

Duties and Demandingness, Individual and Collective

Marcus Hedahl, U.S. Naval Academy

Kyle Fruh, Duke Kunshan University

Concern regarding overly demanding duties has been a prominent feature of moral debate ever since the possibility was famously sounded out by Bernard Williams nearly fifty years ago. More recently, some theorists have attempted to resolve the issue by reconsidering its underlying structure, drawing attention to the possibility that the duties to respond to large-scale moral issues like global poverty, systemic racism, and climate change may be fundamentally collective duties rather than individual ones. On this view, the relationship between potentially overly demanding individual duties and large-scale moral issues is mediated by the fact that the duties are, first and foremost, ours together rather than each of ours on our own.

We believe this theoretical shift constitutes an important development for moral theory regarding large-scale moral problems, but in this paper we focus on two distinct reasons to think that the interplay between collective duties and demandingness is more complicated than has typically been appreciated. First, we argue that in cases in which risks or burdens are indivisible, the move to collectivize duties fails to fulfill its promise to alleviate demandingness concerns, and moreover that those kinds of cases are far more widespread than they may initially appear to be. Second, we argue that if concerns over individual demandingness could block a putative obligation from becoming an actual moral duty, then, in some cases at least, concerns over collective demandingness could do so as well. These complications help elucidate the fact that while the move to collectivize duties can address demandingness concerns in a particular subset of cases, in others doing so may merely relocate—or even exacerbate—the problem.

§1 Demandingness: The Appeal of Going Collective

Contemporary discussions of the problem of demandingness are generally traced back to Bernard Williams.¹ While subsequent philosophical work has both broadened the scope of

¹ See Williams, B. (1973) "A Critique of Utilitarianism" in J. Smart & B. Williams (Eds.), *Utilitarianism: For and Against* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press): 77-150; Williams, B. (1985) *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press).

the objection² and challenged its status as a problem that requires a solution at all,³ our focus in this paper is squarely on philosophical work that takes the problem of demandingness to be a serious one—even for a non-consequentialist framework. So we begin by assuming that putative duties can fail to obtain because they would be too demanding.⁴

Even with that assumption in place however, the meaning of the claim that putative moral duties can be excessively demanding might take several different forms.⁵ Perhaps the most straightforward understanding of the demandingness objection would be to claim that duties are too demanding when compliance would be too costly or burdensome. On this interpretation of the demandingness objection, the allegation is that there are some burdens that would be too great to place upon a potential duty bearer. It would be asking too much, for instance, to require an agent to sacrifice her life so that others—even a great many others—may enjoy a minimal benefit. Critics have been quick to point out that the objection, interpreted in this way, can't amount to much.⁶ If the worry is fundamentally about costs and burdens, then there ought to be equal consideration for the burdens *both* of those who would be under a putative duty and of those who would be negatively affected by the duty's absence.⁷ As some thinkers have adroitly argued, if demandingness requires us to weigh the potential good done by the creation of an obligation against the burdens it would impose, then morality will likely be much more demanding than anyone started out believing.⁸

The cost/benefit interpretation of the demandingness objection highlights an important feature of the moral domain: the needs and interests that stand to ground a moral duty should not be overlooked or underrepresented. Yet there is a further aspect of the demandingness objection not captured by this particular interpretation. The term 'demanding' can be used either as an adjective or as a verb. While some might worry that a putative duty could be too burdensome (i.e. where the phrase 'too demanding' is used to describe a potential duty), others may worry that there could be some potential duties that morality simply lacks the authority to impose (where 'too demanding' describes the way

² See, *inter alia*, Ashford (2003) The Demandingness of Contractualism, *Ethics*, 113(2): 273-302.

³ See, *inter alia*, Sobel, D. (2007) "The Impotence of the Demandingness Objection," *Philosophers' Imprint*, 7(8): 1-17.

⁴ Some may want to take up demandingness concerns only at the level of a moral theory rather than at the level of a particular moral duty. We believe, in a context in which duties of systemic justice may—and in fact ought to be able to—place a large number of putative obligations at our feet, this is a problematic approach. For more on how demandingness concerns can operate at the level of duties, see Fruh, K. & Hedahl, M. (2013) "Coping with Climate Change: What Justice Demands of Surfers, Mormons, and the Rest of Us," *Ethics, Policy, and the Environment* 16 (3):273-296.

⁵ See, *inter alia*, Tanyi, A., & Bruder, M. (2014) "Consequentialism and Its Demands: A Representative Study," *Journal of Value Inquiry*, 48: 293-314.

⁶ See, for example, Sobel, D. (2007) *op. cit.*

⁷ See, for example, Murphy, L. (2000) *Moral Demands in Nonideal Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press.)

⁸ Berkey, B. (2016) "The Demandingness of Morality: Towards a reflective equilibrium," *Philosophical Studies*, 173(11): 3015-3035 is a great example here.

in which morality would overstep its authority if it were to impose such a duty). With this distinction in hand, we can recognize that when the demandingness objection is taken to be about the limits of the authority of morality, then the two sides of a duty are not equally up for assessment in terms of demandingness. After all, a moral theory is not too demanding merely because it requires great sacrifices—any theory of morality must do that at times. In imposing a duty, however, morality makes a *demand* of agents who are subject to it. In failing to impose the duty morality makes *no demands* of anyone, and in particular it does not demand of those whose wellbeing may be the object of the putative duty that they remain in need.

Whenever a duty is demanding—even in morally unproblematic ways—it requires complying agents to make sacrifices. So, to be *problematically* demanding is to require agents to make sacrifices in ways in which the demand *itself* would be problematic or inappropriate. This way of thinking about the issue of demandingness captures questions that arise in connection with moral demands that are in some respect transactional, such as a duty to allocate some portion of one’s own resources to others. But it’s also relevant for less transactional duties, including duties that arguably threaten an agent’s integrity. If, for instance, a moral theory advances moral demands so encompassing and onerous that they would undercut the indexical relationship between an agent and her own projects, the sacrifice it would extract would be very great: Agents would be required to give up the pursuits that animate their own lives and provide them with meaning.⁹

Concerns about demandingness arise in different contexts, but among the most vivid examples are responses to dire, sprawling calamities. Consider, for example, someone who believes that there are strong moral imperatives to mitigate the devastating effects of climate change. Such an agent might have difficulty discerning the precise limits of what is morally required of her, but she begins by working toward the goal of lessening the damage to the already disadvantaged, to future generations, and to the natural world. But then she quickly realizes that the reasons she had to begin her efforts to try to make the world better always remain. She begins to subsume and contort her life to her climate goals, but she realizes she is unlikely ever to finish. Every single moment of her life represents an opportunity to write to a legislator, to plan a protest, to recruit her peers to the cause, to make a donation, to find new ways to emit less, or to hasten the transition to a carbon-neutral global economy. The full moral weight of a massive, generational problem appears to fall on her. Significantly, she takes this burden to fall on her not because she is special; she sees this weight falling on each and every one of us until the problem is resolved.

