

Introduction

The phrase “full responsibility” has a common meaning tied to being the agent in charge of some practical concern, as in “Sam bears full responsibility for the work.” This expression makes a kind of sense in amplifying two common assumptions about responsibility: that it is a provision for something being done that we care about, and that it involves an agent’s commitment to doing the right thing. But the qualifier “full” here is problematic, apart from its possible legal or quasi-legal significance, since in reality no state of affairs is produced solely by what one agent did, nor could an agent ever demonstrate perfect devotedness in attending to a practical concern in the right way. We speak of full responsibility approximately and aspirationally. This is true also for a less commonly invoked but not less important sense of fullness in responsibility that envisions breadth—work responsibility *and* family responsibility *and* responsibility on a sports team *and* responsibility in still other frames of reference. A fully responsible person in this sense is responsible to all relevant parties for all relevant matters in all relevant ways. This is an ideal of maturity. But it could also be a nightmare of inordinate demand and a tool of disastrous manipulation.

What is a full recipe for full responsibility? What stance or set of stances does a fully responsible agent have? A great intellectual investment has been made in the category of the ethical partly to provide a one-stance answer to this question. We could call this approach responsibility monism. It stipulates that responsibility is an ethical function; we know what responsibility means at work, at home, in team sports, and so on because general ethical principles of duty, value, and virtue apply in all practical contexts, and our ideal “responsible agents” (in the sense of agents who “act responsibly”) are those who follow these principles in whatever contexts they find themselves in.

While it is true that ethical standards apply in all contexts, it seems not to be true that all action is responsible just insofar as it is governed by ethics—at least, according to the common and well-motivated understanding of ethics as a concern with general standards of approvable conduct. On this understanding, ethical constraint is determined by principles formulated in advance of cases so that we have an ideally agreeable plan for handling all situations.¹ The great principles of fairness and maximized happiness are distinctively useful and authoritative because they stand up in unlimited discussion and reflection. In practice, we apply these effectively universal and unconditional principles of conduct as officers of a community that is ideally inclusive of members and occasions; in that way we fulfill our ethical responsibility to that community and to each other as its constituents. However, we may find ourselves in intrafamilial or intergroup conflict, where loyalty to our closest collaborators would sometimes require violating general rules or obeying general rules would cause personal betrayals. Or we may acknowledge responsibility to past or future generations, unable to calculate what is due them by the rules of justice or measurements of welfare we are ethically bound to apply to each other but concerned nonetheless to rectify or improve the larger shape of our shared existence in history.² Such considerations point to a difference in modes of responsibility.

One area of responsibility that is often claimed to elude ethical determination is political action. Contrary to the political moralists' assumption that political responsibility is a branch of ethical responsibility—that is, an application of general standards of human dignity and welfare to affairs of state—political realists claim that political responsibility is a direct response to the pragmatic demands of statecraft. Max Weber made a notable contribution to this debate in his late address “Politics as a Vocation,” distinguishing a political “ethics of responsibility” (concerned with managing the consequences of actions involving a government’s coercive power) from an “ethics of conviction” (defined by unconditional loyalty to ultimate ends).³

1. For fuller discussion of this conventional conception of the ethical with attention to its limits, see appendix 1 below.

2. On what divides historical from ethical responsibility, see my “Historical Rightness,” *Soundings* 98 (Spring 2015): 127–45 and “What We Have Time For: Historical Responsibility on the Largest Scale,” *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 13 (June 2019): 163–82, along with appendix 2 below.

3. Max Weber, “Politics as a Vocation,” in H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds., *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1948), 77–128.

Weber thought that these two “ethical” stances can coexist in the life of an agent but cannot be reconciled in principle, given that the ethics of conviction rejects the strategic manipulations and violence of the agent of responsibility while the ethics of responsibility rejects the pure, sometimes very costly idealism of the agent of conviction.

