



Reason-based deference or ethnocentric inclusivity? Avery Kolers, Richard Rorty, and the motivational force of global solidarity

Lee Michael Shults

To cite this article: Lee Michael Shults (2023): Reason-based deference or ethnocentric inclusivity? Avery Kolers, Richard Rorty, and the motivational force of global solidarity, Journal of Global Ethics, DOI: [10.1080/17449626.2022.2138945](https://doi.org/10.1080/17449626.2022.2138945)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449626.2022.2138945>



© 2022 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 15 Jan 2023.



[Submit your article to this journal](#)



Article views: 380



[View related articles](#)



[View Crossmark data](#)

Reason-based deference or ethnocentric inclusivity? Avery Kolers, Richard Rorty, and the motivational force of global solidarity

Lee Michael Shults 

Department of Global Development Studies and Social Planning, University of Agder, Kristiansand, Norway

ABSTRACT

This article uses what Patti Tamara Lenard refers to as the cosmopolitan problem of motivation to discuss the roles of loyalty in two philosophical accounts of global solidarity. Avery Kolers' Kantian, deontological approach to solidarity as reason-based deference is contrasted with Richard Rorty's controversial, anti-Kantian description of solidarity as ethnocentric inclusivity generated through sentimental education. This article offers critical reflections on the work of these two influential thinkers and combines elements of their theories to contribute a limited but useful response to Lenard's concerns regarding loyalty and the motivation of global solidarity.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 18 August 2021
Accepted 17 October 2022

KEYWORDS

Global solidarity; loyalty; justice; sentimental education; motivation

1. Global solidarity: what's my motivation?

In 'What is solidaristic about global solidarity?' Patti Tamara Lenard argues that, while local solidarity can be convincingly described as motivated by loyalty, 'scholars of global solidarity must offer an account of what replaces the motivational force of loyalty at the global level' (2010, 107). This is no easy task, as any global-level alternative must be able to compete with loyalty when global justice is at cross purposes with local interests. Lenard argues that both sentiment-based strategies that offer empathy and interconnection as sources of motivation for global solidarity, and justice-based strategies that appeal to duties invoked by causal responsibility for global injustices, (1) pay insufficient attention to loyalty and (2) invoke commitments that are too thin to compete with local solidarity (2010, 106).

Lenard's critiques of sentiment-based and justice-based approaches are useful in framing Richard Rorty's arguments that the most efficient strategy for increasing global solidarity lies in sentimental education (1998, 3:180) and Avery Kolers' arguments for a deontological link between solidarity and justice that contributes to the fulfillment of duties owed to the victims of structural inequity (2016, 119). Both their positions at opposing extremes of the sentiment-justice spectrum and their shared focus on the role of

CONTACT Lee Michael Shults  lee.m.shults@uia.no  Department of Global Development Studies and Social Planning, University of Agder, Kristiansand, Norway

© 2022 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

loyalty offer compelling reasons to bring these specific thinkers together in responding to Lenard's concerns.

While acknowledging that a full-fledged solution to the cosmopolitan problem of motivation is beyond the scope of this paper, comparing two theories of global solidarity that are hardly silent on questions of loyalty will offer additional nuance to the ongoing discussions connecting motivation, loyalty, solidarity, and cosmopolitanism (Gould 2020; Beckstein 2020; Hobbs 2020). To this end, I argue that there are surprising and informative parallels that can be drawn between Rorty and Kolers' respective strategies for motivating global solidarity. The primary contribution of this paper lies in evaluating and combining elements from the work of both thinkers in order to suggest a limited response to Lenard's cosmopolitan problem of motivation.

As definitional variation has characterized solidarity scholarship (Bauder & Juffs 2020, 15; Scholz 2015, 725), the core terms involved in Lenard's challenge must be operationalized. In the context of this paper, *local solidarity* will refer to commitments to promote the interests of one's existing in-groups, while *global solidarity* will refer to commitments to deemphasize existing loyalties and promote the interests of distant out-groups. Such definitions must be reconsidered in different contexts, and the very choice to distinguish between local and global solidarity or between in-groups and out-groups has been problematized (Anderl 2022, 13; Scholz 2015, 731). The specific definitions offered here are partly inspired by empirical research on the localization of humanitarian aid in the context of the so-called 'refugee crisis' in Greece (Shults, Haaland, and Wallevik 2021). While acknowledging that these operationalizations are limited and contestable, I argue that the proposed definitions allow for a productive application of moral and political philosophy to Lenard's concerns.

Conceptualizing the difference between local solidarity and global solidarity in terms of loyalty, identification, and group-membership requires that the relevant senses of *distance* be determined contextually and not necessarily geographically. Durante argues that the thoroughgoing, transformative effects of globalization mean that 'we can no longer continue to think of ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic groups as being localized to particular regions of the world' (2014, 315). For this reason, efforts to account for both local and global solidarity must make room for loyalties and identifications built on a 'de-localized perspectival proximity', understood through 'commonalities and dissimilarities amongst ways of life and the beliefs, values and practices they entail' (Durante 2014, 316). An emphasis on perspectival proximity suggests that group membership is partially based on 'thick lifeworld solidarity' (Pensky 2009, 100), the ability to collectively engage specific ethical worlds. Perspectival differences regarding moral intuitions, values, and strategies for addressing global injustice are a core part of what makes committing to global solidarity demanding. Therefore, one goal of this article is to critically evaluate the abilities of two competing theories of solidarity to address Lenard's challenge of formulating a global-level, motivational replacement for loyalty that might plausibly lead to the prioritization of global solidarity over local solidarity, despite these perspectival differences.

Importantly, global solidarity is understood here as motivating context-based prioritizations of the interests of distant others, and should not be understood as synonymous with human solidarity—a distinction that has a profound impact on what it means to find a motivation that can *replace* loyalty at the global level. I argue that neither Kolers nor

Rorty should be interpreted as championing a human solidarity that can simultaneously encompass every member of the species. However, if replacing loyalty at a global level means identifying conditions under which the needs of distant out-groups can be prioritized over the needs of established in-groups, both accounts of global solidarity have conceptual resources to contribute.

