Individual responsibility and global structural injustice: Toward an ethos of cosmopolitan responsibility

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1 | INTRODUCTION

The world we live in is unjust and the existing political institutions fail to adequately address the current injustices. In this paper, I will discuss the role and the responsibilities of individual citizens in affluent countries[1] in the face of global structural injustice (GSI): How, if at all, should such individual agents, morally, respond to GSI? This is a challenging question because it links the smallest unit of agency, single persons, with complex moral challenges of an extremely large scale.

Different from attempts to determine the role and moral responsibility of individuals through specific acts and concrete duties, I will propose that a theoretical discussion of global individual responsibility should proceed in terms of an individual—and subsequently potentially collective shared—"ethos." An ethos is understood as an attitude based on normative commitments that pervasively influence the multiple ways in which individual agents think and feel, talk *and* act. Proposing and defending the view that the moral responsibility of individuals in the face of GSI consists in fostering an ethos of cosmopolitan responsibility corresponds with the entanglement of individuals in the distinctive moral wrong of GSI. It highlights how individuals can contribute to overcoming structural injustice through targeting its relational origins.

However, even a cosmopolitan ethos held by many individuals alone will not be sufficient to end GSI. What is ultimately needed is significant institutional reform. But a widely shared commitment to the equal status of all, palpable in the way how many people feel, think, talk, and act about it, seems to be a necessary condition for effectively demanding and eventually realizing adequate institutional reform. Personal attitudinal change and personal action thus are essential practical steps toward the larger goal of overcoming GSI—even if their direct and immediate effects remain frustratingly small.

The following argument is based on a normative commitment to the equal moral status of all which has to be respected in all interactions and connections between people, even if these people

are different (regarding nationality, individual capacity, sex, gender, race, etc.) and occupy different places and roles in a (global) society (being able to consume or to produce, being in need of assistance, etc.). My view is thus based on a variant of global interactional or relational egalitarianism that requires that all interactions—as well as the absence of interaction where such interaction would be possible—are justified and shaped in the light of this fundamental egalitarian commitment.[2]

The paper consists of four sections. The first one introduces the problem of global structural injustice as a distinctive moral wrong and analyses arguments about individual responsibility for global injustice. Section two raises challenges for any account of global individual responsibility. Section three outlines an ethos-based view of individual responsibility for global structural injustice focusing not primarily on specific duties to act to address the severe symptoms. Instead, individuals should primarily target the relational origins of GSI insofar as they are within reach for individual agents. The concluding section four not only discusses some merits, but also identifies limitations of this view.

2 | THE DISTINCTIVE WRONG OF GLOBAL STRUCTURAL INJUSTICE

Over the last decades, scholarship in the field of global justice has pointed out the multiple *connections* between seemingly disconnected events or states of affairs: The abhorrent working conditions in apparel manufacturing in the special export zones of developing countries are linked with international trade agreements and the ultimate consumers buying clothes (Young, 2006). The rising sea-levels and the increase of harsh weather phenomena are influenced by national and international policies which impact on global warming and climate change, as well as by the accumulated effects of individual decisions to consume or purchase certain goods (Cripps, 2013; Gardiner, 2011b). Also the political unrest leading to armed conflict, or the destructive impacts of natural disasters in some places are not disconnected from decisions made elsewhere or made in the past: The lasting legacy of colonial history, to mention but one historical factor, still influences the political and social conditions in numerous former colonies across the globe, and the often flawed transition to independence leaves many nations unstable to this day (Lu, 2011). Another influence destabilizing countries and entire world regions can be found in the rules of the global resource market (Wenar, 2016).[3]

If certain groups of people systematically suffer from disadvantage while other groups systematically enjoy correlated advantages, and if the distribution of advantages and disadvantages is connected through past or present social or causal processes, then, one can identify a distinctive type of injustice, namely *structural injustice*. The actual suffering, deprivation, or disadvantage of some then must not be understood as isolated phenomena. Instead, they are *surface symptoms* of an *underlying, structural problem*. I argue that—among the numerous global inequalities and injustices—the wrong of global structural injustice is a distinctive wrong which commands particular moral attention because of its far-reaching negative impact on the lives of many. A canonical definition of structural injustice has been offered by Iris M. Young. She writes:

"Structural injustice exists when social processes put large categories of persons under a systematic threat of domination or deprivation of the means to develop and exercise their capacities, at the same time as these processes enable others to dominate or have a wide range of opportunities for developing and exercising their capacities. Structural injustice is a kind of moral wrong distinct from the wrongful action of an individual agent or the wilfully repressive policies of a state. Structural injustice occurs as a consequence of many individuals and institutions acting in pursuit of their particular goals and interests, within given institutional rules and accepted norms" (Young, 2006, p. 114).[4]

Three main features characterize structural injustice of a potentially global scope.

1. The common "metric" of the different forms of structural injustice consists in a particular *quality of the relations and interactions* between persons or groups of persons that may ignore or respect the equal moral status of all (Anderson, 1999; Wolff, 1998). Structural injustice is shaped by relational inequality such as domination or exploitation where the more powerful agents, in following their preferences, discount the weight of legitimate claims of the less powerful agents. Yet, structural injustice can appear in different forms—unequal levels of resources, opportunities, well-being, or rights—and should hence be understood in a pluralist way. Furthermore, different disadvantages tend to "cluster," that is, groups and persons that are disadvantaged in one way are more likely to be simultaneously disadvantaged also in another way (Wolff & Avner de-Shalit, 2007, pp. 119–128).

