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RESPONSIBILITY AND GLOBAL JUSTICE: A SOCIAL CONNECTION MODEL*

By Iris Marion Young

I. Introduction

In this essay, I clarify the status of claims about global justice and injustice that are increasingly voiced and accepted in our world. Such claims present a problem for political philosophy because until recently most philosophical approaches to justice assumed that obligations of justice hold only between those living under a common constitution within a single political community. I will argue that obligations of justice arise between persons by virtue of the social processes that connect them; political institutions are the response to these obligations rather than their basis. I develop an account of some of these social processes as structural processes, and I argue that some harms come to people as a result of structural social injustice. Claims that obligations of justice extend globally for some issues, then, are grounded in the fact that some structural social processes connect people across the world without regard to political boundaries.

The second and more central project of this essay is to theorize about the responsibilities moral agents may be said to have in relation to such global social processes. How ought moral agents, whether individual or institutional, conceptualize their responsibilities in relation to global injustice? I propose a model of responsibility based on social connection as an interpretation of obligations of justice arising from structural social processes. I begin, in Section II, with an examination of various views on the extent of obligations of justice. In Section III, I turn to a discussion of justice in the transnational processes of production, distribution, and marketing of clothing, which I use as an example to illustrate the operations of structural social processes that extend widely across regions of the world.[1]

The "social connection model" of responsibility says that all agents who contribute by their actions to the structural processes that produce

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[1] I have begun analysis of global labor justice, focusing on the anti-sweatshop movement, in two previous papers: Iris Young, "From Guilt to Solidarity: Sweatshops and Political Responsibility," in *Dissent*, Spring 2003: 39–45; and Iris Marion Young, "Responsibility and Global Labor Justice," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 12, no. 4 (2004): 365–88.

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injustice have responsibilities to work to remedy these injustices. I discuss the notion of "structural injustice" in Section IV. In Section V, I distinguish the social connection model from a more standard model of responsibility, which I call a "liability model." I specify five features of the social connection model of responsibility that distinguish it from the liability model: it does not isolate perpetrators; it judges background conditions of action; it is more forward-looking than backward-looking; its responsibility is essentially shared; and it can be discharged only through collective action. In Section VI, I sketch four parameters of reasoning that agents can use for thinking about their own action in relation to structural injustice.

II. Global Connections and Obligations of Justice

A widely accepted philosophical view continues to hold that the scope of obligations of justice is defined by membership in a common political community. On this account, people have obligations of justice only to other people with whom they live together under a common constitution, or whom they recognize as belonging to the same nation as themselves. In all of his writing on justice, for example, John Rawls assumes that the scope of those who have obligations of justice to one another is a single relatively closed society.[2] The members of each such society are mutually bound by obligations of justice they do not have to outsiders. This is not to say that insiders have no moral obligations to outsiders. There are some moral obligations that human beings have to one another as human; these are cosmopolitan obligations or obligations to respect human rights. In *The Law of Peoples,* Rawls reiterates that principles of justice as fairness mutually oblige the members of a given society to one another, yet do not apply to the moral relationships among people belonging to different societies across the globe. The law of peoples—which does apply across societies—is broader and thinner than justice as fairness.[3]

Philosopher David Miller also conceives principles of justice as having in their scope only relations among those persons who dwell together within the same nation-state. Obligations to organize coercive institutions to ensure distributive fairness according to need, desert, and equal respect obtain only between persons who belong together in the same nation-state and who live under a single political constitution.[4] Miller worries that a globalizing world is making state sovereignty more porous and liable to being affected by and affecting persons and circumstances outside these nation-state borders. He concludes from this undeniable fact

[2] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971/1999), 7–8.

[3] John Rawls, *The Law of Peoples* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), sec. 1, pp. 11–22.

[4] David Miller, *On Nationality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

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not that principles of justice should follow these globalizing trends, but rather that social justice itself may be a historically specific idea and set of practices whose time is past.[5]

As I understand the logic of this position, it holds that obligations of justice presuppose the existence of shared political institutions. It is incoherent to say that relationships between people are unjust or just, on this interpretation, in the absence of shared institutions for adjudicating such claims or regulating people's relations. Some more general and less stringent obligations obtain between persons across political jurisdictions just because they are human, but these are not obligations of justice.

A contrary position about moral obligation is one that I will call the "cosmopolitan-utilitarian model." On this view, nation-state membership or any other sort of particularist relationship among persons is irrelevant to assessing the nature, depth, or scope of obligations they have to one another. Moral agents have identical obligations to all human beings and perhaps to some nonhuman creatures. There is a moral imperative to minimize suffering, wherever it occurs. Every agent is obliged to do what he or she can to minimize suffering everywhere, right up to the point where he or she begins to suffer. Membership in a political order, either on the part of the agent or the sufferers, is relevant only instrumentally as providing efficient means of discharging obligations and distributing particular tasks. Much about global relationships, however, can override this issue of convenience. Peter Singer and Peter Unger are two prominent examples of theorists who hold this view.[6]

I think that each of these accounts is wanting. Critics of the cosmopolitan-utilitarian model argue that it is too demanding.[7] It flies in the face of moral intuition, moreover, to suggest that all moral agents have exactly the same duties to all other agents and no special obligations to some subset of persons with whom an agent has a special relationship. While the basic moral respect owed to all persons grounds the cosmopolitan obligations that Immanuel Kant calls hospitality,[8] obligations of justice require more and are based on more than common humanity.

Nevertheless, critics of the position that limits the scope of obligations of justice to members of a common political order are right to argue that it is arbitrary to consider nation-state membership as a source of obligations of justice. Political communities have evolved in contingent and

[5] David Miller, *Principles of Social Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), chap. 1.

[6] See Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), chaps. 2 and 9; and Peter Unger, *Living High and Letting Die: Our Illusion of Innocence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

[7] See, for example, Samuel Scheffler, *Boundaries and Allegiances: Problems of Responsibility and Justice in Liberal Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); and Neera K. Badhwar, "International Aid: When Giving Becomes a Vice," elsewhere in this volume.

[8] Immanuel Kant, "To Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch" (1795), in Ted Humphrey, trans., *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1983), 107–44.

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arbitrary ways that are more connected to power than to moral right. People often stand in dense relationships with others prior to, apart from, or outside political communities. These relationships may be such that people's actions affect one another in ways that tend to produce conflict. Or people may cooperate with numbers of others in ongoing practices and institutions that meet some shared objectives. In such social relations, we expect fair terms of conflict-resolution and cooperation. Thus, in contrast with the cosmopolitan-utilitarian position, I believe that some account needs to be offered of the nature of social relationships that ground claims that people have obligations of justice to one another. It is not enough to say that the others are human.

The nation-state position, however, makes prior what is posterior from a moral point of view. Ontologically and morally, though not necessarily temporally, social connection is prior to political institutions. This is the great insight of social contract theory. The social connections of civil society may well exist without political institutions to govern them. A society consists in connected or mutually influencing institutions and practices through which people enact their projects and seek their happiness, and in doing so affect the conditions under which others act, often profoundly. A social contract theory like that of John Locke argues that the need and desire for political institutions arises because socially connected persons with multiple and sometimes conflicting institutional commitments recognize that their relationships are liable to conflict and inequalities of power that can lead to mistrust, violence, exploitation, and domination. The moral status of political institutions arises from the obligations of justice generated by social connection: such institutions are instruments through which these obligations can be discharged.

In his landmark work *Political Theory and International Relations*, Charles Beitz challenged Rawls's assumption that the scope of obligations of justice extends only among members of a single political community by arguing that there exists an international *society* even in the absence of a comprehensive political constitution to regulate it. Ongoing economic processes of production, investment, and trade connect people in diverse regions of the world, and these relationships are often unequal in power and material resources. People move across borders, and institutions of expression and communication are increasingly global in their reach. The activities of many religious, artistic, scientific, legal, and service-providing institutions and networks extend to many parts of the world without too much regard for nation-state membership and boundaries. Beitz concludes that principles of justice like those Rawls argues for apply globally because there are dense global social and economic relationships.[9] A need for political institutions wide enough in scope and sufficiently strong to

[9] Charles Beitz, *Political Theory and International Relations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979).

regulate these relationships to insure their fairness *follows from* the global scope of obligations of justice, rather than *grounding* those obligations.

