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Ana Romero-Iribas & Andrea Oelsner

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Social Justice, Social Friendship, and the Role of Trust as an Other-Oriented Emotion

Ana Romero-Iribas and Andrea Oelsner

This essay discusses the idea that trust is a pre-rational, other-oriented emotion and it is constitutive of friendship practices regardless of the type of friendship. In particular, what we call 'social friendship' refers to a distinctive set of loose but lasting and cohesive bonds both among citizens within society (horizontal dimension) and between them and the state (vertical dimension), triggering solidarity and altruism. The other-oriented emotion of trust underpinning these social bonds–social friendship–in turn, is necessary for social justice to be supported, legitimized, and furthermore demanded by society.

INTRODUCTION

Why do some societies have lesser tolerance for social inequality than others? Why are they more prepared to ensure that wealth and rights and access to power be distributed fairly? Why does solidarity prevail in them? In this exploratory essay we discuss the issue of social justice and its relationship with a particular type of friendship which we term 'social friendship'.

We argue that successful social justice is not only the result of policies and laws implemented by governments. Underpinning a just society lies, too, a distinctive set of loose but cohesive and lasting bonds both among citizens, and between citizens and the state. These bonds constitute a special relationship, a relationship of 'social friendship'. Although it may be difficult to define exactly what friendship is, and especially, what social friendship is, seen as a practice, friendship involves a particular way in which friends act toward each other. We argue that friendly relationships are informed by trust, a pre-rational other-oriented emotion. These kinds of emotions are bonding: they have the other as a constitutive part of the emotion, and they predispose individuals toward solidarity and

altruism. These behaviors, together with the recognition of the other, are crucial elements for the promotion of social justice.

The remainder of this essay is organized as follows. The next section discusses the concept of social justice and introduces its relationship with social friendship. Section 3 examines the issue of social friendship in more depth and argues that a pre-rational, other-oriented trusting disposition is at its basis and imbues social behavior. As a result, social friendship reflects the existence of a denser, more substantive social fabric in which solidaristic behavior comes naturally. In such contexts, policies of social inclusion and social justice are not only more widely accepted and legitimized, but also more readily demanded by society. The concluding section highlights the main arguments and some avenues for further research.

SOCIAL JUSTICE AND SOCIAL FRIENDSHIP

Social justice is a complex reality. It is promoted in various areas and by various actors; among them, national and international institutions (social, political, economic, etc.), civil society, and also individual people. The way in which it is understood has evolved throughout history and, as Murillo and Hernández-Castilla (2011, 12) explain,

> today three leading conceptions of social justice coexist: understood as distribution, as participation, and as recognition. The first is centred on the distribution of goods, material and cultural resources, and capabilities; the second on the recognition and cultural respect of each and every person, and on the existence of fair relationships within society; while the third concerns […] ensuring that people are capable of actively and equitably participating in society.

There is an important relationship, although not necessarily a direct one, between social justice and peace. As shown by the historical origin of the term "social justice," which first appears in the mid-nineteenth century via Taparelli (1949), it is awareness of economic injustice that gives rise to the search for social justice (Murillo and Hernández-Castilla 2011, 12). The problem with these injustices is that they can weaken and even break social cohesion, which requires—among other things—the perception that "society's goods are fairly distributed and that they (citizens) are being treated fairly" (Dragolov et al. 2016, 7). Now, the weakening of this cohesion is always a risk factor for social order and, therefore, for living in peaceful societies. When injustices occur in social life, discontent can arise among citizens, potentially leading to conflict and violence–either

among the citizens themselves, or against the state: "exclusion and discrimination not only violate human rights, but also cause resentment and animosity, and can provoke acts of violence" (SDG, number 16). For this reason, institutions such as the International Labor Organization incorporate the notion of universal justice as the foundation of peace (1919). In this same sense, it is also worth noting that the very notion of social justice has sometimes been understood in history as a peaceful, non-revolutionary way of carrying out social change; specifically, toward social democracy (Murillo and Hernández-Castilla 2011, 12).

Regardless of which conception of social justice we consider, it has to do with scarce resources, or resources with unequal access that have to be distributed fairly, since the "distribution of goods that are abundant does not require any criterion of justice" (Spaeman 2010, 19). Distributing scarce resources and access to rights pertains to power and not to civil society as such, because it is the state that sets the conditions for the distribution of these goods, as well as being behind the notion of justice that is applied. What society or the citizenry can do, and what in fact needs to be done for distributive social policies to be sustainable over time, is to give these policies enough political support, so they become not only legal but also politically legitimate.

