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Discharging the moral responsibility for collective unjust enrichment in the global economy

(Cumplir con la responsabilidad moral por el enriquecimiento injusto colectivo en la economía global)

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ABSTRACT: In this article we wonder how a person can discharge the political responsibility for supporting and benefiting from unjust social structures. Firstly, we introduce the concept of structural injustice and defend it against three possible objections: 'explanatory nationalism', a diachronic interpretation of the benefits of industry-led growth, being part of a social structure does not automatically mean being responsible for its negative consequences. Then, we hold that both Iris Marion Young's 'social connection model' and Robin Zheng's 'role-ideal model' provide clear indications on how to unload responsibility for supporting/participating in unjust social structures, but fail to explain how to get rid of responsibility for unjust enrichment. We maintain that both models should be complemented with a global redistributive scheme that allows to disgorge the benefits that are unfairly obtained in the global economic system, besides undertaking collective transformative actions and assuming ideal-role responsibilities.

KEYWORDS: collective actions, consumers, responsibility, social roles, structural injustice, unjust enrichment.

RESUMEN: *En este artículo nos preguntamos cómo puede una persona cumplir con la responsabilidad política de apoyar y beneficiarse de estructuras sociales injustas. En primer lugar, introducimos el concepto de injusticia estructural y lo defendemos contra tres posibles objeciones: 'nacionalismo explicativo'; una interpretación diacrónica de los beneficios del crecimiento impulsado por la industria; ser parte de una estructura social no significa automáticamente ser responsable de sus consecuencias negativas. A continuación, sostenemos que tanto el 'social connection model' de Iris Marion Young como el 'role-ideal model' de Robin Zheng proporcionan indicaciones claras sobre cómo cumplir con la responsabilidad de apoyar/participar en estructuras sociales injustas, pero no logran explicar cómo cumplir con la responsabilidad de un enriquecimiento injusto. Defendemos que ambos modelos deben complementarse con un esquema redistributivo mundial que permita desembolsar los beneficios obtenidos injustamente en el sistema económico global, además de emprender acciones colectivas de transformación y asumir responsabilidades de rol ideal.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: acciones colectivas, consumidores, responsabilidad, roles sociales, injusticia estructural, enriquecimiento injusto.

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Introduction

The question we would like to address in the following pages is in which sense an individual can say she has discharged her responsibility for structural injustice while being part of a global market. In trying to find a solid response we shall analyse the ethical status of global consumers through the lens of three different models: the social connection model proposed by Iris Marion Young and partially overlapping Thomas Pogge's theory of global justice, the unjust enrichment model described by Todd Calder and the 'Role-Ideal Model' discussed by Robin Zheng. Our conclusion is twofold. On the one hand, we argue that the collective action advocated by Young to take up individual responsibility for structural injustice needs further elaboration, in the sense that we need to clarify whether the collective action can be exhausted in a deontological discourse or rather we need to look at its consequences, and hence also at its effectiveness. On the other hand, we shall maintain that neither the social connection model nor the role-ideal model manage to give due weight to the fact that even an individual which is both active in promoting a structural change and attentive to avoid taking directly part in those single transactions that give rise to systemic forms of injustice cannot help but benefit from living in an unjust world.

More precisely, the article is structured as follows. In section *I* we apply the social connection model to the case of an individual who invests her money in a fund which finances a company that respects every ethical and legal norm in its activities but receives semi-laboured products from a second company that exploits workers overseas. In section *II*, we defend Young's account of responsibility for structural injustice from three main objection: i) the paradigm of structural injustice overestimates the role of global and systemic obstacles to development vis-à-vis local ones; ii) even though globalisation has led to unequal growth, the great majority of people is better off today than they were before; iii) it is not enough to be part of a social structure to be responsible for its negative outcomes.

In section *III* we firstly tackle the issue how much it is really enough to demand of a person who participates in a collective action which is aimed at countering structural injustice, providing reasons in favour of a deontological evaluation of this action. Then we argue that the automatic mechanism of unjust enrichment, that applies either in terms of new and/or improved private market opportunities or of marginal increases in the tax base due to extra profits unfairly obtained abroad, risks making any collective action ineffective with regards to discharging the political responsibility enshrined in the social connection model. Thus, we defend our account of unjust enrichment from the objection that benefiting from an injustice does not create direct obligations to rectify or compensate the victim of the injustice.

In section *IV* we wonder whether in replacing Young's structuralist approach with an alternative model of responsibility for structural injustice, as the one recently proposed by Robin Zheng, which moves from the assumption that individuals should also be held responsible for the single actions they carry out in performing their social roles, in addition to their political responsibility, we might circumvent the theoretical difficulties we envisage in the social connection model. In section *V* we defend the conclusion that either if we propend for Young's model of responsibility or for Zheng's one, they should be seen as necessary but not sufficient for fully discharging the individual responsibility for structural injustice. The latter requires a global redistribution of wealth, at least until the roots of structural injustice remain intact. Lastly, in section VI we wrap up our argument and defend the

account of structural responsibility we have proposed against the objection that it is over-demanding, hence either useless in practice or even normatively incoherent.

I

In two seminal articles, Iris Marion Young (2004, 2006) has argued that both the fault and the strict liability models of responsibility are unable to exhaust all the issues of justice that are raised by those forms of exploitation and domination that reverberate throughout the global chain of production —the classic example being the sweatshops—, and that we rather need to integrate these classic accounts with the model of political responsibility (see also Young, 2011). According to the fault model, an agent —or group of agents— is responsible for causing a given harm to another agent —or group of agents— if at least one of her actions is 'causally connected' to this harm and the connection is voluntary. Conversely, on the strict liability model, the responsibility for harm does not depend on the voluntariness of the causal connection (Young, 2004, p. 368). Thus, if we consider the case in which I bring damage to your property because I lose control of my car, I am responsible for the harm you suffer only on the strict liability model, whereas on the fault model I could discharge —or at least mitigate— my responsibility if I manage to demonstrate that the unmanageability of the car was not my fault.

