

# The Lonely Heart Breaks: On the Right to be a Social Contributor

Kimberley Brownlee<sup>1</sup>

Philosophy Department, University of Warwick

This paper uncovers a distinctively *social* type of injustice that lies in the kinds of wrongs we can do to each other specifically as social beings. In this paper, *social injustice* is not principally about unfair distributions of socio-economic goods among citizens. Instead, it is about the ways we can violate each other's fundamental rights to lead socially integrated lives in close proximity and relationship with other people. This paper homes in on a particular type of social injustice, which we can call *social contribution injustice*. The paper identifies two distinct forms of social contribution injustice. The first form involves compromising a person's social resources so as to deny her adequate scope to contribute socially. The second form involves unjustly misvaluing a person as a social contributor, usually by not taking her seriously as a social contributor.

Keywords: social rights, justice, social injustice, care, social contribution, association

## INTRODUCTION

In 2014, a father and mother tried to leave Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Hong Kong with their two-year old son after the three of them were ordered to spend 10 days separated from each other in isolated quarantine. The order came after the hospital discovered that a girl being treated in the same ward as the boy was infected with a deadly strain of bird flu. Hospital staff stopped the family from leaving and then put them in two adjacent rooms where the father was held in isolation and the mother and son were quarantined together. The father, Tam Ming-wah, said that he would accept the consequences of his conduct (which can include a \$5,000 HK fine and six months in jail for attempted escape), but he believed the hospital had mishandled the case: 'I hope there are other ways that allow the three of us to stay together, ... Our boy is so young and it is very lonely for me not to be able to see my family for so long.' (Tsang 2014).

This case, while not straightforward, shows that some wrongs can be done to us specifically as social beings. These wrongs go to the very heart of what it means to be human. To be human is to have non-contingent, basic needs for the care and company of other members of our own species, particularly from those people with whom we are closely connected. We need these things during our protracted period of

---

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Thomas Parr, Andrea Sangiovanni, Zofia Stemplowska, and Laura Valentini as well as audiences at Cambridge, Nottingham, Newcastle, Oxford, Queen's (Canada), Simon Fraser, and São Paulo for helpful feedback on this material. I am grateful to Fay Niker for her research assistance; to Matthew Sorterious and Hannah Carnegie-Arbuthnott for their editorial work; and to the Leverhulme Trust and the Independent Social Research Foundation for grants that enabled me to work on this project.

childhood development. We need them as we age. And, even when we are mature and healthy, we usually need to live near other people in order to survive and flourish. Consequently, our lives are typified by a range of social connections that include 1) ordinary decent human interactions, 2) general, respectful social inclusion, 3) collective associations such as clubs, teams, and unions, 4) intimate associations such as friendships, partnerships, and family ties, and, among the latter, 5) loving relationships marked by mutual investment, intimacy, and care, all of which maintain the close bonds that make us human.<sup>2</sup>

In addition, to be human is to have a deep wish, indeed need, to contribute to other people's survival and wellbeing. Undoubtedly, our wish to contribute can take many forms, can wax and wain, and can be stifled or perverted. Nevertheless, in general, we seek social connections not only for our own sake, but also for others' sake to support them in ways they need and value. We wish to be someone on whom others can depend, and *do* depend, for care and companionship. Moreover, we do not wish to make all of our social contributions indirectly by, for example, donating money to social causes. We wish to contribute directly with our company and care.<sup>3</sup>

To participate in this world of social connections, we need three things. First, we need social resources. In order of conceptual and evaluative priority, these are:

- (1) Our *abilities* to offer and receive social connections;
- (2) Our *opportunities* to form and sustain social connections;
- (3) Our actual social *connections*, which are valuable in themselves, but also can help us to form other connections.

Second, we need other people to recognise that the social contributions we make have value. Third, more generally, we need others to recognise that we have the capacity, in principle, to be social contributors.

We experience a distinctive kind of *social injustice* when we are victims of the types of wrongs that target us as social beings.<sup>4</sup> *Social injustice* in this sense is not principally about unfair distributions of socio-economic goods among citizens. Instead, it is about the rights-violations that attack our fundamental nature as social beings.<sup>5</sup>

There are two interconnected types of social injustice. The first is *social access injustice*, which denies us access to the social resources we need to secure our safety, subsistence, and emotional stability, as well as the many things beyond that

---

<sup>2</sup> Social connections are distinguished broadly by the parties' decency, mutual consideration, respect, courtesy, and context-specific acknowledgement of one another's needs and wishes. Rich social connections, including most intimate associations and all loving relationships, are distinguished additionally by the parties' mutual concern, shared activity, trust, intimacy, and joint narrative that are both conditional on certain (perceived) merits of the parties and pursued (typically) through direct interactions for one another's sake.

<sup>3</sup> Although contributing socially is often conceived of as a burden or duty, it is in fact primarily a *right*. I thank Laura Valentini for pressing me to clarify this point.

<sup>4</sup> In this discussion, an *injustice* is an unjustified wrong done to a person or group of persons, that is to say, it is a rights violation. The scope is limited here to *persons'* rights, putting aside questions about non-human animals. This last feature is a serious restriction, but it serves to keep this working conception of *injustice* practicable for present purposes.

