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THE IMPLICATIONS OF BEING IMPLICATED. INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY AND STRUCTURAL INJUSTICE

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ABSTRACT

Within the global justice debate the demandingness objection is primarily aimed at utilitarian theorists who defend a version of the ‘optimizing principle of beneficence’ to deal with the problem of global poverty. The problem of demandingness, however, is hardly ever raised within the context of the dominant institutional theories of global justice that see severe poverty as a human rights violation. Nor are the fundamental underlying questions posed by many of these theorists. Which specific responsibilities do individual moral agents have regarding institutional and structural forms of injustice (1)? Which political spheres, organized public spaces, or political practices are necessary to create a setting in which these responsibilities can be discharged (2)? Does a ‘defensible and psychologically feasible conception of responsibility’ (Scheffler 2002, 62) exist that is restrictive – yet demanding – enough to deal with the complex challenges of our globalizing age (3). This paper addresses questions (1) and (3) on the basis of a critical analysis of Iris Marion Young’s social connection theory of responsibility.

Keywords: global justice; demandingness; individual responsibilities; Iris Marion Young

1. Introduction

Within the global justice debate the demandingness objection is primarily aimed at utilitarian theorists who defend a version of the ‘optimizing principle of beneficence’ to deal with the problem of global poverty. According to such an interactional principle we – citizens of rather affluent societies – are required ‘to keep benefiting others until the point where further efforts would burden us as much as they would help the others.’ (Murphy 2000, 6) Peter Singer’s strong version of the principle of preventing bad occurrences is a case in point. ‘If it is in our power to prevent something bad from happening’, he famously claimed in *Famine, Affluence and Morality*, ‘without thereby sacrificing anything of comparable moral importance, then we ought, morally, to do it.’ (1972, 231)

It is no surprise that the demands of such a principle are seen by many as excessive. Intuitively we feel that there is a limit ‘to how great a sacrifice morality, or at least a principle of beneficence, can legitimately demand of agents.’ (Murphy 1993, 273) Spending almost all our time and money on the battle against poverty and other forms of global wrongs would reduce us to mere agents ‘of the universal satisfaction system’ (Williams 1973, 118) and prevent

us from having any ground projects or personal relationships. Careful reflection is therefore needed on the ‘moral demands of affluence’. These demands should neither be too extreme nor too relaxed.

The problem of demandingness, however, is scarcely raised within the context of the dominant *institutional* theories of global justice that see severe poverty as a form of injustice or human rights violation and present us with a ‘non-restrictive conception of morality’.² Nor, and this is a major deficit, are the fundamental underlying questions posed by many of these theorists. Which specific responsibilities do individual moral agents have regarding institutional and structural forms of injustice (1)? Which political spheres, organized public spaces, or (democratic) political practices are necessary to create a setting in which these responsibilities can be discharged (2)?

At first sight it is unsurprising that these questions and the issue of demandingness are largely neglected. Different reasons can be given for why this is so. We will mention only two. Unlike interactional theories – such as Singer’s – institutional theories do not address the problem of global poverty in terms of the ethical responsibilities of individual agents but in terms of the fairness or justice of institutional schemes. The main issue is what kind of justice-relevant connections arise on the global level and what sort of institutional reforms are needed to right the wrongs of global poverty and other forms of deprivation and domination. Individual responsibility for justice is not an important part of this picture. This presumption is further reinforced by the fact that many theorists implicitly or explicitly assume that states and international organizations – and to a lesser extent private nongovernmental organizations and transnational corporations – are the principle (sometimes only) agents responsible for discharging responsibilities of global justice. It is the government’s job to address global injustices and not that of individual actors.

On further consideration, however, it is not so clear that institutional theorists can avoid questions related to the responsibilities for justice of individual moral agents. Take for example Thomas Pogge’s work on global poverty. Although he argues that the ‘the citizens and governments of the wealthy societies (...) significantly contribute to the persistence of severe poverty and thus share institutional moral responsibility for it.’ (2002, 115), he is primarily focused on what governments and international organizations can do to change the rules of the global economic order; such as the rules for global trade or intellectual property rights. Citizens should hold their representatives accountable for the results of international negotiations and press their governments for international reforms, but Pogge does not specify what these

responsibilities specifically entail, how demanding they are, nor whether all citizens are responsible to the same degree.

The object of the debate on global justice, moreover, almost directly leads to similar questions regarding individual responsibilities. The debate, after all, has shifted our attention from the sphere of ‘small-scale interactions, with clearly demarcated lines of causation, among independent individual agents’ (Scheffler 2011, 39), to one of great institutional complexity and ‘complex causal chains’ (Ashford 2003b, 109) between individual and institutional agents. Although this new globalized politico-economic reality complicates the attribution of individual responsibility – ascribing responsibility becomes very difficult if we cannot determine ‘who did what to whom’ – this does not imply that the question of individual responsibility for justice is off the table.

At least three fundamental questions, therefore, need to be raised, that receive little attention within the dominant institutional models of global justice. The first two are the ones mentioned above regarding the specific responsibilities of individual moral agents and the political context for discharging these responsibilities. The third is whether there is a ‘defensible and psychologically feasible conception of responsibility’ (Scheffler 2002, 62) that is restrictive – yet demanding – enough to deal with the complex challenges of our globalizing age (3).

Given that answering these questions in a satisfying way would demand a comprehensive theory of justice, responsibility and demandingness, this paper will only address parts of questions (1) and (3). It will do this on the basis of a critical analysis of the social connection theory of responsibility that Iris Marion Young developed in *Responsibility for Justice* (2011). Unlike many institutional theories of global justice, Young does develop a ‘conceptual tool for thinking about individual responsibility in relation to structural social processes’ (2011, 27). Unfortunately, however, she neither succeeds in clearly reconstructing the different political demands that are implied in her conception of individual responsibility, nor does she succeed in countering the demandingness objection. This article will give such a reconstructing and show why the issue of demandingness should be taken more seriously by those institutional theories of global justice that see global poverty as the effect of complex global institutional or social processes.

