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Taking responsibility *responsibly*: looking forward to remedying injustice

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ABSTRACT

What does it mean to be responsible for structural injustice? According to Iris Marion Young, the ongoing and socially embedded character of structural injustice imposes a future-oriented obligation to work with others toward creating remedial, institutional change. Young explains, 'Political responsibility seeks less to reckon debts than to bring about results' (Young, 2003, p. 13). This paper conceptually develops how the goal of remediation bears on responsibility in relation to structural injustice. Does the attribution of responsibility in this context call upon individuals to simply do *anything* in efforts to affect progressive change? If not, then to what extent are these attributions of responsibility action guiding? On what basis do they direct agents to effectively intervene on relevant conditions and processes rather than act in ways that exacerbate the injustice? I explore the role of etiological explanation in the attribution and acceptance of corrective responsibility, which refers to diagnosis of the operative causation of unjust outcomes. After probing tensions within prominent models of corrective responsibility, I offer my own model attempting to resolve those issues. I argue the forward-looking nature of the call to participate in remedying social problems includes a demand for agents to do so in a way that is itself responsible. I theorize a framework of taking responsibility *responsibly*. This framework accounts for the moral difference between a conscientiously formulated program of remedial action and a quixotic exercise in reckless delusion.

Responsibility, remediation, and etiology

What are individuals' responsibilities regarding structural injustices? Correction of this kind of injustice is conventionally understood as requiring transformation of background conditions of society, e.g. cultural norms and practices, institutional rules, and social processes that have become materially embedded in the built environment. According to Iris Marion Young, individuals bear a responsibility to join with others to organize collective action aimed at changing relevant social background conditions for the

better (Young, 2003, 2006a, 2011). In this view, responsibility for structural injustice essentially consists in being morally charged with remediation.

This paper is devoted to further conceptually developing what is entailed by individuals/groups bearing responsibility in this forward-looking manner. Does this responsibility call upon individuals/groups to do *anything* in attempt to remedy structural injustice? If not, then to what degree of specificity and on what grounds does it indicate tasks they ought to undertake? Young claims forward-looking responsibilities allow individuals and organizations considerable discretion in making judgements about how the abstract goal of remediation is to be pursued (Young, 2003, pp. 13–14, 2011, pp. 143–144). Does responsibility impose any boundaries on this discretion? If so, what are they, and how are they given determinate content in each case? This paper will attempt to answer these questions through an examination of the relationship between forward-looking responsibility and what I call *etiology of injustice*, i.e. diagnosis of an injustice's *operative causation.*

After a situation has been evaluated to be unjust (specifying the way(s) in which it is wrong and what ought to replace it), there remains the transitional question of how we might move from an unjust point A to a just, or comparatively better, point B. When formulating a plan of remedial action for intervening on an ongoing social issue, it is desirable to possess an understanding of the problem's operative causation, which refers to those contributing factors and conditions that might be blocked or changed for the injustice to cease and to prevent it to a reasonable degree from reoccurring in the future.

Etiology of injustice is particularly needful when attempting to remedy structurally rooted issues due to two features of the conceptual definition of structural injustice Young develops:

1) Sufficiently addressing unjust outcomes of the structural kind requires not only correcting the outcome (replacing it with an acceptable one) but changing the underlying social processes that generate it. This is desirable for implementing a suitably stable and lasting solution.[1] Young moreover characterizes these processes as convoluted and complex, suggesting the need for theoretical inquiry in various domains of analysis (e.g. social ontological, political, economic, psychological, and semiotic) and abstract models of representation.

2) The causation of such injustices is not made apparent by focusing on only those features of society that themselves constitute wrongs/injustices, such as the neglect for, or active violation of, a moral/political duty, virtue, or legal liability. Their causation is elusive in that structural injustices are generated by seemingly morally permissible and publicly accepted background conditions of society (Young, 1990, 2003, 2006a,

2011). Uncovering the problematic aspects of the functioning of such background conditions necessitates an additional etiological inquiry distinct from normative evaluations accounting for the various forms of wrongdoing and deviations from social well-orderedness involved in the injustice at issue.

Young notes that inducing social transformations for remedying a structural injustice requires 'significant knowledge' of the causation of that injustice (Young, 2011, p. 153). She asserts political responsibility for injustice must be 'backward looking' in one important sense – in determining how social structures (e.g. market mechanisms, cultural and political norms, rules, and institutions) conspire to produce and reproduce unjust outcomes. This often involves examining the history of relevant social structures; however, this is not performed for the purpose of finding a perpetrator to hold liable, but for better understanding the causative operation of said structures in connection to the injustice at issue (Young, 2003, p. 13, 2011, p. 109). Young explains 'the point' of political responsibility 'is not to look back at who did it, but rather to look forward to an intervention in the process that will change it' (Young, 2003, p. 13).

Marion Smiley similarly theorizes forward-looking responsibility as shared and distributed 'across moral agents in such a way that the sought-after state of affairs can be brought about in a relatively efficient fashion' (Smiley, 2014, p. 7). Smiley explicitly clarifies that 'practical considerations about how to remedy harm are crucial to [forward-looking responsibility] by its very nature' (Smiley, 2014, p. 7). Due to the remediation-oriented nature of forward-looking responsibility, it would be helpful to conceptually map the practical, epistemic, and moral relationship between it and etiology of injustice.

The paper will begin by demonstrating how, although attributions of prospective responsibility are sometimes characterized as less epistemically and normatively dependent on causal analysis than their retrospective counterpart, this is misleading. While not based on what I call *narrative* explanation, prospective responsibility remains dependent on *etiological* explanation. Prominent models of remedial responsibility are then examined in terms of how they represent the role of etiology of injustice. Lastly, the paper theorizes a framework of *taking responsibility responsibly*. An epistemic condition of responsible action is articulated that includes due etiological reflection, i.e. a reasonable amount of consideration for competing accounts of the operative causation of an injustice and articulation of reasons for following one account over others. Where the multifaceted 'wicked problems' of structural injustices are at issue, the accuracy of the etiological account employed is often the deciding factor in whether a course of action aiming at remediation constitutes a carefully informed strategy or a quixotic tilting at windmills.

Are forward-looking attributions of responsibility less dependent on causal explanation than backward-looking ones?

Backward and forward-looking responsibility are conceptually distinguished as different kinds of attributions. To bear a backward-looking responsibility is conceived as a matter of deserving praise or blame for something, while to bear a forward-looking responsibility is conceived as a matter of being morally charged with seeing to it that a desirable state of affairs obtains in the world.

