A Social Connection Model of Individual Responsibility to Face Climate Injustice

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Abstract

In a context of insufficient climate action on the part of governments, the question of whether individuals have any underlying moral responsibility concerning climate change has become increasingly relevant. However, despite various theoretical attempts to ground such responsibility, none of them has been completely satisfactory, resulting in a lack of consensus in the scholarly literature. In this thesis, I engage with this debate, guided by the following research question: what is the nature of individual responsibility for climate change? I build on Iris Marion Young's Social Connection Model (SCM) of responsibility to respond to this question. I argue that using Young's SCM to conceptualize individual responsibility to face climate injustice is appropriate because it captures the structural nature of the problem. The shared and forward-looking responsibility it entails and its focus on collective political action provide a framework to respond to climate injustice meaningfully. However, while Young sees the nature of such responsibility as being strictly political, I engage critically with the author and argue that, instead, the responsibility we bear to face climate injustice is moral. Despite concerns about moral responsibility and the blameworthiness it entails, I explore how blame can be a mechanism of accountability and social enforceability, fundamental for ensuring effective collective climate action.

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Introduction

> *"Today we face the possibility that the global environment may be destroyed, yet no one will be responsible. This is a new problem"* (Jamieson 1992, 149).

Nowadays,3.3 billion to 3.6 billion people live in regions extremely vulnerable to climate change (IPCC 2022). In 2020, 30 million people were displaced from their homes due to climate disasters, and by 2030, the number of displacements caused only by droughts could rise to 700 million (United Nations 2022, 20). The short and long-term consequences of anthropogenic climate change are catastrophic for ecosystems, natural species, and the lives and well-being of millions of humans (IPCC 2022; Moellendorf 2012). If the global temperature increases more than 1.5 ºC by the end of the century, people's health, safety, housing, ability to grow food, etc., will be at risk, and the number of climate refugees will increase (IPCC 2022; United Nations n.d.). Mitigation and adaptation measures are thus necessary, and the time to take them is limited if we want to prevent irreversible environmental damage (IPCC 2022).

Climate change also raises questions of justice. While everyone is affected by climate change, not everyone is equally vulnerable to it or has contributed to it equally. People in poorer countries -which paradoxically emit far fewer greenhouse gases (GHG) - are more affected by climate change and lack resources for adaptation (Falkner 2019; Shue 1999). The time-sensitiveness and the expected dramatic consequences of unabated climate change, as well as the injustice related to the issue, call for immediate mitigation and adaptation efforts and put at the center of the debate the question of who has the responsibility to bear them.

In international climate politics and normative debates regarding climate change, responsibility is usually attached to states. Nevertheless, this thesis focuses on

individual responsibility to face climate change. The justification for this is twofold. On the one hand, the lack of adequate governmental climate action raises the question of whether individuals have any underlying responsibility to act when political leaders and institutions fail to fulfill their duties (Gardiner 2011, 54). On the other hand, understanding climate change as a structural injustice entails that the scope of the problem and the solution it requires are beyond governmental action, calling for the collective effort of individuals (Cripps 2013, 142).

In the scholarly literature on the topic, there is no consensus on whether individuals bear the responsibility to face climate change and, if that is the case, whether such responsibility is moral. The reason for this is that dimensions often associated with paradigmatic moral problems, such as intentionality, direct causality, or time and space closeness, are missing in this case (Jamieson 2010, 436). I engage with this theoretical debate in my thesis. The research question guiding the paper is: what is the nature of individual responsibility for facing climate change?

I build on Iris Marion Young's Social Connection Model (SCM) of responsibility to respond to this question. Even if she does not apply her model to this specific issue, climate change substantially resembles the type of structural injustices that Young focuses on. In this thesis, I argue that using Young's SCM to conceptualize individual responsibility to face climate injustice is appropriate because it captures the structural nature of the problem. The shared and forward-looking responsibility it entails and its focus on collective political action provide a framework to respond to climate injustice meaningfully. However, while Young sees the nature of such responsibility as being strictly political, I engage critically with the author and argue that, instead, the responsibility we bear to face climate injustice is moral. Despite concerns about moral responsibility and the blameworthiness it entails, blame can be a

mechanism of accountability and social enforceability, fundamental for ensuring effective collective climate action.

This thesis contributes to the literature on Young's theory of responsibility, particularly its application to climate injustice. Other authors have previously argued that the SCM applies to this issue (Eckersley 2016; Sardo 2020). However, my thesis differs from their work in two main ways. First, it is more focused on the individual aspect of such responsibility, putting it in conversation with traditional accounts of moral responsibility for climate change and explaining how the model overcomes the challenges those accounts face. Second, Eckersley's and Sardo's analyses are limited to applying Young's political responsibility concept to climate injustice. My analysis departs from theirs by engaging critically with Young's theory and putting forward that the responsibility we bear to face climate injustice is, in fact, moral.

The thesis is structured as follows. In the first chapter, I provide an overview of the scholarly debate on responsibility for climate change, focusing on the difficulties faced by traditional accounts of individual moral responsibility when dealing with this issue. In the second chapter, I present Young's SCM and apply it to the case of climate injustice, discussing potential objections to my argument as well. In the final chapter of the thesis, I put forward that the responsibility we have to join others in the effort to face climate injustice is moral. I also deal with concerns regarding blame rhetorics, arguing that they are, in fact, accountability and social enforceability mechanisms that can be an asset in the organization of collective climate action.