The general framework of Young’s social connection model and a reconstruction of the political responsibilities it entails will be the object of section 2 of this paper. Section 3 and 4 start with two general strategies for sidestepping the demandingness objection: by either claiming that individuals can simply opt-out of unjust social connections or by arguing that it is the government’s job to address global structural injustices. Section 5 discusses a third

strategy: limiting the force of the demandingness objection by focusing on ‘responsibilities for justice’ instead of ‘duties of justice’. All three strategies to sidestep the demandingness objection, as it will turn out, are unpersuasive. A more promising (but not fully convincing) way of dealing with this objection is by developing a system of differentiated responsibilities. Section 7, therefore, critically analyzes the four guidelines that Young describes for reasoning about the actions that are necessary to undermine structural injustices. Section 6 introduces this strategy by taking a closer look at two of the main reasons why institutional theories of global justice are open to the demandingness objection: external circumstances and the grounds for attributing responsibilities for justice. Section 8, finally, draws some general conclusions and gives some suggestions for moving forward.

2. A social connection theory of responsibility

In *Responsibility for Justice* and earlier work on global justice Young tried to accomplish two aims. *First*, to argue that ‘obligations of justice can arise between persons by virtue of the social processes that connect them’ (2006, 102) instead of on the basis of political membership, a background structure or humanity in general. *Second*, to reflect on the ‘responsibilities moral agents may be said to have in relation to such global social processes.’ (2006, 102) Let’s briefly look at both claims before we try to infer what specific kind of responsibilities can follow from structural injustice and how demanding these responsibilities can become.

2.1 Structural injustices and social connection

When do responsibilities of justice arise? What is the appropriate context for justice-relevant connections? Young rejects two standard answers: (a) responsibilities for justice arise from common membership in a nation-state; and (b) responsibilities for justice arise from the fact that we are part of a global institutional order. Both replies are too narrow. The first model because it unduly restricts the context of justice to the domestic sphere. The second because the idea of a global institutional order or basic structure is too much focused on the actions of legal and regulatory institutions, and disregards the importance of social connections. Injustice does not necessarily need to be the result of unjust laws or the wrongful acts of individuals but can also be caused by ‘everyday habits and chosen actions’ (2011, 71); like buying clothes and food.

Such a strong enlargement of the scope of justice can already be found in *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990). In this book Young argues that oppression:

persists in our society partly through interactive habits, unconscious assumptions and stereotypes, and group-related feelings of nervousness or aversion. Group oppressions are enacted in this society not primarily in official laws and policies but in informal, often unnoticed practices of everyday interaction and evaluation, aesthetic judgments, and the jokes, images, and stereotypes pervading in mass media. (Young 1990, 148)

In *Responsibility for Justice*, however, Young specifically focuses on ‘structural injustices’. These are injustices that are ‘distinct from the wrongful action of an individual agent or the repressive policies of a state’ (2011, 52). Structural injustices arise from the:

accumulated outcomes of the actions of the masses of individuals enacting their own projects, often uncoordinated with many others. The combination of actions affects the conditions of the actions of others, often producing outcomes not intended by any of the participating agents. (2011, 62-63)

Young only mentions a few examples of structural injustice on the global scale: sweat shops, global warming and financial crises. These examples, however, do give a general impression of what kind of injustice she has in mind and in what way her notion of responsibility differs from the traditional ideas of moral responsibility and legal liability (which not only imply some form of causality and volition, but also awareness and intention).

2.2 A political type responsibility

Young’s second aim, as we said before, is to develop a conception of individual responsibility in relation to these structural injustices. Such a responsibility derives from social connection and is political in nature. As such it should be distinguished from interactional forms of responsibility like ethical consumerism (buying sweatshop-produced clothing, using green-electricity or drinking Starbucks coffee etc.). Although Young does not deny that individual consumer-based action is an important instrument to deal with certain types of moral wrong, she does claim that an aggregation of disparate individual actions is not the best way to address global structural injustice (cf. Gould 2009, 201). The kind of responsibility that Young is after is a *shared* kind of responsibility – a responsibility ‘I personally bear, but not bear it alone’ (2011, 110) – that can only be taken up by means of *collective action*. Following Arendt she defines politics or the political as a ‘public communicative engagement with others for the sake

of organizing our relationships and coordinating our actions most justly.’ (2011, 112) So the only way to discharge this kind of responsibility is through joining with others.

A second important characteristic of her conception of individual responsibility is that it is *forward-looking*. Instead of trying to attribute guilt or fault for past actions, Young focuses on the responsibility individual and collective agents might have ‘in relation to current events and in relation to their future consequences’. (2011, 92) It is not difficult to find examples of forward-looking responsibilities in daily life. Marriage, for example, implies the responsibility of mutual support and fidelity. And having children implies educating and caring for them. (Richardson 1999, 218) The specific form of forward-looking responsibility that Young has in mind, is the obligation ‘to join with others who share that responsibility in order to transform the structural processes to make their outcomes less unjust’ (2011, 96). Or in more general terms, it is the ‘responsibility to be political’. (2011, 92) In connection with the idea of ‘structural injustice’, however, it is important to keep in mind two things. First of all that this forward-looking responsibility arises because of past and current interactions within complex social structures. So in that sense, Young’s forward-looking responsibility is always based on some form of outcome responsibility – however minimal – and cannot avoid looking backward. Secondly, that this backward-looking component of her social connection model complicates several strategies to counter the demandingness objection, such as opting for ‘responsibilities for justice’ instead of ‘duties of justice’.