2. Think, for example, of factory workers in Bangladesh producing cheap apparel for the international market, like those who worked under unsafe conditions in the Rana Plaza factory complex where more than thousand workers died and more than two thousand were injured, when the ill-maintained eight floor factory building collapsed in April 2013. The wrong in question is not primarily or solely *that* people died or were injured in this accident; this is just the tip of the iceberg or the symptom of an underlying injustice. What was ultimately wrong in Rana Plaza—and still is wrong in many other places producing for the global market—is the systematic exploitation of often already disadvantaged persons working under unsafe conditions, with insufficient protection of their basic rights and with inadequate pay, while others enjoy corresponding advantages, such as having the opportunity to buy cheap products.

3. A second characteristic of structural injustice, connected to the first, then is that it occurs within a *shared social system* which can be called a "structure." A structure can be understood as "a set of rules and resources recursively implicated in the reproduction of social systems in a way that both presupposes and creates certain patterned constraints on agents' positions and on the degree of social and political power that they control" (Ypi, 2017, p. 9). The "locus" of structural injustice hence consists of the acts and interactions of persons in a common social framework, encouraging or discouraging certain patterns of individual or collective behavior through mechanisms like social expectations or economic, political, or legal regulations. Such social structures potentially extend around the globe and are not restricted to direct interactions or national settings. These connections are complex, often not directly visible and abstract, creating difficulties to see and understand their problematic influence.

4. This point can also be illustrated with regard to the global supply chain linking Rana Plaza with consumer options and decisions in other countries. Consumers buying cheap apparel stand in a long chain of social connection with the workers producing the clothes: Their advantage of having access to cheap clothing is made possible by, even depends on the exploitative working conditions of the disadvantaged sewers. Here, interaction on the world market—according to the existing political and economic regulations—constitutes the relevant frame of interaction (McKeown, 2017; Young, 2011). Alternatively, one can also look at global warming and climate change. Most people living in the regions most affected by the negative outcomes of anthropogenic global warming and climate change have never made any significant contribution to anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions that lie at the origin of climate change (Althor et al., 2016). The pacific islanders being menaced by rising sea-levels, the Ethiopian farmers suffering from yet another draught, or the citizens of Bangladesh whose livelihood is washed away by unprecedented rainfalls are not among the populations whose massive greenhouse gas emissions lead to global warming. Yet, by virtue of sharing the same planet, the climate connects the advantages enjoyed over decades by people in affluent countries with the disadvantages currently being suffered by people everywhere.

5. Connected with this point is a third characteristic of structural injustice, namely that it does not presuppose malevolence or evil intent on the side of any of the partners involved. Instead, such injustice is standardly deeply embedded in and results from the *accepted social background conditions* of peoples' lives. Often it may result from apparently innocuous actions and decisions, when people or groups of people follow their seemingly unproblematic and fully legal preferences. The injustice in question is hence often a problematic result of the behavior of persons who do nothing which they would consider particularly wrong. Yet, the absence of any malevolent intent does not exclude the possibility that certain attitudes and corresponding ways of behavior, particularly when they are widely shared and much repeated, are very much problematic and conducive to injustice.[5] The standards of normalcy then hide structural injustice that remains frequently unseen and unacknowledged.

6. Examples include perfectly accepted standard behaviors like consumer decisions to buy some clothes (which, however, may have been manufactured under sweat-shop conditions) or driving a car (which will produce greenhouse gas emissions increasing the likelihood of climate change). Such acts—instances of apparently blameless acts with unintended consequences—are directly conducive to, may uphold or even increase situation of relative disadvantage suffered by others.[6]

To sum up: The notion global structural injustice (GSI) is a conceptual tool to identify the often hidden *relations* and *connections* between advantages enjoyed by some and disadvantages suffered by others. As such the diagnosis of GSI helps to see through the surface of morally problematic states of affairs to the fundamental structures generating them within a shared system of *interaction*, pointing out that also individuals and their acts and omissions are part of the relational origins of structural injustice. The relevant form of injustice in the case of GSI is in itself primarily *relational* or *interactional*, but it often has tangible distributive implications: it is about relationships of domination, of privilege, power, and exploitation, which, as part of social patterns and structures, do not have to follow from malevolent intent. Subsequent distributive inequalities—among others with regard to income, wealth, access to resources, and opportunities—are symptoms of such fundamentally relational inequalities on the global scale. In consequence, addressing GSI cannot rely exclusively on (re-) distribution of some (non-relational) goods. According to the relational nature of GSI, a more fundamental change in institutional and individual interactions and behavior is required. With regard to institutional and political action to address the wrong of GSI, commitment and progress are slow if they exist at all. This increases the importance of the question whether, and if yes how, the advantaged *individual agents*, that is, ordinary persons as well as those in positions of particular influence, bear responsibility to tackle the wrong of GSI from their individual perspective.

To approach this question, it is first necessary to shift attention from the structural problem to the different ways in which individuals can be entangled in GSI and consequently be considered to be bearers of responsibility. Three main argumentative strategies are frequently employed to explain and to justify the privileged moral responsibility in the face of GSI: being a causal contributor to the problem; enjoying personally unjustified advantages connected to unjustified disadvantages for others; and having the ability to help ending the problem.[7] The underlying idea of all three arguments is that morally relevant connections or relations exist between the disadvantaged and the advantaged people generating responsibility for members of the advantaged group, that is, according to the focus of the present paper, the rather affluent, morally sensible, well-informed, and capable citizens in the industrialized countries of the global North.[8] The first and third argument highlight the importance of past or future *actions* of the privileged, while the second stresses entanglement through having *options*.