1. Literature Review

Before discussing the nature of our responsibility to face climate injustice through the lens of Young's theory, I briefly introduce the literature on responsibility for climate change. First, I explain why conceptualizing individual responsibility for climate change is relevant, despite the centrality of state responsibility in climate politics and ethics. Then, I present an overview of the scholarly debate on the topic, putting forward how the aggregated and unintentional nature of actions leading to climate change challenges the theorization of individual responsibility for climate change from traditional accounts of moral responsibility.

1.1. From State Responsibility to Individual Responsibility

When the question of responsibility is dealt with in climate politics, the focus is usually on state responsibility. In the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (the most important international body monitoring state actions concerning this issue), mitigation and adaptation burdens are distributed within states. Disagreements arise, however, on which countries ought to be held responsible and thus should bear such burdens. The Kyoto Protocol (1997), for instance, differentiated between "emitter" and developing countries and called for the responsibility of the former. In contrast, the Paris Agreement (2015) did not make such a differentiation, requiring all states to reduce their emission levels on a nationally determined basis following the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and capacities (Falkner 2019).

This focus on state responsibility at the political decision-making level has also resulted in the centrality of state responsibility in normative debates concerning climate change. Different principles regarding the fair distribution of mitigation and adaptation burdens have been developed, namely contribution and capacity-based ones. On the one

hand, the Polluter Pays Principle holds that agents should bear adaptation, mitigation, and compensation costs in proportion to their contribution to climate change. Thus, the ones who pollute most and have done so historically -mainly developed countries- should bear more burdens (Garvey 2008; Sardo 2020). On the other hand, the Ability to Pay Principle defends that the capacity to bear burdens of mitigation and adaptation and not causal contribution should establish the distribution of such burdens (Sardo 2020). This implies that some developing countries might have to take responsibility for pollution that historically they have not contributed to because they have the capacity to do so[1] (Garvey 2008)

If state responsibility is that important to environmental politics and ethics, why focus on individual responsibility for climate change? The justification for this is twofold. First, the move from state to individual responsibility is justified due to the context of climate inaction we are facing, in which mitigation efforts from existing governments are not sufficient and widespread enough (Hosney and Fielding 2020). Even if states should act, the question remains whether individuals have underlying responsibilities to act when political leaders and institutions fail to do so (Gardiner 2011, 54). It is unclear to what extent, when our governments fail, we, as citizens, can dissociate ourselves from that failure (Cripps 2013, 142). Second, framing climate change mitigation as a task of governments is an underestimation of the scope of the problem, meaning that governments, in isolation, are not the cause or the solution of the problem of climate change (Cripps 2013, 142). As I will argue later in the thesis, focusing only on state responsibility risks leaving underlying structural issues leading to environmental harm unaddressed.

[1]The theoretical discussion on state responsibility for climate change and the fair distribution of mitigation, adaptation, and compensation burdens is more complex than presented here. Discussions on the role of corporate agents in climate change mitigation also remain relevant. However, due to the scope of my argument (limited to individual responsibility to face climate change) and to word limitations, they are not further addressed in this thesis.

1.1. Individual Responsibility for Climate Change: Traditional Accounts and Their Limitations

There is disagreement in the existing literature on whether it is possible to ground individual moral responsibility for climate change. First, there is the view that individuals are morally responsible for climate change. Schwenkenbecher argues that even if our actions leading to climate change are not harmful per se, they are harmful taken together with the actions of others. Thus, moral responsibility for climate change can be grounded if we allow for a collectivized account of harm (Schwenkenbecher 2014, 173). In addition, Kyllönen puts forward that, at least nowadays, individuals are aware of their contribution to climate change and, therefore, can be morally blamed for intentionally contributing to foreseeable harm (Kyllönen 2018).

Jamieson presents another perspective on whether individuals are morally responsible for climate change. He argues that individuals should be morally responsible for climate change, but this does not follow from current understandings of moral responsibility (Jamieson 2010). The lack of a causal nexus between people's emissions and the environmental harm suffered by victims makes it difficult for current moral concepts -like responsibility or blame- to gain traction (Jamieson 2010, 436). Thus, to frame climate change as a problem of individual moral responsibility, we must revise our everyday understanding of moral responsibility and our theoretical toolkit. He puts forward that something like a value of "respect for nature" could ground individual moral duty to respond to climate change (Jamieson 2010, 440).

Finally, Sinnot-Amstrong defends the view that individuals are not morally responsible for climate change and that they cannot be blamed for the aggregated effects of their non-harmful and unintentional actions. His argumentation aims to prove that no

existing moral principle (like the harm, contribution, or general action principles, among many others) can ground individual moral obligation to respond to climate change (Sinnott-Amstrong 2010). According to him, the ones who have a moral obligation to mitigate the impact of climate change, and are failing to comply with such responsibility, are governments. In this sense, we cannot morally require individuals to reduce their emission levels, although they may have some responsibility (albeit not moral) to "get their governments to work" (Sinnot-Amstrong 2010, 334).

All of the approaches presented above have been contested in the scholarly debate. First, the view that individuals are morally responsible for climate change has been criticized for overestimating the connection of individual action to environmental harm, which is too indirect to be able to entail moral responsibility and thus blameworthiness (Jamieson 2010; Sinnott-Amstrong 2010). Second, Gardiner has challenged Jamieson's approach by arguing that the problem is not one of our current moral concepts but rather one related to the lack of motivation of imperfect moral agents, who are not used to thinking of their responsibilities and how demanding they can be. This is a problem highlighted by climate change but not created by it Gardiner 2011, 55). Finally, Sinnott-Amstrong has been criticized by Cripps, who argues that when governments fail to discharge their climate change mitigation duties, these moral duties could fall back on citizens (Cripps 2013, 142). In addition, reducing the necessary climate action to governmental action risks undermining the greater collective action that climate change mitigation requires (Cripps 2013, 142).

