S2 E4 Solidarity

[00:00:00]

**Constance:** Good morning, Darian.

**Darian:** Good morning, Constance.

**Constance:** Welcome to our podcast Woke as Science.

**Darian:** Thanks.

**Constance:** And today we're going to talk about something - lately – or ever since I took this job like six years ago, but I quite often receive emails of staff or students ending in, in solidarity with, or I get emails calling for my solidarity with a particular group or for the university solidarity with a particular group.

**Constance:** I also see in social media people change their profile pictures in solidarity with certain groups or movements. So solidarity is everywhere. And I think it is time for us to talk about that term a bit more and find out what it actually entails, what it means, what kind of action it requires. And that is why we invited a wonderful Guest Francesco.

**Darian:** It's great to have you here, [00:01:00] Francesco, from University of the West of England in Bristol where you are a philosopher. And one of the things that you specialize in, one of the topics that you work on, and you work on that topic together with people from all sorts of other disciplines, so with political scientists, lawyers, I think even data scientists sometimes, is solidarity.

**Darian:** So you're really like a solidarity guy one of maybe Europe's foremost experts in the topic. You've recently published a pretty substantial edited volume on European solidarity, whatever that means, maybe we can talk about that. So nice to have you here and we're going to try and get some answers out of you and figure out what exactly everyone is asking Constance for when they're emailing, asking for solidarity.

**Guest Francesco:** Sure. Thank you for having me.

**Constance:** So maybe we start of with what sounds like a simple question, but I'm sure it is not. What is solidarity?

**Guest Francesco:** That's the question, right? Precisely because it's such a [00:02:00] widespread topic. There are also so many definitions and misconceptions also about solidarity. I share the experience of emails ending with in solidarity.

**Guest Francesco:** And pretty much all the time, that's it. People think that It's the simple expression of solidarity is already enough, right? I show my solidarity with you, which is mainly understood as a form of sympathy, empathy, some kind of, mixed feelings. But it's much more difficult to conceive it as a practice.

**Guest Francesco:** I think so. It's something that goes beyond the purely, Theoretical and also rhetorical. I would say expression of, shared feelings. But I think that's what distinguishes this concept from many other related ideas such as sympathy, empathy, etcetera, right? So it's not just about worse, just not just about an expression of, sympathy and, good feelings.

**Guest Francesco:** But it's about doing something together, showing the willingness to show. Take some risks, come together with people [00:03:00] because of a shared idea or goal, and work together towards that goal. There is a sort of active, practical element to it, which I think is really essential here. I would say the solidarity is fundamentally a human relationship, which allows people to actually build something together and create social and political spaces, which might.

**Guest Francesco:** Allow us to live better, to find a better place, and a better way of, conducting our lives. And that's a very broad conception, of course. It doesn't provide us with, specific information about what kind of action we can undertake or what kind of goal should we, we be able to travel for.

**Guest Francesco:** But I think that's there's practical, element is really essential to it. And that's maybe a good way to start a conversation about it.

**Darian:** We were a little bit, we have a little bit of a head start because we listened to a great talk that you gave yesterday as part of the Jean Monnet Lecture Series. And in that talk, you, I think [00:04:00] you listed, I think, five kind of defining criteria of the concept of solidarity. And some of them you just mentioned now, like it's practice based or practice oriented, or it's, it involves a kind of practice, it's relational, so solidarity is always a relation between people.

**Darian:** Without that, you can't, you don't just have solidarity on your own into the void. But what are some of the other characteristics that you think mark out this concept from this sort of world or universe of other similar concepts?

**Guest Francesco:** I think I mentioned five main aspects of solidarity, which I think are essential to the concept.

**Guest Francesco:** One is the one you just mentioned, the relational aspect, and we talked about that briefly. Then we have the sort of equality element as well, so I believe that solidarity To be real solidarity has to be between equals. So it's a sort of horizontal relationship. So it's a set of providing aid from a position of a hierarchy or of a, superior social or economic [00:05:00] perspective.

**Guest Francesco:** Solidarity typically stems from people sharing the same I would say existential experience, very broadly conceived, right? And that's a historical aspect of solidarity, right? Which is by the way, a very young idea, if you think about it we have been using this term solidarity for pretty much 200 years,

**Guest Francesco:** so that's the kind of meaning that we attribute to it. And the way the idea emerged during the French Revolutionary Era was exactly to mean a new form of relationship which allowed people similar people who shared the same experience to provide mutual aid in a way that was essentially different from the kind of aid that the higher classes in the Ancien Regime were able to produce

**Guest Francesco:** in a sort of charitable way, simply providing aid, from above to the worst off members of the population so for the first time in history, people were able to provide the same kind of aid, but without this substantial pre-existing disparity, right?

**Guest Francesco:** [00:06:00] So AIDS can come from people who share the same experience and are not simply, more, advanced or privileged position, right? Solidarity is, to some extent, against privilege in that sense, ? It allows this more substantial connection between people. This, the third aspect was the elements of goals and ideals ?

**Guest Francesco:** Solidarity is not about Pre-existing characteristics. We form solidarity not based on what we are, but more about on what we want to achieve. It's not about identity, but about agency. We could also say we come together. We are in solidarity because we want to achieve something in the future. We want to build something which is ahead of us.