The problem with these models, Young argues, is that they only work in interactional cases, in which the connection is directly causal. But when we swap to those situations in which actors are constrained in their choices by structural reasons that go well beyond the reach of the concrete perpetrators and victims of harm, we need a broader account of responsibility that encompasses all those people who indirectly contribute to keep in place those structures that limit the choices of the agents involved in direct harm. Therefore, Young proposes to integrate the fault and the strict liability models with the social connection model, according to which individuals are responsible for structural injustice in so far as 'they contribute by their actions to the processes that produce unjust outcomes' in a broad system of cooperation in which agents operate, generally, to maximise their payoff (Young, 2006, p. 119).

Let's consider, for example, the case of a person who lives in a developed country, let's call her individual X, who invests part of her savings in an investment fund. The fund uses part of the money invested by X to finance a multinational retail company, Company A, that respects all the legal and ethical norms that we would expect with regards to the environment, the internal governance, the employees, and so on. Nonetheless, Company A buys semi-laboured goods from Company B, which is based in a developing country, where it operates on legal and ethical standards that would be unacceptable both in the country where Company A is based and in the one where X lives. For the sake of simplicity, let's merely focus on the fact that Company B exploits workers by making them work in unsafe conditions for a very low pay.

Company B is surely responsible for harming local workers on the strict liability model, while it can be disputable whether Company B would also bear responsibility on the fault model. Here much revolves around the issue whether Company B could ameliorate the working conditions of its employees simply by reducing its profits and without incurring in the credible risk of getting out of the market. If Company B were able to dem-

onstrate that its range of action is constrained by national policies that create an incentive to lower labour standards and a disincentive to resist the race to the bottom, it would mitigate —at least partially— its moral responsibility. Does Company A share the responsibility for the exploitation of local workers? On the fault model, as for Company B, we should wonder whether Company A could reasonably stand the economic competition in the retail sector without recurring to sweatshops. We think it would be reasonable to argue that Company A could discharge its fault responsibility only in the very rare case in which it were able to demonstrate that no-exploitation would amount to such a loss in cost-competitiveness that other companies in the sector would end up absorbing its market shares (see also Corvino, 2015).

Yet, in real life, the dilemma is seldom between exploitation and bankruptcy, rather it usually revolves around the choice between lowering the costs of production whatever it takes and renouncing the indiscriminate growth of profits. On the fault model only the former dilemma, when it holds, can exonerate Company B from responsibility for harm. Conversely, on the strict liability model, we think that the most rational way for making sense of responsibility is through the decreasing scale we were hinting at in the previous section: i.e., keeping apart any structural consideration, both Company A and Company B should be held responsible for harming local workers, although the responsibility of Company A is larger than the responsibility of Company B.

But what can the fault and the strict liability models say about individual X? In order to find a valid answer, we should firstly respond to the question we were posing before: to what extent can we assume that a person who entrusts her money to a bank can be held responsible for acquiring information about the use the bank will make of her money? The same question could be asked about a consumer who goes buying a t-shirt in a store or a coffee in a bar. We think that we would err on the side of moral over-demandingness if we maintain that a person is responsible, on the fault model, for the use third parties do of her money, whenever acquiring this information would take the agent an unreasonable amount of time.[1]

The important philosophical point made by Young is that even though we cannot directly ascribe responsibility to X for the harm suffered by local workers, because her participation in the sequence of actions is beyond the point in which the agent could —and should— be aware that the sequence would finally result in harm for someone, there is a different sense in which X is responsible for the exploitation suffered by local workers. And this responsibility is political, it has nothing to do with the money she invests, rather with her participation in the global economic structure that creates an incentive for Company A to recur to Company B, and for Company B to cut on production costs by employing exploited workers.

Obviously, the fact that this peculiar form of responsibility is political renders it indirect. Individual X is responsible for being represented by a government that actively participates in keeping in place the existing global rules on property ownership, production and trade within which local workers become exploitable. What is peculiar about this model is that it stands in a relation of inverse proportion with the one of fault responsibility. For the

[1] Obviously, where we precisely draw the line between an amount of time that is reasonable and one that is not, is doomed to remain an open issue.

more successful companies A and B are in demonstrating that they are constrained in their choices with regards to sweatshops, the more global structures become responsible for the harm suffered by local workers. And vice versa.

II

While the argument of structural injustice is philosophically sound, many people try to resist it on both empirical and theoretical grounds. More specifically, two main objections can be raised against the fact that global economic structures cause harm to the worse off, and a third objection can be levelled against the argument that the responsibility for the alleged structural harm extends towards those who participate in these structures.

The first objection consists in what Thomas Pogge (2008a, p. 17) has named as 'explanatory nationalism': it is certainly true that many people are harmed and exploited all around the world, nonetheless the reasons behind this injustice are to be found in local factors rather than in global structures, and this view finds empirical evidence in the fact that within the same global economic rules some countries have managed to obtain social development while others have not.

On the one hand, it is undeniable that local factors play a fundamental role in determining local destinies – think for example about corruption, clientelism, lack of expertise, and so on.[2] Yet, on the other hand, we think that Pogge (2008a, pp. 16-7) made a convincing philosophical point when he argued that that the existence of local obstacles to development cannot be used as evidence that there are no global obstacles as well. So as the fact that there are pupils in one class who perform better than others does not mean that there is no reason to wonder whether the quality of teaching is satisfactory. For it may be the case that the students who achieve good results are so good that they perform well despite —rather than thanks— to the teaching they have received. And the global factors that harm the poor, according to Pogge, can be traced back to two main categories: unfair trade rules and agreements through which developed countries have kept their markets closed in those sectors in which developing countries would have been more competitive, while constraining the latter to open their economies to the goods coming from the affluent world (Pogge, 2008a, pp. 20-21), and widespread complacency by foreign partners towards corrupt local elites who seize, and dissipate, the financial and natural resources of developing countries (Pogge, 2008a, pp. 118-122).

