A critique of Lewis’ claim that responsibility belongs to the individual

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1. Introduction

The subject of this paper is collective responsibility. Philosophers separate collective responsibility from individual responsibility, and it has been the skeptics of collective responsibility who have controlled the debate. The advocates of classical methodological individualism, Max Weber and H. D. Lewis, are both viewed as key figures in developing skeptical arguments against the possibility of collective responsibility (Smiley 2017). If one wishes to raise arguments for collective responsibility it is common to start by criticizing one of their claims. Questions that have been asked concerning collective responsibility are whether or not it makes sense as a form of moral responsibility (Smiley 2017), if it makes sense to distribute collective responsibility and what would happen if we replaced individual responsibility with it (Smiley 2017).

The purpose of this paper is to argue for collective responsibility, and I will do this by asking the question “Is H. D. Lewis’ claim that responsibility belongs to the individual (Lewis 1948:3) correct?”. I will argue that Lewis’ claim is not correct and I will put forward three arguments in order to support this thesis.

I have chosen to provide a broad argumentation of collective responsibility rather than a more narrow focus, which would provide more depth. The reason behind this choice is that I think it gives a more convincing argument for collective responsibility. This way I am able to show the multiple situations, areas and aspects that collective responsibility exists in, and I believe that makes my argument greater. This paper will work as a stepping stone to other papers that perhaps will have a more narrow and deep focus of collective responsibility.

In order to argue for my thesis I will start by defining the word “responsibility” as well as the word “collective”. Thereafter, in part 3, I will present Lewis’ argument and in part 4 I will present the first argument for my thesis, that you need to consider blameworthy attitudes. I will continue in part 5 and 6 to present my next two arguments: that you need to distance yourself from the wrong act and that one can be held responsible for not acting if one could have acted. Part 7 will discuss a critique of collective responsibility, saying that it wrongly moves the responsibility from the wrongdoers to the group. I will conclude the section by responding to this critique. In part 8 I will discuss a second
critique, questioning if what has been discussed really is collective responsibility, and answer it as well. Finally in the last part I will provide a summary of the paper.

2. Responsibility and collective
The two most important terms in this paper are “responsibility” and “collective”. I found that both of these terms can have a slightly different meaning in philosophy, and hence my paper, compared to the everyday use in the English language. Therefore I will use this part of the paper to define them, in the way they will be used in this paper.

The English language define “responsibility” as having a duty to do something, being in control over someone and/or being held accountable. The reason I do not use these definitions is because “being held accountable” is simply not covering everything I refer to when I talk of “responsibility”. “Being in control over someone” is not at all close to what I will be discussing in this paper. That leaves us with “having a duty to do something”, and although this definition comes the closest to being accurate I cannot use it since it does not include “backward looking responsibility”. I will soon explain what that term means. Therefore, the definition that I will use for “responsibility” is a “moral obligation not to contribute to bad consequences”. This definition contains both varieties of responsibility that Margaret Gilbert has, which are “backward looking” responsibility and “forward looking” responsibility. After I have explained her definition of these two I will explain in what way this paper’s definition of “responsibility” contains both of them. Gilbert describes “backward looking responsibility” as being responsible for something that is currently happening, or has already happened. You are responsible for the actions and the effects they have. The second type of responsibility, which she calls “forward looking responsibility” is to be responsible for something that has yet to happen. You are therefore responsible for its occurrence, to make sure it happens (Gilbert 2006:94). It seems to me that backward responsibility depends on that you are the one who has done something wrong, and are in that case responsible for the wrong you have done. The latter type of responsibility seems to depend on that you have a task to do, you are responsible to make sure it happens. In some of the cases that I will bring up in this paper, it has to do with “cleaning up” the wrong thing that has happened, and that it is the “cleaning up” you are responsible for. I use “clean up” in a very broad sense, and not just in the way of actually cleaning, but in a way where it also includes stopping a wrong action. Held and Larry May make a distinction between to take responsibility and to hold
an agent responsible (Held 2002:158;166). To hold an agent responsible, with purpose of judging or punishing, often belongs to backward looking responsibility. To take responsibility is normally associated with forward looking responsibility (Gilbert 2006:94).