**Guest Francesco:** And that makes it a relationship which is essentially about the future, about planning, about crafting what comes next, instead of just, looking back at traditions and a sort of, problematic past. Then we have the element of risk. So solidarity [00:07:00] might take pain, right?

**Guest Francesco:** Can be very hurtful as well. So typically it stems from situations of suffering and perceived injustice. The reason why we want to come together and work together towards something new is because we are somehow unhappy of how things are going so injustice and suffering are really potent Engines potent means which allow us to form this bond.

**Guest Francesco:** So this element of risk is also an important constituent of it, I think, and also by forming solidarity, we actually are willing to take some risks. The activity as a whole can be very hurtful as well, right? We know that the goals we want to achieve are worth Despite the risks and the burdens that we are somehow forced to take in order to obtain them.

**Guest Francesco:** And that's another aspect. And finally, the elements of [00:08:00] reciprocity, which I also think is absolutely essential here. Unlike other kind of human relationships, which can be one sided, so one providing aid. Help to another. Solidarity implies at least an expectation of reciprocity. So when I am in solidarity with someone, I'm not simply providing something, aid or whatsoever, but I also expect the other to enter a sort of community of interest, whereby at some point in the future, we might be in a different situation where I need help, and I would expect them to provide the same kind of support in a sort of ideal fashion. So even though this maybe is not present at the moment, it's always a potentiality in solidarity, I think, to build this reciprocal mutual bonds. So relational aspect, goals and projects, risk and dangers, reciprocity and equality. [00:09:00] Yes, that's the one I was forgetting

**Constance:** . I would like to go back quickly to the issue of reciprocity. Because yesterday you also said, you already mentioned community of interest and yesterday you also said in your talk that solidarity, that temporary incidents of collaboration cannot be framed as solidarity. Can you elaborate on that?

**Guest Francesco:** You mean that's, it takes time, that it's some kind of a stable relationship?

**Constance:** No, more than, like, when an ad hoc coming together in order to

**Guest Francesco:** you mean that it's not a doc collaboration, but something that's

**Constance:** Yes. That ad hoc collaboration is not…

**Guest Francesco:** Yeah! There's actually some literature on that explaining difference between cooperation and solidarity.

**Guest Francesco:** Actually Barbara Prainsack, good friend of us, wrote a paper just on that. Although there are, of course, similarities, there is a similar planning element to both this form of relationships. Whilst we might argue that a [00:10:00] cooperation is precisely meant to obtain a certain goal, and it also meant to disappear once the goal is achieved, right?

**Guest Francesco:** So we decide to cooperate, to obtain something, but we know that this endeavor Is limited in terms of time and space to the, attainment of that goal. And that's once this goal is attained, that we can just, go for our own path. We can just leave the others and keep going, right?

**Guest Francesco:** I think solidarity has a different form of human relationality involved. I think that's once we form solidarity as a stable bond. It is meant to last even beyond the limited and time sensitive purpose we are working for. So once we enter this community of interest, if it is authentic solidarity, somehow it's a Overlasts the actual practical goals.

**Guest Francesco:** That's what we're working for. And there are many concrete examples of this, right? Think about the importance of [00:11:00] workers as movements in recent history so groups of people at the international level who came together for very specific calls, obtaining Fundamental rights, such as the working week the right to strike, rights.

**Guest Francesco:** And once these goals were obtained the movement resisted and simply moved on to, more goals, more battles. So it evolved and created something which was no longer simply a cooperation to obtain certain goals and purposes, but it was something that became a more stable and meaningful relationship which, resisted in time.

**Constance:** You just framed that movement as an authentic movement. So what would be examples of inauthentic solidarity?

**Guest Francesco:** That's an easy question, actually. We see so many examples of fake solidarity, parasitical solidarity. That's an expression used by another. Very well-known solidarity scholar, Sally Schultz, who teaches at Villanova.

**Guest Francesco:** And that's part of the discussion about,[00:12:00] how widespread the concept is in the public discourse right now, right? How many times we read expressions such as solidarity with X on social media, on Facebook. One example of this fake solidarity or parasitical solidarity is expressions which do not imply any practical side, right?

**Guest Francesco:** Simply, rhetorical expressions of good feelings which do not have any sort of active, proactive element to them. Okay. And that contradicts this practical component, I think. So we need to do something once we are in solidarity, not simply make a statement.

**Darian:** But can't the expression of solidarity in itself be performative?

**Darian:** So by, by expressing my solidarity with, other individuals or group X, Y, or Z or whatever it is. That in itself is a kind of action, the very expression of that has some sort of effect in the world, right? So why is it

**Constance:** Also, for example, when it comes from an institution like a [00:13:00] university, maybe more so than when it comes from an individual.

**Darian:** Sure. But what it seems like for you there is a kind of threshold for, of practice, so it's, it's not enough just to say, You're in solidarity. Even if we all can accept that, even saying you're in solidarity does something in the world, it has some effect in the world, right? It makes people think, oh, what is he talking about?

**Darian:** What is this situation? Et cetera, et cetera, right? And of course, in some cases just saying that you are in solidarity brings risk onto you, right? . So in certain, yeah, many contexts. Offering or claiming, expressing solidarity with a certain group or with a certain cause. can actually entail bringing substantial risk onto you in terms of, yeah, I don't know, your job or whatever.

