even those, who do not belong to the group, but are judged by the dominant

⁷ See, for example, Gadamer, 'Friendship and Solidarity', 3. Gadamer, 'Freundschaft und Solidarität [1999]', 56.

⁸ See, for example, Gadamer, *Reason in the Age of Science*, esp. 85–6.

⁹ Gadamer, 'From Word to Concept', 119.

¹⁰ Gadamer, 'Friendship and Solidarity', 3. ['Freundschaft und Solidarität', 56].

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 4. [*Ibid.*, 57].

¹² *Ibid.*, 5. [*Ibid.*, 57].

¹³ *Ibid.*, 7. [*Ibid.*, 60]. The full German text reads: "Aber daß Heimat und Herkunft eine Bindung darstellt, eine Art Gemeinsamkeit, eine Art Solidarität echter Art ist, da braucht es das nicht erst, daß man sich solidarisch erklärt" (*ibid.*).

society as sharing physical or symbolic markers with the group are subject to similar abuses.

Toward the end of the essay, Gadamer turns to a different but related aspect of solidarity, which he suggests is crucial for present and future communal well-being and often arises in times of crises and necessity. He calls this a solidarity of avowal or declaration. Here Gadamer provides a personal example of how solidarity was realized during the wartime bombing attacks. In such conditions, the anonymity of “rationalized mass existence” is unveiled and

[s]uddenly your neighbors, those who in the circumstances of the city were unknown strangers, were awoken to life. So need works, and in particular a need felt by all so that undreamed of possibilities of feelings of solidarity and acts of solidarity come about.¹⁴

Here solidarity has an event-like quality; it frequently comes forth in a time of crisis and transforms our relationships with others. It discloses to us what was there already, viz. our interdependence and responsibility to one another.¹⁵ As we are awakened to these socio-ethical bonds, we make a conscious decision and “avow” to engage in “acts of solidarity” in order to work toward a particular goal or set of objectives. Solidarity of this sort involves one’s commitment to act—and in many cases self-sacrificially—for a common goal.

To clarify, Gadamer draws upon the etymology of the term “solidarity”, which is linked to the Latin word *solidum*, meaning “whole” as in the expression “in solidum”, that is, “for the whole”. Gadamer then traces the Latin term to the German expression “der Sold” (payment) and emphasizes how it connotes genuineness, in contrast to being a counterfeit, as well as reliability and a firm commitment to fulfill what has been pledged. So too with the term “solidarity”, whose meaning expresses

a sterling and reliable inseparability, and to remain the same if, when in truth, the differences in the interests and the life situations let it be tempted to go its own way and to set back the well-being of the Other.¹⁶

To sum up: avowed solidarities are occasioned when a significant event—typically a crisis or substantial need—discloses our natural solidaristic relations and reveals our interdependence and ethical ties to one another. Here avowed solidarities have something in common with Gadamer’s notion of festival as it relates to his account of aesthetic experience. Unlike our daily work lives, where we experience one another as separate individuals performing various tasks related to our specific function or role in the organization, in a festive celebration we experience ourselves as united or interconnected in communal bonds.¹⁷ The public, trans-subjective event of the festival gathers us together and discloses the reality of our communality (*Gemeinsamkeit*) or, perhaps we could say, our (natural) solidarity.

Just as this revelatory-gathering has a mysterious and indefinable note to it, Gadamer, likewise acknowledges that solidarity cannot be exhaustively defined. As is the case with friendship, one cannot delineate precisely every aspect of solidarity because it is something one lives, experiences as an at-homeness, and finds oneself in the midst of. Moreover, like

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 10. [*Ibid.*, 63].

¹⁵ See also, Walhof, ‘Friendship, Otherness, and Gadamer’s Politics of Solidarity’, esp. pp. 571–75. Walhof argues that for Gadamer, solidarities are not created, as Rorty stresses, but rather are disclosed and brought to awareness.

¹⁶ Gadamer, ‘Friendship and Solidarity’, 11. [‘Freundschaft und Solidarität’, 63].