2. Avery Kolers and reason-based deference

This section will analyze Kolers' treatment of solidarity, understood here as an example of what Lenard refers to as a justice-based approach to global solidarity. Lenard describes justice-based accounts as occupying a roughly Kantian position and emphasizing duties generated by our causal implication in the systems that lead to global injustices. According to Lenard, justice-based strategies often begin with the assumptions that certain cosmopolitan duties of justice exist, that these duties are widely accepted as rational, and that being implicated in injustice can provide a strong enough motivation to engage in global solidarity. Central influences on such accounts include Thomas Pogge's arguments that the global poor are being actively impoverished by our participation in institutions that lead to the conditions for such poverty (2008, 201), as well as Andrew Dobson's suggestion that emphasizing direct causal responsibility can shift the motivation of global solidarity away from charity and towards concrete responsibilities (2006, 172). Despite the skepticism of justice-based accounts towards a sentimental emphasis of specific affective bonds, there remains room for important emotions such as shame and guilt (Linklater 2007, 44), and potentially anger (Hobbs 2020, 59). However, in justice-based accounts these emotional dispositions are not the sources of motivation for global solidarity, but rather tools that can accentuate the moral duties that accompany a privileged position within an unjust global order.

Kolers' treatment of solidarity shares this structural emphasis on the duties of those at the top of existing social hierarchies to act in solidarity with those at the bottom. Solidarity is explored through the lens of 'joiners', those who choose to side with oppressed out-groups, or 'callers', rather than prioritizing loyalty or self-interest. Kolers is particularly concerned with privileged liberals who fail to join in global solidarity, comparing them to the white moderates that Martin Luther King Jr. rebuked for sympathizing with their black compatriots, but nevertheless maintaining the status quo (2016, 1). This comparison is used to portray potential joiners as understandably, but inexcusably, overwhelmed to the point of inaction. With access to substantial amounts of apparently reliable information on both sides of most politically charged issues, Kolers argues that 'it seems to be a condition of sanity in the modern world to be able to ignore a huge amount of everyday suffering' (2014, 423).

The role of Kolersian solidarity is to provide 'a centripetal duty not to sit on the sidelines' (2012, 1), a compelling reason for privileged liberals to relinquish their privilege and shift the status quo. While Kolers does not conceptualize solidarity using a distinction between the local and the global, the goal of his moral theory of solidarity is distinctively global, as defined in this paper— counteracting existing loyalties and motivating political action on others' terms. This characterization of Kolersian solidarity as 'global' is not an attempt to discount the fact that Kolers addresses 'local' examples, such as the dynamics of solidarity in environmental justice activism in Louisville, Kentucky (2018). However, the

role he lays out for solidarity remains global by continuously emphasizing the need for privileged joiners to overcome the perspectival distance between themselves and those that have been rendered out-groups through marginalization and structural inequity. As such, Kolers' theory offers a clear attempt to answer Lenard's challenge by accounting for a version of global solidarity that can compete with loyalty and local solidarity.

Kolers' aims to adjust the dominant moral intuitions of privileged, liberal, potential joiners. He argues that 'liberals tend to be reluctant to amplify our duties much beyond what social conventions expect of us. Still less do they hold us accountable in any way for failing to be motivated to act on amplified duties' (2016, 37). Kolers suggests that the difficulty in expanding accountability beyond the realm of local conventions stems from an overreliance on conscience in liberal culture. He presents conscience as a form of moral reasoning that aims at rationality and consistency but relies heavily on individual judgment. When global and local concerns are at odds, conscience defaults to interpreting one's moral circumstances in ways that support one's own interests and intuitions.

While conscience can produce criticisms of one's own in-groups and lead to internal reforms under stable conditions, Kolers claims that when one's in-groups are threatened by the conflicting interests of out-groups, 'conscience is likely to be too bound by conventional norms and limitations on our ability to appreciate the perspective and plight of others. And more dangerous still, conscience is likely to depoliticize all these issues' (2016, 37). Appealing to conscience leads to such depoliticization by legitimizing deliberation that is based on subjective opinions for which individuals are not held accountable. As the evaluations provided by conscience are based on private criteria, relying on such evaluations in politically charged situations risks parochialism, partisanship, and prejudice. Kolers therefore criticizes liberal confidence in individual conscience, suggesting that this leads to what he describes as a teleological link between justice and solidarity—where the joiner is tasked with the responsibility of *aiming at justice*.

Kolers interprets this teleological link as problematic for two reasons. First, Kolers denies that individual agents are capable of consistently making unbiased judgments as to which ends are just, or which causes will lead to those ends. Even if individual moral deliberations involve appealing to outside sources or expert knowledge, this does not remove the depoliticizing influence of conscience. Potential joiners have access to multiple sources and experts whose opinions can suggest radically different forms of political action. Second, conceptualizing solidarity as teleologically *aiming at justice* allows privileged individuals to choose their own terms of participation—to independently determine which causes aim at justice and then join with groups they agree with.

Although he uses the term 'teleological solidarity' at times, this type of support does not truly qualify as solidarity for Kolers. Teleological solidarity is entirely compatible with what I have called local solidarity that works to solidify or improve the current standing of one's in-groups and it does not necessarily contribute to the motivation of global solidarity. Put in terms of Lenard's challenge, Kolers argues that any cosmopolitan duty that tasks individual joiners with teleologically aiming at justice will fail to generate sustainable motivation for global solidarity because individual conceptions of just ends include defaults towards existing, local solidarities. In the absence of a strong sense of

individual-level accountability that would motivate those privileged by existing social hierarchies to deprioritize their own moral sensibilities, efforts towards global justice can too easily become aligned with individual interests and local loyalties. While teleological solidarity can still be understood as an instance of what Lenard refers to as justice-based solidarity, it is unsuccessful when attempting to connect to *global* justice. Kolers concludes that ‘teleological solidarity travels with conscience, and it is conscience that drives the bus’ (2016, 37).