**Darian:** But I have the feeling that you want to say that's still not enough, right? That's still not, okay, that's something like solidarity, but it's still not really solidarity. Am I right there?

**Guest Francesco:** Yeah, I would say so. It depends. I think on the impact of a statement, right? As you say, different statements, depending on the source, also have different impacts and [00:14:00] consequences.

**Guest Francesco:** I would say that it's important to, measure this impact and see to what extent the statement can have some kind of, practical outcome as well. When I say this, I'm not thinking of institutions mainly, but about, Individuals, citizens who actually use these statements, not as a sort of potential action, but as a way to prevent any action, right?

**Guest Francesco:** As if saying, expressing solidarity is a way to, excuse yourself and, do what you can, but also, maintain that there is nothing else you can do, right?

**Darian:** do have the sense that sometimes when we use this term solidarity in relationship to things that we are extremely far removed from. Solidarity with this, solidarity with that, solidarity with these people suffering somewhere far away. It is precisely in expression of the distance. I'm not gonna do anything really, so what do I offer?

**Darian:** I offer my solidarity, right? And it's a kind of, spiritual gesture or something like that, but it's not really doing anything [00:15:00] else. And I think, yeah, that might be different from situations where an expression of solidarity really has an effect, as you said, in a way that might even be measurable, and also brings some risk.

**Darian:** And also brings me into contact with other people, right? So me expressing, solidarity with a group, somewhere far away that who are never gonna hear or see or read that I'm expressing solidarity with them, that my expression, that's the extent of it. We might say, okay, that's not what you want to talk about when you're talking about solidarity.

**Constance:** And why is it important, that distinction?

**Guest Francesco:** As Scholars are people working on ideas and concepts. One of our main goals and also part of our responsibility is to try to analyze these concepts and provide definitions and categorizations. That's pretty much all we do, right? We are, compelled to handle very thick and broad concepts and all we can do, really, Yeah.

**Guest Francesco:** Since we [00:16:00] don't work with empirical data, it's tried to, look into them and identify differences, contrasts, also misconceptions of these ideas and see what an idea actually means based on this. So we help use an idea in a sort of, consistent and meaningful way. And that's why I think it's important to take such a broad concept and figure out in what instances this concept is used in a sort of, acceptable and substantive way, and when instead it is used in a much more rhetorical and vague way, right?

**Guest Francesco:** So I think that's part of our work, but also of our, public function, really, to do that.

**Darian:** I can see that for philosophers or for academics more broadly, this kind of chopping up of the world into conceptual pieces like this is, that's what we do.

**Darian:** That's it, and we like to do it also. So the more specific your definition of solidarity gets, the more I go, Oh yeah, I like this. It's getting [00:17:00] narrower and narrower. He's really delineating it from all this other, all these other concepts. That's so great. But on, the question would be on the practical level, who cares, right?

**Darian:** So who cares whether it's solidarity compassion, sympathy, charity, whatever, who cares? And I have the sense that it's not just an academic distinction, right? So I have a sense that the distinction that you want to make between solidarity and other ideas has real political stakes, actually.

**Constance:** I think so too, it's a normative distinction. It's not just for the sake of conceptual clarity.

**Guest Francesco:** Many of the discussions around solidarity, especially in academia, but also in the public discourse, are about what is solidarity, can we provide a good definition of it can we distinguish it from other things. It's a big chunk of the job as I was saying, so it is a conceptual work.

**Guest Francesco:** But at some point I think we need to ask a more practical question, which, as you were saying, can have also a deep political significance, right? And the question would be, what is solidarity for, [00:18:00] right? So whatever it is, let's pause for a moment. Let's bracket the notion itself. Let's take it for granted.

**Guest Francesco:** But Once we have some form of definition, some form of idea, so what is it for? So what's the purpose of it? And that's, in a way, another approach to the problem, I think. So instead of, asking ourselves all the time, over and over again, what this thing is, this idea is, we need perhaps to look at concrete situations and scenarios where solidarity is needed.

**Guest Francesco:** Where we think, we believe, we argue that we must Find a way to actually be in solidarity in order to counter certain problems or dilemmas, right? And that somehow also helps us to answer the question from another viewpoint, right? So we need to ask ourselves what's solidarity? is or should be based on the problems that it must be able to address.

**Guest Francesco:** So if solidarity is not able to help us in addressing the immigration crisis [00:19:00] health care emergencies maybe that's not solidarity. Then we need to think about something else. So it's it's more like a problem based approach, if you like. So we need to think of the characteristics that solidarity must have in order to be equipped to help us in handling certain problems.

**Darian:** So you're worried this approach that you've just described, you're working backwards, in a se in a sense, from the problems. And, okay, we have this problem, whether it's, war, oppression poverty, a migration, a migration crisis, as it gets called.