¹⁷ See, for example, Gadamer, RB, p. 40 [GW8, 130].

friendships, solidarities involve benefits and deprivations. In reference to the latter, Gadamer notes, “[w]hen one declares oneself as in solidarity, whether freely or under duress, in every case there lies a renunciation of one’s own interests and preferences.”¹⁸ Even in our highly fragmented, bureaucratized society, solidarities exist which, whether suppressed through sociopolitical hostilities or covered over as a result of our alienation and consequent withdrawal from political life, can be uncovered, forged, and expanded. In order for meaningful change to occur and thus for solidarity to bear fruit, it must be owned and actively cultivated. Gadamer also refers to “avowed” solidarity as “authentic” solidarity. For example, he states that “[a]uthentic solidarity [*Echte Solidarität*] must be conscious [*muß bewußt werden*], only then does it work [*gelingt*].”¹⁹ Then a few lines later he adds: “It is necessary to make clear that real solidarity [*echte Solidarität*] depends on the individuals who have avowed themselves to it and stood up for it.”²⁰ Again, Gadamer’s account of avowed, authentic solidarity shares interesting similarities with his reflections on the dynamic, performative, and participatory ontology of artworks. That is, just as the artwork requires the active engagement of spectators or auditors in order to further its life—or increase its being, as Gadamer puts it—so too, authentic solidarity requires ongoing active engagement. Hence, in order to remain vibrant, solidarities must be continually performed and enacted over the course of time. But if this is the case, then just as artworks and texts are co-created when performed and interpreted, so too are solidarities continually co-created anew over time and not merely disclosed. Authentic (living) solidarities, like artworks, die unless they are performed afresh; the claims that both make on those attentive to their address demand a changed life, which is always a life lived in relation to others.

Since Gadamer’s analysis of friendship is a prominent theme in his works and appears frequently as a topic in his later writings, it will be helpful to discuss it further in order to see how it overlaps and differs from solidarity. Just as there are different kinds of solidarities, so too there are different types of friendships; yet, the two share significant commonalities and are in certain instances nearly indiscernible. For example, civic friendships and business friendships seem to be more or less equivalent to the natural solidarities discussed earlier. In both solidarities and friendships, we find with-one-another and for-one-another aspects in varying degrees of intensity, commitment, and maturity. Following Aristotle, Gadamer highlights a friendship of *arête* or virtue, where one experiences a deep connection and at-homeness that exceeds other associations. Regarding this “true friendship”, Gadamer emphasizes two points. First, there is a mutual embrace of the otherness of the other and a giving “to one another our being as Other”.²¹ The friends no doubt share important communal goals, personal aspirations, moral beliefs, and other interests. In this sense, “one recognizes oneself in others and the other recognizes itself in us.”²² However, friends of the “highest sort” are not simply mirror images of one another. As we saw with solidarity, unanimity is not the basis of friendship, not even in a friendship of virtue. True friends possess a deep sense of their need for another, who

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 11. [*Ibid.*, 63–4].

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 11. [*Ibid.*, 64]. However, as noted earlier, Gadamer is not always consistent in his terminology. For example, he also refers to natural solidarities as genuine, true, and authentic solidarities [*Echt Solidaritäten*].

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 11. [*Ibid.*, 64].

²¹ *Ibid.*, 9. [*Ibid.*, 62].

²² *Ibid.*, 9. [*Ibid.*, 62].

both pursues a life of excellence and is aware of his or her own inadequacies, failings, and self-deceptions. Both possess self-knowledge of their limitations and need for others while at the same time recognizing that they will repeatedly fail as a friend to the other and themselves. “And so the true, deep meaning of such self-knowledge is precisely that one never *fully* recognizes [*ganz erkennt*] the biases of one’s own self-love even when one believes oneself to be a correct friend of the Other.”²³ Given Gadamer’s statement that complete virtue or excellence is not attainable, the “friendship with oneself” that he claims makes possible all friendships and solidarities must be an “at-homeness” [*Zuhause*] that is on-the-way, always in process of working out the tensions of being human and being human-with-others.