2.3 The stance of the deliberative democrat and the political activist

But what could such a responsibility for justice precisely entail for individual moral agents? Young doesn’t present us with a set of clear guidelines or structured account. Instead she only presents her readers with some general clues in her analysis of Hannah Arendt’s concept of responsibility and her discussion of sweatshops and global labor justice. These clues, however, are rather disparate and disorganized. One way of organizing them – probably the most productive one – is on the basis of a distinction that Young made in an earlier paper regarding the ideal of the good citizen: the contrast between the stance of the ‘deliberative democrat’ and the ‘political activist’ (Young 2001). Both stances imply a different and sometimes conflicting interpretation of political engagement.

The ideal of inclusive public deliberation is at the heart of the deliberative democratic model of citizen virtue and forms the basis for democratic legitimacy. Laws and policies ‘ought to be made by processes that bring all the potentially affected parties or their representatives

into a public deliberative process'. As such, this ideal not only guides citizens in their evaluation of political processes and their interaction with those 'with whom [they] disagree or those with whom [their] interests initially conflict in public setting', but it also gives them ample reason to advocate 'processes and action to implement deliberative procedures in actually existing democracy.' (Young 2001, 672)

On a very general level, the stance of the political activist is not all that different. Both the deliberative democrat and the activist try to promote social justice and claim that political engagement should 'communicate specific ideas to the wide public'. (2001, 676) The political activist, however, does not accept that the best (and only) way to address harm and injustice is on the basis of public deliberation within the framework of already existing political processes. These processes, after all, are often marked by deep structural inequalities:

the normal workings of the social economic and political institutions in which he dwells', after all, 'enact or reproduce deep wrongs – some laws or policies have unjust effects, or social and economic structures cause injustice (...) and so on. (2001, 673)

The main focus of the activist is therefore on interest group politics (like sit-ins, boycotts, leafleting, and demonstrations) as a means to counter these structural inequalities.

Both the deliberative democratic and the activist stance seem to be at the background of Young's conception of political responsibility. Individual moral agents participating in processes of structural injustice have the political responsibility to mobilize, contest and create new sites for public deliberation. Systematizing the remarks found in her work on sweatshops and global labor justice I come to the following list of four components of what a political responsibility regarding unjust structural processes might entail:

- i) *Acquiring knowledge*: Considering that individual actors can participate in processes of structural injustices without intending these results or even knowing about them, one of the first responsibilities is to acquire knowledge about the specific connections between their actions, institutions and the fate of distant strangers. It is only on the basis of this information that discussion of problems like hunger and domination can be initiated, that other 'citizens' can be mobilized to reform unjust structural processes, and that governments and international organizations can be criticized for not addressing these issues.
- ii) *Mobilizing others*: Given that participating in unjust structural processes generates a political responsibility, individual moral agents must be willing to *persuade* others of the fact that some

policies, interests and social connections will have ‘unjust or harmful aspects or consequences’ (Young 2001, 672). In addition they have the responsibility to join with others ‘to organize collective action to reform [unjust] structures’ (2011, 112) and to convince governments and international institutions that global structural injustices need to be addressed; for instance by ‘pressuring or cajoling policy makers to serve’ universal interests. (Young 2001, 674)

- iii) *Contesting and monitoring*: Considering that within the real world of politics, processes of deliberation and decision-making are often characterized by deep structural inequalities – such as the significant political power that structurally dominant segments of society often have – individual moral actors have the political responsibility to watch, contest and monitor the actions of the main political actors (like states and international organizations).
- iv) *Creating new deliberative forums*: If these three categories of political responsibilities cannot be discharged within existing national or global organized entities (which seems likely considering the problem of structural inequality and the lack of a full-fledged public sphere at the global level), individual moral agents have the responsibility to create and maintain new sites and processes of deliberation and contestation. (Young 2001, 672)

How these four components relate to the interactional responsibility that individual moral agents have as consumers (such as buying fair trade products) or the responsibilities of states or other institutional actors remains to be seen. And which of these four is the most important one is also an open question. It all depends on how deep structural inequalities at the global level are, whether sufficient deliberative sites are available to give both the ‘perpetrators’ of injustice and the ‘victims’ a political voice, and how difficult it is to initiate change. These four components, however, do give us a general idea of what responsibilities for justice might entail for institutional theories of global justice that share – as most of these theories do – the importance of inclusive public reason and claim that many global injustices are caused by institutional structures and social processes.

Combined with Young’s first aim of enlarging the traditional scope of the context of justice-relevant connections the question will, however, immediately be raised whether the individual agent will not be hopelessly overwhelmed by these political responsibilities. There are, after all, many structural processes we participate in through our actions (both at the local and global level). Sometimes we are well aware of the fact that these processes lead to unjust outcomes, sometimes we don’t even know that we are implicated in unjust processes. Judith

Lichtenberg expresses this very aptly: ‘Every bite we eat! Every purchase we make! To not do these things, to know what to do instead, all this can encroach on our autonomy at least as oppressively as any duties of aid or beneficence’ (2010, 560).

One way out of this dilemma is for Young to deny that either the stance of the deliberative democrat or the activist embodies the ideal of the always engaged citizen. Citizens don’t always have ‘to engage discursively with all interests and social segments, reasonably expressing opinions and criticizing others’. (2001, 688) Young may be right regarding the ideal setting of a more or less reasonably just democratic society – although even in this case the problem of the practical feasibility of large-scale deliberative practices can be legitimately raised – but things look altogether different when we discuss a non-ideal context in which individual agents are implicated in global structural injustices. Being implicated in a context in which institutional actors do not (or not sufficiently) address these injustices individual agents cannot deny their responsibilities for justice.

