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Sharing Responsibility for Divesting from Fossil Fuels

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ABSTRACT

Governments have been slow to address climate change. If non-governmental agents share a responsibility in light of the slow pace of government action then it is a collective responsibility. I examine three models of collective responsi-bility, especially Iris Young's social connection model, and assess their value for identifying a collective, among all emitters, that can share responsibility. These models can help us better understand both the growth of the movement to divest from fossil fuels and the nature of responsibility for collective action problems. Universities and colleges share a responsibility because they occupy similar positions of, among other things, power and privilege.

KEYWORDS

Climate change ethics, divestment, collective responsibility, Iris Young, social connection responsibility, group agency

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Confronting climate change requires wide-scale cooperation among many agents. In other words, the responsibility is collective, a thought that is fairly uncontroversial. Rather, the controversial question concerns who comprises members of this collective. For instance, is it governments of the world or individual greenhouse-gas emitters (Johnson 2003; Sinnott-Armstrong 2005; Godoy 2017)? Is it those who have historically caused the most pollution or those who can most easily afford to address the problem (Caney 2010)? Regarding the first question, world emissions arise from the uncoordinated activities of many in-dividuals, so it is understandable that governments are called upon to address this and other problems stemming from collective action. However, govern-ments have been slow or ineffective in addressing climate change, in part because of disagreement over responses to the second question. Some believe

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that responsibility falls on individuals and other group agents in light of this shortcoming (Broome 2012; Cripps 2011; Hourdequin 2010; Jamieson 2007; Nolt 2011; Raterman 2012; Schwenkenbecher 2014; Singer 2002). This might entail protesting or speaking out against harmful policies, electing environmentally conscious leaders and so on. But if this is not working, or working too slowly, then perhaps such agents have more direct duties. Many have already taken on responsibilities themselves, often with the hope that their own actions will encourage governments to act.[1]

For instance, since 2011 a growing number of institutions across the world, especially colleges, universities and other higher-education institutions (hereafter just 'universities'), have questioned the ethical nature of investing in fossil fuels. There is a growing movement to divest endowments of such holdings. This is largely due to the efforts of 350.org, an international organisation of interconnected local chapters committed to various climate issues. The Fossil Free campaign, as they call it, has been dubbed the fastest-growing divestment movement in history (Vaughan 2015).[2] By 2015, 28 universities worldwide had already committed to divestment, adding to the list of cities, counties, countries, religious institutions, foundations and other institutions that have joined the movement.[3] By the time of the twenty-first Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Paris 2015 (or COP 21 for short), over US$3.4 trillion had been divested by over 500 institutions (350.org 2016). The movement challenges the economic structures that encourage environmentally harmful behaviour by calling attention to and questioning profits from fossil fuel investments. By divesting, institutions hope to influence public opinion and garner political will to help reduce the harmful impact of fossil fuel industries.

In what follows, I am interested in neither whether individual universities have a responsibility to divest, nor whether divestment is the best strategy among all possible strategies to thwart climate change. Rather, I am interested in how the divestment movement illustrates a form of collective responsibility that non-governmental agents can take up and share. Only collective action will reduce global emissions. But in what sense can agents so broadly distributed across the world form a collective or group that is capable of acting

1. In this article, I refer to two types of individual agents: an individual person and a single group agent. A collection of agents may then refer to a collective of people, group agents or some mixture of the two. For instance, all endowment-holding universities constitute a collection of group agents. I also consistently use 'group' rather than 'collective' to refer to an agent that is distinct from individual members.

2. This movement is modelled after that which helped bring an end to South African apartheid. Other divestment movements exist or have existed. However, here I focus solely on the Fossil Free campaign.

3. See the Fossil Free homepage: http://gofossilfree.org (accessed 11 Mar 2015). Norway is the first country to pledge divestment from coal. While a number of institutions and even individuals have divested, my focus here will be on universities.