Our ethical guidance system is in serious trouble if we are forced to say that it is ethically right to do something ethically wrong. The British air marshal Sir Arthur “Bomber” Harris seems to have been caught in this paradox when he insisted on bombing German cities late in World War II.⁴ While the attack on civilians was flagrantly unethical according to long-accepted *jus in bello* standards, Harris made a clear appeal to responsibility for the war and for (and to) his comrades: “Attacks on cities . . . are strategically justified in so far as they tend to shorten the war and preserve the lives of Allied soldiers. To my mind we have absolutely no right to give them up unless it is certain that they will not have this effect.”⁵ We are missing something if we conclude simply that Harris is irresponsible and his ethical critics are responsible, or vice versa. One might wish to say, following Weber’s lead, that Harris exemplifies a pragmatic “ethics of responsibility,” but then one would be giving “ethics” the broader meaning of “normative orientation” (what then distinguishes the more strictly ethical kind of normative orientation?) and “responsibility” the narrower meaning of pragmatic responsibility (but isn’t the “ethics of conviction,” ethics in the stricter sense, responsibly concerned with rectifying conduct in relationship with others?). And one would still have to explain how Harris can have a normative orientation that is somehow tenable even though it is ethically intolerable. I think we will be better set up for clear practical thinking if we keep the category of responsibility inclusive with a view to letting ethical responsibility be ethical and pragmatic responsibility be pragmatic. To do this, we will not only need adequate conceptions of ethical and pragmatic forms of responsibility, we will need an explanation of how ethical and pragmatic evaluations can overlap and interact. For it is obvious that the two categories cannot simply be kept separate. Even if Bomber Harris’s position makes pragmatically responsible sense vis-à-vis his war colleagues, the ethical problem with it is a significant political problem as well.

4. See the ethically disapproving discussion of Harris in Michael Walzer’s *Just and Unjust Wars* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 254–61 and 323–25.

5. Letter to Sir Norman Bottomley (March 29, 1945), quoted in Dudley Saward, *Bomber Harris* (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 294.

I aim to show how the ideal of responsible life works well in encompassing and coordinating our responses to diverse directive appeals subject to manifold practical uncertainties. Lately, there have been two main conversations in philosophy about the nature of responsibility, one about the conditions for voluntary action and blameworthiness (the dominant concern of analytic philosophers) and one about the human subject's orientation to transcendence (with frequent reference to proposals by Levinas and Derrida).⁶ My angle of approach is different, in two ways. First, I align with the common human interest in assigning and assuming responsibility for constructive purposes and view responsibility as a device of collaboration—a plan of action that is meant to be fulfilled and that appeals to us as a fulfillment. Responsibility in this aspect, even though pervasively relevant for practical reasoning, has gotten only a small amount of preliminary attention from philosophers.⁷ But there is much here to observe and interrogate. Second, I divide the field of responsible action sharing into three domains corresponding to the primary temporal dimensions of the constitution of beings: the historically fraught reality of past actions, the ethically governed future possibility of actions on the drawing board, and the pragmatically charged present of actualizing, trying to do things, in which reality is bridged to possibility. The complexity of this view disturbs the slumber of responsibility monism and informs a more sensitive guide model for responsible life.

Another significant conversation has dealt not with the nature of responsibility as such but with how the criteria of political rightness and wrongness relate to the criteria of ethical rightness and wrongness—the issue of “political responsibility.” It comes up in the long-running debate between political realists and moralists; it comes up among moralists as they

6. For an overview of the analytic terrain, see Matthew Talbert, “Moral Responsibility,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Winter 2019), accessed October 20, 2021, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2019/entries/moral-responsibility/>; on ethical transcendence, François Raffoul, *The Origins of Responsibility* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010).

7. See Garrath Williams, “Responsibility as a Virtue,” *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, 11 (2008): 455–70. A recent turn to the study of “forward-looking responsibility,” though largely limited to issues of social injustice, is also germane; see Peter A. French and Howard K. Wettstein, eds., *Forward-Looking Collective Responsibility* (Boston: Wiley, 2014). This work has remarkably little connection with the blame-centered consequentialist work represented in Fraser MacBride, ed., “Forward-Looking Accounts of Responsibility,” *The Monist* 104, no. 4 (October 2021)—except for Mark Alfano’s “Towards a Genealogy of Forward-Looking Responsibility,” in that same issue of *The Monist* (489–509), which pivots toward the desirability of assuming responsibility.

debate how to build an effective politics on ethical foundations;⁸ it comes up among realists as they try to identify the distinctively political kind of constraint that should be binding on conscientious agents.⁹ Because political responsibility is the form best recognized for combining concerns of basically different kinds—ethical and pragmatic, if not also historical and religious—and appeals to us, despite its slipperiness, as a fullest responsibility, it plays a featured role in the present inquiry.