As I have stated, this paper’s definition of “responsibility” is “a moral obligation to not contribute to bad consequences”. It contains both backward looking and forward looking responsibility since you are considered responsible both if you already have violated your moral obligation to not contribute to bad consequences, and because you have to make sure your upcoming acts do not contribute to bad consequences either. So if the bad consequences already have happened, as in backward responsibility, you are responsible for doing that act that contributed to it. To have a moral obligation not to contribute to bad consequences can involve that one can become responsible for not interfering, when for example violence occurs. It can be that one has the responsibility to try and argue that what a wrongdoer said or did is wrong, if possible. It could also be that groups have responsibility for their blameworthy attitudes, and for indirectly supporting wrong acts in the group. Throughout the paper when I use the word “responsibility”, it is moral responsibility I refer to, unless I specifically write legal responsibility.

The next important word that I will define is “collective”. The most significant difference between how “collective” is defined in the English language and how it is defined in this paper is who is responsible and/or who is doing the action. When one is talking of a collective in the English language it is possible to refer to individuals doing an action together. However that is not the correct definition for this paper. When I speak of “collective” in this paper, it is one union. It is not the individuals who for example are individually responsible, it is the collective that is responsible. The “collective” is “people in plural that somehow are joined together”, it can be in many different ways. To explain further I will use Virginia Held’s two types of collectives. She divides collectives into organized groups and unorganized groups. An organized group is a group that has a clear decision procedure, which means that “they have goals, procedures for deciding on how to act to achieve them, and the ability to act accordingly” (Held 2002:164). These types of groups could for example be corporations, states or other forms of organisations. Unorganized groups however, also known as random collections, are groups where the members do not necessarily have anything in common with each other more than that they happen to be at the same place, at the same time, witnessing the same event. They
simply do not meet up to the requirements of being an organized group, and neither do they have to be aware that they are in a shared group together (Held 2002:164). Held and another philosopher, Juha Räikkä, agree that dividing collectives into only these two groups does not do justice, especially not for ethnic, cultural and national groups, that seem to be neither organized nor a random collection (Held 2002:164f). Since I will not be focusing on groups that seem to be neither organized nor random collections, I will not put much weight on, Held's and Räikkä's, thought. Though I do agree with it.

I will therefore use the word “collective” as “people in plural that somehow are joined together”, either as organized or unorganized groups. It will also be implied that they perform actions and are responsible as one unit, as a collective.

3. Lewis’ argument

I will now explain H. D. Lewis’ argument regarding collective responsibility. According to Lewis no one can be morally responsible for something someone else has done (Lewis 1948:3), however persons can share responsibility for something they did together (Lewis 1948:9). These responsibilities are though nonetheless individual (Lewis 1948:3). To be responsible, in Lewis' words, means to act as a moral agent (Lewis 1948:9), and from his text I am assuming that he belongs to the group of philosophers who believe that being an agent capable of being responsible is something that only applies to individuals as it requires being able to have emotions, among other things (Held 2002:164). Lewis even says that if you were to ascribe moral responsibility to a whole group, then what you are left with is not morality at all, but the repudiation of it (Lewis 1948:7). However, Lewis does say that there can be exceptional cases where the action of a group has to be dealt with as if it were an individual (Lewis 1948:9), and that we sometimes have to accept collective responsibility as a tool for reaching a goal (Lewis 1948:10). He is using two examples of this. One of a classroom when the teacher is using the “technique” of punishing all as she or he does not know who in the class did the wrong act (Lewis 1948:9f). The second example is when nations use sanctions on other nations as a way of showing that their behavior is not something they will allow (Lewis 1948:10). However, he states that surely the implications of this cannot be that the innocent are morally responsible for the wrong acts of the guilty, even though they get punished for it (Lewis 1948:11).
Lewis and Held agree on that there is a clear and important distinction between being morally responsible and being responsible in a legal way, and Lewis expresses this by saying that you can be legally responsible for something without being morally responsible for it and vice versa. This can happen if you, for example, get legally convicted for a crime you did not commit or if you get away with a crime you did commit. In the latter case you have no legal responsibility, but you are still morally responsible for your action (Lewis 1948:8).

What I will focus on from Lewis’ argument is his claim that “responsibility essentially belongs to the individual” (Lewis 1948:3), and I will use three different arguments to support my thesis that Lewis’ claim is not correct.

