

NORMS AND STATECRAFT

How can we think about responsibility in a post-Western world—responsibility conceived as moral commitment to people in zones of danger, but also as a commitment to generate global public goods? How do we improve responsibility for the emerging set of critical issues—climate change, energy security, the peaceful management of space and cyberspace—that lie beyond the competence of states? How do states and peoples work out solutions in these domains when the instruments of responsibility we possess—states and intergovernmental organizations alike—are not always up to the job?

To address these and related questions, the Academy convened a working roundtable on May 17, 2013, which included sociologist Claus Offe; political scientist Ulrich K. Preuss; Michael Ignatieff, Professor of Practice at the Harvard Kennedy School; Hans-Ulrich Klose, then vice-chair of the Bundestag’s Committee on Foreign Affairs, and John C. Kornblum, a former US ambassador to Germany.

The following is an excerpt from their discussion.

John Kornblum: If one reads foreign policy literature in America or here, one sees many articles with titles like “Nationalism in Latin America” or “What we are going to do about Iraq?” But there are few systemic, critical discussions about broader questions related to the application of our values. The issue that we would like to focus on today, responsibility, is a very important part of this. Should the West feel obliged to intervene in places like Syria? Can one speak of “Western values” and if so, how can they be applied in global affairs?

Hans-Ulrich Klose: These are interesting questions, especially if one tries to answer them from the point of view of the present situation in Europe. I personally believe that the euro crisis is over, but the European crisis is still very real. All the demons of history, the prejudices and *ressentiments*, are back on the table. The happiness of Germans and others with Europe is declining.

Look at the demography of the world. The Western countries make up about 12 or 13 percent of the world’s population right now. At the end of the century that will be down to about 7 percent. Politically, I draw two conclusions from this: Western countries must stick together, and they must look for partners that might become part of Western society.

Behind this lies my conviction that even with all the mistakes we’ve made and with all the problems we have, I don’t see much that is better than what the Western countries have so far achieved.

Kornblum: One of the victims of the euro crisis has been a sense of consensus. There is a feeling on the part of young people that their governments aren’t very responsible.

Claus Offe: Responsibility is a key concept not only in political theory and philosophy, but also in sociology. Who is responsible? To whom are they responsible? For what are they responsible? Who defines relationships of responsibility? Who monitors whether an actor is living up to his responsibility? I have been part of a study group in the Council of Europe that was convened to develop a concept of shared social responsibility as the foundation of social order.

An important distinction has to be made between causal responsibility and remedial responsibility. In the case of the euro crisis, we can easily assign responsibility for such an ill-conceived currency zone as the Eurozone. But the question remains: who is actually able to do something about this, to assume the burden? In this case, the consensus converges upon Germany.

The range of responsibilities can be very narrow—everyone is responsible for him or herself—and it can be extended by making the concept of responsibility more demanding in the temporal dimension. That is the moral of La Fontaine’s fable of the grasshopper and the ant: that you need to think about the upcoming winter,

to think beyond tomorrow. And then another dimension for enlarging the concept and making it more demanding is the social dimension, not just for yourself but for your family or mankind or anything in between: your fellow human beings.

The third dimension in which you can make the concept of responsibility more demanding is the cognitive dimension—being attentive to things that are going on around you. Richard Posner has written an interesting book chronicling the financial crisis, which describes the cause of the crisis as an ongoing attention deficit, cognitive denial, a refusal to take notice of what is going on. So these are three dimensions—temporal, social, and cognitive—in which you can extend the concept of responsibility.

But what are trends in the real world? Much of the philosophical, sociological, and political science literature has observed the powerlessness of governing elites. There has therefore been a powerful trend since the 1980s to pass on responsibility to individuals, to “responsibilize” them. This delegation of responsibility takes various forms. Labor market legislation is a case in point. Or the reform of psychiatric care, making families and local institutions responsible for care. While this is problematic in many ways, it is true that governments and governance agents of all kinds are dependent upon the informed cooperation of target populations. The success of policies depends upon the attitudes and dispositions of citizens who are or are not willing to practice responsible lifestyles. But in order for people to practice responsibility and to serve as a substitute for insufficiently implemented government, you need a widespread sense of trust or a sense of contingent obligation. I do my part only if I can trust in your readiness to do your part.