**Darian:** And what kind of practices do we actually need to address these problems? In ways that we find acceptable, in ways that will hopefully or that at least are oriented towards the types of outcomes that we think are just…

**Guest Francesco:** Yes, it's more like an inductive approach. So we start from the concrete asymmetries, injustices and traumas that people experience on a daily basis.[00:20:00]

**Guest Francesco:** And then we see how ideas can actually play a part in the, Handling and organizations of this experiences, and I think solidarity plays a huge role in that, which is perhaps why it is so widespread, right? So people feel like they constantly have to resort to this idea to deal with the fundamental problems they have, right?

**Guest Francesco:** Does it work? It depends on what's you know what we mean by it. But starting from the problems helps us in somehow limiting the, discontinuity and instability of the concept.

**Darian:** Yeah, so if we start from the problems, we work back to the kinds of practices that we think are required to address these problems.

**Darian:** And then we look at historical cases and say, ah, these practices resemble this thing that's been called solidarity in all of these different instances. And then that also allows us to say, yeah, And that gives us some sense of what solidarity actually means and it allows us to then rule out other things.

**Darian:** [00:21:00] This practice calls for us, or this problem calls for a certain set of practices. These practices historically have been linked to the concept of solidarity. And simply saying solidarity but meaning compassion or empathy Isn't going to be enough or isn't what we need in fact to address these problems.

**Darian:** And that's why we need to do this sort of almost, coming at it from two directions. On the one hand, this sort of triangulation of the concept. On the other hand, working backwards from practices or from problems into practices and looking at historical examples. Am I understanding that?

**Guest Francesco:** Yes, exactly.

**Constance:** I can also think that could help us to understand the difference between solidarity and charity, for example.

**Guest Francesco:** Yes. Yeah, that's one of the main misconceptions, right? So forms of charity, which is typically a one sided form of relationship someone providing aid in a gratuitous, but also completely one sided way to someone else without expecting anything back.

**Guest Francesco:** [00:22:00] Solidarity is something different from the reciprocal aspect that it's, it's present in it. But also for the more political components, I would say. So precisely because all parties involved in this relationship perform what we could call a community of interest and are somehow, encouraged to take to take a stance.

**Guest Francesco:** I think that this makes a fundamental difference from any charitable acts. Yes.

**Darian:** So to try to give an example to illustrate that. We are now, I think, one year on almost to the day. It was a few days ago from the earthquake in Turkey and Syria of one year ago. When that earthquake happened, of course, so there were lots of efforts where I live in Belgium, where almost everyone has some kind of connection to Turkey, for example.

**Darian:** There are, there's a large Turkish migrant community. There are a lot of people of Turkish origin. And of course, and so there's a huge effort to raise money, to, to collect supplies, et cetera, to send to Turkey. And you do that as out of some sense that there is also a salient [00:23:00] similarity, right?

**Darian:** You have a salient connection to these people. because you live together with people like them in a community, because you know somebody, I'm not Turkish, but I know Turkish people who have family and friends who are affected, et cetera. But I'm not expecting anything back, right? I'm, it's really just a, it's a kind of donation.

**Darian:** It's an act of, Compassion, perhaps, it's an act of sympathy, but it's not an act that's trying to build a new kind of political order. It's not an act that is geared towards future collaboration with these earthquake victims in, in Turkey and Syria. It's just simply saying, , you are suffering, you are in need, we can provide something.

**Darian:** And very often we use the term solidarity in this context. And if I understand what you're saying correctly, and I agree with you, I think, This is just not solidarity. It's not bad. It's just something else.

**Guest Francesco:** I would agree with that. But think about another example, for example, migration, right? Another huge crisis which Europe has been witnessing over [00:24:00] the last few years quite massively.

**Guest Francesco:** And again, a similar case of, provision of help people helping migrants in settling in and providing food, shelter, clothes that's an example of this sort of generous, charitable provision of help, right? But then there is a second phase, think about organizations which were born out of this, movement and that over lasted it somehow,

**Guest Francesco:** organizations that once one wave of immigration ended. Morphed into something else an NGO, an organization which was meant to not only provide help in that specific moment to people in need, but actually work with migrant organizations to, for example, facilitate integration to, teach languages.

**Guest Francesco:** I think there are many examples of how this initially charitable acts that morphed into something more stable and more politically oriented as well. And the fundamental argument underlying all those activities and endeavors was we don't simply [00:25:00] have to provide help now.

**Guest Francesco:** We actually need to build a new social and political background where these things won't happen again, right? And I think that's an example of how charitable acts can potentially, turn into something more solidaristic in the sense of stability, in the sense of performativity, in the sense of Forward looking form of political endeavor.

**Guest Francesco:** So there are no, hard borders between concepts in this case or between practices. So it's very easy. That's something turns into something else. But yes, I agree. So solidarity requires more than a simple help requires this vision for the future. And I think that all these examples are good examples of, potential future solidarity activities. But yeah, not yet. Not just yet.

**Constance:** You also said that these kind of relationships require a certain form of equality between the people entering that relationship or the groups entering that relationship. so I was wondering, I was also probably related to [00:26:00] the migration example that you just gave.

**Constance:** So if that is how we define it, it's a relationship between equals, you have to enter that relationship as equals. With what you said, sharing an existential experience, what happens when that relationship or when two groups that want to enter in such a relationship, are not equals, and they do not share the existential experience, which is in the case of migration, that might be the case in the case of Black Lives Matter or in solidarity with Palestine at the moment, not everyone wanting to enter in a solidarity relationship. Is it equal here?