If our account of friendship or being-at-home with ourselves is correct, then perhaps we can shed light on Gadamer’s closing remarks. As he concludes his essay, “Friendship and Solidarity”, he says the following:

Solidarity here means a promise of a payment of friendship [*eine Zusage im Rate der Freundschaft*], which is limited, like everything, as it calls on the complete dedication of our good will. Thus the tasks presented to us are to be just as much one with oneself [*mit sich selbst einig zu sein*] and to remain united to Others [*mit Anderen einig zu bleiben*]. There is no possible natural ability [*Naturkraft*] that is able to carry this out for us. It requires self-knowledge and grateful learning from models.²⁴

Drawing on the etymological insights noted earlier, it seems that avowed solidarity “as a promise of a payment of friendship” involves a commitment to and for others that presupposes and is maintained by an ongoing self-questioning and openness to learn from and be challenged by others. For such virtues not only constitute the core of philosophical hermeneutics and therefore any Gadamerian-inspired hermeneutical ethic, but they are also required for the ongoing work of being-at-home-with-others. Thus, friendship with oneself, others, and avowed solidarity are tasks—unfinished works—that must be intentionally enacted, actively pursued, and nurtured with love and practical wisdom. For solidarity to thrive, it must be continually performed. Like the ontology of the work of art, the being of (avowed) solidarity is in its (ongoing) performance.

Although there seem to be important differences between solidarities and traditions, we have also observed how they are similar and overlap. For example, it is difficult to imagine how a tradition would not involve solidaristic relations of some sort, relations that are crucial to the ongoing vitality of the tradition. Perhaps one could employ a music metaphor to describe the relation between solidarity and tradition. Tradition is like the melody of piece, which in important ways gives the piece its identity, structure, and trajectory. Whereas solidarity is like the harmony that animates the melody, creating sonic densities that hold the piece together. In this harmonic role, solidarities can mediate between multiple and even dissonant traditions. Solidarities of this sort are often awakened and forged in the midst of extreme suffering and oppression or when facing a far-reaching or even global crisis. For instance, those who have lived through the inhumane experience of imprisonment and torture in gulags have described how previous social and religious-based divisions were overcome in the common struggle to survive. The environmental

²³ *Ibid.*, 9. [*Ibid.*, 62]. I have slightly altered David Vessey’s translation by inserting the word “fully” to reflect the German text.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 12. [*Ibid.*, 64–5].

crisis—a crisis that affects all natural others—illustrates well both aspects of Gadamer’s account of solidarity. That is, given our dependence and interdependence on one another and the natural world, one could claim that a natural solidarity is already present and simply needs disclosing—preferably through education or some other positive encounter rather than a catastrophic crisis event. Such an awakening would then lead (at least some) to an intentional declaration or avowal of solidarity that, on the one hand, opposes practices that damage, exploit, and destroy natural others and, on the other, promotes practices that respect, sustain, and enrich our relations with natural and earth others.

3. Practice, Practical Reason, and Different Kinds of Precision

Gadamer, of course, has much to say about practice and how practice and solidarity interconnect. For instance, practices are carried out among those sharing certain solidarities, and solidarities are forged and strengthened through individual and collective practices.²⁵ Gadamer highlights this connection in his essay, “What is Practice? The Conditions of Social Reason,” where, once again Aristotelian resonances abound. As he explains, practice has both an individual and a communal focus: “Practice is conducting oneself and acting in solidarity.”²⁶ For Gadamer, following Aristotle, practices are animated by practical reason; they are intentional and require choosing or “deciding for something and against something else, and in doing this practical reflection is effective”.²⁷ In this process, an individual or a collective wills a certain goal or objective and deliberates upon what is required to accomplish it.

Regarding the communal dimensions of practice, Gadamer emphasizes how practice shapes the community just as the community shapes it. For example, in our daily lives we think and act in accord with communal norms and conventions that precede us and that are assumed to be the way things are and ought to be. Human societies, in Gadamer’s words, are not only “dominated by conventions”, but also “[i]n every human culture a series of things is taken for granted and lies fully beyond the explicit consciousness of anyone”.²⁸ Although practices are “concretely motivated” and shaped by communal norms, practices can also challenge norms and bring about needed change.

