Rage Against the Machine[*]

Stephanie Collins

This is the final draft of a paper whose definitive version will be published in *Ethics*.

Abstract

David Estlund has recently asked: how can structural injustice warrant resentment and indignation, given that it cannot fully be traced to culpable conduct? This article answers Estlund's question. I propose that a social structure is an object that persists through time and is materially constituted by humans in relation. I use accounts of the point of blame to vindicate attitudes of resentment and indignation that target social structures themselves, without necessarily targeting their human constituents.

Structural injustice is pervasive. Consider robust statistical disparities in outcomes for individuals of different races, genders, classes, abilities, and so on. Such disparities are widespread. It's doubtful they can fully be traced to the culpable conduct of agents.[1]

But if they're not fully traceable to culpable conduct, are they really injustices? This question motivates what David Estlund calls the 'reach/grievance dilemma' for the notion of structural injustice.[2] As Estlund describes the 'reach' horn: "If for there to be injustice there must necessarily be individual culprits, then the idea of injustice can't reach cases we might think it must"—such as the statistical disparities just mentioned.[3] Of course, "the category of structural injustice could reach further if it didn't depend on culprits."[4] But then we would face the 'grievance' horn, on which the lack of culprits renders us unable to vindicate "grievance attitudes such as offense, insult, resentment, indignation, righteous anger, or feeling morally ashamed of one's society" in response to (all aspects of) structural injustices.[5]

Estlund's goal is to "identify the dilemma and take some measure of the sharpness of its horns."[6] His main interlocutor endorses "the hybrid view," on which "while injustice does not depend on individual wrongdoing (that widens its reach), it is nevertheless a wrong (that suggests that grievance attitudes are warranted)."[7] The challenge Estlund poses for the hybrid

---

[1] These examples don't define structural injustice; providing a characterisation will be one of my aims.

[2] David Estlund, "What's Unjust About Structural Injustice?" *Ethics* 134 (2024): 333-359, 335.

[3] Ibid. Here Estlund talks of "individual culprits," but later he says collective agents can be culprits (ibid., 353). I will take his talk of "individual culprits" to refer to *individual or collective* agents who have done wrong.

[4] Ibid., 335.

[5] Ibid. I say "all aspects of" because, as Estlund notes, many structural injustices have some culprits—including culprits who are dead, or culpably shirked their duties to remediate the injustice, or acted negligently, recklessly, or with other condemnable attitudes (ibid., 349). I'll speak as if structural injustices have *no culprits at all*, but my argument covers cases where there are *not enough* culprits, or where they are *not culpable enough*, such that our warranted culprit-targeting grievance attitudes fall short of the situation's severity.

[6] Ibid., 343.

[7] Ibid. I accept Estlund's "Disjunctive Criterion of Wrongness: There is no wrong unless there are either culprits or someone with warranted grievance attitudes." (ibid., 344) I further

theorist is to explain how structural injustices can warrant grievance attitudes, given the lack of culprits. If the hybrid theorist could explain this, they would avoid the grievance horn of Estlund's dilemma.

In this article, I provide a response to Estlund on behalf of the hybrid view. I begin in Section 1 by outlining Estlund's conception of social structures, which produces his challenge to the hybrid view. In Section 2, I provide a different conception of social structures. I argue that, by Estlund's own methodological lights, social structures are not simply states of affairs with social causes (as Estlund assumes). Rather, following Estlund's deployment-focused methodology, social structures are objects composed of role-occupants organized by stable relations, where the structural object persists through time and through changes in who occupies the roles. This allows us to see that social structures are objects distinct from—though materially composed of—humans.

With this metaphysics in hand, Section 3 argues that the social structure itself can be a warranted target of grievance attitudes. The argument takes its cue from recent literature on the point of blame, which I use to vindicate grievance attitudes towards social structures. My proposal satisfies Estlund's main desideratum: that a theory of structural injustice should not vindicate grievance attitudes regarding unavoidable natural disasters. I close by questioning whether our theorising should take individual human culprits as its starting point—as Estlund implicitly does.

