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Justifying a Hybrid Climate Burden-Sharing Approach through the Structural Injustice Perspective

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**Universiteit
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Bachelor Thesis

B.Sc. International Relations and Organizations

**Justifying a Hybrid Climate Burden-Sharing Approach through the
Structural Injustice Perspective**

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Human-induced climate change has resulted in irreversible and substantial damage to people and nature beyond the climate's natural viability (IPCC, 2022, p. 6). This trend should be slowed down because the likelihood of unavoidable climate hazards and their effects will present a significant risk to people and ecosystems (IPCC, 2022, p. 20). Moreover, the countries that have contributed the most to the effects of climate change are less vulnerable than those who have least contributed to climate change (IPCC, 2022, p. 48). Thus, the poorest and socially marginalized populations are the most vulnerable to climate extremes and variabilities (Otto et al., 2017, p. 1658). Although the richer countries promised financial support concerning climate action in the Global South, they have not materialized significantly, leading to disappointment (Puko, 2023). Furthermore, the rise of right-wing populists has resulted in a tendency to dismiss climate change action (Jylha & Hellmer, 2020, p. 315).

Concerning the societal challenges and debates, political philosophy has also extensively discussed the question of who should bear the burden of preventing climate change. Throughout the thesis, this question is described as the burden-sharing question, thus focusing on how to allocate responsibilities and costs among agents. This issue has centered primarily around the question of which actors ought to mitigate and adapt.¹ This refers to the duty to reduce climate change activities and protect the vulnerable from damaging effects (Caney, 2010, p. 204). The costs of adaptation and mitigation have to be distributed globally, making the question of who bears this burden especially significant.² Mainly because a normative based justification of the distributive implications can provide a clear conceptual framework for a reasoned dialogue between policy actors on these issues (Page, 2012, p. 304). Concerning mitigation and adaptation, three main principles have been developed to answer the question of who should bear the burden. The Polluter Pays Principle: those who have caused the problem of climate change should be the ones who pay the adaptation and mitigation costs (Caney, 2010, p. 204). The Ability to Pay Principle (APP): those with the

¹ In contemporary literature about the burden-sharing question, compensation is sometimes also highlighted (García-Portela, 2022). However, this duty has not been widely discussed in other academic articles like Caney (2005, 2010) or Shue (1999, 2014). Thus, due to the scope of this thesis, this duty will not be further developed. For future research, García-Portela (2022) work is a good starting point.

² Furthermore, prevention costs concerning climate change will be high. This is supported by a report of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) which estimates that annual costs for adaptation will be 160-340 billion by 2030 and 315-565 billion by 2050 (UNFCCC, 2022).

greatest ability to pay should bear the cost of adaptation and mitigation (Caney, 2010, p. 204). The Beneficiary Pays Principle: those who have benefited from the activities that caused climate change should pay the burden of adaptation and mitigation (Page, 2011, p. 420). In this thesis, I seek to identify whether these principles are sufficient to answer the question of who should bear the burden of climate change.

To structure this research, I ask the following research question: What principles can be employed to justify who should bear the burden of combatting climate change? Chapter 2 focuses on the first sub-question: What is meant by the PPP, APP, and BPP, and what objections can be given against these principles? By focusing on the prior research, it becomes evident that the above-mentioned principles have their inherent flaws. Namely, the PPP and the BPP cannot address the Causality Objection (CO) and the Excusable Ignorance Objection (EIO). Furthermore, the APP is susceptible to the cosmopolitan duty objection. Thus, a combined approach will not be able to work because the inherent flaws will not be resolved. Therefore, another perspective is needed to overcome these objections, which I will argue is the Structural Injustice (SI) approach. SI focuses on systematic inequalities that should be rectified and addressed if they occur. Chapter 3 will focus on this approach and examine *how* SI can overcome these challenges. Chapter 3 consists of two sections. The first section addresses the second sub-question: What does the Structural Injustice (SI) approach entail, and how does it correlate to climate change? This illustrates that from the SI approach, the Social Connection Model (SCM) of responsibility can be argued for. This model refers to individuals' political responsibility because of their participation within unjust structures. Moreover, climate change can be regarded as a triple inequality through the SI approach. The second section addresses the third sub-question: How can a fourth principle be developed through the SI approach that can address the criticism of the prior principles? This section moves toward whether the SI approach is able to resolve some of the issues within these principles. Here, I argue that a fourth principle can be developed: the Imperfect Responsibility to Pay Principle (IRPP). By combining the other three principles, a more nuanced and coherent hybrid approach can be developed, which is better equipped to deal with the burden-sharing question.

Chapter 2: Reflecting on the Academic Debate

The burden-sharing question focuses on the debate about the duties of agents who bear the burden of climate change and its adverse effects (Page, 2012, p. 301). First, the focus is on the meaning of adaptation and mitigation costs. Second, the chapter highlights the complexity of the debate about the three principles: PPP, ATP, and BPP. Here, their independent strengths and weaknesses will be addressed. Third, the focus will shift toward whether combining these principles can answer the burden-sharing question.