We can see that it is difficult to apply traditional accounts of moral responsibility to the case of climate change. This is because it differs from paradigmatic cases of individual responsibility in many aspects (Shockley 2016, 265). Jamieson identifies three dimensions present in paradigmatic moral problems: an individual intentionally

harming another individual; both the individual and the harm being identifiable; and the individual and the harm being closely related in time and space (Jamieson 2010, 436). With climate change, all dimensions are altered. Harm, in this case, is aggregate, meaning that even if our actions are not intrinsically wrong, they are harmful through the accumulated effects of the actions of others (Schwenkenbecher 2014; Shockley 2016). For example, we contribute to the emission of GHG through mundane activities such as eating meat, buying clothes, or driving to work. None of these actions is harmful per se, but millions worldwide eating meat or driving to work significantly contribute to catastrophic environmental harm. Another difficulty is that in the case of climate change, individuals do not seek to cause damage, nor do they actively support any predictably harmful end. Again, climate change is an unwanted by-product of emitters' everyday actions, which don't seem to have any ethically dubious intentions of their own and aren't a part of any collective endeavor that would have such purposes (Gardiner 2011; Kyllönen 2018, 748).

In conclusion, current accounts of individual responsibility struggle to ground individual responsibility for climate change, resulting in a lack of consensus in the scholarly debate. How can this difficulty be overcome? I agree with Jamieson that revising our understanding of moral responsibility and our theoretical toolkit might be necessary. Still, the extent to which this can be done successfully within an individualistic framework focused on our contribution and connection to environmental harm is unclear. I put forward that traditional accounts of responsibility fail to conceptualize our responsibilities concerning climate change because they cannot capture the structural nature of the problem. Therefore, a model of responsibility that grasps this structural nature of climate change is required. As I will argue in the following chapter, Iris Marion Young’s theory of responsibility provides such a model.

2. A Social Connection Model of Responsibility for Climate Change

After explaining why traditional accounts of moral responsibility struggle to conceptualize individual responsibility for climate change, I now argue how Iris Marion Young's Social Connection Model can overcome these difficulties. Given the centrality of her theory for my argument, the first section is dedicated to presenting its main features. In the second section, I apply Young's theory to the climate change case. In the last section, I discuss three possible objections to my argument.

2.1. Young's Theory of Responsibility for Structural Injustice

In her book "Responsibility for Justice" (2011), Iris Marion Young develops a theory of responsibility for structural injustice. According to Young, structural injustice exists when "social processes put large groups of persons under systematic threat of domination or deprivation of the means to develop and exercise their capacities, at the same time that these processes enable others to dominate or to have a wide range of opportunities for developing and exercising capacities available to them" (2011, 52). These injustices result from the accumulated actions of numerous people acting to achieve their particular objectives and interests, usually within the parameters of accepted rules, norms, and institutions (Young 2011, 52). These actions do not produce any harm by themselves, but the combination of the actions of many does so, resulting in unintended harm. In this sense, structural injustice takes the form of a tragedy of the commons (Young 2011, 63).

Young argues that traditional accounts of responsibility (what she calls the liability model) are not appropriate for conceptualizing responsibility for structural injustice. The liability model assigns responsibility to agents whose actions are causally connected to the harm for which responsibility is sought, intending to punish, sanction,

or ask for compensation (Young 2011, 97). It also isolates particular agents as guilty, absolving others. Responsibility here is seen as a bad exercise of agency, meaning that it entails not only causality but also intentionality and knowledge of the effects of our actions. Young acknowledges that the liability model is necessary to sustain our legal systems and develop a sense of moral right according to which individuals should act toward others (Young 2011, 98). Nevertheless, conceptualizing responsibility for structural injustice from this model is problematic. Given that structural injustices result from social processes reproduced by large numbers of people acting within accepted norms and practices, it is impossible to trace the harmful outcomes of those practices to particular agents that contribute to them. Thus, it is unclear how we can isolate some agents as the responsible ones, consider them morally blameworthy, and ask them for compensation.

Young develops an alternative account of responsibility to make sense of our responsibilities for structural injustice: the Social Connection Model (SCM). According to this model, what grounds responsibility for structural injustice is the participation in the social structural processes leading to harm. The model has five main features. First, it is *not isolating*. Since thousands or millions of people acting within accepted rules and institutions contribute to harm, it is impossible to isolate an agent as the responsible one and absolve others (Young 2011, 106). Second, it *judges background conditions*. The liability model assumes a set of morally acceptable background conditions and judges the harms as a deviation from it. However, the SCM questions these background conditions, as their reproduction is what is causing the harm (Young 2011, 107). Third, the SCM is *more forward-looking than backward-looking*. Structural injustices are ongoing and persist if the social processes behind them do not change. Therefore, the objective is to transform current and future processes that contribute to unjust outcomes,

not to compensate for past harms (Young 2011, 109). Fourth, the SCM entails *shared responsibility*. Again, as the harms result from many people acting together within accepted practices and institutions, identifying who is to blame or how each of us contributes to that harm is impossible. Therefore, all individuals participating in unjust structural processes (including victims) share responsibility (Young 2011, 109). The last feature of the SCM is that it is *discharged through collective action*. Individual actors alone cannot change the widely accepted institutions and practices that lead to unjust outcomes. Taking responsibility under the SCM thus implies joining others to organize and coordinate our actions (Young 2011, 112).

