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COMPLICITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

By

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Thesis

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Master of Arts
in Environmental Philosophy

The University of Montana
Missoula, MT

August 18, 2020

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Complicity and Climate Change

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As individuals, how should we understand our personal complicity in climate change related harms? In this thesis, I argue that the predominant way we think of complicity within the Western moral paradigm—that is, as a distribution problem—is inadequate in helping us understand the nature of our complicity in climate change related harms. This inadequacy, in turn, psychologically hampers individual citizens residing in high-emitting nations of the Global North from effective and sustainable social and political engagement with climate change. To address the inadequacy and obstructions that result from it, I follow the discussion between Christopher Kutz and Iris Marion Young as they respectively build alternative conceptions of collective accountability (for Kutz) and collective responsibility (for Young) within the Western philosophical tradition. After situating their approaches in light of climate change, I gesture, as a conclusion, towards several ways we may begin to shift our understanding of complicity practically in our personal, social, and political lives.

INTRODUCTION

Our climate crisis, predicated upon global structures of exchange, bare the fact that any and all who participate in modern life are implicated in the suffering and dying of others. Human consumption has robbed polar bears of ice floes and doomed whole island nations to drown. Human fingers have helped trigger ravaging fires, withering droughts, and village sweeping floods. Whenever we burn fuel—be it dung or jet fuel—we have contributed to global and intergenerational harm via anthropogenic climate change.

If we as humans truly mean to survive together with as many other beings as possible, it is imperative that we fully confront our personal contributions to climate change and bring others to do so as well. This confrontation is necessary for us to take effective and just action, for recognizing our respective contributions forms the basis by which we can hold each other accountable.

Confronting our contribution to climate change, however, brings us into largely uncharted moral, ethical, social, cultural, and political territory. This 'uncharted-ness' has to do with the fact that the closest frame we have to understand accountability within the context of climate change is *complicity*: a state where one contributes to a wrongdoing or harm. As we commonly make sense of it in our day to day lives this basic understanding of complicity proves inadequate when it comes to our situation within climate change.

To be more precise, our commonplace understanding of complicity inadequately prepares us on two levels: first on the level of our subjective phenomenological experience, and second on the level of our objective understanding of complicity. On the level of our subjective phenomenological experience, our commonplace understanding of complicity inadequately prepares us to make sense discrepancy between the very ordinariness of our climate change contributing actions and the extraordinarily devastating harms that results. Inadequacy on a subjective level troubles us as individuals on psychological and social grounds. On the level of our objective understanding of

complicity, on the other hand, our commonplace understanding of complicity inadequately distinguishes between cases of complicity and cases of sole accountability. The general assumption is that cases of complicity are *continuous* to cases of sole accountability, and we generally treat them as differing in degree rather than in kind. This lack of distinction ultimately fails us when we encounter cases of mass complicity in large scale collective harms—of which climate change is one. Inadequacy on an objective level is a theoretical issue that implicitly influence the way we speak of complicity and, subsequently, craft policies.

As indicated above, these two strands of inadequacy—subjective and objective—trouble both our understanding of our personal involvement in climate change as well as our moral rhetoric around climate change. Together, the interplay of these inadequacies poses formidable barriers to effective ethical and political action on climate change. Subjective inadequacy thrusts us into psychological confusion (as manifest in eco-anxiety), and objective inadequacy exacerbates this confusion by furnishing us with methods and rhetoric that is ultimately disempowering to social relations and political action. What results is a chasm within which social and political motivation is lost, and—as I see it—needlessly so.

Unpacking the ways our commonplace understanding of complicity inadequately equips us when it comes to climate change is the first aim of this thesis. Consonant with this first aim, the second aim of this thesis is to offer a rethink of complicity that will help us bridge the chasm formed by the two levels of inadequacy, specifically along the lines of a Western moral paradigm. To address both aims, this thesis is divided into three parts.

Part I points out how our commonplace understanding of complicity (mis)informs the ways we understand and respond our position as climate change contributors. The central claim in this section is our commonplace understanding of complicity, as it treats complicity as a distribution problem (which is ultimately an objective issue to be further discussed in Part II), fails to account for

how we subjectively experience our complicity in climate change. As described briefly above, our subjective experience is one that features remarkably ordinary (and even subsistence) actions that somehow manage to result in devastating and fatal harms. Treating complicity as a distribution problem does not and cannot help us make sense of this experiential discrepancy, a failure which has increasingly become manifest as a growing problem: eco-anxiety. I further argue, that eco-anxiety—and related issues, such as apathy—impacts our social and political will unnecessarily. This, in turn, affects our global well-being in real ways.

Part I also addresses the question of "who is we?" That is, who is this "us" who are likely troubled by eco-anxiety and are socially and politically compromised? To address this question, I introduce here a conceptual tool called the 'Climate Change Experience Quadrant' (or Quadrant, for short). The Quadrant is a simple four-part map meant to help us track how people differ in their experience of climate change, which in turn helps focus the discussion of this thesis upon those who know climate change as a phenomenon that results from human driven release of greenhouse gases, but whose daily lives are exempt from direct physical disruption.

Part II of this thesis focuses on unpacking in more detail how our commonplace understanding of complicity is objectively inadequate, and how one may revise and rethink our theory of complicity to better fit our scenario of climate change. This section takes as its point of departure Christopher Kutz's 2000 *Complicity: Ethics and Law in a Collective Age,* as well as Iris Marion Young's 2011 *Responsibility for Justice.*

Part III of this thesis—the conclusion—serves as a recap of the material presented in Parts I and II. From this recap, I will gesture towards several ways our re-thinking of complicity can practically be applied in our personal, social, and political lives.

PART I

OUR COMMONPLACE UNDERSTANDING OF COMPLICITY

Complicity, to expand on the definition given in the introduction above, is generally understood as a state where one contributes (or contributed) to or upholds (or upheld) a wrongdoing or harm. A complicitous person is someone whose individual actions contribute to a harm. One may be conscious or unconscious of how one's actions contribute to a harm, but insofar as one comes to understand that one is entangled in a wrongdoing or harm, one can be considered complicit.

This definition is familiar and fairly uncontroversial. Many of us, for example, can likely recall a personal experience of complicity, such as a childhood memory of staying quiet and going along while a group of one's friends or siblings plot and execute a mean plan. We can also recall instances where we have accidentally contributed to a harm, and how likewise we feel ourselves as complicit—be it to a lesser degree than when we are aware of intended or foreseeable harm. This impression of complicity corresponds nicely with how our contribution to climate change is popularly framed. The logic goes like this:

A. I contribute to climate change (by relying on fossil fuels, for example)

B. Climate change results, and will result, in material and cultural harms for many humans and other-than-humans

Therefore,

C. I am complicit in the harms that result from climate change.

This is a standard syllogism, and in itself poses no issue. Trouble appears, however, when we continue on to add the following imperative D:

D. Given my complicity, I must address climate change (by reducing my emissions, for example)

Point D is where the rubber meets the road—it is here where particular notions (and practices) of moral accountability attach to the conclusion of complicity. I situate commonplace understanding of complicity here, defining it as having to do with the complex of moral, social, and cultural expectations that attach to how one ought to account for one's complicity.

To better understand this complex of expectations, we can ask the following questions: How do we evaluate complicity? What do we expect from someone who is complicitous? As it turns out, it is difficult to identify any distinct set of evaluative criteria and expectations for complicity apart from what is normally expected from cases of sole accountability. Our commonplace understanding of complicity seemingly holds that complicitous agents be held to the exact same standards of accountability as agents acting solo. The difference, where apparent, is an extra evaluative step: as complicity is only possible with other people, my contribution to the harm must be evaluated relative to the contributions of others engaged in the same harm.

Complicity, so it seems, is typically treated as a 'distribution problem'. Assigning accountability for complicitous action is largely a matter of dividing up accountability according to the causal impact that each contributor has had in the bringing about of a harm. The amount of accountability to be distributed is determined by criteria of causal significance, which—for example—feature in modern law as *mens rea* (guilty mind) and *actus reus* (guilty action). The degree by which an individual's action approximates the kinds of *mens rea* (purpose, knowledge, recklessness, negligence), and *actus reus* (voluntary, involuntary), is roughly the degree of significance.

Take, for example, a classic two-person bank robbery case. Both the getaway driver and the actual robber are complicit in the crime of a bank robbery. Yet, it would be incorrect to split accountability evenly between them instantaneously. Measuring their respective individual accountability rests on how much of their individual actions can be tracked according to *mens rea* and

actus reus. If both individuals—robber and driver—have equally planned and divvied up the roles voluntarily with full knowledge, then they equally fulfill both *actus reus* and *mens rea* of the fullest kind (having both purposive and planned action). Here, the measure of accountability that attaches to their complicity can indeed be divided amongst them in equal parts.

Consider, however, a second scenario where the getaway driver was kept deliberately in the dark by the robber and was pressured to drive. Here, the scales tips. In this second scenario, the robber, having both criminal purpose and voluntary action, scores higher on the criteria of causal significance. The getaway driver, whose actions lack criminal purpose and are involuntary, scores much lower. Thus, their complicity is distributed accordingly, with much more demanded of the robber than of the driver.

1.1. Complicity as a Distribution Problem and Climate Change: the Problem of Inconsequentialism

Undoubtedly, the commonplace understanding of complicity as a 'distribution problem' is workable for typical scenarios of complicity we encounter in our day to day lives. These cases, after all, are inherently limited by geographical, social, and demographic factors. On a small scale—where a small number of persons partake in an identifiable project with a likewise identifiable finite scope of consequences—approximation is fairly doable. When it comes to climate change, however, understanding complicity as a distribution problem proves to be unhelpful. Climate change, as it features mass complicity at so large a scale and across so many domains, reduces the approach of distribution to absurdity.

The most prominent manifestation of how treating complicity as a distribution problem results in absurdity is the preoccupation in climate ethics with the problem of *inconsequentialism*. Here, as the logic goes, any individual's contribution to climate change is—as measured across the whole number of individual contributors—simply inconsequential. Metaphorically, we can think of it as

follows: if climate change were a river flood caused by rainfall, each individual's lifetime greenhouse gas emissions would be akin to that of a single raindrop. The absence of any one raindrop, no matter how big and juicy of a drop it is, makes no significant difference to the eventuality of the flood.

In terms of our commonplace understanding of complicity, the harmful impact of any given climate related harm is distributed across so many individual contributors over time that accountability per causal significance becomes impossibly minute. Any climate harm, in other words, is overdetermined with respect to the sheer number of persons complicit in the harm. For some, such as Walter Sinott-Armstrong, this leads to a conclusion that holding individuals accountable for climate change is untenable. Given the causal insignificance of one's greenhouse gas emissions to the whole of climate change and its resultant harms, any one person's 'Sunday joyride' is not an instance of wrongdoing. Thus, there is no moral obligation for anyone to reduce their personal emissions, though an individual may well be socially obligated to push for political measures that will reduce emissions (Sinott-Armstrong 2010, 332-346). Others, such as Ronald Sandler and Marion Hourdequin, also accept causal inconsequentialism but maintain that individuals can be held accountable on other grounds. For Sandler, this means a recourse to virtue ethics (Sandler 2009). For Hourdequin, this means a recourse to the idea of integrity and Confucian-style relational morality (Hordequin 2010).

Interestingly, even those who are critical of the causal inconsequentialist position, such as Avram Hiller, nonetheless seem to accept inconsequentialism in theory. Hiller maintains, relying on the calculations of John Nolt, that one can mathematically argue that "on average, an American's lifetime GHG-emitting activities cause serious harm to one or two people, typically in the developing world" (Hiller 2011, 357).[1] Hiller's criticism, notably, is empirical—not theoretical. Hiller

[1] Whether or not Nolt's calculations are accurate, of course, is an open matter. Nolt himself expresses strong caveats that what data he is working with can only be considered as very rough averages, and that his figures—owing to lack of data—may easily be wrong. As he writes of the number Hiller cites, "This figure, of course, is very crude. It

seems to accept that inconsequentialism may still pose a problem for individual accountability. For him, however, the extent of the problem appears to be overblown—at least for Americans. Thus, as this thesis is concerned with interrogating inconsequentialism on more theoretical grounds, the main problem remains unbroached.

That individuals cannot be held accountable for their personal contributions to climate harms on account of the inconsequence of their actions undoubtedly strike many of us as unsatisfying. Moreover, it also poses some pragmatic problems: how do we mobilize to address climate change when, arguably, no one individual can legitimately be held responsible?

Aside from attempts to sidestep the problem altogether (as Sandler and Hourdequin do), attempts to solve the lack of accountability that inconsequentialism poses has led to the proposal that more attention be paid to 1) collective entities and 2) the relative difference in emissions levels between individuals. The first approach moves our discussion up towards collectives, while the second approach moves our discussion down towards individual differences.

The first approach centers on dividing accountability according to the emissions total of a group relative to other groups. The move here is to 'scale up' the subject of accountability from individuals to collective entities, and to assign accountability according to the relative differences between them. The complicity of individuals is thus substituted by the complicity of the collectivities that individuals find themselves within (e.g. the accountability of the nation state substitutes that of the individual citizen). This approach undergirds our seeing global geographical swaths (i.e., Global North and Global South) and nation states (divided in terms of economic and technological powers, i.e. developmental status) as units accountable for climate harms.

could easily be wrong by an order of magnitude, maybe more, in either direction. To get a clear sense of the possible errors would require a good bit more work than I have done here." (Nolt 2011, 9). Apart from the obvious point that Nolt's calculations are American-centric (and therefore inapplicable globally), it seems reasonable to maintain that inconsequentialism is nonetheless a real concern for no small number of us.

The second approach centers on dividing accountability according to the emissions total of individuals. The move here is to make quantifiable how much individuals emit (by measuring the carbon load of specific activities, such as leaving household appliances plugged in while not in use), and to assign accountability according to the relative differences between individuals on account of their personal emissions. This approach undergirds our taking on carbon or ecological footprints as a matter of personal responsibility and allows us to distinguish between subsistence and luxury emissions.

These approaches, undeniably, do some amount of work in making emissions reduction efforts more manageable from a political and policy point of view. By helping us put into perspective how differences in emissions levels across nation states come about (e.g., military expenditure vs. industrial expenditure), as well as what practices in our daily lives lead to more or less emissions (e.g. car use vs. public transit use), these approaches help us target areas for emissions reduction efforts.

Both approaches, however, rely nonetheless on an understanding of complicity as a distribution problem to justify their moves. Crucial here is the notion that significant causal contribution is what ought to determine level of accountability. The first approach attempts to solve the issue of inconsequentialism by zooming in on the micro differences in causal contribution and imposing significance on the relative differences between individual contributions. The second approach attempts to do the same by zooming out on the macro differences in causal contribution. These two approaches, then, seem to take as central the very logic that leads us to the problem of inconsequentialism in the first place.