In contrast with mere technical rationality, which also involves deliberation and in many respects resembles what Aristotle calls “cleverness”, practical reason in the ethical and political sphere is concerned for the common good rather than mere profit, efficiency, and progress for progress’s sake. Even in the midst of an economically driven, atomized, and highly bureaucratic society, our common experiences and the practices they inspire can work to raise awareness of the limits of technical rationality. In this way, our communal practices and experiences play a role in awakening and strengthening (natural) solidarity relations. Once again, Gadamer turns to the ecological crisis. In reference to this crisis, he highlights how we are becoming more cognizant through scientific study of the need to maintain “equilibrium states” so that ecosystems will remain stable and healthy.²⁹ To illustrate, the development and implementation of

²⁵ Practices are also central to and in many ways constitutive of traditions.

²⁶ Gadamer, ‘What is Practice?’, 87.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 81.

²⁸ Gadamer, ‘What is Practice’, 82.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 85.

good practices in landscape ecology—practices that safeguard the local ecosystem, cultivate biodiversity, protect native vegetation, and include sites for community gardens or other public spaces—can facilitate both a greater awareness of the interdependence of our shared world and the need to make radical changes in our current practices. Although these insights and practices, as Gadamer asserts, have “not yet risen to being a leading model of our experience of the world,” nevertheless “what announces its presence here is more than a technical problem. The closed work place of the earth ultimately is the destiny of everyone.”³⁰

Gadamer’s critique of science should not be understood as a rejection of scientific knowledge. As the above quote on equilibrium states indicates, he does not simply dismiss scientific findings. However, his critique is focused on both the dangers of technical rationality and the colonizing tendencies of modern science, which invalidate truths that fail to conform to the methods of the natural sciences. Gadamer expresses concerns along these lines in his 1994 address, “From Word to Concept: The Task of Hermeneutics as Philosophy”. Here he offers a critical commentary on our technological and science-centered world: “There cannot be uncertainty anymore that our science-based civilization, with its unbelievable capacity to alter nature for our own use, life, and survival, has also caused a huge worldwide problem.”³¹ For Gadamer, the natural sciences have their mathematizing ways of being precise; yet the human sciences also exhibit ways of being precise that “do not consist in the application of rules or in the use of an apparatus, but rather in a grasp of what is right” or fitting in a particular context.³²

Gadamer then proceeds to elaborate two kinds of measuring. The first is the quantitative measuring operative in the realm of science, where one applies mathematics and makes things “available and controllable.” The second is the qualitative measuring that occurs in what we today call the humanities and the fine arts but is also characteristic of (good) ethical and political activity. This type of measuring consists in “finding what is appropriate,” such as finding the proper notes in a harmonic sequence or striking the right balance of discipline and flexibility in parenting.³³ Gadamer insists that both forms of measuring and knowing are important and that one should not be privileged over another. However, given the dominance and wide-ranging influence of science and technological rationality, he believes that we are faced with significant ethical and political tasks. “We must make justice our starting point and central concern, and in particular we must make right use of our knowledge and ability to do things.”³⁴ Summing up several of the major themes of his essay, Gadamer writes:

Environmental problems force themselves on us here. Nature, too, is a reality that one cannot protect solely by means of measuring and calculating. Rather, it is something with which and in which one must learn to live [. . .] It is essential, then, that we behave more appropriately. We all feel this in ourselves, [. . .], when we observe animals in their ways of life. We should hold them in respect in the same way that one holds in respect other human beings with their varied beliefs and ways of life.³⁵

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 84–5.

³¹ Gadamer, ‘From Word to Concept’, 110, 111.

³² *Ibid.*, 113.

³³ *Ibid.*, 114.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 117.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

Not only does Gadamer's hermeneutical approach call us to respect the otherness of texts and works of art so that they might challenge us and foster greater self-understanding, but it also calls us to respect natural others. To do so we must linger with them, allowing their otherness to address us so that we might respond and come to see them as others in their own right and others to whom we belong and owe the promise of friendship.

4. Distinguishing Political and Social Solidarity and Solidarities "With" and "On behalf of" Earth Others

As we have seen, Gadamer discusses two aspects of solidarity: natural and avowed solidarities. Natural solidarities do not *require* conscious recognition or commitment to act in concert for a common cause. In contrast, avowed solidarities are forged through commitment, decision, intentional collective practices, and giving of oneself for a specific cause or common set of objectives. Avowed solidarities require some occasion or event (or multiple events) to disclose the reality of one's already existing, natural solidaristic ties. Although Gadamer's discussions regarding the two kinds of solidarities are instructive, more specificity is needed in order to address the complexities of our shared social and political life and to show how different types of solidarities can work together in service of a common goal. Here one finds helpful resources from contemporary feminist studies devoted to environmental ethics and political philosophy.

