

The Limits of Responsibility:

Histories, species, politics



Massey University, December 3rd - 5th, 2012

CFP: THE LIMITS OF RESPONSIBILITY: HISTORIES, SPECIES, POLITICS

Call for book chapters/journal articles, July 2013

And let us not forget that an inadequate thematization of what responsibility is or must be is also an irresponsible thematization: not knowing, having neither a sufficient knowledge or consciousness of what being responsible means, is of itself a lack of responsibility.

Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*

As a follow-up to the "Limits of Responsibility" conference held at Massey University, New Zealand in December 2012, we are now inviting all those with a research interest in the topic to submit full papers to be considered for inclusion in an edited anthology and/or a special journal issue on the conference topic.

Papers selected for publication will be presented as a proposal to international publishers with appropriate lists and/or reputable journals that provide a forum for interdisciplinary dialogue. Submissions will be peer reviewed on a double-blind basis.

From the range of papers given at the conference, we suggest three sub-themes that might form the basis for sections in an anthology or journal special issue:

- Thinking responsibility: Ethical responses
- Responsibilities of history and memory: Recalling social suffering
- Responsible societies? Civil and juridical responsibilities

These topics are further elaborated below. We ask that you consider how your paper might be accommodated within the thematic groupings indicated. Alternatively, you may wish to indicate a further theme within which your paper could be considered.

Papers should represent substantially new research that frames specific issues within a broader theoretical context. We particularly welcome papers that interrogate the terms or limits of your field as it is currently conceptualised. As an interdisciplinary volume/journal issue, there is a potentially wide audience of readers for your work, so please keep the diversity of the audience in mind in shaping and developing your argument.

Papers should be 5,000-6,000 words in length, excluding endnotes and references. Please use MLA referencing format, 7th edition. Include an abstract of no more than 300 words at the beginning of your paper.

Timeline: Full papers due 30 September 2013

Papers sent for peer review: Late October 2013

Book/issue proposals sent out to publishers/editors: Jan 2014

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Routinely, in contemporary society, philanthropic appeals are made invoking our responsibility towards those on the margins of our society/species. Politicians and nations are called on to accept responsibility for historical and recent actions (whether by apology or reparation), and the past quarter century has seen a worldwide proliferation of reconciliation tribunals and the ritualistic confessions of responsibility (if not apology) these invoke. Universities and corporates have adopted “responsibility” as a key term in determining future policy and planning, with little or no explanation of what the term might actually mean. Whether this reflects an amplification of the idea of a self’s or nation’s sense of responsibility for its “others” or a shift towards an ethical realisation of necessary responsiveness to that which is deemed other, remains in question.

Essays collected under this title will extend discussion of the concept of responsibility, exploring its theoretical dimensions, political efficacy and social use through three thematic clusters:

Thinking responsibility: Ethical responses:

Many contemporary theorists and philosophers have engaged extensively with the concept of responsibility: from Giorgio Agamben’s account of ethics, in *Remnants of Auschwitz*, which suggests that responsibility needs to be conceived without reference to the law; to Paul Ricoeur’s extended discussions of political responsibility in essays such as “Fragility and Responsibility”; to Emmanuel Levinas’s conception that ethics is, fundamentally, grounded in the self’s infinite responsibility to and for the other; to Jacques Derrida’s many uses of the term in discussions of care, forgiveness and hospitality. Taking as a starting point Derrida’s assertion that “having neither a sufficient knowledge or consciousness of what being responsible means, is of itself a lack of responsibility,” we invite contributions that theoretically engage with the question of “what being responsible means.” We are particularly interested in work that seeks to reconsider what Derrida refers to as the link between “theoretical consciousness” and “practical conscience.”

Responsibilities of history and memory: Recalling social suffering:

To recall social suffering is not only to remember but also to re-name and re-present collective experiences of violence and catastrophe. Such recollections form part of cultural processes of mourning and commemoration, but they can also constitute political acts of resistance and retribution. We welcome new research that engages with the responsibilities of history and memory and its representation in art, performance, literature, cinema, and other cultural artefacts and practices. These critical interventions might question assumptions about the narrative transmission of traumatic experiences from individuals to collectives, or from one generation to another, and suggest the extent to which the negotiation and construction of social suffering is embedded in discursive, institutional and technological power. They might also consider how representations can challenge and reconfigure these forms of power.

Responsible societies? Civil and juridical responsibilities:

Today there is a wide range of discourses, both in cultural criticism and in public life, that define the ethical and civil responsibilities of the citizen and the human subject. Processes of apology, reconciliation and reparation (for example) hold citizens to be responsible for forms of violence and oppression in their personal lives and national histories – and responsive to the often challenging counter-discursive claims of others. These discourses demand responsibility for the lived, experiential being of those outside the boundaries of national, ethnic or species identity and seek to establish relations of care for others. This extension of responsibility in late capitalism, however, can also be understood not only as an ethical advance but also as biopolitical, insofar as it clearly involves the management of the life of human populations and how these are defined, categorised and valued. We welcome research that engages with these issues by exploring, for example, the ways in which political institutions create and disallow news forms of juridic identity through strategic inclusions and exclusions, or by examining how our contemporary appeals to responsibility can in fact preclude responsiveness and constrain our ideas of the limits of histories, species and politics.