CHRISTOPHER M. KELTY

RESPONSIBILITY: MCKEON AND RICOEUR

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ANTHROPOLOGY OF THE CONTEMPORARY RESEARCH COLLABORATORY (ARC) AIMS TO DEVELOP NEW TECHNIQUES OF COLLABORATION, MODES OF COMMUNICATION AND TOOLS OF INQUIRY FOR THE HUMAN SCIENCES. AT ARC'S CORE ARE COLLABORATIONS ON SHARED PROBLEMS AND CONCEPTS, INITIALLY FOCUSING ON SECURITY, BIOPOLITICS, AND THE LIFE SCIENCES, AND THE NEW FORMS OF INQUIRY.

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Responsibility: McKeon and Ricoeur

Christopher Kelty

Rice University

Over the last few years, in the course of thinking through a fieldwork project on nanotechnology, the term *responsibility* slowly emerged as a distinctive one—not quite ethics, not quite safety, not quite duty or vocation, but somehow related to them all. What concept might be associated with this term is never very clear, especially since the term seems vague enough to reference both individual culpability of the sort exquisitely worked through in, for instance, criminal law, as well as an array of more collective nouns: social responsibility, community responsibility, national responsibility or especially corporate (social) responsibility. Nanotechnology, as one of a series of so-called "emerging sciences and technologies" serves as a place for thinking about how responsibility is made "equipmental," how it is turned from a vague figure organizing certain lines of force, into a doable set of practices that demonstrate ways of remediating the older forms of responsibility in the light of various changed conditions.

This working paper is focused on recovering a more precise conceptual definition of responsibility, primarily by thinking about two different short articles about its formulation and evolution: Richard McKeon's 1957 article "The Development and Significance of the Concept of Responsibility" and Paul Ricoeur's 1994 article "The Concept of Responsibility."[1] Both are focused on the historical emergence of the term, and the key components of the concept, accountability and

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[1] McKeon, Richard "The Development and Significance of the Concept of Responsibility" *Revue International de Philosophie* 11(39) 1957 p. 3-32. Paul Ricoeur, "The Concept of Responsibility: An Essay in Semantic Analysis" in *The Just,* tr. David Pellauer, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000 [1995] p. 11-36.

imputation.[2]   The two analyses help clarify the different traditional problems, clustered around issues of causes and consequences (imputation), on the one hand and on the other, intentions, affect and understanding (accountability) on the other. *Responsibility* was introduced in the 19th century thus as a kind of portmanteau concept that attempts to synthesize these two issues, but one that slowly dissipates and becomes more and more vague over the course of the 200 years since its introduction.

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[2] There is obviously a huge literature on responsibility, clustered primarily around the concept of moral responsibility in philosophy. It is a distinctive feature of the two articles reviewed here that they position the 20th century obsession with moral responsibility in historical light—demarcating the boundaries of its emergence out of political responsibility in the 19th century, and decomposing the concept into imputation/accountability and its juridical and moral aspects.   Most (British and American) philosophers of moral responsibility today, by contrast, are more often then not convinced that individual moral responsibility is in fact a universal, and are frequently caught between the poles of the two core aspects of the concept, imputation and accountability. There are also two separate philosophical traditions debating individual moral responsibility and collective moral responsibility, which very rarely overlap. Work on individual moral responsibility most often makes reference to P.F. Strawson's 1962 "Freedom and Resentment" (in P.F. Strawson, *Freedom and Resentment and other essays,* Methuen & Co. 1974, p. 1-25) as a re-invigoration of the investigation of the concept and the first introduction of an analysis of reactive attitudes (emotion and affect) as opposed to the purely rational attribution of praise/blame. Work based in this tradition is primarily obsessed with the imputation side of the question, and in particular the compatibility of free moral choice and determinism (hence, compatibilits and incompatibilists). An recent review article (John Martin Fischer, "Recent Work on Moral Responsibility,*" Ethics* 110, October 1999 p.93-119) provides a detailed analysis of recent work in this area (more recently, philosophers have turned to experimental work to "discover" the natural reactive attitudes or "folk intuitions" about responsibility, such as Nahmias, Eddy. 2006."Folk Fears about Freedom and Responsibility: Determinism vs. Reductionism." *Journal of Cognition and Culture* 6(1–2): 215–38; and Nichols, Shaun and Joshua Knobe, "Moral Responsibility and Determinism: The Cognitive Science of Folk Intuitions" *NOUS* 41:4 (2007) 663–685). Work on collective responsibility, by contrast, was given earnest momentum by Joel Feinberg's 1968 "Collective Responsibility" (*in Doing and Deserving*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970) (to which Hannah Arendt wrote a succinct reply of the same title in *Amor* Mundi ed. James Bernauer, Amsterdam: Martinus Nijoff publishers, 1987, p. 43-50) and has continued into the present concerns primarily obsessed with the problem of shared intentions and shared actions.   Peter French's work on corporate responsibility provides some provocative directions towards making precise the kinds of imputation and accountability that occur in corporate contexts (French, Peter*, Collective and Corporate Responsibility,* New York:

Part of the impetus for this exploration was to ask whether responsibility is a "contemporary figure" in the terms of Rabinow and Bennet's "Diagnostic of Equipmental Platforms".[3]   The Diagnostic is explicitly described as providing equipment that is "more responsive and more responsible (4)" and I take this offhand comment to be an expression of the salience of this term. There is widespread, if only intuitive, agreement that responsibility designates something different today that it has in the past, and that it is related to the kinds of equipment designed to make oneself and one's collectives more responsible. At the heart of this transition is a reversal: from responsibility for the causes and consequences of something that occurred in the past to a form of prudence today *(phronesis)* in which responsibility designates a prospective concern.   As such, it overlaps with the historical genealogies of risk society, insurance, and, now, preparedness and precaution (as in the "precautionary priniciple"); McKeon and Ricoeur together provide a map of these transitions, and open up a line of questioning about the reconstruction of responsibility as a problem of prospective prudence.

Columbia University Press, 1984).   Strawson's work has also had considerable influence outside of philosophy, and especially in law, in combination with the work of HLA Hart on ascription and legal responsibility (Hart, H.L.A., "The Ascription of Responsibility and Rights*" Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* vol 49. 1948, p. 171-94).   Completely separate from the work on moral philosophy is that of Emmanual Levinas' reconstruction of responsibility for the Other, which is perhaps most widely disseminated in the forms given it in Derrida's work on friendship and answerability (Esp. Derrida, Jacques. *The Gift of Death*. Trans. David Willis University of Chicago Press: Chicago. 1995 and Derrida, Jacques. *Politics of Friendship*. Trans. George Collins. Verso, New York. 1997); in between these two traditions lies Hans Jonas and his Gnostic "principle" of responsibility, which remains the most extensive attempt to reconstruct responsibility in the wake of the great technological and wartime disasters of the 20th century (Jonas, Hans, *The Imperative of responsibility: in search of an ethics for the technological age,* Chicago: University of chicago Press, 1984). The more theologically inflected work on responsibility tends to emphasize the accountability side of the coin, as in W. Schweiker's work ("Radical Interpretation and Moral Responsibility: a proposal for theological ethics*" the Journal of Religion,* vol. 73, no. 4, p. 613, 1993 and Richard Niebuhr's *The Responsible Self,* New York: Harper and Row, 1978. A synoptic overview is available in Gabrial *Moran's Grammar of responsibility,* New York: Crossroads publishing, 1996.

[3] Rabinow, Paul and Bennett, Gaymon. "A Diagnostic of Equipmental Platforms," ARC Working Paper, No. 9, 2007.

Convergence

The concept of responsibility is oft invoked today, but rarely clarified. It's most conventional domain is that of individual moral responsibility, and especially its application in terms of legal liability, but it is also routinely employed with a range of more collective modifiers: social responsibility, corporate responsibility, international responsibility or civic responsibility. The concept is far from clear and both Paul Ricoeur and Richard McKeon, at different moments, have investigated its origins and transformation over the last 200 years. Both philosophers recognize its relatively recent appearance on the scene, in the late 18th century and both agree that the concept combines or remediates two previous concepts: imputation and accountability (or answerability); the former signifies a controversy concerning the nature of free will, determinism, necessity and the definition of human nature; the latter signifies a controversy concerning punishment, justice, obligation and duty. The complex entanglements of the two concepts are often immersed beneath the seeming clarity of the term "responsibility."

McKeon's contribution comes at a moment (Entretiens de Paris, September 13-15, 1956; published 1957) when the concept of responsibility is most explicitly the subject of universalization. Indeed, his article, "The Development and the Significance of the Concept of Responsibility" is the opening contribution to a collection of essays on responsibility as part of a series of convocations of the Institut International de Philosophie, sandwiched between a 1955 meeting in Athens on "Dialogue and Dialectic," and a 1957 meeting in Warsaw on "Thought and Action."[4] McKeon directly addresses the internationalizing goals of the Institute in terms of the communication amongst philosophers and their coordination on certain concepts. Even more pointedly, he suggests that the "the uneasy peace which has followed the close of the war has reflected a more complex conflict of ideologies set in oppositions, which, despite ambiguities in their statement, have become rigid, because differences in policy and action are seen or anticipated as consequences to opposed doctrines, acknowledged or imputed (3)." The problems of cooperation and communication are confronted both by increasing sectarianism within philosophy, and the nationalisms of states

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[4] Richard McKeon, "The Development and the Significance of the Concept of Responsibility" *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, Vol 11, No. 39, 1957, p. 3-32.

committed to one or another doctrine. Nonetheless, the Institute represents a recognition that "everyone has become involved in philosophical problems to the extent that he is concerned with human rights, freedom, justice, independence and self-determination, security, cultural continuity and renovation, welfare and well-being.(4)" McKeon's reconstruction of the concept is thus explicitly pitched at a kind of universalizing unification in the face of obvious diversity, division and dischord.