4. Argument 1: Blameworthy attitudes

The first argument I will put forward in order to criticize Lewis’ claim is the importance to consider blameworthy attitudes. I will explain and argue for the importance of blameworthy attitudes in a situation of determining moral responsibility: that it is not just the individual that can be responsible for his or her action, but a group can also be morally responsible for having blameworthy attitudes that contribute to this action. If this is true, then group A can have some responsibility for person B’s action due to group A’s blameworthy attitudes about the reasons behind the action, and that would mean that Lewis’ claim is not correct.

Held writes both that groups ought to be morally responsible for both the actions and the attitudes of their members, and that the members ought to be morally responsible for the actions and attitudes of the group (Held 2002:157). I believe this makes a lot of sense, as the attitudes that a group carry are, according to me, a collective responsibility and should be something which both members and the group as a whole are responsible for. Our attitudes are part of what makes us act, and if those attitudes are racist, homophobic or misogynist for example then these attitudes can make someone commit a hateful act towards persons within the relevant group. I believe most people accept the following. If you yourself have racist attitudes, and then act them out, you will be responsible for your actions, and your attitudes are something you will need to change. If we then instead imagine a group in which, more or less, all members have this attitude but only a few members carry out the action. Would these people have done this wrong act if they did
not passively get supported by other group members with the same blameworthy attitudes? This is the core question of this argument, and if the answer is that they would perhaps or probably not have done the wrong act without knowing that it was in line with the other group members’ attitudes then it creates a problem for Lewis’ claim. Because that means that the blameworthy attitudes were a contributor, and then it is incorrect that the responsibility only belongs to the individual (Lewis 1948:3).

You might object and say that there is a big difference between having attitudes and carrying them out, and I agree. There is a big difference, however I do not believe this difference is significant here since I do not propose that the person who performed the act is not responsible. Nor do I say that the other group members are equally responsible. I am merely saying that their blameworthy attitudes are a contributor to person B carrying out this action, and because of this it would be wrong to claim that a group cannot be responsible, in any way, for a person's action.

To say that a group has moral responsibility for something does not mean that the members of the group all have equal moral responsibility, there may very well be degrees of it (Held 2002:166). Some members who are morally responsible could be more responsible than other members, depending on their part in the act. This means that assigning responsibility to those who have racist attitudes in a group, does not take away responsibility, nor diminish it, from those who actually performed the act. Assigning responsibility does not have the same effect in cases of legal responsibility, as this must have the effect that a person is either legally responsible or not convicted (Held 2002:168). You cannot be more or less legally responsible, although your sentence can of course be more or less strict depending on your felony. The question of whether you are convicted or not must be definite. But having degrees of moral responsibility is possible and actually almost always the case. It seems like Lewis is not considering this though. It is almost like he is treating moral responsibility as if it were legal responsibility even though he does say that they are two distinct things (Lewis 1948:8). I will now explain this train of thought. When he states his claim that responsibility belongs to the individual, it seems like he is not considering social aspects nor degrees, which are two factors that would rightly not be considered in legal responsibility. But morality has very much to do with social norms, pressure and aspects of how we live, in a way that needs to be considered when talking about moral responsibility. Since Lewis is not mentioning any of
these factors it seems that he is not making a greater distinction than the fact that you can be morally responsible the same time you are not legally responsible and vice versa. However one must give him a little benefit of the doubt concerning degrees. Since he is of the opinion that having moral responsibility is something only individuals can have it is quite understandable that he does not mention degrees, and he might make other distinctions between moral and legal responsibility. However I still criticize him for leaving out social aspects of different kinds in the discussion of deciding moral responsibility.

It seems, perhaps extra, important to be morally responsible for your group members in a political party, as the whole party in some form represents the party’s attitudes and opinions. Even though you did not commit the wrong act, if persons in your party did, maybe you should consider yourself responsible for something that was done “in your name” (Held 2002:176). The party is not necessarily responsible in a way that implies that they agree with what was done, but at least they should recognize that some of the party members have done something wrong, and realize that they are doing it in the party’s name. I do not mean to imply that if you are a member of a party then everything you do in your personal life should reflect the party’s best interest. However if a certain blameworthy attitude or opinion is very common within the party, and a few of the party’s members start acting out these attitudes it is no longer solely separate individual acts but something that the party are responsible for in the way that they should make a statement against it, and discourage their members from behaving in this way. It is simply not enough to say that you do not share this responsibility, and that it is just random individuals who do these acts. Especially not if it becomes a trend. This seems to suggest again that Lewis’ claim is wrong, responsibility does not only belong to the individual. I will talk more of this in the next part, that you have to distance yourself from the wrong act. The leader for a party should also in these cases be partly responsible for the acts that are carried out by members, since in order to gain political advantages the party usually acts in the interest of their members, and if a lot of members then carry out hateful acts it seems logical to ask if this perhaps is a consequence of a climate of receptivity of such agendas (Held 2002:175).