2.2. Conceptualizing Individual Responsibility to Face Climate Injustice

Young applies her theory to the cases of poverty and transnational sweatshop labor. However, we can also apply the SCM to the case of climate change (Eckersley 2016; Sardo 2020). In this case, the structure leading to climate injustice is the carbon-intensive global economic order, along with its embedded norms, rules, and institutions. Individuals' participation in this order is what grounds their responsibility. Climate change is an injustice in the sense that individuals in affluent countries benefit from reproducing high-emitting practices while people in poorer countries suffer the negative environmental and socioeconomic consequences of these practices. This limits, in turn, their capacity to adapt to environmental harm and to prosper economically (Falkner 2019; Shue 1999). This framing of the issue coincides with Young's portrayal of structural injustices as processes that benefit some while putting others in a situation of domination and deprivation of the means to exercise their capacities (Young 2011, 52). Another aspect in which climate injustice is similar to the kind of injustice that Young focuses on is that it results from the accumulated actions of millions of people (Schwenkenbecher 2014; Shockley 2016). These actions are not harmful in themselves

and are not done with the intention to create environmental harm but still contribute to climate injustice together with the actions of others (Gardiner 2011; Kyllönen 2018, 748).

The similarity of climate change to the type of structural injustice that Young focuses on supports the idea that it is appropriate to build on the SCM to conceptualize individual responsibility concerning climate change. Her theory is precisely developed to make sense of responsibility for harms that derive from the structurally embedded, accumulated, and unintentional actions of many. Accordingly, the same way that the SCM overcomes the difficulties of the liability model when dealing with this type of injustice, it can also overcome the challenges encountered when conceptualizing of our responsibilities for climate change from traditional accounts of moral responsibility.

Applying the SCM to climate change entails that all individuals engaging in the carbon-intensive global economic system share the responsibility to face climate injustice. This responsibility is mainly forward-looking, meaning it aims to transform current and future processes that contribute to climate injustice, not compensate for past contributions. In this case, the judgment of background conditions would require the transformation of the norms, rules, and institutions embedded in carbon-intensive economies. It entails, more concretely, the transformation of "carbon-intensive global supply chains, decision-making structures in local, national, and global institutions that exclude and disempower vulnerable front-line communities, as well as social norms favoring unlimited and undifferentiated economic growth" (Sardo 2020, 40). Finally, it needs to be discharged through collective action, requiring us to join others to transform unjust structures leading to climate injustice.

What does joining others to transform structural processes mean in the case of climate change? In the following paragraphs, I discuss how individuals can discharge their responsibility based on Young's theory and on the scholarly debate regarding climate action. First, individuals could discharge their responsibility by traditional means of public participation, like voting for "green" candidates that support sustainable policies or writing and circulating petitions aimed at political elites and institutions (Cripps 2013, 143; Sardo 2020, 40). Young also favors other more alternative and creative modes of protest. In the case of climate change, this could mean joining protests organized by new, more alternative global environmental movements like Extinction Rebellion, for instance. While these actions remain individual, the focus is on the contribution to collective efforts rather than on their isolated impact (Cripps 2013, 153).

Second, an effective way individuals can join each other to transform unjust structures is by joining environmental Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). Due to their pervasive presence in environmental protection efforts, they can play a relevant role in making specific issues salient, defining and specifying practically the goals of collective action, and ushering relevant actors to comply. CSOs arguably also affect the beliefs and attitudes of people, often attempting to transform problematic norms and contributing to the development of a global solidarity ethos (Belic and Bozac 2022, 616-617). These characteristics of CSOs put them in a privileged position to facilitate collective action, something also considered by Young (Young 2011, 69).

The role of existing institutions needs to be discussed as well. Young acknowledges the importance and power of states and international institutions and considers the potential role they could have in fostering collective action (Young 2011, 151). However, we must be wary about focusing on institutional solutions to remedy

climate injustice. As Young puts it, governments often fail to tackle structural injustices properly because "the rules and practices of these institutions are more aligned with the powers and processes that produce and perpetuate injustice than with those who seek to undermine it" (2011, 151). Thus, effective political action leading to the transformation of carbon-intensive economies is not likely to occur (or at least not only) within the current institutional framework. That is why part of the goal of this political action is precisely to change existing decision-making structures or to establish new ones (Cripps 2013, 142).

Finally, the focus put by the SCM on collective action challenges the widely held intuition that the primary responsibility of individuals should be to reduce their GHG emission levels. The logic is that it would be more effective if everyone did "their part" by emitting less (Cripps 2013, 116). Thus, each individual should have a vegan diet, buy sustainable clothes, use public transport, or turn down the central heating. Even though all of these individual decisions might be desirable, approaching climate injustice from Young's theory entails that the "individualization of environmental problems" (DeSombre 2018, 5) is insufficient and misunderstands the structural causes of the problem, running the risk of leaving them unaddressed. While it is very likely that the structural transformation aimed by the SCM will eventually require changing our lifestyles on an individual and societal level and thus cutting our emissions, it is not the primary goal or solution.

