

**Collective Responsibility and the Ownership of Actions**  
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**I. Introduction**

**A. The Collective Reactive Attitudes**

Can it be appropriate for us to feel guilt for what prior generations have done? Or, for that matter, can it be appropriate to blame, resent or praise anyone alive today for the actions of past generations?<sup>1</sup> We can put this question in a general way by noting that these attitudes of guilt, blame resentment and praise are examples of what P.F. Strawson calls the *reactive attitudes*. The attitudes we are concerned with here are those that we direct towards ourselves in virtue of what our group has done, and towards others in virtue of what their groups have done. Let us call these the *collective reactive attitudes*. These are to be distinguished from the *individual reactive attitudes* which we direct towards ourselves and others in virtue of what we and they have done *as individuals*.

Someone might think that the collective reactive attitudes are never justified. But, I am interested in a more limited claim that holds that the collective reactive attitudes, in response to the actions of past generations are inappropriate. Let us call this the **Past Generations Worry**.

I will argue in this paper that the Past Generations Worry is ultimately without basis and thus it can be appropriate for us to direct collective reactive attitudes towards

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<sup>1</sup> Note that I am not directly addressing the question of whether *groups* can be morally responsible for an action. (But see French for an important treatment of this topic). The problem with addressing this question is that even if we find that groups can be morally responsible this still leaves open the question of what this group responsibility means for members of the group; and it is this latter question that I intend to address.

ourselves and others in response to the actions of past generations. The structure of the paper is as follows: in the next section of the paper I will try to explain the philosophical basis of the Past Generations Worry. In the following sections I will then lay out a case for thinking that the worry is nonetheless without basis.

## **B. The Individual Control Thesis**

All the collective reactive attitudes can be viewed with suspicion. As the Past Generation Worry points out, however, the attitudes which deal with the actions of past generations are especially problematic.<sup>2</sup> This, I submit, is due to the following points:

- (a) In order for a reactive attitude to be appropriate the target of the attitude must be *responsible* for the act in action. Let us call this **Responsibility Condition**.
- (b) In order to be responsible for an action an agent must have at some point in time exercised individual control over it. Let us call this the **Individual Control Thesis**.

Among those who accept the Individual Control Thesis there are many possible views concerning what counts as the relevant kind of control. But, on any plausible account it will turn out that:

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<sup>2</sup> Gilbert's theory, for example, provides a plausible justification for *some* collective reactive attitudes; however, it appears not to support them in response to the actions of past generations. According to Gilbert's account, we can properly feel guilt not only for what we do as individuals, but also for the results of our joint commitments. So, if a group of individuals forms a joint commitment to have a government act on their behalf, then the individuals in some sense own the actions of the government, regardless of whether they know or approve of its specific actions. Note, however, that present-day individuals cannot enter a joint commitment authorizing the governments of past generations to act on their behalf.

(c) Agents never had the opportunity to exercise the relevant kind of individual control over actions which were completed before they came into existence. Given (c) and the Individual Control Thesis we can conclude that people are never responsible for actions which predate their own existence. Thus (given the Responsibility Condition) it would be inappropriate for present-day Americans to feel guilt for past American involvement in slavery. At most we could *regret* what our forbears did, or feel *shame* for what they did.<sup>3</sup>

It is this line of thought, I believe, which provides the philosophical underpinnings to the Past Generations Worry. In the following discussion I shall try to diminish the appeal of the Individual Control Thesis. More specifically, I shall argue that in order to be *individually* responsible for an action it is necessary that we have had some sort of individual control over it; however, I shall also argue that we require no such individual control over an action in order to share *collective* responsibility for it.