---

assume—as I believe Estlund intends to—that warranted grievance attitudes are sufficient for there having been a wrong.

1. Estlund's Objection to the Hybrid View

Estlund's critique of the hybrid view depends on his conception of social structures and structural injustice. Estlund initially takes structural injustice to be "roughly, the idea that a society can be unjust in its very structure, something quite different from unjust individual conduct or attitudes."[8] But he later expands this to include any state of affairs that—due to non-culpable social causes—does not conform to "theories in which justice consists in some pattern of distribution of certain goods across individuals or associations."[9] For example, if you're a simple strict distributive egalitarian, then any shortfall from distributive equality will count as a structural injustice, if that shortfall derives from social causes that are non-culpable.[10] It's important to separate the state of affairs from its cause.

As mentioned, the hybrid view says that structural injustices without culprits can warrant grievance attitudes. Estlund's main objection is that "social structure itself—that is, *apart from its causes*—does not warrant grievance attitudes, and this makes it doubtful that it should be counted as wrong … ."[11] Grievance attitudes cannot be "warranted wholly in virtue of social structure itself,"[12] where "structure itself" is understood in a cause-independent way. This claim relies on his distinction between a "simple structural type" and its causes. Estlund does not define "simple structural type," but his main example is hurricane damage.[13] The idea is that a simple structural type is an *undesirable state of affairs*—or perhaps, more narrowly, a state of affairs with morally undesirable distributions or relations between people—as could in principle result from unpreventable hurricane damage. Because they could have purely natural causes, simple structural types alone cannot warrant grievance attitudes.

---

[8] Ibid., 334.
[9] Ibid., 339.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid., 344, emphasis added.
[12] Ibid., 345.
[13] Ibid., 345-6.

Meanwhile, a "complex structural type" is a simple structural type *that has social causes*.[14] Estlund doesn't define social causes, but we might interpret these to include humans, their relations, their doings, and any social objects they constitute (more on these below). By Estlund's definitions, then, structural injustices are complex structural types, not simple structural types. So, what might warrant grievance attitudes regarding *complex* structural types? Estlund writes: "an account must be forthcoming of how something about a social structural condition's being socially rather than naturally caused warrants such attitudes as resentment or righteous anger even without any culprit to be angry at or resented. It is far from clear, to me, how this would go, but I do not prejudge the matter."[15] He thus places the burden of proof on the hybrid theorist: an invitation rather than an objection. I take up the invitation below.

Despite not prejudging the matter, Estlund closes his article by suggesting that the best we might hope for (when vindicating our grievance attitudes over structural injustice) is a situation in which we: (1) find many agent-culprits towards whom grievance attitudes are warranted (including those who are dead, were negligent, omitted to act, or had wrongful attitudes); (2) acknowledge that the situation is bad; but ultimately (3) resist holding grievance attitudes that are not warranted by (and targeted at) the agent-culprits. With this, he appears to have judged the matter and decided against the hybrid view. Estlund acknowledges that (1)-(3) "leaves the resulting idea of structural injustice rough and disunified."[16] But it's worse than that: if we want to vindicate the grievance attitudes of victims of structural injustice—the righteous anger of women at patriarchy, of people of colour at white supremacy, and so on—then we are likely to find Estlund's closing remarks unsatisfying. The hybrid view deserves a more thorough exploration.

---

[14] Ibid., 346.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid., 359.

2. An Improved Theory of Structures

According to Estlund, any departure from ideal justice counts as a structural injustice, when that departure derives from non-culpable social causes. In this, Estlund eschews his own methodological suggestion that we should "take the uses of the idea of structural injustice as we find them in the idea's deployment,"[17] such that "those who deploy the term or idea get to say, explicitly or by implication, what's relevantly structural (or systemic, or institutional) about the case in their view."[18] Estlund notes that "what has come in recent decades to be meant by structural injustice" does *not* include all (non-culpably socially caused) departures from ideal distributions; nor does it necessarily include all (non-culpably socially caused) departures from, say, Plato's or Rawls's conceptions of ideal social institutions.[19] Despite his deployment-focused methodological suggestion, Estlund counts all these as structural injustices.[20] So Estlund does not follow his own methodological advice. If we constrain our understanding of 'structural injustice' to track how the idea is deployed by structural injustice theorists, we will find the seeds of a vindication of grievance attitudes.