**Guest Francesco:** Yes, that's another problem. And I think it depends on how we want to define equality here, right? So when I say that solidarity is among equals, I'm not thinking about pre-existing characteristics necessarily it's more about people who are equal equals. Insofar as once they enter the relationship, they're willing [00:27:00] to actually work together towards the same goal, somehow overcoming or actively dismissing these differences, right?

**Guest Francesco:** So I think that very different people can be in solidarity, and I think there are so many concrete examples of that you mentioned, Palestine, Syria, migration is another good example again. It's not about being equal having the past in mind, having there's a sort of pre-existing traits in mind, but it's more equals in the sense that once you enter the relationship you need to somehow reestablish a sort of parity, horizontal relationship with the other members of the group.

**Guest Francesco:** looking ahead at what you want to obtain. So solidarity is very democratic in that sense. So it helps erase any pre-existing differences and work together towards something new, right?

**Constance:** But wouldn't sometimes these kind of pre-existing differences, understanding them without just too quickly erasing them, help to actually understand the situation of injustice that is The reason for the call for solidarity.

**Guest Francesco:** Yes, [00:28:00] I think that's the risk that solidarity somehow entails, right? Because precisely for this performative aspect is offensive futuristic force, which it's it contains. I think there is definitely a risk of, erasing or overlooking the past to some extent, so I guess the question is, how can we you.

**Guest Francesco:** Form a such a bond, which is strongly oriented towards the future, but at the same time learning some lessons from the past, which might help us in shaping this future. So how do we balance between historical memory or traumatic experience and performative and future facing And privilege.

**Constance:** You said it before, right? Solidarity is against privilege. Which is also about the past, right?

**Guest Francesco:** Which is also about the past, right?

**Constance:** yeah.

**Guest Francesco:** So privilege comes from the past. And yes, it's definitely a problem when it comes to solidarity relationship.

**Constance:** And if you want to build a sustainable alternative [00:29:00] future, I assume that you will have to deal with it somehow.

**Guest Francesco:** Yes. And also give up some privileges whenever possible,

**Darian:** I think there are two things here, right? So on the one hand, we're talking about solidarity as a horizontal relationship between equals. And you're using that term, equals, we're saying, yeah, that doesn't refer to concrete. socioeconomic status, for example, that doesn't refer to historical context necessarily.

**Darian:** What it refers to is a kind of, we would say in the first instance, political equality, and also a sort of what we might call moral equality as ra as well, right? So that when I, the person who I am in solidarity with, or what the solidarity relationship creates, I think that's really important when you define it in the beginning as dynamic.

**Darian:** So it, the solidarity relationship is creative of something. And I think one of the things that, if I understand correctly, you want to say it's creative of, is precisely this sense of equality in the sense of equal worth or dignity. So the person that I'm working together with in a [00:30:00] solidaristic relationship is of equal worth to myself, and I am of equal worth to them, and we share that sense of equal worth and dignity.

**Darian:** So in that sense, solidarity in a sense seeks to work beyond preexisting privileges, right? That are brought into relations for historical reasons, for socioeconomic reasons. On the other hand. we seem to have the way that the term privilege is used all the time today, right?

**Darian:** And that's to refer to certain systemic or structural inequalities that are in society, right? So a certain group is privileged because they are not the victims or they are less the victims of certain structural inequalities structural racism, for example, And this creates a kind of distinction that is very difficult to overcome.

**Darian:** And so when we talk about social movements, one of the things that immediately gets brought in is people need to recognize their privilege, and people need to [00:31:00] check their privilege, people need to be aware of their privilege. How does that fit into this account of solidarity that you are, that you're trying to build?

**Constance:** Maybe I can add to the quick little quote from Anja, I guess we had on the podcast two weeks ago. And she said, you don't, you shouldn't fight for Europeans to be in solidarity with Palestine, but to acknowledge their complicity. That's the first step. So that's, I think that fits to the question you were asking.

**Guest Francesco:** Yeah. That reminds me of what Hannah Arendt said about collective responsibility, right? And the difference between responsibility and guilt. Because many people say, okay, I acknowledge the suffering of the Palestinian people, for example, or of any other people who have been subjected to atrocities.

**Guest Francesco:** But I don't feel guilty because of that. Because it's not on me, right? I'm sorry, I'm happy actually to help if needed, I'm happy to actually, enter, a group or provide some support, but there is no guilt in that. It's not [00:32:00] out of guilt, it's out of, some kind of, political vision which I share with these people.

**Guest Francesco:** But what Arendt said is that yes, this is true, there is no guilt, but there's still, there is still responsibility. So we're even if we're not directly guilty, personally guilty of something we can still or we must still feel a collective political responsibility for what is happening insofar as we belong to the same political community, which is the global community at the moment.

**Guest Francesco:** So in that sense, no one is unresponsible, no responsible for something. So we all bear a certain share responsibility. And that also links to the question of culpability, I think, which is a legal term, right? Very precise. But I think it can be, expanded and broadened to a certain extent to include everyone who is conscious of what is going on.

