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WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE DO

ETHNICITY AND MORAL AGENCY

by

KAREN A. KOVACH

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Philosophy in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2001

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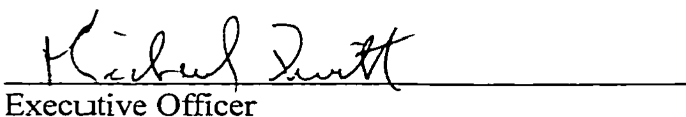
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Abstract

WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE DO: ETHNICITY AND MORAL AGENCY

by

Karen A. Kovach

Adviser: Professor Virginia Held

An array of pressing but conceptually perplexing questions in ethics—questions concerning group rights, collective responsibility, and the ethics of nationalism—would seem to require for their resolution answers to the no less perplexing questions of what social groups are and what membership in them amounts to. In this dissertation, I offer an analysis of the concept of what I call an 'ethnic identity group' and argue that questions about ethics and ethnicity or nationality are best understood as questions about such groups and their agency. The main argument for the analysis involves showing its usefulness for understanding how group membership might be involved in personal moral identity and individual agency.

The analysis I offer makes use of Max Weber's idea that the concept of a social group is analyzable in terms of the possibility that certain kinds of social action will be performed. A Weberian analysis of a kind of social group involves a characterization of the types of social action that are possible in relation to groups of that kind. After responding to Margaret Gilbert's arguments against Weberian analyses of social groups and related phenomena, I suggest that one central social concept is that of a group defined in terms of the availability for group members of standing in a particular relation to an idea of the group, where that idea is, more specifically, an idea of a collective agent. This

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is the concept of an *identity group*. What distinguishes members of an identity group from nonmembers is the availability for the former of standing to the group in a relation I call 'moral alignment'. Roughly, an individual aligns herself with a group to the extent that she sees the group's agency as an extension of her own. This concept of moral alignment is a development of Aristotle's view that through shared deliberation and action, friends in a perfect friendship become "other selves" for each other. A group member is socially placed so as to have access to the idea that other members may act for her and she for them. If she aligns herself with the group, the group becomes another self for her, and she may act *as* a member of the group. An *ethnic identity group* is a collection of individuals, each of whom may align himself with an idea of the group—where that idea is an idea of a particular collective agent, whose collectivity rests on the shared ancestry of the collected individuals—and each of whom may, therefore, act and respond emotionally as a member of the group.

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To

Martin Joseph Kovach

and

Carmen MacDonald Kovach

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Acknowledgments

I am most deeply indebted to Virginia Held for intellectual guidance and moral support. Her enthusiasm and generosity made the writing process more of a pleasure than it could otherwise have been. Thanks are due Stefan Baumrin for unsparing criticisms and numerous kindnesses. Thanks are also due my philosopher-husband, William Fisk, for innumerable conversations about social groups, moral responsibility, friendship, the meaning of life, and all matters great and small and our son, Miles, for putting up with both of us. Finally, I wish to take this opportunity to acknowledge a long-standing debt to my parents, around whose dinner table I began to try out my ideas and from whom I have learned most. This dissertation is dedicated to them.

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CONTENTS

Chapter 1	Introduction	1
Chapter 2	What a Social Group Might Be	35
Chapter 3	Ethnic Identity Groups	70
Chapter 4	Who We Are	93
Chapter 5	What We Do	117
Bibliography		139

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Chapter One

Introduction

When we witness the mass violence of efforts to commit genocide or to cleanse a territory of a people, or the gross injustices of efforts to destroy a culture, or the kinds of group-oppression that aim at keeping an ethnic group in a degraded state, we must, I think, raise questions about individual and collective responsibility, about group rights, and about the ethics of nationalism. I wish to propose an analysis of the concept of what I shall call an 'ethnic identity group' and argue that this concept should be at the center of our thinking about the moral status of ethnic groups. The argument will involve showing how the analysis proposed sheds light on the relevance of ethnicity for questions of "who we are" and "what we do." Since my primary aim is to provide an analysis of the concept of an ethnic identity group and to highlight its importance for moral and political philosophy, I begin with some preliminary remarks on the analysis and on what it reveals about the ethical significance of membership in such a group. Later in this chapter, I will look a bit more closely at the ethical questions that motivate consideration of the nature of ethnicity.

Ethnic Identity Groups

At the center of our thinking about ethics and ethnicity should, I believe, be a particular analysis of the concept of an ethnic group or of what I call an 'ethnic identity group'. The analysis I propose looks to both Max Weber's discussion of the nation and

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Aristotle's discussion of friendship and community.[1] I will be defending a particular development of Weber's analysis of the nation. Discussion of the ethical significance of membership in what I call an 'ethnic identity group' proceeds from this development of Weber's analysis of "the nation."[2] I will try to say enough at this point about my use of Weber's work to make clear my reasons for developing Weber's analysis of the concept of a nation rather than his analysis of the concept of an ethnic group. I will also highlight what I take to be the distinguishing characteristics of a Weberian view of ethnic identity groups. Some of these will play a central role in the discussions to follow and will be discussed more thoroughly in later chapters. Others are less central and will be, at most, only touched on in later chapters.

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[1] For Weber's discussion, see "The Fundamental Concepts of Sociology" in Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, ed. Talcott Parsons, trs. A. M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons (NY: The Free Press, 1947), 87-157 or "Basic Sociological Terms" in Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, Vol. 1, eds. G. Roth and C. Wittich (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978), 3-62; "Ethnic Groups" in Weber, *Economy and Society*, Vol. 1, 385-398; "The Nation" in Weber, *Economy and Society*, Vol. 2, eds. G. Roth and C. Wittich (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978) 921-926; and "Types of Social Action and Groups," in Weber, *Economy and Society*, Vol. 2, Appendix I, 1375-1380. For Aristotle's, see *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books Eight and Nine.

[2] I do not follow Weber's use of 'nation' to refer to this concept, because this term has come to be defined by many as an ethnic group that is to some extent self-governing or that *aims* at some form of political self-determination. It is possible to read Weber as drawing a distinction between ethnic groups that either possess or aspire to some degree of political autonomy and those that do not. I will be arguing that Weber is instead distinguishing the concept of a group based on the shared belief in a common ancestry *as such* and that of a group based on the shared belief in a common ancestry, insofar as that belief is experienced, in part, as the recognition of a shared relation to an idea of the group, where that idea is understood as a collective agent. It is possible for such a group to neither possess nor seek political power. It may turn out that every such group has a *right* to some form of autonomy, but this claim must be argued for and the argument would seem to require some nonnormative definition of the group.

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According to Weber, a nation is a kind of *social group*, and a social group is a kind of *social relationship*. We cannot understand Weber's definition of a 'nation' without looking at his definition of a 'social group', nor can we understand the latter without considering his definition of a 'social relationship'.[3] A plurality of agents form a *social relationship*, according to Weber, if, and only if, (1) the action of each is oriented to the actions of the others, and (2) this mutual orientation of action has a stable source.

> The term 'social relationship' will be used to denote the behaviour of a plurality of actors in so far as, in its meaningful content, the action of each takes account of that of the others and is oriented in these terms. The social relationship thus *consists* entirely and exclusively in the existence of a *probability* that there will be, in some meaningful sense, a course of social action. For purposes of definition there is no attempt to specify the basis of this probability.[4]

In order for there to be a social relationship, there must be some amount of mutual orientation of action, and this mutual orientation of action must have a stable source. Action is oriented to the behavior of another person, according to Weber, if the agent's idea of what he is doing includes reference to the behavior, broadly construed, of that person. Such an action is a *social action.*[5] The action need not, in any other sense, be *directed at* the other person. Its subjective meaning—the agent's understanding of what he does—must simply involve that other person's behavior—past, present, or future—in some way.

According to Weber, a social group is "a certain kind of development of actual or possible social actions of individual persons."[6] Since all actual social actions are possible social actions, we can say that a social group is a certain kind of development of possible

[3] For a more detailed discussion of these definitions, see chapter three.
[4] Weber, *Social and Economic Organization*, Vol. 1, 118.
[5] For discussion of Weber's concept of a social action, see chapter two.

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social actions. In the case of social groups, the likelihood that certain kinds of social action will be performed rests on a definitional *possibility* that certain kinds of social action will be performed, given the existence of a particular social group. This is where Weber's analysis ends, but we can say more. I take it that the kind of possibility Weber has in mind is *social* possibility. We can divide the details of the description of a social action into two parts: (1) a particular "other" is picked out, and (2) a certain kind of orientation is described. If there is an individual person for whom a social action of a particular kind is possible, I will say that a social action of that kind is *available* to him. Whenever there is a person for whom a social action of a particular kind is available, a social action of that kind is a possible social action. Using this rough understanding of a possible social action, a Weberian account of social groups may be said to combine two claims: (1) the existence of a particular social group requires the possibility of certain kinds of social action, and (2) central among the possible action-types associated with a particular group are kinds of action that are available only to group members. Analyzing a *kind of social group* would seem to involve specifying the types of social action that are possible in relation to groups of that kind and, in particular, the types that are available only to members.

Weber defines an 'ethnic group' as a "group" the existence of which is based on the shared belief of members that they belong together in virtue of their shared ancestry, but he also claims that an ethnic group is not a *social group* in the technical sense he has described. There are no implications from the existence of an ethnic group for the

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[6] Weber, *Social and Economic Organization*, Vol. 1, 102.

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possibility of related kinds of social action. A nation is distinguished from an ethnic group in terms of this idea of a social group. A nation is a social group.

> [T]he idea of the "nation" is apt to include the notions of common descent and of an essential, though frequently indefinite, homogeneity. The "nation" has these notions in common with the sentiment of solidarity of ethnic communities, which is also nourished from various sources, as we have seen before [ch. V:4]. *But the sentiment of ethnic solidarity does not by itself make a "nation"* [my emphasis]. Undoubtedly, even the White Russians in the face of the Great Russians have always had a sentiment of ethnic solidarity, yet even at the present time they would hardly claim to qualify as a separate "nation." The Poles of Upper Silesia, until recently, had hardly any feeling of solidarity with the "Polish Nation." They felt themselves to be a separate ethnic group in the face of the Germans, but for the rest they were Prussian subjects and nothing else.[7]

The difference between an ethnic group and a nation, according to Weber, is the difference between a group, each member of which stands in a certain relation to the other members *as individuals*—that of having a feeling that he belongs with each of them—and a group based on a relation of each individual *to the group as a whole.*

I will be suggesting that one very important social concept is that of a group based on a relation of each member to the group as a whole by way of an idea of the group as an agent—as a particular entity with beliefs, goals, and values; with a history of successes and failures; subject of the "social" experiences of being appreciated or resented, elevated or humiliated, trusted or suspected, attended to or snubbed. The collective agent is just an idea, but it may have tremendous significance—as such ideas have today—because individuals orient their actions to this idea. As an idea, the collective agent cannot, properly speaking, act. But we have an idea, and again an important idea, of the acts and psychological states of groups—an idea which, I believe, is built on an understanding that

[7] Weber, *Economy and Society*, Vol. 2, p. 923. See chapter three for a more extended discussion of this passage.

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group members may stand in a significant relation to the group and act out of this understanding of themselves.[8] What distinguishes group-members from individuals who are not members of the group is the availability for the former of standing in this relation—a relation I call 'moral alignment'. Roughly, an individual aligns herself with a group to the extent that she sees the group's agency as an extension of her own. The proposal that a group member is socially placed so as to have access to the idea that other members may act for her and she for them will be spelled out in terms that Aristotle refined in his discussion of friendship and community.[9] The concept of a social group that is based on the availability for members of aligning themselves with the group is the concept of an *identity group*. When the idea of the group also involves a belief in the shared ancestry of its members, it is the concept of an *ethnic* identity group.[10] I call these 'identity groups' because membership in such groups is typically partly constitutive of an individual's identity, or so I shall argue.[11]

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[8] See chapter three for my account of a group act.
[9] See chapter three.
[10] Ethnic identity is often wrapped up with religious or race identity in complex ways. The census of the former Yugoslavia listed 'Muslim' along with 'Serb' and 'Croat' as an "ethnicity." In the United States, we are asked to report our "race or ethnicity." I will freely use as examples such groups as *the Muslims of the former Yugoslavia* and *African Americans*. They clearly fall within the extension of the concept of an ethnic identity group. The analysis I propose allows for this, because it takes an ethnic identity group to be, in Karl Barth's words, "an organizational vessel that may be given varying amounts and forms of content in different socio-cultural systems." Barth, "Introduction," in Barth, ed., *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Cultural Difference* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1969), 9-38, 14. If a particular religion or race is seen by group members as characteristic of those who share an ancestry, it will be part of the defining idea of that ethnic group. I will not be addressing the distinct questions of religious or race identity.
[11] See chapter four.

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Crucial to the discussions of the individual moral person and individual moral agency that follow the development of this analysis of the concept of an ethnic identity group are those aspects of that analysis that are explicit in the term's definition: *an ethnic identity group is a group of individuals, each of whom may align himself with an idea of the group—where that idea is, more precisely, the idea of a particular collective agent, whose collectivity rests on the shared ancestry of the individuals—and each of whom may, therefore, act and respond emotionally as a member of the group.* Several related aspects of this analysis of an ethnic identity group should be highlighted at this point, because they will receive less attention in later chapters.

First, it falls neatly into neither category of the traditional distinction between "objective" and "subjective" analyses. On the one hand, ethnicity is not simply a matter of biological descent. It has to do with the ideas members have about shared ancestry. We don't disprove the existence of Serbs and Croats by pointing out that, if we go back far enough, the two groups share an ancestry. It is a mistake, I believe, to save preconceived ideas of what ethnicity is all about by attributing mass ignorance and dull-mindedness to individuals who identify ethnically in spite of the fact that the groups with which they identify cannot claim to be biologically self-perpetuating entities that can trace their beginnings deeply into the past. No other objective criterion has been mentioned. In particular, no overt sharing of cultural manners or artifacts is required. For that matter, no shared beliefs or values are required.[12] On this view, it is not guaranteed that we will

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[12] This aspect of the analysis will receive a good deal more attention in chapter four and a bit more yet in chapter five. It might be said that the existence of an ethnic identity group requires a shared belief in the shared ancestry of the group members, but this belief need

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find a one-one correspondence of ethnic groups and cultures.[13] This supports our belief that ethnic identity groups can be tracked over time and despite cultural change; changed cultures do not imply distinct groups. Ethnic identity groups can be traced through time because there is a continuity in their way of maintaining boundaries—in the availability for some individuals of aligning themselves with the group and the unavailability for others of standing in this relation to the idea of the group. It remains open to us to see shared culture as a contributing factor in group-formation and as a frequent, understandable result of ethnic thinking.[14] But the Weberian approach focuses on what is, in Karl Barth's words, "socially effective," whatever that might be.

> ...although ethnic categories take cultural differences into account, we can assume no simple one-to-one relationship between ethnic units and cultural similarities and differences. The features that are taken into account are not the sum of 'objective' differences, but only those which the actors themselves regard as

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not be shared by all members. It need only be widely enough believed to generate a widely acknowledged idea of collective agency.

[13] See Barth, "Introduction," in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, especially pp. 11-15. For a philosopher's defense of the view that a nation is a culture, see Yael Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

[14] It may more often be the latter. Many groups seem to form first in response to social changes arising from the activity of other groups and develop distinct cultures later. Culture, according to Donald Horowitz, "is important in the making of ethnic groups, but it is more important for providing *post facto* content to group identity than it is for providing some ineluctable prerequisite for an identity to come into being." Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 69; cited in Chandran Kukathas, "Are There Any Cultural Rights?," *Political Theory* 20 (1992), 105-39; excerpts reprinted in Will Kymlicka, *The Rights of Minority Cultures* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 228-256, 233. Kukathas points to the creation of a Malay people in Indonesia as a response to both colonialist line-drawing and Chinese immigration. The colonialist influence is widespread—the Belgians influencing the development of Hutu and Tutsi as ethnic groups, the British influencing the identity of the Nigerian Ibo. When individuals are treated as belonging together in a certain way, they may respond as group members. This is how a group based on identification by nonmembers becomes a group based on self-identification. Once there are acts that are best seen as the acts of individuals who align themselves with the group and act *as members*, there is an ethnic identity group.

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> significant. Not only do ecologic variations mark and exaggerate differences; some cultural features are used by the actors as signals and emblems of differences, others are ignored, and in some relationships radical differences are played down and denied.[15]

But if ethnic identity is not essentially a matter of sharing a culture with others, then the ethical significance of ethnic identity does not arise from the sharing of a culture.[16] If it can be shown that ethnicity is relevant for attributions of moral responsibility to individuals, the argument will not involve the claim that a shared culture embroils individual group members in each other's acts. If it can be shown that ethnic identity groups have rights, the argument will not simultaneously show that *cultural* groups have rights. On the other hand, while an argument that defends a right to culture might support the claim that a *cultural* group has a right to political power, it could have no direct implications for the claim that a *nation* has a right to political power. And if it can be shown that membership in an ethnic identity group entails special obligations, provides reasons for acting or, at least, excuses partiality, it will not *necessarily* show that membership gives members reason to preserve or defend a particular culture or provides an excuse for any missteps taken in an effort to do so.

The Weberian analysis is also not *simply* a subjectivist analysis. For while at its center is an *idea* of group agency based on shared ancestry, this idea is shared and it is contentful; the idea has implications for ethnic ascription. At the very least, I cannot claim to be Chinese, for example, or Korean if I have no reason to believe that somewhere in my ancestry is an individual who shares an ancestry with other Chinese or

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[15] Barth, "Introduction," in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, 14.

[16] Sharing a culture may turn out to be ethically significant as well, but a separate argument would be needed to show this.

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Koreans. Each idea has been shaped by the history of the people whose idea it is. It is important to remember that it is *the idea shared by members* that determines the criteria of group membership. Weberian views are not simple subjectivist views because it is not the idea of each member that makes each a member; it is the idea of membership shared by members that determines the criteria of membership. This means, however, that were individuals in general not to identify themselves ethnically, there would be no ethnic identity groups. The suggestion that the definition of an ethnic identity group must involve an *idea* of the group, viewed as a collective agent, is loosely related to Benedict Anderson's suggestion that a nation may be defined as an "imagined political community."[17] According to Anderson, we must say that the nation is an *imagined* community, because "the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion."[18] This passage has been very influential but, I think, not always well understood. It is often cited in support of the claim that ethnic groups are not what they seem.[19] Anderson explicitly rejects the association of "imagined" with "false" or "fabricated."[20] Nations are imagined communities, according to Anderson, not

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[17] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (New York: Verso, 1991, rev. ed.).
[18] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.
[19] Consider Russell Hardin's reference to Anderson's idea: "Further evidence that the ethnic purists [in the Balkans] stand on air is that two-thirds of the half million people of Montenegro believe that Montenegrins are indistinct from Serbs, while the other third claim there are irreconcilable differences. Whichever definition a Montenegrin accepts, the implicit nation—greater Serbia or Montenegro—is surely an instance of what Benedict Anderson calls imagined communities." Hardin, *One for All: The Logic of Group Conflict* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 157. What Hardin wishes to show here, I think, is that the claims of the nationalists are false, but this is not what being an instance of Anderson's imagined communities would imply.
[20] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.

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because they are *unlike*, but because they are *like* other communities. The importance of Anderson's work lies not in an unmasking of the nationalist lie but in his appreciation of an essential but underappreciated aspect of nations—or of ethnic identity groups—that "in the minds of each [member] lives the *image* of their communion." It is, more precisely, an *idea* of their communion. We understand the nature of the group by understanding what this idea is an idea of and by understanding more fully how the idea might "live" in the minds of members.

Weberian theories allow for all variety of strengths of ethnic identification, and we do see great variety. At a given time and place, ethnicity may influence behavior greatly or barely. There are ethnic groups in that place at that time if the organization for ethnically-motivated action is in place. While individuals living through periods of ethnic conflict can often look back to times when, far from extensively determining their lives, their ethnicity had very little influence, it would be a mistake to ignore the existence of ethnic identity groups before the onset of group-based intimidation or violence.

It should also be noted that while this view is individualist according to some understandings of what that comes to, it is not individualist according to others. It is, I think, individualist in the important sense that every non-individual entity is analyzed in terms of individuals; I will call this 'explanatory individualism'. It is not individualist if individualism is understood to imply that every claim made about a non-individual can be reduced to some set of claims about individuals; this is perhaps what we have come to mean by 'methodological individualism'. We might say that two sorts of entity are involved in the theory: individuals and shared ideas. An ethnic identity group is a social entity made up of a shared idea and the social possibilities this idea opens up for certain

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individuals, i.e. group members. The claims we make about the acts of a group are claims about this idea; they cannot be reduced to claims about the acts of individuals. This is important, because philosophical discussion of the ethical significance of ethnic groups has foundered on the issues of individualism—explanatory, methodological, and moral. The first two are not always distinguished, but one traditional theoretical divide might be seen as separating philosophers who avoid the problem of saying what a social group is by rejecting explanatory individualism from those who avoid the problem of saying what a social group is by denying that there are any—by claiming that the group is nothing more than its members. Moral individualism is the position that only individual persons are moral agents and only they can make fundamental moral claims on us. The traditional divide on this issue is between those who defend the ethical significance of social groups by rejecting moral individualism and those who save moral individualism by denying the ethical significance of social groups. The moral individualist is typically dismissive of the idea that ethnicity might be ethically significant, because membership in an ethnic group is nonvoluntary or unchosen. He argues that the supporter of collective responsibility or group rights is theoretically confused (Attributing moral responsibility to an individual on the basis not of what *she* has done, but of her nonvoluntary association with others who may well act as she never would, goes against any interpretation of moral responsibility worthy of the name) and practically unwise (To defend a right to national self-determination is to lend support to the ideology that stands behind the massive violence of contemporary ethnic conflict with its gross violations of the individual rights of so many). The individualist response is, I think, cogent but it ends too soon, leaving us with the misguided implication that whatever their sociological or political importance,

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ethnicity has no ethical significance and need interest the moral philosopher only insofar as she wishes to understand the ways in which our efforts to do right go wrong.

I believe that the moral individualist and the "collectivist" each express an important aspect of the truth. Membership in an ethnic identity group may be unchosen, but it involves the availability of choices that are not available to individuals who are not members of the group. Given this analysis of ethnic identity group membership, it may be argued that while membership alone has no implications for the attribution of moral responsibility to individuals, aligning oneself with the group, as only members can, has. It can also be argued that as an important source of the options of individual agency, groups have rights. It is, I think, a mistake to reject either explanatory individualism in the analysis of collectivity concepts or moral individualism in our evaluations of individuals. One challenge is to capture the robust reality of social groups without ignoring their dependence on the psychological attitudes of individuals. Another is to respect the integrity of the individual moral agent without ignoring the social context of her agency.

As for the practical wisdom of taking these issues up: The dangers of lending support to the idea that an ethnically defined group might have a right to self-determination at a time when nationalist rhetoric is behind the most appalling ethnic violence are obvious, as are the dangers of discussing collective responsibility when what is needed is an end to ethnic hatred. Less obvious perhaps are the dangers of *not* reaching a better understanding of the moral status of ethnic groups. Philosophers often *seem*, at least, to believe that if there is to be an end to ethnic conflict, it will come from a global

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embrace of rational universalism. A number of diplomats and theorists concerned with conflict resolution foresee a much different course.

> [Essential to the resolution of the most entrenched ethnic conflicts is] a completed mourning process by which a victim or victim group "lets go" of its losses from historic or contemporary violence and reintegrates and adapts to a new, reasonably secure status so that it can get on with the business of life. For the mourning process to occur, however, requires that the victimizers accept responsibility for their acts or those of their predecessor governments and people, recognize the injustice done, and in some way ask forgiveness of the victims.[21]

Responsible attention to these issues should do more good than harm.

The crucial points about ethnic identity groups are (1) they involve the possibility that members perform certain kinds of social action, (2) this possibility rests on the availability for members of aligning themselves with the idea of the group agent, and (3) the idea of the group agent involves the idea that group members share an ancestry, where the details of this view come from the members themselves. It is in virtue of these characteristics that membership in an ethnic identity group is partly constitutive of "who we are" and that alignment with such a group is relevant for determinations of "what we do." I will argue that personal moral identity is a matter of what is possible for us as *deliberating* individuals. Since ethnic identity group membership is a matter of having available deliberative choices not available to nonmembers, it is a matter of personal identity.[22] I will also argue that adequate descriptions of what an individual does make reference to ideas about what he had reason to consider doing and that aligning oneself

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[21] Joseph Montville, "Epilogue: The Human Factor Revisited," in Montville, ed., *Conflict and Peacemaking in Multiethnic Societies* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1990), 538.
[22] See chapter four.

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with a group gives one reason to consider the history and plans of the group when making a choice for oneself.[23]

Moral Responsibility and the Acts of Ethnic Groups

Philosophers have discussed the appropriateness of attributing moral responsibility to collectivities of various kinds and to individuals as members of each kind of collectivity.[24] Some have discussed the idea that individual citizens of a state may bear moral responsibility for the acts of the state, others that members of a profession may bear moral responsibility for the acts of the profession, some that members of an

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[23] See chapter five.

[24] See, for example, the articles collected in Larry May and Stacey Hoffman, eds., *Collective Responsibility* (Savage, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 1991), in Peter French, ed., *Individual and Collective Responsibility: The Massacre at My Lai* (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman, 1972), and in M. Cohen, T. Nagel, and T. Scanlon (eds.), *War and Moral Responsibility* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974). It has been suggested that we should recognize a concept of collective responsibility that does not involve the attribution of individual moral responsibility to all members of the community. Virginia Held, "Collective Responsibility for Ethnic Hatred," unpublished manuscript, 1998. I will be arguing for a particular view of what is involved in "collective action," consistent with which is the claim that ethnic groups are responsible for particular actions. This simply means, however, that some descriptions of what the group has done are ethically adequate while others are not. What we are to say of individual responsibility is a distinct question. I will argue that individual group members are morally responsible for their own actions and for these alone but that adequate descriptions of individual actions often make reference to the acts of groups. It is never accurate to say that a particular individual shares moral responsibility for the act of the group, but it is often necessary to describe the acts of the individual in light of what the group is doing or planning or in light of what the group has done. Matters are further complicated by the fact that we sometimes talk about being responsible for an event rather than for an act. In this sense, an individual might be partially responsible for the Holocaust or for the Rwandan genocide, if he contributed in some way to its occurrence. In that case, however, we should expect to find some act or some omission of his that links him to the event in this way. See chapter five for a general discussion of the concept of moral responsibility and for the details of my view of the relationship between collective and individual responsibility. For an argument against the separation of collective and individual moral responsibility, see Juha Raikka, "On Disassociating

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institution, organization, or corporation may bear moral responsibility for its acts, and others that members of a community may bear responsibility for what it does or for what other members of the community do. Some have discussed the idea that members of an ethnic group bear moral responsibility for the acts of the group. In the next chapter, I will be arguing that we cannot give one analysis of collectivities of all kinds—at least, if what is wanted is an analysis that will be useful for considering ethical questions. If that is right, then we cannot expect to address the various issues of collective responsibility all at once. The question of this section concerns moral responsibility and, very specifically, *the acts of ethnic groups.*

Many philosophers interested in the question of collective responsibility look back to Karl Jaspers' discussion of the "question of German guilt."[25] Jaspers' discussion

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Oneself from Collective Responsibility," *Social Theory and Practice* 23:1 (Spring, 1997), 93-108.