This is a curious situation. The assumption that cases of complicity, in general, are best understood as continuous with cases of sole accountability seems to lead us around in a logical circle. What is left ultimately unaddressed is the whether or not causal significance is an appropriate

place to ground accountability to begin with, especially as we deal with cases of large and unintended collective harms such as climate change. This foreshadows issues of objective inadequacy, which will be further addressed in Part II. For now, however, let us talk in terms of how these approaches—as they flow from an objectively inadequate account—inadequately address our subjective experience.

From a subjective point of view, talk about inconsequence or consequence do not mean much to persons at all. Even if any given individual's actions are causally insignificant, persons do not experience them as such. What appears most salient, rather, is the discrepancy between the smallness of one's actions and the catastrophic effects that climate change has. The confounding question: how is it that my mundane actions contribute to the suffering of others in such a large, and often fatal, way? How ought I make sense of my contributions to such outrageous harms in the absence of causal significance?

This 'aporia' has led many to a psychological impasse. As evidence of the destruction of various ecosystems, daily extinction of hundreds of species, and increasing number of dispossessed peoples come to light, a growing number of people across the world are facing what psychologists have termed 'eco-anxiety' (Clayton et al. 2017). Psychoanalytic psychotherapist Rosemary Randall describes her experience with patients who face eco-anxiety as follows (Randall 2013, 92):

> For everyone I spoke to there was a clear sense of a connection being made that, once established, could not easily be turned off. Once the obscured relationships between ecological damage and an ordinary Western life had become apparent, the knowledge would not go back in the box…. Some people found themselves preoccupied with each terrible fact. One person compared it to '...trying to peer into a car crash to see every gory detail'. A number spoke of devouring information and becoming unable to stop talking about it, manically imposing the topic on whoever would (or would not) listen. This could be seen as an attempt to master trauma, or alternatively as an attempt to expel pain and responsibility and project it onto others.

Indeed, it appears that the fundamental subjective struggle has to do with how we are complicit in climate change, and not so much in the ways this complicity is to be delineated. Eco-anxiety results as persons face an awkward discrepancy where one feels as if one is complicit in

something heinous, and yet nothing one has in fact done can certifiably be considered criminal or morally questionable. This fundamental puzzle remains overlooked so long as we take the understanding of complicity as a distribution problem as the point of departure for climate ethics.

1.2 A Question of We

Now before proceeding, it is important that we be clearer as to *who* exactly I am making these claims on behalf of. Who is the 'we' who struggle with the discrepancy between personal action and consequence? As the passage describing climate anxiety suggests, those who struggle may be those who lead 'an ordinary Western life'. This, however, is a rather vague designation. What is meant by an ordinary Western life, and who all partakes in this?

Reading between the lines, it is sensible to assume that a Western life refers to the lifestyle of those who reside largely in the Global North and developed nations. After all, these places generate the most greenhouse gas comparative to the Global South and developing nations. An ordinary Western life is best read, perhaps, simply as the life of average persons who reside in these places of highest emissions.

This assessment is intuitive. Moreover, by virtue of globalization processes, it is even possible to assume that across high-emitting places lifestyles share similar elements. Yet it seems too quick to assume that it is geographical location, place of residence, or national identity simply that make individuals vulnerable to eco-anxiety. To rely on this connection simply is to still to treat complicity as a distribution problem, which plays out in this case as the move to average out the causal significance of a collective across the individuals within its bounds. There looks to be more to the story than this simple connection.

To get at the deeper factors that position people to struggle with complicity in the form of eco-anxiety, I would like to introduce a 'conceptual tool' that tracks an individual's *awareness* and

experience of climate change. Tracking kind of awareness (i.e., what kind of knowledge does one have about climate change?) one has in conjunction with the kind of experience (i.e., what kinds of disruption does one experience that owed to climate change?) one has will help us capture, roughly, how one phenomenologically encounters climate change. From this, it is possible to approximate how an individual may relate to how they contribute to climate change, be it in very broad strokes, and whether or not they are likely to experience eco-anxiety. From this position, I argue, we shall be better able to see not only who 'we' are, but also how 'we' are related to others who experience their complicity in climate change differently.

1.3 The Climate Change Experience Quadrant

In the summer of 2017, I had a dream of a climate change borne apocalypse. In this dream, I watched as a rich man suffocated in his underground security bunker due to a malfunctioning airlock, while, simultaneously, halfway around the world, a small illiterate fishing family living in a houseboat off coast of a Pacific island died in their sleep due to an unseasonal ocean storm.

This dream offers a vivid, be it apocalyptic, illustration of two extremes of climate change experience. The first experience belongs to individuals who have conceptual awareness of anthropogenic climate change, but no experience of immediate impact. The second experience belongs to individuals who have no conceptual awareness of anthropogenic climate change (though one might know, empirically, that weather patterns and temperature variance have changed), but who have experience of immediate impact.

For individuals living in the first extreme, anthropogenic climate change is phenomenologically experienced as mediated to us by statistics, news articles, various visual media, and video footage. Climate change is experienced primarily in the abstract, as a cognitive phenomenon. For individuals living the second extreme, anthropogenic climate change is

phenomenologically experienced as physical shifts in climate patterns and even more weather instability. These shifts in weather patterns, more often than not, disrupt life in many ways (economic, political, social), and result in the destruction of livelihoods, land-based cultural traditions and identities, as well as habitats. This second extreme, owing to the different kind of awareness (which constitutes a lack of conceptual knowledge of anthropogenic climate change) encapsulates the experiences of non-humans as well as humans.

To these two lived extremes, we can add a third and a fourth. The third extreme belongs to individuals who of have conceptual knowledge of anthropogenic climate change and experience of immediate impact. The fourth extreme belongs to individuals who have no conceptual knowledge of anthropogenic climate change, and who experience no immediate impact. We can organize these extremes visually into quadrant form. I will title this model the Climate Change Experience Quadrant, or just the Quadrant for short:

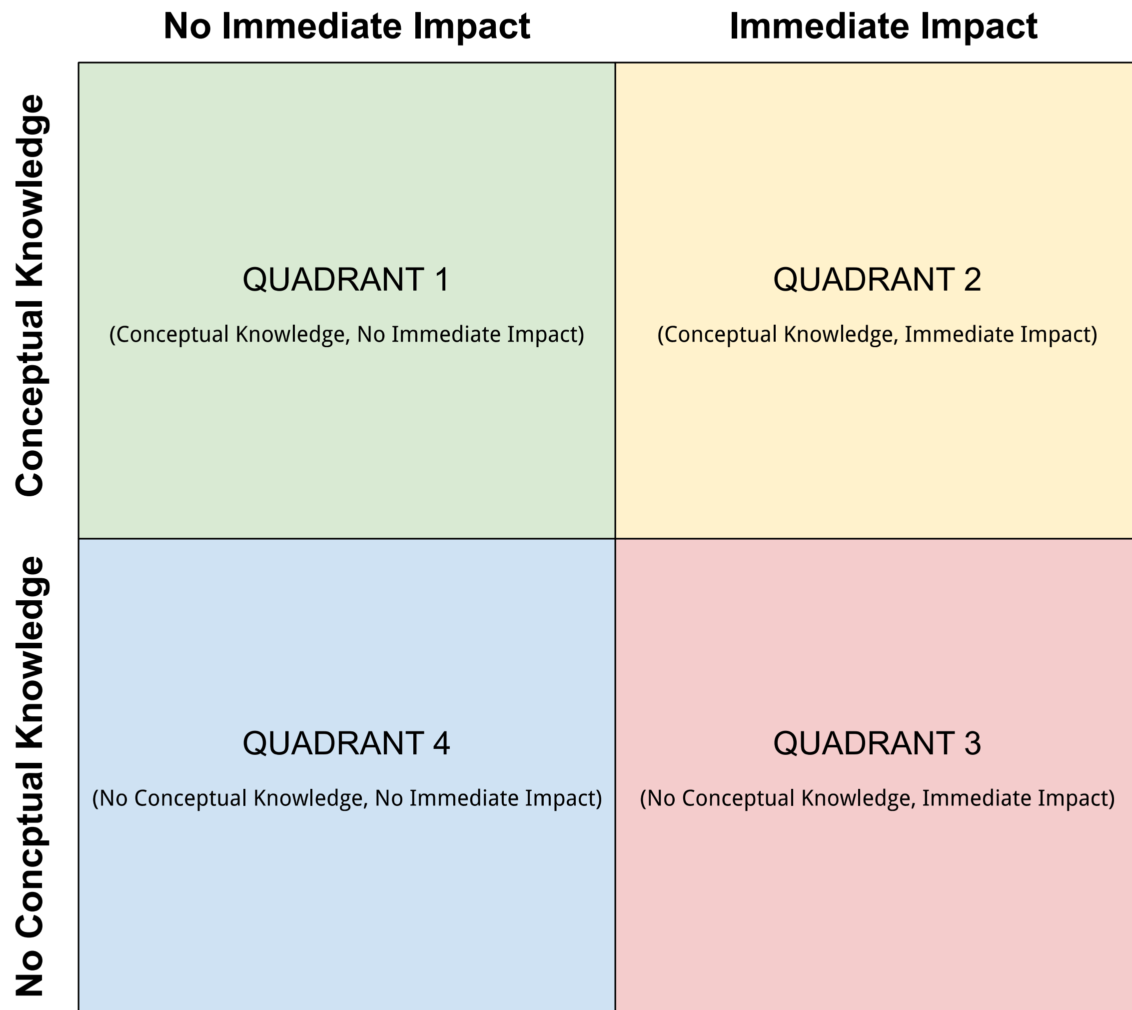

Figure 1: *The Climate Change Experience Quadrant*

To get a feel as to how the Quadrant works, let us consider what it may tell us about the kinds of harms and sufferings individuals (human and otherwise) may experience across all four sectors. Those in Quadrant 2 and 3 suffer quite obvious physical and psychological harms (e.g., displacement, material loss, etc.). Those in Quadrant 1, in comparison to those in Quadrant 2 and 3, suffer more subtle harms that are more psychological in nature. Those in Quadrant 4 are rather exempt from obvious harm, and some occupants may even benefit from climate change.

This breakdown allows us to place the feeling of psychological tension on account of one's complicity in climate change as belonging to those who occupy Quadrants 1 and 2, for these are the two Quadrants whose experience of climate change is defined through the lens of knowing climate change conceptually *as* climate change. Between these two Quadrants, we can distinguish that feeling psychological tension on account of one's complicity in climate change is the hallmark experience of those in Quadrant 1.

This is, of course, not to deny that those who occupy Quadrant 2 do not experience psychological tension on account of their complicity. For those in Quadrant 2, however, the psychological tension is likely augmented by externally imposed physical disruptions. For those in Quadrant 1, on the other hand, face psychological tension without externally imposed physical disruptions. This makes psychological tension in particular the central point of phenomenological experience for those in Quadrant 1.

When I speak of the failures of our commonplace understanding of complicity as being inadequate, then, I am focused on its hampering effects first and foremost on those in Quadrant 1: those who know climate change conceptually, and yet who are distanced from its most disruptive effects. Now the reason for this focus on Quadrant 1, admittedly, is largely personal—this is where my peers and I find generally ourselves. Owing to my being in it, it is the space I feel most equipped to discuss. Beyond the personal, however, there are other more pragmatic reasons as to why I a

focus on Quadrant 1 is necessary. These pragmatic reasons, as I will further discuss the subsequent sections, derive from the unique social and political position those in Quadrant 1 occupy. Persons in Quadrant 1, I shall argue in the next section, are well positioned to act effectively in response to climate change. And yet—as will be discussed in the section following—this potential power is greatly compromised by our understanding of complicity as a distribution problem.

1.3.1 Mapping Quadrant 1

I would like to begin this section by first discussing the idea of capacity. The inherent assumption in much climate discourse seems to be that the capacity to generate high levels of emissions is directly related to the capacity to mitigate high levels of emissions. This idea, once more, flows nicely from our commonplace understanding of complicity, where causal contribution proportions how and how much one ought to repair.

This assumption is not all wrong when it comes to large organizations and institutions, for there are different levels of agency that correspond to increasing organizational complexity. On an individual level, however, this assumption once more comes across as inaccurate, or at the very least unsatisfying. The capacity of individuals to act has to do with factors such as one's geographic, social, political, and economic location—and these do not always align so nicely with an individual's relative level of causal contribution. A single mother of three making minimum wage in a rural Georgia town, for example, does not have the same capacity to act as a single retired public defender in Atlanta. Yet, by accounts of causal contribution, the single mother may indeed have a larger carbon footprint then our retired lawyer—say, on account of having a long commute to work and having to buy imported produce (which happen to be cheapest available) in comparison to the retired public defender's rooftop garden hobby and reliance on public transportation.

Much like with the dimension of response to experience, life factors that influence individual capacity are likewise inaccessible insofar as we operate within the commonplace understanding of complicity. Now, as the Quadrant focuses on experience and not level of contribution, one of the strengths of the Quadrant lies in its ability to capture a more fine-grained view than designations such as 'Global North' and 'Global South' or 'developed' and 'developing' can capture. An upper-middle class, London-educated newspaper editor in Jakarta, for example, qualifies as an inhabitant of Quadrant 1. All the while, this editor can live just a couple of miles away from a local village farmer who inhabits Quadrant 3, as well as a couple of towns over from a marine biologist who inhabits Quadrant 2. These details are salient and important insofar as they allow us understand capacity in ways that are not circumscribed simply in terms of geographical location, geopolitical alliance, or causal contribution simpliciter.

As outlined before, persons in Quadrant 1 experience the climate crisis in a way that is far more abstract than those in Quadrants 2 and 3. What holds these persons in common is their relative distance from the experience of daily, or immediate, life disruptions due to climate change. Just at a glance, we may anticipate that those who live in Quadrant 1 may have, at baseline, a bit more capacity for action on climate change, at the very least on account of their not having to deal with direct threats to either their livelihood or physical safety due to climate change.

There may be—as discussed in the example above, of course—other reasons for diminishing capacity. At minimum, however, it is possible to say that on account of experiential distance, persons in Quadrant 1 at minimum have more leeway. Equipped with this tentative initial reading, we can now ask further questions. How, for instance, does one come to occupy Quadrant 1? Or, are there other patterns or commonalities that happen to correlate to one's being in Quadrant 1?

On this point it is notable that even as classifications per the Quadrant cuts through the one-size readings of Global North/Global South and developing/developed, a large majority of those

who inhabit Quadrant 1 *do* in fact happen to reside in the Global North and developed nations. We can observe this by what empirical data exists tracking global vulnerability and awareness of climate change.