5. Argument 2: Distance yourself from the wrong act
The second argument I will put forward to argue for the incorrectness of Lewis’ claim has to do with distancing yourself from the wrong act. I would say that if you do not distance
yourself from the wrong act then you are automatically partially responsible for not having
tried to argue that what the wrongdoers said or did is wrong, and that is what I now shall
argue for. By “distancing yourself” I mean that you somehow show or say that what is
happening is wrong, and you do not agree with it. This argument concerns everything
from having the responsibility to speak up when group members have a misogynist
approach, not shopping from stores where you know they exploit their staff, to
governments stopping their collaborations with nations who do not value human rights.

As Held writes, we have a moral obligation, when the opportunity presents itself, to try
and share awareness when people around us express for example racist, homophobic or
misogynist opinions (Held 2002:170). An opportunity for this could for example occur
when you work in an office, and are having lunch with your colleagues, and some of them
start to joke and make a lot of misogynist comments. If this situation presents itself, it is
ture that you are in a collective containing colleagues, and it is also true that a few
members of this group have done something wrong. The question is does this collective
have a moral responsibility to speak up? I would say that it does. The criterion for being a
collective has been fulfilled, since it is people in plural that are joined together, as co-
workers. It is also not up to any specific person in the lunch room to do something, and
therefore it is a collective responsibility. In a situation like this it is a known fact that it is
easier to speak up if more people follow, which is a third argument for why it is a matter of
collective responsibility. If no one speaks up, then the collective is letting these wrong
opinions be untouched, and is it not then partially responsible for not having tried to argue
that what the colleagues said is wrong? For not having tried to stand up for the group that
has been subject in this act, which would also diminish the risk of it happening again.
Even if the risk of it happening again can perhaps only be diminished a little, sometimes
not at all, at least the collective should try.

I am of the opinion that being silent in a situation like this is like passively being on the
side of the wrongdoer. To change a system of these thoughts takes a long time, and it is
an extremely wide and difficult process. But in order to once achieve it, all situations like
this must be tackled. However, and this is important, no individual is individually
responsible for handling this, it is a collective responsibility. I feel that this is important
because one should not feel like one has failed if one alone did not stand up for the group
that was being attacked, however one should also not use that as an excuse not to act.
Held also agrees with this, when she writes that “[t]here is rather little we can do as individuals about such large-scale social problems […]. But we can recognize affirmative obligations as collective” (Held 2002:162), and I believe that is very important. If we agree to all this, is it not then incorrect to say that responsibility only belongs to the individual? I argue that it is incorrect to say that, and that you need to distance yourself from the wrong act in order to not be partially responsible for not having tried to argue that what the wrongdoers said or did is wrong. Because if the collective would have argued, they could also have minimized the risk of it happening again. However, the person or persons who said the misogynist jokes or opinions are of course by far most responsible. As I have stated before, there are degrees of moral collective responsibility. It also seems like Lewis does not take any notice of the power of social impact. Social impact can both work if one person disagrees out loud and openly says that the wrongdoers behaviour or opinion is wrong and others follow, and it can work in the way that people might change their opinions if others present an alternative view. It might not happen, but in some cases if the person who said the faulty things is usually only surrounded by people who agree, he or she might not have considered that there might be another side to it until someone has the guts to say so. If one does consider social impacts it becomes more difficult to say that responsibility only belongs to the individual.

