

THE SPELL OF RESPONSIBILITY

LABOR, CRIMINALITY, PHILOSOPHY

FRIEDER VOGELMANN

TRANSLATED BY
DANIEL STEUER

ESSEX STUDIES IN CONTEMPORARY CRITICAL THEORY

Using a Foucauldian methodology, Frieder Vogelmann takes us to the very margins of our culture, where the strange customs of subjects who attribute responsibility to themselves and to others become visible. This makes us realize the great cost—in the form of a continual effort at working on and shaping the self—of this blind allegiance to such a sacrificial ideal.

Axel Honneth, Professor of Philosophy, University of Frankfurt and Columbia University, USA

Frieder Vogelmann has written a fascinating book that will leave a distinctive trace in current social theory. His highly original methodological interpretation of Foucault's archaeology provides him with a powerful tool to critically rethink—and problematize—one of today's most cherished normative concepts. This is one of the finest examples of what one might call applied Critical Theory.

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The Spell of Responsibility

Labor, Criminality, Philosophy

By Frieder Vogelmann and Daniel Steuer

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Most people would agree that we should behave and act in a responsible way. Yet only 200 years ago, 'responsibility' was only of marginal importance in discussions of law and legal practice, and it had little ethical significance. What is the significance of the fact that 'responsibility' now plays such a central role in, for example, work, the welfare state, or the criminal justice system? What happens when individuals are generally expected to think of themselves as 'responsible' agents? And what are the consequences of the fact that the philosophical analysis of 'responsibility' focuses almost exclusively on conditions of agency that are mostly absent from real life?

Frieder Vogelmann demonstrates how large parts of philosophy have fallen under responsibility's spell, and he uses a Foucauldian approach in an attempt to break it. The three axes of power, knowledge, and self are used in a detailed analysis of the practical regimes of labour (including the welfare state), criminality (including policing, punishment practices, and criminal proceedings), and philosophy, and of the two subject positions required by 'responsibility'—those of the attributors and bearers of responsibility—within them. The power relations between these positions, which Vogelmann carefully excavates from the grounds of our practices, reveal that the deck is stacked unevenly from the start.







Frieder Vogelmann is Visiting Professor for Critical Social Theory at the Goethe-University Frankfurt, Germany. **Daniel Steuer** is a Research Fellow at the Centre for Applied Philosophy, Politics and Ethics (CAPPE) in the School of Humanities, University of Brighton, UK.

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