**KEYWORDS:** *collective responsibility, disassociation, genuine opposition thesis, genuine support, negative duty, old ways of thinking, evil practices, medical reasons, Leviathan*

**1. Introduction**

Juha Raikka argues against *disassociation* from collective responsibility based on a premise of logical inconsistency insofar as the conclusion ‘one is not guilty’ does not necessarily follow from the premise that ‘*everyone* is guilty.’ Raikka builds his case on a fictionalized national, ethnic, or cultural group that participates in human sacrifices for the sake of ‘medical reasons’ or human health.[[1]](#endnote-1) He concedes that this fictionalized group bears an uncanny resemblance to Western society and their proposed collective responsibility for practices ranging from (A) foreign conflicts to (B) Environmental pollution and (C) overconsumption of “third world” foreign natural resources. Arguably, these practices could be parsed as exercises conducive *or* equal to ‘human sacrifices’. Our discussion here will be all but entirely subsumed by (C).

**2. A Fictionalized Case of Real-World Harms**

Raikka asks his reader to suppose there is an “ethnic group” that sacrifices human beings because there are "medical reasons" to do so, or so the majority of the members mistakenly believe. Apparently, there is “no opposition” to this practice. He also insists that the values and norms of the group resemble the values and norms of outsiders, and that the majority accepts this practice of human sacrifice *only because* they want to respect the value of health. This practice of human sacrifice is said to hold its roots in “the old ways of thinking,” yet the group is territorially located so that they could easily obtain relevant knowledge yet only *if they would*. On this point, it is said that there are well-equipped libraries nearby to aid one’s pursuit of knowledge on this very topic. Yet, it’s hard to point to any particular person or persons in the majority who should be held *especially* responsible (relative to the others) for the evil practice.

What Raikka says above is right in the most salient of ways, but one question here among others is whether his proposed rebuttal of disassociation has survived the test of time. In this paper, I argue that it has not. Moreover, I also argue that some of Raikka’s thesis was doomed from its conception, that is, in spite of (and prior to) any anachronistic considerations presented herein. Accordingly, it seems there is at least one necessary amendment to be made to this fictionalized case in terms of accessibility of knowledge of evil practices. The amendment reads:

(A1) Yet, the group is territorially and *temporally* located so that they could easily obtain relevant knowledge if they would: there are well-equipped libraries nearby as well as digital libraries at their fingertips, and so on.

Technological advances within the previous two decades since Raikka’s contribution made this modification necessary. Arguably, the opportunity to ascertain knowledge about the moral blameworthiness of one’s actions will prove important here. In a sense, we could almost argue that Raikka’s thesis has been tested by time, that is, if only we could someday abstract the reality of this fictionalized case. To be sure, I aim only to match Raikka fictionalized proposal vis-à-vis fictionalized proposal. That aside, I shall continue digging the trenches herein by moving some potential roadblocks to either proposal out of the way.

**3. Potential Roadblocks to Collective Responsibility Claims**

There are possible objections to either proposal in the forms of (a) Arguments from historical disagreements or (b) Moral disagreements from individualism. To be clear, fictionalized cases even if not entirely fictional allow us to raise concerns about potentially real evil practices without having to contend directly with (a), that is, since we aren’t arguing against it as an actual case. Therefore, we’re absolved of the onus proof from historical disagreements. However, this is to a degree not the case for (b).

There are two objections from (b) with which we must contend. Beginning from the first, when a population P is guilty of something on the scale of group harm as grand in scope as ‘crimes against humanity’, it means that P or something equal to it—e.g., Western Society, America, or Germany—is guilty, *not* any individual moral subject S—e.g., Tom, Dick, or Harry—not even many individual S’s. For example, if the large-scale horrors of the holocaust were brought about by Germany, then individual officers are not necessarily guilty on their own (much less rank-and-file soldiers or ordinary non-military citizens), but rather Germany is guilty for what Raikka would call ‘the crime of German citizen’ or, more reductively, *the crime of German*. On this line of reasoning, a Nazi SS Officer on trial for participation in these crimes could ideally defend himself on the premise that it’s both unreasonable and impossible to put his individual moral actions on trial insofar as that for which he is on trial as a mere individual is the crime of German.

As for the second objection, this claim could abstract from the above example that rather than all Germans being guilty on account of being predicated by the feature German, that instead there must be at least one subject within this relationship who had no opportunity to oppose the practices in question. Yet, in cases like Nazi-Germany, it’s well documented that support for the Nazi party was garnered by way of promises made to self-proclaimed Aryans to punish their perceived non-Aryan or “subhuman” enemies. At very least, we could say that Hitler voters (or even mere supporters) could be held collectively responsible insofar as each was (at minimum) “okay” with these promises to harm perceived enemies or, say, ‘strangers’. Even one imagined as supporting Hitler under some sort of duress would have chosen the safety of their own person or that of, say, their family in exchange for the harm of others. A choice based on collective action as a means to violate group rights of others was made. To be fair, and as shall be established later, such a person could create opportunities for gainsay against what they have been coerced into supporting, if and when doing so would pose no great harm to himself. For to make oneself or their group as bad off as those he is trying to aid does neither he nor the others any good.

It appears evident that individual responsibility in the stated cases seems unreasonable and impossible, that is, insofar as harm was suffered yet without any clear-cut mode of guilt distribution or commensurate punishments as a form of redress for the crimes suffered. Having given these objections their due, it seems clear at this point that there can or even may be cases in which a group is guilty for evil practices that exceed the limitations of individuals, even many individuals.[[2]](#endnote-2) Yet, we may have to contest at least one more rejection, that is, externally to what Raikka has raised for us.

