The Spell of Responsibility

Labor, Criminality, Philosophy

Frieder Vogelmann
Translated by Daniel Steuer

ROWMAN & LITTLEFIELD

INTERNATIONAL

London • New York

Contents

Chapter 1

Introduction

The myth of philosophy's beginnings is the story of a murder: in order to become philosophy, *logos* needed to kill off *mythos*. Theoretical violence thus pertains to philosophy from the very outset; and, like any other story of origins, this one also provides relief from the endless brutalities that ensue, brutalities that (as the myth about the necessary death of myth adds) philosophy *must* commit—thus does the story absolve philosophy of responsibility for its deeds. There are no objections to this, as long as we remain sensitive to the violence of philosophical practices, and this sensitivity is allowed to exert a moderating influence on these practices: the hope must remain that in philosophy we may be able to get by with less than murder—grievous bodily harm, maybe, or perhaps just a black eye.[1] But where this sensitivity is lost, violence threatens to become prevalent and to translate into action. This, in the most general terms, is the topic of this book.

Why do we lose sight of the theoretical violence that we practice? Maybe because the eagerness with which we carry on with our intellectual work does not afford us the inner repose that is needed to trace its consequences. But in order to be able systematically to ignore the damage one is causing, something more than that is needed. In terms of the myth about the death of myth, what is needed is a spell which bewitches and binds (see Mengis 1987; Grimm and Grimm 1854; column 1114f.), and thus distracts the philosophical gaze and lets philosophical practices disregard their own theoretical violence.

Such a spell is cast by the notion of "responsibility." Large parts of philosophy are under it, and either miss or deny the theoretical, as well as the practical, violence exercised by "responsibility." Let us not forget, they say, that philosophical reflection on the "correct" concept of "responsibility" must be categorically distinguished from the philosophically "impure" use made of it in the practical contexts of legal proceedings or crime prevention, of

enterprise management or the welfare state. But the drawing of this line is as erroneous as it is soothing. As a result of the unity of "responsibility," beyond the plurality of its meanings, the force of philosophical justifications is transposed onto entirely different practical domains, where it leads to "unexpected" consequences. At the same time, "responsibility" becomes a theoretically indispensable tool, not only for explaining, or disciplining, moral, social, economic, legal, or political practices, but also for understanding the activities and the object domains of philosophical practices themselves. Philosophy is fascinated by a self-explication based on a deeply rooted "concept of responsibility," and thus goes on to discover everywhere this "responsibility" with which it has furnished every corner of itself, without ever noticing the consequences of its own devotion to this discursive operator. The blind fury with which philosophy labors to legitimize the concept of "responsibility" conceals both what "responsibility" inflicts on the individuals to whom it is ascribed, and the very walls of the theoretical cell in which a philosophy under the spell of responsibility imprisons itself.

Only those philosophical practices which create the spell of responsibility are able to break it—to this end, this book tries to render the spell visible in order to help those who are fighting for their own emancipation.

THESES

Violence and fascination, captivity and emancipation—these concepts indicate the *perspective* from which this book was written, but they do not suffice to articulate its *theses*. The scare quotes around "responsibility" already point toward difficulties that necessitate a more precise vocabulary. Although the detailed methodology will only be presented in the following chapter, we may anticipate the most important strategic decision in order to be able to present the theses pursued here.

In what follows, the term "responsibility" refers to something that is both more and less than a concept—*more*, because "responsibility" is active in practices and so exercises power, produces knowledge, and exerts an influence on the subjectivity of those who use the concept of "responsibility," or who are affected by its use, and *less*, if by "concept" we mean a philosophically well-defined, ahistorical entity.[2] In this latter sense, responsibility has been defined as an *n*-ary relation (where *n* can take any value between one and six),[3] as a human mode of being (Thomé 1998), as the ontological foundation of morality (Buddeberg 2011), or simply as "the nobility of the human person" (Schuster 1947; 332). The present work, by contrast, adopts a different perspective. Historically speaking, "responsibility" is a fairly new term, and one with an exceptional history. It is a controversial concept, and

innumerable philosophical analyses have been dedicated to it. But most of all, it is a *discursive operator* which transforms power relations, knowledge formations, and processes of subjectivation within the practices into which it is introduced.[4]

"Responsibility" has become a spell because—and this is the most important thesis of this book—this discursive operator has become a highly effective paradigm of normativity.[5] Large parts of philosophy today understand the distinctive binding force of normativity *on the basis* of "responsibility." This has far-reaching practical and theoretical consequences. If we want to understand the *practical* effects of this discursive operator, we require a detailed analysis of those practices into which it has been introduced, or in which its importance has emerged. Such an investigation is further complicated by the fact that the transformation of the practices *effected by* "responsibility" does not take place without a transformation *of* "responsibility" itself. The third and fourth chapters will look at these *interlocking transformations* of practices and of the discursive operator "responsibility" in the cases of the practical regimes of labor and criminality.

