

Project Description: The Ethics of Blaming and Praising Group Agents

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2. State of the art

We regularly hold groups morally responsible for what they do. We blame corporations for polluting the environment. We hold the government morally accountable for invading our privacy. We praise non-governmental organizations for saving countless lives. Moral judgments about groups form an important part of our moral responsibility practices. The explanandum of ethical theory consists of all our deontic and evaluative moral judgments and any related moral practices, moral concepts, and values. We can divide the explanandum of ethical theory into two domains. The *individual domain* concerns all moral judgments and practices involving individuals. The *group domain* concerns all moral judgments and practices involving groups. The explanans of such an all-encompassing ethical theory requires a theory of moral psychology and moral agency, a theory of moral responsibility, which, in turn, requires a theory of blame and praise, and a ‘substantive’ ethical theory that justifies deontic moral judgments (e.g., rule-consequentialism, contractualism, Kantianism). There is an ongoing debate between moral individualists and moral collectivists about whether these moral judgments ultimately are about individuals or the groups themselves. Are groups fitting targets for blame and praise? Individualists hold that when we blame the corporation for polluting the environment, only members of the corporation are fitting targets for blame, for example certain high-ranked managers. Collectivists hold that we can fittingly blame the corporation itself without necessarily blaming any group member.

However, the debate on group responsibility is currently disconnected from the debates within the ethics of blame and praise. The ethics of blame and praise has two central tasks: First, to spell out the *nature* of blame and praise, what exactly counts as an instance of blame or praise. Second, to investigate the conditions under which blame- or praise-interactions are *appropriate* (rather than merely whether blame or praise would be *fitting*). For example, someone may lack the standing to blame one of the managers, because he himself is complicit in the pollution. In these debates, the focus is entirely on the individual domain. The prominent theories about the nature and appropriateness of blame and praise are based on cases exclusively about individuals. This disconnect raises two important problems. First, this raises a problem concerning *extensional adequacy*. Our best theories on the nature and appropriateness of blame and praise should not be developed in isolation from the group domain, because cases involving groups are an important part of our moral responsibility practices as well. Hence, the group domain may significantly impact the extensional adequacy of these theories. Second, this raises a problem concerning *methodology*. The nature of blame and praise often informs the conditions of moral responsibility and moral agency, and vice versa. If these theories are developed solely based on the individual domain, there is a significant risk that these theories and concepts are anthropomorphized. This is problematic insofar as many individualists and collectivists straightforwardly apply their best theories of individual moral agency and moral responsibility to groups. This is illustrative of an important methodological lacuna within the debate on group responsibility. How exactly should the group domain be included in our theorizing about concepts such as moral agency, moral responsibility, blame and praise? The Ethics of Blaming and Praising Group Agents project addresses this lack of a unified debate on the ethics, nature and fittingness of blaming and praising groups. In what follows, I will set out the relevant debates and the problems to situate the project and its aims more clearly.

Moral collectivists hold that evaluative moral judgments about groups do not necessarily reduce to moral judgments about individuals: These judgments are not fully explicable and analyzable in terms of judgments about individuals nor are they always made true by such judgments about individuals. These evaluative moral judgments are irreducibly collective. This does not mean that members are necessarily free from responsibility. The group's responsibility can be distributed to members in various ways (Collins and de Haan 2021), but a group can be morally responsible for what they do without any member necessarily being responsible (Copp 2006; Pettit 2007). This type of non-reductive and non-redundant group-level responsibility is often called corporate responsibility, as the paradigm case involves a corporation.

To defend this claim, collectivists advance an argument based on so-called responsibility gaps. For example, consider the sinking of the Herald of Free Enterprise ferry in 1987. An investigation concluded that the corporation was infected with 'the disease of sloppiness' (Pettit 2007, 171). Because of this, members made small mistakes, which combined into a big disaster. No member is to blame for the disaster, as each is excused by the culture of sloppiness or simply by the fact that their mistakes are small. And yet, there is a strong intuition that the corporation is somehow to blame for the disaster. This

is a responsibility gap: We have a pre-theoretic intuition that the group bears moral responsibility, yet we cannot justify this claim via responsibility at the member-level (Collins 2019a). This ‘distressing result’ reveals that there is ‘a deficit in the accounting books’ (Pettit 2007, 194). The key idea is that the corporation cannot invoke its culture as an excuse. Thus, while the individual responsibility of members is defeated, the same considerations need not defeat the responsibility of the group.

What typically underlies these evaluative and deontic judgments is the idea that certain groups qualify as moral agents. For example, procedural collectivists argue that organized groups via their decision-making procedures and organizational structure can adopt and pursue representational and motivational attitudes while robustly satisfying desiderata of rationality (Collins 2019; Hess 2014; List and Pettit 2011). Organized groups, such as states, universities and corporations, qualify as group agents.¹ They have beliefs, desires, intentions and can act just like individuals. Moreover, collectivists argue that these group agents can satisfy the necessary and sufficient conditions for *moral* agency (Björnsson and Hess 2017; Brown 2024; Collins 2019b & 2023; Copp 2006 & 2007; de Haan 2023a & 2023b; French 1984; Hess 2014; Hindriks 2018; List and Pettit 2011). When organized in the right way, group agents can possess moral competence: In a functional sense akin to individuals, these group agents can understand and process moral reasons, relate such reasons to their available evidence and control their actions accordingly (de Haan 2023a; Hindriks 2018; Pettit 2007). Some collectivists further argue that group agents can have moral emotions (Hindriks 2018; Schmid 2014b; cf. de Haan 2023a).² For example, Gunnar Björnsson and Kendy Hess (2017) argue that if certain groups are capable of agency, then they are also capable of states sufficiently similar to guilt and indignation to satisfy the requirements of moral agency. It has further been argued that group agents can have awareness-consciousness (List 2018); that there is a distinctive collective kind of (pre-reflective) self-awareness (Schmid 2014a) and that group agents can be morally self-aware (Collins 2022).

According to collectivists, this makes group agents fit to bear moral responsibility and moral duties. They are fitting targets for blame and praise. Group agents can satisfy the conditions for moral responsibility for an action or omission. Collectivists argue that group agents can possess the right kind of control over their actions, whether this is a structural or programming kind of control (Pettit 2007, Tuomela and Makela 2016); reasons-responsiveness (Hess 2014); or the ability to do otherwise (List Forthcoming). They further argue that group agents can satisfy the epistemic condition for moral responsibility (Biebel 2024; Brown 2021 & 2024). For example, Biebel (2024) argues that a group agent is excused because of ignorance only if that ignorance is justified and a group agent is culpable despite

¹ Gilbert (2014), Schmid (2018), and Tuomela and Makela (2016) identify a wider range of groups as agents and as potential duty- and responsibility-bearers, but de Haan (2023b) argues that these unorganized groups necessarily lack moral competence even if they qualify as group agents.

² de Haan (2023a) argues that group agents are capable of moral understanding without emotions.

being ignorant only if that ignorance is not justified. And they argue that group agents can possess the right kind of sourcehood (Hess 2014), which may involve historical conditions such as not having been previously manipulated or having taken reasonable precautions to guard one's agency against such manipulation (Collins and de Haan 2024).

Moral individualists simply reject collectivism (Badorf 2017; Haji 2006; Hasnas 2017; Ludwig 2007; Malle 1991; McKenna 2006; Miller 2006; Moen 2024; Rönnegard and Velasquez 2017; Thompson 2018; Velasquez 2003). They hold that such judgments can be reduced to more complicated sets of judgments about individuals. They are perhaps a helpful fiction or a *façon de parler*, but groups cannot *really* be agents or morally responsible. When groups are blameworthy, what we ultimately mean is that certain or perhaps all members of the group are to blame. Some deny there are any responsibility gaps, because ultimately members are to blame for the incident (Ludwig 2007; Miller 2007). Others reject the claim that group agents can be autonomous, because members have strategic control over the decision-making (Moen 2024). And some argue that group agents cannot qualify as moral agents because they lack phenomenal consciousness (Badorf 2017) or emotions (Malle 1991; McKenna 2006; Rönnegard and Velasquez 2017; Thomson 2018).

The debate between individualists and collectivists so far has primarily focused on whether groups can possess the general capacities for moral agency, whether groups can satisfy the conditions for moral responsibility for a specific action or omission and whether corporate responsibility is irreducibly collective. The focus has been predominantly on whether groups are fitting targets for moral blame, and to a lesser extent moral praise (Brown 2024; Rozeboom 2024).