**\*3b. What is a Collective?**

In the above, I restated and considered a bit further the objections from individualism raised by Raikka in the contribution under scrutiny. Yet, I am aware that other concerns from individualism are extant in the larger discussion about moral responsibility as much as I am also privy to as many arguments from collective responsibility that could stand to answer individualist concerns as noted above.[[3]](#endnote-3) Yet, delving into these concerns at any substantial depth is sure to lead the particular voice of this discussion and its implications astray and into other territories, for this paper is not only intended as a direct response to Raikka’s thesis, but it is also a topic proposal of sorts for a larger project—i.e., dissertation. And as witnessed in the above section, Raikka himself does not concern his project much with in-depth analysis of individualist notions of moral responsibility. Though, he does add a bit more depth to his concept of collective responsibility and by extension a clear although general concept of groups. That being said, I shall offer some very basic implications from the depths of the larger thesis in which this smaller work is ultimately rooted. I will employ a strategy of building an abstract or more theoretic concept of the kind of groups I intend here when I speak of collectives qua collective entities that can intend and act or be acted upon as well as intend to counteract (or not). I shall then give a brief defense against one thesis of individual responsibility against collective responsibility, that is, before returning to our fictionalized case vis-à-vis Raikka’s genuine opposition thesis.

On the onset, I fully realize the diversity my concept of collectives takes on, that is, in terms of features that may or may not appear to be congruent with my own, yet I will certainly distinguish it from those models that are seemingly or otherwise contrary. Following Margaret Gilbert, I envisage collectives as something somewhat similar to plural subjects insofar as they could hold things like joint commitments (JC). From JC something like joint action (JA) could occur. On Gilbert’s thesis, JAs from JCs rely on two clauses:

Clause 1 (C1): JA doesn’t require physical proximity for such acting to be possible.

Clause 2 (C2): JA necessitates mutual permission for continuing or terminating JC.[[4]](#endnote-4)

As we will see later, I accept C1 although I shall (and for very good reason) reject C2. For now, let us just become privy to the fact that Gilbert rejects the notion of JC holding parts and so the act of unilateral rescinding or disassociation from JC would seem rather implausible. However, I shall show this notion to be necessarily false on my own thesis, for as I shall show parts or roles are necessary for JCs of the kind in the fictionalized account of global harm to be possible. Moving on, one more area of agreement with Gilbert’s plural subject resides in the fact that prior agreements are unnecessary for JCs (2015, 26).[[5]](#endnote-5) Corresponding to the notion of corporate personhood, some like French would agree (1979, 211).[[6]](#endnote-6) Yet, a first intention warrants the fictionalized joint commitment under discussion, which would extend as an intergenerational joint commitment from the advent of colonialism. Following French, the collective I envision holds within itself a kind of moral climate or collective personality (interchangeably). To be clear, French’s collectives like corporate entities require organizational structures, but then so too do nation-states like Janna Thompson’s intergenerational groups. At this point, it is likely becoming increasingly clear there is a necessary metaphysical and moral personhood that I am formulating here, one that pits me in the company of Karl Jasper and by extension Raikka himself. By virtue, I am arguing for a thesis of metaphysical guilt on the part of those who have contributed to the harm under discussion. As noted earlier, I am looking to colonialism as the beginning point from which the fictionalized case and its intergenerational harms extend into contemporary times.[[7]](#endnote-7) As an aside, rather than talk of ‘others’, I instead speak of ‘strangers’ for the sake of evolutionary coherence. But I digress.

On the flip side, most (if not all) commentators from the camp of metaphysical guilt such as May would reject the notion that those being harmed as, say, ethnic groups could be so organized in a way like French’s corporations or Thompson’s nation-states. Though I am not at liberty to discuss this matter here, I will post my rejection of that popular notion by simply noting that by the end of this work the possibility of ethnic groups so organized will be implied. One way in which I do this comes through a similar though distinct way from (according to Smiley) Tuomela who like me employs Hobbes’s Leviathan as a strategy of showing how collective actions “supervene” on individual members.[[8]](#endnote-8) Yet, there are some who reject this notion.

Narveson claims that harms warrant distribution based on “what individuals have or have not done” because nothing else could be the culprit of responsibility.[[9]](#endnote-9) The reason for this, he says, is the serious matter of irreducibility and thereby the feature or ability to be predicated of those who can ‘decide’ or ‘act’ via something like agency.[[10]](#endnote-10) On this view, collectives cannot intend things, not even crimes against humanity like genocide or, perhaps, unjust trade agreements featuring sweatshop conditions.[[11]](#endnote-11) Rather, each instance of murder, say, is merely reducible to individuals acting on other individuals. Yet, as I shall show at the end of this paper, collective intentions are reducible to something like a moral climate that can also be characterized as a collective personality, one that could be intergenerational and therefore irreducible to individuals.[[12]](#endnote-12)

**4. Applying Raikka’s Case Against Disassociation**

Recall, an entire cultural group sacrifices human beings because the group’s majority mistakenly believe this practice is necessary for medical reasons. Though, insofar as there is a majority, there must necessarily be a minority of the group that doesn’t lend credence to the mistaken belief. However, there is apparently *no* opposition to the practice.

This valuation from respecting human health is rooted in what is explained as the old ways of thinking. Yet, in spite of this belief’s anachronistic roots, it also seems the group’s individual members could so easily ascertain knowledge about how morally egregious their practices actually are, that is, insofar as they have access to well-equipped local libraries in addition digital libraries at their fingertips. Furthermore, ascertaining the knowledge in question assuredly (if not undoubtedly) would compel the group as a whole to not only oppose the evil practices in question but to *genuinely oppose* them such that the values and norms of the group are no different from outsiders. Under the conditions set by these fictionalized circumstances, I argue we could presume the outsiders would not participate in such practices if only because they view these actions as morally egregious in light of, say, a *negative duty* not to harm others.[[13]](#endnote-13) Yet, questions arise.

(i) How can there be a minority that in concept counters the majority even when there is apparently no opposition?