A. Climate Costs

To answer the burden-sharing question, it is essential to understand the types of climate change costs. McLaughlin (2019) makes a distinction between impact and prevention costs. The former refers to the costs that occur due to climate change, whereas the latter corresponds to the costs when agents try to stop these effects from causing significant harm (McLaughlin, 2019, p. 18). Impact costs can be understood as costs that occur when there is a change in environmental conditions, like climate catastrophes and extreme weather events (McLaughlin, 2019, p. 19). Moreover, it is understood that certain people can be more exposed to climate events than others (Otto et al., 2017; Sardo, 2023; IPCC, 2022). This depends on where they are situated, which makes them more vulnerable to climate events. This vulnerability is more prevalent for poorer people and nations because their infrastructure is less developed, which increases the risk of damage. These social determinants highlight a skewed vulnerability because the relatively poor are the most vulnerable to climate events (McLaughlin, 2019, p. 20).

The central goal of climate policy should be that "impermissible impact costs due to intolerable levels of warming do not come to pass" (McLaughlin, 2019, p. 23). This is the purpose of prevention costs. The question of who should bear the burden of these prevention costs can be described as the burden allocation problem (Caney, 2005, p. 754). The burden allocation problem shows a need for normative principles that can pinpoint the distributive responsibilities that individuals and communities have in combatting the adverse effects of climate change (Page, 2012, p. 301). This burden allocation problem is a distributive justice question since it focuses on the correct allocation of burdens and benefits of prevention costs (Caney, 2005, p. 749). The literature primarily interprets prevention costs as mitigation or adaptation costs (Caney, 2010, p. 204). The prior refers to the duty to cut back on activities

that cause climate change. The latter refers to duties to devote resources to protect people from the adverse effects of climate change (Caney, 2010, p. 204).³ Furthermore, because of the skewed vulnerabilities of people experiencing poverty, a more significant proportion of adaptation costs must be allocated to measures to protect them (McLaughlin, 2019, p. 30).

In the upcoming sections of this research, the underlying premise is that the mitigation and adaption burdens have to be implemented to counter the impermissible impact costs. Therefore, the PPP, APP, and BPP all must consider these burdens when answering what costs actors have to pay.

B. The Principles of Burden-Sharing

In the following sections, I will outline the three principles: PPP, APP, and the BPP, and I will focus on their shortcomings. Furthermore, the hybrid accounts will be discussed, which will also be dismissed as a valid solution.

I. The Polluter Pays Principle (PPP)

The Polluter Pays Principle acknowledges that the one who has committed the environmental harm should also bear the costs (Luppi, Parisi & Rajagopalan, 2011, p. 135). Caney (2010) describes PPP as a historical principle because it focuses on how the actors who have committed pollution should be the ones who need to make amends (p. 205). The duty-bearer is, therefore, the agent causally responsible for GHG emissions (McLaughlin, 2019, p. 40). This first principle has found appeal because, under international law, there is already an understanding that individuals and companies can sue for damages if they are harmed by pollution by other countries (Singer, 2010, p. 184). As such, there should be a proportional link between the emissions of an agent and the burdens on that actor (Shue, 2014, pp. 182-186).

³ The specific forms of these duties are important to note. The duty of mitigation can be distilled into enhancement, conservation, and abatement burdens. Enhancement burdens refer to enhancing the capacity of our global emissions sink, meaning oceans and forests, which are necessary for removing emissions from the atmosphere (McLaughlin, 2019, p. 24). Conversation burdens refer to the need not to deplete our global emissions sink. Abatement burdens are the need to reduce the overall emissions of greenhouse gases. The abatement burden will primarily result in an opportunity cost because the disallowance of cheap greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions will result in the need to use more expensive alternatives. Adaptation burdens are necessary to reduce an agent's vulnerability to adverse environmental effects.

Criticism

Two prominent critiques against the PPP are the Excusable Ignorance Objection (EIO) and the Causation Objection (CO). The latter refers to the understanding that there is uncertainty about which specific climate effects have been caused by emission-generating activities (García-Portela, 2022, p. 369). Thus, the polluter cannot be directly linked to the event and, therefore, cannot be made to pay for the harmful effects of extreme weather events. For clarity, this is an immediate issue for adaptation costs and not mitigation costs. The reason is that mitigation duties may still be required because there is a correlation between additional emissions and harm. This entails that downsizing emissions still need to occur, even though the location of that harm might not be located. Moreover, adaptation duties are more challenging to defend because this entails knowing where the harm will occur, which may not be possible (García-Portela, 2022, p. 370).

The EIO is based on the notion that – if people did not know, and were not reasonably able to understand, that their activities may have negative consequences concerning climate change – it is unfair to hold them accountable for their actions through these adaptation and mitigation costs (Caney, 2010, p. 208). The EIO argument primarily applies to pre-1990 emissions. Mainly because since 1990, the effects of pollution have been widely known and accepted (Caney, 2010, p. 208). However, this is still an issue because before the 1990s, around fifty percent of the emissions had occurred (García-Portela, 2022, p. 370). The PPP seems ill-equipped to deal with this bulk of emissions because it becomes unfair to let people pay the burden if they were unable to be aware of their negative impact on the world. The same issue applies to states because states can also claim they were excusably ignorant of the environmental damage caused by their GHG emissions (Page, 2011, p. 416). This results in the issue with the PPP of who should bear the costs of pre-1990 pollution (Page, 2008, p. 559).

II. The Beneficiary Pays Principle (BPP)

The Beneficiary Pays Principle (BPP) defines that the agents that have benefited economically from the emission of GHG should be the ones that pay the adverse costs (Page, 2008, p. 562). Thus, the agents that have benefited through the allowance of adverse effects on others should bear the responsibility of climate justice to mitigate and adapt (Page, 2008, p. 562). Beneficiaries are strictly liable to combat negative externalities through mitigation and adaptation costs because they have benefited from these (Page, 2008, p. 562). This principle has developed in response to the criticism of the PPP. Its proponents argue that by

solving the theoretical and practical issues of the PPP, this principle is better equipped to deal with the backward-looking intuitions of environmental justice (García-Portela, 2022, p. 368).