Onora O'Neill argues somewhat differently to reach a similar conclusion. The scope of an agent's moral obligation extends to all those whom the agent assumes in conducting her or his activity. Each of us pursues our interests and goals within the frame of specific institutions and practices, and within which we know others do the same. Our actions are partly based on the actions of others, insofar as we depend on them to carry out certain tasks, and/or insofar as our general knowledge of what other people are doing enables us to formulate expectations and predictions about events and institutional outcomes that affect us or condition our actions. In today's world of globalized markets, interdependent states, and rapid and dense communication, the scope of the actors we implicitly assume in many of our actions is often global. The social relations that connect us to others are not restricted to nation-state borders. Our actions are conditioned by and contribute to institutions that affect distant others, and their actions contribute to the operation of institutions that affect us. Because our actions assume these others as a condition for our own actions, O'Neill argues, we have made practical moral commitments to them by virtue of our actions. That is, even when we are not conscious of or when we actively deny a moral relationship to these other people, to the extent that our actions depend on the assumption that distant others are doing certain things, we have obligations of justice in relation to them.

It is not possible to trace how each person's actions produce specific effects on others because there are too many mediating actions and events. Nevertheless, we have obligations to those who condition and enable our own actions, as they do to us. O'Neill argues, however, that there is an asymmetry in these obligations insofar as some people are rendered more vulnerable to coercion, domination, or deprivation by the institutional relations. While everyone in the system of structural and institutional relations stands in circumstances of justice that give them obligations with respect to all the others, those institutionally and materially situated to be able to do more to affect the conditions of vulnerability have greater obligations.[10]

I interpret both Beitz and O'Neill, along with other theorists of global justice such as Thomas Pogge,[11] as describing transnational social *structures,* and I interpret the injustices they may generate as structural injustices. Allen Buchanan similarly argues that there exists a global basic structure that generates obligations of justice between people across

[10] Onora O'Neill, *Faces of Hunger* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1985); Onora O'Neill, *Toward Justice and Virtue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), chap. 4. Cf. Robert Goodin, *Protecting the Vulnerable* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); and Thomas Pogge, *World Poverty and Human Rights* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), esp. chaps. 1, 2, and 4.

[11] See Pogge, *World Poverty and Human Rights.*

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national boundaries.[12] Before I conceptualize structural injustice and introduce the concept of responsibility that corresponds to it, however, let me elaborate a particular example of claims about injustice as involving transnational social connection: namely, the anti-sweatshop movement.

III. Example of Global Injustice: Sweatshops

Although I believe that the social connection model of responsibility applies to every case of structural injustice, whether local or global, relationships in the global apparel industry offer a perspicuous example through which I will explain the logic of the social connection model. A vocal and multilayered anti-sweatshop movement, moreover, has in recent years pressed claims on a variety of agents to take responsibility for sweatshop conditions.

Anti-sweatshop activists have made claims on institutions that purchase clothing in bulk, such as city governments,[13] or that market clothing bearing their name or logo, such as universities,[14] to take responsibility for the poor conditions under which these garments are produced, often in factories on the other side of the world. Social movement activists have also passed out leaflets in front of brand-name apparel stores such as the Gap or Nike or Disney, or more generic clothing retailers such as Target and Wal-Mart, explaining that much of the clothing sold in those stores is made under sweatshop conditions, and calling upon consumers to take responsibility for those conditions.

Not a few institutions and individuals find absurd the idea that consumers and retailers bear responsibility for working conditions in faraway factories, often in other countries. Not unreasonably, they say that even if the workers producing the items they buy suffer wrongful exploitation and injustice, we here have nothing to do with it. It is, rather, the owners and managers of the factories who are to blame. Despite the apparent reasonableness of this dissociation, the claims of the anti-sweatshop movement seem to have struck a chord with many individuals and institutions. I think that to understand why this is so, we need a conception of responsibility different from the standard notion of blame or liability.

[12] Allen Buchanan, "Rawls's Law of Peoples: Rules for a Vanished Westphalian World," *Ethics* 110, no. 4 (2000): 697–721; Allen Buchanan, *Justice, Legitimacy, and Self-Determination: Moral Foundations for International Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), esp. 83 and 84.

[13] In April 2003, for example, the Milwaukee Common Council voted unanimously for an ordinance requiring the procurement of apparel for city staff from manufacturers that meet several labor-rights conditions; see "Sweatfree Communities Gain Ground," Campaign for Labor Rights, http://www.clrlabor.org.

[14] Lisa Featherstone, *Students against Sweatshops* (London: Verso, 2000); Mischa Gaus, "The Maturing Movement against Sweatshops," *In These Times,* February 16, 2004: 34 and 52.

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What, then, are "sweatshops"? Many of the articles of clothing, shoes, and other small consumer items whose production is labor-intensive are produced in relatively small manufacturing centers in less-developed countries, manufacturing centers that operate at the bottom of a chain of specification, distribution, and marketing that often involves hundreds of distinct companies. Research on the global apparel industry has brought to light that sweatshops abound in North America and Europe.[15] The vast majority of sweatshops, however, operate in less-developed countries. Among the merchandise purchased in the United States in 2000, 85 percent of footwear and 50 percent of apparel was imported.[16]

Conditions in such manufacturing facilities vary of course, but the following are typical. The vast majority of workers are female, and often as young as thirteen or fourteen. They are often treated in dominative and abusive ways by bosses, and sexual harassment is common. Typically, they work ten- to sixteen-hour days in peak seasons; if the manufacturer is behind on an order, the workers may be forced to work through the night. They have few bathroom breaks or other opportunities for rest during their long working day. Sick leave or vacation time are generally unavailable; a worker too ill to work is often fired. Violations of the most basic health and safety standards are normal. Factories are often excessively hot with no ventilation, insufficient lighting, excessive noise, little fire-fighting equipment, blocked exits, poor sanitation, unhygienic canteens and bathrooms, and no access to clean drinking water. Typically, workers in these facilities have no freedom to organize unions to bargain collectively with their employers. Workers who complain and try to organize are typically threatened, fired, blacklisted, beaten, and even killed. Local governments often actively or passively support such anti-union activity.[17]

There should be little doubt that conditions such as these violate basic human rights. Many international agreements and conventions prohibit violence and intimidation in the workplace (as elsewhere) and stipulate that workers should not labor under conditions that threaten their basic health and physical safety. The meaning of such rights, moreover, ought to vary little with local culture or level of industrial development. Exhaustion and the need to use the bathroom are cross-cultural experiences. The right to assemble and organize ought to be recognized everywhere, and it is everywhere wrong to intimidate and beat people who try to exercise

[15] See Peter Kwong, "Forbidden Workers and the U.S. Labor Movement," *Critical Asian Studies* 31, no. 1 (2002): 69–88; and Edna Bonacich and Richard P. Appelbaum, *Behind the Label: Inequality in the Los Angeles Apparel Industry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

[16] See Kimberly Ann Elliott and Richard B. Freeman, *Can Labor Standards Improve under Globalization?* (Washington, DC: Institute for International Economics, 2004), 55.

[17] For an account of working conditions, see Ellen Israel Rosen, *Making Sweatshops: The Globalization of the U.S. Apparel Industry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), chap. 2; and Naomi Klein, *No Logo* (New York: Picador, 1999), esp. chap. 9.

this right. To say that these are rights is to say precisely that there is no valid moral argument for trading them off against profits, or policies designed to foster economic growth, or the earnings of the workers. If many workers endure these violations without complaint because they desperately need those earnings, this is a measure of the coercive pressures of their circumstances rather than of their consent.