(ii) How is it that the old ways of thinking amongst the group’s majority cause *these* particular individuals to ignore the moral intuitions allegedly shared by the group as a whole, something like adherence to a negative duty they apparently share with outsiders who act accordingly in contrast?

(iii) Does the fact of increased opportunity to ascertain knowledge about the moral blameworthiness of the group and by extension individual practices reinforce Raikka’s thesis against disassociation?

**4(i)- How can there be a minority that in concept counters the majority even when there is apparently no opposition?**

To answer this question we must begin sketching out what Raikka defines as genuine opposition to evil practices. On this matter, Raikka frames four preliminary questions. Verbatim, these questions are framed as follows.

*(Q1) Does everybody have an opportunity to oppose the practice without serious risk of being killed or tortured?*

*(Q2) Does everybody have an opportunity to oppose the practice by appealing to ‘shared values’ accepted by the group and to ‘factual knowledge’ readily available to its members?*

*(Q3) Does everybody have an opportunity to oppose the practice in the sense that they have no reason to believe that doing so would be completely futile?*

*(Q4) Does everybody accept the practice without opposing it?*

Raikka says these questions are asked because it is believed by those doing the asking that, on the one hand, if the answers to *all* four are in the positive, then “every single member of the group really is, at least partly, responsible for the evil practice.”[[14]](#endnote-14)

On the other hand, if the answer to *any* of these questions is in the negative, not every member is responsible after all. About (Q4), most believe that merely accepting or opposing the practice under scrutiny is what either associates or dissociates one from moral blameworthiness. All things equal, we must now come to better understand what Raikka intends when he calls for the act of genuinely opposing.

**4(ib)- Genuine Opposition**

Raikka’s genuine opposition thesis is a rejection of general notions of *opposition as disassociation* from collective responsibility (or at least within the conditions set by the fictionalized case under development). Raikka’s genuine opposition seems a concept built upon negative epistemological criteria. Genuine *cannot* be opposition that comes far too late. Genuine opposition cannot be evidentially inefficient, whether it is directly or indirectly as such. Finally, genuine opposition cannot produce more harm than it prevents. Each of these negative qualities from supposed or less than genuine opposition reduces to what he calls “the most extreme version” of opposition as disassociation.[[15]](#endnote-15) In this most extreme example of opposition as disassociation, it is proposed that one can absolve themselves of collective responsibility by forging a symbolic protest, which is sufficient for clearing the subject of blameworthiness even if the action holds no evident chance of doing some good. Raikka, of course, emphatically rejects this notion. I second this sentiment! Though to reiterate, we need to answer the preliminary question under scrutiny.

*How can there be a minority that in concept counters a majority even when there is apparently no opposition?*

Given the above, I shall close out this part of the section by answering the question on which it was based by sculpting our fictionalized group through how we could answer Raikka’s (Q1-Q4) as its basis. Following Raikka, the thesis under scrutiny abstracts from its fictionalized case a rather peculiar mode of opposing called a ‘sacrificing ceremony’, an event in which participation is a necessary means to oppose the evil practices in question. For if one were to oppose these evil practices, say, by rejecting Western living standards, they would not have their opposition taken seriously to what is ultimately a case of collective responsibility for third-world poverty. Therefore, one must participate in the very practices she aims to oppose if she is to disassociate from them. And so we arrive at the concern Raikka raises in what we will call the logical problem from disassociation, a problem whereby the conclusion does not follow from its premise. This is by extension what invalidates the idea of opposition as disassociation insofar as the conclusion ‘*one* is not guilty’ does not follow from a premise of collective responsibility where *everyone* is guilty.

Following from (Q1), it appears that there are *no* rules that prohibit individuals from obtaining new knowledge or suggesting new practices, so it seems this group as a whole is not under threat of bodily harm from either torturing or killings if they were to genuinely oppose current group practices. In the same vein, though, if an individual member (or even many) decided to reject the practice *and* behaved accordingly, individual intentions and actions as such unfortunately would not be sufficient in stopping the practice altogether. But, this latter concern is best kept in memory for later. As for (Q2), it is quite clear that shared norms and values—in practice and custom—as well as factual knowledge are adhered to whether one uses their opportunity to oppose or accept these sacrifices. Moving onto (Q3), members of the group’s minority are led to believe merely their opportunity to oppose evil practices via mere symbolic protests are plenty sufficient to disassociate each one from guilt. Yet, it is upon reaching (Q4) when we realize that the group’s minority in opposition misses the mark vis-à-vis Raikka’s genuine opposition thesis, that is, insofar as their opposition to human sacrifices are (1) Far too late, (2) Evidentially inefficient, and (3) Creating more harm than it stands to prevent. Consequently, this is what Raikka means when he says there is no opposition to the practice of human sacrifices for medical reasons. For he does not mean to say there is literally no opposition at all, only that there is no opposition that could count as such on his genuine opposition thesis. And so on (Q4), everyone accepts these practice without genuinely opposing.

In light of the above, Raikka’s thesis seems air tight on the face of it. But, as I stated before, Raikka’s thesis has a couple glaring problems that will begin below.

**4(ii)- How is it that the old ways of thinking amongst the group’s majority cause *these* particular individuals to ignore the moral intuitions allegedly shared by the group as a whole, something like adherence to a negative duty they apparently share with outsiders who act accordingly in contrast?**

As was established above, the group’s shared norm from the practice of human sacrifices and the basis for this practice from its valuation of human health are part of what doom them to being unable to disassociate from collective responsibility even when they protest in opposition to these norms and values. For how could one manage to disassociate from the very practice she must commit in order to oppose it? On the genuine opposition thesis, this is as unreasonable as it is impossible!