Young in fact recognizes that the demandingness objection will immediately be raised once readers realize that ‘all who participate by their actions in the structural processes that produce unjust outcomes share responsibility for working to alter those processes’. (2003, 40) Although these burdens might be seen by many as unfair because most citizens of affluent societies probably never intended the bad outcomes of their joint actions, because they might have been acting ‘within institutional rules and according to practices that most people regard as morally acceptable’ (Young 2011, 95) or because they are not always in the best position to change things, these injustices still need to be addressed.

The demandingness objection can, therefore, not so easily be brushed aside. How to respond to such an objection? How to avoid making ‘unusually heavy demands of individual moral agents’ in ‘a world where human misery and suffering exist on a vast scale, and where acts that are atrocities on any plausible view come to our attention’ (Scheffler 1986, 531)? In the next three sections three general strategies will be discussed that might be used to sidestep this objection: claiming that citizens can disconnect from unjust structural processes altogether (*section 3*), shifting the responsibility of citizens to their states (*section 4*) and claiming that responsibilities for justice – in contrast to duties of justice – leaves considerable room for personal discretion (*section 5*). These strategies, however, are unconvincing.

3. Why not opt-out?

Can individual moral agents simply escape their political responsibilities to undermine structural injustices by withdrawing their participation in unjust global processes and institutions; perhaps by only buying fair-trade goods or maybe even living the life of self-sustained hermits? Although Young rejects this opt-out strategy she, strangely enough, does take it in consideration. Regarding the option of not buying certain goods, she argues the following:

They choose not to buy certain products or brands, which they have reason to think are manufactured under unjust conditions. But when such a boycott is the act of a single individual, it has no effect on those conditions. And it is nearly impossible in the contemporary world for a person to remove herself from any implication in structures that produce injustice. To the extent that this implication is a ground of political responsibility, then, the responsibility cannot be escaped by withdrawal; it has to be taken up. (Young 2004, 386)

We add ‘strangely enough’ because Young’s forward-looking responsibility is essentially about preventing future wrongs and changing past wrongs (Hahn 2009, 62). We have an obligation, according to Young, ‘to join with others who share that responsibility in order to transform the structural processes to make their outcomes less unjust. (2011, 96) By disconnecting – assuming that this can be done – there is no guarantee that this goal will be reached; that future structural injustices will be prevented. So the main reason why escaping responsibility by withdrawing is not an option is not merely because we cannot avoid being implicated, but because we have an obligation to change precisely those unjust structural processes that we are part of and directly or indirectly helped to sustain.

The same type of criticism, although in a stronger form, also applies to Pogge’s work. Take the following quote from *World Poverty and Human Rights*:

I might honor my negative duty, perhaps, through becoming a hermit or an emigrant, but I could honor it more plausibly by working with others toward shielding the victims of injustice from the harms I help produce or, if this is possible, toward establishing secure access through institutional reform. (2002, 66)

If ‘I helped sustain a social order’ in which many people do not have ‘secure access to the objects of their human rights’ (2002, 66) it seems odd – to say the least – to argue that we can honor our negative duties (and its positive component of reforming unjust institutions) ‘through becoming a hermit or an emigrant’. Such a course of action is only a legitimate option if we never helped to create or sustain such an order in the first place. If participating in and

supporting unjust structural processes is the ground for attributing either forward-looking (Young) or backward-looking responsibilities (Pogge), there is no reason to either avoid taking up these political responsibilities or reflect on their content.

4. Institutional and individual responsibilities

A second strategy to deny the demandingness objection and some of the more difficult questions related to the range of political responsibilities of individual moral agents is to claim that states and international institutions like the WTO or ILO are the primary agents for social change and consequently bear sole or most of the responsibility for countering structural injustices at the global level. Although there is some truth in this claim – structural injustices and inequalities need long-term and institutional solutions – it is too one-sided and far from convincing. To explain why this is the case, it is helpful to look at Young's critique of Robert Goodin's discussion of the 'not my job excuse'. This is one of the two excuses that Goodin mentions for why people – even though they accept that certain things are unjust and need to be changed – still refuse to do the right thing. Someone needs to fight global injustices, people argue, but it is not their responsibility to be that specific someone. (1995, 29)

What makes the 'not my job excuse' so interesting is that it might let the individual agent off the hook but that it has the effect, as Goodin argues, 'of putting collective moral agents such as the state on it, in their stead'. (1995, 28) What is needed in situations where individual agents accept that injustice exists but refuse to do anything about it, is some form of formal organization and coordinated social action. Of course the state is not the only collective agent capable of addressing structural injustices, but in our current political constellation the state is still the most powerful one.

Although Goodin's analysis of the 'not my job problem' does not imply that individual agents have no responsibilities³, Young does criticize him for being too much focused on the importance of the state as a moral agent. Goodin's analysis of the 'not my job excuse', according to her, suffers from two important shortcomings. First of all, it downplays the fact that the state's ability to transform structural processes depends to a great degree on 'the active support of its citizens in that endeavor'. (2011, 169) Citizens must be willing to pay for the actions that the state undertakes in their name.

A second problem with Goodin's analysis is that it insufficiently recognizes that struggles between states and international institutions often form the cause of certain structural injustices. That is why we need citizens, activist organizations, private NGO's etc. to make:

demands on state and international institutions to develop policies that limit the ability of powerful and privileged actors to do what they want without much regard to its cumulative effect on others, and to promote the well-being of less powerful and privileged actors. (Goodin 2011, 151)

Although Young, according to some⁴, tends to overemphasize the standpoint of the activist citizen and the importance of informal modes of collective action, she has a point when it comes to the question of the proper agents for social change. Even though states and international institutions are powerful agents we cannot discard the importance of individual responsibility in relation to global structural processes or with regard to the structural inequalities that are often characteristic of social, economic and political institutions. The ‘not my job excuse’, therefore, cannot be used to simply sidestep questions regarding the nature of individual responsibilities for justice.