The second objection to structural injustice is trickier. Mathias Risse (2005) is right, for example, in reminding us that if we simply look at data on global poverty, we would have serious difficulties in arguing that something unjust has been going on at the global level from the first phase of globalisation, in XIX century, up until now. For we should acknowledge that if before the industrial revolution the great percentage of the world population —75 percent— was living on less than $1 per day, nowadays only the 20 percent do (Risse, 2005, p. 10). Therefore, even though it is true that industrial-led economic growth

[2] Nonetheless, can we really hold that these local factors that might hinder growth and development are not rooted in a history of global injustice and exploitation – e.g. colonialism? I think that we cannot, but for the sake of simplicity we shall take these factors to be entirely endogenous.

has meant unequal growth, the global situation we have today would probably pass a test of Pareto efficiency in relation to any past historical situation, in every part of the world. If this is true, the objection might continue, it does not make sense to say that the global order is harming the poor in a structural way, hence we cannot ascribe any blame to the consumer that, although taking part in a sequence of actions that result in some far people suffering, has escaped both fault and strict liability responsibility.

Here the diriment issue is the benchmark for measuring wellbeing improvements. If we insist on a diachronic benchmark the discourse on structural injustice gets irremediably watered down, and the second objection is successful. Nonetheless, looking at wellbeing only diachronically is never exhaustive, because we might have normative reasons to defend a positive account of justice, in respect to which we want to assess how individuals fares, regardless of whether this account reflects an historical condition – that we may demand to restore (see Meyer, 2003, pp. 154-5). Thus, for example, even though under current arrangements people working for Company B are better off than their parents and grandparents, we might still argue that they are somehow wronged because they receive less than a fair share of the marginal increases in wealth they contribute producing (see Abizadeh, 2007) – and a good unit of measure can be the difference between the final price of an object and the pay of the person who made it, in part or in its entirety.

There remains, however, to demonstrate why and how the responsibility for the structural injustice suffered by local people working for Company B can be traced back to the actions of individual X. Young seeks to explain this causal link through the social connection model we were briefly describing before. We are all parts of a system of social cooperation, within which we seek to further our individual interests. The economic and political rules that subtend this system are partially responsible for the local workers being obliged to look for their sustenance in sweatshops. Those who are part of the system and stand in the position to change its underlying rules, so as to eliminate structural injustice, bear the responsibility to do it and are blameworthy for not doing it (Young, 2006, p. 119). Being part of a global cooperative system can be understood both in the more economic and interactional sense described by Young (2011, pp. 43-74), through which seemingly disconnected individuals pursuing the maximization of their own well-being make market choices that can have negative consequences on the most vulnerable —the emblematic example is that of many individual investors competing for houses in the centre of a city, causing an increase in the price of housing units and thus expelling the working class— or in more political terms, as suggested by Pogge (2008a, pp. 25-6; 2008b, 22-5), thus emphasising the link of responsibility that unites citizens, through the payment of taxes and political/electoral support, to the institutions that negotiate the rules of the system of cooperation.

Many people would resist both explanations of structural responsibility. To do so you do not have to deny that global social structures cause harm or disadvantage to the global poor. You simply have to maintain that only a specific category of agents is responsible for the negative consequences of social structures or that the responsibility can be attributed to the institutions but not to individual agents. The first argumentative strategy is followed, for example, by Saladin Meckled-Garcia (2014), who maintains that in order for an agent to be held accountable for the negative outcomes of a system of rules and of agreements, it is not sufficient that this agent partakes in this system, she should also be somehow complicit in the wrongs that this system causes and be in a position to help change the system.

Accordingly, Meckled-Garcia holds that mere participation in the international trade system, the WTO, cannot be considered as a violation of a negative duty of justice by single countries, let alone by their citizens. For, even though it is undeniable that international trade agreements usually favour the most powerful countries and pose major economic obstacles to developing countries, the international trade system was not designed as an instrument of domination and oppression, but rather as an economic forum in which single countries can promote their national interests through trade agreements that are as favourable as possible for them. Moreover, even if it were possible to conceive of a different international trade system, in which countries refrain from maximising their gains in order to allow other countries meeting the basic needs of their citizens, this would require an unlikely global reform that no single country can obtain through an unilateral decision – hence it would be illogical to hold countries or their citizens responsible for structural negative outcomes that they cannot do anything to avoid.

The second strategy focuses, instead, on the responsibility nexus that binds citizens to government decisions, and which is essential to extend structural responsibility along the chain of political representation. Uwe Steinhoff (2012) made two powerful points with respect to it. One is that simply working for a government, or paying taxes to it and participating in elections cannot suffice to maintain that I am responsible for every decision the government takes – otherwise we would incur in the paradox that if the government decides to kill me and my dear ones for no apparent reason, I am structurally responsible for this decision. The other point is that even if the actions that we have just mentioned were sufficient to extend the structural responsibility to citizens of democratic countries, the only means I would have to live ethically is to become an hermit, and this is surely overdemanding.

We believe that the idea of structural responsibility can, if properly calibrated, withstand such criticisms. And our contribution goes exactly in this direction, i.e. it aims to fill a gap that exists in the literature on how structural responsibility can be discharged. In brief, in response to the complicity objection, we do not engage here in the complex issue whether the global economic system (of which the international trade system examined by Meckled-Garcia is only a part) violates the negative duties of the world poor or infringes their human rights. We simply hold that this system enables a series of market interactions that are patently unfair, as they allow some subjects to obtain a much larger portion of the cooperative surplus than other subjects who are in a weaker socio-economic position – and sweatshops are the most obvious example of this. This suffices to argue the global economic order is structurally unjust, in terms of fairness, both from a procedural and from a substantial point of view.