However, there is little to no discussion of what the appropriate methodology is for including moral judgments about groups in our theorizing about moral agency, moral responsibility, and blame and praise more generally. Collectivists argue that to adequately account for the group domain, we must recognize that various groups can be morally responsible agents, whereas individualists deny this. But what exactly is the status of the group domain for theorizing about moral agency, moral responsibility, and blame and praise in general? Regardless of whether individualism or collectivism is correct, group contexts matter greatly for answering these questions. To understand the nature of blame, the appropriateness of blame-interactions, and the conditions for moral responsibility, we cannot only consider cases in the individual domain, because the group domain is part of the explanandum too. People do regularly hold groups morally responsible (whether reductively or non-reductively) and this is an important part of our actual moral responsibility practices (Michael & Szigetti 2018; Tarnowski, Ziolkowski & Talasiewicz 2022).

And yet individualists and collectivists both often implicitly assign *all-out primacy* to the individual domain in their theorizing and arguments. This resembles what Sara Rachel Chant (2021) calls the Wash, Rinse, Repeat approach to collective action theory: Take the very best accounts of individual action and agency and simply 'collectivize' them. *Collective* agents have *collective* intentions and other *collective* mental states. This approach implies a kind of isomorphism between individual-

and group-level concepts, assuming that if there is an explanatory relationship between two individual-level concepts, there should be a corresponding pair of collective-level concepts bearing the same explanatory relationship to each other. Similarly, many moral individualists and collectivists take the best theory of individual moral agency and responsibility and mechanistically apply this theory to groups. They assume that groups must satisfy the *exact* conditions for individual moral agency and moral responsibility in order to qualify as moral agents and be fitting targets for moral responsibility (French 1984; Haji 2006; Hasnas 2017; Martin 1976; McKenna 2006; Rönnegard and Velasquez 2017; Shoemaker 2019; Thompson 2018).

For example, Michael McKenna (2006) uses his conversational and communicative theory of moral responsibility and blame to express his extreme skepticism that group agents can be morally responsible in their own right. McKenna takes the overt dyadic blame interaction, where the blamer expresses their resentment directly to the wrongdoer, as the paradigm case for developing an *expressive* and *conversational* Strawsonian account of moral responsibility and morally responsible agency. When an agent performs a morally relevant action, these actions bear ‘action meaning’: the action has salience against a shared interpretive background in terms of what the action signifies about the agent’s quality of will. Holding other people morally responsible for their morally wrongful conduct consists in having and expressing morally reactive attitudes such as resentment and indignation. These reactive attitudes *express* and *communicate* moral demands. But such an expression makes sense only if the target can understand the meaning of this emotional communication. Hence, a morally responsible agent is competent just in so far as she is a capable interlocutor in these “conversational exchanges” between her and the moral community (McKenna 2006, 27). He argues that ‘an agent’s sensitivity to reasons concerning the interpretive framework in which members of the moral community assign salience to types of action and thereby interpret the quality of will with which agents act’ is a necessary condition for morally responsible agency (McKenna 2006, 29). He voices his ‘strong suspicion’ that ‘it is only individual persons who can truly embed themselves in the full complexity of adult interpersonal life, can come to be a part of a moral community, and can thereby apply the relevant sort of framework’ (McKenna 2006, 29). He is doubtful that collective agents are capable of reactive attitudes such as resentment, gratitude, indignation, and guilt, which involve attendant emotions that have their own phenomenal peculiarities (cf. Björnsson and Hess 2017; Hindriks 2018; Schmid 2014).

In similar vein, David Shoemaker (2019) argues that group agents cannot be morally accountable (though they can be morally answerable), because group agents cannot feel sincere remorse, and so we cannot sensibly demand it of them. Insofar angry blame precisely consists in this demand, corporations cannot be fitting targets of angry blame. Shoemaker straightforwardly applies his tripartite theory of moral responsibility involving attributability, answerability, and accountability, that is entirely based on analyzing cases in the individual domain (see Shoemaker 2015), to the group domain. Because groups agents do not fit Shoemaker’s exact theory of angry blame and accountability that is based on the individual domain, group agents cannot be morally accountable.

This raises a significant methodological worry: Both McKenna and Shoemaker base their theories of the nature of blame, moral responsibility and moral agency solely on analysis of (paradigm cases within) the individual domain. The worry is that this makes their respective theories anthropomorphized, which may already entail a rejection of collectivism. Why should we think that group agents cannot be morally accountable rather than thinking that the conditions for moral accountability and the nature of angry blame may be slightly different? This *all-out primacy* of the individual domain is a very strong methodological assumption, and it is not obvious this assumption is justified.

This focus on the individual domain is present throughout the debates in the ethics of blame and praise. In the debate on the nature of blame, we can distinguish between cognitive, conative, emotional and functional theories of blame. *Cognitive theories of blame* hold that blame most crucially involves a cognitive element. David Brink and Dana Kay Nelkin (2022) claim that blame is an aversive attitude toward the target predicated on the *belief* that the target is blameworthy for her wrongdoing. Some understand blame as an *evaluative judgment* about the quality of the other's moral self as exemplified in action and attitude. According to Gary Watson (2004), blame involves a negative *aretaic* judgment, the target of blame has displayed some kind of vice or fault. We see the action or attitude as something that tells us about the quality of the other's self. Others understand blame as a kind of moral accounting (Zimmerman 1988). When we blame, we judge that there is a debit in the person's ledger, which diminishes their moral standing.

Conative theories of blame add the importance of conative responses such as intentions, desires, expectations or dispositions to the cognitive aspect of blame (Scanlon 2008; Sher 2006). According to Scanlon (2008, 128-9), to blame a person is to judge her to be blameworthy and to take your relationship with her to be modified in a way that this judgment of impaired relations holds to be appropriate. George Sher (2006) argues that blame consists of a set of affective and behavioral dispositions that are organized around a *desire-belief pair*: The belief the agent has acted badly by violating a moral norm without excuse, and the desire that they not have acted badly.

Emotional theories of blame hold that certain reactive emotions are essential to blame (Strawson 1962; Wallace 1994; Wolf 2011). To blame someone is to be subject to a reactive emotion that is directed toward the wrongdoer. According to Wallace (1994), blame includes an attitudinal aspect that have a distinctive content. This content is given by the reactive emotions, which are responses to particular violations of moral obligation, and this captures the attitude characteristic of blame. When we blame someone, we feel resentment or indignation, or when we blame ourselves, we feel guilt.

Functional theories of blame hold that blame should be identified via the function that it plays. This allows for subsuming various of the features discussed above under blame. Angela M. Smith (2013) holds that blame is to be identified with *protest*. Blaming someone involves a way of protesting the moral claim implicit in the target's conduct, and this protest seeks some kind of moral acknowledgment on part of the blameworthy agent and/or the part of others in the moral community

(see also McGeer 2013). Likewise, Miranda Fricker (2016) argues that blame is essentially communicative (see also McKenna 2012). The illocutionary point of blame is to inspire remorse in the wrongdoer, where remorse is understood as a pained moral perception of the wrong one has done. This remorse effects an increased alignment of the wrongdoer's moral understanding with that of the blamer. David Shoemaker and Manuel Vargas (2021) defend a signaling theory of blame: blame is a costly response to norm violations that is most fundamentally defined by the function of signaling the blamer's commitments. This signaling typically involves two crucial features: norm internalization and (a commitment to) norm enforcement.

Similarly, we can distinguish between cognitive, action-based, emotional and functional theories of praise (Telech 2022). According to judgment views, to praise someone involves the judgment that the agent praiseworthy (Zimmerman 1988). Action views identify praise with treating the agent in some beneficial manner (Nowell-Smith 1954). Emotion views identify praise with reactive attitudes or interpersonal emotions such as approbation and gratitude (Macnamara 2011; Strawson 1962). Functional views hold that praise is to be identified by the functional role that it plays. The idea that the function of praise is communicative is widespread: praise aims to communicate something to its target, and it is successful if uptake is secured (Darwall 2006; McKenna 2012, Telech 2021; Watson 2004). For example, Jules Holroyd (Forthcoming) argues that praise functions to entrench norms and values and exert pressure in relation to those norms by signaling the commitments of the praiser. For better or worse, praise is an effective means of entrenching norms and values.