Although this way of drawing the distinction between the two as different kinds of attributions is useful, it is not entirely accurate and has been criticized. Martha Nussbaum, for example, argues the attribution of forward-looking responsibility remains essentially a determination of blameworthiness. To say a person has a responsibility to shoulder the burden of working toward correcting a social ill is essentially to say that if they fail to shoulder that burden, then they are guilty of doing something wrong and could be rightfully blamed for it (Nussbaum, 2009, pp. 141–142). Moreover, some thinkers such as Derk Pereboom create models of forward-looking responsibility that explicitly involve the assignment of praise and blame (Pereboom, 2015, 2022). What then distinguishes backward from forward-looking responsibility? A more accurate means of conceptually distinguishing the two is according to their different normative and epistemic dependencies on causal analysis/explanation. While one is based on what I call *narrative explanation*, the other is dependent on *etiological explanation.*

Narrative explanation tells a story of events explaining how certain actors, such as specific individuals or groups, causally contributed to the phenomenon in question through their actions and/or inactions. After a causal connection has been identified between an agent or agential entity and the phenomenon of interest, then a process of moral accounting is carried out to determine blameworthiness or praiseworthiness, e.g. an elaboration of which moral/legal duties or virtues were upheld or violated, establishment of whether the agent(s) acted freely and intentionally, whether they foresaw the consequences of their actions, etc. If a retrospective account of responsibility employs an incorrect/misrepresentative narrative explanation – attributing causal efficacy to the incorrect agent(s) – then it is typically a morally incorrect or unfair ascription of praise or blame. The narrative explanation both epistemically informs to whom responsibility is attributed, in what ways, and is involved in normatively justifying that attribution.

Backward-looking attributions are troubled by the problem of causal determination. If an individual is deemed responsible for something by virtue of having caused it through their actions, that attribution may be criticized through the presentation of evidence demonstrating how those actions were themselves caused by other conditions. This can undermine the notion of

responsibility itself, or at least pose difficulties for determining who is respon-sible and where responsibility for a phenomenon stops in the causal chain of events that led to it. Pereboom (and others) have responded to this problem by attempting to theorize a notion of moral responsibility 'immune to the threat from causal determination' (Pereboom, 2015, 2022). Pereboom offers a forward-looking conception in which the assignment of responsibility is motivated by, and justified according to, the desirable consequences of that assignment. These desirable future consequences include the moral improve-ment of the agent to whom responsibility is attributed, the reconciliation of the agent with those they have wronged, and a subsequent restoration of the agent's integrity. Pereboom's model of responsibility remains epistemically and normatively dependent on causal explanation but a different form than the narrative explanation he problematizes. Responsibility is assigned and justified based on the consequences the assignment is predicted to have. These predictions are informed by causal explanations identifying potential sites of intervention for bringing about desired results.

When attributing responsibility for a large-scale social problem, epis-temic dependency on causal explanation presents hurdles. In many instances of locally confined, interpersonal harms, it is relatively easy to tell a causal story of what occurred and which agents were involved in bringing the harm about. Explaining the causes of generalized *social* problems, however, can be highly empirically and theoretically demand-ing and involve numerous controversial assumptions. Young discusses these difficulties as they arise in attempts to delineate responsibility for structural injustices (Young, 2011, p. 96, 100, 175, 180, 185). She explains that social problems of this kind are often the unintentional and unfore-seen result of many agents (individuals, groups, and institutions) acting in ways that are largely uncoordinated, participating in systems that are themselves the result of interactions between a multitude of policies, agents, and institutions (e.g. corporations, states, and NGOs). This renders it near impossible to trace the causal connection between specific agents/groups and unjust outcomes.[2]

The theoretical development of forward-looking models of responsibility has been in part motivated by troubles in determining the causation of structural injustices and moral agents' causal contributions to unjust outcomes.[3] Christian Barry and Kate Macdonald interpret the motivation for the creation of Young's social connection model of responsibility in this way:

> Young aims to build an account which can accommodate the kinds of empirical uncertainty that surround complex structural processes through which social injustice is generated. She is troubled by the difficulty of unravelling complex patterns of causal connection through which individuals are connected within large scale social formations. (Barry & Macdonald, 2016, p. 95)

Forward-looking responsibility attribution is sometimes characterized as less dependent on causal analysis than its backward-looking counterpart since it does not seek to present a narrative about moral agents and how they contributed to the injustice, but rather attempts to specify what agents 'should be doing in the world' to bring about a future considered to be an improvement (Smiley, 2022, section 7). Michael Goodhart identifies Young and David Miller as the two most significant philosophers of responsibility offering a solution to the problems of 'empirical complexity' and 'epistemological uncertainty' in determining the causation of ongoing social issues (Goodhart, 2017, pp. 174–175). According to Goodhart, instead of attempting to devise tools for more precise factual determination, Young and Miller reconceive of the assignment of responsibility as having a normative basis in a way that can overcome gaps in empirical knowledge (Goodhart, 2017, pp. 175–183)

It is helpful to methodologically clarify how, despite claims to the contrary, attributions of forward-looking responsibility for structural injustice do *not* liberate themselves from dependence on causal knowledge of the injustice at issue. Although such attributions are not determined by narrative explanation, their action-guiding character remains dependent on etiological explanation. Etiology of injustice does not tell a story of past events for the purpose of uncovering how specific agents contributed to an injustice (and in cases of structural injustice, such narrative analyses are typically not feasible anyway). Rather, etiological explanation plays a *diagnostic* role in attempting to understand the active causation of an ongoing social problem for the purpose of devising plans of effective remedial action. Etiologies highlight potential sites of intervention for interrupting an ongoing problem and changing the underlying social structures that produce and sustain it, thereby preventing the type of unjust outcome at issue from reoccurring to a reasonable degree.[4]

Smiley describes prospective responsibility attributions:

> [W]hen we ascribe forward looking responsibility . . . we do not tell a causal story about the agent. Instead, we specify what the agent should be doing in the world. Not surprisingly, we often end up pointing to the particular tasks that we think the agent should be carrying out and refer to these tasks as the agent's *responsibilities* . . . How, then, are we to ascribe forward looking collective responsibility in practice? At the very least, we need to make room for various kinds of practical judgments, including those that draw attention to who is best able to remedy the harm in question. (Smiley, 2022, section 7)

According to Smiley, to whom responsibility is assigned, and for what tasks, is partly determined by consideration of who is in the best position to efficiently address the injustice. These 'practical judgements' epistemically inform responsibility attributions as well as morally justify them. Smiley argues, following Robert Goodin, that responsibility for correcting large-scale social problems, such as alleviating hunger, should be assigned on a collective basis

because collective action is the most realistic way of resolving those pro-blems. This fact likewise morally justifies that collective attribution. Smiley characterizes these practical judgements as 'noncausal' considerations, likely because they do not involve backward-looking *narrative* analysis (Smiley, 2014, p. 7, 2022, section 7). There are indeed numerous noncausal considera-tions called for to sufficiently answer the question of what ought to be done to address an extant injustice, such as evaluating the moral permissibility of proposed remedial strategies and weighing the risks and foreseen negative side-effects of those actions. However, understanding the *etiology* of the injustice at issue plays a crucial role in formulating a plan of effective remedial action, especially in the structural context where a suitably lasting and stable solution is sought.