As an alternative, Kolers offers a deontological link between justice and solidarity that attempts to mitigate the appeal of defaulting to local commitments when the path to global solidarity seems daunting or unclear. This deontological link promotes *treating others justly*, rather than teleologically *aiming at justice*, and offers a less individualistic conception of autonomy based on deference and agonism. Kolers describes solidarity as deferential when it requires joiners to act on the moral judgment of callers and he describes solidarity as agonistic when the obligations that joiners accept when answering the call to solidarity are such that ‘the question *which side are you on* is prior to the question *what is the right thing to do*’ (2016, 73). Kolers thereby emphasizes the political act of choosing sides over individualistic and consequentialist evaluations of which groups are properly aiming at justice. Deference to the moral judgments and strategies of callers demonstrates that joiners take seriously the agency and thick lifeworld solidarities of those disadvantaged by the status quo, rather than holding callers to the standards that are implicit in the social systems that disadvantaged them to begin with.

Kolers formalizes the motivation for choosing sides in deferential solidarity as subject *S* supporting the group *G* that is selected by reason *r*. He claims, ‘Individualism, including that involved in acting in unison, is siding with what *S* believes; loyalty is siding with what *G* believes; and solidarity is siding with what *r* requires’ (2012, 379). Importantly, Kolers connects siding with *S* or *G* to *belief* and casts siding with *r* as meeting a *requirement*. On this model, if *S* sides with *G* based on *S*’s own beliefs and interests, then *S* is acting on conscience and the support does not qualify as solidarity. If *S* sides with *G* because of a pre-existing loyalty to *G*, then *S*’s individual biases continue to play a role. As neither *S*’s moral intuitions nor *S*’s established loyalties can form an impartial background, Kolers advocates *reason-based*, deferential solidarity in which reason *r* determines which side to choose.

The requirement that deference be reason-based is where Kolers most clearly uses loyalty to outline a distinct role for global solidarity. Loyalty can involve deference to a group’s interests, but ‘in contrast with loyalty, solidarity is agent neutral in the sense that we take sides based on general reason *r* that applies to everyone, rather than a particular relationship between agent and object’ (2016, 50). Kolers argues that agent neutral, reason-based deference should act on a ‘progressive’ *r*—one that commits *S* to side with whichever *G* is least well-off within a given social structure (2005, 157). His interpretation of ‘least well-off’ stems from his deontological link between justice and solidarity that focuses on *treating others justly*. Kolers portrays this just treatment as partially addressing a duty of equity, writing:

Inequity occurs when an institution fails to give persons their due regard as equal citizens, or denies them a fair hearing ... [and] the principal means of acting on a duty of equity is by hearing, and listening to, others who have suffered inequity, and taking their side. (2014, 130–31)

To summarize, Kolers argues that due to the near constant exposure of potential joiners to conflicting accounts of complex, morally and politically charged situations, teleological approaches to solidarity will be ineffective as motivators and will encourage appeals to conscience that often work to maintain the status quo. In terms of Lenard's challenge to address the cosmopolitan problem of motivation, Kolers suggests that teleologically motivated attempts to replace loyalty with global solidarity will collapse into self-interest or local solidarity under pressure. Kolers' solution is a progressive, reason-based solidarity that aims to override individual conscience by committing those privileged by a given social structure to both join the side of the callers most victimized by structural inequity and to defer to the callers' strategy for correcting the imbalance. Kolers classifies equity as an ultimate value and casts deferential solidarity as a perfect Kantian duty, whereby joining in solidarity represents an important facet of the equitable treatment of callers and is nonvoluntary (2016, 119).

3. The dilemma of deference and the moral compass objection

Having mapped the broad strokes of Kolers' theory of solidarity, I will offer an initial set of critiques that centers around the use of subject S , group G , and reason r to formalize solidarity relations and emphasize the act of choosing sides. While Kolers acknowledges that S uses r to determine which side to join, the language he uses to describe the role of r is potentially problematic. In claiming that r selects the appropriate object of solidarity (2016, 63) or that r requires S to make a specific commitment to the least well-off (2014, 428), Kolers distances r from S and then shifts the burden of agency over to r . While using r to alleviate the pressure of teleologically aiming at justice may make global solidarity appear less overwhelming to potential joiners, this does not diminish the fact that S is active in determining the application of r . Kolers accurately diagnoses reason-based deference as 'least promising from a moral standpoint [when] the referent of the term "worst-off" is unclear' (2005, 167–68). It follows that r does not do any independent work selecting which G is worst-off or requiring S to commit to a specific group. As Scholz argues, 'perceptions of injustice and oppression cannot help but be affected by long-standing communal norms' (2008, 35).

The formal separation of S and r risks ignoring the local standards that influence S 's evaluation of structural inequities. In addition, by pulling r out of S in an attempt to create a non-conscientious reason to side with G , Kolers leaves us with an anemic and hypostatized version of S . He presumably presents S in this way to capture and argue against the problematic and overly individualistic nature of choosing sides based solely on conscience. However, equating 'what S believes' with the ostensibly unified voice of conscientious self-interest fails to capture both the inevitably contradictory nature of the beliefs that accompany S 's various commitments and S 's potential to overcome conscience by means other than reason-based deference.

A similar problem arises with the hypostatization and homogenization of G . As Marin argues, 'In an oppressed group, there are always different voices raising different issues and having different interests. Treating the group's interests as unified marginalizes the group's most vulnerable' (2018, 803). If Kolersian solidarity is predicated on S 's ability to defer to G 's moral judgment, the potential for a reductionistic interpretation of G 's agenda must be taken seriously. While Kolers acknowledges this, his Kantian commitment

to circumnavigating individual bias still leads him to, at times, reduce the process of choosing sides to interactions between three variables. This invites interpretations of *S* and *G* as having stable, unified voices and oversimplifies the complex processes of identity formation and intra-group politics. I agree with Jenkins' assessment that this simplification of the moral situation of joiners offers 'a somewhat unrealistic view of how loyalty and identification usually motivate solidarity' (2021, 579).