However, all these theories on the nature of blame and praise are developed entirely based upon cases within the individual domain. Some theories are entirely constructed based upon a single paradigm case (e.g., Fricker 2016 and McKenna 2012). The group domain currently does not play any role in these debates. But insofar as the group domain is part of the explanandum of ethical theory, it remains unclear what the extensional adequacy is of any of these theories.

Next, there is considerable debate when exactly blame- or praise-interactions are appropriate. From the mere fact that the agent is blameworthy, it doesn't follow that just anyone can appropriately blame the agent. The target of blame can dismiss blame either directly or indirectly (Cohen 2013). When the dismissal is direct, the agent rejects the evaluative judgment that underwrites the blame-interaction. The agent has a legitimate justification or excuse. When the target dismisses blame indirectly, the target does not reject the evaluative judgment that underwrites the blame-interaction, but (typically) points to some agent- or patient-relative feature or to a feature of the blame-interaction itself. An ethics of blame must offer an account of the facts that are relevant to assessing whether an episode or expression of blame is all-things-considered warranted. These considerations can serve as deontic constraints on blame.

Besides the fact that the target is not blameworthy, there are several features one might think are relevant. First, one feature is proportionality: the blame-interaction may be inappropriate because of a mismatch in the severity of the wrongdoing and the chosen means of blame. Second, although the

target is blameworthy, the blamer may express blame at an inappropriate time or place. Third, there may be some epistemic warrant: the blamer must be warranted in believing that the target is blameworthy for the wrongdoing (Todd 2019). Finally, the blamer must have the standing to blame.

Especially the standing to blame is topic of considerable debate. Some philosophers are skeptical about the notion of standing to blame (Bell 2013; Dover 2019; King 2020). Those who accept that standing is relevant for the appropriateness of blame-interactions discuss the following conditions. First, the *Hypocrisy Condition*: One's blame must not be in some relevant way hypocritical (Todd 2019; Cohen 2006; Wallace 2010; Bell 2012; McKenna 2012; Friedman 2013). Second, the *Non-Involvement Condition*: If you have been complicit or involved in the same moral wrongdoing, you lack the standing to blame someone else for it (Cohen 2006). Third, the *Business Condition* (or Meddlesomeness Condition): These are conditions that pertain to the possibility that some special relationship or social role may affect one's standing to blame. If you don't stand in the right relation, it may not be your business to blame them (Todd 2019; Smith 2007; McKenna 2012; Snedegar Forthcoming). And fourth, the *Moral Community Condition*: The blamer and the blamed must inhabit the same moral community. If they do not share moral norms and concepts, they lack standing to blame each other (Darwall 2006).

There is considerable debate among those who think the hypocrite lacks the standing to blame why this is so. The *moral equality account* maintains that hypocrites lack the standing to blame for relevantly similar faults in virtue of the fact that their hypocrisy involves a violation or implicit rejection of the moral equality of persons (Wallace 2010; Fritz and Miller 2018 & 2019). For example, Fritz and Miller (2018 & 2019) argue that the relevant fact is that the hypocritical blamer has an unfair differential blaming disposition, which involves an implicit denial of basic moral equality, which in turn means the hypocrite has forfeited the right to blame.

Commitment accounts maintain that hypocrites lack the standing to blame because they fail to be sufficiently committed to the norms they blame others for violating (Rossi 2018; Todd 2019; Riedener 2019). According to Patrick Todd, you have a standing-enabling commitment to a norm only if you suitably endorse N (endorsement component), and (2) is suitably motivated to act in accordance with N (motivation component). If you lack the requisite commitment, then you lack the standing to blame those who would violate them.

The *moral authority account* holds that the hypocritical blamer lacks the credentials to be a moral authority – someone who the moral community looks to for moral guidance – due to their own similar failings, and only moral authorities have the standing to blame (Isserow and Klein 2017).

Finally, Kasper Lippert-Rasmussen (Forthcoming) has recently developed the *comparative unfairness account*: What makes the hypocrite lack standing to blame is the fact that hypocritical blaming involves comparative unfairness to the blamee in the form of an inappropriate focus on the blamee's similar or less serious faults.

Patrick Todd (2019) argues that there is an important difference between the Hypocrisy condition and the Business Condition. He distinguishes between lacking the standing (with a person) to

express blame and lacking standing (with morality) to *feel* blame. He argues that the Business Condition is a condition on expressing blame, but not feeling blame, whereas the Hypocrisy Condition is a condition even on feeling blame. Todd further argues that the No-Involvement condition simply reduces to the Hypocrisy Condition.

Snedeger (Forthcoming) argues that charges of meddling are contentious, because it is not always settled in advance whether wrongdoing is or is not the business of a would-be blamer (see also Radzik 2011), and such charges may aim to put such a norm in place. Ground of anti-meddling norms, including privacy, intimacy, and respect for victims, support giving those involve significant latitude to set their own boundaries on appropriate blame. This brings out the more general point that norms of blame, including standing norms, are often up for negotiation, and dismissals of blame can be moves in such a negotiation of trying to establish boundaries on blame, rather than merely pointing out violations of pre-established boundaries.

Likewise, we may ask similar questions about the appropriateness of praise-interactions. Again, questions of proportionality, circumstances, and epistemic warrant may be relevant for the appropriateness of praise, though these condition have not been addressed in much detail in the literature. The focus has been primarily on the standing to praise and whether praise can be oppressive.

Daniel Telech (2023) argues that praise is governed by a norm of standing, namely the evaluative commitment condition. Even when the target of praise is praiseworthy and known to be so by the praiser, praise can be inappropriate owing to the praiser's lacking the relevant evaluative commitment. Lippert-Rasmussen (2022) argues that if an agent can lack standing to blame another for an act in view of her own faults, and hypocritical blame is *pro tanto* morally wrongful, then it is also true that a praiser can lack the standing to praise herself for an act even if that act is praiseworthy and that standingless, hypocritical praise is *pro tanto* morally wrongful.

Sofia Jeppson and Daphne Brandenburg (2022) argue that hypocritical praise can fail to respect the equality of persons by expressing that the praiser applies more demanding moral standards to the praisee than to themselves. They further discuss obstructionist praise, which is loosely analogous to complicit blame, and can similarly express that certain moral standards apply to others but not to the praiser. Finally, praise can be patronizing because it is an inaccurate appraisal of a person based on irrelevant considerations – like race, gender, or class – and thereby constitute a failure to recognize their equal worth as a person. In similar vein, Jules Holroyd (2021) argues that praise is often apportioned in ways that reflect and entrench existing structures of oppression.

However, the focus of these debates on the appropriateness of blame and praise interactions is again entirely on the individual domain. Even in isolation from the group domain, the appropriateness of blame and praise raise a host of important philosophical questions. But these questions cannot be fully answered in isolation from the debate on group responsibility, because blame- and praise-interactions involving groups are part of the explanandum of ethical theory as well.

2. Aims and research questions

The aim of this project is two-fold: First, to unite these previously disconnected debates, and to investigate the nature of blame and praise, the conditions of moral blameworthiness/praiseworthiness and the conditions of appropriateness for blame and praise in view of our moral judgments and moral practices involving groups. Second, to develop a novel methodology for systematically including the group domain in our theorizing about moral agency, moral responsibility, blame, praise and related topics. The project consists of three sub-projects and will focus on the following research questions:

Sub-Project 1: Methodology

1. What is the best methodology for systematically including our moral judgments about and moral interactions with or between groups in our theorizing about moral agency, moral responsibility and blame and praise?

Sub-Project 2: Blame

2. What can we learn from the group domain about the nature of blame?
3. What can we learn from the group domain about the conditions of moral blameworthiness?
4. What can we learn from the group domain about the conditions for the appropriateness of blame-interactions?

Sub-Project 3: Praise

5. What can we learn from the group domain about the nature of praise?
6. What can we learn from the group domain about the conditions of moral praiseworthiness?
7. What can we learn from the group domain about the conditions for the appropriateness of praise-interactions?