However, the criteria of justice established by public authorities in order to carry out social justice are not always criteria of equality. For example, in situations of economic crisis, such as the one currently being experienced in Europe, there are certain economic sectors that are more favored by state aid than others. If this is so, it is because the differences are justified. In this way, power not only establishes how scarce goods are distributed, but must also justify the application of different criteria in a reasonable manner (Spaeman 2010, 19). Thus, Rawls (2001, 123) considers inequalities in the distribution of resources to be justified only if they benefit those who are most disadvantaged.

A just society, though, is built not only with policies and laws, but also with people who develop fair relationships. In other words, to create social justice, the state is not enough, for it is also necessary that people carry out the law's commands. Indeed, if a judge is unfair, then she will unfairly apply the just laws, and the structures will not be able to ensure the administration of social justice by themselves. Nor is social justice possible without people who carry out what the law itself cannot command; for instance, through supportive actions between citizens, such as those that many Europeans are currently performing for Ukrainians fleeing the war. The only way that relations between citizens can be fair or supportive is by recognizing and treating the other as an-other, that is, as

a person. After all, what all people have in common is that they are each unique.

On the other hand, the very notion of social justice centers upon recognizing the other in their otherness, that is, as an-other. Among today's dominant approaches to social justice, this is evident in relational or recognitional justice (Collins 1991; Fraser and Honneth 2003; Fraser 2008); but it is also the basis of justice understood as the distribution of goods, material resources (Rawls 1971), or capabilities (Nussbaum 2006; Sen 2009); and also of justice understood as participation (Young 1990; Miller 1999; Fraser and Honneth 2003; Fraser 2008).

Thus social justice demands, on the one hand, that differences be justified at the state level; and on the other hand, that at the level of personal relationships there is a willingness to recognize the other as an equal. Only a citizen and a state that are conscious that each person is unique can begin to think in terms of distributing differently among different people.

Legitimacy for social justice and distributive policies are easier to achieve in societies with a denser, thicker social fabric–in other words, in societies where social bonds between persons and groups, and between them and the state have developed to form a loose but cohesive set of shared and lasting relationships and affects. We call this type of social bond 'social friendship', and argue that it has a horizontal and a vertical dimension, as is discussed next. In social friendships, the recognition of the other as a different equal and an intersubjective predisposition toward trust are crucial. In turn, these elements are relevant for the development and promotion of social justice.

The use of the term friendship in politics has often been controversial. We think, though, that it is central to understanding the emergence of solidarity as a social behavior informed by diffuse trust in the political community and among its members.

To this end, it is useful to follow Graham M. Smith (2014, 43–46) as he makes the case for interpreting the state and the nation as instances of friendship. In particular, he argues that "both states and nations exist only insofar as people are prepared to subscribe to enacting them. What friendship adds to this picture is an understanding that these bonds are not just connective, but constitute a belonging or togetherness involving the sharing of values" (Smith 2014, 43–44).

For Smith, the state–which ultimately is based upon hierarchy and authority rather than simply on coercion–represents a form of vertical friendship ties held together at the top by its overhead connective framework. But the state as an instance of vertical friendship is more than just that. It not only creates a bond between the citizens and the authority of

the state but also makes the former part of the latter, "recognizing that they share in something with others" (Smith 2014, 44). In such societies, the implementation of policies of social justice becomes a matter for all, resulting in wider legitimation of, and support for such policies. As they 'share in' they are all 'part of' as well as 'responsible for'.

More relevant to our case is Smith's idea of the nation as an instance of horizontal friendship (Smith 2014, 45). These horizontal bonds rest

> on what is shared and constructed through social interaction; language, culture, history, religion. […] Thus, although the nation does tend to horizontal bonds and equality amongst *living* generations, it should be noted that there is also sometimes a sense of reverence for ancestors, and a duty of care to future generations. Members of a nation think that they are not only connected to those who went before them, and who come after them, but that they are the inheritors and custodians of the unique good that the nation embodies.

Thus, ontologically speaking, the existence of horizontal friendship embodied in the nation (here also seen as a state's society) is perhaps prior to the vertical form of friendship. A society bound together by such strong, lasting sentiments stretching from the past, through the present and toward the future will more readily not only support but also demand social justice, ensuring dignity, rights, and participation to the whole community. In the next section, we argue that a trusting disposition within a given society is at the basis of this notion of social friendship.