How is the idea of structural injustice deployed by structural injustice theorists? I follow Estlund by focusing on Iris Marion Young and Sally Haslanger.[21] According to Young, structural injustice exists "when social processes put large groups of persons under systemic threat of domination or deprivation of the means to develop and exercise their capacities, at the same time that these processes enable others to dominate or have a wide range of opportunities

---

[17] Ibid., 339.
[18] Ibid., 339-40.
[19] Ibid., 338.
[20] Ibid., 338-9.
[21] Estlund focuses on Young and Haslanger at ibid., 345-350. He takes them to be the main hybrid theorists.

for developing and exercising capacities available to them."[22] By "social processes," Young does not just mean "non-culpable social causes," as Estlund does. Young says that she refers to "processes" rather than "structures" only "in order to emphasize the dynamism of action in institutional contexts."[23] Thus, processes are not merely the *causes* of bad or unjust structures (as Estlund would have it); processes *are* the (dynamic) structures, in Young's view.

Young elaborates four aspects of social processes: "(1) as objective social facts experienced by individuals as constraining and enabling; (2) as a macro social space in which positions are related to one another; (3) as existing, however, only in actions; and (4) as commonly involving the unintended consequences of the combination of the actions of many people."[24] She describes social processes as being like "channels" that guide and constrain agents in certain directions, such that "social structures are experienced as constraining, objectified, thing-like."[25] The channels ground "social positions" that "relate to one another systematically"[26] and "condition expectations and possibilities of interaction,"[27] often via "power differentials and power relations."[28] The relations between these social positions "persist over time, often over generations."[29] Individual actions "reproduce"[30] the structural properties by following the structure's channels, but in doing so individuals are not mere puppets or automata: the structure is reproduced over time through exercises of agency, even though that agency is deeply constrained by the structure.

Haslanger's account is similar. According to Haslanger,

---

[22] Iris Marion Young, *Responsibility for Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 52.
[23] Ibid., 53.
[24] Ibid., 53; more generally 53-64.
[25] Ibid., 55-56.
[26] Ibid., 56.
[27] Ibid., 57.
[28] Ibid., 61.
[29] Ibid., 58.
[30] Ibid., 60.

Structural injustice occurs when the practices that create the structure – the network of positions and relations – (a) distort our understanding of what is valuable, or (b) organize us in ways that are unjust/harmful/wrong, e.g., by distributing resources unjustly or violating the principles of democratic equality. Systemic injustice occurs when an unjust structure is maintained in a complex system that is self-reinforcing, adaptive, and creates subjects whose identity is shaped to conform to it.[31]

Like Young's "processes," Haslanger's "practices that create the structure" are both objectively constraining and agentially reproduced. For Haslanger, the practices are patterns of learned behaviour that enable agents to coordinate around cultural resources, via the cultural technē. The cultural technē is a set of social meanings for signalling to one another, generalizing about one another, scripting interactions, and so on. The cultural resources are things that are taken to have positive or negative value within the technē.[32] The resources, technē, and practices constrain individuals, even while being sustained through individuals' behaviour.

The point is this. According to those who deploy the term, who Estlund says should "get to say … what's relevantly structural,"[33] a social structure is not a state-of-affairs that can be ontologically separated from its causes. It is also not the conjunction of a state-of-affairs and its social causes, where the latter need not reference the social positions occupied by agents. Instead, a social structure is an *object* that persists through time and is constituted by agents-

---

[31] Sally Haslanger, "Systemic and Structural Injustice: Is There a Difference?" *Philosophy* 98 (2023), 1-17, 22. See also Sally Haslanger, "What is a (Social) Structural Explanation?" *Philosophical Studies* 173 (2016), 113-130.

