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The concept of group identification and some of its implications

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- Niels de Haan (Department of Philosophy, University of Vienna, AUT)
- Andras Szigeti (Lund Gothenburg Responsibility Project, Lund University, SWE)
- Björn Petersson (Lund Gothenburg Responsibility Project, Lund University, SWE)
- Olle Blomberg (Lund Gothenburg Responsibility Project, Lund University, SWE)
- Matthias Gunnemyr (Lund Gothenburg Responsibility Project, Lund University, SWE)
- Stephanie Collins (Australian Catholic University, AUS; ERC Project "Group Agency", University of Vienna, AUT)
- Grace Paterson (ERC Project "Group Agency", University of Vienna, AUT)
- Matthew Rachar (ERC Project "Group Agency", University of Vienna, AUT)
- Franz Altner (ERC Project "Group Agency", University of Vienna, AUT)

Abstracts

Name: Stephanie Collins (Australian Catholic University, AUS; ERC Project "Group Agency", University of Vienna, AUT)
Title: Overdemandingness for Collective Agents

Abstract:
When an obligation is overdemanding, its bearer is excused from performing the obligation (or, on some interpretations, the obligation disappears altogether). This paper asks: when is a moral or legal obligation overdemanding for a collective agent, such as a state, business, or not-for-profit? One answer is 'just in case its performance would be overdemanding for at least one member.' But an obligation's being overdemanding on members is neither necessary nor sufficient for its being overdemanding on the collective itself. Another answer is that an obligation is overdemanding for a collective agent just if its fulfilment would frustrate the collective's deep preferences. But this doesn't respect the idea that phenomenology is central to demandingness. I advocate a third answer, under which an obligation is overly demanding for a collective agent only if the obligation's content is beyond the agent's abilities. I analyse collective agents' abilities in terms of their 'procedural constraints.' The result is that pure overdemandingness is never an excuse for a collective agent not to perform an obligation.

Name: Olle Blomberg (Lund Gothenburg Responsibility Project, Lund University, SWE)
Title: Collective authorship and responsibility in science

Abstract:
Standards or guidelines for authorship in scientific practice and publishing sometimes refer to the "joint" or "collective" responsibility of authors, or the responsibility that they "share" for the content of scientific papers and for the integrity of the reported research (see e.g. Wager and Kleinert 2011; ALLEA 2017; ICMJE 2018). Furthermore, this responsibility is, or should be, "taken" by the authors. In this talk, I consider how we should understand the idea of authors taking collective responsibility in the light of the philosophical literature on collective responsibility. I will also examine how we should understand collective authorship as collective agency. While co-authoring of research papers is often mentioned as an example in discussions of collective speech acts (e.g. Hughes 1984; Tollefsen 2007; Fricker 2012; Lackey 2018), existing accounts of collective assertion arguably do not fit many cases of collective authorship in science well.

Name: Matthias Gunnemyr (Lund Gothenburg Responsibility Project, Lund University, SWE)
Title: Making a vague difference:
Kagan, Nefsky and the sorites paradox

Abstract: The problem of collective harm arises when there are bad consequences if enough people act in a certain way, but when no single act seems to make a morally relevant difference. For instance, when enough people emit greenhouse gases, this leads to climate change. Still, no single drive with a gas guzzling car seems to make a morally relevant difference with respect to climate change. Shelly Kagan (2011) starts out arguing that at least in some collective harm cases – the triggering cases – each individual has a reason no to perform the problematic act in question (such as emitting greenhouse gases) since doing so might trigger some great harm. He then proceeds by arguing that non-triggering cases are conceptually impossible, and concludes that all collective harm cases are triggering cases.

  Julia Nefsky (2012) shows that Kagan's main argument is inadequate. It is inadequate since all it amounts to is insisting that in sorites cases, adding one grain of sand could turn a non-heap into a heap. However, she does not show that his conclusion is incorrect. She does however concede that Kagan would be right if the epistemic view of vagueness would turn out to be correct. She then continues: "epistemicism is highly controversial, and we should begin our evaluation of Kagan's arguments—as he begins his arguments—from the intuitive, pre-theoretic perspective in which nontriggering cases seem to be a real possibility" (Nefsky 2012: 378). I agree with Nefsky that we should begin our investigation from a pre-theoretic perspective, but we should also advance to a more theoretic one. I go through the most widely held accounts of vagueness: the epistemic view, accepting a three-valued logic, and supervaluationism, and consider whether they entail that there is a sharp boundary in sorites cases. Interestingly, all these views entail that there is at least one such boundary. Does this mean that Kagan was right after all? I end by arguing that neither the epistemic view nor supervaluationism entails that there must be a boundary of the morally relevant sort, and

(following Fine 1975) that a three-valued logic fails in its own right. This means that non-triggering cases of the morally relevant kind still are conceptually possible.