Here we have the problem that my fellow citizens, with whom I am supposedly sharing responsibilities, are opaque, are invisible. We do not know what their dispositions are, and there are no easy means to find out about this. There is a shortage of enlightened and informed cooperation within a long-term and attentive, solidary relationship. This has partly to do with the cognitive inaccessibility of my fellow citizens and the absence of trust relations with them.

Ulrich Preuß: I would like to raise two questions. Firstly, can we suppose, in a globalized world, with such a diversity of moral systems, historical experiences, economic constellations, and so forth, that there is one universal idea of trust? Trust has to do with closeness, with familiarity, and that is exactly what is missing in our present constellation. The problem is that even between Europe and the United States, there is some degree of alienation due to different cultural traditions—although, of course, the American tradition originates in Europe. But even between these two close continents, trust has become quite rare. Secondly, is our morality really

universal? It is not by accident that you mention the European Council as the source of your very interesting and inspiring insights about responsibility. The European concept of responsibility includes the responsibility to humankind. The whole issue of the “responsibility to protect” is rooted in the idea that we cannot stay inside when something like genocide happens in Rwanda or other parts of the world, because humankind is one moral community. Responsibility means we have to act on behalf of those who suffer. But is this idea of responsibility shared in other parts of the world? The idea that humanity is tantamount to a moral community is a European concept, but the world has changed and this Euro-Atlantic world is no longer the role model for civilization. If this is no longer undisputed, then of course the basic keystone of the “responsibility to protect” may erode. We live in a world in which we have to develop concepts that are universally valid.

Offe: The opposite of trust is the suspicion that others will engage in moral hazard. When I assume responsibility to serve a concept of the common good or shared moral values, I need to trust others that will reciprocate, that I will not be alone, and the beneficiaries of my responsibility will not engage in selfish little games. This is the backdrop of the current euro debate. How can we make sure that others will do their share if we engage in some measure of debt mutualization? We cannot trust that everyone else, even in Europe, to say nothing of Africa, will conform to the same standards. Therefore we have no reason to accept a moral obligation to serve universalist principles.

Michael Ignatieff: I approach the issue of responsibility through the concepts of the “responsibility to protect” and sovereign responsibility, but Claus is reframing the individual dimensions of responsibility: Who owes what? Who has to step up for what? This has become a crucial question in the international order and it is an especially interesting question, because responsibility used to be defined by an alliance structure: a NATO alliance structure, a European alliance structure, a European Union structure that defined the responsibilities of the West in a fairly clear manner. But beyond the

West, the definition of responsibility was extremely diffuse. This is why we speak of China being a free rider, why we speak of so many big powers being free riders. They are riding for free on global public-policy goods created by a Western order.

I suppose our question is how we think about responsibility in a post-Western world, not merely moral responsibility for people in danger in other places, but responsibility to generate global public goods for a whole set of issues that extend beyond the sovereign state. From the oceans, to the biosphere, cyberspace, and the internet, there are a whole set of non-sovereign areas whose management will be crucial to our survival in the twenty-first century. We could define a whole range of areas that are escaping the sovereign state order, transnational problems that are escaping the responsibility networks that were created after 1945.

Kornblum: We are responsible because we feel responsible. Western societies are complex and they are often horrible, but when things go wrong in the world, there seems always to be a discussion as to what to do about it. Of course, we have very good strategic reasons for feeling responsible; we have very good economic reasons for feeling responsible. But I don’t think most people talking about it even understand what those interests are. It’s that people are being killed and we should do something about it. If that’s the case, then to become responsible leaders you have to be able to build this sense of responsibility for one’s fellow human being into a political structure, and that is very hard.

Ignatieff: What I find exciting is that the locus of responsibility is shifting as we speak. Ten years ago you wouldn’t have Brazil in the room, and now you’ve got to have Brazil. And ten years ago you wouldn’t have South Korea there. The locus of responsibility has been shifted by the transformation of global politics. And that then helps to define the problem. If you are not unipolar, if you are not bipolar, if you are polycentric in some way, how do we correlate responsibility? You have to consider sovereignty, because whatever else sovereignty is, whether it’s democratic or not, sovereignty is a very clear institutional attribution of responsibility. Particular pieces of real estate get defined as the responsibility of someone—an authoritarian ruler, democratic system, whatever—and I think we are looking at a world in which that system of attributing responsibility is not adequate to so many of the issues that we are facing.