[32] These terms come primarily from: Sally Haslanger, "What is a Social Practice?" *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 82 (2018), 231-247; Sally Haslanger, "Agency Under Structural Constraints in Social Systems," In Jude Browne and Maeve McKeown (eds), *What is Structural Injustice?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024). Haslanger would perhaps emphasise that social structures and systems are maintained not *just* by practices, but also by physical objects, environments, and infrastructures, which in turn condition the practices. These non-agent objects occupy roles in the structure, alongside agents.

[33] Estlund, "What's Unjust," 340.

in-relation—much as a machine is an object that persists through time and is constituted by parts-in-relation. The sense of 'constituted' at play here is material constitution: the relation a statue has to a lump of clay. Constitution is not merely causation. Thus understood, we cannot separate social structures from those who materially constitute them, as Estlund wants to separate a state of affairs from its (natural or social, innocent or culpable) causes.

More specifically, a social structure is a network of roles (nodes) connected by relations (edges). When agents occupy the roles, they are constrained by the relations—including relations of power, authority, and vulnerability. A social structure becomes instantiated when enough agents occupy the roles, thus becoming connected by the relations. The structure outlives any particular role-occupants: role-occupants can be replaced with other role-occupants, while the structure survives. But social structures are not inert or unchanging. They are complex and dynamic, involving many interlinked and nested sub-systems whose interactions cannot be monitored or predicted. Social structures are multiply realisable and explanatorily powerful. So they should be included in our ontology as a distinct (though inseparable) object from their role-occupying agents, just as a machine is included as a distinct (though inseparable) object from its parts.

To illustrate how this conception of social structures differs from Estlund's, consider Estlund's Slice-and-Patch example.[34] A patient must be surgically sliced and patched today, or he will die. Dr Slice can slice but cannot patch. Dr Patch can patch but cannot slice. Neither is willing to play their part in the surgery, so each is excused by the unwillingness of the other. Here we have an undesirable social outcome that was socially caused, in which neither doctor behaves wrongly.[35] Estlund says this example "poses the reach/grievance dilemma crisply."[36]

---

[34] Ibid., 351.
[35] The doctors have wrongful dispositions, since they're both unwilling, but Estlund separates that from whether their behaviour is wrongful (ibid.).
[36] Ibid.

But on the above account of social structures, this example may not be a structural injustice. Whether it is depends on the role played by the social structure, understood as the instantiation of roles in relations. Estlund stipulates that Slice's and Patch's unwillingness is explained by "their anti-Black racist attitudes," since the patient is Black.[37] But this is not enough to implicate social structure: their attitudes might not reflect their social positions and relations (for example, Slice and Patch might both be Black). The fact that an undesirable outcome has a non-culpable social cause is not enough to make it a structural injustice. It would be a structural injustice only if the roles-in-relation robustly channelled Slice and Patch towards the poor conduct in a way that attenuated their culpability, despite the conduct being an exercise of their agency. We should not expect an account of warranted grievance attitudes in response to structural injustice to also provide an account of warranted grievance attitudes in cases like Slice-and-Patch.

3. Vindicating Grievance Attitudes Towards Social Structures

Estlund asks "how exactly is it that introducing social causation … in addition to simple structural form itself [i.e., undesirable states-of-affairs], gives rise to warranted grievance attitudes even if it does not introduce any culprits?"[38] Section 2 implies Estlund's question is mis-framed. The question is not how social *causes* can warrant grievance attitudes, but how social structures *themselves* can do so. In this section, I argue that structures (as conceptualised above) can be warranted targets of grievance attitudes. I follow Estlund in taking 'grievance attitudes' to be the subset of reactive attitudes that responds to slights. Following Estlund, I focus on resentment and indignation.[39]

---

[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid., 346.
[39] Ibid., 341, fn. 29.

In characterising grievance attitudes, Estlund joins the tradition inspired by P.F. Strawson.[40] That enormous tradition includes many who have theorised about *the point of blame*. I will assume blame is largely constituted by the expression of grievance attitudes. I don't assume that blameworthiness is necessary or sufficient for warranted grievance attitudes: following Estlund, I focus on warranted grievance attitudes themselves. Rather, I assume that the point of grievance attitudes roughly tracks the point of blame. If this is right, then the point of blame can tell us something about when grievance attitudes are warranted. In assessing the warrant for a grievance attitude, we can do better than consulting our intuitions about appropriateness. We can ask whether that attitude serves the point of blame. In case this sounds like I am conflating warrant and consequences—as if grievance attitudes are warranted just when they are useful—note that I am not concerned with any-and-all consequences of grievance attitudes. My suggestion is that a grievance attitude is warranted when it serves the specific point of blame, since grievance attitudes are core constituents of blame.