To answer Q1, the aim is first to show that both individualists and collectivists make a methodological mistake when they rely on the all-out primacy of the individual domain. Possible arguments in favor of all-out primacy will be investigated, analyzed and rebutted. Next, the aim is to develop an alternative method for theorizing about moral agency, moral responsibility, blame and praise that systematically includes the group domain, namely a *directed reflective equilibrium method*. According to the method of wide reflective equilibrium (Rawls 1971; Daniels 1996), our theory construction must start with our judgments that are considered. Considered judgments are subject to a *confidence constraint*, they must be made with ‘conviction’ and ‘confidence’ (Rawls 1974, 4). Next, we must consider various general principles that could accommodate and explain our set of considered judgments. This involves considering arguments for and against these principles. Some of these arguments can come from relevant background theories that inform the equilibrium. We reach a state of equilibrium when the principles and judgments have been appropriately revised and adjusted so that they fully agree with

each other. Theories are justified and evaluated in terms of their coherence within the larger system of beliefs and judgments. A wide reflective equilibrium consists of agreement between revisable judgments and principles following reflection on a wide range of principles, arguments, justificatory devices, and background theories (Knight 2023).

A *directed* reflective equilibrium method involves a particular ‘sequencing’ of various types of cases at different stages of theoretical enquiry, which systematizes the testing of principles and elicitation of moral judgments (Slavny et al. 2021). Slavny et al. (2021) argue for the following sequencing for normative theory construction: First, we must start with *seed cases*, which are ‘situations or dilemmas, usually from real life, that capture our moral attention and elicit strong, if unsystematized, intuitions’ (2021, 3). Second, these seed cases are decomposed into various salient moral factors, which allows one to develop *controlled cases* that represent these factors. Using a variety of such controlled cases, one can then organize the elicited intuitions and considered judgments into moral principles. This requires the theorist to go back and forth between the principles and considered judgments. Third, philosophers can create *argument cases* that have an argumentative function. They can lend support to principles either via exposition, illustrating the application of principles, or substantively, demonstrating the reasons that support such principles (Slavny et al 2021, 11). And they can challenge biases, metaphysical beliefs or underlying conceptual assumptions. Finally, *construction cases* set up choice situations incorporating the fundamental principles and provide a starting point for further normative theorizing (e.g., John Rawls’s original position). The directed reflective equilibrium recommends this specific progression of case-use in normative theory construction, moving from an exploratory mode to an argumentative mode. Slavny et al. (2021) are concerned with *normative* theory construction. The aim of this project is to develop a directed reflective equilibrium method for constructing theories of moral agency, moral responsibility and the nature of blame and praise.

Crucial for the development of theories of moral agency, moral responsibility and blame and praise are the seed, controlled and argument cases. For example, consider the construction of a theory of blame. Shoemaker and Vargas (2021) set out the following ‘data points’ that a theory of blame should be able to accommodate: blame involves more than a mere belief that the norm violator has acted wrongly; directed dyadic overt blame (i.e., cases where the victim expresses blame directly to the wrongdoer); non-directed overt blame (i.e., victim expresses blame to third party); private blame; blaming the dead; self-blame; dispassionate blame; hypocritical blame; and hypothetical blame. These ‘data points’ raised by Shoemaker and Vargas can be understood as the result of a careful collection of seed cases that are decomposed and turned into controlled cases that capture important aspects of blame-interactions.

By going back and forth between these controlled cases and principles, we can identify the core and periphery features of blame (Brink and Nelkin 2022). A core feature of blame is present in all instances of blame (e.g., a mental state, emotion or function). A periphery feature of blame is not necessarily present in all instances of blame but in an important domain of blame-interactions (e.g., a

communicative function for dyadic overt blame-interactions). A *domain* is a specific subclass of the explanandum. *Auxiliary hypotheses* are hypotheses that concern periphery features or the relation between core and periphery features in a particular domain. Together these elements form a theory of blame (or praise). We can understand cognitive, conative, emotional and functional theories of blame as all identifying different core features of blame and defending various related auxiliary hypotheses. To reach a narrow reflective equilibrium, the theory of blame must account for all the ‘data points’.

The method does not assume all-out primacy of the individual domain but employs a *priority constraint*: We must start with the cluster of considered judgments and cases in which we have the most confidence and conviction. Individuals are undeniably the least contentious bearers of moral responsibility; therefore, the considered judgments and cases of the individual domain have priority in the process of theory construction. However, moderate primacy of the individual domain does *not* mean that these judgments or principles cannot be revised nor that we must discard all other considered judgments of other domains. This opens the door for the group domain to play an important role in our theorizing about moral agency, moral responsibility, blame and praise.

This method is compatible with moral individualism and collectivism. However, for collectivism there is an additional question: Why should we think that these different entities stand under agent-neutral principles? To the extent different types of agents have similar functional features, we have good reason to think that similar principles and concepts apply to them. Like core features of blame and responsibility, there are core features of moral agency. Collectivists argue that group agents can possess certain core capacities for moral agency. It may lack *some* other capacities that humans possess, and these capacities may be relevant for (human) moral agency, but this does not imply that they are necessary for moral agency more generally. The idea is that if (a) an important subset of those core features can be found in other entities; and (b) we cannot make sense of the moral phenomena that involve such entities with our current theoretical resources; and (c) we have good reason to think the moral phenomena involves the same moral concept, then the fact that these entities share certain core features is a strong reason to revise our theories, principles and concepts to account for this part of the explanandum of ethical theory. If there is no explanatory gap or significant overlap qua moral agency or blame- or praise-interactions, then individualists are correct that there is no reason to further revise our theories of moral agency, moral responsibility and blame or praise.

This novel directed reflective equilibrium method will be employed for Sub-Project 2: Blame and Sub-Project 3: Praise.

To answer Q2 and Q5, an important aim is to gather the relevant ‘data points’ for the group domain regarding the nature of praise and blame. The aim is not just to investigate seed, controlled and argument cases for the group domain that are analogous to the individual domain, but to investigate whether there are cases involving groups that are fundamentally different from the individual domain. The aim is to expand the range of seed cases, which can be turned into new controlled or argument cases and then to develop a ‘database’ of seed, controlled and argument cases for the group domain.

These seed, controlled, and argument cases may involve a group agent as the blamer or praiser, or as the target of blame or praise (or both). Do these group cases of blame or praise reveal something important about the nature of blame or praise?

Prima facie, if group agents can indeed be the blamers and blamees, and praisers and praisees, this does seem to limit the kinds of communicative functions blame or praise can have as core features. For example, if Shoemaker (2019) is right that group agents are incapable of feeling remorse, then it seems questionable that the illocutionary point of blame is always to inspire remorse in the wrongdoer, where remorse is understood as a pained moral perception of the wrong one has done, as Fricker (2016) claims. Note that the point is not that this communicative function may not be an important periphery feature within the sub-domain involving dyadic blame interactions between individuals, but this communicative function cannot be a core feature of blame, because it does not cover all domains. Likewise, if group agents are not capable of having emotions (cf. Schmid 2014; Hindriks 2018), and if group agents are capable of blaming others, then this may make emotional theories of blame extensionally inadequate. Similar questions can be raised about the communicative function of praise and emotional theories of praise. The point is that the group domain can play a very important role in understanding what the best theory of blame and praise is.

To answer Q3 and Q6, the aim is to investigate the control, epistemic and historical (or source) conditions for moral responsibility in view of our judgments about groups. If collectivism is true, and group agents can potentially be moral agents and morally responsible, how does this impact debates on the conditions of moral blameworthiness and moral praiseworthiness? And to what extent does the exact nature of blame and praise affect these conditions?

To illustrate, consider praiseworthiness, as this has been less discussed in the literature. If there is good reason to think that corporate agents can be praiseworthy (Brown 2024, Rozeboom 2024), what can we learn from this about the conditions for praiseworthiness? *Right Reason* accounts hold that a moral agent is morally praiseworthy exactly if the agent performed the morally right act for the right reason (Arpaly 2002; Markovits 2010). This means that the agent was motivated by the relevant considerations (though not necessarily the action's moral rightness) and weighed them appropriately. *Robustness* accounts further require that the agent's conative state is sufficiently robust. In order to be praiseworthy, the agent must not only do the right thing in the actual world, but the agent must do the right thing for the relevant moral reasons in a range of relevantly similar counterfactual scenarios (Fearnley, 2022). *Knowledge* accounts add an epistemic condition besides a conative one. For example, Paulina Sliwa (2016, 394) defends the Rightness Condition: a morally right action has moral worth if and only if it is motivated by concern for doing what's right (conative requirement) and by knowledge that it is the right thing to do (knowledge requirement). *Exceptionality* accounts hold that moral rightness is not sufficient for moral praiseworthiness to be fitting (Darwall 2006; McKenna 2012; Wallace 1994). Some think that an agent is praiseworthy only if there is something exceptional about the action, such as the effort the agent put into it (Wallace 1994). McKenna (2012, 15) defends that a

person is morally praiseworthy for her action if she knows the action is morally right beyond a reasonable expected minimum, and she performs the action freely. Plausibly, an NGO can be praiseworthy for saving the lives of people in destitute. How, if at all, does the phenomenon of praiseworthy group agents matter for what the best account of moral praiseworthiness is? And does it matter whether the best theory concerning the nature of praise is cognitive, action-based, emotional or functional?