Page (2012) argues that the BPP has the strength to hold agents responsible for tackling climate change even if they are not outcome-responsible. Outcome responsibility refers to identifiable harmful acts by identifiable agents whose harm can be traced back to the behavior of these specific agents (Page, 2012, p. 416). PPP claims that there has to be a relation between the victim and the perpetrator for the perpetrator to be liable for adaption and mitigation. However, as seen above, this raises the issue of EIO and CO. Page (2012) claims that BPP can circumvent this issue by arguing that the relation is between the beneficiary and the victim, whereby the beneficiary is responsible for burden-sharing (Page, 2012, p. 421). Page (2012) further argues that injustice occurs if existing agents continue to enjoy benefits generated by their unfair share of the atmosphere's capacity, negatively affecting living and future generations (p. 422).

Page (2012) implicitly assumes that the CO does not hold because it is not about a link between pollution and adverse effects on a particular agent but between an actor benefiting unjustly. This unjust benefit refers to the fact that the emission of GHG results in negative externalities for other actors. Thus, injustice occurs when those who benefit from climate change fail to bear a fair burden of mitigation and adaptation costs toward the victims of climate change. This unjust benefit is enough to bear the burdens of adaptation and mitigation costs, even if there is no direct causal link. Moreover, EIO seems not to be applicable because the grounds for the burden of the beneficiary are the unjust resources they might enjoy, not the specific action that caused environmental damage.

The BPP can be described as backward-looking and forward-looking. On the one hand, it is backward-looking because it argues that the ones that have historically benefited from pollution should be the ones to share the burden of mitigation and adaptation costs (García-Portela, 2022, p. 368). On the other hand, it is forward-looking because the agents with existing or future benefits from GHG emissions should be responsible for combatting the resulting environmental damage (Page, 2012, p. 308).

Criticism

García-Portela (2022) focuses on the definition of the BPP to critique the notion that BPP can circumvent EIO and IO. The BPP states that the beneficiary must pay for the burdens linked to GHG emissions. Therefore, only the benefits strongly connected to “climate change-producing acts should be redistributed” (Page, 2012, p. 313). However, this excludes

injustices caused by environmental damage from natural variability, for which the beneficiaries are not accountable (García-Portela, 2022, p. 374). As such, BPP does not seem to dissolve the problem of causation because there still has to be a causal link between GHG emissions and foreseeable harm for which adaption is required (García-Portela, 2022, p. 375). Hence, CO still occurs because it is unfair to let the beneficiaries of pollution pay the burden of adaption if it is unclear that the foreseeable harmful effects are the result of human-induced climate change (García-Portela, 2022, p. 375). As with PPP, mitigation might still be necessary because GHG emissions are shown to have adverse effects.

According to García-Portela (2022), EIO is also a problem for BPP (pp. 375-380). Therefore, it is crucial to address the normative underpinnings of EIO. EIO is rooted in the claim that it is unfair to unexpectedly impose burdens on people, which may affect their planning and executing of their life plans (García-Portela, 2022, p. 379). As such, the basic infrastructure of developed countries was developed before the knowledge of the negative effects of their pollution. Moreover, if it unexpectedly becomes the case that people have to give up their benefits, this will run counter to their life plan and will constitute an unexpected burden (García-Portela, 2022, p. 379). Thus, the same concerns arise within BPP as with the PPP, namely, the understanding that it seems unfair to burden agents who had been unaware that they suddenly had to give up their benefits.

III. The Ability to Pay Principle (APP)

The Ability to Pay Principle has at its center the understanding that "among several parties, all of whom are bound to contribute to some common endeavor, the parties who have the most resources normally should contribute the most to the endeavor" (Shue, 1999, p. 537). This higher contribution is regardless of how much good or bad they have caused in the past. As such, APP refers to the capacity of countries, individuals, and businesses to bear the costs of mitigation and adaptation concerning climate change. Therefore, the wealthy should pay the price of adaptation and mitigation proportionately to their wealth (Knight, 2011, p. 532). This principle is distinct from PPP and BPP because the necessary information is *agent-specific*, not *problem-specific* (McLaughlin, 2019, p. 45). Thus, the appropriate knowledge is related to the capacity of the agent. In contrast, PPP and BPP need to know *how* the problem of climate change came into being and *who* has benefited or contributed to that problem (McLaughlin, 2019, p. 45). Furthermore, APP is a forward-looking principle because it focuses on alleviating harm, not on who caused it (Caney, 2010, p. 213).

Criticism

The APP has two prominent objections. The first objection entails that it is counter-intuitive to ignore the historical account of pollution. Thus, a forward-looking account goes against our moral convictions (Caney, 2010, p. 214).⁴ The understanding is that the ones who caused the pollution should also be responsible for solving the problem, and, as a result, the focus should be on rectification justice, which is missing from the APP (Page, 2008, p. 307). The second objection entails that a critique can be raised about the cosmopolitan positive duties this principle ascribes. The cosmopolitan positive duties are: "duties to further the well-being of others no matter where they live and no matter one's relationship with the recipient" (Duus-Otterström, 2014, p. 451). The issue lies not with the moral desirability that some actions should be taken but with how these duties of justice should and can be enforced. Hence, it is unclear how the APP can give an entity certain rights to legitimately enforce duty-takers to certain obligations if there is no association with the prospective victims (Duus-Otterström, 2014, pp. 451-452).