2.3. Objections

I consider three possible objections to my proposition of building on the SCM to conceptualize individual responsibility for climate change. First, attaching responsibility to all individuals participating in social structural processes leading to climate change

can be considered problematic because it entails holding the "victims" of climate injustice responsible. To tackle this objection, it is essential to note that while the SCM attaches responsibility to all actors on the same grounds, the responsibility assigned is not equal. Young puts forward four parameters of reasoning for articulating individual action in relation to structural injustices. These parameters are *power* or influence over processes that produce unjust outcomes, *privilege* in terms of our position in these structures, *interest*, that is, the extent to which the agent's interest coincides with the responsibility for justice, and *collective ability*, meaning the capacity to rely on resources of already organized collectives and use them to promote transformation (Young 2011, 144-151). Based on the parameters of power and privilege, we can expect that those who benefit from processes leading to climate change will have to do more than victims of climate change.

Victims are still held responsible, something which may seem counterintuitive or unfair. However, it is necessary for the meaningful transformation of unjust structures. The reason for this is that there is a tension between power and privilege on the one hand, and interest, on the other. Suppose only those with power and privilege are held responsible. In that case, it is unlikely that the required transformation will happen, as they benefit from the norms, rules, and institutions embedded in these structures. Victims, on the other hand, have more incentives or interests in transforming the structural processes that put them in a position of vulnerability (Young 2011, 113). Also, this does not entail that "big players" (namely large multinational corporations behind a considerable part of industrial GHG emissions) are off the hook. Not only will they have to "do more," but an underlying expectation of the SCM is that there will be a sufficient collective force to pressure and hold accountable these big players (Belic and Bozac 2022, 625).

Second, the forward-looking focus of the SCM could be challenged. For many climate ethicists and activists, compensation for past emissions is fundamental. According to the "climate debt" argument, those who have contributed most to climate change (namely those in wealthy, developed countries) have a debt to those in developing countries and should compensate for this harm (Pickering and Barry 2012). Therefore, the SCM's focus on current and future responsibility can be criticized for leaving historical responsibility for climate change unaddressed, letting those who contributed most to climate change (and that have mostly benefited from it at the expense of others) get away with their past actions.

A response to this objection is that focusing on guilt or compensation in cases of structural injustice can be problematic because it hinders the required transformation of current and future social structural processes creating harm (Young 2011, 116-118). Applying a similar logic to the climate-debt frame, Pickering and Barry argue that while it is morally plausible and robust enough to overcome the objection from excusable ignorance or the intergenerational objection[2], there is a risk of emphasizing retrospective liability rather than future distributive concerns (Pickering and Barry 2012, 667). This, in turn, could hamper international climate negotiations already plagued with mistrust. Instead, a compromise is needed from people in developed and developing countries to adopt a frame of cooperation that can foster public deliberation and help solve collective action problems (Pickering and Barry 2012, 679).

[2] The objection from excusable ignorance holds that we should not consider people in developed countries (which have historically emitted more) responsible because past generations were reasonably ignorant of the effects of their emissions. This objection has been challenged because, at least since 1990 (when the first report of the IPCC was published), this ignorance is not justified, and thus emitters can be held liable. The intergenerational objection asserts that we should not make individuals responsible for harm caused before they were born. Against this argument, it can be said that it is plausible to inherit "climate debt" because the benefits and higher standards of living resulting from industrialization (and thus from historical emissions) have also been inherited (Pickering and Barry 2012, 673-676).

It is true, however, that if the concerns brought up by the most vulnerable are not considered, the adoption of common frameworks could also be hindered. Young deals with this concern by arguing that historical injustice considerations still play a relevant role in understanding how current structural processes reproduce injustice. In fact, in her analysis of historical responsibility for slavery, she puts forward that those benefitting from racialized structures have a special responsibility "to recognize their privilege and its connection with past wrongful practices and to work towards changing present structures, even if it entails reducing their own privileges and opportunities" (Youg 2011, 187). According to Eckersley, translating this idea into the language of environmental ethicists means that, while Young would oppose the Polluters Pay Principle, the SCM could find its middle ground between backward and forward-looking responsibility in a sort of Beneficiary Pays Principle (Eckersley 2016, 355). According to this, people in developed countries would have to "give up" their historically inherited privileges rather than "pay back" for them (Page in Eckersley 2016, 356). This way, the SCM can overcome the concerns about its potentially uncritical or ahistorical conceptualization of responsibility without falling into the fault-finding, punishing logic entailed by the climate debt argument.

Finally, another possible objection to applying the SCM to the case of climate change is that not focusing on reducing individual emissions opens the door to hypocritical behavior. Imagine, for example, that I join a protest in favor of a more sustainable public transport system for my region but decide to go there by car. Or that I support a CSO aiming to end with the fast fashion industry but still buy clothes at Zara. According to the hypocrisy objection, this morally inconsistent behavior results in an overall delegitimization of the cause, providing a case for focusing on individual emission reductions (Cripps 2013, 152). This criticism often done to climate activists,

politicians, or celebrities is, in this case, extended to all individuals and the potential impact of the actions on the legitimacy and the success of the climate action cause.

Scholarly literature on climate hypocrisy challenges this view. This type of "lifestyle hypocrisy" (Beck 2023, 1) or "individual lifestyle outrage" (Gunster et al. 2018, 2) that puts the focus on individual behavior downplays the extent to which our actions are structurally conditioned. Within the current carbon-intensive global economic order, our "hypocritical" actions are often the product of large-scale systems like transport or electricity infrastructures or embedded practices like driving, flying, or heating rather than the outcome of an intentional deception (Gunster et al. 2018, 2). Moreover, even if we could reduce our emissions, our personal decision to do so is not as effective in fostering climate action as this objection implies it is (Cripps 2013, 153). Therefore, even if this "outrage" over the inconsistencies of celebrities, climate activists, or even our neighbors could a priori be a valid reaction, it does not delegitimize the climate action cause[3].