Yet, these norms and values are not the only ones the group adheres to, for it is said that they also follow some so-called old ways of thinking that otherwise distinguish them from allegedly likeminded outsiders. As mentioned earlier, the outsiders in question could not participate in the practice of human sacrifice—or, at least not the latter group’s majority—since they are not morally blameworthy for these acts. As proposed earlier, these outsiders, rather than respecting medical reasons to participate in human sacrifices, perhaps respect a negative duty not to harm people of the third world and so do not consume their natural resources in a very blameworthy manner as their counterparts unfortunately do. Following this example, it seems clear to me that the outsiders hold a respect for something like group rights, that is, above and beyond the narrower threshold of strict individualism qua individual rights and moral responsibility, for if they did not, it would be clear at this point (**having laid the foundation for groups as moral agents**) that they would deem collective responsibility equally unreasonable and impossible. That is, to be *so responsible* as a group so as to override individual pursuit of foreign resources would seem morally impermissible in light of stricter individualist sensibilities. Clearly, the majority of the unoffending group does not believe that the individual holds a right to human sacrifice in light of group rights and negative duties to others. But then, if true, this means we must ascribe this feature of stricter individualism to Raikka’s group. What’s more, it would seem that these two groups hold little in common in the way of norms or values. Finally, could what seems a majority belief in individualism also be part of what is characterized in the old ways of thinking?

Suppose in the closest possible world or what could be the actual world of this fictionalized case, that the group of those guilty are as Raikka describes them to be, a group in Western society, a hemispheric division of the global community that is *culturally* individualistic. Imagine that in the most extreme case of individualistic belief within the division there is a subclass or group so individualistic that it currently carries out the belief that things such as having the means to respect the value of human health based on medical reasons is a privilege rather than a right. Yet, outsiders to this group, whether culturally individualistic or not, hold their norms and values contrary to this strongly individualistic belief.[[16]](#endnote-16) It should be obvious at this point that neither collectivism nor individualism need be strongly held or not at all, for this is not even the case in theoretical discussions of moral responsibility or the actual world at-large where theoretical principles are applied. Recall, I said that there are some commentators, whether proponents or opponents of collective responsibility, who refuse to endorse any notion of objective borders between groups. Perhaps, these commentators view cases like the fictionalized group under discussion as holding a collective of individuals far too diverse for objective borders to be reasonable or possible. Yet, the forebears to the intergenerational group under scrutiny that established the intergenerational evil practices also under discussion did not agree.

Now, suppose this practice to respect human health on medical reasons as the group qua many individuals sees it is not a right, much less one respecting the concept of group moral agency. Rather, human health is viewed as a privilege limited to those who somehow—say, by a just acquisition of holdings (or so it is perceived as such)—“earn” this privilege whether by perceived due diligence or mere accidents of birth. As the forebears saw it, there were objective distinctions between them and (as they perceived) their less than deserving counterparts. Perhaps, they based this notion on perceived ethnic and cultural differences. Consider the very real world possibility that for the forebears of this group mere accidents of birth alone are what justified the perceived privilege they had over others to pursue respect for individual human health for medical reasons, which they acted on by initiating the group’s historical first sacrificing ceremonies. Call this notion of human health as a privilege the old ways of thinking.

But then, how can we understand this manner of thinking as being “old” when its practice has never ceased and therefore appears to have subsisted on an intergenerational timeline? The conclusion simply does not follow from its premise. Fortunately, we are discussing these matters in a way that premises only their possibility in the world. That said, I would like to dress up this matter a little further by connecting it to what other commentators on collective responsibility for things like colonialism, unjust trade, global poverty, and other proposed ‘crimes against humanity’ of these sorts have said about them.

For the sake of argument, I propose we begin to understand this fictionalized case in the following ways. Jana Thompson would call this a case of collective responsibility for intergenerational harm.[[17]](#endnote-17) Thomas Pogge would agree to this sentiment such that he gives the argument from what he calls *actual history against historical stories*, which is to establish the historical precedent set for the contemporary global institutional order that makes our fictionalized account a possible phenomenon in the actual world.[[18]](#endnote-18) Judith Litchenberg in arguing against Pogge’s notion of a negative duty to not harm via consumption of the kind discussed here, does so from the premise that to accomplish such a duty seems unreasonable if not impossible insofar as “These activities are seamlessly woven into our normal routines … Every bite we eat! Every purchase we make! ... To not do these things ... Can encroach on our autonomy at least as oppressively any duties of aid or beneficence.”[[19]](#endnote-19) Then, I think we can begin to explore the possibility that the cultural group under discussion could be defined by its participation in evil practices insofar as its values and norms are so encompassed by their intergenerational subsistence on them.

All things considered, it appears that the fictionalized group participating in practices of human sacrifice does not appear to hold much if anything in common with outsiders who refrain from such evil practices. For whereas the latter group’s majority seems to respect the moral agency of groups, at least as far as a shared negative duty not to harm others overrides individual pursuit of foreign natural resources, the former’s majority does not and accordingly holds to a way of acting from an old belief that those being harmed have not—whether as a random collection of individuals or otherwise—earned the privilege of human health.

And so we appear to have it on good authority that it is reasonable (if nothing else and at minimum) to propose the possibility of *human sacrifice from the notion of human health as a privilege* as itself being a predicate of group identity insofar as it is ever encompassing in the practical sense and metaphysically prior in the theoretic sense to the group’s individual members. What is more, consider the fact that Raikka also levies charges of collective responsibility for human sacrifices of their own group members via foreign conflicts and the world at-large via environmental pollution (perhaps also due in part to overconsumption).[[20]](#endnote-20) Consequently, this means we must entertain the idea of this cultural group as not so much hosting occasional sacrificing ceremonies, but as being one continuous human sacrificing ceremony in-and-of-itself!

**4(iii)- Does the fact of increased opportunity to ascertain knowledge about the moral blameworthiness of group and (by extension) individual practices reinforce Raikka’s thesis against disassociation?**

So far, we already poked some holes in Raikka’s genuine opposition thesis even while attempting to merely unpack it. Accordingly, this is precisely what I meant when I said his thesis suffers from some developmental issues. But then, also recall that I had said that Raikka’s contribution suffers some anachronistic problems as well, that is, such that it has *possibly* yet very realistically failed the test of time. I shall show why in this section simply by answering its foundational question restated above.