But what of their earnings? Economists argue that wage levels for the same kind of work appropriately vary with the local cost of living and labor market conditions, and they are right. Those who argue that the standard of living for workers in sweatshops is often higher than in the countryside from which many of them have moved may be correct. The wage levels of workers in the apparel industry are nevertheless often far below the legal minimum wage.[18] Employers too often renege, moreover, in paying even these meager wages.[19] The workers generally have no recourse when employers underpay them, because they often have no formal employment contracts, and the employers keep poor records or no records of the hours employees have worked. It may be true that under normal market conditions a rise in wages for some workers will mean a loss of jobs for others; where the wages of a massive number of workers are below subsistence level, as they often are, this is more an argument against accepting normal market conditions than against paying living wages.

Thus far, I have cited typical conditions for garment workers in factories. A significant portion of the people who put garments together, however, work from their homes. Employers often prefer contracting out to homeworkers because then the employers do not have to pay for facilities and overhead and they are not legally responsible for working conditions. Workers, especially women workers, often prefer home work to factory work even when it pays less, because they can avoid long and potentially harassing travels to work, can stay with their children, and can save face for their husbands, who can pretend that their wives are not working.[20] Homeworkers are often the poorest paid, however, and work the longest self-imposed hours. The children or old people with whom the worker wants to stay home, moreover, are often enlisted to help with the work.[21]

[18] Most of the countries in which factories such as those I am describing operate do have minimum wage laws, as well as regulation of other labor conditions. In many cases, these laws could be more comprehensive and stronger, of course. For a comprehensive country-by-country survey of labor regulation, see the Industrial Labor Organization, http://www.ilo.org. The primary problem with labor regulation in much of the world, however, including arguably the United States, is lack of enforcement rather than lack of standards.

[19] See Women Working Worldwide, "Garment Industry Subcontracting and Workers' Rights," http://www.cleanclothes.org.

[20] See Saba Gul Khattak, "Subcontracted Work and Gender Relations: The Case of Pakistan," in Radhika Balakrishnan, ed., *The Hidden Assembly Line: Gender Dynamics of Subcontracted Work in a Global Economy* (Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press, 2002), 35–62.

[21] Andrew Ross, *Low Pay, High Profile: The Global Push for Fair Labor* (New York: The New Press, 2004), esp. chap. 2.

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The subject of this essay is responsibility in relation to injustice. The structure of the global apparel industry diffuses responsibility for sweatshop conditions. Big-name retailers in North America or Europe rarely themselves own and operate factories in which clothes made to their order are manufactured. Instead, there is a complex chain of production and distribution involving dozens or thousands of contractually distinct entities that bring the clothes manufactured in one place to the stores in which people buy them. In this system, each of the links in the chain believes itself to be operating close to the margin in a highly competitive environment, and usually is under heavy pressure to meet orders at low cost by firms higher up the chain. The firms higher up the chain, however, often have no legal responsibility for the policies and operations of the firms below with which they contract.

Facilities where garments and other items are manufactured are typically small. Their activities are difficult to regulate or monitor because their operations frequently shut down in one place and open up in another. The export processing zone policies of many developing countries encourage investment in such firms and generally turn a blind eye to the extent to which the firms comply with local labor laws.

In their book *Can Labor Standards Improve under Globalization?*, Kimberly Elliott and Richard Freeman describe the structure of one U.S. retailer, J.C. Penney, and its subcontracting relations in one developing country, the Philippines. J.C. Penney purchases finished goods through a U.S. importer, Renzo. Renzo conveys J.C. Penney's specifications to Robillard Resources, a Philippino exporter, which contracts with a Philippino clothing contractor that organizes a production chain that includes numerous subcontracting factories. These subcontractors, in turn, not only organize and supervise factory production of apparel parts, but also organize a system of contracting out to workers in their homes.[22] According to Elliott and Freeman, J.C. Penney alone contracts with over two thousand suppliers in more than eighty countries. Nordstrom has over fifty thousand contractors and subcontractors, and Disney licenses products in over thirty thousand factories around the world.

Another aspect of the structure of this industry that is relevant for issues of assigning responsibility has to do with the way that the positions of employer and employee are often blurred in this system. In some factories, production line leaders act as subcontracting agents for homeworkers, with the permission and assistance of management. Line workers and homeworkers rarely receive written contracts; they are encouraged to think of themselves as "self-employed."[23]

[22] Elliott and Freeman, *Can Labor Standards Improve under Globalization?*, 50–54.

[23] Elisabeth Prugl and Irene Tinker, "Microentrepreneurs and Homeworkers: Convergent Categories," *World Development* 25, no. 9 (1997): 1471–82; Women Working Worldwide, "Garment Industry Subcontracting and Workers' Rights."

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In this complex system of production and distribution, the workers who make garments are at the bottom of the chain. The wages they earn generally amount to a small portion of the retail price of an item, often under 6 percent.[24] Each layer of subcontracting that runs between the manufacturer and the store in which the consumer buys the finished items adds to the cost of items. Major logo retailers usually make handsome profits from this system; as one moves down the chain of production and distribution, firms operate in more competitive environments. Small subcontractors in developing countries frequently operate right at the edge of solvency.

Anti-sweatshop activists argue that the workers at the bottom of this system suffer injustice in the form of domination, coercion, and need-deprivation within a global system of vast inequalities. Because of the complexity of the system that brings items from production to sale, and the manner in which the system constrains the options of many of the actors within it, this is an example of *structural* injustice.[25] I will now articulate that concept more generally.

IV. Structural Injustice

In *A Theory of Justice,* John Rawls says that the subject of justice is the basic structure of society, which concerns "the way in which the major social institutions distribute fundamental rights and duties and determine the division of advantages from social cooperation."[26] Major institutions, on his view, include the legal system's definition of basic rights and duties, market relations, the system of property in the means of production, and family organization. To these I would add the basic kinds of positions in the social division of labor.

Rawls says little more about what the concept of structure refers to, however. Social theorists use the term in many ways, and I will not review them here.[27] As I understand the concept, structures denote the confluence of institutional rules and interactive routines, mobilization of resources, as well as physical structures such as buildings and roads.

[24] See John Miller, "Why Economists Are Wrong about Sweatshops and the Antisweatshop Movement," *Challenge* 46, no. 1 (2003): 93–122; see also Robert Pollin, Justine Burns, and James Heintz, "Global Apparel Production and Sweatshop Labour: Can Raising Retail Prices Finance Living Wages?" *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 28 (2004): 153–71.

[25] In previous work, I have begun developing an account of structural injustice. See Iris Marion Young, "Equality of Whom? Social Groups and Judgments of Injustice," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 9, no. 1 (2001): 1–18; Young, *Inclusion and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), esp. chap. 3; and Young, "Lived Body vs. Gender: Reflections on Social Structure and Subjectivity," *Ratio: An International Journal of Analytic Philosophy* 15, no. 4 (2002): 411–28.

[26] Rawls, *A Theory of Justice,* 7.

[27] For one catalog of uses by English language theorists through the mid-1970s, see Peter M. Blau, "Introduction: Parallels and Contrasts in Structural Inquiries," in Peter M. Blau, ed., *Approaches to the Study of Social Structure* (New York: The Free Press, 1975), 1–20.

These constitute the historical givens in relation to which individuals act, and which are relatively stable over time. Social structures serve as background conditions for individual actions by presenting actors with options; they provide "channels" that both enable action and constrain it.[28]

I will build an account of structure and structural processes using elements derived from several theorists. Sociologist Peter Blau offers the following definition: "A social structure can be defined as a multidimensional space of differentiated social positions among which a population is distributed. The social associations of people provide both the criterion for distinguishing social positions and the connections among them that make them elements of a single social structure."[29] Blau exploits the spatial metaphor implied by the concept of structure. Individual people occupy varying *positions* in the social space, and their positions stand in determinate relations to other positions. Although social theorist Pierre Bourdieu uses very different language and concepts for theorizing social structures, he too begins from a spatial metaphor. He conceives structures as "fields" on which individuals stand in varying positions in relation to one another, offering possibilities for interpretation and action.[30]

The "structure" in social structures consists in the connections among these positions and their relationships, and the way the attributes of positions internally constitute one another through those relationships. Young unskilled workers who migrate from the countryside to the city, or from one country to another, stand in a certain structural class position in relation to the small entrepreneurs who employ them for apparel manufacture. The entrepreneurs, in turn, stand in structural positions in relation to investors in large exporting firms and executives in the multinational corporations whose labels the clothes sport. The workers and potential workers also occupy particular gendered positions in relations to their employers; their positions may also be structured by racial or ethnic differences that render them vulnerable to exclusion or discrimination. These differing structural positions offer differing and unequal opportunities and potential benefits to their occupants, and their relations are such that constrained opportunities and minimal benefits for some often correlate with wider opportunities and greater benefits for others.