Most importantly, this type of discourse individualizes and moralizes a problem that remains structural, misunderstanding the root of the problem and the required solution. In a similar logic to that of the SCM, authors dealing with this objection argue that requiring individuals to join others in collective efforts is more appropriate and effective than focusing on individual actions (Beck 2023, 10; Cripps 2013, 154). In conclusion, if we want to have "environmental integrity," it is better to commit to the transformation of structural socio-economic barriers hampering environmentally responsible behavior than blaming ourselves and others for our emission levels (Beck 2023, 10).

[3] Gunster et al .carried out an empirical study of the use of different types of climate hypocrisy discourses on top-selling, English-language papers between 2005 and 2015. The analysis shows that the "individual lifestyle outrage" discourse is mostly used in conservative media, with the aim of undermining the urgency and legitimacy of collective climate action (Gunster et al. 2018, 4-5).

3. Individual Responsibility to Face Climate Injustice: Political or Moral?

In the previous chapter, I have explained how the SCM captures the structural nature of climate injustice, overcoming difficulties faced by more traditional moral responsibility accounts. The shared, forward-looking responsibility it entails and the collective way to discharge it (focused on transforming the norms, rules, and institutions of carbon-intensive economies) also provide a better framework to face climate injustice meaningfully. However, there is another particularity about the SCM. According to Young, the responsibility it entails is political rather than moral. In the final chapter of the thesis, I engage critically with this part of Young's argument. First, I put forward that the responsibility we have to join others in the effort to face climate injustice is moral. Second, I deal with Young's rejection of morality and blame rhetorics, arguing for the potential of blame as an accountability and social enforceability mechanism.

3.1. Moral Responsibility to Act Politically

Young argues that our responsibility to join others in transforming unjust structures is political, not moral. But what is the difference between the two? Young draws her conception of moral and political responsibility from the work of Hannah Arendt. In her essay "Collective Responsibility," Arendt distinguishes between guilt, which is always personal and responds to moral considerations of human conduct, and political responsibility, which is always collective and responds to political considerations of human conduct (Arendt 2003, 150-153). While Young is critical of some aspects of Arendt's conceptualization of political responsibility[4], this division of

[4] For Arendt, political responsibility derives from common membership in a nation, and citizens of that nation are responsible for the wrongs done in its name even if they did not do them themselves (Arendt 2003, 149). Young takes issue with this part of Arendt's theory, arguing that it is too static and a simplification of reality (Young 2011, 79-87). Instead, the SCM redefines the responsibility-bearing political body as being based not on shared citizenship or political institutions but on shared social and economic systems of interactions in which individuals participate.

the moral and the political underlies her distinction between the liability model of responsibility and the SCM. She identifies morality with isolating and fault-finding dynamics. In contrast, the shared, forward-looking responsibility that the SCM entails is more concerned with building a public ethic of political responsibility.

I agree with Young that grounding moral responsibility *for* climate change is problematic because the causality and intentionality associated with it are not present in this case. However, once we assume that we have a shared, forward responsibility to take political action to address climate injustice, the focus is not on our contribution to injustice but on the discharge of the burdens we now bear. That is, responsibility now becomes a matter of accountability, not attributability. I put forward that such responsibility to act, contrary to the responsibility for contributing to climate change, is moral. This implies that while blaming individuals for their GHG emissions is not justified, blaming them for not discharging their responsibility to act politically is. Martha Nussbaum, in her prologue to Young's book, supports this same intuition by saying that if, according to Young, A ought to bear a burden, and she does not, then it follows from the logic of ought that A has done something wrong. If not, there is a risk that "people get a free pass indefinitely" (Nussbaum in Young 2011, xxi). Even Young seems to accept this link between the moral and the political within her theory, albeit implicitly, when saying that her analysis "holds for determining what is required *morally* of agents with respect to rectifying structural injustice" (2011, 143).

I am not the first to argue that individuals have a moral duty[5] to act collectively to face climate injustice. The political theorist Elizabeth Cripps puts forward a similar proposal. She explains how traditional responsibility accounts tend to focus on individuals mimicking duties, that is, "duties to do what would be required of one as part of a fair collective scheme to fulfill the duty" in this case through the reduction of our emission levels (Cripps 2013, 116). Cripps argues that this focus is inappropriate and that our primary duties should instead be promotional. With promotional duties, she refers to "duties to attempt to bring about the necessary collective action" to face climate change (2013, 116). These actions include voting for green candidates, joining protests, transforming current institutions, etc. (Cripps 2013, 142-153). In this aspect, Cripps' theory is aligned with what I am putting forward. Why not stick to her theory instead of building on the SCM?

Cripps' theory and the SCM are similar in that they call for collective political action to respond to climate change. Still, they differ substantially in how they ground the responsibility to act. Cripps argues that individual duties derive from the duties of yet-to-be putative collectivities, namely "The Young," "The Able," and "The Polluters" (2013, 60). She argues that "The Young" (younger generations, globally) have a duty to act based on their collective self-interest to mitigate climate change (Cripps 2013, 3). She is aware, however, of the difficulty of grounding moral duties on self-interest. Thus, she puts forward that two collectivities have stronger duties toward victims of climate change. On the one hand, "The Able" (individuals in affluent countries) must act based

[5]I use moral duty and moral responsibility interchangeably. Young says that there is a conceptual distinction between responsibility and duty regarding their openness or the discretion they leave to individuals. While moral duties specify what we are supposed to do, responsibility -being equally obligatory- is more concerned with the ends of our actions, leaving up to us what we are going to do to bring them about (Young 2011, 143). In my argument, however, I assume that the moral duty to act collectively can also leave discretion to individuals. It is possible to morally require individuals to join others in the collective effort to face climate injustice without committing to any specific type of action (Cripps 2013, 143). The conception of collective climate action I have in mind is a more diverse plural, and context-dependent one, not one specified by previously determined duties.

on a collectivized principle of beneficence, no matter their contribution to harm. On the other hand, "The Polluters" (individuals in high-emitting countries) have a negative duty grounded both on their contribution to harm and on the duty to prevent foreseeable harm (Cripps 2013, 59).