If an articulation of remedial responsibilities is to specify tasks agents should perform to address an existing injustice, then it would depend on an understanding of the etiology of that injustice. Even if forward-looking responsibility is assigned in a manner that is highly open and discre-tionary regarding what agents ought to do in attempting to eliminate injustice, it typically still involves morally charging agents with 'exercising such judgement wisely' (Smiley, 2014, p. 2). This implies that agents fired-up with a sense of moral righteousness ought *not* to blindly charge ahead doing absolutely anything in attempt to make the world a better place, which often does more harm than good[5]; they instead must act purposefully according to a carefully considered and well-informed strategy.

According to Goodin, the difference between responsibility and duty is that responsibilities are more outcome oriented. While duties are binary in the sense they can be followed or not followed, responsibilities can be discharged in varying degrees (Goodin, 1995, Chapter 5). On this view, one does not discharge one's responsibility to address structural injustice simply by doing *anything* so long as it is well-intended, even if it is wildly ineffective or self-defeating. Instead, one discharges one's responsibility to a greater or lesser degree according to how successful one is in addressing the structural injustice at issue, i.e. the extent to which one contributes to the remedial goals of cessation, mitigation, and preven-tion. A requirement to perform due reflection on the etiology of struc-tural injustice (i.e. a reasonable amount of consideration for rival explanations and critical examination of one's reasons for endorsing one etiological explanation over others) appears to be implicitly included in the notion of being morally charged with remediation in a forward-looking manner. Building on the work of Smiley and Goodin, this implied aspect of obligation to correct social problems will be explicitly explored and developed in the following sections.

Responsibility for obvious and nonobvious solutions: Virginia Held

How have philosophers of responsibility theorized the role of remedial knowledge (i.e. knowledge regarding what might be strategically effective in solving the problem at hand) in attributions of responsibility for solving large-scale problems? Thinkers have sometimes characterized the question of the structural causation of injustice (an important aspect of remedial knowledge regarding generalized social problems) as a nonissue. David Miller for example introduces one of his major papers on responsibility by discussing how the world is full of suffering, deprivation, and violation of basic rights such as hunger and lack of medical treatment (Miller, 2001). He claims nearly everyone would agree an egregious wrong of this kind ought to be corrected, 'nor is it difficult to grasp what would be needed to remedy it'; thus, the main hurdle to righting such wrongs is assigning responsibility for making it happen (Miller, 2001, p. 453).

Tracy Isaacs argues accounts of collective obligation are helpful for illuminating solutions to multifaceted, globalized problems such as global warming, poverty, and hunger. She characterizes the 'required course of action' for remedying such an injustice as 'clear' and 'easily mapped' when viewed at the collective level (Isaacs, 2011, Chapter 5). Like Miller, she implies it is obvious what might be done to resolve a complex sociopolitical and ecological/economic issue such as hunger. According to Isaacs, 'the trouble' consists not in devising an effective course of action, but rather in defining the 'we' of collective obligation and how it ought to involve 'me' the individual (Isaacs, 2011, p. 144). Isaacs considers the possibility of when the 'clarity condition' is not met such that the solution to an injustice is not obvious (Chapter 6). Yet she only discusses situations in which the injustice is not regarded as morally wrong, but as normal and justified, such as various aspects of sexism. In such cases, the solution is unclear because the situation is not even recognized as calling for one. Isaacs does not consider the kind of situation in which a wrong is recognized as wrong, but it is not obvious, even collectively, how to effectively remedy it.

There are many instances of disagreement in activism and policymaking over strategies for remediation. Groups with the same moral goal (e.g. reducing racism and its harmful effects in a given social context) often have highly divergent views regarding how to achieve that end most effectively. How can the solution to such problems be obvious when actors who are sincerely and fervently motivated to achieve the same goal have discordant, sometimes even rancorous, disagreements over which course(s) of action ought to be pursued?[6]

Virginia Held's classic paper on collective responsibility is interesting for prominently featuring remedial knowledge as relevant to whether actors can

be held morally accountable (Held, 1970). Held considers situations in which an unorganized collection of agents might be responsible for correcting a problem or injustice. Her framework could thus be applied to responsibility for ending structural injustices, i.e. the responsibilities of individuals who are not necessarily preorganized to address social problems they have not straightforwardly caused. Held argues individuals and groups can be deemed morally responsible for solving a problem when it is *obvious to a reasonable person* what must be done to remedy the issue (Held, 1970, p. 476).

She illustrates this through the following example. Imagine an able-bodied adult sees a two-year-old brandishing a razor blade at an infant. It would be obvious to a reasonable person that they must subdue the two-year-old in some way such as by grabbing their arm and taking the razor blade away. If the adult looked on for five minutes while the two-year-old repeatedly slashed the infant, they could be held morally responsible for failing to stop the bloodshed (Held, 1970, p. 477).[7] This implies that if the adult tried to stop the two-year-old through other means but failed, they could be rightly blamed for not taking the effective course of action. Say, for example, the adult believes they have powers of mind control and can use their special abilities to stop the toddler from slashing the infant. The adult saw what was about to happen and leapt into action, vigorously applying the strongest mind control techniques they know. When they inevitably fail to stop the two-year-old, they could still be held responsible for failing to take the obvious and effective course of action.

According to Held, individuals and collections of unorganized individuals cannot be held morally responsible for solving a problem when it is not obvious to a reasonable person what action(s) the situation requires. Imagine, for example, several people are riding in a train-car together. A doctor exits the train-car to go to the restroom leaving her medical bag behind on her seat. Just then, a passenger begins to have convulsions. In a frantic search for air, the man lurches forward against the train door and falls out of the train to his death. The doctor returns to the train-car and says, 'You should have opened my medical bag and administered a shot of medicine X to that man. It would have saved his life!' The other passengers could not be reasonably expected to know this information; therefore, they could not be held morally responsible for failing to perform the required actions to save the man's life (Held, 1970, pp. 478–479).

Held argues that, while a reasonably expected ignorance excuses individuals from a moral obligation to act in some cases, it does not in others. Held considers situations in which it is not obvious what must be done to remedy a situation, but individuals might still be held responsible for failing to organize with others into a collective capable of deciding what to do. Imagine a small building collapses and a man is trapped inside. He calls over three people to help him. He is bleeding from an injury on his leg and

needs a tourniquet. But a tourniquet cannot be applied until the three cooperate to move various beams out of the way. It is not obvious which beam should be moved first. Person 1 argues beam A should be moved. Person 2 argues beam B should be moved. Person 3 argues beam C should be moved. They argue without acting until the man bleeds to death. Since the three people were a random collection of individuals and not an organized group such as a state, they lacked a predetermined decision-making structure. In such cases, even when it is not obvious what must be done, they may still be held accountable for failing to remedy the issue because they failed to decide on which action to take or failed to adopt a decision-making method (Held, 1970, p. 479).