Order of exposition reversing order of discovery, I can best illuminate the political form of responsibility by first examining its purer pragmatic component. The whole sequence of chapters is as follows:

1. Since deeply diverse guidances keyed to responsibility will have to be reckoned with, we must establish an adequately inclusive *concept of responsibility*, clarifying what is generally appealing in the role-related ways of comporting ourselves that we demand or aspire to as responsible and what being responsible generally requires in understanding and commitment, even as different personal and collective realizations motivate different framings of responsibility. We will begin to give the aspirational aspect of responsibility its due by pointing out some of the personal and social fulfillments that appeal to us under this rubric.

2. The premise of potentially divergent past-, present-, and future-related branches of responsibility must be substantiated by locating their centers of gravity and boundaries in our conscientious reckoning. We shall start with the most intellectually obscure but most necessary, the form of responsibility that relates directly to the present constituting of actions. *Pragmatic responsibility* is an appropriate designation of the target here, given that ordinary senses of “pragmatic” are closely tied to immediate or near-term problem-solving and a distinctive salient value of expediency. This kind of responsibility appears clearly in emergencies, such as in wartime, but also in everyday situations of compulsory pragmatism such as in helping friends or colleagues with their tasks. A major challenge in developing an adequate model of pragmatic responsibility is sorting out the claims of action sharing

8. A signal attempt to think through politics on the basis of radical commitment to the Other (as in Levinas and Derrida) is Simon Critchley’s *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance* (London: Verso, 2007).

9. See Matt Sleat, ed., *Politics Recovered. Realist Thought in Theory and Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018). Many of the papers in this volume reference Bernard Williams’s focus on a distinctively political principle of legitimacy in “Realism and Moralism in Political Theory,” in *In the Beginning was the Deed*, ed. Geoffrey Hawthorn (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 1–17.

on various scales of shared action: should I finish moving this piano with my friends now (with rain threatening) if it means being late to work (again) or missing dinner with my family (again)?

3. We can take advantage of a clarified idea of pragmatic responsibility to do justice to the complexity of *political responsibility*, which incorporates all other forms of responsibility and assumes quite different profiles depending on which of our chief concerns about our scheme for action sharing—about the holding of power, justice, workable social organization, or collective identity—is uppermost. Since there can be no standard plan for fulfillment here, we will acknowledge that personal exemplars of success in handling these concerns in combination (political heroes like Martin Luther King Jr.) have great orientational relevance for the most ambitiously responsible agents.

4. We can then test the proposed conception of political responsibility by showing how it informs a distinctive relevant response to a representative range of *challenges of political responsibility*: (a) in the sphere of family relations, the abortion decision, which determines the composition of family networks of responsibility (and where we can observe the partial convergence of a feminist “ethic of care” with the pragmatic responsibility concept); (b) in the sphere of organizations, the aspiration to responsible work amid a scarcity of “good jobs”; (c) in the sphere of self-governing political community, immigration policy, where the collaborative facts on the ground may call for assigning civic rights and duties to relative newcomers to the neighborhood; and (d) in the sphere of global society, the international regime regarding displaced persons, where improvised protection of human rights on the disunified global stage provides some remedy for the failures of states.

5. Political responsibility can be a compelling approximation to the ambiguous ideal of *full responsibility*, but we can recognize a range of different ways of thinking about fullest responsibility that are helpfully guiding and motivating, depending on the circumstances. Here metaphysical and religious views of maximal responsibility raise special problems but cannot be dismissed.

6. In the appendixes I offer concentrated portraits of ethical, historical, and religious responsibility, partly in support of earlier arguments that were obliged to cross into those territories and partly to meet the general challenge of envisioning responsibility fully.



My main claims will be the following:

To bear responsibility is to be in charge of a delegated and evaluated share of action, a fulfillable role, in a community that discusses and judges how best to share action.

Being disposed to be responsible and capable of bearing responsibility is a requirement for prosocial (directively sensitive) human life.¹⁰ Bearing basic social responsibilities is assumed in social life.

Being responsible is not to be equated with being sensitive to others or with being self-determined. It involves participating in a collaborative scheme.

Being *fully* responsible, in the sense of being fully sincere and competent in perception and action, is an aspirational ideal for the bearing of responsibility. Full responsibility in the extensive sense of being responsible in all possible ways is an inordinately demanding ideal and yet sure to be interesting to whoever values the prosocial condition. The fullness ideals are in tension with the equally essential responsibility goals of (a) specifying the agent's burden so as to limit it reasonably and enable the agent to handle it successfully, and (b) upholding the agent's freedom in deciding how to exercise responsibility.