There is an interesting paradox at work here. On the one hand we need to realize that conflicts between the ‘moral point of view’ and the ‘point of view of the individual agent’ (Scheffler 1992, 4) more easily surface and gain in strength under unjust political conditions. ‘In a seriously unjust society’, Scheffler rightly claims, ‘conflicts between moral requirements and the interests of the individual agent may be extremely difficult to avoid (1992, 139). That is why in the simple case of domestic relations we need a just and well-ordered society to limit these conflicts and establish a better fit between morality and the interests of the individual. On the other hand, however, we should not forget that in a globalizing world characterized by a great variety of structural injustices and inequalities such a fit would not only require a just and well-ordered *world society* but also individual moral agents with the political responsibility and the political will to create and sustain such an institutional context.

5. Responsibility instead of duty

Given that ‘citizens’ can never fully transfer their responsibility for remedying structural injustices to states and other organizations, and given that ‘withdrawal’ is not an option, is there a third strategy to sidestep the objection of demandingness? One could claim – like Young does – that structural injustices lead to some form of *liability* for those actors that directly violate duties of justice – like in the case of sweatshops the ‘factory owners and managers who violate local labor laws’ (2011, 131) – but only to *responsibilities for justice* for all those individual moral agents who merely buy their cloths from retailers who do business with these sweatshops or are in other ways implicated in unjust social processes. Duties and responsibilities, after all,

lead to different demands on individual agents⁵. Responsibilities leave moral agents far more room for their own personal projects and interests.

Both duties and responsibilities prescribe certain types of acts or behavior and have the same general form: ‘A ought to see it that X’; where ‘X’ refers to some state of affairs (Goodin1986, 142). The main difference between both, however, is that whereas duties prescribe a specific action that A ought to do or refrain from doing to produce X responsibilities do not refer to specific actions. The difference between duties and responsibilities, in that sense, *seems* to be similar to the distinction that Kant makes in *The Metaphysics of Morals* between narrow and wide obligations or perfect and imperfect duties. Regarding imperfect or wide duties Kant writes the following:

if the law can prescribe only the maxims of actions, not actions themselves, this is a sign that it leaves playroom (*latitudo*) for free choice in following (complying with) the law, that is, that the law cannot specify precisely in what way one is to act and how much one is to do by the action for an end that is also a duty (6, 390)⁶.

The fact that imperfect duties leave a certain amount latitude for free choice when compared to perfect duties, however, does not imply that they are any less binding. Or, to use Young’s phrasing: although responsibilities are ‘no less obligatory’ than duties, responsibilities are ‘more open as to what actions [they call] for’ and leave the agent more discretionary power. ‘It is up to the agents who have a responsibility’, according to Young, ‘to decide what to do to discharge it within the limits of other moral considerations.’ (2011, 143)

To what extent can the distinction between duties and responsibilities be used to sidestep the demandingness objection? It all depends on the circumstances to which these obligations apply in combination with the question whether a certain amount of playroom merely applies to the ‘when’ and ‘how to comply’ with imperfect duties and responsibilities, or also to the ‘how much/how far’. If latitude does not extend to the ‘how much’ or ‘how far’ imperfect duties and responsibilities can become very demanding (Ackeren and Sticker 2015, 78) External circumstances, moreover, can also cause the latitude to shrink and make responsibilities and imperfect duties more stringent and demanding (Walla 2015, 736-736). Think about emergency cases where a child is drowning in a pond or where a neighbor is in dire need for food

So the most important way in which the distinction between duties and responsibilities might help to sidestep the demandingness objection is if responsibilities for justice do not apply to extreme circumstances (i) or when they not only imply an openness with regard to *when* and *how* these obligations are taken up (i.e. what precise actions to take, such as boycotting certain products or supporting social movements), but also to *how far* or even *whether* these

responsibilities should be taken up (ii). Both conditions, however, cannot apply to Young's social connection model or institutional theories of global justice like Pogge's.

At some points in her work Young seems to defend a wider interpretation of the latitude of responsibilities: 'We who share responsibility ought to take action, but it is up to us to decide what is reasonable for us to do, given our abilities and our particular circumstances.' (2011, 143) Responsibilities, in this sense, are indeed like imperfect duties because they leave room for considerable personal discretion and can be overridden by other maxims of duty. Yet at other times Young merely claims that responsibilities are 'more open as to what actions it calls for'. (2011, 143) In that sense 'carrying out responsibilities is not a matter of mere beneficence'. (2004, 379)

The wider interpretation of the openness of responsibilities, however, doesn't square well with her initial premise that the responsibilities of individual moral agents arise precisely because they *participate* in *unjust* structural processes. Young's forward-looking responsibility for justice, after all, is always grounded in a backward-looking responsibility for injustice. These global structural injustices and inequalities form the circumstances to which the responsibilities for justice apply. Although it is difficult, as Young claims, 'to identify how the actions of one particular individual, or even one particular collective agent, such as a firm, has directly produced harm to other specific individuals' (2011, 96) this indeterminacy mainly shows that the liability model might not be an appropriate tool for all social and political contexts. It does not, however, straightaway lead to the conclusion that individual moral agents are morally speaking free to decide 'how far' to deal with their political responsibility.

A similar ambiguity as in Young's work can be found in an interesting article by Elizabeth Ashford (2006). In this article Ashford argues for 'considerable latitude' with regard to the fulfillment of the 'duty not to collaborate in unjust institutions'. She writes the following:

The way in which we support institutional reform is open, and it is also open which particular harms we should seek to oppose or compensate for (...) Agents thus have considerable latitude in deciding which and how many of the harms in which they are implicated through their participation in social institutions they should try to prevent or counteract or redress (2006, 232).

