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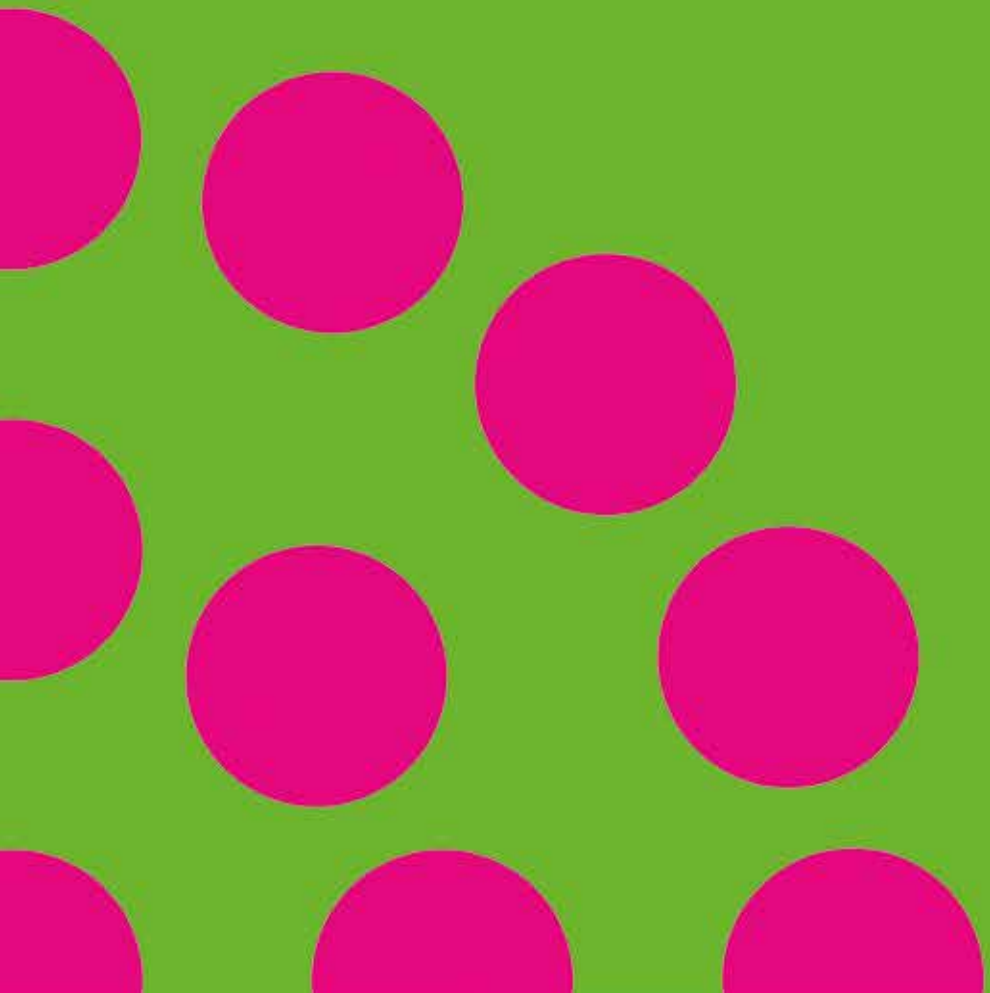
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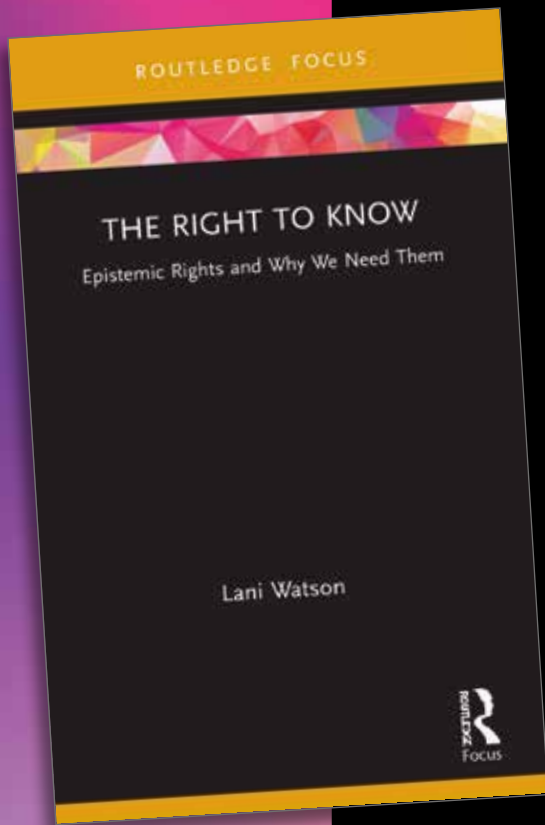
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While Margaret Thatcher famously insisted that there is “no such thing as society”, only “individual men and women”, philosophers appear to demur. Their traditional individualistic brain-in-a-vat search for universal, ahistorical truths seems to be collapsing under the weight of the social and historical forces from which their ideas were presumed to be exempt. The “New Basics” keywords in this issue finally do justice to the social and to the transformation of the philosophical world that this entails.