Ricoeur's contribution, "The Concept of Responsibility" comes much later (1994) but echoes many of the same issues raised initially by McKeon, especially those concerning the transformation of the concept from a political one to a cultural one, and then to a moral and juridical one.[5] Ricoeur's contribution comes amidst, for instance, questions concerning Bhopal, Chernobyl and the 1993 case of hemophiliac's receiving HIV-infected blood in France. Such cases raise for Ricoeur, as similar ones had for Hans Jonas (*The Imperative of Responsibility*) a decade or so earlier, aspects of the collective nature of risk and responsibility in a technologically complex and ecologically interdependent context. McKeon, by contrast and by virtue of writing after the war, is less concerned with the technological complications than he is with the implications of proliferating internationalisms for a concept of responsibility forged in national and cultural settings in response to the excesses of nationalism.

Interestingly, McKeon begins with Levy-Bruhl. *L'Idee de Responsibilite* (1884) is one of a series of statements in the 19th century on responsibility, including those by British Idealist F.H. Bradley*,* Alexander Bain, and William Hamilton, all of which in some way or another responding to John Stuart Mill's attempt to use responsibility as a way to cut through certain controversies and insist that the core of the debate concerns "punishability" (p. 6). Levy-Bruhl, by contrast, sought to separate out the "objective" definition of responsibility (a legal and social problem) from the "subjective" (a moral concern for the individual). Each of the participants McKeon cites give a different emphasis to the term, some on the imputability of an action to an agent, some on the accountability of an agent for his action and some on the obligation to undergo punishment (or

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[5] Paul Ricoeur, "The Concept of Responsibility: An Essay in Semantic Analysis" in *The* Just, tr. David Pellauer, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000 [1995] p. 11-36.

commendation) for an action: "The abrupt beginning of the discussion of a concept which is none the less assumed to be central to moral action and theory, suggests that the word was of recent origin and that in philosophic discussion, it was identified with existing controversial terms rather than examined to determine whether its occurrence indicated a need to define a new concept which alters the significance of the old (7-8)."   McKeon   explores the etymological appearance of the word and its various roots in the history of philosophy which divide into discussions of causality and punishment.   The former is treated in terms of cause, accidental and necessary (*aitia* in greek, *causa* in latin), while the latter is treated in terms of justice, and divides into a series of different senses of the relation between action and expectation (misadventure, mistake, injustice, visciousness, see. 11-12): "For the ancient Greek philosophers, 'justice' was the fundamental term that related ethics to politics, If there are independent marks of justice, which can be recognized by wisdom or which are universal and natural, imputation and accountability function as subordinate terms applied according to the criteria of justice: imputation (or cause) delimits the scope of actions subject to moral and political approval or disapproval, and accountability (or guilt) delimits the scope of actions subject to legal penalty. (12)"

Ricoeur for his part also emphasizes this double origin in imputation and accountability, or "retribution": that aspect of accountability that includes the obligation to undergo (or to deliver) a punishment (or praise); Ricoeur emphasizes the connection between the two-- as in the move "from attribution to retribution." However, he emphasizes not only the origins in Greek philosophy and the imputation of fault to the actions of men, but also the imputation of Christ's merits to the sinner, and to the Reformation and counter-Reformation controversies over the doctrine of justification by faith.   The semantic field of "capacities" (*Zurechnungsfahigkeit* and *Schuldfahigkeit*) is tied to that of natural rights via this theological intermediary. Christ's punishment is universal in the same way that natural rights are universal, and the exercise of faith (and of right) is the only way to secure forgiveness.

The notion of imputation is central for Ricoeur, however. Imputation contains the core problematic: it is the key that unlocks Kant's central cosmological antimony concerning the necessity of natural laws and the requirement of free spontaneous action. Ricoeur traces the evolution of this problem of free will and

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determinism into Kant's second critique and Hegel's Philosophy of Right, in which the "coupling of two obligations—that of acting in conformity with the law and that of compensating for damage done or paying the penalty—tends to be sufficient in itself, to the point of eclipsing the problematic of cosmological freedom upon which depends the idea of the attribution of an action to someone as being its actual author." The result, he suggests is the complete "moralization and juridicalization" of the concept of imputation, by which he implies that the concept of responsibility has entered into the domain of practical action without a resolution of the theoretical antinomies of freedom and necessity. Ricoeur's brief response to this is, unsurprisingly, a speech-act theory re-thinking of the nature of imutation as "ascription," drawing on P.F. Strawson, and of the fundamental problem of "initiative and intervention" rather than the aporias of originary free spontaneity.[6]