The preliminary question for this section coincides with Raikka’s (Q1), which asks ‘if everybody has an opportunity to oppose group practices without the threat of death or torture’ as if the threat of bodily harm is the *only* means to silence dissidents or rogue voices in any meaningful way. Time by way of technological advances of the previous two decades has demonstrated this as being false. But, I would first like to sketch out the group’s majority and minority in just a little more detail, a social psychological profile of sorts in order to better understand the groups’s overall moral climate or collective personality.

Recall, we are now exploring the notion that the fictionalized group guilty of evil practices subsists on something like a *human sacrifice industrial complex*—that is, a system of economics based entirely on human sacrifices! Every bite, every purchase is contingent on a practice of human sacrifice that began at a previous time in the group’s history, yet it has survived changes of the group’s parts from, say, t1 to t2. But, as far as this practice has survived changes of the group’s temporal parts, what is it that has enabled the persistence of this habit to sacrifice the health of others?

The majority derives their group narrative from historical stories contrary to actual histories in response to these charges of human sacrifice, which asserts that the group earned their privilege to respect human health in the way they do simply by way of holding reasonably free economies and trading with other groups such as the third world nations who—they say—are now better off because of it.[[21]](#endnote-21) The third-world nations are simply led by incompetent barbarians who willingly sacrifice their own people.[[22]](#endnote-22) Yet, as they also say, groups are a collection of individuals and personal freedom including moral responsibility ought to override (if not eliminate) any notion of collective responsibility insofar as the individual is the fundamental social unit in a community.[[23]](#endnote-23)

What about the group’s minority that opposes these practices? On the genuine opposition thesis, the minority fails to oppose the practice in any meaningful way. But, also recall that we established that everyone in the group could be predicated or tainted by human sacrifice insofar as the group appears an intergenerational entity subsisting on an economic-based human sacrifice industrial complex. If this is true, whether purely in this fictionalized case or else in some actualized world, then the genuine opposition thesis could be false insofar as it’s guilty of conflating guilt for blameworthy practices with moral taint.

For something like moral taint to be argued, one must establish that a member of a collective bears a kind of stain on their moral integrity. This occurs through the ‘moral climate’ each member shares with the wrongdoer(s) and yet most importantly the wrongdoing. On this view, however, it seems that tainted individuals do not necessarily hold moral responsibility nor do they belong to a collective that bears moral responsibility. Traditionally, taint is something that influences the moral climate (if you will) and thereby inspires each member as moral agents *on the whole* to act accordingly. Mellema emphasizes the role of leadership in establishing these ‘symbolic values’[[24]](#endnote-24). But I worry—as would Raikka—about what seems an evident myopia in this emphasis. This notion seems to excuse participants as bystanders, a mere mob of victims of circumstance in the sense that only the group’s leadership or those perceived as “directly responsible” would be to blame in these cases. And yet, such is precisely the problem for this group’s minority.

Suppose the group’s minority is composed of two opposition movements each of which are similar in political orientation yet are also distinct in principle to one another as far as accepted norms are of concern. Call these distinct movements (A) The Revolution and (B) The Rogues. In this fictionalized paradigm, both (A,B) say they want to put an end to the group practice of human sacrifice. Accordingly, each expresses a desire to help the third-world nations start anew by reinventing the identity of their own country through elimination of evil practices. Both of these groups refer to this aspired move as ‘decolonization’, which is one way of saying ‘to end the human sacrifice industrial complex’. Yet, whereas the rogues simply want to help facilitate a more just world via moderate social changes by respecting the value of everyone’s human health from tried and tested medical reasons, the revolution and its revolutionaries want to make radical social changes that include but are not limited to the *erasure* of tried and tested medical reasons and what these reasons say about the value of human health.

Suppose the revolutionaries are spreading the idea that the value of human health from medical reasons is merely a social construct being used to oppress the bodies of one-half of the population, though not for the sake of health standards, but rather ‘beauty standards’ that as they see it ‘objectify’ and by extension ‘colonialize’ the bodies of this portion of the population. On this line of thinking, knowledge about bodies from medical reasons is at best viewed with skepticism if not seen as oppressive. Accordingly, shared medical reasons to respect human health by not over-consuming resources is seen as a mere narrative of individual body colonization. In relation, (A) on the whole begins to celebrate and even encourage continued over-consumption of resources as a way of decolonizing the body on both the individual and collective (one-half) levels.[[25]](#endnote-25) As far as (A) views this matter, though they are morally stained by extension of shared group membership with those who they view as directly guilty, they are not blameworthy as individuals or a class (within the group) insofar as it would seem unreasonable and impossible for one or a few to be guilty for, say, the crime of American when America is guilty. If we follow this line of reasoning, the evil practice of human sacrifices will never end but only be exacerbated, that is, insofar as continued sacrifices in this case means increases in demand and therefore supply for sacrifices. What this contradiction tells us is that Raikka’s conditions for genuine opposition are still relevant. The reason stems from the fact that opposition to evil practices in this case failed to fulfill the negative qualities of genuine opposition, that is, the revolutionary’s opposition was (1) Far too late, (2) Evidentially inefficient, and it stood to (3) Create more harm than it could possibly stand to prevent. In spite of that, however, I will establish below the failure of Raikka’s preliminary (Q1-Q4) questions for genuine opposition, which fall in light of anachronistic concerns.