⁹ We recognize, of course, that not everyone will endorse this interpretation. Nonetheless, we will assume for the remainder of this paper that this latter interpretation does, in fact, highlight a distinctive worry about the reach of moral duties. There may well be other, related moral concerns that are sometimes also referred to by others as ‘demandingness concerns.’ For a broader defense of this interpretation, see Fruh & Hedahl (2013) *op. cit.*

Of course, our converted, fully-committed climate activist does sleep and eat; she might even occasionally go on vacation, or at the very least have a night out with her friends. But, for any appropriately acting agent who takes the full moral weight of such an immense moral calamity to fall on each and every one of us until the problem is solved, even in these cases of apparent self-indulgence, she would act “for herself” *only if* and equally importantly *only because* doing so will make her more efficient at the moral task always in front of her, a task that occludes any opportunity to live a life of her own design. When the full moral weight of such an immense problem is taken to fall fully on each and every one of us, the demandingness problem becomes readily apparent.

Against this backdrop, the appeal of analyzing some moral requirements collectively becomes apparent as well. For if our moral duties are fundamentally collective rather than individual, then a kind of shield protects us: the full weight lands on *us together*, rather than on each of us on our own. After all, what we together must do does not, on its own, settle the question of what any one of us must do individually. If the relevant moral duties are collective, it seems what they can demand in total might be very great, without forsaking space for any individual agent to make her life her own or extracting any other problematic sacrifices from individuals.

This point has not been lost on those advocating in favor of a shift to collective duties in our moral thinking about large-scale moral problems. Liam Murphy argues at length that if the duty of beneficence were analyzed first and foremost as a collective duty, individual duties could then be calculated via considerations of fairness.¹⁰ Since it is *we together* who bear the responsibility, what each of us must do individually is our fair share of that collective burden. In the context of global moral problems, going collective promises to install a barrier against runaway moral requirements that threaten to take over the lives of individuals clear-eyed enough to face up to them. Andrew Schroeder complicates this basic picture, arguing that, at least in some cases, individual duties stemming from collective ones will be impacted by collective decisions about how best to discharge the collective responsibility.¹¹ This move changes the sense in which going collective shields individuals from excessive demands, but Schroeder contends it still ought to allow agents sufficient latitude in discharging their moral responsibilities.

Stephanie Collins takes a slightly different approach, arguing that individuals have duties to do their part to form collectives in order to accomplish what would otherwise be impossible or onerous for individuals to accomplish alone.¹² Once created, these collectives become the primary duty bearer, allegedly eliminating concerns that the duties will be too

¹⁰ See Murphy, L. (2000) *op. cit.*

¹¹ Schroeder, S. A. (2014) “Imperfect Duties, Group Obligations, and Beneficence,” *Journal of Moral Philosophy*, 11(5): 1-28.

¹² Collins, S. (2013) “Collectives’ Duties and Collectivization Duties.” *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 91: 231-48.

demanding. Similarly, Miklós & Tanyi develop a view they call ‘Institutional Consequentialism’ that holds that consequentialist reasoning should characterize institutional moral deliberation but not necessarily individual deliberation.¹³ The view is motivated in large part by the idea that whereas consequentialist principles may result in excessive moral demands when deployed by individuals, when deployed by institutions that function in a collective context they can achieve great moral gains “without occasioning excessive demands.”¹⁴

We are not seeking to simply smooth over the important differences between all the arguments we consider together under the umbrella of analyzing individual duties to combat large-scale moral issues collectively.¹⁵ They have different motivations, they seek to solve slightly different problems, and they take a myriad of different forms.¹⁶ Nonetheless, one common benefit of going collective seen by most—if not all—of them is summed up succinctly in the words of another proponent, Judith Lichtenberg: that such a shift would be welcome precisely because it would “reduce the demands on individuals.”¹⁷

§2 The Indivisibility Problem

Many significant questions attending collectivist proposals— including those concerning the ultimate nature of collective duties—we leave to one side.¹⁸ Instead, in this paper our focus is the narrower question of whether demandingness concerns in fact would be alleviated by the move to analyze some duties collectively, as generally has been assumed.¹⁹ The paradigmatic cases for going collective are ones in which the moral demands are against

¹³ Miklós, A., & Tanyi, A. (2017) “Institutional Consequentialism and Global Governance,” *Journal of Global Ethics*, 13(3): 279-297.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 280-281.

¹⁵ One important avenue of criticism of such views reasserts a demandingness problem, now in association with individual moral duties to create, support, and sustain just and functional institutions (see, for example Pellegrino, G. (2016) “Beneficence, Justice and Demandingness: A Criticism of the Main Mitigation Strategies,” In S. Maffettone, & A. Singh Rathore (Eds.) *Global Justice: Critical Perspectives* (London: Routledge.): 91-120.). Another important avenue of criticism of such views is that the demandingness problem re-emerges as duties get distributed to individuals in potentially demanding ways, so the move to ground these duties in collectives does not ultimately settle the question of individual demandingness (see, for example, Collins, S. (2019) *Group Duties: Their existence and their implications for individuals*, (New York: Oxford University Press.). The possibility we develop in this paper offers a distinct way in which demandingness problems might reappear on collectivist views, so we don’t directly engage with these or other criticisms.

¹⁶ For an excellent orientation to collective approaches to moral obligation, see Schwenkenbecher, A. (2018) “Making Sense of Collective Moral Obligations: A Comparison of Current Approaches,” in *Collectivity: Ontology, Ethics, and Social Justice*, ed. T. Isaacs, K. Hess, and V. Ionescu, Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 109-132.

¹⁷ Lichtenberg, J. (2014) *Distant Strangers: Ethics, Psychology, and Global Poverty* (New York: Cambridge University Press): 68.

¹⁸ For a small sampling of the historically influential analysis of these issues, and how they have changed over time, see Weber, M. (1914) *Economy and Society, Vol. 1*. Reprinted 1978. (Berkeley: University of California Press); Hayek, F. (1942) “Scientism and the Study of Man,” *Economica* 9: 267-291; Lewis, H.D. (1948) “Collective Responsibility,” *Philosophy*, 24: 3–18; French, P. (1984) *Collective and Corporate Responsibility*, (New York: Columbia University Press); Graham, K. (2002) *Practical Reasoning in a Social World: How We Act Together* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

¹⁹ Two important exceptions worthy of note are Brian Berkey and Collins and Lawford-Smith, both of which we consider in §3.

resources that are easily divisible and easily distributed, demands for things like money or time. In fact, it seems that proponents of analyzing duties respond to large-scale moral issues as collective duties have had in mind primarily cases like these.²⁰ As we argue in this section, however, the impact of going collective will vary. While the collective move may, at times, alleviate demandingness concerns, in some cases the risks and burdens that trigger demandingness concerns are not so readily divisible and distributable. In these cases, the move to collectivize the duties of large-scale moral issues may not achieve its desired effect of reducing individual demandingness, a state of affairs we refer to as *the Indivisibility Problem*.

To begin to make that case, let's start with a straightforward example where the collective move is more likely to be successful. If adequately responding to a natural disaster required millions of hours of service and billions of dollars, one might rightly worry about the demandingness of those requirements on each of us—an individual moral duty to meet those needs could entail total sacrifice from a conscientious agent, including a rendering of service so comprehensive that she might forfeit her role as the author and editor of her own life. However, since the requirements of time and money are easily divisible and easily distributed, an analysis of the moral duties in this case as first and foremost collective promises relief. The move to collectivize duties ameliorates the problem of demandingness by denying that the full moral weight of need falls fully on each and every one of us.