McKeon, by contrast gives a different account of the development (or "shattering" in Ricoeur's terms) of the concept. For McKeon, neither imputation nor accountability form the core of the center, rather the emergence of the term responsibility represents an attempt to deal with social and political changes in the institutions (legal and juridical) that give meaning to imputation and accountability. The political and social changes of the 17th and 18th century, and the emergence of a doctrine of natural law created a connection and blurred the distinction between imputation and accountability. Thus the choice of whether to emphasize one concept or the other under the sign of responsibility fell according to whether one held, on the one hand, that morality and human nature are determined along the model of the necessity attributed to physical nature, or on the other that morality represents the capacity of a will and an intellect to initiate a spontaneous action. In the former case, praise and blame, punishment and accountability are seen as expressions of a natural order (in which McKeon arrays the work of Hobbes, Locke and Hume), and a science of morals aims to uncover (for instance, through the analysis of language, such as in Hume's

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[6] This is an appealing attempt at a solution simply because it avoids thinking in terms of causal chains and adopts a more "thermodynamic" language of swerves and thresholds. Rather than a theory that demands the initiation of an action ex nihilo as the definition of free spontaneity, Ricoeur's approach seems to attempt to define actions as causes of actions in a field of always already constituted flows; or to put it differently, that which is necessary is only statistically necessary, and free spontaneity is more like the negentropic, or statistically unlikely action that changes the course of a pre-exisiting regularity.

philosophy) the system of praise and blame which expresses that moral system. (16); imputation is inseparable from necessity, and the laws of god and men reflect our natures, rather than attempting to control or direct it. In the latter case, by contrast (in which McKeon places Pufendorf, Wolff and Kant), the science of morals would aim primarily at distinguishing free action from necessary action, and persons from things. Accountability and punishment depend on the nature of the action itself, and whether it was truly free, not on the existence of external devices expressing a natural order. McKeon thus divides the choice among those who would favor accountability and those imputability as the core of the controversy, while Ricoeur sees the abandonment of the antimonies of imputation as the core of the problem (and therefore falls into McKeon's latter camp).

In either case (Ricoeur or McKeon), the 18th century controversies concerning a science of morals and a definition of imputation are the context within which the notion of responsibility first appears. An array of practical events might be marshaled to help explain this: the declarations of the rights of man, the institution of new forms of government and new codes of law (Constitutions and the Code Civil de France), to shifting meanings of human nature as a result of the investigations into the economy, into language and into biology (Foucault's trio of life, labor and language). "Mill used the concept in an effort to break away from both controversies, the endless metaphysical disputes concerning freedom and necessity, concerning intentions, motives and consequences, and the endless efforts to find the criteria of morals and politics in sentiment or reason, approbation or duty. (McKeon: 20)" For Mill, "responsibility means punishment —not the expectation of actual punishment to be inflicted by our fellow creatures or by a Supreme Power, but a consciousness that we shall deserve that infliction (20)."

The major shift introduced by Mill's use of the term "responsibility" to refer to punishability is that it represents an urge to begin not with philosophical controversy, but with the facts of social and political life as they present themselves—facts that were obviously changing radically in Europe at this moment. So Mill's elevation of the concept comes as part of an attempt to treat responsibility as primarily a feature of the political life of individuals, the domain within which right and wrong are expressed through the praise and blame visited by individuals upon each other in public; people express the punishability of

actions through "the normal action of their natural sentiments."

Though born of practical questions, Mill's version of responsibility was based on the tradition of accountability, not imputation, and made the domain of law and social norms the basis for uncovering such "natural sentiments." Levy-Bruhl's use was based in the tradition of imputation, but was no less rooted in the 19th century sciences of man and the attempt to explore a kind of proto-cultural definition of responsibility, divided between an "objective notion" or legal responsibility and a "subjective" sense of moral responsibility. As McKeon points out, the controversies hardly ended here, but what is important is that Mill and Levy-Bruhl are both pointing to responsibility as a problem primarily of *practical reason:* "Mill [suggested] that the operation of responsibility as punishment uncovers, but does not create, the distinction between right and wrong; Levy-Bruhl [showed] that responsibility as subjective sense of freedom and rationality originated in society and developed with the evolution of society.(22)" McKeon goes on to say: "If philosophers began with the fact of responsibility in its social context, they might explore and guide its extensions and applications without either deserting basic principles or negating practical significance of principles by making the choice of principles the center of the controversy.(22)"[7]

For McKeon, the emergence of responsibility is not simply a curiosity amongst philosophers, but something issuing from the practical problems of government; the expansion of constitutional and *responsible* forms of government promising self-determination and self-governance, which, by the time he is writing, have been extended to "an enormous number of peoples of the world who had not previously enjoyed such rights. The period since 1787 has witnessed a vast increase in our knowledge of divergent patterns of cultures and of the history of divergent cultural traditions; the last ten years have brought the peoples of the world into contacts in which the claims of divergent value systems must be respected, The moral significance of responsibility can be clarified only by examining its elaboration and operation in the context of these political and social changes.(23)"

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[7] McKeon has an interesting take on this via F.H. Bradley, who makes the suggestion that we need "a philosophy which *thinks* what the vulgar *believe*, [and which is] no more fashionable among philosophers today than it was eighty years ago." cf. F.H. Bradley, *Ethical Studies* London: Stechert & Co, 1876.