To answer Q4 and Q7, the aim is to investigate whether cases in the group domain pose difficulties for existing accounts, and to investigate what best explains all cases within the individual and group domain. If there are blame and praise-interactions that are unique to the group domain, this may have important consequences for understanding the various conditions on the appropriateness of blame- and praise-interactions.

For example, concerning the Hypocrisy Condition, if hypocritical blame may involve groups, what follows from this? One might think that moral equality accounts will have difficulty accounting for group cases, because plausibly, individuals and collective agents are not exactly moral equals in all respects. Moreover, it is unlikely that most group agents will count as moral authorities. This suggests that the group domain may count in favor of the commitment account and the comparative unfairness account, because other accounts of the hypocrisy condition are extensionally inadequate.

Similarly, can we learn something about the Business Condition from cases in the group domain? Plausibly, the Business condition is very important to understand blame and praise within the group domain, because more often than not, it may seem that this is exactly what makes expressions of blame of group agents inappropriate. Do group agents and individuals stand under the same principles when it comes to this or are there important differences? How do meddlesomeness charges work when it concerns groups? Does it matter what role the group agent has (e.g., states versus corporations)?

For Q7, the aim is to investigate what we can learn from the group domain about the conditions of appropriateness for praise-interactions. Can group cases show us something important about proportionality, circumstances, epistemic warrant, the standing to praise and whether praise can be oppressive, patronizing or obstructionist? For example, why is it exactly that group agents may come to have or lack the standing to praise? Furthermore, what role do group agents play in perpetuating oppressive praise? What role do group agents play in entrenching social norms via praise? And are there additional conditions on the appropriateness of praise-interactions that have not been discussed so far in the literature?

To help answer the research questions, the project will employ two doctoral researchers. The first doctoral candidate will be trained as a philosopher specializing in moral philosophy with an emphasis on the ethics of blame. They will write a dissertation that focuses on Sub-Project 2: Blame and develop possible answers to Q2, Q3 and Q4. The second doctoral candidate will be trained as a philosopher specializing in moral philosophy with an emphasis on the ethics of praise. They will write a dissertation that focuses on Sub-Project 3: Praise and develop possible answers to Q5, Q6 and Q7. To

conduct the research related to research questions Q2 to Q7 is a large task that the PI cannot undertake alone. The doctoral researchers are expected to play an important role in gathering and developing the relevant seed, controlled and argument cases related to their sub-project that inform the rest of the project's research into the nature of blame and praise, the conditions of blameworthiness and praiseworthiness, and the appropriateness of blame- and praise-interactions in view of the group domain. The PI and the doctoral researchers will work closely together to develop the 'database' of seed, controlled and argument cases for the group domain. The doctoral candidates are further expected to contribute to the project with original and novel contributions to the relevant debates within collective ethics and the ethics of blame and praise.

The PI will focus on all three sub-projects. The PI's planned book manuscript and articles for each sub-project are outlined in Section 5. In pursuing these lines of inquiry, the PI will build upon his existing research in which he defends moral collectivism, but this is not expected from the doctoral candidates. Given the scope of the research questions, there is ample room for the PI and doctoral researchers to work simultaneously on these sub-projects.

3. Anticipated level of originality or scientific innovation

The project's proposed novel method is expected to make a significant contribution to the field of collective ethics, as there is a significant lack of discussion within collective ethics concerning the methodology for constructing theories of moral agency, moral responsibility and the nature of blame and praise. The project is further expected to make significant contributions to the debates on group responsibility, the nature of blame and praise, and the appropriateness of blame and praise-interactions. These debates have not been connected in any detail, and there is considerable potential for novel insights and important results. As these are all current and ongoing debates within analytic philosophy, the project is a timely intervention and is expected to make a significant impact in these respective fields of analytic philosophy.

4. Methods

Besides standard methods of philosophical theorizing in analytic philosophy, such as conceptual analysis and various forms of philosophical argumentation, the main methodology will be developed in Sub-Project 1: Methodology. The PI will focus on developing a novel methodology for theorizing about moral agency, moral responsibility and the nature of blame and praise in view of the group domain. The development of this directed reflective equilibrium method builds on prior research on the method of reflective equilibrium (Rawls 1971, Daniels 1996; Slavny et al. 2021), a widely recognized method for theory-construction within analytic philosophy. This novel directed reflective equilibrium method will be employed to answer research questions Q2 to Q7. An important claim of this novel method is that concepts such as moral agency, moral responsibility, blame and praise are best understood in terms of core and periphery features along with auxiliary hypotheses. These are not uncontroversial methodological claims.

Some blame-theorists employ a paradigm-based approach (e.g., Fricker 2016; McKenna 2012). As the starting point of theorizing about the concept, they take a paradigm case that exemplifies exactly what blame is supposed to do. For example, for McKenna's communicative theory of blame, the paradigm of blame are instances of expression and communication, while instances of non-directed or unexpressed blame are non-paradigmatic and derivative. McKenna tries to account for the latter by explaining how they are intelligible departures from cases of directed overt blame (see also Fricker 2016). Blaming the absent can be understood in terms of how the blamer *would* respond and converse with the target were they in the presence of the blamer (McKenna 2012, 177). Shoemaker and Vargas (2021) argue that this is not very convincing, because when we blame the absent or the dead this may be radically different from how one would actually blame the person in the presence of that person (e.g., your boss). This makes it questionable that the communicative function is a core feature of blame. Thus, one significant worry about paradigm-based theory-construction is that if the theory cannot adequately explain how non-paradigmatic cases are derivative, then it may misidentify certain periphery features as core features of the concept. The theory becomes extensionally inadequate because it cannot account for all relevant sub-domains of the explanandum. On the directed reflective equilibrium method this problem is avoided through a careful development of seed, controlled and argument cases.

Another important methodological question is whether we are concerned with the same moral concepts when accounting for the group domain. If the conditions for group responsibility differ too greatly from individual responsibility, then we may be concerned with a different concept (McKenna 2006, 27). For example, Ish Haji says: 'if it were true that collectives were responsible under one set of conditions whereas individuals were so under a different set, this would, in my mind, cast doubt on the view that the same concept of responsibility was being invoked when ascribing responsibility to collectives' (2006, 307). Thus, for the redirected reflective equilibrium method it will be important to establish that we are indeed concerned with the same moral concepts.

Given the importance of core and periphery features for these methodological questions, some philosophers may wish to argue that (some of) these concepts have no core features, and that we should employ a family-resemblance-type analysis instead. On such an analysis, tokens of the same type of concepts can have overlapping features, but two tokens need not necessarily share any specific features (otherwise, there is at least one core feature). First, it is not obvious there are no core features of moral agency, moral responsibility and blame or praise. For moral agency, while collectivists and individualists may disagree on certain features, most would agree that moral agency comes with at least some core features (e.g., moral understanding). Or for blame, some cognitive and (non-communicative) functional theories of blame plausibly cover all the data points for the individual domain. At least, the PI's planned article (3) 'Group Responsibility and a Hybrid Theory of Blame' is based upon this conjecture (see work plan below). Second, even if family-resemblance is the right kind of analysis to employ for (some of) these concepts, this would still be an important result, because it will invalidate many arguments from both individualists and collectivists. For example, many arguments in favor of

individualism are based upon group cases lacking certain core features. If concepts such as moral agency, responsibility, blame and praise are best understood in terms of family-resemblance, then it is not sufficient to show that group cases lack only one or two features of moral agency, responsibility, blame or praise, because the concept may still apply if sufficient other features are present.

5. Work plan and timeline

The PI plans to write (at least) two articles for each sub-project and a book manuscript.

For the Sub-Project 1: Methodology, the PI plans to write two articles. The first article (1) ‘Moral Collectivism and the Methodology of Ethical Theory’ sets out the common methodological mistake of individualists and collectivists and the need for a novel methodology within collective ethics. This article involves a sketch of the directed reflective equilibrium method. The second planned article (2) ‘*The Directed Reflective Equilibrium Method for Collective Ethics*’ sets out the method in much more detail.