What, then, is the point of blame? The following are recent prominent contenders: to increase alignment of moral understanding,[41] to scaffold each other's moral sensitivities,[42] to facilitate shared knowledge about normative changes after a wrong,[43] to protest against the target,[44] and to signal the blamer's commitment to the violated norm.[45] My suggestion is that

---

[40] P.F. Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment." *Proceedings of the British Academy* 48 (1962): 1-25. Estlund cites Strawson ("What's Unjust," 340).
[41] Miranda Fricker, "What is the Point of Blame? A Paradigm Based Explanation." *Noûs* 50 (2016): 165-183.
[42] Victoria McGeer, "Scaffolding Agency: A Proleptic Account of the Reactive Attitudes." *European Journal of Philosophy* 27 (2019): 301-323.
[43] Paulina Sliwa, "Reverse-Engineering Blame." *Philosophical Perspectives* 33 (2019): 200-219.
[44] Angela M. Smith, "Moral Blame and Moral Protest." In D.J. Coates and N.A. Tognazzini (eds), *Blame: Its Nature and Norms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
[45] David Shoemaker and Manuel Vargas, "Moral Torch Fishing: A Signaling Theory of Blame." *Noûs* 55 (2021): 581-602.

a grievance attitude can be warranted if it serves one or more of these points. (Perhaps the more points it serves, the more warranted it is—I won't take a stand on that.)

We can serve the above points while targeting grievance attitudes at social structures. However, this requires separating the *target* from the *audience*. Call those whose 'understanding,' 'sensitivities,' 'knowledge,' etc are at issue the 'audience' of our grievance attitudes. By contrast, the 'target' is the object about which, or towards which, we are aggrieved. The target is where we funnel our rage. Building on Section 2's conception of social structures, the *audience* of our grievance attitudes might be the agents who are role-occupants in the social structure, even though the *target* of our grievance attitudes is the social structure itself. The grievance attitudes that target the structure need not 'distribute' to the role-occupants, even though these role-occupants are the 'audience' of our attitudes. The attitudes need not distribute because—as explained in Section 2—the structure is a distinct object with distinct properties, in ways familiar from mereology.[46]

How can it be legitimate for grievance attitudes to have an audience that differs from the target? Because and when—and perhaps only when—the audience materially constitutes the target. As Young says, the agency of role-occupants is embedded within and reproduces the structure. The structure constrains their actions, but they are not puppets. The structure gives them choices. By targeting our grievance attitudes at the structure, we serve the points of blame, by getting these role-occupants to take notice—and shape their understandings, sensitivities, knowledge, protests, and norms. The *constitutive* relationship between the structure and its role-occupants justifies targeting our grievance attitudes at the structure,

---

[46] Some of the authors in the previous paragraph assume that the audience and target must be identical. For example, Shoemaker and Vargas write that blame can target "all and only those creatures believed by the blamer to be capable of violating norms." (ibid., 590) But they also assert that "[b]laming the dead is mostly a signal for living" (ibid., 592)—so why not also say that "targeting grievance attitudes at social structures is mostly a signal for the role-occupants"?

despite having its role-occupants as our audience. Although my proposal involves separating the audience from the target, there remains an intimate (constitutive) relationship between them that allows our structure-targeting anger to serve the points of blame.[47]