Held's framework of responsibility considers situations in which the action required for remediation is either obvious or *arbitrary*, e.g. when any one of several actions will do and what is lacking is merely a decision on which course of action to take, as in the collapsed building example. Held considers a final situation in which the corrective action required is not obvious through the example of a general political injustice:

> If a reasonable person judges that the overthrow of an existing political system is an action that is obviously called for, he may perhaps consider himself morally responsible for the failure of the random collection of which he is a member to perform this action. If he thinks some action to change an existing political system is obviously called for, but is not clear about which action, he may consider himself morally responsible for the failure of the random collection of which he is a member to perform the quite different action of transforming itself into a group capable of arriving at decisions on such questions. (Held, 1970, p. 480)

The main question in this example is: which decision method should be adopted to ensure an *effective* course of action is chosen? It appears that simply organizing into a decision-making body is not good enough, since, unlike in the collapsed building example, not just any of the proposed courses of action will do. The problem at issue is not a simple, locally confined predicament, but a structural injustice. Held states, 'answers to questions concerning which decision methods to adopt for which contexts will perhaps seldom be obvious to the reasonable person' (Held, 1970, p. 481). Ultimately, however, the group must decide in *some* way despite the lack of indicators leading them to choose one course of action over any other.

Although Held's framework of responsibility considers the role of remedial knowledge in the attribution of responsibility, she conceptualizes it through curious extremes. She conceives of plans of corrective action as either obvious or so opaque as to be formulated arbitrarily.[8] I propose altering Held's framework to conceive of structural injustices as complex social problems with solutions that are often not obvious (not even to the ideally reasonable person), nor utterly opaque, but require a process of etiological

investigation to guide their formulation. I propose a framework of *taking responsibility responsibly*, in which the connection between etiology of injustice and plans of curative action is recognized such that individuals and collectives could be held morally responsible for failing to perform due etiological reflection on the operative causation of the structural injustice at issue.

This framework of responsibility for bringing about nonobvious solutions will be elaborated in the paper's final section. But first, I will further explore the relationship between forward-looking responsibility and remedial knowledge. I will do so through an examination of Miller's discussion of the assignment of responsibility for remedying an injustice in the absence of knowledge of its causation.

Attributions of responsibility for correcting injustice made in the absence of knowledge of its causation: David Miller

Can attributions of forward-looking responsibility for correcting an injustice be made in the absence of knowledge of the causation of that injustice? Miller attempts to theorize a model of responsibility for global justice in which such attributions are possible. He theorizes 'two concepts of responsibility,' developing two methods of attribution: 'identification' and 'assignment' (Miller, 2007, Chapter 4).

According to Miller, *identifying* responsibility for a problematic situation involves determining causal matters of fact regarding what produced it. *Assigning* responsibility, on the other hand, can be made in the absence of knowledge of the causation of the problem. Imagine a teacher walks into her classroom and sees it is in a state of chaos with garbage strewn everywhere and desks overturned. There are two different ways she might attribute responsibility for this mess (Miller, 2007, pp. 83–84). She might identify her student Johnny as responsible for cleaning up the classroom because she knows he made the mess; he is guilty of producing the outcome at issue. But perhaps she does not know who or what caused the mess. In which case she might instead attribute responsibility for cleaning up by way of assignment. She might direct the entire class to tidy the room or assign clean-up duty via lottery. Miller explains that assignments of responsibility can be justified or unjustified. It would be unjustified for example for the teacher to continually pick on one pupil. According to Miller, such assignments, however, cannot be correct or incorrect in the way that identifications of responsibility are (Miller, 2007, pp. 84–85). This is because attributions of responsibility through identification are dependent on accounts of the causation of the problem at issue while assignments are not.

Miller is interested in criteria for the attribution of responsibility that are not dependent on causal explanations for multiple reasons. One is that social

problems often appear to be causally overdetermined, i.e. multiple phenomena appear sufficient to cause the effect under examination (Miller, 2001, p. 456, 457). Like Pereboom, he is also troubled by the problem of causal determinism. Distributions of responsibility dependent on causal explanation are vulnerable to the critique that the human actions identified as causes can themselves be explained as the result of *other* causes, thereby dispersing accountability and undermining the notion of responsibility itself (2007, p. 83). He is furthermore interested in attributing responsibility for resolving social problems to agents who may not seem significantly causally responsible for them, e.g. a responsibility to aid the poor of foreign nations.

Miller offers six criteria for distributing remedial responsibility: three that are backward-looking and correspond to the identification type of distribution (causal responsibility, outcome responsibility, and moral responsibility), and three that are forward-looking and correspond to the assignment type (benefit, capacity, and community) (Miller, 2007, pp. 100–104). He explains how a person might not have directly causally contributed to another's unjust deprivation, but simply innocently benefitted from it; they might have enjoyed a greater share of resources due to the victim's deprivation. Since they benefit from the injustice, they would then have a responsibility to remedy it. Sometimes people did not cause a harm, nor benefit from it, but occupy a position in which they are able to help. According to Miller, this capacity to remedy the problem may make it their responsibility to do so. For instance, if a person is stranded on a desert island and a passing ship sees their SOS signal, by Miller's account, it would be the crew of the ship's responsibility to rescue that person. Lastly, the bond of community (e.g. friendship, family, religion, and nationality) might render a person/group responsible for remedying some problem (Miller, 2007, pp. 100–104).

Is Miller successful in creating criteria to attribute responsibility for correcting an injustice that are not dependent on explanation of the causation that injustice? It seems the criterion of capacity, although not dependent on narrative explanations, remains dependent on etiological explanations (see Section Two for definitions of narrative and etiological explanation). On what basis can it be reasonably asserted that a person or collective has the capacity to remedy an ongoing problem? This would require reference to causal explanation highlighting potential sites of intervention to interrupt the injustice at issue and prevent it from reemerging. In attempts to correct the kind of injustices in which Miller is interested (i.e. persistent social problems involving economic processes and political norms international in scope), the need for etiology of injustice is heightened, especially when suitably lasting solutions are sought. Famine is a paradigmatic example of when it is desirable to address underlying political, economic, and ecological conditions that generate and sustain the problem, rather than merely distributing aid, to achieve a lasting solution in the form of food security or food sovereignty.

Miller's method of distributing responsibility has been criticized as flawed in that the capacity criterion is said to occupy an unacknowledged place of primacy (Brooks, 2011; Dzah, 2017). Thom Brooks and Daniel Dzah argue, according to Miller's framework, if an agent or organization lacks the capacity to remedy a problem, then they can never be held remedially responsible for it. Capacity is therefore not its own separate criterion but presupposed in each.[9] It thus appears the attempt to devise criteria for assigning responsibility that are not dependent on causal analysis was unsuccessful, as the noncausal criteria of 'benefit' and 'community' both presuppose capacity. This is not to discount the merit of Miller's connection theory of responsibility for global justice. Highlighting this tension in Miller's work merely illustrates the need for more precisely theorizing the interrelations between responsibility and the etiology of injustice.

The action-guiding character of forward-looking accounts of responsibility: Iris Young

Young states, 'Political responsibility seeks less to reckon debts than to bring about results . . . The point is not to look back at who did it, but rather to look forward to an intervention in the process that will change it' (Young, 2003, p. 13). If the point of political responsibility is to remedy the injustice at issue, as Young claims it to be, then how do articulations of responsibility strive to be action-guiding toward that end? What is the relationship between responsibility attribution and the etiology of injustice in Young's social connection model? Young's model of prospective responsibility is sometimes interpreted as a call to action for correcting a structural injustice offered in the absence of, or in place of, knowledge of its operative causation. This is the kind of interpretation developed in a recent paper by Goodin and Barry (2021).