### **C. Sketch of the Argument**

My attempt to loosen the appeal of the individual control thesis has two stages. In the first stage I provide a Strawsonian defense of the collective reactive attitudes. The gist of this defense is that the individual and the collective reactive attitudes arise out of two distinct psychological structures each with its own internal conditions of justification but neither of which admits of any sort of external theoretical justification. The justification conditions that are internal to the structure of individual reactive attitudes

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<sup>3</sup> For one who tries to base collective responsibility on a sense of shame see Jedlicki. See, e.g., page 55. I believe this approach is not applicable for our present purposes because the conditions in which shame is appropriate are quite different from the conditions in which the reactive attitudes such as blame and resentment are appropriate, and it is these latter attitudes I am primarily concerned with.

hold that someone is an appropriate target of an individual reactive attitude only if he had some sort of individual control over the action in question; however, the conditions that are internal to the structure of the collective reactive attitudes do not require this sort of individual control. Given that this is so the Individual Control Thesis is valid only insofar as it pertains to *individual* responsibility; however, it is not valid generally since it does not hold in relation to *collective* responsibility.

If the Strawsonian defense were fully adequate then the assault on the Individual Control Thesis would be complete at this point; however, in the second stage of the argument I point out a deficiency in the Strawsonian approach to defending a structure of reactive attitudes. Quickly put, the problem is this: the Strawsonian approach fails to adequately account for the view that a reactive attitude is appropriate only insofar as it is a response to an action that *belongs* to the agent in question.

This represents a threat to the defense of the collective reactive attitudes insofar as one might think that the only way to correct for this deficiency would be in a way that undermines the possibility that a collective reactive attitude in response to the actions of past generations could be appropriate. I shall argue, however, that we can correct this deficiency of the Strawsonian approach by showing how we might legitimately be said to share ownership of the actions of past generations. In so doing I will be showing how we can share collective responsibility for an action despite the fact that we never had the opportunity to exercise any individual control over it.

## **II. A Strawsonian Defense of the Collective Reactive Attitudes**

### **A. The Strawsonian Approach**

In order to show how the collective reactive attitudes might be defended let us first examine Strawson's defense of the individual reactive attitudes.<sup>4</sup> Strawson is concerned by the view that determinism, if true, undermines all judgments of individual responsibility. In the end, Strawson does not think that the thesis of determinism undermines our judgments of individual responsibility in any way; but, interestingly enough, he does not take a stand on the truth or falsity of determinism, nor even a stand on what the thesis amounts to. This is because he thinks that:

- (a) We have a "natural human commitment to ordinary inter-personal attitudes" which is "part of the general framework of human life." (13)
- (b) "The existence of the general framework of [reactive] attitudes itself is something we are given with the fact of human society. As a whole, it neither calls for, nor permits, an external 'rational' justification." (23)

Given these two points, Strawson recognizes only two sorts of justification concerning the reactive attitudes.

The first sort of justification is the justification that is *internal* to the structure or framework of these attitudes. (23) It is on the basis of this sort of justification that we might ask *in a particular case* whether it is appropriate to take up the reactive attitudes towards a given person. However, given the actual features of this sort of justification the truth of determinism could in no way show that *all* the reactive attitudes are inappropriate.

Indeed, Strawson thinks that the only intelligible way to question the rationality of the framework of reactive attitudes *as a whole* is in pragmatic terms; and, as Strawson

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<sup>4</sup> For discussions of Strawson's argument, see Ayer, Bennett and Wolf (1981).

puts it, we could choose rationally to keep or reject the structure of the reactive attitudes as a whole (imagining that we could ever have a such a choice) "only in the light of an assessment of the gains and losses to human life, its enrichment or impoverishment." (13)

Strawson makes the case that human life would be very much impoverished were it not to involve a commitment to the framework of the reactive attitudes. For example, he points to the "human isolation" that would occur as a result of this lack of commitment. (11) This human isolation would occur since we would be forced to continually view other human beings as objects moved by forces, and never as *people* responsible for their own lives. Since we cannot imagine any other set of goods that could offset the losses that such human isolation brings we can conclude that the reactive attitudes as a whole are pragmatically justified, and thus they are rationally justified in the only sense that is intelligible.

## **B. How this Bears on the Justification of the Collective Reactive Attitudes**

Let us suppose for the time being that Strawson's defense of the reactive attitudes is fully adequate. What bearing would this have on the justification of the collective reactive attitudes? Given Strawson's view that the reactive attitudes as a whole are pragmatically justified the only way remaining to intelligibly question the justification of the collective reactive attitudes would be via the justification that is *internal* to the structure of the reactive attitudes as a whole.