The theoretical effects of "responsibility" as a paradigm of normativity can easily be seen in those sciences that are traditionally concerned with the practices of labor and criminality, that is sociology, economics, political science, and legal studies. But the theoretical consequences of its new-found importance become clearest in the discussions of "responsibility" that take place in philosophy. Despite this fact, these discussions will be considered only in the final chapter. The reason for this decision is my conviction that philosophy should not begin on its home turf if it wants to be able to say something about the present times. The hope is that we will thereby regain a sense of the practical importance of what is discussed inside philosophy according to its own rules.

This first characterization of the fundamental thesis of "responsibility" as a paradigm of normativity already raises further questions that the present work needs to address. There are *historical* questions: how did "responsibility" acquire such importance? What turned a marginal legal concept into such a powerful discursive operator? Which transformations must "responsibility" have been subjected to in order to play this new role?

This inevitably leads to the *methodological* question of how to ground the supposed *unity* of "responsibility." What reasons are there to believe that all the different uses of the *word* responsibility indicate anything more than mere "family resemblance" between their different senses?[6] What kind of unity permits us to treat the diverse concepts of responsibility in common?

And finally, we should take care not to lose sight of the *political* questions that are raised by this initial characterization: what does it mean not to seek to legitimize the concept of "responsibility," or to search for the "right" concept

of responsibility, but instead to ask what price we pay for our very focus on these analyses? What political consequences are associated with identifying the spell of responsibility?

Although it will only be possible to give sufficiently precise answers to these questions in the course of the actual analyses, we may outline some preliminary hypotheses. The most important hypothesis is the supposed unity of "responsibility." Half of this hypothesis has already been explained: the unity of "responsibility" is not situated at the conceptual level; only when looking at "responsibility" as a discursive operator within various practices is the commonality within all the different uses of the word "responsibility" revealed. While this first half of the answer to the *methodological* question provides a perspective, the second half specifies what this commonality consists in—namely the relationship to self which is associated with "responsibility," the structure of the manner in which "responsibility" influences the subjectivity of those who are "responsible," are made "responsible," or try to be "responsible." The common structure of the responsible relationship to self is ambivalent because it is constituted by the way individuals deal with the fact of their own subjugation, both in the sense of being subjugated and of subjugating oneself or others. A responsible self-consciousness is therefore directly concerned with the exercise of power (subjugating) and with power that is exercised (being subjugated). Both aspects are treated by it as *facts*, and this points toward an *objectification* at the heart of the relationship to self under "responsibility," an objectification which must be both preserved and concealed.[7]

The *historical* question of the mutually transformative relation between "responsibility" and the practices in which this discursive operator is used must be answered separately for each of the three regimes of practice that will be investigated: labor, criminality, and philosophy. What they share is the *intensification* of the responsible relationship to self: it becomes *more permanent*, *more significant*, and *more abstract*. This is evident, for instance, in the case of wage labor. Not only those in executive positions are expected to be responsible subjects, but so are also those who are employed by the hour by temporary work agencies. It is also evident in the case of local crime prevention, where not just the state and its institutions, but all decent citizens are made responsible for the prevention of crime. And last but not least it is evident in philosophy, which no longer views "responsibility" as an occasional, existentially disturbing event, but describes it as a continual relationship to oneself and others, and ends up understanding subjectivity itself as responsibility.

By contrast, the historical development of the power relations between the two subject positions necessary for "responsibility"—the one which makes responsible (which may attribute or remove, accept or reject, responsibility)

and the one which bears responsibility (is being held responsible or is exempted from responsibility)—followed different paths in different contexts. The two subject positions may be occupied by one and the same subject. Reflections on "responsibility" in philosophy illustrate this: the closer we come to the present, the more likely it is that being responsible is described simply as the counterpart of the power to act, and especially of the capacity to make responsible. By contrast, in the practices of wage labor or "unemployment" of crime prevention or the rule of law (but not of legal theory!), the two subject positions have increasingly moved apart. They are *asymmetrically decoupled*, giving the attributors of responsibility an advantage over the bearers of responsibility. The contrast between the practical *asymmetrical decoupling* and the theoretical *amalgamation* of subject positions, which differ in the power they have, again highlights the problematic aspect of philosophical analyses of concepts that lose sight of their own practical consequences.[8]

The answer to the *political* question, finally, can at this point only be grasped in negative terms. The consequences resulting from an analysis of the spell of responsibility should help to make possible an escape from it. For that reason, we will avoid all the critical arguments which can be found throughout discussions of "responsibility." Neither the questioning of a retrospective responsibility in favor of a prospective, caring responsibility for the future, nor the replacement of a legalistic, accountability-based responsibility with a responsiveness-based responsibility are suitable for a critique of the discursive operator "responsibility." At best, these forms of opposition question the local dominance of certain concepts of responsibility whilst promoting others. They thus remain under the spell of "responsibility" and actually perpetuate it.[9]