1.3.2. Vulnerability

In terms of vulnerability, it is a well-documented fact that areas most vulnerable to ongoing and forthcoming climate change related effects and harms are areas of the Global South, and areas of least vulnerability as that of the Global North. This remains consistent even as studies available range in their focus from mapping geopolitical security vulnerabilities such as state failures and political violence (Guy et al. 2020), vulnerability to armed conflicts across drylands globally (Sterzel et al., 2014), global conflict vulnerability as measured by primarily assessing adaptive capacity (Scheffran and Battaglini, 2010), global food insecurity (Ingram, Ericken, and Liverman 2010), global drought vulnerability (Carrão et al., 2016), etc.

So it seems that areas of the Global South on the whole remain most vulnerable to climate change even as different studies employ different methods, different valuation of factors, and slightly different definitions of vulnerability. That acknowledged, for the purposes of this thesis I find it reasonable to refer to one 2008 discussion paper presented as a report to UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs as an exemplary source. The particular strength of this paper has to do with the fact that the authors have come up with an "overall human vulnerability index," which they assessed by combining five vulnerability parameters: natural vulnerability, human vulnerability, social vulnerability, financial vulnerability, and physical vulnerability (Thow and de Blois 2008). As their overall human vulnerability map shows, areas of highest vulnerability cluster within the African continent, followed by the southwest corner of the Middle Eastern peninsula and Western Asia. Areas of medium risk encapsulate the majority of continental Asia and Southeast Asia,

the western coast of South America, and the whole of Central America. Areas of low-medium risk include East Asia (covering Eastern China, the Japanese islands, the Korean peninsula). As expected, big regions of the Global North—the North America (United States and Canada), Australia, Russia, and Europe—are of lowest risk.

1.3.3. Awareness

On the matter of awareness, I shall refer chiefly to a 2015 study published in *Nature Climate Change* that features an "unprecedented survey of 119 countries" (Lee et al., 1014). In it, the authors found that

> The highest levels of awareness (over 90%) were reported in the developed world, including North America, Europe and Japan… By contrast, majorities in developing countries from Africa to the Middle East and Asia reported that they had never heard of climate change, including more than 65% of respondents in countries such as Egypt, Bangladesh, Nigeria and India. Among those respondents who had heard of climate change, however, those in developing countries generally perceived climate change as a much greater threat to themselves and their own family than did respondents in developed countries (1015).

The study continued on to analyze, for those respondents who are aware of climate change, where these respondents became aware of climate change and how respondents assess climate risk. As they further found,

> Worldwide, educational attainment is the single strongest predictor of climate change awareness. Understanding the anthropogenic cause of climate change is the strongest predictor of climate change risk perceptions, particularly in Latin America and Europe, whereas perception of local temperature change is the strongest predictor in many African and Asian countries (1014).

For the purposes of this thesis, it is sufficient to track with the basic distinction the authors of the study draw between respondents who are aware and those who are unaware. However, as far as one might want to further breakdown the varieties of experience in Quadrants 1 and 2, it is interesting to note that there is a difference in how much people in different regions take stock of direct information (i.e., local temperature change) vs. indirect information (i.e., specific

understanding that climate change is anthropogenic). Combining this with reads as to vulnerability, and we can begin to intuit as well where inhabitants of Quadrant 2 roughly reside. One may tabulate which countries in Asia and Africa (regions where local temperature change serves as a strong indicator of higher risk perception) happen to host the highest levels of awareness and cross reference that with data regarding each country's level of vulnerability.

1.3.4. Vulnerability and Awareness: *Quadrant 1 and the Global North*

From the data above, we can safely conclude that the bulk of persons who occupy Quadrant 1 largely reside in countries of the Global North. Protection from direct harms for inhabitants of Quadrant 1 in the Global North is attributable to general national wealth, which tends to correlate to more robust infrastructure (agricultural and otherwise) of their countries of residence. As for conceptual knowledge of climate change, this is attributable to higher literacy rates and educational access, which in turn increases one's acquaintance with the basics of modern science. This is true even if, as in the case of the United States, a large number do not exactly trust the scientific establishment.

Having discerned that the bulk of the population of Quadrant 1 resides in the Global North, we may draw further readings as to capacity. In addition to having a physical buffer against the worst effects of climate change, inhabitants of Quadrant 1 in the Global North also, as citizens, have more access to political power. This is due to the fact that most nation states that make up the Global North are liberal democracies. Of course, this is not to deny that issues of voter access, manipulation, or corruption are not present in these countries. Even as there may be some hindrances and complications to the democratic processes in these places, however, that they are democratic nonetheless indicate that the average individual nonetheless has a baseline amount of political power in the form of one's vote. This is a lot more than can be said of other parts of the

globe, especially those areas that make up Quadrant 3, where persons have no conceptual knowledge and are immediately affected in dire ways.[2]

The potential power for action for those in Quadrant 1 here looks to be quite substantial. Further, that Quadrant 1 acts (or fails to act) on this power will inevitably affect global well-being. It is the case, after all, that nation states of the Global North also happen to make up the majority of the current highest emitters of greenhouse gases. This is true upon both cumulative and per capita readings. In terms of cumulative emissions as measured in 2017, the top ten (fossil fuel combustion based only) CO_2 emitters are, in order,

1. China (9.3 metric gigatons [T])
2. United States (4.8GT)
3. India (2.2GT)
4. Russia (1.5GT)
5. Japan (1.1GT)
6. Germany (0.7GT)
7. South Korea (0.6GT)
8. Iran (0.6GT)
9. Canada (0.5GT)
10. Saudi Arabia (0.5GT)

In terms of per capita readings as measured likewise in 2017, the top ten CO_2 emitters are, in order,

1. Saudi Arabia (16.1 gigatons [T])
2. Australia (15.6T)
3. Canada (14.9T)
4. United States (14.6T)
5. South Korea (11.7T)
6. Russia (10.6T)
7. Japan (8.9T)
8. Germany (8.7T)

[2] For in-depth investigation as to the different ways lives around the globe can be immediately affected by climate change, I recommend Christian Parenti's 2011 book *Tropic of Chaos: Climate Change and the Geography of Violence.*

9. Poland (8.1T)
10. South Africa (7.4T)

(All data from Union of Concerned Scientists 2020)

Consider on top of this that, if one were to count all twenty eight European Union countries as a single entity in 2017, it will rank in third right before India at around 4.2 GT in terms of cumulative emissions—and in terms of per capita rate, EU-28 ranks twelfth, just replacing China's 6.8T with a 6.89T (Ritchie and Roser, 2019). Once more, it is notable that the majority of these countries are indeed working (liberal) democracies.

1.4. Behavioral Responses of Those Who Inhabit Quadrant 1

In the image that appears above, the well-being and survival of those in Quadrants 2 and 3 arguably rests in large part on the shoulders of those in Quadrant 1. Yet, all this latent power and advantageous positioning of the individual citizen in Quadrant 1 is needlessly compromised—not only by eco-anxiety, as we have previously touched on, but also in terms of apathy.

On one hand, as already discussed briefly above in terms of eco-anxiety, persons in Quadrant 1 experience immense psychological distress and exhibit behavior patterns of great upset. Yet on the other hand, we also encounter in our day to day experience persons who do not seem concerned or bothered about the global consequences of their individual actions.

Now, these behaviors of non-response can—at least for some cases—also be seen as a response to overwhelming distress. Human beings have a need for both physical and mental coherence (what complex adaptive systems theorists term 'conceptual homeostasis') and will resort to great lengths to maintain physical and psychological integrity. Considering that climate change both threatens our physical homeostasis and troubles our moral sense making, it is easy to see how—in the pursuit of self-maintenance in the deepest and barest sense—many persons may

choose to ignore or reduce the importance of their cognition of climate change, be it implicitly and unconsciously.

Else, non-response may well signal a deep emphatic disconnect—or at very least, a deep ethical disconnect. That there exists a deep ethical disconnect is the line of thought that a number of climate ethicists take. Proponents of this reading tend to characterize failure to act cohesively on climate change as a failure of our moral frameworks and/or ethical theories. Dale Jamieson, to focus on one figure, considers the apparent inertia and the lack of clear and coherent responses to climate change as having to do, in part, with the fact that our moral paradigms have not developed enough to the point that they can handle climate change. Jamieson characterizes the climate crisis as the "frontiers of ethics," and notes how it challenges our ethical thinking due to its following six characteristics:

1. Climate change features technology as an effect amplifier,
2. Climate change has an all-encompassing spatial reach,
3. Climate change arises out of forces that are systematically related,
4. Climate change is the largest collective action problem we have ever faced,
5. Climate change has an immense temporal scale of effects,
6. Climate change will affect the constitution of world to an extent we have never seen before (160-169)

All six of these characteristics trouble our traditional paradigm of moral accountability, which Jamieson characterizes as having the following structure:

> An individual acting intentionally harms another individual; both the individuals and the harm are identifiable; and the individuals and the harm are closely related in time and space. (148)

Put this paradigm into recipe form, and we get the following three crucial ingredients:

1. Intentionality
2. Identifiability

3. Proximity

The more intensely apparent the above three ingredients are in a given scenario, the more one will more strongly perceive that some wrongdoing has taken place. Climate change, being so temporally, spatially, and causally diffuse, challenges this paradigm.

As Jamieson narrates it, this tripartite paradigm first developed in low-density and low-population societies, whose models for thinking derive from direct face to face encounters. If accepts this version of human moral development as true, then from the point of view of historical development any present human paradigm would be ill-suited to address the reality of anthropogenic climate change, which, as has been pointed out, pose novel moral conundrums on a global scale. Thus, even as we recognize or feel pre-theoretically that there is something wrong with our contribution to global harms, the moral paradigms by which we have navigated and constructed our world with for millennia do not—and cannot—readily provide us with a conceptual frame by which to make sense of the six challenges Jamieson identifies all at once.

Now, one can rightly take issue with Jamieson's 'universal' read on development and status quo of moral paradigms. One does not need to be particularly literate in anthropology to see that moral paradigms vary across cultures and locales, and while on the whole they center on consistent central themes and take as central the concept of responsibility, suffering, harm, and recompense, the ways in which these are worked out and interpreted substantially varies.

The Balinese, for example, consider the well-being and sustenance of the whole universe as resting on their dedication to upholding routine rituals, some of which occur once every century or so. Their moral paradigm, comparative to Jamieson's offering, is one that has a much broader sense of responsibility across time and space—proximity, owing to their cyclical sense of time, is not a sticking point in their moral paradigm. Likewise, as American indigenous writers such as Robin Wall Kimmerer have pointed out, many Native American tribes in North America hold to *reciprocity* as

that which defines our moral relationships—and not only with each other as humans, but also with the more-than-human world. Within this moral paradigm, too, there is a broader sense of responsibility across time and space, as well as across species and generations.[3]

Thus, Jamieson's reasoning as to the inadequacy of our moral paradigms is too reductive. Nonetheless, the problem of inadequacy that he seeks to explain does crucially remains, for climate change is an intrinsically global problem. It arises, after all, through the building of global infrastructure, the establishment of which also amplifies its threats to all of us. All manner of life and histories face the material reality of climate change, and no moral paradigm is exempt from engagement and evaluation on these grounds. We may leave, thus, with a softer conclusion: that *at least one* of the moral paradigms that we operate by is woefully inadequate. In Jamieson's case, he speaks of the inadequacy of a modern Western moral framework in particular. That this may be the case, however, does not mean that other frameworks are, *de facto,* more adequate. We must be open to consider that other moral paradigms may also face difficulties in the face of climate change, albeit in different ways.

In any case, whatever the actual origins of behaviors of non-response (be it psychological overwhelm or a problem with our moral paradigm), anxiety and apathy exacerbate each other, and a vicious cycle is born. The more persons seem to be apathetic or nihilistic in the face of our climate crisis, the more others feel overwhelmed by the enormity of ongoing harms and the perceived lack of response to them—and the more persons are overwhelmed and distressed to the point of dysfunction, the more other persons will choose to disengage to avoid incurring such psychological costs upon themselves. As a friend once remarked of their experience within this cycle: "Whenever I try to care I end up feeling gaslighted [by folks who do not care]. Then it's easier just not to care. I

[3] For one firsthand account (among a number of anthropological texts), see the following 2014 Jakarta Post article: "In Bali Balancing Universe" by Trisha Sertori.

have to make rent next week, anyway." Insofar as our conceptual frameworks are informed by broader patterns of social affirmation and negation as well as our observation of risks incurred by our neighbors, this cycle is one that is subject to neither rational nor technological fixes. Rather, the way out lies primarily within the social sphere and must be addressed, once more, at the level of an individual's subjective experience of climate change.

It seems, however that very few efforts are sensitive enough on this point. Many attempts at rousing persons out of both anxiety and apathy rely on pointing out moral failure either on the grounds of a 'broken relationship with the world', weakness of will to change one's life or a lack of empathy, or having a compromised mindset (e.g., 'colonizing', 'extractivist, 'hyper-individualistic'). While there are important truths in these social critiques—and while it is undoubtedly true that they apply to no small number of persons and institutions—the way they are used in climate discourse tend to be personally disempowering for the majority of folks in Quadrant 1.

That these critiques ultimately feel disempowering once again has to do with just how *normal* much of our climate change contributing practices are day to day. The problem of subjective inadequacy, it seems, crops up once more. That my buying a jar of peanut butter made with palm oil at the grocery store helps the destruction of orangutan habitat an ocean over is hard enough to conceive—what then is there to make of the simple act of my flipping a light switch? At least the peanut butter I can put down, and perhaps boycott the company. Going without light, on the other hand, would make for a very difficult, if impossible, life within the status quo.

In the absence of a greater objective framework that can explain how our ordinary actions result in such devastating harms, methods of moral critique is doomed to be unsuccessful. Far from rousing, moral critique based off of our commonplace notion of complicity will only alienate persons and reinforce a sense of existential malaise, which further undercuts the basis social trust and political will necessary, once again, for effective social and political engagement. Intended or

not, messaging along these lines casts our very existence and our engagement in mundane and ordinary self-maintenance as a matter of moral weakness or failure. Perhaps this leveraging of moral tone is a reaction to how inconsequentialism and insufficiency have become, for many, nihilistic sorts of excuses to doing naught. This is understandable. While understandable, however, it is certainly unhelpful to any sort of positive or harm-reducing transformations at all.[4] To propose that persons refrain from, or alter, these behaviors without providing a different objective framework of complicity is non-sensical and alienating.