So what does the justification that is internal to the structure of the reactive attitudes as a whole involve? One might think that this justification requires that in order for someone to be held responsible for an action that person must have had some sort of

*individual control* in relation to the action. If this were the case then the Individual Control Thesis would be sound and it would follow that the collective reactive attitudes in response to the actions of past generations would not be justified.

What can the defender of the collective reactive attitudes say in response? The best response, I think, is to notice that conditions of justification vary among the reactive attitudes and other emotions. Indeed, Strawson himself recognizes this when he notes that emotions like fear, pity and some forms of love have quite different conditions of justification than do the reactive attitudes of gratitude, forgiveness or the sort of reciprocal love that can exist between adults. (9) Consider, for example, that it can be appropriate to love a newborn infant, but it is inappropriate to resent someone at that stage of life.<sup>5</sup>

My suggestion, then, is that the collective reactive attitudes are part of a distinct structure within the larger structure of the reactive attitudes as a whole which has its own peculiar conditions of justification. To make this plausible consider, for example, the guilt I feel for what my country did two hundred years ago. Although, it is phenomenologically similar to the guilt that I feel for what *I* did two years ago the two kinds of guilt have quite different conditions of appropriateness. The kind of guilt I have for my own actions, I claim, is part of the structure of *individual* reactive attitudes which is within the larger structure of the reactive attitudes as a whole; and, an internal feature of this structure of individual reactive attitudes is that in order for an agent to be an appropriate target of an individual reactive attitude it must be in virtue of his having had some sort of individual control over the action in question.

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<sup>5</sup> I found Pereboom's discussion of this matter particularly helpful. See p. 41.

On the other hand I maintain that the kind of guilt I have for what my country did two hundred years ago is part of a structure of *collective* reactive attitudes; and, I maintain that it is not a feature of this structure that in order for an agent to be an appropriate target of a *collective* reactive attitude it must be in virtue of his having had some sort of individual control over the action in question. Rather, this system will have an analogous feature: in order for an agent to be an appropriate target of a collective reactive attitude it must be in virtue of his being a member of a group which exercised some sort of *collective* control over the action in question.

One might ask here: what is it to be a *member* of a group, and what counts as an exercise of *collective control*? To answer these questions let me start by noting that the groups that I have primarily in mind are ethnic and national groups.<sup>6</sup> In order to provide a more general characterization, though, I shall help myself to Margalit and Raz' notion of an **encompassing group**.<sup>7</sup> For our purposes, the key feature of an encompassing group is that in order to become a member a child (or other initiate) must go through a socialization process which includes:

- a. Coming to see the group as possessing a *kind* of **collective agency**; and,

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<sup>6</sup> To be precise, the national groups I have in mind are those whose members have a sense of shared collective history. Not all national groups have this sense, and even among nations that do, there are individuals who don't share that sense. The account of collective responsibility I develop here applies only to those individuals who have this sense of shared collective history. I thank Rahul Kumar for helping me to see this point.

<sup>7</sup> See Margalit and Raz, p. 448 for a discussion of characteristics of an encompassing group.

b. Coming to have **a sense of ownership** of the collective actions of the group.<sup>8</sup>

Let's consider an example: in becoming an American one comes to understand statements such as "The American people declared their independence from Britain in 1776."<sup>9</sup>

The particular details of how members recognize such actions vary from group to group. They might look to the actions of democratically elected officials, or they might look to the actions of people in other leadership roles set by tradition. Generally, these decision makers, whoever they might be, make the group decisions with an eye towards furthering the interests of the group. This does not mean, however, that they have a good understanding of these interests, or that they are successful in furthering them.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to recognizing what counts as a collective action, a member of a group must see the actions of the group as, in a sense, his own. Again, consider that present-day Americans believe not just that "*Americans* declared *their* independence in 1776" but rather that "*We* declared *our* independence". Now, of course, not just anyone can appropriately adopt this first-person perspective. Here too there are appropriateness conditions that are internal to the idea of being an American (even if there is

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<sup>8</sup> Margalit and Raz emphasize that "it is through a shared history that cultures develop and are transmitted", and thus a major part of the socialization of the young into an encompassing group involves getting them to feel that they have a share in the group's history. (445) The conditions I offer here are an elaboration of this observation.