Many of the large-scale problems, particularly the consequences of global warming and the injustices in the global market, are influenced by aggregated individual behavior. While probably no-one

intended to cause anthropogenic climate change by greenhouse gas emissions ("It's not my fault," as Sinnott-Armstrong [2005] argued prominently), all those who contributed to the increase of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere are—albeit only in a minuscule way—part of the group that collectively *caused* the problem at hand. It has been subject to debate whether such minuscule contributions that in themselves do not cause any measurable or perceptible harm generate some kind of morally relevant causal responsibility.[9] But a strong argument from tort law can be put forward to justify responsibility also in these cases: as a member of the group whose collective behavior caused a problem, one is a "necessary element of a sufficient set" and hence also personally, causally responsible for its existence (Wright, 1985). Being part of a problem—even if the problem could not have been prevented had one acted differently—assigns a share of causal responsibility to all persons involved, and as such those who have caused the problem should also bear a responsibility to deal with it and to provide solutions (Barry & Macdonald, 2016).[10]

Such connections—and the resulting relations of responsibility—become clearer and weightier, if the problematic structures are seen as conveying *unjustified advantages* to some—at the cost of corresponding, *unjustified disadvantages* suffered by others. The opportunities of citizens in high-income countries (e.g., to drive in polluting, private cars or to purchase cheap clothing, or to vacation in low-income countries) are a flip-side of limited opportunities of others elsewhere (who have, e.g., to deal with rising sea-levels, have to work in factories under sweat-shop conditions or whose economies are hampered by unfair international trade regulations). On this account, it is simply inadequate to limit the normative assessment of the quality of citizen's actions to the immediate outcomes in the near range: the complex global background conditions need to be considered as well; if they appear as morally dubious, even massively unjust, then, the seemingly innocent activities of well-intended citizens in Western societies become morally questionable. The enjoyment of unjustified advantage thus indicates specific connections and responsibilities (Butt, 2007; Calder, 2010). Iris M. Young's seminal argument from "social connections" is the paradigmatic version of this argument: The ongoing social connections that constitute the shared framework of structurally unjust interaction establish a link of responsibility between the beneficiaries of these structures and those suffering the generated disadvantages (Young, 2011).

Another type of arguments for individual responsibility—more controversial than the preceding ones because it presupposes only a loose connection between the advantaged and the disadvantaged—is not based on any claims about *actual* social or causal connectedness or the enjoyment of advantages, but stipulates the *sheer ability* to help someone in distress to be sufficient to generate some degree of personal responsibility to do so.[11] Given the urgency of the need of a disadvantaged person or group, being capable of addressing it constitutes already a morally relevant relationship and connection that can be structurally unjust: the fact that someone's fate existentially depends on what another agent does establishes a relation, even though an asymmetric one in which only one side has the privilege to act about the disadvantage or need in question. Such a relation, shaped by *unilateral* vulnerability, persists even if it is not developed further; that is, when those who could initiate an actual interaction remain passive. Yet, refusing to take action does not eliminate the existing connection. In such cases, *omissions to act* should be understood as *passive contributions* to GSI.[12]

These different connections, often hidden or unacknowledged, establish a relation between those suffering from the structural injustice in question and those who are better off, justifying individual responsibility. Some of those willing to consider GSI from a position of privilege will then often feel torn between a powerful, yet, initially indistinct call for concern, compassion, and action, on the one hand, and a need to develop some degree of indifference to be able to continue one's own life, on the other hand, making it difficult, if not impossible to find a morally defensible middle ground between these two competing impulses (Tessman, 2005). Many will agree that someone should be doing

something about it, often lamenting the inaction of powerful, institutional agents—the international community, governments, multinationals—who seem to be the primary bearers of responsibility to address these issues. This initial reaction, however, strongly felt, nevertheless often fades away without triggering any lasting or significant personal engagement or action.

3 | OBJECTIONS AGAINST INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY

The preceding paragraphs offered arguments for holding individuals responsible in the face of GSI based on different kinds of connections and relations that exist between people not only in the domestic, but also in the global setting. But how exactly should agents respond to GSI? Should individuals, qua-individuals, directly target the massive outrageous symptoms of GSI, the deprivation of many, the unfairness in trade regulations, and the changing global climate? Should they aspire to avoid any implication in the global social dynamics that generate GSI, even though this would be only available at the price of fully withdrawing from public life? Any defense of individual responsibility in this context is facing strong criticism. The present section introduces the three most important objections against arguments for individual responsibility outlined above: the *delegation of responsibility* to other types of agents, the *limited effectivity* of well-intended individual action, and the *overdemandingness* of individual responsibility. Indeed, an individualistic approach that would possibly assign duties for specific acts required or forbidden to individuals, seems to misunderstand the nature of individual human agency, neglect the role and impact of the social structures in which individuals are embedded, and also runs the danger of missing the ultimate target of remedying not only the symptoms, but the origins of GSI.