[25] Karl Jaspers, *The Question of German Guilt* (NY: The Dial Press, 1947). Jaspers was explicitly interested in the idea of collective *guilt*, which is not exactly the same as collective moral responsibility. To say that a moral agent is responsible for an action is to say that he may properly be called upon to justify that action. More simply, it is to say—in a sense the details of which are discussed in chapter five—*he did it*. Guilt is related to moral blame. Proper blame requires that an agent has made an unjustifiable choice and has done so inexcusably. To say that an individual is guilty of having performed a particular action is to say he is blameworthy for having done so; *he did it and he shouldn't have*. This traditional understanding of guilt and blameworthiness has been questioned. It has been suggested that an individual may be guilty or blameworthy even when he has done all he could—even when he has not failed to do what he should have done given the circumstances. See Michael Stocker, *Plural and Conflicting Values* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), chapter 1. This claim is the basis of Raikka's argument for the claim that an individual may bear an individual's share of collective guilt even if he could not have done better than he did. I find the aim of such arguments unclear and the result unenlightening. These arguments often appeal to the moral pain it is right to feel when one chooses "the lesser evil" and does what it is right to do when doing what is right involves engaging in a *kind* of activity that is morally repugnant. On the appropriateness of moral pain in such cases, see Michael Walzer, "Political Action: The Problem of Dirty Hands," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 2 (1973) 160-180; Stuart

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remains, I think, the most insightful meditation on the ethical aspects and implications of membership in an ethnic identity group. But it is much more than that and, for this reason, we must be careful when we look to Jaspers for help with understanding questions of ethnicity and moral responsibility. Jaspers accepts that citizens bear a kind of nonmoral guilt for the acts of their state and provides arguments for both the moral guilt of the members of a society for the acts of the society to which they belong and the moral guilt of members of ethnic groups for the acts of those groups.[26] He does not, however, distinguish the collective responsibility of a society and that of an ethnic group. Jaspers does not distinguish membership in a society from ethnic-group membership. The two are easily conflated when attention is focused on a nation-state or on what is taken to be one. But we need only turn our attention to any pluralist society, on the one hand, or, on the other, to any diaspora to see the difference. New York City is a society, but then belonging to a society clearly does not involve ethnic-group membership. Many Armenians identify very strongly with their ethnic group, but they do not share a society. I have said that an ethnic identity group may function as an extension of agency for individual group members. A society, on the other hand, is a *location* of individual

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Hampshire, "Public and Private Morality," in Hampshire, ed., *Public and Private Morality*, 23-53; Bernard Williams, "Politics and Moral Character," in Hampshire, *Public and Private Morality*, 55-74. But it is one thing to say that a kind of remorse or regret is in order in such cases and another to say that the agent bears what Thomas Hill has called "paradigmatic guilt." Thomas Hill, "Moral Purity and the Lesser Evil," *The Monist* 66 (1983): 213-32, 221. Whatever one may think of these questions, guilt remains distinct from moral responsibility, and it is necessary to exercise caution when we look at a discussion of one in the hope of better understanding the other.

[26] Jaspers does not consider the possibility that citizens bear *moral* responsibility for the acts of their state. He also does not recognize a concept of collective responsibility that does not involve individual responsibility for individual members of the group. See note 24 above.

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agency. It is a context for meaningful social action. A society is located in a physical place, but it is constituted by the mutual expectations of individuals who live and act amongst each other.[27] Participation in a society may also be relevant for appropriate attribution of moral responsibility to individuals, but if so, its relevance is distinct from the relevance of ethnic-group membership.[28]

Jaspers' crucial insight into what he calls 'collective moral guilt' lies, I think, in his subtle if incomplete portrayal of what an ethnic identity group is all about. In this conception of ethnicity lies one solution to the puzzle of moral responsibility and the acts of ethnic groups. I will suggest that answers to questions of moral responsibility and the acts of ethnic groups lie in the ethical connections among the deliberative prospects characteristic of group membership, the commitments individual members make from among the choices they have, and the acts of the groups to which they belong. While allowing nondistributive attributions of moral responsibility to an ethnic group as a whole—and providing clarification of what this comes to—this approach leads us not to the attribution of moral responsibility for the acts of the group to every group member, but to more accurate descriptions of the acts of those members for whom membership is ethically significant—for those who *align themselves* with the group.

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[27] See chapters four and five for further discussion of the difference between a society and an ethnic identity group. On the nature of a society, see Dorothy Emmet, *Function, Purpose and Powers: Some Concepts in the Study of Individuals and Societies* (London: Macmillan, 1958), chapter 2.

[28] See chapter 5 for an argument for the claim that participation in a society is relevant for the attribution of moral responsibility to individuals.

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Jaspers begins by drawing distinctions among four "forms" of guilt, only one of which is of interest here.[29] Criminal guilt is borne by an individual who breaks a law. Political guilt is the collective liability borne by citizens of a state for the acts of that state. The political guilt of the citizens of Germany was their liability for war crimes and crimes against humanity. They must, Jaspers says, accept demands for reparation or collective punishment. These forms are familiar, but they will not concern us here. Political guilt, while collective, is the guilt of *citizens*; it is not the guilt of the German people, as an ethnic identity group. It is also not moral guilt. The liability, Jaspers says, involves "neither moral nor metaphysical charges;"[30] "this liability as such leaves the soul untouched."[31] A third form is less familiar. Metaphysical guilt is a guilt we bear for failing to "risk our lives unconditionally, without chance of success and therefore to no purpose."[32] Metaphysical guilt is not guilt we bear as members of a group.

> There exists a solidarity among men as human beings that makes each co-responsible for every wrong and every injustice in the world, especially for crimes committed in his presence or with his knowledge. If I fail to do whatever I can to prevent them, I too am guilty. If I was present at the murder of others without risking my life to prevent it, I feel guilty in a way not adequately conceivable either legally, politically, or morally.[33]

This concept of metaphysical guilt is very narrow. It has specifically to do with guilt for failing to risk a great deal (ideal-typically, one's life) with little (or no) hope of achieving one's aim. It is not the guilt of most omissions, but only of omissions for which the individual would not be blamed; and the idea of an omission is itself broadened so far as

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[29] Jaspers, *Question of German Guilt*, 31-36.
[30] Ibid., 39-40.
[31] Ibid., 62.
[32] Ibid., 32.
[33] Ibid.

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to include the not doing of any action that might have interfered with any evil occurring or anticipated anywhere in the world. The "consequence" of metaphysical guilt is a "*transformation of human self-consciousness before God*...[a] humility which grows modest before God and submerges all its doings in an atmosphere where arrogance becomes impossible."[34] Whatever independent interest this idea might have, it does not, and was not meant to, bear directly on questions of moral responsibility.

This leaves us with the concept of moral guilt. Jaspers begins by describing the traditional conception of moral responsibility and claiming that only individuals can be morally responsible. What each individual is responsible for is the set of actions, failures to act, attitudes, and emotional responses that are his own. The individual is responsible for performing actions he has been ordered to perform; while he is, of course, not responsible for *ordering the action*, he is responsible for *following the order* and performing the action. In addition, the individual is responsible for "countless little acts of negligence, of convenient adaptation of cheap vindication, and of the imperceptible promotion of wrong; the participation in the creation of a public atmosphere that spreads confusion and thus makes evil possible."[35] He is responsible for "blindness for the misfortune of others, lack of imagination of the heart, inner indifference toward the witnessed evil"[36] and for "failure to collaborate in organizing power relations, in the struggle for power for the sake of serving the right."[37] What is specifically and emphatically denied by Jaspers is that an ethnic identity group—a "people"—may possess

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[34] Ibid., 36.
[35] Ibid., 34.
[36] Ibid., 70.
[37] Ibid., 34.

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moral guilt. In view of the potential for misunderstanding on just this point, it may be useful to quote these passages at length.

> It is nonsensical...to lay moral guilt to a people as a whole. There is no such thing as a national character extending to every single member of a nation. There are, of course, communities of language, customs, habits and descent; but the differences which may exist at the same time are so great that people talking the same language may remain as strange to each other as if they did not belong to the same nation.
>
> Morally one can judge the individual only, never a group. The mentality which considers, characterizes and judges people collectively is very widespread. Such characterizations—as of the Germans, the Russians, the British—never fit generic conceptions under which the individual human beings might be classified, but are type conceptions to which they may more or less correspond...For centuries this mentality has fostered hatred among nations and communities...
>
> There is no such thing as a people as a whole. All lines that we may draw to define it are crossed by facts. Language, nationality, culture, common fate—all this does not coincide but is overlapping...
>
> One cannot make an individual out of a people. A people cannot perish heroically, cannot be a criminal, cannot act morally or immorally; only its individuals can do so.[38]

But Jaspers goes on to claim that there *is* a kind of collective moral guilt, which is rooted in the "way of life" of the group—a way of life that is part of every member, even of the individual member who rejects it.[39] This seems to contradict his claim that there is nothing distinctive of every individual German—no character and no way of life that belongs to each and every one. The argument Jaspers gives for this claim involves, in fact, not ethnic group membership, but participation in a society. The political events for which guilt is sought took place, in part, as a result of the way of life of the people among whom they took place; the Nazi regime and its acts could not have arisen without the

[38] Ibid., 40-41.
[39] Ibid., 75-79.

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enabling environment provided by the way of life shared by those who participated in that society. Anyone who propped up this way of life by sharing in it was a conspirator in the Nazis' acts. It was not, however, as ethnic Germans that individuals participating in the way of life that allowed for the rise of Nazism did so; it was as members of a society.

Sometimes, however, when Jaspers talks about what it is to identify as a German, he is not talking about sharing in a particular way of life. He is then no longer talking about participation in a society.

> [As we see among family-members], the German—that is, the German-speaking individual—feels concerned by everything growing from German roots. It is not the liability of a national but the concern of one who shares the life of the German spirit and soul—who is of one tongue, one stock, one fate with all the others—which here comes to cause, not as tangible guilt, but somehow analogous to co-responsibility.[40]

I would suggest that the moral connection supported by this identification—a *connection* Jaspers describes as irrational[41]—is not a connection of one person's responsibility and another person's acts, but involves instead the relevance of the acts of the group for accurate descriptions of the acts for which the individual is morally responsible. This connection, far from being *unlike* the rest of morality, is a consequence of applying that same concept of moral responsibility that applies to every area of human activity. Once we understand the nature of aligning oneself with an ethnic identity group—of committing oneself in a particular way to it—we will see that there is nothing mysterious in the claim that sometimes ethically adequate descriptions of what an individual has done will reflect his membership in a particular ethnic group and include a description of what the group has done. Briefly, in aligning herself with the group, the individual gives

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[40] Ibid., 79.

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herself reason to take its acts into account when considering what she will do.[42] *The acts of an ethnic identity group enter into descriptions of what an individual group member has done or failed to do, not because he shares a way of life with other group members (he may not), but because, and so insofar as, he aligns himself with the group agent and thereby incurs obligations of attention.*

The relation of moral alignment is not just theoretically interesting; it is practically important. What Jaspers describes is not only the position from which an individual can accept responsibility. It is the position from which the individual can require the kind of action of himself that will contribute to *the group's* acknowledgment of *its* wrongs and *its* efforts at reconciliation.

> We feel ourselves not only as individuals but as Germans...The German character has no other form than these individuals. Hence the demands of transmutation, of rebirth, of rejection of evil are made of the nation in the form of demands from each individual.[43]

To the end, Jaspers rejects the idea of collective responsibility as "fictitious thinking." Only individuals bear moral responsibility. But we cannot begin to understand what they are responsible for without understanding the significance of group membership. For groups do not exist without the collective feelings of individuals, and these collective feelings give us reason to act. Perhaps the only hope for an end to ethnic conflict and group-based oppression lies in our ability and our willingness to understand the role of the individual in history's group-acts; it is the same role that individuals of the future will

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[41] Ibid., 80.
[42] See chapter 5 for the argument connecting an individual's having a reason to consider the acts of a group when deciding on her own course of action and the place of group acts in accurate descriptions of an individual's acts.
[43] Jaspers, *Question of German Guilt*, 80.

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play in shaping the future acts of ethnic groups. It is individuals who will determine whether the *groups* of our future will stubbornly resist ethical scrutiny or seek justice and peace by engaging in it.

Group Rights and the Ethics of Nationalism

Much philosophical thinking about ethnicity is motivated by an interest in the issues of group rights and the ethics of nationalism. Does it make sense to say that an ethnic group has a right to a portion of political power, to some form of regional autonomy, or to secession from the state of which it is part? Can an ethnic group have a right to the continued use of a particular language or territory? Might a group that has been wronged have a right to reparations? Is nationalistic thinking morally acceptable? Does membership in a nation involve individuals in special moral obligations? I will not be dealing in any detail with questions of this kind, but a word on the potential usefulness of the concept of an ethnic identity group is in order.

Most contemporary philosophical work on the rights of ethnic groups is to be found in discussions of nationalism. Following Ernest Gellner, we can define nationalism as a "political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent."[44] The central question of the ethics of nationalism, then, is the question of whether nations have a right to self-determination. The right to self-determination is a national right to collective government—one nation, one state. These contemporary discussions continue a conversation that has gone on for over two hundred years—looking back at least to Johann Herder—and address directly a position that has

[44] Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), 1.

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been taken by the United Nations and the United States in the last century. The concept of national self-determination has seemed relevant for our understanding of why European colonialism was unjust and decolonization a great moral victory. It seems, at the same time, to have little bearing on many of the questions concerning the rights of "nations" that we face today—to have scanty application in our world of acknowledged multi-national states. As has been noted by many writers in this area, it is not only practically impossible to guarantee every nation a state; it is morally unacceptable to do so. However the territorial lines are to be drawn, some nonnationals will be left in any new nation. For them, the result of applying this "moral" principle would be minority status in a nationalist state.

The inappropriateness of resolving contemporary power struggles among nations by appealing to the principle of self-determination has (rightly) led some to ask not only what is wrong with that principle but also what is right in it. We should ask *why* this false doctrine seemed to shed light on the moral wrong involved in colonialism. Surely we can reject the doctrine of one nation-one state without rejecting the idea that one nation should not be governed by another. We can reject the principle of self-determination without accepting Gellner's claim that in the choosing of a government, there is no "sillier, more *frivolous* consideration than the question concerning the native vernacular of the governor's."[45] The question remains of what exactly is to be saved in the traditional view and what rejected.

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[45] Gellner, "Nationalism," in his *Thought and Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 153. For similar views of the nationalist idea, see Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993) and Lord Acton, "Nationality," in *Essays*

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First, a good deal of work has been done on the various forms that power-sharing among nations in a multinational state might take. This might involve the devolution of erstwhile state powers to local communities. It might instead involve the guaranteed proportional representation of distinct groups in politics. The most successful form of proportional representation might involve expanding the domain of power-sharing arrangements beyond the political and into the economic and cultural spheres.[46] What must be rejected in the principle of self-determination is the idea that each nation has a right to a state. It is not at all obvious that we must reject the claim that a nation has, in some looser sense, a right to self-determination or that it has what might be called 'autonomy rights'. The difference between the right to self-determination and what I will call autonomy rights is that the latter are not necessarily violated when a nation shares power with other nations. A nation's autonomy rights are not violated when it does not control a state, unless it also does not have a fair say in the governing of the state of which it is part. This is not to say that the power-sharing approach will be appropriate for every situation in which nationalist claims are made. It might be necessary to see partition as one available response to such claims, but as only one among a number of similarly-motivated responses, partition will not be justified by appeal to the principle of

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on Freedom and Power, ed. Gertrude Himmelfarb (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1955), 141-70.

[46] In the most widely cited model—Switzerland—language and religious groups are proportionately represented in the leadership of political, cultural, and economic organizations. Unlike the proposals developed using this model, representative diversity is not legally required there; it is granted as a matter of custom. See Jurg Steiner, "Power Sharing: Another Swiss 'Export Product'?" in Joseph V. Montville, ed., *Conflict and Peacemaking in Multiethnic Societies* (Lexington, MA and Toronto: Lexington Books, 1990), 107-114.

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self-determination. Its justification and the justification of a redistribution of political power within a state must lie together and elsewhere.

Traditional defenses of nationalism appeal to a connection between nations and cultures; they find in the value of culture the legitimacy of nationalist claims. Already in Herder is the idea that individuals cannot develop without a culture in which to do so.[47] This same idea is the basis of Isaiah Berlin's defense of nationalism.[48] For Herder and Berlin, nations are the subjects of cultural development and maintenance. Nations *possess* cultures. Will Kymlicka, Charles Taylor, and Yael Tamir, among others, appeal to considerations of this kind in their defense of "cultural nationalism."[49] According to Kymlicka, cultural nationalism "defines the nation in terms of a common culture, and the aim of the nationalist movement is to protect the survival of the culture."[50] This approach is in some ways like Herder's and Berlin's, but it is in one important respect very much

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[47] *J. G. Herder on Social and Political Culture*, ed. F. M. Barnard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969). For discussion of Herder's view, see Stuart Hampshire, "Nationalism," in *Isaiah Berlin: A Celebration*, ed. Edna and Avishai Margalit (London: Hogarth Press, 1991), 127-34.

[48] Isaiah Berlin, "The Bent Twig," in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, ed. Henry Hardy (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 238-61; Berlin, "Two Concepts of Nationalism," *New York Review of Books*, November 21, 1992, 19-23.

[49] Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); Kymlicka, "Individual and Community Rights," in *Group Rights*, ed. Judith Baker (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994); Kymlicka, *Liberalism, Community and Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989); Charles Taylor, "Nationalism and Modernity," in *The Morality of Nationalism*, eds., Robert McKim and Jeff McMahan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 31-55; Yael Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993). Tamir is perhaps the most consistent in her claim that a nation is a culture; as such, it is open to all who wish to belong. It is all the harder to see how the right of a group to a culture that she describes as developing from the right of individuals to a culture could *ever* result in the right of a cultural group to a state of its own. See Kymlicka's criticisms in "Misunderstanding Nationalism," *Dissent* (Winter 1995), 130-37. Reprinted in *Theorizing Nationalism*, ed. Ronald Beiner (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 131-40.

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out of step with its tradition. According to the traditional view, a nation is not a group that is *defined* in terms of its culture. It is essentially an ethnic group with political standing or aspirations, and it typically possesses a distinct culture. The point, however, of contemporary "culturalist" approaches is to elevate the cultural and dismiss the ethnic element of nationality.[51] Cultural nationalism is typically seen as at least *less* suspect than ethnic nationalism. It appeals not to categories of arbitrary exclusivity but to categories of the fundamental "ways of life" out of which may be developed the coherent individual life plans that it is liberalism's business to protect. I would suggest that there are national rights *and* cultural rights but that these must be kept distinct. Collapsing the distinction tends to lead us away from the problem of nationalism altogether.

The problem with a culturalist approach to nationalism is that significant *cultural* differences seem to be neither necessary nor sufficient for *national* difference. The culturalist must require that there be significant cultural differences between distinct nations if cultural differences are to justify protective group rights. In their influential discussion of the right of self-determination, Avishai Margalit and Joseph Raz introduce the concept of an encompassing group.[52] Encompassing groups are the bearers of the right to self-determination. The essential characteristics of an encompassing group are (1) a pervasive common culture and (2) the importance of membership for individual self-identity. As Margalit and Raz acknowledge, their characterization of encompassing

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[50] Kymlicka, "Misunderstanding Nationalism," in Beiner, *Theorizing Nationalism*, 132-3.
[51] 'Culturalist' is Brian Walker's term. See his "Modernity and Cultural Vulnerability: Should Ethnicity be Privileged?" in Beiner, *Theorizing Nationalism*, 141-165. This paper originally appeared under the title "Plural Cultures, Contested Territories: A Critique of Kymlicka" in the *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 30.2 (June 1997): 211-34.

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groups is designed to highlight those aspects of such groups that would form part of the moral argument for group rights. With this kind of group in mind, it is easy to see questions of group rights as questions of the stakes for individuals of group harms. A plausible argument for group rights would then involve discussion of the nature of an individual group member's *dependence on* the group of which he is a member—an explanation of how the well-being of the individual depends on the well-being of the group and how the self-respect of the individual depends on the self-respect of the group. If either the well-being or the self-respect of individuals can be shown to rest on the flourishing of the groups to which they belong, then special protections for such groups would seem to be in order.[53] The problem is that this analysis of the groups that would be the bearers of moral rights excludes outright particular groups that are intuitively at least legitimate candidates for autonomy rights and includes groups that intuitively are not.

Michael Ignatieff recounts a conversation he had with a Serbian soldier in Croatia in March of 1993.

> I'm trying to figure out why neighbors should start killing each other. So I say I can't tell Serbs and Croats apart. "What makes you think you're so different?"
> The man I'm talking to takes a cigarette pack out of his khaki jacket. "See this. These are Serbian cigarettes. Over there they smoke Croatian cigarettes.
> "But they're both cigarettes, right?"

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[52] Avishai Margalit and Joseph Raz, "National Self-Determination," *Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 87/9 (1990) 439-61.

[53] For other arguments of this kind, see, Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," in *Multiculturalism and the 'Politics of Recognition'*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Yael Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); James Nickel, "The Value of Cultural Belonging," *Dialogue* 33/4 (1994): 635-42 and "Ethnocide and Indigenous Peoples" *Journal of Social Philosophy*, Special Issue (1994) 84-98.

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> "You foreigners don't understand anything." He shrugs and begins cleaning his Zastoro machine pistol.[54]

Ignatieff's point is that nationalism is nonsense. "It is as if the nationalist myth—that Serbs and Croats are radically distinct people who each deserve a separate homeland—is struggling with this man's lived experience that, really, not much distinguishes him from his Croat neighbors."[55] But why should we expect the peoples of distinct nations to be "radically distinct" from each other? When Ignatieff asks for the differences between Serbs and Croats, what kind of differences is he looking for? Undoubtedly, virulent nationalist rhetoric often takes the form of claiming that the people of another nation are essentially *bad* in one way or another. This may be what *ethnic hatred* is all about. But it is not obvious that this fact about rhetoric and its emotional impact has any implications for what we are to say about distinguishing nations and assessing their claims. What is behind Ignatieff's question, I suspect, is the prevalence of culturalist theories of nationalism. But when we look at what seem to be distinct groups, the theory doesn't seem to fit. The problem is not specific to the Balkans. The Tutsi are a minority group in Rwanda, and African Americans are a minority group in the United States. A plausible argument could be developed for the claim that each group may be said to have autonomy rights *as a group* despite the fact that neither is a minority *culture*.

Even when an ethnic or national group might also be said to have a distinct culture, the group's rights do not necessarily follow from that fact about the culture. If the indigenous peoples of North America have a right to noninterference, that is largely

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[54] Michael Ignatieff, "Nationalism and the Narcissism of Minor Differences," in Beiner, *Theorizing Nationalism*, 91-102, 91. First published in *Queen's Quarterly* 102.1 (Spring 1995): 13-25.

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the result of treaties accepted by a state and *by the groups themselves* and of the reasonable expectations *of those groups*. These claims are based on a recognition that the group is to be treated as a moral agent. Shared culture is not essential to such arguments; the existence of a collective agent is essential. What we must understand if we are to understand the role of group rights is not how sharing a pervasive culture influences individuals, but what it is for a group to live among other groups—what it is for a group to act and be acted upon, to have successes and failures, and to make unreasonable or legitimate claims—and what it is for an individual to be a member of a group so understood.

Finally, a shared culture, however pervasive, does not seem to distinguish *national* groups from other kinds. The culture of small-farm life in the United States has, as Brian Walker has pointed out, been destroyed with the passing away of small farms and the rise of "agribusiness." Surely this culture was as pervasive and as identity-involving as French-Canadian culture is for many Quebecois, but it is not clear that whatever cultural rights the small farmer or the Quebecois may be said to have are *national* rights.[56]

While I will not be arguing directly for this claim here, it seems to me that ethnic identity groups are plausible candidates for autonomy rights. It is not simply that the analysis of an ethnic identity group involves an idea of collective agency. Members of an ethnic identity group are distinguished from nonmembers in terms of the possibilities for

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[55] Ibid., 92.
[56] It may be that the Quebecois have national rights to make cultural choices, but an argument for this claim would have to involve a concept of the rights of nations as well as that of the rights of individuals to a culture.

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action that are available for the former. It might be argued that we respect individuals *qua group members* by respecting the rights of groups to determine their own course. The choices of individuals are not necessarily enhanced by the availability of particular cultural forms, which may indeed be oppressive or confining, but *the quality of the choices that individuals have insofar as they may align themselves with the group is necessarily altered by the way such groups are treated by outsiders.* Understood in this way, the autonomy rights of an ethnic identity group are rights against external interference only. If members of the group no longer wish to align themselves with the group, that is a fact about the strength of the agency of the group and cannot be described as an action taken against the group.[57]

When viewed from a perspective that is opened up by the analysis of ethnic identity groups proposed, discussions of the special obligations of group members to a national group look very different. The focus turns away from questions of whether it is all right for an individual to put the interests of his own nation or of fellow group members above universalistic concerns and toward questions of how an individual who aligns himself with a group might do so responsibly. When an individual aligns himself with a group, he acts well by seeing to it, as best he can, that the group acts well. If so,

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[57] It is a problem for many theories of group rights that the rights described may interfere with the rights of individual group members. See Chandran Kukathas, "Are There Any Cultural Rights," *Political Theory* 20 (1992), 105-39, selections reprinted in Will Kymlicka, *The Rights of Minority Cultures* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 228-256; Leslie Green, "Internal Minorities and their Rights," in *Group Rights*, ed. Judith Baker (University of Toronto Press, 1994), 101-117; reprinted in Kymlicka, *The Rights of Minority Cultures*, 256-272; and Darlene M. Johnston, "Native Rights as Collective Rights: A Question of Group Self-Preservation," *Canadian Journal of Law and Jurisprudence*, 2/1 (1989), 19-34; reprinted in Kymlicka, *The Rights of Minority Cultures*, 179-201.

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then he must pay special attention to the goals and plans of the group—not because he is justified in thinking them more important or uniquely worthy, but because they exist through his alignment with the group together with the alignment of other members and because he is socially situated to alter their course.