Conversely, we accept the individual-inefficacy argument, raised by both Meckled-Garcia and Uwe Steinhoff, according to which neither single countries nor single citizens involved in the structural injustice pertaining to the global economic order can alter the *status quo* unilaterally, nor through restricted coalitions. But we resist the conclusion that the single-inefficacy argument sweeps away the individual responsibility for structural injustice. For practical impossibility should not be confused with theoretical impossibility. As long as a it is theoretical possible to alter the *status quo* for good, so as to render it more just, through a collective coordination, no matter how broad it should be, those who do nothing to promote and facilitate this coordination bear the responsibility for the injustice that collective inaction preserves.

Let's suppose, for example, that a gang of five people decide to beat me until I lose consciousness, and that each of the members of the group is so strong that he can achieve the shared goal even alone. The fact that no member of the gang is able to stop the aggression unilaterally does not mean that none of them are responsible for the harm I suffer. That is, at least until someone tries to convince others that it is wrong to attack me, because I am helpless and have done nothing to deserve the beating, or tries to form a coalition within the gang that can stop the aggression (see also Sangiovanni, 2018, pp. 465-9; Vance, 2017).

Since we maintain that duties of structural justice hold still in the face of the individual-inefficacy argument, our interest in the remaining part of this article is to explore how the individual can fulfil her duty of structural justice while continuing to live among others who refuse to coordinate in order to definitively eliminate the roots of structural injustice.

III

After having spent many pages in setting the structural problem, Young (2004, 2006, 2011) does not devote much space to explaining how a person who takes part in imposing an unjust global structure can clean her hands. The difference, Young maintains, between a liability model and a political model of responsibility consists in the fact that the first form of responsibility can be discharged by the single individual, whereas political responsibility can only be mitigated through collective action. This means that every individual involved in the perpetration of structural injustice bears a different level of responsibility according to her position in the social structure, to how much she benefits from it and to the potential impact she might have in bringing about systemic changes. Accordingly, Young (2006, pp. 125-130; 2011, pp. 123-152) indicates four parameters for measuring the political responsibility for structural injustice: power, privilege, interest and collective ability. Boiled down into practical terms, for Young (2004, p. 381) the individual can take up her political responsibility by 'joining with others in a public discourse where we try to persuade one another about curses of collective actions that will contribute to ameliorating the problem'. Yet, there are several limits in this assertion, and Young does not offer us many clarifications (see also Aßländer, 2020).

The first open issue is how much an individual shall be required to do in order to promote a collective action. For example, would it be enough to say 'I am voting against those political parties that are in favour of the *status quo* at the global level, hence I do not feel responsible for structural injustice, given that if all the other persons voted like I do, we would probably live in a better world'? We think that this kind of justification, although reasonable, would not be enough for taking on political responsibility in the way Young interprets it. Probably, it would take the individual to try to persuade others to take a clear stand against global injustice, to explain its roots and to obtain the participation of the sceptical and of the indifferent. But how much would be enough? And above all does the dischargement of political responsibility only depends on the effort the individual puts in countering structural domination, and that obviously depends on the social, political and economic power she can invest in this venture, or is it rather also a function of the reactivity of all the other people who get prompted to get together in collective action?

Consider the case of two persons, Charlotte and Jane, who live in two different places but put exactly the same effort —in proportion to their social position— in supporting the election of a progressive candidate, with regards to structural injustice, in their respective constituencies and in organising events aimed at sensitising people on the forms of exploitations that go on in sweatshops. Nonetheless, Charlotte obtains much more results than Jane, because her candidate gets elected and she receives wide support for the anti-sweatshop cause, whereas Jane falls short of both results. This asymmetry in results derives from the fact that Charlotte happens to live in a city that is much more receptive to progressive demands than the one in which Jane lives. Shall we conclude that Charlotte has discharged her political responsibility for structural injustice while Jane has not?

In other words, shall we be consequentialist regarding the collective action described by Young, or is it simply the action in itself that matters for the purpose of discharging political responsibility? Young never addresses this important issue. Conversely, Laura Valentini (2011) seems to believe that we should focus on the action alone. When discussing systemic coercion, namely the curtailment of freedom due to a system of rules rather than to an individual (or group of individuals), she says that those people who are indirectly responsible for the existence of these norms 'should not be regarded as blameworthy *so long as* they do what is reasonably within their power to address this injustice' (Valentini, 2011, p. 213). Accordingly, it follows from this formulation that, after their respective campaigns, neither Charlotte nor Jane bear any moral blame for poor people working in sweatshops abroad, as for the other cases in which structural injustice reverberates.

We would tend to agree with this non-consequentialist account of moral blame, meaning that the individual has discharged her responsibility for structural injustice —in the sense intended by Young— as long as she has done enough in rallying support for a collective action, regardless of whether this 'enough' has also been effective. But the problem hinges on how we qualify 'enough'. Is it simply a quantity that we calculate in proportion to the four parameters indicated by Young —power, privilege, interest and collective ability— as in the case of Jane and Charlotte? Or shall we rather require a person who stands in a much more favourable position with regards to these parameters to invest, in proportion, more time and resources than another person who is considerably poorer and less powerful? Given that Young's account is forward-looking, we would probably lack normative reasons to go beyond the constraint of proportional equity. Yet, this conclusion risk being too absolutory for the best off.

Let us add some further specifications to our example and assume that Jane is a multimillionaire entrepreneur while Charlotte is a school teacher. From the non-consequentialist account that we are defending here, we cannot maintain that Jane has to keep on investing money in the collective action until the marginal investment risks making her worse off than the victims of structural injustice that the collective action is aimed at addressing. Nonetheless, if we maintain that she has to contribute in proportion as much as Charlotte, we may justify a scenario in which both women invest one third of their monthly income in the electoral campaign of the progressive candidate, but Charlotte gets into economic troubles with the house loan while Jane keeps on conducting a luxury life. This is a bullet we have to bite if we insist, as Young does, on a forward-looking interpretation of the political responsibility for structural injustice, that is to say an interpretation that prescinds both from the causal contribution and from the correlative benefits of each individual with

regards to structural injustice.[3] On the other hand, the advantage of this approach is that it can more easily win the support of the most powerful individuals, whose life style would not be endangered in the process through which they clean their hands for living in an unjust world.