There are additional normative benefits in the move to collective duties relevant to demandingness. For example, the collective may have the ability to introduce considerations of procedural justice, so if there were any vagueness regarding what constitutes a given individual's fair share that might raise demandingness concerns, the collective might have the ability to resolve the ambiguity.²¹ Structured collectives can also introduce mechanisms for dealing with inevitable free-riders who fail to do their part. This is particularly significant for considerations of demandingness, for the failure to adequately cope with non-compliance might mean that individual demandingness concerns resurface. But some collectives could redistribute individual duties in the case of non-compliance of a few to ensure that the collective duty is nonetheless fulfilled, and they could do so with a just redistribution in view.

²⁰ For an excellent illustration of this, see Miklós & Tanyi (2017), op. cit. p. 282.

²¹ This benefit is perhaps easiest to see if the collective that holds the initial duty is organized (e.g. a state or international organization). While some theorists (e.g. Murphy, Schroeder) hold that the initial duty holder is something more akin to all moral agents, the question of distribution remains. And here, this advantage would provide a reason to have the collective duty to be distributed to individual moral agents via structured collectives (as would the benefits of redistribution in the face of non-compliance). Even if moral duties were initially held by an unstructured group and immediately passed to individuals, however, the advantages remain, although they are attenuated somewhat. For example, unstructured collective duty holders lack the ability to reallocate duties in the face of non-compliance in the way more structured collective duty holders can. Yet even a collective as unstructured as the community of moral agents has the authority to constitute new duties for individuals when presented with novel moral situations. For more on this possibility, see Richardson, H. (2018) *Articulating the Moral Community: Toward a Constructive Ethical Pragmatism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press.)

Despite that promise, however, going collective has significant limitations. The most obvious limit is reached when the unavoidable burdens of fulfilling a collective duty cannot be distributed evenly, a limitation we refer to as *The Indivisibility Problem*.

The Indivisibility Problem: If fulfilling a given duty (D) entails a burden (B) so great that B would raise individual demandingness concerns when B is borne by an individual *and* if B is the kind of burden that *cannot* be divided and shared, then analyzing D collectively is an unpromising strategy for reducing the demandingness concerns originally raised against D.

Consider, for example, the much-publicized rescue effort in Thailand in the summer of 2018, where a number of boys and their soccer coach became trapped deep in a flooded cave system. If we suppose that some suitable group (the local government, the township, the people of Thailand, or even all of humanity) had a collective obligation to assist them, it nonetheless remains the case that the risk inherent in some aspects of the rescue could not be widely or equitably shared. Even if it is true that many different people were all contributing in a myriad of different ways (as was true in the actual case), it is also true that only some small number of them had to navigate the extremely dangerous waters of the cave system in order to be able to ultimately fulfill the collective duty. If there were any demandingness concerns for would-be rescuers given the potential risk to themselves with respect to an *individual* duty (a possibility made all the more relevant given the fact that one of the rescuers did in fact die), then those concerns would remain even if the duties were viewed as fundamentally *collective* in nature. If the risks cannot be sufficiently distributed, then whatever demandingness concerns exist in the individual case remain in the collective case.²²

In this case, some may be skeptical that there is a collective duty to help, or that if there is such a duty, that it could be undermined by demandingness objections in unique, one-off emergency situations.²³ We believe, however, that both of these skepticisms can help illuminate the issue of collective demandingness under consideration here. First, we should note that demandingness concerns needn't arise exclusively in connection with highly protracted moral problems that include iterative tasks: sacrifices can be total and all at once. Second, these kinds of emergencies aren't actually especially uncommon. In the United States, for example, thousands of rescues are conducted each year—just within the

²² For the purposes of this paragraph, we leave to one side the possibility of special obligations borne by some individuals in virtue of, for example, a position they had previously agreed to fill (to be a rescue diver in the employment of the government, for example).

²³ We are grateful to an anonymous reviewer for this point.

National Park System.²⁴ These rescues are undertaken as the result of recognizing a reasonable duty to rescue, regardless of whether that duty is appropriately analyzed as falling on the nation as a whole or on the parks service in particular. What makes the Thai cave case so exceptional are the risks it placed upon the rescuers. In other words, it is precisely the fact that the rescue entails such significant sacrifice that would lead some to be skeptical about the existence of a collective duty to rescue in the first place.

Another example of the indivisibility problem arises in the case of war. Traditionally, the *jus ad bellum* criteria are used to determine when going to war is morally permissible; war has not traditionally been analyzed as something that could be morally obligatory on the part of a nation state. One might rightly wonder, however, whether there could be cases in which the collective, in this case the state, could be morally required to go to war.²⁵ If, for example, one state were perpetrating genocide, all the *jus ad bellum* criteria could be satisfied, and another state could prevent the atrocity with little impact to itself *as a state*, then perhaps, given the moral stakes, war could be morally required and not merely morally permissible. Perhaps these cases could be understood as a collective correlate of unburdensome rescue, cases in which we recognize a “presumptive duty to ensure that [everyone] can live in conditions in which their basic rights are respected, at least if we can do so without excessive costs to ourselves.”²⁶

Unsurprisingly, given the concerns of demandingness, the phrase “without excessive costs”—or something similar—is shared among nearly all, if not all, of the non-consequentialist formulations of the duty to rescue. In order to be obligatory, an action cannot place undue burdens upon the rescuer. As the case of war makes vivid, however, sometimes those risks cannot be equitably distributed. Whatever risks there may be in a given war, they will be borne by some individuals more than others.²⁷ When the rescuing state makes its decision to intervene, it does so anticipating that the burden it faces as a state will not be excessive. Such an assessment may well be accurate without precluding the possibility or likelihood that the sacrifices required by particular individuals still could be quite excessive—even total. The rescuing state can accept that there will be casualties, but it is not clear why the individuals who face the highest risk of becoming those casualties could not complain about how demanding this collective moral obligation has turned out to be for them as individuals. Whatever demandingness concerns there may be regarding the obligation to rescue those in war-torn lands, there is a clear limitation on how effective the move of analyzing those duties collectively can be in lessening them.

²⁴ See Vollman, A (2019) “Surge in Hikers Means More Search-and-Rescues for National Parks,” *Modern Conservationist*, May 27.

²⁵ Lango, J. (2001), ‘Is armed humanitarian intervention to stop mass killing morally obligatory?’ *Public Affairs Quarterly*, 15 (3): 173–91: 174.

²⁶ Buchanan, A. (1999) “The International Legitimacy of Humanitarian Intervention,” *The Journal of Political Philosophy*, 7:71-87: 85.

²⁷ Lango, J. (2001), *op. cit.*, p. 174.

Settling questions of whether wars or interventions are morally required, morally permissible, or morally prohibited would take us too far afield from the purposes of this investigation. Some will argue that war can never be morally required because of the costs to numerous individuals who will never live to see the better world a given intervention is striving to create.²⁸ Others will argue that these interventions are either morally prohibited (because they require severe individual sacrifices that are above and beyond the call) or are morally required (because soldiers have already consented to sacrifice themselves in emergency situations) but never merely morally permitted.²⁹ Still others argue, perhaps paradoxically, that it's obligatory for the collective (the state) to intervene, but supererogatory for any of its members (both citizens and soldiers alike) to do so.³⁰ Despite these extreme differences, all the answers worth considering share a common feature: the willingness to grapple with the complexities created between the sacrifice of the collective as a whole and the sacrifices required of a small subset of its members.³¹ We are far from the first to recognize those complexities, but we think that there is nonetheless something beneficial to be gained by recognizing their source: The fact that some sacrifices that would be placed on the collective are *indivisible*.