Overview of Chapters

In the next chapter, I clear the way for the proposal of a Weberian analysis of ethnic identity groups by responding to Margaret Gilbert's arguments against Weber's approach to the analysis of social groups and related phenomena.[58] I also take up Gilbert's own proposals concerning the analysis of social groups and their acts and find them wanting. Chapter Three contains my analysis of the concept of an ethnic identity group and central discussions of group membership, moral alignment, and the acts of such groups. In my description of moral alignment is to be found discussion of Aristotle's view of friendship and community. Chapter Three is the core of this essay. Discussion of the ethical significance of ethnicity proceeds from the conceptual framework laid out there. Chapter Four contains a defense of the claim that we are partially constituted by our membership in ethnic identity groups and discussion of what this comes to. In Chapter Five, I argue for the claim that determinations of what we are morally responsible for require assessment of what we had reason to consider in the course of our deliberation. The argument involves a rather close look at Aristotle's discussion of "voluntary acts." I then argue that when we align ourselves with a group, we have reason to consider the acts of the group when planning our own course of action.

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[58] Margaret Gilbert, *On Social Facts* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), chapter 2.

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While merely being in a position to align oneself with the group has no implications for the attribution of moral responsibility to individuals, actually aligning oneself with the group does have implications for the attribution of responsibility to individuals.

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Chapter Two

What a Social Group Might Be

In her book, *On Social Facts*, Margaret Gilbert argues against what she sees as traditional forms of individualism in the social sciences and offers, in particular, a number of related arguments against Max Weber's individualistic analyses of social groups and related phenomena.[1] I will argue that none of these arguments succeed. In this and later writings, Gilbert proposes an alternative account of social groups, their acts, and their "psychological states."[2] I will argue that there are significant problems with Gilbert's analysis in particular, but also that the attempt to find a single account of "social groups" and their acts—an account that applies to the "group" of two individuals dancing together, or of two or more traveling or working together, as well as to nations, or ethnic and religious groups—is misguided. I suggest that we follow Weber in distinguishing *pluralities* from *social groups*. A plurality may be the subject of a shared intention, a shared belief, or a collective act.[3] If a nation, state, ethnic or religious group may be said to intend, to believe, to act—as I think it may—the appropriate analysis will be fundamentally unlike the analysis appropriate to facts about pluralities. I hope to show

[1] Margaret Gilbert, *On Social Facts* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989). For the arguments against Weber, see chapter 2.
[2] See especially chapter 4 of *On Social Facts*, as well as the essays collected in Gilbert, *Sociality and Responsibility: New Essays in Plural Subject Theory* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000). Examples of a psychological state would include an intention and a belief. Gilbert also discusses moral properties and emotional states.
[3] I think that Gilbert's analyses fail even when understood as analyses of the acts and psychological states of a plurality, but there are other accounts. Michael Bratman, for one, has been working out the details of a more individualistic account. See his "Shared Cooperative Activity," *Philosophical Review* 101 (1992): 327-342; "Shared Intention," *Ethics* 104 (1993): 97-113; "I Intend that We J," in *Contemporary Action Theory*, eds. G.

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that we have reason to pursue a Weberian approach to analyzing social groups and related social phenomena.

According to Gilbert, we must look to holist accounts of social facts because individualist accounts must fail to capture their nature.[4] The immediate target of Gilbert's arguments is Max Weber's treatment of the theoretical foundations of the social sciences.[5] Gilbert proposes a series of arguments designed to show that Weber's concept of social action is ill suited to serve as the fundamental concept of the social sciences and that it is ill suited because Weberian social action is the action of an individual. The first argument is supposed to refute Weber's claim that social actions are at the core of the content of the social sciences by showing that no plausible account of a social group could be built on this foundation. Each of a number of attempts to develop an account of social groups from the concept of social action is shown to founder on the question of sufficiency. The analyses that result, that is, do not provide sufficient conditions for a

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Holmstrom-Hintikka and R. Tuomela (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1997); and *Faces of Intention* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[4] I take it that a theory is individualist if it respects the principle that any reference to non-individuals must be explicable in terms of individuals. Gilbert sometimes seems a bit hard to pin down in this regard. To take but one example of Gilbert's occasional individualist tone, we are told that "[t]here is no doubt that the phenomenon [of collective remorse] characterized by this account is possible. One who takes it to exist is not committed to the existence of any dubious entities. The existence of a joint commitment is a *function of the understandings, expressive actions, and common knowledge of the parties* [emphasis mine]." Gilbert, "Collective Remorse," in *Sociality and Responsibility*, 123-140: 135. The concept of a joint commitment is not, however, *analyzed* in terms of the "understandings, expressive actions, and common knowledge" of individuals; it is said to *arise from* and *give rise to* these. For more discussion of the individualist/holist issue, see chapter 7 of *On Social Facts* and chapter 9 of *Sociality and Responsibility*.

[5] These are mainly to be found in Part One of Weber's *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*. I follow Gilbert in quoting from and referring to A. M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons' edition of Book One, published as *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (NY: The Free Press, 1947).

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collection of individuals to count as a group. Gilbert also argues, among other things, that a Weberian analysis does not provide conditions that are *interestingly* necessary, that Weber's concept of social action is ill suited to be a scientific concept, and that commonly accepted subjects of sociological research would have to be judged illegitimate topics of sociological interest, were Weber's view of the social sciences to be accepted. I believe that every one of Gilbert's arguments fails, but for one of only two reasons. First, Gilbert nowhere considers Weber's *own* analysis of the concept of a social group, and, second, she loses sight of what a foundational concept is supposed to be.

All of Gilbert's arguments take aim at Weber's concept of social action and at the role he assigned it as the foundation of the social sciences. Gilbert quite rightly points out that, as Weber understands them, social actions are actions performed by individuals. Weberian social actions are not the actions of a group or a society. Her discussion addresses the issue of individualism because it asks whether social phenomena can be explicated not only in terms of Weberian social action, but also, more generally, in terms of individual action.

According to Weber, social action is a kind of action. 'Action' is defined as "human behaviour when and in so far as the acting individual attaches a subjective meaning to it."[6] Weber adds that action "may be either overt or purely inward or subjective; it may consist of positive intervention in a situation, or of deliberately refraining from such intervention or passively acquiescing in the situation."[7] Included in

[6] Weber, *Social and Economic Organization*, 88.
[7] Ibid.

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this idea of an action is what many would call *intentional omission*.[8] In all cases, a piece of human behavior counts as an action only if it is *understandable (verstandlich)*. There must, that is, be a subjective state of the agent, interpretation of which would explain, or more fully describe, the behavior. Weber's discussion of understandable, or meaningful, action is mixed with his account of what it is to understand (*verstehen*) the action of another, and it can be difficult to disentangle these ideas.[9] Clearly, *what* we understand are understandable actions, but the distinctions among kinds of understanding do not correspond to different kinds of subjective meaning. We can understand what someone does and we can understand why he does it. When we simply understand what he does, we have what Weber calls *direct observational understanding*. In such cases, we understand the action immediately, or without reference to a broader context. We may understand that the woodcutter is cutting wood without understanding that he does so to earn a wage or that he accepts *this* work because it is near his family and the pay is sufficient for his needs and theirs. This limited kind of understanding is distinguished from what Weber calls *explanatory understanding*. I understand the woodcutter's actions in this sense if I understand why he cuts this wood, why in this place, why now.

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[8] In other, related remarks, it is less clear precisely what kind of inaction counts as *action*. Weber tells us that social action "includes both failure to act and passive acquiescence." *Social and Economic Organization*, 112. Acquiescence is clearly intentional; it is deliberate. Just what would count as a "failure to act" is less clear. Weber did not elaborate on these distinctions, but I suspect he meant also by a 'failure to act' an intentional omission.

[9] Gilbert's focus on the idea of a subjective meaning instead of on *verstehen* in her discussion of these passages leads her to a question that need not be raised. Gilbert claims that Weber leaves unclear whether the 'means-end' beliefs involved in a complete explanation of behavior (e.g., the belief of the woodcutter's that chopping wood will earn him a wage) are part of the subjective meaning of an action. They are undoubtedly

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Explanatory understanding involves an understanding of what Weber calls the agent's *motive*.[10] However far we may in fact get in our understanding of some piece of human behavior, that piece of behavior is an *action* if the individual behaving *intends* in so doing to be doing or not doing something. If the individual intends to do something, then it is logically possible, at least, to understand what it is he intends to do.

'Social action' is defined by Weber as follows.

> Action is social in so far as, by virtue of the subjective meaning attached to it by the acting individual (or individuals), it takes account of the behaviour of others and is thereby oriented in its course.[11]

Action is social in so far as its subjective meaning includes reference to others. Weber makes several clarificatory points. First, he reminds us that social action, like nonsocial action, may consist in inaction. The "action" we would describe as *staying at home to avoid someone*—that of *not* going out—is a social action. The behavior of the other(s) to which action is oriented may also be inaction, and it need not be intentional. The action of pounding the table in anger over the failure of another to apologize is a social action, whether or not the apology is deliberately withheld. Second, Weber points out that social action may be "oriented to the past, present, or expected future behaviour of others."[12]

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involved in our understanding of the action, as becomes clear when we consider cases in which a 'means-end' belief is one that we, the observers, do not share.

[10] 'Motive' is defined by Weber as "a complex of subjective meaning which seems to the actor himself or to the observer an adequate ground for the conduct in question." Weber, *Social and Economic Organization*, 98-99. The motive, then, is not a special part of the subjective explanation of the action; it is a complete explanation of the action. Of course, Weber's distinction between *direct observational understanding* and *explanatory understanding* is not unproblematic. It is hard to say just how much understanding goes beyond a simple understanding of what an agent does to become an understanding of why he does it.

[11] Weber, *Social and Economic Organization*, 88. See also 112.

[12] Ibid., 112.

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These are not mutually exclusive categories. Typically, complete understanding of a social action will involve reference to more than one of these categories. Typically, then, if we understand only how an action is oriented to the future behavior of others, we understand only one aspect of its meaning, even though this is often the aspect that interests us most. We understand what result the agent aims at. We often act in order to bring about results that involve others. If a person works to provide for her family, if she locks her door against intruders, or if she writes a letter of condolence so as to comfort another, her action is oriented toward the future behavior of others. When action is oriented to the past behavior of others, it is often a *response* to the behavior of others. To use Weber's example, fighting out of revenge involves an orientation of the agent's actions toward some past behavior of the opponent. Similarly, when an action is performed out of gratitude, out of a sense of fairness arising from some past consideration, out of sympathy for past misfortunes suffered by another, or regret for past wrongs—if it is done, in part, in acknowledgment of something that has been done, expressed or experienced by some other in the past, it is social action oriented to the past.[13] Finally, we often respond immediately to the present behavior of others. Holding a weeping child, stepping aside to let another pass, listening while someone speaks—these are social actions oriented to the present. It should be clear from the variety of these examples that 'behavior' is very broadly construed by Weber. The behavior of another includes the emotions and sensations, as well as the actions, of another. It will not be obvious from these examples, however, that the behavior of others

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[13] The orientation to another need not be direct. My action might be oriented to a memory of *my* reaction to an action of yours.

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need not be the behavior of other particular individuals. The others to which social action is oriented may be "an indefinite plurality," we are told. Picking up a twenty-dollar bill from the street is a social action, because it is oriented to the expectation that many others will accept this bill in payment.[14] Social actions are performed by individuals and may be performed while the agent is alone. Action is *not* social, Weber says, "if it is oriented solely to the behaviour of inanimate objects."[15] It is this concept of social action and the foundational status attributed to it by Weber that Gilbert rejects.[16]

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[14] Weber, *Social and Economic Organization,* 112. Weber uses an example of a person *accepting money as payment.* This, he says, is a social action because the individual acts out of the expectation that an indefinite plurality exists, willing to accept it from him in payment for other goods. Since accepting money would seem to be a social action for other reasons, I have changed the example a bit. The seller's (or worker's) act of accepting payment is oriented to the behavior of the buyer (employer), as well as to the indefinite plurality of money-acceptors.

[15] The distinction of social/nonsocial action is not exhaustive. Actions oriented to one's self fit neatly into neither category. See note 51 below.

[16] Gilbert's otherwise accurate description of Weber's concept of social action is flawed by her decision to give what she presents as an alternative conceptualization of the same idea: "I shall take it that a social action in Weber's sense must take account of a condition of another which is seen as an expression or aspect of the other's animate nature. It is not enough that some aspect of the condition of another be addressed, while that other is seen as animate." Gilbert, *On Social Facts*, 28. Gilbert wants to distinguish in this way cases like that of A who moves aside to avoid running into B, *for B's sake* (at least, in part) and that of C who moves aside to avoid colliding with D, *for C's sake* (only). A performs a social action, in part because his action is oriented to the possible future pain of B. Gilbert assumes that C's action is not social because she sees it as oriented only to his own possible future pain or annoyance. It is not, however, oriented only to this. The subjective meaning of his act that we would get in an *explanatory* understanding—that which goes beyond merely knowing how to describe that act—might make no reference to any other person, but then the description of what it is he *does* would. If C's act is described as *moving out of D's path*, then an explanation of *why* he does so would not make reference to D. If, on the other hand, C's act is described as *moving aside*, then an explanation of why he does so would make reference to the behavior of D. In either case, D's behavior is part of the subjective meaning of C's act. It is not necessary to reconceptualize Weber's idea in order to capture the details of *his* view. If C has no interest in the actions, attitudes, emotions or sensational states of D, then C's action is not oriented to the behavior of D. If D were, for instance, tied to a

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I

Gilbert's first argument begins with some rather puzzling remarks about Weber's idea that the concept of social action is the foundational concept of the social sciences.

> One might wonder how we, in an attempt to grasp the nature of social scientific subject matters, could accept the claim that 'social action' in Weber's sense was the 'central subject matter'. At least one line of thought throws doubt on this: are not many social scientists concerned with such phenomena as social conventions, with, quite generally, the properties of collectivities, or social groups? And would not a study which aimed at perspicuous descriptions or explanations of these phenomena be for that reason worthy of the title 'social study', whatever its connection or lack of connection with social action?[17]

Gilbert goes on to suggest that Weber might have thought it plausible because he claimed to have defined social groups in terms of social actions. This is precisely why, but Gilbert immediately abandons this possibility, and the rest of her discussion presupposes that the problem remains. Indeed it is misleading to use Weber's phrase, "central subject matter," without elaboration. In the passage from which it is pulled, Weber is distinguishing his own view from those that see actions that are *influenced by others* as the actions central to sociology. Referring then more narrowly to the view that *imitation* is the central social

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moving object, and C moved to avoid the larger object formed by this object and D's body, C's action would not be a social action; C's action would not, in that case, be oriented to the behavior of D. If however, as seems to be the case, C's action is oriented to the behavior of D, however obnoxiously, simply in its orientation to *D's walking toward C* and thereby threatening C's solitude, then it is a social action. There is, of course, some consistency between the extensions of Weber's concept and Gilbert's. Gilbert's reformulation leads, however, to the following mistake: "My way of construing Weber here will presumably allow for the following case, where it is indeed the other's animacy which is at issue: Gold turns because he wants to avoid bumping into Silver, in so far as Silver is (believed by him to be) an animate being. (Perhaps Gold has a phobia of contact with animate beings as such)." Gilbert, *On Social Facts*, 29. Here the two formulations diverge. According to Weber's, the *behavior* of another must enter into the subjective meaning of an action. The mere idea that the other *is such as to behave* would not be enough.

[17] Gilbert, *On Social Facts*, 34.

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concept, Weber points out that some instances of imitation will be social action in his sense, while others will not (e.g., simply using what one has learned from another because it is a useful way to accomplish one's tasks) and that it may be hard to determine which is which. Here is the full passage.

> Mere 'influence' and meaningful orientation cannot therefore always be clearly differentiated on the empirical level. But conceptually it is essential to distinguish them, even though merely 'reactive' imitation may well have a degree of sociological importance at least equal to that of the type which may be called social action in the strict sense. Sociology, it goes without saying, is by no means confined to the study of 'social action'; this is only, at least for the kind of sociology being developed here, its central subject matter, that which may be said to be decisive for its status as a science. But this does not imply any judgment on the comparative importance of this and other factors.[18]

Weber's analysis of the concept of a social group does make use of the concept of social action, but not every significant sociological concept will be analyzable in this way. We shall have to see how these other concepts fit into Weber's vision of the social sciences. Most importantly, it does not follow from Weber's foundational claim about the concept of social action that it is any more *important* a concept than that of social group. Cells may be foundational in biology, but cells are not *more important* than organisms.

As for *Weber's* understanding of the relation between social actions and social groups, Gilbert quotes one of the passages in which that view is described.

> When reference is made in a sociological context to a 'state', a 'nation', a 'corporation', a 'family'...or to similar collectivities, what is meant is...only a certain kind of sequence of actual or possible social actions of individual persons.[19]

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[18] Weber, *Social and Economic Organization*, 114-15.

[19] Ibid., 102. I give Gilbert's slightly modified translation and her selections. *On Social Facts*, 34.

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This is a perfectly representative passage from Weber, but it is the last we hear of the idea expressed in it. Nowhere in Gilbert's discussion of how the concept of a social group might be analyzed in terms of that of social action is an effort made to understand or refute Weber's own view of how that should be done. Social groups are kinds of *social relationship*, for Weber, and these are defined as follows.

> The term 'social relationship' will be used to denote the behaviour of a plurality of actors in so far as, in its meaningful content, the action of each takes account of that of the others and is oriented in these terms. The social relationship thus *consists* entirely and exclusively in the existence of a *probability* that there will be, in some meaningfully understandable sense, a course of social action.[20]

This is a difficult passage, but it is also another route to an understanding of Weber's analysis of social groups. One would expect that Gilbert's argument from elimination of possible ways to analyze the concept of a social group in terms of that of social action would aim at eliminating at least some interpretation of Weber's suggested approach. Gilbert is clearly aware of these passages, but without explanation she begins her argument with an account, according to which "a plethora of social actions entails group existence."[21] Hypothesis W1 states that whenever there are numerous social actions, there is a social group. W1 is, Gilbert says, "refuted easily enough," and so it is. Gilbert

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[20] Ibid., 118.

[21] Gilbert quotes this passage on social relationships in a footnote, and adds that "[w]ith regard to its facilitation of the analysis of intuitive collectivity concepts, this notion can be criticized along the lines that I criticize Weber's notion of social action." *How* this could be so is left unclear. Gilbert does go on to say that her "discussion of the case involving 'demonstrative social actions'...will be most relevant here." Demonstrative social actions—an idea Gilbert introduces—are social actions that refer to others who are in the presence of the agent, and that refer to those others as present. How close *could* this concept be to Weber's concept of a social relationship, which contains no requirements about physical presence and makes essential reference to a probability, or likelihood, of the occurrence of certain kinds of social action? Discussion of the one is

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simply reminds us that social actions may be performed by individuals who are alone. She describes a lone, shipwrecked individual who routinely builds fires to attract the attention of passing ships and (rightly) refuses to call this person a social group.

Hypothesis W2 is designed to rule out the objection raised against W1—that it would include, in certain circumstances, single individuals as groups.

> (W2) Given a population (call it 'P') of more than one agent, P is a social group if most members of P most of their waking lives perform social actions.[22]

It is now simply part of the definition of 'social group' that a social group be composed of more than one agent. The rest of this definition—that "most members of P most of their waking lives perform social actions"—is introduced without explanation. Why *most* members? *Why* "most of their waking lives"? The obvious problem with W1 and W2 is that they seem to have been designed without any reflection on the nature of social groups. More specifically, as Gilbert points out, it is a problem for W2 that it would call a social group the group of three people, each of whom, without any knowledge of the existence of the other two, performs the sufficient number of social actions, oriented to others he does know. The problem with this, Gilbert says, is that while all are performing social actions, they "never act with *one another* in mind."[23] The need to correct this problem would seem to provide Gilbert an opportunity to consider Weber's own definition, but she does not do so. Instead, she introduces the concept of a *demonstrative*

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unlikely to merit consideration as discussion of the other. See the discussion of Gilbert's "Hypothesis W3" below and note 27.

[22] Gilbert, *On Social Facts*, 36.

[23] Ibid.

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social action. This idea is nowhere to be found in Weber's discussion.[24] A demonstrative social action is "a social action in which the other referred to is, and is referred to as being, in the agent's presence."[25] Hypothesis W3 makes use of this concept.

> (W3) Given a population P of two or more agents who much of their time perform (and may be expected to perform) demonstrative social actions with respect to one another, P is a social group.[26]

W3 is clearly designed to handle the kind of counter-example raised against W2, and handle them it does; but it has little else to recommend it and, bearing little relation to Weber's analysis, Gilbert's refutation of W3 constitutes no part of a refutation of his view.[27] Again, the obvious problem seems to be that the analysis reveals no serious thought about the nature of social groups. Must the members of a social group spend much of their time in each other's presence? Gilbert offers an unnecessarily complex and *recherche* counterexample to the sufficiency of W3.[28] Suppose instead, as we see in many parts of the world, two mutually hostile groups, unwillingly living in the same city. There would be (and one would certainly expect there to be) demonstrative social actions

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[24] Gilbert suggests that that this concept is closely related to that of Weber's *social relationship*. I don't see the likeness. See note 21 above and 27 below.
[25] Gilbert, *On Social Facts*, 36.
[26] Ibid.
[27] The one respect in which W3 is like Weber's analysis is in its use of the idea of actions an agent "may be expected to perform." This might be rather loosely related to Weber's idea that the concept of a social group is to be analyzed in terms of the *likelihood* of agents' performing certain kinds of social action. In Gilbert's discussion, however, this idea is not only undeveloped (*Why* is it to be expected?); it is also parenthetical. The dominant idea is that of the relevance of demonstrative social actions. Whatever Weber did mean by "a certain kind of social action," he did not mean demonstrative social action. What kinds of social action are to be expected from members of social groups is a question that a fully-developed account of social groups must answer.
[28] For discussion of the mushroom-pickers, see Gilbert, *On Social Facts*, 37-38.

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performed by members of each group, oriented to the behavior of members of the other; but we wouldn't say that the aggregate formed by considering the two groups together is itself a social group, nor would we accept the more likely result that some hodgepodge grouping of members of the two groups based on which individuals happened to come across each other, or do so routinely, is a social group. W3 also fails to give conditions necessary for *social group* and *group member*.[29] W3 can be read as requiring either that each member perform demonstrative social actions oriented to *every* other member or only that each member perform demonstrative social actions oriented to *some* other members. The first possibility is wildly implausible. States and army divisions, as well as ethnic and religious groups, clearly do not meet this condition. The second interpretation fails as well, though less obviously. Suppose a person had been taken at birth from her community by a member of an ethnocultural group other than that of her parents. She has been raised in perfect isolation from the community into which she was born. She knows the facts of her birth and she knows something about the group, her membership in which is at issue. Perhaps she wishes to be back among members of this group and even plans her return. I think we would say she is a member of the ethnocultural group of her ancestors, even though she has never been in a position to

[29] Gilbert does not discuss the necessity of the conditions specified in W1 through W4. Instead, she briefly considers the necessity of the performance of social actions in general for the existence of social groups, and concludes that even if it is necessary, it is not "illuminatingly necessary." The real question, of course, is whether the conditions proposed by Weber for *social group* are indeed necessary and as illuminatingly as might be hoped.

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perform a demonstrative social action oriented to any member of that group. *Why* we would say so is the question.[30]

Like W1 and W2, W3 neither represents Weber's analysis nor has any inherent plausibility. Each of these proposals springs from Gilbert's failure to appreciate what might be involved in an analysis of *social group* in terms of *social action*. This becomes clear in Gilbert's discussion of W4—the analysis designed to deal with our intuitions about the counterexamples to W3. The problem with W3, the idea is, is that while individuals must perform demonstrative social actions, there need be no "*social* interaction" among them. After suggesting that the particular interaction of a conversation might be relevant to an analysis of *social group*, Gilbert says: "There is no obvious reason to think that the best way to analyze the conversations constitutive of groups is to start by thinking of them as sequences of actions social in Weber's sense, attempting to discover *precisely what subspecies of Weberian social action is at issue* [my emphasis]."[31] This is the ill-fated attempt that W4 makes.

> (W4) Given a population P of two or more agents, if successful acts of communication between various members regularly occur over time, then P is a social group.[32]

This is clearly a flawed analysis, since, as Gilbert points out, if A converses with B, C with D, E with F, and G with H, a social group consisting of A, B, C, D, E, F, G and H is

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[30] Answering this question will settle which aspects of the story are crucial for the result that the newborn is a member of her ancestral ethnocultural group and which are not. Is it essential that she know the facts of her birth or anything about this group? Must she see herself as part of the group? Must she embrace this self-perception? A complete account of social groups would also explain the difficulty of deciding questions of group-membership in such cases.

[31] Gilbert, *On Social Facts*, 41.

[32] Ibid., 42.

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not thereby created.[33] Even if each had, at some time, at least a passing conversation with every other, this would not be sufficient for forming a social group. Once again, however, the refutation of W4 brings us no closer to a refutation of Weber's view, it being nothing like his analysis. None of Gilbert's proposals *could* be anything like Weber's, given her understanding of the requirement that an analysis of the concept of a social group be built up from that of social action. Gilbert concludes that Weber's concept of social action "can make little contribution to the analysis of intuitive collectivity concepts."[34] What she recognizes as a *contribution*, however, is very limited.

> It would be a real achievement to provide a sufficient condition for the existence of a social group of the form 'a proliferation of actions of kind K performed by all or most members of a population P makes P a social group or society.' It would also be an achievement to provide an illuminating necessary condition for the existence of a social group of the form 'a proliferation of actions of kind K performed by all or most members of a population P is necessary to make P a social group.' It is not clear that we can find any action concept which enables us to provide a condition of either type mentioned, let alone one which enables us to provide conditions of both types at once. It should now be clear, however, that Weber's notion of social action is not of the right kind, and at least to this extent, it can make little contribution to the analysis of collectivity concepts.[35]

I have suggested that Gilbert's argument by elimination does not in fact eliminate all of the analyses of *social group* that make use of Weber's concept of social action. Gilbert has left out the analysis Weber recommends, and now we see why. Gilbert assumes that to use the concept of social action to arrive at that of a social group, we must see how *multiplying* social actions (or social actions of some particular kind) would result in a social group. This is implausible on its face, and it is clearly an approach that is rejected

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[33] Gilbert suggests here and argues later that each conversational pair forms a social group that lasts at least as long as the conversation. I take this to be an unhelpfully broad characterization of social groups. See the discussion of Gilbert's approach below.
[34] *On Social Facts*, 43.

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by Weber. Central to his analysis is the idea that social groups involve the *possibility* that certain kinds of social action will be performed.

Weber's first remarks in *Economy and Society* about the nature of social groups appear in a section that begins with these words: "Action in the sense of a subjectively understandable orientation of behaviour exists only as the behaviour of one or more *individual* human beings."[36] Action might be that of a single individual, or it might be that of a plurality, but even if the action of a plurality, it is not the action of a group.[37] Weber goes on to discuss the nature of social groups from the standpoint of his sociology, making clear first that the sociological conception of social groups is not the only legitimate conception. The opening remarks continue as follows.