Distancing yourself from the wrong act is not enough though, as Räikkä points out: you can distance yourself from something and still benefit from the outcomes of it (Held 2002:168). An example of this would be thinking that exploitive labor is wrong, perhaps you are even politically taking a stand in some way, but still you are buying products from a company you are aware of that does this, since you enjoy that the products are cheap. Your moral responsibility for indirectly taking advantage of exploitative labor might diminish since you are taking a political stand against it, however your responsibility is not entirely gone since you still benefit from the exploitation. Another situation where this can occur is if you are asked to sign a petition for, for example, freeing innocent political prisoners and you have the opinion that they are innocent and that they should be released but you do not sign the petition. Your responsibility here might also be somewhat diminished since you at least are of the opinion that these politicians should not be in jail, but you do not act as you say. This points to the fact that you still are responsible, in some sense, for not having tried to argue that what the wrongdoers said or
did is wrong. In this case the argument would have been in the shape of writing your name on the petition that would have been used to argue for these prisoners’ release.

6. Argument 3: Being responsible for not acting when one could have acted
A third argument against Lewis’ claim is the argument of being responsible for not acting when one could have acted. Some of the reasons and examples that I gave under argument 2 would be possible to fit under this category as well, however “disassociate yourself from the wrong act” and “being responsible for not acting” are still two distinct reasons for why responsibility does not only belong to the individual, as Lewis denies. Therefore I will develop the argument of being responsible for not acting when one could have acted.

The main point in this argument is that a group can be collectively responsible for failing to act, when a situation that needs to be dealt with presents itself (Held 2002:171). Different examples of this come to mind. It can for example be people on the street witnessing a threatening situation, perhaps violence between two people. The question would then be if we think that they ought to stop it. Do we think that the rest of the group members have the responsibility to stop it? The group members in this case would be all the people on the street witnessing this. If we do think that they have a responsibility, as people and as group members, it ought to have the implication that if they do nothing, they are somewhat responsible for the continuing of the violence. One cannot say that the group members are responsible for that the wrongdoers started this fight, however there seems to be some truth in the claim that they are responsible for the continuing of it.

Even when the group is an unorganized group like the above one it should, in a crisis, be able to decide how to act (Held 2002:164). I would say it is common sense morality to help the people around you, if you can, and this is a form of collective moral responsibility since it is not you personally who is responsible for the continuing of violence, it is something which rests on the whole group.

Another example of being responsible for not acting is nations not doing their part for the environment (Held 2002:172). To care for our earth and try to reduce emissions is something which all nations need to do in order for it to have the best effect, however this is not the case. All countries could most likely do more than they are currently doing, and
some countries need to start with just recognizing that this is a problem that needs to be dealt with and see their part in it. These are the countries that are responsible for not acting. Since there are examples from real life situations, like the above one, it seems like we are already dealing with collective responsibility in different forms, whether we theoretically recognize the term or not, and that in itself is an argument for recognizing it.

Degrees of moral responsibility apply to this argument as well, which is important to remember (Held 2002:166). Though I argue that a group can be responsible for the continuing of someone else’s action, I do not say that the degree of responsibility is as great as for the agent who did the wrong act.

7. Critique 1: Moving the responsibility from the wrongdoers to the whole group

A possible critique of collective moral responsibility is the idea that it moves the responsibility from the actual wrongdoers to the whole group, letting those who should be held responsible get away with their wrong act to a greater extent (Held 2002:161). I will now explain this criticism and then answer it.

I will use one of the examples which I have already provided to explain the criticism. In argument 3 I used the example of people on the street witnessing physical violence, and if the group of surrounding people do not do anything to stop it then they are partially responsible for the continuing of the violence. This criticism would then say that because the group is responsible for the continuing of the violence, it takes away responsibility from the person who is doing the violence, and that it gives him or her an escape (Held 2002:161).

I believe this is the wrong way to look at it. First of all, assigning responsibility to the group does not take away the responsibility from the person using violence, that is just an error in logical thinking, nor does it mean that they are all equally responsible (Held 2002:166). It seems safe to say that the person or persons using the violence are most responsible. They are not only morally responsible but also legally responsible, which brings me to the second response to this criticism. As I have stated before, there is a big difference between being morally responsible and being legally responsible, and unlike legal responsibility you can be morally responsible to different degrees. It is possible for the surrounding group to be partially morally responsible, and not to the same degree as
the person or persons doing the violence. It is however not possible for the morally responsible surrounding group to be legally responsible (Held 2002:168). Therefore, moral collective responsibility does not move the responsibility from the wrongdoers to the group.