<sup>5</sup> The starting point for my thinking about *social injustice* is Miranda Fricker's rich account of *epistemic injustice* (see Fricker 2007). *Social injustice* as I have characterized it intersects with *epistemic injustice*: one way to fail to take someone seriously as a knower (epistemic injustice) is to disregard the knowledge, skills, and experience she can contribute to social connections (social injustice).

which make for a worthwhile human life (see Brownlee 2013). The second is *social contribution injustice*, which denies us minimally adequate scope and recognition to contribute to social connections according to our abilities.

This paper focuses on social contribution injustice while identifying cases that include social access injustice as well. Among other things, this paper exposes the sheer variety of ways that we can wrong each other as social contributors. The fact that we can wrong each other as social contributors in so many ways is a signal of how important social contribution is to us as human beings.

There are two distinct forms of social contribution injustice:

(1) *Compromising a Person's Social Resources*: We do this when we unjustly limit a person's capacity to develop, maintain, and use her social resources to make social contributions (SCI-1).

(2) *Prejudice about Social Contributors*: We do this when we unjustly misvalue a person as a social contributor. Typically, we do this by not taking a person seriously as a social contributor either in general or in a context where she should be taken seriously. Sometimes, however, we show prejudice by unjustly overvaluing a person as a social contributor (SCI-2).

SCI-1 is about what we do and don't do to and for people to enable them to be social contributors. SCI-2 is about how we view people and their contributions, that is, whether we place value on their contributions. Of course, how we view people bleeds into what we do to and for them, and what we do to and for people affects how we view them. As the cases discussed below will show, the two forms of social contribution injustice tend to march in lockstep; though, occasionally, one can occur without the other.

In my view, the story of the Hong Kong family exhibits both forms of social contribution injustice. First, when the hospital staff sought to isolate the two-year old boy for 10 days, they engaged in SCI-1 since they threatened his capacity to develop social abilities even if they did not ultimately compromise his abilities. Moreover, they sought to deny the father, mother, and son meaningful opportunities to contribute to each other's wellbeing during those 10 days. The parents might reasonably have preferred that one of them take the risk of being infected rather than that both be separated from their child.

Second, when the staff sought to isolate the father, mother, and two year-old from each other, they engaged in SCI-2 by disregarding the toddler's need for his parents' care in the foreign environment of a hospital. The fact that, subsequently, the staff quarantined the mother and son together suggests that they realised they had failed to take the toddler's need seriously.

Moreover, unless the parents chose for the father to be isolated and the mother and son quarantined together, the hospital displayed another, more comprehensive instance of SCI-2 by imposing this arrangement since they dismissed the father as a needed caregiver for his son, and possibly overvalued the mother as the primary caregiver. In short, the staff took the father less seriously as a caregiver than they took the mother. In doing so, they reflected a common tendency in society to disregard fathers as primary caregivers for their young children, which also propagates a stereotype about mothers that may unjustly overvalue them as primary caregivers.

Society's prejudice about fathers as caregivers is specific to the context of caregiving within the family. Outside that context, fathers are not viewed as being

generally unable to contribute socially. Society's general prejudices about social contributors tend to target people who are persistently vulnerable, marginalised, or otherwise disadvantaged, such as children, women, ethnic minorities, elderly people, and people with severe cognitive or physical impairments, especially if they require physical care or are unable to communicate clearly with language. These people are often dismissed as being socially needy and unable to contribute to others' social needs.

Of course, some people are not seen as social contributors in *particular* settings because they are not seen as valuable social contributors in general. Traditionally, women were dismissed as being unhelpful or incompetent in the legislature, the executive office, the boardroom, the court, the surgery, and the club, as well as in their marriages, and these particular judgments fed into, and off of, a more general view of women as being socially less important. But, of course, as just noted, women also experienced (and continue to experience) the flipside of that judgment, which is being unjustly overvalued in the home where their social contributions are highly prized, expected, and privileged above those of men (cf. Lynch *et al* 2009, pp.12-34).

The following discussion examines both SCI-1 and the undervaluing and overvaluing variants of SCI-2 in relation to the three types of social resources listed above: social abilities (Section 1), social opportunities (Section 2), and social connections (Section 3). In doing this, the discussion highlights a range of injustices that receive too little attention in the philosophical literature.

## I. SOCIAL ABILITIES

*Developing Social Abilities.* The most radical wrong that we can do to someone as a social contributor is to prevent her from cultivating in childhood the social abilities she needs to make social contributions:

*Mistreated Child:* Imagine a child, Chloe, who is abandoned, neglected, abused, and otherwise grossly mistreated. Chloe receives inadequate care, intimacy, and socialisation in childhood, and, consequently, fails to develop fully the cognitive, physical, emotional, linguistic, and social abilities necessary to be a meaningful social contributor and, indeed, to lead a human life in close proximity with others.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to causing Chloe severe suffering, *Mistreated Child* is an instance of SCI-1 because Chloe is robbed of the social resources that typically she would have both now as a child and later as an adult. Due to her mistreatment, she loses out now on the caring relations with others that are vital to children; and she is going to be radically limited throughout her life in her ability to offer and receive care, love, and companionship.<sup>7</sup>

Undeniably, many children who grow up in appalling conditions can offer care, love, and companionship to others. But, many of them are unable to be

---

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Gerhardt (2014). For numerous references to the psychological and neuro-scientific literature, see Liao (2015).