In her essay, "Political Solidarity and the More-Than-Human World", Sally Scholz develops an account of political solidarity and explains how political solidarity differs from social and civic solidarity.³⁶ While Scholz's analyses complement Gadamer's reflections, her account makes more concrete the different solidarities operative among humans and the natural world. In addition, her work provides a way to address Gadamer's concerns about the ecological crisis by clarifying how, through strengthening social solidaristic ties with natural others we might form political solidarities on their behalf in order to oppose unjust practices that exploit them or hinder their flourishing.

Scholz defines political solidarity as "a moral relation that unites individuals acting on the basis of some form of commitment to challenge injustice, oppression, social vulnerability, or to otherwise struggle for liberation."³⁷ As this description suggests, political solidarities are oppositional in nature.³⁸ Unlike other solidaristic relations, political solidarities emerge as the result of a *critical* response to a particular injustice, which then concretizes in a commitment to act with others in political solidarity against that injustice and oppression. This commitment to collective action enacts or forges three moral relations. First, individuals are bound to one another as participants in an identifiable collective. (This relation is not unique to political solidarity but is common to social and civic solidarities.) Second, participants share a relation to a social justice goal that informs their collective ties. Third, a moral relation is formed between the members of a political solidarity and the larger community—i.e. those who choose not to participate

³⁶ For Scholz's discussion of civic solidarity, see Scholz, *Political Solidarity*. In broad strokes, civic solidarity "is found in the obligations of civil society to protect citizens against vulnerabilities through the provision of healthcare, welfare, and consumer and environmental protection" (ibid., 5).

³⁷ Scholz, 'Political Solidarity and The More-Than-Human World', 82.

³⁸ For a more detailed account of political solidarity, see Scholz, *Political Solidarity*, esp. chapters 2 and 3.

in the solidarity.³⁹ The moral relations that Scholz delineates leave room for significant leeway, or as Gadamer would say, play. She is not demanding that participants hold the same moral views about the particular social justice issue that unites them; rather, akin to Gadamer's notion of natural solidarity, she is highlighting our belongingness and interconnectedness to one another. In other words, we are always already caught up with and shaped by the other in complex relations of interdependence, responsibility, and mutual obligation. Political solidarities simply make those relations explicit.⁴⁰

Scholz's political solidarity is not equivalent to Gadamer's avowed solidarity; however, the two share certain family resemblances. For example, both views require active, committed participants and both acknowledge that participants have moral obligations to one another and often give self-sacrificially in a collective effort to advance a particular social or political cause. Whereas Gadamer emphasizes the role of practical reasoning (*phronesis*) in shaping individual and collective social, political, and ethical practices, Scholz highlights fostering "epistemic awareness." Here the difference seems to be more terminological than substantive, as her description of developing epistemic awareness presupposes the use of practical reasoning. That is, Scholz focuses specifically on how participants in political solidarity both strengthen group bonds and gain increased self-understanding through acquiring "epistemic awareness of the injustice or oppression to be targeted."⁴¹ Examples of increased epistemic awareness include becoming more aware of one's own participation—whether directly or indirectly—in oppressive practices or injustices or perhaps "an increased awareness of one's experience of oppression or injustice."⁴² One might obtain a heightened awareness through personal dialogue with the oppressed, reading and contemplating relevant literature and art, or spending time (and in some cases living) where the oppressed dwell. In short, epistemic awareness comes about through dialogical engagement with others. Here the goal is to listen to and learn from the (oppressed) other so that one might gain greater insights regarding structural injustice and one's own participation in oppressive practices and discourses.

An additional attractive feature of Scholz's model is its inclusiveness. Participants in political solidarity need not share the *same* understanding of oppression and its ramifications, nor must every member have experienced the oppression or injustice in view. Scholz's articulation of political solidarity is decidedly *not* identity-based but is rather based on a commitment to act for the sake of a shared social justice goal. Accordingly, her model invites a diverse membership. The increased awareness and understanding for which political solidarity labors—which is itself an ongoing task—is thus enriched and broadened by the unique and diverse perspectives of the individuals constituting the group. To summarize, what unites the group is a commitment to act for a particular social justice cause, not sameness of experience, understanding, and the like.