To be responsible is not necessarily to be ethically responsible—unless the ethical (or moral) field is simply equated with the field of responsibility, confounding our broadest category of prosocial constraint with a narrower requirement to act on general principle.

The main branches of responsibility correspond to the main scenes of action sharing, which in turn correspond to the basic ontological permissions for action sharing: the historical past of things done, the pragmatic present of things being done, the ethically assessable future of things that might be done, and perhaps also the envisionable eternal whole of action. For purposes of constructive reflection on right conduct, this view is a highly suggestive alternative to both the dominant monism of ethical responsibility and a chaotic value pluralism.

Political responsibility is a comprehensively combinatory form of responsibility and so in a sense the fullest form, at least from a mundane

10. I intend "prosocial" as an uncontroversial qualification of the human mode of existence as oriented to the proper management of relations among agents. It can be read as a descriptive term (humans are prosocial just as wolves are prosocial) or with the directive force that it has for prosocial beings while engaging in their collaborative life. Occasionally I will say *spiritual* in these places, as I think it is the best term to represent our active engagement with issues of right relationship, for reasons I have laid out in *The Concept of the Spiritual* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988). I will also sometimes use *directive* as a broader concept than the ethically affiliated *normative*.

perspective, but it is also unavoidably unstable in its standards. Seeing it clearly in this character gets us past the standoff between the simplistic alternatives of political moralism and political realism.

A program for the fullest feasible responsibility can be headquartered in any of the ontological venues of shared action—past, present, future, perhaps even eternity—and so will always be subject to challenge from differently located programs.

The comprehensive ideal of *personal* full responsibility is eclectic; it is unified by a personal or cultural vision, not by a normative logic. Though rarely, if ever, a trump, it has considerable life-guiding persuasiveness.



My arguments will be pragmatic. Since we are deeply embedded in the assigning and assuming of responsibility, one main task of a philosophy of responsibility is to elucidate its roles in the practical life we are living, measuring its demands and solving its puzzles to the extent possible. A philosophical account of responsibility will have value if it adds clarity and detail to our shared picture of what we are already trying to do.

In another way, responsibility is discretionary. I might or might not be a friend, a parent, an employee, a member of a profession, or the adherent of a religion. I might be generally leery of living in that burdened way. Our collective mood might be unenthusiastic about promoting responsibility beyond a bare minimum. But this lack of interest could be caused by ignorance. To speak to those who lack appreciation for responsibility as an ideal demand, if only to explain what is at stake, a philosophical account of responsibility may try to show that important assumptions about agentic life involve responsibility, so that the price of dismissing responsibility would be a serious disillusionment. Or it may try to show that what a normally enterprising agent would hope to be true of life involves responsibility.

I can start that argument on both fronts—for responsibility as assumed and as aspirational—with a responsibility-based description of that most constant of all human collaborations, the use of language.

When you encounter another person of presumed linguistic competence, and you endeavor to make conversation, or make an excuse, or request or give direction, you are assuming that the other person will work with you in specifically linguistic ways. You will start the exchange by speaking and the other will be a hearer and responder, those roles being already understood and accepted by all language users (even by the speakers of mutually unintelligible languages). Under normal circumstances, the speak-

er's responsibility is to speak relevantly, not deceptively or distractingly and not merely wasting the hearer's time; the hearer's responsibility is to form a reasonable understanding of what the speaker says, so far as possible, and to be reasonably helpful ("The time? 4:15"). If these responsibilities are not fulfilled, there is not a successful communication. If we could not assume that these responsibilities will normally be fulfilled, if linguistic conduct were not institutionalized and assured of success to this extent, language would not be the public utility that it is and we would not be the citizens of a large community of knowledge sharing.

That language use is responsibility-based we know both positively and negatively: positively, as in the sketch of linguistic role playing I just offered, but also negatively, in our experience of breakdowns in communication due to inappropriate conduct by speakers and hearers. To enter into linguistic interchange on a different understanding—thinking of interlocutors not as freely devoted collaborators in the formation of shared awareness but as puppets to be manipulated by aural tugs, for example, or purely as parts of a natural process—is not to speak or listen. That we can learn a lot about language by manipulating and objectifying it does not remove the pragmatic necessity of fulfilling the responsibilities of speaker and hearer in linguistic performance.