It is misleading, however, to reify the metaphor of structure, to think of social structures as entities independent of social actors, lying passively around them and easing or inhibiting their movement. On the contrary, a social structure exists only in the action and interaction of persons; it exists not as a state, but as a process. Anthony Giddens calls this process "structuration." He defines social structures in terms of "rules and

[28] Jeffrey Reiman, among others, uses this channel metaphor. See Jeffrey Reiman, *Justice and Modern Moral Philosophy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 213.

[29] Peter M. Blau, *Inequality and Heterogeneity* (New York: The Free Press, 1977), 4.

[30] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1980), book 1.

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resources, recursively implicated in the reproduction of social systems."[31] In the idea of the duality of structure, Giddens theorizes how people act on the basis of their knowledge of preexisting structures and in so acting reproduce those structures. People do so because they act according to rules and expectations and because their relationally constituted positions make or do not make certain resources available to them.

Much about the dynamics of the apparel industry, for example, presupposes practices of fashion. Consumers, especially affluent consumers in the developed world with disposable income, often want to be stylish, and look to friends and media stars to determine what stylish means and whether it is changing. They often "need" new clothes even when those they own are in fine shape. Major retailers both follow the trends of fashion and try to manipulate them. Ideas of what is fashionable, as well as conventions of clothes marketed for different "seasons" during the year, drive much about the size of orders and the speed with which they are expected to be delivered, which constrain manufacturers and lead them to overwork workers. Most of these people act as though fashion is some kind of natural force, when in fact its constraints are produced by the ideas that people have about it and the actions they take presuming those ideas.

Defining structures in terms of the rules and resources brought to actions and interactions, however, makes the emergence of structures sound too much like the product of individual and intentional action. The concept of social structure must also include conditions under which actors act, a collective outcome of action which is often impressed onto the physical environment. Jean-Paul Sartre calls this aspect of social structuration the *practico-inert.*[32] Most of the conditions under which people act are sociohistorical: they are the products of previous actions, usually products of many coordinated and uncoordinated but mutually influencing actions. Those collective actions have left determinate effects on the physical and cultural environment, effects that condition future action in specific ways. The gradual consolidation of land holdings by large firms has left many peasants with poor land or no land from which they can eke out subsistence. Thus, many of them move in search of work, erecting shanty towns at the edges of cities. The export processing zones many governments have established, where some of these migrants find work, are consequences of a history of structural adjustment programs that many indebted governments have been pressured to implement by international financial institutions. The background conditions of the lives of these young workers today are structural consequences of decisions and aggregated economic processes beginning more than three decades ago.

[31] Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 25.

[32] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason,* trans. Alan Sheridan-Smith (London: New Left Books, 1976), book 1, chap. 3.

This leads us to a final aspect of the concept of social structure. It is not merely the case that the actions and interactions of differently positioned persons, drawing on the rules and resources the structures offer, take place on the basis of past actions whose collective effects mark the physical conditions of action; these actions and interactions also often have future effects beyond the immediate purposes and intentions of the actors. Structured social action and interaction often have collective results that no one intends, results that may even be counter to the best intentions of the actors. Sartre calls such effects "counter-finalities."[33] When a large number of investors make a speculative run on currencies in anticipation of their devaluation, for example, they often unintentionally but predictably produce a financial crisis that throws some people out of work and ruins the fortunes of others.[34]

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 willfully 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. All the persons who participate by their actions in the ongoing schemes of cooperation that constitute these structures are responsible for them, in the sense that they are part of the process that causes them. They are not responsible, however, in the sense of having directed the process or intended its outcomes.

Persons stand in systematically different and unequal social positions due to the way institutions operate together. Rather than being a static condition, these factors that constrain and enable individual possibilities are ongoing processes in which many actors participate. These constraints and enablements occur not only by means of institutional rules and norms enforced by sanctions, but by means of incentive structures that make some courses of action particularly attractive and carry little cost for some people, or make other courses of action particularly costly for others. The injustice does not consist in the bare fact that structures constrain actors, for all social structures constrain as well as enable. Rather, the injustice consists in the *way* they constrain and enable, and how these constraints and enablements expand or contract individuals' opportunities. The institutional rules, resources, and practices through which people act do not constitute, in Rawls's phrase, fair terms of cooperation.

[33] Ibid., 277–92.

[34] See Joseph E. Stiglitz, *Globalization and Its Discontents* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2002), chap. 4.

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When consumers who take flyers from activists in front of Disney stores react to information about sweatshop working conditions with shock or outrage, they are implicitly making a judgment of injustice. They make the judgment that the workers do not merely suffer misfortune, as though a hurricane had carried away their houses, but that the suffering is socially caused. Somebody, we are inclined to say, ought to do something about this. To make the judgment that poor working conditions are unjust implies that somebody *bears responsibility* for these working conditions and for their improvement. If the injustice has causes rooted in social structures, however, then it would seem that all those who participate in producing and reproducing the structures are implicated in that responsibility. When we say an injustice such as working to exhaustion is structural, we are saying that the workers are not simply victims of mean bosses, although this may be true. Identification of the wrongs that individual actors perpetrate toward them needs to be supplemented with an account of how macro-social processes encourage such wrongs, and why they are widespread and repeated. My question is: How shall we conceptualize responsibility for producing and rectifying structural injustice?

This question presents a puzzle, I suggest, because standard models of responsibility in moral and legal theory do not supply a satisfactory answer. Standard conceptions of legal and moral responsibility appear to require that we trace a direct relationship between the action of an identifiable person or group and a harm. Although structural processes that produce injustice result from the actions of many persons and the policies of many organizations, in most cases it is not possible to trace which specific actions of which specific agents cause which specific parts of the structural processes or their outcomes. In what follows, I offer some steps toward a solution to this puzzle by means of a concept of responsibility in relation to injustice that differs from standard models of moral and legal responsibility. A "social connection model" of responsibility, as I call it, better conceptualizes moral and political issues of responsibility in relation to transnational structural injustice than does what I will call a "liability model" of responsibility.

V. Two Models of Responsibility: Liability and Social Connection

Journalists, religious leaders, social movement activists, and philosophers today sometimes make claims that people in relatively free and affluent countries such as the United States, Canada, or Germany have responsibilities in relation to the harms and deprivations experienced by millions of people in the less-developed world. The claims of the anti-sweatshop movement are one concrete example of such claims and have been relatively successful in getting a hearing and motivating action. To

make sense of such claims, I suggest, we need a conception of responsibility different from the most common conception, the liability model. In this section, I offer some elements of a conception of responsibility that, I argue, derives from connection to structural social processes that produce injustice. I explicate this social connection model of responsibility by contrasting it with the liability model.

A. The liability model

The most common model of assigning responsibility derives from legal reasoning employed to establish guilt or fault for a harm. Under this liability model, one assigns responsibility to a particular agent (or agents) whose actions can be shown to be causally connected to the circumstances for which responsibility is sought. This agent can be a collective entity, such as a corporation, but when it is, the analysis treats that entity as a single agent for the purposes of assigning responsibility.[35] The actions found to be causally connected to the circumstances are shown to have been voluntary and performed with adequate knowledge of the situation. If candidates for responsibility can successfully show that their action was not voluntary or that they were excusably ignorant, then their responsibility is usually mitigated if not dissolved. When the actions were voluntary and were undertaken knowingly, however, it is appropriate to blame the agents for the harmful outcomes.[36] A concept of strict liability departs from a fault or blame model in that it holds an agent liable for a harm even if the agent did not intend or was unable to control the outcome, such as when one person's property accidentally causes damage to another person's property.[37] I include such non-blame conceptions of liability together with blame- or fault-based conceptions in a single category of responsibility, because they share the conceptual and functional features I detail below.