together? I discuss three methods in which philosophers understand collective responsibility – what I refer to as the 'group agent', 'obvious-and-reasonable' and 'social connection' models.[4] Respectively, individuals share responsibility, first, when they are members of a group agent; second, when it is obvious to a reasonable person that they ought to act collectively to effect a favourable outcome; and third, in the same degree and proportion as their connection to structures that produce harm. These are not competing methods, but mutually reinforcing. Below, I discuss the 'group agent' and the 'obvious-and-reasonable' models. Both are helpful but face limitations on their own. Following on from this, I focus on Iris Young's 'social connection' model of responsibility (Young 2011) to argue that agents share responsibilities when they occupy similar social positions within an interconnecting and overlapping network of agency; they meet them by acting with others who occupy similar social positions. Next, I use Young's model to examine fossil fuel divestment. Because of their shared social position, endowment-holding universities make up a collective that can together share responsibility to divest. In the final section, I offer a conclusion that raises some questions about the nature of shared responsibility and joint actions. Climate change challenges many of our traditional moral concepts, such as responsibility. Applying these three models to the divestment movement offers us a chance to rethink what it can mean to share responsibility for large problems of collective action.

FROM GROUP AGENTS TO RANDOM COLLECTIVES

When responsibility is collective, how do we identify members of that collective? In this section, I discuss two possible answers that are useful in the context of climate change. The first is the 'group agent' model. According to what Wringe calls the 'agency principle' (Wringe 2010), only agents can hold collective responsibilities; likewise, the group agent model claims that only group agents have collective responsibilities. By group agent, I mean a collection of agents that share a capacity for making decisions to act based on shared desires and beliefs.[5] This principle restricts responsibility to those col-

4. This survey is not meant to be exhaustive of all forms of collective responsibility, but to address one of the major challenges we face when thinking about collective responsibility in this context, namely, how the loosely connected collection of carbon emitters across the world can share responsibilities. I discuss these three approaches in a different and far more truncated form in Godoy (2017).

5. I take this definition from List and Pettit (2011: 19–41). However, there is a wide range of literature regarding the constitution of group agents and collectives, and what responsibilities may follow from such a constitution. For instance, List and Pettit align themselves closely with, among others, French (1984), who describes the organized decision-making procedures that qualify groups to hold responsibility (List and Pettit 2011: 11); Gilbert (2000) attempts to define what constitutes a 'plural subject' relying on a particular account of shared intentions; and May (1992) focuses on the role that shared desires or goals play in sharing responsibility.

lectives that are organised enough to form distinct agents; many, but not all, corporations and governing bodies do. However, there is an exception to the agency principle that involves what List and Pettit refer to as 'responsibilizing' (List and Pettit 2011: 157, 193). If a company has not established, for instance, rational procedures by which it makes decisions – one of the necessary conditions for group agency according to, among others, List and Pettit – the public still ought to hold it responsible for any harm it causes since doing so will encourage the company to develop those procedures. We punish and praise children for similar reasons. In both instances, there is potential for agency to develop, and this potential is grounds for holding the company or child responsible.

Many believe that group agents, such as corporations, should be addressing climate change, and indeed, many such agents have adopted environmentally minded policies. However, there are limitations to thinking about collective responsibility for climate change in terms of these types of agents. First, group agents that presently exist may be slow to act or resistant to address climate change since they were originally formed with a particular purpose in mind; most likely, this purpose had nothing to do with climate change. For instance, libraries are created to loan books and oil companies to profit from selling oil. Neither was meant to confront a changing climate. Governments were formed to address a wide range of issues and climate change is just one that they consider among many. Sometimes groups are slow to act because it takes time to recognise, incorporate and prioritise new values in their decision-making processes, or to develop or formalise such procedures if these values are new. For decades now, governments have deliberated over how concerns about our warming planet should influence their actions and policies. But sometimes new values are not even compatible with those the group had in mind when it was formed. (This is certainly true for any fossil fuel companies whose aim to generate profits by selling fossil fuels is at odds with the health of the global atmosphere.) In these cases, the public can apply external pressure – or, for members, internal pressure – to encourage groups to reform their values or act more quickly. Slow reaction time and resistance to change are not intrinsic characteristics of group agents, but rather a fact about those currently in existence which might take up responsibility for climate change.

This leads to a second limitation. If group agents are the only way to think about collective responsibility for climate change, then an individual member frustrated by the sluggish pace of their group has little other recourse aside from helping to expedite its action. A group agent meets its responsibilities by taking group action, and only certain people within a group are authorised to act on its behalf (List and Pettit 2011: 35–36). For instance, those who work in human resources or in accounting at BP cannot apologise on behalf of the company after an oil spill. Nor is it reasonable to think such employees should don biohazard suits and clean up the spill themselves. When groups act slowly,

as they have with climate change, it is useful to have a model of collective responsibility that allows for alternatives to group agents.