It is also an error to assume that the group is responsible in all cases for what some group members have done (Held 2002:162). In order to make that statement you need to look at more factors, and the factors that I have been looking at in this paper are blameworthy attitudes, distancing yourself from the wrong act and being responsible for not acting if one could have acted. I stand by that in these cases there is some moral responsibility that falls on the group, however I do not say that this necessarily is the case in all situations. It is therefore an error to use the argument that the responsibility is automatically moved from the wrongdoers to the group, against collective responsibility.

You could also consider the effects of not attributing collective moral responsibility. It is a known fact that we are already using it, it is just a matter of recognizing a term that not all people have. It is collective responsibilities that is at issue when we make the decision not to travel somewhere because that country does not treat its habitants rightly, or when we decide not to buy products from a specific shop because they exploit their workers (Held 2002:163). It makes good sense to talk about these issues, and if we do recognize our efforts as collective responsibilities it would improve the effects of them (Held 2002:159).

It could also work in the opposite direction of what the critique says. Instead of wrongly moving the responsibility from the wrongdoers to the group, collective responsibility could actually sometimes be a first step towards finding the actual wrongdoers within the group (Held 2002:162). This critique is therefore, because of these reasons, not that strong, and in most cases not relevant at all. I will refrain from saying that it is impossible to find a case where this critique is legitimate, however it is not a legitimate critique to my argument.

Lewis even argues in a way that takes this critique a step further. Even if one does not agree that responsibility belongs to the individual, one should not turn to collective responsibility. Instead one should give up the idea that we can be accountable in a moral way at all (Lewis 1948:3). That is what Lewis states, and he continues to criticize
collective responsibility as he goes on to point to the consequences it would bring. According to Lewis if we had collective responsibilities it would have the implications that everybody was responsible for all things everyone did, which would end in chaos and no morality at all (Lewis 1948:3). I wish to counter this. It is a big leap, one which he also does not explain, to go from that collective responsibility exists to that all humans are responsible for what all humans have done. This leap is not necessary nor is it correct. To say that we have collective responsibility does not imply such a consequence, and therefore it is an error to use that as an argument against it. If Lewis wants to argue that there should be no collective responsibility he has to come up with a new argument, one that holds.

8. Critique 2: Is it not just individual responsibility?
The second critique one might have to this paper is perhaps a broad one towards the whole content of the paper. One might question if it really is collective responsibility I am discussing, or if it perhaps is just a normal form of individual responsibility. I will now explain this critique and then answer it.

I could understand why one might at first see it as individual responsibility when I am for example saying “I would say that if you do not distance yourself from the wrong act then you are automatically partially responsible for not having tried to argue that what the wrongdoers said or did is wrong”, however even if I am talking about “you” I do not discuss them as individuals, but as group members and these actions are only open to group members (Held 2002:171). The responsibility to act in a situation, whether it is stopping violence or questioning someone’s misogynist view, is not individual. The responsibility is not down to every single individual, it is a group responsibility. It is the group’s responsibility to handle the situation, and it does not matter who or whom within the group that does it. However of course the group members themselves are individuals, but they should still be discussed as a group since that implies that their behaviors and acts are not secluded from the rest of the group but actually are effected by social aspects of group members.

Max Weber denies this as he says that we cannot talk about collective responsibility because we cannot separate “collective acts” from “acts of many persons” (Smiley 2017). But if we commit to the thought that people belong to groups, it could be the colleagues
around the lunch table, the people on the street witnessing violence or a group of people who have racist attitudes, then Weber’s distinction between “collective acts” and “acts from many people” seems a bit forced and unnecessary. If people from a group act, even if it is only a few members that act, they still do so as group members, and then it seems like it automatically is “collective acts”. If you say “acts from many persons”, you would have to add “within the group” and if they are within the group it is a group act. One could question whether or not there is a difference if it is organized or unorganized groups that is up for discussion, and I agree that perhaps unorganized groups do not necessarily act as a group, although I still view the responsibility as resting on all of the people on the street witnessing violence, and therefore I discuss their acts and responsibilities as a group.

In order for collectives to be considered to have responsibilities they must be considered as agents. It seems like Lewis thinks that only an individual can be an agent however this is something which I do not agree with. If groups can have moral obligations, which we have seen that they can as we are expecting things from some groups, they can be agents. You cannot have moral obligations unless you are an agent, and if you are an agent that acts it means you have moral responsibilities. Hence, collectives can have moral responsibilities.