In many situations, it is certainly appropriate to apply a liability model of responsibility for human rights violations that occur in apparel factories and in cases where work is subcontracted to homeworkers. When factory owners and managers violate local labor laws, for example, as they often do, they ought to be punished.[38] If states in which factories operate fail to find offenders and punish them, as they often do, they

[35] Peter French, *Collective and Corporate Responsibility* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

[36] See George Fletcher, *Basic Concepts of Criminal Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), for a clear statement of this model of responsibility.

[37] See, for example, Tony Honoré, "Responsibility and Luck: The Moral Basis of Strict Liability," in Honoré, *Responsibility and Fault* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 14–40.

[38] As I discussed in note 18, in most cases there are labor laws in place, and sweatshop conditions are often violating them. Sometimes this is because the host countries make exceptions to their labor regulation standards in special manufacturing zones. In many other cases, the problem is that factory operators, distributors, retailers, and others are able to ignore labor laws with impunity. See Bonacich and Appelbaum, *Behind the Label,* chaps. 2 and 8.

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ought morally to be blamed for this failure, and the international community should perhaps find ways to apply sanctions to them. Bosses that harass and intimidate workers, managers who put productivity above workers' health, and so on, certainly should be held responsible in a liability sense for wrongful harms that these workers suffer.

As I have discussed, however, particular workers in particular facilities in particular places stand within an extensive system of structural social processes that connect the making of garments to those who wear them. Within this system, it is often plausible for the first-line agents of harm to try to mitigate their responsibility by appealing to factors outside their control. They may claim that they have little choice about the wages they pay, and cannot afford to give workers time off or to invest in better ventilation and equipment. They operate in a highly competitive environment, they say, where other operators constantly try to undercut them. They themselves are operating at the edge of solvency and are not exactly making huge profits. They can stay in business only by selling goods at or below the prices of worldwide competitors, and they can do that only by keeping labor costs and other production costs to a minimum.[39] They are under heavy pressure from the exporters who place orders with them to deliver, and the exporters in turn are under heavy pressure from the big-name companies that have placed orders with them. The owners and managers of the factories in which the workers toil are small actors with relatively little power in this global system.

A typical justification for state-enforced labor standards appeals to the need to maintain a level playing field among competitors. If there is a human rights floor below which wages and working conditions should not be allowed to fall, the state is the proper agent to guarantee such a floor through regulation. In this way, those employers who wish to be decent to workers need not fear being undersold by less-scrupulous employers.

Certainly the states in which sweatshops operate must be blamed for allowing them to exist. In these states, many of the agencies charged with enforcing labor regulations are inept and corrupt, and often enough some of their officials directly profit from the system that exploits their poor compatriots. As the anti-sweatshop movement uncovers the existence of factories with sweatshop conditions in the United States and other countries with supposedly high labor standards and good enforcement processes, it should certainly blame these agencies for not doing their jobs.

There is no excuse for national and state governments in the United States not to enforce labor standards in the apparel industry, or any other

[39] For an account of the constraints on actors in the global apparel industry, see Rosen, *Making Sweatshops*, chap. 11; see also Bonacich and Appelbaum, *Behind the Label*, chaps. 2 and 5.

industry, and the record here is rather poor.[40] Some governments of less-developed countries, however, can say with some justification that they are under severe constraints that prevent them from improving working conditions. Some of these governments have indirectly encouraged sweatshop practices by constituting special export processing zones whose factories are exempt from taxation and forms of regulation that apply to other enterprises in the country. They have often been advised to establish such zones by international economic experts. These governments will say that they desperately need investment and jobs, and that to get them they must compete with other poor states to promote a "favorable" investment climate, which includes low taxes and minimal regulation. To avoid or pay down balance-of-trade deficits, they need companies that produce for export. They have never had a strong enough public sector properly to monitor and enforce compliance with the labor regulations they develop, and it is difficult to create one with their low tax base. Public-sector regulating capacity has been reduced further in some cases by policy responses to the actions of international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, which pressures borrowing states to reduce public spending.

A concept of responsibility as blame or liability is indispensable for a legal system and for a sense of moral right that respects agents as individuals and expects them to behave in respectful ways toward others. When applying this concept of responsibility, there must be clear rules of evidence, not only for demonstrating the causal connection between a given agent and a given harm, but also for evaluating the intentions, motives, and consequences of the actions. By proposing a social connection model of responsibility, I do not aim to replace or reject the liability model of responsibility. The foregoing considerations suggest, however, that where there is structural social injustice, a liability model is not sufficient for assigning responsibility. The liability model relies on a fairly direct interaction between the wrongdoer and the wronged party. Where structural social processes constrain and enable many actors in complex relations, however, those with the greatest power in the system, or those who derive benefits from its operations, may well be removed from any interaction with those who are most harmed in it. While it is usually inappropriate to *blame* those agents who are connected to but removed from the harm, it is also inappropriate, I suggest, to allow them (us) to say that they (we) have nothing to do with it. Thus, I suggest that we need a different conception of responsibility to refer to the obligations that agents who participate in structural social processes with unjust outcomes have. I call this a social connection model.

[40] See Jill Esbenshade's discussion of sweatshops in the United States and Department of Labor reports concerning these conditions: Jill Esbenshade, *Monitoring Sweatshops: Workers, Consumers, and the Global Apparel Industry* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2004), chap. 1.

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B. The social connection model

In ordinary language, we use the term "responsible" in several ways. One of these ways I have already discussed as paradigmatic of the liability model: to be responsible is to be guilty or at fault for having caused a harm and without valid excuses. We also say, however, that people have certain responsibilities by virtue of their social roles or positions, as when we say that a teacher has specific responsibilities, or when we appeal to our responsibilities as citizens. In this meaning, finding an agent responsible does not imply finding the agent at fault or liable for a past wrong, but rather refers to agents' carrying out activities in a morally appropriate way and aiming for certain outcomes.[41] What I propose as a social connection model of responsibility draws more on the latter usage of the term "responsibility" than on the liability usage. It does share with the liability usage, however, a reference to causes of wrongs—here in the form of structural processes that produce injustice.

The social connection model of responsibility says that individuals bear responsibility for structural injustice because they contribute by their actions to the processes that produce unjust outcomes. Our responsibility derives from belonging together with others in a system of interdependent processes of cooperation and competition through which we seek benefits and aim to realize projects. Even though we cannot trace the outcome we may regret to our own particular actions in a direct causal chain, we bear responsibility because we are part of the process. Within this scheme of social cooperation, each of us expects justice toward ourselves, and others can legitimately make claims on us. Responsibility in relation to injustice thus derives not from living under a common constitution, but rather from participation in the diverse institutional processes that produce structural injustice. In today's world, as I suggested above, many of these structural processes extend beyond nation-state boundaries to include globally dispersed persons. The structure and relationships of the global apparel industry illustrate starkly and concretely such transnational social connections. I shall detail five main features of the social connection model of responsibility by contrasting it with the liability model.

1. Not isolating. The liability model of responsibility seeks to mark out and isolate those responsible, thereby distinguishing them from others, who by implication are not responsible. Such isolation of the one or ones liable from the others is an important aspect of legal responsibility, both in criminal law and in tort law. Social practices of finding offenders guilty, or finding them to be at fault, or holding them strictly liable, focus on

[41] See Henry S. Richardson, "Institutionally Divided Moral Responsibility," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 16, no. 2 (1999): 218–49; see also Robert Goodin, "Apportioning Responsibilities," in Robert Goodin, *Utilitarianism as a Public Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 100–118.

particular agents in order to sanction or demand compensation from them and them alone. A system of moral rules and legal accountability should make clear that agents who violate the rules may face accusation as individual agents.

