

UNITED WISDOM

Solovyov: all-unity and differences within the whole

Traditions and Worldviews

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Epigraph

> *“The human person is infinite: this is an axiom of moral philosophy.”*

Vladimir Solovyov, *The Justification of the Good*, Chapter X, II. Our own English translation of the Russian original. “Infinity” here is the philosopher’s moral proposition, rather than a measurable human characteristic.

What this article is about

We readily agree that everything is connected until connection begins to demand sameness. In a family, work group, or religious community, “unity” may mean cooperation or a convenient absence of objections. Vladimir Solovyov asks a harder question: what should a whole be like for belonging to it to affirm the individual? This article examines all-unity through knowledge, morality, and love. We will distinguish the philosophical aspiration to wholeness from simply mixing different ways of knowing, and examine where the image of a common organism helps and where it conceals power. Solovyov will not become the author of a modern relationship manual here. His thought offers a criterion for our own decisions: does the proposed connection increase everyone’s ability to act and be heard? If the whole is declared the highest value, we need to establish who is allowed to speak for everyone within it.

I. A whole that still needs to be built

All-unity can usefully be read as a demanding question about how connections are arranged, rather than a reassuring phrase about harmony already achieved. Connectedness itself says nothing about a relationship’s quality. Creditor and debtor are connected; rivals depend on each other; participants in an unjust order also form a system. The impossibility of isolation does not establish that the existing whole is well arranged. This distinction governs the discussion that follows.

Imagine a hypothetical editorial office. It has a shared purpose, but every new text is approved in a way that removes its author’s voice. The editor considers the result coherent: the terminology is uniform and no inconvenient contradictions remain. The author sees a different result: the journal no longer contains what made them write. Both discuss quality, but one measures resemblance and the other the possibility of substantive participation. A question about the whole cannot be settled simply by counting identical formulations.

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In *The Philosophical Principles of Integral Knowledge*, Section II, Solovyov proposes an organic synthesis of science, philosophy, and theology. This is his program: one-sided domains should enter into fuller knowledge. “Organic” points to a connection between different functions. The program still needs to answer how methods of examination can be reconciled when they produce different results.

The practical meaning of this reading appears before acceptance of the entire metaphysics. Instead of asking “are we together or separate?” we ask “which differences does our work require?” A shared task may need different speeds, competencies, and ways of objecting. Difference becomes a resource whose use requires relationships to be arranged, rather than an obstacle to eliminate. At the same time, no participant must justify every personal characteristic through its usefulness to the group.

A whole that preserves only useful differences can absorb the person too. Contribution and dignity must therefore be distinguished. A contribution can be discussed, changed, and sometimes become unnecessary. Dignity should not disappear along with a job, productivity, or a fortunate agreement of views. This boundary prevents talk of unity from becoming an attractive description of mutual exploitation.

II. Why a sum does not yet make unity

Adding information is different from connecting its grounds. A medical test, family tradition, religious text, and philosophical argument may be placed on one table. Their proximity does not make them answer identical questions. Laboratory measurement checks one thing, memory reports another, and a moral principle permits evaluation of a third. The mistake begins when the presence of many voices is treated as evidence for a shared conclusion.

Consider a hypothetical decision to move. An economic calculation shows expenses. A memory explains why someone is attached to a place. A conversation with loved ones reveals obligations. A religious conviction may give hospitality or belonging a particular meaning. None of these elements must replace the others. But the decision can become more coherent if we see where they actually meet and where disagreement remains.

Solovyov’s program is interesting for the boldness of this connection itself. In it, knowledge should not remain a collection of detached domains. A contemporary application, however, needs an additional discipline: distinguishing fact, explanation, and value. An account of inner certainty is a significant fact about someone’s experience. It does not yet establish an accurate forecast of the property market. Conversely, economic advantage does not itself cancel a moral obligation.

This discipline can be imagined as a negotiating table for ways of understanding. Each participant presents their own grounds and limit. Ask a calculation about its input data, memory

about its accuracy, a principle about consistency, and faith about its particular tradition. No one receives the right to occupy the entire table simply because their language seems the most rigorous or profound.