Responsibility delegated to institutions. Following the influential Rawlsian tradition of theorizing about justice, justice is understood as a "virtue of *institutions*." According to such an institutional understanding of justice and injustice, institutional agents such as states or the international community are necessary and sufficient in dealing with issues of justice, effectively liberating individuals from any possible demand to tackle issues of justice directly through personal action. In the pointed words of Cohen, Rawls distinguished, on the domestic level, "the task of the state, which is to set the just framework, from the nontask of the individual, which is to do as she pleases within that framework" (Cohen, 2008, p. 9).[13] A parallel argument distinguishing institutional responsibility for justice from any interactional obligations of individual agents could also apply to the global level, where then persons would simply be the *wrong type of agents* to solve problems like securing global justice. Such a model of "delegated authority" has also been defended by Gardiner: "According to a long tradition in political theory, political institutions and their leaders are said to be legitimate because, and to the extent that, citizens delegate their own responsibilities and powers to them. The basic idea is that political authorities act in the name of the citizens in order to solve problems that either cannot be addressed, or else would be poorly handled at the individual level, and that this is what, most fundamentally, justifies both their existence and their specific form." (Gardiner, 2011a, p. 53). The role of individuals would then, at best, consist in demanding or supporting institutional reform or the creation of suitable new institutions, nothing else.[14]

Engagement is futile. Another argument against individual responsibility to address structural injustice focusses on the *ineffectiveness* of individual action (cf. e.g., Parfit, 1984). And indeed: While one person might be able to help, say, one other person or have a small impact on a locally confined level, attempting to fix large-scale problems such as global warming or world poverty through individual agency alone seems indeed pointless. The limited impact of individual actions indicates a fundamental *mismatch* between the size of the respective wrong and individual capacity for action. Thus,

many of the options available to individual agents remain, at best, symbolic, and without measurable effect on the outcomes or origins of structural injustice, no matter how many costs a well-intended agent is willing to accept (Dwyer, 2013). Only in special cases can individuals—such as, for example, John Woolman, Mahatma Gandhi, Rosa Parks, Greta Thunberg—actually trigger tangible change by inspiring coordinated action of large numbers of people. But the "ordinary" citizens at the center of the present discussion, cannot reasonably expect to become effective triggers of structural reform, even if they engage in costly behavioral change. In consequence, addressing GSI should not be seen as lying in their responsibility.

The burdens of individual responsibility would be excessive and necessarily undermine motivation. A third weighty challenge to defending individual responsibility consists in pointing out that instances of GSI abound. Accepting responsibility for GSI would thus generate a plethora of urgent and important demands that, conceptually and practically, exceed the capacities of human agents and, motivationally, exceed the psychological capacities of human agents. When taking the demands to act in the face of GSI seriously (and not only as some rather weak prima facie duties than can be easily overridden or canceled by other, prior obligations), holding individuals responsible for numerous demands resulting from GSI will apparently violate the "ought implies can" principle of deontic logic (cf. Martin, 2009). This principle states that moral obligations are to respect the capacities and limitations of the agents, so that no one is subject to moral demands that exceed such capacities. Any moral theory that generates excessive demands stands in violation of the "ought implies can" principle and is conceptually flawed.[15]

The psychological and motivational capacities of—again: even well-intended—individual agents put limits to what can legitimately be demanded from agents. Accepting positive responsibility, if only for the most urgent problems, would place immense moral burdens on the shoulders of individual agents, potentially dominating and disrupting their normal and apparently innocent lives, preventing them from engaging in otherwise morally valuable activities and inspiring massive feelings of guilt and moral failure. In consequence, such excessive demands and permanent confrontation with one's moral imperfection would undermine all motivation to engage in addressing GSI in the first place (cf. Williams, 1981). Thus, both conceptual and psychological-motivational reasons challenge the idea of holding individuals directly responsible for addressing GSI.

These weighty objections against holding individual agents responsible to take personal action in the context of global structural injustice are often employed to justify continuing established lifestyles undisturbed by the ongoing moral catastrophe brought about by structural injustices in the background. But beyond such strategic use to justify the status quo and preserve the relative calm of those who are privileged and even benefit from GSI, these objections need to be taken seriously as critical challenges for developing a specific and convincing account of the responsibilities of individuals in the context of structural injustice. Is it possible to acknowledge individual entanglement in GSI and assign individual responsibility in a way that respects or avoids these constraints?

4 | AN ETHOS-BASED APPROACH

The preceding sections have explained the *role* of individuals in generating and upholding GSI and discussed arguments and objections about assigning *responsibility to* individuals to personally take action to address and remedy GSI. At this point the main challenge of the debate about individual responsibility for structural injustice has become strikingly obvious: Even if individuals contribute to causing and upholding GSI and are thus integral elements to the problem, the potential impact of individual behavior seems to be too small and necessarily insufficient in bringing about a solution (if

it is not embedded in sweeping *collective* behavioral change or *institutional* reform). The mismatch between the immense seize of the problem and the limited capacities of individuals speaks against imposing moral duties on them, and instead speaks in favor of transferring all responsibilities to overcome the problem to institutional and collective agents. But in spite of the limited impact of individual action, letting individuals off the hook is not a morally acceptable option. What is needed—under conditions where urgently needed collective change and institutional reform is simply not (yet) taking place—is an account of individual responsibility that acknowledges the nature and the limits of individual agency as well as the distinctive role and involvement of individuals in the specific problem of GSI. On this alternative account, responsible individual behavior matters primarily insofar as it responds to and targets, within the limited abilities of individual agents, the *relational origins of GSI*. It also does matter some, but not primarily, insofar as it aspires to directly address and remedy the *symptoms of GSI*. Such direct action is then only part of a comprehensive, individual response to GSI. The remainder of this paper spells out and discusses an ethos-based account of cosmopolitan responsibility with a distinctive focus on the many "ordinary" privileged individuals, not the very few exceptional exponents and triggers of structural change.