It is unclear the extent to which the structural nature of structural injustice as it is theorized by Young occludes attempts to understand its operative causation. Structural injustices are presented as the largely unintended and unforeseen negative consequences of fiendishly complex interactions between individuals, groups, institutions, and norms. This complexity makes it difficult to disentangle the contributions of specific individuals and groups to the structural generation of unjust outcomes. How might this complexity therefore also present barriers to seeing how individuals and collectives can effectively act to resolve structural injustices? Young states that addressing structural injustices requires 'significant knowledge of how the actions of individuals and the rules and purposes of institutions conspire to produce injustice, and the ability to foresee the likely consequences of proposed remedies.' She then states these required conditions of knowledge and foresight are 'often absent' (Young, 2011, p. 153).

Goodin and Barry explore the implications of this difficulty as they impact practical efforts aimed at remediation. They argue that although it may be 'clear what we collectively ought to accomplish' in terms of correcting a structural injustice, what is 'far from clear' is what we need to do, even collectively, to secure that outcome (Goodin & Barry, 2021, p. 6). They explain, '[T]he very same factors that make it hard to disentangle individuals' causal contributions to creating structural injustice in the past threatens to make it hard to see how they can concatenate their contributions in such a way as to cause structural injustice to cease now and in the future' (Goodin & Barry, 2021, p. 7). They claim it is not enough for individuals to take collective responsibility in sharing a *goal* for correcting an injustice; they also require a shared *plan* specifying the necessary steps to reach that goal (Goodin & Barry, 2021, p. 6). But how can individuals develop an understanding of the operative causation of an ongoing problem demanded to formulate such a plan (highlighting potential sites of effective intervention), when structural injustice, by its very nature, thwarts inquiry of this kind? In other words, to what extent does structural injustice not only obscure narrative explanation but etiological explanation as well?[10]

Young asserts that, for an individual to discharge their forward-looking responsibility in relation to a structural injustice, they must participate in collective political organizing aimed at changing the social conditions and processes that produce it. One might therefore argue all an individual needs to know regarding how to correct an injustice is that they should comply with their political organizers' requests (the leaders of social movements and decision-makers of organizations working for progressive change). But Goodin and Barry claim this is unsatisfactory, as it does not solve the problem of how *organizers* can determine what ought to be done to remedy an injustice (Goodin & Barry, 2021, pp. 6–7). The epistemological complexity of structural justice may serve to confound the leaders of a political organization to the same extent as the individual participants within it.

It appears Young is encouraging individuals to take a stand against injustice in the absence of a strong understanding of how their efforts might create positive social change. Goodin and Barry highlight how Young's acknowledgement of the necessity of causal knowledge plus her doubt and pessimism over the ability to gain this knowledge results in a 'call to arms' that is 'an invitation to participate in a quite-probably-quixotic quest' (Goodin & Barry, 2021, p. 8). Young indeed urges for solidarity in tackling structural injustices but emphasizes the uncertainty of success. Young states, 'Usually the prospects for significant change [in social structures] are slim... It would be nice if there were some means whereby well-organized agents interested in justice could institute changes in systems that once and for all would make justice happen. But it doesn't work that way' (Young, 2011, pp. 149–150). She stresses a mindset of epistemic humility in which social transformational

efforts are restrained by the idea of 'perhaps:' *Perhaps* improvement is possible; *perhaps* organizing will happen to have some success (Young, 2011, p. 120). According to Goodin and Barry, 'Young repeatedly calls for efforts at collective action against structural injustice, hoping that it might somehow achieve the desired results – without, apparently, seriously expecting that it will actually often do so' (Goodin & Barry, 2021, p. 8).

Goodin and Barry indicate how attributions of responsibility for correcting a structural injustice, without an accurate conception of its operative causation, are pragmatically useless in that they are unable to meaningfully guide remedial action. If one interprets Young's theoretical framework of forward-looking responsibility as offering a means of attribution in the absence of etiological explanation and guiding remedial action *in place* of such explanation, then its responsibility attributions would indeed be best understood as invitations to participate in quite-probably-quixotic quests.

Goodin and Barry consider how such invitations may not be devoid of moral value. They suggest actions likely to prove ineffective may nonetheless have virtuous and deontological worth (Goodin & Barry, 2021, pp. 8–11). They may also sometimes by chance fortuitously result in the beneficial consequences desired. This presents an interesting virtue ethic that demands agents perform certain actions even when they are likely to be costly to the agent and/or constitute exercises in futility. But what about when well-intentioned, though ill-informed, actions prove to be actively counterproductive? Goodin and Barry (and Young) do not substantively explore the possibility of when blindly taking responsibility is not only ineffective but results in exacerbating the injustice at issue. Afterall, Don Quixote did not wander around the Spanish countryside quietly playing make-believe by himself. The tragedy of Cervantes' tale is that he declares, 'I am the valorous Don Quixote of La Mancha, the undoer of wrongs and injustices,' and then, in his deluded state untethered to reality, proceeds to do precisely the opposite, killing defenseless sheep, freeing criminals, and attacking innocent people, cracking one man's skull open and crippling another for life. Taking it upon oneself to right a wrong in such a manner would likely be described by most people as irresponsible behavior.

A more pragmatically useful interpretation of Young's theory of structural injustice and model of responsibility would acknowledge the action-guiding role of etiology in devising plans of effective remedial action. Some of Young's comments appear to preclude this interpretation by denying the feasibility of the overall project of etiology of injustice.[11] She alternatively offers *parameters of reasoning* (Young, 2003, 2006a, 2011) which aim to provide 'guidance in reasoning about how to take action to undermine injustice' (Young, 2011, p. 144) and indication of 'where our actions can be most useful' (Young, 2006a, p. 126). These parameters (power, privilege, interest, and collective ability) successfully offer grounds for why individuals

and organizations ought to *take up* responsibility to correct an injustice in the absence of a narrative explanation of their causal contribution to that injustice.[12] Contrary to Young's characterization, however, these parameters do not themselves provide guidance on how remediation might actually be achieved.[13]

For example, recognition of the fact that one is privileged by an injustice (e.g. consumers privileged with lower prices due to exploitative labor practices in sweatshops abroad) presents a compelling reason for why one ought to take it upon oneself to take steps toward correcting that injustice. But does the fact of one's privilege entail anything about what those steps should be? Does it imply one should work to divest oneself of the benefits provided by such privileging? This might involve individually disengaging from certain aspects of society or from society altogether. But this does not appear to be entailed since individual disengagement would not satisfy Young's requirement for discharging responsibility of collective political organizing. It furthermore would not contribute much toward the remedial goals of cessation, mitigation, and prevention where structural injustices are concerned.[14] Walking away from Omelas does nothing to actually help the poor child imprisoned in the closet.[15]

Being interested in ending an injustice by way of suffering as one of its victims (the parameter of 'interest') likewise offers a compelling reason to become involved in remedial efforts. But that interest does not entail guidance on what the strategy for creating social change should be. Being a victim perhaps suggests one should serve as a spokesperson providing first-hand accounts to the public of the injustice's harms. But what then should this raising of awareness and buildup of public sympathy be used to demand? Who should be petitioned? What institutional changes in policy or practice should be recommended?