Wholeness then means responsibility for transitions. If a financial result becomes a moral requirement, the transition needs explanation. If a metaphysical image becomes an everyday recommendation, we need to show which conditions make it reasonable. Excess confidence often hides in these transitions. Preserving differences does not obstruct synthesis; it reveals what has really been connected and what has merely been placed side by side to create an impression of completeness.

III. The person as a center of relationships

Relationships form human life, but do not give others the right to own it. In Chapter X of *The Justification of the Good*, Solovyov challenges the conception of the person as a closed circle: its content is connected with others. This grounds a critique of the isolated “I.” It is nevertheless different from permission for society to dispose of every participant.

A child receives language from others; a specialist learns in a system created before them; even a solitary writer uses words from a common culture. Gratitude and obligations may follow. Without further argument, a lifelong duty to obey whoever provided education, employment, or support does not follow. Received help creates a history of relationships, but does not turn someone into a benefactor’s property.

In a hypothetical family, an adult daughter is reminded of the effort invested in her upbringing. The reminder may be true. The conclusion then drawn is that she must choose the profession assigned to her. A substitution has occurred: dependence in one’s origins became dependence in one’s decision. We can notice it without denying the family connection. Recognition of the past and the right to one’s own future can coexist.

The word “center” helps here. A center of relationships is not a point entirely dissolved in the lines converging on it. People receive, understand, and change connections. They can answer differently from what was expected. If that answer is prohibited in advance, a relationship ceases to be an encounter and becomes an allocation of functions. Wholeness has been achieved by excluding the participant’s ability to take part in defining it.

In a mature shared undertaking, obligations can be discussed, deadlines agreed, and particular proposals refused. The connection remains real because disagreement does not automatically destroy belonging. This promises no freedom from conflict. Sometimes differences lead people apart. But parting with recognition of the other is different from declaring them nothing because they no longer occupy an assigned place. A relationship is tested by how it handles its limit as well.

IV. Egoism is different from self-respect

Giving up egoism is often proposed as giving up one's own importance. In Solovyov, this reading meets a direct objection. In *The Meaning of Love*, Second Article, III, the problem is exclusiveness: someone recognizes unconditional significance in themselves while denying it to others. The task is therefore to broaden recognition, rather than diminish one person's dignity.

This thought is especially clear in a dispute about time. One person considers their own exhaustion sufficient grounds for rest, while calling someone else's exhaustion a whim. Another accepts the importance of rest for both but sees that two needs cannot be met simultaneously today. The second case will also involve tension and choice. The conflict, however, is no longer settled beforehand by lowering one participant's value.

Self-respect allows us to say: my time, body, and effort matter. Egoistic exclusiveness adds: other people's time, bodies, and effort matter only insofar as they serve mine. These statements are far apart. If the distance goes unnoticed, an appeal to love readily becomes pressure on someone already accustomed to yielding. They hear that any boundary proves their moral inadequacy.

The reverse error is possible too. Someone uses "boundaries" to declare every convenience inviolable, including a breach of agreement. Equal dignity does not remove responsibility for a particular act. We can recognize a person's value while requiring repayment of a debt, an end to humiliating speech, or fulfillment of a promise. Moral recognition does not mean agreeing with every action of the person recognized.

It therefore helps to divide the dispute into two questions. First: does everyone have the right to be considered? Second: what decision is fair under these circumstances? The first must not be handed over to the winner of the second. Even if one solution is preferred today, the other person retains the grounds for existing with their own needs. Unity appears here as preserving mutual recognition within an irreducible difference of interests.

V. Love need not produce a copy

Closeness faces a serious test when the other person stops matching the image we have made. At a relationship's beginning, it is easier to love someone alongside a convenient forecast: they will always understand, support, and share my interests. An independent desire, unexpected conviction, or refusal then appears. Precisely then we can see whether the other was recognized as a center of life or merely a fortunate addition to ours.

Solovyov's theme of individuality makes this question acute. We can take a bounded moral orientation from it: love should affirm the other's irreplaceability. His broader reflections on the

transformation of nature and human love belong to his own religious metaphysics. An everyday decision does not require presenting these propositions as a proven psychological theory or promising relationships immortality.

Imagine a hypothetical couple. One partner wants long journeys; the other needs a stable home. They may find no joint solution. First, however, we need to establish whether they allow both wishes to be legitimate. If travel is declared development and home cowardice, the conversation has already been decided. If home is called maturity and travel immaturity, the same thing has happened in reverse.