IV. Hybrid Accounts

Through the disadvantages of these principles, various authors have tried to combine them to develop an overarching understanding of who should bear the burden of climate change. This combination of principles has been set in three distinct ways: priority ordering, weighting without ordering, and conjunctive accounts (Page, 2011, pp. 425-427). The priority ordering approach focuses on two or more principles and argues that there is a clear distinction of priority about their importance and the way they should be applied (Page, 2011, p. 425). For instance, Caney (2010) argues for such a primary and secondary principle. The primary principle, a modified version of PPP, should first bear the burden of adaptation and mitigation. However, "the remainder" must be paid by the secondary principle, a modified APP (Caney, 2010, p. 218). The issue with Caney's hybrid approach is that he does not explain why the modified PPP should be the primary principle and the modified APP secondary (Page, 2011, p. 425). Thus, he blatantly accepts the PPP as the grounding principle, whereas APP should focus on the remainder without a moral justification.

The weighting without ordering approach refers to determining the moral importance of each principle on a predetermined or intuitive basis (Page, 2011, p. 425). The predetermined

⁴ It might be argued that this moral conviction is wrong. However, it does seem counterintuitive to argue that the ones who should bear the burden of climate change can stand apart from the historical origin of the problem. For a more detailed discussion I recommend the article of Page (2011), especially pages 417-420.

basis refers to assigning fixed weighting to the principles to determine the burden responsibilities without addressing why this weighting is chosen. Intuitive balancing considers the multiple principles without assigning specific weightings. This, however, raises the issue of either losing consistency or coherence. The prior loses coherence because it is hard to explain why certain weights are preferred over others, and the latter loses consistency because it does not generate a consistent method (Page, 2011, p. 426).⁵

A conjunctive account tries to combat these challenges by proposing a hybrid of priority-based and weighting-based accounts (Page, 2011, p. 426). According to Page (2011), the focus should be on determining which normative principle is best suited to solve the problem of burden-sharing in practice (pp. 426-427). However, by proposing this conjunctive account, the issues raised about the criticism of PPP, BPP, and APP still need to be resolved. Even if such a conjunctive account is accepted, it is still unclear how the issue of EIO and CO is fixed for the backward-looking principles. The problem of how earlier emissions can justly be rectified concerning adaptation and mitigation still has to be resolved. This is well captured by García-Portela (2022), who states that if “these challenges cannot be met, then it might be time to discard backward-looking principles altogether” (p. 382). Moreover, the problem of cosmopolitan positive duties remains prevalent within the APP. Thus, it remains unclear why the ones with the most resources should contribute the most to combat the issue of climate change. Therefore, for a conjunctive account to work, it is essential to resolve the underlying issues in these principles.

Chapter 3: Revising the Burden-Sharing Question

This chapter will first focus on delineating the Structural Injustice (SI) approach developed by Young (2006, 2011). Second, I illustrate how climate change can be viewed as a SI. This understanding flows from the works of Sardo (2023), Godoy (2017), and Sparenborg (2022). Moreover, criticism of the SI approach will be addressed and debunked. Here, I first introduce the critique, and then I debunk these critiques through the works of McKeown (2021), Browne (2023), and Eckersley (2016). Lastly, I contribute to this discussion by

⁵ Page (2011) gives for the intuitive balancing approach the example of Caney’s (2005) older work. Page (2011) argues that in this work, Caney declined to give further guidance on how the conflict within a hybrid of the APP and PPP might be resolved (p. 426). Moreover, Page (2011) argues that Baer et al. (2009) used predetermined weighting combining PPP and APP (p. 426). For more on this particular issue, look at Page (2011), pages 425-426.

connecting the critiques to the SI of climate change. Moreover, I will develop a novel fourth principle that can more coherently answer the burden-sharing question, which I term: the Imperfect Responsibility to Pay Principle (IRPP). Furthermore, I will focus on how this principle can address the shortcomings of EIO, CO, and cosmopolitan positive duties objection. To conclude, I will argue that the solution to the burden-sharing question is a hybrid approach based on four principles.

A. The Structural Injustice approach

Young coined the SI approach as a response to the liability model (2006, 2011). The existence of SI refers to the occurrence of social processes that do not allow people to develop and exercise their capacities. This is due to the systematic threat of deprivation and domination; these processes enable others opportunities to develop and exercise these capacities or to dominate them (Young, 2006, p. 114). As such, a relationship between agents is unjust when self-development and self-determination are constrained by oppression and domination (Sparenborg, 2022, p. 3). SI is present when it is impossible to identify how a particular collective agent, a firm, a state, or a particular individual directly harms other specific agents, which can be described as untraceability (Young, 2011, p. 96). Thus, SI is caused by a large group of agents acting according to accepted norms and institutional rules and is thereby never caused in isolation by a single agent (Brown, 2023, p. 8). Meanwhile, in the liability model, there is a clear link between the actions of an agent and the direct harm it causes. The liability model focuses on how, through a linear causal connection, someone is morally responsible for the harm and, therefore, is blameworthy (Young, 2011, p. 96). The SI approach is hereby distinct from the liability model.