Although there have been sophisticated accounts of individual responsibility for GSI that attempt to tackle these problems, the strategy of this paper is different in that I will argue that we can conceive of individual responsibility in the form of addressing the root causes of the distinctive problem of GSI: the underlying *relational inequality*, by which I understand, as explained above, the fact that it seems acceptable not to consider everyone as equally deserving of moral concern; a fact deeply embedded within socially accepted norms, in structures and patterns of interaction, repeated over and over again—by individuals, public officials, and institutions—frequently even without malevolent intent.

If GSI is shaped by a widely shared mindset of the (different types of) agents involved, leading to problematic actions being repeated over and over again, individuals who become aware of the problem bear moral responsibility to break out of and attempt to change this entire mindset, or ethos. Individuals, entangled in the dynamics at the origins of GSI, bear responsibility to undermine these very foundations by shaping and changing how they think, feel, talk, and act about GSI. As it is the nature of GSI that it does not result from specific actions alone but is a phenomenon deeply engrained into background ideas of normalcy that permit and encourage certain ways of behavior, addressing GSI—from the side of individuals—must also take a wider approach at the level of the ethos.

But what exactly is an ethos and how can developing the right ethos possibly help discharge individual responsibility for GSI? An ethos consists of guiding normative beliefs central to a person—or a group of persons—that subsequently shape the ways individuals and collectives (inter-) act and respond to certain stimuli. Wolff explains:

"Essentially an ethos is a set of underlying values, which may be explicit or implicit, interpreted as a set of maxims, slogans, or principles, which are then applied in practice. As an idealisation we can identify three levels: values, principles, and practice, all of which are part of the group's ethos. Typically the values and principles will be internalised by members of that group, and inform their behaviour. We can talk of the ethos of a particular society, or of a smaller group, and can raise the question of whether, and how strongly, a particular individual shares the social ethos in question." (Wolff, 1998, p. 105)

Thus, an ethos can be understood as a basic attitude, a mindset corresponding with normative commitments and generating a disposition to feel, think, talk, and act in certain ways. It is "a structure of response lodged in the motivations that inform everyday life" (Cohen, 2000, p. 128) linking *cognition*, *emotion,* and *behavior*. As a *structure* of response an ethos is much more encompassing than any focus on concrete action or fulfilment of specific duties (which, this is not to be denied, can potentially be indicative of an ethos). Having an ethos expresses itself in certain habits, meaning that an agent

standardly and consistently displays cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses in situations of a similar kind. An ethos is a intrapersonal structure, a quasi-institution in the normative setup of a person influencing how agents feel and think, talk, and act with and toward others. I argue that fostering an *ethos* of cosmopolitan responsibility that respects the commitment to relational equality in all interactions is the adequate way for individuals to respond to global *structural* injustice, insofar as it—from the side of individual agents—contradicts and replaces the inegalitarian ethos at the origin of GSI.

Thus, fostering a specific ethos opens for individuals a way to accept and discharge of their responsibility by advancing toward a comprehensive, personal response to the origins of GSI that integrates action, reasoning, and feeling. A person's ethos, intimately connected with the character and personality of an agent, connects *cognitive-rational* elements of explicit normative consideration, with *emotional* or *"sentimental"* elements leading to a *practical disposition* to be motivated to take corresponding action. All three elements—the cognitive, the emotional, the behavioral—can be starting points for shaping the ethos, and ultimately all three starting points should be exploited in order to bring about an ethos that helps to address GSI. Let me explain.

Rational debate about the needs, entitlements, rights, responsibilities, and duties of people interacting or standing in a position to interact with one another can help to explain and strengthen the view that the fundamental moral equality of all gives rise to a cosmopolitan moral community within which the members stand in relation of responsibility to one another. This is the field prominently explored by moral and political philosophy, and the existing literature about structural injustice, universal obligations of a potentially cosmopolitan scope—and the challenges for such views—give evidence of the impressive efforts to achieve clarity through rational analysis. With a particular focus on individual action to address structural injustices, Peeters et al. have made suggestions for "enhancing moral judgements […] based on common-sense morality," exploiting strategies such as highlighting the ability of all to take action and the actual negative impact of their actions with massive harms caused for victims of injustice (Peeters et al., 2015, pp. 108–111).[16] Other strategies include pointing toward human rights and values such as impartiality and virtues such as humility, temperance, and others.[17] Yet, as important as these debates are, such "thin" rational arguments alone often fail to motivate people to act: "At the level of motivation […] the cerebral recognition that we are all members of a common humanity seems not to be enough to get us to 'do' cosmopolitanism" (Dobson, 2006, p. 182; cf. also Woods, 2012, p. 33).

That is why several scholars have made a case for supporting the cognitive side of establishing and understanding the existing relations of cosmopolitan moral responsibility with what can be called "thick" (Dobson, 2006) or "sentimental" (Long, 2009) cosmopolitanism. Martha Nussbaum, for example, has argued in a number of articles for the need to ground cosmopolitan obligations with an emotionally rich feeling of compassion and sense of identity as part of humanity, fostering concern for others and increasing a willingness to take action.[18] Others also made a case for developing "transnational solidarity," understood as "a form of *social empathy*" in international contexts which "involves an *affective* element" (Gould, 2007, p. 149, 156), supporting motivation and an inclination to act. *Feeling*—and not only knowing about—the existing connections and the unjust distribution of different advantages and disadvantages will then be conducive to filling a "motivational vacuum" (Dobson, 2006, p. 165) that is likely to persist if attempts of rational justification remain unconnected to the emotional and motivational resources of human agency.[19] And indeed, as psychological research has shown, increasing moral sentiments about global issues does bolster the motivation to take action (Brock & Atkinson, 2008; Cameron, 2018). So, a better cognitive understanding of and an increased emotional connection with GSI can motivate behavioral change (Markowitz & Shariff, 2012).[20]