> Action in the sense of a subjectively understandable orientation of behaviour exists only as the behaviour of one or more *individual* human beings. For other cognitive purposes it may be convenient or necessary to consider the individual, for instance, as a collection of cells, as a complex of bio-chemical reactions, or to conceive his 'psychic' life as made up of a variety of different elements, however these may be defined. Undoubtedly such procedures yield valuable knowledge of causal relationships. But the behaviour of these elements, as expressed in such uniformities, is not subjectively understandable...[38]

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[35] Ibid., 43-44.
[36] Weber, *Social and Economic Organization*, 101.
[37] I suggest that most work on such phenomena as shared action, shared intention, shared belief and so on is actually work on the actions, intentions, and beliefs of what Weber would call a plurality. This is as true of the work of Michael Bratman, among others, as it is of Gilbert's plural subject theory. The questions raised in this area of research are undoubtedly important, but they are also significantly different from questions of the acts, intentions, beliefs, and so on of social groups, in Weber's sense. Gilbert argues (in passing in *On Social Facts* and at greater length in her later writings) that nations, states, tribes, and presumably other large social groups are, like the "group" of two dancers or travelers, analyzable as plural subjects, in the technical sense she describes. See below for discussion of this view and its problems.
[38] Weber, *Social and Economic Organization*, 101.

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Clearly, Weber is not here denying the legitimacy of the biological sciences or disparaging the concepts it uses. He is distinguishing his *verstehen* sociology from other disciplines and describing the concepts appropriate for use within it. Unlike the biological sciences, some disciplines other than his own make reference to the concept of a social group. Within such disciplines, different conceptions of a social group may be appropriate.

> For still other cognitive purposes as, for instance, juristic, or for practical ends, it may on the other hand be convenient *or even indispensable* [my emphasis] to treat social collectivities, such as states, associations, business corporation, foundations, as if they were individual persons. Thus they may be treated as the subjects of rights and duties or as the performers of legally significant actions.[39]

Weber will not treat social groups in this way, because social groups do not perform actions, in the sense he has described. They do not perform *understandable* actions.[40]

It might, of course, be objected that social groups *do* perform actions. I would argue that in a sense they do. We should seek an analysis of the concept of a group's act, but the very plausible intuition that we can *give* an analysis of the act of a social group that makes reference to the acts and ideas of individuals supports Weber's claim that group acts are not the foundational phenomena he takes individual social action to be.[41]

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[39] Ibid.

[40] It might be argued that there is sense to our claims about groups acts but that an analysis of group acts need not involve the attribution of subjective meanings to the acts of groups. The acts of pluralities may well have subjective meanings, as they are best analyzed, I think, in terms of the intentions of individuals. For useful suggestions, see Michael Bratman's work, listed in note 3 above. The acts of social groups might well turn out to be very important without being very much like the acts of individuals or pluralities.

[41] Weber does not consider the possibility of analyzing the concept of the act of a plurality; he treats it too as foundational. I suspect that it can be analyzed in terms of the acts and states of individuals; I would not say it is foundational. The important point is

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If the acting social group consists of individuals who *do* perform Weberian social actions, and if it is not simply a plurality of such individuals, then the sociologist's task is to *explain* such phenomena as the "agency" of social groups. Unlike the lawyer or moral philosopher, the sociologist must address the questions raised by the differences between individuals and social groups and not focus exclusively on their likenesses. The necessity of this kind of analysis certainly does not require that the sociologist *ignore* collectivity concepts. His aim is to understand them, and this aim is not consistent with dismissing them. An understanding of individual behaviour and an understanding of social groups may indeed go hand in hand. Individual action may be theoretically prior, but there is no suggestion in Weber's discussion that we can understand the subjective meaning of the action of actual individuals without making reference to ideas about social groups.

> [T]he subjective interpretation of action must take account of a fundamentally important fact. These concepts of collective entities which are found both in common sense and in juristic and other technical forms of thought, have a meaning in the minds of individual persons, partly as of something actually existing, partly as something with normative authority. This is true not only of judges and officials, but of ordinary private individuals as well. Actors thus in part orient their action to them, and in this role such ideas have a powerful, often a decisive, causal influence on the course of action of real individuals.[42]

As mentioned, a Weberian social group is a kind of social relationship, and the concept of a social relationship is analyzed as follows.

> The term 'social relationship' will be used to denote the behaviour of a plurality of actors in so far as, in its meaningful content, the action of each takes account of that of the others and is oriented in these terms. The social relationship thus *consists* entirely and exclusively in the existence of a *probability* that there will

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that even if "plurality acts" are analyzable in this way, the analysis will be different from that of group acts.

[42] Weber, *Social and Economic Organization*, 102.

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> be, in some meaningful sense, a course of social action. For purposes of definition there is no attempt to specify the basis of this probability.[43]

Weber gives here what appear to be two distinct conditions, and he clearly believes that they are closely and obviously linked.

> 1. The action of each of a plurality of actors is oriented to the actions of the others.
>
> 2. There is a likelihood (or reasonably high probability) of a course of social action.[44]

Weber does not say that *all* of the actions of each individual must be oriented to the actions of the others. There must only be some amount of mutual orientation of action. It is also not necessary that the subjective meaning of the other-oriented action be of any particular kind. We will see that Gilbert thinks it necessary for the existence of a social group that the members see themselves as parts of a plural subject. No such specific intentional content is necessary, according to Weber, for there to be a social relationship of some kind nor even is any particular *kind* of intentional content necessary for a plurality to form a social relationship. The orientation need not be one of fellow-feeling, say, or concern. What is necessary is that the mutual orientation of action *have a stable source*.[45] We are told that "for purposes of definition there is no attempt to specify the

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[43] Ibid., 118.

[44] The idea of a probability, likelihood, or chance is used repeatedly in Weber's definitions. Consider, for instance, his definition of 'power'. "'Power' (Macht) is the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests." Ibid., 152. This seems a matter of method that warrants further study. For a discussion that is both insightful and brief, see Ralf Dahrendorf, *Life Chances* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 62-74.

[45] Cf. Dahrendorf: "For Weber the probability of sequences of action postulated in the concept of chance is not merely an observed and thus calculable probability, but it is a probability which is invariably anchored in given structural conditions." Ibid., 65.

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basis of this probability." It is not that there is a specifiable general basis of the probability that there will be a course of social action, which Weber doesn't bother to mention. There is no single basis, underlying the great variety of social relationships. This is not a flaw in the theory. Gilbert's analysis fails, in part, precisely because it is not as general as it aspires to be.

According to Weber, a social group is "a certain kind of development of actual or possible social actions of individual persons."[46] Since all actual social actions are also possible, we can say that a social group is a certain kind of development of possible social actions. For the case of social groups, at least, the difficult idea of there being a *likelihood* that certain kinds of social action will be performed is explicated in terms of the suggestion that the existence of a social group has implications for the *possibility* that certain kinds of social action will be performed. This analysis obviously presupposes that some social actions are possible, while others are not. The kind of possibility at issue is, presumably, *social* possibility. As we have seen, a social action, according to Weber, is an action the subjective meaning of which is oriented to the behavior of another. Intuitively, to say that a particular kind of social action is possible is to say that an action of that kind—behavior fitting a particular act-description—may be performed by some agent. We can divide the details of the description of a kind of social action into two parts: (1) a particular "other" is picked out, and (2) a certain *kind* of orientation is described.[47] If there is an individual person for whom a social action of a particular kind

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[46] Weber, *Social and Economic Organization*, 102.

[47] For some purposes, we would want to define a 'kind of social action' differently. In order to capture the phenomenon of patriotic feeling, for example, we would want to describe the nature of the orientation and require that it have as its object the agent's own

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is possible, I will say that a social action of that kind is *available* to him. Whenever there is a person, for whom a social action of a particular kind is available, a social action of that kind is a possible social action. As I understand it, Weber's account of social groups combines two claims: (1) the existence of a particular social group requires the possibility of certain kinds of social action, and (2) central among the possible action-types associated with a particular group are kinds of action that are available only to group members. Much more, of course, must be said.[48] The present point is simply that *this* analysis of the concept of a social group is not entertained by Gilbert.

II

We have looked carefully at Gilbert's argument for the claim that the concept of a social group cannot be analyzed in terms of Weberian social action. Gilbert goes on to argue that Weber's concept of social action is not only inadequate to the task of illuminating collectivity concepts, but ill suited to any other use in a description of the subject matter of the social sciences. This argument takes aim more explicitly at individualism.

> Given that Weber's concept of social action is, after all, the concept of a kind of action that individual persons perform, the following question is a natural one: Is social action in Weber's sense going to be *the* type of action of interest to social scientists, when and in so far as they are concerned with kinds of action that individuals perform?[49]

The phrase "*the* type of action" is misleading. We typically understand the emphasized definite article to mean *the only*, but, again, Weber nowhere says that social actions are

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state, whatever that might be. For the purpose of analyzing social groups, however, and so of being able to distinguish one from another, it is essential that we distinguish kinds of social action in terms of their objects as well as their nonobject-specific content.

[48] See chapter 3 for further discussion and development of this idea.

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the only "type of action of interest to social scientists." It is the core concept—that to which any explanation of the sociological interest of an action or other phenomenon must make reference. Again, Gilbert fails to address Weber's view because she fails to see what he took the relationship between this center and the rest of sociology to be. Essentially, Gilbert's argument is as follows.

1. A particular act of suicide need not be a social action, in Weber's sense.

2. Given (1), Weber cannot recognize suicide as an appropriate topic for social science.

3. Suicide is uncontroversially an appropriate topic for social science.

Therefore,

4. Weber's concept of social action cannot be used to demarcate the subject matter of the social sciences.[50]

Let us grant (1).[51] I will argue that (2) is false and (3) in need of explanation.

Consider (3). It surely doesn't follow from the fact that it is *not controversial* that suicide is an appropriate topic for treatment by social scientists that it is *necessarily* an appropriate topic for such treatment. Gilbert acknowledges the importance of Emile

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[49] Gilbert, *On Social Facts*, 44.
[50] Ibid., 44-46.
[51] It is possible to question (1). Weber defines a social action as one the subjective meaning of which is oriented in its course to the behavior of others. So far it seems clear that an act of suicide may be oriented exclusively to some state of one's own mind or body and thus fail to be a social action. A person might simply be in a great deal of pain, without hope of relief. Without thought of any other person, he ends his life. However, Weber does define action that is *not* social (or 'nonsocial action') as action oriented exclusively toward physical objects. It could be argued that, intrinsically, the subjective meaning of suicide is oriented in its course to one's self, and that this subjective meaning fits neatly into neither category. One's self is neither an *other* nor a physical object. My guess is that faced with this lacuna, Weber would have abandoned his definition of 'nonsocial action'. Rejecting (1) is not necessary for refuting Gilbert's "suicide argument."

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Durkheim's work on suicide.[52] Durkheim's accomplishment was to have shown that different suicide rates correspond to different kinds of society, thereby connecting the performance of a seemingly private act with the characteristics of the societies in which it is performed. It is not controversial, Gilbert says, "that Durkheim's claims, if they were clearly established, would show that suicide is a proper subject for sociology or, more generally, for social science."[53] According to Gilbert, "the existence of sociological studies of suicide, in particular Durkheim's, disprove the claim that in so far as social sciences are concerned with types of social action, they are concerned with social action in Weber's sense."[54] But Durkheim's achievement was, of course, to *show* that suicide is an appropriate topic for study by the sociologist. It is not in virtue of any intrinsic feature of the act of suicide that it is appropriate, but in virtue of its connection to various features of the societies in which these acts are performed. Gilbert nowhere entertains the possibility that this kind of explanation might be available to Weber as well.[55] Weber argues that *social group* can be analyzed in terms of *social action*. I have argued in

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[52] Emile Durkheim, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*, tr. J. A. Spaulding and G. Simpson (NY: Free Press, 1951).
[53] Gilbert, *On Social Facts*, 45.
[54] Ibid., 46.
[55] Gilbert seems to consider this objection at one point, but her response makes clear that she does not really understand it. I see no alternative objection she might instead be considering.

> Someone might possibly argue on behalf of Weber, at this point, that Durkheim's approach to suicide is considered sociological because it appeals to states of collectivities, as intuitively conceived, as explanatory variables. That is, it is considered sociological because of its appeal to something constituted by social actions in Weber's sense. While I would agree with the first of the above statements, it is not really germane to the point at issue in this section. As to the second point, I have already argued that the claim that social scientists are concerned with social actions in Weber's sense is misleading, if it is intended to

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support of this idea, but even if Weber's analysis of *social group* is rejected, it is surely unfair and unhelpful to subtract the issue of social groups from Weber's discussion and criticize the result. Weber clearly saw the importance of social groups in social theory. His own work is testimony to that. If individual acts of self-discipline are appropriate objects of sociological study because of their relation to the development of a particular socio-economic order, or individual acts of personal characterological "mediocrity" because of their relation to the rise of bureaucratic rationalism, surely individual acts of suicide are appropriate objects of study if a connection is found between such acts and the societies in which they are found.[56] We can now see why the subject matter of sociology is not limited to social actions and why Weber says that no judgment is implied on the comparative importance of social actions and "other factors."[57] What these other factors have in common is their *relation* to social action—a relation that is often mediated by relations to social groups.

Weber too, then, can acknowledge the sociological interest of those actions that can be explained in terms of the properties of the social groups to which the agents belong. (2) is false. The fact that Weber does not mean by 'social action', *action influenced by a social group* in no way rules out acknowledgment of the importance of action influenced by or, for that matter, contributing to the nature of social groups.

> capture the idea that collectivities and their states, as intuitively conceived, are appropriate subjects for social science. (*On Social Facts*, 49)

[56] It has been argued that Weber's "central question" concerns the shape of individual character, as it is informed by various social factors—religious, economic, legal. How, he asks, are the characteristics of social groups related to the characteristics of individuals? Weber's *aim* is to understand the influence of social groups on individuals; such an influence is simply not his starting-point. See Wilhelm Hennis, *Max Weber: Essays in Reconstruction*, tr. Keith Tribe (London: Allen & Unwin, 1988).

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Gilbert misses the point of calling social action *foundational* when she argues that Durkheimian approaches to suicide or other phenomena are ruled out by Weber's foundational claim.

> [Durkheim's approach] gives us, in effect, another possible definition for the phrase 'social action'. On this definition, a social action would be an action of a kind whose incidence in a society is influenced by particular states of collectivities. This seems unlikely to be extensionally equivalent to Weber's notion and it clearly gives a different meaning to the phrase. As we have seen, by 'social action' Weber does not mean *action influenced by certain states of other people*, let alone *action whose incidence is affected causally by states of the relevant collectivity*. (This latter sense of 'social action' obviously does not fit Weber's 'individualist' orientations with respect to a fundamental concept of sociology.)[58]

It is certainly true that this is not—and could not, consistent with his individualism, be—Weber's concept of social action. To say, however, that social action is the foundational concept of sociology is not to say that it is the only concept of sociology. Gilbert apparently attributes to Weber the view that *only* social actions are of interest to the social sciences, and even that it is only social actions *qua* social action. Gilbert raises the possibility of a sociological interest in political self-immolation. In such a case, she notes, "the intended topic would not be suicide *qua* social action in Weber's sense," but suicide *qua* political action.[59] But, of course, Weber never suggests that sociologists must limit their study to social actions *qua* social action. Were social scientists so to limit their study, they would never get beyond study of the *concept* of social action. Weber analyzes the concept of a social group in terms of that of social action precisely because social-group phenomena are part of the subject matter of sociology. If Durkheim

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[57] Weber, *Social and Economic Organization*, 115.
[58] Gilbert, *On Social Facts*, 48.
[59] Ibid., 50.

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was right and higher suicide rates are associated with certain properties of social groups, then suicide should be studied by sociologists—not, Weber and Durkheim would agree, because suicide is intrinsically social, but because social groups are.

There are similar problems with Gilbert's argument to the effect that Weber's concept of social action is not a "promising candidate for a scientific concept," on the grounds that it does not distinguish social and nonsocial phenomena in a useful way, i.e. in a way that would be conducive to the development of scientific theories. She says that while "performing a private superstitious ritual intended to promote one's child's good fortune; committing suicide in order to earn someone's pity; kicking a man in anger in order to hurt him and thus relieve one's own feeling of misery" would be included in the extension of this concept, "performing a private superstitious ritual intended to promote one's own good fortune; kicking a stone in anger; committing suicide in a fit of 'objectless' depression" would not.[60] But this *need not* be the way the division of particular actions would go. If the explanation of the performance of private superstitious rituals (rather than, say, public superstitious rituals or private rational activity aimed at some hoped-for end) makes reference to the social group in which they are found, they would, for that reason alone, be part of the subject matter of sociology—both those that are social actions and those that are not. If the angry rock-kicking is explained, in part, by the absence of alternative outlets for the expression of anger in the society in which it is found, e.g., the inaccessibility of public fora in which disagreements with public decisions can be expressed or an atmosphere in which one's particular social role has implications for how robust one's emotional reactions may be, then it too is part of the

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subject matter of sociology, even though it is not a social action. We have seen that the suicides led to by objectless despair are a part of the subject matter of sociology if they are correlated with some property of the social group in which they are found. If, on the other hand, the explanations of these nonsocial actions make no reference to social groups or any other social concepts, then they are not part of the subject matter of sociology. This result seems just right.

III

I have been suggesting that Gilbert fails to undermine Weber's approach to the study of social groups and social phenomena in general. Gilbert's own proposals concerning the analysis of collectivity concepts are also, I think, flawed and instructively so. The lesson to be learned is that not all phenomena we might call social are analyzable in a single way. Gilbert's central idea is that social phenomena are analyzable in terms of the concept of a plural subject of action, belief, or attitude.[61] The concept of a plural subject is analyzed in terms of the concept of a joint commitment.[62] For individuals to form a social group, each must see himself as part of the plural subject, of which the others see themselves as part, and each must, initially at least, be a *willing* part of this plural subject. One must be willing, says Gilbert, or *ready* "to put one's own will into a 'pool of wills' dedicated as one, to a single goal (or whatever it is that the pool is

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[60] Ibid., 52.
[61] See especially chapter 4 of *On Social Facts*. The idea is restated, with minor revisions, in most of the essays in Gilbert, *Sociality and Responsibility*.
[62] While the idea of a joint commitment may be found in *On Social Facts* (see especially chapter 4), it is explicitly a part of Gilbert's analyses in later works. See the introduction to Gilbert, *Living Together: Rationality, Sociality, and Obligation* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996) for some remarks on this transition. For additional

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dedicated to)."[63] A plural subject is the subject of a joint commitment to do something.[64] The concept of a joint commitment is not analyzable in terms of individual commitment, nor in any other way that makes reference only to individuals and their attributes. Gilbert's descriptions of how it comes into being and what its implications are do refer to the acts, broadly conceived, of individuals, but these descriptions do not describe what a joint commitment *is*. Roughly, a joint commitment is the commitment of a plurality of individuals. It comes into being when the individuals openly express their willingness to be jointly committed to something. Once the joint commitment is formed, the individuals

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discussion of the concept of a joint commitment, see restatements in any of the later essays.

[63] Gilbert, *On Social Facts*, 18. By 'willingly', Gilbert does not mean *freely*. In an essay on actual contract theory, Gilbert says that "for a joint commitment to be formed it is sufficient, roughly, for the parties to express their personal readiness to be jointly committed. Quite generally, a state of readiness can be created in coercive circumstances...Lisa may now be ready to dance with Joe as a result of threats he has made. She may not want to dance with him, but she is ready to do so." Gilbert, "Reconsidering the 'Actual Contract' Theory," in Gilbert, *Sociality and Responsibility*, 97-122: 105. To say that Lisa is ready, or willing, to dance with Joe seems to come to no more than that she genuinely chooses to do so, that she does so voluntarily (in Aristotle's sense). This element of Gilbert's view is *related* to what I will call the lack of robustness in the concept of individual readiness, but it is not the same. The readiness of an individual may lack robustness even when it is not coerced. Gilbert's discussion of coercion in this context becomes problematic for reasons concerning an aspect of her view that I won't much address, i.e., the idea that rights and obligations attach to joint commitments. Gilbert goes on to say of Lisa and Joe, "Mutual expressions of readiness may thus lead to the creation of a joint commitment. Obligations of joint commitment necessarily ensue...It may be that from a moral point of view a person who has been coerced into entering a joint commitment need not honor the obligations acquired through that commitment, in which case one might wonder why anyone would ever attempt to coerce another person into entering a joint commitment. One reason is that the coerced person's (accurate) sense of obligation through the joint commitment may be what drives her or his subsequent behavior." Ibid. I should think that if Lisa continues to dance, that is because she continues to feel threatened. Should Joe miraculously become innocuous, she would have no reason to continue dancing and significant reason to stop.

[64] As Gilbert says, "do" is here understood very broadly. A plural subject may be the subject of a joint action, a shared intention, a shared belief, collective remorse...

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involved have related rights and obligations. These rights and obligations remain in force as long as the joint commitment lasts, and it can be revoked only by a shared decision. No individual member can unilaterally pull out of a joint commitment. *Social action* is the action of a social group; it involves a plurality of individuals *acting together*, or sharing an action. A number of individuals act together if each indicates to the others willingness to be part of a plural subject for the sake of performing an action of the kind in question.

One problem with Gilbert's analysis of *social group* is that we would not intuitively call social groups many of those collections of persons that meet these conditions. Two people dancing together form a social group, according to this account, as do two people walking together in a wood. If you and I strike up a conversation on a bus, hold on to one another on an icy street, or shake hands in mutual acknowledgment, we form a social group. In these examples, individuals act together and their doing so may involve, as Gilbert says, a shared understanding that they form a plural subject for the purposes of performing those acts. It is not that there is anything wrong with calling the actions of Gilbertian groups 'social actions'. It is rather that there are at least two phenomena concerning, speaking loosely, the actions of a plurality of individuals. One is loosely related to what Gilbert calls 'social action'. We sometimes do things together in a way that might, in some sense, be thought of as our voluntarily putting our wills into a "pool of wills" for the sake of being part of a shared action, aimed at a shared, or generally accepted, goal. We agree, then, to be part of the plural subject, in an intuitive sense, of this action and of this goal. Since Gilbert calls the collection of individuals who join together in this way a 'social group', it is easy to overlook the fact that we normally

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distinguish this kind of plural-subject action from another. We typically distinguish the phenomenon of a plurality of individuals *acting together* or *sharing an action* from that of a social group's "acting". There is a significant difference between a plurality of individuals' joining forces to throw a party and a nation's aiming at statehood, between a couple dancing and an ethnic group committing atrocities. The difference is not just in the seriousness or triviality of the goals or acts in question. What is most perplexing about the idea that social groups *have* goals and act is precisely the fact that when they do, it is not necessarily the case that all group members participate. Gilbert addresses this issue in later work, not by acknowledging a significant difference between the two kinds of "group action," but by offering an explanation of how plural-subject theory applies to large as well as small groups. A look at how the extension is supposed to go will show instead, I think, that the theory doesn't work for any kind of plurality.

In discussions of collective guilt and collective responsibility, Gilbert proposes the following analysis of a group action.[65]

> *There is a group action* if and only if the members of a certain population are jointly committed to pursuing a certain goal as a body, and in light of this joint commitment relevant members (perhaps not all) successfully act so as to reach the goal in question.[66]

Gilbert raises and satisfactorily addresses what she sees as the potential problem peculiar to seeing this analysis as applying to large groups.[67] The real problem is more general,

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[65] "Collective Remorse" is chapter 7 and "The Idea of Collective Guilt" chapter 8 of Gilbert, *Sociality and Responsibility*. These issues lead naturally enough to questions of the peculiarities of the acts of large groups.

[66] "The Idea of Collective Guilt," 148. See "Collective Remorse," 131 for a comparable statement.

[67] This is the question of whether a large plurality of individuals can be jointly committed to something, insofar as the formation of a joint commitment typically involves the open

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but it may be useful to begin by considering an example of a large-group act that is raised by Gilbert. We might say, "The USSR invaded Afghanistan."[68] Clearly it would be false to say that every citizen of the USSR openly expressed readiness to be jointly committed as a body to invading Afghanistan. According to Gilbert, a joint commitment to A may be formed without the open expression by each of the members of readiness to do A. One or more members might be authorized to "set up shared intentions" for the group. There is a "ground-level" joint commitment, in such cases, which is a joint-commitment to authorize these few; and there are some number of derived joint commitments, which result from the exercise of that authority.[69]

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expression of mutual readiness to be jointly committed, under conditions of common knowledge. The question is whether there can be common knowledge among a group too large for individual members to know, or even know of, each other. Gilbert argues persuasively that if there can ever be joint commitments, there can be joint commitments of large groups. It is possible for the members of a large group to gather sufficient evidence of the open readiness of all other members. The real question is whether the concept of a joint commitment, in Gilbert's technical sense, is coherent to begin with.

[68] While Gilbert's examples range over formal and informal groups, her discussions are limited to the examples of formal groups. In *On Social Facts*, for instance, Gilbert mentions that "we say that Russia invaded Czechoslovakia, Britain devalued the pound, this tribe does not like strangers, this group craves freedom of the press, we are going to France this summer, and so on and on." (206) It's not altogether clear whether "this tribe" and "this group" are informal groups, but they might be. She goes on to discuss only Russia's invasion of Czechoslovakia. Her discussion in this early work is not as fully developed as later discussions, but it is a rougher version of the same idea. According to Gilbert, we say that Russia invaded Czechoslovakia even though many Russians had nothing to do with it because "whoever organized the invasion, and whoever took part in it, was the authorized representative of the group as a whole." Ibid. Those involved in the invasion are authorized representatives if "members of the group jointly accept that certain decisions of a certain few are to count as our decisions." Ibid. There is nothing we would very naturally call "acceptance" in the attitude of many Russians toward the particular leaders who organized the invasion, at least not as those whose decisions are to count as "our" decisions, whose creations are to count as "our" intentions and "our" actions. This is significantly different from the idea of the acceptance of legitimate authority.

[69] See "Collective Remorse," 132; "The Idea of Collective Guilt," 147.

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> ...members of G may be jointly committed to accepting a certain goal as a body without all knowing or even conceiving of the content of the commitment. This can happen if there is a "ground level" joint commitment allowing some person or body to make decisions, form plans, and so on, on behalf of the jointly committed persons. Thus an established leader and his or her henchmen may formulate and carry out a plan in the group's name and the members properly say of the group as a whole, "We did it."[70]

What is not at all clear is that the members of large groups ever authorize someone to "set up shared intentions," or, at least, whether this happens with any frequency.[71] They may, in a sense that is by no means straightforward, authorize someone to "make decisions, form plans, and so on," where these will be acknowledged as binding, but not, for all that, *our* decisions and plans in anything like the way decisions and plans accepted by each of us might, in some sense, be ours. Whatever relation it is that all Americans stand in to the authorizing of Bill Clinton's decisions is not a very robust relation. But this lackluster quality of joint commitments is common to the joint commitments of groups of all sizes.