The indivisibility problem does not, however, merely pertain to risks: Any burden that cannot be sufficiently distributed will create similar limitations. Consider the example of climate activist Greta Thunberg. In her widely publicized speech to the United Nations, she proclaimed, "This is all wrong. I shouldn't be up here. I should be back in school on the other side of the ocean. You have stolen my dreams and my childhood."³² Her statement is first and foremost a condemnation of other moral agents, both individual and collective. Yet in these words, the burden she bears is evident as well. Someone has to be the face of a movement and the voice of a generation, the generation most vulnerable to burdens of a dramatically changing climate. It's not unreasonable to worry that those who must play these leadership roles may view doing so as a moral hardship that interferes with their ability to craft a life of their own. Fulfilling collective duties to improve the conditions of those most harmed by great tragedy, whether caused by accident, neglect, or malice, will often include roles defined by burdens that cannot be divided and distributed.

²⁸ See, for example, Walzer (1977) *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations*, (New York: Basic Books).

²⁹ See Oberman, K. (2015) "The Myth of the Optional War: Why States Are Required to Wage the Wars They Are Permitted to Wage," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 43(4):255-286.

³⁰ See, for example, Lango (2001), *op. cit.*

³¹ Sadly this is not true of all work on these issues. Domestic analogies, popularized by Walzer, have unfortunately led some theorists to look only at the sacrifices of the nation as a whole, without thinking about the limitations on how those sacrifices can be distributed.

³² Thunberg, G. (2019) "Speech At The U.N. Climate Action Summit," *npr.com*, Sept. 23, <https://www.npr.org/2019/09/23/763452863/transcript-greta-thunbergs-speech-at-the-u-n-climate-action-summit>.

Sadly, establishing a new institution in order to justly regulate future greenhouse gas emissions may well only succeed with some extremely dedicated individuals in leadership positions with extremely expansive duties.³³ Even a broad-based set of equal contributions may accomplish little in the absence of some small number of individuals who are not just dedicated to doing their part, but are wholly devoted to the cause. So fulfilling some collective obligations may well impose requirements on some individuals that may appear no less demanding than if the duty weren't understood to be collective in the first place.

This problem is exacerbated when those asked to fill those roles, those asked to bear those burdens, are themselves those already most vulnerable to the harms of systemic injustice. To ask the poor to play a central role in easing the large-scale moral issues of poverty, people of color to play a central role in easing the systemic injustices of racism, or the young to play a central role in easing the large-scale moral issues of climate change is more likely to raise demandingness concerns than to ask the rich, whites, or older adults to do so—precisely because the vulnerable already experience the burdens of the underlying systemic injustice. So, in some cases at least, to ask the vulnerable to forgo a life that is not centered around the task of easing systemic injustice that they themselves suffer more than perpetrate, could well be asking too much.

Within the philosophical frameworks we are considering, duties like the duties to rescue the stranded Thai soccer team and to intervene in unfolding genocide, for example, are first and foremost collective. We have pointed out that collectives attempting to discharge their duties may sometimes find they are unable to do so without burdening some individuals in a way that is problematically demanding. If those duties cannot be distributed to individuals in a way that would avoid individual demandingness complaints, then it's not clear what could or should be said about the collective duty. It would be something that we together *must* do, but something that includes tasks that no one of us could be obligated to do.

When that happens, the indivisibility problem threatens to destabilize the entire edifice of obligations constructed by the collective—even the duties that fall well short of advancing unacceptable impositions. For if the collective's ability to distribute responsibilities is blocked by the indivisibility problem in the case of a few, its ability to distribute obligations to the rest also seems to be compromised as well. For the collective attempting the Thai cave rescue, for example, if it cannot morally demand that the risky rescue roles be

³³ The difference between establishing new institutions and reforming existing institutions is relevant to consequentialist discussions inasmuch as it is generally accepted that the latter has a higher probability of achieving success. For example, see Miklos, A. & Tanyi, A. (2019) "Consequentialism and Its demands: The Role of Institutions," *SSRN*: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3333408>. Miklós & Tanyi concede that in the absence of even moderately just institutions, there is likely no consequentialist reason to think that individuals have a duty to fight for reform since it is unlikely that such efforts will succeed.

fulfilled, then it also risks losing its authority to demand that the supporting roles be fulfilled.

At this point, some may object that there often will be someone who voluntarily steps into the breach. There were divers willing to risk their lives in the rescue operation. There are climate activists like Greta Thunberg and countless others who have sacrificed more than could rightly be demanded of them for the cause. There often are soldiers willing to risk their lives to prevent mass atrocities. And, so long as there are volunteers, an objector might suspect, the indivisibility problem doesn't block the rest of us from being morally obligated to do our part. Even if moral burdens resist equitable distribution, that fact need not, by itself, be a limitation of the move to analyze these duties as collective ones. One might even initially suspect that this fact could be a feature rather than a bug of an account that looks to solve the demandingness objection by going collective. When some subset of agents volunteer to perform the parts of the collective task that would be more than morality would require, the collective duty to rally around them to see the task through is triggered. At that point, rather than leaving them to wallow in an unwinnable individual struggle, we become obligated to do our (far less demanding) part as well.

However, that kind of response to the indivisibility problem, while appealing in some ways, comes with its own limitations. Even in the cases in which there are volunteers to take on more than could be reasonably demanded of them, the indivisibility problem necessarily transforms attendant obligations into a particularly problematic form of conditional duty: *Only if* the demanding burdens are voluntarily taken on does the collective have the normative authority to place moral burdens on the rest of us. That could well ultimately prove to be an accurate assessment of such duties, but their contingency is typically taken to be antithetical to the kind of duties in question. With the notable exception of Schroeder, who uses the move to collectivize large-scale moral issues solely to analyze imperfect duties like beneficence, the authors considered in this piece (Murphy, Collins, Miklós & Tanyi, Lichtenberg, etc.) are using the collective framework to consider a set of duties that includes duties of systemic justice. They are seeking to build on arguments like Henry Shue's argument that duties to mitigate climate change are duties of justice,³⁴ Thomas Pogge's argument that duties to combat global poverty are duties of justice,³⁵ Kristen Shrader-Frechette's arguments in the context of environmental justice and public health,³⁶ and on and on. The duties in these cases are generally taken to be accorded the special urgency of exceptionless obligations. One need not accept all of the historical baggage that comes with Kant's distinction between categorical imperatives and hypothetical imperatives

³⁴ Shue, H. (1999) "Global Environment and International Inequality," *International Affairs*, 75: 531- 545.

³⁵ Pogge, T. (2008) *World Poverty and Human Rights*, (Cambridge: Polity Press).

³⁶ Shrader-Frechette, K. (2007) *Taking Action, Saving Lives*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

to point out that duties of justice are not generally considered to be contingent in quite this way.

The problem is not merely about conditionality, for duties of justice can be conditional.³⁷ The problem is rather about what these duties of justice are conditional upon: Only if some heroes come forward voluntarily to take on excessively heavy burdens can the collective obligation be discharged without levying objectionable demands on its members. When overly demanding duties are sufficiently *indivisible*, then, the demandingness objection *necessarily* undercuts the duty to do the overly demanding part of the collective action. The collective duty in question is not just conditional on the good-faith efforts of members of the collective to do their fair share or on the antecedent of a conditional duty to be actualized, but on the willingness of some to do the supererogatory. In cases in which burdens and risks are not sufficiently divisible, therefore, analyzing the duties to respond to large-scale moral issues as collective duties does not offer a normative solution to the demandingness objection, it merely relies upon the presence of heroic moral agents who are willing to do more than their fair share *despite* the problem's continued existence. In these cases, going collective does not offer a resolution to the demandingness objection, but instead a mere hope that the problem will miraculously disappear in the situations that really matter.

