
RESPONSIBILITY IN ACTION

Reading Materials

Essentials.

Braham, Matthew, and Martin van Hees. 2012. "An Anatomy of Moral Responsibility." *Mind* 121 (483): 601–34.

This paper examines the structure of moral responsibility for outcomes. A central feature of the analysis is a condition that we term the 'avoidance potential', which gives precision to the idea that moral responsibility implies a reasonable demand that an agent should have acted otherwise. We show how our theory can allocate moral responsibility to individuals in complex collective action problems, an issue that sometimes goes by the name of 'the problem of many hands'. We also show how it allocates moral responsibility in the classic Frankfurt example.

Halpern, Joseph Y., and Judea Pearl. 2005. "Causes and Explanations: A Structural-Model Approach. Part I: Causes." *The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 56 (4): 843–87.

We propose a new definition of actual causes, using structural equations to model counterfactuals. We show that the definition yields a plausible and elegant account of causation that handles well examples which have caused problems for other definitions and resolves major difficulties in the traditional account.

Horty, John F. 2001. *Agency and Deontic Logic*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Chapter 6: The notion of what an agent ought to do is generalized to yield a notion of what groups of agents ought to do. Relations among the obligations governing groups and subgroups are explored, as well as the connections among different species of individual act utilitarianism, group act utilitarianism, and rule (or cooperative) utilitarianism.

List, Christian, and Philip Pettit. 2011. *Group Agency: The Possibility, Design, and Status of Corporate Agents*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

This book is arguably the most influential contemporary contribution to the literature on group agency and collective responsibility. In particular, *Part I: The Logical Possibility of Group Agents* is very insightful, both philosophically and technically.

Abstract: Are companies, churches, and states genuine agents? Or are they just collections of individual agents that give a misleading impression of unity? This question is important, since the answer dictates how we should explain the behaviour of these entities and whether we should treat them as responsible and accountable on the model of individual agents. This book offers a new approach to that question and is relevant, therefore, to a range of fields from philosophy to law, politics, and the social sciences. The book argues that there really are group or corporate agents, over and above the individual agents who compose them, and that a proper approach to the social sciences, law, morality, and politics must take account of this fact. Unlike some earlier defences of group agency, this account is entirely unmysterious in character and, despite not being technically difficult, is grounded in cutting-edge work in social choice theory, economics, and philosophy.

Regan, Donald. 1980. *Utilitarianism and Co-Operation*. New York: Oxford University Press.

In particular, Chapters 2–7. This book offers a wealth of inspiration and deep insights into moral dilemmas in collective contexts. The author identifies and defines the features of traditional utilitarian theories which account for their appeal, demonstrates that no theory which is "exclusively act-oriented" can have all the properties that utilitarians have attempted to build into their theories, and develops a new theory "co-operative utilitarianism", which is radically different than traditional theories.

Further reading.

Bacharach, Michael. 2006. *Beyond Individual Choice: Teams and Frames in Game Theory*. Edited by Natalie Gold and Robert Sugden. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

In the classical tradition of game theory, Bacharach models human beings as rational actors, but he revises the standard definition of rationality to incorporate two major new ideas. He enlarges the model of a game so that it includes the ways agents describe to themselves (or "frame") their decision problems. And he allows the possibility that people reason as members of groups (or "teams"), each taking herself to have reason to perform her component of the combination of actions that best achieves the group's common goal. Bacharach shows that certain tendencies for individuals to engage in team reasoning are consistent with recent findings in social psychology and evolutionary biology.

Braham, Matthew, and Martin van Hees. 2009. "Degrees of Causation." *Erkenntnis* 71 (3): 323–44.

The primary aim of this paper is to analyze the concept of degrees of causal contribution for actual events and examine the way in which it can be formally defined. This should go some way to filling out a gap in the legal and philosophical literature on causation. By adopting the conception of a cause as a necessary element of a sufficient set (the so-called NESS test) we show that the concept of degrees of causation can be given clear and even empirical meaning. We then apply a game theoretical framework to derive a measure of causal contribution. Our favoured measure turns out to be a generalised version of the normalized Penrose–Banzhaf index of voting power.

Chockler, Hana, and Joseph Y. Halpern. 2004. "Responsibility and Blame: A Structural-Model Approach." *Journal of Artificial Intelligence Research* 22: 93–115.

The notion of causality is extended to take into account the degree of responsibility. We propose a notion of the degree of blame, which depends on the agent's epistemic state. Roughly speaking, the degree of blame of A for B is the expected degree of responsibility of A for B, taken over the epistemic state of an agent.

Hollis, Martin, and Robert Sugden. 1993. "Rationality in Action." *Mind* 102 (405): 1–35.

The paper explores the philosophical underpinnings and ramifications of rational choice theory in light of the advances made within economic theory at the time. The aim of this paper is to survey some recent developments in the theory of choice which are causing great turbulence in economic theory and bear significantly on the philosophy of rational action.

Tamminga, Allard, and Hein Duijf. 2017. "Collective Obligations, Group Plans and Individual Actions." *Economics & Philosophy* 33 (2): 187–214.

If group members aim to fulfil a collective obligation, they must act in such a way that the composition of their individual actions amounts to a group action that fulfils the collective obligation. We study a strong sense of joint action in which the members of a group design and then publicly adopt a group

plan that coordinates the individual actions of the group members. We characterize the conditions under which a group plan successfully coordinates the group members' individual actions, and study how the public adoption of a plan changes the context in which individual agents make a decision about what to do.

Tamminga, Allard, and Frank Hindriks. 2019. "The Irreducibility of Collective Obligations." *Philosophical Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-018-01236-2>

Individualists claim that collective obligations are reducible to the individual obligations of the collective's members. Collectivists deny this. We set out to discover who is right by way of a deontic logic of collective action that models collective actions, abilities, obligations, and their interrelations. On the basis of our formal analysis, we argue that when assessing the obligations of an individual agent, we need to distinguish individual obligations from member obligations. If a collective has a collective obligation to bring about a particular state of affairs, then it might be that no individual in the collective has an individual obligation to bring about that state of affairs. What follows from a collective obligation is that each member of the collective has a member obligation to help ensure that the collective fulfills its collective obligation. In conclusion, we argue that our formal analysis supports collectivism.