Divergence

It is at this point, with a recognition that the concept of responsibility is anchored in the social and political revolutions of democratic governance in Europe that both McKeon and Ricoeur begin to explore, in different ways, the transformation of the concept from its origination in problems of imputation and accountability, to the more familiar, if polyvalent (or vague) political concept of responsibility. For McKeon, the creation of democratic governments lends meaning to the concept in precise ways: a government is responsible when it offers a framework of law that allows for individuals to predict the reactions the state will take to any action; and second that it contain a mechanism for regular review of representatives and of policy. In the first criteria are elements of the notion of accountability, formalized into a legal system that provides the external guide and frame for producing a sense of obligation; in the latter are elements of the concept of imputation, in that actions of government are imputable to individuals, and vice versa. Universal suffrage, therefore, represents the ultimate confirmation that the idea of responsibility had been transformed: from a world in which responsibility must be demonstrated (as in the ownership of land or the existence of title) to one that is deemed a natural capacity (as part of natural rights) of individuals. As McKeon puts it: "[It is] a reformulation of the conviction that in matters of the common good the people are better judges that an uncontrolled ruler or elite. The earlier formulation of this conviction tended to be restrictive: representative government or democracy will work only if the people is ready for it, that is, responsible. The reformulation inverts the relation: responsible government depends on a responsible people but a people acquires responsibility only by exercising it (24)."

This political concept of responsibility ties together the old problems of accountability and imputation with new problems of freedom and rationality—and in concrete terms with the rational design of legal systems and systems of governance. The free, unconstrained exploration of ideas as a route towards establishing values and truths therefore comes to supplement the "negative and external' operations of punishment. McKeon's characterization echoes (*avant le lettre*), Foucault's exploration of the same transformation of punishment from a

display of power to a system of governance.[8]   McKeon adds to this political definition of responsibility, a "cultural" responsibility mediating between the moral and political versions.   For McKeon, the responsibility of communities is distinct from both those of nation and individual, and the most vital space through which common ideas and common values are forged.   Responsibility is therefore a "reflexive relation"--between individuals and their communities, between independent communities, between states and communities.   Institutions of government reflect this.   As the notion of freedom shifts with democratic governments, so too the notions of accountability and imputation, which shift from external constraints to internalized ones based in the free pursuit of values, rather than the imposed coordination of action. The concept of "understanding" likewise undergoes a shift-- from a purely external "recognition" of the law or of the interests of others, to an internal recognition of common values or the common good, forged in communities, and potentially shifting the focus from a mutual calculation of interests (in a contract) to a mutual understanding of values; "Understanding in this sense is the comprehension of beliefs and of the reasons for holding them (27)." The pragmatist influence of Dewey seems marked here in the focus on the collective definition and transmission of values-- the philosopher's version of culture.

Perhaps the most striking conclusion of McKeon's reconstruction is his claim that the moral form of individual responsibility so commonplace today does not precede, but depends upon its creation in political institutions and cultural conflict: "The idea of *moral* responsibility originated and developed in the context of the evolution of political and cultural responsibility.   There was no moral responsibility until there were communities in which men were held accountable for their actions and in which actions were imputed to individual men.   There were no moral individuals prior to the development and recognition of moral responsibility.(28)"[9]

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[8] Foucault, Michel *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison,* trans. A.M. Sheridan New York: Vintage, 1977.

[9] The conclusion is in accord with Nitezsche's second essay in the *Genealogy of Morals* in which the subject is the "making men calculable" such that individual morality appears to them as something internal and eternal, rather than something forged through historical and institutional forces, including the obvious suspects of church and state, but also those of imagined ethnic and nationalist communities.

Ricoeur's understanding of the shattering of the concept of responsibility is different, and perhaps a bit more Euro-centric than internationalist. For Ricoeur, the "juridicalization" of responsibility, especially in civil law, occurs as the relevance of determining fault recedes in importance (the problem of imputation goes unsolved), and comes to be replaced by a focus on the related notion of risk (for which history he cites Ewald's work). Rather than a focus on the ascription of fault to an agent of actions, the focus, in legal terms, shifts to the ascription of harm to a victim, from which it is possible to uncover a form of "responsibility without fault." This transformation, now familiar, clearly upholds the value of solidarity (the distribution of risks over a population) over that of individual security. The trade-off is between an endless metaphysical dispute over the nature of action and agency conducted *ex post facto*, to a recognition of the likelihood of future harm and the need, if not to prevent it, then at least to compensate those who suffer, especially in those events that seem to have no obvious author (e.g. disasters, sickness). However, as Ricoeur puts it, "the perverse effects of this displacement ought to put us on guard. They are encouraged by the incredible extension of the sphere of risks and how those risks have changed in terms of space and time... At the limit, an acquired incapacity, perceived as a suffered harm, can open to a right to reparation in the absence of any proven fault." Such a sense of "responsibility" is more like the theological imputation of Christ's merits to the sinner than it is a calculus of punishability (hence the title of Ewald's work as well, *L'Etat Providence* which echoes the providential role of fate). The wider the array of risks, the more impossible it is to find any entity capable of providing reparations or indemnity.