<sup>9</sup> One can be an American citizen without thereby seeing oneself as part of the American ethnicity which came to establish the American state. In this example I am referring to how one becomes part of the American people *qua* ethnicity, and not merely *qua* citizenry. I thank Rahul Kumar for helping me see this distinction.

disagreement about what exactly the conditions are). But, if someone appropriately identifies as a member of an encompassing group then she will by that very fact come to see the actions of the group as, in a sense, her own.

The point of this section, then, has been to show that a Strawsonian need not see the collective reactive attitudes as having the same conditions of justification as do the individual reactive attitudes. Rather, I have urged the Strawsonian to think that we have distinct sub-structures of individual and collective reactive attitudes, and that (given the Responsibility Condition) there are two corresponding kinds of responsibility: viz., individual responsibility and collective responsibility.

Suppose that I am right about this. There then arises another intelligible way to question the justification of the collective reactive attitudes. This involves questioning whether the sub-structure of the collective reactive attitudes is *pragmatically* justified. Answering this question involves determining whether we would choose rationally to keep or reject a commitment to this structure (imagining that we could ever have a such a choice) in the light of an assessment of the gains and losses it brings to human life.

Let me briefly address why it is plausible to think that the structure of collective reactive attitudes is pragmatically justified. If I am right about the nature of these attitudes then the only way to avoid having them would be to forgo membership in all encompassing groups and thus in all national and ethnic groups. Granted, we might imagine life without these national and ethnic affiliations; furthermore, we can identify gains to our life if we could choose to give them up: e.g., by giving them up we would be free of the considerable threats of pernicious nationalism and ethnic chauvinism.

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<sup>10</sup> See page 449 of Margalit and Raz on the interests of groups vis-à-vis the interests of their members.

But, I claim, our lives would be considerably impoverished without these national and ethnic identities. Consider, for example, Raz and Margalit's claim that in these groups individuals find "an anchor for their self-identification and the safety of effortless, secure belonging." (448) This effortless belonging provides human beings with a powerful tool to combat *social* isolation. Moreover, it increases the total amount of beneficence that we find in the world since many of us are only motivated to benefit those with whom we have a connection closer than fellow human being. The sense of shared nationality or ethnicity can provide this closer connection.

Given these important benefits one might reasonably conclude that it would involve a very great loss to human life were we to choose to give up the collective reactive attitudes; therefore, one might reasonably conclude that the system of collective reactive attitudes is pragmatically justified. However, I should point out that rather little rides on this point. This is because:

- (a) Whether as a result of choice or circumstance it is simply a fact that we find ourselves as members of encompassing groups, and
- (b) We also find that we cannot simply choose to stop viewing ourselves as members of these groups.

To illustrate these points consider, for example, that I (as did many others) reached the age of rational majority conceiving of myself as an American. Suppose (contrary to fact) that I determined that I would be better off not conceiving of myself as a member of any nationality or ethnicity. What actions would then be available to me?

Perhaps I could embark on a process which when completed would result in my no longer conceiving of myself as an American; but, this process would take many years,

if not decades. In short, perhaps I can choose to start a process whereby I no longer identify as an American; but, I cannot simply choose at this very moment to no longer conceive of myself in this way.

This means that insofar as we are members of encompassing groups we cannot simply choose to avoid a commitment to the structure of the collective reactive attitudes. If it turns out that this structure is pragmatically justified then so much the better for us. But even if it were not pragmatically justified this would not erase the fact that we are committed to this structure, nor would it lessen the degree to which our collective reactive attitudes are justified according to the justification that arises internally from the structure of the reactive attitudes as a whole.

With this point in mind we can now turn back to the issue of whether it is appropriate to have collective reactive attitudes in response to the actions of our forbears. We can answer as follows: although it is conceivable that the structure of the collective reactive attitudes might turn out not to be pragmatically justified we nonetheless have a commitment to that structure. And, we find that given the justification that arises internally from this structure the fact that it is impossible for us to have exercised individual control over the actions of prior generations in no way shows us to be the inappropriate targets of the collective reactive attitudes. The Individual Control Thesis, then, must be rejected if it is meant to apply to *all* kinds of responsibility. We can conclude then that there is no barrier *for the Strawsonian* to thinking that we can be the legitimate targets of the collective reactive attitudes in response to the actions of past generations.