In a sense, Cripps' theory is not so different from contribution and capacity-based theories of moral responsibility. Not only does it run the risk of falling back on backward-looking and fault-finding dynamics, but it also absolves victims from the duty to join political climate action. As explained in the previous chapter, this conceptualization of responsibility hinders the effective, meaningful structural transformation that facing climate injustice requires. It is true that by focusing on the need for collective political action and not on the reduction of individual emissions, Cripps' theory partly overcomes the shortcomings of traditional moral responsibility accounts. However, it still fails to grasp the structural nature of climate injustice and the truly shared and forward-looking responsibility that it calls for. Thus, using the SCM to conceptualize individual responsibility for climate change remains relevant and justified.

3.2. Between Accountability and Defensiveness: Blame as a Constructive Social Enforceability Mechanism

As I have explained above, if individuals have a moral responsibility to act collectively in for transformation of norms, rules, and institutions leading to climate injustice, they are blameworthy if they fail to do so. Nevertheless, the use of blame or fault-oriented language raises several concerns. That is, in part, the reason why Young opposes moral responsibility when dealing with structural injustices. She argues that in the same way that we should not be blamed for our contribution to an injustice, "we

should not be blamed or found at fault for what we do to try to rectify injustice, even if we do not succeed" (Young 2011, 143). Thus, the author defends the abandonment of rhetorics of responsibility with echoes of moralistic language in favor of strictly political ones (Young 2011, 144). Again, she admits that "blame rhetorics" might be necessary for some legal or social contexts, but they are inappropriate when dealing with structural injustices (Young 2011, 143). In the following paragraphs, I deal with this concern by explaining how blame need not have the negative consequences that Young presupposses and that, instead, it can be a useful accountability and social enforceability mechanism.

Young puts forward two main limitations of blame rhetorics, albeit she admits that they are not philosophical but rather rhetorical and practical (Young 2011, 113). The first limitation is that fault-finding language often creates a division between wrongdoers, on the one hand, and innocent bystanders, on the other. In a context in which all of us are somehow responsible, it is easy to point at others as blameworthy. This, however, can take the focus from our actions and omissions and risks oversimplifying the causes of injustice, obscuring meaningful ways to face it (Young 2011, 116-117). Environmental ethicists have raised a similar concern regarding "scapegoat ecology." Schmitt argues that environmental discourses focusing on individual shortcomings could turn environmentalism into a "blame game," taking the attention away from more complex systemic environmental concerns (Schmitt 2019, 157). There is a risk, in turn, of distracting the larger community from its own duties of climate action, giving the impression that they are absolved from such responsibilities (Schmitt 2019, 152).

I have previously acknowledged that the focus on individual contribution to climate change misunderstands the structural nature of the problem. Thus, the

arguments presented by Young and Schmitt are plausible. Nevertheless, I am not concerned with who is responsible for climate change. Again, by arguing that blame should gain traction only when we fail to discharge our responsibility to join others in collective action, my focus is on accountability rather than attributability. In addition, my proposition does not justify absolving ourselves from responsibility because others fail to act. If responsibility is shared, we remain responsible despite the actions of others. It is also important to highlight that the motivation behind blame need not be to isolate someone as guilty or to show a certain moralistic high-mindedness. Acknowledging our responsibility is compatible with aiming to make sure that wrongdoers are aware of their bad behavior and that they change it for the better (Fricker 2016, 174). As Fricker puts it, "Blame is not merely expressive (as if one simply needed to get the resentment off one's chest) but rather transformative" (2016, 176). Thus, the concern about oversimplifying the causes of injustice or absolving some of their duties to act because of the shortcomings of others does not hold in this case.

The second limitation put forward by Young is that fault-oriented language often produces blame-switching dynamics that result in defensiveness, which hampers productive political cooperation (Young 2011, 113-117). This somehow resonates with the previously mentioned argument by Pickering and Barry concerning the climate debt frame, according to which we need bridging (and not fault-finding and isolating) rhetorics to ensure cooperation and compromise in climate negotiations plagued with mistrust (Pickering and Barry 2012, 676). In this case, the concern extends to the potential risks that blame-switching dynamics and defensive reactions could have in effectively organizing collective action among individuals.

This argument lies in the commonly-held view that blame is problematic because it always entails an adverse moral reaction like defensiveness (Fricker 2016,

168-170). Nevertheless, this is not necessarily always the case. Blame need not have the undesired responses that Young is concerned about (Nussbaum in Young 2011, xxii-xxv). Being blamed can help someone reflect on the issue and become aware of the importance of joining others in collective action, eventually resulting in a behavior change (Fricker 2016; Nussbaum in Young 2011). In a sense, it can serve as a mechanism to align the moral understanding of the blamer and the wrongdoer, contributing to the construction of a shared moral consciousness (Fricker 2016, 173). Blame can also be seen as a social enforceability mechanism. Dealing with the difficulties of ensuring effective collective climate action, Kyllönen argues that individual responsibility and the potential blameworthiness that comes with it are, in fact, an asset. This is because the possibility of being blamed and held accountable by others puts social pressure on individuals, giving them more reasons to commit (Kyllönen 2018, 739).