Recognizing difference is different from passively accepting every situation. People examine costs, duration, possibilities for alternating, and the boundaries of compromise. Sometimes separate lives are necessary. The question is whether a decision comes from examining actual circumstances or from a demand to stop being oneself in order to belong. Togetherness that permits only one pattern of life does not become love because it receives a warm name.

Giving up the right to explain the other finally is especially difficult. We believe we know their wishes better because we have long been close. But long acquaintance supplies material for understanding, rather than a monopoly on interpretation. Closeness must retain room for: “You know me, but I am telling you something new now.” Without this room, a relationship preserves an earlier image and obstructs what makes personhood valuable: its living existence.

VI. The organism image and its dangerous turn

An organism helps represent differences as mutually necessary. In 1 Corinthians 12:12–27, Paul discusses the community through a body with different members. No function makes the others unnecessary. This is a religious image of community in Christ, rather than a ready-made arrangement for every political or workplace organization.

Comparison with all-unity is appropriate at one point: unity does not require a single function. But the body metaphor becomes dangerous when people are assigned irreversible places. A hand cannot ask to become an eye; a person can change profession, opinion, and group. Whoever manages a common organization should not gain a surgeon’s power over an “inconvenient organ.” The metaphor does not cancel participants’ independence.

A hypothetical manager says the team resembles a family or body. If this means mutual help during illness, the image may support people. If it means giving up leave, the right to object, and the possibility of leaving, it conceals coercion. Concrete actions need scrutiny: who allocates work, who bears costs, and who can revise an assigned role, rather than the solemn description.

A subtler problem also exists. The common good sometimes really requires restrictions. We cannot satisfy all wishes simultaneously, preserve every deadline, and avoid allocating a scarce resource. But a restriction should have intelligible grounds, a duration, and a possibility of examination. The organism image proves nothing by itself. It needs translation into decisions people can manage together.

This translation preserves the metaphor's best part: attention to mutual dependence. Its worst part goes: the idea that the governing center may consider itself the embodiment of the whole. If everyone else exists only as part of its plan, all-unity turns into rule by one. The difference appears in the right to question the shared purpose itself, rather than merely the most convenient way of carrying out an order.

VII. Agreement and resemblance are different results

Agreement does not always mean understanding, and difference does not always mean rupture. In *The Analects* 13.23, James Legge's translation contrasts affability with adulation. What matters here is the possibility of being together without substituting ingratiation for relationship. The Confucian context of cultivating the exemplary person should not become Solovyov's metaphysics; two ways of posing a question about togetherness are being compared.

Participants in a hypothetical council unanimously support a decision. Some studied the arguments, others fear appearing disloyal, and others did not understand the question. The vote is identical, but the agreement's content differs. Unanimity cannot establish that differences were considered. Sometimes public sameness exists precisely because differences had no safe place.

Consider the reverse: two people disagree about spending priorities but accurately restate each other's grounds and are willing to examine data. Their positions remain different, while the connection may be better than in a silently unanimous group. Connection appears in the availability of a mutual answer, rather than obligatory agreement in conclusion. This bounded practical criterion can be discussed independently of religious affiliation.

The criterion changes how an objection is treated. An objection is not always useful and sometimes obstructs work. But usefulness should be assessed by substance, rather than unpleasantness for the manager. Someone pointing to a faulty calculation does not become a destroyer of shared work because it is inconvenient. If they endlessly demand discussion of something already checked without new grounds, the group may set a limit.

Wholeness requires openness alongside the ability to complete particular decisions. It needs neither endless dispute nor its prohibition. The appropriate question is specific: which difference changes today's choice? Everything else may remain a subject for the next

conversation. Preserving this distinction over time allows action together without declaring temporary coordination the final unity of convictions.

VIII. Unity in the face of injustice

An appeal to remember what is shared is especially dangerous when it appears only after someone harmed speaks up. They are asked not to damage the family, the organization's reputation, or spiritual unity. Meanwhile, the violation that already damaged the connection moves into the background. The whole is protected against a report of injustice rather than against injustice.