The analysis in this section is not intended to provide knockdown criticisms of any particular framework for going collective. It is also not intended to catalogue the various hurdles such a framework would have to overcome. Rather, the point of this section has been much more modest: to focus on one purported benefit of the move to collectivize duties to combat large-scale moral issues, namely to alleviate concerns about individual demandingness. According to our analysis, even if all the difficulties facing such a framework could be overcome, this particular benefit cannot be realized if any risks or burdens that would trigger demandingness concerns turn out to be indivisible. *The indivisibility problem* is not merely one among many; it goes to the heart of the purported advantage of the collectivist move. Rather than alleviating demandingness concerns, the move to collectivize duties may in many cases jeopardize the sense in which individual members of the collective may be said to have any relevant obligations at all.

§3 Demandingness at the Collective Level

In this section, we consider another difficulty for those who seek to analyze the duties to respond to large-scale moral issues collectively: the possibility that duties could be

³⁷ See, for example, Horton, J. (2017) "The All or Nothing Problem," *The Journal of Philosophy*, 114(2): 94-104. We are thankful for an anonymous reviewer for this point.

collectively overly-demanding. This problem might seem surprising given the way in which the demandingness problem was framed in §1.³⁸ For this paper, we are operating under the assumption that a set of moral duties is too demanding only when it entails sacrifices so encompassing and onerous that it does not leave sufficient normatively protected space for an agent to make her life *her own*.

That kind of protection seems at odds with commonly held, prereflective intuitions about the nature of collectives. It would be absurd to contend, for example, that *Doctors Without Borders* needs the moral freedom to take a break from focusing on helping the sick in order to finish even more graduate school, to carve out enough time to find and settle down with the right partner (Amnesty International, perhaps), or to create a meaningful existence by nurturing new NGOs that Doctors without Borders and Amnesty International can raise together. We need not deny the possibility of collective responsibility or collective agency in order to recognize that the kind of moral protections afforded to collectives will be rather different than the protections extended to individual moral agents. In part, this difference stems from the fundamental differences in the sets of interests and constitutive ends possessed by individuals and collectives. As John Roberts famously quipped in *FCC v AT&T*, a ruling that held that privacy protections do not extend to corporations, “We trust that AT&T won’t take it personally”³⁹

It is, we believe, nearly universal agreement about this important distinction between the kinds of normative protections collectives and individuals possess that explains the heretofore almost total inattention to the possibility of collective demandingness. It is interesting to note, for instance, that *FCC v AT&T* is one of the very few recent Supreme Court decisions concerning collectives that was unanimous. Even those with radically different views about the ways in which collective interests garner protection can all agree that those protections reach different limits than the limits of protections adhering to the interests of individuals.

The task of this section is to nonetheless establish the possibility that novel demandingness concerns can arise at the collective level. We begin in §3.1 by analyzing and dismissing two possibilities forwarded by other authors for developing distinctively collective demandingness. In §3.2, we sketch an alternative account of collective demandingness before exploring some implications that account would have on the broader analysis of demandingness concerns in §3.3.

³⁸ This seeming incongruity may be why those who consider collective demandingness typically do not frame the demandingness objection the way we do in §1. We believe, however, that such a framing is the most in line with the original objection and ultimately best aligns with duties of systemic justice. For more on this contention, see Fruh & Hedahl (2013) *op. cit.*

³⁹ Roberts, J. (2011) “Opinion of the Court,” *Federal Communications Commission, et al., v. AT&T Inc. et al.*: 12.

3.1 False Starts for Collective Demandingness: Aggregation and Constitutive Ends

A first attempt at constructing a collective notion of demandingness might proceed by simply aggregating demandingness complaints across different individuals, resulting in a collective complaint roughly equal to the sum of the individual complaints. The idea is straightforward enough: However demanding a duty is for person X, person Y, person Z, etc., the demandingness for a group with the membership of {X,Y,Z} is the sum of the demandingness for X+Y+Z, etc. As Berkey nicely highlights, however, this line of reasoning would be deeply at odds with the history of the demandingness objection, which, among other things, can be viewed as an important method of defending the separateness of persons.⁴⁰ If, for example, we are considering whether a collective of well-off people could have an obligation to give up half of its collective resources in order to aid the global poor, one cannot allow a demandingness complaint to be asserted on behalf of the collective if it could not be advanced (in its entirety) on the part of any single individual.⁴¹ The reason why demandingness cannot be aggregated is that there are strong reasons to believe that collectives, even highly organized collectives with formal decision-making procedures, are not experiencing subjects.⁴² Berkey puts the point this way:

If it is true that collectives are not experiencing subjects, that is, if they lack conscious experiences, then there is no entity that would experience the sum of the burdens that would follow from the satisfaction of a (purported) collective obligation. And if there is no entity that would experience the sum of burdens that would follow from the satisfaction of a purported collective obligation, then facts about the sum of those burdens cannot, it would seem, ground a single, unified demandingness complaint against the purported obligation.⁴³

This is not some minor quibble. In fact, the entire project of analyzing duties to respond to large-scale moral issues as collective duties is built on the assumption that collectives cannot press demandingness complaints as a mere aggregation of individual demandingness complaints—otherwise collectives would be *more likely* rather than *less likely* to advance complaints that moral duties are demanding too much.

⁴⁰ Berkey, B. (2019) “Collective Obligations and Demandingness Complaints,” *Moral Philosophy and Politics*, 6(1): 113-132.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

⁴² The view that collective are not experiencing subjects, and so are not moral patients in the same sense that individuals are, is argued by Hess, K. (2013) ‘If You Tickle Us...: How Corporations Can Be Moral Agents without Being Persons,’ *Journal of Value Inquiry*, 47 (3): 319–335, and by Pasternak, A. (2017) “From Corporate Moral Agency to Corporate Moral Rights,” *Law and Ethics of Human Rights*, 11 (1): 135–159. Pasternak (2017), and taken as a given by List, C. & Pettit, P. (2011) *Group Agency: The Possibility, Design, and Status of Corporate Agents* (New York: Oxford University Press).

⁴³ Berkey (2019), p. 120-121.

A second approach to understanding collective demandingness that has some initial appeal is advanced by Stephanie Collins and Holly Lawford-Smith.⁴⁴ In their view, any time a collective has a constitutive end, it's possible that the collective could advance a demandingness complaint in cases where it faced duties that undercut or massively interfered with that constitutive end. The idea is built on an analogy: just as individuals have constitutive ends that ground demandingness complaints, collectives can also possess constitutive ends, and so any collectives with their own collective constitutive ends can rebut overly demanding duties in the same way that individuals can, so long as those collective constitutive ends are themselves morally permissible. Collins and Lawford-Smith take corporations and churches to be the clearest examples of collectives with the kinds of constitutive ends that can block obligations. While there is a *pro tanto* moral demand for these collective entities to have environmentally friendly practices, for example, that putative obligation can fail to obtain if it is incompatible with the full pursuit of those collectives' permissible constitutive ends. According to Collins and Lawford-Smith, "Well-functioning agents—whether individuals or groups—have constitutive ends that morality cannot override. There's no disanalogy here."⁴⁵

The most straightforward way to read Collins and Lawford-Smith's contention is that the existence of a constitutive end, by itself, has the potential to block obligations.⁴⁶ A collective, such as a church or a business, could have a constitutive end or an interest that could come into tension with morality's demands, the same way an individual could have a constitutive end or an interest that could come into tension with morality's demands. If a putative duty fails to obtain in the individual case, it is because of the existence of an individual's constitutive end or interest, by itself, blocks the creation of an actual duty. If a putative duty fails to obtain in the collective case, it is because of the existence of an collective's constitutive end or interest, by itself, blocks the creation of an actual duty.