<sup>7</sup> Virginia Held observes that 'To be a caring person requires more than the right virtues or dispositions. It requires the *ability* to engage in the practice of care, and the *exercise* of this ability' (2006, p. 51) (emphasis added).

caregivers in the practical sense of *taking care of* another person, and many are unable to take the initiative to sustain the connections they have. A vivid example is the children who grew up in Romanian orphanages under the Ceaușescu dictatorship, where they endured chronic neglect and abuse that did lasting damage to their social abilities and much else.

*Mistreated Child* is also an instance of SCI-2 as a failure to recognise the value of what children can and do contribute socially. Children's social contributions are universal, but particularly vivid in lower income families that lack the resources to outsource family care and household maintenance. Children contribute by playing with younger siblings, educating younger siblings, possibly educating parents, and assisting with household social activities such as meals. In these ways, children often contribute significantly to the intimacy and social richness of the family. Older children also often contribute to the family's social health by adding to its material security through unpaid work such as minding younger siblings, which supports their parents' paid work. They may also have their own paid work or formal study that improves the family's conditions. Such contributions can expand the family's social opportunities by enabling them to take leisure time and be hospitable to others.

This point about children's social contributions highlights a general truth about social contribution injustice, which is that its victims include not only the person wronged directly, but also all of the people who have a right to benefit from that person's social contributions, a point I will return to below.<sup>8</sup>

*Maintaining Social Abilities.* An almost equally radical way to compromise a person's social resources is to deny her what she needs to *maintain* them. This can be done through either severe neglect or actively severing her social ties. Let's start with neglect:

*Lonely Person:* Imagine that Maya has significant physical impairments and is unable to seek others' company without assistance. Imagine also that no individual or public body assists her to secure and sustain social connections. She is thereby deprived of minimally adequate social contact, becomes chronically acutely lonely, and suffers the erosion of her social resources.<sup>9</sup>

This is an example of SCI-1 because Maya is unable to form or sustain connections without assistance, and thereby she persistently lacks all social contribution opportunities including opportunities:

- (1) to show decency, respect, courtesy, concern, and care for other people,
- (2) to engage in shared activities and joint narratives with others, and thereby to further others' enjoyment of the activities,
- (3) to share any relevant knowledge she has and thereby to further others' understanding,

---

<sup>8</sup> Now, although *Mistreated Child* is undeniably an injustice, child neglect is excusable in extreme circumstances where there is social resource scarcity and, consequently, there are insufficient numbers of able carers who can ensure that each child is adequately cared for and socialised. This may happen in a society where the healthy adult population has been decimated by a disease like AIDS. (That said, although those within the society may be excused in perpetuating this wrong, others outside the society bear the responsibility to ensure that the children are adequately cared for and socialised.)

<sup>9</sup> Variants on this case might include a person who is severely cognitively impaired; a solitary immigrant who does not speak the local language; or a person released after years in prison who has no family or friends.

- (4) to show that she is trustworthy,
- (5) to give others the benefit of earning and receiving her trust in return,
- (6) to offer intimacy and understanding to others,
- (7) to witness the positive effects she has on others' lives,
- (8) to be appreciated by others for her contributions,
- (9) to be that mirror to another person, which Aristotle says is why we are truly important to each other in the best sense, to offer those corrections that enable a friend to cultivate the virtues.<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, in lacking such opportunities, Maya risks the erosion of her social abilities, which will render her less able in future than she otherwise would be to make social contributions.

This case is also an example of SCI-2 because Maya's society does not take her seriously as a social contributor. Although her society does not actively label her as a social threat or *persona non grata*, nonetheless it incorrectly views her as being unable to contribute socially in ways that it should seek to access. If her society did view her as a potentially valuable social contributor, then it would make political and social efforts to ensure that others could benefit from her social resources.<sup>11</sup>

If we need underlying reasons for why this is an injustice, there are at least two we can give. The first reason concerns autonomy and potential to flourish. Since much of the meaning in our choices comes from our social connections with others, and since some of our most meaningful choices centre on our social contributions, compromising Maya's maintenance of her social resources undermines both her autonomy and her potential to flourish.

The second reason is reciprocity. Eroding Maya's maintenance of her social resources denies her the chance to do for others what her guardians did for her during her childhood, namely, make a massive investment in someone's wellbeing. By lacking social connection assistance, she is denied the chance to reciprocate this social care for her elders as they age or to offer this care to dependents or others (who might then reciprocate when she ages).<sup>12</sup>

It is worth noting that the kinds of impairments that can prevent someone from accessing social settings without assistance do not invariably come with diminished cognitive and emotional ability. Moreover, even when physical, cognitive, and emotional impairments go together, this need not undermine a person's social contribution potential. In allowing herself to be cared for physically, an impaired person provides someone else with opportunities to show kindness, to cultivate empathy, to learn how to care, and to be important to her wellbeing. These are substantial social contributions. To make them, a person needs some cognitive and emotional competence so that she and her caregiver can have a joint narrative, but she need not have as much competence as a critic might think. For example, such social

---

<sup>10</sup> All of these opportunities are, of course, denied to the *Mistreated Child* as well. These various social contribution opportunities could presumably be cashed out within a capabilities approach, granting that social contribution is part of a flourishing life, and justice is about opportunities for leading such a life. I thank Laura Valentini for highlighting this point.