For Sub-Project 2: Blame, the PI plans to write the following two articles. The aim of article (3) ‘Group Responsibility and a Hybrid Theory of Blame’ is to argue that a hybrid theory, a cognitive and functional theory of blame, best accounts for the data points of both individuals and groups. Article (4) ‘Group Agents and Standing to Blame: Hypocrisy, Meddlesomeness and Lack of Authority’ focuses on the Hypocrisy and Business Condition of the standing to blame in view of cases involving group agents. The paper first argues that the Hypocrisy Condition is best understood in terms of a commitment account regarding the specific norm relevant for the behavior under consideration. The paper further investigates how to understand norms of meddlesomeness in the group domain. And finally, the aim is to show that the Hypocrisy and Business conditions can be satisfied, but that appeals to a lack of authority of group agents can nonetheless be a successful indirect dismissal of blame. This strongly suggests that moral authority is a separate condition on the standing to blame.

For Sub-Project 3: The PI plans to write two articles. First, article (5) ‘In Praise of Collective Agents’ (co-authored with Prof. Frank Hindriks) investigates whether group agents are fitting targets of praise. The paper aims to show that group praiseworthiness can be irreducibly collective, because corporate motivation is irreducibly collective. To substantiate this claim, the paper aims to develop an account of corporate moral concern, which involves having a substantive set of normatively informed member rules, procedural policies, and operational policies. Second, article (6) ‘Group Agents, Praise and Sincerity’, investigates whether sincerity is a distinct condition on the appropriateness of praise-interactions and whether group agents can satisfy this sincerity condition. The idea is that insincere praise is distinct from patronizing praise, hypocritical praise and obstructionist praise (cf. Brandenburg & Jeppson 2022). The lack of an appropriate motive for praise alone can make a praise-interaction inappropriate. The aim is to argue that group agents with a high degree of corporate moral concern can in principle satisfy the sincerity condition, but that it is unlikely many group agents in current form will satisfy this condition.

The PI further intends to write a book manuscript ‘A Theory of Collective Ethics’. This book manuscript synthesizes the PI’s prior research and planned research and sets out a comprehensive and unified theory of collective ethics. The book will set out the PI’s theories of collective moral agency, corporate and collective responsibility, corporate and collective duties, and the nature and appropriateness of blame and praise. The PI plans to submit this manuscript to Oxford University Press, Cambridge University Press or Routledge.

For the planned articles, suitable peer-reviewed journals for publication are (among others): *Noûs*, *Philosophical Studies*, *Journal of Philosophy*, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, *Ethics*, *Philosopher’s Imprint*, the *Journal of Ethics*, *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, *Journal of Social Philosophy*, *Synthese*, *Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy*, *Inquiry*, and *Journal of Moral Philosophy*.

The PhD candidates are expected to write either a monograph or a cumulative dissertation to be completed by the end of 2028. The PhD candidates will be co-supervised by the PI and Prof. Hans Bernhard Schmid. The first year, the PhD candidates will focus on writing an extended research proposal and prepare for passing the Public Presentation of their research project, which is a mandatory step in the doctoral program in Philosophy at the University of Vienna. The PhD students will be offered assistance and guidance in publishing their results. For cumulative dissertations, the same outlets as mentioned above will be considered as suitable venues for publication (among others). The PhD candidates can further make use of the Transfer Unit of the FWF-funded Knowledge in Crisis Project if desired to turn their philosophical research into public outreach.

The project will organize two conferences. The first conference ‘Groups and the Nature of Blame and Praise’ will be organized in the summer of 2027. The second conference ‘Groups and the Appropriateness of Blame and Praise’ will be organized in the summer of 2028. Both conferences will be hosted at the University of Vienna. For each conference, three cooperation partners (see below) will be invited as keynotes to the conference. The remaining slots will be filled via an open call for papers.

In addition, the PI expects to present his research (at least) at two international conferences or workshops annually. For example, the annual Social Ontology conference organized by the International Social Ontology Society is one of the most important conferences for recent work on collective ethics. The MANCEPT Workshops in Political Theory at the University of Manchester is likewise an important venue for workshops on related topics. The PhD candidates will be assisted and strongly encouraged to attend and present their research at various conferences.

The following table presents schematically the work plan for the full duration of the project:

Work Plan	2025/2026	2026/2027	2027/2028
<i>Sub-Project 1: Methodology</i>	PI Article (1): ‘Moral Collectivism and the Methodology of Ethical Theory’	PI Article (2): ‘The Directed Reflective Equilibrium Method for Collective Ethics’	
<i>Sub-Project 2: Blame</i>		PI Article (3): ‘Group Responsibility and a	PI Article (4): ‘Group Agents and Standing to Blame:

		Hybrid Theory of Blame'	Hypocrisy, Meddlesomeness and Lack of Authority' PhD Project 1
<i>Sub-Project 3: Praise</i>	PI Article (5): 'In Praise of Collective Agents'		PI Article (6): 'Group Agents, Praise and Sincerity' PhD Project 2
<i>Whole Project</i>	PI Book Manuscript 'A Theory of Collective Ethics'		
<i>Project Events</i>		Conference 1	Conference 2

6. Associated research partners

The project does not involve any associated research partners.

7. National and/or international cooperation partners

The following scholars have confirmed that they will collaborate with the PI on this project.

Confirmation letters are included in Annex 4. The collaborators will be invited to one of the conferences of the project. Each collaborator has extensive expertise in one or more of the core topics relevant for the project. The collaborators are:

- a. Prof. Hans Bernhard Schmid, University of Vienna. Schmid is a world-leading scholar in debates on collective intentionality, group agency and social ontology. Schmid has agreed to serve as the co-supervisor of the two prospective PhD candidates.
- b. Prof. Paulina Sliwa, University of Vienna. Sliwa is a world-leading scholar in normative ethics, with an emphasis on the ethics of blame and praise.
- c. Prof. Gunnar Björnsson, Stockholm University. Björnsson is a world-leading scholar on moral psychology, moral responsibility and collective ethics.
- d. Assoc. Prof. Stephanie Collins, Monash University. Collins is a world-leading scholar in debates on social ontology, group agency and collective ethics.
- e. Prof. Kasper Lippert-Rasmussen, University of Aarhus. Lippert-Rasmussen is a world-leading scholar in political philosophy and normative ethics, especially the ethics of blame and praise.
- f. Prof. Frank Hindriks, University of Groningen. Hindriks is a world-leading scholar on social ontology, group agency and collective intentionality, collective ethics, and institutions.

8. Research-related qualifications of the researchers involved

The PI is an expert in social ontology, normative ethics and political philosophy. In 2021, he graduated with honors from the doctoral program in philosophy at the University of Vienna. His dissertation 'The Foundations of a Theory of Collective Ethics' consists of eight articles on foundational questions related to collective ethics and ethical theory. After his PhD, the PI worked as a post-doctoral researcher in the ERC-project 'The Normative and Moral Foundations of Group Agency' led by Prof. Herlinde Pauer-Studer. He is currently a lecturer (Wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiter / Post Doc) at the Department of

Philosophy at the University of Vienna. He has built a strong international reputation in his fields of research. He has published his research on various topics related to collective ethics such as collective moral agency, group responsibility and group duties in reputable philosophy journals such as *Philosophical Quarterly*, *Philosophical Studies*, *Philosophical Explorations*, *Thought*, *Philosophy*, and *the Monist*. The PI is currently an editor at *Journal of Social Ontology* and a research associate at the African Centre for Philosophy of Science and Epistemology at the University of Johannesburg.

The PI has further played an active role in the field. He has organized six conferences and workshops on topics related to collective ethics with world-leading experts. And together with Olle Blomberg and Gunnar Björnsson, the PI currently organizes the [Collective Ethics Seminar](#). This is a recurring online seminar with invited presentations by leading scholars on topics relevant for collective ethics. Since the start of his PhD, the PI has been invited to speak at ten different international conferences and workshops, and he has additionally presented his research at thirty international conferences and workshops.

9. Ethical, safety-related or regulatory aspects of the proposal

The project is strictly theoretical and therefore faces no ethical issues concerning contact with humans or non-human animals. The PI is familiar with The European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity and the Guidelines for Good Scientific Practice of the Austrian Agency for Research Integrity, and is committed to following its principles.