Suppose the virtual human sacrificing ceremony that is the fictionalized Western group is so vast in size that its overall territory goes on for miles across a vast landmass. Accordingly, the sacrificing ceremony is divided up by region and each region divides even further into cities, counties, towns, and neighborhoods. However, in the last couple decades or so the ceremony, its participants and their habits have been projected live via satellites into an abstract space called the ‘internet’. Part of the sacrificing ceremony includes the opportunity to communicate social and political content on the Internet via mediums called social media. Social media is a global community of sorts and so the opportunity to post social/political content might seem almost boundless on the face of it.

Yet, suppose that as the reach of information has grown, so has authority over access to information. What if social media and posted content was controlled by powerful private firms consisting of venture capitalists with a vested interest in social/political content insofar as—and if nothing else—content of this sort was profitable for them? No matter what inspires these firms, they are committed to censoring content deemed dissident to, say, the status quo or the fashionable nonsense of the time by using algorithms to ‘filter’ out what could be deemed as rogue points of view. And not only are particular views being censored, but entire accounts of individuals or organizations are forcibly suspended or even closed simply for expressing views contrary to the status quo or fashionable nonsense. Moreover, even individual accounts can adjudicate their disapproval for what others say through a point system based on popularity, or they can block or mute individual accounts and their content—a kind of tyranny of the majority via institutionalized groupthink sandwiched between a false dichotomy. In other words, one who expresses opposition to either (P) the human sacrifice industrial complex or (Q) Say, the revolutionary social movements, no matter, loses his opportunity to genuinely oppose human sacrifices by way of systematic censorship. So, one is being forced to accept the very sacrifices he is trying to oppose. As I will establish below, even if Raikka would refuse to call this a case of genuine opposition, he certainly could not call it a case of *genuine support*.

**5. Counter Proposal**

To begin, it is imperative that I make some quick distinctions here. Groups of the kind, say, ‘Type 1’ that happen to be rooted in an intergenerational practice of subsisting on a human sacrifice industrial complex, a practiced premised on a notion of ethnocentricism, are equal to examples of group types that include things like ‘clubs’ or ‘teams’.[[26]](#endnote-26) Another type of group, ‘Type 2,’ includes things like races or ethnicities, genders, or sexual orientations. Ritchie gives the example that while LeBron James plays for the [Los Angeles Lakers] in this world he does not in some possible worlds.[[27]](#endnote-27) However, I take it that on this view, LeBron James is Black in all possible worlds where he exists.[[28]](#endnote-28) Interestingly, arguments against the right to immigrate have employed such premises wherein a place like the United States is viewed as a kind of private club. Then, on this line of reasoning, we can deduce that descendants of the group’s forebears have the opportunity to disassociate from the group identity set long ago if only a means of genuine opposition could be attained. As for descendants of those sacrificed during the historical first ceremonies, things get a little thorny here thereby warranting a separate discussion worth delving into elsewhere. Suffice it to say, though, this opportunity for disassociation is also available to this division of the group as well.

In the previous section, it was obvious that Raikka’s genuine opposition thesis would appear wrong if the fictionalized case under discussion were in fact a real phenomenon, for it seems that genuine opposition is built on a false dichotomy that in turn is based on faulty premises about the blameworthy group, its norms and values, and the general moral climate in question. It was also clear that had Raikka’s contribution been a scientific hypothesis it would have failed confirmation testing over time. To be clear, Raikka’s thesis fails its own line of questioning (Q1-Q4) such that it was shown that (A1) serious risk of bodily harm is not the only means of severely limiting opportunities to oppose evil practices, (A2) the group lacks shared values or factual knowledge they could agree to, and (A3) opposing the practice does seem rather futile in light of (A1,A2). But then, what about (A4)? Well, though we’ve cast some doubt on its stimulus (Q4), we’ve yet to satisfactorily answer whether *“everybody accepts the practice without opposing it,”* as Raikka argues. I will refute this claim en route to our conclusion below.

Raikka alleges that disassociation for the case under discussion is one in which the conclusion does not follow from the premise. Yet, as I showed, Raikka conflates blameworthiness for an action, A, with a concept more tantamount to the moral stain of a population, P, in which individual, *x,* members’ moral integrity is compromised or predicated by the stained moral climate—i.e., @xP(x). In sketching out his notion of genuine opposition, Raikka also seemed to overestimate the moral goodness of his fictionalized group’s shared values while simultaneously underestimating the severity of its moral climate. I presume this is why he never explains what it is to act on *genuine support* for an evil practice. Following Raikka’s negative view of genuine opposing, we can invert genuine opposition against evil practices thereby transferring it to genuine support for disassociation based on the actions—proposed and historically proven—of what we called our Rogue group.

The term political cell typically conveys negative images of extremist or rogue subclasses within a group, a fringe group within a larger whole whose political philosophy is contrary to the status quo or even mainstream minority groups. Yet, if not for such rogue cells, systematic evil practices such as native genocide, slavery, and segregation to name but a few would never have been delegitimized. In spite of the possibility of being systematically and legally censored or ostracized (even arrested or assaulted) by the group, it took individual social/political rogues to come together in order to oppose the status quo or fashionable nonsense of the day. Each of these rogue cells likely began as mere nuisance, irritation, or eyesore, yet benign in light of the system and its practices, and perhaps limited to one region of the overall political body. After all, the very reason why it is unreasonable to charge an individual or even many individuals for the crime of a collective is because only the latter set possesses the possibility of carrying it out or else resisting it in any meaningful way or at all. Yet, benign growth is the way in which many lethal cancers begin.

Under what conditions could we deem one or a subdivision as constituting a rogue cell? To answer, we must begin amending Raikka’s (Q1-Q4).

(Q1) Does anyone or a political cell of the larger collective body *create* opportunity to oppose the practice in spite of the risk of being systematically and legally censored or ostracized by the group?

(Q2) Does anyone or a political cell of the larger collective body create opportunity to oppose the practice by appealing to ‘shared values’ accepted by the group and to ‘factual knowledge’ readily available to its members?

(Q3) Does anyone or a political cell of the larger collective body create opportunity to oppose the practice in the sense that they have no reason to believe that doing so would be completely futile?