Another possible solution might consist in combining a forward-looking interpretation of responsibility for structural injustice with a consequentialist reading of the collective action that can discharge it. In this case the investment every person needs to do for change is context-sensitive, meaning that it is a function of what other individuals are willing to do. So, for example, even though we renounce any backward-looking consideration, Jane should invest in proportion more than Charlotte for the simple fact the people living in Jane's constituency are harder to convince than the ones from Charlotte's constituency, hence Jane's collective actions require more resources, both personal and economic, to be effective.[4]

The limit of a consequentialist (rather than deontological) response to the question 'how much is enough?' is that it risks overburdening the individual with a moral responsibility that in many cases could not be taken up, and this is something that the same Young wanted to avoid. At the same time, the peculiarity of a response which is deontological but is not backward-looking, is that it is a mere function of what the individual can do to ameliorate the structural problem in virtue of her social position. Accordingly, another person who enjoys the same socio-economic conditions as Jane would be required to contribute exactly as Jane, regardless both of the receptivity of the other persons that might take part to the collective action and of the causal link between structural injustice and her fortune.

Nonetheless, and this is the second open issue we want to highlight, even though both Charlotte and Jane successfully discharge their political responsibility for structural injustice in the way described by Young, within a globalised consumer society none of them can easily stop receiving economic benefits from structural injustice. As convincingly argued by Todd Calder (2010), the economic advantages that people living in developed countries obtain from the existence of an unjust global structure represents a form a 'unjust enrichment' and as such it demands a compensation (see also Corvino, 2020, pp. 98-131). The main reason is that those people living in developed countries get increases in public resources and in private economic opportunities (well-paid jobs, low-cost products, etc.) from the fact that other fellow-citizens are involved in a more or less direct way in unjust economic activities occurring in developing countries. Consider for example the case of an investor who becomes wealthy by purchasing the shares of a company that benefits from sweatshops, and assume that this person decides to open up a business of private schools and hires Charlotte, thus offering her an higher salary than she received from the public school. Although having discharged her responsibility for sweatshops in the manner recommended by Young, Charlotte continues to receive unjust enrichment from sweatshops.

[3] Andrea Sangiovanni (2018) has recently maintained that Young's insistence on forward-looking responsibility with regards to structural injustice is 'uncovincing', in particular he argues that it is not clear why backward-looking responsibility should be left out of the account of 'causal involvement in an unjustice'.

[4] A similar argument, although from an individual rather than a collective prospective, was given by Peter Singer (1972).

Moreover, the taxes this investor pays on her earnings go to finance public services and welfare provisions in the cities where both Charlotte and Jane live. But neither Charlotte nor Jane can realistically demand their state to exempt them from enjoying the fruits of the marginal increases in quality and resources that the public sector realises thanks to the marginal taxes levied on unjust enrichment.

Against the argument of unjust enrichment, a number of objections could be raised. First, it can be said that in the current phase of convergent globalisation, the people living in developing countries are benefiting from globalised capitalism, both in terms of wider job opportunities and higher incomes, in comparison with the low and middles classes of developed countries, hence the issue of unjust enrichment is unacceptable in the way we put it. And with regards to welfare systems, it can be pointed out that multinational corporations systematically evade taxes, thus it does not really make sense to talk about a widening of the tax base due to international structural injustice. Both points are empirically valid, but they do not weaken our argument. For it is surely true that the lower the technological and the political barriers, the easier jobs can be relocated from wealthier to poorer countries, yet the majority of the people who benefit from the porousness of the global market are living in developed countries, hence it is reasonable to expect that their enormous wealth spills over to *at least* some members of their social group (see Milanovic). Moreover, tax evasion does not depend on structural injustice, meaning that the companies that evade taxes would do it anyway, no matter whether they rely on sweatshops or not. Accordingly, if take the rate of tax evasion as a (unfortunate) given, we can maintain that even with respect to those companies or individuals that evade taxes, unjust productive practices yield marginal increases in the tax base.

Second, it could be argued that benefit is not a diriment criterion for deciding on the attribution of responsibility for an injustice, because an injustice may occur without anyone benefiting from it. A clear example is that of a person who steals my wallet and then loses it in the river. Thus, it would be logically incoherent to maintain that a person who has discharged her responsibility for structural injustice, either/both in the political or/and in the role-ideal sense, continues to be linked to structural injustice by virtue of the benefits she receives[5]. We believe that this argument, albeit correct, does not weaken our theory. For benefit is not necessary, as we have seen, for there to be an injustice, but this does not mean that it is morally acceptable to reap benefits from an injustice. We believe, rather, that when this occurs, unjust benefits must be disgorged.

Let us go back to the gang example and let us assume that the five fellows have been paid to beat me up by someone who hates me so much. Imagine that one fellow refuses to do so and tries to convince the other fellows to leave me go, but he fails, so the other four accomplish the gang's mission, and at the end of the day every of the five fellows receives an bank transfer with the promised remuneration. Can we maintain that the defector puncher has discharged his moral responsibility for being part of a gang who have beaten me simply because he has behaved as a good guy to me and has also tried to convince the other fellows to do the same? And hence he does not commit any moral wrong in keeping his payment? We do not think so, because this fellow benefits from being structurally linked to a group that has committed an injustice. This explains why the

[5] We are grateful to an anonymous reviewer for raising this important objection.

moral duty to give up the economic benefits stemming from my unjust aggression extends to the defector member of the gang, but not, for example, to the person who gets paid the next day to take my place in class because the beating I took prevents me from showing up for work.[6]