When harms result from the participation of thousands or millions of people in institutions and practices that produce unjust results, however, such an isolating concept of responsibility is inadequate. Where there is structural injustice, finding some people guilty of perpetrating specific wrongful actions does not absolve others whose actions contribute to the outcomes from bearing responsibility. Hired thugs who beat workers in horribly equipped factories are personally guilty of crimes, as are the factory managers who hire them and target particular workers. Finding them guilty, however, does not absolve the multinational corporations from responsibility for the widespread nature of poor working conditions in the factories producing goods they market. Nor does it absolve those of us who purchase the goods from some kind of responsibility to the workers who make them.

2. Judging background conditions. Under a liability concept of responsibility, what counts as a wrong for which we seek a perpetrator and for which he or she might be required to compensate, is something we generally conceive as a deviation from a baseline. Implicitly, we assume a normal background situation that is morally acceptable, if not ideal. A crime or an actionable harm consists in a morally and often legally unacceptable deviation from this background structure.[42] The liability model considers the process that brought about the harm as a discrete, bounded event that breaks away from the ongoing normal flow. Punishment, redress, or compensation aims to restore normality or to "make whole" in relation to the baseline circumstance.

In contrast, a model of responsibility derived from understanding the mediated connection that agents have to structural injustices does not evaluate harm that deviates from the normal and the acceptable; rather, it often brings into question precisely the background conditions that ascriptions of blame or fault assume as normal. When we judge that structural injustice exists, we mean that at least some of the normal and accepted background conditions of action are not morally acceptable. Most of us contribute to a greater or lesser degree to the production and reproduction of structural injustice precisely because we follow the accepted and expected rules and conventions of the communities and institutions in which we act. Usually we enact these conventions and practices in a habitual way, without explicit reflection and deliberation on what we do, having in the foreground of our consciousness and intention immediate

[42] See George Fletcher's discussion of the way that the assignment of criminal liability must distinguish between (1) foregrounded deviations from background conditions assumed as normal, and (2) the background conditions themselves. Fletcher, *Basic Concepts of Criminal Law,* 69–70.

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goals we want to achieve and the particular people we need to interact with to achieve them.

We can think of many examples of accepted norms and institutional practices that constitute the background conditions for sweatshops. I have already referred to the fashion system and its seasons as one set of practices that most producers and consumers reinforce to some extent. Executives at major multinational retailers typically devote more attention and money to advertising campaigns to promote the image of the company than to ensuring that the pay and working conditions of the workers who make the clothes they sell are decent. It is normal in this consumer society for companies to devote a large portion of their investment to advertising rather than production. Levels of unemployment in many of the places where sweatshops exist are normally high, and the social processes depriving peasants of the means to make an independent livelihood speedily create more unemployed people. One should expect under these circumstances that each super-exploitive sweatshop job opening will have multiple applicants, and that the workers in these jobs will normally be compliant and urge their coworkers to be so as well. Though today they are largely taken for granted, each of these aspects of the global apparel system can and should come under critical scrutiny, and questions can be asked about the responsibilities those who act on these assumptions have in relation to the injustice to which they serve as background.

3. More forward-looking than backward-looking. Assigning responsibility, whether under the liability model or the social connection model, always has both backward-looking and forward-looking aspects. The liability and social connection models of responsibility nevertheless differ in temporal emphasis. On most occasions, application of the liability model is primarily backward-looking. The social connection model, in contrast, emphasizes forward-looking issues.

Under the liability model of responsibility, the harm or circumstance for which we seek to hold agents responsible is usually an isolatable action or event that has reached a terminus. The robbery has taken place, or the oil tanker has spewed its contents on the beach. Usually the purpose of assigning responsibility in terms of blame, fault, or liability, then, is to seek retribution or compensation for this past action. To be sure, such backward-looking condemnation and sanction may have a forward-looking purpose as well; often it aims to deter others from similar action in the future, or to identify weak points in an institutional system that allows or encourages such blameworthy actions, in order to reform institutions. Once we take this latter step, however, we may be leaving the liability model and moving toward the social connection model. The reform project likely involves a responsibility on the part of many people to take actions directed at achieving reform, even though they are not to blame for past problems.

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When conceptualizing responsibility in relation to structural injustice, however, we are concerned with an ongoing set of processes that we understand is likely to continue producing harms unless there are interventions in it. The temporality of assigning and taking responsibility, then, is more forward-looking than backward-looking. Because the particular causal relationship of the actions of particular individuals or organizations to structural outcomes is often impossible to trace, there is no point in seeking to exact compensation or redress from only and all those who have contributed to the outcome, and in proportion to their contributions. The injustice produced through structures has not reached a terminus, but rather is ongoing. The point is not to blame, punish, or seek redress from those who did it, but rather to enjoin those who participate by their actions in the process of collective action to change it.[43]

The anti-sweatshop movement illustrates this forward-looking approach. When activists focus on particular factories or on multinationals who contract to manufacture goods under poor factory conditions, they rarely call for shutting down the factory or otherwise simply punishing the operators.[44] The system of incentives and organizational priorities makes it likely that other factories would open in the place of the one closed. Even when particular perpetrators are punished, workers continue to suffer structural injustice.

4. Shared responsibility. From the observation that the social connection model differs from the liability model in that it does not isolate those liable (in ways that implicitly absolve others), it follows that all those who contribute by their actions to the structural processes producing injustice share responsibility for such injustice. Philosopher Larry May distinguishes shared responsibility from collective responsibility in that the former is a distributed responsibility whereas the latter is not. A collection of persons, such as a corporation, might be said to be responsible for a state of affairs without any of its individual members being determinately responsible for it. Shared responsibility, in contrast, is a personal responsibility for outcomes, or the risks of harmful outcomes, produced by a group of persons. Each individual is personally responsible for outcomes in a partial way, since he or she alone does not produce the outcomes; the specific part that each person plays in producing the outcome cannot be isolated and identified, however, and thus the responsibility is essentially shared.[45]

[43] See Hans Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 90–120.

[44] See Elliott and Freeman, *Can Labor Standards Improve under Globalization?*, chap. 3.

[45] Larry May, *Sharing Responsibility* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), chap. 2. As formulated in this book, May's theory of shared responsibility remains backward-looking; he is concerned to assign responsibility for harms that have occurred and reached a terminus. Thus, his theory is more continuous with a liability model of responsibility than the theory I am developing here. May also focuses more on subjective states (such as attitudes) as factors that link persons to responsibility for a wrong, and says little about more objective social structures that connect persons to moral wrongs or injustices. See my essay "Responsibility and Global Labor Justice," cited in note 1 above.

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5. Discharged only through collective action. A final feature of the social connection model that distinguishes it from a liability model of responsibility is that the forward-looking responsibility can be discharged only by joining with others in collective action. This feature follows from the essentially shared nature of the responsibility. Thousands or even millions of agents contribute by their actions in particular institutional contexts to the processes that produce unjust outcomes. Our forward-looking responsibility consists in changing the institutions and processes so that their outcomes will be less unjust. No one of us can do this on our own. Even if it were possible to do so, a single shopper would not change the working conditions of those toiling in sweatshops by refusing to buy all items she had reason to believe were produced under unjust conditions. The structural processes can be altered only if many actors in diverse social positions work together to intervene in these processes to produce different outcomes.

Responsibility derived from social connection, then, is ultimately *political* responsibility. Taking responsibility in a forward-looking sense under this model involves joining with others to organize collective action to reform unjust structures. Most fundamentally, what I mean by "politics" here is public communicative engagement with others for the sake of organizing our relationships and coordinating our actions most justly. Thus, discharging my responsibility in relation to sweatshop workers might involve trying to persuade others that the treatment of these workers is unacceptable and that we collectively can alter social practices and institutional rules and priorities to prevent such treatment. Our working through state institutions is often an effective means of such collective action to change structural processes, but states are not the only tools of effective collective action.[46] In the next section, I will discuss and evaluate some of the activities of the anti-sweatshop movement.