### **III. Beyond the Strawsonian Defense**

## A. The Ownership Requirement

The defense of the collective reactive attitudes would be complete at this point if the Strawsonian line of argument were sound. Unfortunately, I think that Strawson's defense of the reactive attitudes fails to adequately account for a certain feature of the structure of the individual reactive attitudes. And, the Strawsonian defense that I offer in favor of the collective reactive attitudes similarly fails to adequately account for a certain feature of the structure of the collective reactive attitudes.

This feature of the structure of the individual reactive attitudes that Strawson fails to adequately account for is that someone is the appropriate object of an individual reactive attitude in virtue of the fact that he *deserves* to be the object of that attitude; and, this condition of really deserving something is something that, as Strawson puts it, involves a "genuinely free identification of the will with the act" in question. (3) My claim, then, is that any adequate justification of the structure of the individual reactive attitudes must show how they are made appropriate in virtue of agents' genuinely free identification of their wills with the acts in question. Let us call this feature that any adequate defense of the structure of the individual reactive attitudes must account for the **free identification** feature.

Strawson's defense of the reactive attitudes completely fails to account for this free identification feature. This is no mere oversight. This is because Strawson thinks that there is no coherent way to account for it.<sup>11</sup> This means that Strawson's defense of the structure of the reactive attitudes must be revisionary. Indeed, Bennett claims that Strawson has offered us a "maximal salvage" of the structure of the reactive attitudes given the inability to account for such a feature. (pp. 24-5)

There are at least two problems with this "salvage" approach. The first problem is that it is far from clear that the structure of the individual reactive attitudes really does require such a salvage job; that is, we might be able--despite Strawson's pessimism--to find a way to coherently account for the free identification feature. The second and more pressing problem is that it is plausible to claim that the free identification feature is an *essential* feature of the structure of the individual reactive attitudes. If one could not coherently account for that feature one would be free to salvage any other remaining features; however, whatever was salvaged would not be an account of individual *responsibility*; rather, it would be an account which happened to share some features that a fully adequate account of individual responsibility would have.

What bearing does this have on the Strawsonian defense of the collective reactive attitudes? First, one might think (although as we shall see, I do not) that the free identification feature is also a feature of the structure of the collective reactive attitudes. If this were the case then things would be grim indeed for a large chunk of the structure

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<sup>11</sup> In particular he thinks that the free identification feature cannot be accounted for by the view that the reactive attitudes are a response to agents' exercises of contra-causal freedom. This is not because he thinks that determinism is true. Rather, it is because he thinks there is an "insuperable difficulty" in explaining how our possession of contra-causal freedom would account for the free identification feature. (19)

of the collective reactive attitudes. This is because even if we hold out hope that we can show how we make a genuinely free identification of our wills with the acts that we do as individuals, it is massively implausible to believe that we could show how we make a genuinely free identification of our wills with acts that preceded our existence; thus, the very collective reactive attitudes that I am interested in defending would turn out to be indefensible.

I do not think, however, that the free identification feature really is an essential element of any genuine account of responsibility. Rather, I take it that the free identification feature is one specification of a more general feature that really is an essential element of any genuine account of responsibility. This more general feature that any genuine account of responsibility must have is that if someone is to be held responsible for an action it must be in virtue of the fact that the action genuinely *belongs* to him. Let us call this the **ownership requirement**.<sup>12</sup>

It is easy to see how the free identification feature is a particular specification of the ownership requirement. This is because in coming to make a genuinely free identification of one's will with an action one thereby is entitled to see the action as one's own. The interesting question is whether there is any other way to come to own an action which does not involve making a genuinely free identification of one's will with an action.

I believe so. The idea is this: one can come to share ownership of the collective actions of an encompassing group in virtue of becoming a full-fledged member. Indeed,

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<sup>12</sup> For those who have appealed to ideas similar to the ownership requirement see Kane's Ultimacy Thesis and Mele's appeal to authenticity.

it is partially constitutive of being a full-fledged member of an encompassing group that one sees its collective actions as, in a sense, one's own. Moreover, this is so regardless of whether one ever had any sort of individual control over the group's collective actions.