In the opening essay, **Rima Basu** asks: “What are we to believe when our beliefs answer not just to ourselves, but to others?”; **Robin Celikates** asks: “What would it mean to reorient our political practice and theory around the potentialities that migration and border struggles open up?”; **William Davies** asks: “How does feeling challenge the dominant forms of representation and knowledge that modern societies have privileged for hundreds of years?”; **Reiland Rabaka** asks: “What was intersectionality prior to its popularization by Kimberlé Crenshaw?”; **Lani Watson** asks: “What has the individualistic focus of epistemology served to overlook when it comes to questions of knowledge?”; **Jessica Whyte** asks: “What is a market if markets can override the democratic political process and determine the priorities to which nations must conform?”; **Briana Toole** asks: “If objectivity is little more than a shield to protect the interests of the powerful, then what does this mean for the pursuit of truth?”; **Jana Bacevic** asks: “If we believe in reality, what is it that we believe in?”; **Maeve McKeown** asks: “What conception of responsibility is required in our highly-interdependent, globalised world?”; **Michelle Bastian** asks: “Why have philosophers overlooked the question of how societies should tell the time?”; **Yarran Hominh** asks: “What does it mean to begin our inquiry from *unfreedom*, rather than freedom?”; finally, **Eraldo Souza dos Santos** asks: “Is all violence political and all politics violent?”

Elsewhere, **Darren Chetty** and **Adam Ferner** guest-edit a selection of essays and interviews in honour of the great political philosopher Charles W. Mills who died last year. For an overview, see Darren and Adam’s editorial on p.68. **Christopher Belshaw** asks whether it is good for wild animals to come into being and then live out their lives; **Sophie Grace Chappell** generously allowed us to publish her translation of the opening canto of Dante’s *Divina Commedia* along with an essay exploring themes of transformation and immortality in Dante’s work; **Sean D. Kelly** offers a tantalizing preview of themes from his forthcoming book *The Proper Dignity of Human Being*; **Tim Crane** and **Peter Sjöstedt-Hughes** offer critical reviews of recent books by David Chalmers and Chris Letheby respectively; **Chiara Ricciardone** raises an extraordinarily rich set of questions related to the interaction of fiction and Artificial Intelligence, and **Adam Ferner** and **Moya Mapps** close the issue with the first instalment of their short, experimental series on co-authorship. Finally, huge thanks to **William Eckersley** for his compelling photographs in the opening section, for his amazing design skills in every issue of *The Philosopher*, and so much more.

Anthony Morgan, Editor

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**SECTION 1:
THE NEW BASICS
SOCIETY**

RESPONSIBILITY

From 1940-1945, the French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas was interned in a Nazi prisoner of war camp, in the separate barracks for Jewish soldiers. He was frequently seen scribbling in a notebook. Those scribbles would later develop into the view that ethics is “first philosophy”, meaning that ethics is more fundamental than the age-old philosophical quest for wisdom or knowledge. He perceived the foundational concern of philosophy to be:

...Responsibility for the Other, for the naked face of the first individual to come along. A responsibility that goes beyond what I may or may not have done to the Other or whatever acts I may or may not have committed, as if I were devoted to the other man before being devoted to myself. Or more exactly, as if I had to answer for the other's death even before *being*.