<sup>11</sup> If her social resources erode to the point where she is unable to contribute socially, then society's judgment would not be unjustly prejudicial (SCI-2). Instead, there would be the historical injustice in rendering her unable to contribute socially.

<sup>12</sup> According to one account, 'the resource debt that individuals acquire as children and adolescents is not paid off until around [age] 50' (Sterelny 2012, 30. Cited from Levy (forthcoming, 2016)). The reciprocity argument applies to *Lonely Person* and not to *Mistreated Child* because, most likely, the mistreated child has far less of a resource debt to repay.

contribution might come from elderly people who allow people with Asperger's syndrome to contribute to their physical care and thereby improve the carers' skills in social relations.

The other way to compromise a person's maintenance of her social abilities noted above is actively to sever her social ties. This is done most fully by coercively denying her access to human contact:

*Solitary Confinement:* Imagine that Ali is held in coercive isolation for an extended period, such as in solitary confinement, medical quarantine, or isolated immigration detention. She is abjectly dependent on others for any social contact and contribution opportunities she has.

*Alone in Public:* Imagine, in a possibly more extreme form of solitary confinement, that Beau is held in isolation against his will in a room with one-way mirror-windows. He is alone, but knows he's being watched.<sup>13</sup>

These cases involve SCI-1 since such conditions threaten to erode Ali's and Beau's social resources as well as the basic cognitive, emotional, and physical abilities necessary to lead a socially integrated life (Cacioppo *et al* 2008). Empirical evidence indicates that people who are held in solitary confinement not only experience a host of health risks including high blood pressure, reduced immunity, and depression, but also can become self-mutilating, psychotic, suicidal, or semi-catatonic. Moreover, empirical evidence suggests that persistent isolation has a lasting effect after a person's release that can render her less able to re-integrate socially (cf. Shalev 2008).

There is also SCI-2 in such cases since both Ali and Beau are socially dismissed by those who isolate them. They are regarded not as potential social contributors, but as threats, social nonentities, or even instruments for scientific use. The judgement that someone is not a potential social contributor is usually misplaced even in cases where coercive isolation might seem to be defensible.

First, if someone is highly contagious, then direct social contact with her does pose a health risk, but only to people who are vulnerable to her disease. It does not pose a health risk to anyone who is immune. Therefore, the claim that her isolation is in others' best interests does not necessarily hold universally or even for the majority of people. Moreover, for some people, the risk of contagion may be outweighed by the benefits of contact, such as in the Hong Kong family case. Even if the two-year old boy were highly contagious and had to be held in quarantine for an extended period for others' sake, his mother and father might reasonably wish to continue to be his primary carers despite the risk to themselves.

Second, if someone is a refugee seeking asylum, then direct contact with her does not pose any obvious social threat. Even if she poses a security risk, she does not pose a *social* risk that makes her more of a social threat than a social contributor.

Third, if someone is highly dangerous because she is violent or psychotic, then she might pose a threat to anyone who has direct contact with her, but that is not a decisive reason to isolate her. Consider an analogy. Armed, eighteen-year old soldiers

---

<sup>13</sup> Reportedly, the Russian Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Centre puts crewmembers in an isolation chamber for 14 days or so as part of their training. According to General Yuri Glaskov, Deputy Commander of the Centre, it's called being alone in public. 'Everybody is watching you, but you can't see anybody. There are certain psychological nuances there because you fight yourself.' NASA Headquarters History Office (2001). Presumably, those 'nuances' would be more extreme if the isolation were coercive.

strolling through a civilian mall are dangerous, but no one would suggest solitarily confining them. Moreover, holding a dangerous person in isolation may be more likely to exacerbate her condition than to lessen it. Furthermore, even when a person is highly dangerous, she may be able to make a meaningful social contribution in various ways, especially if she has knowledge, training, experience, or information from which others may benefit. Her contribution may have to be mediated to protect others, but it can nonetheless be meaningful.

Now, a critic might object that solitary confinement in prison is very different from medical quarantine and isolated immigration detention for reasons relating to the justification of punishment. When a person acts egregiously, society is justified, so the argument goes, in punishing her by temporarily denying her opportunities to restore relations of care and trust as well as all other social contribution opportunities (because she deserves it or she will be deterred, or she will appreciate society's censure). The underlying thought is that social rights are a privilege that depend on continued good behaviour and good standing.

There are several problems with this argument. First, it assumes wrongly that temporarily isolating a person is among the punishments that are justifiable in principle. But, if we grant that minimally adequate social contact is a fundamental need and human right (a position I have defended elsewhere), such treatment is no more justifiable than denying someone other fundamental resources (Brownlee 2013; 2012). Would it be justifiable to imprison someone with insufficient oxygen or dirty air because prison should be burdensome? Surely not. Would it be justifiable to give a prisoner insufficient food so that he slowly becomes malnourished because prison should be burdensome? Surely not. Such needs are so fundamental that there are no conditions under which it would be justifiable to deprive a person of them as a punishment. Although our social needs take us beyond the level of brute animal survival, they are similarly fundamental to a human life as a human life.