There is a similar point to be made from the unsatisfactory aspects of instituted language—the degrading terms prescribed for some entities and actions, the oppressive hierarchies of sex and class sometimes encoded in grammar, the marginalization of entire languages by conquest or commerce. We could not stage a helpful discussion of such impediments to speaking and listening without the support of basic presumptions of responsibility in communication.

A certain aspiration for responsible conduct is just as unavoidable for language users as assuming the most basically responsible conduct. It is embedded in the terms with which I described language's functioning: usually in serious communications one cannot but hope for a *sincerely* and *intelligently* helpful interlocutor, one who will speak and answer *very* relevantly, as would be likely to happen only if the interlocutor is committed to mastering the roles of linguistic guide and follower. One wants to be able to *trust* one's interlocutor for communications of the highest possible value. Hoping to benefit from reciprocity, hoping not to be abused, one wishes to be a trustworthy communicator oneself.

Obviously, much of our linguistic activity is effective to some degree without being exemplary. We are often disappointed by our fellow speakers

and by ourselves. If you are immune to this kind of disappointment, if your attitude toward all language use is purely that of a strategic manipulator or detached observer, then you will not be motivated to play the most fully responsible roles in it. But then if you were to speak to us in perfect indifference to the exercises of linguistic responsibility that we normally care about, we would probably detect your lack of hope, trust, and trustworthiness. You would be like a scary pitcher who might or might not choose to throw the ball where the catcher can catch it, and who therefore would be dropped from the team.

The sports team model serves as a reminder that norms of responsibility are constitutive of what we often understand ourselves to be engaged in doing. An active collaborator cannot ignore appeals to act responsibly and to strive to be more responsible. The issue is inescapable because normal human life is a tissue of collaborations. Anyone who wholly demurred from everyday helpfulness would be in a profoundly anomalous and unpromising position.

Whether an appeal to act responsibly does elicit greater dedication to collaborative role playing depends on a free response, for this is a personal matter, but it also depends on how revealingly the appeal exhibits the meaning of the choice, which is a rational matter. The philosopher's task is to devise revelations: to show what will and will not work in playing a game, and how to understand the game's key terms. Terms of interest here include collaboration, responsibility, obligation, the ethical, the pragmatic, and the political.

Each of the terms just mentioned has a broader meaning that gets confusingly mixed with a narrower meaning. In some cases I will want to link my claims to a broader meaning than what is more commonly assumed (collaboration, political) while in others the key meaning for my purposes is narrower (obligation, ethical, pragmatic).

Now is a good time to explain what I want to mean by "collaboration," which I am using as broadly as many other writers would use "cooperation" but still with a distinction in mind. It makes sense to think of *cooperation* as the mode of existence that generates considerations of practical rightness and wrongness because cooperation is liable to succeed or fail; it can be in good order, so that it continues, or be undermined, so that it breaks down. For example, I cooperate with strangers on the sidewalk so that the foot traffic keeps flowing smoothly. For the most part, I do this merely by making physical adjustments as I move forward; I cooperate similarly with dogs and even with insects. But there is a more

commanding mode of cooperation in cases where agents are intentionally trying to accomplish something together, and the term *collaboration* expresses this. Collaboration fits the situations in which responsibility can be assumed or imputed. I could not say to an insect, “That’s not helpful,” but I could speak to a human who was blocking me on the sidewalk about our shared project of getting expeditiously to where we’re going and the responsibilities this implies for all of us. Often when “cooperation” is invoked in social and political philosophy what is meant is “collaboration”—or it is the possibility of undertaking cooperation as collaboration that prompts a serious and open normative discussion. A Rawlsian liberal who refuses to posit that we are all working to realize the same agreed good, and who has a reason therefore to demand only a cooperative, not a collaborative, society, still needs everyone to subscribe to liberal justice as a shared project, not a mere *modus vivendi*; otherwise there would be no reasonable appeal for the scheme.¹¹ At the level of normative concurrence, then, cooperation must be a collaboration.