Unfortunately, however, this approach is also contrary to the philosophical thrust of the demandingness objection.⁴⁷ Constitutive ends may well be essential for collective demandingness claims, but they cannot be sufficient. The normative question regarding collective constitutive ends is not merely when they exist, but when they ought to matter morally.

⁴⁴ Collins, S., & Lawford-Smith, H. (2016) "Collectives' and Individuals' Obligations: A Parity Argument," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 46(1), 38-58.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁴⁶ There is some ambiguity about what ultimate thesis about collective demandingness Collins and Lawford-Smith are committed to. We would agree with the contention that constitutive ends *can* sometimes ground collective demandingness complaints (see the argument in §3.2). But the language "there's *no* disanalogy here" [emphasis ours] leaves the impression that Collins and Lawford-Smith more likely hold that the mere existence of collective constitutive ends is sufficient to ground demandingness complaints; and, moreover that it is the collective ends *themselves* that ground those complaints. While this possibility seems problematic for reasons we consider shortly, we ultimately defend a position that may have a great deal of affinity with Collins and Lawford-Smith's aims, if not necessarily their argument.

⁴⁷ Or, at the very least, this approach is contrary to the interpretation of the demandingness objection we laid out in §1.

Consider the constitutive end and interest that makes possible all the others: continued existence.⁴⁸ This end can be examined from the point of view of a member who stands up at the last meeting of a business or church that is considering disbanding and says that the collective ought to continue because doing so would be “for the good of the collective itself.” This statement might seem odd enough, but it becomes even more problematic if the collective’s continued existence is at odds with the interests and constitutive ends of its members, its potential members, and the rest of us.

When individuals stop acting together, one may say to the rest, “Let’s not do this anymore,” and the rest may immediately concur, “I agree, it’s not worth it to me either.”⁴⁹ Alternatively, joint commitments can fade over time. If all members slowly stop having a given interest, and that fact is common knowledge, then the collective’s interests have faded out; they no longer exist.⁵⁰

In some collective endeavours, however, a collective’s interests and constitutive ends can continue to exist even after they are no longer linked to individual interests and constitutive ends. As long as the collective exists (perhaps there is an upcoming meeting to discuss its future, perhaps the members are talking about disbanding and joining or merging with another church or business), it makes sense to talk about the collective’s interests and constitutive ends. Collective interests and constitutive ends can become disconnected or alienated from individual interests and constitutive ends, perhaps because a group is not immediately responsive to changes in member interests and constitutive ends or perhaps because members become alienated from the collective purposes altogether.

One cannot accept the possibility that the interests and constitutive ends of the collective will become disconnected from their members, however, without abandoning the defining feature of Collins and Lawford-Smith’s contention that the existence of a constitutive end, by itself, has the potential to block obligations.⁵¹ The possibility of disconnected collective interests and constitutive ends invites a deeper examination of when a collective’s interests and constitutive ends ought to matter morally—especially if they are at odds with both the well-being of all of its members and all of the rest of us.⁵²

⁴⁸ Of course, there may be some extreme cases in which morality will require an individual moral agent to sacrifice her own life. A common unifying belief of those that take the demandingness objection seriously, however, is that morality cannot demand an agent sacrifice her own life in each and every situation in which the consequences would be better if they were to do so—in part because of the inherent worth of individual persons. It is not at all clear, however, that the same goes for collectives, as the possibility of collectives whose interests and constitutive ends have become alienated from those of their members demonstrates rather vividly.

⁴⁹ Margaret Gilbert, *A Theory of Political Obligations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), p. 141.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

⁵¹ Or at least the defining feature of one reading of Collins and Lawford-Smith.

⁵² Cf., Réaume, D. (1994) “The Group Right to Linguistic Security: Whose Right, What Duties,” in J. Baker (Ed.) *Group Rights* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), p. 122.

The member who says that the club exists, and has constitutive ends, so it would be wrong to thwart those ends—and *even more wrong* to eliminate them—is simply making a moral mistake.⁵³ If the club is deliberating about whether it should continue to exist at all, the mere fact that the collective has constitutive ends cannot be, by itself, a reason that speaks against disbanding. If a collective’s constitutive ends are completely detached from any individual ends, then the collective’s ends do not, by themselves, warrant *any* moral consideration.⁵⁴ As Christopher McMahon bluntly puts the point, “It seems absurd that there could be any moral objection to the departure of the members based [*solely*] on the grounds that the organization will cease to exist if they leave.”⁵⁵

Demandingness is one of the few normative areas in which the concepts of moral agency and moral patienthood are deeply intertwined. An entity needs to be a moral agent to have obligations at all; and it needs to have the right kinds of interests, projects, and ends to garner protection from excessive demands. In the individual case, an entity can be a moral patient without being a moral agent (*e.g.*, babies). The possibility of alienated collective ends and alienated collective interests demonstrates that, at the collective level, the opposite possibility can obtain: A collective can be a moral agent without being a moral patient, *even if* collectives can be or even generally are moral patients.⁵⁶

The implication for the possibility of collective demandingness is clear: If there is sometimes nothing wrong with ignoring—even eliminating altogether—a collective’s constitutive ends, *a fortiori* it is at least sometimes the case that those constitutive ends will lack any ability to underwrite a demandingness complaint. There is therefore at least one significant disanalogy between individual demandingness and collective demandingness: The mere existence of one individual agent’s constitutive ends isolated from the constitutive ends of others, may be sufficient to ground demandingness complaints, while the mere existence of collective constitutive ends is not.⁵⁷

⁵³ This argument originally appeared in Hedahl, M. (2017) “Collective Directionality: A new possibility for collectives as objects of normative consideration” *The Journal of Value Inquiry*, 51(2): 233-250.

⁵⁴ Raz, J. (1986) *The Morality of Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 51.

⁵⁵ McMahon, C. (1994) *Authority and Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), p. 65.