The remaining two parameters of power and collective ability, on the other hand, both appear to *presuppose* a strategic understanding of what can be done to effectively address the structural injustice at issue. How can any individual or collective be reasonably designated as having the 'power' or 'collective ability' to eliminate or ameliorate an injustice without first possessing a conception of what factors and conditions might be blocked or changed to achieve that end, i.e. a conception of the operative causation of the injustice?

That Young's four parameters of reasoning are not themselves action-guiding, with two of them seeming to presuppose etiology of injustice, implies that etiological analysis of structural injustice may be interpreted as possible within Young's framework and even necessary for promoting decisive, well-informed, and *responsible* political organizing. Young indeed states, 'One can formulate a general account of the production of structures, the positioning of persons in them on axes of privilege and disadvantage, and the

processes and policies that contribute together to produce them' (Young, 2011, p. 185). Interpreting the action-guiding character of forward-looking accounts of responsibility as dependent on etiology of injustice moreover coheres with Young's criticism of 'the distributive paradigm of justice.' In short, Young argues many social injustices are not sufficiently addressed through redistributive programs seeking to correct comparative inequalities in the possession of various goods (Young, 1990, Chapter 1, p. 75; Young, 2006b). She instead claims remedial efforts should strive to understand and address the *causes* of injustice, i.e. the processes that give rise to unjust distributive patterns. These arguments appear to attest to the indispensability of etiology of injustice in efforts aimed at transforming social-structural processes for the better.

In the following section, I will attempt to theorize how etiology of injustice might be explicitly included within a framework of prospective responsibility for structural injustice. The forward-looking nature of the call to participate in remediation demands agents not only take a stand against injustice but do so in a way that is itself responsible. I will explore how due etiological reflection forms part of an epistemic condition for responsible action, and how failure to satisfy this condition can account for some of the well-intended but counterproductive activism in efforts to combat structural injustice.

Taking responsibility *responsibly*

Young distinguishes between two different contexts in which justice is sought: justice for past events that have reached a terminus vs. justice for social-structural processes that are ongoing. Attributions of responsibility play critically differing roles in the achievement of justice depending on the context. In the former context, Young discusses how the wrong at issue is conceived as a discrete, bounded event that created a deviation from a baseline norm. Since it is impossible to go back in time and undo the past wrong, justice consists in identifying and holding the relevant parties responsible (liable), which may include retributive punishment and/or some reparation of harms such as through paying damages: 'punishment, redress, or compensation aims to restore normality or to "make whole" in relation to the baseline circumstance' (Young, 2003, p. 12). In what is essentially the commutative justice context, holding the relevant parties responsible in the morally/legally appropriate manner is coextensive with justice being served; the processes of determining responsibility and mechanisms of holding individuals/groups liable are constitutive of justice itself in the traditional form of rectitude.[16]

In the latter context, responsibility and justice do not fit together so neatly. The wrong at issue is structural in character. As Young eloquently articulates, justice in this context does not consist in a return to a past state of normalcy

(reparation/compensation for the past), but rather a transformation of some of the background conditions of society considered to be normal (remediation of an active and socially embedded ill). Attributions of responsibility in this context do not have the performative force of justice being served. Instead, they are more like starting points in struggles aimed at social transformation that may or may not find success. Although Young does an excellent job of motivating and explaining the move from a liability conception of responsibility to a political conception, she does not adequately explore the practical and moral implications of the gap that is opened between responsibility attribution and the remediation of structural injustice.

What is the proper way of conceiving the practical value of the attribution and acceptance of responsibility in efforts to transform social structures for the better? What is the moral value of the *effectiveness* of remedial efforts regarding the fulfillment of responsibilities? Are all forward-looking acceptances of responsibility for structural injustice morally equivalent when so many different possible outcomes lie between that acceptance and the distant hope of remediation? A framework of *taking responsibility responsibly* provides a basis for answering these questions. Some of the methodological confusion in the philosophy of forward-looking responsibility for structural injustice is over whether responsibility attributions specify tasks or simply charge agents with doing *anything* in attempt to bring about remediation. A model of morally charging agents to take responsibility for structural injustice *responsibly* helps resolve the ambiguity plaguing this area of thought over the level of discretion agents have in pursuing remedial action. Taking responsibility responsibly means taking it upon oneself to seek remediation and exercising judgement about how best to counter injustice wisely. Before elaborating further, I must define what it means to simply 'take responsibility.'

Taking responsibility for structural injustice involves accepting that one ought to work toward the goal of remediation. Cheshire Calhoun theorizes the concept of 'taking on responsibility' as volunteering oneself to tackle a problem that one is not already expected or obliged to do (Calhoun, 2019). I am here defining taking responsibility more expansively in a way similar to the idea of the 'committed agents of justice' (Robeyns et al, 2021). Ingrid Robeyns et al define this category as including people who are both responsible for realizing justice and committed to struggle on behalf of doing so, as well as those who are *not* responsible for realizing justice yet still commit themselves to doing so. In short, taking responsibility for structural injustice means committing oneself in some way to attempting to bring about remediation.

Robeyns et al's theorizing on the committed agents of justice is useful; however, it demonstrates the insufficiency of a notion of taking responsibility that does not include consideration of what it means to do so *responsibly*.

They specify that for one to count as a committed agent of justice does not require one eventually become successful in achieving one's goal of correcting the injustice at issue. They further specify that one need not be effective in making any progress toward this goal (2021, p. 6). They consider the possibility of when agents are not successful nor effective at all; they do not, however, discuss the possibility of when agents committed to realizing justice are actively harmful in their well-intended efforts to the point of substantially worsening the situation.[17] Although such a scenario is not uncommon, it is curiously neglected in responsibility literature.[18] Should actors who counterproductively work to exacerbate the injustice they wish to remedy be counted among the committed agents of justice? Individuals and groups of this kind are indeed taking responsibility for bringing about structural change, but the important question is whether they are doing so responsibly.

Recent work developing what has become known as 'the epistemic condition of responsibility' is helpful in defining what it means to take responsibility responsibly (Robichaud & Wieland, 2017). This work seeks to articulate the precise ways in which knowledge and moral responsibility interact. When is ignorance exculpatory, and when is it culpable? So far, this literature has focused primarily on blameworthiness for past behavior rather than forward-looking responsibility for addressing large-scale and socially embedded wrongs. Virginia Held's previously discussed paper is interesting for offering an articulation of an epistemic condition for responsibility that could be applied in a forward-looking, structural context.[19] But Held's conception of this epistemic condition is somewhat spare. She asserts that a random collection of individuals can be held responsible for correcting a problem when it would be obvious to a reasonable person what must be done to achieve that goal. When the required course of action would *not* be obvious to a reasonable person, then the ignorance of the individuals involved is to be reasonably expected and is therefore exculpatory. Unfortunately, what might be done to correct a multifaceted structural injustice is seldom obvious, even to reasonable persons. And yet it seems this fact does not excuse us from our remedial responsibilities. William FitzPatrick helpfully offers a more developed framework of when ignorance is and is not exculpatory (FitzPatrick, 2008).