Finally, just as no one individual agent is capable of making a significant environmental impact on their own, many group agents are incapable of making a significant impact on their own. Large corporations who are leaders within their industry may be in a position to make changes that ripple through to affect the policies of competitors and suppliers, but most group agents are not large industry leaders (more on this below). Similarly, high-emitting countries such as the United States may be in a position to facilitate cooperation by making changes to their emissions policies. However, making an impact on climate change requires the cooperation of other states too. The group agent approach alone is therefore too restrictive for defining collective responsibility as only attributable to group agents. Many large group agents, such as governments, do not seem to be responding quickly enough to climate change. Groups take time to adjust to new problems, formulate responses and convince other groups to do likewise.

The second approach to collective responsibility is the 'obvious-and-reasonable' approach. This begins with individuals rather than groups. I take 'obvious-and-reasonable' from Held, who argues that even random collectives of people may be held responsible for transforming themselves into a group capable of action, 'when the action called for in a given situation is *obvious to the reasonable person* and when the expected outcome of the action is clearly favourable' (Held 1970: 476, emphasis added). This collective can be, for instance, passers-by who encounter a person pinned under the heavy rubble of a collapsed building. The passers-by can be held individually responsible for failing to act together to lift the heavy rubble and save the trapped person (ibid.: 479–480).[6] It is obvious to the reasonable person that this would prevent a death, and clearly the favourable outcome is the survival of the trapped person. In other words, the obvious-and-reasonable account does not require group agency or its potential. This offers an advantage over the group agent approach since it allows for more types of collectives, not just potential group agents, to hold responsibilities, especially new collectives that assemble in response to a particular problem.

But does Held's model violate the agency principle since it requires action of a collective which is not yet an agent? Perhaps agency is not necessary for responsibility. Wringe (2010) has recently challenged the agency principle outright by arguing that obligations can fall on the global collective of all human beings even though they cannot constitute a group agent. He draws a distinction

6. Held's position is similar to that of May, who calls collectives with the potential to become more organized agents 'putative groups' (May 1992: 105–122). Cripps also invokes May's putative groups in order to argue for what she calls 'weak collective responsibility' (Cripps 2011: 174–175), although she makes some distinctions between her position and May's regarding the distribution of responsibility among a putative group (ibid.: 177).

between the subject (the 'global collective') and addressee (individual human agents) of such obligations. According to Wringe, without a global group agent, individuals would be the addressees of obligations to reduce emissions and would have to 'do things which are appropriately related to the carrying out of the action whose performance would constitute fulfilment of the collective obligation' (ibid.: 227). This sounds consistent with Held's understanding of the responsibility that befalls even a random collective. Schwenkenbecher (2013) disagrees with Wringe since, although joint duties are possible among collectives without agency, those collectives must be capable of joint action. By acting jointly, she means people who act 'because they believe that these others will contribute their share toward the joint goal' (ibid.: 313).[7] Since all humans on Earth cannot act jointly, they are not collectively responsible for reducing emissions.

I agree with Schwenkenbecher, who reveals a shortcoming of the obvious-and-reasonable approach. While this approach works well for smaller collectives such as passers-by or other strangers who happen to encounter harm, problems arise when we use it to think about climate change or other issues that are global in scale. Bates raises a related concern with Held's account regarding larger collectives with complicated obligations (say, to overthrow a corrupt government): 'each individual would seem to be a member of a practically unlimited number of "random collections", and it is at least unclear as to which of these random collections is failing to [act]' (Bates 1991: 104). The random collection of emitters is similarly too large and loosely connected to ever be a candidate for joint action, especially since it is not clear with whom each individual should be acting or where the boundaries of collectives begin and end. In other words, there is a practical problem of joint action when collectives get too big or too dispersed. But perhaps there is no reason to think of all emitters as a single collective. In what follows, I show how social connection can identify a collection of emitters – among a vast global collective – who can act together because they share similar social positions and responsibilities that follow from those positions. Such collectives are not group agents, yet they are capable of acting together to confront climate change.