Gilbert's technical sense of 'commitment' is much less robust than the sense that might come to our minds when we hear the term. I need not be *determined* to do A, or *set on* doing A if I am committed to doing A. I have a personal commitment to do A as long as I have *decided* to do A.

> Inclinations and enthusiasms do not yet involve commitments. If I have decided to do A, I am subject to a commitment to do A. In contrast, I can be inclined to do A but not yet subject to a commitment to do A.[72]

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[70] "Collective Remorse," 132.

[71] Many people, Catholic and non-Catholic alike, believe that what is peculiar about Catholics is that something like what Gilbert describes is supposed to be the status accorded the Pope by the rest of the church. The point is that nothing remotely like papal authority seems to be involved in the "authority" of group representatives in many cases in which we would want to say a group has acted.

[72] Gilbert, "What Is It for *Us* to Intend?" in *Sociality and Responsibility*, 14-36: 20. Originally published in *Contemporary Action Theory*, ed. G. Holmstrom-Hintikka And R. Tuomela (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1997).

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While not 'commitment' in any ordinary sense, personal commitment at least involves a decision. Is there really supposed to have been a *decision* by all members of a large group to be jointly committed to the authorization of decision-makers for the group? Is this what 'readiness' comes to? In many states, at least, the attitude of the citizens to the authorities in question seems to be more one of acknowledgment than authorization, and Gilbert nowhere likens individual readiness to be jointly committed to the individual decisions that result in personal commitments. We might wonder, at this point, how something so robust as a shared intention, belief, or action could be created by the presence of individual psychological states so pale as this acknowledgment, or as any more detailed description of readiness that might reasonably be supposed common enough to serve as the foundation of actual group acts. The paleness of the concept of a joint commitment is, however, deeper yet. I have a *personal commitment* to do A if and only if I am "the sole author of a commitment and [have] the authority unilaterally to rescind it."[73] In contrast, when a joint commitment is formed by you and me, *we* are its author and neither of us has the authority unilaterally to rescind it. A participant in a joint commitment cannot alone rescind that commitment, nor can he extricate himself from it. This aspect of the view makes for some rather counterintuitive implications.

Consider Gilbert's general account of a shared intention.

> Persons P1 and P2 have a shared intention to do A if and only if they are jointly committed to intending as a body to do A.[74]

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[73] Ibid., 21. Comparable statements may be found in almost any of the essays in this collection.
[74] Ibid., 22.

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To say that P1 and P2 are jointly committed to do A is not to say that they are each committed to do A, but notice that it is also not to say that they are each presently personally committed to be jointly committed to do A. For while I may, at some point, have expressed my readiness to be jointly committed with you to do A, I may since have changed my mind, but my change of mind cannot alone rescind the joint commitment. Presumably, if each of, say, five individuals, v through z, openly expresses readiness to be jointly committed to do A, all five remain participants in the joint commitment and so in the shared intention, even if w, x, y and z long ago became personally unwilling so to be joined. In such a situation, it is easy to imagine w, x, y and z getting together to talk things over and openly expressing their personal readiness to be jointly committed with each other to refraining from doing A. But then w, x, y and z would each share an intention to do A and an intention to refrain from doing A. What is not at all obvious is that an individual can be party to a shared intention with no relevant contemporaneous individual intention. Just as I cannot *commit* now to having some intention in the future (though I can predict that I will have it or hope and even *intend* to have it), if 'commit' is to mean that I simply *will* have it, just so I cannot embroil myself now in a future shared intention, whatever decisions I am prepared to make now.

A more robust concept of acceptance or readiness seems to be both required and ruled out by Gilbert's theory of collective moral responsibility. On the one hand, a more robust concept is required if we are to say that the group members are participants in the shared act. On the other, a more robust concept is ruled out by Gilbert's view that individuals are not necessarily "personally morally blameworthy" when A is a

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blameworthy act.[75] Gilbert clearly takes the readiness that leads to the ground-level commitment to be enough to justify us in seeing the individual as involved in the performance of the act, but not enough to justify us in seeing him as necessarily involved in a morally relevant way.

The problem with Gilbert's account of large groups and of their acts and psychological states is a problem with plural-subject theory in general. The central concept of a joint commitment is, I think, deeply misguided. But Gilbert's attempt to show that what is mainly argued for as an account of the acts of a plurality applies equally to large social groups is instructive. While Gilbert insists that some sort of *readiness* to be jointly committed to doing A is involved in the simple formation of a joint commitment to do A, whatever kind of acceptance is involved in 'readiness' is not terribly robust and it need not even be present when the shared act or state occurs. This seems implausible even as an account of the acts and states of a plurality. Alternative accounts, such as Bratman's, avoid this implausibility by requiring more robust, contemporaneous individual attitudes; but, for this very reason, these alternative accounts cannot plausibly be extended to cover what are intuitively actual instances of the acts and states of large groups. The shared act of a plurality is undoubtedly something other than the aggregate of related individual acts, but the act of a large social group is something else again.

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[75] Gilbert, "The Idea of Collective Guilt," 150-151.

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Chapter Three

Ethnic Identity Groups

Max Weber analyzed the concept of a social group in terms of the *possibility* that certain kinds of social action be performed. A *kind* of social action is an action oriented in a particular way to the behavior of a particular "other."[1] If there is an individual person for whom a kind of social action is possible, I say that a social action of that kind is *available* to him. Whenever there is a person, for whom a social action of a particular kind is available, a social action of that kind is a possible social action. I have suggested that Weber's account of social groups combines two claims: (1) the existence of a particular social group requires the possibility of certain kinds of social action, and (2) central among the possible action-types associated with a particular group are kinds of action that are available only to group-members. Analyzing a *kind of social group* would seem to involve specifying the types of social action that are possible in relation to groups of that kind and, in particular, the types that are available only to members. I wish to offer an analysis, in these terms, of the concept of an ethnic identity group. Roughly, only group members can align themselves with the group, in the technical sense I will describe. Social actions that depend on the agent's standing in this relation to the group are available only to group members.

I

Since Weber is sometimes said to hold a simpler subjectivist view of social groups than the one that I describe—and a simpler view of ethnic groups in particular—it might be useful first to distinguish Weber's view from a simple subjectivism. A simple

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subjectivist view of social groups holds that the group may be analyzed purely in terms of the subjective states of the members and, correspondingly, that group membership can be determined on the basis of whether a particular individual possesses the appropriate subjective state—a belief that he is a member, perhaps, or a feeling that he belongs with the others. Weber does discuss the subjective meanings of the actions of group members and defines 'ethnic group' as a group the existence of which is based on the shared belief of members that they belong together because of their shared ancestry. Weber's starting point, however, is the idea that a social group is a kind of "social relationship." A number of agents form a *social relationship* if, and only if, (1) the action of each is oriented to the actions of the others, and (2) this mutual orientation of action has a stable source. A *social group*, according to Weber, is "a certain kind of development of actual or possible social actions of individual persons." The stable source of the mutual orientation of action among group members is the *possibility* that certain kinds of social action will be performed. The various kinds of social group are categorized by Weber in terms of the kinds of subjective meaning supporting the mutual orientation of action among group members. The intentional content of the subjective meaning of the actions of members of *communal* social relationships is, in part, a feeling of the members that they "belong together."[2] Weber's examples include "a religious brotherhood, an erotic relationship, a relation of personal loyalty, a national community, the *espirit de corps* of a

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[1] See chapter 2, note 47.

[2] This is not the place for discussion of Weber's idea of the ideal type, but it should be noted that the groups he describes are ideal types. Typically, a particular actual social group will be based on both communal and associative factors.

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military unit" and the family.[3] The sources of *this feeling* vary and must be distinguished and individually described. An ethnic group is a communal social relationship based on the shared belief that the members belong together because of their shared ancestry. On the other hand, the intentional content of the subjective meaning of the actions of members of *associative* social relationships is, in part, a belief in the wisdom, from the standpoint of rational self-interest, of participating in a particular practice made available by membership in the group. Again, particular kinds of associative group must then be distinguished in terms of the kind of perceived wisdom involved. These supportive subjective meanings differentiate groups, but it is not essential that every member have, say, the feeling that he belongs with the others. *The general feeling is part of a description of the nature of the social group, but it does not define the group.* What is essential is that every member have available to him certain kinds of social action. Weber's analysis is not a simple subjectivist analysis because the possibilities for social action of certain kinds is what defines the group; the availability of particular kinds of social action for individuals is what separates members from non-members. Weber's analysis of the concept of a social group is general and provides a framework for the development of analyses of individual kinds of social group. The question to be asked is: what possibilities for social action correspond to a particular kind of social group?

I have suggested that an understanding of the nature of social groups may go hand in hand with an understanding of the behavior of individuals.[4] While we must make reference to individuals in an analysis of social groups, we may not always be able to

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[3] Weber is careful to acknowledge that coercion, conflict, and competition are common within communal social relationships.

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describe the patterns of action among individuals essential to this analysis without making reference to their ideas about social groups. This is how Weber understands the relation of individuals and social groups.

> These concepts of collective entities which are found both in common sense and in juristic and other technical forms of thought, have a meaning in the minds of individual persons, *partly as of something actually existing, partly as something with normative authority*...Actors *thus* in part orient their action to them, and in this role such ideas have a powerful, often a decisive, causal influence on the course of action of real individuals [my emphases].[5]

I wish to explore the idea that the possibility of certain kinds of "mutually-oriented" actions among individuals, in terms of which an ethnic identity group may be analyzed, is, more precisely, a possibility of *group*-oriented actions—of actions the orientation of which is based on shared ideas about the group and about the individual's standing within it. It will therefore be necessary to explain the way such ideas may function in the practical thinking of group members if we are to develop an account of identity groups, but explaining this will also give us the beginnings of an account of the individuals who make up the group. In the next chapter, we shall see that an identity group is a group, membership in which is typically partly constitutive of an individual's identity and constitutive of personal identity in a specific way. In this chapter, I hope to show that identity groups can be analyzed in terms of the availability to group-members of standing in a particular relation to the group, or to what might be called the *character of the group*. This is the relation of moral alignment.

If we are to use Weber's method for analyzing ethnic identity groups, the question to be asked is, what is the basis of the likelihood that one individual will perform social

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[4] See chapter 2, section 1.

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actions oriented to the behavior of certain others? What, more specifically, are the kinds of social action available only to members? I suggest that group-members stand in a certain relation to an idea of the group, where that idea of the group is, loosely speaking, that of a group *agent*. The social actions of individual members are predictably oriented to the actions of *other group members*, not *as individuals*, but *as a group*, and the group is conceived of as a collective agent. The nature of this shared relation must be carefully spelled out. Essentially, what characterizes group members is the availability for them of *aligning* themselves, in a sense to be distinguished, with the group.

There is, famously, little agreement on how 'ethnic group' is to be defined. The term is sometimes used to refer to a plurality of individuals who, in fact, share a common ancestry. Understood in this way, ethnic groups are not social groups at all—certainly not given Weber's definition of 'social group', but also not according to most theoretical approaches to social phenomena. There is simply nothing *social* about unconsidered, and perhaps unrecognized, biological descent. Further, if we could list the "groups" picked out by this definition, the result would be nothing like the list we might draw up by attending to the beliefs, activities, and emotional responses of individuals. The groups we see when we witness ethnic conflict, genocide, or mass population transfers, or hear from in disputes over land or language are groups that have been shaped by social and political, not natural, history. 'Ethnic group' is, by some, used to refer to any group, with which an individual might identify, but this leaves us without a name for the particular kind of identity group that is based on an idea of common ancestry.[6] An *ethnic identity group* is

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[5] Weber, *Theory*, 102.
[6] It also ignores the fact that 'ethnic' derives from *ethnos*, Greek for a people or nation.

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a social group, and it is an identity group of a particular kind. An analysis of this concept can be built up, I believe, from Weber's analysis of *ethnic group*, which is itself not yet an analysis of *ethnic identity group*. Weber's "ethnic groups" (call these W-ethnic groups) are not identity groups. They are not groups, membership in which is partly constitutive of individual identity, because individuals do not necessarily consider the group in a particular, practically relevant way. W-ethnic groups are not the groups that motivate questions about group rights and the ethical significance of group-membership in attributions of moral responsibility. W-ethnic groups that are also identity groups Weber calls "nations."[7]

Both W-ethnic groups and Weberian nations (call these W-nations) are, according to Weber, communal social relationships. The subjective meanings of the social actions of individual group members involve, for both, a feeling that group members belong together. W-ethnic groups and W-nations are not, of course, unrelated. According to Weber, all W-nations are W-ethnic groups; not all W-ethnic groups are W-nations. What makes a W-ethnic group a W-nation has to do with the way in which individuals believe themselves to belong together.

Weber's discussion is difficult but useful. In it, W-ethnic groups are defined first.

> We shall call 'ethnic groups' those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization and migration; this belief must be important for the propagation of group formation; conversely, it does not matter whether or not an objective blood relation exists.[8]

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[7] See chapter 1, note 2.
[8] Weber, *Economy and Society*, 389.

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Weber goes on to say that "ethnic membership," or membership in a W-ethnic group, "does not constitute a group; it only facilitates group formation in the political sphere."[9] This is consistent with the condition that the belief in common descent be "important for the propagation of group *formation* [my emphasis]," not simply, as we might expect, for an individual's standing as group member. It is not that an individual must have this belief in order to count as a member; it is that the "group" must have this belief if a *social group* is to form on the basis of it. Finally, Weber ends his discussion by suggesting that the concept of a W-ethnic group "dissolves if we define our terms exactly."[10]

> All in all, the notion of 'ethnically' determined social action subsumes phenomena that a rigorous sociological analysis—as we do not attempt it here—would have to distinguish carefully: the actual subjective effect of those customs conditioned by heredity and those determined by tradition; the differential impact of the varying content of custom; the influence of common language, religion and political action, past and present, upon the formation of customs; the extent to which such factors create attraction and repulsion, and especially the belief in affinity or disaffinity of blood; the consequences of this belief for social action in general, and specifically for action on the basis of shared custom or blood relationships, etc.—all of this would have to be studied in detail. It is certain that in the process the collective term 'ethnic' would be abandoned, for it is unsuitable for a really rigorous analysis.[11]

These are puzzling remarks.

In the last chapter, I argued that Weber's claims to the effect that certain concepts are eliminable within a further-developed *verstehen* sociology must be very clearly understood as claims about an advanced stage of this particular discipline, the role of which is to explain social phenomena in terms of the subjective meanings of the social actions of individuals. Most philosophical interest in ethnic groups is not the interest of a

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[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid., 395.
[11] Ibid.

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Weberian sociologist. Accepting Weber's basic definitions does not require accepting his research project. The questions that we bring to his discussion determine how far we can follow him in it and at what step in his analysis a concept of importance for our own purposes has been reached. The particular kind of "'ethnically' determined social action" that Weber associates with a nation is just such a concept for the questions raised here. The concept expressed by 'nation' in Weber's writings and by 'ethnic identity group' here is the concept of a *kind* of W-ethnic group with important ties to our ideas about the nature of personal agency and about ourselves as moral subjects. These remarks of Weber's on the status of the concept of *W-ethnic groups* are also, however, clues to the distinction he makes between W-ethnic groups and W-nations.

Why, having just defined W-ethnic groups, does Weber say that ethnic membership does not constitute a group? If we look at the definition of 'ethnic group' in light of Weber's definition of 'social group', we see that if an ethnic group is a social group, then the basis of the likelihood of other-member-oriented social action for members is the possibility of certain kinds of social action arising from this subjective belief in their common ancestry. What Weber is denying is that this subjective belief alone makes possible the performance of distinctive other-member-oriented social actions. Weber does not say that W-ethnic groups may not *also* be social groups, in his sense. He says that "ethnic membership does not *constitute* a group; it only *facilitates* group formation [my emphases]." The important question at this point is, when is a W-ethnic group also a W-nation? How does W-ethnic membership ever lead to the formation of a social group?

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We might begin by supposing that the details of any particular shared belief in common descent must also be part of the subjective meaning of other-member-oriented social action. What we are looking for, however, is a more revealing *definition* of the ethnic group as social group—an analysis at a different level of generality. The question to be answered is, how do beliefs about a group, the content of which is specific to that group, figure into the subjective meanings of social actions that do contribute to the constitution of a social group? I suggest that they enter the subjective meanings of social actions in the form of an idea of agency—as the idea of a particular historical collective entity with beliefs, goals, and values; with a history of achievements and disappointments, some of which are explained, in part, by character strengths and weaknesses, constituting a history of moral victories and humiliations; an entity that is "subject" of the "social" experiences of being recognized by "others," or ignored; possessing moral emotions like gratitude, resentment, trust, and distrust. Consider again Weber's discussion of the W-nation.

> [T]he idea of the "nation" is apt to include the notions of common descent and of an essential, though frequently indefinite, homogeneity. The "nation" has these notions in common with the sentiment of solidarity of ethnic communities, which is also nourished from various sources, as we have seen before [ch. V:4]. *But the sentiment of ethnic solidarity does not by itself make a "nation"* [my emphasis]. Undoubtedly, even the White Russians in the face of the Great Russians have always had a sentiment of ethnic solidarity, yet even at the present time they would hardly claim to qualify as a separate "nation." The Poles of Upper Silesia, until recently, had hardly any feeling of solidarity with the "Polish nation." They felt themselves to be a separate ethnic group in the face of the Germans, but for the rest they were Prussian subjects and nothing else.[12]

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[12] Weber, *Economy and Society*, Vol. 2, p. 923. Of course, we needn't worry about the accuracy of Weber's descriptions of the psychological states of the groups that he uses as examples in his discussion. What matters is what characteristics of groups Weber takes to be criterial for W-nationhood.

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In these examples, a plurality of individuals share a belief in their common ancestry—a belief that comes to the fore when they are confronted with a group of which they are not members. *Acknowledging* a shared descent with, presumably, all other Poles, wherever they might be, the Poles of Upper Selesia "had hardly any feeling of solidarity with the 'Polish nation.'" Their ethnic identity was not defined in terms of a relation to the collective agency of the Polish nation.[13] How does *identifying with a W-nation* differ from sharing the feeling that the members belong together on the basis of a shared belief in common descent? This is, I believe, the same question as that concerning the difference, in my terms, between a W-ethnic group and an ethnic identity group. The difference is between a group, each member of which stands in a certain relation to the other members as individuals—that of a feeling that he belongs with them—and a group based on a relation of each individual to *the group as a whole*, by way of an idea of the group as an agent. The question is, how does the individual relate to this idea of a

[13] Walker Connor also denies that Weber implies a politically-situated or aspiring condition on nationhood. See his *Ethnonationalism: The Quest for Understanding* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994). My discussion diverges from his in significant ways. According to Connor, Weber's "illustrations are of peoples not yet cognizant of belonging to a larger ethnic element [102]." This doesn't seem to apply at all to the case of the White Russians; Weber's point is that while identifying ethnically as *White Russians*, they do not identify in a way that would make it accurate to say that they form a *White Russian nation*. On the other hand, the Poles of Upper Silesia identify ethnically as *Poles*, not as "Poles of Upper Silesia," but they do not identify with the *Polish nation*. What is missing in both cases is a certain kind of relation between individual and group. Connor is, I suspect, reading in an objectivist view of the "larger ethnic element" and seeing the problem as one in which *real* group membership is not acknowledged. "An ethnic group may be readily discerned by an anthropologist or other outside observer, but until the members are themselves aware of the group's uniqueness, it is merely an ethnic group and not a nation. While an ethnic group *may*, therefore, be other defined, the nation *must* be self-defined" (102-3). This is not consistent with Weber's definition of 'ethnic group'. By definition, the *members* of a W-ethnic group share a subjective belief in their common descent.

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collective agent? How, more precisely, does membership in a group open up possibilities for kinds of individual action?

The kinds of action available exclusively to group-members must be distinguished in terms of their orientation. Group members may perform actions that are oriented to the group *in a particular way*; non-group members are not free to orient their actions to the group *in this way*. The question concerns the availability to group-members of forms of practical thinking that are not available to outsiders. How is group-membership reflected in the deliberation of group-members? Non-group members can certainly act with the group in mind. Those who despise the group may do so much of the time. But the practical thinking of group-members may engage the group in a special way.

I wish to suggest that group members may stand in a specific moral relationship with the group that I call *moral alignment*. Roughly, *an individual aligns herself with the group to the extent that she sees the group as an extension of her own agency*. Quite a bit more must be said before this definition can be made precise. It should become clear why no one outside of the group can align herself with the group. Appreciation of the group, sympathy with it, even love for it are available stances for the non-member to take toward the group; but the non-member cannot (reasonably) see the group as an extension of her own agency. Moral alignment is the basis of the possibility of certain kinds of social action.

II

Beginning with Aristotle, many philosophers have found it useful when considering the nature of what we might, following Weber, call communal social relationships, to begin with what may be the simplest of these—that of two people

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engaged in an intimate, affectionate friendship. Aristotle acknowledges the great variety of "friendly" relationships but devotes most of his attention to one kind of friendship between two people. In fact, he spends much time describing an *ideal* of such a relationship. While ideal, the completeness or perfection of the relationship Aristotle describes helps to convey an important aspect of—undoubtedly less perfect—real relationships. For part of the point of looking closely at "complete" personal friendships is to discover what is common to the variety of social relationships as they really are. One central result of Aristotle's discussion is the idea that out of communal social relationships of all kinds come articulations of value.[14] I will argue that such articulations of value are the bridge between individual group members and the groups to which they belong. I wish to look closely at this aspect of Aristotle's discussion of friendship with an eye to discovering the possibilities for practical thinking that are opened up by membership in communal social relationships. The discovery lies in Aristotle's idealized picture of two agents who always make the same choices, of two agents in concord, of two for each of whom the other is an "other self."

Aristotle's conception of a friend as an "other self" has received a great deal of attention because of its role in his argument for the value of friendship to the self-sufficient man. The argument for the claim that the friend is an "other self," however, depends at every point on a prior conception of friendship's involving *concord* or *unanimity*. Individuals are in concord when they share beliefs on practical matters, when they arrive consistently at the same choices, when they each act out of these choices (or are equally prepared to do so), and when all of this agreement is *nonaccidental*.

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[14] This is Charles Taylor's phrase.

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> Unanimity also seems to be a friendly relation. For this reason it is not identity of opinion; for that might occur even with people who do not know each other; nor do we say that people who have the same views on any and every subject are unanimous, e.g. those who agree about the heavenly bodies (for unanimity about these is not a friendly relation), but we do say that a city is unanimous when men have the same opinion about what is to their interest, and choose the same actions, and do what they have resolved in common. It is about things to be done, therefore, that people are said to be unanimous, and, among these, about matters of consequence and in which it is possible for both or all parties to get what they want; e.g. a city is unanimous when all its citizens think that the offices in it should be elective, or that they should form an alliance with Sparta, or that Pittacus should be their ruler—at a time when he himself was also willing to rule.[15]

Concord concerns practical questions of some importance "where both or all can get what they want." We see from Aristotle's examples that getting what each wants is not a matter of dividing up goods in an agreeable way or sharing benefits of any kind. It is a matter of fulfilling the wishes of each. Most important is Aristotle's claim that concord is more than shared belief, "since this might happen among people who do not know each other." For it is not an unaccountable feature of the definition of 'concord' that those in concord must know each other. It is *through knowing each other* that the wishes and choices of friends are formed. It is because they "live together" that friends are in concord. We live together, according to Aristotle, when we "share conversation and thought," and when we do so over time. The agreement of concord is arrived at through this shared conversation and thought. It is not by coincidence that friends might share all of their wishes and choices; it is because they are friends that they may do so. Of course, not just any two people can reach even a substantial amount of agreement on practical matters by talking and thinking together, much less the ideal of concord Aristotle describes. They may be so dissimilar "in virtue" to begin with that no agreement could

[15] NE ix 6 1167a 22-32.

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be reached between them. In most such cases, the two will see little point in continuing to share their lives. Reaching concord would seem to presuppose some likeness to begin with, so that the sharing of thought and action might begin in earnest. But what talking, thinking, and acting together aim at is a shared articulation of how we ought to live.[16] By aiming at what is best and considering what is best *together*, the two form a relationship in which the agency of each develops. Aristotle tells us that, in a complete friendship, "each moulds the other in what they approve of." It would be more precise, I am suggesting, to say that the two mold the character of the friendship, and that is something different from what the characters of each friend had been. In the less-than-ideal case—in, that is, the typical case—the character of the friendship is something other than what the character of each friend *is*.[17]

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[16] While not part of his "definition" of 'living together', it is clear from Aristotle's discussion of friendship as a whole (and from the *Nicomachean Ethics* as a whole) that we are to include acting in the things friends do together.

[17] This reading of Aristotle's discussion of friendship is not standard. Most commentators seem to see what agreement exists between friends as something the two discover and as that which leads to the friendship. In a very influential paper, John M. Cooper writes that complete friendships "exist when two persons, having spent enough time together to know one another's character and to trust one another, come to love one another because of their good human qualities...They enjoy one another's company and are benefited by it and in consequence spend their time together or even live with one another...[S]uch a friendship, once formed, will tend to be continuous and permanent, since it is grounded in knowledge of and love for one another's good qualities of character, and such traits, once formed, tend to be permanent." [Cooper, "Aristotle on Friendship," in Amelie Oksenberg Rorty, ed., *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1980), 308-9.] This would seem to make any relationship approaching Aristotle's ideal a remarkable coincidence and not in the least an achievement. It would also make unfathomable the friendship that exists among the residents of cities or among members of any other large group. Cooper begins this essay with an argument for the claim that Aristotle would acknowledge less ideal friendships as character friendships, but takes the central ideal element to be the requirement that friends be "perfectly good." The role of concord is given much less weight. Aristotle does use this phrase to describe friends, along with that of being

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Aristotle also describes friendship in terms more suitable for larger groups—in terms of community.