For Levinas, moral responsibility is infinite, it is limitless; it applies to all people everywhere for everyone else. Responsibility precedes action and transcends our individual selves; simply by existing we have responsibilities towards others. We are always already responsible for the Other. Levinas' insights into responsibility are moving and profound, but they are also utterly overwhelming. How can I as an individual be responsible for every Other in the world?

Levinas' view is extreme. It also goes against the grain of traditional approaches to responsibility. Western philosophers have generally followed in Aristotle's footsteps. Aristotle argued that responsibility takes two forms. On the one hand, men are responsible for cultivating virtue, for becoming a virtuous person. On the other hand, men are responsible for their actions, but only under certain conditions; for instance, if a man was “taken by the wind” then he was not responsible for his actions because he could not control them. Ever since, whether control determines whether an individual is morally responsible (praiseworthy or blameworthy) for their actions, or whether a person can be judged to be praiseworthy or blameworthy on the basis of their character, have been the predominant ways of framing questions relating to responsibility.

While Levinas' approach may be extreme, it does highlight that the questions posed by Aristotle are limited. The twentieth and twenty-first centuries have generated new problems and new questions for the

by Maeve McKeown
University of Groningen

concept of responsibility that surpassed the concerns of Ancient Greece. Levinas encouraged us to ask: to what extent are individuals responsible for genocide, even if they play no part in it? And this insight generates a whole range of further questions for responsibility: Does the responsibility begin and end with the crimes themselves, or are individuals responsible for trying to prevent them? Is this a responsibility to challenge racism, to support just institutions that won't collapse into genocidal ones? Is this an ongoing responsibility for justice? More fundamentally, the wars, mass atrocities, and structural injustices (like extreme poverty, capitalist exploitation, racism, and sexism) that characterized the twentieth century were beyond the control of any one individual and could not be combatted by virtue alone. How can individuals bear responsibility for what is beyond their control?

And in the twenty-first century, we live in a new era altogether – the *Anthropocene* – the latest geological era (-cene) in which the climate is changing due to human (*Anthropo-*) activity. This generates many further questions: in what ways are human beings responsible not only to each other, but to the planet? Are citizens of rich countries responsible for their countries' past carbon emissions? Can “countries” be responsible at all (what kind of agents can bear responsibility)? If countries or citizens bear responsibility for past carbon emissions do they, by the same token, bear responsibility for past crimes like genocides, slavery, or colonialism? How far does responsibility extend into the past and future? Are all citizens living now responsible for the well-being of future generations, or at least to ensure that a planet safe for human, animal and plant life continues to exist? Are the older theories of responsibility still relevant in these new conditions?

Some philosophers remain steadfast in the view that the old ways remain the only ways. Thousands of pages are written every year on how individuals are responsible for these enormous, collective problems on the basis of consequentialist moral theories (an individual is responsible for choosing the act that will have the best overall consequences), or deontological moral theories (an individual is responsible for following moral rules, such as “do unto others as you would have them do unto you”). Some also pose these questions within

virtue ethics, asking what individuals need to do to cultivate a virtuous character in contemporary times. But not everyone is convinced. Other philosophers are seeking new theories of responsibility that can account for responsibility in our changed circumstances. None of these newer theories are as settled, and certainly nowhere near as established, as the old ones, but they grapple with our complex present realities, trying to make sense of the social and political dimensions of responsibility in our interconnected, fast-paced, and rapidly changing world.