McKeown (2018) illustrates that SI does come with a sense of responsibility, which is different from causal responsibility. This is done through the Social Connection Model (SCM) of responsibility, which is grounded in Young's claim about political responsibility. The SCM states that all individuals connected to SI share the political responsibility to collectively try to change these structural processes (McKeown, 2018, p. 484). In this sense, political responsibility should be understood as a relational call for solidarity, in which agents are required to reform these background conditions of SI because they contribute to it through their actions (Browne, 2023, p. 15). The background conditions are the social, political, and economic relations we have that should be regarded as the object of political responsibility. Thus, the SCM recognizes social connections' critical role in addressing SI embedded in societal structures.

As a result of the SCM, the role of accountability and responsibility becomes less explicit, however, it is not impossible to address this question. For instance, Young (2006) states that “to be responsible on the social connection model is to be accountable to others with whom one shares responsibility—accountable for what one has decided to do and for which structural injustices one has chosen to address” (p. 126). This definition is centered around the notion of *power*, which captures the extent to which social groups are able to influence the circumstances of self-determination and self-development in their lives (Sparenborg, 2022, p. 4). Unjust power relations are twofold. Firstly, social groups are more susceptible to vulnerability than others through otherwise acceptable actions. Secondly, the social position of a dominated or oppressed group is prone to intersectional injustice, which entails overlapping injustices that have to be addressed (Sparenborg, 2022, pp. 4-5). Moreover, “the degree of responsibility” is centered around one's “parameters for reasoning” (Young, 2011, p. 126). Young (2006) states that even though the SCM does not give us a universal model of responsibility, it does bind “power, privilege, interest, and collective ability” together to construct a particular responsibility (pp. 126-127). *Power* refers to one's influence over the processes. *Privilege* refers to a person's relative benefit within a structure. *Interest* refers to one's motivation in maintaining or transforming the structures. *Collective ability* entails a people's ability to organize collective action (Young, 2006, pp. 127-130). Different from the liability model, this political responsibility is not based on blame for what happened in the past, but it focuses on forward-looking responsibility, entailing engagement in collective actions to change the system (McKeown, 2018, p. 498)

Climate change can be understood as a form of SI. GHG emissions do not cause direct harm, but their aggregate will result in environmental damage, and the individual contribution is marginal and mediated by the geophysical and social systems (Sardo, 2023, p. 29). Many people participate in these structural processes that produce SI, but most of them are not consciously engaged in this collective project with the goal to make sure other people are vulnerable to domination or deprivation (Young, 2011, p. 103). Therefore, it is not caused by a single agent, it lacks intentionality, and the emission of GHG on a small scale by billions of people cannot be considered morally wrong. Furthermore, the poor are more vulnerable to the effects of climate change, whereas other groups may even benefit from its effects, for instance, fossil fuel businesses, or at least contribute to the adverse effects through their actions (Godoy, 2017, p. 112).

To further analyze how climate change results in SI, it is vital to understand the structural processes at play and how they produce unjust relations of power (Sparenborg,

2022, p. 5). This is grounded in the understanding that GHG emissions create unevenly spread vulnerabilities among disadvantaged people. Sardo (2023) coins this as the triple inequality in the case of climate change. Triple inequality refers to the fact that the Global South faces *higher vulnerability* to climate hazards. Even though they have *less adaptive capacity*, they *contribute less to GHG emissions* than developed countries (Sardo, 2023, p. 27). Moreover, this triple inequality is not the result of brute luck but is “the result of structural processes of fossil fuel and energy consumption and production” (Sprenborg, 2022, p. 8), which originates in the global economic-political structures rooted in unequal power distribution.⁶ These unequal power relations are the result of the histories of colonialism and intersectional injustice and result in oppression and domination. This is, for instance, visible in Whyte (2016), where he argues that “climate injustice against indigenous communities is structural because colonial institutions facilitate carbon-intensive economic activities which produce adverse climate impacts while at the same time interfering with indigenous people's capacity to adapt to the adverse impacts” (p. 102). This analysis illustrates that structural GHG emissions and consumption processes are rooted in unjust power relations where some actors are oppressed and dominated because they lack the capacity for self-development and self-determination, whereas others benefit (Sprenborg, 2022, p. 8). For instance, the Global North has historically benefited from high emissions; as a result, they now enjoy higher levels of social power and greater resources, perpetuating structural processes (Sprenborg, 2022, p. 9). Therefore, these power relations should not be seen as a vacuum but through an intersectional lens.

B. Critiques of the Social Connection Model

Concerning the issue of climate change, a couple of criticisms against the SCM and political responsibility have to be addressed. The focus will be on the non-attributability objection and the action-guiding objection because these directly question the SCM's applicability to the burden-sharing question.

⁶ Sprenborg (2022) illustrates this through the work of Robert & Parks (2007) and Ritchie et al. (2022). Industrialized countries are responsible for the highest levels of historic GHG emissions and contemporary energy consumption. Moreover, low-income countries do not have access to energy, resulting in a poverty trap. This energy consumption is embedded within the economic structure, resulting in a more significant need for energy, and in more environmental damage. Developing countries suffer the most from the adverse effects even though the rich countries emit the most (Sprenborg, 2022, p. 7). This “can be attributed to the colonial histories and current relation with the global economy that keep certain nations vulnerable” (Robert & Park, 2007, p. 132)