Here we turn to Scholz's elaboration of social solidarity. "Social solidarity describes the cohesion of a community",⁴³ where such cohesion or unity is based on shared characteristics among members. Such shared characteristics include those over which, at least

³⁹ Scholz, 'Political Solidarity', 82.

⁴⁰ On the role of difference and otherness in Gadamer's hermeneutics, see Schmidt, 'Respecting Others', 359–79 and Schmidt, 'Critique', 202–17.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

initially, an individual has no choice such as nationality and gender. Individuals simply find themselves in these relations or are socially identified by such groupings. Here specific moral relations are not the primary factors, which establish a group's identity as a particular social solidarity; however, the social ties and shared experiences among those in social solidarity can and often do facilitate moral bonds and obligations of varying strengths. Similar to Gadamer's natural solidarity, Scholz's social solidarity does not require a conscious decision or commitment to shared goals and objectives. In addition, Scholz distinguishes weak and strong social solidarities. Communities with close and intimate relational bonds will exhibit a strong solidarity and will be more likely to demonstrate an awareness of their moral obligations to fellow members by responding through concrete actions to their various needs. Communities with distant and superficial relational bonds will exhibit weak solidarities. Those connected in weak solidarities are less likely to act on behalf of one another's needs. To illustrate, solidarities tend to be strong among family members such that one member might be willing to suffer significant losses in order to help another family member. In contrast, solidarities are likely to be weak among a group of prospective students taking a campus tour.

This distinction between social and political solidarities plays a key role in Scholz's account. By differentiating between the two types of solidarities, Scholz can affirm, on the one hand, that humans, nonhuman animals, and earth others are connected through bonds of social solidarity of varying strengths. On the other hand, she can also affirm that humans united through political solidarity can labor on behalf of the natural world. Just as our social solidarities with human others can be weak or strong, so too our social solidarities with nonhuman and earth others. For example, some humans demonstrate exceptionally strong affective connections with nonhuman animals, forests, mountains, and ocean life. Others, in contrast, possess weak ties and continue to endorse practices that exploit and harm the environment and its multiple inhabitants.

Although some ecofeminists and other theorists have criticized Scholz's conception of political solidarity for not including earth others and nonhuman animals as participants, Scholz's position does not foreclose solidarity with the natural world.⁴⁴ However, she is adamant that "political solidarity is a relation among humans against an injustice that is human in origin."⁴⁵ While various communities might be morally motivated to help those suffering from a natural disaster, such solidaristic groupings do not constitute a *political* solidarity. A key component of *political* solidarity is that it "involves challenging the social and political structures that result in oppression or injustice. Nature can be violent and limiting, but it cannot be oppressive."⁴⁶ Given Scholz's taxonomy, humans cannot be united in political solidarity *with* the natural world; however, they *are* united in social solidarity of varying degrees of strength. The disagreement between her position and the views of other (eco)feminist theorists centers on whether or not natural, non-human others participate in political solidarity.⁴⁷ For Scholz, given that nonhuman animals and earth others are not able to make the commitment to act against unjust and oppressive social and

⁴⁴ See, for example, Mallory, 'Val Plumwood and Ecofeminist Political Solidarity', 3–21.

⁴⁵ Scholz, 'Political Solidarity', 84.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ For example, in Plumwood's book, *Environmental Culture*, she argues that humans and natural others act together in political solidarity. In Scholz's judgment, for Plumwood's claims regarding interspecies communicative dialogue and agency to work, she needs to provide "a more developed theory of political subjectivity for earth others" (Scholz, 'Political Solidarity', 94).

political structures, discourses, and practices in order to bring about the need change, it is not possible for us to act in political solidarity *with* them. Rather, humans labour in political solidarity *on their behalf*.