One might wonder whether my proposal is really about structural injustices that *lack* culprits. Doesn't it instead suggest that the notion of 'culprit' is complex, including those who are complicit through their participation in structures?[48] In short, I do not think role-occupants generally are culprits, in the sense of being warranted targets of individualised resentment and indignation. Although their choices reproduce social structures, they have few—perhaps zero—options to do otherwise. Social structures give us a set of options between which we can genuinely choose. This makes us non-puppets, meaning grievance attitudes might aim to shape our understandings, sensitivities, knowledge, and so on, such that we gradually make choices that improve the structure. But (almost) all our options involve the reproduction of unjust structures, at least to some extent. We would have to live in isolation from society to avoid this. Our choices are often choices between two evils, and we can only do so much. Our participation includes precious little "elbow room" to make choices that would disrupt the injustice.[49]

---

[47] Others have suggested that negative reactive attitudes can be "apt" in response to "systemic injustice" or "oppression" (Amia Srinivasan, "The Aptness of Anger." *Journal of Political Philosophy* 26 (2018): 123-144, 131), including racism (Myisha Cherry, *The Case for Rage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), sexism (Katie Stockdale, *Hope Under Oppression* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), or an "entire system" such as "rape culture" (Sukaina Hirji, "Outrage and the Bounds of Empathy." *Philosophers' Imprint* 22 (2022): 1-20, 5). But these authors sometimes take a *distributive* approach to system-targeting anger (e.g., Cherry, *The Case*, 23; Stockdale, *Hope*, 93), which doesn't address Estlund's concern with situations that lack culprits. These authors also do not address the possibility that reactive attitudes are warranted only when the target is an agent. My argument is intended to fill this gap.

[48] I thank an anonymous Associate Editor for this suggestion.

[49] I take this phrase from Maeve McKeown (*With Power Comes Responsibility: The Politics of Structural Injustice* (London: Bloomsbury, 2024), 36). McKeown takes it from Daniel C. Dennett (*Elbow Room: The Varieties of Free Will Worth Wanting* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984)). McKeown argues that ordinary individuals are not culpable for their participation in structural injustice due to the lack of elbow room, even though they have agency within structures (McKeown, *With Power*, ch. 5).

That said, Estlund wants to count as 'culprits' those who act negligently, recklessly, or with other condemnable attitudes.[50] Doesn't this mean Estlund, at least, should count mere participation as culpable? I don't think so. One's negligence, recklessness, and attitudes involve more elbow-room than one's general participation in structural injustice. For example, when Angela Smith influentially defended individuals' responsibility for their attitudes, she noted that attitudes are "in principle answerable to a person's judgment," so it is appropriate to ask the person to "acknowledge and to defend or disavow the judgments implicit in her responses to the world around her."[51] But our participation in structural injustice does not always contain implicit judgments. It's also not answerable to our judgment, in that we cannot choose complete non-participation. We can choose to try to make the structures better, but we will remain participants nonetheless. Participating in structural injustice is baked into life in contemporary society. At least, that's how Young and Haslanger view things.

At this point, Estlund might appeal to theories on which grievance attitudes aim at eliciting a response from *the target* (not merely the audience), where the response requires the target to be an agent. This response could take many forms: the "exchange of moral criticism and justification";[52] "some rectifying response";[53] negative first-personal reactive attitudes like guilt or remorse;[54] the action of guiding themselves by a "reciprocal recognition of the second-personal reasons we address and our authority to address them";[55] pleading that they were

[50] Estlund, "What's Unjust," 349.
[51] Angela Smith, "Responsibility for Attitudes: Activity and Passivity in Mental Life." *Ethics* 115 (2005), 236-271, 256.
[52] R. Jay Wallace, *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 164.
[53] Margaret Urban Walker, *Moral Repair: Reconstructing Moral Relations After Wrongdoing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 26.
[54] David Shoemaker, "Moral Address, Moral Responsibility, and the Boundaries of the Moral Community." *Ethics* 118 (2007): 70-108, 91. Fricker, "Point of Blame," 173.
[55] Stephen Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 75.

excused, justified, or exempt;[56] the provision of a justification;[57] "undertaking self-transformation and reform";[58] the development of self-governance;[59] or the development of capacities to recognize and respond to moral reasons.[60] Call these 'response-seeking' theories of grievance attitudes. Such theories require that the *target* is an agent, not merely that the *audience* is an agent.