FitzPatrick discusses how sometimes people do wrong because they do not know it is wrong. Other times, they are not morally ignorant but circumstantially so and this is the reason for their wrongdoing. They might think they are helping, but due to their ignorance regarding important circumstances surrounding the situation, end up making matters worse. FitzPatrick argues that ignorance, whether normative or circumstantial, is culpable under the following conditions:

> if the agent could reasonably have been expected to take measures that would have corrected or avoided [the wrong], given his or her capabilities and the opportunities provided by the social context, but failed to do so … due to the exercise of such vices as overconfidence, arrogance, dismissiveness, laziness, dogmatism, incuriosity, self-indulgence, contempt, and so on. (FitzPatrick, 2008, p. 609)

This kind of epistemic vice model might be applied in the context of forward-looking responsibility for structural injustice. I propose that taking responsibility responsibly in this context requires the exercise of certain epistemic virtues, while taking responsibility *ir*responsibly can involve the exercise of certain epistemic vices. Taking responsibility for correcting structural injustice responsibly demands a good-faith effort in undertaking reasonably rigorous steps to gain remedial knowledge, i.e. circumstantial knowledge critical for devising a plan of effective action. An agent fails to take up responsibility responsibly when they could have acquired requisite remedial knowledge but failed to do so due to their exercise of epistemic vices, including over-confidence, arrogance, laziness, dogmatism, dismissiveness, incuriosity, and self-indulgence.

An agent who takes responsibility for structural injustice, e.g. an activist engaging in collective political organizing aimed at positive social change, who fails to secure the proper remedial knowledge due to the exercise of epistemic vices can end up behaving as a *quixotic menace*. The quixotic menace is an actor committed to justice who is inspired by a morally laudable goal yet acts counterproductively toward the achievement of that goal due to their deluded conception of the struggle in which they have embroiled themselves. The quixotic menace may display some genuinely admirable virtues such as bravery, self-sacrifice, and perseverance, but they do not take up their remedial duty responsibly and so often end up wreaking havoc rather than helping. In Cervantes' story, Don Quixote's harmful actions are not simply the result of the betrayal of his senses; rather, his perceptions become distorted according to his exercise of epistemic vices. Quixote refuses to accept or seriously examine evidence of anything that contradicts the narrative to which he clings. He imagines enemies where there are none and friends where there are enemies according to how it fits his overarching narrative. His overconfidence, arrogance, incuriosity, and rigidity insulate him from engaging in productive dialogue with others, as he self-indulgently misperceives situations in order to inflate his sense of adventure and heroism.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to offer a detailed definition of the full range of considerations that fall under the umbrella of what I am calling remedial knowledge.[20] This paper has focused on the particular aspect of remedial knowledge that is etiology of injustice. Several thinkers participating in the 'nonideal' tradition of political thought emphasize the importance of devoting intellectual resources to developing and refining etiological

accounts of injustice. Charles Mills for example champions the creation of sophisticated conceptual models of the dynamics of various forms of oppression in actual, nonideal societies. Mills argues it is not enough to characterize a situation as something that ought not to be the case (a deviation from the ideal); theorists must also seek to identify and understand the peculiar features of the injustice that explain its persistence and those factors and conditions standing in the way of ideality (Mills, 2005, 2017). Other thinkers such as Elizabeth Anderson, Ann Cudd, and Sally Haslanger have defended the practical value of attempting to accurately explain the operative causation of persistent social problems (Anderson, 2009, 2010; Cudd, 2005, 2006; Haslanger, 2015, 2016; Mills, 2005, 2017). Taking responsibility for correcting structural injustice *responsibly* requires that due etiological reflection is performed through earnest consideration of rival explanations and participation in dialogue regarding reasons for prioritizing one etiological account over others in the formulation of one's plan of remedial action.

Conclusion

Young's theory of political responsibility is provocative for how much it demands of moral agents. Consider Young's example of the violation of basic rights of individuals working in sweatshops abroad. Per Young's model, it is not enough for an affluent person living in the United States to refrain from purchasing goods manufactured in sweatshops. It is not enough for them to wash their hands of participating in the harms and become individually pure. Young establishes how it is their responsibility to enter the fray in some capacity in a shared struggle to *eliminate* sweatshops. This responsibility is only discharged through collective political organizing to change the underlying social structures that enable and perpetuate the injustice at issue. The end goal within Young's model is less a clean individual conscience than for better, fairer conditions to obtain in the world.

This paper has examined moral, epistemic, and practical aspects of the relationship between responsibility for structural injustice and the achievement of remediation. It has argued that where the remediation of structural injustice is concerned, etiological understanding of that injustice is key. The conceptual distinction between backward and forward-looking responsibility was redefined in terms of their differing epistemic and normative dependencies on narrative explanation vs. etiological explanation. It was illustrated how forward-looking attributions of responsibility are untenable in the absence of etiological explanations when those attributions are based on a capacity to successfully contribute to remediation or when they seek to inform agents regarding what tasks they should be undertaking, i.e. when seeking to effectively guide remedial action. After examining tensions within previously

theorized models of responsibility for structural injustice, I offered my own model attempting to resolve them.

I sought to theorize how individuals and groups being morally charged with amending structural injustice includes a responsibility to exercise judgement about how best to counter injustice wisely. A reasonable standard of epistemic virtue was roughly sketched in efforts to acquire critical remedial knowledge, which includes due etiological reflection. I claimed that agents who fail to acquire requisite remedial knowledge due to the exercise of epistemic vices, such as overconfidence, arrogance, dismissiveness, dogmatism, incuriosity, laziness, and self-indulgence, fail to take up responsibility responsibly. Further scholarship is needed to more precisely define and conceptually develop the epistemic conditions of responsibility in the forward-looking and structural context(s).

When one looks ahead with the aim of bringing about a better, more just future, the burdens of morality shift. When one aims at substantive progress – at addressing persistent social problems – it entails envisioning how one's actions as an individual could form part of a larger struggle to successfully achieve that goal. The formulation of this guiding vision ought not to be taken lightly, as it is what connects our actions in the present to the future we desire. And it is a key determinant in whether we bear the onus of affecting social change *well*.