We maintain that responsible consumers within a global economic order that is unjust are in a position that is morally similar to that of the defector gang member, rather than the unaware but fortunate substitute teacher. As the defector puncher and differently from the substitute teacher, the responsible consumer is structurally linked to the injustice from which she benefits, in the sense that she is part of the causal chain of events leading to injustice and she is in a position to help eliminate it by coordinating with others (the fact that this coordination is then extremely difficult or fails does not exempt the individual person from playing a role, albeit a small one, in an attempt to change the status quo). Accordingly, we are not committing to the claim that mere benefiting from injustice gives rise to duties of disgorgement (or direct compensation of the victim), rather we maintain that these duties only hold for those who stand in a structural relation with the system of norms and agreements (or simply with the group, in the gang case) that is responsible for the injustice.[7]

In this sense, a way in which the responsibility for structural injustice might be taken up, both in its active component pertaining to the indirect contribution to the social structures that bring about injustice and in its passive component related to unjust enrichment, might consist in coupling the political action demanded by Young with a global redistributive mechanism. And many global redistributive proposals have been advanced in recent years. A much debated proposal is, for example, Pogge's Global Resources Dividend, according to which every oil-based market transaction should be subject to a minimal tax and all the funds raised in this way should be put in a global fund for fighting world poverty (Pogge, 2008a, pp. 202-3). Another possibility is for developed countries to accord debt relief to those developing countries that have committed to macroeconomic policies that endeavour to fight poverty and contain domestic inequality – and this could happen either through bilateral agreements or through a broader commitment involving international financial institutions (see IMF, 2011; Moellendorf, 2002, pp. 92-6). In the absence of such policy instruments, and acknowledging the impossibility of obtaining them in the medium term, the individual can renounce her unjust enrichment in a purely interactional way, i.e. by redistributing part of her income to international agencies and/or NGOs fighting poverty, to online platforms that organise crowdfunding to finance development projects.[8]

Obviously, it is impossible for anyone to assess precisely what she owes to the global poor as a compensation for unjust enrichment, hence it would be utopian to think of a moral and economic model that prescribes exactly how much each person should give up.

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[6] For a more radical formulation of the principle of restitution for unjust enrichment see also Butt, 2007.

[7] For an illuminating distinction between those cases in which benefiting per se gives rise to compensatory claims, and those other cases in which benefiting reinforces compensatory claims that are normatively independent, see Norbert Anwander (2005). We are also extremely grateful to an anonymous reviewer for helping us clarify our position on the relation between benefits and compensatory duties.

[8] See for example https://www.globalgiving.org/

Our aim in this article, however, is not to make precise calculations, but simply to say that almost every person living in developed countries *owes something* to those living in developing countries. Thus, we hold that maintaining all one's wealth is wrong. Clearly, any person who decides to take our claim seriously will end up making a redistribution that is larger or smaller than it should be, but what is important is that by redistributing she will do a more just action than she would do by preserving all her unjust enrichment. Moreover, it is also possible to imagine, for reasons of political realism for example, that if there are very large levels of inequality within single countries, only a portion of the wealthiest population of those countries would have to give up a percentage of their wealth, by subjecting it to taxation, while everyone else is allowed to retain the unjust benefits – a few years ago, for example, Peter Singer (2006) proposed a milder version of his radical utilitarianism, suggesting a redistributive scheme in which the top 0.01 per cent of the American population gives away one third of its annual earnings, and then descending up to require those who rank between the top 1 and 10 per cent of the population to make an annual contribution of 10 per cent of their income, while exonerating all the others.

It might be observed that the introduction of these reforms is not an easy task, rather it requires a high degree of political involvement that at the end cannot depart from the radical collective action demanded by Young. Thus, the restitution of unjust enrichment seems to collapse into the dischargement of political responsibility. But this conclusion would be incorrect, because while Young's collective action aims at undertaking initiatives that are supposed to correct for the sources of structural injustice, to repay unjust enrichment through forms of global distributive justice means accepting the idea that those individuals who are investing time and effort in changing the *status quo* cannot consider themselves as morally absolved simply because they support joint initiatives aimed at eradicating structural injustice, rather they have to renounce the unjust share of their wealth, at least until injustice will persist.

Another possible objection is that a global redistribution of wealth is already implicitly included among the actions through which Young's political responsibility can be discharged. Thus, you may either decide to discharge your responsibility by campaigning for a candidate who wants to review your country's trade treaties so as to reduce poverty elsewhere, or by participating in boycott initiatives against companies that exploit workers abroad, or by donating part of your income to Oxfam, or by fighting politically for your government to increase domestic taxation in order to redistribute wealth to those who in relative terms come out as net-losers in economic interactions with people or companies from your country. We are not completely sure that this is what Young had in mind, given that her main focus was to eradicate unjustice, through reforming background rules within which economic agents interact, instead of compensating those who lose from being part on unjust social structure.[9] However, even if it were possible to say that a global redistribution of wealth is implicit in the political transformation that should erode unjust global structures, our position would remain different from the one embraced (or embraceable) by Young. For she may say that disgorging unjust enrichment is *one way* in which you can discharge the moral responsibility for being part of the current global economic order,

[9] Conversely, Pogge adopts a more realist approach and proposes a global redistribution of wealth as a compensation that citizens of developed countries owe to the world poor.

while we maintain that as long as the global economic order is not changed, you cannot discharge your structural responsibility *unless* you disgorge the unjust enrichment you get from it.

IV

Against the structuralist approach inherent in Young's theory it might be counterargued that it puts too much emphasis on what individuals can collectively do to reform the social structures within which economic injustice occurs, while overlooking what they could singularly do in their daily life as workers, consumers, family members and so on. With regards to this, Robin Zheng (2018) has recently developed an alternative model of responsibility for structural injustice, starting from the presupposition that individuals should not simply be held responsible for their causal contribution to systemic injustice, as postulated in Young's model, but also for the simple actions they perform in fulfilling their social roles. In other words, what Zheng is seeming to remind us is that for the purpose of a comprehensive evaluation of responsibility we should not simply look at the global set of socio-economic rules that determine structural injustice as an impending entity that stays ahead, quite far from us, and to which we are tied in an indirect way, because we are responsible for electing those people who rule those institutions which prove unwilling to alter the status-quo. On the contrary, Zheng argues, we should look at the role every individual plays within the social structures. In this sense, to every social role —be it mother, father, professor, bus driver, surgeon, and so on— corresponds a role-ideal, that is to say a subjective evaluation regarding how the social role should be best performed. A single social role can be marked by a great variety of role-ideals.