**Guest Francesco:** You can't be conscious, you can't be aware of what is going on at the moment without feeling a sense of responsibility, which typically, [00:33:00] Triggers some form of solidaristic relationship as well. So I think that's really about how the whole thing is started, right? So from this acknowledgement of responsibility to the following a consequent decision to actually do something.

**Guest Francesco:** And I think that's, Anja is absolutely right in that sense. So working on the sense of culpability, I would say responsibility more than culpability, is a good way to actually, force us. To go beyond mere words and actually find ways to, reimagining potential alternatives.

**Constance:** Do you think that is something, you already said the conceptualization of solidarity, not possibly the acts of solidarity, but the conceptualization is 200 years old, going back to the French Revolution. But when you think historically now in that time frame, what you just explained, is that something more recent? Or does it also apply to the more historical solidarity movements that you've mentioned?

**Guest Francesco:** I think there is a red thread which goes through all the manifestations of what we [00:34:00] call solidarity from that very specific historical background until nowadays. Before the revolution the French Revolution, solidarity was mainly an economic concept

**Guest Francesco:** which, referred back to the Roman law, right? The obligatio in solidum. So this is financial transaction, this liability, unlimited liability between people or members of an economic enterprise the social and political component of this idea arose only later on, during and after this very complex historical period.

**Guest Francesco:** And I think that from then on this meaning didn't change, actually. It solidified and became some kind of shared and stable concept that we still use nowadays. The idea that solidarity is about politics, is about our political and moral responsibility, is something that's, emerged all in that specific moment.

**Guest Francesco:** And I think we're still completely within this conceptual framework. [00:35:00] Yes. Which doesn't mean that it can't change again, right? Young ideas are very fluid. Solidarity is a very young idea. So it might well be that at a certain point, new events, new revolutions perhaps will force us to Rethink this idea, once again. And yeah, that's also the beauty of this topic. It's malleability. It's incredible dynamic aspect and constant change.

**Constance:** So one thing that I've been thinking about quite a lot is that when people call for solidarity, or call on people to be in solidarity with a certain group, it seems that there's a very clear idea of how that solidarity should look like. And if one, for whatever reasons, it could be reasons of positionality, right?

**Constance:** Not everyone can afford to take the same risks that you were talking about before. For whatever reasons, if one doesn't subscribe to that kind of idea of how the solidarity should look like, one is very quickly excluded from this community of interest that you were talking about. [00:36:00] So who gets to define what solidarity Being in solidarity with a certain group looks like?

**Guest Francesco:** Yeah, that's a very good question, actually, and I don't have any ultimate answer, really, but it is definitely true that solidarity is often characterized by some form of internal antagonism, we might say, between in group and out group dynamics. So when we are in solidarity with someone we often are also against someone else, right?

**Guest Francesco:** We form this bond with a group of people because we want to, pursue something which is potentially against what other people want to achieve. So that's a very common way to conceive solidarity practices. And to a certain extent, this is unavoidable there have been discussions about the possibility of creating or promoting human or global versions of solidarity.

**Guest Francesco:** So a sort of a utopic principle whereby we are all together as humans, as living beings, as, dwellers in the same in [00:37:00] the same world. But it doesn't really work in practice. I think we don't need to, escape this antagonistic element. And that also helps us better understand, maybe, how the group dynamics of a solidarity group actually work, right?

**Guest Francesco:** So it's who decides how to, organize a group. So once we say, okay, we are in solidarity, So what are we going to do? Are we democratically deciding how to address the problem? Are we, looking at what each individual member of the group thinks? And that's a very difficult question.

**Guest Francesco:** And I think it also helps us understand another huge problem, which is The level of the commitment at the level of unity and merging, which can concretize in a solidarity group. Can we still be considered free, autonomous individuals once we joined this group? So to what extent our own personal opinion counts against that of all the other members, right?

**Guest Francesco:** How can we avoid to [00:38:00] turn the group into some form of single thought, totalitarian group where, you know, the opinion of the many, turns into the opinion of the leader. That's another potential, negative outcome of this social change.

**Constance:** I'm not sure whether everyone thinks that's a negative outcome, by the way.

**Darian:** Probably. Isn't that a kind of paradox, actually? Because the more social fusion you have. the more, at least in the short term, effective you can potentially be, right? Because you don't have to deal with internal conflict and dissensus.

**Guest Francesco:** Yes. There is something incredibly attractive about social fusion, right?

**Guest Francesco:** When Jean Paul Sartre analyzed the topic of fraternity in the critique of dialectical reason, he made precisely this point, right? The reason why during again, back to the French Revolution, the reason why at some point during the Age of Terror, the revolution turned into something else, right?

**Guest Francesco:** Into the prototype of modern totalitarianism. I think that's a very good example of that, right? It's [00:39:00] precisely when the whole revolutionary movement was at risk, because of many political events, of course. When the whole mission of the revolutionaries was at stake, that's when this merging happened.

**Guest Francesco:** This sacred off happened, which allowed them to overcome the problems by reaching A deeper and more substantial level of fusion, right? That's very effective because it's allowed the revolutionaries to, keep going and bring the revolution forward, but it also came at a cost, of course, right?

**Guest Francesco:** Which is the loss of individual autonomous freedom within the group. And the same phenomenon concretizes during political revolutions quite regularly. Another example is the post-Soviet revolution, right? The rise of real existing socialism in the Soviet Union as an example of that.