In order to create a genuine distance between our own position and the discursive operator "responsibility," what is needed is a transformation "of the relationship we have with ourselves and those parts of our cultural universe where, so far, we did not see any problems: in a word, with our knowledge (savoir)" (ROM; 37; trans. modified). It is the ambition of this work to act as a support for those who want to try to find a path to a new relationship with our knowledge about "responsibility." And it is this ambition which does not allow me to state the political consequences yet, to anticipate the results of the analyses to come. However, this ambition also requires me to reflect on the understanding of critique that underpins this work.[10]

In short, the present work will show that within the practical regimes of labor, criminality, and philosophy, one and the same "responsibility" functions as a discursive operator; that its unity rests in the ambivalent relationship to self of the bearers of responsibility; and that it acquires sovereignty through self-objectification. While in the practical regimes of labor and criminality this self-objectification is intensified by the dissociation

of "responsibility" and the power to act, in philosophy this intensification results from the opposite tendency toward the amalgamation of the power to act and "responsibility." Philosophy thus provides legitimacy for a discursive operator the theoretical and practical effects of which it ignores, because "responsibility" as a paradigm of normativity is useful to it for defending philosophy's status as a science. In that sense, the spell of responsibility is not fate. Rather, a large number of philosophical practices take it upon themselves to cast this spell.

The remainder of this introduction will provide some points for the orientation of the reader. I shall first present some elements of the conceptual history of "responsibility," before presenting the three most widely known social analyses of "responsibility" and pointing out where they differ from the hypotheses that have been formulated here. Finally, I shall justify my choice of labor, criminality, and philosophy as the practical regimes to be examined, and why they shall be treated in this order.

CONCEPTUAL HISTORY

There are three truths that can be found in nearly all works on "responsibility." Firstly, there is reference to the fact that it is a comparatively recent term from the area of law—the *Deutsches Wörterbuch* of the Grimm Brothers puts the date of the first occurrence of "responsibility" in the second half of the fifteenth century.[11] Secondly, it is noted that responsibility experienced a "meteoric rise" (Bayertz 1995; 3), accompanied by an equally meteoric increase in laments over the inflationary use of the word. And thirdly, we find an astute reference to the etymological connection between "responsibility" [Verantwortung] and "response" [Antwort], followed by the conclusion that responsibility constitutes a case of justification in front of others and therefore is dialogical in nature.

All this is correct, and yet sometimes these truths are not sufficiently taken into consideration, and sometimes they are prematurely brought in line with today's understanding of "responsibility." Thus, the seemingly unambiguous implication of the etymological truism is actually treacherous. It is not only the oldest form—"to take responsibility" [verantworten] (the noun is about 300 years younger)—that was part of legal terminology, but also "to respond" [antworten], which originally, in medieval legal proceedings, denoted the very specific act of issuing a statement of defense. It is no coincidence that the accused was often referred to as the "antwerder" (Planck 1973 [1879]; vol. I, 229).[12] Even *Zedlers Universal-Lexikon* (1726–1751) still provides an explanation of "verantworten" based on its meaning as

"verteidigen" [to defend], which is derived from the Middle High German "verantwurti":

> "Verantworten" means to defend oneself against accusations, or to engage with the legal action taken by someone else and respond to it; also legally to confirm the state of war, Lat. *se defendere*, or *adacctionem intentatem respondere*. Whence the noun "responsibility," or "defence," statement and response, or the confirmation of the law of war, Lat. *Defensio*, or *Responsio ad actionem intentatam*, and *Litis contestatio*. (Zedler 1746; 96)

Until the eighteenth century, "responsibility" was predominantly a technical legal term that referred to the strictly formal process of providing an "Antwort" (response) to a legal complaint.[13] As "verteidigen" (to defend) may include a much wider range of actions, the interpretation of "verantworten" as "rechtfertigen" (to justify) is too narrow and privileges today's use of the term.

Luther's translation of the Bible also uses "verantworten" in the sense of "verteidigen." In contrast to the widespread opinion that it is a "moral concept of Christian origins" (Picht 1969; 319), responsibility appears only rarely in Luther's last version of 1545, and then it is always used in the legal sense. The last vestiges of this use can still be found in the titles of the so-called "Verantwortungsschriften" (Juridical Defenses) in the nineteenth century of which today Johann Gottlieb Fichte's *Der Herausgeber des philosophischen Journals gerichtliche Verantwortungschrift gegen die Anklage des Atheismus* (1981 [1799]) is probably the best known.[14] We may therefore qualify the etymological truism by pointing out that although "responsibility" [Verantwortung] is, indeed, derived from "response" [Antwort], it is precisely this connection that links it to the strictly formal procedure of defense in court and not to the general form of justificatory answers provided in the context of normal conversation.