Or do they? The above responses can all be provided by role-occupants on behalf of the structure.[61] They do not need to be provided by the structure itself. We regularly accept this in the case of collective agents. Consider political apologies. When a state does wrong, an apology might be issued by the state's leader. The leader is not thereby admitting that they personally are a culprit, or that the state's culpability distributes to them, or that grievance attitudes should be targeted at them as an individual. Perhaps the state's wrongdoing was committed centuries ago, so the current leader could not possibly be a culprit. Nonetheless, the above responses can be provided by the leader on the state's behalf, while the state itself is the target of the grievance attitudes. Similar practices can be extended to social structures. In considering such possibilities, we should not unthinkingly assume that structure-targeting grievance attitudes must follow precisely the pattern of agent-targeting grievance attitudes—a point I return to below.

---

[56] Michael McKenna, *Conversation and Responsibility* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
[57] Angela Smith, "Attributability, Answerability, Accountability: In Defense of a Unified Account." *Ethics* 122 (2012): 575-589, 577-8.
[58] Victoria McGeer and Friederike Funk, "Are 'Optimistic' Theories of Criminal Justice Psychologically Feasible? The Probative Case of Civic Republicanism." *Criminal Law and Philosophy* 11 (2017): 523-544, 539.
[59] Manuel Vargas, "Implicit Bias, Responsibility, and Moral Ecology." *Oxford Studies in Agency and Responsibility* 4 (2017): 219-247, 239.
[60] McGeer, "Scaffolding Agency," 313.
[61] I thank an anonymous Associate Editor for this suggestion.

Finally, Estlund might worry that structure-targeting grievance attitudes are not the real deal. For example, he believes the kind of anger experienced by a victim of unpreventable hurricane damage is not a real grievance attitude: "It is reasonable … to insist that if a given attitude could be warranted by an unpreventable natural disaster, then it is disqualified as a grievance attitude."[62] Likewise, Estlund notes that anger at squirrels or stones is "a kind of faux anger, misplaced and unwarranted, however understandable."[63] It had better not be that faux anger is all we can vindicate toward social structures.

If we separate the target (structures) from the audience (role-occupants), then have our grievance attitudes been downgraded to the frustrated anger of a hurricane victim? No: again, it is crucial that (1) the structure is constituted by agents and (2) the features of the structure that give rise to the grievance attitude are reproduced by the conduct of those agents, however constrained and non-culpable that conduct is. These two facts distinguish social structures from unpreventable natural disasters, squirrels, and stones. Social structures are agentially reproduced, by creatures who are capable of engaging in the Strawsonian participant stance. This makes social structures 'agential' in a broad sense, even though they are not 'agents' and do not have 'agency.' This is unlike hurricanes.

Thus, the hybrid theorist can agree with Estlund that grievance attitudes must target objects that are 'agential'—in the broad sense of being constituted by agents and having features that result from those agents' exercises of agency. This broad interpretation of 'agential' has three virtues: it vindicates the grievance attitudes that Estlund agrees are highly appealing (namely grievance attitudes towards structures such as patriarchy or white supremacy); it respects the idea that grievance attitudes must target agential phenomena (an

---

[62] Estlund, "What's Unjust," 347.
[63] Ibid., 353.

idea implicit in the reach/grievance dilemma); and it prohibits us from targeting grievance attitudes at hurricanes (something on which Estlund insists).

My comments so far have concerned indignation and resentment. But it's worth disaggregating grievance attitudes, since some are more applicable to social structures than others. Even if Estlund rejects my argument that indignation and resentment can warrantedly target social structures, he should still consider the possibility that other grievance attitudes can. Here I follow David Shoemaker's tripartite distinction in types of responsibility, which produces a corresponding tripartite distinction in grievance attitudes. In Shoemaker's telling, an entity that is 'attributable' is liable to grievance attitudes such as disdain, contempt, disappointment,[64] disapproval, irritation, and criticism.[65] An attributable entity has a problematic *character*. This is contrasted with an entity that has problematic *regard for others*, which for Shoemaker licenses indignation and resentment. Social structures do not have the agency implicated in 'regard for others.' But they do embed cultures, ideologies, practices, and conceptual schemas that look an awful lot like characters. They may be liable to some reactive attitudes, even if not others.[66] Estlund does not consider this possibility. It is another place for hybrid theorists to press, armed with the above argument about the point of blame.