Second, even if a critic rejects the above argument, he must acknowledge that many other rights and goods are meaningfully available only when our fundamental social rights are protected, including many civil and political rights, subsistence rights, education rights, health care rights, and, in extreme cases, all rights requiring the maintenance of clear thought. Therefore, social rights cannot be conditional on good behaviour unless a person's conduct were so deplorable that she not only forfeited her social rights, but also all of the rights that depend on the protection of her social rights (Brownlee 2013, 214).

Third, since it appears that the psychological and physical effects of long-term (coercive) social isolation can sometimes be irreversible, such treatment affects not only a person's current social resources, but also her future ones. Hence, social rights cannot be conditional unless a person could act so egregiously that she could forfeit permanently, not just temporarily, both her social rights and all of the rights that depend on the protection of her social rights.

A critic might argue that, surely, we must remove at least some of our good will and good relations with a person when she acts egregiously because she, like all of us, has a responsibility to make herself inclusion-worthy (cf. Valentini 2016).<sup>14</sup> In reply, accepting that our relations with her must change temporarily so as to reorient her attention to her wrongdoing does not entail that we may legitimately deny her minimally adequate access to decent human contact and social contribution

---

<sup>14</sup> I thank David Miller and Andrew Williams for pressing me on this point. See Laura Valentini (2016) for a discussion of the case of 'Grumpy Gertraud' who appears not to take seriously the responsibility to make herself inclusion-worthy.

opportunities.

*Indirect Victims.* As the above cases imply, one clear indicator of our essential sociality lies in the fact that we can be greatly harmed, and wronged, when those whom we love are wronged as social beings. What this means is that social contribution injustice has multiple victims.

First, social contribution injustice wrongs not only its direct victim, but also the particular people who have a right to benefit from that person's use of her social resources. When a person's social resources are compromised, her affiliates' social resources diminish too (though not as much as hers do) because they're denied access to the social contributions she would otherwise make to them. Put vividly, society compromises a child's social resources when it puts her father in long-term solitary confinement. Indeed, unless the child has other family supports, society compromises her social resources when it puts her father in an ordinary prison. Similarly, society compromises an aging husband's social resources when it houses him in a retirement facility that his wife cannot easily visit.

Second, more generally, social contribution injustice wrongs the broader community that would otherwise enjoy the ripple effects of a person's and her associates' social contributions to each other. This ripple effect is difficult to quantify, but easy to recognise. It includes things like the person and her associates modelling caring relations to the community when they make social contributions to each other's wellbeing, and their willingness to extend their care to non-associates because they themselves feel secure and valued.

Admittedly, there's no guarantee that a person will make good social contributions if her social resources are not compromised.<sup>15</sup> She may do more social damage than good. Even so, the risk of such damage does not remove the social injustice of compromising her social resources. This is because, first, compromising her social resources denies her a chance *to try* to make good social contributions. Second, it denies her a chance to learn from others *how* to make good social contributions.

The fact that social injustice has multiple victims indicates that it is more common than we might suppose. So, even if compromising a person's social resources somehow wouldn't *violate* her rights (but only infringe them), it could violate the rights of the people who have a legitimate claim to depend on her, who would otherwise benefit from her social contributions, and whose claims are not overridden by the reasons that make our act an infringement of her rights. Put bluntly, the young child of the father who is put in solitary confinement, the children of the mother who is given a long jail sentence in a brutal prison, and the elderly parents of the son who is put in long-term medical quarantine are all casualties of severed social bonds. The impact on them as well as on the people on whom they depend does not end once the social segregation ends. It can last long after a person is socially re-integrated.

## II. SOCIAL OPPORTUNITIES

---

<sup>15</sup> While there's no guarantee she'd make a good social contribution, it's likely that there would, in principle, be people who could benefit from her use of social resources since our typical state as human beings is one of social connection. In other words, the assumption that, counterfactually, an isolated person would be socially connected is a reasonable assumption.

*Having Social Opportunities.* So far, this paper has focused on our core needs to develop and maintain our social abilities and the central role that having social contribution opportunities plays in those endeavours. Let's now turn to a second set of cases of social contribution injustice, in which a person is denied meaningful *opportunities* to contribute socially without that necessarily compromising her maintenance of her social abilities:

*False World:* Imagine that Sophie is coercively confined to an experience machine, and consequently has no direct human contact. Once in the machine, she is unaware that she is totally isolated. She believes she is leading a normal life populated by the usual kinds of people.

*The Truman Show:* In this movie, Jim Carrey plays Truman, the unsuspecting star of a reality TV show whose whole world is a TV set. Truman is an orphaned baby, who was adopted by a TV corporation and raised by actors who play the roles of 'father' and 'mother', and then later connected to actors who play his 'friend' and 'wife'. Truman's world is essentially a prison. He cannot leave the set which until adulthood he is unaware is a set.