SOCIAL CONNECTION RESPONSIBILITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Young (2011) offers a model of responsibility that is shared among those who are socially connected to structural injustices. This form of harm arises from seemingly innocent everyday routines. Traditional notions of responsibility single out individual agents that cause harm; yet structural injustices are so causally complex that identifying individual offending agents does little

7. Those familiar with Gilbert (1992) will see a similarity between her work and this definition of joint action.

to correct or prevent the harm they encourage from recurring. Young uses the apparel industry's reliance on sweatshop labour as an illustration (ibid.: 125–134).

Individual sweatshop managers who beat their employees, deny them access to water or toilets, or commit similarly atrocious acts are themselves guilty of causing harm. However, it would be missing something important about the situation to stop at singling out such agents. There is a complex chain of interdependent social processes that encourages and perpetuates the persistence of sweatshops. It spans from consumers to retail stores, to global apparel companies, to their contracted manufacturers and supply chains. Authorities may identify and remove abusive managers or close offending factories, but the global demand for cheap clothing and high profits ensures that more will spring up in their place. If host countries begin regulating labour practices in such a way that increases labour costs, companies will likely relocate sweatshops to countries with weaker regulations.

In addition to blaming individually guilty agents, Young suggests that all those socially connected to these processes – from consumers to labourers – share responsibility to improve background conditions and structures that influence individual actions (ibid.: 95–122). Such responsibility can only be met through collective action. People are socially connected by virtue of their common participation in interdependent social processes, or 'mutually influencing institutions and practices through which people enact their projects and seek their happiness and … [through this participation] they affect the conditions under which others act, often profoundly' (ibid: 139). In other words, when considering structural harm, we should begin with the assumption that responsibility emerges from how we already work together, quasi-intentionally, in ways that give rise to patterns of behaviour by which we cooperate with one another to achieve intertwined ends, rather than with the assumption that we act in isolation, and that we are only responsible for the harm we individually cause. In fact, our actions often have a strong influence on the actions of those to whom we are socially connected.

There is a clear analogy between the network of processes enabling sweatshop labour and that enabling climate change. A single consumer can avoid buying apparel produced under unjust conditions. The good intentions behind this abstention may be morally admirable, but it leaves the structures reproducing the injustice intact. Similarly, a single philosopher who refuses to fly to a conference in order to give a paper does little to prevent the harm associated with climate change. Social connection responsibility is met by acting with other agents to transform harmful structures rather than by acting as an isolated, individual agent.

This notion of responsibility is more open-ended than what we might call duties, which outline specific actions one must take (ibid.: 143). Accordingly, Young offers four parameters which act as guidelines when thinking through

possible ways to meet social connection responsibility: power, privilege, interest and collective ability (ibid. 144–147).[8] Each of these is derived from the relative positions that agents occupy within the interconnected framework of social practices. Below I discuss how these parameters define narrower collections of agents among a much wider global collective that shares similar responsibilities to combat climate change through joint action.

The first parameter is power. Some agents have more power than others to affect structures (ibid.: 144). Responsibility is often considered to be commensurate with power (Jonas 1984: x). I cannot have a responsibility to single-handedly bring an end to fossil fuel extraction since it is beyond my power to do so.[9] Power to affect the climate varies according to one's position within the network of social structures that encourage fossil fuel use; the nature of one's moral responsibility varies accordingly. Such power is understood as relative to other positions within this network of agents. Governments, businesses and individuals all have different power to influence social structures. Different individuals have different powers depending on whether they are oil company executives or middle-class commuters.

Likewise, when a leading company demands that its supply chains adopt new manufacturing standards, the effect often ripples through the entire industry. Many manufacturers and suppliers work with multiple corporations. Apple shares factories with Samsung, McDonald's shares suppliers with Burger King and so on. A ripple effect was anticipated, for instance, when McDonald's announced plans to curb its use of chicken treated with antibiotics, since those who raise chicken for McDonald's also supply many other companies (Kesmodel et al. 2015). One such supplier is Tyson, the largest meatpacker in the United States. According to the social connection model, such leaders have different responsibilities from smaller businesses, which correspond to their differences in power.