THE HIGHLY-INTERDEPENDENT, GLOBALISED ECONOMY MEANS THAT CUMULATIVE HUMAN ACTIVITIES CAN IMPACT ON MILLIONS OF GEOGRAPHICALLY DISPERSED PEOPLE IN DEEPLY HARMFUL WAYS

We might like to think that responsibility is an unchanging concept; thus, claiming that it can shift and change in different historical conditions could be understood as undermining the concept of responsibility altogether. This could be read as rather pessimistic. However, as philosopher Garrath Williams points out, the word “responsibility” is modern in origin. While the adjective “to be responsible” has a long history, the English noun “responsibility” didn't appear until the late eighteenth century and became a topic for philosophical debate in the nineteenth century, relating to the political responsibilities of the emerging institutions of democratic governments. The concept of personal responsibility became increasingly important because within Victorian society a person's roles multiplied, and even more so in twentieth century liberal democracies. In the contemporary world, a person fills multiple roles (employee, family member, friend, club member, citizen, etc.), has multiple demands in each role, and those demands often overlap or conflict with other people's roles; the concept of personal responsibility responds to the difficulty of

maintaining human cooperation in these complex, non-ideal circumstances with sophisticated and fragile divisions of labour.

The concept of responsibility is crucial not only to assessments of moral responsibility, however, but also to legal responsibility. Legal conceptions of responsibility are also a product of social and historical conditions and available legal apparatus. As legal scholar Nicola Lacey points out, the concept of “capacity responsibility” (the idea that an agent can be held criminally responsible for a wrongdoing only if they had the mental capacity to understand what they were doing and the physical capacity to act it out) only emerged in the nineteenth century, because it required laws of evidence and the capacity for evidence-gathering, legal representation, law reporting, and a system of appeals. It wasn’t until the early twentieth century that these conditions were in place. So, a concept that we take for granted as a central part of criminal responsibility is in fact historically contingent – it arose from changes in social, economic, and institutional circumstances.

STRUCTURAL INJUSTICE CANNOT BE AMELIORATED BY AGENTS ACTING ALONE; IT REQUIRES COLLECTIVE ACTION

Recognising the historical contingency of the concept of responsibility can be read as an invitation – an appeal to think of theories of responsibility that are adequate to our complex and perplexing times. Responsibility is a relatively new and fast evolving concept. Indeed, it is not one concept at all but rather a family or cluster of concepts. Thus, within this multi-faceted conceptual family there is room for developing accounts of responsibility that fit the prevailing needs of the socio-historical context, which, as we have seen, is how various conceptions of responsibility have emerged in the past. Our task now is to respond to the crises of the Anthropocene and advanced capitalism. In the space remaining, I will highlight two ways that philosophers have tried to grapple with this, both coalescing on the theme of individual, rather than institutional, “political responsibility.” Here the emphasis is less on ensuring

the smooth running of existing societies or legal systems, and more on the need to preserve or change the background conditions of those societies.

In *The Imperative of Responsibility*, originally published in German in 1979, a couple of decades before the Anthropocene idea emerged, Hans Jonas argued that the modern technologies of the twentieth century (industry, high-tech warfare) have transformed human action and its impact on nature. Accordingly, we should rethink what we mean by responsibility. First, traditional ethics is only concerned with the proximate effects of action in time and space, but modern technology generates effects that spread through space and time in unknowable ways. Second, traditional ethics was anthropocentric and treated the non-human earth as ethically neutral. However, technology is now so powerful that it is damaging nature in irreparable and unknowable ways. Third, it used to be that “ordinary intelligence” (a phrase Jonas borrows from Kant) could determine whether or not an act was unethical, but now we cannot know all the effects of our actions because of the ways they interact with technology, nature, and other people’s actions. As Jonas put it, “The gap between the ability to foretell and the power to act creates a novel moral problem”. These changes in the relationship between humankind and the natural world mean that ethics must be based on a new imperative: the imperative of responsibility. Humankind must focus on preserving the conditions for future people to exist. Jonas particularly highlights the role of statesmen in taking “political responsibility” for prioritising the imperative of responsibility.

But it is not only the rise of technology and industry, and their effects on the environment, that we need to be concerned about. The highly-interdependent, globalised economy means that cumulative human activities can impact on millions of geographically dispersed people in deeply harmful ways. *Structural injustice* is the result of the cumulative outcome of multiple actions and processes over time that combine to render certain groups vulnerable to domination or oppression; for instance, the millions who are threatened with housing deprivation in industrialised societies or the millions relegated to sweatshop jobs in poor countries. The American critical feminist theorist



Iris Marion Young argues that our new conditions have generated the need for a “social connection model” of responsibility.