> [I]n every community there seem to be some sort of justice, and some type of friendship also. At any rate, fellow-voyagers and fellow-soldiers are called friends, and so are members of other communities. And the extent of their community is the extent of their friendship.[18]

What is common to these different social relationships is that each involves a shared articulation of the good. In a complete friendship, two individuals share their visions of the good completely—not by chance but because they develop their understandings and

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"similar in virtue." Cooper argues that friends might be friends without being perfectly good. The examples given, however, are examples not only of friendships containing less than perfect virtue, but also of friendships in which one friend has moral failings that the other is without. I take this to be the more significant way in which a friendship might fail to be ideal. Cooper's way of thinking about what is characteristic of friendship leads to less plausible interpretations of Aristotle's arguments for the value of friendship. As Cooper says, Aristotle offers two arguments for the value of friendship for the self-sufficient man; there is the "other-self" argument and the argument concerning how active a person alone can be compared with the level of activity available to him in the company of a friend. According to Cooper, the first concerns the idea that in order to know whether I live a good life, I need to evaluate the life of a friend, who lives as I do. The second concerns the greater and more constant pleasure involved in engaging in shared activities over those one might perform alone, which is based on the reassurance one secures from the other of the worth of the activities in question. "[I]n a certain way [both arguments] emphasize human vulnerability and weakness. If human nature were differently constituted, we might very well be immune to the uncertainties and doubts about ourselves which, according to Aristotle, make friendship such an important thing for a human being. As it is, we cannot, if left each to his own devices, reach a secure estimate of our own moral character; nor by ourselves can we find our lives continuously interesting and enjoyable, because the sense of the value of the activities that make them up is not within the individual's power to bestow. The sense of one's own worth is, for human beings, a group accomplishment." (331) It is not, however, that one cannot know *that* he lives well without being able to witness the like living of a friend; it is that he cannot know *how* he lives well, or how his life differs from the lives of others, distinguishing him as a practical agent. Activity, I should think, is more continuous when shared not because one agent is in need of continuous reassurance of the value of what he does, but because he becomes engaged in the efforts of others as if they were his own. In this way, the reach of "his" actions is much broader, the variety of situations in which "he" finds himself greater, the demands on his deliberative agility correspondingly so.

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their aims together. In larger communities, *partial* visions of the good are shared, but we can assume that here too value-articulations are shared because group-members "live together." "Friendship involves community," Aristotle tells us. "But while brothers and companions have everything in common, what people have in common in other types of community is limited."[19] Still, what they *do* have in common they have through shared living, and what they have in common is a particular, group-specific articulation of value.

While it may be easier to recognize that two people might be at least significantly in concord than to see that the members of a larger community might be, it is no more obvious that there might result from a personal friendship an articulation of value distinct from that committed to and expressed by each of the two individual friends.[20] To the

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[18] NE viii 9 27-30.
[19] NE viii 9 32-35.
[20]Some writers on friendship have described a recognition of this shared agency as it is experienced by one friend upon the death of the other. It is in an essay written after the death of his own friend that Montaigne offers the following comments.

> When Laelius, in the presence of the Roman consuls—who, after condemning Tiberius Gracchus, prosecuted all those who had been in his confidence—came to ask Caius Blossius, who was Gracchus' best friend, how much he would have been willing to do for him, he answered: "Everything." "What, everything?" pursued Laelius. "And what if he had commanded you to set fire to our temples?" "He would never have commanded me to do that," replied Blossius. "But what if he had?" Laelius insisted. "I would have obeyed," he replied. If he was such a perfect friend to Gracchus as the histories say, he did not need to offend the consuls by this last bold confession, and he should not have abandoned the assurance he had of Gracchus' will. But nevertheless, those who charge that this answer is seditious do not fully understand the mystery, and fail to assume first what is true, that *he had Gracchus' will up his sleeve*, both by power over him and by knowledge of him. They were friends more than citizens, friends more than friends or enemies of their country or friends of ambition and disturbance. Having committed themselves absolutely to each other, *they held absolutely the reins of each other's inclinations*...[Montaigne, "Of Friendship," in *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, trans. Donald M. Frame (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1958), 135-44: 139-40; my emphases].

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extent that there is concord between them, the character of the friendship will be the same as the characters of the two. Where there is no agreement, we see only the differences to be expected between individuals. It might help to consider a mundane example. Suppose two friends share an interest in racing sailboats. They sail together, exercise together, choose and care for a boat together, share their ideas about racing, develop plans and aims together. Only one will race their boat in each race. If they are in concord on matters relating to their sport, it may not matter—barring significant differences of skill or physical strength—who actually races. *Their* choices are put to the test either way, not only with respect to *their* preparation, but also *their* manner of sailing—of responding to the different situations in which the racer might find himself. Should he do other than what *they* would do, he would have departed from the "character" of the friendship. Again, someone might experience a friend as sharing an articulation of value when that friend has an opportunity to promote a cause of *theirs* in a way that is not at the moment available to her. *Our* voice, we might think, is heard if yours is.

Members of larger communities may have a similar experience. According to Aristotle, concord is less complete in such communities; it is limited to some areas of practical thought. But the central idea is the same. What is clearer in the group-case is that the "character" of the social relationship is distinct. Because we cannot confuse the articulation of value associated with a large group with the articulations of value expressed by the individual members, we form more clearly an idea of the group as moral

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See also Genevieve Lloyd, "Individuals, Responsibility, and the Philosophical Imagination," in Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar, eds., *Relational Autonomy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 112-123 for a consideration of this experience of the shared character of friends and its implications for moral responsibility.

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agent—as the kind of entity that can deliberate and form a vision of how to live. Most of the questions raised within moral and political philosophy about identity groups can be answered only after we have come to understand how individual group members are related to this idea of the group.

III

I suggest that individual group members might take a particular ethically-significant stance to the group; the individual might align herself with the group. What distinguishes group members from nonmembers is the availability of doing so. It is not only that she has access to the language of value-articulation used by this group; outsiders *might* get access to that.[21] It is that the member is socially placed so as to have access to the understanding that certain others may act for her and she for them. The nonmember cannot see the group as an extension of her agency any more than the new acquaintance can see the newly met individual, however much admired, as an extension of her own agency. To be clear, it is not that a group member must or even ought to see the group to which she belongs as extending her own agency; it is simply that she may.

To the extent that an individual aligns herself with a group, she sees the acts and emotional responses of the group as her will being done on a larger stage than that on which she acts alone; the group, like an "other self," may function as an extension of an individual's agency.[22] As the group's goals are met, so are the goals of the individual

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[21] But see Chapter Four on the way in which factors like language and cultural attitudes are identity-constituting and some discussion of the ethical significance of this aspect of the social constitution of the self.

[22] Real individuals will align themselves to a greater or lesser degree with the group. I will often speak of 'aligning oneself with the group' and mean *aligning oneself to a significant extent*, leaving this idea somewhat vague and intuitive.

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who aligns herself with the group; when its values are respected, so, too, are hers. I suggest that when individuals think practically, they often invoke ideas of social groups, understood as collective agents. The collective agent is just an idea, but individuals often orient their actions to this idea. It is sometimes even part of the aim of individuals to have this shared idea altered in some way. They may wish to alter its fate or they may wish to get it to change its ways. Individuals may want the group to perform certain actions, resist others, perhaps become less stubborn or more patient. Members may see the group as extending their own individual agency by seeing their own values mirrored in it and in such a way that their acts and psychological states contribute to those of the group. For while an outsider may also have ambitions for the group, he can only alter the course of this collective agent by persuading or manipulating group members to act, think, or feel differently. An individual group member who does not align herself with the group may yet have an interest in what the group does, since acting through this group will be, at best, one of her few options for participating in social life on a large scale. More importantly, the acts and emotional states of the group are themselves formed and shaped by members who, to some significant extent, align themselves with the group.

Since it is only an idea, the collective agent can not, properly speaking, act; yet, we routinely speak of the acts as well as the beliefs, hopes, fears, trust, and distrust of ethnic groups. The idea of a group act or psychological state is built on an understanding that group members may align themselves with the group and act out of this view of themselves. A group member may *react emotionally* to some event in a way that she understands to be *reacting as a member of G*. When the African American community was outraged at the killing of Emmett Till or of Amadou Diallo, it was not simply that

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each individual member was morally outraged at a grotesque injustice; most were outraged *as members* of a group that had routinely been treated unjustly. Similarly, a group member may *act* out of an interpretation of the history, goals, and values of the group—out of a perception of its needs and rightful claims. Palestinian youth who, during the Intifada, threw rocks at Israeli soldiers acted *as Palestinians*. Some cases are more complex. The ideology of Rwanda's "Hutu Power" was that Hutu should rule Rwanda—the rationale for Hutu violence that it was necessary for the secure establishment of Hutu leadership. The leaders of Hutu Power claimed to align themselves with the group and to be acting for its sake. Many individual Hutu who might have rejected mass violence as a group response to this perceived threat were coerced into participating. We say, all the same, that the Rwandan Hutu attempted to commit genocide against the Rwandan Tutsi, because the *little-challenged* interpretation of Hutu violence appealed to the history, values, goals, and needs of the group. As far as we know, there was no significant Hutu resistance proposing an alternative self-understanding and plan of action.[23] Individual Hutu who did challenge the choice of violence thereby altered somewhat the nature of the group act. This kind of internal conflict and even the differences in motive behind the killings of individual killers (self-defense versus ideology) make it very difficult to say *precisely* what a group has "done." There is also the potential for error in that it is sometimes hard to say whether someone acts out of her alignment with a group at all or acts for some other reason.

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[23] Should we discover that there had been a reasonably strong resistance among Hutu, we would, I think, no longer make this claim.

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An ethnic identity group is said to have performed a particular act when "our" idea of the history of the group agent has assimilated that act. Of course, there may be—there almost always is—disagreement over which act-description fits best. There is typically disagreement about the character and history of an ethnic identity group. The important point is that the appropriateness of any particular act-description will depend in part on the subjective meanings of the social acts of individual group members and in part on conventions of social narrative—conventions governing the translation of talk about the actions and psychological states of individuals into talk about the actions and psychological states of social groups. Insofar as it depends on the subjective meanings of the actions of members, the act of a group depends on those actions of group members that arise from their moral alignment with the group. When an individual acts or responds emotionally as a member of an identity group, she contributes to the social construction of a group act. Since it is only group members who can align themselves with the group, only they can contribute directly to the construction of a group act. Nonmembers may influence group members, of course, and even influence the way we translate their acts into the language of group agency, but nonmembers can not act *as members*.[24]

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[24] There is more than one way in which an individual might influence how the acts and attitudes of group members get translated into the language of group agency. One is through the familiar tactics of manipulative use of language, selective attention to fact, or unjustified weighing of factors. If we believe that G performed α as a result of the manipulative efforts of a powerful individual or group, then we might well have a false belief about G. Another way, however, is through public reconsideration of our conventions of social narrative. As an activity, the latter is truth-seeking and would aim at general claims about group acts. Essential to this account of group acts is the idea that we cannot analyze the acts of social groups in terms of the social actions of individuals *alone*; if the group agent is an *idea*, then a complete theory of group acts must include an

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The availability of moral alignment and of acting as a member of a group support the probability that group members will perform actions oriented to the group. *An ethnic identity group is a group of individuals, each of whom may align himself with an idea of the group—where that idea is, more precisely, the idea of a particular collective agent, whose collectivity rests on the shared ancestry of the individuals—and each of whom may, therefore, act and respond emotionally as a member of the group.* I wish to argue that the availability of moral alignment is a central feature of personal as well as of group identity. Each group member is partly constituted by the group to which he belongs, because "belonging" is a matter of the availability of significant moral relationships with the group—relationships that are not available to outsiders. Individual group members would not be who they are were they not members of the group. Membership in such a group is a matter not of "possession" but of identity. It is a question not of *what I have*, but of *who I am*. A word of caution may be in order. For the picture I hope to develop of the socially-constituted self differs significantly from the picture offered by those moral and political philosophers most influential in the development of these ideas. To say that identity-group membership is a matter of who I am rather than of what I have means, I suggest, that it is not essentially a matter of the beliefs I have nor of the values I have—not a question of the commitments, rights, or duties that may be mine and may even be mine in part because I am a member of a certain group. Any of these I may lose without becoming "someone else." I may part ways with a group to which I belong in ever so many ways, while remaining partially constituted by my membership in it,

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account of social narrative. One important topic much in need of study is the nature of these conventions of social narrative.

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because "who I am" as moral subject is a matter not of *how I do* but *how I might* think practically.

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Chapter Four

Who We Are

I have argued that ethnic identity groups are analyzable in terms of the exclusive availability of significant kinds of group-oriented actions to group members. Only group members can align themselves with the group, or see the group's agency as an extension of their own; actions expressive of this commitment or of a related aspiration are available only to them. Because only group members can reasonably see the group's agency as an extension of their own, only group members can act as members of the group. I would like now to consider this idea of group membership in relation to the concept of the moral subject. I wish to defend what I take to be Aristotle's general conception of the moral subject and build on it. The Aristotelian moral subject is an agent with a capacity for deliberation. Taken together, these conceptions of the moral subject and group membership require that we see the moral subject as essentially relational. When societies are structured in terms of ethnicity, membership in an ethnic identity group is essential to personal moral agency; it is part of who the individual member is *as a moral subject*. I say *when societies are structured in terms of ethnicity*, because the idea is not that being a moral agent *requires* membership in an ethnic identity group. I will not address directly the question of whether it is "natural" for human beings to form groups of this kind or whether it is a good thing that they do so.[1] The idea is that

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[1] There is, of course, a vast literature on the question of whether identification in terms of ethnicity is the result of a "primordial" impulse in human nature or is instead the (inefficient) result of the efforts of individuals each to act in his own best interest. I suspect it is neither, and the analysis I offer of such groups suggests an alternative explanation; but this question must, in any case, be distinguished from questions about the ethical significance of group-membership. I am not here asking whether there ought

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given the presence of ethnic identity groups, group-membership must be seen as part of "who we are"—at least in one sense of this challenging phrase. I shall call this aspect of the relational moral subject the *agency-extending aspect.* There is a second relational aspect of the moral subject that, while connected, should, I believe, be kept distinct. Membership in an ethnic identity group may coincide with membership in a society, but it need not.[2] I will suggest that we are partly constituted by the societies to which we belong, because they provide the context for our deliberation. I call this aspect of the

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to be ethnic identity groups, or whether we could get along without them; I am asking what the ethical implications might be of the fact that they are part of our social life. For a philosopher's defense of the rational-choice explanation of ethnic-group behavior, and of ethnic conflict in particular, see Russell Hardin's *One for All: The Logic of Group Conflict* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995). One problem with rational-choice explanations of group behavior is that they require that we ignore the ideas that individual group-members themselves have about why they do what they do—at least, whenever they would not explain their actions in terms of self-interest. It seems to me as much a mistake to ignore the fact that individual group members often act out of a sense of what has value as it is to ignore the fact that they often act out of personal need, fear, or ambition. The problem with primordialist views is that they are unable to account for the ease with which many individuals live without ethnic attachment or for the significant variation in the strength of ethnic ties among individuals and for particular individuals over time. The explanation of the presence of ethnic identity groups that goes most naturally with the analysis I have offered of such groups is that articulations of value are often developed within groups that see themselves as sharing an ancestry. We often "live with," in Aristotle's sense, the same individuals with whom we share an ancestry, but share a world with many we know less well. In many parts of the world, this is, for many, no longer true; and it may be that, as geography and ethnicity become even less joined, ethnic identity groups will no longer play the role they do for so many. We must remember, however, that we are now in the middle of an ethnically-interpreted history. Many individuals would see discarding ideas of ethnicity now as requiring that we leave unresolved injustices that have already been committed. What a view of ethnic conflict like Hardin's leaves out is precisely the fact that our history already contains the ethically significant actions of ethnic groups, as well as their successes and sufferings.

[2] See chapter 1 for discussion of this distinction between a society and an ethnic identity group.

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moral subject the *contextual aspect*. The implications of these claims for related issues in moral and political philosophy are, I think, not obvious and must be carefully drawn.[3]

It is common for contemporary discussions of the moral subject to appeal to our intuitions about *who we are* as a way of justifying the claim that the individual moral subject is essentially relational—that it is constituted, in part, by its relations with other moral subjects, with social groups, or with the society in which it develops. In this way, it is suggested, room is made for the idea of a collective moral subject—bearer of collective moral responsibility and of group rights (or duties). I wish to propose an alternative interpretation of the relational nature of the moral subject, but we cannot begin to compare these alternatives without a clear sense of the issue of the nature of the moral subject. I think that our intuitions about "who we are" are imperfect guides to understanding, because the concept of a *moral subject* is significantly different from that of a *self-conception*. The two most influential arguments for a relational view of the moral subject—Michael Sandel's and Charles Taylor's—appeal, if in different ways, to ideas about "who we are" that are really ideas about *our ideas about ourselves*. But intuitions about self-conceptions cannot alone lead to an adequate theory of the moral subject.

An analysis of the concept of the moral subject is an answer to a particular question about moral agency. When we talk about moral responsibility, about moral rights and duties, or about moral character and practical wisdom, we are talking about attributes of moral agents. An account of the moral subject is an account of the subject of these attributes. To consider the concept of the moral subject is, in a sense, to think about

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[3] In chapter 5, I begin to draw the implications of this claim.

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who we are, but it is to do so at a level of abstraction that is far from our ordinary thinking about ourselves; it is to think about who we are as part of an effort to understand not which attributes in fact belong to some one of us, but how it is that any moral attributes might apply to any of us. It may be objected that what I am describing as essential to the concept of the moral subject is really only part of one particular conception of the moral subject—namely, the Kantian conception—but I think not. Kant is responsible not only for one particular formulation of what the moral subject is like—the moral subject as autonomous agent—but also for an explicit formulation of the concept of the moral subject itself. The moral subject is the subject of moral properties. There are, of course, other "self" concepts—the concepts of personal character, of a self-conception, or of a social personality; these concepts are related to that of the moral subject, no doubt, but they are distinct from it.[4] As the concept of the subject of moral attributes, the concept of the moral subject must be the concept of an agent with certain capacities. As I will be using this phrase, "who we are" has to do with *what we might*

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[4] By a 'social personality' I mean, roughly, the conception(s) that others have of us. There are interesting philosophical questions about this concept as well as about the concepts of character and of our conceptions of ourselves. So, Proust: "[E]ven in the most insignificant details of our daily life, none of us can be said to constitute a material whole, which is identical for everyone, and need only be turned up like a page in an account-book or the record of a will; our social personality is a creation of the thoughts of other people. Even the simple act which we describe as 'seeing someone we know' is to some extent an intellectual process. We pack the physical outline of the person we see with all the notions we have already formed about him, and in the total picture of him which we compose in our minds those notions have certainly the principal place. In the end they come to fill out so completely the curve of his cheeks, to follow so exactly the line of his nose, they blend so harmoniously in the sound of his voice as if it were no more than a transparent envelope, that each time we see the face or hear the voice it is these notions which we recognize and to which we listen." Marcel Proust, *Swann's Way*, tr. C. K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin (New York: Modern Library, 1998) 23-4. William Fisk led me to this passage.

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make of ourselves; it involves essentially an idea of possibility. Character concepts have instead to do with *what we have made of ourselves*; they necessarily carry the idea of achievement (or failure). A self-conception is the idea an individual has of herself, understood rather loosely. It might include a sense of one's capacity for deliberation and for deliberate action, some interpretation of one's ethical achievements and failures, and much else besides. If the concept of the moral subject is the concept of the subject of moral attributes, then alternative conceptions of the moral subject should differ only in their descriptions of the relevant capacities. Most theories of the relational moral subject abandon the idea that the concept of the moral subject is essentially a capacity concept. That is why philosophers who hold these views have a hard time explaining how the moral subject they describe *could* be the subject of moral attributes. I am suggesting that *to say that the moral subject is relational is to say that some of the relevant capacities are themselves relational; to possess them is to stand in a certain relation to another person, to other persons, or to a social group.*

Kant's view is that the essence of moral agency is our capacity for autonomous action. It is the person's ability to reason practically and act rationally, where this idea of rational action is understood in a particular (non-Aristotelian) way. This means, first, that persons are not necessarily *caused* to act; they can act for reasons. It means, too, that persons have not only a calculative but also a substantive rationality. Persons are capable not only of determining the best means to a given end, but also of using reason to choose ends. According to Kant, it means very specifically that, as persons, we have the ability to act out of respect for the law we give ourselves—for the rational requirement that we act always so that the principle of our action could be a principle for the action of every

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other person, or that, in our actions, we treat persons always as ends, never as mere means to ends of our own. According to Kant, what is relevant for the moral agency of an individual derives from her rationality as such. We are subjects of moral attributes because we are capable of moral action; we are capable of moral action because we are rational. On this view, it is because our actions need not be causally determined but may be rationally chosen, that we are morally responsible for what we do and that we have duties to act in some ways and refrain from acting in others. It is in virtue of our ability to act morally that we have moral rights. In this way, Kant's conception of the moral subject makes plausible the attribution of moral properties to persons.

To be precise, what Kant's conception of the moral subject makes plausible is the attribution of moral properties to individuals *as individuals*. What it rules out are most conceptions of group rights and any idea that in the attribution of moral responsibility or in an effort to understand adequately the variety of our moral duties, we may need to see individuals as members of social groups. There are many philosophers, of course, who do not see this as a problem for Kant's view but many others who think that social group membership may have a kind of ethical significance or, at least, that a picture of moral life that leaves no room for questions of their significance to be raised may underestimate the complexity of moral agents. For this reason and on the grounds that it seems to many simply false that "who I am" can be described without reference to the community of which I am part or to the shared values and attitudes in terms of which I live my life as a member—for such reasons as these, a number of philosophers have begun to question the adequacy of the Kantian conception of the moral subject and to develop alternative conceptions. The danger, of course, is that in an effort to capture plausible claims about

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communities or about social groups more generally, we might end up with a view that is far less hospitable to our ideas of individual accountability and dignity, or even hostile to them.

I

In his well-known book, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, Michael Sandel offers a sustained critique of the concept of the moral subject presupposed by John Rawls' theory of justice in particular but also, more generally, by the Kantian tradition of moral and political philosophy.[5] In the context of an argument against Rawls' Kantian ideas about the primacy of justice—about the priority of the right over the good—Sandel rejects as well the complementary conception of the moral subject as that which is independent of and prior to its ends. Rawls' conception of the moral subject and his ideas about the primacy of justice are intimately related.[6]

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[5] Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982). Rawls takes his conception of the moral subject from Kant. The moral subject is, according to Rawls, a free and rational chooser of ends, with the capacity for a "sense of justice." Rawls sometimes describes taking the perspective of the parties to the original position as taking the point of view of "noumenal selves." John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 255-6, for instance. This picture of the Rawlsian moral subject conflicts with that given by interpreters who take the concept of rationality attributed to parties in the original position to be the rationality of the Rawlsian moral person. The rationality of parties in the original position is simply one of "taking the most effective means to given ends." Rawls, *Theory of Justice*, 14. But Rawls defines 'moral persons' as "rational beings with their own ends and capable...of a sense of justice." Rawls, *Theory of Justice*, 12. The substantive rationality of moral persons should be captured in a *complete* description of the original position—one which includes the conditions of equality and of the parties' ignorance of their own personal qualities, as well as the condition of a narrowly construed concept of rationality. The parties in the original position have neither ends of their own nor a sense of justice, but then they are not moral persons. They are only pieces of a model of the moral person.

[6] In his later work, Rawls explicitly denies that his theory of justice requires a "metaphysical" view of the moral subject, and suggests that his view be understood as a

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> The structure of teleological doctrines is radically misconceived; from the start they relate to the right and the good in the wrong way. We should not attempt to give form to our life by first looking to the good independently defined. It is not our aims that primarily reveal our nature but rather the principles that we would acknowledge to govern the background conditions under which these aims are to be formed and the manner in which they are to be pursued. *For the self is prior to the ends which are affirmed by it*; even a dominant end must be chosen from among numerous possibilities...[7]

Sandel rejects Rawls' conception of the moral subject on the grounds that it is both intrinsically implausible and ill suited to the tasks to which Rawls sets it. Sandel argues that Rawls' discussions of moral desert and of the difference principle presuppose an idea of a socially-constituted self—of a moral subject that is essentially part of a community. Sandel does not propose a theory of the social self. His arguments against Rawls do not require that he do so. He does, however, reveal some of his assumptions about the nature of the social self, and philosophers working in this area have, I believe, been strongly influenced by his suggestive remarks.

Sandel focuses his description of Rawls' picture of the moral subject on Rawls' claim that "the self is prior to the ends which are affirmed by it." He describes Rawls' view as that according to which "my values and ends do not define my identity."[8]

"political" view of the subject. There are hints to this effect in *A Theory of Justice*. It has been argued that this "political" view is available only to a theory with the corresponding metaphysical view. See Seyla Benhabib, "The Generalized and the Concrete Other," in *Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 148-77. It is not necessary to decide this issue here. Whatever one may think of the status of Rawls' view, the metaphysical view Sandel describes was undeniably held by Kant, and Kant's influence remains pervasive.

[7] Rawls, *Theory of Justice*, 560; cited in Sandel, *Liberalism*, 19. The selection and emphasis are Sandel's.

[8] Sandel, *Liberalism*, 12. By requiring that the moral person be capable of having not only a conception of the good, but also a sense of justice, Rawls comes closer to Kant's vision and, I think, further from the picture Sandel would leave us with. According to Kant, there are some objective ends—those which we are rationally compelled to

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Sandel's own view stands in direct opposition to this. It is that at least some of my values and some of my ends *do* figure into the definition of my identity; some of my values and ends—those you might call my commitments—are essential to me. We might see Sandel's view as the anti-Kantian view. It does not so much reconceptualize the moral subject as express a preference for the alternative made available by Kant's conceptualization.

According to Sandel, the problem with the Rawlsian moral subject is that it is essentially a "subject of possession."

> In so far as I possess something, I am at once related to it and distanced from it. To say that I possess a certain trait or desire or ambition is to say that I am related to it in a certain way—it is *mine* rather than *yours*—and also that I am distanced from it in a certain way—that it is *mine* rather than *me*. The latter point means that if I lose a thing I possess, I am still the same 'I' who had it...[9]

On Rawls' view, I *have* interests, values, commitments, and aims, but I *am* not any of these. On Sandel's view, I *have* some but I *am* others. My values and aims may be part of me rather than held by me. They may be discovered rather than chosen. The commitments that are part of who I am would seem often to be those I have in virtue of my membership in one community or another, but the identity-involving values and aims are not distinguished from the rest in a way that appeals to my membership in a group or, more generally, to my relations to others.

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choose—and any other ends we may choose must be compatible with these "objectively valid" ends, which follow from recognition of the moral law. Similarly, the ends of justice would seem to follow from Rawls' conception of the moral subject; there are, then, constraints on the other ends we could reasonably choose. It is true that my values and ends do not, on either picture, *define* my identity; whatever I actually choose, I remain *capable* of acting rationally. Insofar as I acknowledge and act out of my capacity for practical reasoning, however, some of my values and ends will *reflect* my identity.

[9] Sandel, *Liberalism*, 55.