An individual agent, by contrast, has very little power to curb the world's carbon emissions. A lone joyrider enthusiast's decision to go for a drive on a sunny Sunday afternoon will ultimately have a negligible effect on the atmospheric concentration of carbon; while governments can pass laws to increase fuel-efficiency standards, corporations can create more fuel-efficient cars and so on (Johnson 2003; Sinnott-Armstrong 2005). If individuals wish to effect change, they must put pressure on agents who do have power to influence social processes. In order for this pressure to be effective, individuals must act

8. I focus on the four parameters that Young discusses, but perhaps there are others. For instance, Cripps (2013) discusses three types of collectives – 'The Young', 'The Able' and 'Polluters' – that share some collective responsibilities. Although she does not discuss these groupings in terms of Young's four parameters, there is clear overlap. I do not here have the space to discuss whether Cripps suggests any additional parameters by which to locate shared responsibilities.

9. In other words, ought implies can, though Jonas believes modern technology requires us to modify this Kantian dictate (Jonas 1984: 128–129).

with each other. When agents act together – say by joining a movement – they increase their power and can more effectively encourage leaders to construct new laws, persuade companies to abandon carbon-heavy practices and so on. The same is true of individual states or corporations. Avoiding further serious global warming requires wide-scale cooperation among many agents. States can use their powers to convince other states to adopt laws or sign international treaties to limit emissions.

This means that, according to the social connection model, individuals are responsible not only for the power they presently have, but also for the power gained from acting with other agents. Agents who occupy similar positions of power in relation to a form of structural injustice will have similar responsibilities, since the limits to effect change are relative to one's power. Power is therefore one guideline that can help define a collective of agents who share responsibility. Governments can use their powers to work with other governments, companies with other companies and individuals with individuals.[10]

The second parameter is privilege. One might assume that privilege is a derivative of power, and indeed they are often connected. However, power refers to the ability to influence structures, while privilege refers to the benefits gained from one's position relative to others within a social network (Young 2011: 145). Social-structural processes give rise to positions of relative privilege or disadvantage. Young cites as an example of such privilege the low prices and large selections of apparel that Western consumers enjoy, which is itself a by-product of sweatshop labour (ibid.: 145). The institutions and processes that give rise to climate change create similar positions. The world's affluent citizens consume fossil fuels at relatively low prices since many of the environmental costs are excluded from what they pay. While many are vulnerable to the effects of climate change, the world's poor are particularly so, and face additional burdens (IPCC 2014: 31; Mearns and Norton 2010: 18–23). The affluent are more likely to escape dangerous storms, have access to food during droughts and live in states that build infrastructure to mitigate the effects of climate change.

The world's affluent are also able to reduce some emissions with relative ease: by installing solar panels, driving greener vehicles, buying organic produce, reducing the meat and dairy in their diet and so on. But doing so prevents relatively little harm. Social connection responsibility is met not by making changes to one's own lifestyle, but by acting with others to transform structures that encourage the individual lifestyle choices that lead to harm. Those who

10. I mention a horizontal rather than vertical sharing of responsibilities since I believe it is easier for agents of equal power to share responsibilities. Though there may be other reasons for individuals to share responsibilities with corporations, rich nations with poor nations, and so on. However, the manner in which agents from vastly different positions can share responsibilities with one another will become far more difficult to assess. Indeed, this was one of the difficulties with the obvious-and-reasonable approach. Thanks to Maeve McKeown for helping me refine this point.

occupy similar positions of privilege constitute a collective, the members of which share responsibility for understanding their privilege and finding a productive way of ensuring others are not harmed by it. It is difficult to raise moral questions about one's own privilege. Those who do so are especially vulnerable to arguments that justify their advantages. Gardiner calls this temptation 'moral corruption' (Gardiner 2011: 45–48). Those with similar privileges share a responsibility to refute these arguments and resist such corruption.[11]

In other words, the global affluent must keep in mind their interest, the third parameter, in confronting climate change. Those who benefit from privilege often have an interest in maintaining it. Likewise, those who suffer greatly from injustice have a particular interest in confronting it, one that is quite different from that of those who feel its effects more mildly (Young 2011: 145). Workers who are actually employed by sweatshops and communities who stand to lose their homes due to sea level rise are in better positions to understand the realities of this harm than those who consider them from a safe distance. Becoming a victim of harm does not require one to forfeit agency, although vulnerability conditions responsibility. Those in similar positions are more likely to share similar desires, and those who share desires for common ends are more likely to act together to achieve those ends.[12] This is important for social connection responsibility, which requires people to act together. Keeping interest in mind also guards against paternalistic attitudes that those in powerful or privileged positions are wont to take – that is, by taking responsibility *for* those suffering rather than taking up responsibility *with* them. Often the powerless become victims of power or the powerful, who shape structures to the benefit or privilege of some over others. Meeting social connection responsibility should not take the form of trying to merely wash one's hands of guilt, but instead of examining one's interest in an injustice. This involves questioning one's power and privileges, and by engaging in dialogue with those who have different stakes – for instance, those who have a direct interest in guarding themselves against actual harm.