Notes

1. Young's emphasis on addressing causes in her theorization of the concept of structural injustice is related to her critique of the 'distributive paradigm of justice,' in which she also stresses the need to understand and change the processes that enact and reproduce unjust distributive patterns, rather than attempting only to rework the patterns themselves (Young, 1990, Chapter 1).
2. For a discussion of the 'untraceability' of structural injustice, see Browne, 2023.
3. This is reflected in an interesting pattern that has emerged in recent decades in philosophy of responsibility. Scholarship focused on what could be called backward-looking responsibility is typically interested in theorizing responsibility for locally confined phenomena, while thinkers concerned with large-scale, social problems are often focused on forward-looking responsibility.
4. It is preferable for practical efforts aimed at remedying an injustice to be informed by an understanding of the operative causation of that injustice. This is akin to how a doctor prefers to treat/cure the underlying disease causing a patient's symptoms rather than blindly attempting amelioration. Imagine a patient who is presenting symptoms of rapid hair loss, the underlying cause of which is the patient has developed lupus. Rather than prescribe a hair-growth drug, it would be preferable for the doctor to seek to understand the nature of the problem, diagnose the cause of the hair loss and then create an informed, targeted treatment plan from there. Or imagine a patient who is presenting symptoms of rapid weight loss. Rather than simply prescribe

a higher calorie diet, it would be preferable for the doctor to seek to diagnose the cause of the weight loss, which may be something as serious as cancer.

5. Albert Camus writes, 'the evil in the world almost always comes of ignorance, and good intentions may do as much harm as malevolence if they lack understanding' (Camus, 1948, p. 112).

6. Consider the disagreement among environmental activists and thinkers regarding what ought to be done to address the world's environmental crises. Ecomodernists claim we should focus on increasing technological development and economic growth, which will hopefully result in devising technology that disconnects human subsistence from the use of key natural resources, thereby sparing ecosystems from destruction. Other environmentalists criticize techno-optimism. Instead of advocating for new and better technologies, they demand *degrowth* measures to scale back economic production and consumption to environmentally sustainable levels. Fortress Ecology advocates for the conservation of pristine areas of wilderness protected against human incursions. Other theorists claim this approach makes matters worse because it reinforces a Cartesian dualist logic in which humans and their activities are viewed as separate and distinct from nature (Vogel, 2011). They instead call for an epistemological revolution in how we come to know the world around us, such that we would not see a city as any less natural than a forest. The disagreement over the means of addressing our environmental crises is partly a disagreement over the operative causation of those problems.

7. It is interesting how Held's discussion exemplifies Nussbaum's characterization of forward-looking responsibility (Nussbaum, 2009, pp. 141–142). Held conceives of responsibilities to resolve problems as potential sources of future blame. Goodin and Barry also characterize forward-looking responsibility for structural injustice as a kind of potential source of blame (Goodin & Barry, 2021).

8. Held's later papers on responsibility (Held, 2002, 2018) do not revise this dichotomy.

9. For example, when assigning responsibility for a problem to an individual based on their connection to the problem through the bond of 'community,' they argue it is assumed the individual can contribute to solving that problem.

10. See Section Two of this paper.

11. Young cryptically comments, 'No philosophy can tell actors just what we ought to do to discharge our responsibility, nor can philosophy provide a formula for decision. Philosophy can offer, however, what I call parameters of reasoning to which individuals and organizations can refer to decide what it makes the most sense for them themselves to do in the effort to remedy injustice' (Young, 2011, p. 124).

12. Maeve McKeown clarifies the meaning of connection in Young's social connection model. According to her, a social connection is not based on causally contributing to the injustice at issue, but rather on participating in the general structural reproduction of the injustice (2018).

13. Robin Zheng defends the action-guiding character of accounts of individual moral responsibility (2018). She argues Young's social connection model can distribute remedial duties in such a way as to sufficiently guide action (by directing individuals to act as progressive moral agents in their different social roles) toward effectively rectifying structural injustice. In a subsequent paper (2019), Zheng builds on Young's work to develop her Role-Ideal Model of responsibility for structural injustice. This model aims to provide 'specific

guidelines as to what sorts of actions individuals are expected to take' and to 'clearly explain how individual agency impacts social structure' (Zheng, 2019). Her work here supports the idea that the action-guiding character of forward-looking accounts of responsibility is dependent on how they understanding the etiology of the injustice at issue. Zheng's role-ideal model appears to explain how individuals can effectively change social structures for the better by endorsing a symbolic interactionist account of the operative causation of structural injustice in general.

14. Manuel Rodeiro articulates how taking steps to privately distance oneself from injustice does not constitute adequately taking responsibility for structural injustice per Young's social connection model (Rodeiro, 2022, pp. 90–92).

15. See Ursula K. Le Guin's classic short story *The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas* (1973).

16. At first glance, Young's distinction between two contexts in which justice is sought seems to map onto the classic Aristotelian/Aquinian distinction between commutative/rectificatory justice and distributive justice. Young's discussion of the former does indeed correspond to the commutative justice context, which deals with the relations between individuals within a community. In this context, justice is achieved in the form of rectitude in the traditional sense of restoring the relationship between two parties to a baseline norm. The latter context of justice Young discusses, however, does not map onto the traditional concept of distributive justice, i.e. how the community as a whole relates to individuals in distributing goods according to some criterion/principle. Young's characterization of justice sought for ongoing social-structural processes is somewhat of a hybrid between corrective and distributive justice. It is a context in which correction is sought, but in the organization of social institutions and norms. It concerns both the state relating to individuals and individuals relating to each other as political agents of change. See Young's critique of the distributive paradigm for further explanation of how her approach to correcting structural injustice differs from traditional distributive justice (Young, 1990, Chapter 1).

17. Robeyns et al note that some agents of justice might also be 'perpetuators of injustice.' They explain, 'The world is complicated and messy, and few, if any, agents of justice have perfectly clean hands' (2021, p. 7). They seem to be referring to the fact that most agents are socially connected to injustice in that they participate in an everyday sense in the reproduction of structural conditions that result in unjust outcomes. They do not address how some agents committed to struggle on behalf of realizing justice might exacerbate the injustice with which they are concerned precisely through their well-intended struggling.

18. Young briefly mentions the possibility of when individuals organizing collectively against structural injustice act in ways that are counterproductive. She states those agents 'should be *criticized*' for their actions (Young, 2011, p. 144). It is unclear how being worthy of criticism is related to responsibility.

19. Held is interested in theorizing how random collections of individuals could be held responsible for correcting or preventing problems.

20. An example of nonetiological remedial knowledge would be Young's psychological claims. Young argues attributions of blame for structural injustice tend to elicit responses of defensiveness, create mistrust, and thus make people less willing to cooperate in contributing to remedial efforts (Young, 2011, pp. 117–

118). Following this view, it would be strategic to avoid attributions of blame in activist and government messaging aimed at persuasion. One might feel Young is incorrect regarding these psychological matters. One might instead subscribe to a Nietzschean model for understanding the psychological makeup of the masses, in which the inspiration of feelings of guilt is regarded as highly effective in messaging aimed at persuasion due to a commonly held masochistic streak. Interestingly, Young invokes Nietzsche to argue against using attributions of blame, which she characterizes as animated by a slave morality spirit of ressentiment (Young, 2011, pp. 114–115). Following Nietzsche's views regarding the psychological makeup of the modern masses, however, would entail endorsing the usage of blame in remedial efforts as instrumentally useful. Knowledge of this kind might not be related to the operative causation of the problem at issue, but it would be helpful in formulating a plan of effective remedial action.

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Disclosure statement

Notes on contributor

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