My proposal, then, is that a reactive attitude is appropriate only if the action in question belongs, in some legitimate sense, to the person or persons that the attitude is directed towards. But, I further suggest that there are at least two ways in which an action might come to belong to a person. First, one can come to *individually* own an action, and this sort of ownership requires that one have had some sort of individual control over that action. On the other hand, one can come to share *collective* ownership of an action, and this sort of ownership does not require that one ever have had any sort of individual control over the action.

Let's illustrate how this works with the case of contemporary Americans in relation to antebellum slavery.<sup>13</sup> According to a certain conception of what it is to be an American, the people of America would qualify as an encompassing group whose members go through a socialization process which leads them to identify as Americans. Moreover, present-day Americans will notice that the practices associated with slavery were, at least in part, officially sanctioned and promoted. Against this background, an American might reason as follows: "*We* engaged in these deplorable practices associated with slavery". In adopting this first-person point of view she manifests her ownership stake in these practices despite her awareness that she never had any sort of individual control over them. And, given her ownership stake in these practices she thereby demonstrates that she shares collective responsibility for them.

Once she becomes aware of this fact she might pressure the government to own up to this collective responsibility of the American people. I will not take a stand here on what this "owning up" might involve. It is important to note, though, that admitting that we Americans share collective responsibility for past American slavery in no way connotes that we bear *individual* responsibility for it.

### **B. Does this involve a Mistake?**

There are two related objections that might be raised to the idea that we share ownership of the collective actions of the encompassing groups to which we belong. First, one might object that there is no coherent sense in which one can see an action that was completed before one came into existence as one's own. The idea behind the

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<sup>13</sup> This example is further developed in Rahul Kumar's and David Silver's "The Legacy of Injustice: Wronging the Future, Responsibility for the Past." (ms)

objection is this: in order to legitimately have a sense of ownership of action *X*, one must be able to take a genuine first-person perspective towards the doing of *X*. But, the objection continues, there are only two ways to take a genuine first-person perspective towards an action:

- a. The *individual* perspective in which an agent thinks "*I* did *X*", and
- b. The *inclusive collective* perspective in which an agent thinks "*We* did *X*", where this entails that the agent participated in the group's doing *X*.

It is obviously the case that it is inappropriate to take up the individual first-person perspective concerning actions that were completed before one came into existence. Likewise, it is impossible to participate in an action that was completed before one came into existence.<sup>14</sup> Thus, it is inappropriate to take up the inclusive collective first-person perspective towards such actions. We find then that if these were the only two genuine first-person perspectives that an agent could take towards the doing of *X* then there would be no intelligible way in which one could come to see an action which was completed before one came into existence as one's own.

Let me suggest, however, that there is a third genuine kind of first-perspective that might be appealed to here:

- c. The *non-inclusive collective* perspective in which an agent thinks "*We* did *X*", where this does not entail that the agent participated in the group's doing *X*.

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<sup>14</sup> I do not take a stand here on what kind of participation on the part of the speaker is entailed by "*We* did *X*" when spoken from the inclusive collective perspective. This is because on any plausible account it will be impossible for someone to have relevantly participated in the performance of an action which was completed before one came into existence, and this is all that my discussion requires.

I take it that we human beings are *psychologically* capable of seeing an action as our own in this non-inclusive collective way. And, it is this non-inclusive collective sense of ownership that lies at the heart of the account of collective responsibility being offered here.

This leads us to the second objection one might raise. This objection acknowledges that we human beings can (and do) take the non-inclusive collective first-person perspective towards certain actions; however, the objection continues, this perspective by its very nature involves a mistake. One might hold, for example, that the only way to genuinely come to own an action is by helping to bring it about through the exercise of free will; and, the "ownership" associated with the non-inclusive collective first-person perspective does not require one to exercise free will over an action in order to "own" it.