The final parameter is collective ability, which in the context of our discussion refers to the ability to act as, or like, a group agent. It is with this parameter that we see most clearly how the social connection model is an addition to the prior two models. A collection of agents that is already capable of acting together (broadly construed) has a different responsibility from those that do not (ibid.: 147). Universities, for instance, played a big role in the anti-sweatshop movement. (In the next section I will discuss how these institutions

11. The 'perfect moral storm' of climate change makes us especially vulnerable to an instance of corruption that Gardiner refers to as 'intergenerational buck-passing' – when present generations refuse to act for the sake of future generations. Here I use the term in the wider sense of agents subverting moral language and arguments for their own purposes (Gardiner 2011: 46).

12. We might say that this creates greater solidarity, which according to some is a prerequisite for acting together. See e.g. Feinberg (1968).

have once again taken the front line, this time in the movement to counteract climate change.) Students and faculty pressured administrators to adopt stricter labour standards for manufacturers of their team uniforms and other clothing sold on campus, thereby effecting changes in the apparel industry (ibid.: 147). Universities often have governance structures that are more democratic than those typically found in the corporate world. Students, faculty and staff often have a say in decision-making. Neighbourhoods, streets and even apartment buildings are also collectives that can more easily develop mechanisms facilitating joint action under the right circumstances. Variance in these mechanisms or their possibility entails different responsibilities.

Recall that the problem identified above was the practical difficulties of locating a collective among all emitters who share responsibilities to act together. The social connection model and Young's four parameters are useful for identifying agents who occupy similar positions relative to the injustices resulting from climate change; they narrow down the scope of what could otherwise be a limitless number of random collectives or a nebulous 'global collective' of all moral agents on the planet. Socially connected agents then take up responsibility by acting together with the aim of transforming the structures perpetuating climate change; since no individual agent has the power to do this alone, joint action is important. Yet in acting together, socially connected agents need not transform themselves into a group agent, though doing so may certainly help to achieve common ends more effectively.

I now turn to the fossil fuel divestment movement for an example of social connection responsibility in practice. The divestment movement and its proponents encourage universities to divest, in part, by highlighting the relative social position that endowment-holding institutions occupy. No divesting organisation will effect climate change measurably on its own, but by acting together, universities put pressure on the political and economic structures encouraging carbon emissions. Currently, a number of universities have joined the divestment movement, although by doing so, they are not becoming part of a formal group agent.

THE DIVESTMENT MOVEMENT AND ENDOWMENT-HOLDING UNIVERSITIES

An organisation 'joins' the Fossil Free movement by divesting. But in doing so, it does not become part of a larger group agent; in fact, it is meaningful that they do not. When distinct agents join the movement for their own, sometimes different, reasons, they send a more powerful political message than that which would come from an individual. I believe that the growth of this movement has been encouraged, implicitly, by a social connection model of responsibility. Universities are pressured to join because they belong to a collection of agents

that benefit financially from fossil fuels and that have the ability, collectively, to exert pressure for change. Young's four parameters are again useful to elucidate why responsibility has here taken the form it has.

First, universities have limited power to affect the structures that encourage climate change. They cannot change laws or write public policy, as can governments, though they can teach courses and fund research to help influence public opinion. While not all universities have this kind of clout, many have endowments, and each school possesses the power to divest its own endowment of fossil fuels. Plans to divest, considered individually, are not likely to slow climate change to a measureable degree – as is the case for a single person who refuses to fly or drive. Analysts have pointed out that it is unlikely that even the entire movement will hurt the profits of fossil fuel companies. But advocates claim the movement's power lies in its political, rather than financial, effects. Divesting expresses disapproval for obtaining benefits at the cost of perpetuating great harm on present and future generations.[13]