I. Non-attributability Objection

This objection focuses on how SCM lacks a notion of blame; thus, it fails to attribute moral responsibility to an agent (McKeown, 2021, p. 5). This is an issue for climate change because it seems implausible that the 100 companies that omit 71 percent of GHG emissions are as responsible as the other agents (McKeown, 2021, p. 5). A solution to this problem is illustrating how there are two types of responsibilities in play here. Young supports this solution and accepts the claim that liability and political responsibility can co-exist (Eckersley, 2016, p. 356). I argue that in the context of climate change, liability based on responsibility can be evoked in contemporary pollution cases where the actors know that their GHG emissions have negative consequences resulting in harm, making them blameworthy for these particular actions. Political responsibility for climate change should be in line with how much power an actor has within the structures corresponding to the parameters of reasoning. This should be the case with respect to climate change because the powerful are uniquely positioned to combat the underlying background conditions that result in triple inequality. This does not mean that the victims of climate change should have no responsibility, but their responsibility should be to press the issue and highlight the harm climate change has on them. This illustrates that in the SCM, an agent's social position matters for the amount of power or powerlessness one has and the degree of political responsibility this results in (McKeown, 2023, p. 778).

II. The Action-Guiding Objection

To follow up on the above-mentioned criticism, a variety of authors have argued that the biggest problem with Young's theory is that it "doesn't specify who has to do what" (McKeown, 2021, p. 8). Thus, the SCM is vague about the exact duties of an agent concerning political responsibility regarding one's parameters for reasoning. McKeown (2021) highlights why this objection is not as forceful as one might think because Young deliberately intended the concept to be open-ended (p. 8). Firstly, within SI, the focus should be on a just outcome, and it should be up to the agent to determine how this can best be achieved through one's parameters for reasoning (McKeown, 2021, p. 8). Secondly, McKeown (2021) argues that Young deliberately distinguishes responsibility from duty. Thus, a duty requires a specific act in a specific way, whereas responsibility argues for discretionary action from the agent (p. 8). Thirdly, political responsibility requires prioritizing the needs of the victims and listening to them (McKeown, 2021, p. 8). I argue that McKeown's (2021) argument is a valuable contribution in the context of climate change. Firstly, this emphasizes

the victims' needs, which are the most vulnerable to climate change due to triple inequality. Secondly, it illustrates the need to set things right because of our connection to the system. Thus, if we do not act, we are reproducing this structural injustice (McKeown, 2018, p. 496). As such, it is our responsibility to act within the parameters for reasoning, even if it is not possible to identify our causal connection.

C. A Hybrid Approach

This section aims to combine the findings of Chapter 2 about the burden-sharing question with the SI approach. I propose that a novel fourth principle, the Imperfect Responsibility to Pay Principle (IRPP), can be developed. This principle flows from Browne's (2023) understanding of the imperfect duty. Moreover, I argue this principle can resolve the CO, EIO, and the objection to cosmopolitan duties. However, this does not entail that the other three principles are not of any significance anymore. When there is a direct liability, those other principles are still of great importance. As such, I argue for a hybrid approach based on a conjunctive account, which is better able to address the burden-sharing question.

I. The Imperfect Responsibility to Pay Principle

I propose that through a critical reflection of the works of Eckersley (2016), Sardo (2023), and Browne (2023), a fourth new principle, the IRPP, can be argued for concerning the question of who should bear the burden of climate change. I argue this flows from the works of Eckersley (2016) and Sardo (2023) because they both address the role the SCM should play concerning the burden-sharing question. However, they see the role of the SCM as a *framework* that can integrate the various other principles of BPP, APP, and PPP. Through the lens of the SCM, these principles should be viewed within a broader perspective of decision-making and collective deliberation regarding who should bear the burden of climate change. Thus, by blending these principles within the SCM, a more nuanced approach can be argued for, which allows a more inclusive deliberation on climate burdens (Sardo, 2023, p. 41).

This shift in focus is of necessity within the burden-sharing debate. However, through the work of Browne (2023), I argue that this framework can also be used for the development of the IRPP that can be directly implemented to the question of who should bear the burden of climate change. Browne (2023) describes political responsibility for SI as an imperfect duty where actors do whatever they can, instead of defining a concrete set of duties (p. 15). Thus, emphasizing the necessity of addressing SI without having to rely solely on traceable liability

or fault attribution (Browne, 2023, p. 19). I argue that concerning climate change, our imperfect responsibility should be to combat SI without having to pinpoint who is at fault as a justification for the action. As such, this political responsibility is not based on direct individual causal responsibility but on participation within the structures. It relies on the fact that our political-economical system results in the damaging effects of triple inequality through unequal power dynamics (Sarde, 2023, p. 39). By acknowledging that climate change is a triple inequality, an agent should act sensibly – and within their capacity – to try and resolve this SI. This is not rooted in a moral or legal duty but in the acknowledgment that we must address this SI because otherwise, we are reproducing this injustice. The amount of responsibility is then determined by one's parameters for reasoning and one's unjust power relation producing the triple inequality. As such, structural transformation should be viewed as a political process in which different levels of responsibilities should be allocated towards one's social position (Sprenborg, 2022, p. 19).