*False World* involves both SCI-1 and SCI-2 for the opportunity-related reasons listed above. Sophie lacks all opportunities to make genuine social contributions, and this both risks her social connection opportunities in the future and shows that she is not taken seriously as a social contributor.

*The Truman Show* does multiple types of social wrong to Truman. In terms of SCI, first, he has absolutely no associative control. He is surrounded by actors who nudge and bully him in to 'relationships' that fit the script for the show. There's nothing organic in his social world unless he initiates it by being unpredictable. Second, Truman has no authenticity in his social connections. For much of his life, he has been utterly deceived by people about his social world. He has a 'wife' who hates him, neighbours who recite their lines, and a best friend who spouts lies. When Truman begins to suspect that his world is fake, his 'best friend' Marlon says reassuringly that 'The last thing I'd ever do is lie to you', parroting words fed to him by the show's director. Toward the end of the film, Truman tries to escape by taking a sailboat out into the show's man-made ocean. The director generates a storm to force him back to shore. The storm shows how vulnerable Truman is since the director, actors, and crew are willing to put him at risk to get him to behave and give people a good show.

We can contrast the SCI-1 of *The Truman Show* with that of Sophie's *False World*. As experiences, the two cases may be alike, but the objections against them differ. Unlike Sophie, Truman has the potential to positively affect others' lives directly since actors are not emotionally immune.<sup>16</sup> Truman can also benefit instrumentally from his negative social experiences: through them, he can learn.

Even so, since all of his connections lack mutual trust, honesty, and concern, Truman is unable to offer the intimacy, understanding, and care that distinguish genuine friendships and loving relationships. Among other things, this reduces the impact that his social contributions might otherwise have.

---

<sup>16</sup> The fact that people are paid to perform a role does not necessarily undermine the authenticity of their connection. Actors in the reality TV show are analogous, in principle, to doctors and nurses whose capacity for compassion is not undermined by the mere fact they receive a salary.

In terms of SCI-2, Truman is both unjustly undervalued and unjustly overvalued as a social contributor. He is undervalued in being deemed to be an appropriate object for use. He is overvalued as a source of social investment. One irony of *The Truman Show* is that millions of people are invested in his life as viewers of the show; they care about him (to some degree) and wish him well.

Now, there are significant differences between these two cases and the cases discussed in the previous section. First, the *experiences* of the wronged persons are dissimilar. Unlike *Mistreated Child*, *Lonely Person*, and *Solitary Confinement*, both Truman and Sophie believe they are surrounded by ordinary people. They are possibly as happy in their world as they would be were they surrounded by ordinary people. Indeed, possibly, they are happier if their world exposes them to nicer ‘people’ (or actors) than the people they’d otherwise encounter in their life.

Second, both Truman and Sophie have all the benefits of believing that they are genuinely caring for other people. They get all the good feelings of showing kindness and care. Put more strongly, when they make ‘contributions’, they bring into being the objectively valuable mental states of generosity, care, kindness, compassion, and empathy. Of course, what is missing is the objective value of genuinely and meaningfully contributing to others’ wellbeing; and, there is always the risk of technological malfunction and radical disillusionment. Provided, though, that nothing malfunctions, they have the potential to be *experientially* much better off than the people discussed above.

Third, Truman’s and Sophie’s abilities to make social contributions in future need not be compromised by their current situation. Indeed, if their environments are experientially *more* enriching than the social worlds they would otherwise inhabit, then they could actually grow through the experience and become more socially able than they otherwise would be. Consequently, their future social contribution potential could be better as a result of their faked social worlds since, once released, they would be better able to maximise social opportunities when they arise.

These distinguishing features of *False World* and *The Truman Show* do not alter the fact that each is a social injustice. Rather, these features show that it’s possible to wrong a person by compromising her social resources and failing to take her seriously as a social contributor without causing her psychological or physical distress.

*Having Adequate Social Opportunities.* Within the set of opportunity-compromising cases, there are those that give a person social contribution opportunities, but do not give her quantitatively and qualitatively adequate social contribution opportunities. Consider, for example:

*Worst Enemies:* Imagine that Terry’s social environment is restricted to her worst enemies as a political prisoner’s might be. Or, imagine that her social environment is primarily brutal, hostile, inhuman, or cruel as many prisons are. She makes what social overtures she can, but is greeted with repulsion and abuse.

In this setting, Terry experiences SCI-1, as she is systematically denied conditions conducive to cultivating social connections including, notably, joint narratives, mutual investment, and trusting relations. She is also, most likely, a victim of SCI-2 since her worst enemies probably view her as a threat rather than a social contributor.

That said, ironically, Terry may have a unique opportunity to cultivate other social resources. Being surrounded by enemies may be a productive classroom in which to cultivate compassion, friendliness, and kindness, through necessity. Of course, her conditions remain unjust because she lacks an adequate degree of associative control and misses out on most valuable aspects of social connections, but the environment is not as radically socially deficient as that of complete isolation.

Consider next:

*Lack of Variety*: Imagine two or three people who are forced to keep company with, and only with, each other day in and day out. The most extreme example is Jean Paul Sartre's play *No Exit*, in which three people who've died and gone to Hell spend eternity together making each other miserable. But, it's also the lot of most people in prison to be forced to keep company, and only to keep company, with the same one or two inmates for months or years at a time.