Because each agent that joins the movement increases the strength of this message, those universities that might influence others by divesting have faced stronger pressure – not unlike industry leaders in the corporate world. Sit-ins and other forms of protest at top universities such as Harvard and Yale have been well-covered by journalists, bloggers and tweeters.[14] When Harvard's president Drew Faust published the university's reasons against divestment, it was the subject of heavy public scrutiny. For instance, Harvard and others have suggested that institutions retain more power by holding on to investments in fossil fuels since doing so gives them a seat at the company table as a shareholder (Faust 2015). However, it is not clear how shareholder action could be effective since the business model of such companies is so deeply dependent upon fossil fuels. A strong enough contingent of concerned shareholders may encourage companies to shift some attention to renewables, but a third of global oil reserves, half of gas reserves and over 80 per cent of coal reserves should remain unused in order to meet a warming limit of 2 degrees Celsius (McGlade and Ekins 2015). It is unlikely that concerned voices can surpass those that are merely interested in maximising profits while they still can through the tried and tested business model of extracting fossil fuels.[15] As agents who share the power to divest, universities can share responsibility to collectively put pressure on those structures enabling climate change. Their

13. For more on the communicative value of individuals acting unilaterally to fight climate change, see Hourdequin (2011).

14. See the Divest Harvard homepage: http://divestharvard.com/ (accessed 4 Jul 2015).

15. It is possible that with enough momentum, shareholder activism can illustrate an effective form of social connection responsibility (thanks to an anonymous reviewer for this thought). My point is simply that past efforts seem to have demonstrated that building this momentum is unlikely. However, recent attempts by shareholders have been more successful than in the past (McKenna 2016).

social position, in the context of a growing movement of divesting universities, amplifies the meaning of this act.

Second, universities share a privilege that they can easily give up in order to provoke change. Profits from fossil fuels finance a portion of their operating costs through endowments, while they are insulated from the worst environmental costs of these investments. The divestment movement challenges, in a very public way, the moral status of benefits reaped from fossil fuels. This challenge finds a basis in the principle: One ought to surrender a privilege that is linked to harm if one can do so without incurring a great cost. This is a version of a well-cited principle in moral philosophy regarding harm prevention. The moral choices we make often come with sacrifices, but some sacrifices are worth the cost; for instance, saving a drowning child is generally regarded as worth the cost of getting one's clothes wet.[16] Analysts have determined that divestment will not significantly harm operating budgets, and that in some instances portfolios devoid of fossil fuels even outperformed those with them (Zeller 2015). As more universities decide to divest, it becomes increasingly difficult to argue that these investments are necessary for effective functioning. Universities challenge their own privileged positions by publicly relinquishing their financial ties to fossil fuels; they send a powerful political message by doing so.

Third, universities share a special interest in the good of their communities and the future well-being of their members. Promoting this well-being is the aim of the divestment movement. The social role of a university is, in part, to educate and to advance knowledge, goals that are inherently future oriented and melioristic. University missions often refer to educating the future leaders of society. We can find similar principles reflected in religious institutions and philanthropic foundations, both of which have also joined the divestment movement in notable numbers.[17] An institution publicly pledged to some good sends a different message by divesting than would, say, a for-profit corporation. Even when non-profit institutions divest for financial reasons, there is a moral dimension to their act since everything they do is evaluated in light of their mission and the role that non-profit institutions play in society. The divestment movement has leveraged this interest to increase the impact of each university that announces plans to divest.

Look once more at the remarks by Harvard's president, Drew Faust. He argued that an endowment is an educational resource that should be used solely to advance the institution's ability to educate. He writes: '[w]e should

16. Perhaps the most frequently cited example of this principle comes from Singer (1972). He formulates the principle as follows: 'If it is in our moral power to prevent something bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything of comparable moral importance, we ought, morally, to do it' (ibid.: 231).

17. The Rockefeller Brothers Fund made headlines when it announced plans to rid their US$860 million philanthropic fund of fossil fuel investments, most notably since the history of the family's wealth is intimately linked to the oil industry (Schwartz 2014).

… be very wary of steps intended to instrumentalize our endowment in ways that would appear to position the University as a political actor rather than an academic institution' (Faust 2015). The problem with this reasoning is that refusing to divest also sends a political message; the divestment movement has politicised holding such endowments in the first place. If Harvard continues to maintain the largest endowment in the United States, and if it continues to benefit from fossil fuel investments despite scientific evidence that there are more fuels in reserve than can be safely burned, then it will be forced to reconcile this choice with the purported interests it has in the future of its students and in improving the world through education.