The third component of the ethos-based approach is thus dispositional and actual behavioral change in socially embedded *practice*. As social beings, humans standardly and rather easily mimic

the behavior of others and are willing to comply with what they perceive to be dominant justified expectations. That is why change is difficult to implement; but that is also why a rather small number of first movers or "trendsetters" who consistently display and encourage a certain behavior or demand reform have a real chance of triggering general norm change.[21] Novel patterns of behavior are displayed not out of genuine insight or emotional desire, but simply because this is "what one does." The ability to provide reasons for one's behavior and to express emotional congruence with what one does will then follow (cf. Haidt, 2001).

Understanding the powerful social and psychological dynamics point to ways how it can be made easier and more likely for people to behave in morally preferable ways; and an intelligent exploitation of such psychological and social dynamics—that aspire to establish congruence between reasons, emotions, and behavior not only in individual agents, but also in social groups—should be considered as powerful tools to promote progressive practical change, if it is employed in a comprehensive approach for morally justified purposes. Philosophical analysis of individual responsibility for GSI should take these practical dynamics into account and exploit the possibility that individual behavior does inform others, that behavioral norms can change, and that thus individual behavior can contribute to general norm change.

Targeting the development of one's own ethos then is an option genuinely and realistically available to individual agents. Taking the criticism of the preceding section seriously, *it moves the target of individual responses to GSI from directly addressing the oversize symptoms of GSI to addressing the relational origins of GSI insofar as they lie within the reach of one's necessarily limited individual agency*. Doing so will lead to step-wise changes in the way one thinks and talks, feels and acts about GSI, a process that can accommodate the specific circumstances of any moral agent. It can include, for example, such different acts as informing oneself and others, speaking up and raising questions in a discussion with friends, where structural injustices are not seen and justifications for inequalities are provided; visible, symbolically relevant acts like participation in demonstrations and creative forms of protest against injustices, when the opportunity arises; voting, campaigning, and organizing; it can include donations for institutions promoting institutional reform in the many fields of GSI; writing letters to newspapers; abstaining from buying or consuming certain products and discussing about it; and many others. The ethos can also operate, depending on the specific position of an individual, in the form of educating children, teaching pupils, discussing with one's parents or neighbors, telling stories, writing novels, etc. Changes in one's ethos will, inevitably, have only rather limited effects; but—beyond addressing and alleviating some symptoms of GSI a little bit—visible and expressive changes in an individual ethos inform other agents through the essentially communicative function of what one says and does, providing opportunities for potential change also in the collective ethos. In this way, individual responses to GSI as displayed by "ordinary" people will add important bottom-up support for—urgently needed but still insufficiently existing—attempts of top-down structural reforms to systemically address GSI. Success in living up to one's individual responsibility should not be measured in terms of the direct effects of one's actions to alleviate the results of GSI, but in how credibly one fosters, displays, and communicates an ethos of cosmopolitan responsibility that can function as an antidote to the relational origins of GSI.

To better understand the importance of an ethos in spelling out the responsibility of individuals in contexts of structural injustice, it helps to consider that human agency does not consist of discrete and isolated acts but extends over a lifetime during which large numbers of actions are undertaken again and again, some of them after careful deliberation, others more automatically without explicit reflection, and yet, others resulting from acquired or intentionally shaped dispositions. Thus, the moral qualities of what people do should not primarily be assessed with regard to features of specific, concrete instances of decisions and acts. While clearly some single actions are of particularly high importance,

ethical evaluation must pay more attention to the *repeated* everyday action, as well as the general *dispositions* to act in certain ways—even if occasionally people deviate from such somewhat stable dispositions or patterns of action.[22]

Focussing on dispositions and habits in thinking, feeling, talking, and acting—instead of on isolated instances of decisions and actions—is of particular importance for determining the roles and discussing the responsibilities of people in the context of *structural* injustice, which itself does not result from isolated acts of moral wrongdoing but is constituted and upheld by the uncountable, and seemingly unproblematic everyday actions of many people. Currently, the existence of GSI is brought about and perpetuated by a lack of awareness, problematic dispositions and patterns of behavior, and shortage of sympathy—that, taken together, are often indicative of a shortsighted, parochial ethos. Yet, the global conditions and the numerous interconnections that currently lead to GSI require a reconsideration and reform of the ethos held by individuals and groups. If GSI is to be overcome, individual duties demanding concrete acts (or omissions) alone and their limited direct impact on the overall problem thus will remain necessarily superficial and fail to not reach to the fundamental level at the origin of GSI. Instead, it becomes imperative to eventually replace the dominating parochial ethos by an alternative ethos of cosmopolitan responsibility. Individuals can start to foster such an ethos in their own lives right away.

5 | MERITS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE ETHOS-BASED APPROACH

The preceding pages have analyzed the deep entanglement of individual agents, particularly the privileged citizens of the affluent countries, in the distinctive moral wrong of global structural injustice, and proposed an ethos-based approach to spelling out their personal responsibilities to address such injustice. In conclusion, I raise and discuss three critical questions about this proposal. Is the ethos-based account of individual responsibility distinctive—in particular, is it indeed sufficiently different from an approach that would spell out individual responsibility in terms of duties to perform specific acts? Is it sufficiently demanding? And is it not excessively demanding? In providing concluding thoughts on these questions I hope to provide further contours to the ethos-based account, not only highlighting its merits, but also its limitations and the need for further discussion.