Name: András Szigeti (Lund Gothenburg Responsibility Project, Lund University/Linköping University, SWE)
Title: Obligations towards Collectives
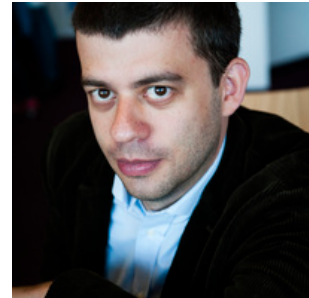
Abstract: One way to frame the discussion regarding the moral status of collectives is to ask how it differs from those of individual human beings. Moral status is understood here to be constituted by the attributes and capacities of an entity, e.g., whether something is an agent, whether it is reasons-responsive, whether it is a person, whether it can be responsible, whether it is the bearer of rights and obligations, and so on. Collectivists argue that an ascription of at least some such attributes and capacities to groups can be made non-distributively, i.e., the ascription does not simply mean that one or more individual members of the group have those attributes and capacities. It is of course possible to argue simultaneously for such a collectivist position in one domain and an individualist one in another. For instance, one could claim that groups can be responsible in a non-distributive sense, but deny that they have moral rights. It is also possible to take collectivist positions with regard to some types of groups (e.g., formal organizations) but not towards others (e.g., random crowds).
This paper contributes to this general debate about the moral status of collectives by investigating some aspects of the obligations we have towards groups. Specifically, the paper aims to show that group obligations are ineliminable in the sense that certain valid obligations towards individuals entail valid obligations towards the group to which these individuals belong. We can only discharge some of our duties towards individuals by also recognizing our duties towards groups they belong to. In a slogan, we may sometimes have to pay to the group what we owe to individuals. This argument demonstrates the existence of group duties without making use of any further assumptions about group agency or group personhood. Since in this way we remain uncommitted as regards the metaphysics of group agency or personhood, our solution is not only theoretically parsimonious but should also appeal to both collectivists and individualists.

Name: Carol Gould (The Graduate Center – City University of New York, USA)
Title: Rethinking Solidarity through the lens of a Critical Social Ontology

Abstract: Existing accounts of collective responsibility in recent philosophical literature have tended to focus on the corporate responsibility of existing groups agents, with a view to holding them to account for their wrongful actions. Likewise, calls to rectify historical injustices also seek to identify wrongful actors and to correct for the harms that they have brought about. In this paper, I argue that accounts of shared or collective responsibility need to be much broader than these. It is not merely that they tend to be limited to backward looking issues of liability for harm, as Iris Marion Young has argued. Instead, they fail to see the way that responsibility can be (and I argue, often needs to be) conceived in a processive and ongoing way. We can see this alternative model in the activity of solidarity networks, often—though

certainly not always--operating transnationally. I draw on the distinction I have previously elaborated between (relatively) unitary solidarity groups, conceived as already existing, e.g. a (putative) national group, and the network solidarities aimed at rectifying injustices, e.g. practices of oppression or exploitation. In these latter contexts, taking responsibility for existing harms and institutional injustices can be a motivation for forming these groups themselves and for guiding their ongoing activity. In a sense, the process of taking responsibility can be seen as binding together these groups, and even as constituting or constructing the groups themselves, in a way that is the opposite of existing models of collective responsibility. The processes of acting in solidarity with others can in turn enhance the sense of collective responsibility among the participants. I suggest that this alternative is especially important for understanding responsibility for global harms like climate change and global economic injustices. The paper will conclude with some brief reflections on how these two models can intersect and interact with each other in important ways.

Name: Björn Petersson (Lund Gothenburg Responsibility Project, Lund University, SWE)
Title: The concept of group identification and some implications

Abstract: The phrase "group identification" is frequently employed in social psychology, e.g. in relation to how degrees and patterns of group identification affect experiences of collective victimhood or collective guilt feelings. However, in these contexts it is not always clear what it means for an individual to identify with a group. In their research reviews of empirical work connecting group identification to collective guilt/collective victimhood Ferguson & Branscombe (2014, 259) as well as Noor et al (2017, 126) identify similar lacunas in the existing body of research when it comes to the conceptual framework: especially concerning the question of in which sense the attitudes studied are collective.

The exact understanding of "group identification" will have implications for the interpretation and significance of empirical results. On one interpretation, which appears to be in line with how many results are presented, an individual identifies with a group insofar as the individual is disposed to feel guilt, pride, grief etc. on behalf of the group. But in that case, the hypothesis that group identification is a predictor of those very attitudes seems to be of little explanatory value.

The concept of group identification has also had a recent renaissance in different areas of philosophy. In philosophy of action, group identification is related to the question of how to distinguish collective action from mere coordination. In game theory, it is central to the much discussed "team reasoning" model. In moral philosophy, it is invoked in relation to criteria for moral and legal complicity.