This latitude, in other words, does not only apply to the specific measures individual agents take to fulfil their duties but also to the degree to which they fulfil them. At the same time, however, and this is also a claim Young makes, 'right-holders have a claim against every affluent agent who is not doing enough' (2006, 234) which implies that there is a non-subjective

standard for determining when individual moral agents have discharged their responsibilities to a sufficient degree.

So focusing on ‘responsibilities for justice’ instead of ‘duties of justice’ does not help us to sidestep the demandingness objection within our current political landscape. Responsibilities for justice will only become less stringent and demanding if we have ‘just political institutions [that] create favorable conditions for moral agency’ (Walla 2015, 742).

6. External circumstances and structural injustice

To further understand why theories of global justice that focus on responsibilities for justice (like Young’s) – let alone institutional theories that focus on duties of justice (like Pogge’s) – cannot escape dealing with the issue of demandingness, it is helpful to take a closer look at two of the four general responses to demandingness that Scheffler distinguishes in ‘Morality’s Demands and Their Limits’ (1986). The *first* is to claim that such a moral theory cannot be acceptable and needs to be replaced by a less demanding one. If ‘ought implies can’ we should dismiss theories that lay down rules and principles that simply cannot be observed by non-heroic moral agents. The *second response* focuses on limits to the scope or pervasiveness of morality, on the acts which can or cannot be subject to moral justification and assessment. As long as moral theories do not subject ‘certain areas of human life (...) to moral assessment or moral demands’ (1986, 531), according to this response, they are acceptable.

Whereas the first two responses accept the claim that the demands of morality can be ‘limited by considerations having to do with the individual agent’s psychology and well-being’ (1986, 531) the last two responses follow a different strategy. Both are rooted in the view that ‘sees morality as more radically disengaged from the standpoint of the individual agent’ (Scheffler 1992, 27). These responses accept that morality can demand a great deal from us but claim that this will primarily affect either the status of morality or the status of us as moral agents, but not the content of moral theories. Given that we are specifically interested in the different strategies that proponents of institutional theories of global justice have of either avoiding the demandingness objection or restricting the demands of morality, we will leave the third and fourth responses for what they are.

Are the first and second responses open to Young’s social connection model or proponents of institutional theories of justice like Pogge? The second isn’t, but the first might. The second response, recall, claims that some actions or areas of human life are beyond the scope of moral justification. Two types of acts are often mentioned in this regard. First, acts

that are ‘too trivial to be subject to moral evaluation’ (1986, 532), like brushing your teeth. Second, acts whose non-performance ‘would be extremely costly, either to the agent himself or to someone dear to him’ (1986, 532), like Bernard Williams’ example of a man who is faced with the dilemma of being able to save only one of two people (his wife and a stranger). Claiming that it is morally permissible for the man to save his wife is, according to Williams, ‘intolerably moralistic’. (Scheffler 1986, 533)

Scheffler argues that both examples give rise to the same critique. Claiming that an act is beyond the scope of moral evaluation ‘implicitly depends on an assessment not only of the act itself, but also of the consequences of the act, the alternatives available to the agent, and their consequences’ (1986, 534); an assessment which, according to Scheffler, appears ‘indistinguishable from moral assessment’ (1986, 535). Perhaps we are brushing our teeth while at the exact same time someone is choking to death just outside the bathroom door. Or perhaps ‘[t]he man's wife (...) is a notorious and sadistic mass murderer’ and the stranger ‘a brilliant and saintly medical researcher who (...) has just discovered a cure for cancer but has not yet had a chance to write it down’ (1986, 535).

Determining whether Scheffler is right in claiming that ‘no voluntary human action is in principle resistant to moral assessment’ (1986, 535) is perhaps relevant when we try to assess the plausibility of interactional theories of global justice that argue for a duty of beneficence to alleviate global poverty but not for institutional theories that focus on the political implications of being implicated in structural injustices. The starting point for Young and Pogge, after all, is precisely a violation of duties of justice. It is within this context that the question regarding the demandingness of responsibilities for justice arises. In that sense they are always already within the domain of the morally prohibited and the morally required. And as a consequence even less options are open to them to sidestep the objection of demandingness. The ground for attributing responsibilities for change and reform, in that sense, has an effect on its demandingness.

What about the first response? Can the demands of morality overburden ‘normal’ moral agents if we take into account their ‘psychology and well-being’? With regard to Singer’s ‘optimizing principle of beneficence’ many critics have argued that they can. Above we have seen that the same can be said for some institutional theories of global justice and Young’s social connection model. The main problem with the first response, however, is determining when morality puts too heavy demands on normal moral agents. On the one hand, morality should be action-guiding and demanding. ‘A morality that was never prepared to make any demands’, Goodin rightly claims, ‘would be a pretty useless morality.’ (2009, 3) Individuals should be prepared to change their normal habits and ‘sacrifice a great deal of what reasonable

people regard as their normal self-interest for the sake of furthering justice'. (Young 2011, 123) On the other hand these demands should not be impossible to comply with.

But when are moral demands impossible to comply with? And can normal moral agents argue that they are overburdened as a consequence of meeting those obligations (such as the obligation to compensate for harms or reform unjust institutional or social structures) that follow from a violation of duties of justice? Responsibilities for justice, precisely because they are grounded in a violation of duties of justice, seem to leave less latitude in this regard than duties of beneficence although some theorists would argue that even stricter obligations than responsibilities for justice leave room for exemptions. Take for example Rawls' description of the natural duties of justice in his *A Theory of Justice* (1971/1999):

This duty has two parts: first, we are to comply with and to do our share in just institutions when they exist and apply to us; and second, we are to assist in the establishment of just arrangements when they do not exist, at least when this can be done with little cost to ourselves (1999, 293-294).