10. Sex-specific and gender-related aspects

There are several sex and gender-related aspects relevant for this project. In terms of methodology, there is a risk that the process of selecting and gathering seed cases may involve a potential (implicit) sex- or gender-bias. This risk is not unique to the methodology of this project, but this is a risk for most (if not all) philosophical theorizing. To mitigate this risk, researchers will be instructed to keep potential biases in mind, and to try to adopt various perspectives when theorizing about seed cases as much as possible.

The hiring process of the PhD candidates will be conducted in coordination with the ‘Personalwesen und Frauenförderung’ Department of the University of Vienna to ensure the hiring process conforms to all ethical and legal requirements. The PI intends to uphold the following principle of affirmative action for the hiring process: If two candidates are of equal strength in all relevant aspects for the position, the candidate from an underrepresented group will be offered the position first. This is a fair and equitable policy of affirmative action to increase diversity within academia.

In both hiring project members and the organization of project activities, every effort will be made to ensure an appropriate gender balance. To ensure the conferences are organized in a fair and equitable manner, the application procedure for presentation slots will be anonymized and submissions will be ranked blindly. In the case of equal ranking, preference will be given to submissions from members of underrepresented groups.

Annex 1: Literature

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Annex 2: Information on the research institute and description of financial aspects

A. Details on research institute

The Department of Philosophy at the University of Vienna is an ideal place for a project at the intersection of collective ethics and the ethics of blame and praise. The department has established itself as one of the key institutes for research on social ontology and related topics. Prof. Hans Bernhard Schmid is a world-leading scholar working on collective intentionality, group agency and collective responsibility. He is the editor-in-chief of *Journal of Social Ontology*. Moreover, the department is the main base for the International Social Ontology Society, which organizes the annual Social Ontology conference. This is the most important conference for research on social ontology. The department hosted this conference in 2022, which attracted over 250 philosophers from all around the world.

Besides the PI and Prof. Schmid, numerous current members of the department work on related topics. Prof. Paulina Sliwa is a world-leading expert on the ethics of blame and praise. The PI expects to work closely with Prof. Sliwa as a collaborator on the project. Dr. Lars Moen is one of the main defenders of moral individualism and he is currently the PI of the FWF-project ‘The Ontological and Normative Status of Groups’. The PI intends to continue to cooperate closely with Dr. Moen and benefit from each others expertise. Asst. Prof. Felix Pinkert is an expert on collective ethics. Dr. Michael Schmitz is an expert on collective intentionality and group agency. Within the cluster of excellence project *Knowledge in Crisis*, there are three researchers working on related topics. Dr. Fabio Lampert is an expert on moral responsibility. Dr. Keith Raymond Harris is an expert on group agency. And Dr. Emilie Pagano is an expert on the metaphysics of groups. Emeritus-Prof. Herlinde Pauer-Studer is no longer an active member of the department, but the PI expects to continue working closely with her. She is a world-leading expert on moral philosophy, she was the PI of the ERC-project ‘Distortions of Normativity’ and the ERC-Project ‘The Normative and Moral Foundations of Group Agency’, and she has worked extensively on group agency and group responsibility.

The University of Vienna is an excellent institution for the two doctoral researchers to undertake their PhD Project in Philosophy. The Vienna Doctoral School of Philosophy (VDP) offers many resources for PhD candidates to fully develop their talents and skills for writing a successful dissertation in Philosophy. The VDP provides tailored training for doctoral researchers, which involves various mandatory courses, the Pragmatic Academic Series (a series of workshops on practical issues for doctoral candidates in philosophy such as writing research proposals and funding information, applying for jobs, conference attendance, supervision, etc.), writing evenings, the Centre for Doctoral Studies Training Offer (a comprehensive university-wide training program for doctoral researchers) and various summer schools. PhD candidates are offered the option of creating a Thesis Advisory Committee. Besides supervisors, this committee consists of non-supervisory faculty and external academics who provide additional expert feedback and support related to their PhD project.

B. Information on funding requested

B1. Personnel costs:

Costs Doctoral Researchers:

The project seeks to employ two doctoral researchers at 30h/week for three years. The yearly salaries (with 6.85% p.a. increase):

Year 1: €47.520,00

Year 2: €50.775,12

Year 3: €54.253,20.

Total salary costs for two doctoral researchers: €305.096,64

Justification:

The two doctoral researchers will play an essential role in conducting Sub-Project 2: Blame and Sub-Project 3: Praise, respectively. To conduct the research related to research questions Q2 to Q7 is a large task that the PI cannot undertake alone. The doctoral researchers are expected to play an important role in gathering and developing relevant seed and controlled cases that inform the rest of the project's research into the nature of blame and praise, the conditions of blameworthiness and praiseworthiness, and the appropriateness of blame- and praise-interactions in view of the group domain. Moreover, the doctoral candidates are expected to further contribute to the project with original and novel contributions to the relevant debates within collective ethics and the ethics of blame and praise.

Costs Senior Postdoc:

Salary Senior Postdoc in Year 3 at 40/week (with 6.85% p.a increase): €105.206,92.

Justification:

The PI's current contract as Universitätsassistent Postdoc (University Assistant Postdoc) at the University of Vienna ends on March 31, 2028. The first two years of the project, the PI will be able to lead the project while being employed at the University of Vienna via his current contract. As this contract runs out before the projected end date of the project, the PI must be employed as Senior Postdoc in the final year of the project, 2027/2028, conform FWF regulations.

B2. Equipment costs:

There are no equipment costs.

B3. Material costs:

There are no material costs.

B4. Travel costs:

There are no travel costs (costs for conference travel is funded through general project costs).

B5. Other costs:

The following costs are budgeted for the organization of two events of the project:

Year 2: Conference 1 - €2000,00

Year 3: Conference 2 - €3000,00

Justification:

The project will organize two conferences with experts in the field. The two conferences are important for developing, improving and disseminating the research results of the project. For each conference, three collaborators will be invited as keynotes. The other participants will be selected via an open call for papers, no reimbursement will be offered for these participants. Both three-day conferences will take place at the Department of Philosophy of the University of Vienna, therefore no venue costs are needed. Two of the collaborators (Prof. Schmid and Prof. Sliwa) work and live in Vienna and require no travel or accommodation funding. The only non-EU keynote is Assoc. Prof. Stephanie Collins, who works at Monash University in Melbourne, Australia.

The costs are calculated as follows:

Accommodation: €150,00 per night times three nights = €450,00 per speaker per conference.

Travel costs for EU speakers: €300,00.

Travel costs for AU speaker : €1300,00

Costs Conference 1 in Year 2:

Accommodation (2 speakers): €900,00

Travel costs two EU keynotes: €600,00

Conference dinner: €500,00

Total costs: €2000,00

Costs Conference 2 in Year 3:

Accommodation (2 keynotes): €900,00

Travel EU keynote: €300,00

Travel AU keynote: €1300,00

Conference dinner: €500,00

Total costs: €3000,00

Annex 3: CVs and descriptions of previous research achievements

a. Personal details

Name: Niels de Haan

Date of birth: 03.12.1988

Nationality: Dutch

Address: Institut für Philosophie, Fakultät für Philosophie und Bildungswissenschaft, Universität Wien, Universitätsstraße 7, 1010 Wien, Austria.

Email: niels.de.haan@univie.ac.at

Telephone: +436769118298

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4021-7410>

Website: <https://sites.google.com/view/niels-de-haan/homepage>

List of publications: <https://sites.google.com/view/niels-de-haan/research>

b. Education

- 2017-2021: PhD in Philosophy (with honors), University of Vienna.
Dissertation: “The Foundations of a Theory of Collective Ethics”. Supervisor: Prof. Hans Bernhard Schmid. Committee: Prof. Deborah Perron Tollefsen and Prof. Gunnar Björnsson.
- 2014-2016: Research Master Philosophy, University of Groningen.
Thesis: “Collectivization Duties in Global Ethics”. Supervisors: Prof. Frank Hindriks, Prof. Bart Streumer, and Dr. Daan Evers
- 2009-2014: Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy with minor in Economics, University of Groningen.

c. Positions

- 2022-2028: University Assistant (Post Doc) / Lecturer in Philosophy. Department of Philosophy, University of Vienna.
- 2022-2025: Research Associate at African Centre for Epistemology and Philosophy of Science. Faculty of Philosophy, University of Johannesburg.
- 2021-2022: Postdoctoral Researcher in European Research Council Project “The Normative and Moral Foundations of Group Agency” (Principal Investigator: Prof. Herlinde Pauer-Studer). Department of Philosophy, University of Vienna.
- 2017-2021: University Assistant / Prae Doc. Department of Philosophy, University of Vienna.

d. Net research experience

Research Experience before Doctoral Degree: Seven years and eleven months (as of February 2025)

Research Experience after Doctoral Degree: Three years and eight months (as of February 2025)

e. Research interests

Areas of specialization: Normative Ethics, Social Ontology, Philosophy of Action, Social and Political Philosophy.