To see how politically compromising instances of alienation on a subjective level can be, it would be helpful to consider an analogous discussion. On this point, I would like to bring up Matt Huber's 2019 *Catalyst* essay titled "Ecological Politics for the Working Class," an essay in which Huber pointedly explicates the social and political implications of alienation in the context of the subjective experience of the American working class. In his essay, Huber points out how the current discourse of US environmentalism is dominated by two positions, which he terms 'lifestyle environmentalism' and 'livelihood environmentalism'. Lifestyle environmentalism, reflecting the particular position of middle-class professionals (who arose during the post-WWII boom), has as its chief concern mass commodity consumption. This environmentalism, as Huber puts it, makes "a politics of material gain inherently ecologically damaging" (12). On the other hand, livelihood environmentalism, which contours political ecology and environmental justice discussions, casts its focus on the margins—where direct and place based environmental struggles over subsistence, land and resource access (dispossession), and environmental quality (pollution, poison) occur. Arising as a

[4] Notably, where moral appeals have seemed to be more successful, they tend to be affixed to an alternative, non-secular framework of moral sense making (e.g., the popularity of New Age or earth-centric spiritualities in broader environmental consciousness). These frameworks, however, may not be suitable as the engine for a broad based politics.

response to lifestyle environmentalism's centering of the relatively affluent, livelihood environmentalism takes as key frontline communities and historically marginalized groups.

Both these positions, Huber points out, ignore the experience of those who—already dispossessed under processes of global capitalism—rely on money and commodities for their survival. In the context of America, these persons belong to a sizeable (though ambiguously defined and somewhat fractionated) working class. Lifestyle environmentalism, with its anti-consumption bent and austerity politics, has no room for those who experience life as barely making ends meet. Livelihood environmentalism, with its anti-modern bent and marginal politics, likewise has no room for those who experience life deep within the status quo. Neither one of these environmentalisms, without revision, is able to build solidarity with those who are caught in the middle. "For the environmental movement to expand beyond the professional class and establish a working-class base for itself," Huber explains,

> …it cannot rely on austerity, shaming, and individualistic solutions as its pillars. It also cannot place so much emphasis on *knowledge* of the science (belief or denial). It has to mobilize around environmentally beneficial policies that appeal to the material interests of the vast majority of the working class mired in stagnant wages, debt, and job insecurity. A working-class environmental program would focus on *anti-austerity* politics. One premise might be: humans are ecological beings who have basic needs to reproduce their lives (food, energy, housing, health care, love, leisure). The proletarian reliance upon money and commodities for these basic needs creates high levels of stress — and excludes huge swathes from meeting them. Instead of seeing those needs as a source of "footprints" that must be reduced, we should acknowledge the majority of people in capitalist society need *more* and secure access to these basics of survival. To make this political we need to explain how human needs can be met through ecological principles. (34)

What is needed, in other words, is a shift to a new objective framework that focuses on how sustainability produces abundance, rather than how sustainability requires sacrifice.

The focus of Huber's essay, certainly, is on the state of US environmentalism broadly, and as such it cannot be taken to encapsulate the state of global environmentalism. One can quite easily imagine, however, a parallel of the 'missing working class' per our discussion of global climate

change. These are persons in Quadrant 1 whose survival relies on fossil fuels, petroleum products, and an energy infrastructure that simultaneously places them in a position to emit more while ensuring that they are able meet their day to day needs. While this population in the Global North may well be wealthier (according to the terms of per capita and national wealth) than a majority of the world population, the real conditions of their lives are far from free.

The task that we are left with, then, is how to empower persons in Quadrant 1 to act out of their globally advantageous position while being sensitive to the constraints of their daily living. We must find a way to objectively rework our understanding of complicity in a way that is amenable to our subjective experience of discrepancy, and moreover our various subjective experiences of constraint.

Now, since complicity as a distribution problem is predicated on cases of sole accountability, any objective reworking must begin by interrogating the way that we think about accountability generally. This leads us to the following question: where do those in Quadrant 1 typically derive their concepts of accountability? The answer to this question this brings us back, incidentally, to Dale Jamieson and the modern Western moral paradigm.

Now in my discussion of Jamieson above, I argued that while Jamieson's read of a 'universal' moral paradigm is too reductive. This being the case, however, I also argued that Jamieson's point is nonetheless important in that it indicates to us that Western moral paradigm, at the very least, can be considered inadequate. At this juncture I wish to add another point to substantiate Jamieson: that while the Western moral paradigm is by no means universal, it is nonetheless globally dominant. We can measure this dominance roughly by considering the social and political make up of our contemporary world on a global scale. Our contemporary global infrastructure is still predicated on the political unit of the nation state, of which we have around 200, give or take a few 'ambiguous' cases. These nation states, by and large, operate as modern democratic states. Modern democratic

states take as basic the moral paradigm that Jamieson articulates, and shape—or at least legitimize—their rule of law along those lines. Most have constitutions, separation of powers, and engage in diplomatic relations with other nations in global forums (and through global structures such as the UN) according to a largely Western code.

This dominance of the Western moral framework, if we were to take seriously Jamieson's concerns regarding the inadequacy of this very framework, is certainly troubling. This concern is echoed by Stephen Gardiner, another climate ethicist. Gardiner, in his 2011 book *A Perfect Moral Storm,* presents what he calls a "global test" for our social and political institutions and the theories and philosophies that undergird them. The test and its conclusions are as follows:

> If either [the social and political institutions or philosophies behind them] does not respect the claim that failure to address a serious global threat is a criticism of it, and a potentially fatal one, *then it is inadequate and must be rejected*." (218)

The collective failure of global negotiations to take seriously and *act* to address the global threats climate change brings up, Gardiner proposes, is a legitimate criticism as to the adequacy of our dominant institutions and the philosophies behind them. Not only that, insofar as these very same institutions and the philosophies behind them are blind to the fact that failure to act decisively confronts their integrity and validity as governing bodies and organizational paradigms, then they are without a doubt "inadequate and must be rejected."

What, however, does it mean to *reject* institutions and the philosophies underlying them, as Gardiner proposes? Following on with Gardiner, it seems that his understanding of rejection is more specific than wholesale. With regard to the global test he proposes, Gardiner painstakingly notes that

> … to say that the global test is one constraint on the acceptability of social institutions and theories is not to claim that it is the only such constraint, or even the dominant one. After all, the test itself is narrowly conceived (e.g., because it deals only with self-generated threats), and there are other important areas of social and political concern, such as individual rights, distributive justice, intergenerational justice, the preservation of communities, our relationship to nature, and so on. Though these concerns may often be implicated in the global test, we need

> not assume at the outset that they can always be simply subsumed under it, nor need we assume that if there are conflicts, the global test always takes precedence. (218)

From his elaboration, Gardiner does seem not advocate that we do away with the modern Western paradigm willy-nilly. There are, as he points out, other concerns and other constraints that ought to be considered. What he is advocating for, so it seems, is that we pay attention to the ways this paradigm evidently fails with regard to climate change, and that we take these failures seriously and work swiftly to address them. That we begin by 'spot-checking' the existing paradigm, for Gardiner, is part and parcel of what he calls an "ethics of transition," a step along the way towards the formation of a new globally adequate ideal theory of morality and ethics (400).

Gardiner's approach of steady transformation as the proper means of rejection, in my estimation, is right. To be clear, I am not interested in maintaining 'the Western tradition' and its many ills. It is no small thing to realize that the societies that have contributed most to the greenhouse gas emissions (in addition to a whole host of extraction-based global harms) have largely operated under the modern Western moral paradigm. It is also no small thing to realize that many other long-standing moral paradigms that regard the earth with much more respect and moral sensitivity have been historically marginalized precisely by projects justified by Western moral paradigm ('civilizing projects', 'development', 'progress', etc.).

At the same time, however, I also see that many other aspects of the contemporary moment we find ourselves in have flowed out of the modern Western moral paradigm. The ways that we as inhabitants of Quadrant 1 have been morally conditioned, the ways that we—by virtue of facticity, of luck, of chance—are intertwined in our material environments, the ways that we form and maintain our social and political organizations, and the ways we make sense of ourselves have been greatly influenced by the modern Western moral paradigm. From a pragmatic standpoint, it would be best to begin with where we are, especially as climate change does not afford us a lot of time.

This does not mean, of course, that one ought to lose sight of more ideal visions—it only means that we must be willing to trust that these ideal visions can be made more viable by working through, intervening in, and subverting the avenues we have available to us in the here and now.

Moreover, from the point of view of intellectual history, it is important to note that not all that emerges out of the Western moral paradigm is necessarily oppressive, nor fundamentally antithetical to other moral paradigms. Historically speaking, there has been a great deal of exchange and amalgamation between what we might consider to be ideas from the Western moral paradigm with ideas from other paradigms, alongside a fair share of rejection—democracy is one case in point. Undoubtedly, the means by which these ideas were propagated (by means of inquisition, for example) were often morally suspect. That this is the case, however, says little as to the process of how ideas are ultimately adopted or resisted—much less about how they were applied, for better or for worse. This invites us to be more discerning and honest in our assessments and not fall into the easy trap of being totally reactive.

From both an intellectual history and a pragmatic standpoint, then, it makes good sense to advocate for the transformation the Western moral paradigm from the inside out. We ought to exercise a critical eye, working to maintain what we find to be beneficial developments (we can even, if we wish, attempt to re-narrativize these developments) while vehemently rejecting what corrupt legacies have driven its development across the globe.

PART II

COMPLICITY, KUTZ, AND YOUNG

Re-thinking complicity from (though not exclusively from) a modern Western point of view, then, does look to be important. The tasks that confronts us in this Part II, then, is twofold. The first task is identifying which aspects of the modern Western paradigm inadequately explains our complicity in climate change. The second task is figuring out how we can revise it to help our situation within climate change.

Fortunately, there exists theoretical work addressing complicity in the Western philosophical tradition. Granted, the bulk of this theoretical work on complicity has tended to center around the question of corporate responsibility and agency, and, as one might expect, has largely blossomed in legal and business discourse. That said, what many consider to be the leading theory of complicity—Christopher Kutz's 2000 *Complicity: Ethics and Law in a Collective Age*—is a distinctly broad philosophical unpacking of complicity. This book will be the main text I will work with in the following section.

2.1. Kutz on Complicity

In his 2000 *Complicity: Ethics and Law for a Collective Age*, Kutz seeks to re-construct a more expansive notion of moral responsibility that better includes "the domain of *complicity*," or the "cultural and legal practices… surrounding relations of an agent to a harm that is mediated by other agents." (2) This domain includes such scenarios as the following:

1. Buying a table made of tropical wood that comes from a defoliated rainforest
2. Owning stock in a company that does business in a country that jails political dissenters

3. Being a citizen of a nation that bombs another country's factories in a reckless attack on terrorists
4. Inhabiting a region seized long ago from its aboriginal occupants
5. Helping to design an automobile the manufacturer knowingly sells with a dangerously defective fuel system
6. Administering a national health care bureaucracy that carelessly allows the distribution of HIV-contaminated blood. (Kutz 2000, 2)

Many, if not most of us, can easily recall to our minds how much recent public discourse have struggled with cases that, as Kutz characterizes them, fall somewhere within the domain of complicity. In the context of the United States, discussion around reparations provides one example of a contemporary political issue contested on the grounds of complicity—am I accountable for the benefits I enjoy today, which has been made available to me by historically unjust acts perpetrated by my direct ancestors? More recently (and ongoingly, as of the time of the writing of this thesis), the rhetoric, debates, and protests surrounding the responsibility of individuals and/or governments with regard to containing the spread of COVID-19, too, is an unfolding example about how groups conflict over readings of complicitous participation and social responsibility.

As significant as they are to our individual, communal, and occupational experiences, however, Kutz notes we have not yet been able to process and subsequently address these problems satisfactorily. While most of us have an intuition that something is amiss when mediated harms occur, we do not have formalized or articulated senses of how to assess and deal well with cases of complicity. Just as Jamieson and Gardiner have identified with regard to the inadequacy of both our individual and political responses to climate change, Kutz attributes that this inability to process mass complicity to the dominant moral paradigm—i.e., the modern Western paradigm.

More specifically, Kutz argues that when it comes to addressing complicity, the primary problem with this paradigm is that it features at heart an *individualistic* conception of moral

accountability, which Kutz specifically recognizes as an expression of the (global) social and economic transformations of the last century. This individualistic conception of accountability is constituted by three principles (3):

1. Individual Difference Principle: "I am only accountable for a harm if something I did made a difference to its occurrence"

2. Control Principle: "I am only accountable for events over which I have control, and whose occurrence I could have prevented"

3. Autonomy Principle: "I am not accountable for the harm another agent causes, unless I have induced or coerced that agent into performing the act"

Paradigmatically, the three principles yield the following picture:

> …individual moral agents are reproached, or reproach themselves, for harms ascribable to them and them alone, on the basis of their intentional actions and causal contributions. (4)

On the whole, Kutz deems this paradigmatic picture as solipsistic in two ways: causally and relationally. It is causally solipsistic in its representation that an individual agent is accountable for a harm if it is demonstrable that they have played a significant part in causing damage, and relationally solipsistic in its representation of individual agents as accountable for a harm if it is demonstrable that they have intended to effect *that* harm on another by their own free will (i.e. without coercion). All determiners of accountability, in other words, refers back to the individual agent: the subject of accountability is none other than myself, the object of accountability is the harm (or proportion of harm) that results from my actions alone, and the basis for my being accountable are "facts about myself"—that is, how much *I* have caused, what is it that *I* have willed, what mental state *I* was in, and so on (4).

Laid out in these ways, we can see how an individualistic conception leaves little room for any solid account of complicity. The paradigmatic cases of accountability offered by an individualistic conception features at heart unmediated harms (what I have referred to before to as

cases of sole accountability). This leaves cases of complicity fundamentally at odds with the paradigm, for cases of complicity by definition feature mediated harms—harms that result from the interactive actions of multiple agents engaging in multiple causal routes, often in less than cooperative or organized ways.

Just how at odds cases of complicity are to an individualistic conception of accountability becomes apparent in cases where "I participate in a harm caused by something we do, but am not personally accountable for that harm, because of the insignificance of my contribution" (5). (This, one might recognize, is precisely the formula behind the problem of inconsequentialism as we have discussed in context of climate change, where our personal emissions are causally insignificant). These scenarios pose an impossible kind of problem—what Kutz calls *I-We* problems—for the individualistic conception of accountability. For the individualistic conception, Kutz writes in context of *I-We* problems,

> …drives a wedge between me and us, between private and public. Since individuals are only accountable for the local effects, responses aimed at individuals are inappropriate. But since there is also no legitimate moral subject corresponding to the *we,* responses to collective harms find no proper target. (5)

As Kutz is keen to point out, however, an individualistic conception of accountability does not fully capture how we exercise accountability in our day to day life. While the individualistic conception of accountability is what may be explicitly articulated in society (and especially within our legal sphere), our day to day practices of accountability more accurately reflects what Kutz terms a *relational-positional* conception of moral accountability. Drawing from this already present conception, Kutz notes, we can begin to find a way to address *I-We* problems.