We are released from this duty to maintain and create just institutions, in other words, 'when the cost to ourselves is considerable' (1999, 100).⁷

Rawls' description of the natural duty of justice is one way of addressing the demandingness objection but it comes at the price of changing a duty of justice into a duty of virtue: no less obligatory but with more playroom for free choice regarding the 'how far/how much'. One can, however, wonder whether this option would be open to Rawls in circumstances of global structural injustices. Extreme circumstances, as we saw above, can even make imperfect duties more 'strict' and limit the playroom for free choice.

External circumstances (like the needs of the global poor or a lack of just democratic global political institutions) in combination with *the grounds for attributing responsibilities for justice* (direct or indirect outcome responsibility for structural injustices and inequalities), in that sense, have a strong effect on the demandingness and content of these responsibilities. And this applies not only to Young's social connection model but also to institutional theories of global justice like Pogge's. What turns Pogge's duty to reform into a relatively stringent obligation that cannot be easily overridden, is that it even more directly flows from outcome responsibility than Young's responsibility for justice: violations of negative duties directly lead to duties of compensation and reform.

7. Differentiating responsibilities

Some form of restriction of morality's demands, however, seems to be necessary to make Young's social connection model or institutional theories of global justice like Pogge's plausible. But what strategy is suitable to restrict the demands of responsibilities for justice or duties to reform? Young introduces four guidelines for reasoning 'about how to take action to try to undermine injustice'. (2011, 144) By presenting these four parameters (*power, privilege, interest, and collectiveability*) Young hopes to take into account the intuition that although all agents share in the responsibility for structural injustices, they can still have 'different kinds and degrees of forward-looking responsibility'. (2011, 144) The main problem with these parameters of reasoning, however, is that they cannot fully avoid the charge that either all people can be held equally responsible for structural injustices (a) or that they might overburden precisely those agents that already try to fight structural injustices or are the victims of these injustices (b). Let's briefly look at these parameters.

Within structural processes agents will occupy different social relations. Some will have more *power* to change structural processes; others will have a rather *privileged* position in relation to these processes. With regard to the global apparel industry, for example, the middle-class in most western societies will have a privileged position. According to Young they not only 'benefit from the large selection and affordable prices that retailers offer them' (2011, 145) but they can also afford to change their habits. Unlike lower income clothing consumers they can very easily make that extra effort.

The criteria of 'power' and 'privilege', however, don't necessarily lessen the responsibilities of the average citizen. Although large multinational designers and retailers 'have the power to pressure manufacturers to improve working conditions, monitor those conditions, and directly subsidize plant improvements' (2011, 144-145), we still need consumers and political activists to push these multinationals to take up their responsibility. And this cannot always be easily done because these giant corporations, as Young also indicates, have an interest in perpetuating the status quo. So unless these multinationals take action, the burden will return to those agents who do not take up a position of institutional power within structural processes.

Something similar also applies to the criterion of 'privilege'. Although middle-class consumers both profit from unjust structures and have the capacity to collectively call for a boycott of certain products, we should not forget that lower-income consumers also profit from the current global apparel and food industry and that they would probably not suffer 'serious

deprivation' (2011, 145) if they changed their habits. Eating less meat or buying less (but more expensive) clothing is an option for most citizens in affluent societies. In addition, many forms of political activism are open to all.

What about the last two parameters of reasoning ('interest' and 'collective ability')? Those agents whose interests 'coincide with the responsibility for justice' (2011, 145), according to Young, also share in the responsibility of challenging and eventually changing these processes. At first sight, this seems like a productive way of differentiating responsibility. Those who benefit from changes in the way the global apparel and food industry is organized have an extra responsibility when it comes to making these changes happen. On second thought, however, the parameter of 'interest' will primarily burden those actors that are either already try to change the way the global industry is organized (like members of NGO's or political activists) or the victims of structural injustices (like the exploited workers in sweat shops). This seems counterintuitive. Take the example of the sweat shop workers. There are, of course, good reasons (such as avoiding paternalism) for involving actual and potential victims in ameliorative efforts. But we should not forget that the dominated and exploited are not in the best position to change oppressive systems. (cf. Gould 2009, 203) They often lack real opportunity for change. 'Interest' in that regard is not a perfect guiding principle for determining how the burdens of the forward-looking responsibility for justice should be distributed.

'Collective ability' suffers from a similar fate. Political responsibility, as we discussed before, is a form of shared responsibility, a collective social project. People should 'organize collectively to regulate or transform some aspect of their shared social conditions'. (2004, 377) Young, however, rightly points out that it is often very difficult to get 'individuals and institutions organized in a new way.' (2011, 147) That is why she argues that some agents are in a better position to initiate change than others. Some agents, for example, 'can draw on the resources of already organized entities [such as unions, church groups, student groups or even stockholder organizations] and use them in new ways for trying to promote change'. (2011, 147) Although Young is right in this regard, she seems to forget that most people in developed countries are not only part of many different organized entities – and in that sense will have the opportunity to initiate change – but that there are also many different unjust structural processes that need to be reformed. The real challenge is often to convince people within organized entities to initiate change and this requires having sufficient information about structural processes to guarantee that change will be effective. And with this we are back to the ideal of the citizen-activist; a role that is open to all.

The fact that Young's four parameters of reasoning do not provide us with a fully convincing answer to the demandingness objection, however, doesn't imply that the strategy of developing a system of differentiated responsibilities isn't a worthwhile endeavor to pursue. It mostly means that more work need to be done to determine 'who needs to do what for whom'. Young's parameters of reasoning, however, not only need to be reworked and refined but also supplemented with an account of the different connections between *ethical consumerism*, *political consumerism* (the ways in which consumers can use markets as 'arena's for politics'; cf. Stolle and Michelletti 2014), *political activism* and *institutional responsibility*. Within the context of global justice and trade, for example, different routes have been proposed to promote development and fight world poverty: *free trade* (removing protectionist laws and policies), *fair trade* (trading partnerships, ethical consumerism and limited forms of political consumerism) and proposals for a more comprehensive form of *fairness in trade* (preventing exploitation, promoting redistribution, changing the rules of the WTO etc.) The precise relation between these different routes and the obligations they entail for different institutional and individual agents, though, still needs to be determined. Are they mutually exclusive or mutually reinforcing means to reach some form of global justice?