One might wonder whether the ethos-based account demanding a comprehensive—cognitive, emotional, and behavioral—response is, in the end, genuinely different from more straightforward duty- or action-based accounts that demand that individuals respond to GSI by taking specific acts (that can potentially be formulated as duties) to tackle the moral wrong of GSI directly. After all, acts that fulfill duties often follow out of such a comprehensive mindset. Yet, while a duty-based and an ethos-based approach partly overlap, only the latter embeds action in a broader perspective allowing to determine the content of individual responsibility in a way that is adequate to both the nature of the original problem and the abilities of human agents.

Given the mismatch between the size of the problem and the abilities of individuals, the futility of individual action, with regard to the overall problem, has already become obvious. Demanding specific acts (including omissions) alone, will inevitably fall short, as I have argued, to address the challenge effectively. Additionally, such acts would in most cases remain at the surface level of the problem. If the nature of GSI is determined by the often unseen relational inequalities in the interactions between (groups of) people, then, addressing its results (e.g., material inequality) can be seen as misguided. What is of prior importance is, first, to understand and acknowledge the social dynamics at the origin of GSI and the individual's entanglement, and then, a willingness to seek change—starting with oneself—in how interactions with others are shaped. Acting against the symptoms of

GSI can be one powerful way to indicate such willingness to seek change, but cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components of a response should work together here. Demanding specific acts alone fails to capture these dimensions insofar as it discounts the need for understanding and ignores the motivational force of emotions, embedded in social lives, by directly and exclusively focussing on the action-component. In this sense, the ethos-based approach provides a richer and more suitable account of moral human agency and responsibility for structural injustice.

Furthermore, since GSI is pervasive in our current unjust world and takes many different shapes, duties to respond to, say, poverty will inevitably conflict with duties to address, say, climate change. Any narrower approach focussing on concrete actions in one field, brackets and ignores the potential actions in any other field (a problem pertinent to most of the debates in responsibility for climate change, world poverty, unfair trade, etc., that exclusively target one domain of GSI). Even if some duty-based actions will possibly address different forms of GSI simultaneously, what should matter most is not that we try to address as many forms of GSI as possible with one act, but that we foster and spread general concern and action about the numerous forms of GSI wherever they occur. The ethos-based approach allows for the possibility to respond to any single one of them out of a general dissatisfaction with and responsibility for the oversize overall problem.

But is such a broader perspective as provided by the ethos-based approach—that would identify many opportunities for concrete action and embed them into a general disposition to take all of them seriously and selectively respond to some of them—not potentially overly permissive with regard to inaction, in one or the other domain of GSI? Does not the ethos-based become insufficiently demanding, when it allows individuals significant discretion to pick and choose what to do and how much to do against whatever form of GSI they choose? I do not worry that a response to GSI in the form as described and demanded by the ethos-based approach would turn out to be insufficiently demanding. Quite to the contrary: once one is starting to see the disastrous effects of pervasive relational inequality, and once one is willing to acknowledge, as a result of the insight about one's own entanglement, to accept an imperative to respond, the demand for responses to GSI generated by the ethos-based approach will proliferate. In consequence, a number of necessarily unmet calls for action will against the different forms of GSI will persist.

If this is the case, then, maybe the ethos-based approach does not deserve to be criticized for being insufficiently, but for being excessively demanding? After all, should a moral theory not be rejected if it generates demands that an agent cannot possibly fulfill? I think that such potential overdemandingness is indicative of the superiority of the ethos-based over an action- or duty-based approach. Duty-based approaches tend to assume that duties actually *can* be met,[23] even under conditions of GSI, which I doubt. The ethos-based approach, instead, acknowledges the fact, that—under current, unjust circumstances and given that the entanglement of the privileged into GSI is so pervasive—moral perfection may be out of reach for the privileged as long as the structural injustice persists. This, however, is the dramatic and regrettable reality, worth to be acknowledged, not to be covered up or denied by the illusionary promise that a moral life is possible under conditions of GSI.

Moral perfection then, is out of reach, as long as injustice persists. But since the ethos-based view is not so much duty- or act-centered, this diagnosis amounts less to a statement about one's personal guilt and failure, and more to a critical and adequate diagnosis of the state of affairs in a massively unjust world. Acknowledging that excessive demands exist thus becomes an essential diagnostic insight of a cosmopolitan ethos; increasing a sense of urgency and supporting the disposition to respond. Only for those primarily concerned with their personal (impossibility to reach) moral perfection, such an insight might undermine motivation. For others, persuaded by ideals of moral and relational equality and seeking just structures of interaction, the persisting existence of GSI is primarily a motivating call for reform: Only in a better world, freed from structural injustices, living a fully moral life would become possible.

Certainly, further research is necessary to advance the ethos-based view outlined in the preceding pages. Also, as should have become clear, the individual ethos-based approach alone, even if endorsed

by a significant number of individuals, would not suffice to effectively end the massive wrong of GSI. Yet, the ethos-based approach offers a conceptual tool to analyse the role and to determine the content of the individual responsibility privileged individuals bear in contexts of structural injustice. As such, it may have directed attention to a valuable starting point for reform that will not only lead to individual moral action to address structural injustices from the bottom up. Additionally, the multiple different forms individual responses to GSI can take will continue to inform others and help create a political climate in which structural reform is demanded and maybe even eventually realized from the top down. While a realistic assessment of the limits of individual responsibility in a structurally unjust world is imperative, even such an assessment does not condemn individuals to despair, nor does it permit inaction. The ethos-based approach outlines how individuals can, and should, understand their role and responsibility in a world shaped by structural injustice.