Within a relational-positional conception of moral accountability, "individual accountability for individual harms depends upon the relations among agents, respondents, and harms" (66). An individual agent's accountability, in other words, is not determined solely by facts about the agents

alone. While these facts remain important, within a relational-positional conception of accountability, the nature of the ties between parties involved in a harm are also important. For example, innovating slightly from an example Kutz gives in his book, my breaking a vase warrants different expressions of accountability depending on the social and relational context of its occurrence. My breaking a vase that belonged to my mother at home warrants a different expression of accountability than my breaking a vase that belonged to a friend at a party. Where with my mother an apology may well be sufficient, with my friend a public apology and promise of replacement may be the appropriate route. This primarily is due to the differences between my relationship with my mother and my friend, though augmenting other aspects of this example—kind of harm, kind of setting, kind of intent, etc.—will also yield different nuances as to what is an appropriate expression of accountability.

The illuminating point here is that our sensitivity to different scenarios and the kinds of accountability they exact of us is not a matter of outright calculation. We know intuitively, having lived within our respective social and cultural worlds, what expressions are sufficient and what are not. We can likewise negotiate differences in perspective via discussion or consultation with each other (in more or less formalized ways). Accountability, in other words, is a collective project. More specifically, accountability is a collective project belong to three parties: agents, victims, and onlookers (24). Agents, victims, and onlookers are the consistent positions that are established by an instance of harm.

Within a relational-positional conception of accountability, then, accountability is more akin to the result of a negotiation than a 'fact' discoverable through objective investigation or a mathematical problem. Here, what an individual agent is ultimately accountable to is the accomplishment of a resolution for and by all parties (agents, victims, onlookers)—including

themselves (as expressed, for example, in the right for an agent to demand that the particular expression of accountability warranted of them do not violate their basic self-respect).[5]

By explicitly laying out what a relational-positional conception of accountability looks like, Kutz opens the door for an understanding of individual accountability predicated on an individual's relationship to other individuals, over and against an understanding predicated on an individual's causal or intentional 'status'. In this set up, the fact that one's individual action makes little, or even negligible, difference in the context of a harm can still be considered meaningfully—for actions that are not causally significant nonetheless may be relationally impactful.

For example, that my sister and I thought it would be fun to make mean comments about passing cars during a long and boring road trip may not result in any actual harm against the drivers of the cars—but they certainly impact our relationship with our parents, who promptly gave us a talking to. Or, for a different and more serious example, that I choose not to testify on behalf of a friend in court may not, at the end of the day, impact the results of the legal case (that is, I do not contribute in any causally significant way as to the harm that arises out of the ruling)—but my opting out certainly impacts my relationship with my friend, who had expected me to have their back and tell the truth, and I am now accountable for addressing their disappointment.

From these examples we can see that the qualifier for accountability within a relational-positional conception of accountability, then, is *participation*—not causal significance or gravity of intent. My sister and I are accountable for our mean comments not because we hurt the feelings of passing drivers (we clearly did not), but rather because we had participated in a speech action that

[5] These negotiations of accountability can of course be brokered by various cultural and social institutions (e.g., the court system), and rules for these negotiations may be set in place (e.g., codes and laws). This being the case, this notion of accountability as a collective project between agents, victims, and onlookers is already in a sense present, if incompletely, in our societal practice. We can consider legal nomenclature, for example, as a particular way of naming the agent and victim (e.g., *Plessy v. Ferguson, Brown v. Board of Education, Juliana v. United States*), and legal proceedings involving witnesses, expert testimony, and—ultimately—a judge as a way to name onlookers.

violates expectations of respect—which is a clear social and relational value. Our parents, as onlookers and as such part of the harm collective, are right to hold us accountable on the grounds of our participation. I am accountable for my opting out of testifying (and I certainly am within my rights to do so) not because I helped bring about legal harm to my friend (I did not), but rather because I had participated in an avoidant action that violates expectations of steadfastness in friendship. I may have my reasons, of course, for not wanting to testify and know that I did not intend to hurt my friend. These facts, however, does not make me less accountable for breaching rapport and trust—and indeed, as a means of expressing accountability I may owe my friend a lengthy explanation (and perhaps dinner).

What, however, counts as participation, if not for causal contribution? For Kutz, participation consists simply and minimally in the form of *participatory intention*. Whenever individuals "act with the intention of contributing to a collective outcome," participatory intention is at play (67). Now, participatory intention might come in varieties (reluctantly, affirmatively, gloatingly, sadistically, cowardly, honorably). Participatory intent may also vary in terms of 'completeness', or how much one participatory intention tracks with the goal of a collective project.

For example, I may donate some books to a friend's yard sale—proceeds of which will be donated to a local homeless shelter. Even if I did not know that the proceeds will be donated to a local homeless shelter, or even if I did not know that the proceeds will be donated at all (perhaps I just wanted to help out and hang out with my friend, or perhaps I wanted to return a favor), I nonetheless still acted with participatory intent. That is, I acted in a way meant to contribute to the success of the yard sale. As Kutz puts it: "what makes my behavior participatory is nothing more (and nothing less) than my conception of what I do to the group act, whether that conception is explicit in my deliberations, or functionally implicit in my actual or counterfactual behavior" (82).

In Kutz's account, participatory intention also serves as a way to define what all counts as a joint or collective action. A joint action is nothing more than the overlap of many participatory intentions (75). All joint action, Kutz maintains, share this common structure. This is a distinctively minimalist conception of joint action, which according to Kutz allows for "superior descriptive coverage" (90)—that is, able to account of collective actions that are barely coordinated. After all, Kutz writes,

> Groups can act jointly although members of the group have only weak expectations about each other's intentions, do not and are not disposed to respond strategically to one another, and do not intend that the group act be successfully realized. So long as the members of a group overlap in the conception of the collective end to which they intentionally contribute, they act collectively, or jointly intentionally. (90)

To anchor collective action and accountability for a collective action on participatory intention simply may seem, at a glance, circular. Kutz acknowledges this point, but argues in response that it is only circular if one thinks that collective actions appear out of nowhere and remain static over time. As by definition comprised of multiple actors, collective actions emerge and change—persons join and leave, tactics added or removed. What maintains a collective action, in Kutz's view, is none other than a consistent overlap of participatory intentions—and it is precisely in this maintenance, via participatory intent, that one can be held accountable to whatever results.

To explain how this overlap plays out in terms of determining accountability, Kutz uses as an illustration in his book the position of a "mid-level engineer for a large manufacturer, who has reason to believe but does not know that the control modules he is helping to design, which are used by the company in manufacturing consumer products, are also used in manufacturing land mines to be sold in the Third World" and his company associates: the shipping clerk and the vice president (156).

Our engineer, Kutz describes, has an indirect relationship with the harms that result from mine explosions. He is, after all, not in the business of promoting the mines intentionally. The

engineer likewise does not know any details of civilian casualties and the like that his designs have helped produce. Nonetheless, Kutz maintains that

> …since [the engineer] may be regarded as a collective actor just so long as he conceives of his actions as a means, he is inclusively accountable for the consequences of the collective act to which he in fact contributes. Indeed, so long as the decision to work with the company is voluntary, and information about the company's activities is available, every employee bears an accountable relation to the victims of the land mines. (157)

As we can see, under Kutz's account a demand for collective accountability is a demand upon all the individuals who participated in bringing about the harms that a particular collective accomplished—be the harm a goal or a side effect. Accountability goes 'all the way down' the chain of participatory intentions. Where participants differ, according to Kutz, is in the manner in the kind and degree of accountability that can be warranted of them depending on the details of their participation. Our engineer, for example, ought to be held to a higher level of accountability on grounds of the "scope of his contribution" with regard to his "functional role" compared to that of a shipping clerk (157). "The engineer's functional role," Kutz writes,

> …is significant, not just in the thin, metaphysical sense of providing necessary contribution to the collective end, but as involving considerable thought, reflection, and adjustment in its execution. The engineer's will pervades the collective act, for in order to explain the (collective) development and production of the mines, we must cite at many points his exercise of skill and judgment. Contrast the engineer with a shipping clerk, indiscriminately sending out blenders to Singapore and landmines to Cambodia; he may also play a necessary role in the collective act. The shipping clerk's participatory role indeed will ground some form of consequential accountability, but it would be mindless to treat him in the same way as someone whose contributions inhabit the collective act more deeply. (157-8)

By the same token, our engineer ought to be held to a different expression of accountability than the vice president of the company, whose "intention is straightforwardly to promote the sale of the mines" (158). Thus, as Kutz puts it,

> Though both the engineer and vice president participate and so are complicit in the same act, their complicity is based in very different participatory intentions. The vice president has sought the sale, fully aware of what she has done. Our response to the vice president, therefore, reflects both the fact of her contribution to the harm, and the fact that she knowingly promoted it. The vice president's will is presumably fully engaged with the project

> of making and selling mines, while the engineer's bears only a contingent connection based in his participation in the company's projects, whatever those turn out to be. (158-9)

Congruent with his notion of joint actions as made up of overlapping participatory intentions, Kutz proposes that we can likewise think of degrees of accountability using a similar visual:

> We can characterize the difference between the vice president and the engineer using a spatial metaphor, treating agents whose roles are merely participatory as at the periphery. Relative distance from core to periphery may then be measured through functional assessments, so the shipping clerk would be said to be more peripheral than the engineer. This spatial metaphor maps the relative difference in our responses to conduct and character. For in the typical case, what distinguishes them both from the shipping clerk, namely the attitudes they take towards the success of the activity. As victims and outsiders we concentrate our responses upon those who seek out the harm, rather than upon those for whom the harm's creation is merely incidental to their focal activity. (159)

In terms of establishing accountability for a harm, then, Kutz seems to propose that we ought to focus preliminary investigations not so much on who all contributed significantly and who all meant to harm, but rather on who all acted in ways that meant to make a particular goal—and its attendant harm—possible. Only after this initial establishment of all who is accountable can we talk about the kind and degree of participatory intention, as this is what matters in determining what expressions of accountability can be appropriately demanded of us.

From this, we have theoretical grounds for demanding that different kinds of accountability be warranted of different persons according to their relationships and positionality within a collective action, as well as according to the particular circumstances surrounding their participatory intention. Those closer to the center of decision making are to be held to more drastic expressions of accountability (such as having to pay fines our of personal fund or face expulsion, for example), while those at the periphery of decision making may well be held only to an expression of apology. All this is possible without compromising any individual's sense of personal responsibility, as an understanding of complicity as a distribution problem leads those at the periphery (and peripheries can be very wide) to do.

All in all, for our discussion of complicity within climate change in particular, Kutz gestures us towards ways by which we can solidly consider individuals accountable even as their emissions are causally inconsequential. Individuals are accountable, that is, for their participation in collective actions that result in harms. The reasons for this are two-fold: 1) that actions that are causally inconsequential nonetheless have relational impact, and 2) that my participation within a collective *is* what makes up the collective, and as follows my participation is what actually makes possible the collective harm from an operational point of view—irrespective of what causal significance or insignificance my action may have had to the particular harm in question. That we as individuals feel accountable for the harms that result from climate change is validated within Kutz's framework, for our accountability does not simply rest on our causal contribution.

Yet, there remains unaddressed the further question of how this all help persons in Quadrant 1 make sense of their subjective experiences. Surely, Kutz's relational-positional conception of accountability, in addition with his account of joint action, help us understand that our accountability need not hinge on the causal significance of our actions—rather, it hinges upon the nature of our relationships with others. This attunes nicely with how many of us already feel and helps provide a more affirming narrative than that of our commonplace understanding of complicity. Kutz's account, specifically along the lines of his relational-positional conception of accountability, does move us closer to an objective framework that better tracks with our subjective experience. This acknowledged, Kutz's account of participatory intention does not seem all that helpful in helping one understand how one's ordinary actions, done without any intent to contribute to climate change, can result in such grievous harms. While Kutz's account so far helps get over the problem inconsequentialism, it does not fully help us make sense of our subjective experience of discrepancy

Certainly, where it is easy enough to understand how those implicated in fossil fuel corporations or policy making roles may be said to be accountable on account of joint action, it is not so easy to make sense of how the ordinary individual citizen, and especially those who find their survival reliant on systems that generate harms, can be said to have any participatory intention to contribute to any collective goal. Thus, as far as our complicity in climate change goes, the question that arises for Kutz's account is the following: *where exactly am I participating, and what am I participating in?* For surely climate change and the harms that results do not derive from any single collective project!

While under Kutz's account the problem of overstepping individual accountability is indeed addressed, the manner of address seems to only effectively apply to cases where collective goals are directly specified (e.g., the goal of a corporation to make profit, or the goal of policy makers to allocate resources in a certain way, etc.). When it comes to cases of individuals or whole communities keen on simply living out their lives in ordinary ways absent of collective ambition, however, the designation of collective action as based on the overlap of participatory intention seems to reach a limit.

Kutz, indeed, does recognize that the criterion of participatory intention seems absent in some cases of collective harm. Thus, Kutz notes that the harms that result out of joint or collective actions can further be broken down in two categories: *structured* and *unstructured* collective harms. Structured harms are generated by individuals united in the pursuit in some collective action that result in harm, while unstructured collective harms are generated by individuals who pursue separate courses of action that nonetheless results in an identifiable collective harm.

In the absence of an explicit collective goal, Kutz asserts, we may still consider that persons are jointly engaging in systems of projects or behaviors that, together, pave way for a particular harm to arise. As such, there is yet something akin to a "shared venture" within which individual agents

are participants, and while there may not be participatory intention in the fullest sense, we may yet talk of a "*quasi-participatory* basis of accountability, 'quasi' because there is no specific project to which individuals contribute" (186). For example, that I drive a car may not appear to me as my engaging within a collective action with other drivers in the full sense that I intend to contribute to the act of driving together (or using the road together, etc.). And yet, Kutz wants to say, it is possible to say that all of us drivers sharing the highway at 08.30am are taking part in a shared venture where we in fact share and together express tacit support for the maintenance of roads and of the use of personal vehicles as the main mode of transportation in our town. Our unexamined or unexplained participation in what is available, then, becomes grounds for our accountability—be it to a far lesser degree than when we explicitly lend our support towards a collective goal.