I argue this can be implemented in the burden-sharing discussion by stipulating that an agent's role within the SI system results in corresponding imperfect responsibilities to pay adaptation and mitigation costs. This can be described as the Imperfect Responsibility to Pay Principle (IRPP).⁷ This principle would entail that action has to be taken concerning mitigation and adaptation costs; otherwise, climate change will result in the oppression and domination of vulnerable agents. This principle acknowledges that agents are not directly at fault for causing specific climate harm. However, they have the political responsibility to address the corresponding injustice by considering their parameters for reasoning. I argue that for *power* and *privilege*, mitigation would entail lessening one's GHG emissions, and for adaptation, ensuring strategies that address the vulnerabilities experienced by developing countries. For *interest* concerns of the vulnerable, mitigation needs to be centered around advocating for less GHG emissions, and for adaptation, the responsibility lies in voicing their concerns and needs. For *collective ability*, the focus of mitigation should involve working together to achieve green alternatives or pressure polluters to limit their pollution; adaption entails working together on adaptation projects and supporting each other in extreme weather events.

⁷ To reiterate this is just a piece of the puzzle. The SCM also proposes collective political action that aims at transforming the fossil-fuel-intensive dominant structure that we now live in (Sardo, 2023, p. 39). However, for the scope of this thesis, the focus is on whether the IRPP can offer a more nuanced justification for mitigation and adaptation costs because, as illustrated in the introduction, a normative-based justification is important.

I argue that the IRPP can be viewed as distinct from the other principles. Concerning the PPP, the distinction is based on direct contribution through emission; this results in *blame*. Instead, the IRPP is reliant on the fact that indirect relations to injustice result in a *political responsibility to act*. Moreover, the APP relies on the idea that agents bear responsibility because they have greater social and material resources through their capacities (Sarde, 2023, p. 39). For IRPP, I argue that agents bear imperfect responsibility because the possession of these resources is made possible through the domination and exploitation of others, even though it was the result of unintended consequences.

At first glance, IRPP seems to resemble the BPP significantly. However, there are four ways in which the IRPP can distinguish itself. First, BPP relies on the *causal link* between their benefits and the corresponding burden, whereas IRPP relies on *participation* within the structural system and their corresponding parameters of reasoning to make the situation right. In line, BPP depends on *liability* to identify a corresponding beneficiary, whereas IRPP focuses on *collective responsibility* to solve the problem of climate change. Therefore, IRPP can be viewed as action-oriented and non-attributive with the goal of addressing the problem of triple inequality, whereas BPP primarily focuses on holding an agent causally accountable for their benefits. Lastly, IRPP recognizes structural intersectionality as power may result in other structural benefits, whereas BPP interprets climate benefits in a vacuum.

II. Addressing the Criticism of the Burden-Sharing Principles

Through the development of the fourth principle, IRPP, it is essential to address whether this principle can counter the criticism of the CO, EIO, and the cosmopolitan duty objection. First, the CO refers to the understanding that it is difficult to pinpoint whether extreme weather events are caused by anthropogenic influences on the climate system or are a natural occurrence (García-Portela, 2022, p. 369). This would result in an issue for adaptation costs, mainly because adaptation duties require a causal connection, which has to be formed between the polluter and the location of those foreseeable harmful impacts. However, by focusing on the understanding of political responsibility, this problem can be circumvented. Through the SCM, it can be highlighted that developing countries are dealing with triple inequality, which makes them more susceptible to environmental threats. This, in turn, is the effect of the global political-economical structures, which result in different social power positions (Sardo, 2023, p. 8). IRPP would argue that agents bear political responsibility for adaptation costs because they benefit and participate in the institutions and carbon-intensive

structures that constitute our economic and political system (Sardo, 2023, p. 26). Through the unjust power relations resulting in triple inequality, agents have an imperfect responsibility for paying adaptation costs, reducing another agent's vulnerability to extreme weather events. Hereby, agents do not have to rely on traceability. Thus, through untraceability an argument can still be made that we should not limit our political ambition to address this injustice. (Browne, 2023, p. 19).

Second, the cosmopolitan duty objective is centered around the moral conviction that actions have to be taken without a clear connection to the vulnerable agents. Although the APP initially supports this conviction, it is improbable that this claim is legitimately enforceable. A counter to this objection is twofold. Firstly, through the IRPP, a case can be made that there is a relation concerning our cosmopolitan duty to act. Through the reproduction of these structures – which results in triple inequality – the actors with more resources become more obliged to pay the costs because they are benefitting and participating in the structural system. To reiterate, the amount one has to contribute is dependent on one's parameters of reasoning. Secondly, even if there is no legitimate enforceability, this does not entail that there is no imperfect duty to act. We are participating in the global political-economical system. Hence, through the IRPP, this would entail that we have the political responsibility to pay adaptation and mitigation costs.

The last criticism is the Excusable Ignorance Objection (EIO), which is the hardest to counter for the IRPP. This criticism is based on the claim that if an agent was excusably ignorant of the harm they were contributing to climate change, it is unfair to argue that they have a duty to pay the costs of adaptation and mitigation. This is a prevalent issue to address because 50 percent of the GHG emissions were done before the 1990s. This objection seems the hardest to counter for the SI approach because the SCM is a forward-looking account. Thus, our responsibility should not be based on blaming historical wrongs but on taking accountability in contemporary times to change the system.