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> It is a consequence of the dual aspect of possession that it can fade or diminish in two different ways. I gradually lose possession of a thing not only as it is distanced from my person, but also as the distance between myself and the thing narrows and tends toward collapse. I lose possession of a desire or an ambition as my commitment to it fades, as my hold on it becomes more attenuated, but also, after a certain point, as my attachment to it grows, as it gradually becomes attached to me. As the desire or ambition becomes increasingly constitutive of my identity, it becomes more and more *me*, and less and less *mine*. Or as we might say in some cases, the less I possess it, and the more I am possessed *by* it. Imagine that a desire, held tentatively at first, gradually becomes more central to my overall aims, until finally it becomes an overriding consideration in all I think or do. As it grows from a desire into an obsession, I possess it less and it possesses me more, until finally it becomes indistinguishable from my identity.[10]

If the difference at issue is the difference between who I am as a moral subject and what beliefs, values, and so on are mine, this is not obviously a difference between what I aim at or care about *obsessively*, or in a way that overwhelms me, and what I aim at with less intensity. Sandel claims that agency involves a sorting of ends, a distinguishing of "what is me from what is mine." Not choosing freely, but coming to understand oneself is the moral goal. Unlike Rawls' conception of the moral subject, Sandel's conception is designed to allow for "the possibility of a public life in which...the identity as well as the interests of the participants could be at stake;" and to describe a sense of community "as an ingredient or constituent" of personal moral identity.[11] But is Sandel's conception of the moral subject suited to these tasks to which he would put it? While it clearly avoids the criticisms appropriate to the Rawlsian conception, is Sandel's conception of the moral subject plausible?

A "possessive" conception of the self would seem to be the only kind of conception consistent with a view of the self as, in *some* sense, autonomous. Sandel

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[10] Ibid., 56.
[11] Ibid., 62, 64.

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begins a tradition of seeing the social self as one that has at least some aims or attitudes essentially, and this is the picture that makes any idea of moral autonomy problematic. If agency is essentially self-understanding, in what sense, if any, am I a *moral* agent? In what sense might I become—or might I have become—something other than what I am? In what sense might I have been something better? It is not at all clear that a significant conception of moral autonomy can survive acceptance of the claim that the central deliberative question is 'Who am I?' rather than 'What shall I choose?'[12]

It has been suggested that this objection to Sandel's proposals can be met without challenging the overall structure of his vision of the social self. Diana Meyers has argued that individuals are not *completely* constituted by membership in a group, because most individuals belong to more than one social group. Even if we were to see the role of groups in the practical lives of individuals as one of duplicating the characteristics of the group in a personal form, these individuals would presumably not be multiple selves but would have two or more perspectives from which to work toward a coherent self, which might then be expected to exhibit its indebtedness to these perspectives.[13] This is, I believe, not a very satisfying answer to the objection. It is a response that makes sense

[12] It might be objected that the *central* deliberative question, according to Sandel, is 'What should I choose, *given who I am*?'—the question of "who I am" being asked in the service of this clearly deliberative question. Perhaps, but the point remains. I think that this *is* the central question of deliberation, but would argue that the "given" here does not include any part of the practical answer—does not include one's commitments.

[13] Diana Tietjens Meyers, "Intersectional Identity and the Authentic Self?: Opposites Attract," in Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar, eds., *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency, and the Social Self* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 151-80. While I believe that this approach doesn't adequately address the problem of autonomy for "social selves" because it does not challenge the basic assumption that the moral subject has particular values, aims, or beliefs essentially,

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only if one accepts that to be socially-constituted, the moral subject must "possess" particular beliefs, values, or commitments. Once we abandon this picture, reliance on multiple group-identities to resolve the stickiness of proposing *any* kind of group identity is no longer necessary. To be partially constituted by membership in a group is not to accept a particular batch of beliefs or values, but it is to form beliefs, values, and aims while being a member of the group. My acts and my thoughts are not *determined* by the acts and thoughts of the groups to which I belong, but they are often shaped by these and by my awareness that my acts and thoughts, in turn, may shape the character of the groups to which I belong. This is not to underestimate the significance of multiple group-identity. We may indeed be freer practical agents insofar as we are related to more social groups, but that is because the social self takes from the social groups to which it is related *possible forms of thought and action*, or so I shall argue. The social self is not constituted by the particular beliefs, values, aims, and attitudes of the social groups to which it is related. Rather these relations open up and close off possible forms of thought and action. The self that is prior to its values and ends still has social attributes.

II

A number of philosophers interested in the social self have seen more promise in the Aristotelian tradition. The Aristotelian moral subject is an agent who is capable of deliberation. Through deliberation the agent makes a practical choice. Aristotelian deliberation is essentially normative; when the agent makes a rational choice, he is

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Meyers' discussion provides a useful beginning for our thinking about the fact that individuals typically identify themselves in a variety of ways.

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choosing what it would be best to do in a particular situation.[14] Deliberation is different from calculation. I might use reason to calculate the most efficient means to a given end, but if I am unwilling to reconsider the wisdom of pursuing the chosen end in the given circumstances, no matter what reason I am given for doing so, I am not deliberating. Aristotle also distinguishes deliberation from the kind of practical thinking involved in craft. Roughly, the mark of deliberation is the absence of limits on the kind of consideration that may prove relevant to a choice. The builder qua builder brings to his decision-making considerations of a particular kind. These are considerations of the durability, aesthetics, and appropriateness of the product and of the efficiency and timeliness of the building. The physician qua physician brings only considerations related to healing to bear on his decision-making. The person engaged in deliberation, by contrast, must be open to all kinds of consideration. Deliberation presupposes no fixed end other than the formal end of doing what is best. As the agent makes choices about what it would, all things considered, be best to do, he is both forming and expressing a view of what sort of agent it is best to be and what sort of life it is best to live. The Aristotelian moral subject is capable of self-evaluation and of the development of a vision of *eudaimonia*.[15]

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[14] I prefer to talk about what it is "best to do" rather than what is "right," because I think that the former better captures the idea that there are actually many decisions to make in deciding what to do. A particular action or course of action can be described with or without the many details of when and how it is performed. Our ordinary understanding of "doing what is right" leaves open the possibility that we do it before or after it should be done or that we don't do it in the manner in which it should be done.

[15] My understanding of Aristotle's view of deliberation owes much to Sarah Broadie's discussions in her *Ethics with Aristotle* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991) and to Alan Donogan's discussion in his *Choice: The Essential Element in Human Action* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), chapter 3.

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Among the many and varied suggestions Charles Taylor has made about the relations of individuals to social groups is a proposal concerning the nature of the social self. Taylor's conception of the self is essentially Aristotelian. It is also what we might call an *achievement* view of the self—a view that looks not to what is determined for the self but to what is accomplished by it. It is like Sandel's conception in that it takes some of our evaluations to be essential to the self but unlike Sandel's in that these central evaluations, or commitments, are seen as the achievement of the self. According to Taylor, the moral subject is a deliberator, in Aristotle's sense. The moral person has the capacity to form a vision of *eudaimonia*—a capacity that involves the ability to be self-evaluating. We understand ourselves in terms of a particular vision of *eudaimonia*, a particular articulation of value, a framework of "strong evaluations." This vision is itself part of the identity of the moral subject.

> The notion of identity refers us to certain evaluations which are essential because they are the indispensable horizon or foundation out of which we reflect and evaluate as persons...A self decides and acts out of certain fundamental evaluations.[16]

> [O]ur attempted definitions of what is really important can be called interpretations...and we can therefore say that the human animal not only finds himself impelled from time to time to interpret himself and his goals, but that he is always already in some interpretation, constituted as human by this fact. To be human is to be already engaged in living an answer to the question, an interpretation of oneself and one's aspirations.[17]

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[16] Charles Taylor, "What is Human Agency?" in his *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 35.
[17] Taylor, "Self-interpreting Animals," in Taylor, *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers I*, 75.

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The framework of strong evaluations that is partially constitutive of the self is developed by the self through the making of practical choices. The point is that *as I have come to be*, there are choices that I must and choices that I could not make.

The fact that we have this sense of ourselves as tied in a deep and lasting way to our commitments is well captured by Taylor's claim that these commitments are *part of us*. But, as we have seen, there are problems with thinking of the moral subject as having particular commitments essentially. Unlike Sandel, Taylor does not suggest that there are commitments that we possess *in virtue of* our social relations and that we cannot give up. But Taylor's conception leads to a somewhat awkward account of moral accomplishments of an important kind—those that involve giving up, taking on, or changing commitments. As Taylor acknowledges, we think that we might *achieve* a vision of the best life; we might reach a new articulation of value as the result of effort or out of an attentive openness to seeing reasons for choosing as we had not been. But if the evolution of my vision involves becoming "someone else," it seems to make no sense to say that this achievement of fresh insight—this deepening of character—is *mine*. This is not to say that what features we take to be partially constitutive of the self cannot be such as to evolve; it is to say that the evolution should make up the history of a single self and not the consecutive existences of distinct selves. But Taylor gives us no reason, in any case, to think that the concept of the *moral subject* is best understood as the concept of an agent, together with the particular commitments *he* takes to be essential at some time. What Taylor describes is not really a conception of the moral subject; it is a conception of a self-conception.

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The self is necessarily social, according to Taylor, because the particular articulation of value achieved by the individual is necessarily the articulation of value *in a language*, and languages are social. The self may, but need not, be social in another way. It may be that among the agent's commitments are commitments to his community, to his country, to his ancestors, to his church. It may be part of his own vision of the best life that he live as a member of his community. Insofar as he attaches value to these social entities and to his relationship with them, they are part of his identity.

> [O]ur identity is defined by our fundamental evaluations. The answer to the question 'What is my identity?' cannot be given by any list of properties of other ranges, about my physical description, provenance, background, capacities, and so on. All these can figure in my identity, but only as assumed in a certain way. If my being of a certain lineage is to me of central importance, if I am proud of it, and see it as conferring on me membership in a certain class of people whom I see as marked off by certain qualities which I value in myself as an agent and which come to me from this background, then it will be part of my identity. This will be strengthened if I believe that men's moral qualities are to a great extent nourished by their background, so that to turn against one's background is to reject oneself in an important way.[18]

These social aspects of the "self" are clearly social aspects of the way in which an agent might conceive himself. My language enters in because it is the medium of my vision of myself. Those social groups to which I belong *might* enter in, because I might value my membership in them. But my language is more than the medium of the framework of value to which, in fact, I am committed and through which I judge my actions and my character; it is the medium of any framework of value that *could* be mine. Whether or not I embrace the society in which I live, I will find beliefs and attitudes there, including beliefs about the kinds of person there are and the kinds of life it is possible to lead and attitudes about the value of these. These beliefs and attitudes do not gain significance for

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us only if we adopt them; they provide the content of many of the practical issues on which we must take some stance or other. And the identity groups to which we belong do not contribute to the nature of our moral agency only if we see our membership in them as important; they contribute by opening up the possibility that we understand ourselves partly in terms of our relationships with them.

III

Taylor begins with the Aristotelian conception of the subject of moral properties—the agent with a capacity for forming a vision of the best life and for evaluating himself accordingly—and ends with a conception of how such an agent would conceive of himself. If we wish instead to develop a more nuanced conception of the moral subject as such, we need a different approach. In particular, we must look not to our intuitions about "who we are," but at this capacity for deliberation and self-evaluation. For if it is a capacity for deliberation and self-evaluation that is essential to the moral subject, then we might wish to say that whatever is essential to this capacity is essential to the moral subject as well.

Consider the following argument for the claim that the self is essentially social. Our capacity for self-evaluation can exist only through an awareness of the evaluations or, more generally, the *attitudes* of others. The self is formed by the society, or societies, in which it is located and in which it develops and in such a way that the structure of the individual's thought—and so the content of the subjective meanings of his actions—reflects the particular context of social action provided by the group. This is the aspect of the social self described by Hegel and by philosophers influenced by him—by

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[18] Taylor, "What is Human Agency?", 34.

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George Herbert Mead, most prominently.[19] The central Hegelian idea is that self-consciousness presupposes consciousness of an other; the self is conscious of itself only indirectly through its taking the standpoint of the other. But taking the standpoint of the others in a particular society, or of a communal or "generalized" other, involves taking the standpoint of others who possess particular attributes—particular beliefs and attitudes, expressed in a particular language.[20] The beliefs and attitudes of the societies of which we are part are essential to who we are, because they provide many of the particular possibilities for deliberation and deliberate action that are available to us.

In his well-named paper, "Making Up People," Ian Hacking defends a metaphysical position he calls "dynamic nominalism."[21] It is a position on the nature of the reality of certain *kinds* of person, which states that many *kinds* of person and many *kinds* of act come into existence when we create ideas of those kinds and because we do so.[22] The metaphysical point is not itself relevant for this discussion, but Hacking's argument for dynamic nominalism involves showing that the range of our deliberative options depends on the nature of the societies in which we live. Consider Hacking's discussion of the argument that our ideas of "the homosexual" and "the heterosexual"

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[19] G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, tr. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), chapter four; George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self, & Society*, ed. Charles W. Morris (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934).
[20] The language of the 'generalized other' is Mead's. A society, and even an individual member, may have more than one language, but no society and no individual has access to all languages. The moral subject is partly formed by his relation to the language or languages in which he finds beliefs and attitudes expressed, and through which he comes to know himself.
[21] Ian Hacking, "Making Up People," in *Reconstructing Individualism: Autonomy, Individuality, and the Self in Western Thought*, ed. Thomas C. Heller, Morton Sosna, and David E. Wellbery (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986), 222-36.
[22] Hacking, "Making Up People," 236.

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date only to the end of the nineteenth century.[23] Without questioning the presence of same-sex sexual *activity* before that time, it has been claimed that there were no categories of *same-sex sex-seekers* and *other-sex sex-seekers*—no categories of the homosexual and heterosexual as *kinds of person*. Without these ideas, Hacking argues, it would not have been possible for a person to be a person of either kind. I want to put aside both the metaphysical position and the historical claim about social categories concerning sexuality. Hacking's central claim about sexuality is that to be either homosexual or heterosexual is to fill a social role.[24] Hacking offers the additional example of the Parisian *garçon de cafe*, as he is described by Sartre in a discussion of bad faith.[25] Examples of a social role would also include the intellectual, the judge, the soldier, the husband, and the mother-in-law. To fill a social role is to take a particular place within a social structure. Hacking describes how the presence of particular roles in a society structure deliberative options for members of the society.

Hacking suggests the following explanation of the claims of dynamic nominalism. What we are is intimately connected to what we do, and what we do is intimately connected to what we might aim at. Following Elizabeth Anscombe (and, of course,

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[23] This is argued for in the essays collected together in Kenneth Plummer, ed., *The Making of the Modern Homosexual* (Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble Books, 1981). Hacking considers the shared views of the contributors.

[24] Hacking does not use the term 'social role' in his discussion, but it has become clear to me that this is what he has in mind. I owe my appreciation of the possibility that it might be to Virginia Held. Kwame Anthony Appiah makes use of Hacking's ideas about making up people in a discussion of race identity and the politics of recognition. See his "Race, Culture, Identity: Misunderstood Connections" in K. Anthony Appiah and Amy Gutmann, *Color Conscious: The Political Morality of Race* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996) 30-105, especially 76-80.

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Aristotle), Hacking claims that an action is necessarily an action under a description.[26] "But if a description is not there, then intentional actions under that description cannot be there either."[27] The possibilities for persons—the actions *available* to them—are not the same in a society with a particular person-kind idea or set of ideas and in one without. According to Hacking, "who we are" has to do with just such possibilities for thought and action. "We are not only what we are," Hacking says, "but what we might have been."[28] The point, then, is not that the development of new shared ideas about kinds of person means that those ideas come to constitute those persons specifically to whom the new terms apply. It is not that, given the idea of the butler, butlers are essentially butlers, nor is it that, given the introduction of the relevant understandings, heterosexuals are essentially straight. It is that the availability of these ideas *to all of us* transforms the person *of each of us*.

I think that Hacking is essentially right about this much. Simply having access to these shared ideas changes what is possible for us, thus making of us something other than what we would have been. But there is more. If it were only that the ideas I have have come to me from my society, then the capacities these ideas help to form are not necessarily relational capacities; they are not capacities that themselves involve my relation to the community. Even if I am aware of a particular set of beliefs and attitudes

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[25] Hacking also offers the "split personality" as an example of "made-up people." This example raises questions about the nature of mental illness that are far too difficult too address here.

[26] Hacking cites Anscombe. See G. E. M. Anscombe, *Intention* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957). See Chapter Five for my discussion of Aristotle's view.

[27] Hacking, "Making Up People," 230.

[28] Ibid., 233. Also, "[Dynamic nominalism] contends that our spheres of possibility, *and hence our selves*, are to some extent made up by our naming..." (236)

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because beliefs and attitudes come to me from my community, this simply means that I have developed socially. It is possible, however, to take the argument further. I suggest that one social aspect of the moral subject has to do with the fact that the details of our capacity for self-evaluation and for the evaluation of others correspond to the beliefs and attitudes of our societies—not because we *develop* within these societies, but because we *deliberate* within them. I shall call this the *contextual* aspect of the social self. It is the aspect of the self that involves essentially my relation to the society that forms the context of my deliberation. It is not just that we share certain ideas with others and are familiar with certain beliefs and attitudes because of others; it is that we deliberate and act within a society that has those ideas and expresses those beliefs and attitudes.

I have rejected the idea that being part of a social group necessarily involves possessing certain beliefs, values, or commitments. To say that the individual is constituted in part by the beliefs and attitudes of the social groups to which she belongs is not to say that she accepts those beliefs or has those attitudes. We might say that the individual *takes in* the beliefs and attitudes of the group, without necessarily taking them over. The self may contain them without possessing them. A person must think and act within the context of a particular set of social attitudes; she need not have those attitudes. If our societies provide possible forms of thought and action, however, they also sometimes provide beliefs and attitudes, thinking and acting in terms of which would be morally repugnant. Many of our communities contain attitudes of exclusionary categorization, e.g. the attitudes of racism, of anti-Semitism, of sexism. Part of what the person that develops in these societies *takes in* are these attitudes. I believe that she need not take these attitudes over. But to say this is not to say that she need not take *some*

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attitude to the attitudes of the society in which she participates. For if she does not firmly and conscientiously reject, for example, racism—does not take an alert and watchful anti-racist attitude—then she expresses an acceptance of the racist attitude of her society, not perhaps because she sets out to do so, but by showing through her manner of living that she does not see the racism around her as an attitude that calls for ethical response. If the society in which we act takes instances of police brutality less seriously when the victims are African American, or if our newspapers describe the terrorizing of women in Afghanistan in terms that nowhere near match its descriptions of comparable persecution of men or whole populations, and if we fail to be outraged by their absence of outrage, then whatever we may claim to believe, we live as if some *kinds* of people matter more than other kinds, and if our living flows from our choices, then we are thinking this way too. Mead describes the nature of an individual's making choices within the context of a society that makes choices. He discusses the trivial choices of fashion, but the point is the same.

> Take a person's attitude toward a new fashion. It may at first be one of objection. After a while he gets to the point of thinking of himself in this changed fashion, noticing the clothes in the window and seeing himself in them. The change has taken place in him without his being aware of it. There is, then, a process by means of which the individual in interaction with others inevitably becomes like others in doing the same thing, without that process appearing in what we term consciousness.[29] We become conscious of the process when we do definitely take the attitude of the others, and this situation must be distinguished from the previous one. Perhaps one says that he does not care to dress in a certain fashion, but prefers to be different; then he is taking the attitude of others toward himself into his own conduct...in the human individual *it is a matter of taking the attitudes of the others and adjusting one's self or fighting it out.*[30]

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[29] Based on what he goes on to say, we can, I think, overlook Mead's use of 'inevitably' here.

[30] George H. Mead, *Mind, Self, & Society*, ed. Charles W. Morris (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934), 193.

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Because we are not perfectly transparent to ourselves, we are not always aware of the attitudes we hold and we are not necessarily aware that the societies of which we are part force us to have some attitude or other on particular matters, or that they do so by having attitudes of their own. But it is one thing to have no conscious thoughts about racism in a society that has no ideas about race and another to have no conscious thoughts about racism in New York City. The Hmong person of Laos who does not consciously reject anti-Semitism cannot, for that reason, be said to be anti-Semitic; the person who deliberated and acted in Nazi Germany but did not consciously reject anti-Semitism may be said to have shared the attitude of his society.

I have argued that ethnic identity groups are analyzable in terms of the exclusive availability of significant kinds of group-oriented actions to group members. Group members may align themselves with the group and may act out of this commitment. Group members, then, are partially constituted by their membership in the group—not because they *necessarily* align themselves with the groups to which they belong but because they *may*. In a different way, the members of one group are partially constituted by their *non-membership* in other groups, because they *cannot* align themselves with those. Group membership tells us nothing about what a particular individual believes or values; it tells us only that he may see his relation to the group in a particular ethically significant way. Like the contextual aspect of the social self, the agency-extending aspect concerns the availability to the self of certain kinds of social action. There are some social groups that I may see as extensions of my own agency—most I may not. Neither

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aspect involves the possession of any particular belief or value; both structure how we can think practically and so what we can do.

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Chapter Five

What We Do

I have suggested that what distinguishes members of an ethnic identity group from nonmembers is the availability for the former of standing in a particular relation to the group. An individual is a member of an identity group if and only if he *may* align himself with the character of the group, where alignment is understood in the technical sense described in Chapter Three.[1] We saw there that moral alignment presupposes a relationship between an individual and a particular group. It is not simply an individual's possession of the same beliefs and values that the group may be said to possess. It is a *sharing* of beliefs and values and, as such, can only arise among individuals who share a life—who "live together" in Aristotle's sense. Moral alignment is not an all-or-nothing affair. I may align myself with a group to a certain extent, and, to that extent, see the group as an extension of my own agency. I may be "as one" with the group on some matters, at odds with or indifferent to it on others, and the strength of my alignment with the group will reflect this point of view, distinguishing my alignment from that of other group members and perhaps from my alignment with the group at some other time in my life. I may be as one with the group on matters of great significance to me or only on those of less concern; this too will influence the strength and nature of my relation to the group. It is difficult to say at what point my alignment with the character of a group begins to involve what would most naturally be called *commitments* of mine, but some degree of alignment would most naturally be seen, I think, as involving personal ethical

[1] Only a group member can directly shape the acts of the group, but that is because acting as a group member presupposes aligning oneself with the group.

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commitments that I possess as a member of the group. Commitments have a special function in our deliberation, and competent deliberation is related in a significant way, or so I shall argue, to what we are morally responsible for.

I wish to argue that when an individual aligns himself with a group, there are implications for the attribution of moral responsibility to that individual. This is to say that substantial alignment with a group is such as to make reference to the group or to its acts necessary in adequate descriptions of at least some of the acts of aligning individuals. The argument proceeds in two stages. First, I will argue that the concepts of moral responsibility and competent deliberation are linked in such a way that describing accurately what an individual is responsible for involves determining what it is he had reason to consider in his deliberation. Second, I argue that while the circumstances of choice *may* be such as to require an individual to take into account his *membership* in a group, if he is to deliberate well, substantial alignment with a group is such as to make consideration of his *alignment* with the group a necessary part of good deliberation for the individual who so aligns himself *whatever the circumstances of choice*. Just as non-group related commitments function as ever-present guides in our practical thinking—leading us toward some actions and away from others—so too does our alignment with a group. Unlike other kinds of commitment, alignment with a group makes of an individual a co-creator or co-sustainer of an idea, the constitution or development of which has implications for the understandings and ultimately the well-being of other individuals. It connects the individual to other individuals, all of whom share an understanding that they may each act as members of the group and thereby shape the group's agency. The legitimacy of the idea of the group as a kind of agent—as that

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which may function as an extension of individual agency—depends on these commitments of individual group members. When group members no longer align themselves with the character of a particular group or when alignment with it becomes rare, the history of that group agent comes to an end. From this we cannot conclude that one individual is responsible for what another does or even for what the group does. We can, however, acknowledge that we may have to refer to what the group does in a description of what an aligning individual does, since the individual has taken on himself the burden of having reason to be mindful of the group's plans and actions.

I have called moral alignment an 'ethically significant' relation, using this phrase in an intuitive way. I would like now to be more precise. A fact will be said to be ethically significant just in case recognition of it is required for an adequate description of an action for the purpose of attributing moral responsibility. I will argue that reference to a particular fact is required for an ethically-adequate description of an action if and only if the agent *had reason to consider* that fact within the context of deliberation. Ethically significant facts are those that we have reason to consider in a particular set of circumstances that make up the circumstances of choice on some occasion. A fact will be said to possess *global ethical significance* for a particular agent just in case the agent has reason to take that fact into consideration while deliberating whatever the circumstances of choice.[2] I will argue that an aligning member of an ethnic identity group always has

[2] Of course, an ethically significant fact need not actually enter into the agent's deliberation. First, we do not always deliberate well. Second, there are times when we do not need to deliberate, properly speaking, at all. Sometimes we are moved to act out of a sense that the action called for by the situation in which we find ourselves is obvious. Either way, we will have *had reason* to take an ethically significant fact into account in any deliberative process that would lead to a responsible choice.

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reason to consider his alignment with the group when he is thinking practically about his own course of action, while a non-aligning group member does not always have reason to consider his membership in the group. Again it is necessary to distinguish membership in an ethnic identity group from participation in a society.[3] Unlike membership in an ethnic identity group, participation in a society is globally ethically significant, or so I shall argue.

By 'deliberation' I mean that form of practical thinking discussed briefly in Chapter Four—roughly, Aristotle's conception of deliberation. According to Aristotle, deliberation begins with the set of wishes possessed by an agent. Of these wishes, one is selected from among those that seem attainable and worthy of pursuit. Some wishes are ruled out as candidates for deliberative consideration because they are, or seem to be, impossible to realize. Others are passed over because they are not very strongly wished for. Yet others are dismissed because the agent quickly, or pre-deliberatively, sees that they cannot be realized by an action that would be best in the circumstances in which he finds himself.[4] It must be accepted by the agent that the wish *may* be realized by an action that is best in the circumstances, if the wish is to be the starting-point of

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[3] See chapters 1 and 4 for discussion of the concept of a society.
[4] With characteristic clarity, Alan Donagan puts the point thus: "Deliberation is practical reflection on how *to* gratify a given wish [as opposed to practical thinking about how a given wish *might be* gratified]; and engaging in it presupposes that you think of the wish that generates it as one to be gratified. Human beings wish for a variety of things while recognizing that they cannot gratify them all: some because they are impossible...and others because the conditions on which one can be gratified exclude gratifying another. Once you have distinguished, however tentatively, between those wishes you can possibly gratify, and those you cannot, according to your present view of the sort of life you wish to lead...you will select some of the former for gratification" Donagan, *Choice: The Essential Element in Human Action* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), 46. See also Broadie, *Ethics with Aristotle*, 225-50.