The separation of *S* and *r* is made to seem inevitable through Kolers' equation of the variables *S*, *G*, and *r* with alternative motivations for choosing sides—individualism, loyalty, and solidarity, respectively. Siding in solidarity is represented as '*r* binds *S* to *G*' (2016, 45), where a progressive *r* determines which *G* merits deference from *S*. If one formalizes the other two motivations in this way, one arrives at '*S* binds *S* to *G*' in the case of individualism. In the case of loyalty, one arrives at either '*G* binds *S* to *G*' or, more probably, a second instance of '*S* binds *S* to *G*' as the normative force at work when *S* chooses to side with *G* due to loyalty is *S*'s own valuation of the preexisting relationship between *S* and *G*. I argue that Kolers' '*r* binds *S* to *G*' should be recast as a third instance of '*S* binds *S* to *G*' as *S* is actively determining how and when *r* can be appropriately applied.

To be clear, I am arguing for a greater emphasis on the role of subject *S* in conceptualizing the act of choosing sides, where Kolers focuses his attention, and not throughout processes such as building trust or engaging in collective political action. By emphasizing the act of choosing sides and equating siding with *S*, siding with *G*, and siding with *r* at the level of strategy, Kolers tempts the reader to also equate *S*, *G*, and *r* as sources of agency. At times, *r* is presented as acting upon a moral situation, in order to yield a structural, agent neutral reason for siding with *G*. However, recognizing that *r* has no agency apart from *S* means that conscience is still present in every actual case of reason-based, deferential solidarity. Lenard's challenge appears unanswered, as it remains unclear under what conditions subjects might prioritize the motivational force of a duty of equity over the motivational force of, for example, loyalty.

Kolers acknowledges the pervasive threat of conscience to his conceptualization of solidarity, writing:

If we defer only after making a substantive moral judgment to the effect that the cause is *just*, then deference is merely a shallow sheen over autonomous moral judgment, and conscience has come in through the back door. Yet if conscience does not play this role, we seem to need a nonmoral reason to defer, which makes it hard to see how there could be a moral theory of solidarity at all. This is the dilemma of deference. (2016, 92)

In addition, Kolers admits that 'some amount of individual initiative in identifying who is affected by a given phenomenon is inevitable' (2016, 110) and accepts that 'within the parameters set by equity ... our own best conscientious judgment may be our guide' (2016, 132). How then are we to make sense of Kolers' claim that the limits of conscience can be overcome by reason-based deference?

One interpretation is that, although individual conscience and loyalty cannot be neutralized by reason-based deference, Kolers holds onto his model of choosing sides as a motivational tool for making joining appear less overwhelming to privileged liberals and as a conceptual tool for expanding political agency to include deference. On this reading, even if Kolers fails to establish a completely nonmoral reason to defer, his Kantian goals might still represent an appropriate ideal that could inform attempts at

moral and political progress—what Gould refers to as a ‘limit notion’ (2014, 109). This interpretation echoes van den Anker’s argument that there is an ‘important role for holding out what justice requires even if there is currently not the motivation to put it into practice’ (2016, 51). However, in the context of the task at hand, this interpretation seems to reinforce Lenard’s concern that theories of global solidarity are more interested in conceptually detailing the requirements of ideal justice than in offering functional replacements for the motivational force of loyalty.

A second interpretation is that Kolers believes that the dilemma of deference arises exclusively in response to justice-oriented substantive moral judgments that are *teleologically* aimed at bringing about justice. If this is the case, one can interpret his argument that ‘equity goes beyond justice and has a resolution that is more precise than that of justice’ (2016, 133)—this resolution being reason-based, deferential solidarity—in combination with his acceptance of a version of conscience that exists *within the parameters set by equity*, as breaking the teleological link between solidarity and justice in a way that resolves the dilemma of deference. In other words, Kolers could be arguing that a deontological link between justice and solidarity can motivate the equitable *treatment* of callers despite the inevitable influence of conscience on individual interpretations of what constitutes *aiming* at justice.

This second interpretation fares better than the first in offering a practical, global-level replacement for the motivational force of local loyalties. To an extent, this reading of Kolers mirrors Lenard’s concerns about the motivational gaps in existing theories of global solidarity by describing one benefit of deontological solidarity as providing ‘a normative foundation to a wide range of arguments that have tried to articulate solidarity without showing whether or why calls for solidarity are morally compelling’ (Kolers 2016, 119). On this interpretation, Kolers attempts to create conceptual room for ideals of equity, while presenting reason-based deference as ‘equity for everyday life’ (2016, 119). Still, it is unclear whether the motivation to commit to equity in everyday life can stand up to the everyday commitments represented by loyalty.

Kolers’ most convincing argument for a motivational replacement for loyalty comes in a rebuttal of what he calls ‘the moral compass objection’, the potential protest that deferential solidarity destroys an agent’s understanding of right and wrong by committing her to supporting actions she finds immoral. Kolers argues that this concern:

... rests on the groundless assumption that the compass is calibrated correctly before the agent undertakes solidary action Why privilege the way we are prior to engagement, rather than the way engagement will make us? Whether this change—this recalibration—is good or bad depends not on the mere fact of recalibration, but on an *independent moral argument*. Such an argument would offer compelling moral meta-principles, the content of which obviously cannot be given by our commonsense moral convictions prior to solidary action. To the contrary, one valuable meta-principle of moral character change is solidarity itself. (2005, 169–70)

If rejecting the moral compass objection is read as an attempt to convince those privileged by the status quo to be skeptical of their own conscience and to consider the potential value of recalibrating their moral intuitions by engaging in reason-based deference, *the appeal of moral character change* offers motivation for global solidarity. While Kolers’ emphasis on supporting the least well-off clearly demonstrates that he connects the motivation of global solidarity to achieving structural equity as well, I agree with

Lenard that the abstract nature of this latter motivation is too thin to compete with loyalty in everyday life.