Kornblum: For all its morality, its strength, its power, the Federal Republic of Germany simply refuses to be responsible on a number of issues. It simply says no. Syria is one, Libya is another, Mali is another,

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— MICHAEL WALZER, “HUMAN RIGHTS IN GLOBAL SOCIETY” (2005)

but there are also many more. The foreign minister, a good friend of ours, says Germany feels it has other ways of dealing with these things. I want to raise this because Germany is a very good case of one of the most responsible countries on earth, without a doubt, pulling back in one major part of responsibility. Is that fair?

Klose: To some extent, but not entirely. Germany hesitates to take military responsibility for historical reasons. But it is also fair to say that we are trying, step by step, to take more responsibility. When you think about what has happened since 1990, there have been steps in that direction. I would be frightened if Germany all of a sudden became a strong military power again.

Kornblum: But Germany is an interesting case because it shows how responsibility is a polycentric phenomenon. No country today is more responsible than Germany, but they have one major gap in their role. Other countries have other gaps.

Klose: We are actually afraid of taking the lead. The moment we take the lead others will immediately come and say, "You want to dominate."

Ignatieff: The Syrian crisis brings the German situation into focus. Nobody thinks Germany, or anyone, is going to send a brigade. But if you look at that arc from Morocco in the North Atlantic right through to Pakistan, and if you look at Germany's southern Mediterranean frontiers, it's a whole world out there where the issue of responsibility to the evolution of political order is very unclear. Part of the difficulty here is to think strategically without thinking imperially, to shift from imperial notions of responsibility, which are territorial control or manipulation or indirect empire, to some other sense of responsibility. And there is a sense that Germans think they have enough problems close to home, enough domestic responsibilities, enough European responsibilities. In the immediate German neighborhood, the dilemma is that there's no model of imperial or power-led responsibility in relation to Eastern Europe, to Ukraine, to all these places.

Offe: There are two obvious obstacles to taking responsibility. One is that, for historical and other reasons, the Germans believe that they will not be given credit for taking responsibility, that there will be suspicions that the hegemonic role they assume is less than benign. There are good reasons for that. The other is that political parties are unable to convince the domestic constituency, particularly ahead of elections, that it is a good idea to assume responsibility and the costs it involves.

Ignatieff: The issue of responsibility is so fascinating in Europe because, again, of the moral hazard issues. The

resistance to debt mutualization is founded upon assumptions not just of responsibility and solidarity based on sovereignty. Whose interests are my interests? Whose fate is my fate? This is partly an issue of fellow feeling, partly an issue of common language and common culture. But we are also realizing that the Greek economy is our responsibility in a literal sense, that this tail can wag the dog in ways that people have not understood before. Germany is discovering its vulnerability with respect to these southern economies.

The European project is designed to allow the emergence of a hegemonic Germany with a European cover. This seems like a good thing to me, I don't have a problem with that. But that's what is making the discussion of responsibility so extremely difficult in Europe. No one in Europe knows who is responsible for what. Is it Brussels? Is it the national government? Is it sub-regional governments? Is it municipal governments? The question as to the opacity of responsibility once you've mutualized debt, fiscal policy, and monetary policies, the question as to who is responsible and whose interests become your interests, is very confusing to voters. It is transforming what a German voter thinks his or her responsibilities actually are.

The correlation between sovereignty and responsibility is such a difficult one to get beyond. It's not simply that Berlusconi is a bad leader, or that Papandrea was a bad leader. Everybody played the system. Nobody declared their swimming pools; the unions took more out of the pot than they put in. You didn't have political discipline, and suddenly the German voter wakes up and thinks: Is this my responsibility? Since when? You discover that it's not merely a transfer of moral responsibility; it's a transfer of active risk. When it looked as if the Greek exit would threaten the euro, the Germans thought: What are my alternatives? My alternative is the deutschmark, where every single car I'm trying to sell to China would become uncompetitive overnight.

Preuss: But Greece was pushed into the Eurozone because it was thought to be in the interest of Germany as well: the bigger the Eurozone, the better for the German economy. That means that Europe as a whole and Germany as a leading power in Europe should assume responsibility for the outcome.