It is impossible to ensure that blaming others will not result in defensiveness. However, in the trade-off between the risk of defensiveness and accountability, we might have to allow for the former if the latter is to be guaranteed. If not, it is difficult to ensure that responsible individuals will discharge their duty to transform the structures leading to climate injustice. Young also anticipates this concern. Therefore, she argues that we need to be able to hold each other publicly accountable for our actions and our inactions in politics (Young 2011, 118-122). Instead of appealing to blame, she says that "we can and should be *criticized* for not taking action, not taking enough action, taking ineffective action, or taking action that is counterproductive" and that we have the right and the obligation to do so (Young 2011, 144).

While Young distinguishes blame and criticism, she does not further elaborate on that distinction. First, it needs to be clarified how criticism avoids the risk of

defensive reactions. As Eckersley puts it, “political responsibility necessarily presupposes a questioning and judging public so we can expect to see shaming and censure by those who raise questions, and discomfort and embarrassment of those who are called to account” (2016, 350). Second, the only apparent difference between criticism and blame (as presented by Young) seems to be that the former is a public or political accountability mechanism, whereas the latter, being moral, is more private or personal. Nevertheless, as I have explained above, more personal expressions of blame can also have transformative power and, most importantly, facilitate the social enforceability of collective climate action. Political and moral accountability mechanisms can thus be seen as compatible and mutually reinforcing. A shared moral understanding of why it is important to act (and why not doing so is blameworthy) can strengthen the ethic of political responsibility that facing a challenge like climate change calls for.

4. Conclusion

I have attempted to show that Iris Marion Young's Social Connection Model allows for a successful conceptualization of individual duties to respond to climate injustice, overcoming the difficulties faced by traditional accounts of moral responsibility. That is because the SCM is precisely developed to theorize our responsibility for harms that derive from the structurally embedded, accumulated, and unintentional actions of many, making it relevant to deal with this challenge.

I have explained that, following the SCM, all individuals engaging in the carbon-intensive global economic order share the responsibility to face climate injustice. Also, the focus has to be on the transformation of current and future processes that contribute to climate injustice rather than on the compensation of past harms. Finally, since we cannot transform the norms, rules, and institutions embedded in carbon-intensive economies on our own, we must join others in collective climate action. I have sketched out different ways in which we can discharge such responsibility. We could, for instance, vote for "green" candidates, join protests organized by local or global environmental movements or support environmental civil society organizations. Of course, reducing our GHG emission levels is still desirable, but it is not the primary goal or solution.

I have dealt with three potential objections to my argument. First, against the objection that attaching responsibility to victims is unfair, I have argued that it is essential that victims take part in collective climate action due to the existing tension between the power we have in structures and the incentives we have to transform them. Besides, based on the parameters of reasoning, we can expect that powerful actors will have to "do more". Second, in dealing with the climate-debt objection, I have explained

that even though the SCM does not focus on compensating past harms, it still takes into consideration historical injustices by individuals to give up on their privileges. Lastly, concerning the hypocrisy objection, I have shown that it misfocuses the problem's structural nature and the required solution. If we want to have environmental integrity, committing to the transformation of the structural barriers hampering our environmentally responsible behavior is preferable.

I have also discussed the nature of our responsibility to face climate injustice. I have explained how, once we have a shared, forward-looking responsibility to address climate injustice, the question is how to ensure that people comply with their duties. The focus is thus on accountability and not on our contribution to structural harm. In this case, we acquire a moral duty to act politically. This implies that blaming those who fail to join others in the transformation of carbon-intensive economics is justified. I have dealt with two criticisms of my argument. First, the concern of oversimplifying the causes of injustice or absolving ourselves from climate action duties does not really apply in this case. Since I still stick to the shared framing of responsibility, finding others blameworthy does not justify any exception from one's duty. On the other hand, I have explained that blame need not always entail an adverse moral reaction like defensiveness. It can instead be seen as a mechanism that contributes to constructing a shared moral consciousness and as a social enforceability mechanism. Instead of a limitation, this can be an asset for building the ethic of political responsibility that a collective response to climate change requires.

This thesis' contribution is twofold. On the one hand, it has engaged with the normative debate on individual moral responsibility for climate change. By building on the SCM and its structural focus, I have overcome the difficulties encountered by traditional approaches of moral responsibility. On the other hand, it contributes to the

literature on the application of the SCM to the problem of climate change. My main contribution in this regard has been going beyond the mere application of the theory and critically engaging with it, putting forward the idea that the SCM can also ground a moral duty to join others in collective climate action.

I have attempted to make a theoretical case for grounding an individual moral duty to act politically to face climate injustice. Nonetheless, I am also aware of the limitations of this argument, mainly when it comes to the real-life implementation of what I propose. Further research on this topic could focus on the specification of what it is that we are morally required to do and what we can expect from each other. This is a difficult task that needs to be overtaken by political theorists, but also by environmental ethicists, sociologists, or political scientists who are working on effective ways to organize effective climate action and the challenges it can face. It would also be interesting to explore in which ways political (public) and moral(personal) accountability mechanisms can further reinforce each other so that the moral and ethical compromise to face climate injustice can be built.

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