Ricoeur further suggests that this expanding protection against risk runs more and more in the direction of security, rather than towards solidarity: "If becoming a victim is unpredictable, its origins also tends to become so thanks to the calculus of probability that places every occurrence under the sign of chance. When so disconnected from a problematic of *decision,* action finds itself placed under the sign of a fatalism that is the exact opposite of responsibility [a footnote reads "There was no chance of an error!"]. Fate implicates no one, responsibility some one. (26)"

But, says Ricoeur, if this juridical transformation of responsibility evacuates it of content, in favor of an expansion of risk and the calculation of harm, then a seemingly comparable expansion occurs in terms of individual moral

responsibility.   The very inflation in terms of risk—that nearly every action implies harm and the need for reparation—implies an inflationary search for those responsible, and especially those responsible for failing to prevent an action, rather than those who authored it.

Two "reversals" follow: first, one has become responsible not for one's own actions but for *other people* (and the harm done to them); second, one has become responsible for a vastly expanded scope of action in time and space. As a result, various difficulties follow: the question of "who" becomes impossible to answer, especially in the context of corporations, bureaucracies, ecologies or financial systems; second, how far in time and space does responsibility extend, especially when one speaks of effects yet to come (as we do today in under the sign of responsibility), instead of effects in the past; and third, what form of reciprocity will this expanded scope of responsibility take—between generations, nations or communities?

 For Ricoeur, the shift in the moral plane of responsibility concomitant with that in the juridical plane concerns the fact that one is no longer responsible for one's actions and their effects (as in the original calculus of imputation), but responsible first for *other people,* and especially those other people who are vulnerable, fragile, or most susceptible to harm.   "The displacement then becomes a reversal: one becomes responsible for harm because, first of all, one is responsible for others. (29)" for Ricoeur, Levinas' philosophy seems to give warrant to this version of morality by locating the source of one's morality in other people, in the face of the other.   The focus on intersubjectivity as the origin of affective experience accords with at least the "accountability" side of responsibility insofar as one is called to account for oneself in the encounter with another.[10]

However, moral responsibility is today more complex because of its expansion in time and space. "Others" includes not only those whose faces we can see, but countless others we cannot, and even those unborn, without a face. It is this

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[10] There is another Chicago connection here, somewhere between McKeon and Ricoeur, in the work of W. Schweiker on accounting for oneself.

aspect of responsibility that Hans Jonas transforms into a "principle": the duty to take responsibility for the continuing existence of the species. Such a radically extended responsibility is justified because of radically extended *powers.* "How far does the chain of harmful effects of our acts extend that we can take as still implied in the priniciple, the beginning, the *initium* for which a subject is held to be an author? A partial response is contaiined in the consideration of the extension of those *powers* exercised by human beings on other human beings and on their common environment. Stated in terms of its scope, responsibility extends as far as our powers do in space and time.(29-30)"

As far as the tradition of imputation is concerned, however, these aspects of the moral concept of responsibility lead to the difficulties of knowing who an author is, what the origin of an action is, and how reciprocity across generations or throughout the populations of the planet might be structured at the level of the individual (*viz.* the very cosmological antimony of imputation Ricoeur locates in Kant as the origin of the problem).

Ricoeur's answers to these difficulties of imputation are less than satisfying. He suggests that moral responsibility should be primarily an orientation of *prevention* of future harm, not only reparation for harm already done. By doing so, he claims that the subject of responsibiility is the same subject "who has the power to generate harm, that is, indivisibly individual persons and systems in whose functioning individual acts intervene in a sort of infinitesimal and 'homeopathic' way. It is on this small but real scale that vigilance, the virtue of prudence proper to a prospective responsibility, is exercised. (31)"[11] The

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[11] It is curious that Ricoeur says "persons and systems" here, since there is at no point in the essay any reflection on the nature of what a system might be, or how its collective and technical nature might rendered in different, with respect to action, from a person. The Kantian split between a persons and things is at the heart of the definition of responsibility Ricoeur employs here, and yet it seems unclear whether a system is a thing or a person. In the juridical domain, this problem obviously references the debates around the 'corporation as a person' in US law, and the whole domain of decision-making, insurance and risk analysis conducted by and for corporations, and which renders the individualized domain of moral responsibility (the *mineness* of an action and its effects) irrelevant, at best. Peter French offers some kinds of distinctions that might help here, including expanded definitions of intentionality, and a re-thinking of the temporal nature of intention as not only reaching into the future, but recovering past action (what he calls the Principle of

question of scope is answered by the demand for a new imperative in keeping with Jonas' imperative: that we "act in such a way that there will be humans after us." But as he recognizes, this creates a problem for the notion of solidarity and reciprocity, which can be understood as part of a related dilemma: that of unanticipated consequences. The dilemma, which Ricouer borrows from a piece by Robert Spämann, goes like this: intention only for the immediate effects of an action is dishonest, given the likelihood of side-effects, but taking account of all possible side-effects renders responsibility infinite and action impossible.[12] To this, Ricoeur simply asserts: "Nothing in excess. (34)"[13]