However, in the course of the eighteenth century, the use of the term "responsibility" began to transcend its narrow legal meaning. The "meteoric rise" of "responsibility" began in politics and is due to two revolutions that were not just linguistic in character. In English and French, "responsibility" and "responsabilité" emerged in the context of the revolutions of 1776 and 1789.[15] The term "responsibility" attempted to reflect the relationship between government and parliament (in the case of France) and between government and the people (in the case of the United States), and it was used for controlling the exercise of state power. In different countries, the use of the concept thus developed in opposite directions: while in France and the United States it moved from the language of politics into legal language, in Germany it was transferred from legal language into politics due to the influence of political writings from France and the United States.[16]

In philosophy, too, the history of "responsibility" is more complicated than the remark on its "meteoric rise" suggests. Chapter 5 will provide an extensive genealogy of "responsibility" as a discursive operator within the practices of philosophy. But here let us just take a brief look at philosophical dictionaries and encyclopedias. This will allow us to demonstrate very easily that the way in which the term came to be included in the narrow circle of serious philosophical concepts was far from uniform and straightforward. First we should note that the early concept found its way into these resources only very slowly. Within German philosophy, it was accredited systematic value for the first time only with Schopenhauer's prize essay *Über die Freiheit des Willens* (1999 [1841]),[17] and soon thereafter turned up in more and more philosophical books and journal articles. As far as philosophical dictionaries and encyclopedias are concerned, it was as late as 1974 that "responsibility" was first considered worthy of independent discussion in Johannes Schwartländer's *Handbuch philosophischer Grundbegriffe*.[18] Before that, "responsibility" was rarely seen as important enough to merit an independent entry. "Responsibility" is neither to be found in the two editions of Johann Georg Walch's *Philosophisches Lexicon* (1740 [1726]), in Georg Samuel Albert Mellin's *Encyclopädisches Wörterbuch der kritischen Philosophie* (1797–1804), or in Johann Christian Lossius's *Neues philosophisches allgemeines Real-Lexikon* (1804). Except for Max Furtmair's little known *Philosophisches Real-Lexikon in vier Bänden* (1855), which defines responsibility in legal-religious terms as accountability before God as the judge, all nineteenth-century dictionaries cover "responsibility" under the entry "attribution" [Zurechnung] (e.g., Friedrich Kirchner's *Wörterbuch philosophischer Grundbegriffe* (1890 [1886]), or treat responsibility not as a philosophical concept but as a legal and political concept (e.g., *Pierers Universal-Lexikon* of 1864). Even at the beginning of the twentieth century, Fritz Mauthner's *Wörterbuch der Philosophie* (1910) lacks an entry for responsibility, and Rudolf Eisler's *Wörterbuch der philosophischen Begriffe*, first published in 1899, only includes the term in the second edition of 1910, simply giving a reference to the entry on "attribution." None of these works attaches any great importance to responsibility as a concept, and where it is assigned a lemma it is dealt with simply in the form of a definition, even in cases such as that of Schuster (1947; 332), who expresses the view that "responsibility expresses the nobility of the human person." When looking at philosophical dictionaries up until 1974, responsibility appears as a marginal concept, and where it is included it is deemed a straightforward notion.

After 1974, this evaluation changes abruptly. Although not everyone agrees with Pavel Baran's (1990; 690) view that "through the concept of responsibility, philosophy, from its beginnings to the present day, has reflected an essential relationship the human being entertains with society,

with nature, and with itself," responsibility has certainly become "*the* central concept of ethics" (Kreß 2002; 577; see also Holl and Redaktion 2001; Holderegger 2006; 394; Filek 2010). However, "responsibility" is a concept threatened by its own success: the "diffusion of responsibility" is seen to threaten the "individual sense of responsibility," requiring systematic educational efforts in order "to strengthen it by building up moral motivation during childhood" (Nunner-Winkler 1993; 1191). Even if this particular recommendation goes further than most entries, since Schwartländer's article it has become the rule to supplement a short conceptual history and a list of controversial issues (usually based on the relata involved in the definition of responsibility as a three- or four-place relation) with an independent account of "responsibility."[19]

While the connection between "responsibility" and "response" is misleading insofar as it seems to point beyond the sphere of law but actually leads deeper into it, and insofar as the "meteoric rise" turns out to be anything but straightforward, the third of the canonical truisms, the comparatively recent history of the concept, is actually on the mark. Nevertheless, philosophical definitions of the concept (not only those in compendia) display an almost excessive tendency to relate "responsibility" back to texts in which it plays no part, or at least not a major one. Typical in this regard are the discussions of "Kant's concept of responsibility." Sometimes—as in the case of François Raffoul (2010; chap. 1) or Ludger Heidbrink (2003; chap. II), both of whom have the story of the concept of "responsibility" begin with Aristotle—the term is not even present in the text they discuss. The justification for this way of proceeding is always the same: even if the word "responsibility" does not occur, or appears only marginally, the *subject matter* actually discussed is said to be "responsibility."[20] After all, is not "responsibility" simply today's term for the one form of obligation whose relationship with freedom constitutes the "fundamental question of ethics" (Holl 1980; 366), so that we are justified in taking its history to begin in Greece (Holl 1989)? Was not "responsibility" misunderstood as calculating attribution ever since Aristotle, and with fateful consequences, until Nietzsche opened our eyes, after which time we witness the great counter-tradition of responsive responsibility emerge in the works of Heidegger, Sartre, Lévinas, and Derrida (Raffoul 2010)? While the appearance of a new word does, without doubt, signify something, do we not nevertheless exaggerate its importance if we claim that "responsibility" became a philosophical concept only in the nineteenth century?