**Guest Francesco:** I think it's a constant risk. Every time we form solidarity groups we must be aware of the risk of, turning this into something [00:40:00] different, into something that can be potentially very detrimental. So I think it's a question of balance. So finding the right balance between Plurality autonomous personal thinking and the need to find ways to collaborate and come together in a productive and a substantial way. So it's always on the threshold between these two things.

**Constance:** When you say detrimental, do you mean to the individual or to the goal of the group?

**Guest Francesco:** I would say both in the sense that individual disappears. But also, the real social effect of the whole action of the group is jeopardized. If the original goal, for example, was to, ensure more freedom and more autonomy to all, actually forming a completely unitary fused group, to some extent, that's the exact opposite, right? In order to have freedom, you have to give up your freedom. In order to have greater freedom, you have to somehow abdicate your personal individual freedom.

**Guest Francesco:** That's a, [00:41:00] very problematic statement, but that's exactly what happens many times in non-democratic and, potentially totalitarian settings. Yeah.

**Constance:** Okay, now, so we talked a lot about the kind of, individuals what it means to join a solidarity movement or to be in solidarity. Let's talk for a second about the institution of the university. Because here the question is, can an institution like a university even be in solidarity with particular groups? And should the university be in solidarity with particular groups? What do you think?

**Guest Francesco:** That's a really good question. An even bigger question would be about Institutions in general, right?

**Guest Francesco:** Is solidarity something that only happens between individuals, like a sort of interpersonal relationship, or can we imagine, broader or more structured versions of solidarity involving groups or even institutions? There have been many discussions about this, and I think it's really problematic to use the same concept at these different levels, but to [00:42:00] some extent, I think We must do this because solidarity must be to some extent institutionalized to work better precisely in order to find a way to make it more stable, less time sensitive as something that is meant to last beyond the temporary efforts of its members.

**Guest Francesco:** In that sense, we can understand the creation of institutions that are solidaristic by definition or should be solidaristic by definition as a way to, solidify and crystallized as a solidaristic endeavors beyond the efforts of a single person and universities are part of this, I think, so as a cultural enterprises, they cannot be indifferent to solidarity problems, I think, and it's important that such universities are able, at least if not to express solidarity directly to you.

**Guest Francesco:** Convey and facilitate the [00:43:00] formation of solidarity bonds, both within the institution itself and more broadly in society. The question, of course, is how? How is it possible? So how can an institution do that so to create this positive, solidaristic environment? I think that several elements are needed.

**Guest Francesco:** Free thinking the importance of telling the truth, even if it's difficult. Allowing for the development of an open and highly dialogic confrontation between different opinions. Even at the risk of, having heated conversations, perhaps. But I think that as educators and researchers, we have this parasitic duty somehow, and that's one of the fundamental aspects of our job. Yeah, I would say that we must conceive universities as providers of solidarity and not just of education to some extent.

**Darian:** So I think it's one thing to say that the university should try to facilitate conditions under which solidarity relations can be formed.[00:44:00] And I think we can go, even go on to say why should it do that?

**Darian:** Why should this be part of the business of the university? Because solidarity plays an important role in the formation, maintenance of democratic societies. And the university has an explicit commitment. towards maintaining, developing, creating, flourishing a democratic society. So I think that seems pretty, pretty straightforward, and I think the ways that you describe that make a lot of sense.

**Darian:** Because, the university is a kind of forum in which the kind of conversations that need to happen for solidarity relationships to form happen. On the other hand, what we have are claims or demands that the university as an institution, and when I say that as an institution, it's almost as a legal person declare itself in solidarity with X, Y, or Z.

**Darian:** And, in fact, sometimes the university seems to have no problem to do this, right? So I think the university, or many universities, have issued statements. of [00:45:00] solidarity with Ukraine, for example. And this sometimes comes with some practical dimension also, right? Or solidarity with oppressed groups in another country, for example.

**Darian:** But who decides when this legal person that the university is which has an influence and can have an impact through actions, declares its solidarity? with a particular movement, group, etc. Does it even make sense that a university call a legal person? I'm using, is it, so I'm almost assuming the university is a legal person, is a legal entity so that it can do this. Does this even make sense to talk about it in this way? And if it does, who decides? How do we make those kind of decisions?

**Constance:** And also as a follow up question, not only who decides, is it actually a risk to the kind of Creating this positive, solidaristic environment that you were explaining before, that you were talking about before. Is it a risk if the legal person of the university stands in solidarity with a certain group? Can it then also at the same time [00:46:00] still offer this kind of space for the creation of solidaristic movements?

**Guest Francesco:** Yeah, I think it is possible. I think it is necessary to some extent. Precisely because a statement can have a huge political effect. I think that's A legal entity like a university making a statement can have a huge import a great importance, right? And therefore, I think that this can be seen as something worthy or necessary even. About whether who decides To do that. That's, again, the question of the internal dynamics of a group

**Guest Francesco:** universities are groups of people after all, even though they have been, solidified into the legal object, right? They're still made of people who decide what the official stance of the institution should be, right? Of course, there should be discussions about what causes, what principles the institution is willing or able to embrace and what not.