For examination, ask which part of events people are being asked to overlook. If unity requires one participant's silence, its value has become conditional. Equal recognition should operate more strictly here than the desire to preserve a familiar picture. A common history can be valued while a particular behavior is required to stop. These actions need not count as betrayal of what is shared.

Kant's humanity-as-an-end formula in *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Section II offers a comparative limit: a person must not be used merely as a means. Kant's justification differs, proceeding through practical reason. The similarity with our reading of Solovyov lies in refusing to turn someone's personhood into expendable material for a common result, rather than in identity between philosophical systems.

In a hypothetical charity, an employee is asked to work continually without pay for a lofty mission. They may voluntarily donate some time. But if an absence of boundaries becomes proof of morality, the mission gains priority over their life. An honest common undertaking must name the actual need, discuss the distribution of burdens, and preserve the right to refuse. Voluntary help is different from unlimited availability.

Protecting a connection sometimes begins with distance. This is especially clear when unequal power obstructs direct conversation. "First feel the unity" may simply return someone to the old pressure. The practical criterion is more modest and precise: has it become possible to report facts safely, retain boundaries, and reconsider decisions? If not, beautiful language about wholeness still describes what is desired rather than achieved.

IX. Integral knowledge must withstand disagreement

The strictest test of synthesis is encountering a fact or argument that does not fit. If a system explains every objection in advance through the objector's spiritual immaturity, it has protected itself from correction. Unity is then achieved by controlling permissible questions, rather than connecting grounds. This matters more to a reflective reader than the impressive breadth of a list of traditions.

A religious intuition can be respected while we ask what it permits us to conclude. A scientific method can be recognized while we discuss which values govern application of its result. These questions need not merge. Their separation helps prevent two substitutions: declaring a desired outcome empirically established, and declaring a measurable outcome morally obligatory without further reasoning.

Imagine a hypothetical reader who finds similar images in three books. The coincidence seems to prove a common truth. Yet the authors may differ in their understanding of personhood, world, and salvation. Similar form does not establish identical content. We need to ask what work the image does in each text and what it does not assert. After such reading, the resemblance may become more modest but more substantive.

In this application, all-unity is a discipline of connecting, rather than a license to mix. It requires seeing relations between domains without destroying each domain’s scrutiny. This is our editorial interpretation, rather than a literal reconstruction of Solovyov’s entire system. It uses the problem he posed for a contemporary reader’s question about the quality of shared understanding.

The discipline has a cost: an answer may remain incomplete. Some claims of faith, philosophy, and science will not be reducible to one conclusion. Recognizing this remainder need not mean defeat. It preserves space for future work. A whole completed too quickly often turns out poorer than the world it hoped to contain. Thought that can withstand difference need not resolve every difference immediately.

X. What remains of the grand design

The value of a philosophical project can be discussed separately from accepting it entirely. Solovyov proposes understanding knowledge and moral life through overcoming separation. We may reject some of his religious foundations while still noticing a question often missing from practical discussion: how can we be together without making the other an appendage to our aim?

The question requires two movements. First, leave the idea that my interests exist in a vacuum. Second, refuse to make dependence a justification of subordination. With only the first, the person dissolves into the whole’s demands. With only the second, any obligation appears an intrusion. Relational life begins where one’s initiative and an actual connection can be examined together.

The hypothetical editorial office from the beginning also gains a different criterion of quality. It need not publish twenty materials that sound identical. It needs to ensure a common standard of accuracy while preserving the authors’ new questions. Sometimes an editor reasonably corrects an error; sometimes an author reasonably defends a difference. Cooperation depends

on the possibility of presenting grounds and changing a decision, rather than one side always winning.

In this sense, the whole appears in its capacity to learn from a part. If no particular testimony can change the common account, the part is decorative. If every particular demand destroys the possibility of shared work, the connection cannot hold. Between these extremes, a procedure is needed: who hears an objection, what counts as grounds, and how a prior decision is revised.

All-unity should not be promised as an experience that removes conflict. For a reader, it may become a more sober requirement for the language of unity. Naming a whole does not show that everyone is included. Naming love does not show recognition of the other. Calling knowledge integral does not connect methods of examination. Each word can nevertheless begin real work if it is followed by a question about concrete relationships and their consequences.