Here we should not overlook the crucial role of *social* solidaristic ties with the natural world. Ties of social solidarity can be strengthened through environmental education, adopting rescue pets, taking a contemplative retreat in the mountains, and countless other ways. If ties of social solidarity are strengthened and result in a greater awareness of one's interdependence, belongingness, and obligations to others—especially those who are oppressed—one is more likely to take concrete actions and perhaps even commit to collaborate with a particular political solidarity. For example, as one becomes more aware of the cruelties that animals suffer in factory farming and how such practices likewise harm the environment as well as human others, one may choose to eat less meat and dairy products, become a vegetarian or vegan and/or support and become an active member of a group committed to exposing and ending animal abuse. In short, social solidarity and the ethical obligations it fosters can and do contribute in crucial ways to forging and expanding political solidarities. Whereas nonhuman animals and earth others have no direct voice in political solidarity, they do “speak” to us in challenging and transformative ways as we actively nurture our ties of social solidarity.

Scholz's inclusive model of political solidarity both recognizes and embraces differences among its members and fosters coalitions across identity-based and other forms of social solidarities. Consequently, a political solidarity created around challenging and dismantling, for example, racist practices against African Americans could consist in not only committed African Americans, but also non-African Americans. Similarly, males could participate in political solidarity with females committed to opposing the oppression of women. Members of these solidarities may (or may not) have similar experiences, share social identities, and hold similar beliefs; however, the basis of unity is their shared commitment to act in political solidarity for a particular social justice cause. Given this description, one might characterize Scholz's account of political solidarity as animated by an openness to the other and an expectation that the other has something valuable to contribute to one's self-understanding and to the group as a whole. Her model is built upon what many commentators have identified as core hermeneutical virtues animating Gadamer's philosophy, viz. openness to the other and a recognition that otherness and difference are needed for ongoing self- and communal growth.⁴⁸ The art of listening to the other is a repeated theme in *Truth and Method* and resonates throughout Gadamer's writings. For example, in an oft-quoted section of *Truth and Method*, he writes: “anyone who listens is fundamentally open. Without such openness to one another there is no genuine human bond. Belonging together always also means being able to listen to one another.”⁴⁹ Our human finitude, not to mention our biases and self-deceptions, highlight our need for regular dialogical engagement with others. To be open to the other, then, involves a willingness to acknowledge that my insights, experiences, and knowledge claims are incomplete and partial and perhaps wrong. One might perhaps describe this openness to the

⁴⁸ See, for example, Risser, *Hermeneutics and the Voice of the Other*, Schmidt, ‘Respecting Others’, and Davey, *Unquiet Understanding*, esp. 161–70.

⁴⁹ Gadamer, *TM*, 361.

other as a form of humility or as Gadamer would say, a recognition of our finitude. Either way, the resonances that sound have strong ethical overtones.

Since Scholz's inclusive conception of political solidarity is not based on epistemic or empathetic requirements, shared identities, or even strong communal ties (though these are often present), diverse and even conflicting groups and individuals can join together for social justice projects.⁵⁰ For instance, a corporation whose leadership and practices demonstrate little or no empathy for environmental concerns may, due to outside pressures and a desire to boost its public image, contribute financially to an environmental advocacy group's project to help clean up toxic waste in local water supplies. In demonstrating through such actions a commitment to work toward a shared goal, the corporation acts in political solidarity with the group. However, once that project is completed, the solidarity may end, as the corporation's commitment has "run its course". Although these "thin" relational requirements may at first seem less than appealing, they create the conditions for greater impact and the accomplishment of a group's core objectives. As Scholz notes, to require that participants share "common intentions or motives [. . .] rather than merely common goals might actually keep the political solidarity from forming and creating the desired change."⁵¹ In short, the inclusiveness of political solidarity must be open to and permit diverse methods, motives, and philosophies. Of course, in such instances the exercise of practical reason is necessary, as methods or practices employed for its various projects must be in harmony with the group's social justice objectives. Furthermore, the moral relations that animate the group and are critical for its well-being require ongoing critique of the group's objectives, justifications, and practices. Political solidarities, like other forms of solidarities, are always in flux.