That individuals are participating in a shared venture tends to be more observable from the outside. In our car driving example, say, someone from outside the US may be able to see from their perspective as an onlooker that all of us are participating in a distinctly American 'car culture', the result of which are higher emissions. Put it another way, while persons in unstructured collective harms do not join in explicit participatory intention to harm, and while harm is never seriously meant by any of the individuals who contribute to these unstructured collective harms, it is rather clear from the point of view of victims and onlookers that a group of persons and their collective practices are the ones who inflict harm. At the very least, then, there is still reason to hold these persons accountable on account of a relational-positional conception of accountability. "So one part of dealing with collective harms," Kutz writes,

> …is emphasizing the moral significance of preexisting networks of collaboration. This invocation of community may seem utopian in the fragmented condition of postmodernity. But it is less utopian than the form of moral reflection proposed by consequentialists, and it is susceptible to social reinforcement. In general individuals do not and need not conceive of themselves as either isolated units or as members of humanity writ large. Rather, they inhabit middle-sized, overlapping fields of shared meanings and political identifications. These shared bases of identification can in turn provide the requisite basis of individual accountability. Drivers can come to be aware of the damage done by a way of life that ignores atmospheric effects. Gun

> sellers can realize that their trade, taken as a whole, occasions a climate of violence. More generally, the regional and institutional arrangements and roles that orient agents in social space can be used as foundations upon which to build structures of accountability. (188-9)

In essence, Kutz seems to be proposing that we can think about the various processes and patterns of action we engage in—cultural practices, social practices, 'ways of life'—as a 'higher order' form of joint project or collective action. Instead of an orientation towards a particular collective goal, we may think of orientation towards "a universe of shared values" (186) within which we all strive to work within as a 'meta' joint project. This meta joint project may not have nameable architects or a specific end goal, but nonetheless it features a series of related goals, endeavors, and values that, in our respective pursuits of them within the infrastructures we find ourselves within, result in harms. Our intentions to satisfy societally conditioned desires, thus, can be considered as a mitigated, or quasi, form of participatory intention.

This recourse to culture or broader societal values is interesting. It is also, notably, a familiar move in contemporary climate change discourse. Various perspectives indeed have variously named Western values, capitalism, the cult of technology, modernity, colonialism, or combinations of thereof as dysfunctional ways of life that feature as the main drivers of climate change and the various crises that result. It is integral to our tackling of climate change, it is argued, to resist and change these ways of life. So long as we participate in them, we are liable for harming not only others but ourselves.

These diagnoses are certainly illuminating of the structures that undergird what paths are open for us to take and, subsequently, the ways we behave. Yet, without further explanation, it remains unclear how helpful this kind of move is when it comes to helping one make sense of how should process one's personal complicity in climate change. This sort of move, once again, also tends to come off as ignorant for those who do not conceive of themselves as aspiring to anything beyond making it day by day. *Surely, the infrastructures and ways of life I am engaged in may result in harm—*

but it is the only one I viably have got access to, and do I not have the right to live just as much as another person? To stop 'participating' in these things I never decided to participate in would bring harm to me and my family, and when it does, who then becomes accountable for our coming to harm for attempting to 'do the right thing'?

Ultimately, the important difference that Kutz seems to gloss over in his treatment of unstructured harms is that of agency. In the case of structured collective harms, even if agency is attenuated by the situation one finds one's self in (peer pressure, perhaps, or threat to livelihood), one could have at least imagined choosing otherwise. That is, even if the paths seem forced or impossible, the opportunity to have acted otherwise is nonetheless open, even if only in theory. In terms of participating explicitly in a harm, I could have viably *refused* to participate—even if it is illogical or irrational to refuse, on grounds of some other consideration such as physical well-being. In other words, there is some amount of personal choice in one's participating in a structured collective harm.

In cases of structured collective harms, then, there is a palpable sense of authorship for one's participation, even if that participation does not come freely. That one can even perceive a course of action as forced *is* a case in point of the possibility of another route. In the case of unstructured collective harms, on the other hand, one cannot possibly recognize that there is a morally problematic situation at hand prior to harm done. In other words, there is no option of acting otherwise—not even theoretically. For the agent, cases of structured collective harms and unstructured collective harms presents different epistemic scenarios. Where in cases of structured harms we can discern (even if it was in retrospect) different possible paths one could take, in cases of unstructured harms, everything appears as, well, *normal*. In cases of unstructured harms, one's actions that turn out to be harmful may even be, by all accounts available, morally upstanding. In the case of climate change, for example, granting everyone access to cheap energy appears as a great idea. Setting aside for now the ills in the execution of the idea, advocating for energy equity strikes

most of us as a morally commendable thing to do. The kicker, of course, comes only when we realize—decades down the road—that extending energy access on the basis of something like coal is a harmful thing to do.

In unstructured collective harms there is no indication that there was a choice to be made, or that I could have acted otherwise. There is no 'stimulus' to prompt such a consideration. In the instance of our contributing to climate change, for example, there is no explicit instance where we could have possibly avoided it—no personal choice somewhere along the line that could have removed us from the path to harm. We are, as with many cases of unstructured harms, born into the swing of things without any say.

For cases of unstructured collective harms, then, the direction of awareness of one's relation to a collective is retrospective, and reflection is often prompted only upon notification by the victims of (and on occasion bystanders who witness) the harmful consequences of one's typical actions. Else, it is recognizable only when there is some deeper investigation, be it empirical (as it is in the case of climate change, where projections of harm are aided by scientific inquiry) or theoretical (as it is in the case, for example, of Marx's sociological insights as to the impacts of industrialism and capitalism). These empirical and theoretical insights, however, are often not so accessible for many persons who are already implicated in the processes and practices that generate harm—not, at least, without a large political movement.

Given the inherently retrospective character of unstructured collective harms, there is not much sense in talking about agency. And if one did not have agency in perpetrating a harm, does it make sense that one should be called to account in the ways that one who participates in structured collective harms does? How can we be morally accountable for our involvement in processes we genuinely had no say in and never registered, well, as processes in the first place?

2.2. Young's Critique of Kutz: Complicity in Issues of Structural Injustice

Iris Marion Young, in her posthumously published book *Responsibility for Justice,* picks up on this limitation of Kutz's theory, pointing out that insofar as Kutz's theory operates on a *liability model* of moral accountability, it cannot properly account for our unique location in unstructured collective harms. A liability model of moral accountability, according to Young, evinces the following four characteristics:

1. It seeks to identify particular agents for the purposes of exacting redress
2. It focuses on restitution as the goal of accountability
3. It seeks to distinguish between perpetrator and victim
4. It assumes that harms are the result of deviations from a fixed set of background conditions

These characteristics, where they aid assessment of accountability in many instances (and certainly in instances of structured collective harms) cannot adequately help us navigate instances of unstructured collective harms, which Young attributes as "issues of structural injustice."[6] That a liability model does not apply to issues of structural injustice, Young writes, primarily has to do with the fact that

> … structures are produced and reproduced by large numbers of people acting according to normally accepted rules and practices, and it is in the nature of such structural processes that their potentially harmful effects cannot be traced directly to any particular contributors to the process. (100)

[6] That Kutz uses the term 'unstructured' and Young uses the term 'structural' may be a confusing point. They are, however, coming at the same thing—that is, instances of collective harm that are the result of no particular project. Simply, they are coming to it from different vantage points. Kutz uses the term unstructured to capture the situation from the perspective of agents who contribute, while engaging in their separate ways, to the collective harm. Young uses the term structural to refer to the means by which these collective harms emerge, or the structures within which agents who contribute, well, contribute. Nonetheless, the fact remains that they are both seeking ways to better account for unintended, uncoordinated, and large-scale harms.

What Young challenges Kutz on is his taking complicity in structured collective harms as differing from complicity in unstructured collective harms in terms of degree and not kind. Young maintains that there is a morally significant difference between *participation in* structured collective harms, for which a liability model is appropriate, and *sharing in* unstructured collective harms, for which it is not. This difference in kind has to do with how, in cases of unstructured collective harms, individuals navigate the infrastructures that form their material and social space in remarkably normal and morally acceptable ways. Here, taking part is a given. This differs from cases of structured collective harms, where clear occasions for choosing participation are present. Given this, Young argues, we need a different understanding of complicity within unstructured collective harms—to which Young suggests her *social-connection* model of moral responsibility.

A social-connection model contains five characteristics (I shall explain each of these points in the following passages as they organically arise):

1. It is not isolating
2. It is judging of background conditions
3. It is more forward looking than backward looking
4. It features shared responsibility
5. It holds that accountability for structural injustices (i.e., unstructured collective harms) can only be discharged through collective action

Similar to Kutz's account, Young's social-connection model of moral responsibility grounds personal accountability in the fact that one contributes to harms via one's actions regardless of causal significance. The social connection model also, much like how Kutz sets up his explanation of unstructured harms, understands that these contributions are not a result of participatory intentions towards making real some collective goal. Rather, for both Kutz and Young, unstructured collective

harms result from an individual's self-directed pursuit of various projects within a larger system. Young describes her take as follows:

> 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. Within these processes, each of us expects justice toward ourselves, and others can legitimately make claims of justice on us. All who dwell within the structures must take responsibility for remedying injustices they cause, though none is specifically liable for the harm in a legal sense. Responsibility in relation to injustice thus derives not from living under a common constitution, but rather from participating in the diverse institutional processes that produce structural injustice. (105)

We see, then, that Young and Kutz both agree as the basis of individual accountability, as well as the nature of unstructured collective harms. Where Kutz proceeds to make a sharp distinction between agents and victims, however, Young denies such a strong divide between individuals. Young's denial of the sharp distinction emerges out of her reading of how we belong together in "interdependent processes of cooperation and competition through which we seek benefits and aim to realize projects."

In Young's reading of unstructured collective harms, both those harmed and those who harm are necessarily engaged within the same structural processes. Agents of harm and victims of harm, under Young's reading, are mutually available to each other as agents and as victims due to the systems they together (if separately) negotiate within—I can be a victim of your actions, and you can be an aggressor against me, *only* because the structural processes we both exist within allows for such a relation between us to be the case. For example, I can be unfilial towards my parents only if the structural processes we both negotiate within (in this case, sociocultural processes) admits this relation by valuing filial piety as a high social priority. If we were not in a space where the processes of valuation, expression, and punishment were in place to enable filial or unfilial relations, there would be no sense in talking of harm or benefit in these senses. In other words, agents and victims

in unstructured collective harms are related by background conditions. This differs from cases of structured collective harms, where agents and victim are related by virtue of a goal-oriented collective project, not simply by the background conditions in and of themselves (though there may certainly be overlap).

In cases of unstructured collective harms, background conditions set the scene for us to harm and be harmed. Young illustrates this in her book via a case study of the global garment industry, where cheap sweatshop made products are made available to us only by the structural processes of international trade and global capitalism. When I buy sweatshop made products, I am complicit in funding the continuing exploitation of the sweatshop workers halfway around the globe. By virtue of my purchase within the global marketplace, I have become an agent of harm—and the sweatshop worker, likewise, has become my victim. The important point, however, is that I and the sweatshop worker are related as agent and victim in this case only because of the structures of international trade and global capitalism. If either of us were not in these systems—say, if I made my own clothing—then there would be no possible grounds for my relationship as an agent of harm with a garment worker halfway around the globe. Thus, Young advocates, we ought to pay attention to background conditions, for background conditions are what make our otherwise normal actions harmful. This features one characteristic of the social-connection model: that it is *judging of background conditions.*

Kutz's account, on the other hand, seems to implicitly maintain that there is a distance between agents of harm and victims of harm. What surfaces here is a landscape where agents are related together in a system of practices or values that result in harms, harms whose victims are located outside of the system of practices or values that agents engage in. Hence Kutz can say, in his proposed solution to unstructured collective harms that

> Agents, victims, and onlookers who look to the social or institutional background of cooperation can find grounds for inclusive, individual accountability. Attention to the

> symbolic resonance of one's choice whether or not to participate in a pattern of wrong can further strengthen an individual's sense of accountability. So, individually accountable for what they jointly do, agents can work together to repair the past and improve the future. (203)

Consistent with Young's characterization of a liability model, Kutz's solution seeks to distinguish between perpetrators and victims in strong terms. Moreover, as with Kutz's assumption that any given individual has a choice "whether or not to participate in a pattern of wrong," it is clear that the focus is not on scrutinizing the background conditions that channel our actions one way or another, but rather on actions—or patterns of actions—in and of themselves. There is an implicit confidence in Kutz account that there exists some less harmful (or 'more ideal') initial condition that can be reverted to by righting the actions of agents. The background, in other words, is considered harmonious—or at least neutral—by default, and harms chiefly result from our engaging in practices that deviate from this working default.

Another (related) point where Kutz's and Young markedly differ is how each characterize how agents, victims, and onlookers fit within the context of unstructured collective harms. Kutz seems to consider that the distinction between agents, victims, and onlookers remain just as crisp in cases of unstructured collective harms as much as they tend to be in cases of structured collective harms. Young, on the other hand, necessitates room for ambiguity and overlap. "An important corollary of the idea that responsibility in relation to structural injustice is shared among all those who contribute to the processes that produce it," Young writes,

> …is that many of those properly thought to be victims of injustice nevertheless share responsibility for 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. In the social connection model, however, those who can properly be argued to be victims of structural injustice also can be called to a responsibility they share with others to engage in actions directed at transforming those structures. (113)

Allowance of ambiguity and overlap features as a second characteristic of the social-connection model: that it is *not isolating*. A social-connection model of moral accountability resists the tendency in liability models of isolating agents as the sole bearers of responsibility. For in cases of unstructured collective harms, as articulated above, agents are brought to harm victims due to the constraints that they find themselves within, by no fault of their own. Likewise, victims are brought to a vulnerable position by the very same constraints, also by no fault of their own. Both are, as it were, constrained by broader structural processes that deny them paths otherwise. In such a context, it does not make sense to hold on to an exclusive understanding of one's position in relation to a harm. Not only does it not make sense, in fact, it seems like per our intuitions a broader understanding is required.

Where in a case of a structured collective harm—say, to borrow Kutz's example, where I participate as an incendiary bomber pilot (among a hundred others) in the bombing of the German town of Dresden in WWII—it is impossible for me to be both agent of harm (the bomb dropper) and the victim (the bomb casualty), and it would be inappropriate to demand that those I had bombed take responsibility in repairing their own trauma. I am, with other agents, fully responsible for repair. However, in a case of an unstructured collective harm—say, to borrow another one of Kutz's example, where I am the (now chagrined) owner of a freon fridge that helped burn a hole in our ozone two decades ago (which in turn increased skin cancer rates amongst Australian aboriginal communities)—it does not sit well to simply peg me as an agent of harm upon whom responsibility for repair rests. While my actions indeed make me accountable, repair here is not exclusively in my domain. It would be strange to demand that it is, especially as there is not really any clear way how I could make it my own—I just bought the dang fridge, had no plans to use it to harm, and am no scientist! The position of an agent in unstructured collective harms must, it seems, be much more open.

Part and parcel with this understanding that we ought not to isolate agents as those who bear responsibility is a third tenet of a social-connection model: *shared responsibility.* At this point, Young distinguishes accountability from responsibility. By contrasting the terms, Young intends to capture more of the openness of our positions in unstructured collective harms. Young puts it this way:

> …the idea of shared accountability applies to others who are not guilty of the wrongs but have attitudes similar to the perpetrators that help create a climate that allows or encourages harm. Shared responsibility in relation to structural injustice, on the other hand, as I have indicated, consists in responsibility for normal and ongoing processes through action more than attitude. (111)

As with agents, the position of victims in cases of unstructured collective harms must also be more open. Where agents do not have exclusive hold on repair, victims likewise are not the exclusive target of repair. To do so would be to, again, miss the point that the real issues are the background conditions that position us to harm and be harmed by each other.