Of course, we cannot rule out that rejecting the possibility of an ahistorical "idea" of "responsibility," which, in the guise of ever-changing linguistic expressions, was the concern of "philosophy from its very beginning" (Baran 1990; 690), overemphasizes the novelty of "responsibility." Nevertheless, such an exaggeration allows us to see something that is lost in the perspective

of the "always already," namely the fine-grained differences between the practices that today involve "responsibility" where, 200 years ago, there would have been talk of "duty" [Pflicht], "guilt" [Schuld], or "Zurechnung" [attribution]. We shall find that it is most of all a transformation of the relationship to self that accounts for the newness of "responsibility," a transformation that creates a new attitude of the "responsible" subject, which, under the title of "responsibility," puts the management of the exercise of power—an exercise of power that is objectified into a fact—at the innermost core of the subject, and nevertheless denies its existence. In contrast to Kant's concept of duty, which turns the subjugation to self-imposed law into an activity within the relation to self of those who act out of duty (and not just according to duty), the activity of the responsible relation to self consists of dealing with the fact of one's own subjugating.[21] For the time being, it will suffice to characterize the hypothesis that "responsibility" marks the beginning of something new as a methodological precept, as a heuristic tool that allows us to take an unprejudiced look at this discursive operator and to avoid examining it in light of its deviations from, and agreements with, an allegedly known and eternal concept of responsibility.

These fragments from a conceptual history of "responsibility" allow us to draw three conclusions. Firstly, the alleged opposition between responsive and legal responsibility cannot appeal to the etymological truism. The opposite is the case: the latter corroborates that the legal notion of responsibility is not preceded by a dialogical one. Secondly, the "meteoric rise" of "responsibility" is full of twists and turns as illustrated by the genre of philosophical compendia. And thirdly, as is often pointed out, the word has only a recent history, and to take its youth seriously demands at least the avoidance of anachronistic retrograde projections.

ANALYSES

Why does "responsibility" become a "key concept" that reflects the "objective spirit [of our] society with the greatest intensity" (Günther 2000a; 465)? The most common answers—because of its diffusion and because of individualization[22]—describe two processes that have given "responsibility" the status it possesses today, and they are also the most important alternatives to the theses we just outlined. As they may therefore serve as a contrasting background to this work, it is worth providing a short summary of them.

Diffusion through an Increasing Power to Act

Ludger Heidbrink describes the success of responsibility as a "diffusion of the principle of responsibility" (Heidbrink 2003; 27), which is pushed forward by

the increasing range of human action and its unintended consequences.[23] The concept of responsibility harbors the promise, he says, of accounting for the increasing complexity of idiosyncratic spheres of action and their incalculable side effects by retaining the possibility of personal moral attribution. In modernity, the use of responsibility is therefore applied to events that are more and more distant in temporal terms (especially into the future, with the aim of prevention), to more and more spheres of action (economic markets, the relationship with nature, relations between generations), and thus also to more and more actors, such as groups, states, or corporations (see ibid.; 35–39). Because in terms of moral philosophy responsibility is a mediation of "duties owed and duties performed" (ibid.; 39, 53f.), this expansion has its own peculiar attraction: "Neither is there an unconditional obligation to intervene in the incalculable network of systemic relations, nor is it possible simply to claim lack of competence and withdraw" (ibid.; 48). The diffusion of responsibility characteristic of the present times is owed to this ambivalence of the concept, which invites the widening of its meaning. We therefore need a new concept of responsibility that resists this tendency (ibid.; 49–55). According to this analysis, "responsibility" is an overstretched concept that is meant to make possible a normative ordering of "increasingly vast fields of human action and knowledge" (ibid.; 27). The experience of growing powers to act and the simultaneous realization, in the face of the incalculable consequences of these powers, that there is a new form of impotence, would thus, on this view, be the cause of this conceptual development. Responsibility and power to act are closely related in this process. Because the power to act and the complexity of networked actions have increased significantly, what is needed is a moral principle that accounts for this complexity but nevertheless offers orientation.