SOCIAL FRIENDSHIP AND THE TRUSTING DISPOSITION

> So far, we have argued that in order for social justice to be sustainable it needs to be perceived as legitimate by society. In this sense, social justice involves a double relationship: the one between the state–as the promoting and implementing authority of social justice–and society–as the legitimizing part–, and the one among members of society, who perceive the principle of social justice as fair and just and necessary. In other words, within a political community, social justice can be realized and sustained more readily when there is vertical friendship bonding individuals and groups with the state and, more importantly, horizontal friendship bonding individuals within society or the nation. These horizontal and vertical dimensions of friendship make up what we call social friendship.

However, it seems unlikely that in the modern state, individuals within society would be able to build strong, personal friendship bonds with all other members of society or even with a significant number of them. Indeed, social friendship and personal friendship seem to be of a different nature. How can we still call them both friendship, then? We contend that friendships with different adjectives (*personal* friendship, *international* friendship, *social* friendship, etc.) bear what Wittgenstein (1953) calls 'family resemblances'. No one type of friendship is essentially purer or more original than the others, and it indeed would be impossible to try to define the concept of friendship by making a list of features that must be present in every friendship. Instead, differently adjectivised friendships share some features but not all, in the same way as siblings in a family share some likeness though not all siblings need to share the same likeness. This is the approach taken by Smith (2011), Digeser (2013), and Oelsner and Koschut (2014).

This being the case, far more interesting questions than what friendship *is* (a definitional or essentialist approach) become instead what friendship *does* (a functional approach) and *how* it does it (a practice approach) (see Van Hoef and Oelsner 2018). In terms of *what* friendship does (the functional approach), it has been said above that it builds particular sets of lasting bonds. *Personal* friendship will build particular sets of lasting bonds between individuals; *international* friendship will build particular sets of lasting bonds between states; and *social* friendship will build particular sets of lasting bonds among individuals as citizens and identity groups (horizontal friendship), and between them and the state (vertical friendship). In turn, this will strengthen the social fabric of society, and facilitate and legitimize the implementation of social justice–our key concern here.

In terms of the *how* question (the practice approach), Digeser (2013) explains that friendships can be understood as belonging to the same 'family of practices' as they bear family resemblances. In other words, we know a friendship when we see one by how friends behave, by the way in which friends go about one another, even if not all of them always behave in the same way. In this sense, what makes different friendship behaviors resembling is that they are imbued with a trusting disposition.

Thus, if friendship (of any kind) promotes lasting and cohesive bonds, we argue that it does so because friends share a *trusting* relationship, initially constituted by an emotional disposition of trust. Within society, this means that social friendship promotes particular sets of lasting vertical and horizontal bonds because the relationships and the friendship

practices among individuals and groups are born out of a diffuse trusting disposition.

Faruk Ekmekci's (2014, 564) 'social trust' relates somewhat to this proposed notion of diffuse trust–though not necessarily to the pre-rational trusting disposition. He explains that social trust "refers to 'trust in strangers' and is alternatively defined as 'the generalized willingness of individuals to trust their fellow citizens' or 'the belief that others will not deliberately or knowingly do us harm'." Furthermore, "whether and how much people within a society trust other people in that society significantly shapes social and political relations within that society," as social (or diffuse) trust contributes to the development of social ties and social solidarity.

Trust and the trusting disposition are understood as emotions constituting the practice of friendship, rather than as practices themselves. As such, trust and the trusting disposition are ontologically prior to action and behavior; certainly prior to rational action. Instead, trust and the trusting disposition are constitutive of behavior because a trusting individual will 'intuitively' behave differently from a distrusting one.

Building upon the conception of trust developed by Brian C. Rathbun (2009, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c) and by Torsten Michel (2013), it is argued here that the presence of a trusting disposition within society distinguishes social friendship from other types of social relations, such as contractual relations. Key to this understanding of trust is that "genuine trust is an emotion and emotions are, in general, not subject to direct rational control" (Lahno, cited in Michel, 2013, 880).