For example, the meaning of the social role of the bartender can be quite clear within a given society. He is expected to prepare cocktails and drinks out of a restricted list and in exchange for money. Within this limited common understanding, any bartender is free to provide a subjective interpretation of how he could best meet the expectations about his being bartender. He may think that part of his social role consists in entertaining his clients with acrobatic bottles tricks or rather in being as much discrete as possible in pouring liquors into the glasses. In Zheng's own words, 'for every social role R occupied by an individual P, a role-ideal is P's interpretation of how she could best satisfy the expectations constituting R (based on P's own beliefs, values, commitments, abilities, and lived experience)' (Zheng, 2018, p. 875).

Within the role-ideal framework, the responsibility for social change falls back on the single actions that all individuals can do to 'push the boundaries of their social roles' as closest as possible to their role-ideal. Accordingly, social change should be seen as the product of a slow and gradual progress that flourishes from within social structures, rather than as an abrupt breakthrough. Nonetheless, the first limit of this kind of approach to structural injustice is that it risks being too much conservative. Meaning that once the individual has met the best expectations concerning her peculiar social role, then she might turn her back to all the cases of injustice that do not fall within the reach of her social role but are anyhow the result of other people living within unjust rules to which people contribute as members of political communities, regardless of their peculiar social role within them. The second limit of the role-ideal model has to do with the fact that it is unfitted to take

into account the unjust enrichment that stems directly from structural injustice. In this sense, discharging the individual responsibility only within individual social roles, by striving toward role-ideals, in unsatisfactory.

Yet, the merit of Zheng's model consists in showing us that focusing only on the political responsibility for structural injustice is quite limitative, because so doing we would overlook the very evident fact that we interpersonally take part in distinct market transactions that when summed together result in structural injustice. There are some cases, for example, in which by stretching our own social role as consumers toward a role-ideal, we can successfully discharge a part of our responsibility for structural injustice. We have mainly in mind selective consumption which penalises companies that engage in sweatshop production, or rely excessively on fossil fuels or rather are responsible for unsustainable environmental practices that determine an unfair allocation of negative externalities – both intra and inter-generationally. Nonetheless, as we were trying to argue before, it does not matter how much a given individual seeks to get close to her ideal-role as consumer – that is to say how much she avoids her economic resources accruing to those companies which are blameworthy for entertaining activities that result in an unfair allocation of costs and benefits related to a given cooperative surplus – she will never manage to resist the economic advantages stemming from the contribution that 'unjust' companies bring to the economies of developed countries.

A clear example in this case is the individual who decides to strive toward a radical interpretation of her idea-role as consumer and avoids interacting with all the companies operating in the retail sector, only buying second-hand attire. This person has taken a clear stand against the sweatshop system and we can assume that, with regards to her social role as consumer, she has taken up her responsibility for structural injustice in the way required by Zheng.[10] Yet, the price that this person will pay for every second-hand item she buys will be a function of the aggregate offer of these items, which in turn will be a function of the rate at which people who buy new clothes replace them. In other words, the lower the prices that retail companies will be able to set (also thanks to sweatshops and to other unethical practices), the higher the consumer demand; the more new products are bought, the more old items will be given away – also to make room in the closets; thus, the higher the offer of second-hand items, the lower the price that our ethical consumer will pay for her second-hand clothes (see also Calder, 2010, p. 274).

The same discourse can be extended to many other social roles. Even though you strictly adhere to what you consider the best interpretation of being a mother, a father, a teacher, a bus driver, a policeman, you can never disentangle yourself from those economic bonds that make you a passive recipient of the economic benefits of structural injustice, thus unavoidably rendering you better off than you would be in a hypothetical world in which no economic agent were exploited because of structural imbalances of power. The reason, as argued in the previous section, is that the marginal increases in profits obtained through unethical practices as sweatshops trickle down also to those individuals who have managed to 'push the boundaries of their social roles' (Zheng, 2018,

[10] We assume that she is unable to discern between those retail companies that rely on sweatshops and those which do not, hence in order to make sure that she does not contribute to reinforcing these practices, she decides to rely exclusively on the second-hand market.

p. 877) toward the subjectively ideal benchmark, mainly in terms of marginal revenues accruing to the welfare state through taxes and of marginal increases of wealth to be reinvested in the society.

V

The point we would like to stress is quite simple. An individual who has discharged her responsibility for structural injustice, either in the political way indicated by Young or in the ethical way defended by Zheng, does not necessarily cease to benefit from the fact that other members of her social group obtain increases in wealth through relying, in a more less direct manner, on unjust productive practices. We can also add that in many cases it is impossible for the single individual to stop benefiting from structural injustice, or at least it is possible but only at costs that are excessively high. Let us consider the example we were making before about the unethical investor who opens a private a school and offers a job to Charlotte. Let us also assume that Charlotte perfectly knows how her new employer got the money he is investing in the private school and that she has lost her previous job in the public school. As we have seen before, Charlotte has discharged her political responsibility for structural injustice by campaigning for a progressive candidate who has taken a clear stance against national companies adopting lower social standards abroad, and by mobilising many other people in the anti-sweatshop movement. We might also assume that she continuously strives to role-ideals in every social position she occupies, as teacher, mom, consumer and so on. In spite of all this, she finds herself in the position of having to choose whether to keep on working, but for a person who has obtained great profits through the same unethical productive practices she has discharged her political and ethical responsibility from, or to renounce an income, with all the consequences that would come for her and her family.