This case involves SCI-1 since the people have insufficient associative control and insufficient variety in their social connection opportunities. There is social injustice in being their forced to be *continuously* in company in general, having to carry out all of their personal activities, private functions, and emotional struggles in view of other people whose good will cannot be assumed. There is even greater social injustice in their being forced to be *continuously* in company with one or two *particular* persons not of their choosing, especially if those persons are unable to offer minimally adequate opportunities to engage in *decent* social relations. Even so, these injustices are of a lesser sort than coercive isolation.<sup>17</sup>

The undue positive socialisation of *Worst Enemies* and *Lack of Variety*, which coerces people to associate with particular persons, contrasts with the equally intrusive, undue negative regulation of people's social worlds, which forbids them to associate with particular people. The latter only ceases to be an injustice when the restriction is necessary to respect others' fundamental rights. Consider, for example:

*Exile*: Suppose that Thomas is forced into exile either as a punishment or to neutralise tensions between political factions (as was common practice in ancient Athens (Forsdyke 2005)). This cuts him off from his pre-existing social connections and denies him any associative control over the day-to-day maintenance of those connections.

We have an understandable distaste for exile as a punishment. Yet, we should find it easier to defend than solitary confinement because exile leaves the person with the option of trying to find a community that will accept him (Cf. Brownlee 2012). He is not abjectly dependent on others for social contact in the way that the coercively isolated person is. If he is lucky, the people in the place where he seeks refuge will accept him, and he may then be highly socially included. Also, unlike the person in coercive isolation, if he fails the first time round to find a community that will accept him, he can keep searching for one.

A subtler form of exile is purely social and not physical:

---

<sup>17</sup> First, coercive isolation denies a person all opportunities for social ties. Second, people who've endured coercive isolation, notably solitary confinement, tend to report that it is as painful as any physical torture they know: that any companion no matter how horrific is better than no companion (Brownlee 2013).

*Shunning*: Suppose that Mattie finds herself in a foreign country and none of the local people will acknowledge her existence. No one will engage with her, tell her where she is, or help her find her way. Even the government ignores her. She is able to leave, but is not kicked out. She has close ties back home and simply goes without social interaction in this foreign land.<sup>18</sup>

Since Mattie is not a member of the society, she has no claim of community-membership. Since she knows no one, she has no claim of personal history. Moreover, since she has affiliates back home and is at liberty to leave, she doesn't face the kinds of threats to her social resources that were discussed above. So, in being denied the opportunity to give her care and company to people in this society, is she a victim of social contribution injustice?

The answer is that here SCI-1 comes apart from SCI-2. Mattie is not a victim of SCI-1 since her social resources are not compromised. She is, however, a victim of SCI-2 because this society refuses to see her as a potential social contributor. A society's default position should be to recognise a person as a potential social contributor and to give due weight to the social contributions she makes. A society that refuses to see a person as a potential social contributor deems her to be beyond the pale.

### III. SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

*Maintaining Social Connections*. The first set of cases discussed above focused on social abilities and the opportunities needed to support them. The second set of cases focused purely on social contribution opportunities. There is a third set of cases that neither denies a person social contribution opportunities as such nor, in consequence, undermine her basic social abilities. Instead, these cases compromise her efforts to form and maintain deep social connections. Consider:

*Non-repeated Contact*: Suppose that Julia is unable to solicit society without help (due, for example, to impairment or confinement) and is given access to decent, friendly social contact that is minimally adequate in the number of contact hours (whatever that is). But, she receives that contact from a different person each day. She never sees the same person twice. There's no continuity in her social interactions.

Although Julia has opportunities to show decency, respect, care, concern, friendliness, and kindness to all the people she meets, she cannot form and sustain relationships, give and receive trust, cultivate a joint narrative, or build intimacy. She is radically limited in her abilities to teach, console, comfort, advice, guide, and share with the people she meets. Only she carries a memory of the history of her interactions with people. She is forever starting over. She cannot be a witness to anyone else's life or they a witness to hers. In lacking social connections, she lacks the *particular* social contribution opportunities to pursue deeper ties with others, and this may erode particular aspects of her social abilities, such as the ability to share intimacy with others. (If a baby were treated this way, she would fail to develop the range of social abilities necessary to lead a socially integrated life. (cf. Gerhardt 2014))

---

<sup>18</sup> This case is similar in many respects to 'Lovely Gertraud' discussed in Valentini (2016).

Indeed, we might recognise in such treatment a perverse, but effective mode of punishment, which gives the person the hope of being socially integrated and socially valuable, but then robs her of the kinds of continuous social contribution opportunities that characterise persistent connections.

Consider two further, related cases:

*Severed Contact I:* Imagine a confined or dependent person who is allowed to have *repeated*, decent social contact with people just long enough for her to become attached to them and they to her. Once attached, that contact is severed and those people are replaced by strangers. An example might be Nelson Mandela's experiences in prison. His guards were repeatedly changed because, reportedly, they came to love him.