An important corollary of this feature of political responsibility is that many of those who are properly thought to be victims of harm or injustice may nevertheless share political responsibility in relation to it. On the liability model of responsibility, blaming those who claim to be victims of injustice usually functions to absolve others of responsibility for their plight. On the social connection model, however, those who can properly be argued to be victims of structural injustice can also be said to share responsibility with others who perpetuate the unjust structures, and can be called on to engage in actions directed at transforming those structures.

[46] Melanie Beth Oliviero and Adele Simmons recommend using civil society organizations to address issues relating to labor standards; see their essay "Who's Minding the Store? Global Civil Society and Corporate Responsibility," in Marlies Glasius, Mary Kaldor, and Helmut Anheier, eds., *Global Civil Society 2002* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 77–107. John Braithwaite and Peter Drahos argue that as transnational social structures impinge on state sovereignty, civil society organizations gain increased ability to influence labor and other business practices; see Braithwaite and Drahos, *Global Business Regulation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), chaps. 5, 6, and 26.

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This point certainly applies in the case of sweatshops. Workers themselves have the strongest interest in combating sweatshop conditions. They also have information and relationships with one another that would be useful in mobilizing to try to alter the structures that perpetuate their exploitation. According to some researchers, employer-sponsored monitoring systems that aim to reform sweatshop conditions but fail to involve workers in a meaningful way are often ineffective or actually harm workers.[47] Even when they do not harm workers, they tend to be implemented as a paternalistic measure, rather than as a means of empowering workers. On the social connection model, workers share responsibility for combating sweatshop conditions and ought to be organized in order to do so. Nevertheless, especially where freedom to organize is not recognized or not enforced, they can discharge their responsibilities only with the support of others, often faraway and relatively privileged others, who make public the workers' grievances, put pressure on the agents that would block their unionization, and give them material aid.

I have been arguing that, when compared to the liability model, the social connection model of responsibility better corresponds to the intuitions expressed in claims about the responsibilities agents have concerning global justice. The social connection model not only has these philosophical advantages, I suggest, but also has rhetorical advantages in public discussion that aims to motivate people to take responsibility for rectifying social injustice. Claims that some persons participate in producing injustice and ought to stop are too often heard under a liability model of responsibility. The actors addressed hear themselves being blamed for harms. More often than not, agents who believe themselves to be targets of blame react defensively: they look for other agents to blame instead of themselves, or find excuses that mitigate their liability in cases where they admit that their actions do causally contribute to the harm. In situations of structural injustice, it is easy to engage in such blame-shifting or excusing discourse, because in fact others are also responsible and there are in fact structural constraints on most of the actors participating in the institutional processes that have unjust outcomes. In many contexts where the issue is how to mobilize collective action for the sake of social change and greater justice, such finger-pointing and blame-shifting lead more to resentment and refusal to take responsibility than to a useful basis of action.[48]

[47] See Esbenshade, *Monitoring Sweatshops.*

[48] William Connolly makes a similar distinction between responsibility as blame and a more politically oriented responsibility. For him, the resentment and counter-accusation dialectic that accompanies blame in a discourse of public affairs makes political identity overly rigid and paralyzes action. Thus, he recommends a notion of political responsibility without blame and with a more fluid and ambiguous understanding of the sources of wrong than the implicitly Christian identification of the sinner. See William Connolly, *Identity/Difference* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), esp. chap. 4. Melissa Orlie also distinguishes between a sentiment of resentment exhibited in blaming (on the one hand) and holding oneself and others politically responsible (on the other). See Melissa Orlie, *Living Ethically, Acting Politically* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 169–73.

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When executives of multinational retailers or consumers who shop at retail outlets hear the claims of anti-sweatshop activists as laying blame on them for the conditions under which goods are produced, they rightly become indignant, or scoff at the absurd extremism of the movement. A social connection model of responsibility that is distinct from (and complementary to) a liability model allows us to call on one another to take responsibility *together* for sweatshop conditions, without blaming anyone in particular for the structures that encourage their proliferation. This does not necessarily mean that all who share responsibility have an *equal* responsibility. The power to influence the processes that produce unjust outcomes is an important factor that distinguishes degrees of responsibility.

VI. Parameters of Reasoning

I have proposed a social connection model of responsibility to correspond to the intuition that those who participate by their actions in the structural processes that produce injustice bear some responsibility for correcting this injustice. In today's world of global interdependence, many of these structural injustices involve people widely dispersed across the globe, and are by no means limited to processes within single nation-states.

So far, I have offered only a way of thinking about responsibility in general. One might well object that the social connection model of responsibility raises as many questions as it answers. For example, the model says that all who participate by their actions in processes that produce injustice share responsibility for its remedy. Does this mean that all participants bear responsibility in the same way and to the same degree? If not, then what are the grounds for differentiating kinds and degrees of responsibility? Most of us participate in many structural processes, moreover, that arguably have disadvantaging, harmful, or unjust consequences for others. It is asking too much to expect most of us to work actively to restructure each and every one of the structural injustices for which we arguably share responsibility. How, then, should we reason about the best ways to use our limited time, resources, and creative energy to respond to structural injustice?

Adequately responding to questions like these would take at least another full essay. Thus, I will only sketch answers here, and illustrate the responses once again through the example of the anti-sweatshop movement.

Some moral theorists argue that responsibility names a form of obligation distinct from duty. Joel Feinberg, for example, distinguishes between an ethic that focuses on obligation or duty and an ethic that focuses on responsibility. On the one hand, a duty specifies a rule of action or delineates the substance of what actions count as performing the duty. A responsibility, on the other hand, while no less obligatory, is more open

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with regard to what counts as carrying it out.[49] A person with responsibilities is obliged to attend to outcomes that the responsibilities call for, and to orient her actions in ways demonstrably intended to contribute to bringing about those outcomes. Because a person may face many moral demands on her actions, and because changes in circumstances are often unpredictable, just how a person goes about discharging her responsibilities is a matter subject to considerable discretion.[50] Given that a combination of responsibilities may be overly demanding, and given that agents have discretion in how they choose to discharge their responsibilities, it is reasonable to say that it is up to each agent to decide what she can and should do under the circumstances, and how she should order her moral priorities. Others have the right to question and criticize our decisions and actions, however, especially when we depend on one another to perform effective collective action. Part of what it means to be responsible on the social connection model is to be accountable to others with whom one shares responsibility—accountable for what one has decided to do and for which structural injustices one has chosen to address. When an agent is able to give an account of what she has done, and why, in terms of shared responsibilities for structural injustice, then others usually ought to accept her decision and the way she sets priorities for her actions.

These considerations begin to provide an answer to the question I stated above, namely, how should one reason about the best way to use one's limited time and resources to respond to structural injustices? In a world with many and deep structural injustices, most of us, in principle, share more responsibility than we can reasonably be expected to discharge.[51] Thus, we must make choices about where our action can be most useful or which injustices we regard as most urgent. While a social connection model of responsibility will not give us a list of maxims or imperatives, it should offer some parameters for reasoning to guide our decisions and actions. These parameters, in turn, address the other question I raised earlier—the question about kinds and degrees of responsibility. Different agents plausibly have different kinds of responsibilities in relation to particular issues of justice, and some arguably have a greater degree of responsibility than others.

These differences of kind and degree correlate with an agent's *position* within the structural processes. By virtue of this structural positioning, different agents have different opportunities and capacities, can draw on different kinds and amounts of resources, or face different levels of constraint with respect to processes that can contribute to structural change.

[49] Joel Feinberg, "Duties, Rights, and Claims," in Joel Feinberg, *Rights, Justice and the Bounds of Liberty* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 135–40. See also Larry May, *The Socially Responsible Self: Social Theory and Professional Ethics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), chap. 5.

[50] See Goodin, "Apportioning Responsibilities," and Richardson, "Institutionally Divided Moral Responsibility."