(Q4) Does everybody accept the practice without opposing it or do they create opportunities for disassociating?

The modification of these questions begins with the notion of ‘creating’ rather than merely ‘having’ opportunities to disassociate from evil practices. In light of the fact that censorship of views against the human sacrifice industrial complex is a legitimized and protected practice within the moral climate of the fictionalized group implies that one must create opportunities to voice their genuine opposition to these practices. Creating opportunities to oppose evil practices requires rogue cells to hold and appeal to values from factual knowledge they share about the circumstances in question. All in all, the rogue cell does not think their opposition to be futile in spite of systematic censorship or institutionalized groupthink that may render the moral climate immune to it—at first. That is, the collective force of those who contribute *genuine support* to evil practices like human sacrifice through appeals to shared values like human health as a privilege may overwhelm rogue opposition at first. But, like in the aforementioned historical examples of delegitimized cases of evil practices, rogue opposition can prevail only if genuine opposition is possible. Let’s dress up this fictionalized group a bit further.

Following Hobbes, imagine a collective as something like a plural subject, a less complexly defined individual composed of vastly more complex individuals.[[29]](#endnote-29) Yet, this artificial man is greater in stature and strength than the natural individual “for whose protection and defense it was intended; and in which the sovereignty is an artificial soul, as giving life and motion to the whole body.”[[30]](#endnote-30) Thought in this way, we can envision individuals as something analogous to cells that compose this artificial man. Individual cells and humans each differ from their peers in things like stored quantities of particular hormones, body shape or form, and even daily function or routine. However, one rogue cell is all it takes to begin potentially serious changes in the body. If a mass forms composed of rogue cells on a particular area of the body, it could become malignant and therefore be potentially lethal. If the rogue mass becomes malignant, the next threat is that of metastasis, a process whereby this cancerous growth spreads and grows in secondary areas. The cancer eventually weakens the body and its host before finally killing them when successful. Yet one thing that the cancer cells benefited from during this process of opposition (if you like) to the body and its practices was the nutrients from food and drink ingested by the body’s host. Yet, food and drink aren’t enough to eliminate a rogue cancerous growth. To drive this point home, consider the following thought experiment.

**Johnny the Human Sacrificing Maniac**

Johnny is a homicidal maniac. Johnny spends nearly every moment of everyday sacrificing small children. This habit of human sacrifice is so ubiquitous in Johnny’s routine that every bite he takes, every purchase he makes necessarily involves the blood or flesh of some poor innocent child he murdered. Johnny bathes in sacrificial blood, brews it in his teas, or else drinks it from the twitching bodies of his victims. Johnny is also a cannibal whose diet is otherwise lacking in variety. The flesh and blood of children is all that he ingests. Likewise, Johnny’s pores almost literally ooze these substances when he perspires, a sign that his bodily tissues and cells benefit solely from the nutrients obtained in these evil practices. One day Johnny begins to feel a bit ill, as he is too weak to keep up with his usual body count. A few weeks later, he is so weak that he is forced to eat bread and bathe in water, as there is not enough flesh and blood to go round. Eventually, Johnny is too weak to murder children and a day or two later he finally passes away. Johnny died of cancer.

It is not uncommon to read or hear about deceased cancer patients ceasing to eat in their final days in order to likewise stop ‘feeding the cancer’. If we loan agency to the cells in the thought experiment, we could say they are predicated on the moral stain of Johnny’s evil practices. We could also say that all were guilty of benefiting from human sacrifices for most of that time. Yet, we cannot deny the rogue cells gave anything less than genuine opposition such that their rogue opposition was necessary to the weakening and eventual ceasing of Johnny’s evil practices. In this case, rogue opposition is genuine opposition, for it does not logically follow that these rogue cells gave genuine support to Johnny’s human sacrifices, that is, not when the support they contributed for the practices were used to further weaken the body and its ability to carry out more sacrifices. Eventually, the body had to subsist on new and even perhaps more ethical sources of nutrients. Though, Johnny and his cells did eventually meet their demise, imagine the fictionalized group of Western society as not necessarily having to meet this same fate, but rather the death of its old ways of thinking and likeminded practices.

**5b. Irreducibility to Roles Within Collective Personalities and Joint Commitments**

As the above shows, joint commitments coincide with Clause 1 or C1 such that joint action (JA) doesn’t require physical proximity for such acting to be possible, yet they fail to correspond to Clause 2 (C2). On the rogue opposition thesis, I reject C2 to at least one degree, insofar as JCs can have parts, contrary to what Gilbert says.[[31]](#endnote-31) To the contrary, Gilbert insists JC is not singularist (2015, 6).[[32]](#endnote-32) But, what if a new counter joint commitment is entered into? Does not the singularist act of going rogue count as a first intention? The JC in our fictionalized case has two parts, namely something like Pogge’s Global Institutional Order and by extension Consumerism. Suffice it to say, jointly committing, intending, and acting are warranted by those being harmed as well, yet, as I shall not discuss here, organization indeed is of the essence.[[33]](#endnote-33) But, what about Narveson’s argument from irreducibility against collective responsibility?

As I showed, something like a metaphysical and moral collective entity can jointly commit, intend, and act and without prior agreements from individuals, namely when the initiators of the JC are all long dead. Rather, first intentions to rid oneself of what has been called, ad naseum, “Others” or what I’ll coin here as ‘strangers’ could be deemed unfit to hold the privilege to respect one’s human health. When ideas like this subsist they serve as the foundation for the guilty group’s moral climate or collective personality. This in-and-of-itself manifests a basis for a kind of agency that is irrespective of strict individualist accounts of intentions and actions. Moreover, when one intends to kill en masse, he does not intend merely to murder the amount he could or will, rather he intends to contribute to a larger score, namely to eradicate a group, not individuals, as Narveson seems to insist.