In the end, Ricoeur's understanding of the transformations of the moral and the juridical concepts of responsibility remain wedded to the problem of imputation, and to the development of a virtue ethics centered around phronesis, or prudence. Of risk and imputation, Ricoeur asks if they "overlap and reinforce each other to the extent that, in a preventive conception of responsibility, it is the uncovered risks that are imputable to us? (34)" This preventive version of responsibility is entirely familiar today, especially in the rise of the similarly vague precautionary principle. But it is in the reference to *phronesis* that Ricoeur's analysis is ultimately most promising, if undeveloped: "It is to prudence, in the

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Responsive Adjustment) as in the case of when people are deemed not responsible for an event which they might subsequently be deemed responsible for if they then repeat the action that led to it. French analyzes two plane crash investigations in these terms: French, *Corporate and collective responsibility,* p. 127-164*.*

[12] Robert Spaemann "Nebenwirkungen als moralisches Problem," *Zur Kritik der politischen Utopie. Zehn Kapitel politischer Philosophie,* Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, p. 167—182, 1977.

[13] These answers are incredibly unsatisfying precisely because they lend themselves to the kind of thinking represented by people such as Eric Drexler and Bill Joy: science fiction-based scenarios of cleopatra's nose-style chains of events which can only be prevented by ceasing to act at all, and which threaten not particular humans but a 'race' of humans-- whether through destruction, ecological or biological, or through supercession (Artificial intelligence or enhancement beyond "humanness"). That Ricouer seems to share, via this backdoor, a kind of absolute metaphysics of human nature threatened by our own actions as humans, and for which we are not taking enough responsibility, strikes me as a kind of secularism gone haywire; consistent only with forms of transhumanist thinking, and not with a serious attention to the historical and bio-cultural transformations we are in fact undergoing.

strong sense of the word, that is assigned the task of recognizing among the innumerable consequences of action those for which we can legitimately be held responsible, in the name of an ethic of the mean. It is in the end this appeal to judgment that constitutes the strongest plea in favor of maintaining the idea of imputability in the face of assaults from those of solidarity and of risk. (34-35)"

Phronesis, in this sense, however, is not equipment. It is a philosopher's practical judgement and not much more, an "ethic of the mean" which when applied in any given case dissolves into the chaos of decisions and justifications without end.   A practical *phronesis*, by contrast, an equipmental *phronesis*, perhaps, would take a different form, and it is McKeon's analysis that is more attuned to the possibility of *phronesis* as the domain of common values, their hierarchy and their criteria.

From Responsibility to Values

McKeon's meditation on responsibility also ends within the domain of practical wisdom, though he does not label it as such. His claim that morally responsible individuals are the result of political and cultural institutions that produce "a sensitivity to moral issues in the agent and an explanation of his decisions and choices in the minds of others.(28)" And it is this interplay between the political and cultural institutions and the individual's norms and decisions which has worked a change in the concept of responsibility: "Responsibility has assumed a reflexive relation to truth as well as to values; the ideal of a science of morals conceived in the 17th and pursued in the 18th century must now be sought in a science of responsibility which can be adapted to different views of morality and provide the basis for the continued testing of ideas in the further advancement of knowledge."

Responsibility, in this sense, is a toolset for dealing with moral pluralism; accountability and imputation are its key components.   These problems (accountability and imputation) concern "freedom and rationality in choice and decision"(30) and they concern national policies as well as individual decisions, both of which could benefit simply from a clear statement of the problems— problems that emerge *today* out of the attempt to solve problems in the *past.*

Which is to say, responsibility and its vagaries today are in fact the result of the attempt to solve problems of accountability and imputation in the past, in national policy, in the juridical and legal sphere and across cultures. In making "punishability" concrete, a system of penalities and rewards (property and honor) has created a concomitant institutional attention to the material needs of populations, and to the management of and responsiveness to the opinions of individuals and populations (i.e. a focus on values structured by the demands of imputation anf accountability). But this very success threatens us in new ways: "We have improved the instrumentalities for solving material problems without making corresponding advances in increasing sensibilities or lessening tensions: can the analysis of responsibility provide a new basis for a hierarchy of values based on material goods, but not dominated by them?" (31) Similarly, this attempt to secure respect for the beliefs and opinions of others has resulted in institutions intended to secure these expressions, but which have "had the contrary effect of binding him by still more intrusive restrictions on thought and action: can the analysis of responsibility provide a means by which the moral character of the individual may be strengthened to withstand the influence of approval and disapproval and in so doing give meaning and significance to that influence?" (31)