The theses we set out above contradict Heidbrink's diagnosis, as well as his implicit picture of "responsibility" in two respects. Firstly, our theses consider the link between "responsibility" and the power to act to be the late and hard-won result of philosophical reflection on "responsibility." Secondly, the "diffusion" of "responsibility," in the sense of a growing distribution of the discursive operator, and a concomitant diversification of its meanings, can certainly be established. But according to our methodological hypothesis, it is sufficient to consider "responsibility" a discursive operator in order to identify the relationship to self that remains specific to it throughout, and this means that "diffusion" does not imply a vagueness or contingency.

Individualization as a Neoliberal Strategy

A second analysis sees the rise of responsibility connected to a general individualization. The individualization theory is exceptionally popular, not least because it provides an argument for a straightforward critique of the use of

responsibility: the individualized attribution of responsibility ignores the con-
ditions that would need to be fulfilled for individuals actually to take on the
attributed responsibilities, and thus it asks too much of them.[24] This critique
thus aims at a contradiction between the attribution of responsibility and the
conditions that would need to be met for such an attribution but are not given.

   For two reasons, it is a surprise to see this critical point being made with
such frequency in governmentality studies.[25] Thomas Lemke (2007b; 26), for
instance, identifies "self-responsibility" as an "integral element of a political
strategy" that individualizes "existential risks" like poverty or illness and thus
not only ignores "the social context and historical conditions of existence,
but also the impositions and coercion . . . exerted by the dominant discourse
of responsibility" (ibid.; 27). According to this analysis, "responsibility" is
a governmental technology of neoliberalism that transforms structural prob-
lems that were previously solved by society into individual questions of self-
care. Whether or not one becomes the victim of a crime, ill, or unemployed,
is, according to this neoliberal political rationality, at least partly down to
one's own behavior because the individual can take appropriate preventive
measures such as taking out insurance and being proactive or entrepreneurial.
And it is actually the duty of the individual to take such measures in order not
to become a burden on society. In that sense, individual risk must be under-
stood as an incentive to acquire an appropriate attitude. Because such risk
can never be fully removed by any preventive strategy, the individual must
from the outset build a relation to self that cannot be shaken by any hard-
ship. According to Lemke, the aim of neoliberal subjectivation through this
individualized attribution of responsibility is a self that is flexible, resilient,
and capable of prudent planning and improvisation. The bonds between this
self and others can remain loose because they are not integral to the self and
are easily replaceable.

   The two surprising moments in this critical analysis of governmentality
studies are the following: firstly, they take as their point of departure the
contradictions between the attribution of responsibility and the necessary
conditions for actually taking responsibility; secondly, they affirm the social
sphere as the "natural" place for the discussion of the individual problems
that supposedly result from the attributed responsibility. This last point is
surprising in the light of Foucault's sober analysis of civil society as "not an
historical-natural given" that could serve as a "source of opposition to the
state or political institutions" (BB; 297), but rather something that is "abso-
lutely correlative to the form of governmental technology we call liberalism"
(ibid.). Thus, a critique of individualization in the name of the social would
need to appeal to the very power strategies, knowledge formations, and
modes of subjectivation that were, and are, necessary for the "invention" of
the social (Donzelot 1984; Lessenich 2008). For only if we assume that the

social is the "right" dimension in which to solve the problems mentioned above is it possible to level charges about the individualization of social phenomena. And in that case, little more is left of the critique put forward by governmental studies than a social democratic reformism.

It is also surprising that the critique of governmental studies takes the contradictions between the individualized attribution of responsibility and the necessary conditions for taking responsibility as its point of departure. A perspective informed by Foucault would suggest that these contradictions should be understood as strategic-functional discrepancies, and their critique should aim at the heterogeneous dispositif that produces them. By contrast, an analysis of the individualization of responsibility as a process of the privatization of the problems that were seen as social by early liberal governmentality, a process which thus transforms these problems into tasks for the neoliberal relation to self, does not seem suitable for providing an effective critique of the neoliberal governmental rationality, a critique that could disclose the excessive demands being placed on individuals. After all, neoliberal governmentality uses these excessive demands productively in the pursuit of its own aims.

Both of these objections to the critical analysis of governmental studies illustrate why the present study will not follow the individualization thesis, even though it correctly describes a part of the transformations of the discursive operator "responsibility" (as does the diffusion approach). The individualization of responsibility, which, in the analyses of the chapters to come, will figure as an intensification of the responsible relation to self, is only one aspect of the process of change. A one-sided focus on it would keep the simultaneous asymmetric decoupling of subject positions and also the new forms of socialization hidden from view. And the latter are elements in the development of "responsibility" as well. Moreover, neither the social democratic version of critique nor the one guided by contradictions is convincing; both fail to keep sufficient critical distance from the discursive operator and do no more than suggest an alternative "social" version of "responsibility."

SYNOPSIS

Diffusion and individualization of "responsibility": these two are the most important social analyses of the discursive operator, and they indicate how comprehensive and how varied the discussions of responsibility are. How, then, should one proceed if one is not to get lost in these discussions?