Areas of competence: Meta-ethics, Business ethics, Epistemology, Metaphysics.

Most important research results: (1) article published in *Philosophical Studies*, a top journal in the research field. (2) a co-authored article published in *Philosophical Quarterly*, a top journal in the research field.

f. Academic publications

Collins, S. and N. de Haan. 2021. Interconnected Blameworthiness. *The Monist*, 104(2): 195-209. <https://doi.org/10.1093/monist/onaa032>. (Written together in equal parts)

Collins, S. and N. de Haan. 2024. Group Responsibility and Historicism. *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 74(3): 754-776. <https://doi.org/10.1093/pq/pqad104>. (Written together in equal parts)

de Haan, N. 2021. Collective Culpable Ignorance. *Thought: A Journal of Philosophy*, 10(2): 99-108. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tht3.484>.

de Haan, N. 2021. On the Relation between Collective Responsibility and Collective Duties. *Philosophy*, 96(1): 99-13. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819120000364>.

de Haan, N. 2022. Cooperative Duties of Efficiency and Efficacy. *Journal of Global Ethics*, 18(3): 330-348. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449626.2022.2135578>.

de Haan, N. 2023. Blame. In *Encyclopedia of Law and Social Philosophy*, eds. M.N.S. Sellers and S. Kirse. New York: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-6730-0_1045-1

de Haan, N. 2023. Collective Moral Agency and Self-Induced Moral Incapacity. *Philosophical Explorations*, 26(1): 1-22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13869795.2022.2086994>.

de Haan, N. 2023. Group Agents, Moral Competence and Duty-bearers: The Update Argument. *Philosophical Studies*, 180: 1691-1715. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-023-01944-4>.

de Haan, N. and A. Schwenkenbecher. 2024. Duties to Promote Just Institutions and the Citizenry as an Unorganized Group. In *Collective Responsibility: Perspectives from Political Philosophy and Social Ontology*, eds. B. Wringe and S. Hormio, pp. 151-170. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-68718-1_9 (Written together in equal parts)

g. Additional research achievements

- 2024: Appearance on the Free Will Show. Podcast hosted by Taylor Cyr and Matt Flummer. Episode 75: Group Responsibility and Historicism. <https://thefreewillshow.com/episode-75/>.
- 2024 Invited talk: Moral Collectivism and the Methodology of Ethical Theory. POLEMO Seminar, Central European University.
- 2024 Invited talk: The Similarity Argument for Compatibilism. 45th International Wittgenstein Symposium 2024. Austrian Ludwig Wittgenstein Society.
- 2024 Invited talk: Moral Collectivism and the Methodology of Ethical Theory. Institutions, Agency and Responsibility Workshop, University of Cork.
- 2024 Invited talk: In Praise of Collective Agents. The Moral Roles of Organizations and their Members Workshop. University of Groningen.
- 2023 Invited talk: The Non-Compliance Dilemma for Team Reasoning Accounts of Collective Moral Duties. Practical Philosophy Seminar. University of Oslo.
- 2023 Invited talk: Contractualism, Group Reasons and Practical Identities. Climate Change and Group Agency Workshop, ETH Zurich.
- 2023 Invited talk: Political Legitimacy and Basic Hypothetical Consent. Social Ontology in Political Philosophy. Bilkent University.
- 2023 Invited talk: Groups as Duty-Bearers. Ethics, Social and Political Philosophy Colloquium, University of Groningen.
- 2023 Invited talk: Advice-Sensitive Perspectivism and the Better Information Problem. Meta-Ethics Reading Group, University of Groningen.

Annex 4: Collaboration letters from national and international cooperation partners

Faculty of Arts
Monash University
Wellington Road
Clayton, VIC 3800
Australia



MONASH
University

20 January 2025

To Whom It May Concern,

I write to confirm my willingness to serve as a project collaborator on the project 'The Ethics of Blaming and Praising Group Agents', under consideration for funding by the Fonds zur Förderung der wissenschaftlichen Forschung.

I will be happy to participate in one of the conferences of the project, subject to availability and timing.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'SCollins'.

Dr Stephanie Collins

Associate Professor of Philosophy
Monash University
Australia
email: stephanie.collins@monash.edu
cell: +61-413-283149

Prof. Dr. Hans Bernhard Schmid
Fakultät für Philosophie und Bildungswissenschaft, Institut für Philosophie
Universitätsstraße 7
1010 Wien
Austria

February 10, 2025.

To whom it may concern,

This is to confirm that I am willing to serve as a project collaborator for Niels de Haan's project 'The Ethics of Blaming and Praising Group Agents', under consideration for funding by the FWF. I am further willing to function as a co-supervisor for the prospective doctoral candidates to be employed within the project. I would further be delighted to participate in one of the conferences of the project.

Yours sincerely,



Prof. Dr. Hans Bernhard Schmid

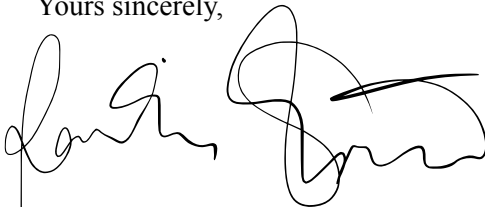
Prof. Dr. Paulina Sliwa
Fakultät für Philosophie und Bildungswissenschaft, Institut für Philosophie
Sensengasse 8/10
1090 Wien
Austria

February 10, 2025.

To whom it may concern,

This is to confirm that I am willing to serve as a project collaborator for Niels de Haan's project 'The Ethics of Blaming and Praising Group Agents', under consideration for funding by the FWF (Fonds zur Förderung der wissenschaftlichen Forschung). I would be delighted to participate in one of the conferences of the project.

Yours sincerely,


Prof. Dr. Paulina Sliwa

January 17, 2025

Gunnar Björnsson
Professor of Practical Philosophy
Department of Philosophy

Letter of intent

This is to confirm that I'm willing—indeed happy!—to serve as a collaborator of Niels de Haan's proposed FWF project, The Ethics of Blaming and Praising Group Agents, and to participate in one of the conferences of the project.

Yours sincerely,



Department of Philosophy

Stockholm University
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Stockholm

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E-mail: gunnar.bjornsson@philosophy.su.se



INSTITUT FOR STATSKUNDSKAB
SCHOOL OF BUSINESS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
AARHUS UNIVERSITET

Professor Kasper Lippert-Rasmussen
Department of Political Science
Bartholins Allé 7
Building 1340, 249
8000 Aarhus C
Denmark
lippert@ps.au.dk
Phone: +4587165643

January 17 2025

Dear Dr. Niels de Haan,

This is to confirm that I would be very happy to serve as project collaborator in 'The Ethics of Blaming and Praising Group Agents'. Indeed, I would be eager to take part in the conferences planned even I would not have the status as project collaborator as the topic is very close to my core research interests.

Yours sincerely,

Kasper Lippert-Rasmussen (D.Phil., Oxford)
Professor of Political Theory, Director of CEPDISC
Aarhus University
Denmark

Institut for Statskundskab

Kasper Lippert-Rasmussen

Professor

Dato: January 17 2025

Direkte tlf.: +4587165643

Mobiltlf.: 60658780

Fax: 86139839

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Web: <http://au.dk/lippert@ps>

Afs. CVR-nr.: 31119103

Side 1/1



Prof. Dr. Frank Hindriks
Faculty of Philosophy
Ethics, Social and Political Philosophy
Oude Boteringestraat 52
9712 GL Groningen
The Netherlands

January 17, 2025

To whom it may concern,

The project 'The Ethics of Blaming and Praising Group Agents' that Niels de Haan has developed is of great quality and promises to be a wonderful contribution to the field. I hereby confirm that I collaborate in it. Participating in one of the envisaged conferences would definitely be a good way to make that more concrete.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'F. Hindriks'.

Frank Hindriks