I grant that there is another way of looking at cooperation and collaboration. Suppose the model for our shared life is a ship voyage. It is as though we are on a ship (this represents all our logistical requirements), and we all have a stake in sailing safely and in the right direction. We also share an interest in a smooth flow of activities on board, so we tend to stay in our lanes. To the extent that our purposes and activities intersect, we make sure that they mesh. But in any given phase of the voyage some of us are crew, sharing the work of operating the ship, while the rest of us are passengers, free for our individual projects. The crew *collaborates* on sailing the ship while the passengers merely *cooperate* with them and each other. (Collaboration is a more focused and constrained mode of cooperation.) Even if the ultimate point of the voyage is to enable passengers to fulfill their individual goals, we would not say that the passengers are collaborators in sailing the ship. So too, the less intentionally demanding relationship of cooperation—not collaboration—is the appropriate inclusive standard for action sharing on the level of a whole society.

This view does capture how we would specify different parties’ responsibilities in many sets of circumstances. But I would note that (1) the passengers (at least, those who are aboard willingly) all share in *sponsorship*

11. On justice versus a *modus vivendi*, see John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, expanded ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 146–48; and see Rawls’s specifications for “social cooperation” on p. 16.

of the voyage in such a way that they all share in executing a governing plan for it—their cooperation is not as passive as it may seem at a given moment during the voyage; and (2) the division of roles between crew and passengers is a luxury that everyone understands might have to be suspended in an emergency. (An emergency would, in effect, re-create older conditions of human existence in which everyone is crew.) In these ways collaboration underlies cooperation.



A general assumption motivating and supporting the following discussions is that we can determine what is satisfactory, best, or necessary for our practice by relating a choice or action positively to the project of rectifying relationships between beings. This general life-project involves conducting one's own parts in relationships in such a way as to support the greatest mutual benefit of beings in them. The sharing of being is the supreme good and norm. No argument will be offered against selfishness and indifference. (We must not, however, overlook the pervasive influence of competition and the constant possibility of disaffection in the field of socially sensitive conduct.)

I will be examining shared action just in the respect that it generates directly charged issues of assumable responsibility in several major modes—pragmatic, ethical, historical, political, and religious—subject to an aspiration to full responsibility. While my account intersects with other theories of responsibility rooted in action sharing, notably Margaret Gilbert's plural subjects theory in chapter 3, I will not offer a distinct theory of the intentional mechanics of joint planning and action.

I will not defend the freedom premise of responsibility from determinist attack.¹² In my view, the relevant kind of agent freedom is not precluded by natural or social causation properly understood, but in any case I foresee that freedom-assuming responsibility games will continue to be played in our reason-sensitive dealings with each other. My discussion is within this game, where for serious players the more important considerations about involuntariness have to do with who we find ourselves responsible to and what we find or can make ourselves responsible for rather than with dimi-

12. See Bruce Waller's determinist argument against moral responsibility in *Against Moral Responsibility* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011).

nution or removal of responsibility by general conditions of our existence. That practical intention takes the lead in our “participant attitude.”¹³

Nor will I (thinking now of politically militant friends on my left) ground my claims in a critical analysis of existing society or gear them to a transformation of that society. I would be in deep trouble if it could be shown that my account of responsibility supports an unjust status quo against better alternatives. But I posit that the best justification for the best politics will incorporate a philosophically broadened and refined view of human aspirations for relationship—a corrective for all inspirational and polemical oversimplifications, though with due respect for the need for such oversimplifications in the cut and thrust of political action.

Finally, in this discussion I will not look beyond issues in human relationship, but I do affirm that responsibility extends to nonhumans as well. That humans use a linguistic, concept-negotiating mode of communication almost exclusively among themselves admittedly makes an immense practical difference and guarantees that issues of interhuman relation will take the highest spiritual priority. It is a mistake, however, to think that we can only have responsibility *for* and never responsibility *to* nonhuman beings simply because we are not talking with them in human fashion—for we can take cues directly from nonhuman beings that constrain how we relate to them, supposing a commitment on our part to mutually beneficial relations.¹⁴

13. The notion of a “participant attitude” is from Strawson, but my prime consideration is not emotions, as in Strawson, but actions. P. F. Strawson, “Freedom and Resentment,” *Proceedings of the British Academy* 48 (1962): 1–25.

14. The work of Bruno Latour and his allies on assemblages of concern shows how we can make sense of an unlimited range of meaningful relations with nonhuman beings, relations that are codetermined by all beings in their various ways of acting. Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*, ed. Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005); and see my “The Structure of Unlimited Action Sharing,” *Philosophical Frontiers* 4 (July–December 2009): 57–71.