It also seems like an unnecessary blockage to deny collective responsibility. We are already putting responsibility on groups, so to deny it only makes it more difficult to analyze it (Smiley 2017). As I have mentioned before, we are putting responsibility on groups when we for example refuse to travel to countries that do not treat their people right, or when we stop buying products from stores that exploit their workers (Held 2002:159). These are forms of collective responsibilities since it would have no effect if one person, or only a few people, did the above acts. The consequences of these actions are only noticeable if it is a collective action, and since we can see results when countries and shops get affected by this method it is collective responsibility. It would simply give us a better tool to analyze these things if we recognize collective responsibility as an action and term. Therefore, if you want to deny collective responsibility you will have to argue that the above actions are not a product of collective responsibility.

9. Conclusion
In conclusion I will summarize the main parts and arguments of this paper. The thesis that I have argued for in this paper is that Lewis’ claim, that responsibility belongs to the individual, (Lewis 1948:3) is incorrect.

The definition of “responsibility”, that I have used in this paper, is “a moral obligation not to contribute to bad consequences”, and the definition I have used for “collective” is “people in plural that somehow are joined together”, with the implication that they perform actions and are responsible as one unit. Lewis did not think that these two words could be used together other than perhaps to sometimes reach a goal (Lewis 1948:10).

Another important feature of Lewis argument, which he shared with Held, is the distinction between moral and legal responsibility. He stated that you can be morally responsible without being legally responsible and vice versa (Lewis 1948:8). However the most relevant aspect of Lewis’ argument, for this paper, is his claim that responsibility belongs to the individual (Lewis 1948:3), and it is this claim that I have criticized by bringing forth three arguments. Argument number one states that blameworthy attitudes have a big importance when it comes to assigning responsibility for a wrong act (Held 2002:157). If there is a group where more or less everyone have racist attitudes but only a few members perform racists acts then I have argued that these blameworthy attitudes are part of the reason for why the wrongdoers performed these acts. It is of course a big difference between having attitudes about something and performing acts, however that is not relevant for my argument since there are degrees of moral responsibility (Held 2002:166), and I am neither arguing that the wrongdoers and the rest of the members share equal responsibility nor am I arguing that the wrongdoers responsibility is lessened because of it. I am merely arguing that the group members who carried these racist attitudes are to some extent responsible for other group members performing racist acts.

The second argument I provided was that you have to distance yourself from the act in order to not be partially responsible for not having tried to argue that what the wrongdoers said or did is wrong. The collective has a moral obligation to try and argue, and if they are silent it contributes to the risk of the wrongdoers doing it again (Held 2002:170). However it is important not to lay this burden on individuals, it is a group responsibility. If some colleagues are talking in a misogynist way at lunch it is the whole witnessing group's responsibility to try and argue against them. My last argument against Lewis’ claim is that one can be responsible for not acting when one could have acted
(Held 2002:171). One of the examples I used was if a group of people witness a fight on the street, they have a moral responsibility to try and stop it. If they do not do this they are, to some extent, responsible for the continuing of the violence. All these three arguments point to that Lewis’ claim, that responsibility belongs to the individual (Lewis 1948:3), is incorrect.

I also gave two possible critiques and then answered them both. The first one is the critique of moving the responsibility from the wrongdoers to the whole group, and with that letting those that should be responsible get away (Held 2002:161). I consider this critique not to be valid though, since assigning responsibility to a group does not take away the responsibility of the actual wrongdoers. This is both because moral responsibility has degrees, and also because there is a distinction between moral responsibility and legal responsibility, and the rest of the members can never be legally responsible for what the wrongdoers did. The second possible critique I discussed is a broad one to the whole concept of defending collective responsibility, the question if this is just individual responsibility. My answer to this critique is that even if it is individual members I am discussing sometimes, they are still part of a group so the discussion is about them as a group. Also it does not matter who in the group that steps in and breaks the fight, or stands up for those that have been ill spoken about, all it takes is that someone in the group does it. And therefore it is not individual responsibility. It also seems like it is an unnecessary blockage to not recognize collective responsibility, since we use it as a method when we collectively decide not to go to a country because they are treating their habitants wrong or when we decide not to buy products from a shop because they exploit their workers.

To sum up, Lewis’ claim that responsibility essentially belongs to the individual is incorrect because we need to consider blameworthy attitudes, distancing yourself from the wrong act and to be responsible for not acting when one could have acted.
References