The procedural questions primarily concern the study's methodology. First, which conceptual framework allows us to establish the greatest possible distance to the discursive operator "responsibility," such that we may analyze

its effects without having to make use of it ourselves? Chapter 2 suggests using a Foucauldian perspective, understood as a kind of analysis of practices, for this purpose. In his later exegeses of his own work, Foucault himself described his way of proceeding as a three-pronged analysis of practices along the axes of power, knowledge, and relation to self. What is particularly useful for our aim of distancing ourselves from the normatively charged discursive operator is the fact that along all three axes there is a "reduction of value" (WC; 60). The investigations are not concerned with the legitimacy of power, the truth of knowledge, or the authenticity of subjects, but with the functioning of power relations, the conditions for the existence of knowledge, and the practical relation to self through which subjects are constituted. However, before making full use of this approach, which suits the present project well, the concept of practices—the foundation of this approach—needs to be fully explicated. In particular, it needs to be demonstrated that the three analytical axes are not mutually exclusive. Once this has been established, the distanced perspective on responsibility as a discursive operator (so far no more than a promise) can be rendered more precise on the basis of this concept of practices.

The second question is how the study's way of proceeding concerns the chosen material for the investigation of "responsibility" along the three axes. As already mentioned several times, we shall analyze three regimes of practice, that is, conglomerates of practices with a degree of cohesion among them: labor, criminality, and philosophy.

Why these three and why in this sequence? There are several advantages to beginning with labor (chapter 3), which, at the present time, necessarily includes those practices that produce the experience of unemployment as the flip side of wage labor. First, all the analyses we have mentioned so far directly refer to (parts of) this regime of practice because they look at the diffusion of responsibility in the economic subsystem or demonstrate the individualization of "responsibility" using the new labor practices under a flexible capitalism as an example. Thus, the sphere of labor should show with particular clarity why we suggest replacing the two one-dimensional analyses with an approach that assumes a *mutual transformation* of "responsibility" and practices which make use of "responsibility," a transformation that consists of an *intensification of the responsible relation to self* and an *asymmetrical decoupling of the subject positions* of those who attribute and those who bear "responsibility." The second advantage of beginning with labor as a regime of practices is the comparatively short history of the discursive operator "responsibility" in this area, in which it has spread only since the 1970s, and in which the changes we have hinted at are therefore relatively easy to isolate and survey.

It follows from its conceptual history that no study of "responsibility" can ignore the law. However, the regime of practices that forms around the experience of criminality includes more than the iconic practices of trials, which have become a "paradigm" for responsibility. What it means to be found responsible in front of a court can only be gauged if the practices of punishment and of police work are also taken into account—those of punishment because they are the manifestation of criminal responsibility, and those of police work because they decide upon who is tried in the first place (see Lacey 2007a). As chapter 4 will show, the transformations in the use of "responsibility" in these practices display the same features as those in the case of labor, although that use is often neglected in theoretical legal reflections on the concept of responsibility because they concentrate on the central practices to do with trials. And this is so despite the fact that use has long since influenced the attribution of responsibility in court as well.

Chapter 5, finally, turns to the regime of practices of philosophy and examines the genealogy of "responsibility" in philosophical practices. This study thus only addresses the theoretical effects of the discursive operator after investigating, in great detail, the practical consequences of the spread and development of "responsibility" in two regimes of practices that are crucial for contemporary societies. In this way, it is hoped that the thesis concerning the spell of responsibility in philosophy can be substantiated without neglecting its practical consequences. The genealogy of the philosophical concept of responsibility can be divided into three stages: "responsibility" enters philosophy through nineteenth-century debates over free will and determinism. In the context of these metaphysical questions concerning "responsibility," the discursive operator mainly serves as an *instrument* used to outdo the opponent. However, "responsibility" changes more and more into the *prize*, that is, it becomes the thing to be won in the debate. But only with the moral questioning of "responsibility" does the concept itself become a central subject of philosophical investigation. This brings with it the conclusive separation of the concept from that of liability and duty, because it is now connected to a moral relation to self that constitutes the specificity of the discursive operator: an *ambivalent relation to self*, which consists of the way in which the subject *deals with the fact of subjugation*, both in the sense of being subjugated and that of being the one who subjugates. An intensification of this responsible relation to self, which heightens the self-objectification that is hidden within it, also takes place in philosophical practices. But instead of a decoupling of the subject positions of the attributor and the bearer of responsibility, the two subject positions are fused within the philosophical regime of practices. This leads to increasingly close connections between "responsibility" and "power to act." Thus, in the third stage of its genealogy, "responsibility" becomes

something that is taken as a *given* and can be used for the explanation of other phenomena—first of all for the explanation of normativity. This is the point where we shall be able to redeem the thesis of the spell of responsibility.

The final chapter will connect the three analyses, giving center stage to the discrepancy between the practical and the theoretical use of "responsibility." It is with respect to this discrepancy that we are justified in speaking of a blind—and furious—legitimization of the discursive operator "responsibility" in philosophy. The blind fury of this legitimization demonstrates philosophy's loss of sensibility for the violence it practices.