⁵⁶ Our contentions in this subsection should therefore be acceptable whether one embraces a more robust sense of collective patienthood (*e.g.* Silver, K. (2019) “Can a Corporation be Worthy of Moral Consideration,” *Journal of Business Ethics*, 159: 253–265) or a more modest sense of collective moral patienthood (*e.g.* Hedahl (2017), *op. cit.*)

⁵⁷ Perhaps Collins and Lawford-Smith’s claim that “there is no disanalogy” between individual demandingness claims and collective demandingness claims is meant less literally than we are interpreting here. Perhaps Collins and Lawford-Smith merely mean to imply that as individual interests and constitutive ends *can* prevent putative duties from becoming actual duties collective interests and constitutive ends *can* prevent putative duties from becoming actual duties. On that interpretation, our argument could be read as building on theirs, providing more context to how the term ‘can’ in the collective case differs from the term ‘can’ in the individual case. In effect, as we argue in §3.2, not only does the constitutive end need to exist (as Collins and Lawford-Smith argue) but also the collective constitutive end needs to be tied to the constitutive ends of a subset of its members in a normatively significant manner. For more on this possibility, see Hedahl (2017), *op. cit.*

3.2 Collective Demandingness: Dependent but not Reducible

On the one hand, demandingness complaints of individual members can't simply be aggregated to render a larger collective total. On the other hand, the mere existence of collective constitutive ends cannot, by itself, ground demandingness complaints. At this point, demandingness concerns, like privacy protections, might therefore seem an area in which collectives simply do not possess anything like the kinds of normative protections that individuals do. A moral theory is too demanding only when it prevents an agent from making her life her own, and it may well seem reasonable to believe that collectives simply cannot advance that kind of complaint. If a collective's ability to "make their life their own" is dependent upon the ability of members to make their lives their own, then one may suspect that after aggregation and the mere existence of constitutive ends have been dismissed, collective demandingness devolves into a non-starter.⁵⁸

We contend, however, that an alternative understanding of the relation between collectives and individuals is available, an understanding whereby collective demandingness claims are ultimately dependent upon, but not reducible to, individual demandingness claims. Rather than immunizing collectives from considerations of demandingness or rendering the very idea of collective demandingness incoherent, it is precisely the dependent nature of such collective interests that requires us to take claims of collective demandingness seriously.

We can begin to make the case for that possibility by noting that a key way in which many, and perhaps even all, individuals exercise their moral freedom is by forming a sense of self-understanding that features participation in various collective endeavours. A general feature of how individuals make their lives their own is by incorporating various collective endeavours into their identities and their projects.⁵⁹ Demands that threaten to overwhelm the ability of collectives to carry out their constitutive projects, as we might say, are thus relevant to the integrity of individuals. Collective demandingness requires our attention not *in spite of* the dependence of collective interests on individual interests but rather *because* of it.

So after earlier attempts to develop a plausible view of collective demandingness failed, the alternative possibility we raise is as follows:

Collective Demandingness: When normative demands on a collective interfere with the collective's constitutive projects, the abandonment of which would constitute a morally problematic sacrifice for (some of) its

⁵⁸ That is the conclusion reached by Berkey (2019) op. cit. about the promise of collective demandingness.

⁵⁹ For more on this point, see Kymlicka, W. (1989) *Liberalism, Community, and Culture*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

members, those demands pose a problematic threat to collective integrity. In such cases, the collective or (some of) its members may issue a legitimate complaint that a putative collective duty is overly demanding.

Some might wish to limit any analysis of collective integrity to those that could ground demandingness complaints without reference to the individual integrity of some subset of members. The analysis of the previous subsection, however, provides us with reasons to be skeptical about that possibility: threats to collective integrity in which the integrity of some subset of individual members is bound may well be the only sense of collective integrity that can ground collective demandingness complaints. The most straightforward way to ground collective demandingness complaints without any appeal to the integrity of its members is simply to appeal to the presence of a collective interest or collective constitutive end. As we have already seen, however, such an approach faces insurmountable explanatory challenges: how “everyday murder” of collectivities can be morally acceptable, while their individual correlates would be a moral failing of the highest order; how collectives are not inherent counterparties to directed duties; and how, unlike individual persons, collectives do not merely by existing become entities to which directed duties are owed.

So, collective constitutive ends must be augmented by some other normative element in order to garner the kind of normative protection that demandingness captures. Perhaps the easiest place to look for such an element is to consider the least controversial grounding for demandingness complaints: individual constitutive ends.⁶⁰ We contend that if collective integrity is integrated with the individual integrity of (at least some of) its members, then the collective itself has the potential to advance demandingness complaints.⁶¹

An example might go as follows: Suppose that a particular community holds a certain event as integral to its identity, as might be the case for New Orleans and Mardi Gras. Now if we imagine that New Orleans as a collective might bear a collective duty to, for example, address climate change, we can readily imagine a situation in which such a duty might, among other things, make a recognizable celebration of Mardi Gras—or at least certain key elements of that celebration—impossible. For example, consider Mardi Gras Indians, a group that is made up of African American New Orleans residents, typically from more economically depressed areas. The moniker ‘Mardi Gras Indians’ and the elaborate Native American-inspired costumes that accompany their celebration are meant to serve as a remembrance of respect for the assistance of Native American tribes in accepting escaped slaves into their tribes in the struggle for freedom. If the demands on New Orleans

⁶⁰ This formulation is not intended to eliminate the possibility that other factors could be combined with collective constitutive ends to make them capable of underwriting demandingness complaints.

⁶¹ For more on how ends and interests become integrated, see Hedahl (2017), *op. cit.*

(perhaps moral demands due to climate change not to rebuild in certain areas of the city) would require them to abandon the possibility of being Mardi Gras Indians, then it is at least a question worth considering whether the collective duty is too demanding.

While the example is hypothetical, this is not merely academic. Countless locations are already facing difficult choices due to the climate crisis and many more will soon face tough decisions about how to respond to their moral obligations as well. It is perhaps impossible to know at this stage precisely what morality may require of any given individual or community in the future. However, it seems it would be a mistake to ignore the possibility that communities could face a putative moral requirement to give up a way of life because doing so would be more efficient or because doing so would have the potential to save more total lives in the future. In such cases, it seems equally a mistake to rule out the possibility that such a moral requirement would be demanding too much.

Contrary to appearances, however, the normative issue here is not fully captured by the aggregation of individual sacrifices, for two key reasons. First, the problem is not merely that individual members would be deprived by the discontinuation of local ways of life, for that is a deprivation to which human beings are universally and constantly vulnerable. The actions of others, for example, will often change the ways in which an agent can engage in meaningful activities. We cannot force others to remain members of our favorite activity, sport, or social club just because we find it meaningful. The case of collective demandingness is, however, quite different. The threat to the collective engagement is not simply due to *empirical* changes in the world, but is instead the result of a *normative* requirement that intervenes in the collective's ability to be a vehicle for meaningful activity. The demandingness objection is advanced at the individual level precisely to limit that kind of encroachment. Likewise, we contend, the demandingness objection can be advanced at the collective level for the same kinds of reasons if an irreducibly collective activity is potentially being collectively sacrificed.

Second, being a Mardi Gras Indian is not something one does one day, one week, or even one month of the year. It is a deeply rooted, deeply particular social role with a rich and storied history. It is a way of life that can only be embodied in New Orleans. As one resident put it after returning to the city after 18 months away following the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, "It's just not possible to be a Mardi Gras Indian anywhere else."⁶² One cannot live in Houston, work on one's Mardis Gras outfit every day from afar and simply return to New Orleans for two weeks every year for the festival. Mardi Gras Indians are deeply rooted in the community, and the practice of being a Mardi Gras Indian is an inescapably communal, collective way of life.

⁶² Lewis, R. (2009) "Interview at the House of Dance and Feathers" with Marcus Hedahl, March 13.

Even though it does not involve a collective moral patient who suffers, this version of demandingness is crucially collective in nature because the demandingness concern arises via the threat to the collective's integrity. Moral demands on a collective could seriously or even comprehensively threaten its own collective pursuit and collective valuing of its projects. The threat to the collective integrity generates a distinctive integrity problem for individual members whose integrity is bound up in the collective project. Collective integrity therefore has the potential to be normatively significant, and while that significance is dependent upon individual integrity, it is nonetheless not reducible to it.