*Severed Contact II:* Imagine a crueller case in which a confined or dependent person is allowed social contact, but not with the people she already loves such as her children or her spouse. Aung San Suu Kyi's life under house arrest for close to 20 years is an example. (Due to her house arrest and the Burmese government's refusal to let her re-enter the country if she were to leave, she was unable to see her husband when he was dying of cancer in the UK. )

These cases show how excessive positive and negative regulation of a person's social connections becomes an injustice toward her. Some of this injustice may involve a standard form of SCI-2, which unjustly undervalues the importance of certain relationships and bonds. But, some of the injustice may actually involve fully recognising the importance of those social bonds and using them as a weapon against the victims of the injustice.

A related way that a society can attack people's deepest bonds is by forbidding their connections and, consequently, denying them the space to grieve when they lose a loved one, as such grief would expose their connection. This in turn denies them the space to make sense of the loss they've suffered. Moreover, by engaging in the grieving rituals around death, they can contribute socially both to other people who are also grieving for the same loss and to people who are grieving for others. More generally, having an outlet for grief to honour a loved one helps a person to maintain her social abilities to commit, care, and be vulnerable to the loss of a loved one. It's an important condition for a healthy ability to sustain social connections that people be allowed to grieve.<sup>19</sup>

*Protecting Connections.* There are, of course, other ways that society can deny people the possibility to form and sustain decent social connections. Typically, these ways intersect with other kinds of misfortune, vulnerability, disadvantage, and inadequacy.

First, our social needs intersect with our material, bodily, and cultural needs. As noted above, a very poor family may be unable to offer hospitality, which narrows its range of social contribution opportunities. A child who grows up in poverty may receive a poor education, which can impact on her ability to care for others. The impact of the aggregation of disadvantage has been explored elsewhere by others, so I shall not dwell on it here (Wolff and de Shalit, 2008).

Second, our social needs intersect with our political and legal interests. There is a host of mundane ways to limit a person's social resources by encroaching upon

---

<sup>19</sup> I thank Cecile Fabre for highlighting this point.

her political freedoms, such as by denying her freedom of expression and access to communication channels, restricting her movement, and limiting her freedom to practice a religion, all of which interrupts her efforts to seek companions, to engage with others, and to affect her world.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

This paper has unpacked one key element of what it means to be fundamentally social creatures. That key element is social contribution. This paper has sought to identify a myriad of ways in which we can wrong a person as a social contributor either by compromising her hold on the three core social resources of social abilities, social opportunities, and social connections (SCI-1) or by being unjustly prejudiced about her as a social contributor (SCI-2). The paper has identified specific groups of people who are likely to be victims of these types of social contribution injustice, notably, children, criminal offenders, people with severe impairments, elderly people, and people who suffer from other forms of disadvantage including poverty, homelessness, lack of education, bigotry, and ill health. The paper has also shown that any discussion of social rights must attend to the contributive dimension of our social needs.

#### References

- Brownlee, Kimberley 2013: 'A Human Right against Social Deprivation'. *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 63(251), pp. 199-222.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2012: 'Social Deprivation and Criminal Justice'. *Rethinking Criminal Law Theory*. François Tanguay-Renaud & James Stribopoulos (eds.) Hart, pp. 217-230.
- Cacioppo, John T. and William Patrick 2008: *Loneliness*. New York NY: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Forsdyke, Sara 2005: *Exile, Ostracism, and Democracy: The Politics of Expulsion in Ancient Greece*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Fricker, Miranda 2007: *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gerhardt, Sue 2014: *Why Love Matters*. Second edition. Routledge.
- Held, Virginia 2006: *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Levy, Neil 2016: 'Neuroethics and Responsibility'. *The Blackwell Companion to Applied Philosophy*. Kasper Lippert-Rasmussen, Kimberley Brownlee, and David Coady (eds). Wiley.
- Liao, Matthew 2015: *The Right to Be Loved*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lynch, Kathleen, John Baker, Sara Cantillon, and Judy Walsh 2009: 'Which Equalities Matter? The Place of Affective Equality in Egalitarian Thinking'. *Affective Equality: Love, Care and Injustice*. Kathleen Lynch, John Baker, and Maureen Lyons (eds.). Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, pp. 12-34.

NASA Headquarters History Office 2001: 'Long Duration Psychology'. *Shuttle-Mir: The U.S. and Russia Share History's Highest Stage*. <http://history.nasa.gov/SP-4225/long-duration/long.htm>

Shalev, Sharon 2008: *Sourcebook on Solitary Confinement*. Nuffield Foundation Report. [http://www.solitaryconfinement.org/uploads/sourcebook\\_web.pdf](http://www.solitaryconfinement.org/uploads/sourcebook_web.pdf).

Sterelny, Kim 2012: *The Evolved Apprentice: How Evolution Made Humans Unique*. Harvard, Mass.: The MIT Press.

Tsang, Emily 2014: 'Police Called after Family Defies H7N9 Quarantine Order'. *South China Morning Post*: <http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/article/1442074/police-called-after-family-defies-h7n9-quarantine-order>.

Valentini, Laura 2016: 'Do We Have a Right to Make Friends: Justice, Beneficence, and Meaningful Social Relationships'. *The Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* (forthcoming).

Wolff, Jonathan, and Avner de Shalit 2008: *Disadvantage*. Oxford University Press.