If one accepts that potential joiners are implicated in conditions of global inequity, that at an abstract level many accept that this commits them to certain cosmopolitan duties, and one also agrees with Kolers that there is a collective failure to hold individual agents accountable for these duties, then Kolers' skepticism about the moral intuitions of liberal culture appears justified. If one concludes that one's moral compass is not properly calibrated, this can offer the motivation to defer to the interests of distant out-groups. Global solidarity can be motivated through a recognition that 'self-reliant agency is not the only, or often even the best, way to be an autonomous person' (Kolers 2005, 160). Scholz has argued along similar lines that 'solidarity need not be contrary to autonomy, but it is contrary to individualism' (2008, 19).

The value of Kolers' theory lies in his attention to the structural nature of global inequities, the pitfalls of an overly individualistic approach to autonomous moral action, and the need for global solidarity projects to avoid reproducing colonialism and paternalism. A focus on the structural nature of inequity reminds potential joiners that they are heavily influenced by social systems and that if those empowered by these systems continue to default to their moral intuitions, the current status quo will likely remain intact. Kolers' arguments against individualistic conceptions of autonomy, and his connected rejection of a teleological link between solidarity and justice, present global solidarity as more manageable for overwhelmed potential joiners— minimizing the likelihood of defaults to conscience and the status quo. Finally, to guard against the potential for attempts at global solidarity to reproduce the hierarchies that lead to the inequitable treatment of callers, Kolers encourages systemically privileged joiners to defer to the moral judgment of the least well-off.

The convincing version of Kolers' argument is that joining in global solidarity, as a political remedy for structural inequities, should not be guided by individual moral judgment, existing loyalties, or a grand ideal of teleological justice— but should instead approach the existing goals and moral standards of disenfranchised groups as viable strategies for social change. The unconvincing version of Kolers' argument is the all too familiar Kantian attempt to keep concepts such as solidarity pure and reason-based, free from the bias of sentiment. I interpret the potentially reductionistic nature of Kolers' model of choosing sides as stemming from this Kantian need to isolate reason *r* and keep self-interest and loyalty from 'sneaking in the back door'. Kolers' earlier work suggests that this Kantian position solidified partly as an attempt to counter Rorty's distinctly anti-Kantian account of solidarity, to which I now turn.

4. Richard Rorty, ethnocentrism, and sentimental education

This section will analyze Rorty's treatment of global solidarity, understood here as an example of what Lenard refers to as a sentiment-based strategy. The acceptance of a central role for sentiment in theories of global solidarity leads to an emphasis on relationships characterized by empathy, cooperation, and horizontality (Gould 2007, 158; 2014, 112). Sentiment-based accounts also emphasize emotional responses to suffering as sources of motivation. For example, both Lu and Rorty argue that an instinctive, aversive response to cruelty is central in explaining the affective ties that motivate global solidarity

(Lu 2000, 254; Rorty 1989, 74). Lenard objects that disapproving of cruelty may be enough to generate empathic interest in the affairs of distant out-groups, but that empathy in the absence of shared values is insufficient to motivate duties of justice. She argues that sentimental strategies fail to clearly lay out ‘the steps that must be taken from empathy through to motivationally efficacious solidarity’ (2010, 107). Again, the challenge lies in accounting for a global-level motivational force on par with loyalty to in-groups with whom one shares perspectival proximity.

While Kolers attempts to deprioritize the importance of shared values by promoting the agent neutral, just treatment of the least well-off, Rortyan solidarity breaks this connection between justice and neutrality. Rorty argues that, ‘our sense of solidarity is strongest when those with whom solidarity is expressed are thought of as “one of us,” where “us” means something smaller and more local than the human race’ (1989, 191). Despite the more local focus, Rortyan solidarity can be global in the sense I have described, by working towards extending the reference of ‘one of us’ to distant out-groups. Importantly, however, these efforts for greater inclusivity need neither originate from nor aim at neutrality. In contrasting Rorty and Kolers, the central difference is whether global solidarity is motivated by *vertically* rising above existing loyalties through reason-based adherence to the higher-order duty of equity, or *horizontally* widening a range of networked loyalties to make the variety of out-groups that might offer potential candidates for ‘one of us’ as flexible and inclusive as possible.

Rorty describes this latter, horizontal version of moral progress towards greater solidarity as an increase in the ‘ability to see more and more traditional differences (*of tribe, religion, race, customs, and the like*) as unimportant ... the ability to think of people wildly different from ourselves as included in the range of “us”’ (1989, 192). This connection between solidarity and a sense of ‘us’ shows the central role that loyalty and identification play for Rorty. The centrality of these attitudes makes solidarity relevant to both evolving local commitments to those one already identifies with and global efforts to extend one’s loyalty to distant others. Rorty, argues that the prioritization of thinner commitments over thicker commitments can be accounted for as a product of intersecting and competing loyalties, writing:

When, for example, the families confederate into tribes, or the tribes into nations, you may feel obliged to do what does not come naturally: to leave your parents in the lurch by going off to fight in the wars, or to rule against your own village in your capacity as a federal administrator or judge. What Kant would describe as the resulting conflict between moral obligation and sentiment, is, on a non-Kantian account of the matter, a conflict between one set of loyalties and another set of loyalties. (2007, 45)

A Kolersian analysis might explain the judge in this passage as choosing to side against the interests of her village using agent neutral reasoning that allows her to rise above loyalty and fulfill a higher-order obligation to equity or justice. However, by rejecting the notion that justice has its origins in reason while loyalty has its origins in sentiment, a Rortyan approach can contrast the judge’s commitments to her village, to her country, to the integrity of her profession, or to the law, while keeping all of these commitments at the level of loyalties. On this horizontal model of choosing sides, appealing to the judge’s sense of justice or to a duty of equity would equate to arguing that a more inclusive, and in this sense ‘larger’, loyalty should take precedence over a less inclusive loyalty. The idea

of a *global* orientation for solidarity thus becomes a function of context-based inclusivity rather than neutrality.