My initial reply to this worry is to note that it is far from obvious that even the best account of *individual* responsibility refers to free will.<sup>15</sup> However, even supposing that one could be individually responsible for an action only through the exercise of free will, this would not directly show that the exercise of free will over an action is a necessary condition for sharing *collective* ownership of an action. Indeed, it would take a further argument to show that the conditions of appropriateness that apply to attributions of individual responsibility also apply to attributions of collective responsibility.

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<sup>15</sup> Fischer and Ravizza, for example, see the possession of *guidance control* as the hallmark of individual responsibility. An agent has guidance control over an action if he freely performs *that action*. This is to be contrasted with *regulative control*. An agent has regulative control over an action if (a) he freely performs that action (i.e. one has guidance control over it), and (b) he can freely do some other action instead. (31)

This takes us back to what I see as the core Strawsonian insight. Strawson's view was that one could properly exhibit the individual reactive attitudes without it being the case that the metaphysical doctrine of determinism was false. Whether or not this particular point is true, I accept Strawson's more general point: we should not saddle a set of reactive attitudes with a philosophical doctrine which they are not committed to, and then reject the set of attitudes on the basis of their commitment to that doctrine.

Strawson's insight applies to the non-inclusive collective kind of ownership in this way. Those who think that "We did *X*" in a non-inclusive collective way often are fully aware *at the time of their thinking it* that they were never in a position to have exercised any sort of individual control over *X*. Moreover, they take the fact that they were never in a position to have exercised any individual control over *X* to be irrelevant to whether they share collective ownership of *X*. If someone accuses them of making a mistake here, they might justifiably complain that it is not they, but rather their accuser who is mistaken. In their eyes, the accuser has saddled them with a doctrine--viz., that it is appropriate to direct a collective reactive attitude towards a person for action *X* only if that person exercised some sort of individual control over that action--that they simply do not, and need not hold.

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Although some think that determinism must be false in order for anyone to have guidance control, one might reasonably think that it is possible to come to possess guidance control over actions even if determinism turns out to be true. See Pereboom, Stump and Zagzebski (pp. 161-162) for examples of those who think that determinism must be false in order for anyone to possess guidance control. On the other hand, see Wolf (1990), ch. 5 for an example of someone who thinks we can have *regulative* control even if determinism is true.

In summary, my defense of the collective reactive attitudes comes down to this: it is simply not necessary for an individual to have exercised individual control over an action in order to share collective responsibility for it. To think otherwise is to project the conditions of appropriateness of the individual reactive attitudes onto the conditions of appropriateness of the collective reactive attitudes. However, this sort of projection simply is not warranted, and thus the Individual Control Thesis must be rejected insofar as it pertains to the collective reactive attitudes.

If this line of reasoning is correct, we have removed the chief philosophical barrier to thinking that collective reactive attitudes are ever appropriate in response to the actions of past generations.

#### **IV. Comparison with Other Accounts of Responsibility**

According to the account I have offered here, one shares responsibility for a collective action of an encompassing group just in case one has been properly socialized as a member into that group. In this section I want to elaborate on some features of this account, in part by contrasting it with some other accounts of collective responsibility that also allow that one can share responsibility for actions that predate one's own existence.

First, let me note that on my account it is neither necessary nor sufficient for one to think that one shares collective responsibility for an action in order for that to be the case. For example, if one properly considers oneself an American then one shares collective responsibility for all the collective actions of the American people, even if one disassociates oneself from certain actions, or even if one believes the very idea of

collective responsibility philosophically untenable.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, if one were to improperly consider oneself a member of an encompassing group, then one would not share collective responsibility for the group's actions, despite one's beliefs or feelings to the contrary.

Next, we can compare my account with that offered by Gregory Mellema. On his account, in order for one to share responsibility for the collective actions of a group, one must make a positive act of affiliation with the group such as voluntarily joining, or otherwise affirming membership. On Mellema's account, then, one need not directly exercise individual control over an action in order to share responsibility for it; but, at the very least one must exercise individual control over whether one positively affiliates with the group which performed the action.

We can contrast Mellema's account with that of Larry May. Unlike Mellema, May does not think that one needs to make a *positive* act of affiliation with a group in order to share responsibility for its actions; rather, he thinks it is sufficient for one to have had an opportunity to disavow membership in the group, and to have refrained from doing so.<sup>17</sup> Despite this difference there is a significant point of affinity between May's and Mellema's accounts: they agree that in order to share collective responsibility for an action of a group one must have had some kind of individual control over one's affiliation with the group.