Of course, different practices could have been chosen. An obvious candidate would have been the question of "responsibility" in political practices, not least because of the prominent place of the "responsibility to protect" in international relations. But, on the one hand, an independent concept of responsibility only emerges in political discussions at the beginning of the nineteenth century (and I shall refer to this in the context of the genealogy of philosophical contexts of "responsibility").[26] In contrast to philosophical reflections on "responsibility," the further development of "responsibility" in the practices of state politics, or at least state-related politics, did not lead to any essential changes. And, on the other hand, the consideration of politics as an independent sphere always runs the risk of identifying it with the diplomatic and administrative practices of (mostly) state apparatuses. But politics is nothing beyond the practices of labor or the welfare state, nothing above, below, or behind the practices of courts and prisons, the work of the police and crime prevention, and nothing outside philosophical practices. In that sense, this study, from beginning to end, investigates the politics of "responsibility."

NOTES

1. Work in feminist philosophy suggests that philosophy is not possible without causing bodily harm; see Grosz (1994).

2. See Koselleck (2006; 87–89), who distinguishes between ahistorical philosophical concepts and their historically changing meanings.

3. An example of responsibility as a one-place relation ("she is responsible") can be found, for instance, in Nida-Rümelin (2011; 23–25), a six-place relation view in Lenk and Maring (1992; 81f.). Most authors opt for a three-place relation view: a *subject* is responsible for an *object* to a particular *authority* (see, e.g., Bayertz 1995; 14–16; Buddeberg 2011; 38f.).

4. The concepts "discursive operator," "power," "knowledge," and "subjectivation" will all be explained in detail in chapter 2. Because "responsibility" is *also* a concept (see section 'Responsibility as a Discursive Operator' in chapter 2), I put the term in quotation marks if it refers to the discursive operator where this distinction is crucial.

5. A *paradigm* in the strict sense described by Kuhn (2012 [1962]; 199) in his postscript—that is, an "exemplar" which not only represents a particularly clear solution to a problem but at the same time provides instructions on how to solve further problems by treating them as analogous cases; a paradigm, because there are other paradigms of normativity, such as "duty" or "obligation."

6. "I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than 'family resemblance'; for the various resemblances between members of a family—build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, and so on and so forth—overlap and crisscross in the same way" (Wittgenstein 2009 [1953]; § 67).

7. In the section on 'The Ambivalence of Responsibility (Friedrich Nietzsche)' of chapter 5, this ambivalent structure will first be given a precise theoretical form through an analysis of Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morality*, and then be shown to provide the matrix for discussions of "responsibility" as a moral problem. However, this ambivalent structure, and in particular the self-objectification in the responsible relationship to self, will be prominent in all chapters.

8. The expression "power to act" refers to a subject's factual possibilities of acting, as well as to its capacity to act. According to Foucault's concept of power, power only exists in being exercised. Thus the idea of a subject that possesses a capacity to act but is prevented by the circumstances from exercising it is alien to this concept of power. The slightly unusual expression "power to act," where usually the terms "agency" [English in the original; D.S.] or "capacity to act" might be used, is meant to serve as a reminder of this aspect of Foucault's concept.

9. It is therefore not enough to counter a "liberal" conception of responsibility with a reinterpretation of responsibility within a tradition that is constructed as "postliberal"; cf. Lavin (2008), and with a similar orientation Assadi (2013).

10. On this, see chapter 2, section 'Recapitulation I: A Critical Assessment of the Present,' subsection on '*Critique*,' and section 'Analysis and Critique' of chapter 6.

11. See Grimm and Grimm (1956; column 79–82). The verb "verantworten" [to take responsibility] can already be found in early Middle High German.

12. On the etymology of "Antworten," see Grimm and Grimm (1854; column 509–11); on "Antwort" in the context of medieval trials, see Planck (1973 [1879]; vol. I, book 3, ch. 1).

13. Thus, "responsibility" refers to an act, as emphasized by Schönwälder-Kuntze (2011; 372), and not (yet) to the state of a person.

14. [Transl. note: Literally "The Juridical Defence of the Editors of the Philosophical Journal Against the Charge of Atheism." See Fichte (2016). (All footnotes are translator's notes.)]

15. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, "responsibility" is first used by Hamilton, Madison, and Jay (1994 [1787]) (see McKeon 1957; 8). The *Grand Robert* gives 1783/1784 as the date for the first appearance of "responsabilité." The article by Proschwitz (1988 [1965]), based on a wealth of sources, confirms this. In both languages, the adjectival forms and the verb forms are older, and their meanings shift, at times considerably.

16. On France, see Stierle (1994); on America and England, McKeon (1957; 23f.). In chapter 5, we shall look at some of the consequences that these different conceptual developments had for philosophical discussions.