What this means in practice

Choose one common undertaking in which “we” actually affects your decisions. It may be a family, work group, or project among friends. Describe it first without philosophical terms: what you do, who participates, which resources are spent, and who decides. This lets you see the connection’s arrangement before giving it an elevated name.

Find a difference currently causing tension. Formulate both positions so their holders could recognize themselves. Instead of “he does not care,” record what the person wants and actually communicated. Instead of “I must yield,” specify which agreement grounds the obligation. If information is missing, leave room for the unknown. Guessing someone’s motive does not make a shared plan more coherent.

Examine the symmetry of recognition. If your exhaustion requires consideration, is theirs considered? If the common aim justifies your request, may the other discuss its cost? Symmetry does not require identical distribution of everything. It requires grounds for unequal burdens and preservation of the dignity of someone temporarily receiving less. Particular circumstances can be discussed specifically without declaring one life secondary.

Choose a small change in the undertaking’s arrangement: a clear deadline, the possibility of refusal, distribution of burdens, or a separate time for objections. It should have an observable result. Have promises become clearer? Has every request stopped becoming an unconditional demand? Is it possible to report inability to fulfill an agreement? Do not measure the result solely by how pleasant the conversation feels.

If a relationship is unsafe or a significant refusal provokes threats, this exercise does not oblige joint discussion. Distance and outside support may be necessary conditions of independent decision. A philosophical image must not persuade you to sacrifice your capacity to act for a beautiful description of the whole. Retain a clear criterion: a connection deserves strengthening insofar as mutual recognition of concrete people becomes possible within it.

Key quotation

> *"The fundamental falsehood and evil of egoism do not lie in this absolute self-awareness and self-evaluation of the subject."*

Vladimir Solovyov, *The Meaning of Love*, Second Article, III. Our own English translation of a short fragment of a sentence in the Russian original. The continuation locates the problem in denying others the significance one recognizes in oneself. The quotation does not propose abandoning one's dignity.

Connections between traditions

Comparison	Similarity	Boundary
Solovyov: person and society ↔ Paul: different members of one body	Community cannot be described through a single function.	Paul addresses the church community in Christ; Solovyov's moral and metaphysical program extends beyond this image.
Solovyov: criticism of exclusive egoism ↔ Kant: humanity as an end	The other should not merely be an instrument of my design.	Kant's grounds concern practical reason; Solovyov's belong to a different religious and philosophical system.
Wholeness of relationships ↔ *The Analects* 13.23: affability without adulation	A good relationship does not require ingratiating agreement.	Confucian moral cultivation is not a doctrine of all-unity.
Solovyov: recognition of an irreplaceable other ↔ Buber: I–Thou	Encounter cannot be reduced to use.	Buber is introduced through the academic SEP discussion; his dialogical philosophy is different from Solovyov's synthesis.
Solovyov: integral knowledge ↔ contemporary distinction between fact and value	Different grounds require explicit transitions.	The latter is this article's reading method, rather than proof of an achieved synthesis of science and theology.

Primary sources and research

1. V. S. Solovyov. *The Philosophical Principles of Integral Knowledge*, II — a program of synthesis; selected passages of the section were read in Russian, rather than the entire work.

2. V. S. Solovyov. *The Justification of the Good*, X, I–II — person, society, and the person's moral status; Russian primary text.

3. V. S. Solovyov. *The Meaning of Love*, Second Article, II–III — distinguishing individuality and egoism; the key quotation was checked against the Russian text.

4. 1 Corinthians 12 — the members-of-the-body image; KJV was read. The article paraphrases it without a verbatim Russian translation.

5. Immanuel Kant. *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, II — the humanity formula; Thomas Kingsmill Abbott's English translation, locator AA 4:429.

6. *The Analects*, XIII.23, Project Gutenberg — a primary passage in James Legge's translation: affability without adulation. The Russian formulations are paraphrases.

7. Martin Buber. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy — the academic account of I–Thou, the section on *I and Thou*, rather than a reading of Buber's entire book.

Tags

Solovyov, all-unity, integral knowledge, personhood, society, individuality, egoism, love, dignity, recognition, differences, whole, connection, freedom, moral philosophy, theology, synthesis, boundaries, agreement, harmony, Kant, Paul, Confucius, Buber, responsibility, togetherness, common undertaking

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