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ENDNOTES

[1] The primary target of my analysis is the privileged group of rather affluent, morally sensible, well-informed, and capable citizens enjoying a wide range of opportunities in the industrialized high-income countries of what is called, on occasion, the global North. This focus does not exclude that other groups, also bear responsibility. However, their responsibilities are not discussed in the present paper.

[2] Fore more details about global relational egalitarianism, cf. Nath (2011), Ip (2016), Cloarec (2017), Heilinger (2020).

[3] An additional layer of *epistemic* global connection is constituted by the new media and information technologies which make knowledge about states of affairs in different world regions easily accessible everywhere on the globe.

[4] In earlier formulations, when Young introduced the notion of structural injustice, she wrote about structural oppression which is based on "unquestioned norms, habits, and symbols, in the assumptions underlying institutional rules and the collective consequences of following those rules." It is hence deeply engrained in "the normal processes of everyday life" (Young 1990, p. 41). For a recent overview on research on structural injustice cf. Parekh (2017).

[5] This, of course, does not exclude the possibility that global structural injustice may in some cases result from or be increased by careless or straightforward malevolent actions; cf. the discussion in Young (2011). For the distinction between an individualistic and a structural approach, cf. also Haslanger (2012, p. 318).

[6] Sometimes even well-intended acts help to uphold conditions of structural injustice: Charitable acts, like donations to support development in developing countries, can—in some cases—have damaging effects for the local economy or the quest of individuals to become independent and can, as such, uphold structural injustices (Wenar 2011). These examples further highlight the pervasive character of structural injustice.

[7] Expanding Young's terminology, the three responsibility-justifying strategies could be called backward-looking (past contributions), present-looking (current involvement), and forward-looking (future abilities). They are not mutually exclusive and any combination between the three strategies is possible.

[8] Again, focussing on the responsibility of the *advantaged* does not deny the existence of responsibilities of the *disadvantaged* (Young 2011, pp. 145–146), as discussed, for example, in Jugov and Ypi (2019). Furthermore, the binary distinction in advantage and disadvantaged groups obviously simplifies for reasons of clarity: further internal distinctions within groups with regard to relative or perspectival levels of (dis-) advantage apply.

[9] Here is not the place to review this literature, but cf. Smiley (2017).

[10] In a modified way, this holds true even if individual agents cannot be said to have been contributing to bringing the problem into existence in the first place, maybe because it originated before they were born: Even if their actions contribute only to *upholding* the problem, they are entangled in it and bear morally relevant, causal responsibility both for its persistence and for addressing it (Pogge 2008).

[11] To put it pointedly: "can" might, in situations of urgency, "imply ought" (cf. also Collins 2018). This view can be found not only in the consequentialist tradition (e.g., Singer 1972), but also in deontic, rights-based arguments (e.g., Luban 1980, p. 174).

[12] For the domestic context, Shklar has introduced the notion of "passive injustice" to label passive contributions to persisting injustice (Shklar 1990).

[13] Yet, Cohen exaggerates slightly, because Rawls foresees some rules for individual interactions and behavior in a just society (cf. Scheffler 2005).

[14] Cf. also Gould, who argues that "institutional problems require institutional solutions, though this is of course not to absolve individuals of their obligations to help create such institutions." (Gould 2009, p. 207).

[15] For detailed discussions cf. Chappell (2009) and Tessman (2015).

[16] Ultimately, however, Peeters et al. (2015) endorse "thick" cosmopolitanism, introduced in the next paragraph.

[17] Cf. again Peeters et al. (2015, pp. 112–118) and Jamieson (2005).

[18] Cf. Nussbaum (1997, 2002, 2013). More recently, however, she has revised her views and taken to a more critical assessment of the outlook of the "noble but flawed" cosmopolitan tradition (Nussbaum).

[19] These authors, with whom I agree, did not go as far as Rorty did, when he questioned the possibility of and the need for rational justification of relations of responsibility altogether and suggested to *replace* such justification with telling sad and sentimental stories (Rorty 1998). The ethos account defended here, will instead integrate sentimentality as an additional avenue to promoting behavioral change.

[20] Yet, sentimentality would be curtailed if it included only positive feelings such as empathy, sympathy, and solidarity; also more negative feelings—such as possible feeling of culpability and personal failure—have to be taken into account. But it has been shown that stressing such feelings too much can undermine motivation by triggering self-defense mechanisms such as denial. For an overview outlining promising strategies and also pitfalls in motivating global citizenship, cf. Cameron (2017).

[21] Cf. Bicchieri (2016) and Chenoweth and Stephan (2011) for the dynamics of norm change in social groups.

[22] The centrality of dispositions, habits, and the general attitudes shaping human acts has been central in ethics from Aristotle on, who defended the importance of *hexeis*, that is, habit, and the role of virtues (Aristotle, 2009, II.5). More recently, the importance of habit have been taken up in pragmatist ethics (e.g., LaFollette, 2000; Dewey, 1922) and contemporary virtue ethics (starting with Anscombe, 1958).

[23] Cf., for example, Kant who argued that duties do not conflict (1797, p. 224).

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