8. Concluding remarks

Although Young has made quite some progress in developing a model of individual political responsibility in relation to structural injustices, a more comprehensive account needs to be given of the implications that this model has for theories of global justice and democracy. Arguing that political responsibility involves 'joining with others to organize collective action to reform' (2011, 112) the social and institutional structures that lead to global injustices is too general an answer. What we need to know – at least if we take the issue of demandingness seriously – is which specific obligations are entailed in the idea of responsibility for justice (1), how these obligations can be differentiated in such a way that the different roles and capabilities of individual actors are taken into account (2), and what the best political arena's and practices are for discharging these responsibilities (3). How to answer these three questions? In section 2.3 a preliminary answer was given to the first question on the basis of a reconstruction of the four general components of the idea of responsibility for justice: acquiring knowledge (a), mobilizing others (b), contesting and monitoring (c) and creating new deliberative forums (d). These four components, however, need to be further elaborated into a convincing account of political agency and activism. No attempt was made in this paper to answer the third question.

That would require a comprehensive account of the relationship between global justice and global democracy.

What about the issue of demandingness? Unlike Rawls' definition of the natural duty of justice Young's description of responsibility for justice does not contain the restriction 'with little cost to ourselves' (1999,294). External circumstances (a great number of global injustices) and the ground for attributing this responsibility (some form of outcome responsibility), in fact, make such a restriction difficult and immediately raise the problem of demandingness. Three strategies have been described and refuted to sidestep this problem: opting-out, shifting responsibilities to the state and emphasizing responsibilities instead of duties. A fourth strategy – at least if we take the psychology and well-being of individual agents seriously – seems more promising: differentiating responsibilities. To convincingly answer the second question, however, more needs to be said about the link between ethical consumerism, political consumerism, political activism and institutional responsibility

Does all this imply that the main claim of this paper is correct; i.e. that the demandingness objection should be taken more seriously within the context of the dominant institutional theories of global justice? Critics could reply that the main reason why Young's theory of responsibility is open to the objection of demandingness is precisely because she overemphasizes the stance of the citizen activist and unnecessarily stretches the scope of justice to include individual participation in social processes that lead to structural injustices; injustices that are often not intended or foreseen by 'any of the participating agents' (Young 2011, 62-63). Up to a certain point these critics are right. Young's forward-looking responsibility casts a far wider net than institutional theories of global justice that are based on a liability form of outcome responsibility; like Pogge's. But even these theories – at least in so far as their grounding empirical claim is correct; viz. that the governments and citizens of affluent societies are largely to blame for global poverty – cannot deny the importance of individual responsibility for justice and should address the issue of demandingness. Young, after all, convincingly argues that individual actors can and should be seen as agents of social change, actors that have a political responsibility to collectively monitor and watch political institutions.

Pogge's 'causal contribution thesis' is of course one of the weak links of his liability based theory of global justice. There are two important complicating factors:

Empirically, it is extremely difficult to determine the main causes of global poverty as well as dubious that most world poverty is the effect of *global* institutions. Philosophically, even if the principle were true, the extent of "our" responsibility for global poverty is complicated by our diverse agency relationships to institutions. (Satz 2005, 48)

Although this problem of indeterminacy does not necessarily discard his theory, it does show that first-order moral questions – which particular demands can legitimately be posed on individual actors – are difficult to adequately answer. At most we might only get a very general notion of who owes what to whom. But this is precisely one of the reasons why Young emphasizes the importance of a forward-looking type of responsibility with regard to structural injustices instead of one based on liability and blame. Young's wider net, in that sense, actually does make sense. In the end, however, the remaining challenge is to further specify the political context for discharging these individual responsibilities and a way to differentiate them.

Notes

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² Scheffler (2001: 42). For exceptions see Ashford (2003a, 2003b and 2005) and Lichtenberg (2010). Outside the context of the global justice debate, however, some examples can be given, such as Ashford (2003) regarding contractualism, Swanton (2009) regarding virtue ethics and Walla (2015) and Ackeren and Sticker (2015) regarding Kants moral theory. It is, of course, tempting to mention institutional theorists that have socioeconomic human rights as the basis of their theories of global justice. The *feasibility condition* is often invoked in this regard. The demands of global justice principles should be able to be fulfilled in practice. (Compare Gilibert 2008) We should note, however, that the primary bearers of responsibility in discussions about welfare rights are states and not citizens. The feasibility objection is much broader than the demandingness objection. Although the literature on *world, global* or *cosmopolitancitizenship*, finally, does sometimes include the political responsibilities of individual moral agents, the general focus is on the moral idea that all human beings are part of a single community. For an interesting exception see Cabrera (2011).

³ '[W]here doing the right thing requires coordinated social action, they are excused in the absence of mechanisms to provide that coordination. They are not excused in the presence of mechanisms to provide it. Nor are they excused from a duty to create and maintain those mechanisms to provide such coordination.' (Goodin 1995, 36) See also Gould: 'institutional problems require institutional solutions, though this is of course not to absolve individuals of their obligations to help create such institutions.' (2009, 207)

⁴ Gould for example argues that global corporations bear far more responsibility than Young acknowledges: 'I have suggested that the difference in responsibility between global corporations and the exploited workers is not adequately conceived as a matter of degree'. (2009: 207)

⁵ Here she follows Feinberg (1966) and Richardson (1999).

⁶Page number refers to the Prussian Academy Edition of Kant's Complete Works.

⁷Criminal law, of course, also leaves room for excuses or mitigating factors when it comes to criminal acts.

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