At first glance, a Rortyan response to Lenard's call for a global-level motivational replacement for loyalty, appears to offer productive disharmonies between expanding, networked loyalties. However, this does little to address Lenard's concern that more inclusive commitments are too thin to overcome the motivational force of less inclusive loyalties. Even if one joins Rorty in seeing appeals to duties of justice as appeals to larger loyalties, whether or not such appeals offer sufficient motivational force will depend on evaluations of contextual factors that seem to be subject to defaults towards smaller or less inclusive loyalties.

Rorty accounts for these defaults in his claim that all evaluations of contextual factors are necessarily produced from ethnocentric positions— where 'to be ethnocentric is to divide the human race into the people to whom one must justify one's beliefs and the others' (1991, 30). This ethnocentrism is a product of subjects being situated in specific socio-historical contexts and developing moral identities by engaging the belief systems that are prevalent in those contexts. Ongoing deliberations that attempt to establish moral accountability necessarily interact with the moral systems that have already come to seem intuitively right to an individual. For Rorty, these moral systems are largely inherited from—and negotiated through—the communities one identifies with, meaning 'the group or groups to which one cannot be disloyal and still like oneself' (2007, 45). While perhaps overly individualistic, acknowledging a degree of ethnocentrism can be appropriate if moral deliberation is seen as a matter of measuring novel or emerging interpretations of the extent of one's moral obligations against previously established standards, rather than measuring both against nonvoluntary duties.

If moral obligations are context-specific and ethnocentric, then Rorty is right that the desire to 'substitute "method" for deliberation between alternative results is just wishful thinking' (1982, 164). I read Kolers' attempted substitution of *r* for individual deliberative judgment about choosing sides as an example of this wishful thinking. While Kolers is right to argue that self-reliant agency is not always the ideal form of autonomy, his reason-based alternative encounters a version of the same problem that he points to in his own critique of individualistic autonomy— namely that '[t]he neutral background does not exist which would make this sort of autonomy attainable in real life' (2012, 374). In other words, while relying on the ability of individual joiners to determine whether or not the strategies of suffering callers are teleologically aimed at justice is a problematic basis for global solidarity, neutrality is not the appropriate measure of a successful alternative. It is not clear how tasking potential joiners with a responsibility to side with the least well-off creates a more neutral background than tasking them with a responsibility to side with those aiming at justice. While expanding autonomy to include deference has merit, grounding deference in non-conscientious agent-neutrality is untenable as the reference of *r* is always determined by a specific, situated *S*.

If *r* is not agent neutral, but rather one of many commitments that a subject could use to justify choosing a side; one is left without what Rorty called 'a skyhook which lifts us out of mere coherence', the search for which he characterized as 'an unfortunate attempt to carry a religious view of the world into an increasingly secular culture' (1991, 38–39). Rorty's horizontal, or skyhook-free, alternative is best summarized by his claim that:

We cannot resolve conflicting loyalties by turning away from them all toward something categorically distinct from loyalty—the universal moral obligation to act justly. So we have to drop the Kantian idea that the moral law starts off pure but is always in danger of being contaminated by irrational feelings that introduce arbitrary discriminations among persons ... [T]he so-called moral law is, at best, a handy abbreviation for a concrete web of social practices. (2007, 47)

The Kantian project rejected here bears an obvious resemblance to Kolars' moral theory of solidarity. Presumably, Kolars' primary objection to an acceptance of ethnocentrism and morality as social practice would echo van den Anker's claim that 'the strongest versions of cultural relativism lead to political inaction and therefore run the risk of perpetuating the status quo instead of challenging power relations' (2016, 43). If our highest moral recourse is to the coherence of a certain web of social practices, what motivational resources could possibly be available to encourage solidarity with those whose political goals threaten the social order upon which those practices are based?

Rorty argues that 'the liberal culture of recent times has found a strategy for avoiding the disadvantage of ethnocentrism. This is to be open to encounters with other actual and possible cultures, and to make this openness central to its self-image' (1991, 1:2). In other words, if ethnocentrism is unavoidable, then the remedy for political inaction and disinterest in the standards and values of distant out-groups is a reflexive skepticism towards one's own ethnocentric position. Rorty finds hope in the 'ethnocentrism of a "we" ("we liberals") which is dedicated to enlarging itself ... It is the "we" of the people who have been brought up to distrust ethnocentrism' (1989, 198).

Rorty contends that the commitment of liberal culture to global solidarity as ethnocentric inclusivity is produced through sentimental education. Rather than emphasizing universal moral obligation, sentimental education fosters:

... the self-doubt which has gradually, over the last few centuries, been inculcated into the inhabitants of the democratic states—doubt about their own sensitivity to the pain and humiliation of others, doubt that present institutional arrangements are adequate to deal with this pain and humiliation, [and] curiosity about possible alternatives (1989, 198).

This doubt increases the likelihood that individuals question their own 'common sense', understood by Rorty as a confidence that all relevant aspects of moral and political contexts can be captured by applying the language and standards of one's existing in-groups. Rorty suggests that sentimental education can promote openness towards out-groups over defaults to common sense in certain contexts, but specifies that the possibility and efficacy of this strategy is unique to groups that enjoy a high degree of existential security, writing 'sentimental education works only on people who can relax long enough to listen' (1998, 3:180).

This interpretation of Rorty offers steps from empathy to solidarity, if only for a limited set of cases. The cultivation of empathy and sensitivity to suffering among existentially secure liberals within a community that valorizes 'the continual refreshment and re-creation of the self, through interaction with selves as unlike oneself as possible' (1998, 3:183) can lead to motivationally efficacious global solidarity, even if the motivation for this solidarity is produced through a shared, local distrust of ethnocentrism. Thus, while I agree with Lenard that empathy in the absence of shared values is not a sustainable source of motivation, the groups that empathy is directed towards and the source of

the shared, motivating values need not be coextensive. The logic of this distinction parallels Lenard's own claim that 'cosmopolitanism relies on the motivational resources generated by nationalism' (2010, 347). The next section addresses the resemblance between this Rortyan response to Lenard and the interpretation of Kolers' project developed in section three.