A final comment returns to methodology—this time, methodology in our theories of agency, responsibility, and grievance attitudes. Estlund suggests one strategy for the hybrid theorist is to "describe attitudes toward problematic social structure which, while they do not presuppose culprits, are similar enough to standard culprit-based grievance attitudes. This

---

[64] In one place, Estlund rules out disappointment as a grievance attitude (ibid., 354); elsewhere, he accepts it (ibid., 355, fn. 8).

[65] David Shoemaker, *Responsibility from the Margins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 14-15.

[66] Nicolai Knudsen recently argued that non-agent groups can be attributable (in Shoemaker's sense) for attitudes and actions that "depend on and are harmonious with the group's emergent cares or commitments." This does not emphasise structures as I would, but is congenial to my suggestion in this paragraph. (Nicolai Knudsen, "A Pluralist Approach to Joint Responsibility" *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 51 (2023), 140-165.)

might satisfy us that cases where they are warranted might be properly counted as cases of wrong after all."[67] This is the strategy I have adopted: I noted that our best theories of the blame that is constituted by "culprit-based grievance attitudes" posit that blame has a point, and I have suggested that attitudes towards structures are "similar enough," in that they can serve the same point.

But why take culprit-based grievance attitudes to have explanatory primacy? As Estlund notes, grievance attitudes towards structures are deep-seated and may not be "optional."[68] They are central to the lived experience of victims of structural injustice. To insist that these grievance attitudes conform to theories that were developed for human culprits is to adopt what Sara Rachel Chant calls the "wash, rinse, repeat" strategy.[69] This strategy involves developing a set of criteria for some category (like the category 'warranted target of grievance attitudes'), where the criteria are closely moulded on individual humans who fall into the category, and then mechanically applying those criteria to socially constructed objects (such as social structures): if the social objects don't meet the criteria, then they simply cannot fall under the category. But why not include social objects within our theorising from the get-go, using the process of reflective equilibrium to arrive at criteria for the category that capture all the central cases—regardless of whether those cases involve individual humans or socially constructed entities such as social structures? This would not only better-illuminate socially constructed entities; it would also better illuminate our categorisations of individual humans. This is not the main strategy I've employed, but it's one Estlund does not consider. It is another avenue for hybrid theorists to explore.

---

[67] Estlund, "What's Unjust," 347.
[68] Ibid., 344.
[69] Sara Rachel Chant, "Responsibility Unincorporated: Group Agents and Corporate Persons." In T. Marques and C. Valentini (eds), *Collective Action, Philosophy, and Law* (Oxon: Routledge, 2021). See also Niels de Haan, "Moral Collectivism and the Methodology of Ethical Theory." Unpublished manuscript.

Conclusion

In this discussion article, I have provided a response on behalf of "hybrid theorists" to the arguments in Estlund's "What's Unjust About Structural Injustice?". I began by outlining Estlund's conception of social structures, on which they are states of affairs with social causes. I contrasted this with how social structures are conceptualised by those who deploy the category of structural injustice, who can be understood as saying that a social structure is an object that persists through time and is materially constituted (not merely caused) by social goings-on, most importantly by humans in relation. I argued that accounts of the point of blame can be wielded to vindicate grievance attitudes towards social structures, as long as we separate the target of our grievance attitudes from the audience of those attitudes. I explained that this proposal does not vindicate grievance attitudes regarding unavoidable natural disasters, which is the key constraint Estlund places on a theory of grievance attitudes. I conceded that one might endorse my proposal only somewhat, by endorsing only some grievance attitudes towards social structures. This would still be a partial exoneration of the hybrid theory. Finally, I questioned whether our theorising about agency, responsibility, and grievance practices shouldn't incorporate structures from the start—rather than shoe-horning them in after the fact, as Estlund seems to assume we must. The prospects for hybrid theorists are numerous and promising.