If Charlotte chooses the first option, she would have discharged her political and social-agent responsibility for structural injustice, but she would still benefit from it. In sum, she could not be said to live ethically within global capitalism. If, instead, she takes on the second option, she could say to be ethically satisfied with regards to structural injustice — at least until similar dilemmas will not arise— but the burden she would shoulder, and she would impose to her dear ones, is disproportionate to the general benefits she would create. Moreover, any moral theory that recommends the individual to undergo this kind of sacrifice would be extremely difficult to implement on a large scale. Just think of how many such renounces we should make. And in many cases we would have to renounce a given individual benefit even when structural injustice has only contributed to a share of it. Imagine, for example, that in our example the investor obtained the 85 percent of his wealth in a 'morally clean' way and the remainder 15 percent thanks to economic activities that implied exploitation abroad. In order to avoid coming into contact with the smaller dirty share of the investor's wealth, Charlotte would have to give up on the entire job opportunity, even though we can expect that, in proportion, the larger share of her salary would have been financed through clean money.

These simple considerations lead us to the conclusion that the responsibility for structural injustice cannot be solely discharged neither through the collective action demanded by Young, nor by the role-ideal model of Zheng, neither through a combination of the two

models. What is required, instead, is that the single individual takes an active part not just in the collective actions aimed at closing-off sweatshops, but also in those other collective actions that aim to create institutional mechanisms that can return the unjust enrichment obtained through sweatshops, at least until sweatshops will continue to exist. Moreover, we sought to emphasise the neither the political nor the moral dischargement of the responsibility for contributing to sweatshops do automatically exonerate the individual from the responsibility for benefiting from sweatshops, and more generally from other instances of structural injustice. Accordingly, given that the unjust enrichment stemming from sweatshops is widespread and does not necessarily stand in a relation of inverse proportion with the pattern of responsibility for contributing to sweatshops, the best way to collectively return unjust enrichment is through a tax on income to be levied nationally and administered globally. In other words, we cannot use the model of the ethical consumer, neither as activist nor as responsible consumer, as a proxy for the responsibility for unjust enrichment. In many cases, an ethical consumer might receive a higher unjust enrichment than another person who buys cheap garment realised by exploited workers. Obviously, individual income is a questionable proxy as well, yet it is the most equitable way to distribute a collective burden that is diffused indefinitely but tends to multiply with the increase in market transactions in which single individuals are involved.

It might be objected that perhaps neither Young nor Zheng would have nothing against a global redistribution of wealth, which on the other hand many scholars have already presented, discussed and defended (see Armstrong, 2012). This is true, but it misses our point. Both the dischargement of the responsibility for contribution and of the responsibility for benefit with respect to structural injustices are necessary but insufficient, if taken singularly, to live ethically within global capitalism. Structural injustice consists of two moral components that cannot be separated. The first one is merely forward-looking and is a function of what the single individual can do with relation to structural injustice in virtue of her peculiar social position, either through collective actions or by promoting a change from the inside – in performing her social role. The second one is both backward- and forward-looking and consists in the advantages that the individual has received and will continue to receive because of global economic rules that are unjust – mainly as consumer or recipient of welfare provisions.

Both Young's and Zheng's models overlook the second component of structural injustice, hence we maintain that they should be integrated with compensatory provisions of global distributive justice, which go beyond direct political action or targeted consumer choices, and require disgorging unjust benefits at least until the global social structure is made just – and this could occur either through direct redistribution (donations, crowdfunding, financing for development projects, and so forth) or through political actions aimed at the creation of global compensation funds.

VI

It could be said that our moral proposal is overdemanding. There are two ways of dealing with the concern. The first one is to bite the bullet and reply that our aim in this article was simply to respond to the question about what it takes to live ethically within a global economic order that is unjust. Then, logical and argumentative rigour demands that the fact

that we may or may not like the answer (as it imposes more or less important moral obligations) must not affect the content of the answer itself – we can subsequently decide, for reasons of political realism, that it is better to ask the citizens of a state to fulfil more modest duties than those which exist towards the world's poor, but this must not alter our normative assessment about the validity of these broader duties at the ideal level.

A more specific and insidious version of the objection of over-demandingness holds that it is both logically and normatively incoherent to defend moral duties that we already know could never be met, because they ask too much of people. For example, if we were maintaining that an individual could only live ethically by giving up such a large part of her income that she can no longer pay for his children's schooling, or be able to afford a means of transport, and so on, our claim would be meaningless because no one would comply with it (see also Heilinger, 2020, pp. 193-220). However, we firmly believe that our proposal to integrate classic models of structural responsibility with compensatory duties of global justice does not require anyone to alter their lifestyles substantially, at least as long as we ask everyone to do their part without making up for the shortcomings of others. Consider, for example, that in 2008 Pogge (2008a, p. 211) was calculating that we could have eradicated severe poverty by investing annually the 0.67 percent of the 2005 GDP – a sum which, if divided equally between and within the most developed states, can be disbursed without enormous difficulty to anyone.

In this article we remain agnostic regarding the way in which these duties of global distributive justice should be put into practice. We simply aimed to argue that they are related to unjust enrichment and represent part of the process of discharging individual responsibility for structural injustice. Whether the global redistribution of wealth, which is aimed at rebalancing the unjust allocation of costs and benefits stemming from global cooperation, should take place through interactional solutions —as donations to poverty funds or NGOs, for example— or by pressing for the establishment of binding redistributive mechanisms, which might be administered either at the national or at the global level, remains outside the scope of our analysis here.

Conclusions

We sought to argue that joining with others in political actions aimed at ameliorating the global economic order is not enough, at last until the political action achieves enough participation to be effective. At the same time, striving toward the ideal-role of the responsible consumer is an ineffective way of disgorging unjust economic benefits, because the advantages of living within an unjust global economic order manifest themselves either in the form of new and/or better market opportunities or of marginal increases in public revenues.

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