**6. Conclusion**

In the forgoing, I demonstrated the failure of Raikka’s genuine opposition thesis against (1) Counterexamples stemming from its own anachronistic problems and (2) Counterexamples from its developmental problems. Surely, one cannot be blamed for not being able to forecast the future, yet an applicable concept of moral responsibility ought to prove itself timeless. Raikka’s genuine opposition thesis does not. If nothing else, its fatal flaw was in not considering far enough something like moral taint, namely as something that predicates its moral subjects. On the counterproposal given here, group members may be morally tainted and collectively responsible for a practice as far as every fabric of their existence is predicated on it, yet they may disassociate from guilt only if they demonstrate genuine opposition. For insofar as genuine opposition is using one’s privileged position to help end systematic evil practices by (I) opposing them in a timely manner, (II) creating opportunities to oppose them in a way that is evident and efficient, and (III) opposing them in a way that stands to reduce harm, she is not genuinely supporting the practices. For while it surely does not follow that one is not tainted when everyone is said to be tainted by an evil practice, it does follow that one cell though tainted by these practices is not guilty for genuinely supporting the practice even when every cell is supposedly tainted via predication.

**Notes**

1. Juha Raikka. 1997. “On Disassociating Oneself from Collective Responsibility.” Social Theory & Practce, Vol. 23, No. 1 (Spring, 1997), p. 100 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Larry May. 2006, “State Aggression, Collective Liability, and Individual Mens Rea” Midwest Studies in Philosophy, XXX: 314-315 [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. I would like to thank [an] anonymous referee(s) for suggesting I broaden my thesis a bit by involving it more in the ‘larger discussion’ over moral responsibility. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Margaret Gilbert.2015. ‘Joint Commitment: How We Make the Social World.’ Oxford University Press, 2015: 24 [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid, 26 [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Peter French. 1979. ‘The Corporation as a Moral Person.’ American Philosophical Quarterly, Vol. 16, No. 3 (Jul., 1979), 211 [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. On that line of reasoning, it appears I am toeing the line if not fully committing to metaphysical concepts of ethnic groups. In the larger scheme, beyond this small-scale work, I am. To the chagrin of collective and individual responsibility sympathizers alike (e.g., Reiff, Narveson, and Iris Young) I am implying—but not discussing here—a thesis of objective borders amongst ethnic groups as extending from colonialism to contemporary times. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Though to be fair, I’ve never read this work. For this proposition, I cite the following entry: Smiley, Marion, "Collective Responsibility", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2017/entries/collective-responsibility/>. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Jan Narveson. 2002, “Collective Responsibility,” Journal of Ethics, 6: 184-85. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Ibid, 184-85. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. May, Larry. 1987, The Morality of Groups: Collective Responsibility, Group-Based Harm, and Corporate Rights, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 211 [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. As an aside, this thesis is bolstered by an evolutionary biology via the warrior theory and talk of the mirror neuron. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. I derive this notion of a negative duty not to harm the global poor from: Thomas Pogge. 2002. World poverty and Human Rights: Cosmopolitan Responsibilities and Reforms. (Cambridge Polity Press, 2002), 3 [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Raikka, ‘Disassociating Oneself from Collective Responsibility,’ 95 [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Ibid, 96 [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. For one thing, Western nations are *inherently* individualistic due to things like bills of rights or cultural attitudes based on individual rights or liberty, yet many individuals in these groups would regard things like taxation for social spending and the public good as positive if not necessary for a just community. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Janna Thompson. 2006, “Collective Responsibility for Historic Injustice” Midwest Studies in Philosophy, XXX: 155. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Pogge, ‘World poverty and Human Rights: Cosmopolitan Responsibilities and Reforms,’ 3 [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Judith Lichtenberg. 2013. ‘Negative Duties, Positive Rights, and “New Harms” Ethics (The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 2 [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Raikka, ‘Disassociating Oneself from Collective Responsibility,’ 100 [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Jan Narveson. 1993. ‘Moral Matters.’ (Lewiston, NY: Broadview Press), 168 [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. Narveson, ‘Moral Matters,’ 168 [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Reiff, ‘Terrorism, Retribution, and Collective Responsibility,’ 224 [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Gregory Mellema. 1997. ‘Collective Responsibility.’ (Rodopi: Amsterdam; Atlanta, GA), 75 [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. Indeed, I am speaking of what is known as ‘body positivity’ and ‘fat acceptance’ as well as each one’s dubious, albeit congruent, connection with mainstream or “intersectional” feminism. I speak more on this connection elsewhere in a conference paper that is also under review. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. Katherine Ritchie. 2015. “The Metaphysics of Social Groups.” Philosophy Compass 10 (5): 310-321 [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. Ritchie correctly remarked James as playing for the Cleveland Cavaliers at the time she published paper (Ibid, 2015, pp. 6). [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. Though, I do not think it is necessary for LeBron James to be African-American in all possible worlds in which he exists, that is, such that his parents could raised him elsewhere in any world similar to this one. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. I understand Hobbes’s Leviathan to hold a contemporary interpretation a bit distinct from what he had initially intended insofar as it contemporary discussions of groups as Leviathans has modified this concept from an authoritative monarchy to something more freely entered into and maintained. As such something like plural subjects spring to mind: Margaret Gilbert. 2002. ‘Guilt and Collective Guilt Feelings’. The Journal of Ethics, Vol. 6, No. 2, pp. 115-143 [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. Thomas Hobbes. 1651. “Leviathan.” Renascence Editions (University of Oregon, 1999), 2 [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. (2015, 32) [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. Gilbert.2015. ‘Joint Commitment: How We Make the Social World,’ 6 [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. I would argue, if called upon, that the Zapatista Liberation Front or EZLN, for example, as the organizational head of all descendants of pre-Colombian peoples. I would base this claim on the Spanish Casta system among other metaphysical considerations. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)