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deliberation. Properly speaking, deliberation consists in the search for a means to the wished-for end. As we have seen, however, it is not a simple search for means but one that involves taking into account every consideration that would be relevant for a determination of whether an action that might lead to the end would be that which it is best to perform or, at least, one of those that while perhaps roughly equally good choices are better than the great majority of actions available to the agent. Deliberation might reveal that one possible means to the chosen end would involve undermining some other goal the agent has or be contrary to a commitment of his. It might lead to the conclusion that the end with which deliberation began cannot be pursued in a way that is consistent with the agent's other—larger or simply more highly-valued—purposes.[5] When deliberation does not lead to a renouncing of the initial plan to pursue a given end, it results in a choice of action. Successful deliberation involves the development of a plan and leads to the choice of an action that is part of this plan, all of which fits into the agent's larger plan of how his life is to be lived.

In the first section of this chapter, I will argue that one important result of Aristotle's discussion of voluntary acts is the claim that we cannot necessarily say what an individual is responsible for without appealing to ideas about what he should have taken into account in his deliberation. In the second section, I argue that when an individual aligns himself with a group, he has a standing reason to consider the acts and plans of the group when making choices for himself.

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[5] See Donagan, *Choice*, 47-8; David Wiggins, "Deliberation and Practical Reason," in Amelie Oksenberg Rorty, *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1980), 221-40, especially 233; and Broadie, *Ethics with Aristotle*, 232ff.

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I

In Book III of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle introduces the concept of a *voluntary* act.[6] An act is voluntary if it has its origin in the agent—if it flows, in some sense, from her character. Voluntary acts are those for which we praise and blame moral agents and, therefore, also those on account of which we have toward them one or another of the "reactive attitudes."[7] Voluntary acts are those for which the agent is morally responsible.

It is as misleading as it is natural to say that what Aristotle does in his discussion of the voluntary is to distinguish voluntary from nonvoluntary acts.[8] This is how his discussion in Book III is usually described and, to be fair, it is how Aristotle himself describes the issue he will address in the remarks with which he introduces those passages.

> Since virtue is concerned with passions and actions, and on voluntary passions and actions praise and blame are bestowed, on those that are involuntary pardon,

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[6] According to Aristotle, an emotional response may also be voluntary or nonvoluntary. While my focus is on adequate description of voluntary acts, the main points of the following discussion apply equally to questions of adequately describing voluntary emotional responses. The argument for this would require a much closer look at the nature of the emotions than would be appropriate here.

[7] P. F. Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 48 (1962), 1-25.

[8] I use 'nonvoluntary' to refer to acts that do not have their origin in the agent. Aristotle later distinguishes this concept from that of acts that *both* do not have their origin in the agent *and* are contrary to the agent's will. In his translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, from which all of the *Ethics* quotations in this essay are taken, W. D. Ross marks this discussion's distinction by using 'not voluntary' for the former concept and 'involuntary' for the latter. Since he otherwise uses 'involuntary' for either, the result is deeply confusing. My 'nonvoluntary' is the same as Ross's 'not voluntary'. Such acts are not themselves reflections of the character of the agent, even if the character of the agent *would be* well represented by them. I reserve 'involuntary' for the more complex concept, except in quoted passages from the *Ethics* in which Ross's familiar translation is not altered.

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> and sometimes also pity, to distinguish the voluntary and the involuntary is presumably necessary for those who are studying the nature of virtue, and useful also for legislators with a view to the assigning both of honours and of punishments.[9]

It is misleading all the same to say that what Aristotle does in the passages to follow is to distinguish voluntary from nonvoluntary acts, since this way of putting it suggests that there is, for each agent, a specifiable collection of acts, which may be sorted into the categories of voluntary and nonvoluntary. What is clear about the discussion that follows is that it concerns questions of what we may say an agent has done when our interest in his actions is an ethical interest. What Aristotle shows is that sometimes what *appears to be* an act-description well-suited to the ethical assessment of an agent is not one at all—either because what appears to be an act of the agent's is no act at all, the appearance being explicable in some way that makes no appeal to the agent's agency, or because what appears to be an act that reveals the agent's character turns out to be uninformative instead. The point is that the attribution of responsibility to an agent for an act is the attribution of responsibility to him for an act-under-a-description, and not just any description will do.

According to Aristotle, voluntary acts are those that have their origin in us. This claim is made more precise through a discussion of two categories of nonvoluntary acts—those which "take place under compulsion or owing to ignorance."

> Those things, then, are thought involuntary, which take place under compulsion or owing to ignorance; and that is compulsory of which the moving principle is outside, being a principle in which nothing is contributed by the person who is acting or is feeling the passion, e.g. if he were to be carried somewhere by a wind, or by men who had him in their power.[10]

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[9] *NE* 1109^{b}35.
[10] *NE* 1109^{b}35-1110^{a}3.

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The ensuing discussion of these categories leads to more than a detailed view of nonvoluntary acts. The central result, I think, is an account of voluntary acts. Aristotle shows that an act is voluntary only under a particular description and that the appropriate description will make reference to certain aspects of the act. In the course of distinguishing acts done under compulsion in the relevant sense from acts done under compulsion in some other sense, Aristotle shows that knowledge of the agent's choice and the circumstances of his choice may be required before we can say what the agent has "done"—at least if we are interested in an ethical assessment of his doings. While distinguishing acts done "owing to ignorance" in the relevant sense, Aristotle shows that a grasp of the range of considerations that should have entered into the deliberation of the choosing agent may also be required.

The idea of "acts taking place under compulsion" is made more specific by Aristotle's examples of an agent's being "carried somewhere by a wind, or by men who had him in their power." Aristotle distinguishes acts done under compulsion from those done "from fear of greater evils or for some noble object."[11] The latter are voluntary, because they are not compulsory in the relevant sense. The sea captain who jettisons the ship's cargo in order to protect the lives of those on board, when, of course, there is no less regrettable alternative, is, in a sense, compelled to do so.[12] Of course, as Aristotle points out, the sea captain would rather not have to throw valuable goods overboard, but sometimes the best thing to do in a particular situation is not something we would be keen to do in the abstract. While we recognize the sense in which he had no choice, we

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[11] *NE* 1110^{a}4-5.

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don't think that his having no choice in this sense makes him not responsible for his actions. If it did, we could not appropriately praise him for his act, but surely we must be able to do so. The ship's captain was right to value the lives of those on board more highly than the cargo. The captain, Aristotle says, "acts voluntarily; for the principle that moves the instrumental parts of the body in such actions is in him, and the things of which the moving principle is in a man himself are in his power to do or not to do."[13] If the sea captain was compelled to jettison the cargo, part of the explanation of this fact has to do with his moral character. If he could not but give priority to the safety of his crew and himself in his deliberations, that is because he is such as to see the overriding weight of this consideration and the lesser weight of holding on to the cargo. One might say that choosing the safety of the cargo over that of the men was not a live option for him. Elsewhere, Aristotle points out that a virtuous act is sometimes not a live option for the vicious agent. The person for whom it is second nature to weigh all considerations in terms of how conducive they are to his own pleasure may not be able to see what it would really be best for him to do on any given occasion. To say that an act is voluntary only when it is in the power of the agent to do it or not is *not*, then, to say that it must be in the power of the agent *given his character*.[14] This is why pleasurable things do not *compel* us

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[12] *NE* 1110^{a}8-11.
[13] *NE* 1110^{a}15-17.
[14] Aristotle recognizes a variety of circumstances in which A may be responsible for α without having had an alternative as a live option. A person may be unable to undo his intoxication when sobriety is necessary for seeing the range of options he has. He typically cannot simply be done with an addiction when it gets in the way of his practical reasoning. Aristotle gives the same sort of explanation for the fact that A's inability to do otherwise given his character does not relieve A of responsibility and for the fact that B's inability to do otherwise given his drunkenness, say, does not relieve B of responsibility. B is responsible for what he does because he is responsible for his drunken state. A is

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to pursue them in the relevant sense. Again, any complete explanation of why an agent would be compelled to choose a particular pleasurable action or the action that leads to a particular pleasure would include a description of the agent's character. If such things compel, that is because the agent is such as to be unable to resist them.

We can now look at the full passage in which Aristotle discusses the voluntariness of the sea captain's act.

> Such actions, then, are mixed, but are more like voluntary actions; for they are worthy of choice at the time when they are done, and the end of an action is relative to the occasion. Both the terms, then, 'voluntary' and 'involuntary', must be used with reference to the moment of action. Now the man acts voluntarily; for the principle that moves the instrumental parts of the body in such actions is in him, and the things of which the moving principle is in a man himself are in his power to do or not to do. Such actions, therefore, are voluntary, but in the abstract perhaps involuntary; for no one would choose any such act in itself.[15]

It would be a mistake to read Aristotle as expressing ambivalence about whether or not such acts are nonvoluntary in the sense of not having their origin in us. What he suggests is that while voluntary, we can acknowledge a sense in which they are contrary to the will

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responsible for actions done "in character" because he is responsible for his character. Given Aristotle's views on moral training, this is wildly implausible. It also collapses what are, I think, distinct problems. Responsibility-attribution concerns character-assessment. An action is voluntary when it reflects the agent's character. It is hopeless to ask whether the agent's character reflects his character. It has been argued that Aristotle's idea that we are responsible for our characters involves just such a category mistake. J. L. Ackrill, "An Aristotelian Argument About Virtue," *Paideia* (1978): 133-137; Broadie, *Ethics With Aristotle*, 161-64. Since our concept of moral responsibility involves an idea of *accountability* as well as the idea that those acts for which we are responsible are those that issue from our character, it would, I think, be hasty to dismiss the problem of how we could be responsible for what we do when we do not shape our own characters. The fact that there is an important sense in which we are not (certainly not *alone*) responsible for our character—the circumstances of our youth and the nature of our upbringing significantly effect who we shall become—is a very serious problem for any account of how it is we can be responsible for anything at all, but it can be put aside in an effort to understand what precisely we are morally responsible for, as questions of whether the intoxicated agent is responsible for what he does cannot.

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of the agent; in particular, the agent wishes the circumstances of choice were other than they are. That the agent wishes he were not in the situation in which he finds himself is itself ethically significant. It reveals something about his character and may contribute to an understanding of his act. Knowledge of his wish does not lead us to say that he is not responsible for the act he performs in those circumstances but goes to determining precisely what act it is he performs. What the sea captain is responsible for is not simply "throwing the cargo overboard" but "throwing the cargo overboard in order to save the lives of his men." This is the description adequate for ethical assessment of his act.

More controversial is Aristotle's example of the tyrant who threatens to kill a person's parents and children unless that person performs some "base" act the tyrant wants him to perform.[16] Aristotle describes refusing the tyrant as a choice the making of which would be more than a human being could be expected to bear.[17] It is tempting to see him as here making use of an idea that he rejects for every other case. If the choice of allowing one's family to be killed cannot be seen as a live option by *any* agent, then the character of the threatened agent is not revealed by his choice to do what the tyrant wants. Agents of vastly different character would make the same choice. Therefore, the agent is not responsible for the act he is compelled to perform. Many writers on moral responsibility trace to Aristotle the idea that we are not responsible for acts performed under coercion, but Aristotle clearly sees doing the tyrant's bidding as voluntary even in these circumstances.

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[15] *NE* 1110^{a}11-19.
[16] *NE* 1110^{a}5-7.
[17] *NE* 1110^{a}25-26.

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> It is difficult sometimes to determine what should be chosen at what cost, and what should be endured in return for what gain, and yet more difficult to abide by our decisions; for as a rule what is expected is painful, and what we are forced to do is base, whence praise and blame are bestowed on those who have been compelled or have not...What sorts of acts, then, should be called compulsory? We answer that without qualification actions are so when the cause is in the external circumstances and the agent contributes nothing. But the things that in themselves are involuntary, but now and in return for these gains are worthy of choice, and whose moving principle is in the agent, are in themselves involuntary, but now and in return for these gains voluntary. They are more like voluntary acts; for actions are in the class of particulars, and the particular acts here are voluntary.[18]

Again, such acts may be performed against the agent's will in an important sense and still be voluntary. The agent wishes his circumstances were other than they are, but he must choose *given those circumstances*. The resulting act has its origin in him. But, again, his wish is ethically significant because knowing of it allows us to describe his act accurately. The particular voluntary act performed in this case is not simply the act of "killing" or whatever we may imagine the unnamed base act to be, but, as it might be, "killing in order to save the lives of one's family." Whether the agent should be *blamed* for performing this act is a separate question; he *is* responsible for it.

When we act under compulsion, *nothing* is contributed by us—but then we really do not *act* at all. Sometimes it merely looks as if α should be ascribed to A, when really there is no α and no act of A's which was mistaken for it. Perhaps B's performing β makes it look as if A is performing α. From a distance, we see A on a boat alone, sailing to where he is forbidden to go. When we catch up with him, we discover that he has been tied to the boat and in such a way that he could not have set its course. Responsibility for A's landing where he should not be clearly lies with others, but they are not responsible

[18] *NE* 1110^a29-1110^b7.

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for α, i.e., for the agent's moving himself to the forbidden place. They are responsible for β, which is perhaps the act of tying A up and setting his course, perhaps that of tying him up and setting him to drift where the wind might take him.[19] When we act out of ignorance, however, we do act. On one description of what A has done, A has done that for which he would be responsible, had he known what he was doing. On another description, he has done, perhaps, something about which questions of responsibility would not have been raised.[20] Strictly speaking, these are the only nonvoluntary *acts*, but what is nonvoluntary is the act under a particular description, for A did *something* voluntarily. Understanding voluntary acts requires special attention to such nonvoluntary acts as these.

Aristotle distinguishes acts performed *due to* ignorance and acts performed *in* ignorance. An act performed due to ignorance is an act, the choice of which is traceable to the agent's ignorance of at least one particular fact concerning the situation.

> A man may be ignorant, then, of who he is, what he is doing, what or whom he is acting on, and sometimes also what (e.g. what instrument) he is doing it with, and to what end (e.g. he may think his act will conduce to some one's safety), and how he is doing it (e.g. whether gently or violently). Now of all of these no one could be ignorant unless he were mad, and evidently also he could not be ignorant of the agent; for how could he not know himself?[21] But of what he is doing a man might be ignorant, as for instance people say 'it slipped out of their mouths as they were speaking', or 'they did not know it was a secret', as Aeschylus said of the mysteries, or a man might say he 'let it go off when he merely wanted to show its

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[19] Of course, A might have asked someone to set things up in just this way, but if he has, he is responsible for χ, the act of getting B to perform β, which is the act of setting things up in the way that we, from our distance, read as A's performing α. Other possibilities may be handled in the same way.

[20] But not necessarily. A might not be responsible for *killing his father*, but still responsible for *killing somebody*.

[21] Aristotle says that an agent may be ignorant of "who he is," but goes on to deny that he could be "ignorant of the agent; for how could he not know himself?" Presumably, he would, in the former case, be ignorant of some property he possesses.

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> working', as the man did with the catapult. Again, one might think one's son was an enemy, as Merope did, or that a pointed spear had a button on it, or that a stone was pumice-stone; or one might give a man a draught to save him, and really kill him; or one might want to touch a man, as people do in sparring, and really wound him.[22]

Acts done *in* ignorance are the result of a more general practical confusion. As we have seen, the vicious person is mixed up about what matters and what doesn't. Similarly, acts done out of drunkenness or rage are caused by a kind of general confusion. These are states in which the agent loses his ability to perceive his situation accurately and understand fully the implications of his actions.[23] In such cases, the agent acts not out of ignorance, but out of drunkenness or rage. In such cases, the act is voluntary.

Aristotle's assumption seems to be that when an agent acts out of ignorance, the explanation of the ignorance will make no reference to the agent's character. Sometimes, of course, an agent is ignorant of some particular of his situation because he has not bothered to get information he ought to have sought or to verify what he had not sufficient evidence for. In such cases, the explanation of the agent's act is not simply that he did not know something. It is that he did not bother to discover or confirm something. This may be because he is subject to some sort of general deliberative confusion. It may instead be what we might see as out of character. Even the most careful agent is sometimes careless, but then the agent acts on this occasion as one who doesn't see clearly, in general, which considerations are relevant for her choice, and how much

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[22] *NE* 1111^{a}3-15. Aristotle makes it a further condition of acting *due to* ignorance that the agent feel pain and repentance on learning of his mistake. He is here deepening our sense of the difference between mere ignorance of particular fact and some kind of global disarray, but he goes a bit too far. Surely, A might be ignorant of some particular even if were he not, he would either perform the same act or perform a different one for some reason other than that it would pain him to perform the first. See Note 7 above.

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weight each is to be given. The act is voluntary. Again we see that some act-descriptions are more appropriate than others when our interest is in ethical assessment of an agent's behavior. We also see that finding the right act-description may require appealing to considerations of what the agent *should have taken into account at some point in her deliberation*. If A should have known her act would be α, then there is some information she should have sought or some matter she should have attended to. But this point about what A should have found out must be part of a larger point, i.e. that *accurate descriptions of a person's acts depend, in part, on ideas about what that person should have been mindful of or attentive to.*

II

If, as I have been arguing, moral responsibility and good deliberation are related in such a way that an adequate description of what an agent is morally responsible for will reflect what she had reason to consider in the course of her deliberation, then a complete theory of moral responsibility would include an account of the elements of good deliberation. Aristotle suggests that a kind of perception or insight is involved in an agent's appreciation of the situation that calls for choice. To appreciate fully one's situation is to recognize which elements of it are relevant for the making of a choice and to give each relevant element the degree of concern that is its due. To appreciate the ethical dimensions of a situation is not yet to make a choice. It is to understand the *context* of choice. Still, this preliminary stage of practical thinking is itself normative. The evaluative stance that I will take into my deliberation will already be expressed in my interpretation of the context in which I must choose. I leave aside the difficult question of

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[23] See Broadie, *Ethics with Aristotle*, 147-8.

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whether it is possible to say anything more precise about the "skill" of ethical perception or "situational appreciation."[24] Those aspects of the situation that are picked out as relevant for the making of a choice I will call *situationally relevant* elements of deliberation. These are the aspects *of the situation* that must be taken into account.

The evaluative stance that informs an agent's sensitivity to the ethical nature of his situation also guides his making of a choice. By an 'evaluative stance' I mean the collection of evaluative positions that the agent brings to deliberation—the collection of his commitments. An agent might, for example, be committed to the idea that we must all act out of respect for the dignity of others. If so, then he aims at keeping his appreciation of human dignity present in all of the thinking he does about what to do, how to do it, how to live. If this idea is not guiding his choices—ruling out some ends, recommending others, shaping the way he will go about pursuing the ends he selects, informing the way he looks at others and how closely he listens to them—then the idea that persons have a dignity that must be respected is not a commitment of his. Our commitments function as deliberative guides. If we commit ourselves to the idea of human dignity, then we must see ourselves as having reason to figure out whether an action we are considering would express this commitment and whether some other action would express it better. When we have commitments, we take those commitments to be globally ethically significant.

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[24] 'Situational appreciation' is David Wiggins' phrase. Wiggins, "Deliberation and Practical Reason," 233. For Kantian developments of the idea of ethical perception, see Barbara Herman, "The Practice of Moral Judgment," *Journal of Philosophy* 82 (1985): 414-36 and Onora O'Neill, "The Power of Example," *Philosophy* 61 (1986): 5-29.

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If an agent may be said, however, to have a standing reason to consider whether his choices are expressive of this respect for persons, it will not be because the agent is *in fact* committed to the Kantian idea. It will be because that individual, like any other, *ought to be* committed to thinking of others in this way. He *has reason* to take into account the dignity of other persons, whether or not he acknowledges that he has reason to do so. But there are also commitments which cannot plausibly be seen as universally required. These are the commitments we have to particular projects, particular individuals, and particular groups. It must seem unlikely that the commitments we have to particular projects or to particular persons could in themselves generate standing reasons to consider those projects and persons in our thinking about what to do. If the moral commitments we have are globally ethically significant not because they are *ours* but because they *ought to be*, then showing that the particularistic commitments we have are globally ethically significant would seem to involve showing that there are particular projects, persons, or groups to which we ought to commit ourselves. If it could be shown that members of an ethnic identity group ought to commit themselves to the groups to which they belong, then we could say that ethnicity is globally ethically significant for all members of such groups, regardless of the commitments they in fact possess. I do not believe that members ought (necessarily) to commit themselves to the groups to which they belong.[25] I wish to suggest that moral alignment with an ethnic identity group is

[25] It might well be argued that members of a particular group ought to align themselves with that group, but the argument would, I think, depend on the details of the circumstances of the group—of how the group has been treated and what would help it to flourish. What I am rejecting is the idea that there might be a sound argument for the claim that ethnic identity group members in general ought to align themselves with the groups to which they belong.

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such as to be globally ethically significant for the aligning individual despite the fact that it is not necessarily the case that the individual ought to align himself with the group.

To say that moral alignment is globally ethically significant for an individual who aligns herself with an ethnic identity group is to say that regardless of the circumstances of choice, the individual has reason to consider her alignment with the group when thinking practically. The agent should be keeping an eye on the group, on its actions and its fate, with the intention of adjusting her choices as the circumstances, construed in this expanded way, dictate. Individuals who align themselves with a group see themselves as living together, in Aristotle's sense; they see themselves as having entered into a communal project of continuing the development of the character and history of the group, through shared conversation and thought and through an understanding that each of those who align themselves with the group may act for the others. The group functions for each individual as an extension of agency, to the extent that each aligns herself with the group, because each may see the acts of the group as to that extent expressions of her own will. By aligning myself with a group, I transform the reach of my own agency. But just as when I pick up and use a walking stick—Aristotle's example of an extension of agency—I have reason to be mindful of where exactly that stick will land and with what it will come into contact, when I align myself with a group, I have reason to be mindful of what it does, what it has done, and what it is preparing to do. If an ethnic identity group performs a morally repugnant act, ethically adequate descriptions of what aligning individuals do or have done may well make reference to that act. If such an individual has done nothing to keep the act from being performed, omissions of failing to do what

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she might have done to steer the group away from the act would legitimately be attributed to her.

Membership in an ethnic identity group may, of course, be *situationally* relevant for a group member's practical choice. If a dying woman calls out for a fellow Catholic (having failed to locate a priest), any Catholic who hears has reason to consider not only the call but also her own relation to Catholicism. If in 1994's Rwanda, a Hutu believed that only a Hutu might be permitted to perform some particular act that he thought ought to be performed—perhaps because it involved travel and a Hutu would be more likely than a Tutsi to move about without being harmed—he would have had reason to consider his membership in the group, simply because of the possibilities it opened up for him. Membership in an ethnic identity group is, however, not globally ethically relevant for any agent. Once again, it is important to distinguish being a member of an ethnic identity group from being a participant in a society. These are not always distinguished, but while membership in an ethnic identity group does not alone give the individual reason to consider the acts of the group when choosing acts of his own, participation in a society *does* give the individual reason to consider the acts and attitudes of that society while deliberating.

In the previous chapter, I suggested that we are partly constituted by the societies in which we live, because they provide the context for our deliberation. It is not simply that the concepts and attitudes of the communities of which we are part are essential to who we are, because we, as members, have access to these concepts and attitudes. The societies in which we live force us to take a stance on *their* concepts and attitudes; we must accept them or "fight it out." I suggested that the German of Nazi Germany who did

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not consciously reject anti-Semitism may be said to have been anti-Semitic. But if our societies engage us in practical thinking of certain kinds—structuring the ethical choices that are available to us—then we have reason to keep an eye on them. Being part of a particular society is globally ethically significant, because I always have reason to consider its acts and attitudes in my deliberation. From this we cannot conclude that the individual in Hitler's Germany is responsible for the anti-Semitism of his society. He is responsible for his own attitudes and for the actions and omissions that issue from these, but his attitudes must be described in the context of the attitudes of that society and of the responses that they called for. He is responsible not for "the Holocaust," but for his own actions and omissions, and these can only be adequately described by including reference to the nature of the society in which he lived.

I have described two aspects of the relational self—the contextual and the agency-extending.[26] I have just suggested that the contextual aspect of the self gives us reason to consider the acts and attitudes of the societies in which we live as we think about what our own acts and attitudes should be and that adequate descriptions of our attitudes, actions, and omissions will make some reference to our location in a particular society. The argument is not based, however, on the mere fact that our participation in a particular society is part of "who we are;" it is based on the same considerations that led to the conclusion that we are partly constituted by the societies in which we live. While membership in an ethnic identity group is also partly constitutive of "who we are," it does not necessarily give us reason to consider the acts and attitudes of the group as we think practically about what our own acts and attitudes should be. To be a member of an ethnic

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identity group is to have available the relation of moral alignment with that group; it is possible for a member to see the group as an extension of her own agency. But a member may have no interest in availing herself of this option. It is not *having access* to some particular walking stick that gives an individual reason to be mindful of where that stick ends up; it is picking the stick up and using it, making of it an extension of her own agency, that gives her reason to be attentive to its location and responsive when it creates dangers. It is not the availability of aligning oneself with a group that gives an individual reason to be mindful of the group's acts and plans, but actually aligning oneself with the group. The Serb who never aligned himself with the Serbs is not responsible for failing to try to prevent Serbian aggression *in virtue of his ethnicity*. If he is responsible for this kind of omission, it will be because he was in a position to prevent harm and did not, but many non-Serbs bear this sort of responsibility, as any serious evaluation of the reaction of the international community reveals.

One of the profound tragedies of the fact that our social world is largely structured in terms of ethnicity is that while only aligning members of ethnic identity groups shape the acts of these groups and bear moral responsibility for individual acts and omissions in virtue of their alignment, all members are targeted by hostile groups when group acts form part of a narrative of ethnic conflict. Further, being forced to share a common interest in survival with others, with whom one may otherwise share very little, may create alignment where there would have been none. Another tragedy of ethnic identity reflects the difficulties of doing anything as a group; our lives are enhanced and our powers broadened when we live and work with others, but our personal control is

[26] See chapter 4.

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lessened when we allow that others may act for us. An individual Serb may have aligned himself with the group without having adopted the goal of achieving a "Greater Serbia" or accepting ethnic cleansing as a means to *any* end. He might have been proud of his heritage, sympathetic to many of the group's thoughts and attitudes, and prone to react to ethnic slights as a member of the group, while believing that the best next step for his nation would be an acceptance of the inevitability of a pluralist society and the moral necessity of its taking a place within a community of equal members. These tragedies reflect the ways in which ethnic identity groups are *unlike* Aristotelian friendships. When the idea that a large number of people can live together and develop a group character is connected to the idea that people belong together because they share an ancestry, the potential is created for individuals to become imprisoned by the understandings of others about them. And when the idea takes hold that one person may extend the agency of another even when the ethical differences between them are profound, the simplicity of the Aristotelian picture of the character of a friendship is lost to the complexity of internal disagreements among aligning individuals with competing views of what their groups should do, many of which are in fact resolved by the coercion or manipulation of group members. If we find that we sometimes admire and other times abhor moral alignment with ethnic identity groups, that is, I think, because it can be very much like, but is often very unlike, the unquestionably valuable characteristic that Aristotle describes of being a friend.

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