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Barbara Darling-Smith, ed. *Responsibility*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007. 280 pp. \$29.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7391-2028-6.

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The Search for Responsibility

The concept of responsibility constitutes a major part of moral philosophy and normative political theory. Its appeal lies in large part in its simultaneously obvious real-world importance and the continual difficulty in devising consensus over its definition and application. Most acknowledge that individuals should be responsible but remain at loggerheads as to what this actually means. The edited collection aptly titled *Responsibility* attempts to fill this gap, bringing together a diverse range of readings concerning responsibility by leading scholars and lay people. Yet for all the work gains from it broadness it loses in its lack of focus. What is left is a collection of often enlightening essays which will, at least in this reviewer's estimation, leave readers little clearer as to what responsibility actually is and how it should be realized in a changing and often morally complicated world.

The edition is divided into three parts. The first is composed of four essays, all concerned with the relationship between "responsibility and selfhood," particularly relating to issues of the self as "multiple" and how differing religious and philosophical traditions approach the concept. It begins with David Roochnik's "Responsible Fictions," examining how responsibility might exist despite the "fictive self" through reference to the Sophist tradition and the ability to argue and convince the public of one's guilt or innocence. This is followed by Malcolm David Eckel's Buddhist-inspired piece "Responsibility without a Self," arguing for the existence of responsibility despite recognizing the self as nonexistent though based on "conventional I." This lead to an ethics of re-

sponsibility centering on responsiveness to others and the ability to forgive "oneself" through confession and change. The third piece by Roger T. Ames, "The Way is Made in Walking: Responsibility as Relational Virtuosity," draws on the Confucian tradition to present responsibility not in terms of autonomous individuals but relational beings acting creatively to improve their shared life in community with others. The last article by Michael Zank, "'Where Art Thou?' Biblical Perspectives on Responsibility," explores the differing ways responsibility is understood in the Old and New Testaments and how this may be relevant to modern life.

The second part of the collection directly engages with questions of an individual's responsibility to others. It starts with Bhikhu Parekh's essay regarding responsibility in contemporary democracies. In it he argues for a reciprocal notion of the concept whereby individuals have responsibility not to violate the rights and welfare of others while governments and institutions should be held accountable for going against the interests of those they represent and serve. More personally oriented, Anne Lannstrom's piece "Am I my Brother's Keeper? An Aristotelian Take on Responsibility for Others" investigates whether she has the responsibility "to make people good" in her capacity as a university ethics teacher. She concludes, drawing as indicated by the title on Aristotle, that while she cannot make bad people good she is responsible for helping good people to become better. At the scholastic level, Margaret L. Miles examines her own responsibilities as an academic theologian to both respect

her research object of Christianity and be true to its historical reality and evolution. She suggests that one must be both sympathetic to and critical of one's subject. The last two pieces in the section address the responsibilities involved with existing social systems of health and business, respectively. Alfred I Tauber tackles the former in "Balancing Medicine's Moral Ledger: Realigning Trust and Responsibility," claiming that medical responsibility should be premised less on paternalistic or contractual relationships between doctor and patients and more on bonds on trust. Tom Chappell, CEO of "Toms of Main," explores his own efforts to be responsible as an entrepreneur in his attempts to combine values of profit and social responsibility in his business practices.

The last part of the work is its shortest and deals with the responsibility individuals have to "non-being," specifically the natural world. Applying a more philosophical lens, Andrea Nightingale's "Towards an Art of Dwelling" argues against a Cartesian perspective emphasizing man's mastery over nature in favor of a Thoreauian "responsiveness" to the natural world. The final article by Steven C. Rockefeller details the complex negotiation involved in the drafting of the UN Earth Charter seeking to formalize humanity's shared responsibility to the environment.

This collection benefits from the wide array of perspectives on responsibility. Given the sheer largeness of the concept it is refreshing to see it approached so diversely. This broad range of perspectives offers a variety of interesting insights on the theme of responsibility. Ame's piece on Confucianism, for example, does well to show how different traditions and understandings can illuminate how we conceive of and act out responsibility in our relationships with others and the world more generally. This is but one example of the impressive breadth of the collection, providing the space for genuine insight and originality on this oft-studied concept. Indeed, Parekh's essay is arguably worth the price of the book alone.

However, ultimately the work suffers from a lack of focus. In this respect, its strength is its very weakness. The absence of a clear overarching theme leaves little room for any sustained discussion of responsibility. Too often it seems debates regarding responsibility are replaced with rather superficial discussions only tangentially related to the topic that, while universally interesting, are nevertheless incomplete. For instance, instead of a mere presentation of the ways Buddhism or the Bible accounts for responsibility, it would have been

more fruitful to see how these perspectives both complement and challenge each other, leading to more concrete evaluations of the theological, philosophical, and practical differences between these traditions for living a responsible life.

Moreover, many of the works appear to engage with responsibility only peripherally, as an addendum to an author's larger thesis and interests. To take but one example, Mile's excellent piece on the responsibility of the academic theologian, one wonders whether she is really concerned with responsibility per se or the proper way to teach and present history. If it is the former, is the responsibility associated with the pedagogy of historians really of relevance to a wider audience, say in comparison to similar discussions regarding the responsibility of labor leaders, political activists, parents, etc.?

Another glaring concern with the collection is its almost complete lack of engagement with issues of power or politics. The sole exception is Parekh's aforementioned impressive discussion of democratic responsibility. Left unasked, for instance, is whether individuals have a responsibility to account for their actions if to do so would serve to reinforce an unjust social order. Returning to a theme briefly alluded to in the book's introduction, would a guerrilla group have the same degree of responsibility regarding their actions as a ruling junta, especially if acknowledging such responsibility would give undue moral legitimacy to these rulers? Or what about a defendant who though clearly guilty of an action nevertheless feels uncomfortable being judged and tried by a corrupt judicial system? More critically, the collection barely engages with how subjects are socially constructed to understand responsibility within differing contexts and what this demonstrates about a society's underlying values and processes of legitimization. The eliding of such issues dramatically detracts from the collection's wider public relevance and indeed scholastic worth.

Finally, expanding on an earlier point, the book does not even hint at the potentially contradictory and often normatively "messy" nature of responsibility in real-world decisions. Instead the articles take on a generally triumphal tone, whereby competing principles and interests can be reconciled under the moral umbrella of responsibility. Is it really as easy as Tom Chappell claims to unite desires for profit with those of social responsibility? What would a union leader in his community feel about such arguments? Similarly, what happens when one's "moral choices" are not so clear cut, as

when a parent with limited funds must choose whether to pay for a child's health or education? Or the opposition leader's choice between diplomacy, and the possibility of co-option, and continued fighting potentially leading to a more just outcome at greater human cost? Or along the same lines, the impoverished citizen who must pick between joining a cause they find immoral or risking the security of their family, a case which happens all too frequently in modern civil conflicts throughout the world? This lack of engagement also extends to more "hot button" issues dominating global politics, such as the use of torture, negotiations with terrorists and dictators, as well as forgiving global debt. How would indi-

viduals from diverse perspectives and backgrounds differently look at the responsibility concerning these topics? Would the World Bank president's view of responsibility contrast perhaps with a sweatshop worker's? If so, on what basis are we to judge who has the stronger claim and how should such judgments be reached politically?

Yet despite these problems the collection remains a valuable addition to the literature on responsibility. Its sheer diversity along with the uniform quality of its writing will benefit scholars and those outside academia alike. It is recommended to all those looking for an introduction to the topic from a wide range of perspectives.

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