Here we encounter another similarity with Gadamer's hermeneutics, whose ethical dimensions by now should be evident. In a dialogical exchange with the other, one need not agree with every aspect of the other's position in order for understanding to occur. Instead, when one comes to understand the other one allows the other's difference to stand, to disclose itself. In so doing, one's own views and biases are challenged and open to change. Even when the dialogical engagement ceases and disagreements remain, by listening to the other and gaining a better grasp of her position one's own horizon is enriched. As Gadamer puts it in one of his late essays,

Understanding, whatever else it may mean, does not entail that one agrees with whatever or whomever one "understands." Such a meeting of the minds in understanding would be utopian. Understanding means that I am able to weigh and consider fairly *what the other person thinks!* It means that one recognizes that the other person could be right in what he or she says or actually wants to say.⁵²

Like the practice of political solidarity, the practice of hermeneutic engagement with others is potentially transformative. As Gadamer might put it, when we linger (*verweilen*)

⁵⁰ For example, although epistemic awareness of a particular injustice may and often does foster greater self-understanding and strengthen group bonds, it does not constitute the basis of political solidarity. One could have an acute epistemic awareness of how a particular ethnicity is oppressed and yet choose to do nothing to liberate the group. In such a case, one is not exercising *political* solidarity with a particular ethnic group, as one has not made a commitment to act with others to oppose the social injustices that continue to oppress them. Perhaps one could say that epistemic awareness is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for political solidarity.

⁵¹ Scholz, 'Political Solidarity', 95–6.

⁵² Gadamer, 'From Word to Concept', 117.

with texts, works of art, human and natural others, and are attentive to their rhythms, melodies, and unique ways of being, our way of being-in-the-world-with-others can be altered and even radically so. Scholz's model of political solidarity involves similar transformative possibilities. As she observes, "in addition to the self-transformation that compels someone to make a commitment, engagement in political solidarity is said to transform the participants in such a way that how they interact with the rest of the world is altered."⁵³

5. Conclusion

Both Gadamer and Scholz emphasize the importance of various forms of solidarities in our collective life together. In the first part of our essay, we examined Gadamer's reflections on solidarity and practice and gestured toward how traditions differ from (and yet overlap with) solidarities. In addition to his account of how natural solidarities are disclosed and can give rise to avowed solidarities, Gadamer offers an insightful analysis of practice, indicating how practices strengthen solidarities through their constructive and critical activities. However, practice is more than action, as it involves the use of practical reason (*phronesis*) to determine which objectives one will pursue and how to best realize them in various concrete contexts. We also drew attention to the hermeneutical virtues of openness and respect for the other, which are principal features of Gadamer's philosophy and are evident in both his early and late writings. The essential role of the other for transformative, dialogical engagement suggests that his hermeneutical philosophy exhibits a strong ethical core, which can be utilized to address contemporary socio-political issues.

In light of his interest in solidarity and his concern regarding the ecological crisis, we enacted a conversation with Gadamer and contemporary feminist and political philosopher, Sally Scholz. Scholz's work on political solidarity enriches Gadamer's reflections by providing an account of the moral relations operative in political solidarities and how political solidarities differ and yet are informed by social solidarities. Political solidarities are formed as a result of individuals committing to act against unjust and oppressive sociopolitical practices, discourses, and structures. They are not, like social solidarities, based on shared characteristics or identities. On Scholz's model, although we cannot collaborate in political solidarity *with* natural others, we can act in political solidarity *on their behalf*. Importantly, however, we do participate in social solidarity with natural others, and these solidarities can be quite strong and thus motivate individuals to act in political solidarity on their behalf. Scholz's inclusive model of political solidarity invites and permits a diverse community unified by its commitment to critically engage a particular social justice issue. By embracing a diverse membership in her notion of political solidarity, Scholz's approach resonates with Gadamer's (ethical) call for ongoing dialogical engagement predicated on an openness and willingness to listen to, learn from, and be challenged by others, which, as we have seen, includes natural others as well.⁵⁴

⁵³ Scholz, 'Political Solidarity', 96.

⁵⁴ I am grateful to Sally Scholz, Lawrence Schmidt, and Mike Vendsel for providing helpful feedback on an earlier version of this essay. I am likewise indebted to the participants at the recent NASPH conference for their patient lingering with my essay, and I especially thank Dan Tate, Nicholas Davey, and Jean Grondin for the post-conference dialogues and suggestions, which have no doubt have substantially improved the essay.

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