This idea of shared responsibility is a clear counter to Kutz's explanation of accountability in unstructured collective harms, where the key move is establishing a sense of collectivity amongst agents of harm. In Kutz's understanding, establishing a sense of collective ownership is necessary because responses of repair and the onus of change are ultimately warranted of agents. While Young does not deny the important role of agents, for Young placing response on the shoulders of agents alone inappropriately exaggerates their role in unstructured collective harms. It would be hubristic, after all, to feel one's self as so powerful as to be *wholly* accountable or responsible for the maintenance of various structural processes (that, likely, have existed prior to one's own life).

Thus, rather than our spending energy buckling down on clarifying one's position (as agent, victim, onlooker) in an unstructured collective harm—which Young seems to think would be a bit of a fool's errand, given the nature of unstructured collective harms—sharing in responsibility for unstructured collective harms centers the unjust structures we all take part in as the proper subject of evaluation and transformation. Shared responsibility invites all of us, in our (many, ambiguous,

uncertain) positions nonetheless to take part in changing the background conditions that bring us to harm. In fact, as Young further elucidates in another point (as will be discussed below), the hope to really resolve issues of structural injustice—or unstructured collective harms—are by acting together in these ties.

This brings us to a fourth central tenet of the social-connection model: that issues of structural can be *discharged only through collective action.* Unstructured collective harms, as they emerge from persons acting in ways responsive to background conditions, requires that individuals in all positions—be it agents, victims, or onlookers—work together. Writing in a more pragmatic flavor, Young writes as follows:

> Most of us are objectively constrained by the rules, norms, and material effects of structural processes when we try to act alone. These processes can be altered only if many actors from diverse positions within the social structures work together to intervene in them to try to produce other outcomes. (111)

This working together does not mean that we should abandon the ways we as individuals personally respond to the particular sets of circumstances we find ourselves in and join in together in a single united action. What is being emphasized, rather, is that individual efforts alone are insufficient to bring about change in terms of background conditions. Now, this statement by itself may strike one as banal. But within a social-connection model we are brought to understand that this point of insufficiency applies to everyone across all positions—not just agents, as our commonplace understanding of complicity implicitly makes it out to be.[7] Put it another way, it is not simply personal individual efforts that are insufficient—but efforts of groups comprised of persons of different positions *acting as individuals* are likewise insufficient.

[7] The flip side of this, of course, is that under a social-connection model all parties have some amount of power. Victims are not helpless, and neither are agents all powerful. Onlookers, too, are charged with power—they are not just a neutral referent, but rather active participants.

In unstructured collective harms, everyone by virtue of their engagement with structural processes knows something about how the harm comes about. If everyone attempts to work out some solution simply through their single perspective, however, it is highly unlikely that the structural processes will change in a way that will empower everyone. For example, in the context of climate change, a focus on reducing emissions alone is clearly not enough. However, it does appear—so long as we center our focus on agents alone—that reduction of emissions is *the* actionable route. This is because the way agents contribute to climate change via established structures *is* through production of greenhouse gases. From the end of those experience climate harms, however, emissions are not the tangible problem. Rather, the issue is the way that climate harms disrupt and threaten their lives. This threat appears tangibly in the form of crop failures, droughts, etc. To these persons, what is at stake is not just 'the human species', but their families, friends, and themselves. From this end—that is, the position of victims—mitigation and adaptation may be emphasized as more appropriate measures of response. A combination of perspective is what allows us to see that coordination between the two is needed, and while efforts from both ends are right and necessary, too much of one or the other will generate sub-optimal results.

Looking at these side by side from the perspective of a social-connection model, the path forward would be to coordinate across positions and couple solutions together. Rather than a discussion as to how to allocate resources across these solutions, a social-connection model would emphasize that solutions be made compatible under a more social lens: efforts to reduce emissions can certainly be designed in a way where it also addresses issues of mitigation and adaptation. This would comprise a collective action across positionalities. If a carbon tax were to be implemented, for example, certainly it is not too far-fetched to imagine how fees can be channeled to projects helping those most vulnerable as opposed to channeling them simply into efforts to make renewables more

competitive. Approaching policy in this way requires that we think in a manner that cuts across the lines of our positions as agents, victims, or onlookers.

Lastly, as in a social connection model we are brought to consider persons in all positionalities as workers in a mutual struggle, we are also brought to consider that taking responsibility in unstructured collective harms means that we emphasize responsibility for the future as opposed to accountability for the past. After all, collective action across positionalities, as a matter of formation, requires that we focus more on what is possible to do together. This places a lesser emphasis on what harmful actions has occurred in the past, back when groups or persons were acting in isolation. Thus, as compared to a liability model,

> The primary emphasis of the social connection model, on the other hand, is forward-looking. We seek to assign responsibility for structural social injustice that has existed recently, is ongoing, and is likely to persist unless social processes change. Because the particular causal relationship of the actions of specific individuals or organizations to structural outcomes is not possible to trace, there is no point in trying to seek redress from only and all those who have contributed to the outcome, and in proportion to their contribution. The injustices produced through structures have not reached a terminus, but rather are ongoing. The point is not to compensate for the past, but for all who contribute to processes producing unjust outcomes to work to transform those processes. (109)

This comprises a fifth tenet of the social connection model of moral responsibility: that it is *more forward looking than backward looking.* One important point to notice here is that Young does not favor a forward-looking approach contra a backward-looking approach. Rather, the emphasis is that seeking restitution alone will not transform what ultimately needs transformation, for it leaves the structural processes that allow for the harm that now requires restitution to occur.

A social-connection model advocates instead that we ought to instead cast our gaze forward to imagine what a life under transformed structural processes may look like. To do so would require that we first empower each other. This, for inhabitants in Quadrant 1, would mean that we must help each other overcome senses of overwhelm and apathy—not by means of moral bluster or impersonal political suggestions (i.e., treating climate change as a technical issue), but rather by

supporting each other socially, emotionally, and materially. Much of this will have to be done first and foremost by changing our language around complicity, though other means—such as re-thinking existent or creating new social and cultural practices of collective accountability and attending to the needs of our neighbor more disadvantaged by the structural processes we share—are likewise avenues of action. I shall discuss these avenues more concretely in our next, and last, section.

PART III

CONCLUSION: LESSONS FROM KUTZ AND YOUNG

All throughout the discussion in Part II, I have attempted to point out, where illuminating, connections between Kutz and Young's analyses of complicity to our situation as persons complicit in climate change. Working from these two, we can begin to construct a better objective framework that better accommodates our subjective experience of complicity in climate change. In this last section, I would like to gather together and expand on the insights that I have attempted to present above with more overt focus on the specific experience of those in Quadrant 1. Between Kutz and Young, I believe, we can find valuable clues as to how we can practically act in response to our complicity in climate change related harms. All through, I will gesture towards some areas of application within our personal lives, social lives, and political lives. Some of what I will present may be of most use to those engaged in climate activism, though much of what I will present may also be of use to a general audience.

I will begin first by retracing the story of complicity I had attempted to tell across Part I and Part II. This thesis began with an identification of how all of us, by virtue of our contribution to greenhouse gas emissions, are complicit within climate harms. That this is true is a matter of physical proof. At this point in time, any and all carbon emissions loads inches us closer towards 4°C degrees of warming—a level that, according to scientific consensus, will result in some severe and fatal upheavals for both humans and other-than-humans. Already, at 1°C, we are seeing mass species extinction, collapsing states, and the beginnings of massive global migration.

The bare fact of our complicity, then, is uncontroversial. What is controversial—or more appropriately, perhaps, what ought to be more controversial—is how we understand this fact. How

we commonly understand complicity, I argue, inadequately prepares us both on a subjective, experiential level and on an objective, theoretical level. What results from this is a chasm where social and political motivation needlessly falls through.

One particularly debilitating feature of our commonplace understanding of complicity is that it treats accountability within cases of complicity as a 'distribution problem'. Treating cases of complicity as distribution problem amounts to attempts to shoehorn our understanding of sole accountability—i.e., our understanding of non-complicitous accountability—onto cases of complicity. The assumption at play here is that the very same measures by which we determine accountability in cases of harms generated by single actors cleanly applies to cases where there are multiple actors. While this may work for cases that are relatively small scale, this fails us when we approach cases of larger scale… and climate change, certainly, is a *very* large and complex case.

As a result of this, climate discourse runs into one main problem: *inconsequentialism*. The problem of inconsequentialism, I argue, results from the fact that our commonplace understanding of complicity features causal significance and intent to harm as a key determiners of accountability. Individuals within the context of climate change harms do not, as individual units, cause any amount of significant impact upon the climate system—nor do they harbor intent to harm. Thus, while individuals are complicit, the conclusion under our commonplace understanding of complicity is that individuals are not accountable. This is, obviously, a paradoxical conclusion.

Moreover, the two main approaches we have employed to get out of this paradox have been likewise unhelpful. The first way attempts to scale up the unit of accountability by invoking collectives—most commonly by invoking nation states. Nation states that have emitted more greenhouse gases, the logic goes, are more accountable than nation states that have not emitted as much. Aggregates of nation states, largely by measurements of 'development' (developing vs. developed nations; Global North and Global South), have also been used as categories by which we

are to determine accountability. The second way attempts to scale down the of criteria of accountability by taking relative differences between individual emissions—not objective differences as to actual climate change impact—as the point of causal significance.

Both of these attempts have been unhelpful, largely because they nonetheless rely on a notion of complicity as a distribution problem to justify their moves. This features as an instance of objective inadequacy, wherein we are left without ways to conceive of accountability outside of the scheme of causal and intentional significance. This objective inadequacy further exacerbates the failure of these approaches to address how persons actually experience their complicity to climate change, which revolve, I argue, around the discrepancy between ordinary actions and extraordinary harms—which manifests, psychologically, in things such as eco-anxiety.

To help us attune to who exactly are compromised by eco-anxiety, I have presented the Quadrant as helpful conceptual tool. The Quadrant, which tracks climate change knowledge (conceptual, otherwise) and climate change experience (direct, indirect), aims to help us assess broadly how persons differ in their experience of climate change—and, subsequently, how they experience their complicity.

For the purposes of this thesis I focus on Quadrant 1, inhabitants of which have conceptual knowledge of climate change, but who live largely insulated from direct (physical) and disruptive climate change effects. This is the Quadrant, I argue, whose experience are ineptly addressed by our commonplace understanding of complicity. Unfortunately, it is also the Quadrant wherein the inhabitants are best positioned to effectively address climate change. That inhabitants of Quadrant 1—the bulk of whom reside in the Global North—are ill-equipped by the commonplace understanding of complicity affects our global state of affairs in a real way. As individuals in Quadrant 1 do not face direct disruption on account climate change, and since the bulk individuals in Quadrant 1 reside in democratic countries of the Global North, we can reasonably say that

residents of this Quadrant have, as individuals and citizens, at baseline a substantial amount of political access and capacity for action. This is in addition to the fact that the countries that the bulk of the inhabitants of Quadrant 1 reside in happen to be the highest carbon emissions.

That persons in Quadrant 1 are position at a crucial and advantageous position, however, is somewhat compromised by eco-anxiety and its flip side, apathy. Eco-anxiety and apathy, I argue, stems in large part from how our subjective experience of our complicity in climate change is left unexplained and unheeded by our objective frameworks of accountability. Moreover, as similar to the case of inconsequentialism, our common methods of addressing eco-anxiety and apathy have tended to merely exacerbate feelings of discrepancy and alienation. That our common methods have been unhelpful has to do, once more, with how objectively inadequate our understanding of complicity is. As it is, this understanding is insensitive to how climate change, as a large collective action problem, is a different sort of moral problem.

To overcome the subjective impasse that residents of Quadrant 1 face, then, a rethinking of the objective framework that defines complicity for us is necessary. This brings us face to face with the Western moral paradigm, which happens to be the dominant moral paradigm we in Quadrant 1 navigate within. Following Stephen Gardiner's assessments as to how to best overcome the inadequacies of the Western moral paradigm, I hold that a rethinking and transformation of this moral paradigm is needed to help us objectively overcome both the objective and subjective problems that our commonplace understanding of complicity drags us into. This is where an investigation with Kutz and Young become helpful to our discussion. I have discussed Kutz and Young in the previous section (Part II). Now, I will draw together their main arguments and insights more succinctly, with more overt focus on our complicity in climate change.

The Western moral paradigm, Kutz argues, cannot adequately address cases of complicity due to its individualistic conception of accountability. Within this individualistic conception of

accountability—which more or less mirrors my understanding of our commonplace understanding of complicity—cases of mediated harms are difficult to square. This is because an individualistic conception of moral accountability considers as the basis, subject, and object of accountability to be the individual. Accountability, in other words, is determined by facts about an individual: what causal impact an individual has on a state of affairs, what level of harmful intent does an individual have, etc. This understanding leads us to an impasse when, as Kutz puts it, we come to *I-We* problems: cases where mediated harms are generated by actors so diffuse that individual causal impact and harmful intent becomes impossible to assess.

Contra this individualistic conception of accountability, Kutz offers a relational-positional conception of accountability. This relational-positional conception, in contrast to an individualistic conception, treats accountability as fundamentally collective. That is, an agent's accountability for a specific harm does not derive from facts about the individuality of the agent, but rather from the context of relationships (familial, social, cultural) that an agent is embedded in and the positionalities of others (victim, onlooker) that an agent interacts with. Relationships relevant include those existing prior to the instance of a harm done as well as those established through the instance of a harm, which can be sorted into three categories: agents, victims, and onlookers (relationships established through the instance of harm are what Kutz calls positionalities).

A relational-positional conception of accountability helps us shift our understanding of complicity from a distribution problem (where accountability for a harm is to be divided among agents according to some objective criteria) to a negotiation problem (where accountability for a harm is to be discussed among those party to the harm). In terms of climate change, this focus on accountability as a collective project between agents, victims, and onlookers, allows us to better digest the specificities of our complicity in climate change. Where complicity is not grounded simply in causality and degrees of intent, we are better able now to conceive *how* we can be accountable to

climate harms—not in terms of causal significance, but on the terms of our relational context and our position as agents of harm. This helps ground the already prevalent feeling that one is accountable in climate harms irrespective of one's actual causal impact in a solid framework, allowing us to take an initial step beyond the problem of inconsequentialism.