My hypothesis is that there is a fruitful way of understanding group identification which is relevant to, and gets support from, these different contexts, and that a scientifically respectable functional analysis of this core concept would clarify empirical claims as well as issues of relevance to ethics and practical rationality. I suggest that we should understand group identification in terms of the perspective from which attitudes are held rather than in terms of their objects. I discuss some normative implications of this approach in relation to group guilt and group victimhood.

Name: Grace Paterson (ERC Project "Group Agency", University of Vienna, AUT)
Title: Trusting on Another's Say-So

Abstract: This talk will examine two kinds of speech act often issued by group agents such as governments and corporations: promises and apologies. These speech acts are of interest because they require a group to be able to take responsibility for its past and future actions. More specifically, promises involve committing oneself to future actions, while apologies involve accepting responsibility for something one has already done (and perhaps additional elements such as expressing regret and taking steps to repair damage). Given the nature of these speech acts, it is notable that group actors can have very long lifespans, going through large-scale turnover in membership as well as changes in their underlying organizational structure. This means that group members present at the time of a promise might not be around to help make good on that promise, and group members present at the time of an apology may not themselves have participated in the harmful actions of the past. Making sense of group promises and apologies therefore requires us to develop a clear picture of what makes a group agent the same over time. I will present an account of cross-temporal group identity and responsibility designed to help make sense of these cases.

Name: Matthew Rachar (ERC Project "Group Agency", University of Vienna, AUT)
Title: "A Pathology of Group Agency"

Abstract: Sometimes an agent does something without her own active participation. Instead of the agent performing the behaviour, some non-agential part does. When that happens in a patterned and predictable way that calls their agency into question, we may be able to identify a pathology of agency. Such pathologies affect both group and individual agents. Just as individual agency is undermined by an unendorsed part of an individual acting in place of the agent, so too is group agency undermined by an unauthorized member of the group acting in place of it. I here discuss one such case of agential pathology in the case of groups, in which a dissident member of a group acts in light of what he takes the group's interests and attitudes to be, but in a way that goes against the group's agential point of view. I consider several practical concerns brought out by dissident member action in the context of a group agent, especially with respect to how dissident member action calls into question a group's agency. I also argue, against an influential account of group agency and in a way that distinguishes them from individual agents, that under certain conditions group agents are responsible for such actions.

Name: Franz Altner (ERC Project "Group Agency", University of Vienna, AUT)
Title: Group Agents and the Moral Sentiments

Abstract: In his famous paper „Freedom and Resentment" Peter Strawson developed an account of moral responsibility grounded in the fairness of adopting reactive emotions towards those that we stand in interpersonal relationships to. A similar stance is also adopted towards group agents such as corporations even though, on first glance, they often seem to lack reflective self-control with regard to moral reasons and reactive emotions such as guilt. In the case of individuals we normally react to these deficiencies by exempting them from being held accountable. Does this mean that we are not justified in holding group agents such as corporations morally responsible? This talk looks at the continuum and limit of possible accountability ascriptions towards group agents and considers how the inner constitution of group agents can diminish or increase the self-control or capacity for states of reactive emotions that would make it (un)fair to hold them responsible.

Name: Niels de Haan (Department of Philosophy, University of Vienna, AUT)
Title: Collective Responsibility and The Principle of Blame Presupposes Duty

Abstract: Moral responsibility as in blameworthiness presupposes the violation or unfulfillment of a moral imperative. Call this the principle of blame-presupposes-duty. I investigate whether and how this principle functions in collective contexts. If type-symmetrical, (i) collective responsibility necessarily presupposes a collective duty; and (ii) given that only moral agents can have moral duties, collective responsibility necessarily presupposes collective moral agency. The assumption of type-symmetry seems widespread among procedural collectivists who (roughly) equate collective (moral) agency with a group having a procedure that facilitates rational decision-making. Analyzing various cases of blameworthy collective actions involving various types of groups, I show that only a weak version of blame-presupposes-duty applies if one adopts procedural collectivism. I argue that non-agential groups can be collectively responsible without having a collective obligation, because the violation of individual obligations may lead to irreducible collective wrongdoing for which only the group is blameworthy. Because of this asymmetry, certain arguments that show that non-agential groups can or cannot have obligations fail. Moreover, procedural collectivists can no longer invoke collective responsibility to argue for the irreducibility of collective agency. Finally, having conceptually pried apart agency and responsibility, I show why none of this is problematic for individual responsibility in a unified ethical theory.
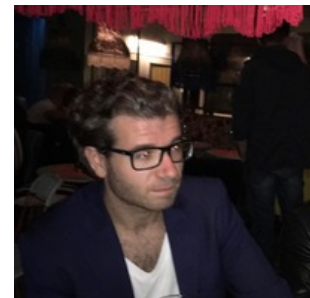
Key words: blame-presupposes-duty; collective action; collective agents; collective duties; collective responsibility; ethical theory; moral blame; moral responsibility; purposive groups; unstructured groups.

Name: Hans Bernhard Schmid (Department of Philosophy, University of Vienna, AUT)
Title: Collective Responsibility and Plural Self-Awareness

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