Previous theories of responsibility searched for an individual’s causal connection to a specific harm, with intent to cause harm and knowledge of the likely consequences. But this “liability model” of responsibility, as Young calls it, is not fit for understanding responsibility in the context of structural injustice. Because no single agent can be said to have caused structural injustice with knowledge and intent, we should hold *everyone* connected to these unjust structures responsible. Instead of focusing on individual instances of wrongdoing and isolating perpetrators of harm, the social connection model focuses on the background

conditions that generate structural injustice. All agents connected to structural injustice should consider their position in relation to it to determine what their responsibility entails. Individuals should assess their position according to four criteria: how much power (capacity to change the injustice), privilege (how much they benefit from the injustice), interest in (the extent to which the injustice affects them or they care about it), or collective ability (whether they are already a member of an organisation that could impact an injustice) they have in relation to an injustice in order to establish what they should do. For example, a middle-class clothing consumer is more able to purchase ethically-produced clothes than a working-class consumer; a sweatshop worker can join a union (if conditions allow, e.g., there is not a culture of harassment and violence against trade

unionists); or a student is a member of a university and can pressure that organisation to procure Fair Trade clothes. Structural injustice cannot be ameliorated by agents acting alone; it requires collective action. This is our political responsibility, which is shared and forward-looking, focusing on improving the future rather than assigning blame for what happened in the past. Consumers, workers, and members of relevant organisations working together will have more impact on changing the background conditions that generate structural injustice than individuals feeling guilty about past actions or making micro changes to their daily lives.

Some have criticised Young's approach as too vague for failing to provide specific guidance about when an act is right or wrong, and how much responsibility anyone bears for structural injustice. But Young's work recognises the inherent complexity of our world in which the origins of bad outcomes are often difficult or impossible to trace, and in which specific actions might generate unintended cumulative outcomes. It is because of these new conditions that the need for political responsibility arises – the imperative to “act responsibly” to minimise one's contribution to or reproduction of harmful structures, and to act collectively to improve structures, instead of the traditional demand to “take responsibility” for one's individual actions. The need to pay attention to the background conditions in which we act is a result of the contemporary conditions of advanced capitalism; if we had continued to live in self-sustaining, self-contained political and economic communities with minimal environmental impact, such a model would not be necessary.

What I believe Young leaves out is an assessment of the responsibility of powerful agents for structural injustice. She is right to theorise the role of individuals in unjust social structures, but there are some agents – states and multi-national corporations – who often *can* change structural injustice, yet fail to do so. Furthermore, they may actively perpetuate the injustice because they benefit from it; for instance, multi-national garment corporations lobby to keep regulations in the industry as lax as possible to continue reaping profits from the extremely poor working conditions and labour standards. But a discussion of the responsibility of corporate agents also generates a discussion of the responsibility of individuals within those corporate agents. This is a problem of modernity that has been

of interest to many philosophers, particularly the political theorist Hannah Arendt. Arendt noted how the Nazi bureaucracy had turned Adolf Eichmann – the man who organized the transportation of Jews and others to concentration camps – into a mere cog in the machine, and how his trial then turned him back from a cog into a man who could bear responsibility for his actions. Corporate wrongdoing is rarely the result of one individual's commands or action; rather, as the philosopher Dennis Thompson and others have pointed out, it is the result of “many hands” working together. Tracing responsibility inside the corporate black box can be challenging but is essential when considering responsibility for industrial, military, or state disasters and scandals.

A DISCUSSION OF THE RESPONSIBILITY OF CORPORATE AGENTS ALSO GENERATES A DISCUSSION OF THE RESPONSIBILITY OF INDIVIDUALS WITHIN THOSE CORPORATE AGENTS

Such discussions highlight that the traditional models of responsibility – under what conditions should an agent bear moral responsibility for their actions, and how can individuals cultivate a responsible character – are by no means obsolete. They are still necessary, but in a new form that responds to the ever-evolving conditions of our world. This combination of traditional categories of moral and legal responsibility, with political responsibility for the background conditions into which we were born and are outside of our control, is the new terrain for conceptions of responsibility.

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