Kornblum: The point here is that it is not, in the end, anybody's fault, because what we're talking about is Europe evolving past the Cold War. They thought that the best thing to do was to make the European Union stronger. The problem is that the European Union ran into globalization. And globalization is the thing which is ripping it apart in the end. The Greek economy could hide as long as it could devalue every five years, and now that it can't devalue, since Singapore and New York are trading its bonds all day, there's simply no place to hide. In the end, Mr. Klose has said the right thing:

the euro crisis has been more or less taken care of, but the European crisis is just starting. And the question of responsibility is going to be the major issue in the years to come. Who's going to be responsible for keeping this important organization running?

Gary Smith: This is the real reason that it is important to have this discussion about responsibility in its deployment. In the debate about Greece, recognizing the distinction between causal and remedial responsibility would change the discussion in a very helpful way.

Ignatieff: It seems to me that what is happening is that the anti-imperialist left has joined hands with a lot of the conservative right to say, "*Cité-jardin*, stay home." There is also a demonstrable futility with certain forms of taking responsibility for development, which confiscates responsibility from the agents who ought to hold it. But the idea of responsibility does not commit you to a constant defense of liberal interventionism. I actually think that it doesn't commit you to any line.

Preuss: I want to emphasize one point I think may be a little under-discussed here. I think that the main problem is not a lack of moral resources, so to speak, or the unwillingness of individuals and politicians to assume responsibility. I think the problem is rather the institutional locations of responsibility. So I agree with what Michael Ignatieff said a few minutes ago: that sovereignty is, so to speak, the basic traditional kind of attribution of responsibility in the political sphere. The problem is that this way of attributing responsibility doesn't work any longer. First of all, there are many, many states among the 190 states in the world that are simply not sovereign in the sense that they can assume responsibility for their territory, for their population, including fulfilling the responsibilities they have vis-à-vis other parts of the world, or the international community. And second, even if they are like the states of the Western world, they see exactly those problems that you mention, that sovereignty is no longer feasible, that it doesn't work. There is one prominent example for the dilemma of sovereignty being collectivized as it is in the European Union. This is the Security Council of the United Nations. And we see it doesn't work either.

That's the reason there is a tendency toward pulling back. Giving up sovereignty in an effort to create a new structure of responsibility has resulted more or less in a system of collective irresponsibility, at least in the European context. So I think this is the dilemma: sovereignty doesn't work any longer, but collectivizing sovereignty doesn't work either. There are many parts of the world that watch the European experiment with great interest, but they are reluctant. In other words, we must look for different institutional concepts for transcending sovereignty as the key issue, the key

institutional cornerstone of responsibility toward some kind of collectivity which fits the kind of problems you mentioned.

Offe: The European Union used to be an idea like this, but it is now losing its foundation and its popular support rapidly. So, again, what is needed is vanishing in a way. Some *finalité* needs to be defined. Although the European Union, as Dieter Grimm has pointed out recently, has relied upon vagueness, there is now a need for *finalité*.

Ignatieff: I think one of the issues that has recast our understanding of responsibility going back a very long way in classical liberal theory, and that is relevant to this discussion, is the Invisible Hand. The Invisible Hand is a vision of collective outcomes that are not intended by any single agent and are not produced by any single agent and for which no single agent, i.e. a sovereign or government, takes responsibility. I think the reason why the issue of responsibility has returned is that the Invisible Hand looks terrific when you're experiencing 3 percent growth. Then you wake up one morning and discover that your pension is worth 25 percent less because the entire global market system has been deregulated in order to accelerate the spread of capital and accelerate the provision of credit.

There are lots of ways in which we are ideologically legitimizing not taking responsibility. Nobody wants a world where from one morning to the next their pension values are dropping by 25 percent. They go in good faith to good German universities, good Greek universities, good French universities, or good Bolivian universities, and are suddenly told that, because of actions and trends half a world away, their lives or the premise on which they built their lives is now over. I'm getting to the thing that Claus talks about, fatalism, where you just think, "I can't. I give up. I'm dropping out." And if you ask me where does fascism return, where does authoritarian populism return, it returns when political systems say, "We have no control over your life, smile, be happy, there is absolutely nothing we can do," and when the bad stuff happens to you, and you have to take a wheelbarrow full of money to buy some bread. We've been there.

This is where I think the responsibility issue becomes politically so urgent, and I guess I'm saying in some way I'm quite optimistic. I'm optimistic because we have no choice about this. We have to have political systems that take responsibility. We have to have political systems that deliver results. If we don't, bad things happen, which we've been through. So we don't need to run experiments. We don't have to get clever about what might happen. We know what will happen, and we cannot allow it to happen again. □