

Book Review

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Elizabeth Cripps: *Climate Change and the Moral Agent: Individual Duties in an Interdependent World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, 278 pp.

Reviewed by *Säde Hormio*

Elizabeth Cripps's book is the first detailed study of climate change from both individual and collective responsibility viewpoints. Although the book concentrates on climate ethics, the discussion on collectivities should be of interest to anyone working on social ontology, especially on collective responsibility for harm. Cripps herself mentions that her non-intentionalist account of collectivities, and the principle of moralized collective self-interest, could have other applications and widespread implications to moral duties we acquire either through mutual dependence, or as part of global collectives.

The basis for collectivityhood for Cripps is in the cooperation (intentional or not) that follows (or should follow) from actual mutual dependency. She motivates her account with a critique of intentionalist models, which she finds too restrictive. Cripps's question is where the duty to act on climate change could originate from. As she observes, traditional theories of moral accountability are ill-equipped to deal with collectively caused harms that cannot be traced back to collectively made decisions. This is why she sets out to find a way to define the subjects for responsibility, an extremely important and timely question. Cripps is right to criticize the dominant approach (which she labels as the intentionalist view) for failing to adequately grapple with large-scale collective action issues and problems. She offers her non-intentionalist model as an alternative that is able to accommodate a wider range of collectivities by appealing to actual interdependence through fundamental interests, or some common or shared goal that can only be achieved together. What makes the claim interesting is that the ascription of collectivityhood is not dependent on the individuals acknowledging their interdependence. In other words, Cripps's model also allows for entirely non-intentional and unstructured collectivities where no member considers themselves a part of the group or jointly intends to do anything.

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Cripps rejects the claim that we could be individually and directly responsible for climate change. Instead, she defends a weakly collective moral duty to organize in a way that allows us to respond to climate change adequately. In the absence of adequate collective action, individuals have a duty to try to bring it about. In Cripps's terminology these are promotional duties. One of the core arguments in the book is that when it comes to climate change, promotional duties are primary over direct or mimicking duties. The idea behind mimicking duties is common in literature on what we should do in response to climate change: an individual should do what would be one's duty if there was a collective scheme in place, for example, cut her individual emissions. Cripps argues that when there is no fair collective scheme to fulfil, it is either redundant or ineffective to concentrate solely on mimicking duties. She is right, but perhaps separating mimicking from direct duties in climate ethics literature is not always very clean-cut. Still, when a collective solution is required, in its absence it is not enough to simply opt for green lifestyle choices and mimic actions that would be enough under the missing collective scheme. Instead, individuals should promote a collective solution.

The structure of the book is carefully constructed and Cripps's grasp on relevant climate ethics literature is nothing short of impressive. Where the book fails to convince, however, is in the rather brusque treatment given to the current literature on collectivities. Margaret Gilbert is the main target of Cripps's criticism, which hones in on the alleged restrictiveness of the requirement for shared awareness, making it impossible to fully account for some collectivities standardly taken as central (the family, the tribe, the state). However, even if it would be successful, this is too wide a criticism to apply to all the intentionalists she mentions, like Christopher Kutz or Raimo Tuomela. For example, Kutz writes that rather than requiring participants to have positive beliefs about others joining in the collective action, they only need to regard the prospect of others joining in as possible. How broadly we should define intentionality and intentions is one of the key questions in assessing Cripps's criticism. Intentionality need not be just about stated intentions that one is aware of; they can also be about participatory intentions of the kind that Kutz describes (Gilbert also seems to allow for something similar).

It is also important to note that Cripps and Gilbert have somewhat different starting points. The way we define collective entities depends on the aim of the definition, and different aims make different definitions preferable. For Cripps, a collectivity (as opposed to a mere aggregate of individuals) is a group of people to assign responsibility to, or individuals who might be said to owe each other cooperation, whereas Gilbert's collectivity is something to explain the social world with. The former is interested in who should or could potentially organise

themselves, whereas the latter is interested in what kind of collective actors are already out there or result from such organisation. These naturally partly overlap, but also direct the debate in different directions with regards to responsibility. For Gilbert, the question is about the nature of joint action that can lead to questions about collective retrospective responsibility, whereas for Cripps it is about cooperation required to secure fundamental interests and the roots for shared prospective responsibility. She is right to point out that social groups are only one category of collectivities, but I think she is wrong to criticise Gilbert for failing to do something that she is not even aiming at doing in the literature discussed, namely to set the criteria for a set or aggregate of people who should develop a framework for collective action where it does not yet exist.

Cripps's non-intentionalist model of collectivityhood is an interesting and timely contribution to the debate. We should discuss potential, should-be collectivities in addition to existing ones to get to grips with collective responsibility properly. The book not only advances climate ethics, but also bridges the gap between the former and social ontology, and I have no doubt that the arguments will find their way into mainstream discussions before long.

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