McKeon's take then, is somewhat like that of "reflexive modernity": by responding to the difficulties of imputation and accountability in the creation of democratic institutions of governance, and by dealing with the problem of moral pluralism, we have created new problems for the meaning and achievement of responsibility. These reflexively generated problems might be clarified by returning to the concept of responsibility and its origins in the early 19th century. By creating institutions (constitutional governments, legal systems, elections) and new technologies for assessing imputation and managing accountability, we have confronted the problem of moral pluralism in concrete terms and created new assemblages to deal with it-- assemblages that in turn raise new kinds of problems. Though McKeon does not name them, these problems could include those referenced by Ricoeur (the emergence of insurance and its focus on solidarity as a solution to problems of imputation, or those of unintended consequences) or to others such as the problem of conflicting legal or juridical systems across nations and empires. What he does seem to suggest, however, is that no matter how far moral pluralism as a problem seems from concerns such as those raised by systemic risk, ecological crisis or technological failure—it is nonetheless at the origin of our confusion about how to handle them.

McKeon's final sections are therefore a call for both a *criteria* of values in the context of moral pluralism and a *hierarchy* of values.   He ends with an appeal to a science of responsibility that would help make sense of the tensions between tradition and innovation (the need for a hierarchy of values) on the one hand, and custom and duty on the other (the need for criteria of values).

It is especially in the context of contemporary science, engineering and capitalism that such questions are relevant. Innovation is an unquestioned value today—so unquestioned that in nanotechnology, for instance, the only question "nanoethics" has so far raised is: should we innovate or not? Do we need a moratorium on innovation or should it progress? The question is incoherent: innovation is an absolute value (at the top of the hierarchy), but one without any criteria. Similarly today the only criteria of value applicaple in the case of any practical decision is that of the cost/benefit or risk/benefit analysis—a criteria without hierarchy.

What then, would responsibility look like if it included both a hierarchy and a criteria of values? How might it differ from a mere weighing of alternatives with respect to individual utility? Between Ricoeur and McKeon's analyses are some important changes in the ways accountability and imputation have started to be transformed: the environmental movements, new talk of a "social responsibility" in science and engineering, "vital systems" security and critical infrastructure protection, analysis of systemic risk in new domains, from financial to ecological to social. But the contemporary vagueness of the concept of responsibility, and its roots in the 19th century are confirmed in these analyses.

  Imputation today concerns problems that are extremely familiar, and well captured in Ricoeur's piece: what we impute to actors today (people and systems) are not acts for which they were in the past the cause, but acts for which in the future they will have been the cause. It is precisely because of our confidence in our abilities to control and to predict that this reversal is not irrational—and yet this reversal has not yet found adequate expression: how does one become the cause of that which has yet to happen? And of which causes that one can become the author, should one reasonably accept responsiblity-- or in mcKeon's terms, can we use responsibility as a way to understand the hierarchy and criteria of values we share today?

In a similar way, Accountability today concerns problems of recognizing when our resentments (or our praise) reflect an expectation that someone should have been responsible, *could* have been responsible for something. Because imputation is conducted in the future anterior, so too must accountability.[14] Accountability, in the form it takes in EPA reporting requirements, or due diligence in law, or "assurance" more generally references this problem, but does so by separating accountability from imputation—bureacratizing it as if there were a clear division of labor between determining imputability and determining accountability.

In responsibility therefore, we see a transformation from the time of Mill, when "responsibility means punishment" (i.e. the obligation to suffer a penalty, and to know that one deserves it) to the present, when that obligation is transformed into a form of prudence, in which it is necessary to first determine what one is responsible for, and accept punishment should such things happen. But the core problems of unintended consequences and the delimitation of the field of possible action (and thus possible accountability) have become far more complex, for more systematic and entangled. Even so, a bit of clarification might go a long way.

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[14] Strawson's classic statement "Freedom and Resentment" captures the way to think about this problem, if not a clear understanding of how it has changed: our philosophical obsession with determinism and freedom blinds us to the commonplace ways in which we express imputation (he doesn't use that word). E.g. When I step on your hand, it matters whether I do so callously and without care, or whether I express sorrow or misgiving. In either case I caused an injury (and I have the power to cause it again), but in the domain of accountability it is dismissed when I am suitably contrite, and when I am not, I am accused, and often convicted, of an aggression. If imputation is conducted in the future anterior, however, then accountability is also transformed. If I have the power to prevent the destruction of your environment, it matters, when I fail, whether I am contrite or callous in doing so. Although conducted in a very different idiom and according to different political reasons, Kass' "Wisdom of Repugnance" *New Republic* 216(22) 1997, p. 17-26. is related here; as is the "wow to yuck" trajectory promulgated by Rice University's Center for Biological and Environmental Nanotechnology, although both are incoherent in the absense of clear imputability; see Kulinowski, Kristen, "Nanotechnology: From Wow to Yuck?" *Bulletin of Science Technology and Society* 24(1) p. 13 2004.