**Guest Francesco:** Risks come both ways. It's also risky not to make a statement [00:47:00] sometimes. And sometimes institutions are compelled or feel compelled to make a statement, not because they actually want to help, but because they want to avoid risks, right? That's another, the other side of the problem. And yeah. What was the other question?

**Constance:** Maybe whether it can go hand in hand that you have these kind of statements for whatever reason, you make them as a legal body or as a legal person, whether that can go hand in hand with providing this forum for the important kind of conversations that you were talking about before, this positivists solidaristic environment.

**Constance:** Yes. Whether there's a tension then between the two. Can you be a forum and you said and we've got it from the New York Times article, but can you be a forum and a protagonist at the same time?

**Guest Francesco:** I think yes. I don't see necessarily a contradiction here. Providing a forum doesn't mean to also, provide a certain stance within the forum. So allowing for an open conversation about the topic doesn't mean that the institution hosting this [00:48:00] conversation doesn't have to actually, make a statement about what is the official position of the institution, I think.

**Guest Francesco:** Another example which I think is relevant here is the kind of origin of solidarity. Something we said earlier is that solidarity stems from experiences and suffering and perceived injustice, right? And as educators, we have something like a duty of care, that's something you mentioned, Costance.

**Guest Francesco:** And Which means that if we witness something which we think is not right, we must intervene, right? That's what duty of care is about. So we can't witness something without actually following up, following through, right? It's a it's a necessity. It's something we need to do. And the same should apply also to, a more global scale, right?

**Guest Francesco:** So when we witness What we consider as profoundly unjust on a global level, perhaps we should also have some form of duty of care. And we should also [00:49:00] somehow, act on that, do something which we believe is necessary to, to react to that. And maybe that's part of the conversation as well, right?

**Guest Francesco:** So universities should Own up to this duty of care also, outside of their four walls and look at society and the global community in that same sense. That's I don't know if it's possible, but perhaps that's a way to, address this.

**Darian:** I know we shouldn't be overly pedantic about, these conceptual boundaries, but I think we also seem to run into some problems here in relation to the initial sort of conceptual delineation of solidarity that you gave, right? Because if we ask that a university as an institution, as a legal object or even as a legal person, enters into solidaristic relationships with another group or with other persons, how can we talk about things like equality or expectations of [00:50:00] reciprocity at that level?

**Darian:** And I don't know, that's a kind of how I don't even understand how it would be possible to talk about equality between individual persons and supra individual persons like universities on the one hand. And then, on the question of reciprocity, I can see how we might, a university, for example, might, issue an expression of solidarity and might even act in solidarity with other universities, right?

**Darian:** So that, because they're on a sort of equivalent plane. But acting in solidarity or trying to act in solidarity just with, this or that social movement or this or that group, seems to me, are we then in a kind of category error again?

**Guest Francesco:** That's one of the problems of institutionalization of solidarity as such, right? How do we maintain the various aspects or components of solidarity at the institutional level. Because when we talk about reciprocity, equality, we [00:51:00] always think of people, not of social objects or institutions, right? Can institutions be equal or, in a sort of reciprocal relationship?

**Guest Francesco:** That's a question of how we define all these aspects and terms. I think there are many ways in which institutions can be involved in solidaristic relations in ways that resemble or somehow, develop some aspects that are typical of interpersonal relationships. Making a statement is, of course, a way, a potential way to express solidarity, as we say, but I think there can be more practical examples as well, right?

**Guest Francesco:** Universities can do more than simply issue a statement about What they think is unjust and showing solidarity, right? Migration is, once again, a very good example. There are many examples across Europe of universities which have created specific tailored programs for refugees and asylum seekers who can enroll get a degree, and rebuild their lives.

**Guest Francesco:** Thanks [00:52:00] to the efforts of these universities. I think that's a much more concrete way to, for example, show solidarity and create a learning community of interest, which is inclusive of these people. And in that sense, I also see a reciprocity because, These people enter this community and are, of course, willing to give something back.

**Guest Francesco:** So I think universities are very permeable institutions, right? Are not simply social objects. They're made of People who constantly join them and leave them, right? It's a constantly changing environment where students are a very important component, and I think that solidarity works very well when there's a situation of intense permeability,

**Guest Francesco:** so I think that, yes, all these aspects can Concretize, can arise in a university. The question is to what extent are we willing to turn the university into a solidaristic place? That's another question. So maybe that's not something that all universities want, but I think there should be discussions about whether and [00:53:00] how this is this is an option.

**Constance:** I totally agree. And I hope that we can have this discussion in one of the next podcast episodes, actually.

**Darian:** Thanks, Francesco.

**Constance:** Thank you so much. It was very enlightening.

**Darian + Constance:** As usual, any and all opinions or positions expressed during this podcast are solely those of the hosts or the Guest Francesco, and absolutely not the official positions of Maastricht University. If you have any questions or ideas for future episodes, please write us a message at wokeasscience@maastrichtuniversity.nl and follow us on Instagram Woke As Science, to listen to previous episodes and also of course get the latest news on our new episodes. You can listen to past episodes and future ones wherever you get your favorite podcasts. Thank you for listening. Till next time. Ciao ciao.