To take this accountability, I argue that a more nuanced understanding of our responsibility to backward-looking activities can be developed through the work of Sparenborg (2022). It is necessary to focus on the fact that historically high GHG emissions in the Global North have resulted in them benefitting more by reaching higher levels of development. Therefore, putting them in a more robust social position (Sparenborg, 2022, p. 9). This can be viewed in the light of *temporality* because the Global North, through the GHG emissions, became more powerful, whereas others suffer disproportionately through the triple inequality (Sparenborg, 2022, p. 10). The current dominance of the Global North illustrates

how backward and forward-looking accounts are interconnected through temporality. To become aware of the effects of this temporality, Nuti (2019) argues for the need to *de-temporalize* structural injustice. Hence, history should not be viewed as static but should be regarded as a long-term structural development that shapes the background conditions that lead to injustice (Nuti, 2019, pp. 23-27). Thus, historical processes are not secluded but are continuously reproduced in new forms. This re-creates and perpetuates the unjust relation of power, which results in oppression and domination (Sparenborg, 2022, p. 10). Furthermore, the social positions in this structural system result in the most vulnerable agents becoming more vulnerable over time (Sparenborg, 2022, p. 10). Highlighting this process reiterates that the people benefiting in contemporary times have a higher level of accountability towards changing this system. Thus, the EIO does not hold because the people benefiting in contemporary times should also bear a sense of political responsibility in relation to these backward-looking accounts of GHG emissions. Furthermore, the IRPP can counter the unfairness criticism of BPP. As a result, people do not suddenly have to give up their benefits, but they should be aware of the benefits that they have required throughout history. This results in an imperfect responsibility to set this right concerning adaption and mitigation with respect to their parameters of reasoning.

III. A Hybrid Approach

Through the development of the fourth principle, I argue that a hybrid approach can give a more satisfactory answer to the burden-sharing question. However, it is important to reiterate that PPP, BPP, and APP still serve a significant purpose. Apart from the APP, in general, the liability model is essential in providing corrective justice when the necessary connection between culpability and harm can be drawn (Eckersley, 2016, p. 358). This entails cases of contemporary pollution where the argument can be made that the emission of GHG results in harm to the vulnerable. Hence, agents are directly liable to mitigate their GHG emissions because they are causally responsible for the adverse side effects of their actions. Therefore, GHG emissions from the 1990s onwards should be accounted for through the PPP, and BPP because it was then evident that their actions resulted in harm. Moreover, through better scientific research, the understanding of GHG emissions' harmful effects can be more accurately described, which puts them “in the realm of traceable moral responsibility” (Browne, 2023, p. 18). However, when issues like the CO, EIO, and cosmopolitan duty

objection arise, I argue that the IRPP proposes a solution. In these instances, the IRPP can serve as a way to still make actors politically responsible for their actions.

This hybrid approach, I argue, can best be realized through a conjunctive account of responsibility. Hereby, using the principles in domains that they are best suited for to resolve burden-sharing problems (Page, 2011, pp. 426-427). This would entail that the PPP would still need to resolve issues where the agent can be causally linked to the adverse effects of climate change. Thus, if, in contemporary times, an agent emits a lot of GHG emissions, they should bear the burden of mitigation costs. Secondly, the APP can be used to determine whether agents have sufficient means to bear the burden of climate change concerning mitigation and adaptation. If they do not, this would exempt them from combatting climate change (Page, 2011, p. 428). Thirdly, the BPP can be used as an adjusting principle concerning the burden-sharing question. Its aim should be to ensure that when states benefit disproportionately from their actions, they should be held more accountable to compensate for the burden-sharing process (Page, 2011, p. 428). The role of the IRPP will be to address the shortcomings of these approaches. We have a political responsibility to address the triple inequality prevalent within climate change. Meanwhile, the PPP, APP, and BPP then address legal and moral forms of injustice concerning traceable injustice. The IRPP aims to address the untraceable forms of SI and argues that we are, through our imperfect responsibility, still required to act.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

To reiterate, the research question for this thesis was: What principles can be employed to justify who should bear the burden of combatting climate change? From this research question, I have argued that the PPP, APP, and BPP are unable to give a coherent answer to this question because they are susceptible to the CO, EIO, and cosmopolitan duties objection. Therefore, I have developed a fourth principle, which is the IRPP. This principle states that agents have an imperfect responsibility to pay with respect to their parameters of reasoning. This principle is able to counter the three objections. First, CO does not hold because it is not *causation* but *participation* that should be the basis of the responsibility. Second, IRPP can give an answer to the objection to cosmopolitan duties because agents still have an imperfect responsibility to pay based on political responsibility even when this is not enforceable. Lastly, EIO can be circumvented through IRPP because GHG emissions throughout history have resulted in intersectional structures from which the Global North benefits. Focusing on

this temporal understanding makes it evident that vulnerabilities arose historically and are further entrenched as time continues. Therefore, it should be our imperfect responsibility to address this phenomenon through mitigation and adaptation costs.

Due to the scope of this research, the development of IRPP does have its limitations. For instance, lack of applicability and possible legal policy challenges. Thus, it might be difficult to coherently address which actors should pay which mitigation and adaptation costs by not pinpointing who should be directly responsible. This correlates with the fact that it may become ambiguous how responsibility should be enforced and measured. Legal and policy challenges arise because it may be hard to put the IRPP into law because it is not based on a causal connection. Thus, it might be difficult to translate this into policy changes.

The societal implication of my research is that the duty of mitigation and adaptation should also be viewed from a different perspective. I highlight that climate change is a SI and, I argue, that we all have an imperfect responsibility to pay with respect to our parameters of reasoning to resolve this issue. Therefore, the principle is not isolating but illustrates our combined participation within the global political-economical structures.

The academic implication of my research is a theoretical advancement concerning the burden-sharing question. Thus, political responsibility should take into account triple inequality. Future research should expand on the understanding of climate change as a SI and apply it to the broader question of how one should change political and economic structures to make them more just, which is under-addressed in this thesis.

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