In contrast, the University of Edinburgh released a statement against divestment in May 2015 only to retract and revise it later that month by announcing plans to begin a partial divestment of its shares in the three biggest fossil fuel producers, or 'only where feasible alternative sources of energy exist, and where companies do not invest in low-carbon technologies' (Brooks 2015; Jeffery 2015). The reversal followed a ten-day student occupation of the school's finance department. The university's original stance involved claiming that it considered the interest of developing countries which lacked 'feasible alternatives to fossil fuels that can ensure power for basic needs, such as heating, clean water and refrigeration'; they called divestment an 'easy privilege of the developed world' (Jeffery 2015) – a misdirected attempt at taking responsibility *for* rather than *with* those suffering. However, developing countries are those most vulnerable to climate change, and thereby also have an interest in cutting global carbon emissions. The political act of divesting does not harm the developing world's actual energy supply – recall the criticism of the movement's efficacy that pointed out how profits from fossil fuels will remain unaffected. Rather, divestment sends a political message to government leaders about the dangers of continuing to ignore the true costs of carbon to present and future generations.

Finally, it is clear that universities already possess collective ability; that is, they already function as a group agent, often with highly democratic deliberative processes. On university campuses, the move to divest is mostly spearheaded by students and faculty. Both frequently have access to organised governance structures used to make collective decisions and liaise with other parts of the community. Shared governance makes it easier for universities to join the divestment movement. Each institution that considers divestment does so with the knowledge that other universities are likely to have similar deliberations within their communities, and that they are likely to consider similar reasons for joining the movement, though no substantial structures are in place for universities to deliberate with one another about divestment. Divesting does not imply that everyone should abandon fossil fuel use; it only implies that it is wrong for universities to continue to benefit from this privilege while others suffer. Each university divests as an individual agent, but does so as

part of a movement of agents that have similar powers over endowments from which they derive morally suspect privileges against their future interests.

CONCLUSION

My claim has been that the social connection model is a useful way to identify agents, among all carbon emitters, that can share responsibility in combatting climate change by acting together. Doing so does not form a new group agent, but those who are socially connected can more easily act towards a common aim because they share power, privilege, interest and collective abilities. This is not true of the vast global collective of emitters. Both the group agent and obvious-and-reasonable approaches capture many of our moral intuitions about collective responsibility. Universities are often group agents, and as such they have responsibilities to address climate change when governments are acting too slowly. In fact, it should be obvious to the reasonable person that all emitters share some responsibilities, but it is unclear how these responsibilities are fulfilled – how, for instance, all emitters can act together to meet a shared responsibility. The four parameters of the social connection model offer a way to imagine how this responsibility can be shared. They provide a map for agents that share similar positions and that can take similar actions to achieve collective aims.

My focus has been on comparing different frameworks of collective responsibility, which has left me room only to hint at some of the interesting metaphysical and linguistic questions they raise about the nature and meaning of shared responsibility, joint intentions and collective agency. Others have written on these topics and I have referred to many of these discussions above. These questions are important and hotly debated. However, metaphysics and language need not always 'trump moral arguments' so long as there 'good moral reasons' to think about collective responsibility (Held 2011: 159–160). Universities have good moral reasons to take up responsibilities by divesting, especially in light of the slow government responses to global climate change, and the fact is that many are doing so. My task has been to better understand why this is so by elucidating the shape of the responsibility, not its necessary content or its metaphysical assumptions – that is, not whether divesting is the best way to meet collective responsibility or whether this responsibility is properly understood as individual, collective or shared.[18]

I have also not discussed how social connection responsibility might operate in the absence of a growing social movement. By focusing on divestment, perhaps I have selected a case in which it is easy to discern shared responsibilities.

18. For additional discussions of the differences between individual, collective and shared responsibility, see Clowney (2014), Cripps (2011), May (1992), Schwenkenbecher (2013) and Young (2011).

If so, I hope to have provided a clue for spotting social connection in less obvious cases. Problems as vast in scale as climate change require many agents, collective and individual, to work together. Because of their vast scale, many are connected to these problems; they are just not connected in the same way. Young's model provides a method for dividing up the global collective into more manageable pieces so that, in the absence of a robust movement, it is more clear with whom we should be acting to create one.

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