5. Between equity and ethnocentrism

Despite their substantial differences, I argue that two similarities between the two theories discussed thus far can suggest a productive middle ground between justice-based and sentiment-based strategies and provide a response to Lenard's challenge. The first similarity is the use of existentially secure liberals as a principal case for exploring the motivation of global solidarity. On the one hand, Kolers and Rorty are anything but similar in terms of their evaluations of liberal values. Kolers connects the liberal tradition to an excessive commitment to self-reliant agency and aims to weaken that commitment, while Rorty praises liberal culture's sensitivity to suffering and aims to expand that sensitivity through sentimental education. On the other hand, their mutual emphasis of the moral situation of privileged liberals implies a shared presupposition—the context in which one can most reasonably expect an individual to prioritize the interests of distant out-groups is one in which that individuals' basic needs are already largely met. European research on the positive correlation between the presence of welfare systems that provide social safety-nets and attitudes of solidarity towards refugees and forced migrants can offer one context in which this assumption seems warranted (Koos and Seibel 2019, 723).

This first similarity is relevant in explaining the second—a shared skepticism towards inherited moral intuitions and a suggestion that altering these intuitions by engaging the perspectives of distant others is key to the potential for moral progress offered by global solidarity. There is a clear resemblance between Kolers' attempt to motivate deference in the hopes of recalibrating liberal conscience and Rorty's attempt to motivate sentimental education in the hopes of challenging and contextualizing liberal common sense. I interpret both theories as offering *the desirability of moral character change* as a motivator of global solidarity, and I interpret this overlap as a consequence of a shared focus on the perspective of privileged liberals.

If moral theories are to have practical relevance, then answering broad challenges using specific contexts is an entirely acceptable, if not inevitable, strategy. While the perspective of existentially secure liberals should not be overemphasized on the global scene, Lenard's own connection of belief in cosmopolitan duties to 'a certain subset of the educated elite' (2010, 346) suggests that this perspective offers a fruitful starting point. If the cosmopolitan problem of motivation can be answered within this more limited context, Lenard's challenge to account for what replaces the motivational force of loyalty at the global level becomes significantly more manageable. If 'account for what replaces loyalty at a global level' means 'offer clear steps to a cosmopolitan world order in which global solidarity does the work currently done by local solidarity', then Lenard is right that both justice-based and sentiment-based strategies fall short. However, if 'account for what replaces loyalty at a global level' means 'offer conditions under which individuals might plausibly be motivated to prioritize the interests of

distant out-groups', then the desirability of moral character change should not be discounted as a motivator.

Considerations of the appeal of moral character change as a motivator will benefit from Kolers' reminder that, in the absence of a structural focus and a politically oriented commitment to defer to the moral judgment of callers, attempts at moral character change will fail to shift the status quo. In other words, sentimental education, on its own, will not lead to global equity. However, I agree with Scholz that "we must be careful not to ascribe undue weight to rational decision-making within political solidarity" (2008, 72). I have argued that overemphasizing the act of siding gives *r* an inappropriately large role and pushes joiners to constantly reevaluate the structural position of *G*. The emotional distance required to make continuous, agent neutral reevaluations of complex situations leaves the notion of *joining* in solidarity superficial at best, and impossible at worst.

An appreciation of Rortyan ethnocentrism can provide balance to considerations of a motivating desire for moral character change by allowing for an inclusive global solidarity—and even a form of progressive deference—that might be based on values exclusively shared by smaller groups. This understanding of ethnocentrism is based on an interpretation of Rorty as aiming at inclusive global solidarity without basing this inclusivity on standards that might someday be held by humanity as a whole. Importantly, this interpretation is controversial among influential scholars of global solidarity. For example, Gould reads Rorty as rejecting the possibility of human solidarity (2014, 109), while Scholz interprets Rorty as working towards a non-essentialist human solidarity by addressing 'one difference at a time' (2015, 730). I side with Gould on this issue, although Scholz' interpretation is understandable considering that Rorty does at times use the phrase 'human solidarity' (1989, XIV & 192). However, I argue that when Rorty invokes 'human solidarity' he is invoking a specific piece of motivational rhetoric that he wants to disconnect from its philosophical presuppositions and instead connect to 'the moral and political vocabularies typical of the secularized democratic societies of the West' (1989, 192).

To the extent that human solidarity is a useful term from a Rortyan perspective, it is a culturally specific rhetorical device employed from an ethnocentric position in the hopes of inspiring existentially secure liberals to contextually prioritize the needs of wildly different others. Once ethnocentrism is acknowledged, it is easier to see global solidarity as a normative force that aims to contextually recalibrate conscience rather than overcoming it with any finality. Kolers' rejection of the moral compass objection is his most convincing response to the dilemma of deference precisely because the metaphor of continuously recalibrating moral intuitions best acknowledges the inevitability of conscience that he seems to resist elsewhere. While I have argued against the suggestion that progressive deference might provide a skyhook that could lift individual moral deliberation out of the mires of conflicting loyalties, a non-Kantian focus on deference offers a more reliable tool than Rorty's ethnocentric inclusivity in terms of balancing self-transformation and social justice. If de-coupled from Kant, Kolers' theory can inform non-idealized instances of contextual risk analysis and moral deliberation. Non-Kantian progressive deference can be offered as a counterweight to the imbalances of ethnocentrism— recalibrating liberal intuitions about political agency and increasing the sensitivity of potential joiners to structural inequities. Once motivation is in place,

Kolers offers a clearer, more practical account of how to take callers seriously and on their own terms.

Contextually balancing an attention to equity and an acknowledgement of ethnocentrism, can produce a middle ground for future discussions between sentiment-based and reason-based strategies for motivating global solidarity. Versions of both strategies suggest that combining existential security or systemic privilege with awareness of global inequity and suffering can create a reflexive doubt about one's common-sense moral convictions, which can in turn motivate solidarity with distant out-groups on their own terms. Kolers adds the duty of equity as a motivator and Rorty adds sensitivity to narratives of suffering. Lenard's critiques convincingly call the sustainability of these added motivators into doubt, at least when they are set in direct competition with local loyalty. However, if global solidarity can originate unidirectionally from a secure structural position, aspirations of self-transformation and moral development offer compelling motivational resources to potential joiners.