Moreover, a focus on the relationships that are generated by the fact of that harm invites us to consider more specifically who climate change impacts, and how they are impacted. We are brought, in other words, to think beyond emissions, which appear under our commonplace understanding of complicity as the clearest and most immediate measure of causal contribution. Under a relational-positional conception, for example, I am indeed accountable to climate migrants and their needs on the grounds that I contribute to climate change. The particular harm that acts as the focal point for my accountability is that of displacement, and I am called to address their particular concrete needs, such as housing. My advocating for immigration reform, then, is not just a gesture of good will or pure principle; rather, it can feature in fact as my taking responsibility for my contribution to climate change. Where the former—good will and pure principle—often fail in political discourse, calls for accountability for harms go much farther. This connection, obscured under an individualistic conception of accountability, is made conceivable under a relational-positional conception of accountability due to its provision that participation is just as meaningfully assessable as causal impact and intent to harm. That participation is meaningful is grounded in an understanding that participation affects relationships and one's social position in ways other than physical causation.

Participation is defined in Kutz's framework simply as the presence of participatory intention, or the intent to participate. Any action done with the intent of contributing something towards the accomplishment of a collective goal is guided by a participatory intention. This minimal definition forms the basis of Kutz's re-definition of collective action as the overlap of participatory

intent, which in turn allows us to account for *I-We* problems more coherently across differences in how individuals conceive of their personal actions. The overlap of participatory intentions to bring about some collective goal, or harm, is what unites individual actions together as a collective action or harm.

Keeping the focus on how individuals relate together in a collective action via their participatory intentions as opposed to some conferred membership in a collective helps us, in the context of climate change, overcome some important issues of identification. This applies in particular to figuring out how to best hold large corporations accountable. Focus on the different kinds and degrees of participatory intentions helps us justify demands for accountability from both individuals more central to accomplishing a harm (such as fossil fuel barons and government leaders), as well as those more on the peripheries of action (such as employees of fossil fuel companies and lower level policy makers), while understanding that these demands for accountability ought to be satisfied by different expressions of accountability (e.g., personal fines vs. a simple apology).

Practically speaking, this may be accomplished via a shift in rhetoric and framing of both social and political pressure. By breaking down more specifics, this helps us understand better how to keep collectives and organizations accountable in more just ways. Working from an understanding that the baseline of accountability is participation, and that it is the *kind* of participation that matters for determinations of accountability, we can better pinpoint and hold appropriately accountable the right people. We are better equipped, in other words, to deny corporations and other entities from off-loading accountability to those at the peripheries of the structured collective harm in question. Emphasizing, in our general rhetoric and demands, that there are different expressions of accountability across different levels of contributions, is a point of application.

Where a focus on participatory intention as the basis of accountability works well for cases of structured collective harms, Kutz's account fails, however, to adequately account for instances of *unstructured collective harms*—collective harms that emerge when individuals pursue separate projects without any discernible overlap of participatory intentions. Unfortunately, this is where most of our harm generating contributions to climate change stem arise out of.

Kutz assumes that the difference between cases where there exist participatory intentions and cases where participatory intentions are absent is a matter of degree. The solution, therefore, is to consider that individual pursuits of personal projects as united within a system of practices that happen to be harmful. That these practices exist in a system, Kutz notes, is more accessible from the perspective of the victims of harm and onlookers, and so even if agents do not feel that they are acting out of full participatory intention, they can be said to be acting out of a 'quasi' participatory intention.

This move to attenuate participatory intention, I argue, is insensitive to how normal many of our ultimately harmful practices day to day are, and how individuals experience them as morally acceptable choices. Individuals in unstructured collective harms do not have the opportunity to deliberate about the ethical implications of their actions. In fact, it is arguable that no situation of choice arises at all—and if this is the case, there can be no viable moral agency at play in their choosing a course of action. In the context of unstructured collective harms, then, centering the focus of collective accountability on practices simply is not helpful. More needs to be done to explicate how systems work, and how our personal practices come to be harmful.

Thus, where Kutz's account helps us understand that the basis of our accountability in climate harms does not have to rest on causal significance, and where Kutz's account help us demand accountability of clearly harmful projects in much more robust ways, it does not help us understand how these expansions are amenable to subjective experience for the bulk of us. Most of

us, after all, are not tied up in explicitly high-carbon or petroleum driven projects. In other words, Kutz's account does not offer, by itself, an objective framework that can fully help us make sense of our subjective experience of discrepancy. We are left still without a way to understand how our ordinary actions indeed become extraordinary harms.

Young, noticing this weakness in Kutz's otherwise robust objective framework, endeavored to offer a different model of moral accountability by which we can specifically make sense of unstructured collective harms. Young calls this different model a *social-connection model of moral accountability,* which she contrasts to a *liability model of moral accountability,* the model she identifies Kutz's account as falling under. A social connection model, according to Young, contains the following five characteristics: 1) that it is *not isolating*, it is *judging of background conditions*, it is *more forward looking than backward looking*, it features *shared responsibility*, and it considers that accountability for structural injustice *can only be discharged through collective action.* These five tenets present alternative principles to that of a liability model, which Young identifies as having the following four characteristics: 1) it *seeks to identify particular agents* for the purposes of exacting redress, it *focuses on restitution* as the paradigmatic goal of harm accountability, it *seeks to distinguish between perpetrator and victim*, and it *assumes harms are the result of deviations from a fixed set of background conditions.* Young's amendments to Kutz's characterization of our role in unstructured collective harms (as captured in the five tenets outlined above) centers around her understanding of how we are all entangled in the social processes that result in structural injustices.

A social connection model recognizes that, in the context of unstructured collective harms, talking of specific practices as 'wrong' is misleading. For in unstructured collective harms, practices that are otherwise ordinary become conduits of harm by virtue of how they are bound up in the structural processes background to our lives. There is, for example, nothing inherently wrong with burning fossil fuels. The practice of burning coal to generate power in and of itself is a neutral act.

That I use petrol to power my car results in harm not because it is a blameworthy practice in and of itself; rather, it results in harm because my using gasoline is embedded in a context and infrastructure that promotes excessive use without heed to its harmful effects. Here we find, in Young's framework, an explanation of how our ordinary actions become extraordinary harms: our ordinary actions become harms by virtue of the structural processes that these actions are embedded in.

Under Young's framework, to posit any of these acts as an immoral thing to do is misleading—and to shame or blame persons for their use of these things is uncalled for. To note the fact that these practices are not wrongs, however, does not exempt one from being accountable on the basis that one's actions nonetheless result in tangible harm. Yet, we must be careful to press the point that it is not the action, but that 1) it is the context of the action that requires scrutiny, and that 2) one's accountability, in light of (1) does not demand redress but reformation of the context. Given that these two points substantially differ to how liability models employ the term accountability, Young favors the use term 'responsibility' as a linguistic differentiation to accountability.

This linguistic shift also signifies how Young insists that our complicity in unstructured collective harms should not be considered so strongly in terms of blameworthiness and guiltiness. Appropriately, our ordinary actions are indeed ordinary, and we ought not feel badly about them. At the same time, however, given that we nonetheless exist within the structural processes that transform our ordinary actions into extraordinary harms, we are still called to be responsible to amend how these structural processes flow.

This insight helps us cut through how persons in Quadrant 1 experience eco-anxiety and overwhelm. Under a social connection model, the subjective discrepancy that we experience is thus resolvable without any sacrifice of individual accountability. While it may not resolve the bigger

problems of hopelessness, at the very least an affirmation that we are not wrong on the grounds of our ordinary actions helps stave off paralysis that results from one's feeling guilty and remorseful for a Western lifestyle. At the same time, however, a social connection model holds us nonetheless to a sense of personal responsibility for amending the structural processes that contextualize our actions as harmful.

Practically speaking, this may be accomplished by our being more careful in how we communicate about climate change—particular in our calls to action. Here, it is advisable that in speaking to a general populace we avoid the language of calling particular practices 'right' or 'wrong'. This latter point helps us become more sensitive and inclusive of those whose lives rely on practices that, while harmful, are necessary for their survival. This helps us form the basis for much needed social and political alliances (such as with the American urban working class) that are, at the moment, which may at present be closed off to climate movements on account of their rhetoric. In place of denunciation, more effort ought to be placed on articulating the ways in which our structural processes (which include, in my estimation, ways of thought) bring us to harm.

As it judges background conditions, a social connection model also recognizes that the very same structural processes can, and do, generate different kinds of harms that afflict persons across different positions. This being the case, one can legitimately understand one's self as both victim of harm, agent of harm, and onlooker. Where this overlapping of positions may be a contradiction in cases of structured collective harms (a fossil fuel baron, certainly, cannot claim to be both victim and agent of the harms they have played a part in), it is not only possible but necessary to recognize in cases of unstructured collective harms.

This understanding of background conditions, combined with an understanding of shared responsibility—where ourselves as agents, victims, onlookers are all called to be responsible precisely by virtue of our entanglement in harms mediated by structural processes—we are brought

to understand even more strongly that structural processes are the proper locus for transformation. Structural processes, after all, are what connect us together as agents of harm and as victims of harm. This is an unfortunate fact, but it is also an immensely powerful fact: that we are tangled up within, too, is what positions us precisely as capable for change. What was once a cause for ill-feeling now becomes the grounds of power. Our complicity, while uncomfortable, can also be illuminating.

Thus, instead of framing our entanglement within structural injustice as a case of mutual oppression simply, and instead of framing agents as the sole bearers of accountability, we are better off understanding the places where we are entanglemed and embedded—as agent, victim, onlooker—as potential sites of transformative knowledge. Personally, this helps us understand that the very same conditions that evoke feelings of powerlessness are simultaneously the conditions that are the best sites of learning. The obstacle, as it were, is the way.

Practically speaking, approximating this mindset may be accomplished by making it common practice to couple expressions of anger and frustration with expressions of humor or (or mockery, if that is more up your alley). Any decrying of structures of harm, perhaps, ought to be accompanied not just by vows of resistance but also by proclamations of power. For example, any criticism of capitalism as one structural process that amplifies climate harms ought to be accompanied by a proclamation of the ways that it can be cheekily subverted—by gift economies, perhaps. To find where power can most be applied, of course, requires that we consult and coordinate with each other across our positionalities. In terms of addressing capitalism, this means that we consult those really see the ways that it is eminently harmful, and this means coordinating with the poor and the economically marginalized.

This brings us to our next point—that of collective action across positionalities. As captured in the social connection model's understanding that accountability for issues of structural injustice as dischargeable only through collective action, the fact we are all entangled within the same structures

means that none of us can—nor ought— address unstructured collective harms alone. If in structured collective harms it is possible to demand that individuals engage, individually, in some expression of accountability the harms they collective cause, in unstructured collective harms shared responsibility demands that individual accountability be tied specifically to collective action across our positionalities as agents, victims, and onlookers. This makes our responsibility for climate change harms explicitly social and political, not just individual.

Moreover, to be capable of collective action means that we have to first and foremost attend to empowering each other so that we can act together. This insight presents a different way to approach the connection between climate change harms and other issues of structural injustice: where the typical method, so it seems, is to connect how *harms* are structurally connected, a social connection model helps us see that it may we can also speak on the flip side of how *power to act* is likewise connected.

Practically speaking, this may be accomplishable if we re-tool how we utilize the concept of solidarity. What does it mean to stand and act in solidarity with each other in our mutual entanglement in climate change? According to Young's framework, within unstructured collective harms the positions of agents, victims, and onlookers are non-exclusive. This invites a very different take on solidarity—one that necessarily includes all positionalities, and one that reconceives of resistance as less an opposition to agents of harms on behalf of victims of harm, but rather as an opposition to structural processes that place us here in the first place.

Perhaps one way to develop this new sense of solidarity in terms of climate change is by working to establish new global coalitions based explicitly on groups of agents, victims, and onlookers. In an age of global connection and social networks, this certainly is doable. Building power globally across the lines of nationality to address climate change issues is sorely needed, but the matter can easily get lost in how commonalities tend to become more abstract (human nature,

economic class, etc.) when it comes to global social connection. By focusing on building along the lines of how a specific harm unites agents, victims, and onlookers, however, and by anchoring membership upon the tackling of a specific climate change harm, there may be a workable middle ground where global connection is maintained while organizing and power building is clearly defined according to tangible goals. The goal may be to establish multiple groups that maintain a network of communication and resource sharing, while nonetheless remain on the whole respectively autonomous. Persons in Quadrant 1, as accountable agents whose actions can be traced to many specific harms, may lend their efforts to any one or more of these groups as best suited to their abilities.

Last, but not least, as a social connection model is more forward looking than backwards looking, we invited to think of how to work through our complicity in a much broader way than just redress, reparation, and restitution. Beyond restitution for harms done, other means of transforming our social processes are ways that we, as individuals complicit in climate change harms, are likewise called to make real. This allows for multiple expressions of accountability to be taken seriously. Insofar as these expressions of accountability are geared towards the transformation of the structural processes that exacerbate climate change—be it economic, aesthetic, spiritual, cultural, etc.—a social-connection model brings us to take them all as equally important. That we need not consider every difference between various modes aiming at transformation as contradictory is a point of application. A social-connection model, then, invites us to consider how our complicity in climate change invites us to engage the status quo more creative and unconventional ways.

Practically speaking, this may be accomplishable—again—through a clarification of language. Rather than attempt to stick, if unconsciously, with a liability model of accountability where actions off the beaten path need to be cast as a means to accomplish restitution (e.g., "x is an act of [reparations, reclamation, etc."]) simply, we can affirm that in the pursuit of a transformed

future there is space for other actions that, in fact, do not directly have an element of redress. These actions nourish us in other ways and have their place. This does not mean that restitution, of course, is not important. Restitutive practices are certainly an important and necessary part of getting us to a better future and in solving unstructured collective harms (as part of, for example, our mutually empowering each other). In the view of a social connection model, however, they are by themselves only part of what it means to transforming the structural processes we find ourselves in.

To end, I would like to recap the introduction paragraph to this thesis. Our climate crisis, predicated upon global structures of exchange, bare the fact that any and all who participate in modern life are in some shape or form implicated in the suffering and dying of other forms of life. Human consumption has robbed polar bears of ice floes and doomed whole island nations to drown. Human fingers have helped trigger ravaging fires, withering droughts, and village sweeping floods. Whenever we burn fuel—be it via dung or jet fuel—we have all, cumulatively, contributed to global and intergenerational harm via anthropogenic climate change.

At the very same time, however, the very fact that our climate crisis is predicated upon global structures of exchange make bare the fact that any and all of us who participate in modern life are all, in our own ways, well positioned to address the challenges at hand. There is always, at some juncture in the system we are connected to, something we *can* do. To be able to, however, requires that we join together with others complicitous—which, in short, truly means everyone. The fact of our complicity brings us to the (paradoxical) grounds of a new kind of unity. Our complicity in climate change, provides us both the impetus *and* the means to address the challenges climate change bring us to confront. It gives us grounds for new forms of community, for shared responsibility across borders, and for moral connection with those before us and those after us. As much as it may be an uncomfortable and lamentable fact, our complicity in climate change indeed is a way for us to expand the horizons of our moral community. In this, I find much hope.

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