Indeed, if we analyze trust from the point of view of the psychology of emotions, we may better understand why social friendship is relevant to promoting social justice. Trust is included among the so-called other-oriented emotions (Martínez-Priego and Romero-Iribas, 2021): a type of emotion that is triggered by the other, and whose target is usually the other. In other words, other-oriented emotions are bonding emotions. They can only be thought of as emotions that establish mutuality: recognizing the other as a constitutive part of the emotion. Both self and other are thus bound by the emotion.

Besides being binding in nature, because they are emotions other-oriented emotions form behavioral preferences. Specifically, they incline us toward altruistic and supportive actions, because they emotionally predispose us to perform them. Hence this type of emotion is the one that is best suited to the development of social justice, and such is the case of trust. If a supportive or fair behavior were not preceded by emotions such as trust—if it were not constituted by the trusting disposition—then a person acting in this way would feel the behavior to be difficult or even violent, because it would not be motivated naturally by any emotional inclination.

Michel posits that trust is an intuitive disposition, consisting of "a nonrepresentational, inarticulate and moralistic disposition which structures our perception of others in our environment" (Michel, 2013, 884). As it does so, trust defines the individual's social orientation toward the world "with a strong moralistic element that carries an inarticulate belief about how others should behave" (Michel, 2013, 879). In this context, trust is seen as an emotional disposition that works as an emotive background—what Michel calls 'a horizon of expectation'—influencing the perception of rationality guiding conscious behavior.

From this perspective, social relations constituted by trust as an other-oriented emotion become social friendship bonds capable of strengthening the social fabric of society (horizontal) and its state (vertical). These strong and lasting social friendship bonds render great disparities within society intolerable; they render demands as well as support for their rectification a moral requirement. At the center of this lies the general recognition of the other members of society as trusted others, deserving of rights and dignity and participation. It could be said, then, that social friendship constituted by a diffuse trusting disposition makes society a community of trust.

CONCLUSION

This essay has put forward the idea that trust as a pre-rational, other-oriented emotion is constitutive of friendship practices regardless of the type of friendship. In particular, social friendship, with its two-fold vertical and horizontal dimensions, triggers solidarity and altruism within society, which are necessary for social justice to be supported, legitimized, and furthermore demanded by society.

While the counter case is easier to argue–that is, that a society with a weak or broken social fabric and no bonds of social friendship is a doubtful candidate to pursue social justice and a fair distribution–, this first exploratory approach to the links between social justice, social friendship, and the role of trust an other-oriented emotion will benefit from further investigation. The present argument has remained at the theoretical and conceptual level. Empirical research through carefully designed case studies will further substantiate this initial approximation.

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ORCID

Ana Romero-Iribas http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5693-0026
Andrea Oelsner http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8867-1321

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Ana Romero-Iribas is a philosopher and Assistant Professor of Educational Ethics at Universidad Rey Juan Carlos (Spain). Awarded with a Fulbright grant for 2022, she is a member of the Innovation and Educational Improvement Research Group of the Universidad Rey Juan Carlos, and of the Consolidated Research Group in Visual Arts and Cultural Studies of the Rey Juan Carlos University (GIAVEC). Visiting Scholar at Harvard University, University of Leeds (UK) and University of Navarra (Spain). Her research is focused in both educational ethics and in friendship studies. In this field she focuses, specifically, in the social and political dimensions of friendship, as well as in its anthropological, psychological, ethical and educational aspects. She serves as a member of the Editorial Board of *AMITY: The Journal of Friendship Studies.* Her recent publications in friendship studies include "The Emotions behind Character Friendship: From Other-Oriented Emotions to the Bonding Feeling" *(Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior*, 2021, with Martínez-Priego); "Paths of Words: The political dimension of friendly conversation in Robert Guédiguian's films" (*French Screen Studies,* 2021, with Alzola); "Friendship, Self-Knowledge, and Core Texts. A Pathway for Character Education at University" (Routledge, 2021); "Friendship without Reciprocation? Aristotle, Nietzsche and Blanchot" or (*The Good Society: A Journal of Civic Studies*, 2019, with G.M.Smith). E-mail: ana.romero.iribas@urjc.es

Andrea Oelsner holds a PhD in International Relations from the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) and is Associate Professor and Director of the Political Science and the IR Programmes at the University of San Andrés (Argentina). She was a Jean Monnet Fellow at the European University Institute (EUI) and a Senior Lecturer at the University of Aberdeen (UK). Her research interests include the fields of IR theories, international friendship, and international security and global governance. She has published books, articles, and chapters on these topics. E-mail: aoelsner@udesa.edu.ar