While emphasizing that the motivation of joiners is problematic in certain contexts (Shults, Haaland, and Wallevik 2021), research into the motivation of volunteering and humanitarian aid provides one example of an arena in which self-transformation through the prioritization of the needs of out-groups is prevalent and can be effective (Theodossopoulos 2016, 176; Haaland and Wallevik 2017, 206; Malkki 2015, 3). One can of course ask whether or not such humanitarian projects exemplify global solidarity, which demonstrates the need for new connections between competing concepts of solidarity that engage practical, moral, and political challenges. I argue that such efforts will benefit from engaging the desirability of moral character change as a motivator of global solidarity.

Notes on contributor

Lee Michael Shults is a Ph.D. research fellow in the Department of Global Development Studies and Social Planning at the University of Agder. Current research interests include ethics of solidarity, politics of humanitarian aid, modelling and social simulation, feminist epistemology, and citizen initiatives for global solidarity (CIGS).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

ORCID

Lee Michael Shults  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4494-6135>

References

- Anderl, Felix. 2022. "Global or Local Solidarity? That's the Wrong Question: Relationality, Aspiration and the In-between of Feminist Activism in Southeast Asia." *Globalizations* 19 (1): 1–16.
- Beckstein, Martin. 2020. "Cosmopolitan Arrogance, Epistemic Modesty and the Motivational Prerequisites for Solidarity." *Ethics & Global Politics* 13 (3): 139–146.
- Dobson, Andrew. 2006. "Thick Cosmopolitanism." *Political Studies* 54 (1): 165–184.
- Durante, Chris. 2014. "Toward a Cosmopolitan Ethos." *Journal of Global Ethics* 10 (3): 312–318.

- Gould, Carol C. 2007. "Transnational Solidarities." *Journal of Social Philosophy* 38 (1): 148–164.
- Gould, Carol C. 2014. *Interactive Democracy: The Social Roots of Global Justice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gould, Carol C. 2020. "Motivating Solidarity with Distant Others." In *The Oxford Handbook of Global Justice*, edited by Thom Brooks, 122–138. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Haaland, Hanne, and Hege Wallevik. 2017. "Citizens as Actors in the Development Field: The Case of an Accidental Aid-Agent's Activities in Aid-Land." *Forum for Development Studies* 44: 203–222. Taylor & Francis.
- Hobbs, Joshua. 2020. "Cosmopolitan Anger and Shame." *Journal of Global Ethics* 16 (1): 58–76. doi:10.1080/17449626.2019.1687567.
- Jenkins, David. 2021. "Understanding and Fighting Structural Injustice." *Journal of Social Philosophy* 52: 569–586.
- Kolers, Avery. 2005. "Justice and the Politics of Deference." *Journal of Political Philosophy* 13 (2): 153–173.
- Kolers, Avery. 2012. "Dynamics of Solidarity." *Journal of Political Philosophy* 20 (4): 365–383.
- Kolers, Avery. 2014. "The Priority of Solidarity to Justice." *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 31 (4): 420–433.
- Kolers, Avery. 2016. *A Moral Theory of Solidarity*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kolers, Avery. 2018. "Solidarity as Environmental Justice in Brownfields Remediation." *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 21 (5): 554–569.
- Koos, Sebastian, and Verena Seibel. 2019. "Solidarity with Refugees Across Europe. A Comparative Analysis of Public Support for Helping Forced Migrants." *European Societies* 21 (5): 704–728.
- Lenard, Patti Tamara. 2010. "Motivating Cosmopolitanism? A Skeptical View." *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 7 (3): 346–371.
- Lenard, Patti Tamara, Christine Straehle, and Lea Ypi. 2010. "Global Solidarity." *Contemporary Political Theory* 9 (1): 99–130.
- Linklater, Andrew. 2007. "Distant Suffering and Cosmopolitan Obligations." *International Politics* 44 (1): 19–36.
- Lu, Catherine. 2000. "The One and Many Faces of Cosmopolitanism." *Journal of Political Philosophy* 8 (2): 244–267.
- Malkki, Liisa H. 2015. *The Need to Help: The Domestic Arts of International Humanitarianism*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Marin, Mara. 2018. "A Moral Theory of Solidarity. By Avery Kolers. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. 208p. \$80.00 Cloth." *Perspectives on Politics* 16 (3): 802–803.
- Pensky, Max. 2009. *Ends of Solidarity, The: Discourse Theory in Ethics and Politics*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Pogge, Thomas W. 2008. *World Poverty and Human Rights*. 2nd ed. Polity.
- Rorty, Richard. 1982. *Consequences of Pragmatism: Essays, 1972-1980*. Minneapolis, MN: U of Minnesota Press.
- Rorty, Richard. 1989. *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rorty, Richard. 1991. *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth: Philosophical Papers. Vol. 1*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rorty, Richard. 1998. *Truth and Progress: Philosophical Papers. Vol. 3*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rorty, Richard. 2007. *Philosophy as Cultural Politics: Volume 4: Philosophical Papers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Scholz, Sally J. 2008. *Political Solidarity*. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Scholz, Sally J. 2015. "Seeking Solidarity." *Philosophy Compass* 10 (10): 725–735.
- Shults, Lee Michael, Hanne Haaland, and Hege Wallevik. 2021. "Localizing Global Solidarity: Humanitarian Aid in Lesbos." *Frontiers in Political Science*, doi:10.3389/fpos.2021.690907.
- Theodossopoulos, Dimitrios. 2016. "Philanthropy or Solidarity? Ethical Dilemmas about Humanitarianism in Crisis-Afflicted Greece." *Social Anthropology* 24 (2): 167–184.
- Van den Anker, Christien. 2016. "Bridging the Gaps in Global Ethics: Grounded Cosmopolitan Praxis." In *Ethics in an Era of Globalization*, edited by M. S. Ronald Commers, Wim Vandekerckhove, and An Verlinden, 53–66. Burlington, VT: Routledge.