[51] Liam Murphy develops a useful theory of moral responsibility under conditions of injustice; see his *Moral Demands in Nonideal Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

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I suggest that persons can reason about their action in relation to structural injustice along parameters of *power, privilege, interest,* and *collective ability.*

A. Power

An agent's position within structural processes usually carries with it a specific degree of potential or actual power or influence over the processes that produce the outcomes. Where individuals and organizations do not have sufficient energy and resources to respond to all structural injustices to which they are connected, they should focus on those where they have a greater capacity to influence structural processes.

Despite the fact that they are often legally separated from the manufacturing facilities whose working conditions and practices violate human rights, large multinational designers and retailers such as Calvin Klein or J.C. Penney have much greater power in global trade processes than do small manufacturers. The anti-sweatshop movement thus rightly concentrates its efforts on pressuring these powerful agents actively to work with manufacturers, host governments, unions, and civic organizations to improve wages and factory conditions for the workers and at the same time protect the workers from being laid off.

Because the agents with the greatest power within social structures often have a vested interest in maintaining them as they are, however, external pressure on the powerful is often necessary to move these agents to action, and to prevent them from taking superficial steps rather than making serious changes. Some of the larger exporters, importers, and retailers in the apparel industry, for example, would appear to be able to change the proportion of the price of a pair of shoes that goes to pay workers and improve working conditions, as compared with the proportion that pays for distribution, marketing, advertising, and decorating stores. Changing those proportions, however, may reduce the companies' own profits to some extent. Nevertheless, public disclosure of a company's connection with poor working conditions is not good for business, and public reporting of a company's support for change seems to be good for its stock price.[52]

B. Privilege

Where there are structural injustices, these usually produce not only victims of injustice, but persons who acquire relative privilege by virtue of the structures. Most who occupy positions of power with respect to unjust structures also have privileges that coincide with this power. In

[52] See Michael T. Rock, "Public Disclosure of the Sweatshop Practices of American Multinational Garment/Shoe Makers/Retailers: Impacts on Their Stock Prices," *Competition and Change* 7, no. 1 (March 2003): 23–38.

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most situations of structural injustice, however, there are relatively privileged persons who have relatively little power as individuals or in their institutional positions, at least with respect to the issue of injustice. Middle-class clothing consumers in the developed world, for example, stand in a privileged position in the structures of the apparel industry. They benefit from the large selection and affordable prices that the industry offers them. Persons who benefit relatively from structural injustices have special moral responsibilities to contribute to organized efforts to correct them, not because they are to blame, but because they are able to adapt to changed circumstances without suffering serious deprivation. Lower-income clothing consumers, whether in the developing or developed world, may be less able than more affluent consumers to spend more for clothing in order to ensure that the workers who make it are treated fairly.[53]

C. Interest

Different people and different organizations usually have divergent interests in the maintenance or transformation of structures that produce injustice. Often those with the greatest interest in perpetuating the structures are also those with the greatest power to influence their transformation. Those who are victims of structural injustice often have a greater interest in structural transformation. Earlier I said that one of the distinctive things about the social connection model of responsibility is that victims of injustice share responsibility with others for cooperating in projects to undermine the injustice. Victims of injustice have the greatest interest in its elimination, and often have unique insights into its social sources and the probable effects of proposals for change.

This point certainly applies in the case of labor conditions in the apparel industry. Actual and potential sweatshop workers are the primary victims of injustice. Analysts of some strategies in the movement to improve conditions for these workers find that these strategies are sometimes ineffectual or paternalistic because the workers' point of view and active participation have not been properly included. Some corporate-sponsored monitoring systems, for example, conduct inspections of factories without talking to workers, or only talking to workers on the factory site. Critics argue that workers' experience and complaints must definitely be a part of monitoring systems, but that workers must be interviewed away from the factory sites when owners and managers are not present. Coop-

[53] See Pollin, Burns, and Heintz, "Global Apparel Production." These authors find that the amount that retail prices would need to increase to raise workers to a living wage is small, and is consistent with increases that North American consumers say they would be willing to pay if they could be assured of "sweat-free" conditions.

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eration with local civic organizations whom workers trust is usually necessary to facilitate such interviews.[54]

Other analysts wonder whether the predominance of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) such as monitoring organizations, education and public accountability organizations, and so on, in the anti-sweatshop movement weakens the ability of workers to organize unions and allows local governments to continue their lax labor-law promulgation and enforcement.[55] Most analysts conclude that NGO activity should work to support unionization and to pressure for greater government protection of workers' rights to form or choose unions.[56] In this case, as in many other cases of structural injustice, victims of injustice have a responsibility to work together to improve their situation, but they are unlikely to succeed without the help and support of other less-vulnerable people who make industry behavior public and who pressure companies to change policies or restructure their business relationships.[57]

D. Collective ability

Sometimes a coincidence of interest, power, and existing organization enables people to act collectively to influence processes more easily regarding one issue of justice than another. That is not always a reason to give priority to that issue, for such ease of organization may be a sign that the action makes little structural change. Nevertheless, given the great number of injustices that need remedy, the relative ease with which people can organize collective action to address an injustice can be a useful decision principle.

The decision by some student groups to focus their anti-sweatshop activism on their colleges and universities illustrates this parameter. The function of universities as large consumers of apparel for their sports teams and as purveyors of apparel through their book stores makes universities obvious targets of activism, because their decisions about

[54] Esbenshade, *Monitoring Sweatshops.* See also Robert J. Liubicic, "Corporate Codes of Conduct and Product Labeling Schemes: The Limits and Possibilities of Promoting International Labor Rights Through Private Initiatives," *Law and Public Policy in International Business* 30, no. 1 (1998): 111–58.

[55] Rainer Braun and Judy Gearhart, "Who Should Code Your Conduct? Trade Union and NGO Differences in the Fight for Workers' Rights," *Development in Practice* 14, nos. 1 and 2 (2004): 183–96; Ronnie D. Lipschutz, "Sweating It Out: NGO Campaigns and Trade Union Empowerment," *Development in Practice* 14, nos. 1 and 2 (2004).

[56] Lance Compa, "Trade Unions, NGOs, and Corporate Codes of Conduct," *Development in Practice* 14, nos. 1 and 2 (2004): 210–15; Dara O'Rourke, "Outsourcing Regulation: Analyzing Nongovernmental Systems of Labor Standards and Monitoring," *The Policy Studies Journal* 31, no. 1 (2003): 1–29.

[57] Ruth Pearson and Gill Seyfang, "New Hope or False Dawn? Voluntary Codes of Conduct, Labour Regulation, and Social Policy in a Globalizing World," *Global Social Policy* 1, no. 1 (2001): 49–78; Archon Fung, "Deliberative Democracy and International Labor Standards," *Governance: An International Journal of Policy, Administration, and Institutions* 16, no. 1 (2003): 51–71.

purchasing and marketing have more impact than those of individual consumers. Campus campaigns politicizing such decisions successfully raise awareness of issues of global labor justice even among students and faculty who do not actively support the campaigns. Universities can relatively easily organize with one another to make an impact on the structural processes of the apparel industry, as they have done by becoming members of the Fair Labor Association and the Workers Rights Consortium.

VII. Conclusion

Obviously each of these parameters for reasoning about the ways that individual persons or institutions might meet their responsibilities under a social connection model—power, privilege, interest, and collective ability—needs further elaboration. This sketch should indicate how an agent's position in the structures that produce injustices might influence the kinds of issues the agent should address and the kinds of actions the agent should take. It also gives more concreteness to the notion that, under a social connection model, agents share responsibility with others who are differently situated, with whom they usually must cooperate in order to effect change. As the example of the anti-sweatshop movement illustrates, however, such need for cooperation does not mean that agents have no conflicts of interest and no need for struggling with one another. Sharing responsibility means, in part, that agents challenge one another and call one another to account for what they are doing or not doing. Global social and economic processes bring individuals and institutions into ongoing structural connection with one another across national jurisdictions. Adopting a conception of responsibility that recognizes this connection is an important element in developing a theory of global justice.

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