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<sup>16</sup> This stands in contrast to an account of individual responsibility which I otherwise find myself much in agreement with. According to Fischer and Ravizza one must *see oneself* as an apt target of a reactive attitude in order *to be* an apt target. (see pp. 225-229) On my account, however, it is possible for one to be an apt target of a reactive attitude without seeing oneself as an apt target.

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, p. 158.

The account I offer parts company with both Mellema and May on this point since I hold that one can come to share ownership of the actions of an encompassing group even if one never had any effective opportunity to either opt in to the group, or to opt out of it. This is a feature of my account since the socialization that results in someone becoming a full-fledged member of an encompassing group is generally (but not always) something that *happens* to a person, and is not something which he has any degree of effective control over.

Recall my earlier observation that many people reach the age of rational majority conceiving of themselves as members of encompassing groups. For example, I am a full-fledged American, but at no point in my point in my life was I required to make a positive act of affiliation in order to obtain this status. Moreover, while I can (and often do) distance myself from particular actions of the American people, I do not think it is within my power to simply decide to no longer be an American; thus it is not within my power to simply slough off the responsibility I share for the collective actions of the American people.

Perhaps this feature of my account will strike some as deeply unjust. After all, it condemns nearly all humanity to a form of ethnic original sin where we share responsibility for the sins of our ancestors, no matter the virtue of our own actions and characters.

Let me make a few points about this injustice. First, as mentioned before, the benefits of membership in an encompassing group often outweigh its drawbacks. When this is the case we need not be deeply troubled by the fact that we receive the drawbacks along with the benefits.

Second, I have argued that even if it turned out that on balance it would be better for us to relinquish membership in a particular encompassing group it is not generally within our power to do so. When we find ourselves thus burdened by our memberships in encompassing groups it can be perfectly reasonable to dislike or even hate the fact that the sins of our ancestors are thrust upon us in the way I have suggested here. This hatred, however, in no way serves to eliminate one's shared collective responsibilities.

This said, it is important to note that the arguments in this paper concern those actions we might share collective responsibility for, and do not at all concern what we must do in order to properly own up to our shared collective responsibilities. This latter topic deserves a separate treatment; however, I will say this much here: there are moral limits on how much a present-day individual might be called upon to contribute to the rectification of the sins of his ancestors. If we demand more of individuals than these moral limits allow, then in rectifying one injustice, we give birth to another.

## **V. Conclusion**

In this paper I have proposed the following:

1. Many people are members of encompassing groups as a result of non-voluntary socialization processes.
2. We share ownership of the collective actions of the encompassing groups to which we belong, including those actions which preceded our existence.
3. In virtue of sharing ownership of these actions, it is appropriate to direct blame, resentment and other collective reactive attitudes towards us in response to these actions.

Taking these points together we can conclude that the collective reactive attitudes can be appropriately directed towards us insofar as we have ownership stakes in the actions of the encompassing groups to which we belong. Moreover, the fact that we never had any individual control over many of these actions simply has no relevance in determining the degree to which we share *collective* responsibility for them. Thus, the Past Generations Worry is ultimately without basis.

Of course, the extent to which we have had individual control over the collective actions of our encompassing groups has a great deal of relevance in determining the degree to which we bear *individual* responsibility for them. This does not mean, however, that the categories of individual and collective responsibility are mutually exclusive. Consider, for example, that the American President both bears individual responsibility and shares collective responsibility for his actions when he acts within the ambit of his political authority.

Still, it is important to note that individual and collective responsibility are based on two quite different kinds of ownership of actions. Indeed, it is this difference which explains why a person must have individual control over an action in order to bear individual responsibility for it but not in order to share collective responsibility for it. This in turn explains why we cannot bear *individual* responsibility for the actions of past generations whereas we can share *collectively* responsible for them. Indeed, I have been urging that we can legitimately harbor guilt, blame and other collective reactive attitudes for the actions of those who have preceded us since, in a way, we share ownership of their actions.

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