The sense in which a collective's ongoing existence is a source of moral concern depends on the way that the group is implicated in the ground projects and integrity of individuals who are part of the group. For most of us, a profoundly important way that we maintain individual integrity is in our shared, collective commitments: individual integrity, often enough if not unavoidably, includes collective commitments that give rise to collective integrity. To not take the possibility of collective integrity seriously risks infringing on the protected space agents need to engage in meaningful activities, for it is precisely through engagement with groups that people engage in those activities.

3.3 Collective Demandingness: Different Problems for Different Collectives

Another way to conceptualize the problem that collective demandingness poses for those that seek to analyze duties to combat large-scale moral issues as collective duties is that at some point, one has to specify what kinds of collectives have these duties. And any possible level will have some sort of problem with collective demandingness. At one extreme, one could contend that *any* collective capable of acting collectively bears these duties associated with large-scale moral issues. This extreme, however, quickly runs into obvious collective demandingness concerns as well as the problem of double (and triple, quadruple, etc.) counting.⁶³ To claim that a club's members have duties to combat systemic harms is one thing, to place duties on them *through* the club is quite another. For it cannot be that joining the APA, a book club, a neighborhood watch, that teaching in multiple departments, or multiple universities necessarily increases an agent's overall duties to combat large-scale moral issues. It would seem counterintuitive, for instance, to say that joining a book club meant one needed to cut even more emissions, or that a professor who teaches at two different colleges owes more to combat systemic poverty than her colleague who earns the same total salary from one position. To demand that these kinds of collectives bear the burdens of duties to combat large-scale moral issues is to demand too much. To do so would be to unfairly burden their members.

⁶³ Collins & Lawford-Smith (2016) *op. cit.* also raise the prospect of double-counting in their discussion of collective obligations (p. 53).

At the other extreme, one might contend that the duties to combat large-scale moral issues are held collectively by the set of all moral agents. Here, any issues of double counting are gone, but the advantages of going collective are attenuated by the unstructured nature of the collective duty holder, including part of the promise of alleviating demandingness concerns. For without the existence of some collective agent to redistribute duties in the face of non-compliance, as soon as some agents fail to do as they ought to do, the full moral weight of the remaining moral burden once again falls fully on each and every one of us. So concerns about the demandingness problem may well remain.

In between these extremes, the most obvious candidate for the bearers of these collective duties are governments. Governments, after all, are unlike other collectives in many ways: the organizations themselves are typically large, membership in the state is not fully optional, and they exist to solve collective action problems rather than as a vehicle for members to make their life their own. So one might think that states in particular are not positioned to respond to collective obligations they bear with collective demandingness complaints. Opportunities to advance the welfare of the least well off, on this proposal, are best thought of as being the moral business of states rather than individuals, so that one's obligations to offer assistance to the global poor are mediated by one's membership in the state in which one is a citizen or resident.

Yet even at the level of states the problem of double counting remains. There are after all a large number of dual-citizens, i.e. members of two duty-bearing collectives. So there might be cases in which individuals belonging to multiple duty-bearing collectives find their moral responsibilities multiplied for that fact alone. This result seems theoretically undesirable, on the one hand, but it also cuts against the initial effect of going collective, on the other hand, by again ramping up how demanding a collective duty ends up being for some individuals.

The issue is not one of distribution of the collective duties to its members, it is rather one of determining the collective's obligation itself. The problem of double counting is not put forward to dismiss the possibility that these kinds of collective can have these kinds of duties; we believe, in fact, that they are the best candidate collectives that can possess duties to combat systemic injustice. However, analyzing those duties, what they can and cannot be, what specifically each collective can be obligated to do, will be complicated by the problem of collective demandingness, especially given that they may have different modes of distributing duties, and that membership in such collectives is not mutually exclusive. Any analysis of such duties needs to be able to resolve this tension inherent in grounding the duties to combat systemic injustice in these kinds of political communities.

Regardless of which particular collectives turn out to be apt foundational bearers of duties to combat large-scale moral issues, there will be cases in which the collective itself can legitimately complain about a moral overreach that interferes with the indexical identity between the collective's projects and its actions. Collective sacrifices can register in (roughly) the same way some individual sacrifices do—as being inappropriate to extract because of the damage they entail to protected moral freedom. While these collective impacts are ultimately constituted by individual sacrifices, they are not merely an aggregation of those individual sacrifices. Rather, the thrust of the demandingness complaint in these cases is that some collective project is jeopardized: we would no longer be able to be who we would otherwise be *together*.

§4 Conclusion

Our purpose in this paper has been to explore two important difficulties for analyzing individual duties to combat large-scale moral issues collectively: the indivisibility problem and the possibility of collective demandingness. Despite these concerns, we nonetheless believe that the project to analyze the duties to combat large-scale moral issues collectively remains worthy of careful consideration. Even acknowledging its limitations, the move to understand these duties collectively still seems more promising than the infelicitous pairing of large-scale moral problems with purely individual duties. Moreover, the move from the individual to the collective level offers a better understanding of the content of our duties to combat large-scale moral issues. At times at least, understanding our duties as collective rather than merely individual helps provide an immediate and direct deontic reason for why these obligations so often require us to change what we do *together*—altering the underlying political and communal order, for instance—rather than to focus primarily on our own individual contributions to large-scale injustices.

Nonetheless, our argument may have worrying implications. If collectives can, at times, advance demandingness complaints then perhaps we have to deny that there are collective obligations to, for example, radically mitigate climate change or eliminate global poverty. In other words, some might worry that our argument places us in a dilemma: Either accept the existence of collective obligations while denying any collective demandingness complaints, or reject the existence of collective obligations, creating a gap between what would be required to save the world and what morality can require of us. Neither option is attractive.

But we would contend – provisionally, since full engagement with this substantive question exceeds the scope of this paper – that neither option requires wholesale endorsement. The answer to any given case of whether a collective obligation should be insisted on over apparent demandingness concerns or whether a collective obligation is so demanding that it

should be rejected will depend upon particulars about the putative duty in question and the potential duty bearer: we have no generalizable way of making this kind of assessment; and, indeed as in the individual case, we would even say that it would be a mistake to be over-precise on this score.⁶⁴ Whether a given duty is overly demanding will depend upon the relationship between the putative duty bearer and the putative duty. By definition, these are cases in which we all will have at least one good moral reason to be dissatisfied, regardless of what the ultimate, legitimate demands of morality turn out to be.

The view we have advanced in this paper does make it possible that some collective duties which, if fulfilled, would produce much good in the world should nonetheless be rejected as excessively demanding. It also highlights ways in which accepting collective duties may come at a greater moral cost than has usually been assumed. This is perhaps an unsatisfying conclusion, but we believe it is the only conclusion that appropriately captures the promise and the reality of going collective. For the promise of going collective must be tempered, not least in connection with what has widely been viewed as one of its principal appeals—its ability to allay demandingness concerns.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ To see how we believe this works at the level of individuals, see Fruh & Hedahl (2013) *op. cit.*

⁶⁵ An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Rocky Mountain Ethics Congress and the Northwest Philosophy Conference, both in 2018. We are grateful to many fellow participants who helped us clarify the ideas presented there, especially Blake Hereth who provided commentary. We also want to thank two anonymous reviewers, whose insightful comments helped us to substantially improve the paper. This paper has also been improved by discussions with Bryce Huebner and Judith Lichtenberg.